

Ten Steps on How to Implement Your International Exchange Programme

The following ten steps are designed to help institutions to develop, implement, and sustain their international exchange activities. This list does not pretend to cover every possibility: individual institutions may need to adjust the order or add additional components, depending on specific situations and needs. Some points might appear to be obvious, others less so: this list is simply an attempt to give guidance, especially to those with little or no experience. It will also serve as a practical resource for new members of staff taking over the task of dealing with international exchanges. One characteristic, however, makes this advisory paper unique: it addresses the special characteristics and needs of professional music training.

The main initiatives within the framework of an international exchange programme can be summarized as follows: exchanges of individuals and groups of students and teaching staff, joint curricular collaboration, and joint programmes. These activities can take place at different levels of intensity: they can range from small-scale bilateral one-to-one exchanges with an informal character to long-lasting cooperation initiatives that include several types of activities and are supported by formal agreements. The needs and capacities of the institutions involved determine the type of activity and the level of intensity. All of these various activities will be discussed in the documents produced by this project.

These ten steps are for institutions interested in initiating a broad range of activities, something beyond incidental exchanges. This does not mean that informal exchanges are less valuable. However, for institutions wishing to be engaged in activities that demand a more structured approach, such as regular, long-term student exchanges, the ten steps provide a useful set of issues and questions to consider.

Please note that this document mainly deals with exchanges in music performance programmes. In relation to exchanges in music education programmes, many of the ten steps will also be applicable, but additional care will have to be taken in relation to the academic courses that music education students will need to follow. This means that it is particularly important to finalise the negotiations relating to the completion of the learning agreement (see step 5) before the student leaves for the exchange. US institutions with music education programmes that are interested in doing exchanges in this field should also take into consideration that the systems for music teacher training vary greatly from one European country to another. More information about these systems can be obtained from the [European Association of Conservatoires \(AEC\)](#).

The ten steps on how to implement your international exchange programme can be divided into three phases: the preparatory, implementation, and exit phases. The target audiences for this list of practical steps are administrative or teaching staff dealing with international relations in professional music training institutions. In the European context, those officials are usually called international relations coordinators. Although the general international policy of the institution will be the responsibility of the dean, director, or principal, the practical aspects will be usually delegated to another staff member.

A. PREPARATORY PHASE

Preparation is critical to success. Five steps are devoted to it. This reflects a central principle in international exchange: once students/teachers start to travel, most of your work will have to be completed.

1. Develop a Clear International Policy

A discussion at senior management level should take place about *why* your institution would like to be engaged in international cooperation. Carefully weigh the pros and cons, the expected benefits (see also the document '[Why Professional Music Training Institutions Should Be Involved in International Exchange](#)') and how various possibilities might affect your institution. It will also help if your initiative can be linked to the overall objectives and goals of the university of which your department/faculty is a part.

- Decide what kinds of activities you would like to and can be engaged in. Would you like to exchange students or teachers or both, would you like to initiate a project or develop one or more aspect of your current programme with a foreign partner? Would you like to do all these activities at the same time or in a series? Set goals over a number of years, preferably starting small and expanding each year as aspirations and conditions warrant. Work according to a plan.
- Make an inventory of all international informal personal contacts that already exist among your teaching faculty. Your teachers may have personal contacts in institutions abroad that might be useful when shaping your international contacts and activities. Many teachers have contacts on international level, but beware of the following:
 - o Individuals who see international exchanges primarily as a way to promote their own master classes, performance opportunities, or research agendas abroad. There can be problems of sensitivity to the exchange principles and operational plans of your international programme.
 - o A scope of action that is beyond your capacity to manage. Make priorities according to your international policy. Focus your efforts on specific countries or regions. However, if a teacher offers an interesting contact in a country with a lower priority in your international policy, always consider it carefully.

It can also be helpful to use contacts that already exist in the community in which your institution is located: contacts in the framework of town-twinning and contacts through local ethnic populations or business networks can turn out to be very useful. Another valuable source of information could be alumni who have moved abroad.

Decide specifically with whom you would like to cooperate and why. Consider the number of partner institutions you would like to work with, but be realistic: remember that some institutions might not be interested in yet another cooperation partner, as they might have several already. They may not be willing to add your institution to their portfolio of international activities unless you have something that interests them, such as specific expertise or a specific teacher. Try to inform yourself about institutions abroad. The following criteria will help you in your research:

- o Purposes: mission, goals, and objectives
- o Size

- o Local, regional, national, or international profile
- o Educational structure: kinds of departments, courses, curricula, etc.
- o Artistic character: kinds of musical activities, levels, approaches, styles, etc.
- o The unique selling points of your institution and the extent to which they are or could be of interest to a particular prospective partner institution

Ideally, an institution will have a mixed portfolio of partner institutions with a variety of sizes, profiles, and educational approaches in order to profit from the various types of expertise and backgrounds of these institutions. However, experiences in the European situation show that, in general, similar institutions work better together.

- Institutions should also consider a number of issues associated with level and quality for each specific exchange programme:
 - o Specific subject matter, repertoires, techniques, technologies, disciplines, or issues to be addressed.
 - o Personnel responsible for delivering instruction, evaluating results, and overseeing the fulfilment of goals and objectives.
 - o Content, methods, and perspectives to be used to reach goals and objectives regarding subject matter, techniques, technologies, disciplines, or issues.
 - o Specific expectations regarding breadth and depth, including degree of specialization.
 - o Expectations regarding problem setting and solving.
 - o Aspirations for specific artistic and intellectual engagement.
 - o Based on the first five items in this list, the specific level of competence that is expected with the content to be studied upon (a) entry and (b) completion.
 - o Mechanisms used to assess student achievements and competencies against expectations.
 - o Means for reporting and documenting expectations and achievements for students returning to their home country.
 - o Guidance, counselling, or mentoring services available to ensure that students stay on track.
- Do research on existing examples of good practice. Avoid reinventing the wheel by contacting colleagues who already have experience with international exchanges (for example university international offices or colleagues at other institutions that already have established such an exchange programme) and look for useful websites. Consult existing documents and publications.
- Make sure that a budget is allocated to international programme development. International work is time consuming and therefore requires resources, particularly staff. At the same time, during the preparatory stage, experience shows that the budget for travel need not be very high. Explore possibilities for financial support: more information about financial aspects can be found in the document '[Guide to Finances, Recognition Issues, and Other Practical Matters](#)'.

- Assess possibilities in your own institution and the community in which your institution is located regarding practical issues. Will housing be available for exchange students? What kinds of support mechanisms for international work are already in place; for example, at the central university level? What are the views of the student administration officers on international exchanges? Is there an organisation locally that could help you with some practical support in developing and operating exchanges? What support is there for language study?

2. Develop Your International Contacts

Once the international policy is developed, you are ready to begin or continue your search for suitable partner institutions. You can inform yourself about potential international cooperation partners through the following means:

- Your own internal inventory of already existing contacts in your institution.
- Meeting representatives of other institutions at events that bring together large groups of conservatoire officials, such as those from the National Association of Schools of Music (NASM) Annual Meeting, the European Association of Conservatoires (AEC) Annual Congress, and the AEC Annual Meeting for International Relations Coordinators.
- Most professional music training institutions have informative websites with useful information. Links to the websites of individual member institutions can be found on the websites of NASM and AEC.

Once one or more institutions have been chosen, a first formal contact should be made, usually by exchanging letters and information (brochures, study guides, recordings, etc.) at the level of the senior management or the head of the institution. This formal contact will indicate the interest of the partner institution. If an institution clearly shows no interest, it is wise to look for an alternative immediately.

As a next step, institutions are strongly encouraged to arrange visits to establish closer personal contacts with colleagues in the institution abroad. It is vital to stress that successful international relations between institutions are strongly dependent on the personal relations between conservatoire leaders, international relations coordinators, and/or teachers. Do invest in this personal connection by making a visit to the institution or, if budgets and time are limited, meet in person during another occasion, such as a congress or a similar event. Another good way to establish a first contact is to send a student ensemble to the institution to give a performance and make a visit to the institution.

For a first visit, it is important to prepare well in advance, particularly to ensure meetings with key people. Relevant printed information (brochures, study guides, recordings, etc.) should be exchanged beforehand. During a first visit, make sure you:

- Ask for appointments with as many people as possible: officials dealing with international relations at all levels (not only departmental level), heads of department, teachers, etc.
- Try to make an appointment with the director, even if you are not a dean or principal yourself. Knowing the senior management might be useful in the future.
- Always ask for a tour of the building, so you can get an impression of the local infrastructure (concert hall, library, studios, practice facilities, student facilities, etc.)

- Attend performances of students and/or teachers, if available. Visits should preferably be held during a period when the institution is in full operation, so that an impression can be gained regarding the overall dynamism of the institution.
- Try to exchange questions beforehand, so that you are able to give answers to these questions during the visit.

During discussions with your colleagues:

- Exchange information on curriculum matters: how is your institution similar to and different from the potential partner institution? US students usually have to follow liberal arts courses as part of their study programme: how will this be dealt with during the exchange?
- Discuss the types of activity you would like to initiate.
- Ask about practical issues: housing, use of language, finances, selection procedures, semester timing, and recognition issues. Detailed information about housing arrangements for exchange students is critical.
- If both institutions express their interest in working together, discuss if and how you would like to formalise your activity: for example, will there be a formal bilateral agreement and who will sign it?
- Agree on a clear structure of communication: a direct contact between only two officials (one on each side) responsible for a particular exchange works best. If an official in one institution has to deal with several officials in the other institution, things might get complicated and mistakes could be made.
- Always take cultural differences seriously: the partner institution will work differently from the way you do in your home institution, which is the reason why you want to send students or teachers. Be very sensitive to cultural differences and avoid judgemental remarks or unfavourable comparisons.

Usually, a first personal visit forms a good basis for further development of the collaboration. However, be realistic: if, after your discussions, you have the feeling that the institution is not really enthusiastic about working with you, consider looking for another partner. Finding a partner committed to cooperation from the beginning is the key to success.

At this stage, it is critical to start deepening mutual trust. The most important factor in achieving overall programme success, and in developing successful recognition of study periods abroad, is establishing strong professional trust between partners. This requires coordination and reciprocity among faculty colleagues and programme administrators. Trust is built on a clear understanding of one another's educational and artistic goals and contexts, assessment procedures, credit point systems, and educational methods. Regular contact by e-mail and telephone is essential; telephone calls are more personal than e-mails. Participants also need to have background knowledge regarding the cultural and historical differences among countries, differences that shape institutional and individual thinking and practice.

If information and aspiration sharing, programmatic investigations, and trust building have gone well, institutions are encouraged to develop a bilateral agreement, negotiate about its content as necessary, and have the agreement signed by authorised officials. Model bilateral agreements for adaptation by professional music training institutions in transatlantic ex-

changes can be found on the project website at <http://msma.arts-accredit.org> under the [Transatlantic Cooperation](#) heading.

3. Build Up Internal Support

It is critical to build broad support within your institution for the international activities you agree to pursue. Make sure you have the full backing of the senior management for the details as well as the concept, especially if support was given in earlier stages, when the institution's international relations policy was developed.

In addition to obtaining the backing of senior management, engage as many faculty members and heads of departments as possible to develop an institutional culture that supports exchange at departmental level. Programme success and sustainability, as well as student involvement, require a critical mass of faculty committed to a culture of internationalisation in your institution. Find allies. Convince students and teachers of the benefits. Do not be afraid of opposition or scepticism. Here are some typical responses from students, teachers, and administrative staff regarding an international exchange programme:

- *“Why these international programmes: aren't we already international enough?”* Because a conservatoire has many foreign students, it does not necessarily have an active international exchange policy. Just as it is important to *receive* students, it is also important to be able to *send out* students and teachers.
- *“Exchanges do not work in professional music training because of its highly individual character!”* The individual character of professional music training can make working with exchanges more complicated, especially with regard to long-term exchanges. However, students and teachers have been exchanged between American and European conservatoires for many years. This shows that the exchanges can work and produces a basis for confidence in higher levels of cooperation among institutions. One example of the way in which links could be established and strengthened, without having to invest into expensive and time-consuming visits, is by using video master classes, which can greatly support the development of mutual trust and contact.
- *“Our students come to study with a specific teacher, so they are not interested in studying abroad”* Although it is true that students often come to study with one particular teacher, this should not necessarily mean that in the course of their studies (three, four, or five years) they should not be stimulated to go abroad for a study period. It is healthy for students to have contacts with different approaches and perspectives.
- *“How can we control what the student is doing when he/she is abroad? We cannot support academic tourism!”* Student exchanges are based on mutual trust among participating institutions: before the student is sent somewhere, the institutions must be in close contact about the content of study period. The institutions should always be able to show what is being studied, how participating students will be evaluated, and how time abroad will be spent.
- *“Our institution cannot support another administrator dealing with an exchange programme!”* It is true that exchange programmes can produce additional administrative burdens. However, an additional full-time administrative official for these programmes is not always necessary, except for large programmes in large institutions. Often, the

officials dealing with exchange programmes are teaching or administrative staff with other duties.

- “*The student will never come back!*” Normally, students return to their home institution after the period abroad. In fact, experiences from the European exchange programmes seem to indicate that exchange students return, graduate, and then sometimes enrol in the foreign institution at a later stage as a regular student. In some countries, where student numbers are dropping and where there are fears that participation in exchange programmes will lower the numbers even further, student mobility becomes an issue. If a student suddenly decides to transfer to a different institution at his/her own initiative, the home institution simply loses; however, if students are widening their horizons within an exchange programme, the home institution keeps them, since the exchange is organized by the home institution and students remain registered there. Students are also encouraged to return to the home institution after the study abroad period to collect the outstanding amount of their grant or scholarship.

Another vital point is to make a clear connection to existing activities within your institution. As a basic principle, there should always be a clear connection among international activities, existing study programmes, and regular activities. If this connection is not achieved, the international programme activities will always have the reputation of being luxurious, expensive, and not really necessary. Make sure as soon as possible that the international activities become part of regular teaching activities or part of already scheduled operations and projects, such as ensembles or master classes. Use all public relation tools at your disposal to disseminate information about your plans and expected outcomes. Discuss your plans with students, teachers, and administrative staff and ask for their advice and opinions. Adjust your plans as necessary.

4. Develop Internal Procedures

Having informed everyone what is about to happen, now is the time to think carefully about internal procedures. The following internal procedures are relevant:

- ***Internal selection procedures for your students who want to go on an exchange.*** In collaboration with your partner institution abroad, develop application forms with a clear internal deadline. Cooperation partners are strongly advised to develop the same application form for both institutions: the standard application form used by European conservatoires could serve as an example (this form may be found on the MSMA project website at <http://msma.arts-accredit.org> under the *Transatlantic Cooperation* heading). Make sure students and teaching and administrative staff in your institution are familiar with this form and know where to find it and how to use it.

Once applications from students are received, a selection procedure must be in place. Even if the actual number of applications is quite low, always be careful in making choices. Consider the following:

- o Who needs to approve the student’s study abroad period? The principal study teacher must approve in any case, but is additional approval from senior management required?
- o Is the student in the appropriate phase of his/her study to spend time abroad? Acknowledge that it might not be the right moment for the student to go. The opinion of the teacher will be important in this regard.

- o Does the student possess sufficient language skills to manage in a country where the students' native language is not the main language? If the answer is no, is there something that can be done before the student leaves, or does the partner institution abroad offer short intensive language courses upon arrival?
 - o Are the wishes of the student in relation to the destination and the study programme realistic and appropriate? How does the study plan fit into the overall schedule of the student's studies? Will the study period be recognised as an integral part of the student's study in the home institution?
 - o In addition to musical and instrumental skills, does the student possess sufficient personal attributes and social skills to 'survive' the study period abroad? Not all students will be able to handle the challenges connected to a study period in a foreign country.
 - o Will the student be able to serve as an 'ambassador' of your institution abroad? This could be an important point: you want to send out students who can make a good impression for your institution in many ways.
 - o Try to foresee all the possible conflicting interests. A student exchange could be opposed by a teacher or by the senior management. Teachers may take a very personal position regarding student exchanges: "I have invested so much time in the student and now he/she wants to go on an exchange to another teacher!" Senior management equally may have other interests: think of that good bassoon, viola, and bass trombone student you desperately need for your orchestral or big band concerts who has suddenly indicated interest in an exchange. What to do? A student exchange should primarily benefit the development of the student. Since teachers and institutions do not 'own' students, denying a student an exchange possibility can be counterproductive. The student might simply leave your institution and never come back. After study abroad in the home institution's programme, the student will return (as he/she stays registered in the home institution), having learned a lot and usually being more committed to the home institution than if the possibility had been denied.
- ***Internal selection and placement procedures for incoming exchange students.*** It is essential to develop a clear mechanism, which will ensure that whenever an application package arrives from the partner institution abroad, the institution is able to notify the partner institution in a relatively short time whether or not to the student can be accepted. Relevant issues are:
 - o Does the student show sufficient technical and musical ability to be admitted to your institution? Even when a strong mutual trust has been developed between the partners, institutions are advised to ask for audio or video recordings of the potential exchange students. Decisions must be made about who will assess these recordings: will this be done by an individual teacher or a selection committee?
 - o If the student asks in the application form for a specific teacher, will this teacher have space in his/her studio and be willing to accept the student? If not, an alternative should be offered and the student should be notified about this as soon as possible, and certainly before arrival.
 - o Can the institution fulfil the needs of the student in terms of specific courses the student asks for on the application form? For example, if a student asked

specifically for chamber music or ensemble work, will the institution be able to organize this? If not, the student should be notified about this as soon as possible.

- o Does the student possess sufficient language skills to be able to follow the courses he/she is asking for? Are there any classes in the local language as a second language, and, if not, could a short intensive course be offered to the student?
- o Can the institution fulfil requirements regarding recognition of the study period? Will credit points be used and, if so, are the numbers of credits required by the student comparable to the numbers of credits within the study plan you can offer?
- o Is the time period in which the student would like to come appropriate? Avoid holidays or examination periods, leaving the exchange student with very little to do.
- o How are internal procedures for practical matters organized? Who will be responsible for housing? Who will deal with applications with regard to student life? Think also of all the services regular students receive and find out if and how all these could be offered to exchange students as well (e.g., library, sports facilities, student cards, computer accounts, practise rooms, recording studios). Make a list of items including the names of officials responsible for these items, so that whenever an exchange student arrives, the relevant people are informed and practicalities are prepared. Once you have made an inventory of all the steps to be made internally and a list of responsible persons, it helps to make a diagram that lays out the various steps to be taken (a) once an application form is received and (b) when students arrive.
- o How are internal placement procedures organized? As a result of the individual character of music training, problems often occur with student exchanges because of the numbers of students in a certain class or studio. This is especially relevant in institutions that pay teachers for the actual number of students in their class. If this is the case in your institution, determine beforehand how to deal with this situation. Some institutions have a special budget for paying teachers extra for the study period of an exchange student. Other institutions might favour one-to-one exchange: one student goes out, another one from the same class comes in. This does not necessarily have to be at the same time or even in the same class. Much will depend on the capabilities of the institutions involved. One-to-one exchanges, however, are often difficult to realise, but when both collaborating institutions make a special effort could also work out well. In some institutions, when teachers are given a fixed sum independent of the number of students they teach, teachers might not mind taking on an extra student for a period of time. Negotiations between the teacher and the institution resolve these questions. It is vital to decide how to deal with the placement of the exchange student in your institution; this decision will have a powerful impact on how the exchange will work. Make sure you inform your partner abroad about your decision.

It might be necessary for the official responsible for the exchange programme to consult with his/her colleague abroad about these issues several times. Remember that the more issues regarding the students' study period are clarified beforehand, the greater the chance of success.

- ***An internal admission status for incoming exchange students.*** How is the exchange student going to be registered? It is critical to develop an internal mechanism to ensure that foreign exchange students, once they have been selected, will be fully registered and eligible for the benefits of full registration. In some cases, exchange students are officially registered as regular students (even when they come for a short period of time). In some cases, some kind of ‘special’ status is developed. In other cases, the students will only be registered in the home institution. Approaches might differ from institution to institution, but it is important that, as much as possible, the exchange students, regardless of their status, receive the same benefits that regular student have and that they are given access to all services of the institution.
- ***Internal selection of the teachers wanting to go on an exchange.*** Teachers might be interested in your international relations programme, as they are often eager to travel. The question, “*Can you organize master classes for me abroad?*”(for a list of frequently asked questions by music teachers, see the project website at <http://msma.arts-accredit.org> under the [*Transatlantic Cooperation*](#) heading) will be often asked of international exchange officials. Although it could be a part of your international programme to organize teaching abroad for the teaching staff, this does not necessarily have to be in the form of a high profile and well-paid master classes. Internationally famous teachers might be less interested in teacher exchanges. Think also of excellent teachers (for example, young assistants) who have not yet reached ‘celebrity status’, but who are nevertheless challenged by the idea of teaching at a different institution for a specified period. It is important to realise that many exchange programmes do not always pay teaching fees; often only travel and accommodation costs are covered. However, at times, even renowned musicians are willing to teach a class of a colleague for a day or so without receiving a fee. Sometimes exchanges present a solution to the problem that develops for institutions when teachers tour: a substitute teacher can be arranged, whose travel and accommodation costs are covered by the exchange programme. However, it is vital to sort out the financial issues at an early stage.

Whenever an institution sends out a teacher in an exchange programme, consider how the institution will benefit:

- o Will the teacher exchange be reciprocal, and if so, within what kind of time limit?
- o Will the teacher exchange lead to other activities, such as student exchanges?
- o Can the exchange be part of a larger continuing professional development or a research assignment for the teacher?
- o Can the exchange be connected to a specific task in relation to curriculum development?
- o Can the exchange promote a certain studio, department, or the institution as a whole, possibly attracting future (exchange or regular) students? At the same time, be careful about ‘recruitment’ aspects of such teacher visits. If recruitment is emphasised or pursued without regard to applicable national protocols in Europe and US protocols, the reputation of your institution could be harmed.
- o What are the financial arrangements?

Answering such questions might define the character and length of teaching staff exchange. Experience in Europe shows that teachers of performance mostly favour short visits, because they best accommodate teaching and other professional engagements.

5. Develop External Procedures

In cooperation with the foreign partner, external procedures need to be developed to facilitate the exchange of students and teachers:

- It is important to develop common standard forms, starting with application forms as already mentioned. Standard forms promote clarity and will keep bureaucracy to a minimum.
- Partners are also strongly advised to jointly develop a learning agreement form that formalizes all details regarding the actual content of the study programme the student will be following. The standard learning agreement form used in European exchanges can serve as an example (this learning agreement form can be found at www.aecinfo.org/bologna/europeanexchange) A well-designed learning agreement form will not only list the courses, but also the amount of credit points, in order to facilitate later recognition of study period.
- Set clear and compatible deadlines on both sides, taking into consideration the time the internal procedures will take for the selection and admission of the student.
- Exchange information on selection requirements and procedures.
- Exchange information on courses, teachers, and other relevant information on a regular basis.
- Develop procedures about important practical issues such as housing and insurances.
- Agree on recognition issues: will you be using credit transfer points, or will you use recognition of the study period through the comparison of course content?

In the European context, a ‘Code of good practice for European programme management in European conservatoires’ has been developed to facilitate exchanges between institutions for professional music training. Although the code has been specifically designed for its use in the ERASMUS exchange programme of the EU, many of the issues mentioned in this code might be relevant for the US/EU exchanges as well; this document can be found at www.aecinfo.org/bologna/europeanexchange.

B. IMPLEMENTATION PHASE

6. Public Relations

Once many of the technical issues and procedures are in place, it is time to start to advertise your international exchange activities. The success of the international exchange programme will depend in part on how well you inform various constituencies about the possibilities offered. This can be done by:

- Printing a small brochure with short relevant information. Disseminate the brochure twice a year and leave sufficient copies in strategic places (library, public spaces, etc.). Producing a poster with information helps too.

- Posting information on the institution's website and local and institutional networks (see also the document '[Guide to Finances, Recognition Issues, and Other Practical Matters](#)' for more information)
- Talking to as many people as possible: heads of departments, students, teachers, administrative staff, etc. Address meetings of students, teachers, and administrative staff about the international exchange programmes. Be everywhere, present benefits and successes.
- Making sure that you have sufficient information about your foreign partner institutions. This should include general information brochures, course descriptions, lists of teachers and information about concert and project activities. Even in this age of Internet and beautiful websites, it is a good to have materials at hand whenever a student or teacher comes for more information.
- Including written information about the international exchange programme in the institution's study guide, catalogue, and information brochures. Make sure you agree with your partner institution abroad about the exact content of this information. Be truthful: advertise what is possible, do not exaggerate possibilities.
- Using every opportunity to contribute a short text about the international exchange programme to internal and external publications.

If your institution has a public relations office, it should be able to provide assistance.

7. Assist Internal Applicants

To assist interested students and teachers wanting to participate in an exchange:

- Help students and teachers in your institution with the application procedure. Remind them of the deadlines and selection requirements, help them with filling in the forms, be in touch with your colleagues abroad about specific questions and needs. Watch for problem areas; for example, students tend to be especially late with the production of sound recordings. If necessary, comment on the student's or teacher's prospective destination: based on your knowledge of partner institutions, you might be able to give advice on whether or not the institution is suitable for the needs and wishes of the student or teacher.
- Take time to talk to students about their questions and wishes: a study abroad period is a major undertaking for them and they will want to prepare it well. Expect many questions regarding the study programme, but also about practicalities such as housing, visa requirements, and how students will be welcomed and helped upon arrival. Talk about the benefits, challenges, and pitfalls of studying abroad, reminding the student that he/she could experience his/her 'study abroad process' by going through various phases. These various phases can be described in chronological order of the study abroad period as follows: application anxiety, honeymoon stage, cultural shock, initial adjustment, mental isolation, integration and autonomy, departure phase, re-entry phase, reintegration. For a list of frequently asked questions by students, see the project website at <http://msma.arts-accredit.org> under the [Transatlantic Cooperation](#) heading.

- Be clear about the time-line for various internal and external selection and application procedures. Try to indicate when the student should expect a decision regarding the study abroad period. Keep track of the application of the student you are sending during the selection process at the host institution.
- Expect the same types of questions from teachers: how many students will I teach? Am I asked to give a concert as well? Where will I stay? For a list of frequently asked questions by teachers, see the project website at <http://msma.arts-accredit.org> under the *Transatlantic Cooperation* heading.

At this point in the process, it is usually wise to establish a direct contact between teachers to discuss forthcoming study periods of students or teaching visits. If the contact between teachers already exists, this will make consultations even easier.

8. Assist External Applicants

Assist interested students and teachers wanting to come on an exchange by considering the following points:

- Help your colleague in the partner institution by giving information on deadlines, on selection requirements, and on study programmes for individual students and teaching activities for individual teachers. If an application for a student exchange arrives:
 - o Start the internal procedure for the selection and admission of the applicant. Contact teaching and administrative staff regarding the application and urge them to give an answer relatively soon.
 - o Keep track of the application of the incoming student during the selection process at your own institution.
 - o Once you have received an answer from the internal procedure for selection and admission, immediately notify your partner institution of the result. If the procedure is taking more time than usual, inform the partner institution why and indicate when you expect to be able to give an answer. There is nothing so unsettling for a student as sending an application for an exchange and not hearing anything for a long period of time.
 - o If a student is accepted, send him/her a welcome package with general information; exchange and, if necessary, negotiate with the partner institution the learning agreement with the participation of the student and his/her teacher; and start the internal procedure for practical arrangements such as housing.
- If a proposal for a teacher visit arrives:
 - o Collect details on the achievements of the teacher (e.g. curriculum vitae, recordings).
 - o Discuss with senior management the extent to which the proposal fits the need of the institution in terms of subject area and timing. Timing is crucial. Normally, short-term visits should not take place at the same time when other important projects are scheduled or during an examination period.

- o Once the proposal is accepted, develop a clear division of responsibilities between you and whoever in your institution is responsible for projects and other similar activities. Think of the following items:
 - ✓ Planning the contents of the teaching visit and its connection to the existing study programme.
 - ✓ Coordinating teaching rooms and teaching hours.
 - ✓ Advertising the teaching visit with the help of the public relations office (if available).
 - ✓ Planning a final concert or extra activities if required.
 - ✓ Arranging for accommodation and meals.
 - ✓ Organizing transportation and other logistic details such as airport transportation.
 - ✓ Discussing future cooperation projects, meetings with senior management and with other teaching staff

9. The Exchanges Are Taking Place

All forms have been exchanged, placements arranged, and practicalities prepared: the student and/or teacher arrives. Keep in mind that the success of the exchange will depend a great deal on the adequacy of advance preparation. However, even with perfect organisation, expect problems. This is not surprising: human beings (sometimes young) are being placed in new and challenging situations. Always take into consideration that the quality of your services may considerably influence the success of the study period abroad. Some advice:

- Be open minded and flexible. The official dealing with international exchanges will need to combine the knowledge and skills of an organizer, psychologist, counsellor, parent, trouble-shooter, and communicator. Keep in mind that for students this might be one of the most challenging experiences in their lives so far.
- Be welcoming. Take time and resources to prepare an appropriate event in order to make students feel welcome. You could combine such an event with an activity already scheduled for regular foreign students (i.e. foreign students that are registered as regular students, not through an exchange programme). If you are planning such an activity, consider the following actions:
 - o Invite senior colleagues to greet newcomers.
 - o Offer a tour of the building and other facilities.
 - o Provide written documents on your institution.
 - o Encourage students to ask questions.
 - o Show professional understanding of the particular situation of the incoming students.
 - o Try to establish a non-intrusive but personal relationship.
 - o Encourage exchange students to network.

- Be reasonable about limits. Be aware that there is a maximum to what you can do. Students should learn to solve some of their problems on their own. Try to be available as much as possible in the first days/weeks to help students learn how to function in your environment, but also calculate your time (and money) resources before offering additional services.
- Be connected. Stay in close contact with your contact person abroad about the achievements of your students there and the foreign students in your institution. Always keep in mind the uniqueness of the internal culture of the institution seen from an outside perspective. If a serious problem occurs, contact the home institution immediately. Also keep an eye on the exchange students in your institution: if you never see him/her, it is either because he/she does not need your help or is totally lost. Like domestic students, some exchange students need additional attention, others less. Talk to the relevant teacher(s) and departments about the progress and achievements of the exchange students, taking the learning agreement as the basis.
- Keep smiling!

C. EXIT AND EVALUATION PHASE

10. Assessment and Evaluation

Assessment and evaluation will need to be done throughout the exchange programme on the following levels:

- The assessment and evaluation of the individual incoming student exchanges during and at the end of the study abroad period.
 - o Check periodically with the relevant teacher(s) or department to determine whether the student is fulfilling his/her study programme and if the number of credit points (if applicable) originally mentioned in the learning agreement are being earned. Try to discover and understand any deviations from the original learning agreement and think of ways to resolve these deviations early in the programme. At the end of the study period, fulfilment of credits must be verified and not much can be done if the student has not made sufficient progress.
 - o Inform yourself about assessment. Has the student been assessed only by relevant individual teachers or has he/she performed for a jury/committee? Taking the European exchange context as an example, it is important to stress a basic principle: in a well-developed exchange programme, the assessment of the student's study period should normally be done in the host institution. This not only requires understanding of each other's assessment procedures and levels, which should have been discussed in the preparatory phase of the exchange programme, but also a certain amount of trust between the partner institutions that the assessment of the student has been competent and fair. Avoid, almost always, the situation in which students come back into the home institution and then take an examination in order to prove sufficient progress. This practice counters a basic principle of partnership and may put the student into the unpleasant situation of having to lose study time because of problems with recognition of his/her study abroad.

- o Make sure you are fully informed about study and credit recognition requirements at the partner institution in order to assist leaving exchange students to get the necessary documents (confirmed period of study visit, transcript of records, etc.) from your institution before his/her departure.
 - o Invite exchange students to evaluate their study stay and ask about merits and shortfalls before they return home.
 - o Answer incoming exchange students' inquiries about possibilities of continuing their studies at your institution with great care. Do not use exchanges as a recruitment mechanism. *Always* be open about this matter to your colleague in the partner institution, and work within guidelines and protocols accepted by schools of music in *both* Europe and the United States.
 - o Find a direct and individual way to say goodbye to your incoming exchange students.
 - o Encourage incoming exchange students to stay in contact with your institution and with future exchange students in their home institution.
- The assessment and evaluation of the individual outgoing student exchanges at the end of the study abroad period. You may consider the following points:
 - o Check with your partner international relations coordinator to determine whether the student has fulfilled his/her study programme and if the number of credit points (if applicable) originally mentioned in the learning agreement will be or has been awarded. Clarify the reasons for any deviations from the original learning agreement.
 - o Inform yourself about assessment. Have only relevant individual teachers assessed the student or has he/she performed for a jury/committee? Here, the same principle applies as in the case of the assessment of an incoming exchange student.
 - o Make sure you fully inform your partner institution about your own recognition in order to assist exchange students to bring the necessary documents (e.g. confirmed period of study visit, transcript of records).
 - o Invite your exchange students returning to your institution to complete their studies to evaluate their experience; ask them about merits and shortfalls. Often students are asked to write a report. If applicable and helpful, exchange these reports or summaries with your colleague in the host institution abroad and keep these reports on file for future reference.
- The evaluation of the individual teacher exchanges:
 - o Invite incoming exchange teachers to evaluate their stay and ask about merits and shortfalls.
 - o Invite comments on the exchange teacher's visits from the relevant department, teachers, and students. You may even consider handing out evaluation forms, although the outcomes of these should be handled with great care. Exchange the information with your colleague in the host institution abroad, if appropriate.

- o Invite your returning exchange teachers to evaluate their stay abroad and ask about merits and shortfalls. In some cases, teachers may be asked to write a short report, which could be helpful for evaluation.
- Overall evaluation of the international exchange programme.
 - o Make sure that in the case of long-lasting partnerships, you take time to evaluate the programme after a certain period (e.g. two years). Be aware that a thorough evaluation is your best tool for increasing the quality of exchanges, both for the follow-up and for learning about partner institutions.
 - o Make use of exit interviews of incoming students and teachers participating in the exchange programme.
 - o Make use of evaluation interviews and reports of outgoing students and teachers participating in the exchange programme and keep a file of these reports.
 - o Pass on praise and criticism to the relevant individuals and groups. Be ready to consider changing approaches/procedures, if these approaches/procedures are frequently criticised.
 - o Encourage the creation of alumni networks and tutor systems, through which the contacts with partner institutions can also be continued.
 - o Try to benefit from synergy effects: for example, an exchange of teachers may have a positive effect on student exchanges or a lasting implication for curriculum development.
 - o Evaluate the functioning of the bilateral relations, reflect on an extension or suspension of these relations, and start a dialogue, when needed.

At first sight it may seem quite a challenge to go through these ten steps. However, professionals working in the field of international exchanges know that once the internal and external procedures and contacts are well established, contacts can become relatively easy and the process almost automatic. At the same time, there will always be (un)pleasant surprises, which is why working with international relations is both rewarding and challenging.

Those institutions that want to have advice on technical details should look at the document '[Guide to Finances, Recognition Issues, and Other Practical Matters](#)'.

In addition to the 'ten steps', the following documents are available on the project website with additional information:

- '[Frequently Asked Questions: Music Students Interested in a Transatlantic Exchange](#)'
- '[Frequently Asked Questions: Music Teachers Interested in a Transatlantic Exchange](#)'
- [Examples of application forms and bilateral agreements](#)

Available at www.aecinfo.org/bologna/europeanexchange:

- '*Code of Good Practice for European Programme Management in European Conservatoires*'
- A model application form for student exchanges
- A model learning agreement form
- Model bilateral agreements