



**M Philosophy, Politics and Economics  
University of Groningen**

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Project code P2115

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## Summary

### Standard 1. Intended learning outcomes

The master's programme in Philosophy, Politics and Economics (PPE) of the University of Groningen's Faculty of Philosophy is characterised by its integrative and interdisciplinary approach, its policy orientation, and its focus on applicability. The panel applauds this clear profile and its translation to PPE's intended learning outcomes, which reflect the Dublin descriptors and demonstrate an academic master's level, while also demonstrating the professional policy orientation.

### Standard 2. Teaching-learning environment

The panel considers the curriculum of PPE to match the aims and goals of the programme. It is impressed with the logical build-up of the courses and especially appreciates the Methods of PPE course and the link to policy applications in the two Policy Seminars. According to the panel, PPE's curriculum offers students a challenging and interdisciplinary programme with a good balance between the three disciplines of philosophy, politics, and economics. The panel appreciates the interdisciplinary content and methodology, and the link between theory and (professional) practice. It noticed that teaching methods are varied and well-chosen, and aimed at activating students in class. In order to achieve more depth both in the courses and in the thesis, the panel suggests looking into options to lower the pace, such as a longer and/or more flexible thesis-writing period.

Student numbers are limited (around 25 per year) and this allows the programme to offer small-scale teaching in a close-knit learning community, which is highly appreciated by students and alumni. Students are offered thorough guidance and support, and the panel applauds the programme for achieving this. It does recommend relying less on informal communication by formalising support structures. It also recommends considering additional measures to bring students up to the same level in the various disciplines, for instance through organising pre-sessional courses before the start of the programme. The panel is impressed with staff quality and quantity. It suggests hiring staff members with an economics or political science background to further boost the expertise in methods of economics and political science, expand specialisation and networking possibilities for students in the programme, help keep all course content state of the art, and show to outsiders that the programme has strong politics and economics components.

### Standard 3. Student assessment

The panel considers student assessment in PPE to be in line with the aims of the programme. Assessment is varied and fitting, clear procedures are in place, and the programme makes sure the learning outcomes are achieved. Students are supported in their learning trajectories and receive a lot of feedback. The Board of Examiners fulfils its task in guaranteeing quality of assessment through regular course and thesis checks. The panel considers the thesis defence and the amount of feedback students receive to be strong points regarding assessment. The panel recommends adding a discursive evaluation of the thesis so that it is clear to the students how the evaluations on the subcategories underlie the final grade. It also advises ensuring that students receive sufficient feedback about their final product on these forms. The Board of Examiners could play a more proactive role in addressing issues such as this.

### Standard 4. Achieved learning outcomes

The panel studied a selection of 15 final theses of PPE and concludes that while some of the weaker theses were written in a slightly journalistic style and remained more superficial than others, they all meet the required level and reflect the interdisciplinary approach and policy focus of the programme. Alumni of the programme do well finding positions such as research consultant, charity coordinator, policy consultant, or information technology project manager. The panel encourages stronger engagement with alumni, which will provide recent graduates with a network and serves as an inspiration to students in the programme.

## Score table

The panel assesses the programme as follows:

### *Master's programme Philosophy, Politics and Economics*

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. Luc Bovens, chair	Dr. Fiona Schouten, secretary
Date: 13 June 2022	

# Introduction

## Procedure

### Assessment

On 4 and 5 April 2022, the master's programme Philosophy, Politics and Economics of the University of Groningen was assessed by an independent peer review panel as part of the cluster assessment Philosophy, Politics and Economics (PPE). The assessment cluster consisted of three programmes, offered by the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, the University of Groningen and Utrecht University. The assessment followed the procedure and standards of the NVAO Assessment Framework for the Higher Education Accreditation System of the Netherlands (September 2018). It also followed the NVAO Criteria Pertaining to Distinctive Feature of "Small-scale And Intensive Education" (January 2018).

Quality assurance agency Academion coordinated the assessment upon request of the cluster Philosophy, Politics and Economics after taking over from Qanu per August 2021. Fiona Schouten acted as coordinator and secretary, and Peter Hildering acted as secretary in the assessment for the site visit to Utrecht University. 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 12 January 2022, the NVAO approved the composition of the panel. The coordinator instructed the panel chair on his role in the site visit according to the Panel chair profile (NVAO 2016).

The programme composed a site visit schedule in consultation with the coordinator (see appendix 3). The programme selected representative partners for the various interviews. It also determined that the development dialogue would be made part of the site visit. A separate development report was made based on this dialogue.

The programme provided the coordinator with a list of graduates over the period 2018-2021. In consultation with the coordinator, the panel chair selected 15 theses. He took the diversity of final grades and examiners into account, as well as the various tracks. Prior to the site visit, the programme provided the panel with the theses and the accompanying assessment forms. It also provided the panel with the self-evaluation report and additional materials (see appendix 4).

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

### Site visit

The site visit to Groningen was held online due to Covid-19 restrictions. 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 for peer assessment within Academion. Subsequently, the secretary sent the report to the panel for feedback. After processing this feedback, the secretary sent the draft report to the Faculty 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 secretary sent it to the Faculty of Philosophy and the University of Groningen.

## Panel

The following panel members were involved in the cluster assessment:

- Prof. L. (Luc) Bovens, professor in Philosophy and core faculty in the Philosophy, Politics and Economics program at the University of North Carolina (United States) [chair site visit University of Groningen];
- Prof. J. (Joshua) Preiss, Professor of Philosophy at Minnesota State University (United States) [chair site visits Utrecht University and Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam];
- Prof. dr. J. (Jutta) Bolt, professor in Global Economic History at the University of Groningen;
- C.C. (Coen) Brummer MA MSc, director of the Mr. Hans van Mierlo Foundation, a think tank affiliated with the Dutch political party Democrats '66;
- Prof. dr. D. (Dirk) De Bièvre, professor in International Politics at Antwerp University (Belgium);
- Prof. dr. M.O. (Madeleine) Hosli, professor of International Relations at Leiden University;
- C. (Carsten) Jung MSc., senior economist at the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) in London (United Kingdom);
- Prof. R. (Roberto) Veneziani, professor in Economics at Queen Mary University of London (United Kingdom);
- N. (Natalia) Jagolski, bachelor's student Philosophy, Politics and Economics at Utrecht University [student member];
- C.H. (Clara) van Vliet BA, bachelor's student Economics and Business Economics at the University of Amsterdam [student member].

The panel assessing the master's programme Philosophy, Politics and Economics of the University of Groningen consisted of the following members:

- Prof. L. (Luc) Bovens, professor in Philosophy and core faculty in the Philosophy, Politics and Economics program at the University of North Carolina (United States) [chair];
- Prof. dr. D. (Dirk) De Bièvre, professor in International Politics at Antwerp University (Belgium);
- C. (Carsten) Jung MSc., senior economist at the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) in London (United Kingdom);
- Prof. J. (Joshua) Preiss, professor of Philosophy at Minnesota State University (United States);
- Prof. R. (Roberto) Veneziani, professor in Economics at Queen Mary University of London (United Kingdom);
- C.H. (Clara) van Vliet BA, bachelor's student Economics and Business Economics at the University of Amsterdam [student member].

## Information on the programme

Name of the institution:	University of Groningen
Status of the institution:	Publicly funded institution
Result institutional quality assurance assessment:	Positive

Programme name:	Philosophy, Politics and Economics
CROHO number:	69321
Level:	Master
Orientation:	Academic
Number of credits:	60 EC
Specialisations or tracks:	Philosophy Political Science Economics
Location:	Groningen
Mode(s) of study:	Fulltime
Language of instruction:	English
Submission date NVAO:	01-11-2022



# Description of the assessment

## 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 master's programme in Philosophy, Politics and Economics (PPE) at the University of Groningen is organised by the Faculty of Philosophy. It was first started in 2017 as the only PPE programme at the master's level in the Netherlands, and possibly also Europe. PPE at the University of Groningen starts from the assumption that the philosophical, political, and economic dimensions of today's problems are fundamentally interconnected and must be studied in a unified way. The programme distinguishes itself through its integrated and comprehensive approach, offering an interdisciplinary core programme that includes both economics and political theory alongside philosophy.

In PPE, the disciplines of economics, philosophy, and political science and theory form the intellectual foundation for exploring critical social problems, the development of social policy, and concrete policies. The one-year degree programme thus combines its academic nature with a clear orientation towards public policy. The goal of the programme is to provide students with knowledge, insight, and skills in the field of PPE that will prepare them for careers in national or international public administrations, governmental and non-governmental organisations, private businesses and banks, think tanks, and research institutions. Students learn to draw on and combine philosophical, political, and economic concepts and theories, and to apply them to concrete problems.

The panel studied this profile and discussed it with programme representatives and students. It appreciates the clear integrated approach, the policy orientation, and the aim of applicability. While the programme is organised in the Philosophy faculty, PPE aims at interdisciplinarity and a combination of all three disciplines and their methods. The panel is positive about this setup and finds the general interdisciplinary focus commendable.

The programme translated its profile and goals into a set of intended learning outcomes (ILOs, see appendix 1). The panel finds that these reflect the methodological and integrated approach well. They also match the Dublin descriptors for master's programmes and are clearly of an academic level, while also demonstrating the professional policy orientation. The programme could develop the ILOs further by providing a clearer description of the various political, philosophical and economic methods students are to acquire. All in all, however, the panel considers the intended learning outcomes well-phrased and clear.

### Considerations

The master's programme in Philosophy, Politics and Economics (PPE) of the University of Groningen is characterised by its integrative and interdisciplinary approach, its policy orientation, and its focus on applicability. The panel applauds this clear profile and its translation to PPE's intended learning outcomes, which reflect the Dublin descriptors and demonstrate an academic master's level, while also demonstrating the professional policy orientation.

### 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*

PPE consists of nine modules of 5 EC each and a 15 EC master's thesis. The History of PPE, Theories of PPE, and Methods of PPE modules are the academic foundation or 'core' modules. The first two take place in parallel during the first quarter of the programme, the third is programmed in the second quarter. These modules are followed by two policy seminars synthesising and applying the knowledge gained during the core courses. Four PPE electives and a master's thesis complete the programme. For an overview, see appendix 2.

The programme aims to teach PPE as an integrative and interdisciplinary field, to pursue theory and practice in close connection to each other, and to provide students with an understanding of the pillars on which this interdisciplinary edifice rests. These aims have been translated clearly and recognisably into the curriculum. The historical and theoretical modules form the pillars of the programme and explicitly approach PPE as an interdisciplinary field. In Theories of PPE, students learn to develop an interdisciplinary perspective on the central institutions of modern industrialised societies and draw on insights from economics, political science, and philosophy. In the History of PPE module, students learn to understand and critically reflect on the main Western philosophical and economic traditions relevant to PPE. The panel values these courses as a solid foundation in PPE, which provides students with a clear understanding of the programme and its interdisciplinary perspective.

Students then move on to the Methods of PPE module, where they gain insight into several key PPE methodologies and approaches. The course deals with such methods as decision theory, statistics, causal analysis, impact assessment methodologies, and causal modelling. The panel is impressed with the Methods module. It finds that the methods taught in this course, particularly causal graphs, decision theory, and theoretical approaches to uncertainty, are highly relevant and useful in light of the policy profile of PPE's graduates. After the previous assessment, impact analysis has been added as well, which the panel applauds. For the future, the panel suggested that, for example, the students' understanding of methods in economics could be further deepened by including sessions in which an in-depth critique of selected papers in applied economics takes place.

The students follow two Policy Seminars, where they apply the methods and theories they learn in the core modules to concrete policy issues. The two seminars vary in their setup and aims. The first policy seminar focuses on circumscribed policy problems and introduces a new problem each week, paying careful attention to the concrete and varying legal environments in which policy makers operate. Topics discussed are related to research conducted by Groningen faculty and vary across years. From 2021 onwards, they have focused more strongly on the Sustainable Development Goals, in line with university policy. The second seminar provides an in-depth look at problems around economic inequality and democracy, and at policies to address them. The first part of the module deals with economic inequality; the second part covers democracy and voting behaviour; and the third and final part requires students to write and present their own policy reports on related issues. The panel finds these policy courses important in connecting the academic and methodological strands to the professional, policy-oriented outlook of PPE. It learnt from alumni that they consider the policy seminars to have been a very good preparation for their further careers.

The panel applauds the design of PPE, whose courses are carefully programmed: they feed into and build on each other. The suggestion of the previous assessment committee to move the History course to the start of

the programme works well. The panel appreciates the interdisciplinary contents and methodologies, and the link between theory and (professional) practice. It also noticed that teaching methods (such as in-class discussion, presentations, etc.) are varied and well-chosen, and aim at activating students in class. Student numbers are limited (around 25 per year) and this allows the programme to offer small-scale teaching, which is highly appreciated by students and alumni.

PPE is organised primarily by the Faculty of Philosophy and this is noticeable in the curriculum, but the panel still finds that this 'philosophy-driven' approach strikes a good balance between the disciplines of Philosophy, Politics, and Economics. The courses have been designed, and are taught, by interdisciplinary scholars and are clearly interdisciplinary in setup, placing the interaction between disciplines and their application in real-world policy issues in the foreground. The Faculty itself has an interdisciplinary profile and this provides a good basis for PPE.

Due to the limited duration of the programme, the panel understands that it would not be feasible to aim for all students to achieve equal levels in Philosophy, Politics, or Economics. Students are offered the possibility to shape their own learning trajectories mainly through the electives. They can either select courses from a list of electives especially designed for the PPE programme and hosted in the Faculty of Philosophy, in which philosophical perspectives are combined with political and/or economic perspectives, or opt for disciplinary electives from a preselected list of master courses offered by the participating faculties. They are also allowed to follow other courses upon approval of the programme coordinators. The prior education and interest of students play a role in the options they have here. Students with an interest and background in economics can include an economics focus in their curriculum. The panel appreciates this flexibility offered to students.

The panel regrets that the programme contents are offered in a condensed time frame of only 9 months with the last ten weeks in the fourth quarter being reserved for the thesis. Notwithstanding the fact that a high level is being achieved in the courses, there could be more time for reflection and in-depth analysis. The panel also thinks that starting the thesis earlier alongside the courses could be beneficial to the final level of the students (see also standard 4). The ten-week period for thesis-writing could perhaps be expanded or made more flexible, so that students can take their time in achieving an optimal result.

Previously, the programme offered an optional internship, and the initial accreditation panel advised the programme to develop a clear vision on, and procedure for, the internship. However, the programme decided to no longer include this option in PPE. The panel understands this decision: the programme is already quite full and students don't show an interest in the internship: over the past years, only a handful of students did an internship while enrolled in the PPE programme, without receiving ECs for the internship. Those students were accommodated on an individual basis.

#### *Guidance and feasibility*

The PPE programme selects around 25 students per year. Admission criteria include a bachelor's degree in PPE, philosophy / philosophy of a specific scientific discipline, economics, political science, or similar; motivation; a grade point average of at least 7.5; a score of at least 7.5 for the bachelor's thesis; and a sufficient level of English. As a result of this procedure, the incoming students have varied backgrounds. In order to make the programme feasible for all incoming students, they are given a reading list that covers fundamental knowledge in philosophy, politics, and economics respectively. The reading list is meant to bring all students up to a minimum level of preparation in all three sub-disciplines (philosophy, politics, and economics) before the start.

Upon recommendation of the previous panel, PPE adapted both the content and the assessment of the core modules (particularly the methods course) to directly address aspects from the various disciplines. In this way, a more level playing ground is created as students acquire a solid basis in each discipline. Also, a Pub

Quiz covering materials in the reading list was introduced in the beginning of the year to offer students an opportunity to test their knowledge of the disciplines, get acquainted with the backgrounds of their peers, and get to know their fellow students and PPE staff members in an informal way.

The panel considers these adaptations sufficient, and it appreciates the stronger focus on the various disciplines in the courses. At the same time, these attempts at levelling out differences between students only apply after students have entered the programme. The panel learnt from students that they would appreciate a more active preparation method before the start of the programme, in addition to the reading list. This would take some pressure off the programme. The panel suggests considering other measures to bring students up to speed in the various disciplines, for instance through organising pre-sessional courses before the start of the programme. It seems to the panel that this would be an effective way to increase preparedness and boost the level and depth achieved by students in the programme itself.

Once in the programme, students receive a lot of guidance. One of the didactic aims of PPE is to achieve a close-knit community of students and staff. Key figures in achieving this aim are the two programme coordinators and the dedicated PPE study advisor. Students that the panel interviewed were enthusiastic about the approachability of the programme coordinators and the study advisor, who is crucial in solving issues and helping students find their way in the programme. Each student is also paired with an academic mentor chosen from the core staff of the programme. The mentor helps students shape their individual study programme, and advises on electives and the choice of a master's thesis topic and supervisor. Finally, students can turn to the University of Groningen's International Service Desk, which provides support for foreign students (e.g., concerning housing or residence permits). During the thesis process, students are guided by their supervisors and discuss their drafts with other students in small peer groups.

The community of PPE is further enhanced by the study facilities offered to students: all faculty life (lecturing, meetings, and so on) takes place in one building that houses only the Faculty of Philosophy, thereby contributing to an academic community spirit. The Faculty organises regular social events, facilitating close contact between students and teachers.

The panel concludes that the PPE programme is feasible and that guidance is up to standard. Students and alumni told the panel that they considered the level of guidance and personal contact with staff to be among the programme's strengths. They described the programme as intensive, but feasible. Around 50% of students finish the programme within one year and 80-90% graduate in less than two years. Students told the panel that this is often due to personal choices or circumstances. PPE manages to form a real and close-knit community among staff and students, allowing students to feel at home in the programme and helping them with issues they run into. The panel praises PPE for achieving this. It does, however, find that the guidance structures in place rely strongly on individuals and an informal community culture. While this works well in daily practice, it could make it harder to raise, or deal with, any issues that arise. The panel therefore recommends formalising these structures more and making clear to students and staff how and to whom to voice complaints, and thus how to deal with problems.

Due to the small scale of PPE, the programme was able to switch to online teaching relatively easily during Covid-19 lockdowns. The programme monitored student well-being especially through the PPE study advisor, who proactively contacted students. Nevertheless, the return to the live classroom was a relief to the programme and enhanced the community experience. The panel appreciates the programme's efforts and finds that quality of education and student well-being were guaranteed sufficiently.

#### *Language of instruction*

The programme name and language of instruction are English, which the panel considers an apt and logical choice considering the international academic and working fields connected to PPE. The choice for English also aligns with one of the programme's didactic aims, which is to offer an international perspective on PPE.

The programme actively aims to admit international students (currently 55 % of the student population). This diverse composition of the student body contributes to the quality achieved in the courses, since it enhances the possibilities of comparing types of policy programmes and problems within an international context.

#### *Teaching staff*

With a staff-student ratio of 1:26 for PPE core staff, or 1:19 including electives teachers, the quantity of staff members is clearly sufficient for the small-scale teaching PPE aims for. The panel finds staff quality to be excellent: it highly appreciates the strong research backgrounds of the core staff members, who all have a clearly interdisciplinary profile that is in line with PPE's aims. Although core staff members are primarily affiliated with the Philosophy faculty, they often have a background (for instance a master's degree) in one or more of the other disciplines of PPE. Staff members all hold a UTQ didactic qualification, and their command of English is up to or above standard, as the panel learnt from discussions with staff, students, and alumni.

The panel is convinced that the current staff is very well capable of teaching the interdisciplinary courses in PPE. It learnt that the PPE staff reaches out to colleagues in other participating faculties when the need arises, for instance when a student writes a strongly economics-oriented thesis. Nevertheless, the panel recommends looking into possibilities to hire PPE staff with an economics and/or political science profile. This would increase specialisation and networking possibilities for students in the programme, help keep all course content state of the art, and show to outsiders that the programme has strong politics and economics components.

#### Considerations

The panel considers the curriculum of PPE to match the aims and goals of the programme. It is impressed with the logical build-up of the courses and especially appreciates the Methods of PPE course and the link to policy applications in the two Policy Seminars. According to the panel, PPE's curriculum offers students a challenging and interdisciplinary programme with a good balance between the three disciplines of philosophy, politics, and economics. The panel appreciates the interdisciplinary content and methodology, and the link between theory and (professional) practice. It noticed that teaching methods are varied and well-chosen, and aimed at activating students in class. In order to achieve more depth both in the courses and in the thesis, the panel suggests looking into options to lower the pace, such as a longer and/or more flexible thesis-writing period.

Student numbers are limited (around 25 per year) and this allows the programme to offer small-scale teaching in a close-knit learning community, which is highly appreciated by students and alumni. Students are offered thorough guidance and support, and the panel applauds the programme for achieving this. It does recommend relying less on informal communication by formalising support structures. It also recommends considering additional measures to bring students up to the same level in the various disciplines, for instance through organising pre-sessional courses before the start of the programme. The panel is impressed with staff quality and quantity. It suggests hiring staff members with an economics or political science background to further boost the expertise in methods of economics and political science, expand specialisation and networking possibilities for students in the programme, help keep all course content state of the art, and show to outsiders that the programme has strong politics and economics components.

#### Conclusion

The panel concludes that that the programme meets standard 2.

### Standard 3. Student assessment

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

#### Findings

##### *Student assessment*

Student assessment in PPE aims at assessing the achievement of learning outcomes, while also supporting and guiding the students' learning behaviour. PPE has an assessment programme that provides an overview of the specific teaching and assessment forms in all courses of the programme, and an assessment matrix that links all courses to the intended learning outcomes. Many courses contain weekly assignments (either mandatory or voluntary ones) to ensure that students spread the workload, and to prevent peak periods at the end of the term. There are always at least two assessment components. Academic staff jointly design exams and other forms of assessment.

A variety of assessment types, such as presentations, policy reports, or papers, ensures that students are tested in various skills and methods. Assessment methods focus on giving students an opportunity to draw on interdisciplinary perspectives and to apply theoretical concepts and arguments to concrete societal or policy questions. Some assessment methods, such as group presentations, encourage students to learn from each other, although the main focus is on individual assessment. Students are provided with ample feedback to improve their conceptual, argumentative, and communication skills. They are informed about the learning outcomes, assessment form(s), criteria, and other requirements for each course in the course syllabi or additional documents made available on the digital learning environment Nestor. Where possible and appropriate, mock exams are shared, so students know what to expect from the assignment.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, assessment was not a major challenge, as many exams have a take-home-format (e.g. writing a final term paper) or could be replaced by online tests (e.g. presentations, thesis meetings).

The panel considers PPE's assessment system to be well-designed and adequate. It discussed assessment with students and alumni and learnt that they are enthusiastic about the variety and methods. Students also mentioned that staff members were keen to adapt deadlines when these turned out to overlap between courses. The panel appreciates this and suggests coordinating more between courses to avoid overlap beforehand. The panel applauds the amount of feedback the students receive, which matches the small-scale setting of the programme and is highly valued by the students themselves.

##### *Master's thesis*

Students complete the programme by writing a master's thesis (15 EC), PPE's capstone. They set up and carry out an interdisciplinary research project. Students are advised early on that writing a PPE thesis will require integration of different bodies of literature. They are instructed about the process during an event in December or January, and start looking for a topic and supervisor in January and February. The actual writing and supervision process takes place in April, May and June. Students choose a supervisor in the area of their specialisation. If the supervisor comes from outside the Faculty of Philosophy, a second supervisor from within the PPE core teaching staff is chosen to ensure that the thesis fulfils the requirement of the PPE programme. The supervisor(s) and the student sign a supervision contract with a jointly agreed schedule of 4 to 5 meetings. As part of the master's thesis course, students also discuss their drafts with other students in small peer groups.

For the assessment of the thesis, an additional examiner is assigned. Both the supervisor and the additional examiner need to formally approve the thesis. During a 45-minute defence, students respond to the critical comments of their supervisor(s) and the additional examiner. The defence creates an opportunity for

presenting the topic of research to an ‘outsider’, a situation comparable to that of a PPE alumnus working, for example, as a policy advisor and presenting research to a committee. Immediately after the defence, the supervisor(s) and additional examiner together decide the final grade for the thesis, which they have assessed independently, with the help of the thesis assessment form.

The panel appreciates the setup and procedure of the thesis, which is described extensively in the thesis manual. It is positive about the clearly defined role of the second reader and about the thesis defence. However, when the panel studied a selection of theses and their assessment forms, it noticed that these forms did not always contain much feedback. It recommends ensuring that all assessors provide clear substantiation of the assessment on the thesis forms, so that students do not just receive feedback during the thesis process, but also afterwards on the final product.

Moreover, the panel noticed that the criteria on the assessment forms do not clearly add up to a particular grade. This leads to unclarity and possibly even to overly generous marking. In the self-evaluation, the programme points out that the grade distribution in PPE is upwardly skewed, and the panel also noticed this in the theses it read. Though the high grades may partly be explained by the fact that the programme selects talented students, the panel also feels that the room for interpretation on the thesis assessment form may be partly to blame. The panel recommends adding a discursive evaluation of the thesis so that it is clear to the students how the evaluations on the subcategories underlie the final grade.

#### *Board of Examiners*

PPE falls under a faculty-wide Board of Examiners which is composed of four senior Philosophy staff members and one external member. It meets at least once a month to assess whether the intended learning outcomes can be achieved via the assessment programme, and to monitor the quality of assessment of the courses. In line with the University’s assessment policy, the Board of Examiners evaluates the assessment quality of a number of randomly selected course units. This is done yearly on the basis of relevant documents, such as the prospectus, syllabus, exams, and grades. The Board communicates the evaluation outcomes to the teacher(s) and the programme coordinators, who may then be asked to revise the course assessment. The Board also evaluates course units if the student evaluations or discussions in the Programme Committee suggest that this is necessary. Finally, the Board of Examiners takes random sample checks of theses every year.

The panel concludes that the Board of Examiners adequately fulfils its legal tasks of guaranteeing quality of assessment in PPE. The fact that the Board is only composed of staff members from Philosophy (not Economics or Political Science) does not present it with any challenges, since its members are interdisciplinary scholars who are familiar with the programme and who can always call in the help from other departments if needed. The panel recommends not only looking at the assessment of learning objectives in courses and the final level of the thesis, but also taking a more proactive advisory role in addressing issues such as the relatively high grades given to PPE theses.

#### Considerations

The panel considers student assessment in PPE to be in line with the aims of the programme. Assessment is varied and fitting, clear procedures are in place, and the programme makes sure the learning outcomes are achieved. Students are supported in their learning trajectories and receive a lot of feedback. The Board of Examiners fulfils its task in guaranteeing quality of assessment through regular course and thesis checks. The panel considers the thesis defence and the amount of feedback students receive to be strong points regarding assessment. The panel recommends adding a discursive evaluation of the thesis so that it is clear to the students how the evaluations on the subcategories underlie the final grade. It also advises ensuring that students receive sufficient feedback about their final product on these forms. The Board of Examiners could play a more proactive role in addressing issues such as this.

## Conclusion

The panel concludes that that the programme meets standard 3.

## Standard 4. Achieved learning outcomes

The programme demonstrates that the intended learning outcomes are achieved.

## Findings

The panel studied a selection of 15 final theses of PPE, as well as the accompanying assessment forms. It concludes that all theses meet the required level and reflect the interdisciplinary approach and policy focus of the programme. According to the panel, some of the weaker theses were written in a slightly journalistic style and remained more superficial than others. The panel points out that both in academic writing and in policy reports, in-depth analysis and focus are required. It hopes that more time for and flexibility in thesis-writing (see standard 2) will allow all students to attain such focus.

Alumni of the programme do well finding positions such as PhD researcher, research consultant, charity coordinator, energy transition consultant, policy consultant (at various levels, from municipal to international), or information technology project manager. Alumni looking back on the programme told the panel it prepared them very well for their professional careers. However, structural data are not yet known, as PPE is planning to improve its contacts with alumni and engage them in the programme, for instance as guest speakers. The panel encourages this development, which will provide recent graduates with a network and serve as an inspiration to students in the programme.

## Considerations

The panel studied a selection of 15 final theses of PPE and concludes that while some of the weaker theses were written in a slightly journalistic style and remained more superficial than others, they all meet the required level and reflect the interdisciplinary approach and policy focus of the programme. Alumni of the programme do well finding positions such as research consultant, charity coordinator, policy consultant, or information technology project manager. The panel encourages stronger engagement with alumni, which will provide recent graduates with a network and serves as an inspiration to students in the programme.

## Conclusion

The panel concludes that that the programme meets standard 4.

## General conclusion

The panel's assessment of the master's programme Philosophy, Politics and Economics is positive.

## Development points

1. Look into options to expand the course period and/or the three-month period for thesis-writing in order to achieve more depth in the curriculum and the master's thesis.
2. Formalise support structures.
3. Consider additional measures to bring incoming students from various backgrounds up to the same level in the various disciplines, for instance through organising pre-sessional courses before the start of the programme.
4. Hire staff members with an economics or political science background to increase specialisation and networking possibilities for students in the programme, to help keep all course content state of the art, and to show to outsiders that the programme has strong politics and economics components.
5. Adapt the thesis assessment form so that the assessment of sub-criteria leads directly to a final grade, in order to avoid generous marking. Ensure that students receive sufficient feedback on these forms. The Board of Examiners could play a more proactive role in addressing issues such as this.



# Appendix 1. Intended learning outcomes

## Knowledge and understanding

*Graduates of the PPE programme have:*

1. advanced knowledge and understanding of the key concepts and theories of the field of PPE, including rationality, utility, efficiency, equality, and fairness;
2. advanced knowledge and understanding of the main historical traditions in and predecessors of PPE including capitalism, communism, dialectical materialism, Marxism, utopian socialism, Keynesianism, and laissez-fairism;
3. advanced knowledge and understanding of the conceptual and formal methods of PPE, including statistics, decision theory, game theory, social choice theory.

## Applying knowledge and understanding

*Graduates of the PPE programme are able to:*

4. identify appropriate concepts, theories and methods for complex problem-solving tasks;
5. gather and organise information and evaluate its relevance to the case at hand;
6. interpret, analyse and make sensible use of the information;
7. process information in organised, structured argumentation;
8. use insights from PPE to analyse conceptual and normative assumptions of arguments;
9. use insights from PPE to probe political legitimacy and power in decision-making;
10. use insights from PPE to implement policies efficiently and equitably;
11. use insights from PPE in public policy making.

## Making Judgements

*Graduates of the PPE programme are able to:*

12. apply the conceptual, formal, quantitative and qualitative methods of PPE to concrete policy questions;
13. design a feasible research question that is relevant to the policy issue at hand;
14. collect background information and data necessary to address the research question;
15. design a model for the policy issue at hand, and combine and analyse data using the main PPE methods.

## Communication

*Graduates of the PPE programme are able to:*

16. report on research in an academically sound way both orally and in written form;
17. present opinions clearly to an audience of both colleagues and non-specialists;
18. practise good oral and written skills in English.

## Learning skills

*Graduates of the PPE programme have:*

19. the ability to independently integrate new knowledge and understanding from the field of PPE into existing expertise in an effort to continuous learning;
20. the ability to read and comprehend English at a level such that an academic debate in that language can be followed;
21. the ability to function in the labor market, to conduct work of academic quality within the appropriate working environment and to function in a group in a hierarchical and subject-related work environment;
22. the ability to plan and implement activities independently, to learn effectively, to organize the time available and to keep deadlines.

## Attitudes

*Graduates of the PPE programme:*

23. are critical, independent, creative, pro-active and resourceful;

24. are able to work together in multi-disciplinary and multi-cultural settings;
25. are able to receive feedback;
26. have an academic attitude that demonstrates academic integrity.

## Appendix 2. Programme curriculum

	1 <sup>st</sup> Quarter	2 <sup>nd</sup> Quarter	3 <sup>rd</sup> Quarter	4 <sup>th</sup> Quarter
<b>Core Modules (25 ECTS)</b>	Theories of PPE (5 ECTS)	Methods of PPE (5 ECTS)		
	History of PPE (5 ECTS)	PPE Policy Seminar 1 (5 ECTS)	PPE Policy Seminar 2 (5 ECTS)	
<b>Electives (20 ECTS)</b>	Elective 1 (5 ECTS)	Elective 2 (5 ECTS)	Elective 3, Elective 4 (5 ECTS each)	
<b>Thesis (15 ECTS)</b>				Master's thesis course and thesis (15 ECTS)

## Appendix 3. Programme of the site visit

<b>Monday 4 April 2022</b>	
14.00-15.30	Start and preparation panel
15.30-16.15	Welcoming and interview with those responsible for content and form
16.15-16.30	Break
16.30-17.15	Students and alumni
17.15-17.30	Break
17.30-18.15	Core staff members

<b>Tuesday 5 April 2022</b>	
14.00-14.30	Board of Examiners
14.30-15.00	Deliberation (panel)
15.00-15.45	Interview programme management & dean
15.45-17.15	Additional research, formulating preliminary conclusions (panel)
17.15-17.30	Presentation preliminary findings
17.30-18.15	Development Dialogue

## Appendix 4. Materials

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

- Self-evaluation report
- Domain specific reference framework (2016; updated 2021)
- Programme learning outcomes
- Assessment matrix
- Admission and selection criteria
- Quantitative data of the teaching-learning environment
- Reading list
- Teaching team
- Teaching and examination regulations
- PPE Assessment programme
- PPE Master's thesis protocol, supervision contract, and assessment form
- Example of support document: Notes on the assignments (from History of PPE, 2021)
- Assessment plan Faculty of Philosophy
- Short teacher's guide to Philosophy exams
- Overview of final projects (Master's theses)
- Results of the National Student Survey (NSE)

Making Connections. Strategic Plan University of Groningen 21-26  
OER MA PPE 2021-2022

- Course manual Policy seminar 1 2021-2022
- History of Philosophy, Politics and Economics (PPE) 2021-2022
- Prospectus PPE 2021-2022
- Syllabus Methods of PPE 2021-2022
- Syllabus policy seminar 2021-2022
- Syllabus PPE Theories 2021-2022