

Union of Free Evangelical and Baptist Churches of Estonia  
ESTONIAN FREE CHURCH THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY



**SELF-EVALUATION REPORT**  
**For Institutional and MA Curriculum Accreditation**

Tallinn 2024  
Submitted to the Estonian Quality Agency for Education

December 2024

<b>Name</b>	Estonian Free Church Theological Seminary
<b>Legal Status</b>	The Seminary is a private professional higher education institution owned by the Union of Free Evangelical and Baptist Churches of Estonia (UFEBEC).
<b>Established</b>	1922, reopened 1989
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<b>Formal Education Curricula and their registration numbers in the Estonian Education Information System (EHIS)</b>	BA: “Free Church Theology and Leadership”, reg 5260117 MA: “Theology and Society”, reg 235462

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## Abbreviations

AEC – Academic Ethics Committee

BWA – Baptist World Alliance

EBF – European Baptist Federation

HEI – higher education institution

RDC – Research, Development and Creative Activities

RPL – recognition of prior learning

EFCTS – Estonian Free Church Theological Seminary (also used in the text as Seminary, or school)

UFEBEC – The Union of Free Evangelical and Baptist Churches of Estonia, owner of the school

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## List of main documents

List of most important documents in English is here: <https://kus.kogudused.ee/in-english-seminary/documents/>

List of documents in Estonian is here: <https://kus.kogudused.ee/uldinfo/dokumendid/>

Direct links to documents:

- [Statute of the school](#) (in Estonian)
- [Strategic Planning Document 2021-2027](#) (in English)
- [Management Plan](#) (in English)
- [Research plan 2020-2026](#) (in English)
- [The Principles of Internationalisation](#) (in English)
- [Study regulations](#) (in English, document also includes rules for solving complaints)
- [Policy of Academic Ethics](#) (in Estonian)
- [Description of practical training](#) (in Estonian)
- [RPL document](#) (in Estonian)
- [Policy of Attestation](#) (in Estonian)

All documents, which are in English, are also available in Estonian.

## List of appendixes (not found openly on the web page):

1. [The Key Results Report 2024](#) (in English)
2. [Budgets 2020-2024](#) (in English)
3. Faculty and Subjects. [BA](#) and [MA](#) (in English)
4. [Comparison of Higher Education Standards and Seminary's Curricula](#) (in English)
5. Analyses of Alignment of Curricula. [BA](#) and [MA](#) (in English)
6. [Report of the Research Plan 2024](#) (in Estonian, English data in the text of standard)

7. [Financial Analyses of MA Program](#) (in English)
8. [Publications by faculty in categories](#) (in English and numbers)
9. [Faculty attendance in trainings and conferences](#) (in English)
10. [Media Plan](#) (in English)
11. [Risk Analyses](#) (in English)
12. [Policy of Administration](#) (in Estonian)

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 General information

The Estonian Free Church Theological Seminary (EFCTS, also referred as Seminary or school) is a private professional higher education institution, owned by The Union of Free Evangelical and Baptist Churches of Estonia (UFEBC). It serves the needs of evangelical Protestant churches and Christians, with a special focus on Free Church Theology.

The following information is taken from the [Strategic Planning Document](#).

**The mission** is “The Seminary supports the comprehensive and lifelong development of individual Christians and congregations.”

**The vision** is “The Seminary is a nationally and internationally recognised evangelical free church education centre, which through its activities empowers local churches and has a positive impact on society.”

**The motto sentence** is “For the good and growth of the local churches.” This leads us best when we need to make decisions.

**Values** of the school are: Treasuring Bible-knowledge and Christian experience; Dependence on a relationship with God; Knowledge-based and practical; Congregational and teamwork-based; Discipleship- and mentorship-oriented.

The school was established and developed to prepare leaders for Estonian Free Churches. Its predecessor, The Estonian Seminary for Baptist Preachers, was opened in the Spring of 1922. The school was the first free-church educational institution in Estonia. Unfortunately, the school was closed between 1940–1989, during Communist times. After reopening, the school gained the status of a government-acknowledged professional higher education institution. Since its re-opening, more than 140 students have graduated. In 2019 the school moved from Tartu to Tallinn. During the move, the Seminary changed its English name from Tartu Theological Seminary to Estonian Free Church Theological Seminary.

In Fall 2022, the Seminary opened an MA level program, which was a long dream come true. This degree is targeted to evangelical protestants, including members of UFEBC, as a greater focus than merely serving local churches. In Fall 2024 the school (Estonian Free Church Theological Seminary) opened the Centre of Leadership and Mentoring to serve the development activities of the UFEBC in a more focused way.

Over the last 35 years the school has grown from a professional higher education institution (HEI) to an educational centre, offering a wide range of activities and materials for churches and the broader society. The main areas of activity are:

- formal education on the BA and MA level
- conferences, both on the research level and for the wider public

- yearlong adult training courses and micro credentials
- short courses (including e-courses) and networking events (called “comb”) for church ministries, both for youth and adults
- open lectures and concerts
- publishing books, video lectures, regular podcasts, study materials, animations etc.
- activities in leadership and mentoring
- coaching program for local churches to support their development

There is strategic cooperation with other areas of the UFEBC – Children and Youth Work Unit and Social Work Foundation and the UFEBC Executive Board where the rector is a member. UFEBC is in the midst of the process of reorganising and optimising all training events into a more coherent and systematic structure.

## 1.2 The structure of the Seminary

See: [Management Plan](#)

The structure of the school consists of the following groups:

- Advisory Board. The group consists of representatives of the owner, UFEBC (4 people), leadership team members, lead teachers (5 people), student representatives (3 people).
- Leadership Team. The group consists of the rector, director of development, academic dean, student dean (study coordinator), educational designer (who also oversees the library), project leader of the Centre of Leadership and Mentoring, and the research fellow. The director of development functions also as a Research Development Manager. Some of the roles might be combined differently as the leadership team goes through changes in the beginning of 2025, but all these roles will be fulfilled among team members.
- Lead teachers. The group consists of five lead teachers, who are responsible for the five main curriculum areas. Each of them works with 10% of a workload from full time job but are paid according to their education and publishing. Three of the leadership team members are also elected lead teachers.
- Representatives of the student association. The group consists of five elected representatives from both the BA and MA level of students. Three take part in the Advisory Board with voting rights.
- Network of mentors and internship supervisors, who mostly work for local churches and parachurch organisations.

## 1.3 The process of writing the report

Preparations for the accreditation were done step-by step. First there was training by HAKA at the end of August 2024 with participation by the leadership team and lead teachers.

In September 2024 the tasks of writing the self-analysis report was shared between leadership team members and lead teachers. There was brainstorming about which ideas could go under which criteria. After that the Seminary lead team had regular meetings of the whole team and smaller criteria teams to check the process of answering the questions. In the beginning of December, we gathered the Advisory Board to discuss and vote on some renewed documents which needed to be changed. In the last phase, the home page of the Seminary was changed and a new, more understandable structure was created. After the report was put together, lead

teachers and administrative team members took time to read it through once again, made comments and corrections where needed.

In mid-December, the Seminary presented the IA and MA reports for HAKA for purposes of revision. After feedback we added corrections and additions and sent the joint report for language editing. In mid-January we presented the clean version for HAKA and the accreditation board. At the same time, we uploaded our application to continue the study rights to the Estonian Ministry of Education.

## 2. Main changes after the last accreditation (2019), its secondary conditions (2021) and initial MA accreditation (2022)

There were two processes of the previous accreditation. First there was the accreditation process in 2018 and the decision in 2019, which set secondary conditions, which were fulfilled in 2021. Second, initial accreditation was received for the MA program in 2022.

### 2.1 IA accreditation in 2019 and 2021

A panel for the 2021 assessment of secondary conditions gave the school commendations after the assessment of secondary questions in 2021 as follows:

- The leadership responsibilities are better distributed, and the rector oversees her activities and is in control.
- The international exchange is, at the moment, partly hindered by the Covid-19 pandemic, but the institutional relationships are utilised well for online meetings and conferences.
- The Seminary launched a clear longtime research plan.
- The Seminary hired new young staff and appointed a Research Development Manager.

**Further considerations**, done in 2021, were that the Seminary should maintain a strong focus on international exchange. During the implementation of the Research Plan the Seminary should focus on three or four research topics which structure the research of students and staff. Additionally, we have developed and implementing a model of applied science for students.

The **development of international exchange** has continued. We have new international contacts every year, the Seminary accepted the [Principles of Internationalisation](#). We have organised BIP-courses (blended intensive program), have built two-directional mobility of the School of Theology and Leadership from Norway and Evangelical Theological Seminary in Osijek, Croatia. By Mobility we mean whatever is included in every international exchange between students, faculty or administrative team, with the purpose of teaching, learning or training.

Additionally, we have taken part and given papers in several international conferences, contributed to international publications (like The Eastern European Bible Commentary), and lately (Nov 1–2, 2024) organised an international theological conference in Estonia. The Rector has been elected to the role of Commission leader of Theology and Education Commission of the European Baptist Federation. Toivo Pilli, one of the lead teachers, is the general editor of the international publication “Journal of European Baptist Studies” (jeps.eu). Tarmo Toom a

member of the Finnish Patristic Society, is the representative of Estonia to the International Association of Patristic Studies (I.A.P.S.)/*L'Association Internationale d'Études Patristiques* (A.I.E.P.) and a member of the North American Patristic Society (NAPS). Meego Remmel has been the president of the European Baptist Federation, the chairman of the Institute for the Study of Christian Origins at the Protestant Faculty of the Eberhard Karls University in Tübingen, a member of the Ethics Council for the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe and a member of the Baptist World Alliance Commission on Christian Ethics. Helle Liht serves the Canadian Baptist Ministries (CBM) working groups for Theology and Education, Creation Care and Gender Studies. A further list of international activities is written in the [Report on the Research Plan 2024](#) (APPENDIX 6) and in [The Key Results Report 2024](#) (APPENDIX 1).

**Implementation of the [Research plan 2020-2026](#)** has been implemented through the focus on the relationship on three main themes: Free Church identity, relationships of church and society, and practical questions of Free Church life. These have been guiding publications of our faculty members and inspired the title of our research conference in Fall 2024, in addition to other annual conferences. These research areas will not only guide the scholarly work of faculty and staff but also structure the research projects of BA and MA students.

**Further development and implementation of a model of applied science for students** has reached a new level with the implementation of the MA program “Theology and Society”. Students are encouraged to wrestle with difficult dilemmas like the Russia-Ukraine War in relation to the teachings of Jesus or to question the relevance of theology in contemporary society. During the second year, they are encouraged to find the “hot topics” at the border of church and society, and before starting their research they are required to do a piloting apprenticeship about the topic of their research. During the process they get supervision and feedback about their work from both teachers and co-students.

BA students concentrate more on the topics of church work. However, recently mission-related topics have become more popular. In most cases, the question is if the message the church proclaims is adequately understood and received in the society, and if not, then why. There is one work in progress about the obedience of Christians to the rules of society (based on Paul’s letter to Romans, chapter 13). Interesting research was done about youth anima culture and how this enables church leaders to support the development and mental health of young people in the church and society.

Both BA and MA final papers go through the valorisation process by the school leadership (in subjects teaching research skills and final paper seminars across the last year of studies) and the lead teachers (during mock viva) to make sure the approach is adequate and important for the church and society. Additionally, the requirements are written into the syllabus of the final paper and shared with the supervisors.

The model of applied science could be described as follows:

- Practical Research Projects: Students will engage in field-based research that addresses real-world challenges faced by churches, communities, and faith-based organizations.



- Faculty supervision: students get guidance and supervision for applied research projects, fostering a culture of practical inquiry and innovation.
- Problem-Based Learning: The curriculum will incorporate case studies and problem-solving exercises that reflect the missional and societal context of theological education.
- Partnerships and Internships: Collaborations with local and international churches, NGOs, and educational institutions will provide students with hands-on experience and opportunities to apply their learning.

The Seminary will strengthen its academic identity and societal impact by focusing on these strategic research topics and integrating applied science into the curriculum. These initiatives will ensure that the Seminary remains a dynamic centre for theological education, equipping students and faculty to serve the church and society effectively in the 21st century.

In addition, there were several more detailed suggestions in the 2019 IA report, which we reflect in the table below.

**Table 1. IA recommendations and their implementation**

Recommendations (Assessment report, 2019)	Changes made for now
Since the daily practices of the Seminary are free and informal, the leadership should ensure that the decisions are less informal and clearly documented, for example, in the area of curriculum development and in contacts with alumni.	Document “ <a href="#">Quality Assurance</a> ” (in Estonian) was created and renewed in 2024 to formalise the processes of gathering the information and developing the processes further.
The Assessment Committee encourages the Seminary to further develop research in the area of Applied Science and to develop a long-term research plan for the Seminary as a whole.	The document Research Plan 2020-2026 has been established, and progress is evaluated at the end of every year. The Seminary decided on the main focus of the research and added some subtopics to guide students and teachers.
The Assessment Committee encourages the Seminary to further develop ideas of research in the area of mission and social outreach in combination with Free Church Theology.	These ideas have been developed further in the final papers of students <a href="#">Karl-Emil Kase</a> , <a href="#">Adele Kuznetsova</a> and <a href="#">Aveli Tiiter</a> , some are still in progress. Articles written by teachers touch the topic of mission and outreach as well, See an example <a href="#">here</a> .
For the sustainability of the leadership, delegate tasks and continue to distribute areas of responsibility.	The number of the administrative staff has grown, some tasks such as finances, research leadership and curriculum development have been shared successfully, a few things (for example syllabus

	evaluation) are still in progress due to changes in the leadership team.
Develop a strategy and create opportunities to make TTS more visible in secular Estonian society and media.	The move to Tallinn in 2019 was one big step. We have reached many more people both for our degree programs and short courses. <a href="#">Media Plan</a> (APPENDIX 10) has been created and tasks shared. We ordered special marketing analyses from Karin-Liis Tambaum. Nevertheless, there are still possibilities we need to use such as more writing for the secular press and development of our web page. From January 2025 there will be special team member in charge of communications and marketing.
Student mobility is minimal	There is growth to both directions – mobility in and out, both by students and faculty. See: Table 4.
The majority of our faculty are part-time employees. As they work often in other HEIs at the same time, RDC activities are partly supported by the other employees.	We do not consider it a big problem that the other employers partly support our part-time faculty members' RDC activities. Their teaching is research-based with us despite the source of the support of their RDC activities, which is the main aim of the RDC activities. Additionally, their areas of research, even if partly supported from elsewhere, are very similar to our research areas and activities.
The salary level of employees is below the Estonian average level.	The pay of our employers has grown almost annually, and we hope to see it grow further in the future. Lead teachers who have a doctoral degree and who publish, are paid double. We keep increasing the salaries and finding new ways to support the RDC activities of our faculty members. See: <a href="#">Risk Analyses</a> (APPENDIX 11)
Develop and prioritise a specific plan for how to increase the research level among the junior staff members.	Lead teachers have, as one of their tasks, to support research and development of junior staff members. Possibilities to attend conferences and present papers have been well received by several junior staff members Helina Voogne, Sander Tulk, Sven-Joonatan Siibak, Martin Kuusk, Karl Tõnne, and Lisete Lige. Recently we recorded videos in pairs, where one older faculty member involved a younger member.
Analyse the Applied Research profile and describe the activities.	In the end of each year, we will analyse our research to see how the research plan has been fulfilled.

A better distinction between pure reporting and research (which implies methods and some theoretical aspects) should be developed and pursued, the initiative possible among the five lead teachers.	During recent years research has grown, and it is analytical, not merely reporting. All five lead teachers take their research seriously.
Strengthen research in the field of contemporary theology.	This will be done by several MA research projects currently in progress. Also, we held a research conference on Priesthood of All Believers (Fall 2024), where the newest approaches were discussed. The elective course “Pentecostal Theology” presented a new contemporary approach.
Strengthen the research output through national and international publications.	Research and RDC activities have grown, especially during the last three years. See: <a href="#">list of publications by faculty in categories</a> (APPENDIX 8)
More resources need to be allocated for research purposes.	In the budget the funds dedicated for RCD has grown, See: <a href="#">Budgets 2020-2024</a> (Appendix 2) and 3.2. Resources of the report.
New resources should be prioritised for supporting younger faculty to participate in research workshops, seminars and conferences abroad.	There is a special fund for younger faculty members to attend different events, both in Estonia and abroad. Additionally, we use Erasmus+ resources and other possibilities created by projects.
Younger faculty should be encouraged and supported to develop research.	We contiguously encourage younger faculty members to attend conferences and to give presentations. For example, recently there was a <a href="#">publication</a> by Hele-Maria Kangro, our MA student and young faculty member. Sander Tulk is planning to publish two materials in 2025.
Make a stronger distinction between mentors and supervisors.	This is done through discussions in Advisory Board and online gatherings, where we discuss the difference of these roles and the tasks of each. However, as our mentors and supervisors often overlap, in real life the difference might not be so clear. Both roles are designed to support the learner, the entire mentor’s role is holistic, the supervisor’s is more academic.
Reflect on and develop the supervision quality in the research plan.	This is done through mentioning the key themes and means of reaching the goals of the research plan. As faculty members, who are supervisors, are

	also researchers and lead teachers, the quality of research helps the quality of supervision as well.
Participate in and further develop training seminars for supervisors in the Seminary and also for those outside.	Recently there was a faculty training session about how to improve student motivation, including research motivation (March 2024), where we invited supervisors from the outside. In January 2025 we will organise another seminar specially for supervisors. Our new tradition of mock vivas also helps to train supervisors as other faculty members give feedback to the research they have supervised.
TTS should encourage students after their graduation to write articles on the theme of their diploma thesis.	This has been done regularly in the UFEBC journal called “Teekäija”.
TTS should stress the importance of updating the profile and publications list of their faculty members in the ETIS. There is a high risk that the membership of academic associations is not reflected in this database.	Most of our teachers (except international teachers) have an ETIS profile. We gather additional information about other activities, including membership of academic associations in an online database about our teachers.

To conclude, most of the areas of recommendations – management, international mobility, RDC activities and financial sustainability have been greatly developed during the last few years. We hope the following report and its 12 criteria confirm that the direction the school is going is right.

## 2.2 Initial accreditation of the MA program in 2022

In the initial assessment the Seminary received two suggestions for development:

1. Syllabuses (presented before the start of studies) did not describe study methods. The requirement was to express study and assessment methods more clearly in syllabuses.

Response: currently we have syllabuses for all subjects and these include study and assessment methods. See this school year’s [syllabuses](#): and one example of the elective subject ([Letter to Romans](#)) .

2. Attestation of academic staff had not happened and there were no regulations to do so.

Response: [Regulations of attestation](#) were accepted in March 2022. The first attestation occurred on June 9, 2022. Four of the elected teachers received attestation, one did not. The teacher who did not get attestation was because of lack of research and writing and was given 5 months to find ways to publish some of his research. As he was not able to do so, in the spring of 2024 we had an open competition for the role of the teacher in Biblical Studies. Sander Tulk was the newly elected teacher in the fall of 2024. The next process of attestation will be in Spring-Summer 2027.

## 2.3 Trends of last five years: students and faculty

**Table 2. Number of students in 5-year trend**

		20/21	21/22	22/23	23/24	24/25
Curriculum (BA)	Students	46	52	44	45	39
	Admissions	20	10	8	8	13
	Dropouts	7	11	2	10	0
	Graduates	7	7	5	4	-
BA total		59	51	50	43	52
Curriculum (MA)	Students	-	-	-	13	17
	Admissions			14	5	8
	Dropouts			1	1	
	Graduates				-	-
MA total				13	17	25
Students total		59	51		60	77
Mobilities (in)					8	12
Mobilities (out)					4	3

Commenting on the number of students, there has been a gradual growth. Opening the Master program has certainly helped. This additional program has attracted several BA graduates of the Estonian Methodist Seminary. Students come from different churches. In addition to the “owner’s” church, UFEB, there are quite a large number of students from the Estonian Pentecostal Church. Other denominations such as the Estonian Free Church Union, Methodist Church, and Lutheran Church are represented by some students.

We consider mobility every international exchange between students, faculty or administrative team, which has the purpose of teaching, learning or training. The usual period of mobility is 5 days, sometimes a day less or few days more. Due to the part-time character of our studies, we have had only one long term (a full semester) mobility during the last five years.

There are no foreign students listed in the table, because we have taught full programs only in Estonian. The Seminary has considered opening the MA course in English, but until now there has not been enough interest (we will open the group in case we have at least 8 students per year). At the moment, we offer only short electives and some MA subjects in English and invite international students to participate in these as an exchange project, Erasmus+ express mobility or BIP course.

**Table 3. Number of faculty and support personnel in 5-year trend**

	20/21	21/22	22/23	23/24	24/25
Academic staff, total (female/male)	19 (9/10)	22 (12/10)	38 (14/24)	40 (15/25)	43 (15/28)
Academic staff with Doctor’s degree	5	5	18	19	20
Average (medium) age	54	53	46	46	47
International faculty members	2	1	4	5	6
Support personnel	4	5	5	6	7
Mobility in	2	1	1	15	10

Mobility out (3 days minimum)		2	4	9	10
Students per teacher (full-time equivalent)	13	12	9,5	9	8,55

Description of the current faculty on the [BA](#) and [MA](#) levels is found in APPENDIX 3 (Faculty and Subjects). Most of our teachers work through contracts, according to the courses needed each year plus supervision of the final papers. This makes counting of the full-time workload of our teachers a little tricky. Most of the courses will be taught every second year, a few even every third year. In addition, we have five elected lead teachers, who form the academic team, and teach a large portion of the subjects and who get paid on top of their administrative roles for their teaching and supervision.

Support personnel consist currently consist of the rector, academic dean, director of development, student dean, educational designer and project leader for the Centre of Leadership and Mentoring (JUME). Additionally, we have one research fellow, who also helps students doing research. Three of the administrative team members have PhD degrees, one is a PhD candidate. In addition, we share with the owner a bookkeeper and an IT-specialist.

We have international faculty members mainly for the MA program: Jozsef Steiner from Hungary, Dave Cupery from the US, Dietrich Schindler from US/Germany, Ivana Noble from the Czech Republic, Fred Hansen from the US, Peter Penner from Austria.

One of the greatest aims is to grow the next generation of local teachers, male and female. Now, there is a strong group of teachers who are 55–65 years old. After 5–10 years, they will need to be replaced or at least to be training successors.

### 3. Self-analyses report of the HEI

#### 3.1. Strategic Management

The school operates according to the [Strategic Planning Document for 2021–2027](#), and other corresponding documents such as the [Research plan 2020-2026](#) and [The Principles of Internationalisation](#). While preparing the Strategic Planning Document we included all main interest groups, including the UFEBC Elders' Board (who also represent the employers and churches), students, faculty members, and the Advisory Board of the school.

The school has set its key results in the [Strategic Planning Document](#) and assesses these regularly, just like the results of the research plan ([Report on the Research Plan 2024](#), APPENDIX 6) and realisation of the budget. The areas of responsibility have been written in the [school's statutes](#) (in Estonian) and in the [Management Plan](#). More specific tasks among the administrative team have been written down in the working document called Distribution of Roles, which will be changed when people and roles change. This provides information to everybody about who does what. The [policy of administration](#) document (APPENDIX 12) has another better way of coordinating the work of the administrative team.

Every 1–1,5 months we have administrative team meetings where people mention a few things they have done recently and few things they are going to do. This enables us, in spite of the



challenge of our team members living in different cities, to have enough information about each other's activities and challenges.

Larger visioning and planning activities take place together with the lead teachers. Examples of these planning events include conferences and publications, main documents and other strategic developmental steps. Lead teachers also help to decide which translator to choose, to whom a full scholarship will be given (if such is offered) etc. Both the administrative team and lead teachers, in addition to the school Advisory Board, help us to keep the focus on the mission, vision, and values of the school.

The final responsibility concerning the work of the Seminary lies with the rector, who keeps all processes going, moving and developing. She also leads the administrative team, lead teachers, and Advisory Board.

Responsibility for the feedback system is on the responsibility of the academic dean. The Seminary values the input and feedback of our main interest groups. This helps us to develop according to our mission to serve the needs of the churches and the larger society. Regular feedback has been requested from the students, alumni, faculty and administrative team, churches and the Union Elders' Board. The system is documented in the [Quality Assurance document](#) (in Estonian), which also involves the Feedback system. More information concerning the feedback is found under the 3.3. Quality Culture standard.

Contact with the main interest groups is created as follows:

- The school's administrative team gathers twice in three months for their working meeting. The rest of the work is done in smaller work groups.
- Greater coherence with the needs of the owner UFEBC and the churches as employers has been developed by the membership of the rector in the executive board of the UFEBC and membership of the director of development in the Elders' Board of the UFEBC.
- There are regular meetings of the School Advisory Board and lead teachers.
- Local churches are very important partners for us. We have a special Seminary Sunday every year at the end March where we visit local churches. Usually we reach 20–25 churches every spring where we talk about the work of the Seminary and invite people to study. In addition, the rector, director of development and other lead teachers visit local churches around the year for preaching and training.
- Recently the student association, which has always been present in the Advisory Board of the school, has increased its active role in the life of the school. They contribute to different school events and give suggestions for the study programs.
- Faculty members, both elected and visiting or guest lecturers, are invited to take part in the main events of the year: opening and graduation ceremony and the Christmas party. Every year we offer the possibility of in-site training events for our teachers in one area of didactics, usually together with teachers from other theological schools. We see also a greater need, according to the feedback, to gather teachers once or twice in a year to speak about the developments and challenges of teaching. In the future this is planned to be the task of the academic dean and lead teachers.
- Students gather at the school every month. To create a greater coherence, we always organise the first study session at the camping site, during "city" study sessions students and teachers take turns preparing breakfast before classes start and organise some other events together with the student association. Mentoring groups are a great possibility to build coherence between school administration and students.

- As the school celebrated its 100-year anniversary two years ago and 35 years of re-opening this fall, these events have enabled us to refresh contacts with our alumni and former teachers.
- Annually we gather with possible employers and our internship supervisors and mentors at which time we offer them regular training.

In addition to these we organise annual picnics for the faculty, alumni and for “friends of the Seminary”, which also includes our supporters.

**The key results** from the [Strategic Planning Document](#) are as follows:

1. The alumni are mature spiritually and in their character. They are leaders with an ability to learn, and they can work sustainably in the different areas of local church ministry and the planting of new churches.
2. The local churches and their leaders have embraced the Seminary as a credible and essential partner.
3. International mobility has become a ‘two-way road’.
4. The Seminary has contributed to making the Christian message and activities more visible and better understood in society.
5. The work done in research and development has doubled.
6. The Seminary has developed in all areas.

[The Key Results Report 2024](#) (APPENDIX 1) evaluates the state of the key results indicators at the end of 2024. The team's working document for the year 2025 is also a Plan of Application in the Strategic Planning Document.

Emphasis on sustainable development has been expressed in sharing the facilities with a local church – this enables a better connection with the possible employer, but also means shared resources and a more reasonable financial plan. Creativity and innovation are built into the team as several of its members have an innovative spirit and are continuously thinking of the next steps the school could take. New ideas also reach the leadership from students, the Advisory Board, and the leadership group of UFEBC. Feedback systems help us to make possible input regular.

Digital technologies are used in many ways, including Moodle, Tahvel, Zoom, video-lectures, e-courses, and podcasts. After the Covid-epidemic, the challenge is to get students to come to school as most of the teachers use active methods and the quality of learning is clearly better when students and faculty are together in the same room. Leading learning in a hybrid group is a challenge to most of our teachers. Therefore, we use the help of other students to build a connection with students who cannot attend physically. At the same time, we encourage everybody to attend the lectures on site as a lesson consists not only of listening but involves active participation. At the same time, the Zoom environment helps us a lot with our foreign teachers – they usually teach part of their course over the internet, even though we encourage them to do most of the course on site as well.

We know that even though the roles were described, and the administrative staff has grown since 2021, it is still demanding to lead the school with such a small team. Each time people in administrative leadership change (as happened with two people in February 2024 and will happen in the beginning of 2025), we try to accommodate the gifts and strengths of these people as well as possible. During 2024, we had two long-term key people leave. They were replaced by three new people. As the team is small, we often adjust roles and workload according to the



gifts, skills and preferences of people, simultaneously taking care that the needs of the school are fulfilled.

Therefore, a clear description of roles (there is a working document) always follows the changes to be sure everyone knows their role and tasks. After three months of working together with new members of the faculty, we have a cooperation discussion where the rector discusses the appropriateness of the description of roles and, if needed, makes changes. In addition, there are annual cooperation discussions with each administrative team member. Additionally, even in the light of the current rector being elected for the next five years, we are already working on finding a possible successor to this role.

**Strengths** include a clear system of management with different levels of responsibility and regular meetings of the administrative team and Advisory Board. There is also stability as the rector has been re-elected for another five years, 2025–2029. The number of administrative team members has grown. Recently, we have re-connected with many alumni members who have supported the Seminary on the anniversary of 35 years since re-opening.

**Areas of improvement** are growing out of the challenge of a period involving mostly a remote way of working where extra effort has been needed for communication. Other challenges are recent changes in the administrative team and a still comparatively small team to run a school, operating as an educational centre. The Seminary's reaction to those challenges has been to clarify even more the roles and tasks in the working documents of [Description of Roles and Policy of Administration](#) (APPENDIX 12). The rector will run regular meetings with individual team members as well.

### 3.2. Resources

The rector is responsible for the purposeful, systemic and sustainable development of the staff and financial resources. She shares responsibility for **finances** with the General Secretary of the UFEBK and the leader of the financial unit Valduste OÜ. This financial team approach is a recent development and will help to provide much better sustainability for the school. Even if some strategic changes are still in process, this already means improvement and less responsibility concerning finances falling on one person. This will make it easier for the next rector to take over the role one day as the financial burden and need for fundraising skills is always quite demanding.

Finances have been stable over the last years. [Budgets 2020-2024](#) (APPENDIX 2) of the last years vary a little according to the project money. Some years donations have been more generous than others. Funds gathered in the better years have supported those years in which fewer funds have been contributed.. There has always been enough backup money to keep the school running. During the last 5 years self-earned income has grown remarkably – from 17% (2020), 23% (2021), 35% (2022), 31,5% (2023) to 40% (2024). The percentage is taken from the total income and includes income from: tuition, adult education courses, church development programs and book sales. The aim of the finances is that self-earned money will reach 50% in the future.

Because of the interest on funds and some generous supporters, we have been able to offer scholarships to several students and through that encourage them to complete their studies well and in time. Recently, we found two additional scholarship providers, one of them is an alumni, another an organisation from abroad. Finances of the Seminary will be regularly audited by the

UFEBC executive board and Elders' Board. They, together with the Seminary Advisory Board, also follow the purposefulness and focus of the use of the finances.

Sustainability is guaranteed and risk management done through several funds, which are not used up, but where we use only the interest money. See: [Risk Analyses](#)  
Every year there is some support from abroad.

In addition to self-earned money and support there is also project money, which is mostly used for RDC activities. It is easier to raise funds and write projects for specific things. These projects not only fund research and publishing, but also enable us to do things for the churches and the larger community. The main providers of project money are the Estonian Ministry of Inner Affairs, Estonian Council of Churches, UFEBC project fund, Katrin and Raigo Tammo Charity Fund, Toronto Baptist Church, etc. Recently a new fund was started by our visiting international teacher Fred Hansen (USA), with other contacts coming through Pentecostal Church missionaries Bob and Chrissy Godwin. All of these give us courage and the possibility to invest in training and hiring of new faculty members and training for those whom we already have. The shadow side is that the Estonian Ministry of Education does not support private HEIs as it does other entities. – Thus, we need to raise all the funds for our RDC activities by ourselves.

Responsibility for staff **development** is shared with the academic dean, director of development and the lead teachers. Recruitment of new teachers happens in two ways. For lead teachers, when the post becomes open, we have an application procedure and open competition, which we announce on our web page. However, usually there is no long list of applicants waiting, as we expect our lead teachers to be active members of evangelical churches with appropriate education. In most cases we must encourage someone to apply, even more, support someone to grow into the role of teacher.

The attestation process of the school for lead teachers has been clearly formulated in [Policy of Attestation](#) (in Estonian). Until now, there has been one attestation process. During this process we found that one of our lead teachers did not measure up to the standard (he did not have an MA level in Theology and did not publish at all). This past spring we have had an open competition for a lead teacher of the area of Biblical Studies. In August we received one application and selected Sander Tulk to fill the role.

For other teachers we have the document, [Guide for Faculty Member](#) (in Estonian), which regulates all processes connected to teaching and supervision. This explains how teachers are paid, what is expected of them, how we motivate them and other important things. More specific possibilities of joining Erasmus+ mobility, taking part in the conferences with the support of the school, getting extra scholarships for publications and other ways of motivation will be covered during oral work interviews and be sent by e-mail.

Visiting teachers are recruited according to the need and are asked to teach a course where there is an opening. In these cases, we often “grow” younger faculty members into the role as well, first asking someone with at least a BA to come on the side of the teacher in charge of the course and then try to slowly move the subject into the hands of the younger generation. This kind of change has happened with Toivo Pilli and Sven-Joonatan Siibak in Church History and Baptist Identity, with Meego Rimmel and Kertu Rajando and Christopher Kontus in Ethics, Meego Rimmel and Meelis Kibuspuu in the area of leading the church

and with Fred Hansen and Sander Tulk in Biblical Studies area. This enables our more senior faculty members to move “up” and take more subjects in the MA program.

Strategically, the opening of the master’s program has been a good step in developing the next generation of teachers. This enables us to find new promising teachers among MA students and encourage them to continue their studies. As the rector is part of international networks, this will also give more input about possible places for PhD studies for younger faculty where we can encourage them to continue their studies. Recently, there have been four young persons interested in teaching in the Seminary in the area of Biblical studies as the most strategic area in the future: three of them are studying on the MA level (one with us, one at Tartu University, one abroad), and one on the PhD level. In addition, we have prospective young faculty members doing their master’s degrees in other areas: one in Pastoral Care, one in Missions, one in Church History, and one in Christian Media.

The most recent addition of a PhD level teacher has been Helen Haas, who has promised to teach one course on the BA level (Study of Religions) and has already taught one on MA level (Intercultural Dialogue). Before starting the MA program in 2022, we were encouraged by Patristic specialist, PhD Tarmo Toom’s return to Estonia – he now teaches four courses on the MA level and one at the BA level. Another addition to the faculty has been the well-known psychologist, PhD Aleksander Pulver, who is now teaching two courses at the Seminary. The aim of hiring teachers for the MA program is to have most of them with the PhD level of education. Currently only two faculty members have only the MA degree. Happily, one of them is currently pursuing a PhD.

Feedback concerning the satisfaction of faculty and admin staff is gathered regularly. Comparing the results of 2017 and 2024, some things have been solved, and some are still challenging and need to be dealt with. Some of the good changes are that since 2017 we have a system of additional pay being given to teachers who assess bigger groups, which was one request. Another expectation was to have more international exchanges, which have seen good increases during the last years. Even the salaries of the employees have gradually grown. Also, connection with the local churches has become much better and teachers can order almost all the books they want for the library. Respondents in both surveys were happy with the flexibility and student-centredness of the school, the good atmosphere and very supportive administrative staff, with the work of the leader of the Seminary, and working systems.

The areas, which still need development are all explained by the change in the administrative team during the year 2024. Two key people – the academic dean and educational designer/library coordinator left, and new administrative team members needed time to adjust to new roles. In addition, the person in the role of academic dean was more skilled as a researcher and professor than as an administrator. His gifts were strong in those areas but not in line with his administrative role. From January 2025 the Seminary will have a new, experienced academic dean to do the administrative part of the work and the former academic dean will remain on the team as a lead teacher, being one of the promising young faculty members. Distribution of tasks among administrative team members will be done through discussions during January and February and recorded in the corresponding working document called Distribution of Roles. While satisfaction with the leadership of the Seminary is slightly lower in 2024 than in 2017 (less “very good”, more “good” and on “average” marks in 2024), for comparison, all four 2024 graduates evaluated the leadership of the Seminary highly, giving the response “very good”. Out of 13 students, who assessed the leadership of the Seminary in 2024, 11 gave the mark “5” – very good and 2 said that the leadership was good, “4”.

The respondents of the 2024 faculty and administrative team survey asked for quicker communication through email, a clearer system of how the work is spread between people, and better inclusion of all faculty members. The Seminary has already been working on these issues as mentioned in the Strategic Management part. One way to do this is to specify the procedures more clearly in the [Policy of Administration](#).

The **physical resources** of the school are shared with the owner and the local church. This makes it possible to lead the school with such a small administrative team as we do not need to worry about the study environment – classrooms are available, clean and well resourced. These classrooms provide all the physical space needed in which to conduct our humanities-based instruction. Thus, we do not have a regular, systematic assessment of the premises. The digital infrastructure will continue to be developed and sustained by the UFEBC as they have work agreements and volunteers to do that work. When we surveyed 2024 graduates about what they would like to be different, they mentioned longer breaks and more subjects in the Biblical Study area. No one complained about the physical resources.

**Digital resources.** We audit Moodle regularly and renew it if needed. The environment enables us to identify users and assess their work. The role of supporting Moodle users has been shared between the academic dean (faculty members) and student dean (students). The student dean also gives advice to students about how to use the study information system Tahvel. Lead teachers and alumni members have access to Microsoft Office and the Seminary pays their annual fee.

We have a document of [Privacy regulations](#) (in Estonian) on our web page and we follow it. The Seminary uses an online environment “Surveer” for gathering feedback. Students who do research for their final paper can also use that resource. Additionally, we use it for the organisational development survey made among churches. As already mentioned, the professional version of Zoom is also part of our study environment.

We used input from the students and faculty when the home page of the school was changed in December 2024.. This new web page has enabled us to decrease the work of the bookkeeper as several participant fees for conferences and short courses can be paid directly. Additionally, it is more mobile phone friendly.

### **Communication**

The communication of the Seminary has been developed over the years. The [Media Plan](#) (APPENDIX 10) is the basis of the activities. Some of the main ways to reach different target groups are as follows:

- e-mail lists to the UFEBC members and leaders, including e-mail to other Christian denominations through our contacts and the Estonian Council of Churches – to share information and reflect our accomplishments.
- e-mail lists to share information with BA students, MA students, faculty members, administrative team, Advisory Board, alumni.
- Social media – home page with events and blog articles, Facebook page (outward) and group (inward), Instagram. Our home page also corresponds to our enrolment procedures, curricula, and state of accreditation.
- Christian Radio and TV channels for promoting our study possibilities and events.

- “Seminary Sunday” – every year at the end of March we visit churches with students and faculty and talk about the work of the Seminary. Additionally, the rector, director of development and academic dean visit several churches every year for the purposes of preaching and teaching. This also enables us to share information about the possibilities of study in the Seminary.

With the current changes in the administrative team, we are looking at an even clearer system for accomplishing the communication responsibilities. Currently, the responsibility is shared between the rector, academic dean, and educational designer.

There is also a communication aspect of cooperation with other schools and organisations in Estonia. For a long time, we have had good cooperation between theological schools in Estonia – Estonian Methodist Seminary, Institute of Theology owned by the Lutheran Church, and Tartu University Theological Faculty. With two of them – the Methodist Seminary and Tartu University we also have written agreements of cooperation. More than a year ago, the rector of the Seminary was welcomed as an associate member of the Estonian Rectors’ Conference of Universities of Applied Sciences, which has enabled better cooperation and flow of information with other applied HEIs.

**Strengths** of the resources include a stable budget, a growing percentage of self-earned income, an increasing number of highly qualified faculty members who joined the team in 2022 when we opened the MA program, good connections with local churches and sufficient physical and digital resources.

**Areas of improvement** could be raising self-earned income to 50% of the budget, finding at least some support for research from government sources, encouraging younger faculty members to continue their studies, and finding a good balance between the administrative team members for media and marketing activities.

### 3.3. Quality Culture

A quality culture has been developed during recent years. A document of [Quality Assurance](#) (in Estonian) has been created and information is collected through forms, which are compiled mostly by the academic dean who is also responsible for quality assurance. We implement internal and external evaluation to gather information on most of our core activities, to know what is working well and what is not. Based on this information, recommendations for improvements are presented to the team. Following we will give some examples from feedback gathered from UFEBC churches, graduating students, and faculty and staff members.

For example, the feedback gathered from churches (the latest feedback from November 2024) gave us input about the topics churches need: parenting according to Christian values, pastoral care, discipleship etc. Respondents from Southern Estonia would like to see more short courses happening in that part of the country as well. Another suggestion was to do research about the practical life of smaller churches. We are already working on these suggestions, and will implement them as soon as possible.

Another example comes from the feedback of the graduating students – they report their opinions about the curriculum, teachers, supervision, study regulations etc. One of the main feedback items we received regards the fact that there are too few courses in the area of Biblical

studies. This is one of the main focuses influencing the search for new faculty members and adding the proportion of this area into the next version of the curriculum.

A mentoring system has also been very useful in ensuring the quality of teaching. Even though it was created to support the individual growth of students and support their studies, it has turned out to be an important source of feedback as well. Challenges of study load, some subjects and teachers, their personal academic tasks etc have been expressed in these conversations. If students give permission, mentors share these things with the school administrative team. At the beginning of each academic year, student groups are formed, and each group is assigned a mentor who communicates with students about study-related matters and provides support and guidance as needed.

**Curriculum development** in the Seminary is a continuous process, and happens regularly, but greater changes are made every 3–5 years. The ground rule is that whenever there is enough reason to make changes, we will make these. The seminary gets input for curriculum development from different interest groups and stakeholders:

- Feedback is gathered about each BA and MA subject. This happens one month after the end of the course through the Surveer environment. As a result, we have increased and/or decreased some credit amounts of the subjects and changed some teachers.
- Feedback is given through mentoring groups. One example was during the first year of MA studies when students gave us feedback that the speed of studies to finish the program in two years was too fast and we prolonged the program to three years. We also get feedback if the workload of certain subjects does not correspond with the credits given for the course. This happened in spring 2024 with the Exegesis course.
- Feedback is gathered from students immediately after graduation. For example, one expectation in it was that the last year students would have the past spring free from the (difficult) subjects – this was already implemented this school year. Some of them would like longer breaks, quicker feedback or more information about the RPL process. Some are very happy with Moodle and encourage teachers to use it even more. Perhaps the most significant feedback we get again and again is to offer more courses in the area of Biblical studies. This is one thing we plan to consider seriously when we take the next step of curriculum development in the beginning of 2025. There are no graduates as yet from the MA group, but we already know some things they would prefer differently through oral discussions. Quite definitely, there will be feedback gathered from them as soon as they graduate.
- The rector gets feedback from those who decide to terminate their studies by contacting them. There is always a meeting or phone call. For example, we have learned that for some students, part-time study is not at all easy, and this is one reason they leave. Some of them do not realise that they are coming to an academic institution with demanding studies. They expect something similar to a church's Bible education and then dropout because these expectations are not fulfilled. To "soften" that process all our 1st year students have to study the Bible thoroughly.
- Faculty members, including international faculty members, give feedback. Often, they have told us what they expect to teach better or how to modify their subject or perhaps the whole curriculum.
- Additional input is gathered from the theology syllabuses in different theological schools – our Erasmus partners, network members of the European Baptist Theologians and other international sources.



**Strengths** of the quality culture are clear and the up-to-date system of quality assurance and regular feedback surveys. Curriculum development, including development of our new MA program has been constant. Mentoring groups have functioned well as the source of quick and personal feedback. We have changed several things as a response to that input.

**Areas of improvement** would be to continue implementing changes, which need to be done according to feedback. As a result, we hope to get even higher satisfaction with the leadership of the Seminary. The process of curriculum development needs to combine BA and MA programs and increase the percentage of course offering in the area of Biblical Studies.

### 3.4. Academic Ethics

The Seminary has defined comprehensive principles for academic ethics in the [Policy of Academic Ethics](#) (in Estonian) ensuring these are effectively communicated and upheld across its community. Academic ethics are supported by the following aspects:

- Regulation of Academic Ethics. [Policy of Academic Ethics](#) (in Estonian) was formally approved by the lead teachers on February 12, 2024, and ratified by the Advisory Board on April 25, 2024. Ethical regulations align with the [Estonian Code of Conduct for Research Integrity](#), which the school has signed with other applied HEIs. This code promotes values such as respect, fairness, and accountability. These guidelines are available to all members of the institution, emphasising the importance of adherence in both academic and digital contexts. Faculty and students are supported in understanding and addressing ethical issues, and are trained to identify and report misconduct, including plagiarism and academic dishonesty.
- Composition and Role of the Academic Ethics Committee. The Academic Ethics Committee (AEC) is composed of five faculty leaders, each representing different areas of expertise. This diverse team oversees the ethical practices within the Seminary, ensuring alignment with the national Code of Conduct for Research Integrity and providing balanced guidance on ethical issues.
- Monitoring and Promoting Good Research Practice, including research applications by students. All writers of final papers who do their research with human beings or which are sensitive in other ways must send an [application](#) to the Academic Ethics Committee and get their permission to proceed. Through this procedure, the AEC initiatives aim to integrate ethical awareness into all aspects of academic and research activity at the Seminary upholding core principles of academic integrity, including freedom, honesty, and collaboration.
- Monitoring ethical challenges related to Artificial Intelligence and plagiarism. With the development of AI, monitoring plagiarism has changed as AI can easily rephrase anything or, even worse, write anything. It is impossible to know if AI has been used if we merely read the text. Therefore, our plan to fight these dangers is to place value on regular supervision as the best way to avoid cheating and organise a pre-defence for final papers. The current trend has been to add additional oral methods of assessment as these are more valid. We also explain what is allowed and what is not to students, covering the issue in Study regulations every August before starting the new school year.
- Dealing with plagiarism takes several forms. We have used the program Plagium to check possible plagiarism in the final papers in recent years. Over the last 5 years, all final papers were checked and no plagiarism was found. Students also get to know what the procedures are in case of plagiarism – if there is repeated and conscious practice, they will be ex-matriculated. During the last few years, no plagiarised works have been detected.

- Study regulations describe the ways of handling complaints, in case the usual channels such as feedback gathering and mentoring groups cannot be used for solving the problems. These complaints might include cases of discrimination, which need to be addressed transparently and impartially for all parties involved. For example, in case of the more discrete complaints with the rector, these go to the president of ECBU and to one of the Elders' Board members to solve. Because we are a small school, we need clear procedures for assuring academic ethics on all levels.

**Strengths** of academic ethics are the recently signed Estonian Code of Conduct of Research Integrity with other plied HEIs and the establishment of a Policy of Academic Ethics in the Seminary. There are also clearer policies dealing with complaints and plagiarism than were in place 5 years ago. Application for research ethics were established a few years ago and the AEC has become a clear structure, led by the Director of Development, who is also in charge of research in the school.

**Areas of improvement** are finding ways to deal with AI in the future, which makes it very difficult to discover plagiarism.

### 3.5. Internationalisation

As growing mobility and participation in international networks is one of our key results, we monitor these regularly. The Seminary has compiled and published the [Principles of Internationalisation](#). We see a growing trend of mobilities during recent years – both the number of Erasmus and non-Erasmus partners has grown. Our Erasmus partners are listed here: [Erasmus partners](#) and there are a few new partnerships in the process of negotiation and some planned but not yet discussed. In addition to Erasmus partners, we have three strong partners: [Finnish Free Church Seminary "Teopolis"](#), [TCMI](#) in Vienna, and [Norwegian School of Theology and Leadership](#).

We have achieved both ways mobility (student and faculty exchange with the purpose of study or teaching) – this is a great improvement for us. Incoming students and outgoing faculty show that we have something to offer to others as well. One key condition for doing that has been our MA program, where we teach courses in English, and our growing participation in international networks. Also, we have organised blended intensive programs (BIPs) twice so far, which has encouraged us to bring international partners together.

**Table 4. The mobility of students and faculty**

	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024	2024/2025
Students out				4 (EAP 33)	3 (EAP 3)+
Students in				8	12
Staff out			4	9	10
Staff in	2	1	1	15	10

The Seminary regularly encourages students and faculty to attend different mobilities. We do it through e-mail and during the coffee breaks at the study sessions. We share the stories of those who have been in mobility, See: [here](#) and [there](#): As we are a small school, up to now everybody interested in mobility has been able to take part in it.



We are still looking for better ways to add international internship possibilities to existing mobilities. Last spring we had three of our students doing their internship in Osijek, Croatia. After organising two BIP-courses we have had to learn how to start to plan these earlier – one group came together in the last minute (Erasmus + requirements have been three foreign partners and 15 participants), the other did not come together in terms of Erasmus+ and. Unfortunately, we lost the financial support. However, the second BIP had enough participants, just not through Erasmus connections. We have learned that we need to start earlier to get confirmations from our partners, not only hope that they come. Fortunately, the requirements of BIP-courses by Erasmus + have decreased – now there is a need for only two partners and 10 participants from Erasmus partners in abroad.

In addition to Erasmus funds, we have applied for and received money from different funds for cooperation with our Norwegian partner. Previously, we had received support from the EMP/Norwegian Higher Education program. Currently, we are using the funds granted by the Nordplus program. There is a special fund (in a special row in our budget) to support our faculty members' studies at partner institutions in Estonia and abroad. For example, we supported Helina Voogne's attendance in Soul, in the Lausanne conference.

Recently, there has been a growing possibility to attend different seminars and networking events online and we have used these possibilities. For example, Helle Liht and Einike Pilli will attend Project Violet, an online course about women in ministry, in January 2025. The Baptist Union of Great Britain has initiated this network of female theologians. The Nordic Network of Woman in Theology meeting will be held in Tampere, Finland, in January 2025, this will be attended by Helle Liht, Einike Pilli and two female students. Helle Liht is participating in the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) Commission for Creation Care and Relief & Development. More of these international relationships are written in the [Report on the Research Plan 2024](#) (APPENDIX 6).

Study done by students in international schools is assessed and recognised by the RPL system. There are three RPL application times per school year and before the students go to mobilities, we do a pre-assessment of their studies compared to our curriculum. We do not have a "window of mobility" in our study cycle because our students prefer shorter exchanges, but there is a plan to encourage participation in summer courses, both in Osijek, Croatia and Leuven, Belgium. Our Seminary offers "incoming mobility windows" in the spring, usually in May, when we use at least one international teacher and invite our partners to send their students to participate.

Subjects in English where we have had incoming mobility, are as follows:

- "Two student-centred practices: problem-based learning and mentoring", 3 ECTS (BIP course), taught by Einike Pilli and Meego Remmel (Fall 2023).
- "Dialogue of Art", 2 ECTS, taught by Ivana Noble from Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic (April 2024).
- "Luke and Acts", 4 ECTS, taught by Peter Penner from TCMI, Vienna, Austria (April 2024).
- "Primary and Secondary Theologies", 3 ECTS (BIP course), taught by Meego Remmel and Gabriel Stephen from School of Theology and Leadership, Norway (Fall 2024.)

However, we still need international help for excellence in teaching Biblical Studies subjects on the MA level. To fulfil that need we will continue cooperating with our Finnish partner

Teopolis and look for other possibilities such as sharing some international faculty with the Methodist Seminary in Estonia.

Currently, we do not have any full program (100%) in English. The Seminary's MA curriculum is 24% taught in English. We have been considering to open the full program in English as all our faculty is proficient in it and we can teach some courses together. However, this is still in process. We continue negotiations with our partners in Finland and Latvia and look for the key person to lead this process.

In our research plan we expected one bigger international conference, which took place on Nov 1–2, 2024, together with a pre-conference for MA students. This was the first opportunity for several students to present their research in English and get feedback from internationally recognised theologians like Teun van der Leer and Stephen Holmes. The conference itself was very well attended internationally, bringing participants from the US, UK, Netherlands, Norway, Lithuania, Nigeria, Philippines (students at our Norwegian partners) and Ukraine. All the plenary videos of the conference are available here: <https://kus.kogudused.ee/vabakirikute-dna-free-curch-dna-2024>

Foreign teachers are taking part in the supervision of our master's thesis. For example, Hele-Maria Kangro is supervised by Myron Williams (Austria, US) and several master's students have received specialist help from Fred Hansen, our incoming international teacher.

Some examples of our faculty members' mobility:

Meego Rimmel has been teaching at the Norwegian School of Leadership and Theology in Oslo, Norway (18–21.10.2022), in Lviv Baptist Seminary, Ukraine (20.–23.05.2024), in Tavriski Christian Institute, Ukraine (24.–26.05.2024, 23.–25.05.2025), in the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Osijek, Croatia (27.–30.01.2025).

Einike Pilli (Norway, HLT) "Value-based leadership" - 4.05.23, 18.09.23, 22.–25.04.25

**Strengths** of the standard are as follows: the school has grown mobilities in both directions, both students and faculty members, two BIP courses, an international research conference in Fall 2024 and increased cooperation with international faculty, due to the MA program.

**Areas of improvement** are to do earlier planning ahead of BIP courses, continuous growth of mobility and new Erasmus+ partners (there are plans with Helsinki University (Finland), Elstal Seminary (Germany), our Norwegian partner (HLT, they have not had an Erasmus charter for a while), and a school in Oradia (Romania)), and finding new international teachers in the area of Biblical Studies.

### 3.6. Teaching Staff

The teaching staff is the primary resource of the Seminary. The work of the teaching staff is regulated by documents, which are listed on our web page under the topic "[Information to Faculty](#)". Here are documents such as [Guide for Faculty member](#) (in Estonian), [Regulations of attestation](#) (in Estonian), template for the syllabus, [Guide for Moodle](#), and [Regulations of Academic Work and Pay](#). These documents regulate recruitment, roles, tasks and procedures, pay and digital environments in which our faculty members work.

As a comparatively large number of faculty members are part-time, we need to be systematic and purposeful to ensure a quality educational experience for our students. On our web page

we have listed important documents and materials for our faculty, including those which describe the good practices of teaching and assessing and all of the processes, which we expect them to follow: <https://kus.kogudused.ee/uldinfo/dokumendid/> Information has always been sent to teachers through email, teachers have been invited to attend Advisory Board meetings, we have always welcomed them to all-school events such as opening and graduation ceremonies, Christmas party, and the Summer picnic which are organised for friends of the Seminary. Many of them have attended. However, we have learned from their recent feedback that this is insufficient. In addition, we see the need for meetings at least twice a year to share the school news and discuss some more complicated cases with our faculty members. Already, a good start has been made.

The Seminary has five elected lead teachers and many others, working through an agreement according to the need. In addition to these two groups of teachers we annually invite somebody new to teach one elective course. Often these are either young or international teachers. For example, Simona Andreas-Sou, a Wheaton College (US) alumni taught the course about the phenomenon of ‘burnout’ last fall. Our fresh alumni member, Meeri Jakobson, a young teacher with a double degree (another from pedagogy) taught a course about children's work in church (Fall 2024), which she had prepared as her final project.

Similarly, Kadi Tingas prepared e-course about youth work for her final work. In Fall 2023 she taught it for ecumenical group as e-course. Ragne Ülevain (Kivimets), another of our alumni members, is teaching several elective courses including Discipleship and Christian worship music. The Seminary also invites international teachers to participate, fostering global relationships and international learning experiences.

The Seminary is staffed with highly qualified and active teachers in their respective fields – See: Faculty and Subjects [BA](#) and [MA](#) (APPENDIX 3). Half of the Seminary's 43 teachers (20 out of 43) hold doctoral degrees. As of the 2024 academic year, there are 77 students enrolled (52 in the bachelor's program and 25 in the master's program) and 40 academic staff members with varying workloads. Calculated at a full-time workload, there are an average of 8,55 students per teacher.

Opening the MA program has been a good reason to recruit new teachers and in reverse – we could not have opened the program without enough highly qualified teachers. During 2022–2023 we had several new faculty members joining us: Tarmo Toom, Tõnu Lehtsaar, Aleksander Pulver, Dave Cupery, Helen Haas, Marge Unt, Fred Hansen (he was teaching occasional electives before), Jozsef Steiner and Dietrich Schindler. Smaller parts of the courses were taught by academics Tarmo Uustalu and Karl Pajusalu. Thus, the MA program has helped us to take a qualitatively and quantitatively next step in our faculty teaching staff. Now we also have new high-quality teachers for our BA program.

Our lead teachers go through the attestation process, which is based on the [Policy of Attestation](#) (in Estonian). For more information See: 3.2. Resources section). Four of the elected teachers received attestation in the first round in June 2022, one did not. The teacher who did not get attestation was because of lack of research and writing and was given 5 months to find ways to publish some of his research. As he was not able to do so, in the spring of 2024 we had an open competition for the role of the teacher in Biblical Studies. Sander Tulk was the newly elected teacher in the fall of 2024. The next process of attestation will be in Spring-Summer 2027.

To recruit new lead teacher, we organised an openly announced competition in 2024. This has been the process also before, that the competition is openly announced. The selection process is done by the Advisory board of the school and confirmed by the Elders Board of UFEBC. The most recent competition to the role of lead teacher was held in the summer of 2024 where Sander Tulk, our alumni member holding a fresh MA, was selected to fill the position. He is continuing his studies in the Tartu University Theological Faculty PhD program. Visiting teachers are recruited according to their professional capacity and most of them come from UFEBC churches as we value practical skills combined with theoretical knowledge.

There is no special career model for new faculty members, but everybody who is ready to study and willing to teach is given the opportunity. In some cases, we have had the experience that some younger teachers who were given the opportunity, did not fit into the role. They were not ready to work enough for the courses they taught and therefore we did not invite them back. Usually, we try at least three times before we make such a decision, to give young faculty members time to adjust to the new role. Usually, the decision is made based on the triangulation of feedback – by students and other teachers. Conversations and/or written feedback is given to visiting teachers after each course they have taught if there has been a problem.

However, during the last 8 years there have been only two cases in which this has happened – all other younger and new faculty members have been very good and keep developing further. About finding new faculty members, See: 3.2. Resources section.

The Seminary also collects feedback on teacher performance, and the responses have been consistently positive. For instance, over the past three years, most students (an average of 70%) have agreed – either completely or generally – that learning outcomes for the subjects taught were achieved. Students can also individually assess each teacher's teaching competency. Feedback consistently highlights the practical experience of the teachers, confirming that they actively engage in their field of expertise. Additionally, students frequently note the high-quality, constructive feedback provided on their work. Some teachers, however, are late with their feedback or give it only superficially. We try to encourage teachers to see feedback as one form of the learning process. Many students also appreciate the practical nature of the subjects taught, reflecting that the course content is not merely theoretical but actively connected to real-life situations and professional contexts.

As a Seminary, we are dedicated to supporting the professional development of our teachers. One course on didactics is organised almost every year in cooperation with other theological schools. In 2024, we organised a [course taught by Grete Arro](#) about how to support the motivation of students. Faculty members from all four theological institutions of Estonia were in attendance. In 2022, we had a course with Veronika Tuul about how to teach students in hybrid form and use digital tools to enrich teaching (<https://kus.kogudused.ee/kuidas-hubriidoppes-hasti-opetada/>).

Next year we plan to organise a course concerning Visual learning with Kati Orav. We are happy that the HARNOKVARA program is offering support for these courses in the future. Information about our teachers attending training and conferences is available in [Faculty attendance in trainings and conferences](#) (APPENDIX 9).

Digital competencies of the teaching staff are developed in two ways. One is day-to-day practical work in the environment of Moodle, Tahvel and other environments, where teachers get technical support from the education designer and academic dean. We also provide them

with guides for working in the learning environments. The other possibility is to attend specific training sessions. For example, the academic dean attended training about AI/Chat GPT in the university setting, in addition to the courses mentioned above. We offer information about faculty training both in Estonia and abroad. However, not all teachers are alike in use of the possibilities. Therefore, we keep helping them improve their digital and pedagogical competencies.

Our budget includes support for publishing, and we offer higher pay to those visiting lecturers with advanced degrees, thereby promoting the work of academically active teachers. Lead teachers are also paid according to their degrees and publishing is taken into consideration as well. Technological support is readily available, with guides prepared for using the relevant platforms.

There are some cooperative projects between theological HEI in Estonia and between different faculty members. For example, Meego Remmel published with the rector of Estonian Methodist Seminary, Laur Lilleoja in “Usuteaduslik ajakiri” article titled „Eestimaalaste moraalsete ja eetiliste hoiakute muutumine 1995–2020“ (Usuteaduslik Ajakiri 2024/2 (86), 93–117). Another article was published by Hele-Maria Kangro (our faculty member) and Laur Lilleoja. Einike Pilli and Meego Remmel have recently co-published an article in “Journal of European Baptist Studies” and have done several conference and consultation speeches together. We also practice joint teaching in our school – sometimes between two colleagues of the same level, sometimes to introduce new teachers and mentor them into the process.

**Strength** of the teaching staff has developed mainly in the recent increase in the number and quality of teaching staff. This development in strength is, in many ways, due to starting the MA program. The work of the teachers has been regulated by several documents and policies. There has been regular training in the field of pedagogical and digital competencies for faculty members, often in cooperation with other theological HEIs in Estonia. Hiring alumni members to teach is also a strength we are happy about, and we hope that, as the MA program continues, we also get more younger teachers to join the team.

**Areas of improvement** are to create equally high levels of digital and pedagogical competencies among faculty, to ensure timely and profound feedback for students in all subjects and, as said earlier – to find and develop younger faculty, especially in Biblical studies. First steps in this direction have already been taken. Additionally, we would like to continue organising regular and purposeful meetings of our faculty members to create the sense of community and ensure similar understanding of the learning-centred study process.

### 3.7. Study Program

The Seminary has two study programmes: the [BA program](#) “Free Church Theology and Leadership” and the [MA program](#) “Theology and Society”. Both programmes are in line with the mission and vision of the school and the expectations of the owner. The majority of the graduates work in local churches, but also in the context of chaplaincy and para-church organisations such as Christian TV and Radio or Christian journals. Many graduates are already working during their studies, even though not all the work is paid. After opening the MA program, we have had several top leaders of the free churches studying with us.

The [BA program](#) is practically oriented toward church work. There are quite a number of subjects about teamwork, media, leadership and mentoring, pastoral care, children and youth,



worship music, chaplaincy, and many other areas of practical church work. The percentage of internships is around 1/3 of the total curriculum and the percentage of electives is almost as high.

The BA program has been developed gradually, the greatest change was made in 2015, as the new concept of education was received by UFEBEC. Smaller changes have been made afterwards. In the 2015 version of the curriculum, we tried four specializations to attract different groups of interest – theology, practical mission, youth work, and church planting. Later Christian worship was added as the fifth specialisation. When we gathered feedback from the students, we learned they wanted a mixture of the subjects taught as part of these specialisations. As a result, we created a larger selection of electives from which students can make their choices more freely. Now we sometimes combine electives for BA and MA groups. After those changes, we have done some minor adjustments to the workload, as both the student and faculty feedback gave us good reasons for those adjustments. One of distinctives in our curriculum is the larger amount of credit for the final paper – instead of the common 6 ECTS we have 9 ECTS and value highly the possibility this provides for students to do research concerning something important about the practical and theoretical part of free church life.

The [MA program](#) was created in early spring 2022. Input was gathered from the UFEBEC Elders' Board, the Seminary's Advisory board, BA students and our partners in other theological schools. We also compared other theological curriculums when we prepared for the new curriculum. After the draft was prepared, we again circulated it among interest groups. The MA curriculum was called "Theology and Society" because the gap between church and society has grown. It has been built up as a problem-based integrated curriculum. Einike Pilli and Meego Remmel have written an [article](#) published in the Journal of European Baptist Studies, about the theoretical background of the MA program.

The structure of the curriculum is built on four different modules which we call studios, and which are integrated by themselves: Bible and the Society; Theology and Identity; Communication and Leadership and Creativity and Fruitfulness. Three main studios have been organised around one problem each, integrating the content which students discuss before their studies and try to solve during their studies during the first year. The second year of the studies students bring their own problems to the subject "Hot topics of theology" and do additional reading to find out more about the topic under discussion. Additionally, they have to find the area of their Master's thesis and do a 6 ECTS Apprenticeship of the Master's thesis in order to discover more about the reality and problems of their chosen field. Two areas – hot topics and apprenticeship can be combined, and these help them to get ready for their final work in the third year. The percentage of internships is much smaller in the MA program compared to the BA program, but it forms 10 ECTS of the 120 ECTS curriculum.

One thing must be said about the length of both programs. As our form of study is part-time and most of the students have families and are employed with larger or smaller responsibilities in the church, they are unable to study at full-time speed. Therefore, our BA program has been four years long. When we started the MA program, we tried to spread it across two years. Before the end of the first semester, we got strong feedback from the students that this speed was not sustainable, and their learning quality went down. Therefore, we spread the MA program over three years and now the workload has been much more doable. In the spring of 2025, we will have the first-ever MA graduates.

In case some of the students feel that the workload per year is still too heavy, we offer them the opportunity to study at their own speed. We also have a few students with special needs,

who are helped to study according to their possibilities. Digital and foreign language skills are needed on both levels of study; however, in some cases, it is possible to graduate from the BA program without strong English. This is not possible in the MA program since much of the instruction is given in English and materials for study and research include many English-only sources. Digital skills are the absolute prerequisite for the studies as most of the learning is supported by the Moodle environment and students must write all of their papers in digital form.

Both BA and MA curricula are outcome-based; learning outcomes of the curriculum, modules, and subjects are well-aligned and coherent. Learning outcomes are clear and possible to assess. Included and integrated into both curricula are the generic outcomes required of all areas of study. These outcomes include: communication skills (both BA and MA), leadership skills and entrepreneurship (both levels), self-leadership (MA), critical thinking and problem-solving, etc. These two curricula are also comparable to the corresponding learning outcomes of the appendix of the Estonian Higher Education Standard – See: [Comparison of Higher Education Standard and Seminary's Curricula](#) (APPENDIX 4). Vertical alignment of both of the curricula is demonstrated in Analyses of Alignment [BA](#) and [MA](#) (APPENDIX 5).

However, we would like to develop both curricula even more during the spring semester of 2025. There are different aims to fill with this process of development:

- to make the Seminary's BA and MA curricula even better comparable with the new list of learning outcomes of the appendix of Higher Education Standard and specify the LO of the BA curriculum
- after (almost) completing the first round of the MA program, adjust this according to the feedback of students and faculty members
- make BA and MA better comparable. The BA can be developed to fit the MA better and also prepare students who continue for the MA, even though we will accept people from outside our own MA program as well
- to increase the area of Biblical studies – this feedback has been strong from different parts of interest groups, including alumni
- to adjust to different new creative approaches of theological curricula
- to better integrate generic competencies than was done before, including innovation, Creation care, entrepreneurship, and support of the mental health of students. In the process, we plan to focus more on future skills like analytical thinking and creativity, intercultural skills, stress tolerance and the ability to adapt in difficult contexts.
- There might appear other reasons during the data collection, which may give us input for curriculum development.

**Strengths** of the study programs are as follows: BA and MA curricula are different enough, nevertheless building on each other; both curricula are well aligned within themselves and with the Higher Education Standard; there is an ongoing process of curriculum development, and we consider the innovative problem-based approach of MA curriculum quite an impressive accomplishment as well.

**Areas of improvement** are continuous development of both curricula according to the ways described above, including all important interest groups and finding some new innovative angles. The KVARA program led by Harno provides important support in that.

### 3.8. Learning and Teaching

Learning and teaching processes are documented and developed continuously. Most of the important information is written into [Study Regulations](#). Student admission is prescribed in the document [Regulations of admission and exmatriculation](#). We welcome students with educational special needs. We have had students with MS graduate with us recently and, at the moment, there is a student with diagnosed dyslexia and dysgraphia. The growing number of Russian-speaking students in our school also means creating conditions for those with special educational needs such as ESOL support. In some cases, we offer people the possibility to study at a slower speed. In the case of students with physical restrictions we offer them the possibility to attend lectures over Zoom, even though we usually encourage them to attend physically if possible. The same possibility is offered for people who get sick or who, for some other reasons cannot come (for example we have a student from Ruhnu Island who might be stuck because of transportation problems).

Admission interviews and tests help to decide whether students are ready for their studies. If the test does not go too well, but the student is intellectually otherwise capable, we encourage them to study. In some cases, we have not been sure about the mental health or motivation of the students. However, even in these cases, we suggest possible learners go through the first step of BA education – Bible school and if that goes well, to continue with the rest of the BA program. With students who have another mother tongue, we will speak in Estonian during the admission interview to ascertain they have enough language skill to study. We would also like to add the requirement for future MA students to hold their discussion with the admission commission in English. This is because part of the MA program is in English.

More talented students are encouraged to take additional courses as electives in the MA program, at other universities (especially Biblical languages) or in mobility abroad. They often take more demanding tasks to themselves as well and this gives us hints about possible future faculty members.

All syllabuses are available on our web page: [BA](#), [MA](#), and [electives](#). The aim is that all syllabuses be available at the beginning of each school year, if not earlier. We offer BA and MA students the chance to select one or two electives from the other program. As we are a small school, we run some electives together, always providing the possibility to choose between one in the Estonian language as well.

Learning methods of study sessions are varied – we use a lot of group discussions, presentations, even debate and other methods requiring social skills, an analytical approach and integration of material studied with their context of life and service. Of course, there are interactive lectures as well. However, we prefer students take part physically of the study sessions as much as possible because we believe that they learn much better in social interaction, face to face in the same room. We audio record all lectures so that those who have difficulty with language or speed of studies or who are away because of their responsibilities, can still get the information needed.

Assessment methods vary and we encourage students to relate the material learned with their own life and professional experience. Sometimes, students can do tasks together, which helps them to develop their teamwork skills. Many of the teachers require presentations, because public speaking is an important generic competence of theologians and church leaders. Additionally, there is a growing number of oral exams, case studies, projects and reflections.



Both learning and assessment methods require digital skills and creativity, especially in searching for literature and writing essays and other creative forms.

We have created a system over the years, for students in their final year, of how they can get the final paper ready in time. In August, they must present their ideas in the seminar; by November they have to confirm their themes and supervisors, the theory part of the paper must be ready. In February, research needs to be completed in March and the mock viva usually happens in the beginning of May, which means that their first draft has to be ready by the end of April. To support the process of writing the final paper, we organise regular seminars. BA students take a seminar the subject of which is called “Research Practice” and MA students take a course called “Sociological Literacy”. In addition, there is personal communication between the students and rector or academic dean. A few years ago, we added more criteria to the BA syllabus of the final paper and set the limit of words in the paper and project explanation. Staying within the limit of words has been challenging for some of the graduates.

Supervision of the final papers is one of our priorities. Most of our lead teachers carry the load of supervision, but we also have guest teachers participating in this. We offer input about the supervision sending them the syllabus, inviting them to take part in trainings and discussions about the supervision, and offering them feedback through the mock viva experience of their students, as other faculty members give their input as well.

However, we still have students who have done all or almost all of their studies, but who cannot finish their studies because the last effort seems too challenging. We keep communicating with them personally to encourage them to finish. In most cases, it has worked. There are also one or two students who are on BA level and good in practical work but find it very difficult to write a systematic and logical long paper. We have considered adding an extra possibility for them in the future, possible in the format of big oral exam.

The part-time format of the BA and MA studies requires students to take more responsibility for their studies than in the case of full-time studies. While the rhythm of contact hours and individual study has been spread over the year – study sessions happening in 11 months and having July for a holiday, it still requires strong personal time management skills and self-motivation. It is not always easy. Therefore, we encourage it through different means:

- We teach and encourage it in courses like “Introduction to Studies and Academic Writing” (BA), “Introduction to Studies and Theology” (MA), “Mentoring” (BA), “Methods supporting the growth” (MA), “Leading oneself and the projects” (MA).
- The format of mentoring meetings is another strong means of supporting self-directed learners. People meet their mentors in two ways – individually and in a group setting. The students themselves select individual mentors, and they need to take the initiative for booking the meetings with their mentor. This requires active responsibility for their studies and growth. To encourage this even more, we introduced the BA elective course “Dynamics of the Self Analysis” to encourage them to meet with their mentors regularly throughout their studies. Individual mentoring continues for one year after graduation, which offers a continuing possibility to support the career choices of students.
- Student internships (sometimes referred as practical training) require taking responsibility as well. They must find their own internship places, agree with the supervisor and find a time to do the internship. They can always ask for help (for example if a Russian-speaking female student is not allowed to do a preaching

internship in her church, we help her to find a place where she can). Nevertheless, in most cases, students find their places and supervisors by themselves. The School supports that by offering information about internships and encourages students to do and report some of the internships every year, so these will not gather all at the end of their studies. One small form of the “internship” is the prayers they have to lead, taking turns each morning at the study sessions. As a form of study, internships are intertwined with more theoretical studies and connected to the main learning outcomes of the curriculum. The last internship added is in the area of Christian media where they are required to do a digital marketing project with some Christian organisation. There is a network of supervisors – our alumni and other theologians working in our churches.

- The fourth strong form of self-directed learning is writing the final paper. Even though the themes are offered, they have the freedom to choose what interests them. They are offered a list of possible supervisors, and their time management is supported by the pre-defence of the final paper, where they get more feedback than their supervisor alone is able to give.

Despite our best efforts and because of several responsibilities of our students not all of them get everything done on time. Sometimes we do not know if their reasons are serious or not. Therefore, we created the [Application of Extension](#) (in Estonian) for them to fill out. In that form they have to state the reason for asking for an extension. When they do get the work done, they must, in addition, ask for the signature of their mentor.

These four ways of supporting self-directed learners during their studies also help students to find their career choices, supporting their creativity and innovation. International competencies and social skills are learned during interaction and active methods as people with different ages, genders, church backgrounds, nationality and sometimes also from other countries interact with each other. Those students who have the possibility for student exchange and mobility, have even better possibilities to learn international social skills.

Feedback from students is helping us to improve the process of teaching and learning. In these forms, we also often ask about their motivation and commitment to their studies, because their results also depend on themselves. A 2024 satisfaction survey provided positive feedback from students regarding the Seminary’s educational and organizational structure. Students were asked, for example, about the alignment of course syllabi with the actual study workload, and all responses scored 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale (5 – suitable, 1 – not at all suitable). Students also expressed satisfaction with communication with the team and highlighted the supportive attitude of the leadership in their studies, especially in terms of mentoring. A few comments were noted, such as inconsistencies in feedback given by different teachers or the uneven structure of the Moodle environment across faculty members.

In a 2024 alumni survey (n=4), graduates rated the education at the Seminary as high-quality. Practically all respondents rated the education received between 8 and 10 on a 10-point scale (10 – best, 1 – worst). Course organization received a similar result, with only one respondent rating it as a 5, citing the incompatibility of study workload with a full-time job as the reason. A few other alumni also mentioned the challenges of balancing paid work with seminary studies but highly appreciated the Seminary team’s support through mentoring, which helped them complete their studies. Alumni also shared feedback on how the Seminary education supported them professionally, primarily noting improved communication skills, work ethic, and leadership abilities fostered by their Seminary studies. Students contribute to planning their

studies through feedback – both regularly collected written feedback and oral feedback through mentoring relationships.

A survey done among students in 2024 (n=13) showed that students were satisfied that their personal differences had been taken into account, including the possibility to use their own time schedule. All respondents evaluated that the study load and credit numbers correspond well with each other and enough information was given about the subject in the syllabus, which were available early enough.

There are some things they would like to see improved as well. These are some changes in the study sessions and study plans over the year, sessions that are too long (often 10 academic hours). Some students would like to get reminders before the homework due dates (compare this fact with the aim of self-supported learners). One of the students asked to get access to the library outside study sessions. We informed them by letter how this is possible. For some the study plan was not clear enough. We have already improved it and will do so again for the next school year.

Some of our alumni have found international jobs (Kadi Tingas at the European Baptist Federation), (Helle Liht with Canadian Baptist Ministries). A large number of students and alumni work as schoolteachers or administrators, one works as a leader of a Christian TV station, not even to speak about ministers and active group leaders in local churches or the Estonian Council of Churches or chaplaincy.

When feedback has been asked from employers (mainly local churches), they are satisfied with the graduates and praise the Seminary for that. Their feedback helps to improve our studies even more.

**Strengths** of the standard are well planned systems, improved support processes for the final paper, a diverse system of supporting the self-directed approach in learners, and good feedback from the alumni. We have improved the system of presenting syllabuses early enough in our web page.

**Areas of improvement** are as follows: to speak English with prospective students during MA admission interviews; build an even stronger support system and alternatives to those who struggle with their final paper and get all the syllabuses ready and presented in the beginning of August on the web page. In the new web page, we no longer duplicate information, which helps the page to be clearer about the dates and study plans. A new format of the study plan is in the process as well.

### 3.9. Student Assessment

For assessment purposes, the Seminary has the document presented on the web page as [Assessment](#). Other details about the process of assessment are written in the [Study Regulations](#). Study regulations and the Assessment also describe how the students can dispute their assessment results and redo their assessment methods. The majority of our subjects are assessed in a non-differentiated way, but in case the subject or some of its assessment methods are assessed in a differentiated way (marked), these syllabuses also have more specific assessment criteria or at least some indicators concerning what differentiates the marks. Because of many non-differentiated assessment methods, there are not too many complaints about the marking.

A few complaints happened earlier concerning the marked final paper. After receiving these complaints, we further developed the syllabus and assessment criteria.

One place where students have not always agreed with their mark has been the final paper. Over the years we have written more specific assessment criteria for the final paper and therefore recently we have had fewer complaints and expressed feelings of injustice.

Students take their studies seriously and often work hard to finish everything on time. For some, the challenge is to get the assessment methods presented in time. As students study part-time in addition to so many other duties, it is often difficult to decide if their apologies are sincere or they could have done the work in time if wanted and prioritised well enough. Recently, the increase of mental health problems has made it even more difficult to discriminate between serious and artificial reasons for being late with homework.

In most cases, students have syllabuses before the beginning of the school year with assessment clearly described. At the end of the course, we gather feedback about the course and there are questions about the assessment and feedback as well – its clarity, fairness etc. and how they think they have achieved the learning outcomes of the course. In most cases, feedback has been positive, but we have given feedback to teachers who must clarify their assessment systems and to others who have to give timely and more specific feedback. In extreme cases, we do not re-invite visiting lecturers who do not communicate well with students in the form of feedback. However, we first talk to them at least once before making this decision.

We had a teacher recently, who gave too much feedback and returned their work too many times with very specific requirements. Because of that experience, several of our perspective graduates did not graduate last year and are still finding it difficult to write their final paper – this was a big, unexpected loss we are still trying to sort out. As the teacher was the previous rector of the school, we expected him to know how assessment works. Students have asked us not to use him anymore.

Specific regulations about RPL are presented in the [RPL document](#) (in Estonian). We also add materials, which help students to understand the principles and process of [RPL](#), in Estonian. The School announces RPL application deadlines three times a year – in September, January and May. During the process, we also give RPL counselling to our students. If some students come in with a greater amount of previous theological studies, we help them compare their studies with our curriculum. Not all RPL applications get positive answers – sometimes, they must do additional work, and other times, they must take the whole subject again. We also have some bigger applications from those with long-time work experience – for example, at the moment the president of UFEBC has come to study on a BA program after working 25 years in the same pastoral position. He has taken several subjects and has written his final paper, but many subjects have been and will be accredited with RPL.

**Table 5. The RPL applications in 5-year trend**

	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024	2024/2025
<b>Applied (number of ECTS)</b>	207	177	99	101	225 (fall)

<b>Recognised (number of ECTS)</b>	207	165	85	101	219 (fall)
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In the case of RPL assessment and the assessment of the final paper, we use commissions, which consist of 3–5 people. There are negotiations that we could exchange one final paper examination board member with the Estonian Methodist Seminary, to make the results even more comparable. In the case of the final paper (both BA and MA), the lead teachers developed the assessment criteria together. In other cases, faculty members have the right to define their assessment criteria and methods by themselves, but often these are negotiated after the rector or academic dean has looked through the syllabuses. This process of reviewing all syllabuses helps faculty members approach assessment similarly. This is an especially important procedure with international faculty members, who come from different backgrounds. International qualifications are recognised according to Estonian legislation and if needed, then assessed by RPL.

Assessment methods of the courses are heterogeneous and there are multiple oral and written variations. Additionally, assessment methods encourage students to relate the material learned with their own life and professional experience. Sometimes, students can do tasks together, which helps them to develop their teamwork skills. Many of our teachers require oral presentations, because public speaking is an important generic competence of theologians and church leaders.

AI has forced us to move more toward oral assessment methods or in specific case studies, work written on-site. For example, Vilver Oras in his course “Legal questions in the Church Work” lets students solve four different case studies in the classroom, using legislation to support their points and solutions. In addition to these, we use projects and reflections. Assessment methods require digital skills and creativity, especially in searching for literature and writing essays and other creative forms.

As our school operates a part-time study format, this teaches students time management and a self-directed approach in learning. Several study groups have reported that they make tables of all assessment methods they have to do over the school year to keep track. In mentoring groups, they often share best practices on how they manage to do everything on time. Recently first year master students asked AI how to learn difficult definitions and got advice to use the form of a “Kuldvillak” competition – using that helped them to prepare for assessment.

If teachers teach the course together, they also plan the assessment together. Lead teachers sometimes gather teachers of their theme and discuss both the content and methods of teaching and assessment. Some of the assessment methods are already mentioned in the teaching and learning part. However, we tend to move toward analytical and integrative assessment, where students have to demonstrate that they understand, approach critically and are able to offer creative solutions. Typically, students can choose between two or three assessment methods in several subject areas.

For example, Helle Liht and Johanna Rosenvald are faculty members who are very good at using debate, dispute and problem-based approaches on the BA level. Additionally, as the Seminary’s curriculum is of a practical nature, we ask students to analyse their own contexts – church leadership structure (in the internship “Leadership in the Missional Context”, BA) or

prepare a real training for non-Christians (in “Methods supporting development”, MA). Additionally, Toivo Pilli uses personalised diaries of spirituality, and all of our internship reports include self-analysis. Meego Rimmel uses a portfolio in the subject of Ethics.

Moodle enables teachers to give feedback to students directly. This helps both students and teachers develop their digital skills. Generic competencies are especially assessed in the context of internship, where the format of the supervisor’s feedback requires them to give more in-depth feedback than just the task in hand, including generic competencies like the ability to analyse oneself, spiritual growth during their internship time and student’s readiness for pastoral work.

Teachers’ assessment competence is developed through training. In 2023, we had Grete Arro’s training about how to motivate students where assessment was one of the main topics. Before that, we had learned together with the representatives of other theological schools about curriculum planning, feedback, assessment and learning methods. Digital skills are often supported individually as each teacher is in a different place and needs personalised help. However, we see the need to talk about the role of AI in assessment and teaching. This issue has already been discussed in some faculty gatherings, but we see the need for more profound and systematic discussion and maybe regulations about the issue in the future.

**Strengths** of the assessment standard are a good system of RPL, various assessment methods, clear regulation and well-built syllabuses.

**Areas of improvement** are adjusting to the AI-created challenges in assessment, avoiding too little and too much feedback, and getting all assessment presented on time.

### 3.10. Learning Support Systems

Individual development and academic progress of students are monitored and supported regularly. The school is small, thus, a lot of support happens in an informal way. However, the formal support systems are in place as well. These are two formats of mentoring for holistic and career counselling (organised by the project leader of the Centre of Leadership and Mentoring (JuMe)). There is a student dean for all formal issues related to studies, a rector for more serious personal or study issues, an educational designer for technological support, and other team members and lead teachers are included whenever needed. We also cooperate well with Karita Kibuspuu and Maire Latvala, Christian psychologists from the Union-owned [Foundation From Friend to Friend](#) who have been helping a number of our students.

Two formats of mentoring function as follows:

1. group mentoring. People are placed into mentoring groups in the beginning of the school year. We spread BA and MA students into separate groups with 5–8 members. Both groups have students from all courses, both men and women. Each group is led by one Seminary lead teacher or administrative team member. Mentoring groups meet a minimum of 3, a maximum of 4 times in a year, usually for 1–2 hours as part of a study session. In these mentoring groups, students can share both personal and academic questions and challenges. This format also enables them to share experiences and learn from each other. In addition, this builds up the school community and fellowship.
2. individual mentoring. Students are asked to find themselves with a mentor, preferably one with the same theological background and ideally from the same gender. Students

can find mentors from the Network of Estonian Christian Mentors ([Eesti kristlike mentorite võrgustik \(kogudused.ee\)](http://Eesti.kristlike.mentorite.vorgustik.kogudused.ee)) We expect individual mentoring meetings to take place 3–4 times a year. Individual mentoring is meant to support students holistically, including emotional, intellectual, professional, social and spiritual development. An additional role of individual mentors is to sign the forms needed to prolong the due dates of an assessment.

The freshly established [Centre of Leadership of Mentoring](#) and its project leader are in charge of coordinating the mentoring activities and refreshing the network of mentors. The Seminary offers supportive guidelines, writing materials and short courses for those who will become mentors. The next course for mentors will be at the end of January, 2025. At least once a year, we ask mentors for feedback about the process (not content) of the mentoring. We have received several confirmations about the importance of the role of mentors in student and alumni feedback. They mention and value it also in connection to their mental health questions. As in the case of individual mentoring, the initiative lays on the student to contact their mentor (another good practice of a self-directed learner), they know that in case of depression or some other severe mental health condition, mentors will contact them.

In the process of individual mentoring there have been cases where we realise that a mentor is not enough – the student needs psychological counselling or in some cases even psychiatric help. Our mentors have been trained to know their limits and do what is best for the students at the given moment. The School does not have its own psychological help, but there is a strong connection with [Foundation From Friend to Friend](#) for that.

In addition to highly valuing mentoring, students also value breakfasts together. These usually happen every morning of the study session. They are held between 8-9 in the morning before lectures begin. Students and teachers take turns preparing these meals and many students come earlier to have time to talk to each other. Every first session of the year will be organised at a camping site where students spend 24/7 together, swim and go to a sauna, take part in the worship service and other activities. We have learned that a good school community has a strong, supportive influence. Another form of emotional support is prayer time – every day at the school, from 10.30 to 11 one of the students leads the morning prayer time. Usually, it is a personal story of faith and/or growth, but also involves a time of prayer where, in several cases, students share their prayer requests and, in most cases, there are people taking personal time for these students, who need discussion and prayer.

Students and alumni have been asked about the support services of the Seminary regularly, among other questions. There are questions about the experience with mentors, final thesis supervision, leadership of the school and even about the fairness of tuition. The last survey (2024, n=13) among the students mentioned that they have gotten help with the due dates and technical questions, finding literature and information. They are also grateful for flexibility with their homework, prayer support, discussions with co-students, and mentoring groups. Most of them do not mention more need of support, just encouragement to continue with mentoring and say that sometimes feedback could be better.

Career counselling of the students is done both by mentors and internship supervisors. The Seminary has trained their internship supervisors with the financial support of Innove project [1019-2020](#). The process of internship is written in the [Description of practical training](#) (In Estonian).



There is a new role from spring 2024 – a dean of students. She supports students in all kinds of areas and answers their questions. Currently, the Seminary does not have long-term international students. However, in case we have such students in the future, the dean of students will also support their studies.

The Rector usually helps students who need to compile individual curriculum/study plans to talk through their preferences, possibilities and areas of interest. This is often done before their studies begin. Several students study at a lower speed and are helped to find the best way to do this. Faculty members are also flexible in taking into consideration challenges students are facing.

Participation in study sessions has been made flexible by means of Zoom (The dean of students usually prepares the link and students themselves help their co-students connect). We strongly encourage the physical presence of students during the study sessions, but there are circumstances which make this impossible and they must study from a distance. Another support for their study is that we audio record all lectures – this helps those who cannot attend the lectures synchronously over Zoom, are sick or busy because of their work. Additionally, it is a big help for those whose mother tongue is not Estonian (in BA) or Estonian or English (in MA) – they can listen to the lectures several times and learn both the content and the language better.

The Seminary has a physical and a digital [library](#) and its students can have access to the main data-bases through the libraries of Tartu and Tallinn University. All students must use the Moodle environment – there they get all important information, find their study materials (both written and audio recordings), and also post their assessment methods. The Study Information System is called Tahvel and is shared with other applied HEIs of Estonia. There is plenty of information also on the homepage of the Seminary, for example See: [here](#).

Of course, despite all supportive systems, the Seminary has a number of dropouts. We always conduct an interview with them when they decide to go. The two most often reported problems are too heavy a workload and difficulties with studying part-time. Some students feel that they wanted to study more in a Bible School than in a theological university-level school. In a few cases, people have had such big problems with their mental health that they cannot continue. There are also problems with a few students who do not come to school for the lectures and other events, especially in the MA program. They are unwilling to attend the study sessions but hope to get things done on their own terms. As school leaders, we have talked with them, but the conversation continues. They get the material through audio lectures and Zoom, but this is not good enough quality. Therefore, at times, the support is not assisting the students in the right way.

**Table 6. The number of students discontinuing their studies**

Drop off	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024	2024/2025
First year of BA	2	2	1	1	-
Following years of BA	5	9	1	9	-



First year of MA	-	-	1	1	-
Following years of MA	-	-	-	-	-

The average study time to complete the BA program during last three years is 4,8 years. In the MA program no one has finished yet. The first graduates of the MA program will finish in June 2025.

However, the limitations of students and faculty are also strengths. Because of part-time studies and many other responsibilities students contribute to the life of society in many ways. One of our students is a wrestling coach, another offers care for children before adoption (kriisipere), some have gone to do development work in Africa, one contributes to the work of the Estonian Council of Churches, and all of them contribute to the life of local churches as one form of civil society. The school encourages and requires their active participation in the life of churches and society. This happens also through their internships and visits to local churches (usually in March) to serve and share information about the work of the Seminary.

**Strengths** are various non formal and formal support systems, including two forms of mentoring. Because the Seminary is a small school, we recognise problems earlier than usual. The number of support personnel has increased and there is an atmosphere of trust in the school.

**Areas of improvement** include diminishing the number of dropouts and helping others to stay on a regular rhythm of studies. A growing problem with mental health of the students needs new solutions as well. We will consider this new problem in the process of curriculum development, probably adding some more subjects about mental health such as a recently added elective course in burn out.

### 3.11 Research, development and/or other creative activity (RDC)

The Seminary's [Research Plan 2020-2026](#), approved in 2020 (and continuing through 2026) which was updated in 2021 and 2024, highlights the theme of Free Church Identity and the Church's Relationship with Society and three sub-topics. The Seminary's research, development, and creative activity (RDC) and aligns closely with its mission to support the church and society through academic inquiry and practical engagement. The Seminary is a small school representing a comparatively small community of evangelical believers speaking Estonian. This makes RDC activities simultaneously difficult and very important. Important, because there is virtually no one else creating good quality materials for this target group. Difficult, because there are not many funds to support the activity.

This commitment to serve through RDC activities is reflected in a focused RDC theme responding to societal expectations and the specific needs of the Free Church context in Estonia, aiming to deepen understanding of the free church's role within Estonian society and the wider international community. In addition to the main theme, we have created three more specific sub-themes suggested by the last IA panel. The role of looking after and leading the area of RDC is the responsibility of the director of development.

At the end of each year, the Advisory Board receives an annual evaluation of research activities, with results documented to inform further planning. This ongoing evaluation process ensures that the Seminary's RDC remains aligned with its mission and adapts to societal changes. Since the adoption of its research theme in 2020, the Seminary has made significant strides in scholarly output, event organization, and collaborative initiatives that advance knowledge of free church identity and its societal role. The following are examples of RDC activities.

### *3.11.1. Publications and Special Issues*

Comment: in the Estonian system there are different classifications of publications. 1.1., 1.2., 2.1. and 3.1. are peer-reviewed writings in international publications, which have ISSN code numbers and are distributed internationally. These are of the highest value. In addition to these, we counted 3.2. (articles or chapters published in books) and 3.3. (specific research publications like dictionaries, lexicons etc.) publications.

- The Seminary's faculty – both elected and visiting – have been actively publishing in high-impact forums. Between 2020 and 2024, Seminary faculty have published twelve scholarly articles in peer-reviewed journals across the 1.1-1.2 and 3.1. classification, which highlights their commitment to rigorous academic inquiry on Free Church and theological themes. In addition, Tarmo Toom and Toivo Pilli have published chapters in academic books, for example, Pilli in the T&T Clark Handbook of Anabaptism (2022).

**Table 7. Academic Publishing by Faculty**

<b>ACADEMIC PUBLISHING</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2024</b>
<b>Peer-reviewed and internationally published articles and chapters, 1.1, 1.2 and 3.1, 3.2, 3.3; books 2.1, 2.2 and 2.4 (total)</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>14</b>
Helen Haas	1			1	
Tõnu Lehtsaar		2	1		
Helle Liht	1	2			
Toivo Pilli	1	4	3	1	
Aleksander Pulver	3		2	2	1
Meego Rimmel	1	2	2	1	1
Tarmo Toom	4	3	3	2	2
Einike Pilli		1	4		1
Marge Unt	3	8	3	3	2
Dave Cupery		1			

Hele-Maria Kangro					1
Laur Lilleoja		1	1	1	2
Taavet Taimla		1	1		
Johanna Rosenvald		1			
Karl Pajusalu	6	8	8	7	4
Peter Penner		2			

- A dedicated issue of *Usuteaduslik Ajakiri* (Theological Journal) presented research specifically on free church theology and identity, addressing topics unique to the Estonian free church context <https://ojs.utlib.ee/index.php/UA/issue/view/1855>. The faculty also contributed to the *Seminary 100* commemorative volume, celebrating the Seminary's centennial with reflections on its historical and contemporary significance. See: <https://kus.kogudused.ee/kus-100-artiklid-tarkus-huuab-tanavail/>
- Additionally, articles in the *Armastame loodu(s)t* volume by the Estonian Council of Churches provided theological perspectives on ecology and creation care, reinforcing the Seminary's engagement with pressing contemporary ethical issues. <https://kus.kogudused.ee/ekn-seminar-armastame-loodut/>
- Noteworthy faculty publications include Tarmo Toom's textbook *Varakristlik teoloogia* (Theology of Early Christianity), and two books by Toivo Pilli, *Lähivaates* (In Close-Up) and *Selginemisi* (Clarifications), which explore core themes of free church historical identity and doctrine. These works provide a substantial foundation for understanding the theological underpinnings of free church identity and are widely used in both academic and congregational settings.
- Several of our faculty members contributed to the "Central and Eastern European Bible Commentary" and some (Meego Rimmel, Einike Pilli and Helina Voogne) presented papers at its presentation conference in Prague, Czech Republic, March 2023: <https://kus.kogudused.ee/middle-and-eastern-european-theologians-met-in-prague/>

### 3.11.2. Conferences we organised during recent years:

- Research Conference "Free Church DNA. Priesthood of All Believers Decoded" in 2024: The Seminary hosted a research conference in 2024, attracting scholars from Estonia and abroad to examine free church identity and its societal dimensions. Presenters were well-known European scholars. The theme was taken from the suggestions of our last accreditation panel – priesthood of all believers. People from different European countries and the USA attended. The event was done in cooperation with the European Baptist Federation. Even though it was in English and oriented more for theologians than laypersons, it gathered 49 people from almost 10 different nationalities, several theology students and faculty members among them.
- Conference "Sexuality and Relationships" in Tallinn (October 2023): the Seminary organised a conference on sexuality and relationships, offering insights into complex ethical issues. There were more than 200 participants, many of them young people.

- Jubilee-conference Seminary 100 was held in March 2022 in Tallinn and called “Wisdom Calls in the Streets”. This conference gathered international visitors and speakers from Germany and Norway, including also younger and older speakers like Mikael Raihnelgautz and Joosep Tammo from Estonia. More than 100 people attended, bringing together both employers and alumni.
- Conference “Small church and Big world” in Oct 2021 was meant for multi-generational church teams. Participation was good, we had more than 140 participants. See:: <https://kus.kogudused.ee/vaike-kogudus-ja-suur-maailm-jarelkaja/>
- Mission conference “Inspired and Sent” was organised in 2020.

People of the Seminary contributed to the following conferences during the last few years:

- “At the Truth, Love, and Unity: Challenges of Russian-Ukrainian War to European Baptists” conference in Warsaw (October 2023), the Seminary contributed both organizationally and academically, presenting papers on pastoral responses to the challenges arising from the war.
- One faculty member presented at an international conference on the Ukrainian diaspora during times of war, held in February 2024 in Heiligenkreuz, Austria, examining how theological frameworks address diaspora and displacement.
- IBTS Jubilee and Theological Colloquiums: Seminary faculty presented at the International Baptist Theological Study Centre (IBTS) 75<sup>th</sup>-anniversary conference in Amsterdam (May 2024) and at the University of Bucharest’s colloquium *The Role of Dialogue in Theological Education and Missions* (May 2024). Both events allowed faculty to engage with global perspectives on Free Church identity and mission.

### 3.11.3. Other creative activities:

- Erasmus BIP Courses: The Seminary has collaborated on Erasmus Blended Intensive Program (BIP) courses in Tallinn. In November 2023, faculty co-led sessions on academic mentorship, while a November 2024 course focused on primary theology and free church practices, reflecting the Seminary’s dedication to forming students through practical theology. See:: <https://kus.kogudused.ee/our-first-blended-intensive-program/>
- “Old Stories, Fresh Meaning” – 12 video lectures on the parables of the Bible. <https://kus.kogudused.ee/juubelikingitus/>
- “Hesekiel” – 4-part teaching series about the book of the prophet Hesekiel.
- Seven videos in the format of dialogue “Called in one Spirit” – about the year theme of the UFEBC for the local churches to use. <https://kus.kogudused.ee/uhes-vaimus-kutsutud-2/>
- Innovate approach: Problem-Based Learning Studios in the Master’s Program: The Seminary’s master’s program integrates problem-based learning, encouraging students to tackle real-world theological challenges and equipping them with critical ministry and community engagement skills. <https://kus.kogudused.ee/magistriope-kui-vastuste-otsimise-keskkond/>
- Animation for non-Christians about Christianity. Local churches asked us to produce something similar. Look here: <https://kus.kogudused.ee/mis-asi-on-ekbk-liit/>

- Art exhibition in Tartu and Tallinn with biblical lithographs by Ivana Noble (Czech Republic) together with the 2 ECTS course in cooperation with Tartu University Orthodox Theology Microdegree people. <https://kus.kogudused.ee/dialogis-kunstiga/>
- 11 new teaching videos about the Bible and an e-course (e-piiblikool) to organise these into a whole.
- Podcasts “Teoloogika” cover a large range of topics and has a wide listening audience. <https://kus.kogudused.ee/meedia/podcastid/>
- Documentaries, done in incorporation with professionals and students, available on our web page: <https://kus.kogudused.ee/meedia/videomaterjalid/>
- Development of the Piibel+ app, a study Bible. This has been very well received and used not only by the Seminary's home union, but also by other denominations. The app is in the process of further development. Soon we will try to add a video player and then the Bible Project videos, which have already been translated into Estonian, will be added to the possibilities of this app.

We have several upcoming collaborative efforts.

- International Ethics Training in Osijek (January 2025): Faculty will participate in ethics training at the Osijek Evangelical Theological Seminary in Croatia, focusing on the role of character formation and mentorship within Christian education.
- Hosting Czech Baptist Union Leaders (March 2025): The Seminary will host a delegation from the Czech Baptist Union, facilitating a cultural and theological exchange on Free Church practices and societal engagement.
- Institutional Accreditation Review (March 2025): The Seminary will undergo an accreditation review of its institution and master's program, a process that will inform future strategic and academic development.
- Believers Church Conference (June 2025): Seminary representatives will contribute to the 20th Believers Church Conference in Amsterdam, engaging in discussions on Free Church identity, mission, and its role in societal dialogue.
- Some books, which will be translated and published in 2025: “How to Read the Bible for All its Worth”, written by Gordon Fee and “Free Church, Free State”, written by Nigel G Wright.
- Original writing – Sander Tulk is gathering study material about Hermeneutics and Exegesis, which will be used not only by our students, but also by preachers in the local churches.
- Student Research on Free Church Practices. Some examples of current student research includes Vilver Oras’ thesis on pastoral mentorship practices in free church networks and Hele-Maria Kangro’s work on church outreach through social media. These contribute to the theme *Priesthood of All Believers*, supporting the Seminary’s focus on congregational engagement in society.
- The process of preparing the digital environment of collecting spiritual songs and instrumental music is a project in cooperation with some local churches and the Elders’ Board of UFEBC. In the future this will provide enormous help for church musicians.

By engaging in these extensive scholarly and practical endeavors, the Seminary fulfils its role as a hub of theological education, addressing both the needs of the church and society. The Seminary’s contributions underscore its unique position in Estonia as a Free Church institution

dedicated to nurturing future leaders, fostering theological understanding, and supporting societal well-being.

One way to evaluate the effectiveness of its RDC activities is to ask for feedback from the churches. Evaluations done in Fall 2024 showed that most of the 35 churches know, have used and value the RDC we produce – podcasts, study videos, training events and books we publish. One recent topic has been mental health and the growing need for pastoral care. We have tried to react to this need in several ways, also producing an e-course about the main themes of mental health from the perspective of Christian psychologists and psychiatrists.

The Seminary continues to work hard to create and encourage the environment for RDC activities. There is a remarkable financial resource dedicated to this part of the work. Financial resources, which go to RDC activities are as follows: €9337 (2024), €16317 (2023), €23751 (2022), €8027 (2021), €6938 (2020). These numbers vary because from year to year the activities are different and sometimes another part of the UFEBC pays for part of it as happened in 2024, but for a small school with no government support at all these numbers are not small.

The leadership of the school continues working hard to find project funding to support the RDC activities. There are already resources waiting for publishing two books next year (2025). The Rector continues asking questions of the educational leadership of the country about when and how to get private applied HEI support for their research (there was extra funding given to the publicly owned applied HEIs for RDC activities).

The School keeps rewarding faculty members financially who publish high-level research papers. The director of development encourages faculty members to publish and create material for the churches to use. Sometimes he sends encouragement with the list of journals where people could publish their papers. Actually, having an MA program in itself is a bridge to young researchers who are starting to write and create other RDC forms for local churches and the society. This is the place where teachers invite students to contribute to their research field, helping them through supervision and other professional contacts.

The Seminary also has one researcher, who is working on his PhD at Wrije Universitet, Amsterdam and who helps teachers and students with research questions. His area is cooperation between churches, and this is tightly connected to the program of development of churches, which is organised through the Center of Leadership and Mentoring.

The Seminary faculty have not only contributed to theological and church-based RDC. Rector Einike Pilli has been part of several expert groups, one in the area of RPL development, the other in the area of university level curriculum planning, and also helping “Kutsekoda” to prepare a new version of the Quality Framework for the Estonian work market.

In conclusion, the RDC activities of the Seminary have developed and grown in many ways. Having the Research Plan and more focused RDC activities are the biggest reasons for improvement, together with a growing number of talented and motivated faculty. But the RDC is not a thing in itself – its main aim is to strengthen and enhance the primary process – teaching and learning. It helps teachers to teach well, to be informed about the newest research and to think systematically through their own teaching.

**Strengths** of the standard are an increased number of high-level publications, partly due to new faculty members, but also because of the established Research Plan and more emphasis

on RDC activities. As the Seminary is an applied HEI serving the needs of the Free Church community, many of the activities are directed to local churches and are therefore more an applied rather than a basic level of research. One of the most innovative projects has been animation about Christianity for non-Christians, Piibel+ application (study Bible with different additions) and an international research conference about Free Church DNA in Fall 2024. Opening the MA program is just starting to add to the research the school is doing, but it is already there.

**Areas of improvement** are as follows: to encourage younger faculty and administrative team members to write an increasing number of articles, to find new resources for supporting RDC activities, and to continue development of the Piibel+ application for the everyday use of many Estonian Christians, especially younger ones.

### 3.12. Service to Society

The Seminary is dedicated to serving the broader Estonian society by sharing theological knowledge, fostering interdenominational cooperation, and addressing societal, social and environmental issues. This mission is reflected in its educational programs, publications, and collaborations, which aim to provide meaningful resources for a diverse audience within and beyond the Christian community in Estonia. Actually, it is difficult to differentiate the RDC activities of the Seminary from its current criteria as most of the development and creative parts of the RDC that we do are meant to do service to the broader community.

However, some areas of service are part of our DNA as a school and make us not only a university-level school but also a centre for lifelong learning. These areas are adult education, innovative networks, conferences, publications, cultural events, contributing to professional discussions, and ecumenical networks.

**Adult education and innovative networks** (called beehive, kãrg in Estonian) are part of everyday school life. Many of the individual training sessions have been developed as a response to the identified needs or based on feedback from our questionnaires.

We offer different types of adult education training. Short courses, organised and planned extra as adult education courses. Every year we organise some such courses. For example in January we will have an 8-hour course in suicidology with Adrian Sarbu from Bucharest. Often, these courses are jointly organised with Estonia's Ministry of Interior Affairs. For example, in 2023, we had a very well-attended course about caring for elderly people. We did this in Eluringikeskus (a home for the elderly owned by the UFEBC) and had more than 60 participants, some from other homes for elderly people. In earlier years, we have organised courses about Christian media, leading change, etc and these have reached representatives of different denominations, sometimes from among outside of Christianity. See:: <https://kus.kogudused.ee/rahu-voimalikkusest-nuti-ja-arevuse-ajastul/>, <https://kus.kogudused.ee/erilised-eakad/> and others.

We also offer several micro-credentials as a form of adult education, which are formed from the subjects of BA and MA curriculum. From our BA curriculum we offer micro-credentials like "Bible for Yourself and for Teaching", "ABC of Pastoral Care" (most popular), "Basic course of the church leader". There is also a concentration of MA courses in the form of micro-credentials, but nobody has been interested in the during the past two years and we are considering whether to continue.



One new form of short courses is “kärg” (beehive) – an innovative network for people in a certain field of ministry. During 2024, we had three gatherings – for Christian teachers, for church pastoral care workers and for those who are interested in church development. See: <https://kus.kogudused.ee/hingehoidjate-karg-opetas-paremini-abivajajaid-markama-ja-toetama/>, <https://kus.kogudused.ee/kristlastest-opetajad-said-kokku/>. Earlier, we had these innovative networks for church musicians (twice), church planters, new and young preachers, Christian media workers etc. Next year (2025) we plan to have a similar gathering for Christian parents, preachers and church leaders.

Through this partnership, the Seminary supports programs aimed at enhancing societal well-being, focusing on community service projects that address social and spiritual needs. This collaboration underscores the Seminary’s commitment to public service and strengthens its impact on the broader society. In February 2023, the Seminary received a letter of appreciation from the Ministry of Inner Affairs.

Recognizing the importance of mental health, the Seminary has organised several adult training sessions on topics related to spiritual and emotional well-being. In some cases, the video materials or e-course from these sessions have been made available to a wider audience, supporting churches, community groups, and individuals in understanding and addressing mental health issues.

The Seminary organises special shorter courses also for church planters (5 ECTS), children and youth workers. These are done in cooperation with the Children and Youth Centre of UFEBC, but participation is far greater than only by UFEBC church members.

“Võta vabalt” (*take freely*) is another adult education possibility. It offers the chance for someone to study one subject together with BA and MA students and use it in another university as an elective course (vabaaaine). Micro-credentials – we have four different micro-credentials, which are thematic clusters of BA or MA subjects. For now, we have had 17 participants taking BA micro-credentials the most popular is “ABC of Pastoral Care”.

Longer courses like Bible School (9 ECTS), e-Bible School (3 ECTS) and Futuurum and Kasvuhoone (Green House) for younger leaders have high participation numbers and are often the first step before entering the formal program.

**Conferences** are usually organised once or twice a year. While in 2024 we had a research conference, most of our annual conferences are meant for the broader public, including church members and even people outside the churches. Names and short descriptions of the conferences are listed above. All of our conference plenary speeches are recorded and freely available on our web page. For example, See: <https://kus.kogudused.ee/seksuaalsus-suhted-ja-sussid/>

The numbers of participants in adult education, innovative networks and conferences during the last few years are as follows:

- 2021 – 215 participants in the conferences; 917 participants in adult training courses.
- 2022 – 140 participants in the conferences; 406 participants in adult training courses.
- 2023 – 221 participants in the conferences; 528 participants in adult training courses.
- 2024 – 49 participants in the conferences; 419 participants in adult training courses.

**Publications** take different forms. The Seminary publishes books designed to engage and educate a wide Christian readership, offering resources that are accessible and relevant to both

laypersons and scholars. Notable recent publications include “Jumala läheduses” (Approaching God), which explores patterns of Christian worship, and “How to Read the Bible” a guide that provides readers with foundational skills for biblical interpretation and application in their daily lives. These works contribute to the spiritual and intellectual enrichment of Estonia’s Christian community, supporting personal and congregational growth.

Another format of “publications” comes as **videos or audio materials**, including podcasts and documentaries. We have also prepared, taught, recorded and disseminated several small group study materials, all available on our [web page](#). The Seminary has received [good feedback](#) from our churches (questionnaire in Fall, 2024 and earlier) stating that people are using these for themselves, smaller groups in the church and also for the worship service. Recently, the Seminary’s e-Bible School has produced a series of educational videos designed to support religious education in Estonia. It has recorded 11 videos to introduce the Bible and its content. These videos will be available for religious education teachers, offering tools to enrich their classrooms and engage students in meaningful discussions on faith and spirituality. Additionally, these resources are accessible online, enabling broader community engagement and making biblical learning more accessible to those interested in exploring Christian teachings.

In response to the growing awareness of ecological issues, the Seminary has developed an online course on creation care. It is an interactive course that offers a theological perspective for creation care, discusses historic and contemporary reasons for the ecological crisis, provides scientific insights and ideas for sustainable living, and inspiration for incorporating ecological themes in church liturgy. The participants are asked to design and implement a church or community-based project advocating for sustainable living and creation care as a practical assignment. By making this course widely accessible, the Seminary encourages Christians and other interested individuals to thoughtfully engage with ecological responsibility.

Two other digital platforms, mentioned earlier, are also forms of serving the broader society – app “Piibel+” as a study Bible (already broadly used in Estonia, especially among the younger generation) and a digital environment for Christian music, which will be presented in 2025 and is open to all organisations willing to use it.

The Seminary has organised several **cultural events** as well. In spring 2024 we opened the exhibition of biblical lithographs by Ivana Noble in Tartu Salem church and later moved it to Tallinn as well. We have organised two high level jazz concerts during the last years – one in Fall 2024, another in Spring 2022. Not to mention several book publishings, which have all been well attended.

Lead team, faculty members, and Seminary students contribute in many ways to **professional discussions and ecumenical networks**. For example, we have a general secretary and vice president of the Estonian Council of Churches among our students. One of our alumni members is the leader of the Christian TV station TV7. Our people contribute to Christian and secular radio programs (Raadio 7, Pereraadio, Vikerraadio), Christian TV programs and write for newspapers about Christianity and ethical issues. They also contribute to the associations and communities of Church history (Toivo Pilli, Eesti Kirikuloo Selts/The Society of Estonian Church History, chairman), bioethics (Meego Remmel, a member of national and international bioethics committees), education (Einike Pilli, member of several expert groups and trainer of RPL and assessment), creation care (Helle Liht, member of the Christian Network for Creation Care, and representing the UFEBC in the Estonian Council of Churches Creation Care Working

Group) etc. These are all possibilities to disseminate our knowledge and acquired experience and make it a good use in broader society.

The Seminary is committed to fostering unity and mutual respect among Estonia's Christian denominations. Students from various traditions, including Lutheran, Methodist, and Pentecostal backgrounds, participate in seminary courses, creating a rich, ecumenical environment where dialogue and collaboration are encouraged. This interdenominational approach allows the Seminary to serve the needs of diverse faith communities, promoting understanding and shared values across traditions. By providing accessible resources, fostering interdenominational cooperation, and addressing contemporary societal issues, the Seminary plays an essential role in enriching both the church and the wider community in Estonia.

**Strengths.** We consider service to society to be one of our greater strengths. During different formats like adult education courses, conferences, publications and contributions to different discussions we serve so many more people than merely UFEBC members. Recently the innovative networks have been surprisingly well attended with participants from several different denominations. Books we have published and cultural events we have organised have been well received.

**Areas of improvement** are mostly in the sustainable organisation of these activities. 'As BA and MA education constitute our main task, we need a better structure of planning and executing the ideas, which we get through the feedback and among our team members. We have taken first steps to do that gathering the Policy of Administration and describing the working document of Distribution of Roles. This will enable us to be even more effective in this area.

## 4.Re-assessment self-analyses report of MA program

### 4.1 Introduction

In Spring 2022 the Seminary got permission and initial accreditation for the Master's Program, which was opened in Fall 2022. All the teachers we had planned to be involved have come to teach as they promised and have made the program really valuable. There is a very high percentage of teachers with PhD degrees – currently, only three teachers do not have PhDs.

The program has started well. Therefore, we see good reasons to continue. We have had admission during three autumns to three different courses. Altogether, we have admitted 27 students, 25 are continuing their studies and only two have dropped out. There has been a growing variety of Christian denominations represented among students – in addition to UFEBEC and the Estonian Pentecostal Church, there are people from the Estonian Methodist Church and the Association of Free Churches of Estonia (Eesti Vabakoguduste Liit). Three students do not speak Estonian as their mother tongue. The first graduates will defend their theses in June 2025.

In the initial assessment by HAKA, the Seminary MA program got two suggestions for development:

1. Syllabuses (presented before the starting of studies) did not describe study methods. The requirement was to express study and assessment methods more clearly in syllabuses.

Response: for now we have syllabuses for all subjects and these include study and assessment methods. Look here to see the syllabuses of this school year:

<https://kus.kogudused.ee/tasemeope/magistrioppe/magistrioppe-ainekavad/> and one example of the elective subject ([Letter to Romans](#))

2. Attestation of academic staff had not happened and there were no regulations to do so.

Response: [Regulations of attestation](#) were accepted in March 2022. First attestation happened on June 9, 2022. Four of the elected teachers received attestation, one did not. The teacher who did not get attestation because of a lack of research and writing, got 5 months to find ways to publish some of his research. As he was not able to do so, in spring 2024 we had an open competition for the role of the teacher in Biblical Studies. Sander Tulk was selected as the new elected teacher in fall 2024. The next process of attestation will be in Spring-Summer 2027.

We are sure that the MA curriculum is needed because there are no other free church types of evangelical MA degrees offered – neither in Estonia nor in Finland and Latvia. At the same time the MA level is the common prerequisite for professional life these days – for example, the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church considers this as a prerequisite for the priest's role. Opening MA level studies had been in earlier versions of the Strategic Planning Documents. This time it says: “We respond to the needs of the Union promptly” and interest to study in the MA program shows that there was a need. The MA curriculum corresponds to the vocational standard of the chaplain and is an important prerequisite for working as a pastoral care specialist.

The extra value of the new MA is in the strong connection between (Free) Church and Society. While the Lutheran Theological Institute teaches a MA level course “The Story of Christian Culture” and Tartu University Theology Faculty offers a MA in Religious Studies, the Seminary offers a program combining theology (with a special focus on free church life and its service to the wider community) and society (with a special focus on the contemporary needs

in pluralistic societies). So, the Master's program "Theology and Society" is also designed to address a growing need in Estonia's theological education landscape, serving a diverse group of students who are actively engaged in faith-based and social work.

The program provides unique study opportunities for individuals who will serve as church workers, leaders, chaplains, counselors, religious education teachers, and those occupying positions connected to religion or theology within society. Additionally, it welcomes those with higher education in other fields who wish to gain further theological expertise, such as journalists or other professionals seeking specialised theological training.

This program is a natural extension of the undergraduate curriculum in "Free Church Theology and Leadership," which primarily focuses on practical theological training for church workers. However, the Master's level curriculum takes a more theoretical approach, specifically designed for those who are not only passionate about practical service but also keen on deep intellectual engagement with theological concepts. The program thus helps those who want to explore theological ideas at a profound level while maintaining a connection to their practical work in various societal contexts. Moreover, the program is accessible to individuals who do not have a background in theology, as we offer a parallel online Bible school to support their academic journey. This inclusivity ensures that those with different academic backgrounds can integrate theological education into their careers and life pursuits.

An additional benefit of the revised curriculum is its adaptability. The program accommodates students with young children or those living outside of Estonia, making it flexible enough to serve individuals in diverse personal and professional situations. In such a way, this Master's program addresses the educational needs of a broad range of professionals working at the intersection of theology and society, whether in Estonia or nearby countries. By providing a platform for deeper theological reflection alongside practical engagement, the program is equipping individuals with the knowledge and skills necessary to contribute meaningfully to society, the church, and their respective fields.

Most of the data needed for this report is already included in the IA report. Therefore, in the following section, we will provide cross references to its parts and add comments about the MA program and other requirements, which help to cover the needed criteria.

## 4.2 Study program

See: 3.7. Study Program in the IA report

Additionally, see the [Comparison of the Higher Education Standard and Seminary's Curricula](#) (APPENDIX 4).

The [MA curriculum](#) is in tight connection with the main theme of the research plan 2020–2026 – "Free Church Identity and the Relationship between Church and Society". The vision of the Seminary is "The Seminary is a nationally and internationally recognised evangelical free church education centre, which through its activities empowers local churches and has a positive impact on society." As the BA concentrates more on church life, the MA curriculum puts its focus on the interplay of church and society, thus building the bases for the positive impact on society.

One of the special features of the program is its problem-based structure, which helps students to relate different subjects to each other and see connections between them. The three first

modules or studios, as we call them, are built around connecting problems, which will be brainstormed, discussed and analysed by first year MA students. The modules themselves are related to two different areas in their titles: Bible and Society, Theology and Identity, Leadership and Communication. During the second year, students are expected to find problematic areas around these connections by themselves to prepare for the third-year Master thesis.

There is a plan to develop the MA program further, after the first round is done. The [Quality Assurance System](#) describes ways of asking for feedback about the program – following of every subject, alumni feedback after graduation, drop outs immediately after dropping out, students, alumni and faculty every three years. This system of feedback will give us enough information to know when the time is right to do smaller or larger adjustments of the curricula. If major adjustments in curricula are needed, all interest groups will be involved: alumni, students, teachers, and employers.

There have already been some adjustments made influenced by the feedback we have got (from mentoring groups, from written feedback and from the attendance):

- We prolonged the program from two years to three because of student feedback. Because of their workload in paid jobs, in most cases voluntary church ministry and family responsibilities, they felt that there was no time to concentrate on the planned workload as first established. This change was made from Fall 2023.
- We have been looking for the best rhythm for study sessions. The first year we had six 3–4-day study sessions in the school year (2022/23) and four Zoom-days in between. The second year (2023/24) we diminished the number of Zoom hours and increased the hours of actual meetings. Study sessions were mainly from Monday to Thursday. This year (2024/25) we planned study sessions together with the BA group, partly on overlapping days. Because there are 11 sessions now, these are shorter and there is less time between meetings. Also, we no longer teach on Mondays because, for some of our students, this was a very busy day at work. Now, it seems that for some people (especially those who come from the Estonian islands) this is too demanding a rhythm. Therefore, we plan to do a questionnaire before we start planning for the next school year.
- During the program we have received feedback about subjects we have planned for the curriculum. There is interest in having more subjects in the area of Biblical studies from one hand and more content about the society on the other. We have realized that some planned subjects are a little too “soft” and could be moved to electives. There is quite a big interest in studying Estonian Church and Culture History as a BA level elective, which could in the future belong to the MA curriculum in some form. Therefore, we plan to make some changes in the curriculum next year.

As mentioned, students are asking to have more subjects about the Bible and more about society. Just as the first version of the MA curriculum was developed with strong cooperation with different interest groups (See: IA report, 3.7. Study Program), the next phase of the development will be done similarly. We plan to start with the students, but also ask faculty members and employers, including the UFEBC Elder’s Board members. Additionally, the new addition of the Standard of Higher Education will be taken into consideration.

**Strengths** of the study program are its problem-based nature and planned methods to connect



the content of the subjects through the discussion of and reading about the problems, designed for studies.

**Area of improvement** is to re-arrange some parts of the curriculum – to move some compulsory subjects to electives, to add more subjects about the Bible and increase the proportion of the topics about society. We have gathered feedback over the first 2,5 years and found several ways to improve the curriculum. Additionally, we have looked for better coherence between BA and MA programs. The Seminary plans to start this curriculum development process in January 2025 by gathering all stakeholders and discussing the possibilities with them. We hope to use the adjusted version already for the 2025/26 school year if possible.

### 4.3 Learning and Teaching

See 3.8. Learning and Teaching in the IA report

Just as on the BA level, mentoring groups are an important part of the context of supporting the generic competencies, especially time management skills. Additionally, generic competencies like English, teamwork, analytical thinking etc. are also written into several syllabuses.

See: examples of syllabuses [here](#) and more specifically here:

- [How Do Christians Read the Old Testament, 4 ECTS](#) (in English)
- [Practice: From Hermeneutics to Message, 4 ECTS](#) (in Estonian)
- [Philosophy of Religion, 2 ECTS](#) (in Estonian)
- [Paul's letter to Romans, 3 ECTS](#) (in English, elective course)
- [Social Literacy, 2 ECTS](#) (in Estonian)

Balance between contact hours on-site, in a web environment and independent work have not yet been settled. We keep looking for the best way to offer students high-level interactive input from faculty and group members in the school environment while trying to be flexible and using digital technologies. The portion of independent studies remains quite large as our students are motivated to study by themselves and have mostly good study skills for that level as well. They have also reported creative ways of studying together, especially for the more demanding subjects taught by Tarmo Toom.

Admission regulations are set. However, as almost one-third of the Master program happens in English and the level of English language skill of a few students has not always been good enough for studies, we plan to introduce the practice of asking some questions in English during the admission interview. If there are enough students interested, we will also offer an elective course in Theological English.

**Strengths** of the teaching and learning process are as follows: strong content, clear syllabuses, and high motivation of students to find best ways of studying.

**Areas of improvement** are using English during the admission interviews, which we plan to do next summer and finding a good balance between on-site and online contact hours. To find out the best ways to achieve a good balance, we plan to conduct a survey among MA students in spring.

## 4.4 Organisation of Studies

[Study regulations](#) are clear and renewed regularly. There is quite a lot of flexibility in the study process: students can choose their own speed of studying (in case of learning disabilities), students who live further away are offered the possibility to attend over Zoom, even if they are encouraged to attend on site, in case students cannot attend neither on site nor in Zoom, they are offered audio recordings of the lectures to listen to afterwards. These recordings will appear in the Moodle environment at the latest one week after each study session. The possibility of repeatedly listening to the lectures is helpful to those who are slower in their processing and/or who are not studying in their mother language. There is also the possibility to move at a faster speed – we have several MA students who have done part of their Theology studies at the TCMi MA level and who can use the RPL process to get these studies recognised. See more about the [RPL regulations](#) and practice at 3.9. Student Assessment in the IA report.

MA students have applied for RPL several times. Recently we have managed to recognise all for which they have applied. This has been due to two reasons. First, we have managed to offer them good RPL counselling. Secondly, even though some of the RLP applications have been first partially recognised, students have completed the needed additions and gotten full recognition for their applications.

**Table 8. The RPL applications by MA students**

MA RPL	2022/2023	2023/2024	2024/2025 (autumn)
Applied (number of ECTS)	45	34	39
Recognised (number on ECTS)	29	34	39

There is not too much practical training in this program. However, there are two places. “Practice: From Hermeneutics to Message” is a practical training, which happens in the classroom setting. For “Master’s Apprenticeship” as another form of practical training or internship students have to decide the area of their Master’s thesis and then prepare for this work in some “hands on” way. For example, those who do historical research work in archives. Others conduct preliminary interviews to map the area of research more clearly. A third group of students observe certain situations or investigate on web pages. As this apprenticeship happens in the second year of their studies, it helps them to start dealing with their thesis studies early enough. In addition to the practical part, they need to start reading about their area of research as well.

Because of the nature of the apprenticeship, we do not have agreements with special organizations. However, in case there is a need, the Seminary will send a letter or call to agree upon the conditions of apprenticeship.

As the program is very new, there are only two first cases of mobility – 2nd year Student Kadi Vildersen will take part of the course at Norwegian School of Theology and Leadership (HLT) and 3rd year student Daily Adam will participate in Nordic Consultation of Female Theologians in Tampere, Finland, both in January 2025. However, there are more coming.

Different support systems for students are described in IA report 3.10. Learning Support Systems. Mentoring is one of these, which offers possibilities for study, career and psychological counselling. Mentoring groups also operate as the first context where we hear about difficulties. For example, during the first year of the MA program we had one foreign teacher from the US, who did not understand the study load of 4 ECTS and had planned his course at least twice more demanding than expected. Because of mentoring groups and non-formal interactions, we were able to address the issue and the teacher changed his requirements quickly. Complaints are handled according to the rules written in the Study Regulations. However, as the mentoring groups and formally gathered feedback function well, the Seminary is able to solve possible problems before these get too big.

Quality assurance system (see more at 3.3. Quality Culture in the IA report) functions to gather regular feedback also for the development of curricula, individual subjects and the study environment. Feedback will be gathered also from future alumni and their employers after they go to work with their freshly completed education.

**Strengths** of the program are different flexible methods to study on site and listen to the lectures later. Another strength is flexibility in the speed of studies.

**Areas of improvement** are student mobilities. We are in the process of building strong connections with other evangelical schools, where our MA students could go to short or longer exchanges. One upcoming possibility will be in August – Leuven ETF Summer School, our new Erasmus+ partner, where we hope to send our MA students.

#### 4.5 Academic Staff

See 3.6. Teaching Staff in the IA report and [Faculty and Subjects MA](#) (APPENDIX 3).

As has been said in the IA report, the MA program has made our school faculty much stronger and more highly qualified, because we have tried to hire only the best teachers on the PhD level. The hiring process was done in most cases among those who have active church membership and good skills of teaching, in addition to a PhD. We are happy to have Dr Tarmo Toom return to Estonia just before our program started, Prof Tõnu Lehtsaar has been willing to contribute, Dr Aleksander Pulver became a church member during the period of the start of the program and the willingness of several international teachers like Fred Hansen, Dave Cupery and Jozsef Steiner to contribute to our program.

Thus, the number of elected and visiting teachers is enough for teaching and supervising at the MA program. The average age of the MA faculty is 49 years. Some visiting teachers such as Marge Unt have helped our students with their specialist knowledge in addition to their teaching commitments. Aleksander Pulver is supervising Master Theses about the mental health of pastors. Saying that, we still look forward to training our own younger generation of teachers to the PhD level, so we are prepared for generation change in 8–10 years. At the same time, the MA program itself prepares new faculty members and from their study habits we recognise who has potential to become future PhD level faculty.

Our faculty members regularly participate in conferences and training events. In several cases some of them also teach regularly in other higher education institutions such as IBTSC (Amsterdam) and TCMI (Vienna), which enriches their competence. Faculty members like Meego Rimmel, Toivo Pilli, Tarmo Toom, and Einike Pilli have been part of international mobilities of teaching and training.

Their attendance in international projects is seen through their ETIS accounts and in the [Report of the Research Plan 2024](#) (APPENDIX 6). More information about training our faculty has been taking part in, both digital and didactical, See: [Faculty attendance in trainings and conferences](#) (APPENDIX 9). There is more information about the RCA activities in 3.11 Research, development and/or other creative activity (RDC) in the IA report. However, some of the faculty members have very heavy administrative loads and would need some ways to free time for research. Some steps toward the solution have already been taken.

Each time after the study subject is completed, we gather feedback from students and forward this to teachers. We have struggled with finding a good balance between encouraging students to fill these without making it compulsory. However, teachers take the feedback seriously and in some cases ask for feedback themselves as part of teaching the course.

Elected faculty members have gone through the attestation process as planned. Faculty members who teach for the MA course have been very supportive of students and the program. They have appreciated knowing what goes on even if they are only visiting teachers. We look for ways to create an even stronger community of teachers by different means in the future.

**Strengths** of the academic staff are a very high percentage of teachers with PhDs, who are committed to helping students in their studies and research. Some of our faculty members are very strong in publishing.

**Areas of improvement** are systematic work already in progress with the next generation of PhD teachers, and stable high-level publishing with some of the teachers whose administrative load is high. For the last challenge we will increase the number of administrative workers, share the load of financial responsibility with UFEBC executive team members, and if possible, offer short possibilities for “writing leave”.

## 4.6 Learning and Teaching Environment

As we teach in the area of humanities, the physical study environment is not as important as in sciences. However, we have good and flexible facilities in Koskla 18. Our main campus in Koskla 18, Tallinn, is very easy to access and flexible to use – we can adjust study rooms to be larger and smaller and use, if necessary, the UFEBC rooms for our classrooms. As we do not operate the rooms, this helps the Seminary administration to focus only on the issues of study. At the same time, as the rooms are owned by the Social work unit of UFEBC, we can use the classes for a very reasonable price.

In addition to our main site, at least once a year, we use the camping site/training centre in Nuutsaku, Viljandimaa, also owned by UFEBC. Additionally, local churches operate as extensions for our possibilities, if needed. A newly built church in Viljandi, for example, is usually a place for daily studies when we have camping-types of study sessions in August.

Our Digital environment is shared with the UFEBC and is thus continuously developed and looked after. The Seminary uses the study information system Tahvel and Moodle environment for study support. We look forward to a better connection between Moodle and Tahvel, but patience is a good Christian value and an important generic competence to develop. We already initiated one change in Tahvel about the form of RPL, so we keep giving feedback.

Students get digital support from the academic dean, educational designer and teachers, if needed. The Seminary has a fresh and sufficient physical library and a growing digital library. Digital science databases are available in larger libraries, including the University of Tartu and Tallinn and the National Library. More about the supportive systems of the school See: 3.10. Learning Support Systems in the IA report.

**Strength** of the study environment is the flexible and well-situated campus. Digital environments are well functioning.

**Areas of improvement** are better connection between Moodle and Tahvel. For that, we keep giving feedback to the working group of Tahvel.

#### 4.7 Financial Resources

See: 3.2. Resources in the IA report for general information about the Seminary's resources, financial resources are included. See also: [Budgets 2020-2024](#) (APPENDIX 2) for the budgets of the last five years and [Financial Analyses of MA Program](#) (APPENDIX 7).

Budgets of the Seminary have been stable and there has been a growing stability. In addition to the actual money in use there are funds to back up the work of the Seminary. We have been able to pay scholarships to students (which means they are responsible for smaller tuition payments) because of interest coming from these funds, support from our foreign partners such as the Whittier Area Community Church and Alongside Ministries who gave scholarships especially for MA students, and other donors (one of our alumni promised 3000 euros for the next 5 years). However, scholarships are something that we are not obliged to offer in case funds become insufficient in the future.

Before opening the MA program, we did a [Financial Analyses of MA Program](#) (APPENDIX 7) of the cost of the program. Even as it is not possible to count the administrative costs clearly as most of the roles overlap with other activities, we can say the prediction has been realistic. At the moment, financial resources are available for good quality studies, sufficient support for development of students and faculty, and for RDC activities. We have been able to grow the number of administrative staff, which has been helpful.

Of course, we hope that one day private applied HEIs like us get at least some support both for students' studies and RDC activities in the same way as other applied HEIs, as we teach taxpayers like any other Estonian university.

The Seminary has done a [Risk Analyses](#) and has a good connection with UFEBC and its financial mechanisms. Part of the financial projection is described in [Financial Analyses of MA Program](#) (APPENDIX 7). The Seminary and UFEBC in its executive board keep developing the school and managing risks, so that quality education will be guaranteed in the future. Annual overview of the year's financial information (majandusaasta aruanne in Estonian) of UFEBC is [here](#).

**Strengths** of the financial resources are stability and growing support of the UFEBC. We also consider growing number of student scholarship as a strength.

**Areas of improvement** are the fair treatment by the Ministry of Education so that our school would receive in future at least some support for the students and RDC activities as other private schools and other applied HEIs are getting. We keep using democratic means to achieve that outcome.