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Bachelor Circus Arts
Codarts Rotterdam
University of the Arts

Report of the extensive programme assessment
31 May 2024

September 2024
www.AeQui.nl
Assessment Agency for Higher Education

Colophon

Programme
Codarts Rotterdam
University of the Arts
Rotterdam

Bachelor: Bachelor of Arts
Location: Rotterdam
Mode: full-time
Croho-number: 34128

Panel
Ab Groen, chair
Ute Classen, member
Adrian Porter, member
Steven Vos, member
Fleur van Stratum, student member
Jesseka Batteau, secretary
The panel was presented to the NVAO for approval.
The panel assessed on the basis of NVAO Framework 2018

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Summary

On 31 May an assessment panel of AeQui evaluated the Bachelor Circus Arts at Codarts Rotterdam. This four-year, full-time programme consists of 240 ECTS and aims to educate broadly employable circus artists with a distinctive signature who can shape their own working environment and work interdisciplinary, have a reflective and inquisitive attitude and are active in multiple professional contexts. Based on the site visit, the discussions, and the documentation, the panel concludes that the programme meets each standard, and that the overall quality of the programme **meets** the required standard for a bachelor's programme in circus arts.

Intended learning outcomes

The intended learning outcomes are in accordance with the expected (inter)national level and orientation of a Bachelor of Circus Arts and are qualified as satisfactory. The programme has formulated a professional profile and matching learning outcomes in close consultation with the (international) professional and educational fields. The panel judges that the 11 competencies – subdivided in four professional roles – are concrete and adequate, meeting the current demands of the working field. The programme succeeds in keeping its goals and intended learning outcomes up to date through its strong professional network as well as through the professional experience of its teachers and guest teachers and the involvement of external experts in the assessments. The panel assesses that the programme **meets** standard 1.

Curriculum

The panel is positive about the content and orientation of the programme. From the start, there is a strong professional orientation in the curriculum content and build-up, with a focus on all the necessary professional skills and roles, which integrate knowledge, technical abilities, artistic vision and critical reflection as well as professional responsibility and attitude. Thanks to the involvement of professional, permanent teachers and guest teachers, the recurring individual and collective projects and the strong focus on a sustainable professional circus career, students receive the necessary preparation for future employment as an independent circus artist who can work in an interdisciplinary manner. The panel is positive that the programme has made adjustments to the research line in the curriculum, which is now more aimed at the development of the student as a reflective art practitioner. The programme offers a close-knit and energetic study community as well as a rich student-centred study environment, which revolves around artistic identity and development of the students. Throughout the programme, there is a strong focus on health, safety and wellbeing, teaching students to develop a professional attitude that contributes to a healthy and safe circus art practice. The programme offers an extensive intake-procedure that ensures that qualifications and wishes of incoming students are aligned with the content and goals of the programme. The panel assesses that the programme **meets** standards 2, 3, 4 and 5.

Staff

The panel appreciates the expertise and experience of the staff members of the programme. The appointment of two coordinators and the increase of permanent teachers has improved the quality of education, which now benefits from more continuity. The team is highly qualified, has strong professional networks and experience and is cohesive and dedicated. The close collaboration with the Student Life team and the awareness of health and wellbeing issues ensures that the staff is well equipped to deliver responsible and professional circus artists. Teachers are described by students as knowledgeable, experienced, committed and

demanding, and very supportive of their aims and goals. The panel assesses that the programme **meets** standard 6.

Facilities and support

The panel is impressed by the material facilities and positive about the tutoring system. The accommodations and material facilities are state of the art, and the fact that there is on-site support for the health and wellbeing of the students makes for an excellent material and supportive infrastructure for performing artists. The panel praises the integrated and collaborative approach of tutoring in the circus arts programme, as well as the broad range of (para) medical specialists available to the circus arts students. The 'Team Around the Artist'-approach (TATA) is unique and highly effective in its holistic approach.
The panel assesses that the programme **meets** standards 7 and 8.

Quality assurance

The panel is positive about the way the programme implements its quality assurance system and succeeds in sustaining an open and critical culture of continual improvement. Teachers, staff and students, as well as the professional field are actively involved in the PDCA-cycle and their input leads to concrete improvements in the study programme.
The panel assesses that the programme **meets** standard 9.

Assessment

The panel is positive about the assessment system and procedures of the programme. The panel has established that the assessments of the programme are valid, objective and transparent due to the use of standard assessment forms, the application of the multiple-eyes principle for practical assessments and the involvement of external assessors during assessments and the proactive role of the examination board. The panel was satisfied with how the graduation projects and products were assessed by the programme.
The panel assesses that the programme **meets** standard 10.

Achieved learning outcomes

The theses and final graduation performances (individual and group) meet the required level of a bachelor's degree in circus arts and demonstrate that the students have achieved the necessary competencies for a career in the performance arts. The theses show that students have acquired the necessary (applied) research skills and that they can appropriately report on their findings. The careers of the alumni prove that the programme is successful in training circus artists who can find employment as performers in companies and productions and as teachers in various circus institutions. Representatives of the working field are highly appreciative of how the programme has developed in recent years, emphasising the importance of Circus Arts for the domain through the education of competent, innovative and independent circus artists.
The panel assesses that the programme **meets** standard 11.

Distinctive feature

The panel observes that the distinctive feature 'Health and Wellbeing' for which the programme has applied is unique, relevant and implemented concretely within the given programme. It judges that this distinctive profile is thoroughly embedded in the DNA of the programme and that students benefit in many ways from Codarts system of support: Student Life. The programme in Circus Arts distinguishes itself from other circus art programmes through the unique way the support system has been operationalised, establishing close collaborations between the Student Life team and educational staff members. The panel highly values integration of health, education and research,

and is very much impressed by the professional way the support system is continuously improving through evidence-based research conducted within the professorship Performing Arts Medicine. Over the course of years this innovative approach of health and wellbeing in the arts has developed from curative to preventative to performance enhancement.

Based on the interviews and underlying documentation, the panel finds that the programme **meets** the three criteria of the distinctive feature 'Health and Wellbeing'.

Recommendations

The panel has formulated the following recommendations which will contribute to the further enhancement of the programme's quality in the future:

- The panel supports the programme in its intentions to invest more in the Dutch infrastructure for preparatory trajectories in circus arts to ensure the quality of incoming Dutch students. This also implies a wider strategy for grassroots preparatory trajectory to ensure that its student population is sufficiently diverse and represents the diversity of Dutch society.
- The panel appreciates that students can choose to do research in the Theoretical Graudation Project (TAP) aimed at producing something else than a written thesis. The panel encourages the programme to align the goals and assessment criteria of the TAP to strengthen the assessment of an alternative product.
- The panel also concludes that there is some room for improvement when it comes encouraging more artistic experimentation in theory trajectory to support the students' artistic profile development. This needs to be thought through carefully and made clearer in the goals of the TAP.
- The panel sees room for improvement when it comes to the assessment of the final performances and urges the programme to make the feedback of the external jury to the student on the artistic process more explicit.
- The panel applauds the growing and close-knit community of circus arts alumni and encourages the programme to formalise the infrastructure for its alumni since they are important ambassadors for Codarts circus arts and the circus arts domain in the Netherlands.
- The panel is very positive about the implementation of the distinctive feature Health and Wellbeing, which is integral the DNA of the programme. So much so that students are sometimes not aware of the benefits of this unique evidence-based support structure. The panel spurs the programme to keep making explicit why the research and data collection are important and that they are essential to a healthy and durable artistic career.

The assessment was carried out according to the schedule presented in attachment 2. The panel has carried out its assessment in relation to, and in consideration of, the cluster of programmes in which this programme is placed. The contextualisation of the programme within its cluster (Circus Arts) was conducted by the complete panel during the preliminary meeting and the final deliberations. The knowledge required for this was present in (part of) the panel.

The programme has made several developments, based on the results of the former assessment (see attachment 3). The panel considered these developments as an integral part of the current assessment.

The committee assessed the programme in an independent way; at the close of the visit, the chair of the assessment committee presented the initial findings of the committee to representatives of the programme. All standards of the NVAO assessment framework are assessed positively; the assessment panel therefore awards a **positive recommendation** for the accreditation of the programme. The three criteria of the distinctive feature 'Health and Wellbeing' were also evaluated positively by the panel. On that basis, the panel gives a **positive recommendation** around retaining the distinctive feature for the Circus Arts programme.

On behalf of the entire assessment panel,
Utrecht, September 2024,

Ab Groen,
Chair

Jesseka Batteau
Secretary

Intended learning outcomes

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

Findings

Profile and learning outcomes

The bachelor's programme aims to train circus artists with a distinctive signature who can shape their working environment and work in an interdisciplinary manner, have a reflective and inquisitive attitude and are active in multiple professional contexts. When the programme started in 2006, there was no national professional profile for circus arts in the Netherlands. The professional profile was developed in close consultation with the international field (Montreal, Paris, Stockholm and Brussels) and the set of qualifications defined by the co-founder and director of the École Nationale de Cirque de Montréal in Canada. These anchor points, together with Dublin Descriptor framework, form the foundation of the 11 learning outcomes of the circus arts programme. In turn, the learning outcomes are divided into four professional roles (which structure all of the educational programmes at Codarts): artist, creator/performer, researcher and entrepreneur. Each of the roles stresses a different aspect of the professional circus artist. Incorporated into these roles, and in line with Codarts' vision on sustainability, is the programme's aim to train students in taking responsibility for their own health, wellbeing and learning process so that they can maintain sustainable, safe and healthy art practices in the working field after graduation. This aspect of the intended learning outcomes will be discussed in more depth in the chapter on the distinctive feature.

In 2023, the programme started a review of the learning outcomes and the related (learning lines in the) curriculum through a working session with the teachers. This reflection on profile, learning outcomes, and the curriculum structure will be continued in the following years.

Specialisations

Students enter the programme with a chosen specialisation and can only switch if they meet specified requirements. At present, the programme teaches the following specialisations:

- applied floor acrobatics: dance/acro and integrated acrobatics in performance;
- aerials skills: static trapeze, dance trapeze, duo trapeze, aerial hoop, vertical rope, straps, aerial silks;
- balancing skills: hand balancing in combination with object manipulation, hand balancing, walking globe;
- chinese pole;
- cyr wheel;
- object manipulation: balls, clubs, diabolo, rings, non-conventional objects, and materials;
- partner acrobatics: banquine, hand to hand, Icarian;
- teeterboard;
- tight wire.

Links with the professional and educational field

When the programme started at Codarts, it was the only bachelor's programme in circus arts in the Netherlands. However, since the previous assessment, the recognition and visibility of circus arts as art discipline has improved considerably and the circus (cultural and educational) infrastructure has grown and blossomed. At the moment, there is one other Dutch circus arts programme, at Fontys hogeschool, under a

different CROHO number. The profiles of the two programmes are different, not only in the way the curriculum is organised but also with regard to the kinds of specialisms that are offered. Collaborations already exist between both programmes (a project and a joint Master of Choreography) and there is the intention to intensify exchange concerning the alignment of learning outcomes and the national profile.

The programme ensures that its objectives are aligned with the developments and requirements of the profession in several ways. The programme designs and monitors its own professional profile in close consultation with experts from the international professional and educational fields and through exchange with different professional circus and art programmes, as well as with a wide range of regional, national and international institutes, companies, festivals, organisations, agents and producers in the performance arts. Codarts partakes in, and actively contributes to, the network of FEDEC (Fédération Européenne Des Écoles de Cirque Professionnelles). The Codarts programme also stays attuned to developments in the field through the experience and networks of its teaching staff who are themselves professionals in the fields of circus and performing arts. It has many contacts in the professional national and international field of theatre, dance and circus and invites these professionals to presentations and graduation shows of the students. The coordinator of year 3 and 4 is involved in the international network circusnext-european label, the European platform for emerging Circus artists, and thus stays attuned to the most recent and innovative developments in the field. The alumni of the programme are quite entrepreneurial and play a significant role in building a vibrant and dynamic professional field. Finally, the involvement of external experts in the assessments of the graduation show ensure that the programme receives valuable feedback and input on its level and learning outcomes.

Considerations

The panel is positive about the level, orientation and profile of the programme. It fully supports the programme's aims to educate technically skilled, independent circus artists with a distinctive artistic signature who can contribute to shaping and innovating the professional circus arts field, while maintaining a healthy and sustainable circus arts practice. In fact, the panel concluded that level and orientation can be qualified of potentially exceeding bachelor level.

In its discussions with management, staff and teachers, the panel could establish that there is a strongly shared understanding of the programme's aims and profile, and a sincere drive to keep developing and improving. According to the panel, the programme ensures that its goals and profile remain relevant and up-to-date through its excellent ties with the professional field, regionally, nationally as well as internationally, through the professional experience of its teachers and the involvement of external experts in the assessments.

The assessment panel establishes that the programme **meets** standard 1.

Curriculum

Orientation

Standard 2: The curriculum enables the students to master appropriate (professional or academic) research and professional skills.

Findings

Professional orientation

The circus arts programme aims to train students to become independent performers/creators who can find employment in the dynamic and interdisciplinary field of the performing arts. The study programme offers circus specialisation classes in small groups and a broad interdisciplinary range of subjects in group classes in various basic circus techniques, artistic creative skills, physical preparation, research skills, health and wellbeing and entrepreneurial skills. The panel observes that the curriculum offers a broad range of subjects and that students are prepared for a professional career through the creation and presentation of individual and collective artistic acts at regular intervals throughout the programme. In the presentation of the individual acts in year one, two and three, students are responsible for the full production, which includes communication with the technicians, the riggers, hosting and PR & marketing. The experience of working in a collective is gained through the annual group productions, directed by a choreographer or a theatre- or circus director from the international professional field. During these creation processes they learn how to combine the knowledge from the artistic creative classes with their specialisation, take responsibility for the production and how to work individually as well as collectively.

In addition to the training students receive in producing their own acts, the programme offers students valuable opportunities for exchange with the professional field: through collaborations with professional companies (for example Scapino Ballet Rotterdam), workshops and masterclasses from guest teachers from the professional field, residencies (Theater op de Markt, Pelt, Belgium; Perplx, Kortrijk, Belgium); attending international performances, festivals and competitions. Also, the programme offers opportunities for interdisciplinary exchange with other departments of Codarts and stimulates joint projects with other circus schools.

Thanks to temporary governmental funding (Kwaliteitsafspraken), the programme was able to offer students personal guidance by artistic coaches throughout the whole programme (whereas before the coaches were only available in the fourth year). The artistic coaches are professionals - mostly international artists and directors - with a lot of experience and valuable networks which students can benefit from. The programme aims to make this a structural feature in the guidance of students.

Internship, entrepreneurial classes and professional development module

Students are encouraged to follow internships at circus companies and other cultural institutions (opera and dance companies). The internship is not part of the curriculum at this point, but the programme is considering incorporating this so that all students have the opportunity to acquire key professional experience which will help them after graduation and credit points. This will imply making choices as to which modules can be replaced or altered to make room for the internship.

The programme offers entrepreneurship classes in year 3 in which students learn about all aspects involved in forming and promoting a collective. Experts in the field of marketing, promo-

tion and/or production are invited to these classes. In the fourth year, the orientation of the entrepreneurship classes shifts from a collective approach to the promotion of the individual projects of the students.

The programme evaluates the professional development of students every semester in the first three years. It takes the following aspects into account: active participation in class, creative and active research attitude, the application of corrections, attendance in class (physical and mental presence), the ability to prepare for class (being on time and equipped for class/rehearsal and handing in assignments in time etc.), the ability to inform their teachers concerning relevant issues and the ability to communicate in a respectful matter. They must pass this module in the first year to continue their studies.

Sustainable circus career

An important part of the professional development as a performing artist concerns learning how to stay healthy mentally and physically and how to build a sustainable career. The programme approaches this from a holistic perspective and offers different modules and support structures to accommodate this. Physical Preparation programme is not only aimed at becoming physically strong and resilient but is also about awareness and attitude as a professional circus artist. In the intermediate tests the teachers evaluate the progress of the student and decide together with them if changes are needed in the goals or the way of training.

The Student Life Monitor (part of the award-winning Student Life and Team Around the Artist-approach of Codarts) is another important tool that is used to monitor the physical and mental health of students. It is aimed at helping them learn more effectively and take ownership of their health and development from the moment of intake up until year three. The data are used to continuously evaluate and develop the curriculum (intensity, planning, approach, methods, etc.) in close consultation with teachers, students, and external partners. For more on Student Life and the Team Around the Artist, see Standard 4 and the distinctive feature.

Research

Critical reflection, analytical and research skills are addressed throughout the programme as important competencies that students need to incorporate into their professional artistic practice. In the theoretical classes of Circus History and Art Orientation, students are taught to reflect on their own profession and the surrounding world. They learn to reflect, analyse, write and present. These skills are further developed in the research-based theoretical graduation project (TAP) in the fourth year. Students are free to choose their own subject, which must be related to their artistic practice. Guided by research coaches, students formulate a research question that is related to their own artistic practice, conduct practice-based research and present the results to an audience. They are offered classes in research skills and research coaches are appointed to help them formulate their research question, structure the research project and follow the methodological requirements. Students are free to choose what kind of end product they want to deliver for the TAP, this can either be a written thesis or an alternative product.

Considerations

The panel is positive about the way the progamme prepares students for a professional career in circus arts. From admission onwards, there is a strong professional orientation in the curriculum content and build-up, with a focus on all the necessary professional skills and roles, which integrate knowledge, technical abilities,

artistic vision and critical reflection as well as professional responsibility and attitude.
The panel observes that the Codarts programme has established and maintains a relevant network with the professional working and educational fields of circus and performing arts. Thanks to the involvement of professional, permanent teachers and guest teachers, the recurring individual and collective projects and the strong focus on a sustainable professional circus career, students receive the necessary preparation for future employment as a circus artist. The panel also values the interdisciplinary orientation of the programme which is visible in the projects of the students and the many collaborations with regional, national and international partners. In its discussions during the site visit, the panel observed that students and alumni are very satisfied with how the programme prepares them for the circus art profession, and that they benefit greatly from the extensive and diverse networks of the Codarts programme.
The panel sees that the programme has been able to extend and intensify its connections with the wider professional field (regionally, nationally and internationally), and that it has itself, through the education of talented and inspiring circus artists, actively contributed to the development of a vibrant and lively infrastructure for circus arts in the domain.

The internship is not yet part of the curriculum itself, and the panel thinks it is indeed worth considering whether this should be a fixed feature of the programme since it is an excellent opportunity for students to gain practical experience and also offers a natural entryway into the professional domain.

The panel applauds that the programme has taken previous recommendations of the former assessment to heart and has made adjustments to the research line within the programme which is now more aimed at the development of the student as a reflective art practitioner. The panel encourages the programme to continue along this path and to investigate how the theoretical graduation project may be even more firmly connected to the artistic profile of the student, for example by formulating the goals of TAP more explicitly in relation to the student's artistic identity and bringing the assessment criteria in line with this approach.
The assessment panel establishes that the programme **meets** this standard.

Contents

Standard 3: The contents of the curriculum enable students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

Findings

The bachelor's programme is a four-year, full-time programme consisting of 240 EC and is taught in English. The specialisation classes form the core of the curriculum – in the first year 4 hours per week, in years 2-4 this is 8 hours a week – in which students aim to achieve a high technical level.

Year 1 and 2

The first two years are formative and offer students a solid basis for their artistic practice in the years to come. To become acquainted with the various circus disciplines, students in year 1 and 2 are trained in various basic circus techniques such as floor acrobatics, partner acrobatics, balancing skills, spatial awareness and object manipulation. These techniques are also used in group productions as well as in the professional working field. Next to circus discipline classes, there are group classes in artistic creative subjects such as dance, theatre training, music, improvisation and composition. Through different types of assignments (solos and duets)

students learn to develop their own style and stage presence. Collective making and collaboration is taught through group production. Laban Movement Analysis provides the tools to analyse, create and improve movement in combination with circus skills. Students are also trained in matters of safety, rigging and the use of circus materials. The focus on health and wellbeing can be found in the daily, physical preparatory classes, performance preparation classes as well as a weekly class with a physiotherapist and anatomy teacher.

First and second year students follow a daily class of physical preparation (PP), which can be ballet training, core training, flexibility, or resistance training. It allows students to become more aware of their posture, breathing, alignment and to improve their strength, speed, coordination, stamina and flexibility. It teaches students to train responsibly and sustainably and to analyse and solve any problems they encounter in their artistic practice.

Year 3 and 4

In the third and fourth years, the focus shifts to the student's individual development and the integration of all the various aspects that are part of a circus arts practice. Students are allowed to participate in work placements in the profession (internships) or take part in an exchange with another school within the FEDEC network. In the physical preparation (PP) classes, students develop their own individual training and warm-up programme tailored to their circus specialisation. In the entrepreneurship classes, students are confronted with all aspects involved in forming and promoting a collective. Experts in the field of marketing, promotion and/or production are invited to these classes to share their experiences.

The fourth year is focused on the graduation trajectory. There are limited group classes and there is more individual coaching. The entrepreneurship classes shift from the collective to the promotion of the students' individual projects. The research skills initiated in years 1 and 2 are further developed in the research-based theoretical graduation project (TAP) which ends in a thesis or an alternative end product (see standard 2). The final exams consist of conceiving and developing a graduation act and performing in a group production, directed by a circus director. These are presented in professional theatres and assessed by a committee with representatives from the (inter)national working field.

During the site visit, the panel spoke to students and alumni of the programme. They indicated that they were very satisfied with the content of the programme, offering them not only the opportunity to hone their skills in their specialisation but also teaching them to develop and integrate the various competencies necessary for a career in the circus arts. They showed much appreciation for the interdisciplinary approach of the programme, as well as for the expertise, dedication and high standards of the staff members.

Considerations

The panel concludes that the content of the programme meets the required level, has an appropriate build-up, and is challenging, inspiring, and well-tailored to the needs of the individual students. The panel is very positive about the way the issues of safety, health and wellbeing have been fully integrated into the curriculum. This finding is supported by the panel's conversations with students and alumni, who are without exception very positive about what the programme offers them with regard to their own specialisation, the opportunities for (interdisciplinary) collaboration, the system of care, safety

and wellbeing, and other supporting subjects which help them become independent, broadly skilled circus artists.

The assessment panel establishes that the programme **meets** this standard.

Structure

Standard 4: The structure of the curriculum encourages study and enables students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

Findings

The educational concept of the bachelor's programme ties in with the Codarts' vision. Next to the six core values structuring each educational programme at Codarts (craftsmanship, self-management, diversity, inquisitiveness, sustainability and connectivity), the bachelor's programme subscribes to the Codarts didactical concept, which views learning as an active process in which students are expected to take responsibility for their development as a professional. The learning processes of students within the programme are supported and stimulated by a learning environment that is student-centered, varied in theoretical and practical work forms, with many opportunities for collaborative learning in professional settings.

The artistic identity of the student is leading for the programme and addressed from the moment of admission. The programme aims to support, question and reinforce the artistic identity of its students in every phase of the programme. To achieve this, the programme implements the 'Team Around the Artist'-approach. This means that different professionals (teachers, artistic coaches, study career coaches (SLB), administrative services and the performing arts health team) work collaboratively and in an integrated manner to support the students in their development.

Collaborations with other schools and disciplines are an important ingredient of the learning environment. For example, during the annual Kick Off Week, incoming circus, dance and music students work in small groups on a cross-over project, guided by two coaches. In the recurring project weeks students are offered masterclasses and workshops that add to their regular programme and allow for collaborations with other departments. Furthermore, the programme collaborates with circus schools abroad, such as Flic (Italy) and CRAC de Lomme (France). The programme also organises an annual reflection day in which students, teaching and non-teaching staff and alumni participate with presentations by professionals around a certain theme, for example on artistic identity, artistic research and social-artistic awareness.

Social safety

Social safety is an important theme for the programme, even more so after the COVID-19 pandemic, since some students faced mental and physical challenges due to the lockdowns. The programme has addressed these issues through discussions with students and teachers within Circus Arts as well as with other departments of Codarts, and has drafted a guideline in collaboration with Student Life for the use of physical contact in performing arts education. This guideline is now deployed by the whole performing arts section of the school. At this moment, a new (international) guideline is being developed for the use of nudity in training and performing. Codarts is also in the process of designing a gender protocol in dialogue with students and staff, and the student council.

Language of instruction

The programme's official language of instruction is English, which aligns with the international orientation, the international scope of the working field, the student population and the

backgrounds of the teaching staff. Codarts is a bilingual institute, and students and staff are encouraged to gain proficiency in both Dutch and English. The programme underwrites this as well and makes sure that staff and students can improve both language skills if necessary.

Considerations

The panel is very positive about learning environment of the programme. It observes that the programme revolves around artistic identity and development of the students, that it has an appropriate build-up and that the varied individual and collaborative work forms are strongly aligned with what the programme wishes to achieve. The many (interdisciplinary) projects and collaborations ensure that students are challenged, learn to work together while also developing their own approach and signature, and are thus prepared for a dynamic working field in which a strong artistic identity, collective making and interdisciplinarity are key features. The panel applauds the sense of community expressed by all involved, teachers, staff members, students and alumni. The warm, safe and dynamic atmosphere created by the programme is highly valued by the students, who feel that they are valued, challenged and guided accordingly by all involved. As one international student put it, the programme feels like a 'nurturing mother'.

The panel supports the programme's choice to teach the course in English. This is fully in line with the international scope of the working field, as well as profile, content and orientation of the programme, the student population and the backgrounds of the teaching staff and guest teachers. Even though the official language of the programme is English, the panel encourages the programme to support and facilitate international students if they wish to become proficient in Dutch, since this will also help them find internships and employment in the Netherlands as circus artists.

The assessment panel establishes that the programme **meets** this standard.

Incoming students

Standard 5: The curriculum ties in with the qualifications of the incoming students.

Findings

Each year, the programme selects around 17/18 candidates for admission from an average of 135-140 applicants. The programme has an extensive intake procedure in place, which ensures that the level of incoming students meets the requirements and profile of the curriculum. The entrance process for Codarts' programme in circus arts consists of a pre-audition and a final selection. In the first audition round, the programme pre-selects a list of candidates based on videos with a personal presentation, a demonstration of technical skills, a circus act, a motivation letter and a medical statement. These are assessed by a panel of two, with input from the circus specialisation teachers. The actual audition consists of four or five days of classes that represent the core of the bachelor study programme with various circus disciplines, dance, music, improvisation/composition and physical preparation, a presentation of an individual act, a screening by the physiotherapist and individual meetings regarding pre-education, motivation and financial situation. A panel of four teachers and an external expert assess the audition. The coordinator of year 1 and 2 chairs this assessment committee. During this admission process, students are asked to present their personal and professional aims and goals for a later circus career, and together student and programme investigate if the curriculum indeed can offer the support the student needs to achieve these goals.

Students are assessed on their proficiency in English before being admitted. The minimum level of proficiency in English at Codarts is a 5.5 score IELTS (academic level) or an equivalent norm. For those who have to improve their English language skills, Codarts offers an English course.

Preparatory programme

The programme has a preparatory programme in place for Dutch students between 15-18 years old. Around 30 pupils are enrolled on average. However, the number of students enrolling in the Bachelor Circus Arts through this programme is still limited. Students coming from abroad are often more experienced and have a higher technical level, whereas Dutch students struggle to meet the required entry-level, mostly through a lack of sufficient training hours in the preparatory trajectories and the youth circus schools in the Netherlands. The bachelor programme intends to invest in the preparatory infrastructure for circus arts in the Netherlands.

Overall, the programme wishes to diversify its student population and would like to enroll students with different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, Dutch, EU and non-EU. This might become even more difficult with expected governmental restrictions to the influx of international students.

The students with whom the panel spoke were very positive about the intake procedure. They praised the relaxed atmosphere of the audition classes and felt that they had a genuine connection with representatives of the programme and the teachers doing the assessment. The students were also positive about the fact that the programme is looking for good group dynamics during the auditions and that candidates are selected with the cohesion of the cohort in mind. International students feel themselves to be very well taken care of, in all respects.

Considerations

The panel establishes that the programme has a highly effective intake procedure that ensures that the qualifications of admitted students are in line with the profile, ambitions and level of the curriculum. The panel was very positive about the thoroughness of auditions which allows candidates to get to know each other and the learning environment, and to gain insight into what kind of circus artists the programme aims to deliver. Also, the health and mental screening is quite exceptional according to the panel, giving students information about their abilities and limitations even before the programme starts. The panel concludes that the programme is highly successful in meeting the expectations of its students, and that it succeeds in attracting students who match its profile and orientation. The support for international students is very good.

The panel appreciates the effort made by the programme to raise the level and number of Dutch students through a preparatory programme. One way to address this challenge, is to invest in the quality of youth circus schools (focusing on the ages 15-17): Codarts' teachers or alumni could play a role here by becoming involved as mentors, coaches, or teachers. Including circus arts in the DAMU regulation (high schools that incorporate arts education in their curriculum) could also be an important stepping stone for Dutch pupils to achieve the necessary admission level in circus arts. The panel encourages the programme to continue its efforts to diversify its student population.

The assessment panel establishes that the programme **meets** this standard.

Staff

Standard 6: The staff team is qualified for the realisation of the curriculum in terms of content and educational expertise. The team size is sufficient.

Findings

The Circus Arts staff policy is in line with the Codarts policy. Codarts uses a cycle of progress, functioning and assessment interviews to not only assess the daily functioning of staff members but also to discuss their satisfaction with their work, their needs, ambitions and wellbeing, and allow them to provide feedback on the functioning of their superiors. In 2023 a new interview cycle was initiated - Conversation Arts - that is more in line with the specific characteristics of Codarts culture in terms of structure and implementation. All permanent staff members have at least one interview with a superior each year.

Since the previous site visit, the bachelor programme has further invested in improving the balance between permanent teachers who bring continuity to the learning environment and the involvement of guest teachers who have active practices within the professional field and can inspire both students and teachers. It has appointed two artistic coordinators and increased the number of permanent staff members from 12 to 18 persons. A division in the tasks has been made with one coordinator for year 1 and 2 and the intake of new students and a coordinator for year 3 and 4 and the transition to the professional field. Next to the teachers involved in teaching the circus disciplines, there are also staff members who teach art subjects, such as music, dance, choreography, theatre, improvisation and composition.

Staff development

The programme invests a lot of time and effort into staff development. Staff members of the programme receive many opportunities to improve their expertise within Codarts as well as outside of the institute. Teachers can follow workshops on anatomy and first aid, safety and rigging, performance preparation and visualisation as well as workshops on how to give feedback and deal with students with learning differences such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. Teachers are also offered didactical training trajectories and workshops. In addition, the programme encourages staff members to apply for exchange programmes, participate in conferences and festivals or to send in proposals for research and innovative projects. The FEDEC is an important network partner for staff members of circus art programmes.

Health and Safety are very important features of teacher development as well. Safety protocols have been established that apply to both teachers and students and are checked and shared every year. A general rigging class is part of the curriculum. Riggers ensure that their knowledge and skills remain up-to-date. To do so, they participate in an international rigging project by the FEDEC in which expertise and best practices are exchanged, protocols and processes are reviewed, and new techniques and technologies are shared and developed during seminars, work visits and via a digital platform.

Codarts is currently finalising a revised teacher professionalisation programme that specifies the educational requirements that the various staff members must meet. It intends to make this programme mandatory. The professionalisation programme is also aimed at teachers

acquiring one or more of teaching certificates BDB, BKE and SKE.

Considerations

The panel is very positive about the size and quality of staff and teachers. The appointment of two coordinators and the increase in permanent teachers has improved the quality of education, which now benefits from more continuity. The team is highly qualified, has strong professional networks and experience and is cohesive and dedicated. There is good cooperation between permanent staff and guest teachers. Teachers are described by students as demanding, but also very supportive of their aims and goals: "there is a teacher for every student" in the sense that every need can be met.

The staff members the panel spoke to are very satisfied with the programme's working environment, which they deemed open and aimed at improvement. There is an open atmosphere and a real involvement with the learning trajectories of the students. Teachers and staff are also highly aware of the benefits of a healthy and durable artistic practice. They share the overall goals of the programme to educate independent, self-aware and versatile circus artists, and to this end collaborate closely with their colleagues and the Student Life team. The programme offers its staff ample opportunity to develop their expertise through peer-to-peer learning, workshops and exchange.

The assessment panel establishes that the programme **meets** this standard.

Facilities and support

Accommodation

Standard 7: The accommodation and material facilities (infrastructure) are sufficient for the realisation of the curriculum.

Findings

In 2019, Circus moved from a former warehouse of the Holland America Line (Fenix 2) to a new building (Fenix 1) with good facilities and climate control. At the new premises of Fenix there is a health suite providing physiotherapy treatments, counselling by student and performance psychologists and a nutritionist. In addition, an exercise studio is available to the students, providing them with the opportunity for training and maintaining cardiovascular fitness. The facilities have been expanded gradually over time and are reviewed periodically to ensure that the most effective equipment is provided within the available resources. Through the collaboration with Theater Zuidplein the programme also has a good location for Circus productions, such as the graduation show of 2024.

The Codarts library/media centre, located in the main building of Codarts, has a selection of material on circus arts, with opening hours to accommodate the busy schedules of the students. At the start of their studies, first-year students are introduced to the use of the library. Over the past few years, Codarts has invested heavily in ICT and the further development of the Digital Learning Environment (DLO): it now includes a portfolio system, a video platform, and an assessment environment where exam products can be submitted. The DLO is available at all times and can be accessed anywhere. This allows for flexibility with online and offline educational activities and the possibility of developing individual learning trajectories.

Considerations

According to the panel, the accommodations and material facilities are state of the art. The panel has not seen anything like it in the field of circus education: not only are the building and material facilities excellent, the fact that there is on-site support for the health and wellbeing of the students makes for an excellent material and supportive infrastructure for performing artists. There are some very minor issues which the programme is addressing, such as finding a suitable (i.e. silent) lecture room for the music courses. The students the panel spoke to during the site visit show themselves to be more than satisfied with the location and facilities of the programme. The panel could experience first-hand that the communal kitchen helps community building and nutritional goals.

The assessment panel establishes that the programme **meets** this standard.

Tutoring

Standard 8: The tutoring of and provision of information to students are conducive to study progress and tie in with the needs of students.

Findings

The programme subscribes to a 'Team Around the Artist'-approach in which researchers, study coaches, staff members and supporting staff work together to offer the student integrated guidance and tutoring. The Performing Arts Health Centre offers students access to a wide range of (para)medical specialists, including physio(manual) therapists, a sports dietician, a speech and voice therapist, studentpsychologists and a performance psychologist. A hearing and ear protection specialist is also available

(see also the chapter on the Distinctive Feature). In addition, a health and wellbeing course is implemented in the curriculum of Circus Arts. The study progress of students is monitored by a study coach (SLB) and the head of the department. For each study year, Circus Arts works with a study coach who knows the content of that year's training programme and other required activities. The study coaches organise several group meetings in addition to the individual meetings with the students. The study coaches work in close collaboration with the Student Life team.

Information provision

In recent years, the programme has improved its information provision to the students: the MyCodarts StudySpace contains all kinds of information, such as module descriptions, the study guide, and information on the various regulations as well as information and tools on social safety, health and wellbeing. Since scheduling is always a challenge, the programme has a dedicated scheduling officer to manage the complex planning of the many activities at the school. The scheduling officer has weekly meetings with the schedule programme committee, which includes representatives from the students and teachers. The year planning is discussed with the student council and the teachers before the summer holiday. The students can indicate their preferences and the (adjustments to) schedules are published through various channels.

Overall, surveys show that students are satisfied with the information provision. The panel also found in its conversations with the students that there are few complaints with regard to the communication of the programme. This also has to do with the fact that the school is relatively small and fosters a strong sense of community: communication lines are short and there is an open atmosphere in which informal exchange comes naturally.

Considerations

The panel praises the integrated and collaborative approach of tutoring in the circus arts programme, as well as the broad range of (para) medical specialists available to the circus arts students. The 'Team Around the Artist'- approach is unique and highly effective, ensuring that students receive mental, physical and educational supervision tailored to their individual needs. The digital learning environment works well, and students are provided with good information about the programme via various channels and are asked to give input when it comes to changes in scheduling. The panel also appreciates the way the focus of tutoring shifts throughout the programme whereby students are guided and supported to become increasingly independent as performing circus artists.

The assessment panel establishes that the programme **meets** this standard.

Quality assurance

Standard 9: The programme has an explicit and widely supported quality assurance system in place. It promotes the quality culture and has a focus on development.

Findings

The quality assurance of the programme is in line with the policies of Codarts and is organised according to the PDCA-cycle. This consists of an Institute Plan, the annual statement on Finances & Quality Assurance, the evaluative summaries per study programme/department and a biannual, so-called traffic-lights report. These are discussed in bilateral consultations with the Executive Board. The programme uses various tools to evaluate its curriculum and facilities, including the National Student Survey, EvaSys for the evaluation of the educational programme and services, a Staff Satisfaction Survey and the HBO Arts Monitor. In addition, Codarts employs work field committees/consultations, student panels and external experts.

The results of the evaluations are shared and discussed in the general teacher meetings as well as with the study programme committee and student council. Improvement measures are translated into concrete plans and incorporated into the PDCA cycle. In recent years, improvements have been made in the following areas:

- more focus on collaborations with other departments (as also recommended by the previous assessment committee);
- improving the flexibility of the curriculum so students have more choice and options;
- internal communication was strengthened through a newsletter and an extra feature in the digital environment in which all practical information can be found;
- social safety: the implementation of a guideline for physical contact in the performing arts and the drafting of a guideline for the use of nudity in performances;
- inviting more guest-teachers from several circus arts specialisatons to offer students more varied perspectives.

The content and implementation of the curriculum are discussed in the Codarts study programme committee. Circus Arts is a member of the Performing Arts study programme committee, which includes the Departments of Dance (Performing and Dance in Education), Circus Arts, Music Theatre and the Master of Art Therapies (Dance and Music Therapy) and is represented by 1 student and 1 teacher. In addition, Circus Arts has an active student council that proposes ideas and wishes concerning the content of special weeks and the invitation of guest teachers.

There is regular exchange with the professional field through the contacts with circus organisations, festivals and productions as well as with other educational programmes in circus arts. Also, through the structural involvement of external experts for the final exams, the programme is able to receive feedback on the end level.

Considerations

The panel is positive about the way the programme implements its quality assurance system and succeeds in sustaining an open and critical culture of continuous improvement. Teachers, staff and students, as well as the professional field are involved in the PDCA-cycle and their input is taken seriously by the programme. Students and teachers are committed to the programme and collectively strive to find ways to improve it. The panel could also confirm

that concrete measures have been taken in recent years to improve various aspects of the programme, which included following up on recommendations of the previous assessment panel (see also attachment 3).
The quality culture is strengthened the by fact that there are a lot of opportunities for informal exchange and deliberation on any issues that may arise. The lines are short due to the shared sense of community and the relatively small size of the school.

The assessment panel establishes that the programme **meets** this standard.

Assessment

Standard 10: The programme has an adequate student assessment system in place.

Findings

The assessment system and policy of the programme is aligned with the Codarts vision on assessments, which was updated in 2019. In this vision, assessment is described as an important means to support students' learning processes and a source of information for teachers about the effectiveness of their supervision. The circus arts programme's assessment policy, following the policy of Codarts, has been translated into the manual for testing and assessment (which describes the guidelines for the construction, administration, assessment and processing of tests) and the Teaching and Exam Regulations (TER). The method of assessment and assessment criteria are described in the module handbooks, which also include the learning objectives, assessment methods and grading for each test.

The quality of assessments is not only ensured through clear and aligned policies, regulations and manuals, but also through the implementation of the multiple-eye principle in practical tests, the structural involvement of external experts and technical chairpersons for assessment procedures, and the training of examiners.

Assessments and graduation projects

The panel looked at the assessments of the TAP/thesis, the collective and individual acts of the last two student cohorts (graduation years 2022 and 2023). The programme uses standard assessment forms with assessment criteria for each of these three graduation projects. For the thesis, students are graded for the product and for the presentation, each of which is based on relevant assessment criteria.

The final exams consist of an individual graduation act and performing in a group production, directed by a circus director. These are presented in professional theatres and assessed by a committee that consists of representatives from the (inter)national working field, led by a technical chair. The process of the group production is assessed by the director who assesses the creative research and interpretation, the technical research and craftmanship, the cooperation and communication using the 6-point Birmingham scale. The performance itself is assessed by the committee based on the criteria of technical skills/craftmanship, interpretation and expression and stage awareness using a 20-point scale. The individual act is assessed by the committee in terms of concept, creativity, communication towards the audience, the use of dramaturgy/composition, visual aspects and other disciplines, using the 20-point scale. The findings of the examiners are summarised on a final form.

In its conversations with students and alumni, the panel established that they were satisfied with the programme's assessment procedures. They valued the intersubjective nature of the assessments and the practical exams and felt that they were judged fairly and carefully throughout the programme. According to the students, the intended learning outcomes, assessment methods and criteria were communicated in a transparent manner.

Examination board

The Codarts exam board consists of two 'chambers': a chamber of Performing Arts/Education and a chamber of Music. The exam board also includes an external member with legal expertise. All members of the exam board have taken part in external trainings for exam board

members. The panel observes that the exam board of Codarts is proactive and critical when it comes to the monitoring of the assessment procedures. In recent years, it has taken different measures to evaluate and improve the quality of the assessments. They inform examiners of their appointment and the guidelines they need to follow. New chairpersons receive training and already appointed chairpersons are required to take part in an intervention meeting once every two years. The assessment committee carries out systematic screenings of tests and testing programmes at the request of the Examination Board and reports to the examination committee. The exam board of Codarts visits a number of graduation shows each year to verify whether the assessment protocols are being followed correctly. The final exams of Circus Arts were visited in 2020-2021 and in 2022-2023. The results are evaluated in the annual talks with the head of the department. These meetings also address the state of affairs regarding student file checks, the examiners and the training (BKE, BDB, SKE) of the teaching team in the field of testing expertise.

Covid-19

The examination board was actively involved in adjusting the assessment protocols during the Covid-related lockdowns starting in 2020. For Circus Arts this resulted in substantial changes to the practical assessments, which were mostly solved by assessing the student's process of making and performing during the periods of lockdown. The programme was able to prevent major study delays by being flexible and attuning the programme and the assessments to the situation, while also maintaining educational quality and the desired end level.

Considerations

Based on the findings described above, the panel concludes that the assessments of the programme are valid, objective and transparent due to the clear definition of learning outcomes, assessment methods and criteria of each module for the thesis, the individual graduation act and group performance. It concludes that the programme succeeds at realising robust intersubjectivity in its assessments through the use of standardised assessment forms, the involvement of more than two examiners for practical exams and a jury consisting of external members for the final exams. Students are well-informed about the intended learning outcomes, assessment methods and criteria when it comes to the written thesis. A point that the panel thinks could be improved has to do with the possibility of students work on a different end product in the TAP. The module description and current assessment forms and are still oriented towards a written thesis. The panel is positive about the programme's choice to open the possibilities for other graduation products, which is fitting for a performance-oriented curriculum. For this to be successful, the programme needs to align the learning outcomes and assessment approach of the TAP. The panel appreciates the proactive attitude of the examination board and the role of the assessment committee. It supports the examination board in its efforts to make sure that all teachers follow the BKE course.

The panel agreed with the grades given for the theses (and video) and the individual acts. That being said, it urges the programme to reserve more room for reflection on the artistic process itself in the assessments of the performances. The programme does have a strong focus on the creative and artistic process as students prepare for the exams, but how the process is valued is difficult to reconstruct based on the 20-point assessment forms. More explicit and written reflection on the artistic process will help the students in their development towards being an

independent circus arts performer, and also strengthen the link with the circus arts intended learning outcomes.

The assessment panel establishes that the programme **meets** this standard.

Achieved learning outcomes

Standard 11: The programme demonstrates that the intended learning outcomes are achieved.

Findings

Bachelor's level

In preparation for the site visit, the panel studied a selection of 15 theses (TAP) and recordings of individual acts for the final exam from the last two student cohorts (graduation year 2022 and 2023). The theses studied by the panel were of the required bachelor's level. The technical and artistic levels of the individual acts meet the standard of a bachelor's degree in circus arts and show that the students are ready for employment in the professional field.

Alumni

Graduates of the programme find employment quickly and easily in the circus field. Almost all the alumni are in some way active in the circus world, an observation confirmed by the HBO Arts Monitor (2020-2021): 78% is satisfied with the preparation for entrepreneurship which is much higher compared to previous years: 67% is fully employed in circus arts, 33% is partly employed in this domain. A relatively large number of them (83%) are self-employed.

Many of the programme's graduates perform in circus companies or productions or have their own company. Performing is their main occupation, often combined with teaching appointments in various circus-related educational programmes. Some have started their own circus school or training space. Both students and alumni are frequently nominated for awards.

The panel spoke to alumni and representatives from the working field during the site visit. The alumni were very satisfied with how they had been prepared for the profession, all of them had found employment and most indicated that their careers had exceeded their expectations. Several had started successful companies themselves and fulfilled a role in training students from the programme through internships. The representatives from the working field indicated that the programme's graduates were recognised by their professional attitude, flexibility, collaborative orientation and their ability to innovate and work in a inter/multidisciplinary way.

Considerations

Based on its findings, the panel concludes that the graduates of the bachelor's programme meet the standards of a Bachelor of Circus Arts. This is evident in the theses and final projects, which demonstrate that the students have acquired the competencies and goals formulated by the programme and are prepared for a profession in the field of circus arts.

The panel appreciated the individual and collaborative acts which can be characterised as: well-crafted demonstrating high levels of skill as well as strong performance qualities grounded in concepts from theatre and movement.

The panel observed that students were able to formulate relevant (applied) research questions and could conduct adequate research. The panel appreciates that students can choose to do research aimed at producing something else than a written thesis. As described in the chapter on assessments, the panel thinks that there is some room for improvement when it comes encouraging more artistic experimentation in theory trajectory to support the students' artistic profile development. This needs to be thought through carefully and made clearer in the goals of the TAP. This would also include investigating with other (artistic) research methods.

The careers of the alumni prove that the programme is successful in training circus artists who can find employment as performers in companies and productions and as teachers in various circus institutions. That they can use their entrepreneurial skills is evident from the fact that some have started successful schools and companies. The panel observed that the representatives of the working field are highly appreciative of how the programme has developed in recent years, and that they emphasise the importance of Codarts Circus Arts for the domain through the education of competent, innovative and independent artists. The panel applauds the growing and close-knit community of circus arts alumni and encourages the programme to formalise the infrastructure for its alumni since they are important ambassadors for Codarts, the programme and the circus arts domain in the Netherlands.

The assessment panel establishes that the programme **meets** this standard.

Distinctive Feature

1. Distinctive

Criterion 1: *The feature to be assessed is distinctive for the programme in relation to other relevant higher education programmes in the Netherlands.*

Codarts is the only performing arts university in the Netherlands where health and well-being, and sustainable artistic practices are key to its mission, vision and strategy. It recognises that performing artists must live up to high expectations and demands at every level. In Codarts' view, performing arts students need to develop a strong sense of self-awareness regarding their physical and mental health. After graduation, they must be able to conduct self-health management and remain resilient in a competitive profession to pursue a sustainable, successful career. The health risks are, perhaps, even higher for the circus artist, who must demonstrate a high level of acrobatic, athletic and aesthetic ability as well as mental resilience. Circus Arts strongly believes that self-sufficient and educated circus performers are better able to manage the demands of the ever-changing environment of new circus arts and better equipped to maximise their performance potential.

In line with its vision on health, safety and sustainability, Codarts has developed an extensive, integrated student support system that addresses mental and physical health and wellbeing as well as safety issues: Student Life (launched in 2012). Aim of this programme is to help students grow as artists, supporting them with a dedicated team of professionals with a background in performing arts or elite sports. This is part of the 'Team Around the Artist'-approach (TATA), which means that the students' personal and professional development is central, and supported by a team of health practitioners, teachers, study coaches, researchers and support staff. Student Life offers information, education, guidance and care in areas relating to performance enhancement, personal development, injury prevention and general wellbeing, from pre-entry to graduation. Students receive regular health screenings and are monitored from the very start of the programme (Student Life Monitor). The outcomes of these inquiries are used, with consent of the students, as data for scientific research by the researchers at the Performing Arts Health Centre to continually improve the health and wellbeing programmes within the Codarts curricula. The Student Life team collects and connects different sets of data at various levels to monitor students' health monthly.

Based on the provided documentation and its conversations during the site visit, the panel confirms that this comprehensive support system has been fully integrated into programme. The programme conducted a benchmark study with other (inter)national circus art bachelor's programmes, the results of which were presented to the panel. The findings show that the Codarts Circus Arts programme is unique in its holistic Team Around the Artist Approach, and also stands out with regard to the scope and integration of the support system within the curriculum. The interconnectedness and multidisciplinarity of the support offered, with professionals working closely together, is unique to Codarts. The Student Life Monitor is a highly distinctive feature: it is an award-winning innovative online web-based system that has been developed in collaboration with Codarts' researchers, educators and the school's Performing Arts

Health Team. Though other programmes do offer services in health and wellbeing, these are not offered as in-house services nor are they a part of an integrated system of student support.

As the panel could establish during the site visit, the staff and Student Life team members of Codarts work closely together to monitor the individual health and wellbeing of the students. The students the panel spoke to indicated that Student Life contributes to their self-awareness with regard to health, wellbeing and safety and as well as to their development as professional artists who can sustain a long and healthy circus career. The panel concludes that the distinctiveness of the health and wellbeing programme can be found in the integrative and multidisciplinary approach, the scope and intricacy of the system and the implementation of the Student Life support system.

Based on these findings, the panel judges that the programme meets the requirements of criterion 1 of the distinctive feature.

2. Concretisation

Criterion 2: *The impact of the feature to be assessed on the quality of the education provided by the university has been operationalised on the basis of the relevant standards contained in the Assessment Framework for the Higher Education Accreditation System of the Netherlands.*

The panel confirms that the distinctive feature has been operationalised concretely in the quality standards of the Dutch national assessment framework for higher education.

Standard 1

In the documentation and its discussions with students, teachers, management and the Student Life team, the panel observed that the goals with regard to health and wellbeing are clearly defined and shared by all involved. During their studies at Codarts, students must become increasingly self-sufficient and develop the ability to organise and maintain their health during and after their career. This ability is assessed at different points during the programme. The demands with regard to self-management, safety and health are implicit in the formulated competencies and learning outcomes.

Standard 2 and 3

In the programme, students learn to take responsibility for their mental and physical health and wellbeing. As future circus artists, they gain insight into their individual physical and psychological possibilities and limitations. The Student Life team, together with staff members of the programme, offer various tools and modules to achieve this goal.

Research

Research is at the core of the Student Life programme. The researchers conduct applied research within the programme and investigate how to enhance performance, prevent injury and develop talent. Students too, participate in various research projects of the professorship Performing Arts Medicine. New scientific knowledge is used and integrated into the students' educational programme, trainings or injury treatments. The research sustains close collaborations with an international network of scientists, medical specialists and experts. The research team is also involved in the coaching of students writing their thesis if they choose a topic that requires methods of applied research.

Screening and monitoring

The Student Life Monitor (SLM) was developed by the Student Life team and the researchers of the professorship of Performing Arts Medicine. The SLM collects data on health problems and

injury risk factors for circus arts students. SLM is integral to the circus arts curriculum and consists of various tools to monitor health:

- Screenings: at the beginning of the academic year, a comprehensive initial screening takes place for all new students and a less-extensive screening for the 2nd and 3rd year students. Briefer screenings take place every six months for all 1st, 2nd and 3rd year students. The screenings address aspects, such as (sport) medical and musculo-skeletal concerns, fitness, psychology and nutritional issues. The purpose of the screening is to give students a personal profile of their medical, mental and physical status. Screening can also help determine whether students can participate full time in training classes, identify possible injury risk factors and promote an ongoing healthy approach to training and performing.
- Online health monitor: students are asked to report on physical and mental health problems every month in the online health monitor module of SLM. Questionnaires include VAS pain scale, Oslo Sports Trauma Research Centre Questionnaire on Health Problems, mental complaints and items on sleep quality, mental energy, feelings and emotions and satisfaction with rehearsals and performances.

The individual results of the screening and monitoring tools are shared with the student in different ways. Firstly, the sports physician and physiotherapist offer students individual feedback during their screenings. Secondly, special classes are organised for students to give them feedback on their screening. Finally, students have access to their individual results in an online personal profile (Student Life Monitor). Within this profile, test scores are displayed, and the students can compare themselves with previous measurements and with the average of the group.

Modules the curriculum

Students also follow different modules that are specifically aimed at offering theoretical and practical knowledge about health, safety and wellbeing issues relevant to performance artists.

- Physical Preparation classes are offered every morning during the week. It gives students the opportunity to become more aware of their breathing, posture and alignment as well as to improve their strength, coordination, stamina and flexibility. In the third and fourth year, the students are responsible for their own physical preparation.
- Circus Health & Wellbeing module: This module is given in years 1 and 2 and aims to educate students on how to train and avoid injuries. It covers topics, such as anatomy and physical fitness, injury prevention strategies and tools, nutrition and mental skills, such as focusing, goal setting and confidence.
- Risk management, safety and rigging classes: risk management and safety awareness are integrated into various classes. Parameters, such as fatigue, confidence and students' physical and mental state are linked to a safe and sound practice. In the first year, all students receive a general class in rigging and safety. In the second year, there is a follow-up and more detailed instruction for aerial students. Students with aerial as their specialisation receive extra tutorials on safety rigging.

Based on these findings, the panel concludes that the health and wellbeing modules and screening programmes are fully integrated into the curriculum, forming a coherent system that

is conducive to health awareness and the practices of the students as well as to their learning process as future circus artists.

Standard 4
Student Life subscribes to the 'Team Around the Artist'-approach, which means that the student figures centrally in the educational programme, guided by a team of professionals (health practitioners, teachers, study coaches, researchers and supporting staff) who work collaboratively to facilitate and stimulate the learning process of the student.
As described in the assessment report, the programme has in recent years developed a guideline collaboration with Student Life for the use of physical contact in performing arts education. This guideline is now deployed by the whole performing arts section of the school. At this moment, a new (international) guideline is being drafted the use of nudity in training and performing. Codarts is also in the process of designing a gender protocol in dialogue with students and staff, and the student council.
According to the panel, the health and wellbeing aspects of the learning environment are without a doubt fully student-centred and geared towards teaching students how to become self-sufficient, responsible circus artists who know how to work in a healthy and safe way. There is a clear build-up throughout the four years of education during which students are increasingly able to train their technical skills independently.

Standard 5
To match the physical and mental ability of incoming students with the expectations of the programme, prospective students are offered a pre-screening during the auditions. They also receive advice on how to train during the summer before they start at Codarts. At the start of their studies, a screening is held to provide a profile of the circus artist's medical and physical status. The student, the teacher and the Student Life team can use the information obtained to understand the student's strengths and areas of improvement. In this way, the programme ensures that the health and wellbeing of each student is monitored and supported from the very start and that students are aware of what is expected of them in this regard. The panel applauds this careful screening and preparation of incoming students. In this way, the programme ensures that health and wellbeing are integral to the students learning trajectory from the very beginning and that they are aware of the Codarts approach.

Standard 6
All staff members of the Performing Arts Health Centre (which include physio-manual therapists, a sports dietician, speech- and voice therapist, student psychologist and performance psychologist) are qualified paramedical professionals. Many also have a teaching or pedagogical degree. Continuous professional development of teachers and staff is very important to Codarts Circus Arts. The panel applauds the professorship Performing Arts Medicine, which is innovative, high level and internationally recognised.
The research team has regular professional development meetings with the staff member of the programme and organises training sessions on various relevant topics, such as warming-up, health and injury prevention and guidance of injured students. In line with the recommendations from FEDEC, teachers also receive training from the PAHC team on topics such as warming-up, health and injury prevention, guidance of injured students. During the yearly teachers' meetings, topics regarding health, wellbeing and safety are also on the agenda and discussed. The external experts to which students are referred when more extensive treatment is

necessary, have vast experience working with (pre-)professional dancers, musicians, singers or circus performers and are affiliated with the Codarts' partners Erasmus Medical Centre, IKAZIA hospital and Sportgeneeskunde Rotterdam.

Based on its conversations with the staff members of the programme and the research team of Student Life, the panel established that all staff members are fully involved in the health and wellbeing programme and are always in close consultation with the health experts to ensure that students train and learn healthily and responsibly.

Standard 7
The accommodations and facilities offered by the programme support its focus on health and wellbeing, according to the panel. Students have access to various facilities and materials to promote fitness, prevent injuries and performance enhancement. An in-house exercise room offers a wide variety of exercise equipment. In addition, students benefit from a physiotherapy treatment room and physiotherapy equipment on site where they can see the school's physiotherapist twice a week. This physiotherapy treatment room is also used for confidential student counselling sessions with the study coach, student or performance psychologist, sports dietician or the student counsellor.

Codarts has developed a Safety Policy specifically for the circus arts environment. The aim of which is to ensure students' safety. The policy is aimed at encouraging dialogue on how to minimise physical risk, discovering practical and creative solutions and raising general awareness about safety.

Standard 8
As described above, the programme works with a 'Team Around the Artist'-approach in which all researchers, study coaches, staff members and supporting staff work together to offer the student integrated guidance and tutoring. The Performing Arts Health Centre offers students access to a wide range of (para)medical specialists: physio(manual) therapists, sports dietician and a speech and voice therapist. Studentpsychologists and a performance psychologist are present four days a week for consultations. A hearing and ear protection specialist is also available, and students follow a workshop on Movement & Hearing in the first year.
The programme's research team, staff members and study coaches work in close collaboration, ensuring that students' injuries are shared and addressed appropriately in classes. If a student is injured, specific classes or parts of the lessons can be adapted as a result of the student's feedback and the advice of health professionals. Weekly updates on the progress of injured students and their workload capacities are provided by the physiotherapists and shared with the study coaches and teachers.

The panel is very positive about the integrated and collaborative approach of guidance and tutoring in the circus arts programme as well as the extensive range of (para)medical specialists available on site to the circus arts students.

Information provision
The Student Life programme communicates its services and data effectively from the very start of the programme. Incoming students receive a screening and advice on healthy training at the auditions and are informed about the SLM programme in an introduction letter sent out by the programme. During the introduction week, they are further introduced to the health programme of SLM. Furthermore, information regarding the

SLM programme is shared via intranet, the Codarts website and notices/posters on site at Circus Arts. The students the panel spoke with were very well informed about the SLM-procedures and could explain clearly how they contributed to their own training programmes and learning trajectory.

Standard 9
The panel judges that the circus arts programme has an effective evaluation system in place specifically aimed at measuring the quality and effectiveness of the health and wellbeing pro-gramme of Student Life. Quality reviews include:
• Every other year, the programme conducts student satisfaction evaluations of Student Life, including questions on services, facilities and specialists.
• Student Council meetings are held on a regular basis, attended by the Head of Student Life upon invitation, and students actively contribute to the SLM and research projects via specific student panels.
• Course evaluation takes place biannually through EvaSys, including student satisfaction on the Physical Preparation and Health & Wellbeing modules.

Student satisfaction figures show an increasing appreciation with Student Life: In 2021, every Circus Arts student is familiar with Student Life (100%) and is more than satisfied with the services provided (4,4 on a five-point scale). The SLM has been assessed by Codarts' students with a 7,4 on a ten-point scale.

Standard 10
Students of all year groups are assessed on their work process and professional attitude. They need to demonstrate a level of healthy literacy regarding their training and performance as well as actual implementation in their work, training, final projects and performance. In the Physical Preparation module, students must show that they have the necessary physical basis for their specialisation. In addition, in the Health and Well-being module, students write a self-reflection paper on how they apply issues of health within their own specialisation.
The panel judges that health and wellbeing aspects are assessed adequately, measuring the level of self-awareness of students and their ability to apply effective techniques that contribute to a healthy and sustainable professional practice.

Standard 11
Based on its conversations with students and representatives of the working field, as well as on the theses it read, the panel was able to confirm that students, indeed, acquire the necessary competencies with regard to the management of their health and wellbeing within a professional circus art context. Students are self-aware and confident about their ability to sustain a healthy circus art career, and are knowledgeable about the different aspects of health and wellbeing for performance artists. Also, many of the theses addressed questions of health and safety, researching and developing approaches that contribute to a more effective training regime. Finally, the representatives from the working field indicated that Codarts students stand out for their professional attitude.

3. Relevance
Criterion 3: *The feature to be assessed is of essential importance to the nature of the programme.*

Based on the findings and considerations described above, the panel is convinced that the distinctive Health and Wellbeing feature is essential and integral to the programme in circus

arts. There is a strong, interrelated system of health support through scientific research, screening, monitoring, teaching, tutoring and appropriate facilities, which together offer students a learning environment in which they receive guidance tailored to his/her individual physical and mental abilities. In the view of the panel, this approach is unique to the circus art educational domain and something that other bachelor's programmes in circus arts could profit from given the high workload and physically and mentally challenging nature of the profession. By educating students about their own abilities and ways to arrive at a healthy practice, the programme contributes to the working field by delivering knowledgeable and self-aware students who can fulfil a long career in the circus profession. That the Student Life programme is unique, effective and, therefore, relevant to the discipline and working field of performance arts can also be derived from the fact that it is being implemented by other national and international schools and professional companies in Germany, France, Switzerland. The panel is also very much impressed by the way this approach of health and wellbeing has become more and more sophisticated, going from a curative to a preventative approach and now indeed has developed into an evidence-based *performance enhancement* scientific method.

Attachment 1: assessment panel

dr. ir. Ab Groen, chair
Trained chair for AeQui, independent consultant and interim manager and teacher at the General Association of School Leaders

prof.dr. Steven Vos, member
Lector Move to Be – Fontys University of Applied Sciences and Professor Industrial Design at TU/e

Adrian Porter, BSc, member
Head of Higher Education Delivery - National Centre for Circus Arts, United Kingdom

Ute Classen, member
Managing director ute classen | kulturmanagement, Aachen, Germany

Fleur van Stratum, MA, student member
Alumna Master Situated Design – St Joost, Avans University of Applied Sciences

The panel was supported by dr. Jesseka Batteau as a NVAO-certified secretary.

All panel members have completed, signed, and submitted a statement of independence and impartiality to NVAO.

Attachment 2: site visit schedule

Friday 31 May 2024
Location: Fenix I, Dolf Henkesplein 15, 3072 LN Rotterdam

09.00 – 09.30	Preparation Panel
09.30 – 10.15	Management Welcome, goal and programme visitation head Performing Arts; head Circus Arts; coordinator year 3 and 4 and transition to professional domain/alumni; coordinator year 1 and 2 and intake
10.30 - 11.15	Health and Wellbeing: fit to perform head Student Life; lector Performing Arts Medicine, head Research
11.30 – 12.15	Exam board Assessment and realised learning outcomes
12.15 – 13.00	Lunch and assessment of documents
13.00 – 13.30	Video presentation
13.45 – 14.30	Teachers Goals of the programme, curriculum, assessments, quality of teachers Expertise staff: circus specialisation; physical preparation; study program committee; theoretical graduation project; coordinator preparatory programme; music; improvisation/composition; coach Own Work; preparation final performance)
14.45 – 15.30	Students Programme, assessments, quality of leaders Two C4 students One member study program committee C2, Dutch, preparatory programme, preparatory programme in Italy C2, non-EU, preparatory programme in Germany)
15.45– 16.30	Alumni and professional practice Connection programme to professional practice, assessments and final examination former artistic leader Scapino Ballet Rotterdam artistic director festival Circusstad Rotterdam Theater op de Markt/ Circuswerkplaats, Pelt, Belgium

	Two alumni Tall Tales Studio and company (also alumnus)
16.45 – 17.30	Deliberation panel, additional examination, conclusions
18.00 – 18.30	Feedback

Initiated by the programme, a development dialogue will be planned in the course of fall 2024. The results of this development dialogue have no influence on the assessment presented in this report.

Attachment 3: follow-up on former assessment

The previous assessment panel gave the following recommendations for the Bachelor Circus Arts:

• The panel encourages the programme to further develop its vision and aims with regard to the circus arts, clarifying what its profile is in relation to the (international) professional and educational domains and articulating how its graduates may contribute to the future development of the discipline.

Follow-up:
To investigate whether the programme and vision of the school is clear, the department has conducted a survey in the beginning of 2024 amongst representatives of the working field (companies, residencies and circus structures) artistic coaches, circus directors and guest teachers that worked with Codarts Circus Arts as well as a selection of our graduates). In the survey questions were asked about the general impression of the school as well about its strengths and weaknesses and the learning outcomes of the programme. The respondents were also asked to indicate how Codarts Circus Arts differs from other educational programs.

• The panel would like to see more opportunities for students and teachers to look beyond the school itself, allowing them to develop a broader view of the profession and art in general.

Follow-up:
For students the first two years are foundation years in which they have to focus on building up a good basis in circus and supporting skills. In the higher years they have the possibility to do internships, exchanges at other schools, and can participate in external projects. Due to Corona and the lockdowns, this was not possible for a couple of years. In addition, guest teachers are invited for master classes to offer a different approach to the discipline and the group productions in the higher years are directed by well-known external circus directors.
Teachers have the possibility for exchanges with other schools, participate in international projects of the FEDEC (rigging, development of digital tools, social safety) apply for special funding to attend seminars, workshops, festivals or further education.

• The panel encourages the programme to continue the development of its assessments through an ongoing critical reflection of its assessment criteria and procedures as well as through the calibration of its grading system.

Follow-up:
The assessments have been further developed in several ways: there is more emphasis on process in the assessments of the end products, as well as more focus on the students' outlook and attitude as curious, critical and reflective artists.

• The panel spurs the programme to strengthen its focus on critical reflection and to offer students more exposure to different influences, thus supporting them in the development of their artistic signature.

Follow-up:
Critical reflection, analytical and research skills are now addressed throughout the programme as important competencies that students need to incorporate into their professional artistic practice. In the theoretical classes of Circus History and Art Orientation, students are taught to reflect on their own profession and the surrounding world. They learn to reflect, analyse, write and present. These skills are further developed in the research-based theoretical graduation project (TAP) in the fourth year, that has been redesigned (see below). Leading up to their graduation act, students in year one to three get artistic coaching for the development of their acts and learn to reflect on their process and artistic choices and to ask critical questions.
*Once a year a Reflection Day is organized, which focusses on a specific aspect of circus education, creation or the profess*ional *circus world. For this day both actual students, teachers and alumni are invited to participate.*

• The artistic and experimental orientation of the theory and thesis trajectory could be strengthened in order to support the students' artistic profile development

Follow-up:
The programme has redesigned the theoretical graduation project: it now starts in the third year and takes the students position as artists in the field of circus as its starting point. Students must ask stake holders to give input and feedback so that they know if their choice of subject is relevant. The criteria have also been redefined: the theoretical project can result in a thesis but may lead to another type of end product, like a video or an installation. In this way the theoretical project is more connected to the profile and identity of the student, something which the panel applauds. It encourages the programme to continue in this line of improvement and development to ensure a strong connection between artistic practice and theoretical investigations.

Attachment 4: documents

- Position paper Circus Arts
- Study Guide Circus Arts
- Teaching and Examination Regulations
- Overview Teachers and Staff/Student Ratio
- Annual report Exam Board 2021-2022; 2022-2023
- Results Kunstenmonitor (alumni)
- Assessment criteria and standards for practical examinations
- Results survey professional field
- Graduation work of 15 students

Attachment 5: overview

The judgements per standard are presented in the table below.

Extensive Programme Assessment

Standard	Judgement
1. Intended learning outcomes	*Meets the standard*
2. Orientation of the curriculum	*Meets the standard*
3. Contents of the curriculum	*Meets the standard*
4. Structure of the curriculum	*Meets the standard*
5. Qualifications of incoming students	*Meets the standard*
6. Staff: qualified and size	*Meets the standard*
7. Accommodation and infrastructure	*Meets the standard*
8. Tutoring and student information	*Meets the standard*
9. Evaluation of the programme	*Meets the standard*
10 Assessment system	*Meets the standard*
11 Achieved learning outcomes	*Meets the standard*
Overall	**Positive**

Distinctive Feature

Criterion	
1. The feature is distinctive	*Meets the standard*
2. The feature has been made concrete	*Meets the standard*
3. The feature is relevant	*Meets the standard*

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