

# Executive summary

## Report

### Programme quality enhancement review

# **KASK & Conservatorium, the School of Arts of HOGENT and Howest Drama Programme (Ghent, Belgium)**

**Site-visit: 22-24 May 2022**

## Introduction

KASK & Conservatorium forms part of the School of Arts of University College Ghent (HOGENT), which is affiliated with the Association of Ghent University and Howest University College. KASK & Conservatorium has a student body of 2,000 and a faculty staff of 500 in addition to technical and professional services staff<sup>1</sup>. The Royal Academy of Fine Arts (KASK) was founded in 1751 and the Royal Conservatory (Conservatorium) in 1835, with drama training having been established within the Conservatorium in 1860<sup>2</sup>. In 2009-10, the drama programme was integrated into KASK and now sits within the Department of Film, Photography and Drama. It comprises a three-year Bachelor's degree taught in Dutch,

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<sup>1</sup> SER, p.5

<sup>2</sup> SER, p.6



a one year Master's degree taught in Dutch and one year Master's degree with an identical curriculum taught in English<sup>3</sup>.

Under the leadership of Sam Bogaerts, Chair of the Drama Training Programme Committee from 2005 to 2013, a new curriculum was developed and implemented in 2007-2008. A further major review of the programme was undertaken in 2013 with significant changes to curriculum, teaching staff and infrastructure being made. The programme as it currently stands has adopted a 'broad profile', aimed at creating drama artists, rather than graduating students in specific disciplines such as acting or directing<sup>4</sup>.

In the past ten years the programme has been through a period of consolidation and this enhancement review has been undertaken with the aim of testing the programme's currency and taking the opportunity to identify and address any issues or areas for enhancement in partnership with stakeholders including staff, students, professionals and alumni. In preparation for this review, the programme undertook a number of semi-structured conversations with students and teachers, both together and separately, based on the MusiQuE standards<sup>5</sup>. Through this process, the programme's main stakeholders identified some of the challenges, opportunities and potential actions for its future development, which were then integrated into a self-evaluation document.

The Flanders region operates a three-cycle degree structure, with accreditation of programmes and review of institutions overseen by NVAO (the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders). HOGENT was last reviewed in 2022<sup>6</sup>. KASK & Conservatorium is one of four institutions in Flanders offering drama degrees at Bachelor's and Master's levels, the others being in Antwerp, Brussels and Leuven.

The procedure for the review of the drama programme followed a three-stage process:

- KASK & Conservatorium prepared a self-evaluation report (SER) and supporting evidence, based on the *MusiQuE Standards for Programme Review*
- An international review team composed by MusiQuE reviewed the SER and supporting documents and conducted a site-visit at KASK & Conservatorium from 22<sup>nd</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> May 2023. The site-visit comprised meetings with the Training Programme Committee, teachers, administrative and technical staff, students, alumni and members of the professional field. The review team used the *MusiQuE Standards for Programme Review* as the basis of its investigations.
- The review team produced the review report, structured to align with the standards mentioned above.

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<sup>3</sup> The Dutch and English Master's are distinct programmes with the same content but different languages of delivery and assessment. It is a requirement of the Flanders education system that all institutions offering a degree programme taught and assessed in English must offer an equivalent programme taught and assessed in Dutch.

<sup>4</sup> SER, p.6

<sup>5</sup> SER, p.4

<sup>6</sup> SER, p.7



# Summary of the compliance with the Standards and recommendations

The review team concludes that the Drama programmes at KASK & Conservatorium comply with the *Standards for Programme Review* as follows:

1. Programme's goals and context	
<p><b>Standard 1.</b> The programme goals are clearly stated and reflect the institutional mission.</p>	<p><b>Fully compliant (Bachelor and Dutch Master) / Partially Compliant (English Master)</b></p>
<p><b>Recommendations:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The review team recommends pausing the English language Master's programme until such time as a clear market and strategy for integration with the Dutch language programme can be established.</li> </ul> <p><b>Suggestions for further enhancement:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The programme could acknowledge and articulate more strongly its key strengths, for example embodiment, theory and critical thinking.</li> </ul>	
2. Educational processes	
<p><b>Standard 2.1.</b> The goals of the programme are achieved through the content and structure of the curriculum and its methods of delivery.</p>	<p><b>Fully compliant (all programmes)</b></p>
<p><b>Suggestions for further enhancement:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The programme is encouraged to continue to focus on reducing load and implementing a culture of care within the first two years of the training programme, possibly through a rebalancing of workload across the first three years.</li> <li>The programme is encouraged to find ways to better integrate collaboration with students from other programmes at KASK &amp; Conservatorium within the drama programme.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Standard 2.2.</b> The programme offers a range of opportunities for students to gain an international perspective.</p>	<p><b>Substantially compliant (all programmes)</b></p>
<p><b>Recommendations:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The programme should consider how alternative models of delivery might make it possible for international students to integrate into the drama department.</li> </ul>	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The review team recommends that the programme considers how to build a level of flexibility into the curriculum that would allow more students to participate in international exchange programmes, such as Erasmus+.</li> </ul>	
<b>Standard 2.3.</b> Assessment methods are clearly defined and demonstrate achievement of learning outcomes.	<b>Substantially compliant (Bachelor)/Fully compliant (Dutch and English Master)</b>
<b>Recommendations:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It is recommended that the Bachelor programme establishes clear boundaries for performance assessments in the first two years of the programme to ensure that expectations are clear for students and the focus on process is maintained in line with the stated learning outcomes.</li> </ul>	
<b>Suggestions for further enhancement:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The review team suggests that the final competencies for Bachelor and Master project units are reviewed in order to strengthen the assessment criteria associated with collaborative working.</li> <li>The review team encourages teaching staff to continue to seek a balance between critical and supportive feedback that best supports students' trajectories, particularly as they move from the second year to the third year of the Bachelor programme. As part of this process, teachers are encouraged to consider how marking schemes can be used most effectively in order to indicate a range of outcomes utilising the whole of the available scale.</li> </ul>	
<b>3. Student profiles</b>	
<b>Standard 3.1.</b> There are clear criteria for student admission, based on an assessment of their artistic/academic suitability for the programme.	<b>Fully compliant (all programmes)</b>
<b>Recommendations / suggestions for further enhancement:</b> None	
<b>Standard 3.2.</b> The programme has mechanisms to formally monitor and review the progression, achievement and subsequent employability of its students.	<b>Fully compliant (Bachelor)/Substantially compliant (Dutch and English Master)</b>
<b>Recommendations:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It is recommended that efforts to ensure that Masters's students complete their studies within expected timeframes are prioritised, including finalising the restructure of the Master's project units.</li> </ul>	

<b>Suggestions for further enhancement:</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The programme is encouraged to continue with its plans to re-establish the alumni feedback committee in order to formalise opportunities for graduate input into the development of the programme, and explore opportunities for alumni to provide professional advice and workshops to students.</li> </ul>	
<b>4. Teaching staff</b>	
<b>Standard 4.1.</b> Members of the teaching staff are qualified for their role and are active as artists/pedagogues/researchers.	<b>Fully compliant (all programmes)</b>
<b>Suggestions for further enhancement:</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The review team suggests that the programme explores ways to connect the research culture within the programme with KASK &amp; Conservatorium's infrastructure for supporting and promoting research.</li> <li>The programme may contribute to the School's efforts to ensure that the learning from the Nomadic School of Art is preserved and use this resource to inform the introduction of different social contexts within the curriculum.</li> </ul>	
<b>Standard 4.2.</b> There are sufficient qualified teaching staff to effectively deliver the programme.	<b>Fully compliant (all programmes)</b>
<b>Suggestions for further enhancement:</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The review team suggests the programme to continue working to decolonise the curriculum to bring more diverse teachers onto permanent contracts as opportunities arise, so that the different backgrounds and perspectives currently contributed by guest teachers are embedded within the core of the programme.</li> </ul>	
<b>5. Facilities, resources and support</b>	
<b>Standard 5.1.</b> The institution has appropriate resources to support student learning and delivery of the programme.	<b>Substantially compliant (all programmes)</b>
<b>Recommendations:</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The programme should seek to acquire more specialist spaces and facilities, either through the realisation of the Drama Cluster, or by other means.</li> </ul>	
<b>Standard 5.2.</b> The institution's financial resources enable successful delivery of the programme.	<b>Substantially Compliant (all programmes)</b>

<b>Recommendations:</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The programme should continue to consider ways in which it can reduce costs to ensure its sustainability, for example restructuring the Master programme in order to encourage timely completion.</li> </ul>	
<b>Standard 5.3.</b> The programme has sufficient qualified support staff.	<b>Substantially compliant (all programmes)</b>
<b>Recommendations:</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The review team recommends that the programme continues to explore opportunities to partner with other institutions to increase the provision of technical support.</li> </ul>	
<b>6. Communication, organisation and decision-making</b>	
<b>Standard 6.1.</b> Effective mechanisms are in place for internal communication within the programme.	<b>Fully compliant (all programmes)</b>
<b>Suggestions for further enhancement:</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The programme is advised to consider embedding the practice of ‘closing sessions’ across the programme and provide additional guidance to support guest teachers to embed reflective practice.</li> <li>The review team encourages the programme to reinstate these opportunities as planned, within the organisational care track.</li> </ul>	
<b>Standard 6.2</b> The programme is supported by an appropriate organisational structure and decision-making processes.	<b>Fully compliant (all programmes)</b>
<b>Suggestions for further enhancement:</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The programme is encouraged to continue its efforts to ensure that the DRAG initiative is sustained and that the Training Programme Committee continues to engage with this group. Further, the programme may wish to consider how conversations between these bodies can be formally captured in programme action plans.</li> </ul>	
<b>7. Internal quality culture</b>	
<b>Standard 7.</b> The programme has in place effective quality assurance and enhancement procedures.	<b>Fully compliant (all programmes)</b>
<b>Recommendations/Suggestions for further enhancement:</b>	

None	
<b>8. Public interaction</b>	
<b>Standard 8.1.</b> The programme engages within wider cultural, artistic and educational contexts.	<b>Fully compliant (all programmes)</b>
<b>Suggestions for further enhancement:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The programme may wish to explore how to embed further opportunities for students to make work in different social contexts within the programme's curriculum.</li> </ul>	
<b>Standard 8.2.</b> The programme actively promotes links with various sectors of the music and other artistic professions.	<b>Fully compliant (all programmes)</b>
<b>Suggestions for further enhancement:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The review team encourages the programme to continue to develop structural partnerships in order to further develop its networks and enhance student engagement with a range of performing arts organisations.</li> </ul>	
<b>Standard 8.3.</b> Information provided to the public about the programme is clear, consistent and accurate.	<b>Fully compliant (all programmes)</b>
<b>Suggestions for further enhancement:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The review team advises the programme to consider expectations and guidelines around contextual information for public performances in order to ensure an ethical approach to audience engagement.</li> </ul>	

## Conclusion

The review team found the drama programme at KASK & Conservatorium to be a distinctive offer, with its broad approach to the development of drama artists creating an environment in which unique and talented artists are encouraged to develop individual and wide-ranging profiles. This was particularly evident from the meetings with alumni and members of the profession, who emphasised the impact of KASK Drama graduates on the creative and performing arts in Ghent, Flanders and the wider region.

Teachers and students are committed to the programme's shared ethos, in particular the fluid approach to making and playing, with a strong critical underpinning and a focus on embodied learning. The review team was privileged to see a range of student work during the site-visit and was particularly impressed by the physicality that students develop through their training, a strength that the professional field also recognises and values. It was pleasing to hear that the programme is moving towards an increased focus on collaborative working that will support the types of collective work through which a number of alumni are having a significant impact in their field.

Through its own process of critical reflection, the programme identified a tension between the 'culture of care' that it aims to instil, the intensity of the training and the ambition of students. It was clear to the review team that students and staff were part of a respectful and caring community, however the risk of overload did emerge as a theme and through its recommendations the review team encourages the School and the Training Programme Committee to continue its work to identify way in which it can achieve a balance between these conflicting demands.

The broad approach within the programme and the ability of the core programme team to adapt to individual students' interests promotes a diversity of approach, viewpoints and contexts within the curriculum. Within its theoretical modules, the programme is actively working to decolonise the curriculum, however teaching staff acknowledge that there is more work to be done, in particular to diversify the core teaching team. As peers, the review team recognise this as a key concern within arts education across Europe and are reassured to see that this is an important issue for staff at KASK & Conservatorium.

As outlined in the report, there are some barriers to international participation in the programme, with take-up of English Master's and incoming exchange places low. In addition very few students participate in outgoing international exchanges. There are points in the programme at which international mobility is possible, however the Training Programme Committee may wish to reconsider its approach in this area and the review team has recommended pausing the English Master's until there is greater clarity. Part of the rationale behind this recommendation is the pressure on space and resources within KASK & Conservatorium and the need for additional specialist drama teaching and performance spaces in order to ensure the sustainability of the programme. This would be addressed by the planned Drama Cluster, however at the time of the review there was no confirmed timeline for this new facility to be completed.

The programme is facing some financial challenges due to restrictions on public funding streams but is proactively considering how to make the most effective use of its resources in order to continue to deliver a high quality learning experience while also reducing the burden on staff and students and securing their wellbeing. Reducing the completion time for Master's





students and streamlining assessment processes will be central to this. The review team is confident that the programme will continue to move forward collaboratively, engaging students, alumni and professionals as critical friends as it continues to evolve to meet the demands of current educational and professional contexts.

Finally, the review team would like to thank KASK Drama for making the visit productive and enjoyable through candid and positive conversations, and through the provision of a critically reflective self-evaluation document, which enabled a detailed and thorough review to take place.

