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YOUNG MUSIC TALENTS IN EUROPE

Building the Musical Bridge

Learning outcomes and the transition from pre-college to higher music education

THE FULL REPORT

A proposed European reference for educational development
Final version 1.2 | 26 October 2026

Connecting educational stages through shared musical foundations, clearer learning outcomes and dialogue between institutions.

A European study and proposed competence framework for specialised pre-college music education.

Young Music Talents in Europe
In cooperation with AEC and the project partnership

Developed through the Erasmus+ project:
Developing a better curricular connection between pre-college and higher music education

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Learning outcomes and the transition from pre-college to higher music education
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This report is the principal educational publication developed through the YMTE Erasmus+ partnership. It is intended for independent use by pre-college and higher music education (HME) institutions, teachers, curriculum developers, professional networks and policymakers.

The partnership comprises Young Music Talents in Europe, the Association Européenne des Conservatoires, Académies de Musique et Musikhochschulen, Johann-Joseph-Fux-Konservatorium des Landes Steiermark in Graz, Austria, Varaždin School of Music in Croatia, Conservatorio Profesional de Música Costa del Sol in Spain and Eberhard-Ludwigs-Gymnasium in Germany. The contractual project period was 1 September 2024 to 31 August 2026. This report was consolidated after that period and includes professional consultation at the YMTE Conference in Oslo on 1 October 2026. [1, 30]

The report presents a proposed reference for educational use, scrutiny and further development. Its 14 outcomes draw on the documentary study, institutional contributions and professional consultation. They support curriculum development and dialogue with HME while respecting national qualifications, institutional curricula and admission regulations. The framework remains a proposal; publication does not imply formal adoption by every partner.

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Young Music Talents in Europe — **Mattias Lundqvist.**

Association Européenne des Conservatoires, Académies de Musique et Musikhochschulen — **Finn Schumacker.**

Glazbena škola u Varaždinu, Varaždin School of Music — **Sanja Buhin.**

Johann-Joseph-Fux-Konservatorium des Landes Steiermark in Graz — **Eduard Lanner.**

Eberhard-Ludwigs-Gymnasium, Stuttgart — **Mario Zecher.**

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The report builds on earlier European work on learning outcomes and musical progression, including Polifonia and the AEC/CALOHEx materials credited in the references. Acknowledgement recognises contributions to the work; it does not imply that every contributor endorses every interpretation or recommendation. Responsibility for the final synthesis rests with the report's editorial coordination.

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Executive summary

European specialised pre-college music education provides several routes towards advanced study. This report proposes a European reference framework of 14 learning outcomes to support dialogue and progression between pre-college and higher music education. Institutions differ in organisation, age coverage, curricula and relationships with HME. A European reference can make achievement more understandable across these differences while preserving artistic and educational diversity.

The central conclusion is that curricular connection requires work from both educational levels. Pre-college institutions need to explain the competences students develop and how these are supported and assessed. HME institutions need to describe their starting expectations, including what students should bring and what they will develop after admission.

The report combines a 2025 questionnaire, institutional examples, European reference materials, an interview and consultations at the AEC Congress in 2025 and the YMTE Conference in 2026. The questionnaire export contains 42 submissions. It provides descriptive and qualitative evidence rather than a representative survey of Europe. Thirty-eight submissions report using competence-based outcomes. Thirty-three of the 40 answering the main alignment question report HME collaboration, although written responses identify unclear expectations, theory and aural preparation, workload and unequal access. [2–4, 7–22]

Conference contributions broaden the discussion of readiness. The AEC workshop emphasised the educational ecosystem, whole musicianship, transparency and access. YMTE group notes identify creativity, reflection, collaboration and self-management as insufficiently explicit, while cautioning that entrants cannot be expected to have identical backgrounds, a fully developed artistic voice or a settled career plan. These are professional contributions rather than evidence of unanimous agreement. [15–16, 19–22]

The proposed framework contains 14 outcomes in practical and artistic, theoretical and contextual, and generic and transversal categories. It retains continuity with Polifonia and makes responsibility for learning more explicit. Digital competence, sustainable musicianship and professional awareness are included at an introductory level appropriate to preparation. The statements are proposed for use and scrutiny, not presented as an adopted European standard.

EQF level 4 provides a reference for discussing knowledge, skills, responsibility and autonomy in advanced preparatory learning. Finn Schumacker's May 2026 working draft adapts the eight dimensions of the Creative and Performing Arts and Design framework to this context. Appendix B presents the connections proposed in his contribution between the report's 14 outcomes, the EQF4 draft and CALOHEx level 6 completion descriptors. Together these materials describe a direction of development towards and through HME. They do not assign a formal qualification level to every programme. [27–28]

The report addresses alignment through institutional accounts, reported cooperation, professional consultation and comparison of competence descriptions. It establishes an educational basis for relating preparatory achievement to HME starting expectations; it does not verify the entrance requirements of individual programmes. Practical priorities are to connect outcomes with learning opportunities and evidence, make starting expectations clearer, develop shared judgement and include students in reviewing transition. Programme-level comparison and evaluation are recommended as subsequent work.

The proposed framework at a glance

The 14 outcomes describe achievement at the end of specialised preparation for an intended HME pathway. Use this overview to locate the full outcome statements, scope and evidence examples in Chapter 6. The categories organise connected aspects of musicianship; several outcomes can be developed and demonstrated in the same musical activity.

Code	Outcome area
	Practical and artistic
P1	Artistic expression and principal study
P2	Repertoire and stylistic engagement
P3	Practice and rehearsal strategies
P4	Ensemble and collaborative musicianship
P5	Aural understanding and musical representation
P6	Creativity and musical exploration
P7	Performance and audience communication
	Theoretical and contextual
T1	Musical knowledge in practice
T2	Repertoire and cultural context
	Generic and transversal
G1	Responsibility and reflective learning
G2	Communication and participation
G3	Digital competence
G4	Sustainable musicianship
G5	Professional awareness and educational choice

How the references fit together

Three categories organise the report's 14 outcomes. Eight CPAD dimensions provide the external framework comparison in Appendix B. Knowledge, skills, responsibility and autonomy describe aspects of achievement within those dimensions. EQF4 is a working reference for preparatory learning; the CALOHEx level 6 descriptors concern bachelor completion. The comparison supports discussion of progression, while actual admission expectations remain programme-specific.

1 Purpose and educational context

1.1 Why the connection matters

The transition to HME is built on learning accumulated over many years. Instrumental or vocal development, aural understanding, musical literacy, ensemble experience and habits of practice cannot be reduced to the short period immediately preceding an entrance examination. They emerge through sustained teaching, opportunities to make music and increasingly informed participation in learning.

The settings supporting that development vary. Some students attend specialised schools combining general and musical education. Others study at conservatories, music schools or junior academies associated with HME institutions. Preparation may also include private instruction, regional ensembles, projects and independent learning. These different routes make a common description of achievement useful, but also make uniform assumptions about educational background unreliable. [1, 3, 5]

For a student, unclear starting expectations can lead to uncertainty about preparation and choice. For a teacher, they can make it difficult to judge priorities or identify support needs. For institutions, they can obscure the relationship between a preparatory curriculum and the programmes to which students progress. These are educational questions as well as questions about selection.

The report therefore asks what specialised pre-college education should enable students to know, understand and do, and how those achievements can connect more clearly with HME. Its reference framework is intended to support curriculum development, institutional planning and policy discussion without prescribing a single route through musical education.

1.2 Scope and intended users

Specialised pre-college music education, abbreviated here as Pre-CME, refers to provision with a sustained preparatory relationship to higher music education. It includes different organisational forms and need not correspond to one age range or national qualification. The report also considers relevant contributions from broader music education, while distinguishing their educational purposes.

HME refers to higher music education and HMEI to an institution providing it. A competence is understood as the capacity to draw on knowledge, skills and personal capabilities in musical or educational activity. A learning outcome describes what a learner is expected to know, understand or be able to do following learning. A reference framework helps institutions describe and compare achievements; a curriculum also specifies how learning is organised and supported.

The main readers are institutional leaders, teachers and curriculum developers in Pre-CME and HME. Students and families can use clearer descriptions to understand preparation and choice. Networks and policymakers can use the analysis to examine access, cooperation and the conditions needed for sustained learning. Not every part of the report serves every reader equally: the framework and implementation chapters provide the most direct practical tools.

1.3 Musical development and educational choice

Preparation for higher education is a central purpose of specialised provision, but it does not exhaust the value of musical learning. Students may change direction. Their achievements in listening, collaboration, creative work and independent learning remain meaningful even if they choose a different field of study.

This wider purpose appears in the questionnaire. The Frankfurt general-education respondent emphasises cultural participation and cautions against strengthening professional preparation at the expense of general music education. A Vienna contribution stresses high-quality teaching while leaving students free to choose music or another discipline. These perspectives place educational choice within the discussion of progression. [3]

At the same time, acknowledging multiple pathways should not obscure the demands of specialised preparation. Students pursuing HME need substantial musical foundations and honest guidance about the intended programme. The educational challenge is to combine ambition with developmental support and informed choice.

1.4 Origins of the report

The Erasmus+ partnership coordinated by YMTE set out to investigate competence-based learning outcomes in specialised pre-college education and their correlation with HME admission requirements. Its intended publication was to provide insight into European provision and an updated set of competences and outcomes for curriculum and policy development. [1]

The report responds to that purpose by bringing together mapping, documentary study and professional consultation, and by offering an updated set of proposed outcomes. The relationship with HME is examined through reported practice, institutional examples and developmental framework comparison. A systematic audit of individual programmes' admission requirements was beyond the evidence assembled. The resulting reference supports curriculum and policy development, with programme-specific testing proposed as follow-up. Its findings and recommendations provide a basis for continuing dialogue through YMTE and AEC.

2 Evidence and approach

2.1 Complementary sources

The inquiry combines institutional self-report with examination of educational documents and professional discussion. The questionnaire describes organisational models, curricular approaches, assessment, cooperation and support needs. Institutional contributions show how outcomes can be expressed at programme or subject level and connected with learning opportunities. Reference materials provide continuity with earlier European work. Consultation records help test the relevance of the emerging analysis against professional experience.

These sources answer different questions. A positive questionnaire response shows that an institution reports using learning outcomes; its curriculum may reveal how explicitly those outcomes are defined. A workshop recommendation identifies a proposal or concern; it does not measure how widespread that concern is or prove the effectiveness of the proposed response.

Evidence strand	Principal material	Contribution
Institutional mapping	2025 questionnaire and response export	Descriptive characteristics, reported practice and concrete needs
Documentary study	Polifonia, outcome tables and institutional examples	Concepts, developmental expectations and examples of implementation
AEC consultation	2025 workshop report, discussion notes and feedback	Professional perspectives on transition, access and cooperation
YMTE consultation	2026 presentation and handwritten group records	Scrutiny of emerging findings, readiness and messages to HME
Interview contribution	Young Academy Styria leadership response	An attributed account of preparation and level interpretation

2.2 Questionnaire coverage

The instrument contains 22 questions across six sections: institutional overview; curriculum and competence-based learning; transition to HME; cooperation and networks; challenges and needs; and open feedback. Several questions allow multiple selections. [2]

The available export contains 42 submissions with completion timestamps from 12 August to 31 October 2025. All 42 are retained for descriptive submission-level counts. Young Academy Styria appears twice, and two entries appear to concern the same Latgale institution. The results therefore refer to submissions rather than 42 verified distinct institutions. The dataset includes a Qatar contribution and institutions with general or elementary education remits; these inform comparison but are not automatically equivalent cases of European specialised Pre-CME. [3]

Question-specific denominators are used throughout. Forty submissions answer the main HME collaboration question; nine provide non-empty entries on student preparation and seven on transition challenges. All nine answering the preparation question answered No or left the preceding collaboration question blank, suggesting a possible routing effect. The available documentation does not establish which questions respondents saw. Blanks are therefore not interpreted as No or as evidence that preparation or cooperation was absent. Appendix A retains the submission-level counts. [2–3]

The dataset supports descriptive comparison and qualitative examples. It does not establish the prevalence of particular practices across Europe, the proportion of invited institutions responding or a complete national comparison. Nor does a cross-sectional questionnaire establish change over time.

2.3 Study and consultation

The documentary study considers the content and organisation of learning outcomes, the opportunities through which they are developed, and the evidence used to assess them. It distinguishes preparatory outcomes from HME completion outcomes. Examples are attributed to their source institutions rather than presented as independently evaluated models. [5–14]

At the AEC Congress in Salzburg, the pre-congress workshop Empowering tomorrow's talents – paving the way took place on 6 November 2025. It combined presentation, facilitated group discussion and plenary synthesis around transition barriers, practical responses and inclusion. The materials use Delphi terminology; the records are treated here as structured professional consultation rather than a formal Delphi consensus. Organiser-reported attendance was approximately 32, including 29 pre-registered people; the registration list is not a signed attendance record. [15–16, 34]

The YMTE Annual Conference took place in Oslo from 30 September to 2 October 2026. Its Erasmus session on 1 October combined presentations with group discussion of readiness, reasonable entry expectations and messages to HME. Finn Schumacker emphasised a shared competence language and reciprocal responsibility. The edited Sanja/Davor record connected the mapping with artistic foundations, broader learning capabilities, assessment, access and manageable implementation. Conference documentation records 44 participants overall, without establishing an exact session attendance count. Presentation syntheses and handwritten group sheets are attributed professional contributions rather than evidence of collective endorsement or direct student testimony. [18–22, 30–32, 35]

The available completed interview with Anke Schittenhelm contributes the perspective of Young Academy Styria. Other names and questions in the interview-planning correspondence are not treated as completed interviews. [13]

2.4 Synthesis and limits

The synthesis compares artistic and theoretical preparation, autonomy and reflection, assessment, admission expectations, cooperation and access. The 42-submission export is the governing descriptive dataset. The 18-response summary, presentation labelled "31 institutions" and later analyses represent intermediate stages or interpretations of the same inquiry. They are not independent confirmations or evidence of change over time. Qualitative observations are presented as examples and themes rather than ranked by frequency without a documented coding method. [3–4, 17]

Institutional and professional perspectives predominate, while direct student evidence about entering HME and the early experience of study remains limited. Mobility reflections illuminate related learning but cannot substitute for transition accounts. The documentary examples largely come from classical conservatoire and specialised school settings. The framework's broader wording invites adaptation; it does not establish equal applicability across classical, jazz, popular and traditional music education. Testing with practitioners and students from these fields is a priority for follow-up. [3, 7–13, 19, 25]

Chapter 6 synthesises these sources into a proposed outcome framework. Chapter 7 illustrates its application, and Chapter 8 identifies responsibilities for further development. Testing with teachers, students and receiving programmes is recommended as follow-up.

3 The landscape of specialised pre-college music education

3.1 Diversity of institutional models

The mapping shows several organisational relationships between musical preparation and higher education. Public stand-alone institutions are the most frequently selected type. Other respondents identify private provision or junior academies associated with university departments or stand-alone HME institutions. Because selections overlap, the figures describe reported categories rather than mutually exclusive institutional groups. [3]

Reported organisational category	Mentions across 42 submissions
Public stand-alone institution	29
Junior academy of a university music department	8
Private stand-alone institution	5
Junior academy of a stand-alone HME institution	4

These relationships matter educationally. A junior academy may have direct contact with HME teachers and facilities. A stand-alone school may coordinate with several receiving institutions and different entrance requirements. An integrated school must connect specialised music with general education. None of these models guarantees alignment by itself: the practical relationships, curricular decisions and opportunities for students remain important.

Institutional size also varies. Submissions cover every enrolment band, from 0–50 to more than 800 students. The largest single band is 101–200, selected ten times. Such figures cannot be converted into a precise total number of students. They nevertheless indicate that a shared framework needs to be usable by institutions with different staffing and organisational capacities.

3.2 A long developmental pathway

The most frequently selected age bands are 16–18, present in 39 submissions, and 10–16, present in 37. Provision also extends below and above those bands: 31 submissions include ages 6–10 and 32 include students aged 18 or above. Age coverage is not the same as the distribution of enrolled students. [3]

The significance is developmental. A late-stage outcome may depend on earlier access to theory, aural work, ensemble opportunities and appropriate teaching. The Royal Irish Academy of Music, for example, distinguishes students who develop these foundations within its provision from later entrants who may have less time to reach the required theory and aural level. [3]

A reference framework should therefore help institutions examine continuity across stages. It should not be applied only at the final examination or interpreted as an assumption that every learner has received the same sequence of opportunities.

3.3 Musical offer and curricular emphasis

Classical music is explicitly selected in 41 submissions; the remaining response describes broad general music education. Jazz receives 16 mentions, contemporary music 12, traditional music nine and popular music seven. Additional responses mention early music, cross-genre activity and technology-related provision. Classical music dominates this response set, while other practices contribute to its diversity. [3]

Instrumental or vocal technique is selected as a key curricular competence in 41 submissions, music theory in 38, performance in 36, technical skills in 33 and improvisation in 25. These counts reflect the questionnaire's options. They do not establish that an unlisted competence is absent or that all selected competences receive equal emphasis.

The written responses extend the picture. Some institutions emphasise self-assessment, project organisation, communication or learning strategies. Others identify these as areas needing development. The challenge is to understand how musical knowledge, practical activity and personal capabilities are connected, rather than infer the curriculum from a list of selected labels.

3.4 Explicit outcomes and inherited practice

Thirty-eight submissions report using competence-based learning outcomes, three report that they do not and one describes partial implementation. The distinction between reported use and explicit design is important. A curriculum may name outcomes while assessment remains focused on other priorities; equally, sustained educational practices may develop valuable capabilities without articulating them in an outcome framework. [3]

Ventspils Music Secondary School illustrates partial implementation. Its programmes align with state-approved professional standards, but course syllabi remain more focused on content and repertoire than explicit competence statements. It cautions against reducing holistic artistry to narrowly fragmented descriptors. Barratt Due's questionnaire response likewise calls for terminology showing the relationship between educational stages. [3]

The appropriate response is to make educational intentions understandable and examine whether teaching and assessment support them. Replacing repertoire lists with longer lists of abstract capabilities would not necessarily help teachers or students. Useful outcomes describe capabilities that can be recognised in musical activity.

3.5 Assessment and the learning it makes visible

Public performance is selected as an assessment method in 39 submissions. Written theory examinations and continuous assessment receive 34 mentions each, while auditions and structured examinations receive 31 each. The response set combines formal testing, artistic presentation and continuing evaluation. [3]

The same method can serve different purposes. A performance may provide evidence of technical control, interpretation and communication. An observed rehearsal may reveal listening, preparation and collaboration. A theory task may test isolated knowledge or the application of knowledge to music. The questionnaire does not establish the criteria, weighting or consistency of these judgements.

Several written responses identify the difficulty of moving from familiar grade-based habits towards competence-based feedback. Others request rubrics, shared examples and professional development. Such requests indicate that adopting outcomes requires work on assessment language and teacher judgement, as well as on curriculum documents.

3.6 Resources and institutional conditions

Learning opportunities depend on staff, instruments, rehearsal space, time and institutional organisation. Respondents identify limited facilities, recruitment difficulties and the demands of combining general education with intensive musical study. Kaunas and Maribor describe student workload; The Hague identifies staff capacity; Den Jyske Sangskole describes difficulties attracting and retaining expertise outside a city with a music college. [3]

These issues affect the feasibility of curricular ambitions. An institution cannot develop every proposed competence simply by adding requirements to an already full timetable. Curriculum review needs to identify where capabilities can develop within existing musical work and what additional support is necessary. Cooperation may expand opportunities, but also requires coordination and staff time.

4 Readiness and the transition to higher music education

4.1 Three different educational judgements

A productive discussion of progression distinguishes three questions. What has a student achieved through preparatory learning? What does a particular HME programme require at entry? And which applicants will receive the places available? These questions overlap, but they are not interchangeable.

Completion outcomes describe an educational achievement. Starting expectations identify what is needed to begin a programme. Selection decisions may also reflect competition, the availability of places and institutional priorities. Getafe's questionnaire response, for example, identifies limited places and increasing competition as a transition problem. A shared framework can clarify preparation, but it cannot eliminate capacity constraints or guarantee admission. [3]

There is a further distinction between admission and successful engagement after entry. A student may prepare effectively for an audition while needing support with unfamiliar learning practices, workload or theoretical demands. The educational relationship between the two levels should therefore extend into the early experience of HME.

4.2 Artistic achievement and whole musicianship

Artistic and technical preparation remains central in the questionnaire and the institutional examples. YMTE group notes also recognise technical and performance competence as particularly important for entry. This should remain visible in any broader framework: the proposed expansion of explicit outcomes does not reduce the significance of musical achievement. [3, 7–13, 21]

However, the consultation material challenges a narrow definition of readiness. One YMTE group identifies creativity, reflection, collaboration and self-management as insufficiently described and assessed. It calls attention to practice tools, time management, wider knowledge and longer-term musical perspectives. Another group emphasises teamwork, group processes, large ensembles and crossover activity. [20–21]

These contributions connect performance with listening, knowledge, reflection and interaction. They support making broader educational aims visible in learning opportunities and feedback, while leaving their assessment and relative weighting open to local interpretation.

4.3 Theory and aural understanding

Theory and aural preparation emerge in several forms. The Royal Irish Academy of Music identifies difficulties for later entrants; Young Academy Styria's questionnaire contribution notes needs in theory and ear training despite strong instrumental work; Tallinn asks for clearer international definitions of theoretical expectations. Other respondents describe relatively close alignment and established theory provision. [3]

The AEC workshop notes criticise aspects of traditional theory teaching and propose stronger connections between theory and instrumental lessons. Post-workshop feedback also argues for retaining theoretical standards. These positions should not be collapsed into either a demand to remove theory requirements or an endorsement of all existing tests. They concern both the value of musical understanding and the ways it is taught and assessed. [16]

The implication is to clarify what knowledge and aural capabilities enable students to do musically. Repertoire-based analysis, listening and practical application can help connect subjects. Receiving institutions should explain why particular requirements matter for their programmes, while preparatory institutions can show how those foundations develop over time.

4.4 Transparency and shared starting expectations

Thirty-three of the 40 submissions answering the main alignment question report collaboration with HME. Written responses nevertheless request more specific information, regular communication and involvement from institutional management. Some describe masterclasses and visits that do not directly address entrance requirements. The existence of contact is therefore different from a shared understanding of expectations. [3]

At the AEC workshop, participants proposed clear communication of audition criteria and a common competence language. YMTE group records sharpen this point: entrants can meet requirements more reliably when those requirements are clearly written, while HME should not assume identical musical or personal backgrounds. [16, 19]

In his Oslo presentation, Finn Schumacker proposes using the knowledge, skills, responsibility and autonomy logic at the beginning of HME programmes as well as at their completion. Preparatory institutions would describe what graduates bring; receiving institutions would explain both the foundations required and the capabilities still to be developed. He also asks whether assessment recognises the broader capabilities institutions say they value. These are proposals for reciprocal dialogue, not agreed entrance requirements; bachelor completion outcomes cannot simply be relabelled as admission criteria. [18, 29]

An effective starting profile should explain the intended programme and discipline, the required foundations, how these are assessed and what support follows admission. Where institutions use illustrative repertoire, it should help students understand the underlying musical demand rather than substitute for an explanation of competence.

4.5 Developing independence without assuming completion

One YMTE group lists performance, aural and theoretical competence, time and workload management, practice organisation and collaboration as reasonable entry expectations. In the same record, it cautions against assuming a fully developed artistic voice or professional strategy. Another group similarly distinguishes entry capabilities from a clear plan for studies, career and life. [20–21]

These distinctions are central to the proposed framework. Independence is developmental. A student can take increasing responsibility, use feedback and make artistic choices while still needing substantial teaching and support. Professional awareness can mean understanding that several musical pathways exist, without requiring a settled career identity.

The framework should therefore describe an emerging capacity to learn and participate in HME. It should not require young applicants to display the finished artistic or professional profile that their degree is intended to help them develop.

4.6 Access and the music education ecosystem

AEC workshop contributions connect progression with instrument costs, study fees, family knowledge, geography and workload. Participants describe the need for institutions to understand their place in a wider educational ecosystem and to share responsibility for students' development. This includes reciprocal teacher contact and a shift from exclusive ownership of a student towards coordinated educational support. [16]

The separate YMTE message sheet asks HME to reach out to pre-college institutions and make the breadth of musical careers visible beyond traditional soloist and orchestral pathways. Such outreach can support informed choice by students and families and make the purpose of preparation clearer. [22]

Transparency alone cannot remove unequal access to teachers, instruments or time. If new entry expectations include portfolios, digital work or collaborative experience, institutions must consider whether applicants have had reasonable opportunities to develop and demonstrate them. Broader assessment can recognise overlooked capabilities, but it can also introduce new barriers if it rewards access to expensive preparation.

4.7 Sustainable learning and student voice

Workload and wellbeing connect the institutional conditions of learning with the capabilities expected of students. The 2026 presentation proposes awareness of practice habits, overload, hearing protection and available support. The AEC notes also identify physical and mental wellbeing as part of equitable educational provision. [16, 18]

An educational outcome in this area should concern awareness, decisions and help-seeking. It should not make health status, personal disclosure or an appearance of resilience into a criterion of artistic worth. Institutions retain responsibility for reasonable learning conditions and accessible support.

The YMTE records identify students' perspectives as a missing element. Future examination of transition should include students' understanding of criteria, access to preparation, the experience of auditions and the early months of higher study. Such evidence is needed to test whether institutional descriptions are understandable and useful to the people crossing between the two levels. [19]

5 Learning outcomes in institutional practice

5.1 Connecting intentions with educational provision

Institutional examples make the meaning of a framework more concrete. They show how broad competences can connect with a timetable, a progression sequence, subject teaching and assessment. The examples below are selected for their explanatory value rather than ranked as models of effectiveness.

The comparison distinguishes outcomes, learning activities and evidence. A chamber-music rehearsal provides a setting for learning. Listening and adjusting to others are capabilities developed within it. Observation, performance and discussion can provide evidence. These connections are what make a framework useful beyond its written statements.

5.2 Young KC in The Hague

The Young KC outcome document, dated 26 June 2025 and based on Polifonia, organises expectations into practical, theoretical and general categories. Its practical outcomes include convincing artistic expression, purposeful practice, ensemble experience, improvisation, notation, aural work and presentation. General outcomes address responsibility for learning, reflection and communication. [7]

The accompanying curriculum makes the educational support visible. It specifies 36 teaching weeks, principal-study and group lessons, accompaniment, chamber music, theory and choir, together with a daily Learning Lab where coaching is available. The model adapts provision for instrumental specialisms and jazz students, including different combinations of ensemble, theory and secondary instrumental study.

This example shows how independence can be supported rather than simply demanded. Structured study time and coaching can help students translate lesson objectives into practice decisions. It also demonstrates that a common outcome framework can coexist with differentiated curricular routes.

The Young KC example illustrates the relationship between a broad outcome profile and supported independent practice. Its wording and programme scope are attributed to the supplied institutional contribution. [7]

5.3 Young Academy Styria and Graz

The Graz material describes learning objectives, course content and assessment across principal study, theory, aural training, supplementary piano and chamber music. Elementary theory and ear training connect notation, intervals, scales, harmony and rhythm. More advanced descriptions relate theoretical and historical understanding to repertoire, listening and performance. [8]

Instrumental descriptions emphasise technical and artistic development, repertoire, performance and increasingly independent work. Chamber music includes rehearsal methods, ensemble listening, responsibility and social cooperation. Assessment commonly combines preparation, progress and performance; attendance conditions differ between courses and are not treated as a general standard of musical achievement.

In the interview contribution, Anke Schittenhelm explains that preparatory outcomes are connected with admission requirements for the relevant KUG bachelor programmes. Her proposed level descriptions distinguish guided preparation and initial interpretations from more independent planning, advanced analysis and reflective repertoire choices. The contribution illustrates a way of thinking about development, without establishing a formal EQF assignment for all preparatory education. [13]

5.4 Varaždin School of Music

Varaždin School of Music provides a vertically connected educational environment encompassing preschool, primary and secondary music education. Its contributed Learning Outcomes Framework connects artistic and practical development, theoretical and analytical understanding, and generic competences. Technical development, interpretation, ensemble participation, musical literacy and increasing responsibility are understood across successive stages of learning. [9, 25]

Principal-study teaching, theoretical learning, ensemble work and public performance provide complementary contexts for musical development. International cooperation, including Erasmus+ mobility and participation in YMTE activities, offers further opportunities for shared music-making, intercultural communication and reflection on different educational approaches. These are learning opportunities, not evidence that the proposed European framework has already been formally adopted or evaluated by the school. [25]

The contributed framework relates educational intentions to assessment and monitoring across successive stages. Performance, theoretical achievement, participation and progression can inform institutional review when considered alongside students' starting points, development, access and educational choices. Activity counts or admission rates alone do not establish educational quality. The example's principal value is continuity across stages; an EQF4 reference concerns advanced preparation and does not assign one formal qualification level to all the school's provision. [9, 25]

5.5 Qatar Music Academy as a comparative example

Qatar Music Academy explicitly maps its Academic Program outcomes to the AEC/Polifonia pre-college categories. Daily formative assessment is connected with lesson reports, term progress reporting and diagnostic examinations. Reported areas include technique, musicality, sight-reading, practice and wider learning behaviours, alongside musicianship and ensemble work. [10]

The example shows how outcomes can connect with continuing feedback for students, families and staff. It also invites consideration of workload and the usefulness of recorded information: collecting more data is valuable only when it supports learning and appropriate educational decisions. As a contribution from outside Europe, it is used for comparative insight rather than to characterise a European national system.

5.6 National objectives and higher education endpoints

The supplied Spanish text of objectives from Royal Decree 1577/2006 combines musical technique and knowledge with listening, aesthetic judgement, heritage, group experience, bodily awareness, improvisation and public communication. It illustrates a broad educational conception within a national curricular text. This report analyses the supplied contribution rather than making a determination of current legal applicability. [11]

The Barratt Due document describes completion outcomes for a four-year bachelor in performance music. It includes professional performance, contextual understanding, artistic projects, communication, ethics and professional development. These are HME endpoint outcomes. They help identify the direction of development during a degree, but do not describe a preparatory curriculum or establish an entrance threshold. [12]

The examples connect artistic work with knowledge, reflection and participation through different curricular arrangements. They provide approaches to consider in relation to students, disciplines and institutional responsibilities.

6 A shared competence reference framework

6.1 Purpose and foundations

The proposed framework gives institutions a common language for describing the achievements of students completing specialised preparation for HME. It is intended to support curriculum development, comparison and dialogue. It does not prescribe one teaching method, repertoire list or organisational model, and it does not confer admission or a qualification.

Polifonia's 2007 pre-college competences provide the main historical foundation. They use practical, theoretical and generic categories and emphasise the educational continuum. They were not designed to specify the level of every skill or to require every competence to be examined at admission. This distinction remains relevant: a developmental framework needs explicit interpretation before it becomes an assessment or qualification instrument. [5]

Polifonia and the earlier outcome tables provide continuity between educational stages. Abbink and Solvik's 2024 comparison explains how AEC Learning Outcomes 2017 were adjusted and supplemented to develop music subsets at levels 6 and 7 within eight CPAD dimensions. At level 8, descriptors remain at the joint arts level. The May 2026 EQF4 draft is a separate preparatory adaptation. The 14 outcomes below synthesise the documentary study, institutional examples and professional consultation. [5–14, 16, 18–22, 27–28]

The Varaždin review supports the three categories and 14 outcome areas. Institutions can use them to examine musical demand, developmental stage and intended pathway. [25]

6.2 EQF and the question of level

EQF provides a language for discussing knowledge, skills, responsibility and autonomy across different systems. The project material uses level 4 as a reference point for considering advanced preparatory learning. Finn Schumacker's 2026 presentation expressly distinguishes this use from assigning a formal level or qualification to every pre-college programme. [18, 23]

That distinction allows a productive educational question: do the expectations associated with a reference level help teachers and institutions describe a recognisable stage of musical learning? It does not justify assuming that all programmes sharing the term pre-college have the same formal status. National qualification contexts and actual descriptors remain relevant.

The Graz interview also discusses levels 4 and 5 in terms of increasing technical breadth, independence and reflection. The variation reinforces the need to state the expected context and degree of support. It is not evidence that the whole sector has agreed a single threshold. [13]

The report therefore uses a developmental description of readiness: students demonstrate substantial foundations and increasing responsibility, while remaining learners who need teaching, feedback and opportunities to deepen their work. Institutions can compare this description with their own qualification context and receiving programmes.

6.3 A music-specific translation of competence

CALOHEx relates general qualification language to discipline-specific achievements. The AEC comparison distinguishes joint CPAD dimensions from music subsets and detailed outcomes. The EQF4 working draft applies the eight dimensions to preparatory learning through knowledge, skills, responsibility and autonomy descriptors. These dimensions support comparison with further development during HME; the report's three categories organise the proposed outcomes for practical use. [27–28]

The practical requirement is to make the learner visible in the language. Responsibility for learning might be shown by planning practice, noticing an ineffective strategy and adapting it after feedback. Musical understanding might be shown by explaining a phrase, recognising a harmonic relationship by ear and using that understanding in interpretation. The meaning lies in the musical action, not in the sophistication of the terminology.

The 14 outcomes are organised in three categories: practical and artistic, theoretical and contextual, and generic and transversal. The eight CPAD dimensions provide an additional reference for examining coverage and progression. Knowledge, skills, responsibility and autonomy describe aspects of achievement within those dimensions. Appendix B shows how the structures connect without requiring institutions to adopt several parallel assessment systems. [27–28]

Framework category	Principal emphasis	Connections across categories
Practical and artistic	Realising musical intentions through performance, creation, listening and shared work	Knowledge informs choices; reflection supports practice
Theoretical and contextual	Understanding musical material, repertoire and its contexts	Practical tasks demonstrate application; inquiry supports interpretation
Generic and transversal	Responsibility, communication and sustainable learning	Developed within musical activity and supported by teaching

The May 2026 EQF4 document is treated as a working preparatory reference. Finn Schumacker identifies it as his contribution to collaborative framework development through the YMTE Erasmus+ project. Its exploratory status is consistent with his Oslo presentation. It provides a basis for educational comparison rather than formal qualification assignment. [27, 32–33]

6.4 How to read the outcome statements

The reference point is the end of a specialised preparatory phase leading towards an identified HME pathway. Students should demonstrate these capabilities in relevant musical situations, with increasing independence appropriate to age, experience and intended study. They are not immediate expectations for preschool or primary pupils: earlier stages need locally defined milestones, suitable teaching and age-appropriate evidence. [25]

Each statement is followed by an explanation of scope and possible evidence. These examples support interpretation rather than prescribe a new entrance test. Local application should specify musical demand, repertoire or task complexity, the support permitted and the relationship with the receiving programme.

The outcomes should be read together: a performance can demonstrate technical control, contextual understanding and communication, while a rehearsal can reveal listening, preparation and responsibility. Several outcomes can share evidence. Institutions should explain their priorities and weighting in relation to principal study and intended pathway. [25]

Practical and artistic outcomes

P1 Artistic expression and principal study

Outcome Realise and communicate musical intentions with developing technical control and expressive understanding appropriate to the principal study and intended HME pathway.

The emphasis is on an emerging capacity to make and communicate artistic choices. It does not require a fully formed artistic identity. Interpretation, composition or other principal-study practice should be understood in the relevant discipline.

Possible evidence Prepared performance or creative work and a short discussion of musical decisions. Successive examples can show development and responsiveness to feedback; a single high-pressure audition cannot demonstrate the whole outcome.

P2 Repertoire and stylistic engagement

Outcome Prepare and present relevant repertoire or musical material across an appropriate range of styles, using understanding of musical and contextual characteristics to inform decisions.

Breadth should reflect the principal study and the intended programme. Illustrative repertoire can clarify demand, but a shared framework should not imply that one list of works fits every student or tradition.

Possible evidence Contrasting work, a repertoire record and discussion of stylistic choices. Partner-country repertoire, early music or contemporary work may be included where relevant to the programme; no fixed European canon is implied.

P3 Practice and rehearsal strategies

Outcome Plan purposeful practice and rehearsal, identify problems, select and adapt strategies, and evaluate progress with increasing independence, seeking guidance when needed.

P3 concerns practical problem-solving in practice and rehearsal; G1 concerns broader responsibility, goal-setting and reflection across learning. Independence includes recognising when guidance is needed. Teachers remain responsible for helping students acquire and adapt effective strategies.

Possible evidence A brief practice conversation, annotated score or short record connecting a problem, strategy, feedback and adjustment. A lengthy diary is justified only when it has a clear educational purpose.

P4 Ensemble and collaborative musicianship

Outcome Prepare and contribute responsibly to shared music-making, listening and responding to others, participating in musical decisions and adapting to different roles.

The outcome includes rehearsal behaviour, coordination and shared artistic responsibility. Relevant settings may include chamber music, large ensembles, bands, choir or collaborative creative work.

Possible evidence Observed rehearsal and performance, with concise teacher feedback and, where suitable, peer feedback. An ensemble concert recording alone may not reveal an individual's preparation, responsiveness or contribution to shared decisions.

P5 Aural understanding and musical representation

Outcome Recognise, remember and work with musical material by ear, and interpret and use notation or other relevant forms of representation appropriate to the discipline and intended HME pathway.

Hearing, reading and musical action should be connected. Local expectations must specify relevant sight-reading, rhythmic fluency, inner hearing, notation, memorisation or transposition and their musical demand. Alternative representations must not obscure essential notation requirements of the intended programme.

Possible evidence Listening and practical tasks, score work or other relevant representation, connected where possible to repertoire and specified local requirements.

P6 Creativity and musical exploration

Outcome Explore, develop and evaluate musical ideas through improvisation, composition, arrangement, interpretation or other creative activity relevant to the principal study.

The outcome concerns exploration, revision and evaluation as well as a finished product. Creative interpretation is valuable, but should not displace opportunities to improvise, compose or arrange where these suit the programme.

Possible evidence A short creative task, rehearsal experiment, recording or account of development, including an alternative tried and the reason for a resulting decision. Exploration and development matter alongside the finished work.

P7 Performance and audience communication

Outcome Prepare and deliver a musical presentation that communicates artistic intentions with awareness of audience, setting and practical responsibilities.

P7 concerns planning and communicating a presentation, complementing P1's musical realisation. Judgement should concern musical communication and practical preparation, not outward confidence or personality. Performance anxiety calls for appropriate support, not an inference of insufficient artistic potential.

Possible evidence Performance or presentation, selected preparation material and a concise reflection or conversation about communication and next steps.

Theoretical and contextual outcomes

T1 Musical knowledge in practice

Outcome Explain and apply relevant concepts of rhythm, melody, harmony, form and musical organisation in listening, creation and interpretation, as appropriate to the intended HME pathway.

Applied understanding complements necessary theoretical and aural foundations. Expected complexity and vocabulary must be specified for the intended pathway. A generic statement cannot establish every entrance threshold; connecting theory with repertoire does not remove essential programme-specific requirements.

Possible evidence Written, oral, aural and practical tasks, pairing selected theory or listening work with repertoire at a locally specified level of complexity.

T2 Repertoire and cultural context

Outcome Relate selected musical work to relevant stylistic, historical and cultural contexts, using that understanding to inform artistic choices and engagement with different musical perspectives.

The focus is informed engagement with repertoire and openness to unfamiliar perspectives. Students can explore cultural and societal relationships through repertoire and local musical activity. Oral discussion and accessible source material can demonstrate understanding without requiring cultural travel or specialist vocabulary. Ethical and environmental questions can be explored with G2 through shared projects. [27, subsets 2.2 and 5.1]

Possible evidence Discussion, presentation, short commentary or annotated score connecting context with musical decisions. Oral explanation is a valid alternative to polished written prose.

Generic and transversal outcomes

G1 Responsibility and reflective learning

Outcome Set realistic goals, use feedback constructively, reflect on progress and take increasing responsibility for learning and artistic decisions, with appropriate guidance.

The student should demonstrate a developing ability to understand and direct learning. This is compatible with uncertainty, experimentation and substantial teacher support.

Possible evidence Learning conversations and examples of revised decisions showing how feedback and reflection improve learning. Polished reflective prose is not itself the competence.

G2 Communication and participation

Outcome Discuss musical work clearly, give and receive constructive feedback, and contribute respectfully and responsibly to shared activity in different educational or cultural settings.

Assessment should recognise different communication styles and accessible forms of response. Local ensembles and classroom collaboration are valid contexts; international mobility is not a condition for achievement. Programme-specific language requirements should be explained separately. Respectful participation can include considering inclusion, the needs of others and the effects of musical activity on participants and communities, as introduced in CPAD Dimensions 4 and 5. [27]

Possible evidence Group work, constructive feedback exchange and discussion in local or international settings, with attention to the student's contribution.

G3 Digital competence

Outcome Select and use accessible digital tools for musical learning, practice, creation, recording or collaboration, explaining their purposes and limits and applying relevant principles of attribution, consent and responsible use.

Digital tools should serve a musical purpose. The outcome does not require costly production, mastery of a named product or AI use. Where AI contributes to a task, students should explain its role and how its output was checked and attributed. Institutions must offer reasonable access to the tools they expect students to use.

Possible evidence An authentic musical task with a brief explanation of tool choice, responsible use and output checking. Simple recordings, notation or feedback exchange may suffice.

G4 Sustainable musicianship

Outcome Plan and review practice habits and workload, demonstrate basic awareness of hearing protection and excessive strain, and identify appropriate sources of guidance and support.

Sustainable musicianship here concerns healthy musical learning, manageable workload, hearing awareness and access to support. It connects most directly with EQF4 subsets 8.1 and 8.2. Assessment concerns informed practice decisions and help-seeking, without requiring personal health disclosure. Institutions retain responsibility for learning conditions. Environmental awareness and responsible resource use form part of the broader societal dimension and can develop through shared projects. [27–28]

Possible evidence An ordinary practice-planning scenario or discussion of workload and available support, without requiring disclosure of personal health information.

G5 Professional awareness and educational choice

Outcome Identify different ways of studying and working in music and relate these possibilities to personal interests, learning needs and possible next steps.

Students should explore a broad musical profession, including performance, education, creative and community roles, while remaining free to change direction. The outcome does not require a fixed career plan, business strategy or evidence of employment readiness.

Possible evidence Information gathering, project reflection or a pathway discussion linking different musical roles to interests, learning needs and possible next steps.

6.5 Relationship with higher education development

The framework describes foundations for further learning. The supplied CALOHEx level 6 assessment descriptors concern bachelor completion: they extend preparatory work towards broader artistic mastery, research and reflective enquiry, varied collaboration and professional participation. For example, EQF4 subset 2.3 introduces purposeful use of basic musical technologies; level 6 subset 6.2.3 expects knowledge and application of a wider range of technologies. This is a developmental relationship, not a common admission threshold. Appendix B provides comparable links for all 14 outcomes. [27–28]

The next step is reciprocal comparison. Preparatory institutions can explain the achievement represented by an outcome and the learning opportunities supporting it. HME programmes can identify the foundations they require at entry and the capabilities they intend to develop thereafter. This process can reveal genuine gaps, unnecessary duplication and assumptions that should be reconsidered.

Area	Preparatory emphasis	Further development during HME
Artistic expression	Clear intention and appropriate technical foundations	Broader range, sustained artistic enquiry and more independent realisation
Learning	Purposeful practice and increasing responsibility	More autonomous study, research and self-management
Understanding	Apply relevant concepts to musical work	Deeper contextual, analytical and disciplinary understanding
Collaboration	Responsible participation and musical response	Varied roles, settings and collaborative responsibilities
Professional awareness	Explore possibilities and make informed choices	Develop professional practice and a sustainable direction

Interpretative summary informed by the supplied EQF4 and CALOHEx materials. The final column concerns development during higher education, not requirements already to be completed at admission. Appendix B provides the detailed source connections. [27–28]

7 Using the framework in practice

7.1 Begin with the existing curriculum

A useful first step is to compare existing provision with the outcome domains. Institutions can identify where students already develop each capability and what evidence teachers use. This may reveal valuable practice that needs clearer articulation as well as gaps requiring new opportunities.

The exercise should consider the learner's experience across subjects. Theory and aural work may inform principal study; ensemble activity may develop communication and responsibility; recorded practice may support reflection and digital choice. Cross-subject planning can strengthen these connections without adding a new course for every outcome.

The institutional examples show different routes. The Hague connects a broad timetable with supported practice. Graz provides detailed subject descriptions. Varaždin links educational stages. Qatar Music Academy connects outcomes and reporting. Institutions can draw on these principles while retaining their own organisation and traditions. [7–10]

7.2 Specify level through musical situations

Broad wording needs local interpretation. For an outcome concerning practice, teachers should clarify the type of musical task, how independently a student is expected to plan, and when guidance remains appropriate. For theory, the institution should specify the material and complexity required for the intended pathway.

A small set of examples can be more useful than additional abstract descriptors. Teachers and HME partners can compare performances, practical tasks or learning conversations and explain their judgements. Examples should show a range of acceptable artistic solutions and acknowledge different routes to achievement.

This process can also expose an unreasonable expectation. If a capability is required at entry but students have had little opportunity to develop it, the institutions should discuss whether the curriculum needs support, the entry requirement needs explanation or introductory HME provision should address the difference.

7.3 Use a proportionate range of evidence

A framework should improve understanding rather than create an examination for every line. Selected evidence from normal teaching can demonstrate several outcomes together. A performance can be combined with a short discussion; a rehearsal can provide evidence of collaborative capability; a theory task can connect with repertoire.

For example, one chamber-music rehearsal and presentation can provide evidence for P1, P4 and P7. A brief conversation about an interpretative choice can also illuminate T1 or T2, while discussion of a revised practice strategy can support P3 and G1. A concise teacher record should identify the individual contribution and the codes actually evidenced; participation alone does not demonstrate every outcome. This is a proposed integrated assessment example, not a validated project intervention.

Reflective evidence should illuminate learning, not reward elaborate writing or access to professional recording. Where portfolios are used, their scope should be manageable, accessible and relevant to the intended decision. Students should know the purpose and criteria in advance.

The following example illustrates a developmental process within a programme. It is a proposed application, not an activity reported as already tested by the project.

Stage	Student and teacher activity	Learning made visible
Establish goals	Discuss repertoire, current needs and the next learning task	Understanding of purpose and starting point
Develop work	Connect practice, lessons, listening and relevant subject learning	Strategies, application and adaptation
Share evidence	Present music and discuss selected decisions	Artistic achievement and understanding
Review feedback	Compare evidence with agreed criteria and consider alternatives	Reflection and responsiveness
Plan next steps	Agree priorities and appropriate support	Increasing responsibility and continuity

7.4 Support teachers and shared judgement

Teachers need time to discuss outcomes and examine evidence together. Professional development should connect with actual teaching: formulating a useful outcome, designing a task, giving feedback and comparing judgements. A shared vocabulary should help staff explain their expertise rather than replace it.

Assessment moderation can make differing interpretations visible. Teachers may agree that a performance demonstrates technical achievement while differing over independence or stylistic understanding. Discussing the evidence can clarify which judgement is being made and what further information is needed.

The questionnaire requests for teacher development and resources, and AEC workshop proposals for reciprocal teacher contact, support such work. Its practical design should account for workload and institutional capacity. An elaborate framework that staff cannot sustain is unlikely to improve the learning experience. [3, 16]

7.5 Work with receiving HME institutions

Begin with a manageable set of receiving programmes. Collect dated starting profiles and admission information, separating competence requirements from audition format. For each relevant outcome code, compare musical demand, task complexity, independence, assessment evidence and support after admission. Preparatory and receiving teachers should review the comparison together, recording partial matches, gaps and unresolved differences rather than declaring general equivalence. The template below provides a common record. [25–26]

Programme comparison record

Mapping field	Record for each receiving programme
Programme and source	Institution, programme, principal study, source title, date and version; distinguish published requirements from informal advice.
Starting expectation	Exact competence or requirement and its source location; distinguish this from audition format and bachelor completion.
Framework connection	Relevant P, T or G code and reason for the connection; record partial matches and gaps.
Musical demand and support	Task or repertoire complexity, independence and guidance; opportunities before entry and support after admission.
Evidence and interpretation	Proposed or existing assessment evidence, individual contribution, apparent match and unresolved differences.
Joint verification	Preparatory and receiving reviewers, date, agreed interpretation and issues still open.

Developmental or orientation auditions can give students feedback before high-stakes selection. They should be clearly distinguished from admission and explain what is being assessed. Where teachers observe each other's work, the purpose should include understanding the different educational responsibilities of the two levels.

Cooperation should continue after students move into HME. Feedback on the early learning experience can help receiving institutions review assumptions and preparatory schools evaluate their curriculum. Student participation is essential to interpreting that feedback.

7.6 Make implementation accessible

The cost and availability of learning opportunities should be considered before expanding expectations. Shared projects, visiting teachers and appropriately designed online activity may widen participation, but access to technology, instruments, travel and time varies. Specific funding arrangements require separate investigation when activities are planned.

Student support also involves families and educational choice. AEC workshop notes identify uncertainty about musical careers and the need for guidance; YMTE notes call for a broader view of the profession. Information should make several pathways visible without promising employment outcomes the evidence cannot establish. [16, 22]

Institutions should evaluate the framework through use: whether students understand it, whether feedback becomes clearer, whether staff can apply it consistently and whether the transition is better supported. Publication is a starting point for such evaluation rather than evidence that those benefits have already occurred.

Pilot selected outcomes with one student group over one term, using existing activities. Keep a brief record of the task, codes, evidence, feedback and next step. Consult Appendix B where detailed descriptors clarify demand or autonomy; avoid documenting every descriptor in every lesson. Review clarity, access and workload with teachers and students. Test Dimension 5 through a discussion of societal or environmental choices within an existing project. [25–28]

8 Recommendations for institutions and policymakers

The evidence supports a coordinated programme of educational development. The following recommendations combine reported needs with proposals arising from the study and consultations. They identify responsibilities and practical directions; they do not assume uniform national systems or a single institutional capacity.

8.1 Develop the shared reference through use

Pre-college institutions, HME partners and networks should examine the proposed outcomes with teachers and students. Begin with a limited number of disciplines and compare how different institutions interpret the statements. Record revisions and develop examples showing the expected musical demand and degree of independence.

YMTE and AEC can support the exchange and make the developing resource accessible. A useful reference should remain open to adjustment as programmes and musical practices change. It should not acquire the authority of a qualification or quality label before the relevant processes and responsibilities have been established.

8.2 Make starting expectations understandable

HME institutions should publish and explain the competences required to begin specific programmes, alongside audition procedures and illustrative material. They should distinguish essential foundations from capabilities to be developed during the degree and explain support available for entrants with different backgrounds.

Pre-college institutions should relate preparation to these expectations without allowing a single audition format to define the whole curriculum. Joint review should consider both the relevance of requirements and applicants' opportunities to prepare.

8.3 Align assessment and feedback with educational aims

Institutions should examine whether their assessments recognise the competences they say matter. Creativity, collaboration and responsibility should have relevant learning opportunities and feedback, alongside artistic and theoretical achievement. Broader recognition does not require a separate test for every competence.

Teacher development should include discussion of criteria and evidence. Networks can support exchange of contextualised examples and moderation practices, while institutions evaluate their usefulness and workload.

8.4 Strengthen continuity through cooperation

Pre-college and HME institutions should establish recurring contact at leadership and teaching levels. Reciprocal visits, joint ensembles, masterclasses, mentoring and orientation activities can support continuity when they have a clear educational purpose.

The AEC and YMTE discussions indicate that cooperation also requires a change in perspective: responsibility for development extends beyond the boundaries of an individual studio or institution. Follow-up should include students' experience before and after transition. [16, 19–22]

8.5 Address the conditions of equitable preparation

Policymakers, funders and institutions should consider instrument costs, fees, geography, facilities and the time needed to combine educational demands. Curriculum reforms require adequate staff capacity and access to expertise. Cooperation opportunities should be designed so that smaller or less-resourced institutions can participate meaningfully.

Digital activity and portfolios should not become hidden access tests. Sustainable practice, wellbeing and support should be embedded in educational provision. A student's need for guidance must not be mistaken for a lack of potential.

8.6 Broaden professional understanding and preserve choice

Schools and HME institutions should make diverse musical roles visible, including performance, teaching, creative production and community or collaborative work. Students and families need credible information about educational routes and the skills associated with them.

The preparatory phase should encourage curiosity and informed decisions without expecting a fixed career plan. Educational success should include meaningful development and appropriate choice, as well as progression into professional study.

8.7 Test impact and develop the evidence base

Further inquiry should include final-stage preparatory students, recent HME entrants and, where feasible, students who were not admitted or chose another pathway. Ask what expectations they understood, how they prepared, what opportunities and feedback were available, what proved difficult after entry and what support would have helped. Record recruitment, sample, timing and limitations. Explain how contributions will be used, provide appropriate consent and anonymisation options, and apply relevant safeguards for minors. Keep quotations, summaries and editorial interpretations distinct. [25]

Future comparison should distinguish submissions from unique institutions and retain question-specific denominators. Longitudinal inquiry can examine change; programme studies can test alignment. Claims that teaching, assessment or outcomes have improved require dated curricular decisions, implementation records and evaluation evidence. A proposed rubric, conference discussion or publication demonstrates development work, not achieved impact. Qualification and quality-assurance connections require source verification and the relevant formal processes. [25–26]

Dissemination should include a readable public report, concise versions for different audiences and practical examples. Translation priorities should reflect intended use. The most informative measure of success will be how the work helps institutions and learners, rather than the number of documents distributed.

9 Conclusions

European specialised pre-college music education contains diverse organisational forms and educational traditions. The mapping nevertheless shows substantial reported attention to competence-based learning, artistic achievement, theory and assessment. Institutional examples demonstrate several ways to connect broad outcomes with curricula and continuing feedback.

The transition to HME remains a shared educational responsibility. Preparation can be strengthened by clearer outcome descriptions, but alignment also requires receiving institutions to explain and review their starting expectations. Admission transparency, the quality of musical learning and access to preparation need to be considered together.

The conference contributions make the developing student more visible within this relationship. Artistic and technical foundations matter, while reflection, creativity, collaboration and learning strategies help students use those foundations. Entrants need opportunities to grow into an artistic identity and explore professional directions; they should not be expected to have completed that development before higher study begins.

The framework can help teachers connect subjects, students understand progress and institutions discuss expectations. Its further development should involve students and a wider range of musical practices, alongside attention to the conditions that make learning possible.

A stronger curricular connection will not make every programme identical or remove every difficulty in progression. It can make educational achievements and expectations more understandable, support informed choices and create a better basis for continuing cooperation between pre-college and HME.

Appendix A Questionnaire results and interpretation

All figures below refer to the 42-submission export, not a deduplicated institution population. Counts describe the response set and should not be generalised as European sector estimates. [2–3]

Item	Recorded responses or selections	Interpretation
Competence-based outcomes	38 Yes; 3 No; 1 Partial	Self-reported use, not verified implementation depth
HME alignment collaboration	33 Yes; 7 No; 2 blank	40 answered; the main collaboration question has high coverage
Student preparation for HME	9 non-empty entries	Sparse coverage and possible routing; no general estimate
Transition challenges	7 non-empty entries	Qualitative examples; some entries are brief or uncertain
Implementation challenges	35 non-empty entries	Completion count, not number sharing a theme
Requested support	35 non-empty entries	Completion count, not a measure of agreement

Programme strands and age coverage

Category	Selections
Classical	41
Jazz	16
Contemporary	12
Traditional	9
Popular	7
Ages below 6	6
Ages 6–10	31
Ages 10–16	37
Ages 16–18	39
Ages 18 and above	32

Multiple selections were allowed. The age figures indicate bands included in provision, not numbers of students. The remaining genre response describes broad general music education. Additional free-text strands are discussed in Chapter 3.

Curriculum and assessment

Competence or assessment method	Selections
Instrumental or vocal technique	41
Music theory	38
Performance competence	36
Technical skills	33
Improvisation	25
Public performance assessment	39
Written theory examinations	34
Continuous assessment	34
Auditions	31
Structured examinations	31

The competence counts reflect the questionnaire's listed options and should not imply absence of other capabilities. The assessment counts do not show weighting, standards or validity. A form can record several methods without demonstrating alignment between each method and the stated outcomes.

Potential repeated entries remain separate in the submission-level results. Institutional identity and questionnaire routing have not been fully resolved; no unique-institution total or interpretation of blanks as negative answers is inferred. A future deduplicated analysis should document its decision rules and retain the original export. Any specialised European subset would need explicit eligibility criteria and a separate denominator. [3, 25]

Appendix B Comparison with the EQF4 draft and CALOHEx

This appendix compares the report's 14 outcomes with the May 2026 EQF4 working draft and the level 6 music descriptors in Abbink and Solvik's AEC/CALOHEx comparison. It develops the mapping proposed in Finn Schumacker's contribution. The level 6 references below point to pages 2–6 of the 12-page document cited at [28], using its subset identifiers 6.1.1–6.8.2. EQF4 references use the detailed subsets in [27]. Connections show shared subject matter and development towards bachelor completion; they do not establish equivalent demand or individual HME admission standards. [27–28, 33]

The eight dimensions

1. Creative / artistic practice

2. Knowledges, creative understandings, critical and generative thinking

3. Autonomy, judgement and critical reflection

4. Collaborative, participatory and co-operative processes

5. Sustainable, societal and cultural awareness

6. Communication and presentation

7. Professional awareness and practice

8. Independent development

Knowledge, skills and responsibility and autonomy are read together within each dimension. For example, in EQF4 subset 2.3 the learner knows basic musical technologies, uses appropriate tools and takes responsibility for safe and appropriate use. In level 6 subset 6.2.3, knowledge and application extend across a wider range of technologies. The difference concerns breadth, musical purpose and independence; it should not be reduced to possession of particular software. [27–28]

Source version and status

The EQF4 source is a working draft titled Draft Qualifications reference framework at EQF level 4, May 2026. The comparison uses its detailed subsets 1.1–8.2. It does not rely on the Dimension 2 overview row, which repeats Dimension 1 wording in the supplied version. The detailed Dimension 2 subsets describe knowledge and creative understanding, contexts and technology. The level 6 source is the dated Abbink–Solvik comparison with AEC Learning Outcomes 2017. Both sources support developmental interpretation; the report does not present the EQF4 adaptation as an adopted European standard. [27–28]

Connections for all 14 outcomes

Entries paraphrase the relevant descriptors. A connection indicates shared subject matter and a direction of development; it does not mean equal demand, identical assessment or full coverage. K denotes knowledge, S skills, and R/A responsibility and autonomy. Where two EQF4 rows share a subset number, the summary draws on both. [27–28]

Report outcome	Connection with the EQF4 draft	Development towards level 6 completion
P1 Artistic expression	D1, 1.1–1.2: core musical knowledge (K), technical and creative realisation (S), and developing control and coherent intentions (R/A).	6.1.1–6.1.2, p.2: command of craft, artistic expression across representative repertoire and coherent experiences for an audience. Progression concerns breadth and mastery; P1 retains an emerging artistic identity.
P2 Repertoire	D1, 1.2; D2, 2.1–2.2: stylistic and contextual knowledge (K), use of examples and styles in interpretation (S), and informed, respectful choices (R/A).	6.2.1–6.2.2, pp.2–3: comprehensive repertoire knowledge, engagement with new challenges and positioning practice in artistic contexts. Breadth remains discipline-specific; no common repertoire list is implied.
P3 Practice strategies	D1, 1.1; D3, 3.1–3.2; D8, 8.1: know practice and reflection methods (K), compare strategies and apply feedback (S), organise and adapt learning (R/A).	6.1.1, 6.3.2 and 6.8.1, pp.2–3,6: professionally appropriate practice, reflective enquiry and independent feedback-seeking. Preparatory help-seeking remains compatible with increasing independence.
P4 Ensemble work	D4, 4.1: understand teamwork, listening and shared responsibility (K), respond musically and socially (S), contribute reliably to shared goals (R/A).	6.4.1, p.3: varied collaborative settings, including beyond music, and teamwork, negotiation and organisation. Preparatory contribution does not require professional project leadership.
P5 Aural skills and representation	D1, 1.1: recognise and realise material by notation and/or ear (K), apply aural and coordination skills (S), prepare reliably (R/A).	6.1.1, p.2: command of technical skills and recognition, memorisation, interpretation and manipulation of musical materials. Programme-specific notation and sight-reading requirements still need definition.
P6 Creativity	D1, 1.2; D2, 2.1: awareness of creative and expressive processes (K), experimentation and creation (S), initiative and evaluation of ideas (R/A).	6.1.2 and 6.2.1, p.2: creating and realising music and developing, researching and evaluating ideas. Preparatory exploration is guided and does not demand completed artistic research.
P7 Presentation	D6, 6.1–6.2; D1, 1.2: know audience and presentation contexts (K), communicate and adapt presentation (S), take responsibility for engagement (R/A).	6.6.1–6.6.2, pp.4–5: varied communication strategies, professional presentation and audience engagement. P7 deliberately assesses musical communication rather than outward confidence or personality.
T1 Musical knowledge	D2, 2.1; D1, 1.1: know musical materials and relationships (K), apply theoretical understanding (S), prepare and evaluate ideas within agreed structures (R/A).	6.2.1, p.2: wider knowledge of musical forms, languages and resources, used in creative and reflective work. The report gives theory an explicit outcome; neither framework supplies a universal entrance theory test.
T2 Cultural context	D2, 2.2; D5, 5.1: know selected traditions and societal contexts (K), inform interpretation through context (S), respect perspectives and consider effects on others (R/A).	6.2.2 and 6.5.1, pp.3–4: position practice in artistic and societal contexts and reflect on cultural and ethical issues. T2 covers part of Dimension 5, not its entire societal or environmental remit.

Report outcome	Connection with the EQF4 draft	Development towards level 6 completion
G1 Reflective learning	D3, 3.2; D8, 8.1: understand reflection and continued learning (K), apply feedback and adapt skills (S), take growing responsibility (R/A).	6.3.2 and 6.8.1, pp.3,6: critical enquiry into practice, constructive response to feedback and responsibility for further learning. G1 spans learning decisions; P3 focuses on practice problems.
G2 Participation	D4, 4.1–4.2; D6, 6.1; D5, 5.1: understand collaboration and others' needs (K), exchange ideas and feedback (S), support respectful group processes (R/A).	6.4.1–6.4.2, 6.5.1 and 6.6.1, pp.3–4: teamwork, supporting or leading learning, sensitive social engagement and communication. Peer support at EQF4 is not a teaching qualification or a requirement for mobility experience.
G3 Digital competence	D2, 2.3; D7, 7.2: know basic musical technologies and relevant rights (K), use tools purposefully (S), handle resources responsibly (R/A).	6.2.3 and 6.7.2, pp.3,5: broader technological application and intellectual-property awareness. Attribution, consent and optional AI use are explicit contextual refinements in this report, not a verbatim EQF4 descriptor.
G4 Sustainable learning	D8, 8.2 and 8.1: know wellbeing and support needs (K), use sustainable routines and feedback (S), manage workload and seek guidance (R/A).	6.8.2, p.6: sound working practices, support networks and awareness of professional demands. Dimension 5 is broader than wellbeing; neither health disclosure nor apparent resilience is evidence of achievement.
G5 Educational choice	D7, 7.1–7.2: know study routes, working contexts and expectations (K), reflect on goals and habits (S), pursue agreed learning goals with curiosity (R/A).	6.7.1–6.7.2, p.5: evaluate professional environments, develop a longer-term direction and understand business, legal and network contexts. Preparatory awareness does not mean employment readiness or a fixed career plan.

What the comparison changes

The 14 outcomes connect with all eight dimensions without reproducing the EQF4 draft in full. Dimension 5 makes music's societal role, ethics and environmental considerations particularly explicit. In this report, cultural and societal awareness are developed through T2 and G2 and through the project example in Chapter 7. G4 focuses on sustainable learning and wellbeing. These connections retain a manageable outcome structure while making the broader scope visible. Their adequacy can be examined through subsequent institutional use.

The EQF4 draft also includes limited peer guidance under 4.2 and professional conduct under 7.2. These connect with P4, G2 and G5 without requiring a teaching qualification or a fixed career direction. Communication is interpreted through musical purpose and accessible evidence, with attention to Varaždin's recommendation to avoid judging personality or outward confidence. [25, 27–28]

A practical comparison should retain the expected musical demand, degree of guidance and available learning opportunities. Similar words at EQF4 and level 6 do not prove equal competence. Receiving institutions still need to identify which foundations they expect at entry, which capabilities will develop during the degree and what support is available. The table provides a basis for that conversation, not its conclusion.

References

References identify the questionnaire evidence, institutional contributions, framework materials and professional consultation underlying the report. Institutional accounts illustrate educational practice; the proposed outcomes and Appendix B are a synthesis rather than an evaluation of institutional effectiveness.

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[3] Mapping Questionnaire_2025.xlsx. Response export, August–October 2025.

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Especially Chapter 7 on pre-college competences and their relationship with HME.

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