

Theology Study Programme Group assessment decision University of Tartu

08/04/2019

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

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

1. The University of Tartu coordinated the quality assessment period of the Theology Study programme Group with EKKA on 19.10.2017.
2. With the order of 30.08.2018, the Director of EKKA approved the Committee for Quality Assessment of the Theology Study Programme Group of the University of Tartu (hereinafter the Committee) in the following composition:

Joke van Saane (Chairman of the Committee)	Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Religion and Theology, Professor of Psychology of Religion, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (Netherlands)
Antti Räsänen	Dean of the Faculty of Theology, Professor of Religious Studies, University of Helsinki (Finland)
Mervi Kalmus	Head of the Department of Estonian Conference of Seventh-day Adventist Church (Estonia)
Eva Liina Kliiman	Student, Tallinn University (Estonia)

3. The University of Tartu submitted the following curricula for assessment in the Theology Study programme Group:

Religious Studies and Theology (Bachelor’s study)
Religious Studies and Theology (Master's study)
Religious Studies (Master's study)
Theology (Master's study)

4. The University of Tartu submitted a self-analysis report to the EKKA office on 13.08.2018, which was sent to the Committee by the assessment coordinator on 2.09.2018.
5. The assessment visit to the University of Tartu took place on 6.11.2018.
6. The Committee sent the draft assessment report to the EKKA office on 21.12.2018, which EKKA forwarded to the institution of higher education for comment on 10.01.2019 and to which the University of Tartu submitted a reply on 24.01.2019.
7. The Committee submitted the final assessment report to the EKKA office on 25.01.2019. The assessment report is an integral part of the decision. The report is available on the EKKA website.
8. The Secretary of the Assessment Council forwarded the final assessment report and self-analysis report to the members of the Assessment Council on 27.03.2019.
9. The Assessment Council discussed the received documents at the meeting of 8.04.2019 with the participation of nine members and decided to highlight the following strengths, recommendations, and areas for improvement concerning the first and second levels of higher education of the Theology Study Programme Group of the University of Tartu.

The Committee highlighted the following strengths, areas for improvement and recommendations for the Theology Study Programme Group of the University of Tartu:

Strengths

- 1) Society and societal impact are at the heart of the study programme structure. The result is innovative curricula that attract students from diverse backgrounds. Not only students with ambitions related to different churches are involved, but also people with a more general interest in religion and society.
- 2) One of the strengths of the curricula is the interdisciplinarity between the academic structures of the university. Students have the opportunity to develop their competencies outside the field of religious studies and theology.
- 3) The infrastructure is of good quality and supports the learning process. The most important resources - staff and students - are dedicated to their work and studies.
- 4) A positive attitude towards developments and improvement activities testifies to high work culture. The Faculty of Theology intends to further improve the curricula. An example is the plan to increase visibility in society and develop curricula in cooperation with Estonian religious and social partners.
- 5) Lecturers are encouraged to participate in each other's lectures and provide mutual feedback. This is a laudable practice that encourages the development of teaching skills and active collaboration outside their narrow field of research.
- 6) Given the relatively small number of students, lecturers are able to apply an individual approach, giving students additional feedback if necessary, and also adapting their teaching methods to suit each specific group or course.
- 7) According to the interviews, the students' satisfaction with the lecturers is very high. Students find their teachers inspiring and see them as role models. Students are satisfied with the various methods of teaching and learning and are aware of their roles and responsibilities as learners. Students are satisfied with the support offered by the Faculty of Theology and with the general friendly atmosphere. Student feedback is valued by faculty and management, and vice versa.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

- 1) The Faculty of Theology should take into account the broader student body in the field of theology, which also requires the application of even more diverse methods of learning and teaching.
 - 2) Subject courses should be better aligned with the general learning outcomes of the curricula.
 - 3) Alumni have been excluded from the study programme feedback process. Their feedback can be very useful for the link between curricula and the labor market.
 - 4) Study programme flexibility should have clear limits for students. Students need more structure and guidance; too much flexibility increases student insecurity. Due to flexible study paths, there is a risk that students will not experience a sense of belonging.
 - 5) The Faculty of Theology has adapted well to the new structural unit in the field of the humanities and the arts. It is also advisable to preserve its identity.
 - 6) The Faculty of Theology uses university development funds to develop curricula, including internationalization and, in particular, the involvement of German universities. It is recommended to involve English-speaking universities (British, Continental European, and Scandinavian) in international cooperation.
 - 7) Although access to online resources and e-books is available, paper literature is less available due to very limited budgets. There is a need to improve the resources of either the faculty or the library in this regard.
 - 8) Teachers should be provided with systematic support as well as financial support when applying for research grants. Internationally funded research would increase the visibility and attractiveness of the Faculty of Theology.
 - 9) Information on the physical accessibility of premises and buildings should be available and easily found on the university or faculty website.
 - 10) The objectivity of assessments must be ensured, including in oral examinations.
 - 11) Plagiarism detection systems should be implemented consistently.
 - 12) Mobility is a challenge that should be addressed; students also need support in this regard. Erasmus agreements should be concluded with new universities.
 - 13) The Committee recommends continuing work on the feedback system. Further implementation of the learner-centered approach in the feedback system is important and helps students to understand their role in the learning process.
 - 14) There are enough courses at the university that contribute to the development of various professional and teaching skills, but the participation of teachers in these courses could be better regulated. This applies to long-term lecturers as well as visiting lecturers and newly elected lecturers. The development of teaching skills should be regular and systematic.
 - 15) Candidates' motivation for admission to Master's studies is not assessed. As the self-assessment report mentions, among other things, the wrong choice of specialty as the reason for dropout, it is recommended to apply for an admission interview in the new Master's program.
- 10.** Clause 41 of the document “Quality Assessment of the Study Programme Group at the First and Second Levels of Higher Education” stipulates that the Assessment Council shall approve the assessment report within three months after its receipt. The Council will consider the strengths, areas for improvement, and recommendations identified by the Assessment Committee and decide to carry out the next quality assessment of the study programme group in three, five, or seven years.

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

DECIDED

To approve the assessment report and to carry out the next assessment of the quality of the Theology Study Programme Group of the University of Tartu in seven years.

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

12. The Council proposes to the University of Tartu to submit to EKKA no later than 8.04.2020 an action plan on taking into account the areas for improvement and recommendations presented in the report.
13. A person who considers that the decision has violated his or her rights or restricted his or her freedoms may file a challenge with the Assessment Council of EKKA within thirty (30) days after the appellant became aware of or should have become aware of the contested act. The Assessment Council shall send the challenge to the challenge committee of the Assessment Council of EKKA, which shall submit a written, impartial opinion to the Assessment Council on the reasoning of the challenge within five (5) days of receipt of the challenge. The Assessment Council shall resolve the challenge within ten (10) days of receipt, taking into account the reasoned position of the appeal committee. If the challenge needs to be further investigated, the Assessment Council may extend the term for reviewing the challenge by up to thirty (30) days. Contesting a decision in court is possible within thirty (30) days as of its service by submitting an appeal to the Tallinn Courthouse of the Tallinn Administrative Court pursuant to the procedure provided for in the Administrative Court Procedure Act.

Eve Eisenschmidt
Head of the Council

Hillar Bauman
Secretary of the Council