

# QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ACCREDITATION IN HIGHER MUSIC EDUCATION

POLIFONIA ACCREDITATION  
WORKING GROUP



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ERASMUS NETWORK FOR MUSIC

**polifonia**



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*A free electronic version of this handbook is available through [www.polifonia-tn.org](http://www.polifonia-tn.org).*



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## FOREWORD

This document outlines a framework for reviews of higher education institutions and programmes in music. It was developed by the *Association Européenne des Conservatoires, Académies de Musique et Musikhochschulen* (AEC)<sup>1</sup> as a tool for institutions, authorities, agencies and organisations involved in quality assurance and accreditation.

### EUROPEAN DEVELOPMENTS

The Bologna Declaration Process is resulting in substantial reforms of European higher education. Many higher music education institutions across Europe are affected by these reforms<sup>2</sup> which include measures relating to quality assurance.

Quality assurance is the collective term for the systems used by institutions which ensure reliability, consistency, fairness and high standards in courses and qualifications. The Bologna process makes a distinction between internal and external systems of quality assurance:

- Internal quality assurance systems are monitoring processes set up and operated by the institution itself (annual evaluations, the use of external examiners, periodic major review of courses, etc). Educational authorities expect institutions of higher music education to conduct internal reviews to enhance the quality of their work. Such reviews may be centred on specific educational programmes/courses of study, or on the whole institution. They may focus on specific aspects of an institution's educational programmes. These aspects may include student-centred outcomes-based learning, transparency and fairness, employability in a changing professional environment, visibility in the larger context of local or national music life, and the development and promotion of student and staff creativity. Internal reviews are often based on internally produced assessment reports by students and staff and they may include reports from external peers.

Please note that internal quality assurance processes are not the main focus of this document, but readers should be aware of the existence of the 'Handbook on Internal Quality Assurance in Higher Music Education'<sup>3</sup> produced by the ERASMUS Network for Music 'Polifonia'<sup>4</sup>.

- External quality assurance and accreditation systems are operated by external bodies such as government and accreditation agencies. In most countries, educational authorities conduct quality assurance or accreditation reviews at a national level in order to ensure that institutions

<sup>1</sup> For more information about the AEC, please visit [www.aecinfo.org](http://www.aecinfo.org).

<sup>2</sup> For more information about the effects of the Bologna Declaration Process on higher music education in Europe, please visit the extensive 'Bologna & Music Website' in English, French and German at [www.bologna-and-music.org](http://www.bologna-and-music.org).

<sup>3</sup> This handbook is available at [www.bologna-and-music.org/internalqa](http://www.bologna-and-music.org/internalqa).

<sup>4</sup> The ERASMUS Network for Music 'Polifonia' is the largest project on Higher Music Education to date. The project started in 2004 with a first 3-year cycle (2004-2007) followed in 2007 by a second 3-year cycle (2007-2010) and studied various issues related to higher music education in Europe. More information on this project can be found on [www.polifonia-tn.org](http://www.polifonia-tn.org).

and/or programmes of higher learning meet the nationally required standards. The reviewed institution's self-evaluative report and a site visit are vital features of a review.

Quality assurance will be a major tool once, as the Bologna Declaration suggests, higher educational programmes will become more comparable across Europe. Thus, where they do not already exist, quality assurance and accreditation agencies have been established in virtually all Bologna countries, while standards and procedures are being developed at European level<sup>5</sup>. Agencies are responsible for setting out the responsibilities, processes and procedures and mechanisms for quality assurance. In addition, some subject areas (e.g. engineering, chemistry and business management) have been setting up subject-specific review or accreditation programmes at European level, which either add a European dimension to the existing national procedures through the use of European-wide standards or propose a subject-specific review mechanism at European level in addition to the existing national procedures.

#### MUSIC AND QUALITY ASSURANCE/ ACCREDITATION

The discipline of music is intrinsically linked to quality. Music students are constantly asked to perform for committees, auditions, competitions and the concert public. However, the application of external quality assurance and accreditation procedures in music is less consistently developed. Further work is therefore needed to inform institutions as to how to approach quality assurance and enhancement. It is also important to ensure that the special characteristics of higher music education are taken into account when quality assurance procedures and methodologies are being formulated.

The work undertaken on quality assurance within the EU/USA project entitled 'Music Study, Mobility and Accountability'<sup>6</sup>, which ran from 2002 to 2004 in partnership with the National Association of Schools of Music (NASM<sup>7</sup>) has shown that assessing and accrediting institutions and programmes for higher music education must be rooted in a comprehensive understanding of the characteristics of music and the contexts and traditions in which music is created. Without such a rooting, the assessment may be preoccupied with only technical and academic aspects of musical production and ignore the innate unique and artistic characteristics of music.

#### THE POSITION OF THE AEC AND THE AEC FRAMEWORK FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ACCREDITATION

The AEC published in 2007 a position paper based on its experience in the 'Music Study, Mobility and Accountability' project which states:

- <sup>5</sup> See 'Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area', published by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), Helsinki, 2005: [www.enqa.eu](http://www.enqa.eu).
- <sup>6</sup> The outcomes of the project, nominated by the European Commission as the first 'Best Practice Project' in the EU/USA programme, can be found on the project website <http://msma.arts-accredit.org>.
- <sup>7</sup> NASM is a specialised accrediting body serving postsecondary institutions offering non-degree and degree credentials.



1. Quality assurance and accreditation must function as mechanisms that can assist autonomous higher education institutions in the enhancement of their quality instead of bureaucratic processes based on inflexible criteria and procedures.
2. Quality assurance and accreditation processes must recognise the specific nature and characteristics of higher music education in their criteria and procedures.

In line with this position, and using its specialist knowledge and understanding of conservatoire higher education provision - musical, pedagogical and institutional - the AEC has developed a European approach to external quality assurance and accreditation in higher music education. The AEC project 'Accreditation in European Professional Music Training' initiated in 2006-2007<sup>8</sup> formulated a set of common European criteria and procedures for external quality assurance and accreditation which has been tested in institutional review visits<sup>9</sup>.

This Framework Document therefore outlines a European music-specific approach to external quality assurance and accreditation. The AEC project on international cooperation in higher music education entitled 'Mundus Musicalis'<sup>10</sup> was also considered during the drafting process of this document so as to ensure wider comparability in a global context.

An Accreditation Working Group was set up in 2007 within the ERASMUS Network for Music 'Polifonia'<sup>11</sup> with responsibility for further developing the AEC framework for reviews of higher education institutions and programmes in music. A Register of experts for peer review panels was established including guidelines and protocols for selection, while the Framework Document was updated following the Working Group's findings and analyses. Most notably, a differentiation was introduced between criteria for *institutional* and *programme* review.

<sup>8</sup> This project was supported by the EU SOCRATES Programme. For more information, please visit [www.bologna-and-music.org/accreditation](http://www.bologna-and-music.org/accreditation).

<sup>9</sup> The developed criteria and procedures were tested in 4 visits in institutions in Germany, Norway, Italy and the Czech Republic during April/May 2007 and presented at a final conference at the Janáček Academy of Music in Brno in June 2007. The reports of the test visits and the conference, as well as other available information about the project, can be found at [www.bologna-and-music.org/accreditation](http://www.bologna-and-music.org/accreditation).

<sup>10</sup> This project, supported by the EU ERASMUS MUNDUS programme has produced an analytical document, which compares quality assurance and accreditation procedures in higher music education in various parts of the world. The comments made in the 'Mundus Musicalis' project on this framework document were taken into account ensuring that a first step is already taken towards the international comparability and recognition of the criteria and procedures suggested in the document. For more information about 'Mundus Musicalis', please visit [www.aecinfo.org/mundusmusicalis](http://www.aecinfo.org/mundusmusicalis).

<sup>11</sup> More information on this project can be found on [www.polifonia-tn.org](http://www.polifonia-tn.org).

Based on this work, the AEC has formulated the following aims for its activities in accreditation and quality assurance:

1. To provide higher music education institutions within and outside Europe with an *advisory* and developmental *institutional* review process.
2. To provide higher music education institutions within and outside Europe with an *advisory* and developmental *programme* review process.
3. To work with national agencies, supplying criteria and/or experts for *formal institutional* reviews.
4. To work with national agencies, supplying criteria and/or experts for *formal programme* accreditation.

## A. HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT

It is important to be aware of the great variety of national quality assurance and accreditation systems in the various European countries with many stakeholders. Therefore, instead of producing alternative documents for the various stakeholders, systems and contexts, one overarching and comprehensive Framework Document was developed. It is likely, therefore, that some of this information may be familiar to some of the stakeholders but that the document will nonetheless provide all the necessary data for all groups, notwithstanding their prior knowledge. The first chapter, for example, is an introduction to the characteristics of higher music education and is mainly aimed at stakeholders with a limited knowledge of the sector.

The AEC Framework Document is currently being used in the following contexts:

- In an informal context – as part of the ‘AEC Quality Enhancement Process for Institutions and Programmes’. This is a music-specific peer review system and consists of visits carried out by panels of experts aiming to provide assistance to higher music education institutions in their quality enhancement activities.
- In formal contexts – i.e. in formal procedures led by national quality assurance and accreditation agencies reviewing higher music education institutions. In this scenario, the agencies can use the entire document or selected parts of it. The AEC has established several types of bilateral cooperation with national quality assurance and accreditation agencies in Europe:
  - For certain procedures, the criteria of both the AEC and the national agency are compared and merged, and the AEC advises on international experts. The agency then uses these criteria and experts in its procedures.
  - In other procedures, the criteria are merged, after which the AEC assembles a committee of international experts, undertakes the review visit and produces the final report of the visit, which is submitted to the national agency for the accreditation decision.

The following table describes possible scenarios for the use of this document:

SCENARIOS AND SITUATIONS (including those where national accreditation agencies/ systems have established criteria and procedures)		The AEC can provide national accreditation agencies/systems with:	See chapter(s)*:
		- Information on the specific characteristics of higher music studies and of quality assurance (QA) in the field of music - Programme outcomes for music study - A European/international dimension	B, C and D
Scenario	National accreditation agencies/systems that:	What the AEC can offer in each scenario: (in addition to the elements mentioned above)	See chapter(s)*:
<i>Formal context</i>	1	- have established criteria and procedures - are in need of experts for reviews of higher music education (HME) institutions or programmes	- Experts from the AEC Register of Experts  F
	2	- have established procedures and experts - are in need of criteria for reviews of HME institutions or programmes	- Criteria for reviews of HME institutions or programmes  E
	3	- have established procedures - are in need of criteria and experts for reviews of HME institutions or programmes	- Criteria for reviews of HME institutions or programmes - Experts from the AEC Register of Experts  E and F
	4	- have established criteria - are in need of procedures and experts for reviews of HME institutions or programmes	- Procedures for reviews of HME institutions or programmes - Experts from the AEC Register of Experts  F
	5	- are in need of criteria, procedures and experts for reviews of HME institutions or programmes	- Criteria for reviews of higher music education institutions or programmes - Procedures for reviews of higher music education institutions or programmes - Experts from the AEC Register of Experts  E and F
<p>* Chapters of the AEC Framework document:</p> <p>B: The Characteristics of Higher Music Studies C: The Characteristics for Quality Assurance in Music D: Programme Outcomes E: Criteria for programme and institutional review in music F: Procedures for programme and institutional review in music</p>			
<i>Informal context</i>	6	When all sections are read together, the document contains information on the implementation of the AEC framework for reviews of higher education institutions and programmes in music	Whole document

Thus, the proposed framework document can be used flexibly in various contexts; it takes into account the diversity of systems and approaches to quality assurance and accreditation in European higher education that exist today and which are likely to develop in the future.

In any case, the content of this document is based on the philosophy that reviews of programmes and/or institutions should contribute to the improvement of educational quality as well as to international recognition. Furthermore, such reviews will ensure that:

- The criteria and procedures are based on an appreciation of the characteristics of music and music education.
- The standards and guidelines for quality assurance in higher education, set by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education<sup>12</sup> (ENQA), are acknowledged.
- Programme outcomes as described by the 'Polifonia/Dublin Descriptors' (PDDs) and (where relevant) the AEC Learning Outcomes<sup>13</sup> are taken into account.

<sup>12</sup> See 'Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area', published by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), Helsinki, 2005: [www.enqa.eu](http://www.enqa.eu).

<sup>13</sup> The 'Polifonia/Dublin Descriptors' (PDDs) and the AEC Learning Outcomes are presented in section D of this document and can be found in appendices 1 and 2.