2.2 Philosophy

Since the research focus of Philosophy is in the national and international community of philosophers rather than in collaboration with History, it makes sense to assess philosophical research, under all six headings, in the same way that it has been represented by the Philosophy section in the Self-Assessment Report, somewhat separately from History.

2.2.1 Volume, profile and organization of the research

The Philosophy section is larger than it first appears: besides the four permanent teaching staff (two professors, a postdoctoral researcher and a university lecturer), there are nine researchers or part-time teachers and fifteen docents or adjunct professors. There are also eleven doctoral students.

Research in the Philosophy section covers the following areas, all well-established research areas in international philosophy, and all organized with impressive professional leadership at the University of Tampere: (i) Reason and Judgement in Phenomenology; (ii) ‘Being’ (in Heidegger and Frege and others); (iii) Reason-Emotion-Imagination; (iv) Theories of Mutual Recognition; (v) Social Ontology.

The Philosophy section has produced a significant number of high quality publications, reflecting the fact that it is well embedded in international debates, particularly in the history of modern logic, in recognition theory, in analytic metaphysics and in French trends in Phenomenology (this is particularly true of the assessment period, but it is also important to recognise the continuing significance to the present research environment of works published further back in the past). The section has also attracted significant funding – of particular note are the three Academy of Finland grants in the assessment period – and it is clearly and actively focused, at all levels, on gaining more.

2.2.2 Scientific quality of the research

The research output of the Philosophy section is widely recognized to be of a very high standard, and it is clearly growing in volume in recent years. The likely trajectory is very promising indeed, since the section is balanced between established scholars producing high quality work in a steady flow (particularly on the reception of Frege, Heidegger and Charles Taylor) and younger researchers with the incentive to produce such work and promising research programmes clearly designed to be attractive in the current research environment (particularly on Hume’s metaphysics, Husserl’s philosophy of mathematics, Quine, and epistemic issues in fiction). Citation indices and bibliometric analyses seem to be misleading about the scientific quality of research in the Philosophy section – as they are throughout Philosophy (a complicating factor is that it is by no means uncommon for philosophical work of the highest quality and in the best journals to cite rarely and in unsystematic, unrepresentative ways). It is also worth pointing out that the section is correct that edited collections are often regarded as more valuable amongst the
philosophical academic community than they are generally accredited by external review formats. Indeed, editorship of such volumes has a particular value for smaller and more isolated departments like that at Tampere: it enables them to work towards being, and then represent themselves as, an internationally recognized node of scholarly research.

Grade 5 (Excellent)

2.2.3 Scientific impact of the research

As the philosophical community has recognized and the evidence of reviews of their work appearing in international journals has regularly shown, members of the Philosophy section are playing a significant and growing role in international debates. In addition, they are contributing to edited collections and carrying out reviewing tasks in significant journals, which gives them an increasing presence in the academic community. The Philosophy section has organized at least one significant conference per year in the assessment period; this is a good record for a section of this size, where quality counts for a good deal more than quantity. The Academy-funded projects on ‘The Possibility of Metaphysics’, ‘Phenomenology and Early Analytic Philosophy’ and ‘Judgement and Human Rationality’ have made a significant impact.

Grade 5 (Excellent)

2.2.4 Societal impact of the research

Societal impact is always difficult to document in Philosophy, and thus particularly difficult for an outsider to assess. But the section makes a good case for significant impact in this dimension – in terms of the high reputation of some philosophers, the visible media role, the impact on school education, the involvement with the cultural journal niin&näin, and the links with former pupils now in public life.

Grade 4 (Very Good)

2.2.5 Quality of the research environment

The most significant fact about the research environment of the Philosophy section is that there is no unifying concentration and that individuals are focused quite differently, employing various philosophical approaches and methodologies (e.g. Analytic; Pragmatic; Phenomenological) and covering a wide variety of topic areas (both in Theoretical and Practical philosophy).

It is a highly commendable – but equally a difficult and very challenging – goal for a relatively small group of philosophers to pursue international research excellence and substantial scientific and societal impact without concentrating on a particular approach to philosophizing or a single core of topic areas. This goal is hard enough to achieve even in very large departments;
Pittsburgh is perhaps the only really successfully analogue here, but it is far too large to count as a useful model here.

Difficult as it is, we have no doubt that this goal is being achieved at Tampere and at a high level. The publication record is most impressive, the international contacts are genuine and run deep, and there is a readily appreciable sense of vibrant energy and forward thinking at every level, from the permanent teaching staff and the adjunct faculty to the doctoral students. In short, the Philosophy section is a fine model of how philosophy can and should be done in smaller scale departments, stimulating dialogue between different traditions of philosophy, enriching the core activities of the School and University, and sustaining creative engagements at both international and societal levels.

Grade 5 (Excellent)

2.2.6 Future potential of the Unit of Assessment

How to achieve the goal that the Philosophy section has set itself – to sustain research excellence and a substantial impact while retaining its breadth of approach and coverage – is becoming an ever more urgent issue at a time of great internal and external pressures on all departments of Philosophy around the world. The Rector spoke of the need to identify ways to clarify the profile of each UoA; in our view, its success here is the uniquely identifying feature of the Philosophy section and its greatest value. Other institutions would benefit greatly from seeing how the difficulties are being overcome so successfully at Tampere. So it is to be hoped that (i) the University of Tampere will continue to sustain and support the Philosophy section in achieving this goal; and (ii) that the University will encourage visiting scholars to come and spend time in the Philosophy section; it would greatly enhance the reputation of UTA abroad. The lack of significant-length site visits by international scholars, as detailed in Table 5b, means that this opportunity is not being realized adequately at present.

With the exception of long-term visits to Tampere, mobility at every level in the Philosophy section is excellent and every attempt should be made to sustain it. Professional training seems of an enviable level also, though it is something that will need to be attended to constantly in the coming years of change. The balance of well-established researchers and career-young philosophers is crucial and clearly working well to sustain the vibrant research environment at Tampere; this is always difficult to sustain over time, but it is vital if the Philosophy section is to continue to realize its great strengths.

2.2.7 Recommendations and suggestions

In order to sustain research excellence and substantial impact, we recommend that UTA continue to support the Philosophy section in its breadth of approach and coverage.
In order to enhance the University’s reputation abroad, we recommend that the Philosophy section encourage more visiting scholars to spend a substantial period of time at UTA.

Mobility and professional training are key areas for the present success of the Philosophy section; we recommend that both remain a constant focus of attention.