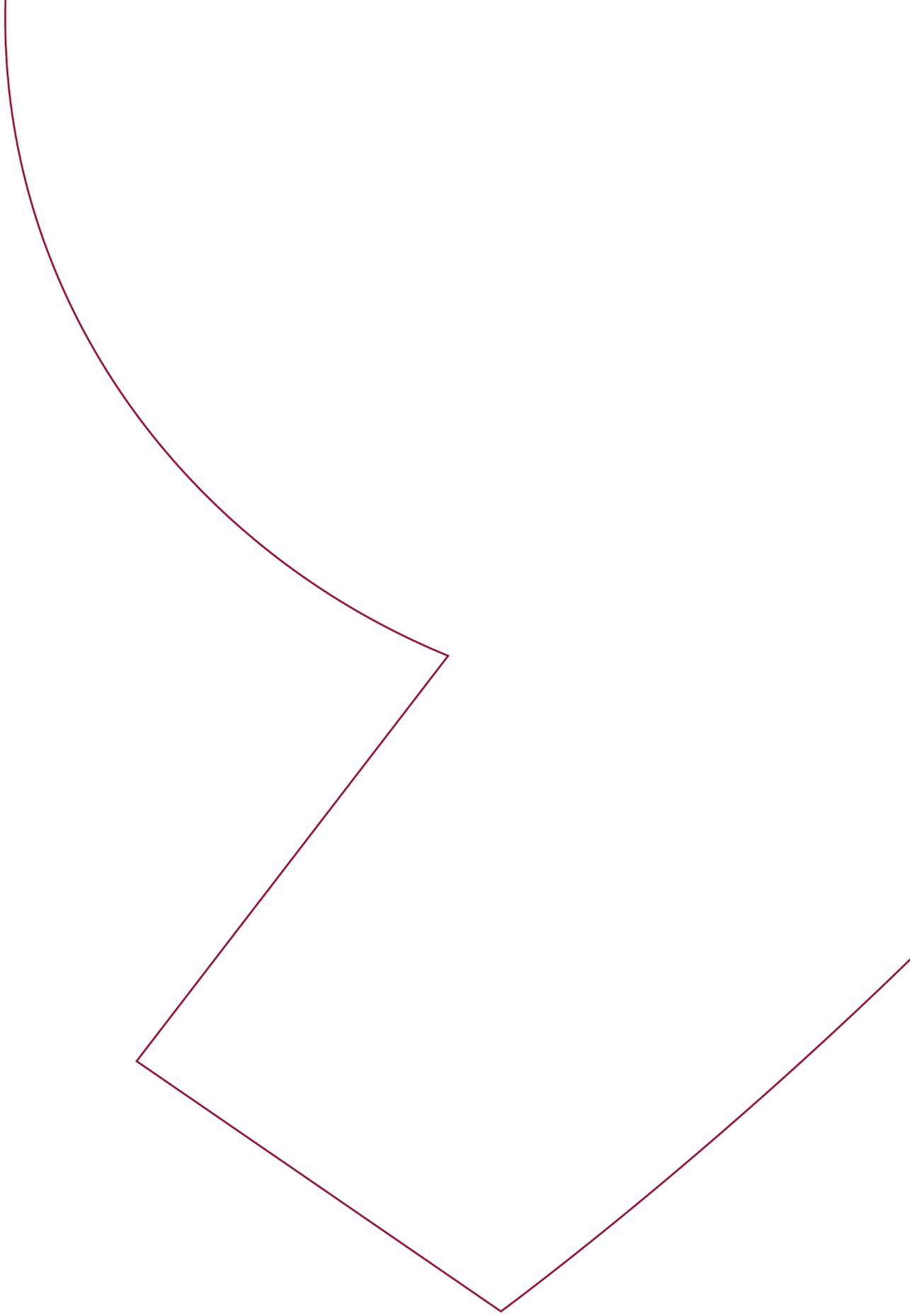


ASSESSMENT REPORT

Limited programme assessment

Bachelor Circus and Performance Art
Full time

Fontys University of Applied Sciences



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Bachelor Circus and Performance Art
Full time

Fontys University of Applied Sciences
Fontys Academy of the Arts

Croho registration: 30014

Hobéon Certificering & Accreditatie

Dated:

21 October 2024

Audit Committee

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A. (Adrian) Porter

C. (Cyril) Thomas

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Secretary / co-ordinator

C.F. (Cathelijne) van Oeffelt

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1. GENERAL AND QUANTITATIVE DATA

Name Institution	Fontys University of Applied Sciences
Status	Funded
Outcomes of Institutional Quality Assessment	Positive (august 2019)
Name of programme in Central Register of Higher Professional Education (CROHO)	Circus and Performance Art
ISAT-code CROHO	30014
Domain/sector croho	Arts
Orientation and level	Hbo
Level	Bachelor
Orientation and level	Bachelor of Arts
Number of credits	240
Location	Tilburg
Variant	Full-time
Language	English
Date site visit	28 - 05 - 2024

2. SUMMARY

Fontys University of Applied Sciences (hereafter: Fontys) offers a unique bachelor's programme of Circus and Performance Art. This is a full-time programme of 240 EC that is offered in English. The programme focuses on contemporary circus, a genre of performing arts in which story, theme, mood or question is conveyed through traditional circus skills. The programme enables students to start a professional career in various fields of contemporary circus and other performing arts.

Standard 1. Intended learning outcomes

The panel finds that Fontys Circus meet the requirements of Standard 1. The intended learning outcomes consist of a set of five competencies that represent the broad scope of the field of Circus and Performance Art. At the same time, these competencies manage to characterize the Fontys Circus focus on contemporary circus and performance art. The bachelor's level is incorporated in the five competencies through alignment with the Dublin Descriptors and the NLQF-level 6. The competencies and other parts of the programme are discussed with the professional field and the full membership of Fontys Circus with FEDEC¹ ensures reconciliation with the professional field. The vision of the programme is clear to the panel, but can be further developed in terms of *stepping stones*. The panel advises the programme to also give more insight in the journey and development of the programme towards the goals as stated in the vision.

The panel finds that a focus on the development of research skills and the international field are well included in both the intended learning outcomes and the vision of Fontys Circus. Artistic research and practice-based research are key aspects of the research development of students, fitting both the nature of performing artists and the bachelor's level according to the panel.

Standard 2. Teaching-learning environment

The Fontys Circus curriculum is devised to both meet core academic requirements and instruct rigorous physical and artistic skills to pursue a circus career as a performing artist. With courses in circus techniques, acrobatics, flexibility and physical preparation, dance, theatre, performance arts, dramaturgy, artistic research, arts and circus history, and entrepreneurship, the programme educates and enables creative and autonomous circus performers who are able to partake in and contribute to the professional circus field, and the overarching performing arts sector.

The programme offers a four-year, full-time curriculum with a major of 210 EC and a minor of 30 EC. The first two years emphasize foundational skills, while the third and fourth years focus on developing individual styles and professional practices. The curriculum integrates theoretical knowledge, like cultural theory and dramaturgy, with practical skills in Circus and Performance Art, ensuring a balanced education. The panel is satisfied with the curriculum's structure and finds the strong link between theory and practice highly beneficial to student development.

The programme's emphasis on artistic research is seen through various projects, especially the Research Performance Project (RPP), where students apply research skills to creative tasks. Each project begins with a research framework and includes source material, objectives, and relevant case studies. Students are guided by teachers to translate their research into physical performances, ensuring a deeper understanding of their craft. The strong connection to the professional field, with guest lecturers and festival participation (e.g. Circolo and Panama Pictures), further enriches students' learning and helps them build networks for their future careers.

¹FEDEC stands for Fédération Européenne des Écoles de Cirque Professionnelles and is an international network for professional circus education. The network supports the development and evolution of training, teaching, and learning in the field of circus arts.

The panel is impressed with the facilities and staff structure. Students benefit from access to high-quality spaces like the Circus Hall and other campus resources. The staff includes a core team and flexible guest lecturers, ensuring a diverse learning environment. While the panel acknowledges the small core team's concentration of knowledge, it encourages a focus on sustainability to maintain continuity. The individual guidance and formative assessment structure, combined with the programme's efforts to cater to each student's unique discipline, are praised as strong aspects of the educational experience.

Standard 3. Student assessment

The panel commends the programme for its comprehensive and meticulous assessment scheme, which is not only in place in the first three years of the programme but also in the graduation phase. Testing within Fontys Circus is very formative and development-orientated, which suits the character of Performing Arts according to the panel. Students are assessed for learning and receive proper feedback and feedforward. Additionally, the panel found that summative assessments are well-organized, with students being evaluated at the appropriate level, and the grading process is transparent and traceable.

The graduation phases covers the fourth and final year of the programme. Students finalize their study with four assignments: i) Work Placement, ii) Research and Performance Project (RPP), iii) Management and Organization business plan, and iv) a Group Performance. In the new curriculum the Group Performance will be replaced with an individual artistic performance, as students are more prepared to make individual choices towards graduation.

The Board of Examiners (BE) and the Test Committee play key roles in maintaining the quality of assessments. The BE monitors compliance with guidelines and advises on curriculum and assessment development. The Test Committee is responsible for teacher assessments, policy improvements, and regularly evaluates the quality of assessments using a PDCA cycle. Reliability, objectivity, and transparency are ensured through clear grading profiles, calibration sessions, and the involvement of multiple assessors in final judgments. These efforts collectively support the objectivity and consistency of performance-based assessments at Fontys Circus.

Standard 4. Achieved learning outcomes

From a review of students' graduation work, the panel concludes that Fontys Circus demonstrates that it delivers students who achieve the intended learning outcomes at bachelor's level. The panel is highly satisfied with the artistic performances it saw, where creativity and students' own identity stood out. In the underlying motivation and reflection files the panel learned that students reflect properly on their own development as a Circus artist. All aspects that accompany students' development of their own identity are well substantiated and research is done in the RPP, where the inquisitive attitude of students fits the bachelor qualifications.

The professional field is more than happy with the results of students' work and do recognize the creative circus performers the programme aims to deliver. In addition, the professional field is very satisfied with the entrepreneurial aspects of the course that allows students to build up a network in the field. The panel also heard from alumni that the focus on creating an own identity is very valuable for further professional development. Alumni further expressed their appreciation for the way the programme has prepared them as professionals.

Overall conclusion

Fontys Circus meets the requirements of all the standards of the NVAO's Limited Assessment Framework 2018. Considering the NVAO's assessment rules the panel therefore advises the NVAO to reaccredit the programme.

Upon agreement with the panel members the chair adopted this report on 21 October 2024.

3. INTRODUCTION

The Bachelor Circus and Performance Art of Fontys University of Applied Sciences (hereafter: Fontys Circus) is known for its focus on contemporary circus and interdisciplinary approaches. The course teaches young people with talent and motivation for the profession of circus artist. Students are highly encouraged to develop their artistic profiles, both as creator and artist in circus art. The education at Fontys Circus enables its students to start a professional career in various fields of contemporary circus and in other performing arts. Students will become artistic entrepreneurs and receive many opportunities to build up a professional network during the course.

Fontys Circus is a four year, full-time study programme with a pioneering, distinctive artistic shape. The programme is based at Fontys Academy of the Arts in Tilburg. At the moment of writing, 58 students are actively participating in the programme. Alongside Codarts Circus, Fontys Circus is one of the two bachelor's programmes in the Netherlands and one of twenty prestigious professional programmes for circus talent in the world. This marks the uniqueness of the programme.

Fontys Academy of the Arts (FAA)

Fontys Circus and Performance Art is a small department that is part of the Fontys Academy of the Arts (FAA), located in Tilburg. FAA offers a total of seventeen bachelor's and master's programs in arts education, performing arts and design. This is done from authentic experiences, in interaction with the professional field and with attention to individual choices. The programmes are divided into three clusters: Performing & Design (to which Fontys Circus and Performance Art belongs), Art Education and Masters programmes.

Previous visitation

The programme was lastly visited by an accreditation panel in 2018. The panel assessed the programme as 'satisfactory' on all standards. The table below showcases the recommendations from the 2018 visitation and the subsequent improvements of the programme between then and now.

Panel remark (2018)	Assimilation of the remark
The panel believes it would be beneficial to the management if they restate their artistic vision on the basis of a meeting with the staff and the students. It is suggested to rephrase the vision in a much simpler way, from bottom up.	After the previous accreditation, an organic process of formulating a new vision was started. Whilst developing the new curriculum, ideas on Circus principles and priorities were collected and discussed with the (inter)national work field and in European context with FEDEC to align with external developments. In the course committee and with the outcomes of course evaluations, the student's opinion was taken aboard. Therefore, over the years, most stakeholders have been involved in the process in various ways. Choices in the curriculum and for the didactical vision were based on global principles, derived from the input collected. Recently, words and ideas that reflect the core of the programme and how that is translated into the new curriculum were collected, re-ordered and scrutinized by the core team. The audit panel sees the steps the programme has made in formulating their artistic vision. With the other developments (e.g. the new curriculum) in mind, the panel

	finds this assimilation sufficient. The panel also spoke with the team about further developing the vision.
The panel strongly supports the implementation of a firm alignment scheme among examiners	To improve the quality of testing, all teachers of the core team have obtained their UTQ (BKO) certificate. One team member obtained the UEQ (BKE) standard for examination so far, more are preparing to do so. This has resulted in more alignment between course descriptions and tests and improvement of clarity in assessment criteria. An updated test policy was introduced and the test committee has developed a year plan for the PDCA-cycle for the next year. In addition, the four-eyes principle has been widely introduced in assessments. The panel finds that the remark is assimilated properly.

The current audit panel incorporated the implementation of the improvements in its assessment of the Bachelor Circus and Performance Art. When applicable, the panel will refer to the aforementioned improvement scheme under the relevant Standards in the next chapter. Overall, the panel finds that the course has taken the recommendations from the previous audit to heart.

4. FINDINGS AND JUDGEMENTS

4.1. Intended learning outcomes

Standard 1: The intended learning outcomes tie in with the level and orientation of the programme; they are geared to the expectations of the professional field, the discipline, and international requirements.

Explanation: The intended learning outcomes demonstrably describe the level of the programme (Associate Degree, Bachelor's, or Master's) as defined in the Dutch Qualifications Framework, as well as its orientation (professional or academic). In addition, they tie in with the regional, national or international perspective of the requirements currently set by the professional field and the discipline with regard to the contents of the programme. Insofar as is applicable, the intended learning outcomes are in accordance with relevant legislation and regulations.

Findings

The Fontys Circus programme trains students to become skilled circus artists and creators. Students are equipped with the knowledge and skills needed for performances on both (international) circus stages and interdisciplinary stages with aligned, adjacent sectors such as dance and music. This goes together with the ability to develop and shape their own artistic vision and to communicate about it on the basis of practice-oriented research. This vision of students is based on an inquisitive attitude and inquisitive skills, which are strongly anchored in the educational programme of the course. In addition to individual circus skills, students also learn how to contribute to a collective collaboration process. This enables them to develop and organize their own careers and reflect on them. The panel finds this entrepreneur part a very strong aspect of the course of Fontys.

Competencies and level

The intended learning outcomes of the programme are described in five competences:

Competence	Definition
Craftmanship	The ability to perform as a highly skilled circus performer with a wide range of professional knowledge and applies them in different contexts with consideration to health and safety as being of elementary importance to the circus practice.
Artistic vision & research	The ability to connect artistic research with societal changes and technological development to create a unique artistic identity.
Cultural entrepreneurship	The ability to work as an independent artist with an entrepreneurial attitude, a distinctive personal position in the arts, and capable of positioning themselves on the national and international market, identifying opportunities in the community and turn it into concrete actions.
Communication & collaboration	The ability to express themselves clearly and distinctly orally, non-verbally, and in writing. Using different communication tools and platforms in a multi-ethnic and international environment. The ability to collaborate with openness and adaptability, analyze and solve problems to give support to others.
Reflection	The ability to reflect as an artist with cultural awareness in an (international) circus context. The ability to investigate developments in the work field and translate them to their circus practice as a life-long process of professional and personal development.

For the sake of Bachelor's level the programme aligned the phrasing of its competencies with the Dublin Descriptors and the NLQF-level 6. The panel believes that the intended learning outcomes of the programme clearly indicate the level of the Bachelor's degree of an entry-level professional, are comparable to the learning outcomes of equivalent Bachelor's programmes in Europe, and unquestionably represent the broad scope of the field of Circus and Performance Art, while at the same time giving direction to the programme in order to facilitate as an unique course with a broad focus on contemporary circus.

Fontys Circus has renewed their vision and mission (see below) and stated this clearly to the panel. The panel is undoubtedly positive about these renewed statements. The panel sees the taken actions and recommends the programme to clarify the vision and mission further. Not only towards the professional field and (future) students, but also towards the programme itself. The mission and vision of the programme are guidelines and function as an anchor in the ever-changing context and developments of the programme. Therefore including the *stepping stones* is of great importance: not only explaining what the programme intends, but also how

Circus is an incessantly evolving art form that establishes itself on community spirit and a sense of equality and democracy. Circus is approachable, inclusive and interactive. By constantly re-inventing the profession and incorporating social and cultural developments, Circus connects with and surprise audiences of all layers of society, worldwide. Circus artists are driven by learning through exploration, and in doing so combine highly technical skills with innovation and originality.

They are by nature driven, resilient, agile and (internationally) collaborative. With great physical and artistic abilities, circus artists contribute in various ways to culture and arts.

Mission

Fontys Circus educates students to develop their own artistic style as a highly skilled and autonomous circus performer and creator.

Vision

Fontys Circus is a multidisciplinary, international bachelor programme provided by Fontys Academy of the Arts.

the programme intends to do so. This also ensures sustainability and portability within the programme.

Professional field

The requirements of the professional profile that Fontys Circus intends has been created in close consultation with the professional field. The panel notes that Fontys Circus is closely connected to and actively participating in the FEDEC network, of which it has obtained full membership since 2011. FEDEC sets the standards for Circus and Performing Arts education in Europe. The panel is very pleased by the close membership of Fontys in FEDEC. Aspects of the programme, such as renewing of competencies, are done in consultation with close working field partners. Due to the close connection to the professional field, both FAA and Fontys Circus are well informed about and attuned with international developments in the Circus domain.

Furthermore, through its involvement in the national Circus Coalition and Fontys Circus' own professional field committee, Fontys Circus has ensured that its relevance is secured on a national level as well. Strengthening national ties and enhancing the study's national relevance have been a particular focus over the past year.

Research

Fontys Circus is a multidisciplinary, international bachelor programme founded on the principles of artistic research to enable students to graduate as critically thinking circus artists, equipped with a profound grasp of cultural entrepreneurship. Therefore, artistic research is one of the core values in the Circus programme and explicitly included in the competencies. The audit panel finds that Fontys Circus has assimilated research sufficiently in the intended learning outcomes and the vision of the programme. Artistic research and practice-based research are key aspects

of the research development of students, fitting both the nature of performing artists and the bachelor's level according to the panel. The focus on research becomes particularly clear from the reflective competence that requires students' capacity to investigate developments in the field and translate these to their circus practice. Also, the competence 'artistic vision and research' challenges students to conduct in artistic research and align their circus practice with societal changes.

International dimension

The course is fully internationally focused which is important in the small and global world of circus and performance art. Students and teachers from all over Europe and beyond come to attend the course in Tilburg. Therefore the whole course is offered in English, aligning the English name of the programme. The panel finds it obvious that this programme is internationally focused.

Considerations and Judgement

The panel finds that Fontys Circus meet the requirements of Standard 1. The intended learning outcomes consist of a set of five competencies that represent the broad scope of the field of Circus and Performance Art. At the same time, these competencies manage to characterize the Fontys Circus focus on contemporary circus and performance art. The bachelor's level is incorporated in the five competencies through alignment with the Dublin Descriptors and the NLQF-level 6. The competencies and other parts of the programme are discussed with the professional field and the full membership of Fontys Circus with FEDEC ensures reconciliation with the professional field. The vision of the programme is clear to the panel, but can be further developed in terms of *stepping stones*. The panel advises the programme to also give more insight in the journey and development of the programme towards the goals as stated in the vision.

The panel finds that a focus on the development of research skills and the international field are well included in both the intended learning outcomes and the vision of Fontys Circus. Artistic research and practice-based research are key aspects of the research development of students, fitting both the nature of performing artists and the bachelor's level according to the panel.

4.2. Teaching-learning environment

Standard 2: The curriculum, the teaching-learning environment and the quality of the teaching staff enable the incoming students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

Explanation: The intended learning outcomes have been adequately translated into educational objectives of (components of) the curriculum. The diversity of the students admitted is taken into account in this respect. The teachers have sufficient expertise in terms of both subject matter and teaching methods to teach the curriculum, and provide appropriate guidance. The teaching-learning environment encourages students to play an active role in the design of their own learning process (student-centred approach). If the programme is taught in a language other than Dutch, the programme must justify its choice. This also applies if the programme bears a foreign language name. The teaching staff must have a sufficient command of the language in which they are teaching. Services and facilities are not assessed, unless they have been set up specifically for the programme concerned.

Findings

Programme

The curriculum of the programme comprises a four-year, fulltime study. It features a major of 210 EC and a third year minor of 30 EC. Due to the international orientation and high amount of international students, the language of instruction is English. The curriculum is competence-based and consists of several modules. Below the curriculum per year is displayed. In the last two years, Fontys Circus has renewed the curriculum of years 1 – 3. In the first two years of the program, the emphasis is on basic skills and knowledge. The students develop an understanding of physical practice and training methods, the creation and theoretical context of the professional field. In the third and fourth year of the programme, the focus is more on developing an individual style and working methods.

Year 1
<p>Physique in knowledge & experience (39 EC)</p> <p><i>Awareness and reflection</i></p> <p><i>Circus technique</i></p> <p><i>History of circus disciplines</i></p> <p><i>Acrobatics</i></p> <p><i>Trampoline</i></p> <p><i>Dance and movement</i></p> <p><i>Theatre</i></p>
<p>Research in theory & practice (18 EC)</p> <p><i>Research and performance project</i></p> <p><i>Practice based research</i></p> <p><i>Performance art</i></p> <p><i>Dramaturgy and choreography</i></p> <p><i>Security, safety & rigging</i></p> <p><i>Group performance, group work & group dynamics</i></p> <p><i>Cultural theory</i></p> <p><i>Interdisciplinarity & theme week</i></p>
<p>Personal Professional Development (3 EC)</p> <p><i>Management and organization</i></p> <p><i>Portfolio, competence exam</i></p>
Year 2
<p>Physique in knowledge & experience (37 EC)</p> <p><i>Awareness and reflection</i></p> <p><i>Circus technique</i></p> <p><i>History of circus disciplines</i></p>

<p>Acrobatics Trampoline Dance and movement Theatre</p>
<p>Research in theory & practice (20 EC) Research and performance project Artistic research Performance art Dramaturgy and choreography Security, safety & rigging Group performance, group work & group dynamics Cultural theory Interdisciplinarity and arts meet art</p>
<p>Personal Professional Development (3 EC) Management and organization Portfolio, competence exam</p>

<p>Year 3</p>
<p>Physique in knowledge & experience (14 EC) Circus technique Basic body skills Dance and movement Theatre</p>
<p>Research in theory & practice (10 EC) Research and performance project Group performance</p>
<p>Personal Professional Development (3 EC) Management and organization Portfolio, competence exam</p>
<p>One module of 3 EC Rigging; or Embodied artistic research</p>
<p>Free part (30 EC)</p>

<p>Year 4</p>
<p>Circus disciplines (14 EC) Circus technique</p>
<p>Expression and interpretation (5 EC) Dance Physical theatre</p>
<p>Basic body skills (6 EC) General physical preparation Floor acrobatics</p>
<p>Theory and methods (3 EC) Security, safety and rigging Portfolio, competence exam</p>
<p>Laboratory and research work (8 EC) Research performance project</p>
<p>Performances and productions (15 EC) Group performance Workplacement</p>
<p>Organization and self-management (9 EC) Management and organization</p>

The audit panel is satisfied with the curriculum. The development of theoretical knowledge (e.g. cultural theory, dramaturgy, theater, and rigging) takes places in an integrated way in the context of Circus and performance Art. This results in a constant intertwining of theory and practice in education. The panel believes this empowers students in their creations and performances.

Research

Fontys Circus is an artistic research-based programme. The curriculum includes a research approach related to student self-examination as well as research components in theoretical subjects. The most important element where students' research skills are made visible is the Research Performance Project (RPP). Students create two RPP's each year. These projects start with a research task. A conceptual framework is introduced and relevant source material is provided. With this baggage, students apply a research proposal, that includes objectives and expectations from the research trajectory, but more importantly, the positionality of the research by defining theoretical sources and case studies relevant to their research topic. Accompanied by a teacher in the role of project coach, students shape their thoughts on paper and into physicality and movement.

Orientation to professional practice

The programme is strongly connected to and focused on the collaboration with the professional field. Student are educated in a context that is connected to the professional reality. Guest lecturers are active in the professional field and bring in specific expertise. Next to knowledge about the professional field, students also perform at relevant and well-known festivals (Circolo, Rotterdam Circus Stad Festival, The Great Catch, Panama Pictures and Keep An Eye). For example the Circolo festival in Tilburg, where Fontys Circus organizes a professional field meeting on the festival grounds. This conference provides students the opportunity to set up a network and receive feedback from audience and professional field. At Circolo students can engage in multiple workshops in which they meet professionals.

Health and safety

Concern for health and safety is a high priority within the domain of Circus and Performance Art. Attention is paid to these topics in the programme in the theoretical subjects of anatomy, biomechanics and security, safety and rigging. In addition, since 2018 there has been a collaboration with the bachelor's programme Fontys Physiotherapy. International physiotherapy students advise the students on injury prevention under the supervision of the professional physiotherapy teacher(s). A safety instructor is always present in the Circus Hall (see further).

Inclusion

As in every artistic course, social safety and inclusion are main themes. The thrive on creativity, innovation, and unique perspectives of students call for a socially safe environment. During the site-visit the panel spoke with students about

Staff

The staff team of Fontys Circus consists of three groups:

- The core team – six core teachers (5.6 fte), a quality assurance coordinator, and a study leader;
- The regular team – the core team plus four teachers and a teaching assistant
- The flexible guest lecturer team – international lecturers who are deployed on an invoice basis for a specific content.

All lectures command the English language sufficiently. This was made clear in the documents and students told the panel that there are no issues regarding the language. Because of the broad scope of Circus and Performance Art that are educated within Fontys Circus, the programme appeals to flexible guest lecturers. Students receive a list of names at the beginning of each year and can opt for their guest lecturer of choice, based on their discipline. It does happen that a student has such a rare discipline that a specific lecturer cannot be found. Other

arrangements are made then. Students assured the panel this is done in consultation with them. The panel highly appreciates this level of customized education students receive.

The core team and guest lecturers create a mixed group of lecturers that possess plenty knowledge of the national and international field. Fontys Circus explicitly presents itself as an international partner for the professional field. The staff is and remains aware of current developments through their participation and contribution to FEDEC projects, participation in the circus coalition, co-creation with Festival Circolo and visiting national and international events and performances.

According to the panel, the small size of the core team also has a downside. The teaching methods and educational vision are currently concentrated among a few individuals in the core team. The panel advises the core team and programme management, to focus on ensuring the sustainability of the educational methods. This will help maintain continuity and reduce dependency on specific individuals.

Guidance

Every student has a study coach that guides the student in matters such as meeting deadlines, progress in personal development, and overall study progress. Individual attention is paid to the physical and artistic development of the student and their progress is closely monitored. Fontys Circus shared its ambition to assign students to a coach to supervise the specific discipline in which a student wants to become proficient. Students have expressed a need for this, and with the new curriculum, which is more individualised, the panel also sees this as a strong development.

As the programme is competence-based and highly focused on formative assessment, the cyclical process of feed up, feedback and feedforward is crucial. The panel finds that Fontys Circus safeguards this cycle of support towards students. Criteria of assessment are clear to students learned the panel from the conversation it had with students. During (physical) lessons students receive feedback just in time from their teacher or study coach.

Services and facilities

The main campus of FAA is based in the centre of Tilburg. The campus holds the key-facilities that both students and staff use. It features dance studios, a fully equipped theatre, a media library, a concert hall, classrooms for lectures and flexible workspaces with computer facilities. Next to this building, Fontys Circus also has an accommodation on the other side of the city of Tilburg (Campus Stappegoor). This is a temporary building that accommodates a Circus Hall, where students can practice their techniques. Students can use trampolines, trapezes, ropes and many other equipment there. The panel finds that students and staff have access to very fine facilities.

Considerations and Judgement

The programme offers a four-year, full-time curriculum with a major of 210 EC and a minor of 30 EC. The first two years emphasize foundational skills, while the third and fourth years focus on developing individual styles and professional practices. The curriculum integrates theoretical knowledge, like cultural theory and dramaturgy, with practical skills in Circus and Performance Art, ensuring a balanced education. The panel is satisfied with the curriculum's structure and finds the strong link between theory and practice highly beneficial to student development.

The programme's emphasis on artistic research is seen through various projects, especially the Research Performance Project (RPP), where students apply research skills to creative tasks. Each project begins with a research framework and includes source material, objectives, and relevant case studies. Students are guided by teachers to translate their research into physical performances, ensuring a deeper understanding of their craft. The strong connection to the professional field, with guest lecturers and festival participation (e.g. Circolo and Panama

Pictures), further enriches students' learning and helps them build networks for their future careers.

The panel is impressed with the facilities and staff structure. Students benefit from access to high-quality spaces like the Circus Hall and other campus resources. The staff includes a core team and flexible guest lecturers, ensuring a diverse learning environment. While the panel acknowledges the small core team's concentration of knowledge, it encourages a focus on sustainability to maintain continuity. The individual guidance and formative assessment structure, combined with the program's efforts to cater to each student's unique discipline, are praised as strong aspects of the educational experience.

Therefore the panel rates Standard 2 as 'satisfactory'.

4.3. Student assessment

Standard 3: The programme has an adequate system of student assessment in place.

Explanation: The student assessments are valid, reliable and sufficiently independent. The requirements are transparent to the students. The quality of interim and final examinations is sufficiently safeguarded and meets the statutory quality standards. The tests support the students' own learning processes.

Findings

Testing

Since the programme is primarily aimed at the art of performing, student assessment is for the larger part dedicated to evaluate student's performance, i.e. to establish competent behavior. Therefore, Fontys Circus has made a clear distinction between *assessment of learning* and *assessment for learning*. Assessment of learning is concerned with whether a student has achieved the learning objectives or outcomes of a defined unit of study for which credits are awarded. This type of assessment is therefore used for selection purposes. Assessment for learning assess the student's learning process. These assessments generally have formative/diagnostic purposes and focus on the stage of the students learning process, on the learning process, on the final objectives of the learning process and on the steps to be taken to achieve these objectives. Therefore, these assessments require the assessor to provide continuous feedback and feedforward. The panel finds that the programme has implemented this formative assessment strategy well. It fits the competence-based education of the programme and ties in with the starting point of the testing policy, namely the intrinsic motivation of students.

The panel confirms that Fontys Circus uses a variety of testing forms, which was made clear in the CLETC² scheme. The main forms of tests used are Competence Exams (portfolio presentations), Skills tests (circus techniques, dance, and research and performance project), Assessment (theoretical and practical exams, both written and oral), and Process Reviews (used to assess group works and group projects). The testing policy adopted by Fontys Circus includes guidelines to ensure test validity and reliability and is properly implemented. In addition, the authenticity of the students' work is closely monitored. The testing policy document also includes an overview of all summative tests and assessments throughout the programme, including the test formats, the elements to be assessed, the weighting of elements to be assessed, the weighting of the elements in terms of European Credits and the grading scale.

Graduation

The fourth and final year of the Fontys Circus bachelor consists of four graduation assignments:

- Work placement. A seven-week work experience that can consist of four different activities (performing, teaching, creation, and research). Students can create any combination – or focus on one domain - of these four activities and find a balance that suits their professional interests. The work experience is the final guided proof of the development into an autonomous professional artist.
- The Research and Performance Project (RPP), where all final qualifications are present. This final project is the result of students' individual artistic research. This research is explained in an artistic dossier as well as students' motivation for the project and their reflection on their development during the creative process. Students present the RPP to an audience of teachers, fellow students, and the professional field.
- A Management and Organization business plan that demonstrates the students' capacities as a cultural entrepreneur.
- A Group Performance in which students develop an artistic concept as a collective. In the new curriculum this group performance will no longer appear. Students will do an

² CLETC stands for Competences, Learning goals, Educational activities, Testing forms and Credits.

individual final performance where they display their personal artistic identity in an individual performance.

The panel finds the graduation phase well organized, with proper balance between individual and group components. The multiple assignments are aligned to the competences and match with the preparatory courses of the programme.

Board of Examiners

During the site-visit, the panel spoke to representatives of the independent Board of Examiners and the Test Committee. The Board of Examiners (BE) is functionally independent and is set up for the whole institute of FAA. In a proactive role, the Board develops guidelines for quality assurance and monitors compliance with these guidelines. The Board has also been asked to advise on the development of the new curriculum and associated assessment. The BE also regularly attends graduation ceremonies to ensure that procedures are followed correctly and that the final level is achieved. Based on the year reports and the conversation the panel had with the BE, the panel finds that the BE is fulfilling its legal duties and monitors the level of achievement of students.

The quality assurance of Fontys Circus tests has been delegated to the Test Committee. This committee is responsible for developing teacher assessments and for overseeing their implementation. It also formulates guidelines for teachers. The Test Committee provides management with advice on improvements to the testing policy based on evaluations. It also monitors the evaluation of competencies, including the instruments used, the functions assigned to them (formative and summative), the assessment organization and evaluation. The Test Committee evaluates the quality of tests at regular intervals, at least once a year. The committee uses a PDCA cycle to determine when all relevant parts of the review programme will be evaluated and what further actions will be taken if necessary from the evaluation.

Reliability, objectivity, validity, and transparency

Testing is secured well by the programme, according to the panel. By cross referencing multiple sources the programme ensures reliability, validity, and transparency. Clear grading profiles are used – by both core and guest lecturers - when forming a summative judgement on a student's grade, which is always done by multiple assessors in order to make up an objective assessment. For further alignment between examiners on the interpretation of rubrics formal calibration sessions are held. The panel is of the opinion that these calibration sessions are important, due to the rather small group of examiners. This also contributes to the objectivity of grading in Performance Art, which always has a subjective component. The panel concludes that Fontys Circus, the Board of Examination and the Test Committee make the best efforts to ensure objectivity and reliability.

Considerations and Judgement

The panel commends the programme for its comprehensive and meticulous assessment scheme, which is not only in place in the first three years of the programme but also in the graduation phase. Testing within Fontys Circus is very formative and development-orientated, which suits the character of Performing Arts according to the panel. Students are assessed for learning and receive proper feedback and feed forward.

The Board of Examiners (BE) and the Test Committee play key roles in maintaining the quality of assessments. The BE monitors compliance with guidelines and advises on curriculum and assessment development. The Test Committee is responsible for teacher assessments, policy improvements, and regularly evaluates the quality of assessments using a PDCA cycle. Reliability, objectivity, and transparency are ensured through clear grading profiles, calibration sessions, and the involvement of multiple assessors in final judgments. These efforts collectively support the objectivity and consistency of performance-based assessments at Fontys Circus.

Considering all of the above, the panel judgement on Standard 3 reads satisfactory.

4.4. Achieved learning outcomes

Standard 4: The programme demonstrates that the intended learning outcomes are achieved.

Explanation: The achievement of the intended learning outcomes is demonstrated by the results of tests, the final projects, and the performance of graduates in actual practice or in postgraduate programmes.

Findings

Prior to the site-visit, the audit panel reviewed all the products of the graduation programme (see Standard 3) of fifteen students. The sample of fifteen was taken from cohorts 2021-2022 and 2022-2023, with an emphasis on the latter cohort and the individual research and performance projects, as these cover the realisation of all learning outcomes. Not only did the panel review the written papers, but it also watched video-clips of students' performances.

The panel found the overall quality of the graduation products to be satisfactory and appropriate to the bachelor's level. Although the graduation works are practice orientated, students managed to relate their practice to methodologies and research at NLQF-level 6. The panel saw a diversity of graduation projects: multiple circus techniques and types of performances (rigging, pole dancing and many more). Next to the graduation files the panel also reviewed the accompanying assessment forms. The grades given to the reviewed works were in line with the assessing of the panel members. The panel also confirms that students are properly assessed at an individual level, because of the multiple components of the graduation phase (see Standard 3).

Alumni and professional field

The professional field representatives with whom the panel spoke, characterized Fontys Circus students as 'highly skilled'. Not only in circus techniques, but rather in the way students possess the ability to design and create their own artistic identity.

The panel spoke with a few alumni and studied a recently held inquiry among alumni. It is without saying that Fontys Circus delivers students that are ready to start a professional career as circus artist or performing artist. Alumni are connected to FAA, as some of them stay in the periphery of the academy in the first years of their career. Circolo and other artistic theatres or festivals (such as Oerol or Theater de Mark) offer internships that help recent graduates build up their network.

Considerations and Judgement

From a review of students' graduation work, the panel concludes that Fontys Circus demonstrates that it delivers students who achieve the intended learning outcomes at bachelor's level. The panel is highly satisfied with the artistic performances it saw, where creativity and students' own identity stood out. In the underlying motivation and reflection files the panel learned that students reflect properly on their own development as a Circus artist. All aspects that accompany students' development of their own identity are well substantiated and research is done in the RPP, where the inquisitive attitude of students fits the bachelor qualifications.

The professional field is more than happy with the results of students' work and does recognize the creative circus performers the programme aims to deliver. In addition, the professional field is very satisfied with the entrepreneurial aspects of the course that allow students to build up a network in the field. The panel also heard from alumni that the focus on creating an own identity is very valuable for further professional development. Alumni further expressed their appreciation for the way the programme has prepared them as professionals.

Therefore the panel rates Standard 4 as 'satisfactory'.

5. OVERALL CONCLUSION

Considering the unique identity and character of the bachelor's programme Circus and Performance Art, the highly passionate and enthusiastic staff, and the level of attainment achieved by alumni, the panel finds that the programme fulfills all of the requirements of all standards of the limited programme assessment. Fontys Circus clearly benefits from the carefully considered and planned programme and most of all highly committed staff members. The panel appreciated the open conversations during the site visit, where dialogues were enriched and the programme showed a high level of self-reflection. The panel rates Fontys Circus as 'meet the standard' on all Standards and therefore advises the NVAO to reaccredit the programme.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to facilitate the continued growth and development of the programme, the panel formulated recommendations throughout the report which are all valuable. The most important of these are summarized in this chapter.

Clarify your mission, vision, and strategy further

Fontys Circus has updated its vision and mission and presented them clearly to the panel. The panel is positive about these new statements. However, the panel recommends that the programme further clarify the vision and mission, not only to management and the professional field, but also to (future) students. It is therefore essential to outline the concrete steps: not only explaining what the programme aims to achieve, but also how it intends to accomplish this.

Focus on the sustainability of the educational method

The panel noted that the small size of the team has a drawback. The responsibility for the teaching methods and educational vision currently rests with a few key individuals. The panel recommends that the core team, and thus the programme, work on strengthening the sustainability of these educational methods. This would ensure continuity and lessen the reliance on certain individuals.

ANNEX I**Overview of judgements**

Overview of the panels judgements Fontys Academy of the Arts hbo bachelor's programme Circus and Performance Art Full-time	
Standard	Judgement
Standard 1. Intended learning outcomes	Meets the standard
Standard 2. Teaching-learning environment	Meets the standard
Standard 3. Student assessment	Meets the standard
Standard 4. Achieved learning outcomes	Meets the standard
Overall judgement	Positive

ANNEX II

Programme of site-visit

Programme³

Time	Conversation
08.45 – 09.00	Arrival and welcome
09.00 – 09.45	Preliminary consultation
09.45 – 10.45	Interview with programme management (including a short presentation)
10.45 – 11.00	<i>Break</i>
11.00 – 11.45	Interview with students Fontys Circus (including a short demonstration)
11.45 – 12.30	Interview with the FAA Exam Committee
12.30 – 13.30	<i>Lunch break and transfer to Campus Stappegoor</i>
13.30 – 14.15	Interview with professional field and alumni Fontys Circus
14.15 – 14.30	<i>Break and return to Zwijsenplein</i>
14.30 – 15.15	Interview with teachers Fontys Circus
15.15 – 16.00	<i>Internal consultation panel</i>
16.00 – 16.15	Feedback
16.15 – 17.00	Development interview

³ For privacy reasons, the names are not included in this report. The names of auditees are known to the secretary of the audit panel.

Working methods

Selection of the delegations / the auditees

In compliance with the NVAO regulations the audit panel decided on the composition of the delegations (auditees) in consultation with the course management and on the basis of the points of focus that had arisen from the panel's analysis of the course documents.

The audit panel offered students, lectures, and other stakeholders who were not included in the visitation programme an opportunity to use an online response form to highlight issues they deemed important for the assessment. The panel verified that the study programme brought this opportunity to the attention of all parties involved in a timely and correct manner. The panel received one reaction to the open consultation session, which was solely complimentary. No further actions were necessary.

Auditing process

The following procedure was adopted. The panel studied the documents regarding the programme and a number of theses. The panel secretary organised input from the auditors and distributed the preliminary findings among the panel members prior to the audit. A week in advance of the site visit, a preparatory meeting of the panel was held online to discuss the preliminary findings.

The interviews during the site-visit focused on verifying the findings from the prior document analysis and obtaining additional information about the programme's content. This was achieved through conversations with multiple representatives of the programme: the management, tutors, students, the professional field and the examination board. The audit panel also reviewed a number of assessments and additional students' work on site.

The verification was conducted by discussing the same themes multiple times with various stakeholders, by using additional documentation, and - in the case of facilities - also through direct observation.

The panel formulated its preliminary assessments per theme and standard immediately after the site visit. These were based on the findings of the site visit, and building on the assessment of the programme documents.

A first version of the assessment report was drafted by the secretary and circulated among the members of the panel for review and comments. The final draft was subsequently forwarded to the institute to correct factual inaccuracies.

Coordination between audit panels within the cluster

The reviews within this cluster 'HBO Circus' are organised by the quality assurance agencies Hobéon and Aequi. The coordination between subpanels first occurred by instructing the panel members about the assessment framework. The criteria for assessments, calibrated between Hobéon and NQA, are part of this instruction. Prior to this, alignment was ensured through overlapping membership across all sub-panels within the cluster. Panel members were involved in multiple reviews, ensuring the coordination by overlap in staffing between the subpanels. Taking into account that each programme assessment is an individual assessment, the overlap in staffing has (where possible) led to progressive reflection on the other reviews within the cluster. Furthermore, coordination between the panels is maintained through the support of the same secretary from Hobéon and the use of trained chairpersons.

Assessment rules

For assessing the programme, the panel used the "Netherlands Higher Education Accreditation System Assessment Framework, September 2018". This framework lists the standards on which the audit panel focuses during the extensive programme assessment and the criteria by which

the panel should determine its judgement. According to the NVAO Assessment rules; a standard meets, partially meets or does not meet the score.

Final conclusion limited framework

The final conclusion of a course assessment is in any case positive if the course meets all the standards.

The final conclusion of a course assessment is conditionally positive if the course meets standard 1 and partially meets a maximum of two standards, with the imposition of conditions being recommended by the panel (see Additional assessment rules regarding conditions).

The final conclusion of a course assessment is negative in the following situations:

- The course fails to meet one or more standards;
- The course partially meets standard 1;
- The course partially meets one or two standards, without the imposition of conditions being recommended by the panel;
- The course partially meets three or more standards

ANNEX III

List of documents examined

List of documents examined

- Digital Quality Portfolio FAA – Circus and Performance Art
- Educational Vision Circus & Performance Art (2023-2024)
- Mission and vision Circus & Performance Art
- Professional Profile Circus & Performance Art (2024)
- Competence matrix
- Curriculum overview
- Teacher Analysis
- CLETC (Competences, Learning Goals, Educational Activities, Testing Forms, Credits)
- Report Artistic Council 2019
- Testing Policy FAA – Circus & Performance Art
- List of all recent final al projects/papers examined prior to the audit.

Following NVAO-regulations the panel prior to the audit the panel has studied 15 students' final projects. For privacy reasons, the names of these graduates and their student numbers are not included in this report. The names of the graduates, their student number, as well as the titles of the final projects, are known to the secretary of the audit panel.

ANNEX IV

Composition of the audit panel

On April 5 2024, the NVAO endorsed the composition of the panel to assess the Bachelor Circus and Performance Art of Fontys University of Applied Sciences (PA 1886).

Naam visitatiegroep:	HBO Circus
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Succinct resumes of participating panel members:

Name	Succinct CVs
D.Th.M. (Désirée) Majoor <i>chair</i>	Experienced manager, director and supervisor in both (higher) education and in the cultural and creative sector
A. (Adrian) Porter <i>member</i>	Head of Higher Education Delivery – National Centre for Circus Arts (United Kingdom)
C. (Cyril) Thomas <i>member</i>	Director of ENACR and specialist in programming in both circus projects and scientific arts projects (France)
F. (Fleur) van Stratum <i>student-member</i>	Alumna (July 2023) Master Situated Design (Sint-Joost/Avans)

C.F. (Cathelijne) van Oeffelt <i>secretary</i>	Consultant at Hobéon. Certified secretary (NVAO) since 2022.
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Prior to the audit all panel members undersigned declarations of independence and confidentiality which are in possession of the NVAO. This declaration certifies, among other things, that panel members do not currently maintain or have not maintained for the last five years any (family) connections or ties of a personal nature or as a researcher/teacher, professional or consultant with the institution in question, which could affect a fully independent judgement regarding the quality of the programme in either a positive or negative sense.



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