REVIEW REPORT

International Seminary of Theology and Leadership (ISTL), Zürich

Related to a visit for a cyclical review;
10-12 June 2024

European Council for Theological Education

ECTE

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A. Executive summary

Report of a cyclical review of the institution and the programmes of the International Seminary of Theology and Leadership (ISTL), an alternative provider of higher education (AP).

This report relates to a process, including a desk analysis of the Cyclical Self-Evaluation Report (C-SER) and supplemental documentation provided to the Visitation Evaluation Team (VET), and an on-site visit June 10-12, 2024, for the purpose of reaccrediting ISTL's four EQF Level 6 programmes based on the European Council for Theological Education (ECTE)'s *Standards and Guidelines* and relevant ECTE Supplemental Guidelines.

Programme-SERs for the EQF Level 7/Second Cycle programmes were submitted for the first time for ECTE accreditation, however, these programmes were withdrawn from the review prior to the visit.

The VET suggests to the ECTE Accreditation Commission (AC) six commendations of excellence, five recommendations and seven requirements.

B. Introduction to the review

Description of the review

This is a cyclical review of ISTL as an AP, dedicated to the development of men and women for Christian ministry in both national and international contexts.

ISTL obtained institutional and programme accreditation from ECTE as an AP in 2019.

The documents guiding this review are the Standards and Guidelines of the ECTE (parts A and B), the Guidelines for Programme Design, the Guidelines for Site Visits and VETS, and the Guidelines for Institutional Status and Qualifications Nomenclature.

Programmes

Programmes submitted for re-accreditation in 2024:

EQF/QF-EHEA	Name of qualification used by ISTL	ECTS	ISCED Level	ICETE Level	Delivery Mode
EQF 6/First Cycle (P)	Bachelor of Theology (CH)/ Bildungsgang Theologie (DE)	210	6	Bachelor	residential
EQF 6/First Cycle (P)	Bachelor of Arts in Theology (CH)/ Bildungsgang Praktische Theologie (DE)	180	6	Bachelor	residential
EQF 6/First Cycle (P)	Bachelor of Arts in Pastoral Leadership (CH)/ Bildungsgang Pastorale Leiterschaft (DE)	180	6	Bachelor	residential
EQF 6/First Cycle (P)	Bachelor of Arts in Intercultural Studies (CH)/ Bildungsgang Interkulturelle Studien (DE)	180	6	Bachelor	residential

The Visitation Evaluation Team

The composition of the VET team to ISTL was as follows:

Rev. Dr. Ciprian Gheorghe Luca (Team Leader)
Rev. Dr. Lina Toth (VET Member)
Dr. David Singh (VET Member)
Mr. Stephanus Schal (Student Representative)
Dr. Grace Al-Zoughbi (Review Secretary)

Visit Arrangements

The C-SER was written following the template set out in the ECTE protocol for writing an SER and was received, along with supporting documents, in time by the Accreditation Director (AD). The Review Secretary (RS) recommended the team to the AC. The AC approved the team and the dates of the review visit, and these were communicated to ISTL by the RS who also asked the institution if they had any reservations about the team members, but there were none.

Logistical and administrative arrangements prior to the visit were set up as follows:

- The RS provided access for the VET-members to the SER, supplemental documents, and all previous correspondence with the institution via hyperlink.
- VET members recorded their initial observations from the SER in a shared document.
- The Internal Review Coordinator (IRC) of the institution was identified and received a copy of the visit protocol.
- A messenger app group was set up internally for the VET members for fast communication, and a second one for fast communication with the institution.
- The final schedule was organised and agreed upon by the VET leader and the IRC.
- An initial pre-visit meeting of the VET took place via video-conferencing to discuss the SER and supporting documents.
- A shared working report document was set up for members of the team to access and modify throughout the visit. The document follows the structure of the interim report form pertaining to the current standards and protocol of ECTE. This was filled out and commented on by members of the VET, as the visit progressed in preparation for the interim report-writing on the last day of the visit.

The team was very warmly received by the leadership and the staff. The institution provided all online and on campus means needed for an effective evaluation of the academic work and communal life. From the team's perspective, the documentation submitted was well produced, and discussions held were transparent and sufficient for the purposes of the evaluation. The documentation provided a useful summary of the institution's current state. The review took place over three days plus travel. The on-campus visit began June 10, 2024 and concluded June 12, 2024. Prior to that Stephanus Schal visited the Dresden site 27-28 May, 2024.

The review was conducted in English and where needed translation from/to German was provided by the institution.

Visit Schedule

Meetings with the various stakeholders occurred as follows, at times including all the VET and other times the VET split up and attended different meetings. They included meetings with:

Principal
Programme leaders
Leadership team
Administrative Staff
Mentors
Lecturers
Board Representatives
Stakeholders
Church Representatives
Students
Alumni

The team also attended chapel services and classes in Old Testament Survey and Isaiah.

The complete schedule is appended to this report.

C. Introduction to the institution and programmes

General Description of Institution

This is a cyclical review of ISTL as AP, dedicated to the development of men and women for Christian ministry in both national and international contexts. ISTL has been a member of ECTE since 2010 and has been accredited as an institution since 2019.

ISTL operates in two different contexts. It is a registered association in the canton of Zurich, Switzerland where using degree nomenclature is not protected. On the other hand, in Germany, ISTL is a registered association in Freiburg im Breisgau, where using degree nomenclature is protected.

The documents guiding this review are the Standards and Guidelines of the ECTE (part A and B), the Guidelines for Programme Design, the Guidelines for Site Visits and VETS, and Guidelines for Institutional Status and Qualifications Nomenclature.

Mission and Vision Statement

Vision

"Thousands of young leaders give themselves wholeheartedly to God's mission and bring forth new spiritual awakenings for and with God."

Mission

"A well-founded study of theology in an inspiring culture."

Values

ISTL is based on the following values:

Biblically based:	We hold fast to the inspired word of God.
In partnership:	We provide training on an equal footing.
Practice-oriented:	We train for practice.
Evangelistic:	We actively incorporate the work of God's Spirit into our everyday lives so that people come to faith in Jesus.
Pioneering:	We promote and create an innovative environment in which new projects and ideas can emerge.

History

In September 2005, the first class started in Zurich (CH) by Heinz and Annelies Strupler, and the help of a team of young leaders. The school was launched following two years of foundational work. Aided by the support of pastors and local churches, a second location in Thun (CH) was established. In 2018, the first German location was opened in Freiburg i.Br., when a church made its premises available. International schools - not part of this review - were later established in Albania, Jordan, Kenya, Rwanda, and Eastern Congo for the purpose of supporting local leaders. Starting from September 2023, the Freiburg i.Br. location was relocated to Karlsruhe, and a new location in Dresden is currently expanding training opportunities in Germany.

Facilities

ISTL study centres are housed in local churches and provide classrooms and office space.

Zurich Study Center (ZH)

Thun Study Center (TN)

Study Center Karlsruhe (KA)

Study Center Dresden (DD)

Governance

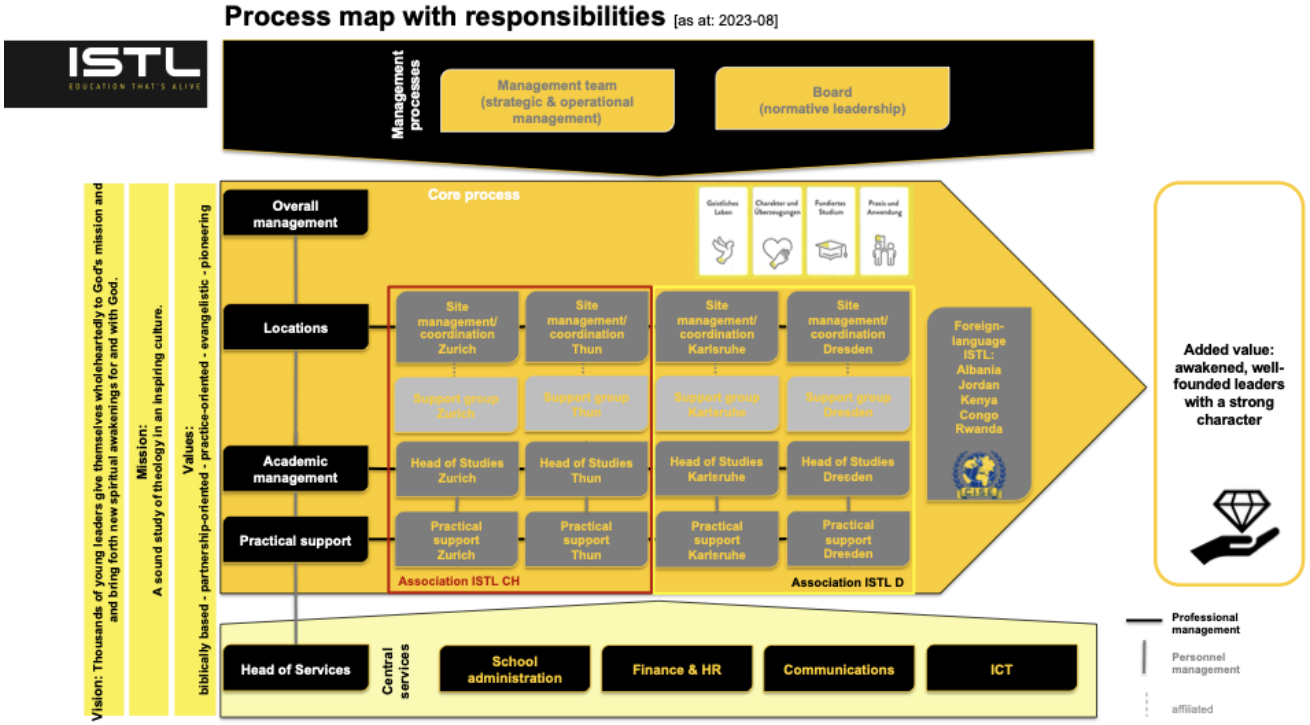
The purpose and organisational development of ISTL are briefly outlined below.

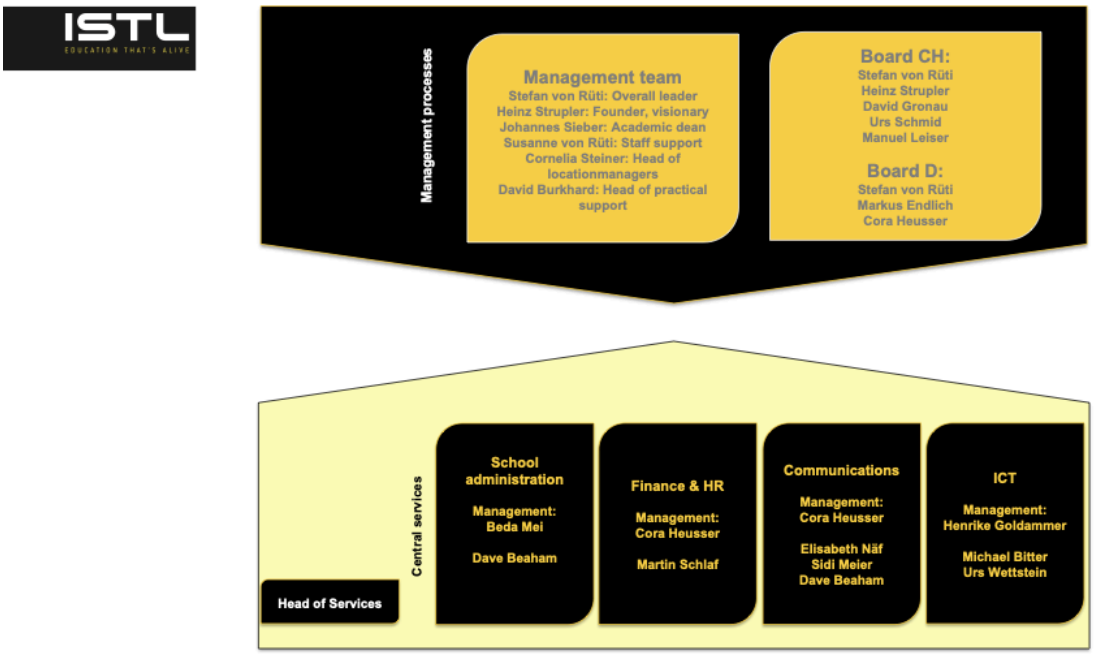
Purpose

ISTL is a registered association in the Canton of Zurich, Switzerland, and a registered association in Baden-Württemberg, Germany. The purpose of the association is adult education based on Christian ethics. The governing body, the Board, consists of members from various denominations. Two Board members oversee finances, personnel, school philosophy, conflict resolution and quality assurance. External experts provide support in legal matters, finance, and other areas. Board members, including the principal, are evaluated every four years, and must be re-elected. Annual reports are presented at the Annual General Meetings and approved by the Board.

Organisational development

In an organisational development process, the ISTL management team of 2023 worked with an external consultant to develop a process map. This map outlines the processes, responsibilities, and the organisational chart. The supporting areas have now been combined in the "Central Services" process, making the matrix organisation also more clearly visible. This restructuring of the organisation makes it possible to take the next growth steps. ISTL has clear organisation structure as follows:




Management processes
Management team
Stefan von Rüti: Overall leader
Heinz Strupler: Founder, visionary
Johannes Sieber: Academic dean
Susanne von Rüti: Staff support
Cornelia Steiner: Head of locationmanagers
David Burkhard: Head of practical support
Board CH:
Stefan von Rüti
Heinz Strupler
David Gronau
Urs Schmid
Manuel Leiser
Board D:
Stefan von Rüti
Markus Endlich
Cora Heusser
Central services
School administration
Management:
Beda Mei
Dave Beaham
Finance & HR
Management:
Cora Heusser
Martin Schlaf
Communications
Management:
Cora Heusser
Elisabeth Näf
Sidi Meier
Dave Beaham
ICT
Management:
Henrike Goldammer
Michael Bitter
Urs Wettstein
Head of Services

Locations
Cornelia Steiner
Academic management
Johannes Sieber
CAS/MAS
David Aeberhard
Practical support
David Burkhard
Site management/ coordination Zurich
Silvia Zeier
Site management/ coordination Thun
Coni Steiner
Alex Mürner
Tirza Mürner
Site management/ coordination Karlsruhe
Bettina Herbster
Site management/ coordination Dresden
Simon Ehlebracht
Support group Zurich
Support group Thun
Support group Karlsruhe
Support group Dresden
Head of Studies Zurich:
Marc Mattmann
Head of Studies Thun:
David Burkhard
Linda Steiner
Head of Studies Karlsruhe:
Salome Holm
Head of Studies Dresden:
Tobias Vögler
Practical support Zurich:
Susanne von Rüti
Practical support Thun:
David Burkhard
Practical support Karlsruhe
Jonas Fetzer
Practical support Dresden:
Simon Ehlebracht
Association ISTL CH
Association ISTL D

Educational and non-educational Staff

In the last five years, there has been an increase in the number of employees due to the establishment of new locations. The following list shows the current number of people employed by ISTL, mostly on a part-time basis (as of January 2023).

- 27 ISTL employees (non-educational staff)
- 115 lecturers
- 43 supervisors

Budget

ISTL has been able to maintain balanced budgets for the previous years. The accounts are audited externally. External audits contribute to the integrity of financial reporting and serve as a tool for the continuous improvement of financial management.

ISTL's income comes from six areas, with the first four serving as stable pillars:

1. Tuition fees from students
2. Education contributions from churches
3. Student sponsored run
4. Donations for salaries
5. Other donations
6. Miscellaneous

The approved budgets and audit reports offer a clear overview of financial priorities and expenditure, while the audit reports provide detailed analyses of financial performance and compliance.

Student Numbers

The establishment of new locations has led to an increase in the number of students over the last five years.

	EQF 6 /First Cycle (P) (Bachelor of Theology/ Bildungsgang Theologie)		
	Entering	Total headcount	Graduating
2019-20	2 (2M)	11 (7M/4F)	10 (9M/1F)
2020-21	6 (6M)	14 (11M/3F)	3 (2M/1F)
2021-22	3 (3M)	14 (13M/1F)	4 (2M/2F)
2022-23	2 (1M/1F)	13 (12M/1F)	3 (2M/1F)
2023-24	2 (2M)	13 (12M/1F)	8 (5M/3F)
Total	**15 (14M/1F)**	**65 (55M/10F)**	**28 (20M/8F)**

	EQF 6 /First Cycle (P) (Bachelor of Arts in Theology/ Bildungsgang Praktische Theologie)		
	Entering	Total headcount	Graduating
2019-20	5 (4M/1F)	29 (22M/7F)	3 (3M)
2020-21	7 (5M/2F)	30 (22M/8F)	6 (5M/1F)
2021-22	12 (7M/5F)	29 (21M/8F)	13 (8M/5F)
2022-23	6 (2M/4F)	30 (18M/12F)	5 (5M)
2023-24	17 (12M/5F)	42 (26M/16F)	5 (2M/3F)
Total	**47 (30M/17F)**	**160 (109M/51F)**	**32 (23M/9F)**

	EQF 6 /First Cycle (P) (BA in Pastoral Leadership/ Bildungsgang Pastorale Leiterschaft)		
	Entering	Total headcount	Graduating
2019-20	7 (3M/4F)	13 (4M/9F)	1 (1F)
2020-21	1 (1F)	11 (4M/7F)	4 (4F)
2021-22	0	10 (4M/6F)	1 (1F)
2022-23	0	8 (3M/5F)	1 (1F)
2023-24	0	1 (1F)	2 (1M/1F)
Total	**8 (3M/5F)**	**43 (15M/28F)**	**9 (1M/8F)**

	EQF 6 /First Cycle (P) (BA in Intercultural Studies/ Bildungsgang Interkulturelle Studien)		
	Entering	Total headcount	Graduating
2019-20	6 (4M/2F)	16 (11M/5F)	0
2020-21	4 (2M/2F)	17 (11M/6F)	3 (2M/1F)
2021-22	3 (1M/2F)	16 (10M/6F)	3 (1M/2F)
2022-23	4 (1M/3F)	17 (8M/9F)	3 (3M)
2023-24	4 (2M/2F)	15 (6M/9F)	7 (5M/2F)
Total	**21 (10M/11F)**	**81 (46M/35F)**	**16 (11M/5F)**

How the institution prepared for the review

In December 2016, ISTL began a self-evaluation process with an application for admission to an accreditation process for a Bachelor of Theology Honours and a Bachelor of Arts in Theology at ICHE (ichenetwork.org). Following successful accreditation with ICHE, ISTL also initiated an accreditation procedure with ECTE, thus continuing the self-evaluation process. This took place over 2.5 years and was completed in the summer of 2019.

On January 15, 2020, ISTL was officially informed that accreditation was granted by ECTE in 2020 for the four programmes on EQF Level 6 under review now.

ISTL submitted Annual Progress Reports (APR) to ECTE every summer for the last four years. In order to maintain this accreditation, ISTL worked on producing the C-SER and P-SER, for a scheduled visit in Zurich June 10-12, 2024, and a site visit in Dresden, May 27-28, 2024.

ISTL's Accreditation Committee:

Coordination:	Academic Dean
Collaboration:	Principal Academic Dean Practice Coordinator Head of Administration Head of HR and Finance Head of ICT Head of Mentoring Senior Advisor

The self-evaluation process was managed by the coordinator, who considered the ECTE documents *Standards and Guidelines* for ECTE Accreditation, *Guidelines for Producing Self-evaluation Reports* and other ECTE supplemental *guidelines.* This process was carried out in the respective departments with senior staff.

Self-evaluation and accreditation process:

Summer 2023	ECTE authorises the preparation of the C-SER and the site visit.
October 2023	ISTL begins creating the C-SER for ECTE in several management team meetings. The coordinator initiated and monitored the self-evaluation process, which was carried out in the respective departments with senior staff from October 2023 to January 2024.
February 2024	The C-SER is finalised in German and released for translation into English.
March 2024	The English version of the C-SER is reviewed and approved by the ISTL Accreditation Committee and ISTL management.
April 8, 2024	Submission of the C-SER to ECTE.
May 27-28, 2024	A VET team member visits the Dresden site.
June 10-12, 2024	VET team visits the Zurich site.

D. Findings of the review

Institutional Standards

Standard A1 - Identity and Purpose

Institutions have clearly formulated statements of identity and purpose

Standards examined:

A.1.1 Identity, A.1.2 Legal and Fiscal status, A.1.3 Vision and Mission, A.1.4 Public information.

Evidence of Compliance:

Meetings with faculty, students, and stakeholders. SER section D.1- A.1. 1,2,3,4. Examination of supplemental documents, in particular:

- EN_141_vision mission values
- Website
- Budgets
- Catalogues

Analysis and Assessment:

In reviewing the description of the background to the original accreditation, C-SER, and appendices under A.1.1, it was clear to the team that ISTL sees itself as a significant Christian theological education provider at the level identified and aspired. It continues to have networked study centres in Zurich (main) and Thun, and since the last accreditation in 2019, it has established two learning centres in Karlsruhe and Dresden. These sites are housed in local church buildings, which enables ISTL to remain in close proximity to the local populations it is mandated to serve.

The VET reviewing ISTL in 2019 ascertained ISTL's evangelical foundation shared with the European Evangelical Alliance and the understanding of mission shared with the Lausanne Commitment. The currently accredited programmes rest on this foundation. This promises to be a sound foundation on which to build or expand the institution's presence in Germany and Switzerland. The addition of Dresden and Karlsruhe as additional centres for the delivery of the EQF Level 6 programmes under review seems to be a fruit of this sense of identity and purpose though there is a concern that rapid expansion can dilute assurance of uniform quality.

The VET found no evidence of a shift in identity of ISTL as an institution since the last review.

ISTL staff and leadership understand themselves as providers of tertiary level Christian theological education, endorsing the statement of faith and theological orientation of their relevant stakeholders and communities and integrating core Christian values into their operations and programmes. Biblical grounding is evident in all programmes.

ECTE core values are endorsed, applied, and reflected in learning activities, programmes, and institutional aspects. ISTL has a clear vision and mission, and these inform its identity, study programmes and its relationships with the stakeholders. The vision statement was updated relatively recently which shows that the leadership sees the vision/mission rightly as something

that defines who they are and what they do. One sees the evidence of the significance of this not just in the way the C-SER integrates these throughout their report but as lived and expressed in the region. ISTL recognises the significance of the role teachers play in advancing the traditional evangelical vision through teaching, mentoring, and modelling it for the students who operate at the cutting edge of churches' mission and ministry.

The vision, mission, and values are clear and consistent across centres and personnel involved across all study centres. Upon reviewing the documentation attached, the programme information is publicly accessible. As the programmes are expanding, with one EQF 6 being excised, ISTL is proactive in updating or refreshing details pertaining to these. The catalogue (Course Manual) is sufficiently detailed and was available to the VET to view as part of the attachments.

ISTL's identity, activities and the relevant details of the programmes are publicly accessible. They provide easy access to this information in the language of the users. Internally, ISTL uses a learning platform or learning management system which is accessible across the Board for leaders, teachers, admin staff and students. ISTL is recognised as an association in both Germany and Switzerland as two separate Associations. Further, ISTL demonstrated a clear understanding of the differential legal status of the institution and the programmes. ISTL recognises that ECTE accreditation and national recognition are not the same. Branches in the two countries have appropriate legal status and operate as suitable for their purposes. ISTL has appropriate legal status within the countries where they operate in accordance with local laws and as suitable for their purposes. ISTL complies with fiscal and financial regulations in the countries in which they operate. See comments and conclusions for Standard B.5.1 related to programme nomenclature.

Commendations:

A.1.1 - The VET commends ISTL for its strong sense of identity as a provider of theological education. It has a core set of values exhibited by their desire for academic excellence and biblical grounding.

A.1.3 - The VET commends ISTL board and management for their faithfulness and commitment to their stated vision and mission.

Panel Conclusion: Full Compliance

Standard A.2 - Governance and Quality Assurance

Institutions have appropriate and effective Governance and Quality Assurance Structures

Standards examined:

A.2.1 Governance, A.2.2 Leadership and Management, A.2.3 Decision-making structures, A.2.4 strategic planning, A.2.5 Internal Quality Assurance procedures, A.2.6 Cyclical External Quality Assurance.

Evidence of Compliance:

Meetings with the Board, leadership team, principal, academic staff, students. SER sections D.1 - A.2.1 to A.2.6. Examination of supplemental documents, in particular:

- C4_17_Organigram and Responsibilities
- C4_16_Workshop Organisational Development
- C4_15_RoleModel Canvas
- EN_141_Vision Mission Values
- D1_29_ISTL Strategy for Germany
- D1_30_RoadMap New Locations

Analysis and Assessment:

ISTL is governed by a Board which the management reports to. The Board is a properly constituted and registered entity both in Switzerland and Germany. It has the overall role of governing the ethos, finances, personnel, etc of ISTL. In executing their governing role, there is evidence of 'externality' through the reported input from experts in finance, legal and organisational development matters. Reportedly, the Board encourages the participation of all stakeholders in decision making especially those involving the development of the curriculum.

The purpose of the association is adult education based on Christian ethics. The various levels of leadership and accountability are shown in ISTL's organisational structure. The governing body consists of members from various denominations. During an Organisational Development process in 2023, significant clarity was developed as to roles and responsibilities of various decision-making levels at ISTL:

1) The Role Model Canvas was developed which clearly defines the responsibilities and tasks of the Executive Board. As a supervisory body, the Board creates a framework in which ISTL can flourish and multiply. It ensures that the vision, mission and values are, and remain, anchored in the organisation in the long term. The Board supports and strengthens the management ("co-sponsor"/protective function). It exercises a supervisory and control function with an outside view. The Board is in point of contact in the event of conflicts and prevents (power) abuse.
2) A process map developed by the management team and an external consultant which outlines the processes, responsibilities, and the organisational chart. The matrix organisation is now more clearly visible. The various teams work independently within their assigned areas of responsibility. Each team is accountable to the school management for information and accountability. In turn, the school management is accountable to the Board.

ISTL actively encourages the *participation* of lecturers, staff and students in decision-making related to both community life and academic programmes. A core value of ISTL is partnership, which means that education takes place on an equal footing with students and other educators (lecturers, subject mentors, and practice trainers). Nonetheless, ISTL has not implemented a clear policy and structure for formal faculty, staff, and student participation in decision-making. Most significantly, there is no institutionalised student involvement in the decision-making processes. In other words, there is a strong feedback culture, but decision-making structures should be strengthened.

ISTL provides informal opportunities for stakeholders' participation in decision-making as regards to both community life and academic programmes as appropriate to cultural contexts and to good practice in its national higher education settings.

The institution does not have a student government structure in place, although there is evidence that student opinions/complaints are sometimes heard, usually through individual/class feedback.

The VET was not able to find an official, concrete "Strategic (Action) Plan", but has acknowledged, based on other documents provided by ISTL (minutes of the team discussions about strategic planning, seminars/orientations about strategic planning etc.), that the leadership and the Board are intentional about thinking/planning strategically and that they are willing to improve this aspect by creating and implementing a strategic action plan. Some elements of a strategic plan are already in place – such as a mission statement with institutional values, core values and mission.

ISTL places great importance on quality assurance. ISTL is aware of the expectations of students and stakeholders and is constantly endeavouring to meet these demands. ISTL is also aware that quality assurance is an ongoing process and therefore ensures that the progress made since the last external quality assurance review is maintained. Based on the content and tone of the discussions with the leadership, lecturers and students, the VET is cognisant of both the efforts and the willingness of ISTL to constantly improve the quality of the education it offers.

ISTL's main activity is providing theological education in four areas: Academic Education, Spiritual Life, Character & Beliefs and Practice & Application. ISTL believes that the quality of these four pillars of education has a significant impact on students' learning, which in turn has a positive effect on their future professional success and personal satisfaction. In this regard, ISTL sees quality assurance as a service to its students and is fully committed to it. The school management, lecturers, practical mentors, and supervisors all strive to ensure the quality of training. The quality management concept serves to support this goal.

A major step forward since the last SER in 2019 was the introduction of the ISTL's administration system. This system facilitates and automates the student survey and simplifies the evaluation of feedback. Digitalisation makes all filing, changes, processes, and evaluations more effective. This step has greatly improved the quality and sustainability of ISTL.

ISTL understands "quality" not as a static and externally imposed end state, but as a continuous process and development, meaning that the objectives are milestones along the way. As the framework conditions and requirements are constantly changing, these milestones also serve as a starting point for the realignment of objectives.

For this reason, ISTL undergoes regular reviews by two external providers: ICHE and ECTE.

For ISTL, quality assurance is a continuous process, and the school ensures that the progress made since the last external quality assurance activity is taken into consideration when preparing for the next one.

Recommendation:

A.2.3 - The VET recommends that ISTL develops a formal student government structure to ensure that the student body is part of the formal decision-making structures.

Requirement:

A.2.4 - The VET suggests to the AC a requirement be given that ISTL submit a timeline for the development and approval of a Strategic Plan with a listing of aspects to be integrated (which provides information on how and when the goals may be attained, what resources are required, who will be responsible for each element and to whom they are accountable, what group will monitor the process, and the governance role in the development and approval of the plan).

Panel Conclusion: Non-Compliance

Standard A.3 - Human Resources

HUMAN RESOURCES IN INSTITUTIONS ARE FIT FOR PURPOSE AND MANAGED FOR FLOURISHING

Standards examined:

A.3.1 Human Resources; A.3.2 Non-Educational Staff; A.3.3 Educational Staff; A.3.4 HR Policies and procedures.

Previous requirements or recommendations:

As fulfilment of the requirement qualifications for level of study, the school nominated a core faculty. The VET recommends the school to develop this system further.

The VET recommends the school development, enrichment of qualifications and to implement their written policies.

The VET recommends the school to have an eye on a realistic workload for the faculty.

Evidence of Compliance:

Meetings with leadership, non-teaching staff, academic staff, Board. SER sections D.1 - A.3.1 - 3.4. Examination of supplemental documents, in particular:

- C4_16_Workshop Organisational Development
- C4_17 Organigram and Responsibilities
- C4_15_Role Model Canvas
- D1_34 Long-term healthy employees
- D1_35_ISTL_Team_support
- D1_44_Advertisement_Employee_local_dean_of_studies
- D1_35 ISTL Team-Begleitung
- EN_137_ISTL_Faculty_Development_Plan
- EN_136_Guidelines_for_lecturers
- D1_37_Guidelines_for_supervisors
- D1_41_Personnel_regulations
- D1_42_Template_employees_interview
- Data protection declaration

Analysis and Assessment:

Identifying, recruiting, and engaging **Human Resources** is challenging for all theological institutions. Since its founding, ISTL has pursued various strategies for staffing needs and leaders understand their responsibility for the long-term health of employees. This includes a focus on workload and flexible working models.

In the period under review, ISTL has opened two new learning centres, leading to an increase in the number of employees. Currently, ISTL has:

- 27 employees (non-educational staff)
- 115 lecturers
- 43 supervisors

Given ISTL's ethos, recruitment focuses equally on an applicant's formal qualification as it does on Christian commitment and spiritual maturity. Commitment to ISTL's vision is also expected.

Moreover, all-non educational staff are expected to raise their own funds (completely or at least partially) as 'mission partners,' which self-selects individuals drawn to ISTL's vision and model of work. Financially and personally, this can be a challenge, particularly for non-educational staff. The leadership of ISTL and the Board members indicated to the VET that they are aware of these issues, and the staff are aware that the ISTL leadership and the Board are working on an equalisation fund.

This is a 5-year plan, at the end of which there should be defined levels to address staff remuneration issues, particularly for non-educational staff. There is a recognition that the organisation has grown and a shift in this area is required.

Some of the non-educational staff noted that the workload can be quite challenging, and that leadership should be more proactive in addressing these issues when they are raised. Some of the staff (representing different departments) do not seem to be aware of a clear line management. Conversations with staff regarding workload indicate that in their perception it is their responsibility to recruit more help in the form of new mission partners. It will be important for ISTL leadership and line managers to ensure staff understand that bringing qualified new people on board in terms of quality assurance does not lie solely with them. Ultimately it is the leaders' responsibility to ensure qualified staff are involved, irrespective of the remuneration model.

The institution has clear, transparent, and fair processes for staff recruitment. The VET is aware that ISTL are addressing the issues around conditions of employment.

Regarding **educational staff,** ISTL relies on adjunct faculty to deliver the programmes based on using multiple part-time ('freelance') lecturers, leaning into their expertise in a particular area. Lecturers are expected to have a Master's degree in their subject area and corresponding experience. They are usually actively involved in the life of the church/mission. All teachers are expected to complete an orientation course before joining ISTL. In practice, however, not all of them complete this course, and some would like a more in-depth orientation, as confirmed in the meeting with the lecturers. However, the annual "Instructor Day" held for all educational staff in each learning centre clearly plays an important, positive role.

While ISTL's model allows for an involvement of many experts and practitioners, its weakness is that none of them see ISTL as their primary place of work, and thus can have limited contact with the school prior to/after the delivery of the specific course they teach. Head of Studies work with each of the lecturers, but the involvement of so many diverse lecturers can lead to varying competency levels in teaching levels and expectations, the lack of consistency in marking standards, the lack of fully grasping the programmes ISTL is providing, etc. This is even more important to pay attention to because ISTL operates in multiple learning centres.

At the same time, the institution employs a number of educational staff teaching only one or two courses, whose main responsibilities include caring for the students and monitoring their progress as Location Managers of a study centre. All the employed educational staff are expected to raise their own funds as ISTL's mission partners. The leadership seem to recognise the sacrificial nature of such an arrangement, and are approaching it sensitively, but at the same time portrayed a high degree of certainty that this model works and is appropriate for ISTL.

In its documentation, ISTL states that it encourages all teachers in their development and professional growth. There are no annual reviews for the teaching (contracted) staff; but all those employed undergo an annual appraisal. However, given the part-time involvement of the teachers, the actual opportunities for promoting or ensuring professional development are rather limited. The Faculty Development Plan stipulates that 'the initiative for continuous development of professional competence belongs to the lecturers': i.e., ISTL can point to different opportunities or support lecturers in regard to specific professional development opportunity requests, but under the current plan a coherent, comprehensive professional development programme cannot be ensured. ISTL is currently developing a tracking method which enables them to appraise individual faculty development.

Being aware that most lecturers, as practitioners, need their pedagogical skills strengthened and continuously developed, ISTL is planning to introduce two particular measures over the course of the next few years:

1. A structured induction course for new teachers, as the teachers have studied theology and not education.
2. A module on teaching methodology and didactics to be developed.

The VET appreciates the emphasis ISTL makes on drawing on the strength of practitioner teachers who understand ISTL's vision and resonate with its ethos and vision. Their personal involvement in ministry and mission as well as their academic credentials are one of ISTL's strengths. Such a selection of local educators demonstrates that they are well adapted to ISTL's cultural and linguistic context, both in Switzerland and Germany.

The use of mostly adjunct teachers can be a strength in that the students are exposed to an impressive number of different teachers, and the costs are kept considerably lower than they would be in a more traditional scenario of employing educational staff. That said, given the very limited involvement of the adjuncts during the course of an academic year, further measures are required to ensure all teaching staff receive appropriate induction and training, including training in pedagogical practice and methodology.

The VET is pleased that ISTL is developing further measures (i.e. the above-mentioned courses). Special attention must be paid to ensure that equal quality of training and a comparable educational experience is provided across different training centres to which the specific lecturers are linked.

HR Policy documents are in place with the exception of a written anti-discrimination and staff protection policy.

Recommendations:

A.3.2 - The VET recommends that ISTL carefully monitors workloads, conditions of employment, and line management procedures of its employed staff.

A.3.3 - The VET recommends that ISTL continues taking further appropriate steps for a sustainable faculty development plan.

Requirement:

A.3.1 - The VET suggests to the AC a requirement that ISTL produces written anti-discrimination and staff protection policies.

Panel Conclusion: Non-Compliance

Standard A.4 - Community and Context

Institutions display healthy community dynamics in active response to context

Standards examined:

A.4.1 Learning Community; A.4.2 Stakeholder Community; A.4.3 Civil Community; A.4.4 Communication.

Evidence of Compliance:

Meetings with Board, academic staff, non-academic staff, students, stakeholders, managers of extension centres. SER sections D.1 - A.4 1 - 4. Examination of supplemental documents, in particular:

- Website
- Manuals
- Report of VET member concerning visit to extension centre (Dresden)
- Curriculum and relevant module descriptors

Analysis and Assessment:

ISTL strongly emphasises the **learning community** aspect. The core of ISTL's educational model is the development of character and attitudes. This is the reason for choosing the in-person and on-site delivery mode to include the dual education model in all its programmes. ISTL students are studying intentionally in classes to foster the aspect of community learning even more. In addition, the churches and the ministry fields of the students are also crucial parts of the learning community. ISTL emphasises community life through corporate worship and prayer, availability of staff, sufficient student support systems, and a culture of equality between staff and students.

It is evident that all staff members, the Board, and the leadership team are actively engaged and contribute to ISTL's mission and vision. Ethical codes and disciplinary regulations are in place and are handled appropriately. Graduate employment and alumni care are not as evident as the other points of Standard A 4.1.

ISTL lives Standard A.4.1 in a plausible way. ISTL has a very intense network of relationships with their **stakeholder community**. As a dual educational institution, ISTL emphasises close relationships with local churches and ministries and students perceive their education as a joint undertaking between ISTL and their practice fields. ISTL provides official training and strategic partnerships with many churches and mission agencies for different denominations.

In addition, at each study centre there exists a strong relationship with a local church and its pastors. ISTL tries to offer through those networks a high-quality, community-oriented education. ISTL lives the stakeholder community in an exemplary way.

ISTL actively participates in networks of theological educators such as the regular meetings of Swiss institutions' leaders and the "Konferenz bibeltreuer Ausbildungsstätten" (KBA).

The connection to the **civil community** is - at least as evident from the SER and the interviews - restricted to (evangelical) theological institutions. Connections to the broader community or other higher education institutions are rare. The VET, therefore, encourages ISTL to continue to engage with the wider community through their active role in equipping Christians from a broad spectrum.

Good communication is especially important for an institution like ISTL with multiple study centres. ISTL has many different communication formats as follows:

> *Public information & Communication* - website with all basic information regarding ISTL, programmes, and events | bulk mailing | advertisement material | social media |.
>
> *Communication with employees*- Internal communication happens mostly via the central school management software and a digital pinboard. ISTL provides the information - it is the responsibility of staff and students to actively gather all information they need.
>
> *Communication with adjuncts* - All lecturers and supervisors of ISTL have access to relevant information via the ISTL community, a part of the central school administration software. In addition, twice a year all lecturers and supervisors receive a newsletter detailing recent developments at ISTL.
>
> *Communication with students* - The backbone of communication is many handbooks and written documents. Student communication mainly happens via the ISTL Community. Additionally, there are monthly info mails.

The information system is appropriate and healthy for a multi-campus school. At the same time, especially lecturers and students (and some staff members) would welcome some further proactive communication. This is even more necessary when referring to lecturers and students who are not located at the main campus in Zürich. The VET encourages ISTL to take further steps in ensuring consistent communication at all levels and study centres.

ISTL displays healthy community dynamics in active response to context.

Commendations:

A.4.1 - The VET commends ISTL for nurturing a flourishing learning community through corporate worship and prayer, availability of staff, sufficient student support systems, and a culture of equality between staff and students.

A.4.2 - The VET commends ISTL as a dual educational institution which emphasises close relationships with local churches and ministries, in which students perceive their education as a joint undertaking between ISTL and their respective practice fields.

Panel Conclusion: Full Compliance

Standard A.5 - Educational Resources

INSTITUTIONS HAVE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES THAT SUPPORT THEIR MISSION AND STRATEGY

Standards examined:

A.5.1 Student services; A.5.2 Study facilities; A.5.3 Library/Learning Resource Centres; A.5.4 Information management; A.5.5 Information Technology; A.5.6 Virtual Learning Environment and Educational Resources.

Evidence of Compliance:

Meetings with students, librarian, non-academic staff, virtual learning environment and technology staff, leadership. SER sections D.1 - A.5.1-6. Examination of campus, and also premises for another site in Dresden, supplemental documents, in particular:

- Students' guide
- Faculty's handbook
- Library plan
- Website

Analysis and Assessment:

Student Services: Staff take great care in communicating with potential students and communicating the programme details through publicly accessible information such as requirements for enrolment, transparent details on fees, details of the courses and how they translate into ECTS credits. The open day for the prospective students enables students to make their choice before enrolling. This pre-enrolment phase is clearly streamlined for EQF Level 6 candidates.

ISTL's reporting on Student Services relating to the accredited programmes is satisfactory. ISTL demonstrates in reports and in interviews their commitment to the 'student first' policy. Student support services at ISTL are adequate, readily accessible and fit for purpose. However, see summary under B.3.

ISTL provides **study facilities** that are adequate, fit for purpose and readily accessible in all of their sites, and are in accordance with local standards in Switzerland and Germany. As the facilities are rented, ISTL does not have the additional responsibility of maintenance, and this enables them to focus their energies on educational processes.

ISTL has four rented study centres: two are in Switzerland (Zurich and Thun); and two in Germany (Karlsruhe and Dresden). As these are located in Community Centres/Churches, they are in proximity to the community, accessible and reasonably fit for purpose. They are on long term and affordable leases.

The report demonstrates access to **libraries** in Zurich, Thun, Karlsruhe and Dresden. The access to the theological resources in these physical libraries is not uniform. Actual use of these libraries by students is encouraged but it appears the students are less inclined to use them because of the distance, at times, from where they actually reside. Also, single copy sources are often unavailable when needed. Further, the paucity of the practice orientated theological

resources is an added challenge. For these reasons, the students often just work with limited resources, at times provided to them by teachers in pdf format or obtained online.

The C-SER indicates the presence of additional resources which likely meet the need - for example through the use of BiblioPass for those in Switzerland; Theological Research Exchange Network, other general Databases (JSTOR), paid library databases in addition to LOGOS (package access to ISTL students) which allows offline use of the resources after an initial download. The use of such online facilities by the students (as reported by them) is quite variable - some do, and others do not.

ISTL lacks substantial physical learning resources on its sites but this lack is alleviated by online/digital access to sources in addition to theological resources in the local theological and university libraries. There seems to be a need for a further library development plan that is suitable in terms of quality and variety especially including practice orientation. Based on the VET-members extensive familiarity with libraries at Universities and theological seminaries, it is likely that the educational focus on practice in ministry is not supported as well as the heritage disciplines. It is recommended, therefore, that ISTL would also strengthen further student training for finding library resources.

ISTL's report indicates excellent institutional investments in the development of **IT resources** which are critical for information management. AcademyFive introduced in 2020 is a case in point as it serves as a single point school management system which includes communications, timetables, source details, submissions, grade sheets, etc. The entire system for use by staff and students (all have password protected access) is digitised. ISTL has prepared a video tutorial for students which is complemented by written instructions for users.

ISTL has invested in a centralised storage system with access for employees via SharePoint. As this is backed up, it is sufficiently secure and safe. Students can use it via links provided to them, so they see what is relevant and when they need to see it. ISTL outlines the specific areas for which data is needed and collected which includes surveys and data monitoring student progress which is needed for administration purposes (e.g. records, grades, finances, transcripts, etc) but also to assure quality. As noted, AcademyFive enables ISTL to achieve this.

Matters involving data must follow the principles of confidentiality, integrity and availability. How the data that has been gathered is processed, used or stored is a matter of importance for any institution. ISTL manages all personal data in line with the Swiss law and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

On the data security front, the Data Protection declaration attached notes a large number of areas covered by the privacy policy such as: duration of storage, policy on YouTube, transmission/transfer, application, etc. C-SER reports that legal aspects of security are covered. The VET presumes other areas of security such as: Back-up, Recovery, Network security and physical security are covered too in how the platform has been set up, but ISTL also has a designated data protection officer. The data security protection measures are, however, in place and the backup facilities are located in-house.

It was clear from the VET's conversations with the office staff that ISTL's AcademyFive effectively organises and stores relevant information as it relates to their programmes and other activities. This data is accessible to students and staff and plays a range of purposes including internal quality assurance. See analysis under Information Management.

ISTL controls the system through a secure password management system. Currently, this is made available to employees to work with, and no students are involved. Technology is a means for achieving ISTL's educational mission. IT instruments including data are managed by qualified personnel in the service of the educational mission and organisational structures of the institution.

Commendation:

A.5.5 - The VET commends ISTL for setting up an effective IT infrastructure for the management of all the programmes and communications.

Recommendation:

A.5.3 - The VET recommends that ISTL continues to develop their programmes adequately with learning resources that are accessible and fit for purpose, taking the different learning centres into account.

Panel Conclusion: Substantial Compliance

Standard A.6 - Finances and Sustainability

INSTITUTIONS HAVE SUITABLE FINANCIAL POTENTIAL, PLANNING, POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Standards examined:

A.6.1 Financial Potential and Planning; A.6.2 Financial Policies and Procedures; A.6.3 Sustainability; A.6.4 Remuneration and Fees; A.6.5 Fundraising.

Evidence of Compliance:

Meetings with the Board, financial officers and secretaries, principal. SER sections D.1 – A.6.1-5. Examination of supplemental documents, in particular:

- C6_20_Budget expenditure and income 2023_24
- D1_76_Audit report 2022
- D1_77_Audit report 2023
- D1_78_Four pillars of finance
- Other financial documents

Analysis and Assessment:

ISTL has adequate **financial potential and the appropriate planning, policies and procedures in place.**

ISTL pursues two strategic approaches to ensure long-term financial stability and flexibility. Firstly, an amount is regularly set aside to create a sufficiently large financial reserve. This serves to mitigate unforeseen events such as lower income or extraordinary costs in individual years. Secondly, funds for the development of additional locations are specifically budgeted for. These funds are earmarked and are intended to ensure that ISTL does not run into financial bottlenecks when opening new locations. A regular review of the appropriateness of tuition and careful liquidity control help to ensure that financial resources are used conservatively, and that the viability of the institution is guaranteed.

ISTL provides rationale and evidence that sufficient financial resources are available to sustain its mission. In terms of financial planning, **budgetary procedures** are in place and a comprehensive, approved business plan matches the mission and strategic planning of the institution. Fundraising and other income sources are appropriately allocated to operational costs, contingency, funds, and investments.

The budget is prepared in close cooperation with the management and the Executive Board to ensure that all relevant aspects are considered appropriately. Once prepared, the budget is entered into the accounting software. This software enables regular reviews to compare the current situation with the budget. To ensure a targeted and responsible spending policy, the release of expenditure is subject to a defined set of rules. The aim is to keep expenditure in an appropriate ratio to income to guarantee sustainable financial stability.

ISTL has clear written **policies** in place for establishing, approving, and revising budgets. The institution also has procedures in place to ensure that all spending is accounted for and appropriately authorised within budgetary forecasts. Likewise, all incoming funds are appropriately documented, allocated and acknowledged. Accounting procedures are maintained and audited at professional level by qualified personnel.

All receipts and bank statements are carefully filed by the accounting department. These are not only used for proper accounting but are also checked at the end of the school year for auditing purposes to ensure that all financial transactions comply with the applicable regulations.

In the area of human resource **remuneration**, ISTL attaches great importance to sustainability by offering generous vacation arrangements and enabling employees to participate in further training measures. These measures help to create a long-term positive working environment and promote employee development but given the expectation at ISTL that staff must raise their own financial support/salary, the fact that most staff are part-time (50-80%) and its continuous growth, the school management should ensure that workloads are adequate for all staff members. (See A.3.)

Sustainability has been demonstrated over time. Stability is also demonstrated in such factors as continuity of Board membership and administrative leadership, low rate of staff turnover, generally satisfactory student enrolment and continuity in its programmes of instruction. It is safe to say that ISTL has appropriate funding to support the quality of its programmes and other activities. There is demonstrated continuity in income and expenses over time. The budget shows reasonable expenditures and forward-looking investments to serve the mission of the institution.

Every employee is comprehensively insured, both in terms of statutory insurance and additional pension provision. Transparency of wage costs, deductions for insurance and all ancillary costs is ensured by a detailed statement. Every year, all employees receive a comprehensive overview in which each item is listed transparently. Additionally, the insurance policies can be viewed.

The VET acknowledges a highly bespoke mission-partner model for employed ISTL staff and feels it cannot comment on comparability to prevailing national standards in relation to staff and faculty salaries, social security, pensions, and fringe benefits, although agreed upon in writing.

Tuition and fees are also monitored using the software. There is a clear overview of costs incurred and unpaid amounts at all times. This information can also be viewed by students who can see and manage their invoices and payments to ISTL at any time via the ISTL Community platform.

All student fees are transparent and public and give due consideration both to the financial ability of the students and to the actual expenses of the institution.

Both personnel compensation and student fees are reviewed regularly.

The income is based on four pillars:

1. Tuition and fees.
2. Contributors from self-funded employees: Each employee builds up their own circle of supporters in order to pay their salary.
3. Contribution from partnering churches in the bi-vocational educational model.
4. Fundraising Event: A sponsoring run takes place every year in which employees and students take part. Fundraising procedures are transparent and illustrate true needs. Fundraising proposals are truthful, and reports are marked by gratitude.

Panel Conclusion: Full Compliance

Programme Standards[1]

Standard B1 - Holistic Integration

Institutions form their students within a holistic approach to theological education, carefully integrating spiritual formation, character education, academic achievement and practical training

Standards examined:

B.1.1 Holistic Integration; B.1.2 Spiritual Formation; B.1.3 Character Education; B.1.4 Academic Achievement; B.1.5 Practical training; B.1.6 Mentoring.

Previous recommendation:

The VET commends the school for the successful implementation of such a complex and demanding mentoring system. Nevertheless, the quality control for such a system remains an ongoing challenge and should be developed further: e.g. workshops for mentors in spiritual formation, providing tools for the practical in ministry trainers.

Evidence of Compliance:

Meetings with leaders, faculty, stakeholders, staff and students of the institution. SER sections D.2 - B.1.1-6. Examination of supplemental documents, in particular:

- Appendix D2_93_Syllabi, where all syllabi from the school year 23_24 can be found.
- EN_138_Competences ISTL
- Interviews with practice mentors
- D1_28_Course manual
- D1_46_Education_Agreement
- D2_99 to D2_105: D2_99_Guidelines for Practice Mentors

Analysis and Assessment:

Holistic integration is a key principle of effective adult education and fundamental to ISTL. Through its practice-integrated learning approach, theory is applied in practice, practical experiences are evaluated in the classroom, and teachers are expected to be involved in ministry.

ISTL educates its students within a holistic approach to theological education that carefully integrates spiritual formation, character development, academic achievement and practical training. The courses are built holistically on the four pillars and cannot be separated into the four areas, including the formation of the spiritual life. Development and promotion of the spiritual life is formally included in the ISTL curriculum and is integrated holistically into these three areas:

1. In the block courses, such as Introduction to Exegesis, Epistle to the Romans, Church History, etc., spiritual life is also taught. Depending on the course, spiritual life is given weight, and is even reflected in the assignments.

[1] Analysis and compliance statements apply to all programmes unless otherwise specified.

2. In the annual courses, there is a greater focus on the development and promotion of spiritual life. These annual courses are credited with up to 9 ECTS per school year, as outlined in the curriculum.
3. ISTL is a dual school. This means that students receive up to 16 ECTS credits per academic year for practical work and practical supervision. Students are trained by practical instructors. The development of spiritual life plays a major role in the documentation and assessment of practical experience.

Through the VET's conversations, students and graduates commended ISTL's emphasis on character formation which was instrumental in their own ministry development. Character education components that are part of the formal learning plan and are mapped onto the curriculum, are appropriately assessed, given credit, and included in the total calculation of ECTS credits.

ISTL includes and monitors outcomes and learning activities in its programmes related to the study of academic theology. In addition to subject knowledge and understanding, students develop intellectual virtues and abilities such as critical thinking, ability to find information and ability to apply knowledge. Students are motivated and equipped to be lifelong learners. This is in line with the EQF 6 learning outcomes:

1. Have demonstrated knowledge and understanding in a field of study that builds upon their general secondary education, and is typically at a level that, whilst supported by advanced textbooks, includes some aspects that will be informed by knowledge of the forefront of their field of study.
2. Can apply their knowledge and understanding in a manner that indicates a professional approach to their work or vocation, and have competences typically demonstrated through devising and sustaining arguments and solving problems within their field of study.
3. Have the ability to gather and interpret relevant data (usually within their field of study) to inform judgements that include reflection on relevant social, scientific or ethical issues.
4. Can communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions to both specialist and non-specialist audiences. Guidelines for Programme Design and using ECTS 6.
5. Have developed those learning skills that are necessary for them to continue to undertake further study with a high degree of autonomy.

The training agreement between ISTL and the practice location regulates the most important basic elements of the joint training. This agreement comes into effect with the confirmation of acceptance from ISTL and the agreement of the management of the practice location. The resulting interplay of theory and practical application enables students to acquire the "tools" for full-time service. For example, students are trained in self-management and communication skills. The focus on competencies enables them to integrate and live out Jesus' mission in their everyday ministry. Students also develop leadership skills and learn to lead teams and groups.

ISTL offers churches or Christian organisations the innovative opportunity to be part of theological education themselves. This involves completing tasks amounting to 500 hours per year in a suitable training institution (BA: 1750 hours/3.5 years, BTh: 2000 hours/4 years). In order for the practical work to be recognised, students must have three formal interviews with the practical mentor during the school year. During the assessment, areas of responsibility are defined, and goals are set. In the progress report, these are reflected on and, if necessary,

adjusted or supplemented. The students will receive a grade based on this assessment. In addition, students must obtain external evaluations (feedback) of at least four completed practical tasks per semester and discuss these with their practical mentors. Additionally, students keep a logbook, a written reflection on the ISTL skills training and the ISTL annual focus areas, which serves to highlight the learning process.

The practical mentor is selected by the church leadership. They support students in their day-to-day work, give them feedback and assess them regularly using various documents provided by ISTL. The practical mentor does not "only" act as a client, but also as a trainer in the field of practice. A high level of commitment and willingness to invest in the trainees is therefore a prerequisite for working as a practical mentor. They must work actively in the church and hold a leading position. A formal qualification in theology is also desirable.

On the ISTL side, the Head of the Practice Department is responsible for coordinating the entire practice area. He is part of the ISTL management team and therefore also of the academic committee. In addition to him, the local practice managers at each location are the contact persons for questions, ambiguities, difficulties, internships and contact with students and practical mentors.

The head of practical training also regulates the exchange of information. The practical mentors are invited to an annual meeting which focuses on personal exchange and faculty mails are sent out regularly.

For the 2023/24 school year, ISTL has significantly enhanced the entire practical part of the training (the ISTL annual courses and practice). Each level now has an annual focus that is linked to a competency to be attained. The competencies are based on the focal points that are recognised in missionary service or the unique discipleship mandate of Jesus: winning, strengthening, training, and sending people. This is precisely what students are instructed and trained in during the annual courses and in practice.

ISTL has now made it a requirement for practical training to specifically develop these skills according to the respective level. This means that the objectives for practical training have become more focused. At least one goal per school year, set collaboratively by the student and their practice instructor during the assessment at the beginning of the school year, must serve to train the respective competency. The implementation is individual and must be coordinated by the practical mentor. A further measure is the specification of written reflections on the practical tasks performed and the collection of external evaluations (feedback). Here, the performance records have been further developed so that the written reflections only need to relate to the competency to be acquired. The logbook is used for this purpose. In it, students document the practical process with the competency to be trained. An entry in it could, for example, describe findings, ideas, progress, or problem-solving behaviour relating to the focus of the year, or the competency. External evaluations with corresponding feedback forms should also be obtained for individual tasks.

Mentoring and study support has a high priority at ISTL and is an integral part of the training programme. Students are supported and challenged in their spiritual and personal development so that they become leaders of strong character.

At each ISTL location, one person is responsible for planning and coordination. This person is also responsible for student concerns and communication with the mentors.

At the beginning of the programme, two introductory interviews are held with staff from the location team or with students from Level 4. The aim of these meetings is to find out where the student stands and what development goals they are aiming for. They help to find a suitable mentor by arrangement.

Mentoring at ISTL has two pillars:

One-to-one mentoring with an experienced mentor by arrangement, and peer mentoring in a team with fellow students:

1. Each student commits to having a personal mentor for the entire duration of their studies, with whom they meet monthly. As a mentoring tool, ISTL provides mentors with the "Key Skills Checklist". This relates to the four pillars of ISTL's formation: Spiritual Life, Character and Beliefs, Academic Learning, Practice and Application. Each student keeps a mentoring journal with personal notes.

   ISTL provides forms of mentoring in which students can be kept accountable, helped in problem-solving and conflict resolution, and assisted in mapping their personal growth. Mentoring components address the students' relationship with God, the spiritual disciplines and relational issues that deal with the family, the church and human relations in general. Mentoring components support outcomes related to spiritual formation, character education, academic achievement, and practical training.

   Mentoring programmes include an overall on-going evaluation through which students are informed periodically on their progress. This evaluation is included in the graduation requirements and included in the student progress file.

   Mentoring components are part of the formal learning plan, are mapped onto the curriculum, are appropriately assessed, given credit, and included in the total calculation of ECTS credits.

2. Teams are formed within the classes for peer mentoring. The teams learn about various tools for peer mentoring during the training period. The teams make it possible to work on specific objectives, questions and practical cases. In this way, students learn to reflect on their situation and also benefit from the knowledge and experience of their fellow students. Time is reserved for this every 2-3 weeks in the timetable.

   Mentoring and study support is one of four areas of the annual courses. The tasks correspond to the specifications in the syllabus. For each level there is an introduction, a reflection (progress report) and an evaluation.

   - Level 1 students meet every two weeks in growUP teams (of the same gender) to give an account of their personal development goals.
   - Level 2 students meet in InterVision teams (mixed gender) for collegial advice. The site team also offers to conduct appointment interviews.
   - Level 3 students meet in Sharing and Caring Teams (mixed gender and by field of study) for peer counselling.

   Mentoring and study support has evolved over the last five years in line with the training programme and the evaluation processes. The tools, such as InterVision, have proved very successful and are an integral part of the programme.

The "Key Qualifications Checklist" was drawn up and handed out to students and mentors by agreement. ISTL forms its students within a holistic approach to theological education, carefully

integrating spiritual formation, character education, academic achievement and practical training.

Commendations

B.1.3 - The VET commends ISTL for its strong emphasis on character formation for the preparation of leaders for church and mission ministry.

B.1.5 - The VET commends ISTL for their model of practical training, which is a great strength and the ‘signature’ of the school.

Panel Conclusion: Full Compliance

Standard B.2 - Curriculum Development

INSTITUTIONS DESIGN AND IMPLEMENT APPROVED, OUTCOME-BASED PROGRAMMES THAT ARE FIT FOR PURPOSE IN CONTEXT

Standards examined:

B.2.1 Design & approval processes; B.2.2 Outcomes & fitness for purpose; B.2.3 Curricula, module descriptors & learning activities; B.2.4 Graduate profiles; B.2.5 Content, level, feasibility & progression; B.2.6 Credit allocation & duration; B.2.7 Content; B.2.8 Monitoring processes.

Previous Recommendations or Requirements:

Vocational/academic distinction: The VET recommends the school to pay attention to the academic/vocational (**new**: research/practice) distinction. In their desire to enhance academics, the school might blur this distinction.

Evidence of Compliance:

Meetings with leaders, faculty, stakeholders, staff and students. SER sections D.2 - B.2.1-8. Examination of supplemental documents, in particular:

- Curriculum
- Learning outcomes
- Curriculum maps
- Andragogic practices
- Module descriptors
- Student handbook
- Faculty handbook

Analysis and Assessment:

ISTL has published curricula for each programme of study and the module outlines also offer details of outcomes. These are regularly reviewed through student feedback which the deans use for improving the content and delivery of the programmes as part of the annual cycle. Learning outcomes, learning activities and assessment tasks are carefully aligned.

The design and approval processes have not changed in practice since the last approval event in 2019.

ISTL has used their experience of actual curricular development since accreditation to help:

1. Consolidate EQF Level 6 programmes that demonstrated high satisfaction, enabled ISTL to fulfil its missional objectives and generally attracted more students/good quality lecturers.
2. Make minor changes/adjustments in the programmes such as course name, highlighting differentiations between the various programmes.
3. Discontinue a programme for consistently low numbers, satisfaction and the perception of its need for fulfilling ISTLs mission.
4. Plan further changes going forward into the next stage of accreditation.

ISTL has approved processes for design and approval of programmes, and they involve several stakeholders.

The programmes are designed to meet clearly defined learning outcomes at EQF 6 level, and the programmes are mainly practice oriented but also have a research dimension to them.

The published curricula for each programme approved in 2019 remain in place when the ECTE panel first subjected them to QA processes leading to institutional and programme approval. The teachers interviewed confirmed they inherited this when they began teaching with ISTL. Although, they were not sure whose responsibility it was to review these but suggested that their practice was to adapt what they inherited through discussion with the deans. The process actually involved three parties in practice: The lecturers from whom they inherited them, new lecturers and the deans. They suggested that they were also constantly reminded by the ISTL Academic Dean and that this sort of ongoing improvement and adaptation of curriculum, modules or specific learning activities was a teamwork. This shows that the overall curriculum criteria and design is owned and shared by those participating in it.

The evidence of student participation in it is less overtly evident though the students testified they felt they had a 'direct line' to the dean and teachers and that they gave their input as needed directly but also through feedback after each module was completed. They saw changes occurring in due course and this suggested the entire process to be more collaborative than it appeared on the surface. Lecturers suggested that they did not see student feedback or once submitted online by the students, they did not know how to access these. They believed it was the dean's role to process the feedback for any refinements in the curriculum criteria or design in which they were happy to give their inputs.

All of ISTL programmes continue to be vocational as has been noted before. Thus, in most cases, the programmes enable students to improve their existing practice rather than enabling them to seek new employment opportunities. Further, there is no need for a separately designed internship or traineeship. The students are normally situated in their own contexts and attend the onsite programmes with sufficient opportunity within the programme for classroom/peer and wider community level engagements/reflections.

Attempts are being made to more clearly distinguish the two EQF Level 6 programmes in Theology as one leaning more towards practice and the other including substantial research components for students intending to earn an EQF Level 7 qualification at a later point.

The practice-based programmes engage robustly with theological and biblical studies and have in them a research component informed by the context.

ISTL continues the practice of the Credit Transfer Exam with one change since 2020 – it is conducted not just at Zurich but also at other sites. The oral exam is fit for purpose. It takes place after students apply and uses questions taken from the curriculum of the one-year foundation course. The aim is to test the suitability and readiness of those seeking transfer of credits and their skill levels for a successful completion of the desired programme.

The existing programmes are clearly structured with ECTS credits. The completion of the different EQF Level 6 programmes follows the ECTS credit system.

Access options have not changed since the review in 2019. The students can enter the programmes 'laterally' but are required to attend an introductory course besides demonstrating skills needed for the programme. This remains the same without changes since the last approval in 2019.

Both C-SER and conversations with people concerned suggested that the EQF Level 6 programmes were developed with the local contexts and the needs of the students and their sponsors in view. This is evident from the successfully running programmes, student numbers and graduates.

The careful integration of theory and practice promises a growth trajectory for the increasing need for continuing equipping for pastoral and leadership roles in the communities. The students are recruited locally from Switzerland and Germany and remain in their own cultural contexts. Their theological and biblical reflections enabled by qualified teachers inform these contexts.

The VET was satisfied with the monitoring procedures for the EQF Level 6 programmes which is facilitated by the online administration system or the 'school management software', and feedback mechanism. It is evident that closer monitoring has indeed led to changes described as 'marginal' (see before) and others proposed for the near future. In the context of the perceived mission drift in evangelicalism, this could be costly if some teachers committed to ISTL's vision/mission and traditional evangelical position, choose to leave. This is for ISTL to review and take a call for a sustainable future.

The learning objectives and subject descriptions are publicly available on the ISTL Community in the course handbook. The Director of Studies defines the learning objectives in consultation with the CRC and discusses them with the course lecturers. Each syllabus contains the assignments and the grading weights. The course description, the learning objectives, the assignments and the weighting in the assessment are binding for the lecturer, the students and the academic committee.

The learning objectives are achieved through the lessons (lectures and tasks in the course) and the tasks in the syllabus. Each task also serves one or more learning objectives. Tasks that do not support learning are also adapted or are deemed superfluous and are deleted. Each task serves to support the learning objectives and ultimately the overarching competencies. The Director of Studies ensures this process by monitoring the learning objectives and tasks, as well as avoiding content overlaps.

Panel Conclusion: Full Compliance

Standard B.3 - Learning, Teaching and Assessment

Institutions implement good educational practice in areas of learning, teaching and assessment

Standards examined:

B.3.1 Educational philosophy and adult pedagogy; B.3.2 Student centred learning and teaching and assessment; B.3.3 Module design and delivery; B.3.4 Variety; B.3.5 Delivery feedback; B.3.6 Assessment.

Evidence of Compliance:

Meetings with leaders, faculty, stakeholders, staff and students of the institution. SER sections D.2.B.3.1-6. Examination of supplemental documents, in particular:

- EN_136_Guidelines_for_lecturers
- D1_37_Guidelines_for_supervisors
- Leitfaden für Fachmentoren
- Syllabus Christologie
- Competencies ISTL
- ISTL Kurs-Handbuch
- https://istl-community.campusweb.cloud/
- Student Handbook
- Competencies ISTL
- Vision Jahreskurse / Vision Annual courses
- D2_113 Collaborative Learning
- Curricula of all programmes under review
- Syllabus Kirchengeschichte III
- D2_112 Protokol Curriculum Review Committee
- D1_28 ISTL Kurs-Handbuch
- Curriculum Map
- Curriculum document
- Jahreskurs Mentoring & Studienbegleitung
- Mentoring & Studienbegleitung Schlüsselqualifikationen
- Anleitung growUP Team
- EN_137_ISTL_Faculty_Development_Plan
- D2_122 Kursbewertung
- D1_31_Course Evaluation Introduction to Theology
- EN_136_Guidelines_for_lecturers
- D1_37_Guidelines_for_supervisors
- Leitfaden für Praxisausbilder
- Syllabi - Praxis I & Praxisbegleitung I

Analysis and Assessment:

Training at ISTL is based on four pillars: spiritual life, character and beliefs; sound studies; and practice and application. Learning objectives are understood to comprise affective, cognitive, and behavioural aspects in the institution's description of competencies.

Educational philosophy is partially addressed in the C-SER. It is based on an 'apprenticeship model' in which service at a local church or Christian organisation plays a key role alongside the

training taking place at ISTL. ISTL emphasises the principles of holistic learning and practice-integrated learning approach. (Competences ISTL document.) This general understanding of the institution's approach to teaching and learning has been confirmed by the VET team's discussions with various stakeholders. Similarly, the lecturers in Dresden indicated that there was no written educational philosophy, but that it is communicated mainly through role models.

ISTL has done some work on updating its adult pedagogy practices, particularly via the recent review of the teaching methods and their suitability of specific courses. For instance, annual courses were redesigned based on the idea of Competency-Based Theological Education. Further work is being planned in reviewing the teaching methods of the foundational studies course.

The use of multiple lecturers across different sites means that such work is primarily the onus of the core employed staff, rather than the lecturers themselves, though of course there is collaboration. Moreover, a number of lecturers do not possess much pedagogical training, as they are primarily practitioners rather than educators. The institution recognises the challenge and is planning to create specific/required opportunities for the teachers to engage with educational theory, studies of best practice and theological understandings of adult learning. ISTL is working on an induction course for the new lecturers and is developing a module on teaching methodology. Whilst ISTL is strong on its institutional philosophy, ISTL's educational philosophy and andragogy are not developed and publicly available.

A clearly articulated educational philosophy would amplify what ISTL seeks to exemplify, and also would help strengthen the implicit values and expectations to be embraced and met by all the educational staff across different learning sites. Further, ISTL seeks to provide flexible and contextualised learning paths according to the students' needs. Individual mentoring support is provided. Individual courses are designed with these different competencies in mind. ISTL has been working on the development of the teaching methods employed. This has been done in consultation with the leadership, teaching staff, educational experts, and students. Currently there is more emphasis on the lecturer acting as a coach, rather than only a subject specialist, with an understanding that this reflects ISTL's ethos.

Overall, in conversations with students and graduates, they have readily confirmed ISTL's claim to be a student-centred learning institution in different aspects of its life. Currently missing, however, are clear 'equal opportunity policies and strategies… in the delivery of teaching and learning. In relation to specific learning needs or disabilities. It seems that specific students are granted special provisions/flexible paths (e.g., those not having a sufficient level of German). However, since there are no details of this policy, the practice is vulnerable to random use, rather than consistent and fair application.

Careful attention is paid at ISTL to ensure that students develop as autonomous learners, exhibiting progression throughout the course of their study that helps them to develop into motivated, self-reflective, competent practitioners in their chosen field. The diversity of learning styles and teaching methods is well appreciated and affirmed by ISTL. Whilst, given the high number of teaching staff, individual lecturer approaches vary, the overall quality of instruction is satisfactory in relation to the needs of the learners.

Appropriate procedures are in place for dealing with students' complaints. The same is true for appropriate regulations and procedures to deal with academic misconduct and plagiarism. The

VET suggests that ISTL consider the use of plagiarism software and is proactive in developing an appropriate policy in relation to the use of AI. Flexible learning paths are available.

Significant importance is placed on involving a range of stakeholders in programme development. Programmes and curricula are developed in cooperation with the local churches, associations, and missionary societies. The Director of Studies is responsible for the process.

The delivery of four distinct programmes is aided by the fact that all students complete the first two years (four semesters) of foundational studies before selecting their specialisation - so it is only at the upper two years that different courses need to be delivered for different programmes. The challenge lies in ensuring the quality of the module/programme delivery is consistent across different sites and as taught by different teachers and across different learning centres. The programme is designed for the training of leaders who will be full-time church/mission/Christian non-profit workers. The intercultural studies programme is designed for the training of church planters who are likely to work in an intercultural context. Close collaboration with the sending church is essential. A variety of teaching and evaluation methods (and their relationship to the learning objectives) is discussed in the Guidelines for lecturers and supervisors' documents. Collaborative learning is emphasised as a way of highlighting different perspectives and mutual support in learning. Using lecturers and mentors who are well experienced in their field of practice further adds to the richness of the programme.

Approaches to learning and assessment are varied and appropriate to specific courses/disciplines. New technologies are used effectively in ways that enhance delivery. Courses based on ministry experience employ effective strategies for the students' own learning and assessment. Course evaluation 'must be completed by every student in every course'. This was confirmed in the sessions with the alumni and the students. Thus, a course evaluation system is in place, but it does not require the lecturers to engage with the feedback (instead, it is the local site manager who picks up the big issues to address them with the teacher). While ISTL informs lecturers how to access the feedback, some lecturers in conversation with the VET did not know how to access it. This is understandable in light of most lecturers teaching only few courses at ISTL, but can be approved upon by more proactive guidance per individual lecturer by the Heads of Study in the respective sites.

Up to 16 ECTS credits per academic year can be granted for practical work and practical supervision. Practical mentor's role is key in the success of the practical aspect of the programmes.

According to the Guidelines for lecturers document, all student work must be marked and returned within six weeks. In Dresden, when students were asked how formative and helpful the grading was for them, they responded that in most cases, there are only numbers on the grading grid, and that returning the work takes longer than anticipated.

While an evaluation form is mentioned in the Guidelines for lecturers document, which should provide the basis for constructive marking feedback, it became clear in conversations with lecturers that some are not much engaged with ISTL's grading rubric and base their marking on their experience in other institutions. Lecturers could not remember the time limit for returning graded assignments to students. There is space for further work to be done.

Currently, all four ISTL's programmes under review require a final thesis. As they are vocational programmes, guided practice learning in relevant service contexts represents a key element which is appropriately assessed. Appropriate procedures related to assessment are in place.

Credits in ECTS are clearly applied to an appropriate amount of work submitted for assessment. Minimum requirements for awarding credit are public and determined in advance.

ISTL has prepared a comprehensive overview of the marking procedure and regulations to be used by the instructors. However, there is some inconsistency in terms of how this procedure is applied by some teachers. Overall, the formative aspect of assessment should be strengthened. The institution needs to substantially strengthen its educational practices in areas of teaching and assessment.

Requirements:

B.3.1 - The VET suggests a requirement to the AC that ISTL clearly articulates a written and detailed educational philosophy and andragogy, that is grounded theologically, and that undergirds the curriculum and the learning and teaching strategy, which they disseminate at the level of faculty and students, and make it publicly available.

B.3.2 - The VET suggests to the AC a requirement be given for ISTL to develop and implement an equal opportunity policy and strategies which would ensure equity and consistency in dealing with different student needs.

B.3.5 - The VET suggests to the AC a requirement that ISTL closes the feedback loop of course evaluation to teachers and students.

B.3.6 - The VET recommends that the formative aspect of assessment should be strengthened in order to enhance students' academic development.

Panel Conclusion: Non-Compliance

Standard B.4 - Student Admission, Progression, Recognition and Certification

Institutions formulate and implement suitable policies for the student "life cycle" that includes admission, progression, recognition and certification

Standards examined:

B.4.1 Admission; B.4.2 Progression; B.4.3 Recognition; B.4.4 Graduation and certification.

Previous Recommendations or Requirements:

The VET recommends the school to use a policy and procedure handbook tailored to its special administrative activities that may occur through the case-by-case evaluation which is practised.

The VET recommends the school to put their thoughtful plans of IT development into practise.

Evidence of Compliance:

Meetings with leaders, faculty, stakeholders, staff and students of the institution. SER sections D.2 - B.4.1-4. Examination of supplemental documents, in particular:

- Diploma of German Students
- Diploma Supplement of German students
- Transcript of German students
- Diploma
- Transcript
- Diploma Supplement
- ECTE accreditation certificate

Analysis and Assessment:

ISTL has a clearly regulated and intuitive admission process with fitting entry requirements for the different EQF Level 6 programmes.

The requirements for EQF Level 6 programmes are:

- Twelve-year general education (apprenticeship or Matura/Abitur)
- Active involvement in a church or missionary organisation
- Reference from church leader
- Personal, living relationship with God

A plausible application procedure is in place, which occurs completely online. Additionally, there is in most cases an interview with potential students. The admission decision is taken in cooperation with all involved stakeholders and especially the church or practical field where the student will work during the time of study at ISTL.

ISTL's admission procedures are sufficient and fit for purpose and the institution offers competent support staff to assist applicants in the process. The admission procedures are public, implemented consistently and transparently. The admissions standards are aligned with comparable higher education access. The involvement of the local churches in the admission process is to be applauded.

ISTL has clear and published progression procedures and regulations. However, there is no provision for special access opportunities. ISTL uses a school management software (AcademyFive) which simplifies and centralises the collecting, monitoring, and processing of information about each student's course of study.

ISTL recognises previous academic achievements and learning experiences from formal and informal learning. A distinction is made between the recognition of academic achievements at partner institutions, external academic achievements, and practical experience.

ISTL has written policies for recognising prior learning and a transfer credit exam, which is applied where needed and sufficient.

ISTL has clear graduation requirements which are published on the website and communicated to potential students from the start. All programmes will be completed by a thesis, which is intended to demonstrate that the student meets the graduate profile of the different programmes. ISTL has in consultation with the practice instructor the right to review or deny graduation of students on the basis of factors other than purely academic performance. This may occur if ethical and character issues play a negatively determining role or if all bills have not been paid. These factors are an integral part of the learning outcomes of the programme and the educational concept of ISTL and are communicated to students from the start.

ISTL's certification documents are in general helpful and sufficient.

However, in the Diploma Supplement ISTL is titled as "private Hochschule" (private university).

In addition, for students from Germany the graduation documents are not meeting the ECTE Standard B.4.4, since:

- The German programme nomenclature is not used as listed on the German website. Students graduating from German sites cannot be given graduation documents using protected degree nomenclature in Germany.
- The diploma supplement for German graduates does not include any information on the German educational system.

There should be in general a higher consistency and transparency regarding questions of the legal status of the institution and its positioning in the national education systems - fitting for the educational contexts of Switzerland and Germany. The issue is most important as ISTL seeks pathways for German students to receive government subsidy for their studies (BaföG).

ISTL formulates and implements suitable policies for the student 'life cycle' that include admission, progression, recognition, and certification.

Requirement:

B.4.1 - The VET suggests a requirement to the AC that ISTL has an explicit policy that supports academic equality, making provisions for special access cases, for candidates with special needs and in exceptional circumstances.

Also see requirement suggested under B 5.1.

Panel Conclusion: Non-Compliance

Standard B.5 - Qualification Nomenclature and Credits

Institutions follow internationally recognised qualification nomenclature and credit-counting systems

Standards examined:

B.5.1 Qualification nomenclature; B.5.2 Credits.

Evidence of Compliance:

Meetings with leaders, faculty, stakeholders, staff and students of the institution. SER sections D.2 - B.5.1-2. Examination of supplemental documents, in particular:

- Diploma of German Students
- Diploma Supplement of German students
- Transcript of German students

Analysis and Assessment:

ISTL notes the issue of operating in Germany where degree nomenclature is protected and thus cannot be used by APs such as ISTL. ISTL seeks to clearly communicate and handle their degree nomenclature according to the different national and international laws and higher education standards.

ISTL is aware of the fact that different conditions apply to qualifications and nomenclature in Germany and Switzerland. This is communicated to students upon admission and there are two different websites - one for Germany and one for Switzerland - with a somewhat different use of nomenclature.

Further, ISTL actively seeks to promote international mobility. This includes clearly stating the duration, level, type of study, the practical orientation, including the indication of credits in the graduation documents.

It is evident that ISTL tries to ensure that qualifications resulting from a programme are clearly specified and communicated and indicate comparability to the correct level of the national qualifications framework for higher education and, consequently, to the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (EQF-EHEA).

At the same time there are some major shortcomings regarding Standard B.5.1.:

1. ISTL is titled as “private Hochschule” (private university); e.g. in the Diploma Supplement, which does not match the category of an AP.
2. ISTL does not communicate explicitly and transparently that the qualifications are not recognised by competent national authorities. Although the laws in Switzerland allow ISTL to call their degrees “Bachelor” or “Master” - which is not the case in Germany - , it states in the same document from the government of Switzerland clearly that those degrees are not recognised by the state (see “C1_12_CH Titel_privater_institutionen”). This is not evident on ISTL’s website, other publications or the diploma supplement.
3. The general wording and understanding by students, staff, and faculty is still - also in Germany - that of “Bachelor” and “Master”, not “Bildungsgang on EQF Level 6” (among students, teachers, staff, in the SER, Image Brochure, etc).

Comparison tables provide clear guidelines to facilitate credit transfer and promote international student mobility. ISTL defines the expected student workload in their programmes in terms of ECTS in line with the EQF and the ECTE Certification Framework. In addition, the institution demonstrates awareness of international systems of credit counting and provides comparability tables of credit value to enhance international mobility.

Requirement:

B.5.1 and B.4.4 - The VET suggests to the AC a requirement that ISTL must use a more consistent and legally sound nomenclature for their qualifications that are in line with national and international frameworks for higher education and, consequently, to the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area.

Panel Conclusion: Non-Compliance

E. Conclusions

SUMMARY OF COMMENDATIONS

A.1.1 - The VET commends ISTL for its strong sense of identity as a provider of theological education. It has a core set of values exhibited by their desire for academic excellence and biblical grounding.

A.1.3 - The VET commends ISTL board and management for their faithfulness and commitment to their stated vision and mission.

A.4.1 - The VET commends ISTL for nurturing a flourishing learning community through corporate worship and prayer, availability of staff, sufficient student support systems, and a culture of equality between staff and students.

A.4.2 - The VET commends ISTL as a dual educational institution which emphasises close relationships with local churches and ministries, in which students perceive their education as a joint undertaking between ISTL and their respective practice fields.

A.5.5 - The VET commends ISTL for setting up an effective IT infrastructure for the management of all the programmes and communications.

B.1.3 - The VET commends ISTL for its strong emphasis on character formation for the preparation of leaders for church and mission ministry.

B.1.5 - The VET commends ISTL for their model of practical training, which is a great strength and the 'signature' of the school.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

A.2.3 - The VET recommends that ISTL develops a formal student government structure to ensure that the student body is part of the formal decision-making structures.

A.3.2 - The VET recommends that ISTL carefully monitor workloads, conditions of employment, and line management procedures of its employed staff.

A.3.3 - The VET recommends that ISTL continues taking further appropriate steps for a sustainable faculty development plan.

A.5.3 - The VET recommends that ISTL continues to develop their programmes adequately with learning resources that are accessible and fit for purpose, taking the different learning centres into account.

B.3.6 - The VET recommends that the formative aspect of assessment should be strengthened in order to enhance students' academic development.

SUMMARY OF REQUIREMENTS

A.2.4 - The VET suggests to the AC a requirement be given that ISTL submit a timeline for the development and approval of a Strategic Plan with a listing of aspects to be integrated (which provides information on how and when the goals may be attained, what resources are required, who will be responsible for each element and to whom they are accountable, what group will monitor the process, and the governance role in the development and approval of the plan).

A.3.1 - The VET suggests to the AC a requirement that ISTL produce anti-discrimination and staff protection policies.

B.3.1 - The VET suggests to the AC a requirement that ISTL clearly articulates a written and detailed educational philosophy and andragogy, that is grounded theologically, and that undergirds the curriculum and the learning and teaching strategy, and they disseminate it at the level of faculty and students, and make it publicly available.

B.3.2 - The VET suggests to the AC a requirement be given for ISTL to develop and implement an equal opportunity policy and strategies which would ensure equity and consistency in dealing with different student needs.

B.3.5 - The VET suggests to the AC a requirement that ISTL closes the feedback loop of course evaluation to teachers and students.

B.4.1 - The VET suggests to the AC a requirement that ISTL have an explicit policy that supports academic equality, making provisions for special access cases, for candidates with special needs and in exceptional circumstances.

B.5.1 and B.4.4 - The VET suggests to the AC a requirement that ISTL must use a more consistent and legally sound nomenclature for their qualifications that are in line with national and international frameworks for higher education and, consequently, to the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area.

IN CONCLUSION

The VET recommends to the ECTE AC that ISTL be judged to be in compliance with the *Standards and Guidelines* of the ECTE with the exceptions of the requirements listed above.

The team recommends to the ECTE AC that, subsequent to compliance with the requirements, it grants ISTL accreditation, with the relevant recommendations listed above monitored through the annual reporting processes of ECTE.

The VET records their gratitude to ISTL staff for a warm welcome and constantly helpful interaction with the team throughout the process. It was truly a meeting of colleagues in the process from which we in the team learnt much and greatly appreciated the staff and leadership of ISTL for their excellence and commitment in following their calling.

In producing this report, all those involved as peer experts have been free from undue influence of stakeholders on the findings, analysis, conclusions, commendations, recommendations, and requirements.

The visitation evaluation team:

Signed:

Rev. Dr. Ciprian Gheorghe Luca (Team Leader)

Rev. Dr. Lina Toth (Team member)

Dr. David Singh (Team member)

Stephanus Schal (Student Representative)

Dr. Grace Al-Zoughbi (Review Secretary)

June 2024

APPENDIX 1

Visitation Schedule

			Place	Comments
Day 1: Wednesday, 10.06.2024				
07:20-07:50	**Team Briefing**		Buchegg Church (BC) 104	
08:00–08:30	*"Mini-Celebration":* VET is introduced to staff and students.		BC 103	
08:30-09:15	**Introductory meeting with Senior Leadership Team** Principal, Academic Dean, Leader Location Managers, Leader Practice Mentors, Leader Staff, Supervisor		BC 104	
09:15-09:50	Tour of Facilities			
10:20-12:30	Visit Classes: "Old Testament Survey" (EQF Level 6) and "Jesaja" (EQF Level 6). (One team member each class).	Learning Resources (library/online) (Approx. 45 minutes- two team members. Then Team Time / Review Worksheets)	Classrooms and BC 104	
11:45-12:30	**Team Time /Review Worksheet**		BC 104	
13:30-14:15	Meeting with Alumni Alumni BTh EQF L6, Youth Worker Alumni BA Theology EQF L6, Missionary (on Zoom) Alumni BA Pastoral Leadership EQF L6, Pastor Alumni BA Theology EQF L6, Youth Pastor Alumni BA Theology EQF L6, Pastor Alumni BTh EQF L6, forder Studies (on Zoom)		BC 104 or BC 110	
14:15-15:00	Educational Staff (includes programme directors) Academic Dean, Dean of Students MAS (EQF L7), Dean of Students in Zurich (EQF L6), Dean of Students in Thun (EQF L6)		BC 104	
16:15-17:30	**Team Time /Review Worksheet**		BC 104	
Day 2: Thursday, 11.06.2024				
07:30-08:00	**Team Briefing for the Day**		BC 104	
08:00-08:25	*"Mini-Celebration":* VET members have a chance to address staff and students			
08:45-09:30	Teaching Faculty Greek, Book of Acts, Theological competences II - EQF L6 Exegesis II, supervisor - EQF L6		BC 104	

	Intercultural studies, mission strategies, Islam - EQF L6 Mission in the 21st century - EQF L7 Church history, dogmatic, supervisor, second reader BA Papers - EQF L6 Leadership, Leadership culture and team development - EQF L6 Theological competences I, research methodology, supervisor - EQF L6 Ethic - EQF L6 Mission in the 21st century, supervisor - EQF L7			
10:15-11:00	Practice mentors 2 Students, Pastor 2 Students, Pastor 2 Students, Pastor Youth pastor, 1 Student	Students– in person meeting EQF L6: Level 3, BA Theology Level 3, BA Intercultural Studies Level 3, BA Pastoral Leadership Level 2, BA Theology Level 2, BTh Level 2, BA Pastoral Leadership Level 1, BA Intercultural Studies Level 1, BA Pastoral Leadership EQF L7: MAS Theology	BC 104 and BC 107	
11:15-12:30	**Team Time /Review Worksheet**			
13:30-14:15	Programme Directors Academic Dean - all programmes Dean of Students MAS (EQF L7)		ISTL Office: meeting room	
14:15-15.00	Board Members Chairman Founder and Board member	Administrative Staff Leader back office	ISTL Office: meeting room and Office	
15:45–16:30	Support Staff Head of finance, Head of communications, ICT, Leader of ICT Team		Office	
16:45-18:00	**Team Time /Review Worksheet** **Decide on need for follow-up conversations for day 3 – communicate to Review Manager**		Meeting room	
Day 3: Friday, 12.06.2024				
08.00-08.45	**Team Briefing for the Day**		ISTL-Office	
45 min	**Reserved for follow-up conversations as needed**		ISTL-Office	
45 min	**Reserved for follow-up conversations as needed**		ISTL-Office	
2-3 hours	**Finalising Report (commendations, recommendations, requirements)**		ISTL-Office	
13:30-14:30	**Sharing Conclusions with leadership team**		ISTL-Office	

APPENDIX 2

ISTL (Pre)site visit Dresden – 27 May 2024

8:00-9:50:	Mini-celebration & classroom consultation
11:00-12:15:	Interview with faculty (3 lecturers in OT Introduction, Exegesis, Isaiah; Introduction Theology; Evangelization)
13:30-14:45:	Interview with students (4 students of ISTL Dresden participating in Bachelor of Arts in Practical Theology; Bachelor in Theology)
15:00-16:15:	Interview with leadership team (Leader of the Study Center Dresden; Director of Studies in Dresden; General Director of Studies)