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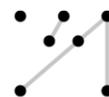
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Den Haag  
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The Hague

# Quality Culture at the Royal Conservatoire:

*2020 and beyond*





## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	3
Quality Culture at the Royal Conservatoire: The Lemniscate of Continuous Improvement .....	4
Recent developments.....	8
Developments within the University of the Arts and the Royal Conservatoire .....	8
(Inter)national developments.....	9
Quality Culture KC 2020 and beyond.....	11
Interpreting statistical survey results .....	11
Benchmarking .....	14
Alignment of processes.....	15
e-Quality and agility .....	17
Conclusions .....	18



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## Introduction

For the past four years, the Royal Conservatoire has been working with a new approach intended to achieve a sustainable quality culture<sup>1</sup> throughout the institute. Having gained quite some experience with this approach, it is time to update the previous document in which we describe new insights gained and interesting developments we have experienced during implementation. In some instances there have been situations where fine-tuning of specific instruments was needed. Tailoring the student panels to the specific needs of the departments is an example. But also working with our international partners on revising an international benchmarking exercise, which resulted in a more specific and effective knowledge-sharing and learning experience. Developments *within* our institution have had its positive effects, such as the restructuring of the policy cycles of the University of the Arts, with internal consistency between policies at different levels. In line with cross disciplinary practices in the arts we aim to discuss between the two faculties of our University how to explicitly examine and harmonise our quality-culture practices. An example of a suitable framework for this is the national Institutional Accreditation Pilot Project initiated by the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, in which we participate.

Developments coming from *outside* our institution also need to be taken into account. The most recent example being the COVID-19 epidemic, confronting us with the need to significantly change the way in which we interact with teachers and with students. This resulted for instance in online Student Panels.

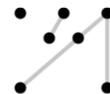
Nevertheless, the main and guiding principles of our approach are still intact and we expect them to continue to be so in the coming years. The most important principles in this approach are:

1. linking educational quality to artistic standards;
2. connecting and balancing the internal and external quality cycles;
3. developing new forms of evaluation, designed to facilitate a discussion of the quality of the curriculum and its continuous improvement, and intended to increase teacher's and student's engagement with quality assurance.

In this document, we will start with a general description of the quality-culture approach of the Royal Conservatoire and subsequently address relevant national and international developments. From there, we will describe our experiences with the approach during these first years of implementation and the possibilities we see for further optimisation of its instruments. We will conclude with how we plan to further implement and develop our approach in the years to come.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Quality Culture KC, 2016 and beyond'



## Quality Culture at the Royal Conservatoire: The Lemniscate of Continuous Improvement

Musical education has always been strongly concentrated on artistic standards, as is borne witness by the tradition of examinations and final presentations in the form of public concerts. *Artistic standards* take the lead in music teaching as well, where ongoing evaluation and improvement is an integrated part of individual lessons but also rehearsals and concerts. Another aspect of the approach to quality in conservatoires has been the *informal* nature in the past as a result of the daily routine of continuous reflection in discussions among all ranks of the institution: short lines of communication between teachers and students (in- and outside classes), between senior managers and staff, and also among staff or students.

Although the informal approach is crucial in a conservatoire, the *formal* approach has acquired more emphasis over the years through the system of quality assurance and diverse formalised consultative opportunities at the level of management, departmental heads, teachers, educational committees, examination committees, tutors, student counsellors, confidential advisors and co-participation bodies. The formal approach has been influenced by the international developments in the wake of the Bologna Process that stressed *educational quality*, by which is meant the standards of educational aspects such as the organisation and coherence of the curriculum, how exams are organised and whether students have adequate opportunities to receive or give feedback.

The international debate on quality and quality assurance in higher musical education makes increasing reference to a concept of quality in which two components are brought together: artistic standards and educational quality. This debate is in line with developments on a more generic level, as is visible in the definition of quality culture by the European University Association (EUA):

*“Quality culture refers to an organisational culture that intends to enhance quality permanently and it is characterised by two distinct elements: on the one hand the cultural/psychological element of shared values, beliefs, expectations and commitment towards quality and, on the other hand, a structural/managerial element with defined processes that enhance quality and aim at coordinating individual efforts. (EUA 2006)*

By enhancing the connection between and the continuity of internal and external methods of quality assurance, we expect to improve the overall quality of the study programmes and to create a broad-based quality culture, especially when artistic and educational quality are reconciled in the process. This is put into practice by linking *internal* and *external* quality assurance in a way that literally places continuous improvement at the centre of the model. The Conservatoire acquires a broader view of the quality of its programmes by learning more about external perceptions of its quality and by increasing their influence on its actions, which it can in turn incorporate in the internal cycle of improvement and innovation. To report on quality and to measure it is still important, but it is not the point of departure. By tilting and linking the two ‘Plan, Do, Check, Act’ (PDCA) cycles, the focus expressly shifts to continuous improvement and as such, a new model is created. By combining the activities under the headings Act and Plan (the wellspring of improvement), the internal and external cycles of quality assurance are



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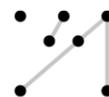
connected in the form of a lemniscate<sup>2</sup>. The two cycles fuel and activate not only themselves but also each other.

Thus, the Conservatoire has consciously chosen to make the transition from a system of quality assurance to the development of a quality culture. This approach is visualised in the Lemniscate of Continuous Improvement (see figure below). This model provides everyone concerned with a tool to guide a broad dialogue on the quality of our education.



The results of the quantitative and qualitative measurements and the improvement plans that originate in the internal cycle are used to improve the quality of the programmes, but also have a major impact on internal perceptions of quality. Conversely, knowing what people within the

<sup>2</sup> The lemniscate is an international symbol for infinity, standing for ongoing movement and growing quality



institution feel is working well and where improvements are needed is an important foundation for external accountability in documents such as self-evaluation reports, annual reports and other publications, and therefore also influences external perceptions of the quality of the education.

This point of departure constitutes the basis for our perspective on quality at the Royal Conservatoire. The essence of the study programmes (artistic standards) is explicitly tied to educational quality and its continuous monitoring. The remit of **quality assurance** is therefore shifting to a **quality culture** at the Royal Conservatoire in a broader perspective.

The *internal perception of quality* is monitored in this model by various instruments:

- Student Satisfaction Survey: the (bi)annual survey asking for students' opinions on all aspects of the institution (from the canteen to the quality of the study programme)
- Subject and Project Evaluations: specific questionnaires for students upon completing a subject or project.
- Staff Satisfaction Surveys: triennial survey among members of staff about all aspects of their appointment at the conservatoire.
- Feedback from the Examination Committee and the Education Committee: the subjects discussed within these committees are almost always related directly to the quality of the programmes. The feedback from these two committees is therefore regarded as extremely valuable information that can be used to improve the programmes.
- Management Information: all kinds of statistical data are regularly collected that provide insight into both artistic standards and educational quality. Examples of data of this kind are the number of applications/admissions, the drop-out rate and a comparison of marks given by internal and external committee members for final presentations.
- The Annual Plans of the departments in which heads of department annually indicate what developments they expect in the coming year or would like to see implemented backed by the results of quality surveys (e.g. student surveys or consultations in the professional field of music).
- Student Panels. Each department forms a panel of students who meet regularly (around two times a year) at the invitation of the head of the department and is facilitated by the Quality Culture Office. Relevant subjects for discussion could be the results of Student Satisfaction Surveys but also the Annual Plans or subjects that students themselves propose.

The results and reports on the internal perception of quality together constitute an important source of opportunities for making improvements, which, if possible, can be directly implemented but which in conjunction with each other serve as input for improvement plans or campaigns that can have an impact on the internal perception of quality. This completes the internal cycle.

The source of opportunities for improvement also feed into the cycle of *external perception of quality*. Knowledge about what is going well and what can be done better is a sound basis for



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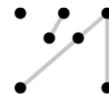
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various external documents such as self-evaluation reports, but also annual reports and other publications, and this therefore has an impact on external perception. Instruments that can therefore be used to measure, verify and monitor external perception are:

- Professional Stakeholders Meeting: feedback on the perception of the quality of the programmes in the contemporary-music world can be gathered at departmental level by means of regular meetings of those working in the musical field.
- Alumni Surveys: information is gathered about the activities of our students about a year and a half after they have graduated through the Kunstenmonitor [Arts monitor]. They are also asked to reflect on the quality of the training that they have had.
- Accreditation processes: visits of accreditation panels produce valuable insights during the visit itself and afterwards in the reports we receive. The Conservatoire is above all keen to make use of the internationally recognised procedures, standards and experts of the European accreditation organisation *MusiQuE – Music Quality Enhancement*.
- Evaluation among External Examiners: An (international) external committee member is present at all examinations as someone who assesses the student from the point of view of the professional musical field. Additionally, all external committee members are asked in a survey to give feedback on the quality of the assessment process, the level of the candidate and the degree to which this level corresponds to requirements in working practice. The ambition of the Royal Conservatoire is to mainly use foreign experts for the external committee members so as to enable the aforementioned comparison of artistic standards.
- Critical Friends: A triennial visitation at departmental level by a Critical Friend. This external expert is an authority within the discipline of the department in question, speaks with teachers and students, attends classes, presentations and assessments during a visit of around two days and then formulates a report on his or her findings.

The results of these and other quality instruments described in the figure constitute input for the accreditation cycle (which closes the cycle of external perception), but also feed into the internal cycle, completing the Lemniscate and the development of ongoing improvement. Internal and external feedback are thus brought into much better balance.



## Recent developments

### ***Developments within the University of the Arts and the Royal Conservatoire***

Parallel to the developments in quality culture at the Conservatoire, and in line with the decision to participate in the Institutional Accreditation Pilot Project, several interconnected policy cycles have been substantially revised and restructured during the last few years. At university level, an Institutional Plan has been devised<sup>3</sup>, which lays down the policy framework for the medium term (six years) and the priorities we have set in that policy. It describes the context in which we operate and our strategy for achieving the key points of the policy. It also gives a specific definition of the distinctive features of the university's profile, i.e. research, internationalisation, and preparation for professional practice and entrepreneurship. Linked to the Institutional Plan are the 'Quality Agreements' – agreements on targets for improving the quality of education in the period from 2019 until the end of 2024.

The Royal Conservatoire has furthermore written a Faculty Plan<sup>4</sup>, which sets out the specific actions planned to implement the Institutional Plan. The Faculty Plan has a horizon of two years but is discussed in the Executive Board every year and revised if necessary. At departmental level, these plans are the guiding framework for the departmental Annual Plans, providing heads of department with the opportunity to elaborate on their plans for the coming year. The Quality Culture Office plays a role in monitoring these processes and provides relevant input for the processes and the content of these plans.

Additionally, in 2019, the University of the Arts successfully participated in the institutional audit (ITK). The key question to be answered by the panel was: "Is the institution's quality-assurance system safeguarding the realisation of its vision of good education, and is the institution continuously working on development and improvement?" The audit panel's conclusion was positive, and the panel concurred with our quality-culture approach, as can be concluded from the following quotes<sup>5</sup>.

*'The panel finds that the university has a clear vision of quality, which is shared by all of the stakeholders and is consistent with the points of departure of the institute's educational philosophy. In each domain, the university's policy is based on common values and ambitions and is operationalised and rolled out in a manner that corresponds with the actual situation of the two faculties. The university has developed an extensive, and in the panel's view impressive, set of instruments to monitor policy implementation and the quality of the education, which ensure that the stakeholders have access to the relevant information they need to make the correct decisions at their respective levels. Appropriate follow-up is given to measurements and evaluations in closing the quality circle by not only identifying improvements, but also systematically monitoring their implementation.'*

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<sup>3</sup> Institutional Plan University of the Arts, The Hague + Quality Agreements 2019–2024

<sup>4</sup> Faculty Plan Royal Conservatoire, 2019–2021

<sup>5</sup> Advisory Report Institutional Audit HdK Den Haag 2020



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*'The panel found from the documents it studied and the conversations it held during the two site visits that quality assurance is deeply embedded in the university, that both individual stakeholders and representative bodies demonstrate a high degree of quality awareness and that there is a good balance between the quality assurance system and the quality culture within the organisation. It is therefore the panel's opinion that the University of the Arts The Hague has a quality culture and a quality assurance system capable of guaranteeing that the institution's education meets national and international standards and expectations.'*

These conclusions from the audit panel confirm us in our belief that we are on the right track. Although this feedback is of course very encouraging, we should not sit back and relax. Very recently, with the accreditation procedure of the Dance Department and its result<sup>6</sup>, we have experienced that our approach is not fully implemented everywhere and more work needs to be done to involve all departments.

### ***(Inter)national developments***

For some time now nationally and internationally, discussion has been underway about new future forms of accreditation. In the Netherlands, one example is the plan for introducing an institutional accreditation, sometimes also called review, which involves institutions being responsible for the development and monitoring of their own quality-assurance system more than is currently the case. The (limited) assessment of the study programme would no longer be an externally led process but a part of the Conservatoire's own responsibility. The present system of accreditation in the Netherlands offers few opportunities for international comparison because clusters at the level of the Dutch programmes are the sole focus. The institutional accreditation/review being currently considered would offer more scope for international comparisons, because the institutions themselves can give shape and content to the review process.

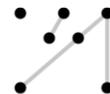
This was also one of the reasons for our decision to take part in the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science's Institutional Accreditation pilot project in 2016. From the Ministry of Education's perspective, the pilot is mainly concerned with determining whether or not institutes are able to review their educational programmes on their own, without an external accreditation procedure. It is up to the institution to meet that responsibility with the prevailing quality culture.

The University of the Arts The Hague signed up for this pilot project in the conviction that we can play a pioneering role in this regard on the basis of an awareness of the unique nature of the notion of quality in arts education and to learn from the project ourselves. And this turns out to be the case indeed. Working together with like-minded organisations<sup>7</sup> for some years now has resulted in an inspiring pressure cooker of developing instruments and sharing best

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<sup>6</sup> The conclusion by the audit panel recommends a weighted and substantiated final conclusion regarding the Bachelor of Dance programme: conditionally positive.

<sup>7</sup> Institutions participating in this pilot are the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences, LOI University of Applied Science, Fontys University of Applied Sciences and the University of the Arts The Hague.



practices. The preliminary effects of the pilot are promising and are having a substantial influence on discussions concerning institutional accreditation, or rather review, in the near future. Before the end of 2020, the Ministry plans to discuss the remits and political support for institutional accreditation with the House of Representatives.

Nationally and internationally, benchmarking of comparable courses of study is commanding growing attention. For some considerable time now the Royal Conservatoire has wanted to focus on benchmarking and cooperation, specifically at an international level, as part of its ambition to measure up to the most highly-rated schools of music worldwide.

The COVID-19 pandemic confronted us with the need to significantly change the way in which we interact with (international) teachers and (international) students. This has delayed visits by Accreditation Panels and Critical Friends, and at the same time triggered innovations, such as online student-panel meetings. At this moment we cannot completely oversee the overall effects of these developments, but it seems certain that it will have a lasting influence on the way we work on the quality of education now and in the foreseeable future.



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## **Quality Culture KC 2020 and beyond**

With the implementation of the approach developed in 2016, a substantial change in culture has been initiated. Awareness of quality among management, teachers and students has grown and a sense of a mutually felt and supported responsibility has evolved. External quality checks have started to feed into an internal quality improvement and vice versa.

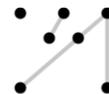
However, based on new insights we gained during these first years of implementation, in some cases it turned out that fine-tuning of specific instruments was needed.

This chapter goes into several adjustments we have made over the years to optimise our quality culture approach.

### ***Interpreting statistical survey results***

Overall we are becoming increasingly aware that it is very important to always try to place survey results in their proper context. By discussing results of Semester Evaluations in Student Panels, we find that a sometimes abstract satisfaction score (- / +) used in such surveys is very much clarified by a discussion with students about its backgrounds. A negative rating last year of a specific teacher, for instance, turned out to be explained by the fact that this teacher decided to strictly enforce attendance (something that was suggested by students themselves in earlier student-panel meetings), and had nothing to do with the quality of the teacher. We see this in other types of surveys as well. In the HBO Kunstenmonitor (Art Monitor), for instance, we are always a little surprised by the critical feedback we receive from our alumni. Especially since this feedback is not always in line with information we get from other sources, such as alumni meetings. Because we take these results very seriously, we have also decided that we need to find out more about the background of some of these results. This could be done in the same manner as with the Student Panels, by discussing the background of the responses to these reports with alumni, trying to better understand the context in which this feedback was provided. But also by being more aware of current developments in the Conservatoire's community, for instance by what is being discussed on social media. We will seek alliance with the Marketing and Communication Department in collecting this feedback.

**The Critical Friends** approach in particular generates positive responses: heads of department have embraced this as an instrument that creates a shift in mindset and stimulates a productive discussion on the quality of the study programmes. In contrast to traditional accreditation visits, which often only look superficially at the various graduation profiles within overall study programmes, we can now explicitly explore relevant aspects of the programmes and their departments within a much broader scope, and reflect on both artistic standards and educational quality with the teachers and the students who are directly involved. And we do so in a way that directly links with their daily educational practice. We deliberately invite departmental heads and teachers to reflect on their curricula, and also on their own role in them. The quality of their own teaching therefore is a much more explicit subject for discussion. The involvement and ownership of teachers and students within the department notably increases as a result. We now even see departments applying for the visit of a Critical Friend on their own initiative in Departmental Annual Plans.



Nevertheless, no matter how sincere we try to operate, we have realised that selecting Critical Friends ourselves make the approach, and more specifically the results of the approach, seem less objective than they should be. After all, since we want to use the Critical Friends' reports as a substitute for the standard 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 the assessment, 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*'<sup>8</sup>, which describes in great detail the steps required for organising an effective procedure, including all relevant reference and policy documents. Additionally, in this handbook we have made a point of elaborating on the rationale of the approach itself and the way it fits into both existing internal policy cycles as well as external accreditation procedures. We will keep finetuning this approach in the coming years. Just recently we have come to the conclusion that the response to the second visit could perhaps be more interwoven with existing policy processes, reducing the administrative workload for heads of department. This is something that we will further explore in the coming period.

In 2019, a governmental decision forced all higher-education institutions, including the Royal Conservatoire, to make use of the National Student Survey (**NSE**<sup>9</sup>). Years earlier, in 2013, the University of the Arts The Hague decided to stop participating in the NSE and to develop a Student Satisfaction Survey that was more tailored to the specific character of Higher Arts Education. In the years following this decision and with the help from external experts, we developed a well-functioning instrument (STO HdK<sup>10</sup>), which measures student satisfaction in a way that enabled us to use the collected feedback for internal quality improvement processes and still relate/benchmark their feedback to the national NSE results. Unfortunately, with this recent decision from the government, we have no choice but to discontinue our STO HdK survey in order not to overload students with questionnaires and comply with the national one. Although the NSE will provide us with much less meaningful information than the survey we have finetuned for several years and mainly is a tool for measuring the *perception* of students instead of the actual *quality* of education, at least we are making an effort to influence this national survey as much as we can by participating in working groups and sharing our knowledge on sector-specific features.

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<sup>8</sup>See annex 1: Handbook for a Critical Friend Review, March 2019

<sup>9</sup>NSE: Nationale Studenten Enquête

<sup>10</sup> STO HdK: Student Tevredenheids Onderzoek Hogeschool der Kunsten



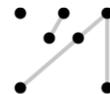
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Since we started implementing our quality-culture approach, we quickly noticed that the short subject and project evaluations we have been conducting produce interesting results, but are not fully meeting our needs. One of the great challenges for a conservatoire, where one-to-one tuition plays an important role, is to also assess the quality of those lessons. Especially when the teachers providing those lessons teach a limited number of students and can easily connect the feedback to specific students. Therefore, sending students a survey that specifically asks them about the quality of their main-subject teachers could create a situation where students may feel forced to respond in a socially desirable way. Because of this, and also because we felt the need to acquire periodical feedback on the design of the curricula as a whole, we started developing **Semester Evaluations**. These triennial evaluations, generally conducted after the first semester of the academic year, encompass all courses of a specific year in the bachelor's and/or master's curriculum. We ask students of all years to provide feedback not only on the courses of their current year, but also on their coherence within the curriculum. As opposed to other satisfaction surveys, this Semester Evaluation is not specifically anonymous. Firstly, because we include the evaluation of the main-subject anonymity is not something we can guarantee, but also because the evaluation is mainly intended to facilitate a dialogue between students and teachers. This is resulting in a truly cultural shift for both students and teachers. Students really need to make an effort providing teachers with thoughtfully formulated feedback that could be traced back to them. Teachers need to receive that feedback in a constructive way and use it as a starting point for a discussion with students about what goes well and what could be improved. The Conservatoire has already started further developing this important skill by means of the '*Critical Response Method*', as discussed in the professional development course 'The Artist as Teacher' offered to all teachers. We aim for a continuous debate as a natural part of the interaction between students and teachers that is additionally fuelled by objective data collection every three years when a Semester Evaluation is conducted (or more often, if deemed necessary). Although there is still much work to be done, in recent years we have seen promising developments in this dialogue. We feel that this is a very important aspect of the quality culture we are working on and it is also a way for teachers and even for students to take responsibility for the (development of the) quality of the curricula. Additionally, this all-encompassing Semester Evaluation provides valuable preparatory information for both Critical Friends visits and Student Panels.

We have seen **Student Panels** ensure that students feel they are being taken seriously as fully-fledged partners in the debate. These panels also play an important role during the visits of Critical Friends. Students thus feel they are being heard and carry a joint responsibility for the quality of their study programmes. By working with Student Panels and switching from just data from surveys to a constructive dialogue, we are able to place the results of regular quality surveys in their proper context. This helps us to determine where there is room for improvement more accurately and effectively. In recent years we have adjusted the approach in such a way that, aligned with the specific needs of those involved, the form and frequency of Student Panels can differ between departments. The Classical Department, for instance, has migrated towards a more specific way of organising the Student Panels per instrumental



section, leading to more frequent meetings, but also to a much better participation by students, therefore generating more interesting and valid feedback. We do feel that communication about what was discussed in these panels should be unambiguous but also diplomatic. The reports of these meetings are an important source of information both internally and externally, and it is very important that no one is damaged by what is chronicled in there. Therefore, training sessions have been organised for the secretaries of these panels (most often the coordinators of the departments), teaching them to formulate their minutes both diplomatically and in adequate English. Also, together they have developed a format for these reports<sup>11</sup>, which makes them more consistent in appearance. Interestingly, attempts to increase participation in Student Panels by offering students study points has turned out to be unsuccessful. In these four years of implementation, the possibility of an extra study point has been communicated but never claimed by students. It seems that the quality of the discussions and the follow-up of actions decided upon during the meeting by department heads and coordinators is a far better incentive for students to participate.

### **Benchmarking**

The Royal Conservatoire continues to invest in new forms of international activities enabling both artistic standards and educational quality to be compared internationally and thus allow insight to be gained in the quality of the institution. An international comparison of artistic standards can be achieved by engaging *international members* in the committees of examiners, so that a picture can emerge of the extent to which students at the Royal Conservatoire meet international quality standards. Our aim is to have, in general, at least one (international) external examiner as part of the committee of examiners at the bachelor's and master's final presentations. The external examiners are asked to fill in a survey about their experiences with regard to the final presentation. In this way we can monitor if both the assessment criteria and the final qualifications of our students sufficiently connect with the demands of the profession and the international artistic standards. With ten years of experience with this benchmarking approach, we see that there is a significant impact not only on the quality of the assessment process, but also on the discussions resulting from it, both in the Examination Committee as well as within the departments, where the demands of the international profession are increasingly influencing the frame of reference for the curriculum and learning outcomes.

**Critical Friends** provide us with important benchmarking information as well. Specifically selected on their authority both within the discipline of the department in question (artistic standards) and their knowledge of higher education (educational quality), they provide us with valuable insights on the quality of our educational programmes in relation to both the European conservatoire sector as well as the demands of the profession.

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<sup>11</sup> Format report Student Panel meeting KC



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As to comparing educational quality, the Royal Conservatoire takes part in the **International Benchmarking Exercise (IBE)** along with seven other international conservatoires<sup>12</sup>. The IBE compares all kinds of information, often statistical, that gives a sound and comparative impression of the different aspects of educational quality. Despite a suspension of data collection in 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the IBE is actively being developed further. In 2018, significant revisions have been made in the definition of the acquired data, as to make comparisons between the participating conservatoires more meaningful.

The Royal Conservatoire is also actively involved in developing international quality standards as part of the European accreditation and evaluation agency *MusiQuE* – Music Quality Enhancement, which uses internationally agreed criteria and procedures in which artistic standards are closely interwoven with educational quality.

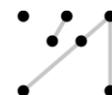
As of 2016 the Conservatoire has taken part in a pilot as part of **U-Multirank**, a European instrument for benchmarking that tried to make a comparison of various aspects of a number of conservatoires. Unfortunately, the U-Multirank pilot did not lead to a subject-specific approach and despite many attempts to find out what happened with all the input and data collected during this period, we have not heard what has become of the pilot in the end.

### ***Alignment of processes***

As already mentioned above, the last few years we have worked on aligning, integrating and in some cases restructuring several relevant processes. At all levels, one process is sometimes not only of influence, but also a prerequisite for the next. By describing these relations more meticulously and presenting them in a visual manner, we have pursued a better understanding of the context of these policies. This has resulted in more coherent policy processes, where relations between departments, faculties, but also between several quality-culture tools have been made clear. In the next illustrations, these relations are visually described in increasing detail.

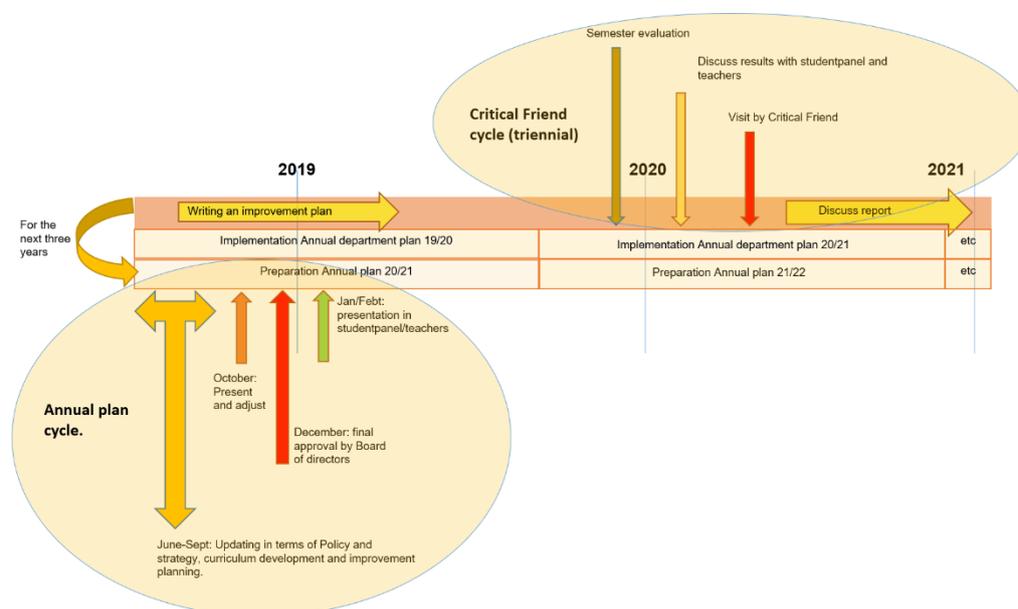
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<sup>12</sup> Participants in the International Benchmarking Exercise (IBE) are: Geneva Conservatoire, New England Conservatory, Norwegian Academy of Music, Royal Conservatoire The Hague, Royal Northern College of Music, Sydney Conservatorium, University of Music and Performing Arts Graz, Yong Siew Toh Conservatory.



This pyramid is a visual display of the policy cycles of the University of the Arts, where an effort has been made to base all plans on the same structure in order to create internal consistency as details increase.

Going further up from the base of this pyramid, we have restructured the departmental Annual Plan process, seeking for more uniformity in the formats used by both faculties. In addition to this, the departmental Annual Plan process has increasingly been positioned as a pivotal instrument in bringing several quality-culture processes together. The figure below visually shows the relation between the departmental Annual Plans and the Critical Friend process.



The feedback report resulting from the Critical Friend's visit and the department's response together constitute an important source of information for the departmental Annual Plans (which are in turn linked to the Institutional and Faculty Plans), which describe how the improvements will be implemented and when. The same applies to Professional Stakeholder



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University of the Arts  
The Hague**

Meetings, of which the resulting reports influence the Annual Plans in a similar cycle of three years.

Looking at an even more-detailed level, the figure below describes the relation between several important quality-culture instruments.

The semester evaluation is always combined with and feeds into the visit of the Critical Friend

Professional Stakeholders Meetings are never planned simultaneously with Critical Friends

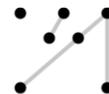
A studentpanel is in place and actively involved in the process

Planning Critical Friends						
	2020/2021 Acc. Masters Music & Sonology (re- visitation Dance)	2021/2022 Acc. BaMu and DOMU (re- visitation Dance)	2022/2023 (NVAO midterm Review Quality Agreements)	2023/2024	2024/2025	2025/2026
Classical Music			CF2 visit 1			CF2 visit 2
Early Music	CF2 visit 1			CF2 visit 2		
Jazz	CF1 visit 2	CF1 visit 2			CF2 visit 1	
Vocal				CF2 visit 1		
Composition		CF1 visit 2			CF2 visit 1	
Music Education	CF1 visit 1			CF1 visit 2		
Sonology	CF1 visit 2		CF2 visit 1			CF2 visit 2
Art of Sound			CF2 visit 1			CF2 visit 2
Dance		CF1 visit 2			CF2 visit 1	
Music Theory		CF1 visit 1			CF1 visit 2	
ArtScience			CF1 visit 2			CF2 visit 1
DNQA						
ArtScience						
Planning Semesterevaluations						
	2020/2021 Acc. Masters Music & Sonology (re- visitation Dance)	2021/2022 Acc. BaMu and DOMU (re- visitation Dance)	2022/2023	2023/2024	2024/2025	2025/2026
Classical Music			x			x
Early Music	x			x		
Jazz		x			x	
Vocal	x			x		x
Composition		x			x	
Music Education	x			x		
Sonology			x			x
Art of Sound			x			x
Dance		x			x	
Music Theory		x			x	
DNQA			x			x
ArtScience						
Planning professional stakeholders meeting (never in the same year as Critical Friend)						
	2020/2021 Acc. Masters Music & Sonology (re- visitation Dance)	2021/2022 Acc. BaMu and DOMU (re- visitation Dance)	2022/2023	2023/2024	2024/2025	2025/2026
Classical Music		x			x	
Early Music			x			x
Jazz	x			x		
Vocal	x	x		x		x
Composition					x	
Music Education			x			x
Sonology	x			x		
Art of Sound		x			x	
Dance			x			x
Music Theory						
DNQA						
ArtScience						

Here as well, some instruments are a precondition for the effective execution of others. An example is the triennial Semester Evaluation among students. For a Critical Friend to genuinely get a clear view on the quality of the educational programme, it is very important to offer recent student feedback on the curriculum. In our timetables we make sure that these processes are optimally aligned.

### **e-Quality and agility**

Because of the COVID-19 epidemic, e-Learning in general has taken a flight, and of course we try to align the quality-culture instruments to this new situation. Agility is of the essence in order to keep our quality-culture approach up to date and meaningful. We feel that, when analysing information acquired with our quality-culture instruments, it is very important to take stock of current developments concerning the perception of students and teachers within the Conservatoire. Being aware of what is discussed on social media for instance, and relating this to feedback collected in surveys, will help us interpreting results and defining effective improvement actions. This is also the case for the alignment of our quality-culture instruments with the issues of **Diversity** and **Sustainability**, which are important focal points for the Conservatoire as well as for the University as a whole. Additionally, taking into account specific kinds of management Information, such as enrolment, drop-out and graduation rates of students, offers us valuable background information in the analyses of the state of the quality culture we are aiming for. In the coming years we will actively seek alliance in developing this reference framework with the Marketing and Communication Department.



We have started to adjust Student Panels to the present situation as much as possible. Several online Student Panel meetings have taken place now and we see that these are as effective as before (although preferably with not too many students, because of technical limitations). Several questions on e-Learning have been integrated in existing surveys, such as the evaluation among (International) external examiners. In cooperation with colleagues from the e-Learning working group and the IT and HR Departments we have developed a survey among students and teachers on the effects of this completely new situation, in which we study and work from home and because of which face-to-face education has not been possible for some time now. We want to contribute to anticipating future developments and to prepare for them.

Reinforcing Professional Stakeholder Meetings, be it digitally, could help with taking stock among representatives of the professional field. But also reflecting on these developments with students, teachers and alumni, in surveys and in panels could contribute to defining the opportunities and threats in the near future. With agility and speed we try to contribute in every way we can to a resilient conservatoire, which is, after all, one of the characteristics of an overall quality culture.

### **Conclusions**

Although at the moment we are operating in unprecedented circumstances, many implications foreseen in the original document 'Quality Culture 2016 and beyond' are still relevant today. A more open and common culture of quality improvement is emerging, which will entail even more clear and detailed communication, notably with students. Students are becoming equal partners in the process and if they are prepared to put in the time and energy to give feedback we should actively welcome it, and visibly make use of it. As argued earlier, we are working on a cultural shift by asking students to provide constructive feedback, and asking teachers to constructively receive that feedback, using it as a starting point for discussion about the quality of education.

It is important that the departments and the teachers involved should not feel vulnerable about this and thus withdraw. On the other hand it is crucial that the students participating in surveys and Student Panels do not feel vulnerable either and can speak out freely for themselves and their fellow students. Formal and informal feedback will thus be brought into a better balance. We have made considerable progress in this respect but there is always room for improvement, which is logical as cultural change usually takes more than a few years.

Heads of the department have also been asked to put in quite a bit of effort. Not only are they closely involved in the Student Panels: they too are drawing up Departmental Annual Plans and reporting on these, which requires time and energy. The invitation of a Critical Friend not only has financial implications but also a considerable effect on capacity of both the department involved as well as the Quality Culture Office. Outsourcing the organisation to *MusiQuE*, delegating tasks to the coordinators of the departments in the organisation of student panels and a capacity extension of the Quality Culture Office have made the workload manageable.



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Nevertheless, it is important to carefully monitor and balance the time and energy it takes from all involved and always be aware of the notion that we should reduce bureaucracy and futile technocratic processes wherever we can. In guarding this delicate balance, we hope to provide the programmes and the Conservatoire as a whole with an overall instrument for working on a future-proof form of quality enhancement, which enables us to work not only on quality assurance but on a framework for an all-embracing quality culture as well.