



**M Philosophy (Applied Ethics)**  
**Utrecht University**

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## Summary

### Standard 1. Intended learning outcomes

The panel believes the Applied Ethics master's programme at Utrecht University has a distinct profile and forms a valuable element of the landscape of Dutch master's programmes. The profile is reflected well in the intended learning outcomes, which match the Dublin Descriptors for master's programmes and are of the required academic level. The panel finds the intended learning outcomes ambitious where the connection with the professional field is concerned, as befits the programme's profile. The skills students acquire in the programme qualify them for a range of professions where philosophical principles are applied to societal dilemmas. The panel recommends clarifying the distinction and balance between theoretical perspectives in moral and political philosophy and the application of ethics in or to a particular field or domain.

### Standard 2. Teaching-learning environment

The panel believes that the curriculum, learning environment, and quality of the teaching staff enable students in the Applied Ethics master's programme to achieve the intended learning outcomes. The programme is feasible for both full- and part-time students and leaves ample freedom for students to pursue their own interests. The panel advises the programme and faculty to investigate the possibility of extending the courses in master's programmes to 7.5 EC. This will lead to a more relaxed schedule, allow for more depth in the courses, and facilitate establishing connections with other faculties. The panel praises the available extracurricular support. To further reduce student workload, the panel suggests removing the overlap between the thesis trajectory and other programme elements and offering more support in finding internships.

The teaching staff is knowledgeable and experienced in the application of ethics, which is an asset of the programme. While lecturers report high workloads, the faculty endeavours to mitigate this issue. The panel supports the proposed expansion of the curriculum to include non-Western philosophy and advises that it be fully integrated rather than isolated in separate courses. In the panel's view, the programme can better engage with the variety of students' backgrounds to enhance its quality, among others by formalising peer-to-peer learning, and recommends implementing structural collaborations with stakeholders from professional fields to enrich the programme. The panel appreciates the programme's efforts to promote social safety and inclusivity and urges it to continue this work with all students.

### Standard 3. Student assessment

The panel finds that the Applied Ethics master's programme assesses the intended learning outcomes in a valid, independent, and reliable manner. It has a clear and well-balanced curriculum and assessment plan, which links the courses and assessment forms to the intended learning outcomes. The plan is updated regularly. In the development of assessment methods, lecturers employ a 'four-eyes' principle. The board of examiners is well aware of its responsibilities and has sufficient expertise. The fact that the board is multi-disciplinary and oversees multiple programmes facilitates a valuable exchange of experiences, contributing to a culture of quality. The panel finds the grading of theses in some cases a bit too generous, but not to a serious extent. The assessment standards in the Applied Ethics master's programme are consequently considered sound.

The panel does offer some recommendations. It suggests closer involvement of the board of examiners in day-to-day assessment practices, increased focus on assessing skills other than writing skills, clarification of consequences when theses exceed word limits, and explicit definition of the role of the final interview in evaluations of theses. Moreover, information about how the final mark for a thesis is derived should be provided so that a transparent method for comparing various thesis evaluations results. The existing ten-

working-day guideline for test grading seems to be unrealistic. Either the practices must conform to this guideline, or the guideline needs adjustment. In the panel's view, the Applied Ethics master's programme should beware of theses in which the philosophical component is too weak or only loosely connected to the ethical case study.

#### Standard 4. Achieved learning outcomes

The theses demonstrate that students have realised the intended learning outcomes. Available information indicates that alumni find appropriate positions in a broad range of settings, indicating that the programme's intended learning outcomes match the demands of the labour market.

#### 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

## Procedure

### Assessment

On 10 and 11 October 2023, the master's programme Applied Ethics 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).

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:	M Filosofie / Philosophy
CROHO number:	60822
Level:	Master
Orientation:	Academic
Number of credits:	60 EC
Specialisations or tracks:	-
Location:	Utrecht
Mode(s) of study:	Fulltime, parttime
Language of instruction:	English
Submission date NVAO:	1 May 2024



## Description of the assessment

### Organisation

The Applied Ethics master's programme at Utrecht University (formally the master's programme Philosophy) 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 School also offers the Dutch-language bachelor's programme Filosofie and an English-language research master's programme Philosophy. The Applied Ethics master's programme attracts between 30–50 students each year.

### Reflection on the previous assessment

The previous assessment report (2017) recommended sharpening the intended learning outcomes, which were formulated broadly, and implementing a more systematic involvement with professional stakeholders. Based on the SWOT analysis and discussions with programme representatives during the site visit, the panel concludes that the programme has adequately followed these recommendations.

### 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 Applied Ethics master's programme is a 1-year, English-language programme focussed on the interaction between ethical theory and moral practice. Students explore ethical theories in relation to real-life practical issues and dilemmas. The programme focusses on moral problems both for individuals and for organisations, such as businesses or public institutions (institutional ethics). It allows students to specialise in a broad range of domains, such as the ethics of technology, medical ethics, sustainability ethics, and economic ethics. Within certain constraints, students may assemble course packages that suit their interests, backgrounds, and ambitions. The programme's profile has been translated into an extensive list of intended learning outcomes for knowledge and insight, the application of knowledge and insight, reflection, communication, and learning skills. Appendix 1 provides a full list of the programme's aims and end qualifications.

The panel acknowledges the distinctive ethics profile of the programme, which constitutes a valuable addition to the educational landscape, with students' freedom to compose their own portfolios as an extra asset. When this programme is studied subsequent to the 'Ethics and Politics' specialisation of the Philosophy bachelor's programme of Utrecht University, one can receive an all-round ethicist's education comprising both the bachelor's and master's levels.

The intended learning outcomes align well with the Dublin descriptors and are of the appropriate academic level for a master's programme. Regarding the connection to practice, the panel finds the intended learning outcomes sufficiently ambitious. The qualifications address a societal demand that manifests in a broad range of professional contexts, and they fit well with programme's profile. The skills students acquire in the programme qualify them for a range of professions where philosophical principles are applied to societal dilemmas.

The panel notes that confusion may arise between two fields covered by the intended learning outcomes: (a) moral and political philosophy in general and (b) ethics applied in a specific domain or field. The panel

believes that the distinction between theoretical and applied perspectives should be clarified in the intended learning outcomes.

### Considerations

The panel believes the Applied Ethics master's programme at Utrecht University has a distinct profile and forms a valuable element of the landscape of Dutch master's programmes. The profile is reflected well in the intended learning outcomes, which match the Dublin Descriptors for master's programmes and are of the required academic level. The panel finds the intended learning outcomes ambitious where the connection with the professional field is concerned, as befits the programme's profile. The skills students acquire in the programme qualify them for a range of professions where philosophical principles are applied to societal dilemmas. The panel recommends clarifying the distinction and balance between theoretical perspectives in moral and political philosophy and the application of ethics in or to a particular field or domain.

### 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*

With the help of a tutor, students choose a study path during the first weeks of their trajectory. Part-time students may divide the 60 EC over 2 years. The first two blocks of the curriculum include four required courses ('Ethical Theory & Moral Practice', 'Ethics & Public Policy', 'Ethics of Institutions', and 'Methods & Tools in Practical Philosophy', each 5 EC) and one of three electives ('Medical Ethics and Philosophy of Medicine', 'Economic Ethics', and 'Sustainable World: Humans, Animals & Nature'). In the second and third blocks, students take 20 EC more of electives either within the School of Philosophy or Religious Studies or – after approval by the board of examiners – another department, faculty, or university. A 15 EC internship, as well as an individualised course comprising a literature study (including teacher-student meetings) on a topic chosen by the student, may also be taken as an elective. In the fourth block, full-time students work on their thesis, whilst for part-time students in their first year, more electives are on offer. Appendix 2 provides an overview of the curriculum.

The panel finds the curriculum structure well presented in the overview of goals and assessment of courses. The position of each course within the curriculum and its contribution to the learning pathways is clearly and explicitly formulated in terms of both learning objectives and assessment. The description convincingly demonstrates that the learning outcomes are closely aligned with the course objectives and that the intended learning outcomes can be achieved in the programme. The groundwork is laid in the first two semesters, after which students have many choices. Coherence is maintained by assigning the same substantive focus to three elements of the curriculum: the electives, the stakeholder project in the 'Methods & Tools' course, and the thesis. In addition, the alignment between the courses is frequently discussed by the lecturers, who are also aware of each other's syllabi. The panel considers the possibility of following an individual tutorial or literature list as an elective to be an important option to bring more depth to a specialisation. The programme strives to schedule all classes on Mondays and Thursday, which makes the programme predictable and enables part-time students to combine two master's programmes or part-time employment and study.

In the panel's view, because each 10-week block contains three 5-EC courses according to faculty rules, this limits the level of depth that can be achieved and can also lead increased stress amongst students, who encounter multiple deadlines in the same period. Furthermore, differences in course size (5 EC in the MA of Philosophy in Utrecht; 7.5 EC at other faculties) makes it difficult for students to take courses from other programmes. The panel advises the programme and faculty to investigate the possibility of changing the courses in master's programmes to 7.5 EC.

The panel appreciates that practical skills are practised in a variety of ways, which is in line with the ambitious learning goals (see Standard 1), . Most lecturers have expertise and/or experience in relevant areas of application (see also 'Teaching staff', below), which reflects positively on their teaching. The 'Methods & Tools' course provides students with the necessary skills to engage with professionals; they advise stakeholders on ethical dilemmas and reflect on the process of giving advice, before concluding the course with a presentation for the stakeholders. The internship, taken by three out of four students, offers an opportunity to employ the practical skills referred to by the intended learning outcomes. During the site visit, alumni mentioned that these skill-based elements plant the required seeds for a professional career and that the programme offers a sufficient introduction to the application of ethics outside of academia.

Although the focus on the interface between theory and practice is an asset of the programme, it could be further strengthened. The panel sees unrealised potential for a programme that has the interaction between theory and practice at its core and recommends a more systematic engagement with stakeholders both in- and outside the university. A similar recommendation was made by the previous review panel, which led to involvement of alumni as guest lecturers in the programme. This is a positive step, but as the programme itself suggests, ties with alumni could be strengthened further. Moreover, the current panel recommends also focussing on other stakeholders. Given its distinctive nature as a master's programme in applied ethics, it has something to offer to stakeholders in a much broader sense, in the form of well-trained graduates equipped to reflect on ethical questions. As such, the programme should confidently and actively approach potential beneficiaries, possibly with the help of the university. The panel recommends building a database of stakeholders, utilizing the extensive networks of lecturers from the Ethics Institute of the Faculty of Humanities, other departments of the university such as UMC Utrecht, other programmes, (international) alumni, and any other public or private parties that may be interested because their core business is ethically challenging. Once such an infrastructure is implemented, the programme can build on it and develop structural collaborations for guest lectures, cases studies, internships, thesis topics, and consultancies. In the panel's view, thus further opening up the programme and systematically integrating stakeholders can help realise the programme's full potential. Given its importance, this should be a responsibility that the director of education shares with the entire Ethics Institute.

The programme aims to continue its endeavours to diversify the curriculum, including non-Western and non-canonical voices. The panel strongly 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.

### *Programme language*

The programme's view is that academic research is an international playing field, and the field of applied ethics is no exception. Within this international context, English is the language of communication. The programme's teaching staff is not only strongly internationally oriented but also internationally trained. For these reasons, the programme is taught in English. This setting constitutes a natural preparation for the future careers of graduates in the Netherlands or abroad, both in- or outside of academia. The panel fully endorses this view.

### *Learning environment*

The Applied Ethics master's programme is open to all students with a bachelor's degree in philosophy, or another bachelor's degree with a suitable 30-ects minor in ethics and political philosophy. Students residing in the Netherlands may also enter the programme through a pre-master's programme (30 EC maximum) to fill any gaps in their knowledge of philosophical ethics and political philosophy. This pre-master's programme is developed on an individual basis, but the standard trajectory is the 30-ects minor 'Ethics in Modern Society') The panel verifies that this pre-master's programme brings students to the required knowledge level. All students must also complete a written assignment. The fact that the programme is open to students with different academic backgrounds, both from the Netherlands and abroad, helps to create a diverse student population.

As the programme rightly notes in its SWOT analysis, a drawback of the diversity of disciplinary and interdisciplinary backgrounds of students is that deficiencies may hamper students' progress within a course. For instance, students do not all begin at the same level regarding philosophical skills. This is a genuine point of concern. However, the panel stresses that this diversity is a double-edged sword. The exchange between students with different disciplinary backgrounds is also enriching and an asset of the programme. After all, the field of applied ethics has a wide scope. Students find the diversity inspiring, and peer-to-peer learning may contribute to realising the intended learning outcomes. As such, the panel suggests formalising peer-to-peer learning. Such formalisation can help students without philosophical backgrounds better appreciate their own advantages, by describing a case from their own practice or discipline, for instance.

### *Feasibility*

Students in the Applied Ethics master's programme receive much guidance. In addition to the 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. In addition, the programme's philosophical skills website provides information on academic skills specific for philosophy, such as reading, writing, sources and references, and presenting. The site, designed for philosophy students at all levels, 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.

Only about half of students graduate within the nominal 1 year. This may be partly explained by the fact that many students simultaneously pursue a second degree. The panel does not see the extended study duration as reflecting problems in that the teaching-learning environment. However, it remains important to monitor the causes of these issues and make changes where necessary.

Social safety and inclusion are on the policy agenda in both the Faculty of Humanities and Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies. A contact person for student social safety exists (in addition to one for lecturers), and the panel was informed that an action plan has been written about diversity, social safety, and inclusion. The panel observes that not all students are aware of the action plan and 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.

While the curriculum enables students to realise the intended learning outcomes, it is intensive, and students experience a high workload. In the panel's view, this can be reduced in several ways, firstly by replacing demanding large-scale assessments by a greater number of lighter assessments wherever possible (see Standard 3). Students also feel challenged by the overlap between the period assigned to thesis writing and the internship: students must already choose a thesis topic while still completing their internship. The panel recommends adapting the curriculum to avoid this. Another way to reduce the workload for students is by offering them more support in finding internships. Particularly for international students who do not speak Dutch, this can be difficult. If the panel's recommendations to build structural collaborations with stakeholders are implemented, it should be possible to make a map of organisations in the Netherlands that offer internships. Finally, the panel suggests building in shared opportunities for thesis support in the form of a peer group, so students can help each other during the writing process.

#### *Teaching staff*

The panel observes that the lecturers are knowledgeable, enthusiastic, and engaged. The proportion of faculty with doctoral degrees is 95%. 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. Lecturers are often willing to do more than what is expected of them, by contributing to the study association or engaging in other extracurricular activities, for example. Students highly appreciate this attitude and commitment. The panel learned that the teaching staff in the Applied Ethics master's programme possess ample experience in the application of ethics, for instance through involvement in policy advising on national and European levels. The panel considers this source of expertise an important asset of the programme.

Lecturers 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 to development and consultation ('scatter time'), and research time for university lecturers and senior university lecturers has been increased to 40% and 50% of total 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 will 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 implement additional measures over and above the first steps that have already been taken.

## Considerations

The panel believes that the curriculum, learning environment, and quality of the teaching staff enable students in the Applied Ethics master's programme to achieve the intended learning outcomes. The programme is feasible for both full- and part-time students and leaves ample freedom for students to pursue their own interests. The panel advises the programme and faculty to investigate the possibility of extending the courses in master's programmes to 7.5 EC. This will lead to a more relaxed schedule, allow for more depth in the courses, and facilitate establishing connections with other faculties. The panel praises the available extracurricular support. To further reduce student workload, the panel suggests removing the overlap between the thesis trajectory and other programme elements and offering more support in finding internships.

The teaching staff is knowledgeable and experienced in the application of ethics, which is an asset of the programme. While lecturers report high workloads, the faculty endeavours to mitigate this issue. The panel supports the proposed expansion of the curriculum to include non-Western philosophy and advises that it be fully integrated rather than isolated in separate courses. In the panel's view, the programme can better engage with the variety of students' backgrounds to enhance its quality, among others by formalising peer-to-peer learning, and recommends implementing structural collaborations with stakeholders from professional fields to enrich the programme. The panel appreciates the programme's efforts to promote social safety and inclusivity and urges it to continue this work with *all* students.

## 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 Applied Ethics master's programme has a comprehensive assessment plan detailing the types of assessment used and how learning objectives and trajectories are linked to courses. In developing assessments, lecturers adhere to the 'four-eyes' principle. The panel sees this as a solid foundation for adequate assessment practices. The panel has reviewed the various assessment methods and the extent to which they cover the learning objectives. It believes that while all intended skills as specified in the learning objectives are assessed, a rather one-sided emphasis is placed on writing skills. Skills such as oral argumentation, critical listening, collaboration, and the ability to tailor one's wording to different target audiences are assessed but seem to hold a less prominent place. A reduced focus on writing and more attention to other skills would align with the intended learning objectives and help decrease the workload for lecturers and students, especially if assessments are more evenly distributed over time.

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.

The programme has put much effort into developing assessment criteria for the internship, which include elaborate rubrics. The panel finds both the assessment procedure and the rubrics sophisticated and well designed. Furthermore, the lecturers' collective reflection on proper assessment methods is a sign of quality-consciousness. The panel praises the programme for how internships are assessed.

#### *Board of examiners*

Three boards of examiners oversee the quality and integrity of the assessments of the philosophy programmes. For the Applied Ethics master's programme, this is the board of examiners for the 11 master's programmes at the Faculty of Humanities. Each domain is represented by one member on the board of examiners. The board re-evaluates the assessment plan against the intended learning outcomes with each curriculum change and critically engages with programme management about this. This occurs at least once every 4 years for each programme. The board of examiners checks whether course results show irregular patterns – such as grades that are too high or too low – and conducts a sample review of assessed final theses. It also evaluates requests for exemptions and the manner in which the elective space is filled 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 the board of examiners is aware of its role and possesses sufficient expertise. It 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 thesis trajectory 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, organizes thesis presentation sessions and peer review sessions, and highlights that assessment forms are to be completed correctly. 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. The grading of the theses is based on an integrated application of the substantive criteria. Intentionally, no weighting factors are used because the department does not want to view the final assessment as a sum of partial assessments.

Theses are assessed by two reviewers who first complete assessment forms independently before consulting to reach a final grade. To further ensure independence, varying pairs of first and second reviewers are used, and the second reviewer does not take on a supervisory role. Only the research design is approved by both reviewers. If the first and second reviewers cannot agree on a final grade, a third reviewer is engaged. Consistency in assessment is pursued by the first and second reviewers always consulting with each other and by calibration sessions where lecturers discuss the assessment of several theses together.

The panel concludes that the procedure for assessing theses is carefully constructed and that the reviewers work sufficiently independently. The panel's assessments of the theses it reviewed do not significantly differ from those of the programme assessors, although in some cases, it found the scores somewhat too high.

Hence, the panel concludes that the thesis assessment is in general well designed and solid. However, the panel has several recommendations.

The panel notes that the thesis forms do not clarify how the final score is arrived at. As a consequence, it is not sufficiently clear how different scores for theses are to be compared. The panel advises verifying that the assessment forms are always fully completed, that all sub-criteria are applied on these forms, and that it is made transparent how the sub-criteria scores translate into the final score.

The panel did not see any theses that were too long or too short in the Applied Ethics master's programme, but it did not encounter a clear policy for theses that exceed the word limit. To create a level playing field, the panel advises formulating and enforcing clear rules on this. Students who do adhere to the word limit may now be disadvantaged because their theses allow for less depth. Enforcing the word limit will also contribute to reducing the workload for lecturers and students.

Whether the final interview contributes to the final grade should be made explicit in the assessment plan. The panel recommends lecturers to set the bar high and be strict on originality, reflective depth, and relevance. In addition, they should ensure that each thesis holds a significant philosophical component and that it is sufficiently connected to the ethical case study.

#### Considerations

The panel finds that the Applied Ethics master's programme assesses the intended learning outcomes in a valid, independent, and reliable manner. It has a clear and well-balanced curriculum and assessment plan, which links the courses and assessment forms to the intended learning outcomes. The plan is updated regularly. In the development of assessment methods, lecturers employ a 'four-eyes' principle. The board of examiners is well aware of its responsibilities and has sufficient expertise. The fact that the board is multi-disciplinary and oversees multiple programmes facilitates a valuable exchange of experiences, contributing to a culture of quality. The panel finds the grading of theses in some cases a bit too generous, but not to a serious extent. The assessment standards in the Applied Ethics master's programme are consequently considered sound.

The panel does offer some recommendations. It suggests closer involvement of the board of examiners in day-to-day assessment practices, increased focus on assessing skills other than writing skills, clarification of consequences when theses exceed word limits, and explicit definition of the role of the final interview in evaluations of theses. Moreover, information about how the final mark for a thesis is derived should be provided so that a transparent method for comparing various thesis evaluations results. The existing ten-working-day guideline for test grading seems to be unrealistic. Either the practices must conform to this guideline, or the guideline needs adjustment. In the panel's view, the Applied Ethics master's programme should beware of theses in which the philosophical component is too weak or only loosely connected to the ethical case study.

#### 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 selection of theses read by the panel yields a somewhat mixed impression: the quality ranges from mediocre to good. However, all were of a satisfactory level and demonstrate that the students have realised the intended learning outcomes. It strikes the panel that in virtually all theses, the applied ethics component is stronger than the reflection component; most students make a serious effort to truly understand a field or application of ethics but struggle to add a philosophical perspective to their analysis that is both relevant and accurate and has added value.

Research conducted by the programme regarding where its graduates find employment indicates that around 30% of respondents work at universities, as either lecturers or PhD candidates. Other graduates teach ethics to professionals or work as consultants in governmental and policy contexts. Some alumni work in journalism, at various NGOs, or in banks. This diversity of employment situations fits well with the programme's profile and demonstrates that the intended learning outcomes match the demands of the labour market.

### Considerations

The theses demonstrate that students have realised the intended learning outcomes. Available information indicates that alumni find appropriate positions in a broad range of settings, indicating that the programme's intended learning outcomes match the demands of the labour market.

### Conclusion

The panel concludes that the programme meets standard 4.

### General conclusion

The panel's assessment of master's programme Applied Ethics is positive.

### Development points

1. In the intended learning outcomes, clarify the distinction and balance between a theoretical perspective of moral and political philosophy in general and the practical perspective of ethics as applied in a certain field or domain.
2. Further strengthen the curriculum by changing the courses to 7.5 EC, building a more systematic engagement with stakeholders from both in- and outside of the university, and continuing to diversify the curriculum to include non-Western and non-canonical voices. Stress the importance of a cross-pollination in the diverse student group and formalise peer-to-peer learning.
3. Reduce the workload for students by replacing large-scale assessments with a greater number of lighter assessments, separating the thesis trajectory from other programme elements, and offering more support in finding internships.
4. Translate the faculty policy for social safety and inclusion at the department's level into practice and ensure that an open conversation is held with all students about it.
5. Further improve the assessment practices by actively involving the examination committee in daily assessment activities, clarifying the procedure for theses exceeding the word limit, making the role of the final interview in the thesis grade explicit, and making clear how final scores are arrived at. Moreover, set a high bar for theses, with a focus on originality and reflective depth.

# Appendix 1. Intended learning outcomes

## Aim of the programme

1. The programme aims to provide students with specialized knowledge, insight and skills in the field of applied ethics and practical philosophy in order to seek justifiable and feasible approaches to ethical and societal issues in a national and global context through a balanced understanding of the ethical, political and empirical aspects of these issues.

After successful participation in this study programme, Masters of Arts in Applied Ethics will have developed the analytic, reflective, and communicative competences that are necessary for starting a career as a professional confronted with ethical issues in their chosen professional domain. Excellent students will also develop the basic knowledge and skills for starting a PhD study in (applied) ethics.

2. Exit qualifications:

### *Knowledge and insight*

The graduates:

1. have profound knowledge of and insight into general theories in the field of applied ethics, and moral and political philosophy;
2. have thorough knowledge of a specialism within the study programme, or thorough knowledge at the interface of the study programme and another field;
3. have knowledge of methods and tools in the field of applied ethics;
4. have insight in central methodological/meta-theoretical aspects of theoretical approaches in applied ethics.

### *Application of knowledge and insight*

The graduates:

5. are able to employ ethical theories to identify, analyse and understand ethical issues and to find justifiable approaches to these issues in a way that are feasible as well as meets academic standards;
6. are able to utilize the methods and tools in applied ethics in order to provide ethical expertise in different contexts (e.g. facilitate moral deliberation in specific practices, develop & formulate policy recommendations, contribute to public debates etc.);
7. are able to clarify ethical, societal and political dimensions of developments and debates in one or two chosen domains of specialization, such as with regard to the life sciences; business and the economy; sustainability; politics and public sector
8. are capable to draft a fruitful outline for a scientific (research) project in (applied) ethics.

### *Reflection*

The graduates:

9. are able to develop their own position in discussions within applied ethics regarding ethical theories, methods, tools and expertise;
10. are able to critically reflect on the role ethicists play in different academic, professional and public contexts.

### *Communication*

The graduates:

11. are able to conduct research in applied ethics and practical philosophy and to report on it in a manner that meets the general standards of the discipline;
12. are able to communicate conclusions (written and orally), as well as the underlying knowledge, grounds and considerations, to an audience composed of specialists or non-specialists;
13. are able to listen and identify & clarify & reformulate moral problems confronted by professionals and in this way to support and assist professionals;
14. are able to organize fruitful and constructive ethical deliberation in institutional and professional contexts;
15. are able to structure, evaluate and moderate public debates on ethical issues.

*Learning skills.*

The graduates:

16. are able to apply knowledge and insight in a way that demonstrates a professional approach and attitude to their work or profession;
17. are able to maintain a socially engaged yet at the same time independent and critical perspective on ethical issues, reasoning, and possible solutions, choices and policies;
18. are able to collaborate with professionals from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds in a joint project;
19. are able to meet the standards of scientific and professional integrity;
20. are capable to critically reflect on their competencies and expertise and are motivated to continually improve knowledge and skills in order to meet the changing demands in the field of applied ethics ('lifelong learners').

## Appendix 2. Programme curriculum

### Core curriculum (20 EC)

Course code	Course title	EC	Block
AEMV16001	Ethics of Institutions	5	1
AEMV16002	Ethical Theory & Moral Practice	5	1
AEMV16003	Ethics and Public Policy	5	1
AEMV16004	Methods & Tools in Practical Philosophy	5	2

### Electives (5 EC) Constrained choice

Students have to choose at least 1 of the three electives listed below.

Course code	Course title	EC	Block
AEMV16005	Medical Ethics and Philosophy of Medicine	5	2
AEMV16006	Economic Ethics	5	2
AEMV16007	Sustainable World: Humans, Animals and Nature	5	2

### Electives (20 EC)

Students can choose the other electives or from the courses listed below. 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.

Course code	Course title	EC	Block
FRRMV17004	Topics in Social and Political Philosophy (uneven years)	5	1
FRRMV16009	Topics Philosophy of Human Rights (even years)	5	1
FRRMV17005	Topics in Ethical Theory (uneven years)	5	2
FRRMV16013	Topics Moral Psychology (even years)	5	2
FRMV22002	Topics in the Ethics of Technology	5	2
AEMV16005	Medical Ethics and Philosophy of Medicine	5	2
AEMV16006	Economic Ethics	5	2
AEMV16007	Sustainable World: Humans, Animals and Nature	5	2
FRRMV16017	Digital Ethics	5	3
ECRMITT	Institutions Think Tank	5	3
AEMV17001	Tutorial I	5	3
AEMV17002	Tutorial II	5	4
AEMV22001	Internship	15	1 2 3 4
AEMV19001	Literatuurmodule	5-10	1 2 3 4

### Research Project (15 EC)

Course code	Course title	EC	Block
AEMV20001	Thesis	15	1 4

## Appendix 3. Programme of the site visit

### DAG 1 - 10 oktober 2023

08:45 – 09:00	Aankomst
09:00 – 09:15	<b>Welkom (NL)</b>
09:15 – 10:30	Vooroverleg panel (intern) inclusief optie spreekuur (10:00-10:30)
10:30 – 10:45	Pauze
10:45 – 11:30	<b>Startgesprek opleidingsmanagement (NL)</b>
11:35 – 12:15	<b>Gesprek examencommissies (alle programma's samen) (NL)</b>
12:15 – 13:00	Lunch
13:00 – 14:00	Overlegtijd panel (intern)
14:00 – 14:30	<b>Gesprek studenten Bachelor Filosofie (NL)</b>
14:35 – 15:25	<b>Themasessie Bachelor Filosofie / Gesprek met docenten (NL)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Thema 1: hoe kan het deelgebied theoretische filosofie beter opgebouwd worden?</li><li>- Thema 2: hoe kan de behandeling van niet-Westerse filosofie ons curriculum verrijken en naar een hoger reflectief en zelf-kritisch niveau brengen?</li></ul>
15:25 – 15:40	Pauze
15:40 – 16:00	Overlegtijd panel (intern)
16:00 – 16:30	<b>Gesprek studenten Master Applied Ethics (ENG)</b>
16:35 – 17:25	<b>Themasessie Master Applied Ethics / Gesprek met docenten (ENG)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- 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?</li><li>- 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?</li></ul>
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	<b>Gesprek studenten Research master Philosophy (ENG)</b>
10:20 – 11:10	<b>Themasessie Research master Philosophy / Gesprek met docenten (ENG)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Thema 1: How can we further diversify our programme while maintaining a coherent curriculum structure with sufficient depth?</li><li>- Thema 2: How do we prepare students for the full range of career opportunities post-RMA?</li></ul>
11:10 – 12:15	Overlegtijd panel
12:15 – 13:00	Lunch
13:00 – 13:30	<b>Eindgesprek opleidingsmanagement (NL)</b>
13:30 – 15:30	Opstellen bevindingen (panel intern)
15:30 – 15:45	<b>Mondelinge rapportage (NL)</b>
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

	Link naar studentenwebsite
Algemene informatie programma	Voorlichtingsbijeenkomst eerstejaars studenten
	Link naar studiekiezerswebsite
	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
	Cursus 1: Inleiding Ethiek (niveau 1)
Cursussen	Cursus 2: Continentale Filosofie (niveau 2)
	Cursus 3: Modellen van de Mens (niveau 3)
	Handleiding eindwerkstuk
Eindwerkstukken	Steekproef 15 eindwerkstukken inclusief beoordelingsformulieren
Opleidingsspecifieke 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 onderzoeksvisite
Opleidingsspecifieke informatie en voorbereiding themasessies	Link naar WiPRMaPhil website Stageverslagen en stagehandleiding