

To the Board of MusiQuE

MusiQuE's External Evaluator's report 2016

Purpose and scope of the report

The 2015 Self Evaluation Report of MusiQuE stated the following:

An external evaluator will be appointed, who will formulate recommendations to the Board of MusiQuE, based on a "review [of] material documenting MusiQuE's activity, especially the annual report and to monitor the compatibility of the system with the ESG for QA"

Background

MusiQuE was accepted for registration in EQAR (European Quality Assurance Register) on 6 June 2016.

MusiQuE had been subjected to an external review of compliance with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG, 2015) with a view of making an application to be listed in EQAR, which took place on 1-2 July 2016.

The review panel having concluded that MusiQuE fully complies with eight Standards, substantially complies with five Standards and partially complies with ESG 3.5 (Resources), recommended that the EQAR Register Committee accept MusiQuE's application. The panel considered that 'over time' MusiQuE will have the opportunity to strengthen its 'financial sustainability', and formulated a proposal to the RC for inclusion in EQAR.

Following this external review, there was an exchange of communication, involving the Chair of the Register Committee, the Chair of the External Review panel, and finally, through the Director of EQAR, with the Board of MusiQuE, touching upon various issues mentioned in the External Review report.

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

The MusiQuE Board has produced a complete set of documents, which provide a full picture of the current state of affairs of MusiQuE to the external evaluator. They are: *Framework Document (with Background, Mission and Regulations); documents related to the submission for being listed on EQAR (MusiQuE's SER; the External Review Report; its follow-up documents), External Review Reports for Quality Enhancement & for Accreditation of HMEIs, the Activity Report of MusiQuE since its foundation (2015-2016); peer reviewers list; Statutes, Business Plan (revisited, cf. the Document 'Actions undertaken in response to*

Recommendations from the External Review panel', p. 4), outcomes of recent Board meetings on student engagement, Action Plan ((Business Plan), contractual agreements with AEC on the use of staff; Balance Sheets, Annual Report with Profit and Loss Statements 2014-2015.

General Conclusions

1. The above documents clearly describe the history, purpose and workings of MusiQuE. There are distinct provisions for the accreditation, quality enhancement and advisory procedures, and transparent references to the original proceedings and proven relevant expertise gathered by MusiQuE's 'founder' AEC, through the framework of 'AEC Quality Enhancement Process". The links with the two other 'partner organizations' (EMU – music employers; and PEARLE – performing arts employers), which now together constitute the 'MusiQuE foundation', are clarified in the Statutes of the organization, which state that MusiQuE is a Foundation under Dutch Law, with a registered Seat in The Hague, NL. ('Memorandum and Articles of Association' of 7 October 2014).
2. MusiQuE originated from the wish to have formal accreditation procedures run from the sector itself, while remaining deeply connected to the music sector through AEC and its partner networks AEC, PEARLE. In order to maintain this exclusive link the Statutes of MusiQuE prescribe that membership of the Board of MusiQuE, which is the sole statutory body of the association, is subject to being a partner organization, which then has the exclusive right to nominate a member of the Board (Article 4, par. C of the Statutes). In a further clause however, one of the founding partner organizations, AEC, is guaranteed a structural majority in the Board ("... the number of Board members nominated by the AEC shall always have a majority on the Board", Statutes, Article 4, par. d). These statutory provisions give MusiQuE a sound basis for doing accreditation in a specific sector of education, but at the same time create an exclusive dependence on one sector, and a de facto hegemony for its founder AEC.
3. MusiQuE has advanced robust reasoning for going for subject-specific QA & accreditation, which has led to a close involvement with the sector of music education. It was meant as a shift away from more dogmatic and formal procedures towards 'content-oriented' approaches, which would be characterized by 'flexibility, diversity, transparency and accountability' (Mission Statement of MusiQuE). In addition MusiQuE aims at creating a framework for voluntary review processes in music education specifically geared to quality enhancement.
4. As explained in its Activity Report 2014-2015 MusiQuE wants to be proactive in securing its long term viability and sustainability. In order to achieve this, it will have to increase its marketing to a wider group of Higher Music Education Institutions (HMEIs) in the EHEA and beyond. MusiQuE could for this purpose increase its services to targeted HMEI : organize training sessions on e.g. writing self-evaluation reports,

make review reports available more widely, in the format of executive summaries in English and national languages; have a greater diversity in the reviewers' profiles, via the partner organizations Pearle and EMU, and by broadening the pool of experts in the MusiQuE Peer Reviewers Register.

5. The financial sustainability of MusiQuE needs to be a constant concern, as was pointed out by the External Review Team, in its 2015 Report, and further stressed by the RC's Report of June 2016. Important steps were made in securing continuing support (until 2020) from the three partner organizations that constitute the Board of MusiQuE, in the form of a formal written agreement (d.d. 17/09/2015), and the question of staffing/staff servicing through secondment from AEC has been consolidated for the same period through a Convention with AEC (d.d. 30/06/2016). The above warranties may however not suffice to guarantee MusiQuE's long-term sustainability. It is therefore necessary for MusiQuE to come forward with innovative ideas to tap also other sources of funding.

Main findings on ESG 2015 compliance :

The following are observations regarding the issues which were highlighted in EQAR's Register Committee report of 6 June 2016, concerning compliance with the ESG (revised ESG, 2015), and which granted MusiQuE inclusion in EQAR, until 30 November 2020.

ESG 3.1 Stakeholders involvement

The pertinent recommendation of the RC to have *a full and permanent student representation* on the Board of MusiQuE will not be fully met by inviting a member of the 'FULL SCORE' Student WG as an observer to the Board meetings. The aim should be to have a sustainable and fully-fledged student representation in the MusiQuE Board in future. Waiting for a European Music Student Association to be set up, as suggested by the Board of MusiQuE, will delay the full compliance with stakeholders' involvement for an indefinite time. Other options should be envisaged temporarily, in order to meet the request from the RC of EQAR at short notice. For example, MusiQuE could temporarily relax the rule of mandatory experience in accreditation/QA via the MusiQuE Reviewers Register for members of the MusiQuE Board, and appoint for example a Phd student or a recent graduate/alumnus from Music Higher Education, with a declared interest in pedagogical aspects. In line with the Statutes of MusiQuE, AEC would have to nominate this additional person, with approval of the current Board members, and more importantly with statutory changes in the Foundation (see further).

It is also commendable to have additional stakeholders' representatives on the Board of MusiQuE, who are not from the 'partner organisations', but from the broader society with 'a music affiliation or interest' (e.g. representatives of pre-school music education). Involving 'parties' outside the narrower circle of music experts with review experience, may lead to a greater commitment of 'civil society' to the broad range of activities of MusiQuE, enhance its visibility, and ultimately contribute to its sustainability.

ESG 3.3 Independence

The present statutory arrangement for the composition of the MusiQuE Board (with AEC, and sometime EMU and Pearle selecting the candidates, who need to be on the MusiQuE Peer Reviewers' Register) a relatively narrow Board profile is created. Indeed AEC this way plays a crucially important role in determining eligibility for Board membership on the one hand, and through the MusiQuE Statutes on the other hand, is guaranteed a 'structural majority' in the only decision-making body of MusiQuE.

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

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

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

ESG 3.5 Resources

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

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

Conclusions and recommendations to the Board of MusiquE

Through its inclusion in EQAR, MusiQuE has increased its potential as a trustworthy and sustainable QA & accreditation body, and consequently enhanced its prestige and visibility in the EHEA. It is realistic to think that the 'European approach' in the recognition of joint programs will further stimulate MusiQuE's cooperation with national governments (and QA agencies), for reviews leading to recognition in the coming years.

The revised ESG rightly stress the application of LOs in teaching and accreditation, which means that a focus on subject-specific LOs is an additional asset for HEIs going through a review, and consequently creates opportunities for the sector-specific agencies 'accompanying' or 'processing' them in this.

Recommendations to the Board of MusiQuE:

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

Further strengthen outreach to stakeholders and the wider community:

- In view of meeting the recommendation of the RC of EQAR for a 'student representation' in the Board of MusiQuE at a short term, the Board should in a next meeting take a decision on a de facto extension of the Board with one or more representatives of student organizations, HME alumni, umbrella organizations representing music teachers at various education levels, etc. This move can at a later stage be formalized by adapting the Statutes of MusiQuE in a way that the Board can in a legal manner be extended, on a unanimous decision of its current members, to include representatives of the wider community with affinity to the music (education) sector.

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

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

Increase financial stability and sustainability:

- The Board of MusiQuE should continue its efforts of a complete transformation of the former *AEC Review Scheme* into a full-fledged and sustainable agency for QA & Accreditation, on the basis of a detailed Business Plan for the next 4 years.
- The Board should develop strategies for appointing and deploying staff of its own, and solve the VAT issue.
- The Board may set up a contingency fund, as a reserve for as long as the dependence on the 'founding & partner organizations' will last, based on the contractual agreements established with AEC & its partner organizations.

