**Post-Master**

**Advanced Performance**

**and Scenography Studies (a.pass)**

**Posthogeschool voor Podiumkunsten**

*Report of the programme evaluation*

*10 and 11 November 2014*

Utrecht, The Netherlands

January 2015

www.AeQui.nl

*Assessment Agency for Higher Education*

## 

*This document is best printed in duplex.*

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## Summary

On 11 and 12 November an evaluation committee of AeQui performed an evaluation of the post-master programme Advanced Performance and Scenography Studies (a.pass) supported by the vwz Posthogeschool voor Podiumkunsten. The overall judgement of the committee regarding the quality of the programme is **excellent**.

*The intended learning outcomes are assessed as* ***excellent****.* According to the committee, the mission, goals and intended learning outcomes of a.pass are highly relevant to the professional field of performance art, as well as for the arts domain in Belgium and beyond. The committee applauds a.pass’ aim to create a collaborative and transdisciplinary research environment where participants are supported and challenged in the development of their artistic research practices and invited to contribute to shared reflection on the principles underlying the discipline of performance art and the domains of education and the arts in general. The committee thinks that a.pass’ focus on research is extremely clear and highly appreciates the unique manner in which it balances an educational and collaborative structure, ensuring that everyone is involved in the reflection on the mission and philosophy of the institute.

The committee recognizes that a.pass is highly attuned to developments in the professional field through its many collaborations with groups, initiatives and institutions in the performing arts and through its structural involvement with guest teachers, APCs and mentors. External experts interviewed during the evaluation indicated that the programme is a resource for and a vital political presence in the artistic field, locally and nationally, as well as internationally. Students who were interviewed by the committee were all extremely appreciative of the aims of the programme, lauding its critical engagement, the space it offers researchers to develop and extend their practices through experimentation and the manner in which it continually strives to question its own philosophy and pedagogical principles throughout the programme.

*The teaching-learning environment is assessed as* ***excellent****.* a.pass ensures that its participants and PhD researchers acquire their final qualifications through the exceptional manner in which it supports and challenges participants in their individual practices and research trajectories. The committee applauds the structure and content of the programme and the coherent and precise manner in which it is able to empower participants to experiment, collaborate and further develop their practices through research. The committee highly appreciates the careful balance in the programme between a focus on participants’ individual needs and the creation of a critical community that sustains a spirit of sharing, mutual responsibility and continual feedback. In this sense, a.pass may be seen as an excellent example for other disciplines and art practices, both nationally and internationally.

The programme remains closely aligned with developments in the artistic field, the cultural sector and society at large through the structural involvement of guest teachers, external mentors, affiliated researchers and the many collaborative events organised with other groups and programmes. The committee applauds the manner in which a.pass is in a constant process of renewal and reflection, explicitly questioning and transforming its own artistic, theoretical and pedagogical principles according to the needs of participants and developments in the field. The permanent instructors, mentors and guest teachers are fully committed to the a.pass project and are highly qualified as educators and professionals in the arts domain. The committee concludes that it is a great feat of the a.pass team to realise such a programme with so few means.

Given the careful selection of qualified students, most of the participants thrive in the programme’s challenging environment. Students and alumni indicated that they received excellent mentoring and that their time at a.pass had been of great value to them, fundamentally influencing the direction of their practices. According to the committee, the facilities and space at a.pass are ideally suited to the intentions of the programme.

*Assessment and achieved learning outcomes are assessed as* ***excellent****.* The committee is impressed by the exceptionally responsible and thorough manner in which students are evaluated and assessed at a.pass. The competencies and end qualifications of a.pass provide a frame of reference during the intake, the block and end communications. The students the committee spoke to were all very satisfied with the manner in which they were evaluated and received feedback throughout the programme, indicating that they felt that staff members and mentors were very careful and transparent in the evaluation of their work, offering them challenges when needed and pushing them to experiment and explore beyond the familiar. The course’s coherent methods and philosophy, the intense personal guidance and productive collective exchange ensure that participants achieve the goals set by the programme as independent and critical artistic researchers in the field of performance art, scenography and theatre.

The committee was able to see many examples of the work and research produced by participants and concludes that these were excellent examples of the experimentation, exploration and questioning that defines the a.pass programme. The committee commends the determined yet subtle manner in which a.pass is influencing and transforming the professional field, choosing a deliberate strategy of collaboration and sharing. The committee is very impressed with the accomplishment of a.pass in effectively serving the needs of participants while at the same time thinking beyond their own parameters and contributing to the field through rigorous questioning and an exploration of what artistic research can achieve within society at large. The committee believes that with additional resources the institute would be able to realise its plans for both the programme and the research centre, allowing for more collaborative initiatives, the sharing of its archive and the founding of an international publishing house.

All three subjects were assessed positively and hence the review committee awards a positive recommendation for the continuation of the programme.

On behalf of the entire review committee,

Utrecht, 2015

Chair Secretary

Raoul van Aalst Jesseka Batteau

## Colophon

**Institute and programme**

a.pass, Advanced Performance and Scenography Studies

vzw Posthogeschool voor Podiumkunsten

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Programme: Advanced Performance and Scenography Studies (a.pass)

Level: HBO Post-Master

Location: Brussels, Belgium

Mode of study: fulltime

For quantitative data: see Attachment 3

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**Assessment committee**

R. Van Aalst, chair

V. Pérez Royo, domain expert

B. Knaup, domain expert

J. Kelleher, domain expert

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The assessment was conducted under the responsibility of

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## Introduction

The post-master Advanced Performance and Scenography Studies (a.pass) is an artistic research environment that develops research on performativity and scenography in an international artistic and educational context. It is supported by vzw Posthogeschool voor Podiumkunsten and offers a one-year artistic research training programme at post-master level for artists and theoreticians, based on the principles of self-organisation, collaboration and transdisciplinarity. In addition, a.pass has a research centre where it develops tools for qualitative and relevant artistic research practices. The research centre supports PhD trajectories of doctoral students, giving them the possibility to develop the practice-based part of their PhD research in a collective research environment.

**The institute**

The post-master programme a.pass, in its current form, came into being in 2010/2011. In previous years, vzw Posthogeschool voor Podiumkunsten offered two programmes: one with a focus on performance and theatricality (called a.pt since 2008), the other with a focus on stage design (called a.s since 2008). In 2010/2011, these programmes were merged under the name ‘a.pass’. From this moment onwards, a.pass profiled itself as an institute with a double function: it offered an educational programme with two strands (performance and scenography), as well as an artistic research centre that developed and archived methodologies for artistic research. The research centre also offers a collaborative and practice-based environment for PhD researchers from various disciplines.

In 2012, a.pass moved to Brussels to intensify its public visibility, strengthen its relations with a broader international artistic research scene and create a larger platform for the development of the PhD programme. Its collaborations with the RITS Drama Department (RITS is the higher education platform for the Arts of the Erasmus Hogeschool group) have been strengthened by its move to the Bottelarij building, where RITS is also housed. RITS is a strong partner in the development of the a.pass PhD programme and in the co-organization of the post-master workshops.

**The programme**

The post-master of a.pass is a residential, one-year programme equivalent to 60 EC. The post-master programme is aimed at researchers with a master’s degree from an artistic or academic discipline, but is also open to artists/researchers with professional experience and a qualitative body of work. a.pass strives to support and challenge participants to further develop their practices and to become independent artist researchers who can contribute to the artistic field and art domain through critical reflection and transdisciplinary collaboration.

As well as the post-master programme, the a.pass research centre offers a PhD programme for PhD researchers who wish to develop (part of) their trajectory within the a.pass environment. This can take place before and during the actual PhD trajectory. Since a.pass cannot grant a PhD degree, the researcher has to be associated with a university and have a university supervisor.

The a.pass programme consists of three blocks of four months in which participants take part in workshops, projects and collective events. The curriculum is set up by the programme coordinator and three associate programme coordinators (APCs) each of whom are responsible for one block per year. The APCs help to define the communal basis for individual projects: they invite mentors and speakers, organise workshops and prepare public output, via publications and other media. Participants are expected to partake in at least two workshops and attend structural collective events, such as the Opening Week, End Week and Halfway Days. Participants receive personal guidance from staff members, APCs, and from dedicated mentors for each block and are given a financial budget to acquire additional mentoring from experts in the professional field. Participants can join the programme at the beginning of each new block. Therefore, the group changes throughout the year and consists of participants in different stages of their research trajectory. The a.pass post-master programme currently facilitates around 15 participants per year.

**The assessment**

The post-master programme a.pass assigned AeQui VBI to perform a quality assessment. AeQui has assembled an independent and competent assessment committee in close cooperation with the programme. A preparatory meeting with representatives of the programme took place before the evaluation; the goal of the meeting was to exchange information and to plan the agenda for the visit.

The assessment was carried out according to the itinerary presented in Attachment 2. The committee assessed the programme independently. At the conclusion of the assessment, the results were presented to representatives of a.pass. The NVAO framework for evaluations of higher education as well as the Bergen Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area served as frameworks for the evaluation and the underlying report. The concept of this report was sent to the programme in January; their feedback has been incorporated in the current final version.

## 1. Mission, goals and intended learning outcomes

Based on the interviews and examination of the underlying documentation, the evaluation committee qualifies the intended learning outcomes of the programme as **excellent**. According to the committee, the mission, goals and intended learning outcomes of a.pass are highly relevant to the professional field of performance art, as well as for the arts domain in Belgium and beyond. The committee applauds a.pass’ aim to create a collaborative and transdisciplinary research environment where participants are supported and challenged in the development of their artistic research practices and invited to contribute to shared reflection on the principles underlying the discipline of performance art and the domains of education and the arts in general. The committee thinks that a.pass’ focus on research is extremely clear and highly appreciates the unique manner in which it balances an educational and collaborative structure, ensuring that everyone is involved in the reflection on the mission and philosophy of the institute.

The committee recognizes that a.pass is highly attuned to developments in the professional field through its many collaborations with groups, initiatives and institutions in the performing arts and through its structural involvement with guest teachers, APCs and mentors. External experts interviewed during the evaluation indicated that the programme is a resource for and a vital political presence in the artistic field, locally and nationally, as well as internationally. Students who were interviewed by the committee were all extremely appreciative of the aims of the programme, lauding its critical engagement, the space it offers researchers to develop and extend their practices through experimentation and the manner in which it continually strives to question its own philosophy and pedagogical principles throughout the programme.

**Position in professional and educational fields**

The evaluation committee has been able to establish that the mission, goals and intended learning outcomes of a.pass are excellently attuned to developments in the field of performing arts and art education. According to the committee, a.pass’ political presence in and impact on these domains – locally and internationally – is of crucial importance, as it provides an environment where artists and theoreticians can further develop their research and artistic practices through collaboration and experimentation while also contributing to ongoing reflection on the principles structuring the artistic field, academia and education. The committee was able to observe that the aims of the programme are clear, shared by staff, participants and guest teachers alike. They were impressed by the strong drive to rethink and redefine performance art through intensive artistic research and transdisciplinary exchange.

a.pass offers a one-year artistic research training programme at post-master level for artists and researchers who wish to develop their artistic and research practices in performativity and scenography in a collaborative and transdisciplinary learning environment. It aims to support and challenge participants in their research trajectory while also involving them in the development of alternative perspectives on knowledge and art production. Artistic research conducted at a.pass is understood as an alternative practice or route, balanced between art practice and formal academic knowledge production. Artistic research at a.pass is not limited to the development of art-related knowledge, but also involves the creation and testing of formats, methodologies, communication strategies and shared practices that broaden the understanding of artistic research.

a.pass sees participants as ‘artist researchers’ who must be able to reflect critically on the artistic research trajectory they have chosen and on the value, visibility and impact of art. a.pass encourages explorative and experimental practices that do not directly correspond to the current demands of the art sector or academic understandings of research. It wishes to create an environment in which certain premises and assumptions can be subverted or reappraised. In this sense, the programme at a.pass is not aimed at preparing participants for the ‘profession’ – a primary goal of many other master’s programmes in the arts – but is strongly invested in reflection upon and questioning of the principles structuring the artistic field. a.pass’ core mission is to continually reconsider its role as educational institution and to reflect upon the position of artist-researchers within the current ethical, political, economic and social context of knowledge production and distribution.

The a.pass artistic research centre plays an important role in the realisation of its mission. It brings together researchers from various disciplines and from different backgrounds in order to stimulate collaboration and sharing within and beyond artistic disciplines. It aims to develop, document and archive tools for qualitative artistic research practices. The research centre uses its growing archive to communicate and interact with artistic and educational fields and strives to function as a public forum for reflections on the relations between art and research. The research centre strives to strengthen the post-master programme through the development of experimental and challenging research arrangements.

As interviews with participants, alumni and experts in the field made clear, a.pass’ goal and mission are highly appreciated by all involved parties. The students are of the opinion that the objectives of the programme are extremely relevant to their development as artist researchers, emphasizing the manner in which a.pass aims to challenge them in their exploration of their research practices. Experts from the professional field stressed the strong political relevance of a.pass’ position within the artistic field, both locally and internationally. They commended a.pass for its focus on a particular niche and the responsible, caring and precise manner in which it operates, encouraging participants to stay close to their own practice, while also questioning formats and structures that inform the professional and educational domains. According to these experts, a.pass is an exceptional school with a specific identity and philosophy that functions as an example for others in the cultural-political field. In their view, the presence and impact of a.pass is vital to the professional domain, counterbalancing large art education institutions and dominant approaches to art. a.pass is fully embedded in the performance art scene in Belgium and connected to a network of international artists who wish to investigate and question the relationship between art and research and the conditions of knowledge production.

The evaluation committee fully underwrites this view and applauds the manner in which the mission of a.pass operates on different levels. In the first place, a.pass is contributing to art production by creating a sheltered space for experimentation and reflection. It is designed to effectively serve the needs of those who follow the programme. From an academic perspective, it is also transforming the understanding of what research is or should be. Additionally, it takes an explicit ethical position, creating a caring and responsible learning environment and inspiring people to do the same. They are a vital resource for the international artistic community, providing a unique pedagogical research environment. Furthermore, their mission has broad implications on society: they aim to work with people from various disciplines and to investigate how art can instigate change in other fields. The range of interesting pertinent issues that the institute is involved is evidenced in themed symposia and research events convened by a.pass

The committee is impressed by the programme’s decision to remain open and undefined, and to continually question its own educational principles and structures. In this sense, a.pass sustains a culture of quality, organising the programme in such a way that arising questions or problems are addressed collectively. The committee thinks that a.pass deserves to be more visible in the field, both locally and internationally, but recognizes that it has its own strategies with regard to its effect and impact: insights and methodologies are not communicated via traditional PR-methods, but rather through the participants themselves who share the a.pass ethics, philosophy and working methods through their own professional networks. For a.pass, influence is a form of being ‘contagious’ – inspiring others to incorporate a certain way of thinking, working and sharing.

**Up-to-date**

The committee was able to conclude that the programme continually monitors its goals and intended learning outcomes in relation to participant groups as well in response to developments in the discipline and the professional field. The programme cultivates an ongoing dialogue between staff, students and guest lecturers with regard to the goals of individual projects as well as with regard to the overall goal and mission of a.pass, and provides an environment for research and reflection within the field of performance arts. What artistic research is or can be in relation to other forms of knowledge production, or how it relates to art making and to society at large are questions that are addressed continually and in various ways, throughout the programme. Through its strong partnerships with like-minded institutes and initiatives in the performative and scenographic arts, the structural involvement of guest teachers, external programme coordinators and mentors from a variety of backgrounds and the ongoing critical discussions between students, staff, mentors and guest teachers, the programme ensures that it is attuned to the latest developments in the field of performance art and that it is always in the process of thinking through new and/or relevant models for the interrelation between art and research.

**Concrete**

In the opinion of the evaluation committee, the aims and intended learning outcomes of the post-master are highly relevant and concretely applied to the individual trajectories of the participants.

*Post-master programme*

The a.pass post-master programme is aimed at researchers with a master’s degree from an artistic or academic discipline who wish to investigate questions related to the fields of performativity and scenography. The programme also welcomes artists/researchers with professional experience and a qualitative body of work. Since the notion of artistic research is central to the programme, participants are expected to challenge their preconceptions, work methodologies and strategies, and be open to experiment and develop their research ‘case’ without reservations. The programme aims to support participants in becoming independent researchers in the fields of performance and scenography. It challenges its participants to think and make art beyond the familiar and to critically position and contextualise their research and practice in relation to the artistic field, educational institutions and society at large.

In order to realize these end qualifications, the a.pass programme expects its participants to acquire the following competencies:

* Research competencies: the participant is able to develop an individual research trajectory. The participant is able to incorporate practice-based as well as theoretical notions into the research in order to challenge his/her own artistic and/or theoretical preconceptions.
* Organizational competencies: the participant is able to organise, schedule and communicate his/her research within the context of the programme’s shared curriculum.
* (Self-)Critical competencies: the participant is able to analyse and reflect on his/her own development as well as offer feedback, critique and support to fellow participants. Peer-to-peer feedback figures centrally in the post-master programme and is the most important tool for achieving new insights in the research trajectories.
* Collaborative competencies: the participant is able to collaborate with other researchers throughout the programme without losing view of his/her own research goals. The participants are expected to use their own interests and drive to contribute to the programme’s project, be it on the level of organisation, methodology, content, feedback, etc.
* Transdisciplinary competencies: the participant is able to transpose specific theoretical and/or practice-based tools and models from one discipline to another, in order to question and problematise their own points of departure.
* Communication competencies: the participant is capable of communicating his/her research to a wider audience and the professional world. In the first instance, the participant mainly relates to fellow researchers and contributors within the a.pass environment. Eventually, participant is able to share his/her findings with the broader artistic and educational domains. Participants must develop tools to share this knowledge in an appropriate manner.

These end qualifications form the basis of the admission procedures, the mentoring sessions and the content of the workshop programmes. They also form the basis for the assessments and evaluations of participants’ research trajectories.

*PhD programme*

The PhD programme aims to help researchers become emancipated independent researchers in the fields of performance and scenography, and beyond. In addition to the competencies formulated for the post-master participants, PhD researchers must also have the following competencies to achieve the final qualifications of the programme:

* Social and pedagogical competencies: the researcher is able to share acquired knowledge, deployed methodologies and formats of collaborative research with others, be they fellow researchers or the broader public. He/She should be able to use his/her research experience as an instrument of change at a.pass and later on, in his/her professional life.
* Theoretical and practice-based competencies: PhD researchers are expected to have developed a thorough knowledge of the relevant theories, methodologies and artistic practices related to their research theme. The PhD researcher must be able to situate his/her research and methodologies within the relevant fields and disciplines, in an informed manner.
* Professional communicative skills: the researcher has the ability to communicate his/her findings and methods to different audiences, whether in an academic setting, via the media/press, or within an art-practitioners context. They must be able to share the knowledge they have acquired with others via lectures, conferences, publications, performances or other experimental frameworks.

## 2. Teaching-learning environment

Based on the interviews and examination of the underlying documentation, the assessment committee qualifies the teaching-learning environment as **excellent**. a.pass ensures that its participants and PhD researchers acquire their final qualifications through the exceptional manner in which it supports and challenges participants in their individual practices and research trajectories. The committee applauds the structure and content of the programme and the coherent and precise manner in which it is able to empower participants to experiment, collaborate and further develop their practices through research. The committee highly appreciates the careful balance in the programme between a focus on participants’ individual needs and the creation of a critical community that sustains a spirit of sharing, mutual responsibility and continual feedback. In this sense, a.pass may be seen as an excellent example for other disciplines and art practices, both nationally and internationally.

The programme remains closely aligned with developments in the artistic field, the cultural sector and society at large through the structural involvement of guest teachers, external mentors, affiliated researchers and the many collaborative events organised with other groups and programmes. The committee applauds the manner in which a.pass is in a constant process of renewal and reflection, explicitly questioning and transforming its own artistic, theoretical and pedagogical principles according to the needs of participants and developments in the field. The permanent instructors, mentors and guest teachers are fully committed to the a.pass project and are highly qualified as educators and professionals in the arts domain. The committee concludes that it is a great feat of the a.pass team to realise such a programme with so few means.

Given the careful selection of qualified students, most of the participants thrive in the programme’s challenging environment. Students and alumni indicated that they received excellent mentoring and that their time at a.pass had been of great value to them, fundamentally influencing the direction of their practices. According to the committee, the facilities and space at a.pass are ideally suited to the intentions of the programme.

**Programme covers the intended learning outcomes**

The evaluation committee has established that the content of the curriculum are excellently designed to meet the goals formulated by a.pass: the programme supports and guides the individual research trajectories of the participants and PhD researchers and sustains an environment of critical reflection, collaboration and shared responsibility for the curriculum. The committee thinks that a.pass has created a unique and extremely productive balance between care for the individual participants and commitment to the creation of a critical community through collective workshops, days and events. It is a complex project sustained and shared by all involved parties, producing a fine balance between the questioning of principles and a powerful identity as an educational institution.

Though the post-master programme curriculum is geared towards the needs of individual participants and their research trajectories it is structured by obligatory collective events and days during which participants engage with one another’s work within a group setting. The committee notes that the fact that the programme has no final degree is greatly supportive of what it is able to realise.

The curriculum translates into a 60 EC programme with an equal 50/50 division between the realisation of an individual research (IR) project and participation in collective work (CR) moments – the overall workload and division between IR and CR is stipulated in the contract participants sign when entering the programme. The a.pass programme requires 12 months to complete, which means participants follow three blocks consecutively. Participants who wish to interrupt their studies for a defined professional activity can extend their participation in the programme by a maximum of four months (resulting in 16 months total). This must be explicitly requested beforehand and needs the official approval of a.pass staff.

The collective part of the curriculum (three blocks) is set up by the programme coordinator and the APCs, each of whom are responsible for one block per year. The structure and content of the blocks are always determined by the current situation at a.pass: questions regarding research, issues relating to the mission and goals or the concrete needs of the current group. The APCs help explore which points of departure the individual projects have in common and actively contribute to the programme by inviting mentors and speakers, organising workshops and preparing public output via publications and other media.

Each participant is expected to choose at least two workshops within a block and to attend the collective Opening Week, the End Week and Halfway Days of the block in question. Workshops can take on very different forms and may pertain to practice, theory and/or the technical aspects of (performance) art. APC involvement ensures that the blocks focus more strongly on a particular aspect of artistic research, for example: the radicalisation of ‘self-organisation’, the formalisation of ‘collaboration’ and the radical rethinking of ‘space’ and scenography. Participants use the blocks as tools to challenge and enrich their individual research. The b-workshops, or ‘a.pass basics’ (two per block), were introduced in 2011 to establish a common understanding of the basic concepts and methodologies of a.pass. Participants are asked to attend at least one of these workshops. a.pass also regularly organises reading sessions on performance theory, philosophy and other academic pursuits. Outside of the organised programme, participants are expected to develop their own research and organise their mentoring sessions and meetings with other participants.

The committee observes that the methods and tools deployed by a.pass are coherent and precise, empowering participants to develop into independent artistic researchers

In addition to the regular workshop programme, a.pass develops projects and conferences for a wider audience and maintains an active and engaged dialogue with different partners in the arts field in Brussels, Belgium and further abroad. This ensures that the programme’s research lab remains open to other stakeholders and influences. The committee was presented with many examples of these collaborations during its visit and was impressed by the diversity, relevance and high quality of these shared projects.

The a.pass research centre has an important role to play in the realisation of the intended learning outcomes of the post-master programme. It fulfils a role in the development of long-term exemplary and experimental research projects that address the parameters and potentialities of artistic research conducted at a.pass. There are three types of researchers contributing to the research centre: PhD researchers, associate researchers and independent researchers. PhD-researchers devise a contract with a.pass wherein the conditions of the research are stipulated. Conditions could include stipulations regarding time frames, types of research guidance, goals of the research conducted within the context of a.pass and expected outcomes. Associate researchers join a.pass for one year and develop exemplary artistic research in that period of time. Independent researchers are loosely connected to the research centre and are asked to contribute on the basis of an already-existing research trajectory relevant to the interests of a.pass.

The methodologies and findings of the centre’s research projects are regularly addressed and deployed in the post-master programme. Participants also partake in working groups on different themes organised by members of the research centre.

*End Communication*

A participant’s trajectory within a.pass usually results in an ‘end communication’. This is not necessarily the end point of the research, nor is it about showing an end product. But it is an important moment in the sense that participants present their findings to a wider audience. For some of the participants, this is also the moment at which they finish their research phase and start with the production of their artistic work. For others, this is the moment to embark upon a new period of advanced research that continues after the a.pass programme. An end communication has a very open format and can range from an exposition to a performance or publication. Most end communications are accompanied by a publication produced in collaboration with the a.pass research centre.

In the first phase leading up to the end communication, all participants who plan to present come together to discuss their plans to see if their ideas overlap, or if the presentation could be strengthened by creating a common set-up, ‘title’ or approach. Once the ideas become clear, participants start looking for a location. a.pass expects the participants to prepare for and organise the end communication themselves. They are free to ask for support and advice from the programme coordinator, the production manager and the technician. In the third phase, the research coordinator involves participants in the public communication of the event and investigates whether there is an interest in a shared publication or an event concurrent with the end presentations. a.pass invites external experts to the end communications to evaluate the participants’ work. The nature of the feedback on the end communications will be described in Section 3 (Assessments and results).

**Didactic methods and educational tools**

The evaluation committee has been able to conclude that the didactic structure of the curriculum is excellently aligned with the goal of a.pass to support and challenge participants in their individual research trajectories. The committee notes that the methods and tools deployed by a.pass are coherent and precise, empowering participants to develop into independent artistic researchers. The committee observes that the diversity of the work-forms in the programme’s educational model ensure that the students’ individual trajectories can be realised within an environment of collective exchange, collaboration and feedback.

Participants are expected to contribute to and feel responsible for the curriculum. They partake in the ongoing critical reflection at a.pass, relating their own work to the themes and issues addressed during the collective blocks and events. a.pass deploys various formats in its collective programme: the case, collective work moments (Opening Week, Halfway Days, End Week), workshops and b-workshops.

*The Case*

Participants are expected to build a ‘case’ throughout their research trajectory. A case consists of an assemblage of traces, clues and objects that provide insight into the working methodologies, the experiments, the performative set-ups and the hypotheses set out in the research of the participant. A case is concrete, but also flexible in that it can change its format according to the audience at hand. A case is not only a documentary tool reporting on the development of the research, but also contains projects, ideas and methods for the future. It can contain practices, scores, books, texts, research objects, movements, ingredients, maps, diaries, images, recipes, etc. The case is an important tool in opening up the research to others during the collective work moments and the basis for the preparation of the end communication.

*Collective Work Moments*

In every block there are three collective moments when everyone comes together to share, discuss and evaluate one another’s trajectories. During the ***Opening Week*** of each block (which start in January, May and September respectively) participants become acquainted with each other, learn more about a.pass’ philosophy, its working methods and the upcoming block. The administration and production team inform participants about the rules and guidelines of the programme, the use of materials and the virtual budget for personal mentors. Since new participants join the programme with each new block, a.pass ensures that there is an ongoing renewal of ideas and that participants can benefit from each other’s experiences in the different phases of their research process.

In the middle of the block, the a.pass community meets again for three days during the ***Halfway Days*** for an update on the projects and feedback sessions. Participants must present their cases to the a.pass group. Participants often present their work in a way that makes use of space, materials and performative structures, so that it can be ‘visited’ by other participants, team members and mentors. These set-ups aim to produce an encounter or enable collaborative practice.

***End Week*** is the last week of the block and is usually organized in the Performing Arts Forum (PAF), near Reims, France. PAF is a former convent that has been turned into an artistic residence space with 80 rooms and about 10 studios. At PAF, participants present their work one last time before they embark on a one-month individual working period. At this point, the presentations are central to the working process, and the feedback procedures take on a more thorough and critical form. Many individual and group mentoring sessions are organised during this week to evaluate the block and the development of individual research.

*Feedback, critique and discussion*

Feedback, critique and discussion are important tools in the a.pass learning environment and emerge organically from the practices of the participants and the structure of the programme. A culture of discussion and exchange is of crucial importance for participants to develop strongly grounded critical positions for themselves and to constructively contribute to the shared project of a.pass. a.pass encourages participants to think about, create and propose the critical modes and feedback strategies that would best suit their research. Similarly, the artistic team uses various methods for exchange, borrowing techniques from different environments—therapy, activism, political organization and decision-making—in order to make participants aware of how the chosen communication already determines what can and cannot be said. Feedback and critique are at their most intense during the Halfway Days and End Weeks. Workshops also reserve time to discuss and evaluate the process and outcome of the work.

The alumni and students who participated in this evaluation process confirmed that the structure of the programme contributes greatly to their development as independent researchers, offering them various settings, methods, tools and strategies that help them to engage critically and productively with their projects. They highly appreciate the manner in which a.pass operates and the way in which the programme is designed to include structural workshops, collective work moments and the ongoing exchange and feedback between participants, staff and mentors. The committee was impressed by the degree to which participants were committed to the a.pass project, all demonstrating a strong sense of responsibility for the content and form of the programme.

Representatives of the field that the committee spoke to were very positive about a.pass’ ability to offer a space for shared critical reflection and an in-depth investigation of what artistic research can or should be, while at the same time tending to the needs of individual participants. The committee feels that the didactic structure of the programme is extremely well thought through; it is open and flexible, able to change according to the needs at hand and ensures that students feel cared for and are motivated to experiment and to go beyond the familiar.

**Up-to-date**

The committee has established that the a.pass programme is fully attuned to developments in the artistic and educational fields through its many (research and artistic) collaborations with partner institutions and initiatives within and beyond Belgium, as well as through the structural involvement of (international) guest teachers from a wide array of domains. The programme has strong connections with like-minded performance art groups and institutes in Brussels, in Belgium and abroad. It also keeps up with developments in the discipline through its contacts with related educational programmes. In past years, the majority of a.pass participants have come from outside of Belgium. Similarly, many of the staff members, mentors and guest teachers have an international background and maintain strong international connections and practices. All communication, therefore, takes place in English.

As stated in previous sections, the programme is designed so that there is a constant flow of feedback from participants, staff members, mentors and the professional field. a.pass ensures that the programme is formally evaluated throughout the year by staff, mentors and participants. These evaluations are always documented and are used for later assessments, as well as for the (re)formulation of the methodology and philosophy of a.pass. Meetings with all members of the artistic team (coordinators and APCs) take place over two or three days and are organised once per block in conjunction with the Halfway Days. During these meetings, the team discusses the block as well as the overall a.pass programme. Team members identify possible problems and formulate new points for development. Mentor meetings (coordinators and dedicated block mentors) take place during End Week and discussions involve an evaluation of mentoring approaches, the participants’ progress and the programme as a whole. Starting in 2014, the coordinator and APCs have been asked to write an evaluative report of the block programme. The block evaluations ensure that the methodologies deployed during the blocks are transparent and that they are open to staff members and mentors. The document contains a fixed set of questions to be answered by both the coordinator and the APCs.

From time to time, a.pass invites an external party to evaluate its programme in order to get a clear view on the current dynamics and to better- define what the programme stands for and what it wishes to achieve. The most recent external evaluation took place in 2014 and was executed by Peter Strijdonk. The evaluation was organised around the notion of ‘liquid sustainability’ as a vision for the future. Every team member of a.pass, as well as two APCs took part in the evaluation sessions.

Every year, a.pass writes a report for the board of directors, describing the strong and weak points of the programme and formulating a vision for the following year. Both documents are read, evaluated and commented on at board meetings. The board makes decisions in matters of policy and personnel in the case of conflict.

The committee has established that a.pass is highly aware of the issues and questions central to the profession and is always in the process of finding new approaches and methods to transform the practice of performance art and scenography. The committee has observed that students are highly articulate, critical and aware and that they actively contribute to a.pass’ ongoing project of exploration of the potential of artistic research in the context of the discipline and in the wider professional domain. The representatives of the professional field underlined the self-critical awareness of staff and participants and a.pass’ desire to always evaluate and reflect on its own methods. In this sense, a.pass may be qualified as a programme that takes full responsibility for its own quality control and ongoing renewal.

**Coherence**

The evaluation committee has established that the a.pass programme is exceptionally coherent in its design. It is impressed by the manner in which the programme forges continuities between the collective components, the participants’ individual research projects and the research centre. This is achieved through the blocks, the collective work moments, the many collaborative projects and the manner in which feedback and discussion are managed. The coherence of a.pass can also be attributed to its ability to create an atmosphere of mutual responsibility and care in which there is a shared motivation to produce new methods and insights that might transform the professional field. Due to the small scale and intensive collective parts of the programme, the group cohesion is strong throughout.

Although the post-master programme and the research trajectories may follow different timelines and their relationship might not always be explicit, the committee has observed that they connect and resonate with each other in a productive manner. The majority of the PhD researchers actively participate in the a.pass workshop programme and the committee observed that the post-master programme benefits from the insights and methods developed in the context of the research centre. a.pass indicated that it aims to strengthen its focus on the mutual exchange of research methodologies and results between the research centre and the post-master programme, in the near future.

**Feasibility and coaching**

According to the committee, the programme of a.pass, though highly demanding, is quite feasible for participants. There are very few dropouts, and if a student discontinues, this is often for personal reasons and not because of the content or structure of the programme itself. The selection of participants at the beginning of the programme, the obligation to articulate their research goals when entering the programme and the manner in which participants receive mentoring enable them to follow the programme to a successful completion.

According to the committee, students receive excellent mentoring in the a.pass programme. Given the collective components of the programme, the structural moments of feedback and discussion, the close-knit group of students and staff, the availability of mentors and the overall atmosphere of mutual care and responsibility, participants are fully supported and receive guidance for any problems or issues they may encounter along the way.

a.pass deploys individual as well as group mentoring formats. The collective mentoring sessions are usually part of the End Week and take on different formats, depending on the block in question. There are different types of individual mentoring:

1. Coordinators: the a.pass programme and research coordinators give constant feedback throughout the programme. They meet with participants individually at least twice per block and support and critically engage with individual researchers from their own professional points-of-view. The coordinators are also in constant dialogue with participants to adapt the curriculum, the discussions and the questions that arise.
2. Dedicated mentors: the dedicated mentors are the participants’ mentors for a period of three months. For each block, four mentors are proposed by the artistic coordinators, of which participants choose two. Dedicated mentors are artists, theoreticians and practitioners who are familiar with a.pass. They are experienced in artistic research and have the ability and skills to attend to a variety of research approaches. They follow the participants’ trajectory during one block and meet with them at least twice per block (at the beginning and at the end). Their own practice, experience and background are the starting point for their mentoring sessions.
3. Personal mentors: from the second block onwards, each participant obtains a virtual budget (1248 euro) to spend on ‘personal mentoring’: they can invite artists, theoreticians, scientists or practice mentors to help them with specific questions emerging from their research. Participants can also share their budgets to organise work groups at their own initiative.

During conversations between the committee, students and alumni, it became clear that participants are very satisfied with the manner in which the staff and mentors coach them during the programme. Staff members provide students with a lot of their time, are always available for questions, and give support or challenge participants as necessary.

**Intake**

The evaluation committee has concluded that the programme selects participants who are not only qualified and talented, but who are also familiar with the approach and philosophy of a.pass. The committee applauds its ability to accommodate such a diverse group of researchers coming from a wide range of backgrounds and nationalities, and possessing such a broad skill-set. Though diverse in background, the participants all share the drive to engage with artistic research in the development of their practices in performance art and/or scenography. Participants feel that their interaction with researchers from various domains enrich their own experience. They made clear, along with alumni, that they were very much inspired and challenged by each other’s interests and practices.

The selection process at a.pass starts with the submission of a research proposal and biography by candidates. The deadlines for applications are September, January and May so that admitted participants may start the programme in January, May and September, respectively.

The proposal consists of the following elements:

1. A written text describing the project, including a clear plan for the first three-month period. Topics should include the central question of the research project, the proposed research trajectory and methodology and the type of media that will be explored.

2. A description of the relevance of the research for the applicant’s artistic and/or theoretical development as relating to performativity or scenography.

3. A proposal as to how the applicant aims to develop and communicate the research process to fellow participants and a wider audience.

4. A portfolio illustrating past achievements: DVD’s, photos, texts, reviews, etc.

5. A recent curriculum vitae including the master’s degree or the highest diploma obtained.

a.pass makes a selection based on the following criteria:

1. The research value of the project for the participant’s artistic and/or theoretical trajectory.

2. The originality of the project/research questions.

3. The potential of the project to develop performance, scenography and/or theatre practices.

4. The probability that the research will encourage creative dynamics within the group.

5. The potential impact on the professional field, in the broadest sense.

Candidates may be asked to give more information or to specify certain elements of their research proposals. To this purpose, they may be invited for an interview. The selection of candidates is made by a committee consisting of the artistic coordinators, one or two mentors of the a.pass programme and an a.pass alumnus.

**Teaching staff**

The evaluation committee was impressed by the exceptional commitment and dedication of the staff members to creating an environment in which participants are supported, inspired and challenged to develop into independent artistic researchers. The permanent staff members, the associate coordinators, the dedicated mentors and guest teachers show themselves to be highly experienced experts within the field of performance art, scenography and theatre and are committed to a.pass’ strong investment in research-driven artistic practice.

The roles of the members of the artistic team (programme coordinator, research coordinator, APCs), and those of the a.pass ‘daily’ team (coordinators, administrator, production manager and technician) are as follows:

**Programme coordinator (0,5 FTE)**

The programme coordinator is the primary mentor throughout each participant’s trajectory. He/She supports individual research through mentoring sessions and follows the participants’ development through workshops and informal sharing. The programme coordinator designs the block program together with the APCs and ensures that the programme corresponds to the needs of the group, the institution and the APCs.

**Research coordinator (0,7 FTE, also a.pass general manager)**

The research coordinator mentors the post-master participants at least twice throughout each block, focussing specifically on methodologies for artistic research. The a.pass research centre also organises different work groups that are open to post-master participants. The research coordinator assists participants with their publications at the end of their trajectory and is responsible for publications produced in the context of blocks or other events.

**3 APCs (total of 0,5 FTE):**

The three APCs are each responsible for one of the blocks of the programme. They are important points of reference for and initiators of discussions with participants. Furthermore, APCs introduce specific vocabulary and working methods and make sure that these are used throughout the block.

**Administrator (0,6 FTE)**

The administrator supports individual participants with regard to legal administration (visas, student contracts, residency permits, etc.) and regularly advises on issues such as the organisation of work and payments in a foreign country, as well as on the legal status of artistic workers in Belgium.

**Production manager (0,5 FTE)**

The production manager supports participants in the organisation of workshops and by helping them to find suitable spaces for the various collective events and presentations. He/She also helps students with the management of their individual budgets.

**Technician (0,4 FTE)**

Technical support is provided for the use of technical materials, the use of event spaces, and the realization of public events. From time to time, technical support is offered in the form of workshops on video and sound editing, woodworking or other necessary skills that are relevant to participants’ research

**General manager (? FTE)**

The general coordinator is the link between the artistic-pedagogic team and the administration, and has ultimate responsibility for the budget and the overall organisation of a.pass. He/She is also the main link between a.pass and the board of the vzw Posthogeschool voor Podiumkunsten. The a.pass ‘daily’ team meets once a week to discuss current affairs, organise workshops, manage the budget, etc. Involvement of the APCs in the organisation and design of the blocks is relatively recent – at the moment of the evaluation this was the fourth time it had taken place. The aim was to open up the content and form of the programme (previously the sole responsibility of the programme coordinator) to a larger group of critical partners.

**Facilities**

According to the committee, the housing and material facilities are ideally suited to the programme. a.pass is based at the former industrial site ‘de Bottelarij’ in Molenbeek (Brussels). The former brewery is now occupied by a variety of cultural organisations and a.pass currently shares the fourth floor with drama students from the RITS art school. a.pass mostly uses two different work spaces. The first is a studio of 650 square metres where participants can develop their work, host meetings and organise the space according to their needs. The second is a large ‘silent’ work/office space of 140 square metres and a small workspace for constructing scenographic sets. It also has some basic technical equipment for recording and editing video and sound. If necessary, a.pass helps participants find other suitable workspaces in which they can develop a specific element of their practice or research.

## 3. Assessments and results

Based on the interviews and examination of the underlying documentation, the evaluation committee qualifies the achieved learning outcomes as **excellent**. The committee is impressed by the exceptionally responsible and thorough manner in which students are evaluated and assessed at a.pass. The competencies and end qualifications of a.pass provide a frame of reference during the intake, the block and end communications. The students the committee spoke to were all very satisfied with the manner in which they were evaluated and received feedback throughout the programme, indicating that they felt that staff members and mentors were very careful and transparent in the evaluation of their work, offering them challenges when needed and pushing them to experiment and explore beyond the familiar. The course’s coherent methods and philosophy, the intense personal guidance and productive collective exchange ensure that participants achieve the goals set by the programme as independent and critical artistic researchers in the field of performance art, scenography and theatre.

The committee was able to see many examples of the work and research produced by participants and concludes that these were excellent examples of the experimentation, exploration and questioning that defines the a.pass programme. The committee commends the determined yet subtle manner in which a.pass is influencing and transforming the professional field, choosing a deliberate strategy of collaboration and sharing. The committee is very impressed with the accomplishment of a.pass in effectively serving the needs of participants while at the same time thinking beyond their own parameters and contributing to the field through rigorous questioning and an exploration of what artistic research can achieve within society at large. The committee believes that with additional resources the institute would be able to realise its plans for both the programme and the research centre, allowing for more collaborative initiatives, the sharing of its archive and the founding of an international publishing house.

**Assessments and evaluations**

The evaluation committee has ascertained that the evaluations and assessments are of a very high calibre and that the competencies and final qualifications serve as reference points at various stages of the programme. The staff members and mentors are highly dedicated and responsible in their roles as assessors. Since the programme has no end degree, assessments of participants take on the form of formative evaluations.

Evaluations play a central role in sustaining the quality of participants’ research projects and of the programme, overall. Participants receive evaluative feedback in various ways and at different points within the programme, through mentoring sessions, peer-to-peer feedback, visitor evaluations during the end communications and the shared evaluation sessions during workshops and collective work moments.

*Evaluation of the participants*

**Mentors**

The mentoring sessions with coordinators and mentors are aimed at increasing understanding of the participants’ research. Together with the participant, the mentor seeks out hidden barriers, refines or devises the methodology and determines whether the research project is living up to its own promise or is running into obstacles. Every mentor (programme coordinator, dedicated mentor, personal mentor) does this within his/her own frame of reference and discourse. It is important that participants are involved in these meetings, and that they determine the course of action they wish to follow. Coordinators take note of all mentoring suggestions in a document, which is shared with the participant, in order to keep track of the participant’s trajectory. The document specifies the different phases of the research, the methodologies deployed, the references suggested and any obstacles encountered.

**Group Evaluation Sessions**

Group evaluations are always part of the End Week at PAF, during which a.pass staff members and participants discuss the content and coordination of the block and the results of individual trajectories in relation to the central theme of the block. The format of this evaluation differs according to the situation. Sometimes group sessions are based on written evaluations, other times they are based on the workshop evaluations formulated during the block and other times still, they take on the format of an open discussion to which everyone may contribute. The outcome of the group evaluations is always documented and serves as an important resource when designing a new block.

**Peer-to-peer evaluations**

Peer-to-peer evaluations are of great importance at a.pass, given its stress on the self-organisation of the programme. Halfway Days are used mostly by participants to invite others to engage with and experience their research. Peer response is usually obtained during feedback sessions. During these Halfway Days, participants are asked to incorporate feedback forms within their presentation, so that peers can leave written feedback after an encounter with the participant’s research case. Halfway Days often end with a group feedback session

During End Week, the presentations are longer and give an overview of what was accomplished during the block. Here, the feedback takes on a more critical and in-depth quality. Again, participants are encouraged to organise the format in which they want to receive feedback so that they obtain the critique they need at this particular phase of their research.

Another mode of peer-to-peer feedback takes place via collaboration since participants often decide to develop parts of their research with peers. During these collaborations, differences in methods, practices and concepts naturally emerge, forcing the participants to clarify their position and make transparent their points of departure.

**Evaluation of end communications**

During the end communications, participants receive feedback from three to five visitors invited by a.pass to view their work. The visitors can be professional artists, curators or academics with an interest in artistic research. They receive the participant’s portfolio (the printable and edited version of the case) beforehand, and conduct an interview with each participant. They also view and interpret the work. Afterwards, they discuss their findings with the coordinators. These discussions form the basis for a ‘Visitor’s Report’ that is sent to the participant. a.pass explicitly chooses a feedback format instead of an evaluation procedure, since it considers in-depth feedback of external professionals to be more useful for the participant’s future development. The visitors are asked to evaluate the quality of the research, the communicative aspects of the presentation and the relevance of the work within a larger context. Given their diverse backgrounds, they approach the research from very different points-of-view and it is up to participants to decide how to deal with the feedback, which can sometimes come in the form of a strong critique.

**Transparency**

During the interviews with participants, the committee was able to confirm that participants are very aware of the format and goals of evaluations at a.pass. Participants are very satisfied with the feedback and evaluations they receive from staff and mentors, despite the fact that they can sometimes be very challenging and confrontational. Participants describe the evaluations as serious and invested discussions, which take place on the basis of professional equality. The committee is pleased to see that participants are active and informed self- and peer-evaluators through opportunities provided during the feedback sessions and is impressed with how the programme has managed to create an environment in which feedback and evaluation come naturally and are productive on both an individual and collective level.

**Results and achieved learning outcomes**

The evaluation committee has been able to establish that the participants of a.pass fully master the intended learning outcomes of the programme. According to the committee, participants and alumni convey a high level of self-reflexivity and are exceptionally articulate about their practices and aims as artistic researchers. During its visit, the committee viewed (individual and collective) publications of a.pass and was presented with several performative ‘set-up’s presenting the research projects of present and former participants. The products, practices and ‘cases’ viewed by the committee are clearly the result of a thorough process of research and investigation and document the work a.pass is doing in the development of experimental and transformative performance art, scenography and theatre. The committee was fascinated by the way participants’ research could take on different forms and be linked to a variety of domains and practices.

The participants and alumni alike indicated to the evaluation committee that they experienced the great value of developing their research projects within the context of a.pass and that the programme and interaction with peers had greatly contributed to their present artistic and research practices. The alumni of a.pass made clear that they had incorporated the methods and philosophy into their own artistic and research practices, building on the strong focus on exchange, collaboration, experimentation and critical feedback within their own professional environments. In this sense, a.pass’ influence in the professional field in Belgium and abroad must be fully acknowledged, according to the committee. a.pass’ ability to create an environment that produces its own knowledge and methodologies with very little resources is a feat to be celebrated and further encouraged with sufficient funding and proper conditions. Not only does a.pass serve the needs of participants in their programme, it also goes beyond this through their carefully selected collaborations and by exploring what artistic research might achieve within the broader cultural field. The results of the a.pass programme can also be found in the output of the research centre, which organizes events with and for different groups outside of a.pass and publishes research outcomes for a wider audience. It also initiates research collaborations with institutions and groups outside the a.pass environment. In this way, it communicates the philosophy and methods of the institute to a broader public. Currently, there are plans to activate the research centre’s archive in various settings and also to start an international publishing house. In addition, the research centre has the intention to put more emphasis on networking through the realisation of collaborative projects. The committee fully underwrites the necessity of the research centre to communicate with the outside world and thinks that the realisation of these aims would be possible if the institute had access to more resources.

## Attachments

## Attachment 1 Assessment committee

## Attachment 2 Programme of the assessment

Day 1

11.00 Arrival committee and brunch

12.00 Internal meeting committee

13.30 a.pass team: Elke Van Campenhout and Nicolas Galeazzi

14.30 Research centre participants and associate researcher: Mala Kline, Veridiana Zurita and Cecilia Molano

15.30 Current participants a.pass: Damle Ekin, Danny Neyman and Rares Craiut

17.00 Professional field: Bart Vandeput, Katrien Reist, Matthieu Goeury and Daniel Blanga-Gubay

18.00 Dinner and presentation research cases in studio

Day 2

10.00 Alumni: Carlotta Scioldo, Raquel Santana de Morais and Adva Zakai

11.00 APCs: Pierre Rubio and Lilia Mestre

12.00 Mentors and workshop supervisors: Geert Opsomer, Kristien Vandenbrande and Christophe Maierhans

14.00 Internal meeting committee: formulating conclusions

16.00 Feedback of findings and conclusion

## Attachment 3 Documents

* Critical Self-Reflection;
* Overview programme;
* Overview workshops of the post-master programme 2010-2014;
* Overview of public events, conferences and collaborations 2010-2014;
* Overview cv’s staff members;
* Overview guest teachers, mentors, workshop coordinators;
* Publications of research projects and events;
* Evaluation of Peter Strijdonk (2014)
* Examples of portfolio’s of participants (2013)
* Examples of admission forms of participants (2013, 2014, 2015)
* Examples of visitor’s report End Communication
* Presentations of research projects of current and former participants;

## Attachment 4 Declarations of independence