

# Executive summary

## Report

### Programme quality enhancement review

# Bachelor Dance, Royal Conservatoire Antwerp (Antwerp, Belgium)

**Site-visit: July 2021**

## Introduction

The roots of the current Bachelor Dance programme were founded in 1973. The programme addressed the needs of the working field for well-trained and qualified dance teachers for the conservatoires and academies. Since this time the programme has undergone a multitude of name and structural changes before its latest move to the international art campus of deSingel in 2010.

In 1988 the programme State Education for Dance Pedagogy was transformed into a four-year programme for professional classical and contemporary dancers. In 1991, the Dance and Dance Pedagogy, Dramatic Art and Music programmes from three Antwerp institutes merged providing artistic opportunities for multidisciplinary projects. In 1992 the school, then called Higher Institute for Dance (HID) moved to Lier and became a certified three-year programme with a separate teacher training course. In 1994, the Decree for the Institutes of Higher Education instigated a change in the University College higher



education landscape, and the programme became part of the Department of Drama, Music and Dance of Hogeschool Antwerpen, which later became Artesis University College.

In 2010 the dance programme moved to the deSingel arts campus. In 2013, Artesis University College fused with the Plantijn University College, forming the Artesis Plantijn University College (AP). The Royal Conservatoire Antwerp (RCA) and the Royal Academy of Fine Arts Antwerp (KA) became two Schools of Arts within the new AP University College. (Source: SER, p.7).

A decree in 2003 marked significant changes to the education system in Flanders. The implementation of the EU

Bologna Agreement reformed higher education into a Bachelor/Master structure and the European Credit Transfer System was introduced, universities and university colleges were clustered in associations and external quality assessment for the purpose of accreditation was introduced.

In 2012 the Integration Decree established the organisation of higher art education in semi-autonomous Schools of Arts, administratively embedded in university colleges. Also, in 2012, the Flemish government decided to increase the autonomy of its educational institutions and to simplify the process of accreditation by introducing a system of institutional reviews. The review assesses the educational policy in place and the manner in which the institution itself is ensuring the quality of its programmes. Universities and colleges are responsible for ensuring the quality of their educational programmes. Both music and dance within the Schools of Arts opted for external programme reviews carried out by MusiQuE.

The Belgian educational system distinguishes between professional and academic bachelor programmes. A professional bachelor programme has a professional orientation and provides direct access to the labour market. The RCA Bachelor Dance is a professional bachelor programme with 180 credits. (Source: SER, p.8)

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

- RCA prepared a *Self-evaluation Report (SER)* and supporting documents, based on the *MusiQuE Standards for Programme Review*,
- an international review team composed by MusiQuE studied the *SER* and carried out an online review visit at RCA on 29-30<sup>th</sup> March 2021. The online review visit comprised of meetings with representatives of Bachelor Dance and RCA management team, teaching staff, students, alumni, and members of the dance working field. Due to COVID, videos had to substitute for live to classes and



performances. The review team used the *MusiQuE Standards for Programme Review* as the basis of its investigations;

- the review team produced the review report that follows, structured along the *Standards* mentioned above.

The review team consisted of:

- Samuel Wuersten (Chair) Director of BA/MA Dance, Zurich University of the Arts, Director Holland Dance Festival, The Hague
- Rasmus Ölme, Professor and Head of BFA/MFA, Danish National School of Performing Arts, Copenhagen
- Izah Hankammer (Student member) freelance dancer and recent graduate of Fontys School of Fine and Performing Arts, Tilburg
- Celia Duffy (Secretary) Royal Conservatoire of Scotland



# Summary of the compliance with the Standards and recommendations

The review team concludes that the Bachelor Dance programme complies with the *Standards for Programme Review* as follows:

<b>1. Programme’s goals and context</b>	
<b>Standard 1.</b> The programme goals are clearly stated and reflect the institutional mission.	<b>Fully compliant</b>
<b>2. Educational processes</b>	
<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.	<b>Fully compliant</b>
<p><b>Commendations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The review team commends the programme’s enhancement-led approach and responsiveness to feedback that is evident from the thoughtful critical reflections in the SER, as well as in the involvement of stakeholders in the continuous evolution of the programme.</li> </ul>	
<b>Standard 2.2.</b> The programme offers a range of opportunities for students to gain an international perspective.	<b>Substantially compliant</b>
<p><b>Recommendations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The review team recommends that the Bachelor Dance programme’s international strategy would be enriched by a more proactive and less ad hoc approach to international institutions and organisations, such as seeking exchange agreements or formal international collaborations as has already started with a local peer institution, PARTS. This would increase opportunities for both students and staff and cement the programme’s international positioning.</li> </ul>	
<b>Standard 2.3.</b> Assessment methods are clearly defined and demonstrate achievement of learning outcomes.	<b>Fully compliant</b>
<p><b>Commendations</b></p>	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The review team commends the assessment philosophy, structure and practice detailed in the SER. It is a model of its type, well-informed by current specialist educational practice, thoughtful and values-driven.</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</b>
<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</b>
<b>Suggestion for enhancement</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In order to further develop and strengthen the students' possibilities to connect with the work field, the Bachelor Dance programme could prioritise an enhanced internship programme. Other forms of activities, such as a community-based project, or seminars based on artistic practices of current professionals in the field, could also be valuable in bridging the student community and professional community</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</b>
<b>Standard 4.2.</b> There are sufficient qualified teaching staff to effectively deliver the programme.	<b>Fully compliant</b>
<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>Partially compliant</b>
<b>Recommendations</b>	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· The review team recommends that a realistic inventory of additional spaces required to realise the Bachelor Dance programme should be made, in line with the commitment to quality described in the SER;</li> <li>· The review team recommends that a staff room should be provided;</li> <li>· The review team recommends that training for staff and students to acquire or enhance the necessary basic requirements for digital literacy should be formulated and implemented.</li> </ul>	
<b>Standard 5.2.</b> The institution's financial resources enable successful delivery of the programme.	<b>Fully compliant</b>
<b>Standard 5.3.</b> The programme has sufficient qualified support staff.	<b>Substantially compliant</b>
<b>Recommendations</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· The review team recommends that care is taken to ensure the culture of intense individual feedback is manageable and that the workload of the two Artistic co-ordinators should be reviewed with workflows optimised and tasks delegated where possible.</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</b>
<b>Standard 6.2</b> The programme is supported by an appropriate organisational structure and decision-making processes.	<b>Fully compliant</b>
<b>7. Internal quality culture</b>	
<b>Standard 7.</b> The programme has in place effective quality assurance and enhancement procedures.	<b>Fully compliant</b>

8. Public interaction	
<b>Standard 8.1.</b> The programme engages within wider cultural, artistic and educational contexts.	<b>Fully compliant</b>
<b>Commendations</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The review team commends the Bachelor Dance programme's work in the area of dance inclusion and diversity, which it finds exemplary.</li> </ul>	
<b>Standard 8.2.</b> The programme actively promotes links with various sectors of the music and other artistic professions.	<b>Substantially compliant</b>
<b>Recommendations</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The review team recommends that connections could be strengthened with other disciplines at RCA. Artistic coordinators could look into creating learning experiences in which both the curricular content and interdisciplinary connection can be targeted together.</li> </ul>	

## Conclusion

As can be seen from its review report, the review team found much to commend in the Bachelor Dance programme. It has a clear, thoughtful, ambitious and distinctive vision and mission with a particular emphasis on diversity, an holistic outlook and wide engagement. Its work in the area of dance inclusion and diversity is exemplary. The review team was impressed by how far the thinking and learning outcomes are understood, supported and enacted by different stakeholders, particularly in what is a very wide group of guest teachers; this is largely due to the efforts and commitment of senior staff, particularly the Artistic co-ordinators. The review team encountered a nuanced understanding by the Artistic co-ordinators of current educational practices translated into the dance context and an enhancement-led attitude throughout. There is a positive, energetic and inspiring atmosphere in which care for the individual and curiosity and willingness to learn is much in evidence.

Of the few areas of concern, the number of studios is the most pressing. The review team finds that the lack of physical spaces does not reflect the high quality of the programme. The review team also felt that a great deal of stamina and 'plate spinning' is needed to sustain the ambition and complexity of the programme and that a strategy to support it with realistic workloads and curricular choices (e.g. makers vs dancers?) will be important in its next phase.

As noted above, the Bachelor Dance is forward-thinking and ahead of the curve. The review team felt it deserves to be better known outside its immediate context and this could be achieved by working more strategically with international partners. The review team will watch with interest the development of its strong inclusion and diversity-led agenda. We wish the programme well.

