



Critical Friends 2016-2022

AN OVERALL ANALYSIS OF CRITICAL FRIEND VISITS FOR THE:

- BACHELOR OF MUSIC
- MASTER OF MUSIC
- MASTER OF SONOLOGY

∞Royal Conservatoire The Hague, Quality Culture, 2023∞

Content

Introduction. 2

Guideline 1: Goals, Design and Delivery of the Study Programmes 6

Guideline 2: Teaching & Learning Environment14

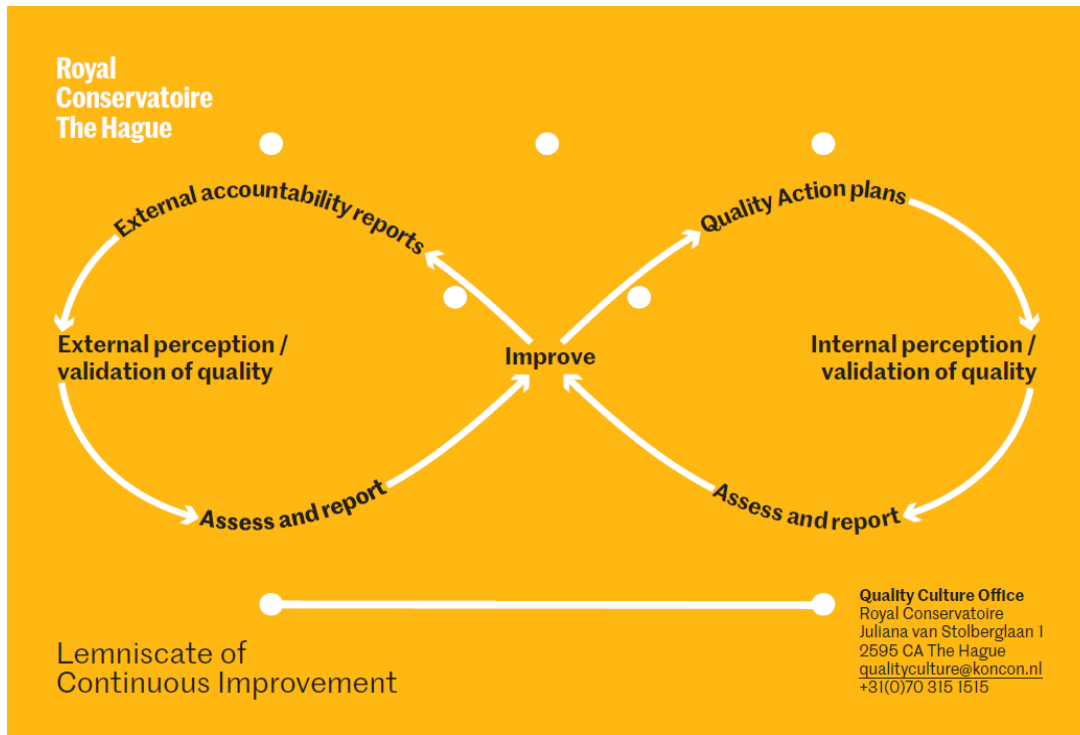
Guideline 3: Quality Culture17

Guideline 4 : Public Interaction19

Appendix: Overview Critical Friends and reactions from departments22

Introduction.

The Critical Friend approach is an important instrument in linking the internal and external quality assurance cycles designed to integrate the Royal Conservatoire's envisaged quality culture within the institution. The Royal Conservatoire's strategy for developing a quality culture is illustrated by the Lemniscate of Continuous Improvement (see below).



The Critical Friends are recognised experts in the discipline of the department concerned. The visit is underpinned by the results of various surveys, including curriculum evaluations, as well as reports of Professional Stakeholders Meetings and minutes of Student Panels, which are held prior to or during the visit. The Royal Conservatoire has consciously chosen to adopt the system of using Critical Friends as its response to the – often technocratic – focus on quality assurance in Dutch Higher Education, and in order to pave the way for the development of a genuine quality culture as described in the action plan for the coming years.¹

With this approach, the quality of the study programmes can be assessed on the basis of:

- international criteria defined by the sector itself, which also enables the Conservatoire to determine its position in relation to similar conservatoires (benchmarking) and to learn from best practices (bench learning).
- a clear connection between internal and external quality assurance cycles, the information about the quality of the programmes collected during these cycles, and the way in which this information is used to make continuous improvements.
- a focus on improvement, based on the conviction that focusing on improvement also delivers accountability, while the reverse is not necessarily the case.

¹ This strategy is described in detail in: 'Quality Culture KC, 2020 and beyond'.

- feedback at department level from national and international Critical Friends, which is underpinned with other instruments, such as Student Panels (internal feedback), Curriculum Evaluations (internal feedback), Evaluation among Externa Examiners (external feedback and benchmarking) and Professional Stakeholders Meetings (external feedback and benchmarking).

With their background, Critical Friends can easily identify what goes well and what could be improved, and they can provide the departments with very specific feedback that can be taken to heart and used to enhance the quality of the education. Additionally, all these Critical Friend reports and the respective reactions to those reports by the departments, provide us with an overview on study programme level.

This document provides an overall analysis of the feedback provided by Critical Friends who have visited the departments of the Conservatoire between 2016 and 2022, and refers to responses by the departments and actions that have been taken because of this feedback. This analysis aims to give an overview of the perceived quality of the study programmes that are taught within the departments, namely:

- Bachelor of Music
- Master of Music
- Master of Sonology

We refer to the individual reports and their responses for a complete overview of findings per department and improvement plans resulting from this feedback (Appendix: Overview Critical Friends reports and reactions from the departments).

Benefits of the Critical Friend approach

A visit by a Critical Friend is an opportunity for a department to secure feedback with the active involvement of the head of department, the teachers and the students. In contrast to a regular accreditation visit, which covers entire programmes, a Critical Friend is a respected professional peer whose visit focuses entirely on the performance of a specific department. Consequently, the results of the visit and the feedback are more specific, more personal and more recognisable.

It has been found in recent years that this approach appeals to students and teachers and has generated greater engagement with and a sense of ownership of quality processes. We have found that the more experience we have gained with this form of department-specific review, the greater the enthusiasm has been for the Critical Friend approach in the Conservatoire's community. The heads of department, but also the Study Programme Committee and the Exam Committee, have expressed their admiration for this method of evaluating the quality of education and observe that both the reports and the ensuing improvements have genuine added value. This makes the approach very different from the traditional review and accreditation processes. These approaches tend to be more generic because the focus is on an entire study programme, such as the Bachelor of Music (encompassing several, very different departments, such as Early Music, Jazz or Composition). Furthermore, the reports of the Critical Friends allow us to incorporate external perceptions of the quality of the programme in the internal quality assurance cycle, for example through the views expressed by a Critical Friend (on the basis of their professional frame of reference) as a result of discussions with teachers and students regarding the quality of specific aspects of the programme, such as assessments and the curriculum.

Over the past six years, we learned that Critical Friends provide a valuable contribution to the monitoring and subsequent enhancement of the quality of the study programmes. Because they are experts in the field, Critical

Friends can easily relate to teachers and students and make the connection between artistic standards and educational quality. The involvement and ownership of teachers and students within the departments has notably increased and has stimulated a productive discussion on the quality of the study programmes.

Challenges and actions taken

Over the years, we have realised that selecting Critical Friends ourselves makes the approach, and more specifically the results of the approach, seem less objective than they could be. After all, since we would like to use the Critical Friends' reports as a substitute for the existing programme accreditation process, we should be able to prove without a doubt that these visits are both completely independent as well as reproducible and comparable between the departments. Based on these findings, we have taken two important steps to further strengthen the Critical Friend approach and its implementation within the study programmes.

First, to guarantee the necessary objectivity in these reviews, the Royal Conservatoire decided to delegate the selection of Critical Friends as well as the organisation and monitoring of the process to the European accreditation and evaluation agency MusiQuE, Music Quality Enhancement. Second, we have developed the *Handbook for a Critical Friend Review*, which describes the steps required for organising an effective procedure in detail, including all relevant reference and policy documents.² In cooperation with MusiQuE, we have developed a set of guidelines for structuring the Critical Friend's feedback. These guidelines are derived from the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) and the MusiQuE framework document for programme reviews,³ which makes them fully compatible with the most relevant formal criteria and frameworks in the area of quality assurance in higher (music) education. Additionally, we have made a point of describing the rationale of the approach itself and the way it fits into existing internal policy cycles. An example of how this integration of existing policy with Quality Culture processes works is described below:

Based on feedback from the first Critical Friend visit, and further discussions in Student Panel meetings, the Classical Department devised an action plan for chamber music,⁴ which was further elaborated in the *Quality Agreements*.⁵ This has resulted in a new chamber music programme for bachelor's students, a programme for more permanent ensembles, an ensemble-in-residence programme, and participation in the European Chamber Music Academy (ECMA). To quote the Critical Friend's feedback report after his return visit: "*Teams are being set up, roles and responsibilities are clarified: there is real significant progress in the planning and follow-up. Good results and higher motivation are to be expected in the next few years as these are implemented. The reserved attitudes against chamber music among some of the students I met, show that there actually is ground to be cultivated.*"⁶ This quote perfectly illustrates the importance of a return visit, during which progress can be monitored and additional observations and suggestions provided.

Since its introduction, the Critical Friend approach has encountered challenges, for instance when it comes to consciously diversify between bachelor's and master's level, not only during the visit, but also when writing the report. This is something we started to realise during the first experiences with Critical Friends and is now actively addressed during the preparatory stages of their visits.

² Quality Culture KC: Handbook for a Critical Friend Review, 2019.

³ <http://www.musique-qe.eu/reviews/accreditation-processes-for-institutions-programmes-and-joint-programmes>.

⁴ Reaction to the report Critical Friend Classical, 2018.

⁵ Quality Agreements: The University of the Arts The Hague has developed these agreements in 2019, based on the government's decision to agree on targets for improving the quality of education in the period from 2019 until the end of 2024.

⁶ Report Critical Friend Classical, 2020.

Another important observation was that by inviting only one Critical Friend per department, although a renowned expert, there is the risk of having more emphasis on the particular perspective of this individual peer than there would have been in the context of an entire review panel. Also for Critical Friends themselves, it can be experienced as a heavy responsibility to bear. Thus far, we have no sound solution yet for this vulnerability in the approach, except for being very aware of the fact that it is indeed only one perspective and should be treated as such. To better prepare Critical Friends for their visit, we now ask them to participate in an externally organised peer reviewers training.⁷

Nevertheless, it is important to be aware of the fact that the perspectives of the Critical Friends combined, as they are described in this analysis, offer a very substantiated view on the overall quality of the programme, thus contributing to the work of review panels on a very detailed level. Additionally, by inviting Critical Friends to meet collectively with the panel during a review, they can reach some level of calibration in their overall findings. Combined with this present report, we expect the panel to be able to get an overarching view of the findings of all Critical Friends when it comes to the quality of the study programme they are going to review.

There have been situations where the department could not completely recognise itself in the feedback provided, or simply did not agree with specific observations. In fact, we have learned that this is not (and should not) be a problem. The point of inviting a Critical Friend and the resulting report is not to gain approval of everything we are doing, but to create a point of reference to which the department can relate. This can also mean that the department has good reasons not to follow up on a specific suggestion for improvement, as long as they can substantiate why. This reasoning process is in itself a manifestation of the quality culture we are aiming for at the Royal Conservatoire.

Unfortunately, there have also been situations where we consider the Critical Friend visit as un- or less successful. Although the discussions induced by the visit of a Critical Friend to the Master ArtScience programme were considered meaningful and created food for thought, unfortunately, they did not result in a sensible feedback report, and attempts to attain more structure and content-related feedback have failed.⁸ Because of the discussions with and between students and teachers that took place during the visit, the process was not entirely in vain. The situation made us realise that it is very important to point out the goal of the visit to Critical Friends, the processes around it, and what kind of feedback we are specifically asking for.

This is another reason we now ask Critical Friends to participate in an externally organised peer reviewers training to better prepare them for their visit. But even so, we have found that there can always be situations where Critical Friends, or the departments they are visiting, slip through the mazes. Just recently, the Critical Friend for the Composition Department was invited for a return visit without any involvement of Quality Culture, MusiQuE, or anyone else outside of the Composition Department. As was the case with the Master ArtScience, this visit turned out to be very meaningful according to students and teachers involved, but did not result in the kind of information such visits are designed to generate. This is unfortunate, because the exercise did not contribute to an overview on study programme level, and also because the review was not as informed, structured and in-depth as it could have been and not consistent with other Critical Friend visits. Nevertheless, the fact that departments are apparently this proactive in inviting their Critical Friend, without even thinking to align it with others, does suggest that the instrument is being embraced.

⁷ <http://www.musique-qe.eu/review-team/training-for-peer-reviewers>.

⁸ Report Critical Friend ArtScience, 2020.

We will actively continue to finetune the Critical Friend approach. Only recently we have concluded that the response to the second visit by a Critical Friend could perhaps be more interwoven with existing policy processes, as to reduce the administrative workload for the heads of department. This is something that we will further explore in the coming years. During the review visit of the Master of Music, the panel suggested to organise (online) meetings between Critical Friends, so that they can share experiences and discuss implications at programme level. This is a recommendation we will consider in the further development of the approach.

The Covid-19 pandemic forced us to organise some of the Critical Friend visits online, which turned out to work very well for second visits. When Critical Friends had already visited the department in person, getting a grasp on the specific background of the department and its progression since that visit in an online manner was indeed feasible. We are now considering this online possibility for every second visit, thus saving time and energy of everyone involved, as well as reducing the burden on resources and the environment.

Guideline 1: Goals, Design and Delivery of the Study Programmes

The clarity of the goals and rationale of the study programmes

We find that our Critical Friends conclude that the aims of the programmes are clearly expressed and that the goals are aligned with the Royal Conservatoire's positioning. Both the institution and departments are described as influential centres in shaping the next generation of professional musical life in the Netherlands and internationally. The variety of curricula at the conservatoire is often mentioned as an important contribution to the quality of its programmes. Although the goals and rationale of most curricula are clear, the Critical Friends express the need to develop a more effective way of explaining certain topics to students in some departments (Composition, Classical, Jazz, Art of Sound), such as what the master's adds to the bachelor's programme, or the rationale behind certain assessment criteria and the structure of the curricula.

These are areas for improvement that were not only further discussed and developed within the departments themselves, but also influenced the overall Quality Culture activities in the Conservatoire. Topics such as these have, for instance, been integrated in several surveys, discussed in Student Panels, with teachers and the Study Programme Committee. We now see the results of these efforts in the reports of more recent visits by Critical Friends, confirming that we are on the right track:

Quote from the Critical Friend of the Early Music department, 2021: *The Bachelor- and Master- curriculum handbooks give a very precise description of requirements, objectives, contents, assessment procedures and criteria for each course. Progression is designed throughout the curriculum (including intermediate Learning outcomes); the assessment methods are clearly stated and consistent. The diverse assessment procedures and grading systems are adapted to the nature of the subject and the moment of the evaluation. Even if they don't refer regularly to the handbooks, students I talked to are aware that the information is available- and where to find it when needed.*⁹

Where in some cases a need for further clarification or improvement is identified, in others, our Critical Friends provide us with useful suggestions for innovation. The Critical Friend of the Art of Sound Department, for instance,

⁹ Critical Friend report Early Music, 2021.

encouraged creating a master's programme after her first visit in 2017.¹⁰ This master's programme was realised during subsequent years, and this development was assessed by the same Critical Friend in 2020. While she expressed her appreciation for what had been achieved since her last visit, she also continued to make valuable contributions to the further development of the master's programme in the coming years and the connection between the bachelor's and master's programmes. The added value of a Critical Friend returning after three years was thus very tangible for the department.

Quote from the Critical Friend of the Art of Sound Department, 2020: *Rather than try to define the direction of the exiting master's program for Art of Sound from within, it is time to do outside research to help the faculty define and take ownership of the amount and level of course work for a master's degree. It is important to involve the core team of faculty in this process – all of whom are very invested in the future of this program.*¹¹

Based on this feedback, several actions have been taken in the Art of Sound Department, including discussions in the core team about possibilities for deepening the skills while keeping up with the latest developments in the industry¹².

The content, structure and international orientation of the study programmes, its methods of delivery, how it encourages students to shape their own learning environment (student-centred learning), and how it provides them with performance opportunities.

According to most Critical Friends, the content and structure of the study programmes generally have a consistent and balanced structure. The content of the programmes is reported to be well adapted to general and specific needs of students, and there is a good balance between main subject lessons, theory subjects, general courses and electives. The structure of the curricula is deemed to work well as the develop students' knowledge of the repertoire at the beginning of the bachelor's towards the development of a critically reflective practice where the students can choose a variety of paths and projects. This structure continues in more depth at master's level.

Various suggestions for improvements were made, for instance by changing the structure or order in some of the subjects, by adding other (elective) courses to the curriculum and by intensifying the integration of practice and theory.

Quote from the Critical Friend of the Institute of Sonology, 2022: *The goals of the Sonology programmes are crystal clear, as evidenced by the mission statement on the Sonology website and elsewhere. It is apparent that considerable thought has been given to designing programmes that cover essential topics one would expect in the area of electronic composition and performance in many comparable institutions around the world, but also to specialisations that Sonology is uniquely qualified to provide. The curricula are wide-ranging and of the utmost relevance to artists approaching this area form a variety of different entry paths. More to the point, students will almost certainly be exposed to much more than those areas of interest with which they entered the programme, and this is particularly desirable in an institute of higher education. [...] Furthermore, the curricula are being refined and improved upon on a regular basis, in reaction to the demands of the students as well as to technological developments and the special areas of expertise which the teaching staff offer.*¹³

¹⁰ Critical Friend report Art of Sound, 2017.

¹¹ Critical Friend report Art of Sound, 2020.

¹² Reaction to the report of the Critical Friend Art of Sound, 2020.

¹³ Report Critical Friend Sonology, 2022.

Although feedback from Critical Friends is often directed towards the specific departments they are visiting, many times we see an interesting overlap and suggestions for improvement relevant for the entire bachelor's or master's programmes. The suggestion to strengthen and increase relations with alumni (Jazz, Classical, Composition, Art of Sound) is an example of this. This is something that is now, some years later, common practice in the Conservatoire.¹⁴ Extending and intensifying cross-disciplinary cooperation between departments (Vocal, Classical, Composition, Early Music, Jazz) is another suggestion that was often made and taken to heart in the development of the departments. For several years now, Heads of department are being actively invited to elaborate this cooperation with other departments in their Annual Plans.

Quote from the Critical Friend of the Jazz Department, 2018: *Even though there are some very valuable collaboration examples between the Jazz and other Departments such as the Art of Sound Department and the Classical Department, more can be done in order to take full advantage of the intense and creative environment of The Royal Conservatoire in The Hague.*¹⁵

This feedback also had an important influence on the recent restructuring of the master's curriculum. Designing Master Circles with participants from all departments is one of the outcomes, which allows students from different musical backgrounds to work together and learn from each other's experiences.

The measures taken in both the bachelor's and the master's programmes to enhance cross-departmental cooperation have been noticed and acknowledged by Critical Friends in years to follow. As, for instance, the Critical Friend of the Classical Department concluded after his return visit: "Some of the barriers between departments have been lowered, and cross-disciplinary tendencies are strengthened. In 2016, especially the Early Music Department seemed quite isolated from the Classical instrumental studies. Now more flexible practices have been established between the Classical Department and the Early Music Department. The historical development course in the Classical Department is being moved to B1 as of 2019/2020, so that students can become familiar with an early-music perspective to raise their interest for a historically informed practice. In addition, the course can serve as a way to interest students to follow the Early Music minor starting in B2."¹⁶

The development and implementation of an education skills course in the bachelor's curriculum in 2019/2020 is yet another example of action taken partially as a result of feedback from several Critical Friends, as was the development of a Professional Integration module in the master's programme.

Critical Friends invariably acknowledge that the programmes have a strong **international orientation**, not only because of the experience of the teaching staff, but also because of the varied nationalities of the students.

Quote from the Critical Friend of the Classical Department, 2016: *The international dimension of all activities in KC is a kind of a cantus firmus, a red line going through all visions, declarations and handbooks. The constant flow in the exchange of students, teachers and staff is stressed in every document, and is seen as a basic tool for*

¹⁴ <https://www.koncon.nl/alumni>.

¹⁵ Report Critical Friend Jazz, 2018.

¹⁶ Report Critical Friend Classical, 2019.

*developing the institution. [...] This strategic, extensive prioritization of international relations was not only strongly praised by most teachers but was seen as self-evident.*¹⁷

A distinctive characteristic often mentioned is the supportive interaction between teachers, students and the surrounding artistic community. The mobility of the teachers (often teaching in several institutions) is another guarantee for this international standard. This constant flow in the exchange of students, teachers and staff is stressed in many feedback reports.

Quote from the Critical Friend of the Jazz Department, 2018: *Given that Jazz music business is getting more and more competitive and the number of job opportunities is shrinking, and even though there are no official numbers, graduates from The Royal Conservatoire in The Hague seem to have reasonable employability, when compared to graduates from other schools in Europe and America. After graduating, some international students have the chance to stay living and working in the business in The Netherlands, which is a very good indicator.*¹⁸

It can be concluded, according to the Critical Friends, that the Conservatoire is supportive of students' individual learning process, responsively and responsibly underpinning student initiatives and personal motivation. **Student-centred learning** is confirmed to be at the heart of the departments. Knowledge is provided by formal lectures as well as by workshops and rehearsals, where students learn how to interact with technology and professional musicians in order to shape their own artistic expression. In their conversations with students, Critical Friends found confirmation that students feel enabled to shape their individual learning environments to a significant extent. However, improvements have also been suggested in these talks (Composition, Art of Sound, Jazz), including new facilities and innovations such as adding a digital dimension. Many steps have been taken since, the process even further reinforced by COVID-19 as well as the move to our new building, with state-of-the-art facilities. Several instruments for digital learning have been developed these last year and although live lessons are preferred by all, digital solutions such as working with TEAMS, now have a fixed role in the learning environment as well.

The relation between the quality of the graduating students (learning outcomes) and the requirements of the discipline and of the (international) professional field.

With their background in the discipline and their knowledge of the (international) field, Critical Friends are well-equipped to assess the relation between the Learning outcomes and the requirements of the discipline, and can make very specific suggestions for improvement.

In most cases, with a practice in the professional field, teachers are reported to have extensive knowledge on the subject they are teaching and they are sensitive to the constant changes in the professional life of musicians, modifying the contents of courses from year to year where appropriate. Critical Friends find there is a good emphasis on the course objectives and available professional links articulating with the profession in the areas of the departments' activities.

Quote from the Critical Friend of the Early Music Department, 2017: *I observed the O18C¹⁹ principal flute player spend time after one rehearsal, using the concert hall space, to explain about projection and tonal control in a solo passage that had just been rehearsed. The student played the passage over a number of times,*

¹⁷ Report Critical Friend Classical, 2016.

¹⁸ Report Critical Friend Jazz, 2018.

¹⁹ O18C= Orchestra of the 18th Century.

*experiential learning was enhanced with feedback and advice from the orchestral member, bringing added value beyond the formal session. The student played that same passage in concert the following day reinforcing the learning that had taken place. The principal oboe also offered some reflections on that same passage in the context of his experience of orchestral playing. This was an excellent example of the quality and depth of experience that side-by-side projects can bring.*²⁰

However, there are also examples where Critical Friends have suggestions for further improvement. Following the visit from the Critical Friend of the Composition Department, for instance, the head of department took initiative to redefine the learning outcomes of both the bachelor's and master's programmes.²¹ This was done in consultation with a selection of students acting as representatives of their fellow students within the department. These newly defined learning outcomes were subsequently discussed and finetuned with teachers, and were presented to the other departments.

Finally, the level of the graduating students is reported to be high and meeting the requirements of the discipline and the international professional field.

Quote by the Critical Friend of the Institute of Sonology, 2017: *Luc Döbereiner, who became the Critical Friend's doctoral student in 2010 and who finished his studies at the University of Music and Performing Arts Graz with the thesis "The Concept of Compositional Model" in 2013. The broad field of subjects that he learned at Sonology laid the ground not only for his excellent dissertation, but also for unfolding his artistic development which I am still following with great interest.*²²

The role of (artistic) research in the programmes

Critical Friends acknowledge that artistic research is a key feature in the study programmes. At the Conservatoire, the Master of Music and the Master of Sonology programmes have substantial research elements. The close collaboration with Leiden University (offering the third cycle) has also enabled the master's programmes to reach fargoining results in research. Research training has already been put into action in the bachelor's programme, and the reflective attitude of the student is now indicated and assessed in the applications for the master's programmes. Although the Critical Friends have concluded that the conservatoire is doing well when it comes to the research in the programmes, they have also suggested that directing the students to digital examples of artistic research (for example at the Orpheus Institute or in the online Research Catalogue)²³ might be helpful. Students could be further stimulated towards additional research activities, especially through organisation and participation in conferences, talks, recordings, publications, and other research-driven activities.

Several initiatives have been made since then, such as implementing obligatory research-based modules in the Bachelor of Music programme. As a result, there is a clear learning line throughout the Bachelor and Master of Music programmes that is supporting students in becoming reflective practitioners. After successful completion of a master's programme, students can apply for a PhD programme in docARTES at the Academy of Creative and Performing Arts (ACPA) at Leiden University,

²⁰ Report Critical Friend Early Music, 2017.

²¹ Report Critical Friend Composition, 2018-2019.

²² Report Critical Friend Sonology, 2017.

²³ Researchcatalogue.net

and enrol for a doctoral programme geared to their artistic practice.²⁴ In other words, the Conservatoire now offers a continuous learning trajectory that starts early at bachelor's level and can continue even beyond the award of a master's degree. Another example is the significant contribution by the Critical Friend from the Art of Sound Department on the development of (artistic) research in the programme as was discussed earlier.

Quote from the Critical Friend of the Music Education Department, 2021: *The Educational Skills course is defined by the Education Department [...] as 'a way of preparing students of the performing departments with basic pedagogical skills, for teaching individuals and groups and preferably also in a social context'. They organise numerous field trips to professional organisations in and outside The Hague. There is scope of further development of this with the opening up of Amare. There is a recognition that research has a part to play in education and there is room for developing critical mass and capacity among staff.*²⁵

How assessment methods demonstrate achievement of Learning outcomes.

The means of assessment are mainly judged as satisfactory and realistic, and the assessment methods are suitable to the nature of the individual modules. In general, there has been reported to be a healthy focus on formative rather than summative work.

An illustration of how the feedback from Critical Friends is used to improve assessment is described below:

Reaction from the head of the Classical Department to the report of the Critical Friend: *We have taken these remarks (of the Critical Friend) seriously and have implemented a set of measures to strengthen assessment practices. First, we have introduced a rubric of assessment criteria that are used during the examinations. These criteria are also included in the students' Curriculum Handbooks, so as to familiarise them with the criteria applied by the jury. Second, the current head and deputy head of department have planned to visit and divide between them entrance exams and bachelor's and master's exams of the different instrument groups in the upcoming five years. In this manner, monitoring the level of the exams will be an iterative process between comparing entrance exam levels with outcomes during the course of the bachelor's and master's courses, a process in which department management can intervene when necessary. Third, we plan to introduce new methods of assessment so that exams carry more benefits for those involved. These methods include involving a student member in examination juries, asking students to co-assess their own exam by means of submitting a self-reflection report, and by using multiple, independently operating juries to assess one exam as a way to avoid groupthink. These measures have already been initiated and will be further implemented during the 2018/2019 academic year.*²⁶

The conservatoire's policy to add (international) external examiners to its juries is perceived as a good way to ensure that the perspectives of the professional field are taken into account, as well as objectifying the assessment process, as was stated by the Critical Friend of the Institute of Sonology: "The assessment system has been recently improved by reducing the number of internal teachers in the committee. [...] This provides a

²⁴ DocARTES is a joint venture of the Orpheus Institute in Ghent, Leiden University, University of Leuven and the conservatoires of Amsterdam, Antwerp, Leuven and The Hague.

²⁵ Report Critical Friend Music Education, 2021.

²⁶ Reaction to the report of the Critical Friend Classical, 2016.

much better evaluation when independent voices from outside [external jury members] can express their unbiased comments which in turn makes the grading not only more just, but also more objective.”²⁷

Some reconsideration of grading and the examination process have been suggested by Critical Friends in earlier years (Jazz, Vocal, Composition). It was recommended to be more consistent and to refine module specifications regarding the nature of assessment (criteria) and the relative proportions of assessment marks. As was stated by the Critical Friend of the Jazz Department in 2018: “The Master final exams did not reflect clearly the students’ artistic research process that took place during the programme. If the research topics allow, a more profound articulation between research and performance areas during the Master could help differentiate both Programmes (Bachelor and Master) and shape differently the Master final exam.”²⁸ This specific feedback has been very useful in working on improvement within the Jazz Department, where work has been done on including more jazz musicians in the assessment of jazz research projects. The assessment criteria for the Jazz Department’s bachelor’s programme were renewed in 2019, adding a descriptive value for each category in the matrix²⁹.

Quote by the Critical Friend of the Institute of Sonology, 2022: *I was particularly impressed with the formal approach taken for the evaluation of the final concert exams. Teachers will have read each student’s thesis in advance of their concert. A session with the students takes place the day after the concert. This allows for a little cooling-off period, where any discomfort caused by perhaps technical issues can be digested and reflected upon in preparation for the upcoming question session. After the discussion, the student leaves and the teachers note their suggested grade individually, on paper, and an average is arrived at. Teachers then offer support statements for the grades they have indicated and subsequently have the possibility to revise their grade in light of colleagues’ comments. After a potentially new average is arrived at, the student is invited back to be informed of the final grade. I consider this to be a robust and fair procedure, one that is by no means reflected in all comparable institutions.*³⁰

Although much work has been done over the years on assessment and grading, we realise that this is still work in progress, and for the coming years this topic needs to stay high on the agenda . Since 2021, an overarching improvement programme for assessment and grading is being implemented in the departments. A pilot took place in a number of departments with the use of a feedback form for examiners in (final) presentations. This resulted in examiners paying more attention to the assessment criteria and the pilot will be continued and expanded in the coming years. With the establishment of a bachelor’s curriculum working group on assessment and grading, a substantive discussion has been started about possible assessment models with regard to artistic development.

The selection of suitable students, the monitoring and review of their progression, achievement and subsequent (international) employability.

Critical Friends judge the **selection process** for the bachelor’s and master’s programmes as thorough. They perceive the student population enrolled in the bachelor’s and master’s programmes at the Conservatoire to be of a large variety of nationalities and highly qualified. The reflective attitude of the student has already been indicated and assessed in the application for the master’s programmes. In the fourth year of the bachelor’s programme, the Personal Activity Plan functions not only as a preparation for the professional life, but also as a bridge to master’s studies.

²⁷ Report Critical Friend Sonology, 2017.

²⁸ Report Critical friend Jazz, 2018.

²⁹ Reaction to the report of the Critical Friend Jazz, 2019.

³⁰ Report Critical Friend Sonology, 2022.

Quote from the Critical Friend of the Early Music Department, 2021: *The monitoring of progression is clearly structured, the assessment criteria correspond with the demand of a professional practice in EM.*³¹

The **monitoring and review** of students' progression is reported to be carefully done at various levels. There is formative feedback and review throughout the course of the programmes. Critical Friends report they have noticed through conversations with students that there is a deep sense of respect for the teachers and how they help the students review their own progress. In terms of progression through the programmes, students feel enabled to strengthen practical and academic aspects of their study. Progression thresholds across the different levels of the programmes are clearly expressed within the course descriptions. Students following the programmes confirmed that they can shape their individual learning environments to a significant extent, and that an acceleration of their programme is occasionally permitted only when strict criteria have been met across a range of competencies. However, Critical Friends also suggest that the monitoring system could be explored in more detail. This is something that we have seriously considered for all study programmes and discussed in management and staff meetings, as well as the Study Programme Committee. Possibilities for improvement have been identified and implemented. These are clearly visible not only in the Annual Plans of the departments, but also in the Faculty Plan of the Conservatoire.

Quote from the Critical friend of the Composition Department, 2018: *From a monitoring perspective, for difficult students, I would encourage the teachers to refer to the criteria every so often in individual meetings, well ahead of the end exams, just to informally remind the students of how their work will be assessed at the end and if they are 'on track' or not. The importance of feeding back student process to the regular team meetings is essential, and if appropriate the staff/student meetings might be a place to remind students of the criteria for end exams. I should stress again that this should not be a replacement for the excellent professional feedback the students get: it is merely a supportive mechanism to help the students' progress.*³²

Overall, Critical Friends confirm that students develop themselves into professionals in their field, their **employability** is seen as evident. As the Critical Friend from the Institute of Sonology reflected: "The range of skills the students acquire through the study programme is indeed impressive. It covers a broad range from 'hard skills' like sound engineering, software development, and hardware construction to 'soft skills' like project management and concert organisation to 'artistic skills' like composition, improvisation, and performance. This enables graduates to work in different fields of the 'music industry' and the arts, not only as musicians/artists but also as technicians/scientists."³³

³¹ Report Critical Friend Early Music, 2021.

³² Report Critical Friend Composition, 2018.

³³ Report Critical Friend Sonology, 2017.

Guideline 2: Teaching & Learning Environment

The quality and number of teaching staff and their (international) qualifications for their role (artists/pedagogues/researchers).

diCritical Friends reported that the teaching and learning environment was positive and student-centred, and that they experienced the existing atmosphere as open. The relationships between students, teachers and staff were mentioned as important ground for developing musical skills. The **level of teaching** is high and communication with the students is engaging and encouraging. The number of teachers seems appropriate to the number of students, and the teaching staff is reported to be of a high quality and with a solid (international) career in the professional field.

Quote by the Critical Friend of the Composition Department, 2018: *The staff comprises world-leading, innovative artists and incredibly supportive teachers, which is both very rare and healthy! There are some positive developments regarding artistic research, with the award of recent doctorates. There is an excellent interchange between practice and research in the Department. The students and support staff both commented on the excellence of the teachers in support of projects.*³⁴

Quote by the Critical Friend of the Vocal Department, 2021: *The staff who teach singing showed in the lessons which I saw that the work is carried out at a highly skilled level, which demonstrates technical expertise, professional musicianship and knowledge of the repertoire, artistically creative insights, and appropriate empathy with the students. The standards of vocal tuition compares very well with other conservatoire departments and there was clear evidence that with suitably talented student intake the professional levels which students can achieve is well up to international standards. Staff are obviously in touch with professional standards and in general it was good to see/hear teaching which went well beyond the sometimes-encountered 'do-it-as-I-do-it' style of singing teaching. Staff were encouraging and thoughtful in lessons, whilst simultaneously retaining professional targets for students. The sense of enthusiasm on behalf of students was palpable.*³⁵

The staff development programme The Artist as Teacher³⁶ is seen as supportive and useful. Critical Friends express their appreciation for the learning opportunities for the teachers, sometimes leading to a master's degree or doctorate.

Quote by the Critical Friend of the Music Education Department, 2021: *There is strong support for staff development at an institutional level, most notably evidenced in the substantial investment it makes in providing its Artist as Teacher programme for staff. This is now in its sixth year and has been taken up by about a quarter of the staff and looks certain to grow in importance and popularity. It is an innovative way to address issues affecting a diverse range of employees such as those working in a conservatoire. Topics such as assessment and diversity have been addressed and presenters are sourced both internally and external to the Conservatoire. I believe this*

³⁴ Report Critical Friend Composition, 2018.

³⁵ Report Critical Friend Vocal, 2021.

³⁶ The Artist as Teacher: The Conservatoire has developed a course for teachers that aims to give participants stimulating learning experiences at any stage of their career through which knowledge and skills in the field of education, research and production will be developed further. Successful participation leads to a Didactic Skills Qualification and a Qualification to act as Examiner for Teachers in Dutch Higher Education.

*initiative can do much to raise the profile of music education as an important part of the work of higher education institutions generally and withing the Conservatoire specifically.*³⁷

The level to which facilities, resources and support staff constitute a coherent and optimal teaching-learning environment for the students.

The level of the **facilities, resources and support staff** was deemed satisfactory to good. Until 2022, the relatively outdated lecture rooms have been mentioned, as well as the necessity of moving to a new building. Still, overall, Critical Friends were positive about the facilities offered to students and the concert and rehearsal facilities together with the technical/production support were seen as particularly good. Some Critical Friends, however (Composition, Art of Sound, Early Music), reported feedback from students who have some concern about the access arrangements and availability of specific rooms on site (e.g. for the storage of instruments). Critical Friends praise the elaborate library and archive of the Conservatoire and the well-functioning room booking system (Asimut). However, providing more digital, video and audio materials was suggested. Critical Friends have reflected after recent visits that they have seen a steep learning curve as regards the usefulness of IT and online working which has been imposed by the pandemic, and with the move to Amare, there is now good availability of high quality IT and online facilities in the new building.

Quote by the Critical Friend of the Institute of Sonology, 2017: *The learning environment of Sonology has a big asset, the Analogue Studio, probably the largest in the world. It connects seamlessly to the heroic pioneer phase of electronic music such as the WDR studio in Cologne which was run Stockhausen, Eimert and Koenig in the 1950s. At Sonology, students can learn and experience the basic techniques of electronic music production „hands on“ which provides a different and maybe also more comprehensive approach then using software or computer languages.*³⁸

The support staff is described as having a good knowledge, skill and loyalty. Although the administration is functioning, the administration of teaching and projects is complex and could be improved, specifically when it comes to the roles and systems in and between departments.

Quote by the Critical Friend of the Composition Department, 2018: *In terms of support staff, there is a tremendous knowledge, skill and loyalty in the team to make the very best experience possible. The technical/production support for concerts is outstanding and KC is a place where concerts happen as a core part of learning, with all staff connecting to make this happen. The administration of the teaching and the projects can sometimes place a large burden upon the support staff. There is also a lack of clarity about systems and roles that can place stress upon support staff 'behind the scenes'. This lack of clarity is sometimes felt by students as well.*³⁹

These observations are issues that cannot only be addressed within the departments. We try to address these cross-departmental issues in a collective manner by discussing all feedback reports from Critical Friends in staff and management meetings.

³⁷ Report Critical Friend Music Education, 2021.

³⁸ Report Critical Friend Sonology, 2017.

³⁹ Report Critical Friend Composition, 2018.

Quote by the Critical Friend of the Early Music Department, 2017: *It was very gratifying to see, in my meetings, that administrative staff had an equal voice with academics, their views were recognised and appreciated. This is a productive environment, giving administrative staff the confidence to step forward and assume responsibility, and take initiative. The professionalism of all of the administrators I encountered was highly commendable; their commitment to students, colleagues and the institution as a whole, evident to see.*⁴⁰

In some reports (Sonology, Composition Art of Sound), reflections were made on the gender balance in the department. The Critical Friend of the Composition Department addressed this as follows: “The Department is not unique in having a largely white male composition staff, and some measures of positive gender diversity have been brought in, for example the previous, current and next two visiting teachers are women. I would encourage the team to consider how non-white teachers might also be brought into the staff team, to reflect current society.” Since then, the head of the Composition Department has made great effort to address this issue. To make an explicit statement, he has given up one day a week of his position as head of department, and gave it to a female composition teacher.

A similar observation was made by the Critical Friend of the Institute of Sonology. The head of the Institute of Sonology has discussed this feedback with both teachers and students and summarised the key conclusions in his response to the report as follows:

*The most important way in which a solution to the gender imbalance among Sonology students may be approached is in appointing more female staff members, and this is an issue we are actively addressing, not only in the choice of workshop leaders (for example Sara Pinheiro and Cathy van Eck, who teach one-week intensive workshops every year) but also in the recent appointment of Barbara Ellison and Ji Youn Kang to the staff. Starting in September 2018, Irene Ruipérez Canales will take care of the Educational Skills course in the Sonology bachelor’s curriculum. In line with Essl’s suggestion (support programmes for female students), Ji Youn Kang has recently implemented the possibility for female students to meet her individually or in groups to discuss gender-related issues. On the other hand, it was brought up precisely by our current female students and staff that when “nerdy” is understood as “characterized by an obsessive interest in something, especially technology” (online dictionary), it is not a very emancipated standpoint to see that as something causing a gender imbalance. During the academic year 2018–2019, spread over the four-year bachelor’s, the two-year master’s, and the one-year-course, we will have 39 male and 26 female students. This is especially the result of a continuous increase of female participants in the one-year course, and to a lesser extent in the bachelor’s programme, while the number of female applicants for our master’s programme was unusually low (this has been much higher in previous years). Nevertheless, gender balance and diversity are on our agenda for the years to come.*⁴¹

⁴⁰ Report Critical Friend Early Music, 2017.

⁴¹ Response to the Critical Friend Sonology, 2018.

Guideline 3: Quality Culture

The extent to which the organisational structure allows for efficient decision making and effective internal communication.

Critical Friends agree that the organisational structure makes efficient decision making and effective internal communication possible. The department's Annual Plans are a good way to take the departments to a higher level in decision making and stimulates self-analysis. Heads of department show initiative in generating effective and efficient decision-making mechanisms for reflective analysis and hearing students and staff. The views of administrative staff were reported to be recognised and appreciated in department meetings.

Quote by the Critical Friend of the Early Music Department, 2021: *The 'Annual plan Early Music' and the 'KC Early Music Department; Overview, observations, teachers' show the obvious link between the analysis made by [...] (the Head of Department), the panel meetings and the strategic decisions that take place at a higher level in the institution.*⁴²

Some Critical Friends (Composition, Early Music) noticed that there are issues for some support staff members who felt that their roles were different in relation to similar jobs in other departments. This was reason to discuss these roles with those involved and redefine and revalue them together with Human Resources.

Another issue was raised regarding organisation and communication. Several Critical Friends (Composition, Classical, Jazz) reported hearing from students that some teachers were not showing up for sessions or cancelling them last minute. Although this has been actively picked up by the heads of the department involved, the suggestion is considered to create a clear handbook or system for students, staff and teachers on what to do when planning difficulties occur.

The quality assurance and enhancement procedures that are in place.

Critical Friends are positive about the Quality Culture approach of the Conservatoire.⁴³ They conclude that the Lemniscate of Continuous Improvement is a coherent approach that clearly connects not only internal and external quality cycles, but more importantly, connects artistic standards to educational quality. Their visit as a Critical Friend is a very clear example of this. They reported to be enthusiastically welcomed by the departments, in which they noticed an openness and willingness to consider critique and, if necessary, suggestions for improvement. Critical Friends confirm the importance of the international focus chosen in this approach as well as the involvement of external stakeholders. This makes the approach well-structured and allows continuous learning and improvements. Of course, there is always room for improvement in the process itself, and we take this feedback from Critical Friends very seriously.

Quote from the Critical Friend of the Vocal Department, 2018: *This is a bold and courageous element in the quality culture of the Conservatoire. My presence there and the enthusiasm expressed for me to visit and report are further evidence of an openness and willingness to consider critique and if necessary change/development. The visits worked well overall and for the three days of my visits I was able to see a great deal of the working of the department. Perhaps for the future it would be even better if it were possible to organise time for conversations/interviews with some staff members and individual students. It might be worth considering offering whomever is there as 'Critical Friend' some questions or topics which the department would like to be considered.*

⁴² Report Critical Friend Early Music, 2021.

⁴³ Quality Culture KC, 2020 and beyond.

As the time available is limited, this could help focus attention on areas of concern which are already known, without excluding the value of a fresh, unbiased viewpoint. Of course it was possible to have some brief conversations with some staff and students during my recent visits but these were usually either just before or just after a more formal element (eg a singing lesson) and it would have been helpful to investigate views and opinions more deeply.⁴⁴

Quote by the Critical Friend of the Institute of Sonology, 2022: *The formal approach of commissioning Critical Friend reports is, in my opinion, an excellent one. To have a person external to the conservatoire scrutinise a particular department or programme as deeply- as is possible in the time available – and then with their (hopefully) dispassionate and detached view, give their expert opinion on any and all aspects of the educational endeavours of the institution in question – is no doubt extremely useful in gaining insights into the strengths and flaws of a particular approach and then being able to extrapolate paths of quality improvements from the suggestions made.*

The approach is, however, not without its potential pitfalls. First of all, the Critical Friend may misunderstand even fundamental aspects of the institution or its programmes. [...] Another problem is that the Critical Friend is only rarely able, in such a short time, to gain insights necessary to fully understand why a programme has developed in a particular way and which impetus may have led to a course or programme taking on any of its particular approaches.⁴⁵

As was described in the introduction of this report, we take this feedback to heart, also when it comes to the responses written by the departments. We invite heads of department to relate to the feedback of the Critical Friend, not to unquestionably take over all suggestions made, but to underpin in their reaction which suggestions they will or will not use in future years, and why.

Critical Friends mention that the teachers and staff surveys, departments' Annual Plans, the Study Programme Committee and the Exam Committee are all helpful in assuring and enhancing quality. The alumni surveys, accreditation visits, external committee members at final presentations, and international benchmarking are also important in terms of the establishment of a quality culture at the Conservatoire.

Quote from the Critical Friend of the Classical Department, 2016: *The double fold concept of quality is well formulated in the Quality Culture at the Royal Conservatoire 2016 document: not only the traditional artistic quality as seen in assessment of skills during lessons, examinations and public performances, but also as educational quality in well- functioning procedures, good planning, rehearsal facilities, inspiring learning environment etc.⁴⁶*

However, some Critical Friends (Art of Sound, Jazz, Composition) felt that it could be a challenge to get the teaching staff and students involved in the quality procedures of a department. They warned that the system should not become an administrative burden for the teaching or support staff.

Further advice was to promote more discussions about quality with teachers and students, and emphasise the importance of these procedures. To show that we have taken this advice seriously, we have organised more Student Panels, and, in some cases, Teacher Panels within the departments.

⁴⁴ Report of the Critical Friend Vocal, 2018.

⁴⁵ Report Critical Friend Sonology, 2022.

⁴⁶ Report of the Critical Friend Classical, 2016.

Students Panels are seen as a valuable mechanism by Critical Friends. This formal system of dialogue between students and staff in meetings and meeting minutes allows students to express feedback on their learning experience and make suggestions for improvements. By distributing the minutes of these meetings to fellow students as well as to the management of the Conservatoire and the Study Programme Committee, Critical Friends felt assured that the feedback from students was actively and seriously used to make further improvements.

Quote from the Critical Friend of the Vocal Department, 2018: *This is clearly a very valuable mechanism for articulating concerns from students and feeding back to the student body responses and information about departmental matters. In the meeting I saw, and the minutes of the meetings which I have read, it was clear that this provides a healthily open forum for discussion of issues. It is already showing specific outcomes, for example in how assessment criteria are disseminated and used. The students clearly take the forum seriously and the fact that there are clear responses and time-lines attached to issues raised is important. The panel was well organised and action points in the minutes make clear how any issue is being progressed – it would be good to always include an intended time-line for the action points whenever possible. One of the most valuable assets of this excellent forum is that it can help give students a better informed view of the reality of certain situations, including practicalities, which sometimes elude students in moments of ‘blue-sky’ thinking. In the exchange of views and information the existence of the panel should mean that serious problems and issues cannot be allowed to fester.⁴⁷*

However, according to some Critical Friends, more (follow-up) action and promotion could be made. The Critical Friend of the Art of Sound Department believed more attention could be given to feedback from the teaching faculty as well. Finetuning Student Panels was also suggested. In the Classical Department, for instance, some students expressed less interest in participating in department-wide Student Panels than in more specialised instrument-based panels. This was reason to adjust the organisation of the panels within this department, accordingly resulting in much appreciation from the students and a significant increase in attendance.

Guideline 4 : Public Interaction

The engagement of the programme with society (in cultural, artistic and educational contexts) and the contributions made at local, national and international level.

According to the Critical Friends, the Conservatoire develops many different forms of engagement with society. The Conservatoire has a programme of public events and a concert programme, which attract many different listeners. There are links between projects and professional environments with external partners. Final presentations are open to public and show the development of students. However, valuable suggestions for improvements have been made as well.

Quote from the Critical Friend of the Composition Department, 2018: *Whilst high-profile artists and institutions visit the Department to discuss the classical music industry, perhaps there could also be a reflection of DIY approaches in these sessions. For example, whilst publishing houses still have power and help some kinds of*

⁴⁷ Report of the Critical Friend Vocal, 2018.

composers, there are also issues of self-publishing that might be helpful to consider. The same goes for issues around DIY record labels, radio stations and websites which help to sustain contemporary thinking beyond the concert platform or established media. I would encourage the team to think about bringing in an even wider range of artists from the high-profile/established concert or film or EDM composer to the successful interdisciplinary DIY artist, to show the students a very wide and dynamic mixture of potential routes beyond their studies. It would be interesting for students to get a sense of a wide variety of potential career paths/artistic practices, rather than focussing just on the “pieces”/“products” of the visiting artists or organisations. ⁴⁸

The engagement of the bachelor's and master's programmes with society (cultural, artistic and educational contexts) and the contributions made at local, national and international level are well known and considered as prominent and valuable. The Conservatoire's move to Amare in 2022, a building that is shared with the The Hague Philharmonic Orchestra has opened up new opportunities for collaboration with the professional field.

Quote from the Critical Friend of the Early Music Department, 2018: *I attended a concert in which students worked side-by-side with members of the Orchestra of the 18th Century (one of three concerts in the series). This has obvious beneficial implications for students on an educational level. The concert was a free concert, open to the public, and well-attended, offering a high quality cultural and artistic experience for members of the public, who were clearly interested to experience the work of the conservatoire in this arena. I attended a meeting during my visit at which the integration of the NAIP project into the Early Music curriculum was discussed. Work to connect musical expression and purpose with sectors of society that don't regularly engage in this art form (as auditors or as participants) are to be supported and explored to ensure the continued relevance of the work inside the institution to the society outside. Such exploration is vital for the health and wealth of the community of musicians as well as for society as a whole.* ⁴⁹

The interaction with the profession (music and other artistic professions), including the assessment and monitoring of its ongoing needs.

Critical Friends notice that many teachers combine teaching with their (international) performance work. With their knowledge, (artistic) skills and their network they offer their students the opportunity to enter the international music field. International artists and institutions visit many departments to discuss developments in the professional field and to perform together. Conferences are organised bringing members of diverse international educational institutions together as well as exchanging projects, students and staff members.

Quote from the Critical Friend of the Institute of Sonology, 2017: *Sonology is not only an important educational institution, but also serves a hub for the academic Electronic Music scene. In 2014, it has organized the conference „50 Years of Electroacoustic Music and Computer Music Education” (which I attended), bringing together members of 17 international educational institutes. One of the outcomes was the foundation of a platform for exchanging projects, students and staff members. Outside the Conservatory, Sonology is well-known for its concert programmes that attracted many listeners. Besides regular students recitals, it also curates excellent electronic music festivals. Most recently, “Historically Informed Performance Practice of Electroacoustic Music” (in cooperation with the ICST Zurich) presented some well-known „classical” electronic works in the spirit of “historical performance practice”, raising a bunch of questions that are currently discussed in academia.*

⁴⁸ Report Critical Friend Composition, 2018.

⁴⁹ Report Critical Friend Early Music, 2018.

*And finally, Sonology fulfils a prominent role in preserving the cultural heritage of early electronic music which is partly implemented in the aforementioned Analogue Studio, but also in the collection of original tapes and materials from the 1950s on. The institute's website houses a plethora of information including research topics, software development and master thesis which can be downloaded for free.*⁵⁰

The clarity and consistency of information given to the public (potential students, concerts audiences, parents, other interested stakeholders, etc.).

Critical Friends acknowledge that the website provides a lot of information about audition requirements and interview expectations. The website uses a combination of texts, photos, audio and video as well as information for the public (concert audiences, parents, other interested stakeholders) in a clear and consistent form. Departments organise many local, national and international educational, cultural and artistic activities through platforms such as annual meetings, artistic residencies, masterclasses, workshops and concerts. These events are helpful to put the educational programmes of the Conservatoire on the international map, and have an impact in terms of the number and level of applicant students. Although the current quality of the information given to the public is good, some Critical Friends (Jazz, Art of Sound, Composition) suggested that more emphasis could be placed on the diversity and the community the departments create, and that there could be more alumni news. These are all subjects that have since been further explored and developed.

Quote from the Critical Friend of the Jazz Department, 2018: *The Jazz Bachelor and Master Programmes at The Royal Conservatoire in The Hague have a very good international exposure, partially because to the already mentioned umbilical relationship with the IASJ. The Department developed a large amount of local, national and international educational, cultural and artistic efforts through the IASJ platform such as annual meetings, artistic residencies, masterclasses, workshops, concerts, and other activities. These events were crucial for putting the Conservatoire Jazz Programmes on the international map, and had a considerable impact in terms of the number and level of applicant students. The final exams, for example, constitute a very good occasion for showing locally the work developed by teachers and students. Students also play regularly in jam sessions, which also enriches the local community. The Department also develops other forms of engagement of the Programmes with society, even though the number of performance opportunities outside school is decreasing, as previously stated. This is a considerable challenge that should keep concerning the Jazz Department. The information given to the public (potential students, concerts audiences, parents, other interested stakeholders) appears to be clear and consistent.*⁵¹

⁵⁰ Report Critical Friend Sonology, 2017.

⁵¹ Report Critical Friend Jazz, 2018.

Appendix: Overview Critical Friends and reactions from departments

Department	Visit	Report available?
Classical Music		
CF report Gustav Djupsjobacka first visit 2016	1	1
Reaction to report first visit Gustav Djupsjobacka 2018	1	1
CF report Gustav Djupsjobacka return visit 2019	2	1
Reaction to report return visit Gustav Djupsjobacka 2019	2	1
CF report Robert Cutietta 2023 ⁵²	1	
Early Music		
CF report Jane Booth first visit 2017	1	1
Reaction to report Jane Booth 2020	1	1
CF report Claire Michon 2021 ⁵³	1	1
Reaction to report Claire Michon 2021	1	1
Jazz		
CF report Ricardo Pinheiro first visit 2018	1	1
Reaction to report Ricardo Pinheiro 2018	1	1
Vocal		
CF report Stephen Robertson first visit 2018	1	1
Reaction to report first visit Stephen Robertson 2018	1	1
CF report Stephen Robertson return visit 2021	2	1
Reaction to report return visit Stephen Robertson 2021	2	1
Composition		
CF report Matthew Wright first visit 2019	1	1
Reaction to report Matthew Wright 2019	1	1
CF report return visit Matthew Wright 2022 ⁵⁴	2	1
Music Education		
CF report Mary Stakelum 2021	1	1
Reaction to report Mary Stakelum 2021	1	1
Dance		
CF report Mavis Staines 2018	1	1
Reaction to report Mavis Staines 2018	1	1
Art of Sound		

⁵² At the time of writing the visit by the Critical Friend of the Classical department did not yet take place.

⁵³ Due to the unavailability of the first Critical Friend to come for a second visit, the Early Music department decided to invite a new Critical Friend in 2021.

⁵⁴ Visit and report did not meet requirements of the procedure. Therefore, we did not ask the Head of department to write a reaction to the report. However, some of the content of the report is included in the overall analysis.

CF report first visit Theresa Leonard 2017	1	1
Reaction to report first visit Theresa Leonard 2017	1	1
CF report Theresa Leonard return visit 2020	2	1
Reaction to report return visit Theresa Leonard 2020	2	1
Sonology		
CF report Karlheinz Essl 2017	1	1
Reaction to report Karlheinz Essl 2017	1	1
CF report by Michael Edwards 2022 ⁵⁵	1	1
Reaction to report Michael Edwards 2022	1	
ArtScience		
CF report Ulf Langheinrich 2020 ⁵⁶	1	1
Total		29

⁵⁵ Due to the unavailability of the first Critical Friend to come for a second visit, the Institute of Sonology decided to invite a new Critical Friend in 2022.

⁵⁶ Visit and report did not meet requirements of the procedure. Therefore, we did not ask the head of department to write a reaction to the report. However, some of the content of the report is included in the overall analysis.

