

Annual Report Quality Culture Office

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Annual Report Quality Culture Office 2016-2017

With the recent implementation of a new approach for quality management at the Royal Conservatoire, annual progress reports and a regular reflection on its effectiveness will become standard features. As a result, the Quality Culture Office would like to report on its work over the past year and to analyse what worked well and what can be improved. In annex 1 an overview can be found on all activities of the Office, while this narrative text gives further explanations.

General findings

Much of the feedback we collect is primarily intended for the individual departments. In most cases, this departmental focus is our main objective, which we try to encourage even further with the introduction of student panels and critical friends visits. The differences between departments and their specific cultures require such an approach and it is important for staff and students to recognize the feedback as being specific for their environment. However, for the Royal Conservatoire as a whole, it is important to have a general overview as well, so that trends and effects of improvement measures can be identified.

Looking at quality from that perspective, we see that some of the improvement measures we started during the last years seem to be more effective than others. Tutoring and the general guidance of our students are slowly but steadily improving, as well as the international services we offer to our students. Results of surveys on these issues (student and alumni surveys, and evaluations among external committee members), as well as discussions in student panels and expert meetings all point in this direction.

Other measures had a more temporary effect. A good example of this is the introduction of the online room-booking system Asimut, which caused a large boost in student survey results regarding the availability and even the quality of the practice rooms. However, we see this effect gradually disappear during the past year.

There are also topics that still need our continuous attention. Preparation for the profession and assessment and grading are examples of such topics. On many different levels we find that students do not feel sufficiently informed about what is expected from them during assessments and how the grading processes function. Furthermore, both through surveys and student panels we observe that students seem to be more and more insecure about their future. The cultural environment they are preparing for is getting tougher and more difficult to predict, and for our students this translates in a need to learn in a concrete way how to prepare for such a dynamic and versatile professional context. The Conservatoire will need to step up the debate on issues such as entrepreneurship and the development of a mind-set that will enable students to function as self-employed professionals.

Nevertheless, we should also not ignore the fact that regarding many important topics the Conservatoire has been performing very well over a period of years. This is the case for the quality of our main subject teachers, the content of our study programmes and our international environment. Interesting in this context is that the reputation of the departments and the

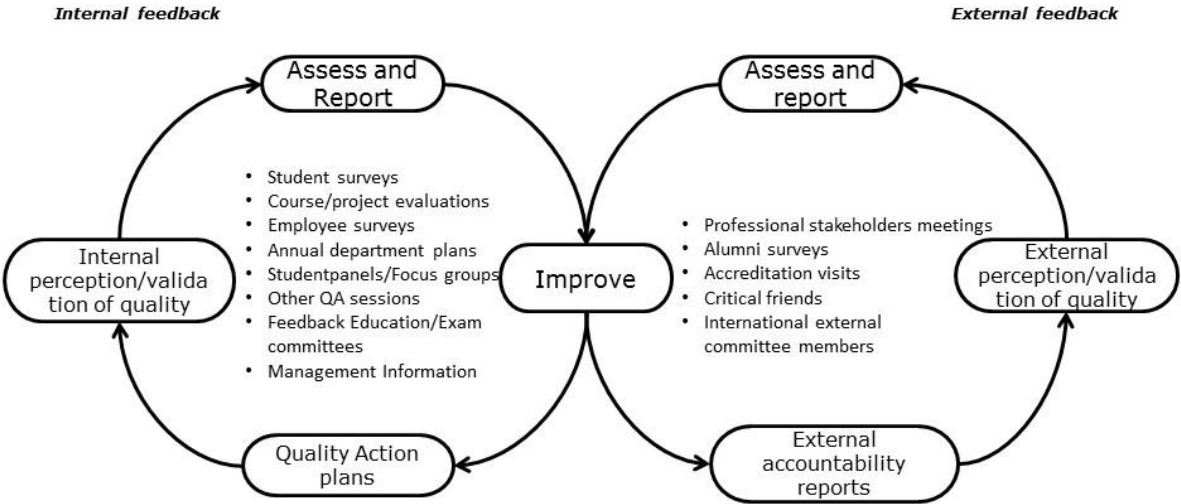
Conservatoire itself seem to be receiving a more prominent role; over these past few years, we see that the reputation of teachers is still important, but no longer the only reason of students for choosing the Royal Conservatoire. Discussions with and measurements among students, alumni, (international) external experts and representatives of the professional field corroborate this view.

Experiences with the new approach for Quality Culture

With its objective to bring together artistic standards and educational quality within one encompassing concept of quality, Quality Assurance has evolved towards Quality Culture (this explains the shift from a Quality Assurance Office to a Quality Culture Office). However, this implies a cultural shift as well within the Conservatoire, which we already see having a significant impact on several stakeholders of the educational programmes. We will return to this aspect in the report below.

By connecting internal and external quality assurance tools, and introducing several new ones, we have created a new dynamic, in which the Quality Culture Office (QCO), the students, heads of departments and teachers are working more closely together on their common responsibility; to create the optimal learning environment for the students.

Quality Culture at the Royal Conservatoire
 ‘Lemniscate of continuous improvement’



Annual planning cycle

With the implementation of a process and structure to link together annual department plans (in which the relation between QA instruments and their results are explicitly described), project planning and budgeting, we aim to create a more integrated and structured annual cycle for all departments.

Critical Friends

In 2016, we started inviting critical friends and discovered it is beneficial to connect those visits more closely to curriculum evaluations and expert meetings. In the first months of 2017, we have developed a long-term planning for these three instruments to ensure departments can use the results optimally and can prepare themselves in time.

In addition, in order to better prepare the critical friends for their visit and generally to create more structure in the feedback reports, we have developed a set of brief guidelines that offer a template for the report and list the topics on which we would like to receive feedback. These guidelines are based on the standards for programme review developed by the European organisation for quality enhancement MusiQuE¹ and the Dutch accreditation organisation NVAO².

The first experiences with critical friends are promising. Already, we see a growing commitment from both heads of departments as well as teachers, as the visit of a renowned expert focussing only on their department makes it more interesting and worthwhile to reflect on the quality of the study programme and the teaching.

Student panels

The further implementation of department-specific student panels has a similar effect. Facilitating and structuring this dialogue helps building understanding between staff and students, and establishes a commonly felt sense of responsibility. A large variation of topics is discussed in these panels, from specific issues that are brought in by students themselves, to changes in the curriculum the head of the department is considering. But also the results of student surveys and reports of critical friends are a regular topic on the agenda.

Discussing results of student surveys helps creating a better insight in what is behind the abstract data they provide. Or, in the analogy of a thermometer, if the results of the survey identify a problem somewhere, we can now discuss with students what is the cause and what could be a solution.

¹ MusiQuE – Music Quality Enhancement: www.musique-ge.eu

² Nederlands Vlaamse Accreditatie Organisatie: www.nvao.net

International benchmarking

Having gained some benchmarking experience in previous years by participating in the International Benchmarking Exercise (IBE³), we realise that comparing ourselves with relevant institutions in an international context is both an interesting as well as crucial exercise in which we need to participate. However, we do see many possibilities for improving these comparisons and make them more suitable for internal use. Thus, we actively participated in a pilot for U-Multirank in 2016, contributing to the development of suitable indicators for the field of Music. In 2017, we decided to continue by participating in the ensuing official U-Multirank system.

Additionally, we worked on a feedback document regarding the indicators and resulting data for the IBE benchmark in 2016, which led to a conference in July 2017 where we discussed possible improvements with all partners. Although these benchmarks do not always provide us with useful information yet, already we are starting to see interesting results. We are, for instance, certainly not alone in our struggle to provide our students with a solid preparation for the profession. Conservatoires all over Europe (and even beyond) are facing this issue, as well as the seemingly endless shortage of practice rooms.

Accreditation procedures

In 2016, we participated in the execution of the accreditation process of two study programmes; the cluster accreditation of the Bachelor of Music together with the conservatoires of Amsterdam, Groningen and Maastricht; and the cluster accreditation of the Bachelor of Music in Education together with all other equivalent Dutch programmes. Also in 2016, we contributed to an international review at the School of Young Talent carried out by *MusiQuE – Music Quality Enhancement*, based on the recently developed standards for pre-college level music education. In 2017, we worked together with the Royal Academy of the Arts on the review of the University of the Arts in the framework of the Branch Protocol Quality Assurance Research ('Brancheprotocol Kwaliteitszorg Onderzoek-BKO'). In the framework of this procedure, a research review took place at the Royal Conservatoire, which was also carried out by *MusiQuE* on the basis of European-level standards for the evaluation of research units in conservatoires.

Cultural shift

By connecting the artistic standards with educational quality in our approach towards quality culture, we have set in motion a cultural shift, which this last year has led to several effects. We see more commitment from both students and teachers towards reflecting on the overall quality of their departments. By being involved in students panels and with critical friends, they are explicitly invited to a dialogue on what goes well and what could be improved, and, as a result, seem to feel more responsible towards the quality of their department as well. However, this sense of responsibility is still fragile and will need time and commitment to further develop. Although the new approach seems to be cautiously embraced by the heads of departments, in some cases this is

³ Participants in the International Benchmarking Exercise (IBE) are: Geneva Conservatoire, New England Conservatory, Norwegian Academy of Music, Royal Conservatoire The Hague, Royal Northern College of Music, Sydney Conservatorium, University of Music and Performing Arts Graz, Yong Siew Toh Conservatory.

mostly 'on paper'. Actually doing the work, providing solid reports of students panels, following up on the actions that they committed to and communicating this within the department does not always happen yet. This is an important issue for the coming years, because it is crucial for developing an actual and effective quality culture.

It is encouraging to establish that in cases where departments are taking this role seriously, we see immediate effects. Response and results of surveys increase significantly, students are behaving more pro-actively and start involving each other as well as their teachers in discussions regarding the quality of their learning experience.

Unfortunately, we also see the reverse effect. Some departments have showed a clear decrease in response on surveys and participation in panels. In this years' student survey, a student even mentioned specifically that, although it was felt that a lot of useful issues were discussed during the panel meeting, nothing seemed to have come out of it.

Conclusion

It has been a busy year, where students and staff have invested significant time and energy to participate in this new approach towards quality culture. We have seen many encouraging effects that lead to the conclusion that shifting from quality assurance towards a quality culture is an achievable goal. This should eventually lead to an overall increase in the quality of the learning experience for our students and for the Conservatoire as a whole.

However, for the coming years, a strong commitment by all stakeholders to this new approach will be the key factor for success. The term 'quality culture' implies it already. Truly creating such an environment can never be solely the task of a Quality Assurance Office, not even if its name will change to the Quality Culture Office. Management, heads of departments, staff, teachers and students all play a vital role in making it a success.

For students, this means not only expressing their wishes and grievances in panels, but also trying to act as spokespersons for their fellow students, providing us with useful feedback by constructively filling in surveys and preparing for student panel meetings to make them more effective.

For staff and teachers, this means learning to receive feedback and to work with it. It is no longer an option to dismiss results of surveys or panels as 'not being related to my work'. Student feedback is getting more and more specific, reports of surveys are available on departmental, and even subject specific level. It is now time to actually embrace this feedback, use it as a starting point for discussion with students, and determine if and where improvements can be made.

Heads of departments and their coordinators are now starting to discover the benefits of this new approach (for instance by being able to invite renowned colleagues and discuss with them the quality of their department), but it is crucial they engage with the new tools in a pro-active way. A report from a critical friend is not the end, it actually is the beginning of a new process, in which

areas for improvement are determined and actions can be implemented. And, most importantly, that improvement actions are clearly communicated, both to students and teachers. This means making sure that decent reports and analyses are made of survey results, students panel meetings, and visits from critical friends. Only by setting the right example, and by a strong commitment, we can expect teachers and students to fully acknowledge their role and to actively participate.

Annex 1:

Surveys, reports and policy plans produced by the Quality Culture Office in 2016-2017

Visits from Critical Friends:

2016:

- Classical Department: Gustav Djubsjobäcka

2017:

- Institute for Sonology: KarlHeinz Essl⁴
- Art of Sound Department: Theresa Leonard
- Early Music Department: Jan Booth

Surveys:

2016:

- Evaluation external committee members
- Evaluation entrance exams
- Course evaluations Vocal department
- Course evaluations Music teacher department
- Course evaluations minor education
- Evaluation educational subjects
- Evaluation student drop outs
- Evaluation theory curriculum
- Evaluation among students that were admitted, but did not register
- Survey on research results
- Student survey U Multirank
- Evaluation alumni (Kunstenmonitor)
- Evaluation Erasmus exchange
- Employee survey

2017:

- Student survey University of the Arts/Royal Conservatoire
- Evaluation external committee members
- Evaluation entrance exams
- Semester evaluations Vocal department
- Semester evaluations Music Teacher department
- Evaluation among students that were admitted, but did not register
- Evaluation theory curriculum
- Evaluation alumni (Kunstenmonitor)
- Evaluation Erasmus exchange

⁴ Due to illness, the visit was postponed to the fall of 2017

Student panels:**2016:**

- Classical (3x)
- Jazz (1x)
- Early Music (1x)
- Art of Sound (monthly)

2017:

- Classical (2x)
- Early Music (2x)
- Vocal (3x)
- Sonology (1x)
- School for young talent and Classical (1x)
- Art of Sound (monthly)

Benchmarks:**2016:**

- International Benchmarking exercise (IBE)
- Pilot U-Multirank

2017:

- International Benchmarking exercise (IBE)
- Full participation in U-Multirank

Policy Plans:**2016:**

- Quality Culture KC 2016 and beyond
- Analyses and feedback on the international Benchmarking Exercise (IBE)
- Update planning cycle KC
- Action plan for semester evaluation KC

2017:

- Integral planning and approach for Critical Friends, Semester evaluation and expert meetings.
- Guidelines for critical friends (in corroboration with MusiQue)

Diverse:

2016

- Expert meeting Jazz.
- Expert meeting Art of Sound.
- Facilitating the election for the participation counsel of the University of the Arts.
- Contribution to the accreditation process of the Bachelor of Music and Music Teacher.
- Contribution to the international review at the School of Young Talent, based on the recently developed standards for pre-college level music education carried out by *MusiQuE – Music Quality Enhancement*.
- Contribution to the AEC congress by delivering a training on peer-review and sharing experiences on the U Multirank pilot with participants.

2017

- Contribution to the review of the University of the Arts in the framework of the Branch Protocol Quality Assurance Research ('Brancheprotocol Kwaliteitszorg Onderzoek-BKO').