

# Development Dialogue Report Bachelor of Music

Royal Conservatoire The Hague  
University of the Arts The Hague – The Netherlands

**2023**

## Introduction

The Bachelor of Music programme offered by the Royal Conservatoire, the faculty for music and dance of the University of the Arts The Hague in The Netherlands, was assessed by an independent review team of international peer-reviewers. A development dialogue was organised after the site visit, to allow representatives of the programmes to discuss both strengths and potential improvements from a development perspective with members of the review team. In this report, the main elements discussed during the development dialogue are presented.

The review team consisted of the following members:

- ∞ Don McLean (Chair), Professor Emeritus and former Dean of the Faculty of Music at the University of Toronto, Canada;
- ∞ Mist Thorkelsdottir, Head of International Programs in the Performing Arts at the University of Southern California, Thornton School of Music;
- ∞ Finn Schumacker, CEO and Artistic Director of Odense Symphony, Denmark;
- ∞ Claus Finderup, Programme Coordinator and Associate Professor at the Rhythmic Music Conservatoire, Denmark;
- ∞ Miranda Harmer, Master student in cello performance and composition at Leeds College of Music, UK.

## Context of the review procedure

The review team assessed the Bachelor of Music programme in the context of the Dutch external quality assurance system, which is regulated by law and implemented by the Accreditation Organisation of The Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO). For the assessment of the programmes, the review team was asked to make use of the NVAO assessment framework for the 'Experiment Institutional Accreditation with a Lighter Programme Accreditation'<sup>1</sup>.

However, because of its international profile, the Royal Conservatoire expressed the wish not only to have the Bachelor of Music programme assessed on the basis of the relevant national frameworks, but also to receive feedback on the programme based on the internationally recognised assessment framework of MusiQuE - Music Quality Enhancement. In its self-evaluation report, the institution explains this choice as follows: "This is consistent with the opinion of the Royal Conservatoire that an institution can only call itself truly international if it is also willing to use internationally based methods for assessment and tools for external review. Therefore it is only the MusiQuE framework that can assist in a qualified comparison of programmes and institutions at an international level and confirm an international profile of a programme or

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<sup>1</sup> The University of the Arts The Hague passed an Institutional Audit in 2020. Institutions that have successfully completed the Institutional Audit have the opportunity to apply for participation in the 'Experiment Institutional Accreditation with a Lighter Programme Accreditation'. The experiment was set up by the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and is implemented by NVAO. The University of the Arts applied, and was permitted, to take part in the experiment. Existing programmes offered by institutions which have passed an Institutional Audit are normally assessed with a limited framework featuring four NVAO standards. In the context of the 'Experiment Institutional Accreditation with a Lighter Programme Accreditation', however, these programmes are being reviewed with a lighter framework: only the assessment in relation to standard 1 (Intended learning outcomes) and standard 4 (Achieved learning outcomes) is presented to NVAO as part of the application for accreditation of the programmes. The institution is responsible for organising the assessment of standards 2 and 3 independently, without involvement from NVAO in the review process.

institution.” (Self-evaluation report, p. 8) For this reason, the review team assessed the programmes also against the MusiQuE standards for programme review.

Both the assessment on the basis of the NVAO framework and the assessment on the basis of the MusiQuE standards for programme review resulted in separate reports. In the development dialogue, elements resulting from both assessments were jointly discussed.

## Organisation and structure of the development dialogue

The development dialogue was organised by the institution and took place online on 31 October 2023. A large group of representatives of the programme (including institutional managers, heads of department, teaching staff and support staff) was invited to participate.

The discussions during the development dialogue took place in an informal atmosphere and were facilitated by the Chair of the review team. The Chair presented a concise overview of selected strengths and elements for improvement at the start of the development dialogue. Both the review team members and the institutional representatives agreed to use the overview to structure the discussion.

## Overview of the elements discussed

The institutional managers expressed themselves being impressed by the rigour of the analysis and observations made by the review team in the reports, and indicated that they would like to discuss the various recommendations made with the review team members. The section below provides an overview of the elements discussed<sup>2</sup>.

- ∞ The Bachelor of Music shows a very strong profile both national and internationally. The panel supports the ambition of KC to use the European qualifications framework for the programme objectives for the bachelor to support the institution’s international profile. The panel also invites the institution to ensure that the programme objectives are better known by students and teachers.
- ∞ The panel has seen how the relevance of the programme objectives of the Bachelor of Music programme is continuously checked with the music profession through joint projects with professional ensembles, various meetings, teachers that are active in the profession and contacts with alumni. The work done for alumni is impressive but should also lead to some more quantitative data about how alumni are doing in the profession.
- ∞ The panel was also able to confirm the high artistic quality of the Bachelor of Music through the examination of recordings of final presentations and visits to several live ones. A clear recommendation for improvement was made about the documentation for these (final)

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<sup>2</sup> For an optimal understanding of the elements listed in this section, readers are encouraged to consult the reports resulting from the assessment on the basis of the NVAO framework and the assessment on the basis of the MusiQuE standards for programme review first. These reports can be found on the MusiQuE website or through the following link <https://www.musique-qe.eu/reports/review-reports/>

presentations (e.g. report forms), which were not in all cases consistent and varied in terms of the quality of the feedback given to students.

The procedure also addressed the MusiQuE international accreditation standards for higher music education programmes. With regards to the standards, the panel identified several strong points about the Bachelor of Music programme and KC more generally:

- ∞ A widely shared commitment to the continuous improvement of artistic and educational quality. The panel was very explicit about how strongly they felt an institutional culture that (as described eloquently by the panel chair) “combined pride of the institution with humility to continuously improve”. According to the panel, this is a very distinctive feature of KC within the context of the conservatoire sector.
- ∞ Another distinctive feature of the institution is its international profile: it was said that “KC is international by definition”.
- ∞ The new building and library were mentioned to be a great asset, holding many opportunities for cooperation among the Amare inhabitants. The panel also identified the need of students to have their own social space.
- ∞ The panel noticed the strong focus on social safety in the institution. Students and staff mentioned to feel safe in KC and are well informed about where they need to go in case of difficulties.
- ∞ An increased interaction between departments was identified, even if more development could still be explored in this area.

Other issues that were mentioned by the review panel were:

- ∞ With regards to both internal and external communication, the panel praised the institutions for the very complete curriculum handbooks, the development of the internal information portal, and the extensive and fully bilingual website.
- ∞ Assessment processes were found to be clear overall, although the panel would like to encourage the institution to continue with its efforts to improve its procedures on assessment and giving feedback. Especially the feedback on the progression of students, the use of assessment criteria, and differences between pass/fail and grading approaches were mentioned as areas of attention.
- ∞ The international attractiveness of KC is evident, and the institution could be even more straightforward with presenting information about its international profile by providing data on the origin of students and applicants.
- ∞ The support by tutors was seen as a strong point, as was some of the activities in the area of health & wellbeing.
- ∞ The presence of strong and engaged teaching staff, and the opportunities offered to the teaching staff for professional development in the form of courses (the ‘Artist as Teacher’ course for teachers) and support for master, PhD and research trajectories. According to the panel, KC serves as an international model in this regard.

- ∞ The presence of strong and engaged support staff, which equally has access to various forms of professional development.
- ∞ There is a clear openness to the student voice through the deployment of Student Panels and a good balance between formal and informal feedback.
- ∞ With regards to public interaction, the panel saw a proactive attitude by the institution through its collaborations with professional ensembles and other organisations in the profession, and a clear ambition to be proactive in terms of societal engagement within the city of The Hague.

During the development dialogue, the Critical Friends<sup>3</sup> approach was discussed quite intensively, as well as opportunities to further fine-tune this approach in relation to the MusiQuE review process. During the visit of the review team a discussion with a selection of Critical Friend was part of the programme. Based on this experience, the potential gains of increasing the synergy between Critical Friends were further discussed, as well as combining their findings and overall suggestions for improvement, not only for individual departments, but also for the programme as a whole<sup>4</sup>.

Programme representatives indicated that bringing Critical Friends together offers opportunities indeed, but that at the same time the institution seeks to avoid doubling up efforts and to keep a clear differentiation between the roles of the Critical Friends and the external review team.

On a final note, the panel expressed its opinion that it was very positive about the Bachelor of Music programme and about KC more widely, that many developments are well on track and that in various areas KC could be seen as an example of good practice internationally.

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<sup>3</sup> The Royal Conservatoire uses the term 'Critical Friends' to refer to external peers whom MusiQuE has selected to provide external perspectives and advice. For the Royal Conservatoire, a 'Critical Friend' is an external expert who is considered as an authority within the specific field of study of one of the disciplines in the bachelor programme. Critical Friends form a part of the external dimension of the internal quality assurance system of the institution

<sup>4</sup> Page 8 of the feedback report: *In fact, the review team gathered from the very interesting discussion with the Critical Friends that their visits and ensuing reports could become even more effective if they would have the opportunity to share their findings post-visit with each other. Moreover, it would be good if Critical Friends were invited around the time of the final presentations. Having attended a few graduation performances, the review team considers some form of this scheduling alignment would definitely add value to the observations of the Critical Friends, and thus to the relevance of their findings and recommendations.*