



# Towards a European Space for Higher Arts Education

*AEC-ELIA Position Paper*



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of the Arts

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### **Main principles**

The European League of Institutes of the Arts (ELIA) and the Association Européenne des Conservatoires, Académies de Musique et Musikhochschulen (AEC) represent more than 550 higher arts education institutes across Europe, providing higher education in architecture, art, dance, design, media arts, music and theatre, for over 200.000 students annually.

This represents some of the most influential contributors to the development of European cultures and a powerful source for economic growth in Europe. The culture of Europe is a profound expression of our civilisation, it reflects what we are.

The arts provide unique, creative modes of inquiry - ways of thinking, working, making and problem solving - which are of immense benefit to everyone. Actors, architects, artists, dancers, designers, film makers and musicians continually challenge the traditional concepts of sight, space, sound and society, transforming them and providing new meaning.

We believe in the potential of the Bologna process, and strongly support the European ministers, who in seeking greater comparability and readability of qualifications as the platform for a stronger, more integrated European space of higher education, also place emphasis on retaining cultural diversity. This has always been the starting point for all aspects of international co-operation in higher arts education within Europe and beyond.

Furthermore we support the Prague Communiqué which states that higher education should be considered a public good. We also support the declaration of the European University Association (EUA), together with the American Council on Education and the Association of Canadian Colleges and Universities, opposing the inclusion of higher education services in the GATS negotiations.

At the same time, we welcome the opportunity to stress that arts education must be recognised as functioning up to and including higher education level in all European countries.

It is a widely shared goal of our member institutions to deliver high-level professionals for an international world of work. We develop the creative potential of future artists and offer the possibility of learning in and through the arts.

While many qualities in our field are shared with other disciplines, it is probably the combination of the following features that make teaching and learning in higher arts education a unique and different experience:

- addressing the specific natures, techniques, and achievements of each of the art forms;
- focusing on creation and presentation of works of art in teaching, learning and evaluation;
- promoting innovative student-centred learning and teaching methods;
- celebrating diversity in learning content, approach and outcome;
- providing space for creative thinking and making;
- contributing to, and defending cultural diversity and social inclusion;
- participating in the contemporary realities of our communities;
- exploring the boundaries of the local, the national, the European and the global;
- embracing new technologies and media as creative tools.

Such dynamic learning and teaching require specialised resources. To sustain these aims and unique qualities, higher arts education institutions must be sufficiently funded.

To release the potential of the Bologna process and address the particular needs of higher arts education, we underline the following:

### **1 Transparency and comparability**

- 1.1 The ELIA/AEC institutions express their willingness to work together towards the shared recognition of study programmes, qualifications and degrees.
- 1.2 We support the use of ECTS compatible credit systems.

### **2. Quality assurance and enhancement**

- 2.1 Higher arts education is fundamentally about individual creative development.
- 2.2 Quality assurance should reflect the shared wisdom of the higher arts education community about the often highly individualised learning conditions that are necessary to realise this fundamental aim.
- 2.3 Higher arts education is recognised as attaining the same levels of quality as other subjects in higher education. This is increasingly the case as the equivalence of practice-based disciplines to those of a more theoretical nature becomes better understood.
- 2.4 Quality assurance and quality enhancement need to be built on mutual trust in and between institutions, utilising processes such as peer review and self-evaluation and providing effective support for institutions towards maintaining and raising standards.
- 2.5 ELIA/AEC are opposed to using the outcome of quality assurance processes for the ranking of individual institutions, but support the creation of informative profiles of higher arts education institutions.

### **3. Academic levels**

- 3.1 ELIA/AEC support the implementation of the two-cycle system, providing students with professional qualifications at both levels.
- 3.2 We advise national governments to recognise that the whole sector of higher arts education is eligible to participate fully within the two cycles, provided appropriate quality standards are achieved.
- 3.3 We anticipate that discussions on a European space for Higher Education will extend to the third cycle - PhD level. We advise governments to recognise that all accredited higher arts education is eligible to participate fully at this level.

### **4. Mobility**

- 4.1 International student mobility is an integral part of education in the arts. It contributes to a comprehensive learning opportunity, and an inspiring cross-cultural experience essential for a professional career.
- 4.2 ELIA/AEC will work closely with the ministries to define and address art discipline-specific obstacles to staff and student mobility, such as the mutual recognition of study periods.

### **5. Artistic development and research**

- 5.1 The teaching and learning environment in higher arts education is based on artistic development and research. In some countries, artistic development in this context is recognised as a form of research. Artistic development and research taking place in higher arts education have to be recognised on a level equivalent to all other disciplines of higher education. Dedicated funding and incentives are needed in order to develop further the research/artistic development dimension in higher arts education.

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*Within the framework of the Socrates thematic network 'Innovation in higher arts education in Europe' ELIA/AEC is currently surveying the implications of the two-cycle structure, and*

*developing initiatives in the field of quality assurance, mobility, transparency, specific descriptors for art disciplines, and joint masters courses. For more information consult - [www.bda.ahk.nl](http://www.bda.ahk.nl) - or contact [truus.ophuysen@elia-artschools.org](mailto:truus.ophuysen@elia-artschools.org) (Truus Ophuysen) or [aecinfo@aecinfo.org](mailto:aecinfo@aecinfo.org) (Martin Prchal).*

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