

The External Evaluation Report
of the INSTITUTE OF PHILOSOPHY
of the Ignatianum University in Kraków, Poland

Institute of Philosophy at Ignatianum University in Kraków (UIK) is a scientific and educational entity recognized as an ecclesiastical institution under Canon Law. The Institute of Philosophy is one of three institutes of the Faculty of Philosophy at UIK. The other institutes are the Institute of Psychology and the Institute of Cultural Studies and Journalism. UIK belongs to the Southern Polish Province of the Society of Jesus.

The current evaluation and external visit of the Institute of Philosophy on 10-11 June 2025 was carried out by an Evaluation Team appointed by AVEPRO on 2 May 2025, composed of:

- Rev. Prof. Sławomir Nowosad (John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, Lublin) – chair,
- Rev. Prof. Mariusz Tabaczek OP (Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas, Rome) – expert,
- Rev. Prof. Wojciech Kućko (Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University, Warsaw) – expert,
- Miss Monika Szymczak (Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University, Warsaw) – student representative.

1. The Evaluation Visit and Comments on the Self-Evaluation Report

During its visit to the Institute of Philosophy, the AVEPRO Evaluation Team held a series of meetings, discussions and activities essential to the effective execution of the planned evaluation. The following meetings took place: with the University authorities – the Rector, Vice-Rectors, and the Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy as well as with academic staff of the Institute, a large group of students, administrative personnel, and with representatives of external stakeholders. Due to his absence, the Team was unable to meet with the Vice-

Chancellor of the University of Ignatianum (Provincial of the Southern Polish Province of the Society of Jesus). Additionally, The Team held two internal meetings to address key issues and coordinate the subsequent stages of the visit. Throughout the process, the Director of the Institute of Philosophy provided the Team with full cooperation and highly professional organisational and logistical support.

For the Institute of Philosophy, the current evaluation by AVEPRO is the second one, the first having taken place in 2015-2017, resulting in the External Evaluation Report of 2018. As stated in the Self-Evaluation Report (SER) of the Institute of Philosophy, prepared prior to the current evaluation, a number of recommendations from the 2018 Report were implemented, which contributed to the scientific, didactic and organisational strengthening of the Institute. Philosophy study programmes were integrated and intensified, greater differentiation was introduced between first- and second-cycle studies, while at the same time more clearly defining the objectives of individual subjects, and at the same time more clearly defining the research profile of the entire Institute and the departments within its structure, more effectively synchronising the classes conducted by academic teachers with the subject matter of their research activities, and also drawing attention to the expansion of relations with domestic and foreign scientific institutions. The Evaluation Team confirms the actual implementation of these changes and, thus, the multiple strengthening of the Institute of Philosophy, as described in more detail by the authors of the SER of 2024 (pp. 1-2).

The 2025 Self-Evaluation Report of the Institute of Philosophy has been prepared with care and thoroughness, resulting in a comprehensive document (comprising 39 pages plus appendices). In the opinion of the Team, the Report accurately reflects the Institute's identity, presenting both its internal structure and its relationship with its governing bodies – the Faculty of Philosophy and the University as a whole. Where relevant, it also takes into consideration the Institute's situation and legal standing in relation to both Polish and ecclesiastical legislation. The Coordinating Committee responsible for the Report, appointed by the Institute's authorities, was appropriately composed. The Self-Evaluation Report includes all components required by AVEPRO, including appendices such as a SWOT analysis.

2. Summary of the Institute of Philosophy's Vision, Mission, Governance and Strategic Plan

In defining its vision, mission and strategy, the Institute of Philosophy draws in a thoughtful and creative manner on key Church documents, most notably Pope Francis'

Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis Gaudium*. It articulates with clarity the research and teaching dimensions of its mission: “seeking solutions to philosophical problems in the natural light of a reason and showing the consistency with the Christian vision of the world, man, and God”, while also aiming to educate students to “undertake teaching and perform appropriate intellectual activities” and to “promote Christian culture” in a spirit of dialogue with the world. Accordingly, the Institute’s mission, formulated in 2018, highlights the importance of “a high level of substantive and methodological scientific research (...) in the field of philosophy”. The integration of the Gospel, Christian culture, and Ignatian pedagogy is rightly emphasised. Notably, the Institute expresses a strong ambition to establish itself as a leading Jesuit centre for philosophy in Europe (pp. 3-4).

In this context, the Institute of Philosophy’s vision, mission, management model and accompanying strategic plan may be considered coherent, ambitious and, at the same time, realistic. The Institute’s leadership – its Director and team – has articulated clear development objectives that align with the Institute’s academic identity as well as its ecclesiastical and social mission. These goals and strategic directions are well-defined, attainable and grounded in Christian axiology and the Christian vision of humanity and the world.

In view of the current cultural and legal-social context, the Institute also aspires to shape and enhance the quality of academic education in Poland, while maintain a keen awareness of the international dimension. Ultimately, this is intended to foster both the research excellence of the Institute’s academic staff and the meaningful education of young people, always in the service of the integral development of the human person.

While acknowledging certain structural limitations – such as the lack of financial independence and reliance on University and Faculty authorities – the Institute’s management model effectively supports the pursuit of strategic goals. It is notably characterised by transparency, inclusive engagement of both internal and external stakeholders, and a strong commitment to accountability at all organisational levels. As a result, the Institute’s development plan should be regarded as thoughtful, coherent and achievable.

3. Learning and Research

Based on the analysis of the Self-Evaluation Report and the findings from the on-site visit, the Evaluation Team concludes that the Institute of Philosophy effectively and

meaningfully fulfils the university's two fundamental missions: education (first mission) and scientific research (second mission).

With regard to teaching, and in light of ongoing cultural and societal shifts – particularly the growing secularisation and the deepening demographic challenges in Polish society – the Institute's stable (though modest) student population and consistent annual recruitment levels merit recognition and appreciation. The Institute's management and academic staff demonstrate genuine concern for the substantive quality of instruction, as well as for fostering respectful, individualised relationships with students. This has been repeatedly affirmed by the students themselves, who regard the distinctive quality of professor-student relations as a distinguishing feature of the Institute within the broader academic landscape of Kraków.

Students have also expressed gratitude for their professors' openness to innovative and self-directed research topics, a dynamic that actively nurtures critical thinking and creative intellectual courage. In addition, the teaching staff's willingness to encourage students to explore new methods and approaches to commercialising their research findings is a particularly commendable feature of the Institute's academic ethos.

Tutorials offered to students, particularly seminars, are notably effective, although they place greater demands on the teaching staff. This form of teaching draws not only on the rich tradition of medieval universities, but also on the principles of Ignatian pedagogy. The Institute ensures that its curricula comply with academic standards and comply with both the requirements of higher education in Poland and the norms and guidelines of the Catholic Church. These matters are discussed with students where appropriate, fostering transparency and shared understanding.

Amid ongoing programme reorganisation, the Institute of Philosophy rightly underscores the role of philosophical studies as a "path to integrated self-development". It enriches its academic offering with components that nurture critical thinking (SER, p. 12). Contemporary educational frameworks – such as the VUCA model (Volatility – Uncertainty – Complexity – Ambiguity) and the 4 Cs of education (Creativity, Collaboration, Communication, Critical Thinking) are thoughtfully incorporated. In addition to classical philosophical subjects, the inclusion of modern currents such as existentialism, the philosophy of dialogue and phenomenology is a well-considered enhancement of the curriculum.

The integration of insights from the social sciences, natural sciences, and humanities requires deliberate and careful coordination to ensure coherence and interdisciplinary alignment. One pedagogical challenge noted by the Institute's faculty concerns students entering second-cycle studies without a prior first-cycle degree in philosophy – a situation

permitted under Bologna Process regulations. The academic staff are aware of this issue and have responded with increased personal engagement and supplementary teaching efforts. In light of this, the visiting Team recommends considering the introduction of an optional bridging course in the fundamentals of philosophy, specifically tailored for students from non-philosophical backgrounds.

Following the meeting with a large group of students and doctoral candidates, the Team noted diverse opinions on the structure of the doctoral (third cycle) programme. A number of participants expressed concerns that the programme is overly burdensome, thereby impeding their ability to focus effectively on the research and the preparation of the doctoral theses.

In light of this, it would be advisable for the Institute's authorities, working in consultation with academic supervisors and doctoral students themselves, to carry out a comprehensive analysis of the programme's content and intensity. Such an evaluation could facilitate the development of solutions that better balance educational requirements with the demands of sustained research activity. It is worth noting that similar challenges are evident at many Polish universities, largely due to the wide-ranging and, in several respects, ambiguous reform of higher education introduced in 2018.

The Team observed a genuine commitment on the part of the University authorities to improving and modernising the technical and IT infrastructure across University premises. This represents a significant strength for the institution as a whole, including the Institute of Philosophy. However, it was also noted that some student groups attend classes in rooms that are overly cramped and insufficiently ventilated. It is essential that the ongoing and planned renovation works address these shortcomings to ensure a more comfortable and conducive learning environment.

Given the financial constraints faced by the University – and by extension, the Institute of Philosophy – it is necessary to explore new opportunities for accessing “all philosophical databases and text databases and to increase the ability to use them fully and comprehensively” (SER, p. 2, 20-21). Expanding access to the library collections of all academic centres in Kraków could also significantly support this goal. Promoting the ongoing development of competencies and the active engagement of students and doctoral candidates in this domain is becoming an increasingly urgent priority for institutions of higher education.

The Evaluation Team extends its unequivocal appreciation to the academic community of the Institute of Philosophy for its unwavering commitment to high standards, scientific excellence and further growth. The Institute's academic staff are actively engaged in numerous significant research projects, regularly participate in competitions organised by national and

international grant-awarding bodies, and increasingly publish in leading philosophical journals and across broader humanities platforms.

Within their available means, the Institute's authorities also offer financial support to academic staff in pursuit of their research endeavours. At the same time, professors enjoy the freedom to independently define their research interests, which encompass a broad spectrum of topics, including classical philosophy, currents in contemporary philosophy, Polish philosophy in relation to European philosophy, philosophy in relation to other scientific disciplines and fields of science, and the analysis of contemporary cultural shifts.

The Institute's journal, "Forum Philosophicum", is highly regarded within academic circles. Equally commendable are the Institute's examples of international cooperation, especially with Loyola University in Chicago and the University of Zagreb, as well as its active participation in the international Jesuit Kircher Network is also valuable.

In this regard, the Team strongly encourages the further development of the Institute's research profile by forging additional bilateral partnerships – such as with other Jesuit universities in United States beyond Loyola – and by creating new opportunities for faculty members who engage with foreign institutions, take part in international research initiatives and contribute to scholarly organisations and editorial boards. Such efforts will also foster greater mobility among students and doctoral candidates and encourage more frequent visits to the Institute by students from abroad.

4. SWOT Analysis

According to the Team, the SWOT analysis was prepared thoroughly and accurately, reflecting the current condition of the Institute of Philosophy. In addition to the strengths previously highlighted, particular emphasis should be placed on the Institute's consistent and visible commitment to enhancing the quality of both education and research; the availability of relevant data on teaching staff; the alignment of study programmes with both international and ecclesiastical standards; the far-reaching individualisation of teacher-student relationships; the high level of digitalisation across the University; and the generally good condition of its infrastructure. Notably, genuine efforts are being made to enhance the Institute's public image – an essential step toward attracting new students and securing its meaningful presence in the broader social landscape.

At the same time, the Institute is fully aware of its weaknesses, including the relatively small student population (a broader societal problem, not limited to Poland); instances of student attrition; the increasing average age of incoming students, many of whom are already employed. Additional concerns include the persistent difficulty of applying philosophy in the labour market; limited library resources and restricted access to academic databases; and insufficient staff engagement on the international forum – though it is encouraging that one professor regularly teaches at Loyola University in the United States.

The Institute also recognises a relatively low level of student involvement in academic pastoral care and university-wide events, suggesting limited community awareness. However, during discussions with students, the Team encountered the opinion of a sizeable group of young people who emphasised the good level of mutual understanding, openness and willingness to cooperate on the part of their professors. This is all the more encouraging given the relatively modest social amenities available to students and the absence of larger sports facilities. Importantly, the University has identified these challenges and outlined specific measures to address them.

Taking into account the dynamic internal development alongside ongoing external transformations – particularly in the legal and cultural domains – both the Institute’s leadership and academic staff recognise emerging opportunities for growth and innovation. Of particular importance is the internationalisation of the academic community, the readiness to develop distinctive academic programmes (including inter-university initiatives) with a strong interdisciplinary dimension, and the potential to offer philosophy courses to students from other faculties and academic disciplines within the University.

A key motivating factor for the Institute is Kraków’s exceptionally high concentration of institutions offering philosophy programmes, among them the Jagiellonian University, the John Paul II Pontifical University, the University of the National Education Commission and several private higher education institutions. Rather than viewing this landscape as a challenge, the Institute rightly sees it as a stimulus to continuously elevate the quality of its teaching and research. Within the wider university context this fosters a distinctive, open, and forward-looking identity.

Moreover, the increasing recognition among employers of the importance of soft skills, intellectual and cultural formation, and the ability to think logically and critically presents a promising avenue for the institute’s further development and visibility. In the Team’s view, it is both timely and essential to acknowledge and promote the teaching staff’s commitment to cultivating these competencies in students.

Some of the threats faced by the Institute – and the University as a whole – are shared with the broader academic community in Poland. Chief among these are clearly negative demographic trends. The Institute is further challenged by limited access to substantial financial resources, which remain under the control of University authorities (a model that, from another perspective, may be seen as serving the collective interests of the institution).

Although the government subsidies for the University have remained stable, the institution's dependence on a single source of funding presents a significant and ongoing concern. Additional challenges arise from broader negative trends in the field of national and international education – such as the pronounced disparity in access to financial resources between domestic and foreign universities. A further threat is the growing lack of interest among young people in pursuing university studies, particularly in the humanities.

Considering the components of the SWOT analysis, the Institute of Philosophy emerges as an academic institution approaching the future with measured optimism. Its creative responses to the often unfavourable shifts in higher education and cultural dynamics appear to be yielding measurable – albeit limited – results. In the Team's view, the Institute of Philosophy, equipped with both the capacity and determination, should persist in efforts to enhance educational quality, actively promote philosophical inquiry, and offer philosophical studies integrated with practical applications. Despite the evident challenges faced by the Institute's small academic community – particularly in forming robust research teams – it remains essential to consistently support and promote the quality of scientific research conducted by its staff.

5. Quality Assurance

As a teaching and research unit of Ignatianum University, the Institute of Philosophy operates in accordance with both internal university standards (such as the "Principles of Quality Assurance in Education") and state and Church regulations. In line with these frameworks, the Institute's educational programmes adhere to the guidelines of the Integrated Qualifications System, aligning with levels VI to VIII of both the Polish and European Qualifications Frameworks.

As outlined in detail in the Self-Evaluation Report (p. 7ff), responsibility for the quality of education at the Institute rests with the Director and the Institute's Education Quality Committee. To ensure comprehensive preparation for a new field of study, a dedicated

committee is appointed to design the programme – covering learning outcomes, graduate profile, syllabi, and related components – which is then reviewed in consultation with students. Subsequent stages include the formulation of opinions by the Education Department and the Institute Council, followed by approval from the University Senate. The Field-Specific Education Quality Team evaluates the syllabi for each subject, all of which are made accessible to students. The principles and practices of quality assurance in education provide for various methods of verifying both interim and final learning outcomes, including oral or written examinations, tests, discussions, case studies, and more. At the conclusion of the first-cycle programme, students are required to complete a bachelor's thesis, while those in the second-cycle programme must submit a master's thesis. In addition, first-cycle students take the *ex universa philosophia* examination. These processes are formally regulated by the university-wide document “Principles of Graduation” (2023).

The Institute's Education Quality Committee convenes at least once per semester and comprises nine professors from the Institute. Additionally, various tasks are carried out on an ongoing basis by working teams appointed by the Director or the Committee. These include, for example, proposing changes to educational programmes, collaborating with internal and external stakeholders on the development or revision of programmes, observing classes, and approving thesis topics.

The Institute's management meets at least once a year with each academic year group of students, all of whom are assigned individual supervisors. In addition, meetings are held each semester with all Institute faculty to evaluate the current state of teaching. At least once annually, faculty members are also offered the opportunity to participate in training courses and workshops on a variety of topics. At the end of each semester, students are invited to provide feedback through course-specific surveys. Based on these responses, the Institute's management may hold follow-up discussions with teaching staff to clarify concerns or formulate appropriate recommendations. It should be noted, however, that only a small proportion of students regularly complete these surveys.

The AVEPRO Team is confident that the system of quality assurance in education at the Institute of Philosophy, both in its formal structure and in practical implementation, effectively fulfils its role and meets its objectives. The Team examined a selection of bachelor's, master's and doctoral theses, the majority of which were deemed to meet the expected academic standards. However, it was observed that some bachelor's theses were notably brief. Nonetheless, students frequently expressed positive opinions regarding the quality of lectures and the dedication of faculty to the teaching process. In the Team's view, the tutorial programme implemented at the Institute – covering select classes – proves to be a particularly

effective teaching method and makes a significant contribution to quality assurance. Both faculty and students expressed positive opinions about its impact. This approach fosters the discovery and development of individual academic potential while enhancing analytical and communication skills. The same applies to other courses, which are frequently conducted in small groups, thereby encouraging deeper philosophical reflection and cultivating an atmosphere of trust and mutual understanding between students and teachers.

Discussions with students highlighted challenges in the functioning of the student council at the university level, which also affect the Institute indirectly. The Team believes that revising election procedures and simultaneously encouraging broader student participation in the electoral process would be beneficial. Strengthening self-governance structures could invigorate and enrich academic life, while empowering the student community. Such developments not only enhance the quality of education but also foster a deeper sense of responsibility among students for the institution and its core mission.

6. Third Mission

In alignment with the wider University, the Institute of Philosophy demonstrates a strong commitment to fulfilling the third mission. While this task presents particular challenges for the philosophical community, there are noteworthy examples of successful initiatives. In recent years, these have included training courses designed to strengthen communication, leadership, and work efficiency skills among members of the broader administrative sector. Participants have included local government officials and trade union leaders, both domestic and international. During a meeting with representatives of schools and public libraries, the visiting Team received highly positive feedback regarding the involvement of the Institute's staff in lectures, thematic meetings, and structured discussions – such as Oxford and Kraków debates. These initiatives extend not only to institutions in Krakow but also to those in other cities. Notably, the renowned H. Kołłątaj Public Library in Kraków, in collaboration with professors from the Institute, hosts a successful lecture series for teachers and librarians titled *Akademia Wartości* (Academy of Values). The Institute also offers training courses and postgraduate studies in ethics targeted at primary and secondary school teachers. Consistent with its mission, the Institute remains actively engaged in similar initiatives at Jesuit schools in Nowy Sącz, Kraków, and Gdynia.

Another effective example of the Institute's engagement with its third mission is the organization of several-day philosophical retreats for students from outside the Institute. With

the support of external funding, the Institute's faculty have also delivered a series of workshops and webinars, and produced numerous podcasts, films and articles exploring the theme of so-called Christian ethical capital. For secondary school students, initiatives such as the Food for Thought workshops and a series of discussions and meetings aimed at popularising philosophy have been launched. Notably, these activities involve not only academic staff but also students and doctoral candidates. The AVEPRO Team strongly encourages both faculty and students of the Institute of Philosophy to continue – and further expand – such third mission initiatives for the benefit of the aforementioned and other external institutions. Given the deeply Christian character of the Institute and Ignatianum University, this engagement powerfully contributes to the “missionary transformation” of the Church and its meaningful presence in contemporary society.

7. Recommendations

Taking into account all the elements presented in the External Evaluation Report and the on-site visit findings, the Team offers the following recommendations:

1. **Sustain a strong commitment** to the continuous enhancement of the quality of scientific research conducted by the Institute's academic staff, alongside their active engagement in the philosophical community at both the national and international levels.

2. **Explore innovative approaches** to promoting philosophy in today's academic and cultural context. This includes developing study programmes with practical applications of philosophy and integrating philosophy courses into curricula across various University faculties.

3. **Strengthen international cooperation** through expanded bilateral partnerships with foreign universities, thereby increasing opportunities for staff and student mobility – particularly through programmes such as Erasmus+.

4. **Advance initiatives for the commercialisation of humanities knowledge**, especially in philosophy, by identifying new forms of support to help students acquire practical competencies relevant to professional life and civic life.

5. **Reorganise, enhance, and empower the student council structure**, fostering greater involvement in the Institute's academic and social environment within the broader University context.

6. Expand the Institute's outreach and promotional efforts, with particular emphasis on increased visibility and engagement through social media platforms.



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Chair of the AVEPRO Evaluation Team

3 July 2025.