Trend Analysis Report 2019-2021

by Don McLean

About the Author

Don McLean is Professor Emeritus of Music Theory and Musicology at University of Toronto (UofT). He was awarded the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal through the Canada Council in 2012 for his "exploration of the changing context of music in the academy and society, and innovations in infrastructure development and interdisciplinary teaching and research". He served as Dean of the University's Faculty of Music from January 1, 2011 through June 30, 2021. Prior to his return to UofT he taught at McGill University from 1988–2010 and served as the Dean of its Schulich School of Music from 2001–2010.

As a research scholar, Prof. McLean is engaged in four areas: (1) Schenkerian theory and analysis, with focus on motive and hierarchy across repertoire domains, (2) music of the New Viennese School, with focus on Berg, (3) the emotional impact of music on listeners, with focus on how structural features engender emotional response, and (4) higher education in music in an evolving global context, with focus on interdisciplinary research, infrastructure development, digital media, and curricular reform. He is a frequent international keynote and conference speaker for professional and general audiences.

Trained in piano performance and pedagogy, coaching and accompanying, conducting and composition, musicology and music theory, Prof. McLean is a three-time graduate of the University of Toronto and a two-time graduate of the Royal Conservatory of Music, and taught for both institutions from 1978–1989. His masters/doctoral graduate work and subsequent research has been funded by the Canada Council, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, and the Connaught Foundation, and he was one of the first recipients of the American Musicological Society (AMS) 50 doctoral awards. He received a UofT SAC/APUS campus-wide teaching award in 1983. He completed a professional computer coding certificate in full-stack web development in 2022. His former graduate students now hold prestigious academic positions at major Canadian and international institutions, some moving on to success in other professional fields.

Professor McLean served as co-opted Council Member for the Associate Member (non-EU) Institutions of the Association of European Conservatories (AEC) from 2013–2016 and is a Peer Reviewer for MusiQuE. He has participated in over 40 programme, institutional, and curriculum review processes in Canada and around the world.

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Foreword

As a European quality assurance agency dedicated to the specific sector of music education, MusiQuE – Music Quality Enhancement (MusiQuE) is a reference for higher music education in Europe and beyond, its services being sought by many higher music education institutions.

MusiQuE is a member of ENQA (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education) and it has been registered in EQAR (European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education) since 2016. As such, MusiQuE is enabled to conduct formally recognized accreditation procedures across Europe, and publishes the reports of its trained MusiQuE Peer Review Teams on DEQAR (Database of External Quality Assurance Results). Through their in-depth exploration of the reality of institutions, and the programmes they deliver, these reports provide valuable evidence for a better understanding of the higher music education sector.

True to its mission to strengthen the music education sector, MusiQuE regularly produces a trend analysis based on the findings collected in these review reports over a period of two or three years. As with previous analyses, the Trend Analysis Report herein «cannot be taken as a comprehensive survey of the sector» (McLean, p.16, below). However, it is a work that integrates the most recent developments and challenges that European higher music education institutions have dealt with between 2019 and 2021 inclusively, thus offering the sector rich insights. This analysis is all the more valuable to the sector currently, as it recovers, like all other economic, cultural and social sectors, from two years of global health crisis and it is consequently facing an extended economic crisis.

MusiQuE commissioned Don McLean, a highly qualified expert, to write the current edition of the Trend Analysis Report. Don is exceptionally positioned to conduct such an in-depth analysis. Given his extraordinary expertise as a musicologist and researcher, and his experience as an academic leader and evaluator, Don was able to convey, from a cross-Atlantic viewpoint, an enriched and manifold perspective over the key areas that are worth further attention and targeted intervention from and across the sector.

The MusiQuE Board and Office thank him warmly for his dedication to this mission, and for the truly remarkable document he provided to MusiQuE.

I therefore hope that, in turn, you will discover this analysis with the same enthusiasm as we, its first readers, experienced.

On behalf of the MusiQuE Board,
Jacques Moreau,
Chair of the Board

A. Overview and Executive Summary of Key Trends

This trends analysis report surveys twenty four reports stemming from twenty different procedures undertaken by MusiQuE from 2019 through 2021. The goal, as commissioned, is to identify trends in the higher education music education sector, both in relation to challenges faced by institutions and successes. The analysis endeavours to identify good and/or innovative practices that can be shared with other institutions and to flag issues that could benefit from further support and/or intervention from national or regional decision-making institutions, some of which might subsequently form the basis for recommendations to the Association of European Conservatoires (AEC), the European Union (EU), or other higher-education and government quality assurance (QA) agencies.

Section A of the report, to achieve some standalone potential, provides *introductory remarks* on MusiQuE and the role of Trends Analysis reports (for MusiQuE and the EU). **Table 1** provides a *chronological list of the reviews.* General comments are made on the different *types* of reviews, including consultative visits, benchmarking exercises, and regular quality enhancement (QE) or accreditation reviews at programme or institutional level. Although the consultative visits (CV) and benchmarking exercises (BM) lie outside the scope of the regular analysis — their contents considered confidential to the institutions that commissioned them — a few general remarks on their value and focus are offered, particularly since they overlap with significant trends.

Section B of the report provides the requisite *summary overview* of 'how the performance of institutions and programmes has been assessed by the Review Teams for *each* MusiQuE standard.' A compressed summary of the MusiQuE standards is presented along with descriptions of the four Compliance Levels available to the review teams. **Table 2** provides a *synoptic overview of the evolving state of compliance* by mapping the 16 QE reviews of Table 1 onto the 17 MusiQuE standards, colour-coding the compliance levels assigned by the review teams. Used as a pivot, this setup allows each standard to be addressed on a simple statistical basis (captured in a series of *pie-charts*). The charts are followed by a selection of observations from comments in the reviews. These charts and comments summarize many key points found in the QE reviews examined. However, a more synthetic approach is needed to capture *Key Trends* that cut across and move beyond the litany of standards. More detailed discussion of these trends is provided in Section B.3 below. The Key Trends are listed briefly here together with related recommendations.

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Key Trends

0. The Pandemic: impact, institutional responses, future implications
1. The State of QE/QA and related organizational & communications issues
2. Diversity and diversification: the changing global environment
3. Students: student-centredness—engagement, feedback, support
4. Curriculum: continuing & evolving issues
5. Staff and resources: professional development, space & technology

Key Trends: brief descriptions and recommendations

0. The Pandemic: its impact, institutional responses, and future implications

The global COVID-19 pandemic (from March 2020 onwards) has had profound impact on higher education, the arts, and society as a whole. It is 'ground zero' and 'trend zero'. Its broader health and socioeconomic realities have been devastating. Its impact on the MusiQuE review process and wider implications for the sector are discussed further in Section B.3.

Recommendation: that MusiQuE work with other higher education agencies and arts organizations to make the pandemic — its impact and institutional responses — the subject of data-informed critical analysis, and that various pathways are considered to share information and best practices forward across the network.

1. The state of Quality Enhancement (QE), Quality Assurance (QA), and related organizational and communications issues

MusiQuE and the review teams are to be commended for their focus on QE, working with the reviewees in the manner of 'critical friends' in conducting the reviews and writing their reports. There is now widespread recognition and realization of the value of articulating institutional (and programme) mission and vision (standard 1), the main challenges remaining the need to develop implementations and roadmaps to ensure success. The ultimate goal is to embed QE and mandated QA exercises within the institutional fabric of an IQC (Internal Quality Culture). The challenges of achieving a strong IQC are often associated with concerns about the effectiveness of internal communications (standard 6.1) and the appropriateness of the local organizational structure to ensure clear decision-making processes (standard 6.2). (See Section B.3 for details.)

Recommendations: *organizational and communications structures* and their ongoing impact on IQC would be a useful topic for best-practices discussion at sector level. (Related to this is the ongoing trend towards institutional *mergers* — the main subject of BM#1 — and their far-reaching implications for organizational change and stakeholder challenges.) Also useful would be examples of best-practices in articulating missions and goals that are distinctively inspiring *and* demonstrably operational.

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2. Diversity and Diversification: the changing global environment

In the global context of *diversity* considerations, *it is surprising that the word "diversity" is (to date) entirely absent from the MusiQuE standards.* (See Section B.3 for detailed discussion.) The recent reports from MusiQuE also reflect significant *diversification.* Reviews now regularly extend to institutions far beyond the EU and to disciplines other than music: dance, theatre, visual arts. Thus, MusiQuE's review activities have become both more *international* and more *interdisciplinary*, reflecting the emerging trend towards interdisciplinary and collaborative work.

Recommendations: it is imperative that MusiQuE incorporate *diversity* expectations into its compliance standards and institutional guidelines so that these issues may be 'raised to consciousness' and appropriate actions can be taken across the sector. Further opportunities would also be welcome to expand *diversification* through interdisciplinary discussions, and reflections on creative opportunities that can evolve within the ongoing shift towards globalization.

3. Students: student-centredness—engagement, feedback, support

Over a period of several years (perhaps several decades at this point) there has been a growing recognition of students' position at (and as) the centre of the academy. A significant corollary of that trajectory is the expectation for increased *engagement* of students in curricular and organizational (governance) matters. In many institutions the detail and quality of evaluation feedback is still evolving, the connection between Learning Outcome (LOs) and assessment needing to be more transparent for all stakeholders. Expectations for more robust *student services,* including mental health and well-being assistance and anti-harassment education, have become central.

Recommendations: More work linking LOs to assessment procedures needs to be done, perhaps in the form of workshops focused on those issues. Best practices in engaging students in governance need to continue to be shared. Institutions and sector support organizations should recommend and implement training in harassment prevention and unconscious bias across their communities. Institutions should prioritize health and well-being for their students, staff, and faculty members by establishing policies and procedures that provide paths of empathetic confidential support, and by embedding physical and mental health concerns within and beyond the curriculum.

4. Curriculum: continuing & evolving issues

The fundamental premise of QE means that curriculum issues — the educational processes that ensure delivery of programmes, opportunities for international experience, and assessment — are always continuing to evolve. Several rubrics continue to emerge: artistic identity, independent critical thinking, artistic research and professional

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outcomes, learning outcomes and clear links to assessment, interdepartmental, interdisciplinary, interinstitutional, and international efforts.

Recommendations: There is very little new here. However, it seems, there is still a need for ongoing best-practice discussions. MusiQuE should continue to support QE in these curricular areas.

5. Staff and resources: professional development, space & technology

The need for additional *professional development*, supported by improved HR policies and resource allocations, is central. Teaching staff still need greater encouragement and support to develop their personal profiles in practice-based *artistic research* and pedagogical study. *Staff mobility*, through Erasmus and other agencies, is often underutilized and opportunities for personal growth and institutional perspective consequently missed. *Part-time professional staff* play a central role in reputation and programme delivery for most institutions, and finding opportunities to engage them in IQC and curricular discussions is a critical component of building community. The work of *support staff* is highly valued and the need also to foster professional development is noted. Most reviews react positively to the physical and technological *facilities* made available to ensure program delivery as well as public profile, with advocacy support proffered where needed. The pandemic required rapid deployment of additional *IT and Audio-Visual (AV) resources* for online learning, which will need to be expanded and maintained going forward.

Recommendations: *professional development* needs for academic *and* support staff would profit from sharing of best-practice. *Artistic research* (including advanced pedagogical study) should continue to be a central focus for ongoing development across the sector. *Space and IT/AV* issues seldom mature for discussion at the sectoral level, but keeping higher-level institutional and governmental agencies aware of what excellence means, and what it can deliver, is a useful thing: making these topics the subject of exchange and dialogue is advisable. The post-pandemic emerging hybrid of in-person and remote/online activities should become a focus for thematic discussion, both for its curricular and institutional resources implications and for its impact on considerations of travel and climate change.

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B. MusiQuE Trend Analysis Report 2022

1. MusiQuE at a glance and the Trends Analysis in context

MusiQuE

"MusiQuE is a recognised European independent accreditation and external evaluation body for music, contributing to the continuous improvement of the quality of higher music education across Europe and beyond. Its operations are underpinned by independent, skilled and authoritative international peers. MusiQuE operates according to the Standards and Guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) and is registered on the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR). MusiQuE's work is discipline-specific and aims to be characterized by flexibility, diversity, transparency and accountability in its treatment of quality enhancement in music. Through its accreditation, quality enhancement and advisory services, MusiQuE assists higher music education institutions, across Europe and further afield, in their enhancement of quality."

—*MusiQuE Strategy Paper 2020–2025*, 2022.03.10, p.2

Trends Analysis

Internal Context: From MusiQuE's 2019/2022.03.03 *Internal Regulations*: 11 Public interaction, 11.1 Trend Analysis, p.62. "The most important public interaction in terms of content is through the period[ic] analysis of trends carried out by MusiQuE. This trend analysis is just one of the many elements that are put into the public domain through the use of the MusiQuE website, newsletters and other modes of communication. Every two years an individual well experienced in higher music education, and in quality assurance activities within this sector, is commissioned to produce a trend analysis. This analysis uses samples of MusiQuE review reports (all types of procedures) and focuses on identifying trends in the recommendations expressed by the Review Teams and how the performance of institutions and programmes has been assessed by these teams for each MusiQuE standard."

External Context: The MusiQuE trends analysis procedure is based on Standard 3.4 of the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESGs): "Agencies should regularly publish reports that describe and analyse the general findings of their external quality assurance activities. [...] A thorough and careful analysis of this information will show developments, trends and areas of good practice or persistent difficulty." (2015:3.4, p.23 available *here*).

The present document provides a "trends analysis" (as defined by the documents cited above) based on general findings of procedures conducted by MusiQuE between 2019 and 2021. [**See Table 1** below].

#	Report	Institution	Location	Type of Review
1	2019.06.20	Kurmangazy Kazakh National Conservatory (KKNC)	Almaty, KZ	Programme Accreditation (follow-up procedure)
2	2019.10.30	Royal Conservatoire, University of the Arts (KC)	The Hague, NL	Programme Accreditation BA Dance (jointly with NVAO)
BM1	2019.11.20	Uniarts Helsinki	Helsinki, FI	Benchmarking
3	2019.12.16	Zürcher Hochschule der Künste (ZHdK)	Zurich, CH	Programme QE BAM BAMM MA MAperf (EQ-Arts)
4	2020.01.08	Yong Sieh Toh Conservatory of Music (YST)	Singapore, SG	Institutional QE
5	2020.05.11	Conservatorium Maastricht (CM)	Maastricht, NL	Programme Accreditation MM (jointly with NVAO)
6	2020.05.12	Karol Lipinski Academy of Music (KLAM)	Wroclaw, PL	Institutional Accreditation
7	2020.05.20	College of Music, Mahidol University (CoM)	Salaya, TH	Programme Accreditation MM & MA
8	2020.06.03	Faculty of Music, University of Arts	Belgrade, RS	Institutional QE
9	2020.06.22	Haute École Spécialisée de Suisse Occidentale	Geneva, CH	Programme QE BA BAMM (HES-SO)
10	2020.06.30	Janacek Academy of Music & Performing Arts (JAMU), Faculty of Theatre	Brno, CZ	Institutional QE (jointly with EQ-Arts)
11	2020.07.03	JAMU, Faculty of Music	Brno, CZ	Institutional QE
12	2020.09.11	Faculty of Music & Musicology, Université Antonine	Beirut, LB	Programme Accreditation BA & MA in Music & Musicology
BM2	2020.11.09	Orpheus Institute (OI)	Ghent, BE	Benchmarking
BM3	2020.12.01	International Opera Academy (IOA)	Ghent, BE	Benchmarking
CV	2021.06.14	Jazeps Vitols Latvian Academy of Music (JVLMA)	Riga, LV	Consultative Visits (5 departmental reports)
13	2021.07.08	Royal Conservatoire Antwerp, School of Arts (RCA)	Antwerp, BE	Programme QE BA Dance
14	2021.07.16	Royal Academy of Fine Arts	Antwerp, BE	Programme QE BA & MA Visual Arts (jointly with EQ-Arts)
15	2021.11.26	College of Music, Mahidol University (CoM)	Salaya, TH	Programme Accreditation DM & PhD
16	2021.12.20	Royal Conservatoire, University of the Arts (KC)	The Hague, NL	Programme MM & MSonology (jointly with NVAO)

Table 1. List of MusiQuE Reviews 2019–2021

Table 1 provides a list of the MusiQuE Reviews covered in this trends analysis. The table is ordered chronologically by report date (site visit dates, whether in person or online, occur earlier), showing the relevant institution and geographical location, and the type of review. The first column (**#**) is only for ease of reference. It will be noted that additional items are inserted chronologically between reports #2 and #3, and #12 and 13. These insertions represent three Benchmarking Exercises (BM1, BM2, BM3) and a group of five

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departmental-level consultative visit reports (CV). BM and CV documents are considered confidential to the institutions that commission them and are therefore referenced only in a general way in this analysis where their contents resonate with other trends. [See CV and BM discussion below.] The sixteen remaining reports are labelled as "regular Quality Enhancement (QE) reviews" even though their level of formality may vary: eleven of those focus on particular programmes (#1, #2, #3, #5, #7, #9, #12, #13, #14, #15, #16) and five take place at the institutional level (#4, #6, #8, #10, #11). [See QE Reviews discussion below.]

MusiQuE's services and approach

The different types of services offered by MusiQuE form a kind of arc: from informal to formal, locally confidential to publicly posted, limited scope to comprehensive overview, moving obliquely from consultative visits reports to benchmarking exercises, through programme and institutional quality enhancement reviews to accreditation processes (for institutions, programmes, and joint-programmes).

The fundamental approach of MusiQuE is always oriented towards quality enhancement (QE): critical, yet collegial, engagement with stakeholders with a view to the gradual and continual improvement of artistic and educational experience and outcomes, and the *enhancement of the discipline as a whole*. Supported by the MusiQuE office, the process involves the coordination of international external expertise (in the spirit of the *'supportive critical friend'*), institutional leadership, staff and students, and administrative support. More narrowly, although 'quality control' [QC] concerns sometimes arise in the course of the reviews, these largely pertain to systems management (IT, admissions and assessment data, etc.).

At the more formal end, MusiQuE serves as the quality assurance (QA) agent in various requisite national and international reviews. These may involve bilateral collaborations with national QA and accreditation agencies within the ESGs process. Among the reviews covered in this trends analysis, those in the Netherlands (#2, #5, and #16) were undertaken in conjunction with the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (Nederlands-Vlammse Accreditatie Organisatie) [NVAO]). And one of the Swiss institutions (#9) used its own quite extensive evaluation criteria (Critères d'Évaluation des Filières d'Études HES-SO). In these cases, the MusiQuE office undertakes considerable effort to map and coordinate the received national/institutional standards with the MusiQuE standards. Reviews in disciplines other than music, specifically in theatre (#10) and visual arts (#14) — though not for dance (#2, #13) — as well as those for music programmes embedded within a larger Swiss multidisciplinary arts institution (#3), were done in collaboration with the EQ-Arts.

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Consultative Visits [CV]. Different discipline-specific MusiQuE reviewers worked with *five* departments within the Jazep Vitols Latvian Academy of Music in Riga, LV: Voice; Jazz; Music Performance and Instruments; Conducting, Composition and Music Theory; and Choreography. The service was tailor-made to complement the institution's internal QE processes , and focused on the departmental level of programmes to bring a more content-driven (less QA abstract) conversation to bear in reviewing their current state and imagining future directions. This kind of service can be a prelude to, or an iteratively embedded exercise within, regular QE reviews. The results of these consultative visits are confidential to the institution involved. Nonetheless, it may be valuable to note that these conversations often broach many of the dialogues found throughout the network of higher music education institutions and represented in the regular QE reviews.

Benchmarking Exercises [BM]. MusiQuE assisted in the coordination of three Benchmarking Exercises during the period under analysis. MusiQuE's website provides information on its [coordination of BMs](#), which lie outside the scope of ESGs. In each BM, the principal institution and three comparator institutions respond to extensive and detailed questionnaires. The resultant data is then gathered and analysed by MusiQuE experts, with secretarial and administrative support, and (where possible) site visits to the four institutions are set up. An analysis report concludes the process, the results (including the questionnaire data) of which are shared with the participating institutions.

Although the contents of BM exercises are confidential to the institutions, it is useful to identify the purpose and focus of each. Indeed, each BM review centres, respectively, on an important 'key trend' in the music higher education sector: mergers, artistic research, and transitional professional training.

BM#1 principal institution: Uniarts Helsinki, FI; comparator institutions: Academy of Music and Drama, University of Gothenburg (AMD); Bern University of the arts (BUA); Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (RCS). The main purpose BM#1 was to consider the immediate and longer-term impact of major organizational *mergers* on the participant institutions. All are at different stages of evolution and with different institutional and national contexts and many challenges, successes, and valuable collegial advice is shared, notably also through a public seminar for this BM project. Nonetheless, the phenomenon of institutionally and governmentally driven mergers is a key and ongoing trend in higher education, and the sharing of expertise and experience extremely valuable in optimising response and strategic action in a changing world.

BM#2 principal institution: Orpheus Institute (OI), Ghent, BE; comparator institutions (sub-institutions/programmes): Doctoral School for Artistic Research (KWDS), University of Music and Performing Arts (KUG), Graz, OS; Queensland Conservatorium Research Centre (QCRC), Griffith University, Brisbane, AU; Research and Knowledge Exchange Department (RKED), Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (RCS). The main purpose of BM#2

was to consider the design and delivery of *artistic (practice-based) research* in several programme, department, and institutional contexts. The report summary comments briefly on institutional character and research profile, distinctive differences in size, and international connections. Artistic research is key and ongoing trend in higher education in music and the arts. Its place in the future development of the field as well as its presence in QE processes remains of critical importance.

BM#3 principal institution: International Opera Academy (IOA), Ghent, BE; comparator institutions (programmes): School of Vocal Studies and Opera, Royal Northern College of Music (RNCM), Manchester, UK; Department of Opera, Stockholm University of the Arts (UniArts), Stockholm, SE; Stuttgart Opera Institute, University of Music and Performing Arts, Stuttgart, DE. The main purpose of BM#3 was to consider the design and implementation of professional opera training programmes. While the questionnaires used in BM exercises carried out by MusiQuE are built on the basis of the MusiQuE Standards for Programme Review, a notable addition from IOA was a chapter on *"Safety, wellbeing and prevention"* which addresses some very important current issues of great student and institutional concern. Although not the central element in the exercise, the section identifies a key trend in higher education in music and the arts, and, indeed, in society as a whole.

Regular Quality Enhancement (QE) Reviews. The 16 'regular QE reviews' shown in Table 1 form the bulk of the more detailed trends analysis by MusiQuE standards, below. Whether the reviews are programme-specific, institutional level, or directed to accreditation, the report formats and review processes have become fairly standard. Following a Self-Evaluation Report (SER) generated by the institution based on MusiQuE's Guidelines for Institutions, a review team of international experts (with peer review guidelines, codes of conduct, and administrative support) reviews the SER, makes a site visit to assess matters in situ and to engage in dialogue with all available stakeholders (administration, faculty, students, support staff, alumni, external professionals and community members), and writes a final report gauging compliance levels for each MusiQuE standard along with comments and recommendations.

Once approved by the MusiQuE Board, the report is formally shared with the institution and published on MusiQuE's website and on the Database of External Quality Assurance Results (DEQAR). The 16 QE reports form the main basis of the *trends analysis by standards* below. They largely follow a typical format with framing introduction and conclusion, and sections of commentary on each MusiQuE standard. These sections will reference the SER, the site visit and discussions, assess the levels of compliance with each standard, and provide comments on strengths (including commendations of good practices) and recommendations/suggestions for improvement. They are often complemented by numerous appendices that

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supply an overview of the documents studied by the review team, the site visit schedule, methodological details related to the procedure, etc. An appended tabular overview of the MusiQuE standards and assessed levels of compliance with comments provides a helpful summary, though it does not obviate the value of much useful detail in the body of the review.

In order to set up the comparative trends analysis, a highly abbreviated recap of MusiQuE Standards and Compliance Levels is warranted.

MusiQuE Standards (8 Domains, 17 Standards)

1: Institutional Mission, Vision and Context

The institutional mission and *vision* are clearly stated.

2: Educational Processes

2.1: The goals of the institution are achieved through the content and structure of the *study programmes* and their methods of delivery

2.2: The institution offers a range of opportunities for students to gain an *international* perspective.

2.3: *Assessment* methods are clearly defined and demonstrate achievement of learning outcomes.

3: Student Profiles

3.1: Clear *admissions* criteria exist, which establish artistic/academic suitability of students.

3.2: The institution has mechanisms to formally *monitor and review* the progression, achievement and subsequent employability of its students.

4: Teaching Staff

4.1: Members of the teaching staff are *qualified* for their role and are active as artist/pedagogues/researchers.

4.2: There are *sufficient* qualified teaching staff to effectively deliver the programmes.

5: Facilities, Resources and Support

5.1: The institution has (partner institutions have) appropriate *resources* [space and equipment] to support student learning and delivery of the programme.

5.2: The institution's *financial* resources (financial resources of the partner institutions) enable successful delivery of the study programmes.

5.3: The institution has sufficient qualified *support staff*.

6: Communication, Organisation and Decision-making

6.1: Effective mechanisms are in place for *internal communication* within the institution.

6.2: The institution has an appropriate *organisational structure* and clear decision-making processes.

7: Internal Quality Culture

The institution has a strong internal *quality culture*, supported by clear and effective quality assurance and enhancement procedures.

8: Public Interaction

8.1: The institution *engages* within wider cultural, artistic and educational *contexts*

8.2: The institution actively *promotes links* with various sectors of the music and other artistic professions

8.3 *Information* provided to the *public* about the institution is clear, consistent and accurate.

Note: my italics highlight selected keyword(s) as an abbreviated mnemonic.

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Compliance Levels

MusiQuE's *Internal Regulations* (8.1.2, p.51) define the **compliance levels** used by reviewers:

• **Fully compliant (FC):** A standard is fully compliant when the approaches, structures or mechanisms relevant to that standard are fully implemented in a coherent and consistent way

• **Substantially compliant (SC):** A standard is substantially compliant when the standard is in place, while minor weaknesses have been observed but the manner of implementation is most effective. In such cases Review Teams are asked to include a recommendation as to how full compliance can be achieved.

• **Partially compliant (PC):** A standard is partially compliant when the standard is in place, while significant weaknesses have been observed or the manner of implementation is not sufficiently effective. In such cases Review Teams are asked to include a recommendation as to how full compliance can be achieved or a condition.

• **Not compliant (NC):** A standard is not compliant when the approaches, structures or mechanisms relevant to that standard are lacking or implemented inadequately. In such cases Review Teams are asked to include a strong recommendation or a condition.

Note: 'conditions' are only formulated in accreditation reports. When conditions are determined, a follow-up report will be undertaken to address issues raised. For example, this is the purpose of the 2019 follow-up report (#1) on the Kurmangazy Kazakh National Conservatory (KKNC). The original report 2017.07.14 granted accreditation to 1st cycle programmes but conditional accreditation to 2nd and 3rd cycle programmes. The follow-up determines that the three conditions — concerning artistic research policy, AEC learning outcomes, overarching documentation with statistical data, programme operations, etc. — had now largely been met, and aligns them with a review of the MusiQuE standards (most now 'fully compliant') though with various further recommendations, particularly in the areas of internationalization (exchanges and English language competence, 2.2) and assessment of learning outcomes (written feedback and external juries, 2.3), which standards were now deemed 'substantially compliant'.

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2. Trends Analysis by Standards

As was noted in Section A. above – Overview and Executive Summary of Key Trends, **Table 2** provides a *synoptic overview of the evolving state of compliance* by mapping the 16 QE reviews of **Table 1** onto the 17 MusiQuE standards, colour-coding the compliance levels assigned by the review teams. Used as a pivot, this allows each standard to be addressed on a simple statistical basis (captured in a series of pie-charts) as well as through the synthesis of observations from comments in the reviews.

Standards

Reviews	1	2.1	2.2	2.3	3.1	3.2	4.1	4.2	5.1	5.2	5.3	6.1	6.2	7	8.1	8.2	8.3
#1																	
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#12																	
#13																	
#14																	
#15																	
#16																	

Compliance Levels:

Fully Compliant		194 of 272	71%
Substantially Compliant		54 of 272	20%
Partly Compliant		24 of 272	9%
Not Compliant		24 of 272	0%
			100

Table 2. Synoptic overview of standards / compliance levels

Table 2 supplies the reference number # (column 1) and the list of 16 regular QE programme/institution reviews (column 2). The remaining columns show the heading number of the 17 MusiQuE standards. A total of 272 boxes is available in the 16 x 17 grid. The compliance levels are colour-coded as follows:

• Fully Compliant (FC): dark green,

• Substantially Compliant (SC): light green,

• Partially Compliant (PC): light brown, and

• Not Compliant (NC): red.

A cursory overview of the Table shows that the majority of findings are FC (194 of 272 = 71%), followed by SC (54 of 272 = 20%), with relatively few PC (24 of 272 = 9%), and no instances of NC findings in these reports.

Overall, the high success in compliance reflects the thorough preparation of the institutions in assembling their Self-Evaluation Reports, and the QE-focused dialogue and follow-up with the review teams. For the present purpose, the valuable aspect of Table 2 is not *who* receives various assessments of compliance in which standards, but *how* compliance evolves overall in the QE process: what the current state of different standards (read by column) is in the opinions of the review teams, and what future directions for enhancement should entail. A further caveat must recognize that the 'set' of reviews is itself an artificial and arbitrary sample, merely the collection of MusiQuE documents produced within the timeframe of this analysis. It does not, indeed cannot, be taken as a comprehensive survey of the sector, beyond the level of snapshot.

The presentation of each standard, below, begins with a 'pie-chart' that captures its relative levels of compliance. Findings of FC do not preclude additional (sometimes quite extensive) comments from the review teams: 'good-practices' are identified and commended, and further ideas for enhancements are offered. SC and PC findings are accompanied by more detailed analyses and recommendations for steps that would need to be taken as follow-up to move to FC. To the extent that such information forms 'trendlines' of successes and challenges *within* the standards, some further comments are made below.

Summary overview of compliance levels for each MusiQuE standard

S1: *Institutional Mission, Vision and Context*

The institutional mission and *vision* are clearly stated.

1: Mission, Vision, Context
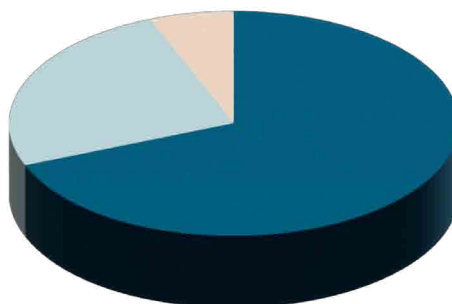

FC 69%, SC 25%, PC 6%.

Standard 1 is the departure point and critical defining standard for QE. Most institutions have now embraced strategic planning, and the articulation of mission, vision, and goals for their distinctive context. It is still a difficult process, one that requires the open engagement of all stakeholders to be successful. The importance of student-centredness and the development of artistic identity remains key. As one student stated: "We come to conservatories not just because we are good at *something*, but because we want to become *someone*." Where the overall vision is well-articulated, it permeates the institution and the buy-in from most stakeholders is evident.

Recent use of MusiQuE's less formal 'critical friends' procedures at the departmental level, and their iteration and roll-up at programme and institutional levels is to be highly recommended. In SC cases, reviewers emphasized the need to articulate clear, achievable targets, and priorities. Institutions with very large international student populations were also encouraged to expand their non-EU perspectives, a more general globalization strategy also emerging on other fronts. In the PC situation, the problems mostly arose from 'version control' issues, with the strategic plan still underdeveloped, and the distinction between present state and future vision, including the capture of internationalization ambitions, confusing. In all cases, reviewers made appropriate suggestions for improvements in the context of ongoing QE.

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S2: Educational Processes

2.1: The goals of the institution are achieved through the content and *structure* of the study *programmes* and their methods of *delivery*

2.1: Programme Structure & Delivery
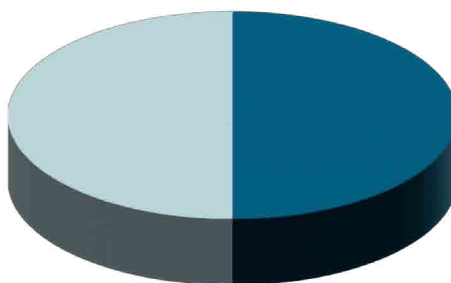
FC 50% and SC 50%

Reviewers are 50–50 in their assessment of this most central standard for programme content and delivery. Standard 2.1 is probably the most varied and complex consideration in the review process. The one-to-one relationship between students and teachers remains a defining feature of higher education in the arts. Yet, recommendations of balancing group work with individual lessons are becoming normal, given their evident value for improved learning outcomes. An important aspect of the shift to student-centred learning is the goal to develop individual artistic identity, critical thinking, and professional opportunities.

Most institutions, being part of the MusiQuE process, are working with some form of the AEC learning outcomes (LOs) to structure their programmes. Early adopters of the LO process (going back to the Polifonia/Dublin Descriptors) are now often quite advanced in their programme content and delivery, as well as its link to assessment procedures. That said, one review team noted that the occasional tendency to over-document and over-complicate LO descriptions can create a countereffect. In FC and also SC cases, recommendations for improvements often focus on achieving better communications among all stakeholders (students, teaching and support staff, administration) so that full 'buy-in' to artistic and academic goals can occur.

Artistic research is very much a continuing central theme in higher education discussions, although it tends to get rather short shrift as a (mere) component of standard 2.1. Reviews confirm its importance by acknowledging best practice in some institutions and encouraging more refined development of practice-based artistic, as well as pedagogical, research. It is always a topic for discussion, though one still slow to

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mature in some places. The impact of the pandemic on programme delivery has been profound, the restrictions on in-person teaching and performance only partially offset by the rapid deployment of upgraded online resources and creative workarounds for ongoing engagement.

2.2: The institution offers a range of opportunities for students to gain an *international* perspective.

## 2.2: International Perspective
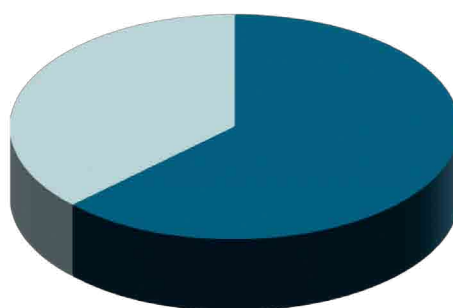
FC 63%, SC 37%

International perspective remains a fundamental intention of the higher education sector as a whole and, given its cultural implications, of the arts sector in particular. Reviewers found 63% of the programmes/institutions FC. Several institutions were commended for their focus on developing regional alliances by taking into account geographical and culture opportunities. The importance of English language competence, though sometimes overly worried, remains key to many wider international experiences. For some SC cases, this is also a recurrent issue in admissions expectations regarding language of instruction. Specific projects have developed 'good practice' by focusing on inclusivity across the institution and in the community.

Further opportunities to draw global perspectives from interactions among the many international students enrolled in the programmes are encouraged. The pandemic had an obvious deleterious effect on mobility. Workarounds necessitated investment in various creative online and hybrid solutions. (Going forward, concerns about sustainability are emerging. See B.4 – Concluding Remarks, below.)

2.3: *Assessment* methods are clearly defined and demonstrate achievement of learning outcomes.

2.3: Assessment
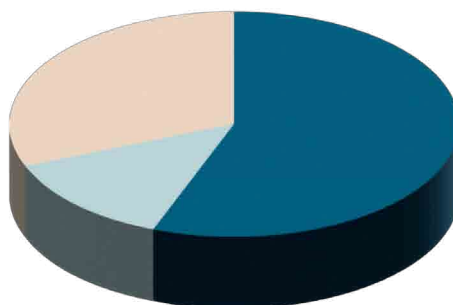
FC 56%, SC 13%, PC 31%

Although over half of the reviews were deemed FC for standard 2.3, there remains a need for continuous vigilance concerning assessment procedures. When things are working well, the assessment methods, procedures, and criteria are precisely and thoroughly described and documented, and students — as well as teachers — are well informed about them. Several institutions are cited for their good practices in this regard. The methods used are effective and appropriate when assessing the stated LOs. Self-assessment as part of the portfolio approach is commended as a way to ensure that students reflect on the growth of their own artistic identity.

In other cases, inconsistencies in assessment procedures across and between programs are noted. (See also, comments regarding handbooks and supervision in 3.2, below.) In particular, thorough mapping of assessment criteria against intended LOs is often lacking, which results in gaps (or duplications) in assessment coverage. In cases where policies and procedures are not yet fully embedded in the programme/institutional culture, the need for regular discussion of LOs and related assessment criteria among stakeholders is emphasized. These exchanges may involve focus groups, surveys, etc.

Formalized written feedback, including reports from external examiners, is often lacking and should be linked to assessment criteria and intended LOs.

Understandably, during the pandemic, all institutions needed to review their assessment procedures and find workarounds for evolving health restrictions.

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S3: Student Profiles

3.1: Clear *admissions* criteria exist, which establish artistic/academic suitability of students.

3.1: Student Admission Criteria
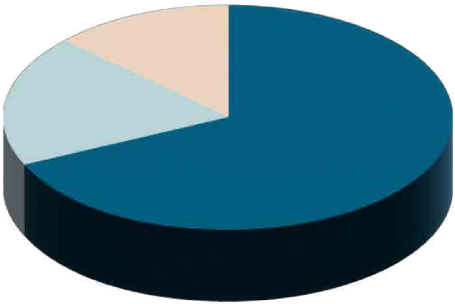
FC 69%, SC 19%, PC 13%

Most admissions criteria are deemed FC by the review teams. The differences between those institutions and programmes that are mostly national and those that are targeted at international students can be significant. The importance of student motivation as well as achievement to-date in assessing qualification for admission to programmes was commended. The significant financial differentials for domestic and foreign students in some jurisdictions receive relatively little treatment from reviewers, mostly as they are matters for advocacy with the relevant parent institutions and governments.

In SC and PC cases, reviews cite the need for more clarity of admission expectations for different sub-programmes (performance, composition, education, etc.). Some incipient reporting is done on plans to accommodate applicants with physical disabilities (an important element in wider expectations for diversity). The impact of the pandemic on admissions (3.1), student progress, and employability (3.2) has yet to be fully assessed.

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3.2: The institution has mechanisms to formally *monitor and review* the progression, achievement and subsequent employability of its students.

3.2: Student Monitoring Progression
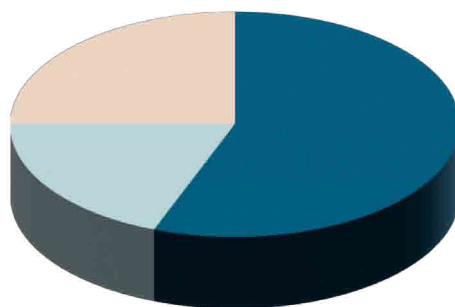
FC 56%, SC 19%, PC 25%

Just over half of the institutions are deemed FC with this sometimes complex and multifaceted standard. The expectations for monitoring students within the programme are often met, but the *data* on end-of-programme achievement and subsequent employability is often lacking. Alumni surveys are recommended where they are not already in place.

Internships and community projects are suggested as ways of bridging the gap between the academy and the profession.

These institutional habits and data processes are worth sharing at the sectoral level to help develop best-practices.

Even in FC cases, the need for better (particularly upper-cycle) handbooks (e.g. student study guidelines, teaching staff evaluation guidelines, etc.) and regular supervisory contact was raised. And there are sometimes disparities between assessment quality and procedures across various subdisciplines; e.g., academic vs performance, music vs other specializations. (Some of this information pertains to 2.3 Assessment above, even though it was reported by reviewers in relation to the way student progress is being monitored across the programme(s).)

On the longitudinal end, one institution was commended for "creating a culture of caring for the students and their professional progression, as well as keeping close contact with alumni and acknowledging them as an important part of the [institutional] identity and community." On the other hand, there are still some cases where there remains "significant resistance to the use of metrics in QA" altogether.

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S4: Teaching Staff

4.1: Members of the teaching staff are *qualified* for their role and are active as artist/ pedagogues/researchers.

4.1: Staff: Qualifications
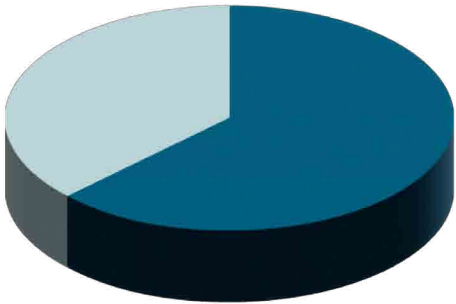
FC 63%, SC 37%

Most teaching staff members are eminently qualified for their roles and are active as artists/pedagogues/researchers. Some institutions were commended for their deft collaborations between external working artists and internal qualified teachers. In SC cases, ongoing developments to improve peer dialogue around pedagogy and to utilize resources from institutional education specialists were recommended. As well, the need for greater English language competency was referenced in some institutions, given its value in internationalization.

4.2: There are *sufficient* qualified teaching staff to effectively deliver the programmes.

4.2: Staff: Sufficient Numbers
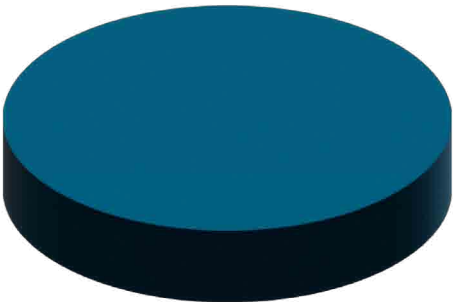
FC 100%

Remarkably, all review teams found teaching staff numbers of sufficient quantity to deliver the programmes. (Although such a finding of 'sufficiency' is undisruptive to the programme/institutional status quo, it is difficult to think that the need for more staff in some strategic areas would not be a common concern for many organizations.) Additional recommendations concerned the need for better gender equity, strategic recruitment, and succession planning.

S5: *Facilities, Resources and Support*

5.1: The institution has (partner institutions have) appropriate *resources* [space and equipment] to support student learning and delivery of the programme.

## 5.1: Resources (Facilities: space, IT, library)
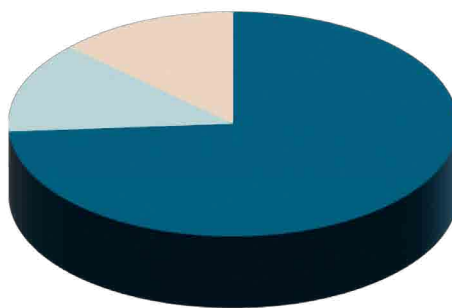
FC 74%, SC 13%, PC 13%

In general, review teams find the space and equipment resources adequate to the quality delivery of programmes and therefore find them FC. In the SC and PC cases, shortfalls in studio space and/or scheduling problems are acknowledged. Some major infrastructure renewals are pending, a fact noted optimistically by the reviewers. A couple of newer institutions are commended for their extraordinary facilities. The pandemic created immediate needs for upgrading IT and Audio-Video infrastructure in many institutions, needs which are unlikely to diminish going forward.

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5.2: The institution's *financial* resources (financial resources of the partner institutions) enable successful delivery of the study programmes.

5.2: Resources (Financial)
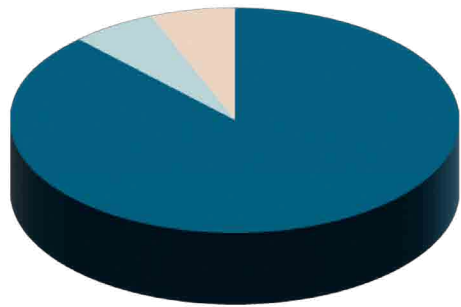
FC 88%, SC 6%, PC 6%

In general, review teams feel that financial resources, though vastly different from one institution to another, are adequate for the quality delivery of programmes, and therefore find them FC. SC and PC levels note systemic government underfunding and other pressures on resources. Alternative, including philanthropic, sources are encouraged.

5.3: The institution has sufficient qualified *support staff.*

5.3: Resources (Support Staff)
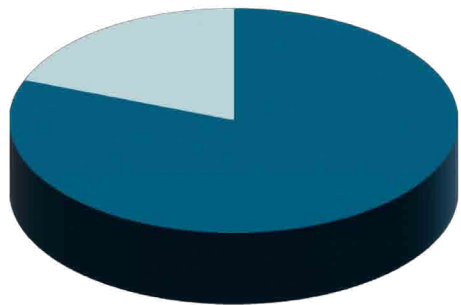

FC 81%, SC 19%

Reviewers regularly praise *support staff* for being "committed, dedicated, efficient, and engaged". *They are clearly one of the major assets of most institutions.* A recurrent recommendation for support staff was to increase opportunities for professional development, including opportunities for increasing specialized skills.

In SC cases, the reviews acknowledge that "administrative support is already stretched, and this has been exacerbated by COVID circumstances." General institutional financial distress can also contribute to overburdening support staff where they are too few in number.

S6: Communication, Organisation and Decision-making

6.1: Effective mechanisms are in place for *internal communication* within the institution.
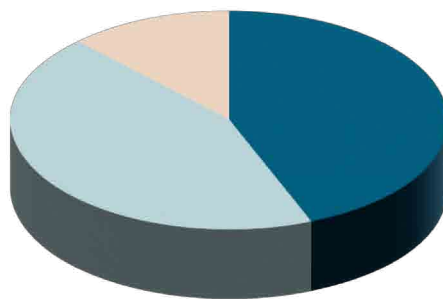
6.1: Internal Communication
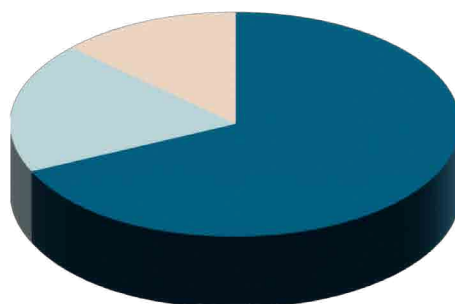
FC 69%, SC 19%, PC 13%

Most reviews find internal communications FC with the standard. Some Quality Control (QC) issues with respect to information and data keeping systems arose. In the SC and PC cases, suggestions to develop a comprehensive information strategy, to develop ethical guidelines for communications between students and teachers (with appropriate protocols in place), and to establish activities (and spaces) for students to meet and collaborate were most notable. The need to involve students in the evaluation of teaching remains under development in some places. The pandemic highlighted structural gaps in communications since institutions found their often informal in-person habits compromised.

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6.2: The institution has an appropriate *organisational structure* and clear decision-making processes.

6.2: Structure & Decision Making


FC 44%, SC 44%, PC 12%

Organizational Structure and its effect on internal communication and decision-making processes is a critical factor in programme and institutional success. Review teams found FC as often as SC, and many of the recommendations made are similar for both.

The need to ensure closure of feedback loops (to staff and students) on curriculum discussions and changes is a recurrent concern. Allowing students a more formal role in the organizational (and governance) structure also comes up regularly. In PC cases, the need for clear standing agendas for departmental meetings and the opportunity to highlight strategic issues was strongly recommended to build IQC. In addition, the need to rethink organizational and decision-making processes was emphasized, particularly in the face of ongoing integration into a larger institutional context.

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S7: *Internal Quality Culture*

The institution has a strong internal *quality culture*, supported by clear and effective quality assurance and enhancement procedures.

7: Internal Quality Culture (IQC)
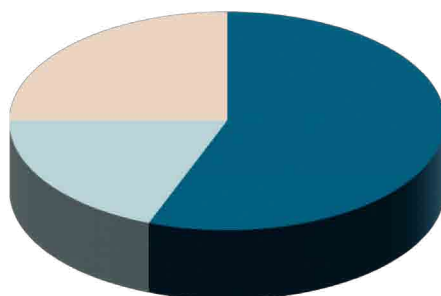

FC 56%, SC 19%, PC 25%

Maintaining a strong yet flexible Internal Quality Culture (IQC) is a difficult iterative task, yet reviewers found slightly more than half of the programmes/institutions FC. The recommendation to use more external experts to assist the process was commonly suggested. In one FC case, the need to reduce excessive bureaucracy and paperwork was noted. Several institutions were cited for their strong IQC 'best-practice', while one particularly stands out for its self-critical mindset and embedded use of the 'critical friends' (CF) approach at the departmental level. Opportunities for the 'silos' of CF reviews to interact was a valuable suggestion.

PC and SC cases mostly note the need for better documentation (and internal communication) concerning QA for specific programmes to ensure broader adoption of QE measures. In addition, concerns about 'inappropriate behaviours' surfaced the urgent need for policy development and action plans, as is noted in the detailed discussion of Key Trends 2 and 3, below.

S8: Public Interaction

8.1: The institution engages within wider *cultural, artistic and educational* contexts.

8.1: Cultural, Artistic, Educational Contexts
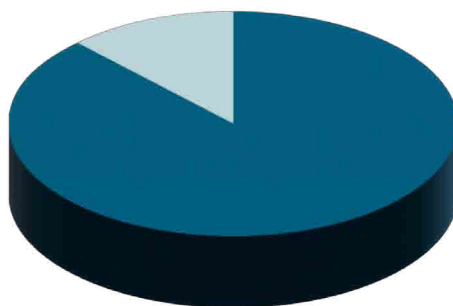
FC 88%, SC 12%

Most institutions and programmes are clearly well-embedded in their local cultural, artistic, and educational contexts. Many were cited for the quality of their public interactions. It was remarkable that so many institutions found creative ways to keep their public presence going during the pandemic, despite the shutdown of most public events. SC issues pertained mostly to the desirability of having a more developed outreach and pre-university educational policy to encourage domestic growth.

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8.2: The institution actively *promotes links* with various sectors of the music and other artistic professions.

8.2: Links with Professions
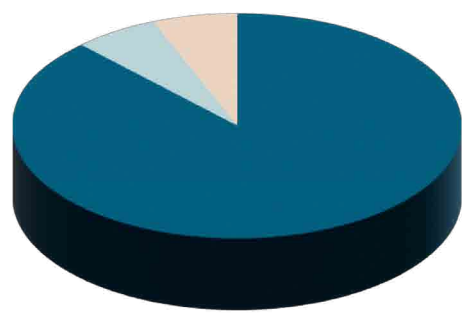
FC 88%, SC 6%, PC 6%

Again, links with the profession are generally well-developed. Recommendations for further improvements often centred on the value of developing more interdisciplinary activities and internship programmes. In the SC and PC cases, the need to formalize partnership agreements where these appear too casual was noted.

8.3 *Information* provided to the *public* about the institution is clear, consistent and accurate.

8.3: Public Information

FC 100%

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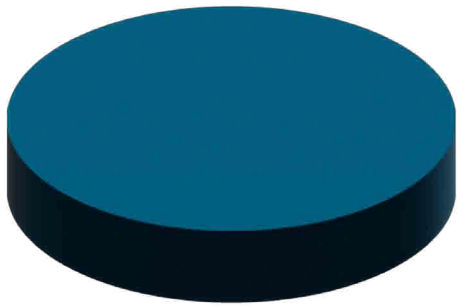
One notes the 100% Full Compliance for this final Standard, a testimony to the sector's universal recognition of the importance of public presence. Several institutions (#5, #6, #14) were commended for their strong digital and social media presence. English language presence is important to internationalization; some institutions (#4, #7) are exemplary in this regard, some others challenged, in part due to deployment delays given limited financial and HR capacity for communications/IT resources (#10, #11).

3. Key Trends: detailed discussion and recommendations

0. The Pandemic: its impact, institutional responses, and future implications

The global COVID-19 pandemic (from March 2020 onwards) has had profound impact on higher education, the arts, and society as a whole. It is 'ground zero' and 'trend zero'. Its broader health and socioeconomic realities have been devastating and its implications for the sector, significant. Fifteen of the twenty reports surveyed were issued during the pandemic shutdown or just emerging from it (if, indeed, we are). More critically, due to pandemic protocol restrictions, the last four reports (#13–#16 in Table 1), as well as the consultative visits (CV) reports and two benchmarking exercises (BM#2–#3 in Table 1), found the review teams unable to carry out in-person site visits (normally felt to be a central component of the review process). MusiQuE and higher education institutions in the arts have done an extraordinary job finding amazingly creative workarounds for the delivery of services and programmes. Several reports, for example, cite rapid online shifts, many involving extensive enhancements of IT and AV resources, a trend that will not go away in future and that will have significant ongoing curricular implications. These efforts are a testimony to the resilience of our students, teaching faculty, and support staff, and to their underlying commitment to teaching and learning, and to the art form itself. Yet, some of the later reviews (given that they took place at the height of the shutdowns) appear to report the pandemic as a mostly logistical challenge: 'we couldn't do *X*, so we did *Y*'.

The reality, of course, is far more complex. Higher education has almost 'missed out' on half a student cohort over the two-plus-year timeframe of the pandemic, if not in numbers then in altered teaching and learning experience. Studies are only just emerging that assess the situational data (for example, in admissions and internationalization). Notwithstanding the many laudable innovations discovered in response to restrictions, the impact — particularly on mental health — has been enormous, much of it still to be considered. Similarly, the 'gap' in much professional programming over the same (two-seasons) period has had a deeply deleterious effect on society as a whole, and has been deeply discouraging for both students and professionals. Moving forward, we will need to shift from 'resilience' to 'anti-fragility', to become proactive in recognizing ongoing challenges and creating new opportunities.

Recommendation: that MusiQuE work with other higher education agencies and arts organizations to make the pandemic — its impact and institutional responses—the subject of data-informed critical analysis, and that various pathways are considered to share information and best practices forward across the network.

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1. The state of Quality Enhancement (QE), Quality Assurance (QA), and related organizational and communications issues

MusiQuE and the review teams are to be commended for their focus on QE, working with the reviewees in the manner of 'critical friends' in conducting the reviews and writing their reports. As noted previously, the arc of MusiQuE's different services — from consultative visits (CV) and benchmarking exercises (BM), to programme and institutional reviews and accreditation procedures — shows a range of activities that often makes cross-report comparisons difficult. As well, reviewers must meet the considerable challenge of mapping the assessment criteria of other agencies (NVAO, HES-SO, EQ-Arts) onto the MusiQuE standards, with impressive though predictably complicated results.

There is now widespread recognition and realization of the value of articulating institutional (and programme) mission and vision (standard 1), the main challenges remaining the need to develop 'SMART' implementations and roadmaps to ensure success. (SMART is an acronym for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound.) Also noted is the importance of defining a vision that embodies the distinctive (including geographical and cultural) context of the programme/institution.

Given MusiQuE's laudable goal of focusing on QE, one might expect that Critical Friend Reviews would be preferred among 'first-time clients'. However, the iterative and lengthy next steps involved in moving such processes to programme/institutional level QE can seem daunting, particularly for institutions still at the early stages of QA. After all, the ultimate goal is to embed QE and QA within the institutional fabric of an IQC (internal quality culture), a situation acknowledged as fully compliant (with some reservations) in just over half the reports (standard 7). A few institutions show 'model' IQCs, the ongoing process perhaps most succinctly characterized by the Royal Conservatoire of The Hague's (#16) invocation of the 'lemniscate of continuous improvement' using the infinity symbol ∞ as a representation for continuous QE.

The challenges of achieving a strong IQC are often associated with concerns about the effectiveness of internal communications (standard 6.1) and appropriateness of the local organizational structure to ensure clear decision-making processes (standard 6.2). The QA processes can lack widespread engagement of all relevant stakeholders, particularly the inclusion of students, but can also fail to secure the understanding of the issues and positive participation of teaching faculty and support staff. Organizations can sometimes be too top-down, and sometimes too bottom-up, and the reporting structures too horizontal or too vertical.

Recommendations: organizational and communications structures and their ongoing impact on IQC would be a useful topic for best-practices discussion at sector level. (Related to this is the ongoing trend towards institutional *mergers* — the main subject of BM#1 — and their far-reaching implications for organizational change and stakeholder challenges.) Also useful would be examples of best-practices in articulating missions and goals that are distinctively inspiring *and* demonstrably operational.

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2. Diversity and Diversification: the changing global environment

In the global context of *diversity* considerations — from 'me-too' and Black Lives Matter (and other racialized dialogues), to indigenous reconciliation and migration/immigration crises, gender equity/diversity, disability inclusion, and so on — higher music education institutions are also facing major upheaval and change. *Given this situation, it is surprising that the word "diversity" is entirely absent from the MusiQuE Standards*[1] . When the word does appear in the review documents, it mostly pertains to diversity of artistic activities, musical styles, and pedagogical approaches (the last sometimes a codeword for disagreements). And questions from reviewers about diversity and equity issues are often met with surprise. The Swiss (#3 in Table 1) now incorporate diversity expectations into assessment criteria — "the study programme takes account of societal changes such as sustainability and diversity" — and into institution-level strategic plans for staff recruitment. Across the arts higher-education sector, the large numbers of international students at many institutions (from over 50 different countries, in one case) present opportunities for showcasing diversity that are, so far, mostly underrealized.

In contrast, Singapore (#4 in Table 1) and Thailand (#7, #15 in Table 1) engage with "diverse cultural and musical identities" as a matter of cultural and geographical norm, another excellent opportunity for 'outside-in' influence for the EU. In a similar way, Beirut (#12 in Table 1) was commended for its conscious and successful efforts to bring together Christian and Muslim communities. Beyond music, institutions in visual arts and dance (and to a lesser extent theatre) have created exemplary high-profile projects that focus on diversity and inclusion and suggest potential interdisciplinary opportunities.

The recent reports from MusiQuE also reflect significant *diversification.* Reviews now regularly extend to institutions far beyond the EU: Kazakhstan (#1), Singapore (#4), Beirut (#12), Thailand (#7, #15). Several reviews focus on EU institutions from the former Soviet bloc (now at some distance in time): Poland (#6), Serbia (#8), Czech Republic (#10, #11). And from EU-proximate Switzerland: Zurich (#3) and Geneva (#8). In addition, recent reviews extend to disciplines other than music: dance (two QE reviews and one CV department visit), theatre, visual arts. Thus, MusiQuE's review activities have become both more *international* and more *interdisciplinary.* Though such complexity can be challenging, it is a very positive sign, not just as a tribute to growing confidence in MusiQuE, but also as a tremendous learning opportunity. The shift from colonialization to globalization is inspiring, as is the resultant potential for 'reverse-influence', where, for example, there is much to admire and learn from the fresh and ambitious approaches to strategic vision, curriculum design, geographical and cultural integration, and the often extraordinary resources and facilities found in Singapore and Thailand.

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1   MusiQuE Standards are currently being revised. An amended framework of assessment will be published and implemented from 2023 onwards. The above observation on *diversity* refers to the 2015 rev. 2019 Standards used for the reviews conducted between 2019 and 2021 that constitute the object of the present analysis.

Recommendations: it is imperative that MusiQuE incorporate *diversity* expectations into its compliance standards and institutional guidelines so that these issues may be 'raised to consciousness' and appropriate actions can be taken across the sector. Further opportunities would also be welcome to expand *diversification* through interdisciplinary discussions, and reflections on creative opportunities that can evolve within the ongoing shift towards globalization.

3. Students: student-centredness—engagement, feedback, support

Over a period of several years (perhaps several decades at this point) there has been a growing recognition of students' position at (and as) the centre of the academy. This represents a fundamental shift away from the teacher's role as iconic expert and authoritarian arbiter of knowledge towards a role that develops a nuanced relationship as coach/mentor and co-artistic explorer. A significant corollary of that trajectory is the expectation for increased *engagement* of students in curricular and organizational matters. Building critical thinking, reflective, independent artists is a process. Students need to be engaged in curricular change so that they can take joint ownership of Learning Outcomes (LOs) and assessment processes. Students should also have a well-articulated role in governance, a situation still quite unevenly implemented across the sector. While student voice is sometimes challenging, its presence is essential to the development of an open institutional (and professional) community.

In many institutions the detail and quality of evaluation *feedback* is still evolving. Several institutions are asked to revisit the connection between LOs and assessment, and to make the link more transparent to all stakeholders (teachers as well as students). The need for better written feedback and more formalized record keeping is regularly cited. In contrast, one review team for dance (#13) commended "the assessment philosophy, structure and practice detailed in the SER [Self-Evaluation Report]. It is a model of its type, well-informed by current specialist educational practice, thoughtful and values-driven": clearly a good practice worth sharing. There are sometimes concerns about equity, where the otherwise admirable individualized engagement between student and teacher (or programme leader) can lead to the perception of unequal treatment. In parallel, student representative roles in governance need to be determined by transparent process, not, as is sometimes the case, doled out on the basis of academic or artistic achievement.

Finally, expectations and needs for more robust *student services* and support are growing rapidly. Some institutions need to expand and improve support for their many international students. Health and well-being concerns, most notably mental health issues, have grown significantly in recent years, and their impact has become even more evident during the disruptions of the pandemic. In-house and external referral services need to be enhanced. Institutions are also at different stages of providing confidential

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counselling. Such support needs to be independent from (or at least additional to) normal interface with the principal teacher, programme leader, or 'education manager'. This is particularly true where concerns about student safety, including sexual or other forms of harassment, may be in question.

Recommendations: More work linking LOs to assessment procedures needs to be done, perhaps in the form of workshops focused on those issues. Best practices in engaging students in governance need to continue to be shared. Institutions and sector support organizations should recommend and implement training in harassment prevention and unconscious bias across their communities. Institutions should prioritize health and well-being for their students, staff, and faculty members by establishing policies and procedures that provide paths of empathetic confidential support, and by embedding physical and mental health concerns within and beyond the curriculum.

4. Curriculum: continuing & evolving issues

The fundamental premise of QE means that curriculum issues — the educational processes that ensure delivery of programmes, opportunities for international experience, and assessment — are always continuing to evolve. There is a lot of detail to consider. A few issues are, however, recurrent, and trends can be identified. Many institutions are now focusing on the development of students' individual *artistic identity*, supported by emphasis on the growth of *independent critical thinking*. Embedding *artistic research* and *professional outcomes* throughout the programme of study is gradually becoming normative. Expectations are of course different depending on the cycle level of the programme. Capstone projects, professional internships, entrepreneurial efforts are part of this trend. There remains, however, much work to be done on integrating *Learning Outcomes (LOs)*, based on the Polifonia/Dublin Descriptors and/or AEC Learning Outcomes, *into* the curriculum, or, more specifically, ensuring that staff and students have inculcated LOs into their conscious teaching and learning activities. Study guides, handbooks, assessment criteria, shared digital information, etc. (some more successful than others) can go a long way to build clarity and consistency in this area.

A recurrent problem is the perceived relationship (or rather the gap) between LOs and *assessment*. The need for better linkage, and for more formalized (including written) feedback tools is still very much in the process of evolution, as is evident in a number of reviews. Another recurrent theme is the need to 'branch out': student experience (and staff guidance) is increasingly expected to be interdepartmental (breaking down silos), interdisciplinary (connecting to other people and programmes), interinstitutional (using project partnerships, Erasmus+, etc.), and international (gaining valuable perspective and networks). The fact that these *'inter'- efforts* are often difficult to achieve does not gainsay their importance as a key trend in curricular change. A related need to build language competency and to make high quality communications available in *English*

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is often cited in the reviews, particularly for their role in support of internationalization. Programmes and institutions are both commended for this work and occasionally advised to improve it.

Recommendations: There is very little new here. However, it seems, there is still a need for ongoing best-practice discussions of LOs, assessment, artistic research, artistic identity, professional outcomes, internships, entrepreneurship, and various 'inter-' experiences. MusiQuE should continue to support QE in these curricular areas.

5. Staff and resources: professional development, space & technology

For the most part, the reviews are very well disposed to the topics of staff (both academic & support) and resources (space & technology). However, there are a few ongoing trends/concerns. The need for additional *professional development*, supported by improved HR policies and resource allocations, is central. Teaching staff still need greater encouragement and support to develop their personal profiles in practice-based *artistic research* [the main subject of BM#2] and pedagogical study. Understanding what is expected from teaching staff in the changing conservatoire context is far from uniform, and embedding QE in research into the IQC is an ongoing process. Staff mobility, through Erasmus and other agencies, is often underutilized and opportunities for personal growth and institutional perspective consequently missed.

Also noted as a need in the 2019 Trends Analysis, such opportunities were understandably curtailed during the pandemic. The resultant restrictions necessitated the creation of more opportunities for remote/online engagement, and a new-norm of hybrid in-person and online has emerged, one that also addresses growing sensitivities to the impact of travel on climate change, another strongly emerging thematic in arts and higher education. Success in raising the individual and institutional profile of research requires strategic leadership and the directed allocation (including reallocation) of resources. Integrating professional development opportunities into the academy also helps reduce the occasional problems of balance (and disjunction) between research/artistic-professional and teaching activities. *Part-time professional staff* play a central role in reputation and programme delivery for most institutions, and finding opportunities to engage them in IQC and curricular discussions is a critical component of building community.

Almost all reviews make a point of acknowledging the extraordinary work of *support staff* who are (as in 2019) found to be "committed, dedicated, efficient and engaged". We owe them all tremendous respect and gratitude. Several cases of overwork, due to staffing shortfalls or multitasking challenges, are noted. Again the pandemic often created additional burdens due to 'working at home' (or, as it might be more accurately framed, 'living at work'). Fostering the acquisition of specialized skills for support staff through their own forms of professional development is highly recommended.

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Most reviews react positively to the physical and technological *facilities* made available to ensure program delivery as well as public profile. Space in academia, to paraphrase Star Trek, really is 'the final frontier'. And space for advanced creative work is specialized and expensive. A few institutions under review are clearly challenged by space and financial shortfalls (and sometimes Quality Control [QC] needs for systems/scheduling, etc.). Advocacy support from the AEC and other agencies is important. In contrast, some institutions have been fortunate enough to create extraordinary world-class facilities in recent years, working with many levels of higher education, government, and sometimes philanthropic support. The pandemic required rapid deployment of additional *IT and Audio-Visual [AV]* resources for online learning. Maintaining the progress will be an ongoing challenge, as expectations for internal as well as public presence through digital and social media are not going away.

Recommendations: *professional development* needs for academic *and* support staff would profit from sharing of best-practice. *Artistic research* as well as advanced pedagogical study should continue to be a central focus for ongoing development across the sector. *Space and IT/AV* issues seldom mature for discussion at the sectoral level, but keeping higher-level institutional and governmental agencies aware of what excellence means, and what it can deliver, is a useful thing: making these topics the subject of exchange and dialogue is advisable. The post-pandemic emerging hybrid of in-person and remote/online activities should become a focus for thematic discussion and research, both for its curricular and institutional resources implications and for its impact on considerations of travel and climate change.

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4. Concluding Remarks

The intention, in these concluding remarks, is not to recapitulate the Key Trends identified in sections A and B.3, even less so the Trends Analysis and pie charts detailed in section B.2, but rather to highlight a few recurrent issues for further consideration (the main points emphasized in italics).

The *pandemic* has had profound effect on higher education and the profession, particularly in the performing arts. Its impact was immediate in the shutdowns around March 2020, and is ongoing as we re-emerge to more 'normal' modes of activity in teaching and learning as well as public presence. There is *a need for longitudinal data gathering and analysis* to assess the range of the pandemic's impact on the academy and the profession, including acknowledgement of the reality that hybrid forms of online and in-person activity, as well as expectations for high-quality audio-visual online and social media presence, are part of the new norm.

MusiQuE's emphasis on Quality Enhancement (QE) is laudable and its engagement with institutional stakeholders generally creates a very collegial and positive experience during the requisite and sometimes daunting processes of Quality Assurance (QA) and accreditation. The information and guidelines MusiQuE provides to programmes and institutions under review are valuable, indeed worthy of wider dissemination and discussion outside the QE process. However, notwithstanding such preparatory support, a number of persistent issues arise.

The review process is challenging for everyone and tends to reveal gaps in an *institution's organizational structure and decision-making processes*. The summary notes to chart 6.2, above, are indicative of the concerns and needs: closing feedback loops for staff and students on curriculum reform, giving students a more formal role in governance, providing clear standing agendas for institutional meetings, ensuring opportunities for discussion of strategic issues with all stakeholders (staff, students, support staff, alumni, administration, governors), rethinking the decision-making processes, etc. — all of these directed towards the goal of greater *transparency*.

The need for MusiQuE and other QA agencies, and for higher-education organizations alike, to make considerations of *diversity* central to their policy development and actions plans is hugely important. Diversity questions must be incorporated into the next round of Standards revision. Such needs are also connected to the *diversification* of programmes, where expectations of decolonization and inclusive globalization have become fundamental to strategic discourse and public action.

Interdisciplinary and collaborative work is becoming normative across Europe and beyond. This is partly reflected in the fact that MusiQuE has been commissioned to conduct reviews in arts disciplines beyond music. Implications for programme

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development, institutional organization, and the building of artistic identity are significant, and expect the embracing of wider pedagogical and professional perspectives.

Within the academy, *internationalization* opportunities remain underutilized, notably concerning staff mobility through Erasmus and other agencies. Remote connections became requisite during the pandemic and hybrid solutions will continue to be utilized going forward. This consideration also relates to emerging concerns about *sustainability* — both as an artistic theme and a practical consideration — including reflection on the carbon footprint impact of extensive travel on climate change.

Artistic research is here to stay. It remains a key status element in the academy, reflecting a central tenet in the professional profile of teaching faculty. It has also become embedded in the academic and artistic development of students, obviously so for doctoral studies, but increasingly so for all cycles. MusiQuE, as well as higher education organizations in the arts, should continue to enhance artistic research in both concept and practice.

Curriculum issues continuously evolve and the *ongoing need for reflection and change* is critical for the achievement of excellence and relevance in programmes and institutional missions. Although most institutions, spurred in part by the review process itself, now routinely embrace Learning Outcomes (LOs) in the design of their programmes, these can exist at various levels of development and clarity. In particular, the *gap between LOs and assessment procedures* is a recurrent concern. In quite a few cases, the need for more formalized written feedback is apparent. The sector would benefit from more sharing of best practices and sample curriculum (including assessment) packages to enhance overall quality, while respecting disciplinary and institutional differences.

Student-centredness continues to evolve as an expectation of higher education in the arts. Ongoing focus on artistic identity, critical thinking, creative outcomes, social justice, and professional development, etc. is becoming ubiquitous. There remains a lack of *'exit data'* for graduates and alumni throughout the sector, something which warrants deeper study and coordination, not least because it is a critical component of sectoral advocacy with governments and other agencies.

In addition to these curriculum-based elements, the broader shift from older authoritarian structures in arts training to more *collaborative and mentoring environments* is a welcome though challenging trajectory. Expectations for more formal feedback and for student engagement in governance are recurrent. The pandemic and other evolving socio-economic dynamics have also heightened

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the need for better support structures, particularly those that serve student *(physical and mental) health and well-being*. Such concerns, which also extend to teaching faculty and support staff, need to become embedded in the caring mindset and day-to-day practice of progressive institutional cultures.

Finally, a note on changing organizational contexts. As governments seek greater accountability and (presumed) bureaucratic efficiency in many sectors, there has been a tendency toward *institutional mergers*. (This is the main subtext of one of the Benchmarking Exercises briefly reviewed in this analysis, and a challenge facing several other programmes and institutions.) Such mergers are a growing trend and are unlikely to be rolled back in future, although they regularly morph into different configurations over time. Anxiety about the effects these mergers might have on *institutional identity and quality* outcomes could benefit from further data-informed analysis to maximize opportunities for positive change. More fundamentally, *sustaining artistic and academic excellence* in the face of organizational and societal upheaval is the core mission that must continue to motivate us all in these challenging times.

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List of Abbreviations

AEC Association of European Conservatories

AV Audio-Visual

BA Bachelor programme

BAM Bachelor of Arts Music

BAMM Bachelor of Arts Music and Movement

BM Benchmarking Exercise

CV Consultative Visit

DM Doctor of Music

DEQAR Database of External Quality Assurance Results

  https://www.eqar.eu/qa-results/search/by-institution/

ENQA European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

  https://www.enqa.eu

EQAR European Quality Assurance Register

EQ-Arts Enhancing Quality in the Arts (*http://www.eq-arts.org*)

ESG European Standard and Guidelines (ESG2015)

  https://www.enqa.eu/esg-standards-and-guidelines-for-quality-assurance-in-the-european-higher-education-area/

EU European Union

FC Fully Compliant (compliance level)

HES-SO Haute École Spécialisée de Suisse Occidental (Genève)

IQC Internal Quality Culture

LOs Learning Outcomes

MA Master of Arts

MAperf Master of Arts in Peformance

MM Master of Music

MSonology Master of Sonology

NC Not compliant (compliance level)

NVAO Nederlands-Vlammse Accreditatieorganisatie

  (Accrediation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders)

  https://www.nvao.net/en

PC Partially Compliant (compliance level)

PhD Doctor of Philosophy

QA Quality Assurance

QC Quality Control

QE Quality Enhancement

SC Substantially Compliant (compliance level)

SMART Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-Bound

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MusiQue
Music Quality Enhancement
Avenue des Celtes / Keltenlaan 20
1040 Etterbeek, Brussels
Belgium

Tel: + 32 2 737 16 76

General contact
info@musique-qe.eu

MusiQue website
https://musique-qe.eu/

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