



M Philosophy  
Tilburg University

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Project code P2225

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## Summary

### Standard 1. Intended learning outcomes

The master's programme Philosophy offered at Tilburg University is a broad programme in philosophy. The programme follows Tilburg University's educational profile, summarized by the 'understanding society' motto. Within the profile the programme offers five specialisation tracks, which are clearly distinctive from each other, and which deal with topical societal themes. The panel appreciates the programme's clear profile and specialisations. It finds that its profile is attuned to the professional fields linked to it through its alumni and the social advisory committee.

The intended learning outcomes are logically derived from the profile and are structured according to the Dublin descriptors for academic master's programmes. They are worded clearly and reflect the academic master level. They also tie in with (inter)national requirements formulated in the Domain-Specific Framework of Reference for Dutch philosophy programmes. The panel feels that the programme can take pride in its connection to Tilburg University's 'understanding society' focus and encourages the programme to better reflect this connection even more in the intended learning outcomes.

### Standard 2. Teaching-learning environment

The panel appreciates the teaching-learning environment offered by the programme. In a close-knit community, teaching and support staff are accessible and always willing to help students. The programme's staff members combine research expertise with didactical skills and are working closely together. This results in a clear and logical curriculum with attractive specialization options, where students can develop their academic knowledge and skills. Students who enter the programme with a bachelor's degree in philosophy sometimes experience being slowed down by students who entered the programme upon completing a premaster. The panel recommends improving the classroom experience of students with a bachelor's degree in philosophy and to re-consider the study load of the pre-master programme. There are several 3 EC courses, and the panel sees the benefits of the planned larger signature courses for a better alignment of course topics, less adjustment time for teaching staff, and a calmer pace in the curriculum. Tilburg University's 'understanding society' profile is clearly recognizable in the curriculum. Professional skills in line with this profile are well addressed but can be made more visible in documents. The panel advises the programme to formulate a vision on including non-Western philosophy in the curriculum and implementing that vision consistently. The programme is offered in English except for one Dutch-oriented track. This is in line with the fact that the academic field of philosophy uses English as its lingua franca and with the foci of the various specializations. The panel concludes that the choice for English is valid and that the programme staff has a good command of English.

### Standard 3. Student assessment

The programme has a good system of assessment, which is transparent for students. Policy and regulations are adequately safeguarded in appropriate documents. The panel sees a valid assessment system and concludes that the predominance of written assignments is a logical choice in this master's programme. There is enough variety in types of assessment. Students are guided towards writing larger research papers step by step through assessments that logically build up in level and complexity. Grading is being done reliably, and students are well aware of the criteria that they have to meet. For assessments of significant weight, the four-eyes principle is applied in the development process or grading. Thesis assessment is in place. The assessment process can be better facilitated by distinguishing assessment criteria for the masters' theses more. The quality of assessment is safeguarded by the examination board. The panel recommends implementing a structural procedure for the independent quality safeguarding of the theses.

#### Standard 4. Achieved learning outcomes

Students achieve the intended learning outcomes on the academic master level and alumni are well-equipped to start working or pursue a PhD. Theses show good writing skills, concern relevant topics, and have a clear structure. The focus on 'understanding society' is clearly recognizable in the topics of the theses. Alumni end up in a wide range of positions. The programme keeps track of alumni and invites alumni regularly to provide students with information about their careers, which the panel encourages.

#### Score table

The panel assesses the programme as follows:

##### M Philosophy

Standard 1: Intended learning outcomes	meets the standard
Standard 2: Teaching-learning environment	meets the standard
Standard 3: Student assessment	meets the standard
Standard 4: Achieved learning outcomes	meets the standard

General conclusion positive

Prof. dr. Martin van Hees  
Chair

Marieke Schoots  
Secretary

Date: 12 March 2024

# Introduction

## Procedure

### Assessment

On 2 and 3 November 2023, the master's programme Philosophy of the Tilburg University was assessed by an independent peer review panel as part of the Philosophy cluster assessment. The assessment cluster consisted of 29 programmes, offered by Leiden University, Erasmus University Rotterdam, Radboud University, University of Groningen, Tilburg University, University of Twente, Utrecht University, University of Amsterdam and Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. The assessment followed the procedure and standards of the NVAO Assessment Framework for the Higher Education Accreditation System of the Netherlands (September 2018).

Quality assurance agency Academion coordinated the assessment upon request of the cluster Philosophy. Fiona Schouten acted as both coordinator and secretary, and Irene Conradie, Mariette Huisjes, Marieke Schoots, and Anne-Lise Kamphuis acted as secretaries in the cluster assessment. They have been certified and registered by the NVAO.

### Preparation

Academion composed the peer review panel in cooperation with the institutions and taking into account the expertise and independence of the members as well as consistency within the cluster through overlapping panel participation. Martin van Hees, who chaired the panel at Tilburg University, was also panel chair for the visits to the universities of Leiden, Twente, Utrecht, Radboud University and Erasmus University Rotterdam. Mariette van der Hoven was a panel member for the Tilburg assessment as well as for the visits to Leiden University, Erasmus University Rotterdam, and Radboud University. Sarah Boer was student panel member for the Tilburg site visit and also acted as student panel member at Leiden University, the University of Twente, Utrecht University and the University of Groningen. On 20 July 2023, the NVAO approved the composition of the panel. The coordinator instructed the panel chairs on their role in the site visit according to the Panel chair profile (NVAO 2016).

The Philosophy programmes in Tilburg composed a site visit schedule in consultation with the coordinator (see Appendix 3). The programmes selected representative partners for the various interviews. They also determined that the development dialogue would take place at the end of the site visit. A separate development report was made based on this dialogue.

The programme provided the coordinator with a list of graduates over the period November 2022-August 2023. In consultation with the coordinator, the panel chair selected 15 theses. They took the diversity of final grades and examiners into account, as well as the various tracks. The panel chair selected 3 part-time and 12 full-time theses. Prior to the site visit, the programme provided the panel with the theses and the accompanying assessment forms. They also provided the panel with the self-evaluation reports and additional materials (see Appendix 4).

The panel members studied the information and sent their findings to the secretary. The secretary collected the panel's questions and remarks in a document and shared this with the panel members. In a preliminary meeting, the panel discussed the initial findings on the self-evaluation report and the theses, as well as the division of tasks during the site visit. Prior to this, the panel was also informed on the assessment frameworks, the working method and the planning of the site visits and reports.

## Site visit

During the site visit, the panel interviewed various programme representatives (see Appendix 3). The panel used the final part of the site visit to discuss its findings in an internal meeting. Afterwards, the panel chair publicly presented the preliminary findings. The panel offered students and staff members an opportunity for confidential discussion during a consultation hour. No consultation was requested.

For health reasons, the student member of the panel participated only in part of the conversations during the site visit, through an online video connection and with approval of the programme. She handed in written questions for the other conversations in advance, which were covered by the other panel members. The student member provided her feedback on the panel report the same way the other panel members did.

## Report

The secretary wrote a draft report based on the panel's findings and submitted it to the Academion coordinator for peer assessment. Subsequently, the secretary sent the report to the panel for feedback. After processing this feedback, the secretary sent the draft report to Tilburg University for a factual check. The secretary discussed the ensuing comments with the panel chair and changes were implemented accordingly. The panel then finalised the report, and the coordinator sent it to the Tilburg School of Humanities and Digital Sciences of Tilburg University.

## Panel

The following panel members were involved in the cluster assessment:

- Prof. dr. Martin van Hees, professor of Moral and Political Philosophy, VU Amsterdam, and Dean of Amsterdam University College (AUC) – chair;
- Prof. dr. Gerd Van Riel, professor of Ancient Philosophy, KU Leuven – chair and panel member;
- Prof. dr. Mariëtte van den Hoven, professor of Medical Ethics, Amsterdam UMC;
- Prof. Thomas Reydon, professor of Philosophy of Science and Technology, Leibniz University Hannover;
- Em. prof. dr. Jos de Mul, professor of Philosophical Anthropology, Erasmus University Rotterdam;
- Prof. dr. Sonja Smets, professor in Logic and Epistemology, University of Amsterdam;
- Prof. dr. Bart Raymaekers, professor of Moral Philosophy and Philosophy of Law, KU Leuven;
- Prof. dr. Geert Van Eekert, professor of European Philosophy, University of Antwerp;
- Prof. dr. Martine Prange, professor of Philosophy of Humanity, Culture, and Society, Tilburg University;
- Prof. dr. Wybo Houkes, professor of Philosophy of Science and Technology, Eindhoven University of Technology;
- Prof. Federica Russo, professor of Philosophy and Ethics, Utrecht University;
- Dr. Victor Gijsbers, assistant professor Philosophy, Leiden University;
- Prof. dr. Vincent Blok, professor of Philosophy of Technology and Responsible Innovation, Wageningen University;
- Prof. Rein Raud, professor of Asian and Cultural Studies, Tallinn University;
- Prof. Corien Bary, professor in Logical Semantics, Radboud University;
- Dr. Elsbeth Brouwer, assistant professor in Philosophy of Language and Cognition, University of Amsterdam;
- Prof. dr. Erik Weber, professor of Philosophy, Ghent University;
- Dr. Constanze Binder, associate professor Philosophy, Erasmus University Rotterdam – referee;

- Dr. Bruno Verbeek, assistant professor of Ethics and Political Philosophy, Leiden University – referee;
- Sarah Boer, MA student Philosophy, Politics, and Society, Radboud University – student member;
- Tim van Alten, MSc student Philosophy of Science, Technology and Society, University of Twente – student member;
- Christa Laurens, MA student Modern European Philosophy, Leiden University – student member.

The panel assessing the master’s programme Philosophy at Tilburg University consisted of the following members:

- Prof. dr. Martin van Hees, professor of Moral and Political Philosophy, VU Amsterdam, and Dean of Amsterdam University College (AUC) – chair;
- Prof. dr. Mariëtte van den Hoven, professor of Medical Ethics, Amsterdam UMC;
- Prof. dr. Bart Raymaekers, professor of Moral Philosophy and Philosophy of Law, KU Leuven;
- Prof. dr. Geert Van Eekert, professor of European Philosophy, University of Antwerp;
- Sarah Boer, MA student Philosophy, Politics, and Society, Radboud University – student member.

## Information on the programme

Name of the institution:	Tilburg University
Status of the institution:	Publicly funded institution
Result institutional quality assurance assessment:	Positive
Programme name:	Philosophy
CROHO number:	60822
Level:	Master
Orientation:	Academic
Number of credits:	60 EC
Specialisations:	Ethiek van Bedrijf en Organisatie Philosophy of Contemporary Challenges Philosophy of Data and Digital Society Philosophy of Humanity and Culture Philosophy of Mind and Psychology
Location:	Tilburg
Educational minor:	Not applicable
Modes of study:	Fulltime, parttime
Language of instruction:	English
Submission date NVAO:	1 May 2024



## Description of the assessment

### Organization

The master's programme Philosophy at Tilburg University is offered by the Department of Philosophy, which is part of the Tilburg School of Humanities and Digital Sciences. The Department also offers a pre-master's and a bachelor's programme Philosophy. A specific programme director who is responsible for content and quality oversees the master's programme, which saw an average inflow of approximately 85 students per year over the past four years. An estimated 25% of students entering the programme are part-time students.

### Reflection on the previous assessment

In the previous NVAO assessment, which took place in 2018, the panel recommended improving the integration of staff research into the curriculum, increasing the number of teaching staff with didactical training, better separating the responsibilities of the programme committee and the programme management, designing clearer guidelines for the size and duration of the thesis phase, and improving the process of thesis assessment.

The current panel concludes that the programme has implemented the recommendations of the previous panel. Details about the current situation concerning these points are described under the relevant standard assessments below.

### Standard 1. Intended learning outcomes

The intended learning outcomes tie in with the level and orientation of the programme; they are geared to the expectations of the professional field, the discipline, and international requirements.

### Findings

#### *Profile*

The master's programme Philosophy aims to educate creative, resourceful, constructively critical, and entrepreneurial philosophers, who can contribute to understanding and solving current societal challenges. The programme follows Tilburg University's educational profile, which implies that it emphasizes the importance of knowledge acquisition, skills training, and character-building for its 'understanding society' focus. The programme offers students the choice of five specialization tracks, one of which is taught in Dutch and four of which are taught in English (see Standard 2 for more information about the tracks). The tracks, all of which connect to a relevant societal issue, are the following:

- Ethiek van Bedrijf en Organisatie (EBO),
- Philosophy of Contemporary Challenges (PCC),
- Philosophy of Humanity and Culture (PHC),
- Philosophy of Mind and Psychology (PMP), and
- Philosophy of Data and Digital Society (PDD).

To connect the programme with the professional field, the Tilburg School of Humanities and Digital Sciences has created a Social Advisory Committee that is composed of representatives of professional and academic fields. The programme seeks to maintain a record of its alumni and their positions (see Standard 4).

The panel appreciates the profile of the master's programme and its distinctive link with the university profile on 'understanding society'. The programme expresses this vision well, and it is recognized broadly by staff and students. The profile connects well to the wide variety of jobs and professional contexts of alumni (see Standard 4). The panel sees a clear distinction between the content of each of the specialization tracks and finds the content suited for a master's philosophy programme. The panel is positive about the programme's connection to the future studies and professional fields of students through the involvement of alumni and an advisory committee, and encourages the programme to continue these activities.

#### *Intended learning outcomes*

The programme's intended learning outcomes (see Appendix 1) are logically derived from the 2016 Domain-Specific Framework of Reference for Dutch philosophy programmes, reflecting national and international academic standards. The outcomes are structured according to the Dublin descriptors for academic master's programmes and are attuned to the expectations of the professional fields in which alumni may land. In addition to the learning outcomes that apply to all students, the intended learning outcomes for each specialization track are outlined.

The panel finds that the intended learning outcomes adequately reflect the programme's broad profile and that the track-specific outcomes provide a useful direction for specialization. The learning outcomes are clearly worded and comply with the academic master level. However, the panel does not explicitly recognize Tilburg University's 'understanding society' vision in the intended learning outcomes. Since this vision is such a strong trademark of the programme, and the panel does see this focus in its content and output (see Standards 2 and 4), it is recommended that this specific vision be explicitly included in the intended learning outcomes.

#### Considerations

The master's programme Philosophy offered at Tilburg University is a broad programme in philosophy. The programme follows Tilburg University's educational profile, summarized by the 'understanding society' mission. Within the profile, the programme offers five specialization tracks that are clearly distinguished from each other and that address topical societal themes. The panel appreciates the programme's clear profile and specializations, and it finds that this profile is attuned to the professional fields linked to it through its alumni and the Social Advisory Committee.

The intended learning outcomes are logically derived from the profile and are structured according to the Dublin descriptors for academic master's programmes. They are clearly worded and reflect the academic master level. They also tie in with (inter)national requirements formulated in the Domain-Specific Framework of Reference for Dutch philosophy programmes. The panel believes the programme can take pride in its connection to Tilburg University's 'understanding society' focus and encourages the programme to reflect this connection even more in the intended learning outcomes.

#### Conclusion

The panel concludes that the programme meets Standard 1.

## Standard 2. Teaching-learning environment

The curriculum, the teaching-learning environment and the quality of the teaching staff enable the incoming students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

## Findings

### *Curriculum*

The programme contains 60 EC and lasts one year in full-time study mode. Part-time students follow the same timetable and curriculum as the full-time students, but their studies will take more than one year, sometimes twice as much. Except when mentioned otherwise, this report applies to both full-time and part-time students. The curriculum contains core courses, a specialization track, electives, and a thesis.

The curriculum starts with two compulsory core courses of 6 EC each: 'Ethics' and 'The Canon and Beyond'. The ethics course surveys a selection of topics organized around four domains: moral responsibility, moral practices, morality under pressure, and contemporary issues. In 'The Canon and Beyond', students reflect on philosophy and philosophical methods. The course addresses reasons why certain philosophical approaches have reached the canon whereas others have remained marginal as well as ways to determine what counts as (good) philosophy.

The core courses are followed by 27 EC of compulsory courses for each of the five specialization tracks, which are summarized in Appendix 2. Students choose their specialization track at the beginning of the programme or when they start the pre-master's programme. The panel notices that there is approximately an equal distribution of students over the various tracks. The PHC track has fewer students than the others, but the difference is small, while the PDD track has seven students, but this track exists only since 2022.

The Dutch EBO track focuses on current issues in organizations and businesses that are directly or indirectly related to ethics. Students learn to relate philosophical theories and insights to organizational practices while understanding how to incorporate knowledge from other disciplines such as sociology, economics, psychology, and organizational science.

The PCC track focuses on key challenges that contemporary societies are facing today, such as climate change, migration, economic inequality, and racism. Using insights from contemporary philosophers, students learn how to evaluate prevailing ideas on these issues and contribute to a deeper understanding and to integrated solutions.

The PHC track is concerned with fundamental questions about art, culture, identity, and humanity. The track covers the most important 20<sup>th</sup>-century and contemporary movements in European philosophy, including existentialism, postcolonialism, phenomenology, and poststructuralism.

The PMP track focuses on the interface of philosophy and psychology. Using insights from disciplines such as psychology, cognitive science, and behavioural economics, students learn to reflect on mental phenomena, such as emotions, intelligence, and cognition, as well as ethical and existential questions related to the human mind.

The PDD track examines philosophical questions related to datafication and digitalization, focusing on three domains: (1) ethical and political issues, (2) ontological and epistemological issues, and (3) anthropological and cultural issues. Topics addressed concern the impact of digitalization in contexts such as politics, work, knowledge, and our social lives. Students learn how to contribute to a morally acceptable digital social world.

Students also choose one or two electives worth 6 EC in total. The choice of electives is restricted to courses of other tracks within the master's programme to ensure connection to the profile of the master's in Philosophy. The students conclude their studies with a 15 EC thesis.

The panel sees a strong and coherent academic curriculum with solid and relevant content and training in both academic and professional skills. The programme builds logically toward the academic master's level. The courses are well designed, and the panellists regard them as up to date. Students have enough space for free choice in the assignments, tracks, electives, and theses, which enables them to play an active role in the design of their own learning process.

The programme provides adequate training in academic skills such as writing, debating, and critical thinking. The panel also notes that the professionally oriented skills that students learn -such as presenting, skills for job interviewing, conversation skills, and attitude development- connect with Tilburg University's 'understanding society' profile and its emphasis on the importance of character building. The panel heard from students that lecturers initiate active conversations about the role of the philosopher in society. While the panellists did not find these profile-related skills very clearly represented in the documentation, the site visit made clear that these skills are actively integrated into the curriculum. The panel sees an opportunity for the programme to make these aspects more visible for all stakeholders, as the programme can be proud of this.

The panel received mixed signals about the integration of more diverse, non-Western philosophy into the curriculum. The self-evaluation report states that the programme chooses not to include courses on non-Western philosophy or comparative philosophy. However, in the conversations during the site visit, the panellists heard of thoughts and first steps to include non-Western philosophy and make the programme more diverse and inclusive. The panel recommends formulating a clear vision about the integration of diverse, non-Western philosophy and implementing it consistently.

The panel noticed that the programme contains several 3 EC courses within the tracks, which may negatively affect the study load of students and place additional pressure on the teaching staff's workload. Recently, the programme decided to enlarge some course units, striving to have at least one signature course of 6 EC in each track. The panel sees the benefits of larger signature courses for a better alignment of course topics, less adjustment time for teaching staff, and a calmer pace in the curriculum. Therefore, the panel encourages this development.

Regarding quality assurance, the panel is positive about the ways in which students are involved in the evaluation of education, for example, with student focus groups. Students believe their opinion is highly valued by the programme. The previous panel recommended better separating the responsibilities of the programme committee and programme management, and the current panel finds that adequate measures on this point have been taken. Another step in this improvement process is to clearly formalize the programme committee's right of consent and to communicate this to all stakeholders.

#### *Educational approach, student guidance and feasibility*

The programme follows the educational vision described in the Tilburg Educational Profile, which is connected to the university's 'understanding society' focus. In line with this vision, the programme aims to educate knowledgeable, self-aware, and engaged academics who want to play a significant role in society. The programme offers a variety of didactical forms to achieve this, such as lectures, debate lessons, group assignments, student presentations, online learning, and, of course, self-study and individual assignments.

The panel compliments the programme on the variety of didactical forms as well as the efforts to create new didactical forms such as vlogs, a wiki page, and peer feedback.

The programme has an educational coordinator to help, for example, with study planning, personal support, and choice of a specialization track. Part-time students receive additional support from the educational coordinator in logically planning courses at a slower pace. Students say they are quite satisfied with the educational coordinator, and they praise her for her psychological support, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Teaching staff are always willing to explain theory within or outside the classes and help students choose assignment topics and tracks, which is highly appreciated by students. Communication through the digital system Canvas is clear and on time, according to students. However, part-time students say they need more advance notification of their study schedule, which is not always possible because of last-minute changes.

The master's programme currently has an inflow of approximately 100 students per year who come from a relatively wide range of bachelor's programmes. Most students enter the programme with a bachelor's degree in a subject other than philosophy. These students first complete the 30 EC pre-master's in philosophy that Tilburg University offers. Students then enrol in the master's programme either in February or September. Most students start in September, but there is also a substantial influx in February. Most courses are offered once a year and can be followed independently: no prior knowledge of other master's courses is presupposed. This allows a sufficiently coherent programme for students who enrol in February.

The master's programme is finalized with a thesis of 15 EC. The thesis process starts with a preliminary 3 EC course to determine the subject of the document (12 EC). When students have identified their project, they can opt for a supervisor. Supervisors have enough time available for this process, and students feel well supported by them. The panel finds the thesis procedures to be adequate and notices an improvement on this point since the previous site visit. The panel notes that the programme maintains clear guidelines for duration and size of the thesis as well as clear go/no-go moments and deadlines. If the student fails, there is a three-month period of extra time to repair the thesis. If a student does not meet the standards after that period, they must write a new thesis under the guidance of a new supervisor. The panel learned from students that the preliminary course is very helpful and that they believe this preparation phase is a strong point of the programme. In terms of guidance on content, the panel offers some advice: in some cases, the thesis topic touches on the borders of the philosophical domain because of the interdisciplinary and/or applied character. Students tell the panel that although the first research question is always essentially philosophical, the research sometimes deviates from it during the later process. The panel alerts the programme to guide students more strictly on this point to ensure that a thesis adheres closely to the philosophical research question.

The panel obtained the impression of a programme that offers personal and customized guidance to students. Students told the panellists that they experience a sense of belonging to an academic community and that the teaching staff is very accessible. The diverse backgrounds of incoming students constitute both a strength and a challenge, according to the panel. They lead to a diverse classroom, which is generally appreciated by students, since examples from all kinds of domains are shared in class. The panel highlights, however, that the prior philosophical knowledge of students who enter through the pre-master's programme differs from that of students who have a bachelor's degree in philosophy. Students with a philosophical background indicate that they sometimes feel slowed down by students who entered the programme through the pre-master's programme. The panel recommends improving the classroom experience of students with a bachelor's degree in philosophy and reconsidering the study load of the pre-master's programme.

The panel expresses concern about the study load. Students indicated that the programme is doable within a year (full-time) or two years (part-time), but they stated that it is hard work and not to be combined with any other activities. Full-time students said they experience significant study pressure. As a result, they deliberately choose to take another year to enjoy more electives or to take more time for their thesis. International students often have funding for only one year and cannot make these kinds of choices, which leads to a high study pressure. The panel advises the programme management to undertake a comprehensive analysis of study load and to subsequently formulate measures for improvement that reduce study delay.

#### *Language policy*

Except for the Dutch-language EBO track, the programme is taught in English. This aligns with the fact that the academic field of philosophy uses English as its lingua franca. The international classroom helps students develop a global orientation, which, given the global nature of societal challenges, aligns with Tilburg University's 'understanding society' focus. The EBO track is taught in Dutch because it is less inherently focused on international topics and is directed more toward the Dutch labour market. For this reason, programme leaders said it is important that students in EBO develop communication skills in Dutch.

Applicants for the English tracks must demonstrate their command of English with a recent Cambridge certificate at a minimum of C2 level, a TOEFL test with a minimum score of 90, or an IELTS certificate with an average score of 6.5. Students can turn to Tilburg University's Language Centre for free English courses or to the university's academic writing centre, Scriptorium, if they would like additional support. Students indicate that they do not call on this support, as they feel well equipped for reading and writing in the English language. The panel discussed the language policy with management, staff, and students. It supports the choice for the English language, mainly because of the importance of academic growth of students in the international academic context.

#### *Staff*

The panel met with committed, flexible, and motivated teaching staff. The staff has been expanded in recent years, which has resulted in a pool of instructors and support staff who have sufficient facilities and opportunities to fulfil their educational tasks and who comprise a wide variety of expertise. Staff members devote 35-40% of their time to research tasks, which enables them to work in depth on subjects that also benefit education. Together, the bachelor's, pre-master's, and master's programme employ 43 staff members, including three professors, eight associate professors, and 24 assistant professors. All teaching staff members in the master's programme hold a PhD, and PhD candidates can fulfil their educational tasks under the guidance of teaching staff. The panel concludes that the quantity and academic quality of the teaching staff are clearly sufficient.

Teaching staff in the programme are didactically skilled. Staff members who teach in the English language must prove their command of English with a language certificate, and aspiring teaching staff must prove their teaching skills in a trial lesson. Students are positive about the English language skills of their teachers. New staff members receive didactical training (UTQ) and are guided by their more experienced colleagues. Within a system of peer review, teaching staff are periodically reviewed by an experienced colleague on the contents of their course and their teaching skills in the classroom. In the peer review system, priority is given to new teaching staff. The panel learned during the site visit that teaching staff members work together to align courses and improve the programme. The panel was impressed by the professional manner in which new teaching staff is guided and trained, and it appreciates the didactic training.

Most teaching staff also have hours for service teaching: teaching philosophy in other programmes at Tilburg University. Every bachelor student in a non-philosophy programme at Tilburg University enrolls in 12 EC of philosophy as part of the university's 'understanding society' focus. The panel is enthusiastic about this model since it strengthens the position of the philosophy programmes within the university.

### Considerations

The panel appreciates the teaching–learning environment offered by the programme. In a close-knit community, teaching and support staff are accessible and are always willing to help students. The programme's staff members combine research expertise with didactical skills and teaching staff are working closely together. This results in a clear and logical curriculum with attractive specialization options in which students can develop their academic knowledge and skills. Students who enter the programme with a bachelor's degree in philosophy sometimes experience being slowed down by students who entered the programme upon completing a pre-master's programme. The panel recommends improving the classroom experience of students with a bachelor's degree in philosophy and reconsidering the study load of the pre-master's programme. There are several 3 EC courses, and the panel sees the benefits of the planned larger signature courses for a better alignment of course topics, less adjustment time for teaching staff, and a calmer pace in the curriculum.

Tilburg University's 'understanding society' profile is clearly recognizable in the curriculum. Professional skills in line with this profile are well addressed but can be made more visible in documents. The panel advises the programme to formulate a vision on including non-Western philosophy in the curriculum and consistently implementing that vision. The programme is offered in English with the exception of one Dutch-language track. This is in line with the fact that the academic field of philosophy uses English as its lingua franca and with the foci of the various specializations. The panel concludes that the choice for English is valid and that the programme staff has a good command of English.

### Conclusion

The panel concludes that the programme meets Standard 2.

## Standard 3. Student assessment

The programme has an adequate system of student assessment in place.

### Findings

#### *Assessment policy and practice*

The assessment system of the programme is based on the assessment handbook and assessment policy of the Tilburg School of Humanities and Digital Sciences. In the handbook, various types of assessments with their construction procedures and guidelines for development and planning are described in detail. The assessment policy describes the quality assurance system around assessment at university, programme, course, and thesis levels. The programme follows the guidelines stated in these documents, which include the existence of a coherent assessment policy, assessment types based on the intended learning outcomes, and application of the four-eyes principle.

The types of assessment and assessment criteria in the programme depend on the intended learning outcome(s) involved. The programme consists of four blocks, and assessments are conducted at the end of

every block. Written assessment types, such as a journalistic article or a research paper, are the primary form of assessment, but students are also required to give presentations or create videos.

Rubrics and assessment criteria are provided to students upfront, and students perceive clear expectations. Model questions are available for written exams, and grading is done by one or two examiners on the basis of clear assessment forms. Students are positive about the grading process; they receive extensive written feedback with their grade, and they can always ask for an explanation from the appropriate examiner.

The panel sees a well-functioning system of assessment and considers the emphasis on written tests to be well justified for this master's programme. The panel believes that grading is conducted reliably and sufficiently independently and finds that the amount of written and oral feedback that students receive is impressive. It learned from students that some examiners are aware of the need to help students gain confidence in their own skills. To achieve this, students are encouraged to develop their scientific level step by step: in some courses, students start with a small written assignment and gradually work toward writing a scientific text as their final assessment.

#### *Thesis assessment*

The thesis is assessed separately by two examiners: the thesis supervisor and a second, independent examiner. After first conducting separate assessments, the examiners jointly decide on a provisional grade for the written thesis and then weigh in on the oral defence. If the examiners disagree on whether the thesis is of sufficient quality to pass, or if they agree on a 6 as provisional grade, a third examiner is appointed. Furthermore, a third examiner is appointed when the two examiners cannot agree on a final grade and their provisional grades differ by more than 1 point. Criteria for assessment include the problem statement, literature, methods, originality, and conclusion. The panel finds the assessment process for the thesis to be adequate.

The panel studied the assessment forms of 15 theses and noticed that the assessment form used for the bachelor's programme theses is almost identical to the form used for the master's theses. Although the panellists found the feedback offered and the grades assigned to be logical, they advise better facilitation of the master's thesis assessment process by better distinguishing the assessment criteria at the master's level from those at the bachelor level.

#### *Quality assurance of assessment*

The quality of assessment is safeguarded according to legal standards by an examination board that functions for all programmes within the Tilburg School of Humanities and Digital Sciences. The board works with chambers and a specific member of each programme to organize the safeguarding per specific programme. All members of the examination board have been trained by an assessment expert. As is indicated in the annual reports, the examination board makes decisions regarding student requests and in situations of possible fraud or plagiarism. Furthermore, the board is involved in university-wide consultations to align policies around assessment. The examination board guarantees the quality of assessment in the master's programme by examining grade distributions and differences between supervisors and the second examiners and by reading internal and external calibration and review reports (see below). The panel met with the examination board during the site visit. What positively stood out in the conversation is that members of the board are actively involved in the discussion about the implications of artificial intelligence for the assessment policies of Tilburg University. The panel concludes that the members are committed and competent for their safeguarding tasks.



In addition to the formal safeguarding, the programme has a strong system of internal and external calibration in place that is worth mentioning here. An assessment committee periodically reviews courses and forms of intermediate assessment, and advice from the assessment committee is reported to the examination board. A specialist is available to offer advice to all examiners in constructing assessments. In addition, thesis examiners periodically calibrate by grading theses of another examiner afterwards, so they can learn from each other and align their assessment criteria. These calibration sessions are guided by the assessment specialist, and outcomes are reported to the management as well as the examination board. In general, grading is well aligned, and the calibrations have led to small adaptations of assessment forms. For external safeguarding, the programme organized a comparable calibration exercise with Utrecht University, and the findings about the theses by examiners from the Utrecht University were comparable with the findings of Tilburg's examiners. The programme is planning to regularly conduct this external check. The panel encourages this as it advises that theses be examined on a structural basis by an external party or the examination board.

### Considerations

The panel concludes that the programme has a satisfactory system of assessment, which is transparent for students. Policy and regulations are adequately safeguarded in appropriate documents. The panel sees a valid assessment system and concludes that the predominance of written assignments is a logical choice in this master's programme. There is sufficient variety in types of assessment. As they write their large research papers, students are guided step by step through assessments that logically develop in level and complexity. Grading is being done reliably, and students are well aware of the criteria that they must meet. For important assessments, the four-eyes principle is applied in the development process or grading. Thesis assessment is in place, and the assessment process can be better facilitated by further distinguishing assessment criteria for the masters' theses from the bachelor's theses. The quality of assessment is safeguarded by the examination board. The panel recommends implementing a structural procedure for the independent quality safeguarding of the theses.

### Conclusion

The panel concludes that the programme meets Standard 3.

## Standard 4. Achieved learning outcomes

The programme demonstrates that the intended learning outcomes are achieved.

### Findings

#### *Achieved level*

The panel examined the theses and corresponding assessment forms of 15 graduates from all specialization tracks except for the PDD track, which has no graduates yet. The panel concludes that the theses demonstrate the expected academic master's level. The theses exhibit a similar structure, which is based on information provided in the programme's thesis manual. This has advantages, according to the panel: It makes theses easily readable, and students appreciate the clear format. However, the panel suggests keeping in mind that students who would like to choose another form or style for the thesis should be supported in doing so. Topics of the theses are in general a good fit for this philosophy programme and the respective tracks (see Standard 2 for a recommendation on this point). The theses that the panel studied are

well connected to university's motto of understanding society and are predominantly of satisfactory quality. Students demonstrate good writing skills in their theses.

#### *After graduation*

Alumni of the master's programme either undertake a PhD or begin working in a variety of job settings. They can pursue a number of advising, training, or management roles not only in education or healthcare but also in commercial settings such as banking or consultancy. Alumni who were interviewed by the panel confirmed that they are equipped to find a job on the academic level or to pursue a PhD. Graduates said they are able to find jobs within a reasonable time.

The alumni office maintains a record of graduates' careers. The data available from the alumni office reveals that most graduates work in education, consulting, and management, with a smaller number seeking traineeships or policy advising. A LinkedIn group has been established for students and alumni in each specialization track, and information about job opportunities and experiences in the work field are exchanged in these groups. Alumni are invited to conferences at Tilburg University to share their experiences and to further bolster a network between students and alumni. The panel is positive about these ties with alumni.

#### Considerations

The panel concludes that students achieve the intended learning outcomes on the academic master's level and that alumni are well-equipped to start working or to pursue a PhD. Theses demonstrate satisfactory writing skills, address relevant topics, and exhibit a clear structure. The focus on the theme of 'understanding society' is clearly recognizable in the topics of the theses. Alumni are hired into a wide range of positions and are regularly invited to return to campus to provide students with information about their careers. The panel is positive about this tradition.

#### Conclusion

The panel concludes that the programme meets Standard 4.

#### General conclusion

The panel's assessment of the master's programme Philosophy at Tilburg University is positive.

#### Development points

1. Formulate a clear vision on including non-Western philosophy and consistently implement that vision.
2. Improve the learning experiences of students with a bachelor's degree in philosophy by ensuring that students are not slowed down by others with a different background.
3. Reconsider the study load of the pre-master's programme (now 30 EC).
4. Analyse the full-time programme's study load and implement measures for improvement.
5. Ensure that the quality checks of theses by an external party or examination board become part of the safeguarding cycle.

# Appendix 1. Intended learning outcomes

## **General Learning Outcomes**

### **1 Knowledge and Understanding**

*A degree in Philosophy, Master of Arts, is awarded to a student who:*

1. 1a has profound and specialized knowledge and understanding of concepts in ethics;
2. 1b has profound and specialized knowledge and understanding of the philosophical canon and how it is being challenged.

### **2 Applying Knowledge and Understanding:**

*A degree in Philosophy, Master of Arts, is awarded to a student who:*

1. 2a can analyse, summarize and interpret primary philosophical texts;
2. 2b can develop, analyse and research independently philosophical problems at a high academic level;
3. 2c can develop and deepen argumentation with respect to philosophical problems;
4. 2d can apply his or her acquired knowledge and understanding on complex issues within society.

### **3 Judgment:**

*A degree in Philosophy, Master of Arts, is awarded to a student who:*

1. 3a can argue and think analytically, critically, interpretatively and synthetically at a high academic level;
2. 3b can collect and interpret scientific and philosophical argumentation;
3. 3c can critically reflect and comment independently on scientific and philosophical argumentation;
4. 3d can reflect on and use philosophical knowledge to form a judgement about contemporary issues surrounding individuals and society.

### **4 Communication:**

*A degree in Philosophy, Master of Arts, is awarded to a student who:*

1. 4a can present own philosophical analysis and argument both orally and in writing (in Dutch and English) at a high academic level;
2. 4b can translate philosophical knowledge and expertise to contemporary societal contexts and connect the insights in primary philosophical and other academic texts to urgent and complex societal issues at a high academic level;
3. 4c can communicate philosophical knowledge and arguments clearly and unambiguously to an audience of philosophers and non-philosophers and society at large.

### **5 Learning Skills:**

*A degree in Philosophy, Master of Arts, is awarded to a student who:*

1. 5a can independently read and write philosophical and other academic texts;
2. 5b carries responsibility for analysing and researching philosophical issues;
3. 5c can collaborate with others.

### ***Track-specific learning outcomes***

The track-specific learning outcomes are additional to the general learning outcomes (1c) or specify a general learning outcome (2d and 3d).

#### *Track Ethiek van Bedrijven Organisatie*

1c has profound and specialized knowledge and understanding of the ethical and philosophical issues that relate to businesses and organizations.

2d more particularly in the domain of ethics of businesses and organizations.

3d more particularly with regard to themes relevant to the ethics of organizations and business.

#### *Track Philosophy of Contemporary Challenges*

1c has profound and specialized knowledge and understanding of the contemporary societal challenges and the ethical and philosophical theories that analyse these.

2d more particularly in the domain of contemporary societal challenges such as climate change, migration, populism, inequality and other crises.

3d more particularly with regard to contemporary challenges such as climate change, migration, populism and the relation between science and public policy.

#### *Track Philosophy of Humanity and Culture*

1c has profound and specialized knowledge and understanding of modern and contemporary continental philosophy and its relevance for understanding European identity, culture and art.

2d more particularly in the domain of art and culture and reflections on the meaning of human life and existence.

3d more particularly with regard to contemporary issues in art, aesthetics, culture, literature, and more generally the meaning of human life and existence.

#### *Track Philosophy of Mind and Psychology*

1c has profound and specialized knowledge and understanding of philosophical approaches to the human mind and to mental phenomena such as cognition, intelligence, emotions and the unconscious.

2d more particularly in the domain of psychology and different aspects of people's mental lives. 3d more particularly with regard to the ways in which mental phenomena such as emotions and cognitive heuristics give rise to societal phenomena.

#### *Track Philosophy of Data and Digital Society*

1c has profound and specialized knowledge and understanding of philosophical approaches to the idea of digital society in its relation to (big) data, digitalization, and data science.

2d more particularly in the domain of digital and technological aspects of contemporary societies. 3d more particularly with regard to the ways digitalization impact issues such as privacy, autonomy, work and knowledge.

## Appendix 2. Programme curriculum

EBO - Ethiek van Bedrijf en Organisatie			PCC - Philosophy of Contemporary Challenges			PHC - Philosophy of Humanity and Culture			PMP - Philosophy of Mind and Psychology			PDD - Philosophy of Data and Digital Society						
	BLK	ECTS		BLK	ECTS		BLK	ECTS		BLK	ECTS		BLK	ECTS				
700284-M-6	Organisatie-ethiek	6	700085-M-3	Justice and Inequality	1	3	700004-M-3	Close Reading 1	1	3	700387-M-3	Thinking Mistakes	1	3	700399-M-3	Rights and Justice in a Digital Society	1	3
700299-M-3	Professionalisme en Professie	1	700086-M-3	Migration, Refugees and Human Rights	1	3	700372-M-3	Philosophy of Media and Online Culture	1	3	700382-M-3	Philosophy of Influence	1	3	700372-M-3	Philosophy of Media and Online Culture	1	3
700290-M-3	Markt, Moraliteit en Samenleving	2	700002-M-3	Identity, Race and Gender	2	3	700002-M-3	Identity, Race and Gender	2	3	700385-M-3	The Intelligence of Emotions	2	3	700396-M-3	Knowledge and Truth in the Digital World	2	3
			700088-M-3	Science and Public Policy	2	3	700001-M-3	Trauma and Art	2	3	700001-M-3	Trauma and Art	2	3	700392-M-3	Ethics and Digital Life	2	3
825050-M-3	Consumentsme	3	700079-M-3	Sustainability and Environmental Ethics	3	3	700007-M-3	Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious	3	3	700007-M-3	Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious	3	3	700391-M-3	Digitalization and Meaningful Work	3	3
827152-M-3	Pragmatisme en Management	3	700386-M-3	Artificial Intelligence	3	3	700087-M-6	Enlightenment and Counterenlightenment	6	3	700386-M-3	Artificial Intelligence	3	3	700386-M-3	Artificial Intelligence	3	3
800963-M-3	Zin en Waarde van Werk	3	700090-M-3	Populism and Active Citizenship	3	3	700359-M-3	Digital Aesthetics	3	3	700381-M-3	Philosophy and the Limits of Psychology	3	3	700359-M-3	Digital Aesthetics	3	3
700395-M-3	Kennis, Rechvaardigheid en Management	4	700389-M-3	Crisis and Insecurity	4	3	700006-M-3	Close Reading 2	4	3	700389-M-3	Crisis and Insecurity	4	3	700398-M-3	Philosophy of Data Science	4	3
700213-M-3	Bedrijfsethiek	4	700084-M-3	Bioethics, Technology and the Body	4	3					700388-M-3	Brains and Bodies	4	3	700397-M-3	Philosophy of Big Data and Society	4	3

### Track Specific Courses

#### Common Courses

The Canon and Beyond (Fall 700383-M-6 / Spring 700384-M-6)  
Ethics (Fall 700209-M-6 / Spring 700375-M-6)

Masterscriptie Filosofie (799402-M-12)  
Scriptietraject Master (799403-M-3)

Master Seminar

## Appendix 3. Programme of the site visit

DAY 1		Thursday, November 2
13.00	13.30	<b>Arrival and welcome, with lunch</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Dean TSHD</li> <li>- Program Director B Philosophy</li> <li>- Program Director M Philosophy</li> <li>- Policy Officer Education TSHD</li> <li>- Head of Education Support Team</li> </ul>
13.30	15.00	Panel meeting
15.00	15.45	<b>Interview program management</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Vice-Dean Education TSHD</li> <li>- Head of Department</li> <li>- Program Director B Philosophy</li> <li>- Program Director M Philosophy</li> </ul>
15.45	16.15	Break
16.15	17.00	<b>Interview Ba students (incl. PC and recent alumni, full-time)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- BA student, ondernemen track</li> <li>- BA student, onderzoek track</li> <li>- BA alumna, PPE track</li> <li>- BA student, PC member</li> <li>- BA student, PC member</li> <li>- BA alumna, onderzoek track</li> </ul>
17.00 17.15?	17.45	<b>Interview Ba teaching staff</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Thesis coordinator</li> <li>- Internship coordinator</li> <li>- Teaching staff (3)</li> </ul>
17.45		End of the first day, short process evaluation

DAY 2		Friday, November 3
8:45	09.00	Welcome
09.00	09.45	<b>Interview Ma students (incl. PC and recent alumni, 2 part-time)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- MA student, PCC track, PC member 22-23</li> <li>- MA alumnus, PCC track</li> <li>- MA student, PHC track</li> <li>- MA alumnus, PMP track</li> <li>- MA student, EBO track</li> <li>- MA student, PDD track</li> </ul>
09.45	10.30	<b>Interview Ma teaching staff (incl. PC)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lecturer, PC member</li> <li>- Thesis coordinator</li> <li>- Track coordinator PMP</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Track coordinator PDD</li> <li>- Track coordinator PHC</li> <li>- Former track coordinator PCC</li> <li>- Former track coordinator EBO</li> </ul>
10.30	11.00	Break
11.00	11.45	<b>Interview Examination Board and assessment committee member</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Chair Examination Board TSHD</li> <li>- Member Examination Board Philosophy</li> <li>- Assessment Committee Philosophy</li> </ul>
11.45	12.30	Internal panel session
12.30	13.15	Lunch
13.15	14.00	<b>Concluding session program management (important session: panel gives preliminary advice if possible and mirror one last time and/or answer final questions)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Vice-Dean Education TSHD</li> <li>- Head of Department</li> <li>- Program Director B Philosophy</li> <li>- Program Director M Philosophy</li> </ul>
14.00	16.00	Concluding panel session
16.00	16.45	<b>Development dialogue (program chairs, decides on the agenda (1 or 2 questions) and makes minutes, that need to be approved by the panel through the secretary, and then published by the program)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Program Director B Philosophy</li> <li>- Program Director M Philosophy</li> <li>- Head of Department</li> <li>- Policy officer Education (notes)</li> </ul>
16.45	17.15	<b>Oral feedback panel</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Plenary, with Department of DFI</li> </ul>
17.15	18.00	Drinks, finalization

## Appendix 4. Materials

Prior to the site visit, the panel studied 15 theses of the programme. Information on the theses is available from Academion upon request. The panel also studied other materials, which included:

- Self-evaluation report
- Reports of previous NVAO site visit
- Master Filosofie curriculum overzicht 2023-2024
- Assessment plans 2022-2023
- Staff overview
- Guidelines programme committee 2023-2024
- Annual report programme committee 2022-2023
- Quality assurance education visual
- Assessment handbook TSHD 2022
- Assessment policy TSHD 2022
- Education and examination regulations 2023-2024
- Annual report examination board 2021-2022
- Study guide master Philosophy 2023-2024
- Inflow, drop-out and graduation rates
- Thesis manual
- Thesis grading guidelines
- Grading rubrics graduation