



Development conversation, follow up on the visitation 2020 of the Master's degree study programmes DAS Choreography and DAS Theatre, which are part of DAS Graduate School of the Academy of Theatre and Dance (ATD), Amsterdam University of the Arts.

In June 2020 the visitation of the Master's degree study programmes DAS Choreography and DAS Theatre took place. For the first time the visitation of the study programmes in theatre and choreography was combined. The aim of both programmes is to offer practicing artists the opportunity to develop their research and reflection skills, while continuing their artistic practice. Students learn to use research as a tool to expand and deepen their practice.

The third Master's degree programme at the ATD, Creative Producing, started in 2018 and wasn't up for accreditation yet. Together with research department DAS Research the three Master's degree programmes compose DAS Graduate School.

The visitation panel had the purpose to judge the quality of the education and organization thereof. The panel used the NVAO framework for limited programme assessment. During an online site visit the panel was presented with work of students and a virtual tour of the learning environment (facilities). The panel also spoke extensively with students, alumni, tutors, representatives of the work field(s), members of the participation councils, the exam committee and the artistic directors and management.

According to the panel both programmes are strong and meet all standards. The panel was in particular very appreciative about

- the awareness of the programmes of their surroundings and upcoming challenges;
- the strong links to the professional field at various levels and the ability to use these connections to continually adapt to changes in the field;
- the high level of student's work, the new ways and formats students have been able to develop and the recognition of the work field of the innovative power and intellectual level of alumni.

The development conversation took place on 26 October 2021. Its purpose was to address some of the points of attention formulated by the study programmes, which also resonated with the panel and their recommendations in their assessment report, in particular the international orientation of both programmes and the wish to strengthen local connections. The development conversation was joined by the chair of the 2020 visitation, representatives of both study programmes (including programme management), the head of DAS Graduate School and the ATD head of education and student wellbeing.

Concise summary of the development conversation

Both programmes want to maintain the international influx of students (also recommended by the panel in its report) from different contexts and backgrounds, giving body to the international orientation of the programmes and reflecting the reality of an international work field. The notion of what the term 'international' means is shifting. In the field of production and festivals this is opened up more and more to North – South, undoing the mainly Western focus in the international field of performing arts. This affects networks of relations in the professional field of the programs, as well as profiles for recruitment. This is a challenge because of student precarity. Although the merits of international orientation within education, the arts and beyond are nowadays recognized in the Netherlands and internationalization and globalization is seen as a given (by Arts Council, KUO arts education policies), at the same time more restrictive policies and funding have a huge negative impact on supporting infrastructure for students and alumni (from higher tuition fees for non EU-students and high expenses for living in Amsterdam, to less funding for experimental performative arts in art subsidies). Student precarity does not only concern non-EU students, but also practitioners from within the EU are having a difficult time sustaining their artistic practice.

How can the programmes deal with these challenges? How to adapt to reality while at the same time trying to alter it? In exchange with the panel several lines of thinking are explored to improve conditions for students both in their studies and in their practice. The conversation centers around strengthening local networks and partnerships to sustain the lively exchange with international developments in the field of the performing arts, looking for other resources and using existing resources in another way.

Strengthening local networks and partnerships

The programmes will continue to invest in extending and sustaining local networks and partnerships and introducing students to those networks and partners, connecting students more to the city of Amsterdam and the city to the programmes. The panel thinks local students and alumni can be used as allies. This resonates



with the programmes wanting to be more attractive to local makers and achieving more of a balance between students who were educated in the Netherlands and abroad. Both programmes require professional experience after bachelor education before entering the master's programmes. The programmes may also attract alumni of bachelor programmes of the ATD.

More visibility and opportunities could be created by working more closely together within DAS Graduate School (including the programme Creative Producing which has a largely Dutch student population) and within the ATD, where small scale collaborative initiatives are taking place. There's plenty of enthusiasm for more. Biggest challenge is finding space in curricula.

The panel encourages the programmes to look for opportunities at AHK level. More exchange at that level may also address time constraints of the small scale master's programmes. The panel suggests the programmes to look at these issues from three angles: 1) creating time for exchange (in the curricula); 2) sharing information and connections (external orientation); and 3) sharing best practices (internal orientation). This also includes finding more efficient ways to keep each other informed on what you're doing.

Looking for other resources

In performing arts funding there currently are less opportunities for experimental, explorative, research based practices. New possibilities are coming from research, as the interest in artistic research has increased. Students and the programmes may profit from those opportunities by making more explicit that what the students are doing *is* artistic research. Apart from research funding, there may also be opportunities in funding by companies, provided that artistic freedom is guaranteed.

Using existing resources in another way

DAS Graduate School has limited studio space, which has to be shared by students of all programmes (including THIRD). Students would be better served if they had more hours access to a studio. While there may be opportunities finding additional studio space, existing space could also be made better use of, for example by extending opening hours, which needs both a culture of shared responsibility and taking some practical hurdles (like making sure in-house emergency response service is present). Also making more use of shared AHK-resources is something to be further explored.

Diversity, equity and inclusion

During the conversation diversity, equity and inclusion were addressed in different contexts, for example when talking about student precarity and collaboration within the academy. The series of focus groups within the Graduate School was an example of a concrete, visible action taken, which was appreciated by students. Students are less satisfied with the speed and visibility of the process of diversifying staff, which takes more time for small staffed programmes than for the Academy as a whole. The panel acknowledges the awareness and effort of both programmes.

The panel is thanked for their time and input during the visitation and this conversation. The programmes will continue a fruitful exchange, involving students, staff, colleagues and experts of the work field.