

Brussels, 14th June 2019

Dear colleagues,

The AEC has great pleasure in inviting you to the next edition of

**The AEC Annual Meeting for International Relations Coordinators in
European Institutions for Higher Music Education (IRCs meeting)**

which will take place at the

**Academy of Performing Arts in Prague, Czech Republic
on 19-22 September 2019**

What for and for whom?

The Annual Meeting for IRCs is meant for administrative and/or teaching staff members in conservatoires who deal with international relations and European programmes (such as ERASMUS+). The meeting is open also to students interested in the international dimension of their learning. During the meetings, relevant topics in the field of mobility and international cooperation are discussed in plenary sessions, workshops, discussion fora and parallel sessions. The meeting is also a unique platform for networking at European level: participants have the opportunity to develop relations with fellow IRCs, meet project partners and potential partner institutions and show projects and activities that have been developed within their home institution.

***The Pink Elephant
Reflections on the Future to Transform the Present***

The “**pink elephant in the room**” is an expression used to indicate that something very visible and obvious is there, but nobody wants to point it out and talk about it¹. How many “pink elephants” do the international relations coordinators have to deal with in their daily work? Starting from the points raised by the International Relations Coordinators Working group in their [Reflection on the AEC Annual Meeting for International Coordinators 2018 - looking back at the past while imagining the future of internationalization of Higher Music Education](#) (which we invite all of you to read before coming to Prague) the IRCs Meeting 2019 presents itself with the provocative title “The Pink Elephant” to trigger discussion about all constraints, contradictions, unsaid and unknowns that make the work of the IRCs more and more complex and multifaceted.

¹ <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=pink%20elephant%20in%20the%20room>

Pink elephants generate **contradictions**: how can we stay **flexible** within the constraints of the institutional, national and European **regulations**? If we claim that all our work is for the good of the **students**, why is our work not entirely based on an accurate listening of their needs? If we claim that it is important to be in a network with common tools and procedures, why still many AEC members do not accept applications via **EASY**? If we claim that “being international” is a sign of quality, why don’t we **compare** each other internationally on regular basis? And if we claim that networking is the most important function of the IRCs meeting, while as the **networking activity** been presented as an optional feature of the event? The IRCs Meeting 2019 will talk openly about these “pink elephants” and will address in particular the centrality of networking by assigning a central place in the programme to the Networking Activity, which will take place for the first time on Saturday afternoon, as part of the main programme.

Uncertainty is one of the biggest pink elephants in the IRC room. While in Birmingham the Brexit was for obvious reasons at the centre of the debate of last year, the approaching end of the current Erasmus+ Programme is bringing more questions than answers. Besides the news about the **doubling of the budget**, many other important details are still unknown, including the administrative implications of managing the expected huge increase of mobility numbers. And what about the **European Universities** initiative? How could higher music institutions take advantage of this big opportunity? Or is this *elephant* too big to handle? Other question marks are related to the **Erasmus Going Digital** initiative: what and how will be officially digitalized as of 2021? Which degree of autonomy will the institution(s) have in this process? Contradictory information is coming out in this regard and exact details have not been officially disclosed. In his “TedX style” talk, **Mirko Varano**, Senior Advisor International Projects at KTH Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm, will try to “unveil” the **Erasmus 2021** pink elephant by telling more details about the future of the most famous EU programme².

Employability is another pink elephant for higher music education institutions: what do we mean exactly when speaking about it in relation to the music sector? How can we best measure it for reporting purposes? And what is the responsibility of higher music education institutions and IRCs in particular? The impact of international mobility of students on employability will be addressed by the keynote speaker **Dana Petrova**, Director of Centre for International Cooperation in Education in Czech Republic, who will trigger breakout groups discussion on this theme, which will also address the responsibility of institutions in providing international internship opportunities to their graduates.

The responsibility of institutions in relation to the employability of their graduates reflects the **responsibility of higher music education actors in society** at large. The role of international relations coordinators within their institution in relation to the bigger role of the institution in society is also a pink elephant. The paramount role that IRCs have in transforming individuals by facilitating life-changing experiences such as Erasmus exchanges and international opportunities is undeniable and often neglected. The societal responsibility of IRCs goes even beyond that as it touches also the environmental sphere. The **sustainability of physical mobility**, which concerns all travels involved in international meetings and activities, is nowadays becoming an increasing important issue and has entered the strategic agendas of governments and institutions. Unfortunately, the sustainability agenda clashes

² Mirko Varano will also give a pre-conference seminar about Joint Programmes

with the internationalization and mobility goals which set higher and higher numbers in terms of projects and activities to be performed and people to involve. But is this reflecting the actual trends? Many institutions see a **decline in exchange applications** despite the increased Erasmus budget. Are music students surprisingly become less mobile? And, if so, why? Could **technology** help in solving the puzzle by providing digital solutions to replace physical mobility with virtual and blended mobility? Can distance learning and cooperation offer a sustainable future to higher music education? The **future of internationalization** in higher music education will be a central topic of the 2019 IRCs Meeting. Extensive discussions which will lead to the publication of an IRCs Manifesto 2020 will be inspired by the “expert on future” **Ronald Jones** from Harvard University, who will help participants imagining the future of internationalization.

The AEC is looking forward to welcome you at the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague from 19th to 22nd September for the 19th AEC Annual Meeting for International Relations Coordinators, the second taking place in the framework of the Creative Europe funded project [AEC - Strengthening Music in Society \(SMS\)](#). The event will also feature sessions and pre-conference seminars prepared by the Diversity, Learning & Teaching, Digitization and Student working groups of the SMS Project and the usual EASY Workshop open to all internal and external users of the system. Plenty of time will be given to discussion on relevant topics for international relations coordinators and informative sessions about international projects carried out by AEC member institutions.

Join us in our reflection upon the future to transform the present!

Practical information and procedures to attend the meeting

Further information, such as the programme of the meeting, information on travel, accommodation and participant fee payment, as well as the links to the online registration can be found at www.aec-music.eu/irc2019.

We are very much looking forward to seeing you in Prague in September!

Kind regards,

The AEC Office Team and the IRCs working Group