



**Baltic Methodist Theological Seminary
SELF-ANALYSIS 2024**

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INTRODUCTION

GENERAL INFORMATION

Name: Baltic Methodist Theological Seminary
Abbreviation: BMTS (all abbreviations used in the self-analysis are given in [Appendix 1](#)).
Legal status: Private higher education institution
Owner: Estonian Methodist Church (abbreviation: EMC)
Education: Applied Higher Education
Year of foundation: 1994
Address: Narva mnt 51, Tallinn, Estonia
Number of curricula: 3

HISTORY

The Baltic Methodist Theological Seminary was founded in 1994 with the main aim of educating clergy for the Methodist Church in the Baltic countries. From the very beginning, the education has had a practical orientation and has been conducted in three languages: Estonian, Russian and English. The first graduating class of 1998 consisted mainly of Methodist pastors already working in congregations in Estonia and Latvia. Over time, the BMTS expanded its reach and began to offer theological education to Christians from other denominations. The Seminary noticed that there was a clear need for theological education also for people who served in various lay leadership roles, often on a voluntary basis. In response to this need, the Seminary's emphasis on education expanded. Today, the BMTS sees its target group as Christians who feel called to Christian ministry, both within and outside the church, whether as clergy (ordained and hired by the church) or lay people (mainly volunteers or part-time workers in churches or non-profit organisations). In 2010, the traditional daytime study format was replaced by a cyclical study session system and e-learning consortium was joined. In 2013, the BMTS moved to a three-year curriculum. The Seminary has three curricula with the same content - in Estonian, Russian and English.

Table 1. Curricula and student numbers for the period 2021/2022 - 2023/2024. Source: Estonian Education Information System (EHIS).

Curriculum name	Language	EHIS code	Study level	Year of opening	Student numbers (19.Aug. 2024)
Theology and mission	Estonian	121657	applied higher education	2013	15
Theology and mission	English	121658	applied higher education	2013	7
Theology and mission	Russian	121659	applied higher education	2013	46

During the period of the pandemic, the Seminary made a major technical leap forward by starting to offer hybrid studies. In response to the challenges of the war against Ukraine, a War Time Student Assistance Plan was set up in 2022 to support the learning of Ukrainian students. In 2023, the first Erasmus+ study trip for faculty and students took place.

GOALS

The general **purpose** of the BMTS is set out in its [Constitution](#): The purpose of the Seminary is to prepare Christian workers, clergy and leaders for churches and Christian and charitable organisations by providing higher theological education based on the Methodist tradition and responding to the needs of the church and society; to support spiritual formation through the

educational process; to provide continuing education and lifelong learning opportunities. The **mission** of the BMTS is to provide theological higher education and offer continuing education that supports the spiritual formation of learners and prepares them for serving both the church and society. (Development Plan 2024-2028)

The **vision** for the year 2028 is to be an educational and competence centre that offers students a life-changing learning experience through an engaging educational process, meeting the needs of both the church and society. In addition to providing contemporary theological higher education, it aims to create opportunities for continuing education, being recognized both nationally and internationally. (Development Plan 2024-2028)

CORE VALUES

The **core values** of the BMTS are based on a Christian worldview and a Methodist quadrilateral consisting of four pillars: Scripture, tradition, reason and experience. From these, the core values of the BMTS are:

- The Bible and a personal relationship with God
- Christian worldview and Methodist theology
- Academic and practical focus
- Learner-centredness, inclusion and professionalism
- Ecumenism, internationalism, community-centeredness and integration.

The Seminary's owner, leadership, faculty, staff, students, alumni and key partners build on the traditional foundations and core values of the Christian Church, forming a community with a coherent value system, both within the school and in the partner network. A Christian worldview also underpins the BMTS' values in relation to human relations, the natural environment and the use of natural resources. These are described in the BMTS' Code of Ethics.

MEETING THE NEEDS OF SOCIETY AND THE LABOUR MARKET

By implementing the mission and vision of the BMTS, the BMTS contributes to the achievement of the objectives of the Estonian Education Strategy 2021-2035 to raise the quality of higher education and to provide learners with the knowledge, skills and attitudes that enable them to fulfil their potential in their personal lives, work and society. The strategic orientations of the BMTS are based on the **objectives and priorities of the Estonian Education Strategy**, which emphasise improving the quality of education, expanding lifelong learning opportunities and promoting learner-centred and value-based education. The Seminary, with its trilingual and hybrid learning opportunities, also contributes to the provision of wide variety and accessible learning opportunities and to the development of a diverse learning environment, which are also among the objectives of the National Strategy. With 30 years of experience, the BMTS is a private higher education institution that continues to develop, providing higher education and continuing education for the benefit of the Church and society. To contribute to the systematic improvement of educational quality, the Seminary has been also participating in the European Union-funded program "Quality and Internationalisation of Higher Education" (KVARA) since 2024.

The educational programmes of the Baltic Methodist Theological Seminary respond to the **needs of the labour market**, providing both the teaching of specialised knowledge and skills and the development of generic competences essential for the preparation of clergy, leaders of non-profit organisations and other social service providers. Preparing clergy and other non-profit sector workers contributes to increasing social inclusion and strengthening communities, in line with the objectives of the Estonian Civil Society Development Plan 2021-2030 to increase the capacity and impact of civil society and communities. Churches, faith-based organisations and society as a whole need educated clergy and professionals who

can provide spiritual guidance, serve communities and work with vulnerable groups. The BMTS' curriculum also includes the development of leadership and project management competences, which are essential skills for the wider labour market. The BMTS' emphasis on ethics, spiritual formation and service to society prepares graduates for a wide range of jobs requiring a strong values-based and community-based approach.

Over the past 30 years, the BMTS has trained people who have contributed to society with their knowledge and skills in the non-profit, private and public sectors, and have found employment in churches, Christian organisations, charities and elsewhere. The vast majority of alumni are either working or volunteering in churches and congregations. Among the **288 alumni** of the Baltic Methodist Theological Seminary are leaders of churches and denominations, alumni who are actively involved at the ecumenical level, Christian media workers, chaplains, alumni involved on the boards and in the leadership of churches and organisations, workers in social, health, education, training, cultural and other sectors. In order to provide timely and relevant education, feedback from alumni, employers and graduates are used to assess the relevance of the curriculum to the needs of the labour market and society, and to make the necessary changes. For a more in-depth overview of alumni's participation in the labour market and contribution to society, please refer to the chapter Serving Society and Appendix 3 "The BMTS alumni in the labour market and service to society".

INTERNATIONALISATION

The **strength and competitive advantage** of the BMTS compared to other applied higher educational institutions offering theological higher education is its internationality, supported by trilingualism and the possibility of hybrid studies. This is illustrated in the graph below, where the percentage of international students at the BMTS is shown in dark blue, the Estonian average in orange, the share of international students at the Estonian Free Church Theological Seminary (EFCTS) in green, and the share of the Institute of Theology of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church Institute of Theology (EELK UI) in light blue.

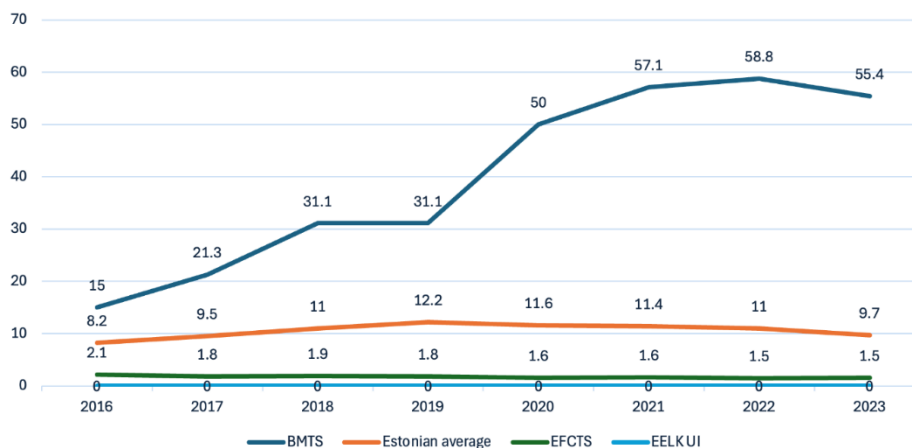


Figure 2: Foreign students as a percentage of all students (%). Source: Haridussilm.ee

At the BMTS, you can study in Estonian, Russian and English, both in the classroom and online. Trilingual hybrid education has made it possible to offer higher education to a much broader target group than just Estonian-speaking Christians, both linguistically and in terms of distance. In the academic year 2023/2024, students from the following countries studied at the BMTS: Estonia (38%), Ukraine (16%), Belarus (13%), Russia (13%), Finland (4%), the United States of America (3%), Latvia (3%), Nigeria (3%), as well as students from Israel, Ghana, New Zealand and Moldova. In addition to the above countries, students from

Lithuania, Brazil, Sweden, Romania and representatives of the Komi, Udmurt and Khanty nationalities have previously studied at the Seminary. A map of the countries of origin of the students and alumni can be found in [Appendix 3](#).

The presence of international faculty and students and cooperation at international level allows the development of competences to communicate with people from different cultures and increases intercultural understanding. As a testimony to the Seminary's contribution to promoting cultural tolerance and mutual understanding, Ukrainians, Russians and Belarusians study side by side in the same classroom.

In addition, the Seminary has historically maintained close relationships with several international partners, particularly in the United States, which has enabled it to support the quality of education through qualified foreign faculty. Since 2023, the Seminary has also been a member of the Erasmus+ program, which has facilitated the creation and development of partnerships with several European higher education institutions. The aforementioned KVARA measure also supports internationalisation.

ECUMENISM

The BMTS offers a sufficiently broad theological education to make it suitable not only for Methodists but also for members of **different denominations and churches**. In the academic year 2023/2024, the BMTS had members from the following churches and denominations: Estonian Methodist Church (42% of students), other Methodist churches (3%), Estonian Christian Pentecostal Church (ECPC) (9%), other Pentecostal churches (12%), Lutheran church (6%), Baptist church (4%) and Messianic church, non-denominational free churches and other churches and denominations (24%). In the past, members of Orthodox, Catholic and other churches have also studied at the Seminary.

A multilingual, multicultural and ecumenical approach has become a hallmark of the Seminary, as it values and strongly supports ecumenical bridge-building among students and faculty at grassroots level. For this, the BMTS has been awarded a special prize by the Estonian Council of Churches (ECC) in 2005 and 2007. Trilingualism, internationalism and ecumenism are also seen as important values by the students. In spring 2024, when asked for input for the accreditation self-analysis during student interviews, the students mentioned these three keywords among the most important values of the Seminary, justifying this by the enrichment of the learning environment.

The international character of the school, its trilingualism and the possibility of online learning have required the continuous development of **support services**. Classrooms and technology have been constantly upgraded to allow video broadcasting and hybrid learning. New translation equipment has been acquired to improve the quality of the translation service. International students are provided with the knowledge they need to cope in Estonian society and are introduced to Estonian language and culture. New support services are constantly being developed to ensure comprehensive support for both Estonian and international students. For more information on support services, see the section Learning Support systems.

LEADERSHIP

The BMTS is an arm of the Estonian Methodist Church. The Seminary's leadership **structure**, responsibilities and decision-making levels are defined in the constitution of the [EMC](#) and the [BMTS](#).

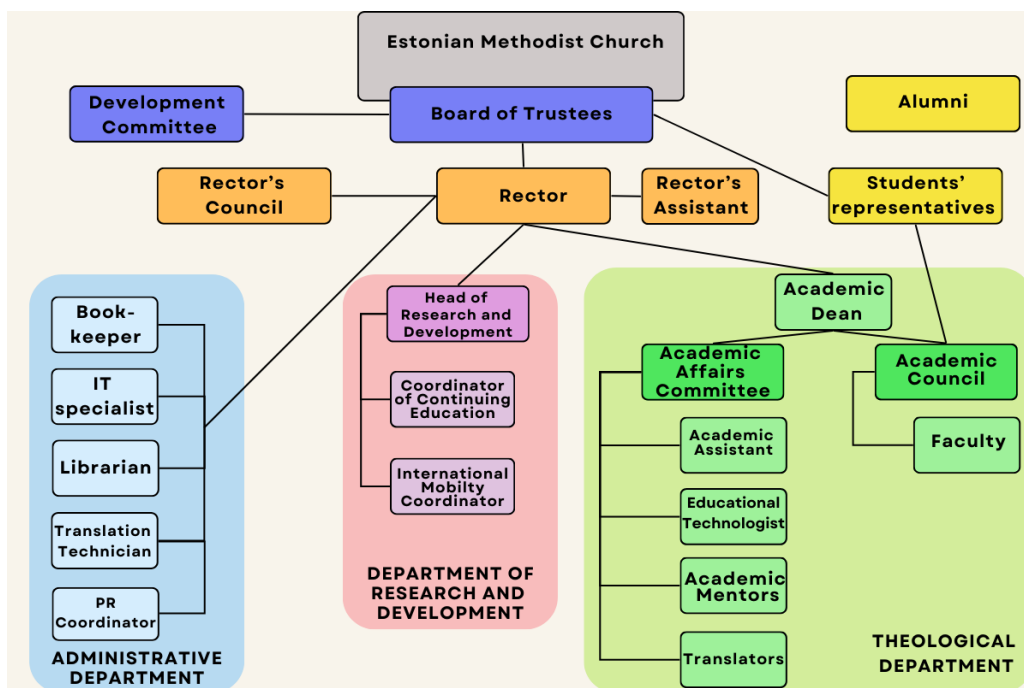


Figure 1. Structure of the Baltic Methodist Theological Seminary

The highest legislative body of the Seminary is the Board of Trustees, whose members are approved by the Seminary's owner. At least 1/5 of the members of the Board of Trustees must be representatives of the teaching staff, and an equal number of student representatives. The executive body of the Board of Trustees is the Rector's Council, which consists of the Rector, the Dean of the Theological Department, the Head of Research and Development and a representative of the Church Administrative Council of the EMC. The Rector is elected by the Board of Trustees and approved by the owner.

In the summer of 2023, Rector Dr Külli Tõniste's work at the Seminary came to an end. The new Rector, Dr Laur Lilleoja, was elected in June 2024 and will take up his post as Rector on 1 September 2024. In the interim period, Taavi Hollman, who previously served as Rector's Assistant, served as Interim Rector.

Students are involved in the governing of the Seminary through their Student Representatives. The student body elects its own representatives who are members with a vote of the Board of Trustees and the Academic Council.

The Continuing Education Department is currently undergoing renewal. In the past, it primarily served the continuing education needs of EMC pastors in cooperation with the EMC Superintendent. The new development plan envisions broadening the department's focus by designing courses for a wider range of target groups. To achieve this goal, a new coordinator position has been created, and recruitment is currently underway.

The Academic Council is responsible for developing, approving and implementing the curriculum and the academic regulations. The Academic Council is led by the Dean and includes the Rector, the Academic Assistant, Seminary faculty, as well as representatives of the translators and students, all of whom have a vote. Minutes of Academic Council meetings are taken and the decisions of the Council are binding for faculty and students.

The constitution of the Seminary allows for the creation of the necessary departments, branches and other subdivisions to achieve its objectives. In response to needs, a development committee has been set up in 2019 under the Board of Trustees to deal with fundraising.

In line with the objectives, mission and vision of the Seminary, and with the aim of increasing the involvement of the school's owner in the governing and day-to-day running of the school, the following changes have been made at the governance level:

- Due to the changes in the structure of the church, the Board of Trustees of the BMTS is led by the Superintendent of the EMC from July 2023. Whereas previously the head of the Board of Trustees was outside of Estonia (for the last 14 years a Bishop resident in Denmark), this role is now filled by a person living in Estonia and working in the same building as the Seminary, who has a better understanding of the Estonian culture, education system and social context, and is more closely connected to the local community and networks. As a result, the decisions and strategies of the Board of Trustees are better adapted to the specific conditions in Estonia and the local community is more effectively involved, thus increasing the effectiveness and impact of the organisation. The speed and flexibility to respond to change, which is also an advantage of having a local leader, is significant. Replacing a foreign leader with a local one does not mean a reduction in the international dimension of the Board of Trustees. 55% of the members of this body live outside Estonia.
- In order to strengthen the cooperation between the owner and the Seminary also at the level of the executive body, an amendment to the constitution of the Seminary was approved, according to which the EMC Administrative Council appoints one representative of the EMC to the Rector's Council. This will help to increase the owner's involvement in the governing and day-to-day work of the school.
- In order to keep in step with the activities and objectives of the school and its owner, several members of the Seminary's leadership team are part of the governing bodies of the EMC: Taavi Hollman, who acts as Interim Rector from summer 2023, and Dr Laur Lilleoja, who will act as Rector from September 2024, are members of the EMC Administrative Council; the Dean and the Rector's Assistant are part of the owner's structural unit responsible for developing the future strategy of the owner of the school.

STUDENT BODY

The table below presents **student statistics** for the last five years.

Table 2. Student statistics. Source: Haridussilm.ee

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Number of students	61	54	56	51	65
Curriculum 121657 (Estonian)	17	17	13	12	10
Curriculum 121658 (English)	10	14	11	10	9
Curriculum 121659 (Russian)	33	22	32	29	46
Curriculum 251	1	1	0	0	0
Female	31	32	39	32	35
Male	30	22	17	19	30
Age: up to 19	2	1	2	3	4
Age: 20-24	10	12	13	10	11
Age: 25-29	7	6	8	9	8
Age: 30-34	9	8	10	13	16
Age: 35+	33	27	23	16	26
International Students	19	27	32	30	36
Graduates	15	10	8	6	7
Admitted	14	16	22	15	29
Dropouts	7	2	11	2	0

The number of students enrolled in 2023/2024 increased significantly, mainly due to an increase in the number of Russian-speaking students. A steady upward trend can be observed in the number of international students. In the 2023/2024 academic year, 45 full-time, 14 part-time students (50-74% study load) and 5 external learners (less than 50%) studied at the Seminary.

The student body has been through the years consistently international, trilingual and ecumenical. The high proportion of Russian-speaking students over the years reflects the scarcity of alternative learning opportunities in the region and the fact that the support services developed to mitigate the effects of the war in Ukraine have paid off and enabled Ukrainians to receive theological education at the BMTS (Ukrainians are the second largest ethnic group among the BMTS students).

While in the period 2020-2022, the number of female students enrolling was higher, in 2023 the gender distribution of students was once again more balanced. The age distribution of students is evenly spread across age groups. Trends in drop-outs and graduates are discussed in more detail in the chapter Learning Support Systems. Statistics on international students are explained in the chapter on Internationalisation.

EMPLOYEES

The statistics on **faculty and staff** by five years are shown in the table below.

Table 3. Staff and faculty statistics

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Contract faculty	7	7	7	7	7
Contract support staff	3	5	4	5	6
Adjunct faculty	9	11	7	11	15
Guest faculty	2	0	2	3	4
Female	9	9	7	9	11
Male	11	11	9	17	21
Average age of faculty and staff	50	50	52	53	54

The BMTS has 7 contracted academic staff members with a total FTE academic teaching load of 3.1. Contracted academic staff also include staff in administrative and chaplain roles, which are not included in the academic teaching load. The number of full-time students per full-time equivalent contracted academic staff member is 14.5. The number of contracted support staff has been increased in order to meet the objectives of the Seminary more effectively.

In teaching practical subjects, expert practitioners are used as adjunct and visiting faculty to ensure relevance and applicability to the real working environment, and international experts to bring a broad range of scientific knowledge, perspectives and experiences. The share of international faculty (contract, adjunct and guest) was 50% in the 2023/2024 academic year. Nationals from the USA, Ukraine, Canada, New Zealand and the UK were represented.

Table 4: Statistics on faculty by qualification, teaching volume, age and gender.

FACULTY	Qualifications				ECTS taught	Age				Gender	
	Doctorate	Doctoral candidate	Masters	Bachelors		30-39	40-49	50-59	60+	Female	Male
Contract	2 (29%)	1 (14%)	4 (57%)		127 (65%)	1	2	2	2	3	4
Adjunct	6 (40%)	1 (7%)	7 (46%)	1 (7%)	58 (30%)	1	5	2	7	3	12
Guest	2 (50%)	1 (25%)	1 (25%)		9 (5%)		1	2	1	2	2

The average age of faculty is 55; the average age of contract faculty is 51.

The statistics on the **qualifications** of faculty show a consistent increase in those with doctoral degrees.

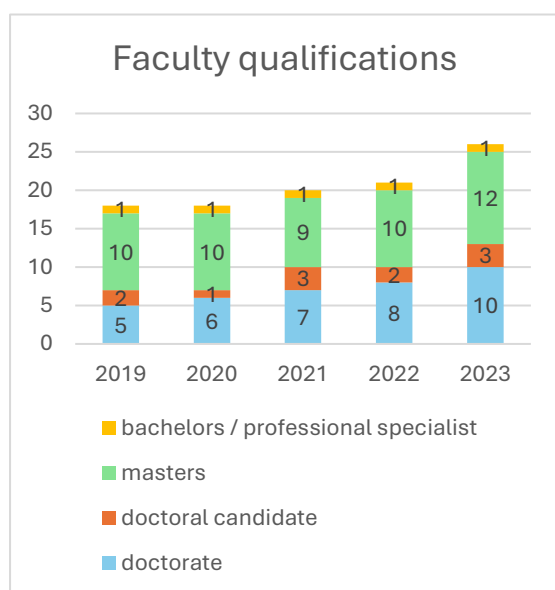


Figure 3: Qualifications of faculty for the period 2019-2023.

As the overall number of teaching staff has also been on an upward trend, the change in the proportion of faculty with a doctorate over the five-year period is shown more clearly in the table below, which shows the percentage of faculty with a doctorate. Compared to 2020, there has been a 100% increase in the number holding doctoral degrees (from five to ten).

Table 5: Percentage of faculty with a doctorate in the period 2019-2023

Percentage of faculty with a doctorate	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Among all faculty (contract, adjunct, guest)	27,8%	33,3%	35,0%	38,1%	38,5%
Among contract faculty	28,6%	28,6%	28,6%	28,6%	28,6%

For more information on faculty and staff, see the chapters [Resources](#) and [Faculty](#).

PROCESS FOR CONDUCTING SELF-ANALYSES AND REPORT

The results and recommendations of the previous accreditation were immediately analysed by the Seminary team after the accreditation process. In the interim period between accreditations, the Seminary has analysed and implemented the committee's recommendations and prepared for the next accreditation.

In autumn 2023, the Estonian Quality Agency for Education provided a training session for the Seminary, introducing the new framework for institutional accreditation. The training was attended by the Seminary's leadership, faculty, staff and the head of the Board of Trustees. Tasks for the preparation of the accreditation and creating the self-evaluation report were then distributed. Regular meetings were held to review what had been done and to allocate the following tasks.

Input for the self-analysis and report was received from student representatives, faculty, staff, leadership and the EMC members. The collection of material was mainly carried out by the Interim-Rector, the Rector's Assistant, the Dean, the Educational Technologist and the Academic Assistant. The self-analysis document was sent to the leadership, faculty, staff and student representatives for approval.

MAIN CHANGES TO THE STANDARDS FOLLOWING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF PREVIOUS INSTITUTIONAL ACCREDITATION AND OTHER QUALITY ASSESSMENTS

At the institutional accreditation in 2021, the expert panel highlighted areas for improvement and development proposals, on the basis of which the Seminary team prepared an action plan, assigned tasks and the Rector has regularly monitored the implementation of the action plan. Based on the committee's recommendations, the following improvements have been made:

1. Strengthening and developing research skills in applied sciences

The share of doctorate holders is on a steady upward trend. In 2019, doctorate holders accounted for 28% of all faculty, rising to 38.5% in 2023. This will ensure stronger academic excellence and better research skills in teaching and research.

The development of students' analytical and critical skills will be developed in an integrated way across all subjects, supported by the general subjects "Academic Writing" and "Foundations of Scientific Research", as well as supervision of the diploma paper. In the 2024 curriculum revision, Academic Writing was increased from 2 to 3 ECTS. Foundations of Scientific Research was divided over two semesters and increased in weight from 2 to 3 ECTS. Students now have monthly group sessions to guide the development of their diploma papers from March of their second year until December of their 3rd year. During this time they make two formal presentations before the commission, first to confirm their topic (12 months before the final defence), and again at a mid-term presentation (6 months before the defence). In between, a written review of the introduction is conducted in October. Ongoing private meetings with their advisor continues until through the pre- and final defence. To improve the work of the supervisors, a research seminar will be organised in autumn 2024.

In 2024, the BMTS Research, Development and Creative Activities (RDCA) strategy ([Appendix 4](#)) was drawn up, which is based on the vision of the Seminary and formulates the meaning of practical theology in the context of the Seminary. The RDCA strategy outlines the objectives, priorities, activities, timelines, and key indicators for the Seminary's RDCA during the 2024-2028 period.

Academic cooperation has been developed at both the Estonian and international levels through joint publications, conferences, and other outputs. The seminary's academic staff actively participate in research networks and, in addition to producing pedagogical materials, have increasingly published peer-reviewed articles. While there were no highly ranked publications recorded in the [Estonian Research Information System \(ETIS\)](#) database during the 2019-2021 period, from 2022 to 2024, Seminary staff have published 3 peer-reviewed scientific articles classified as 1.1 or 1.2 and at least 3 articles are currently under review. Most recent overview of the Seminary staff's scientific publications can be found in [ETIS](#). For more information on the activities of RDCA, see the [Research, Development and Creative Activities](#) section.

2. Making the criteria for assessing students more objective and more general.

In 2019, a staff and faculty handbook ([Appendix 5](#)) was produced and is available to faculty and staff on the front page of Moodle. The handbook is regularly updated. The most recent version is from 2024. The Handbook contains rules and recommendations on best practices for syllabus design, assessment of assignments and other topics. One of the aims of the Handbook is to ensure uniform assessment among faculty. All faculty are required to make the syllabus include assessment-related information available

to students online before the start of the course to ensure transparency and the implementation of outcome-based education. This requirement is set out in the Handbook ([Appendix 5](#)). The Dean monitors compliance with this requirement.

Course syllabi must include clear learning outcomes, homework assignments and assessment criteria. Faculty meetings in the period 2023-2024 have analysed the coherence and consistency of these elements with the curriculum, shared best practices, and created stronger links between learning outcomes, assignments and assessment criteria. Continued analysis of assessment criteria by the faculty will help to harmonise assessment standards and increase the objectivity of assessment. In some subjects, students are involved in the assessment of each other's work. Diploma papers are assessed by two readers and a committee, which ensures objectivity. Academic regulations set out the rights of students and the procedures for dealing with assessment disputes. Objectivity in assessment is ensured by defined assessment criteria and the possibility for students to challenge their grades.

The basis for assessment is described in more detail in the chapter on [student assessment](#).

3. Increasing transparency in the activities of the Seminary

The Seminary has added a formal structure to several informal activities by documenting important procedures, agreements and feedback. In the chapter on [Quality Culture](#), a number of internal and external evaluation activities are described which were previously mainly based on verbal agreement, but which have been recorded in writing with creating the Quality Improvement System. The guidelines and requirements for teaching are set out in the relevant documents, which are regularly updated and supplemented to keep them timely and relevant. The concerns raised by the Committee about potential conflicts of interest between faculty and students have been analysed in the Seminary's risk analysis ([Appendix 6](#)).

4. Developing strategies to increase the visibility of the Seminary

The Seminary has prepared a marketing and communication strategy ([Appendix 7](#)). Based on the strategy and the Seminary's main target group, marketing activities have not previously focused on the major media of Estonian society, but have focused on the channels through which the Seminar's main target group - the Christian community - can be reached most effectively. For this purpose, we have used the Seminary's own and the owner's online channels, e-mail lists, information channels of our partners, Christian platforms: radio, newspapers and magazines. For more details, see the chapter on [Resources](#) and [Serving Society](#). In the future, marketing activities are planned to focus more on the major media in the context of the new Rector Dr Laur Lilleoja's experience in sociology of religion and the renewed curriculum areas.

In the area of continuing education, the Seminary has found several new partners, both within the church and from outside. As a result of collaborative projects, the Seminary has reached a wide range of target groups: church planters and leaders, people working with children and youth, parents, people involved in music ministry in churches, counsellors for Ukrainian war refugees, psychologists and many other new target groups. The content of the training courses has varied from practical medical skills to apologetics. Equally varied has been the format of the continuing education, which has enabled a wide range of participants to take part. For a more detailed description of the content, format and participants of the continuing education courses, see the chapter on [Serving Society](#).

In response to the Commission's recommendation a wide range of material be added to the website, including students' diploma papers that are publicly available on the [website](#). Feedback from participants of continuing education courses and an overview of how the Seminary and its members serve society are included in [Appendix 26](#). The [website](#) also includes information on the library's opening hours.

As the building where the Seminary is located does not belong to the Seminary, but to the EMC Tallinn congregation, from whom the Seminary rents its premises, the BMTS is working closely with the congregation to find ways to use the building for the wider benefit of the community. In addition to its teaching activities, the BMTS organises training courses and conferences in these premises and has invited organisations from Estonia and abroad to hold its meetings and events. For example, the Estonian Association of Masters in Conference Interpreting and Translation organised its own meeting in the premises of the Seminary to get acquainted with the translation work of the BMTS and the infrastructure and technology (classrooms with translation booths, translation equipment) required for this work. The European Council of Theological Education (ECTE) organised a meeting on the premises of the Seminary. A conference of European Methodist churches, schools and organisations will be held on the premises in 2025. The owner also uses the building for the benefit of the community in a number of other ways: a food bank, music practices and concerts.

The Seminary's visibility in the community is enhanced by the active involvement of staff, alumni and students in charitable organisations, churches, leading national events and in various leading roles. For more details, see the Introduction and the chapter on Serving Society.

In addition to the four main areas of development mentioned above, the BMTS has addressed a number of other Commission's recommendations:

- The Seminary has systematically developed drop-out prevention by introducing stricter admission requirements, creating more flexible opportunities for participation in studies, extending the period for writing the diploma paper, analysing the causes of drop-outs, developing a mentoring programme, and developing a range of support measures to provide students with multifaceted support to complete their studies within the nominal period. These are described in more detail in the chapter on Learning Support Systems.
- The Seminary is working to ensure that the school has sufficient student numbers and income to ensure its sustainability.
- Feedback from employers, alumni and students is regularly sought to ensure that both higher and continuing education meet labour market needs.
- To ensure student-centred learning, students are involved at the management levels of the Seminary (discussed in more detail in the Introduction and Strategic Management chapters) and the pedagogical skills of the teaching staff are developed (described in more detail in the Faculty chapter).
- Progress has been made in developing international mobility. As a result of participation in international higher education networks, cooperation agreements have been signed with foreign higher education institutions and learning mobility of faculty and students has been organised. This is described in more detail in the chapter on Internationalisation.
- The Seminary continues to work on improving teaching materials and research databases. To this end, collaboration is done with Asbury Theological Seminary (ATS) and teaching materials are translated. This is discussed in more detail in the chapters on Research, Development and Creative Activities, Learning Support Systems and Resources.

QUALITY STANDARDS

The following chapters describe how the BMTS' activities meet the standards for institutional accreditation. In each chapter, the indicators of the respective standard, a description of compliance with the standard with examples and an analysis are provided. At the end of each chapter, the strengths of the BMTS in the respective standard and areas for improvement are highlighted.

1. STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

In its development plan ([Appendix 2](#)), the BMTS has set the objective of creating a professional, innovative and mutually respectful working environment through a strategic and inclusive management culture, based on the needs of students, faculty, alumni and other stakeholders.

STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT

Various stakeholders, including the owner, staff, students and external stakeholders, are systematically involved in the governance and development of the BMTS and their views are sought and taken into account.

As a private higher education institution, the BMTS is very closely linked to its owner, the **EMC**, which, with its subdivisions, is one of the largest employers of the Seminary's alumni. The cohesion between the Seminary and the EMC is strengthened by the participation of the EMC representatives in the Seminary's structural units (Board of Trustees, Rector's Council) and vice versa. The Seminary is accountable to the EMC Annual Conference - this allows delegates from all EMC congregations to be informed about the activities and plans of the Seminary. Consultations between the Seminary leadership and the EMC Administrative Council are organised to assess the fulfilment of the objectives and impact of the Seminary. Among other things, the Church Administrative Council has provided input to the planning of the Seminary's RDCA and feedback on the renewed curriculum. The competence of the EMC Church Council includes the approval of the BMTS' budget and the members of the Board of Trustees. Representatives of the EMC have also been actively involved in the preparation of the new development plan for the Seminary and the renewing of the curriculum, which ensures that the owner and the Seminary develop in the same direction.

The Seminary also cooperates closely with **other denominations** that send their members to study at the Seminary. The leaders of the EMC as well as other denominations (e.g. the ECPC, the Union of Estonian Evangelical and Free Churches) have been involved in the renewal of the curriculum (see the [Curriculum](#) chapter for more details). In addition, they have been asked for feedback on the organisation of the teaching (see the chapter on [Quality Culture](#) for more details) and have been involved in teaching by introducing their denominations. Close cooperation with **employers** of alumni (both EMC and other denominations) ensures that learning is needs-based, with employers providing feedback on the employability of graduates' knowledge and skills, and input on the kind of preparation the Seminary could offer to learners. This will increase the provision of labour market-driven learning and contribute to one of the focuses of the [Estonian Education Strategy](#) and the [Estonian Research and Development, Innovation and Entrepreneurship Strategy 2021-2035](#), namely to enhance cooperation between educational institutions and employers.

Students are involved in governance through the [student representatives](#), who participate in the work of the [Academic Council](#) and the Board of Trustees. These formal systems allow

students to raise concerns and complaints, to be informed of decisions concerning their proposals and to keep abreast of the plans of the Seminary leadership. Student representatives are also involved in the curriculum renewal working group and in the preparation of the new development plan.

Faculty and staff representatives participate in the work of the Academic Council and the Board of Trustees, and the whole staff can make suggestions at regular team meetings.

The Board of Trustees includes representatives of key **external partners** to maintain close contact between the Seminary and the partners. External partners include the partner seminary in the United States, the Seminary's sponsors, organisations that send their members to study at the Seminary, etc. More details are given in the Internationalisation chapter.

Alumni can submit proposals through the Alumni Association. Representatives of the alumni association were involved in the recent curriculum review process. The Seminary sees the more systematic involvement of alumni as a development area, which would enable the use of alumni experience in teaching and even more effective design of teaching activities and continuing education in line with the needs of the labour market.

EVALUATION OF THE ACHIEVEMENT OF OBJECTIVES

A system has been developed to assess the achievement of the targets, analysing the achievement of the long-term objectives by monitoring trends in key indicators and the achievement of the targets set in the development plan. The evaluation of the short-term objectives is carried out through regular analysis at different levels of management and through reporting. The consistency of the activities with the objectives and the effectiveness of the selected actions are analysed at different levels of management according to their respective area of responsibility.

- The Rector monitors continuously budget execution and reports to the Rector's Council meetings.
- The Rector submits a quarterly activity and financial report to the Board of Trustees.
- Once a year, the BMTS submits an activity and financial report to the EMC Annual Conference. In the same report, objectives are set for the following period.
- Regular consultations between the Rector and the EMC Administrative Council help to assess the school's progress and obstacles to achieving its goals.
- Achievement of the longer-term objectives are assessed regularly throughout the period of the development plan, and more thoroughly at the end of the development plan period.
- Statistics are regularly collected and trends monitored on key indicators such as academic performance, reasons for drop-outs and non-completion in the nominal period, student and staff satisfaction and other outcomes. Based on the analysis of trends in key indicators, new measures will be introduced. For example, a mentoring programme has been launched to prevent drop-outs and to support students to graduate in nominal time. A quality improvement system has been developed to assess the achievement of objectives and the impact of activities, and is described in more detail in the chapter on Quality culture.
- In-depth analysis and evaluation is also carried out as part of the accreditation process. The action plan will be adapted according to the proposals of the Accreditation Committee. On the basis of the development proposals from the previous accreditation, an action plan was drawn up and its fulfilment has been regularly monitored and activities implemented. The implementation of the quality assessment recommendations is described in more detail in the introductory section.

- Asking for regular feedback from students, graduates and staff is one of the essential tools for assessing both long-term and short-term goals.

A staff survey in 2024 confirms that **satisfaction with the leadership of the Seminary** is high. The survey included 22 statements to rate on a 5-point scale. The average scores given by the staff ranged between 4.09 and 5. The statement "The leadership is accessible to me" received a maximum score of 5. The highest scores were given to the statements "I am generally satisfied with the school" (4.91), "I like working at the BMTS" (4.82) and "My job allows me to use my abilities, knowledge and skills" (4.82). The lowest scores were for the statements 'flow of information' (4.1) and 'receiving feedback on work' (4.09). The assessment of the achievement of the objectives and the feedback system are described in more detail in the chapter on Quality Culture.

While the constitution sets out the overall purpose of BMTS, the development plans include specific targeted measures, measurable activities, and outcomes. The achievement of short-term goals relies on implementation plans that specify deadlines, responsible parties, and funding sources.

Indicator: the implementation rates of the activities of the previous development plan (2021-2023) are shown in the graph below.

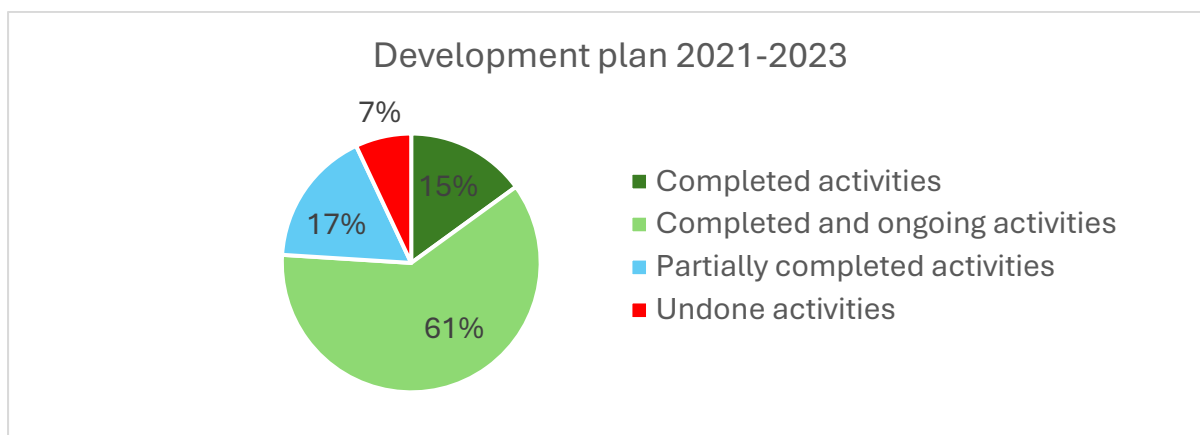


Figure 4: Achievement rates for the actions of the Development Plan 2021-2023

Even though the period of the previous development plan was set shorter than usual (3 years), this period was marked by significant changes both in the world and in Estonia, which had a direct and major impact on the activities and plans of the Seminary. The focus of the development plan drawn up during the pandemic was sometimes based on needs that were current at the time. Changes in the world economic and political situation in a short period of time have slowed down the implementation of certain plans.

For example, the development of cooperation with the Moscow Seminary on textbooks, as set out in the development plan's implementation plan, has been hampered by the war. Rapid changes in society have led to a shift of focus to other activities, e.g. needs-based measures have been developed to support Ukrainian students. Despite the fact that the changes in society have required the Seminary to be flexible, responsive to unpredictability and to apply agile management, the percentage of achievement of the key results of the development plan is good. Out of the 109 actions planned in the Implementation plan, only 8 (7%) are not implemented. 19 (17%) actions have been partially implemented. A total of 82 actions have been implemented, of which 16 (15%) have been completed and finished, 66 actions (61%) were completed but are ongoing. The latter are mainly initiatives that have been launched but

need to be continued, e.g. activities related to student recruitment, staff training, promotion of cooperation, etc.

The objectives of the development plan put a strong emphasis on supporting students to complete their studies in nominal time. To this end, a mentoring programme was developed, the effectiveness of which is continuously measured and on the basis of which the support action is developed. In the event of learning difficulties, students are offered the possibility of creating an individual learning plan, and a number of other methods are implemented, as described in more detail in the chapter on Learning Support Systems. There have been developments in student mobility. Efforts to ensure staff salary increases have continued. The development of RDCA has been addressed. A wide range of continuing education opportunities have been offered. The Seminary's digital learning infrastructure has been upgraded and a number of other objectives set in the development plan have been implemented. For more details on the implementation of the activities of the previous development plan, see Appendix 8.

In the first half of 2024, a **new development plan for the period 2024-2028** was completed in cooperation with the leadership, staff, faculty, representatives of the EMC and students. The classification of the development areas of the new development plan is based on the quality standards for institutional accreditation developed by the Estonian Quality Agency for Education. Among the most important objectives of the development plan are increasing the proportion of Estonian-language students, increasing financial capacity, improving the quality improvement system, increasing the amount of learning mobility, supporting the self-development of faculty members, promoting cooperation with other higher education institutions, creating more opportunities for taking into account the special needs of students, implementing RDCA in line with the strategy and other goals and plans related to the teaching and research activities, management, organisation and working conditions of the Seminary.

The BMTS has prepared a **risk analysis** (Appendix 6) to identify, assess and manage the various risks that may affect the achievement of its strategic objectives. For each risk, its likelihood and impact have been assessed and a risk mitigation strategy has been developed.

ACTIVITIES:

- The development planning of the Baltic Methodist Theological Seminary is purposeful and systematic, resulting in a strong and well-functioning school with high levels of satisfaction among both staff and students.
- Various stakeholders are involved in the development of the school, and regular evaluations are carried out to assess the achievement of the objectives set and the impact of the Seminary's work, so that it continues to develop and meet society's expectations.
- The BMTS' governance is well thought through, ensuring that the activities of the Seminary' are in line with its mission and vision.

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT:

- Involving alumni more systematically in the life of the Seminary to strengthen links with the labour market.
- Filling the posts of continuing education and mobility coordinators.

2. RESOURCES

OBJECTIVES

The BMTS has formulated its resource **objectives** in its development plan ([Appendix 2](#)): The Seminary has a motivated and competent staff and faculty; systematic, purposeful and sustainable management of infrastructure and financial resources; effective and purposeful internal and external communication.

The following analysis presents an overview of the Seminary's use of funds, infrastructure, communication activities, and staff satisfaction.

FINANCES

The Rector's Council drafts the budget, which is approved by the Board of Trustees and the EMC Administrative Council. The Board of Trustees regularly monitors the implementation of the budget. The Development Committee of the Board of Trustees, in cooperation with the Rector and the Board of Trustees, sets funding targets and deals with securing funding. The financial reports are reviewed by the EMC Audit Committee. The Board of Trustees, the EMC Administrative Council and the EMC Annual Conference review and approve the EMC financial reports. The financial report of the Seminary is part of the annual financial report of the EMC and is publicly available in the Estonian Business Register.

The following graph illustrates the total expenses and income of the Seminary for the period 2018-2023.

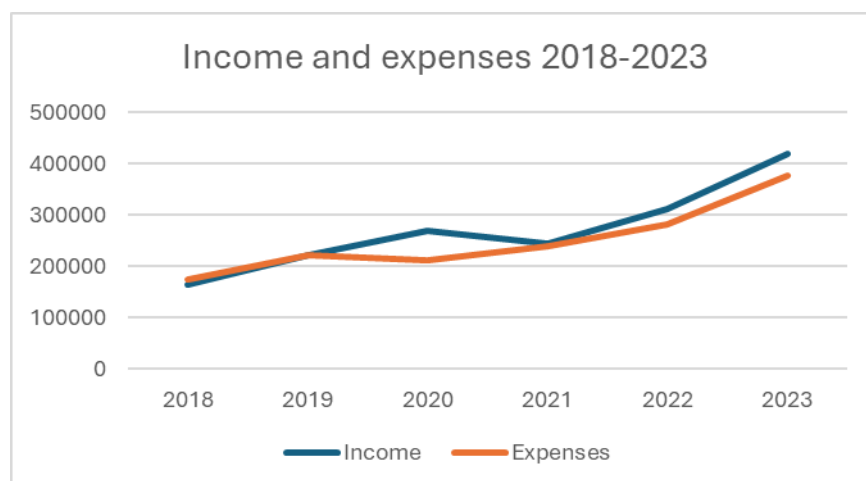


Figure 5. Seminary's expenses and income for the period 2018-2023

Compared to 2021, income in 2023 increased by 72% and expenditure by 57%, confirming the financial sustainability of the Seminary. The responsible use of resources is reflected in the reserve built up over the years, which may be needed in the event of unexpected increases in costs or decreases in income. The Seminary has an additional reserve fund deposited with LHV bank.

INCOME

For already 30 years the Seminary has been successful in consistently raising **income** to ensure adequate funding to provide quality education. The significant increase in income is due in particular to the dedicated work of the development committee set up within the Board of Trustees to increase income, the consistent development and maintenance of partnerships and the establishment of new contacts. In 2023, GBHEM consultant Dr Scott Gilpin conducted a workshop for the team and members of the Board of Trustees on fundraising,

which has had a positive impact on finding new sources of income. Funding for the Seminary is mainly based on tuition fees and various donations and grants.

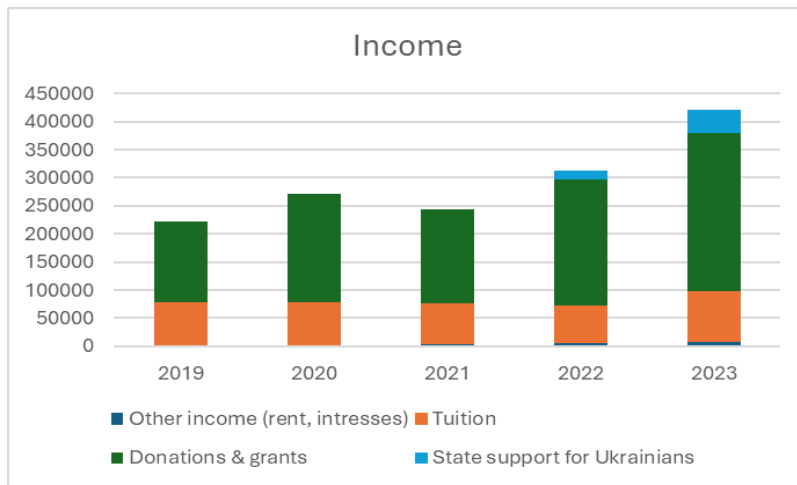


Figure 6. Distribution of the Seminary income

The nominal tuition fees have accounted for 21-35% of total income over the years. In recent years, the Seminary has also generated some additional revenue, which is planned to be emphasized more in the future. The Seminary also earns income from conference fees, book and souvenir sales, and similar activities. There are plans to expand publishing activities in the future, which would also bring in additional income.

Tuition fees were increased to €2050 and €2200 in 2021 and 2023 respectively. The current tuition fee remains at an average level compared to the tuition fees of other private theological higher education intuitions.

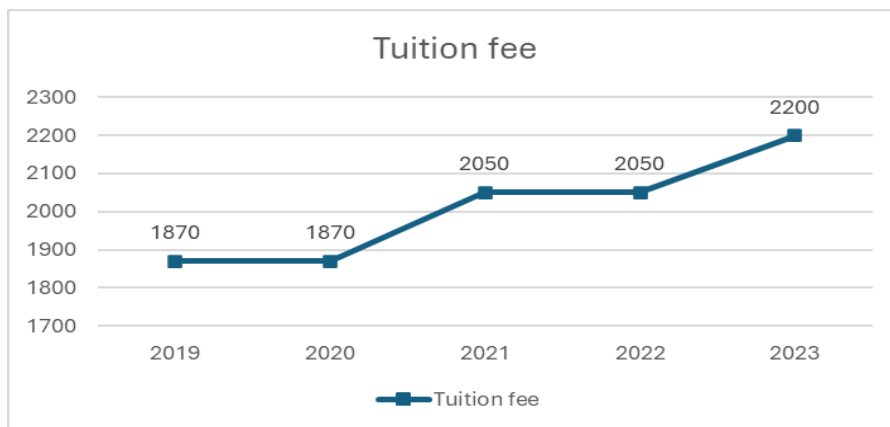


Figure 7. Change in the amount of tuition fees over the period 2019-2023

Each year, the BMTS has awarded various **scholarships** to students, which have reduced the amount of tuition fees by up to a third. For many students, these incentives have been financially decisive in helping them to start and continue their studies.

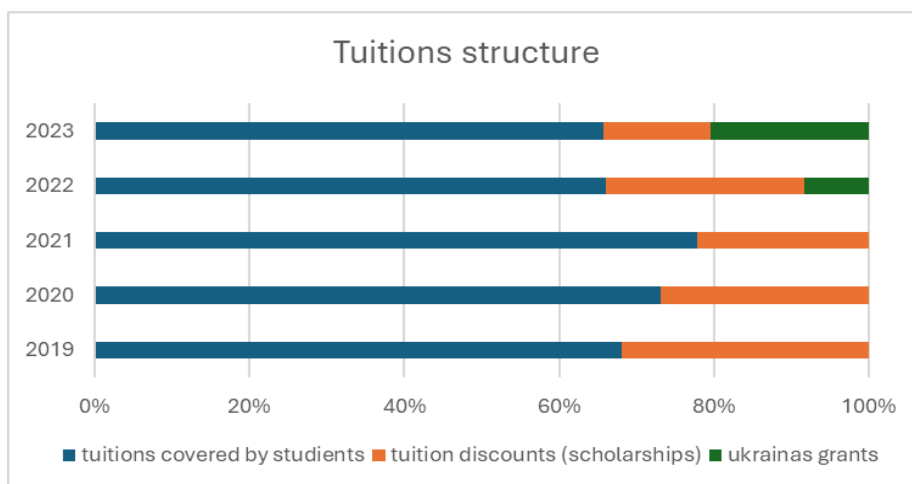


Figure 8: Tuition fees structure for the period 2019-2023

In 2022 and 2023, the Ministry of Education and Research allocated in total €55,000 in exceptional earmarked funds to support Ukrainian students, which also covered their tuition fees. A more detailed overview of the scholarships can be found in the [Learning Support Systems](#) section.

A significant contribution to the Seminary's income has come from various **external donations and grants**, which accounted for 71% of total income in 2023.

One of the most important partners has been Asbury Church in the United States. This congregation has been a partner of the Seminary since the establishment of BMTS and has supported the Seminary with significant annual contributions. In 2023, Asbury's support accounted for 22% of income. Asbury Church is also represented on the Seminary's Board of Trustees.

The Seminary has also had a long-standing partnership with both the Holston Foundation and the World Methodist Council World Evangelism (WMCWE). Both organisations enable US residents to support the work of the Seminary through their online giving platforms.

The General Board of Higher Education and Ministry (GBHEM) of the United Methodist Church (UMC) launched a collaborative partnership programme in 2018 called Regional Hubs for Leadership, Education and Development (LEaDHub), aimed at supporting the development of theological schools and Christian leaders. Under this programme, the Seminary has received financial support for various activities over several years. For more details on the activities carried out with LEaDHub funding, see the RDCA chapter.

Through the UMC General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM) and WMCWE, BMTS receives grants from congregations as well as from individuals.

During the period under review, the General Conference of UMC Central Conferences Theological Education Fund (CCTEF) has also provided funding to the Seminary in support of multilingual education.

As already mentioned, the Ministry of Education and Research allocated ad hoc funding to support higher education and Estonian language learning for Ukrainian students from 2022-2023.

Funding has also been provided by the Erasmus+ programme to promote academic mobility.

The contribution of the school's owner, the Estonian Methodist Church, has increased significantly. Compared to previous years, in 2023 the contribution of the EMC increased more than 3 times. In addition, the Seminary has a stable donor base in Estonia.

COSTS

The increase in income has made it possible to allocate more funds to staff and faculty salaries, infrastructure improvements, support services, increased scholarships, improved teaching and other necessary expenses.

Table 6. Costs of BMTS for the period 2021-2023

	2021	2022	2023
Salaries	163345	188818	240504
Investments in infrastructure	21820	22448	32458
Operation & development	13832	16996	28892
Office rent	21474	23621	26464
Scholarships	3620	5695	14119
Office costs	7481	6953	8366
Cooperation	661	2092	7339
PR	100	2091	2948
Other costs	7781	13885	15204
Total	240114	282598	376295

Increasing incomes and the collection of earmarked subsidies have made it possible to invest significant sums in **infrastructure**. Much of the investment in technical equipment was made during the pandemic, but the technical base has continued to be developed since. New computers have been purchased for use in the library by staff and students. Classrooms have been upgraded with technical capacity - screens, cameras and other equipment have been purchased to provide professional-level hybrid learning. Some years ago, investment was also made in replacing interpretation equipment. As a result, the BMTS is able to offer students a higher quality translation service and to generate additional income from the rental of interpretation equipment.

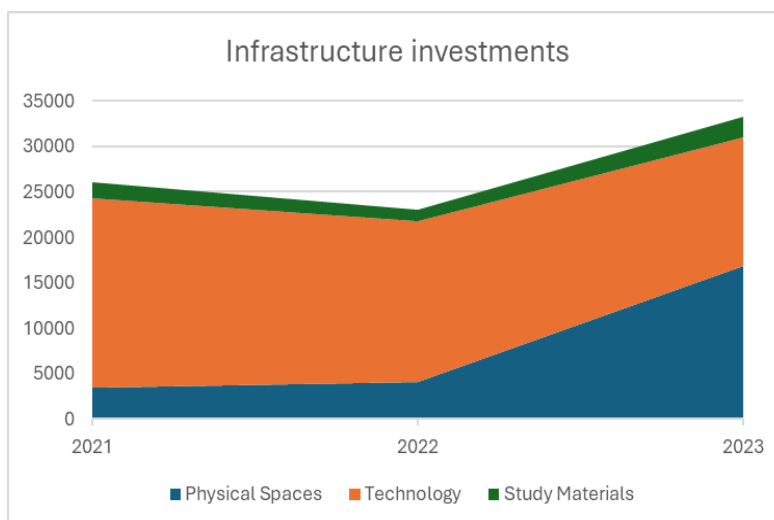


Figure 9: Infrastructure investments in the period 2021-2023

From 2023 onwards, investment in **improving premises** has been increased. The Seminary is housed in the building where, at the design stage, a theological seminary was planned alongside the church headquarters and the sanctuary. The Seminary has been allocated five

classrooms of varying sizes, two of which are equipped with translation booths, for lectures and group work. Four classrooms are equipped with built-in projectors and, if necessary, a mobile projector can also be used. The Seminary staff have access to a teachers' room and 5 offices. Students can also use a room where they can look after a small child while listening to a lecture broadcast. The Seminary people can use the other facilities in the building (cafeteria, lobby, hall, studio). Seminary worship services are usually held in the chapel. During the study sessions, students can stay in a dormitory in the same building at a reduced price with private rooms, shared kitchen and laundry facilities. WIFI access is available throughout the building.

Based on feedback from students, the library has been made more comfortable and user-friendly with the addition of sofas and armchairs, which create corners suitable for deeper study. To improve the working environment for staff, in 2023 a kitchen area with a lounge area was built in the teachers' room, the whole room was renovated, the furniture was replaced and six workstations were created.

The existing furniture was recycled and a waste sorting system was introduced to fit into the building. In cooperation with a Seminary alumni, the installation of beehives on the roof of the building is being considered, thus raising awareness among the Seminary's members of environmentally friendly practices and the importance of nature in the urban environment. The honey produced by the apiaries will be used as a souvenir of the Seminary.

Regular meetings with the owner of the building are organised to ensure good management and sharing of premises and technical equipment.

A survey carried out in 2024 showed that personnel were very satisfied with the working conditions (average score 4.73/5) and that the resources needed for their work were considered adequate (4.55/5).

DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE

The Seminary is using Microsoft Office, which provides the latest versions of Office Pro Plus programmes on all computers. Teachers and students have authorised access to all MS Office programs and the cloud-based OneDrive is used to store documents. Seminary staff and students are able to log in to the various systems (Moodle, Webriks Online Library, Resources Web Varamu, Office 365 applications, OneDrive, SharePoint intranet, StrikePlagiarism plagiarism checker) with their Office 365 profile, ensuring stable, secure and private access to the Seminary resources. Two of the classrooms are equipped with a large screen and a smartboard for additional interactive classes. Teachers have access to laptops and a laptop for recording and editing videos. All computers in the Seminary are equipped with ESET NOD central anti-virus. In cooperation with the Estonian Methodist Church, a backup server, a mailing list server and a video server are available. The school has its own storage device with Raid technology connected to its network for storing video files.

The Seminary is using a number of web-based information systems. It uses Tahvel for course management, Moodle for e-learning administration and Lime Survey for feedback collection and the creation and implementation of research questionnaires. The *BMTS varamu* is the Seminary's open access website for learning resources, manuals and guides. OpenCast is a server with software for recording, editing, managing and distributing lecture videos. The Seminary is also linked to an online student card application centre, which offers the possibility to apply for a student and teacher card. The Seminary transfers its information on students, faculty, curricula, graduation information, etc. to the national information system Estonian Education Information System. Zoom is used as a platform for online lectures. Its translation function is particularly useful in the Seminary context. Mailchimp is used to

compile and distribute the Rector's monthly newsletter to keep in touch with the wider Seminary community, alumni and supporters.

LIBRARY AND STUDY MATERIALS

In addition to new purchases, the library also receives donations of books from individuals and organisations. New books are purchased in collaboration with faculty and external consultants. Particular emphasis is placed on literature and materials on Methodism, Wesley Studies and mission. The acquisition of new books and information materials is based on the Seminary development plan and the criteria reflected therein, as well as on specific research projects and lectures.

Between 2020 and 2024, a total of 1,150 books have been added to the library, including 362 in Estonian and 787 in other languages. 52% of the library's collection is in Estonian.

A survey carried out in the academic years 2021/2022-2023/2024 showed that students are very satisfied with the availability of study materials. The statement "The required literature was available to students" received an average score of 4.66/5.

The library has an administrative computer with Riksweb software and public computers for online research and studying. All students have access to a multifunctional photocopier for scanning, making copies and printing materials. Students have card-based access to the building and the library at all times. There is a self-service computer in the library where students can borrow books using their student card or ID. A librarian assists students with searches.

Seminary students also have access to Asbury Theological Seminary's (ATS) electronic research resources, which is introduced to all students in the first semester. A cooperation agreement signed in 2024 stipulates that ATS provides limited access to the B.L. Fisher Library's online research databases as part of the Fisher Research Fellowship Program. Visiting scholars have full access to the research resources of the B.L. Fisher Library during the semester. BMTS students are taught how to use both the ATS e-library and public library databases.

A survey was conducted among BMTS members in 2022 to gather feedback and improve the library. Positives highlighted were the 24/7 accessibility of the library, the possibility of independent use, the selection of theological literature, the possibility of using computers and making copies, and the helpfulness and advice of the librarian. Additional suggestions included improving lighting, adding a variety of seating areas with sofas and chairs, and providing digital access to diploma papers. Based on the suggestions, improvements were made to the library in 2023-2024 and a link to diploma papers was added to the website.

The library is open to anyone interested, even outside the Seminary. Information on library opening hours is available on the website. For more information on the library and study materials, see the section on Learning Support Systems.

PERSONELL

In order to ensure a motivated and competent staff and faculty, the Seminary strives to provide opportunities for staff personal development, competitive salaries and an environment conducive to teaching and research.

In 2019, the Rector's Council developed a 5-year salary increase plan for faculty for the period 2021-2025. Each year, the salaries of faculty have been increased by an average of 10.6%. For more detailed information on the salary increase plan and how to achieve this target, see Appendix 9. Next year, the Seminary will set new salary increase targets.

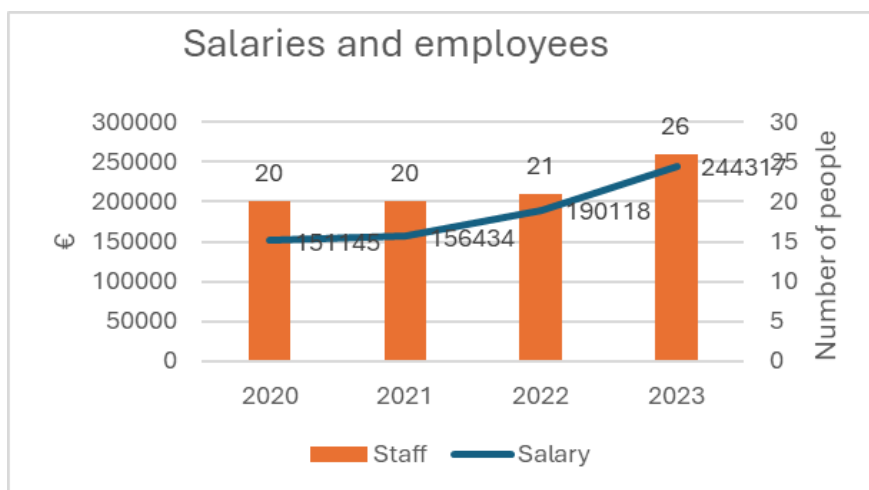


Figure 10: BMTS staff numbers and salary costs for the period 2020-2023

In addition to a salary, the Seminary offers its staff the opportunity to participate in training and mobility activities with Seminary funding, free participation in field trips, lectures, continuing education programs and informal staff social events. A bonus is paid to Seminary staff on the occasion of important family events (e.g. birth of a child) and jubilees. Each year, the Rector awards the Employee of the Year award to one staff member. Employees have the flexibility to plan their work and working hours and can work partially from home.

RECRUITMENT

According to the constitution of the Seminary, the Board of Trustees determines the qualifications and job descriptions of the staff, and approves the posts of permanent faculty, together with the salary range. The elaboration of the specific conditions and the revision of the job descriptions of the Seminary's faculty are delegated to the executive body, the Rector's Council. In order to ensure a reasonable distribution of tasks, the Rector and the Dean regularly review the workload and tasks of the staff and, if necessary, changes are made. The Dean and the Rector give directions concerning day-to-day work. All official directions are based on minuted records and given in written form.

The criteria for recruiting new faculty for long-term contract positions are based on the Estonian Higher Education Act and the constitution of the Seminary. Staff qualifications are defined in more general terms in the constitution and more specifically in the job descriptions. Criteria and a process for the recruitment of academic staff have been developed. The Dean is responsible for the training and mentoring of new faculty, the Rector for other staff. An educational technologist provides personalised training to all new staff to familiarise them with the information systems.

STAFF

As of June 2024, the faculty and staff of the Seminary includes 13 contracted staff members: the Rector, the Rector's Assistant, the Dean, the Academic Assistant/PR, the IT Specialist/Educational Technologist, 5 faculty members, the Accountant/Librarian, the Translation Technician, the Head of Research and Development. Of the 13 staff, 8 teach regularly. In order to support the spiritual formation of students in the learning process, one member of faculty has been assigned the role of chaplain, in addition to academic duties. In addition to contracted faculty and staff members, the Seminary made use of regular adjunct faculty from other Estonian and foreign higher education institutions, as well as practitioners in their field and guest faculty to teach individual courses. In addition, interpreters, paid on an hourly basis, and students who perform an IT support role are hired.

The posts of Continuing Education and Mobility Coordinators are currently vacant.

STAFF PERFORMANCE REVIEWS

The Rector conducts regular performance reviews with staff, in the context of which development plans are drawn up and key areas for competence development are identified. The Seminary supports the personal development of faculty and staff by planning financial resources for training and study trips, by allowing time for self-development alongside teaching, and by offering participation in trainings and mobility. Internal training for Seminary staff and joint training with other private theological higher education institutions have been organised, and the possibility has been given to participate in training of the staff member's own choice. Information on staff participation in training is summarised in [Appendix 10](#).

EMPLOYEE FEEDBACK

The BMTS staff satisfaction with the support for their development and the opportunities to participate in professional training is high. In a survey carried out in 2024, staff gave an average score of 4.6 out of 5 to the adequacy of professional training opportunities. Staff feedback shows stable satisfaction or some upward trend in all areas. For the statement "I like working at the BMTS" included in the survey, 82% of respondents gave the maximum score (5). 18% gave this statement a score of 4. The statement "I feel valued as an employee" received a very high average score (4.73/5). There was a significant increase in satisfaction with this question compared to 2021, when the corresponding score was 4.18.

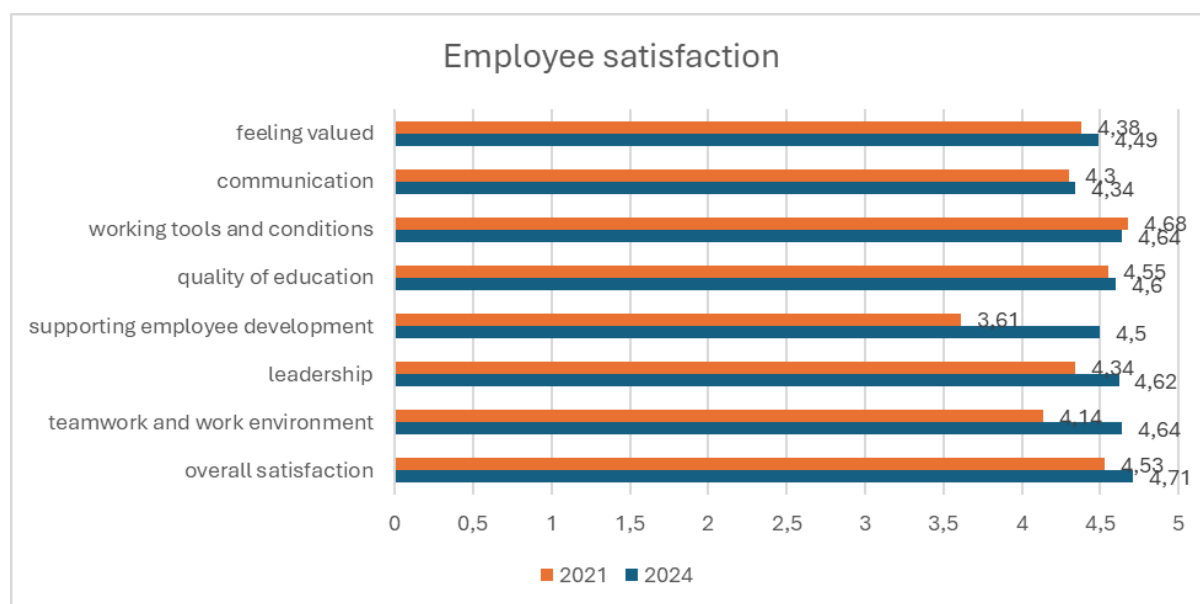


Figure 11: Employee satisfaction survey results for 2021 and 2024

More information on the results of the staff satisfaction surveys can be found in the chapters [Quality Culture](#) and [Faculty](#).

MARKETING AND EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION

The BMTS' internal and external communication objectives are set out in the Marketing and Communication Strategy ([Appendix 7](#)). The main external communication objectives are to increase the proportion of Estonian-speaking students, to raise the profile of the Seminary and to promote academic careers. As the main target group of the BMTS is the Christian community, marketing will focus primarily on Christian channels.

The following activities have been carried out to inform the public about the activities of the BMTS, to raise awareness of the Seminary and to promote academic careers:

- The Seminary has a website in three languages, where information is presented in a systematic and targeted way. The front page is updated with the latest news and information on events, training and conferences. Information on enrolment, studies and other necessary information is easy to find. The website features students' diploma papers.
- The Seminary's activities, events, trainings, conferences, field trips, study sessions and daily life is regularly posted on social media to keep the Seminary in the public eye and inform the public about its activities. New material is actively posted on the Seminary's Facebook and Instagram pages. Posts on both pages are mainly in Estonian. An automatic translation function allows the texts to be read in other languages.
- The Seminary's Youtube channel features recordings of several conferences and lectures, as well as video interviews with alumni sharing their experiences at the Seminary.
- For the recruitment of students, videos and posters in three languages are produced and distributed in the congregations of the EMC and to ecumenical partners, information is posted both at the Seminary and on the EMC social media, on the EMC website and sent to the EMC e-mail lists. Information about starting the studies is also distributed via Christian radio. The same channels are also used to promote the Seminary's trainings, conferences and events.
- Short and engaging video clips are regularly posted on the Seminary's social media to introduce the subjects. The short videos act as an appetizer to generate interest in the subjects taught at the Seminary.
- Diploma papers defenses and graduation ceremonies are broadcast to the public via video with the aim of sharing information about the Seminary, disseminating the knowledge gained from the diploma papers and popularising academic careers.
- At training courses and conferences organised by the Seminary, with participants from outside the Seminary membership, the possibility of studying at the Seminary is introduced. Over the past year, the Seminary has organised several training courses in cooperation with other organisations, networks or EMC subunits. This has opened up the possibility of sharing information about the training course in question, but also about the Seminary in general, with new audiences. For example, a webinar series for parents and Sunday school teachers was organised in cooperation with the EMC Children's Ministry Board; a seminar on "Children and War" was organised in cooperation with other denominations and Ukrainian psychologists. For more information on the organised training courses and the participants, see the chapter on Serving Society.
- Information about the Seminary reaches the membership of the Estonian Methodist Church largely through the Seminar staff, students and alumni, a large number of whom are also members of the EMC. More strategically, information about the Seminary is disseminated in the EMC magazine Koduteel, in which the BMTS members and alumni regularly write articles and which publishes information about enrolment in the Seminary on an annual basis. The magazine also disseminates advertisements for training courses and conferences organised by the Seminary, and features faculty and staff through personal stories. Once a year, the EMC has a Seminary Sunday, when all the EMC congregations pray for the Seminary, read a greeting text from the Rector or show a video of the Seminary, and take up a collection in support of the Seminary. Seminary faculty lead Bible studies and deliver sermons at the EMC's largest annual Summer Conference.
- Cooperation with the Next Step Bible School of the ECPC on joint marketing has been launched.
- Continuing education information has been sent to the lists of other denominations.

- The BMTS is involved in the publishing of the Time for Kindred Nations magazine. This magazine focuses on the national identity of other Finno-Ugric people groups, introducing their cultural and religious expressions and cooperation projects between these nations.
- Ecumenical Christian youth are reached thanks to the youth magazine Pluss, which publishes an advertisement for the Seminary in each issue and occasionally features articles by Seminary staff or alumni.
- Paid advertisements have been bought in Estonia's largest Christian newspaper, Eesti Kirik, and on the Christian TV channel TV7.
- Leaflets and roll-ups are used to promote the Seminary at trainings, conferences, EMC and ecumenical events.
- Good cooperation with Christian radio stations has created the opportunity to promote all the events of the Seminary on the radio and to report them afterwards. In addition, there is a BMTS radio show on Pereraadio, which includes personal interviews with almost all BMTS faculty members and introduces the Methodist theology. Broadcasts on Estonian-language Christian radios introducing the Seminary's activities, staff and subjects help to raise awareness of the Seminary among Estonian-speaking Christian listeners and contribute to the recruitment of Estonian-speaking students.
- The international audience is informed about the Seminary through the monthly newsletter and the contact persons of the partner organisations (members of the Board of Trustees, guest faculty, representatives of the cooperation agreement organisations, etc.). Alumni also receive newsletters, including many pastors of congregations and superintendents, one of whose tasks is to organise the preparation of new clergy and leaders.
- Once a year, the activities of the Seminary are presented at a Friends of Estonia meeting in the United States, which brings together representatives of various Methodist churches.
- The well-known *Christianity Today* magazine, which covers current issues related to church and society and is read by 4.5 million Christians, published in 2023 an article about the BMTS, which discusses the work of the Seminary with students from different cultural and political backgrounds in the context of the war in Ukraine.
- To reinforce the brand, the Seminary uses a common design language for visual advertising.
- The Seminary's advertisements deliberately use alumni from different denominations who are known to the wider Christian community, to emphasise the Seminary's ecumenical nature and to use well-known personalities in the advertising.
- Seminary staff, faculty, students and alumni are, for the most part, active at congregational, church and community levels. They also contribute to the marketing of the Seminary through their example and information sharing. For more information, see the chapter on Service to Society.

The BMTS' communication and marketing activities are based on the objectives set out in the strategy, and are intentional and targeted. Targeted information channels are used to reach the wider community. The awareness of the Seminary has been most effectively raised by the active involvement of the Seminary's members and alumni in ecumenical and social activities. Information about the Seminary spreads internationally through students, alumni and cooperation partners - this is confirmed by the consistently high percentage of international students (from 2020, more than 50% of students have been from outside Estonia). The number of Estonian-speaking students has been on a downward trend over the last 4 years, which is why the communication strategy has chosen Estonian-speaking

Christians as the main target group. The Seminary has made efforts to increase its visibility in the Christian community in Estonia (videos in Estonian language to introduce the subjects, regular presence in Christian media, especially radio, etc.). The fruits of this work can be assessed by the Seminary in the coming years.

INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

The main internal communication channels for the BMTS staff are e-mails, the common document management system and meetings. E-mail lists have been created for each target group. Based on the structure of the Seminary and depending on the purpose and content of the meeting, meetings are organised by different groups. Responsibility for disseminating management decisions taken at a higher level downwards follows from the management structure (see chapter on Strategic Management). The Rector is primarily responsible for disseminating information. The Dean is responsible for the dissemination of studies-related information to the Theological Department and to all faculty (including visiting faculty). The documentation in Sharepoint is in Estonian. Important documents are also in English. All faculty members speak English and/or Estonian, so there is no need to translate documents into Russian. Where necessary, staff members use artificial intelligence language translation when reading foreign texts.

Information is mainly provided to students via e-mail lists and Moodle - this ensures that all students (including those participating via Zoom) receive the necessary information. Students set up groups on social networking sites (e.g. WhatsApp, Telegram) to communicate with each other and support each other's studies. For group work, students have created language-based groups of students from their own class. An alumni group has been set up on Facebook. During the joint worship services during the study sessions, which are attended by both staff and students, speeches and sermons often reflect themes related to the purpose and mission of the BMTS: the preparation of workers, the needs of the church and society, spiritual formation.

Internal communication takes account of international students and faculty - letters are either bilingual or trilingual depending on the target group (faculty letters do not need to be translated into Russian).

The small school also offers the opportunity to communicate one-to-one and informally. To facilitate this, student cafés and shared lunches are organised during each study session.

EVALUATION OF THE ACHIEVEMENT OF OBJECTIVES

The effectiveness of the communication activities will be measured by key results (e.g. percentage of Estonian-speaking students) and feedback surveys to achieve the objectives set in the strategy.

The results of a survey of the BMTS staff in 2024 show that staff are very satisfied with the reputation of the BMTS (average score 4.45/5). The availability of leadership was rated with a maximum score by all respondents. The statement "I receive the information I need to do my job in a timely manner" received an average score of 4.10 out of 5. This is one of the lowest scores in the staff survey, and more attention needs to be paid to this area and to identify what activities could further facilitate communication.

STRENGTHS:

- The BMTS has made significant progress in increasing income, thus ensuring financial sustainability. Resources are used responsibly and reserves are built up.
- The use of the Seminary's financial resources clearly demonstrates that the Seminary's priority is to create an environment conducive to learning, to support students in all aspects and to have a motivated staff. Investments have been made in technical

infrastructure to provide high quality hybrid learning. In response to feedback from students and staff, the facilities have been improved to create a supportive environment for learning and working.

- The results of the staff satisfaction survey show that the staff appreciate working at the Seminary.
- The leaderships' efforts to secure a 5-year pay rise for staff have been effective.

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT:

- Ensuring that staff pay is competitive remains high on the agenda.
- Improve rest conditions for students.
- More targeted communication activities to increase the number of Estonian-speaking students.
- Based on staff feedback, internal communication needs to be further improved.

3. QUALITY CULTURE

THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF A QUALITY CULTURE

The core values of the Seminary are the foundations of the BMTS' quality culture:

1. The Bible and a personal relationship with God
2. Christian worldview and Methodist theology
3. Academical and practical
4. Learner-centredness, inclusion and professionalism
5. Ecumenism, internationalism, community-centredness and integration.

The **first** set of BMTS values - the Bible, a personal relationship with God, a Christian worldview and Methodist theology - is embedded as a central element in all the activities of the Seminary, including the quality culture. These values influence all aspects of the Seminary, from curriculum development to day-to-day management and decision-making processes. Biblically based ethical guidelines and a Christian worldview define the standards of conduct for faculty, staff and students. Education based on Methodist theology is aimed at preparing students for work in churches and Christian organisations, so it is essential to support students' spiritual growth and biblical knowledge during the learning process.

Incorporating this set of values (Bible, personal relationship with God, Christian worldview and Methodist theology) will help to achieve important aspects of the Seminary's purpose and mission: The Seminary aims to prepare Christian workers, clergy and leaders for churches and Christian and charitable organisations by providing higher theological education that is grounded in the Wesleyan/Methodist tradition and responsive to the needs of the church and society; also to support spiritual formation in the learning process.

The Seminary's spiritual atmosphere has been rated as good for the period 2021-2024 by students (4.66 on a 5-point scale), graduates (4.42) and staff (4.64). According to the latter, this is fostered above all by common goals, jointly organised events, worship services and prayer time at meetings, and by people and their fellowship with God.

The **second** set of BMTS values is academical, practical, learner-centred, inclusive and professional.

The vision of the BMTS, which is based on the purpose and mission of the Seminary, is to be a centre of education and competence for congregations and structural units, which continuously develops quality standards in higher education, is nationally recognised and is driven by the needs of the church and society. In order to achieve this vision, the Seminary

considers it important to define what quality leadership, teaching and research and service to society mean, and to make continuous improvements in these areas based on feedback (Development Plan 2024-2028). The quality definitions will be guided by the BMTS' values, purpose and vision (described in the introduction to the self-analysis). The BMTS has a number of guidelines and documents containing specific quality definitions, codes of conduct and descriptions of procedures. The Code of Ethics describes the foundations for ethical behaviour. As a member of the non-profit sector, the BMTS is based on the guidelines given in the Code of Ethics for nonprofit organisations, a reference to which can be found on the BMTS' website. The conditions and standards for academics are set out in the Academic Regulations, the Student Handbook (Appendix 11), the Etiquette for virtual learning (Appendix 12), the Guide for formatting assignments, the description of the grading system and the Student Academic Contracts (Appendix 13). Staff and faculty are guided in their activities by the Staff and Faculty Handbook (Appendix 5), the BMTS' Work Organisation Rules (Appendix 14), the BMTS' Administrative Procedures (Appendix 15), the Personal Data Processing Procedures (Appendix 16), the Employment Contract, the job description and other BMTS' rules and guidelines. Research is carried out in accordance with the Agreement on Research Integrity. Recruitment of academic staff is based on the criteria and process developed. Based on specific areas the Seminary has also other guidance documents containing quality definitions. A document management system has been developed with a list of documents (Appendix 17) to help navigate through all these documents. It contains information on the location, retention period and access restriction of each document. The documents containing the quality definitions are available to all concerned and are used in day-to-day work. Breaches are recorded and discussed with the parties concerned (an example is given in the chapter on academic ethics). Repeated breaches will be dealt with more severely. Following the quality standards contained in the documents helps to ensure the academic, professional and quality standards of the Seminary.

Below are the results of the student, staff and alumni satisfaction surveys on questions regarding academicism, practicality, learner-centredness, engagement and professionalism. For the period 2021-2024, students and graduates rated the professionalism and competence of faculty with an average score of 4.66 and 4.58 respectively. In terms of learner-centredness and engagement, students' satisfaction averaged 4.52. Practicality and applicability of the subjects were also highly rated, with students giving a score of 4.44 and graduates 4.58. The academic atmosphere at the BMTS received an average score of 4.55 from staff. The overall quality of education provided by the Seminary was rated with an average score of 4.54 by graduates and 4.64 by staff.

The **third** set of BMTS values - ecumenism, internationalism, community-centredness and integration - focuses on relationships and cooperation. In the context of the BMTS, these forms of cooperation are an integral part of the quality improvement system. The international and ecumenical membership of the BMTS is enriching and allows for the development of cultural competences of its members, but such diversity can be a potential source of disagreement and conflict, especially when members come from nations at war with each other. Therefore, it is important to work intentionally and purposefully towards a peaceful, friendly atmosphere at the Seminary and to develop a cohesive community of members who care for each other and have love for one another. Ecumenical and international relations and collaboration provide an opportunity to foster mutual understanding, to overcome theological and cultural barriers, and to create a deeper understanding and respect between different cultures and Christian traditions.

On the issues of ecumenism, internationalism and community, the results of the surveys carried out in the period 2021-2024 show a high level of satisfaction among staff and graduates. Learning and working in a multilingual, international and ecumenical environment was rated with an average score of 4.71 by graduates and 4.55 by staff. As part of the accreditation self-assessment, Seminary members were asked what they value most about the Seminary. Some students, as well as staff members, highlighted the people they met while studying or working at the Seminary as the most valuable. Many have made close friends at the Seminary, and some have found a spouse.

QUALITY IMPROVEMENT SYSTEM

To analyse the impact of the Seminary's main and supporting activities and to improve the quality of the activities, a quality improvement system has been developed, which includes reporting, monitoring of quantitative key indicators, internal evaluation, external evaluation, analysis of activities and results, and the planning of improvement actions based on this analysis.

Trends in key **quantitative indicators** are regularly monitored. Information is collected on the following indicators: number of enrolments, drop-out rates, academic performance indicators, qualifications of faculty, number of scientific publications per faculty member, number of mobility activities, number of continuing education courses and participants, average scores in satisfaction surveys, income and expenditure amounts, scholarship amounts, etc. An analysis of trends in key indicators is used to identify problem areas and, where necessary, new measures are implemented. For example, a mentoring programme has been launched to prevent drop-outs and to support students in completing their studies in nominal time. The quantitative key indicators, their metrics and targets are described in the development plan ([Appendix 2](#)).

Reporting is an important part of the BMTS' quality improvement system. Reporting requires the collection and analysis of data and the evaluation of the impact of activities and the achievement of objectives. Reporting helps to identify problem areas and, on this basis, to make informed decisions for improvement actions. Regular reporting monitors progress and the necessary adjustments are made to achieve the quality objectives set.

- The Rector and the Dean present an activity and financial report to the Board of Trustees on a quarterly basis.
- The Seminary submits an annual report to the state once a year.
- Every two months, the Administrative Council of the EMC reviews the financial situation of the Seminary.
- Once a year, the BMTS submits an activity and financial report to the EMC Annual Conference. In the same report, objectives are set for the following year.
- Project reports are prepared as necessary.
- Annual development conversations are carried out with Seminary staff.
- At the end of each period of the development plan, an analysis of the achievement of the objectives of the development plan is carried out.
- In-depth analysis and evaluation is carried out as part of the accreditation process. An action plan is drawn up on the basis of the proposals of the Accreditation Committee and regularly monitored.

In addition to formal reporting, it is common practice in the Seminary to analyse the performance of tasks and the achievement of objectives in **meetings** with different compositions, where improvement actions are also planned. Quarterly meetings of the Board

of Trustees assess the achievement of long-term objectives and the fulfilment of the development plan targets. Regular consultations between the Rector and the EMC Administrative Council help to assess the school's progress and obstacles to achieving its objectives. The consistency of activities with the short-term objectives and the effectiveness of the selected actions are analysed at monthly meetings of the Rector's Council and the Seminary team. The Academic Council meetings are held at least 3 times a year to analyse the impact of learning and teaching activities on the achievement of the objectives. In addition to the above, regular meetings are organised at the Seminary in smaller groups according to the tasks and responsibilities of the respective staff. Where necessary, teams are set up to carry out specific tasks (e.g. separate teams were set up to prepare the development plan and to renew the curriculum). External partners from other higher education institutions are also involved in the curriculum renewal process to help assess the relevance of the curriculum. This is discussed in more detail in the chapter on Curriculum.

An important part of the quality system is the **collection of feedback** from students, recent graduates, alumni, drop-outs, staff, faculty and employers.

Students have the opportunity to give feedback and have a say in leadership decisions through representation on the Academic Council and the Board of Trustees. The school's leadership constantly reminds student representatives of the opportunity to give feedback on learning and school life. Students are also involved in major planning and changes, e.g. creating development plans, curriculum renewal. At the end of each academic year, students are asked for feedback on the subjects they have studied. The questions concern the students' personal motivation to learn, the structure and presentation of the course, the encouragement of independent thinking, the spiritual atmosphere, the development of critical thinking, the amount of independent work, the assessment tasks and grading, the use of digital technological tools, the quality of translation and the usefulness and applicability of the subject. Comprehensive feedback on the curriculum, the academic regulations, the learning environment, the teaching methodology, the applicability of the education, the support services, etc. is collected from graduates immediately after the defense of their diploma paper. The survey forms sent to students and alumni are in Estonian, English and Russian. Trends in both student and alumni feedback surveys are highlighted in the Learning and Teaching section. The possibility of **mentoring meetings** has been added to provide feedback. This provides an opportunity for those who prefer to give feedback in a less formal way through one-to-one conversations to express their views.

Students who drop out of their studies are asked for the reasons for their drop-outs and these will be recorded (more information in the section on Learning Support Systems).

Alumni surveys were conducted in 2019 and 2024. Alumni have the opportunity to make suggestions on an ongoing basis through the Alumni Association.

The Seminary takes student feedback and suggestions very seriously and shapes the life of the Seminary according to student views, as long as this does not conflict with the Seminary's purpose, mission and the national standard for higher education. Sending the results of the course satisfaction surveys to the respective faculty members allows the faculty to continue with the aspects that have received positive feedback and to modify the aspects that have been more critical. The Dean monitors trends in course satisfaction surveys and, if necessary, interviews faculty members who have received negative feedback. The library has been adapted to make it more user-friendly and comfortable to use, based on student feedback (see Resources section for more details). Based on student feedback, the days of the week on which study sessions take place were not changed (see the section on Learning and Teaching for details). Based on the positive feedback about the study session that took place outside the Seminary, the leadership decided to continue once a year with a study sessions outside the

Seminary. These are just a few examples of how students' views are taken into account and how school life is shaped around students' needs.

Faculty representatives participate in the work of the Academic Council and the Board of Trustees, and the extended staff can provide feedback and suggestions at the team's working meetings. Opportunities for individual feedback have been created in the framework of development conversations. Anonymous feedback can be provided by staff through a satisfaction survey, which is carried out in every three years. The staff satisfaction survey includes questions on the reputation of the Seminary, the quality of education, the Seminary as an employer, staff appreciation, spiritual atmosphere, academic excellence, self-development opportunities, internationality, teamwork, leadership, working conditions and tools, communication and remuneration.

Trends in the employee satisfaction survey clearly show an increase in satisfaction. In 2021, the overall satisfaction rating on a 5-point scale was 4.73, while in 2024 it was 4.91. Out of 22 questions assessed, 16 have an average score of more than 4.5, indicating a very high level of satisfaction with the employer. In 2021, the lowest average score was 3.4 (question on staff training opportunities). Three years later, the lowest score was above 4 (4.09 - receiving feedback on work). The highest score this year (5 - maximum possible) was for the question on access to leadership. In 2021, the highest average score (4.91) was given to the statement that the employee has all the tools needed for the job.

The areas with the lowest scores in the 2021 survey (opportunities for further professional training and support for staff development) have received more attention from the Seminary: setting development objectives in development conversations, organising internal training, communicating information about trainings, allocating resources in the budget for continuing education, enabling staff to participate in further training and to continue their studies at the next level. Although not all faculty and staff members have actively taken advantage of the opportunity to engage in self-development, this year's survey shows a significant increase in the satisfaction indicator (average score for support for staff development has increased from 3.82 to 4.4; the score for opportunities for further professional training was 3.4 three years ago and is now 4.6). For more information on staff satisfaction, see the Resources chapter. Reasons for **staff leaving** are asked and recorded in a database of faculty and staff.

Faculty and staff feedback and satisfaction trends are dealt with by the Dean, the Rector, the Rector's Council and the Board of Trustees, who are responsible for organising staff working conditions and tools, remuneration and staff development. Longer-term objectives are set and monitored at the level of the Board of Trustees. Day-to-day issues are dealt with by the Rector's Council, the Rector and the Dean.

One of the most important evaluators of the Seminary's performance are the **employers** of the alumni. We define the term "alumni employer" in the context of the Seminary as a church, congregation, organisation or institution to which an alumni contributes his/her knowledge and skills acquired at the Seminary, regardless of whether he/she is paid or volunteers.

Among the largest employers, the EMC is the owner of the Seminary. A very large number of alumni work or volunteer in the EMC's congregations, its structures and sub-organisations. The head of the EMC is also the head of the Seminary's Board of Trustees. The governing body of the EMC - the Administrative Council - is closely linked to the Seminary: the Rector is a member of the Church Administrative Council; 5 members of the Administrative Council are alumni of the Seminary; 5 members are either former or current faculty. The Superintendent and the Church Administrative Council have a very good overview of the work of the Seminary and the level of skills and knowledge of the Seminary graduates. The EMC provides feedback to the Seminary through regular joint meetings and participation at leadership level.

Among the largest employers are also the Estonian Christian Pentecostal Church (ECPC) and

the Union of Estonian Evangelical and Free Churches (EEVL). In addition to the large number of BMTS alumni among the clergy and active lay members of the ECPC and EEVL, the leadership of both organisations also includes a significant number of Seminary graduates: of the 8-member board of the ECPC, 5 are Seminary alumni, including the head of the ECPC - Bishop Alur Õunpuu; 50% of EEVL pastors have graduated from the BMTS. Having had the experience of studying at the BMTS themselves, and having employed many of the Seminary's alumni, the members of the leadership of these organisations are well acquainted with the quality of the Seminary education. The representatives of both organisations were asked for more in-depth feedback during the curriculum renewal process in spring 2023 in order to identify the training needs of staff and volunteers in their organisations. This feedback was taken into account in the curriculum renewal process as well as in the organisation of the Seminary's teaching.

Representatives of the BMTS' main **external partners and donors** are members of the Board of Trustees. Membership of the governing body ensures the opportunity to express their views.

A small school also offers the advantage of receiving feedback from staff, students and partners in an **informal way**. This is facilitated by student cafés during study sessions, shared lunches, occasional excursions, yearly off-campus study sessions and Christmas parties. These joint events provide an opportunity for open discussion and expression. In addition, there are opportunities for hallway chats during the school day and for communication by phone, email or social media between sessions. Informal feedback, which requires an immediate response, is passed on to the leadership via the Seminary staff or the Student Council. Significant issues identified through informal feedback and requiring intervention will be dealt with in a Rector's Council or team meeting, depending on the area. Less important or non-intervention information shared during the discussions may not reach the leadership and therefore remain unrecorded. The possibility of providing formal feedback in sufficient numbers and in different forms ensures that important and wide-ranging opinions reach decision-makers. However, capturing informal feedback is something that needs to be developed.

The Seminary focuses on the implementation of the BMTS' values in the framework of the Quality Improvement System, which helps to support students' spiritual and academic development and prepares them for work in churches and Christian organisations. The BMTS' Quality Improvement System is based on the Deming's PDCA (Plan Do Check Act) approach, builds on the core values of the Seminary and is structured around a complex and coherent analysis involving systematic reporting, internal and external evaluation and monitoring of quantitative key indicators. This system continuously identifies areas for improvement and implements the necessary quality enhancement measures in order to fulfil the vision of being a recognised centre of excellence in education and competence, which continuously develops quality standards in higher education, responds to the needs of the church and society and ensures that the Seminary lives up to its core values.

Indicator: a selection of improvement actions implemented on the basis of an analysis of the results of the internal evaluation:

- The faculty members have made improvements based on feedback from students, which has led to an increase in student satisfaction - in terms of course presentation, structure and applicability. For more information, see the Learning and Teaching section.
- A significant increase has been made by the average satisfaction rating of staff on the opportunities for further professional training. To achieve this, the Seminary has organised internal training, provided information about trainings and enabled staff to engage in self-development. This is discussed in more detail in the Resources chapter.

- To reduce the number of drop-outs, a mentoring programme was developed and launched more systematically for first-year students in 2022 and for all full-time students in 2024. Regular mentoring interviews support students at risk of dropping out due to lack of motivation, struggling to meet academic standards, difficulties in balancing time between studies and other life-roles. The mentoring system is still in a development stage and the fruits of this action can be assessed in the coming years.
 - A range of scholarships are offered to all those who wish, in order to alleviate students' financial difficulties.
 - Based on feedback from staff and students, a number of rooms have been made more user-friendly this year and last (teachers' room, library, classroom).
 - The timing of the study sessions was left unchanged in response to student feedback.
- There have been further improvement actions resulting from the internal evaluation. Some of these are described in the different chapters of this document.

STRENGTHS:

- The Seminary has developed a quality improvement system to assess the impact of its main and supporting activities, which ensures that the Seminary meets its core values.
- Regular gathering of feedback and analysis of the effectiveness of activities allow for continuous improvement and adaptation of the learning process.
- The positive feedback and high satisfaction among the Seminary staff, students and graduates confirms that the Seminary is fulfilling its mission and providing quality education.

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT:

- The collection of feedback from employers of alumni needs to be made more comprehensive, regular and systematic to further respond to labour market needs.
- A system for recording informal feedback should be developed at the Seminary.
- The feedback survey should include questions to assess the impact of new measures such as mentoring.

4. ACADEMIC ETHICS

PURPOSE

The BMTS strives for high quality and value-based teaching and research through adherence to the principles of academic ethics ([Development Plan 2024-2028](#)). In order to ensure this, the BMTS has laid down basic principles of academic ethics, disseminates them among its staff, faculty and students, monitors compliance with the standards and reacts to breaches of the rules.

AGREED PRINCIPLES AND THEIR DISSEMINATION

Academic ethics are based on general ethical principles. The BMTS, as a Christian higher education institution, and all its members base their conduct on Christian values and the ethical principles of the Christian world. As a member of the non-profit sector, the BMTS is guided by the [Code of Ethics of non-profit organisations](#).

The BMTS has joined the [Agreement of Research Integrity](#), pledging to follow, disseminate, promote and implement research integrity and to do its utmost to prevent, detect and properly handle cases of misconduct.

The BMTS has developed its own Code of Ethics, which describes both general ethical principles and the foundations of academic ethics. Among other things, the Code of Ethics sets out a standard of conduct in a multi-denominational and multicultural environment in order to prevent the fragmentation that can result from the different views of people from different denominational and cultural backgrounds.

The rules on academic ethics are established by the Academic Council and are set out in the Academic Regulations, which is available on the BMTS website in three languages and is mandatory for all BMTS faculty, staff and students. By submitting an application for admission, students confirm their agreement to comply with the Code of Ethics of the Seminary, the Academic Regulations and the internal rules.

More specific standards of conduct and guidelines on academic ethics are outlined in a number of BMTS' guidance documents: the Student Handbook (Appendix 11), the Etiquette for virtual learning (Appendix 12), the Guidelines for formatting assignments and the BMTS Staff and Faculty Handbook (Appendix 5). In 2024, the Academic Regulations and the Student and Faculty Handbooks were updated to reflect how AI can and cannot be used in learning. In this context, the previous rule on plagiarism was extended and reformulated to cover other forms of academic fraud.

The principles of academic ethics are introduced in the following subjects: Introduction to Studies, Academic Writing, Foundations of Scientific Research I and II. Homework in these subjects is used to practice the principles of academic ethics.

The course Foundations of Scientific Research II also includes a section on conducting empirical research, where students are introduced to the principles of ethical research in this field.

The BMTS faculty and staff have participated in **training**, surveys and discussions on academic ethics to keep abreast of the latest developments in research practice, to improve academic quality in both teaching and research, and to harmonise ethical standards and practices across different higher education institutions. In September 2022, Dr Meeli Tankler, then Head of Research at the BMTS, participated in a meeting on research ethics for research advisors from Estonian higher education institutions and ministries. In March 2023, Tankler participated in the webinar "Ethical Values in Academic Publishing: Beyond Plagiarism", which took place as part of the lecture series "Foundations of Academic Literacy for Authors of Scholarly Articles" of the Eastern European Institute of Theology and Eastern European Journal of Theology. Tankler shared the information from the webinar with the BMTS faculty. In April 2023, Seminary faculty participated in an online survey on research ethics. Dean Mark Nelson participated in the training "How to use ChatGPT in an Educational Institution?" in May 2024. Our educational technologist had previously attended this training.

DETECTING AND DEALING WITH CREATIVE THEFT

The Staff and Faculty Handbook (Appendix 5) contains guidance on how to act in case of suspicion or detection of plagiarism and academic fraud.

Until the end of the 2023-24 academic year, the BMTS used the Ouriginal plagiarism detection platform, which searches texts in different languages and compares them to the resources available in Google Search Engine and Google Scholar. All core faculty members could submit papers to the Ouriginal detection system according to the instructions given in the Staff and Faculty Handbook. The Plagiarism Detection System could be used by faculty for any written work.

One major drawback of the Ouriginal programme was that the students themselves had no way of submitting their work to the system to proactively check for random missing references in written assignments. This was partly because sending the same work twice into

the system immediately caused it to be flagged for plagiarism. At the end of the spring semester 2024, the Seminary started testing the StrikePlagiarism platform, which promises to address these shortcomings.

Indicator: In the first semester, all homework assignments of first-year students in one subject will be checked with Ouriginal or StrikePlagiarism and reports sent to the student to demonstrate the functioning of the plagiarism detection system and to help them correct and avoid referencing errors. This is repeated for a specific required course at the beginning of the 3rd year as students are starting to write their diploma papers. During other courses, teachers occasionally send papers through the detection system when they suspect the possibility of plagiarism. All diploma papers are checked by the plagiarism detection system. The results are shown in the table below.

Table 7. Papers checked by the plagiarism detection system and the number of plagiarism cases detected for diploma papers and other written work in the period autumn 2020 - spring 2024

Period autumn 2020 - spring 2024	Diploma papers	Other written work
Papers checked by a plagiarism detection system	31 (100% of diploma papers)	166
Plagiarism cases detected	0	6 (3.61%)

No cases of creative theft have been identified in diploma papers. The cases of plagiarism detected in other written works between autumn 2020 and spring 2024 have involved students from different cultural and educational backgrounds. In all cases, the student was thoroughly explained what he or she had done wrong, told to redo the work and informed that the response to repeat offences would be much stricter. No repeat offences have been identified during this time period.

LODGING COMPLAINTS

The formal system for lodging complaints is described in the Academic Regulations. In June 2024, the appeals system described in the Academic Regulations was amended to protect both the teacher and the student. The system for appeals concerning diploma papers' grades is defined in the relevant syllabus. The contract for the provision of teaching services stipulates the right to submit a reasoned submission to the Rector, through the student representative, on the unsuitability of a faculty member to teach a subject.

Indicator: no complaints have been lodged in the period 2020-2024. There has been one case in this period where a student raised a concern with the Dean about a faculty member. The student did not wish to lodge a formal complaint, but instead spoke to the faculty member and the situation was resolved.

STRENGTHS:

- At the BMTS, the principles of academic ethics are set out in writing and explained through examples in three subjects. This helps students to better understand the need to follow the principles of academic ethics.

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT:

- Introducing students to the use of a plagiarism detection system.
- Adapting students' written assignments according to the new agreed rules on the use of AI-generating tools.

5. INTERNATIONALISATION

PURPOSE

Internationality is one of the core values and competitive advantages of the BMTS. The purpose of the internationalisation at the BMTS is to ensure the cultural openness of the Seminary and the development of teaching and research activities through international cooperation (Development Plan 2024-2028). The Seminary successfully fulfils the internationalisation objective it has set for itself through cooperation with a number of foreign higher education institutions and organisations, participation in international networks, organisation of international conferences and study trips, and its international membership. The BMTS participates in international networks, which provide an opportunity to establish contacts and develop cooperation with international organisations and higher education institutions. In accordance with the Seminary's RDCA strategy ([Appendix 4](#)), conferences and cooperation projects with other theological higher education institutions outside Estonia are organised to promote international collaboration, thus contributing to the implementation of the Estonian Ministry of Education's [Estonian Research and Development, Innovation and Entrepreneurship Strategy 2021—2035](#).

An international student body and faculty, close cooperation with partner universities, and participation in exchange programmes and international networks ensure that the BMTS is a versatile and open institution that prepares its students for both local and global service and leadership. The internationalisation activities of the BMTS help to promote intercultural competence (i.e. the ability to operate in different cultural contexts) among its faculty, staff, students and partners, which is identified as one of the competences of the future in the [Estonian Education Strategy 2021-2035](#). Culturally open learning environment is demonstrated by the fact that in the same classroom, representatives of nationalities at war with each other learn without any problems or tensions.

INTERNATIONAL MEMBERSHIP

The BMTS' trilingualism, e-learning possibility and flexible academic regulations support internationalisation and the participation of international faculty and students in the Seminary's activities. Bringing together professionals, students and Board of Trustees members from different countries to the BMTS brings together unique knowledge and experience and creates a fertile environment for intercultural communication, learning and mutual understanding. This cultural diversity ensures a rich and varied learning experience that offers students a broad perspective on theological issues.

Membership of the **Board of Trustees** includes representatives of a number of international partners:

- Coordinator of the In Mission Together Partnership programme of the General Board of Global Ministries of The United Methodist Church, who also works with Latvia and Lithuania.
- Director of the World Methodist Evangelism branch of the World Methodist Council
- Members of Asbury Methodist Church, and their Mission Director
- Asbury Theological Seminary representative
- Presidents of the organisation Friends of Estonia (USA)
- Bishop of the Kwang Lim Methodist Church of South Korea, and his deputy
- Senior pastor of the First Broad Street UMC, Kingsport, TN
- Senior pastor emeritus of the Midland First UMC, Midland MI, which is active in partnership with the Lithuanian UMC.
- Senior pastor emeritus of the Crieviewood UMC, Nashville TN

The BMTS has seven core **faculty members**, two of whom are the U.S. citizens and one a Canadian citizen and one Ukrainian citizen. Of the seven, five have obtained their most recent education from a university abroad. A large number of international adjunct and visiting faculty regularly teach at the Seminary. In the period 2021/2022 - 2023/2024, these have included faculty from Russia, USA, Canada, Lithuania, Ukraine, New Zealand. The selection of international faculty also takes into account the students' country of origin in order to bring their cultural and contextual perspective to the teaching.

In the academic year 2023/2024, **students** from the following countries studied at the Seminary: Estonia (38%), Ukraine (16%), Belarus (13%), Russia (13%), Finland (4%), USA (3%), Latvia (3%), Nigeria (3%), Israel (1%), Ghana (1%), New Zealand (1%), Moldova (1%). The share of international students in the student population over the 7 years is shown in Figure 2 in the Introduction.

NETWORKS

The BMTS is part of various international networks with the aim of finding partners, developing international relations and promoting cooperation to achieve research and teaching objectives.

- The BMTS is part of a worldwide network of Methodist schools called the *International Association of Methodist Schools, Colleges and Universities* (IAMSCU). The organisation's network in the European region is called *Methodist-related Theological Schools in Europe* (MTSE), which provides networking and mobility opportunities for faculty and students. Dr Külli Tõniste, Rector of the BMTS for the period 2018-2023, was a member of the MTSE Steering Committee for the period 2018-2023. Membership of this network has been fruitful for the BMTS in many ways. Through the MTSE network, cooperation partners have been found and several cooperation projects have been implemented. In 2020, students from MTSE member schools participated in a church growth conference organised by the BMTS. In 2021, an online lecture series was organised in cooperation with MTSE and the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry (GBHEM), which is described in more detail in the next sub-section.
- In 2018, GBHEM, a sub-agency of the United Methodist Church, launched a partnership programme called Regional Hubs for Leadership, Education and Development (LEaDHub) to support the development of theological schools and Christian leaders. One of the coordinators of the European region of the network for the period 2019-2023 was Dr Meeli Tankler, Head of Research Development at the BMTS. The regional coordinators had regular meetings to share experiences, organise training and other joint activities. In the framework of the LEaDHub programme, the BMTS worked closely with another European regional coordinator, Reutlingen Theological Seminary in Germany. As a result of joint activities, funding was organised for the participation of members of the Latvian Methodist Church in the Church Growth Conference organised by the BMTS in 2019. The most significant fruit of the cooperation was the organisation of an online lecture series *European Methodist Lecture Program* for the period 2021-2023. The planning of the lectures and the search for speakers was done in cooperation with MTSE. The programme was designed in such a way as to allow both pastors to participate as a continuing education course and students to participate as electives. There were 10 lectures each year, with a total of around 15 countries, including Estonia, in attendance. In order to offer the audience a variety of perspectives and variation, the lectures were conducted by 23 experts from 9 countries. From the BMTS, Dr Külli Tõniste, Dr Üllas Tankler and Dr Meeli Tankler were among the experts.
- Through the EMC, the BMTS is a member of the Friends of Estonia network and has strong relationships with a number of congregations in the United States who have become

partners and sponsors of the Seminary. E.g. Mount Bethel Church in Marietta, Georgia, Asbury Church in Tulsa, Oklahoma, First Broadstreet UMC in Kingsport, Tennessee, Hyde Park UMC in Florida, Midland First UMC in Michigan.

- Since March 2014, the Seminary is a member of the European Council of Theological Education (ECTE). During the pandemic, the BMTS faculty members have participated in online trainings organised by the network. In November 2023, the BMTS hosted an ECTE leadership meeting in Tallinn.
- The BMTS participates in the work of *Study in Estonia*. It is a network of higher education institutions in Estonia offering English-language teaching. In April 2024, the BMTS Academic Assistant took part in a meeting of the network, where good practices were shared and educational institutions in Ida-Viru County were visited.
- Through the EMC, in 2023 cooperation was launched with the European Methodist Churches Network, which includes, among others, the Wesleyan missionary organisations One Mission Society (OMS) and Train-Mobilize-Serve Global (TMS Global), the United Theological Seminary and the Global Methodist Church member churches in Europe. Dean Mark Nelson, representing the EMC and the BMTS, attended the network meeting in 2024. In 2025, the network meeting will be hosted in Estonia.

PARTNERS

The BMTS has established a number of international partnerships that support the development of research and teaching and create conditions and opportunities for the development of both faculty and students. Cooperation agreements have been signed with a number of foreign universities, covering joint projects, research and mobility programmes.

- The BMTS has had a partnership with Asbury Theological Seminary (ATS) since its early years. With the help of Asbury Seminary alumnus Wes Griffin, preparations were made to establish the Seminary. Wes became the Seminary's first dean. During the 30 years of collaboration, several ATS faculty members have taught at the Seminary, and the BMTS staff and faculty have studied at Asbury: a Master's degree has been obtained there by former rectors Andrus Norak and Külli Tõniste, and current faculty members Douglas Childress and Hindrek Taavet Taimla. The doctoral degrees at ATS have been obtained by former faculty member Üllas Tankler and former faculty member and rector Meeli Tankler. Currently, the BMTS faculty member H. T. Taimla is a doctoral student at Asbury Theological Seminary. ATS members belong to the BMTS Board of Trustees as consultants. In March 2020, Church Growth Conference was held in cooperation between the ATS and the BMTS, with participants from the Baltic States, Scandinavia and other European countries. In 2024, the cooperation agreement between the Seminary and the ATS was renewed, setting out the basis for cooperation in the areas of faculty exchange, cultural immersion, guided service opportunities for students, database sharing, joint conferences, joint publications, opening of Master's programs, faculty sabbatical opportunities.
- Negotiations have been initiated with the Global Methodist Church (GMC), whose member churches are potential students at the BMTS. During the negotiations, among other things, the subject of an e-Academy has been discussed, as well as cooperation in sending students to study.
- Colleen Weaver, a faculty member at the BMTS, continues to teach at the European Nazarene College alongside the Seminary. The Dean of the BMTS met with the representatives of EuNC at a cooperation meeting in spring 2024. Both schools are interested in working together.
- As a result of the cooperation with the missionary organisation TMS Global, one guest faculty member has been teaching at the BMTS in the period 2020-2024.

- Through the mission organisation One Mission Society, one contracted, one adjunct and one visiting faculty member have taught at the BMTS in the period 2020-2024.
- Under the Erasmus+ programme, cooperation has been established with John Wesley Theological College in Hungary and Evangelische Theologische Faculteit in Belgium. Mobilities have also been carried out with both.

COOPERATION WITH THE BALTIC COUNTRIES

In addition to Estonia, the target groups of the BMTS also include the United Methodist Churches of Latvia and Lithuania, with whom the EMC and the BMTS have many points of contact. The EMC has a cooperation agreement with the UMC. In agreement with the Bishop of the Nordic and Baltic countries of the United Methodist Church, the BMTS has a Baltic scholarship, which enables members of the congregations of the UMC of Latvia and Lithuania to study in the Seminary free of charge. Three members of the Seminary's Board of Trustees belong to the Friends of Baltics network which deals with the development of Methodist Churches in Latvia and Lithuania. In cooperation with the EMC, the BMTS, the Latvian Methodist Church and a number of other partners, a joint project for the promotion of mental health was set up in spring 2024. The BMTS has used the camping centre of the Latvian UMC for a study session. A large number of students from Latvia and Lithuania have studied at the BMTS. Among the alumni are superintendents of churches in both countries.

FINNO-UGRIC MISSIONS

The BMTS has long been involved in missionary work to Finno-Ugric people groups. In this field, it has cooperated with the Estonian Evangelical Alliance (EEA) mission workgroup, with whom a cooperation agreement is still in force since 2011. Since 2002, the Seminary and the EEA have cooperated in sending missions groups to the Finno-Ugric nations in Russia and supporting Christian work there. The BMTS has offered the opportunity for Finno-Ugric peoples to study at the Seminary. For the first time in the history of the world, a representative of the Komi people, Nadezhda Popova, obtained a protestant theological higher education and graduated from the Seminary in 2009. A similar historic event took place in 2015 when two Udmurts graduated from the Seminary. The political situation in Russia and the war in Ukraine have put major obstacles in the way of Finno-Ugric missionary work, but one Komi student continues to study part-time online. During the missionary work among the Finno-Ugric small nations, ethnological research material has been collected, which was the basis for an exhibition to mark the 30th anniversary of the Seminary.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR MOBILITY

The BMTS has created the conditions and opportunities to support the mobility of faculty and students. Participation in mobility programmes broadens students' horizons and allows them to experience theological studies in different cultural and academic contexts. Through mobility, faculty gain new experiences and the opportunity to develop their teaching skills in another culture. Mobility programmes cover the costs of international mobility for faculty and students, so that financial constraints do not become an obstacle to participation in international programmes. The Seminary encourages its staff and students to participate in international research groups and joint projects that provide opportunities for collaboration with foreign partners and support academic development. Online studies in three languages provide an excellent opportunity to participate in BMTS' learning from all corners of the world. In October 2022, the BMTS joined the Erasmus+ Charter programme, which allows both students and faculty to participate in the learning activities of partner higher education institutions. Cooperation has been launched with two European higher education institutions:

John Wesley Theological College Oltalom Charity Society in Budapest, Hungary and Evangelische Theologische Faculteit in Leuven, Belgium. Both schools have cooperation agreements in place and have received funding for mobility.

A study trip to the University of Budapest took place from 17 to 20 March 2024 with the participation of 10 students and 4 staff members, funded by GBHEM LEADHUB and the BMTS. The study trip was organised within the framework of the courses Comparative Religious Studies and Missions Theology. A return visit by representatives of the Budapest school has been agreed for autumn 2024.

Studies completed at an institution of higher education abroad are taken into account for the fulfilment of the curriculum, provided that the learning outcomes are in line with the BMTS' curriculum. In the period 2021-2024, courses from higher educational institutions of the following countries have been transferred to the BMTS through APEL: USA, New Zealand, Belarus, Finland.

Indicators:

Mobilities in the period 2021-2024:

student mobility out: 11

student mobility in: 0

faculty mobility in: 29

faculty mobility out: 10

For more details on mobility, see [Appendix 18](#).

STRENGTHS:

- The international membership of the BMTS enriches teaching and research activities and enables the development of intercultural competences.
- The BMTS supports the integration of non-Estonian-speaking students into Estonian society.

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT:

- Establish cooperation agreements with more universities to create mobility opportunities.
- Encourage students and faculty to make more use of mobility opportunities.

6. TEACHING STAFF

PURPOSE

In order to ensure quality education, the BMTS ensures that the Seminary is staffed by faculty who are professionally competent, support the development of the learner and are engaged in self-development. ([Development Plan 2024-2028](#))

RECRUITMENT

In accordance with the constitution of the Seminary, the Board of Trustees sets the requirements for qualifications and job descriptions and approves the posts of permanent faculty, together with their salary ranges. As the Rector's Council is the executive body for the decisions of the Board of Trustees, it is the responsibility of the Rector's Council to develop specific conditions and to review the job descriptions of the Seminary's faculty. The Dean is responsible for recruiting teaching staff, inviting guest faculty and collecting

feedback on courses. The Rector concludes, renews and terminates the employment contracts of faculty and staff.

The Seminary has defined a process for the open competition for contractual academic posts. The process includes a public announcement of the competition, a written application from the candidate with a CV and a letter of motivation, an interview and a public lecture. The recruitment of academic staff is based on the verification of candidates' compliance with the qualification requirements laid down in the Higher Education Act, the Constitution, the Faculty job description and the Academic Regulations. Guest faculty are invited to teach individual courses on the basis of their CV, interview and a sample lecture. In the case of guest faculty the lecture may be organised by the Seminary or lecturing experience from another institution may be taken into account. Faculty qualifications are documented in 'Tahvel'.

Indicator: new academic staff recruited in the period 2022-2024:

In 2022 a Russian-speaking faculty member, was recruited through an open competition.

In 2023, based on previous cooperation experience, CV and interview, a faculty member was recruited on a fixed-term contract to replace a full-time faculty member who is in doctoral studies.

In 2024, a Head of Research and Development was recruited on the basis of previous collaborative experience.

In 2024, a new Rector was recruited on the basis of an open competition.

The large number of Russian-speaking students made it necessary to recruit Russian-speaking Greek and Inductive Study teacher and diploma papers supervisors. Therefore, after a public competition, Tetyana Radomska, a native Russian-speaking faculty member was recruited in 2022. Three native Russian-speaking academics with doctoral or Master's degrees combined with their practical experience are deployed as diploma papers supervisors for Russian-speaking students. In preparation for the supervision, they study previous diploma papers and receive guidance from the Dean and other faculty members.

In the autumn of 2023, Dr Colleen Weaver, a foreign faculty member, joined the Seminary team. As this is a replacement for a faculty member in doctoral studies for a limited period of time, no open competition was announced. Dr Weaver was invited as a short term replacement on the basis of her CV, interview and previous guest teaching experience at the BMTS.

To replace the retiring Head of Research and Development a new person was recruited in spring 2024. In order to better fulfil the mission of the BMTS to prepare leaders and workers for service to society, it was decided to appoint Laur Lilleoja, a PhD holder with a strong background in sociology of religion and international academic experience, as the new Head of Research and Development. Laur Lilleoja has been the project leader of one of the most important studies on Estonians' religious identity and spiritual practices, *Life, Religion and Religious Life 2020*. The requirement for a public lecture was fulfilled when Dr Lilleoja taught an elective course in January 2024.

Dr Laur Lilleoja was selected in the open competition for the position of Rector in spring-summer 2024 and will continue to hold the post of the Head of Research and Development.

Indicators: the number of full-time students per one full-time academic staff member was 14.5 in the academic year 2023/2024. The proportions of faculty with a doctoral degree are as follows: 29% of full-time faculty, 40% of adjunct faculty, 50% of guest faculty. More detailed information on this can be found in the introduction.

FACULTY DEVELOPMENT AND THE CONDITIONS FOR ACHIEVING IT

In order to ensure a motivated and competent teaching staff, the Seminary strives to provide teachers with opportunities for professional development, competitive salaries and an environment conducive to teaching and research. The BMTS supports the development of the professional, pedagogical, research and supervising skills of its faculty.

The BMTS creates the conditions for the further development of faculty through the provision of information about training, the funding of training, the organisation of internal training and the organisation of educational activities. Development conversations are used to map out the objectives of self-development, identify key areas for competence development and draw up development plans. The Seminary supports the self-development of faculty by planning financial resources for training and study trips, by allowing time for self-development alongside teaching, and by offering participation in training and mobility opportunities. Both contract and adjunct faculty have the opportunity to participate in all further and internal training courses organised by the BMTS. Information on training courses is regularly communicated to faculty via an e-mail list. If they so wish, faculty can seek out training courses, conferences and other opportunities for self-development that are of interest to them. The knowledge and information gained from training is shared with colleagues in work meetings and integrated into teaching activities. Staff are encouraged to continue their learning, and the organisation of teaching takes into account the self-development and further professional training of faculty. For example, in 2023, a faculty member Hindrek Taavet Taimla began his doctoral studies at Asbury Theological Seminary (ATS). Taimla completed the first year of his studies from distance while continuing to teach at the Seminary. The Seminary reduced Taimla's workload for this period and considered his doctoral studies timetable when creating its class schedule.

The BMTS budget includes an amount to cover the training costs of faculty and staff. There is the possibility of writing periods and funding for travel through the Seminary partners. Funding is also found through the partners to cover larger costs related to self-development. For example, a long-standing partner, Asbury Theological Seminary, is contributing financially to the studies of the BMTS faculty member H. T. Taimla.

To develop digital competences of teaching staff, online guidelines have been developed and made available, information on digital training is shared on faculty mailing lists, internal digital training is organised and the educational technologist provides individual consultations. In 2020, internal training on the use of the Teams platform for teaching and work was organised. In 2022, a joint training session on hybrid learning was organised by the BMTS, the Estonian Free Church Theological Seminary and the Institute of Theology of the EELC. From 2023 onwards, most of the faculty are undergoing online training on Moodle. The Seminary plans to organise an internal training on the new version of Moodle. Two staff members of the BMTS attended a training on the topic of the use of artificial intelligence in learning. During the pandemic, the educational technologist provided individual consultations on the use of Zoom and on the production of video lectures. Teaching staff continue to receive advice and support from the educational technologist on the use of all digital technologies and platforms.

In order to develop teaching skills, a learner-centred teaching methodology training programme was organised for faculty in 2021-2022 within the framework of the Bolgna HUB Peer Support programme, which consisted of learning sessions through half a year. The programme consisted of practical assignments to apply the learning to the context of the

subjects taught. The programme was conducted by Dr Anthony J. Vickers from the University of Essex.

A new faculty development programme is launched in 2024-25 in partnership with Asbury Theological Seminary. Dr John Oswalt, a faculty member at the ATS, and Tetyana Radomska, a faculty member at the BMTS, work together to prepare and jointly teach a Seminary course. The aim of the collaborative project is to enable an experienced scholar to support a younger colleague through mentoring, thereby raising the standard of teaching of the Seminary faculty member. It is planned to implement the collaboration between the ATS and the BMTS faculty members in preparing and teaching a subject on an annual basis.

In addition to general training topics (e.g. the modern learning approach), teachers also take part in training courses based on their own specific field. For example, in the period 2020-2024, they have participated in training courses and conferences on the following topics: mission, leadership, spiritual growth, teamwork, counselling, community work, ecumenism. Regular faculty meetings have been held to share good practices on teaching methodology, assessment and pedagogical competences.

Indicator: Since 2020, the BMTS core staff have participated in an average of 11.3 conferences, training courses or seminars related to self-development. For faculty, this indicator is 10.6. For more detailed information on the participation of contract staff and faculty in training and self-development, see [Appendix 10](#). For more information on the self-development of faculty, see the chapters on [Research, Development and Creative Activities and Resources](#).

STAFF SATISFACTION WITH OPPORTUNITIES FOR SELF-DEVELOPMENT

Employees are regularly asked for feedback on their opportunities for self-development through development conversations and surveys. The average results of the surveys on a 5-point scale are shown in the table below.

Table 8. Results of the satisfaction surveys of the BMTS staff on self-development opportunities

Question	2024	2021
The BMTS supports staff development	4.4	3.82
The BMTS offers sufficient opportunities for further professional training of its staff.	4.6	3.4

EVALUATING THE WORK OF TEACHING STAFF

The workload of the teaching staff, the distribution of subjects, potential guest faculty and other issues related to the faculty are discussed in the faculty meetings and the Academic Council. Faculty performance is evaluated through development conversations, regular feedback from students and graduates, supervision and the effectiveness of RDCA, and the contribution of faculty to the community. Once a year, the Rector awards the Employee of the Year Award.

Indicator 1: Student feedback surveys show a very high level of satisfaction with the work of faculty. The surveys conducted between 2021 and 2024 show that the faculty member with the lowest satisfaction rating had an average rating of 4.26 on a 5-point system; the highest was 5. The average rating was 4.61. For the period 2021-2024, the professionalism and competence of the faculty was rated with an average score of 4.66 by students and 4.58 by graduates. More information on feedback from graduates and students can be found in the chapters on [Quality Culture](#), [Learning and Teaching](#) and in [Appendix 19](#).

STRENGTHS:

1. High student satisfaction with the work of faculty.
2. The Seminary uses highly qualified international faculty to bring in international scientific knowledge, different perspectives and experiences to enrich teaching and student development.

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT:

3. Activating international mobility of faculty.
4. A more systematic engagement of the Seminary's teaching staff in self-development would bring new knowledge in teaching methodology and professional knowledge to the teaching process of the Seminary.

7. STUDY PROGRAMME

PURPOSE

The BMTS is working to ensure that its curriculum is responsive to the expectations of the church and the needs of society, and provides a learning approach that is in line with higher education standards and trends in the field (Development Plan 2024-2028).

The BMTS Theology and Missions curriculum is a 3-year (180 ECTS) programme of applied higher education leading to a bachelor's degree. The curriculum is divided into three main areas: 1) theology, mission and church history, 2) biblical studies and 3) practical theology. As Estonian law does not allow teaching one curriculum in several languages, the BMTS has three identical curricula: in Estonian, Russian and English (Appendix 20). The majority of subjects are taught through simultaneous translation. Greek and Inductive Study subjects are taught separately for each language group, as linguistic nuances play an important role in these subjects.

Indicator: the distribution of the student population between the three different language curricula is illustrated in the graph below.

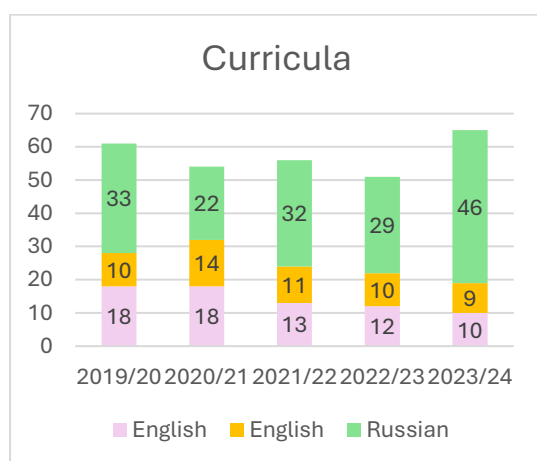


Figure 12. Distribution of students by curriculum for the period 2019/2020 - 2023/2024.

INCREASING THE COHERENCE OF THE DIFFERENT SUBJECTS IN THE CURRICULUM

In order to reduce duplication, increase coherence and, where possible, combine assignments, meetings of faculty of similar subjects (e.g. biblical subjects) have been organised to analyse syllabi and discuss possible cooperation. The school has created the conditions to allow for

coherence and integration of assignments between subjects. For example, subjects whose content allows for collaboration (e.g. Missions Theology and Comparative Religions), are scheduled during the same sessions. Some examples of coherence and integration of subjects: the tools taught in New Testament Exegesis form the basis for the study of other subjects; the outcome of an assignment in the subject Foundations of Diaconal Ministry (creating a new diaconal project) is used as the basis for an assignment in the subject Entrepreneurial Leadership of Missional Projects.

INTEGRATION OF GENERAL COMPETENCES

The development of general competences is integrated with specialised studies. Digital competences are developed within specific subjects such as Introduction to Studies, Information Skills, and Bible Study Aids. Entrepreneurship, creativity, initiative and civic competences are taught in the subjects Entrepreneurial Leadership of Missional Projects and Foundations of Diaconal Ministry. The development of many of the above competences is also integrated with the specialised studies in a number of other subjects and in the system of practicums. The competences of self-directed learner are developed in the subject Lifelong Learning and are applied to assignments in all subjects. In order to develop competences in foreign languages, there is an optional Estonian language course for non-Estonians and English conversation group meetings. The trilingual environment contributes to the development of foreign language skills and supports intercultural and social competences. Theological vocabulary as well as learning and doing tasks in one's mother tongue (Estonian, Russian or English) support the development of mother tongue competences. Students are required to perform both oral and written tasks, and the development of mother tongue competences is therefore supported both orally and in writing.

DEVELOPING ANALYTICAL AND CRITICAL SKILLS

The development of students' analytical and critical skills is developed in an integrated way across all subjects, supported by the general subjects Academic Writing and Foundations of Scientific Research I and II, as well as diploma paper supervision. In order to ensure that the diploma paper include a properly developed research problem, method and data analysis appropriate to applied higher education, the process of selecting and refining the diploma paper topic is given greater attention by the faculty and students are provided with a clear diploma paper structure.

STUDENT AND GRADUATE FEEDBACK ON THE CURRICULUM

Seminary graduates in the period 2021-2024 answered to the question "Overall, how satisfied are you with the education you received at the Seminary?" - 63% answered "very satisfied"; 33% answered "satisfied" and 4% (1 respondent) "not satisfied". When asked whether the Seminary provided a comprehensive education appropriate for Christian ministry, 67% of respondents answered "strongly agree", 25% "agree" and 8% remained neutral.

As students were asked for input through student interviews in spring 2024 in order to complete the self-analysis document for accreditation, they shared their views on what they value most about the BMTS. On the one hand, the practicality and the applicability of the teaching was highlighted, with one third-year student stating that there was no subject in the Seminary curriculum that was useless or purposeless. Examples of practical service activities carried out as part of the studies were mentioned, such as distributing soup on the street to people in need, organising jointly a worship night, etc. On the other hand, the value of more theoretical subjects was highlighted, which help to create clarity of thought. It was acknowledged that there is a very good balance between theory and practice in the Seminary. The logical and efficient system of practicums was also highlighted. According to the

students, their studies at the Seminary have helped them to understand themselves better, to find out what their strengths are and which areas are not their speciality. A third-year student plans to start an inductive Bible study group to put the knowledge gained in the Seminary into practice.

CURRICULUM RENEWAL

The renewal of the curriculum is the responsibility of the Academic Council. Until this year, students were taught on the basis of a curriculum that was opened in 2013, revised during the period 2014-2016, with the revised version in force in the period 2016/2017 - 2023/2024. Major curriculum renewal took place in the period 2022-2024.

The Academic Council set up a working group, chaired by Dean Mark Nelson, that included faculty, student and alumni representatives, representatives of the owner and major employers of the alumni. The renewal of the curriculum was preceded by extensive preparation. Two interviews were held with the leaders of two denominations (the Estonian Methodist Church and the Estonian Christian Pentecostal Church) to discuss the needs of the church and society. A survey among current BMTS students and alumni was carried out. In addition, a survey among potential students was carried out specifically in the three denominations (EMC, ECPC and EEVL) and in the wider ecumenical lists. The participation of the BMTS leadership in meetings organised by the Ministry of Education and Research and the Estonian Rectors Conference of Universities of Applied Sciences, where higher education standards and developments were discussed, also contributed to the curriculum review process.

In the preparatory phase of the curriculum renewal, a comparative analysis was carried out with the theological curricula of other Estonian schools and areas not offered by others were mapped to avoid duplication. The curricula of leading schools in Estonia, the USA, Canada and Europe were examined to establish the balance between major and minor tracks. In order to learn from the experience of international theological higher education institutions, a number of specialists were involved in the curriculum renewal: Dr Kirk Sims, PhD (formerly responsible for curriculum development at Asbury University, USA); Dr Daniel Poff, PhD (recently retired Director of the doctoral program in physiotherapy, Accreditation Consultant - Indiana Wesleyan University, USA); Dr Ramon Baker, DTh (Apologetics specialist - Apologia - Centrum för Kristen Apologetik, Sweden); Dr Laurynas Jacevičius, PhD (Apologetics specialist - Apologetika.lt, Lithuania); Dr Gregg Okesson, PhD (Provost and Senior Vice President of Academic Affairs - Asbury Seminary, USA). At key stages of curriculum development, a draft plan was submitted for input to both the Board of Trustees and the Estonian Methodist Church Administrative Council. The involvement of various stakeholders ensured a broad and balanced approach to curriculum renewal, taking into account academic standards as well as the needs of the labour market and society.

The renewal of the curriculum and the preparation of the new development plan took place partly in parallel. In the course of these processes, the core values, mission and vision of the BMTS were reviewed to ensure their continued relevance and compatibility with a changing society. In between curriculum working group meetings, the Dean met separately with all core faculty to discuss how their individual course objectives fit with the planned curriculum changes and to receive input for curriculum development. This helped to ensure both consistency and acceptance of the changes.

On the basis of the background research, the curriculum working group started by reviewing the curriculum goals and outcomes, making only minor stylistic changes. The overall aims and objectives of the curriculum remained unchanged in substance. The main focus of the curriculum revision was on structural changes that would allow for a choice of minors based on the personal interests and talents of the learner, and flexibility in achieving the overall objectives in a more personalised, focused and applicable way in the changing context of the

Church and society. Most of the curricular changes involved the development of three minor tracks: Church Leadership and Multiplication; Gospel and Society; and Biblical Studies and Teaching. The work started with the formulation of the goals and outcomes of the minors, followed by the definition of individual courses. The process ended by returning to the goals and outcomes to ensure that the courses formed a coherent whole and confirming that the goals and outcomes were met. The renewed curriculum ([Appendix 21](#)) was adopted by the Academic Council on 4 June 2024 and will be used for teaching from the academic year 2024/2025.

The renewed curriculum will help the Seminary to more effectively fulfil its purpose and mission - to prepare Christian workers, clergy and leaders, to respond to the needs of the church and society, and to support the spiritual formation of students. The renewed curriculum allows for specialisation according to the strengths and interests of the learner and a deeper commitment to the chosen field of study. This will enable students to be better prepared specifically for their vocation of service to the Church and society. Specialisation gives the learner the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills that are most needed for his or her ministry and tasks. In the renewal of the curriculum, particular attention has been paid to the balance between theoretical and practical learning, in order to avoid a predominance of one or the other, and to the coherence between the curriculum and the subjects taught.

MASTER'S LEVEL STUDIES

In 2017, Asbury Theological Seminary approached the BMTS to discuss the possibility of opening a joint Master's programme in mission and church planting. As this aligns with the core values and mission of the BMTS, it was discussed with the school's owner and Methodist leaders from across Europe, as well as with the Seminary's partner, the Estonian Christian Pentecostal Church. There is a known need for such a programme. The Seminary alumni have also expressed interest in such a curriculum. Few European seminaries offer a Master's degree in church planting. The Seminary is moving step by step towards the long-term plan of opening a Master's program. More staff have been recruited, including the head of RDCA, there is a continuous effort to develop the professionalism and qualifications of the teaching staff, and there is a steady upward trend in the proportion of faculty with doctorates. The strategy for RDCA sets the opening of a Master's level program in 2026/2027. The Seminary plans to open a competition for a docent in Systematic Theology and also for a docent in Practical Theology as soon as the funding for these positions is confirmed.

STRENGTHS:

- Balance between theoretical and practical learning. According to the students, the balance between theory and practice is one of the most important values of the Seminary.
- The renewal of the curriculum has taken into account the views of a wide range of academic experts and stakeholders.
- Opportunities for learners to specialise in an area that matches their interests and abilities.

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT:

- More systematically and regularly solicit feedback on the curriculum from employers of alumni to identify specific areas for improvement and ensure the curriculum remains relevant and up-to-date to the needs of the labour market and society.

8. LEARNING AND TEACHING

PURPOSE

Learning and teaching are the main activities of the BMTS and derive from the purpose and mission of the BMTS: to prepare Christian workers, clergy and leaders. The objectives of learning and teaching are formulated in more general terms in the Development Plan (2024-2028): The BMTS has a systematic and learner-centred learning process that supports the learner's lifelong learning, spiritual development and creativity and prepares people with social skills, who are competitive, self-directed, who value cooperation and possess professional knowledge.

The more specific objectives and learning outcomes of learning and teaching are formulated in the curriculum, which is based on the mission of the BMTS.

STUDENT ADMISSION

The BMTS' admission requirements and process ensure fair and transparent access to higher education and serve to develop a motivated and academically capable student body that is in line with the school's mission and objectives. In order to fulfil its mission, the BMTS has established policies and process for admission requirements, which are reviewed annually by the Admission Committee and amended as necessary to ensure that they are kept up to date.

Admission requirements for both EU and non-EU nationals are described on the BMTS website. In accordance with the BMTS' mission and the requirements of the system of practicums, membership of a Christian congregation is a prerequisite for admission.

The admission form and the interview questions are designed to assess the student's motivation, readiness and ability to cope with the curriculum, which is based on the BMTS' mission. Transparency and impartiality are ensured by the Admissions Committee, which decides on admission by consensus in general and by majority vote in exceptional cases. This collective decision-making process ensures objectivity and equality of candidates. The motivation of students is assessed by means of the pastor's letter of recommendation, the admission questionnaire, essay and interview, which provide a thorough understanding of the candidate's commitment and suitability for theological education. From 2023 onwards, more specific criteria apply to the admission essay. In the essay, the candidate has to analyse a problem which he or she sees in his or her congregation and in society and which relates to the need for theological education. The admission essay is used to assess the student's motivation and analytical thinking, which are essential prerequisites for writing a quality diploma paper and for overall academic success. This ensures that accepted students are not only motivated and committed, but also able to cope successfully with the demands of the curriculum. In order to assess prior knowledge in the field, all applicants are required to take a Bible knowledge test, the results of which indicate the student's level of basic knowledge. If the applicant is promising but the committee judges their readiness for theological studies at the higher education level to be insufficient, they will be encouraged to attend a Bible school programme (e.g. the Way of Light Bible School or the NEXT Step Bible School) and encouraged to return to the Seminary after a certain period of time.

Foreign qualifications are assessed according to the ENIC-NARIC system, which ensures compliance with international standards and comparability. While in the past the international students who were refused a visa after admission increased the number of students who dropped out of the BMTS, it was decided to change the admission process so that foreign students are formally immatriculated only when they appear for the first session.

The Seminary is ready to welcome **students with special needs**. The Seminary has experience with teaching deaf students who graduated in 2019. In that situation and also in the future, training is provided for faculty to teach the students based on the specific needs. The premises of the Seminary are wheelchair accessible.

As a result of active marketing, the number of students accepted in 2023 almost doubled compared to the previous year. This has also raised the overall number of students, bringing it one step closer to the target of 80 students set in 2021.

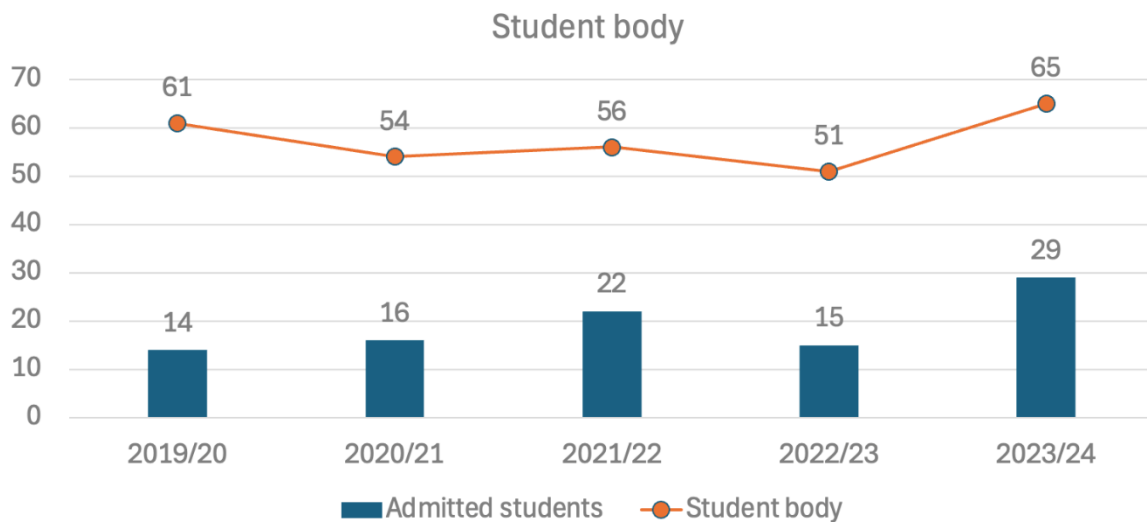


Figure 13: Numbers of the student body and the admitted students in the period 2019/2020 - 2023/2024. Source: Haridussilm.ee

ORGANISATION OF STUDIES

The learning process is designed and organised around the needs of students. They are given the opportunity to give feedback on the organisation of studies and to suggest improvements for curricula. This ensures that the learning process meets students' needs and expectations, making it even more effective and motivating. The vast majority of students are family people and/or working. For them, the cyclical session-based learning is the most appropriate form of studies. Sessions run once a month from Wednesday to Saturday. The Seminary considered changing the time of the sessions from Tuesday to Friday and students were asked for their views. Based on the students' preference, the sessions were kept to the current days of the week. Starting in autumn 2024 specific classes that focus on developing skills that require regular practice (for example Inductive Bible Study and Greek) have a required online session on Tuesday or Wednesday evening of weeks that do not have a study session. This change is designed to improve the students' ability to achieve learning outcomes. Study sessions can be attended **in the classroom or online**. The school recommends that students attend the classroom whenever possible to take part in the wider experience of personal interaction such as the student cafe, shared lunches and spontaneous conversations during the breaks. However, the online platform also allows those who are unable to attend because of distance or other reasons to participate in studies. [Estonian Education Strategy 2021-2035](#) emphasizes the need to ensure flexibility and accessibility in education, identifying accessibility as one of the priority areas. The BMTS offers the possibility to participate in higher education as well as in continuing education online. This ensures that learning opportunities are also available for those who are unable to attend courses in person.

From 2022 onwards, the first study session of the academic year for all students takes place in a retreat setting. This provides an ideal environment for first-year students to meet staff and students of other years. Getting to know each other in an informal atmosphere makes communication easier and more natural and helps to build strong bonds. The time spent together by the entire student body and the staff helps to create a sense of unity, which fosters mutual support and cooperation throughout the academic year, and a sense of being part of the Seminary community. The spiritual atmosphere of the camp environment contributes to the deeper spiritual growth that is an essential part of the BMTS learning process. Prayers and spiritual activities together provide a strong foundation for the whole academic year. The off-campus study sessions have received very positive feedback from students and the Seminary will continue to organise them.

For more information on the organisation of studies and the comprehensive support for students, see the Seminary [website](#) and the section on [Learning Support Services](#).

LEARNER-CENTRED APPROACH

At the Baltic Methodist Theological Seminary, a learner-centred approach is at the heart of the learning process, guiding students to take responsibility for their studies and career planning. This endeavour is in line with the corresponding objectives of the [Estonian Education Strategy 2021-2035](#).

When completing the application form and in mentoring meetings, students formulate their learning goals and the actions they will take to achieve them - this increases their commitment and sense of responsibility.

Each student has the opportunity to receive personalised advice and guidance to help them identify and develop their strengths. Faculty pay particular attention to students' personal development needs, providing individual feedback and support. All subjects require students to do a set amount of independent work. This helps to develop self-discipline and a sense of responsibility. In addition, the learning process encourages creativity and innovation by providing a range of opportunities for independent homework, enabling students to apply their ideas and creative solutions. The students choose the place of practicum based on their own experience and interests. There are also opportunities for options in homework of certain subjects.

A diverse range of teaching methods also supports students' individual needs and development.

Here are some examples of how teachers take into account learners' needs:

1. In lectures and seminars, students always have the opportunity to express their views and ask questions. This creates interactivity in the classroom and allows the needs of students to be taken into account.
2. In many subjects, group work is used both for short discussions in lectures and for joint homework. In a group, students have the opportunity to express their own views. Students with different knowledge and skills complement each other in group work and learn from each other. Group work is used in a variety of ways in different subjects, depending on the specificity of the subject: group discussions in many subjects (e.g. Church History and Lifelong Learning); group role-playing tasks in Evangelism and Discipleship; group presentations and analysis and other group work methodologies.
3. In a number of subjects (e.g. Homiletics, language learning and Lifelong Learning), students are required to make reports and presentations. Individual presentations allow the student to approach the task and make a presentation according to his/her needs. In the case of individual presentations, the faculty give feedback to the individual student based on his/her progress.

4. A number of subjects use the "flipped classroom" methodology. For example, students are asked to watch a video before the lecture and then discuss the video in class. In Inductive Bible Study, homework is given to be done before class, followed by an analysis of the assignment and discussion in class.
5. Reflection exercises with open questions are used.
6. Creative projects and tasks (e.g. acting, drawing) are implemented. This highlights students' strengths and specificities.
7. For written assignments, students often have the option to choose the topic they like best from a list of given topics. In the student interviews in spring 2024, the value of the fact that in certain subjects (e.g. Spiritual Formation) students can choose the assignment according to their field of activity was highlighted. This adds practical value to learning.
8. Similarly to the previous point described, a framework is provided for certain subjects, but the specific project is chosen by each student.
9. In the case of written assignments, faculty provide individual feedback on Moodle platform based on the work of the individual student.
10. Students are encouraged to combine homework assignments from different subjects where possible, for example, an assignment in Lifelong Learning subject focuses on methodology, but the content of the assignment may be derived from homework in another subject. This approach encourages interdisciplinary thinking and integration of knowledge.
11. For numerous practicums, each student can choose the organisation or project they want to work in, according to their skills and interests. The Dean confirms that the chosen location allows fulfilment of the practicum requirements.
12. While students with weaker academic abilities can mostly manage with compulsory reading, more advanced students have the opportunity to acquire more knowledge through recommended reading.

DIGITAL TOOLS TO SUPPORT LEARNING

The BMTS has invested in modern learning infrastructure, including a digital learning platform, interactive learning tools and online platforms. For example, a variety of digital tools such as Moodle forums, Mentimeter, PowerPoint, Jamboard, Microsoft Whiteboard for online collaboration, group work facilities in Zoom and MS Teams, video presentations and blogs are used. The use of different technological and digital tools in the learning process supports the development of students' digital competences. An educational technologist provides individual coaching to faculty on digital learning methods. More details on digital learning tools can be seen in the chapters on Learning Support Systems and Resources.

SYSTEM OF PRACTICUMS

The system of practicums at the Baltic Methodist Theological Seminary is designed in a way that supports the application of students' theoretical knowledge in a practical context and their spiritual and professional development. In addition to the many practical assignments in the theoretical subjects, the renewed curriculum includes 31 ECTS of practicums: 23 ECTS in compulsory subjects (17% of compulsory ECTS) and 8 ECTS in the minors (24% of minor subject ECTS).

During the course of their studies, students are required to complete three practicums related to the general ministry of the Church, adapted to the student's situation, talents and interests:

- Congregational Observation Practicum – a thorough observation of the practical workings of the student's home congregation including the history, organisational structure and areas of ministry, leading to a comprehensive analysis including describing how to minimise weaknesses and maximise potential.

- Congregational Ministry Practicum - supervised experience in different areas of ministry in the student's home congregation.
- Mission Practicum - supervised experience in a Christian ministry of the student's choice, outside their home church, focusing on the physical and spiritual needs of society.

Additional required practicums cover specific topics for practical development such as Homiletics, Inductive Bible Study, etc.

Each minor contains 2 or 3 practicums focusing on the development of specific skills needed to achieve particular learning outcomes unique to that area of focus.

The practicums are spread over the period of study in such a way that the completed subjects support doing the practicums. Different parts of the practicums are integrated with specific subjects in order to strengthen the coherence between theory and practice.

Within given parameters, students can choose a location or focus for their practicum based on their experience, interests and area of ministry. This allows them to focus on areas that support their personal and professional development. Practicums in Christian organisations and churches encourage the recruitment of alumni as staff and volunteers.

During the practicums, students draw up individual practicum plans that include specific objectives and the activities to achieve them. This helps students to focus on their learning and development goals and takes into account their individual needs and strengths. During the practicums, students are provided with ongoing guidance to help them reflect on their experiences, receive constructive feedback and develop their skills and knowledge. The Practicum Supervisor's Handbook ([Appendix 22](#)) supports the supervision process and the standards of feedback, thereby ensuring equal treatment of students and a consistently high quality of the practicum experience. During the practicum, the student is supervised by the pastor of the respective congregation, who has completed pedagogical courses as part of his/her studies. This ensures that the practicum supervisors have basic pedagogical skills. Students regularly submit practicum reports and reflections to help them analyse their experiences. This process encourages students to think critically and monitor their own progress. At the end of the practicum, students receive comprehensive feedback from their supervisors, including both strengths and opportunities for development. The assessment focuses on the student's individual development and achievements.

ASSESSING LEARNING AND TEACHING RESULTS

The results of the teaching and learning of the Baltic Methodist Theological Seminary are continuously evaluated to ensure that the education is of high quality and meets the needs of the Church and society. To this end, a variety of mechanisms are used to get feedback from students, graduates and employers. The regular collection and analysis of feedback enables the school to make the necessary adjustments to the learning process and curriculum to ensure continuous development and improvement.

Student satisfaction is regularly monitored through online surveys using the LimeSurvey platform. At the end of a course, a survey is sent out to obtain feedback. The surveys are anonymous, and the results are reviewed by the Dean before being sent to the course instructor. If problems are identified in specific areas, a meeting will be arranged between the teacher and the Dean to discuss remedial action. In order to avoid an oversaturation of surveys, feedback is not requested for all subjects. Feedback is sought selectively for subjects where it is important to collect feedback (e.g. subjects taught by a new faculty member or subjects with a lower-than-average past feedback).

Indicator 1: The results of the student satisfaction surveys show a consistently high level of satisfaction with all aspects of the Seminary and studies. In the comparison of the periods, the increase in satisfaction can be seen in the motivation of the students and in the presentation of the course. The table below shows student feedback across periods.

Table 9. Average scores of student satisfaction surveys on a 5-point scale comparing periods

	2018/2019- 2020/2021	2021/2022- 2023/2024	Change
Personal motivation of the student	4,35	4,50	+0,15
Structure of the course	4,61	4,65	+0,04
Course presentation	4,52	4,68	+0,16
Encouragement of independent thinking	4,42	4,47	+0,05
Spiritual atmosphere	4,67	4,66	-0,01
General results	4,40	4,46	+0,06
Learning environment	4,65	4,64	-0,01

In the spring of 2024, when students were asked for input for the self-analysis, they were asked to identify what they value most about the BMTS. According to a number of students, the Seminary's system of practicums deserves to be highlighted for its logical structure and integration with the subjects. They also praised the fact that the practicum could be carried out in a field of interest to the student. According to the students, the three-stage system of practicums, whereby the student first observes and familiarises himself/herself, then contributes in a familiar environment, and in the third stage contributes in an unfamiliar environment, is very supportive of the student's development and allows them to take on more and more responsibility step by step.

All **graduates** are asked for feedback on the whole learning process immediately after graduation using the LimeSurvey platform. In addition to numerical ratings, respondents have the opportunity to anonymously write comments, which also provides necessary input for the Seminary.

Indicator: Feedback from graduates in the period 2021-2024 is presented in the table below.

Table 10. Graduates' feedback survey average scores on a 5-point scale for the period 2021-2024

How did the Seminary meet your expectations?	4.33
How satisfied are you overall with the education you received at the Seminary?	4.54
How likely are you to recommend the BMTS to a friend?	4.42
Do you consider the Seminary faculty competent in their area of teaching?	4.58
The teaching method used in the Seminary was appropriate and encouraged learning.	4.33
The Seminary gave an appropriate broad base of education relevant for Christian ministry.	4.58
The education I received at the Seminary helped me grow closer to God.	4.42
I received the appropriate support from the staff and faculty to complete my studies.	4.54
How satisfied were you with your Diploma paper advisor and the Diploma paper advising process?	4.71

More information on the feedback from students and graduates is presented in [Appendix 19](#).

Regular surveys are carried out among **alumni**. The last in-depth alumni survey was carried out in 2022. This survey assessed alumni satisfaction with various aspects of their education and experience at the Seminary. They were also asked to assess the practical value of specific subjects from a labour market perspective. Respondents were given the opportunity to list subjects that are relevant to the labour market but were not sufficiently covered in the Seminary. The results of the alumni feedback were used to update the curriculum.

Graduates' competences are assessed on the basis of feedback from the main **employers** (EMC, ECPC). This helps the Seminary to tailor its activities and the content of its training to the needs of the labour market. Feedback on the professional competences of graduates is continuously applied to the development of the Seminary at all levels. In the course of the curriculum renewal meetings with the two denominational leaders (EMC, ECPC), who are the main employers of the Seminary graduates, the relevance of the curriculum, the organisation of studies and its content to the needs of the churches were thoroughly discussed. On the basis of the information received, changes were made to the curriculum. Also other methods are used to evaluate the learning process and the results of the Baltic Methodist Theological Seminary, as described in more detail in the chapter on Quality Culture.

STRENGTHS:

1. The Seminary focuses on the individual needs and abilities of students, offering personalised solutions in terms of learning process, its content and organisation.
2. A diverse learning methodology supports learners with different needs, enriches the learning process and develops students' creativity and innovation.
3. The use of modern digital tools and online platforms enriches the choice of teaching methodologies and develops the digital competences of faculty and students.
4. The three-stage and subject-integrated system of practicums supports the application of theoretical knowledge and the professional development of students step by step.
5. Student and graduate satisfaction confirms the existence of a learner-centred and effective learning environment.

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT:

1. Increase training of faculty in innovative teaching methods and expand the use of digital learning methods.
2. Apply the potential of artificial intelligence and continue to analyse the associated risks in the context of learning and teaching.
3. Develop cooperation with other higher education institutions to share best practices in the organisation and methodology of teaching.

9. STUDENT ASSESSMENT

PURPOSE

The BMTS is committed to having a transparent, learning supportive, learning outcomes-based and objective assessment system with a variety of assessment methods (Development Plan 2024-2028).

SYSTEM FOR ASSESSING LEARNING OUTCOMES

The learning goals and outcomes are set out in the curriculum (Appendixes 20 and 21) and are based on the BMTS' mission. All syllabi include learning outcomes, homework

description and assessment criteria to be used to assess the achievement of the learning outcomes.

A description of the evaluation system is available on the Seminary's website. The Academic Regulations contain a comprehensive description of the regulations for assessment, the prerequisites for passing subjects, the organisation of examinations, deadlines, the calculation of the average grade for academic performance, the results of exams or assessments and a process for students to appeal the results.

The BMTS uses both differentiated and non-differentiated assessment. The assessment criteria for differentiated assessment tasks must make clear what requirements must be met in order to obtain a specific grade.

In order to ensure the versatility and relevance of assessment methods, each faculty member is able to choose the most appropriate methods for the subject, depending on the nature of the subject. Discussions in faculty meetings revealed that essays, reflections and research papers are used as assessment methods in many subjects. In addition to the more common methods, a wide range of other methods are used: forums, presentations, leading small group discussions, blogs, creative work, tests, etc. These methods are also used for the assessment of the learning outcomes. In most subjects, the course grade will be based on the results of several assignments.

Faculty members use the Moodle platform to mark grades. The Moodle system helps to automatically calculate the student's final grade and allows direct communication between student and instructor. The final official grade is posted on Tahvel, where students can also track their course enrolment and curriculum completion.

In order to ensure that students receive timely information on learning outcomes and assessment tasks, the BMTS Staff and Faculty Handbook (Appendix 5) requires that the syllabus be made available to students before the start of the course. The Dean monitors compliance with this requirement.

The results of the course feedback surveys carried out in the period 2021-2024 show the satisfaction of students with the availability before the start of the course of information on the course objectives, main topics, requirements, assignments and assessment criteria. More detailed information on this can be found in Appendix 19.

To encourage and recognise graduates, the BMTS annually awards three prizes for outstanding performance in academics, leadership and preaching:

- Joy and Wes Griffin Award for Outstanding Academic Achievement
- Olav Pärnamets Award for Leadership
- Georgi Lanberg Award for Preaching

DEVELOPING ASSESSMENT COMPETENCES AND HARMONISING ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

The BMTS Staff and Faculty Handbook (Appendix 5), which is available to faculty on the front page of Moodle, contains rules and best practice recommendations for assessing assignments to ensure quality and consistency of assessment.

The coherence of the learning outcomes, tasks and assessment criteria in the syllabi and their consistency with the curriculum have been thoroughly analysed at the faculty meetings in the academic year 2023-2024. In the course of the in-depth analysis of the syllabi, best practices were shared and some syllabi were worked through as examples, where a stronger coherence between learning outcomes, assessment tasks and assessment criteria was established.

Through a series of meetings, the core teaching staff agreed on common definitions, objectives and emphases for the three main types of assessment for written assignments (reflections, essays and research papers). The basis for the development of assessment criteria for each type of assignment was also identified. The working group's guidelines were included in the Staff and Faculty Handbook ([Appendix 5](#)).

Examining and analysing the different syllabi allowed the faculty to adapt the syllabus of their subject to avoid overlaps and gaps between syllabi. As a result, the competence of the faculty in designing syllabi and in linking and formulating learning outcomes, tasks and assessment criteria has increased. A common analysis of assessment criteria helped to harmonise assessment standards and increase the objectivity of assessment.

ENSURING THE OBJECTIVITY OF THE ASSESSMENT

Objectivity in the assessment is ensured by fixed assessment criteria and the possibility for students to challenge their grades. [The Academic Regulations](#) set out the rights of students, including the procedures for submitting and dealing with assessment-related disputes. The policy on diploma paper assessment appeals is described in the diploma paper syllabus. The possibility of grading each other's courses' assignments has been discussed at faculty meetings. In most cases, this is not feasible because a small school does not have several experts in the same field and the other faculty member does not know what has been discussed in the lectures. As a result, teachers do not have the competence to assess each other's assignments.

In order to increase the objectivity of the assessment, in some subjects the involvement of students has been used in the assessment (e.g. Biblical studies courses and Lifelong Learning). Practice shows that course mates tend to assess each other's work more positively than the assessment criteria suggest, but the assessment of each other's work is an opportunity to learn from each other and to see the material through the eyes of the other learner.

Two readers and a committee are used to ensure objective assessment of diploma papers. The committee has access to all diploma papers one week before the defence. A Powerpoint presentation prepared by the student and the two reviews are also sent to the committee before the defence. The reviewers' comments in the thesis assessment file are also visible to the members of the committee, making it easier for them to understand the reviewer's reasoning and to perceive the rigour of his/her assessment. This helps to ensure a fairer and more balanced approach to the assessment.

The results of the course feedback surveys show student satisfaction with the assessment (average score 4.5 out of 5).

IMPLEMENTATION OF APEL

The APEL procedures are presented on the BMTS [website](#). There is also an APEL application guide. In the first semester's subject "Introduction to Studies", the APEL possibility is introduced. The Academic Assistant and the Dean offer students advice on APEL.

According to the APEL guidelines, most APEL applications undergo a counselling process before submission. If it is absolutely clear that what is included in the application does not meet the requirements, the relevant courses are removed during the counselling process before the application is submitted. As a result, the number of ECTS refused for transfer is significantly lower than it would be without the counselling process.

Indicator: The table below shows the statistics for APEL applications.

Table 11. APEL application statistics for the period 2020-2024

	total	average per year
APEL applications	37	9.3
Total ECTS accepted for transfer	555	138.8
Total ECTS denied transfer	82.5	20.6
Formal learning applications	20	5
Average ECTS accepted for transfer per formal learning application	25.9	
Work experience / refresher training / other subject applications	17	4.3
Average ECTS accepted for transfer per work experience and other application	2.2	

STRENGTHS:

- As a result of the analysis of the curricula, the coherence between learning outcomes, tasks and assessment criteria has increased and the assessment criteria for different subjects have been harmonised.

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT:

- Promote the students' assessment of each other's work in a controlled and structured way to increase objectivity and develop critical thinking.
- Use analytics and learning analysis to monitor the effectiveness of assessment practices and make adjustments where necessary.

10. LEARNING SUPPORT SYSTEMS

The BMTS offers a support system that takes into account the diverse needs of the student body and supports individual development and academic progress (Development Plan 2024-2028). To achieve this goal and to support students in all aspects, a number of measures have been developed to ensure a high-quality learning environment and a smooth learning experience.

The support measures, grouped under 9 main areas, form the support services system of the BMTS.

1. Library, study materials and databases

- With the help of a door card and a self-check-out system, students can use the library room, books, printer-copier and computers with access to databases at their convenience.
- The BMTS library offers a wide range of theological literature and teaching materials to support students' academic activities and research. In cooperation with the teaching staff, the librarian is constantly working to update the study materials.
- The BMTS library participates in the interlibrary loan service, which means that students have the opportunity to borrow materials from all Estonian libraries. The librarian assists both faculty and students in finding literature from databases and other libraries.
- If necessary, the librarian sends materials by post to students living further away.
- The subjects "Introduction to Learning" and "Information Skills" teach how to use databases and search for information.

- Students and faculty are supported in their information searches from a variety of international databases, including the National Library of Estonia (EBSCO) database, the JSTOR database, and Asbury Theological Seminary's Fisher Research Scholar Program, which provides access to B.L. Fisher Library's online research databases.
- The librarian helps people to order books at a reduced price, and a meeting was arranged with the Swiss Methodist Church archivist Ulrich Frei, who was conducting research on the basis of the EMC archives.

For more information on the library and the study literature, see Resources.

2. Translation

- The Seminary allows studies in Estonian, English and Russian languages. There is simultaneous interpretation into two languages in lectures. High-quality translation equipment and services ensure that students can study in their mother tongue, which supports better understanding and motivation to learn.
- The Seminary has experience of teaching deaf students, for whom sign language translation was organised.

3. Counselling

- The Dean and the Academic Assistant offer academic and APEL counselling to students.
- Each student is assigned a specific person to supervise their diploma paper and practicums.
- Students are offered academic guidance through a mentoring programme. Each student is assigned a mentor, with whom they meet at least once a semester during the academic year to discuss the student's concerns and joys regarding their academic performance and school. The mentor also provides support on a personal-emotional level. More details about the mentoring programme can be found on the following pages.
- As part of a number of first-year subjects, students are asked to choose a prayer partner from their fellow students to support, encourage and pray for each other.
- The Seminary has an agreement with a Christian psychologist who provides psychological counselling to students if needed.

Information on counselling opportunity is available on the website.

4. Scholarships and study grants

- The BMTS offers scholarships, or tuition fee rebates, to members of the EMC on a larger scale and to members of other denominations on a smaller scale. The scholarships are linked to academic performance and the student's contribution to the congregation, which motivates active participation in church life and studies.
- The Baltic Scholarship facilitates the studies of the members of Latvian and Lithuanian Methodist churches at the Seminary.
- Thanks to the state support, it was possible to offer a Ukrainian Scholarship to facilitate the studies of Ukrainian students in 2022 and 2023.
- On its website, the Seminary provides information on the state need-based study allowance.
- The Seminary offers special support for students who are not eligible for the state need-based study allowance.

Information on scholarships, study allowances and their criteria can be found on the BMTS website.

5. IT support and digital technologies

- The school provides education technological support for all students through the course "Introduction to Studies" and individual IT support counselling.
- The BMTS has developed rules on information security that are introduced to students as part of the "Introduction to Studies" course.
- The BMTS uses the following digital tools: Learning Information System Tahvel, Learning Management System Moodle, communication and collaborative tools in Microsoft 365 platform (e-mail, documents, web meetings), learning analytics tools LimeSurvey, study materials website Varamu, the Seminary website, library electronic database Riksweb, the library's self-access system Rita, the digital access system FoxSec, for the library and the Seminary building, online lecture tools (Zoom, MS Teams), in-school social media (Microsoft Engage), the online recording automation platform OpenCast, remote recording cameras and microphones in classrooms. In addition, the national databases for the management of learning activities EHIS, the scientific information system ETIS, the examinations information system EIS, the student ID ordering platforms minukool.ee and ISIC.ee and the Erasmus Without Paper Portal EWP.
- Students can rewatch or relisten to the lectures. The recordings are available in three languages. Video subtitles, translated using artificial speech applications, are used where necessary. The video files are shared on the Moodle page of the respective course via Microsoft Stream, Youtube, Archive.org and OpenCast through local servers.

The BMTS website has information on e-learning support.

6. Supporting international students

- International students are offered counselling on documentation and residence permits, and are provided with information necessary for living in the country, including the emergency number 112 and other essential information.
- First-year students are advised by second- and third-year international students who have themselves experienced similar challenges when starting their studies in a foreign country.
- For international students and foreign-language students living in Estonia, events introducing Estonian culture, such as excursions and national cuisine, visits to open-air museum, are organised to facilitate their cultural adaptation and integration. Estonian language courses are also offered.
- Due to the difficult economic situation facing Ukrainians as a result of the war, special support was offered to Ukrainian students, including scholarships (up to 90% discount per academic year), compensation for transport and accommodation costs, free of charge transfer of credit points with APEL for those who have started theological studies in Ukraine but were unable to continue them due to the war.

7. Supporting students with special needs

- During the admission interview, students have the opportunity to highlight any special needs or learning difficulties that need attention or extra support. Learning difficulties are also highlighted in discussions with the Dean or mentor.
- If necessary, the Dean will draw up an individual study plan or offer the student a special solution based on his or her needs, depending on the student's learning difficulties or special needs.
- Examples include allowing parents of young children to take care of the child in another room during a lecture while simultaneously attending the lecture via Zoom.

- Digital technology solutions and the availability of hybrid learning also allow people who live far away from the school (e.g. an Israeli national currently studying at the Seminary) to participate.
- While individual needs are taken into account and flexibility of learning is offered, it is ensured that the quality and academic standards do not decline.
- Access for people with reduced mobility is guaranteed.

8. Support for practicum and job placements

- Career planning and the labour market are addressed in the subject Lifelong Learning in the Congregation.
- The subject Foundations of Diaconal Ministry introduces organisations and career opportunities in the social field.
- Regular "Kuum Days" showcase ministry and career opportunities outside the church. "Kuum Day" is designed to connect students with potential practicum placements for their third year of study, which must be completed in an organization or ministry that focuses on activities outside the church. Speakers for the " Kuum Day" are invited from a variety of Christian organisations, charities, community projects, etc. Often the invitees include Seminary alumni sharing their career experiences.
- Career and job search counselling takes place in mentor meetings. When needed students are referred to the Unemployment Insurance Fund for more in-depth career advice and job search, a service which is free of charge.
- The school has established practicum placements that are offered to students when needed.
- Practicums in Christian organisations and congregations help to build connections, provide students with work experience in the respective institutions and facilitate the recruitment of alumni in these same institutions.
- Among the faculty are denominational and organisational leaders, one of whose tasks is to find new clergy, workers and volunteers. In other words, they are potential recruiters. In the learning process, they have the opportunity to get to know the students, and this is also a beneficial factor in recruitment.
- The Erasmus+ program offers students international internship opportunities.

9. Supporting students' participation in extracurricular activities

- Active involvement in the congregation is a prerequisite for enrolment, which therefore requires BMTS students to be actively involved in extracurricular activities.
- Various extra-curricular activities such as the step count challenge, worship nights and food distribution for the homeless have been organised to strengthen the student body's sense of unity. These activities support students' social and spiritual development.

The support services measures listed above ensure that students and faculty have all the resources and support they need for a successful learning process and for their professional and personal development.

AVERAGE DURATION OF STUDIES

Under Estonian law, students can extend the duration of their studies by one year and still be considered full-time students.

Indicator: Using the TalTech example, the table below also includes students who graduate within 3+1 years among those who graduate in the nominal time.

Table 12. Average duration of studies of students by graduating classes

2021	2022	2023	2024
3.3	3.4	3.0	3.7

According to the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research, 43% of undergraduate students in Estonia graduate within the nominal duration. The BMTS' average percentage of students graduating in the nominal duration (62) is significantly higher than the Estonian average.

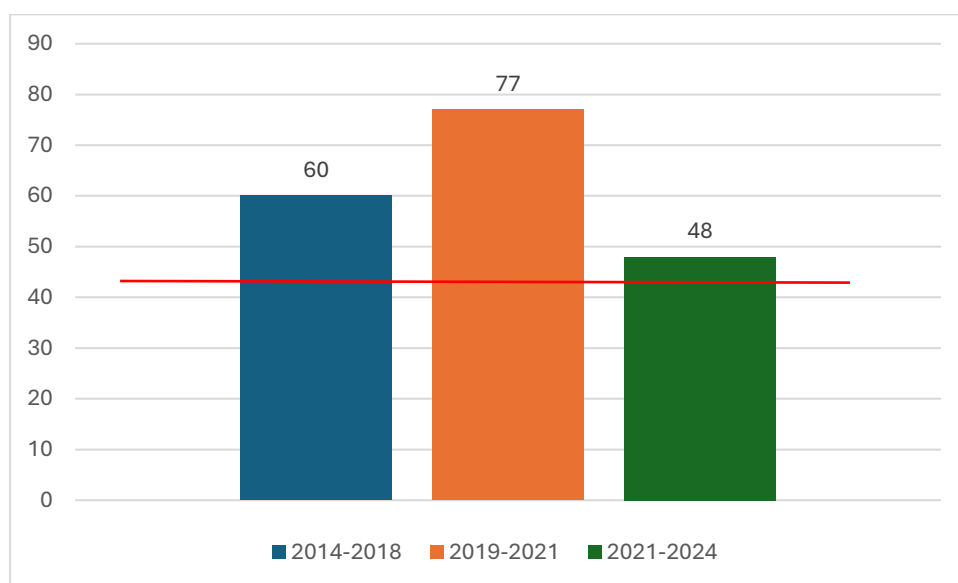


Figure 14: Percentage of BMTS students graduating in nominal duration compared to the Estonian average.

In the period 2021-2024, the number of graduates in nominal time dropped drastically to 48%, largely due to COVID and the war in Ukraine, which had a very large impact on the students who entered the Seminary in the period 2019-2021. However, the lower than usual number of graduates in nominal duration at the BMTS exceeds the Estonian average. Part of the reason for not graduating in the nominal time is the lack of time of students. Around 2/3 of students are aged 30+, which generally means that students have family and work roles to fulfil in addition to their studies. As a result, students often deliberately postpone writing their diploma paper until their fourth year. In order to extend the period for working on the thesis, a change has been made to the curriculum, with thesis preparation starting in the 2nd year. This gives students the opportunity to work on a large volume of work over a longer period of time and increases the likelihood of a larger number of students completing their diploma paper by the deadline.

Reasons for not graduating within nominal duration are also sometimes due to the political situation in Europe. Some foreign students try to maximise their time in Estonia because they do not want to return home due to the political situation there or to avoid potential mobilisation. To this end, the possibility of extending the study period is used.

STATISTICS ON GRADUATES AND DROP-OUTS

Indicator: the graph below shows the percentages of graduates from the BMTS, the percentage of students who continue their studies as external learners and the percentage of drop-outs. The figure excludes the BMTS students on academic leave (including extended parental leave).

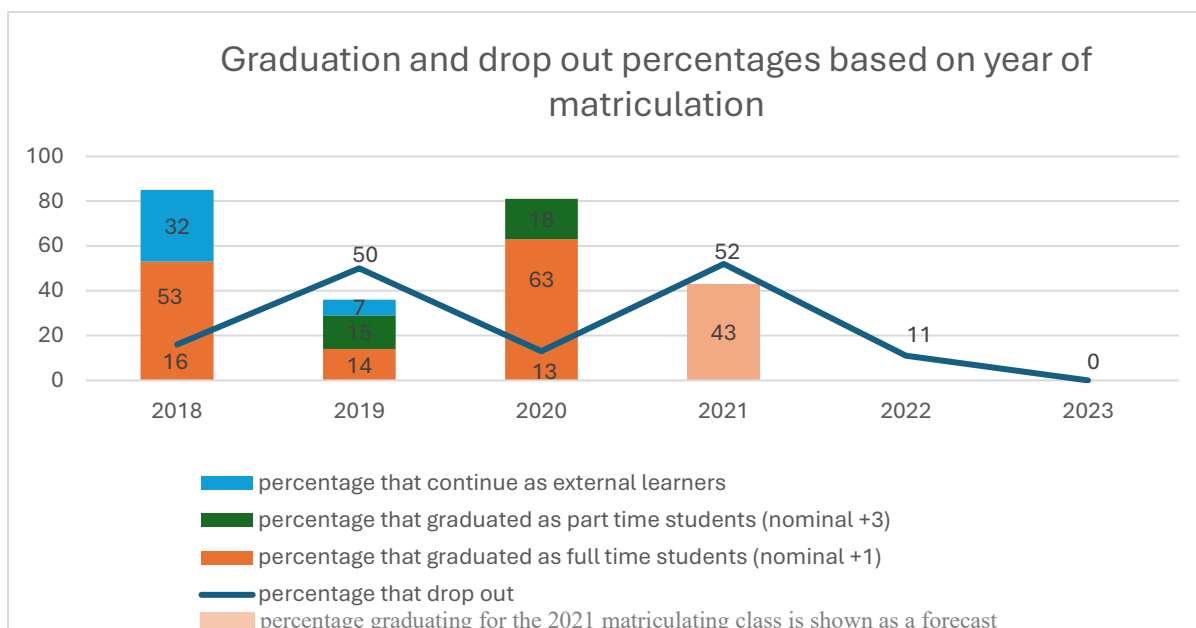


Figure 15: Percentages of drop-outs, graduates and students who continue as external learners for the period 2018-2023

The 2021 Accreditation Report analysed the graduation and drop-out rates for the period 2015-2021. At this point, the drop-out rate was concerningly high at 24%, and the report therefore outlined the steps planned to reduce this rate. The 2024 report looks at graduation and drop-out rates for students who started their studies in 2018 or later. Graduation and drop-out rates in this period were significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and the war against Ukraine. Students who started their studies shortly after the beginning of the crisis (2020 and 2022) seem to be better prepared to cope with the stressful situation. A higher than usual drop-out rate in the academic year 2021/2022 has been observed in Estonian higher education in general.

One of the measures outlined in the 2021 report to reduce the dropout rate was to track the causes and timing of dropouts. This data has been collected since 2019.

Indicator: In the observed period, 93% of dropouts occurred in the first academic year and 7% in the second academic year. There were no drop-outs in the last year. The data show that the first academic year is the most vulnerable and therefore needs special attention. On the basis of this trend, it can be hoped that for classes starting in 2022 and 2023, which currently have very low drop-out rates in the first year of study, a high graduation rate can be expected.

Table 13. Reasons for dropping out

<i>Year of enrolment:</i>	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Total	%
balancing work responsibilities	5		2			7	36%
balancing family responsibilities	2		3			5	23%
denied living permit in Estonia			3			3	14%
health problems		1	1	1		3	9%
mental health problems		1		1		2	9%
academic struggles			1			1	5%
loss of motivation			1			1	5%

Stress related to work and family are two of the most important factors for dropping out. Unsurprisingly, the prevalence of these factors increased significantly among students who started their studies in 2019 and 2021, when they were exposed to the COVID crisis and the invasion of Ukraine, which led to an economic and psychological crisis in their first year of study. Among the drop-outs in 2021, there are three people who received a negative response to their application for a residence permit after matriculation. As a consequence, the Seminary has changed its admission process and enrolls foreign students once they have obtained a residence permit.

Statistics show that the average drop-out rate in undergraduate studies in Estonia is 33%. The average dropout rate for the BMTS students enrolled between 2018 and 2023 is 22%. This is a slight decrease compared to the previous accreditation report of 24%. In view of the sharp increases in dropout rates during the COVID and the Ukraine war crisis which can be considered exceptional, there is reason to expect the dropout rate to fall significantly in the coming period.

MENTORING PROGRAMME

The Seminary's main measure to prevent students from dropping out is the academic mentoring programme. It was launched as a pilot project in 2022 and expanded between 2023 and 2024, when mentors were assigned to all full-time students. The mentoring programme has a total of 8 mentors. The mentoring programme involves a meeting between the mentor and the student every semester, during which the mentor and the mentee discuss academic performance, learning challenges and other relevant topics. The results of the meetings are compiled in a database, allowing the mentors to review the agreements of previous meetings and for the Dean to get an overview of the student body.

The functioning and effectiveness of the mentoring programme was analysed in spring 2024 through a discussion between the Dean and mentors and a student survey. Small procedural changes were made as a result, but the feedback has been overwhelmingly very positive. The effectiveness of the programme is regularly monitored.

Table 14. Mentoring programme statistics

	2022-23	2023-24
Total students enrolled in the Seminary	51	65
Total students assigned to a mentor	63%	83%
Individual students who met with their mentor	47%	78%
Meetings scheduled (and took place)	18 (89%)	58 (86%)
<i>Combined evaluation of academic and personal discussion:</i>		
The student is progressing satisfactorily towards graduation	38%	57%
The student is progressing, but with minor difficulties	44%	23%
The student is in need of ongoing support	6%	16%
The student is in danger of dropping out	13%	5%
<i>Most common challenges facing students:</i>		
Balancing time for studies with other responsibilities	19%	56%
Completing assignments	25%	26%
Financial	19%	28%

For more detailed information on the statistics and changes to the mentoring programme, see [Appendix 23](#).

GRADUATES' SATISFACTION WITH SUPPORT SERVICES

The impact of the support services is assessed by asking graduates for feedback on an annual basis, monitoring trends in key quantitative indicators (drop-out rate, academic performance indicators) and analysing the effectiveness of the measures in the Academic Council meetings, which are also attended by student representatives, and in the Rector's Council meetings.

Indicator: an overview of the feedback from students and graduates concerning support systems is given in the table below.

Table 15. Students' and graduates' satisfaction with support measures in the 5-point system for the period 2021-2024.

Graduates	I received the appropriate support from the staff and faculty to complete my studies	4,50
	diploma paper advisor and the diploma paper advising process	4,71
Students	use of e-learning platforms	4,61
	use of classroom equipment and technology	4,70
	oral translation	4,63
	written translation of materials	4,66

In student interviews conducted in spring 2024, students shared their views on what they value most about the BMTS. Among other things, students highlighted a number of support services. The availability of scholarships has given many people the opportunity to study theology. The possibility of hybrid learning, which allows students to participate in their studies alongside their family roles, was also mentioned, as was the example of possibly attending classes via Zoom when children are ill. One student said that the support of a course mate as prayer partner helped them to share their concerns and discuss school-related issues. Students who had previously attended a larger university highlighted the free interaction between faculty and students as an advantage of the small school. Whereas in a big school, the faculty seem distant, and it is scary to go to certain lectures, in a small school this is not experienced. According to the student, in a small community it is easier to perceive the goodwill, humanity and personal approach of the faculty.

Based on the results of the evaluation of the impact of the support system, improvement actions are implemented, and new support measures are developed to support students and prevent dropouts. In order to improve the support system, the following activities have been carried out over the past years:

- Designing, developing and expanding the mentoring system
- Developing the library system, ensuring 24/7 access and the possibility to borrow books independently.
- War-Time Relief programme to support Ukrainian students.
- Making scholarships available to more students.
- Renewed cooperation agreement with Asbury Theological Seminary to make their databases available to students and faculty.
- Introducing Estonian culture and offering Estonian language courses to foreign language students.

STRENGTHS:

- The BMTS has a multi-faceted system of support services, the measures of which are constantly evaluated and improved.
- A personalised, systematic and documented mentoring system is in place.
- The possibility of trilingual learning with simultaneous interpreters and translation equipment.
- Hybrid online learning support with lectures broadcast and recorded.

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT:

- Continued monitoring and development of the effectiveness of support services.
- Exploring and implementing the potential of artificial intelligence to facilitate translation and improve translation quality.

11. RESEARCH, DEVELOPMENT AND CREATIVE ACTIVITY

RESEARCH, DEVELOPMENT AND CREATIVE ACTIVITY (RDCA) OBJECTIVE AND STRATEGY

In accordance with the mission of the BMTS, the central aim of the Seminary's RDCA is the cultivation, development and popularisation of practical theology as a creative activity based on scientific research and its expressions.

In order to ensure that RDCA is in line with the needs of the church and society, the Seminary, in cooperation with the EMC Administrative Council, defined the priority areas of RDCA in 2019. In the spring of 2024, in cooperation with Dr Laur Lilleoja, Head of Research and Development at the BMTS, Dr Helen Haas, Research Fellow at the University of Tartu, and Taavi Hollman, Interim Rector of the BMTS, the BMTS Research, Development and Creative Activity Strategy was prepared ([Appendix 4](#)), which frames the objectives of the Seminary's RDCA for the years 2024-2028, the activities needed to achieve them and the main indicators. The strategy identifies the main areas of the BMTS' RDCA as addressing systematic academic research and building general research competency, creating new teaching and guidance materials for church work, and acting as a competency centre for church workers and members. In order to implement the RDCA strategy, the Seminary plans to cooperate with higher education institutions in Estonia and abroad.

THE CONDITIONS CREATED FOR RDCA

In order to carry out the RDCA, the Seminary has created the following prerequisites:

- To coordinate research and development at the Seminary, the **position** of Head of Research and Development was created in 2020, and Dr Meeli Tankler took up this position. The tasks of the Head of Research and Development are to prepare the RDCA strategy, to support the teaching staff in their research, development and creative work, and to participate in networks. Tankler retired in 2023. From 2024, Dr Laur Lilleoja has taken up the position of Head of Research and Development.
- Being part of and contributing to **networks** creates contacts and opportunities for cooperation in the field of RDCA and for obtaining funding. To promote teaching, research and development, a cooperation agreement has been signed and recently renewed with Asbury Theological Seminary. There has been an active participation in the MTSE network. For the period 2018 - 2023, the previous Rector, Dr Külli Tõniste, was a member of the MTSE Coordination Committee. Since January 2022, Meeli Tankler was the coordinator of the *Methodist e-Academy*, a pan-European continuing education

network, and a member of the MTSE coordination committee. Opportunities for cooperation are also being sought through the International Association of Methodist-related Schools, Colleges, and Universities (IAMSCU) and the European Council of Theological Education (ECTE) networks, of which the BMTS is a member. Dr Meeli Tankler was one of the coordinators of the European region of the Regional Hubs for Leadership, Education and Development (LEaDHub), a collaborative partnership programme launched in 2018 by the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry of The United Methodist Church, for the period 2019-2023. The LEaDHub programme included cooperation with Reutlingen Theological Seminary in Germany. As a result of the joint activities, funding was arranged for the participation of members of the Latvian Methodist Church at the BMTS-organised Church Growth Conference in 2019 and an online lecture series European Methodist Lecture Program was organised for the period 2021-2023. From the BMTS, the speakers included Dr Külli Tõniste, Dr Üllas Tankler and Dr Meeli Tankler. Through the LeadHub projects, the Seminary is in partnership with the Institute of Multicultural Ministry and the Methodist e-Academy, both pan-European educational projects.

- The Seminary contributes to the **professional development of faculty** by enabling them to participate in scientific conferences, training courses and to engage in self-development.
- Improvements to the **physical space** of the BMTS library and teachers' room have created opportunities for more comfortable and effective research, development and creative work.
- In agreement with Asbury Theological Seminary (ATS), the BMTS faculty have access to Asbury's **research databases**, which facilitates research, development and creative work.
- The Memorandum of Understanding with ATS includes a **sabbatical period** for the faculty, during which the faculty member can focus on research.
- In order to motivate the teaching staff, the budget provides an amount for honorariums for research articles. Additional funding for research and development is sought through projects.

Indicator: In the period 2021-2023, the number of externally funded RDCA projects was 3 and the financial volume was 1800€. Funding was sought and received from the Estonian Council of Churches for the publication of a special issue of the Religious Studies Journal in cooperation between the BMTS and the University of Tartu. In addition, a grant was received from the LEADHUB project for the salary of the Head of Research and Development and for the development of research activities. Funding has been sought and received from the same source for the participation of faculty in international scientific conferences. Douglas Childress, Dr Külli Tõniste, Dr Meeli Tankler, Hindrek Taavet Taimla have participated in conferences. The BMTS has also received funding for collaborative projects from the Erasmus+ programme.

RESEARCH, DEVELOPMENT AND CREATIVE ACTIVITIES

The research, development and creative activities of the BMTS have included research, presentations, articles, textbooks, conferences and contributions to the work of the church, congregations and organisations through the application of academic and research competences. This has enabled churches, congregations and organisations to put academic theology into practice and thereby fulfil their mission more intentionally and effectively. The activities of the Seminary's RDCA have played an important role in responding to the needs of congregations and society and in promoting religious life. The results of its research have been disseminated to the wider public through articles, presentations, and through organising research conferences and continuing education courses.

RDCA have also enriched the teaching of the Seminary. Participation in international and local scientific conferences and doing research have enhanced the academic quality of the teaching staff and supported professional development, thus enriching teaching with new knowledge, skills and quality.

Indicator: the table below shows the number of **research publications** by the BMTS faculty members in the period 2020-2023, broken down by classification in the Estonian Research Information System (ETIS).

Table 16: Research publications by the BMTS faculty members by classification for the period 2020-2023.

Classifications	1.1.	1.2.	1.3.	3.2.	3.3.	6.3.	6.6.	6.8.
Number of scientific publications	2	2	1	2	4	1	14	2

Articles in categories 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3 include:

- Joint article by Dr Meeli Tankler, former Head of Research and Development at the BMTS, and Dr Laur Lilleoja, current Head of Research and Development at the BMTS, "Perceptions of the Estonian Christian Community Regarding the Coronavirus Pandemic and Their Relation to Personal and Community" in *Usuteaduslik Ajakiri (Journal of Theology)*.
- Hindrek Taavet Taimla's article "From Hospitality to Hostility: Biblical Theology of Hospitality in Hostile Contexts and its Implications to the Church in Eastern Europe During the Ukrainian-Russian War" in *Acta Missilogiae*.
- An article by adjunct faculty member Üllas Tankler, "The Theology of Partnership in Mission. Reflections on Interdependence" in the *European Journal of Theology*.
- An article by adjunct faculty member Ago Lilleorg "In Search of Alternatives: The Theory of Just Peace and Its Theological Starting Points" in *KVÜÕA Toimetised* and the joint article with Kaido Soom and Tõnu Lehtsaar "Characteristics of Growing Churches in Estonia: A Qualitative Study" in *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*.

Among the articles in categories 3.2 and 3.3 are:

- Hindrek Taavet Taimla's article on the ECC education portal, Dr Külli Tõniste's article in the "Global Wesleyan Encyclopedia of Biblical Theology" and Dr Meeli Tankler's and Dr Külli Tõniste's articles in the Langham Publishing House's "Central and Eastern European Bible Commentary".
- In 2022, the BMTS, together with the Faculty of Religious Studies of the University of Tartu, published a special issue of the *Usuteaduslik Ajakiri (Journal of Theology)* entitled "Making Sense of the COVID-19: Faith Community Responses to Traumas and Epidemics Past and Present". Among the peer-reviewed articles published in the special issue were an article by the BMTS faculty member Douglas Childress, a study by Meeli Tankler in collaboration with Laur Lilleoja, and an article by the BMTS adjunct faculty member Kelvin Friebel. The special issue was co-edited and the foreword was written by Külli Tõniste in collaboration with Anne Kull.
- Faculty are contributing to theological studies in Estonia through the articles in the web-based journal *Church and Theology (Kirik ja teoloogia)*. For the period 2021-2024, articles by Külli Tõniste, Hindrek Taavet Taimla and Laur Lilleoja have appeared in this journal.

- Külli Tõniste's study *John Wesley's Eschatology* was published in *The Asbury Journal* in 2021. This was probably the first contribution of a BMTS faculty member to this prestigious journal.

Articles by the Seminary's faculty are published on the [ECC education platform](#) website. For the period 2021-2024, articles by the following faculty members have been published: [L. Lilleoja](#), [M. Luist](#), [H. T. Taimla](#).

Almost all of the Seminar's faculty contribute articles to the publication of the EMC magazine Koduteel. In each issue of Koduteel, among the authors of the articles are either Seminary faculty, staff, alumni or students. Most of the members of the magazine's editorial board are the BMTS teachers and alumni. In addition to church news, the magazine deals with a variety of theological topics from a contemporary perspective. It deepens readers' knowledge of biblical and theological topics. The magazine also publishes summaries of students' diploma papers. On the occasion of the Seminary's 30th anniversary in 2024, a special Seminary's issue of the magazine Koduteel was published.

More information about the publications of the Seminary's faculty can be found on the [ETIS website](#), but as it is an Estonian Research Information System, there are no publications by foreign faculty members. Also, ETIS may not reflect the publications of all the faculty involved in the Seminary (including adjunct and guest faculty).

The faculty of the Seminary have collaborated in the **peer-reviewing of articles** in the *Usuteaduslik Ajakiri* (Journal of Theology) and the *European Journal of Theology* (issued by FEET).

In order to cultivate and popularise practical theology, the faculty members give **presentations** and deliver lectures at conferences, trainings, other higher education institutions, on Christian radio, and so on.

- Several faculty and staff members of the BMTS have given presentations at EMC summer conferences, EMC clergy training days, EMC webinar series, EMC congregations' confirmation courses, etc. The presentations are available on the [EMC website](#). Dean Mark Nelson contributed to the preparation of the EMC Advent Bible study materials. A number of faculty members give weekly or monthly sermons and Bible studies, mainly at the EMC, but also at other congregations.
- Seminary faculty have given presentations, lectures and sermons at worship services, training courses, conferences and study programmes in other denominations. For example, Dean Mark Nelson has taught at the NEXT Step Bible School of the ECPC, the summer camp of the ECPC Deaf Congregation, and the Bible School of the Nõmme Baptist Church. Hindrek Taavet Taimla has presented at the ELC Mission Centre Conference and the ECC Youth Council Youth Conference.
- The Seminary faculty also deliver courses at other higher education institutions. H. T. Taimla has taught Biblical Interpretation course at the EFCTS. Dr Meeli Tankler has taught strategic management at the Pärnu College of the University of Tartu and delivered a lecture at the Estonian Academy of Arts. Representatives of the BMTS participated at [the conference "Where are you going, Estonian Theology?"](#) at the Faculty of Theology of the University of Tartu in 2021, where H. T. Taimla gave a comment on a presentation and Dr K. Tõniste participated in the discussion.
- Some of the faculty are active on Christian radio. In the Pereraadio series "With Heart and Mind", the Rector Interim Taavi Hollman and EELC pastor Aare Kimmel comment on the sermons in the volume *John Wesley's 52 Standard Sermons*, the foundational texts of Methodist doctrine. To date, 10 programmes have been recorded. Hindrek Taavet Taimla has given morning reflections on Pereraadio, Vikeraadio and Radio 7 and has participated

in several radio programmes. Tetyana Radomska has given interviews to the Russian-language Christian radio Eli.

- With regards to international conferences, active contributions have been made to events organised by the One Mission Society (OMS): Dean Mark Nelson and Dr Colleen Weaver have given presentations at the OMS Europe and the Middle East theological web lecture series, and Dr Weaver has participated in an OMS panel discussion on church planting. In addition, Dr Weaver has presented at the Central and Eastern European Association for Mission Studies conference.

More details of the presentations can be found in [Appendix 24](#).

Continuing education courses, international conferences, open lectures and discussion evenings are organised to promote practical theology.

Indicator: three international conferences, seminars and lecture series were organised in the period 2021-2024:

- In an international cooperation between the BMTS and Reutlingen Theological Seminary, within the framework of LeadHub programme a web-based lecture series was produced, the [European Methodist Lecture Program](#), for the period 2021-2023. The programme was designed to allow pastors to take this course as a continuing education and students as an elective. Each year, 10 lectures were held, with a total of around 15 countries in attendance. In order to offer the audience a variety of perspectives and variation, the lectures were conducted by 23 experts from 9 countries, including the BMTS faculty members Külli Tõniste, Üllas Tankler and Meeli Tankler.
- In the spring of 2024, a church growth conference was organized in partnership with Asbury Theological Seminary and TMS Global, featuring presentations by mission consultant Dr Bud Simon and ATS faculty member Dr Phil Meadows. The conference was attended by 63 people from five different denominations. 65% percent of the attendees were not Seminary students.
- In the summer of 2024, a conference was organised to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the BMTS, with a presentation by Dr Jody Ray from the United States.

For a list of continuing education courses, open lectures, conferences and other events as well as a summary of the feedback, see [Appendix 26](#). More information can also be found in the chapter on Service to Society.

Within the framework of BMTS' teaching and research, **studies** concerning the Estonian Methodist Church and Methodism in general are carried out, on the basis of which diploma papers are prepared.

Indicator: the percentage of diploma papers defended in priority research areas in the period 2021-2024 was 69%. One such example is the study on the history of the first congregation of the EMC conducted by Rando Metsamaa in 2021 as part of his diploma paper for the purpose of collecting and preserving historical material of the EMC. There are a number of diploma papers to be defended in 2025 that are relevant to the present time. Examples of topics include: An analysis of the Ukrainian military chaplaincy and spiritual support for children in war in Ukraine.

The publication and distribution of **books on theology and practical theology** (including translation books) is also one of the outputs of the Seminary's RDCA.

- The BMTS [website](#) contains information on the books published so far.
- In 2021, the booklet "Steps on the Way to Ordination. Guidance Material for Ordination Candidates and Mentors", compiled by the Rector Interim Taavi Hollman and faculty member Robert Tšerenkov, was published.

- The translation of the book "Foundations of Lutheran Dogmatics" by the faculty member Arne Hiob into Russian and English has been initiated, so that the high quality theological material written in Estonia would be available in other languages and could be used as teaching material or compulsory literature in the course of studies.
- The textbook "Contemporary religions from an evangelical Christian perspective" by Douglas Childress will be published in 2026. The aim of the textbook is to produce contextually relevant teaching material. The textbook will be published in three languages.

Homiletics, or the art of preaching, plays an important role in the preparation of the clergy, the preparation of which requires theological (often historical or other field-based) research and its combination with both literary and rhetorical dimensions. Church members need a deeper knowledge of the Bible and hermeneutics in order to better understand the nature of Christianity. Preaching is therefore seen as a **creative work** in the context of practical theology. The BMTS is engaged in the publication of sermon collections and their popularisation.

- In the Pereraadio series "With Heart and Mind", a collection of standard sermons based on the teachings of Methodist theologian John Wesley is presented.
- In the Seminary project "What Would Wesley preach?", launched in 2018, students produced modern versions of sermons written by Wesley over 200 years ago. These sermons are continuously published in the EMC's magazine Koduteel.
- Sermons are regularly delivered by faculty, staff, students and alumni. The sermons given by the faculty are mapped in the list of presentations provided.

The BMTS has long been involved in missionary work among Finno-Ugric peoples, involving faculty, students and alumni. **Ethnological material** has been collected during the trips, which is used in teaching and organizing thematic exhibitions. An exhibition of Finno-Ugric missionary work was prepared for the 2024 graduation ceremony and the BMTS anniversary conference.

The application of academic and research competences to the activities of the church and Christian organisations carries the aim of practical theology.

- In the spring of 2024, under the guidance of the Seminary, surveys were carried out among members of the Estonian Methodist Church, people working with children in the congregations and structures of the Estonian Methodist Church, and children themselves. The aim of the surveys was to map the current situation in terms of mental health awareness and support by target groups. On the basis of the data collected, the Church designed a project to raise awareness and provide more informed mental health support. A series of activities will be implemented as part of this between 2025 and 2026, and the impact of these activities on raising awareness and providing mental health support will be evaluated by the Seminary using scientific research methods.
- A number of BMTS staff members contribute their competences and skills to the work of the church and Christian organisations. For more details, see the chapter on Service to Society.
- Several of the Seminary's faculty have taught at EMC clergy study sessions, summer conferences and other EMC training courses. For the first time in the history of the EMC, an EMC Music Day was organised in cooperation with the EMC, with participants from 11 Methodist congregations and three other denominations. In addition to the technical support provided by the Seminary, the BMTS faculty also contributed to the content of the Music Day - H. T. Taimla led a panel discussion on church music from the perspective

of practical theology. Similar to the EMC Music Day, the Seminary has contributed to the organisation and content of several other EMC training courses, e.g. the webinar series "Our Children in the Church" for parents and children's workers; the three-day seminar "Children and War", etc.

STRENGTHS:

- The Seminary actively participates in a variety of international networks that provide opportunities for collaboration, funding and research exchanges that enrich the Seminary's academic and research work.
- The research, development and creative activities of the Seminary support the application of academic knowledge in the church and society.

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT:

- The effectiveness of research, development and creative activities should be evaluated more systematically to ensure that they meet their objectives. The newly developed strategy for RDCA, with clearly defined specific objectives, areas, key results and metrics, will allow the results of RDCA to be measured, evaluated and used as a basis for planning improvement actions.
- More could be done to focus on developing the research capacity of students by offering them more opportunities to participate in research projects, scientific conferences and publishing activities. This would help to build up students' skills and experience in research and motivate them to pursue their academic careers.

12. SERVICE TO SOCIETY

PURPOSE

Serving society and providing theological higher education and continuing education based on the needs of society is a cross-cutting focus of BMTS' purpose, mission and vision. In order to have a positive impact on society, the Seminary is engaged in the promotion of lifelong learning and the popularisation of practical theology (development plan 2024-2028) by sharing its resources, organising training courses and applying its competences to strengthen the church and society. In choosing its priority areas of service to society, the Seminary is guided by its purpose and vision to be a centre of education and competence for the church, congregations and areas of ministry in the church in the preparation of Christian workers, clergy and leaders and in supporting the spiritual formation.

CONTINUING EDUCATION

The Seminary offers increasingly and in different forms opportunities for continuing education and self-development for different target groups. It has organised conferences, training courses, open courses, seminars, language courses and discussion evenings. The use of a variety of formats offers the opportunity to engage in lifelong learning for different target groups, from those who prefer more academic self-development to those who seek more practically oriented learning experiences. The number of collaborative projects in the field of training is steadily increasing, reaching a wider target group. These collaborative projects have reached church planters and leaders, people working with children and youngsters, parents, people involved in music ministry in churches, counsellors for Ukrainian war refugees and many other new target groups.

Indicator: in the period 2022-2024, the BMTS has organised 26 training courses, with 790 participants in addition to the student body.

Table 17: Number of open training courses and participants offered by the BMTS in the period 2022-2024.

Open continuing training	2022	2023	2024
Number of trainings	4	11	11
Participants from outside the student body	30	97	663

In order to develop the biblical knowledge of Christian workers, clergy and leaders, the Seminary has offered as open courses the Old Testament Theology course taught by Dr Richard Bennett, the Jeremiah course taught by Dr Kelvin Friebe, and the 11-part small group video series Wisdom Literature and Poetry taught by the same teacher, which was attended by 14 groups.

The following open courses in the field of **practical theology** have been offered in the period 2022-2024:

- Rando Kangro's course on "Evangelism and Discipleship";
- Dr Laur Lilleoja taught a lecture entitled "What do Estonians believe?", which presented the results of the survey "Life, Religion and Religious Life". This is a survey of Estonians' religious views, which has been repeated every five years since 1995. The survey's long time-frame, wide range of topics and large random sample make it a unique and valuable dataset on the religious beliefs of Estonians and related changes. Dr Laur Lilleoja was the project manager of the 2020 survey.
- To answer questions from atheists and secular people, a discussion evening was organised in 2024 with a well-known US apologist Sam Raju. The meeting was attended by 68 people, 47 of them from outside the Seminary student body.
- Homiletics, or the art of preaching, was a popular open course, taught by Robert Tšerenkov, superintendent of the EMC. It was attended by 17 people from outside the Seminary.

In order to fulfil its mission to be a centre of competence for the church and congregations, the Seminary, in cooperation with the EMC and leaders of its ministries, has offered lifelong learning opportunities **for the development of congregations' ministries**.

- For the first time in the history of the EMC, a seminar "EMC Music Day" was organised in 2024 in cooperation between the EMC Church Centre and the Seminary with the aim of discussing the role, form and quality of church music and creating a network of church musicians. In addition to participants from 11 Methodist congregations, music lovers from three other denominations took part in the seminar. In addition to the technical, financial and organisational support provided by the Seminary, the BMTS faculty also contributed to the content of the music day. H.T. Taimla led a panel discussion on church music from the perspective of practical theology.
- In 2024, a series of four webinars "Our Children in the Church" was organised for parents and children's workers in cooperation with the EMC Board of Children's Ministry, with a total of 367 participants from different denominations. Participants included people from outside the church. The trainers for the webinars were: former Dean and Interim Rector of the BMTS Lii Lilleoja - a family therapist and educational counsellor, Lea Kübar - clinical speech therapist, Karita Kibuspuu - psychologist and family counsellor, former Rector of the BMTS Dr Meeli Tankler - psychologist and pastoral care counsellor.

Participants included teachers, kindergarten teachers, psychologists, university faculty, speech therapists, Sunday school teachers, special educators, clergy and parents who wanted to gain further knowledge about child psychology, developmental characteristics and educational methods.

- In cooperation with the Seminary and the EMC Youth Board a youth leadership development programme "Greenhouse" was created in the framework of a student's practicum, which was implemented in 2023-2024. 23 young people participated in the programme. The developed programme with video lessons can be used in the future and for different target groups.

To train leaders, one of the target groups for community service, the following events were organised:

- In 2023, in cooperation with the EMC Tallinn congregation, a seminar "Growing Leaders", with Ukrainian pastor David Baltshosa as keynote speaker;
- In 2024, in collaboration with the EMC, TMS Global and Asbury Theological Seminary, an international Church Growth Conference that focused on the work of the Holy Spirit in planting and growing churches.

In preparing students and other interested people for successful service **in society at large**, not just within the church, an annual open seminar called "Kuum Päev" is organised, where inspiring Christians working outside the church speak about their work and ministry. A primary school teacher, a police chaplain, a sports chaplain and a director of an orphanage, a social chaplain, a diaconial hospital worker, a homeless aid worker and a Salvation Army worker have all come to present their work and ministry.

The BMTS students have contributed into to the development of over 50 organisations and regions through the third-year practicums over the period 2020-2024. The contribution of the Seminary students has reached all over Estonia: Harju County (including Tallinn), Ida-Viru County (Kohtla-Järve, Jõhvi), Lääne-Viru County (Kunda, Aseri, Rakvere), Valga, Haapsalu, Hiiumaa, Saaremaa, Viljandi. In addition to Estonia, practicums have also been carried out in the following countries: Finland, Israel, USA, Mongolia, Ghana, Ethiopia, Uganda. By performing the tasks of the practicum, a wide variety of target groups have been reached, for example: international groups, church members, non-Christians, families, Christian artists, elderly people in nursing homes, food aid recipients, Ukrainian war refugees, homeless people, addicts, hospital patients, rehabilitation program participants, children and young people (including children from disadvantaged families, homeless and children from orphanages), etc. Depending on the practicum's organisation and the target group, trainees have had to carry out a wide variety of tasks, such as administering the work of the organisation, organising events, organising and running camps, starting youth work, helping children with their studies, providing leisure activities for children, running Bible studies, courses and services, organising Alpha courses, organising food and clothing drives, counselling addicts, mentoring, pastoral care and talks, media work, developing and implementing a radio programme, leading radio shows, writing articles, developing a community health programme in developing countries, distributing Bibles, etc.

In addition to its chosen priority areas of service to society, the Seminary aims to respond rapidly to the needs arising from **crises and unexpected events in society**. In this spirit, the following training courses have been offered:

- Seminar "Children and war". In 2022, more than 126 000 Ukrainian war refugees arrived in Estonia. This number represents about one tenth of the Estonian population, making the arrival of such a large number of refugees a major challenge for Estonian society as a

whole. The Church has been actively working to welcome refugees, provide them with accommodation, food, essential first aid supplies and help them find homes and jobs. The vast majority of refugees have settled into Estonian society. Now that the refugees' basic needs have been met, the need for counselling and pastoral care has emerged as the greatest need. According to the head of the Crisis Management Department of the Social Insurance Board, almost one in two war refugees has depression or severe mental trauma. In response to this need, a three-day seminar "Children and War" was organised in 2024 in cooperation with the Christian Church Maa Sool Tallinn Bible Church and the organisation Samaritan's Purse for psychologists, teachers, social workers and pastors. At the seminar the Ukrainian psychologist Oksana Gritsjuta and her training team provided both theory and tools for crisis and grief counselling. The participants were of Russian, Estonian and Ukrainian nationality. Among the 82 participants were psychologists, counsellors, pastors, school teachers, social workers, Sunday school teachers, kindergarten teachers, pastoral care counsellors, childminders, youth workers, parents, children's camp organisers, youth centre workers, orphanage workers, etc.

- Teaching counselling skills to as many interested people as possible was also the reason for offering the "Family Counselling" course as an open course, taught by Dr Maire Latvala.
- Based on the need to develop the Estonian language skills of Ukrainian war refugees who have settled in Estonia, the Seminary organised two Estonian language courses at A1 level and one at A2, totalling 90 hours. The courses were open to participants from outside the Seminary, the vast majority of whom were Ukrainian war refugees. A total of 49 people participated in the courses.
- The corona pandemic, the war in Ukraine, the energy crisis, frequent power cuts due to weather conditions, water pollution and other situations that have had a major impact on society have created a demand for crisis preparedness information. This is especially the case among the international members of the Seminary, who are less informed than the local population about what help to ask for and from where. In cooperation with the Women's voluntary defence organization, a "Be Prepared" training and a first aid training with the Red Cross were organised as open courses in 2022.

In 2022, the Seminary launched the first study session of the academic year as a trip outside of Tallinn. In 2022, the opening session was held at the Latvian Methodist Church's camping centre, in 2023 at the EELC camping centre in Saaremaa and in 2024 at the EMC camping centre in Aa beach. All the off-campus sessions have been open to non-members of the Seminary. This opportunity has been taken up by several members of the Seminary staff and students' families, who have appreciated the chance to combine study, holiday and family time. The following topics have been covered at the off-campus study sessions: developing missional thinking, pastoral care in difficult times, and developing small group ministries in the congregations.

In order to facilitate communication between the **international members** of BMTS and to develop students' foreign language skills, the following were organised:

- In spring 2024, English conversation evenings open to all who were interested.
- The BMTS offered international students the opportunity to learn about Estonian culture and history. To this end, two excursions to Tallinn Old Town were organised in the winter of 2023.

In June 2024, on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the BMTS, a conference was organised, where a historical overview of the history of the Seminary and its 30 years of

activity was given, and a presentation was made on "Challenges of Theological Education Today and in the Near Future".

The vast majority of these conferences, training courses and seminars have offered possibility for Zoom's participation, so that as many people as possible can attend. This opportunity has been actively used.

A feedback survey form has been created and is sent to participants immediately after the training event. The average **feedback** score for 2024 continuing education courses was 4.7 out of 5. The course with the lowest average score had an average score of 4.45. The highest score was 4.9. The results of the survey are used to gauge the quality of the event and the speaker, interest in educational events on related themes, and to gather information for improving future educational events.

WORKERS' CONTRIBUTION TO CHURCHES AND SOCIETY

In addition to their work in the Seminary, all the BMTS staff contribute in one way or another to the life of the church, congregations and/or society. A large number of staff, faculty and alumni contribute with their skills and knowledge to the development of civil society and the charitable sector as members of leadership, also as members of NGOs and as volunteers. For a brief overview of the contribution of alumni to society, see the Introduction and Appendix 3.

Seminary faculty also contribute to society through churches and other organisations. Several of the Seminary's faculty are actively involved in the EMC branches of work: Taavi Hollman and Anne Saluraid are members of the Ordination Committee; Taavi Hollman and Mark Nelson are members of the EMC Future Working Group; several staff members are on the board of the magazine Koduteel; and almost all of the contracted faculty write articles for the magazine.

The Seminary contributes its expertise to the church's activities and projects. One such example is the conduct of a survey as part of an EMC project on mental health, which resulted in an action plan to raise awareness on mental health. Seminary staff also contribute their important training input to the EMC's clergy training days and other events.

Ecumenism and internationalism, as core values of the Seminary, are also reflected in the contribution of the Seminary staff to ecumenical and international organisations. Kaire Lotamõis is the head of the EEA Missions Workgroup, Taavi Hollman is a council member of the Estonian Bible Society, Regional Secretary of the Evangelism Committee of the World Methodist Council and the representative of the EMC in the Estonian Council of Churches. Dr Laur Lilleoja is a member of the ECC working group on sociology of religion.

Ecumenism as a value is very clearly expressed in the contribution of the staff of the Seminary to educational projects of different denominations. Hindrek T. Taimla and Dr Laur Lilleoja also teach at the EFCTS, adjunct faculty member Allan Kroll leads the Bible School of the Free Church Valguse tee, Dean Mark Nelson is a member of the Board of the ECPC Study Centre. Contribution to the development of national education outside the BMTS was made through feedback on the formulation of learning outcomes for the Higher Education Standard.

A wider audience is reached by the Seminary staff through broadcasts on Christian radio channels and morning reflections on national radio. A series of broadcasts on Pereraadio has been launched, presenting reflections from John Wesley's book of sermons.

Because of the valuable translation experience of the BMTS, the Seminary hosted a meeting of the Estonian Association of Masters in Conference Interpreting and Translation (ETML) in

February 2024, where long-time ETML member Tarmo Lilleoja gave a presentation on religious translation, religious terminology and translation work at the BMTS.

The participation of Seminary staff in the work of the organisations is mapped in [Appendix 25](#).

For the 30th anniversary of BMTS, an exhibition of ethnological material collected in the framework of Finno-Ugric missionary work was prepared, which reflects a historical overview of the Lord's Prayer in Estonian language. The exhibition will remain on the premises of the EMC Tallinn congregation for a longer period of time, so that all visitors to the building can view it if they wish. As the building is often used for large concerts, the potential audience for the exhibition is large.

SHARING RESOURCES

The Seminary shares recordings of presentations from a number of courses and conferences on its Youtube page.

The library is open to the public from Wednesday to Friday. Information about this is on the Seminary [website](#).

The Seminary has Zoom with the translation package, which the EMC and the ECPC have been able to use in their Zoom events.

The Seminary rents out translation equipment to various churches, denominations, Christian events, NGOs, etc. Translation equipment has been rented for:

- EMC events: Summer Conference, Annual Conference, Music Day, Clergy training days, etc.
- other denominations: for events and conferences of the EELC, UFEBCE and ECPC.
- congregations: the EMC Tallinn congregation uses the translation equipment at every Sunday worship service for translation into English. The EMC Reeküla and the ECPC Nelikaare congregations used the translation equipment to translate worship services for the Ukrainian war refugees. The Estonian Christian Tule Congregation has used the equipment for its own events.
- major ecumenical events: the Global Leadership Summit leadership conferences, Complete Healing Ministry events.
- other theological higher education institutions: the Institute of Theology of the EELC.
- NGOs: NGO Children in Estonia, NGO Estonian Church Partners, NGO Damota, NGO Complete Healing Ministry, Youth Centre Generation2 (translation at summer camps), Estonian Evangelical Alliance.
- businesses: Sound Expert OÜ.

Every year at Christmas, the Seminary has organised a collection for charity purposes. The collections have been organised in support of the Ukrainian theological education and the Light House Children's Centre in Tallinn.

STRENGTHS:

- The Seminary offers a wide range of varied continuing education and courses, which, as a result of collaborative projects, reach different target groups.
- The Seminary has been able to respond rapidly to various societal crises, such as the need for counselling for Ukrainian war refugees, by providing training and seminars that meet the needs of society.
- Through the BMTS staff and alumni, the Seminary helps to increase the capacity and impact of civil society and communities.

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT:

- The Seminary organises high quality and substantive training courses and seminars, but so far only a small number of these have been recorded and made available to the public. The Seminary plans to make more MOOCs (*massive open online course*) available to an even wider audience in order to make its training and seminars more accessible.
- The Seminary aims to find ways to support society in the transition to Estonian-language learning in general education schools.

List of Appendixes

- 01 Abbreviations
- 02 Development Plan 2024-2028
- 03 BMTS Alumni in the Labour Market and in Serving Society
- 04 The Research Development and Creative Activities Strategy
- 05 Staff and Faculty Handbook
- 06 Risk Analysis
- 07 Marketing and Communication Strategy
- 08 Implementation of the 2021-2023 Development Plan
- 09 Fulfillment of the five-year salary increase plan for BMTS teachers
- 10 Participation in Conferences and Seminars
- 11 2024 Student Handbook
- 12 Online Study Etiquette
- 13 Tuition Service Contract
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- 20 Curriculum 2021
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- 25 Faculty membership in committees organizations and bodies
- 26 Continuing Education Courses and Events 2022-2024