



Decentering Curricula: Questions for Re-Evaluating Diversity and Inclusiveness in HMEIs

Section 2: How do we study? How do we teach?

Teaching and learning are closely interrelated and happen in diverse settings that are influenced by the people involved, the facilities, the curricula and more general factors such as societal and institutional orientation. In this context, the question of *how* we teach (from the point of view of teachers) and *how* we learn (from that of students) in higher music education is just as important a consideration as where, what, why, etc, as a measure of the diverse and inclusive nature of an institution, department or programme and its internal culture.

How is the core activity of a Higher Music Education Institution (HMEI) carried out in your institution? Individual (1:1) lessons are the classic model in instrumental and vocal teaching based on the transmission of knowledge, understanding and skill from master to apprentice over time. Students certainly benefit from a close relationship with a teacher. At the same time, this model is challenged today by factors such as the need for students to individualize as emerging artists through synthesis with diverse stimuli; the social dynamics of power relations and the rising awareness of their impact on learning and teaching; and, not least, rising costs. Collaborative teaching and learning has been implemented in many institutions across Europe and supports team-based qualities and competencies often needed in artistic and creative processes.

The establishment of short, intense, festival-like periods of free creative collaboration among peers, more or less indirectly supervised, has emerged in recent years within the curricula of various institutions as an effective mechanism or practical framework for facilitating the creative process, independence, increased ownership of learning and trans-disciplinary collaborative skills. These periods have been likened to Foucault's *heterotopia*, comprising cultural and institutional spaces that are 'intense, transforming and contradictory'.

On the premise that assessment and feedback are as much a part of the learning process as didactic teaching and peer-based collaboration, consideration of issues surrounding how and what we assess, how such assessment is constructed, and how it is communicated to students, comprise a significant and impactful opportunity for 'decentering' institutional teaching and learning. Issues of assessment pervade the learning journey from start to finish – from initial admittance to the institution or programme to the final performance examination prior to graduation. Similarly, the mutual construction of a student's assessment of progress and performance issues (in which both teacher and student contribute) has grown more frequent in recent years.

In addition, the Covid-19 pandemic has brought the issue of distance learning more to the fore and has compelled many HMEIs to consider their facility with eLearning more urgently. It is not just a pandemic issue; geographical and financial considerations have long contributed to barriers to access in higher education. In this way, an institution's ability to extend access to those outwith its geographical vicinity can be a powerful measure of inclusiveness. It can be valuable and timely, therefore, for an HMEI to review regularly its tools for eLearning, the efficacy of its 'virtual classroom' and its processes for training staff and students to use these tools effectively.



2.1 (Main) instrument lessons

Questions to be considered when self-evaluating within this sub-domain:

- **How are (main) instrument lessons conducted?**
 - a. What role do one-2-one lessons play?
 - b. What other models of main instrument lessons are used?

2.2 One-2-one lessons

Questions to be considered when self-evaluating within this sub-domain:

- **In what ways does your curriculum provide one-2-one lessons for students?**
- **How much time per week is spent on one-2-one with each student?**
- **What provisions are in place for students who want to choose more than one instrument and have one-2-one lessons?**
- **To what extent may the student contribute to determining the repertoire / style / genre taught in one-2-one lessons?**
- **What procedures are in place to combat power abuse and misconduct (sexual harassment, verbal harassment) within one-2-one lessons?**
- **What provisions are in place if a student wants to change their one-2-one lesson teacher?**

2.3 Peer and collaborative learning

Questions to be considered when self-evaluating within this sub-domain:

- **To what extent does your curriculum contain compulsory activities or electives for learning collaboratively (other than teacher-led group lessons)?**
- **To what extent does such collaborative learning involve students of different artistic genres / practices?**
- **How are students engaged in peer- or group-based assessment at any level?**
- **If appropriate, please describe one or more examples of collaborative learning in your curriculum.**



2.4 Team and collaborative teaching

Questions to be considered when self-evaluating within this sub-domain:

- In what ways does your curriculum allow lessons to be taught by a team of teachers or in a collaborative way (e.g. a rota system of teachers, groups splitting up, etc.)?

2.5 Group lessons

Questions to be considered when self-evaluating within this sub-domain:

- How do our students reflect on their future professionalization?
- What forms of group lessons does your curriculum provide?
- Which subjects are taught in a group? Please name a few.
- How would you describe the purpose of and rationale for the group lessons (peer learning, tradition, financial etc.)?
- How many students are there in a group lesson?
- In group activities that require an audition (orchestra, ensemble etc.) or have a restricted number of participants, what measures are in place to avoid favoritism / nepotism and power abuse?

2.6 Project-based studies

Questions to be considered when self-evaluating within this sub-domain:

- How does your curriculum promote and instil project-based work skills for students (and teachers)?
- Where do the projects happen (inside and / or outside the institution)?
- How are teachers involved in the projects?
- Who are the teachers (faculty staff, external tutors)?
- Can you give a brief description of one or more projects (what is the content, who is involved, duration, outcomes, long-term vision)?



2.7 External tutors / artists in residence

Questions to be considered when self-evaluating within this sub-domain:

- **How does your curriculum provide the opportunity to bring in external tutors and / or artists in residence?**
- **What specific (formal) qualifications, if any, must external tutors or artists in residence have?**
- **If formal qualification is not required, what qualities replace the formal aspects?**
- **What is the approximate balance of the amount of lessons taught by faculty and those taught by external tutors / artists in residence (e.g. 90% - 10%)?**

2.8 Virtual classroom / E-learning / Use of location-independent learning / Teaching tools

Questions to be considered when self-evaluating within this sub-domain:

- **How does your curriculum utilise the virtual classroom (webinars, online one-2-one or group lessons etc) to enhance learning and teaching?**
 - a. How do you ensure that all students have equal access to class?
 - b. What provisions are in place for students without a computer?
 - c. What provisions are in place for students with learning disabilities related to computers and seeing-impaired students?
- **How much of the content of your curriculum is delivered through a virtual classroom format (e.g.: tutorials for specific content / resources, delivery of assignments, discussion forums...)?**
- **How does the faculty at your institution use these tools? Are they expected to use them regularly?**
 - a. Do you feel that the right tools are available to students and faculty?
- **What regular training do teachers and students receive in this field?**
 - a. How is this supported by your institution?
- **How have the tools enhanced pedagogical approaches?**



2.9 Assessment and Feedback

Questions to be considered when self-evaluating within this sub-domain:

- **What do you assess?**
- **How do you assess it (e.g. through formal exams, peer / self-evaluation, etc)?**
 - a. Is the assessment mutually constructed in dialogue with students?
 - b. If yes, formatively or summatively?
 - c. If no, why not?
- **How is the assessment appropriate to the artistic standards you define?**
- **What are the most important criteria for you when assessing?**
- **How are these criteria communicated, both to the student and to the examination panels / juries?**
- **What is the purpose of feedback in your institution?**
- **How and in what settings do you communicate assessment as feedback?**
- **How frequent is feedback offered from tutors to students, and vice versa?**
- **How are your juries composed for performance examination, whether it be for individual or group performance?**
 - a. How do you consider the composition of juries?
 - b. What role do considerations based on gender, race / ethnic background, musical genre, external / internal faculty, number of members play in the make up?
- **How are your juries composed for admission exams?**
 - a. How do you consider the composition of juries?
 - b. What role do considerations based on gender, race / ethnic background, musical genre, external / internal faculty, number of members play in the make up?

2.10 Difficulties

Questions to be considered when self-evaluating within this sub-domain:

- **What procedures are in place to**
 - a. file formal complaints?
 - b. challenge an exam assessment?
 - c. change teachers or class?
 - d. report misconduct and abuse between
 - ⇒ teachers
 - ⇒ teachers and students as well as
 - ⇒ students?



How do we study? How do we teach?

We hope that this catalogue of questions will help you to start a process of consideration and change at your institution. These questions have been at the base of change already undertaken by several HME institutions across Europe and beyond. In the first publication of the AEC-SMS Diversity, Identity, Inclusiveness Working Group, *How are 'diverse cultures' integrated in the education of musicians across Europe?*, you can find many examples and case studies that might inspire you to consider new paths within your own institution.

Should you have any question, please do not hesitate to contact us via the AEC office or SMS contact form [here](#).

Link to:

- [Section 1: What do we study? What do we teach?](#)
- [Section 3: Where do we study? Where do we teach?](#)
- [Section 4: Who is the student? Who is the teacher?](#)

Publications:

- [Decentering Curricula: Questions for Re-evaluating Diversity and Inclusiveness in HMEIs](#)
- [How are 'diverse cultures' integrated in the education of musicians across Europe?](#)

Please note this document is part of *Decentering Curricula: Questions for Re-evaluating Diversity and Inclusiveness in HMEIs*, written by the [members of the Diversity, Identity, Inclusiveness Working Group](#) of the AEC - Strengthening Music in Society (SMS) project.

More information is available on www.sms.aec-music.eu