#### B3 Curricula of Philosophy, BA and MA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the curricula, level</th>
<th>Philosophy BA, Philosophy MA</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Structural unit responsible for carrying out the curriculum</td>
<td>Faculty of Philosophy, Institute of Philosophy and Semiotics. Chairs of practical philosophy, theoretical philosophy, history of philosophy and philosophy of science.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The main compiler of the self-assessment of the curriculum; programme director of the curriculum</td>
<td>Kadri Simm, associate professor of practical philosophy and programme director, <a href="mailto:kadri.simm@ut.ee">kadri.simm@ut.ee</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Short description of the process of compiling the self-assessment of the curriculum</td>
<td>Period: December 2014 – January 2015  Participants: Kadri Simm, Ruth Jürjo, Margit Sutrop, Bruno Mölder, Endla Lõhkivi, Daniel Cohnitz, Alex Davies  Process description: Ruth Jürjo contributed to the curricula descriptions and B3.8.3 Appendix 3, Bruno Mölder helped with the list of grants and publications as well as the description of his own course. Daniel Cohnitz and Margit Sutrop contributed their CVs and Endla Lõhkivi and Alex Davies provided the description of their courses. All contributed towards and commented on the B-part of the analysis of which Kadri Simm wrote the majority.</td>
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#### B3.1 Curricula of philosophy and their development (BA and MA)

**Background.** Philosophy was one of the original disciplines taught at the University of Tartu from its establishment in 1632, but was “substituted” with ideological disciplines during the Soviet occupation. The current department and the possibility to study for a philosophy BA was reinstated in 1991. Our department is the only one in Estonia to provide education in philosophy at three higher education levels (from BA to PhD). The main teaching and research foci are linked to the structure of the department, which is made up of four chairs: theoretical philosophy, practical philosophy, history of philosophy and philosophy of science.

The structure of the BA and MA degrees in philosophy are guided by the general objectives of the curriculum, which pertain to providing fundamental knowledge in the field of philosophy and preparing students for continuing their studies or finding employment. After the completion of the BA programme the student:

- has systematic knowledge of the theoretical foundations, main concepts, schools of thought, research methods and current trends of different branches of philosophy, all that is necessary for the continuation of their studies on the master's program;
- is capable of seeing connections between philosophy, science and other areas of intellectual endeavour;
- knows possible application areas of philosophical competence;
- has basic research skills, such as the ability to analyse and interpret various texts, formulate problems and construct arguments, as well as academic writing skills in Estonian and at least one foreign language;
- has the ethical basis for estimating the role of and responsibility for applying one's knowledge in practical circumstances.
The curriculum (see the table below) consists of a base module in the field of humanities (24 ECTS), a base module in philosophy (24 ECTS), 2 narrow field modules (24 ECTS each), 2 speciality modules (24 ECTS each), elective and optional courses (12 ECTS each) and a written BA thesis and its oral defence (12 ECTS). We have for years encouraged philosophy students towards interdisciplinary studies and therefore one base module and one narrow field module need to be chosen from outside of philosophy department. This way our graduates also acquire a minor in a different discipline, the most popular minors throughout the years being political science, psychology and languages. Detailed description of the curriculum is given in appendix B3.8.1

For the MA programme the study outcomes in comparison to BA level are deepened (incl. in-depth knowledge in a chosen narrow field of research) and diversified to include the following:

- the student is able to identify and independently formulate problems and research questions that require an expertise in philosophy;
- the student has the presentation and argumentation skills required for participating in academic and non-academic discussions in oral and written English;
- the student has a tolerant attitude towards diverse values and opinions;
- the student understands the ethical aspects, possibilities, limits and social functions of the philosopher's role, plus is able to suggest solutions based on specialised expertise.

Recently the structure of the MA degree in philosophy has considerably changed. From 2014/15 we opened an English-language program. Until last year the curriculum (120 ECTS) consisted of general subjects (39 ECTS), specialist subjects according to the individual study plan (45 or 60 ECTS), optional subjects (6 ECTS) and the writing of the MA thesis (with a subsequent public defence) (30 ECTS or 15 ECTS). The new curriculum offers considerably more flexibility via a more tailored and research-focused structure (see the table below).
The reasons for changing the curriculum included: wanting to open-up the programme to those coming from outside of Estonia; involving the students more directly in our research projects; addressing the problem of the diminishing demographical pool of potential Estonian students.

The setup of the new MA programme in Tartu is designed to allow students with different levels of expertise in philosophy to follow tailor-made, fulfilling and productive study plans. The curriculum structure permits a flexible research-based programme for those who have studied philosophy before, would like to focus on a specific area and get more involved in research. The curriculum is equally suitable for those who are just beginning to study philosophy and would like to attend more general philosophy classes.

**Specialisation courses** (18 ECTS) are carried out in agreement with a supervisor and involve course work and or individual research.

**Curriculum development and quality assurance.** The curriculum structure and development are based on various regulatory documents: the standard of higher education, university study regulations and statutes of curriculum. Curriculum development is also influenced by the research and qualifications of the teaching staff, student and alumni feedback, and the general trends and developments in the international field of philosophy teaching. For example, over the last few years our teaching staff have noticed that the critical reading and academic writing skills of our students has deteriorated. Although these skills are generally taught and practiced in most of the philosophy courses, we also thought it necessary to develop new elective courses (“Philosophical writing”, “Argumentation Theory”). International cooperation in providing intensive courses and organizing summer schools is ongoing at MA level (Baltic Philosophy Network (balphin.org) funded by Nordplus).

The development of the philosophy curriculum aims at securing a sustainable balance between: 1) providing students with the basics of traditional academic philosophical education that would enable further studies in philosophy; 2) equipping students with transferrable skills and experiences that would enable them to work in a wide variety of professions. An important change in the BA and MA curricula during the past year has been the introduction of the compulsory practice course that allows students to apply their knowledge and skills in an actual work environment. At the level of BA we cannot expect the students to fully and successfully apply their philosophical knowledge, but it gives them an opportunity to: exercise their critical reading, writing and communication skills; work in teams; manage their projects and time. At the MA level we have involved students more with
ongoing research projects of the department and provided supervision for practice taking place outside the university. A lack of practice opportunities was previously highlighted in student and alumni feedback as problematic.

**Strengths**
- Systematic and comprehensive teaching of philosophy. Our curriculum combines a broad history of philosophy with practical and theoretical issues, thus providing a sound foundation. We also maintain the importance of teaching both the analytic and continental traditions in philosophy.
- Active research. There are always numerous ongoing research projects that support good quality teaching and offer the students (esp. MA) the possibility to participate in projects as well as in workshops and seminars.
- Regular staff discussions and continuous development of the curricula.

**Weaknesses**
- The ways in which transferrable skills are systematically developed throughout the curricula are unclearly presented to the students and this might deter prospective participants. There should be more coherence and cooperation amongst the staff as regards these aims.

**Action plan**
- The main challenges for the years ahead concern improving and better coordinating the plan for transferable skills training across the curriculum. This involves also diversification of our grading criteria and employment of more interdisciplinary and problem-based learning methods.

**B3.2 Resources**
Teaching of philosophy does not generally require special infrastructure or equipment. Literature and published research – the most important part of philosophy teaching and research – is available centrally via the university library (electronic journals and databases) and we also have specialized literature at the institute. It does sometimes happen that needed articles are not accessible, but generally this is not a problem.

The working environment of the department is very good. We are situated in a recently renovated building at the centre of Tartu, our auditoriums and seminar rooms are equipped with all the necessary technology and teaching staff are provided with their own working spaces. IT support is available from the university. Use of digital sources and systems (Study Information System, Moodle) has also meant that the study materials are easily accessible to students. Student and alumni feedback regarding resources has been positive and there are no major problems.

The only major issue concerns finances for staff salaries – with lower student numbers it becomes more difficult to maintain these and still provide choice for students.

**Strengths**
- A very modern, convenient and technologically advanced teaching and working environment.
- Availability of electronic materials and our own excellent specialist library of philosophy textbooks and sources.
- Good IT support.
- Student access to study materials is mostly available electronically.
- The department is closely affiliated with the Centre for Ethics (www.eetika.ee) and students can partake and benefit from the numerous international projects and events of the centre.
Weaknesses

- The research and higher education funding mechanisms in Estonia (80% of the research money is competitively distributed) creates a lot of instability, especially for younger researchers, and does not support their staying in academia.

Action plan

- In order to find additional resources for teaching staff salaries, we need to continue our current practice of searching for finances outside the university (research grants) and also to prepare more courses that are accessible for non-philosophers (teaching non-philosophers and especially foreign students is reimbursed with higher rates).

B3.3 Teaching and learning process

Our curricula have been designed with the aim of directing students towards interdisciplinary studies (compulsory minor in BA) and providing tailored study programmes (specialization courses of the MA are designed individually in cooperation between the supervisor and the student). The fact that the total number of philosophy students is about 100 annually (incl. BA and MA), means that supervision at both MA and BA level is possible through close individual cooperation and feedback. Study of philosophy still mostly concerns teaching and learning in small seminar groups (an exception is the large introductory lectures of the humanities base module). This means that the traditional methods of discussion, joint reflection and individual feedback are standard and the average seminar sizes are 5-20 students. While nothing can substitute for teaching small groups, the department has nevertheless over the past five years also developed numerous e-courses or electronic homepages for courses. While a few courses are almost 100% web-based (these mostly cater to non-philosophers and Open University students), most are meant to supplement regular courses (for example by providing places for online discussions, uploading homework or encouraging peer-reviews).

Student feedback regarding our teaching and learning has been generally positive. Because student numbers are not high and students tend not to fill in SIS feedback consistently, it is difficult to make generalizations (a number of staff also use their own feedback questionnaires in addition to SIS). As a rule, larger lecture-type courses tend to get lower feedback scores than smaller seminar-type ones. On a yearly basis we analyse the student feedback and have taken measures when feedback has been negative (including changing the teacher and reworking the grading criteria). A number of our MA students have successfully continued their studies at PhD level outside of Estonia, which testifies to the good teaching quality here.

Strengths

- Our student numbers allow for individual and seminar-type traditional teaching methods that are well appreciated by students and alumni.
- Supplementing lectures and seminars with digital materials and dedicated web-sites has allowed more flexible and inclusive access to philosophy studies.
- The guest lecturers and the numerous ongoing research projects offer the students regular opportunities for learning and engagement (courses, presentations, workshops, international conferences).

Weakness
As practice courses only became available from year 2014/15, it is yet unclear how well they will function and how effectively they provide the students with necessary skills.

Action plan
- We plan to monitor and individually supervise the practice courses at both MA and BA level. The head of the curriculum is responsible for a coherent and well-functioning practical skills course aspect over the next years.

B3.4 Academic staff

The Department of Philosophy has very high quality teaching staff – over 80% of them hold a PhD. We have four professors – Prof. Margit Sutrop in practical philosophy, Prof. Daniel Cohnitz in theoretical philosophy, Prof. emer. Úlo Maťus in history of philosophy and Prof. emer. Rein Vihelem in philosophy of science. Our staff includes two associate professors, two senior researchers, seven researchers and two lecturers. Additionally we have teaching assistants (mostly PhD students) (See A8.4 Appendix 4).

Almost all of our academic staff are involved in research, including our joint institutional grants and numerous international and national projects. At BA level our curriculum allows the staff the flexibility to offer courses that are linked to their research (for example in practical philosophy students over the past few years have had the following courses to choose from: Autonomy, Value Theory, Justice, On Lying, Essentialism, Ethical intuitionism, Toleration etc.). This is done through the so-called Selected Topics/Authors course format that allows for varying the content of the courses. The new MA programme has student involvement in research at its core. MA students are involved with research from the very beginning of their studies through active participation in dedicated research seminars (for example weekly seminars on our institutional research grant topic “Disagreements”). The tailored specialization courses at MA level mean that supervisors and students work closely together and as a rule there is a lot of independent study involved.

For a small department in a small country we have quite a significant level of internationalization amongst our staff and students. Over the past decade we have accepted numerous post-doctoral students from outside of Estonia and over the past five years approximately 10 staff members have been from outside of Estonia at one time or another. Numerous staff members have their doctorates from outside of Estonia (University of Konstanz, Scuola Normale Superiore Pisa, University of Bristol, Heinrich-Heine-Universität-Düsseldorf, King’s College London). Additionally, every semester we have had guest professors from different parts of the world teaching here. With the new English-language MA programme the number of foreign students has increased considerably and the international students in Tartu (e.g. Erasmus) are also always attending in our courses. Our staff also teaches a number of interdisciplinary courses outside of our department, for example on medical ethics, ethics and research methodology courses, business ethics, philosophy of language, social and ethical aspects of engineering etc.

The majority of the staff of the philosophy department have participated in courses aimed at improving their own teaching. From 2014/15 we have started collegial feedback, focusing first on helping and supporting younger colleagues (PhD students) who have just started teaching.

Strengths
- Staff are highly qualified with appropriate research publications, international networks and research grants.
- International teaching staff have been crucial in internationalizing our research and providing an opportunity to open an English-language MA. That students have often studied some
courses in English for their BA encourages them and has meant they have been introduced to
different approaches and methods in philosophy teaching.

- Guest professors regularly (every semester) offer intensive courses to students.
- Staff have actively participated in courses regarding new teaching methodologies to improve
  their own teaching.
- Curriculum design allows for the flexible integration of research and teaching.

Weaknesses

- Collegial feedback has been launched, but only very recently and amongst the younger staff.

Action plan

- At the moment collegial feedback aimed to improve teaching is voluntary and while there are
  no plans to make it compulsory in the next few years, all staff are encouraged to get involved.

B3.5 Students

The intake of students to philosophy over the past years has depended on changing university
policies (entrance levels, state exams accepted) and Estonian demographics (for example the number
of 20 year olds in the Estonian population will change from almost 22,000 individuals in 2010 to
about 12,000 in 2019). The competition to become a philosophy student has therefore decreased and
at BA level especially we continue to struggle to find highly motivated students. Partly this has to do
with the media-cultivated image of philosophy as impractical.

From autumn 2014 we launched several initiatives to ensure that philosophy is promoted more and
attractive as a potential major. For example, in cooperation with our MA students we are about to
publish a brochure (about 60 pages) introducing various aspects of philosophy to mostly high school
audiences (philosophy as a fascinating and useful subject, our department and its research projects etc.).
Several of our teaching staff are participating in “Back to School” programmes that coordinate
guest visits and seminars between high schools and university graduates and staff. We have launched
the Philosophy Film Club with our BA students and hope to launch a philosophy club for high
school students in Tartu in 2015. In 2015 the department will launch a regular article series in
cooperation with one of the dailies to make philosophers and philosophical argumentation more
visible in the Estonian media.

In summer 2015 we will introduce interviews as part of the admission procedure in order to learn
more about the candidates and their motivation (previously admission was based on state exam
results only).

For the Estonian language admission MA the competition during the previous few years was almost
non-existent and we often failed to attract enough students to fill our places. The first intake of
international MA students (year 2014/15) exceeded our expectations, was highly competitive and the
quality of incoming students was very good. We now have 11 1st year MA students (from UK to
Hong Kong) and the university has allowed us to accept 15 students next year. The competitive
admittance and the design of the curriculum that supports close cooperation with the supervisor will
hopefully keep drop-out rates low. Drop-outs and non-graduates have also been problems at BA
level. This is partly related to the fact that many students already work during their BA studies
because of the need to support themselves financially. Dropping-out in philosophy is also often
linked to the realization that philosophy does not really suit their interests or expectations. This is
linked to the fact that philosophy as a subject is only available in a small minority of high schools in
Estonia, thus the students do not really know what this subject entails.
Feedback regarding the programme from alumni has generally been positive and despite philosophy’s image as impractical, we were happy to learn from the recent faculty study (1998-2013) that philosophy graduates have the highest average wages amongst faculty alumni and their employment rates are comparable to other humanities graduates. Nevertheless alumni tend also to be unsure of their qualifications in terms of transferrable skills and complain about lack of practice.

**Strengths**

- Our new MA programme has attracted good quality students from all over the globe. Their presence is also beneficial to Estonian students as it internationalizes their study experience.
- Employment opportunities for graduates are comparable to other humanities graduates and their salaries are good.

**Weaknesses**

- We need more and high quality student candidates at BA level.
- The employment opportunities and career pathways are unclear for many (potential) students.
- Graduates are not used to viewing their studies as also providing transferrable skills
- Drop-out and non-graduation rates could be lower.

**Action plan**

- Improved cooperation with philosophy teachers in high schools and other extra-curricular activities (establishment of the philosophy film club at the university, the philosophy club for high school students etc.) aimed at introducing philosophy as a potential major at the university.
- Presentation of particular career pathways and opportunities on our home page and using other materials (based on communication with alumni).
- Increased and more outspoken focus on the development of transferrable skills and the strengthening of the practice course at BA and MA levels.
- Improved and more consistent supervisory practices across the curricula; early counselling of students.

**B3.6 Summary of the Main Strengths and Weaknesses of the Curricula of Philosophy BA (2437) and MA (125597)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Strength</strong></th>
<th><strong>Possibilities of applying the strengths</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Systematic and comprehensive teaching of philosophy</td>
<td>Continuous attention to curricula development, it’s balance as well as provision of a good choice of courses for students.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Numerous international and interdisciplinary research projects</td>
<td>Ongoing participation in active research and further involvement of students (esp. MA) in research projects.</td>
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<td>Very good work environment and access to resources</td>
<td>Increased sharing of the facilities and resources with students (graduate study rooms etc.).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Seminar-type teaching methods and individually</td>
<td>Further improvement is possible in terms of diversifying teaching methods and evaluation criteria, as well as better cooperation between teaching staff in terms of cohesion of the curriculum and links between courses.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Field of improvement</td>
<td>Activities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Practice and transferrable skills training</td>
<td>Practice became available for philosophy students only from year 2014/15. We need to invest more effort and time into providing a good choice of useful practice opportunities for our students and involve them (esp. MA) in our research projects. More straightforward and better articulation of transferrable skills training on our courses.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unstable funding</td>
<td>Continue finding research funding through various projects funded from outside of the university as well as jointly lobbying with other humanities disciplines for changes in how higher education is funded.</td>
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<td>Diminishing student numbers at BA level</td>
<td>Cooperation with high schools to increase the attractiveness of philosophy as well as popularising philosophy as a minor at university.</td>
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<td>Drop-outs and non-graduates</td>
<td>Improved and more consistent supervisory practices across the curricula; early counselling of students.</td>
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### B3.7 Action plan for the Curricula of Philosophy BA (2437) and MA (125597)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Responsible person</th>
<th>Deadline</th>
<th>Result(s)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enrolment of students</td>
<td>Involvement with high school students and teachers of philosophy; participation in “Back to School” programmes as well as improved marketing strategies for both MA and BAs; popularisation of philosophy as a major</td>
<td>Kadri Simm (programme director), Daniel Cohnitz (head of the department)</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>We fill our places with a sufficient number of good quality and well-motivated students, entrance to the philosophy programme is competitive.</td>
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<td>Curricula development</td>
<td>Further development of the practice component of the curricula; development of transferrable skills throughout the courses</td>
<td>Daniel Cohnitz (head of the department), Kadri Simm (programme director)</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Students are satisfied with the level of practice in the curricula, as well as with their acquisition of transferrable skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervision and drop-outs</td>
<td>Improved and more consistent supervisory practices across the curricula; early counselling of students</td>
<td>Kadri Simm (programme director), Daniel Cohnitz (head of the department)</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Greater satisfaction of students with supervision and lower drop-out rates</td>
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</tbody>
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