

Theology Study Programme Group assessment decision Estonian Free Church Theological Seminary

26/02/2019

The Higher Education Assessment Council of the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education (EKKA) decided to approve the report of the Assessment Committee and to carry out the next quality assessment of the first level of higher education of the Theology Study Programme Group of the Estonian Free Church Theological Seminary in seven years.

Pursuant to clause 41.1 of the document “Quality Assessment of the Study Programme Group at the First and Second Levels of Higher Education” established on the basis of the authorization contained in § 21¹ (2) of the Institutions of Professional Higher Education Act, § 10 (4) of the University Act and clauses 3.7.3 and 3.7.1 of the Statutes of the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education, the Higher Education Assessment Council of the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education (hereinafter the Council) states the following:

1. The Estonian Free Church Theological Seminary coordinated the quality assessment period of the Theology Study Programme Group with EKKA on 09.09.2017.
2. With the order of 14.08.2018, the director of EKKA approved the Committee for Institutional Accreditation and Quality Assessment of the Theology Study Programme Group of the Baltic Methodist Theological Seminary and the Estonian Free Church Theological Seminary (hereinafter the Committee) in the following composition

Gerrit Immink (Chairman)	Professor Emeritus, Protestant Theological University (Holland)
Jonathan Loose	Director of Learning and Teaching, Heythrop College, University of London (UK)
Trygve Elliv Wyller	Professor, Faculty of Theology, University of Oslo (Norway)
Heiki Haljasorg	Project Manager, Estonian Council of Churches (Estonia)
Ringo Ringvee	Adviser, Ministry of the Interior (Estonia)
Heidi Maiberg	Student, University of Tartu (Estonia)

3. The Estonian Free Church Theological Seminary submitted the following professional higher education study programme for assessment in the Theology Study Programme Group:

Free Church Theology and Leadership

4. The Estonian Free Church Theological Seminary submitted a self-analysis report to the EKKA office on 13.08.2018, which was sent to the Committee by the assessment coordinator on 15.08.2018.
5. The evaluation visit at the Estonian Free Church Theological Seminary took place on 11.-12.10.2018.
6. The Committee sent the draft assessment report to the EKKA office on 26.11.2018, which EKKA forwarded to the institution of higher education for comment on 30.11.2018 and to which the Estonian Free Church Theological Seminary submitted a reply on 11.12.2018.
7. The Committee submitted the final assessment report to the EKKA office on 17.12.2018. The assessment report is an integral part of the decision. The report is available on the EKKA website.
8. The Secretary of the Assessment Council forwarded the final assessment report and self-analysis report to the members of the Assessment Council on 14.02.2019.
9. The Assessment Council discussed the received documents at the meeting of 26.02.2019 with the participation of ten members and decided to highlight the following strengths, recommendations, and areas for improvement concerning the first and second level of higher education of the Theology Study Programme Group of the Estonian Free Church Theological Seminary.

Strengths

- 1) Students are satisfied with their studies and are enthusiastic. Faculty and management are committed to their students.
- 2) The Seminary uses various learning technologies effectively and competently to support students' learning and also provides effective support to students in their independent work.
- 3) The Seminary is very effective in integrating practical and theoretical studies, providing students with significant practical experience, but at the same time allowing this experience to be reflected in depth.
- 4) The Seminary demonstrates maturity in its approach to higher education, recognizing the need to develop staff research and to continue to take steps to expand the Seminary's activities in this area in order to improve teaching.
- 5) The Seminary allows students to complete the study programme in four years so that their workload can be distributed more evenly.
- 6) Systematic presentation of recorded lectures for review and wider use by students.
- 7) The Seminary has gained significant mentoring experience and develops the ongoing process based on feedback from students and other stakeholders.
- 8) The research of the most frequently published lecturers is of a high standard.
- 9) The employment of UK professor Nigel Wright at the university is a positive step, which will allow, among other things, the supervision of younger lecturers.
- 10) The number of graduates is on the rise, which is a very positive sign.
- 11) The lecturers of the Seminary are members of several international organizations and have either participated in or helped to organize several international conferences.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

- 1) To develop a long-term research plan for the Seminary as a whole, and to increase funding for staff research.
- 2) To initiate and plan research (applied research) at the intersection of church and society.
- 3) It is necessary to train and recruit a new generation of lecturers.
- 4) To support and strengthen international lecturer mobility/exchanges.
- 5) To ensure that the premises located in Tallinn meet the needs of a modern professional higher education institution.
- 6) To expand access to the digital theological library by finding additional possibilities for staff and students' access to the Tallinn University library.
- 7) It is advisable to develop the student admission procedure, and teaching practices in such a way that it presents challenges to all students and thus helps them all realize their potential.
- 8) The Committee recommends that the Seminary continue its regular study programme review, setting up relevant processes and a timetable in advance. It would also be necessary to create a formal channel for alumni to provide feedback on the study programme.
- 9) To continue the development of common evaluation rules and ensure their consistent and uniform use. The volume of credit points must also be reviewed, and their equivalence ensured. The consistency of the submission of subject syllabuses needs to be improved, and a formal procedure for the approval of subject syllabuses needs to be established.
- 10) There is a need to develop regulations that clearly set out the rules for examinations and re-examinations.
- 11) The Seminary should review the need for non-distinctive assessments so that it does not place some students at a disadvantage/too favorable situation when awarding *cum laude* diplomas.
- 12) It is necessary to implement a mentoring quality assessment system.
- 13) To continue to improve international connections and international learning opportunities for students.
- 14) The feedback system should be developed in such a way that it does not rely so much on the Rector and is sustainable in terms of staff turnover.
- 15) It is necessary to develop a longer-term research plan (5-7 years). The plans, activities, and profiles of applied research need to be more clearly defined. Research in the field of modern theology needs to be strengthened.
- 16) A separate plan is needed to develop the research activities of younger staff.
- 17) The distinction between reporting and research needs to be made clearer, that could be done by five lead teachers.
- 18) Research results need to be published in national and international publications. More resources are needed for research, and new resources should, in particular, support the participation of younger staff in foreign conferences and seminars.
- 19) The distinction between mentors and supervisors needs to be clearer.
- 20) Supervision and its quality should be analyzed and developed.
- 21) Seminars for supervisors and participation in them should be further developed and offered to those coming from outside the Seminary.
- 22) The Seminary should encourage its alumni to publish articles on the topics of their graduation theses.
- 23) The need to update lecturer information in ETIS should be emphasized.

10. Clause 41 of the document “Quality Assessment of the Study Programme Group at the First and Second Level of Higher Education” stipulates that the Assessment Council shall approve the assessment report within three months after its receipt. The Council will consider the strengths, areas for improvement, and recommendations identified by the Assessment Committee and

decide to carry out the next quality assessment of the study Programme group in three, five, or seven years.

11. The Council considered the strengths, areas for improvement and recommendations set out in clause 9 and found that the study programme, the studies provided on it and the development activities related to the studies meet the requirements and:

DECIDED

To approve the assessment report and to carry out the quality assessment of the first level of higher education of the Theology Study Programme Group of the Estonian Free Church Theological Seminary in seven years.

The decision was adopted by ten votes in favor. None opposed.

12. The Assessment Council proposes to the Estonian Free Church Theological Seminary to submit to EKKA no later than 26.02.2021 an action plan on taking into account the areas for improvement and recommendations presented in the report.
13. A person who considers that the decision has violated his or her rights or restricted his or her freedoms may file a challenge with the Assessment Council of EKKA within thirty (30) days after the appellant became aware of or should have become aware of the contested act. The Assessment Council shall send the challenge to the challenge committee of the Assessment Council of EKKA, which shall submit a written, impartial opinion to the Assessment Council on the reasoning of the challenge within five (5) days of receipt of the challenge. The Assessment Council shall resolve the challenge within ten (10) days of receipt, taking into account the reasoned position of the appeal committee. If the challenge needs to be further investigated, the Assessment Council may extend the term for reviewing the challenge by up to thirty (30) days. Contestation of a decision in court is possible within thirty (30) days as of its service by submitting an appeal to the Tallinn Courthouse of the Tallinn Administrative Court pursuant to the procedure provided for in the Administrative Court Procedure Act.

Eve Eisenschmidt
Head of the Council

Hillar Bauman
Secretary of the Council