



Report for Institutional Accreditation

Baltic Methodist Theological Seminary

2025

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Introduction

Institutional accreditation

'Institutional accreditation' is the process of external evaluation which assesses the conformity of a university or higher education institution's management, work procedures, study and research activities and environment to both legislation and the goals and development plan of the higher education institution itself. This is feedback-based evaluation in which an international assessment panel analyses the strengths and weaknesses of the institution of higher education based on the self-assessment report of the institution and on information obtained during the assessment visit, providing recommendations for improvement and ways of implementing them.

The goal of institutional accreditation is to support the development of strategic management and quality culture that values learning-centeredness, creativity and innovation in the higher education institutions (HEIs), as well as to increase the societal impact of education, research and development delivered by the HEIs.

HEIs are assessed according to twelve standards of institutional accreditation. Assessment focuses on the core processes of the HEI – learning and teaching, research, development and creative activities, and service to society – as well as on strategic management of the organisation and resource management. The learning and teaching process is examined in more detail under five standards (study programme, teaching staff, learning and teaching, student assessment, and learning support processes). Throughout the assessment process, there is a focus on academic ethics, quality culture and internationalisation.

Achievements that exceed the level of the standard (not compliance with the standard) are presented as strengths. Areas of concern and recommendations point to shortcomings in meeting the requirements of the institutional accreditation standard and affect the formation of the final decision of the Council. **Opportunities for further improvement are proposals for improvement that do not contain a reference to noncompliance with the standard** and the inclusion or exclusion of which is at the discretion of the institution of higher education. Proposals for further developments will not affect the final decision of the Council.

Educational institution must undergo institutional accreditation at least once every seven years based on the regulation *Guidelines for Institutional Accreditation* approved by HAKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education as of 7.01.2022.

The institutional accreditation of Baltic Methodist Theological Seminary took place in November 2024. The Estonian Quality Agency for Education (**HAKA**) composed an international expert panel, which was approved by the higher education institution. The composition of the panel was thereafter approved by the order of HAKA director.

The composition of the expert panel was as follows:

Joke van Saane	Chair; Rector, University of Humanistic Studies; The Netherlands
Helen Thomas	Secretary; Freelance Educational Consultant; UK

Heidi Maiberg	PhD student; Royal Holloway University of London; Estonia
Eve Eisenschmidt	Professor, Tallinn University; Estonia
Antti Räsänen	Professor, University of Helsinki; Finland
David Shepherd	Professor, Trinity College Dublin; Ireland

Assessment process

The assessment process was coordinated by HAKA staff – Ms Tiia Bach and Mr Hillar Bauman.

There was an initial preparation phase where the distribution of tasks between the members of the assessment Panel was determined, and questions discussed and agreed on during two Teams meetings before the site visit. Work in Estonia started on Monday, 11 November 2024 with a meeting to finalise the questions and areas to discuss with each group and to confirm the detailed schedule for the site visit.

During the following two days, from Tuesday 12th to Wednesday 13th of November 2024, meetings were held with representatives of the Baltic Methodist Theological Seminary as well as with external stakeholders.

On Thursday, 16 November 2024, the Panel held a half- day meeting, during which the findings of the Panel were discussed in detail and the structure of the final report was agreed. Findings of the team were compiled in a first draft of the assessment report and evaluation of the 12 accreditation standards.

In finalising the assessment report, the Panel took into consideration comments made by the institution. The Panel submitted the final report to HAKA on 30.01.2025.

The current report is a public document and made available on HAKA website after HAKA Council has made an accreditation decision.

Information about Baltic Methodist Theological Seminary

The Baltic Methodist Theological Seminary (**BMTS**) is a private higher education institution offering applied higher education. It was established in 1994 and is owned by the Estonian Methodist Church (**EMC**). When it was established, its primary purpose was to train pastors for the Methodist Church. Over the years it has widened the scope of its offer to provide theological education to Christians from other denominations. It sees its target group as being Christians who feel called to Christian Ministry both within and outside the church.

BMTS is led by a Rector who reports to the Board of Trustees and then to the EMC. The Board of Trustees is led by the Superintendent of EMC and includes equal numbers of teaching staff and students. At the time of the Panel's visit the Rector had been in post since the beginning of September 2024. The new Rector also holds the role of Head of Research and Development. Two members of the senior leadership of BMTS are members of the governing bodies of EMC.

BMTS offers one bachelors' curriculum, Theology and Mission, simultaneously in three languages: Estonian, Russian and English. As of August 2024, there was a total of 68 students registered of whom 46 were studying the Russian programme, 15 the Estonian programme and 7 the English

programme. In the academic year 2023/24 there were 36 international students. The programme is offered in hybrid format.

There are 6 employed support staff and 7 employed faculty. In addition to this, in 2023/24, there were 15 adjunct faculty undertaking various amounts of teaching, and 4 guest faculty.

Statistical data

Table 1: Student body of the last five years

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

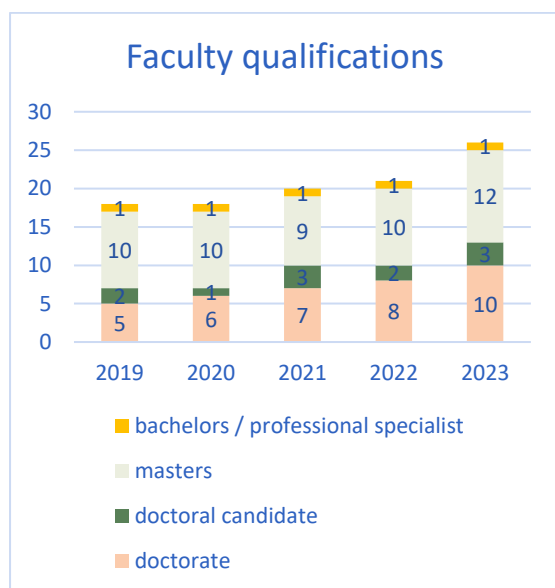
Source: Self-Evaluation Report p 8

Table 2: Staff and faculty statistics

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

Source: Self-Evaluation Report p 9

Figure 1: Qualifications of faculty



Source: Self-Evaluation Report p 10

Main impressions of the self-evaluation report and the visit

The self-evaluation report (**SER**) was well organised and comprehensive, supported by relevant and helpful appendices which provided the Panel with a good basis for the assessment visit. BMTS readily provided the few additional materials that the Panel requested in advance of the visit.

The organisation of the site visit was good. The atmosphere in all the meetings was open and constructive and enabled fruitful discussions. This greatly facilitated the work of the Panel.

Main changes on the basis of recommendations of the previous institutional accreditation

The last accreditation visit took place in 2021 and made a substantial number of recommendations and areas for improvement. BMTS prepared an action plan with four main areas: strengthening and developing research skills in applied sciences; making the criteria for assessing students more objective and more general; increasing transparency in the activities of the Seminary and developing strategies to increase the visibility of the Seminary. The SER describes the actions taken in relation to each of the four main areas. In addition, the SER also outlines how the Seminary has addressed a number of other recommendations from the last accreditation including action to address the retention rate; action to increase student numbers for sustainability; improving the seeking of feedback from alumni and students; developing the pedagogical skills of teaching staff; taking steps to develop international mobility and enhancing teaching materials and databases.

The thoroughness with which BMTS has responded to the recommendations and advice on improvements is positive endorsement of the seriousness with which they take the outcomes of external evaluations.

Summary of the institutional accreditation findings

BMTS demonstrates a strong commitment at academic, personal and professional levels to the church and to society. The Panel noted that since the last accreditation, the Seminary had faced

several significant changes which impacted on the institution. These include the Covid pandemic, the war in Ukraine, and the disaffiliation of the Estonian Methodist Church from the United Methodist Church. At the time of the Panel's visit the new Rector had been in place for just over two months. Overall, the Seminary has faced these challenges well and developed its provision. The Panel found significant improvements in internationalisation, facilitated by ERASMUS+ which the institution successfully applied for membership of. The Panel also noted significant development in Research and Development Activities where there is now a separate strategy covering this area; an increase in the percentage of staff holding doctorates, and a clear institutional priority for enhancing research activity led by the Rector who has a research profile.

The Seminary's resources are sound with reliable donors from the church both in- and outside Estonia. BMTS has taken advantage of the situation created by the war and has successfully increased the student numbers, the trilingual provision represents a significant advantage in this respect. The number of students studying the Russian language programme is currently the largest, although the Seminary aims to develop a more balanced profile across the three languages.

There is a core of well-motivated and appropriately qualified staff which is international in profile. Visiting and guest lecturers also contribute to the provision. The Panel found that all staff are appropriately qualified for delivering the bachelor's programme. The study programme was revised and, at the time of the visit, was in the early phase of delivery. The revisions to the programme took feedback from different stakeholders into consideration.

Students are well-supported in both academic and pastoral areas. They are positive about the teaching and learning they receive and clear about the requirements of them.

The small size of the Seminary offers the advantages of facilitating good relationships among staff, and between staff and students, and enables effective, but informal, communication. There are regularly administered end of course and end of programme questionnaires; however, more systematic feedback from alumni and employers is lacking. The feedback loop is sometimes but not always closed. Whilst acknowledging the effectiveness of the informal channels, the Panel recommend greater systematicity in the formal channels of communication, ensuring surveys are consistently administered, and the results formally considered with decisions made reported back to the respondents. Greater systematicity in sharing good practice, including that emerging from the individual development conversations, is also recommended to ensure that good practice is shared across the staff body.

BMTS has defined its vision and mission and has a development plan which reflects these. The plan includes goals and objectives and the senior management monitors these. However, many of the goals lack specificity making it difficult to monitor progress and ascertain when the goals have been achieved. The Seminary needs to revise the goals to make them more specific and measurable. The Panel learned of several plans for developing the infrastructure, new provision, and new sources of income. These included introducing a dashboard to help with monitoring, developing a master's course and offering micro-credentials. BMTS is encouraged to pursue these plans systematically and ensure that developments are well informed by stakeholders.

Main Strengths

- The natural relationship between seminary and church.
- The stable resource base which supports the sustainability of the Seminary.
- The way that BMTS takes the findings of external evaluations seriously and acts on them.

- The international nature of the Seminary in terms of its staff and student body and its international partnerships.
- The tri-lingual delivery of the bachelor programme and the resources that support this.
- The increase in the number of teaching staff holding doctorates.
- The overall support to students, both academic and pastoral.
- The development of a research strategy.

★ Worthy of Recognition

- The internationalisation of the Seminary with its tri-lingual provision, international staff and student body.
- Student support is comprehensive and highly valued by the students whose awareness of their own learning process is high.
- The effective partnerships which provide substantial funding.

Areas of concern and recommendations

- Currently goals and objectives as set out in the Development Plan are not sufficiently well articulated to enable the effective monitoring and assessment of their achievement. The goals should be revised to enable effective monitoring.
- It is important to monitor the relationship with the church continuously and critically in order to secure the institution's independence and academic freedom, as well as scientific quality.
- Whilst BMTS has some good partnerships these do not adequately embed the Seminary in the broader higher education landscape in Estonia. BMTS must ensure that it develops strong links with other higher education institutions to support sustainability and establish the institution as a clearly distinguished part of the Higher Education landscape in Estonia.
- Whilst the Seminary is open to and responds to feedback from a range of stakeholders, there is a need to develop more formal and regular channels for feedback, especially from alumni and potential employers, to ensure that the benefits of the feedback are not lost and that the feedback loop is closed.
- The language used around the definition of quality culture presented by the Seminary lacks clarity. The Panel found it difficult to understand and the staff group could not articulate an understanding of quality. BMTS must revise the language used to describe quality culture and ensure that there is a shared understanding of what quality means in the institution.
- Whilst the individual feedback conversations held between the Rector and teaching staff are reported as being valuable, the Panel found that these need to be more goal oriented. In addition, it is recommended that the Seminary finds ways to more systematically disseminate the good practice that emerges from these conversations.
- Currently the admission criteria limit access to those who may benefit from the education offered by the Seminary. It is recommended that BMTS reviews the admissions criteria to enable those from different denominations to study at the Seminary.
- Whilst there is a range of activities that support service to society, there is no strategy which identifies target groups and what this means for the provision. BMTS is recommended to develop a strategy for service to society.

	conforms to requirements	partially conforms to requirements	does not conform to requirements	worthy of recognition
Strategic management	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Resources	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Quality culture	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Academic ethics	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Internationalisation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Teaching staff	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Study programme	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Learning and teaching	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Student assessment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Learning support systems	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Research, development and/or other creative activity	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Service to society	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Key to evidence

E: interviews with employers and other external stakeholders

M: interviews with management staff

S: interviews with students

A: interviews with alumni

T: interviews with teaching staff

R: inspection of resources (e.g. library, laboratories)

SER: Self-Evaluation Report

1.1. Strategic management

Standard

Development planning at the higher education institution is purposeful and systematic, involving various stakeholders.

The higher education institution regularly evaluates the achievement of its stated objectives and the impact of its activities.

Guidelines

The HEI has formulated the objectives and key results for its core activities – learning and teaching; research, development and creative activities, and service to society – taking into account national priorities and the needs of society, focusing on its strengths and reducing unnecessary duplication both within the HEI and throughout higher education in Estonia.

The HEI is managed in accordance with its mission, vision and core values, as well as objectives set out on the basis of those principles. Responsibility for implementation of the goals and action plans of the development plan are clearly specified. Achievement of the objectives and effects of the activities are evaluated regularly.

Sustainable development, creativity and innovation are supported and given value in both core and support activities.

The HEI is mindful of the opportunities provided by digital technologies in planning for development activities.

Membership of the HEI (including students), as well as external stakeholders, is involved in developing and implementing the HEI's development plan and action plans. The HEI members share the core values that serve as a basis for the institution's development plan.

Indicators

- The rate of achieving the objectives set in the development/action plan (key results)
- Other indicators depending on the HEI

Evidence and analysis

At the time of the Panel's visit the Rector, who was appointed from outside the Seminary through open competition, had only been in post since the beginning of September 2024 and was actively engaged in developing a thorough knowledge of BMTS and its community. The Panel considered that the new Rector's skills and experience fit the Seminary's needs well at this point in its development.

The strategy of BMTS is articulated in the Development Plan 2024-2028 (DP) and covers the principal areas of activity: education, research, and service to church and society. The DP includes the mission, vision, and core values of the Seminary. According to the SER, various stakeholders, including the owner, staff, students and external stakeholders, were involved in the process of developing the DP. This was confirmed in interviews (T/S/E/A). The views of diverse groups are similarly considered in the case of policy changes and institutional decisions. For example, the decision to offer Russian programmes for Ukrainian refugees took the perspectives of both Church and teaching staff into account.

The Rector's Council, led by the Rector, is responsible for monitoring progress on aims and targets. The supervision of the renewal and monitoring of the curriculum and the academic regulations are delegated to the Academic Council, led by the Dean. The Panel noted that many of the indicators in the DP were not very precise or concrete for example, *regular communication, collaboration agreements are signed during 2025, the feedback system aligns with the quality culture described and the ratio of interactive sessions compared to lecture*. This means that it is difficult to monitor the progress made on reaching the goals. The indicators in the DP need to be more specific to allow for effective monitoring of the long- and short-term objectives.

The SER includes a report on the actions taken in the light of the recommendations of the last accreditation. It is clear from this report that all the recommendations were considered, although not all have been resolved. An ongoing concern is the need to further formalize and standardize processes, while doing justice to the informal culture highly valued by staff members, students and alumni. In the interviews, both staff members and students showed a high level of personal commitment to the Seminary.

As with most small independent theological institutions in the world, sustainability is a matter of concern. Within the context of secularization, it is hard for a theological institution focused on one denomination to survive. In this light, the Panel values the ecumenical perspective of the Seminary, as is visible in their cooperation with the Pentecostal Church and other Evangelical and Free churches in Estonia.

In the light of the many institutional developments, as, for example, the appointment of a new Rector, the increase of Ukrainian and Russian speaking students, and the impact of Covid, the Seminary's focus has been on internal processes. Whilst BMTS has some good partnerships these do not yet adequately embed the Seminary in the broader higher education landscape in Estonia. For BMTS to strengthen sustainability as a higher education institution within the Estonian context it must ensure that it develops strong and formal partnerships with other higher education institutions and be an active part of the higher education landscape in Estonia.

BMTS has carried out a risk assessment on 11 topics, including prevention actions. In the interviews with both the Rector and the Superintendent, it was clear that the awareness of risk within BMTS is high.

Conclusion

The Seminary has successfully faced a significant number of challenges in the environment and has ensured that its development planning is purposeful and systematic, involving various internal and external stakeholders. BMTS regularly evaluates the achievement of the stated objectives and the impact of its activities. The monitoring of progress on the attainment of the goals outlined in the DP is, however, hampered by the impreciseness of the goals. Overall, the objectives and key results are in line with the core values of the Seminary.

BMTS has several sound links and partnerships but is not yet sufficiently embedded in the higher education landscape in Estonia to ensure its sustainability.

Overall BMTS conforms to the requirements of Strategic Management.

Strengths

- Both student and staff members are highly committed and dedicated to the Seminary.

Areas of concern and recommendations

- Although the staff and students report that their views are taken seriously in decision-making processes, these processes remain too informal. It is strongly recommended that the Seminary formalize existing procedures and meetings to make participation and consultation secure and accountable.

- Progress on the development plan is monitored. However, the goals in the plan are often imprecise, making it difficult to monitor them and establish that the action is completed. It is strongly recommended to formulate more concrete indicators to enable better monitoring of both short-term and long-term goals.
- BMTS has partnerships and links with several organisations. However, it does not have sufficient formal partnerships with other higher education institutions to secure its long-term sustainability. It is recommended that formal partnerships with other higher education institutions are developed and that BMTS is an active part of the higher education landscape in Estonia.

1.2. Resources

Standard

The higher education institution develops its staff and manages its physical and financial resources in a purposeful, systematic and sustainable manner.

Internal and external communications of the higher education institution (including marketing and image-building) are targeted and managed.

Guidelines

The HEI has an efficient staff development system in terms of both academic and support staff. The principles and procedures for employee recruitment and development are based on the objectives of the HEI's development plan and are fair and transparent. The principles for employees' remuneration and motivation are defined, available to all employees, and followed.

Allocation of the HEI's financial resources is based on the objectives of its development plan. The management and development of its infrastructure (buildings, laboratories, classrooms, digital infrastructure, etc.) are fit-for-purpose and economically sound. The infrastructure is regularly analysed (including the network, digital equipment, software and services, IT systems, user support, digital security, etc.), taking into consideration among others the needs of students, teaching staff and other members of the HEI personnel.

Sufficient resources are available for updating the infrastructure for education and research, and/or a strategy exists enabling the HEI to acquire them.

The HEI has defined information protection rules (including on data protection and the protection of user privacy) and these are implemented. The development and security of the online learning and teaching environment are ensured. The online learning and teaching environment allows to identify the authorship of student work.

The HEI has a functioning system for internal and external communications, relevant to the target audiences. The information made public about HEI's activities (including study programmes) and the findings of external evaluations is correct, up to date, easily accessible and understandable. The HEI has a system to popularise its core activities and academic career opportunities. The HEI members are informed of the decisions relevant to them in a timely manner.

Employee satisfaction with management, working conditions, information flow, etc., at the HEI is surveyed regularly and the survey results are used in quality improvement activities.

Indicators

- Distribution of revenues and costs
- The results of the staff satisfaction survey
- Other indicators depending on the HEI

Evidence and analysis

The staff composition and size are appropriate for a small institution of this kind. The number of full-time students per full-time academic staff member is reasonable (14.5:1)]. Rules for job competition for academic positions are publicly available on the webpage. The share of international faculty members is high (50%) and is on a solid basis, supporting the Seminary's aims to work in close international collaboration. This helps to ensure sustainability as international networks are strong. To meet the objectives of the Seminary, an international coordinator was recruited (SER, M). Thus, the principles and procedures for employee recruitment and development are based on the objectives of the HEI's development plan.

Staff satisfaction surveys demonstrate that employees feel valued and satisfied with working conditions. During the last three years, satisfaction with support for professional development has increased. The Seminary is participating in the Estonian Universities EU fund programme KVARA,

which offers training for staff. Recently, topics like the use of AI in learning and teaching have been key focuses for staff professional development, particularly the use of Chat GPT. International mobility has increased supported by Erasmus+ agreement.

Both physical and digital infrastructure are fit for purpose. Infrastructure costs are not high (approx. 18% of the annual budget) as the premises belong to the Methodist church. Recently, several investments have been made in the learning environment and digital learning resources (SER). The last institutional accreditation report emphasized a shortage of literature in Estonian. In response, the sources of the Asbury Theological Seminary (ATS) e-library and the Estonian National Library are now more frequently used, along with the MIRKO e-book lending system. The library is well-developed and accessible to the public. Improving educational work and infrastructure resources is one of the sub-aims in the development plan, with library resources and staff working conditions remaining priorities. During the meeting, students and staff appreciated the comfortable and cosy environment (M/S). There is good infrastructure for learning and work, with two classrooms equipped with translation booths. The learning environment, including Moodle, is developed for hybrid teaching and learning options, enabling students to attend classes either on campus or remotely via Zoom. For effective hybrid learning, an online study etiquette has been developed and introduced to students and teachers. The flexibility of participation in the learning process was mentioned and appreciated by students and alumni (S, A). The Panel finds that the learning and working environment is well-established and managed.

Compared to 2021, income in 2023 increased by 72%, while expenditure grew by 57%, confirming the financial sustainability of the Seminary, which also has an additional reserve fund (SER). The main sources of income continue to be donations and grants (approx. 70%). Fundraising capacity is, therefore, crucial. The Board of Trustees is focused on ensuring financial stability through fundraising efforts. Representatives of the Board of Trustees confirmed their systematic efforts, including establishing a development committee and holding seminars, to enhance the fundraising capacity (E). A development committee, established in 2019, has emphasized fundraising efforts. Asbury remains the main contributor, deeply connected and committed to the Seminary. Simultaneously, efforts are underway to build partnerships with other strong organizations, including one church in the US and another in Korea (M). One of the strategic aims in the DP is to expand the donor base. Consultations with professional fundraisers have been conducted. The aim is to ensure sustainable funding for the Seminary and to establish a financial development team to find additional funding sources (M/DP). In the risk analysis, diversifying funding sources is mentioned as a preventive measure (e.g. applying for project grants, developing continuing education, and establishing a reserve fund). It can be concluded that financial sustainability is taken seriously.

In the last accreditation, the Panel noted that the Seminary lacked a communication and marketing strategy to increase its visibility in Estonian media and society. In 2024, a communication strategy was introduced. As part of this strategy, an analysis of the impact of the external environment was carried out, identifying stakeholders, target groups, and key messages (SER). The staff member responsible for communication demonstrated clear processes for internal and external communication (M). Senior management and other staff members also showed a clear understanding of external communication strategies and new methods to reach prospective students (M).

The Seminary's webpage is informative, presenting general information and target group-specific content, such as study programmes, in-service training, and partnerships. Additionally, one identified area of improvement was to ensure the public was clearly informed that the Seminary's library is open to all. This information is now available on the webpage.

For internal communication, a document management system is in use. At the time of the visit, the Rector was initiating a dashboard for everyday management to provide online access to information. However, personal conversations and informal clarifications of expectations are still common. For academic staff and students, the Dean remains the main contact person for accessing information. The Panel concluded that internal and external communication has improved, with a planned strategy that is relevant to target audiences.

Annual development conversations are carried out, providing self-evaluation opportunities and clear expectations for staff. These conversations are more informal and not officially documented but do form the basis for a staff development plan. Conversations focus on feedback and identifying professional development needs (M).

A remarkable salary increase has been implemented, making salaries comparable within the sector (other theological seminaries in Estonia). The salary analysis was presented to the development committee, and a salary increase plan was created (M/SER). However, regular review of salary growth remains one of the development aims. The Panel did not find any formally agreed principles for employees' remuneration and motivation.

Conclusions

The Panel found that overall resources are well understood, managed and planned. BMTS manages and develops the staff base. Employee satisfaction has improved and BMTS has succeeded in increasing the salary levels so that they are in line with the sector.

Financially, revenue has grown significantly supported by fundraising efforts, though donations remain a key risk. Infrastructure, including classrooms with translation booths and a hybrid learning environment, supports flexible learning process. The library has expanded access to digital and national resources. A new communication strategy has improved internal and external outreach, enhanced visibility and aligns with strategic goals.

Annual development discussions with the staff to support professional development are carried out, but documentation and formalised motivational policies require attention.

Based on the documentary evidence and the evidence gained during the site visit the Seminary conforms to the standard.

Strengths

- The Seminary has a strong fundraising background with US partners and has established a fundraising committee. This is worthy of recognition.
- Salaries have been increased and are comparable within the sector.
- The appointment of a communication specialist to implement the communication strategy and increase visibility in society.

Areas of concern and recommendations

- The developmental discussions for staff are not currently documented. It is recommended that developmental discussions with staff are documented and include set development goals which are revisited in the following developmental conversation.

- Whilst staff remuneration has improved significantly there are no documented principles for remuneration. It is recommended that the Seminary develop formal principles for employees' remuneration and motivation and make them available to all employees.

Opportunities for further improvement

- Secure joint research grants with Estonian universities or incorporate staff into their research groups to increase research funding.
- Encourage students to use resources such as the Tallinn University library and its databases to access scientific literature.

1.3. Quality Culture

Standard

The higher education institution has defined the quality of its core and support processes, and the principles of quality assurance.

In the higher education institution, internal evaluation supports strategic management and is conducted regularly at different levels (institution, units, study programmes).

The findings of internal and external evaluations are analysed and quality improvement activities implemented.

Guidelines

Members of the HEI have agreed upon definitions for the quality of their core and support processes and are guided by them in their daily work. The HEI has established its policies and procedures for internal quality assurance (internal evaluation). The regular internal quality assurance both at the institutional and study programme level takes into account, inter alia, the standards set out in these Guidelines. All members of the HEI, including students and external stakeholders, participate in internal evaluations.

Internal evaluation of study programmes results in feedback from experts within the HEI and/or from outside it. Regular reviews and enhancements of study programmes ensure their relevance, including their compliance with international trends. In the course of internal evaluations, peer learning, comparisons with other HEIs regarding their results and means for achievement, as well as a sharing of best practices take place, among other things.

Internal evaluation is based on the following key questions in quality management: What do you want to achieve, and why? How do you want to do it? How do you know that the activities are effective and will have the desired impact? Is there an equilibrium between the desired outcomes and the resources used for their achievement (including technological solutions)? How do you manage the quality improvement activities?

Indicators

- Improvement activities implemented based on the analyses of internal evaluations in the HEI's core and support processes (examples from different areas)
- Other indicators depending on the HEI

Evidence and analysis

The last institutional accreditation report in 2022 made several recommendations and suggestions. BMTS reports that it analysed the concerns raised and developed an action plan to address these areas (SER). The promptness of the action, the thoroughness of the analysis and the resulting action plan demonstrate that BMTS takes the outputs of external assessments seriously and is committed to developing all aspects of its provision.

The SER states that quality culture is defined by the core values of the Seminary and that *these values influence all aspects of the Seminary* (SER). The Panel found it difficult to understand how the core values as articulated by BMTS constitute a definition either of quality culture or of the core and support processes for quality assurance and enhancement. The Panel understood the values as an articulation of the Seminary's specific theological principles: as for, example, *The Bible and a personal relationship with God; Christian world view and Methodist theology, Ecumenism, internationalism, community-centredness and integration* which clearly provide a shared base of Christian ethical values. The Panel could not, however, gain an understanding of how these were understood in the context of quality culture. Members of senior staff were unable to provide an

account of how the values related to quality assurance processes other than to say they support the ethos of the Seminary overall and that this was a shared understanding (M/T). Neither staff nor students could give the Panel a clear picture of how they understood the overall concept of quality and there was no evidence of a shared understanding. BMTS has over-complicated its description of its approach to quality definition with the result that it is confusing. BMTS would benefit from reviewing and simplifying how it presents quality and clarifying its definition of quality and quality processes so that they are clearly understood by all stakeholders.

The SER states that BMTS has several guidelines and documents containing specific quality definitions. A review of the documents mentioned did not, in the Panel's view, give specific definitions. The documents did, however, outline processes, relevant to quality assurance. The Panel noted that there was some misuse or misunderstanding of language and that 'definition' was used rather than 'describe' which would be more appropriate in the context of what was presented in the SER. BMTS should review the use of the language relating to quality assurance processes so that both internal and external stakeholders have a consistent and shared understanding of what is meant by quality assurance and the purposes of it.

BMTS does, however, have many documents describing processes that form the building blocks for quality assurance. These include Academic Regulations; a guide for formatting assignments; student academic contracts; the BMTS Administrative Procedures; Data Processing Procedures; Employment contracts and recruitment criteria which are all sound processes in quality assurance. Staff were aware of templates and guidance for assessments and developing modules. Students reported that regulations relating to their academic work were clear and they were well disseminated to them. Staff demonstrated that they were fully aware of the relevant documents and mostly where they would find them (M/T). There was some lack of clarity as to whether there was a template for course descriptions. The course samples presented included the required information but were inconsistent in some of the detail. For example, some course descriptions detailed which learning outcomes were associated with which assignments, some did not. Despite the lack of consistency noted, students found the information clear and accessible.

BMTS conducts surveys and questionnaires. The Panel learned that students are asked for feedback at the end of the courses, and at the end of the academic year. End of course feedback is conducted when there is a new member of staff or when there has been lower than average returns in the past (SER). Completed questionnaires are sent to the Dean to review, and outcomes are sent by the Dean to the relevant member of teaching staff (SER/T). The Panel learned that where the Dean identifies an issue, it will be shared with the relevant member of staff so that it can be addressed (M). Where something is raised that appears from more than one evaluation, it is discussed in faculty meetings so that action can be identified. Feedback is also given informally by students to staff. This is not unusual in a small institution where there are good and open relations between staff and students. Students provided examples of action that they knew had been taken in response to their feedback. This included changing the study days of the programme overall; changing the order of topics in a specific module. Closing the feedback loop may be done by the Dean, through the student representatives or, informally, during the Friday lunch. The Panel learned that feedback to the graduate survey is not given because the students are no longer there, and action would not affect them (M). The Panel learned that the staff had had some surprising feedback from the graduates in response to the survey which showed that the most valued areas of the curriculum were Greek and classical education as well as the practical counselling and pastoral support. This fed into the curriculum review where the classical emphasis was retained (M). Whilst action is taken in response

to student and graduate feedback and students feel well listened to, it was not clear to the Panel that the feedback loop is consistently and transparently closed.

Surveys of staff and of alumni and employers are less frequent. Staff surveys were reported as being administered every two years; those for alumni and employers were very irregular and inconsistent (A). The DP notes that BMTS needs to improve and make more transparent and consistent the collection of feedback from alumni and employers; this work needs to continue.

It was clear to the Panel that internal monitoring of progress on the attainment of goals in the DP is the responsibility of the Rector's Council. It was not clear, however, how the outcomes of staff surveys and student questionnaires fed into the monitoring by the Rector's Council and contributed to the monitoring of the indicators in the DP.

The Panel explored with staff what mechanisms there were for the sharing of good practice. The Panel were given the example of a visitor who was focussing on the enhancement of pedagogical skills (M). This had led to discussions and developments in teaching and learning. More frequent sharing of good practice happens informally among course groups. The Panel found no evidence that there were systematic channels for sharing effective practice between course groups. Nor could the Panel find evidence that the annual development conversations between the Rector and the individual staff members promoted the sharing of good practice across the faculty. These present missed opportunities for sharing good practice and enhancing the provision.

Although the SER states that quality improvement is based on the *plan, do, act, check* model, it was not clear to the Panel that this was consistently practised. The Panel learned from the Rector that he planned to address the issue of greater transparency in processes and decision making so that they are accessible to all stakeholders. The DP includes the action to develop a Code of Good Practice for quality. It was unclear from the documents what the purpose of the Code was. In the Rector's presentation the Code of Good Practice is described as a "single source of truth for all processes" (Presentation slide). The Rector also emphasised the need for the Code, considering that it will be a useful development in ensuring greater transparency and consistency. Including a clear and simple definition of BMTS approach to quality would be appropriate and helpful in such a code. The Panel considered that including quality reporting would also be a useful addition to the planned Dashboard to enable senior management to monitor the effectiveness of quality processes and the findings of these processes.

The DP includes an action to develop a system for recording violations of quality processes. The title of this system is at odds with the core values and principles espoused by the Seminary. It is not clear what the purpose and benefits of this would be. BMTS may like to reconsider the appropriateness of developing this.

Conclusions

The Seminary has a strong ethos which promotes a desire for high quality. However, there is a lack of clarity as to how the ethos links to the overall approach to quality and its associated processes; stakeholders could not provide an understanding of this. There is much room for improving the clarity and transparency of the language used in relation to quality.

BMTS does have many of the processes necessary for institutional quality assurance and staff are mostly aware of these processes. However, these processes are not yet sufficiently systematic and are not fully disseminated.

As well as the formal surveys from students, there is informal feedback, especially between students and staff and between staff members. Whilst this is of value, it risks not being captured either for addressing specific issues or for enhancement. The closing of the feedback loop is inconsistent and not transparent. The DP notes that there is a need to improve and make more transparent and consistent the feedback from alumni and employers.

It is not clear how the outcomes of surveys and questionnaires contribute to the monitoring of progress on the attainment of the goals outlined in the DP.

The sharing of good practice, whether directly between staff or emerging from development conversations, is irregular and this can present missed opportunities for enhancement.

The evidence overall leads to a judgement of partly conforms.

Strengths

- The Seminary demonstrates that it takes the outcomes of external feedback seriously and takes action to strengthen the provision.

Areas of concern and recommendations

- There is a lack of clarity about how the Seminary views quality and how it presents quality assurance processes. It is recommended that BMTS review and simplify the language used in its definition of quality and for describing quality processes so that they are clearly understood by all stakeholders.
- The monitoring of goals and objectives is not documented nor is it clear how questionnaires and survey outcomes contribute to the monitoring of goals and objectives.
- Action is taken in response to student feedback and overall students feel well listened to. However, it was not clear to the Panel that the feedback loop is consistently and transparently closed. The processes for closing the feedback loop would benefit from being formalized so that the feedback loop is consistently closed.
- The Development Plan notes that the Seminary needs to improve and make more transparent and consistent the collection of feedback from alumni and employers. This action has not yet happened; the Panel recommends that work continues to make the collection of feedback from alumni and employers more regular and transparent.

Opportunities for further improvement

- The Rector outlined the need for a Quality Code as a useful tool in ensuring greater transparency and consistency. Including a clear and simple definition of the Seminary approach to quality would be appropriate and helpful in such a code.
- The Panel considered that including quality reporting would be a helpful addition to the planned Dashboard to enable senior management to better monitor the effectiveness of quality processes.
- Effective practice is shared informally between staff groups. Outputs of the development conversations may identify effective practice. The Panel suggests that the Seminary develops regular channels for the sharing of effective practice, so that it is easily accessible to all staff and opportunities for enhancement are not missed.

- The Self-Evaluation Report expresses the intention for the Seminary to produce a way to record violations of quality assurance processes. The use of violations is at odds with the core values and principles espoused by the Seminary. It is not clear what the purpose and benefits of this would be. The Seminary may like to reconsider the appropriateness of developing this.

1.4 Academic ethics

Standard

The higher education institution has defined its principles for academic ethics, has a system for disseminating them among its members, and has a code of conduct including guidelines for any cases of non-compliance with these principles.

The higher education institution has a functioning system for handling complaints.

Guidelines

The HEI values its members and ensures that all its employees and students are treated according to the principle of equal treatment.

Employees and students of the HEI are guided by the agreed principles of academic ethics in all their activities.

The HEI respects fundamental values and policies of research set out in the document, 'Research Integrity', issued jointly by Estonian research institutions, the Estonian Academy of Sciences, the Estonian Research Council and the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research.

The HEI supports its students and teaching staff in their understanding and responding to ethical issues. Teaching staff and students do not tolerate academic fraud, including cheating and plagiarism, and they will act immediately upon any such occurrence. Attention is paid to the application of principles of academic ethics in the digital environment: avoidance of creative theft, the protection of intellectual property rights etc.

Management of complaints from HEI members (including discrimination cases) is transparent and objective, ensuring fair treatment of all parties.

Indicators

- The percentage of student papers checked by plagiarism detection systems and the percentage of detected plagiarisms
- Other indicators depending on the HEI, for example statistics about complaints (total number, the proportion of decisions taken in favour of the applicant)

Evidence and analysis

BMTS has defined its principles for academic ethics which are based on general ethical principles which, in turn, reflect the fact that BMTS is a Christian higher education institution, and all its members base their conduct on Christian values (SER). These principles are disseminated to students through guidelines, in the Student Handbook, and in some subjects where they are dealt with explicitly such as *Introduction to Studies and Academic Writing*. The Seminary has developed its own Code of Ethics which covers the principles of academic ethics, and which is available on the BMTS website. This code reflects the Code of Ethics for Estonian non-profit organisations, and a statement to this effect is included at the end of the Code of Ethics on the website.

Students are aware of the issues of academic ethics, including how to avoid plagiarism and how to avoid AI related academic misconduct in their assignments (S). The Seminary has guidelines on the use of plagiarism detection tools that are clear to both staff and students (T/S). All diploma papers are checked by a plagiarism detection platform: until 2024 BMTS used Ouriginal, from the autumn of 2024 this was replaced by StrikePlagiarism which was considered more appropriate for the needs of the Seminary as it enabled students to check their own work before submitting it (SER).

The Seminary has a clear statement for students appealing an assignment grade. Both staff and students were able to demonstrate their awareness and understanding of the appeal process (S/T). Students can also provide anonymous feedback at the end of every course if they have concerns over academic misconduct. They can also contact the staff member, the Dean or their mentor should they have concerns in this area. Staff similarly demonstrated that they are clear what to do if there are issues associated with academic misconduct. The size of the Seminary lends itself to informal communication, including on academic misconduct; this does represent some risk, and the Panel recommends that an anonymous channel is developed for reporting suspected misconduct, i.e. a 'whistle blowing' process.

The Panel learned that one of the recent challenges to the Seminary is the development of AI. Management has been proactive in acting and offering training for staff; shortly after the site visit a group of staff was due to travel to Greece for training in this area (M/T). BMTS has also renewed their guidance on AI which students were aware of (SER/S).

BMTS has joined the Agreement on Research Integrity, and research is carried out in line within the principles and guidance in this agreement (SER). Several staff have attended training sessions on research ethics including training offered for research advisors in Estonian higher education institutions, *Ethical Values in Academic Publishing: Beyond Plagiarism* (SER). As noted in the DP, BMTS does not have an ethics committee, though it plans to have one. In discussion with staff, it became apparent that the current focus of research projects is not such that they require ethical approval. However, the Panel are mindful that there are potential changes to the focus of research and new research areas may well need to have ethical approval. Rather than setting up its own Ethics Committee, the Panel consider that it would be more appropriate for BMTS to cooperate with other research institutions in Estonia to enable relevant research proposals to be considered by them.

Conclusions

BMTS has defined its principles of academic ethics which reflect both the values of the Seminary and the Code of Ethics for non-profit organisations. The principles are well disseminated to students and staff who are clear on the principles. The Seminary has guidance on academic misconduct which is clear to both staff and students. BMTS has been pro-active in dealing with the challenges to academic integrity of AI.

Based on evidence from SER, additional documents and the site visit, the Seminary conforms to requirements of Academic Ethics.

Areas of concern and recommendations

- There are informal and formal channels to raise issues relating to academic misconduct but no anonymous routes for this. The Seminary is recommended to develop an anonymous formal channel so that issues of academic misconduct can be raised without the potential risk of reprisal.

- The Seminary has not set up an ethics committee to review and approve research proposals. Given the potential for new research areas in future which would require ethical approval, the Panel recommends that the Seminary seek ways of cooperating with other research institutions to enable staff and students to apply for ethical approval through them.

1.5 Internationalisation

Standard

The higher education institution has set objectives for internationalisation and assesses the attainment of these objectives regularly.

The higher education institution has created an environment that encourages international mobility of students and teaching staff, supporting the development of learning, teaching and RDC activities, as well as the cultural openness of its members and Estonian society in general.

Guidelines

The HEI creates opportunities for international student exchanges by offering study programmes and/or modules taught in English. The learning environment at the HEI supports internationalisation and cultural openness.

Recognition of qualifications and recognition of prior learning and work experiences for student admission and programme completion are in accordance with the quality requirements set by the HEI, are systemic and consistent with the expected learning outcomes and support international student mobility. The organisation of studies at the HEI facilitates student participation in international (including virtual) mobility (e.g., study programmes enable mobility windows). The HEI has agreements with foreign higher education institutions and, through international exchange, sends its students abroad to study and undertake internship, providing comprehensive support for this. Members of the teaching staff encourage students to participate in international mobility.

International lecturers participate in the process of teaching, including supervision of doctoral theses.

The HEI supports and recognises the participation of its teaching staff in international teaching, research or creative projects, as well as their teaching, research or creative work and personal development which are performed at HEIs abroad.

Indicators

- Teaching staff mobility (in-out)
- Student mobility (in-out)
- Other indicators depending on the HEI, for example:
 - Number of English-taught study programmes by main units and levels of study
 - Percentage of foreign students (by study programmes, levels of study, in total in the HEI)
 - Percentage of study programmes that include English-taught subjects (of at least 15 ECTS)
 - Number of ECTS acquired through external mobility

Evidence and analysis

The SER clearly identifies internationalisation as one of the core values and competitive advantages of the Seminary. The trilingual provision of the curriculum, in Estonian, Russian and English is an enriching basis for internationalisation. The cooperation with several foreign institutes and organizations is long lasting and secure, especially with Asbury. Together these provide a strong basis for the international aims of the Seminary.

BMTS has a very international student body and faculty. In the academic year 2023/2024 38% of the students studying in the Seminary were Estonian. Students came from a wide range of countries

including Ukraine, Belarus, Russia, Finland and the USA. Faculty members have backgrounds in Europe, the North America, and several African countries, parallel to the worldwide spread of Methodism. By using digital and remote solutions, it is not necessary for all students to be based in Estonia. This diverse student body requires personalized and flexible enrolment procedures, provided through individual interviews.

Since the previous accreditation, which identified the low participation of engagement with exchange programmes, a staff member for international mobility was hired to support mobility for both students and staff. BMTS was successful in achieving membership of Erasmus + and, at the time of the visit, was preparing a second agreement for Erasmus+. Data from the SER (appendix 18) showed that there were 8 BMTS staff mobility events during 2023/24 undertaken by 6 members of staff. In the same period there were 5 incoming mobility visits. There was one mobility programme in 2023 involving both staff and students travelling to Budapest.

BMTS describes its future aims for internationalisation in the DP. Most of these focus on increasing student mobility, by encouraging students to participate in Erasmus+ programmes. This is, of course, important. However, given the Seminary's ambitions, a strong international research network is needed too. Opportunities should be found for staff members for co-publishing and attending international research meetings.

The importance of staff and student mobility based on a network of strong international relationships was recognized by all interview participants. Outgoing student mobility is restricted by the characteristics of the student population: the average age is high, and this comes with family and job obligations. Outgoing students participating in the interviews were very satisfied about the level of the Seminary's studies, they easily meet the international standards.

Conclusions

BMTS has set clear objectives for internationalisation and assesses the attainment of these objectives regularly. The Seminary creates an encouraging environment for international mobility supporting the quality of the institution's principal areas of activity: education, research, service to society, and cultural openness within the restrictions of the church. Whilst participation in international mobility has increased since the last assessment, the mobility is largely undertaken by staff. The Seminary's tri-lingual programmes and its e-learning possibilities are a strong basis for internationalisation activities.

Extensive use is made of digital solutions, including remote and hybrid learning. Prior learning outcomes and work experience are considered in enrolling students. Several students and alumni testified during the interviews that they were well prepared for further studies abroad.

Internationalisation conforms to the standard.

Strengths

- The international character of the institute is excellent, especially visible in its tri-lingual programmes, the translation facilities and the international staff and student body. This is worthy of recognition.

Opportunities for further improvement

- Although there is no doubt about internationalisation at the Seminary, the Panel notes that many practical issues still arise within the institution, which could be solved by an extension of the international office.

1.6 Teaching staff

Standard

Teaching is conducted by a sufficient number of professionally competent members of the teaching staff who support the development of learners and value their own continuous self-development.

Guidelines

Distribution of teaching staff by age and the percentage of young members of the teaching staff ensure the sustainability of studies. The career model of academic staff motivates capable young people to start an academic career and creates opportunities for their advancement.

The HEI supports systematically the development of its teaching staff. Members of the teaching staff engage in development of their professional, teaching and digital competences, improve their supervision competence, and share best practices with one another. IT and educational technological support (including trainings) are available to teaching staff.

Teaching staff's participation in research, development and/or creative activities supports the teaching process and ensures competence for the supervision of students' theses (including doctoral theses).

Members of the teaching staff collaborate in fields of teaching, research and/or creative work within the HEI and with partners outside the HEI, e.g. with field practitioners, public sector organisations, companies, other research and development institutions, and lecturers from other Estonian or foreign higher education institutions. Qualified visiting lecturers and practitioners participate in the teaching process.

When assessing the work of teaching staff (including their periodical evaluations), the effectiveness of their teaching as well as their research, development and creative work is taken into account, including student feedback, the effectiveness of their student supervision, development of their teaching; supervisory and digital competences, their international mobility, and their entrepreneurial experience or other work experience in their fields of speciality outside the HEI.

Indicators

- Competition for elected academic positions
- Number of students per teaching staff member in full-time equivalent (FTE)
- Percentage of teaching staff holding a PhD degree
- The results of the students' feedback about the teaching staff
- Teaching staff participating in continuing training or other forms of teaching and digital competences and professional development
- Other indicators depending on the HEI

Evidence and analysis

It was clear to the Panel from the SER and the site visit that, with a favourable ratio of 14.1 students per one full time equivalent staff member, there are enough teaching staff to support the development of learners and deliver the current bachelor's curriculum. There has been an increase in the number of staff holding PhDs: in the last two years three of the new academic appointments held PhDs. At the time of the visit one academic staff member was on leave undertaking doctoral studies abroad. The new Rector also holds a doctorate. Whilst the current numbers of PhDs are sufficient for the bachelor's curriculum, BMTS needs to ensure continued increase in the numbers of contract staff with PhDs if it wishes to develop and deliver a master's programme. There is open competition for the hiring new teaching staff (SER).

The average age of the teaching staff, at 55, is relatively high and most staff are thus in their later career stages. The new Rector/Head of Research Development is early to mid-career and thus lowers the current average age. Whilst the age profile of academic staff does not present an

imminent risk to the sustainability of studies, BMTS needs to be mindful of the need for succession planning when recruiting new academic staff.

The Panel found that both longer serving and early career staff are well motivated (T). Within the Seminary there is a clear focus and support for increasing the number of academic colleagues with doctoral degrees (SER). The career model is implied rather than explicit. The Panel gained the view that capable young people are motivated less by a career model than by their personal commitment to the mission of the Seminary. The Panel found that all staff were well motivated and dedicated to the teaching and learning of the students; this was reflected in the positive endorsement of teaching by students(T/S).

BMTS provides opportunities, both internally and externally, for staff to develop their pedagogical and IT skills and to share best practice with each other. According to the interview with teachers' there is an annual seminar for Estonian theological schools where they discuss many topics, including evaluation, outcome-based teaching, and other teaching methods. Staff value and participate in these activities. Teachers also mentioned that they share good teaching practices when they meet each other informally between the classes at the Seminary and elsewhere (T).

While not all teaching staff are highly research active, there is evidence of research and creative activities within the teaching staff which do relate to the fields being taught. Because the supervision of student research is limited to the undergraduate level, the level of research overall within the institution is adequate to ensure competence for its supervision. More research activity would be required if master's level education is to be offered.

There is evidence of collaboration within the Seminary and with partners outside the Seminary. Until now local external collaboration has focused primarily on the joint development of pedagogical skills, which takes place at the annual seminar of Estonian theological schools. Some teachers have also completed pedagogical studies at university. The Panel learned that there are plans to increasingly broaden collaboration with other theological colleges. The joint teaching of a module in the coming year with an academic colleague from Asbury Theological Seminary reflects collaboration with a foreign higher education institution. The Panel learned that the Rector's plans may lead to more collaboration with those from other Estonian higher education institutions (M). Visiting lecturers and practitioners make a significant contribution to teaching (SER). The visiting lecturers are sufficiently qualified to support the current undergraduate provision.

There are annual professional development conversations between teaching staff and the Rector. The Panel learned that these are structured and cover a wide range of the work expected of teaching staff. The Panel did not find evidence that goal-setting or planning happens consistently in these conversations. However, some evidence was presented to demonstrate that development needs in research and training are identified and responded to as, for example, the fact that a faculty member is currently on leave to work on a doctorate.

Conclusions

There is good ratio of staff to students and staff are well qualified to deliver the bachelor's programmes. The number of teaching staff holding doctorates has increased since the last accreditation; the number of contract staff holding doctorates will need to increase to deliver the planned master's programme. The process for hiring new staff is undertaken through open competition. Staff engage in professional development related to teaching both within the seminary and in collaboration with other institutions. Students report very positively on the teaching staff.

Staff engage in the annual development conversations; however, these are not formally recorded, and the outcomes are not goal oriented.

Based on the review of the SER and the site visit, the Panel confirms that the Seminary has met the required standard in relation to teaching staff.

Strengths

- The student-teacher ratio is favourable for students.
- The increasing numbers of staff appointed who hold doctorates.
- The engagement of staff in professional development for teaching and learning.

Areas of concern and recommendations

- Staff participate in annual professional development conversations. The Panel heard no evidence to demonstrate that these were consistently goal-oriented and include measurable objectives. The Seminary is recommended to ensure that all professional development conversations are goal-oriented and include measurable and agreed objectives.

Opportunities for further improvement

- Whilst there are currently sufficient staff with PhDs, the Seminary is encouraged to continue to make progress in increasing the percentage of full-time academic staff holding PhDs particularly within the context of the proposed development of a master's programme.

1.7 Study programme

Standard

Study programmes are designed and developed while taking into account the expectations of stakeholders, higher education and professional standards, and trends in the relevant fields. The objectives of study programmes, modules and courses and their planned learning outcomes are specific and coherent. The study programmes support creativity, entrepreneurship and development of other general competencies.

Guidelines

In planning and developing study programmes (incl. programmes conducted in a foreign language), the HEI is guided by its objectives, its competence areas and the needs of the labour market, and takes into account national strategies and the expectations of society. The study programmes are based on up-to-date sectoral know-how and research.

The planned learning outcomes are in accord with the requirements for the corresponding level of the Estonian Qualifications Framework, and in planning them the HEI has taken into account the future needs, among other things. In developing study programmes, the HEI has conducted a comparative analysis of similar programmes in leading foreign higher education institutions.

The objectives of the study programme and its modules, the planned learning outcomes, theoretical and practical learning, the proportion of independent work and internship, and the assessment of the achieved learning outcomes form a coherent whole.

The development of general competences (incl. creativity and entrepreneurship) and speciality-related digital competences as well as support for the development of a self-directed learner is a natural part of the study programme, and these are integrated with speciality studies.

Expected student workloads defined in the study programmes are realistic and consistent with the calculation that, on average, 1 ECTS credit equals 26 student learning hours. The study programme offers sufficient challenge for learners with different levels of knowledge and skills.

Indicators

- Number of students per study programme
- Other indicators depending on the HEI

Evidence and analysis

The study programme of BMTS offers curricula in Estonian, English and Russian, with identical content across all three languages. Most of the instruction in these programmes is delivered through simultaneous interpretation in the three languages. This positions the Seminary as international, both in terms of its student body and its study programme.

According to the SER, the number of students in the Estonian-language curriculum has decreased, remained stable in the English-language curriculum, and increased significantly in the Russian-language curriculum, which is currently the largest. Interviews revealed that the Seminary leadership and the Board are aware of the imbalance among students. Efforts are underway to increase the number of domestic students through enhanced marketing and communication strategies. The growth of the Russian-language programme can be attributed to Ukrainian immigrant students at BMTS. In this matter, the Seminary has responsibly taken up the social challenge by offering study opportunities to immigrants and to people interested in Theology living in difficult conditions in Ukraine.

Over the past five years, 59% of enrolled students have been women, and 41% men, reflecting a gender distribution consistent with OECD-countries (56% female students) and especially Estonian gender distribution in higher education (about 60% female students).

However, the average age of BMTS students is notably higher than that of students in other higher education institutions, with 63% over 30 years old. Interviews with both students and teaching staff indicated that teaching arrangements accommodate students' life circumstances. During the site visit, it was observed that childcare services are available during classes. The older average age of students limits international engagement, such as participation in student exchange programmes.

Participants were asked about the access to the study programme on-line (S/T). Students reported no issues, but teachers highlighted challenges related to the technology for facilitating cross language group work; on Teams, groups can only be divided by language, not pre-assigned or randomized.

The curriculum is designed to meet the needs of the Methodist Church and Estonian society at large. A revised curriculum is being delivered for the first time in the 2024/2025 academic year. According to the SER and the Dean, the curriculum development process included consultations with faculty, students, alumni, Seminary stakeholders, and employers from Estonian churches (Estonian Methodist Church and Estonian Christian Pentecostal Church). The Panel recommends involving other potential employers, given alumni' suggestions of adding specialized skills, such as music, pedagogy, and interpersonal communication to the curriculum. Similar suggestions for skills may well be anticipated from employers. The curriculum was revised by a working group led by the Dean. A comparison of the old (SER Appendix 20) and new (SER Appendix 21) curricula reveals significant improvements: students can now choose a minor or specialization. The new curriculum supports individualized learning, creativity, and diverse career aspirations. It also incorporates stakeholders' feedback, increases the emphasis on integrative general competencies, and expands elective options. While no feedback is yet available from students studying under the new curriculum, it is reasonable to assume it will provide enhanced preparation both for working life and further academic pursuits.

Alumni indicated that graduates work in a wide range of roles within churches, organisations, and Estonian society (A). Surveys of graduates highlight an appreciation for the practical and applicable nature of the BMTS degree (SER). According to the SER, the teaching of general competencies is integrated into other courses. The students' perspectives on this integration varied. Some students cited specific first-year courses, such as *Academic Writing*, where these skills are explicitly taught. Others emphasized that syllabi clearly outline the objectives and assessment of general competencies, demonstrating successful integration.

Conclusions

Based on this analysis, the Panel concludes that the BMTS study programme conforms to requirements. The strengths of the Seminary's study programme include a well-designed new curriculum, excellent feedback on studies under the previous curriculum, and trilingual instruction. However, the Panel acknowledges that coordinating trilingual teaching poses challenges and that these must continue to be addressed. In the future, the Seminary should focus on balancing its programmes, by paying particular attention to recruiting more Estonian students. Enhanced marketing efforts and increased visibility of the BMTS' positive reputation are likely to support these goals.

Strengths

- A well-designed new curriculum
- The provision of tri-lingual education in Estonian, Russian and English making the curriculum accessible to those with different language competencies.

Areas of concern and recommendations

- Whilst the Seminary consulted the Estonian Methodist Church and Estonian Christian Pentecostal Church in the development of the new curriculum, there was no formal consultation with other potential employers or with alumni. The Panel recommends that the development of the curriculum more systematically involves the alumni as well as systematically involving other potential employers beyond the Estonian Methodist Church and Estonian Christian Pentecostal Church.

Opportunities for further improvement

- BMTS is encouraged to focus more on developing a balance between the three language programmes by increasing the number of Estonian students. Marketing development is likely to support this.
- It would be beneficial for the Seminary to explore options to better facilitate cross language group discussions on-line to enhance the accessibility of hybrid learning.

1.8 Learning and teaching

Standard

Admission requirements and procedure ensure fair access to higher education and the formation of a motivated student body.

The higher education institution systemically implements a student-centred approach that guides students to take responsibility for their studies and career planning and supports creativity and innovation.

Graduates of the higher education institution, with their professional knowledge and social skills, are competitive both nationally and internationally.

Guidelines

Admission requirements and procedure are fair and impartial. In the admission process, student's ability for academic progress on the chosen programme is assessed.

The academic recognition of foreign qualifications is based on international conventions, agreements between countries, and the Estonian legislation.

Learning and teaching process takes into account students' individual abilities and needs and supports their development. Learning offers sufficient challenge for students at different levels. Students participate in planning and implementation of the learning process. Organisation of independent work and face-to-face teaching motivates students to take responsibility for their studies.

Teaching methods and learning aids used in the learning and teaching process are modern, appropriate and effective and support the development of digital culture, contributing – among other things – towards the development of a self-directed learner, creativity, innovation and the development of digital and other general competencies. The HEI has a Code of Good Learning and Teaching (including online) and it is applied in practice.

The internship is integrated with speciality studies, the requirements for the internship are defined and the student's supervision ensured.

Students are motivated to learn and contribute to improving the quality of their studies by providing meaningful feedback on both the learning and teaching process and the organisation of studies.

Doctoral students plan their studies, as well as their research and development activities, in collaboration with their supervisor(s), setting specific objectives for each year and assuming responsibility for achieving those objectives.

Indicators

- Student satisfaction with the content and organisation of studies
- Alumni satisfaction with the quality of studies
- Employer satisfaction with the preparation of the graduates
- Other indicators depending on the HEI

Evidence and analysis

The requirement for admission to BMTS is membership in a Christian congregation, justified on two grounds: first, to ensure the applicant's alignment with the values of BMTS, and second, because practicums conducted within congregations require membership in one (SER). For international students, alternative practicum arrangements are sought, usually in their home country. The requirement for admission means that BMTS is not fully open to all applicants eligible for higher education.

The admissions process consists of multiple phases and includes several elements: an admission questionnaire, an admission essay, an interview, a Bible knowledge test, and a pastor's letter of recommendation from the applicant's home congregation (SER). None of these elements are scored, nor is the weight of each component disclosed. The admission essay is a new and useful tool for assessing applicants' motivation and academic skills. However, the Panel considers that all essays should be evaluated using uniform assessment criteria. To enhance fair and transparent access to the Seminary, the admission process requires development, an area that the Rector was committed to improving (M).

It is commendable that the Admission Committee holds an annual discussion on student admissions. This enables admission criteria to be adjusted with minimal bureaucracy. The Panel noted that any changes should be clearly communicated to applicants to further improve accessibility, fairness and transparency.

From documents and interviews, the Panel observed that BMTS considers students' needs in its teaching practices. For example, in response to student feedback, the seminary chose to retain session-based teaching days from Wednesday to Saturday rather than moving them to Tuesday to Thursday as initially planned. Remote students were asked about informal opportunities for interaction, and they mentioned meetings on Teams and Zoom groups (S). Mandatory attendance in-person is limited to practicums, where students rarely meet each other because these are carried out individually in locations chosen by the students.

The SER describes various teaching methods, supporting both individual learning and community engagement. Students reported that teachers employ diverse teaching methods as needed. Students mentioned the very practical study methods in practicums, such as working with homeless people. Teachers mentioned reading circles, essay writing, traditional exams, and alternative teaching methods brought about by remote education to illustrate the variety of teaching methods. For challenging courses such as Greek language and Bible exegesis, tutorial groups have been organized since the autumn of 2024. Trilingual instruction presents a significant challenge for teaching and learning in some areas. During interviews, the teaching staff highlighted some difficulties in communication, particularly in online group work, caused by students lacking a common language. Some of these difficulties may be technological. Teachers highlighted the importance they place on contact teaching to engage students.

There are three distinct practicum phases (SER). The first focuses on observation, monitoring, and analysis. The second is conducted in the student's home congregation, providing practical experience in various ministerial tasks. The third practicum aims to develop students' knowledge and skills to address societal, cultural, and spiritual needs. The Practicum Handbook is well-constructed and serves as a concrete tool for supervision and feedback.

Students express high levels of satisfaction with the instruction and atmosphere at the Seminary (SER/S). The three-phase practicum was also highly praised. Feedback from graduates highlights satisfaction with the supervision process of the Diploma paper and the feedback provided by teachers and supervisors (SER). Feedback from alumni has been utilized in developing the new curriculum. The alumni value the comprehensive nature of BMTS studies and the high quality of theological subjects. Eligibility for further studies in other universities is also important to many alumni. However, employer feedback is not documented in the SER or its appendices.

Conclusions

The Panel concludes that while there is room for improvement in student admissions, in terms of transparency and eligibility, progress has already been made, for example, through the development of the use of admission essays. Feedback from all stakeholders regarding the Seminary is positive, often excellent. Teaching methods are adapted to individual needs and applied flexibly. Trilingual instruction poses some challenges, especially for small group on-line discussions. Based on the analysis, the Panel concludes that BMTS conforms to the requirements of the standard.

Strengths

- The flexibility of teaching methods which are adapted to the individual needs of students.

Areas of concern and recommendations

- The current admissions criteria exclude access to those who do not belong to a church community or to some denominations. The Panel recommends that the Seminary explore the possibility of opening the Seminary to students outside specific denominations.
- Currently the admissions process lacks some transparency and objectivity. It is recommended that a scoring system is introduced for student admissions to enhance transparency and to provide a basis for procedures in the case of any complaints.

Opportunities for further improvement

- It would be helpful for changes that the Admissions Committee make during their annual review to be recorded and well disseminated to support potential applicants.

1.9 Student assessment

Standard

Assessments of students, including recognition of their prior learning and work experiences, support the process of learning and are consistent with expected learning outcomes.

The objectivity and reliability of student assessments are ensured.

Guidelines

The assessment criteria are understandable to students and students are informed about them in a timely manner. Members of the teaching staff cooperate in defining assessment criteria and apply similar approaches.

Assessment methods are versatile and relevant, assess the degree of achievement of learning outcomes (including general competencies), and support the development of a self-directed learner.

If possible, more than one staff member is involved in the development of assessment tasks and student assessments. Along with assessments, students receive feedback that supports their individual development.

The HEI develops the teachers' assessment competence and supports the solid application of digital technologies in assessment.

Evaluation of doctoral students is transparent and impartial. Its purpose is to support the development of doctoral students, to assess the effectiveness of their current work and to evaluate their ability to complete the doctoral studies on time and successfully defend their doctoral theses.

When recognising prior learning and work experience towards the completion of the study programme, results obtained through the studies and work experiences (the achieved learning outcomes) are assessed. Students are aware of their rights and obligations, including the procedures for challenges regarding assessments.

Indicators:

- The number of credit points applied for and awarded under the accreditation of prior and experiential learning scheme (APEL)
- Other indicators depending on the HEI

Evidence and analysis

It is clear from the previous accreditation report, the SER and information from the BMTS webpage, that the Seminary recognises the prior learning and work experience of students. Guidelines on how to apply for transfer of credit are included in the Student Handbook. The Seminary keeps a record of applications, how many credits these are for, the number approved and those rejected as well as whether the credits are for formal study or for work experience (SER).

From the SER, a sample of course descriptions and meetings with students it was clear that the assessments are aligned with the learning outcomes. Students demonstrated that they are aware of expected requirements as well as of the assessment criteria. Students reported that they were well informed about the assessments at the beginning of each course, that they received reminders about assessments during the course and that the information was also included in the syllabi which are readily accessible online. It is clear which learning outcomes an assignment is testing. The Panel noted that the course descriptions present the information in diverse ways. The course *New Testament Survey* was particularly clear in laying out which learning outcomes each assignment was addressing. The Panel commends this and encourages the Seminary to consider introducing a standard template for the assessments within the course descriptions.

The Seminary has increased the coherence between different subjects in the curriculum. To reduce duplication and develop integration and collaboration, the assignments of similar subjects have been aligned with each other. For instance, the tools taught in *New Testament Exegesis* form the basis for the study of other subjects; the outcome of an assignment in the *Foundations of Diaconal Ministry* (creating a new diaconal project) is used as the basis for an assignment in the subject *Entrepreneurial Leadership of Missional Projects* (SER). The Seminary takes students' opinion of the workload into account and, if possible, provides flexibility in terms of changing the timetable to support the acquisition of knowledge. The Moodle study system helps students manage their deadlines (S).

The Panel noted that compared with previous accreditation assessments, teachers are now using a greater variety of and more innovative assessment types. These include essays, reflections and research papers, forums, presentations, discussions, and creative work. Staff choose the assessment

method for their courses (differentiated and non-differentiated) based on the learning outcomes (SER). In several courses students are encouraged to reflect on their own and their peer's work and suggest a grade with the aim of supporting greater analysis and the meeting of the learning objectives.

It was confirmed that most teachers provide individual feedback on student's work (S). The amount of feedback depends on the type of assessment: for instance, for multiple choice exams there is no feedback (T). Students expressed satisfaction with the individual feedback they received and commented that feedback is not only related to the learning objectives in the course but includes comments which help students to improve their study and general skills overall (S).

For most courses, the teacher who teaches the course marks the assignment. In the case of the final diploma paper, there are two assessors and a committee which increases the objectivity of the marking (SER).

The assessment criteria are clear and included in the course descriptions. Students are aware of the option to appeal, for which they need a sound reason, and they are also aware of what the process is to lodge an appeal.

The Student Handbook includes a short, clear process on how to apply for an extension. The Panel learned that students are aware of this process (S). The Panel also learned that there is considerable flexibility in granting extensions which enables individual support to be given to students in their circumstances. Extensions are granted on a case-by-case basis and thus the decision is not objective. However, staff confirmed that the process of recording how an extension is given is transparent (T/M). When an extension is granted, it is recorded on the student information system. The students provided an example of when there was a technical failure, and their work was refused because the system did not record the extension(S). The Seminary responded to the student's claim that an extension had been granted, and the error was rectified.

Conclusions

The Seminary recognises the prior learning and work experience of students. Assessment types are varied and support the development of knowledge and skills. The assessment criteria are clearly set out and align well with the learning outcomes. Students receive feedback which enables them to understand the grade, and which supports their further learning. Students are clear about the processes for appealing a grade and for requesting an extension. For most assignments there is a single teacher involved in the setting and marking. In the case of the final diploma there are two markers and a committee.

Overall, the Panel confirms that BMTS conforms to the requirements of the standard.

Opportunities for further improvement

- The Seminary is encouraged to consider creating a template for courses so that the learning outcomes are consistently linked to the assignments. This would help further increase the coherence between courses.

1.10 Learning support systems

Standard

The higher education institution ensures that all students have access to academic, career and psychological counselling.

Students' individual development and academic progress are monitored and supported.

Guidelines

The HEI assists the student in developing an individual study programme based on the student's special needs as well as educational abilities and preferences.

The HEI advises its students (including students with special needs and international students) on finding internship places as well as jobs. Students are aware of where to get support in the case of psychological problems.

The HEI has a functioning system to support and advise international students (including psychological and career counselling) which, inter alia, helps them integrate smoothly into the membership of the HEI and Estonian society. The HEI analyses the reasons students withdraw from studies or drop out, and takes steps to increase the effectiveness of the studies.

In order to carry out studies and research, development and creative activities, the availability of up-to-date study and research literature, other study materials and tools (including those for independent work) and access to research databases is ensured. Study literature, materials and other teaching aids are of equally high quality.

To support study activities, timely and relevant information and communication technology solutions have been planned, including the study information system, document management, online learning environments, analytical tools for teaching and learning. Support for online learning and IT is available to students.

The HEI supports student participation in extra-curricular activities and civil society initiatives.

The HEI monitors student satisfaction with the counselling services, the online learning and IT support provided and makes changes as needed.

Indicators

- The average duration of the study by levels of study
- Dropout/withdrawal rate (during the first year and the whole study period)
- Students' satisfaction with the support services
- Other indicators depending on the HEI

Evidence and analysis

The SER identifies nine areas for learning support: library study materials including databases; language and translation; counselling; study grants; IT support and digital technologies; support for international students; students with special needs; practicums and job placements, and extra-curricular activities. These nine areas cover fully those specified in the Standard.

The SER included statistics on the withdrawal and completion rates for students. Overall, the retention rates have improved, although the curve has not been consistent. The Seminary reasonably attributes this to the impact of the Covid pandemic and the war in Ukraine. The data shows an estimated downward curve from a high of 52% to 11 in 2022 and none in 2023. The Seminary has worked to address the retention rate since the last accreditation. This includes careful analysis of students' reasons for withdrawal, the majority of which are personal and financial. The Seminary strengthened the entry criteria and decided not to enrol international students until they had a visa. Additional support was also introduced through the new mentor system.

The data showing the numbers of students graduating within the nominal study time is good. The comparison in the SER shows that 62% of BMTS students graduate within the nominal period (3+1)

compared to an Estonian average of 43%. The Seminary did not know whether there was a differential between Estonian and international students. They were aware, however, that international students may choose to take four years to ensure they have time to complete, and their visa allows for this.

Access to academic counselling is provided by the Academic Affairs Committee (Dekanaat) which is a sub-committee of the Academic Council, led by the Dean, and through the mentors allocated to individual students. The mentor system was established two years' ago, in part to address the retention rate (SER). In the 2023/24 academic year 83% of students were allocated a mentor. Staff reported to the Panel that from the beginning of the 24-25 academic year all students were allocated a mentor. Students meet with their mentors twice a semester. The Panel learned that in mentor sessions both academic and personal issues are addressed (T). Brief records of the session are made, and these are accessible to the Dean. The form used to record the sessions was revised slightly after the first year to capture more information. The form includes a box for the mentor to assess whether the student is having difficulties with their studies or whether they are in danger of withdrawing. The system enables action to be taken on 'at risk' students. The students reported that they found the mentor sessions helpful. Additionally, students felt that they could approach the Dean directly if they wanted to discuss any aspects of their study (S).

Student grades are entered into the Moodle system, which also shows if students have been awarded an extension for an assignment. Moodle enables the Dean to have oversight of student progress. The fact that the Dean also sees the mentor meeting report means he has a holistic overview of the student's progress (M). This works well in the context of a small number of students overall.

BMTS has recently appointed a member of staff who is a trained psychological counsellor and is able to offer expert advice when needed. Students felt fully supported in their studies by the staff. In addition to the support offered directly by the Seminary, the Panel learned that students also gain support from their church communities and their pastors, many of whom are very familiar with the Seminary (S).

The premises of BMTS are wheelchair accessible enabling the admission of students with physical mobility issues. The Seminary could give one example of a student with a hearing disability, apart from this, the Panel saw no other instances of students with a physical disability. Staff were not aware of specific provision for students with unseen disabilities such as dyslexia, dyscalculia, and those on the autistic spectrum. Staff commented that such disabilities could be picked up in the mentoring sessions but noted that disclosing a disability could be a sensitive issue for students. The Dean reported that he had tried to identify a testing system for special educational needs but had not yet found anything suitable. It was not evident to the team that there was shared awareness across the Seminary of these kinds of disability and what kinds of support might be appropriate. The Panel encourages BMTS to raise awareness across the staff group of how to recognise and support a range of disabilities.

International students have represented over 50% of students in the years between 2021 and 2023, a few of whom are already settled in Estonia when they start their studies. The Seminary supports those arriving newly in Estonia with sorting out the necessary paperwork. It also offers Estonian language classes to promote integration into life in Estonia. The Seminary has a system of prayer partners and encourages partnerships to be between students from different cultural and language groups; for example, a student studying in Israel was successfully paired with a student based in

Estonia. Students from outside Estonia or from a more distant part of Estonia can book accommodation within the premises at a reasonable rate (SER). Students confirmed that this was good support and that the booking process was straightforward; information was available on the web as well as in the student handbook. There is no member of staff with a specific role to support international students; this is something BMTS could consider addressing (T).

There are several sources of funding for students including bursaries and scholarships some of which are offered directly by the Methodist church, some earmarked for Ukrainians and some for students from other church denominations. The criteria differ for different scholarships/bursaries. Students reported that the criteria were clear and that they appreciated the opportunities for financial support, which, in some cases, made study possible.

Students undertake a practicum in each year of study. The first two are in the congregation to which the student belongs. The course in Lifelong Learning in the Congregations addresses career planning and job opportunities. "Kuum" days offer the opportunity for students to find out about placements in a variety of Christian organisations. Mentor meetings also provide guidance on work and practicum placements. Students are well supported during their practicum. There is written guidance for supervisors which outlines the requirements of the student and what the supervisor needs to do. Supervisors reported that they completed reports on both what tasks the practicum included and how well the student undertook them. The reports are submitted to the Dean. The Dean told the Panel that he approves placements to ensure there is the appropriate support and expertise to oversee the student and support their learning. The students reported that some of the practicums and placements open further opportunities, including those in the broader community.

IT support is offered by the educational technologist who also teaches digital competencies. The technologist is available to help students with access to materials on Moodle, to databases and any other IT support needs. Access to relevant study materials is available through the library. There is also dedicated support for translation to ensure students can equitably access the learning and teaching. The Panel were impressed by this support.

Conclusions

BMTS fully addresses all aspects of Learning Support Systems, and these are sound and well-organised. Students are well supported in all aspects of their learning, and their progress and development is monitored enabling any additional support to be offered. BMTS has little experience of students with unseen disabilities. There are no barriers for students with physical difficulties. There is low awareness of the specific needs and how these can be addressed for students with unseen difficulties. This is an area for development. The Panel noted that there is no member of staff identified for international students which is a consideration for further development. BMTS provision fully conforms to the requirements of the standard and is worthy of recognition.

Strengths

- The introduction and development of the mentor system which provides individualised academic and personal support to students.
- The overall provision of learning support to students which is comprehensive and effective.

Opportunities for further improvement

- Although international students are well supported there is no identified point of contact for them among the staff. The Seminary is encouraged to assign a member of staff to act as first point of contact for international students.
- The Panel found that staff were not very aware of unseen disabilities and were not well equipped with strategies to identify such disabilities. The Seminary is encouraged to raise awareness of unseen disabilities across the Seminary and identify sources of specific support, such as strategies to help students deal with tasks or activities, they find challenging.

1.11 Research, development and/or other creative activity

Standard

The higher education institution has defined its objectives and focus in the fields of RDC based on its mission, as well as on the expectations and future needs of society, and assesses their implementation and the societal impact of its RDC activities. RDC supports the process of teaching and learning at the higher education institution. Support services for RDC are purposeful and support implementation of the objectives of the core process.

Guidelines

The HEI places a high value on the role and responsibilities of the field of RDC in society and evaluates the results of its RDC activities, their international visibility and societal impact.

The HEI responds flexibly to the current needs of society and the labour market in terms of its research and plans its research in collaboration with enterprises, public sector institutions and organisations of the third sector.

Members of teaching staff introduce students to their research results as well as the latest scientific achievements in their areas of specialisation, and involve students in their R&D projects where possible.

The organisation and management of RDC take into account the profile and the mission of the HEI.

The HEI applies digital tools for the administration and re-use of research data.

Indicators depend on the specificities of the HEI

- Numerical data:
 - (1) scientific publications by classifiers;
 - (2) public presentations of creative work; recognition from international competitions; reviews in professional publications, etc.;
 - (3) patent applications, patents;
 - (4) textbooks, study aids of various formats, etc.;
 - (5) system development solutions; product development solutions; environmental applications solutions;
 - (6) contracts concluded with enterprises;
 - (7) spin-off companies, etc., in line with the profile and priorities of the HEI; etc.
- Number of scientific publications / creative works per member of academic staff and per employee with the requirement to do research (FTE, by areas)
- Number and volume of externally funded projects of RDC activities
- Proportion of projects with a positive financing decision out of the submitted project applications.
- Other indicators depending on the HEI

Evidence and analysis

BMTS has defined its objectives and focus in the fields of research, development, and other creative activities (RDC) based on its mission. These objectives are outlined in the RDC Activities Strategy 2024-2028. The Strategy has been defined in relation to the needs of the church which the Seminary clearly states is part of society. According to that Strategy, BMTS's priority research areas consist of themes of Church and society (mainly social work and mental health), Church history (meaning different periods and important persons), and internal dynamics and resilience of congregations (i.e. growth, involvement). This strategy will allow the realisation of their objectives to be evaluated.

The RDC Activities Strategy includes the goal to increase the number of research publications further. The Panel noted that the number of research publications has increased since the last assessment has increased (SER). Some staff have been given research specific time which demonstrates support for the development of research and creative activities within the institution. There is some support for identifying opportunities for research. Staff are also offered honoraria for publication. The Panel did not hear of any further support for research such as mentoring or facilitating relationships with research-active scholars in similar discipline areas.

There has been some sharing of research with the wider public via church networks and publications. The dissemination of RDC via more scientific avenues is increasingly valued, demonstrated by the granting of leave for academic colleagues to undertake doctoral work, and the recent, though minimal, achievements in publication. The outlining of clear RDC indicators in the coming years will also improve investments made in research (RDC activities strategy 2024-2028). The fact that the recently appointed Rector is also Head of Research and Development is a clear sign that RDC will be prioritized at the highest level and aligned with the profile and mission of the Seminary.

RDC activities, such as publishing traditional academic research articles, historical studies, and especially applied theology, are attuned to the needs of that sector of society with which the Seminary identifies itself i.e. the church. This identification would benefit from being made explicit in the RDC strategy.

The Panel found that teaching staff were well-informed regarding research in their fields. In the light of an increasing number of faculty with doctoral degrees, an increase in RDC activity and the incorporation of staff's research activity into teaching and learning, students will become more aware of research in the field, particularly that carried out by BMTS academic staff.

Conclusions

BMTS has developed a research strategy for RDC and identified its goals and objectives. These align with the Seminary's mission and serve society through the church. RDC is being given higher priority within BMTS, and the profile of the new Rector and his stated aims clearly support this. Research activity supports students' teaching and learning.

Based on review of the SER and the site visit, the Panel confirm that BMTS meets the required standard in relation to Research, Development, and/or Creative activities.

Strengths

- The Seminary have developed a research and development strategy with identified goals and objectives.

Opportunities for further improvement

- Staff could benefit from more support for their research activity, such as exploring the option of mentoring pairing with established research-active scholars in relevant disciplines.
- Research and development activities could be enhanced by the development of further plans which may involve specific guidance and support in applying for research funding available through national and international sources; more transparent communication of available financial support for contribution to academic conferences, and enabling the protection of time for research through study leave provision, whether through sabbatical research leave or more limited concentrated blocks of time for research.

1.12 Service to society

Standard

The higher education institution initiates and implements development activities, which enhance prosperity in the community and disseminate recent know-how in the areas of the institution's competence.

The higher education institution, as a learning-oriented organisation, promotes lifelong learning in society and creates high-quality opportunities for that.

Guidelines

The HEI contributes to the development of the community's well-being by sharing its resources (library, museums, sports facilities, etc.), by providing consulting and advisory services, participating in the development of non-profit sector and charitable activities, and by organising concerts, exhibitions, shows, conferences, fairs and other events.

The HEI involves alumni in activities aimed at the development of the HEI and the knowledge society. Employees of the HEI participate in the work of professional associations and in other community councils and decision-making bodies as experts, directing society's development processes as opinion leaders. The impact academic employees have on society is taken into account when evaluating their work.

The HEI has clearly defined the objectives for in-service training, measures their implementation and plans improvement activities. The HEI plans in-service training based on the present and future needs of the labour market target groups. Evidence-based learning supports the learning and self-development of adult learners.

The HEI takes advantage of digital means in order to provide trainings and services to the public at large.

Indicators

- Number of people in continuing training and other privately financed open forms of study (by responsibility areas or structural units)
- Other indicators depending on the HEI

Evidence and analysis

The mission of BMTS is dedicated to the preparation of students for service to the church and to society (SER/DP). Service to the church is the very reason for the existence of BMTS and is the

primary goal for the owner. The design of the educational programmes is based on the needs of the church. The Panel learned that BMTS considers that service to the wider society is channelled through service to church given that local congregations have practical and spiritual impact in their own contexts (M). Nevertheless, the Seminary provides services to wider society through offering trainings and workshops and enabling access to their library.

According to the interviews, the Seminary's continuing education courses have received positive feedback from alumni and cooperation partners. Since the last accreditation in 2022, BMTS offers an increasing number of continuing education courses. For instance, in 2022 there were 4 courses with a total of 30 participants from outside the student body; in 2024 there were 11 courses with 663 participants outside the student body (SER). The majority of these are professional education course such as *Children and war* and *Family counselling*. Some of them are more general in nature such as the open language courses offered by native English-speaking staff members to Ukrainian refugees. In addition, there are some courses like *Old Testament Theology*, *Wisdom Literatures and Poetry* or *Evangelism and Discipleship* which are aimed at raising the knowledge and awareness of prospective students and other interested people. The DP included a plan to develop micro-credentials that was highly supported by interviewed alumni; however, the Panel established that staff members were unaware of the plan. Overall, the courses offered are a mixture of those related directly to the church and those more broadly as service to society through the church. The Panel learned that life-long learning activities were also seen as a potential source of funding (M) and a way of using the digital facilities of the Seminary which are a promising basis for initiatives in this area. However, the Panel recommends that these activities, whether conceived as lifelong learning or service to society, need to be more thoroughly thought through to ensure that they are in line with the mission and vision of the Seminary.

Students and alumni of the Seminary are socially active members of their congregations and wider society. Alumni of the Seminary who are clergy members, are often active in other roles in their local communities. According to SER and the site visit, they often work in serving positions in churches, as clergy in prisons or in the military, or social institutions. During the study visit, the alumni and cooperation partners confirmed that, while their main motivator is their religious background, the Seminary has provided them or their students with necessary skills to work with people in different capacities. As the roles they choose serve society, the Seminary, through its people, is serving society.

In order to develop the area further, the staff and students of the Seminary are encouraged to look beyond congregational communication channels and engage in public discussions through radio, newspapers and their online channels.

Conclusions

BMTS initiates and implements a wide range of development activities which disseminate its know-how to the church and to society. The Seminary also promotes and develops life-long learning opportunities with which it has reached a wider audience beyond the student body.

BMTS conforms to the requirements of standard Service to society.

Areas of concern and recommendations

- The range and body of the Seminary's continued education is large and of sufficient quality. However, there seems to be a lack of an overall plan which is explicit about the different

target groups, what these mean for the range of courses and how the decision about what to offer is made. The panel recommends that BMTS limits itself to the content covered by its own education and research, and that it systematically involves its own alumni in developing and innovating life-long learning.

- The Seminary is encouraged to support their staff and students to express their opinion and engage in societal discussions through public media channels, such as radio stations, newspapers and online media.