



**M Philosophy**  
**Erasmus University Rotterdam**

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## Summary

### Standard 1. Intended learning outcomes

ESPhil's master's programme Philosophy (henceforth: Philosophy Now) invites students to engage in contemporary philosophical debates centred around the greater challenges of our time. Students learn to apply a variety of philosophical methods and approaches to present-day challenges within science and society. The programme has a 'Rotterdam' profile: it is topic-oriented through its focus on contemporary challenges, with a philosophical basis in both historical and contemporary philosophy. The programme also has a specific awareness of and interest in the challenges of (inter)disciplinary methods. According to the panel, the new profile of Philosophy Now is distinctive and recognizable. It is attractive to future students and clearly refers to professional fields the students end up in. The programme's profile is very much in line with the 'Erasmian Values' which Erasmus University Rotterdam highlights in the university-wide vision on education (entrepreneurial, engaged, open-minded and connecting attitudes). The panel appreciates the concrete phrasing of the ILOs, which takes into account the skills and roles that graduates will be able to apply in the various professional fields that they may end up in. It finds that the intended learning outcomes are sufficiently academic and clearly reflect the Dublin descriptors for master's programmes.

### Standard 2. Teaching-learning environment

The panel considers Philosophy Now's curriculum to be well-designed and coherent, with ample opportunities for students to shape their own learning trajectories and with considerable attention paid to academic as well as professional skills and trajectories. It is taught by well-qualified staff with fitting academic and didactic expertise. The programme stands out for the variety of its activating teaching methods and its involvement of external stakeholders. The small size and relative autonomy of the faculty enhances the informal atmosphere in which collaborative learning takes place. The design of the curriculum is quite complex, with students selecting elective clusters and professional specializations early on. Students are guided well through these options and courses through a strong system of guidance and support, as well as efforts by the programme management to create a coherent student community. Students feel that the programme succeeds in this, with the aid of teaching and support staff members in the programme, whom they consider accessible, helpful, and highly involved.

The panel is positive about the renewed programme, which, it notes, continues to be finetuned. The panel recommends simplification of the curriculum so that its tracks and specializations become more integrated, which would make the programme's structure and profile more transparent for new students and easier to organize for teaching staff and management. The panel acknowledges the attention paid to diversity and inclusivity within the programme and within ESPhil at large. It recommends embedding these themes more structurally than is currently the case. Finally, the panel agrees with the choice of English as language of instruction, as a consequence of Philosophy Now's focus on interdisciplinarity and global contemporary challenges. However, this choice could be re-evaluated if the number of international students remains low. The panel recommends formulating a School-specific language and internationalization policy so that decisions on curricula regarding language of instruction and internationalization are taken in a coherent, well-founded, and clear manner.

### Standard 3. Student assessment

The panel finds that assessment in Philosophy Now follows adequate procedures and uses fitting and quite varied methods of assessment, which match the societally oriented profile. Assessment of courses is done well and the system of assessment is well-designed. The Examination Board (EB) is clearly in control and fulfils its quality assurance duties proactively. Thesis assessment is done according to a clear and well-

designed protocol and with the use of clear assessment forms. The panel appreciates the thesis defence, which is a good addition in a programme that places a strong focus on professional (communication) skills. In order to reduce the workload of supervisors, the panel recommends simplifying the procedure by seeing to it that supervisors do not have to assess theses twice. Furthermore, it is important to ensure better alignment among staff members on what counts towards a certain grade, for example by organizing calibration sessions and maintaining a dialogue on the assessment process.

#### Standard 4. Achieved learning outcomes

Based on the high quality of the final theses, and taking into account the fact that the programme's graduates find employment in a variety of relevant professional fields, the panel concludes that the intended learning outcomes are being achieved. The panel recommends setting up a structured alumni network to gain a clearer picture of alumni success, and to consider including alumni as guest speakers in the courses.

### 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. Martin van Hees  
Chair

Dr. Fiona Schouten  
Secretary

Date: 18 March 2024

# Introduction

## Procedure

### Assessment

On 21 and 22 November 2023, the master's programme Philosophy of Erasmus University Rotterdam 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. On 24 July 2023, the NVAO approved the composition of the panel. On 20 July 2023, the coordinator instructed the panel chair on his role in the site visit according to the Panel chair profile (NVAO 2016).

Erasmus School of Philosophy composed a site visit schedule in consultation with the coordinator (see appendix 3). The School selected representative partners for the various interviews. It also determined that the development dialogue would take place during 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 May 2020-August 2023. In consultation with the coordinator, the panel chair selected 15 theses. The selection reflected diversity of the final grades, the examiners involved in thesis supervision, and the various specializations. 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 reports 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 also offered students and staff members an opportunity for confidential discussion during a consultation hour. No consultation was requested. 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 within Academion 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 Erasmus School of Philosophy 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 Erasmus School of Philosophy at Erasmus University Rotterdam.

## 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 and Dean of the Institute of 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 Gijssbers, 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 master's programme Philosophy at Erasmus University Rotterdam consisted of the following members:

- Prof. dr. Martin van Hees, professor of Moral and Political Philosophy, VU University and Dean of Amsterdam University College (AUC) – chair;
- Prof. dr. Gerd Van Riel, professor of Ancient Philosophy and Dean of the Institute of Philosophy, KU Leuven – chair and panel member;
- Prof. dr. Mariëtte van den Hoven, professor of Medical Ethics, Amsterdam UMC;
- Prof. dr. Martine Prange, professor of Philosophy of Humanity, Culture, and Society, Tilburg University;
- Prof. dr. Vincent Blok, professor of Philosophy of Technology and Responsible Innovation, Wageningen University;
- Tim van Alten, MSc student Philosophy of Science, Technology and Society, University of Twente – student member.

## Information on the programme

Name of the institution:	Erasmus University Rotterdam
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
Location:	Rotterdam
Mode(s) of study:	Fulltime, parttime
Language of instruction:	English
Submission date NVAO:	1 May 2024



## Description of the assessment

### Reflection on the previous assessment

After the previous assessment in 2018, the master's programme Philosophy underwent an additional assessment of conditions pertaining to Standard 2. The assessment panel concluded that these conditions, which referred to adapting the PPE track, were addressed in a satisfactory way.

Aside from these conditions, the 2018 assessment report contained recommendations on offering more career orientation for students, covering more analytical philosophy and logic, creating a thesis writing trajectory, having theses screened by the Examination Board, and extending thesis assessment forms. Based on the self-assessments and interviews during the site visit, the panel concludes that these recommendations have been followed up by the programmes. See standards 1, 2, and 3 below for a more detailed discussion.

### 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

ESPhil's master's programme Philosophy invites students to engage in contemporary philosophical debates centred around contemporary social and political challenges, such as climate change and sustainability, the impact of AI on our self-understanding, rising pressures on democratic participation, and the increase of inequality. With this master's programme, ESPhil aims to equip students with the knowledge and skills needed to select between, and find their own way amongst, a variety of philosophical methods and approaches. Students learn to apply these methods and approaches to present-day challenges within science and society. The Philosophy programme was redesigned per 2020-2021 under the heading 'Philosophy Now' to underline this orientation.

Philosophy Now educates professional and academic philosophers who can put philosophy into practice, either in their future research (which will most likely be interdisciplinary), public philosophy, or professional careers as, for example, policy advisors, journalists, or educators. The programme has a 'Rotterdam profile': in other words, it is topic-oriented through its focus on contemporary challenges, with a basis in historical and contemporary philosophy. The programme also has a specific awareness of and interest in the challenges of (inter)disciplinary methods. These aims have been translated into a set of 15 intended learning outcomes (ILOs, see Appendix 1).

According to the panel, Philosophy Now's new profile is distinctive and recognizable. It is attractive to future students and clearly refers to professional fields the students end up in. The panel points out that the programme's profile is very much in line with the 'Erasmian Values' which Erasmus University Rotterdam highlights in its university-wide vision for education (entrepreneurial, engaged, open-minded and connecting attitudes). The programme embodies many of these values already and Philosophy Now thus is well positioned to connect with and disseminate part of the university's policies and practices. The panel appreciates the concrete phrasing of the ILOs, which clearly take into account the skills and roles that graduates will be able to apply in the various professional fields that they may end up in. It finds that the intended learning outcomes are sufficiently academic and clearly reflect the Dublin descriptors for master's programmes.

## Considerations

ESPhil's master's programme Philosophy (henceforth: Philosophy Now) invites students to engage in contemporary philosophical debates centred around the greater challenges of our time. Students learn to apply a variety of philosophical methods and approaches to present-day challenges within science and society. The programme has a 'Rotterdam' profile: it is topic-oriented through its focus on contemporary challenges, with a philosophical basis in both historical and contemporary philosophy. The programme also has a specific awareness of and interest in the challenges of (inter)disciplinary methods. According to the panel, the new profile of Philosophy Now is distinctive and recognizable. It is attractive to future students and clearly refers to professional fields the students end up in. The programme's profile is very much in line with the 'Erasmian Values' which Erasmus University Rotterdam highlights in the university-wide vision on education (entrepreneurial, engaged, open-minded and connecting attitudes). The panel appreciates the concrete phrasing of the ILOs, which takes into account the skills and roles that graduates will be able to apply in the various professional fields that they may end up in. It finds that the intended learning outcomes are sufficiently academic and clearly reflect the Dublin descriptors for master's programmes.

## 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*

Philosophy Now is a 60 EC English-language master's programme that may either be followed as a full-time or as a part-time programme (in the latter case, students follow the same curriculum at half the pace). Students follow 30 EC of skills and thesis courses, and 30 EC worth of elective 'cluster' courses. They start by following the introductory course Academic Skills I (5 EC, block 1), followed by three blocks of courses belonging to four thematic clusters (blocks 2 to 4, 30 EC). In parallel, students follow the 7.5 EC course, From Theory to Practice, which is concluded by a short block of two weeks for the co-creative completion and presentation of the activities belonging to this course. When they start with the thematic clusters, students also embark on their Master Thesis and Milestone Trajectory, which ends in block 6. See Appendix 2 for an overview.

In block 1, Academic Skills I introduces students to classical texts for each thematic cluster, as well as skills such as close-reading and text interpretation, with a focus on applying these to the understanding of current societal challenges. The elective curriculum, starting in block 2, is built around four thematically organized clusters, inspired by contemporary societal challenges: (1) Representation: Democracy, Science, and Culture; (2) Environment, Life, and Technology; (3) Subjectivity and Response-Ability; and (4) The Politics of Inequality: Wealth, Capitalism, Exploitation. Taken together, these clusters problematize the status of the present-day human subject. They reflect on how it is embedded in its (natural and technological) environments, shaped by its social and economic situations, and represented within its public and political spheres. All clusters offer students both historical and systematic approaches. Within each course, specific methods in philosophy are employed: historical, analytic, continental, or a combination of these, often in combination with an interdisciplinary perspective. Students are encouraged to choose two of the four

clusters, since this structure provides them with a focused and coherent curriculum, but they are not obliged to do so: they can also design their own elective programme.

The course From Theory to Practice focuses on the development of academic as well as professional skills, and on their practical application within and beyond academia. Throughout the year, students are trained via small mentor group meetings and workshops. They are supervised by a member of the staff or an externally hired professional with a relevant background and network. Students choose between four specializations where specific skills are trained relevant to the respective professional domain:

- Public Philosophy involves skills such as writing a public philosophy essay, producing a podcast, preparing a video lecture, and presenting a talk during a public philosophy event/festival.
- Philosophy of Public Administration and Policy concerns the preparation of policy documents, among other things.
- Innovation in Higher Education has focused thus far primarily on the use of new technology in philosophy teaching. It is being redesigned in the direction of transformative philosophy teaching more generally.
- Research Practices includes the organisation of the Graduate Symposium and the joint publication of a special issue of the School's Erasmus Student Journal of Philosophy (ESJP), with an emphasis on interdisciplinary research.

The results of the skills training for each specialization are shared with all other students in block 5 during an intensive two-week course. Each track organizes a workshop or symposium for the participants of the other tracks, and this includes relevant assignments. This ensures that all students in this module interact with, reflect on, and benefit from the training of the other specialized tracks.

Students embark on a Master's Thesis Trajectory relatively early in the programme, from mid to late October onwards. Students have four meetings and three assignments ('milestones') designed to guide them during their first steps towards writing their final thesis. The first milestone consists of a description of the research area of their thesis, a working title, a review of three key publications, and a short bibliography. When they have produced this, students start approaching supervisors. The second milestone is a thesis draft, with a section on the research question, its context, and its relation to relevant literature. The third milestone is a 10-minute presentation of the thesis concept in the final thesis tutorial.

The programme has a limited intake of 2–3 part-time students every year. Part-time students follow an adapted programme where classes are scheduled as much as possible on Mondays. Each year, two clusters (and their respective courses) form a so-called 'part-time cluster', which means that all courses and sessions within these clusters are scheduled on Mondays to facilitate part-time students. The students participate in From Theory to Practice', but are not placed in mentor groups; individual appointments are made and they are free to spread the assignments of this module over two years. The part-time students' thesis process does not include thesis milestones but consists of individual trajectories (see 'Guidance and feasibility').

The panel has studied the curriculum and finds that it is carefully designed. The mandatory skills courses ensure that students gain the necessary academic and professional skills, while the elective clusters and the four specializations ensure that students can tailor the curriculum to their preferences. The panel does point out that the programme in its current design is quite complex. Students need to choose two thematic clusters out of four, or create their own elective packages. They also select one of four professional specializations for their skills training in From Theory to Practice. In parallel, students select a thesis topic and begin working on their thesis. While students do not consider this complexity to be a problem, due to the

guidance and support offered to them (see ‘Guidance and feasibility’), the panel expects that they would benefit from simplification of the curriculum. By integrating tracks and specializations, the programme would be easier to grasp conceptually for incoming students and easier to organize for teaching staff and management. Since certain thematic clusters show overlap (notably Representation: Democracy, Science, and Culture; and The Politics of Inequality: Wealth, Capitalism, Exploitation), the panel thinks the curriculum offers clear possibilities to simplify. The programme management has informed the panel that the new curriculum is still a work in progress, and that it is undergoing small revisions. The panel supports the programme and recommends finetuning and simplifying its content so that its tracks and specializations become more integrated.

The panel finds that the master’s programme stands out through its varied and fitting teaching methods. It offers a combination of lectures and seminars divided over two weekly contact moments, with room for alternative teaching methods such as group reflections, the design and organisation of seminar sessions, podcasts and student presentations. In addition to writing academic texts, students practice such skills as blogging or scriptwriting. Students and alumni from the programme mentioned the skills course From Theory to Practice as being particularly varied and inspiring. Depending on their specialization, students are trained in the practice of writing blogs, making philosophical pitches on socially relevant subjects, or presenting video lectures (both in collaboration with the International School of Philosophy and in the context of the Philosophy Night in The Hague). Students also have the opportunity to write policy reports in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science in The Hague, develop philosophically relevant vlogging techniques, or establish a philosophical helpdesk. Students who want to specialize in academic practices write a grant proposal, pitch their research idea, organize a seminar, and publish in or edit a publication in a special issue of ESJP. The panel applauds these varied teaching methods and the collaboration with stakeholders in the professional field that they often entail. It encourages the programme to make use of the Rotterdam context and its various political, societal, and cultural institutions in all courses, including the non-skills electives. In summary, the panel sees the development of a new and innovative programme that works well and continues to be improved upon.

The panel was pleased to hear that many ideas for the new course formats arise from the bottom up. Before starting Philosophy Now, the working group of staff members who designed the programme announced a ‘call for courses’, to which all lecturers could apply. The courses were selected based on their fit with one of the cluster themes, their focus on a societal problem and/or on an interdisciplinary approach, and their contribution to the intended learning outcomes. Care was taken to avoid overlaps and to align skills training. The panel points out that, as the programme develops further, its programme management and ESPhil as a whole need to ensure that any changes are made in a coherent manner, which also requires top-down steering. The programme coordinator is planning an inventory of all courses in order to further streamline Philosophy Now, which the panel considers a good step towards maintaining a consistent and well-structured programme.

The programme is considering creating a more diverse and inclusive curriculum, for instance through adding more non-Western philosophy components. Students reported that attention to this is currently dependent on individual staff members teaching a course. Some actively juxtapose the Western canon with non-Western voices, while others take a more traditional approach. The panel acknowledges the intention to pay attention to diversity and inclusivity within the programmes and within ESPhil at large. It recommends further embedding this development structurally by making the intended diversification of the curriculum a coordinated and coherent effort. Such an approach would not only take into account the contents of the programme per se, but also consider aspects such as the use of gender-neutral language.

### *Language of instruction*

The master's programme Philosophy Now is offered in English, and both the formal programme name Philosophy and the heading Philosophy Now are in English. This choice was made because of the programme's interdisciplinary and topical focus. The contemporary challenges addressed in the programme are often global issues (sustainability) or topics that benefit from comparative, multidisciplinary approaches (democracy, inequality), for which English is a logical and necessary choice. The programme was also conceived with the aim of achieving an international classroom, so as to provide a wide range of perspectives and increase the quality of in-class discussions.

Notwithstanding the programme's international orientation, M Philosophy students can submit a request to the Examination Board (EB) for permission to take exams in Dutch. This is especially important since Philosophy Now also appeals to forms of philosophical training relevant to the Dutch political, cultural, and societal contexts. In the track 'Public Philosophy' and the From Theory to Practice component, for example, workshops can be held in Dutch if students wish to focus on public philosophy in a Dutch national context. The panel discussed the choice of language with programme management, staff, and students. It agrees with the choice of English, which reflects Philosophy Now's focus on interdisciplinarity and global contemporary challenges. The Dutch-language options in 'Public Philosophy' match the orientation of this specialization. However, since the programme has not yet managed to attract many non-Dutch students (at present seven out of 57 students are non-Dutch), a proper international classroom has yet to be achieved. The panel advises re-evaluating the choice of language if this number does not increase in the future. The panel further recommends formulating a School-specific language and internationalization policy so that decisions on the curricula regarding language of instruction and internationalization are taken in a coherent, well-founded, and transparent manner.

### *Guidance and feasibility*

In previous years, the M Philosophy had low success rates, with less than half of the students graduating in two years. The programme's redesign was formed partly in response to recommendations from the previous assessment panel, but also to improve study success. In Philosophy Now, the deadlines of courses are better aligned. The programme now offers more flexibility and supervision in the courses, and the thesis phase has been better structured (see below).

In order to ensure that students entering the programme are sufficiently prepared, the master's programme admits students with either a bachelor's degree in philosophy or a bachelor's degree in a related discipline with a total of at least 60 EC in philosophy-related courses (minor excluded). As of the academic year 2023–2024, ESPhil offers a pre-master's in Philosophy (60 EC) for students with a bachelor's degree in another discipline. Students from universities of applied sciences as well as research universities are welcome to apply.

Given the limited number of students, the programme is able to offer all of them individual support and guidance. They are supported by a dedicated study advisor, who provides individual support, and by two wellbeing officers, who run a programme with workshops and seminars and who circulate a weekly wellbeing newsletter to inform students about various initiatives organized by the EUR. In addition, ESPhil has an international officer who collaborates with the EUR international office to provide support to international students. The programme encourages its students to join ESPhil research meetings as well as extra-curricular activities. In addition, students work together with the faculty student community through the Faculty Student Association ERA and the Erasmus Student Journal of Philosophy (ESJP) in the skills course From Theory to Practice.

The programme's structure allows students considerable freedom in the formulation of their trajectories. To prevent this from negatively affecting the cohesion of the student body, and to help students navigate the curriculum, the programme invests much time in stimulating a sense of community. As part of the first course, Academic Skills I, an introductory week is organized that consists of workshops, lectures, and welcome sessions, as well as a cultural and social event. The aim of this intensive introduction week is to build up a sense of community between all students before they embark upon their chosen specific clusters and specializations. The course also includes cluster sessions, where lecturers from each cluster hold a close reading workshop on classical texts relevant to the cluster and discuss their contemporary relevance interactively with the students. This process can help students in their elective choices. Over the course of their studies, through From Theory to Practice, students are part of small, fixed mentor groups linked to their professional specialization. In principle, they are free to choose these, though sometimes students are redistributed to their second choice to avoid the mentor groups being too small. The thesis trajectory and its milestones are designed to ensure students find a topic, supervisor, and research plan early on and can share experiences with their peers.

For part-time students, guidance is organized differently. Students benefit from the community and the availability of support staff, but their trajectories are less fixed. In Academic Skills 1, they attend only two cluster sessions in year 1, and the other two in year 2 (in line with the 'part-time cluster' approach described earlier). In From Theory to Practice and for the thesis, these students are not part of mentor or thesis groups. Individual trajectories are tailor-made by student and supervisor together, which is possible due to the limited number of part-time students (2–3 per year).

During the site visit, the panel discussed the feasibility of the programme with both full-time and part-time students from the master's programme. Students told the panel that they are happy with the intensive guidance they receive and the many curricular and extracurricular options on offer. They feel part of the ESPhil academic community. In spite of the complex curriculum structure, students feel well guided and capable of making coherent choices within the curriculum. They consider the study load feasible, although the final phase, where the thesis and the From Theory to Practice course overlap, is seen as quite intense. Part-time students are positive about the support and guidance they receive and the fact that the programme offers the option to follow all courses on a fixed weekday. All students praise the support and teaching staff members in the programme, whom they consider accessible, helpful, and very much involved. The panel concludes that the guidance offered, and the feasibility of the programme as such, are clearly sufficient.

According to the panel, students and staff form a vibrant academic community, which is one of the programme's strengths. Students are offered considerable flexibility and receive ample help to create the study trajectory that best suits them. One risk of this positive aspect is an overly accommodating and liberal attitude that could lead to differences in treatment between students. The panel encourages the programme to streamline the guidelines on guidance and supervision, and to ensure they are implemented consistently.

#### *Staff*

The master's programme draws its teaching staff members from ESPhil staff. Almost all of its 22 current lecturers are assistant, associate, or full professors. At the moment, one postdoc is teaching in the programme. All lecturers have a didactic UTQ certificate from EUR (or adequate alternative certificate) and a proven proficiency in English: either a degree in English or an English-speaking PhD, or a TOEFL exam, which is mandatory in order to obtain the didactic UTQ certificate at EUR. In addition, the programme invites its lecturers to improve their English by taking one of the advanced courses offered by the EUR Language and Training Centre. All lecturers in the programme are experts in their respective fields and bring their

(inter)disciplinary expertise and networks to the classroom. New and current staff members are selected on the basis of their interdisciplinarity and/or focus on societal challenges.

The panel considers the staff to be well qualified for teaching in the Philosophy Now programme, both academically and in terms of their didactic expertise. ESPhil ensures that staff members have sufficient fluency in English to teach in the English-language courses. The staff has a profile that matches the programme's profile and uses its networks to establish collaborations with external stakeholders. Many courses invite guest speakers from other universities or from outside academia, including public philosophers, policymakers, and other social and cultural stakeholders. The panel concludes that the staff of Philosophy Now is well-suited to teach the programme.

### Considerations

The panel considers Philosophy Now's curriculum to be well-designed and coherent, with ample opportunities for students to shape their own learning trajectories and with considerable attention paid to academic as well as professional skills and trajectories. It is taught by well-qualified staff with fitting academic and didactic expertise. The programme stands out for the variety of its activating teaching methods and its involvement of external stakeholders. The small size and relative autonomy of the faculty enhances the informal atmosphere in which collaborative learning takes place. The design of the curriculum is quite complex, with students selecting elective clusters and professional specializations early on. Students are guided well through these options and courses through a strong system of guidance and support, as well as efforts by the programme management to create a coherent student community. Students feel that the programme succeeds in this, with the aid of teaching and support staff members in the programme, whom they consider accessible, helpful, and highly involved.

The panel is positive about the renewed programme, which, it notes, continues to be finetuned. The panel recommends simplification of the curriculum so that its tracks and specializations become more integrated, which would make the programme's structure and profile more transparent for new students and easier to organize for teaching staff and management. The panel acknowledges the attention paid to diversity and inclusivity within the programme and within ESPhil at large. It recommends embedding these themes more structurally than is currently the case. Finally, the panel agrees with the choice of English as language of instruction, as a consequence of Philosophy Now's focus on interdisciplinarity and global contemporary challenges. However, this choice could be re-evaluated if the number of international students remains low. The panel recommends formulating a School-specific language and internationalization policy so that decisions on curricula regarding language of instruction and internationalization are taken in a coherent, well-founded, and clear manner.

### 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 system and practice*

The programme's student assessment system is based on the principles outlined in the ESPhil Assessment Policy. These principles refer to assessment criteria for students, constructive alignment of assessments, and

support of the student's learning trajectory through formative as well as summative testing. The principles have been translated into an assessment plan for the programme.

Most courses use a combination of assignments, instead of a single final assignment, to monitor and support learning development and skills. Examples range from intermediate critical reflections on specific approaches or case studies to short essays and presentations. Specific communication and presentation skills are assessed in the skills module From Theory to Practice (for example, making a pitch or a video lecture at a philosophy festival). To support disciplinary, interdisciplinary, and professional cooperation and teamwork, group assignments are used in some of the elective courses and in From Theory to Practice. These may not count for more than 30% of the final grade. Products on the basis of which skills are assessed include portfolios, policy documents, and film scripts, as well as conference organisation and peer review responsibilities. The panel is pleased with the diversification of exam types undertaken by the programme. It concludes that the assessment of courses is conducted adequately and that the system of assessment is well-designed.

#### *Examination Board*

All ESPhil programmes share the same Examination Board (EB). The EB checks the assessment in Philosophy Now through the assessment plan, and is attentive to examiners using alternative forms of assessment. So far, the EB has not been able to inspect specific exams in the new master's programme, but it is planning to start doing so now that it has acquired access to all course materials on the Canvas digital learning environment. In addition, there is an annual thesis review by a panel consisting of board members, following recommendations from the previous site visit. In addition, the EB critically surveys incoming assessment forms in order to ensure that these have been submitted in a complete and conscientious manner.

In light of the recent challenge to thesis assessment posed by generative AI, the EB has monitored the plagiarism scores of all submitted theses and has taken further action where deemed appropriate. At the request of the board, the ESPhil Board has set up an ESPhil working group on AI to formulate principles to safeguard assessment.

The panel met with the Examination Board and discussed assessment practices with its members. Based on this conversation and on the available documentation, the panel concluded that the EB is clearly in control and proactive in fulfilling its quality assurance duties.

#### *Thesis assessment*

The master's thesis is assessed by a supervisor and an advisor. They use an assessment form that contains criteria including the selection of the research topic, the design of the research hypothesis, and the choice and processing of literature. An additional evaluation criterion refers to the process of writing and supervision. Both supervisor and advisor fill out the thesis assessment form separately and offer a provisional grade. This grade is the unweighted average of the two grades, except when the second reader judges the thesis to be unsatisfactory, in which case the lowest grade counts. If there is a significant difference (1.5 points or more) between the grades awarded by supervisor and advisor, a third examiner is appointed; the thesis is subsequently graded as the average of all three (or in case of two unsatisfactory grades, the average of those two). The student is then offered the opportunity to rework the thesis according to the feedback of the second reader. If they take this opportunity, the thesis is re-evaluated and the grade may be adjusted. Once the final version of the thesis is submitted, the student presents it in a public defence that consists of a 15-minute presentation followed by 40 minutes of questions by the supervisor and advisor. Afterwards, supervisor and advisor agree on a final grade, taking the quality of the defence into



consideration. The final mark is based on the total preliminary mark, plus or minus a maximum of 0.5 points on the basis of the quality of the student's thesis defence.

The panel appreciates the inclusion of the thesis defence, which is a good addition in a programme that places a strong focus on professional skills such as communication. The panel has noticed that the theses sometimes receive higher grades than the panel would expect based on the comments on the assessment forms and its own assessment. According to the panel, supervisors and assessors should better align their views of what counts towards a certain grade, for instance in calibration sessions. The assessment form, which the panel considers clear and well-designed in itself, could be adapted by adding a rubric specifying what constitutes a certain grade. Also, thesis supervisors should be encouraged to motivate their final assessment more extensively, since this is currently not always the case.

Regarding the supervision and assessment procedure, the panel is pleased that first and second reader act separately, as this heightens the independence of their assessment. The option for students to improve their thesis before handing in the final version is an important service to the students. However, the panel wonders whether this should be kept up in view of the extra workload for supervisors, who have to read a thesis twice. It advises investigating if this procedure could be simplified.

#### Considerations

The panel finds that assessment in Philosophy Now follows adequate procedures and uses fitting and quite varied methods of assessment, which match the societally oriented profile. Assessment of courses is done well and the system of assessment is well-designed. The Examination Board (EB) is clearly in control and fulfils its quality assurance duties proactively. Thesis assessment is done according to a clear and well-designed protocol and with the use of clear assessment forms. The panel appreciates the thesis defence, which is a good addition in a programme that places a strong focus on professional (communication) skills. In order to reduce the workload of supervisors, the panel recommends simplifying the procedure by seeing to it that supervisors do not have to assess theses twice. Furthermore, it is important to ensure better alignment among staff members on what counts towards a certain grade, for example by organizing calibration sessions and maintaining a dialogue on the assessment process.

#### 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

Based on 15 Philosophy Now theses that the panel read, it concludes that students achieve the intended learning outcomes of the programme. The panel found the quality to be high and the societal orientation of the programme clearly visible in the choice of topics.

Alumni from the programme (usually still the curriculum prior to the introduction of the new Philosophy Now programme) have occupations in a variety of sectors, including education, journalism, public services, and consultancy. Recent alumni interviewed by the panel were enthusiastic about the programme, stating its focus on skills and topical issues had prepared them well for their careers. The panel recommends setting up a structured alumni network to gain a clearer picture of alumni success, and to consider including alumni as guest speakers in the courses.

### Considerations

Based on the high quality of the final theses, and taking into account the fact that the programme's graduates find employment in a variety of relevant professional fields, the panel concludes that the intended learning outcomes are being achieved. The panel recommends setting up a structured alumni network to gain a clearer picture of alumni success, and to consider including alumni as guest speakers in the courses.

### Conclusion

The panel concludes that the programme meets standard 4.

### General conclusion

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

### Development points

1. Simplify the curriculum so that its tracks and specializations become more integrated, thus making the structure and programme more transparent for new students and easier to organize for teaching staff and management.
2. Formulate a coherent and structured approach to the diversification of the curriculum.
3. Formulate a School-specific language and internationalization policy so that decisions on the curricula concerning language and internationalization are taken in a coherent, well-founded, and clear manner.
4. Streamline the guidelines on guidance and supervision, and ensure they are implemented consistently while still accommodating the students' needs for flexibility.
5. Reduce the staff workload by simplifying the thesis procedure. Organize calibration sessions and a dialogue on assessment among staff members of the programme.
6. Set up a structured alumni network to obtain a clear picture of alumni success, and consider including alumni as guest speakers in the courses.

## Appendix 1. Intended learning outcomes

### **Intended Learning Outcomes Master Philosophy Now, 2023-2024**

#### **Knowledge and understanding**

1. To possess a thorough knowledge of systematic philosophy, the history of philosophy, and recent developments in contemporary philosophy, that deepens and surpasses the knowledge acquired in the bachelor.
2. To have a thorough understanding of specific interrelated developments in the history of thought, in contemporary philosophy and in the application of philosophical methods and arguments to contemporary societal challenges.
3. To possess a thorough knowledge of the chosen field of specialization (clusters and/or specialization track).

#### **Putting knowledge and understanding into practice**

4. The ability to interpret and reflect on complex philosophical problems.
5. The ability to situate the acquired knowledge in a broader, multi-disciplinary context.
6. The ability to develop a philosophical approach to contemporary challenges in the natural, social, political, anthropological and/or scientific domain.
7. The ability to communicate their philosophical approach to professionals outside the university and/or to the general public.

#### **Skills and communication**

8. To be able to study, analyse and assess complex philosophical texts in a critical way, and to present the result verbally (presentation) and in writing (essay).
9. To be able to give a presentation, to defend the (preliminary) results of the master thesis before an audience of fellow-students, and to write the definite version.
10. To be able to present the conclusions of the master thesis (as well as the underlying motives, knowledge and considerations) before an audience of specialists and non-specialists; and to be able to defend the master thesis during the examination.
11. Specifically for students in the 'Sustainability Transitions' specialisation track: to be able to explain and present a philosophical approach to a specific sustainability issue before, and to collaborate with, an audience of specialists and non-specialists; and to be able to defend this approach during the master thesis examination.

#### **Attitude and judgmental capabilities**

12. To develop a critical academic attitude in the field of contemporary philosophy, paying attention to the highest standards of philosophical rigor and creativity.
13. The willingness to abstain from premature 'solutions' and to ask probing and unorthodox questions.
14. Receptive to the societal relevance of philosophical questions and prepared to interpret the studied literature from this particular perspective, with due consideration of the social and moral responsibilities involved.

#### **Learning skills**

15. To be able to complete a subsequent academic study independently and/or to subsequently pursue an academic career, based on the aforementioned intended learning outcomes.

# Appendix 2. Programme curriculum

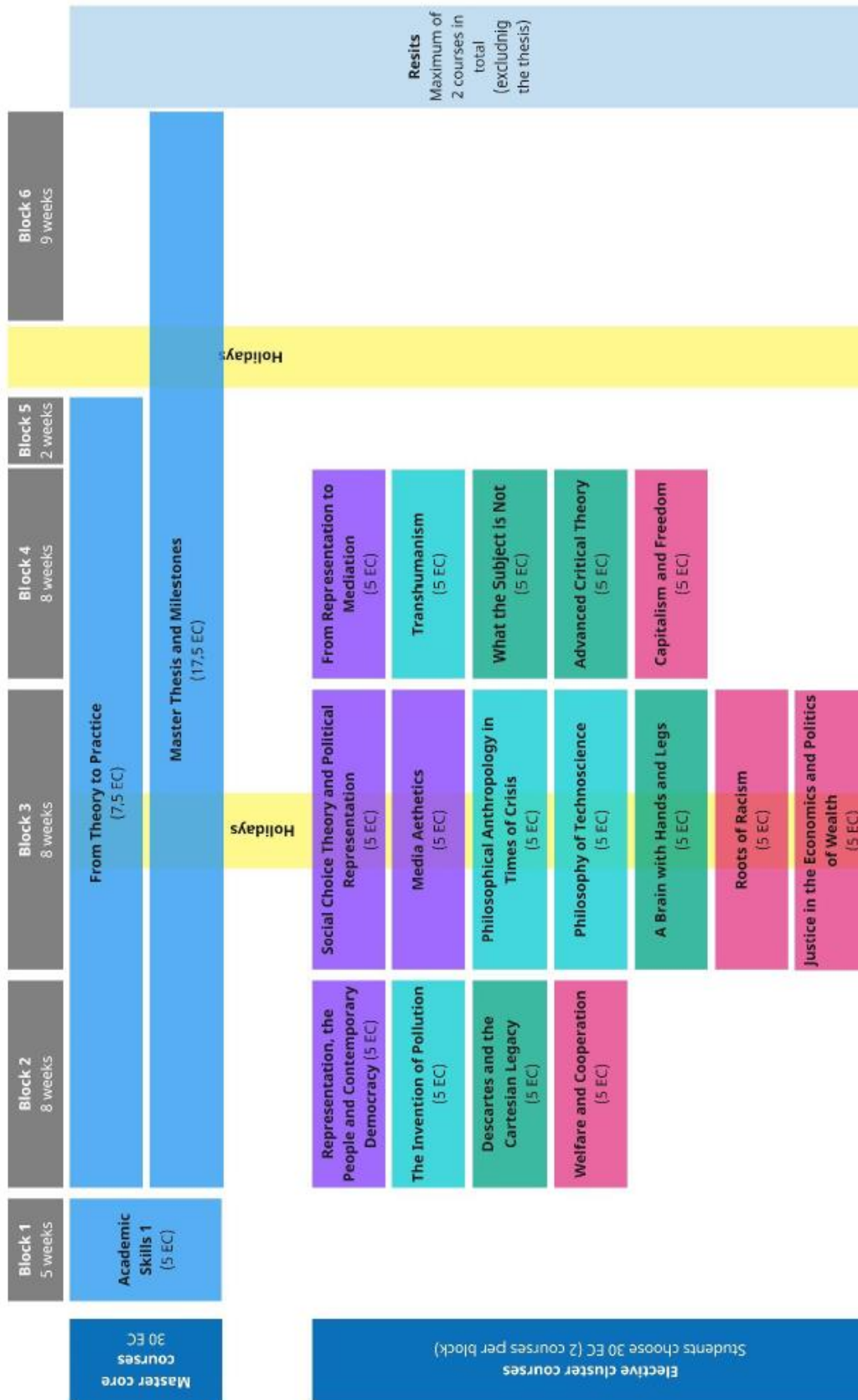


Figure 3: Full curriculum overview Master Philosophy Now.

## Appendix 3. Programme of the site visit

<b>21 November</b>		
10.00	Welcome panel	NL (of EN)
10.15	Preparation meeting panel & open virtual 'walk in'	
11.45	Meeting with programme management	EN
12.30	Lunch	
13.00	Meeting on BPSD theses	NL
13.15	Meeting B Philosophy students & (recent) alumni	NL (of EN)
13.45	Meeting B Philosophy of a Specific Discipline students & (recent) alumni	NL (of EN)
14.15	Meeting B Philosophy & B Philosophy of a Specific Discipline staff	NL (of EN)
15.00	Break	
15.30	Meeting M Philosophy students & (recent) alumni	EN
16.15	Meeting M Philosophy staff	EN
17:00	End	
<b>22 November</b>		
09.00	Meeting Examination Board	NL (of EN)
09.45	Meeting M Philosophy (research) students & (recent) alumni	EN
10.30	Break	
11.00	Meeting M Philosophy (research) staff	EN
11.45	Internal meeting panel	
12.15	Lunch	
13.00	Final meeting programme management	EN
13.45	Internal meeting panel	
15.30	Development meeting programme management	EN
16.15	Report and conclusion by panel	EN
17:00	End	

## 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:

0. Self evaluations
  - Part I – ESPhil general information and reflections
  - Part II – Self evaluation B Philosophy
  - Part II – Self evaluation B Philosophy of a Specific Discipline
  - Part II – Self evaluation M Philosophy
  - Part II – Self evaluation M Philosophy (research)
1. ESPhil general appendices
  - Appendix 1.01 – Domeinspecifiek referentiekader Wijsbegeerte 2016
  - Appendix 1.02 – All courses ESPhil
  - Appendix 1.03 – ESPhil academic staff overview
  - Appendix 1.04 – Collaborations
  - Appendix 1.05 – Alumni portraits
  - Appendix 1.06 – EUR taalbeleid 2020
  - Appendix 1.07 – Reflection Covid pandemic
  - Appendix 1.08 – Programme Committee year report 2022 – 2023

### 2. Programme specific appendices

#### *B Philosophy*

- Appendix 2.01 – Filosofische profielen Filosofisch Atelier
- Appendix 2.02 – Eindreflecties Filosofische Stage 2021 – 2022

#### *B Philosophy of a Specific Discipline*

- Appendix 2.07 – BPSD Erasmus MC courses
- Appendix 2.08 – BPSD Erasmus School of Economics courses
- Appendix 2.09 – BPSD Erasmus School of Health and Management courses
- Appendix 2.10 – BPSD Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication courses
- Appendix 2.11 – BPSD Erasmus School of Law courses
- Appendix 2.12 – BPSD Erasmus School of Social and Behavioural Sciences courses
- Appendix 2.13 – BPSD Erasmus University College courses
- Appendix 2.14 – BPSD Rotterdam School of Management courses
- Appendix 2.15 – Full overview all EUR programmes

#### *M Philosophy*

- Appendix 2.03 – Elective course clusters

#### *M Philosophy (research)*

- Appendix 2.04 – International benchmarks ReMA
- Appendix 2.05 – ReMA core staff and expertise
- Appendix 2.06 – ReMA student self-evaluation MP3

### 3. Assessment

- Appendix 3.01 – Assessment policy ESPhil
- Appendix 3.02 – Examination protocol ESPhil
- Appendix 3.03 – Jaarverslag EC ESPhil 2020-2021
- Appendix 3.04 – Jaarverslag EC ESPhil 2021 – 2022
- Appendix 3.24 – Review theses EB 2022

#### *Assessment plans*

- Appendix 3.05 – Assessment plan BA 2023-2024
- Appendix 3.06 – Assessment plan BPSD 2023-2024
- Appendix 3.07 – Assessment plan MA 2023-2024
- Appendix 3.08 – Assessment plan ReMA 2023-2024

#### *Intended learning outcomes*

- Appendix 3.09 – Eindkwalificaties- Bachelor Filosofie Voltijd
- Appendix 3.10 – Eindkwalificaties Bachelor Filosofie Deeltijd
- Appendix 3.11 – ILOs Bachelor Philosophy of a Specific Discipline
- Appendix 3.12 – ILOs Master Philosophy Now
- Appendix 3.13 – ILOs Research Master Philosophy and Economics

#### *TER and R&G 2023-2024*

- Appendix 3.14 – OER Bachelor Filosofie Voltijd
- Appendix 3.15 – OER Bachelor Filosofie Deeltijd
- Appendix 3.16 – TER Bachelor Philosophy of a Specific Discipline
- Appendix 3.17 – TER Master Philosophy Now full-time and part-time
- Appendix 3.18 – TER Research Master Philosophy and Economics
- Appendix 3.19 – Regels en Richtlijnen BA VT
- Appendix 3.20 – Regels en Richtlijnen BA DT
- Appendix 3.21 – Rules and Guidelines BPSD
- Appendix 3.22 – Rules and Guidelines MA
- Appendix 3.23 – Rules and Guidelines ReMA

### 4. Theses

- Appendix 4.14 – Rapportage scriptie review EC januari 2022

#### *Manuals and grading forms*

- Appendix 4.01 – Bachelor thesis manual
- Appendix 4.02 – Thesis assessment form bachelor
- Appendix 4.03 – Master thesis manual
- Appendix 4.04 – Thesis assessment form master
- Appendix 4.05 – ReMA thesis milestones
- Appendix 4.06 Thesis assessment form ReMA
- Appendix 4.07 – Formal requirements + grading criteria ReMA
- Appendix 4.08 – Instructions for thesis examiners ReMA

#### *Theses 2019 – 2023*

- Appendix 4.09 – All theses ESPhil
  - Appendix 4.10 – Theses B Filosofie

- Appendix 4.11 – Theses B Philosophy of a Specific Discipline
  - Appendix 4.12 – Theses M Philosophy
  - Appendix 4.13 – Theses M Philosophy (research)
5. Research
- Appendix 5.01 – Research review Philosophy
  - Appendix 5.02 – Rapportage mid term research review ESPhil
  - Appendix 5.03 – Action plan ESPhil research
6. Accreditation reports
- Appendix 6.01 – Rapport accreditatie BA – BPSD – MA 2028
  - Appendix 6.02 – Rapport accreditatie ReMA 2018
  - Appendix 6.03 – Rapport accreditatie na herstel BPSD – MA 2020
  - Appendix 6.04 – Panelrapport TOE 2021