

## Theology Study Programme Group assessment decision The Institute of Theology of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church

08/04/2019

**The Higher Education Assessment Council of the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education decided to approve the report of the Assessment Committee and to carry out the next quality assessment of the first and second level of higher education of the Theology Study Programme Group of the Institute of Theology of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church 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 § 21<sup>1</sup> (2) of the Institutions of Professional Higher Education Act, § 10 (4) of the University Act and clauses 3.7.3 and 3.7.1 of the Statutes of the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education, the Higher Education Assessment Council of the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education (hereinafter the Council) states the following:

1. The Institute of Theology of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church coordinated the quality assessment period of the Theology Study Programme Group with EKKA on 19.10.2017.
2. By the order of 30.08.2018, the Director of EKKA approved the Committee for Institutional Accreditation and Quality Assessment of the Theology Study Programme Group of The Institute of Theology of the EELC (hereinafter the Committee) in the following composition

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

3. The Institute of Theology of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church submitted the following study programmes for assessment in the Theology Study Programme Group:

**Theology (professional higher education)**

**Theology (Master's study)**

**Studies in Christian Culture (Master's study)**

4. The Institute of Theology of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church submitted a self-analysis report to the EKKA office on 29.08.2018, which was sent to the Committee by the assessment coordinator on 02.09.2018.
5. The evaluation visit to the Institute of Theology of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church took place on 06.11.2018.
6. The Committee sent the draft assessment report to the EKKA office on 21.12.2018, which EKKA forwarded to the Institute for comment on 10.01.2019 and to which the Institute of Theology of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church submitted a reply on 20.01.2019.
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 Council discussed the received documents at the meeting of 08.04.2019 with the participation of eleven members and decided to highlight the following strengths, recommendations, and areas for improvement concerning the first and second levels of higher education of the Institute of Theology of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church.

**The Committee highlighted the following strengths, areas for improvement and recommendations for the Institute of Theology of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church:**

**Strengths**

- 1) The strength of the Institute is the good connection between theory and practice. The small number of students makes it possible to create a friendly atmosphere and an effective system for monitoring student progress.
- 2) The staff is committed and has good professional knowledge. Many employees have an extensive personal research network.
- 3) The practical knowledge and involvement of the staff in the life of the congregations of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church have been valued and appreciated at the Institute. Many lecturers are recognized practitioners (pastoral caretakers, chaplains, pastors, etc.), which adds credibility to their position at the Institute.
- 4) The students' general assessment of the lecturers' teaching skills and methods is very positive based on the interviews. Student feedback is taken into account when selecting lecturers.
- 5) The students of the Institute are committed and have realistic career goals. Students feel valued.
- 6) Mentor groups are highly valued by students and are very important.
- 7) Stakeholders estimate that the demand for graduates is high.

### Areas for improvement and recommendations

- 1) The Institute's current focus is rather inward. A long-term vision should be developed to improve the visibility of the Institute in Estonian society, including the recruitment of the younger generation of lecturers. The value to society can be increased if employees develop their skills to participate in public debates.
- 2) The average age of students has risen, currently to 46 years. To ensure the sustainability of study programmes, a strategy should be developed to recruit the younger generation of students. The use of more diverse communication channels can help recruit the younger generation. Involving the younger generation of students would help maintain the Institute's impact on society.
- 3) Study programmes are too limited to the field of theology and the church. Students would benefit from the development of soft skills (communication, teamwork, etc.) and research skills. Although stakeholders are generally satisfied with graduates (especially their practical experience), they also expressed the need to focus more on developing students' transferable skills.
- 4) Subject courses should be better aligned with the general learning outcomes of the study programme.
- 5) The feedback system of the Institute is adequate but mostly informal. Formalized feedback systems should be implemented to avoid inconsistencies.
- 6) In addition to the church and students, representatives of other stakeholders, such as hospitals, the military, and other public institutions, should be actively involved in study programme development.
- 7) The digital learning environment should be used more widely. Some faculty members of the Institute need more guidance in this regard. Digital competencies could be enhanced through appropriate courses.
- 8) The self-assessment report describes the physical accessibility of Tallinn's premises as poor, as there is no elevator. The premises of Tartu are fully accessible. However, information on the physical accessibility of the premises should be easily available on the Institute's website.
- 9) It is recommended to use a plagiarism detection program.
- 10) The Committee also recommends a closer look at student workloads; according to students, the workloads of some courses is too high. Mentoring groups could be a great place to discuss how much time and resources can be spent on studies.
- 11) It is recommended that the Institute devise a long-term strategy that would result in an increase in the number of lecturers with doctoral degrees. At present, less than 50% of lecturers have a doctoral degree.
- 12) The Institute uses many external practitioners in its teaching process. In order to ensure quality teaching, their teaching skills and methods should be monitored more closely and supported where necessary. Full-time lecturers also need more systematic and regular development of professional teaching skills. It is important to develop common methods for giving feedback to students.
- 13) It is recommended to involve foreign lecturers in the teaching and research activities of the Institute in order to offer students an international perspective and motivate them to develop their English language skills.
- 14) The interviews revealed that students feel the need for more contact classes, including between the study cycles. This would provide additional support in achieving learning outcomes.
- 15) The drop-out rate is high in the professional higher education study programme, often the reason for dropping-out is unrealistic expectations. In the admission interview, candidates should be made more aware of the Institute's expectations of students.
- 16) Although the Committee recognizes that it is difficult for the Institute to promote the international mobility of students, various ways should be found to support and motivate

students. One way to encourage students to study and practice abroad is to introduce a mobility window into the study programmes. Participation in international conferences or short-term training could be further encouraged. There are other ways to expand students' internationalization opportunities, such as MOOCs or other e-learning opportunities.

10. Clause 41 of the document “Quality Assessment of the Study Programme Group at the First and Second Level of Higher Education” stipulates that the Assessment Council shall approve the assessment report within three (3) 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 seven, five, or three 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 within 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 Institute of Theology of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church in seven years.**

The decision was adopted by eleven votes in favour, none opposed.

12. The Council proposes to the Institute of Theology of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church to submit to EKKA no later than 08.04.2020 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. Contestation of a decision in court is possible within thirty (30) days as of its service by submitting an appeal to the Tallinn Courthouse of the Tallinn Administrative Court pursuant to the procedure provided for in the Administrative Court Procedure Act.

**Eve Eisenschmidt**  
**Chair of the Council**

**Hillar Bauman**  
**Secretary of the Council**