

Executive summary

Report

Programme review

**Royal Conservatoire The Hague
University of the Arts The Hague
Bachelor of Music
(The Hague, The Netherlands)**

Site-visit: 5-8 June, 2023



Introduction

The Bachelor of Music programme offered at the Royal Conservatoire in The Hague was visited in June 2023 by an independent review team of international peers in the context of a quality enhancement review coordinated by MusiQuE - Music Quality Enhancement. In this report the review team presents its findings according to the MusiQuE standards for programme review.

Overview of the MusiQuE quality enhancement review procedure

The review procedure followed a three-stage process:

- the Royal Conservatoire prepared a self-evaluation report (SER) and supporting documents, offering background information and insights about the programme under review;
- an international review team studied the self-evaluation report, supporting documents, and a sample of graduation projects, and visited the institution and the programme on site;
- the review team produced the present report.

Context of the review procedure

The review team assessed the Bachelor of Music programme in the context of the Dutch external quality assurance system, which is regulated by law and implemented by the Accreditation Organisation of The Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO). For the assessment of the programme, the review team was asked to make use of the NVAO assessment framework for the 'Experiment Institutional Accreditation with a Lighter Programme Accreditation'.¹ The review team presented its findings resulting from the assessment based on this framework in a separate report.² When in the text on the following pages reference is made to this separate report, the title '*Assessment report*' will be used distinguishing it from the present '*Advisory report*'.

However, because of its international profile, the Royal Conservatoire expressed the wish to not only have the Bachelor of Music programme assessed on the basis of the relevant national framework, but also to receive feedback on the programme based on the internationally recognised assessment framework of MusiQuE – Music Quality Enhancement. In its self-evaluation report, the institution explains this choice as follows:

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

² The *Assessment report* will be made publicly available through the online database of NVAO (<https://www.nvao.net/en>) and through the DEQAR Database of Quality Assurance Results on the website of the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) (<https://www.eqar.eu/>).

“This is consistent with the opinion of the Royal Conservatoire that an institution can only call itself truly international if it is also willing to use internationally based methods for assessment and tools for external review. Therefore it is only the MusiQuE framework that can assist in a qualified comparison of programmes and institutions at an international level and confirm an international profile of a programme or institution.” (SER, p. 6) For this reason, the review team also assessed the programme against the MusiQuE standards for programme review. The review team’s findings in relation to the MusiQuE standards are presented in this report.

The Royal Conservatoire

Founded in 1826, the Royal Conservatoire in The Hague is the oldest music academy in The Netherlands. Together with the Royal Academy of Art, it currently forms the University of the Arts The Hague. As the Faculty for Music and Dance of the University of the Arts The Hague, the conservatoire is a centre for education, research, and production. It presents itself as an institute that has been dedicated to excellence for decades, with internationally renowned musicians as teaching staff and where tradition and craft are inseparably linked to experimentation and innovation. The principal objective of the Royal Conservatoire is to train talented young musicians and dancers to the highest artistic and professional standards and provide them with the versatility they need to function in today’s demanding, constantly changing and increasingly international professional environment.

The Bachelor of Music Programme

The Bachelor of Music programme at the Royal Conservatoire in The Hague is a four-year full-time programme that amounts to 240 ECTS and leads to a bachelor’s qualification as a musician. In line with the conservatoire’s ambition to reflect the variety of artistic and professional contexts, the degree programme embraces ten profiles (e.g. Theory of Music, Sonology, etc.) and several disciplines (e.g. Jazz drums, Classical guitar, etc.). The full set of profiles is provided in the administrative data section in Annex 1. All Bachelor of Music students are trained to achieve a very similar set of end-level qualifications, in line with the AEC Learning Outcomes for first cycle studies, which were drawn up by the Association of European of Conservatoires in 2017.

The departments in the conservatoire are responsible for organising and delivering the profiles and disciplines. Each discipline has its own curriculum and consists of five components: (i) artistic development; (ii) musicianship skills; (iii) academic skills, (iv) professional preparation, and (v) electives and minors. All curricula are divided in a propaedeutic (year one) and a post-propaedeutic (years two-to-four) phase. Each curriculum is designed in such a way that it encourages students to develop their craftsmanship, musicianship, and artistic vision.

The previous external assessment was held in 2016. The current Review Team noted that the Bachelor of Music programme considered the observations and recommendations of the previous panel. Moreover, the Royal Conservatoire has fine-tuned and continues to enhance its policies and practices that affect the bachelor programme under review. These developments are described in the main section of this report.

Structure and scope of the report

In order to bring the national and international frameworks together, the relevant NVAO and MusiQuE standards for programme review were mapped against each other. The



conservatoire used this mapping to structure the self-evaluation report on its Bachelor of Music programme. As a result, the self-evaluation consisted of several thematic chapters according to the relevant NVAO standards and sub-chapters addressing the corresponding MusiQuE standards. The review team has adopted the same structure with thematic chapters and corresponding MusiQuE standards to give shape to the present report.

The full set of the MusiQuE standards for programme review are addressed, except for standard 5.2 on financial resources.³ Where relevant for the discussion of the MusiQuE standards, parts of the analysis presented in the *Assessment report* under NVAO standards 1 and 4 have been included. Each time this is the case, this is indicated in the text. Since the MusiQuE standards exceed the scope of NVAO standards relevant to the 'Experiment Institutional Accreditation with a Lighter Programme Accreditation', this report also addresses topics relating to NVAO standards 2 and 3 which were omitted in the *Assessment report*.

The review team is grateful to the Royal Conservatoire and its staff and students who contributed to the development of the self-evaluation report, for the warm welcome to the review team, and for engaging in sincere and open discussions. The review team encourages the institution to make the present advisory report available to all stakeholders by circulating it among its staff members and students and by publishing it in an appropriate place on its website.

³ The decision to omit MusiQuE standard 5.2 was made in agreement between the institution and MusiQuE at the request of the institution, as the topic addressed in this standard is fully covered in the Institutional Audit.



Summary of the compliance with the Standards and recommendations

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

Quality culture, critical friends and accreditation	
MusiQuE standard 7	Bachelor of Music
Compliance level	Fully compliant
<p>Strengths and commendations The Royal Conservatoire has developed a clear and well-elaborated vision of quality culture and has translated this vision in sound quality assurance and enhancement procedures and tools. These efforts have led to an exemplary quality culture that is shared at all levels (conservatoire, programmes, and departments) and by all stakeholders (management, lecturers, support staff, and students) in the institution.</p> <p>The review team was impressed by both the student panels and the Critical Friends as relevant instruments of internal and external quality assurance through their contributions to gathering discipline-specific information that helps departments and the programme improve educational quality. The reports of the Critical Friends are used on an ongoing basis, in parallel with the Dutch accreditation process, to monitor the ongoing quality of the programmes and the teaching-learning environment and assessment.</p> <p>The review team commends the Royal Conservatoire for the way it has designed the quality assurance and enhancement system and extends this appreciation to the departments involved in the Bachelor of Music programme for their implementation of the system and for the ways in which they embrace the quality culture paradigm.</p> <p>Recommendations / suggestions for enhancement The review team suggests that the institution may wish to align Critical Friends visits with the final presentation cycle to add further value to their programme-level observations. In addition, it is recommended that the institution find a way for Critical Friends to share findings with each other post-visit.</p>	
Intended learning outcomes	
MusiQuE standard 1	Bachelor of Music
Compliance level	Fully compliant
<p>Strengths and commendations The review team noted the clear alignment of the mission of the university, the ambitions of the conservatoire, and the objectives of the Bachelor of Music programme.</p> <p>The choice of the conservatoire to adopt the international framework of AEC learning outcomes is not only valuable as such, but also confirms the international ambitions of the institution, its departments, and the bachelor programme. The programme allows</p>	

students to take ownership of their personalized learning experiences and gives them space to not only display a high level of instrumental/vocal skill but also to demonstrate individual artistic personality, be reflective and inquisitive, and function in a diverse artistic environment.

The review team commends the university, the conservatoire, and the programme for the way its mission, vision, ambitions, and objectives are aligned not only on paper, but also in the day-to-day reality of the Bachelor of Music programme, thus enabling the conservatoire to prepare artist-musicians for the current and constantly developing professional world.

Recommendations / suggestions for enhancement The review team sees two opportunities for further enhancement in the future. The integration of the conservatoire into the university and the move to the new Amare building that houses several artistic organisations provides an opportune moment for the conservatoire to reaffirm its position nationally and internationally, and to reformulate a vision and mission that encompasses the new internal and external situation.

The programme may also want to seek ways to consider simplifying its learning outcomes while still adhering to the relevant international framework (noting also that the AEC learning outcomes are currently being revised).

MusiQuE standard 2.2	Bachelor of Music
-----------------------------	--------------------------

Compliance level	Fully compliant
-------------------------	-----------------

Strengths and commendations The review team found internationalisation to be an integral component of the University of the Arts' strategy and focused on improving the quality of teaching and research, and on enriching the educational community. The conservatoire has a strong international orientation that goes beyond the terms of this standard. The programme uses the international AEC learning outcomes; the language of instruction and of curriculum documentation is English; students, teachers, and support staff take advantage of international mobility opportunities; the programme employs international peers as Critical Friends and external examiners; and the current parallel review process employs both Dutch NVAO accreditation and MusiQuE quality enhancement standards.

The review team commends the conservatoire for its outstanding level of internationalisation. Affecting all stakeholders, internationalisation has become part of the quality culture for the institution and the programme.

Recommendations / suggestions for enhancement None

MusiQuE standard 8.1	Bachelor of Music
-----------------------------	--------------------------

Compliance level	Fully compliant
-------------------------	-----------------

Strengths and commendations Creating dynamic and active partnerships with organisations in the music profession and society at large is a distinguishing feature of the conservatoire's profile which the Bachelor of Music programme managed to mirror successfully. The conservatoire and the programme are becoming increasingly

connected to the social, cultural, and artistic context of the city and surroundings of The Hague. The recent move to the Amare building has opened additional opportunities to reach out to other arts disciplines, and to devise new ventures for collaboration.

The review team commends the different curricular opportunities for Bachelor of Music students to practice as musicians in society as an integral — credited — part of their study. The review team considers ‘curricular projects’ such as entrepreneurial bootcamp, neighbourhood musicians, external educational activities, and career development projects as examples of good practice.

Recommendations / suggestions for enhancement None

MusiQuE standard 8.2	Bachelor of Music
-----------------------------	--------------------------

Compliance level	Fully compliant
-------------------------	-----------------

Strengths and commendations The conservatoire takes a proactive approach in reaching out to members of the profession. Regular meetings with a wide variety of professional stakeholders constitute a platform for discussing the expectations and needs of the sector, which are then accommodated into the learning outcomes and programme content. The review team commends the conservatoire, and the Bachelor of Music in particular, for the breadth and depth with which the professional field is involved in the ongoing monitoring and development of the programme.

Recommendations / suggestions for enhancement None

MusiQuE standard 8.3	Bachelor of Music
-----------------------------	--------------------------

Compliance level	Fully compliant
-------------------------	-----------------

Strengths and commendations The review team was very satisfied with the way the conservatoire provides information about the Bachelor of Music programme that is comprehensive, clear and reflective of the reality of the programme. The bilingual website is user-friendly, easy to navigate, and written in good-quality English. The curriculum handbooks provide detailed content on the programme disciplines. The review team commends the programme and the conservatoire for the attention and care invested in the design and development of these information tools and encourages the faculty and staff to maintain the high level of service going forward.

Recommendations / suggestions for enhancement None

Teaching and learning environment

MusiQuE standard 2.1	Bachelor of Music
-----------------------------	--------------------------

Compliance level	Fully compliant
-------------------------	-----------------

Strengths and commendations The review team commends the conservatoire for the way it changed the structure of the Bachelor of Music programme since the last accreditation. The new structure allows for more alignment, comparability, and convergence between the curricula, and offers a wide range of electives. The review

team was very pleased to note the widespread support for greater opportunities in cross-departmental cooperation.

Student-centred learning is a defining element throughout the programme, and research, alongside education and production, is a key pillar for the conservatoire.

The bachelor level focuses on four academic skills which are addressed throughout the curriculum and prepare students for more advanced degrees.

The checks and balances within the programme structure as well as the systemic support from staff and tutors helps ensure student success.

The conservatoire is to be commended for its recent development and implementation of a social safety policy.

Recommendations / suggestions for enhancement The review team encourages the programme to continue to monitor and adjust its structure in line with recent efforts and in ongoing discussion with stakeholder groups.

MusiQuE standard 4.1	Bachelor of Music
-----------------------------	--------------------------

Compliance level	Fully compliant
-------------------------	-----------------

Strengths and commendations The members of the teaching staff responsible for the Bachelor of Music programme have the appropriate qualifications and international reputations, along with the requisite expertise (both artistic and academic as well as didactic). They are evidently enthusiastic and supportive of their students, programmes, and colleagues.

The review team commends the conservatoire for its staff professionalisation policy and activities, which has allowed many teachers to enhance their pedagogical and assessment skills and, in many cases, to top-up their second cycle credentials with a master's degree. In this regard, the review team finds the Artist as Teacher programme a noteworthy example of good practice.

Recommendations / suggestions for enhancement None

MusiQuE standard 4.2	Bachelor of Music
-----------------------------	--------------------------

Compliance level	Fully compliant
-------------------------	-----------------

Strengths and commendations The review team noted that many staff hold composite appointments that add various administrative duties or teaching assignments to their main roles. Overall, the review team considers that there is sufficient teaching staff to deliver the Bachelor of Music programme effectively.

The review team commends the conservatoire for its efforts to integrate the range of teaching staff in ways that show their commitment to the students and ownership of the programme.

Recommendations / suggestions for enhancement None

MusiQuE standard 5.1	Bachelor of Music
-----------------------------	--------------------------

Compliance level	Fully compliant
<p>Strengths and commendations The review team was impressed by the quality of artistic and educational spaces that the Royal Conservatoire now offers, since its move to Amare in September 2021. The move to a new building had a boosting effect on the profile of the conservatoire: students are offered more opportunities for engagement with professional organisations and the community; the design of the new building facilitates interaction among staff and across departments; the physical and online resources of the library are impressive.</p> <p>The review team commends the conservatoire for its substantial investment in new musical instruments and recording equipment which brought a significant improvement, especially for students and staff in the Sonology and Art of Sound department.</p> <p>Recommendations / suggestions for enhancement In discussions with students, the review team noted—beyond their understandable satisfaction with the excellent performance and teaching facilities of Amare—the desire for more dedicated informal student spaces that would foster a community feeling. The wish to have places to post notices and the concern for the commercial-level costs of available food services were also cited. The review team drew these concerns to the attention of the conservatoire management and hopes that appropriate solutions, comparable to those that are so well serving teaching and support staff, can be found.</p>	
MusiQuE standard 5.3	Bachelor of Music
Compliance level	Fully compliant
<p>Strengths and commendations The review team thinks highly of the breadth, depth, and quality of the support services and the demonstrated commitment, professionalism, and determination of the support staff.</p> <p>The review team commends the conservatoire’s policy to have a dedicated budget for the continuous professional development of support staff, including mobility and training schemes, comparable to that available to teaching staff.</p> <p>Recommendations / suggestions for enhancement None</p>	
MusiQuE standard 6.1	Bachelor of Music
Compliance level	Fully compliant
<p>Strengths and commendations The review team was pleased to note how the communication challenges highlighted in the previous accreditation visit were addressed. Both the content of communications and the multiple modes of transmission are appropriate. In particular, the review team commends the conservatoire for the way in which the voice of students is taken on board in the internal communications process.</p> <p>Recommendations / suggestions for enhancement None</p>	
MusiQuE standard 6.2	Bachelor of Music

Compliance level	Fully compliant
<p>Strengths and commendations The review team commends the Royal Conservatoire for its initiative to adjust the traditional ‘vertical’ organizational structure of individual instruments and disciplines with the aim to enhance cooperation among departments, as well as the comparability and compatibility across disciplines in the Bachelor of Music programme. The recent move to Amare has also facilitated a more organic collaborative environment.</p> <p>Recommendations / suggestions for enhancement In terms of policy, the review team finds that the alignment of plans at the university, conservatoire, and department levels is currently adequate, yet presents strategic opportunities for further consideration. As noted above in standard 1 , the new internal and external structures present an opportune moment for the conservatoire to use its evolving internal collaborative and communications successes to reaffirm its position nationally and internationally, and to reformulate its vision and mission towards that end.</p>	
Student assessment	
MusiQuE standard 3.1	Bachelor of Music
Compliance level	Fully compliant
<p>Strengths and commendations The review team found the admissions criteria to be clear, and the requirements and application process comprehensive, transparent, and based on an assessment of artistic/academic suitability for the specific discipline of the programme. The review team concluded that the admissions process is well-organized and contributes to the success of the programme.</p> <p>Recommendations / suggestions for enhancement The review team suggests that the selection process used during the auditions be made as transparent as the admission requirements and procedures. Further, the conservatoire may wish to consider ways in which the complete spectrum of admissions data be collected and aggregated at the institutional level so that it can be used as an additional instrument for quality enhancement and performance monitoring.</p>	
MusiQuE standard 2.3	Bachelor of Music
Compliance level	Fully compliant
<p>Strengths and commendations Assessment methods, examination content, and evaluation criteria are clearly stipulated in course descriptions and curriculum handbooks. Although department/discipline-level assessment processes differ, there is sufficient awareness of the overall assessment framework to ensure demonstrated learning outcomes at the programme level. The review team discussed at length with various stakeholder the different components of the evolving Assessment & Feedback project and commends the conservatoire on its significant progress to date, including the revised examination forms (with the their improved alignment of assessment criteria with specific learning outcomes).</p>	

Recommendations / suggestions for enhancement As part of its parallel external review according to NVAO requirements, the review team identified a number of gaps and inconsistencies in the evaluation reports and accompanying documentation. The review team made several suggestions to the conservatoire management to address these issues, many of which are already being addressed through the internal Assessment & Feedback project. The conservatoire should continue to follow through on that project to complete and implement its key elements: alignment of course description objectives and assessment, building teaching assessment expertise, formulating criteria for assessment of artistic development, and strengthening the role of the Exam Committee.

Achieved learning outcomes

MusiQuE standard 3.2	Bachelor of Music
Compliance level	Fully compliant

Strengths and commendations The review team was pleased to note the recent positive efforts made by the programme and the conservatoire to detail the alignment of course contents, programme objectives, and achieved learning outcomes.

Student progress is tracked in the Osiris system, which is fully operational and accessible for students, teachers, tutors, heads of departments, and management.

The review team commends the conservatoire for the number and variety of methods it uses to monitor the level of progress and achievement of its students. All learning outcomes of the AEC framework are addressed and assessed in the lead-up to the final presentation.

Recommendations / suggestions for enhancement The review team encourages the conservatoire to further explore possible avenues to stimulate students to strengthen the individual artistic dimension of their final presentations and better demonstrate their personal vision and creativity.

Students reported that disparity of feedback may lead to some uncertainty about their state of progress, an issue being partially addressed through the tightening up of evaluation criteria and learning outcomes in the current Assessment & Feedback project.

The review team recommends that, while department-level anecdotal reporting on graduates is impressive, more quantitative information be gathered and made available by aggregating the data for professional/educational tracks that students follow post-graduation, and by surveying them at various intervals several years out. The recent development of the alumni portal is impressive and should contribute to improving such monitoring.



Conclusion

Based on the written self-evaluation documentation and the discussions on site, the review team established that the Bachelor of Music programme at the Royal Conservatoire in The Hague fully complies with all standards of the MusiQuE assessment framework it was expected to assess. As a result, the review team recommends the MusiQuE Board to take a positive accreditation decision.

This positive conclusion is based on the following considerations. Firstly, the review team found that the Bachelor of Music programme is embedded in adequate policy frameworks and procedures that are common to the University of the Arts and/or the Royal Conservatoire. This is notably but not exclusively the case in terms of profile, programme objectives, staffing, and quality assurance.

Secondly, the review team observed that at the time of the site visit there is a strong alignment between the profile, learning outcomes, programme curriculum, and assessment methods of the Bachelor of Music programme. The distinctive features of the programme – and in particular its international scope – reflect the priorities of the conservatoire and are effected in the learning outcomes, the curriculum courses, and the assessment system.

Thirdly, the review team noted that since the previous accreditation visit, the conservatoire has put a lot of effort into increasing the quality of the Bachelor of Music programme, among others through the Assessment & Feedback Enhancement Project. In this way, the programme effectively succeeded in enhancing the alignment between programme objectives and course goals, in delivering a student-centred curriculum, in improving the quality of its feedback and assessment forms, and in making course components compatible across disciplines.

Fourthly, the review team realised that the conservatoire's move to the new premises at Amare entails not only an enhancement of its teaching and practicing facilities, but also allows for more cooperation and communication internally among staff and externally with other art organisations.

Fifthly, the review team is particularly impressed by the quality culture that pervades all aspects of the Bachelor of Music programme and is shared among all interviewees it has met during the visit. While quality assurance has always been an important element in the endeavours of the conservatoire, the quality principles and provisions have been taken to a new and model level of excellence in recent years. An additional commendation is noted for the enhancement and championing of the student voice within the multidimensional quality culture.

In addition to this overall appreciation and its five commendations, the review team invites the conservatoire and the programme to continue the recent initiatives on cross-disciplinary curriculum innovation and on improvements to feedback and assessment. The first results are promising but require further monitoring and implementation.

The review team has no specific recommendations for improvement, only a few points for administrative attention in the future. Firstly, the work preceding the site visit has shown that the conservatoire and the Bachelor of Music programme could do more in terms of collecting quantitative information on admission and selection, as well as on the professional whereabouts of its graduates. Secondly, there is work to do in archiving the full set of final presentation materials.

Since the previous accreditation visit, the Royal Conservatoire has lived through 'interesting times'—the pandemic, the move to Amare, the increased attention to social safety, the revised governance situation at the university—and has worked hard to enhance the quality of its educational offerings. All these events and developments have had significant impact on the institution. According to the review team, the Royal Conservatoire could use the forthcoming accreditation period to devise a new strategy that takes stock of both the 'historic' features of the institution and the new opportunities that shape its exceptional profile.

