



# polifonia

## REPORT

### **INTERNATIONAL EXTERNAL EXAMINERS IN HIGHER MUSIC EDUCATION**

ROLE, PURPOSE AND CASE STUDIES

'P O L I F O N I A'  
WORKING GROUP  
ON MOBILITY:  
RECOGNITION,  
MONITORING  
AND JOINT DEGREES



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## REPORT

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ROLE, PURPOSE AND CASE STUDIES

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W O R K I N G G R O U P  
O N M O B I L I T Y :  
R E C O G N I T I O N ,  
M O N I T O R I N G  
A N D J O I N T D E G R E E S

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## ABBREVIATIONS

<b>AEC</b>	Association Européenne des Conservatoires, Académies de Musique et Musikhochschulen
<b>DMA</b>	Doctor of Musical Arts
<b>ECAS</b>	European Commission Authentication System
<b>ECHE</b>	Erasmus Charter for Higher Education
<b>ECTS</b>	European Credits
<b>ELIA</b>	European League of Institutes of the Arts
<b>EPARM</b>	European Platform for Artistic Research in Music
<b>EQF</b>	European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning
<b>ESC</b>	Erasmus Student Charter
<b>HME</b>	Higher Music Education
<b>HMEI</b>	Higher Music Education Institution
<b>IIA</b>	Inter-institutional agreements
<b>IRC</b>	International Relations Coordinator
<b>LA</b>	Learning Agreement
<b>LEAR</b>	Legal Entity Appointed Representative
<b>LLP</b>	Lifelong Learning Programme
<b>LOS</b>	Learning Outcomes
<b>NA</b>	National Agency
<b>PDD</b>	'Polifonia'/Dublin Descriptors
<b>PIC</b>	Participant Identification Code
<b>OS</b>	Organisational Support
<b>SAR</b>	Society for Artistic Research
<b>URF</b>	Unique Registration Facility
<b>WG</b>	Working Group

## FOREWORD

### PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

The principle of International External Examiners can be seen as a new form of cooperation, mobility and professional development between European institutions for higher music education. Within the ERASMUS Network for Music 'Polifonia', the working group called "WG5 Mobility: Recognition, Monitoring and Joint Degrees" was responsible for exploring the use of International External Examiners in the assessment methods used by institutions and for providing, through this report, practical solutions to institutions interested in using International External Examiners. The information in this document is based upon recent experiences of International External Examiners and institutions currently using such examiners, which are presented in the form of case studies.

This report provides information on what exactly is meant with the term International External Examiners, lists the benefits to institutions from the use of such examiners and presents some recent experiences. It also outlines a few practical details institutions have to consider when operating a system that uses International External Examiners.

### CONTEXT OF THE PROJECT

Since its launch in 2004, the ERASMUS Network for Music 'Polifonia' <sup>[1]</sup> has proactively addressed European higher education policy issues (such as mobility, research, quality assurance and accreditation, admission and assessment, links with the profession, etc.) from the perspective of higher music education (HME). Through the consistent output of high quality products, it has been able to raise the awareness of these issues throughout the sector, which has subsequently supported the implementation of these outputs at both institutional and national levels. From a general higher education point of view, 'Polifonia' has often been cited as a good example of what can be achieved through a subject-specific and European-level approach to the modernisation agenda that was initiated by the Bologna Declaration and is now embedded in the Europe 2020 strategy.

The 'Polifonia' project, supported by the ERASMUS Networks programme of the European Union<sup>[2]</sup>, is the biggest European project on professional music training to date. The first project cycle ran from 2004-2007, the second from 2007-2010 and the third, jointly coordinated by the Royal Conservatoire The Hague and the Association Européenne des Conservatoires, Académies de Musique et Musikhochschulen (AEC), from 2011-2014. In this last cycle, experts from 55 different institutions in the field of higher music education and the music profession were involved, coming from 26 European countries and 4 countries outside Europe.

The overall aim of 'ERASMUS Network for Music 'Polifonia' is to promote innovation in and enhance the quality, attractiveness and accessibility of European higher music education through cooperation at the European level.

### AUTHORS OF THIS GUIDE

'Polifonia' Working Group (WG) 5 on Mobility: Recognition, Monitoring and Joint Degrees has promoted mobility in the higher music education sector through a variety of activities. During the course of the project, the WG has focused on the following aims:

<sup>[1]</sup> For more information about the 'Polifonia' project, visit its website [www.polifonia.eu](http://www.polifonia.eu).

<sup>[2]</sup> The Erasmus academic networks were supported by the Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP) of the European Commission, the European Funding programme in the field of education and training, in place between 2007 and 2014. The Erasmus academic networks were designed to promote European co-operation and innovation in specific subject areas. For more information on this funding programme, visit the website [http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/llp/erasmus/erasmus\\_networks\\_en.php](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/llp/erasmus/erasmus_networks_en.php).



- achieve a European-level agreement on how to deal with recognition issues in higher music education institutions
- develop a methodology to facilitate reciprocal external examining arrangements in higher music education
- carry out case-studies to identify mobility and recognition issues in European joint degrees

The Working Group on Mobility: Recognition, Monitoring and Joint Degrees was composed of:

- Keld Hosbond (Co-chair - Det Jyske Musikkonservatorium, Aarhus)
- Rineke Smilde (Co-chair - Prins Claus Conservatorium, Groningen)
- Chris Caine (Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, London)
- John Galea (Università ta' Malta, Malta)
- Aygül Günaltay (State Conservatory of Istanbul, Istanbul)
- Hannah Hebert (Koninklijk Conservatorium Den Haag/AEC, The Hague/Brussels)
- Shane Levesque (Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts, Hong Kong)
- Hanneleen Pihlak (Eesti Muusika - ja Teatriakadeemia, Tallinn)
- Martin Prchal (Koninklijk Conservatorium Den Haag, The Hague)
- Eleonoor Tchernoff (Koninklijk Conservatorium Den Haag, The Hague)
- Ioannis Toulis (Music Department - Ionian University Corfu, Corfu)
- Maarten Weyler (Conservatorium Hogeschool Gent, Ghent)



## I. DEFINITIONS

What do we exactly mean with an International External Examiner? As has been identified through research in the ‘Polifonia’ project, there are many different practices in the use of International External Examiners and their role(s) in relation to the assessment of student performance.

### I.1 EXTERNAL EXAMINING

The first step of the working group in its task to collect information in this area was to gain an overview of current practice in AEC member institutions in relation to external examining in general, i.e. the presence of (not necessarily international) external examiners in assessment panels. This collection of information was done through a questionnaire that was circulated to AEC member institutions in 2012, which asked questions about the attendance of external examiners in student recitals, entrance examinations, other parts of the curriculum, as well as other practices. It became clear from the replies that much is already taking place in various institutions, but that the questionnaire also created confusion about the kind of external examiners information was being compiled on. As described by working group member Ben Croft (The Hong Kong Academy of Performing Arts) in his analysis of the replies, it was therefore difficult to extrapolate certain national trends, as it was not clear if the replies described nation-wide practice (so based on legal requirements) or institutional localised practices. Notwithstanding this uncertainty, it was interesting to identify the practice of inviting external examiners for entrance examinations in French institutions and on the other hand the lack of external examiners in Austrian, German, Hungarian, Italian, Polish and Spanish institutions, even if it is not clear if these are national trends or localised institutional practices. Furthermore, the principle of using international external examiners did not feature in this survey at all. It was therefore clear from the survey results that if further information was needed on this topic, a clearer definition of the term ‘external examiner’ would be required.

What did become evident from this first questionnaire and from the work done by ‘Polifonia’ Working Group on Assessment and Standards<sup>[1]</sup> is that there seem to be three approaches in use in relation to the composition of the committee (or panel) that will assess the performance of a student, e.g. during a final or intermediate assessment or examination:

- A committee only consisting of teachers who are connected to the institution where the student is studying
- A committee only consisting of external examiners (e.g. representatives from the profession, teachers from other institutions) who are not connected to the institution where the student is studying
- A committee consisting of both teachers who are connected to the institution where the student is studying and external examiners who are not.

### I.2 TYPE OF EXTERNAL EXAMINERS

In order to avoid confusion with the terminology used in some countries where a tradition of external examiners/ evaluators/assessors exists (e.g. UK, Hong Kong and Malta), it is important to be clear about the different roles and types of external examiners:

- In the context of this project an external examiner is normally a specialist in a specific discipline (e.g. a teacher in violin, composition, voice or jazz guitar) with the task to serve on assessment panels in formative and/or summative performance assessments.

<sup>[1]</sup> Information on ‘Polifonia’ Working Group on Assessment and Standards can be found at: [www.aec-music.eu/polifonia/working-groups/assessment--standards](http://www.aec-music.eu/polifonia/working-groups/assessment--standards)

- In some countries, another practice exists in which an external expert (often called an ‘overall external examiner’ or a ‘programme external examiner’) is overseeing final examinations in different departments as a generalist to examine the overall comparability of standards and procedures between departments within one single degree.

Whereas the ‘overall external examiner’ can be seen more as a quality assurance tool to review the institution’s internal standards and procedures for assessment, the specialist external examiner will be more directly involved with the actual assessment of individual students. Therefore, the profile of such a specialist external examiner will be more connected to the actual content of the study programmes and its curriculum.

### **1.2.1 International External Examiners**

The ‘Polifonia’ Working Group suggests adding an international dimension to the principle of external examining by involving external examiners originating from a different country. These International External Examiners can serve in both types of functions as described above. One case study has been included from the University of Malta, where the external examiner in fact functions as an ‘international overall external examiner’, combining the role of ‘overall external examiner’ as described above with an international dimension. The case study from the Hong Kong Academy of Performing Arts describes the use of both types of external examiners, in both cases coming from countries abroad.

For further information about the general principle of external examining (not explicitly at international level), it is advisable to consult the Final Report produced by the ‘Polifonia’ Working Group on Assessment and Standards <sup>[2]</sup>.

<sup>[2]</sup> Full report of WG I will be published on AEC website: [www.aec-music.eu](http://www.aec-music.eu)

## 2. PURPOSE: WHY INTERNATIONAL EXTERNAL EXAMINERS

The reasons for looking into the use of external examiners at international level are as follows:

- Higher music education is very much an international discipline. To ensure that the programmes are continually updated in line with the requirements of international professional practice it is not only important that there are foreign students and teachers present in the institution, but also that the study programmes are continuously benchmarked at international level. International cross-institutional assessment can provide valuable information as to a programme's outcomes in relation to international standards.
- Music is a very specialist discipline and there may be only a small number of instrumental practitioners in a particular country. It is therefore possible that cross-institutional assessments with institutions within one country will have only limited benefit in terms of objectivity. The engagement of International External Examiners enlarges the number of practitioners and thus enhances objectivity.
- At the same time, international collaboration on assessment is an effective way of enhancing teachers' expertise through engaging with colleagues at international level and gaining understanding of other examination systems. An important principle therefore is reciprocity. Teachers gain experience of different pedagogic approaches but above all they learn to develop their own idea of what standards are required internationally.
- Lastly, this international approach can make a positive contribution to the accreditation and programme or institutional review procedures institutions will have to undergo as part of their national quality assurance systems. Not only can this approach show stronger links between the assessment, quality assurance and internationalisation policies of the institutions involved, but also provide an useful tool for comparing standards of student achievement at the international level.

## 3. FEEDBACK FROM EXPERIMENTS AND OTHER EXPERIENCES

Based on the impressions from the experiments with International External Examiners during the academic years 2012-2013 and 2013-2014 in the framework of 'Polifonia' as well as from practice that has already been in place in institutions for some time, the following observations can be made:

- From the perspective of the institution and the departments, the presence of the International External Examiners was perceived as highly valuable, as they gave an additional international and objective perspective to the assessment of the students' achievements. This support to the use of International External Examiners was also voiced by students. As can be read in the case study of The Hong Kong Academy of Performing Arts, the presence of International External Examiners is seen as particularly important, as mainland China students in particular value the views of experts from abroad.
- Questions were raised in some departments by teaching faculty on the rationale and necessity of using International External Examiners. However, once the first experiences with the International External Examiners had taken place, most of these concerns were resolved, but some discussion beforehand was necessary. The former practice of only using examiners known to the faculty may have contributed to the teachers' concerns.
- Students commented that careful preparation of the International External Examiners was essential, especially in terms of providing information on assessment rules and criteria beforehand. They also pointed out that expectations of International External Examiners should be clearly set out. Furthermore, the choice of International External Examiners should be made on the basis of professional and academic expertise rather than of quality assurance considerations, i.e. the International External Examiners should be experts in their field and not generalists.
- In one example, detailed reports were made by International External Examiners following their visits. These reports were important sources of information that gave the conservatoire an outside view on its assessment practices. The reports were shared with the management team at the conservatoire in question and led to interesting and intensive internal discussions about the current approach to assessment and how it might develop as a result.
- In another instance, quality assurance questionnaires were handed out to all external examiners, including the international ones. These showed some significant results: external examiners were asked if they thought the students were reaching international standards. The scores of International External Examiners tended to be somewhat lower than those of other current and/or national external examiners. This discrepancy has the potential to inform more effectively the institution about its standards in an international context.
- In some institutions a preference was expressed towards inviting 'professional' external experts (i.e. experts that are not connected to another conservatoire but are active in the music profession). Although such experts can provide highly valuable feedback on the professional standards of the student being assessed, it was also mentioned such experts could sometimes cause problems by not being familiar with assessment procedures and principles in higher music education, especially if they were from another country.
- The presence of International External Examiners can have an important positive impact on student and staff mobility. Teachers will learn about the host institution's standards and practices, they will be more inclined to send their students on an ERASMUS student exchange to this institution and more likely to be involved in an staff exchange themselves.

- The Hong Kong Academy of Performing Arts makes further use of external examiners by asking these to teach students at the end of their visit: this makes the presence of the externals more beneficial and personal.
- Finally, it was mentioned that in some countries (e.g. the UK and Hong Kong) the tasks for the external examiners can be extensive, requiring the examiners to attend a large number of examinations and to consider a considerable amount of documentation. In the case of International External Examiners, this not only requires relevant language skills but also having the sufficient amount of time to be able to fulfil the required tasks (including travel). In the case of Hong Kong for example, the external examiners often stay for 3-4 weeks.

An interesting SWOT analysis on external examining at international level was made by Working Group member Aygul Sahinalp (Istanbul University State Conservatory) following her experience as an international external examiner at the Royal Conservatoire in The Hague and based on her personal expressions and observations:

#### **Strengths**

- Increased transparency in assessment methods
- Development of expertise in assessment and the use of international standards
- Enhancement of the expertise of the examiners
- Contribution to internationalisation of HME Institutions
- Comparison of different assessment and teaching practices in different HME Institutions
- Validation of the institutional standards through international comparisons
- Expanded opportunities for collaboration and international dimension of knowledge
- Increased mobility of not only students, teachers and non-academic staff but ideas as well
- Added value to mobility

#### **Weaknesses**

- Sustainability could be endangered through a lack of funding
- The use of too differentiated criteria for external examiners
- Educational systems lacking comparability
- The lack of clear assessment criteria or guidelines/protocols

#### **Opportunities**

*For students in their home institutions:*

- Assessment against international standards
- International performance opportunities as a potential spin-off
- Increased objectivity

- Career guidance

*For teachers in both their host and home institutions:*

- Exchange of expertise
- Continuous professional development
- Professional networking
- Enhanced objectivity in assessment
- Exchange of good practice and peer learning

*For institutions:*

- Opportunity to situate institutional performance within the context of international good practice
- Improved quality assurance through sharing of experiences internationally
- Further development of new partnerships for other cooperation activities between institutions and teaching staff
- Contribution to continuing personal development of teachers
- Providing transparency in assessment for students
- Refinement of curricula that will meet international requirements
- Exchange of good practice and peer learning

## **Threats**

- Lack of funding
- A possible lack of transparency in the selection of external examiners: should there be a European pool of International External Examiners or are they approached on an individual basis?
- A lack of a clear definition of International External Examiners: specialist, expert, moderator or member of the jury?

Aygul Sahinalp concludes that “external examining at international level is not only an important tool for validation of assessment and standards internationally and exchange of expertise, but a very useful and practical way of increasing and assuring the added quality to mobility. The use of external examiners by Higher Music Education institutions is a very good model that closely meets almost all of the main activity areas and requirements of the Bologna Process in terms of: international openness, transparency, student participation, mobility, synergy between the Higher Education institutions and quality assurance.”

The full report of her visit to the Royal Conservatoire in The Hague as an international external expert is included with this document as an appendix.

### 3.1 PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

One of the concerns of institutions regarding the use of International External Examiners are high costs. Nevertheless, there are strategies that can resolve this problem.

The use of the regular teaching staff exchanges in ERASMUS+ can be considered for this purpose on the basis that the visiting teacher is carrying out a role in the evaluation of teaching. At the moment, there are no regulations that would contradict this assumption, as the regulations usually only speak of limits in terms of time to be spent at the host institution. It is prudent to check this with the ERASMUS+ National Agency beforehand. A solution could be to combine the role of the teacher as an international external examiner with a few hours of actual teaching in the host institution (after the examinations have taken place). If ERASMUS+ can cover the costs of the international external examiner, then the international external examiner could even be more financially attractive than employing one from within the same country.

Another financial arrangement could be to use the principle of ‘closed purses’. This means that the sending institutions pay the travel costs, while the hosting institution covers local costs (hotel and meals).

In some countries it is standard practice to pay external examiners a fee. If this is the case, the international external examiner should be treated in the same way. It is important to agree very precisely on such details beforehand.

It is also important to have realistic ambitions with regards to the numbers of International External Examiners visiting each year. For example, alternating departments or sections from year to year may be advisable, as it would be financially unrealistic to expect that all departments would be using International External Examiners at the same time.

Another crucial requirement is careful preparation of a visit by an international external examiner. It is important that the international external examiner is informed fully about the assessment procedure and the grading system in advance of the examinations. Marking/grading criteria provided by the host institution are essential tools for the external examiner.

It is important to note that engaging in an exchange of International External Examiners on a reciprocal basis requires significant trust in the quality of the partner institutions. It is critical that the institutions involved are well informed about each other’s standards and systems, and this may require some preparatory visits by members of the management beforehand. The exchange of International External Examiners can be facilitated through bilateral arrangements. Alternatively institutions may wish to set up strategic partnerships with small groups of institutions, through which these exchange can take place. An example of this can be found in the case of the Royal Conservatoire and its ‘Pentacon’ Group. However, in some countries a reciprocal exchange of external examiners is not allowed due to quality assurance regulations. At the Hong Kong Academy, where this is not permitted, this creates a challenge: if the arrangements would be based more on reciprocal agreements, the use of International External Examiners would be more sustainable financially on the long term.

One of the original plans of the working group was to create an online register for International External Examiners for use for recruitment by institutions. However, in order to avoid a duplication of efforts through the creation of too many online registers, it was decided to add information on the profile of International External Examiners to the existing database of peer reviewers as part of the Quality Enhancement Processes conducted by MusiQuE <sup>[1]</sup>. The register will therefore serve the dual purpose of supplying peer-reviewers for institutional and programme reviews and external examiners.

<sup>[1]</sup> MusiQuE – Music Quality Enhancement (Foundation for Quality Enhancement and Accreditation in Higher Music Education) is an external evaluation body dedicated to the continuous improvement of the quality of higher music education across Europe and beyond and, through its accreditation, quality enhancement and advisory services, to assisting higher music education institutions in their own enhancement of quality.



## 4. CASE STUDIES AND FURTHER DOCUMENTATION

In addition to this document, a series of appendices have been made available that describe current practice or experiments with International External Examiners. These case studies describe the following situations:

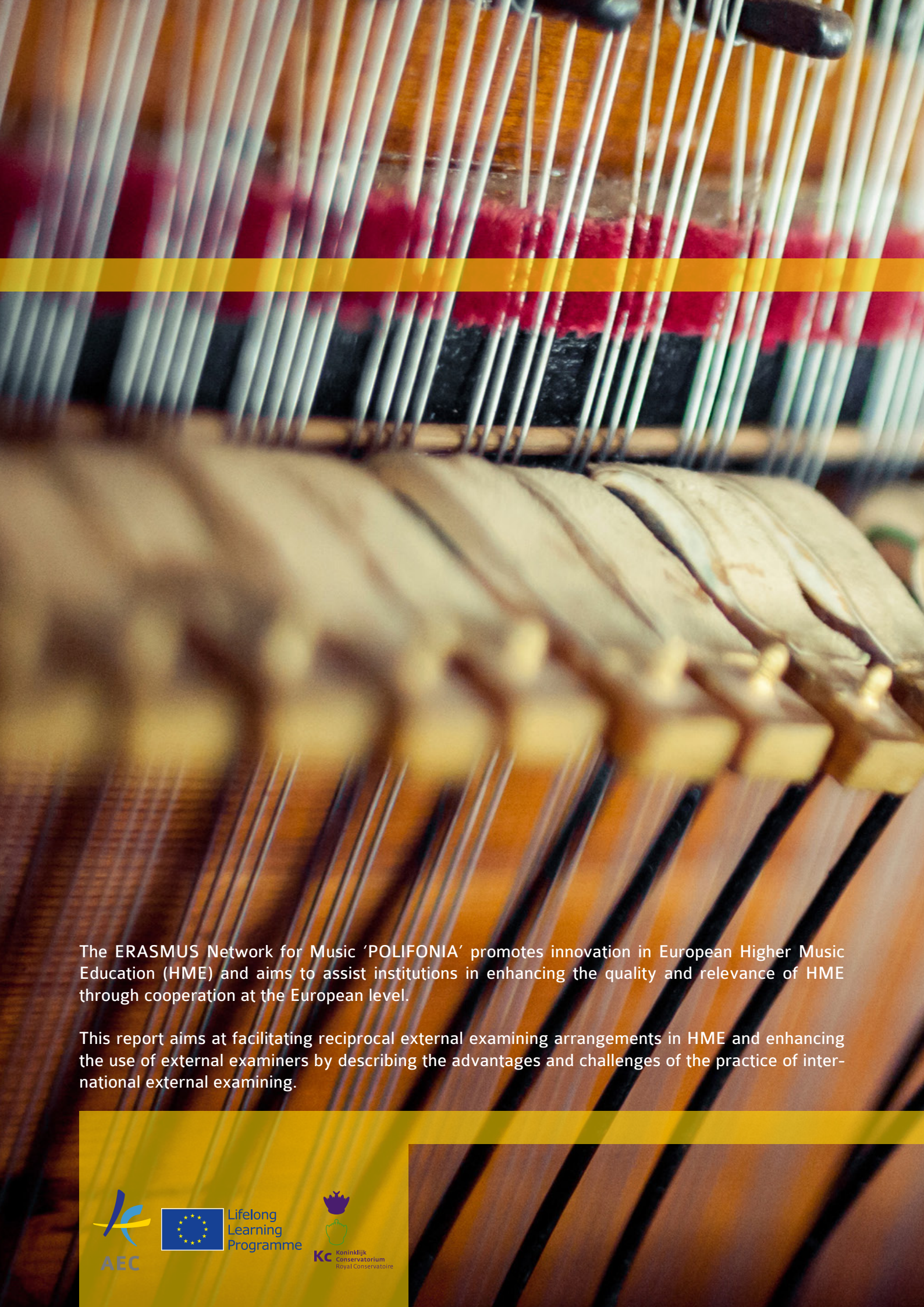
- The use of International External Examiners at The Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts. This interesting case study written by working group member Shane Levesque describes very well the procedures and forms that are being used in the Academy in relation to International External Examiners. This example could serve as a model for other institutions wanting to set up a comparable system. In fact, the system used by the Academy is similar to the one for external examiners used in the UK, but because of the particular context of Hong Kong the external examiners will almost always come from abroad. This makes the case study from Hong Kong particularly interesting as it is one of the few institutions that has been systematically using International External Examiners over a long period of time.
- The use of International External Examiners at the Royal Conservatoire The Hague, the Norwegian Academy of Music and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama as part of an experiment undertaken within the 'Pentacon Group', a group of five conservatoire worldwide seeking closer cooperation. This case study describes the context in which the International External Examiners have visited the institutions and includes some reports from the examiners in which feedback is given on their experience in the experiment.
- A report by Working Group 5 member Aygul Sahinalp describing her experience as an international external examiner at the Royal Conservatoire The Hague in March 2013.
- The use of external examiners at the University of Malta, Music Department, described by working group member John Galea. Similarly to the situation in Hong Kong, most of the external examiners tend to have an international background because of the geographical context of the university.



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The ERASMUS Network for Music 'POLIFONIA' promotes innovation in European Higher Music Education (HME) and aims to assist institutions in enhancing the quality and relevance of HME through cooperation at the European level.

This report aims at facilitating reciprocal external examining arrangements in HME and enhancing the use of external examiners by describing the advantages and challenges of the practice of international external examining.



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