



# **Report**

**Quality Enhancement Review**

**Bachelor and Master in the Visual Arts**

**Royal Academy of Fine Arts Antwerp**

**(Antwerp, Belgium)**

**Site-visit: 8-10 March 2021**

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## Introduction

The Royal Academy of Fine Arts Antwerp (hereafter ‘the Academy’) is one of five art colleges in the Flanders region of Belgium and forms one of the Schools of Arts of the Artesis-Plantijn (AP) University College, which itself is one of thirteen Flemish University Colleges. The Academy was established in 1663 and is one of the oldest art schools in the world. The Bachelor and Master in the Visual Arts form the Academy’s core educational offer and are complemented by an Educational Master’s programme and a PhD programme, which is delivered in collaboration with the University of Antwerp and Antwerp Research Institute of the Arts (ARIA). While most of the Academy’s learning and teaching activities are delivered at the historic Campus Mutsaard, a former medieval convent and church, converted into an art school in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, there are additional city centre locations for Fashion, In Situ and Graphic Design.

The Visual Arts Programme comprises a 180 credit Bachelor degree (normally taken over three years) and a 60 credit Master degree (normally one year). The Academy approached the review with a single SER that presented the two awards as an holistic educational experience (although in future they wish to draw further distinction between the two). In light of this, the Review Team’s report addresses the programme as a whole, and this is reflected in the matching compliance levels in all standards. The detail of the report does however, draw distinctions between undergraduate and postgraduate provision where applicable,

The Visual Arts Programme is available within six specialisms; Photography, Graphic Design, Jewellery Design, Theatre Costume, Fashion and Fine Arts. The Fine Arts specialism is further divided into Sculpture, Painting, In Situ and Printmaking options. All specialisms are offered in both Dutch and English at both Bachelor and Master level, attracting a substantial number of international students (60% of total in 2019-20). There are around 568 students on the Visual Arts Programme each year, evenly split between the Dutch language and English language pathways. Fashion is the largest specialism, with around 200 students, the next largest being Graphic Design with around 100 students. [Source: *Q Report, Student & Study Profile – figures 2017-2020*]

The current structure of the higher education system in Flanders stems from the region’s implementation of the Bologna agreement in 2003, including the adoption of first and second cycle programmes (Bachelor and Master) and the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). The 2003 Structural Decree established clusters of universities and university colleges within structural partnerships in the form of associations, and also introduced a public accreditation system to quality assure Flemish higher education provision with the establishment of the Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Organisation (NVAO). In recent years the government has allowed higher education institutions greater autonomy in quality assuring their own provision and it is within this context that this review of the Visual Arts Programme has been undertaken.

The two Schools of Arts of AP University College (the Royal Academy of Fine Arts and the Royal Conservatoire) commissioned MusiQuE to conduct a quality enhancement review at programme level, aimed at assessing the educational and artistic activities as well as the quality assurance systems in place for the Dance Bachelor Programme and the Bachelor and Master of Visual Arts Programme. MusiQuE sub-contracted the review of the

Visual Arts Programme to EQ-Arts while remaining responsible for the overall coordination of the procedure. In preparation for the site-visit, the MusiQuE Standards and Guidelines for Institutional Review were mapped against those of EQ-Arts and a merged set of standards and guiding questions was established, which has been used as the basis for this report.

The procedure for the review of the Visual Arts Programmes followed a three-stage process:

- The Academy prepared a Self-evaluation Report (SER) and supporting documents, based on the combined MusiQuE and EQ-Arts Standards for Programme Review;
- An international Review Team from EQ-Arts, joined by a Secretary appointed by MusiQuE, analysed the SER and supporting documents with reference to the Standards and carried out a virtual site-visit<sup>1</sup> in accordance with the EQ-Arts Virtual Site Visit Protocol, on 8-10 March 2021. The site-visit included virtual tours of the Faculty buildings, workshops, studios and exhibition spaces and meetings with; the Dean of the Academy, Heads of Programmes, the Quality and Education Development Advisor, students of the Bachelor and Master programmes, alumni, teachers and Studio Coordinators, staff with responsibility for research, staff in administration and learning support roles and representatives of the work field.
- The Review Team produced the report that follows, addressing the provision against each of the Standards for Programme Review.

The Review Team was constituted as follows:

- Dr Sarah Bennett (Chair) – Associate Professor and former Head of the School of Art and Architecture, Kingston University, UK
- Karen Harsbo – Associate Professor, Royal Danish Art Academy in Copenhagen, Denmark
- Frank Koolen- Course Leader of BA Fine Art, Utrecht School of Arts (HKU), Netherlands
- Lena Paßlick - recent graduate of MA Photography, Master Institute of Visual Cultures AKV St. Joost, Netherlands
- Mark van Vorstenbos - Head of Textile & Fashion, Royal Academy of Art in The Hague, Netherlands
- Laura Witt (Secretary) - Deputy Registrar (Quality Assurance and Enhancement), Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, UK

The Review Team appreciated the extent of the reflection and strategic planning undertaken by the Academy in the preparation of the self-evaluation report (hereafter SER), against the backdrop of a global pandemic which necessitated extensive work to adapt the programmes to accommodate physical restrictions and blended delivery. The SER itself, presented as a 'collective self-portrait', addressed each of the standards and related these to current challenges and future plans for enhancement. Alongside the SER, a significant amount of supporting

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<sup>1</sup> As a result of the 2020/21 COVID-19 pandemic, it was not possible for the Review Team to complete a physical site visit, therefore a virtual site visit was planned to be conducted in a similar manner, using video conferencing and pre-recorded footage of the facilities prepared by the Academy.

documentation was provided including a five year strategic roadmap<sup>2</sup> outlining a clear vision for the development of the Visual Arts Programmes.

The Review Team wishes to thank the staff and students of the Academy for their time and constructive approach to the evaluation process during the site visit. Those attending meetings responded to questions with an honesty and enthusiasm that enabled the team to gain valuable insights into both the current state of affairs and potential future developments within the Academy’s studios, classrooms and virtual spaces. It was pleasing to see a wide range of stakeholders engaging with verbal feedback at the conclusion of the site visit and the Review Team would like to encourage the Academy to continue its transparent approach by sharing this report with all of its staff, students and partners ahead of its publication on the Academy’s website.

**Key data:**

<b>Name of the institution</b>	Royal Academy of Fine Arts Antwerp (School of Arts, Artesis-Plantijn (AP) University College)
<b>Legal status</b>	Public institution
<b>Date of creation</b>	1663
<b>Website address</b>	<a href="http://www.ap-arts.be">www.ap-arts.be</a>
<b>Departments</b>	Photography, Graphic Design, Jewellery Design, Theatre Costume, Fashion, Fine Arts (including Sculpture, Painting, In Situ, Printmaking)
<b>List of reviewed programmes</b>	Bachelor in Visual Arts (English) Bachelor in Visual Arts (Dutch) Master in Visual Arts (English) Master in Visual Arts (Dutch)
<b>Number of students enrolled in reviewed programmes (2019-20)</b>	Bachelor in Visual Arts (English) – 228 Bachelor in Visual Arts (Dutch) - 224 Master in Visual Arts (English) - 60 Master in Visual Arts (Dutch) – 66 Total for all pathways – 578
<b>Number of teachers serving the programmes reviewed [permanent and part-time staff]</b>	112 (60.9 FTE)

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<sup>2</sup> At the time of the review the road map was pending full approval from AP University College.

## 1. Programme's goal and context

### Standard 1: the programme goals are clearly stated and reflect the institutional mission.

The Academy describes itself as an international biotope, with the studio as an interactive and creative space, and with the synergy between education, research and community service as its driving force. [Source: *SER*, p.12] A set of strategic and operational goals was established in 2018 building on an earlier working document entitled *The Academy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, developed by a group of Academy staff based on their observations, conversations and research. These goals are linked to the strategic plan of AP University College, which focuses on: active citizenship with social impact, maximum learning benefits, unique and leading educational offerings, innovative development and the ability to achieve these objectives. [Source: *SER*, p.16]

An institution-wide transformation project known as ADAPT, based on the principles of product leadership, aims to improve performance and efficiency in a number of key areas and will lead to a reconfiguration of the Academy's management and support services in 2022. In addition to the strategic plans at University College and Academy level, the *Making Mutsaard* project, which will result in the transformation of the main campus site (shared with the University of Antwerp Faculty of Design Sciences) is expected to have a significant impact on the possibilities for the development of the Visual Arts Programme, including the potential creation of new interdisciplinary and research spaces. [Source: *Meeting with Research & nexus Education-Research*] The intention is also to bring the city into closer connection with the Academy's physical spaces and to create a more readable campus. [Source: *Making Mutsaard*]

The Academy's objectives are to be assertive, ambitious and adaptive while focusing in its education, research and cultural activities on the goals of diversity, sustainability and Do It Yourself/Do It Together. A strategic roadmap created in 2021 sets out a timeline for a number of key developments that will enable progress towards these three key goals over the next five years, alongside two additional strategic targets related to internationalisation and interdisciplinarity. The roadmap outlines a practical vision for the transformation of the Visual Arts Programme through a number of processes and associated actions, which are to be regularly monitored and reviewed using the tools identified therein. Quality Assurance processes, currently in the early stages of development, are based on the formulation of SMART objectives to support the programme in realising its ambitions and the implementation of an annual monitoring cycle. The student voice is brought into the process through the use of feedback mechanisms such as surveys and focus groups, and through consultation with the Student Council.

One of the main distinctive features of the Visual Arts Programme is a strong focus on the studio and the *métier*, or technical artistic skills, developed therein. The studios exist at the heart of the Academy as discipline-focused spaces for learning, sharing, research and experimentation. The Programme's focus on technique and discipline, embedded within the studio method of teaching, is seen by the Academy as both a strength and a weakness, as there is a tendency for studios to operate and develop as silos. One of the main challenges for the institution is therefore to open up and connect individual studios, in order to embed interdisciplinarity and encourage a more outward-looking, socially-connected approach. [Source: *Meeting with Head of Institution*]. Recently established

inter-studio cells, such as the Moving Image cell, have provided students with opportunities to explore other media and techniques. Students from all specialisms are also required to engage with a programme of drawing and theory classes, which operate outside of the studio structure.

The concept of Do It Yourself/Do It Together (DIY/DIT), although a new initiative, has the support of teaching staff who are keen to encourage students to take more responsibility for their own collaborative projects outside of normal studio hours, with technical support and guidance from the Heads of Programme. [Source: *Meeting with Heads of Programme*] The encouragement of sustainable and adaptive attitudes through DIY/DIT is intended to have an impact on the development of professional skills, and to support the Academy's aim to embed diverse perspectives and inclusive ways of working within the curriculum. [Source: *SER, p. 17*] In order to achieve this, the Academy aims to maintain its close interaction with arts and cultural organisations in Antwerp, and to strategically expand its network of national and international partners.

The Academy plans to maintain its number of students at around 600, as this is considered to be the optimal number for the delivery of the programme with the resources available. The strategic aspirations to reduce socio-cultural barriers for incoming students [Source: *Roadmap p.9*] are not expected to impact on overall numbers, but rather to result in a more diverse student body of a similar size. [Source: *Meeting with Head of Institution*] There is however, no detailed data collected on applicant and student profiles that will allow the institution to track its progress in relation to this objective.

### **Review Team's Analysis**

The Bachelor and Master in Visual Arts Programme forms the core of the Academy's educational activities, therefore the institutional strategy and the programme aims are fully intertwined. The Review Team found the aims of the programme to be clearly articulated within the Academy's mission and vision and encountered a growing awareness of the established strategic goals within the staff body. The recently developed Roadmap and associated action plans indicate the basis on which the programme will continue to develop in a sustainable and future-focused way. The creation of 'Studio Portraits' in preparation for the programme review appears to have been a valuable self-reflection exercise, which has already resulted in changes within some specialisations and could be repeated on a periodic basis.

The Roadmap was not yet fully approved at the time of the site visit, however the document sets out clear plans for the involvement of key stakeholders in the establishment, monitoring and review of objectives for the development of the programme. The new monitoring tool described in the Roadmap ensures that actions are fully articulated and owned by relevant individuals. The addition of information on how completed actions will be communicated and to whom, could assist the Academy in closing feedback loops as it moves forward with its plans for transformation.

The Academy's mission and vision clearly take account of the global context within which the Academy operates, however through its analysis of the programme documentation, the Review Team concluded that the

programme would benefit from expressing the theme of globalisation more clearly within the curriculum. The Roadmap suggests that global perspectives will be brought into the programme through its international student body, however it is recommended that the strategic target related to internationalisation is expanded to include the incorporation of a greater range of non-European reference points within the programme content.

Objectives related to the inclusivity of the programme are outlined within the SER and the Roadmap, however very little is data currently collected in relation to applicant and student characteristics that would enable the Academy to track its progress in these areas. The Review Team recommends that, with support from AP University College, data on applicant profiles is systematically collected, in addition to data on student progress and employment outcomes, in order to enable analysis of access to and attainment within the programme throughout the study cycle, for all students including those from underrepresented socio-cultural backgrounds.

### **Compliance with Standard 1**

*The Review Team concludes that the programmes comply with Standard 1 as follows:*

<b>Programme</b>	<b>Compliance level</b>
<b>Bachelor of Visual Arts</b>	Substantially compliant
<b>Master of Visual Arts</b>	Substantially compliant

## 2. Educational processes

### 2.1 The programmes and their methods of delivery

**Standard: the goals of the programme are achieved through the content and structure of the curriculum and its methods of delivery**

The Flemish region publishes domain-specific learning outcomes for Bachelor and Master programmes in the Visual Arts, related to the level descriptors outlined in the Flemish Qualification Structure (VKS), which in turn are based on the Dublin descriptors. These overarching learning outcomes were validated by the NVAO in 2015 and form the basis of the learning outcomes for the Visual Arts Programme. Although the programme leads to awards at Bachelor and Master level, there is limited recognition of the difference between level 6 (Bachelor/First Cycle) and level 7 (Master/Second Cycle) programmes in Belgium, where Bachelor level study is largely perceived as preparation for Master level study, with automatic progression between the two. [Source: *SER*, p.20] In spite of this, an increased number of international students joining at level 7 has led to greater differentiation and has prompted the Academy to limit the number of credits that students can carry with them as they progress from Bachelor to Master. [Source: *SER*, p.52] Graduates with an interest in teaching and arts education have the opportunity to progress to the Educational Master in Visual Arts programme, while those with a research focus can apply for a PhD.

A number of projects and initiatives undertaken in recent years demonstrate how the Academy's strategic aims have been embedded within learning and teaching activities. The theme of sustainability is the most developed of these, as demonstrated by projects such as *Objects Telling Stories*, which focuses on sustainable jewellery design. Courses have now been developed such as *Making Change*, *Artistic Tools for Environmental Solutions* and learning objectives related to sustainability have been embedded in all specialisms from 2020/21. [Source: *SER*, p.22]. DIY/DIT, through which the Academy aims to develop self-reliance and entrepreneurship amongst its students, has been evident in projects that disrupt the traditional master-apprentice model of studio learning and encourage partnership between staff and students. One example is the opportunity for third year Bachelor students to work with artists' collectives in the studio on experimental practice.

Themes of diversity and inclusion are also evident in a number of high profile projects, such as the annual *Noorderlicht* project. Over the past five years this event has enabled In Situ students to collaborate with members of a diverse community in north Antwerp on a number of artistic interventions within the local environment. [Source: <https://ap-arts.be/en/northern-light-parade>] In 2018, the Educational Master Programme initiated the *Arts Inclusive* project, which establishes a whole institution approach to creating a diverse and welcoming environment, and supports teaching staff to reflect on their own pedagogic practice through the lens of inclusivity. The recent *Second Shelf* project (2018-2019), through which the library collection was critically reviewed from a gender perspective, incorporated talks on artistic identities, creative practices, institutional representation and memory. [Source: <https://second-shelf.org/second-shelf-alive/>] Some minor changes to the curriculum have been implemented, such

the introduction of post-colonialism into the *Philosophy of Art* course, however more work is required in order to diversify the theoretical and contextual aspects of the curriculum and to embed wider cultural perspectives. [Source: *SER*, p.23]

Learning within the studios is focused on individual artistic development, with more opportunities for students to pursue their individual interests as they progress through the programme, culminating in an autonomous Master project. Elective courses form part of the final Bachelor year and the Master year, enabling students to broaden their knowledge or focus on professional skills, and include a number of options delivered by the Academy's partners in the Antwerp University Association. Opportunities for students to create interdisciplinary work are available within the annual project week, through the establishment of inter-studio cells (for example the Moving Image Cell) and the provision of shared studio spaces, however these opportunities are currently limited. Students and teachers are often unaware of the availability of shared facilities and rely on word of mouth to find out about the possibility of working in other studios. [Source: *Meeting with BA Students*] Where a student is able to articulate a need to use another studio to their teachers, requests are generally accepted, however the Academy has identified the development of more inter-studio practice as a challenge. [Source: *SER*, p.29] An attempt to establish an extra-curricular *Cross-over* course, enabling students to work in a different studio, proved unfeasible within the constraints of the timetable and available space. [Source: *Meeting with Teachers including Coordinators of Specialisms*]

The main pedagogical methods used within the Visual Arts Programme are studio practice, lectures, workshops, internships, learning portfolios and projects. Learning and teaching strategies differ from specialism to specialism, however the Academy has recently developed a unifying *Didactic Concept* to establish a set of shared pedagogical principles. These principles were based on insights gained through the reflective *Studio Portraits* and include; a progression from directed to autonomous learning through the stages of the programme, a focus on drawing across all disciplines, the integration of theory and practice, use of artistic research, collaboration and individual artistic development. [Source: *Towards a Didactic Concept*] Teaching staff did not appear to be aware of the document at the time of the site visit, however a working group on the nexus of theory and practice had been established in order to strengthen links between theoretical and practical courses. Students, particularly those in the applied arts specialisms, articulated a need for closer connections between theory and artistic practice, as the current focus on the canon of European art history (particularly pre 1500) is not perceived by students as wholly relevant to their artistic practice. Some progress has been made in this direction with the introduction of more specialised theory classes (for example on the history of theatre and fashion or photography), which students find to be more germane. [Source: *Meeting with BA Students*]

In the first years of the programme, a master-apprentice model of learning is common, however a greater emphasis on autonomous learning, critical reflection and dialogue emerges as students progress to the final year of the Bachelor and the Master year. Opportunities for peer learning vary from studio to studio, with Graphic Design and Photography providing numerous opportunities for students to participate in critical group discussions. Master

students in Sculpture and In Situ, seeking more peer-led activities, have established group meetings themselves to discuss their work outside of facilitated sessions. [Source: *Meeting with MA Students*] An emphasis on verbal communication as a means of enhancing self-reflection is evident throughout the programme and critical evaluation forms a key element of the assessment process. In spite of this, feedback from alumni indicates that more attention could be given to developing the critical skills to effectively communicate with others about their artistic practice [source: *Alumni Survey 2019-20*] and the Academy is considering how it might strengthen its provision in this area. [Source: *SER*, p.33]

Opportunities to present work are embedded within the Visual Arts Programme as a learning tool, a means of artistic exposure and as a means of furthering artistic discourse in the public domain. Presentation or exhibition of work is a core learning outcome and is linked to assessment through both the interim evaluations in January and final evaluations in June of each year. In the final year of the Bachelor and at the end of the Master year, large scale public presentations are staged, such as the Master exhibition, which acts as a showcase for the graduating students and the Academy, attracting large audiences including professional artists, gallerists, curators, critics and collectors. [Source: *SER*, p.39] The annual *Fashion Show* is a high profile event which exposes students to an international audience including industry professionals.

The Academy has three dedicated exhibition spaces at Campus Mutsaard, including the Long Gallery (suited to curated exhibitions), the Winter Garden (suited to more experimental work) and the Temple, which will be renovated and joined by additional exhibition spaces as part of the *Making Mutsaard* plans. [Source: *SER*, p.39] Students are able to submit proposals for independently organised exhibitions to the Planning Committee and the annual Starter Prize organised by the Student Council provides the opportunity for one student each year to organise a funded project within one of the exhibition spaces. Students also benefit from a number of opportunities to present their work externally, such as the *Schmuck* fair (jewellery), FoMU (photography) and the Het Bos art centre (costume design). In collaboration with other art schools, the Academy is a partner in *Startpoint*, an annual travelling exhibition of selected Master graduates' work, and the biennial *Master's Salons in Painting and Graphics*, both exhibited at the Academy. Selected student work is also published by the Academy (for example through the Track Report) and externally, in art magazines such as *Metropolis M* and through partnerships with publishers such as Stockmans and Boek.be. [Source: *SER*, p.40]

The Academy is bound by Structural Decree to deliver research-based arts education and to embed research competencies in both the Bachelor and Master programmes as distinct learning outcomes. There is a strong connection between learning and teaching and research and the Academy purposefully appoints teachers with strong research profiles and researchers who can contribute to studio teaching. [Source: *SER* p.33] A number of funded short-term research projects (16 in 2020/21) and doctoral fellowships are available on an annual basis as research opportunities for staff, alumni and external applicants, creating a strong research culture within the institution. Support for Master students to construct project proposals has increased over the years, resulting in high quality applications. [Source: *Meeting with the work field*] Students have the opportunity to interact with

researchers in the studio, through extra-curricular activities such as the *Extra Academy* (a series of events exploring a wide range of artistic practice) and through masterclasses guided by PhD students and researchers, which are initiated by the Academy's research groups. [Source: *Meeting with Research and nexus Education-Research*]

Four interdisciplinary research-groups; *Archivolt*, *Thinking Tools*, *Body and Material Reinvented* and *MAXlab*, enable the development of specific areas of expertise and reinforce the development of students as artist-researchers. Outputs include exhibitions, lectures and a range of publications, including a series of *Track Reports*, short publications emerging from the Academy's diverse range of research activities. Annual research weeks act as a platform for researchers to share their work with colleagues, students and the general public. The Academy has also recently formalised its public lectures into the *Guess who's coming to dinner* series, which brings interdisciplinary artists into the institution to talk about their practice. A new initiative, the *Expanding Academy*, seeks to build on these activities and in collaboration with a group of other European arts organisations, will link artistic research with social and environmental issues [Source: *SER*, p.35]

The Academy makes a distinction between research *on* the arts (related to art history or theory) and research *in or through* the arts (artistic research or practice as research). Most research activity takes place in the studio, informed by research-active staff, however a *Research Methodology* course is also compulsory for Bachelor students and includes lectures given by Master students and professional artists, who discuss their research strategies and methods. [Source: *SER*, p.34] The focus on research within the curriculum grows as students progress from the first Bachelor year through to the Master year, when the final Master project incorporates documentation of the student's research. Master students also have the option of writing a thesis. The biennial *Drawing Marathon* offers another opportunity for intensive artistic research, wherein students can experiment with various contexts, subjects and techniques, alongside lecturers, alumni and overseas partner institutions (via live stream) over a 24 hour period. In spite of these activities and interventions, there is still a tendency for students to understand research as theoretical and text-based rather than something embedded within or enacted through their practice. [Source: *Meeting with MA Students*]

### **Review Team's Analysis**

The Visual Arts Programme utilises a range of pedagogic approaches that support students to develop their artistic voice. The Review Team recognises the value to students of the studio method and individual contact with teachers, which demonstrate the importance of student-centred learning within the programme. Some of the projects linked to the programme are highly innovative and effectively embed artistic research within the student learning experience. Two commendable examples are the *Second Shelf Project* and the *Drawing Marathon*.

The sustained development of artistic research is embedded through a range of strategic initiatives, from locating funded PhD students in the studios, to running additional student projects and externally facing research platforms, as well as allocating funding and regular awards for research activities. The associated outputs are building the reputation of the Academy as an institution at the forefront of artistic research and research is increasingly seen as an additional trajectory for graduates as they embark on their professional careers. There is however, some work still to be done in establishing artistic research more explicitly in the minds and learning experiences of the students.

Students recognise the value of close links between their practice and the theory delivered within the specialisms, and appreciate the ways in which theory teachers aim to align class content to reflect topics simultaneously encountered in the studio. The Review Team recommends that the theory-practice working group prioritises its project to further consider the ways in which a hybrid approach to theory and practice can be developed, in order to sustain the curiosity and critical engagement of students (particularly those in the applied arts who feel that their specialisms are not currently reflected) in the theoretical and contextual aspects of the programme. It is further recommended that students' views and experiences are fully integrated into the ongoing review and development of the curriculum.

The Review Team recommends that the motions being made towards greater crossover between ateliers and workshops are structurally embedded within the programme. The first steps being taken in this direction are bearing fruit and the impetus should continue in order to prepare students for the world of work, especially in light of comments from the work field, which support a need for graduates with interdisciplinary skills as reflected in the strategic targets for the programme. These developments should be balanced with a continued commitment to the core skills associated with each specialism, as these are at the heart of the Academy's unique identity. However, the current offer could be enhanced in certain areas, for example through a greater focus on socially engaged art practice, which represents an under explored territory in the Bachelor and Master programmes in spite of an emphasis on active citizenship within the strategic goals of AP University College.

**Compliance with Standard 2.1**

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

<b>Programme</b>	<b>Compliance level</b>
<b>Bachelor of Visual Arts</b>	Substantially compliant
<b>Master of Visual Arts</b>	Substantially compliant

## 2.2 International perspectives

**Standard: the programme offers a range of opportunities for students to gain an international perspective.**

The Roadmap for the Visual Arts Programme includes a strategic aim to be international in all aspects and states that in 2025, the programme will stand out as an artistic player in an international context. [Source: *Roadmap*, p.12] The launch of English language versions of the Bachelor and Master has attracted a large number of international students (around half of the total student body), which has both enhanced the international reputation of the programme and broadened the world view of its home students. The Academy's approach to *internationalisation at home* is focused on the international diversity of the student body, which is made up of more than 50 different nationalities. This wealth of student perspectives enriches the learning experience and has a positive impact on the outputs of each studio. In spite of this the programme has a strong focus on Western art and the Academy is considering ways in which it might globalise the curriculum in future and enable its international students to bring their own cultural heritage into the institution. [Source: *SER*, p.41]

The domain specific learning outcomes allude to the development of international perspectives. At Bachelor level they include: Possession and continued development of knowledge and insight with regard to the social, cultural, artistic, historical and international context of the visual arts and artistic practice; and at Master level: Ability to take and defend a critical position with regard to relevant social, cultural, artistic and international developments. Some specialisms embed explicit opportunities for international travel within the curriculum, such as an annual Painting project in France and site-specific workshops in Portugal and Greece for In Situ. A collaboration between the Drawing and Engraving Department and partners in Spain and Norway is in development, which will allow students to work in Oslo, Madrid and Antwerp for a few weeks each year. [Source: *SER*, p.43] Due to timetable constraints, it is not possible for students from all specialisms to participate in these types of activities. [Source: *SER*, p.41] The *Drawing Marathon* provides a more accessible opportunity for all students to interact digitally with an international institution.

The Academy's Roadmap articulates an ambition to diversify its international collaborations through the development of global partnerships that establish a strategic presence in each continent. [Source: *Roadmap*, p.12] It also aims to expand its international office in order to empower it to identify and administer such partnerships. [Source: *Clarification Meeting*] Some global partnerships are already established, such as the Over Seas programme with the Department of Arts at Shenzhen University in China. This programme provides an opportunity for Chinese students to spend three months studying fashion or graphic design in Antwerp, however there has been a lack of reciprocal activity to date. Take up of student mobility is relatively low, with around 12 outgoing students per year participating in the Erasmus programme. Alumni reported that students in some studios, such as fashion, felt that they would be disadvantaged by time away from their teachers at the Academy. [Source: *Meeting with Alumni*]

There are few international staff teaching on the programme and those who are from other countries are mostly western European. This can be at least partly attributed to stringent regional regulations surrounding the recruitment of non-Dutch speaking teachers, exacerbated by relatively low levels of remuneration within art schools, making international recruitment difficult. [Source: *Meeting with Support Staff*] Digital learning opportunities may present a solution in this area and the COVID-19 pandemic has led to a greater number of international artists and researchers delivering lectures online. [Source: *Meeting with Research and nexus Education-Research*] Teaching staff are encouraged to take advantage of mobility opportunities, including exchanges with partners in Cuba, Portugal, the US and China, and the Academy intends to promote these opportunities further in order to improve take up. [Source: *SER, p.42*] An initiative to offer international residencies was launched in 2019-20 with the intention of hosting two artists in residence each year.

International students are supported through a dedicated induction programme and can be connected with study buddies from the Social Work programme in order to aid integration into life in Antwerp and the Academy [Source: *SER, p.56*] however the Review Team did not meet any students who had participated in this project. A digital info point has been established on the Academy's website for new international students, which includes the *Quick Start Guide for International Students*. This comprehensive handbook includes practical information on travelling to and living in Antwerp and on facilities and services within the Academy.

### **Review Team's Analysis**

The Academy is proud of the international diversity of its student body, describing itself as an international biotope, and recognises that the different cultural backgrounds of those coming into the programme can benefit the whole community. The Arts Inclusive project is focused on making each individual within the Academy responsible for creating a welcoming atmosphere and intercultural communication training has provided teaching staff with increased awareness of the cultural differences that have the potential to impact on students' learning and achievement.

Both teaching staff and students benefit from an increasing range of opportunities for international travel and exchange, with a number of non-European partnerships in development, however there appear to be barriers within some specialisms that prevent students from considering study abroad opportunities. Possibilities for digital interaction with global contacts arising during the pandemic have been embraced and have exposed the programme to a number of opportunities for future collaboration. This is a positive development which could help the Academy to enhance the diversity of its programmes if continued.

Although the Academy welcomes large numbers of international students through its doors, either on a full time basis or through international exchanges, there is an imbalance between the international student profile and the largely domestic staff profile, which may be a contributing factor to the relative lack of global perspectives

explicitly taught within the Visual Arts Programme. It is recommended that the Academy finds effective mechanisms for drawing the global perspectives of its students into the design and content of the curriculum.

**Compliance with Standard 2.2**

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

<b>Programme</b>	<b>Compliance level</b>
<b>Bachelor of Visual Arts</b>	Substantially compliant
<b>Master of Visual Arts</b>	Substantially compliant

## 2.3 Assessment

**Standard: assessment methods are clearly defined and demonstrate achievement of learning outcomes.**

The Visual Arts Programme employs a range of formative and summative assessment methods, including practical assignments, presentations, written and oral examinations and written assignments. Assessment and teaching methods are aligned in the sense that more theoretical, lecture-based courses generally have written examinations, whereas studio practice is assessed through the presentation of practical work, however the Academy has identified the need to devise a matrix that links learning objectives, curriculum content and assessment methods. [Source: *SER*, p.48] Studio work is most commonly assessed through *permanent evaluation*, a final assessment at the end of the year with either an internal jury, or for the Master programme, an external jury whereby staff from the Academy are joined by practicing artists and professionals from the work field. [Source: *SER*, p.45] These assessment methods support programme learning outcomes related to the development of artistic skills and individual visual language or artistic imagery, alongside the ability to communicate this to a critical audience. The external element of the Master permanent evaluation, alongside the assessment of the optional Master's thesis by written assignment and oral presentation, enables students to demonstrate the higher level learning outcomes related to independent artistic research and the ability to take and defend a critical position when situating their work within a broader context.

For final evaluations, a 20 point marking system is used, with 10 points required to pass. Pass/fail grades are also being trialled in some cases. [Source: *Meeting with Heads of Programme*] Interim assessments use a variety of systems across studios, with some contributing to the summative assessment outcome and others not, however the Academy has recently standardised the weighting of Master's assessments across all specialisms. Possibilities for peer assessment and self-assessment are being explored, with some studios such as Costume and In Situ inviting Bachelor students to Master evaluations to contribute feedback, and others providing opportunities for group evaluation. [Source: *SER*, p.46] Students in the Fashion department have participated in a mock jury, which provided an opportunity for them to share work with their peers in a supportive environment. [Source: *Meeting with MA Students*] There is a need to develop students' understanding of how their grades are awarded and to improve the transparency of marking practices as a priority within the programme. [Source: *Meeting with Heads of Programme*]

The Academy reviews its assessment methods at the end of each cycle through discussion with teaching staff about issues and good practice. Student feedback is sought through cyclical course-level surveys and annual student focus groups. There is a trial and error approach to the development of assessment methods within the programme, whereby the short lines of communication within the institution allows the Heads of Programme to understand what is and is not working. [Source: *Clarification meeting*]

The assessment process guards against individual subjective evaluation through the use of the four-eye principle, or assessment by several individuals at once, both in the final jury evaluations and in other modes of assessment throughout the year. The introduction of externality to jury assessments through the use of artists, alumni, critics,

gallerists and curators as jury members is used both as a means of mitigating against internal bias in the assessment process and as a means of external evaluation of the programme as a whole. [Source: *SER*, p.46] Some external juries have the opportunity of assessing students twice, in January and June, which helps to give jury members an insight into students' creative process and individual artistic development. [Source: *Meeting with the work field*]

Juries are expected to reach a consensus on marking, however there are currently no established institutional protocols for their operation, therefore the process for agreeing marks varies between studios. Representatives of the work field indicated that although some initial criteria are provided, it is up to the jury to decide which of these are most important. [Source: *Meeting with the work field*] All juries include a Chair and a Secretary who have the role of refocusing the discussion on learning outcomes when required. [Source: *Meeting with Heads of Programme*] Bachelor students reported significant variation in the use of assessment criteria. Some understood how their marks were arrived at and weighted, whilst others had not received any criteria at all. Students are aware of the existence of ECTS sheets containing learning outcomes, however it is up to individuals to read these as teachers do not refer to them in class on a regular basis. [Source: *Meeting with BA Students*]

Due to the individual, student-centred nature of the programme, students are exposed to informal feedback from their teachers on a daily basis. Feedback on assessed work is typically oral, however permanent evaluations offer opportunities for both oral feedback from juries and written feedback, delivered at a later date. The content, volume and quality of feedback varies substantially across studios and in some cases the vocabulary used is not accessible to students. [Source: *SER*, p.47] The Academy has identified its assessment policy as a weakness [Source: *SWO(t) Analysis – Visual Arts*] and expressed a need for greater professionalisation of teachers' approaches to feedback. In order to address this, a professional development track using expertise from within the Educational Master programme has been planned. Younger teachers are paired with more experienced teachers who provide peer feedback, however significant differences still exist within the programme. [Source: *Meeting with Heads of Programme*] Students and Alumni indicated that written feedback from juries is variable in terms of quantity, criticality and timeliness and is not provided early enough to be useful for future development. [Source: *Meeting with Alumni and meeting with BA Students*]

#### **Review Team's Analysis**

The Academy recognises the challenges associated with designing and delivering assessment that is aligned to learning outcomes and robust in its methods, while ensuring that the assessment process does not deter risk taking or impede creative development. The Review Team was pleased to hear that assessment methods are kept under continual review and that through this process the wellbeing of students has been considered, for example in terms of overall workload and ending the public announcement of evaluation results.

It is clear that a strong emphasis is placed on the permanent evaluation of studio work, with some students choosing to postpone theory courses in order to focus on this element of the programme. The Academy should

be mindful of the possibility that, where teachers see the judgement of external jury members as a reflection on the quality of their teaching, they may be motivated to dissuade students from creative risks or from pursuing avenues of research that fall outside of their own expertise. It is recommended that clear protocols are established for the operation of jury evaluations, which outline the responsibilities of those in different roles and set expectations for the consistent conduct of these assessments.

Whilst the Academy is confident about the processes used to assess written assignments and examinations, there are a range of less formal approaches taken to studio-based assessment and a lack of transparency in relation to the criteria used for jury evaluations. Some examples of good practice are emerging in individual studios and the Review Team was provided with mark sheets designed for use by assessment panels in the Jewellery department which outlined a set of assessment criteria mapped to learning outcomes. The Painting department has also started to use a form which is completed by students as they receive feedback on their assessments, in order to identify areas for further development. Both of these processes could be extended to all studios in order to enhance assessment and feedback practices, through sharing best practice.

The Review Team concurs with the Academy that its Assessment Policy needs to be reviewed and recommends that this is undertaken as a priority, in order to ensure that the enhancements already made are followed through across the whole programme. This would provide transparency of assessment processes for students, such that students are explicitly provided with assessment criteria at the start of each period of their studio practice. It is further recommended that efforts to enhance the quality and consistency of written feedback on assessment, through the development of targeted training and guidance for teaching staff, are prioritised.

### **Compliance with Standard 2.3**

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

<b>Programme</b>	<b>Compliance level</b>
<b>Bachelor of Visual Arts</b>	Partially compliant
<b>Master of Visual Arts</b>	Partially compliant

### 3. Student profiles

#### 3.1 Admission/Entrance qualifications

**Standard: there are clear criteria for student admission, based on an assessment of their artistic / academic suitability for the programme.**

Entry criteria for the Bachelor and Master programmes are outlined in full on the Academy's website and consist of a diploma requirement, language requirement and artistic admission test. [Source: <https://www.ap-arts.be/en/education/bachelor-and-master-visual-arts/register>] All entrants to the Bachelor are required to have a secondary education diploma or equivalent and while it is possible for applicants to be admitted with an alternative vocational qualification, this is not promoted and such instances are rare. It is however, possible for applicants with prior experience at the correct level to gain exemption from part of the programme and to complete the Bachelor in two years [Source: *Clarification Meeting*] A list of acceptable international entry qualifications is also published on the website. Proficiency in the relevant language of instruction, Dutch or English, is required at a minimum of CEFR Level B2.

The artistic admission exam includes submission of a CV, portfolio of work and covering letter, and a two day test consisting of written and/or artistic assignments and an interview. As a result of the coronavirus pandemic, the admission exam moved online in 2020 and the Academy has noticed a positive impact on accessibility, particularly for international students. [Source: *SER*, p.49] Practical information about the timing and format of the admissions test for each specialism is published as a PDF document on the Academy's website. Feedback from Bachelor students indicated that further information about admissions procedures was disseminated to prospective students on open days and that they were generally satisfied with the amount of information available on the website. [Source: *Meeting with BA Students*]

CVs, portfolios and interviews aim to gauge applicants' academic ability, while interviews focus on their cultural interests, artistic background and expectations for the programme. The various artistic and written assignments are used to determine observational skills, creative skills and critical/analytical skills. [Source: *SER*, p.50] Motivation is used as a core criterion for the selection of students and admissions committees look for applicants' potential to evolve over time. [Source: *Meeting with Teachers including Coordinators of Specialisms*] Admissions tutors feel able to take a risk on applicants and to give them the opportunity to succeed in their first year. In theory the admissions procedure enables admissions tutors to suggest alternative specialisms to applicants where it is felt they may be better suited to a different discipline, however in practice, due to the different timings of entrance exams, transfers normally take place in the months after joining the programme. [Source: *Meeting with BA Students*]

The Academy must balance the number of students admitted to each specialism in order to maintain critical mass while ensuring that none are oversubscribed. The demand for each specialism varies substantially between the larger studios such as Fashion and the smaller specialisms such as In Situ. As a result, admissions tests are organised by specialisation, however they remain equivalent to one another in structure and content. [Source:

SER, p.49] An external observer attends admission committees and provides feedback on the efficacy of the admissions process to the Dean of the Academy. [Source, SER, p.50]

The Academy sees the contact that it has with applicants during the admissions process as an important promotional opportunity for the institution, regardless of the result for the individual. As such it strives to make a professional and authentic impression on its prospective students. A debriefing and evaluation exercise takes place each year with teaching staff in order to identify issues or share good practice across specialisms and the Academy intends to gather feedback from students and applicants in future. In order to enhance the monitoring and evaluation of its admissions procedures, the Academy has also identified a need to gather data on applicant profiles and to track this information through the student journey. [Source: SER, p.50]

### **Review Team's Analysis**

The Review Team is confident that there are clear criteria for student admission based on an assessment of their artistic and academic suitability for the programme. It is fairly common for students to change to other specialisms after enrolment, however the admissions process appears to generally result in a good match between student, institution and programme. Where there has been a lack of clarity about the nature of a specialism, as for example reported by students in relation to In Situ, the department has already undertaken work to clarify its mission, which should enable prospective students to gain a better understanding of what to expect once on the programme.

The use of motivation as the key criterion for entry to the programme enables the admission of students on the basis of their artistic and academic potential, creating opportunities for the Academy to widen access to individuals from different backgrounds. It is perhaps this approach to individual applicants that leaves students with the impression, articulated during meetings with the Review Team, that admissions decisions are made on the basis of personal rapport with teachers. The Academy may wish to consider how it can mitigate against this impression in future in order to ensure that all applicants feel that they have been treated fairly and that admissions procedures are transparent.

The Review Team was pleased to hear about the successful adaptations to the Academy's admissions procedures, made in response to coronavirus restrictions. The transition to online admissions exams during the pandemic has made the process more accessible for international applicants and those with other barriers to travel. The pivot to online admissions also appears to have resulted in a more individualised approach to communicating results and feedback as, where results may have previously been articulated publicly to a group of applicants, written feedback is now provided online.

The annual evaluation of admissions arrangements and sharing of good practice between studios provides an opportunity for their ongoing development. The evaluation process could be further augmented by applicant and student feedback and the Review Team encourages the Academy to follow up on its intention to gather this information in future. Likewise, additional data on applicant profiles would provide an insight into how admissions

procedures might be developed to ensure that they do not present barriers to applicants from particular backgrounds.

**Compliance with Standard 3.1**

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

<b>Programme</b>	<b>Compliance level</b>
<b>Bachelor of Visual Arts</b>	Fully compliant
<b>Master of Visual Arts</b>	Fully compliant

### 3.2 Student progression, achievement and employability

**Standard: the programme has mechanisms to formally monitor and review the progression, achievement and subsequent employability of its students.**

The Academy monitors progression and achievement through the use of statistical data, obtained through analytics software provided by AP University College. Student counsellors also share their insights with specialism Coordinators on an informal basis. Adjustments are made to teaching and assessment arrangements where students have particular needs and require additional support. Regular information sessions are provided for teachers by the Student Counsellor in relation to considerations such as autism, dyslexia and gender identity. [Source: *Clarification Meeting*] Through their close working relationships with students, teachers are well-placed to identify issues and many refer students to the counselling service for additional support. [Source: *Meeting with Support Staff*] AP University College is investing in a system for the confidential monitoring of counselling service activities, which is expected to provide further insight into student support needs. Time management is a particular concern for students and annual workshops are provided to address this. Motivational talks are also arranged for students who struggle with self-confidence and motivation as a result of disappointing assessment outcomes. [Source: *SER, p.55*]

Progression and achievement rates are an area for concern, with an average of 74.08% of Bachelor students successfully completing courses between 2016 and 2019. The academic success rate for Master students is significantly higher at around 90%, however only 61% of Master and 65% of Bachelor students complete their programmes within the normally expected timeframes (3 years for BA and 1 year for MA). The Academy has recently taken action to improve this position by reducing the number of credits that can be carried from Bachelor to Master and by revising the academic calendar to improve the assessment load at key pressure points. [Source: *SER, p.52*] Many students see an additional year as necessary for the development of their practice, research or professional skills. [Source: *Meeting with alumni*] Students also feel that theory classes are of limited importance and that the effort they put in to this aspect of the programme reflects this. As a result, many students do not engage with the first opportunity to take theory exams, opting instead to take them at a later date. [Source: *Meeting with BA students*]

Academic progression is a particular issue within the Fashion department, where it is common for students to postpone their theory courses in order to focus on the intensive workload associated with preparation for the fashion show, or to give themselves more time to gain an internship opportunity and improve their employment prospects. [Source: *SER, p.53*] The Fashion department is considering ways in which it might embed internships within the programme, however the drive for students to complete a long internship with a major fashion house makes this difficult to deliver within the current programme structure. [Source: *Meeting with Teachers including Coordinators of Specialisms*]

The mechanisms for recognising prior learning and exempting students from courses or course components are outlined in the Education and Examination Regulations. The Admissions Committee has the authority to grant exemptions based on an application from a student, accompanied by relevant certification or evidence of previously

acquired qualifications or competencies. [Source: *Education and Examination Regulations 2020-21, Art. 10.5*] Applications to substitute courses with credit earned in other institutions at home or abroad, are also detailed in the regulations and are considered in a similar manner, by the Admissions Committee. Students must already have accumulated 60 credits in order to undertake a study abroad placement, the conditions of which are outlined in a learning agreement indicating the ECTS requirements. [Source: *Education and Examination Regulations 2020-21, Art. 3.5*]

The Academy initiated an alumni survey in 2020, which gathered feedback from those graduating between 2016 and 2019, and intends to repeat this survey every three years. [Source: *Meeting with Advisor, Quality and Education Development*]. Feedback from the survey has been shared with staff across the institution in order to address issues or identify areas for future development, however as this is a new initiative the impact has yet to be seen.

The alumni survey indicates good levels of employment, with 55% of alumni working in the arts sector and 13% as teachers. Other graduates have found work in the hospitality, communication or design fields. One third of alumni are self-employed and just under a quarter are looking for work. Employment success is particularly high amongst alumni from the applied arts specialisms, with all of the working respondents from Fashion and Jewellery Design engaged in employment fully or largely in line with their studies. [Source: *Alumni Survey 2016-2019*]

Both the Bachelor and Master include optional courses focused on professional skills, such as *To Start as a Pro* or *Arts Management*, however in a meeting with the Review Team alumni commented on a lack of preparedness for professional life and limited opportunities for gaining employability or transferable skills whilst at the Academy. Some had received support from individual teachers to apply for residencies or funding, however structured elective courses, such as *Arts Management*, were found to be less useful from an employment perspective. [Source: *Meeting with alumni*] This view mirrored that of current students, who felt that the programme had insufficient focus on employability and did not provide the tools they would need to start their own business. Where students had had the opportunity to complete an internship however, they had been able to gain an insight into the professional world and to build a professional network. Those who had not had this opportunity indicated that they would have found the option beneficial. [Source: *Meeting with MA Students*] The studios aim to give students an insight into how their practice relates to the professional world by inviting alumni back to give presentations or workshops, and by providing opportunities to speak with teachers about practical issues such as how to price their work. [Source: *Meeting with Teachers including Coordinators of Specialisms*]

Employers and professional artists are invited into the Academy to talk to students and to contribute to the *Extra Academy*, which is open to students and graduates of the Visual Arts Programme. Activities such as this enable students to make connections on the periphery of the programme, which opens up possibilities for future collaboration and employment. Through the provision of internships and participation in assessment juries, employers and creative professionals are able to share their impressions of students' skills and competencies, as a reflection of the curriculum and learning and teaching methods used at the Academy. External professionals are

regularly approached by their contacts in the Academy to assist with exhibitions or research and have numerous opportunities to provide informal feedback on the content of the programme. [Source: *Meeting with the work field*] More formal feedback is provided by external members of the School of Arts Council and through the recently constituted Work Field Committee.

### **Review Team's Analysis**

The Review Team found the current disconnect between theory and practice within the programme (as outlined in its analysis of standard 2.1) to be a contributing factor to sub-optimal academic success rates for the Bachelor degree. The Academy is encouraged to continue its work to embed and improve the relevance of theoretical studies to artistic practice, in order to improve students' perceptions of and engagement with the contextual elements of the programme.

The Academy's relationship with the work field and in particular its central position within the Antwerp arts scene provides it with frequent opportunities to gather feedback from prospective employers on the curriculum and the pedagogical approaches used within the Visual Arts Programme. Links with employers, such as those established through internships, are clearly valued by students, who would like more opportunities within the curriculum to prepare for the world of work. Where internships are embedded within different specialisms, they enable students to develop key employability skills and have a positive impact on both their preparedness for professional life and their ability to build professional networks.

The Academy should consider how it can embed relevant employability and professional skills incrementally within the curriculum (from BA through to MA), to ensure that students are all equally well prepared to make the transition out of the programme and into the professional world. Following positive feedback on the value of internships from students, alumni and the work field, the Review Team shares the Academy's view that opportunities for internships should be reviewed to establish how they can be embedded within students' learning experience and across all specialisms.

Alumni data is limited as only one survey has been undertaken to date. The regular collection of information about alumni destinations and feedback on the relevance of various aspects of the programme to graduate career pathways has the potential to assist the Academy in developing and embedding employability skills within the curriculum. The Review Team recommends that this data is collected and analysed on an annual basis in order to identify actions that might enhance the programme's employment outcomes. Alumni already make a significant contribution to the programme and the Academy through presentations, workshops and other activities. The alumni survey indicated significant interest amongst the Academy's graduates in actively contributing to its activities which suggests that this resource could be used to even greater effect.

### **Compliance with Standard 3.2**

***The Review Team concludes that the programmes comply with Standard 3.2 as follows:***

<b><i>Programme</i></b>	<b><i>Compliance level</i></b>
<b><i>Bachelor of Visual Arts</i></b>	Partially compliant
<b><i>Master of Visual Arts</i></b>	Partially compliant

## 4. Teaching staff

### 4.1 Staff qualifications and professional activity

**Standard: members of the teaching staff are qualified for their role and are active as artists/pedagogues/researchers.**

The Academy's recruitment process tests the knowledge and skills described in the relevant job description, which includes qualities such as artistic aptitude, attitude to research, communication skills, external profile and knowledge of art theory. Vacancies are publicised to personal and international networks, and a number of candidates for studio teaching roles are already known to the Academy as valued contributors to workshops, guest lecturers and evaluation juries. The Academy's staff recruitment policy requires all teachers to have pedagogical skills, however only theory teachers are required to have a formal teaching qualification. All newly appointed teachers are required to provide English Language certification as part of the recruitment process. [Source, *SER*, p.59]

Theory teachers are expected to have an academic background and normally hold a doctorate in arts sciences or philosophy of the arts in addition to a teaching certificate. Within the interview process these teachers are asked to deliver a trial lesson in Dutch and English. [Source: *SER*, p.59]

Staff members without formal teaching qualifications are encouraged by the HR department to take short courses in educational skills, particularly those related to feedback and intercultural communication. The Educational Master team is working on a streamlined version of the programme for colleagues without a pedagogical qualification. Some initial workshops, focused on inclusive practice with respect to protected characteristics such as race, age and sexuality, have been delivered through workshops associated with the *Arts Inclusive* project and annual *Inspire!* days. [Source: *Meeting with Support Staff*]

Teaching staff are expected to continuously update their skills and to stay abreast of pedagogical developments. The main programme of training and development activities is currently provided by AP University College and is therefore not specifically tailored towards arts education. In order to provide a more relevant source of continuing professional development, the Arts Schools have been collaborating for several years on *Inspire!*, an annual day of lectures and workshops focusing on themes pertinent to day-to-day teaching within the Academy and the Conservatoire. A new training course on intercultural communication has also been implemented in 2021. [Source: *SER*, p.60]

Staff are encouraged to gain English Language qualifications and have free access to English classes through AP University College, which can be taken within working hours. [Source: *Clarification Meeting*] A system of regular performance review, linked to contract renewal or extension, is in place for individual teaching staff, managed by the Heads of Programme (or by the Head of Institution for senior staff). These formal evaluations draw upon student feedback provided through surveys or focus groups, to identify any priorities for development. [Source: *SER*, p.59]

A number of funded short term and doctoral research projects are available each year and teaching staff are encouraged to submit proposals. The short-term projects are seen as a way of promoting individual learning and

of strengthening the connections between education and research within the Academy, as teachers develop their own practice and bring new insights into the studio. In relation to theory courses, a Theory Board is in place that discusses pedagogical approaches and feedback from students on the teaching methods used in the preceding year. [Source: *Meeting with Teachers including Coordinators of Specialisms*]

Lecturers and researchers are regularly involved in the organisation of events, exhibitions and guest lectures as curators, coordinators, mediators or participating artists. [Source: *SER*, p.59] Teaching staff are also represented in institutional committees, including the School of Arts Council (which has oversight of education and staffing), the Library Committee and the Planning Committee (which plans exhibitions and events).

The Academy organises specific activities that encourage its teaching staff to reflect on their pedagogical practice, such as the 2013 symposium on art education, and cultivates ongoing opportunities for critical reflection through forums such as the nexus education research. [Source: *SER*, p.32] Teaching staff see the jury evaluations as an important opportunity for critical discussion and peer evaluation of their artistic and pedagogical approaches, as reflected in the artistic output of their students. New teachers entering a department are purposefully engaged in critical discussions with their colleagues, which feed into the development of the programme through a process of iterative changes to the curriculum year on year. [Meeting with Teaching Staff] A set of overarching pedagogical principles is set out in the recently developed *Didactic Concept*, however this document has yet to become embedded in the evaluation of learning and teaching. Less formal opportunities for staff to meet, share and discuss their practice with students and alumni, are encouraged through activities such as *Café Dessiner*, an annual gathering focused around the act of drawing, and *Soup Sessions*, in which lecturers and researchers share their work. [Source: *SER*, p.60]

### **Review Team's Analysis**

The Academy benefits from substantial expertise related to pedagogical theory and educational development within the Educational Master Programme and this resource is starting to be utilised to good effect. The plans to share aspects of the Educational Master curriculum with teaching staff on the Visual Arts Programme in order to provide targeted opportunities for the development of their teaching practice, have the potential to elicit significant pedagogical enhancements. The review team was pleased to hear that the newly initiated inclusivity training for staff has already had an impact on day-to-day teaching practice, and also that staff are supported to gain English language qualifications. Opportunities for staff to apply for funded research projects enable individuals to develop their artistic practice and to strengthen links between studio teaching and research.

The Academy provides some good opportunities for continuing professional development, however individual engagement with pedagogical developments and sector good practice, for example those related to assessment design and feedback models, could be improved. Currently the main forum for studio teachers to engage in critical reflection appears to be dialogue with their peers in the course of jury evaluations, however within this context student achievement becomes the main indicator of teaching quality, rather than the broader learning

experience. The Review Team recommends that the work currently being undertaken by the Educational Master team to devise a programme for the continuing professional development of the Academy's teaching staff, continues to be prioritised. It is further recommended that teachers (particularly those without formal pedagogical qualifications) are strongly encouraged to engage with these opportunities in order to enhance their skills in the areas of inclusive and effective teaching, assessment and feedback.

**Compliance with Standard 4.1**

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

<b>Programme</b>	<b>Compliance level</b>
<b>Bachelor of Visual Arts</b>	Substantially compliant
<b>Master of Visual Arts</b>	Substantially compliant

## 4.2 Size and composition of the teaching staff body

**Standard: there are sufficient qualified teaching staff to effectively deliver the programme.**

The programme has a teaching staff of 112 lecturers, with teaching allocations amounting to 60.9 FTE, managed by two Heads of Programme (1.2 FTE), assisted by fractional Coordinators and Chairs of specialisms and departments. The Heads and Coordinators have responsibility for ensuring that the studios and other departments are functioning effectively, with the Coordinators providing day-to-day supervision of staff and ensuring that each studio or department operates according to institutional policy. [Source: *Coordinator Role Description*]. A greater number of teachers are employed within the larger studios such as Fashion and Graphic Design, and in the central Drawing department, to ensure that the number of teaching staff is adequate for the number of students. A staff composition plan is prepared annually by the management team as part of the planning cycle. [Source: *SER, p.58*]

The age profile of teaching staff across the institution is relatively mature and the Academy seeks to expand the range of expertise within the programme through natural staff turnover. [Source: *SER, p58*] There is limited international diversity amongst the teaching staff body, with only 17 foreign teachers, all from Europe. Some specialisms have sought to expose students to a broader range of international and artistic perspectives by introducing researchers from more diverse backgrounds into the studio. [Source: *Meeting with Teachers including Coordinators of Specialisms*] The Visual Arts Programme also makes extensive use of guest lecturers in order to retain a level of flexibility that enables delivery to adapt to changing requirements and new developments within the curriculum.

Some doctoral researchers are allocated studio teaching time and sit on juries as part of their role. These researchers work closely with other teachers in their department to exchange information related to research developments and pedagogical approaches. Additionally, masterclasses for BA and MA students guided by PhD students or researchers bring initiatives from research groups and the Educational Master into the curriculum of the Visual Arts Programme. This ensures that new developments in the field feed into the Academy's educational mission and contribute to teaching methodology. [Source: *Meeting with Research and nexus Education-Research*]

### **Review Team's Analysis**

The number of students recruited across the Visual Arts Programme is relatively stable, therefore the number of teaching staff employed by the Academy remains adequate to cover the range of specialisms offered and to support a high-quality learning experience. Where there are new developments, such as with the recent establishment of the Moving Image Cell, the Academy factors this into their planning processes and recruits teachers with the requisite skills and experience.

There are clear examples of how some recent staff appointments (including the allocation of studio teaching to researchers) have begun to have an impact on the development of the various visual arts specialisms. There is however, an aspiration to increase the international diversity of the teaching staff to better reflect the diversity of the student body. The Review Team encourages the Academy to seek, where feasible, to continue to recruit

teaching staff from a variety of backgrounds and with a diverse range of experience, in order to facilitate the integration of global perspectives within the curriculum.

**Compliance with Standard 4.2**

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

<b>Programme</b>	<b>Compliance level</b>
<b>Bachelor of Visual Arts</b>	Fully compliant
<b>Master of Visual Arts</b>	Fully compliant

## 5. Facilities, resources and support

### 5.1 Facilities

**Standard: the institution has appropriate resources to support student learning and delivery of the programme reviewed.**

The Academy has four campuses; the historical Campus Mutsaard (home to the majority of specialisms), Campus Mode (Fashion), Campus Graphic Design and Campus In Situ. The size and shape of the studios varies dependent on the nature of the specialism. The Painting and Sculpture studio spaces are large with high ceilings and abundant natural light, whereas the jewellery studio is smaller and more suited to precision working. [Source, *SER*, p.62] Master students are provided with their own personal workspaces. [Source: *Meeting with MA students*] Several exhibition spaces of different size and type are located on the Mutsaard Campus, including the Long Gallery, Venus Hall, the Winter Garden and the Temple Building.

In collaboration with the University of Antwerp Faculty of Design Sciences and the DKO, with which it shares the Mutsaard Campus, the Academy has embarked on a major development plan for the site over the next 10 years, entitled *Making Mutsaard*. The masterplan for the project was formulated on the basis of a user survey, needs analysis and discursive 'Making Mutsaard' nights involving students and staff. [Source: *SER*, p.62] Some of the stated aims of the project are to provide enough space for 'our courses' and to provide a 'platform for cross-pollination'. [Source: *Making Mutsaard*] Some of the research staff have proposed the formation of a think tank in relation to the *Making Mutsaard* project in order to ensure that the development is sustainable and includes physical spaces where research and education can meet. [Source: *Meeting with Research and nexus Education-Research*]

Those studios located outside of Campus Mutsaard are housed in buildings uniquely suited to their needs, such as the large industrial space used for In Situ and the location of the Fashion studio above the MOMU (fashion museum) in the fashion district. All students visit the main building for certain activities, such as theory classes. [Source: *SER*, p.63] In addition to the Academy's own spaces, students have the opportunities to work externally, in spaces such as local theatres. [Source: *Tour of the facilities*]

The Academy has some shared 'technical rooms' such as the computer room, the digital print studio, the mixed lab, the Mekano lab and the carpentry studio. [Source: *SER* p. 63] Students indicated that the availability of these shared resources was not well publicised and that many teachers were not aware of their existence. Self-motivated and outgoing students who mix widely with those from other studios tend to find out about the possibility of using these additional spaces and equipment by word of mouth. This can be a problem for students from specialisms based outside of the main Mutsaard campus (In Situ, Graphic Design and Fashion). [Source: *Meeting with BA students*] It is necessary for students to negotiate access to other specialisms' studios through their teachers, which can make the process slow. [Source: *Meeting with MA students*] The practice of students making a financial contribution for the purchase of materials in their 'home' studio complicates the practicalities of sharing studios and workshops, as it can lead to a shortage of space and materials in the more popular studios that is perceived as unfair. [Source: *Tour of the facilities*]

Students reported that in some workshops the equipment is old and not well maintained (as in the jewellery workshop), specialist equipment is in limited supply (for example in the wood workshop), or has recently been removed altogether (such as the large plotter in graphic design). Equipment in shared studios, such as the welding studio, is regularly damaged as there is no close supervision or training for students. [Source: *Meeting with MA students*] Apart from a single technical staff member who is also responsible for the print studio, the Academy does not have separate technical staff, therefore teachers are also responsible for equipment and technical resources and are timetabled to maximise available staff cover. [Source: *Tour of the facilities*]

A computer lab is available at Campus Mutsaard and students also have access to the Mekano Lab at Antwerp University, although it is not well used. Through the *Making Mutsaard* project, there is a possibility that a new IT hub might combine these resources. The Graphic Design department has its own computers and a mixed lab for use by all students houses some technical equipment such as a 3D printer, however this lab is still in a nascent state. [Source: *Tour of the facilities*] Virtual learning is facilitated through Digitap, a digital learning platform housing course-level information. [Source: *SER, p.69*]

Through the *Digital and Distance Art Education Project*, the Academy is building on the developments made to accommodate the pandemic restrictions and is focusing on making all classrooms streaming-ready and equipping all teaching staff with the necessary skills to stream their classes. The IT department is also optimising Wi-Fi access and working to remove dead zones. [Source: *Meeting with support staff*]

The campus library, located on the Campus Mutsaard functions as a space for research, meeting and exchange. The collection is focused on physical publications and includes a wide variety of art books and monographs, in addition to the *Track Reports* (publications related to the Academy's research outputs). There is also a collection of e-resources and databases provided by AP University College. The library is run by a librarian supported by a Library Committee, which makes suggestions for new acquisitions. Regular callouts are also made by the librarian, so that all staff have the opportunity to suggest new titles (including e-books and online publications). [Source: *Meeting with Research and nexus Education-Research*] The librarian has had the opportunity to contribute ideas to the *Making Mutsaard* plan and hopes to modernise the library fixtures and fittings in future. [Source: *Tour of the facilities*]

### **Review Team's Analysis**

The Academy provides a range of well-equipped and appropriate workspaces, including large studio spaces (for example for painting and In Situ). Students benefit from the central position of Campus Mutsaard and its historical structures, which attract a wide audience to its public and exhibition spaces. The masterplan for *Making Mutsaard* indicates a variety of exciting opportunities to ensure the sustainability and adaptability of these spaces in future, including the potential for designated research spaces and digital hubs.

Technical equipment is adequate, however students made a number of comments about limited, aged or ill-maintained equipment in need of updating. While there are a number of shared studio spaces the opportunities

for interdisciplinary work are not well communicated to students or to teaching staff in other studios. It is possible for students to work in other specialist studios depending on the focus of their work, however the process for gaining access is not always clear to students and could be more clearly established. Some challenges around the oversight and management of workshop areas where there are potential health and safety considerations or risks were discussed during the site visit. While the Review Team is reassured that the Academy has plans to address these issues, it is recommended that the Heads of Programme continue to prioritise workshop supervision, health and safety training on equipment for students, and the availability of budget for urgent repairs.

Library, computing and digital resources are fit for purpose and students have access to a virtual learning platform (VLE), online timetable and student intranet, which support their learning effectively. The librarian works collaboratively with staff and students to make the most of the available resources and research staff were appreciative of the investment that has been made over the years to improve the academic content of the collection. The *Second Shelf* project has positively impacted the gender diversity of the collection and brought a renewed focus to its importance within the Academy. It was noted that student interest in e-books and other digital resources had increased during the pandemic and the Academy will want to ensure that the library's digital resources meet students' needs should elements of blended learning continue to be used within the programme.

**Compliance with Standard 5.1**

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

<b>Programme</b>	<b>Compliance level</b>
<b>Bachelor of Visual Arts</b>	Substantially compliant
<b>Master of Visual Arts</b>	Substantially compliant

## 5.2 Financial resources

### **Standard: the institution's financial resources enable successful delivery of the programme reviewed.**

Programmes at the Academy are publicly funded via a sealed financial envelope from the Flemish Government that funds all higher art education in the region. As the funding level is fixed, any growth in one institution will result in a reduction in funding for others, leading to competition between the Flemish art schools. [Source: *SER*, p.64] The funding level is based on a range of factors including student enrolments, credit load and academic results and is payable to AP University College, rather than to the Academy directly. The Academy submits an annual budget proposal to AP University College, which applies an allocation model taking account of overheads when transferring funds to the Academy for staff and operations (approximately €4.5 million in 2019).

Funding for the educational elements of the Visual Arts Programme comes mainly from tuition fees, however the Academy also receives project funds (from AP University College) and some external funding (approximately €100,000 combined in 2019), and has its own reserve fund. Research has a separate funding stream, some of which is allocated to the nexus of education and research. [Source: *SER*, p.65] The Academy has aspirations to develop a third flow of external funding based on community engagement and sponsorship in order to make further enhancements to its programmes but does not see this additional income stream as critical to its financial sustainability. [Source: *Meeting with Head of Institution*]

A management team consisting of the Head of Institution, Heads of Programme and Financial Officer is responsible for allocating budgets for the delivery of the Visual Arts Programme, allocating around 80-85% of funds to teaching activities and the rest to support services. Each year the studios are asked to provide details of their requirements for the year, which are analysed and translated into budgets by the management team. Part of the budget is set aside for enhancements and innovations and the team aims to focus on a different area each year. Departments are invited to give feedback after the budget round and urgent technical requirements are given priority. [Source: *Tour of the facilities*]

#### **Review Team's Analysis**

The Academy is confident that its status as a publicly funded institution will enable sustained delivery of its programmes, through a combination of income from the government and income from tuition fees. While it has aspirations to develop additional funding streams these are not yet fully developed or prominent within its strategic plans. Budget allocations are set in collaboration with staff in the various studios and departments, which have the opportunity to articulate their needs on an annual basis. There is evidence of the Academy funding identified and prioritised developments in relation to the Visual Arts Programme, such as the new Moving Image Cell attached to the photography department.

In light of students' comments about the availability and repair of technical equipment within the studios (as outlined in standard 5.1), the Review Team encourages Heads of Programme to continue to prioritise urgent technical requirements within their budget plans and to anticipate the need for the replacement of equipment over time. The Review Team understood that there was an increasing focus on purchasing equipment for use

across studios, which would indicate an effective use of resources, provided students and teachers are made aware of the availability and location of new equipment.

**Compliance with Standard 5.2**

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

<b>Programme</b>	<b>Compliance level</b>
<b>Bachelor of Visual Arts</b>	Fully compliant
<b>Master of Visual Arts</b>	Fully compliant

### 5.3 Support staff

#### **Standard: the programme has sufficient qualified support staff.**

AP University College provides support staff across a number of functions including library services, communication, quality assurance, IT, security and technical support. Some services, such as human resources, finance and facilities, are centralised within the AP University College and are funded by contribution to overheads. In addition, the Academy has a dedicated support staff of 28 individuals (9.6 FTE) covering policy and coordination, administration, production and engineering, and student counselling. Feedback from students indicated that support staff are currently both helpful and accessible. Students find the ombuds service particularly useful in helping them to communicate with the Academy should they have any concerns or complaints. The Ombudsperson has responsibility for managing academic appeals and mediating disputes and can be accessed by students directly, or following a referral from teaching staff or the counselling service. [Source: *SER*, p.57] The counselling service provides general support, psychosocial support and also manages individual adjustments to accommodate students' disabilities or health needs. Students also have access to the administration team for general assistance and help with study regulations. [Source: *Meeting with support staff*]

A transition exercise named ADAPT, operating within AP University College and its schools between 2019 and 2025, aims to restructure educational support services in order to make them more efficient and responsive. [Source: *SER*, p.66] This exercise is still in the initial stages, involving conversations between the Heads of Schools and AP administration about which service should be located in which department. The Academy recognises the value of student-focused services, such as counselling and international support, that are tailored to the visual arts and delivered close to its diverse student body. [Source: *Clarification Meeting*]

The human resources department of AP University College organises induction and training for support staff and offers online training packages that are available to all staff. Support staff may make requests for specific staff development activities, however the budget for this is limited. [Source: *Meeting with support staff*]

#### **Review Team's Analysis**

The current numbers of support staff are appropriate for the size of the student body. Student support services are carefully tailored to the needs of visual arts students and the large community of international students within the Academy. Student feedback indicates that these services are accessible and that staff are knowledgeable, friendly and supportive.

In considering how best to structure its support services through the ADAPT exercise, the Review Team encourages AP University College to ensure that students on the Visual Arts Programme continue to receive excellent support from experienced staff who understand their particular needs, and who are based within the School of Arts.

#### **Compliance with Standard 5.3**

*The Review Team concludes that the programmes comply with Standard 5.3 as follows:*

<b><i>Programme</i></b>	<b><i>Compliance level</i></b>
<b><i>Bachelor of Visual Arts</i></b>	Fully compliant
<b><i>Master of Visual Arts</i></b>	Fully compliant

## 6. Communication, organisation and decision-making

### 6.1 Internal communication process

**Standard: effective mechanisms are in place for internal communication within the programme.**

A range of methods are used by the Academy to communicate with students on the Visual Arts Programme, including induction activities for new incoming students, such as a meet and greet event with key members of staff and information sessions with practical themes. During the induction period, third year Bachelor and Master students also attend information sessions relating to electives, study options, masterclasses and the Master Thesis. A Who's Who document provides students with key contact details for support staff. [Source: *SER*, p.68]

Digital communication channels used to communicate with students include MyArts (online timetable), Digitap (virtual learning environment housing course-level information), AP email, the Academy website, social media channels, student intranet and a digital newsletter. Students receive emails containing general information and updates from AP University College but reported that they normally only learn about changes to the programme as they happen. Some information about upcoming changes is channelled through the Student Council and students reported that the flow of information is improving each year. [Source: *Meeting with BA students*] A student intranet has recently been established but has yet to be used to its full potential. [Source: *Tour of the facilities*] The most important method of communication for students and staff continues to be face-to-face interaction within the physical space of the studio. [Source: *SER*, p.69]

The Academy has identified a number of challenges with internal communications, related to its multiple campuses, dual-language delivery, large international student body and high numbers of part time and visiting staff. In focus groups and surveys, students have articulated concerns about information overload and the number of different communication channels in use. [Source: *SER*, p. 70] A Communications Officer, appointed in 2019, has been analysing the situation and developing a policy that outlines which communication methods should be used for which purpose. [Source: *Meeting with the Head of Institution*] A digital newsletter called *Hello There* has recently been introduced and is widely read, with students able to contribute copy to promote projects or share information. [Source: *Meeting with MA students*] Students also communicate with each other through the Academy's social media channels, regularly tagging its Instagram account when sharing images of their work. [Source: *Tour of the facilities*] The Communication Officer retains control of the Academy's social media accounts, however students can send material to her for posting.

Digital communication between staff has been more successful during the pandemic. Studios use Microsoft Teams to communicate and have regular meetings, attendance at which has improved since they moved online. There are many fractional teachers employed in the Theory department, who are provided with notes of Theory Board meetings if they are unable to attend. [Source: *Meeting with teachers including Coordinators of specialisms*] A staff intranet is also operational.

The Communication Policy Officer has reviewed the internal communication structure and found it to be overly complex.. At the time of the site visit, the administration office and Communication Officer were developing a

communications charter in order to streamline the process and set clear expectations around the use of different communications channels. [Source: *Tour of the facilities*]

Some members of staff teach in more than one studio, stimulating informal sharing of ideas. The Specialism Coordinators also attend a weekly meeting where they have the opportunity to discuss common issues and share information. [Source: *Meeting with teachers including Coordinators of specialisms*] These meetings act as a forum for studios to share good practice, and to discuss a range of topics including jury systems, feedback on assessed work, the annual calendar, project week and other educational activities. [Source: *SER, p.68*]

### **Review Team's Analysis**

The Academy relies heavily on face to face communication on campus and has found internal communications particularly challenging during the pandemic, due to the number of different channels used. Students like the flexibility of multiple channels but this has the effect of diluting messaging and results in information overload. However, interpersonal communication between staff and students remains strong and is highly valued by students.

The recently appointed Communication Officer has had a significant impact on the Academy's communications strategy. Recent enhancements to internal communications, such as the *Hello There* newsletter and use of Instagram have provided channels for students to share their work and communicate with their peers across the Academy and beyond. The use of social media platforms such as Instagram and WhatsApp as mechanisms for students to share their work have clearly become very popular and the Review Team encourages the Academy to move towards shared ownership of these communication channels with students as they become more embedded within the programme.

The Review Team understands that a communication policy is in development that will aim to streamline communication channels and outline which mechanism should be used for which purpose. The swift implementation of this policy is recommended in order to ensure that digital communication is effective, particularly during this time of increased online and blended learning.

### **Compliance with Standard 6.1**

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

<b>Programme</b>	<b>Compliance level</b>
<b>Bachelor of Visual Arts</b>	Substantially compliant
<b>Master of Visual Arts</b>	Substantially compliant

## 6.2 Organisational structure and decision-making processes

**Standard: the programme is supported by an appropriate organisational structure and clear decision-making processes.**

The School of Arts (SofA) Council is the most senior committee in the Academy's organisational structure and reports to the AP University College Board. The SofA Council includes staff, student and external representation and is responsible for decision making in relation to education (for example admissions tests, module exemptions, departmental regulations and the designation of the Ombudsperson) and some staffing matters. The Council acts in an advisory capacity to the AP Executive Board in relation to staff appointments, programme amendments and partnerships. [Source: *SER*, p.67] An annual report is presented to the SofA Council which tracks the progress of actions from the previous year and is reported upwards to the AP University College Board.

Teaching staff are also represented on the Library Committee, which has decision making responsibilities in relation to the library's collections and its operation, and on the Planning Committee. The Planning Committee evaluates proposals for events taking account of their pedagogical, artistic and social value, and their relationship to the Academy's strategic priorities. [Source: *SER*, p.68] Personnel matters are discussed at the School of Arts Negotiating Committee and student matters at the Student Council, an advisory body composed of elected student representatives. There are plans to include students, as appropriate, in committees where they are not currently represented, such as the Planning Committee.

The Academy realises that it needs to strengthen the student voice within its decision making processes and the Heads of Programme have initiated regular meetings with the Student Council. Students indicated that this had been a positive development, however the Student Council is widely regarded by the student body as ineffective, with no decision making power. As such it is difficult for the Council to recruit student representatives and most leave the membership after a year, leading to the same issues being raised repeatedly with no progress. [Source: *Meeting with BA students*]

Day-to-day management and decision making within the Visual Arts Programme sits with the two Heads of Programme, who have individual responsibility for different studios or specialisms and joint responsibility for leading the programme as a whole. The Heads of Programme work under the leadership of the Head of Institution, who meets with them and the Artistic Staff (comprised of senior educational and operational managers) on a weekly basis. [Source: *Organisational Chart*] Teaching staff also have input into strategic, operational and artistic-pedagogical matters through the Education Staff or Visual Arts Coordinators Consultation, which includes all Coordinators of studios and options, in addition to the Chairs of the departments of Theory and Drawing. [Source: *SER*, p.67]

Staff responsibilities within the programme are clearly defined, with one of the Heads of Programme responsible for Fine Arts studios and the other for Applied Arts studios. Heads of Department are responsible for the artistic direction of the studio while Studio Coordinators are responsible for operational matters such as staff supervision and the implementation of policy. [Source: *Tour of the Facilities*] In some studios these roles are combined. In

addition, central educational departments such as Drawing and Theory, are managed by a Chair, also reporting to one of the Heads of Programme.

### **Review Team's Analysis**

The Academy has a strong sense of community and an open approach to communication that enables colleagues from different studios and departments to interact and share information. The relatively flat management structure results in short lines of communication between teaching staff, Heads of Programme and the Head of Institution. There are numerous forums through which staff at all levels can have input into decision making within the Visual Arts Programme.

The progress of business through the committee structure indicates that decision making is broadly effective, however the closure of feedback loops requires more attention in order to ensure that all stakeholders and contributors are aware of the actions taken in response to their feedback. Mechanisms for communicating decisions and responding to feedback are not well established, therefore students feel that their views are not always taken seriously. As suggested in relation to standard 1, the Academy's monitoring tool could be adjusted to ensure that completed actions are communicated to relevant stakeholders. Plans to include student representatives on the Planning Committee are a step in the right direction.

The Review Team recommends that the Heads of Programme continue to support the Student Council to find its voice and to contribute to the culture of DIY/DIT that the Academy is seeking to embed within the programme. The Student Council should be encouraged to establish ways to track issues and actions across academic years and to make use of the student intranet to both gather feedback and disseminate information.

### **Compliance with Standard 6.2**

*The Review Team concludes that the programmes comply with Standard 6.2 as follows:*

<b>Programme</b>	<b>Compliance level</b>
<b>Bachelor of Visual Arts</b>	Substantially compliant
<b>Master of Visual Arts</b>	Substantially compliant

## 7. Internal Quality Culture

**Standard: The programme has in place effective quality assurance and enhancement procedures.**

AP University College bases its approach to quality assurance on the PDCA cycle (PLAN, DO, CHECK, ACT). As such, the quality culture is enhancement-focused, driven by strategic aims relating to education, research, community service and arts practice. Through the ADAPT project, the role of quality and education development has been made explicit across AP University College. A Quality and Education Development Advisor has been assigned to the Academy as part of her remit at AP University College, which has led to significant recent improvements to quality assurance practices. Planning and monitoring is informed by a number of processes including surveys, student interviews and focus groups, data analysis, feedback from external jurors and consultation with the professional field. [Source: *SER*, p.71] These processes support the less formal opportunities for feedback, reflection and enhancement that emanate from interaction between teachers and students and between staff and visiting external professionals.

The Quality Coordinator and Study Trajectory Counsellors ran online focus group interviews in 2020, resulting in a number of suggestions for improvements to the programmes. A report was compiled and passed to the Heads of Programme for action. As the Counsellors receive updates they aim to communicate these to students in order to close the feedback loop. [Source: *Meeting with Support Staff*] Statistical data has recently become accessible to the Academy, enabling analysis of basic student demographic data and success and progression rates in preparation for this review. [Source: *SER*, p.72]

AP University College operates the majority of student surveys on behalf of the Academy, which uses the results to inform its strategic planning. A three-year cycle is currently being implemented, which will include the coordination of a programme survey, alumni survey and course surveys. Ad hoc surveys are also conducted and have recently provided useful insights in the areas of digital education and library services. [Source: *SER*, p.71] Feedback is disseminated to teachers for use as a lens through which they can reflect on their own day-to-day pedagogical practice. [Source: *Meeting with Heads of Programme*] For example, in response to feedback received through the alumni survey that indicated relatively low satisfaction with the In Situ specialism, the studio has developed a new mission and vision, which outlines the nature of the specialism and promotes a shared understanding between staff and students. [Source: *Clarification Meeting*]

The institutional committee structure occupies a central position in the Academy's quality cycle. The SofA Council has oversight of various aspects of educational strategy and delivery, providing a forum in which representatives of the student body, teaching staff and external professionals can contribute to the development of the programme. [Source: *SER*, p.71] A Work Field Committee has also recently been constituted in order to establish a formal channel for the collection of feedback from external professionals. The Student Council currently has an advisory function and raises any issues related to the quality of the programme from a student perspective. [Source: *Meeting with BA students*] Student representatives on the Council collect feedback from their peers either in person, or through digital platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook and Microsoft Teams. [Source: *Meeting with MA students*]

Aside from this, students have the opportunity to raise issues anonymously with the Ombudsperson, who acts as a neutral point of contact to mediate and provide students with information on their rights and obligations, and to guide them through relevant procedures. [Source: *Meeting with BA students*]

As most of the Academy's quality assurance processes are recent developments, there has been limited opportunity for changes made as a result of feedback to be communicated to stakeholders. The Heads of Programme have started to meet with the Student Council and to update members directly on any actions taken in response to their concerns, however dissemination of this information to the wider student body is a challenge. Some information about changes to the programmes is included in the *Hello There* newsletter, which is distributed to the whole student body. Alumni learn of changes made in relation to their feedback through personal contacts with staff and students in their studio. [Source: *Meeting with alumni*]

The Academy undertook a widespread internal review in preparation for this external review of the Visual Arts Programme and as part of this process, formulated its aims into a structured action plan. Now that this is in place, the progress of actions will be reviewed by the management team at three points each year. Enhancement activities related to the Academy's main strategic aims of sustainability, diversity and DIY/DIT will be driven by the objectives laid out in the Roadmap, which are in turn tracked through a newly developed monitoring tool. Staff buy-in is key to the success of these aims on a pedagogical level and there is widespread enthusiasm amongst teachers for these themes. [Source: *Meeting with Advisor Quality and Education Development*]

### **Review Team's Analysis**

The Visual Arts Programme has previously depended on informal feedback mechanisms, such as discussions between teachers and students, or between Academy employees and external professionals within their personal networks, or in the context of jury evaluations. These feedback loops continue to form an important element of the Academy's approach to quality assurance and enhancement, however these insights are now supported by a more structured system that enables greater accountability and closer monitoring of actions. The use of regular focus groups as a means of interrogating the student perspective is, in combination with other data collection methods such as surveys, an effective way of gathering student feedback on priority areas.

A number of new quality assurance initiatives have been recently implemented, such as the Work Field Committee and meetings between the Student Council and the Heads of Programme. The Review Team recommends that these mechanisms are formally embedded within the regular quality assurance cycle, in order to ensure that the experience of students and the needs of the work field are considered as part of a regular monitoring and review process undertaken by the programme management. As indicated in relation to standards 1 and 6.2, the Academy should also ensure that any actions or improvements undertaken in direct response to feedback is communicated to students and other relevant stakeholders.

As the Academy's approach to quality assurance and enhancement matures and embeds it will be necessary to adapt and prioritise the various processes used to monitor and evaluate the Visual Arts Programme. It is

recommended that the quality assurance mechanisms themselves are reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that they are fit for purpose and continue to identify issues, areas for enhancement and examples of good practice.

**Compliance with Standard 7**

*The Review Team concludes that the programmes comply with Standard 7 as follows:*

<b>Programme</b>	<b>Compliance level</b>
<b>Bachelor of Visual Arts</b>	Substantially compliant
<b>Master of Visual Arts</b>	Substantially compliant

## 8. Public interaction

### 8.1 Cultural, artistic and educational contexts

**Standard: the programme engages within wider cultural, artistic and educational contexts.**

As a public institution with a historic campus at the centre of the city of Antwerp, the Academy engages with and shapes public discourse on arts and culture within its immediate environment through the organisation of public exhibitions and lectures. Such events may be grounded in artistic research, or involve the exploration of artistic themes within a social context, such as the exhibition *Naughty Kids*, which focused on the impact of the Antwerp punk scene on arts and culture in the city. [Source: *SER*, p.73] The Academy engages with wider artistic discourse connected to its publications and through international or, more recently, online events such as the 2020 Fashion Show. Involvement in the global debate around sustainability and the arts is one of the Academy's strategic aims and further public lectures on the relationship between art and sustainability are planned for 2020/21. [Source: *SER*, p.74]

The Academy is aware of the need to diversify its links with the cultural sector and artistic professions in order to extend its reach and impact to minority groups currently underrepresented in the visual arts. AP University College is aware of the challenges in this area and will provide the Academy with additional expertise to focus its own efforts and to participate in sector-wide debate. Expanding the programme to include a wider range of art forms, such as street art, may be one route to increasing diversity. [Source: *Meeting with Head of Institution*]

Public lectures have been packaged under the title *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, which has increased public engagement and expanded the audience for this diverse range of talks. [Source: *SER*, p.73] In addition, both the *Extra Academy* lectures and the research platform *Expanding Academy* provide opportunities for students, staff and alumni to encounter a variety of artistic practice. The *Extra Academy* lectures are followed by dinner events where attendees can interact with the speaker and therefore act as a vehicle for artistic discourse. The *Expanding Academy* brings long-term research projects into the Academy and a number of these have a social aspect. [Source: *Meeting with Research and nexus education-research*] The Antwerp Academy Art Book Fair provides a further opportunity for dissemination of printed research alongside historical publications as a means of drawing links between the tradition and future of artistic print. [Source: <https://ap-arts.be/en/AAABF-en>]

The Academy sustains close contact with the professions through its external juries and the external members of the SofA Council, and gains formal feedback through these channels that help it to assess its impact on the local cultural and artistic communities. Teachers, researchers and managers are intertwined with the arts sector through their professional practice at home and abroad, acting as ambassadors for the programme and raising its public profile. Staff are able to draw on their professional connections when bringing collaborators into the programme and bring an understanding of the wider educational context through their work on juries in other institutions or as members of external committees. [Source: *SER*, p.74]

The programme provides a number of opportunities for students to present their work in a public context. The Master exhibitions publicly present students' work as examples of artistic research positioned within the broader artistic field and in some cases, involve dialogue between the artwork and public spaces (especially for In Situ students). [Source: *SER*, p.75] The *Noorderlicht* project provides opportunities for students from the Academy and the Conservatoire to work in public spaces and connect with the community in a multicultural Antwerp neighbourhood. Other socially engaged projects include the production of face masks by Fashion students at the start of the pandemic and the research project *No Time* in which painting students investigated their representations of the landscape with reference to the impact of climate change. [Source: *Track Report 'De Opwarming'*]

The majority of socially engaged practice happens around the periphery of the programme, through activities initiated by students. [Source: *Meeting with Heads of Programme*] Students feel that they are sometimes discouraged from pursuing societal agendas within their studio work, in part because teachers do not have the expertise to assess projects associated with specific issues or environments. The Academy encourages students to consider issues of sustainability and inclusivity, but support for this varies from teacher to teacher and such issues are not widely critically debated within the programme. [Source: *Meeting with MA students*]

### **Review Team's Analysis**

The Academy's openness and commitment to inviting members of the art world and the wider Antwerp community through its doors is evident from the many events, exhibitions and showcases that are available to the public, for example the *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* series. In particular, the *Extra Academy* appears to be a force for change and an opportunity for the Academy to engage more fully with public discourse and the *Expanding Academy* has the potential to expose students on the programme to a wide range of artistic research. *Noorderlicht* emerged throughout the review as important example of a project that promotes social interaction between students and the wider community. The Review Team heard about a number of exciting possibilities for the future, such as bringing Antwerp's urban art culture into the programme, which have the potential to diversify the student body.

While there are examples of projects that include elements of social engagement, the Review Team encountered limited formal opportunities for students to create work within the community. The Review Team encourages the Academy to support students to explore the application of their skills in a social context and the ways in which this aspect of artistic practice could be embedded within the programme.

The Academy is beginning to explore more global connections and to consider how it can diversify its partnerships and associations to connect the Visual Arts Programme with a wider range of international communities. It already has some strong connections with other educational institutions in China, the USA, Cuba and South Africa, which it could build on to provide opportunities for staff and students to engage with a broader range of global issues.

**Compliance with Standard 8.1**

*The Review Team concludes that the programmes comply with Standard 8.1 as follows:*

<b>Programme</b>	<b>Compliance level</b>
<b>Bachelor of Visual Arts</b>	Fully compliant
<b>Master of Visual Arts</b>	Fully compliant

## 8.2 Interaction with the artistic professions

**Standard: the programme actively promotes links with various sectors of the relevant artistic professions.**

The Academy has strong connections with the Antwerp art community and works closely with galleries and other organisations to ensure that it meets the needs of the artistic professions locally. [Source: *Meeting with Heads of Programme*] These relationships are formed and maintained both through the personal networks of its staff and through formal partnerships with a range of organisations including museums, galleries, artists' collectives, publishers, fashion houses, theatre companies and other higher education providers. [Source: *SER*, p.75] Some of these connections are embedded within the programme, whereas others relate to one-off projects or the provision of space and facilities, which can also lead to learning opportunities for students. One example is the use of the Temple for a production by theatre collective SKaGeN, which led to studio visits and dialogue between the visiting artists and students. [Source: *SER*, p.76] Students receive some support to organise their own projects and are able to use the Academy's exhibition spaces when available. [Source: *Meeting with BA students*]

All teachers on the programme are active in the profession and bring their personal networks into the service of the Academy, using their contacts to recommend guest lecturers and collaborators. Coordinators are encouraged to introduce visiting staff to the Heads of Programme in order to establish a connection at the institutional level. [Source: *Meeting with Heads of Programme*] There is also consideration given to the breadth of professional expertise brought into the institution through new staff recruitment and the strategic connections that can be made through the appointment of jury members. [Source: *SER*, p.76] In spite of extensive professional connections, it is often difficult to attract high profile or international guest lecturers due to low rates of pay, therefore the Academy works closely with other institutions to share expertise through collaboration. [Source: *Meeting with Heads of Programme*]

The Academy plans on further strengthening its ties with Antwerp's major arts organisations and continuing to benefit from their international networks. At the time of the site visit it was planning additional collaborations with Extra City (contemporary art gallery), the Middelheim Museum, M HKA (Museum of Contemporary Art), Royal Museum of Fine Arts Antwerp, FOMU (foto museum) and MoMu (fashion museum). [Source: *SER*, p.76] Through its strategic roadmap, the Academy has stated its intention to develop a diverse range of global partnerships, strategically pursuing collaborations in all continents. [Source: *Roadmap Visual Arts 2021-2025*]

The professional networks of individual members of staff, in addition to their interaction with visiting professionals on external juries and through research projects, provides an organic feedback mechanism through which the Academy gains insight into the ongoing needs of the profession. Internships in Costume Design, Graphic Design and Photography also provide students with insights to the professional world, which impact on their expectations for the Visual Arts Programme. The hosting organisations themselves benefit from the new ideas that interns bring with them, however internships can be costly for individual artists to support and therefore some are unable to make such a commitment. [Source: *Meeting with the Work Field*] Internship hosts and the broader arts professions

are able to have input into the curriculum through informal conversations in the many forums in which they encounter Academy staff, and through more formal channels such as the SofA Council.

Continuing professional development opportunities exist within the Academy for alumni and arts professionals, including formal educational opportunities such as research projects and the Educational Master programme. Public lectures such as the *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* series, while open to the public, mainly attract those working in the cultural field. Adult education classes take place in community colleges and are not common within Flemish higher education institutions. [Source: Clarification Meeting]

### **Review Team's Analysis**

The Academy occupies a central position within the Antwerp art scene and has a symbiotic relationship with many arts organisations and institutions within the city. As a result, the programme is in a unique position to respond to the needs of the profession and to continue to contribute to the local arts ecosystem in a sustainable way. International connections with the professions are less developed, however the Academy aims to broaden its range of global partners and has a growing global network of alumni who could be engaged to support this aim.

All students have opportunities to encounter the professional field through a range of activities including exhibitions, workshops and (in some specialisms) internships. The Review Team met with members of the work field who suggested that certain specialisms (for example Fashion) receive more outside attention and that others, such as Graphic Design and Jewellery, could benefit from further opportunities for professional exposure.

### **Compliance with Standard 8.2**

*The Review Team concludes that the programmes comply with Standard 8.2 as follows:*

<b>Programme</b>	<b>Compliance level</b>
<b>Bachelor of Visual Arts</b>	Fully compliant
<b>Master of Visual Arts</b>	Fully compliant

### 8.3 Information provided to the public

**Standard: information provided to the public about the programme is clear, consistent and accurate.**

The Academy has a clear communication strategy, which connects relevant target audiences with information about the programme and the Academy's events and outputs. An in-house designer has also been employed and a house style developed in common with the Conservatoire, with which the Academy shares the recently redeveloped ap-arts website. [Source: *SER*, p.70] The 2020 Communication plan identifies six main external communications channels; digital and online, social media, *infomail* and newsletter, print, live events and media campaigns. [Source: *Communication 2020*]

Dynamic content on the website gives public audiences access to up to date information about the Academy and its programmes, supported by analytics that provide demographics data on potential students. Daily updates on activities within the studios are posted on Facebook and Instagram accounts, where the Academy's followers have increased by 100% in the past year. [Source: *Communication 2020*] Monthly email communications are used to both update potential students and to engage with members of the public interested in exhibitions and events. Printed communications include the annual publication of the Academy's brochure, which showcases each specialism, posters, flyers and exhibition guides. Live events aimed at external communication include information days (held online in 2020), open studios and an open house event. After surveying prospective students, the Academy found that most first encountered the programmes through public events, therefore it aims to take advantage of these events to better promote the programme in future. [Source: *SER*, p.70]

The Communication Officer acts as a gatekeeper for external communication, with all published information checked by the Dean of the Academy. Social media accounts are also operated by the Communication Officer, with students sending images and other information for posting. The graphic designer is responsible for the consistency and accuracy of all visual communications. [Source: *Tour of the facilities*] Programme information for each specialism is published on the website and includes details of the programme structure, studio staff and facilities. The Academy is obliged by government to publish the outcome of periodic reviews every six years. This report will therefore be published on its website. [Source: *Meeting with Advisor Quality and Education*]

#### **Review Team's Analysis**

The Review Team found the information published by the Academy on its website to be well presented and reflective of the content of the Visual Arts Programme for both Bachelor and Master cycles. The institution's digital presence has grown substantially over the past year, as indicated by significant increases in social media followers and large numbers of attendees at virtual information days and other online events, such as the 2020 Fashion Show. The Review Team was able to view informative chatboxes associated with a programme open day that presented each specialism and studio to applicants, with contributions from staff and students. The continued use of a range of communication platforms, as outlined in the communication strategy, will be of

benefit to students disseminating their work to external audiences and to members of the public wanting to gain an insight into life at the Academy.

**Compliance with Standard 8.3**

*The Review Team concludes that the programmes comply with Standard 8.3 as follows:*

<b>Programme</b>	<b>Compliance level</b>
<b>Bachelor of Visual Arts</b>	Fully compliant
<b>Master of Visual Arts</b>	Fully compliant

## Summary of the compliance with the standards

<b>1. Programme's goal and context</b>	
<b>Standard 1. The programme goals are clearly stated and reflect the institutional mission.</b>	
<b>Bachelor of Visual Arts</b>	<b>Substantially compliant</b>
<b>Master of Visual Arts</b>	<b>Substantially compliant</b>
<p><b>Good Practice</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The impact of the Academy's thorough and critically reflective preparations for the review process can be seen in its newly developed strategic roadmap, which sets out a clear vision for the future development of the Visual Arts Programme.</li> <li>• The creation of 'studio portraits' has provided a mechanism for critical reflection at the studio level that has stimulated change and could be a valuable enhancement tool if repeated periodically.</li> </ul> <p><b>Recommendations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is recommended that the strategic target for the programme related to internationalisation, as articulated in the roadmap, is expanded to include the incorporation of a greater range of non-European reference points within the curriculum.</li> <li>• Data on applicant profiles should be systematically collected, in addition to data on student progress and employment outcomes, in order to enable analysis of access to and attainment within the programme throughout the student study cycle, for all students including those from underrepresented socio-cultural backgrounds.</li> </ul>	
<b>2. Educational processes</b>	
<b>Standard 2.1. The goals of the programme are achieved through the content and structure of the curriculum and its methods of delivery</b>	
<b>Bachelor of Visual Arts</b>	<b>Substantially compliant</b>
<b>Master of Visual Arts</b>	<b>Substantially compliant</b>
<p><b>Good Practice</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The studio method and individual contact with teachers are highly valued by students, demonstrating the importance of student-centred learning within the programme.</li> <li>• Projects linked to the programme, such as the <i>Second Shelf Project</i> and the <i>Drawing Marathon</i>, are highly innovative and effectively embed artistic research opportunities for students within the programme.</li> </ul>	

- The sustained development of artistic research and the use of research students as studio teachers enriches the curricula and provides additional career trajectories for graduates of the Master programme.

#### Recommendations

- The theory-practice working group should prioritise the development of a hybrid approach to theory and practice, in order to sustain the curiosity and critical engagement of students (particularly those in the applied arts) in the theoretical and contextual aspects of the programme.
- Opportunities for crossover between specialisms should be structurally embedded within the programme in order to encourage the development of interdisciplinary skills that equip graduates for entry to the professional field.

#### Standard 2.2. The programme offers a range of opportunities for students to gain an international perspective.

**Bachelor of Visual Arts**

**Substantially compliant**

**Master of Visual Arts**

**Substantially compliant**

#### Good Practice

- The *Arts Inclusive* project is focused on making each individual within the Academy responsible for creating a welcoming atmosphere and embracing the diversity of its learning communities.

#### Recommendations

- The Academy should find effective mechanisms for drawing the global perspectives of its international student body into the design and content of the curriculum.

#### Standard 2.3. Assessment methods are clearly defined and demonstrate achievement of learning outcomes.

**Bachelor of Visual Arts**

**Partially compliant**

**Master of Visual Arts**

**Partially compliant**

#### Recommendations

- The Academy should review its Assessment Policy as a priority, in order to ensure that enhancements already made in some studios (such as the use of mark sheets with clear assessment criteria and assessment feedback forms), are implemented throughout the programme.
- Clear protocols should be established for the operation of jury evaluations, which outline the responsibilities of those in different roles and sets expectations for the consistent conduct of these assessments.

- Efforts to enhance the quality and consistency of written feedback on assessment, through the development of targeted training and guidance for teaching staff, should be prioritised.

### 3. Student profiles

**Standard 3.1. There are clear criteria for student admission, based on an assessment of their artistic/academic suitability for the programme.**

<b>Bachelor of Visual Arts</b>	<b>Fully compliant</b>
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<b>Master of Visual Arts</b>	<b>Fully compliant</b>
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#### Good Practice

- The use of motivation as the key criterion for entry to the programme enables the admission of students on the basis of their artistic and academic potential, creating opportunities for the Academy to widen access to individuals from different backgrounds.
- The transition to online admissions exams during the pandemic has made the process more accessible for international applicants and those with other barriers to travel.

#### Recommendations

None

**Standard 3.2. The programme has mechanisms to formally monitor and review the progression, achievement and subsequent employability of its students.**

<b>Bachelor of Visual Arts</b>	<b>Partially compliant</b>
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<b>Master of Visual Arts</b>	<b>Partially compliant</b>
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#### Good Practice

- Internship, where it is embedded within different specialisms, enables students to develop key employability skills and has a positive impact on both their preparedness for professional life and their ability to build professional networks.

#### Recommendations

- The Academy should consider how it can embed relevant employability and professional skills incrementally within the curriculum (from BA through to MA), to ensure that students are all equally well prepared to make the transition out of the programme and into the professional world.
- Opportunities for internships should be reviewed to establish how and whether they can be embedded within students' learning experience and across all specialisms.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Data on alumni destinations should be collected and analysed on an annual basis in order to identify actions that might enhance the programme's employment outcomes.</li> </ul>	
<b>4. Teaching staff</b>	
<b>Standard 4.1. Members of the teaching staff are qualified for their role and are active as artists/pedagogues/researchers.</b>	
<b>Bachelor of Visual Arts</b>	<b>Substantially compliant</b>
<b>Master of Visual Arts</b>	<b>Substantially compliant</b>
<p><b>Good Practice</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Opportunities for staff to apply for funded research projects enable individuals to develop their artistic practice and to strengthen links between studio teaching and research.</li> </ul> <p><b>Recommendations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work currently being undertaken by the Educational Master team to devise a continuing professional development programme for the Academy's teaching staff should continue to be prioritised in order to ensure that all teachers are supported to enhance their skills in the areas of inclusive and effective teaching, assessment and feedback.</li> </ul>	
<b>Standard 4.2. There are sufficient qualified teaching staff to effectively deliver the programmes.</b>	
<b>Bachelor of Visual Arts</b>	<b>Fully compliant</b>
<b>Master of Visual Arts</b>	<b>Fully compliant</b>
<p><b>Recommendations</b></p> <p>None</p>	
<b>5. Facilities, resources and support</b>	
<b>Standard 5.1. The institution has (partner institutions have) appropriate resources to support student learning and delivery of the programme.</b>	
<b>Bachelor of Visual Arts</b>	<b>Substantially compliant</b>
<b>Master of Visual Arts</b>	<b>Substantially compliant</b>
<p><b>Good Practice</b></p>	

- The Academy provides a range of well-equipped and appropriate workspaces, including large studio spaces (for example for painting and In Situ).
- The masterplan for *Making Mutsaard* indicates a variety of exciting opportunities to ensure the sustainability and adaptability of the campus spaces in future, including the potential for designated research spaces and digital hubs.

**Recommendations**

- A clear process for requesting access to specialist studios and equipment (outside of a student's normal studio) should be established and communicated to staff and students.
- The Academy should ensure that: all workshops where health and safety is a priority are supervised by a member of staff when accessible to, or timetabled for students; urgent equipment repairs are prioritised; and students are trained to use the equipment therein safely.

**Standard 5.2. The institution's financial resources (financial resources of the partner institutions) enable successful delivery of the study programmes.**

<b>Bachelor of Visual Arts</b>	<b>Fully compliant</b>
<b>Master of Visual Arts</b>	<b>Fully compliant</b>

**Recommendations**  
None

**Standard 5.3. The programme has sufficient qualified support staff.**

<b>Bachelor of Visual Arts</b>	<b>Fully compliant</b>
<b>Master of Visual Arts</b>	<b>Fully compliant</b>

**Good Practice**

- Currently available and accessible student support services are carefully tailored to the needs of visual arts students, including the large community of international students within the Academy, and are led by knowledgeable, supportive staff.

**Recommendations**  
None

**6. Communication, organisation and decision-making**

**Standard 6.1. Effective mechanisms are in place for internal communication within the programme.**

<b>Bachelor of Visual Arts</b>	<b>Substantially compliant</b>
<b>Master of Visual Arts</b>	<b>Substantially compliant</b>
<p><b>Good Practice</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The appointment of a dedicated Communication Officer has had a significant impact on the Academy's communications strategy, leading to enhancements such as the <i>Hello There</i> newsletter and use of Instagram as a channel for students to share their work and communicate with their peers across the Academy and beyond.</li> </ul> <p><b>Recommendations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The approval and swift implementation of the planned internal communications policy is recommended in order to ensure that digital communication is effective, particularly during this time of increased online and blended learning.</li> </ul>	
<b>Standard 6.2. The programme is supported by an appropriate organisational structure and clear decision-making processes.</b>	
<b>Bachelor of Visual Arts</b>	<b>Substantially compliant</b>
<b>Master of Visual Arts</b>	<b>Substantially compliant</b>
<p><b>Good Practice</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There is a collegial and open approach to communication between the Head of Institution, Heads of Programme, Coordinators of Studios and teaching staff, and numerous forums exist through which staff at all levels can have an input into decision making within the programme.</li> </ul> <p><b>Recommendations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clear mechanisms for the closure of feedback loops should be established to ensure that students and other stakeholders know how their feedback on the programme has been considered and actioned where appropriate.</li> <li>The Heads of Programme should encourage the Student Council to establish ways to track issues and actions across academic years and to make use of the student intranet to both gather feedback and disseminate information.</li> </ul>	
<b>7. Internal quality culture</b>	
<b>Standard 7 The programme has in place effective quality assurance and enhancement procedures.</b>	
<b>Bachelor of Visual Arts</b>	<b>Substantially compliant</b>

<b>Master of Visual Arts</b>	<b>Substantially compliant</b>
<p><b>Good Practice</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The regular use of focus groups is, in combination with other data collection methods, an effective way of gathering student feedback on priority areas.</li> </ul> <p><b>Recommendations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Regular meetings between the Heads of Programme and the work field, and between Heads of Programme and the Student Council should be formally embedded within the annual quality cycle and feed into programme monitoring and review processes.</li> <li>The newly developed quality assurance mechanisms employed by the Academy should be regularly reviewed to ensure that they are fit for purpose and continue to identify issues, areas for enhancement and examples of good practice.</li> </ul>	
<b>8. Public interaction</b>	
<b>Standard 8.1. The programme engages within wider cultural, artistic and educational contexts.</b>	
<b>Bachelor of Visual Arts</b>	<b>Fully compliant</b>
<b>Master of Visual Arts</b>	<b>Fully compliant</b>
<p><b>Good Practice</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The many public events, exhibitions and showcases organised by the Academy demonstrate its commitment to public engagement and to solidifying its position within the Antwerp art scene.</li> <li>Initiative and projects such as the <i>Extra Academy</i>, the <i>Expanding Academy</i> and <i>Noorderlicht</i> provide opportunities for students on the Visual Arts programme to participate in public discourse and community engagement.</li> </ul> <p><b>Recommendations</b></p> <p>None</p>	
<b>Standard 8.2. The programme actively promotes links with various sectors of the relevant artistic professions.</b>	
<b>Bachelor of Visual Arts</b>	<b>Fully compliant</b>
<b>Master of Visual Arts</b>	<b>Fully compliant</b>
<b>Good Practice</b>	

- The Academy has a symbiotic relationship with the Antwerp’s arts organisations and institutions, which enables the programme to respond to the needs of the profession and contribute to the local arts ecosystem in a sustainable way.

**Recommendations**

None

**Standard 8.3. Information provided to the public about the programme is clear, consistent and accurate.**

**Bachelor of Visual Arts**

**Fully compliant**

**Master of Visual Arts**

**Fully compliant**

**Good Practice**

- Recent work undertaken to increase in the Academy’s digital presence, through social media, a new website and online events, has resulted in growing public engagement.

**Recommendations**

None

## Conclusion

The Royal Academy of Fine Arts is embarking on a period of transition as it navigates the space between its long rich history and its vision for the future. The senior management team is relatively new in post and has developed clear strategic aims for the Visual Arts Programme, supported by consultation with staff and students and operating within the context of AP University College's concept of product leadership. The studio is at the heart of the Visual Arts Programme and in preparation for this review, each studio was encouraged to reflect on its values and methods and to produce studio portraits that were collated into the collective self-portrait presented in the self-evaluation report. The Review Team found this report to be a well-written, insightful and accurate representation of the current state of the programme and the actions required to enhance its delivery, currency and appeal in years to come. A significant effort was made in the months preceding the review to develop systems and processes for the quality assurance of the programme that have already led to a number of enhancements, in spite of the challenging circumstances surrounding the delivery of arts education during the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is evident to the Review Team, that as it approaches its 360<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the Royal Academy of Arts maintains a central role in the artistic life of Antwerp. The Visual Arts Programme contributes to the cultural profile of the city through its interaction with a range of arts organisations with regional and international significance, through its research-led events and platforms, and by enriching the local arts scene with the activities of its students and alumni. The *Making Mutsaard* masterplan heralds exciting new developments that will further enhance the Academy's facilities and create new opportunities for interdisciplinary work, while making this important cultural and historical site more accessible to the public. Currently few opportunities for social engagement are embedded within the programme and, as outlined above, more of these could help to establish new connections between Antwerp's diverse population and the Academy. However, its close collaborations with other Flemish and Dutch art schools extend its reach, while enhancing student learning opportunities.

The Review Team found that the priority areas of diversity, sustainability and Do It Yourself/Do It Together demonstrate the Academy's commitment to the future of its students, and hopes that the institution maintains its current momentum for change as it continues to make progress towards its highly ambitious goals for the programme. The recently established management team acknowledges that a small number of actions identified at the time of the previous review in 2011 have yet to be completed and have incorporated these into the new strategic roadmap.

Since the previous review, the Academy's research culture has evidently been developed considerably and this has had a significant impact on the programme, supported by the nexus education-research which aims to create new intersections between the two types of activity. Opportunities for teaching staff to become involved in research projects and for researchers to teach in the studios exposes students to new developments in their specialist fields.

The programme, with its Dutch and English language delivery at both Bachelor and Master level, attracts an internationally diverse student body that contributes to a stimulating working environment for both home and

overseas students alike. The cultural diversity of its students brings challenges in relation to the inclusivity of the programme and the diversity of its curriculum, which the Academy is committed to addressing through its strategic roadmap, and currently through the *Arts Inclusive* project to ensure that the programme is accessible to students from all backgrounds and cultures.

In noting areas of good practice and in making its recommendations against each standard, the Review Team is broadly in agreement with the Academy's own analysis of the programme's strengths, areas for enhancement and opportunities for development as set out in the self-evaluation report. The SER and the Roadmap for the Visual Arts Programme establish a clear vision for its future development, including aims and objectives for the next few years. The Academy is encouraged to maintain its critically reflective, sustainable and innovative approach to the enhancement of the programme as it considers the recommendations set out in this report.

Finally the Review Team would like to acknowledge that, while the review had to be carried out as a virtual site visit due to the Covid-19 pandemic, nonetheless the thorough preparation and availability of documents for the review by the Academy, the high level of engagement of all the Academy's representatives with full attendance at meetings, and the 'guided tour', enabled a thorough, fair and rigorous review process to take place.

## Annex 1. Site Visit Schedule

Meeting with representatives of the institution	Colour legend
Review Team private meeting	
Break	

Day 0 – 07/03/2021		
Time	Meeting (working session)	Location
13.00-15:00	Preparatory meeting of the Review Team	Online
15.30 - 17.30	Preparatory meeting of the Review Team	Online

Day 1 – (08/03/2021)			
Time	Meeting (working session)	Names and functions of participants from the visited institution	Location
09:00-09:15	Meeting with Liaison person	Advisor Quality and Education Development	Zoom
09:45-10.15	Meeting 1 <i>Meeting with the Head of the institution</i>	Dean of the Academy	Zoom
10:15-11.00	Break/Review Team meeting		Zoom
11.00-12.00	Meeting 2 <i>Meeting with the Heads of the Visual Arts Programme</i>	Head of Programme Visual Arts (In Situ, Painting, Photography, Printmaking, Sculpture; coordinator of Theory & Research) Head of Programme (Costume Design, Fashion, Graphic Design, Jewellery Design)	Zoom
12.00-12.30	Review Team meeting		Zoom
12:30-13:00	Meeting 3 <i>Meeting with Quality Assurance Advisor</i>	Advisor Quality and Education Development	Zoom
13:00-13:30	Break	Review Team	
13:30-14.30	Meeting 4: <i>Meeting with BA students</i>	Student 2BA Fashion – Germany Student 2BA Photography, Student Council - Belgium Student 3BA Sculpture, Student Council - UK Student 3BA Painting - the Netherlands Student 2BA Printmaking, Student Council - Belgium Student 3BA Graphic Design - Belgium Student 3BA In Situ, Moving Image - Germany Student 3BA Jewellery Design, Student Council - Belgium Student 3BA Costume Design, Student Council – Belgium	Zoom

14.30-15.30	<b>Break/Review Team meeting</b>		Zoom
15.30-16.30	<b>Meeting 5:</b> <i>Meeting with MA students</i>	Student Master Photography - Israel Student Master In Situ - Netherlands Student Master Graphic Design - Belgium Student Master Sculpture - Belgium Student Master Fashion - Switzerland Student Master Jewellery Design - Peru Student Master Printmaking - Belgium Student Master Costume Design - Germany Student Master Painting – Belgium	Zoom
16.30-16.45	<i>Break</i>		
17:00-17:45	<b>Meeting 6:</b> <i>Meeting with Alumni</i>	Graduate 2018, Photography - Belarus Graduate 2019, Fashion - USA Graduate 2018, Jewellery Design – South Korea Graduate 2020, Painting - Belgium Graduate 2020, In Situ - Italy Graduate 2020, Graphic Design – Belgium	Zoom
17:45-19:00	<b>Review Team meeting</b>		Zoom
<b>Day 2 – (09/03/2021)</b>			
09:00-10:00	<b>Review Team meeting</b>		
09:30–10:30	<b>Meeting 7:</b> <i>Meeting with Teachers including Coordinators of Specialisms</i>	Teacher Graphic Design, theory & practice - Italy Coordinator Photography Coordinator Costume Design Coordinator Sculpting Coordinator Painting Coordinator Fashion Coordinator Printmaking Teacher Jewellery Design, studio practice & bachelor projects - Netherlands Teacher Drawing, In Situ, Noorderlicht Teacher Theory, Research, Thesis Teacher Painting, Sculpting	Zoom
10:30-11:30	<b>Break/Review Team meeting</b>		Zoom

11:30-12:30	<b>Meeting 8:</b> <i>Meeting with Research Staff and nexus education-research</i>	Head of Research Researcher-teacher Fashion, Body and Material Reinvented - Italy Researcher-teacher Photography, Thinking Tools Researcher-teacher Graphic Design, MAXlab Researcher-teacher ArchiVolt and Expanding Academy Researcher-teacher Painting, theory & studio practice Researcher-teacher Jewellery Design, Body and Material Reinvented - Greece Researcher-teacher In Situ, Second Shelf Project, ArchiVolt – Germany	Zoom
12:30 -13:30	<b>Break/Review Team meeting</b>		
13:30-14:30	<b>Team view virtual tour</b> <i>Pre-recorded tour of the Facilities at Campus Mutsaard, Campus Mode, Campus In Situ and Campus Graphic Design</i>		
14:00-15:00	<i>Guided tour of the facilities and questions</i>	Head of Programme Visual Arts (Costume Design, Fashion, Graphic Design, Jewellery Design) Librarian Communication Coordinator Studio Coordinator Jewellery Design Teacher Scenography Studio Coordinator Printmaking	Live online tour of Campus Mutsaard
15.00-15:30	<b>Break/Review Team meeting</b>		Zoom
15:30-16:00	<b>Meeting 9</b> <i>Meeting with support staff</i>	IT helpdesk Ombudsperson and Study Trajectory counsellor Coordinator International Office Advisor Quality and Education Development Finances and HRM Head of Educational Master – Professionalisation Student Counsellor	Zoom
16.00-16.30	<b>Review Team meeting</b>		Zoom
16:30-17:15	<b>Meeting 10</b> <i>Meeting with representatives of the work field</i>	Artist photographer, professor at Malmö Art Academy in Sweden, research proposals committee Curator & editor FOMU - Fotomuseum Antwerpen, master jury photography Extra Academy, alternative platform for and about the arts Director & Chief Curator at ModeMuseum Antwerpen, member of the Board of Directors of the Academy, regular member of the master jury Fashion Artist entrepreneur & graduate, participant in the work field committee, regular member of the master jury Jewellery Design, exhibition space for graduates Gallerist and vice-president of BUP (Association of Belgian modern and contemporary art galleries), participant in the work field committee, regular member of the master jury Fashion	Zoom
17:15-17:45	<b>Break</b>		

17:45-19:00	<b>Review Team meeting</b>		
<b>Day 3 – (10/03/2021)</b>			
09:00-10:00	<b>Review Team Meeting</b>		
10:00-11:00	<b>Meeting 11:</b> <i>Clarification Meeting</i>	Dean of the Academy Advisor Quality and Education Development Head of Programme Visual Arts (In Situ, Painting, Photography, Printmaking, Sculpture; coordinator of Theory & Research) Head of Programme (Costume Design, Fashion, Graphic Design, Jewellery Design)	Zoom
11:00-13:00	<b>Review Team meeting</b>		
13:00-14:00	<i>Lunch</i>	<i>Review Team</i>	
14:00-16:00	<b>Review Team meeting</b>		
16:00-16:30	<b>Meeting 12:</b> <i>Feedback to the Institution</i>	Dean of the Academy Advisor Quality and Education Development Head of Programme Visual Arts (In Situ, Painting, Photography, Printmaking, Sculpture; coordinator of Theory & Research) Head of Programme (Costume Design, Fashion, Graphic Design, Jewellery Design) Joined by colleagues, students and alumni	Zoom
<b>END OF THE SITE-VISIT</b>			

## **Annex 2. List of documents provided to the review team**

**Self-Evaluation Report (English language programme):** Tradition in Transition, Bachelor & Master in Visual Arts, A Self-Portrait

**Self-Evaluation Report (Dutch language programme):** Tradition in Transition, Bachelor & Master in the Beeldende Kunsten, A Self-Portrait

### **Supporting documents and web pages:**

SER Timeline

Visual arts in regional perspective 2018-2019

Programme, Structure & Students, 2019-2020

International student profile, 2019-2020

Q Focus-group discussions with students, 2019-2020

SWOT analysis for Visual Arts, 2019-2020

Studio portraits/Studio portraits WORK DOC, 2019-2020 (in Dutch)

Q External Review 2011, Follow-up, 2019-2020

Vision of the Academy

Self-definition of the Academy, 2019-2020

Vision of the Academy translated into goals, 2018-2019 13. Vision on Sustainability WORK DOC, 2019-2020

Vision on Diversity and Inclusion WORK DOC, 2019-2020

An inclusive Academy, inspiring shelf, 2020-2021 16. Jaarverslag Academie 2018-2019 (Annual Report in Dutch)

Jaarverslag Academie 2017-2018 (Annual Report in Dutch)

Jaarverslag Academie 2016-2017 (Annual Report in Dutch)

Learning outcomes for the Bachelor in Visual Arts

Learning outcomes for the Master in Visual Arts

Programme, Overview of courses, 2019-2020

ECTS files

Didactic Concept, 2019-2020

Curriculum Bachelor Programme, 2020-2021

Bachelor classes

Bachelor Programme, optional courses, 2020-2021

Curriculum Master Programme, 2020-2021

Master classes, 2019-2020

Master classes, 2018-2019

Master classes, 2017-2018

Master Expo: [www.antwerpmasters.be](http://www.antwerpmasters.be)  
Fashion Show: [www.showwww.be](http://www.showwww.be)  
Master salon in Painting and Printmaking  
Studio tutoring in Corona times, 2019-2020  
Art Philosophy online, Hors Série  
Artists' collective Piece of Cake 2019-2020  
Northern Light Parade/Noorderlicht  
Drawing Marathon/Tekenmarathon  
Artist in residence  
Internationalisation results - Annual Report, 2016-2019  
Education and examination regulations (OER) 2020-2021  
Q Analysis of the Bachelor programme, 2019-2020  
Q Analysis of the Master programme, 2019-2020  
Tradition in Transition Bachelor & Master in the Visual Arts January 2021 A Self-Portrait  
Research groups: Archivolt, Thinking Tools, Body and Material Reinvented & MAXlab  
Antwerp Research Institute for the Art (ARIA) Website  
The Academy's publications  
Track Report of current research projects  
Research Weeks with Master classes  
ARTICULATE, the annual festival for research and art  
Expanding Academy, a post-Master research platform  
Soup Sessions, informal lunches with research presentations  
Optional course, Extra-Academy: 2018–present; 2011–2018  
Admission policy  
Artistic admission test in Photography  
Artistic admission test in Fashion  
Introduction for new students, 2020-2021  
Introduction for Master students, 2020-2021  
Digital info point for international students  
Who's Who/Wie is Wie, 2020-2021  
Q Student & Study profile, 2017-2020  
Q Student & Study profile in regional perspective, 2018-2019

Educational & research staff, 2020-2021  
Personeelsformatie/Staff Composition, 2020  
Professionalisation Activities AP University College  
Inspire!  
Café Dessiner  
Making Mutsaard: nulmeting en ruimtelijke analyse  
Organisational chart Academy  
Communication strategy Academy 2020  
[www.royalacademyantwerp.be](http://www.royalacademyantwerp.be)  
[www.ap.be](http://www.ap.be)  
Academy brochure, 2020  
<https://www.facebook.com/RoyalAcademyAntwerp/>  
<https://www.instagram.com/royalacademyantwerp/>  
Intranet for students  
MyArts (timetable application)  
Digitap, digital learning platform  
Q Student Survey programme, 2018-2019  
Q Alumni survey, 2019-2020  
Q Teaching and learning in a digital context, 2019-2020  
Q Satisfaction survey 2019, initiative of the library manager (in Dutch)  
Exhibitions: Naughty Kids, De Opwarming, Multiples van Guillaume Bijl, The Unruly Apparatus  
Antwerp Academy Art Book Fair  
Guess Who's Coming to Dinner programme  
Assessment Matrix, Studio Jewellery Design  
Template for Registration of feedback, Painting  
Roadmap Visual Arts 2021-2025  
AP Kritische Reflectie  
Student Council: Regulations on student participation  
Role description for Studio Coordinators: Functiehandboek met competencies  
Assessment Criteria for Admission Test  
Entrance Examination – procedure for every studio  
In Situ - Vision

### Annex3. Definition 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 weaknesses 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 weaknesses 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.)*