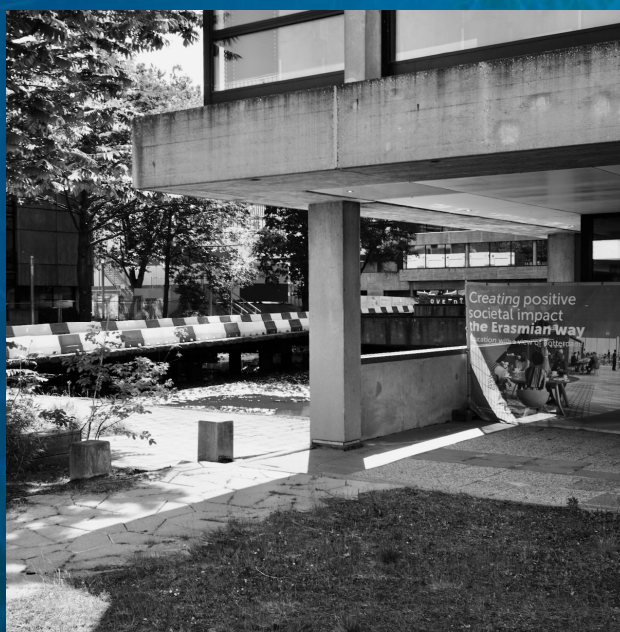


RESEARCH ASSESSMENT

ERASMUS SCHOOL OF PHILOSOPHY

2018-2024



Erasmus
School of
Philosophy

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Preface

The assessment committee visited the Erasmus School of Philosophy (ESPhil) during a period of significant institutional change, both within ESPhil and across Erasmus University Rotterdam, and in national and international contexts. ESPhil took a bold decision in replacing chair groups by a structure based on themes and centres, alongside the installation of an entirely new faculty board, including a new Dean. At the university level, a strategic reorientation is underway, while national higher-education budget cuts and ongoing geopolitical turmoil add further uncertainty. Together, these developments have had a significant impact on ESPhil.

The committee was impressed by the clear mission of, and mission-aligned changes made by, ESPhil. Both mission and changes are distinctive and aimed at carefully balancing what ESPhil is traditionally known for and what ESPhil is working towards. During our visit, we observed both the momentum and the tensions associated with ongoing change, including uncertainty among staff and PhD candidates. The energy, however, coming with the internal restructuring process permeated all of our conversations. These changes align well with the EUR strategy and can give ESPhil a distinctive profile, both within the EUR and within a national and international context. The timing of the research assessment, then, placed the committee in a position to reflect on a period in which many changes had already been implemented, while others were still emerging.

We understand that with this research assessment ESPhil seeks advice on the managerial implications of its new organizational structure. This report provides that advice, while we emphasize the *cultural change* that should go with the new phase. We recommend fostering broad, open discussions at ESPhil about key strategic concepts, such as what ‘engaged philosophy’ entails and how excellent academic research relates to interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary collaboration. We also call for maximum transparency in decision-making procedure, even when they are still in embryonic phases.

During the visit, the committee concluded that a good communication strategy of key importance. To shape ESPhil’s future, structured platforms for discussion are essential to organize dialogue in a way that supports engaged philosophy and builds a clear profile within Erasmus University, the city of Rotterdam, and beyond, nationally and internationally. We thank the staff and PhD candidates for their candid communication with us during the site visit, which enabled the committee members to gain a clear understanding of developments at ESPhil and to formulate suggestions that we hope will be useful in helping ESPhil move its ambitions forward.

On behalf of the assessment committee,

Iris van der Tuin
Chair

Executive summary

Main findings

Between 2018 and 2024, the Erasmus School of Philosophy (ESPhil) underwent substantial institutional transformation while maintaining a strong research profile. The replacement of chair-based structures with thematic research clusters marks a decisive shift towards collaborative scholarship. The committee encountered a distinctive, outward-looking faculty combining disciplinary depth with societal engagement. Research quality across the three established themes is high.

‘The Making of Modernity’ delivers internationally recognized scholarship in early modern philosophy and intellectual history. Its methodological strength and philosophical rigour – as manifested in critical editions of philosophical books and works on conceptual history – anchor its reputation. The theme is particularly strong in research on women philosophers of the early modern period and contributes to a broadening of the canon. While historically focused, it frames its work as relevant to contemporary debates. The team is small and top-heavy, which creates vulnerability, particularly given upcoming retirements.

‘Human Conditions’, the theme with the largest team, presents a broad continental-philosophical landscape structured around five emerging foci, including ecophilosophy and technology. The theme has strong national and international visibility, especially in philosophy of technology. The establishment of the Erasmus Institute for Philosophy and Technology (EIPT) sharpens its external profile and aligns with the university’s strategic domain of responsible technology. At the same time, the theme’s breadth raises questions about long-term coherence and internal balance between its subfields.

Philosophy and Economics, connected with the Erasmus Institute for Philosophy and Economics (EIPE), is a globally leading centre in its specialized field. Its academic output is outstanding, supported by strong grant acquisition and international networks. The theme has broadened its scope to normative economics and policy implications without losing methodological coherence. It demonstrates how disciplinary excellence and societal engagement can reinforce one another, though tensions around evolving performance criteria were noted.

Across themes, societal relevance is tangible and varied: advisory roles in government bodies, collaborations with ministries, public philosophy, co-creation with artists and technologists, and lectures or tailored courses for professional audiences. ESPhil clearly contributes to EUR’s impact domains, particularly ‘resilience and robustness of our society’, ‘sustainable entrepreneurship & inclusive prosperity’, ‘healthy society & accessible, affordable health care’, ‘responsible use of technologies’, and ‘just transition to

a sustainable society'. However, the concept of 'engagement' remains internally underdefined. Interpretations range from outreach to transdisciplinary co-creation. Greater conceptual clarity on what 'engagement' means would strengthen strategic alignment and performance assessment.

PhD numbers increased sharply during the review period, driven by external funding. ESPhil responded with a new Graduate Office, a PhD manual, and structured supervision frameworks. While support is appreciated, graduation timelines lag behind the nominal four-year trajectory. Differences in supervisory culture and onboarding experiences persist. The growth in PhD candidates also increases organizational complexity and demands continued investment in supervision quality and integration.

Human resources policies have matured. Recruitment aligns with thematic priorities; promotion procedures are clearer; diversity and inclusion structures are active and conceptually broad. The adoption of the national Recognition & Rewards framework allows differentiated career profiles beyond publication metrics. Yet uncertainty remains about how research excellence is defined across themes and how engagement relates to international competitiveness. Moreover, internal communication and decision-making processes require further development to reduce ambiguity and strengthen transparency.

Open science practices are exemplary in journal publishing, with near-complete open access coverage. Diamond open access initiatives, notably within EIPE, demonstrate leadership. Broader dimensions of open science such as promotion criteria, diversity of staff, canon expansion, are recognized but not yet fully integrated into a coherent framework.

Financially, ESPhil faces structural vulnerability. While income increased substantially over the review period, expenditures outpaced revenues in recent years, resulting in deficits. Dependence on external grants, demographic pressures, and national funding cuts create risk. Continued grant acquisition alone will not secure long-term stability.

Overall, ESPhil combines high research quality with strong societal orientation and institutional ambition. Its main challenges concern conceptual clarity (engagement, excellence, interdisciplinarity), financial sustainability, and the consolidation of its new thematic model.

Main recommendations

- Define and operationalize engaged philosophy. Develop a shared conceptual framework that distinguishes monodisciplinary, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary engagement, and align evaluation criteria accordingly. Position ESPhil to take intellectual leadership at university level in clarifying what meaningful academic engagement entails.
- Clarify research excellence across profiles. Formulate transparent, theme-sensitive quality indicators that safeguard international

competitiveness while accommodating diverse Recognition & Rewards profiles.

- Consolidate and future-proof the thematic model. Formalize procedures for adapting themes and subthemes, safeguard continuity in ‘The Making of Modernity’, and ensure inclusive development of EIPT within ‘Human Conditions’.
- Further strengthen PhD training and integration. Fully implement supervision frameworks, improve onboarding, invest in supervisor training, and foster a supportive, welcoming academic culture across themes.
- Improve governance transparency and participation. Structure decision-making and communication through themes and centres, and formally embed the Diversity and Inclusion Committee in policy processes.
- Deepen cross-theme collaboration. Incentivize joint research, co-teaching and co-supervision to reinforce ESPhil’s internal coherence and distinctive profile.
- Secure long-term financial sustainability. Combine continued grant acquisition with strategic development of lifelong learning and other revenue streams, while protecting core research strengths.

I. Assessment goals and method

In 2025, the executive board of Erasmus University Rotterdam commissioned a research assessment of the Erasmus School of Philosophy as part of its regular six-year quality assurance cycle. The assessments covers the 2018-2024 period. A committee of international experts in the relevant disciplines was appointed, as well as an independent secretary.

I.1. Assessment objectives and criteria

In accordance with the Strategy Evaluation Protocol 2021-2027, the assessment of ESPhil has the dual purpose of improving the quality and relevance of research, and providing accountability to the executive board, funding bodies, government and society. The outcomes of this assessment will inform quality assurance initiatives and strategic development for the faculty in the coming period.

The research assessment adhered to the aims and methods outlined in the Strategy Evaluation Protocol 2021 - 2027. Under the terms of reference issued by the executive board of the university, the committee was tasked with evaluating the quality of research conducted by ESPhil and providing recommendations for its improvement and strategic direction. The committee was instructed to base its written conclusions on qualitative considerations and arguments rather than numerical scores. Specifically, the committee was requested to evaluate the faculty's performance based on the three main assessment criteria of the Strategy Evaluation Protocol:

1. research quality: evaluating the academic rigour and innovation of the research conducted at ESPhil,
2. societal relevance: examining the contribution of the research to societal challenges and its impact beyond academia,
3. viability: assessing the resilience and future potential of the school.

Additionally, the assessment was to include four supplementary aspects outlined in the protocol that are deemed essential in the current academic context and vital for the ongoing success of research initiatives:

- open science: evaluating the school's commitment to transparency and accessibility in research practices,
- PhD policy and training: assessing the effectiveness of support systems for doctoral candidates,
- academic culture: examining the inclusivity and collaborative environment within the research community, including social safety and research integrity,
- human resources policy: evaluating policies related to talent management and diversity.

In addition to these criteria specified in the Strategy Evaluation Protocol, the board requested the committee to pay attention to the following additional questions as well as to offer its assessment and recommendations:

1. Future plans for the ESPhil research themes and their respective contribution to the impact domains of the EUR strategy,
2. ESPhil's research contribution to the EUR as an 'engaged' university.

I.2. Composition of the assessment committee

The board appointed an assessment committee (hereafter: 'committee') of six external peers:

- Prof. Iris van der Tuin, professor of Theory of Cultural Inquiry, Utrecht University (chair);
- Prof. Antoinette Baujard, professor of Economics, Université Jean Monnet, CNRS GATE Lyon Saint-Etienne;
- Prof. Gert-Jan van der Heiden, professor of Continental Philosophy, Radboud University;
- Prof. Paul Ziche, professor in the History of Philosophy, Utrecht University;
- Dr Elizabeth O'Neil, assistant professor in Philosophy and Ethics, Eindhoven University;
- Ties van Gemert, MA, MSc, PhD candidate in Philosophy of Science at Tilburg School of Humanities and Digital Sciences.

Mariette Huisjes, MA, was appointed independent secretary to the committee.

I.3. Documentation

Prior to the site visit, the committee received the Strategy Evaluation Protocol 2021-2027, the terms of reference for the evaluation, and ESPhil's self-assessment report, including the information and appendices required by the protocol.

Additional documents received by the committee included:

- a set of ESPhil policy documents, such as the professorial plan, the talent management plan, and the statement on social safety;
- the EUR strategy for 2030;
- an overview of funded projects at ESPhil;
- a set of bibliometric analyses for ESPhil;
- information on ESPhils PhD policy, such as an overview of PhD graduations, the PhD handbook, and the plans of the ESPhil Graduate Office 2.0.

I.4. Working method

An online kick-off meeting was held on 13 October 2025 to familiarize the committee members with the Strategy Evaluation Protocol and with each other. Leading up to the site visit, the committee members were requested to individually study the documentation and formulate preliminary findings and

questions. The secretary made an overview of these findings and sent a list of factual questions to ESPhil, which were duly answered.

The site visit took place on 8 and 9 December 2025. It started with an internal committee meeting. Over the course of two days, the committee spoke with representatives of ESPhil, including its management, researchers, and doctoral candidates. The visit concluded with a plenary presentation of the committee's findings by the acting chair. The programme for the site visit is included in appendix 1.

Following the site visit, the committee members provided written input for the assessment report, which was then compiled into an initial draft by the secretary. This draft was circulated among all committee members and then revised to incorporate their feedback. Subsequently, the draft assessment report on ESPhil was submitted to ESPhil for factual corrections and comments on 26 February, 2026. After incorporating these comments, in close consultation with the chair, the secretary finalized the report on 12 March 2026.

2. Introduction: Mission, structure and strategy of ESPhil

2.1. Mission

The Erasmus School of Philosophy (ESPhil) is a small but self-standing faculty within Erasmus University Rotterdam (EUR), founded in 1974 and employing around 65 persons (50 fte) in research staff. Its mission as presented in the self-evaluation report is ‘to develop thought-provoking philosophical perspectives on contemporary challenges, combining academic excellence with engaged scholarship, building on a range of philosophical approaches and seeking collaboration with other disciplines as well as with societal actors’. To realize this mission, ESPhil hosts a diverse group of philosophers, who work in different intellectual traditions. What they have in common is an outward-looking attitude, engaging with societal issues. The ESPhil brand of philosophy labels itself as ‘engaged’, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary, and public-facing.

2.2. Governance structure

Research architecture

Philosophical research at ESPhil is organized in different ‘collaborative research themes’. Three of these research themes have been longstanding. ‘The Making of Modernity’ focusses on the early Enlightenment – particularly in the Dutch Republic, with Erasmus, Descartes and Spinoza – and its relevance for contemporary challenges. ‘Human Conditions’ explores the implications of growing technological complexity on how we define our relationship with nature, culture, technology, politics, each other and ourselves. ‘Philosophy and Economics’ investigates economics as a scholarly discipline and analyzes larger-scale implications of economic thinking for concepts such as efficiency, freedom, fairness, well-being, sustainability, inequality, long-term policy making and the role of economic expertise in democracy. A fourth theme is still emerging and taking shape in relation to transdisciplinarity and societal partnerships. An earlier theme, ‘Colliding Worldviews’ analyzed fundamental collisions between scientific and societal worldviews, notably in addressing wicked problems. This theme was successful and led to several research projects. Because of its mainly collaborative character, it was decided to let the theme go as a separate category. Researchers who worked on the theme now contribute to new initiatives, such as the Erasmus Institute for Philosophy and Technology.

In the period under review – and inspired by the previous assessment committee’s recommendations –, the three research themes have replaced the former ‘chair groups’, concentrated around full professors. The idea was to overcome fragmentation, and collectively pursue a research programme along thematic lines. Each of the themes is associated with one or more research centres: the Erasmus of Rotterdam research centre for ‘The Making of

Modernity', the Erasmus Institute for Public Knowledge and the Erasmus Institute for Philosophy and Technology for 'Human Conditions', and The Erasmus Institute for Philosophy and Economics, which carries the third research theme. While ESPhil is a well-known brand for collaborations within the EUR, the centres are vehicles to connect the researchers with national and international academic partners.

Governance of the school

Research at ESPhil is governed by the Faculty Board, which consists of the Dean of ESPhil, a vice-dean of research, a vice-dean of education and a faculty director. A number of tasks are delegated to relatively autonomous offices and committees that report to the Faculty Board, partly through the vice-dean of research, and partly through regular joint meetings. The Graduate Office runs the PhD programme. The Committee for Scientific Research ('Vaste commissie wetenschapsbeoefening') provides independent advice to the Faculty Board on matters of research. Research theme coordinators advise and deliberate about research governance. Recently, a Diversity and Inclusion Committee has been installed, and a faculty diversity officer appointed. ESPhil also has a Research Ethics and Review Committee, and an open and responsible science ambassador.

The ESPhil research support team facilitates grant acquisition and project administration, provides bibliography and literature help, and ensures legal, financial, privacy and data compliance.

Strategy over the past years

In response to the previous committee's recommendations after the assessment of the 2012-2017 period, ESPhil adopted five strategic research aims:

1. To further emphasize the unity of the research conducted at ESPhil;
2. To intensify research collaborations with other faculties;
3. To explore a collaboration with the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam for a shared ReMA programme in philosophy and economics;
4. To keep the possibility of internally funded PhD positions;
5. To make sure that junior members of staff have sufficient research time.

Replacing chair groups with research themes was an important measure under this strategy. The themes allow researchers to develop their specializations, while at the same time remaining open for flexible forms of collaboration with colleagues from other topics, themes and faculties (strategies 1 and 2). The themes seem sufficiently flexible to accommodate emerging topics, to enable the development of new themes, and to allow the discontinuation of outdated ones. Another outcome of the strategy was the set-up of the new Graduate Office to strengthen PhD research, and to better support PhD candidates in their research and career (strategy 4). In addition, ESPhil took several organizational measures, such as regular faculty meetings and biannual research meetings (strategy 1). ESPhil initiated a collaboration with the VU for

a joint research master, but after a series of meetings, the VU stalled its plans in this direction. This strategy (strategy 3) was therefore discontinued.

3. Research quality, societal relevance and viability of the themes

3.1. Research theme ‘The Making of Modernity’

Research quality

With interests spanning from antiquity through the Renaissance and Early Modern periods, to the Enlightenment and its aftermath in the Modern Age, the research theme ‘The Making of Modernity’ explores how our modern intellectual universe emerges from its earlier stages, how it fits into the global intellectual perspective and how its representation may serve present-day discussions of our past as well as our own scientific and societal situation and aims.

The committee found that researchers working on this theme produce excellent work in the history of philosophy. The theme has developed a clear profile, particularly in the study of early modern philosophy and of philosophy in the Netherlands. It is impressive to see that alongside newer approaches – such as conceptual history, digital humanities, and interdisciplinary methods – the team manages to keep up the more traditional research techniques, such as producing critical editions and other philological work, involving the close, historically informed study of texts. Notable publications emerging from this work include *The Dictionary of Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Dutch Philosophers*, *The Continuum Companion to Spinoza*, *The Continuum Companion to Locke* as well as the publication of modern text editions of works by early-modern philosophers such as Descartes, Geulincx, Spinoza, Bekker, Locke, Leibniz and Bayle. This philological and editorial acumen is also used for improving our access to neglected or oppressed authors in the history of philosophy, with a particular emphasis on women philosophers. It will contribute to a broadening of the canon in early modern philosophy

The committee applauds the team’s endeavour to repair the ongoing lack of scholarly recognition for women philosophers such as Anna Maria van Schurman, Germaine de Staël and Lou Andreas Salomé. ESPhil’s ambition is to counter the shortage of scholarship on these parts of our intellectual heritage by filling the knowledge gap surrounding context and reception of female authors, and by re-establishing the proper conditions for the transmission of their ideas by professionalising the scientific presentation of the primary sources concerned. This is apt and laudable. ESPhil is particularly strong in its research on women philosophers of the early modern period. Its research also includes non-Western perspectives in studying the history of ancient philosophy. While equally laudable, it is worthwhile exploring how these activities can be further developed, for instance through national or international cooperation, guest lectures, etc. This is clearly a challenge for a small team such as ‘Making of Modernity’.

Societal relevance

The committee found that researchers in this theme combine a devotion to intellectual precision with a steady commitment to engage students and scholars beyond philosophy, as well as the larger public. For the students of the EUR – specializing mostly in disciplines such as management, economics or medicine – the historic and epistemic perspectives of the theme provide a meaningful enrichment of their expertise. Researchers within the theme regularly publish popular Dutch editions of philosophical works and communicate their scientific findings through a variety of media. Besides offering lectures for professionals at local or national philosophy events, for historical associations and schools, the team contributed to documentary films, exhibitions, and anniversaries of associations and societies. On behalf of ESPhil, researchers in this theme initiated the Erasmus of Rotterdam Research Centre in 2021, linking research on the humanistic philosopher Erasmus of Rotterdam with current debates on shared values in science and society. The committee is impressed by the roles of team members in boards such as the Council for Public Administration (‘Raad voor het Openbaar Bestuur’, an independent advisory body for the Dutch government on issues such as democratic legitimacy), as advisor to the Dutch House of Commons and as a member of the Syllabus Committee on secondary school final examinations in philosophy. In all these ways, the theme’s researchers deliver on their promise to mobilise philosophical concepts in the service of contemporary societal aims.

As presented in the self-evaluation report, ‘The Making of Modernity’ contributes to the EUR strategy for 2030, particularly the impact domain ‘resilience and robustness of our society’, by harnessing research in the history of philosophy for public engagement, and by helping to safeguard the resilience of democratic procedures in society. The committee endorses this claim.

Profile and visibility

During the site visit, the discussion focused on the theme’s profile and on effective ways to make it visible within and beyond the EUR. In the committee’s view, ‘The Making of Modernity’, is an intriguing theme title and highlights the current-day relevance of historical research. However, the title suggests a broader interdisciplinary research programme than the theme’s current historical focus on early modern philosophy, recently expanded to include the philosophy of late antiquity actually delivers. A more emphatically interdisciplinary research programme could enhance visibility by seeking collaboration with, for instance, historians and sociologists within the EUR. The team could then also take a more active role in addressing topics from the history of economic thought, in cooperation with the Erasmus Institute of Philosophy and Economics. The committee acknowledges the risk – particularly salient for a small group of researchers – of joining forces with larger groups. However, the opportunities of combining the theme’s highly specific methodological expertise with broader conceptual questions clearly outweigh the risks. Such collaborations could also lead to a more diversified

outreach strategy. At the moment, the strategy is focussed on public lectures as a route for presenting historically sound narratives to a broader public. The committee wholeheartedly encourages ESPhil to continue this line, but advises to broaden its portfolio of strategies. The activities of EIPE may serve as a source of inspiration, co-creating with artists was mentioned in the interviews during the site visit.

Viability

With 10 academic staff members divided over 6 fte, the team working on ‘The Making of Modernity’ is rather small and therefore vulnerable. It is also top-heavy in its composition, including two full professors. Now that two senior members of the team are about to retire in the next years, this forms a threat in times of budget cuts, as ESPhil is well aware. The committee fully supports continuing the theme and notes that research in the history of philosophy is a skills-intensive practice that relies on institutional continuity. The theme’s research and outreach activities have shown that it is precisely their methodologically sound approach to the history of philosophy that proves relevant for understanding and critically assessing current-day predicaments in society

It will always be a challenge to find strategies that match the team’s small size, build on its strong methodological expertise, and both build forth on the this expertise (depth) and work towards new interdisciplinary and outreach perspectives (breadth). Researchers in the theme are well equipped to face this challenge, but this presupposes that the continuity in staffing is not under threat. The committee recommends the Making of Modernity researchers to continue playing to their strengths in traditional methodology and research topics, and to fully explore the opportunities that come with including a new colleague working on ancient philosophy into the theme. At the same time, they should engage with key concepts and topics that are discussed in the other themes within ESPhil and the EUR.

3.2. Research theme ‘Human Conditions’

Research quality

With 22 staff members working on Human Conditions, this is the biggest collaborative research theme within ESPhil. The theme’s methodology includes theoretical, practical, and historical perspectives. Its focus is on continental philosophy: philosophical anthropology, pragmatism, critical theory, phenomenology, and poststructuralism, with a special interest in the philosophy of technology. The theme brings together different approaches and questions, linked by a shared research interest: the philosophical examination of human conditions. Researchers working on this theme come from diverse backgrounds; almost all of them are trained in multiple disciplines – ranging from data science or health science, to media theory – with philosophy as their intellectual home. In the period under review, the theme has clustered its wide-ranging research field into five foci: (1) ecophilosophy, (2) the future of techno-science and AI, (3) reinventing political subjectivity, (4) aesthetics and decolonization and (5) normative dimensions of self, body and health. These five foci have arisen in a bottom-

up process, in part due to the rejuvenation and expansion of the staff gathered in this theme.

The committee states that Human Conditions is a highly visible and recognizable theme within ESPhil, both nationally and internationally. The theme offers a very diverse palette of continental philosophical approaches, which seems unique to the Netherlands. The committee welcomes the clustering into the five foci, which gives a new direction to the theme, after the rejuvenation of staff and influx of fresh expertise and research interests. The multi-faceted backgrounds of researchers in the theme is a strong asset, because it enables inter- and transdisciplinary research, which is indeed what the theme has practiced in the past and aims for in the future. A compelling example is the collaboration within the Convergence partnership on health and technology between the universities of Rotterdam, Delft and Leiden, where philosophers of the ‘Human Conditions’ theme contributed to the research proposal, so that philosophical reflection is now included in all stages of the research programme.

Societal relevance

Through public philosophy books – some of which have been translated into a dozen languages –, media contributions and podcasts, and participation in ethical committees, researchers in this theme have a strong impact societal impact on professionals, artists and policymakers. This impact is further facilitated by the methodological experimentation that is strongly welcomed Human Conditions, such as performative practices of co-creation between philosophy, science, technology, art and societal partnerships. This experimentation also results in a strong local visibility, by which Human Conditions continues a longer tradition of philosophers at the EUR. More recent examples are found in alternative outputs such as film.

An important new venue for societal relevance is the recently founded Erasmus Institute for Philosophy and Technology (EIPT). This institute gathers expertise in philosophy of technology and AI, and it mainly studies philosophy from the perspective of technology. It stands out from other institutes reflecting on the relation of philosophy and technology as it does not practice philosophy of technology as an applied ethics, but rather researches the technological dimension at stake in the different foci in the theme. Its ambition is to become a globally visible research centre on philosophy and technology, to organize public events and build strategic partnerships. In doing so, it could make a substantial contribution to the EUR impact domain ‘Responsible use of technologies’. In order for this to happen, and for technology to be structurally positioned within ESPhil, the teaching of philosophical issues of technology, that all theme-members do, needs to be uplifted to research. The committee’s opinion is that this can be done, as every thematic sub-focus as well as the human condition itself is related to the issue of technology. After all, technology changes what the human condition means.

Viability

While the plurality in approaches reflects the research expertise and interests in this theme, it does give rise to some concerns regarding its coherence. Is this actually one research theme, or rather a grouping of several research interests? The committee sees that a lack of strong coherence might be a risk for the recognizability of the theme's profile. At the same time, the committee found that the theme is proactively addressing this issue, by the clustering of research into foci and by founding EIPT, which strengthens its external profile. Then again EIPT suggests that the future of technoscience and AI will take precedence within this theme over the other foci. This is also reflected by the expertise of the full professors. The committee recommends that all members of the theme be duly consulted on the further development of EIPT. In this respect, the site visit was reassuring, showing how indeed the first steps were taken in a bottom-up reflective process, and that the technology topic is framed in such a way that it concerns each of the foci. This should remain the guiding principle for all future decisions.

The development of a fourth theme within ESPhil, which is now under consideration, may affect Human Conditions. For instance, the focus on ecophilosophy might be taken up by the fourth theme, and the same goes for some of interdisciplinary collaborations or societal partnerships of Human Conditions. As a consequence, some foci, collaborations or partnerships may become superfluous within Human Conditions. The relation of Human Conditions to the potential fourth theme should therefore be a point of attention. The committee advises open conversations about this matter between ESPhil's management, research theme coordinators and staff active in both Human Conditions and for a potential fourth theme.

3.3. Research theme 'Philosophy and Economics'

Research quality

Philosophical inquiry into the methodological and normative foundations of economic theory and their implications for economic policy making have a long tradition at ESPhil and within the EUR. The research theme 'Philosophy and Economics' is connected with the Erasmus Institute of Philosophy and Economics (EIPE). Founded in 1997, it hosts one of the world's largest graduate communities in the field.

The committee notes that in Europe and beyond, EIPE continues to set an example of academic excellence in a highly specialized research field. The quality of its research is outstanding, and its excellent reputation endures today, even after a generational shift in scholarship, with an influx of young researchers joining the team. In the period under review, EIPE has attracted members with an international reputation, who considerably broadened its remit to analytic ethics and epistemology, as well as added more potential for engaged research. The EIPE community was pivotal in editing and contributing to the field-defining *Routledge Handbook of Philosophy and Economics*, which came out in 2022. Team members and alumni play leading roles in international networks such as the International Network for Economic Methodology, and the European PPE Network (for philosophy, politics and

economics), that organized the first European PPE conference in 2023. EIPe is also the home of the *Erasmus Journal for Philosophy and Economics*, one of the leading journals in the field, published under the conditions of diamond open access and offering a hands-on professionalisation opportunity for graduate students. The EIPe seminars regularly host international experts of the field. Together with the University of Amsterdam and Maastricht University, EIPe organized the Dutch Social Choice Colloquium. The committee concludes that ‘Philosophy and Economics’ definitely is a strong theme with a clear profile.

In developing new sub-themes such as ‘the philosophy of normative economics’, ‘implications for policy makers’ and ‘rationality and decision making’, next to a broader foundation in ethics and epistemology, leaders of the theme seem to have struck a good balance. The classic methodological and historical themes that EIPe’s reputation is based on continue to flourish, the theme as a whole is coherent, and at the same time, the theme expands in new directions based on the priorities of its members. The committee recommends monitoring the future suitability of the sub-themes in relation to profile and coherence of the theme.

Societal relevance

The theme witnessed an increase of societal engagement in recent years, ranging from courses on broader welfare indicators for national policy makers, collaborations with the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, panel membership at a symposium on university collaboration with the fossil industry, to co-creation of tools for digital democracy with private and public partners. The committee concludes that the theme connects well to the EUR strategy, addressing topics with great societal significance, and has enabled successful collaborative research initiatives. The Rema programme Philosophy and Economics taught by the team has a very strong reputation. Moreover, EIPe offers a favourable environment for PhD candidates, who are embedded in the academic culture of ESPhil, and draw on its community to develop their skills. EIPe’s alumni shape society in leading positions in academia, the private and the public sector.

As presented in the self-evaluation report, ‘Philosophy and Economics’ contributes to the EUR strategy for 2030, particularly to the impact domains ‘Sustainable entrepreneurship & inclusive prosperity’ and ‘Healthy society & accessible, affordable health care’ by offering opportunities for lifelong learning and engaged philosophy on inclusive prosperity, grounded in its specialized and well-reputed expertise. The committee endorses this claim.

Viability

Over the period under review, the team secured numerous competitive grants and external funding for many PhD positions, such as several European grants and grants from the Dutch funding organization NWO. EIPe’s ability to attract funding reflects its strong academic reputation and demonstrates a degree of financial stability that few institutions in the humanities or social sciences in Europe currently enjoy. As part of ESPhil’s strategy to emphasize the unity of the research conducted at ESPhil, the team has integrated more

with their colleagues from other themes. EIPe members are now performing key administrative duties within the faculty. In addition, some of the courses taught in the ReMa Philosophy and Economics have also been structurally used in the MA Philosophy Now – which is offered by ESPhil as a whole – and vice versa.

One challenge for EIPe concerns the evolving criteria for assessing the performance of staff members (see section 5.7). During the site visit, some frustration was voiced about this. It is feared that the increasing focus on societal engagement will forge a disconnect with international indicators for high-quality philosophical research, such as publications in well-regarded, highly selective philosophy journals. However, the committee knows that the verge towards societal relevance is currently a massive and pan-European trend demanded by politics and society more broadly that needs to be taken seriously and requires a strategic response. It should be noted that societal engagement comes in many forms, and not all themes within ESPhil need to do the same. EIPe seems to have found some forms of engagement that suit the researchers well and that are of great value to society. Moreover, regardless of societal trends, the proper role of a university in public debate should be based on the best possible academic research, and it should always be possible for individual researchers to concentrate on classic indicators for academic success. The relevance of first-rate research, according to the well-established criteria for research quality, is not under discussion. It should be clearly communicated to all staff members that the more flexible criteria are intended to account for more diverse types of academic performance and make it possible for individual researchers to develop their personal career path.

Another challenge for EIPe is sustaining the pace of external grant acquisition within the theme after several years of success. The past successes may have created a dependence on external funding and require some reflection on how EIPe can maintain this level of success over time, given increasing competition and changing funding criteria, or alternatively, how it can deal with decreasing external funding.

For the future, EIPe aims to consolidate its strong expertise in foundational areas of philosophy and economics and its excellent national and international reputation and network, to further expand its focused societal engagement, ranging from life-long learning initiatives for professionals to strengthening its contributions to the development of economics and other social sciences within the EUR, as well as on a national and international level. The committee wholeheartedly supports these plans. In addition, stronger connections with other (emerging) themes within ESPhil seem to offer interesting opportunities for the future. There will be some methodological obstacles to overcome, but cross-fertilization may eventually bring the research to a higher academic level.

4. PhD Policy and training

4.1. PhD programmes at ESPhil

In the period under review, the number of PhD candidates at ESPhil has risen sharply, from 4 in 2018 to 24 in 2024, with a peak of 31 candidates in 2023. The main cause of this rise is an increase in externally funded research projects. In general, the PhD candidates pursue research that is closely associated with one of the research themes. Their research is generally supervised by a team of two or three researchers, according to a training and supervision plan that is agreed upon at the start of the project. The default supervision construction consists of one relatively junior supervisor (such as an assistant professor) as daily supervisor, and a more senior supervisor, both from the same research theme. Some PhD candidates are supervised by researchers from other faculties. In 2024, ESPhil started a part-time PhD programme next to its regular PhD programme, in order to better cater to externally funded and self-funded PhD candidates who write their theses next to a career.

In addition to individual research supervision, PhD candidates at ESPhil can take courses from the Erasmus Graduate School of Social Sciences and Humanities. They can also participate in courses, summer schools, workshops, and conferences provided by the national research school in Philosophy.

Graduation rates have been lagging behind the nominal 4 years in the reporting period (see appendix 6.2). In reaction to this, ESPhil's efforts to support PhD candidates have increased significantly. As mentioned in section 2.4, a new Graduate Office now caters for the needs of the growing PhD population. It consists of the head of the Graduate Office, who is responsible for the employed PhD candidates, and a director of the newly formed part-time PhD programme. In 2023, ESPhil launched a PhD manual. This manual aims at clarifying the requirements for PhD candidates, and what they may expect in return. This is an important step that, however, needs to be further expanded because in the interviews, some PhD candidates voiced the experience of having to do with divergent expectations

4.2. Recommendations for further improvement

The committee commends ESPhil for taking careful steps to improve PhD experience at ESPhil. It encourages ESPhil to proceed on this road, further improving PhD experience and PhD productivity, and trying to keep up the task of giving a large number of researchers the opportunity to develop their philosophical skills at the highest academic level. 'It takes a village to raise a child, as the saying goes', and likewise it takes a community to train a PhD candidate. In other words, ESPhil as a whole should be involved in strengthening the doctoral training and supervision.

Now that a clear framework for effective supervision is in place, it should be fully implemented to ensure that PhD experiences do not hinge on the chance of having a supportive supervisor. The institution of the Graduate Office as the responsible office seems a very good move in this regard. It may also be valuable to have intervision meetings where supervisors can share good practices, and to encourage all supervisors to undergo training on supervision. Furthermore, all PhD candidates should know where they can find the departmental policies and resources that are already available to them, as well as where they can find information about university-level contact persons and procedures in case of social safety issues or similar types of problems. From the committee's conversation with the PhD candidates during the site visit, it sounded as the onboarding process for new PhD candidates could be improved and the access to information could be streamlined.

With regard to the physical space in which PhD candidates work, it seems that not all needs are yet met; some PhDs require a quiet space to work yet cannot count on finding one, others miss a dedicated space for video calls. Since the PhD candidates have three rooms at their disposal, there should be ways for solving this problem (e.g. by constructing some sound-proof calling booths). This is not an insignificant issue, inasmuch as it can affect whether PhDs come to campus and feel well-integrated in the ESPhil community, as well as how efficiently and well they can perform their work.

The committee heard from the PhD candidates that they are happy with the support they receive. Also, the opportunity to give tutorials or guest lectures is much appreciated. It is worth noting, however, that not all PhD candidates feel comfortable speaking up or presenting at research theme meetings, and that some PhD candidates perceive these meetings as intimidating. This should be addressed as part of the cultural change that has been initiated with opening up the internal structure of ESPhil. Meetings within ESPhil should provide a welcoming space to all members of the community to practice key philosophical skills and to learn disciplinary norms through discussion, questioning, and presentation. The different themes seem to have different cultures in this respect. It would be worthwhile for the Graduate Office to look for good practices, so that the themes can learn from each other. It shows resourcefulness that the PhD candidates have organized cross-theme monthly seminars on their own initiative. At the same time, they need a formal venue to voice their views on matters that affect them.

4.3. Part-time PhD candidates

During the site visit, the committee learned that acceptance of part-time PhD candidates is one of the ways in which ESPhil engages with local and national communities, since many such PhDs are part-time precisely because they have jobs, and thereby impact, elsewhere. It is commendable that the school is systematizing the support it supplies to such PhDs, through a dedicated member in the Graduate Office.

The committee's remarks in section 4.2 concerning the integration and well-being of PhD candidates in the school equally apply to postdoctoral candidates.

5. Viability of ESPhil as a whole

5.1. Governance

Organizational dynamics

At the time of the assessment, ESPhil has been facing major changes. For one, the governance structure has changed during the period under review. The Faculty Board has not only been renewed, but also expanded in size, so that each member now holds a single primary portfolio rather than combining multiple responsibilities. With the research themes and connected centres replacing the more fixed chair groups, ESPhil's organizational chart has also changed. Intellectually, the change implies that an academic culture of collaborative research is now being fostered at ESPhil. Within the themes and the centres, ESPhil staff and – to some extent – PhD candidates work together. The centres are clearly defined units with a limited number of members. The themes are open: all staff may participate in theme meetings, enabling exchange and movement between themes. The Board funds cross-theme exchange, for example by supporting a process of choosing and hosting guest speakers relevant to multiple themes.

While valuing the transition from the closed chair groups to the more open themes, the committee found that it also raises important issues concerning the concepts that guide the various themes, and the dynamics of defining and also changing the themes. This clearly applies to the establishment of a fourth theme, but also to the existing themes. The existing themes should not be considered as fixed forever, as the earlier theme *Colliding Worldviews* already demonstrates. (see section 2.2.) New themes, or new subthemes, could emerge from collaborations, provided such dynamics are facilitated by creating open places of internal exchanges. This has implications for arguments and discussions concerning concepts and content, but also for establishing clear procedures for managing the internal dynamics of ESPhil. It needs to be clarified for the staff and certainly also for the PhD candidates. For instance, the directors of centres could be organizing discussions on such matters, and/or the theme meetings could play a role, as vessels for a more systematic way of participatory decision making.

Communication and decision processes

In general, the communication and the decision procedures within the school need some revision, in the committee's view. There seems to be an overall need for places and procedures of organized discussion, without adding extra structures. Many decisions are now made informally. The result is that while some in ESPhil have the perception that such decisions come naturally, others are not clear on how important decisions are made, nor how they could give input on them. The committee appreciates that many members of the ESPhil community participate in the decision-making process, and it acknowledges that top-down decisions are efficient, but it also found that staff members

struggle with some unclarity as to these procedures. Extending decision-making processes and formalizing information flows through intermediate levels, such as the themes, would likely yield significant benefits. The Diversity and Inclusion committee needs a formal place in the decision-making process and it is advised that this committee is facilitated to play an active role in the process of communication to and from the Faculty Board. No staff member or PhD candidate should remain unaware of major developments within the school or of key changes affecting its direction.

5.2. Strategy

‘Engagement’, ‘excellent academic research’ and ‘interdisciplinarity’ are key concepts in ESPhil’s mission, and shape its strategy to foster an academic culture of collaborative research.

Engagement

ESPhil translates the EUR ambitions into its own register: it advances a programme of engaged philosophy, aligned with the university’s 2030 strategy to act as a civic partner within Rotterdam and beyond. However, in the opinion of the committee, this engagement strategy needs to be further specified and implemented (see also section 5.3). Currently, ESPhil is working out three so-called ‘flavours’ for engaged philosophy: communicating philosophical research with a larger public (outreach), interdisciplinary forms of engagement within academia, and transdisciplinarity and/or the co-creation of research questions with societal stakeholders. While these roles do not yet have formal status, the committee welcomes the ongoing efforts to translate societal engagement into actionable roles.

In practice, the committee found that ‘engagement’ takes different forms across contexts, with varied interpretations shaped by themes and individual scholars at ESPhil: ranging from disciplinary to inter- or transdisciplinary work, and from long-term institutional partnerships with societal stakeholders to participatory research, contract research or outreach activities. Working collectively on a clarification of the aims of and approaches to engagement will help, e.g., to value the contribution of every staff member to ESPhil’s engaged philosophy strategy. In general, the committee recommends broadly discussing the definition of engagement as well as its guidelines and values, and making sure they are understood equally across the school.

Research excellence

Research excellence is a key commitment of ESPhil, yet, as a phenomenon and as a goal it is not static but rather dynamic. Research excellence can be found in all of ESPhil’s research themes and centres, yet the definition of it is diverse within ESPhil and it is a moving target. Whereas members of EIPE explicitly highlighted the importance of classic indicators for academic success (see above in section 3.3), the committee sees in a theme like ‘Human Conditions’ and among staff identifying with a possible fourth theme that a more diverse set of criteria is embraced more and more as a measure for research excellence. The committee experienced both confidence about

pluralism and feelings of unclarity across ESPhil about the direction that the school is taking with regard to research excellence.

The definition of guidelines and values seems to form a challenge for ESPhil, in general, and when it comes to research excellence in particular. A formal debate on the contribution of excellence, alongside engagement, to the profile is recommended by the committee, so that all themes and levels within ESPhil are on board.

Interdisciplinarity

As for interdisciplinarity, the committee found that the Faculty Board has a conceptual vision: for them, interdisciplinarity means collaborating as philosophers with academics from different disciplines. This vision codefines ESPhil's identity, but there is currently no strategy for how interdisciplinarity should define the professional identity of individual staff members. The committee therefore recommends that ESPhil distinguishes between monodisciplinary (philosophical), interdisciplinary (academic) and transdisciplinary (societal) engagement and develop a shared vision on whether staff members are to specialize in one of the 'flavours' of societal engagement, or whether all staff members are to tick all boxes. The latter is not what the committee would recommend. The committee would recommend a conversation about profiles out of which a shared and actionable vision on this matter would follow for both individuals and teams (themes, centres).

ESPhil's MA programme Philosophy Now is a paradigm of interdisciplinary engagement, offering three tracks: 'philosophy of technology', 'philosophy of social change' and 'philosophy of history'. These tracks correspond with 'Human Conditions', the potential fourth theme and 'The Making of Modernity'. EIPE, as well, combining philosophy and economics, is a paradigm case of interdisciplinarity. But does this flavour work for everyone? What lessons can be drawn from EIPE, the MA programme, and other developments within the school regarding effective disciplinary, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary practice?

5.3. Combining research and education

The committee found that the combination of research and education works out well for ESPhil in many ways. Teaching is based on research interests of the staff, courses are – as was said during the site visit – 'small laboratories of thinking out new research ideas', and co-teaching leads to collaborations with other disciplines. All in all, there is a lively dynamic, where teaching influences research and vice-versa.

5.4. Contribution of ESPhil to the EUR strategy

Through education and research

ESPhil's position as a self-standing faculty has been harnessed into a deeply connected way of working within the EUR. As the smallest faculty, it naturally connects with students and researchers across all parts of the EUR. Its BA

programme Philosophy of a Specific Discipline allows every BA student of the EUR to acquire an additional BA in philosophy, next to their disciplinary BA in a total of four years. ESPhil also offers large-scale teaching in the educational programmes of Erasmus School of Economics and the Rotterdam School of Management. The MA programme Philosophy Now, the MA Societal Transitions, and the ReMa Philosophy and Economics educate the next generation of philosophers. Most will pursue careers beyond academia, in a wide range of societal roles. The committee therefore concludes that, through its contributions to EUR's educational programmes, ESPhil substantially advances all of the university's designated impact domains: 'resilience and robustness of our society'; 'sustainable entrepreneurship & inclusive prosperity', 'healthy society & accessible, affordable health care', 'responsible use of technologies', and 'just transition to a sustainable society'. Most of these goals contain a normative element, or at least require reflection. In its educational activities, ESPhil ensures that future generations of professionals bring some tools for philosophical reflection to their jobs.

Because its research is structurally embedded across the university, ESPhil staff collaborate with all EUR faculties in joint projects and initiatives – some formally institutionalized, others emerging organically – thereby integrating philosophical reflection into diverse disciplinary agendas and strengthening the university's societal impact.

Clarifying the concept of engagement

ESPhil's focus on engaged philosophy fits well with EUR's overall strategy. Moreover, philosophy is a natural instrument for clarifying the EUR's understanding of what 'engagement' can and should mean. The school has already done important work on, e.g., 'Erasmian values'. The committee therefore strongly encourages ESPhil to build on its endeavour to provide deep conceptual definitions and operational views on societal engagement and take a leading role in such conceptual debates at the EUR level. The debates should lead to sharing the same goals and consolidating a common language that can guide policy and practice across faculties. However, as stated in section 5.2., conversations *within ESPhil itself* about what 'engagement' can and should mean have only just started. In the committee's view, further developing the school's potential to contribute to these discussions at EUR level should be a priority. Questions that should be addressed include: what is engagement, what distinguishes it from academic activism, how does it relate to academic excellence, what different forms can be distinguished, how should it be achieved, who should be partners, and how should it be monitored and assessed for quality? By spearheading these highly topical debates, ESPhil would enhance its relevance and strengthen its position within EUR.

To further embed ESPhil in the EUR, a tentative suggestion the committee would like to make is for ESPhil to consider launching a pilot theme that transcends faculty boundaries, bringing together researchers from across EUR to collaborate on a strategically significant topic.

5.5. Open science

ESPhil has a highly impressive track record in publishing 100% of their journal articles in open access-formats. Also, the PhD candidates in EIPE run the diamond open access journal *Erasmus Journal for Philosophy and Economics*, which they are rightly very proud of. The committee recommends exploring whether some of these successful publication practices can be extended to cover books and edited volumes, which are notoriously difficult to publish in open access formats.

Beyond open access, ‘open’ in ‘open science’ has many dimensions. The committee suggests that ESPhil, and/or EUR at large, actively promote these dimensions as belonging together: promotion criteria, the identity of ESPhil and EUR as ‘engaged’ institutions, diversification of staff bodies and philosophical and other disciplinary canons are strategies that belong together and support each other. This can be combined fruitfully with the debates concerning key concepts such as ‘engagement’ that have been referred to in this report.

5.6. Financial viability

Currently, ESPhil is in a vulnerable financial position. Like most faculties in the social sciences and humanities, it faces budgetary pressure due to demographic decline in student numbers and policies of the previous Dutch government, aiming at reducing public spending on higher education and research and discouraging international students from studying in the Netherlands. On top of that, an important challenge arises from the considerable budget deficit that ESPhil has to deal with. Addressing this problem seems to be of great importance for safeguarding ESPhil’s viability, e.g. as concerns future hirings and appointments. Attracting more grant money is an option for financial viability, and ESPhil has taken measures to support individual and collaborative grant applications. For instance, there are now annual conversations about such strategies between each staff member and the vice-dean of research. ESPhil also incentivizes the submission of grant applications, for instance by providing ‘second-chance’ funding to applicants whose proposals received good evaluations but were not funded. These are all excellent measures.

Given that financial viability cannot come from grants alone, one option could be that ESPhil follow the route of continuing education and lifelong learning. The school has a lot to offer to professionals, and given the mature students in its programmes and public philosophy activities, ESPhil seems to already reach these audiences. In the committee’s view, it would be prudent to activate existing expertise and activities and – adopting an entrepreneurial approach – develop new initiatives in order to capitalize on the financial opportunities this form of education offers.

For the committee, it is difficult to come up with good suggestions for additional measures, given that the plans of a new government have not been fully fleshed out at the time of writing this report. Some options – such as not

filling in positions that become vacant through retirement – are clearly financially attractive but can also be problematic for the school's profile and for the quality of its research and teaching. The committee can only highlight ESPhil's financial vulnerability and urge the school, but also the EUR at large, to develop sustainable strategies for safeguarding ESPhil's continued flourishing at the heart of the EUR.

5.7. Human resources policy

Professionalization measures

The period of 2018-2024 has been marked by sustained growth; ESPhil roughly doubled in size between 2018 and 2024. After the previous research assessment, some new strategic personnel policies were put in place. Firstly, new professorial appointments now have to align with the chosen research themes. Secondly, the ESPhil talent management plan was launched in October 2023. Its aim is to clarify the criteria and standards for promotion. Later, the national Dutch framework Recognition and Rewards was added to this. Its aim is to broaden academic assessment beyond publication metrics, recognizing diverse contributions such as teaching, leadership, societal impact, and team science. Thirdly, the Tenure and Promotion Advisory Committee now supports the Dean in personnel decisions. The committee commends ESPhil for these measures, which have professionalized its talent policies and contribute to a more consistent profile of the school.

Recognition and Rewards

The new nation-wide 'Recognition and Rewards' programme marked a shift in talent policies. Each staff member can now build their own profile, based on different talents and professional aspirations. The committee commends ESPhil for coming up with four interesting profiles that staff members may choose from: education marked a shift in talent policies. Each staff member can now build their own profile, based on different talents and professional aspirations. The committee sees great potential in the profiles and recommends bringing them to wider attention within the ESPhil community and sharpening them on the theme level. This can support the cultural shift envisaged by the committee, creating space for diverse forms of academic contribution beyond publication metrics. Using the profiles on the level of the themes clarifies that individuals may still choose to do classic ways of doing research. It also stimulates team science, where different team members concentrate on different aspects of the work and together do research that is both excellent and engaged. While operationalizing the profiles at the level of research teams organized around or across the themes, the committee urges that questions of international academic competitiveness be treated with the same seriousness as questions of local impact. What options do the profiles open up? In light of these, what strategic choices can individual staff members make within their team context? The profiles should go hand in hand with quality criteria. The combination of profile plus quality criteria may then be used to structure the conversation about performance and workload.

Clarity about what indicators will be used to judge the quality of academic work and profiles is key to success. Therefore, the committee encourages

ESPhil to think creatively about ways to collectively select, justify, and communicate the quality indicators that may be relevant for each of the Recognition and Rewards profiles, and to ensure that all employees are aware of them. All researchers should find a way to organize their own career in accordance with the profile and directions of the school, while also being able to remain competitive at the international academic level.

Diversity

The committee commends ESPhil for having set up a Diversity and Inclusion Committee. In an interview with the committee members during the site visit, it became clear that they envisage different kinds of diversity, not only identity-related but also around philosophical methodology. Other categories that are often overlooked in the Netherlands, such as class, are also on the committee's radar. The committee finds this broad conceptualization of diversity commendable. Initiatives such as the faculty-wide inclusivity training day and the Gender Minority Network bear witness to the fact that inclusivity is taken seriously within ESPhil, and that the Diversity and Inclusion Committee is operating in a proactive manner. The committee's advice to the Board is to keep the Diversity and Inclusion Committee in the loop when it comes to making policy (see section 5.1) as one of the platforms for organized discussion.

5.8. Academic climate

Collaborative research

There is a great diversity in philosophical approaches present at ESPhil, and researchers using different approaches seem to respect each other, which is an achievement in itself, as well as an excellent foundation for collaborative research. The committee found, however, that it is not quite common for staff to actually cross the borders of the themes, either for scientific discussions, co-authoring, co-teaching of classes, co-supervision of PhD candidates and transmissions of professional norms. Such collaboration would strengthen ESPhil's profile and therefore deserves to be stimulated. In addition, the role of researchers who do not affiliate strongly with one of the themes should be clarified, and this vulnerable group should get ESPhil's attention.

Social safety

The committee found that ESPhil has social safety on the agenda. In 2023, the Faculty Board issued a 'social safety statement', which explicitly stresses the commitment to create a secure and inclusive working culture at ESPhil. The committee applauds the fact that active-bystander trainings have been organized, and recommends making sure that the relevant people follow these trainings. Another advice is to broaden the concept of social safety; the feeling of being intimidated in the setting of ESPhil meetings, for instance, should be included in the school's social safety strategy. Aligned with this, the committee advises to lower the threshold for reporting cases of misconduct, and offer the possibility of confidential consultation, even without submitting a formal complaint.

Academic integrity

Academic integrity is of particular relevance for ESPhil, as it aims to play an active role within the EUR to help colleagues address challenges in this domain. The committee wholeheartedly supports these plans. It is satisfied to have heard that all PhD candidates at ESPhil receive training in academic integrity.

6. Appendices

6.1. Programme for the site visit

Monday, December 8, 2025

- 11:00 Committee arrives. Word of welcome by Dean of Erasmus School of Philosophy
- 11:15 – 13:00 Internal meeting of committee to prepare the site visit. Includes lunch.
- 13:00 – 14:00 Management
Interviewees: Management team ESPhil
- 14:00 – 14:30 Reflections committee
- 14:30 – 16:30 Research quality
- 14:30 – 15:00 Research theme Making of Modernity
- 15:00 – 15:30 Research theme Philosophy and Economics
- 15:30 – 16:00 Research theme Human Conditions
- 16:00 – 16:30 Reflection on the dynamics and diversity of ESPhil research themes since 2018
- 16:30 – 16:45 Break
- 16:45 – 17:15 Reflections committee
- 17:15 – 18:00 Societal engagement and open science
- 18:00 – 18:30 Reflections committee
- 19:00 – 21:00 Informal dinner committee

Tuesday, December 9, 2025

- 8:45 Committee arrives
- 9:00 – 9:45 How to fruitfully combine research and education
- 9:45 – 10:15 Reflections committee
- 10:15 – 11:00 PhD policy
Interviewees: PhD representative and PhD candidates
- 11:00 – 11:15 Reflections committee
- 11:15 – 12:00 PhD policy
Interviewees: Director Graduate Office, Dean, Vice-dean research
- 12:00 – 12 :30 Reflections committee

12:30 – 13:30 Lunch

13:30 – 14:30 Academic culture, diversity, and personnel policy

Interviewees: current or former members of the ESPhil Diversity & Inclusion (D&I) committee

14:30 – 16:30 Committee draws shared conclusions, management team available in case of final questions or points to discuss (if possible: writing time for committee)

16:30 Presentation of first results, followed by drinks

Open to all colleagues at ESPhil

6.2. Facts and figures

Budget ESPhil over the period under review

in 1,000 Euros	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Base funding and 1st stream	3.398	4.796	4.856	5.733	4.786	6.707	7.973
Research grants (2nd stream)	298	92	350	418	622	788	658
Contract research (3rd stream)	44	146	379	365	535	636	269
Other income	146	157	15	317	351	534	212
Total income	3.886	5.192	5.601	6.833	6.293	8.665	9.113
Personnel costs	3.456	4.563	5.335	5.976	6.553	8.316	9.325
Material and other costs	497	542	434	340	862	721	627
Total expenditure	3.953	5.106	5.768	6.316	7.415	9.037	9.952

Staff overview over the period under review

	2018 # / FTE	2019 # / FTE	2020 # / FTE	2021 # / FTE	2022 # / FTE	2023 # / FTE	2024 # / FTE
Full Professor	10 / 6,4	11 / 7,6	13 / 8,8	13 / 9,6	14 / 8,5	14 / 7,9	16 / 8,2
Associate Professor	6 / 6,0	6 / 6,0	8 / 7,9	7 / 6,6	7 / 6,6	8 / 7,8	9 / 8,8
Assistant Professor	6 / 4,6	9 / 7,6	8 / 6,6	7 / 5,5	8 / 5,4	8 / 7,7	11 / 10,7
Researcher	1 / 0,8	1 / 0,4	3 / 2,3	6 / 5,3	8 / 6,4	6 / 4,4	4 / 3,8
PhD Candidate	4 / 3,7	8 / 7,2	14 / 12,9	20 / 18,9	24 / 22,1	31 / 27,4	24 / 17,2
Total staff	27 / 21,5	35 / 28,8	46 / 38,5	53 / 45,8	61 / 49,0	67 / 55,2	64 / 48,7

Academic staff per theme, as of December 2025

Making of Modernity		Human Conditions	Philosophy and Economics
Members of staff	10	22	13
FTE	6	17,4	10,7
Full professor	3	4	3,9
FTE (including endowed professors)			
Associate professors FTE	0	5	3,8
Assistant Professors FTE	1,7	3,8	3
Postdoctoral researchers FTE	1,3	4,6	0
PhD candidates	8	33	22

PhD graduations from 2018 onwards

Employed PhD candidates and scholarship-funded PhD candidates

		Cumulative PhD defences										
Starting year	PhD trajectories started	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	Not yet finished	
2018	5					-	1	2	3	4	1	
2019	9					-		3	5	7	2	
2020	6						-	-		2	4	
2021	8							-		1	7	
2022	7									1	6	
2023	2										2	
2024	5										5	
Total	42	-	-	-	-	-	1	5	8	15	27	

The table shows the cumulative PhD graduations per starting year of employed PhD candidates. The shaded area indicates a four-year trajectory. Of the 42 trajectories started, one was completed in 2023, five were completed in 2024, eight were completed in 2025, and a total of fifteen will be completed in 2026 (theses approved and defences scheduled). A total of 27 theses are yet to be completed.

Externally and self-funded PhD candidates

		Cumulative PhD defences											
Starting year	PhD trajectories started	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	Not yet finished	Discontinued	
2014	6	-	1	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	-	1	
2015	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
2016	5	1	2	2	2	2	2	3	3	3	1	1	
2017	9		1	2	2	2	2	3	3	3	1	5	
2018	2					-	-	-	-	-		2	
2019	7					2	2	3	3	3	2	2	
2020	14				3		4	5	6	7	3	4	
2021	7								1	1	2	4	
2022	5						1			1	2	2	
2023	7								-		5	2	
2024	7									1	5	1	
Total	69	1	4	9	12	11	16	19	21	24	21	24	

The table shows the cumulative PhD graduations per starting year of externally and self-funded PhD candidates. Of the 69 trajectories started, 19 were completed in 2024. By 2026 that total will be 24 completions (theses approved and defences scheduled). A total of 21 theses are not yet finished, and 24 projects have been discontinued.