

Appointment for 20 % position to strengthen the interface between philosophy of science and policy making

Background

In the original application for the FPIII area “Centre for Philosophy and the Sciences” (then called “Philosophy in Science”), the project sought funding for a 3-year 20 % position to strengthen the interface between philosophy of science and policy making. This position was intended to help the project to help achieve its aim “to influence how science shapes society via research and teaching at the interface of science and the humanities.” The funding for this position was cut, together with the funding for other temporary positions. Yet, due to external buyouts for another position (Gry Oftedal), the funding is now available and CPS has been granted funding for hiring someone in this position, both from the side of the faculty of humanities as well as the department (IFFIKK).

This letter specifies what specific profile we would like for this position, provides a job description for it, and argues that we would like to hire Dr. Anders Strand in this position via kallelse.

Outline of the position to be filled

The current coronavirus situation has more than ever brought to the foreground the central societal importance of something we emphasized in our original application. That is: “[T]he centrality of mathematical modelling and computational methods in contemporary science provides new challenges and possibilities for communicating knowledge, estimating risks, dealing with scientific uncertainty, and judging the relevance of evidence.” The part of the project that was supposed to deal with mathematical modelling, risk assessment and communication, communication of scientific uncertainty, and similar topics, cannot be adequately covered by our existing staff: Øystein Linnebo works in the philosophy of mathematics, but his research is more centred on foundational issues rather than the applied ones mentioned above. Similarly, the research and teaching profiles of both new hires Karen Crowther and Gry Oftedal are only tangentially related to this central topic (Crowther covers the philosophy of physics, Oftedal the philosophy of the life sciences).

We would therefore like to hire someone for the 20 % position with expertise in the area of: issues regarding the application of mathematical modelling in the societal context, dealing with scientific uncertainty, and judging the relevance of evidence. Given the ethical and political dimension of the relevant issues, we would like to hire someone who has experience in ethical evaluation of research, and the interplay between the areas listed and broader ethical concerns. Further, we would like someone in the position who has practical experience in facilitating interdisciplinary communication across the boundaries between the humanities and the natural sciences, including medicine, and applied mathematics. Given that the central aim for this position is to engage with society, someone from the Norwegian context would be desirable in order to facilitate communication with all central stakeholders, and at how academic discussions interact with procedural questions in the use of science for policy making.

Job Description

Specifically, we envisage the person in this position to do the following work:

- Be responsible for a regular seminar/meeting series on “Mathematical Models: philosophical and ethical perspectives” that deals with issues regarding the use of mathematical models, machine learning, artificial intelligence and similar in a societal context.
- Establish networks that connect research ethics, mathematical modellers, experts in the use of expertise in policy making (e.g. project member Prof. Cathrine Holst), philosophy of science, and central actors in Norwegian medical research.

- Supervise MA students within the area of applied philosophy of science and research ethics.

Argument to call Dr. Anders Strand

Given the desired profile for the position to be filled, and the specific job description, we believe that this position should be filled by hiring Dr. Anders Strand through “kallelse”:

- Dr. Anders Strand is a philosopher of science (PhD, UiO, 2008), who is currently an advisor for the Regional Committees for Medical Research ethics.
- He was a central force behind the original application for CPS, an especially responsible for networking and connecting people around the University of Oslo, thus proving his strength in the kind of networking we would like to see in this position.
- In his current position, he is dealing exactly with evaluations of risk-benefit in scientific projects, ethical concerns regarding big data and the use of new statistical and mathematical tools, communication of scientific concerns in interdisciplinary settings and ethical decision making. Consequently, our position will integrate well with his current position.
- Strand has several international publications on themes like causal semantics, modelling and analysis, decision making in science and the use of new technologies, and group agency and responsibility. This includes publications in top tier journals like *British Journal for Philosophy of Science* and *Philosophy of Science*.
- He has already been engaged in initiating and attending a seminar series on “Mathematical Models: philosophical and ethical perspectives” as part of the Centre for Philosophy and the Sciences.
- He is an established supervisor on the MA level
- He has very strong networking experience in exactly the relevant context, especially as previous board member of the university wide Science Study colloquium series.
- He could, through his current position, and his networks, help realize CPS’ potential to connect the humanities and the natural sciences especially with an eye toward issues of current societal concern with regard to research ethics and procedures (to which he is directly exposed in his current position), communication of risk, and the use of mathematical modelling in a societal context.

Given the nature of the position, we do not at this point see anyone else who would come close to Anders Strand as a match for this position:

- Since we want the relevant person to build interdisciplinary networks at the University of Oslo, and to other actors in the Norwegian society, and to lead a regular seminar series, the person needs to be in Oslo on a regular basis. With only a 20 % position to offer, we evidently cannot bring someone from outside of Oslo here for the whole year.
- We have considered some other possible candidates, but have come to the conclusion that they are clearly less qualified for this position:
 - Veli-Pekka Parkkinen, currently postdoc at the University of Bergen. Has a research profile somewhat similar to Strand, but lacks his networking and organizing experience, experience also in research ethics, and connections to actors in the societal context.
 - Gry Oftedal, who fits part of the description, but not the connection to mathematical modelling, has already been hired full term by the project.
 - We are not aware of any other candidates who fit the description.
- We have considered gender considerations:
 - The Centre for Philosophy and the Sciences (CPS) that is searching for this position has so far made three permanent hires: Gry Oftedal, Karen Crowther, and Ingrid Lossius Falkum. All of them have been women. We have also hired one PhD candidate, Yael Friedman, who also has been a woman.

- For the present position we need a philosopher of science located in Oslo with an established network in the Norwegian context. We are not aware of any women fitting that description.

We thus do not see any other person than Dr. Strand at this point that could be equally suitable for the position we are seeking to fill. For this reason, we would like to call him for the position.