



Follow-up Review Report

(Quality Enhancement Review)

Bachelor of Dance

Royal Conservatory Antwerp

(Antwerp, Belgium)

February 2024

Follow-up Review Report

Name of the institution: Royal Conservatoire Antwerp

Name of the programme: Bachelor of Dance

Date of the follow-up site visit: 8 March 2023

Name of the reviewer(s) in charge of the Follow-up Procedure: Prof. Samuel Wuersten

Introduction:

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. Two review teams worked in sequence in each department, with MusiQuE undertaking the overall coordination of the whole review process, and review reports were produced for each programme – the Bachelor of Dance, the Bachelor and Master of Visual Arts for the Dutch language track and the Bachelor and Master of Visual Arts for the English language track.

The Bachelor of Dance was reviewed using the MusiQuE Standards for Programme Review as a framework of assessment. The site visit was organized exclusively online in March 2021, in the context of the Covid-19 global pandemic. Consequently, the follow-up procedure was organized in two phases:

- A) The Royal Conservatoire produced a Progress Report describing the actions taken at the level of the Dance Bachelor Programme to implement the recommendations conveyed by the Review Team in their 2021 Quality Enhancement Review Report.
- B) A site visit was organized in March 2023 to enable the Chair of the Review Team to observe the progress that the Programme made since the initial review.

The template below aimed to assist the Royal Conservatoire and the reviewer in the post-site visit process. It is structured following the standards included in the framework of assessment used for the procedure. For each of the standards, the initial recommendations of the Review Team are included, followed by a description of the actions undertaken and progress achieved at the level of the institution / department / programme reviewed, and by the conclusions that the reviewer draws in relation to this progress.

Context for the follow-up procedure

It was agreed between MusiQuE and the Royal Conservatoire that, in view of the fact that the Conservatoire's Review in March 2021 took place exclusively online due to the Covid-19 global pandemic, the follow up procedure should include a site visit by the Review Panel Chair – Prof. Samuel Wuersten. This visit took place on 8 March 2023 (see schedule of visit below, in Annex 1) and included a tour of the departments of the Conservatoire during which there were opportunities for conversations with coordinators, teachers and students, senior leadership, and administrative staff.

The Chair noted that the Royal Conservatoire Antwerp (RCA) currently offers a range of dance programmes: Bachelor's in Dance, Master's in Dance, bridging programme between bachelor and master and three educational programmes in Dance. Several of these

programmes are relatively new and are currently under a formal accreditation procedure by the government. Once this procedure is completed in 2023, the time-consuming cycle of external quality control of the various dance programmes can be optimised. This will lead to a relief of the workload for all those involved in the dance department, and it will thus ensure a more profound and structural follow-up of the recommendations formulated by the review panel. Some of these will therefore gain momentum from 2023-2024 onwards.

Despite this context, the programme has already adopted numerous initiatives to meet the recommendations of the review panel.

During his visit, the Chair was able to genuinely experience the life of the Conservatoire in all its vitality, and takes the opportunity to extend his gratitude towards all those involved for making the whole experience both productive and enjoyable.

Samuel Wuersten, March 2023

The recommendations listed below were produced by the MusiQuE Review Team following the quality enhancement programme review carried out for the Bachelor of Dance offered by the Antwerp Royal Conservatoire (RCA) between January and July 2021, with an online visit carried out between 29 and 30 March 2021.

The description of the actions undertaken refers to actions carried out by the reviewed programmes in relation to the recommendations received from the Review Team.

The reviewer's conclusions convey the assessment of the progress made by the reviewed programmes in implementing the recommendations of the Review Team.

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

Recommendation:

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.

Description of the actions undertaken and progress achieved:

The dance programme endorses the desire for a more pro-active and strategic approach to international institutions and organisations. However, it also indicates that the development of such a policy exceeds what is feasible for the coordinators of the programme at this time. Although as a theme for the whole dance programme in the Conservatoire, this is already developing. The Master dance programme is currently involved in IMPACT, a three-year Erasmus+ Cooperation partnership to produce an International Joint Master in Choreographic Technologies partnering four innovative higher education institutions (RCA, CNSDM Lyon, SKH Stockholm and Ecole de Sables) and three renowned professional organisations (De SINGEL, Les Subs and Teatro Municipal de Porto Campo Alegre) from Europe and Africa. This was partly initiated as a result of seeing the work of the Bachelor students in the AEC conference in 2022 in RCA and their interest in the inclusive dance practice within the Bachelor dance curriculum. These relationships once embedded for the Master, will be explored for further extensions with the Bachelor programme.

In this academic year we have welcomed 5 incoming Erasmus students in the 2nd and 3rd bachelor, which we had stopped during covid. These exchanges enable the school to extend their connections and partnerships with these schools.

There are currently two international schools interested in bringing students to visit the Bachelor programme. Students and teachers from Institut del Teatre in Catalonia will visit this March and The Danish Talent Academy next spring. The programme will

accommodate such exchanges where possible and will continue to explore possibilities where feasible.

We are interested in building a network of contacts worldwide for widening our outreach for potential student intake. Although we have a diverse student population, we are actively engaged in trying to expand the diversity further afield, also outside of Europe where our predominance lies. A placement student beginning in March may begin some of this research, but we are interested in how this can be developed to make considerable impact in future student groups. Within this search we are also open to the teacher mobility possibilities supported by Erasmus.

Reviewer's conclusions:

International activities and programmes are starting up again after Covid. They are considered to be important by the management/coordinators, teachers and students.

The management/coordinators indicate that they wish to shift from an ad hoc approach to a more sustainable approach of the international agenda.

When it comes to working with international guest artists/teachers, the restrictive contract rules become an obstacle.

Although the international agenda is considered important on the strategic agenda, the management/coordinators point out the limited time available to work on this.

Students comment on the importance of international networks and opportunities. Possibilities for exchanges such as the Erasmus programme are appreciated as well as guest teachers and the international student community.

Teachers see the shift from the ad hoc to a more sustainable approach of the international agenda of the school. They appreciate the coordinators vision and the fact that it is taking off. They consider the guest teachers to be an important representation of the school's international network. Visiting schools and exchange students are also positively mentioned within this context.

Overall, the topic is well positioned on the strategic agenda of the programme. It deserves continuous attention to further develop. **The Review Panel's recommendation has been enacted and actions are ongoing.**

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

Suggestion for enhancement:

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.

Description of the actions undertaken and progress achieved:

The programme has responded to previous alumni feedback and has taken clear steps to help prepare students for the transition to the professional field.

Today's programme includes the B3 course *Work Field Orientation* (within Production Practice) where students are introduced to – amongst others – touring networks, funding possibilities, and contracts and follow most of these classes off campus in dance organisations in Antwerp, Brussels, Gent and Leuven to make direct links with the professionals in those organisations.

In the Bachelor Project subjects *Group Choreography & Solo*, students learn skills such as how to pitch their work, build a presentation, perform and critically reflect. Also these assignments have an external jury from the working field who both write feedback and have a discussion with all students about their choreographic practice and vision. This moment helps prepare students for pitching their choreographic ideas with programmers in the future.

In the 3rd year, students can choose to follow an internship with a dance company. This is relevant for some students that wish to audition for a company dancer position, but many of our students prefer to take the full three years to develop a diverse set of skills that can lead to a wide range of future work possibilities. Requiring **all** students to do an internship for a period in the programme does not match the vision.

In line with the existing course activities, we note a few additional ideas and concrete actions that are currently being discussed or processed:

- There is a general desire to make students more responsible for their own learning to increase their self-reliance and strengthen their professional attitude. One aspect of this has started this academic year with the re-implementation of *Open Stage*, a platform for regular student curated performances. Two have already taken place this year, both completely organised, managed and performed by students.
- In recent years the programme has offered *Artist in Society* as an optional course for 2nd and 3rd bachelor. From 23-24 this course will be embedded in the programme for 1st years. The course brings artists from a range of social-artistic organisations to speak about their practice and visit organisations in a collective group of dance, music and drama students. The contacts made here can continue to support their post-student trajectory.

- The programme continues to find links with external organisations who can contribute concrete information or skills for the students. Two events are programmed in the next months, a session for all Bachelor students with GRIP, a dance organisation with shared artistic leadership with choreographers Femke Gyselinck, Jan Martens, Cherish Menzo and Steven Michel and an open workshop with WardWard, the company of Ann Van den Broek. These experiences help build direct relationships with the working field.
- On request of recent alumni, we have established a system whereby alumni can register to join the Bachelor 3 technique classes. There are 4 spaces available each day and open to alumni, master dance and educational dance students in specified classes. This offers a service to both the alumni as well as bridging the contact between alumni and upcoming graduates.
- AP University College runs a centre of expertise for alumni of the non-arts programmes. The head of dance has initiated the idea of expanding the scope of this expertise centre. It could be a hub for young starting artists, a meeting place to pitch ideas, with a rehearsal room, where student projects can also be shared with the field. However, this idea is still in an embryonic stage.
- Job opportunities are forwarded to our alumni network. We will continue to explore the most efficient and proactive method for achieving this.
- The interdisciplinary Mayday Mayday festival in Campo Victoria Gent, has invited our students to co-curate and perform in their festival with students from other arts schools. We will pursue such projects to help students build networks with venues and students from other schools.
- In 23-24 the programme will create another symposium for all dance students and guests from a range of organisations that incorporate diverse and inclusive practices.
- The LABO inclusive research project supported by the research group CORPoREAL also brings students into contact with external organisations and participants
- Bachelor students are encouraged to explore both the Master dance and Educational Master and Bachelor post graduate courses available in house. An information session is given each year to inform students of the possibilities.

Reviewer's conclusions:

Connecting with the work field is a high priority for all parties involved.

Students feel particularly challenged as their future is at stake. They appreciate the school's efforts to build connections to the work field. Guest artists are favourably mentioned as well as the connections with De Singel. Students also point out that social skills are as important as dancing/physical skills to make a successful transition into the work field.

Teachers also notice that the guest teachers/artists and their respective networks are helpful in building bridges to the work field. Alumni also contribute to a better understanding. Their presence as guests in various classes facilitate an exchange of information. Another positive contribution to building a network to the work field is the participation of external jury members who get to know the students and consider them for future projects.

MusiQuE Follow-up procedures

External internships are only selectively chosen by students.

A further recommendation could be to look into this in more details to weigh the pros and cons of the benefits to make a more regular use of internships.

Overall, there is sufficient awareness of the importance of this topic and an openness to continue developing sustainable relationships with the work field. **The Review Panel's recommendation has been enacted and actions are ongoing.**

Standard 5.1. The institution has appropriate resources to support student learning and delivery of the programme.

Recommendations:

(I): 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.

(II): The review team recommends that a staff room should be provided.

(III): 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.

Description of the actions undertaken and progress achieved:

(I): The infrastructural needs of the programme are recognised by the senior management of the conservatoire but cannot be met in the short term. However, the renovation of a vacant wing in the campus into a dance studio for the dance department should be available from November 2023. The bachelor's programme will share this space with the master dance programme. In the meantime, the conservatoire has a one-year option for an additional space for dance practice in 2022-2023. The space is usable but does not meet the conditions of a dance studio for regular class, but it is occasionally used for individual rehearsals.

(II): The shared wish from all departments in the conservatoire have been met and a staff room will be available from September 2023. This will provide an essential space for relaxed exchange between colleagues.

(III): There are several actions and plans that integrate more digital tools into the curriculum and programme organisation:

- Theoretical subjects are now predominantly supported via the digital education platform Digitap.
- A new scheduling tool Asimut is now in place, where students can digitally follow personal schedules
- A project is currently in development in RCA to develop a digital portfolio (how to position and present oneself in the arts field).
- We make use of digital tools in communication & organisation (intranet for students, iBamaflex for teaching staff & students for registration, study programme, ...), but we are aware that guest teachers with shorter assignments do not find their way intuitively in these programmes.

Reviewer's conclusions:

Already a staff room and one additional studio have been realized since the last visit. Nevertheless, the existing facilities still do not match the ambitions of the programme. There still is need for more studio space.

The management points out, that it remains an ongoing struggle to bring these needs for improvement to the attention of the school board. The dance programme is only “one of the programmes in need of better facilities”

Although **students** appreciate the studios, **they** point out needs for in-house support for general fitness and physio treatments. They also wish for the library to be up-dated.

Teachers comment favourably on the new digital system for schedules and feed-back.

Overall, the programme deserves ongoing support to improve the facilities and is encouraged to continue to seek optimal ways to support students and staff, especially guest teachers with shorter assignments, to use the available digital tools more efficiently. **The Review Panel’s recommendations have been partially enacted and further consideration is planned.**

Standard 5.3. The programme has sufficient qualified support staff.

Recommendation:

The review team recommends that care is taken to ensure that the culture of intense individual feedback is manageable and that the workload of the two Artistic coordinators should be reviewed with workflows optimised and tasks delegated where possible.

Description of the actions undertaken and progress achieved:

An optimisation of the workflow between the head of the programme, coordinators, lecturers, and support staff is high on the programme's list of priorities. In this context, the university college is currently in a transition phase with, among other things, a major reorganisation of its administrative support. For example, investments are being made in the establishment of a central student centre that will support all the programmes in the entire university college. In preparation for this, the administrative processes have been analysed and the responsibilities and roles in the programme and the university college have been mapped out. This major institutional reorganisation is ongoing and requires adjustments in the time to come. Although this has not resulted in a more efficient workflow yet, the intention is there for it to be efficient for all.

This year the dance programme is utilizing a new system of gathering and communicating feedback and transferable skills from teachers to students which lightens the processing load for the pedagogical assistant. Additionally administrative systems that support the vision of the programme in for example, monitoring attendance and evaluation have recently been developed.

The employee contracts from AP university college still provide a severe restriction on the teachers that we employ, as the conditions restrict a teacher returning within a three month period, and do not work flexibly with the artist statute or unemployment benefits. These rules impact the workload for engaging artists.

In the last year there has been significant development of a new well-being policy in RCA. This has resulted in the establishment of three working groups: Code of Conduct; Diversity and Inclusion; and Teaching in RCA. Although still in the early phases, the intention is that these groups should support both students and staff.

Reviewer's conclusions:

The coordinators' job descriptions have become more defined. They are sharing the workload in a way that allows avoiding the overlaps. This creates more efficiency. On the other hand, other tasks have been added to the package, e.g. the development of a well-being/prevention programme so it is recommended that attention still be paid to optimising the workflows and ensuring manageable workloads.

The mentoring system has improved as has student counselling. This results in a better flow of supporting students in their studies.

Students experience the coordinators and teachers as open and approachable. They appreciate the mentor talks, class meetings and the dialogue driven feedback culture. At times they find the timing of feedback to slow. Feedback is collected and sometimes given after considerable time has passed. It is then experienced as difficult for the students to connect to the feedback. They also would like to see a more structured approach to student representatives' meetings.

Teachers are asked to give their feedback to students in writing. They don't always know how it is received by them; they observe the workload of the coordinators as being high, resulting in a shortage of time to exchange.

Overall, efforts were made to make the intense workload of the coordinators more manageable and sufficiently supported. This is an never-ending work in progress. Balancing the needs of all parties involved requires ongoing attention and consideration and should always be monitored to keep this layered and complex operation healthy and in a good flow. Further, the programme is encouraged to continue to seek improvement in terms of creating effective and coherent feedback loops between its internal stakeholders. **The Review Panel's recommendation has been partially enacted and further consideration is planned.**

Standard 8.2. The programme actively promotes links with various sectors of the music and other artistic professions.

Recommendation:

The review team recommends that connections could be strengthened with other disciplines at RCA. Artistic coordinators could investigate creating learning experiences in which both the curricular content and interdisciplinary connection can be targeted together.

Description of the actions undertaken and progress achieved:

Discussions are now in place for a learning trajectory that incorporates interdisciplinary learning and practice. From academic year 23-24, Bachelor 1 dance students will participate in *Artist in Society* with music and drama students. In the following year 24-25, this will be followed by a new course *Introduction to interdisciplinary practice* which will be embedded in the BA2 programme initially through current interdisciplinary practices. Then in 25-26 this trajectory will culminate in a course within the *Next Doors* project week where students take the lead in an interdisciplinary project. The coordinators of each discipline and heads of training are now in discussion to consolidate these courses which will significantly affect the students experience in the programme. The conservatoire initiative is in line with the educational vision of AP university college, which encourages more cross-pollination between the programmes.

There are already significant elements in the bachelor programme that incorporate interdisciplinary approaches:

- A choreography module was taught this year for BA2 dance students and music composition students led by a choreographer and composer.
- *Next Doors* is a project week currently without study credits for all students in RCA, where students can experiment together without the expectation of a final product.
- For the improvised performances by Agostina d'Allesandro in BA2 and BA3, the students collaborate with a musician from the jazz music department.
- For the Bachelor project *group choreography* students are instinctively incorporating collaborations with costume designers, musicians and actors, although the course does not specifically demand it.
- For the Bachelor project *solo choreography*, students are required to collaborate with an artist from another discipline to create a performed work. Students can choose their collaborator and working process.

The end creations this year choreographed by guest artists will be supported by a new music composition from Matthias Coppens as part of his research. Ba1 will also work in an inclusive setting with guest dancers. This continues our strive for collaborative and inclusive practices.

Reviewer's conclusions:

Generally speaking, an increasing number of interdisciplinary collaborations have been realized.

Students appreciate interdisciplinary project. There is a desire for more. Although the opportunities are there, there are also time constraints which form an obstacle.

Teachers comment that dance often takes the lead in interdisciplinary work within the context of the RCA. There is increasing awareness of the possibilities with set up joint classes and planned interdisciplinary practices.

Overall, there is sufficient awareness around this topic and a consensus by all involved that interdisciplinary connections and curricular content can be targeted together. **The Review Panel's recommendation has been enacted and actions are ongoing.**

Annex 1 – Site visit schedule

Follow-up visit to the Bachelor Dance programme
08/03/2023

Time	What	Where
10:00-10:30	Meet & greet	Artiestenfoyer
10:30-11:15	Meeting with artistic coordinators and head of dance	Vergaderzaal
11:30- 12:15	Visit studios and tour in the building BA1 Hernan Mancebo (studio 437) BA2 Sun Xiao Jun (studio 436) BA3 Masha Kolegova (studio 501)	Studios BEEL
12:30-13:30	Lunch	LEON deSINGEL CAFE
13:45 – 14:30	Meeting with head of dance, dean RCA and artistic coordinators	Office Stefaan
14:15	Preparation meeting students (with Iris)	Dance office
14:45-15:30	Meeting with students	Vergaderzaal