



## **ASSESSMENT REPORT**

Limited programme assessment

### **Professional Bachelor programme Circus and Performance Art**

Fulltime

**Fontys Academy  
of Circus and Performance Art (ACAPA)**

**De kracht van  
kennis.**



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## **Fontys Academy of Circus and Performance Art (ACAPA)**

Croho registration: 30014

Hobéon Certificering BV

**Dated: 12 October 2018**

**Audit Committee**

Drs. W.G. van Raaijen, chair

T.A. Roberts MSc

S. Flor

D. Westera, student member

**Secretary / co-ordinator:**

H.R. van der Made



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# 1. GENERAL AND QUANTITATIVE DATA

## General data

### *Institution*

Name	Fontys Academy of Circus & Performance Art (ACAPA)
Status	Government funded
Outcomes of Institutional Quality Assessment	Pass

### *Programme*

Name of programme in Central Register of Higher Professional Education (CROHO)	Circus and Performance Art
ISAT-code CROHO	30014
Orientation and level	Professional Bachelor
Number of credits	240EC
Variant	Fulltime
Specialisations	n.a.
Language of instruction	English
Location	Tilburg
Special Quality Feature	n.a.

<i>Date of site-visit</i>	July 2 2018
<i>Contact person (name and e-mail address)</i>	John van Riemsdijk a.vanriemsdijk@fontys.nl



## 2. SUMMARY

This chapter presents the key findings and judgements of the panel, as well as the most crucial recommendation for improvement of the course, the overall outcome of the assessment and the panel's accreditation advice to the NVAO.

### **Preface**

The Bachelor Circus and Performance Arts of Fontys University of Applied Science in Tilburg is assessed against the NVAO Framework for Limited Programme Assessments. The programme belongs to the 'accreditation cluster' HBO Circus, together with the Bachelor Circus Arts of Codarts, Rotterdam.

The programme aims to deliver skilled, creative and self-reliant circus performers to the professional circus domain.

### **Standard 1. Intended Learning Outcomes**

The programme meets the requirements of this standard: the intended learning outcomes consist of a distinct and compact set of five competences that give direction to the programme. The focus is clearly on the profession of the circus and performing artist. Bachelor's level is incorporated through alignment of the learning outcomes with the Dublin Descriptors; an international reference is made to FEDEC standards. A focus on the development of research skills is also included. The distinctive profile of the course, particularly the 'artistic research' aspect of it, could be made more explicit.

The panel considers Standard 1 to be '**satisfactory**'.

### **Standard 2. Teaching-Learning Environment**

The panel concludes that the programme on this Standard exceeds basic requirements. The programme is coherent, develops along three stages of command and ties in extremely well with the intended learning outcomes; it provides a solid coverage of all final qualifications. The curriculum is highly student-centred in the sense that it leaves ample room for individual learning and development of one's own artistic vision.

The faculty is extremely well equipped to execute the programme and can call upon a flexible non-core workforce of experts to cater for students' individual needs.

Facility-wise ACAPA has made great progress since the last accreditation assessment. It now possesses a very fine learning and teaching environment featuring great facilities that are available at all times to both students and faculty.

Not only in the audit students express their satisfaction about the curriculum, staff and facilities, but the NSE outcomes, too, show a high degree of appreciation.

The panel therefore considers Standard 2 to be '**good**'.

### **Standard 3. Student assessment**

The panel commends the programme for its elaborate, thorough and – to circus education – well-attuned assessment scheme, not just in the first three years of the programme but also in the graduation stage of the course. The review of a sample of interim tests and assessments that were on display in the audit, the marking of students' graduation work, and the students' general satisfaction about the clarity and fairness of the assessment scheme demonstrate that ACAPA carefully observes the common denominators for quality assessment, such as validity, reliability, authenticity and – to students – predictability and transparency. A higher degree of reliability and transparency, however, can still be obtained through a firm and continual practice of 'rubrics', and staff alignment (calibration sessions) which at the time of the audit was still 'under construction'. The panel in particular appreciates the programme's shift to a more student-centred (i.e. formative) approach to testing, which is very much in line with the didactic approach of the course.

Considering all of the above, the panel judgement on Standard 3 reads '**satisfactory**'.

**Standard 4. Achieved Learning Outcomes**

From a review of students' graduation work, the panel concludes that the programme demonstrates that it delivers students who have achieved the intended learning outcomes. It is the conviction of the panel that further alignment between examiners (and coaches) may, even more, strengthen the output stability and reliability of the final level. The professional field is more than happy with the results of the course and recognises the creative circus performers the course aims to deliver. Alumni express their appreciation for the way the course has prepared them for the professional field.

The panel therefore rates Standard 4 as '**satisfactory**'.

**Overall conclusion:**

Fontys' Bachelor programme in Circus and Performance Art unquestionably meets the requirements of NVAO's Limited Assessment Framework. A consideration for further improvement would be to invest more in a broad understanding of the concept of 'artistic research', to review and enrich it bottom up, and to make it more explicit to strengthen the course profile.

Considering NVAO's assessment rules the scores for the individual Standards result in the judgement 'Satisfactory' for the programme as a whole.

It is the panel's advice to the NVAO to award accreditation to the programme for another period of six years.

After approval of the panel members, this report was adopted by chairman Van Raaijen in The Hague on 12 October 2018.

### 3. INTRODUCTION

In this Chapter a brief introduction to the course is given, its position within the faculty/institution and the relevant historic and contextual information on the course is shared. A conclusive paragraph is dedicated to the key developments that have taken place in the wake of the previous accreditation audit and/or internal audits.

#### **Fontys School of Fine and Performing Arts (FHK)**

The programme is executed under the flag of the Academy of Circus and Performance Art (ACAPA), a department of Fontys School of Fine and Performing Arts (FHK). FHK originated from a 'merger' in 2000 of various Academies, such as the Dance Academy, Art Academy and Conservatoire. In 2005 the FHK moved to a modern building in the centre of Tilburg.

FHK, together with 30 other Schools, make up Fontys University of Applied Sciences. As of 1 January 2012, FHK consists of four sectors: Visual, Dance, Music and Theatre, in total offering 17 Bachelors and Masters programmes. This concerns art education in the fields of music, rock, drama, dance, circus and performance art, visual arts and architecture. FHK also offers teacher education programmes in drama, dance, visual arts and music. ACAPA is part of the sector Theatre.

At the time of the audit the number of students in the programme amounts to 71. In the past two years 25 students graduated.

#### **Developments since the previous audit**

In its Self-Evaluation report the programme outlined to the panel how it has materialised the recommendations from the previous accreditation. The suggestions for improvement were in particular related to Standards 2 and 3:

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Action taken</b>
Expand the literature on circus (more video material and scientific literature on modern circus).	The literature list has been extended qualitatively.
Critically review the study load for each of the courses	In the current study program, it is clear for students what the relation is between the credits and the study load.
Expand the staff, because in the long run the small size poses a threat to the program.	The permanent staff is expanded. Because of the amount of circus disciplines, it is not possible to have permanent teachers for all of those disciplines. As an aside, the number of circus disciplines has been reduced, so that more depth can be offered in the remaining disciplines.
Add a teacher to the program committee as soon as possible.	Teachers are participating in the programme committee (2 students and 2 teachers).
A new accommodation is essential, and it should be in line with the standards set by FEDEC.	ACAPA has a new accommodation in line with the standards set by FEDEC.
There are no grading matrices.	For all the courses of the ACAPA curriculum grading matrices (rubrics) have been designed. An assessment committee has also been set up to monitor the assessment policy and the execution and results of the tests.
Students are critical about both the portfolio and the competence exam	Both the portfolio and the competence exams (level I, II and III) have been reviewed and adapted. Students have to prepare a (written) presentation before each competence exam, give a verbal presentation to a three-person committee and have to show that their portfolio is in order. These revisions have led to positive feedback from the students.

The current audit panel incorporated the implementation of the improvements in its assessment of the Bachelor Circus and Performance Art. When applicable, the panel will refer to the aforementioned improvement scheme under the relevant Standards in the next chapter. Overall, the panel finds that the course has taken the recommendations from the previous audit to heart.

## 4. FINDINGS AND JUDGEMENTS

This chapter deals with the panel members' findings and judgements based on the documents delivered by the course staff and the subsequent discussions during the site-visit. The text is ordered according to the four standards of the applicable NVAO assessment framework.

### 4.1. Intended learning outcomes

***Standard 1: The intended learning outcomes tie in with the level and orientation of the programme; they are geared to the expectations of the professional field, the discipline, and international requirements.***

Explanation: The intended learning outcomes demonstrably describe the level of the programme (Associate Degree, Bachelors, or Masters) as defined in the Dutch qualifications framework, as well as its orientation (professional or academic). In addition, they tie in with the regional, national or international perspective of the requirements currently set by the professional field and the discipline with regard to the contents of the programme. Insofar as is applicable, the intended learning outcomes are in accordance with relevant legislation and regulations.

### Findings

The programme aims at delivering graduates from a wide variety of nationalities who can start an independent professional career in the domain of the performing arts, specifically in contemporary circus. The Academy describes the profile of its graduates as performers who at Bachelor's level maintain high technical and artistic standards, are able to work multidisciplinary, possess an autonomous, self-directed and entrepreneurial attitude, have knowledge of the professional field, know how to profile and present themselves and have acquired the relevant knowledge and research skills for the profession. An important aim of the course is to deliver reflective and creative practitioners. To this end the programme profile features the concept of 'artistic research', the relevance of which was discussed at some length in the audit. At some time it became evident that students and faculty in particular have a corresponding understanding of the concept, although for it to become an integrated profiling element of the course, in the eyes of the panel the term 'artistic research' would require a more thorough explanation, communication and internalisation.

In tune with its profile description the set of intended learning outcomes of the programme comprises the following five competences:

Competence	Specification
Craftsmanship	The ability to create performances by applying skills and knowledge from the domain of circus and the performing arts.
Artistic vision	The ability to develop personal artistic ideas and concepts, to take position as an artist in circus and other performing arts and to carry out artistic research.
Entrepreneurship	The ability to develop, organize and manage one's own professional career.
Communication	The ability to communicate in a clear way about artistic ideas and concepts, both verbally and in writing and the ability to contribute to a collective creative process.
Reflection	The ability to investigate developments and artistic practices in circus and the performing arts, the capacity to reflect on the role of an artist, the capacity to acquire knowledge and skills and approach learning as a life-long process of professional and personal development.

For the sake of Bachelor's level the programme aligned the phrasing of its learning outcomes with the Dublin Descriptors. The panel believes the intended learning outcomes of the course clearly indicate the Bachelor's level of a starting professional, that are comparable to learning outcomes of equivalent Bachelor's programmes in Europe and unquestionably represent the broad scope of the Circus and Performance Art's domain while simultaneously providing direction to the programme. The focus on research becomes particularly clear from the reflective competency that requires students' capacity '...to investigate developments and artistic practices...' and '...to reflect on the role of an artist...', but also from the artistic vision competency that highlights the capacity to do artistic research.

Professional and international alignment is achieved by the programme's full membership since 2011 of the Fédération Européenne des Écoles de Cirque Professionnelles (FEDEC) that sets the standards for Circus and Performing Arts education in the European area. It became clear that the programme management and some faculty play an active role in this European Federation of Circus Schools.

From the panel discussions in the audit it appeared that both the (internationally composed) faculty and the Professional Advisory Board were well informed about and attuned with the international developments in Circus and Performance Arts, the latter explicitly functioning as an effective sounding board for the programme.

### **Considerations and Judgement**

The programme meets the requirements of this standard: the intended learning outcomes consist of a distinct and compact set of five competences that give direction to the programme. The focus is clearly on the profession of the circus and performing artist. Bachelor's level is incorporated through alignment of the learning outcomes with the Dublin Descriptors; an international reference is made to FEDEC standards. A focus on the development of research skills is also included. The distinctive profile of the course, particularly the 'artistic research' aspect of it, could be made more explicit.

The panel considers Standard 1 to be '**satisfactory**'

## 4.2. Teaching and Learning Environment

**Standard 2: The curriculum, the teaching-learning environment and the quality of the teaching staff enable the incoming students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.**

**Explanation:** The intended learning outcomes have been adequately translated into educational objectives of (components of) the curriculum. The diversity of the students admitted is taken into account in this respect. The teachers have sufficient expertise in terms of both subject matter and teaching methods to teach the curriculum, and provide appropriate guidance. The teaching-learning environment encourages students to play an active role in the design of their own learning process (*student-centred approach*). Programme-specific services and facilities are assessed, unless they involve institution-wide services and facilities already reported on during the institutional audit.

### Findings

#### Programme

The curriculum of the programme comprises a four-year, fulltime study. It features a major of 210 EC and a third year minor of 30 EC. The student body is highly international and so the language of instruction is English. The annual schedule includes three periods of 14, 14 and 13 weeks, the last week of each period being an assessment week.

ACAPA Program Year 1 - 4						
	Module	EC	Year1	Year2	Year3	Year4
<b>Circus disciplines</b>		<b>54,0</b>	<b>15,0</b>	<b>15,0</b>	<b>10,0</b>	<b>14,0</b>
101	Circus techniques	I	13	13	10	14
102	Group work		2	2		
<b>Expression and interpretation</b>		<b>32,0</b>	<b>12,0</b>	<b>10,0</b>	<b>5,0</b>	<b>5,0</b>
201	Dance	II	4	4	2	2
202	Physical theatre		4	3	3	3
203	Performance Art		4	3		
<b>Basic body skills</b>		<b>34,0</b>	<b>13,0</b>	<b>12,0</b>	<b>3,0</b>	<b>6,0</b>
301	General physical preparation	III	4	3	1	2
302	Floor acrobatics		6	6	1	4
303	Trampoline		3	3	1	
<b>Theory and methods</b>		<b>29,0</b>	<b>11,0</b>	<b>13,0</b>	<b>2,0</b>	<b>3,0</b>
401	Y1 Anatomy; Y2 Biomechanics	IV	2	2		
402	Circus in context		2	3		
403	Training methods and planning		2	2		
404	Dramaturgy		2	3	1	
405	Security, safety, rigging		1	2		1
406	Study guidance, portfolio		2	1	1	2
<b>Laboratory and research work</b>		<b>24,0</b>	<b>5,0</b>	<b>6,0</b>	<b>5,0</b>	<b>8,0</b>
501	Research and performance project	V	4	5	5	8
502	Y1 Themaweek; Y2 Art meets Art		1	1		
<b>Performances and productions</b>		<b>27,0</b>	<b>4,0</b>	<b>4,0</b>	<b>4,0</b>	<b>15,0</b>
601	Group performance	VI	4	4	4	5
602	Work placement					10
<b>Organization and self-management</b>		<b>10,0</b>	<b>0,0</b>	<b>0,0</b>	<b>1,0</b>	<b>9,0</b>
701	Management and organisation	VII			1	9
<b>Minor</b>		<b>30,0</b>			<b>30,0</b>	
801	Minor	VIII			30	
<b>Total EC points</b>		<b>240,0</b>	<b>60,0</b>	<b>60,0</b>	<b>60,0</b>	<b>60,0</b>

Diagram 1: curriculum overview

The programme, as outlined in diagram 1, is grounded on eight modules, seven of which take the shape of a concentric 'learning track', so as to provide curricular cohesion. The seven modules of 30EC each, feature the following coherent units of study: circus disciplines, expression and interpretation, basic body skills, theory and methods, laboratory and research work, performances and productions and organisation and self-management. The third year minor, either programme specific or offered across the university, forms the eighth module. In essence, the programme deals with the following three key elements:

- skills and knowledge,
- artistic development,
- entrepreneurship.

The *skills and knowledge component* implies all practice-based courses such as circus technique, acrobatics, trampoline, general physical preparation and the dance courses focussing on movement education. Besides these practical courses, the theoretical courses circus in context, dramaturgy, anatomy and biomechanics belong to the skills and knowledge track within the programme.

The *artistic development path* within the programme features the 'Research and Performance' component. Each year of study students create two Research Performance (RP) projects, that challenge them to create performances based on field and desk research. Also, their artistic development is encouraged during workshops and group performances, as well as dance courses focussing on interpretation and during physical theatre.

The *entrepreneurship component* prepares students to become autonomous circus performers. Subjects include research and performance, management and organisation and the work placement in their graduation year during which they participate in circus and performance activities in the professional field. Current students of the course as well as alumni say it does happen that students get last-minute placements and sometimes under sub-optimal conditions, but so far every student has succeeded in acquiring one. The panel believes it would help students if the faculty would communicate about the importance of acquiring a work placement sooner in the programme.

Also, throughout their study students – besides their in-school practicals – perform in renowned (street) festivals in the Netherlands and receive substantial feedback from circus and performance professionals.

The profession-specific knowledge base of the programme is largely derived from resources provided by the European Federation of Professional Circus Schools, of which Fontys ACAPA is an active member. The panel considers the literature and materials it reviewed as part of the audit fine for higher professional circus education at Bachelor's level.

The content of the programme is consistently linked to the five intended learning outcomes and presented at three consecutive levels of command that, in turn, tie in with the three phases within the curriculum: foundation, main and graduation phase. Each of the courses have learning objectives and performance indicators that materialise the intended learning outcomes and tie in with the respective learning phase/level. The panel studied a selection of course materials and established that the performance indicators clearly set out the requirements for students to accomplish a specific level of competence. Also, the indicators serve as a guideline for providing feedback and for assessing the individual student. In a so called CLETC scheme<sup>1</sup>, specific for Fontys education at large, the alignment between competences, learning objectives, programme components with performance indicators, assessment formats and the awarded credits is presented.

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<sup>1</sup> CLETC scheme: Competences, Learning goals, Educational units, Tests and Credits.

The scheme supports the panel's initial impression of a neatly designed and cohesive programme that demonstrates both an increasing complexity and an explicit focus on student centred learning, using tools such as feed up, feedback and feedforward, and the deployment of peer reviews. Moreover, the CLETC scheme shows that the programme covers all of the intended learning outcomes.

In tune with the principles of competence-based training, it is the programme's philosophy to develop competences in an integrated manner, i.e. by executing whole tasks. Thus, theoretical knowledge for subjects like e.g. rigging, safety and security is always presented 'just in time' in the meaningful context of preparing circus training or a performance. This approach enables students to immediately apply the acquired knowledge and to better retain and understand the relevance of theoretical concepts for their professional practice.

In the first two years of the programme, the focus is on basic skills and knowledge. Students develop an understanding of the physical practice and methods of training, creation and the theoretical context of the circus profession. There is individual attention for the student's physical and artistic development and their progress is closely guided and monitored. In the third and fourth year of the program there is more focus on developing an individual style and working methods, the development of which is facilitated and enhanced by conducting artistic research throughout all four years of the study.

To this end, students do research and performance projects, at the outset of which a conceptual framework is introduced and relevant source material provided. The student presents a written draft of his or her performance, including clear objectives of the act. The performance itself is the object of assessment whereby the student should consciously predict a certain outcome. Next, the concept is discussed in a dramaturgical conversation that should sharpen the ideas and views of the student. The concept should also include the strategy of creation, which research activities a student will deploy and what he or she wants to communicate with the audience.

Viewing sessions are held during the creation process in which peer feedback is given to help them advance their artistic research. Each performance is video-analysed under the guidance of a lecturer, who challenges the student to reflect on the outcomes of his or her performance from a dramaturgical perspective. Subsequently the students hand in a written report of their reflections, including the original concept as well as the adaptations made during the rehearsal and the research outcomes. The information from each report should be used for the next project, so as to continually strengthen the student's ideas and to further develop his or her artistic vision and professional behaviour.

The panel established that the admission requirements for the programme have been adequately defined in the Teaching and Examinations Regulations. That includes requirements with regard to students' command of English (IELTS/TOEFL scores), prior qualifications and additional admission tests to assess the presence of (i) technical and physical skills and (ii) artistic talent.

It struck the panel that students, perhaps slightly more than with programmes of an equivalent nature, particularly appreciate the creative freedom at ACAPA, the opportunity to invite dedicated guest lecturers who help them develop their own artistic views and concepts and the broad scope of disciplines it has on offer. In this regard, students also mention the fact that classes make them aware of what might be the next step in one's career if physical conditions decline, an aspect the panel highly values.

Students in the audit say it is a physically demanding programme, but doable. As is often the case with arts programmes, students tend to put in the amount of hours they feel necessary for a particular act. In this regard the panel would recommend some emphasis on self-care in the first year to avoid burn-out.

From the National Student Enquiry (NSE, 2017) it shows that the students in general appreciate the preparation for their professional career (3.4 out of 5.0), the academic skills they acquire (3.5) and the content of the programme (3.5). Also, students consider the programme 'challenging' (3.9) and internationally focussed (3.8).

### **Faculty**

The nature of the programme calls for a relatively small staff of permanent lecturers, the so-called core team (6.85 FTE), and a relatively large flexible body of visiting lecturers (3.2 FTE).

The permanent team has nine members. The guest lecturers are hired for their specific professional experience, techniques and competences. An analysis of faculty resumes shows that three lecturers hold a Master's Degree and that two of the remaining six lecturers plan to finish their Masters study next year. This ties in with Fontys' institutional policy to enhance the number of Master-qualified faculty.

With regard to their areas and levels of expertise the CVs demonstrate that two fulltime lecturers have a thorough understanding of the art of performing in the circus world and in fact are still performing. Two faculty members (0.17 FTE) are theatrical performers (physical theatre, dance, choreography etc.), one of whom is still professionally active. Two lecturers (1.4 FTE) are trained gymnastics (acrobatic, trampoline), the remaining faculty (3.28 FTE) were e.g. trained as a dramatist, theatre director/producer or political scientist. Six of them hold a Bachelor's Degree and three an academic Master's Degree.

The course requires all permanent teachers to possess didactic skills. If their prior training did not ensure these, Fontys offers a dedicated course in didactics. At any rate, the course is mandatory for new lecturers who qualify for an indefinite appointment.

The majority of lecturers (80%) bring in professional experience. As students confirm during the audit the presence of such a substantial amount of knowledge and experience ensures that adequate transfer of these takes place continually. From the audit discussion with a selection of permanent lecturers it became clear that all faculty are expected to keep their profession up-to-date through reading literature in their field of expertise, by studying relevant scientific literature and by being active themselves in the professional field, by contributing to the European Federation and by regularly visiting performances. The panel considers the qualifications, the expertise and the experience of the faculty definitely up to par. Moreover, it favours the possibility for students to make suggestions for hiring guest lecturers who accommodate their artistic development.

With a teacher to student ratio of 1:8, bearing in mind the specific intensity of the (mostly one-on-one) professional training within ACAPA, the panel rates the number of available staff sufficient for the programme to be executed properly. Also, students in the audit testify that throughout their training enough coaching and other staff availability is provided.

The panel observed a faculty that present themselves as a cohesive and committed team of education professionals. They respond well to one another and have similar interpretations of the same notions or concepts in support of the profile of the course. To the panel it is therefore not surprising that students rate their lecturers with a 3.7 (out of 5.0) in the NSE 2017, hence expressing their satisfaction with both their professional and didactic experience, as well as their substantial expertise.

### **Services and facilities**

The main campus of Fontys School of Fine and Performing Arts is in the centre of Tilburg. The campus holds the key-facilities that both students and staff use. It features dance studios, a fully equipped theatre, a media library, a concert hall, classrooms for lectures and flexible workspaces with computer facilities. The academy itself is accommodated in an separate building suited for circus education. On each location both the Fontys Intranet and Internet are accessible.

From a tour of the premises and facilities the panel concluded that the academy, in comparison to the previous accreditation audit, has made major investments in the study environment. Students appreciate that the facilities are also available in the weekend. The panel is of the opinion that students and staff of the Bachelor's course have access to very fine facilities. From the very start of their study students are assigned a study career counsellor who supports the student in his study career, i.e. he helps him to meet deadlines, to conduct his personal development and to draw up action plans. Also, the counsellor keeps an eye on the student's overall study progress.

If desired, a student can rely on support from a dean or student psychologist for queries of a personal nature. For issues related to their choice of study students may contact the Fontys study career centre. In the audit students express their satisfaction about the counselling and the scaffolding services to facilitate their study.

The programme aims at providing unambiguous and easily accessible study information. A review of course documents and information presented in the digital environment, convinced the panel that it succeeds in achieving this aim. The panel established that each course comes with a course description. All relevant course materials and supporting information can be obtained in the portal environment. This, too, holds good for schedules, including individual timetables for guest lecturers in circus and assessment schedules. An up-to-date overview of study results is logged and made accessible in Progress to both students and lecturers. Students, both in the audit and the NSE (2017) show their satisfaction about the way the course deals with the provision of information. 'It's timely, well-presented, ready accessible and complete,' say students. On the other hand, communication with (guest) teachers is at times somewhat sloppy, although student evaluations indicate clear improvements in this field.

Finally, at the FHK academy level all necessary facilities, including an up-to-date media library and ICT facilities are in place.

### **Considerations and Judgement**

The panel concludes that the programme on this Standard exceeds basic requirements. The programme is coherent, develops along three stages of command and ties in extremely well with the intended learning outcomes; it provides a solid coverage of all final qualifications. The curriculum is highly student-centred in the sense that it leaves ample room for individual learning and development of one's own artistic vision.

The faculty is extremely well equipped to execute the programme and can call upon a flexible non-core workforce of experts to cater for students' individual needs.

Facility-wise ACAPA has made great progress since the last accreditation assessment. It now possesses a very fine learning and teaching environment featuring great facilities that are available at all times to both students and faculty.

Not only in the audit students express their satisfaction about the curriculum, staff and facilities, but the NSE outcomes, too, show a high degree of appreciation.

The panel therefore considers Standard 2 to be **'good'**.

### 4.3. Student Assessment

**Standard 3: The programme has an adequate system of student assessment in place.**

**Explanation:** The student assessments are valid, reliable and sufficiently independent. The requirements are transparent to the students. The quality of interim and final examinations is sufficiently safeguarded and meets the statutory quality standards. The tests support the students' own learning processes.

#### Findings

Since the programme is primarily aimed at the art of performing, student assessment is for the larger part dedicated to evaluate student's performance, i.e. to establish competent behaviour. All the same student's knowledge and understanding of theoretical concepts is assessed as well. ACAPA has laid down its 17/18 policy for testing and assessment in an elaborate Testing Policy document, in which a clear distinction is made between *assessments of learning* and *assessments for learning*.

*Assessments of learning* deal with the question whether a student has mastered the learning objectives or outcomes of a defined unit of study in the event of which credits are awarded. Ergo, this type of assessments is deployed for selection purposes. *Assessments for learning*, however, evaluate the student's learning process. These assessments generally have a formative/diagnostic purpose and focus on the stage of the student's learning process, on the final objectives of the learning process and on the steps to be taken to achieve these objectives. Hence, these assessments involve the assessors to continually give feed up, feedback and feed forward.

As students generally experience the latter type of assessment more inspiring, it made ACAPA decide to fully implement this type of assessment throughout the program, starting with trampoline and acrobatics classes. The panel firmly endorses the implementation of this type of assessment as it fits in nicely with the student-centred learning approach that the course advocates.

The testing policy adopted by ACAPA also provides for guidelines to safeguard the test validity and reliability. Moreover, the authenticity of student's work is closely monitored, as lecturers in the audit confirm.

The test policy document, too, incorporates an overview of all summative tests and assessments throughout the programme, featuring the test formats, the elements to be examined, the weighting of elements in terms of European Credits and the rating scale. Even in group performances students are assessed individually.

Year 1 (Level I)					
Module	Elements of examination	Weighting (as part of examination) In EC	Tests	Individual/group	Rating Scale
Circus discipline	Circus technique	13	Skills test	Individual	1-10
	Group work	2	Evaluation group work	Individual	Sufficient/insufficient
Expression/interpretation	Dance	4	Two tests, average is final result	Individual	1-10
	Physical theatre	4	Two tests, average is final result	Individual	1-10
	Performance art	4	Evaluation of workshop	Individual	1-10
Basic body skills	General physical preparation	4	Two skills tests, average is final result	Individual	Sufficient/insufficient
	Floor acrobatics	6	Two skills tests, average is final result	Individual	1-10

Diagram 2: example of assessment overview

Assessments at ACAPA come in four different formats: (i) *competence exams*: in which each student prepares an individual presentation based on his competence plan. Students are asked to evaluate and reflect on their own competence development at each programme level while presenting evidence from their portfolios; (ii) *knowledge tests*: through which students' level of theoretical and practical knowledge and understanding is assessed. This type of assessment is predominantly summative; *skills tests*: to determine the students' level of physical and technical skills and the progress made; skills tests are also mainly deployed as a summative instrument; (iii) *performance critics/feedback/feed up/feedforward*: implies the evaluation of student's capacity to integrate the acquired skills and knowledge, student's degree of professionalism, his ability to autonomously organize his work and to participate in team work, student's interpretative and artistic capacities, his problem solving capacities and his ability to apply and transfer. Performance tests are also deployed to determine student's general command of the competencies. This type of (mostly formative) assessment is conducted individually, but also in collective performances and during production processes. In the graduation exam the assessment is of course summative.

In the CLETC scheme, the relationship between each assessment (format) and the corresponding unit of study has been made explicit and transparent to students. Students generally achieve the required level of command by following each unit of study, at the end of which it is assessed. To enhance test reliability, all skills tests are executed using the four-eye-principle, meaning two examiners are involved. At the time of the audit the Testing Committee together with examiners are busy to further strengthen test reliability by drawing up sets of rubrics for all assessments, of which the panel has seen promising examples. For further alignment between examiners on the interpretation of rubrics formal calibration sessions have been scheduled in the upcoming year. The panel welcomes this action as it ties in well with the observation that definitions of awarded marks, and thus the marking criteria, do not always seem to have been aligned between different assessors.

Recently, the course revised the assessment of the Research and performance project (at the final stage of the programme), meaning a shift was made from a focus on (the technical level of) the performance itself to an emphasis on all phases of the research and *creation process*. Now, all steps such as concept/evaluation, process, performance are rated separately by different lecturers. The panel supports this improvement. From the panel discussion with the students it appeared that they not only take an active part in the creative process of their own work, but also participate in peer reviews of each other's achievements.

Over the course of the programme, the weighting of assessment criteria develops from an emphasis on process in the first year to the quality of the performance in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year. A student's graduation exam is assessed by the joint team of lecturers involved and an external jury from the professional field. Jury members attend both the individual and the collective performances of the graduation year. The final grading, however, is done by fixed teachers/appointed examiners.

### **Graduation**

In the graduation year, among other things, students focus on four subjects for their graduations. Together the (learning objectives of the) four subjects cover all of the intended learning outcomes of the Bachelor's programme. At the time of the audit each of the graduation components have been described in independent study guides; the panel appreciates the action of the programme to bring the information on the graduation programme together in a single graduation manual, as this will, indeed, help students to gain a clear overview of the graduation requirements. The four graduation components are: (i) *a group performance*, (ii) *a work placement*, (iii) *a research and performance project* and (iv) *Management & organization*.

The *group performance* features the design as a collective of a performance concept with the support of a coach. Students are assessed by their coach on the collaborative process, and individually by a professional jury for their performance.

In their *work placement* students spend at least seven weeks in any professional setting. The work placement – self-acquired and based on a predetermined and approved plan of actions – may be composed of performing, creation and/or research. Students are allowed to make any combination of the three activities and find a balance that suits their professional interests. They can also decide to focus on only one of the three domains, but performing is always a mandatory component of the work placement. The programme considers the work placement to be the last *guided* step on the way to the autonomous professional artist it aims to deliver.

Finally, students execute their own individual *Research and performance projects*, in which they demonstrate command over all learning outcomes. The students are supposed to develop their own work as a result of their individual artistic research. The performance is to be presented to an audience of their teachers, peers and representatives from the professional field. Students must be involved in all aspects of the performance, have the opportunity to network during the evening and present themselves as (future) artists. The performance is evaluated by a work field jury.

In the *Management and organisation* part of the graduation trajectory, the student draws up a business plan to demonstrate his readiness for self-employed cultural entrepreneurship. In addition he delivers a paper on the usefulness of organisational metaphors.

Overall students favour the assessment system. They maintain that the grading has improved a lot over the last two years in the sense that there is more alignment between examiners and clearer criteria. This observation ties in with what the panel has seen in the documentation.

### **Examination Board**

During the site-visit the panel spoke to representatives of the institutional Examination Board (EB) and the programme's Assessment Committee (AC), which is composed of three faculty members. It appeared that all assessments/tests are examined by the Assessment Committee prior to deployment.

Both the Examination Board and the Assessment Committee were able to put across to the panel their relative positions, their priorities in the work they do to safeguard the quality of the assessment scheme (work placements and knowledge tests), the quality of the assessors involved and how they regularly give advice to the management if improvements so require. It became clear to the panel that the EB and AC play a pivotal role in the quality assurance of the assessment system and that the EB acts compliant to the Higher Education Act (WHW).

### **Considerations and Judgement**

The panel commends the programme for its elaborate, thorough and – to circus education – well-attuned assessment scheme, not just in the first three years of the programme but also in the graduation stage of the course. The review of a sample of interim tests and assessments that were on display in the audit, the marking of students' graduation work, and the students' general satisfaction about the clarity and fairness of the assessment scheme demonstrate that ACAPA carefully observes the common denominators for quality assessment, such as validity, reliability, authenticity and – to students – predictability and transparency. A higher degree of reliability and transparency, however, can still be obtained through a firm and continual practice of 'rubrics', and staff alignment (calibration sessions) which at the time of the audit was still 'under construction'. The panel in particular appreciates the programme's shift to a more student-centred (i.e. formative) approach to testing, which is very much in line with the didactic approach of the course.

Considering all of the above, the panel judgement on Standard 3 reads '**satisfactory**'.

#### 4.4. Achieved Learning Outcomes

**Standard 4: The programme demonstrates that the intended learning outcomes are achieved.**

Explanation: The achievement of the intended learning outcomes is demonstrated by the results of tests, the final projects, and the performance of graduates in actual practice or in post-graduate programmes.

#### Findings

Ahead of the audit the panel members reviewed of 15 graduates all four products from their graduation programme (see Standard 3). The sample was taken from the 2015/2016 and the 2016-2017 cohorts respectively, with an emphasis on the latter cohort and the individual research and performance projects, as these cover the realisation of all learning outcomes. Not only did the panel review papers, but it also watched video-clips of students' performances; in addition, a panel delegation attended examination performances prior to the site visit.

In regards to the quality of the student work, the panel found that most of it was appropriate to Bachelor's level. However, in two cases the marks given were higher than for the other students, which raised the question as to how this could be justified. The more so, because the panel considered the acrobatic/equilibristic content of their performance of a lesser substance – but still satisfactory – than the work of the other students. Also the panel found the work placement files of a diverse quality, although none of them were considered under par. The panel discussed its findings during the audit with both lecturers/examiners and the Examination Board. This clarified the difference in valuations between the panel and the course examiners and underlines the importance of further alignment between examiners as the programme plans to do in the course of next year (see Standard 3).

When asked, the professional field representatives with whom the panel spoke characterise graduates from ACAPA as 'highly skilled' and as 'real circus artists'. 'All graduates have a round act and possess the skills to create something new.' One of the field representatives is also involved in the programme and attends professional projects in progress. She observed time and again that during the years students develop from experimental to more creative. Graduates are ready to work, she says, and very self-reliant. An important result of the course according to alumni is that students have transferable skills preparing them for later life when they may be unable to perform. An observation coherent with what the current students had already told the panel (see Standard 2).

The outcomes of an elaborate and recently held inquiry among the alumni of the programme justifies the conclusion that the Fontys Bachelor's course in Circus and Performance Art delivers students that possess the competences to work independently and to function as the beginning circus and/or performance professional that is indicated by the programme's intended learning outcomes.

#### Considerations and Judgement

From a review of students' graduation work, the panel concludes that the programme demonstrates that it delivers students who have achieved the intended learning outcomes. It is the conviction of the panel that further alignment between examiners (and coaches) may, even more, strengthen the output stability and reliability of the final level. The professional field is more than happy with the results of the course and recognises the creative circus performers the course aims to deliver. Alumni express their appreciation for the way the course has prepared them for the professional field.

The panel therefore rates Standard 4 as '**satisfactory**'.



## 5. OVERALL CONCLUSION

The panel has seen a coherent and demanding programme that features a thorough didactic concept to deliver self-reliant and creative circus professionals. The course employs a permanent staff, supported by a body of freelance professionals, that operates as a team with knowledgeable, conscientious and committed educators/coaches. The facilities are fine and the Examination Board and Assessment Committee have made major contributions in refining the assessment system.

The panel was happy to learn that the programme appeared to be much richer than its written Self Evaluation had suggested.

Fontys' Bachelor programme in Circus and Performance Art unquestionably meets the requirements of NVAO's Limited Assessment Framework. A consideration for further improvement would be to invest more in a broad understanding of the concept of 'artistic research', to review and enrich it bottom up, and to make it more explicit with the purpose to strengthen the course profile.

Considering NVAO's assessment rules the scores for the individual Standards result in the judgement '**Satisfactory**' for the programme as a whole. It is the panel's advice to the NVAO to award accreditation to the programme for another period of six years.



## **6. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- The panel believes it would be beneficial to the management if they restate their artistic vision on the basis of a meeting with the staff and the students. It is suggested to rephrase the vision in a much simpler way, from bottom up;
- The panel strongly supports the implementation of a firm alignment scheme among examiners.



## **ANNEXES**



## ANNEX I Overview of judgements

<b>Overview of judgements on the professional Bachelors programme Circus and Performance Art (fulltime) of Fontys ACAPA</b>	
<b>Standard</b>	<b>Judgements</b>
<b>Standard 1. Intended Learning Outcomes</b>	<b>S</b>
<b>Standard 2. Teaching-Learning Environment</b>	<b>G</b>
<b>Standard 3. Student Assessment</b>	<b>S</b>
<b>Standard 4. Achieved Learning Outcomes</b>	<b>S</b>
<b>Overall judgement</b>	<b>S</b>



## ANNEX II Programme of site-visit

**Programme date: July 2 2018**

**Location: Bisschop Zwijzenplein 1, Tilburg**

Time	Auditees	Topics
08.15 - 08.30	Walk in & reception audit panel	
08.30 - 09.30	Preliminary consultation	
09.30 - 10.15	Education management Short presentation ACAPA	John van Riemsdijk (Head of Studies) Heleen de Hoon (ACAPA) Gerard Hupperetz (Director Department Theatre) Karen Neervoort (Director Fontys School of Fine and Performing Arts)
10.15 - 10.30	Break/internal consultation audit panel	
10.30 - 11.15	Teachers Artistic council	Karoly Gaspar Noë Robert Willem Jan Slaats Janneke Aussems Heleen de Hoon
11.15 - 11.30	Break/internal consultation audit panel	
11.30 - 12.15	Professional field + Alumni	Arlette Hanson (Workfield) Tobias Baesch (alumnus) Saphia Loizeau (alumna)
12.15 - 13.00	Lunch panel	
13.00 - 13.45	Students	Solune Laurent (Year 2) Signild Thygesen (Year 3) Cal Courtney (Year 3 & Education Committee) Ollii Park (Year 3) Marth Kinder (Year 4)
13.45 - 14.00	Break/internal consultation audit panel	
14.00 - 15.00	Material inspection Tour programme-specific services at Fontys	
15.00 - 15.45	Examination Board and Assessment Committee	René de Klein (Examination board) Anton Neggens (Examination board) Heleen de Hoon (Testing committee) Janneke Aussems (Testing committee)
15.45 - 16.00	Break/internal consultation audit panel	
16.00 - 16.15	Pending issues	
16.15 - 17.00	Internal consultation audit panel	
17.00 - 17.15	Feedback	John van Riemsdijk Heleen de Hoon René de Klein Gerard Hupperetz Nicoline Lambers
17.15 - 18.00	Development interview	John van Riemsdijk Heleen de Hoon René de Klein (report) Nicoline Lambers (report)
08.15 - 08.30	Walk in & reception audit panel	

## **Methods**

### ***Selection of the delegations / the auditees***

In compliance with the NVAO regulations the audit panel prior to the audit decided on the composition of the delegations (auditees) in consultation with the course management and on the basis of the focal points that had arisen from the panel's analysis of the course documents.

### ***Auditing process***

The following procedure was followed. The panel studied the documents regarding the programme (Annex III: Documents reviewed) and a relevant and balanced sample of products from the graduation programme. The panel secretary organised input from the auditors and distributed the preliminary findings among the panel members prior to the audit. A separate preliminary panel meeting was held the day before the site visit that was scheduled on 2 July 2018.

The panel formulated its preliminary conclusions on each standard immediately after the site visit, founding them on the findings during the audit process, and the earlier review of the programme documents.

A first version of the assessment report was drafted by the secretary and circulated among the members of the panel for review and comments. Subsequently, the final draft was forwarded to the course management for a check on factual inaccuracies. The panel finalised the report on October 11<sup>th</sup> 2018.

### **Assessment rules**

The audit committee evaluates the programme against the standards of the assessment framework and applies the following assessment scale: unsatisfactory - satisfactory - good - excellent. To be awarded a positive overall judgment on the programme each of the four standards must at least be judged satisfactory.

The final outcome of the programme assessment will always be "unsatisfactory" if any one of the four standards is rated "unsatisfactory", in which case it will have to close down.

The final conclusion regarding a programme can only be "good" if at least two standards are rated "good", one of which must be standard 4.

The final conclusion regarding a programme can only be "excellent" if at least two standards are rated "excellent", one of which must be standard 4.

The final conclusion regarding a programme will always be "unsatisfactory" if standards 1 and/or 3 are rated "unsatisfactory".

### **ANNEX III Documents reviewed**

- Critical Reflection of the programme
- Analysis of staff ACAPA
- Artistic vision
- CLETC New learning goals
- Educational vision
- Link Dublin descriptors competences of the program
- NSE, Report NSE Circus 16 June 2017
- Organogram FHK
- Program ACAPA
- SBO results and analysis
- TER 2017-2018
- Testing Policy
- Documentation regarding student and staff satisfaction;
- Reports on consultations in relevant committees / bodies;
- Test questions with corresponding assessment criteria and requirements (answer models) and a representative selection of actual tests administered (such as presentations, work placements, portfolio assessments) and assessments;
- Reference books and other learning materials;
- Representative selection of final projects, selected by the panel, of the past two years with corresponding assessment criteria and requirements; sample of 15 final projects/papers examined prior to the audit<sup>2</sup>:

2183316
2198429
2206550
2310422
2202889
2311941
2232065
2304406
2231115
2224496
2300710
2224546
2220033
2219720
2300397

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<sup>2</sup> Following NVAO regulations student enrolment numbers have been denoted here. For reasons of privacy names of students and projects are known to the panel members and panel secretary only.



## ANNEX IV Composition of the audit panel

Name	Role	Expertise						
		Discipline	Education	Assessment	International	Professional field	Auditing & QA	Student-related
W.G. van Raaijen	chair				x		x	
T.A. Roberts	expert member	x	x	x	x	x	x	
S. Flor	expert member	x	x	x	x	x		
D. Westera	student member							x

Co-ordinator/certified secretary: H.R. (Rob) van der Made

### Succinct CVs of panel members

Drs. W.G. (Willem) van Raaijen	Willem van Raaijen is partner at the Assessment Agency Hobéon and as lead-auditor has conducted numerous accreditation audits in Higher Professional Education since 2004.
T.A. (Tim) Roberts MSc	Tim Roberts is currently responsible for the organisation and delivery of a CEGEP Diploma, a specific Province of Québec (Canada) qualification, as well as a Certificate delivered by the École de Cirque de Québec. From 2000 – 2016 Roberts was Director of Higher Education at the National Centre for Circus Arts in London; from 2014 – 2016 he was the Vice-President of the European Federation of Professional Circus Schools (FEDEC). He started his career as a juggler and instructor.
S. (Søren) Flor	Søren Flor has professional experience as a performer in handstand and double acro/acro sport; as a lecturer at the Higher Circus Education AMoC in Copenhagen (Denmark) he is, among other things, responsible for the intake and selection of prospect students and for the curriculum development in several disciplines.
D. Westera	David Westera is a 2nd year student at the Bachelor of Theatrical Performance in Maastricht, Netherlands.

On 23 May 2018 the NVAO endorsed the composition of the panel to assess the Bachelor of Circus & Performance Art of the Fontys University of Applied Sciences, registration 006727.

Prior to the audit all panel members undersigned declarations of independence and confidentiality, which are in possession of the NVAO. This declaration certifies, among other things, that panel members do not currently maintain or have not maintained for the last five years any (family) connections or ties of a personal nature or as a researcher/teacher, professional or consultant with the institution in question, which could affect a fully independent judgement regarding the quality of the programme in either a positive or negative sense.



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