



13th European Quality Assurance Forum

Broadening the scope of QA

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Call for contributions: paper submission form

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Please note that all fields are obligatory. For a detailed description of the submission requirements and Frequently Asked Questions please consult the Call for Contributions.

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Short bio (150 words max):

Janneke Ravenhorst (MA Social and Organisational Psychology, Leiden University) has worked with Quality Management and Benchmarking systems and approaches in business and government organisations, as well as in higher education. As a board member of EFQM_NL for large government organisations (2006-2008) she has contributed to the further development of the EFQM model. This background has enabled her to gain a wide-ranging view on quality culture and organisational improvement that comes in handy designing 'out of the box' approaches for institutes with specific characteristics such as the Royal Conservatoire the Hague, where she is currently Head of the Quality Culture Office. In this capacity, she also serves as a trainer for peer reviewers for *MusiQuE* – Music Quality Enhancement, a European-level Foundation for Quality Enhancement and Accreditation in Higher Music Education registered on EQAR, and plays an important role in her institution's participation in the Pilot Institutional Accreditation recently launched by the Dutch government.

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Short bio (150 words max):

Martin Prchal is vice-principal at the Royal Conservatoire in The Hague, the Netherlands, with responsibilities for curriculum development, quality assurance and international relations. Trained as a musician of Czech origin, he holds teaching and performance diplomas (violoncello) and a MA in musicology. In his previous position as Chief Executive of the European Association of Conservatoires



(AEC), Martin developed a substantial expertise on EU project management through his involvement in several music projects in various EU programmes and on the implications of the Bologna Process on higher music education in Europe. Martin has served as reviewer for quality assurance agencies in various countries and has been member of the boards for the Swiss agency OAQ (now AAQ) and the Flemish agency VLUHR KZ. Currently he is chair of the board of *MusiQuE* – Music Quality Enhancement, a European-level Foundation for Quality Enhancement and Accreditation in Higher Music Education registered on EQAR.

Proposal

Title: Making the move from Quality Assurance to Quality Culture concrete: an example from the field of music

Abstract (150 words max):

The Royal Conservatoire has been testing and implementing a new Quality Culture with the aim at linking internal and external quality assurance cycles, as well as connecting educational quality and artistic standards. Experiences show that these concepts can reinforce each other instead of existing side by side. This point of departure forms the basis for a new view on quality and standards at the Conservatoire. As a result, the essence of the study programmes (artistic standards) is more explicitly tied to educational quality and its monitoring. This process is further reinforced by connecting the information gathered in both internal and external quality assurance processes, bringing both cycles into balance. The approach provides both the programmes and the Conservatoire as a whole with a tool for a future-proof and permanent form of quality enhancement. This way the Conservatoire moves from working with quality assurance to establishing its own shared quality culture.

Text of paper (3000 words max):

'Quality' in a conservatoire context

At the Royal Conservatoire (the oldest conservatoire for music and dance in The Netherlands), every day people come and go who are passionate about what they do and who are, as a consequence, concentrated on permanent development and improvement. Conservatoires have traditionally been characterised by a constant search for excellence. This focus mainly aims at reaching the highest musical or artistic standards, which is demonstrated by the tradition of holding exams and final recitals in the form of public concerts or the important role of competitions in the field of music. This approach is also noticeable in conservatoire teaching, in which ongoing evaluation and improvement is a natural component during individual classes as well as during rehearsals and concerts.

In the wake of international developments as a result of the Bologna process, in past years emphasis was primarily given to the assurance of educational quality, i.e. to issues such as the organisation and cohesion of the curriculum, the organisation of assessments or the collection of feedback from students. The focus on educational quality, which was often presented as something new generating its own language and expertise within higher education, occasionally resulted in incomprehension and irritation among conservatoire students and teachers. They were suddenly asked to concentrate on 'quality' while they felt this is what they had been doing all along. By not specifying which 'quality' was being addressed (artistic standards, educational quality, or both) misunderstandings arose that resulted in people digging in their heels.



Internal and external quality processes

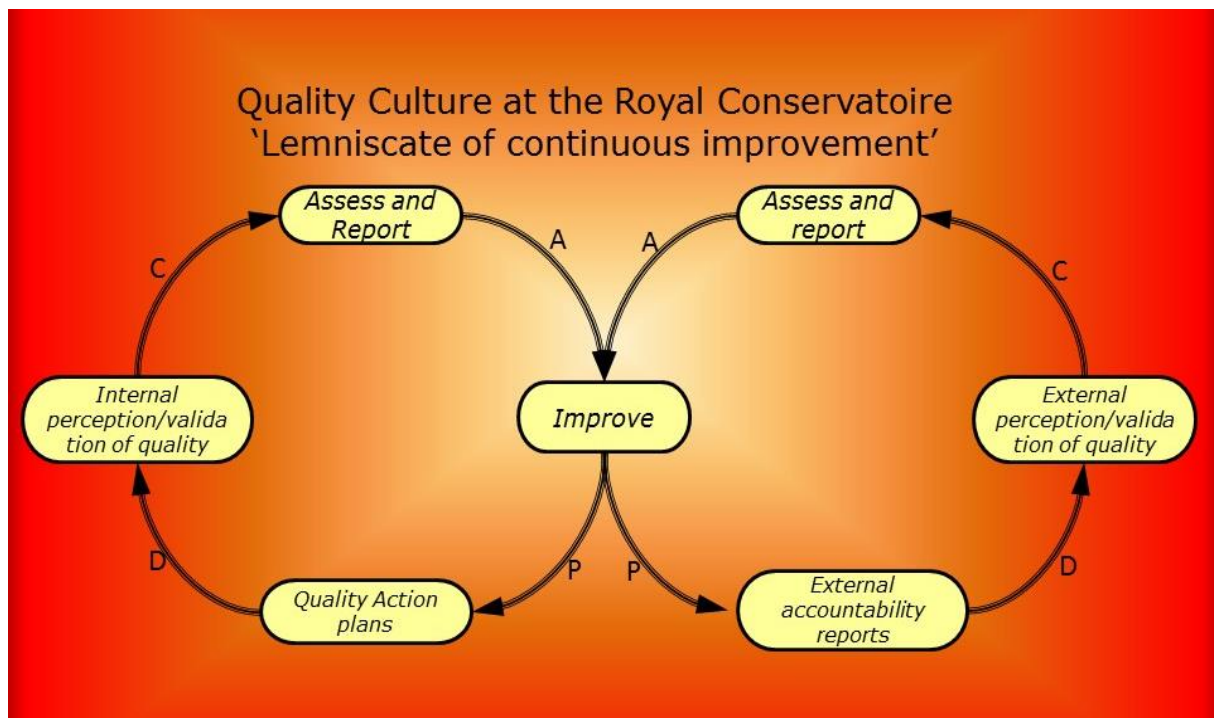
At the Royal Conservatoire, the previous quality assurance system had a strong focus on educational quality generating a lot of information for accreditations and internal cyclical improvement. However, there were also problems: the information gathered was often abstract involving a lot of statistical data and providing insufficient view of underlying causes so that heads of departments and teachers were sometimes wary of engaging with the findings. The Deming circle (PDCA) was there, but the 'Check' and 'Act' were not always apparent. Students sometimes felt that they were not being heard and the motivation to give feedback diminished. Teachers felt very little ownership of quality assurance processes. Results from internal and external cycles did not feed into each other sufficiently. Of course, when accreditation processes were underway there was an enormous urge to implement improvements, only for these to fall away after a successful result had been achieved every six years. The focus was more oriented on 'what went well' than on 'what could be improved'. This was also reflected in the accreditation reports we received. Often these reports provided only a description of the findings of the visit, but not many concrete leads on what to improve and how. With educational programmes composed of several departments with different profiles, the feedback after accreditations was almost never specific enough to be useful. This is understandable considering the substantial differences between – for instance – the Early Music Department and the Jazz Department, which serve both under the same Bachelor of Music programme.

Furthermore, the system did not always fit in with the small-scale context and informal culture in which a great deal of information about quality in daily practice is being exchanged in a natural way. The ever-present discussion on artistic standards did not connect to the quality assurance activities. People felt a need for new ways of working with quality assurance, including a more holistic way of thinking about quality and its external monitoring, and a more continuous workflow for accreditation processes. Altogether heads of departments, teachers and students were insufficiently involved in quality enhancement. Survey results were often only presented as final results and were used too little as a starting point for discussion.

A new approach

While developing our new approach, the main objective was to achieve a close link between the internal and external perceptions of quality, as well as connecting educational quality to artistic standards. By introducing a closer connection and continuity in the way in which we approach quality, we wanted to further strengthen the overall quality of the study programmes and develop a shared quality culture. We found confirmation in this approach by research by Bendermacher e.a. who analysed recent studies relating to the concepts of quality management and quality culture development in higher education. An important conclusion of this study was that institutions working on developing a quality culture should best operate from a contingency approach, i.e. make use of quality management approaches specifically tailored to the organisational context.

The following figure shows the connection between internal and external quality assurance processes.



By linking the 'Act' and 'Plan' parts of the internal and external cycle of quality assurance (where improvement begins) they are linked as in a lemniscate¹ or figure of eight. Both cycles feed and activate not only themselves individually but also mutually.

The internal quality assurance cycle consists of the following tools:

- Student satisfaction surveys
- Course/project evaluations
- Employee satisfaction surveys
- Faculty/department development plans
- Student panels
- Feedback Education/Exam committees
- Management Information
- Other QA sessions

We measure and assess the internal perception of quality using all these various instruments. One example will be explained in greater detail below to illustrate how the internal and external quality assurance cycles are interacting: the student panels.

Student panels

An important element in the development to a quality culture is that the findings from surveys are increasingly viewed as the point of departure for a dialogue instead of as a final result. To make this clear for teachers and students we often illustrate survey reports by the use of a thermometer. A thermometer allows one to see whether something is too hot or too cold, but

¹ The sideways figure of eight or the mathematical lemniscate is used as an international symbol for infinity and symbolises continuous movement and the enhancement of quality.



the underlying causes cannot be seen. For this a dialogue is essential.

In line with the informal structure at the conservatoire, as mentioned earlier, the departmental heads (facilitated by the Quality Culture Office) organise student panel meetings to discuss the results of the student satisfaction surveys or matters that students themselves put forward. Reports of these meetings are distributed within the conservatoire. They form the input for the management of the conservatoire and its main formal gremia, such as the Educational Committee, the Participation Council and the Examination Committee. They use these reports as an instrument to monitor the perceived quality of the educational programmes and can act on them accordingly. Even if the use of student panels is certainly not innovative in higher education, its application and the formal status of these panels are essential parts of our quality culture. By doing this we not only integrate the traditional culture of informal feedback within a more formal process, but it also offers us the opportunity to address artistic standards and educational quality together in conjunction, as both types of quality specifically feature in the conversations.

Following on from this we regularly monitor whether these improvement campaigns have led to the desired results. Successful implementation after all has an impact on the internal perception of quality. It is in this way that internal quality assurance comes full circle. Of course, these reports are also used as an important source of information in accreditation procedures. Additionally, they serve as important input for the 'Critical Friend' approach, an instrument designed to generate external feedback that will be discussed below. These reports therefore feed directly into the external cycle and thus influence the external perception on the quality of our programmes.

External quality processes

As illustrated in the example above, sources of information about the internal perception of quality and possible improvements feed into the external quality assurance cycle. Knowledge of what is going well and what could be improved is an important basis for external accountability documents such self-evaluation reports, annual reports and other publications, and thus has an impact on the external perception of quality.

In addition we also measure, check and monitor this external perception of quality by using various quality assurance instruments such as:

- Professional stakeholders meetings
- Alumni surveys
- Accreditation visits
- Critical friends
- International external committee members
- International benchmarking

To illustrate here again how the quality assurance cycles have a mutual momentum, a number of less typical examples are dealt with in detail below.

Critical friends

Since 2016 we have been organising review visits at departmental level by so-called 'Critical Friends'. These are renown and external international and independent experts within the



discipline of the department in question. In the course of a visit, which lasts about three days, the experts talk to management, teachers and students, attend classes, presentations and assessments, review management documentation, and sample research output, and write a report of their findings (on the basis of the framework of the Netherlands-Flemish Accreditation Organisation and the international standards of the European-level subject-specific organisation *MusiQuE-Music Quality Enhancement*) with recommendations for improvement. Because of the broad scope of such a visit, the Critical Friend must be an expert in the main subject of the relevant study programme, but also one with expertise in educational management. After receiving the report the department discusses this internally as well as with other departments and formulates a written response containing an action plan for improvement which is then implemented in the period following to the visit. After about three years the Critical Friend is invited again to come and see what has been the result of these actions. As such the expert plays an important part in our external accountability. In the future this may come to replace (part of) the formal accreditation process of the programmes. The reports of Critical Friends and the responses of the departments may in the long run be a substitute for the writing of voluminous and ad hoc self-evaluation reports. The Critical Friend approach forms the basis for the participation of the Royal Conservatoire and the University of the Arts The Hague in its entirety in the Pilot Institutional Accreditation, which has recently been launched by the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture & Science.

Professional stakeholders meeting

Departmental heads periodically ask a number of important, often international, employers in the music world to come and reflect with the management on the educational programme in general, its curriculum and the degree to which they view students as potential candidates in the event of vacancies. Drawing representatives of the professional world of music into a joint discussion generates an interesting dynamic and reveals the contemporary music world's perception of the quality of the programmes and the options they offer. These meetings generate valuable feedback, activate new ideas about education and strengthen the relationship with the future music world of our students. The reports are distributed throughout the Conservatoire. They form input for the Educational Committee, the Participation Council and the Examination Committee, but also for student panels and visits by Critical Friends.

External examiners

An external examiner is present at all (final) presentations as a member of the assessment panel to assess students from an external perspective. In addition we ask all external examiners to fill in a questionnaire giving feedback on the quality of the assessment process, the standard of the candidate and the degree to which that standard corresponds to the demands of professional practice. The conservatoire's ambition is to engage foreign experts as external examiners as much as possible so that it can compare the achieved standards with international artistic standards. It is in the assessment of the final recital where artistic standards and educational quality come together in a natural way: while the external examiner must be an eminent musician to be able to assess the achieved artistic standards of the student, they must also be able to give, through the questionnaire, feedback on the formal side of the assessment process, such as the fairness of grading, the quality of the



feedback given, the use of the appropriate criteria, etc.

Benchmarking

Both at national and international levels increased attention is being given to the benchmarking of comparable study programmes. The Royal Conservatoire has had the ambition to engage in comparing itself and cooperating with other institutions for this purpose for some time. This applies particularly at the international level: as an internationally-oriented institution the Conservatoire is keen to measure itself against first-ranking schools of music worldwide. The Royal Conservatoire therefore wishes to invest in new international activities in the coming years, which will enable both artistic standards and educational quality to be compared internationally and thus provide insight into the quality of the institution.

An international comparison of artistic standards is being enabled by inviting international examiners from other institutions in assessment panels (as described above), with the aim to gain an impression of the extent to which students meet international quality standards.

For comparing educational quality, the Conservatoire is participating with eight other international conservatoires² in the International Benchmarking Exercise (IBE). This involves all kinds of (often statistical) information being compared so as to provide a sound impression of educational quality. The same applies to the participation of the Royal Conservatoire in a pilot of U-Multirank in 2016: although the usefulness of U-Multirank in the European conservatoire sector still needs further articulation, it is expected nevertheless that this form of international benchmarking will produce useful information. The Royal Conservatoire is also actively involved in developing international quality standards as part of *MusiQuE – Music Quality Enhancement*, a European evaluation and accreditation organisation recognised by the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR), which adopts criteria and procedures to match artistic standards closely with educational quality. We have had positive experiences with the international accreditation procedures, standards and experts of *MusiQuE* in the course of review and accreditation processes and are keen to expand these further. All these forms of international benchmarking and review provide the Royal Conservatoire with insight into its position in relation to similar institutions internationally.

The information that we gather using the aforementioned quality instruments creates not only input for the external cycle (which closes the circle of external quality assurance), but also feeds into the internal cycle and thus creates the Lemniscate of Continuous Improvement. This brings into balance both internal and external quality assurance processes.

² Participants in the International Benchmarking exercise are: Royal Northern College of Music Manchester (lead institution), Conservatoire de Genève, New England Conservatory Boston, Norwegian Academy of Music Oslo, Royal Conservatoire The Hague, Sydney Conservatorium, University of Music and Performing Arts Graz, Yong Siew Toh Conservatory Singapore, Schulich School of Music McGill University Montreal.



Optimistic

With two years of experience in implementing this new approach our preliminary conclusions are optimistic. The Critical Friends in particular produce positive responses: study programmes and their subsequent departments appear to have been given a wake-up call. In contrast to traditional accreditation visits, which often only look superficially at the various graduation profiles within overall programmes, we can now explicitly explore relevant aspects of the profiles and their departments within a much broader scope, and reflect on both artistic standards and educational quality with the teachers and the students who are directly involved. And we do so in a way that directly links with their daily educational practice. We deliberately invite departmental heads and teachers to reflect on their curricula and also on their own role in them. The quality of their own teaching therefore is a much more concrete subject for discussion. The involvement and ownership within the department notably increases as a result.

The student panels ensure that students feel that they are being taken seriously as fully-fledged partners in the debate. They also play an important role during the visits of Critical Friends. Students thus feel they are being heard and carry a joint responsibility for the quality of their study programmes. By working with student panels and switching from just data to a constructive dialogue, we are able to place the results of regular quality surveys in their proper context. This helps us to determine where there is room for improvement more accurately and effectively.

Our experiences are positive, but our approach also necessitates investment: in international experts, in time and energy coordinating all the activities at the level of quality assurance in general but above all within the departments themselves. Departmental heads need to take time to prepare and follow-up on a visit of a Critical Friend. A dialogue with the students in panel meetings generates many insights and background information, but also produces expectations: students expect that at the next meeting something will have been done with their proposals for improvement. All these developments take time. Time for all stakeholders to get used to the new approach and their new role, but also time for trust to grow. Trust among students that something will really be done with their input and trust among teachers and department heads that the energy they are giving will lead to the desired results.

Worth the investment

Altogether we conclude that what we are doing is worth the investment. A sustainable change in culture has been launched. Awareness of quality among management, teachers and students has grown and a sense of a mutually felt and supported responsibility has evolved. External quality checks have started to feed into an internal quality improvement and vice versa. The Royal Conservatoire will continue along the path it has chosen in the years ahead with the Lemniscate of Continuous Improvement and will continue to work on an optimal quality of its programmes. The approach provides both the programmes and the Conservatoire as a whole with an instrument for working on a future-proof and permanent form of quality enhancement. We are not only working on quality assurance, but rather on our own quality culture as a whole.



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Messas, L., & Prchal, M., (2015), 'How to support Quality through International Activities - Case studies from the field of higher music education', paper presented at the tenth European Quality Assurance Forum, London, UK, November 2015.

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Discussion questions:

- 1) What is your experience with creating links between internal and external perceptions of quality?
- 2) In particular, what kind of tool for external quality assurance do you have in addition to the formal external processes demanded by your governments, such as accreditation or external review?
- 3) In the development of your Quality Culture, what role is being given to students?

Please submit your proposal by sending this form, in Word format, by 24 July 2018 to QAForum@eua.eu. The file should be named using the last names of the authors, e.g. Smith_Jones.doc. Please do not send a hard copy or a PDF file.