

National Academy of Theatre & Film Arts (NATFA) Sofia, Bulgaria

Institutional Review Report

Preamble

- i. The National Academy of Theatre and Film Arts (the Academy) has established a distinctive profile as the leading national provider of education and training in theatre and film arts. In a recent national survey that rated all of the Higher Education Institutions in Bulgaria, the Academy was positioned in second place behind Sofia University. The high national significance of the work and reputation of the Academy has recently been acknowledged by the Chairman of the National Assembly as being the '*most prestigious theatre and film higher school in the country*'. The Evaluation Team (ET) also noted the many national and international awards that have been received by staff and students of the Academy.
- ii. Through its engagement with staff and students of the Academy during the process of Evaluation and in meetings with external stakeholders, the ET formed the view that the reputation enjoyed by the Academy is fully deserved and the ET saw much evidence to suggest that the Academy was effectively led, soundly managed and offered its students a learning and teaching experience of exceptionally high quality. The ET is confident that the Academy has established a secure academic and administrative infrastructure that provides a firm springboard for the further improvement and development of its quality assurance and enhancement processes and procedures. Therefore, the evaluation, commentary and recommendations contained within this Institutional Review Report are made in this context and are intended to assist the Academy in meeting its own aspirations.

1. The Report

- 1.1 The Institutional Review (the Review) of the National Academy of Theatre & Film Arts was carried out under the auspices of the pilot Quality Assurance

and Enhancement process being developed by the Inter}artes Thematic Network. In carrying out the evaluation process, the Evaluation Team (ET) was guided by the general principles of the Quality Assurance & Enhancement Institutional Review process as set out in the relevant Guidelines (*Guidelines for Institutional and Subject Review for Higher Arts Education Programmes*). These guidelines ask that the evaluation process 'takes as its starting point, the institution's mission statement, aims and objectives'. Therefore, the Mission Statement of the Academy set out in the Self Evaluation Report¹ (SER), that expresses the main aims and objectives of the institution, guided the ET in its work, shaped the questions which it put to the staff and students of the Academy and underpinned its approach to the review process.

1.2 The Evaluation Team comprised four members supported by a reporting secretary; the membership of the Team was as follows:

Professor Anthony Dean (Chair)
Dr. Maisa Huuhka
Carsten Burke Kristensen
Dr. Milan Rasla
Lars Ebert (Secretary)

1.3 In line with the requirements of the pilot Quality Assurance and Enhancement procedures and processes, the ET made two visits to the Academy. A preliminary visit took place from the 23rd to the 25th October 2006 and the main Review visit took place from the 11th to the 13th December 2006. The ET took as the starting point for the Review a Self-Evaluation Report (SER) that was produced by the Academy in advance of the preliminary visit. This was revised and updated by the Academy in advance of the main visit and was presented to the ET together with a Disciplinary Self-Evaluation Report (DSER) for Puppet Theatre. The Academy also provided a range of translated documents as had been requested by the ET at then end of the preliminary visit (*see Appendix A: Additional Documents*).

¹ The Academy's Mission Statement is reproduced on page 7 of this Report.

2. The Academy

- 2.1 The National Academy for Theatre & Film Arts (NATFA) was founded in 1948. It was initially formed as a Theatre School and it was subsequently expanded into two Faculties (the Faculty of Stage Arts and the Faculty of Screen Arts) and its initial degree programs were opened in 1973. In 1995, through an Act of the National Assembly, the institution was awarded the status of the National Academy of Stage and Screen Arts. The Academy is currently the only state funded Theatre and Film institute in Bulgaria and, since it was founded, it has contributed significantly to the development of Bulgarian theatre and cinema. The Academy offers a wide range of programmes and study disciplines, some of which are unique within the context of Higher Education in Bulgaria (for example; puppet directing, physical theatre, theatre studies, film and theatre dramaturgy and several specialised study areas of screen arts). The Academy reports that it has professionally prepared about 90% of the country's specialists in the fields of stage and screen arts.
- 2.2 The Academy, as an academic institution in the Bulgarian Higher Education system, is required to operate in strict concordance with the Bulgarian Higher Education Act. The requirements of this Act are articulated through the Statute of the Academy which regulates the structure and the activities of the Academy. Together, the Higher Education Act and the Statute of the Academy define the nature and scope of its academic autonomy and self-government. The Academy also aspires to implement the objectives of the Bologna Declaration, which was co-signed by the Government of Bulgaria in 1999. Through a range of activities, the Academy seeks to foster mobility and international co-operation, to pursue the advancement of knowledge, art, and intercultural dialogue and to contribute to the development of the '*European space of Higher Education*'.
- 2.3 The Academy has an overall student population of approximately 550 students and an academic staff compliment of circa 108. The Academy offers programmes of study across the three cycles of higher education. The

Bachelor's degree consists of four years of full-time study. The Master's degree consists of 3 semesters of full-time study and the Doctoral degree (PhD) takes up 3 years of full-time study. Study at the Academy is predominantly full-time at undergraduate level but study can be undertaken on a part-time basis at postgraduate level (MA and PhD).

2.4 The institutional infrastructure of NATFA is comprised of four broad units:

- academic faculties;
- management and executive;
- administrative support;
- service & production.

The main academic units within the Academy are the two faculties; Stage Arts and Screen Arts. Each faculty has a General Assembly that elects the Dean and the Faculty Council. The Faculty Council is responsible for the co-ordination and development of their undergraduate and postgraduate programs. Each faculty is organised into Chairs that effectively function as academic departments based on cognate subject areas and disciplines. Altogether, the Academy has eight Chairs: five in the Stage Arts Faculty and three in the Screen Arts Faculty. The eight Chairs currently comprise the following.

Stage Arts Faculty:

- Acting & Directing for Drama Theatre (ADDTh)
- Acting, Directing & Design for Puppet Theatre (ADDPTh)
- Theatre Studies (TS)
- Stage Speech (SS)
- Stage Movement (SM)

Screen Arts Faculty:

- Film & TV Directing & Animation (FTDA)
- Film & TV Cinematography & Photography (FTCPh)
- Film Studies & Dramaturgy (FSD)

Each Chair has a Chair Council that is comprised of all the full-time lecturers in the Chair. The Chairs form the basic network of the Academy's education, training, scientific, creative and cultural activities and each Chair Council elects a Head of Chair.

2.5 The principal governing bodies of the Academy are the General Assembly, the Control Council, the Senate (Academic Council), and the office of the Rector. The General Assembly is the supreme governing body of the Academy. It includes all full-time habilitated lecturers (tenure Professors and Associate Professors), representatives of the non-habilitated full-time lecturers (Assistant Professors and Lecturers), of the non-teaching staff and of the students. The Control Council is an internal control body which is elected by the General Assembly and annually presents the Academy's budget accounts to the General Assembly. The Control Council is authorised to inspect internal processes such as the legitimacy of election procedures, labour grievances, disciplinary procedures and budget plans. The membership of the Senate is elected by means of secret vote by the members of the General Assembly. At present, Senate has 24 members who represent the habilitated lecturers (18), non-habilitated lecturers (1), administrative staff (1) and student representatives (4). The present Senate was elected by the General assembly on 3 November 2003. The General Assembly also elects the Rector by secret ballot. The current Rector (Prof. Dr Stanislav Semerjiev) was elected in November 2003. On completion of the election process, the new Rector presents a mandatory programme for approval by the Senate. This programme then serves as the basis of the educational, scientific, creative and administrative policies and activities of the Academy throughout their term of office.

2.6 The programme presented by the Rector in 2003 established five Advisory Councils that have taken over the responsibilities and functions that were previously undertaken by Vice-Rectors. These five Advisory Councils are comprised of:

- Quality of Education Advisory Council
- Scientific Policy Advisory Council

- Creative Development Advisory Council for Drama Theatre
- Creative Development Advisory Council for Puppet Theatre
- Creative Development Advisory Council for Screen Arts

The aim of this development was to achieve a more pluralistic, transparent and effective self-government within the Academy (see *Appendix B: Structure of the Academy*). The Rector also presents to Senate a proposed membership for each of the five Standing Advisory Councils for approval. The role of the Advisory Councils is to assist the Rector, functioning in both a developmental and advisory capacity. The Councils meet periodically during the year to analyse, evaluate, recommend improvements and develop new policies in their respective fields. In addition to the five standing Advisory Councils, there is a Co-ordinating Advisory Council. However, the ET learned that this is not a permanently constituted council within the Academy's committee structure. The ET was informed that it meets only as required to deal with extraordinary business that is beyond the remit of the other Councils or other matters that may remain unresolved through the normal processes.

2.7 The Rector co-ordinates all his activities with the collective governing bodies, with the aim of ensuring open, transparent and democratic decision-making procedures. Problems that arise within the Academy are solved following discussions in the Chairs, Faculties and the Senate. The Rector presents annually to the General Assembly a report on the current state of the Academy.

2.8 The ET fully appreciated that the current committee system had been organised so as to promote a more pluralistic and transparent management of the Academy than had previously been the case. In overview (*as set out in Appendix B*), and particularly in relation to the size and nature of the institution, the committee structure appears to be somewhat complex and though the ET had some concerns as to the overall efficacy of this approach, it fully understood the Academy's overriding concern to establish a clear and democratic committee structure that encouraged the wider participation of staff. The ET was assured by the Academy that the efficacy of its committee

structure is constantly monitored and that it will continue to optimise this appropriately as circumstances permit.

2.9 The ET was highly impressed by the clear leadership role and strategic vision offered by the Rector and his senior colleagues that follows from the Mandatory Programme presented by the Rector to the Academic Council on his election. The ET strongly endorses the Academy's approach to the strategic planning of budgets, physical estate and human resources that seek to fully recognise and reflect the strategic needs and priorities of Academy.

3. Results from Previous Accreditations

3.1 An Institutional Accreditation undertaken by an Expert Group (EG) on behalf of National Agency for Evaluation and Accreditation (NAEA) was undertaken at the Academy in 2005 and concluded in 2006. During the course of this accreditation process the EG inspected the Academy's teaching facilities and held meetings with the Rector and Senate. They also met with administrative departments, with undergraduate and postgraduate students, alumni, external partners and employers. A Programme Accreditation by the NAEA commenced in 2005 and was still in the process of completion at the time of the Inter}artes Evaluation visit. Following the completion of the Institutional Accreditation, the NAEA Commission came to the following conclusion:

"On the basis of the above findings the Standing Commission of Humanities and Arts gives a VERY GOOD mark for the institutional accreditation of the National Academy of Theatre and Film Arts and, in accordance with the Higher Education Act and the Regulations of NAEA, proposes a six-year period of validity, after which a new institutional accreditation is to be undertaken".

The Commission made the following three recommendations:

- *to enhance the professional development and habilitation of young and promising academic lecturers;*
- *to speed up the accomplishment of the project for the development of an Information Centre;*
- *to regularize the performance of the newly-established QAE System.*

The Academy accepted the findings and recommendations of the Commission and the ET saw evidence that significant progress has already been made on the recommended measures.

4. The Mission, Educational Philosophy and Aims of the Academy

4.1 The mission of the National Academy of Theatre and Film Arts was clearly set out within in the SER:

- *develop as a leading contemporary academic and cultural institution, offering a wide range of specialities and programmes which combine theoretical studies and practical training in the fields of stage and screen arts, theatre and film studies;*
- *prepare highly qualified specialists, adaptable to the dynamically changing cultural and public needs; to develop the knowledge, competences and skills which will ensure the successful professional realization of its students;*
- *raise the creative potential, the analytical and communicative skills of the students, to encourage informed and independent critical thinking, to broaden their cultural horizons;*
- *foster, through its educational activities, the democratic values of tolerance, dialogue, co-operation and initiative.*

4.2 Through interaction with staff and students of the Academy over the course of two visits and through its reading of the documentation provided, the ET found evidence to suggest that while the aims and aspirations contained within the Mission Statement are being broadly realised within the day-to-day work of the Academy these are not always clearly or explicitly linked to the strategic aims as they are expressed in the Mission Statement. The ET noted the claim, set out by the Academy in the SER, which states that *'the*

Mission of NATFA has been publicised and made wide-known by the members of the Academy and its governing body'. However, it is the general view of the ET that the Mission Statement could play a much more effective role in assuring and enhancing the quality of provision across the Academy if it were to be more widely promulgated and promoted within the institution. The ET perceived that the claim (made in the SER) that the Mission Statement '*underlies the goals and objectives of NATFA's educational policies, and shapes its programmes and practices*' was currently more of an aspiration rather than a concrete reality.

- 4.3 The Academy's educational philosophy seeks to achieve an effective balance, interrelation and synthesis between the academic principle (pursuit of knowledge, scholarship and research, interdisciplinary focus on the arts and humanities) and the professional art education principle (nurturing and training highly-qualified professional practitioners through a variety of task-based approaches and methods, including practice as research). The Academy's approach to learning and teaching is based upon the 'atelier principle' which is designed to support a creative relationship between the teacher, the students and the creative discipline being studied. Each student entering the Academy is assigned to a class and the educational experience of each class is largely directed by an individual professor who takes on the role of Artistic Advisor (or Creative Director) to that class throughout the term of their studies.
- 4.4 Each study speciality at the Academy has a formal curriculum that has been approved by Senate. The curricula define the sequence, duration, status (compulsory, optional, elective) of each study discipline, the required workload and the assessment procedures. Each discipline has a syllabus that contains detailed information on the study programme and assessment tasks. The quality of each educational programme is monitored by the Quality of Education Advisory Council.
- 4.5 In meetings with the ET, both staff and students confirmed that the role of the Artistic Advisor was central to the educational experience offered by the Academy. Though Artistic Advisors enjoy a high level of autonomy in the

way that they shape their own syllabus to meet the needs of the overall curriculum, their proposals are subject to discussion and debate by the relevant Chair where they may be revised and are then forwarded to the respective Faculty Council, and then Senate, for approval. Based upon its discussions with the representative groups of staff, the ET was highly impressed by the way in which the staff share in formal discussion and debate about each proposed teaching syllabi and how this forum appears to be utilised as a strategic loci for the critical evaluation of the quality of the student learning experience.

4.6 The ET came to understand, through its dialogue with both staff and students, that curriculum design, learning and teaching strategies and learning outcomes are subject to regular review and evaluation through a variety of both formal and informal means within the Academy. This is most often done at the level of the individual discipline rather than as a systemic process across the range of educational provision. Understandably, given the size of the institution, informal mechanisms for the evaluation, analysis and critiquing of the student learning experience are highly valued within the Academy. While the ET appreciates the value of such mechanisms, it wishes to encourage the Academy to ensure that these informal processes articulate fully and effectively with the formal mechanisms that are currently in place so as to foster and inform wider discussion and debate across the Academy regarding matters related to the educational philosophy of the institution.

4.7 The Academy seeks to expose the work of students and, by extension, staff to regular public scrutiny as a means of benchmarking its own standards of the levels of professional attainment achieved by students. This is most often achieved by placing the practical examination work of students before a public audience at each key stage of development, typically at the end of each semester and/or academic year. While the ET recognises that such exposure may be regarded as essential to the nature and purpose of the education provided by the Academy it also recognises that there is a concomitant danger of student learning outcomes being too forcibly shaped by the demands associated with public performances.

4.8 The Academy aims to provide a 'first-rate' professional and academic education to each of its students and, in particular, to develop their creativity and individuality. During the course of the Evaluation Visit, the ET found much evidence to support this intention of the Academy. This links to the explicit aim – expressed within the Mission Statement – that the Academy seeks to '*ensure the successful professional realisation of its students*'. While the ET gathered the impression that this aim appears to be appropriately supported through the appreciation and/or direct experience of current professional practice of the majority of teaching staff, some students expressed a view that this was not consistently the case across all of the strands of training. They expressed a desire for a greater emphasis to be placed upon the acquisition of the relevant entrepreneurial skills and knowledge of the current professional landscape within their curricula, particularly as they approached graduation.

5. Learning Outcomes

5.1 The intended outcomes of student learning are expressed as broad learning 'goals' within the descriptors of the individual syllabi. The ET was able to gather from its meetings with both staff and students that these broad learning goals are discussed in detail with students at the beginning of each learning experience and that this provides opportunity for students to seek to finesse the proposed learning outcomes to reflect both individual and group requirements. Through these means, the Academy seeks to ensure that detailed learning outcomes are held flexibly enough to enable students to undertake specific tasks within a shared class activity, enabling them to develop their individual creativity and address their individual learning needs. In some instances, particularly in the later stages of their programme of study, students are able to propose their own tasks and projects and, therefore, negotiate specific and relevant learning outcomes associated with the agreed activity.

5.2 Learning outcomes are evidenced by students within the Academy through a number of means, from the production of written assignments and research

papers through to practical production and performance tasks. However, the ET learned that detailed learning outcomes are specified and/or agreed largely through discussion between individual students or class cohorts and the appropriate tutor, there does not appear to be any formal recording of these discussions or agreements. However, both staff and students assured the ET that such learning outcomes were very clearly understood by all parties and that they were clearly signposted to students in advance of learning activities and that they were regularly revisited and reviewed as part of the ongoing learning and teaching processes.

5.3 The ET was particularly interested to learn how the overarching learning outcomes, set out within the Academy’s Mission Statement, were achieved. The ET asked both staff and students to describe the ways in which the development of *‘informed and independent critical thinking’* was fostered within the Academy. The ET heard examples of the effective use of teaching methodologies that promoted both self- and peer-evaluation and ways in which students were actively encouraged to engage in critical evaluation, to form independent critical judgements about their own work and the work of others. Through its dialogue with staff and students, the ET gained a favourable impression of the ways in which the learning environment of the Academy engaged students in the learning process and actively promoted the general learning outcomes that are enshrined within its Mission.

5.4 Student learning outcomes that demonstrate the pedagogical and creative work at the Academy are most often demonstrated in the context of open and public performances, shows, productions and colloquiums. The quality of these outcomes are subsequently discussed, analysed and evaluated in the meetings of the Chairs, Faculty Councils, Advisory Councils and Senate. There is also a Student Award (awarded by the student body) for the best student performers of the (academic) year. While the ET understood the value of demonstrating and testing student learning outcomes in this way, it also recognised that this places a significant focus on those learning outcomes most closely associated with the exposure of student work to public audiences. In the view of the ET, there exists a considerable risk that the highly demonstrable student learning outcomes – those most closely

associated with public performance – may dominate both staff and student attention – perhaps at the expense of more abstract learning goals.

5.5 The ET were also interested to learn how the more detailed learning outcomes, associated with specific aspects of study and/or study specialisations, were achieved. Through its dialogue with staff and students, the ET became aware that the concept of articulating the goals of student learning through 'learning outcome' statements was a relatively recent development within the Academy. The ET received the impression that the concept of learning outcomes, other than those most readily demonstrated through public performances (public examinations) was not, as yet, securely held or widely understood within the staff cohort.

5.6 In accordance with its Mission Statement, the Academy seeks to foster skills in citizenship and promote the values associated with a civil and democratic society. The Academy has, therefore, committed itself to a policy of non-discrimination and equal opportunities. It seeks to follow these principles through its educational programmes, procedures and practices. The Academy actively seeks not discriminate on grounds of national or ethnic origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sex (including pregnancy), sexual orientation, social status, age or disabilities. An example of the Academy's positive and pro-active approach to equality of opportunity is represented by the founding of the BA programme in pantomime, which has been designed specifically for students with speaking and hearing impediments. While the ET applauds this development, it hopes that the Academy will build on this initiative by finding ways of enabling students with disabilities or specific learning difficulties to be integrated into the full range of educational and training provision offered by the Academy.

6. Curriculum Development

6.1 In accordance with the aims of the Bologna process, the Academy has sought to organise its educational provision to reflect the three-cycles of Higher Education. At present it offers a range of degree programmes at BA, MA and PhD level. In addition to these formal qualifications, the Academy also offers specialised programmes in the fields of Stage and Screen Arts

and study programmes for students of diverse ethnic, social, regional, international backgrounds. In 2005 the Academy moved to a modular structuring of the curricula with an associated credit system in order to meet the requirements of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). The tariff of the credit system adopted by the Academy is one credit awarded for 30 hours of work. This is inclusive of lectures, practical work, seminars, other forms of instruction and independent study.

6.2 Study at the Academy is mainly undertaken in full-time mode. The BA is comprised of four years of full-time study, the MA three full-time semesters and the Doctoral degree (PhD) three years of full-time study. However, the ET learned that the Academy has recently become a member of the European Virtual University and it is currently planning to develop some distance learning, blended learning and life-long learning teaching strategies and a range of programmes within its areas of expertise. The SER also indicates that the Academy is currently seeking to establish a suite of MA programmes that will be taught in English. Staff informed the ET that these new MA programmes were intended to attract students from the international market.

6.3 Proposals for new programmes or revisions to existing programmes at the Academy are developed or revised through discussions at the appropriate Chair, they are then approved by the respective Faculty Council and ultimate approval is given by the Senate (Academic Council). Each specialised programme has a formally approved curriculum that defines the sequence, duration, the status (compulsory, optional, elective) of each component discipline, the required student workload and the assessment procedure. Each component discipline within each programme has a formally agreed syllabus that includes a programme descriptor, a summary of the content of each semester, the overall learning outcomes, workload requirements and an outline of the assessment tasks. The quality of educational programmes and services is monitored by the Quality of Education Advisory Council, which takes part in discussing and formulating the quality criteria.

6.4 Staff informed the ET that, until comparatively recently, the Academy was the only institution in Bulgaria that offered training in its particular fields. More recently, a number of similar programmes have been established by competitor institutions which has created something of a competitive student market. However, the staff explained that this situation does have some advantages, for example, they now more frequently update their syllabi and curricula. They also cited two further key drivers that prompted revision of syllabi and curricula, one was the need to ensure that their programmes reflected the changing professionals arenas of theatre and film and the other was the need to harmonise their provision with the like training offered across Europe. Staff reported that they sought to make their syllabi and curricula more flexible and more useful to students in this way while also seeking to preserve the valuable and successful aspects of their own traditions.

7. Learning and Teaching

7.1 The ET learned that the Academy does not currently have a formally adopted learning and teaching strategy. However, at the request of the ET, a document outlining the Academy's pedagogical strategy (Document 23) was produced by the Academy for the commencement of the main Evaluation Visit. This document confirmed that the pedagogical strategy of the Academy was closely shaped by the Mission Statement and that the pedagogical practice of individual members of staff was expected to conform to these principles. It was clear to the ET that the academic freedom of staff, with regard to the content of their teaching and individual choice of pedagogical methods, was highly valued by the Academy and, accordingly, it is regarded as being enshrined within its governing statutes (Chapter 3, Article 35, paragraph 2). The document also clearly states that the pedagogical and methodological practices of each member of academic staff is subject to periodical review and appraisal through the on-going work of the various committees and councils at Chair, Faculty and Academy level.

7.2 The ET gathered through discussion with staff that matters relating to the pedagogical practice of academic staff and the student learning experience

were regular topics of discussion, both within the committee structure and, across the Academy, in more informal contexts. The Academy states in the SER that matters of learning and teaching are routinely discussed in the Quality of Education Advisory Council (QEAC). Where learning and teaching issues relate very directly to matters associated with practical training projects in the fields of theatre, puppet theatre or film discussions on pedagogical practice and the student learning experience also take place at the respective Creative Development Advisory Council (CDAC). Discussion and debate about matters relating to learning and teaching also takes place at Senate (Academic Council) and staff gave the examples of student recruitment, the development of new disciplines and curricula as matters that Senate had recently focussed upon. Staff also reported that through discussion and debate at Senate, the Academy had managed to bring the various disciplines into closer academic alignment and had also overseen the adoption of the three-cycle system of BA, MA and PhD.

7.3 The ET asked staff to outline their educational philosophy of the Academy. The ET heard that the educational philosophy of the Academy is one that strives to combine tradition and innovation, and that the training provided at the Academy is a two-fold process, based on both the individual achievements of the student and their ability to work as part of a team. The traditions that the Academy seeks to preserve are the development of the individual creativity of its students and the quality of the relationship that it seeks to foster between theory and practice. The staff recognised that conditions within the professional fields that related to the Academy's teaching had changed significantly in recent years. This has prompted the Academy re-assess its mission and begin to broaden its portfolio of specialist provision (for example Theatre Management and Physical Theatre have recently been added).

7.4 Both staff and students confirmed the view formed by the ET, that the role of the Artistic Advisor was central to the learning and teaching experience offered by the Academy. Staff recognised that this was a pedagogic characteristic specific to the preparation of students for entry to the professional arts arena, where learning was centered around an eminent

professor or artist. Therefore, they took the view that students, as emerging artists, should centre around a well know professor and that this forms a major foundation of their development. In this system it is usual for individual professors to encourage different techniques and encourage their students to develop in different ways. The staff could see that this approach might clash with the development of a more unified approach to learning and teaching processes but they were not clear how to go about resolving this issue. They felt that it was difficult to see how they can reconcile the unique approaches of the professors, who have their own classes, with the desire to establish a shared approach to the system of learning and teaching.

7.5 The ET asked the students to articulate their understanding of the role of the artistic advisor within the educational process. In their view the artistic advisor (which they referred to as the creative director) played an important role in directing their learning, deciding in which particular areas of their learning they should experiment and in which areas they should go deeper. The students expressed the view that the current system of learning and teaching would not work without this key role. They expressed the view that, were the role of the artistic advisor to cease to exist, there would be a danger that their learning would remain at a superficial level and that without this direction they may attempt to cover too wide a spectrum of study. The students also referred to the fact that the artistic advisor was responsible for drafting the detailed syllabus, which determined which specific aspects of the discipline they would focus at any given stage of their learning process. However, they also reported that it was normal practice for artistic advisors to seek student opinion on particular aspects of their discipline that they wished to study in greater detail. Students reported that it was common practice for their requests to be carefully considered by the artistic advisor and that these were often then accommodated within the syllabus. The students expressed the view that each class (cohort) was seen as a group of artists and that they saw the artistic advisor as the creative director of this artistic team. They expressed the view that this pedagogic approach was consistent with their perception of the prevailing condition of

professional practice. While the ET found some evidence that staff were fully aware of the changing professional context of their subjects, it was less confident that this was always fully reflected by, and integrated within, the curricula.

7.6 The ET asked staff to describe the various means by which students provide feedback to them about their learning experience. The staff stated that there was ongoing debate about this in class and that each new assignment was first put before the class for general discussion. Staff also reported that, at the end of each semester, every student had a personal tutorial. Staff felt that they maintained both close contact with their students and that they actively promoted an open and frank dialogue with them about their educational experience. The ET asked the staff to explain what happened if a student and a teacher didn't get along? Staff confirmed that this occasionally was the case and that this might happen on either a personal level or on a 'professional' where there were creative differences. If such differences can not be overcome, the student can choose to move to the class of another professor. The ET was informed that students could only be allowed to move to another class in the same study discipline and if no other class was available the student would have to intermit for a year and join the following cohort. However, a student pointed out that this option would not be open to all students as some study disciplines only recruited a cohort every few years. If a student chooses, or has, to change their study discipline they have to undertake the appropriate entrance exam.

7.7 The ET asked the staff team to explain how they helped students to understand their own development path. The staff responded by saying that, from the very beginning of their first year, this development path is explained to students. That every teacher, including those teaching the supporting disciplines, explains to the students what they will be learning. At the end of each semester students are notified of their assignments for the following semester so that they are able to prepare themselves appropriately. Staff said that at the end of each semester they have a discussion with the individual student about their development and about

their relative standing within their learning process so they can also compare their own progress with that of their peers.

7.8 The ET asked the staff team to explain how they make clear to students the learning outcomes that they are expected to achieve? The staff said that this was clearly set out within the curriculum for each discipline. However, they also stated that the Artistic Advisor (creative director) has the right to vary the set curriculum in line with the needs of the student class as they perceived them. The ET asked the staff team to clarify how they communicate to the students the means by which they will be assessed and what criteria they will be assessed against? The staff responded by saying that the students were able to read this in the written syllabus and that, at the very beginning of their studies, it is explained to students that they are expected to acquire their knowledge '*organically*' during their studies.

7.9 The ET asked staff to explain how they fostered independent critical thinking within the students? The staff responded by saying that everybody was familiar with the mission statement of the institution and that, accordingly, students were encouraged towards freedom of expression. That the students were free to express their own individual opinions regardless of the beliefs of the teacher and that the goal was to enable the student to develop a professional way of thinking. An important aspect of student learning was, therefore, their introduction to the professional language of their study discipline and staff had an expectation that students developed the ability to critically assess their own work and progress through the medium of this professional language. Students were also encouraged to be self-critical and to critically appraise the work of their peers. Students confirmed that they were each expected to comment critically on the work of their fellow students and receive critical feedback from their peers in return and that they were expected to produce written critical evaluations on their own performances. Students stated that the process of developing their ability to engage in critical thinking began as they first entered the academy and that an emphasis was placed upon the formulation of their own opinions before they heard the opinions of their teachers. The students confirmed that, as they progressed through their programme of study, they developed their

ability to both formulate and defend their individual and independent views and opinions.

7.10 The ET asked staff to characterise the pedagogic relationship that they sought to foster with their students? The staff responded by saying that they regarded them variously as their '*children*' and as being '*young colleagues and as customers*'. The students confirmed that their teachers acted in a quasi-parental role and that, in this role, staff sought to '*push their child to develop in the right way*'. The students stated that their teachers fully understood the strength and weaknesses of each student and that they would, therefore, always seek guide them in the right direction. In this context, students spoke about how a level of trust was built up between themselves and the teachers, commenting that this was a long, complex and highly individual process.

7.11 The ET asked students if they could suggest one improvement that the Academy could implement that might improve the overall quality of their experience. Students stated that, whenever they did have such ideas or proposals, they felt able raise them immediately and openly with staff. However, when pressed by the ET, students did identify the need for a greater integration of entrepreneurial skill into their curriculum. They referred to the significant changes that had come about in the conditions of professional practice in recent years, recognising that the socialist system of the allocation of employment had now disappeared and that the established links with theatres and professional companies were not as strong as they once were. They felt that some of their teachers were not as familiar with the new conditions that currently prevailed in the field of professional practice as they might be and that, consequently, they were less well equipped to prepare the students appropriately.

7.12 The ET asked staff if student participation in international festivals provided opportunities for them to to compare pedagogical methods and processes with those of other colleagues? The staff responded by saying that when students perform in festivals they are normally accompanied by their professor and that they also take part in any workshops and/or seminars

that are organised as part of the event. The ET also asked staff about opportunities for co-operation and collaboration within the Academy? The staff said that, as the academy is relatively small, co-operation came quite naturally. Staff pointed out that evidence of this was provided by the recent establishment of study disciplines that exist between the two faculties, such as Dramaturgy and Stage & Screen Design. They also drew the attention of the ET to their co-operation with the Academy of Fine Arts (where there was a scenography programme) and that some of the teachers of the Academy of Fine Art also taught at NATFA. Staff gave the example of co-operation between the Academy's directing students and the scenography students of the Academy of Fine Arts, stating that it was natural that future directors and stage designers should meet and have the opportunity to forge artistic relationships with those that may well become their future colleagues. The staff identified such connections as being crucial to the future careers of their students. However, staff confirmed that while such collaboration was not formally fixed it did form part of their daily practice.

8. Assessment

- 8.1 The Academy seeks to assess the knowledge and skills acquired by students through a range of assessment tasks and forms (including, production and performance projects, practical and theoretical assignments and oral and written examinations). These are appropriately designed so as to enable students to demonstrate the required learning outcomes. Through a joint decision of the Student Council and the General Assembly, the Academy seeks to ensure that a clear outline of assessment procedures, including the nature of the assessment tasks, the assessment criteria and the approximate date for completion, is provided to students at the start of each module, programme and study discipline. By these means, the Academy seeks to ensure that students are provided with advance notice about when and how they will be assessed.
- 8.2 The established system of student assessment in Bulgaria is calibrated on a scale of marks that range from 2 (lowest) to 6 (highest). Though grade equivalencies may differ slightly from institution to institution, the ET were

given to understand that they are based on a common set of guidelines that are widely applied across the Bulgarian higher education sector. Although the ECTS grading scale is not currently used in Bulgaria, some equivalencies with the Bulgarian scale have been established for the purpose of both student mobility and to meet the requirements of the Diploma Supplement.

8.3 The SER states that creative and scientific progress of each student at the Academy is constantly observed, monitored and discussed by teaching staff, and that feedback on progress is regularly provided to students – often in the form of individual and group tutorials, and in the context of class discussions. The ET asked students to comment on their experience and understanding of assessment processes. Students reported that they perceived the assessment process as taking place in two phases, one that was continual that commenced at the start of each learning activity and then a final assessment at its conclusion. In terms of performance-based projects, the ET heard that the artistic advisor undertakes the first part of the assessment process and that an assessment commission, chaired by the artistic advisor, undertakes the second part of assessment.

8.4 The ET learned that an Artistic Adviser who is responsible for the overall process of their education and training leads each class. At the end of each semester the students are required to submit to '*public examinations*' and these are normally followed by open discussions that are attended by people from outside the Academy, such as external evaluators and representatives drawn from the relevant fields of professional practice. While students said that they felt it was possible to discuss the outcomes of their assessments they did not feel that it was possible to challenge assessment outcomes. While they expressed a vague awareness that a procedure by which students could challenge assessment outcomes might exist, they were not clear about how this worked. In general, students expressed the view that their main focus should be on their acquisition and development of knowledge and skills rather on the assessment process itself.

- 8.5 Through their representatives in the Student Council and within the wider committee structure of NATFA, and also through an annual survey, students can provide feedback on the utility of the assessment processes and make suggestions with regard to further optimization. In this respect, the ET noted the significant contribution made to the work of the Academy through the garnering, gathering, focusing and expressing of student views through the activities of the Student Council.
- 8.6 The SER refers to the introduction of External Evaluators as part of the assessment and examination process and the ET were keen to gain a closer understanding of their role in relation to the assessment process. During the course of the evaluation visit, the ET met one External Evaluator who told them that they personally had not taken part in the final assessment of students but had so far acted more as an external observer of the examination process. However, the ET were informed that the role of the External Evaluator had only recently been introduced and they received the impression that it was intended that External Evaluators would be more directly involved in the final assessment of students from the end of the current academic year. Staff indicated that they were able to draw on a long list of potential External Evaluators and that the primary purpose of this role was to provide an external perspective on student achievement.
- 8.7 From the documentation provided and the discussions that took place with staff during the evaluation visit, the ET were unable to form a clear understanding of the precise role and function of External Evaluators within the assessment and examination systems of the Academy. However, the ET welcomes this initiative and encourages the Academy to find ways of developing and formalising this role so as to secure the scope and purpose of external evaluation within assessment and examination procedures and to feed more broadly into the Academy's quality assurance and enhancement processes.
- 8.8 The Academy strongly expounds the view that performing on a real stage in front of a real audience is the best way for the future actors, directors, designers and dancers to get a hands-on experience of their job. While the

ET would not wish to challenge this view, it perceives that there is currently a tendency for staff to place a preponderance of attention to the product, or outcomes, of learning over the attention given to the actual processes of student learning.

9. Resources

9.1 The physical infrastructure of the Academy comprises a range of professionally equipped performance, recording and ancillary facilities that support student learning within the specialised areas of study offered. These are situated within three neighbouring buildings that are located close to the city centre of Sofia. In addition to the specialised facilities mentioned above, the Academy also has a variety lecture halls, rehearsal rooms, studios, laboratories, workshops, a fully digitized TV Studio, a sound-recording studio and a computerized editing studio, a Digital Multimedia Centre, a photo-lab and other professional facilities. The main specialist facilities of the Academy comprise:

- Drama Training Theatre (440 seats);
- Puppet Training Theatre (80 seats);
- Film & Video Screening Hall (80 seats);
- Digital Television Studio.

The student learning experience in each of these practical and technical facilities is supported by specialist technical staff who are managed by the respective Faculty.

9.2 The ET heard that several years ago many of the buildings were in a poor state of repair. Staff reported that, over the last three years, the physical conditions within the academy have been improved considerably. The ET learned that prior to the election of the current rector, the Academy prioritised very little if any of its recurrent budget towards the repair and refurbishment of its building stock. Over the last three years the academy has spent approximately 25% of its total annual budget on repairing and refurbishing its physical resources.

- 9.3 The Academy also houses a Library that contains circa 60,000 volumes of Bulgarian and foreign books that support student learning and postgraduate research within the fields of stage and screen arts. It also houses the country's unique archive relating to Bulgarian theatre that contains a range of printed materials dating from 1879 until the present time. In addition to printed materials, the Library also houses a collection of music CD's. The Academy also has a video/DVD collection that supports the work of the Faculty of Screen Arts and an archive of recordings of student graduation performances but that these are held elsewhere in the Academy. The Library also has a unique database that provides a reference to all publications available in Bulgaria. The ET also learned that students have access to the library of the Bulgarian Actors Union. The ET asked staff if the budget normally allocated to the Library was sufficient to meet demand? Staff responded by saying that while each year the demands for the purchase of new material is normally greater than the monies allocated for this purpose, it was possible for the Library to make requests for additional funding. They also said that they sometimes sought external sponsorship for new acquisitions.
- 9.4 At the time of the evaluation visit, the Library was closed for renovation and expansion as part of a plan to establish an Academic Information Centre. The ET asked staff to describe the intended scope and function of the information centre. The ET heard that it was intended as a means of bringing together and integrating a range of student-facing services to form a combined hub that will support the wider educational, scientific and international activities of the Academy. When completed, the Information Centre will comprise the Library, a suite of 20 open-access computer workstations (with internet access) and the International Office. The ET was informed that the Information Centre is planned to come on stream in January 2007.
- 9.5 The SER indicates that academic and artistic international co-operation and exchange represents a key strategic priority for the Academy and a number of long-term contacts with universities and art academies across the world have been established. The Academy is an active partner in projects

developed through TEMPUS, Culture 2000 and other educational and creative programs. In 2005, the Academy was granted an ERASMUS Charter and it currently has contracts for student and staff exchange with Lithuania, Portugal and Germany. In light of this, the ET sought to gain a better understanding of the role of the International Office in facilitating international exchanges? Staff said that, as a participant of the Erasmus programme, they frequently hosted foreign students who came to study at the Academy for semester-long periods. Though the Academy has not, as yet, sent its own students to undertake studies at institutions in other countries through this scheme, it was envisaged that this would happen in the near future. The ET learned that students wishing to come from abroad to study at the Academy made their initial contact through the International Office, which ensured that the appropriate documentation was in place. It was then the role of the International Office to introduce the visiting student to the appropriate faculty and the teacher whose class they would be joining.

9.6 It was clear to the ET that staff regarded internationalisation as being very important to the academy and the ET heard about plans to widen this activity, the Academy was keen to build upon the links that staff were currently forging through their own visits to comparable institutions in China, Japan, Russia and other parts of Europe. However, the ET learned that there was currently no formal international strategy that underpinned the Academy's activities in this area other than the bilateral agreements that the Academy has signed as part of its participation in the Socrates/Erasmus programme. The ET noted that the intention to offer MA programmes taught in English would set new challenges for the Academy, both for the International Office and for the Library, in terms of the additional that they would need to offer to these students.

9.7 The ET learned from the President of the Student Council that currently there were no specific social structures in place for students. The Academy does not offer sports facilities or activities directly to the students but, through the budget of the Student Council, a contract has been set up with the Bulgarian Sport Federation so that students can go swimming there

and/or use their training facilities. The Academy is able to offer accommodation to some students though it recognises that this is in need of significant upgrading – particularly in light of the intention to attract international students.

10. Student Recruitment

10.1 The number of students (excluding international students) that the Academy can enrol in any one year is strictly controlled by the Ministry of Education. The ET noted that, according to the statistical data provided by the Academy, there had been a gradual decline in the overall number of student applications over recent years, falling from 947 in 1999/2000 to 637 in 2006/2007. The figures provided conflate undergraduate and postgraduate applications and much of this decline may be attributed to a significant decline in applications for both Masters and Doctoral study over this period.

10.2 The process of application to the Academy takes place throughout August and September with entrance exams being held in September. The entrance exams are undertaken in several stages, these include auditions, written and oral exams and selection projects. Each of the entrance exams contains a series of assignments specific to the relevant subject and candidates are selected to continue on at each stage. Detailed information about the application assignments is provided to applicants and they may also consult with staff with regard to matters relating to the application process.

10.3 The ET asked the staff about the marked decline in the number of doctoral studies students over recent years. Staff explained that this was partly a matter of motivation and partly a matter of financing. Potential PhD students are becoming more aware that following their doctoral study they are likely find difficulties in securing an appropriate job and that the Academy, as a state institution, is dependent on state financing and the Academy is currently only allowed to allocate a small percentage of its annual budget to support PhD students. The Academy currently has 5 study places available and there are usually about 20 applicants.

11. Student Support and Guidance

11.1 Students are recruited to the various programmes within the Academy through a selection process based on entrance examinations. Applicants are able to contact the Academy in advance of making their application in order to receive guidance on the interview and examination process. The ET Learned that it is common that applicants to the Academy apply several years in succession that, in so doing, they are able to establish and maintain close contact with staff of the Academy, develop an understanding of the programme for which they are applying and gain a clear idea of what will be expected of them as students. Applicants are able to access written information about their perspective programme of study. Students informed the ET that, while the written descriptors of programmes are not highly detailed, they felt that there is an onus on the applicants themselves to make a thorough investigation of their proposed programme of study.

11.2 The Academic Affairs Office is responsible for the provision and co-ordination of the student orientation and support services with additional support for foreign students provided by the International Office. The services offered through these means currently include assisting students in:

- registration and orientation;
- academic matters (time-tables, exams, academic records, etc);
- securing scholarships and other financial aid;
- securing accommodation (registration in the student hostel);
- matters of mobility, transfer and international exchange (Erasmus, etc);
- career counselling.

Additionally, information to assist applicants, students and alumni is published in NATFA catalogue, the student magazine and on the Academy's web site. The Academy regularly takes part in educational fairs, where potential applicants are provided with information on the application procedures, entrance exams and the various programmes offered by the Academy.

11.3 In line with its Mission Statement, the Academy seeks to advance the role, growth and development of a civil society and in its efforts for public benefit. It has a number of good practices in this area, as for instance the special pantomime course programme for students with hearing and speaking impediments; also the regular charity performances for children in orphanages, SOS centres, etc.

11.4 NATFA has an established tradition of providing education and training to international students, both on the basis of formal agreements with other institutions and agencies, and in response to individual requests. In order to facilitate student mobility, the Academy makes provision to assist students' in the development of their intercultural and communicative skills and competencies. To this purpose, the Academy offers courses in Bulgarian for foreign students, and a special course in foreign languages and intercultural communication for its Bulgarian students.

12. Student Progression and Achievement

12.1 The ET asked if there was a strategy to encourage students to carry on from the BA to MA, to PhD? The group responded by saying that the implementation of the three-cycle system is very recent so any encouragement for this is not yet formalised. Staff felt that they were currently rushing to harmonise their institution with the European requirements. They felt that there was a pressure placed upon them that Bulgaria would not be able to enter the EU if there were no BA/MA/PhD system in place.

13. Graduate Employment

13.1 The ET learned that the Academy currently has no means of generating statistical data that would provide a detailed survey of graduate employment. However, they do receive formal feedback from the respective trade unions that provide an overview of employment patterns of Academy graduates that gain work within the professional arenas of theatre and film. The Rector told the ET that he fully recognises the importance, to the Academy, of maintaining a check on the success of graduates, on who is

employing them and how they perform in the first few years of their professional careers. He emphasised that the Academy needed to develop and implement an appropriate and effective monitoring mechanism for tracking both the latitudinal and longitudinal employment patterns of its graduates.

13.2 The Academy has designed and developed various initiatives to assist the students in finding placements and in the pursuance of their professional careers as graduates. Such initiatives include student presentations to (and meetings with) potential employers, collaborative projects with professional theatres, student internships in professional theatres and film production companies. The Academy has provided the significant proportion of eminent practitioners in the professional arenas of theatre and media within Bulgaria. Additionally, many of the Academy's alumni have established themselves as successful professional artists in various countries around the world.

13.3 The Academy claims that quality of the education and training it provides is held in high regard by both audiences and employers. In support of this view, feedback is routinely gathered from:

- employers (directors of theatre and film, TV studios, etc);
- representatives of professional bodies (Actors and Filmmakers Unions);
- external evaluators (who participate in examination boards);
- reviews of the work of the Academy that appear in the media.

During the course of the Evaluation process, the ET was able to meet with a range of representatives from the industries which the Academy serves. They were able to assure the ET of the high regard in which the Academy was held and affirm the high quality of its graduates. It was clear to the ET that the Academy had established an open and critical dialogue with the relevant constituencies of professional practice.

14. Research

14.1 In the SER, the Academy outlines its educational philosophy as one that seeks to achieve an effective balance between the 'academic principal' and the principal of 'professional art education'. It defines the academic principal as the pursuit of knowledge, scholarship and research with an interdisciplinary focus on the arts and humanities. While the principal of professional art education is defined as the nurturing and training of highly qualified professional practitioners through a variety of methods that include practice-as-research. Accordingly, the Academy places a high value upon the quality of its research activity and the distinguished research activities of individual staff.

14.2 The ET asked staff to outline the Academy's research policy and strategy? Staff said that they saw their primary task in this area was to seek to exploit the unique nature of the Academy, as an institution that is concerned with both theatre and film. This particularly encourages them to engage in research of an inter-disciplinary nature. The ET were given the example of a staff colleague with background in costume design who was currently investigating the tradition of costume in the genre of science-fiction films. A further example was provided by a PhD student who was investigating interactive improvisation based in digital media used in theatrical settings. Staff stated that they viewed it as important for the Academy to establish new areas of research which are both highly contemporary and that sought to reconcile global issues to their specific problems.

14.3 The ET invited staff to outline the role of the Scientific Policy Advisory Council. The staff said that there were two main strands to this role. The first was to monitor, support and assist with the scientific (research) activities within the Academy, for which purpose they had access to a special budget. Secondly, that the Council oversee an annual competition for the support of research projects (including those associated with PhD study) to which all academic staff and research students can apply. The Council is able to make awards of various different kinds in order to support an appropriate range of research activity. The projects that are approved in this way are published with the financial support of the Academy.

14.4 The ET asked staff to describe how PhD study is supported within the Academy? Staff said that the Academy seeks to ensure that research students have access to appropriately qualified and experienced members of the academic staff, both in terms of the review and supervision of their work. The ET asked if it was possible for research students to access co-supervision from outside the Academy when necessary? Staff confirmed that this is possible and gave the example of student whose research work is largely taking place at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences and that one of their supervisors is a member of staff there. Staff reported that they not only seek to invite in experts from other fields of research but that they proactively seek collaboration with other organisations. They gave the example of a staff colleague, specialising in Asian cinema, who was currently working in co-operation with the Korean Film Institute and an Australian university and that this project had been awarded a major research grant.

14.5 The ET asked staff to explain how ethical matters connected with research are dealt with in the Academy? The ET learned that there is a code of ethics governing research activity that is observed by both students and staff. The statutes of the Academy also regulate some aspects of research, for example, that research enquiry cannot be undertaken on certain sensitive topics. Staff told the ET that research proposals are first discussed within the Chair before being put forward to the Scientific Policy Advisory Council. Research proposals are ultimately approved by Senate with any outstanding issues being fed back to the Chair where the proposal had originated.

14.6 The ET asked staff about the ways in which research activity informs the processes of learning and teaching within the Academy? The staff responded by saying that they are engaged in both teaching students and researching and that their research informs both their teaching methodologies and the content of the syllabi, PhD students also undertake teaching duties. The SER also points out that the exchange of researchers and joint research activities are also a feature of a number of the bilateral co-operation agreements that the Academy has established with other institutions. Staff informed the ET that, at one time, research was only carried out by academic staff teaching

in the areas of theatre or film studies. A recent innovation within the Academy has been that academic staff working in the more practical fields, such as acting, directing and physical theatre are now producing theoretical papers and that these are extremely valuable to the Academy in forging usefull connections between practical experience and theory.

14.7 The ET was favourably impressed by the range of research outputs by academic staff over the last 5 years. These include 800 printed publications, out of which 73 are books and 36 are textbooks and other learning materials. 38 of these publications have been published in translation in other countries. During this period, members of Academy staff have also organized 8 national/international conferences; these have also included the participation of specialists from the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences and other higher education institutions. Nearly half of the Academy’s academic staff have been invited to give guest lecturers at foreign theatre and film academies over this same period. Many academic staff within the Academy are actively engaged in international organisations and projects of one kind or another in the fields of theatre and film arts and arts education.

15. Staff Recruitment and Staff Development

15.1 The SER presents a range of qualitative and quantitative information that provides a profile of the academic staff working within the Academy. The ET was informed that two types of doctoral degree exist in Bulgaria with the Doctor of Sciences being the higher doctoral degree. Approximately 30% of the Academy’s academic staff are qualified to doctoral level and six of these are Doctors of Sciences. The Academy appoints academic staff in three main categories; Professors, Associate Professors and non-habilitated Lecturers. The Academy has recently become concerned about the age profile of its academic staff, the average age currently being 52.5 years. In light of this, Senate has developed – and is currently implementing – a human resources strategy that is intended to enable younger members of staff to advance more quickly. This strategy is designed to meet one of the recommendations made by the NAEA as an outcome from its recent accreditation of the Academy.

15.2 The Academy has also developed and implemented an 'Attestation System' which is designed to assure that the quality of teaching of each member of the academic staff is regularly appraised. Under the terms of this scheme all habilitated staff are appraised every five years and non-habilitated staff every three years. The Attestation System combines two procedures; appraisal through the Chair to which the individual member of staff is assigned and through the analysis of data from a student survey. The process of Attestation, as it operates in the context of the Chair, is based on four appraisal indicators. These comprise: *quality of teaching; teaching methodology; creative and scholarly achievements; participation in the life of the academic community*. The first procedure is comprised of the following components:

- a self-evaluation;
- peer-evaluation by Chair members (anonymous)
- an evaluation by the Head of Chair
- evaluation by the members of the Faculty Attestation Commission.

The second procedure is conducted through an annual student survey based on three indicators: *regularity; pedagogical qualities* and *quality of teaching*. The results drawn from the student survey is formularised within the Attestation outcomes that range from *unsatisfactory* through *satisfactory* to *positive*. Each member of staff is informed of the Attestation results and provided with a copy of the final attestation document. The three categories of appraisal outcomes are regarded as being key factors for the individual career progress of academic staff. The Academy has found, following completion of the first cycle of the Attestation System, that the outcomes have broadly confirmed the high quality of the teaching within the Academy. The Academy intends to review the performance of the Attestation System at a meeting of the General Assembly, with a view to optimising the system. Both staff and students met by the ET during the conduct of its visit to the Academy spoke positively about their experience of the Attestation System.

15.3 The ET noted that staff are actively encouraged to participate fully in relevant networking organisations at national and international level. The Academy has been a full member of ELIA (European League of Institutes of the Arts) since 1990. From 2000, a senior member of Academy staff has been a member of the Executive Board of ELIA and the Academy continues to be an active participant in the various activities of the organisation. The Academy has also become a member of ITI (International Theatre Institute) and actively participates in its events and projects. The majority of staff in the Chair of Theatre Studies are members of IATC (International Association of Theatre Critics), one of whom is its current Vice President. The Academy became a full member of UNIMA (Union Internationale de la Marionnette) in 1962 and has continued to be an active participant in UNIMA activities. The Academy has also been a full member of CILECT (Centre International de Liaison des Ecoles de Cinema et de Television) since 1982 and, again, has been an active participant in its activities. The present Rector is a Vice-President of CILECT and another member of Academy staff is a member of its Executive Council.

15.4 The Academy maintains also a high profile in the public life of Bulgaria. In the recent past the posts of Minister of Culture and one Deputy Minister of Culture were held by Academy staff and the present Minister of Culture is one of the professors of the Academy. In addition to the above, staff of the Academy have also taken the roles of Presidential Advisors and one a Member of Parliament.

15.5 The ET concurs with the views reported in the SER as to the high National reputation of NATFA as being the '*most prestigious*' theatre and film Academy in the country. This fully deserved reputation provides a firm springboard for developing further international collaboration. In respect of this, the ET note the many international awards already received by staff and students of the Academy. The ET recognises the vital contribution that the '*eminent*' scholarly and creative achievements of the Academy's staff makes to the quality of the student learning experience.

16. Quality Assurance and Enhancement Policies and Procedures

16.1 The SER states that the current system through which the Academy monitors and assures the quality and enhancement of the educational experience was formulated relatively recently and is, therefore, at an early stage of implementation (*see Appendix C: QAE System of the Academy*). The system is intended to regulate the requirements of internal academic quality processes with the external standards set out within the Higher Education Act and with the requirements the of the National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency (NEAA), relevant professional bodies, employers and other stakeholders. The QAE system adopted by the Academy is detailed within a key regulatory document. While this document sets out the processes and responsibilities of the QA system it does not appear to provide any qualitative definitions or criteria that would usefully guide staff in matters of quality assessment and assurance.

16.2 While overall responsibility for the Quality Assurance and Enhancement (QAE) system rests with Senate, responsibility for the oversight and effective operation of the Academy's QAE systems is delegated to the Quality of Education Advisory Council (QEAC). The Council is presided over by a Chairperson elected by Senate and its membership includes a representative of each of the Chairs, the Head of the Academic Affairs Office and a representative of the Student Council. Each Faculty also has its own Quality Assurance and Enhancement Commission which has a similar profile of membership. Each Chair within the Academy elects one of its members to the role of QAE co-ordinator. The QEAC co-ordinates and monitors the work of the two Commissions and the activities of the QEAC are, in turn, monitored by the Co-ordinating Council, the membership of which includes the Rector, Deans of Faculty, Assistant Rector, Chief Accountant, Chairs of the Advisory Councils and the Chair of the Student Council.

16.3 The ET asked staff to clarify the ways in which the QEAC exercised its responsibilities. Staff explained that communication within the Academy is a bottom-up process and that in each Chair there is a designated person who is responsible for reporting on matters of quality assurance. The ET was

assured that there is a constant exchange, both bottom up and top down, between the QEAC and the two Faculty QAE Commissions, the main concern of which is the quality of the student experience. The SER states that the QEAC maintains a regular review of the curriculum and syllabi of programmes and, when and where necessary, recommends revisions and changes in accordance with best national and international practices in both higher education and in the related fields of professional practice.

16.4 The SER confirms that the QAE system implemented by the Academy is designed to monitor, evaluate and continuously improve the quality of the education and academic standards, the utility of learning and teaching facilities, the quality and competence of teaching, assessment processes and the criteria by which learning outcomes are assessed. The QAE system is also designed to be attentive to the overall quality of staff/student relations and seeks to promote the introduction of innovative teaching methods, examples of which include task-related teaching, research-based learning, independent study and internships. In respect of the Academy's commitment to enhancement, the QAE system also seeks to both identify and disseminate good practices across the Academy. In a discussion with the ET, a member of staff helpfully summarised the view that the essential purpose of the QAE system was to enable the Academy to *'Keep all good traditions and develop all new good ideas'*.

16.5 Staff informed the ET that, in the past, they had not been fully aware of issues of quality in their field of educational practice. They had become more aware of such matters following the founding of the National Agency for Evaluation and Accreditation. The academy was one of the first higher education institutions in Bulgaria to undergo an institutional and programme evaluation. As the outcome of this evaluation the Academy attained the highest possible scores and this gave them confidence in the quality of their educational practices.

16.6 The ET asked staff to define their concept of quality as it is specific to this institution. Staff explained that, in their view, the term quality has a specific meaning in the context arts education. From this discussion the ET received

the impression that, in the minds of staff, the quality of student student accomplishment demonstrated through learning outcomes was indistinguishable from the quality of the processes that supported their educational development. Staff went on to say that one way that they are able to evaluate the quality of the education they provided was through the Academy's participation in international festivals, that through this means they have a way of comparing themselves with other schools. Staff also said that another way of assessing the quality of the education that they provide is through the success of their graduates in their field of professional practice. Staff said that one way in which they test the ability of a teacher is through making an assessment of the proposed syllabi of their programmes. They emphasised that these critical debates on the proposed syllabi offered an effective means by which they are able to ensure the quality of the student learning experience and harmonise their approaches to teaching.

16.7 The students are able to provide feedback on the quality of their learning experience through the work of the Student Council. Representatives of the Student Council are present at all levels of the Academy's governing bodies and they regularly hold meetings with the Rector and Deans of Faculty, as well as other staff, to ensure that students opinions are considered in all matters, including the matters pertaining to the quality of the education provided. The ET asked students how they would raise a collective concern about an aspect of the educational experience offered. The students said that, in the first instance, they would notify the Student Council that can then draw the matter to the attention of the relevant Faculty Commission and, if deemed necessary, the matter is then drawn to the attention of QEAC.

16.8 The Rector confirmed that whilst the issue of the quality of student learning experience was formally dealt with through regular meetings with the Student Council he also emphasised that students were able to approach him or other senior staff at any time, as problems arose. Matters of this nature may also be formally raised through the agency of the class student representative or alternatively a class can invite a member of staff to address the whole group. Through these means, the Academy maintains

that issues regarding the quality of the student learning experience are discussed on a day-to-day basis within the Academy. However, the Rector acknowledged that in his experience the Academy was generally inclined to pay more attention to informal systems of feedback than to the formal systems that had been designed and implemented for this purpose.

16.9 The ET noted the Academy's stated intention that *'the QAE system aims to promote and encourage lecturers' competence and motivation ... through dissemination of good practices'*. However, the ET perceived that a tension may exist between the 'atelier' approach to student learning and the routine identification and productive sharing (dissemination) of good practice that may prohibit the Academy in meeting this aim. The ET also perceived that there is risk to the Academy associated with the apparent lack of a clearly stated definition of 'quality' and that this may prevent the establishing of a shared and widely owned concept of quality that can be used to underpin, evaluate and assure all of the Academy's activities. This comment is made with respect to assisting the institution in meeting the summary recommendation of the (NAEA) Accreditation Report that the Academy should seek to *'regularise the performance of the newly-established QAE systems'* (pages 13 and 14). The ET regards the Academy's Mission Statement as both clear and highly appropriate to the nature and aspiration of the Academy and that, in the view of the ET, it contains within it a useful definition of quality that reflects the character of the institution. The ET considers that the Academy's Mission Statement provides a strong and apposite blueprint for the definition, monitoring and development of quality assurance and enhancement. The ET wishes to encourage the Academy to use the Mission Statement as an explicit and effective tool with which to shape a clear definition of quality that can be shared and widely owned across the Academy.

17. Identification of Good Practice

17.1 In line with the protocols set out in the Inter}artes *Guidelines for Institutional and Subject Review for Higher Arts Education Programmes* and in addition to the commendations set out below, the ET were able to identify

a number of features of the Academy's provision that it would wish to highlight as being good practice.

- i) The ET was particularly impressed by the way in which shared discussion and debate about the proposed teaching syllabi was utilised as a strategic loci for the critical evaluation of the quality of the student learning experience [paragraphs 4.5 & 16.6 refer].
- ii) The ET applauds the positive interrelation and synthesis of the Academy's areas of subject expertise (Theatre & Film) in terms of curricula development, creative practice and scientific research [paragraphs 7.12, 14.1, 15.3 & 15.5 refer].
- iii) The ET noted the significant contribution made to the work of the institution through the garnering, gathering, focusing and expressing of student views through the activities of the Student Council. The ET was also highly impressed by the level of commitment given by the Academy to ensure that there was full student participation and engagement with committee structure at all levels [paragraphs 8.1, 8.5 & 16.7 refer].

18. Commendations and Recommendations

18.1 Commendations: Based on the evidence of their visit to the Academy and their reading of the documentation provided, the ET commends the Academy on the following.

- i) The ET considers that the Academy's Mission Statement provides a strong and apposite blueprint for the definition, monitoring and development of quality assurance and enhancement [paragraphs 4.2 & 6.9 refer].
- ii) The ET was highly impressed by the clear leadership role and strategic vision offered by the Rector and his senior colleagues that follows on from the Mandatory Programme presented by the current Rector to the Academic Council on his election [paragraphs 2.6, 2.10, 15.1 & 15.2 refer].

- iii) The ET strongly endorses the Academy's approach to the strategic planning of budgets, physical estate and human resources that seek to fully recognise and reflect the strategic needs and priorities of Academy [paragraphs 2.10 & 9.2 refer].
- iv) Through its dialogue with staff and students, the ET received a good impression of the means by which '*informed and critical thinking*' as well as the '*creativity and individuality*' of students was fostered within the academy through the effective use of teaching methodologies that promoted self and peer evaluation as well as independent critical and generative thinking [paragraphs 5.3 & 7.9 refer].
- v) The ET welcomes the introduction of the External Evaluators within the examination system and would encourage the Academy to find ways of developing their role in such a way as to feed more broadly into its quality assurance and enhancement processes [paragraphs 8.4, 8.6 & 8.7 refer].
- vi) The ET recognises the vital contribution that the 'eminent' scholarly and creative achievements of the Academy's staff make to the quality of the student learning experience [paragraphs i (*in the preamble*) & 15.5 refer].
- vii) The ET noted the 'positive and friendly' relationship that the Academy fostered between staff and students [paragraphs 7.5, 7.6, 7.10 & 16.8 refer].

18.2 Recommendations: Based on the evidence of their visit to the Academy and their reading of the documentation provided, the ET recommends to the Academy that it gives particular attention to the following matters.

Essential

- i) The ET perceived that there is risk to the Academy associated with the apparent lack of a clearly stated definition of 'quality' which may prevent a shared and widely owned concept of quality becoming widely established.

The ET encourage the Academy to develop such a definition so that it can be effectively used to underpin, evaluate and assure all of the Academy's activities. This comment is made with particular respect to assisting the institution in meeting the summary recommendation of the NAEA Accreditation Report, which advises that the Academy should seek to '*regularise the performance of the newly-established QAE systems*' [paragraphs 16.1, 16.5 & 16.6 refer].

ii) The ET noted the Academy's stated intention that '*the QAE system aims to promote and encourage lecturers' competence and motivation ... through dissemination of good practices*'. However, the ET perceived that a tension may exist between the 'atelier' approach to student learning and the routine identification and productive sharing (dissemination) of good practice that may prohibit the Academy in meeting this aim. The ET recommends that the Academy ensures that its QAE systems are effective and robust in the gathering, evaluation and dissemination of good practices across the full range of its provision [paragraphs 4.3, 7.4 & 16.9 refer].

iii) The ET noted that the concept of learning outcomes, other than those associated with public performances (public examinations), was not securely held or widely understood across the staff cohort. The significant weighting of staff attention appeared to be placed upon the quality of the 'product' of student learning with less attention given to the quality of the learning process. The ET recommends that the Academy endeavours to promote a fuller understanding of learning outcomes as a means of both shaping and assessing the student learning experience, ensuring that an appropriate value is placed on the process of student learning [paragraphs 4.7, 5.4, 5.5, & 8.8 refer].

iv) The Academy recognises the importance of maintaining a check on the success of graduates, on who is employing them and how they perform in the first few years of their professional careers. However, it currently has no effective formal system for doing this. The ET recommends that the academy needs to develop and implement an appropriate and effective

monitoring mechanism for tracking both the latitudinal and longitudinal employment patterns of its graduates [paragraph 13.1 refers].

Advisable

- v) The ET perceived the claim (made in the SER) that the Mission Statement '*underlies the goals and objectives of NATFA's educational policies, and shapes its programmes and practices*' may currently be more an aspiration than a concrete reality, therefore, the ET encourages the Academy to ensure that this intention becomes fully realised [paragraphs 4.2 & 16.9 refer].
- vi) The ET encourages the Academy to find ways of ensuring that a clear articulation of agreed institutional policies and strategies – informed by its definition of quality – is consistently and widely promoted within the institution (possibly through the publication of a common staff handbook) [paragraphs 4.2, 8.7 & 16.9 refer].
- vii) The ET found evidence to support the aim of the Academy to provide a 'first-rate' professional education to its students and this appeared to be appropriately anchored in current professional practice. However, the ET was less confident that this was consistently the case across all strands of training offered by the Academy. The ET recommends that the Academy finds means to ensure that all academic staff are fully aware of the changing professional context of their subjects and that this understanding is fully reflected by, and inculcated within, the range of curricula and syllabi [paragraphs 4.8, 6.4, 7.3, 7.5, 7.11, & 13.3 refer].

Desirable

- viii) The ET recommends that the Academy continues to actively monitor the efficacy of its committee structure, optimising the utility of this while retaining an appropriate level of transparency and ensuring that it remains fit for purpose in relation to the size and nature of the institution [paragraphs 2.4, 2.5 & 2.8 refer].

Appendix A: Additional Documents

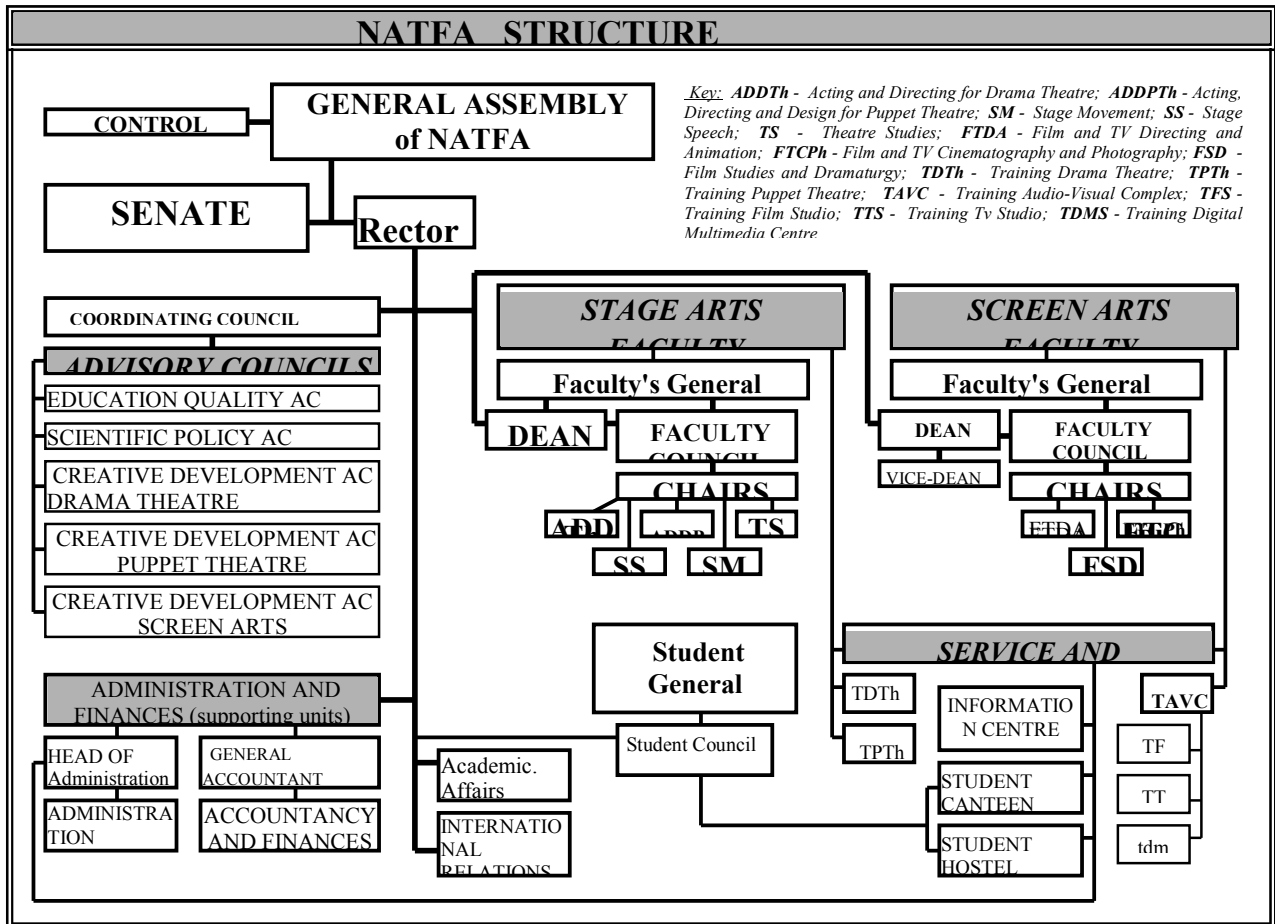
The following documents were provided (translated into English) for i}a QAE main visit to the Academy.

(Latest version institutional SER e-mailed 12.12.2006)

01. Statute book
 - a. Chapter 3
 - b. Chapter 4
 - c. Chapter 5
 - d. Chapter 7
 - e. Chapter 10
 - f. Chapter 11
 - g. Chapter 13
02. Student handbook
 - a. First year students' handbook
 - b. Student council info material (printed brochure in Bulgarian)
03. Application rates, progression rates and awards statistics by subject discipline
04. Employment statistics and any employment data available
05. Minutes (sequential)
 - a. Chairs: April 05; May 05
 - b. Faculty quality commission (2 documents)
 - c. Senate (Statement)
06. Information on selection procedure; online and print (catalogue in print form) and some additional materials:
 - a. Admission guide, Stage Arts Management (Stage Arts Faculty)
 - b. Admission guide, Theatre Arts (Stage Arts Faculty)
 - c. Admission guide, Film and TV Arts (Screen Arts Faculty)
 - d. Admission guide, Screen Arts Management (Screen Arts Faculty)
07. Budget plans templates digital (actual budget in print only)
 - a. NATFA budget 2004
 - b. NATFA budget 2007
08. Example staff development programme: structure/budget/time
 - a. Strategy 2010 (see also Material Nr. 21 - Sociological Findings, Table 9) = table of payroll development
 - b. Staff Development Mechanisms and Initiatives
09. Most recent annual Rector's report to senate/general assembly
10. Copy of accreditation report; sections relating to outcomes given in the SER (*last version e-mailed 10.12.06*)
11. Examples of learning outcomes and assessment criteria provided for students.
12. Copy of rector's mandatory programme presented at the beginning of his term of office.
13. List of staff according to membership of committees' chairs and councils, mentioning their function

- 14. List of responsibilities and tasks of Rector, Dean and Teacher (*last version e-mailed 10.12.06*)
- 15. List of administrative and technical staff
- 16. QAE regulations
- 17. Minutes of student council
- 18. Minutes and report of scientific policy advisory council
 - a. report on NATFA *Krastyo Sarafov* research work for 2005
 - b. Minutes nr. 1 of 30 January 2006 of a Scientific Policy Advisory Council meeting
- 19. Student questionnaire on staff
- 20. Staff questionnaire
- 21. Findings and conclusions of the sociological survey conducted by the professional agency
- 22. Anonymised statistical data drawn from the recent attestation system
- 23. Pedagogical strategy (*last version e-mailed 10.12.06*)
- 24. Description of decision making power delegated by the rector
- 25. Participation in international competitions, festivals etc.
- 26. List of artistic activities of teachers (*last version e-mailed 10.12.06*)
- 27. Document about international co-operation, students and teachers mobilities (*in print form only*)
 - a. Partnership agreement between Unesco and NATFA
 - b. Federal assistance award
 - c. 27e Bulgarian document
- 28. Foreign language teaching policy
- 29. Discipline self evaluation report "Puppet theatre acting"
- 30. Discipline specification puppet acting
- 31. Puppet acting syllabus
- 32. Study Plan/Curriculum

Appendix B: Structure of the Academy

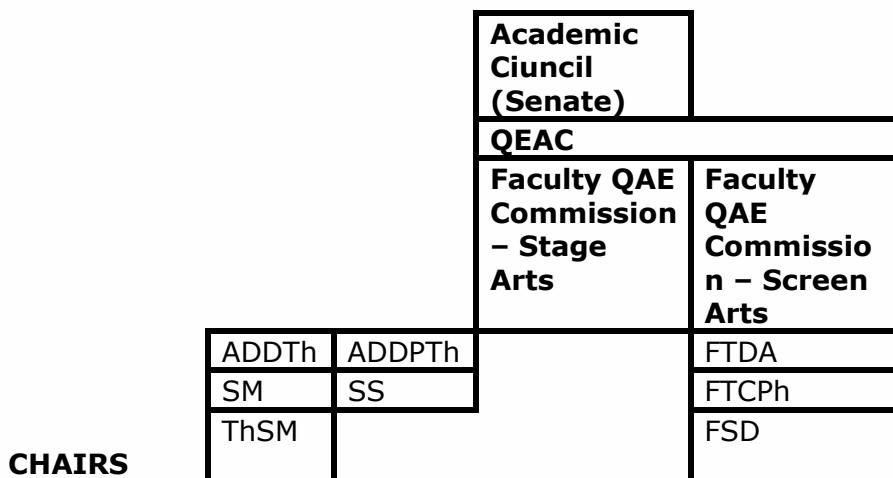


Appendix C: QAE System of the Academy

REGULATIONS ON THE SYSTEM FOR MONITORING, EVALUATION, ASSURANCE AND ENHANCEMENT OF THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION (NATFA’S QAE SYSTEM)

These **Regulations** were adopted by NATFA’s Academic Council (Senate) with Minutes No. 26 / 20.03.2004

1. The **Regulations** on the **System** for Monitoring, Evaluation, Assurance and Enhancement of the Quality of Education (QAE System) is the top-level document in the **System** Hierarchy. It is in accordance with Academy’s mission, goals, objectives, and priority lines of development.
2. The **Regulations** is based on NATFA’s operational rules and ordinances and on other regulatory and legal documents (see Annexes Folder). The documents relative to the QAE System are kept by the Quality of Education **Advisory Council** (QEAC).
3. The **Regulations** specify the key **System** features such as: QAE System substance, objectives and scope, structure, quality indicators, processes and mechanisms for monitoring, evaluation, assurance and improvement of the quality of education of NATFA’s BA, MA and PhD students. It regulates the feedback with and opinion survey of NATFA’s education users.
4. The **System** building process involves the whole academic community. The **System** has several **levels** providing coordination of the quality assurance of education activities. It has the following **structure**:



5. **System level I** includes the **Academic Council (Senate)**. NATFA's academic management represented by the **Academic Council (Senate)** provides material, financial and organizational resources for the quality assurance of education and training.
6. **System level II** includes the **Quality of Education Advisory Council (QEAC)**. **QEAC** is the main one of the five **Advisory Councils** established in NATFA in 2003 within the mandate program of the new Rector Management. **QEAC** includes representatives of all basic **Chairs** in the Academy plus the **Head of the Education Department** and a representative of the **Student Council**.
 - 6.1. The core activity of **QEAC** is focused on the quality of education and training. To that end, the **Advisory Council** has developed a comprehensive **System** for Monitoring, Evaluation, Assurance and Enhancement of the Quality of Education (QAE System) and **Rules** for its operation which is used by **System's primary units**.
 - 6.2. **QEAC** is managed by a Chairperson who plans and organizes all activities of and represents **QEAC** before the **Academic Council (Senate), the Rector and the National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency (NEAA)**. **The Chairperson of QEAC** introduces all proposals, recommendations and opinions on quality issues to the **Academic Council (Senate)** for discussion.
 - 6.3. **QEAC's functions** include:
 - (a) studying international and national quality of education practices; studying the academic, educational and professional standards in the professional and educational lines within Academy's scope of activity;
 - (b) organizing regular internal quality reviews by specialties, chairs and faculties; reviews of syllabi, plans and programs; discussing quality review results and disseminating good practices in the Academy;
 - (c) organizing and holding regular meetings with representatives of the students and the **Student Council** on quality of education issues;
 - (d) making proposals to the Academic Management for distinctions and awards of professors and students.
 - 6.4. **QEAC** discusses the source information collected and makes proposals for solving institutional quality of education problems.
 - 6.5. **QEAC** coordinates its quality-related activities with all other **Advisory Councils** in the Academy (Scientific Policy Advisory Council, Creative Development Advisory Council – Drama Theatre, Creative Development Advisory Council – Puppet Theatre, and Creative Development Advisory Council – Screen Arts), with the **Attestation Commission** and the **Student Council**.
 - 6.6. **QEAC** regulates the consistency of the external (of NEAA, professional organizations, employers, etc.) with academic quality of education

criteria. **QEAC** develops all documents for NATFA's institutional and program **accreditation**.

7. **System Level III** includes two Faculty Quality of Education **Commissions (Faculty QAE Commission)**, one in the **Stage Arts Faculty** and one in the **Screen Arts Faculty**.
 - 7.1. The **Faculty QAE Commission** includes one representative each of all **Chairs** and a representative of the **Student Council**. Each **Faculty QAE Commission** is managed by a **Chairperson** who plans and organizes all activities of the **Commission**. The Chairperson represents the **Faculty QAE Commission** before the **Faculty Council, the Chair of the Faculty and QEAC**.
 - 7.2. The **Faculty QAE Commissions** review and discuss the minutes of chair meetings on quality of education issues in the respective **Faculty**. They collect and process the source information on quality of education issues from the **Chairs** within the **Faculty** and submit it to **QEAC** together with the minutes of their meetings.
 - 7.3. The **Faculty QAE Commission** relegates **QEAC's** decisions to **System's Primary Units**.

8. **System Level IV** includes QAE System's **Primary Units** – NATFA's **Chairs**.
 - 8.1. There is one **QAE System representative** in every **Chair** who reports to the **Faculty QAE Commission** the quality of education and training problems in the **Chair** discussed on a regular basis at Chair meetings.
 - 8.2. **The QAE System representatives** relegate **QEAC's and Faculty QAE Commission's** decisions to the **Chairs** as **QAE System's Primary Units**.

9. The **System** for Monitoring, Evaluation, Assurance and Enhancement of the Quality of Education operates on basis of the following basic **indicators**:
 - (a) consistency of education and of academic standards with public needs;
 - (b) improvement of academic facilities;
 - (c) lecturers' competence and motivation
 - (d) development of innovative teaching methods and forms maximizing the educational and training impact
 - (e) monitoring of learning outcomes
 - (f) academic atmosphere.

10. The quality of work of both lecturers and students is under continuous internal control through the **System** for Monitoring, Evaluation, Assurance and Enhancement of the Quality of Education, but it is also subject of **direct public control and evaluation** because of the public-oriented activity of the National Academy of Theatre and Film Arts.