

The decision of the Higher Education Assessment Council of the Estonian Quality Agency for Education

Baltic Methodist Theological Seminary

The decision on institutional accreditation

19 February 2025

The Higher Education Assessment Council of the Estonian Quality Agency for Education decided to accredit the Baltic Methodist Theological Seminary for seven years with a secondary condition.

Pursuant to clause 43.2 of the document “Guide to Institutional Accreditation” established on the basis of the authorisation contained in subsection 38(3) of the Higher Education Act and subsection 24(5) of the Statutes of the Education and Youth Board, the Higher Education Assessment Council of the Estonian Quality Agency for Education (hereinafter referred to as the Council) states the following:


1. The Baltic Methodist Theological Seminary (hereinafter: BMTS or higher education institution) agreed on the period for institutional accreditation with HAKA on 28 November 2023.
2. On 11 June 2024, the Director of HAKA approved the following composition of the committee for institutional accreditation (hereinafter referred to as the Committee):

Joke van Saane (Chair)	Rector, University of Humanistic Studies, Netherlands
Helen Thomas (Secretary)	Freelance Educational Consultant, United Kingdom
Heidi Maiberg	PhD candidate, Royal Holloway University of London, Estonia
Antti Räsänen	Professor, University of Helsinki, Finland
David J. Shepherd	Assistant Professor, Dean of Undergraduate Studies, Trinity College, Ireland
Eve Eisenschmidt	Professor, Tallinn University, Estonia

3. The BMTS submitted a self-evaluation report to the HAKA Bureau on 26 August 2024 and the HAKA assessment coordinator forwarded it to the Committee on 29 August 2024.
4. An assessment visit was made to the BMTS on 12–13 November 2024.
5. The Committee sent its draft assessment report to the HAKA Bureau on 10 January 2025. HAKA forwarded it to the higher education institution for its comments on 13 January 2025 and the BMTS submitted its comments on 27 January 2025.
6. The Committee submitted its final assessment report to the HAKA Bureau on 30 January 2025. The assessment report is an integral part of the decision. The report is available on HAKA's website.
7. The Secretary of the Council forwarded the final assessment report along with the self-evaluation report to the Council members on 12 February 2025.



8. The Committee's assessments were as follows:

Standard	Assessment
Strategic management	Conforms to requirements
Resources	Conforms to requirements
Quality culture	Partially conforms to requirements
Academic ethics	Conforms to requirements
Internationalisation	Conforms to requirements
Teaching staff	Conforms to requirements
Study programme	Conforms to requirements
Learning and teaching	Conforms to requirements
Student assessment	Conforms to requirements
Learning support systems	Conforms to requirements 
Research, development and/or other creative activities	Conforms to requirements
Service to society	Conforms to requirements

 **According to the assessment committee, the following deserves recognition**

- 1) High level of internationalisation at the higher education institution, including trilingual studies and an international student body and teaching staff.
 - 2) The support for students is comprehensive. The students value this highly and their awareness of their learning process is high.
 - 3) Effective partnerships of the higher education institution provide a significant part of the funding.
9. The Council with 13 members present discussed these received documents in its session on 19 February 2025 and decided to point out the following strengths¹, areas for improvement² and recommendations, and suggestions for further development³ regarding the BMTS.

9.1 STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Strengths

1. Both the students and the staff of the higher education institution are highly committed.

Areas for improvement, and recommendations

1. Although employees and students are of the opinion that their views are taken seriously in decision-making processes, these processes remain too informal. The higher education institution must assemble the existing decision-making processes in a clear format to ensure clarity and responsibility regarding participation and involvement.

¹ The strengths pointed out include achievements beyond the standard (not compliance with the standard).

² The areas for improvement and the recommendations point to shortcomings in meeting the requirements of the institutional accreditation standard and affect the final decision of the Council.

³ The suggestions for further development are suggestions for improvement which do not contain a reference to non-compliance with the standard and which are at the discretion of the higher education institution to either take into consideration or disregard. The suggestions for further development do not affect the final decision of the Council.

2. The implementation of the development plan is monitored. However, the goals of the development plan are often non-specific, which makes it difficult to monitor them and determine whether the goal is achieved. The higher education institution must lay down more specific indicators that would allow better monitoring of the achievement of both short and long-term goals.
3. The higher education institution has partnerships with several organisations. However, formal cooperation with other higher education institutions is insufficient. This is important to ensure the long-term sustainability of the cooperation. The higher education institution must develop partnerships with other higher education institutions and be more active in the Estonian higher education landscape.

9.2. RESOURCES

Strengths

1. The higher education institution has a very strong fundraising system in place with its US partners. A relevant committee has been formed.
2. The wages of employees have been increased and are comparable to those at other similar higher education institutions.
3. In order to implement the communication strategy and increase the visibility of the higher education institution in the society, a communication expert has been employed, which has led to the development of clear procedures for internal and external communication.

Areas for improvement, and recommendations

1. Employee development interviews are not currently documented. This must be done and it must be ensured that in the structure of the development interviews, each employee has their own development goals in place, among other things, the fulfilment of which is assessed at the next development interview.
2. Although wages have increased significantly, there are no formal wage principles in place. Formal principles for remuneration and incentive plans must be developed and communicated to all employees.

Suggestions for further development

1. Research grants could be applied for jointly with other Estonian higher education institutions. In order to increase research funding, the academic staff of the BMTS could attempt to be included in the research groups of Estonian universities.
2. Students should also be encouraged to use non-university resources, such as the libraries and databases of other universities, to improve access to scientific literature.

9.3. QUALITY CULTURE

Strengths

1. Based on the recommendations of the previous accreditation, the higher education institution has undertaken activities to improve the quality of the organisation of studies.

Areas for improvement, and recommendations

1. There is a lack of clarity about the higher education institution's approach to quality and the procedures for quality assurance. The higher education institution must review and simplify the language it uses to define quality and describe quality procedures, so that these could be clearly understood by all stakeholders.
2. The monitoring of goals has not been documented. It is also unclear how feedback questionnaires and survey results contribute to the monitoring of goals.
3. Student feedback is taken into account and in general, students feel that they are being heard. However, the completion of the feedback loops is not fully clear. The procedures for completing the feedback loops must be formalised.
4. The development plan of the higher education institution stipulates that feedback from alumni and employers needs to be developed and made more transparent and consistent. So far, no action has been taken in this regard. The actions planned in this regard must certainly be implemented.

Suggestions for further development

1. The rector pointed out the need for a quality code that would help ensure greater transparency and consistency. The inclusion of a clear and simple definition of the Seminary's quality approach in that code would be appropriate and helpful.
2. Adding quality reporting to the proposed management dashboard would be a useful addition to enable top management to better monitor the efficiency of the quality processes.
3. Academic staff share good practices informally. Good practices can also result from development interviews. Regular communication channels accessible to all employees should be developed to share good practices.

9.4. ACADEMIC ETHICS

Areas for improvement, and recommendations

1. There are informal and formal channels in place for raising questions about academic misconduct, but there is no option to remain anonymous. A formal, anonymous way of reporting and handling ethical issues must be developed.
2. The BMTS has not set up an ethics committee to review and approve research proposals. Given the potential future needs of new research areas that require ethical approval, opportunities for cooperation with other higher education institutions should be sought to enable academic staff and students to apply for ethical approval of their research proposals through them.

9.5. INTERNATIONALISATION

Strengths

1. The international orientation of the higher education institution is excellent, particularly evident in its trilingual study programme, the options for simultaneous interpreting, and the international student body and teaching staff.

9.6. TEACHING STAFF

Strengths

1. The student to teaching staff ratio is good for the students.
2. The number of teaching staff with doctoral degrees has increased.
3. The teaching staff are actively involved in developing their teaching skills.

Suggestions for further development

1. Efforts should be continued to increase the share of full-time teaching staff with doctoral degrees. This is particularly important in light of the opening of the proposed master's programme.

9.7. STUDY PROGRAMME

Strengths

1. The new study programme is well structured. Several important developments have been made compared to the previous study programme: the students can specialise; the new study programme supports individualised learning, creativity, and diverse career aspirations.
2. The carrying out of the study programme in Estonian, Russian and English allows access for students with different language backgrounds.

Areas for improvement, and recommendations

1. While the higher education institution consulted the Estonian Methodist Church and the Estonian Christian Pentecostal Church in the development of the new study programme, no formal consultations were held with other potential employers or the alumni. Alumni and other potential employers outside the Estonian Methodist Church and the Estonian Christian Pentecostal Church must be more systematically involved in the development of the study programme.

Suggestions for further development

1. It is recommended to improve the balance between the study programme carried out in different languages by increasing the number of students studying in Estonian through more active and targeted marketing activities.
2. In order to improve the accessibility to hybrid learning, the options for online discussions across different language groups should be explored.

9.8. LEARNING AND TEACHING

Strengths

1. The teaching methods are flexible and adapted to the individual needs of the students.

Areas for improvement, and recommendations

1. There is a slight lack of transparency and objectivity in the current admission procedure. It is recommended to establish a points system for the different admission criteria for the admission of students, in order to increase transparency and provide arguments in case of possible complaints.

Suggestions for further development

1. The current admission criteria exclude access to those who are not members of the church community or any denomination. It is recommended to explore the possibility of opening the higher education institution to students outside specific denominations.

9.9. STUDENT ASSESSMENT

Suggestions for further development

1. It is recommended to establish a uniform format of a subject card where the learning outcomes are consistently related to tasks and assessments. This would help improve the coherence between the subject courses.

9.10. LEARNING SUPPORT SYSTEMS

Strengths

1. The mentoring system that has been developed provides students with individual academic and personal support.
2. The learning support system as a whole is diverse and efficient. The higher education institution offers psychological, pastoral and educational technology counselling and support to students. It is also possible to apply for various scholarships and, if necessary, accommodation at a discount price in the premises of the higher education institution.

Suggestions for further development

1. Although foreign students are well supported, there is no designated contact person for them among the staff. It is recommended to appoint an employee to be the first contact person for foreign students.
2. The staff of the higher education institution is not sufficiently aware of hidden disabilities or of how to identify such disabilities. Awareness of hidden disabilities should be raised throughout the Seminary and support activities should be defined to help students cope with tasks or activities that are difficult for them.

9.11. RESEARCH, DEVELOPMENT AND/OR OTHER CREATIVE ACTIVITIES

Strengths

1. The higher education institution has developed a research and development strategy with clear objectives. These are in compliance with the mission of the higher education institution and serve the society through the church. Research and development is a priority at the higher education institution.

Suggestions for further development

1. Academic staff could receive more support for research. For example, the establishing of mentoring pairs with active experienced researchers should be considered.
2. Research and development activities could be improved. Specific instructions should be developed, and support should be provided for applying for research funding from national and international sources. More transparency should be given to the options for financial support for participation in conferences, and the possibility of taking a semester / time periods off for research should be provided.

9.12. SERVICE TO SOCIETY

Areas for improvement, and recommendations

1. The volume of further training offered by the BMTS is large and the trainings are of high quality. However, there is no general plan that clearly defines the different target groups of the trainings. The decision on which courses to offer must also be clarified. It is recommended to limit the further training to subjects related to own studies and research and to systematically involve alumni in the development of lifelong learning.
 2. It is recommended to encourage and support the staff and students in expressing their opinions and to participate in social discussions through public media channels and online media.
-
10. If one to four sub-assessments are 'partially conforms to requirements' and the remaining sub-assessments are 'conforms to requirements', the Assessment Council shall analyse the strengths and areas for improvement of the higher education institution and assess that the management, work organisation, teaching and research activities and the teaching and research environment of the higher education institution meet the requirements, and shall decide to accredit the higher education institution for a period of seven years; or shall assess that there are shortcomings in the management, work organisation, teaching and research activities or in the teaching and research environment of the higher education institution, shall provide guidance on their elimination and shall decide to accredit the higher education institution for a period of three years.
-
11. The Council analysed the strengths and areas for improvement of the BMTS and deemed it necessary to point out the following:
 - 11.1. The higher education institution is characterised by several important strengths:** effective partnerships of the higher education institution provide a significant part of the funding. The international orientation of the higher education institution is excellent, particularly evident in its trilingual study programme, the options for simultaneous interpreting, and the international student body and teaching staff. The teaching staff are actively involved in developing their teaching skills. The new study programme is well structured. Several important developments have been made compared to the previous study programme: the students can specialise; the new study programme supports individualised learning, creativity, and diverse career aspirations. The learning support system as a whole is diverse and efficient.

11.2. The shortcomings of the higher education institution are mainly related to quality culture and quality management: there is a lack of clarity about the higher education institution's approach to quality and the procedures for quality assurance. The higher education institution must review and simplify its definition of quality, and the quality procedures, so that these could be clearly understood by all stakeholders. Among other things, the procedures for completing the feedback loops must be assembled in a clear format, as well as other existing decision-making processes, in order to ensure clarity of participation and involvement, and responsibility. A formal, anonymous way of reporting and handling ethical issues must be developed.

12. According to subsection 53(1)2) of the Administrative Procedure Act, the secondary condition of an administrative act is an additional duty related to the principal regulation of the administrative act, and according to subsection 3), it is also a supplementary condition for the creation of a right arising from the principal regulation of the administrative act. Subsections 53(2)2) and 3) prescribe that a secondary condition may be imposed on an administrative act if the administrative act cannot be issued without the secondary condition or if issue of the administrative act must be resolved on the basis of the administrative right of discretion.
13. Weighing the strengths and shortcomings given in clause 11 and relying on clause 43.7 of the document "Guide to Institutional Accreditation", the Council found that if the higher education institution meets certain requirements, it will be possible to adopt a more positive decision if a secondary condition is imposed on the decision.

Based on the above, the Council

DECIDED THE FOLLOWING:

to accredit the Baltic Methodist Theological Seminary for seven years with the following secondary condition: The BMTS shall submit no later than on 19 February 2027 a report in English on the elimination of the shortcomings specified in clause 11.2. Members of the Committee shall be included in assessing the meeting of the secondary conditions.

The decision was adopted with 13 votes in favour. 0 were against.

14. If the Baltic Methodist Theological Seminary fails to meet the secondary condition on time, the Council shall cancel the accreditation decision or shall establish a new secondary condition.
15. This accreditation will be valid until 19 February 2032 or until the decision is declared invalid.
16. The Council suggests that the Baltic Methodist Theological Seminary submit no later than on 19 February 2027, along with the report on meeting the secondary condition, an overview in English of the activities of the higher education institution relating to the consideration of other areas of improvement and recommendations as pointed out in the Council's decision.
17. A person who finds that his or her rights are violated or his or her freedoms are restricted by this decision may file a challenge with the HAKA Assessment Council within 30 days after he or she became or should have become aware of the decision. The Assessment Council shall send the challenge to the HAKA Appeals Committee, which shall, within five days of receipt of the challenge, provide a written unbiased opinion to the Assessment Council on the validity

of the challenge. The Council shall resolve the challenge within 10 days of its receipt, taking into account the reasoned opinion of the Appeals Committee. If further examination of the challenge is necessary, the Assessment Council may extend the deadline for examining the challenge by up to 30 days. Judicial contestation of a decision is possible within 30 days from the date of service of the decision by filing an appeal with the Tallinn Administrative Court pursuant to the procedure provided for in the Administrative Court Procedure Act.

Hillar Bauman

Secretary of the Council