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# **Pilot project in Institutional Accreditation with a Lighter Programme Assessment Progress Report**

Experiences of the University of the Arts The Hague, 2020-2021

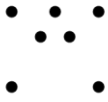
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## Introduction

The University of the Arts The Hague applied to participate in the pilot project in institutional accreditation with a lighter programme assessment in 2016 with the desire to contribute to the development of an innovative quality assurance system for higher education in the arts. Higher education in the arts has traditionally focused heavily on quality and the pursuit of excellence. As mentioned above, the focus was principally on artistic quality, based on the link between the artistic and educational perspectives of quality. That raises two related questions:

1. Do we succeed in training students who meet the highest possible standards of artistic quality? That can be shown mainly by the position they come to occupy in their profession and in society after graduation in relation to the ambitious goals we have formulated for the programme.
2. How do we succeed? What human and other resources and what methods do we adopt to achieve it? Do they enable us to realise the highest possible artistic standards, or is there still room for improvement? Do we realise the goals we have set, without unintentional negative effects? To determine that, we look at the programme (including assessment) and the learning environment (including the teachers and the facilities) that we offer the students.

This is also reflected in our education: continuous evaluation and improvement in an artistic sense are key elements of every lesson and all other educational activities, as well as in assessments, public presentations, performances, concerts and exhibitions. By extension, the main aspects from the perspective of educational quality are the organisation and coherence of the curriculum and the organisation of testing and assessment, but also, for example, the quality of the available facilities and access to them for students with a functional impairment.

We nurture and develop our focus on quality with a view to providing education of the highest standard, according to national and international benchmarks and given the context of the discipline. In the process, we treat the university's internal and external stakeholders as equal partners. We provide accountability by being transparent about how we design our education, our reasons for designing it in that way and the results we achieve as a result. We regularly evaluate the stakeholders' views on what we are doing and where we can make improvements. That calls for a permanent vertical and horizontal dialogue with all the stakeholders: management, teachers, staff members, students, councils of representatives (University Council, Academy Council and Conservatoire Council), the Supervisory Board, the profession and our partners. Through this dialogue, for which we adopt criteria and forms of consultation appropriate to our objectives and our vision of education, we are also accountable to the public for our policies, style of management and results. Participating in the pilot in institutional accreditation enables us to explore those forms of consultation and the criteria. The University of the Arts has formulated an institution-wide vision for its policy on quality. Quality assurance itself is



organised by the faculties. The university gives each of the faculties the freedom to develop and design its own quality assurance system in a way that closely reflects the educational content and the individual identity of the discipline. Applying to take part in the pilot stimulated the thinking about quality assurance and discussions on the subject within and between the faculties, in a process that was all the more inspiring because it was approached – on the basis of shared principles – by discipline and bottom-up, rather than top-down with a quality assurance system for the institution as a whole.

This has helped to achieve the aim of developing a broad-based quality culture. It also fits in well with the developments occurring in the accreditation system. Quality assurance does not have to be arranged in precisely the same way in every programme/faculty in an institution. The pilot leaves room for different approaches or priorities, and the university wants to use the scope provided not only to contribute to the further development of a tailored approach to quality assurance in arts education, but also to improvement of the system in general.

Participating in this pilot has led to more interaction between the Royal Conservatoire and the Royal Academy of Art. We realise the importance and usefulness of permanently sharing experiences and understand that there are many areas in which we can learn from each other. It has also led in practice to each of the faculties adopting some of the instruments developed by the other. However, we see that there is still a lot to be gained from further strengthening this interaction, and from closer collaboration in certain areas, for example on issues that apply to the university as a whole such as participation in the National Student Survey (NSS) and the KUO Monitor. Regular consultation between departments already increases the opportunities for such collaboration and we therefore intend to intensify the cooperation in the coming years.

The objectives formulated by the university when it registered for the pilot form the basis for the reporting on our participation in it.

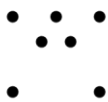
Briefly, they are:

- To strengthen the sense of ownership and the engagement of students and teachers in quality processes.
- To develop quality assurance instruments that enable the university to measure itself against international standards and thereby improve.
- To increase the relevance of the outcomes of the quality processes, particularly in terms of recommendations for improvement.
- Further cooperation in relation to quality assurance between the two faculties of the university: the Royal Academy of Art and the Royal Conservatoire.

The participating institutions<sup>1</sup> have devised a joint strategy for evaluating the pilot. The strategy was formulated in association with Jeroen Huisman and an official from the

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<sup>1</sup> In addition to the University of the Arts The Hague, they are the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences, LOI and, since 1 September 2019, Fontys



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Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. In the chosen approach, the institutions all collect information on the basis of the same criteria.

The participating universities of applied sciences all publish the information they have collected on progress with the pilot in an annual report. In view of the recent experiences with accreditation processes as part of the pilot, we have decided that rather than reporting on just one year we will provide a slightly more detailed report describing the experiences of each of the faculties. Additional input for this annual report came from the reports of meetings and the logbook kept by the participating institutions (see appendices 1 and 2). These logbooks are discussed with all the participating institutions in the presence of an external expert at a so-called calibration session. A report is written of this meeting. The participating institutions have also written a joint introduction to the annual report on the basis of those discussions.

### ***Joint introduction of the participation institutions***

Every year the monitoring group, comprising the participants in the experiment, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and the NVAO, organises an annual calibration session at which the participating institutions share and analyse the data they have collected for the evaluation. This year the calibration session was held on 19 April 2021, when the participating institutions reviewed their experiences in the preceding calendar year. Prior to the meeting the institutions exchanged the logbooks/reports in which they recorded their findings in relation to the objectives of the pilot. The participating institutions also gave presentations on their practical experiences with the experiment in 2020/2021. Some of the institutions also gave presentations on their experiences with the themes of student engagement, the independence of peer reviewers and their own implementation of NVAO standards 2 and 3 (ESG quality aspects II). The monitoring group invited Vera Pletinx and Ruben Janssens from the higher education sector in Flanders to attend the calibration session as external experts.

The main findings from the calibration session were:

- The involvement of students and teachers in quality processes is greater than it used to be. There is a greater sense of responsibility and more transparency regarding quality.
- Reviews of quality aspects II (ESG) are deeper and more substantive. The integration of standards for the content of the programmes and educational and professional quality has improved.
- The distinction between the assessment of quality aspects I (regular accreditation of NVAO standards 1 and 4) and II (experiment) is felt to be contrived and impractical. Due in part to the separation of quality aspects, participating stakeholders require a lot of clarification, attention and support to properly contribute to the experiment.
- The peers, especially veterans of the existing NVAO framework, also require a lot of help in understanding how to work within the parameters of institutional accreditation.



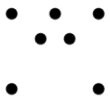
This is also a point that will need to be considered if institutional accreditation is actually introduced.

- The process of programme assessment is more effective: a) education and quality are more closely connected and b) internal and external quality assurance are more attuned to each other.
- The administrative burden is often not lighter, but is often perceived to be.
- To create support it is important to ensure that student representatives remain involved in the further development of this pilot.
- The experiment provides leverage for organising a dialogue with the stakeholders and thereby provides an impulse for improving the quality of the education.

### ***Evaluation of the pilot***

The annual reports of each university and the report covering all of the institutions all provide input for the external agency that will evaluate the pilot as provided for in the ministerial decree (Article 24 3n 25). The evaluation will in any case investigate the following aspects:

- a) Improvements in the quality culture within the institution(s)
- b) More ownership for students and teachers
- c) A more effective accreditation system (which refers mainly to lower perceived costs and administrative burden, but also – as yet unspecified – benefits).



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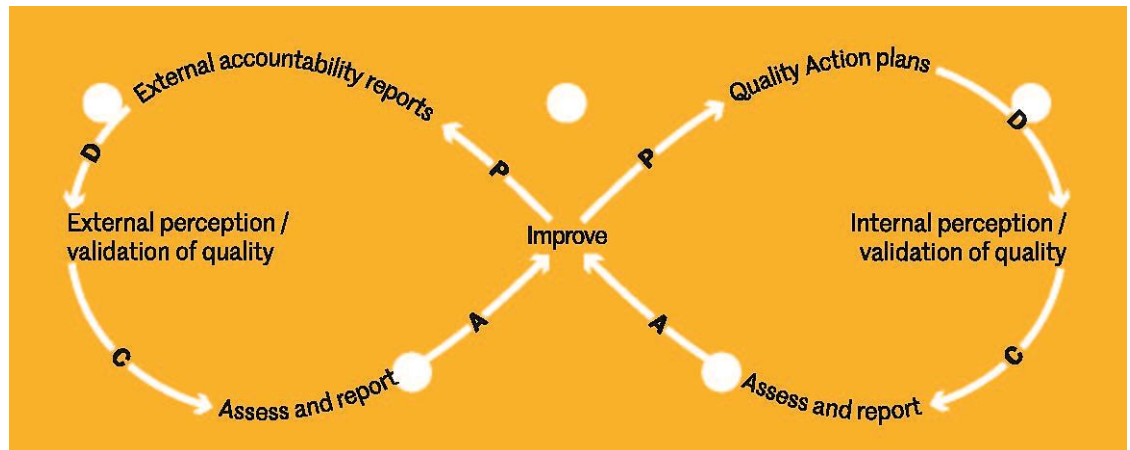
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## Experiences of the Royal Conservatoire

In 2016, the Royal Conservatoire introduced a new approach to quality culture, the *Lemniscate of Continuous Improvement*, which has proved to be a good match with the design of the pilot project in Institutional accreditation with a lighter programme assessment. The emphasis of the Royal Conservatoire's approach is on linking the internal and external quality cycles in order to demonstrate, retain and build on its prominent international position.



*Conservatoire's Lemniscate of Continuous Improvement*

Key to this approach is the use of Critical Friends,<sup>2</sup> who visit the Conservatoire to conduct a review of a specific department and then write a report with its findings and recommendations for improvement. 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 meetings of student panels and the professional advisory committee held prior to or during the visit. In this way the Conservatoire endeavours to make quality assurance less bureaucratic and instead focus more on a discussion about the quality of the education. As has been shown in recent years, this approach appeals greatly to students and teachers and has generated greater engagement with and a sense of ownership in 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.

With this approach, the NVAO Standards 2 + 3 (quality aspects II) can be assessed in the lighter programme assessments on the basis of:

- ∞ International criteria defined by the sector itself.

<sup>2</sup> See appendix 3: Handbook for a Critical Friend Review Royal Conservatoire, January 2019



- ∞ A clear connection between internal and external quality assurance cycles, the information about the quality of the programmes collected within these cycles and the way in which this information is used to make continuous improvements.
- ∞ A strong focus on improvement, based on the conviction that this focus on improvement automatically yields accountability, while the reverse is not necessarily the case.
- ∞ 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), assessments by external examiners (external feedback) and professional advisory committees (external feedback).

### ***Experiences with lighter programme accreditation***

During a visitation<sup>3</sup> of two of the Conservatoire's Master's programmes in 2021, an international panel<sup>4</sup> simultaneously assessed NVAO standards 1 + 4 (quality aspects I) and standards 2 + 3 (quality aspects II). Although we had naturally been making preparations for the visitation for some time, it was our first experience with the lighter programme accreditation in practice.

It proved an interesting challenge in various respects. A clear dividing line had to be made between NVAO standard 1 + 4 and NVAO standard 2 + 3 in the self-evaluation report, whereas in the regular accreditation process it was not unusual for a reference to be made under NVAO standard 1, say, to further details in NVAO standard 2. For the purposes of the pilot, it was important to avoid that in this document. The form and content of the two sections were also different. The section of the self-evaluation report on NVAO standards 1 + 4 was explicitly devoted to describing the situation in the programmes and included detailed underpinning and documentation. The description under NVAO standards 2 + 3, on the other hand, was less extensive and focused more on the findings of the Critical Friends who had visited the departments over the years, since they had already carried out a significant part of the review. To provide a clear impression of the situation at programme level, a meta-analysis was produced of all the reports of the Critical Friends and the plans for improvements written by the departments in response to those reports.<sup>5</sup> In addition, a separate meeting with a number of Critical Friends was arranged during the visitation to ensure that the panel could gain a proper understanding of the role of Critical Friends and their findings.

Because we wish to be assessed on the basis of international and sector-specific criteria, it was necessary to devise a format in which the evaluation report could also address

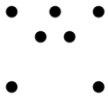
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<sup>3</sup> Due to the corona pandemic, the visitation was mainly conducted online.

<sup>4</sup> The visitation for the Master's programmes was originally planned for May 2020, but had to be postponed until May 2021 because of the corona pandemic.

<sup>5</sup> See appendix 4: Critical Friends 2016-2020, an overall analysis of Critical Friends visits for the Bachelor of Music, Master of Music and Master of Sonology, February 2021.





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those standards. In association with the European accreditation body *MusiQuE – Music Quality Enhancement*, an attempt was made to integrate the NVAO standards with the MusiQuE standards for programme review,<sup>6</sup> while also showing the relationship with the reporting structure for Critical Friends.<sup>7</sup> Since the structure of the self-evaluation report also had to meet specific requirements, the report included an extensive introduction and a separate preliminary meeting was held with the international panel and representatives of MusiQuE to explain the complex integration of these standards and to elaborate on the specific parameters of the feedback report. Given the nature of the pilot, the results of the accreditation process had to be described in two separate reports. The first was a report for the NVAO dealing exclusively with NVAO standards 1 + 4. The Conservatoire has now received a draft of this report (which is positive), which shows that the extensive preparations appear to have borne fruit. The form and content of the report meet the criteria for the pilot, although we will naturally only know that for certain if the report is actually approved by the NVAO. We also expect to receive a second, more extensive report with an assessment of the programmes against the international and sector-specific MusiQuE standards and, as described above, against NVAO standards 2 + 3. A meeting will be arranged with the panel in October 2021 for further discussion of potential improvements in the programmes on the basis of the two reports.

In conclusion, we find that it has been confirmed in practice that the distinction between NVAO standards 1 & 4 and 2 & 3 seems artificial and difficult to implement. A holistic approach in which the programmes could be evaluated against all four standards could save a lot of duplication of work and bureaucracy. It would also allow programmes to conduct the evaluation on the basis of international standards drawn up by the sector itself. It is increasingly apparent that those standards are more important in our sector than the generic NVAO standards because they are tailored to the discipline in an international (and thus sector-relevant) context. In relation to those standards, the Conservatoire would work with the international accreditation organisation *MusiQuE-Music Quality Enhancement*, rather than with a regular evaluation agency with a highly national orientation. Through this partnership we would devise an international, sector-specific form of assessment, which we believe would produce far more relevant results than those of a standard accreditation procedure. This would offer the Conservatoire the possibility of comparing itself with similar institutions worldwide that have also followed an evaluation or accreditation procedure based on those same internationally recognised standards. Naturally, the NVAO would still have to formulate criteria that also comply with Dutch legislation for the institutional accreditation/institutional review. A final observation that needs to be made in this report is that the scope this pilot gives us to decline the support of the usual (and often expensive) evaluation agencies also allows us to use our financial resources more efficiently. We feel that by hiring advisers that can not only provide

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<sup>6</sup> See appendix 5: NVAO MusiQuE merged standards\_KC pilot, 2021.

<sup>7</sup> See appendix 6: Mapping CF standards with NVAO MusiQuE standards, 2021.



expertise in accreditation, but also provide it in a sector-specific and international context, we will be able to use our budget far more effectively in this partnership.

### ***Experiences of students, teachers and heads of department.***

Besides its practical experiences with a light programme assessment this year, the Conservatoire has also investigated perceptions of the new approach to quality culture in the context of the pilot in other ways.

Due to the corona pandemic, some planned activities could not go ahead, including visits by Critical Friends. However, in most cases it was possible to organise an online alternative.

Two Critical Friends conducted visits online and the experience taught us that a digital visit works well, particularly in the case of a second visit. Someone who has already been able to visit the department and taste the atmosphere there is well able to recall it three years later and therefore has a frame of reference for the online discussions and meetings. A Critical Friend who is visiting a department for the first time does not have the benefit of that. Our conclusion therefore is that initial visits will in future be live, even if it means that a visit has to be postponed due to the circumstances (for example because of a lockdown). However, second visits can be conducted online even in normal times. It is certainly just as effective, saves travelling (and is therefore better for the environment) and money (such as travel and accommodation costs).

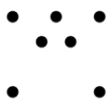
Once again our participation in the *International Benchmarking Exercise – IBE* (in which we and a number of conservatories around the world collect, compare and analyse a large volume of statistical data), as well as the surveys of our *international external committee members*, provided us with valuable information this year to help us with our international benchmarking. In both cases, we were also able to include the effects of online teaching and assessment and thus better assess our activities in this domain in an international context.

Some meetings of the *Professional Advisory Committees* had to be postponed, but for one of the programmes it could go ahead online. Once again, discussing the quality of the programme and the design of the curriculum with representatives from the profession yielded valuable insights.

For the last eighteen months every meeting of the *Student Panels* has taken place online. The response to this was better than expected. Students seem to have little difficulty logging on briefly for a meeting and the panels also seemed to perform a social function. For students in some departments they were a place to meet (even if it was online), something the students had few opportunities to do especially during the periods of lockdown. Accordingly, the turnout for Student Panels was high and the students were very engaged in the discussions about the quality of the education.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> See appendix 7: overview of student panels



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A number of heads of department mentioned that it is sometimes difficult to convey the information (or criticism) from the Student Panels to the relevant teachers. This is always a sensitive issue, but even more so when most lessons are being given online. We feel it is important to monitor this carefully in the coming period.

It was also apparent from the Curriculum Evaluations that students and teachers still have to get used to giving and receiving feedback. This point will continue to receive attention in the coming years.

We periodically investigate experiences with the new approach to quality culture by organising *qualitative interviews or meetings* with the heads of department. At the beginning of 2021, the relevant heads of department were asked for their opinion of the approach to quality culture with an email survey. What came through most strongly in their responses was their perception of the relevance and ownership of the approach. Although the perceived administrative burden had certainly not declined, especially during the corona pandemic, the approach was felt to be useful. Despite the effort required, responding to feedback from a renowned figure in their own discipline or to discussions in a student panel was regarded as worthwhile and useful. They view it as a totally different exercise than distilling the relevant information for their own department from the general feedback in an accreditation report. The heads of department indicated that this approach has led to a stronger sense of ownership, not only for themselves, but also among students and teachers. A visit by a Critical Friend in particular generates a lot of energy in departments. This type of peer review is felt to be deeper and more relevant than the regular programme assessment. Linking the visits to the curriculum evaluations and student panels has further reinforced this dynamic. Both students and teachers are challenged to really think about the quality of the programme, what that quality means for them and the influence they themselves have on it.

To collect quantitative information that could help to identify trends emerging during the pilot, the existing *student and staff surveys* also included questions about the envisaged results of the pilot. The previous annual report included information about the results of the Student Satisfaction Survey and the Staff Satisfaction Survey. However, since 2020 the University of the Arts has, like all other institutes of higher education in the Netherlands, been obliged to participate in the National Student Survey (NSS). Because the questionnaire for the NSS is so extensive, it is impossible for the Conservatoire to conduct a parallel survey of students' views on subjects of specific relevance for the institution, such as questions about the envisaged effects of the pilot.<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately, we are therefore no longer able to provide a quantitative review of the students' perceptions of the effects of the pilot.

Nevertheless, the NSS does include questions that shine some light on students' views on this subject. The results are encouraging and we regard them as a positive signal.

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<sup>9</sup> Students are asked to complete the NSS every year and are also invited to take part in surveys specifically relating to the programme and curriculum. With an additional survey on the effects of the pilot, survey fatigue would set in, which would have a negative effect on the response rate and hence on the validity of the results.



Engagement and contact (NSE 2021)			
Royal Conservatoire		HBO programmes	
4,1		3,8	Theme score; Engagement and contact
4,2		3,6	In addition to the regular lessons and assignments, I am also actively involved in my course programme
3,9		3,7	Teachers appreciate the feedback from students about the course programme
4,2		3,8	My course programme is open to feedback from students

The Staff Satisfaction Survey is conducted every three years and the next one will probably be held at the end of 2021. The results will be reported in the next annual report. Like the other participating institutions, the Conservatoire keeps a record of its findings with respect to the QC instruments we use and their contribution to achieving the objectives of the pilot. The log records, for example, how the Student Panels are leading to a greater sense of ownership among students, but also that our participation in the KUO Monitor (a national survey of alumni) and the NSS is not yet helping with the further development of a functioning quality culture. Because the log is a living document, keeping it up to date enables us to document relevant developments in the instruments we use. The curriculum evaluation is a good example of this. The insertion of questions about the main subject (the feedback on which can usually be traced directly to the student concerned) is a development whose effects we are monitoring closely. This is something we will revise if necessary.<sup>10</sup>

## Conclusions

The impression that emerges from reviewing the above findings in relation to the previously mentioned reasons for participating in the pilot is as follows:

- ∞ There is notably greater engagement among students and teachers. As described at length in the log, Student Panels and the Critical Friends in particular have created a new dynamic of students and teachers being far more aware of their own influence on the quality of the education. But the use of the Curriculum Evaluations, and what the departments do with them, have also visibly increased the sense of ownership.
- ∞ From our recent experience with a lighter programme assessment, with the important role in it for Critical Friends, we were able to determine that we can use it to make the desired improvements in comparing ourselves internationally. The results of international benchmarks and feedback from international external committee members also help in that regard.
- ∞ The use of the evolving quality assurance instruments (the Lemniscate of Continuous Improvement) is increasingly recognisable to our teachers and students and is regarded by them as meaningful. By constantly seeking to link artistic standards and educational quality, for example through visits by Critical



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Friends, but also the more intensive dialogue between students and teachers following Curriculum Evaluations, we see that quality assurance instruments are regarded as more relevant. The same applies for the linking of the internal and external quality cycles. We have found, for example, that by informing a Critical Friend (external) in advance of the findings from the Curriculum Evaluation and providing him/her with the reports of the Student Panels (internal) in advance the two cycles complement and supplement one another. This is far more productive for the department than an accreditation report that (with a bit of luck) merely reiterates the possible improvements already mentioned by the programme itself. Because the Critical Friend discusses specific findings from Curriculum Evaluations directly with students and teachers, the instrument also makes a deeper impression and has greater value. We also see that this is the moment when the added value and relevance of such an instrument is recognised not only by students and teachers, but also by the Conservatoire's wider community.



# Experiences of the Royal Academy of Art

## ***Introduction***

The annual report on progress with the experiment in Institutional Accreditation with Lighter Programme Assessment in 2019 described the course taken by the Royal Academy of Art (further referred to as the Royal Academy) in the pilot. We reported that the pilot was only really starting for the Royal Academy at that time and that there would be some delay in implementing the new strategies we were announcing because of the corona crisis.

During 2020 the Black Lives Matter movement sparked heated debate in the Royal Academy (and elsewhere). In addition, a controversial article about transgressive behaviour by a former student of the academy appeared in October 2020, which led to considerable unrest in the Royal Academy. There is a connection between these events and the development of quality assurance and the quality culture.

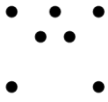
Against that background, in this report we describe our experiences with the implementation of the experiment up to now. In that context, we first refer to the goals we specified in the annual report for 2019 and then review our experiences arising from the recent events referred to above. We conclude with a number of reflections on those experiences.

## ***1. Making maximum use of the scope allowed in the programme assessments***

In the annual report for 2019 we indicated that we intended to use the scope allowed by the experiment to further develop a quality and policy cycle:

- focused on continuous improvement, development and innovation,
- based on a dialogue between and involvement of all the organisation's internal and external stakeholders,
- based on criteria and national and international standards that are relevant to our disciplines and recognisable to both teachers and students, and
- creates a good balance between internal policy development and external accountability.

Particularly from the perspective of a dialogue between those directly concerned based on criteria and standards that are relevant and recognisable to them, we started by delegating primary responsibility for writing the self-evaluation to the relevant heads of department rather than, as in the past, to the Quality Assurance department. After all, the heads of department know better than anyone the language and the frames of reference of their own discipline and are therefore ideally positioned to describe how their programmes relate to those aspects to a panel of external peers. The Quality Assurance department supervised this process, mainly to ensure that the self-evaluation focused on those aspects that are relevant for the experiment. It also ensured that students could provide their own independent input for the self-evaluations. Each of the programmes performed this exercise in its own way.



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The self-evaluations for our Master Interior Architecture and Master Type and Media programmes were finalised in July 2021 and submitted to the visitation panels.

Both self-evaluations have a highly individual character in keeping with the sense of ownership felt by both heads of department for their own process and text. Because these texts have more in common with the 'language of the discipline' than the usual idiom of quality assurance, it was also easier for everyone concerned (in particular the teachers and students) to engage in a discussion and to arrive at a nuanced and broad-based document. We feel that each in its own way constitutes a good combination of factual description and critical (self-)reflection. The greater recognisability and ensuing dialogue have helped in the development of the quality culture in the programmes and in determining the potential for improvement.

## ***2. Separation of the quality aspects I and II***

One aspect of the experiment about which we want to learn more is the distinction between the quality aspects relating to the envisaged and actual exit level (quality aspects I; the 'old' standards 1 and 4) on the one hand, and the quality aspects connected with the design of the learning environment and the assessment (quality aspects II; the 'old' standards 2 and 3). In that context, we are mainly concerned with the consequences for:

- (the writing of) the self-evaluation,
- the visitation and the panel's advisory report, and
- the subsequent programme of development and improvement.

The self-evaluations for the aforementioned programmes were expressly devoted exclusively to NVAO standards 1 and 4, and the NVAO standards 2 and 3 were totally ignored. After an initial struggle, the experience can be described as positive.

The authors of both reports grappled with the problem. Their initial feeling was that describing the envisaged and realised objectives of a programme without explaining how the education is organised created an artificial distinction. Along the way, however, they came to see the distinction as an invitation to define the envisaged position of the programmes in their respective disciplines and to investigate the extent to which graduates actually fill the positions they are trained for. Both authors seized on this invitation to engage in fundamental reflection on this point, together with their teachers, students and the profession. See under the heading "Quality requires choices" below.

But the distinction between NVAO standards 1 and 4 and standards 2 and 3 does seem to have an effect on the character of the accreditation of the first-mentioned standards, since they mainly concern the objectives and the results of the programme, while standards 2 and 3 relate to the practical implementation. In other words, standards 1 and 4 concern the 'what and why', and standards 2 and 3 the 'how'. That leaves the question of what effect the distinction will have when the NVAO standards 2 and 3 are assessed. The loss of integrality could be a drawback, but also an advantage in that the assessment is less of a snapshot and there is more room for a development-centred description of the programme's goals.



We have found that panel members find it difficult to separate the two aspects: in addition to self-evaluations, they request additional information relating more to NVAO standards 2 and 3, with the promise that they would disregard it in their advisory report. The programmes were visited by international panels. We are very curious what our international panel members feel about this separation.

### **3. Quality requires choices**

To formulate criteria and standards derived from the content of the various disciplines that are relevant and recognisable for everyone concerned, the Royal Academy has introduced the concept of the 'standard 0': the quality standard that supersedes all other standards and criteria. Teachers and other stakeholders were specifically asked to describe how they saw their programme's position in what is generally a very broad discipline and in society, and what that implies for the demands they make on the graduates. Arts academies largely set themselves apart from each other with their artistic profile, which is therefore also an essential element of a programme's quality. This profile is fleshed out in the envisaged learning outcomes of the programme concerned.

This 'standard 0' has led to an updating and further definition of the professional profile of the programmes. A quality culture requires that developments in the profession are constantly taken into account and responded to where necessary. Writing 'standard 0' offered an ideal pretext for a more explicit discussion of this aspect with the professional stakeholders. It sometimes also led to a conscious decision to update certain aspects of the programme. Although the use of a 'standard 0' is certainly feasible in the regular accreditation system, the focus on the NVAO standards 1 and 4 in the experiment has provided an enormous stimulus for this approach in the Royal Academy.

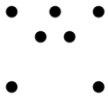
### **4. Focus on complex issues**

Assuming that the positive outcome of the Institutional Quality Assurance Audit reassures us that the 'day-to-day quality assurance' is in order, above all we want to use the experiment to explore how we can address more complex issues. Examples we gave in the annual report for 2019 included:

- formulating and implementing an assessment policy with a good balance between formative and summative assessment;
- formulating a policy on diversity and inclusivity and translating it to the curriculum;
- integrating forms of online education in the study programmes (this as a result of the corona crisis);
- creating a balance between cross-discipline and discipline-specific education, and
- integrating research into the education.

Most of these issues relate to the quality aspects covered in NVAO standards 2 and 3. It is therefore still too early to say anything about them. However, one observation we can make is that the dialogue on the self-evaluations for NVAO standards 1 and 4 have already raised subjects that will certainly need to be addressed in relation to NVAO standards 2 and 3. Here





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too we see a possible effect of this distinction: whereas the accreditation with respect to quality aspects I is partly agenda-setting, the assessment of the quality aspects II could address the ways in which we are implementing that agenda.

### ***5. Inspiring rather than controlling***

A fourth aspect of the accreditation system that we wish to explore is the form of the visitations, particularly in relation to the learning environment and assessment. In view of our current focusing on the visitations for two programmes with respect to the quality aspects I, there is little we can say about this at present. However, we observe that the new approach to the NVAO standards 1 and 4 shows that in general more and different approaches than we are accustomed to are possible and would, above all, be more recognisable and increase the sense of ownership among those involved in the programme. In addition, writing the self-evaluations new-style also generated ideas among the stakeholders for the approach to the NVAO standards 2 and 3, with the emphasis on further development and innovation of the curriculum.

### ***6. Processes and instruments***

Given the positive outcome of the Institutional Audit, we have largely maintained and implemented our instruments and policy processes. It should be noted, however, that the use of those instruments and processes was determined to a large extent by current events: teaching during the corona epidemic and the disquiet arising from discussions concerning inclusivity and social safety. That applies in particular for the results of the National Student Survey, in which the University of the Arts participated again for the first time in a number of years. The results of the survey for the Royal Academy were undoubtedly partly influenced by the aforementioned unrest, which is precisely the reason why it was interesting to be able to compare the results with those of our colleagues in the benchmark, and will be worthwhile monitoring trends in those results – also comparatively – in the coming years.

### ***7. Recent events***

The Royal Academy was confronted with a number of events that influenced developments in the academy during 2020:

- the outbreak of the coronavirus and the consequent changes in the education;
- the Black Lives Matter movement, which sparked debate in the Royal Academy on themes such as diversity, inclusivity, discrimination and post-colonialism, and
- the publication of an article about transgressive behaviour by a former student of the Royal Academy, both during and after his studies, and an ensuing debate about undesirable behaviour and social safety in the arts sector at national level.

Although the discussions on the first two subjects were heated, and sometimes still are, it was the issue of undesirable behaviour and social safety that prompted the Royal Academy to order an external investigation into the nature, seriousness and possible causes of the disquiet. Bureau Bezemer&Schubad, which specialises in such studies, reported its findings on 23



March 2021. We will not go into those findings here. For the purposes of this progress report, the most important point is that the investigation produced a number of findings that had not been identified with our regular quality assurance instruments. Apart from that, only a limited number of people participated in the study. Bezemer&Schubad (2021, p. 22)<sup>11</sup> also gave a number of possible explanations for these observations. For example:

- The vast majority of students and employees did not report to Bezemer&Schubad in any case, but it is not clear how representative the final outcome is. People who had not had any negative experiences were perhaps less inclined to come forward for such a study.
- Launching such an investigation automatically attracts the attention of those who have had negative experiences and can therefore also reveal signals that had not been picked up earlier.
- People from some (cultural) backgrounds are very reluctant to report such experiences.
- The publication of the aforementioned article prompted people who had not reported incidents earlier to do so.

We are currently deliberating on how we should interpret these findings and what consequences they should have for (the application of) our quality assurance instruments. For the purposes of the experiment, those questions are particularly relevant for determining whether institutional accreditation will make the programmes more susceptible to missing such important warnings. Would the signals ever have been picked up with our own instruments? Can we design those instruments in such a way that we can identify and draw attention to similar negative experiences in future and are able to monitor whether adequate measures are taken in response to them in the policy cycle? Or will additional channels outside the domain of quality assurance always be needed? And if it is the latter, what are those channels and how do we ensure that they become part of the quality culture?

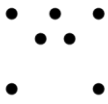
## **8. Reflections**

As already mentioned, in the Royal Academy the implementation of the experiment with Institutional accreditation with a lighter programme assessment only really began in 2020. Although it was a turbulent year in many respects, we still took a number of worthwhile steps from which a number of provisional conclusions can be drawn:

- The separation of NVAO standards 1 and 4 and standards 2 and 3 calls for a slightly different approach to the self-evaluation, but nevertheless proved feasible for us. A 'side effect' appears to be that it creates a distinction between the more policy-driven choices (NVAO standards 1 and 4) on the one hand, and the implementation aspects (NVAO standards 2 and 3) on the other. We don't yet know whether that is a positive or a negative outcome.

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<sup>11</sup> Bezemer&Schubad (2021). *Koninklijke Academie of Beeldende Kunsten. Rapportage cultuuronderzoek*. Rotterdam: Bezemer&Schubad.



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- It seems to be more difficult for the panels to strictly separate the different standards. To assess the actual learning outcomes on the basis of the final work, they still want some insight into the structure of the curriculum and the assessment. We would like to analyse this impression further in order to determine what it implies for the results of the experiment.
- Students have been given every opportunity to provide their own input and to formulate it in their own way. It is too early to draw any firm conclusions about how the students rate this new approach. It has so far only been used for two programmes with roughly thirty students in all; that is not representative for the entire student population. Naturally, we will be asking these students for their impressions.
- The initial experiences have yielded the insight that the accreditation process can be approached differently. Less 'bureaucratic' and controlling and based more on confidence in our own strengths, but also self-critical.
- The disquiet within the Royal Academy has raised questions about the scope of our quality assurance instruments and what we can expect from them. Perhaps it will be necessary to design new channels – in addition to the existing ones – for monitoring some aspects, such as issues closely related to social safety and mental welfare, more closely. Naturally, considerations of confidentiality will play an important role in that respect.
- In carrying out the experiment, the Royal Conservatoire and the Royal Academy both had their own emphases connected with the character, organisation and existing quality culture of each faculty. Participation in the experiment has greatly stimulated consultation between the faculties, partly because the question arises of the extent to which different experiences of the faculties can be traced back to their unique identities.
- As regards the goals of the experiment in Institutional accreditation with a lighter programme assessment, we can make the following observations:
  - The focus on the programme's strategic choices has clearly increased the sense of relevance and ownership among the stakeholders. Especially among the heads of department, who clearly put their own stamp on the self-evaluations they wrote. The quality assurance department has come to play far more of a coaching role than in the past.
  - The (suspected) side effect of separating assessment of the goals and results of the education from the assessment of their implementation appears to be leading to a more sustained approach to the development of the education. That is helping to create a stronger quality culture that fosters constant discussion of that development at every level of the organisation, and consequently to a greater emphasis on improvement than on accountability.
  - This approach does not seem to have eased the perceived administrative burden, as was intended, but we believe that the results are felt to be more relevant and more useful.