

Limited programme review (Bachelor of Dance)

Royal Conservatoire The Hague, The Netherlands

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The Dance department of the Royal Conservatoire (Koninklijk Conservatorium, hereafter: KC) is a specialised and internationally recognised institute that provides training in academic theatre dance for a small group of exceptionally talented students between ages of 10 and 20 whose ambition (or dream) is to become a dancer in a company with a repertoire based on academic theatre dance. The Bachelor of Dance is a 2-year full time course which follows on an eight-year programme of the Interfaculty School for Young Talent that provides courses for pupils who combine preparatory training in dance with regular primary and secondary education. Its aim is to train versatile dancers of the future as self-assured and independent artists who combine an open, creative mind with professional skills, passion and ambition. To this purpose, the programme has been designed to provide students with the knowledge and training they need to master both classical and modern techniques, building towards a versatile profile that facilitates graduates working in a large variety of classical and contemporary dance styles. (Source: *Study Guide 2019 – 2020*, pp.5 – 15). In this context, the term “neo-classical” dancer was referenced on several occasions during the interviews, across various layers of the programme’s community – from the level of management to that of external stakeholders. The panel notes that the abstract notion of the “neo-classical dancer” lacks any clear or universally accepted definition by the programme. The panel was not able to identify a common conceptual thread throughout all the interviews, and the KC has confirmed that a debate on an actual definition is still ongoing. In this report, the panel will adopt henceforth this terminology to reflect its widespread informal use across the programme, highlighting that a prevalent understanding of this profile seems to lean towards the unique combination of classical and contemporary dance training that the programme aims to provide.

The Bachelor of Dance programme focuses on the practical aspects of a career as a dancer. A special feature is the cooperation with the dance company Nederlands Dans Theater (NDT). In 2021 KC, including its Dance department, will move to a new building in the centre of The Hague. This new building will house KC, Nederlands Dans Theater and the Residentie Orkest (The Hague Philharmonic), sharing concert halls, studios, rehearsal rooms and other facilities.

For the assessment of the programme the panel used the limited programme assessment framework (for existing programmes) of NVAO (version September 2018) to serve as the basis for the assessment process. The NVAO standards for limited programme assessment were mapped against the MusiQuE standards for programme review. As a result, the MusiQuE standards and areas of inquiry were added under each NVAO standard in order to both express and reinforce the correspondence between both sets of criteria and to complete the NVAO framework with criteria relevant for performing arts programmes. The report is structured according to the mapped NVAO-MusiQuE standards. The panel judgment as expressed in the present report is based on the assessment rules for limited programme assessments (existing programmes), which are further detailed in Annex 5.

NVAO Standard 1: Intended learning outcomes

The programme receives the following assessment on NVAO Standard 1: the programme meets the standard.

The Bachelor of Dance programme at KC subscribes to the *Dutch professional and educational profiles for bachelor dance 2017*, a set of subject-specific requirements that describe the educational profiles of a dancer and

were developed in close collaboration with representatives of the dance profession. The intended learning outcomes therefore comply with both international and national standards for a Bachelor programme in dance.

The programme has an association with NDT, one of the leading dance companies in the Netherlands. This is a real asset of the programme. Students follow classes twice a week on NDT repertoire. In addition, students have possibilities for attending the three month-long Young Talent Programme which is offered annually in cooperation with NDT. Another strong point is the effort of the programme in preserving the Dutch repertoire.

The choice for training neo-classical dancers with strong reflective skills is promising. At the same time, a clearer profile and further support by the KC for targeted marketing would enable the programme to attract a larger pool of talented students. The development and the delivery of the programme could be based in an even more structural way on the intended learning outcomes to enhance a more distinct profile of the programme.

NVAO Standard 2: Teaching-learning environment

The programme receives the following assessment on NVAO Standard 2: the programme meets the standard.

The curriculum is closely linked to the professional practice of professional dance. Strong emphasis is laid on training in both classical ballet and modern dance. Furthermore, students are trained in classical ballet repertoire and repertoire of the 'Dutch School'.

The programme has a curriculum that reflects the intended learning outcomes. During the last five years the programme implemented measures to train more all-round students. Strong points are the NDT Young Talent project and the course Dance Now. The programme could strengthen the curriculum by elaborating reflective skills in a more methodical and comprehensive way and transferring this into the physicality of the students. More emphasis on contemporary and modern technique in relation to a firm classical basis could serve to further stir the curriculum towards the neo-classical direction that the programme's community seemed to aspire to throughout the interviews.

Staff and teachers are qualified, very motivated and dedicated. Keeping with the fast developments of the professional world of dance represents a continuous challenge for the teaching staff. In this regard, the panel finds the programme Artist as Teacher to be an asset regarding staff policy from an educational viewpoint.

The resources and facilities enable student learning and delivery of the programme in a sufficient way. Regarding student support the panel advises further development of the preventive aspects of (mental) health to help students to prevent injuries and mental problems instead of curing them. Investing in a contemporary way of scheduling would help students to be more effective in their study. Being part of University of Arts The Hague is a great asset, and students could increase their benefit if more interdisciplinary projects were initiated with the other departments within the University of Arts The Hague.

NVAO Standard 3: Assessment

The programme receives the following assessment on NVAO Standard 3: the programme partially meets the standard.

The Bachelor of Dance programme has done work to develop a system of assessment that fits to the aim of the programme: training professional dancers. Assessment is strongly based on the way how professional dance companies work in combination with tailor made feedback of staff and company members. Assessment of ballet classes is well defined and transparent.

However, the assessment of the student's self-choreographed solo, modern techniques and reflective skills is not clearly defined. For these aspects, criteria are limited and not clearly related to the learning outcomes. Instead of the formative way of assessment currently in place, the assessment of the internship could contribute more strongly to the professional quality of the students if clear criteria were defined and explicitly linked to learning outcomes.

External examiners taking part in the assessment of the ballet classes is a strong point, but the assessment of the overall quality of the students seemed inconsistent and was not immediately evident to the panel. In the view of the panel, the programme could be enhanced by considering an integrated and specific product to demonstrate that students explicitly achieve the Bachelor level on all intended learning outcomes. Based on the interviews held on site and the documents provided by the programme, it became evident to the panel that the informal feedback the students receive is relevant for their development and supportive of their becoming professional dancers. At the same time, the formal assessment, especially in the solo and contemporary dance, could benefit from further fine-tuning. The KC is encouraged to consider how it could further support the programme to become more engaged in monitoring the quality of the assessment process by, for example, a more systematic approach towards formal feedback. In this regard, the panel highlights the need for a more coherent set of criteria used for assessment, and for explicit guidelines by which these criteria are employed and become part of a formal evaluation or mark. Given the above made remarks the panel advises to reflect on the task and responsibility of the exam committee and to expand its working methods and locus of engagement with the quality of the assessment process. The programme has already undertaken a first step in this direction, as it has been described in the memo sent to the panel after the audit.

A strength regarding intake is that the majority of Bachelors come from the own School for Young Talent. These candidates are well prepared for the 2-year Bachelor programme. For the intake of external candidates, the criteria for exemptions to fit them into the programme as observed by the panel in the student's files are not as well developed as for the internal students. The panel advises the programme to define these criteria in a more elaborated way so that the incoming students are able to meet the international standard after finishing the 2-year curriculum.

There is clear evidence of good practice, including the assessment process in place for the classical ballet classes and the quality of feedback that students receive. However, this was not consistently observed across the programme, and the programme team is required to elaborate clear and coherent assessment criteria for all courses based on the learning outcomes. As a condition for further improvement the panel recommends that the programme draw up a 4-year plan to strengthen the quality of the assessment process including an integrated method to assess the Bachelor level and to let the exam committee comment yearly on the effect of the measures taken.

NVAO Standard 4: Achieved learning outcomes

The programme receives the following assessment on NVAO Standard 4: the programme meets the standard.

The programme's objective is to deliver self-assured dancers with a broad training in classical and modern techniques, able to apply them to contemporary dance styles and influences, and to adapt to the continuously evolving dance profession (*Source: Study Guide 2019 – 2020 p.5*). Good work has been done regarding training the work ethic of the students and their versatility. The panel was impressed by the self-reflective skills of the students. Students do get jobs as dancers, but the interviewed students and graduates presented it as a challenge to get a job at a dance company after the internship. The panel has seen the results of work in progress, and commends the programme for laying solid foundations with regard to the students' classical training. Regarding the overall technical standard and especially the acquisition of contemporary and modern techniques, the programme is encouraged to undertake further steps to attain the level of versatility that the profile seeks to achieve. The panel advises to define a more comprehensive final assessment to help students in reaching this

goal. Considering the extent to which graduates of the programme find employment in the Dutch professional field, the panel concludes that the standard is met with the reservation that further enhancement of the training in contemporary and modern dance technique, combined with the work lying ahead for reaching full compliance with Standard 3 above, are necessary milestones that the programme is encouraged to strive towards.

The 2-year curriculum is a challenge. The Young KC Dance Company is a positive concept which could help in bridging the still existing gap between professional dance companies and the curriculum. Its position between school and company is, nevertheless, delicate and forms a critical success factor. In reinforcing the bridge that the Young KC Dance Company represents, the KC and the programme are encouraged to define the Company's position more clearly, and to implement the concept in close cooperation with their alumni network and with the dance companies. For this purpose, the panel advises both the programme and the KC to expand the pool of professional experts involved therein and to advance a realistic development plan.

It is beyond the panel's doubt that the programme is moving in the right direction. The progress already made since the previous review is evident. While work still lies ahead, it can be argued that within the Dutch higher education landscape in which the KC is embedded, the Dance programme demonstrates that the intended learning outcomes are achieved. However, given the intrinsic international dimension of the dance profession, the panel strongly encourages the programme to strive beyond its national context and aim to meet the competitive international standard circumscribed to by the profession. To this purpose, it would be essential that students entering the programme are of an international standard. As such, an improvement of the recruiting process, both nationally and internationally, may be an important aspect to consider. Likewise, the KC could help expand their international position towards the Dance department by, for example, increasing marketing and recruitment resources.

The panel is aware that raising the overall technical standard to a level that is compliant with the requirements of both national and international companies takes time. However, the programme is encouraged to consider developing a comprehensive 4-year plan including yearly milestones to achieve this goal. The panel urges both the programme and the KC to consider the following recommendations as significant priorities in such a plan for further improvement, in order to increase the employability of graduates:

- To better balance the two year curriculum by ensuring a more diversified training in contemporary and modern dance technique;
- To establish a strategic development plan for the Young KC Dance Company, one that takes into account the design and implementation of a more comprehensive final assessment able to convey a more integrative view on the students;
- To better the premise for an enlarged and better qualified student intake by streamlining the description of the profile, expanding the reach and scope of marketing initiatives, and enhancing the recruitment process.

Final conclusion

Given the outcomes of the above-mentioned standards the panel recommends as weighted and substantiated final conclusion regarding the programme: conditionally positive.