

An Advocacy Strategy for AEC

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1. Introduction

In 2018, the AEC Council presented for the first time the cornerstones for an AEC Advocacy Strategy. The AEC Council was thus reacting to the requirements of the current [AEC Strategic Plan](#) which came into force with the decision of the AEC General Assembly on 11 November 2017, and whose term was extended to the end of 2023 by the decision of the same body on 7 November 2020.

In the AEC Strategic Plan, advocacy is described as one of the core tasks of AEC's activities. Advocacy is a topic in all three pillars of the Strategic Plan, but especially in Pillar 1 which regards *'Fostering the value of music and music education in society'*. Pillar 1 sets three objectives for AEC in relation to advocacy about the value of music and music education in society:

- AEC will represent and advance the interests of the Higher Music Education (HME) sector at national, European and global levels for the greater societal good;
- AEC will work to increase opportunity and access to Music Education;
- AEC will assist its members in engaging audiences in an evolving cultural environment and in exploring the musical needs in society.

In September 2021, the AEC Council identified a number of actions to support and facilitate the implementation of the Advocacy Strategic Plan, such as:

- acting as a 'Higher Music Education trend scout' and reacting to developments and trends which could represent threats or opportunities for its members;
- developing an advocacy toolkit for its member institutions enabling them to strengthen advocacy and lobbying at the national, regional and local level;
- taking a leading role in the follow-up of a [European Agenda for Music](#) initiated by the European Music Council (EMC);
- gathering and sharing examples of good practices and innovative approaches that Higher Music Education institutions have identified as helpful in their work to increasing audience inclusivity and diversity;
- promoting the integration of more diverse learning and teaching approaches among its member institutions.

In addition, the paper adopted by the AEC Council also formulated fields of action that are considered crucial for the further implementation of the AEC Strategic Plan in the area of advocacy, such as:

- Raising awareness for the needs of HME in and outside the community
- Collecting arguments with cross-cutting relevance
- Promoting access to music education and cultural offerings
- Increasing recognition of HME
- Increasing access to funding

The AEC office deals on a daily basis with advocacy through keeping permanent and close contact both with EU bodies relevant to the sector ([DG EAC](#), [EACEA](#), [CULT committee](#), MoPs, [the Council of the EU](#), etc.) and European partner organisations (see page 6). The AEC Newsletter includes a section under the heading 'Advocacy news' reporting on these activities on a monthly basis,

As part of the description of AEC's flagship project [Empowering Artists as Makers in Society \(ARTEMIS, 2022-2025\)](#), co-funded by the European Union, the development, adoption, testing and implementation of an AEC Advocacy Strategy is one of the focal points. The related activities are to be understood explicitly as a continuation and specification of the preparatory work carried out by the AEC Council and the AEC Office in the years 2016 to 2021.

2. What is advocacy?

In the following, an attempt will be made to outline the specific understanding of the term advocacy on which this paper is based. The [Merriam-Webster English Dictionary](#) suggests a definition that probably corresponds to a widespread usage of the term and that we can agree with in principle. Following this understanding, advocacy is 'the act or process of supporting a cause or proposal'.

However, this definition does not say anything about the goals of advocacy, nor about the target groups to be addressed by advocacy activities. As advocacy can only unfold its *raison d'être* when these elements are more precisely defined, the above-quoted definition risks being insufficient. In other words, without a more detailed definition of the goals and the target groups, the term advocacy remains meaningless and empty.

But even if we stay at the general level suggested by Webster's Dictionary, we would add to this definition that **advocacy is always about change**. In this sense, advocacy is mostly aiming at change, but sometimes also protecting certain areas from becoming subject or victim of change processes triggered by external factors or events such as financial difficulties, political or public pressure etc.

Generally speaking, change is achieved by influencing people in positions of power. At first glance, it might appear as people in power would be found first of all in the realm of politics. But as advocacy is about handling power among those who set the tone in the public debates, it would not go far enough to limit an advocacy strategy's target group to political decision-makers. On the contrary, it might at least be just as important to address stakeholder groups which are involved in the internal debates and to ensure that this debate is influenced in such a way that the interests of one's own sector are given due weight.

Work Package 4 of the ARTEMIS project, entitled 'Reinforcing the capacity of AEC and its members to represent their interests and to advocate for the promotion of the cultural and creative sector', is explicitly committed to encouraging '*players in the sector at all levels to develop, implement and apply systematic advocacy strategies and thus make the voice of the sector heard better*' as it is stated in the project application. One of the objectives of this AEC Advocacy Strategy is to create a reliable basis from which concrete measures can be derived, such as an AEC Advocacy Toolkit and ideas for workshops and the like.

The AEC Advocacy Strategy will be two-track. On the one hand, it is meant to provide answers to the question of what the AEC can do for the benefit of its members at the European level. On the other hand, it should also make clear how AEC can support its members in advocacy at the local, regional and national levels.

As a first step, a survey was launched in the autumn of 2022 to ask the AEC members about their needs and concerns related to advocacy. In a second step and on the basis of the outcomes of this survey, the AEC Advocacy Strategy will provide more detailed information about the target groups AEC advocacy actions are aiming at and about European partners with whom it makes sense to join forces in order to reach these goals. The paper will then set out a framework for the elaboration of tools which is underpinned with some exemplary models, and finally present some key messages on advocacy that AEC wants to bring forward.

3. AEC members' priorities and demands regarding advocacy

In April 2022, a small number of representatively selected AEC members were asked to list and prioritise key areas to be addressed by potential advocacy activities. 5 areas were identified (A. Topics & Target Groups; B. Key Messages & Priorities; C. The interests of the HME sector compared to others; D. How to react to challenges & threats; E. Measures & Methods of Advocacy) and thus served as a basis to design an in-depth survey to be sent out to the entire AEC membership. Although the survey has been closed since late October 2022, the [full questionnaire](#) is still available online.

Unfortunately, despite repeated reminders and the extension of the deadline, the number of responses was significantly lower than expected, which should be taken as a sign that the topic as such is not particularly important to most members in their everyday work. Nonetheless, the survey results were still helpful and beneficial as the responses we received were very thoughtful, detailed, and informative. In addition, the geographical distribution of the feedback was reasonably balanced.

From the answers to the question '*Who should benefit from advocacy activities and in what way?*', it becomes obvious that the vast majority of respondents care about the welfare and wellbeing of students, but also of teachers at AEC member institutions. However, the society in its capacity as a '*multifaceted stakeholder*' was also mentioned.

Most respondents would like advocacy activities to be directed to political decision-makers both at the EU level (funding) and at the national level (cultural and educational policy), but approximately every second also named businesses organisations and/or private sponsors. In addition, targeted support for specific countries was highlighted as an option in case of need.

The answers to the questions '*How can these interests be represented?*' and '*What are the interests and causes (key messages) that AEC should support on behalf of its members?*' were quite heterogeneous. The fact, however, that there are so many and diverse topics raised at this point, should not be mistaken as an indicator for opposite positions or conflicting viewpoints among the AEC membership, but rather as evidence that most respondents find it difficult to derive a list of priorities from the many points that they consider important.

When it comes to prioritising certain topics, the results of the second part of the survey are more meaningful. 75% or more of the feedback supports the request for innovating higher

music education (by providing resources and infrastructure that enable adaptation to an environment under constant change) and to do more and to advocate more powerfully in order to raise awareness both among politicians and the wider public on the significance of arts and culture in society, but also on the contribution of arts and culture to strengthening the society and social cohesion. Not as highly ranked as the above-mentioned issues, but still seen to be very important are issues such as the need to advocate for better access to EU funding and for full recognition of higher arts education on equal terms with university offers. On the other hand, there is also agreement that advocacy is more than asking for more money,

The greatest challenge or even threat mentioned is that artistic and pedagogical arguments and values are not given sufficient attention in the societal debate compared to the commercial interests of the music business sector. Moreover, it is seen as a threat that the special needs of higher arts education might not be sufficiently taken into account within processes of streamlining higher education systems following the needs and requirements of the universities.

Last but not least, it can be stated that policy dialogue, policy monitoring and policy campaigning are considered to be almost equally important and are assessed by almost all respondents as either important or very important.

You can see all results from the Advocacy Survey [by clicking here](#).

4. AEC Advocacy Strategy: Target groups

To be successful, advocacy has to be carried out at multiple levels and in a multidimensional space. Advocacy is always linked to public relations activities reaching out to both external and internal target groups.

Addressing **internal target groups** opens up the option to adapt additional tools and measures complementing the usual single-channel communication measures (from the acting group towards the target group) and to include explanatory and persuasive efforts from peer to peer at the micro level. This type of internal advocacy represents a special but crucial aspect of advocacy activities, especially when it comes to mobilising teachers and students. Despite this, the here presented paper will mostly be about advocacy directed towards the outside, since the measures and tools developed for this purpose should basically also be suitable to do internal advocacy. But it is also true that internal advocacy has to be more than organising campaigns based on the model of external advocacy. Peer-to-peer advocacy follows its own rules and has its own dynamics. That is why the topic shall be tackled more in-depth at a later stage and on the basis of the knowledge gained up to that point in the course of the work on and with the AEC Advocacy Strategy.

If advocacy in general is seen to be '*an act or process of supporting a cause or proposal*', this also means that advocacy inevitably aims at influencing people who are not yet convinced about the need to support a cause or proposal. There are many reasons why people might not be as open to this cause or proposal as one might wish: different priorities in the competitive struggle for limited honey pots, diverging political goals and priorities, competitive thinking, to name just a few.

Efficient advocacy first and foremost aims to influence people who are in positions of power. In addition to the political decision-makers, these are also sponsors, who sometimes

decide completely independently of public debates, what they consider worthy of support and what not, and who sometimes do not even have to justify their decisions to the public.

However, **a third authority should not be forgotten in addition to the political decision-makers and the patrons or sponsors. These are the expert committees** that exist in particular at the national and regional level, such as music councils, cultural agencies, boards of national funds, etc. These committees were usually established with subsidiary intentions, which means that politicians deliberately decided to delegate decision-making to a group of chosen experts from the field, thus increasing the legitimacy of the decisions made.

This does not mean, however, that the decision-making processes that take place within these bodies are always in consensus and free of conflicts of interest. Let's observe two typical case scenarios from AEC's field of action.

The question of whether it is seen to be more important to support top-class artistic performers or grass-root projects that might give many people access to cultural practice and/or music education, is even within a body such as a music council not always a both-and, but rather an either-or decision. How this decision turns out to be made in the end, largely depends on the internal power relations within the music council.

If a committee comprising a majority of musicologists makes the decision to grant funding to support research projects in the field of music, applicants from the field of artistic research may quickly feel disadvantaged and 'powerless'.

The issue of which target groups to address and reach out to through advocacy activities is always at the same time an issue of how to deal with power and power relations. In other words, it is always about strategies on how to influence and change power relations.

In principle, one can influence power relations by:

- making better heard the voices of those who share one's own interests by enabling and empowering this voice to advocate for their cause.
- providing information on the special features of the subject in question (in this case: higher music education) and the related requirements and needs that must be met in order to enable AEC to carry out the task assigned to it.
- joining forces and taking part in joint projects and campaigns with partners who are pursuing the same or similar goals.

In all of this, it should not be forgotten that decisions are sometimes made outside of the formal political processes and outside of the official decision-making bodies. This is in particular the case when public pressure arises, which can be intensified and controlled in a positive sense by the media - both traditional media and social media - but of course can also be manipulated.

What does this mean for designing and implementing an AEC Advocacy Strategy aligned with the interests and objectives, opportunities and limitations of the AEC? Taking all of the above-mentioned in account and relating it to the specific context in which AEC operates, there are at least six distinct categories of target groups which can or should be addressed in different ways and possibly through different means and tools.

1. *Political decision-makers, especially in the field of European policy.*

- this target group includes on the one hand the legislative bodies of the European Union, the European Parliament, the Council of the EU and the European Commission, on the other hand their operational subdivisions in charge of developing and preparing draft laws; the aim of such advocacy measures is to place agenda items and narratives in the EU policy papers, such as the EU Work Plan for Culture;
 - in principle, AEC is also able to support its members in advocating at the national level, but for political reasons is committed to only act as a consultant or mediator at the request of its members.
2. *Other players in the music and art sector.*
- the non-educational music sector, music business, art education dealing with other disciplines than music;
 - the aim is to promote the interests of education in general and higher education in particular vis-à-vis the interests of other players in the music sector;
 - alliances in question include e.g. [EMC](#), [CAE](#), [ELIA](#), [GEECT / Cilect](#), [SAR](#), [EMU](#), [EAS](#), [ENJ](#), [EFN](#), [ECSA](#), [EPASA](#); all of them are already now strong partners of AEC, but these partnerships can still be further strengthened and expanded as part of targeted advocacy activities.
3. *The community of peers*
- these are the members and affiliates of AEC member institutions, ie. teachers, students, but also administrative staff, friends and alumni;
 - among artists, the determination and readiness to take corporate responsibility through cooperative action is as a rule not very pronounced; providing factual information to them and taking measures to raise awareness can help to better reach this target group.
4. *Other players in the higher education sector.*
- the aim is to promote the interests of higher music and higher arts education vis-à-vis the interests of higher education in general;
 - long-standing AEC partners to be mentioned at this point are [EUA](#), [EURASHE](#) and [EUF](#); in addition to further developing and strengthening these partnerships, it might be considered to expand the partnerships beyond the borders of Europe and also beyond the realm of organisations dealing exclusively with higher education.
5. *Business and other organisations (non-cultural non-educational political influencers).*
- partnerships with representatives of the Cultural and Creative Sector, such as [IMZ](#), [ECHO](#) and [PEARLE](#), are solid and based on common interests; these should be deepened and expanded;
 - other partnerships are caught between common interests and conflicts of interest, but are functional and reliable when it comes to concrete actions;
 - the aim is to strengthen the interests of the artistic and pedagogical vis-à-vis commercial interests in the music business sector; it might be worth investigating how to identify and transparently tackle in joint action the respective role of the partner as an ally or competitor.
6. *Society at large*
- a distinction should be made between advocacy actions targeting specific groups (such as young people, migrant communities, women, etc.) and advocacy actions that are aimed at the society as a whole.

5. Advocacy measures, campaigning and tools

The question of which tools can be used to reach target groups arises on three levels. Firstly, there is the question of how to draw the target groups' attention to one's own concerns in general and how to develop and implement an advocacy campaign (1). Secondly, there is the issue of what role each of the target groups identified in the last chapter has and how these target groups can be addressed with differentiated and tailor-made tools (2). And thirdly, it is about how AEC can empower its members to enable them to successfully engage in advocacy themselves (3). We want to pursue these questions systematically and also include concrete examples that might serve as models for the development of concrete tools, actions and action plans adapted to the respective occasion.

(1) Raising awareness and campaigning

In order for advocacy to be successful, a few prerequisites must be met. Those advocating must

- agree on a common narrative within the community;
- formulate and present their concerns and requests in an understandable way;
- make themselves heard in the public debate.

Successful advocacy is as a rule based on some form of collective action. As the history of social movements and political upheavals shows, the starting point of change is most often a shared idea and a shared understanding of a problem. Whether a situation is perceived as problematic or not, always depends on the viewer's perspective, interests, economic realities, and social and cultural routines.

Shared narratives can motivate masses if these shared narratives are based on common identities and common values. Referring to such common values and identities is a prerequisite to reach out to people, to address them emotionally and to mobilise them.

Cornerstones of a set of common values in the field of music and higher music education are, for example, the belief in the intrinsic value of cultural education, the power of art as a driving force for social interaction and innovation and the belief that it is the task of art and culture to critically challenge a mainstream political discourse. Shared beliefs are the glue that holds the community of those affected together. But this goes hand in hand with the risk of isolation and segregation, as common beliefs are also reference points for distancing oneself and one's own community or peer group from those who do not share these beliefs or at least have other priorities. Advocacy campaigns can only be successful if they are comprehensible and transparent also for people outside of one's own bubble. It is of course desirable to get these people to share one's own concerns and to support the related issues and to show solidarity with them. However, it is even more important that the people from outside the own bubble understand the issue and the arguments presented.

That's why it is imperative for any advocacy campaign to frame and articulate an issue or concern in a way that is compatible with core ideas and constructs that are also shared outside one's own bubble. This also means that understanding one's concerns on a larger scale can only be achieved if the proposed change is not too far away from what the system is able to absorb. In concrete terms, this means that a thorough analysis of the societal atmosphere, the political options and the limits of one's own power must be part of any campaign.

In the context of such an analysis, it is worth asking questions such as:

- Have there been comparable advocacy campaigns in the past from which one can learn?
- How does one's own concern fit in with the conversation partner's strategic goals, priorities and political agenda?
- Is the timing right, when will be the momentum, when will be the next elections?
- Is it part of your counterpart's / your government's habits to reach out to interest groups on their own, are they willing to listen or do they find this type of advocacy embarrassing? Etc.

The third and crucial step is to get the voice of the sector heard by the public in **a structured campaign**. Roughly speaking, this phase can be divided into three stages. a) Preparation and investigation; b) Designing a campaign; c) Launching a campaign.

Preparation and investigation include a thorough analysis of the legal framework and research findings on the subject. (It may well be that this is the most time-consuming part of preparing a campaign, but it is a must.) The preparation also includes investigating cases in which others have found themselves in comparable situations in the past. Referring to this, the AEC offers good conditions for providing valuable information due to its Europe-wide scope and perspective.

An illustrative real-life example from AEC's everyday practice is the fight for having higher music education institutions recognised at equal footing with universities by their own national government. This process has taken place in all European nation states over the past decades, but mostly without any coordination among the different countries. In some nation states, this process is either very advanced or even complete, in some cases it has not even started. This is just one example of how extremely valuable intra-European exchange can be to learn from the successes and mistakes of others.

Another crucial action in preparing a campaign is to identify elements that might help or hinder the campaign.

- Are there like-minded people to form alliances with?
- Are there conflicting narratives, and are those conflicting narratives worth referring to, and if so, how should this be done?
- Which stakeholders are there that the campaign should address in addition to the political decision-makers?
- Is there a need to develop separate narratives to address these stakeholders?

Here, too, it can be referred to the already mentioned example of the fight for the recognition of higher music education as equal to university education. In some cases, it was not primarily politics that blocked the recognition of higher music and art education, but university rectors or union representatives protecting the privileges of their clientele. What narrative can and should be used to convince these stakeholders to act in favour of the concerns and needs of the higher arts education sector?

Last but not least, before starting a campaign, goals must be formulated that are concise, understandable and realistic.

When designing a campaign, **it is about the elaboration of the narrative or the narratives as such, storytelling and the production of images** - both metaphors and images in their physical form (visual identity, corporate design, photos, videos, posters, etc.). Storytelling is becoming increasingly important when doing advocacy. It is crucial to create a version that tells a story in a few words so as not to lose the target's attention.

Launching a campaign means: writing emails, posting on social media, organising events, raising credibility through testimonials etc. There is a long list of options and possible actions, and there is no one size fits all. That's why we will not go into more detail at this point. Part of an AEC advocacy strategy, however, should also be to empower members to develop tools suited to serve their needs by their own on a case-by-case basis. It is particularly important to keep in mind that the process of developing, implementing and disseminating an advocacy campaign must always be open to dynamic adjustments in the process. Because no campaign goes exactly as planned at the beginning. In this sense, running a campaign is less like performing a Beethoven symphony than playing a football match.

(2) Which tools are suited to make contact with the different target groups as part of an overarching AEC Advocacy Strategy?

The political decision-makers, especially in the field of European policy, are the core target group of the AEC advocacy activities. Although national states have legislative power in the areas of culture and education, European organisations still have considerable influence over the shaping of the political framework in the sectors of culture and education. On the one hand, by making recommendations for a coordinated, cross-border approach in these areas (examples include the Bologna Declaration and the recommendation to earmark at least 2% of the Corona Recovery Funds for arts and culture). But even more powerful are the funding programmes set up by the European Union to support projects in the fields of art and culture (Creative Europe), education (Erasmus+) and research (Horizon). It therefore makes absolute sense to advise, support and monitor the political decision-makers in the process of developing and preparing the launch of political agenda, concrete actions and funding programmes. In this process, the AEC takes on the role of an expert in the field who represents the interests of its members, or to say it with the words of AEC's slogan: ['AEC is the leading voice for higher music education in Europe'](#). The target groups of corresponding advocacy actions are the Members of the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union, the European Commission or the Directorate General Education, Youth, Sport and Culture ([DG EAC](#)), as well as their subordinate operational units such as [FACEA](#) and [EYCS](#).

It is evident that it very often makes sense to form strategic alliances together with other actors and organisations active in the music and art sector at European level, in particular if it's about concrete actions as described in the previous section. In fact, there is a tightly woven network in which the most important players are involved. A distinction must be made between organisations that are active in the same or a similar sector but have a different focus than the AEC, as is the case with [EMU](#) (music schools), [EAS](#) (music classroom teachers), [ELIA](#) (higher arts education), [GEECT / Cilect](#) (higher film & media education), [SAR](#) (Artistic Research), [PEARLE*](#) (Orchestras & venues), [EPASA \(Student representation\)](#), [ENCATC](#) (cultural management & policy) and such organisations that have more the role of an overarching

umbrella organisation, such as the [European and International Music Council](#) and [Culture Action Europe](#). It happens that in concrete actions the AEC and individual partners set different priorities, but actual conflicts of interest are very rare in this kind of cooperation. The question here is not so much which advocacy tools to use in contact with these partners, but rather which tools to develop together to address one of the other above-mentioned target groups.

Joint actions are often carried out as immediate reactions to current events that affect all players in the field equally. These can be joint statements on political decisions (e.g. budget cuts) or events (e.g. support for partner institutions in Ukraine). However, there can also be medium- or long-term joint actions (e.g. to promote gender justice), some of which also include the pooling of forces in the areas of analysis and research (e.g. actions to improve the recognition of artistic research).

In addition to these above-mentioned, more reactive joint actions, it also makes sense to form consortia of joint advocacy in order to proactively intervene in the shaping of politics. The EU regularly launches policy papers, such as the [New European Agenda for Culture](#), the [Council Work Plan for Culture](#) or the [European Education Area](#), to name only a few, the adoption of which is preceded by months of planning and hearings. In order to make the concerns of the sector better heard, it is extremely helpful if the entire sector speaks with one voice.

The situation is similar when it comes to addressing the other players in the higher education sector. However, conflicting interests do come to light more frequently in these contacts, especially when it comes to promoting understanding for the special needs and requirements of the higher arts education sector, which is easily seen to be an annoying little partner that is constantly demanding special treatment. What is crucial here, is to turn *passive opponents* (i.e. players who have different interests than AEC has, but who do not act openly and actively against it) into *passive supporters* (i.e. supporting the distinct and diverging interests of the higher music education sector by meeting them with benevolence and understanding) which does still not mean that they would necessarily actively campaign for them. The difference between passive opponents and passive supporters in that sense may seem marginal at first glance, but might make the notable difference at the end of the day.

Of course, **it makes sense for the various players from the fields of art and culture to join forces**. In addition, promising approaches are, on the one hand, to identify individuals in positions of power among e.g. the representatives of the university organisations, in particular EUA, who are familiar with the music sector and are known and valued for their experience in that field, and on the other hand to suggest political decision-makers to test a special feature or policy for the higher music education sector, arguing that the AEC can act as a guinea pig for further development of the same feature for other structures or disciplines.

A topic that reveals a variety of overlaps with different sectors is the use of artificial intelligence (AI). The application of AI and its legal and ethical, but also pedagogical, artistic, communicative and technical implications urgently require joint advocacy. When it comes to the pedagogical aspects of the topic, it is worth joining forces with the representatives of the major universities and their associations, when it comes to the creative and artistic aspects, it makes particularly sense to act jointly with representatives of the CCS, etc.

Cooperation with the business sector is two-fold and probably the most challenging of all advocacy actions. On the one hand, there are the representatives of the music business, some of whom are also organised in associations at European level, but who might pursue different interests than the rest of the music sector. They tend to exploit other associations for their own interests, but are at the same time reluctant to support actions that do not directly serve their own interests. The task of an advocacy strategy will be to develop suitable tools to lead these associations and organisations out of their role as opponents and make them partners who collaborate and join forces to promote the well-being of the music sector as a whole.

Cooperation with non-cultural and non-educational players from the business sector is even more blurry, because it is often not clear what the shared interests are and how sustainable it is to act jointly once a common ground has been found. As target groups of advocacy actions, the business sector is particularly important when it comes to acquiring private funding. Also this sector is largely unstructured, and that's why it is often dealt with on a case-by-case basis. It is undoubtedly a huge, but also very challenging task, which the AEC should take on in the long run.

The last of the target groups identified in chapter 4 was referred to as the 'society at large'. It's always worth stepping out of one's own bubble, to talk about one's own bubble in unfamiliar contexts and to engage in discussions about the values and shared beliefs of one's own community. Especially in recent times, when the contribution of art and music to societal well-being is more and more subject of a public debate, there are also more opportunities to engage in the public discourse and to shape it proactively. It would be the worst of all possible options to withdraw into the ivory tower in order to act out one's own values in supposed splendid isolation. Again, there are opportunities to form alliances with other sectors (e.g. environmentalists, education and health professionals, anti-discrimination groups) that might provide opportunities to make music more visible in societal discourses.

Dialogue with a broader audience needs to be learned. Tools that should be developed and tested include something like a 'translation aid kit' that explains in simple language what musicians do and why they depend on certain things to be able to do their job, and what added value the outcome of their work brings to society. At the end of the day, the ability to present one's own concerns in easy-to-understand language will also be helpful when advocating vis-à-vis politicians, journalists and potential sponsors.

But despite all efforts to develop and use tools, it must always be kept in mind that tools are always related to topics. Tools don't mean a thing if it's not tools to solve topic specific issues. Moreover, it should also be emphasized that developing advocacy tools is not only top down. The variety and heterogeneity of the conditions and requirements that the individual AEC member institutions find down on ground, are also an opportunity for developing and testing tailor-made tools at the micro level. In this sense, it is also part of the AEC Advocacy Strategy to be a place to collect and showcase good practice examples developed bottom up by members.

(3) How can the AEC empower its members to successfully engage in advocacy themselves?

Generally spoken, all rules and principles described under (1) and (2) also apply whenever AEC members practise advocacy independently and in those contexts which are relevant to them. As a rule, it is not the goal of advocacy actions carried out at local or regional level to

influence legislative measures or to engage in drawing up major political agenda. It is often a question of promoting and supporting measures of limited scope. This does not mean that these measures would be less effective or less important than helping to shape major politics. The other way round, experiences from advocacy work in the micro area can also be experimental fields for advocacy in a larger context. A good example of this is the principle of so-called *positive advocacy*.

Positive advocacy can be seen as a synonym for preventive advocacy describing preventive action in the sense of not only reacting once there are real threats in the air, such as the announcement of financial cuts for cultural institutions or actions putting the autonomy of an institution or freedom of teaching at risk. Positive advocacy aims to keep the public aware of the significance of one's own institution, one's own activities, the goals of one's own activities and the contribution of one's own actions to societal well-being. Brussels, for example, is overflowing with stakeholders spending their day pointing out how important they are. One way to strengthen visibility in this crowd is to have clear answers to the four following questions.

a) Why is higher music education relevant? Why is my institution relevant?

Above all, it is important to explain clearly and in a way that everyone can understand what contribution the higher music education sector makes to society. Make your position clear and tell a story that is better than the story others are telling. The significance of storytelling has already been mentioned in the beginning of this chapter.

b) Are you credible and are your concerns presented with credibility?

Make clear that you are not just speaking for yourself, but for your colleagues, your students or even the sector as a whole - even if it might differ from case to case how this sector is defined. If you can't agree on common interests or priorities within the sector, find a compromise or a middle ground and focus on intersections and commonalities. Ask those sharing your interest and your stakeholders for a statement on the matter. Film this testimonial or ask your fellow stakeholders to film themselves when speaking. Use anecdotes, put a human face on it. Make use of social media to disseminate your message.

3) How up-to-date are your concerns?

Come with the right information at the right time. Focus your activities and energy on a few selected goals and keep these issues permanently present. Try to keep up with the latest developments, respond to the current debate. Avoid generalisation (e.g. laments about the decline of the sector) and avoid telling old stories. Check beforehand with whom you are speaking and what goals and interests your interlocutor is pursuing. Do some research to understand their priorities and think about how you can meet their expectations.

4) How can you make sure your voice is heard?

Once again: Creating synergies with partners is key (this is especially important for a rather small sector like music and higher music education) and avoid double representation. Get the attention of relevant people. Offer to your conversation partners a convincing argument as to why they should listen to you. Give the political decision makers a reason to take immediate action. Use social media as a tool. Think about how you can convince the recipient of your message with 40 characters and personalise your message.

6. Key messages of a revised AEC Advocacy Strategy

The AEC has dealt with an advocacy strategy already in the past. A first comprehensive advocacy strategy to which the introduction of this text referred, has been endorsed by the AEC Council in 2018. This document defines the interests of AEC and presents in a more general way also tools and target groups. In addition, *Goals and Objectives* as well as content-related *Areas of Advocacy* are listed. The work which has been done in this respect already in 2018 should be the starting point for a revision and, if necessary, a reassessment of the goals and of the content of a new advocacy strategy. **Key messages of a new AEC advocacy strategy should then be derived from the results of this revision.**

The 2018 AEC Advocacy Strategy mentions as goals and objectives of an outward-oriented (i.e. addressing political decision-makers and external stakeholders) advocacy:

- *Awareness* = strengthening arts and culture in society and at the same time strengthening the society and social cohesion through arts and culture (new audiences, digitisation, innovating learning & teaching etc.)
- *Communication* = informing policy makers, stakeholders, citizens as well as the own community and seeking dialogue with them through events, publications, digital and social media.
- *Accessibility* = promoting the accessibility of musical educational offers for every human being and at all levels (covering the whole range from Early Childhood Music Education to high level artistic performance training).
- *Recognition* = making fully effective the recognition of music higher education on equal terms with university offers (this includes teaching, research, degrees and more) and the mutual recognition of educational offers from abroad.
- *Funding* = access to EU funding and project collaboration with partners on shared issues.

On the one hand, the question should be asked whether the system should be adopted and, if necessary, supplemented, or whether it should be rewritten. In a second step, the question should be asked whether the goals need to be updated and whether they might also be prioritised.

The part of an AEC Advocacy Strategy described in 2018 as *Areas of Advocacy* is a mix of content to be promoted through advocacy actions and sub-goals associated with that content. Although a certain prioritisation as to which content the individual sub-goals might be assigned to seems to be obvious, a clear and explicit assignment was deliberately avoided. In detail these are:

- *at the level of content or areas:*
 - Higher Music Education,
 - the Music sector,
 - the Art sector,
 - the societal sector
 - Artistic Research,
 - General education,
 - Participation,
 - Election campaigns.

- *at the level of the sub-goals these are:*
 - promoting diversity,
 - promoting excellence,
 - promoting equity and inclusion,
 - promoting music education,
 - encouraging quality enhancement in HME,
 - investigating and testing innovative practices,
 - fostering the value of music and music education in society,
 - raising social awareness and responsibility,
 - engaging in political opinion making,
 - acting as a trend scout in the field.

In particular the second of these lists, needs a thorough review. When doing so, it should be noted that with both of the lists the last two terms are somehow alien to the system. In the first list, *participation* and *election campaigns* are neither content nor areas, but in the one case more of a guiding principle (*participation*), in the other case an opportunity to launch an advocacy action (*election campaign*).

In the second list, '*engaging in political opinion making*' and '*acting as a trend scout in the field*' are not goals but actions. It is therefore necessary to examine the extent to which this system can or must be modified and supplemented in such a way that coherent and consistent key messages to be addressed by an AEC advocacy can be derived from a corresponding system. In this process, however, the feedback from the questionnaires (see chapter 3) should have a prominent role.

The 2018 paper mentions *quality, values and collaboration* as overarching principles and thus suggests what kind of concluding key messages this could be, above all because these terms are also in line with the titles of the 3 pillars of those in the AEC Strategic Plan 2016-2023:

- Fostering the value of music and music education in society
- Enhancing quality in Higher Music Education
- Promoting participation, inclusiveness and diversity

7. Implementation timeline

by 3 May 2023	Gathering feedback from the AEC Council on the draft AEC Advocacy strategy	done
by 31 July 2023	Revision of the draft AEC advocacy strategy by the Artemis advocacy TF	done
26 August 2023	Adopting the new AEC Advocacy strategy by the AEC Council	
by end of September 2023	Developing exemplary tools and drafting an AEC Advocacy toolkit for its members	

November 2023	Workshop at the AEC Congress on Advocacy	
2024	Implementing the AEC advocacy strategy on different levels	