

To the Board of MusiQuE

MusiQuE's External Evaluator's Report 2018-2019

Preamble

This is the **third External Evaluator's Report** based on an evaluation of the QA & related activities of Music Quality Enhancement (MusiQuE), a sector-specific European quality assurance agency, following a second mandate from the Board of MusiQuE in its meeting of 22-23 March 2018. It covers the working year 2018-2019, until the Spring Board meeting of MusiQuE on 6th May 2019, with an oral report on that occasion.

Purpose and scope of the report

According to the above mandate the purpose was three-fold:

- to assess the progress of MusiQuE, since my second evaluation and subsequent Report on MusiQuE's compliance with the ESG for QA (2017).
- to critically analyse the quality of the work of MusiQuE, on the basis of its publicly available working tools and documents, and comment on its general functioning as an organization (QA agency)
- to propose ways to raise the visibility and standing of MusiQuE among its stakeholders, the European institutions and a broad public.

In agreement with the Director of the MusiQuE Secretariat, and because the **following (fourth) External Evaluation report** was to be produced by mid-December of the current year (2019) the underlying third report only deals with the first objective (assess MusiQuE's progress since the previous EQAR review), and with the third objective (raise visibility & standing).

The second objective (analyse the work of MusiQuE) will be the subject of the next report, with a detailed analysis of a MusiQuE's activity (in this case, an external review), illustrating its impact on the 'customers' and stakeholders of MusiQuE. The two reports taken together analyze the quality of MusiQuE (as seen from an outsider's point of view) and its capacity to address the issues flagged in the 2015 external review for EQAR, and are to feed in the self-evaluation report (SER) in preparation of the 2020 external evaluation of MusiQuE, in view of its renewal on the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR).

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 MusiQuE will be subjected to another review in the course of 2020. From this follows that the issues flagged in the EQAR External Review Report (2016) need to be addressed in the next SER for the renewal of inclusion in the Register in 2020.

Points of attention, as revealed in the report of external evaluation ('peer review') in order to be listed on EQAR, and the subsequent comments of EQAR's Register Committee:

- **partial compliance** with ESG 3.1 (Stakeholders' involvement),
- **compliance** with 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).

- **partial compliance** with ESG 3.5 (Resources, financial sustainability).

Although the RC concluded that "MusiQuE **complies substantially** with the ESG as a whole" and approved the application for inclusion in the Register, according to EQAR rules, MusiQuE, is expected to address the issues that were flagged for attention in the Register Committee report of 6 June 2016, by the following external review (2020).

EXTERNAL EVALUATION REVIEW REPORT

On progress in meeting the flagged Standards in the 2016 EQAR external review report

1. 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 revised ESG, 2015.

For each of the three issues I am giving for the points that were flagged by the RC/External Review panel, followed by my remarks in the 2017 report and a description of the present state of affairs at the time of this report.

ESG 3.1 Stakeholders involvement

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

External Evaluator (2017 report):

Relax the rule of mandatory experience in accreditation/QA via the MusiQuE Reviewers Register for members of the MusiQuE Board. Appoint a PhD student or a recent graduate/alumnus from Music Higher Education, with a declared interest in quality in music education. Broaden the composition and profile of the MusiQuE Board, e. g. by adding stakeholders with a diversified profile. Broaden the scope of the experts involved in the Peer Reviewers Register of MusiQuE.

State of Affairs Spring 2019:

- The RC recommendation has been fully met, with the creation of a permanent seat in the Board reserved for a student, as from the Spring 2018 Board meeting.
- MusiQuE now has experts from the PEARLE* and EMU communities, who participate in training sessions in view of joining/ who have joined the Peer Reviewers Register.
- There are also further efforts to engage with other domains with touch points to music education (arts, cultural expression), via transdisciplinary projects and benchmarking.

ESG 3.3 Independence

RC/External Review Report recommendation:

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

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

External Evaluator (2017 report):

A narrow Board profile with too much interdependence from the founding organisations AEC, EMU, PEARLE. 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). Potential outcomes: a greater commitment of 'civil society' to the broad range of activities of MusiQuE, enhancement of visibility, and sustainability of MusiQuE. Strict and impartial arrangements to avoid a potential cause of conflict of interest for secondment of staff from AEC. Entire independence (from AEC), in terms of management, staff and resources.*

State of Affairs Spring 2019:

The Board of MusiQuE has in practice a partly rotating membership based on a close consultation with the three partner organizations AEC, PEARLE*, EMU, with delegates from a variety of different backgrounds and profiles. The majority of the six Board members are still nominated by AEC (three members), and one each by PEARLE* and EMU, which helps maintain the link with the three original founders. The statutory student Board member on the other hand is appointed following a selection process done by the Board itself. The *raison d'être* of MusiQuE still being to accompany Higher Music Institutions in their search for quality, and its enhancement, the prevalence of Heads of such entities in the main decisive management body seems justified.

Regarding the selection process for the Board, the newly revised Statutes state that the nominations by the three partner organizations are 'not binding', in the sense that they can make proposals, which the Board in function is free to follow or not, when appointing a new Board member. The appointment of the Board members thus appears to have evolved from 'binding' nominations, to a form of consultation of the Board with the partners on proposed candidates for the Board, who on their turn, when appointed, will choose their successors in consultation with their 'constituencies'. The close involvement of music & arts education in this way remains secured, whereas the Board members' profiles may vary, following trends in the sector.

As appears from agreements recently signed with AEC, the primary partner and main stakeholder organization, due care is given to have competent Board members with experience in MusiQuE review procedures, being listed on the peer-reviewers Register, while at the same time guaranteeing their autonomy towards their 'constituency'.

The current Board is this way composed of heads of HME (higher music education) institutions as well as of stakeholder organizations, who together act in full autonomy.

Similarly, peer review experts complete and sign a Conflict of Interest questionnaire and statement, which guarantees their independence.

ESG 3.5 Resources

The RC noted in its decision of 6 June 2016 that MusiQuE's sustainability remained dependent on the number of reviews it could carry out in practice in the given period (2016-2020).

External Evaluator (2017):

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

State of Affairs Spring 2019:

During its first years of operation MusiQuE relies on the financial and logistic support of the three (founding) partner organisations, EMU, PEARLE*, and AEC.

A statement was signed by the three organisations, offering their support, without impeding on MusiQuE's independence. In addition, AEC has an agreement with MusiQuE for temporary part-time staff secondment.

Concerning the recommendation to aim at complete financial independence from AEC:

- AEC staff servicing agreement for 2018-2019 signed with AEC: staff costs are paid for by AEC, with agreement to repay 50 % of cost for these seconded staff members as from 2017. This financial support is gradually being phased out, as according to the draft Business Plan 2020-2024 the reimbursement of seconded staff will reach 100 % by 2022 (now it is 80 %).
- In addition, an annual percentage is paid to AEC to cover overhead costs of the MusiQuE office, agreed at 7 % of MusiQuE's direct costs.
- MusiQuE's portfolio of activities has been extended to evaluations of research activities undertaken by HMEI; MusiQuE also offers critical friends reviews ('Critical Friends approach'), reviews for pre-college education, evaluation of classroom teaching.

Concerning the recommendation on VAT:

- With the move of the registered seat of MusiQuE to Belgium (Brussels region), the Issue with the Belgian VAT system appears to be solved.

Concerning the earlier recommendation to prepare a Business Plan over four years (including marketing strategies and a risk management plan): the Board has developed a MusiQuE Strategy Paper 2020-2025, which now clearly outlines the goals of the organization, firstly as the main provider for external quality enhancement in HME; secondly an important contributor to QA, through a subject-specific approach to quality enhancement (mainly for HMEI, but also for the wider HE community); thirdly, its procedures advocate a quality culture with respect to specific contexts; and fourthly, the further expansion and growth of MusiQuE should lead to sustainability of the organization for the benefit of the HMEI, and its stakeholders. As they rightly point out, realistic targets set for each of their accreditation and enhancement activities, and also additional consultancy services are likely to enhance MusiQuE's capacities greatly. The Budget details and prognosis provided for the period 2018-2019 are both detailed and promising, and compared to the observation in my previous EER (2017) MusiQuE has made a more thorough examination and projection of its financial structure and resources, on the basis of a 4-year Business Plan (2020-2024), which also contains a Risk Management Strategy (see under 2. Recommendations to the Board of MusiQuE, item 4).

A full budget overview for 2018-2019 is provided, and also a 4-year Business Plan 2020-2024.

Concerning the Recommendation to set up a contingency fund:

- A contingency reserve of 2 % of overall expenditure has been put aside annually
- The growing income from QA reviews and related activities may gradually do away with the need for a contingency fund.

2. Recommendations to the Board of MusiQuE:

EQAR registration renewal if MusiQuE wants to be a reference framework for music education and its quality assurance in the coming years (increase of joint programmes under joint European approach, the 2019 European Universities call with more emphasis on robust QA provisions).

In my previous report I formulated recommendations under four specific objectives, the progress of their attainment is being outlined:

- 1) **MusiQuE has to further strengthen outreach to stakeholders and the wider community**, *by advocating itself as the competent tool for quality enhancement in the field of (higher) music education; using partner organizations as a way to promote quality enhancement exercises (reviews, etc.) in their constituencies; agreeing on a shared 'consultancy role' with AEC, PEARLE*, EMU as a means to separate external reviews from professional development.*

MusiQuE will address these issues in following ways (selection):

- The ENQA webinar on a subject-specific approach is planned for 14 June 2019: the presenters will discuss, among other issues, the specificities of a subject-specific approach in quality assurance and will take a closer look at how a subject-specific agency handles thematic analysis and their relations with external stakeholders.
 - Organisation of the MusiQuE peer reviewers training session 2019, November (Torino, IT), focusing on 'Preparation, procedures and paperwork': the roles and responsibilities of peer-reviewers during MusiQuE review procedures.
 - Presenting services to AEC members during the AEC Annual Meeting for International Relations Coordinators, September 19-22, 2019 (Prague, CZ). The session entitled *MusiQuE – linking internationalisation and quality assurance* will focus on three international quality tools: International external examiners, International benchmarking and sector-specific Reviews by MusiQuE.
- 2) **Enhance services and provisions for present and future 'beneficiaries' of MusiQuE**, *by developing an appropriate strategy for implementing the 'European joint programmes approach' and through interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary cooperation with networks*

of related or complementary disciplines to music education (Arts, Teacher Education, Cultural Management, etc.).

Response:

MusiQuE started opening up to interdisciplinary work, by means of:

- A benchmarking projects with three interdisciplinary Higher Music and Arts Education Institutions, in cooperation with Uniarts Helsinki (FL);
- Benchmarking exercises with Orpheus Institute and International Opera Academy in Ghent (BE-FI);
- Fourth Trend Analysis report published in 2019: examines quality enhancement processes and accreditation procedures in the higher music education sector 2017-2018.

3) *Recognition procedures with official country authorities (Ministries, HE Councils, national QA Agencies-NQAA), by familiarizing itself even more with the regulatory framework of the countries in which it operates, and by concluding agreements with the responsible authorities.*

Response:

MusiQuE further expanded its existing cooperation on a national/country level in Institutional and Programme accreditations jointly with the respective national accreditation bodies, e.g. in Belgium (French & Flemish-speaking communities), the Netherlands, ...

4) *Greater financial stability and sustainability, by increasing both the accreditation and quality enhancement activities and by evolving into a full-fledged and sustainable agency for QA & Accreditation, on the basis of a detailed Business Plan for the next 4 years.*

Response:

MusiQuE stepped up its efforts to full independence and self-sufficiency,

- Progressively and more or less automatically, by a 75 % increase of review and enhancement activities.
- The Business Plan 2020-2024 also contains a Risk Register, an instrument to identify and manage the scope of MusiQuE's risks.

- The estimated expected income from review and enhancement activities appears realistic and results in (re)-building moderate reserves.
- A more flexible arrangement with AEC for sharing staff with AEC on a remunerative basis, allows for further expansion with some related risks, however without jeopardizing the entire financial picture of the organization.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stefan G.M. Delplace', written in a cursive style.

Stefan G.M. Delplace, external evaluator Gent (BE), December 2019