

Development report Philosophy masters UU

Dates: 10 and 11 October 2023

Secretary: Mariette Huisjes

Master Applied Ethics

1. Optimising philosophical (writing) skills for a diverse student body

In order to achieve theoretical depth in ethics and political philosophy, a high level of philosophical skill is needed, among which philosophical writing skills are especially prominent. At the same time, it is essential for the programme to have a diverse student body, consisting of students with a wide variety of disciplinary backgrounds. How, then, to optimize philosophical (writing) skills for a diverse student body? The programme is addressing this by sharpening entry requirements and the premaster's programme and by adapting the training of philosophical (writing) skills during the master's programme.

The panel addressed this question in its assessment report, advising the programme to diversify assessment and to provide sufficient feedback on writing from the very beginning of the programme. Peer learning within the courses should allow students with various backgrounds to learn with and from each other. It additionally suggests to guide and support students by carefully explaining them which writing skills they are learning and how they differ from non-academic writing. The panel mentions that the extracurricular support the faculty and the department offer regarding skills training, including writing skills, is excellent.

2. Further developing ties with alumni

It seems important to increase the input from 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?

The panel agrees that this is an important development from which programme and students would benefit. As mentioned in the assessment report, it recommends building a database of stakeholders, making use of the extensive networks of lecturers from the Ethics Institute, other parts of the university such as UMC Utrecht, other programmes, (international) alumni and, in general, public and private parties that may be interested because their core business is ethically challenging. Once such an infrastructure is there, the programme can build on it and develop structural collaborations for, among others, guest lectures, case studies, internships, thesis topics, and consultancy.

The panel adds that it is a good idea to organise networking events in which external stakeholders are also involved. Alumni should be invited to lectures and social events hosted at the institute. The programme could also organise a sort of 'Wetenschapswinkel' and advertise such an initiative among relevant organizations. The panel further suggests keeping placement records for internships. The alumni officer could involve the organisations that took an intern with the programme and its activities. However, the panel also advises that networking activities should be integrated into the programme, and not solely deferred to an alumni officer.

1. How can the programme further diversify while maintaining a coherent curriculum structure with sufficient depth?

In its assessment report, the panel encourages the programme to gradually integrate diversification into all of its courses and to include students as a sounding board in this. The panel suggests creating focus groups on diversification for each of the three research lines and including students in these groups. The Dutch Research School of Philosophy could provide expertise that is lacking in the own staff.

The combination of a diverse curriculum with critical voices and an analytic methodology would create a distinctive profile. In this context, it will be helpful to clarify what is meant by 'analytic'. The panel suggests discussing this internally and making sure that everybody is on board with the same definition.

2) How to prepare students for the full range of career opportunities post-RMA?

The programme would like to improve non-academic career preparation and is considering investing additional effort into facilitating opportunities for non-academic internships, perhaps even mandatory making the internship mandatory. It is also considering further broadening types of examination to target the development of more widely relevant skills.

The panel gives the option to select a few non-academic career paths and concentrate on the skill sets that are required in these paths. Public policy could be one of them, science communication another. Reflection on different career paths, practicing for job interviews etc. could be integrated into the programme. The panel also suggests to ask the students what they want by way of information for their professional career, and to encourage students to find research internships outside academia.

The programme could also make more of an effort to tell students from the start that not all of them will end up as PhD candidates, prompting them to consider other opportunities. Inviting postdocs to talk about their career trajectories could help motivating some and informing others. The professional career should be presented as a viable option and not as 'Plan B'.