

Institutional Accreditation Decision Estonian Free Church Theological Seminary

26.02.2019

The Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education of the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education decided to accredit Estonian Free Church Theological Seminary for seven years with a secondary condition.

Acting in accordance with the authorisation granted by the clause 21 (3) 1) of the Institutions of Professional Higher Education Act and clause 10 (4) of the Universities Act and section 3.7.3 of the Statutes of the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education (EKKA) and based on sections 48.2 and 48.7 of the 'Conditions and Procedure for Institutional Accreditation' compiled on the basis of the authorisation given in section 3.7.1 of the Statutes of EKKA, the EKKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education (hereinafter, "the Council") shall state the following:

1. Estonian Free Church Theological Seminary agreed with EKKA for the institutional accreditation to take place on 09.09.2017.
2. On August 14, 2018, the Director of EKKA approved by her order the following composition of Estonian Free Church Theological Seminary and Baltic Methodist Theological Seminary institutional accreditation and Theology study programme Group Assessment Committee (hereinafter, "the Committee")

Gerrit Immink (Chair)	Professor Emeritus, Protestant Theological University (the Netherlands)
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 a self-evaluation report to the EKKA Bureau on 13.08.2018, and the assessment coordinator forwarded it to the Committee on 15.08.2018.

4. The assessment visit to Estonian Free Church Theological Seminary took place on 11 and 12.10.2018.
5. The Committee sent its draft assessment report to the EKKA Bureau on 26.11.2018, and EKKA forwarded it to Estonian Free Church Theological Seminary for its comments on 30.11.2018 and the Seminary delivered its response on 11.12.2018.
6. The Committee submitted its final assessment report to the EKKA Bureau on 17.12.2018. The assessment report is an integral part of the decision. The report is available on the EKKA website.
7. The Secretary of the Council forwarded the Committee's final assessment report along with the self-evaluation report to the Council members on 14.02.2019.
8. The component assessments by the Committee were as follows:

Organisational management and performance	Conforms to requirements
Learning and teaching	Conforms to requirements
Research, development and/or other creative activity	Partially conforms to requirements
Service to society	Conforms to requirements

9. The Council with 10 members present discussed these received documents in its session on 26.02.2019 and, based on the assessment report, decided to point out the following strengths, areas for improvement, and recommendations regarding Estonian Free Church Theological Seminary.

9.1. Organisational management and performance

Strengths

- 1) Estonian Free Church Theological Seminary has defined its role in the Estonian society and seeks to develop its understanding of the role of churches in today's society.
- 2) The Seminary has a strong leadership in terms of management and vision. Leadership and staff have an adequate estimation of the quality of teaching and research on the level of higher professional education.
- 3) The Seminary has qualified staff for teaching and research.
- 4) The leadership team, staff and Supervisory Board operate in mutual understanding.
- 5) The Union of Evangelical Christian and Baptist Churches of Estonia supports and facilitates the relocation to Tallinn and guarantees sustainability during the transition. The transition to Tallinn will benefit the majority of students in terms of accessibility.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

- 1) Managerial tasks shall be delegated and distributed as much as possible, considering the high workload of the rector and in order to ensure the long-term sustainability of the Seminary. Managerial responsibilities of the staff shall be defined more clearly, in particular the role of the Lead Teachers.

- 2) A long term research plan should be developed for the Seminary as a whole. Funds for research activities of staff should be increased.
- 3) The Seminary should initiate and plan research activities (of Applied Research) in the area of the intersection between church and society.
- 4) It should be observed that daily decisions are clearly documented.
- 5) The Seminary should train and recruit a new generation of teachers.
- 6) Fundraising should be initiated for scholarships.
- 7) The Seminary should support and intensify the mobility and international exchange of staff.
- 8) The importance of theological education should be promoted in local churches.
- 9) The Seminary should observe that the housing facilities in Tallinn conform to the needs of a modern institute for higher professional education.
- 10) Access to a digital theological library should be broadened. It is recommended to explore the possibilities of access for staff and students to the library of Tallinn University.

9.2. Learning and teaching

Strengths

- 1) Students are satisfied with and enthusiastic about their studies. Teachers and the leadership are dedicated to their students.
- 2) The Seminary makes competent and effective use of learning technology to support the student experience and provides effective support for learners during periods in which they are not on campus.
- 3) The Seminary efficiently integrates practical and theoretical studies, providing significant levels of practical experience to students while also enabling in-depth reflection on practical activities.
- 4) The Seminary demonstrates maturity in its approach to higher education, recognising the importance of developing staff research for the enhancement of teaching and continuing to take steps to extend the Seminary's effective activity in this area.
- 5) The Seminary enables students to study for four years so that workload can be distributed more evenly.
- 6) Recorded lectures are systematically provided for student review and wider use.
- 7) Students have been involved in the assessment of study criteria and learning outcomes.
- 8) The Seminary has developed significant expertise in the area of mentoring and is in the process of continuing the development of the system in light of student and other feedback.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

- 1) The Seminary should consider ways in which it can develop its admissions system and teaching to address the wide range of academic ability of its student body to ensure that all students are challenged and enabled to reach their full potential through their study programme.
- 2) The Seminary should continue to engage in regular programme review, formalising and publishing in advance its processes and timetable. A formal channel should be created for alumni to give feedback to the curriculum.
- 3) The Seminary should continue to develop uniform rules for assessment and ensure their consistent use. A review of the credit point system should be carried out, ensuring the equality of the credit weighting. There should be an increased level of consistency in the presentation of course syllabi, and a formal process should be documented for the approval of course syllabi.

- 4) The Seminary should develop the study regulations to include clear regulations related to the process of taking and retaking examinations.
- 5) It is recommended to verify that the use of non-differentiated assessment is appropriate, ensuring that it cannot cause students to be unfairly advantaged or disadvantaged in the awarding of *cum laude* diplomas.
- 6) A mentoring quality assessment system should be developed.
- 7) The Seminary should continue to enhance its international links and international study opportunities for students.
- 8) The feedback system should be developed in such a way that it does not rely so much on the rector and is sustainable in case there is a change in personnel.

9.3. Research, development and/or other creative activity

Strengths

- 1) The most frequently publishing teachers produce high-level research.
- 2) The applied research profile is relevant to both church and society.
- 3) The conferences are both socially and theologically relevant and gather a good number of participants.
- 4) British Professor Nigel Wright's joining the Seminary staff is a positive step forward that will also enable mentoring younger teachers.
- 5) The increase in the number of graduates is a very positive sign.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

- 1) A longer-term research plan should be developed for the next 5-7 years. The Seminary should analyse and define its applied research plans, activities and profile. Research in the field of contemporary theology should be strengthened.
- 2) A specific plan should be developed for how to increase research among junior staff members.
- 3) A better distinction should be made between pure reporting and research. This initiative could be carried out by the five Lead Teachers.
- 4) Research outcomes should be published in national and international publications. More resources need to be allocated for research purposes, and priority should be given to supporting younger faculty members' participation in research seminars and conferences abroad.
- 5) The Seminary should make a more apparent distinction between mentors and supervisors.
- 6) Supervision quality should be analysed and strengthened.
- 7) The Seminary should further develop training seminars for supervisors, and these should also be available for participants from outside of the Seminary.

9.4. Service to society

Strengths

- 1) The lecturers of the Seminary are members of various international organisations who have either contributed academically or helped to organise numerous international conferences.

- 2) The Seminary has a new website since 2018 which also provides access to video lectures and diploma theses.
- 3) The Seminary has a partnership with the Estonian Conference Seventh-day Adventist Church and the Estonian Council of Churches.
- 4) In-service training (adult training) offered by the Seminary is in accordance with the needs of the Union of Evangelical Christian and Baptist Churches of Estonia.
- 5) The Seminary is active on social media, and information about in-service training is also promoted on the Seminary's website. In-service training is open to the public and also used as a tool for recruiting new students. The Seminary library can be used by the general public.
- 6) There are clearly defined goals and a focus – strengthening its identity, being socially active and open to society.
- 7) Active participation in society is encouraged, and faculty members are good examples of it.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

- 1) The Seminary should encourage its alumni to publish papers on the theme of their diploma thesis.
 - 2) The Seminary should stress the importance of its faculty members updating their profile and publications list in the ETIS (Estonian Research Information System). There is a high risk that the membership of academic associations is not reflected in this database.
 - 3) It is recommended to consider possibilities and strategies in which the Seminary could become more visible in the Estonian secular society and media. Relocation from Tartu to Tallinn could be one of these possibilities.
 - 4) In line with the areas of improvement of the Self-Evaluation report, the Committee recommends that the Seminary develop a systematic plan in cooperation with the local churches and the Union of Evangelical Christian and Baptist Churches of Estonia to map the needs of the target groups.
 - 5) There should be periodic evaluations on the public-oriented activities. As they were not mentioned in the Self-Evaluation report, it remains unclear what kind of evaluations are used if any, and if there is an evaluation system for how the results are evaluated.
- 10.** If one or two of the component assessments are "partially conforms to requirements" and the rest are "conforms to requirements", the Council shall analyse the strengths and areas of improvement of the higher education institution, assess that the leadership, organisational management, teaching and research activities and teaching and research environment comply with the requirements, and decide to accredit the higher education institution for seven years, or assess that the leadership, organisational management, teaching and research activities and teaching and research environment have some issues, and decide to accredit the higher education institution for three years.
- 11.** The Council analysed the strengths and areas of improvement of Estonian Free Church Theological Seminary, and concluded that the leadership, organisational management, teaching and research activities and teaching and research environment comply with the requirements if the higher education institute eliminates the following issues:
- 1) Regarding management and staff of a higher education institution:
 - According to section 7.1.1.5 of the 'Conditions and Procedure for Institutional Accreditation' based on clause 10 (1) 1) and 4) of the Universities Act, subsections 21 (1) to (3) and (5) of the Institutions

of Professional Higher Education Act and subsections 21 (1) to (3) and (5) of the Private Schools Act, *liability at all management levels shall be defined and described, and it shall support the achievement of institutional purposes and the coherent performance of core processes*. Delegate and distribute managerial tasks as much as possible, considering the high workload of the rector and in order to ensure the long-term sustainability of the Seminary. Managerial responsibilities of the staff shall be defined more clearly, in particular the role of the Lead Teachers.

- According to the section 7.1.2.5 of the regulation 'Conditions and Procedure for Institutional Accreditation', *employees shall participate in international mobility programmes, cooperation projects, networks, etc*. The mobility and international exchange of staff must be supported and intensified.

2) Regarding research and development:

- According to the section 7.3.1.1 of the regulation 'Conditions and Procedure for Institutional Accreditation', *a higher education institution shall define its RDC objectives and measure their implementation*. The Seminary should develop a longer-term research plan for the next 5-7 years. The Seminary should analyse and define its applied research plans, activities and profile. Research outcomes should be published in national and international publications.
- According to the section 7.3.2.2 of the regulation 'Conditions and Procedure for Institutional Accreditation', *a higher education institution shall have financial resources needed for RDC development and a strategy that supports their acquisition*. More resources need to be allocated for research purposes, and priority should be given to supporting younger faculty members' participation in research seminars and conferences abroad.

12. According to clause 53 (1) 2) of the Administrative Procedure Act, the secondary condition of an administrative act is an additional duty related to the principal regulation of the administrative act and according to clause 53 (1) 3), also a supplementary condition for the creation of a right arising from the principal regulation of the administrative act. Clauses 53 (2) 2) and 3) of the Administrative Procedure Act stipulate that a secondary condition may be imposed on an administrative act, if the administrative act cannot be issued without the secondary condition or if the issue of the administrative act must be resolved on the basis of the administrative right of discretion. The Council found that the next institutional accreditation shall be conducted without a secondary condition in three years and on the basis of points 48.2 and 48.7 of the 'Conditions and Procedure for Institutional Accreditation'.

DECIDED

to accredit Estonian Free Church Theological Seminary for seven years with a secondary condition.

Estonian Free Church Theological Seminary submits by 26.02.2021 at the latest a report in English about eliminating the shortcoming described in point 11. Members of the assessment committee will be involved to assess compliance with the secondary condition.

The decision was adopted by ten votes in favour and 0 against.

13. If Estonian Free Church Theological Seminary fails to fulfil the secondary condition by the given deadline, the Council shall repeal the accreditation decision or apply a new secondary condition.
14. The accreditation is valid until 26.02.2026 or until repealed. The EKKA Bureau shall agree the time of the next institutional accreditation with Estonian Free Church Theological Seminary by 26.02.2025, at the latest.

15. A person who finds that his or her rights have been violated or his or her freedoms restricted by this decision may file a challenge with the EKKA Quality Assessment Council within 30 days after the person filing the challenge became or should have become aware of the contested finding.

The Council shall forward the challenge to its Appeals Committee who shall provide an unbiased opinion in writing regarding the validity of the challenge to the Council, within five days after receipt of the challenge. The Council shall resolve the challenge within ten days of its receipt, taking into account the reasoned opinion of the Appeals Committee. If the challenge needs to be investigated further, the deadline for its review by the Council may be extended by a maximum of thirty days.

A legal challenge to this decision is possible within 30 days after its delivery, by filing an action with the Tallinn courthouse of the Tallinn Administrative Court under the procedure provided for in the Code of Administrative Court Procedure.

Eve Eisenschmidt
Chair of the Council

Hillar Bauman
Secretary of the Council