



MA Philosophy (research)
Utrecht University

© 2024 Academion

www.academion.nl
info@academion.nl

Project code P2225

Contents

- Summary 4
 - Score table 5
- Introduction..... 6
 - Panel 7
 - Information on the programme 8
 - Organisation 9
 - Reflection on the previous assessment 9
 - Standard 1. Intended learning outcomes 9
 - Standard 2. Teaching-learning environment..... 10
 - Standard 3. Student assessment 15
 - Standard 4. Achieved learning outcomes 17
 - General conclusion 17
 - Development points 17
- Appendix 1. Intended learning outcomes 18
- Appendix 2. Programme curriculum..... 20
- Appendix 3. Programme of the site visit 22

Summary

Standard 1. Intended learning outcomes

The panel believes that the research master's programme in Philosophy at Utrecht University has a distinct profile, determined by the analytic focus of the Philosophy Research Institute in which it is firmly rooted. The profile is reflected in a set of clearly articulated intended learning outcomes, which match an advanced and research-focussed interpretation of the Dublin Descriptors for master's programmes. The panel considers the intended learning outcomes appropriately ambitious and explicitly research oriented. They match the expectations both of an academic work field and of other research-intensive employment sectors; this is particularly the case for the high-level transferrable skills in research, analysis, and communication that are part of the intended learning outcomes.

Standard 2. Teaching-learning environment

The panel finds the curriculum of the research master's programme appealing and of a high academic level. The content and structure are well designed and fitting for a research master's programme and allow students to realise the intended learning outcomes. The panel supports the programme's plans to diversify the curriculum and advocates for this diversification to be gradually executed based on a well-considered vision of the programme as a whole. The curriculum is complex but coherent and reflects the programme's ambition of research-led teaching. Students acquire knowledge and transferrable skills in an integrated manner, through appropriate and varied working methods that allow them to take advantage of the high-quality academic community the programme is rooted in. Lecturers are knowledgeable and committed, and of a senior level. A curricular balance exists between offering a core body of knowledge and expertise at the start, and subsequent specialisation, which offers ample opportunities for developing a tailor-made programme. With the exception of 15 EC devoted to electives, the programme is specifically research oriented, and a mechanism is in place that guarantees all coursework is of the appropriate level: courses are either taken from the programme itself or approved by the board of examiners.

Student admission is well designed, students are supported, and both supervision and guidance in the programme function well, although the thesis trajectory leaves room for improvement. The panel recommends giving it more structure to avoid delays and stimulate the best possible quality of theses. The panel approves of the choice of English as the language of instruction in light of the international academic and professional fields the programme and its alumni operate in. Students are well trained in philosophic methodology. The combination of the curriculum with courses followed in the Dutch Research School of Philosophy is currently not optimal, but the programme has solved this issue for current students and deserves praise for taking the initiative in trying to find a solution on the national level.

Standard 3. Student assessment

The panel considers the assessment policy and practice in the programme well designed. The assessment plan gives a good insight into the alignment between intended learning outcomes, courses, and assessments. Assessment types are sufficiently varied, and the panel appreciates the focus on the social aspects of doing research. The thesis trajectory guarantees that students complete the entire research cycle. The panel finds the recommended word count of 30,000–40,000 words for the final thesis too high. It recommends replacing it by a format that prepares them better for a research career. The board of examiners is well aware of its responsibilities and has sufficient expertise. The panel advises closer involvement of the board of examiners in day-to-day assessment practices.

Standard 4. Achieved learning outcomes

The panel considers the final theses of the programme it has studied of a satisfactory level, and many of them very good or excellent and of publishable quality. The alumni find fitting positions, and a relatively high percentage end up in the academic field. The alumni the panel met were happy with the skills they had learned in the programme and could apply them in jobs in- or outside universities. The panel concludes that the programme achieves its aims.

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

Drs. Mariette Huisjes
Secretary

Date: 9 February 2024

Introduction

Assessment

On October 10 and 11 2023, the research master's programme Philosophy of Utrecht 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), as well as the Specification of Additional Criteria for Research Master's Programmes (NVAO, 2016).

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. On July 24 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 department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at Utrecht University composed a site visit schedule in consultation with the coordinator (see appendix 3). The department selected representative partners for the various interviews. It also determined that the development dialogue would take place during the site visit. Since the assessment was development-oriented, the panel and the lecturers discussed two themes that had been suggested by the programme. A separate development report was made based on this dialogue.

The programme provided the coordinator with a list of graduates over the period 2020 – 2023. In consultation with the coordinator, the panel chair selected 15 theses. He took the diversity of final grades and examiners into account. 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 SWOT analysis containing development-oriented discussion topics 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 SWOT analysis and the theses, as well as the division of tasks during the site visit. 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 also offered students and staff members an opportunity for confidential discussion during a consultation hour. One staff member requested a consultation, which was held online before the other interviews. 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.

Report

The secretary wrote a draft report based on the panel's findings and submitted it to the 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 the department in order to have it checked for factual irregularities. 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 department of Philosophy and Religious Studies.

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. dr. 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. dr. Federica Russo, professor in Philosophy of Science and Technology, University of Amsterdam;
- Dr. Victor Gijsbers, assistant professor Philosophy, Leiden University;
- Prof. dr. Vincent Blok, professor of Philosophy of Technology and Responsible Innovation, Wageningen University;
- Prof. dr. Rein Raud, professor of Asian and Cultural Studies, Tallinn University;
- Prof. dr. 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 Philosophy master's programme at Utrecht 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. Gerd Van Riel, professor of Ancient Philosophy, KU Leuven – chair and panel member;
- Dr. Victor Gijsbers, assistant professor Philosophy, Leiden University;
- Dr. Elsbeth Brouwer, programme director and assistant professor in Philosophy of Language and Cognition, University of Amsterdam;
- Sarah Boer, MA student Philosophy, Politics, and Religion, Radboud University – student member.

Mariette Huisjes, MA, acted as secretary to the committee.

Information on the programme

Name of the institution:	Utrecht University
Status of the institution:	Publicly funded institution
Result institutional quality assurance assessment:	Positive
Programme name:	Philosophy (research)
CROHO number:	60128
Level:	Master
Orientation:	Academic
Number of credits:	120 EC
Specialisations or tracks:	-
Location:	Utrecht
Mode(s) of study:	Fulltime
Language of instruction:	English
Submission date NVAO:	1 May 2024

Description of the assessment

Organisation

The research master's programme Philosophy at Utrecht University is situated in the School of Philosophy and Religious Studies within the Faculty of Humanities. The Director of Education of the School is responsible for the content of the degree programmes and the organisation of the courses, the teaching policy and the teaching quality. The staff is part of the Research Institute of Philosophy and Religious Studies. The philosophy research within the institute covers three areas: Practical Philosophy, Theoretical Philosophy, and History of Philosophy. In addition to the research master's programme, the School offers two additional philosophy programmes: the Dutch-language bachelor's programme *Filosofie* and the English-language master's programme *Applied Ethics*. The influx of students to the research master's programme is around 15 students each year.

Reflection on the previous assessment

The previous assessment report (2015) included recommendations on feasibility and student support. The panel concludes that the programme has adequately addressed these recommendations very well (see standard 2).

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

The research master's programme in Philosophy at Utrecht University offers an internationally oriented research degree programme in one of the core disciplines of the Faculty of Humanities. This 2-year, English-language programme provides a balance between specialised research and the advanced, integrated study of core issues in philosophy, in terms of both content and skills. The programme combines an analytic approach with a focus on the history of Western philosophy. It has institutional links with research institutions and other master's programmes in the areas of applied ethics, the history and philosophy of science, and artificial intelligence (and, to a minor extent, ancient medieval and renaissance studies), which allows students to broaden their horizons with interdisciplinary education if so desired.

The programme is embedded in the Research Institute of Philosophy, which is primarily concerned with central issues of Western philosophy and their history, systematic conceptualisations, and applications. Its hallmark style of doing philosophy is informed by both the history of philosophy and the social and natural sciences. This approach contributes to the research master's programme's analytic profile. With this programme, the institute offers students a challenging and stimulating research-oriented environment in which they can acquire the academic skills and knowledge needed to participate in international philosophical discourse and make initial research contributions to their chosen areas of philosophy.

The panel confirms that the School of Philosophy and Religious Studies offers an internationally oriented research programme of a high academic level based on an articulate vision on what philosophical research could and should be and a clear analytic profile. This profile is translated into the intended learning outcomes, which the panel finds clearly phrased and precise. Appendix 1 provides a full overview of these outcomes. The panel finds that the intended learning outcomes, which align with the Dublin Descriptors and are appropriately ambitious and, as suits a research master's programme, place a strong emphasis on

research skills, including the capacity for careful, in-depth analysis of complex ideas and texts, and the precise and independently researched presentation of such analysis. The skills are transferable and will qualify students for careers in academic research or outside academia where critical thinking, the ability to do research, and an advanced proficiency in communication are needed. Examples of such contexts are policy making, consultancy, journalism, and education. The panel concludes that the intended learning outcomes match the expectations of a range of professional fields.

Considerations

The panel believes that the research master's programme in Philosophy at Utrecht University has a distinct profile, determined by the analytic focus of the Philosophy Research Institute in which it is firmly rooted. The profile is reflected in a set of clearly articulated intended learning outcomes, which match an advanced and research-focussed interpretation of the Dublin Descriptors for master's programmes. The panel considers the intended learning outcomes appropriately ambitious and explicitly research oriented. They match the expectations both of an academic work field and of other research-intensive employment sectors; this is particularly the case for the high-level transferrable skills in research, analysis, and communication that are part of 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 has a core curriculum of 30 EC, composed of two semester-long core seminars (each 10 EC) in the first year and participation in two research colloquia of the institute (each 5 EC), on which the students write reflection reports. The core seminars are co-taught by two members of the research staff and integrate different philosophical methodologies to examine a central issue in philosophy in depth. They train philosophical skills such as comparing different perspectives, writing papers, and giving oral presentations in a symposium setting. The core seminars also prepare students for the job market by practising job interview skills. Students participate in research colloquia together with academic staff, PhDs, and post-doctoral students. The aim of their participation in the colloquia is to provide them insight into and hands-on experience with current philosophical research, scholarship, and debates. It also allows them to discuss their current research projects. The Utrecht Philosophy Lectures and RMA masterclasses organized ca. 3 times a year form occasions at which students can become acquainted with the work undertaken by leading international scholars.

In addition to the core curriculum, students choose four topic seminars of 5 EC each, which familiarise them with positions in current debates. Courses are offered on a large number of topics within the institute, alternating between even- and odd-numbered years. Examples are 'Topics in Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle', 'Topics in Philosophy of Mind', 'Topics in Metaphysics', 'Topics in Epistemology and Philosophy of Science', and 'Topics in Philosophy of Action'. Another 15 EC of electives can be chosen from a list of courses such as '20th Century German Philosophy', 'Philosophy of Artificial Intelligence', and 'Sustainable World'. Appendix 2 contains the full curriculum. These electives may be replaced by a teaching or research

internship. Subject to prior approval by the programme coordinator and the board of examiners, students may also use this elective space to select MA-level courses from a related graduate programme at Utrecht University or another university in the Netherlands or abroad. The programme also offers an interdisciplinary research area course: students should choose at least one of three 5-EC courses. Students are formally required to take 10 EC worth of courses from the Dutch Research School in Philosophy (OZSW) or the National Research School in Classical Studies (OIKOS) for students with a focus on philosophy in the context of Classical Antiquity. The curriculum includes a 10-EC individual component comprising one or two individual tutorials, or flexible courses, the topics of which are decided in part by the students. Around two to five students typically participate in a tutorial with one or two staff members. The purpose of a tutorial is to provide the opportunity for in-depth study within one of the specialised areas of philosophical research in which the philosophy staff is engaged. Finally, students perform a 30-EC project of original research, in which they also write their final thesis, supervised by a staff member.

The panel has studied the curriculum and finds it an appealing programme at a high academic level, which matches the intended learning outcomes and enables students to achieve them. The curriculum includes a broad range of teaching methods. Many courses include the teaching of research skills. A curricular balance exists between core components and specialisation options, which enable the development of a tailor-made programme. The curriculum offers a number of individual courses that students may choose a selection from. Whereas this results in a certain complexity of the curriculum, because of the core courses and the constraints on the choice options, the panel finds it is cohesive. Much emphasis is placed on research skills and becoming part of an academic community. The programme offers structured opportunities and regular feedback that enable students to develop the ability to express themselves clearly and cogently and to participate in professional philosophical discussions at an advanced academic level, both in writing and speaking. By including colloquia and tutorials in the curriculum, the structural integration of the programme in a research context is ensured. Save for the option of taking up to 15 EC in regular MA courses, the programme consists of courses that are specifically taught at a research master's level. The panel appreciates this.

The panel notes that following faculty rules, each 10-week block contains three 5 EC courses. In its view, this limits the level of depth that can be achieved and also leads to peaks in workload experienced by students, who face multiple deadlines in the same period. As such, the panel strongly advises the programme and faculty to investigate the possibility of changing the courses to 7.5 EC. The programme has partly addressed the issues that arise due to the brevity of courses by introducing the two 10-EC core seminars spanning an entire semester (two blocks). The panel welcomes this: the core seminars offer students and lecturers the opportunity to work more in depth, diving into topics without the stress of close deadlines.

The relationship with the Dutch Research School of Philosophy is a challenge to the programme. Most of the courses given within the research school are small seminars or workshops of only 1 or 2 EC, which implies a scattered, sub-optimal use of the 10 EC that students are supposed to take. Moreover, their late planning and communication currently make it difficult for students and staff to incorporate them into the curriculum. The panel is aware that this is a problem for all research master's programmes in philosophy in the Netherlands. Utrecht University deserves praise as a trailblazer in a national initiative aiming to find a governance-level solution for these issues surrounding the research school. Additionally, to avoid a fragmented programme and additional stress for students, the programme allows students to choose additional topic courses offered by Utrecht University beyond the required 20 EC and have them count towards satisfying the Dutch Research School requirement. The panel finds this solution sub-optimal but a good work-around for students. As long as the research school courses remain difficult to introduce into the curriculum, the panel

recommends maintaining this route as an option. However, in the panel's view it would be wise to have a separate approval of this route for every individual student by the board of examiners.

The panel notes that integrity in philosophical research is addressed in the core seminars. The programme also explores other options and is currently developing an educational game in which students become acquainted with research integrity, specifically 'grey areas'. The panel encourages this. It is confident that research integrity is on the radar of the lecturers and students when research methods are discussed but expresses that it deserves to become an explicit topic as long as students do not take up such courses elsewhere (e.g. Dutch Research School of Philosophy).

In recent years, the programme has made a start towards diversifying its curriculum. It encourages lecturers to ensure a better gender balance among the authors treated in the courses and to explicitly reflect on the intellectual history within philosophical sub-disciplines. The aim is to give students insight into the various forces that contribute to unequal attention to different perspectives and provide information on recent attempts to counteract them. The panel supports this objective. Non-canonical perspectives enrich the reflection on complex philosophical issues and enable reflection on global trans-boundary societal questions such as climate change and social inequality. Confrontation with philosophical positions from diverse traditions also sharpens students' critical skills, leads to a more complete awareness of the history of philosophy, and can yield innovative concepts or methods. The panel recommends implementing the educational innovation on the basis of a well-considered vision of the programme as a whole. Students can serve as a sounding board in this process. The process requires effort, as expertise of faculty members must be expanded.

The programme is selective. An admission committee with representatives from each of the three research lines assesses whether a candidate will be able to successfully complete the programme within the nominal duration. The committee considers the candidate's general level of professional and intellectual ability, level of relevant knowledge, and mastery of relevant methods and techniques, motivation, and communication skills. The panel finds these criteria relevant. It appreciates that no minimum grade point average (GPA) is required. Instead, there is a qualitative guideline: the expectation that a student is capable of finishing the programme in the allotted time. The panel finds this a fitting method. It advises against use of the word 'excellent' in the entry requirements ('excellent level of academic achievement') since it may discourage certain groups of students.

Language

The research master's programme has a distinctively international character, attracts international students, and offers students the opportunity to join an international and multi-disciplinary community. The intellectually challenging setting of the international classroom is the ideal context for students to develop excellent research skills and acquire competencies and a network that are useful for their future in- or outside academia. The panel therefore fully supports the choice for English as the language of communication within the programme.

Learning environment and feasibility

The integration of students into a research community within which they can learn to see the relevance of different theoretical and interpretive positions is a valuable feature of the programme. The panel finds that students do indeed feel part of an academic community and that they appreciate this. Students experience a great deal of trust in their abilities; the programme is challenging and demands personal responsibility and initiative but is taken to be in principle feasible.

The panel agrees that demands on students in a selective research master's programme may be high. Over 60% of the students graduate within the nominal 2 years, and more than 80% do so within three. The panel finds this to be a good score. Students reported feeling supported by their lecturers, tutors, and the academic community as a whole. Tutoring, based on a series of individual meetings spread over the academic year, allows for many opportunities to discuss problems with the lecturers and to request feedback and support in an informal and friendly manner. Students also profit from several informal opportunities to collaborate and spend time together. During the programme, students receive training and support in the development of a career path, including an understanding of what is required for a successful academic career, how to apply for grants, and what employment opportunities exist outside academia for implementing the skills and knowledge acquired in the programme. In addition to lecturers, a career coach (tutor), study adviser, and, if necessary, student psychologist, wellbeing trainer, and student dean contribute to this support. The Utrecht University skills lab offers individual extracurricular writing coaching and courses on time management and studying with dyslexia, autism, or ADHD. The programme's philosophical skills website gives information on academic skills specific for philosophy such as reading, writing, sources and references, and presenting. The site is designed for philosophy students at all levels and is a good example of targeted hands-on support. Feasibility is further stimulated by the students' close and vibrant community, with active student committees that organise both substantive and social activities. The panel praises the support provided for students outside of the courses through these measures.

The panel sees some room for improvement in the thesis trajectory. The process is designed so that the supervisor is involved throughout the entire process. How often students meet their supervisor is decided by themselves, and depends on the needs and individual circumstances of the student. In practice, lecturers told the panel that they do not interfere with the thesis process and leave it up to students to ask for support. The panel finds that students experience the writing of their thesis as very intensive; they are under high pressure. Many students do not finish their thesis in time. Although some students thrive on the autonomy they are given, others experience the large personal responsibility as daunting. Although some level of self-sufficiency may be expected from the students in this programme, the panel finds they should be guided more proactively in the writing process. Therefore, the panel advises that the support given during the thesis trajectory should be more structured and not completely student driven. In addition, a form of collective preparation for the thesis project by which students can support each other, could be considered for those students who appreciate it, without making this obligatory.

In both the Faculty of Humanities and Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, social safety and inclusion are on the policy agenda. A contact person exists for student social safety (in addition to one for lecturers), and the panel was informed that an action plan has been written about diversity, social safety, and inclusion. In other (UU philosophy) programmes, the panel has observed that not all students are aware of the action plan. The panel recommends translating existing policies into everyday practice. An inclusive HR policy for lecturers and an admissions and support policy for students should be aligned. The panel learned that work is being done in this area. For example, a serious game is under development to initiate discussions about social safety, and a *consent matters* project has recently become part of the introduction weeks. These are commendable initiatives. The panel encourages the programme to continue with its efforts and notes that for optimal effectiveness, all students should be involved in these initiatives.

Teaching staff

It is clear to the panel that the programme is rooted in a high-quality research institute. During the latest research assessment, from 2012–2017, the three research groups were rated as either 'excellent' or 'very good' from an international perspective during external evaluations. The institute serves as a training ground for doctoral candidates and other early-stage researchers. The research-led teaching allows students to

participate in projects and internships to deepen and broaden their interests and capabilities. They benefit greatly from being involved in the Utrecht Philosophy Lectures, bi-weekly research colloquia, and reading groups to make the most of the research environment. The panel finds the teaching staff of the research master's programme an especially strong and closely-knit academic community. It has the impression that the lecturers are engaged in a continuous, lively, and respectful dialogue on the values and directions to be taken in research and teaching, resulting in a shared vision. The students notice and appreciate this. Finally, the panels finds that students recognize the analytic profile but experience no prejudice or hostility towards other traditions in philosophy.

The panel observes that the faculty members are knowledgeable, enthusiastic, and engaged. The majority of the faculty (73% of Philosophy teaching staff members) have attained University Teaching Qualification (BKO), and several are in the process of obtaining this or additional certificates. All teaching staff in the research master's programme have a doctorate degree and are of a senior level. Faculty members experience the workload as high. The Faculty of Humanities is aware of this and is committed to reducing the workload. For this reason, 10% of work time is allotted for development and consultation ('scatter time'), and research time for university lecturers and senior university lecturers has been increased to 40% and 50% of the working time, respectively. A permanent faculty-wide working group monitors the workload and provides advice on how to alleviate it. Additionally, the vice-dean indicated that fewer temporary and more permanent faculty positions would be appointed and that the goal is to provide the same education with more staff members. The panel is impressed by these measures and the faculty's determined attitude to alleviate faculty workload.

The enhancement of workforce diversity is cited as an objective in the faculty staffing plan. The panel underscores the importance of this objective and encourages the programme to take additional measures over and above the first steps that have already been taken.

Considerations

The panel finds the curriculum of the research master's programme appealing and of a high academic level. The content and structure are well designed and fitting for a research master's programme and allow students to realise the intended learning outcomes. The panel supports the programme's plans to diversify the curriculum and advocates for this diversification to be gradually executed based on a well-considered vision of the programme as a whole. The curriculum is complex but coherent and reflects the programme's ambition of research-led teaching. Students acquire knowledge and transferrable skills in an integrated manner, through appropriate and varied working methods that allow them to take advantage of the high-quality academic community the programme is rooted in. Lecturers are knowledgeable and committed, and of a senior level. A curricular balance exists between offering a core body of knowledge and expertise at the start, and subsequent specialisation, which offers ample opportunities for developing a tailor-made programme. With the exception of 15 EC devoted to electives, the programme is specifically research oriented, and a mechanism is in place that guarantees all coursework is of the appropriate level: courses are either taken from the programme itself or approved by the board of examiners.

Student admission is well designed, students are supported, and both supervision and guidance in the programme function well, although the thesis trajectory leaves room for improvement. The panel recommends giving it more structure to avoid delays and stimulate the best possible quality of theses. The panel approves of the choice of English as the language of instruction in light of the international academic and professional fields the programme and its alumni operate in. Students are well trained in philosophic methodology. The combination of the curriculum with courses followed in the Dutch Research School of

Philosophy is currently not optimal, but the programme has solved this issue for current students and deserves praise for taking the initiative in trying to find a solution on the national level.

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

Types of assessment

The research master's programme has a comprehensive assessment plan that details the types of assessment used and how learning outcomes and trajectories are linked to courses. In developing assessments, lecturers adhere to the 'four-eyes' principle. The panel sees this as an important foundation for adequate assessment practices. The panel has reviewed the various assessment methods and the extent to which they cover the learning outcomes. It believes that all intended learning outcomes are sufficiently assessed. The assessment methods reflect the high demands posed on research master's students. The social aspects of academic research are emphasized: engaging in discussions, providing feedback to the work of other students, presenting and explaining course readings to the class, responding to constructive criticism, and writing about philosophy for a wider audience. The panel appreciates this and considers it a good preparation for working as an academic researcher or professional. In addition, the students are well trained in academic writing. The panel is also pleased with the fact that lecturers plan the assignments for the various courses on a shared calendar to reduce overlap in deadlines and testing.

The faculty board's guidelines state that each assessment should be graded within 10 working days. In practice, this has proven too optimistic. Whereas students with whom the panel spoke indicated that they do not find it problematic if assessments take longer, the panel advises to align the practice with the guidelines, or vice versa. In other words, it recommends to investigate why the guidelines cannot be followed and finding solutions for these issues or, if this proves impossible, to adjust the guidelines accordingly.

Board of examiners

Three boards of examiners oversee the quality and integrity of the assessments of the philosophy programmes. For the research master's programme, this is the board of examiners for the eleven research master's programmes of the Faculty of Humanities. Each domain is represented by one member on the board of examiners. The board of examiners assesses the testing plan against the learning outcomes with each curriculum change and critically questions the programmes about this. This occurs at least once every 4 years for each programme. The board of examiners checks whether course results show irregular patterns and conducts a sample review of assessed final theses. It also evaluates requests for exemptions and the fulfilment of the profiling space when a student chooses courses from outside Utrecht University. The board of examiners investigates when lecturers suspect plagiarism and decides whether fraud or plagiarism has been committed and what the appropriate sanctions are.. Students can also approach the boards of examiners when they disagree with an assessment.

The panel has spoken with a delegation from the board of examiners and concludes that it is aware of its role and possesses sufficient expertise. The board of examiners fulfils its legal task in ensuring the quality of assessments within the programme. The panel understands that the board of examiners rarely initiates

direct contact with lecturers and does not always take samples from the assessed theses itself, often leaving this to the programme. The panel advises that the board of examiners seek a more active connection with the programme's assessment practices and initiate reflection on more diversified methods of assessment, particularly in light of the threats generative AI poses to the assessment of written work.

Assessment of theses

The programme coordinator plays a crucial role in guiding and monitoring the process during the assessment of theses. The coordinator requests thesis proposals from students and assigns supervisors and second readers. The coordinator informs students, supervisors, and second readers about the process, confirms that assessment forms are completed correctly, and acts as a point of contact for all involved. The assessment criteria are specified in a programme-specific assessment form and divided into formal prerequisites that every thesis must meet and substantive criteria for the final grade. Final thesis assessment is based on an integrated application of all of the substantive criteria, but the various criteria are not weighted since the department does not consider the final assessment as a sum of partial assessments.

Theses are assessed by two reviewers who each complete an assessment form independently before consulting to reach a final assessment together. The joint final assessment is substantiated on the assessment form by the first reviewer. To ensure independence, varying pairs of first and second reviewers are used, and the second reviewer does not adopt a supervisory role. Only the research design is approved by both reviewers. If the first and second reviewers cannot agree on an assessment, a third reviewer is engaged. Consistency in assessment is pursued by consultation between the first and second reviewers and by calibration sessions where lecturers discuss the assessments of several theses together. The thesis trajectory concludes with an oral thesis defence, which must be satisfactory for the student to graduate.

The panel finds that the thesis trajectory is designed in such a way that students cover the full philosophical research cycle, which includes identifying a suitable topic, composing a research proposal, developing a sustained and cogent piece of written work, understanding principles of academic integrity, and defending the thesis in an oral examination. The panel finds the recommended word count of 30,000–40,000 words too high. For their preparation to academic or professional careers, a format in which the output consists of a publishable article and/or proposal for a PhD trajectory would be more apt. Such an adjustment could also benefit the staff, as it might entail a reduction of their workload.

The panel concludes that the procedure for assessing theses is carefully constructed, and it agrees with the way the various reviewers work independently. The panel's assessments on the theses it reviewed do not significantly differ from those of the programme assessors. It is obvious to the panel that examiners set a high bar in the assessment of theses. The panel concludes that the thesis assessment is well designed. To further improve it, the panel suggests providing rubrics that specify what constitutes a particular grade, so that assessors have a common framework of reference. The panel also recommends changing the desired output towards a realistic model of an academic paper with a lower word limit and clearly formulating and enforcing the criteria for such a format.

Considerations

The panel considers the assessment policy and practice in the programme well designed. The assessment plan gives a good insight into the alignment between intended learning outcomes, courses, and assessments. Assessment types are sufficiently varied, and the panel appreciates the focus on the social aspects of doing research. The thesis trajectory guarantees that students complete the entire research cycle. The panel finds the recommended word count of 30,000–40,000 words for the final thesis too high. It recommends replacing it by a format that prepares them better for a research career. The board of

examiners is well aware of its responsibilities and has sufficient expertise. The panel advises closer involvement of the board of examiners in day-to-day assessment practices.

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

The panel has studied a selection of the theses with which students have graduated from the programme and finds all theses to be at a sufficient level, and most theses even at a remarkably high level. A broad range of relevant topics is covered, as fits the scope of the programme and the liberty it leaves students to follow their own interests. All topics are research based and adequately prepare a student to work as researcher.

A survey of the programme's graduates was conducted in 2022. The alumni survey had a limited response but does provide useful information. Approximately 30% of the respondents have obtained a PhD position. Most of them did so in the Netherlands, and about 20% found a position at a university outside of the Netherlands. Given how difficult it is to find a PhD position in philosophy, the panel finds this a good result. The other respondents show a mixed palette: they work in education, for government institutions, or for companies or other employers. The panel interviewed some alumni during the site visit and they confirmed that the research skills that they were taught are of value in jobs outside of academia as well.

Considerations

The panel considers the final theses of the programme it has studied of a satisfactory level, and many of them very good or excellent and of publishable quality. The alumni find fitting positions, and a relatively high percentage end up in the academic field. The alumni the panel met were happy with the skills they had learned in the programme and could apply them in jobs in- or outside universities. The panel concludes that the programme achieves its aims.

Conclusion

The panel concludes that the programme meets standard 4.

General conclusion

The panel's assessment of the research master Philosophy at Utrecht University is positive.

Development points

1. Continue your efforts to diversify the curriculum. Gradually integrate these innovations based on a well-considered vision of the programme as a whole.
2. Do not use the word 'excellent' in your entry requirements but look for more inclusive phrasing.
3. Bring more structure to the thesis trajectory.
4. Change the recommended format and word count requirement of the final thesis so that it prepares students better for a research career.
5. Further improve assessment by actively involving the examination committee in assessment practices.

Appendix 1. Intended learning outcomes

Aim of the programme

1. The programme aims to provide:

- a. a cohesive curriculum that enables students to acquire advanced knowledge of key concepts, debates, methods and texts that are relevant for philosophical research and publication in the field of philosophy and its history, as well as more specialised knowledge of and insight into the same for a chosen area of specialisation;
- b. structured opportunities and regular feedback that enable students to develop their ability to express themselves clearly and cogently and to participate in professional philosophical discussions at an advanced academic level, both in writing and speaking;
- c. integration of students into a research community within which they can learn to see the relevance of different theoretical and interpretive positions and to critically assess them on the basis of an independent analysis of the arguments and an informed understanding of the textual support for the claims;
- d. structured opportunities to develop an awareness of a variety of philosophical approaches and research projects (internationally, nationally, among the programme's research staff, and with interdisciplinary collaborators) and to position their own philosophical approaches with respect to these approaches;
- e. training and support for the development of a career path, including an understanding of what is required for a successful academic career, how to apply for grants, and what employment opportunities exist, outside academia, for putting to use the skills and knowledge acquired in the programme.

2. Exit qualifications: The graduates:

1. *Knowledge and understanding*

- a. have comprehensive knowledge of central debates, methods and texts relevant for philosophical research and publication in the field of Philosophy and its history, such that students can position themselves in an informed and independent manner regarding a variety of philosophical approaches;
- b. can identify, formulate, investigate, and propose solutions to research problems in philosophy;
- c. have advanced knowledge and understanding of a chosen area of specialisation – theoretical philosophy, practical philosophy, or history of philosophy;
- d. can understand and analyse the claims and arguments made in philosophical texts (both classic texts and contemporary research publications) and, particularly in their area of specialisation, can develop an independent critical assessment of them;
- e. have a level of expertise in the chosen area of specialisation that enables them to complete a sustained research project (expressed in a substantial Thesis) that makes an independent contribution to an important philosophical research problem.

2. *Application of knowledge and understanding*

- a. can relate their own research focus, approach, and specialisation to research being done in other related fields both within and outside the field of philosophy;
- b. have a solid understanding of and experience with the role of philosophical research in interdisciplinary collaborations.

3. *Making judgements*

- a. have a mature and professional appreciation of philosophical standards of argumentative rigor and interpretive acuity;
- b. an awareness and understanding of the current academic research (infra)structure in the field in the national and international contexts that are relevant, given their envisioned career path(s) and area(s) of specialisation;
- c. have an understanding of the societal relevance of philosophical research, in general, and of research in their area(s) of specialisation, in particular;
- d. have an understanding and appreciation of the requirements and significance of academic integrity, and an academic track record that reflects this.

4. *Communications skills*

- a. are able to express themselves effectively and cogently in writing in academic English, specifically to write papers that are – in form, style, and orientation – suitable for publication in journals or collections of scholarly essays;
- b. are able to express themselves effectively and cogently in speaking, both in formal presentations (e.g., in class or at conferences) and in the seminar discussions and question-and-answer sessions central to professional philosophical research;
- c. are able to communicate (in writing and orally) their knowledge and understanding of philosophical texts and research results to a non- specialist audience.

5. *Learning skills.*

- a. the professional attitude required to work independently and take initiative in acquiring the requisite knowledge and in carrying out research;
- b. a willingness and ability to respond in a professional and constructive way to criticisms of their written work and oral presentations, and to critically assess the academic contributions of others in a professional, constructive and respectful way;
- c. an understanding of how their qualifications – critical analysis, research methods, writing and presentation skills – can be put to use effectively inside or outside an academic career.

Appendix 2. Programme curriculum

Curriculum Programme: Philosophy (120 EC)

Appendix 1 – Composition degree programme

Core curriculum (30 EC)

Course code	Course title	EC	Block
FRRMV19001	Core Seminar 1	10	1-2
FRRMV19002	Core Seminar 2	10	3-4
FRRMV16005	Research Colloquium Year 1	5	Year
FRRMV17001	Research Colloquium Year 2	5	Year

Electives – Restricted Choice (20 EC)

Students complete at least four "Topics Seminars". The courses are offered biannually on an alternating basis.

Course code	Course title	EC	Block
FRRMV17002	Topics in Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle	5	1
FRRMV17003	Topics in Philosophy of Language and Logic	5	1
FRRMV17004	Topics in Social and Political Philosophy	5	1
FRRMV17005	Topics in Ethical Theory	5	2
FRRMV17006	Topics in German Idealism	5	2
FRRMV17007	Topics in Philosophy of Mind	5	2
FRRMV22002	Topics in Ethics of Technology	5	2

The following courses, offered in uneven-numbered years (*next offered in 2024-2025*):

Course code	Course title	EC	Block
FRRMV16008	Topics in Metaphysics	5	1
FRRMV16009	Topics in the Philosophy of Human Rights	5	1
FRRMV16010	Topics in Early Modern Philosophy	5	1
FRRMV16011	Topics in Epistemology and Philosophy of Science	5	2
FRRMV16012	Topics in Hellenistic Philosophy	5	2
FRRMV16013	Topics in Moral Psychology	5	2
FRRMV22001	Topics in Ethics of Technology	5	2
FRRMV22001	Topics in Philosophy of Action (<i>even years</i>)	5	3

Electives (15 EC)

Course code	Course title	EC	Block
FRRMV16015	20th-Century German Philosophy	5	4
FRRMV16019	Teaching Internship in Philosophy	5-10	1 2 3 4
FRRMV16018	Research Internship in Philosophy	5-10	1 2 3 4
WBMV05003	Philosophy of Artificial Intelligence	7,5	1 3
WBMV13005	Logic and Computation	7,5	1
AEMV16007	Sustainable world	5	2
AEMV16005	Medical Ethics and Philosophy of Medicine	5	2
AEMV16006	Economic Ethics	5	2

Subject to prior approval by the program coordinator and the Board of Examiners, students may also select MA-level courses from a related graduate programme at Utrecht University or another university in the Netherlands or abroad.

Interdisciplinary Research Area - Restricted Choice (5 EC)

Students complete at least 5 EC from the following courses:

Course code	Course title	EC	Block
FRRMV16014	History and Philosophy of Objectivity	5	3
ECRMITT	Think Tank Institutions	5	3
FRRMV16017	Digital Ethics	5	3

Research School (10 EC)

Students fulfil this requirement by completing 10 EC of courses from the course offerings of RMA programmes that participate in the Netherlands Research School in Philosophy (OZSW) or the National Research School in Classical Studies (OIKOS). Note that Topics Seminars beyond the required 20 EC can be counted towards satisfying the "Research School Seminar" Requirement. Students who complete 30 EC at a university abroad are required to earn a minimum of 5 EC (rather than the standard requirement of 10 EC) that meet the conditions for the Research School Seminar.

Course code	Course title	EC	Block
OFRM14001	Research School Seminar Year 1	5	1 2 3 4
OFRM14002	Research School Seminar Year 2	5	1 2 3 4

Individual component - Tutorial (10 EC)

Course code	Course title	EC	Block
FRRMV17009	Tutorial 1	5-10	1 2 3 4
FRRMV17010	Tutorial 2	5-10	1 2 3 4

Students who complete 30 EC at a university abroad are required to earn a minimum of 5 EC (rather than the standard requirement of 10 EC) that meet the conditions for the Tutorial requirement.

Research Project (30 EC)

Course code	Course title	EC	Block
FRRMV17008	Master Thesis Research Master	30	Year

Appendix 3. Programme of the site visit

DAG 1 - 10 oktober 2023

- 08:45 – 09:00 Aankomst
- 09:00 – 09:15 **Welkom (NL)**
- 09:15 – 10:30 Vooroverleg panel (intern) inclusief optie spreekuur (10:00-10:30)
- 10:30 – 10:45 Pauze
- 10:45 – 11:30 **Startgesprek opleidingsmanagement (NL)**
- 11:35 – 12:15 **Gesprek examencommissies (alle programma's samen) (NL)**
- 12:15 – 13:00 Lunch
- 13:00 – 14:00 Overlegtijd panel (intern)
- 14:00 – 14:30 **Gesprek studenten Bachelor Filosofie (NL)**
- 14:35 – 15:25 **Themasessie Bachelor Filosofie / Gesprek met docenten (NL)**
- Thema 1: hoe kan het deelgebied theoretische filosofie beter opgebouwd worden?
 - Thema 2: hoe kan de behandeling van niet-Westerse filosofie ons curriculum verrijken en naar een hoger reflectief en zelfkritisch niveau brengen?
- 15:25 – 15:40 Pauze
- 15:40 – 16:00 Overlegtijd panel (intern)
- 16:00 – 16:30 **Gesprek studenten Master Applied Ethics (ENG)**
- 16:35 – 17:25 **Themasessie Master Applied Ethics / Gesprek met docenten (ENG)**
- Thema 1: How best to guarantee the philosophical skills level of incoming students, esp. the level of philosophical writing skills, and how best to further improve that level throughout the master?
 - Thema 2: It seems important to increase the input from our alumni in the programme, in order to enhance the practice orientation of applied ethics and the labour market preparation for our students. What steps would it be desirable to take?
- 17:25 – 17:30 Dagafronding

DAG 2 – 11 oktober 2023

- 08:45 – 09:00 Aankomst
- 09:00 – 09:45 Overlegtijd panel (intern)
- 09:45 – 10:15 **Gesprek studenten Research master Philosophy (ENG)**
- 10:20 – 11:10 **Themasessie Research master Philosophy / Gesprek met docenten (ENG)**
- Thema 1: How can we further diversify our programme while maintaining a coherent curriculum structure with sufficient depth?
 - Thema 2: How do we prepare students for the full range of career opportunities post-RMA?
- 11:10 – 12:15 Overlegtijd panel
- 12:15 – 13:00 Lunch
- 13:00 – 13:30 **Eindgesprek opleidingsmanagement (NL)**
- 13:30 – 15:30 Opstellen bevindingen (panel intern)
- 15:30 – 15:45 **Mondelinge rapportage (NL)**
- 15:45 – 17:00 Afronding

Appendix 4. Materials

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

Algemeen

Uitleg informatiedossier	Leeswijzer Richtlijn Onderwijs UU
Onderwijs UU/GW	Link naar website welzijnstrainers GW Overzicht recente maatregelen werkdruk (GW)
Kwaliteitszorg UU/GW	Gids interne kwaliteitszorg 2022-2023 Handboek opleidingscommissies 2022-2023 Facultair reglement examencommissies
Examencommissies GW	Handboek examencommissies IJKpunten proces en kwaliteit van toetsing Jaarverslag examencommissie 2021-2022

Opleidingsoverstijgende documenten

Opleidingsoverstijgende documenten	Lijst onderwijsstaf alle opleidingen Alumni-onderzoek alle opleidingen
------------------------------------	---

BA Filosofie

Algemene informatie programma	Link naar studentenwebsite Voorlichtingsbijeenkomst eerstejaars studenten
Reflectie	Link naar studiekeizerswebsite SWOT-analyse Studentenhoofdstuk Rapport vorige visitatie Opleidingsmonitor
Onderwijs en toetsing	Onderwijs- en Examenregeling (OER) Curriculum- en Toetsplan
Opleidingscommissie	OC notulen vergaderingen 2022-2023 Verslag onderwijsgesprek 2022-2023
Studenten	Onderwijskaart
Cursussen	Cursus 1: Inleiding Ethiek (niveau 1) Cursus 2: Continentale Filosofie (niveau 2) Cursus 3: Modellen van de Mens (niveau 3) Handleiding eindwerkstuk
Eindwerkstukken	Steekproef 15 eindwerkstukken inclusief beoordelingsformulieren
Opleidings specifieke informatie en voorbereiding themasessies	Link naar vaardighedenwebsite

MA Philosophy (Applied Ethics)

Algemene informatie programma	Factsheet MA Philosophy (Applied Ethics) Link naar studentenwebsite Link naar studiekeizerswebsite SWOT-analyse
Reflectie	Studentenhoofdstuk Rapport vorige visitatie Opleidingsmonitor
Onderwijs en toetsing	Onderwijs- en Examenregeling (OER) Curriculum- en Toetsplan
Opleidingscommissie	OC notulen vergaderingen 2022-2023 Verslag onderwijsgesprek 2022-2023
Studenten	Onderwijskaart
Cursussen	Cursus 1: Ethical Theory & Moral Practice Cursus 2: Methods & Tools in Practical Philosophy Handleiding eindwerkstuk (zie factsheet)
Eindwerkstukken	Steekproef 15 eindwerkstukken inclusief beoordelingsformulieren Powerpoint: On writing a philosophical paper Thesis proposal template (Applied Ethics)
Opleidingsspecifieke informatie en voorbereiding themasessies	EMP project: skill levels Applied Ethics Instroom BA-achtergronden studenten Applied Ethics Stageverslagen

RMA Philosophy

Algemene informatie programma	Factsheet RMA Philosophy Link naar studentenwebsite Link naar studiekeizerswebsite SWOT-analyse
Reflectie	Studentenhoofdstuk Rapport vorige visitatie Opleidingsmonitor
Onderwijs en toetsing	Onderwijs- en Examenregeling (OER) Curriculum- en Toetsplan
Opleidingscommissie	OC notulen vergaderingen 2022-2023 Verslag onderwijsgesprek 2022-2023
Studenten	Onderwijskaart
Cursussen	Cursus 1: Core Seminar 1 Cursus 2: Topics in Moral Psychology: Institutions & Emotions Handleiding eindwerkstuk (zie factsheet)
Eindwerkstukken	Steekproef 15 eindwerkstukken inclusief beoordelingsformulieren Rapport & zelfstudie meest recente onderzoeksvisitatie
Opleidingsspecifieke informatie en voorbereiding themasessies	Link naar WiPRMaPhil website Stageverslagen en stagehandleiding