



Self-Assessment Report

December 2024

Brussels, Belgium

Prepared as part of an external evaluation of compliance with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) with a view to making an application to the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR).

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Glossary of acronyms

AEC	Association Européenne des Conservatoires, Académies de Musique et Musikhochschulen
AEQES	Agence pour l'Evaluation de la Qualité de l'Enseignement Supérieur de la Communauté française de Belgique
ANVUR	Agenzia Nazionale di Valutazione del Sistema Universitario e della Ricerca (Italian National Agency for the Evaluation of the University and Research Systems)
AQU Catalunya	Agència per a la Qualitat del Sistema Universitari de Catalunya (Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency)
DEQAR	Database of External Quality Assurance Reports
EAS	European Association of Music in Schools
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
EMU	European Music Schools Union
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
EQAR	European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education.
ESG	European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area
ESU	European Students' Union
EUA	European University Association
MusiQuE	Music Quality Enhancement, The Foundation for Quality Enhancement and Accreditation in Higher Music Education
NVAO	Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatie Organisatie (Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Organisation)
Pearle*	Pearle*-Live Performance Europe (the Performing Arts Employers' Associations League Europe)
SEADOM	Southeast Asian Directors of Music

PROLOGUE

Message from the MusiQuE Board

Since its creation 10 years ago and its first registration on EQAR, MusiQuE has developed considerably, increasing its audience within the music education sector, and now reaching out towards other art forms in the performing arts.

From the beginning, MusiQuE has been built on a concept of quality that connects artistic standards with educational quality: while the former is based on a traditional and ever-present understanding of quality within particular artistic disciplines, the latter manifests the experiences with learning, teaching and management within institutions dedicated to those disciplines. It is exactly this combination that MusiQuE is seeking to address in its procedures. This dynamic process is one of the main drivers for an enhancement-led approach to quality, which is also why MusiQuE is so strongly focused on enhancement as a basic principle for all its procedures.

Several developments that initiated a fundamental shift within the sector of higher music education have been observed during the ten years since MusiQuE was created: firstly, the emergence of Artistic Research as a practice-based, practice-led research in the arts; secondly, an increased awareness of the role in society that higher music education institutions play in a context of rapid global change. As a result, MusiQuE now extends the highly specific and holistic aspects of its concept of quality combining high level artistic standards and all-round educational quality, to research competences and societal engagement. Additionally, MusiQuE takes into account existing issues that were strongly intensified by the COVID 19 pandemic – i.e. health and well-being, the digital shift, etc.

The opportunities and challenges that MusiQuE is facing have been explored by the Board through a SCOT analysis (Strengths – Challenges – Opportunities – Threats) while designing the Strategic Plan for the coming years. Secured by their relevance for the sector, MusiQuE's services would become more accessible world-wide, the operational difficulties intrinsic to MusiQuE's status of cross-border quality assurance agency be overcome. In addition, MusiQuE is currently asked to act ever more often within the South-East Asian region. MusiQuE also expands to other art forms within the performing arts, as more institutions are offering education in these disciplines as well. All these developments may lead to a reflection on the services it provides, but also on its internal organisation and communication processes.

The Board therefore welcomes this opportunity to benefit, through the self-assessment report and the review process, from the external perspectives of the review team with the aim to strengthen its vision and choices for its future as a distinctive, fully-engaged and positive contributor to the European and international communities of quality assurance actors.

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PART I – BACKGROUND

1. Introduction

MusiQuE – Music Quality Enhancement is a cross-border, external evaluation agency dedicated to the continuous improvement of the quality of music education. Through its accreditation, quality enhancement and advisory services, it assists music education institutions in their own enhancement of quality.

MusiQuE was created in 2014 after a lengthy exploration of the higher music education sector needs in the field of quality assurance and accreditation. Given the specificities of the sector, it was deemed highly desirable and necessary to provide institutions with assistance in the improvement of their quality in a manner that was tailor-made to the particular needs of the music discipline, and to the specialist institutions in which musicians are most often educated. Doing so was seen as a way of reinforcing and complementing the work already done by national agencies to accommodate the specificities of higher music education within their generic quality assurance procedures.

MusiQuE was founded by the following three organisations, which became MusiQuE's direct partner organisations: the Association Européenne des Conservatoires, Académies de Musique et Musikhochschulen (AEC), the European Music Schools Union (EMU) and Pearle* Live Performance Europe, the European Federation of Music and Live Performance Organizations. In 2021, the European Association for Music in Schools (EAS) became a fourth partner, with a representative appointed on the MusiQuE Board. This stakeholders model enables MusiQuE to involve in its governing body, as well as in its procedures, not only representatives of higher music education institutions but also stakeholders from the pre-college education sector, the music profession and the cultural sector. As such, MusiQuE is able to address the needs of music education at all levels, from children to higher education students, and to reach out to society at large, to national associations of orchestras, ensembles, theatres, festivals and other music organisations and venues.

MusiQuE was first confirmed as operating in compliance with the [Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area \(ESG\)](#) on the basis of an external review report finalised in October 2015. Consequently, MusiQuE achieved listing in EQAR in June 2016. Its registration was renewed in November 2020, based on a full external review carried out in 2020.

MusiQuE decided to opt for an enhancement-focused, targeted review in 2025, coordinated by ENQA. Consequently, the present SAR aims:

- to present information on how MusiQuE addressed the recommendations received during its previous review, and to provide evidence for its compliance with ESG 2.6 and ESG 2.7,
- to show how it continues to meet the requirements of ESG 2.1, ESG 2.3, and ESG 2.5 following the revision of its frameworks of assessment in 2023,
- and to reflect on the challenges and expected support for its continuous enhancement in the areas covered by ESG 3.1.

Based on this document, and on the report to be produced by the external review team, MusiQuE intends to apply for the renewal of its registration on EQAR.

2. Development of the self-assessment report (SAR)

The self-assessment report herein represents the outcome of a collaborative self-assessment process conducted by the MusiQuE Board in collaboration with the MusiQuE Office.

During its May 2024 meeting, and having considered all available options, the MusiQuE Board decided in favour of a targeted review with ESG standard 3.1 as the elective enhancement-oriented standard for this process. It was considered that this would be a valuable opportunity to collect external feedback on MusiQuE's strategic plan, mission, vision, and the ways these are translated in the agency's day to day activities. Given the particular changes in the European QA landscape, with more and more national agencies making a shift towards cross-border cooperation and enhancement-led review exercises, MusiQuE aims to gain deeper insights on how to best take advantage of its unique offering in order to ensure a continuous flow of yearly evaluation procedures, and to raise more awareness on the main challenges of the sector that may require more immediate action.

Once the guiding materials from ENQA were received, the MusiQuE Office worked over the summer to produce a first draft of the self-assessment report.

In September 2024, the MusiQuE Board and Office had a series of meetings to discuss MusiQuE's strategy for the next five years and to work on MusiQuE's SCOT analysis. During the self-assessment process, formal and informal feedback from MusiQuE registered peer reviewers and evaluated institutions was also examined and incorporated¹.

On 2 October 2024 MusiQuE organised a conference marking its 10th anniversary and used this opportunity to present its [achievements since 2014](#), reflecting together with its stakeholders² on these achievements and on their impact on the sector, as well as exploring how MusiQuE can play a more active role in shaping the future for quality assurance in higher music education. The insightful discussions and reflections shared during the conference were fed back into MusiQuE's self-assessment process. Subsequently, the MusiQuE Office was able to finalise the self-assessment report and presented it to the MusiQuE Board for a round of feedback in November 2024.

The MusiQuE Board commented on and approved of the SAR between 5 and 16 November 2024 and between 22 and 24 November. The SAR endorsed by the MusiQuE Board was shared with ENQA Secretariat on 25 November 2024. Following the feedback received from ENQA, further amendments were incorporated by the MusiQuE Office. The final version of the SAR was then endorsed by the MusiQuE Board and shared with the external review panel on 13 December 2024.

¹As part of its internal quality culture, MusiQuE employs a variety of feedback mechanisms and, on an annual basis, draws up a report informed by this feedback so that its actions to implement continuous enhancement are transparent and readily available to interested parties. Surveys are addressed to institutions and peer reviewers after each review procedure, and to all participants after each event organized by MusiQuE (annual training of peers, webinars, conference). Results of all surveys are being compiled by the MusiQuE Office and suggested actions for improvement are being discussed with the Board during its biannual meetings

² A list of participants to MusiQuE's 10 Year anniversary Conference can be consulted in [Annex 1](#).

3. MusiQuE's approach to quality enhancement and changes since last full review

3.1 How MusiQuE works

MusiQuE has a set of [key policy documents](#) that define its governance and operational aspects. This set includes:

- [Internal Regulations](#)
- [MusiQuE Standards](#)
- [Guidelines for Institutions](#)
- [Handbook for Critical Friend Reviews](#)
- [Guidelines for Peer Reviewers](#)
- [Code of Conduct for Peer Reviewers](#)
- [Complaints and Appeals Procedure](#)
- [Strategy Paper and Action Plan 2020-2025](#)

This section offers solely a glimpse at MusiQuE's methodology, procedures, and decision-making processes, and indicates the sections in the documents listed above where further details on certain aspects of interest may be sought.

As an EQAR registered cross-border agency, MusiQuE functions independently from any national regulations while acting in compliance with the ESGs for all services provided, both within and outside the EHEA.

3.1.1 MusiQuE's vision, mission, and core values

Vision for 2025: MusiQuE in 2025 is the leading provider of quality enhancement services to (higher) music education institutions and a recognised, independent, and well-respected contributor to higher education quality assurance in general. It will have earned a reputation for working constructively and efficiently with institutions in which its procedures are applied to promote, embed, and disseminate a broadly-supported quality culture that respects the specific and individual characteristics of (higher) music education and its institutions, in an international context.

Mission: MusiQuE works internationally to uphold and advance the quality of music education.

It delivers this mission on the basis of the five principles listed below which, collectively, define what MusiQuE stands for.

MusiQuE's principles

MusiQuE's **core principles** can be summarised as follows:

1. Promoting and supporting the HME sector
2. Working in partnership with institutions, the professional sector and other stakeholders in music education, and with national quality assurance agencies
3. Involving international perspectives in quality enhancement
4. Encouraging institutions to reflect on their own practices
5. Respecting the values and ethos of each individual institution and making quality enhancement issues more meaningful to staff and students.

3.1.2 MusiQuE's governance and structure

The **governance and structure** of MusiQuE involve stakeholders from both the education sector (at various educational levels) and the professional field of music and performing arts. Considerations on lifelong learning and the needs of the profession are therefore aspects embedded in MusiQuE's work.

MusiQuE's organisational structure, with its five constitutive elements tightly and harmoniously integrated in a transparent and inclusive decision-making process, is represented in the diagram on the right.

The five elements of MusiQuE's structure are as follows:

- [Board](#)
- [Office](#)
- [Peer Reviewers Register](#)
- [Complaints and Appeals Committee \(C & A Committee\)](#)
- [External Evaluator³](#)

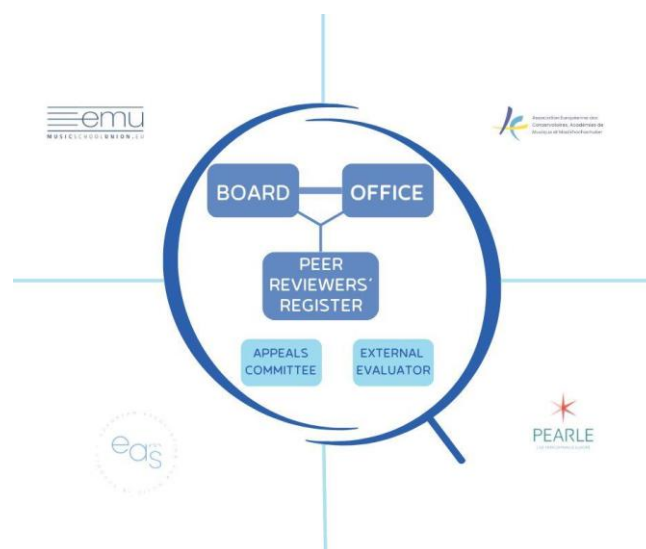


Fig. 1 MusiQuE's Structure

MusiQuE's governance model, and how roles and responsibilities are divided between the five constitutive elements are explained at large in [MusiQuE's Internal Regulations](#) (Sections 2, 3, 4, 5, and in Section 10.2.1).

3.1.3. MusiQuE's services

MusiQuE's offer is conceived as an important service to music education institutions, aimed at assisting them in their quality enhancement activities.

MusiQuE provides the following services:

Review procedures within the scope of the ESG:

- Quality enhancement reviews for institutions, programmes and joint programmes
- Accreditation processes for institutions, programmes and joint programmes
- Critical Friend reviews (for quality enhancement or accreditation at programme, joint programme, or institutional level)
- Bilateral collaborations with national quality assurance and accreditation agencies

Services outside the scope of the ESG:

- Quality assurance support desk for institutions
- Evaluations of research activities
- Reviews of pre-college institutions and programmes
- Consultative visits
- Evaluations of projects
- Coordination of benchmarking projects

³ MusiQuE's External Evaluator for the current period is Achim Hopbach, former Managing Director of the Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria (AQ Austria).

All of the above are detailed and explained in depth in [MusiQuE's Internal Regulations](#) (Section 6). It is worth noting that MusiQuE has been offering, since its inception, external evaluations of Classroom Music Teacher Education Programmes⁴. These evaluations take the form of programme accreditations or of programme quality enhancement reviews (i.e. services within the scope of the ESG) and make use of a specific set of standards that draw on MusiQuE's Standards for Programme Reviews, but take into account specific features of such programmes (see Section 3.1.4 herein).

Relevant traits of MusiQuE's review procedures are briefly discussed below.

All MusiQuE **review procedures** have the following core features:

- They are designed from a subject-specific perspective;
- They are conducted by peer reviewers with specific subject expertise and an international background;
- They follow a supportive peer to peer approach⁵.

Most procedures and services are carried out by experts drawn from **MusiQuE's Peer Reviewer's Register**⁶ (currently including 142 Peer-reviewers and 18 Student reviewers) that may work individually (e.g. Critical Friends visits, consultative visits, etc.), or in teams of five (or more) members performing the following roles: Review Team Chair, Expert/Trained peer reviewers and Review Team Secretary. All MusiQuE review teams comprise a student member.

Roles and responsibilities within the team are clearly defined in [MusiQuE's Code of Conduct for Peer Reviewers](#). The Code of Conduct is an essential document that all aspiring and existing MusiQuE peer reviewers are made aware of during the [Annual Training for Peer Reviewers](#) and as part of any appointment to a review panel. It is an integral part of [MusiQuE's Guidelines for Peer Reviewers](#) which are shared at the beginning of each review procedure with all panel members who accept a review team assignment.

The general principles and the process of selecting peer reviewers for MusiQuE procedures are further detailed in Section 4.3. of the [Internal Regulations](#). Criteria and procedures for recruiting and training peer reviewers are outlined in Sections 4.1 and 4.2 of the same [Internal Regulations](#). The final composition of the review team is endorsed by the MusiQuE Board.

A peer to peer system

The role of peer reviewers is at the core of the MusiQuE review system. Their expertise is combined with an intimate understanding of the realities that apply in music education and related arts institutions. They are perfectly placed to engage with artistic, educational, and organisational processes, delivering their quality judgements in a spirit of constructive dialogue with the institution, its leaders, teachers, students and administrative staff. The expertise of the peer reviewers is primarily as artists and teachers within their discipline, but most of them also possess significant leadership and administrative experience, and understand the issues of music

⁴ Classroom music teacher education may take place in different contexts and institutions, in Higher Music Education institutes, universities or specialist teacher education colleges in programmes providing qualifications specifically as a classroom music teacher.

⁵ Although MusiQuE's accreditation procedures necessarily involve assessing the performance of institutions and programmes against a set of standards, the principle of support in quality enhancement and the peer to peer approach apply even in this more formal context.

⁶ In exceptional cases, experts from outside the Register may be employed by MusiQuE for specific procedures. Further details in this regard are available in Section 4.3.2 of [MusiQuE's Internal Regulations](#).

education from this perspective as well. In general, Review Teams are assembled in such a way that the individual expertise of each team member complements that of the others.

The specialist expertise of trained peer reviewers within MusiQuE reviews emphasises the peer-to-peer aspect of MusiQuE reviews. MusiQuE reviews are not conceived as top-down, management-driven exercises but more as an engagement of equals where, in another context and with the appropriate training, the roles of reviewer and reviewed could potentially be reversed.

A strong student voice

Being at the centre of higher music education institutions, students are systematically included as members of the Review Teams assigned on procedures conducted by MusiQuE. The role of students is the same as that of the other peer reviewers, and their perspective and contribution is equally valued.

Core phases of a regular MusiQuE review procedure

Whether within or outside the scope and reach of the ESGs, most MusiQuE procedures follow a similar pattern in which five main phases can be distinguished. These are further detailed in **Section 6.4 of [MusiQuE's Internal Regulations](#)**. The sequence and timeline of these phases is captured in the diagram below.

Phases and Timeline of a MusiQuE Regular Review Procedure

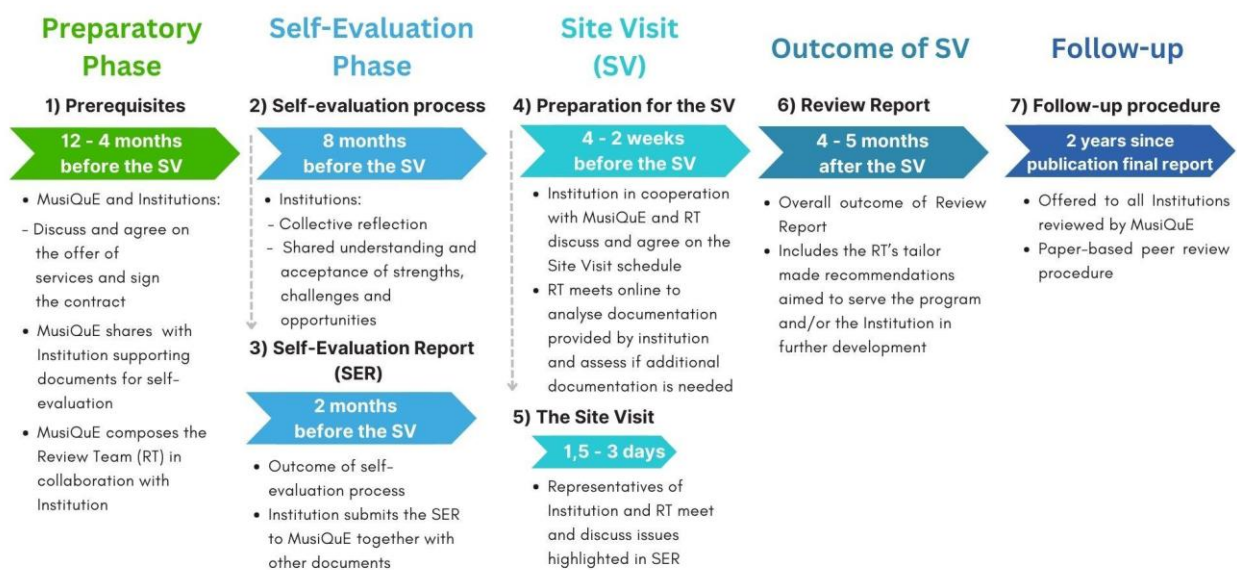


Fig 2. Phases and Timeline of MusiQuE's Regular Review Procedure

Comprehensive details about these main steps of an external evaluation process are outlined in the [Guidelines for Institutions](#) (Sections 4 - 7), in the [Guidelines for Peer Reviewers](#) (Sections 5 - 7).

3.1.4 MusiQuE's Standards

True to its concept of quality culture⁷, and as an agency that is not rooted in any particular national higher education system, MusiQuE designed and developed its own **frameworks of assessment** which take into account the specific features, and the high degree of cultural diversity intrinsic to external quality assurance and accreditation in European music education.

MusiQuE currently operates with the following sets of standards, depending on the type of procedure it conducts:

- For review procedures within the scope of the ESG:
 - MusiQuE Standards for Institutional Reviews (revised in 2023)
 - MusiQuE Standards for Programme Reviews (revised in 2023)
 - MusiQuE Standards for Joint Programme Reviews (currently under revision)
 - MusiQuE Standards for Classroom Music Teacher Education Programmes (currently under revision)
- For procedures and services outside the scope of the ESG:
 - MusiQuE Standards for Pre-college Music Education (currently under revision)
 - MusiQuE Standards for Project evaluation (revised in 2023)
 - MusiQuE Standards for the Evaluation of Research Activities (revision planned for 2025)

MusiQuE's Standards for Institutional and for Programme Reviews represent the core set of standards applicable to most procedures conducted by MusiQuE – i.e. quality enhancement reviews and accreditation procedures at institutional, or at programme level respectively. Drawing on these standards, separate frameworks of assessment were developed since the very creation of MusiQuE, in order to better reflect MusiQuE's service portfolio, to address the specific traits of certain programmes and / or institutions, and to better respond to the particular needs of the various groups of beneficiaries – i.e. in the evaluation of joint programmes, classroom music teacher education programmes, research activities, or pre-college music education programmes and / or institutions.

With regard to Critical Friend Reviews, one or several frameworks of assessment may be employed, as follows:

- For the external review at the end of a cycle of critical friend visits the framework of assessment related to the main object of evaluation will apply – i.e. if it is a Critical Friend Review at institutional level (either for quality enhancement or for accreditation), the review team will use MusiQuE's Standards for Institutional Reviews to conduct their external evaluation;
- For critical friend visits conducted in between two external evaluations, given their smaller and more targeted focus, the MusiQuE Standards for Programme Reviews are being used to create the guidelines for structuring critical friends reports. If transversal themes (e.g.

⁷ MusiQuE stands for, and seeks to, address in its procedures a **concept of quality culture** which addresses together *highly focused artistic standards*, as these have been long understood within a particular academic or artistic discipline, and an *all-rounded educational quality* as this is manifested in the lived experience of those who work, learn and teach in institutions dedicated to that discipline. Further, and in response to recent HME trends, MusiQuE extended its concept of quality to *research competencies* developed through the educational process, and *societal concerns* as an expression of the institutions' and the artists' roles within society. MusiQuE therefore recognizes both the highly specific and the holistic aspects of quality culture and the way that latter impinge upon every dimension of an institution's activities (the organisation and management of the curriculum, governance, assessment procedures, student feedback mechanisms, internal and external communication, etc.).

governance, quality culture, etc.) are the focus of critical friend visits in certain procedures, then MusiQuE Standards for Institutional Reviews may also be used to address certain topics.

As MusiQuE's Standards for Institutional and for Programme reviews have been revised in 2023, all related frameworks of assessment are now following the same path, and they are in various stages of revision discussed in greater detail in Section 3.2 below.

All [sets of Standards are available on MusiQuE's website.](#)

3.2 Changes since the last external review

Overall, during the past five years since its last external review, MusiQuE took important steps towards strengthening its position in the quality assurance for higher education landscape. A brief overview of MusiQuE's most important changes implemented since 2020 is presented below.

New partner organisations

A partnership agreement was signed between MusiQuE and EAS in 2021, enlarging the range of stakeholders involved in MusiQuE's governance. EAS was able to nominate a candidate for the MusiQuE Board. This agreement was under negotiation during MusiQuE's 2020 full review and it was addressed by the review team during their visit, even if it only came to fruition after the review was completed (January 2021). The initiative was commended by the external panel, whose members also recommended that MusiQuE further explore expanding its stakeholders' model to involve in its governance representatives of the larger society, beyond the music field. This remained an unbeaten path for MusiQuE, and it is one of the focus areas for enhancement explored in Part III. Section 4 below. It should be noted that this change did not affect MusiQuE's independence as all measures in place to guarantee MusiQuE's independence from third party influence explained in the last full external review are still in place and applicable to EAS in the same way as they are to AEC, Pearle* and EMU.

In addition, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed in February 2024 between MusiQuE and Southeast Asian Directors of Music (SEADOM) to join efforts in promoting quality enhancement in music education at all levels in South-East Asia, thus bringing to MusiQuE the specific perspectives on music education raised by the different reflections drawn by SEADOM. At this point, it is not foreseen that SEADOM would play an advisory role or nominate a candidate for the MusiQuE Board.

The impact of the Covid-19 outbreak

MusiQuE was heavily impacted by the Covid-19 global pandemic, having its procedures from March to December 2020 postponed to 2021 and, in some cases, 2022. While rapidly adapting and switching to feasible options of digital assistance, MusiQuE faced a stagnation in the number of contracted procedures in 2020 and 2021, peak years for the global pandemic, and a slow revival in 2022, when institutions were able to shift focus on quality assurance matters as they emerged from the immediacy of pandemic management. In hard numbers, this may be translated as a hiatus in MusiQuE's development: after a "survival mode" period in 2020 (focused on exploring how reviews could be postponed to 2021 and all activities delivered online), the years 2021 to 2023 were dedicated to increasing MusiQuE's visibility, reaching out to institutions to promote MusiQuE's services, progressively coordinating an increased number of reviews, and undertaking a large revision process of the MusiQuE Standards. It is only from the start of this year that space could be created again to address strategic matters, and consider the recommendations of the 2020 external review panel concerning the standards with which MusiQuE was deemed compliant.

More comprehensive details about the ebbs and flows linked to the review procedures that MusiQuE conducted since its last external review are available in [Annex 2 – MusiQuE's activities in numbers \(2020 - 2024\)](#).

Lessons learnt from the 2020 digital shift

A. Improved review procedures

MusiQuE introduced since 2022 an **additional preparatory meeting of the review team** members that is conducted online, before the physical site visit, three to four weeks after the review team receives the institution's self-evaluation report. This ensures that 1) the requests for additional documentation is received by the reviewed institution in a more timely manner, and 2) improves the efficiency and quality of the panel's physical preparatory meeting at the start of the site visit. This additional online preparatory meeting of the review team is being consistently communicated to review teams through the briefing papers shared with peer reviewers after their selection for a certain procedure.

MusiQuE developed a **Protocol for Online Visits** that enabled institutions who agreed to continue their evaluation processes to prepare for, and conduct site visits online. MusiQuE conducted 4 online visits in 2021 following this protocol. Experience showed that, while successful, in the case of art institutions a physical site visit is certainly more revelatory, at least for considering the artistic quality of performances, projects, and outputs produced by students. The benefits of online visits were nevertheless noted and online elements are being further used when necessary⁸:

- In complex review procedures of institutions that offer a high number of programmes in several artistic domains, all parties involved – MusiQuE, review teams, and institutions alike, are now open to include preliminary online meetings between the panel and the institutional representatives if this is considered helpful in easing the workload of both reviewers and reviewees on site.
- In follow-up processes, the possibility of complementing a paper-based evaluation with an online visit is being discussed both with the institution concerned and with the peer reviewers involved in the follow-up. Where proven useful, helpful, or deemed necessary (e.g. to assess full compliance for certain standards) by the parties involved, MusiQuE will include an online visit in the follow-up protocol.

B. Improved training workshop for peer reviewers

Based on the feedback collected during the 2020 edition of the training workshop for peer reviewers (conducted fully online), MusiQuE developed a successful hybrid formula which now consists of a half-day online training focusing mostly on theoretical aspects related to MusiQuE's philosophy, principles, standards and procedures. This is complemented by a two-day interactive training conducted in person. This format was proven highly successful, as the online "theory day", organised two or three weeks prior to the on-site interactive workshop, allows participants to thoroughly prepare their home assignments, and to benefit from further clarifications directly from the trainers before the in-person training. Consequently, the quality of the role playing and of the interactions during the various exercises conducted in person was reportedly higher in later years, as indicated in feedback surveys.

⁸ As the options above are currently being offered on a case by case basis, this "hybridisation" of review processes was not yet formalised in MusiQuE's Internal Regulations. But it is an option that is being clearly communicated to both institutions during the negotiation of a service contract, and to peer reviewers during the selection of panel members for a specific procedure.

Streamlined governance

In September 2022 the Board established two sub-committees, the Operations Sub-Committee, that monitors reviews and the Peer Reviewers' Register, and the Strategy Sub-Committee, that deals with strategic management. They prepare the Board discussions and do not have decision-making powers. They became operational in March 2023. MusiQuE's external evaluator suggested in his report from November 2024 that MusiQuE evaluate their effectiveness after a certain period. He also makes a number of recommendations on how the formal and informal communication means between the Office and the Board could be improved and in particular how the Board monitors MusiQuE's operations (see [Annex 3. Draft Report by MusiQuE's External Evaluator](#)).

Greater diversity and a larger geographical outreach

- *Diversifying services:* MusiQuE won two calls for tenders issued by the Flemish government to evaluate the performance of research institutes and successfully conducted these missions.
- *Growing interest for Critical Friend Reviews⁹:* Following the pilot reviews taking place at The Hague Royal Conservatory, three additional institutions requested this type of review, each with different requirements in terms of the focus of the visits by the critical friends (Antwerp, Singapore, and Malmö).
- *Expanding the geographical outreach beyond Europe:* Institutions based in Tunisia, Thailand, Singapore, and Qatar contracted MusiQuE for an external review. Further, MusiQuE was asked to organise for the very first time a Training Workshop for peer reviewers in the framework of the Southeast Asian Directors of Music (SEADOM) conference (attended by 21 participants).
- *Reaching other arts:* MusiQuE was asked to conduct procedures in other disciplines than music – i.e. visual arts, drama, and dance (see [Annex 2](#)) and received very good feedback from institutions reviewed.

Strengthened communication, visibility and advocacy

As a domino effect of the 2020 digital shift, MusiQuE invested time and energy in further enhancing its online tools and experimenting with different media of communication.

- *Rebranding:* MusiQuE changed its visual identity (including a new logo) and launched a new website in 2021.
- *Thematic webinars:* MusiQuE launched, in the summer of 2021, a series of [webinars on relevant topics](#) for music and arts education institutions, and quality assurance agencies faced with similar challenges
- *Trend Analysis:* MusiQuE produced, in 2022, a new edition of its regular [Trend Analysis Report](#) reflecting on the particular context in which transformations within the sector came to fruition. Unlike previous years, this edition of the Trend Analysis Report was converted into an e-book for an easier and far-reaching distribution.
- *Digital Marketing:* MusiQuE contracted an external consultant in 2023 who guided the work of the Office on a Digital Marketing Strategy developed in 2024. This strategy aims to improve MusiQuE's visibility and support MusiQuE to maximise the potential of social media to ensure a continuous flow of review procedures.

⁹ Comprehensive information about the [Critical Friend Review Procedure](#) is included in the [Handbook for Critical Friend Reviews](#) published on MusiQuE's website.

- *Thematic conference:* MusiQuE marked its 10 year anniversary with a thematic [conference in October 2024](#). (See [Annex 1](#)).

Revised Standards

It is part of MusiQuE’s internal quality policy to regularly review and adjust its standards and procedures based on external surveys conducted among its stakeholders, recommendations collected from the MusiQuE Board during online and in person meetings, and the Office’s own experience gained through mapping exercises in various procedures conducted jointly with other agencies. Subsequently, MusiQuE engaged in 2020 in a complex process of revising all of its frameworks of assessment (see Section 3.1.4 above). The process is still ongoing and it is expected to be finalised in 2026. It comprises the following steps:

- *Step 1:* Revision of MusiQuE Standards for Institutional and for Programme Reviews (Fall 2020 – Fall 2022)
- *Step 2:* Revision of MusiQuE Standards for Pre-College Education and for Classroom Music Teacher Education Programmes (2023 – 2025)
- *Step 3:* Revision of MusiQuE’s Standards for Joint Programme Reviews and for the Evaluation of Research Activities (2025 – 2026)

The revision process was purposefully designed and adjusted to effectively engage MusiQuE’s stakeholders to a large extent, and to guarantee that the revision is conducted in an appropriate and transparent manner. For each of the steps outlined above, a relevant Working Group was formed and operated within the terms of reference set by the MusiQuE Board and Office, following a similar agenda:

- 1/. Proposal for revision
- 2/. Consultation with the MusiQuE Board and subsequent amendments of the proposal for revision
- 3/. Consultation of stakeholders
- 4/. Revision of standards in line with collected feedback
- 5/. Validation by the MusiQuE Board and official publication

Up until now, Step 1 of the revision was completed: MusiQuE’s Revised Standards for Institutional and for Programme Reviews have been [published online](#) in 2023. Subsequently, the [Handbook for Critical Friend Reviews, as well as other key documents of MusiQuE \(Internal Regulations, Guidelines for Institutions, Guidelines for Peer Reviewers\)](#) have also been adapted to reflect the revision of standards. The diagram below shows how the overall agenda of the process, outlined above, was implemented in practice in the revision of MusiQuE’s Standards for Institutional and for Programme Reviews.

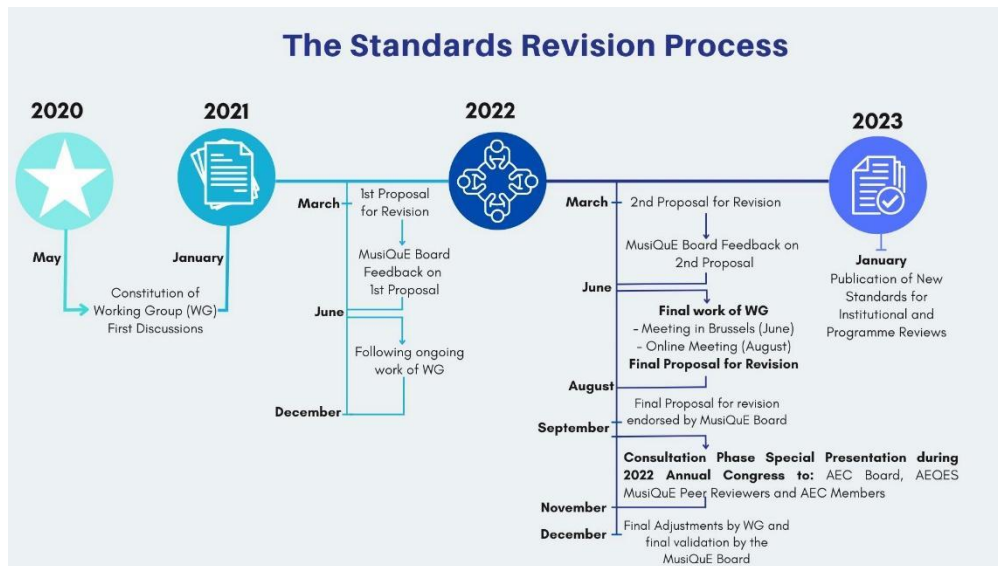


Fig. 3. MusiQuE’s Standards for Programme and for Institutional Reviews: process & timeline of revision

Step 2 in the revision process is expected to be finalised in 2025, when Step 3 of the revision is planned to begin.

The following **objectives** underlined the overall unfolding of Step 1:

- a) A simpler structure for both sets of standards – for institutional and for programme reviews;
- b) Better differentiation between the two levels of inquiry – the institutional and the programme level;
- c) Better emphasis on the student voice with explicit reference to student-centred learning and teaching;
- d) More alignment to current changes in the sector – i.e. a relevant reframing of existing topics (e.g. research, lifelong learning, engagement with the social context, equality, diversity, inclusion) and attention to emerging themes (e.g. the digital shift, mental health and well-being, sustainability);
- e) Better stimulate the shift from compliance-based quality assurance to enhancement-driven quality culture.

In relation to these objectives, the following **outcomes** were achieved in the revision of MusiQuE’s Standards for Institutional and for Programme Reviews:

- a) The revised frameworks of assessment are structured in four chapters (as opposed to eight previous domains) comprising 13, and 12 standards respectively (as opposed to 17 formerly), despite new standards being added (e.g. standard 5.2 Health and Well-being);
- b) There is a better differentiation between the two levels of inquiry – the Standards for Institutional Reviews focus on overall strategies and institutional policies, while the Standards for Programme Reviews take into account the operational aspects of related implementation processes;
- c) Student-centred learning now has a dedicated standard (2.1), while the topic is also addressed through guiding questions related to other standards;
- d) New standards and / or guiding questions have been added to reflect current changes in the sector (e.g. artistic research and research-based practice, sustainability, digitality, etc);
- e) Standard 7.1. Quality Culture has a broader and more comprehensive reach, while questions that address the effectiveness of processes and procedures have been included in relation to all the other standards.

The diagram below (Fig.4) shows how the revised structure of MusiQuE’s Standards better reflects the Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) improvement cycle, and gives an indication of the chapters where new or existing topics have been added and / or reframed (in white highlights).

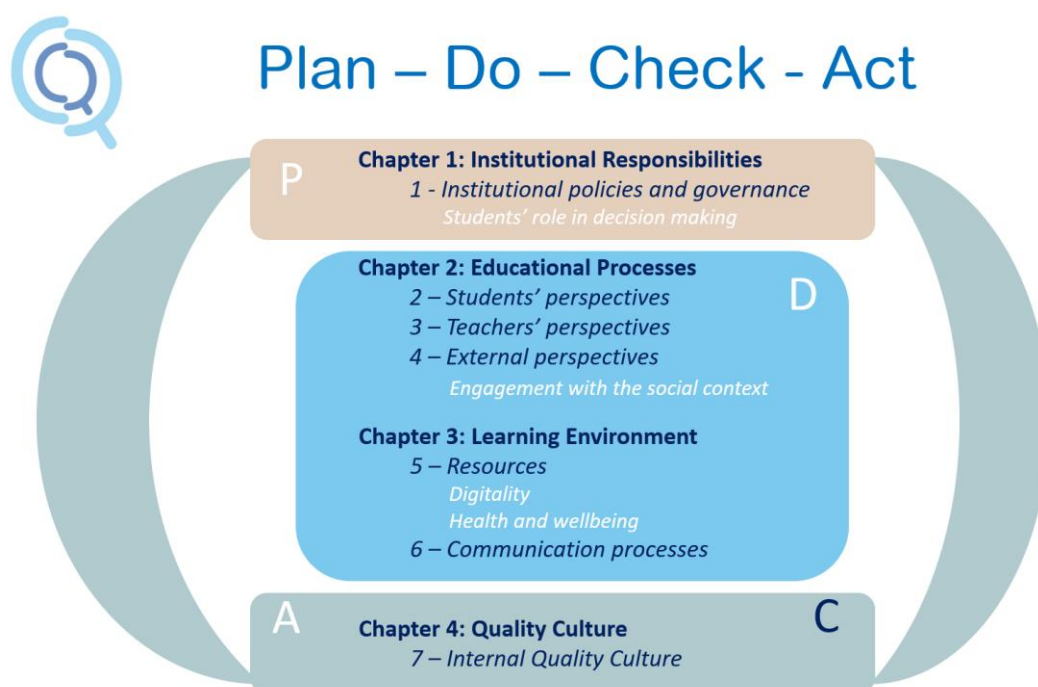


Fig. 4. Structure of MusiQuE’s Revised Standards and the PDCA improvement cycle

Comprehensive details about the overall process, the objectives, and the outcomes of this revision are included in [Annex 4. Revising MusiQuE’s Standards for Programme and for Institutional Reviews](#), and in [Annex 5. Revising MusiQuE’s Standards for Pre-College Education and for Classroom Music Teacher Education Programmes](#), respectively.

Revised Complaints and Appeals Procedure

MusiQuE was found partially compliant with ESG 2.7 Complaints and appeals during its last full external review. The recommendations received both from the external panel and from the EQAR Committee in its decision to renew MusiQuE’s registration in 2020 are presented in great detail in Annex 7 herein. These were fully taken on board in the process of revising this procedure.

The MusiQuE’s Complaints and Appeals policy was revised by the MusiQuE Office and Board, starting in 2023 with benchmarking against similar policies of national agencies involved in joint accreditations with MusiQuE (e.g., NVAO Netherlands, AQU Catalunya). A preliminary proposal was completed in Autumn 2023 and shared with experienced peer reviewers for external input. Suggestions received during this consultation phase led to a second proposal for revision presented to the MusiQuE Board in February 2024.

After Board feedback, additional research was conducted, including insights from [ENQA’s thematic analysis on agencies’ approaches to complaints and appeals](#) (Ed. December 2023) as well as further benchmarking with cross-border and national QA agencies (e.g. EUA’s Institutional Evaluation Programme, AEQES). A final revision was endorsed by the Board in May 2024, along with a shortlist of potential Complaints and Appeals Committee members. The [Revised Complaints and Appeals Procedure](#) was officially published in June 2024, with the [Complaints and Appeals Committee’s composition](#) confirmed in July 2024, following members’ acceptance.

The overall revision process is summarised in the diagram below.

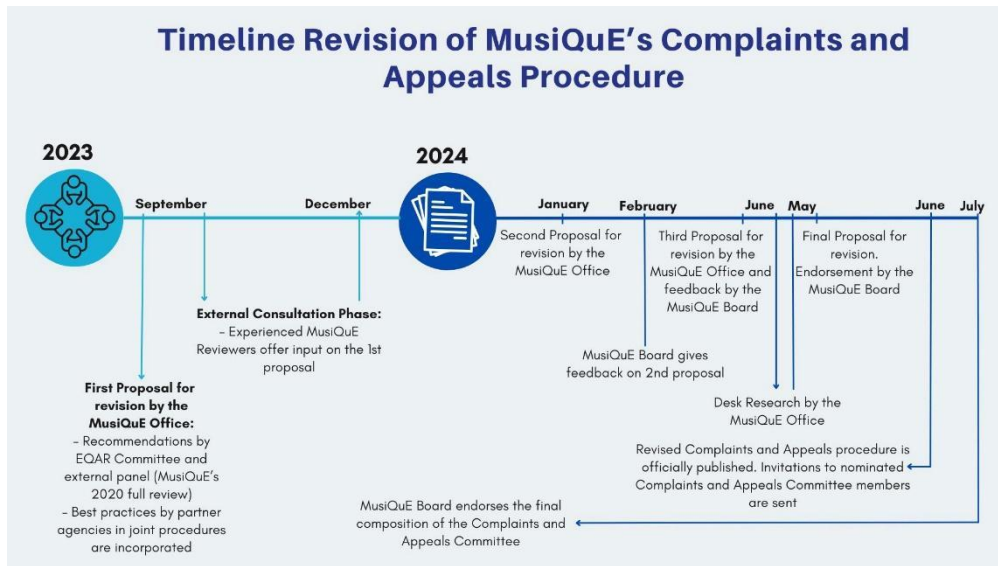


Fig. 5. MusiQuE's Complaints and Appeals Procedure: process & timeline of revision

Further details on how MusiQuE addressed the recommendations received following its 2020 external review in order to reach full compliance with ESG 2.7 (Complaints and Appeals) are included below, in Part II Section 4 – ESG Part 2. Focus areas for compliance (ESG 2.7).

PART II – FOCUS AREAS FOR COMPLIANCE

4. Focus areas for compliance – PART 2 of the ESG

Following MusiQuE’s last full external review conducted in 2020, the agency was found fully compliant with all standards included in ESG Part 2, with the exception of ESG 2.6 and ESG 2.7 for which the EQAR Committee granted partial compliance. Further, given MusiQuE’s revision of Standards for Institutional and for Programme Reviews described at length in [Annex 4](#) enclosed herein, a substantive change report was submitted to EQAR in February 2024. Subsequently, the Register Committee expressed that it expected the MusiQuE’s current review to look into whether “all aspects of ESG Part 1 are covered in practice in the updated guidelines (ESG 2.1)”, and whether “the revised guidelines are implemented consistently (ESG 2.3 and ESG 2.5)”.

Consequently, in this section the self-assessment report explains the ways in which MusiQuE maintained or further worked towards its compliance with the following standards in ESG Part 2:

- ESG 2.1 – Consideration of internal quality assurance
- ESG 2.3 – Implementing processes
- ESG 2.5 – Criteria for outcomes
- ESG 2.6 – Reporting
- ESG 2.7 – Complaints and appeals

ESG Standard 2.1 Consideration of internal quality assurance

Standard:

External quality assurance should address the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part 1 of the ESG.

Guidelines:

Quality assurance in higher education is based on the institutions’ responsibility for the quality of their programmes and other provision; therefore, it is important that external quality assurance recognises and supports institutional responsibility for quality assurance. To ensure the link between internal and external quality assurance, external quality assurance includes consideration of the standards of Part 1. These may be addressed differently, depending on the type of external quality assurance.

The agency review in 2020 found MusiQuE fully compliant with ESG Standard 2.1. Since then, MusiQuE did not undergo major changes in its structure, activities and methodology. MusiQuE continues to uphold and advance the quality of music education internationally, and to assist higher music education institutions in their own enhancement of quality, through well rounded expertise, and tailor-made services and support. Among the five key principles that form the backbone of MusiQuE, the fourth and fifth read as follows:

- MusiQuE encourages institutions at all stages of music education to reflect on their own practices and potential in adapting to ongoing challenges in society
- MusiQuE pursues quality enhancement in a way that respects the values and ethos of each individual institution and strives to make quality enhancement issues more meaningful to staff and students

MusiQuE’s frameworks of assessment have been conceived by higher music education institutions as a support mechanism to those within them who are responsible for quality assurance, and higher music education institutions have been largely involved in their revision, as detailed in [Annex 4](#) herein.

The revised standards for Institutional and for Programme Reviews adopt a simplified structure that is more clearly in line with the structure of the ESGs part 1. An overview of MusiQuE's new standards (Fig.6), and how they align with ESG part 1 (Fig.7) are captured in the diagrams presented below.

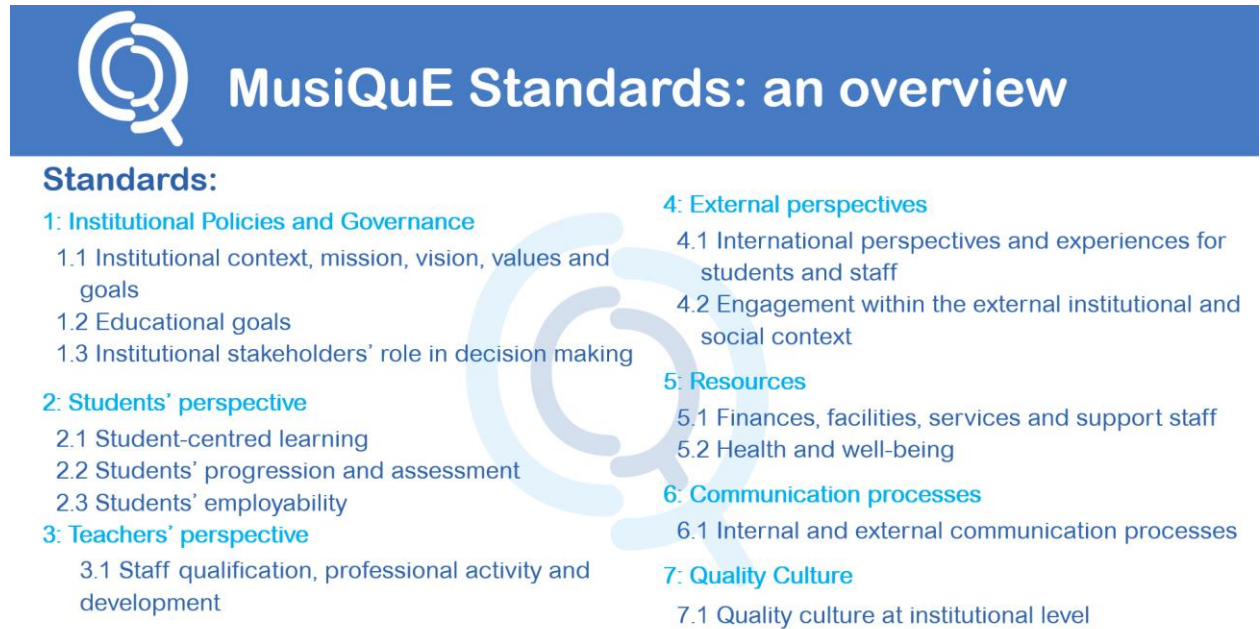


Fig. 6 MusiQuE's Revised Standards: an overview

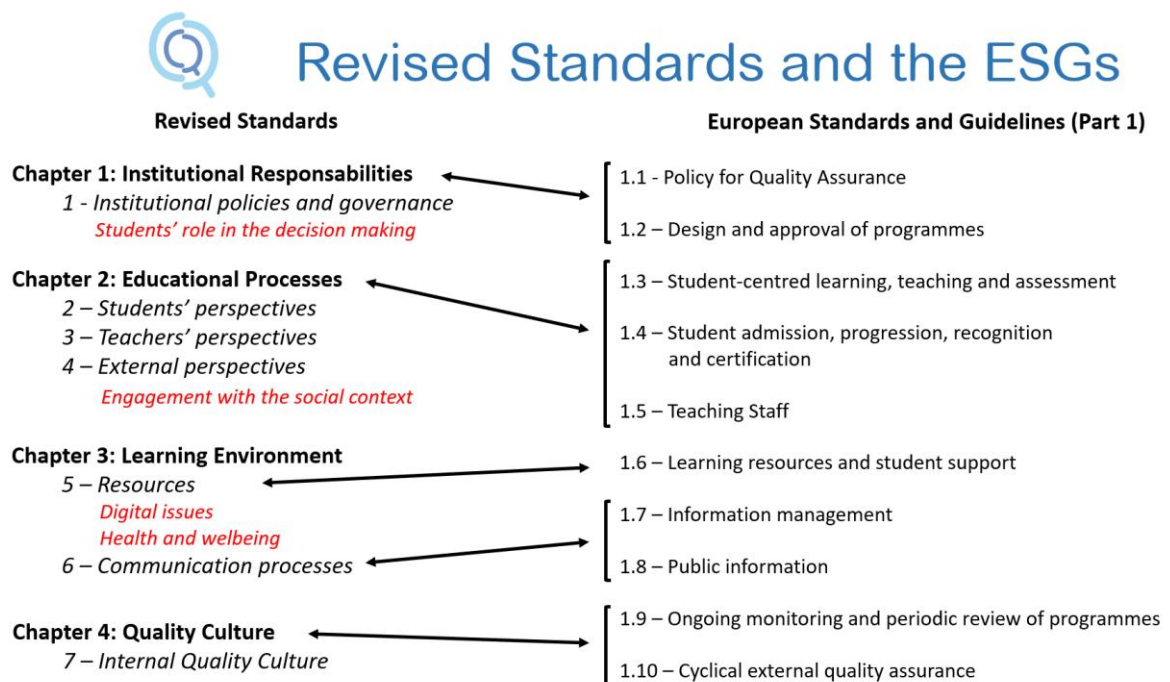


Fig. 7. Revised MusiQuE Standards and the ESGs

Through their guiding questions if not explicitly in the text of the standard, all standards address the effectiveness of internal processes and procedures, how these are being monitored and continuously revised, and how feedback loops are being closed at different decision-making levels. All these strings, revealing information on the outcomes of internal quality assurance

processes, are then brought together in the overarching **Standard 7.1. Quality Culture** that takes the consideration of internal quality assurance a step further, and looks into how internal and external feedback is sought and connected, and how staff and students are actively involved in an ongoing dialogue about the quality of education, of programme activities, and of institutional strategies and policies respectively.

Institutions and programmes are thus enabled to ensure the quality of their educational programmes, or of their curriculum and educational processes respectively, and to work towards an all-encompassing quality culture.

MusiQuE's Critical Friend Reviews¹⁰ take an additional step to building a quality culture based on continuous improvement. A Critical Friends review includes a range of visits to the institution by independent external experts, who review the institution's activities and deliver an analysis which represents the starting point of the overall review process: the reports by critical friends inform the self-evaluation process and are included in the self-evaluation report, thus further informing the work of review teams. As such, the review of an institution is extended over a larger period of time, and is conducted through an interactive approach which allows for an in depth input, beyond that which may result from the more regular site visit model.

In cases of joint accreditation or quality enhancement procedures conducted in cooperation with national quality assurance and accreditation agencies, either MusiQuE Standards are being used as the sole framework for the evaluation (case in which Standard 7.1 will always be addressed by review teams), or a mapping of both agencies' standards applicable for the procedure is being realised, case in which any standards from MusiQuE missing from the set of standards of the partner agency will be included in the evaluation framework. Insofar, it has never been the case that (internal) quality assurance or enhancement be missing from frameworks of agencies that MusiQuE cooperated with.

ESG Part 1 in MusiQuE's Standards

With each revision of standards, whether the ESG in 2015 or MusiQuE's Standards in 2023, MusiQuE conducts a mapping exercise between its own frameworks and ESG Part 1, in order to demonstrate how the ESGs 1.1 to 1.10 are being considered and addressed in MusiQuE's evaluation criteria and processes for institutions and / or programmes. The mapping verified and confirmed by the external panel in MusiQuE's 2020 review report showed that not only all standards, but also all guidelines of ESG Part 1 were covered by the MusiQuE Standards. Further, the panel noted that MusiQuE Standards include two elements that are not explicitly addressed by Part 1 of the ESGs, i.e. the focus on internationalisation (former standard 2.2 "The institution offers a range of opportunities for students to gain an international perspective"), and the explicit reference to the engagement with the wider cultural and artistic context (former standard 8.1 "The institution engages within wider cultural, artistic, and educational contexts"). These themes are still addressed in both sets of revised standards – for institutional and for programme reviews (see standard 4.1 "International perspectives and experiences for students and staff" and standard 4.2 "Engagement within the external institutional and social context").

Two areas for further improvement were also brought forth by the review panel:

- The most significant change in Part 1 of the 2015 ESG is the focus on student-centred learning, teaching, and assessment. The panel noted that while the MusiQuE frameworks

¹⁰ How frameworks of assessment are employed in Critical Friend Reviews is detailed under Part I. Section 3.1.3 above.

tackle, indeed, most separate elements of student-centred learning, teaching, and assessment (i.e. learning outcomes, flexible learning paths, using different pedagogical methods to encourage critical reflection), the overarching concept of student-centred learning is not mentioned in the assessment frameworks.

- In sum, the panel gathered that the only standard under Part 1 of the ESG for which compliance is not guaranteed by MusiQuE's processes is standard 10, which requires external quality assurance. Although the agency cannot require from institutions that they involve MusiQuE structurally to guarantee a cyclical approach to external quality assurance, it might ascertain during its reviews whether programmes or institutions have in place cyclical external quality assurance processes and conduct their own reviews.

In revising its Standards for Institutional and for Programme Reviews, MusiQuE acted on these observations outlined in the 2020 external review report. As noted in [Annex 4](#) herein, **student-centredness** was encapsulated by *Standard 2.1. Student-centred learning*, while it is also being addressed through the guiding questions listed under *Standards 2.2. Students' progression and assessment, 1.2* (and *1.3* respectively) *Programme / Institutional stakeholders' role in decision making*.

With respect to the reported lack of a formal assessment on whether the programmes or institutions under review undergo external processes on a cyclical basis, it was rightfully noted by the external panel that MusiQuE cannot compel institutions or programmes to engage in external quality assurance procedures other than those required by national law. However, it can, indeed, indicate that such an approach among institutions and programmes is not only desired, but also necessary if compliance with the ESG is being sought after. Consequently, MusiQuE included in the revised *Standard 7.1 Quality culture*, a guiding question that explicitly inquires:

What external quality assurance and enhancement procedures are in place actively involving all stakeholders, how cyclical are they, and how do they impact internal quality assurance and enhancement procedures?

Lastly, MusiQuE's Standards revision added further elements that are not currently explicitly explored by ESG Part 1. As explained in [Annex 4](#) herein, one of the objectives of the revision process was to reflect the ever more complex challenges with profound impact on higher education in the arts, and the continuous change that higher music institutions is facing as a result. Consequently, certain topics were introduced (or better emphasised – e.g. the increasing role of research in higher arts education) in the revised frameworks for Programme and for Institutional Reviews, either as new stand-alone standards, as new issues added to the text of formerly existing standards, or as new or rephrased guiding questions.

It is MusiQuE's view that some of these issues are not yet explicitly addressed by ESG Part 1, for instance:

- the level of concern for staff and students' physical and mental health and well-being (MusiQuE Standard 5.2),
- the level of concern with regards to the issue of sustainability (MusiQuE Standards 1.1, 4.2, and 5.1),
- the level and the ways of engagement with the broader society (MusiQuE Standard 5.1),
- the depth and efficiency of digitalisation processes (MusiQuE Standard 5.1),
- the ways in which equality, diversity and inclusion are being accounted for at institutional and programme level (MusiQuE Standards 1.1, 2.1, 3.1, and 5.2)

To conclude, a self-assessment of MusiQuE’s Revised Standards compliance with ESG Part 1 is captured in **Table 1** below. The full text of the mapped standards is available in [Annex 6. Mapping of MusiQuE’s Standards against ESG Part 1](#).

ESG PART 1 *Numbers in the table refer to the relevant MusiQuE standard.	<i>MusiQuE’s Revised Standards for Institutional Reviews (quality enhancement reviews and accreditation procedures)*</i>	<i>MusiQuE’s Revised Standards for Programme Reviews (quality enhancement reviews and accreditation procedures)*</i>
1.1 Policy for quality assurance	1.1	1.1
1.2 Design and approval of programmes	1.2 1.3	1.1 1.2
1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment	2.1 2.2	2.1 2.2
1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification	2.3	2.3
1.5 Teaching staff	3.1	3.1
1.6 Learning resources and student support	5.1	5.1
1.7 Information management	6.1	6.1
1.8 Public information		
1.9 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes	7.1	7.1
1.10 Cyclical external quality assurance		

Table 1. Self-assessment of compliance with ESG Part 1 for MusiQuE’s Revised Standards for Institutional and for Programme Reviews

The mapping assessed by the panel during MusiQuE’s 2020 full external review remains valid for [MusiQuE’s Standards for Joint-Programme Reviews](#) and for [Classroom Music Teacher Education Programmes](#) until their revision is officially completed. This mapping is retaken in **Table 2** below. Once their revision is completed, the mapping shown in Table 1 will also apply to MusiQuE’s Standards for Joint Programmes and for Classroom Music Teacher Education Programmes.

ESG PART 1 *Numbers in the table refer to the relevant MusiQuE standard.	Quality enhancement reviews and accreditation of classroom music teacher education programmes*	Quality enhancement reviews and accreditation of joint programmes*
1.1 Policy for quality assurance	6.2 7	6.2 7
1.2 Design and approval of programmes	1 2.1 8.1	1 2.1 8.1
1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment	2.1 2.3 4	2.1 2.3 4
1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification	3 8.1	3 8.1
1.5 Teaching staff	4	4
1.6 Learning resources and student support	5 7	5 7
1.7 Information management	1 2.1 3.2 7	1 2.1 3.2 7
1.8 Public information	6.1 8.3	6.1 8.3

	3.2	3.25
<i>1.9 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes</i>	7 5.1 5.3	7 5.1 5.3
<i>1.10 Cyclical external quality assurance</i>	7	7

Table 2. Self-assessment of compliance with ESG Part 1 for MusiQuE's Standards for Joint Programmes and for Classroom Music Teacher Education Programmes

Self-evaluation: Given the elements above, we believe that **MusiQuE's quality enhancement reviews and accreditation procedures are fully compliant with ESG Standard 2.1.**

ESG Standard 2.3 Implementing processes

Standard:

External quality assurance processes should be reliable, useful, pre-defined, implemented consistently and published. They include

- a self-assessment or equivalent;
- an external assessment normally including a site visit;
- a report resulting from the external assessment;
- a consistent follow-up.

Guidelines:

External quality assurance carried out professionally, consistently and transparently ensures its acceptance and impact.

Depending on the design of the external quality assurance system, the institution provides the basis for the external quality assurance through a self-assessment or by collecting other material including supporting evidence. The written documentation is normally complemented by interviews with stakeholders during a site visit. The findings of the assessment are summarised in a report (cf. Standard 2.5) written by a group of external experts (cf. Standard 2.4).

External quality assurance does not end with the report by the experts. The report provides clear guidance for institutional action. Agencies have a consistent follow-up process for considering the action taken by the institution. The nature of the follow-up will depend on the design of the external quality assurance.

Apart from the revision of MusiQuE's Standards for Institutional and for Programme reviews, a process described at length in [Annex 4](#) herein and in Part II. Section 4. ESG 2.1 above, MusiQuE did not implement further changes with respect to its implementing processes. The revision of standards was also reflected in MusiQuE's key documents – [MusiQuE's Internal regulations](#), the [Guidelines for Institutions](#), the [Handbook for Critical Friend Reviews](#), and the [Guidelines for peer-reviewers that contain comprehensive details of all aspects of MusiQuE's procedures](#). No other substantive changes were brought to MusiQuE's key documents apart from the amendment of the relevant sections related to MusiQuE's standards.

As a reminder, MusiQuE conducts reviews that employ pre-defined processes:

- *Self-evaluation*: a self-assessment exercise carried out by the institution and resulting in a self-evaluation report for which a tailor-made template is provided by MusiQuE;
- *External evaluation*: an external assessment made by an expert panel and informed by a site visit;
- *Reporting*: a report produced by the panel according to a defined sequence of actions, each with a specified timeframe;
- *Follow-up*: a follow-up procedure designed to cope with routine procedures and, where necessary, with complaints or appeals. The final reports of MusiQuE reviews are published on its website and on DEQAR.

To ensure consistency in its implementing processes, the following elements are routinely embedded in each external review procedure:

- [Templates](#) have been developed to assist those preparing the documentation: templates for the self-evaluation report and one for the review panel's report. These are both [published online](#), and shared directly both with reviewed institutions and with reviewers.
- Once the review team produces a draft review report, the MusiQuE Office ensures that the report is analytical and well-referenced, that supporting evidence is provided for the observations and quality judgements made, and that a list of points for further

development is included. The Office produced a check-list for secretaries and for the Office itself to check the reports. In addition, the Operations Sub-Committee of the MusiQuE Board¹¹ considers the report by focusing on three areas: 1) the overall quality of the report, 2) the compliance levels and their justification and 3) the consistency with the other reports.

- In order to assist visited institutions in the post-site-visit process and to enable MusiQuE to assess its impact, a peer-reviewed follow-up process is offered, 2 years after the initial review, based on a [specific template](#) made up of three sections under each standard in the applicable framework of assessment.

Concerning the follow-up processes, the recommendation of the external panel that visited MusiQuE in 2020 is still valid: “the follow-up should [...] be embedded more structurally in the work of the agency [...] in order to guarantee a consistent follow-up in each of its external quality assurance processes”. The difficulty to ensure a consistent follow-up in its review procedures is listed as a challenge in MusiQuE’s SCOT analysis herein, and will be addressed in the next strategic period. The MusiQuE Board and Office started reflecting on this matter and identified in the [‘Thematic Analysis: What comes after the agency reports are published?’](#) published by ENQA some interesting ideas and actions that MusiQuE could implement, such as seminars, conferences or annual meetings for reviewed institutions.

For [Critical Friend Reviews](#), in which a MusiQuE review visit is preceded by ‘critical friends’ visits to various departments or programmes, some components are added to the processes referred to above (also described in [MusiQuE’s Handbook for Critical Friend Review](#)):

- each programme or department to be reviewed sends relevant material to the ‘critical friend’ who will then conduct a review including formal and informal elements;
- the ‘critical friend’ then produces a report with recommendations, structured in line with the guidelines which MusiQuE developed on the basis of the MusiQuE Standards (the report is addressed to the head of department or programmes);
- the department or programme prepares an action plan in response to the ‘critical friend report’ and implements the action plan.
- a regular review procedure concluding the cycle of critical friend visits is then undertaken by a review team and it will unfold in the same manner already described above, with the following two amendments that allow for the whole critical friend evaluation process to be included and reflected in the all-encompassing external review report:
 - critical friends reports and response-action plans created by reviewed departments, and the ways these were implemented to effect improvement, are included in the self-evaluation documentation provided to the review team
 - the reviewed institution will facilitate a live discussion between the critical friends and the members of the review team during the site visit.

Self-evaluation: given the elements above, we believe that **MusiQuE’s quality enhancement reviews and accreditation procedures remain fully compliant with ESG Standard 2.3.**

¹¹ For the special roles within the MusiQuE Board please see Section 2.2.2 of [MusiQuE’s Internal Regulations](#).

ESG Standard 2.5 Criteria for outcomes

Standard:

Any outcomes or judgements made as the result of external quality assurance should be based on explicit and published criteria that are applied consistently, irrespective of whether the process leads to a formal decision.

Guidelines:

External quality assurance and in particular its outcomes have a significant impact on institutions and programmes that are evaluated and judged.

In the interests of equity and reliability, outcomes of external quality assurance are based on predefined and published criteria, which are interpreted consistently and are evidence-based.

Depending on the external quality assurance system, outcomes may take different forms, for example, recommendations, judgments or formal decisions.

Apart from the revision of MusiQuE's Standards for Institutional and for Programme reviews, a process described at length in [Annex 4](#) and in Part II. Section 4. ESG 2.1 above, MusiQuE did not implement further changes with respect to the ways in which its criteria for evaluation are being used in the review procedures it conducts.

Explicit and published criteria

As a reminder, for all MusiQuE's activities in the scope of and in compliance with the ESG, the relevant MusiQuE Standards constitute the explicit and published criteria against which the outcomes and judgement of all MusiQuE reviews are made.

A comprehensive list of all MusiQuE's Standards, together with relevant links to MusiQuE's website, was included under Part 1. Section 3.1.4 above. Aside from being [published on the agency's website](#), the relevant set of standards to be used in a certain procedure is sent electronically to the applicant institution upon signature of the service contract. The corresponding self-evaluation report template, as well as the Guidelines for Institutions are also shared together with the applicable framework of assessment. Further, clear reference to the standards that are being used for a particular procedure is included among the provisions of the service contract.

The outcomes of MusiQuE review procedures can be the following:

For Quality Enhancement Reviews:

The review report itself represents the final result. It includes a summary of compliance levels to the standards in the applicable framework, it highlights the institution's / programme's strong points, and it provides advice and suggestions / recommendations for change.

For Accreditation Procedures:

The accreditation report represents the final result. It also includes a summary of compliance levels to the standards in the applicable framework, the strong points and the areas for further development identified, as well as recommendations for change and, where the case, conditions for accreditation. In addition, the report includes a decision on the accreditation of the institution/programme/joint programme, with the following possibilities:

- Accreditation (if only recommendations are expressed in the report)
- Conditional accreditation (if one or more conditions, and a timeframe to meet them, are included in the report)
- Not accredited.

Consistency in the application of criteria for all types of reviews

For all MusiQuE's activities in the scope of the ESG, the following steps are in place:

- All review team members receive the [MusiQuE Guidelines for Peer Reviewers](#) that comprise an explicit section on reports and outcomes (Section 6).
- Review team secretaries are provided with guidelines for writing the report.
- Review teams also receive short guidelines to assess compliance levels. The intended purpose is to enhance the level of consistency of the assessment process across all reviews and facilitate the work of the teams.
- The MusiQuE Office and the Operation Sub-committee of the MusiQuE Board conduct a first check of the report when delivered by the Review Team¹². In this phase, the report's structure, format, and consistency with other reports are being considered. Particular attention is given to ensuring that the MusiQuE Standards are applied consistently, and that outcomes or quality judgments are justified appropriately with reference to evidence gathered by the review team.

Based on comparative research conducted by the MusiQuE Office in relation to compliance levels and corresponding compliance sentences used by various agencies, and after considering a possible move to three compliance levels, the Board maintained its decision to keep four levels in order to enable teams to better nuance their findings. The compliance statements currently in use both in the external quality enhancement reviews, and in accreditation procedures conducted by MusiQuE, are listed in Section 3.1 of MusiQuE's [Guidelines for Peer Reviewers and in Section 8.1.2 of MusiQuE's Internal Regulations](#).

Self-evaluation: given the elements above, we believe that **MusiQuE's quality enhancement reviews and accreditation procedures remain fully compliant with ESG Standard 2.5.**

¹² See Part II. Section 4, ESG 2.3 (Implementing processes) above, as well as **Section 8.1.3 of [MusiQuE's Internal Regulations](#)** for further details regarding the approval of review reports by the MusiQuE Board.

ESG Standard 2.6 Reporting

Standard:

Full reports by the experts should be published, clear and accessible to the academic community, external partners and other interested individuals. If the agency takes any formal decision based on the reports, the decision should be published together with the report.

Guidelines:

The report by the experts is the basis for the institution's follow-up action of the external evaluation and it provides information to society regarding the activities of an institution. In order for the report to be used as the basis for action to be taken, it needs to be clear and concise in its structure and language and to cover

- context description (to help locate the higher education institution in its specific context);
- description of the individual procedure, including experts involved;
- evidence, analysis and findings;
- conclusions;
- features of good practice, demonstrated by the institution;
- recommendations for follow-up action.

The preparation of a summary report may be useful.

The factual accuracy of a report is improved if the institution is given the opportunity to point out errors of fact before the report is finalised.

As noted in Part 1. Section 3.2 above, MusiQuE underwent a full rebranding process which included the redesign and restructuring of its website. The new website was launched in 2021 and since then, the DEQAR database has been integrated on the [Review Reports](#) section of the MusiQuE website. In this way, once a MusiQuE procedure within the scope and reach of the ESG¹³ is completed, and the review report is formally shared with the institution and published online, it is instantaneously featured on DEQAR.

MusiQuE reports have always been published in full, together with the accompanying decision by the MusiQuE Board. Since 2017, an executive summary is also being published together with the full report. Reports resulting from follow-up procedures (either 'sur dossier' or after a site visit) are published online together with the decision by the Board and with a reference to the initial review report.

All review reports are based on the same template, to ensure consistency, and they follow the structure of the framework of assessment used during the review. Further, MusiQuE reports comprise an introduction explaining the context of the evaluation, evidence and analysis of compliance with each standard, and a summary of all commendations, recommendations, and compliance levels. Since 2019, a conclusion has been consistently added at the end of all reports, restating the strong points of the institution / programme, the most important commendations and recommendations, and a general statement of the review team (which, in the case of accreditation procedures, can be formulated as a recommendation for accreditation to the MusiQuE Board). Following the revision of MusiQuE's Standards for Programme and for Institutional Reviews, the corresponding review report templates¹⁴ have been adapted to match the revised frameworks.

¹³ See Section 3.1.3 above for details regarding the distinction between the services offered by MusiQuE within and outside the scope and reach of the ESG.

¹⁴ See, for instance, the [Accreditation Report for the Training BA and the Studios MA offered by P.A.R.T.S Brussels](#), an outcome of a procedure conducted on the basis of MusiQuE's Revised Standards for Programme Review.

Optimisation of the review report writing process

One of the recommendations received from the external panel during MusiQuE's full review in 2020, and underlined by the Register Committee in its corresponding decision, referred to the optimisation of the report writing process in order to reduce the time between the site visit and the publication of the final report which was reported to last up to one year, in certain situations. [MusiQuE's Internal Regulations](#) describe at length the writing and approval process of review reports (Section 8.1.3). A summary of all milestones is presented in the diagram below:

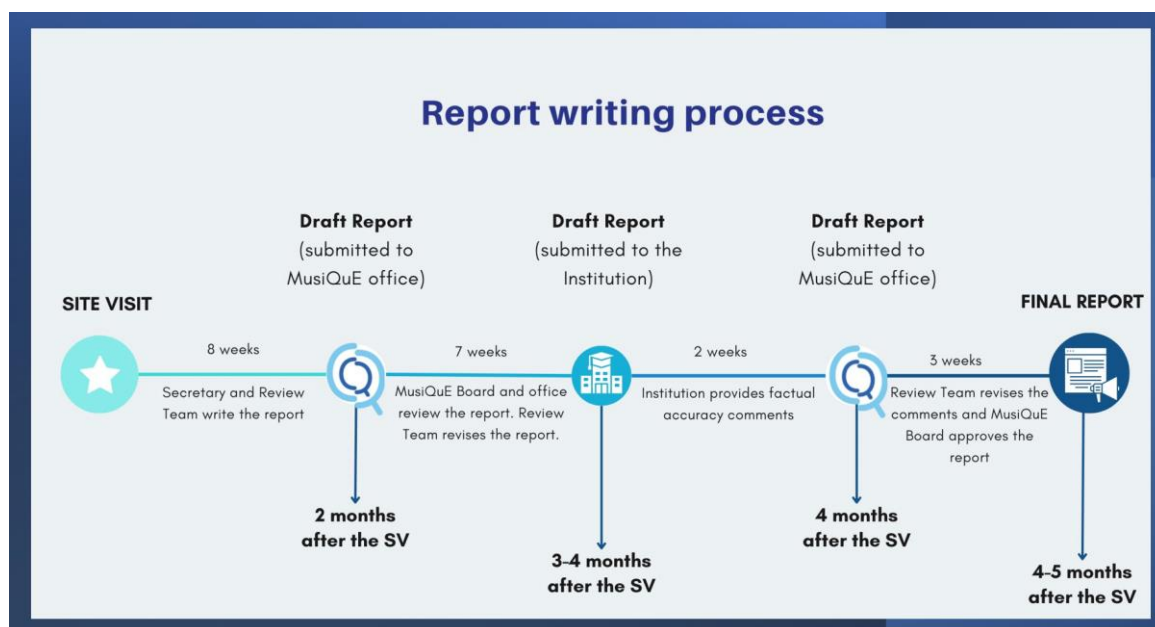


Fig. 8 Review reports: from initial draft to official publication

Since the agency's 2020 external review, the following steps were undertaken to give course to the recommendation received:

- The deadline for producing the first draft report by the review team has been reduced from ten to eight weeks;
- As mentioned above, a Board sub-committee — the Operations Sub-Committee — was established in 2022 to review all reports for quality, compliance, and consistency with other MusiQuE reviews. Its conclusions are then presented to the full Board for formal approval before reports are sent to institutions for accuracy checks, thus expediting decision-making on review reports¹⁵.
- Previously, the MusiQuE Office reviewed draft reports for layout and content consistency before passing them to the Board. Now, the MusiQuE Office and the Board's Operations Sub-Committee provide combined feedback in a single step. The review team revises the report based on this feedback, and it is then sent to the institution for a factual accuracy check. After the institution's comments are integrated, the final report is approved by the full MusiQuE Board.

In this way the time length between the site visit and the publication of the final report has been reduced to four up to maximum five months. This duration is within the standards currently fulfilled by other QA agencies.

¹⁵ See Section 8.1.3 of [MusiQuE's Internal Regulations](#) for further details about this process.

The external panel also recommended in its 2020 review report that MusiQuE clearly defines which language version constitutes the primary report. Consequently, the service contracts and agreements signed by MusiQuE ever since comprise a provision that states, in addition to the official language of the procedure, which report will be considered official and which language versions are to be considered secondary translations.

Publication of Critical Friend Review reports

In Decision RC28/A88, the Register Committee noted that MusiQuE does not publish critical friend review reports, neither separately nor with the final review report. The Committee emphasized that all expert-prepared reports, covering full evidence and analysis, should be published. They indicated it would be sufficient to include the critical friend reports alongside the final external review report. Considering the non-publication of critical friend review reports, the Register Committee was unable to concur with the panel's conclusion of (full) compliance and concluded that MusiQuE complies only partially with standard 2.6.

Consequently, MusiQuE pondered extensively the course of action with the aim to find a compromise that would rise to the Committee's expectations without altering the core principles and philosophy of the Critical Friend Review.

Within the Critical Friend Review process¹⁶, it is important to emphasize the link between the CF visits and the final panel review: CF reports and institutional responses always form part of the self-evaluation report for the final review, and the final review report integrates the full CF review process. During the site visit, the panel engages directly with CFs, thus ensuring that **the whole CF review process is incorporated and reflected in the final review report**.¹⁷ An ideal timeline of such a procedure is exemplified below (Fig. 9).

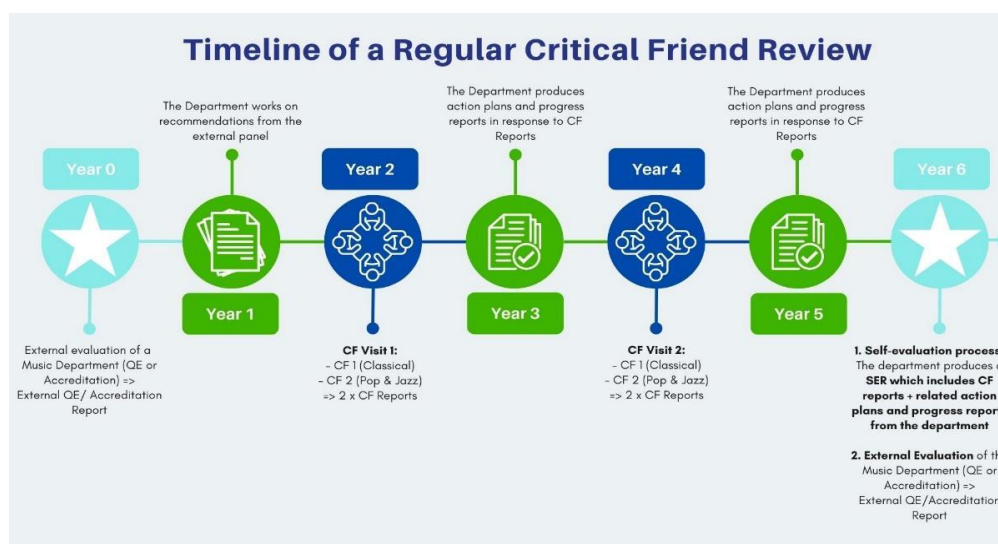


Fig 9. Regular Critical Friend Review Procedure

¹⁶ Reminder of the process: A standard Critical Friend Review is conducted between two six-year external evaluation cycles, and involves critical friends (CFs) visiting one or more departments twice. Each visit results in a report, which the department addresses in an action plan and progress report, shared with CFs before the next visit. This sequence repeats, and all CF reports and progress updates are included in the institution's self-evaluation report, which the external panel reviews.

¹⁷ Comprehensive details about the procedure are included in the Handbook for Critical Friend Reviews published on [MusiQuE's website](#).

Since it is not a requirement for higher (music) education institutions to publish their self-evaluation documentation, and in some national contexts such information may even be treated as confidential, MusiQuE refrained up until now to publish individual CF reports while making sure that such reports are being reflected and integrated in the final review report published on DEQAR.

Further, in contrast to formal external reviews, which typically convey an overall perspective of a programme or an institution, a CF visit has a very specific, and usually small-scale focus, thus making the feedback more personal, and more recognisable. The intimate and informal tone of CF reports actively contributes to shifting from potentially abstract processes to a discourse about the quality of the content of education. It is MusiQuE's view that formalising CF reports, beyond the general requirement to employ the applicable MusiQuE standards in conducting the overall visit, would alter the intimacy of the dialogue between the critical friends and the departments concerned, and the individuality of the feedback that such reports vividly capture.

In trying to give course to the Committee's recommendation, MusiQuE carried out discussions with institutions currently undergoing a Critical Friend review, aiming to explore ways in which compliance to the requirement of publication be attained without altering the spirit of the overall procedure. It was unanimously accepted **that summaries of recommendations from CF reports be published together with the review report by the external panel**, may it be a quality enhancement review or an accreditation procedure. And, where institutions feel comfortable with the publication of full CF reports alongside the final review report, MusiQuE will act accordingly.

Given the predominantly free style of existing CF reports, compiling such summaries of recommendations proved to be a rather challenging task insofar. Consequently, and using the revision of MusiQuE's standards as an opportunity, MusiQuE amended the Handbook for Critical Friend Reviews to include, **as guidelines**, more specific suggestions for the structure of CF reports – for instance a clear indication that each topic addressed be concluded with a summary of commendations and recommendations (pp.15-22, [Handbook of Critical Friend Reviews](#)). These guidelines are implemented for procedures conducted from 2024 onwards.

The only completed CF review procedures concluded with programme accreditations were conducted at The Hague Royal Conservatoire. In this case, the institution agreed that CF reports be retroactively published in full, alongside with the related accreditation reports¹⁸.

All other CF reviews contracted by MusiQuE are still ongoing, with external reviews planned for future years. Once these procedures are completed, MusiQuE will proceed to the publication of the report in the way described above.

Self-evaluation: All of the above considered, it can be concluded that MusiQuE undertook the necessary steps to fully implement all recommendations received during its most recent external review in 2020. Consequently, it can be inferred that **MusiQuE's quality enhancement reviews and accreditation procedures are fully compliant with ESG Standard 2.6.**

¹⁸ For further details please see: <https://musique-ge.eu/completed-reviews/quality-enhancement-reviews-and-accreditation-processes/report/109681/> and <https://musique-ge.eu/completed-reviews/quality-enhancement-reviews-and-accreditation-processes/report/109680/>.

ESG Standard 2.7 Complaints and appeals

Standard:

Complaints and appeals processes should be clearly defined as part of the design of external quality assurance processes and communicated to the institutions.

Guidelines:

In order to safeguard the rights of the institutions and ensure fair decision-making, external quality assurance is operated in an open and accountable way. Nevertheless, there may be misapprehensions or instances of dissatisfaction about the process or formal outcomes.

Institutions need to have access to processes that allow them to raise issues of concern with the agency; the agencies, need to handle such issues in a professional way by means of a clearly defined process that is consistently applied.

A complaints procedure allows an institution to state its dissatisfaction about the conduct of the process or those carrying it out.

In an appeals procedure, the institution questions the formal outcomes of the process, where it can demonstrate that the outcome is not based on sound evidence, that criteria have not been correctly applied or that the processes have not been consistently implemented.

All recommendations received by MusiQuE for revising its Complaints and Appeals procedure, both in the 2020 external review report and in the Register Committee's related Decision RC28/A88 were collected in [Annex 7 – MusiQuE's compliance with ESG 2.7](#), herein.

With this in mind, MusiQuE introduced the following changes in its [Revised Complaints and Appeals Procedure](#):

- A Complaints and Appeals Committee was created. The Committee is composed of three voting members nominated by the MusiQuE Office and appointed by the MusiQuE Board for a fixed term of three years, renewable once. To be appointed to the Complaints and Appeals Committee one should not have been involved in any of MusiQuE's decision making or executive bodies for a period of five years. Former Committee members may not act as MusiQuE peer reviewers until one year after their mandate came to term, provided that they fulfil all requirements in this regard. Should a conflict of interest arise between the complainant and any member of the Committee during the period of their office, the member in question will withdraw from the complaint or appeal process. In the unlikely event that two of the three members of the Complaints and Appeals Committee declare a conflict of interest in relation to a specific complaint or appeal, a temporary replacement of at least one of the two recused members will be specially appointed by the Director of the MusiQuE Office ([Introduction, p.4](#)).
- Clear deadlines and divisions of roles for each step now foreseen in the Complaints and Appeals Procedure have been introduced. A summary of these was added at the end of the policy document ([Summary of procedural deadlines, pp.11-12](#)). How to introduce a complaint or an appeal, how they are being considered by MusiQuE, and how their outcomes can be further contested has been streamlined and clarified in the revised procedure.
- The appeals procedure no longer applies only to accreditation procedures. It can be introduced to contest the outcomes of quality enhancement procedures as well ([Section 2.1. Grounds for an appeal procedure, p.7](#)).
- The roles and the limits in the decision-making process related to the consideration of complaints and appeals have been better defined and streamlined, as follows:

- The composition, scope and mandate of the Complaints and Appeals Committee has been completely revised. Its members are no longer nominated by the MusiQuE Board. Their selection and nomination is handled by the MusiQuE Office with the Board endorsing the final list of candidates. Any temporary substitute members joining the Committee due to possible conflicts of interests in certain complaints or appeals procedures, are being appointed by the Director of MusiQuE.
- In cases of complaints, the primary decision-making body remained the MusiQuE Board, given that they can only pertain to perceived procedural failures hence circumscribed to common-sense assumptions, normative expectations and conventions governing MusiQuE's day-to-day business with which the Board is most familiar. The Complaints and Appeals Committee is informed throughout the whole procedure, but only takes the lead in decision-making once and if a decision by the MusiQuE Board is being further contested by the complainant ([Section 1.2 Consideration of complaints, pp.5-6](#)). Should a complaint relate directly to the MusiQuE Board, or any of its individual members, the matter will be referred directly to the Complaints and Appeals Committee ([Section 1.3 Consideration of complaints related to the MusiQuE Board, p.6](#)).
- In cases of appeals, the primary decision-making body is the Complaints and Appeals Committee. As a first step in considering the appeal, the Committee will invite the MusiQuE Board to review, in the way considered fit for purpose, its initial decision on the endorsement of the compliance quality judgements included in the review report that make the object of the appeal. Should the MusiQuE Board decide not to uphold the appeal, the matter shall be investigated further by the Complaints and Appeals Committee. The decision of the Appeals Committee will be final, and irrevocable, and shall be communicated in writing to all parties involved ([Section 2.3 Consideration of appeals, p.9](#) and [Section 2.5 Communication of the Complaints and Appeals Committee's decision, p.10](#)).
- With regard to transparency, the [Complaints and Appeals Procedure](#) as well as the composition of the [Complaints and Appeals Committee](#) are published on MusiQuE's website. Further, the Revised Complaints and Appeals Procedure is included in the [Guidelines for Institutions](#) that are being shared with institutions applying for a MusiQuE procedure upon signature of the service contract.

Self-evaluation: All of the above considered, it can be concluded that MusiQuE undertook the necessary steps to implement fully all recommendations received during its most recent external review in 2020. Consequently, it can be inferred that **MusiQuE's quality enhancement reviews and accreditation procedures are fully compliant with ESG Standard 2.7.**

PART III – ENHANCEMENT AREA AND SCOT ANALYSIS

4. Focus areas for enhancement – PART 3 of ESG

ESG Standard 3.1 Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance

Standard:

Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities as defined in Part 2 of the ESG on a regular basis. They should have clear and explicit goals and objectives that are part of their publicly available mission statement. These should translate into the daily work of the agency. Agencies should ensure the involvement of stakeholders in their governance and work.

Guidelines:

To ensure the meaningfulness of external quality assurance, it is important that institutions and the public trust agencies.

Therefore, the goals and objectives of the quality assurance activities are described and published along with the nature of interaction between the agencies and relevant stakeholders in higher education, especially the higher education institutions, and the scope of the agencies' work. The expertise in the agency may be increased by including international members in agency committees.

A variety of external quality assurance activities are carried out by agencies to achieve different objectives. Among them are evaluation, review, audit, assessment, accreditation or other similar activities at programme or institutional level that may be carried out differently. When the agencies also carry out other activities, a clear distinction between external quality assurance and their other fields of work is needed.

The MusiQuE Board and Office chose ESG 3.1 as the enhancement oriented standard for this targeted review.

MusiQuE's current mission and vision, goals and principles, how these are translated in its daily work and in the activities it conducts were described in Part I above. A summary of MusiQuE procedures implemented for each of the EQAs it conducts was included in Annex 2 herein. (Re)assessing what exists is not the primary goal that MusiQuE pursued when selecting this standard. Advice and support in shaping its vision for the future was MusiQuE's main reason for this choice.

MusiQuE will start revising and updating its Strategy Paper (which currently covers the period 2020-2025) and would greatly benefit from the feedback of the external review panel on the directions it is contemplating for the next strategic period (2026-2030). Indeed, many different perspectives are to be considered, as "MusiQuE lays the foundation to play a role that goes beyond the role many national quality assurance agencies play" ([Annex 3. Draft Report by MusiQuE's External Evaluator](#), p.11).

MusiQuE wishes to address the following questions:

- How can MusiQuE "move beyond a demand-driven growth model, where the agency develops and broadens its offerings to respond to specific requests by higher education

institutions, to a more streamlined, planned, and strategic-growth model”?
[recommendation from the 2020 external review panel¹⁹]

- How can the unique expertise of MusiQuE better help its positioning in the international higher education sector, more specifically in relation to national governments and agencies?
- How can a broader body of stakeholders, at both European but also national level, help shape the future and scope of MusiQuE’s operations?

4.1 Moving to a more streamlined, planned, and strategic-growth model

After ten years of operation, MusiQuE’s achievements are numerous, but the number of institutions that worked with MusiQuE remains relatively low: MusiQuE worked with 50 different institutions up until now, which represents only 16% of the 309 higher music education institutions from among the AEC membership.

MusiQuE remained active in approaching institutions individually by email, and through online and in-person meetings, to share information about its services, make contact with the relevant persons in the institution, and encourage institutions to explore how MusiQuE can support them in their work. The Office developed a comprehensive database where all higher education institutions members of AEC are listed alongside their estimated interest in MusiQuE services, as well as brief reports by Office and Board members on their regular contacts with the institutions they are in charge of.

In its most recent discussions, the Board started pondering two possible pathways that MusiQuE could focus on from 2026 onwards:

- targeting specific geographical areas (such as Germany, where registration on the German Accreditation Council has been completed in 2021, or South-East Asia where a Memorandum of Understanding with SEADOM was signed in 2022)
- making a strategic choice between further diversifying its services to address particular demands or specific needs of institutions, and narrowing its focus on increasing the number of procedures that already stood the test of time (quality enhancement reviews, Critical Friend reviews, accreditation procedures).

A **focus on a geographical area** would require an initial investment (e.g. for Germany: desk research to explore the exact types of reviews which institutions across the various states would need [system accreditation, programme accreditation, etc.], production of material in German to approach institutions, meetings with the rectors’ conference and individual meetings, etc.) although its success would not necessarily be guaranteed (as institutions may prefer working with the national agency with which they have been working for a long time).

Concerning the **diversification of its offer**, MusiQuE has been expanding, since 2020, the type of services it delivers (always as a reaction to demands from institutions: e.g. to conduct external reviews of programmes or departments in other artistic domains than music). Further, it engaged in several large-scale consultancy procedures: MusiQuE was contracted to evaluate the

¹⁹ After a “survival mode” period in 2020-2021, and a focus on increasing its visibility and coordinating an increased number of reviews in 2022-2024, MusiQuE is finally ready to work on this recommendation of the external review panel from 2020.

performance of research centres in Flanders, to assess the effective implementation of projects, and to develop a comparative study of internal and external quality assurance systems for institutions member of a European University Alliance.

Recently, MusiQuE has been approached by institutions in Spain to discuss how it could assist Spanish institutions to implement the new law on Artistic Education which requires that the institutions establish a quality assurance system (that must then be accredited by a national or regional quality assurance agency); by institutions in Italy and by ANVUR to potentially provide assistance with the evaluation of third cycle degrees in the artistic sector; and some institutions have also contacted MusiQuE on an individual basis to explore a complete rethinking of their quality assurance procedures.

These demands are demonstrating that MusiQuE is gaining momentum and is seen as an increasingly strong partner in the field of quality assurance. However, such demands are also generating substantial additional workload for MusiQuE, in particular for the Office (in terms of discussing and understanding the institutions' particular needs, and finding the most suitable ways to address them effectively), while they may not necessarily materialise in actual contracts.

Alternatively, MusiQuE could deliberately focus on **offering more intensely its regular review procedures** (i.e. Quality Enhancement reviews and accreditation procedures) as well as its Critical Friend reviews. The amount of work for the Office would be more predictable, and synergies could be found between the various procedures to enable Office members to coordinate a slightly larger amount of reviews per year. Consequently, more availability to conduct policy work, desk research, and to enhance external communication would potentially be created at the level of the Office. Further, by focusing only on a few services, MusiQuE would be able to better streamline its communication and to convey clearer and more straight-forward messages to its target groups.

However, there is no certainty that demands for these services would grow to the level that is required for MusiQuE to continue developing. Despite cross-border quality assurance gaining momentum in policy-making at EU level, MusiQuE is not currently able to conduct its procedures, as an alternative to compulsory national evaluation procedures, in several EHEA countries (see Section 4.2 below). Experience showed that institutions are less likely to work with MusiQuE if the services it offers imply additional workload and/or additional expenses. And, for as long as some form of certification from the national agency remains obligatory, regardless of the number and types of quality assurance procedures an institution may undergo with an EQAR-registered agency of their choice, there will be little interest to go off the beaten path and engage with internationally-based procedures.

4.2 Improving its positioning in the international higher education sector

Despite its EQAR registration, MusiQuE is facing many administrative, bureaucratic and financial obstacles when operating at cross-border level, which often complicate and burden MusiQuE's work, making the use of MusiQuE more difficult or too expensive for some institutions.

MusiQuE delivered a presentation on these challenges at the EQAR Members' Dialogue meeting in December 2022, and published in January 2024 a [*Position paper on the European Quality Assurance and Recognition System - How to overcome challenges and obstacles to cross-border quality assurance in higher education*](#) with the aim to share information on these challenges. The position paper was sent to the European Commission, EQAR, ENQA, ESU, the Thematic Peer Group of the BFUG – and a panel discussion on the topic was organised by MusiQuE with these

key stakeholders during its 10th anniversary conference (see [Annex 1](#)). All representatives showed understanding and concern about the difficulties expressed by MusiQuE, but stressed their limited power, as the responsibility lies with the national authorities.

MusiQuE's external evaluator advises that "national higher education authorities and also quality assurance agencies could be considered addressees of strategic relevance" ([Annex 3. Draft Report by MusiQuE's External Evaluator p.11](#)).

The key questions rolling forward are therefore: a) how can MusiQuE advocate at national level to be recognised by competent authorities to operate under the same conditions as national quality assurance agencies, and b) how should MusiQuE position itself as a partner, providing subject-specific expertise and support to national agencies and to national authorities, in order to demonstrate its value and potentially generate more recognition at national level.

4.3 Enlarging its body of stakeholders to shape the future and scope of MusiQuE's operations

The external review panel that assessed MusiQuE in 2020 noted: "The previous Review Panel and the EQAR Register Committee encouraged the agency to involve the broader society in the governance of MusiQuE. The agency has reached out to the European Association of Music in Schools (EAS) which represents music teachers in general education throughout Europe but did not go further in involving society at large in its structures and work. Although the agency argues convincingly about the value of an agency built on sector expertise and the exchange between peers, the Review Panel also stresses the potential added value of a diversity of perspectives. While MusiQuE rightly points out that one of the specificities of its review frameworks is the focus on interactions with society, this outsiders' view may also be relevant within review procedures and within the governance of the agency. The value of music and high-level music education goes beyond the quality of future performers and teachers, and so, representatives of the broader society may also contribute valuable insights" ([MusiQuE's External Review Report 2020](#), p.37).

Indeed, MusiQuE's negotiations with EAS came to fruition in January 2021, and since then EAS has one representative on the MusiQuE Board as a result. This change is in full compliance with MusiQuE's statutes (Art. 6, 1b. and 1c.) that stipulate as follows:

- The members of the Board shall be appointed by the Board on the nomination of the Foundation's partner organisations.
- The Board shall at all times be empowered to recognise organisations as partner organisations time. These partner organisations shall then be empowered to make nominations for appointment of board members of the foundation.

This change did not require any alternation of the statutes, nor it implied subsequent amendments of the Board members' nomination procedure. All procedures to safeguard MusiQuE's independence which were listed in MusiQuE's 2019 SAR are still applicable : the members of the Board are appointed by the Board itself, based on proposals by MusiQuE partner organisations; the processes through which AEC, EMU, Pearle* and EAS can propose candidates to the MusiQuE Board are defined as consultation processes; since 2017, Board members are asked to sign a Code of Conduct, declaring that they act in their personal capacity and not as representatives of the partner organization which proposed them; finally, there is no link between AEC, EMU, EAS or Pearle* membership criteria and the outcomes of MusiQuE's review procedures.

Thus, the addition of EAS as partner organisation solely reflects MusiQuE's drive to enhance its stakeholders' model in order to better represent the area of music education in general. Further, it brought to MusiQuE a better reflection of its inclusive competence towards a crucial sector for the teaching of music, from a cultural and social point of view – the school being the potential place of access to music for the great majority of future professionals.

With respect to the suggestion of including the broader society in MusiQuE's governance, given the international nature of MusiQuE and the fact that it includes several stakeholders on its Board already, it is unclear for MusiQuE which stakeholders outside the (music) sector would be relevant and in which way their involvement would benefit to MusiQuE.

SCOT analysis

The Board decided to start the work on the Strategic Plan by developing a SCOT analysis²⁰.

²⁰ Instead of developing a SWOT analysis establishing a list of *Weaknesses* – which seemed to be static elements on which little could be done – the Board preferred to list *Challenges* (defined as *Internal issues on which MusiQuE may have a possibility to react/adapt*).

STRENGTHS <i>(Internal issues/qualities that allow MusiQuE to function at its best)</i>	OPPORTUNITIES <i>(External issues/facts that MusiQuE may use for its development and internal issues that MusiQuE wishes to further develop)</i>
<p>WHY MUSIQUE – Value of MusiQuE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Subject-specific expertise in the field of music education and related arts ● Advocacy and support for continuous quality enhancement at all levels of education in music and related arts ● International perspectives as a subject-specific, cross-border agency, with international staff (Office, Board, Register of expert peer reviewers), using ethics, standards and procedures in compliance with ESGs ● Consideration for the local context when operating services ● Unique MusiQuE standards and procedures ● Upskilling of the sector through annual peer reviewer training ● Provision of quality-related know-how/expertise/data for the sector ● Registration on EQAR (recognition and an endorsement of quality) ● Experienced and excellent service provision of the MusiQuE Office ● MusiQuE’s endorsement is becoming a brand for quality <p>HUMAN CAPITAL</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Highly qualified five-person MusiQuE Office Team ● Dedicated and experienced seven-member MusiQuE Board ● Large pool of qualified subject-specialist peer reviewers (160), review team secretaries and review team chairs ● A diverse cultural background and geographical representation at all levels of the services offered <p>PARTNERSHIP /STAKEHOLDERS / NETWORK</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Involvement of relevant networks within the profession, including at Board level – a platform where the educational and professional levels meet and cooperate (AEC, EAS, EMU, PEARLE) ● Consistent student participation (Peer Reviewers’ Register and review teams, Board membership, working groups for standards development, MusiQuE events, etc.) 	<p>A. EXTERNAL FACTORS (OPPORTUNITIES)</p> <p>THE MARKET</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The size of the market: all EHEA institutions need to comply with national and European QA requirements and the international aspect of the music sector makes institutions beyond Europe interested to act in compliance with the ESGs ● Capacity-building in the field of QA: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Intensified dissemination of the concept of quality culture. Awareness raising among institutions that would facilitate a shift from a compliance mind-set to an enhancement and sustainable development mindset ○ Training teachers and joining AEC’s future initiative to launch a Lifelong Learning Academy ○ Extending MusiQuE to other levels and types of (music) education ○ Funding availability for cross-border QA initiatives ● Growing interest towards enhancement-led procedures among institutions and QA agencies, as documented by ENQA and EQAR ● Growing interest from other art forms and in interdisciplinary procedures ● Potential for MusiQuE’s involvement in all national procedures <p>QA POLICY DEVELOPMENTS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● EU policies and initiatives that support creating a borderless QA landscape ● Institutions’ understanding of QA gradually shifts from a compliance-based mindset towards enhancement and sustainable development ● Linking internationalisation and quality assurance: supporting the sector in the internationalisation of music studies in Europe

- Established position within the European QA landscape and the HE developments (e.g. University alliances, joint initiatives with other QA agencies)
- Partnerships in the global higher music education environment, beyond the EHEA (NASM, SEADOM)
- Strategic and financial support of AEC

SERVICES

- Peer to peer approach in institutional and programme review provision and / or accreditation
- Creative and innovative approach to review procedures: Critical Friend reviews
- Diverse offer of tailor-made services for institutions upon request
- In-depth support from the MusiQuE Office: comprehensive process guidance before and after the procedure is completed
- High quality and successful peer reviewers training based on review experiences
- Tailor-made training for institutions upon request

TOOLS / RESOURCES

- Regularly updated standards and procedures, keeping with the needs of both the subject-specific and quality assurance sectors
- Well established procedures that connect internal and external quality practices
- Comprehensive documentation for all procedures offered
- Reports publicly available on DEQAR
- Continuous development of new resources / platforms for the sector (webinars, conferences, etc.)
- Research-informed policy instruments (regular trend analyses, policy papers, etc.)

- A competence-based approach to quality assurance at European level
- Further development and provision of training for the sector
- Development of European Universities Alliances that open a space of new explorations in the field of QA²¹

INNOVATION & RESEARCH

- Policy support and funding for innovation and research in the sector (which could generate potential for further expanding MusiQuE's services in the area of research activities' evaluation)

EVOLUTION OF TECHNOLOGY

- Impact of AI (opportunity, or threat, or unknown)

B. INTERNAL FACTORS (AREAS FOR FURTHER ENHANCEMENT)

ADVOCACY AND BRANDING

- Developing ambassadors who can advocate for the strength of the MusiQuE brand
- Increasing MusiQuE's influence on the European and national quality assurance landscapes
- Motivating institutions to be recognised as part of the MusiQuE community

INNOVATION & RESEARCH

- Innovation in services to the sector emerging from the Trend Analyses
- Creating an archive of resources and examples of "good practice" to help institutions reflect on their own processes
- Consistent development of standards to meet the needs of both the subject-specific and quality assurance sectors

²¹ MusiQuE already began exploring this opportunity through its involvement in the IN.TUNE University Alliance for which it is currently conducting a comparative study between the QA systems in place across the member universities of the Alliance. Based on the results of the study, MusiQuE will make a proposal for the design of a functional QA system for the Alliance as a whole.

CHALLENGES <i>(Internal issues on which MusiQuE may have a possibility to react/adapt)</i>	THREATS <i>(External issues on which MusiQuE may have a possibility to react/adapt depending on the context in which this issue will occur)</i>
<p>HUMAN CAPITAL</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workforce planning (MusiQuE Office, Board, balance of peer reviewer expertise etc.) • Excessive workloads at certain times of the year • Limited capacity to promote MusiQuE services and to better fructify existing opportunities for further development <p>REVIEW PROCEDURES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review scheduling challenges due to unpredictable demand for reviews • Workload involved in the pre-contracting phase of review procedures (linked to the diversity of national contexts in which MusiQuE operates and related legal requirements it has to comply with) • Unbalanced workload within the Review Team (disproportionate responsibilities for Secretaries compared to other peer reviewers which may increase the workload for the Office and Board) • Difficulty in ensuring consistent follow-up of review procedures outcomes in the case of voluntary external evaluations • Language of review procedures which may require, in certain national contexts, professional translation services <p>BUDGET</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget planning: subject to annual agreements with AEC • Review procedures remain the main source of income • Limited capacity for exploring alternative sources of income (projects, consultancy, etc.) • Cost of the reviews in a competitive market (absence of national subsidies for institutions interested in the services of cross-border agencies) • Building sufficient financial reserves 	<p>IRREGULAR DEMAND FOR REVIEWS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resistance within some institutions to quality enhancement generally • Legal barriers to the promotion of MusiQuE’s services in certain national contexts • Procedural obstacles to MusiQuE’s operations in various national contexts despite EQAR registration • Apprehension of institutions to engage with internationally-based procedures • Competition with national QA agencies due to lack of equal level playing field with regards to financial support (services from national QA agencies being funded by governments or other national arrangements) <p>EVOLUTION OF TECHNOLOGY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact of AI (threat, or opportunity, or unknown) <p>EVOLUTION OF POLITICS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pressure on higher education and culture budgets • More international conflicts and a rise in extremist discourse and nationalist policies (anti-European) • National governments’ position towards Quality enhancement policies • A rise in international conflicts that shifts attention away from education and QA

PART IV – CONCLUSION

This report provides an in-depth overview of MusiQuE’s daily operation and its approach to quality enhancement. Additionally, it highlights the significant changes and developments implemented by MusiQuE since its most recent comprehensive review in 2019–2020.

We present information on how MusiQuE addressed the recommendations received during its previous review, and provide evidence for MusiQuE’s compliance with ESG 2.6 and ESG 2.7. We also demonstrate how MusiQuE continues to meet the requirements of ESG 2.1, ESG 2.3, and ESG 2.5 following the revision of its frameworks of assessment (“MusiQuE Standards”) in 2023.

Finally, having chosen ESG 3.1 as enhancement area, we reflect on the opportunities and challenges ahead and the support we expect from the external review team, and we present the detailed SCOT analysis that forms the first step of our work on the revision and update of our strategy.

We are now looking forward with anticipation to engaging in productive discussions with the external review team. We are confident that this process will help MusiQuE to take next steps in its development. This will be to the benefit of the sector and, ultimately, to music and the performance more widely.

We believe that MusiQuE’s great moments are still to come. Having an organisation that is focused on enhancement, approaches its work from a transnational view, and serves the subject-specific interest of our sector, is in our opinion how quality assurance will develop in Europe for the coming decades. We, as musicians and artists with our never-ending search for improvement and excellence, are ideally positioned to not just participate but also take a proactive role in this development with the support of MusiQuE – Music Quality Enhancement.

Annexes

Available online

MusiQuE has a set of [key policy documents](#) that define its governance and operational aspects. This set includes:

- [Internal Regulations](#)
- [MusiQuE Standards](#)
- [Guidelines for Institutions](#)
- [Handbook for Critical Friend Reviews](#)
- [Guidelines for Peer Reviewers](#)
- [Code of Conduct for Peer Reviewers](#)
- [Complaints and Appeals Procedure](#)
- [Strategy Paper and Action Plan 2020-2025](#)

Attached annexes

- Annex 1. MusiQuE 10th Anniversary Conference
- Annex 2. Overview of MusiQuE's review activities and services (2020-2025)
- Annex 3. Draft Report by MusiQuE's External Evaluator (November 2024)²²
- Annex 4. Revision of Standards for Institutional and Programme Reviews
- Annex 5. Revision of Standards for Pre-College & Classroom Music Teacher Education
- Annex 6. Mapping of MusiQuE Standards against ESG Part 1
- Annex 7. MusiQuE's compliance with ESG 2.7

²² This report will be finalised once MusiQuE has shared its comments to correct factual errors and typos.