

Assessment report
Limited Framework Programme Assessment

Research Master in Philosophy and Economics

Erasmus University Rotterdam

Contents of the report

1. Executive summary	2
2. Assessment process	5
3. Programme administrative information.....	7
4. Findings, considerations and assessments per standard	8
4.1 Standard 1: Intended learning outcomes	8
4.2 Standard 2: Teaching-learning environment	10
4.3 Standard 3: Student assessment.....	13
4.4 Standard 4: Achieved learning outcomes	15
5. Overview of assessments.....	16
6. Recommendations	17

1. Executive summary

In this executive summary, the panel presents the main considerations which led to the assessment of the quality of the Research Master in Philosophy and Economics programme of Erasmus University Rotterdam. The programme has been assessed according to the standards of the limited framework, as laid down in the NVAO Assessment framework for the higher education accreditation system of the Netherlands, as published on 20 December 2016 (Staatscourant nr. 69458). The NVAO Specification of additional criteria for research master programmes of May 30, 2016 has been taken into account as well.

The panel was pleased to learn that through an arrangement between the Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy and the Executive Board of Erasmus University, the financial means and staff required for the continuation and further development of the programme have been secured, with a solid long-term perspective as a result.

The panel welcomes the programme's clear and narrowly defined research focus, which is directed towards the study of analytical philosophy of economics. The panel recommends that programme management holds onto and further develops this focus. The programme's intended learning outcomes are in line with the objectives and meet the master level, as identified by the Dublin descriptors. The subdivision of the intended learning outcomes in formal aims, substantive aims and curricular aims is regarded by the panel as a strong point. The panel recommends to specify more precisely the role of the social sciences for the intended learning outcomes, and focus on economics. 'Social sciences' is too broad for what is being offered.

The detailed benchmarking national and international with other programmes is appreciated by the panel. The panel acknowledges that the programme occupies a unique position as a research programme in this domain in the Netherlands and internationally. The programme is clearly distinct from regular master programmes. The panel welcomes the intention of programme management to train students for both academic and non-academic careers.

The panel regards the organisation of the programme to be solid and to involve the stakeholders of the programme.

The intended learning outcomes of the programme are all covered in the curriculum. The panel highly appreciates the curriculum in its content, skills training and clear structure. Both philosophy and economics are addressed. The panel advises the programme to consider introducing more macro-economic elements to strengthen the policy perspective of the programme. The coherence of the curriculum is ensured, both in discussions between the programme director and coordinator and the lecturers and through the essays in the courses of the first year, which prepare students well for the research master thesis. The panel advises the programme to clearly require students to do extra coursework if they take courses of regular master programmes.

The panel is very positive about the lecturers in the programme. They are excellent researchers and experts in their fields. The lecturers are highly skilled instructors and transfer their research knowledge and skills successfully to their working with the students.

The panel considers the admission requirements and procedures of the programme to be very selective, allowing only motivated and very good students in. The panel advises the programme to be attentive to diversity in the student population and among staff.

The panel applauds the very favourable student retention rates, which are substantially better than for most other research master programmes in the Netherlands. These retention rates are a consequence of the strict admission requirements and procedures and the intensive guidance and supervision in the programme. The panel advises the programme to keep the study guidance intensity at the current level, also if student numbers should be rising. The teaching model of the programme is the master-apprentice model, ensuring the intensity of learning processes. Through the learning, guidance and supervision processes, students are introduced to research in this domain. The panel regards the study load of the programme to be high, but doable.

Although the assessment policies of the programme are appropriate, the panel advises the programme to accelerate the pace with which improvements in the assessment quality assurance system are being implemented. In addition, the panel advises to specify and further improve the assessment plan, aligning the programme intended learning outcomes, the course goals, course contents and the examinations and assessments.

The essays as examination methods in the courses are consistent with the courses learning goals and the scoring form for the essays are transparent and up to standard. The assessment process for the research master thesis with three examiners is welcomed by the panel as leading to reliable assessments. The assessment form is, however, too concise and should be more elaborate. The panel found the introduction in 2016 to be rather late in time.

The formal position and the composition of the Examination Board are adequate. However, the panel recommends that the Examination Board should take a more independent position vis-à-vis programme management and monitor examinations, assessments and related processes more actively.

The panel assessed the course examinations to be up to standard for this research master programme. None of the theses the panel reviewed were regarded to be unsatisfactory. The panel considers the theses generally to be very good and to be in line with the grades actually given, which are high, but justified. The average grade for the theses was 8.4 in 2015 and 8.1 in 2016. The panel is impressed by the level of the theses for this research master programme. A number of theses are publishable. The research master theses cover the whole research cycle. They are well-written and well-structured, address the contents of the thesis adequately and use sources appropriately. Some of the theses address subjects that may be considered to be outside of the programme profile. The panel advises the programme to keep subjects within the programme profile.

In the panel's opinion, the programme succeeds in preparing the programme's graduates very adequately for both academic careers and non-academic careers. The panel is impressed by these results.

The panel which conducted the assessment of the Research Master in Philosophy and Economics programme of Erasmus University Rotterdam assesses this programme to meet the standards of the limited framework, as laid down in the NVAO Assessment framework for the higher education accreditation system of the Netherlands, judging the programme to be good. Therefore, the panel recommends NVAO to accredit this programme.

Rotterdam, 12 March 2018

Prof. dr. H.H.A. van den Brink
(panel chair)

drs. W. Vercouteren
(panel secretary)

2. Assessment process

The evaluation agency Certiked VBI received the request by Erasmus University Rotterdam to conduct the limited framework programme assessment process for the Research Master in Philosophy and Economics programme of this University. This objective of the programme assessment process was to assess whether the programme would conform to the standards of the limited framework, as laid down in the NVAO Assessment framework for the higher education accreditation system of the Netherlands, published on 20 December 2016 (Staatscourant nr. 69458). The NVAO Specification of additional criteria for research master programmes of 30 May 2016 has been taken into account as well.

Having conferred with management of the Erasmus University Rotterdam programme, Certiked invited candidate panel members to sit on the assessment panel. The panel members agreed to do so.

The panel composition was as follows:

- Prof. dr. H.H.A. van den Brink, Dean, University College Roosevelt, full professor of Philosophy, University College Roosevelt, full professor of Political and Social Philosophy, Utrecht University (panel chair);
- Prof. dr. ir A.W.M. Meijers, distinguished university professor, full professor of Philosophy and Ethics of Technology, Eindhoven University of Technology (panel member);
- Prof. dr. B.P de Bruin, full professor and chair in Financial Ethics, Faculty of Economics and Business, honorary professor, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Groningen (panel member);
- Dr. F. Russo, assistant professor in Philosophy of Science, Faculty of Humanities, University of Amsterdam (panel member);
- Dr. D.J. Jansma, PhD student, Groningen Institute of Educational Research, University of Groningen (student member).

On behalf of Certiked, drs. W. Vercouteren was the process coordinator and secretary in the assessment process.

All panel members and the secretary confirmed in writing to be impartial with regard to the programme to be assessed and the institution concerned and to observe the rules of confidentiality. Having obtained the authorisation by the University, Certiked requested the approval of NVAO of the proposed panel to conduct the assessment. NVAO have given their approval.

To prepare the assessment process, the process coordinator convened with management of the programme to discuss the outline of the self-assessment report, the subjects to be addressed in this report and the site visit schedule. In addition, the planning of the activities in preparation of the site visit were discussed. In the course of the process preparing for the site visit, programme management and the Certiked process coordinator regularly had contact to fine-tune the process. The activities prior to the site visit have been performed as planned. Programme management approved of the site visit schedule.

Well in advance of the site visit date, programme management sent the list of in total 23 final projects of graduates of the programme of the four most recent years. Acting on behalf of the assessment panel, the process coordinator selected 15 final projects. The grade distribution in the selection was ensured to conform to the grade distribution in the list, sent by programme management. Additional criteria have been taken into account, if these had been found to be relevant for the programme.

The panel chair and the panel members were sent the self-assessment report of the programme, including a number of appendices, relevant for the panel's understanding of the programme. In the self-assessment report, the student chapter was included. In addition, the panel members were forwarded a number of final projects of the programme graduates, these final projects being part of the selection made by the process coordinator.

A number of weeks before the site visit date, the assessment panel chair and the process coordinator met to discuss the self-assessment report provided by programme management, the procedures regarding the assessment process and the site visit schedule. In this meeting, the profile of panel chairs of NVAO was discussed as well. The panel chair was informed about the competencies, listed in the profile. Documents pertaining to a number of these competencies were presented to the panel chair. The meeting between the panel chair and the process coordinator served as the briefing for panel chairs, as meant in the NVAO profile of panel chairs.

Prior to the date of the site visit, all panel members sent in their preliminary findings, based on the self-assessment report and the final projects studied, and a number of questions to be put to the programme representatives on the day of the site visit. The panel secretary summarised this information, compiling a list of questions, which served as a starting point for the discussions with the programme representatives during the site visit.

Shortly before the site visit date, the complete panel met to go over the preliminary findings concerning the quality of the programme. During this meeting, the preliminary findings of the panel members, including those about the final projects were discussed. The procedures to be adopted during the site visit, including the questions to be put to the programme representatives on the basis of the list compiled, were discussed as well.

On 29 January 2018, the panel conducted a site visit on the Erasmus University Rotterdam campus. The site visit schedule was in accordance with the schedule as planned. In a number of separate sessions, panel members were given the opportunity to meet with Faculty Board representatives, programme management, Examination Board representatives, lecturers and final projects examiners, and students and alumni. The panel were given the opportunity to study, among other, course material, course examinations, Examination Board annual reports and Programme Committee annual reports.

In a closed session at the end of the site visit, the panel considered every one of the findings, weighed the considerations and arrived at conclusions with regard to the quality of the programme. At the end of the site visit, the panel chair presented a broad outline of the considerations and conclusions to programme representatives.

Clearly separated from the process of the programme assessment, the assessment panel members and programme representatives met to conduct the development dialogue, with the objective to discuss future developments of the programme.

The assessment draft report was finalised by the secretary, having taken into account the findings and considerations of the panel. The draft report was sent to the panel members, who studied it and made a number of changes. Thereupon, the secretary edited the final report. This report was presented to programme management to be corrected for factual inaccuracies. Programme management were given two weeks to respond. Having been corrected for these factual inaccuracies, the Certiked bureau sent the report to the University Board to accompany their request for re-accreditation of this programme.

3. Programme administrative information

Name programme in CROHO: M Philosophy (Research)
Orientation, level programme: Academic Master
Grade: MSc
Number of credits: 120 EC
Specialisations: N.A.
Location: Rotterdam
Mode of study: Full-time (language of instruction: English)
Registration in CROHO: 60128

Name of institution: Erasmus University Rotterdam
Status of institution: Government-funded University
Institution's quality assurance: Approved

4. Findings, considerations and assessments per standard

4.1 Standard 1: Intended learning outcomes

The intended learning outcomes tie in with the level and orientation of the programme; they are geared to the expectations of the professional field, the discipline, and international requirements.

Findings

The Research Master in Philosophy and Economics programme is a programme of the Faculty of Philosophy of Erasmus University Rotterdam.

In the last few years, some uncertainty has existed regarding the continuity of the programme. An agreement that was recently concluded between the Dean of the Faculty and the Executive Board of Erasmus University Rotterdam ended this uncertainty. It ensures the continuation of this programme as well as of other programmes of the Faculty of Philosophy.

The programme's objective is to educate students to study the concepts, foundations and methodology of economics from a philosophical perspective. Contrary to what the programme name may suggest, the programme does not aim to study both philosophy and economics separately but aims to study philosophy and economics in an integrated manner. The programme aims to be interdisciplinary, linking philosophy and economics. More specifically, the programme is geared towards studying analytical philosophy of economics. For the programme, four interdisciplinary themes have been chosen: methodology of economics, ethical aspects of economics, rationality and choice and the history of economic thought. Notably, the themes ethical aspects of economics and rationality and choice have been introduced in response to recent trends in this domain.

The programme objectives have been translated into a series of intended learning outcomes, which are subdivided in *formal aims*, which address general academic and research skills, *substantive aims*, which address knowledge about the research fields of philosophy and economics and especially about the four themes mentioned and *curricular aims*, which are directed at students' becoming self-directed researchers.

In a diagram drafted to that effect, programme management showed the intended learning outcomes to meet the Dublin descriptors for the master level.

Programme management conducted a desk research survey, comparing the programme to a number of other, similar programmes in this domain in the Netherlands and abroad. Programmes in the comparison notably included programmes of Bayreuth University and of London School of Economics. From this survey it may be concluded that the Rotterdam research master programme is indeed quite unique in the national and international context. It is geared towards an intensive training in self-directed research in this rather narrow research field of philosophy of economics, at the same time addressing a broad range of areas within this domain.

The research master programme understands research as central both to academic careers and to certain careers in the public and private sector. It focuses primarily on academic research, but aims to open up students' skills and knowledge to wider research outside academia as well.

Considerations

The panel was pleased to hear that the financial means and academic staff required for the continuation and further development of the programme have been secured for the years to come.

The panel welcomes the objectives of the programme, as stated by programme management. These objectives display a clear and narrowly defined research focus, which is directed towards the study of analytical philosophy of economics, including its foundational concepts. The panel advises programme management to hold onto this clear focus. The panel considers the four themes that the programme singles out within its field of interest to be convincing.

The intended learning outcomes are in line with the programme objectives. In addition, the panel considers these to be solid, well thought through and formulated in a clear and competent manner. The subdivision of the intended learning outcomes in formal aims, substantive aims and curricular aims is a strong point, and helpful in aligning all aspects of the programme in an integrated manner. The panel recommends that the role of the social sciences for the intended learning outcomes be specified more precisely, with a stronger focus on economics. 'Social sciences' seems too broad for what is being offered.

In the panel's view, the intended learning outcomes meet the master level, as identified by the Dublin descriptors.

The comparison with other programmes in this country and abroad is appreciated by the panel. The panel acknowledges that the programme occupies a unique position as a research programme in this domain both in the Netherlands and internationally. The programme is clearly distinct from regular master programmes.

The panel is positive about the aim of the programme to train students for academic as well as extra-academic research careers.

Assessment of this standard

These considerations have led the assessment panel to assess standard 1, Intended learning outcomes, to be satisfactory.

4.2 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

The responsibility for the quality of the Research Master in Philosophy and Economics programme rests with the Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy and is delegated to the Educational Director of the Faculty. A programme coordinator is in charge of programme management on a day-to-day basis. For this programme as well as for the other programmes of the Faculty, the Programme Committee, which consists of four staff members and four students, is involved in securing the quality of the programme. In addition, the Examination Board of the Faculty is responsible for ensuring the quality of examinations and assessments.

The number of students enrolling in the programme was 48 students in total in the period 2009 – 2015. This averages out at an influx of seven students per year on average. The target for the number of incoming students is about 15 students per year. Programme management is considering a joint-degree programme with the Vrije Universiteit programme. When collaborating with Vrije Universiteit, the target figure would be 20 students per year for the first five years, being raised to about 30 students per year after this period.

In a table, programme management presented the relations between the intended learning outcomes and the courses of the curriculum. The curriculum of the programme is composed of mandatory courses (52.5 EC). These consist of core courses in Philosophy and Economics, which address the themes from the programme objectives (22.5 EC), research courses in this domain (15.0 EC) and two out of three courses from the Philosophy, Politics and Economics track of the master programme in Philosophy (15.0 EC). In addition, students are to take an academic skills course (3.75 EC) and are to attend the EIPE (Erasmus Institute for Philosophy and Economics) research and PhD seminars. Students may take 22.5 EC of elective courses, offered in the research master programme, in the master in Philosophy programme or, through the Dutch Research School of Philosophy, in one or more of the research master philosophy programmes in the Netherlands. At the end of the curriculum, students write their research master thesis (30.0 EC) and submit their PhD proposal or policy report (3.75 EC).

The research components of the programme are mainly covered in the academic skills course, the EIPE research and PhD seminars and the master thesis. In the core courses, both philosophy and economics subjects are addressed. In the academic skills course, critical thinking skills, presentation skills and writing skills are being trained. The students and alumni with whom the panel met were positive about the training in academic skills, which they claimed helped them greatly in both the programme and their later careers. Of the 120.0 EC total study load of the programme, 82.5 EC are offered exclusively for research master students. Students take some regular master courses in which they are not required to do extra course work. As part of the programme's requirements, students may choose to either write a PhD-proposal directed at purely academic research or to write a policy-research report directed at high level policy research. Lecturers and the programme coordinator meet regularly to align courses and to ensure a coherent curriculum. When course contents change, the team thinks through consequences for the coherence of the curriculum.

The teaching staff consists of a rather small number of permanent staff (four staff, 3.1 fte) working in the programme and a number of visiting professors. The student-to-staff ratio in recent years varied between about 7 : 1 to 9 : 1. As part of the new agreement between Faculty and University Board, several PhD positions will continue to be available for graduates from this programme. This will strengthen the programme, the prospects of its best graduates, and the research of programme staff.

The programme is embedded in the Erasmus Institute for Philosophy and Economics (EIPE). Since its foundation in 1997, EIPE established a strong position in this field of research. In a formal sense, teaching staff is mainly based at the Chair of Theoretical Philosophy. In the most recent research assessment of 2013, this Chair obtained scores of 4.5 for quality, 4.5 for productivity, 3.5 for relevance and 4.0 for viability. All staff members come from leading research universities across the globe. All of them either have acquired the BKO-certificate for teaching, are in the process of acquiring the certificate or have been given exemptions on the grounds of extensive teaching experience. Teaching staff meet on a regular basis during so-called teaching days, discussing the programme curriculum and related subjects.

Programme management informs prospective students about the programme through a number of communication channels. The admission requirements to enter the programme are a bachelor or master degree in either Economics or Philosophy or in Philosophy, Politics and Economics or in related fields. In addition, applicants are to report an average grade of at least 8.0 for both their courses and their thesis in the previous education. Applicants should demonstrate adequate command of the English language and are requested to write a letter of intent, showing their interest and their aptitude for the programme. An admissions committee, consisting of the programme coordinator and two lecturers, check the applications. Every one of the members of this committee submits their assessment of the applications. In case of diverging assessments, candidates are interviewed. The admission committee decides on applications through deliberations.

The programme student success rates are 69 % of the students graduating within two years and 81 % of the students graduating within three years. These figures would be even more favourable, if the early leaving students would be excluded. The programme is challenging but doable, the experienced study load is 40 hours per week on average, so the students with whom the panel met explained. The number of contact hours are about 7 hours in the first year of the programme and about 3 hours in the second year. When considering the student numbers in the programme, the courses are small-scale and allow for intensive interaction between students and staff members and among students. Before and at the beginning of the programme, students are assigned a so-called buddy, a second-year student or PhD student to help them to prepare for their studies. In the so-called Tutoring Scheme, every one of the students have access to their individual tutor, who is a member of the academic staff and with whom they meet regularly. The tutors assist students in selecting electives and in designing their own curriculum. In the process to arrive at the research master thesis and the PhD proposal or policy report, students are entitled to guidance by their supervisor. This process is structured according to the so-called Milestones Scheme, which consists of six milestones, allowing students to balance the study load. The students with whom the panel met were very content with the small-scale lectures and with the guidance and supervision offered. The students are socialised into the EIPE research community, so they explained to the panel.

Considerations

The panel judges the organisation of the programme to be solid and to involve the stakeholders of the programme.

The panel inspected the table relating the intended learning outcomes of the programme to the courses and concludes that all of the intended learning outcomes are covered in a very convincing way in the curriculum. The panel highly appreciates the curriculum, which has excellent content and is very well structured. Both philosophy and economics are addressed. The essays that are scheduled in the courses of the first year help prepare students well for the research master thesis, which fosters the coherence of the curriculum. In all, the coherence of the curriculum is convincingly guarded by the programme director and the programme coordinator especially, who regularly meet about daily and more structural issues with all involved in the programme. There is remarkably strong commitment to the programme among the academic staff. The panel recommends that more macro-economic elements be added to the curriculum, in order to further strengthen the policy perspective in the programme. The panel also recommends that students who take courses of regular master programmes should be given extra challenges through for instance extra reading material and research assignments.

The panel is very positive about the lecturers in the programme. They are excellent researchers and experts in their fields. The panel is convinced that the lecturers have all the skills they need to educate students well and to transfer their research into the lectures.

The panel considers the admission requirements and procedure of the programme to be very selective and highly appropriate for this research master programme. The admission procedures are very strict, allowing only highly motivated and very good students in. The panel does recommend that management be attentive to diversity in both student population and among academic staff.

The panel compliments programme management on the student success rates, which compare favourably to other research master programmes in Philosophy in the Netherlands. The strict and well conceived admission procedures and requirements as well as the intensive guidance and supervision in the programme really pay off. The panel applauds the Tutoring Scheme for the courses and the Milestones Scheme for the research master thesis. The panel advises management to continue these well-conceived, small-scale and intensive practices, even if student numbers should rise in the future. The panel regards the teaching model of the programme to be the master-apprentice model. They ensure the intensity and quality of the learning processes in the programme. Through the learning, guidance and supervision processes, students are introduced to research in this domain. The panel regards the study load of the programme to be high, but well-balanced and doable for the highly talented students in the programme.

Assessment of this standard

These considerations have led the assessment panel to assess standard 2, Teaching-learning environment, to be good.

4.3 Standard 3: Student assessment

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

Findings

The examination and assessment rules and regulations of the programme comply with the formal assessment framework of the Faculty of Philosophy. In addition, programme management developed a new assessment plan, meant to align the examinations of the courses to the courses' learning goals and to the programme intended learning outcomes.

The Examination Board of the Faculty of Philosophy of Erasmus University Rotterdam has the authority to monitor the examination and assessment processes and to ensure the quality of the examinations and assessments, including the research master theses of this programme as well as of the other programmes of the Faculty. One of the member of the Examination Board is an external member, who is employed at the Erasmus University Rotterdam research institute for education.

Examination methods adopted in the courses include presentations, participation in class, essays and group work. Written examinations are rarely used. The dominant examination method is the essay or the paper. Programme management feels for this Research Master programme, this approach is in most cases appropriate for testing students' knowledge and insights and their engagement with core research skills.

Examiners who prepare examinations use checklists. These checklists mainly regard formal criteria. No model answers are included. Validity of judgement is, however, established by fellow examiners reviewing examinations and judgements.

To assess the essays of the students, a number of assessment criteria are adopted. These criteria are listed in the course files, which are available to the students. Students typically propose their essays, fellow students comment on these and students adjust or rework their essays. In the course assessments, these elements are taken into account.

The research master theses are assessed by three examiners: a thesis supervisor, an advisor and a third, independent examiner. Up to the year 2016, the research master theses were assessed orally by the three examiners involved. Facilitated by the chair of the examination committee, they used a number of assessment criteria and arrived at their assessment by means of oral deliberation. From 2017 onwards, the examiners document their assessment in writing in the thesis form, in which the assessment criteria are listed. The assessment criteria address, among others, clarity and relevance of the research question, argument of the thesis, style and organisation, formal academic requirements and the level of independent work on the part of the student. Originality is an assessment criterion, but will only raise the grade if it is firmly rooted in theory or research.

The quality assurance measures taken by the Examination Board include appointing examiners for the course examinations and the research master theses. The Board will start to review course examinations, but has not yet done so. The Board investigates cases of fraud or plagiarism and takes appropriate measures if fraud or plagiarism by students has been identified.

Considerations

Although the assessment policies of the programme are appropriate, the implementation of these policies lag behind. The panel recommends that the programme accelerate the pace with which improvements in the assessment quality assurance system are being implemented. The panel feels this is proceeding too slowly.

The essays as examination methods in the courses are consistent with the courses learning goals and the scoring form for the essays are transparent and up to standard. In addition, the panel is of the opinion that the essay assignments indeed prepare students appropriately for the research master theses, adding significantly to the coherence of the programme.

The assessment process for the research master thesis with three examiners is welcomed by the panel as leading to reliable assessments. The assessment form, however, really is too concise and should be more elaborate. The panel also found the introduction of this form in 2016 rather late in time, given that earlier accreditation and mid-term panels had recommended introduction.

The panel recommends that the programme complete a thorough assessment plan, by which the intended learning outcomes, the course goals and contents and the examinations and assessments are aligned. The current assessment plan is a good starting point, but needs elaboration by linking detailed assessment plans in the courses to the intended learning goals for the whole programme.

The panel regards the formal position and the composition of the Examination Board to be adequate and highlights the important role of the external member of the Erasmus University Rotterdam research institute for education. However, the panel recommends that the Examination Board take a more independent position vis-à-vis programme management and monitor assignments, assessments and student results more actively.

Assessment of this standard

The considerations have led the assessment panel to assess standard 3, Student assessment, to be satisfactory.

4.4 Standard 4: Achieved learning outcomes

The programme demonstrates that the intended learning outcomes are achieved.

Findings

The panel studied the examinations of a number of courses of the programme.

As has been noted above, the panel also reviewed a number of fifteen final projects or theses of graduates of the programme. These theses exhibited a variety of grades, ranging from satisfactory to very good.

Programme management recorded the grades for the research master theses for the last two years in order to illustrate the level achieved by the students. The average grade for the theses was 8.4 in 2015 and 8.1 in 2016. A number of theses were awarded prestigious prizes, such as the Professor Bruins Prize for the best research master student of Erasmus University.

Graduates of the programme have generous opportunities on the labour market and tend to find suitable positions rather easily. As preparation for academic or non-academic careers, students draft either their PhD proposal or policy report. About 55 % of the graduates obtain PhD positions at prestigious institutes in the Netherlands and abroad, most of them in philosophy but also in economics, politics and law. About 28 % of the graduates obtain positions with private companies and about 17 % go on to work in public service organisations, like ministries and international bodies.

Considerations

Having studied the examinations of a number of courses of the programme, the panel assessed all of these examinations to be up to standard for this research master programme.

None of the theses the panel reviewed were assessed to be unsatisfactory. The panel considers the theses generally to be very good and to be in line with the grades actually given, which on average are high for the right reasons. In two of the fifteen theses, the panel assessed grades to be slightly on the high side. But the panel is impressed by the level of the theses in this research master programme. A number of theses are publishable. The research master theses cover the whole research cycle. They are well-written and well-structured, reach a (very) high level in dealing with their subjects, and use the right sources appropriately. Some of the theses address subjects that may be considered to be outside of the programme profile. In order to guard the continued high level of theses, the panel recommends the programme to keep subjects strictly within the programme profile.

In the panel's opinion, the programme succeeds in preparing the programme's graduates for both academic and non-academic research careers on a high level. The panel is impressed by these results.

Assessment of this standard

The considerations have led the assessment panel to assess standard 4, Achieved learning outcomes, to be good.

5. Overview of assessments

Standard	Assessment
Standard 1. Intended learning outcomes	Satisfactory
Standard 2: Teaching-learning environment	Good
Standard 3: Student assessment	Satisfactory
Standard 4: Achieved learning outcomes	Good
Programme	Good

6. Recommendations

In this report, a number of suggestions and recommendations by the panel have been listed. For the sake of clarity, these have been brought together below. These panel recommendations are the following.

- To keep the narrowly defined research focus of the programme directed towards the study of analytical philosophy of economics.
- To focus more clearly on economics instead of the social sciences in the intended learning outcomes, as 'social sciences' is too broad (refers to intended learning outcome ii b.).
- To consider introducing more macro-economic elements in the curriculum, in order to further strengthen the policy perspective in the programme.
- To require students of this programme to do extra coursework in courses of regular master programmes.
- To be attentive to diversity in the student population and among staff.
- To keep the intensity of study-guidance at the current level, also in case of rising student numbers.
- To accelerate the pace of improvements in the student assessment system, with a focus on more elaborate assessment forms for final theses and a finalized assessment plan that aligns training and testing of all relevant elements of the intended learning outcomes throughout the programme.
- To ensure that the Examination Board take a more independent position vis-à-vis programme management and that it monitor the quality of examinations, assessments and related processes more actively.
- To keep subjects of the research master theses within the programme profile.