

To the Board of MusiQuE

MusiQuE's External Evaluator's Draft Report 2017

This is a preliminary report in preparation of a meeting with the 2018 Board of MusiQuE of 22 March 2018.

Purpose and scope of the report

This Report is the second External Evaluator's Report on the QA & related activities of Music Quality Enhancement (MusiQuE), a sector-specific European quality assurance agency, following a mandate from the Board of MusiQuE.

Its purpose is three-fold:

- to assess the progress of MusiQuE, since my first evaluation and subsequent Report on MusiQuE's compliance with the ESG for QA.
- to critically analyse the quality of the work of MusiQuE, on the basis of its available working tools and possibly participation in some of its evaluation work
- to propose ways to raise the visibility and standing of MusiQuE among its stakeholders, the European institutions and a broad public.

BACKGROUND:

MusiQuE was accepted to be listed on EQAR (European Quality Assurance Register) by the Register Committee on 6 June 2016, following an external review of compliance with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG, 2015). MusiQuE's inclusion on the Register is valid till 30 November 2020, which means that EQAR will be subjected to another review in the course of 2020.

Whereas the only proviso from the peer review had been the financial sustainability (ESG 3.5, Resources) the Register Committee in its letter to the Board of MusiQuE dated 18-05-2016 also formulated observations on two other Standards, namely ESG 3.1 (Stakeholders' involvement), and ESG 3.3 (Independence). The RC having accepted the arguments from the Head of the External Review team on compliance with ESG 3.3 (Independence) decided on **partial compliance** for ESG 3.1 (Stakeholders' involvement) and ESG 3.5 (Resources). The RC however expressed its confidence that MusiQuE would be able to manage the remaining shortcomings appropriately, and therefore concluded that "MusiQuE **complies substantially** with the ESG as a whole" and approved the application for inclusion in the Register.

ESG 2015 compliance of MusiQuE:

The following are observations regarding the issues which were highlighted in EQAR's Register Committee report of 6 June 2016, concerning compliance with the ESG (revised ESG, 2015). I am giving for the points that were flagged, the original remarks of the RC/External Review panel, followed by the External Evaluator's remarks and an attempt at describing the present state of affairs.

ESG 3.1 Stakeholders involvement

RC recommendation: have a sustainable and fully-fledged student representation in the MusiQuE Board, on a short term.

External Evaluator's Advice (2016):

- *The recommendation of the RC of EQAR could be met at short notice by relaxing the rule of mandatory experience in accreditation/QA via the MusiQuE Reviewers Register for members of the MusiQuE Board. MusiQuE could for example appoint a Phd student or a recent graduate/alumnus from Music Higher Education, with a declared interest in quality in music education. In line with the Statutes of MusiQuE, AEC would have to nominate this additional person, who will be able to take up a seat upon unanimous decision of the Board.*
- *The representative role of MusiQuE could be further enhanced by broadening the composition and profile of the MusiQuE Board, e. g. by adding stakeholders with a broader profile.*
- *Likewise, broaden the scope of the experts involved in the Peer Reviewers Register of MusiQuE.*

State of Affairs Spring 2018:

- The first part of the recommendation has been fully met, with the appointment of a student as a full Board member, as from March 2018, following an explicit mention of the obligatory student Board member in the revised Statutes.
- MusiQuE plans to invite experts from the PEARLE and EMU communities to future training sessions in preparation of joining the Peer Reviewers Register, in Spring 2018.
- Staff secondment from AEC in these initial years is gradually reimbursed, starting as from 2016. This way financial independence is secured on a mid-term basis. It is projected (Annual Report 2016) that MusiQuE will acquire complete financial independent as from 2020.

ESG 3.3 Independence

RC/External Review Report recommendation:

MusiQuE Board members should act independently from the MusiQuE partner organizations that appointed them.

External Evaluator's Advice (2016):

With the present statutory arrangement for the composition of the MusiQuE Board (with AEC, and sometime EMU and Pearle selecting the candidates, who need to be on the MusiQuE Peer Reviewers' Register) a relatively narrow Board profile is created, with too much interdependence. It is therefore commendable to have additional stakeholders' representatives with 'a music affiliation or interest' on the Board of MusiQuE, who are from

the broader society (e.g. representatives of pre-school music education). Involving ‘parties’ outside the narrower circle of music experts with review experience, may lead to a greater commitment of ‘civil society’ to the broad range of activities of MusiQuE, enhance its visibility, and ultimately contribute to its sustainability.

The present arrangement with AEC to hire staff from this partner organization is a good solution on the financial and administrative side, as long as the hiring procedure is based on strict and impartial arrangements, in order to avoid a potential cause of conflict of interest.

MusiQuE’s management, staff and experts being selected by the MusiQuE Board, full operational independence is to be guaranteed and should be at all times verifiable.

As is clearly stated in the Register Committee’s recommendations, on a longer term, however, it would be good to envisage entire independence (from AEC), in terms of management, staff and resources.

State of Affairs Spring 2018:

The Board nominations by partner organizations are ‘not binding’, according to the newly revised Statutes. However, the majority of the Board members are still nominated by AEC.

A similar arrangement is also found in a number of other non-national or non- state QA agencies. This led to similar remarks by visiting review panels as to the potential conflicts of interest that may arise. There is however no uniform opinion on the matter, so we could speak of a lack of consistency here in the EQAR-linked assessments and judgements.

The Board of MusiQuE has in practice a partly rotating membership from the three partner organizations AEC, PEARLE, EMU, with delegates from a variety of different backgrounds and profiles.

The issue of ‘financial independence is addressed in the ESG 3.5 discussion.

ESG 3.5 Resources

RC noted in its decision of 6 June 2016 that MusiQuE’s sustainability as from 2018 remained dependent on the number of reviews it could carry out in practice in the given period.

External Evaluator’s Advice (2016):

On the basis of the current estimates MusiQuE’s long term sustainability cannot be guaranteed by an income from review activities only. The breaking point of MusiQuE is estimated at five reviews per year and is dependent on the current support by AEC staff via a contractual agreement or by secondment. The immediate future of MusiQuE appears safe, with a sufficient number of confirmed procedures for 2016, and a fair estimate for 2017, and on the basis of a contractually guaranteed assistance by AEC. On a longer term further assistance remains a discretionary power in the hands of AEC, as the contractual agreement stipulates that the financial support will be given ‘when assistance is needed’.

For reason of transparency it is also recommended to have an overview of the ongoing cooperation agreements of MusiQuE with national and other (sector specific) agencies, in connection with joint programs, recognition and accreditation.

MusiQuE should therefore aim at appointing and deploying staff of its own.

State of Affairs Spring 2018:

- Statement of commitment on the financial side signed with AEC, EMU and PEARLE*
- AEC staff servicing agreement for 2018-2019 signed with AEC
- Problems with Belgian VAT system solved (registered seat in Belgium, as from Spring 2018)
- Preparation of a Business Plan (including marketing strategies and a risk management plan) scheduled for 2018
- A contingency fund has been set up (details of this?)
- Examine further services to e.g. pre-college level, survey of research activities in HMEI & contribute to enhancing teacher training in general education programmes

Corresponding remarks on ESG compliance, also flagged in other non-national QA agencies

(cfr. RC & review panels' decisions)

- Lack of consideration of ESG part1, when analyzing an institution's IQA (ESG 2.1)
- Lack of consistency in applying one's own criteria (ESG 2.3)
- Restricted profile of the experts involved in the reviews and/or pool of experts (ESG 2.4; IEP review, only former rectors, vice-rectors);
- No consistent use of follow-up procedures progress reports, nor follow-up evaluations (ESG 2.3)
- The voluntary nature of a review does not preclude an agency from insisting on correct procedures in the contractual conditions and requirements with a HEI (ESG 2.3)
- Methodologies fit for purpose (ESG 2.2): reviews that fail to provide adequate evidence to support the findings and conclusions (AHPGS, following complaint)
- ESG 3.3: Independence from 'founding organizations': ESG 3.5 Own Resources: formal aspects (separate legal entity) seem to matter less than operational practice (separate budget and staff), specific Terms of Reference for use of staff & support structure.
- Inadequate participation of students in all evaluation work, not only on-site visits, mainly because of few students in the experts pool (ESG 2.4; ESG 3.1)
- No publication of full review reports (ESG 2.6; CTI review, only summary which is in French)
- Absence of stakeholders' perspective in the reviews (ESG 3.6)

Note:

Issues that **have been flagged need to be addressed in the next SER for the renewal of inclusion in the Register.**

RISK/SWOT ANALYSIS**CHALLENGES/THREATS for MusiQuE:**

- Demonstrate clearly and consistently to the HMEI the 'added value' of a sector-specific approach to QA
- Link with other education sectors (secondary and VET education) in line with the EU policy on the creation of a European Education Area by 2025. (*Sorbonne Declaration, 2017*)
- Remaining legislative obstacles for cross-border QA on national levels of EU countries
- Lack of increase in joint programmes & corresponding European approach to QA & accreditation
- Lack of recognition of programmes & curriculums in arts & music education
- Increasing marketization of quality assurance with resulting loss of high QA standards
- Low commitment of national governments to the arts and culture sector
- Financial restrictions in case there is no financial or staff support from AE, EMU and PEARLE.
- Commitment for a minimum of 8 reviews per year (compared to 5 reviews in 2017) in order to be financially sustainable

OPPORTUNITIES**MusiQuE (potential for) 'good practice'**

- Assist institutional QA coordinators in writing self-evaluation reports (in 2020 only?)
- More students participating in trainings of peer reviews; inclusion of students in the Peer Reviewers Register of MusiQuE.
- Consistent provision of 'follow-up' procedures: MusiQuE's new tariff for reviews automatically contains the cost of a follow-up review (October 2017)
- Publish (short) executive summaries of review reports in English, and possibly also in the native language
- Publish press releases to announce the publication of QA review reports, and other (system)-wide reports
- Revised Framework Document 'Background, Mission and Regulations' listing all services by the agency & updated review procedures
- Bi-annual MusiQuE Trend Analyses (second installment, 2018)
- Publish Standards for Joint Programmes in line with the 'European Approach' (2018)

- Cooperation with EQ-Arts (QA agency in the Arts), in view of joint procedures for reviews
- Together with its partners AEC, EAS and EMU MusiQuE developed Standards for the review of programmes for music teacher training & for pre-college education
- Creation of a contingency fund, as a reserve for as long as the dependence on the 'founding & partner organizations' will last.
- MusiQuE strengthens the cooperation with the global partners NASM (USA) and EASPA in view of extending its activities also beyond the EHEA.
- European Summit publication (Gothenburg 2017) : education as a continuum necessitates closer links between 'sectors of education' (VET, secondary education)
- The launch of the 'European Universities' networks in 2018 (EC Communication expected for May 2018): there may be an open call for networks, next to the original idea of selecting (and financing) 20 top universities, secured with financing from the Erasmus + progr; *Joint Masters programme*.
- European Commission Progress Report on QA (April, 2018): reference to sector-specific QAA, MusiQuE given as an example

CONCLUSIONS

Renewed inclusion in EQAR, as from 2020:

Note on sector-specific agencies listed on EQAR within and outside the EHEA:

There are at this stage five QA agencies that can be called sector-specific, listed on EQAR, of which three or four (depending on the definition) can be called a national agency as well. A few more are preparing themselves to be listed on EQAR, one of which is EQ-ARTS, with whom MusiQuE has a cooperation agreement, in view of joint reviews.

All sector-specific agencies, apart from MusiQuE in 2016, have (to my knowledge) been reviewed against the former ESG (2005), which had another focus, and with less attention to issues that are now considered as relevant for the inclusion (stakeholders' involvement, SCL, attention for IQA in the institutions, etc.).

The motivations of these QAA to be listed on EQAR are, because of their status of national or regional (thus public) agency, of course contingent upon the national obligations (since Yerevan 2015), but all of them acknowledge the increased visibility this status is giving them.

In future especially *joint accreditations & reviews with national QA agencies* will most likely determine whether an EQAR-listed agency is solicited by the HMEI within the EHEA.

Draft Recommendations to the Board of MusiQuE:

The external evaluator would like to extend further recommendations under the following objectives:

Further strengthen outreach to stakeholders and the wider community:

- MusiQuE has to advocate itself as the competent tool for quality enhancement in the field of (higher) music education
- Use partner organizations as a way to promotion quality enhancement exercises (reviews, etc.) in their constituencies
- Agree on a shared 'consultancy role' with AEC, PEARLE, EMU as a means to separate assessments from enhancement practice/professional development

Enhance services and provisions for present and future 'beneficiaries' of MusiQuE :

- *In accordance with its express intention to enhance its service to current and future beneficiaries of its activities, the Board of MusiQuE should:*
 - o *develop an appropriate strategy for implementing the 'European joint programmes approach' as an individual player in the QA market for higher music education*
 - o *examine the possibility of interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary cooperation with networks of related or complementary disciplines to music education (Arts, Teacher Education, Cultural Management, etc.)*

Recognition procedures with official country authorities (Ministries, HE Councils, national QA Agencies-NQAA)

- MusiQuE has to familiarize itself with the regulatory framework of the countries in which it operates, and conclude agreements with the various authorities governing QA in those countries

Increase financial stability and sustainability:

- *The Board of MusiQuE should continue its efforts of a complete transformation of the former AEC Review Scheme into a full-fledged and sustainable agency for QA & Accreditation, on the basis of a detailed Business Plan for the next 4 years.*