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# Master Opera The Dutch National Opera Academy

*Report of the limited programme assessment  
16 and 17 January 2020*

Utrecht  
April 2020  
[www.AeQui.nl](http://www.AeQui.nl)  
*Assessment agency for higher education*

## Colophon

Dutch National Opera Academy

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Programme: Master Opera  
EC: 120  
Mode of study: Fulltime  
Location: Amsterdam  
Croho-registration: 49105

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Programme: Master Opera  
EC: 120  
Mode of study: Fulltime  
Location: Den Haag  
Croho-registration: 49105

### **Assessment committee**

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Annett Andriesen, domain expert  
Jeanne-Michèle Charbonnet, domain expert  
Linnhe Robertson, domain expert  
Gavin Henderson, domain expert  
Kadi Jürgens, student member  
Titia Buising, secretary

The committee was presented to the NVAO for approval.

The assessment was conducted under the responsibility of  
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## Summary

On 16 and 17 January an AeQui committee assessed the master programme in Opera of the Dutch National Opera Academy. The overall judgement of the committee is that the quality of the programme **meets the standard**.

### Intended learning outcomes

The committee concludes that the intended learning outcomes meet the standard. The committee concludes that the intended learning outcomes (competences) have been concretised with regard to content, level and orientation and meet international requirements for music and are in tune with the demands from the professional field. The programme is quite unique, and functions as a stepping stone for graduates towards the professional field of opera. The committee values the programmes holistic approach, the focus on both process and result and that not only technical / vocal skills are addressed but also acting and physicality. The programme is effectually embedded within the (international) field of opera, which contributes to the relevance and topicality of the intended learning outcomes and the programme and the career perspective of graduates. The committee notes that the programme also adequately reacts to developments in the field, such as the emerging opera studios.

### Programme

The committee assesses that the programme meets the standard. The committee concludes that the programme enables students to realise the intended learning outcomes. For each course, the competences have been translated into course objectives. The professional orientation of the programme is reflected in reflective and career skills and the two fully staged opera productions each year. These productions enable students to integrate singing, acting and physicality within their performance and to perform larger roles. The auditioning training is very helpful for students professional career. Research is practice

based, intertwined with student's operatic practice and aimed at fostering students curiosity. The programme is able to mirror an opera house and to create a safe learning environment as well. In this safe and small scale learning environment students feel nurtured and safe to fail. The intensive and selective selection procedure allows for care in selecting students and ensures that motivated students enrol the programme. Teachers are very committed and very competent. The committee values that students can choose their own voice teacher.

### Assessment

The committee concludes that the programme has an adequate system of assessment in place, and that the programme meets this standard. Adequate measures are taken to guarantee the validity, reliability, intersubjectivity and transparency of the assessments, by using the more-eye-principle in all summative and formative assessments, including external experts and by communicating feedback also in written form to students. The committee strongly supports the current development of a common assessment form for the assessment of the opera productions/performances. Both boards of examiners are active in safeguarding the quality of the assessments.

### Achieved learning outcomes

The committee assesses that the programme meets this standard. Based on the studied documents and the interviews, the committee concludes that graduates of the programme achieve the required master level and the intended learning outcomes (competences). The committee also established that the programme has an adequate

graduation procedure in place, in which the final production is essential. The clips from the final production and the performance attended during the site-visit showed some high level singing by the students. The discussions with students and alumni confirmed the good level of the programme; they are capable of creating their own career path within the field of opera.

#### **Recommendations**

To further improve the programme, the committee has made the following suggestions:

- to invest in singing in German, and in diction training.
- the international orientation of the programme could be broader than the more traditional opera countries.
- to structurally contact alumni and to actively involve them in the programme.

All standards of the NVAO assessment framework are assessed positively, hence the committee awards a positive recommendation for the accreditation of the master programme in Opera. The committee concludes that the overall assessment of the programme meets the standard.

On behalf of the entire assessment committee,  
Utrecht, April 2020,

Raoul van Aalst  
Chair

Titia Busing  
Secretary

## Introduction

The master programme in Opera aims to produce graduates that are technically secure, artistically confident and personally resilient, so that graduates can continue to find their places on the international operatic stage.

### The institute

The programme is part of the Dutch National Opera Academy (DNOA). The DNOA was established in 1996 and is an initiative of the Conservatorium van Amsterdam and the Royal Conservatoire The Hague. The DNOA offers the master programme in Opera and aims for highly talented young opera singers focusing on the integration of singing and acting.

The board of the DNOA is formed by the directors of both conservatoires. The composition of the board ensures short lines of communication with the DNOA management, teaching staff and students, and provides a relevant network in and out of both institutions. The DNOA is headed by a director / artistic leader.

The mission of DNOA is for graduates to be in a position to find gainful employment as an opera singer and to enjoy a successful, long and sustained career. By bridging the gap between their formal studies and successful entry to the operatic profession, the DNOA aims to address the specific needs and continued progress of the individual learner.

One of the main developments since the last accreditation was the retirement of the former and long-standing director and artistic leader. This introduced a period of transition and a process of exploration, both in terms of the content of the programme, how it was being delivered, and as importantly, examining the role the DNOA could and should play in training the next generation of opera singers. The latter is related to the current practice of opera studios attached to opera companies becoming the main point of entry to the profession. This process of exploration has led to the positioning of the DNOA as an educational

master's programme that supports and facilitates the successful transition of students from secondary education to the operatic profession.

### The programme

The two-year programme runs in English and is offered in a fulltime variant. The committee concurs with the choice to run the programme in English, as the field is completely international: both artists and teachers have an international field in which they operate. The structure of both years is comparable, with courses on vocal and musical skills, on performance skills and reflective and career skills. The programme includes the production of two professionally prepared operas per year.

The programme has a dual focus in so far as it places equal emphasis on acquiring a clear understanding of process and creating meaningful performance opportunities. Furthermore, the DNOA supports the development of constructive networks within the operatic business so that the academy can fulfil its potential as a viable career launch pad.

The recommendations of the last accreditation have been considered. The programme for example increased its focus on German repertoire, with regular sessions by specialist coaches. In addition, the research element of the programme has been further developed into a form that is practice-related, while at the same time complying with current norms of academic research. And regular student panels have been introduced, where students can offer feedback and discuss any issues that may rise throughout the year.

### The assessment

The Dutch National Opera Academy assigned AeQui Nederland to perform a quality assessment. In close co-operation with AeQui, an independent and competent assessment committee was convened. A preparatory meeting with representatives from the programme has taken place.

During the preparation and the site visit, the panel has discussed and taken into account the several programme assessments in the cluster. The site-visit took place on 16 and 17 January 2020 in accordance with the programme in ap-

pendix 2. The committee assessed in an independent manner. At the conclusion of the assessment, the results were presented to representatives of the programme. The draft version of this report was sent to the programme representatives; their reactions have led to this final version of the report.

As part of the site-visit, a developmental meeting has taken place. The results of this meeting have no influence on the assessment written down in this report.

## Intended learning outcomes

The committee concludes that the intended learning outcomes (competences) have been concretised with regard to content, level and orientation and meet international requirements for music and are in tune with the demands from the professional field. The programme is quite unique, and functions as a stepping stone for graduates towards the professional field of opera. The committee values the programmes holistic approach, the focus on both process and result and that not only technical / vocal skills are addressed but also acting and physicality. The programme is effectually embedded within the (international) field of opera, which contributes to the relevance and topicality of the intended learning outcomes and the programme and the career perspective of graduates. The committee notes that the programme also adequately reacts to developments in the field, such as the emerging opera studios.

### *Findings*

The programme aims for students to be in a position of "taking responsibility for yourself". According to the programme, this is one of the keys to success in an operatic career. Both in structure and content of the curriculum, the programme aims to provide a form of holistic training that goes beyond the central competency of singing, including drama, physicality, reflective practice in the form of master research and most importantly, audition training and professional studies.

In addition to the focus on developing and refining technical skills (vocal, dramatic and physical), students are encouraged and supported in developing a very clear sense of vocal and artistic identity, who they are both as a singer and as an artist, and how these attributes can best be united to meet market demands and expectations. The focus is on enabling young artists to enhance chances of success in a competitive field as they transition from full-time education to the workplace.

The programme notes that the one development in the field that will have most impact on graduates is the change in the employment structures throughout the operatic business. In the past an ensemble was a viable option for young singers. These vacancies have become however much more difficult to find. The programme notes that

the reduction in the number of singers on permanent contract corresponds directly to an increase in the number of those employed on a freelance basis. Instead of offering trainee contracts to young graduates, opera companies are now starting an opera studio affiliated to their company. In Amsterdam the Dutch National Opera has set up a new studio in collaboration with the Nederlandse Reisopera and Opera Zuid. A similar set-up is to be found in Brussels, Paris, and in twenty-eight German theatres as of 2019 – 2020.

The intended learning outcomes of the programme are based on the national competence profile for bachelors and masters in music. This profile comprises six areas of competence: a) technical skills, b) creative skills, c) contextual focus, d) research and development skills: e) communication skills, and f) organisational skills. Within these areas, the master programme in Opera focuses on:

- further professional deepening of the technical skills (vocal, musical and performance skills) as the fundament of a singer's craftsmanship;
- emphasising the integration of disciplines (singing, acting and physicality), so as to develop the singer's artistic credibility (creative skills) and ;
- the relevance of the research and development skills, aimed at developing a reflective and responsible attitude.



In the national profile, the areas of competence have been worked out into indicators. Where necessary, the programme adapted this to domain specific competencies of opera. This mainly includes translating the student's individual creative practice into being part of a group process and realising the concept and vision of a creative team. The competences and indicators have been translated in to learning objectives per course.

The site-visit confirmed that the before mentioned changes in management (see introduction) and the establishment of opera studios in the field has led to a redefinition of the positioning of the programme. The programme is positioned as an educational master's programme, focused on developing students in their skills and knowledge regarding opera. After the programme, students can apply for an opera studio or an opera company.

#### *Links with professional practice*

Different ways are used to align the programme with the demands of and developments in the professional field. (Guest) teachers have ample experience in the (international) professional field of opera. The artistic leader has an international performing career and is CEO of Opera Collective Ireland. In addition, the programme has developed strategic partnerships with a number of prominent Dutch orchestras such as the Residentie Orkest The Hague, the Netherlands Philharmonic Orchestra and the National Youth Orchestra of The Netherlands.

The committee met with several representatives from the professional field during the site-visit. It was remarked that the programme creates an open atmosphere and communication with the professional field and for students. Even though the field of opera is quite competitive, students are very supportive of each other. The intensity of rehearsals for performing with an orchestra is also valued by the representatives from professional

field as well as the positioning of the programme as an educational master's programme bridging the gap between education and professional practice.

#### *Considerations*

Based on interviews and the examination of underlying documentation, the committee concludes that intended learning outcomes of the programme tie in with (inter)national requirements for a Master of Opera, and are in tune with the demands from the professional field. The programme adheres to the Dutch national competence profile for bachelors and masters in music.

The committee notes that the programme is quite unique. Not only is it unique in the Netherlands, it also has few equivalents elsewhere in the sense that it focusses on creating a learning environment, rather than a focussed professional training. In that way it functions as a stepping stone for graduates towards the professional field of opera. The committee values the programmes holistic approach, the focus on both process and result and that not only technical / vocal skills are addressed but also acting and physicality. The programme positions itself as an educational programme and by this distinguishes itself from the opera studios that are currently emerging.

The committee concludes that the programme has ample contacts with the professional field, which contribute to the relevance and topicality of the programme. In addition, this is very helpful for students in their future professional career as an opera singer. (Guest) teachers have ample (international) professional experience in the field of opera and guest teachers are invited on a structural basis.

Based on the above, the committee assesses that the programme **meets this standard**.

## Programme

The committee concludes that the programme enables students to realise the intended learning outcomes. For each course, the competences have been translated into course objectives. The professional orientation of the programme is reflected in reflective and career skills and the two fully staged opera productions each year. These productions enable students to integrate singing, acting and physicality within their performance and to perform larger roles. The auditioning training is very helpful for students professional career. Research is practice based, intertwined with student's operatic practice and aimed at fostering students curiosity. The programme is able to mirror an opera house and to create a safe learning environment as well. In this safe and small scale learning environment students feel nurtured and safe to fail. The committee recommends the programme to invest in singing in German and diction training. The intensive and selective selection procedure allows for care in selecting students and ensures that motivated students enrol the programme. Teachers are very committed and very competent. The committee values that students can choose their own voice teacher.

### *Findings*

#### *Programme*

The two-year programme runs in English and is organised in four learning areas: a) vocal and musical skills, b) performance skills, c) performing opera and d) reflective and career skills. Both years have the same structure semesters and classes. A semester comprises initially of 6-8 weeks of education followed by a production period of 8-10 weeks. Voice lessons and individual coaching sessions continue throughout the entire semester.

The first area, vocal and musical skills (12 EC per year), addresses the individual vocal and technical skills in voice lessons and coaching sessions. Within this area, students are supported and encouraged to further develop and refine their craft in such a way that it can be integrated into performing opera. Equally important is the development of a technical foundation for a successful and sustainable career as a lyric artist. This includes the weekly singing lessons, correpetition (language coaching and repertoire development), ensemble class and the study of an additional core repertoire role. The individual singing lessons comprise 5 EC in both years. The correpeti-

tion, language coaching and repertoire development also consists of 5 EC each year. 2 EC each year is reserved for ensemble class.

The committee learned during the site-visit that if possible the vocal teachers are also present during the rehearsals for the productions. In preparation, vocal teachers discuss potential roles for their students with students, the artistic leader and other teachers involved. Moreover, voice teachers discuss topics such as choices and development of repertoire with their students. In addition, it became clear that the voice classes are planned throughout the year and if possible also during rehearsal and production. This amounts to one hour week, for a period of 34 weeks in both years. One of the coaches available for students is a guest teacher, who attends the academy for six weeks. The site-visit learned that this helps students in associating with new people and feedback.

The second area, performance skills (8 EC per year), includes acting skills as well as body and space awareness dominate. In drama sessions students work on character development using spoken text (for example, Shakespeare monologues), subsequently applied to operatic roles and especially audition repertoire. 'Body and

Space Awareness' is an in-depth study and exploration of the performer's physicality and how body awareness can inform and enhance the singer's performance. The site-visit learned that movement teachers also attend students rehearsal for productions to provide them with feedback and advice.

The third area, performing opera (30 EC each year), includes the preparation and execution of the four opera productions (two per year), as well as diverse staged recitals in which operatic scenes are presented. The site-visit learned that the repertoire is chosen specifically to suit and facilitate the development of the respective students. The goal is for all students to have two performances in each production. During the site-visit it was made clear that even though students study and perform certain roles during the programme, they are not specifically trained for performing specific roles. It was also remarked that during the programme students work with different conductors.

Language coaching is provided in the context of the opera productions. The programme aims to ensure that each student has been involved in operas of different epochs during their enrolment. In recent years the programme has presented operas in French, German, Italian and English. For the future, the programme aims to involve each student in at least one opera in German. The programme deems this very important as the majority of singers will at some point in their career consider employment opportunities on offer in German-speaking countries.

Students expressed during the site-visit a need for more language coaching and diction in different languages. In addition, the international field of opera beyond Germany and Austria could be addressed more. And students would like to be informed about performances and scheduling at an early stage.

During the site-visit, the committee discussed language coaching and dictation with several

representatives. It became clear that in recent years, language coaching was related to the production students worked on. This is however becoming a more structural part of the programme with Italian and German language coaching. Starting next academic year, the programme will collaborate with the Goethe Institute enabling students to learn German at the Goethe Institute. It was also remarked that languages coaches are present during rehearsals for the productions.

In addition to the four opera productions, students participate in public performances, programmes of staged scenes and concerts. For this, the programme has developed strategic partnerships with a number of prominent Dutch orchestras and promoters. Moreover, the DNOA has a long-standing relationship with the Residentie Orkest The Hague, the Netherlands Philharmonic Orchestra for annual performances, the Royal Concertgebouw, the National Youth Orchestra of The Netherlands and the Dutch National Opera. With the latter students participate in the lunchtime concert series. Students also perform with ensembles from both conservatoires involved. The new educational and cultural complex "Amare" at the centre of The Hague which will open in 2021 will also provide opportunities for the programme. This complex will host the Residentie Orkest, the Nederlands Dans Theater and the Royal Conservatoire The Hague and will serve as a performance venue for future collaborations with the programme.

The fourth area, reflective and career skills (10 EC each year) addresses strategic and managerial skills essential to a successful link with the labour market. This includes the audition training module, by the artistic leader and joined frequently by guests including conductors, agents and casting directors. In this module students develop a tactical approach to choosing audition repertoire both in terms of personal strengths and market expectations and are resourced to dealing with competitive and challenging circumstances. During the module, students audition is analysed by

video recordings. An example mentioned during the site-visit was students writing a German guest teacher as if they were writing an agent. Students had to present themselves, send their resume and received feedback on this. In general, it was noted that students are invited to sing for guest teachers (for other topics than singing) as much as possible, to get acquainted in singing for strangers and to gain further experience with their chosen audition repertoire. In addition, market orientation, managerial and business skills are addressed in different seminars (within this area). A further area covered is dealing with the press, journalists and reviews.

The fourth area also includes the Planning and Reflective Portfolio (1 EC each year). With this portfolio students identify and articulate their goals and aspirations. The portfolio is a means to develop and hone critical and self-awareness attributes. In addition, it is an aid for planning and effective use of time, and for setting objectives for the respective modules and establishing strategies by which to achieve them. The portfolio also serves as a frame of reference in students' progress and can be used in (preparation of) the semester evaluations.

The site-visit learned that the planning and reflective portfolio is a new element the programme. It aims at providing students structure in their own goals and ambitions with the programme and to allow structural reflection on those goals and ambitions.

Research is also part of the reflective and career skills (4 EC each year). Students undertake and complete a research project within a chosen research area that has relevance to their practice as an opera singer. Research can address a role study of the repertoire performed during the programme, but also an area with a social or cultural character. In the first year students are introduced to a range of different types of research, to discover which type of research most suits them, as well as the various methods of documenting and

presenting their research. Students explore questions such as: "How do I formulate a viable research question that is close to my own artistic practice?" and "What sources can I use and where can I find them?" will be addressed during the classes. In the first year, students define their research area and research question, in the second year students execute their research. This is further elaborated on in standard 4.

The site-visit learned that regarding research mixed classes organised: classes with all first and second year students and separate classes for both groups. The classes address for example writing skills, use of sources, the history of the operatic field and different roles, connecting theory and practice, expanding student's world and fostering curiosity. With regard to the latter, it was noted that 'a curious singer is far more interesting'. Alumni value the learned research skills in their current professional practice.

Internationalisation is in different ways part of the programme. The operatic field students are prepared for is international. In addition, the student body is international and currently reflects ten nationalities. Moreover, the (guest) teachers and the artistic leader are active in the international operatic field. The programme also participates in international festivals and possible collaboration and exchange with a range of international partners including opera companies and other conservatoires.

#### *Learning environment*

The programme notes that the focus is on student-centred learning within a group context. This reflects the challenge for every opera singer on how to remain artistically autonomous within a group context. Due to the variety of voice types and thus repertoire, the needs and trajectory of every student is different. The programme aims to support students in such a way as to allow them to explore and develop a clear sense of their own vocal and artistic identity. Nevertheless, an operatic undertaking essentially remains the ultimate expression of a group process. In addition to the

individual development of each student, learning from and with each other, reacting and interacting with practitioners and disciplines is a common filament throughout the programme.

The programme positions itself as creating opera in an educational context. The four operas (public performances) that students participate in during the programme serve as a learning platform and showcase for the students and the rehearsal process of these operas is of equal value. The choice of repertoire is focused on which operas and specific roles are conducive to furthering the vocal and dramatic progression of the students. The operas are chosen to suit the singers (voices) in the programme and for the main part are double cast. In addition, the choice of creative teams leading the productions is also aimed at attracting directors and conductors that can work in a learning environment.

Students and alumni are in general quite content with the programme, the site-visit revealed. Students value the focus of the programme on bridging the gap between their training / education and the professional field. In addition, the small scale, the safe environment the programme offers as well as the attention for embodiment and physicality are appreciated by students as well as alumni. The programme allows them to discover their own individuality as an opera singer. The audition training is experienced as hard but also as valuable.

#### *Intake*

The legal enrolment criteria apply to programme. The programme has an intensive and selective admission procedure in place. This procedure not only considers vocal and artistic qualities, but also includes the study capabilities and adequate command of English of the applicant. The academy holds annual auditions to select students for the next two years. Starting in 2019, the programme organises a specific event for interested students allowing them to participate in

open classes and coaching sessions with the DNOA faculty.

The auditions comprise three rounds. The first round includes assessment of the online applications and submitted materials (including video-links of at least two arias) by the artistic leader, education manager and the head of music. In the second round candidates are invited for live auditions to present to present four arias in contrasting styles, one of which must include a recitative, and in at least three different languages and to present a spoken text. Candidates are assessed by a jury including the artistic leader, the head of music and the drama and the physical/ embodiment teachers, the heads of the vocal departments of the conservatoires and an external expert. In the final round twelve singers are selected to participate in a day of classes and coaching sessions, culminating in an interview in which the candidates are encouraged to talk about their aspirations and motivation to study at the academy.

In general, six students are admitted each year. Currently eleven students are enrolled, representing ten nationalities. Students are registered at one of the conservatoires involved; this registration determines the institute that awards their diploma.

#### *Staff*

The programme notes that the staff consists of two categories: managerial/operational staff and educational staff. The first group includes the artistic leader and the education manager. The artistic leader is responsible for the overall artistic and educational content of the programme. The artistic leader also oversees the Audition Training & Professional Studies Module and is a mentor.

The artistic leader and the education manager develop and oversee the implementation of the curriculum. The education manager is in charge of the daily management, and is responsible for organisation, budgeting, compliancy, quality assurance and chairing the examination panels. The

management is supported by a production & operations manager who is responsible for all operational and technical matters for DNOA productions and other events. The core teaching staff at the DNOA includes a head of music, a drama lecturer, a lecturer for body & space awareness and a newly appointed master research supervisor. The core teaching team is supported by two répétiteurs. The programme currently explores hiring an apprentice répétiteur/coach.

Guest teachers are involved as vocal coaches and teachers, agents, as well as experts from the field of cultural management and performance psychology. In addition, guest directors and conductors are involved in the production of the four operas. This also helps students in developing their own professional network. Moreover, students of the two-year master programme in Conducting regularly assist the conductors of the DNOA productions. This also enhances their understanding and experience of what is involved in opera productions.

Regarding their voice training, students can opt for studying with a teacher of one of the conservatoires involved, or with a respected external teacher. The latter is approved by the artistic leader and educational manager and contracted on a freelance basis.

In total 3,7 fte is involved in the programme (excluding guest teachers). The staff student ratio is on average 1:3 (also excluding guest teachers). The staff members are employed by one of the two conservatoires. The site-visit learned that the core teaching staff meets on a regular basis to discuss the programme and students' progress and development.

The site-visit revealed that students and alumni are in general quite content with their teachers and guest teachers. They appreciate the guidance in their development as an opera singer, the approachability of their teachers, the open atmosphere and the continuous and open dialogue

with their teachers and between their teachers about their progress and development.

#### *Facilities*

The programme is executed in both Amsterdam and The Hague at the locations of the conservatoires involved. The lessons mainly take place in Amsterdam, where the programme uses the Theaterzaal (a black box theatre) for group activities (classes and stage rehearsals), in addition to the recital hall and the concert hall for masterclasses, concerts and auditions. The winter production takes place in The Hague where there is a fully equipped professional theatre, including an orchestra pit. Students are offered facilities at both conservatoires (study rooms, library, etc).

Students are guided on an individual basis, during the weekly classes by their voice coach, core teachers and the artistic leader. During monthly meetings staff involved monitors students well-being and development. If needed, students can be referred to the student services (counsellors and study advisors) of both conservatoires involved.

Starting last academic year, the programme introduced a formal student panel, in addition to the informal dialogue with students. The student panel is organised three times per year and provides students a formal opportunity to discuss different aspects of the programme. The minutes of these meetings are shared with students and the boards and examination committee of both conservatoires. Currently course evaluations are introduced, to give students an opportunity to provide the programme with anonymous feedback and to stimulate dialogue between students, management and teachers. In addition, the programme considers to introduce peer review: inviting a critical friend to spend a period of time at the academy to form an in-depth opinion about the programme and the context in which it is delivered.

#### *Considerations*

The committee concludes that the programme enables students to realise the intended learning outcomes. The curriculum handbook informs students about the content and goals of the different modules and the assessments. The curriculum handbook also comprises an overview with the relation between the competences (and the indicators) and the different courses. This shows that all competences are covered in the programme. For each course, the competences have been translated into course objectives.

The programme effectively addresses professional and research skills. The professional orientation of the programme is reflected in reflective and career skills (which include auditioning training) and the two fully staged opera productions each year. These productions enable students to integrate singing, acting and physicality within their performance and to perform larger roles. The committee values the auditioning training. This is very helpful for students professional career. In addition to that, students have ample opportunities to perform, for example in lunchtime concerts in a range of venues including the Dutch National Opera and the Concertgebouw.

The committee notes that the programme is able to mirror the structures and scheduling of an opera house while providing a safe learning environment at the same time. During the programme students have learned and performed several roles, which provides students with relevant experience for their future career. The committee also concludes that research skills are sufficiently being addressed. Research is practice based, intertwined with student's operatic practice and aimed at fostering students curiosity.

Regarding the content of the programme, the committee is of the opinion that singing in German and diction should be addressed more in the programme. The committee therefore encourages the programme in further implementing this.

The structure of the learning environment and the small and informal scale of the programme allow for interactive contact between students and teachers and an individual approach. The programme has succeeded in creating a safe learning environment for students. Students feel nurtured and safe to fail.

The legal enrolment criteria are applicable to the programme. The intensive and selective selection procedure allows for care in selecting students and ensures that motivated students enrol the programme. The students are not only tested on their vocal and artistic capabilities, but also on their study abilities, such as command of English and coachability. The facilities available for students are adequate. The committee values the introduction of a student panel, the course evaluations and peer review. This will contribute to the quality of the programme.

The committee suggests the programme to inform students about performances and scheduling as soon as possible and to fully utilise the options for collaboration both conservatoires have to offer. In addition, the committee agrees with the students that the international orientation of the programme could be broader than the more traditional opera countries.

The committee concludes that teachers/tutors are very committed and very competent. The committee values that students can choose their own voice teacher. The committee also notes that the composition of the staff is very international. Staff have an adequate command of the English language, according to both students and the panel.

Based on the above, the committee assesses that the programme **meets this standard**.

## Assessment

The committee concludes that an adequate system of assessment is in place. Adequate measures are taken to guarantee the validity, reliability, intersubjectivity and transparency of the assessments, by using the more-eye-principle in all summative and formative assessments, including external experts and by communicating feedback also in written form to students. The committee strongly supports the current development a common assessment form for the assessment of the opera productions/performances. Both boards of examiners are active in safeguarding the quality of the assessments.

### *Findings*

The system of assessment is integrated competence-orientated and distinguishes between formative and summative assessment. The summative test evaluates the results of what has been learned, while formative testing is focused on development and aims at guiding and stimulating student learning.

Feedback to the student and continuous dialogue between student and lectures take place during individual meetings with teachers, the artistic leader and the education manager.

### *Formative assessment*

Students vocal, musical and performance skills are assessed each semester by the core teaching staff and the voice teacher. This assessment, based on criteria for each course, is expressed on a scale from insufficient to excellent. In addition, the respective teachers provide a written evaluation of each student's development during the semester.

The Master Research course has a formative assessment at the end of the first year and a summative assessment at the end of the second year (see standard 4).

### *Summative assessment*

The assessment of Performing Opera and Auditioning are summative tests. The assessment of Performing Opera (at the end of each semester) is based on a specific performance, assessed by a panel consisting of the artistic leader, core teaching staff and at least one external expert from the field. Students receive comprehensive feedback

on a range of criteria as the basis for awarding a specific grade for technical assurance and artistic credibility. The final grade for Performing Opera is an average of the individual grades of the assessment panel. This is discussed with the student in the semester evaluation with the artistic leader and the education manager. In this session the observations during the semester evaluation are discussed with the student and the student receives his/her mark for his/her performance in the opera production.

The site-visit learned that starting recently, the students voice teacher is also involved in the assessment of the different productions.

The Auditioning assessment takes place in a simulated setting in the latter part of the second semester. A panel of opera experts listens to singers from both years in a broad range of repertoire chosen by the candidates themselves. After the simulated audition, students receive feedback in terms of choice and suitability of repertoire, and or technical and artistic performance and presentation. Students can also ask questions to the panel. In the first year, students are expected to sing three contrasting arias in terms of style and language, one of which should include a recitative. In the second year this includes five contrasting arias in terms of style and language, one of which should include a recitative and one of which should be written by a composer born after 1950.

In recent years, external experts have become more involved in the assessments. Now, external



experts are not only involved in the final assessment but also in the assessment of the other productions and the simulated auditions mentioned above.

Students are assessed based on the procedures of the conservatoire they are registered at. In the next academic year, the assessment system will be standardised and equal for all students. The semester evaluation and the assessment forms of the various courses form part of the student study dossier.

Students are informed about the assessments through the curriculum handbook and/or by their teachers. Students remarked that in general they are content with the feedback they receive from their teachers and the opportunity to discuss the feedback with their lectures. The procedures of the assessment are also clear to them. Students noted that feedback is part of the continuous and day-to-day dialogue with their teachers and that the feedback after formal assessments is never a surprise.

#### *Examination board*

Two examination boards are involved in assuring the quality of the assessments; one of both conservatoires. The formal aspects regarding testing and assessments are laid down in a DNOA specific addendum in the teaching and examination regulations of both conservatoires. Both examination boards safeguard the quality of the assessments and the final level and appoint examiners. Students graduate with a degree from the conservatoire they enrolled.

During the site-visit, the committee met with representatives of the examination boards. It became clear that both examination boards attend a selection of assessments (exams) and review the filled out assessment forms.

The committee discussed the different assessment forms used in the final assessment with representatives from the examination boards. It was made clear that this was also noticed by both examination boards in an internal audit and that currently a new form is being developed. This will be implemented in the next academic year.

#### *Considerations*

The committee concludes that an adequate system of assessment is in place. The measures taken to guarantee the validity, reliability and transparency of the assessments match the formative and subjective assessments within art education. These include using the more-eye principle, assessment criteria and written feedback. The committee values the deployment of professionals in the field (for example agents) as external examiners.

The examination boards are active in safeguarding the quality of the assessments. Both boards check the quality of the assessments by attending assessments and checking the assessment forms. The committee highly encourages the current development a common assessment form for the assessments.

Based on the above, the committee assesses that the programme **meets this standard**.

## Achieved learning outcomes

Based on the studied documents and the interviews, the committee concludes that graduates of the programme achieve the required master level and the intended learning outcomes (competences). The committee also established that the programme has an adequate graduation procedure in place, in which the final production is essential. The clips from the final production and the performance attended during the site-visit showed some high level singing by the students. The discussions with students and alumni confirmed the good level of the programme; they are capable of creating their own career path within the field of opera.

### *Findings*

The programme notes that of all the qualities that make a "successful" opera artist, technical assurance and artistic credibility are indispensable for those wishing to pursue an operatic career. Without technical assurance, even a singer with the finest of voices will have considerable difficulties sustaining a meaningful career over the years. Artistic credibility, while very subjective, is seen by the programme as a means by which to reach and move audiences. The programme notes that the latter is the primary reason for performing opera in the first place.

Students are expected to deliver their best in a group context, realising their own technical assurance and artistic credibility in the conception of the director and the conductor. The final examination takes place in the fourth semester during one of the performances of the summer production. The performance is assessed by a panel of faculty members and one or two external experts. The grade for the examination performance is one of the four grades that the student received during the two-year programme.

As mentioned before, students start with their master research in the first year. In this period students define their research area and question. In the second year is students complete their research and present their findings in a (public) presentation occasionally accompanied by musical examples, either recorded or performed live.

The supervision of the master research takes place in master research circles (group context),

as well as during individual sessions with the master research supervisor throughout the year. The final presentation is assessed by a jury consisting of the master research supervisor, the artistic leader and one or two external jury members.

The alumni the committee met during the site-visit noted that there are not yet formal contacts between alumni and the programme. They are however of the opinion that this could be very beneficial for the programme.

A report by the Dutch Council of Culture concludes that alumni of the programme often find their place in the international field of opera. It also notes that quite a few internationally acclaimed singers have graduated from the programme.

### *Considerations*

The committee concludes that the programme has an adequate graduation procedure in place. In assessing students final work, multiple examiners, including an external examiner are involved.

To assess whether students achieve the competences and the required end-level, the committee studied 15 files from students including their master research and videoclips from their performance in the operas performed during the programme. Based on this, the committee is of the opinion that the level of the graduates is good and that students achieve the master's level. The committee agreed with the grades given.

The level was confirmed in the performance the committee attended during the site-visit. The performance showed some high level singing by the students. The committee remarks that the performance attended included first and second year students as well as bachelor students. The committee noted however a big difference in level between bachelor and master students (in favour of the master students). In addition, the committee is of the opinion that (based on the performance) students body work and diction of English could be improved.

The committee notices that the feedback provided on the assessments forms is very diverse and sometimes rather limited. Even though students receive continues feedback during their interactions with teachers and the artistic leader,

the committee also values the more formal feedback in writing.

The meetings with students and alumni during the site-visit confirmed the adequate level of the programme. The students and alumni the committee met with, seem capable of creating their own career path within the operatic field. The committee strongly recommends the programme to structurally contact alumni and to actively involve them in the programme.

Based on the above, the committee assesses that the programme **meets this standard**.



## Appendices

## Appendix 1 Assessment committee

drs Raoul van Aalst	Chair of the panel
Prof. Gavin Henderson CBE	Principal, Royal Central School of Speech & Drama
Linnhe Robertson MA BMus BA	Artistic and Research Consultant for Opera & Voice, Guildhall School of Music & Drama
Jeanne Michèle Charbonnet	Mezzo soprano
Annett Andriesen	Algemeen directeur Internationaal Vocalisten Con- cours IVC
Kadi Jürgens	Student at Ghent International Opera Academy
Titia Busing	Secretary

## Appendix 2 Programme site-visit

### Day 1 Thursday January 16

17.00 – 19.00 Preparatory meeting panel (Room M103)

19.30 – 22.00 Showcase: Performance of Little Women (1996, M. Adamo) by students of Dutch National Opera Academy (Kees van Baaren Zaal)

### Day 2 Friday January 17 (Room M103)

09.00 – 10.15 Board and management  
*Welcome, development discussion.*

10.30 – 11.45 Teachers  
*Goals of the programme, curriculum, assessments, quality of teacher*

12.00 – 12.45 Examination Board/ Educational Committee  
*Assessments and realised learning outcome*

12.45 – 13.30 Lunch and assessment of documents, open consultation

13.30 – 14.30 Students  
*Programme, assessments, quality of teachers*

14.45 – 15.30 Alumni and professional practice  
*Connection program to professional practice, assessments and final examination*

15.30 – 17.00 Additional examination, conclusions

17.00 --17.15 Feedback (all involved welcome)

## Appendix 3 Studied documents

- DNOA final presentations 2014-2019: an overview of 15 selected final presentations including a link to the opera productions and the documentation of the 15 selected final presentations (copies of diploma, grade form and evaluation report)
- The Critical Self Reflection "Dutch National Opera Academy in 2019"
- The Curriculum Handbook of Dutch National Opera Academy 2019
- A Youtube video made by current DNOA students as their contribution to the Critical Self Reflection
- The DNOA assessment-evaluation cycle
- The DNOA assessment form Performing Opera
- Master Researches of alumni
- The Master Research Guide of the Conservatorium of Amsterdam
- Programm booklet *Little Women, winter production DNOA 2019-2020*
- Publicity material from recent DNOA productions
- Publicity material from The Conservatorium of Amsterdam and the Royal Conservatoire The Hague





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