

AEC – MusiQuE COOPERATION PAPER

Introduction

This paper explores the roles and relationship of the Association Européenne des Conservatoires, Académies de Musique et Musikhochschulen (AEC) and *MusiQuE - Music Quality Enhancement*.

AEC is a European cultural and educational network with around 300 member institutions for professional music education in 57 countries. AEC is the leading voice for European higher music education.

MusiQuE - Music Quality Enhancement, the Foundation for Quality Enhancement and Accreditation in Higher Music Education, is an external evaluation organisation dedicated to the continuous improvement of the quality of higher music education across Europe and beyond, and to assisting higher music education institutions in their own enhancement of quality.

The establishment of *MusiQuE* was the result of a long journey, which started with the Bologna Declaration in 1999. Since then, art disciplines in all Bologna signatory countries were faced with the challenge of demonstrating they fulfil certain quality standards by means of formal and transparent procedures. Since 2004, the AEC supported its members in this development by establishing working groups and running pilot projects. In doing so, it became clear rather quickly that the AEC could provide valuable help in the development and testing of music-specific quality standards but could by no means act as a reviewing or accrediting entity itself. In this respect, the formal establishment of *MusiQuE* as an organisation independent from AEC in 2014 was a logical step and a necessary prerequisite for making the positive results of the trial phase sustainable. In 2016, *MusiQuE* gained registration with the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) as the first external quality assurance organisation in the arts and humanities. Formally speaking, this means that, at the European level, *MusiQuE* has the same status as many national quality assurance agencies and is therefore licensed to operate as a recognised accreditation or evaluation agency in a growing number of European countries. Originally founded as a foundation under Dutch law, *MusiQuE* moved its legal seat to Belgium in 2018.

The independence of AEC and *MusiQuE* is key to have an impact of both organisations on the sector. At the same time, AEC and *MusiQuE* remain committed to shared goals, values and quality standards. This is demonstrated by the wording of the two mission and vision statements of both organisations.

This paper will discuss the relationship between AEC and *MusiQuE* by comparing the mission and vision statements of both organisations, exploring issues of independence and interaction, and formulating proposals for a close cooperation between the organisations in the coming years. The document is also drafted for external stakeholders with the aim to clarify the relationship between AEC and *MusiQuE*, and to avoid that the external quality assurance activities of *MusiQuE* as an EQAR-registered agency might be attributed to AEC. This is also recommended in the EQAR's Use and Interpretation of the ESG for the European Register of Quality Assurance Agencies.¹

¹ See Annex 5: Guiding principles for the separation between agencies' activities.

Comparing the vision and mission statements of AEC and MusiquE

A closer analysis of the mission and vision statements of both organisations shows that they have similar aims and objectives in the following areas. It is within these parameters that the interaction between AEC and *MusiquE* can be further developed.

- Quality: in the AEC mission statement one of the four overarching pillars mentioned is 'Enhancing Quality in Higher Music Education', whereas in the *MusiquE* statement (which because of *MusiquE's* role is more targeted towards quality enhancement processes) terms such as 'quality culture' and 'quality enhancement activities' are mentioned at different occasions.
- Scope: both organisations clearly underline their subject-specific and European dimensions.
- Societal relevance: both organisations want to advance the position of higher music education in society. For AEC this is an overarching general aim, while *MusiquE* focuses more on the self-reflection of institutions to engage with ongoing challenges in society.

An important feature of the statement of *MusiquE* is its vision to become the leading provider of quality enhancement services in (higher) music education. It also stresses its independence and recognition based on its subject specific and international focus. AEC's statement clearly mentions advocacy, partnership-building and providing support to its members as important aspects of its mission.

About roles and independence

AEC sees professionally focused arts education as a quest for excellence in three areas: artistic practice; learning and teaching; research and innovation. To strive for quality is key to the daily work of AEC and its institutions, and to deal with quality enhancement issues is consequently one of its crucial tasks. AEC has clarified its contribution to the area of quality assurance and enhancement by outsourcing the task of carrying out reviews and accreditations to *MusiquE*. Nevertheless, it is in AEC member institutions where excellence is made operational, defined and continuously renegotiated with regards to the three above-mentioned areas.

The duty of *MusiquE* is to develop and use recognised and agreed standards for the evaluation of artistic and educational quality. In doing so, *MusiquE* can and must rely on expertise that has been emerging from the core of the institutions and closely linked to the processes of artistic practice, learning and teaching, and research and innovation.

AEC contributes to quality enhancement by:

- addressing the quality of artistic practice, learning and teaching, research and innovation on a continuous basis
- capacity building and the development of expertise
- acting as a think-tank for renewal and ongoing innovation of the field

MusiquE contributes to quality enhancement by:

- conducting quality enhancement reviews, accreditations and other review activities
- supporting institutions with relevant expertise and advice

- Using a set of internationally agreed standards that enable AEC members and other (higher) music education institutions to assess their own position in an objective and subject-specific manner

There are also overlaps between the tasks of *MusiQuE* and AEC, and for good reasons. One of *MusiQuE*'s most compelling strengths is that *MusiQuE*'s review system is based on standards decided upon by the sector itself. The history of the establishment of *MusiQuE* by AEC itself should always be kept in mind, which implies that *MusiQuE*'s services must always be informed by the latest developments and needs of the higher music education sector. Moreover, *MusiQuE* will be supporting institutions in building their internal quality assurance, as national quality assurance systems are increasingly focused on building internal quality assurance systems but with an external dimension as required by the *European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ESG)*. These internal quality assurance systems are sometimes part of institutional review systems of larger educational institutions to which AEC member institutions belong as faculties or departments.

The need to keep AEC and *MusiQuE* independent from each other is well understood by both organisations. In order to maintain the credibility of and trust in *MusiQuE*'s review activities, it must be absolutely clear there can be no interference from AEC in the daily operation of *MusiQuE*. Moreover, *MusiQuE*'s independent status is one of the requirements for its registration on EQAR.

How are AEC and MusiQuE interacting on policy issues?

Quality assurance and quality enhancement continue to be an area of dynamic development in the European Higher Education Area. Recent reports published in the framework of the Bologna Process show a varied European landscape with regards to external quality assurance. Whereas in many countries there is a clear tendency towards institutional accreditation/review, giving institutions more freedom and ownership to shape their own internal quality systems, in other countries programme accreditations/reviews are still important tools for external quality assurance. These developments strongly influence the daily reality of the institutions in the European higher music education sector. *MusiQuE* must closely monitor these developments in order to ensure that its activities are fit for purpose in all national contexts and offer a flexible and varied portfolio of review activities. At the same time, because of the relevance of these developments to its member institutions, AEC should not leave quality enhancement issues aside, but rather, supported by expertise developed by *MusiQuE*, provide its members with relevant information about the latest trends in this area.

Apart from topics related to quality assurance and enhancement, for which *MusiQuE* should be able to develop and express its own policy agenda, the development and implementation of a policy agenda with regards to generic issues relevant for the sector (e.g. research, curriculum design, employability, etc.) should be mainly the responsibility of AEC. In brief: *MusiQuE* should always refer to AEC for opinions and positions on generic issues relevant for the entire sector, while AEC should

refer to *MusiQuE* for reviews and accreditations. In this context it should be underlined once more that *MusiQuE* executes a review system that is based on standards decided upon by the sector itself. As can be seen in the paragraph below, the AEC sector will be consulted on the *MusiQuE* standards on a regular basis.

With regards to policy development in the area of quality assurance, the views of both organisations should be closely coordinated. Because of its subject-specific dimension based on its origins in AEC, *MusiQuE* promotes a concept of quality that brings together artistic standards and educational quality. Policy debates on quality issues in both organisations should be closely coordinated, so that conflicting (and therefore confusing) views are avoided.

In which concrete actions is AEC and MusiQuE's interaction resulting?

AEC and *MusiQuE* are mutually supportive. *MusiQuE* is helping the sector to develop in terms of quality issues and this should be acknowledged and promoted. On the other hand, because of its subject-specific focus, it is essential that *MusiQuE* remains in close contact with the latest developments in and needs of the sector the AEC represents. This is being done through:

- AEC proposes members for the *MusiQuE* Board. Recently, the *MusiQuE* Board has added a student member to the Board following the strong advice received from the EQAR Register Committee. *MusiQuE* Board members are proposed by AEC but appointed by the *MusiQuE* Board on a personal (not representative or institutional) title. *MusiQuE* has developed a Code of Conduct for *MusiQuE* Board members to be signed by each Board member, which includes a declaration of independence and states that, once appointed, they serve *MusiQuE* and not the organisation that proposed them.
- AEC member institutions are consulted on the revision of the *MusiQuE* standards.
- Staff members from AEC member institutions are encouraged to apply to *MusiQuE* Peer-Reviewers Register.
- AEC proposes a member to *MusiQuE's* Appeals Committee.
- *MusiQuE* is given a permanent agenda item during the annual AEC General Assembly during which information about its activities can be provided.
- The AEC and *MusiQuE* leaderships (more specifically the AEC President and Chief Executive on the one hand, and the *MusiQuE* chair of the Board and Director on the other) are holding annual formal meetings to discuss cooperation and interaction between both organisations.

In terms of opportunities for future developments, the following concrete suggestions are made:

1. There could be more attention to *MusiQuE* during AEC events. For example, there could be a regular *MusiQuE* session during the AEC Annual Meeting for International Relation Coordinators on the link between quality assurance and internationalisation, or during EPARM on the assessment of quality of research output (with reference to the *MusiQuE* Framework for the

evaluation of Research Activities in Higher Music Education Institutions). For the AEC Annual Congress, it could be explored giving *MusiQuE* the responsibility for a (breakout) session addressing developments in quality assurance and enhancement or discussing its concept of quality. Promotional sessions in which *MusiQuE* is presented as an AEC service should be avoided. Quality could also be explored as a central theme to one of the future AEC Congresses.

2. The organisation of organising joint activities will be explored, e.g. the organisation of a one-day AEC / *MusiQuE* workshop addressing those staff members at AEC member institutions who are in charge of quality assurance issues.
3. More generally it would be helpful to present *MusiQuE* as a part of a unique overarching sectoral approach that AEC has developed over the years towards the internationalisation of the sector: from a Sectoral European Qualifications Framework (the AEC Learning Outcomes and 'Polifonia/Dublin Descriptors') for an internationally based description of study programmes, towards the support to the development of an international learning environment through various tools (mobility, joint programmes, international external examiners, etc.) and as final point an international approach towards review and accreditation (*MusiQuE*).

A specific AEC-MusiQuE agreement will be formulated and signed by both organisations that will describe the various ways in which the cooperation will take place.

Staff arrangements and staff independence

One issue that needs constant attention in terms of safeguarding a clear independence between both organisations is the fact that AEC and *MusiQuE* share the same staff and office space. By agreeing on clear protocols and agreements on personnel, finances, services and facilities that are updated on an annual basis, it is guaranteed that interference or any conflict of interest is avoided. The employees are aware of all arrangements and procedures that underpin the full independence of *MusiQuE* with regards to AEC as stated in the *MusiQuE Internal Regulations* and will maintain full confidentiality of information concerning the procedures executed by *MusiQuE*, ensuring there can be no interference in these procedures from the side of AEC or its other partner organisations, the EMU and Pearle*.

In this context, a Staff Convention has been signed between AEC and *MusiQuE*. This Staff Convention has been drafted in order to formalise the agreement that one or more employee(s) of AEC will be serviced to *MusiQuE* and undertake the role of *MusiQuE* staff members as outlined in their job description. Staff Conventions between AEC and *MusiQuE* are renewed every two years. It should be noted that AEC involves the *MusiQuE* Board in the decision-making process related to the appointment of the concerned employee(s). The Staff Convention also stipulates that the Secretary of the *MusiQuE* Board should hold annual review talks with the employee(s). These reviews address matters related to workload, job description, staff development, internal communication, etc., but will not concern the employee(s)'s salary. The results of these review talks are reported upon during the annual meeting of AEC and *MusiQuE* leadership.