



**RE-ACCREDITATION OF  
Evangelical Theological Seminary in Osijek**

**Date of the site visit:  
January 21, 2014**

Zagreb, February 16, 2014

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## **COMPOSITION OF THE EXPERT PANEL**

- Gorazd Andrejc Ph.D., Woolf Institute/St Edmund's College, Cambridge, UK
- Doc. dr. sc. Bogdan Dolenc, Teološka fakulteta, Univerza v Ljubljani, Slovenia
- Prof. Markus Bockmuehl Ph.D., Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Oxford, UK
- Doc. dr. sc. Niko Bilić, Faculty of Philosophy of the Society of Jesus, University of Zagreb, Croatia
- Nina Kvesić, student, Theological Faculty »Matija Vlačić Ilirik«, University of Zagreb, Croatia

### **Expert panel was supported by:**

- Vlatka Šušnjak Kuljiš, coordinator, Agency for Science and Higher Education
- Goran Briški, interpreter, Agency for Science and Higher Education

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## **INTRODUCTION**

### ***Short description of the evaluated institution***

NAME OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION: Evangelical Theological Seminary in Osijek

ADDRESS: Cvjetkova 32, HR-31103 Osijek

NAME OF THE HEAD OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION: Prof. Peter Kuzmič, Ph.D.

ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE (e.g. chairs, departments, centres): Management board, Professional board, Dean, Secretariat

LIST OF STUDY PROGRAMMES (and levels): undergraduate (professional) study of theology and graduate (specialized) study of theology with four modules

NUMBER OF STUDENTS (part-time/full-time/final-year): 76 full-time students and 78 part-time students

NUMBER OF TEACHERS (full-time, external associates): 10 full-time teachers (7 lectures, 1 full professor, 1 associate professor and 1 assistant professor) and 28 external associates

NUMBER OF SCIENTISTS (doctors of science, elected to grades, full-time): 3

TOTAL BUDGET (in kunas): 3.263.960,00 kn

MSES FUNDING (percentage): 0,00

OWN FUNDING (percentage): 2.431.173,92 kn

## **SHORT DESCRIPTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION:**

The Evangelical Theological Seminary in Osijek (ETSO) was contractually founded on September 25th, 2003 and legalized at the notary on September 20th, 2004. The representatives were: Dr. Peter Kuzmič (Laslovačka 15, Osijek, co-founder and first director), the Evangelical (Pentecostal) Church in Croatia (based in Osijek, Cvjetkova 32; also represented by its president Peter Kuzmič), the Evangelical Pentecostal Church, the International Church Osijek (Cvjetkova 32), represented by Pastor Yordan Kalev Zhekov, the Reformed Christian Church in Croatia (based in Vinkovci, Vladimira Nazora 31), represented by bishop Endre Langh and Church of God in Croatia, based in Vinkovci, Kralja Zvonimira 85, represented by bishop Josip Jendričko.

The Ministry of Science and Technology in the Republic of Croatia (through the Croatian National Council for Higher Education) gave its licence in 2003 and enabled ETSO to offer professional undergraduate and graduate studies of theology and scientific, advanced professional work in the scientific fields of theology and cognate disciplines.

This Higher Education Institution (HEI) was established as a legal successor of Biblical Theological Institute ("Biblijsko-teološki institut") in Zagreb, which in turn was founded by Christ's Pentecostal Church in former Republic of Yugoslavia in 1972.

## **The Work of the Expert Panel**

For its work the Panel drew upon the Self-Evaluation Report prepared by the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Osijek. A site visit was carried out on January 21, 2014. During the visit to the Institution the Expert Panel held meetings with representatives of the following groups:

- The Senior Management, including several members of the Executive Board
- The Working Group that compiled the Self-Evaluation;
- A panel of both senior and junior lecturers, teaching assistants and administrators
- A substantial (self-selected) group of students.

The Expert Panel also had a tour of the Library, IT rooms, Academic Registry and several classrooms at this HEI, meeting relevant staff in each location. It received an extensive tour of the facilities and was supplied with a wide range of additional documents as requested, including correspondence about the status of the school's proposed relationship with the University of Osijek and with the Croatian Agency of Higher Education, as well as about an international collaboration arrangement with the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies dating back to 1998.

# **DETAILED ANALYSIS BASED ON STANDARDS AND CRITERIA FOR RE-ACCREDITATION**

## ***1. Institutional Management and Quality Assurance***

### ***1.1 Strategic Plan***

In the troubled legal and educational context of the post-communist period, this HEI has developed a strategic vision of its own identity and role within the region. The Expert Panel was not shown a written strategic plan. While the self-assessment document (SA) at paragraph 1.8 acknowledges and addresses the needs of stakeholders (like churches in the region, including in Northern Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Romania) and challenges to ETSO's success (like declining enrolment and inadequate fee income), no formally articulated institutional strategic plan appears to exist and only rudimentary institutional risk analysis appears to have been undertaken.

During the site visit, the HEI management expressed some awareness of these issues, and it became clear that initial attempts are underway to articulate an operational plan and to implement academic, fiscal and operational monitoring mechanisms. The Management is clear in their project to offer higher education in theology for both groups of potential students, the younger ones looking for professional competences as well as adults who have personal interest in theology. More work is, however, needed in all these departments.

### ***1.2 Organizational Structure and Processes***

Basic Higher Education management structures are in place. Governance under the leadership of the acting Dean (Prof. Kuzmič) is supported by a Management Board of regional church leaders and alumni (some with academic doctorates) and by a Professional Board composed of representatives of the academic staff. According to the organizational chart supplied with the SA, all other aspects of ETSO's operations are the responsibility of this management structure. One significant concern noted by the Expert Panel was the extent to which recent disciplinary proceedings against the Associate Dean had left the successful transition to new institutional leadership unclear in view of the Dean's forthcoming retirement. Given the extent of Prof. Kuzmič's long-standing pivotal role in securing ETSO's institutional vitality, international profile and fundraising success, this suggests significant risk exposure.

The Management board is international; participants are involved in their own professions elsewhere and they come regularly to give their support. They are not teachers in the Seminary but they persevere in the care for the buildings, financial support and progress of the teaching personnel. The Professional board holds regular meetings overseeing the teaching process and the current status of the students. Teachers are appraised on an annual basis.

### ***1.3 Study Programmes and Institutional Mission***

Both its formal written submissions and the replies given to the Expert Panel's questions suggest that this HEI has a clear and articulate sense of its mission both in academic

terms and in its responsibilities to stakeholders both regionally and internationally. The Study Programmes are well formulated as an expression of this mission, but they lack official accreditation in Croatia in accordance with the Bologna Protocol. Within the Croatian context there is a long-standing public and legal confusion in ETSO's continued traditional use of the term "Faculty" in the Croatian name of the institution, when it would seem to be classified as a "College" conducting "professional studies" rather than as a University "Faculty".

#### ***1.4 Quality Assurance Policy and Procedures***

The need to formulate and enact quality assurance policies is recognized and actively engaged in the SA, although the Expert Panel had the impression that implementation is as yet only at a rudimentary stage. Systems of data collection and monitoring on ETSO's non-teaching activities appear limited. Although the SA makes repeated reference to a "student council" (pp.59, 61, 98) or "student board" (pp. 19, 59) whose representatives are said to serve on the Management and Professional Boards, the formal contribution of students, private or public-sector stakeholders in quality assurance processes is nowhere formally acknowledged in the documentation or the organizational chart.

Students have recently begun of their own initiative to insist on their contribution in this area. They have good contacts with their teachers. The Teachers in the Professional board are highly motivated and determined to improve the status and performance of their School. The ETSO still needs to focus its efforts on ensuring that its policy and procedures comply with the legal framework of Higher Education in Croatia.

#### ***1.5 Monitoring of Teaching Quality***

For the specific aspect of the monitoring of teaching quality, by contrast, the Expert Panel felt that appropriate mechanisms for monitoring and improvement are in place. This is an area to which the HEI had clearly given careful attention.

#### ***1.6 Monitoring of Research Quality***

It is one of the ambiguities of ETSO's status that it operates as a professional school (a College) within the Croatian legal framework, and yet aims to encourage a scientific research environment to support academic master's degrees and research collaborations with outside institutions. Academic members of staff are encouraged to publish and to contribute to international theological conferences, but monitoring procedures lack recognized criteria of external peer review and of national or international excellence.

#### ***1.7 Monitoring Professional Ethics***

The Expert Panel were not reassured by written evidence for the design and implementation of the required mechanisms for ensuring professional ethics in teaching and research. Although the SA mentioned an "ethics committee" in relation to student disciplinary cases (p.15), elsewhere it conceded that this committee does not yet exist (p.17). Answers provided under section 5.12 (p.91) were too generic: while a school of Christian ministerial formation may understandably be concerned about "learning and

practicing a life pleasing to God”, a serviceable HEI policy of professional ethics should include explicit headings relating to research involving human subjects, safeguarding of intellectual property, plagiarism policies, protection of diverse minorities, etc. On a more positive anecdotal note, the site visit illustrated ETSO’s commitment to professional ethics in relation to recent disciplinary proceedings against the Associate Dean on grounds of professional misconduct.

## **2. Study Programmes**

### **2.1 Monitoring Procedures**

ETSO’s study programmes are on the whole well aligned with the goals of higher education. Monitoring procedures in this connection appear to be generally effective and fit for purpose, although student learning outcomes could be more clearly defined and articulated in relation to nationally and internationally recognizable standards. However, we were unclear to what extent the internal monitoring of study programmes draws on the involvement of both students and external stakeholders.

The Management board’s supervision of study programmes is motivated by its vested interest in securing well-educated staff for their respective institutions (Churches). The programmes do, however, require formal approval in Croatia in accordance with the Bologna process.

### **2.2 Justification of Enrolment Quotas**

Enrolment appears appropriate to the needs of the institution’s primary constituency. The documentation provided was somewhat contradictory about ongoing trends in enrolment. On the one hand, the SA indicated that numbers fluctuate from year to year, it acknowledges that there has been a noticeable decline both in part-time students (p.34) and in the overall number of students (p.65). At the same time, however, the Description of the Study Program (DSP) in Professional Theological Studies (April 2013) projects a 24% increase in overall numbers to 2017 (p. 243, Table 5.3). The Expert Panel was impressed to learn of the presence of a minority of Orthodox and Catholic as well as occasional Atheist or Muslim students.

The quotas proposed are appropriate to ETSO’s specific mission to offer theological education for religious minorities and to work in the area of reconciliation.

### **2.3 Enrolment in Relation to Resources and Pass Rate**

Based on the evidence provided, the Expert panel felt confident that ETSO’s enrolment levels are appropriate in relation to the institution’s resources in teaching and its ability to secure robust pass rates.

### **2.4 Definition of Learning Outcomes**

The SA and DSP documents demonstrate a basic awareness of pedagogical progression in the formulation of learning outcomes, and the so-called “Dublin descriptors” are invoked in addressing this challenge (but the implementation could usefully be refined in consultation with the original 2004 Bologna/Joint Quality Initiative document

outlining these descriptors: [bit.ly/NljZYn](http://bit.ly/NljZYn)). During the meeting with teaching staff the Expert Panel were reassured to see sample course outlines that attempted to articulate subject-appropriate learning outcomes. These samples, at least, appeared appropriate in offering measurable learning outcomes in terms of the knowledge and skills students would acquire as a result of taking the courses concerned. It would nevertheless be appropriate to continue refining an institutionally agreed approach to this matter.

## **2.5 Student Assessment**

Although the evidence provided was largely informal, staff are aware of the need to ensure the correlation of assessment with learning outcomes in relation to the respective level of qualification. That said, the questions in the sample course exams supplied (biblical languages, hermeneutics) did not map straightforwardly onto the published learning outcomes.

## **2.6 Work Load and Allocation of Course Credits**

Care is being taken to ensure the appropriate correlation of ECTS credits to the standard expected student workload. The teachers are well aware of the proposed framework of up to 30 working hours for students for 1 ECTS. They individually arrange the obligations for students in their respective area, which can be modified according to the special needs and interest of the students.

## **2.7 Standard of Programme Content and Quality**

The course content and quality appear comparable to similar programmes internationally, and the Expert Panel was offered anecdotal evidence that ETSO graduates regularly go on to doctoral and other postgraduate programmes in other countries including in particular Slovenia, the UK and the US. On the other hand, it was also clear that graduates who go on e.g. to Ljubljana are sometimes expected by their host institutions to pass qualifying exams to validate ETSO qualifications that are not immediately recognized. Concern about the lack of official recognition even in Croatia was also repeatedly voiced in the Panel's meeting with students.

## **2.8 Teaching Methods**

The Expert Panel were particularly impressed by the dedication and commitment of the teaching staff, the thought they give to teaching methods and philosophy, and their excellent rapport with and support for the students. This impression was evident not only in the meeting with staff, but was also enthusiastically confirmed by the students themselves.

## **2.9 Supplemental Resources**

The availability and range of library, electronic and other teaching resources are exemplary for an HEI of this size and financial position. Students have free access to the on-line database of American Theological Library Association, and the databases provided by Croatian Academic Research Network (CARNet). The library of ETSO has its own audio-visual and digital collection on education.

## ***2.10 Availability of Practical Applications***

Given the institution's strong commitment to training and preparation for ministerial, educational and social work, the opportunities for outside engagements, internships and knowledge transfer are appropriate and appreciated by both teachers and students.

### ***3. Students***

#### ***3.1. Admissions***

Greater clarity and transparency about admissions criteria would be desirable, not least in relation to students' expectations and demands in relation to future careers. No minimum high school graduation result or grade point average is stipulated. The SA implies, moreover, that a so-called "motivational essay" may be used to substitute for graduation from high school. No indication is given of how the qualifications of foreign applicants are assessed. Generally speaking, however, the site visit confirmed that the HEI admits intellectually lively, open and interested students with the competence to operate confidently in an international academic environment which especially at the graduate level operates extensively in English.

Only a minority of students intend a career as pastors or parachurch workers in their respective communities. The majority are hoping to gain an education that will enable them to find job in Croatia or their respective homeland. They would benefit from early information about how they can, for example, achieve appropriate qualifications for teaching Ethics, Religion and Sociology in Croatian secondary schools.

#### ***3.2. Support for Extracurricular Activities***

The Panel was offered limited information about extracurricular activities, which appear to be mostly organized by the students. However, none of the meetings on site raised concerns about the HEI's support for student involvement in this respect. There is institutional support through contacts and recommendations for students' summer engagement e.g. in youth camps and social work.

#### ***3.3. Counselling and Professional Development***

Based on the evidence supplied to the Expert Panel, this HEI offers appropriate and valued support for students' personal, spiritual and professional development needs.

#### ***3.4. Transparency of Knowledge Assessment***

There appear to be clear and well-publicized policies and mechanisms for knowledge assessment. Teachers offer clear and helpful written feedback and there are formal opportunities for student feedback and appeal.

#### ***3.5. Alumni***

The SA acknowledges that there is no alumni organisation, although there is an informal Facebook group involving about 250 former students and the HEI occasionally contacts them with information about institutional events. No systematic data on employment, alumni giving or the like appears to exist.

Regular contacts exist with former students who are now teachers or members of the Management, or otherwise contribute to ETSO's activities. There are connections with those who are prominent international personalities (e. g. Prof Miroslav Volf) or who hold important public offices (a mayor in Croatia, a rector in Romania, etc.).

### **3.6. *Public Relations***

The Dean travels extensively to advance the cause of ETSO both regionally and among its supporters especially in the United States. But the regional general public, and the more immediate constituency including potential students, appear inadequately informed about the nature of the institution, its official status within Croatia, its educational policies or the range of students' opportunities for employment and/or transferring to other educational institutions. Some students felt misled by what they had been told before applying about the accreditation of their degree. PR policies and practices are in need of some improvement.

### **3.7. *Student Input and Contribution to HEI Decision-Making***

The SA suggests avenues for student participation and representation on institutional decision-making bodies, although the precise nature of this participation and the selection of student representatives require clarification. Both academic teachers and students individually expressed appreciation for the openness and warmth of staff-student communication. Nevertheless, the meeting with students also brought to light a level of frustration that student concerns had not been taken seriously in the past – a state of affairs unhappily reflected in the fact that the current application for official reaccreditation had emanated from the students rather than from the HEI leadership. The Expert Panel noted that the discussions with the institutional leadership and the teaching staff did not reflect clearer awareness of the levels of concern and anxiety expressed in the subsequent meeting with students. At the same time, it clearly speaks well of the institution that its institutional framework and staff-student relations allowed for such strong student engagement.

### **3.8. *Feedback on Student Concerns***

Students are generally very pleased with their educational, personal and social experience at the HEI. Given that policies for student representation and participation remain somewhat underdeveloped, is perhaps unsurprising that formal mechanisms for feedback on student opinions and suggestions for improvement do not appear to have been adequately articulated or implemented.

## **4. *Teachers***

### **4.1. *Number and Qualifications of Teaching Staff***

ETSO employs a sufficient number of teaching staff and ensures a good ratio between students and full-time teachers. On the other hand, a relatively high proportion of the full-time teaching staff at the Seminary are educated only to MA level, even some of those teaching graduate level students themselves. Staffing levels had been seriously

affected by the relatively sudden departure of five teachers in the past year. At the time of the site visit, there appeared to be only three full-time teachers employed with a PhD from a recognized educational institution either in Croatia or abroad. The quality and continuity of teaching and learning in the core disciplines did appear to be covered to a satisfactory level, but there is clear room for improvement if the institution is to live up to its own strategic goals.

Some teachers work at ETSO as part of an assignment from their home Institution, which is funding their salaries. There are many visiting teachers who provide teaching *pro bono*.

#### **4.2. Human Resources Development**

The SA explicitly acknowledges that there is as yet no HR policy in place (p. 69). Particularly in view of the major recent personnel challenges, this would seem to be a matter of some importance: in the absence of an Associate Dean, the question of how to ensure an effective succession to the long and charismatic leadership role exercised by Prof. Kuzmič. That said, both the Seminary leadership and the teachers themselves reassured the Expert Panel that care is in fact being given to the growth and development of human resources. The leadership clearly encourages and supports junior staff to pursue PhD research and acquire doctorates, to do their own research and to attend conferences, thereby fostering the ongoing development of professional skills and academic expertise. This also provides assurance for sustainability of teaching programmes for the future. Teachers seemed highly motivated and organized, and expressed general satisfaction with their job. This included those responsible for the core first and second-year undergraduate modules, which seem to entail an unusually high load of weekly contact hours.

ETSO also has external associates from the local University of Osijek, as well as several former students now engaged in teaching.

#### **4.3. Ratio of Students to Full-Time Teachers**

Class sizes appear commendably small, ensuring a highly attractive teaching environment. This HEI does rely extensively on part-time teachers. The Panel felt that there are probably just enough full-time teachers at the Seminary to ensure a basic continuity in core modules and supervision. Nevertheless, it needs to be noted that many modules – especially the more specialized ones – are taught very intensively for only a week or two, several hours a day. This situation reflects ETSO's arrangements with several guest lecturers from abroad who visit (typically from the US) and teach *pro bono*. While such repeated contact with international academics has obvious advantages for students, it also suffers the downside of some discontinuity of teaching. The institutional leadership's aspiration to raise funds for the endowment of one or more permanent Chairs in theology should certainly help address this situation.

#### **4.4. Professional Development Policies**

The institution's mission and aspiration would seem to necessitate a higher percentage of teaching staff with academic doctorates, as well as higher levels of peer-reviewed research activity than are currently supported. As noted earlier, teachers are actively

encouraged to acquire their Ph.D. and to engage in research and publication. Resources and teaching expectations, however, are not yet sufficiently conducive to this outcome, and should be actively taken into account in the formulation of an adequate HR policy. The SA's rhetoric of support for research needs to be matched by the reality.

Research objectives for teachers at the Seminary should be much more clearly defined in line with the Croatian system of academic grades and advancements, and followed more consistently and methodically. Some teachers appear not to have time to pursue their research, and lack mentoring and structural guidance on how to do this. To some extent it may be that the confessional research context in which many of the teachers would feel most at home is in a type of evangelical theology and biblical studies that is not well developed in this part of Europe. More significantly, perhaps, staff who work as active church pastors have to balance this external commitment with their part-time teaching, which leaves little time for research development. It will be important for ETSO to establish clear written policies suitable for an HEI to develop of teachers in their scientific research activities, actively monitoring their implementation. This must be in addition to the existing opportunities for professional development and encouragement.

#### **4.5. *Teaching Workload***

Statistical information provided in written documents suggest a wide range of teaching workloads. In the meeting with staff, however, this did not seem to be a pressing concern and teachers voiced the view that although they work very hard they do not see the workload as excessive. Leaving aside this query about relative equity between staff members, the Panel's main workload concern pertained to the apparent absence of research and non-teaching responsibilities from the overall workload calculation.

#### **4.6. *External Commitments***

ETSO exercises a significant role of local and international public impact among stakeholders throughout the region, and has a recognisable brand name well beyond the Balkans. This is to a large extent a function of the external impact and engagement of members of staff, and contributes to the value of this HEI as a national asset to Croatia. That said, however, it is undeniably the case that insufficient allowance is made for such staff engagements in a workload model that prioritizes teaching activities on the part of the academic faculty.

ETSO's focus on religious minorities and small communities seemed to some extent to neglect attention to the majority religion and Church in Croatia and in the region. At the same time, however, ETSO is deemed to offer regionally the best education of its kind.

### **5. *Scientific and Professional Activity***

#### **5.1. *Strategic Research Agenda***

Although lip service was paid repeatedly to the encouragement of research, the Expert Panel saw no evidence of a strategic research agenda. The SA's paragraph on research strategy seemed insipid and short on specifics. This is an area which the Panel saw in need of considerable clarification.

## **5.2. Domestic and International Research Collaboration**

Evidence was slender. There appear to be no research projects formally registered in Croatia. Although the SA did not mention it, we were given oral information that ETSO has had a limited collaboration with the University of Southern California's Pentecostal and Charismatic Research Archive, funded by a \$7m grant from the Templeton Foundation, which on its website claims to be "creating a global inventory of published resources on Pentecostals and Charismatic subjects, as well as builds an online digital archive of primary historical materials related to Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity from different regions of the world." ETSO's role in this is presumably fairly minor. Aside from this, the SA gives a list of national and international conferences attended by teaching staff, and there is relatively extensive evidence of research cooperation associated with the institutional journal *Kairos* and a number of self-published multi-author volumes activity resulting from conferences and seminars held at the HEI.

## **5.3. Research Staffing Levels Appropriate to Research Agenda**

Since there is no clear research agenda, it cannot be said that this criterion has received sufficient attention to begin implementation. The Institution's researchers for the most part do not appear to be legally registered as such in Croatia. Work on this question will also involve a coherent approach to the earlier query about the percentage of teaching staff with research degrees.

## **5.4. Global Contribution to Scientific Research**

A small number of past academic employees have published their dissertations in international peer-reviewed monograph series. Most of these teachers are, however, no longer employed at ETSO and few of the current members of staff appear to be publishing research in high-quality monographs or in leading international journals. Repeated reference was made during the Panel's visit to allegedly "peer-reviewed" publications like the journal *Kairos* and a number of multi-author volumes; but *the* editorial board of *Kairos* consists entirely of individuals with close personal and academic links to ETSO and its sister campus in Zagreb (Biblijski Institut), while several of the volumes concerned were also published in-house.

## **5.5. Recognition and Reward of Research Excellence**

Research activity on the part of the teaching staff is orally encouraged, but the Panel did not receive evidence of any active system of reward or promotion based on scientific productivity.

## **5.6. Peer-Reviewed Research**

The issue of peer review is not addressed in the SA. Discussion during the site visit suggests that a culture of encouraging professionally peer-reviewed research has neither taken hold nor does its meaning and significance seem to be understood by the leadership (as is also suggested by comments in 5.4 above). The institution's mission

and strategic aims, however, would seem to depend vitally on encouraging colleagues to move in this direction.

### **5.7. *Domestic and International Research Projects***

As noted earlier, there is evidence of a small number of individual and collaborative research projects, although this has not been helped by the significant recent staff turnover. There is much room for concerted improvement in this area.

### **5.8. *Knowledge Transfer***

It is in the nature of ETSO's emphasis on ministerial and practical formation that much of its past and present research activity is closely attuned to the needs of its stakeholding constituency. Evidence of this can be seen in the subject matter and orientation of recent publications, many of which might in turn be said to facilitate engagements such as preaching, counselling, workshops, seminars, lectures etc. This institution therefore scores very high on its engagement in knowledge transfer.

### **5.9. *Balance of Professional and Core Activities***

In keeping with the observation in 5.8, the teaching staff's extensive stakeholder engagement and integration of academic and ministerial aims suggests in principle a viable and mutually enriching balance of professional and core activities. Financially, the institution benefits from a number of these outside activities, particularly those carried out in the US by Prof. Kuzmič.

## **6. *International Mobility and Co-operation***

### **6.1. *Inbound Mobility of Students***

This HEI regularly welcomes students from abroad, both within the Balkans and further afield – e.g. occasionally from developing countries, for whom this location is significantly more affordable than institutions in Western Europe. Policies on inbound students transferring from Croatia and abroad, however, should be more formally articulated. Legal re-accreditation will greatly aid in this process.

### **6.2. *Study abroad***

While it was not clear to the Panel that formal arrangements are in place for students to complete part of their ETSO programme abroad, the institution is clearly engaged with some success in facilitating its graduates in the pursuit of further study overseas. The international, multi-confessional nature of the HEI clearly favours these activities, as does the excellent knowledge of English by most teachers and many students. The important example of well-known and high-achieving alumni like Prof. Miroslav Volf at Yale doubtless serves as an important role model for the pursuit of study abroad.

### **6.3. *International Mobility of Teachers***

The teaching staff are encouraged to attend scholarly events and present papers internationally, and a number of them are engaged in conference and speaking activities beyond the confines of Croatia.

### **6.4. *Relations with Similar International Institutions***

ETSO has sought and maintained links with cognate institutions both in South-Eastern Europe (for a number of which its library resources serve as a valuable hub) and further afield with its graduates' destinations for further study - including Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary in the US and the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies (OCMS) in the UK.

The information documenting these links for the Expert Panel was, however, at best significantly out of date and in part misleading. Thus the SA repeatedly claims that ETSO was licensed to award master's degrees in New Testament by the University of Leeds (p. 8, 11, 24) in partnership with OCMS, and in 1998 to have been "successfully ... evaluated" by the University of Oxford for graduate studies in theology (p. 11).

In fact OCMS (which is not itself a degree-granting HEI, and has no connection with any university in Oxford) did for a while have a relationship with the University of Leeds. OCMS also established a link with ETSO in 1998. But the formal status of ETSO's relationship vis-à-vis Leeds appears to have been less than clear from the outset. In any case even the OCMS relationship with Leeds was terminated quite a number of years ago. It never entailed ETSO's award of master's degrees on behalf of either OCMS or Leeds. OCMS programmes are now supervised by Middlesex University, and its website contains no reference to any link with ETSO. As for the University of Oxford, it does not accredit degrees by any outside institution and certainly never "evaluated" or established any official connection with this HEI.

For the sake of ETSO's national and international reputation and integrity it seems important to curtail inflated claims of this kind.

### **6.5. *Attraction of Students from Abroad***

For reasons already described, there is evidence that ETSO attracts students from outside Croatia and indeed from outside the Balkans. During the site visit Prof. Kuzmič suggested that the institution would like to see expanded international recruitment, potentially including from Western Europe and North America. Once accreditation has been secured, this does not seem an unrealistic aim for the medium term.

### **6.6. *Attraction of teachers from abroad***

It is clear that ETSO's business model currently depends extensively on academic staff from the region who are paid at least in part by churches and other stakeholder organizations, but also on teachers from abroad (mostly North America) who come without cost to the institution either for short intensive courses or in some cases for a longer period of residence. Although this introduces a certain degree of volatility and impermanence to the student experience, on balance it is enriching for all concerned and illustrates the institution's attractiveness to outside teachers.

### **6.7. *Erasmus and other European and bilateral agreements***

This institution at present does not participate in the Erasmus programme or other European initiatives, but its success in placing its graduates in overseas HEI courses suggests that such initiatives could well be expected to prosper in the wake of formal reaccreditation.

## **7. *Resources: administration, space, equipment and finances***

### **7.1. *Learning Resources***

ETSO's classroom, office and library resources are up to date, exemplary and highly unusual for an institution of this size and location. The site visit made this even clearer than the SA had led to the Panel to expect. While renovation is deemed desirable in Building B (dormitory, kitchen, auditorium), students are on the whole offered excellent facilities for learning and study.

### **7.2. *Ratio of Teaching and Non-Teaching Staff***

As noted earlier, the number of full-time teaching staff is at present rather low. Although senior administrative staff clearly offer competent and energetic support to the operations of the HEI, at least one or two of them also hold teaching responsibilities.

The number of full-time teachers is almost exactly matched by the number of non-teaching staff, including those involved in servicing the dormitory and kitchen.

### **7.3. *Professional Development of Non-Teaching Staff***

The Panel received insufficient information to be able to assess this question. The SA comments only on the professional qualifications of non-teaching staff, and acknowledges that responsibility for their professional development rests with the Professional Board (pp. 16, 103-04). But no formal policy on this matter appears to have been articulated.

### **7.4. *Equipment and Usage Protocols***

To the extent that it is relevant to this HEI, the evidence we saw was encouraging. The particular application of this criterion to the operation of the library and IT resources suggests appropriate protocols are in place.

### **7.5. *Teaching and Research Equipment***

Classrooms are well equipped, computer resources and databases for research and teaching seem appropriate, and are also suitably deployed in the library.

### **7.6. *Size, Usability and Availability of the Library***

Although by international standards the library is not large, it is nevertheless one of this institution's most notable assets, having benefited by a substantial founding donation by the founding family of Hendrickson Publishers in the US. Holdings particularly in English are highly commendable for an institution of this size and nature, and have clearly been

augmented repeatedly by relevant donations from publishers and private individuals. The facilities serve as an important research hub not only for the HEI but for the wider region. A more critical observation would be that holdings may be somewhat skewed in the direction of donors' interests and confessional priorities, so that American religious trade publishers predominate and there are rather fewer publications by major university presses or monograph series by other leading academic publishers like Brill, de Gruyter or Mohr Siebeck. Journal holdings, too, seem somewhat haphazard, although hard-copy subscriptions are supplemented by useful electronic resources. It was difficult to gauge the appropriateness and extent of resources in other languages, although here too one senses in the eclectic holdings something of the serendipity of private donations.

Here, perhaps, lies the real Achilles heel of the library: it is not clear to what extent there is a systematic and appropriate purchasing budget. (The SA's financial statement is not reassuring in this respect, p. 115).

Given the institutional aims, the library's opening hours seem unnecessarily limited; they could perhaps with the training of suitable student assistants or volunteers be extended without undue difficulty.

### **7.7. *Financial Sustainability***

Despite what appears on the surface to be an improving financial statement, the SA indicates that income "stagnation and decline" is perhaps this HEI's most pressing challenge ("the main difficulty", p. 22). Discussions during the site visit also confirmed a sense that while facilities are modern and exemplary, salaries are low and money is tight, particularly since the downturn of 2008. Continuing discussions about fee income, financial aid, and potentially enhanced recruitment of students from abroad, certainly have a part to play in clarifying the financial position. At the same time, the management's laudable institutional foresight has allowed it to devote significant resources to the building of an endowment. Although still modest by international standards, this could in time vitally assist the institution in securing its longer-term financial sustainability. Given the unresolved question of the succession to Prof. Kuzmič and his extensive personal connections with donor communities in the US, there may be some question about the likelihood that the endowment will continue to expand at the same rate. At least in the short to medium term, alumni seem unlikely to be able to contribute on a large scale.

### **7.8. *Use of Own Funds for Teaching and Research activity***

The HEI deploys its available funds effectively in the support of its enhanced teaching and research commitments. It is worth noting, perhaps, that with the desirable enhancement of research activities one should rightly expect an increasing demand on the institution's resources in support of this aim.

## **FINAL REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS BY THE EXPERT PANEL FOR THE ACCREDITATION COUNCIL**

The Expert Panel formed an overwhelmingly positive impression of the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Osijek, and strongly recommends its accreditation for the conduct of professional studies in Croatia under the Bologna Protocol. The HEI in our view meets the required criteria for its (re)accreditation. The deficiencies and recommendations noted below do not prevent the successful and sustainable conduct of teaching and research, and should prove possible to address in relatively short order. ETSO is clearly already a significant national and international asset for Croatia and the region, serving as a significant resource hub for teaching and research. Its accreditation is highly appropriate.

### ***ADVANTAGES (STRONG POINTS)***

1. The Seminary employs an adequate number of teaching staff and ensures a good student-teacher ratio. The teachers are superbly motivated for their engagement in education.
2. The facilities and resources – classrooms, computers, desks, staff offices, catering facilities – are modern and optimal for teaching and study. The Library serves as a particularly impressive and valuable asset.
3. The study programmes are well monitored and implemented. Sensitive to the cross-cultural and interfaith context of the wider society, they are well suited to the institution's mission and particularly attuned to the needs of its students, with a primary focus on ecumenical theological and pastoral training for evangelical churches in the region. The specific interest in the reconciliation process in Bosnia and Herzegovina deserves special appreciation in the region. While ETSO has traditionally attracted international students from diverse areas of Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia and Romania, the management is keen to recruit increasing numbers of students from the EU and Overseas.
4. The Seminary is very supportive of students. It offers mentoring and pastoral counselling, students can appeal against assessment decisions and raise broader issues at the Seminary, including through their elected representative at the board meetings. Student-teacher relationships appear to be excellent and there is explicit care and support for disabled students. (A spontaneous personal witness to this was offered by one disabled student who is a member of the Catholic Church going on to further studies in the University of Zadar.) According to the experience of the student-member of our Panel a student in Croatia would be happy to study under such conditions.
5. The Seminary regularly attracts teachers from abroad and offers excellent international connections for both its staff and students.

6. Extensive support for scholarly publication is given through the Seminary's in-house journal *Kairos* and the publication of multi-author volumes of collected papers.

### ***DISADVANTAGES (WEAK POINTS)***

1. No written strategic plan has been formally adopted.
2. There is not yet an adequate written statement of professional ethics.
3. The Institution's future leadership is unclear in view of the Dean's imminent retirement and the recently diminished management structure.
4. ETSO's income and operational budget suffers from a complete lack of state support, inadequate fee income, and reduced donations since the 2008 economic downturn.
5. ETSO employs a very small number of full-time teachers relative to its size.
6. The HEI lacks research-active scholars with an adequate number of high-quality academic papers published in internationally peer-reviewed, independent journals. The quality of published papers by the full-time employed academic staff at the Seminary is generally not up to the standard of national, let alone international excellence. The HEI's research culture requires concerted planning and monitoring in order to generate a regular and continuing output of independently peer-reviewed, scientific publications.
7. The Seminary's approach to Publicity and Public Relations does not adequately meet the need of potential students and the general public for clear and accurate information about the Institution's legal status and accreditations within Croatia and internationally, its programmes and academic certifications, as well as graduate destinations including opportunities for employment or further study.
8. There is an ongoing confusion in the Croatian version of the HEI's name with the word "Faculty" (and "Rector"), in contrast to the English terminology of "Seminary". A clear distinction between the internal church-language and the Croatian official academic terminology is required.
9. The otherwise excellent focus on religious minorities has a certain downside in the institution's somewhat exclusive orientation. ETSO at present does not have any regular and formalized relationship with the local University of Osijek, with the neighbouring Faculty of theology in Đakovo, with the Catholic majority faith in Croatia, and with Croatian culture more generally.

# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT OF QUALITY

## Management of the Higher Education Institution and Quality Assurance

1. As a matter of first importance, this HEI should formulate a 5-7 year strategic plan in keeping with its institutional mission and goals in the areas of teaching, research and administration, including the question of how to attract high-quality leadership and to secure continuity and stability in the succession to Prof. Peter Kuzmič. In formulating its strategic plan it should seek to emulate international best practice (examples of which are readily accessible on the websites of leading universities). The plan's implementation needs to be carefully monitored and progress tracked in the formulation of subsequent plans. Ongoing monitoring processes for the implementation of this plan should be combined with the compilation and regular review of an institutional risk register.
2. Formulate and implement a robust Quality Assurance policy for the monitoring of teaching and assessment, research (including the involvement of credible external peer review), governance and administration. This should include data collection in relation to both teaching and non-teaching activities, and spell out the role of student input into quality assurance processes.
3. Establish the proposed ethics committee. This might be a subcommittee of the professional board that meets when necessary, and a standing item on its agenda. Formulate a clear written policy that includes within the ethics committee's remit issues such as research involving human subjects, confidentiality, data acquisition and management, safeguarding of intellectual property and copyright, plagiarism, scientific misconduct, conflicts of interest as well as the professional conduct of mentoring and line management relationships.
4. Clarify the name and status of the HEI within the Croatian framework of Education and Science.

## *Study Programmes*

5. Ensure that the definition and monitoring of student learning outcomes involves students and other stakeholders in relation to nationally and internationally recognisable standards.
6. Refine monitoring procedures for the study programmes to ensure that the curriculum is being continuously adjusted and adapted in awareness of contemporary best practice in higher education in theology, both nationally and internationally.
7. Consider adopting double marking procedures for final course assessments, to ensure that examination procedures follow best practice and clearly test for published learning outcomes.
8. Consider adopting the appointment of a qualified external examiner to help monitor the institution's overall conduct and quality assurance of final examinations.

9. Revise the institutional website to make all relevant documentation for the study programmes readily accessible and up to date.

### ***Students***

10. In all advance information to the public and at the point of student induction, the HEI should provide each student with clear and accurate information about the legal status of the School within Croatia, the national and international recognition and accreditation of its diplomas, and the transferability of qualifications to continue studies at other University Faculties in Croatia or abroad.
11. Clarify procedures of student representation at all levels of governance, and ensure robust procedures for feedback and action on student concerns.
12. Establish and maintain an effective alumni association to encourage lifelong learning and alumni support, offer appropriate academic and social events and benefits (e.g. Library or database access), maintain a serviceable alumni database with information about destinations and employment, and encourage giving to the institution.

### ***Teachers***

13. Increase the proportion of full-time staff holding doctoral or post-doctoral (post-doc, Habilitation etc.) qualifications from recognized Higher Education Institutions.
14. All teachers at the graduate level should be hold completed doctoral or post-doctoral qualifications from recognized institutions. Full-time teachers at the undergraduate level should be encouraged and assisted to acquire a PhD-level qualification. For the training of counsellors, there is a need for teachers formally qualified in psychology.
15. Articulate a written and monitored policy incentivizing the Institution's research culture and staff career progression in line with Croatian and international systems of academic grades and advancements.
16. Formulate a clear Human Resources policy for both teaching and non-teaching staff, including a plan accounting for staff turnover, recruitments and retirements.
17. Ensure that contracts and workload models explicitly account for research activities of the employed teaching staff, and also for their external commitments.

### ***Scientific and Professional Activity***

18. Formulate and implement a viable, specific and verifiable institutional research strategy.
19. Embed in the research culture an expectation of credibly external and international peer review of scholarly books and articles, with encouragement being given to publication in leading international journals and monograph series.
20. Encourage, motivate and incentivize staff to engage in ongoing high-quality research and publication. Research objectives for teachers at the Seminary should be clearly defined and more in line with the Croatian system of academic grades and advancements.

21. Encourage and assist staff to establish registered individual as well as collaborative grant-funded research projects with colleagues in other institutions in Croatia and abroad, and to present their research at international conferences.

### ***International Cooperation and Mobility***

22. Formulate a coherent institutional approach to the facilitation of inbound as well as outbound transfer students, within Croatia as well as internationally. As soon as it becomes feasible in the light of accreditation, aim to participate in exchange programmes like ERASMUS.
23. Formulate a coherent institutional approach to the inbound as well as outbound mobility of academics, whether for research fellowships, research leave or exchange semesters.
24. Build on existing international connections to begin attracting larger numbers of foreign students.
25. Publish a transparent and up-to-date statement of facts regarding ETSO's formalized bilateral institutional links and accreditations by academic institutions abroad.
26. Establish relationships with leading theological research libraries abroad (e.g. Tyndale House, Cambridge; University of Tübingen; Pontifical Biblical Institute) to facilitate short-term research visits by students and teachers.

### ***Resources, Administration, Space, Equipment and Finance***

27. Develop a systematic library acquisitions strategy and budget, covering books and international research journals as well as enhanced electronic resources, if necessary by establishing initial clusters of subject specialization in which the HEI seeks to resource at a higher research level.
28. Seek to extend library opening hours as appropriate to demand.
29. Building B (dormitory, kitchen, auditorium) needs a thorough renovation.
30. Formulate a policy for the professional development of all non-teaching staff.
31. In the interests of financial sustainability, seek to raise additional revenue from research grant overheads, international projects, fee income and international students.
32. Continue efforts to secure the endowment (or the medium to long-term establishment) of senior full-time teaching posts in core subjects.