

Report theme sessions as part of the M Philosophy of Science, Technology and Society (PSTS) development review

28 September 2023

Panel

Prof. dr. Martin van Hees, prof. dr. Wybo Houkes, prof. dr. Federica Russo, prof. dr. Erik Weber, Sarah Boer BA, dr. Irene Conradie (secretary)

Theme session Internationalization

Participants

PSTS programme director, three PSTS lecturers, PSTS graduate / PhD candidate, PSTS graduate / adviser at SURF), PSTS student

Discussion

Programme management notes that the programme has a strong international dimension. PSTS attracts people from all over the world: two thirds of the staff and more than half of its students are international. The programme links its international learning environment to its aim of promoting diversity and inclusion. PSTS aims to further emphasize the importance of diversity and inclusion in its curriculum and in the teaching environment. The panel found the combination of the two themes important and deems it valuable to explore its consequences further. It appreciates the awareness of their interrelation and the formulation of diversity and inclusion as objectives. The diversity and inclusion plans sound promising, and the panel was grateful that the site visit dispelled the impression that the issue was being approached from a box-ticking, 'getting the numbers right' approach. Although students may well decide to study in the Netherlands to learn specifically about the Dutch perspective, multiple perspectives enrich the curriculum. Alumni indicate that the programme is already successful in promoting integration and mutual exchange.

For the panel, the consideration of whether or not to go through a CeQulnt procedure to obtain the ECA Certificate for Quality in Internationalization depends on the internationalization goals of the programme. The panel wanted to convey to the programme that there are all kinds of motivations for pursuing internationalization and diversity and inclusion, and that it is useful to be clear about the programme's own motivations before deciding on policy choices and implementation. Just going through the framework itself can help to think more deeply about internationalization and for that reason alone it may already be worthwhile applying for it. The programme can then consider which aspects need to be addressed most urgently. And what is expected of staff and students in this regard. The panel suggests approaching the conversation in terms of positionality and introducing learning moments where everyone broadens their perspective. It is appropriate to challenge lecturers to step outside their comfort zone, but they should not feel pressured to leave their area of expertise. Finally, the panel recommends that in developing this theme, the programme should also consider the intended learning outcomes and whether they should be adjusted when reviewing internationalization objectives.

Theme session Challenge-Based Learning (CBL) in the MSc thesis

Participants

PSTS programme director, PSTS lecturer, section chair Philosophy, educational consultant, PSTS student

Discussion

The programme and the panel exchanged views on the introduction of a Challenge-Based Learning (CBL) pilot project in the Master's thesis. CBL is a student-centred approach that actively engages students in multidisciplinary teams to develop solutions to real-world challenges. The panel commends the two pilot projects and the fact that the programme is considering what adjustments are needed to the MasterLab course and in the skills training. The programme already has expertise in community-based philosophy and field philosophy. Additional resources are available as CBL is one of the University of Twente's strategic objectives.

The panel notes that obtaining commitment from external stakeholders can pose a challenge as they may opt out of a project. Securing commitment therefore is a hidden cost. The panel suggests making use of the active alumni network. The network is a strength of the programme and alumni may be less likely to withdraw from a project. Management acknowledges that alumni indeed prefer a structural involvement in the programme. Another factor to consider is the workload and training linked to CBL for staff, both in preparation and supervision. Although PSTS has implemented an effective internship programme, it acknowledges the significant level of commitment required. It demands a substantial initial investment. The pilot projects provide an opportunity to test it on a small scale.

It is the opinion of the panel that the use of CBL in the MSc thesis can be an attractive option for some students, and it seems natural to combine it with the internship. In particular, for the possibly increasing number of students who do not aspire an academic career, this may be a very good idea. The panel proposed that CBL could be included in a more practice-oriented track alongside a more research-oriented track. However, the programme does not consider the various graduation options as a limitation on career opportunities. The programme has encountered students who have acquired knowledge of a field through an internship and then started their PhD studies from there. However, the panel is still unsure how CBL could work towards a philosophically strong thesis that prepares for a PhD.

The panel acknowledges that stakeholder questions are very motivating to work on, but care must be taken to ensure their academic depth. The participants and the panel deliberated about situations in which students undertake projects that are highly relevant and valuable yet lack sufficient philosophical substance. The programme indicated that academic depth would be monitored from the outset, with strong guidance on how to translate the assignment as a challenge. Additionally, there is an opportunity to demand philosophical reflection as an additional deliverable to guarantee philosophical outcomes.

The overall finding is that CBL generates positive energy and offers many opportunities given the profile of the programme. Important is that the programme carefully evaluates the impact of the CBL pilot.