

Decision on the initial assessment of the Master's degree programme in Theology and Society of the Theology study programme group of the EEKBL Free Church Theological Seminary

31.03.2022

The Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education of the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education has decided to propose to the Minister of Education and Research to grant the EEKBL Free Church Theological Seminary the right to provide instruction to the Theology and Society Master's programme of the Theology study programme group for a period of three years.

On the basis of subsection 9 (3) and subsection 10 (1) of the Higher Education Act, and clause 32.4 of the document 'Guidelines for Initial Assessment and Re-assessment of Study Programme Groups', established by the Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education of the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education, the Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education of the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education (hereinafter referred to as the Council) declares the following:

1. The Ministry of Education and Research forwarded the data required for the initial assessment of the Master's programme in Theology and Society of the Theology study programme group of the Estonian Free Church Theological Seminary (hereinafter the Higher Education Institution) to the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education (EKKA) on 15.12.2021.
2. With the order of 24.01.2022, the Director of the EKKA approved the following members of the Committee for Initial Assessment of the Master's programme in Theology and Society of the Theology study programme group (hereinafter referred to as the Committee).

Ringo Ringvee – chairman of the committee	Advisor, Religious Affairs Department, Ministry of the Interior, PhD
Katre Koppel	PhD student, University of Tartu
Anneli Randla	Associate Professor, Senior Research Fellow, Estonian Academy of Arts
Priit Rohtmets	Associate Professor, University of Tartu; Professor, Head of Development, Institute of Theology of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church.

3. The following Master's programme was submitted for assessment:

Theology and society

4. The Committee examined the data provided by the Higher Education Institution and the Ministry of Education and Research. The Committee's visit to the Higher Education Institution took place on 14.02.2022.
5. The Committee submitted the draft assessment report to the Higher Education Institution for comments on 10.03.2022.
6. The Higher Education Institution submitted its comments on the assessment report on 11.03.2022.

7. The Committee submitted the final assessment report to the Council on 21.03.2022. The Committee's report is an integral part of the Decision.
8. The Committee's assessments were as follows:

Quality of learning	Partially conforms to the required standard
Resources	Conforms to the required standard
Sustainability	Conforms to the required standard

9. The Council discussed the documents of the initial assessment of the Master's programme in Theology and Society of the Theology study programme group of the EEKBL Estonian Free Theological Seminary at the 31.03.2022 meeting with the participation of 9 members and, based on the assessment report and the data provided by the Higher Education Institution to the Estonian Education Information System, decided to highlight the following strengths; areas for improvement and recommendations; and opportunities for development:

a) Quality of learning:

Strengths:

- Various stakeholders have been involved in the design and development of the study programme.
- Problem-based learning supports the achievement of the study programme's objectives and learning outcomes.
- The teaching staff are aware of the study programme's objectives and have extensive teaching and supervising experience.

Areas for improvement and recommendations:

- The form and content of the Master's thesis and the Master's project need to be clarified, e.g. compliance with the learning outcomes and the requirements and objectives set for the Master's project.
- There are currently no pre-arrangements with traineeships. In order to meet the expectations of students (but also their previous experience), the panel recommends that, when concluding pre-placement agreements, consideration should be given to entering into cooperation with different organisations contributing to the development of society.
- Even though it is a small higher education institution where academic staff interact closely with management, feedback from academic staff should be formalised. Similarly, feedback from employers should be formalised.

Development opportunities:

- The title and content of the study programme are broadly in line, although in the absence of syllabuses, it is difficult to adequately assess the correspondence between subject content and title for all subjects. It is advisable to formulate subject titles in such a way that the content is already clear in the subject title (e.g. Mission-Conscious Leadership and the Synergy of Talents, Vision-Based Church).
- A more detailed description of studio and problem-based learning in the study programme or in the materials introducing the study programme.

b) Resources:

Strengths:

- Highly qualified, highly motivated academic staff.
- The number of academic staff involved to achieve the study programme's objectives and learning outcomes exceeds the number of students planned.

- Sufficient opportunities for self-development of teaching staff, including international mobility.
- The teaching infrastructure is up-to-date, and the premises have been recently renovated and furnished. The necessary digital infrastructure is also in place and is being upgraded.
- The Higher Education Institution contributes to the digital literacy of its staff.
- The Higher Education Institution has sufficient financial resources to start up the course and the school has a contingency plan to finance it if the tuition fees do not cover the planned costs.

Areas for improvement and recommendations:

- The attestation of academic staff has not yet taken place and there are no procedures for this. In order to provide more systematic feedback to academic staff, a procedure for the appraisal of academic staff should be established.

c) Sustainability:

Strengths:

- Adequate risk analysis and financial projections.
- The age composition of academic staff ensures the sustainability of the study programme.
- The Master's programme is seen as an opportunity to recruit new faculty.

10. If one of the assessment areas is rated as 'partially conforms to the required standard' and the remaining areas are rated as 'conforms to the required standard', the Committee will consider the strengths and areas for improvement of the programme group and make one of the following decisions: (a) adopt a decision that the study conforms to the required standard and propose to the Minister of Education and Research to grant the Higher Education Institution the right to provide instruction in the respective study programme group and study level, or (b) adopt a decision that the study partially conforms to the required standard and propose to the Minister of Education and Research to grant the Higher Education Institution the right to provide instruction in the respective study programme group and study level for a period of one to three years.
11. The Council considered the strengths and areas for improvement of the Higher Education Institution in the implementation of the Master's programme in Theology and Society of the Theology study programme group, and taking into account the areas for improvement identified in clause 9 of the decision:
- According to subsection 3 (2) of the Standard of Higher Education, the study programme and the organisation of studies must be *in line with the internal quality standards of the educational institution and national and international quality requirements and agreements*. In accordance with clause 9.3.7 of the Regulations of the EKKK 'Guidelines for Initial Assessment and Re-assessment of Study Programme Groups', higher education institutions must conduct *regular internal assessments, including the analysis and taking into account of feedback from various stakeholders (students, alumni, employers, academic staff)*. Although this is a small higher education institution, where academic staff interact closely with the management, feedback from both academic staff and employers needs to be formalised.
 - In accordance with clause 9.3.2 of the 'Guidelines for Initial Assessment and Re-assessment of Study Programme Groups', the organisation of the practical training is *regulated, requirements for the completion of practical training have been laid down and preliminary agreements concluded with organisations offering opportunities for practical training*. The Higher Education Institution does not have any pre-arrangements with traineeships. In order to meet the expectations of students (but also to build on students' previous experience), the Committee recommends that, in the context of pre-placement agreements, consideration should be given to entering into cooperation with different organisations contributing to the development of society.
 - Pursuant to subsection 35 (2) of the Higher Education Act, *the employer shall evaluate a regular academic staff member at least once every five years of employment*. The

assessment of academic staff has not yet taken place at the Higher Education Institution and there are no procedures for its implementation.

DECIDED:

- 1) Learning partially conforms to the required standard;**
- 2) To propose to the Minister of Education and Research to grant the right to provide instruction in the Master's degree programme in Theology and Society of the Theology study programme group at the EEKBL Estonian Free Theological Seminary for a period of three years.**

The decision was adopted by 9 votes in favour. Against 0.

12. If the person concerned does not agree with the substantive reasons for the assessment decision, he/she has the right to submit an objection to the EKKK Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education within 30 days of receipt of the decision. The Council shall send the objection to the EKKK Disputes Committee, which shall, within 5 days of receipt of the objection, give an unbiased written opinion to the Council on the merits of the objection. The Council shall prepare a reasoned reply to the objection within 30 days of receipt of the objection, also taking into account the reasoned opinion of the Disputes Committee.

Hillar Bauman
Council Secretary