



ESTONIAN QUALITY AGENCY  
FOR HIGHER AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

# Report on Institutional Accreditation

## Baltic Methodist Theological Seminary

2022

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## Introduction

### Institutional accreditation

**‘Institutional accreditation’** is the process of external evaluation which assesses the conformity of a higher education institution’s management, work procedures, study and research activities and environment to both legislation and the goals and development plan of the higher education institution itself. This is feedback-based evaluation in which an international assessment panel analyses the strengths and weaknesses of the institution of higher education based on the self-assessment report of the institution and on information obtained during the assessment visit, providing recommendations for improvement and ways of implementing them.

**The goal of institutional accreditation** is to support the development of strategic management and quality culture that values learning-centeredness, creativity and innovation in the higher education institutions (**HEIs**), as well as to increase the societal impact of education, research and development delivered by the HEIs.

Educational institution must undergo institutional accreditation at least once every seven years based on the regulation approved by EKKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education. The current accreditation of the Baltic Methodist Theological Seminary (**BMTS**) is based on the regulation *Conditions and Procedure for Institutional Accreditation* approved by EKKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education on 11.11.2016.

Three years ago BMTS underwent the **quality assessment of its only study programme group Theology**, involving one study programme at BMTS - **Theology and Mission**. Quality assessment of a study programme group takes place at least once every 7 years based on the regulation *Quality Assessment of Study Programme Groups in the First and Second Cycles of Higher Education* approved by EKKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education. In 2019, EKKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education decided that the next assessment of the study programme group of theology at BMTS would take place in 7 years; however, the Council imposed a secondary condition that needed to be fulfilled by September 2021. **In the current report the panel has also evaluated the fulfilment of the secondary condition imposed on the study programme group of theology at BMTS.**

The institutional accreditation of Baltic Methodist Theological Seminary took place in November 2021. The Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education (**EKKA**) formed an international expert panel, which was approved by the higher education institution. The composition of the panel was thereafter approved by the order of EKKA director.

The following members formed the expert panel:

Gerrit Immink (Chair)	Emeritus professor of Practical Theology at the Protestant Theological University, the Netherlands
Jonathan Loose (Secretary)	Former Director of Learning & Teaching, Heythrop College, University of London, United Kingdom

Antti Räsänen	Professor of Religious Education, Faculty of Theology, University of Helsinki, Finland
Aivar Sarapik	Orthodox Church of Estonia, Director of development and administration in Tallinn, Estonia
Heidi Maiberg	Student; Royal Holloway University of London, United Kingdom

### Assessment process

The preparation of the expert panel for the accreditation visit began with an introductory seminar organised by EKKA. At its first meeting the distribution of tasks between the members of the panel was determined, the members of the team agreed the overall questions and areas to discuss with each group during the site visit and a detailed schedule for the site visit was prepared.

During three days, from Tuesday 23rd to Thursday 25th of November 2021, online meetings were held with representatives of Baltic Methodist Theological Seminary as well as external stakeholders. Two panel members had an opportunity to visit the facilities, the library and lecture rooms of the Seminary.

After discussions with different groups, the panel held a meeting, during which the findings of the panel were discussed in detail and the structure of the final report was agreed. Findings of the team were compiled in a first draft of the assessment report and evaluation of the four assessment areas.

In finalizing the assessment report, the panel took into consideration comments submitted by the Baltic Methodist Theological Seminary. The panel submitted the final report to EKKA on February 4, 2022.

The current report is a public document and made available on EKKA website after EKKA Council has made an accreditation decision.

### Information about the Baltic Methodist Theological Seminary

Baltic Methodist Theological Seminary (BMTS) was founded in 1994 with the primary goal of educating clergy for the Methodist Church in Baltic countries. From the very beginning, the education was practically oriented, and was operating in three languages: Estonian, Russian, and English. According to the Development Plan (2021-2023) the Seminary intends to offer 'a balanced theological education that is practical and applicable in today's world to empower today's church with people ready to lead and serve' (SER p. 3).

Although the Seminary is rooted in the tradition of the Methodist Church, the institution and its workers have 'a creative and unprejudiced attitude towards the idea of co-operation with other churches.' The Seminary practices ecumenism as people from different denominations are studying together, and also acknowledges that the partnerships with different churches and higher education institutions and mission organizations at home and internationally have made them stronger and better.

A special characteristic feature of the Seminary is its international and Pentecost-like study atmosphere where students from different nations and denominations come together in the same

classroom and hear and experience the same theological knowledge “in their own native language” (Acts 2:12).

Multi-lingual simultaneously teaching is a unique trademark of the Seminary. However, it is also time-consuming and demands significant resources.

**Table 1. Overview of the BMTS student body 2017-2021**

Baltic Methodist Theological Seminary	01/10/2017	01/10/2018	01/10/2019	01/10/2020	01/10/2021
<b>Theology and Mission curricula together (12657, 12658, 12659)</b>					
<b>Total students</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>54</b>
External learners	6	6	6	8	9
Academic leave	4	6	4	6	4
Guest students	2	3	4	2	1
<b>Total learners</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>68</b>
Admitted	24	21	14	20	21
Graduated	14	13	6	15	10
<b>Theology and Mission curricula separately (EST/ENG/RUS)</b>					
EST students 12657	12	16	20	12	12
ENG students 12658	2	9	11	12	10
RUS students 12659	30	34	32	24	32
International students	13	19	19	27	30
Gender men/women	Men 61% Women 39%	Men 52% Women 48%	Men 49% Women 51%	Men 41% Women 59%	Men 38% Women 62%

Source: Self-Evaluation Report of BMTS

**Table 2. Overview of academic staff 2017-2021**

Baltic Methodist Theological Seminary	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21	21/22
<b>Contract faculty</b>	8	8	7	7	7
<b>Adjunct Faculty</b>	11	8	9	11	7
<b>International guest / adjunct teachers</b>	4	6	4	2	2
<b>Gender</b>	11 women 12 men	9 women 13 men	9 women 11 men	9 women 11 men	7 women 9 men

<b>Average age</b>	49	51	50	50	52
<b>Faculty with doctoral degree</b>	6	8	5	6	4
<b>Contract support staff</b>	3	3	3	5	4

Source: Self-Evaluation Report of BMTS

### Main impressions of the self-evaluation report and the visit

The panel received a clear and helpful self-evaluation report that was referenced to other institutional documentation. All of the documentation was accessible and all documentation other than student work was provided in English. The review was well organised in the panel's view. In particular, the panel were aware in advance of whom would be involved in each meeting and were therefore able to address questions to address issues effectively. The meetings were, in general, well run. The use of translation in online meetings was excellent. One or two meetings experienced minor technical problems, but in general the panel's impression was that meetings were well run.

The atmosphere of the meetings was positive and helpful, and the institution had a generally positive attitude towards the process. The panel noted that the previous report in 2018 had led to constructive changes in the institution, and that the self-evaluation report is detailed. These are good indicators that the institution is taking the ongoing process of quality enhancement seriously.

### Main changes on the basis of recommendations of the previous institutional accreditation

The findings of the 2018 institutional accreditation visit were as follows:

- Organisational management and performance - partially conforms to requirements
- Teaching and learning - conforms to requirements
- Research, development and/or other creative activities - partially conforms to requirements
- Service to society - partially conforms to requirements

#### 1. Strengths:

The expert panel identified three main strengths that distinguish BMTS in the Estonian context of Academy, Church and Society.

*1: A good teaching and learning program that is relevant for the churches.*

The Expert Panel confirmed that the quality of the study program conforms to the standards of the higher education in Applied Science and has evidence that the program is effective for the professional work in ministry.

*2: A strong emphasis on the integration of different cultures and ethnicities in the student body.*

The teaching in three languages is carried out successfully and creates an atmosphere of cultural and ecumenical diversity. The translation staff is of high quality and is according to the Expert Panel a jewellery of the Seminary.

*3: A dedicated staff that runs a small school in close cooperation with the stakeholders.*

BMTS is a small institution with limited resources. The Expert Panel observed a supportive atmosphere between staff and students. Since the study program has a practical orientation, the Seminary also

creates networks between churches, Christian organizations and religious denominations. The Expert Panel sensed a real ecumenical atmosphere and a proper gender balance.

## **2. Challenges and Recommendations:**

The main vulnerability of BMTS is its size. As a small institution, it is limited in staff, students and finances. The Expert Panel noticed that the leadership and the stakeholders acknowledge the need of strengthening the research skills in the area of Applied Science. Initial steps have already been taken. To support the Seminary with respect to its role as an institution for higher education in Estonia, the Expert Panel highlights four areas for consideration.

### *1: Strengthen and further develop research skills in the area of Applied Science.*

Appointing and hiring staff with high level academic degrees (PhD) is essential. The Expert Panel recommends the cooperation in research projects with national and international partners in order to strengthen research skills and research methodology. The Committee trusts that this way indirectly the quality of the student's theses will be improved. When internationalisation of research improves, it might also lead to a research level more in dialogue with also the critical profiles of international theology.

### *2: Objectify and generalize student assessment criteria*

The Expert Panel found that a welcome diversity of assessment methods is used in the curriculum. The Committee recommends, however, to introduce a more objective and centralised approach to assessment criteria and that the guidelines are applied consistently.

### *3: Create more transparency in the activities of the Seminary*

The Expert Panel noticed that in a small institution many things are settled in an informal way. The open and constructive atmosphere was evident, but the Committee nevertheless holds that the Seminary's approach to its learning and teaching activities should be less informal and more systematic, strategic and clearly documented.

### *4: Develop strategies to make the Seminary more visible in the public arena*

The academic staff should more actively participate in learned (theological) societies and professional associations. In addition, the Seminary should focus on the publication of popular professional articles and media-materials for the general public.

The Panel's interactions with BMTS indicated that the Seminary has taken good account of the previous report, retaining the strengths noted there. The Seminary has also made some progress towards addressing the challenges and recommendations. One important main change is that the Rector, who was new to the role in 2018, has had three years to establish the direction and structure of the Seminary and has made good progress, successfully establishing herself in this leadership role. Consequently, initial moves have been made towards strengthening research, developing centralised assessment criteria, a greater degree of formalisation, and active participation in learned societies professional associations and wider scholarship. These developments are described in more detail in all that follows. There is more to do to continue the Seminary's trajectory, and accelerated development is expected as the global pandemic recedes and notwithstanding any other unexpected,

significant, external events. Considering this, this report makes further recommendations that emerge from this most recent phase.

## Fulfilling the requirements of the secondary condition of the study programme group of theology

At its meeting on 26 February 2019, EKKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education decided that the next assessment of the study programme group of theology at the Baltic Methodist Theological Seminary would take place in 7 years (maximum term) but on the condition that BMTS presents to EKKA a report by September 1, 2021, about the fulfilment of the requirements set by EKKA Quality Assessment Council. It was decided that the fulfilment of the secondary condition would be assessed during the next institutional accreditation.

The following are the three requirements set by the Quality Assessment Council to be met by BMTS and the panel's assessment on the developments the institution has made since previous assessment.

1. Clause 6 (7) 2) of the Regulation of the Government of the Republic, 'Standard of Higher Education', prescribes that a member of the teaching or research staff who conducts studies in a given subject must have the necessary teaching competence and his or her qualification must support achievement of the objectives and learning outcomes of the study programme. According to students' assessment, lectures are often limited to text being read off the paper, with a lack of group work and discussions. It is recommended to develop and enhance existing opportunities for regular academic staff development, including sharing of innovation and good practices among lecturers and engaging external experts.

**Assessment of the expert panel: the secondary condition is fully met**

### Evidence and analysis

The panel has observed that the leadership and the management of BMTS have taken good notice of the 2018 assessment report and they have acted accordingly. The Rector has taken strategic measures in supporting teachers to use more creative and active teaching methods and the students reported during the online site-visit positively about the interactive quality of the lecturing.

### Creative teaching

The panel noticed that the rector addressed the urgency of interactive teaching in the Academic Council and this issue is further discussed and developed in the team meetings.

The Seminary took an important step in the Autumn of 2021 by participating in the Bologna Hub Peer Support program and by inviting an external Erasmus+ professor to work with the staff on innovative teaching methods (SER 40).



The panel also observed that during the pandemic the turn to teaching online was thoughtfully implemented by the Seminary and that staff were provided with the necessary training and support to make this possible. During the interviews the panel found strong evidence that teaching and support staff are very dedicated and have invested much energy to support the students in this period.

The SER (40) reports that 'Faculty are now being encouraged to incorporate video lectures prepared during the pandemic as home assignments to be viewed [by students] prior to coming to class. This will allow more time in classroom for theoretical courses to focus on interaction and discussion.' The Seminary also reports that 72% of the classes have a more theoretical content and this requires a style that emphasises lecturing while including student interaction.

The meeting with the students during the online visit (November 24, 2021) gives strong evidence that many lectures are nowadays quite lively. 'The multi-lingual lecturing does not stop questions being asked.' When physical attendance because of Covid was not possible, students had the feeling that they were in the classroom. 'Our teachers do give us lectures using Power Point, using video's and giving life examples.' There are also group discussions during class.

### **Staff development**

The panel noticed the strong desire of the leadership to strengthen the internal research culture of the Seminary. Staff development and academic writing have priority in the annual performance interviews with the Rector (SER. p. 50).

The panel believes that the recent appointment of a Director of Research and Development (0.3 FTE) is an important, positive step to improve the academic quality of the staff and of the Diploma Papers of the students. The new director will function as a role model for the younger staff and stimulate publications in journals with a higher scientific status.

International cooperation with seminaries in the Methodist tradition (such as Asbury Theological Seminary) is an important hallmark of BMTS. Joint research meetings and conferences will strengthen the teaching and research skills of the staff. The panel also welcomes initiatives for cooperation with Baltic institutions (SER 53).

The panel heard from staff that the Seminary was attentive to the need to train staff in the use of online teaching tools when the pandemic struck. This is an example of a broader commitment to training staff, which the panel welcomed. Over the period from 2018-2021 the number of occasional staff development activities amount to a 'regular' programme. However, these events are not run as part of a systematic ongoing programme and the panel would encourage the Seminary to maintain an ongoing systematic programme of staff development events on regular dates each year so that it is a systematic part of the seminary's activity and integrated into the seminary calendar.

The panel discovered during the interviews that Russian speaking students now have sufficient access to theological resources in their own language, although the resources are neither the same nor as extensive as those in English. This is an improvement in comparison with the previous assessment.

### **Conclusion**

The panel concludes, based on the SER and the online site-visit, that that the secondary condition is fully met.

### Strength

- Students are satisfied with possibilities for interaction and group-discussion in the classroom. The same holds for students who follow online classrooms.

### Opportunities for further improvement

- To strengthen the teaching and research skills of the staff by cooperating with Asbury Theological Seminary and also with Scandinavian and Baltic institutions.
- To continue to explore new ways of student-centred teaching.
- To develop the existing regular staff development events into a systematic, proactively organised programme.

2. Clause 2.1 of Annex 1 of the Standard of Higher Education provides that *in order to be awarded a diploma of studies in professional higher education, a student shall be able to formulate problems relating to the field of study and to analyse and evaluate different solutions and be able to collect information independently by using appropriate methods and means, and to interpret it critically and creatively*. In many cases, the dissertations submitted to the Committee lacked the theoretical foundation and depth expected at this level. Students' analytical and critical thinking skills need to be developed. To do so, the Committee recommends that the Seminary develop, document and implement a clear and realistic strategy for the development of staff research.

**Assessment of the expert panel: the secondary condition is substantially met**

### Evidence and analysis

In response to the 2018 accreditation committee's critique of the level of research seen in the diploma papers, the process went through another revision. According to the SER (p. 60) from 2020/2021 school year, 2nd year students began developing their Diploma Papers earlier, in March. Consequently, the students spend more time on the Diploma Papers (16 months) and spend more time with the supervisor (13 months).

Surveys show an increase of student satisfaction (SER, p.61). Students reported that they receive an 'academic writing' course on how to write an academic paper. This course also deals with plagiarism and the quality of sources. With respect to empirical data students are taught how to save the data and use them in the Diploma Paper.

The Panel has checked Diploma Papers and judges that the average quality has improved. It is notable that in the field of empirical research there is a growing awareness of good methodology and data analysis. Among the students there is a tendency to study practical issues. The staff know that the themes and subjects of the student's Diploma Papers must sometimes be narrowed down because the staff must be able to guarantee the quality of the Paper in terms of content, methodology and supervision.

Another important step in the development of critical and analytical thinking is the appointment of Dr. Meeli Tankler as the Director of Research and Development. (SER. 51). She mentors the faculty in the area of research and helps to find appropriate venues for publishing.

The Panel holds that cooperation in research with colleagues from other respected institutions is a good strategy to strengthen the research-skills of BMTS. The Seminary mentions the initiative of a recently launched project (SER, p. 53) 'In spring 2021 a **research project** was initiated by the seminary in collaboration with a sociologist, Laur Lilleoja, as a result of a conversation with colleagues from Tartu University Institute of Theology and Religious Studies. The aim of this research is to map theological questions and arguments regarding the COVID-19 pandemic and vaccination among Christians from various churches in Estonia. The research will be launched in October 2021 and will be published in the special edition of the *Usuteaduslik Ajakiri* in 2022.'

Although the Seminary developed a plan for research and publication (*Strategic Development Plan*, p. 15), a long-term *research program* is still lacking. The Panel strongly advises the Seminary to develop a research program that coheres with its core identity and its status as an institution for higher education. Research in Applied Science in theology and religion will focus on practical issues and use the skills of analysis, theoretical reflection and practical application. Applied Science in the domain of church and society will also raise the need for hermeneutical reflection. The Panel believes that staff and students will benefit from a clear and well-defined research program.

*In this part, the panel is expected to provide evidence and analysis on fulfilment of the particular requirement of the secondary condition. The analysis should be made with explicit reference to the written documents (progress report, analytical papers, strategies, questionnaires etc.), discussions during the interviews, and any other available evidence when and if applicable.*

*It is the task of the panel to indicate the extent to which the institution meets or does not meet this requirement of the secondary condition.*

*The panel may also go beyond the analysis of the fulfilment of the requirement, identifying new improvement opportunities for the institution and providing examples of best practices that the institution could benefit from.*

## Conclusion

The Panel concludes that, given the actions taken by the Rector and the positive remarks of the students, that the secondary condition is substantially met.

## Strengths

- The Rector has taken necessary measures to improve the quality of the Diploma Papers and this is evident in the high level of appreciation that students express for their supervision.
- The appointment of a Director of Research and Development underlines that research is a core task in the performance of the Seminary as an institution of Higher Education.

## Area of concern and recommendations

- The Panel recognises the good work of the Seminary to develop the research skills of staff but is also concerned that the Seminary should continue this positive trajectory, being able to demonstrate a continuing improvement in the level and amount of publication.

### Opportunities for further improvement

- To ensure that a PhD (completed or nearing completion) is an essential requirement for any new academic staff appointments.
- To develop a plan of Applied Research in Theology that increases the national and international scope of work.

3. According to the section 5.3.7 of the regulation 'Quality Assessment of Study Programme Groups in the First and Second Cycles of Higher Education', *assessment of learning outcomes is appropriate, transparent and objective and supports the development of learners*. Academic staff have relatively unconstrained freedom to determine assessment tasks and criteria. This, however, can lead to inconsistency and lack of clarity in the assessment. It is important to create objective, clear and coherent assessment criteria that comply with the level of higher education and are consistently understood and applied by all academic staff.

**Assessment of the expert panel: the secondary condition is fully met**

### Evidence and analysis

In 2018 the Seminary was asked to bring in a more centralised approach to assessment criteria. In response to the criticism the Academic Committee formed a workgroup to discuss the issue. 'In a series of meetings core faculty shared about the types of assignments they use for assessment. It was discovered that while there was general similarity, there was also different terminology employed that could cause confusion among students.' (SER, 43) The Seminary decided to define the criteria for three primary types of written assignment: reflection papers, essays, and research papers. For each of these, definition was provided, and they were included in the guidelines. The SER says that the guidelines from the working group were presented to the Academic Council in spring 2021 and then added both to the *Staff and Faculty Handbook* as well as the *Student Handbook* (SER, 44).

In the meeting with the Teaching Staff the Panel has checked this topic. The teachers we have spoken to confirmed the process and answered that they have updated their course descriptions and the types of assessment used in the courses. 'The discussion prompted by the introduction of these types of assessment has been helpful because in different languages the titles can be interpreted differently', teachers told us. Subsequent checking of the course descriptions confirmed that assessment methods are specified.

The panel welcomed this development as an important step towards resolving the issue of 'unconstrained freedom to determine assessment tasks and criteria'. The panel noted that the criteria presented are not differentiated by level (4, 5, 6) and would recommend that, as a next step, the seminary develop assessment criteria that are differentiated in this way.

The assessment of practical skills in, for example, pastoral, social or liturgical performances is different from the assessment of written assignments. The assessments of these competences have, according to the teachers, a more observational feature and go hand in hand with recommendations for improvement. More objectivity is guaranteed when more than one teacher is involved. During the

visit, the Panel found evidence that teaching staff are interested in the involvement of multiple teachers in assessments of this type.

### Conclusion

The Panel concludes, given the actions taken by the leadership and the answers given by the teaching staff, that the Seminary fully met this third condition.

### Opportunities for further improvement

- The Panel would like to encourage the Academic Council and the Teaching Staff to further develop the criteria for the assessment of practical competences and skills.
- The Panel strongly encourages the Seminary to create systems where students can be assessed anonymously, and where double marking is used on samples of student work to ensure consistency. These systems should be described as part of the Seminary's Academic Strategy and the sampling strategy should balance the need for consistency in assessment against staff workload.
- The Seminary is encouraged to strengthen and develop its Academic Regulations to continue to enhance the consistency of courses to ensure that no students are disadvantaged, expectations are clear to students, and there is balance across the curriculum.

## Summary of the institutional accreditation findings

### General Findings:

The Panel has observed on the basis of the written documentation and the interviews that BMTS has made some progress since the assessment of 2018. There has been some general improvement and some particular improvements in relation to areas highlighted in that report. Strengths have remained and some weaknesses have been resolved. Although not all the areas fully conform to requirements, the Panel is convinced that the Seminary has dealt adequately with the recommendations of the 2018 assessment.

### Commendations:

The Panel would make the following commendations:

- The Seminary is seen as a great place to study by its students.
- A remarkable clarity and strength in the current leadership of the Seminary. The rector is well aware of the challenges of the Seminary and seeks (in close cooperation with the stakeholders) to position the Seminary in the context of the Baltic Methodist Church and the Estonian society.
- A dedicated staff that runs a small institution with a quite diverse student body. The teaching in three languages simultaneously (Estonian, English and Russian) is a unique trademark of the Seminary. This situation creates opportunities for the integration of different ethnicities and cultures.

- Increased attention to Research and Development, through the appointment of a Director.
- Excellent support for simultaneous translation in teaching face to face and online.
- A positive and effective response to the pandemic.
- An effective development of admissions policy to show a greater concern for the intellectual strengths of applicants.

#### Areas of concern and recommendations:

- As an institute of Higher Education, the Seminary should keep a strong focus on the use and the development of analytical and critical skills of staff and students.

The Panel has observed that the Seminary has made progress in the quality of the Diploma Papers. In order to maintain the international standards of higher education, the Seminary should continue to focus on the analytical and methodological skills of students and staff.

- The Seminary should develop a long-term research program that coheres with the identity of the Seminary and meets the requirements of an institution for higher education.
- A detailed research program will structure the research of staff and students. This program should also clarify how to deal with Applied Science in theology and how to deal with hermeneutical questions.

Panel observed that the area of Research and Development and the area of Service to Society have the attention of the leadership and the staff. The improvement of these areas, however, takes time and needs a long-term strategy. We urge the Seminary to continue to focus on these areas and to invest time and money in research skills and in the service to the Estonian and Baltic society.

- The Seminary should develop strategies to make BMTS more visible in the main-stream Estonian society and media.

The Panel welcomes the appointment of a PR specialist. The Panel also encourages the Seminary to think through the media strategy for the near future. Despite the close connection with the Methodist world, the Panel believes that the Seminary can create opportunities to serve the broader society. Therefore, the Seminary is encouraged to research how other HEIs see 'society' and how they serve it

- When developing their continuing education plan, The Seminary should take into account the needs of other Christian Churches and secular members of the society in addition to the Methodist Church. Also, the feedback of the courses should be publicly available.

The Panel sees that the continuing education in the development plan should include supporting the Methodist Church in offering broad-based continuing education and training in church planting and activities for other Christian Churches and secular members of society.

In the previous assessment, the Seminary was encouraged to upload the feedback of the in-service training to their webpage for the general public. Currently, the feedback is not found from the homepage. The Seminary is recommended to upload and present the in-service feedback on their web page with the rest of the information about the training.

- The Seminary should raise awareness about possible conflict of interests between lecturers and students

The Panel read from the SER and heard from the meetings that several staff members (including lecturers) are working in addition to the Seminary in congregations. While this trend has its benefits, due to the small size of the community, it can lead to conflict of interests. Moving from one role to another might be difficult for students and lecturers. The Seminary is encouraged to analyse possible conflict of interests and its possible impact on the personnel and the students of the HEI. If there are cases of conflict of interests, the Seminary is invited to work through principles that the counterparts should follow.

- The Seminary should clearly state that their library is open to everybody at certain times via approachable channels of the Seminary.
- The Seminary should encourage to publicise student paper titles, years and authors on the Seminary's webpage with links to the documents.
- Making papers publicly available online would increase the likelihood of students and other interested counterparts reading them, which will serve society by providing analysed thoughts and new ideas.
- The Seminary should differentiate curricula and assessments across language groups where there are significant disparities in the type and amount of available literature.
- The Seminary should continue to work to reduce dropout rates.
- The Seminary should make increasing use of its strategic location for visitors both inside and outside Estonia to ensure that it makes a contribution to wider society not limited to the churches.

	conforms to requirements	partially conforms to requirements	does not conform to requirements	worthy of recognition
Organisational management and performance	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Teaching and learning	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
RDC	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Service to society	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## II Assessment areas and sub-areas

### 1.1. Organisational management and performance

Sub-areas	conforms to requirements	partially conforms to requirements	does not conform to requirements	worthy of recognition
1.1.1 General management	x			
1.1.2 Personnel management	x			
1.1.3 Management of financial resources and infrastructure	x			

#### 1.1.1 General management and performance

##### Requirements

- ✓ A higher education institution has defined its role in the Estonian society.
- ✓ The development plan and the related action plans of a higher education institution arise from the concrete purposes that are built on its mission, vision and core values, and that consider the country's priorities and society's expectations.
- ✓ Key results of a higher education institution have been defined.
- ✓ The leadership of a higher education institution conducts the preparation and implementation of development and action plans and includes the members and other stakeholders in this work.
- ✓ Liability at all management levels has been defined and described, and it supports the achievement of institutional purposes and the coherent performance of core processes.
- ✓ Internal and external communications of a higher education institution (including marketing and image building) are purposeful and managed.



**Indicators:**

- *the rate of achievement prescribed in development/action plans (key results)*
- *results of employee satisfaction survey: satisfaction with management and information flow*
- *other indicators depending on the HEI*

## Evidence and analysis

The Panel has found that the general management and performance of the Seminary is very well organized. The Rector takes seriously her role as initiator and stimulator of innovative processes. A good example is the way in which she dealt with the critical remarks of the previous assessment report (2018). One remark concerned the style of lecturing. The Rector has taken strategic measures in supporting teachers to use more creative and active teaching methods. Another critical issue concerned the skills of critical and analytical thinking of staff and students. To cope with this issue, she created a 0.3FTE function for a Director of Research and Development and appointed Dr. Meeli Tankler to this role.

In the organizational structure, the Board of Trustees forms the official and formal connection with the United Methodist Church in Estonia (holder). The Rector's cabinet is the executive body that runs the Seminary. The Panel holds that the Board of Trustees and the Rector's cabinet have well-defined leadership roles in the performance of the Seminary. In the meeting with the representatives and the owner of the Seminary the Panel observed that the academic freedom of the staff is respected and that the owner of the Seminary is positively involved in the weal and woe of the Seminary.

Both the owner of the Seminary and the Rector acknowledge that the development of critical and analytical thinking is essential in the life of the students. They see that during their stay at BMTS the "black and white thinking" of students decreases and that they receive deeper insights in theology, ethics and practices. The Panel noticed that the Development Plan (2021-2023) and Implementation Plan show a balanced mixture of requirements for Higher Education in theology and the needs of the Methodist Church (and other religious minorities) in Estonia. The Board of Trustees told us during the interview that 'the Seminary has trained all the pastors and church leaders, either through a full course or a one-year course. The Seminary shapes the church leadership in many countries.' The Panel noticed, however, that a long-term research program is still lacking. Such a program is strategically important in order to bring together the wide expectations of the church with the specific scientific mission of the Seminary as an institution for higher education.

Internal communication with the student body is going on via mailing lists, Tahvel Student Information System (SIS), and the Moodle platform in three languages (SER., p. 14.15). The panel welcomed the news from students that the staff of the Seminary are dedicated and that communication with students during the pandemic was effective despite the very significant challenges of moving online quickly.

The Panel heard that the Russian speaking students are now at less of a disadvantage than they were in comparison to English or Estonian speaking students. In fact, there are good textbooks for Russian students and many of them are bi-lingual nowadays. (Nevertheless, there remain different types and amounts of learning materials between languages.)

The Seminary is aware that, in order to guarantee the quality of teaching and research both international cooperation with institutions in the Methodist tradition as well as partnerships with researchers in Estonia will be necessary. The Seminary has a long-term partnership with Asbury Theological Seminary in the USA. A good example of national cooperation in research is the research project that was initiated by the Seminary in collaboration with a sociologist Laur Lilleoja from Tartu University theology faculty. (Launched spring 2021).

## Conclusion

The Panel concludes that the general management and performance conforms the requirements because of the contribution of the Rector and her cabinet, the maintenance of timed development and implementation plans, and effective communication.

## Strengths

- The Seminary has a dedicated staff and the teaching and support staff found effective ways to communicate with the students during the Covid pandemic.
- The Seminary has a solid practice of teaching in three languages simultaneously.

## Opportunity for further improvement

- The Panel found evidence in the meetings with students and stakeholders that the Seminary effectively manages opportunities to engage in the social needs of the Estonian society. In fact, students are involved in social practices during their internships. The Panel urges the leadership to make these activities more visible in the performance of the Seminary and in the external communication.

## 1.1.2 Personnel management

### Requirements

- ✓ The principles and procedures for employee recruitment and development arise from the objectives of the development plan of a higher education institution and ensure academic sustainability.
- ✓ When selecting, appointing and evaluating members of the academic staff, their past activities (teaching, RDC, student feedback, etc.) are taken into account in a balanced way.
- ✓ The principles of remuneration and motivation of employees are clearly defined, available to all employees, and implemented.
- ✓ Employee satisfaction with the management, working conditions, flow of information, etc., is regularly surveyed and the results used in improvement activities.
- ✓ Employees participate in international mobility programmes, cooperation projects, networks, etc.
- ✓ Employees base their activities on principles of academic ethics.

**Indicators:**

- the rate of competition for academic positions
- the number and profile of the staff (academic and administrative/support staff, age distribution, qualifications, including their average age by qualification level)
- the proportion of foreign teaching staff and research staff
- indicators of international mobility of academic staff as a proportion of their total number
- other indicators depending on the HEI

### Evidence and analysis

The Development plan (2021-2023) shows that the total faculty/staff employed at BMTS is equivalent to 7.5 FTE. Of these 1.5 positions are missionaries funded by General Board of Global Ministries of the UMC (GBGM) and 0.33 by General Board of Higher Education and Ministry of the UMC (GBHEM). Rector and dean have full-time jobs and they also teach.

In addition to contracted staff the Seminary uses guest lecturers from other Estonian and foreign higher educational institutions as well as practitioners from specific fields of study. The Panel suggests that the Seminary could also consider hiring guest lecturers from Scandinavian and Baltic universities with specific knowledge of local Christianity and folk cultures, since this would be relevant to students, enhancing their preparation to work across these regions. Besides, the Panel would like the Seminary to inspire and encourage students to take classes from other academic theological institutions (for example classes in methodology).

The policy of BMTS is that *faculty consists of persons with pedagogical skills and Christian ministry experience, having master or doctoral degree, as well as experts having higher education and practical knowledge in their specific field. (SER, p. 17)*

### Employee recruitment

The Academic Dean is responsible for recruiting faculty, inviting guest lecturers and collecting course feedback. The employment contracts with faculty and staff are signed, renewed and ended by the Rector. The Rector holds annual performance interviews with faculty and staff.

The Panel welcomes the Rector's Council decision in 2021 to search for a part-time Russian-speaking staff member for Biblical studies and Greek.

The Panel noticed that 44% of current faculty have doctoral degrees. Of the six contracted faculty two have a doctoral degree. Of the teaching faculty 44 % have a Master's degree and two of those are developing their doctoral proposals.

The Panel highly appreciates the creation of the post of Director of Research and Development (0.3 load) and recognizes that a successful appointment has been made by placing Meeli Tankler in this position. This is an important step to strengthen the Applied Research capacity of the Seminary. As the Director of Research she will mentor staff and lead in areas of research.

### Principles of remuneration

In 2019 all contracted employees received a 4.16% raise of salary. Recently, the BOT has set fundraising goals for a 5-year plan of faculty development. In January 2021, the first step was taken, and the academic staff received a substantial raise. There are also more funds available now for continuing education and honorariums for research and writing. The Seminary expects that a second step to improve the faculty salaries will take place in 2022. The Panel noticed that the Seminary has the intention is to pay the staff in due time the Estonian national average salary.

### Employee satisfaction

In Spring 2021 BMTS did its first anonymous online employee satisfaction survey. 11 out of 16 invited individuals responded. The overall employee satisfaction is as high as 4.73 (on a 5-point scale). The annual performance interviews also offer a platform for feedback to the administration. The performance interviews showed that some faculty attend training sessions frequently, while a few felt no need for them, and some had little time or found nothing in their area of interest.

In the meeting with the employees the Panel observed that the staff welcomed the salary raise. But they also said: 'Pay is not our main motivation'. 'Those kind of movements show the school's attitude to the value of the workers.'

### International mobility

As a Methodist school BMTS belongs to the *International Association of Methodist Schools, Colleges and Universities* (IAMSCU), and at the European level is part of the network of *Methodist-related Theological Schools in Europe* (MTSE).

The Seminary has a long-term partnership with *Asbury Theological Seminary* (ATS) in USA. All three BMTS rectors have acquired their higher degrees at Asbury. The MOU that was renewed in 2018 also provides opportunities for organizing joint conferences, research projects and consultations on online resources.

The seminary has participated in the work of the *Federation of European Evangelical Theologians* (FEET) by attending conferences and writing book reviews for their journal.

The Seminary is creating partnerships with Methodist churches in Latvia and Lithuania. These have been developed and strengthened through the recent visit of the Rector.

The Panel observed that the international network is rather strong, since BMTS is an active member of a number of networks and partnerships. Involvement with the International Association of Methodist Schools, Colleges and Universities, and Methodist-Related Theological Schools in Europe bring some benefits such as interaction through conferences, faculty exchange, and networking opportunities (SER p. 22-23). In addition, involvement with the Federation of European Evangelical Theologians brings the opportunity for some small-scale publication and further conferences. The Panel would encourage the Seminary to continue these positive engagements while also developing engagements with wider networks in academic theology. It would also encourage the seminary to make the best use of these networks to establish opportunities for joint peer-reviewed publications and other research activities, as well as guest lecturing. This will provide wider exposure to BMTS students when lecturers come in and will enrich BMTS staff as they contribute elsewhere. The Panel heard from staff that the Seminary instructs the teaching staff about *academic ethics*. The staff

confirmed that they are strict in confidentiality in relation to students and that they aim to be unbiased in their grading. They also spoke sensitively about issues across the denominations.

## Conclusion

The Panel concludes that the personnel management conforms the requirements.

Although the Seminary is very small in terms of employees, the leadership has taken the right measures in terms of personnel management.

## Strengths

- The appointment of a Director of Research and Development (0.3 FTE)
- A salary raise of 4.16 % for all contracted employees.

## Opportunities for further improvement

- The Panel advises the leadership of the Seminary to continue to strengthen the research skills of academic staff in Applied Theology. This will enhance their teaching and supervision of projects as well as enable them to publish more and better work that is influential in society, academy, and church. It will enable the development of the seminary as it maintains its aspiration to teach an MA programme in future.
- Enlarge academic and educational perspectives by opening up new networks in the Baltic and Scandinavian countries.
- To develop existing work in staff pedagogical development by ensuring that the seminary has an ongoing, proactively organised, rolling programme of activities for sharing good practice and staff training.

## 1.1.3 Management of financial resources and infrastructure

### Requirements

- ✓ The allocation of financial resources of a higher education institution as well as the administration and development of infrastructure are economically feasible and are based on the objectives of the development plan of an institution of higher education and national priorities (except private institutions).
- ✓ A higher education institution uses information systems that support its management and the coherent performance of its core processes.
- ✓ The working conditions of the staff, and the learning and RDC conditions of students (library, studios, workshops, laboratories, etc.) meet the needs arising from the specifics of an institution of higher education and the expectations of members.

### Indicators:

- *the distribution of the revenue and expenditure*
- *investment dynamics*
- *results of employee satisfaction survey: satisfaction with working conditions*
- *results of student satisfaction survey: satisfaction with learning and RDC conditions*

- other indicators depending on the HEI

## Evidence and analysis

Although BMTS is a small Seminary, its financial basis is solid. This is mainly due to external funding (UMC and grants, and scholarship funds) there is a steady growth of the yearly budget.

In November 2019 faculty and BOT members received training in fundraising from a GBHEM consultant. In 2020 the Rector and her assistant followed an online training course in fundraising for deans and academic leaders. BMTS believes that fundraising and funding is a meaningful part of the assignment of the Seminary and will strengthen the position of the Seminary in the Baltic region.

### Financial resources

The seminary's primary sources of finance include tuition (currently about a third of the budgeted income comes from tuition), budgeted funds from the UMC in Estonia and internationally, project-based grants through UMC Central Conferences Theological Education Fund, donations from churches and private donors, grants, and endowment income.

BMTS holds a security cushion deposit of €80,000. The annual budget of the Seminary is drafted in the Rector's council, finalized in the Board, and accepted in the Annual Conference of the UMCE (SER p. 12; checked by the Panel in the meeting with the Board). The Seminary also has the Endowment Fund provided by *United Methodist Higher Education Foundation*. Once a year the Seminary receives distributions. In recent years BMTS has been quite successful in fund development, which has allowed the Seminary to have more activities, and invest more in faculty and staff.

The Panel observed that research and development and raising staff salary levels have been budget priorities with other elements (e.g., the library) also receiving significant support.

### Infrastructure and working conditions

The seminary's library offers important support to faculty and students in the learning process. The library is 142 square meters in size and includes over 21,500 items. The library purchases literature in Estonian, English, and Russian. In co-operation with the Theological Seminary in Moscow BMTS aims to improve access to Russian language theological resources. During the interviews the Panel heard that the availability of theological literature in the Russian language has improved over the years substantially. However, the level of literature in the Estonian language remains comparatively low since there is neither the history of publication nor the scale of population to facilitate growth in the same way.

Strengthening the library is a development priority of the Seminary (SER p. 30). The Seminary has set aside €17,000 for a library makeover and has set the target to fundraise \$70,000 for an upgrade. Seminary students can use Tallinn University library databases (located next door) to support research for their diploma papers.

BMTS operates in three study languages (Estonian, Russian, and English) with the help of *simultaneous translation*. The Seminary possesses professional equipment that works on radio frequency and is very

reliable. E-learning has had an increasingly important role in classroom studies. All classes have some online-learning incorporated.

The Panel observed and experienced during the online site visit that the support system for simultaneous online translation and the professionalism of the translators is of a high standard.

### Conclusion

The Panel concludes that the management of financial resources and infrastructure conforms the requirements.

The Panel realizes that BMTS is a small Seminary. The small size of the institution determines the infrastructure of the Seminary and the working conditions of staff and students. The Panel found processes to be well organized and, most of all, a trustworthy and competent leadership. These points are essential for an institution of this size. Not only for the business operations of the Seminary as an institution for Higher Education, but also for the link with the United Methodist Church.

### Strengths

- The Seminary has prioritized fund raising and succeeded to bring in a substantial amount of money from the Funds of the Methodist Church.
- The Seminary has a high-quality support system for simultaneous translation.

### Opportunities for further improvement

- Continue to operate with Asbury Theological Seminary to build a theological e-library for materials of the Wesleyan and Methodist tradition.
- While the increasing availability of theological literature in Russian is welcome, the relatively low levels of literature in Estonian remain a concern. It is also notable that the same texts are not often available across the languages groups and so the corpus differs across language groups. The Seminary will not be able to correct these large-scale differences by its own efforts and so it should ensure that its programmes differ from one another in ways that enable students to make the most of what is available in each language.

## 1.2 Teaching and learning

Sub-areas	conforms to requirements	partially conforms to requirements	does not conform to requirements	worthy of recognition
1.2.1 Effectiveness of teaching and learning, and formation of the student body	X			
1.2.2 Study programme development	X			
1.2.3 Student academic progress and student assessment	X			
1.2.4 Support processes for learning		X		

### 1.2.1 Effectiveness of teaching and learning and formation of the student body

#### Requirements

- ✓ A higher education institution has defined its educational objectives and measures their implementation.
- ✓ A higher education institution educates students so that they are nationally and internationally competitive.
- ✓ The number of student places is planned in accordance with the social need and the potentials and purposes of an institution of higher education.
- ✓ The admission rules are consistent with the mission and purposes of an institution of higher education and support the formation of a motivated student body.
- ✓ Students are provided with opportunities to study at a higher education institution regardless of any special needs.



**Indicators:**

- *positive graduation rates, including the fulfilment of performance agreement*
- *employer satisfaction with preparation of graduates*
- *rates of alumni employment*
- *other indicators depending on the HEI, which, among other things, give evidence of the international competitiveness of graduates*

## Evidence and analysis

The panel heard that the institution has benefitted from three years of stable leadership since the previous Accreditation Review in 2018, which was conducted at a time of transition, and that the foundations for moving forward are now stronger than they were. The panel would broadly agree with this and formed a view from what it read and heard that the seminary has a clearer trajectory and is making progress in learning and teaching.

### Setting Objectives and Measuring Implementation

As noted in the SER, the seminary's educational objectives are built on its mission statement (<https://emkts.ee/index.php/en/statement>) and are stated within its curriculum for the programmes in "Theology and Mission". They are focused on theological knowledge, practical skills for ordained ministry and professions requiring theology, the integration of these two, and personal development. The seminary is focused on its future objectives, having produced a Development Plan 2021-2023 to provide intentional ongoing development as a 'new normal' develops post-COVID.

The programme-level learning outcomes are also clear and aligned with the College's mission. The primary means for measuring achievement of these outcomes has been through student achievement in individual courses and surveys provided for students at the end of each course and at the end of the programme. The seminary has a Strategic Plan 2021-23 and associated Implementation Plan. This demonstrates that objectives in teaching and learning are defined and implementation is measured. However, these plans do not address learning and teaching in detail and it would be good to see more developed strategic planning and implementation within this area.

The panel welcomed the seminary's work to improve the implementation and measurement of its educational objectives and the recent establishment of an **Academic Affairs Committee** to be responsible for student mentoring, with an aim to 'be more proactive and structured in assisting students in the fulfilment of their learning objectives.' (SER, p.34) The panel recommends careful monitoring of this new development as part of a formal, documented process, in order to develop and enhance its work over time, making it more effective, and giving a particular focus to this monitoring over the first few years of operation. Generic information gained from this mentoring activity should contribute to enhancement of programmes and other student support systems in a systematic way.

The panel heard that there is also ongoing interaction with the **United Methodist Church** as the main employer of graduates of the seminary as well as the **Estonian Christian Pentecostal Church**, given the large number of Pentecostals attending the seminary. This stakeholder engagement enables the seminary to assess the extent to which its educational objectives are achieved. The panel welcomed

this. It is expected and appropriate for this seminary to have a strong connection with the denomination that owns it and runs it for the sake of developing its own churches. The panel welcomes the wording of the Seminary's mission statement, that its goal is to prepare Christian workers not only for church ministry but also to be leaders for '**Christian and charitable organisations**'. This broad goal is consistent with the seminary's position as part of Higher Education provision in Estonia. The seminary should consider the extent to which the knowledge, skills, and personal development embedded in its learning outcomes also facilitate this wider objective and contribution.

The panel would also highlight a theme detected across conversations with Seminary staff that the United Methodist Church is working through significant challenges in the short- to medium-term that may lead it to split. Given this risk, the Seminary would be wise to **consider the breadth of both its financial support-base and its educational contribution**. The potential risk is that the Seminary would receive a smaller grant from UMC and the pool of Methodist churches and prospective students aligned with the Seminary would be reduced. The Seminary should evaluate this risk and work to protect itself from any reduction in financial support or pool of prospective students that might result from the unpredictable consequences of such an event. The panel read and heard that only 1/3 of the students are Methodist, with other significant groups including Pentecostal, Independent, Lutheran, and Baptist. The seminary may be well advised to continue the intentional development of this denominational diversity while also focusing on its core commitment to recruit Methodist students.

### **National and International Competitiveness**

The panel welcomed the decision of BMTS to maintain an aspiration to develop an MA programme with Asbury Theological Seminary in due course, but to do so only when the College has developed its staff and scholarship to a point at which teaching at level 7 is appropriate.

The panel read of the ongoing relationships with **Asbury Theological Seminary**, formally based on a Memorandum of Understanding renewed in 2019 (SER, p. 9) enabling (among other things) staff mentoring, student exchange, and the potential for joint conferences. There are also informal associations with Asbury. BMTS has a strong affinity for Asbury since it is the Methodist institution at which all three of its rectors did their PhD work (SER, p. 24). Prior to the 2018 Accreditation Review, BMTS was considering offering an MA programme jointly with Asbury, however it was the recommendation of the previous panel that the seminary should first develop the scholarship of its own academic staff to a point at which it was ready to teach at this higher level, including supervision of student project work. The panel read that BMTS now takes this programme as a 'long term goal', recognising that it must first 'develop our faculty and recruit more specialists and PhD level faculty' (SER, p. 38). The panel welcomes this approach and the work that has been going on since 2018 to develop scholarship within the faculty, which should continue. This more cautious approach to developing MA provision, coupled with ongoing strengthening of the seminary's academic capacity in anticipation of this, is likely to be more successful ultimately, making it more likely that the course will be nationally and internationally competitive.

In order for students to become nationally and internationally competitive, staff must be internationally competitive, too, and involved in continual updating and enhancement of their skills in scholarship, teaching, and (where appropriate) administration and management. The panel welcomed two principal ways in which attention has been given to staff development in recent years in learning and teaching. Both of these reflect a strong staff community and the ongoing, informal

engagement that would be expected in a small institution. First, the seminary's response to the pandemic necessitated a rapid response and the seminary rose to the occasion. The panel heard that the process of taking teaching online was thoughtfully executed and that staff were provided with the necessary training to make this abrupt change.

Second, the seminary's response to the previous report in 2018 has included development of staff focused on areas such as student-centred learning and creative teaching methods. The panel heard that a main feature in this is the seminary's participation in the Erasmus Bologna Hub Peer Support program, which includes the involvement of an external Professor from University of Essex, UK, to work with faculty on innovative teaching methods. The panel welcomes this development and recommends that BMTS consider establishing pedagogical staff development and sharing of good practice as a systematic, regular activity. The panel heard from teaching staff that development activities are not infrequent but occur on a needs' basis rather than a regular schedule.

The panel welcomes the seminary's responsiveness to the pandemic and the previous report. The panel's discussions suggested that staff lack a systematic, regular programme of staff development that ensures that good practice is shared, and training takes place on a regular basis independently of particular events that might trigger it. This is a concern in relation to the ongoing implementation of enhancements in learning and teaching. The panel also heard differing opinions about the extent to which the staff benefit from regular evaluation. This is also a risk. The panel would recommend that the seminary ensures it implements an ongoing, regular programme of staff pedagogical development to assure itself of these things and that processes of staff peer-support and appraisal are implemented regularly in order to provide a developmental benefit.

The panel heard from external stakeholders that graduates in previous years have been valued by the churches and ministries in the North European region. This provides some evidence of competitiveness of graduates internationally within churches at a regional level. The panel read that the "Competency of graduates is measured based on feedback from the primary employers such as the UMCE and ECPC. As the head of the UMCE Superintendent is a member of both the seminary's BOT and RC and teaches. Feedback of the on-the-job competency of graduates is constantly being applied in the development of the seminary at all levels" (SER, p. 38). While the impressions of key individuals connected with both the Seminary and its main employer are valuable, a more systematic approach to gathering feedback from graduates and employers would be welcome to ensure that the Seminary has a broad-based and authentic impression of graduate destinations. This systematic approach should also be able to gather feedback from the significant proportion of students who do not move from the Seminary into either the Methodist or Pentecostal churches.

### **Planning Student Numbers**

The panel discussed with stakeholders and employers whether the number of graduates from BMTS is sufficient to meet their needs. The panel heard that there are about 1500 Methodist church members across Estonia in around 25 churches. Thus, insofar as the seminary's primary mission to prepare leaders for ministry in the church is focused on Estonia it can be met with the existing numbers of graduates each year (see student number tables, above). Any expansion of the student body is thus likely to involve developing new markets. The panel heard that Latvia, Lithuania and Finland are likely sources of additional students to the seminary if the local churches decide to send them and the global Methodist Mission Board sees the seminary as one of the full-time training institutes in continental

Europe linked with the Baltics, Finland, and some parts of Ukraine and Russia. Students have also been coming from Belarus recently.

In addition to a possible wider geographical market the panel heard from stakeholders that there are many workers in Pentecostal churches that study at the seminary (26% of students are Pentecostal – see 2021-23 Development Plan, p.7) and that Pentecostal organisations work with it.

The seminary has set an ambitious student number target, aiming to raise total numbers from around 60 to 80 over 3 years. The panel read that this is partly in recognition of the high staff/student ratio and surfeit of teaching space. This reflects a sensible concern for efficiency. However, **staff workload** is also a concern. In a small seminary staff typically have heavy administrative responsibilities and it is also important to develop scholarship and research, so the College management should manage staff workload carefully as student numbers grow to ensure that effective functioning and the production of scholarship can continue to develop. Furthermore, in addition to the Seminary's priorities to reach more Methodist congregations and students from Latvia and Lithuania (supported by scholarships), achievement of student number targets is likely also to depend on **increasing emphasis on the seminary's wider ecumenical approach**, reaching out to other denominational groups within Estonia. (Presently only 32% of the seminary is Methodist, with 26% Pentecostal; 29% non-denominational, Baptist 8% and Lutheran 5%. See Development Plan 2021-23, p.7.)

Even if the seminary does not achieve its student number target and remains stable at its current numbers it will continue to make a viable and valuable contribution to theological education within Estonia that is in accord with its purpose as a higher education institution.

### Admissions and Student Body

The seminary has a clear aim to 'continue to grow and nurture a culturally diverse, international and ecumenical student body while focusing on recruitment from the Methodist churches in the Baltic, Nordic region and keep theological education accessible for all Estonian churches.' [Development Plan 2021-23]

The panel were provided with a clear account of the admissions system and were able to confirm that it is consistent with the seminary's mission and purpose. The mission and practicum requirements of the seminary justify a number of its admission requirements, including limitation of admission to members of Christian congregations only, as well as inclusion of vocational experience, statement of motivation, and pastoral reference as part of the application process.

The panel commends the seminary for the way that it has responded to the Accreditation Report, 2018, and the recommendation there that 'the seminary would better support achievement that is internationally competitive by providing a more rigorous evaluation of a prospective student's intellectual ability and his or her capacity to develop skills of critical analysis and academic reflection on practical activities.' (Accreditation Report, 2018, p. 16). The panel noted that the seminary has claimed to have implemented a more 'vigorous' application process in light of this report that includes questions on past educational experience, a 500-word essay, careful consideration of the applicant's secondary diploma and previous education results, and assessment of analytical thinking during the interview stage (SER, p. 35). These changes have resulted in an increase in the percentage of applicants not accepted in the years 2019-2021, with particularly high rejection rates in 2019-20 and 2021-22. The average number of applications not accepted from 2019-21 is over three times higher than in

2016-18; from 5% in 2016-2018 to 18% in 2019-2021 (SER, p. 36). This outcome is very good evidence that the process has indeed become more rigorous. However, it should be noted that two of the three years have been affected by recruitment during a pandemic, as well as other changes to recruitment conditions and so an intentional concern for intellectual strength should be maintained and rejection rates should continue to be monitored annually in future and considered as part of the seminary's annual reflection, as well as in further self-evaluation reports.

The seminary notes that its satisfaction surveys indicate a small reduction in student motivation in 2019-2021, which is reasonably explained as being an effect of the pandemic. From all it read and heard the panel formed a view that the seminary's response to the pandemic has been effective and proactive and so it has been doing all it reasonably can to mitigate these effects. However, it is not clear that the survey instrument will be sensitive to small changes of this kind. As noted in the Self-analysis, the seminary should average scores over equal periods (SER, p.40). It should also continue to review and enhance its surveys and data collection processes (as it has done in 2021) to ensure that there can be increasing confidence in their internal reliability (see above).

The panel heard a very positive general report from students about their experience in the seminary. Students could identify how the seminary has provided information that students value and how it has developed their intellectual and academic skills. Students were generally well aware of what is expected of them and conveyed enthusiasm for their studies and experience. The students noted that they receive a lot of surveys, although did not feel survey fatigue.

## Conclusion

In general, the panel concluded that the College has made acceptable progress in continuing to develop itself as an institution that works intentionally towards its objectives and prepares students to be nationally and internationally competitive. Good work has been done on strengthening the admission process. The Seminary conforms to requirements in this area.

## Strengths

- The seminary takes care to seek feedback on the effectiveness of each course from students via surveys that address a variety of aspects of the Course. It aims to avoid survey fatigue by not surveying all courses every year.
- The Seminary has adapted to the uncertain circumstances caused by the pandemic well.
- Students convey enthusiasm for their studies and experience.

## Areas of concern and recommendations

- To mitigate the risk of problems within the Methodist Church by intentionally developing a financial support base and student body to ensure that it continues to develop as an interdenominational Seminary.
- To maintain intentionally the seminary's concern for the intellectual strength of applicants, monitoring rejection rates annually into the future and considering them as part of the seminary's annual reflection, as well as in further self-evaluation reports.

## Opportunities for further improvement

- To monitor the work of the newly formed Academic Affairs Committee and the student mentoring that it will implement, to ensure that it becomes firmly established.

- To ensure a high number of graduates, there is a need to increase the availability of scholarships for the students.
- To develop the strengthened strategic approach to provide a detailed learning, teaching and assessment enhancement strategy.
- To continue to develop the seminary towards its aim of running a joint MA programme with Asbury Seminary in due course.

## 1.2.2 Study programme development

### Requirements

- A higher education institution bases its new study programmes on its purposes and the needs of the labour market and takes into account the strategies of the country and expectations of the society.
- Development activities related to study programmes are systematic and regular, and different stakeholders are involved in the development of study programmes.
- Graduate satisfaction with the quality of instruction and employer satisfaction with the quality and suitability to the requirements of the labor market of graduates are surveyed and analysed; the results are considered in the development of study programmes.

### Indicators:

- *student satisfaction with the quality of studies*
- *alumni satisfaction with the quality of studies*
- *employer satisfaction with preparation of graduates*
- *results of quality assessments of study programme groups*
- *other indicators depending on the HEI, e.g., the number of joint study programmes, the number of study programmes in English, etc.*

## Evidence and analysis

### Foundations of Study Programme Development

The panel welcomed the response of BMTS to the previous 2018 report, which indicates the ongoing maturation of the institution as it considers and reflects on matters raised and responds accordingly. The Panel recognised that this Methodist Seminary is seeking to do all the good it can, responding by all the means it can to the prior recommendations. The panel read that BMTS has three parallel curricula in order to teach in different languages while respecting the Estonian requirement that a single curriculum cannot do so. However, the programme that underlies these parallel curricula is the same and is not presently differentiated by language in any way. The panel read that BMTS takes this approach to promote mutual understanding and cooperation between language groups. Through its discussions the panel agreed with the seminary that there is value in multi-lingual teaching with simultaneous translation, and that this aligns with the typically multi-lingual environments in which Estonians live. However, the panel also noted that there are different theological literatures available in English and Russian, and there is a paucity of theological literature in Estonian. It also heard that in



teaching the value of exchange between language groups is affirmed, but often group discussions are conducted in language groups to facilitate communication. So the panel was reinforced in its view that there is value in multi-lingual teaching, but there are also points of differentiation between language groups that should be reflected in proper differentiation of curricula and – if necessary – teaching at those points.

The desire for multi-lingual teaching does not necessitate the absence of any differentiation between programmes. Indeed, in order to be responsive to differences in the available literature in each language the panel heard that the seminary continues to consider differentiating the programmes so that each is better aligned with the resources available. The panel welcomes this ongoing reflection and recommends that the forthcoming programme review consider a more granular approach to programme curricula and syllabi in which learning, teaching and assessment reflect both the value of integration and the need for differentiation at certain points.

The panel was content with the plan to introduce a course of study to credential pastors in the Baltic and Nordic regions. This short course will be composed of a small selection of modules (courses) that are taken from the degree curriculum and so those who complete this ‘short course’ may subsequently put the credit they have earned towards a full degree programme. This is a reasonable approach, but in order to maintain academic standards it is important that only courses at level 4 (introductory) or below are available for this purpose, that the assessment requirements are identical to those applied to students on the BA programme, and that any progression from the ‘course of study’ to the degree is subject to the same admissions requirements as standard degree applications. ‘Courses of study’ of this kind that are taught are to be welcomed since they are in line with the seminary’s mission, but they must be constructed in a way that does not weaken academic or admissions standards; something that the seminary will be concerned to ensure. This issue points to a general concern that the seminary should remain alert to the academic level at which a course is set and explicitly align teaching and assessment with this level. (See comments below relating to assessment criteria.)

The panel heard from stakeholders that graduates of BMTS have been valued by churches and ministries in the region. The involvement of the Methodist Mission Board in the seminary was noted and the good cooperation that exists, including joint projects with the churches. The stakeholders represented were from the Methodist Mission Board, Methodist and Pentecostal churches, and a Children’s Centre in which BMTS students volunteer. Understandably the seminary’s strongest connections are with the Methodist church and reflection on the quality of graduates was primarily heard from that direction. The panel welcomed the strengthened relationship with the Pentecostal churches since a significant proportion of its students are now within that denomination. The panel recommends that the seminary consider how it might ensure effective feedback from other Christian organisations and other charities that are (or might become) employers of seminary graduates and that their feedback is also taken into account in the forthcoming review.

### **Regular Study Programme Development**

The seminary reviews its curricula regularly and the panel heard that the forthcoming review in 2022 will focus on *how* learning, teaching, and assessment take place as much as on *what* is taught. The panel welcomed this focus, which is also expressed in the Development Plan, 2021-23 (e.g. p.3). The review process is clear, as explained in the self-evaluation report. The previous review, undertaken prior to the 2018 assessment report, sought to rationalise the programme and to align individual courses more clearly with programme outcomes and goals. The seminary intends to enhance its

review process via an increase in alumni involvement through the new Alumni Association, increased student input through student membership of the review group and input from the Estonian Christian Pentecostal Church in addition to the United Methodist Church. The panel welcomed these intentions to deepen and widen student and stakeholder input in the review and would encourage the seminary to broaden the range of stakeholder involvement as much as possible so that the full breadth of the institution's mission is able to impact programme development.

The panel saw the survey that is filled in by students after a sample of courses each year. (The panel heard from management that a sampling process was used to avoid student survey-fatigue - this was confirmed by students -, but all courses are surveyed over a period of years.) The panel were provided with student satisfaction scores in each of 7 years that are derived from this questionnaire and its predecessors. Consideration of the survey questions by panel members suggest that the survey is a useful tool that provides a range of helpful enhancement information.

Since this survey plays a central and important role in generating feedback that leads to enhancement of the programme it is good that the seminary has continued to review it, placing it online in 2021 (SER, p. .41). The seminary should continue to review its survey instruments regularly with a view to ongoing enhancement. Reviews should include student feedback on the survey's content and ease of use. The seminary may also consider making use of external consultancy in research design and statistics to ensure that the survey is internally valid. This would provide expert assurance that there is a correspondence between the survey results and the judgments of satisfaction that the seminary makes based upon it. This point is emphasised not because the panel found significant problems with the survey, but because of the importance of the survey in the seminary's quality assurance and enhancement processes. That being said, the course survey includes the useful statement, 'The course requirements and assignments were communicated to me in the syllabus at the beginning of the course.' Despite high scores reported for the relevant satisfaction measure in the SER, the panel heard in its meetings that course information is often *not* ready and available for students at the start. The seminary should address this particular problem and also assure itself that its survey tools will pick up such issues in future. The seminary may wish to provide similar levels of attention to its other surveys (e.g., graduation).

### **Graduate and Employer Satisfaction**

The panel heard very positive views about the seminary and its teaching from the seminary's students and from stakeholders. The panel also saw the online survey that is used to assess classes (see detailed comments above). The Dean confirmed that all courses are surveyed over a period of years, but not every year to avoid survey fatigue. Given the length of the survey this is a good thing. In general, the surveys are well constructed and show high levels of satisfaction but note the point above that given the importance of surveys they should be subject to regular review and ongoing enhancement.

The range of surveys that are undertaken at the seminary is good. No mention is made of feedback solicited from those who fail to graduate for whatever reason. To systematically gather feedback from such students would help to establish any areas in which the quality of instruction has not satisfactory for students. The panel recommends that the seminary consider ways to gather feedback from this group and to identify themes for enhancement from it.

The panel read that the seminary uses student feedback to help identify themes for development of study programmes and were able to identify counselling, church leadership, preaching and missions



as topics that should be introduced or enhanced within the seminary's teaching. These issues are to be addressed in the forthcoming review.

## Conclusion

In general, the panel concluded that BMTS does base its study programmes on its purposes and the needs its main stakeholders and that a culture of regular review is progressively being established. The strong endorsement from students demonstrates the effectiveness of what is done. The Seminary conforms to requirements in this area.

## Strengths

- Strong cooperation between the Seminary and the Methodist Mission Board and the churches. For example, joint projects, personnel and discussions of development needs
- The graduates of BMTS have been valued by churches and ministries in the region
- Stakeholders and students value the Seminary for its formative impact and strong community, among other things.

## Areas of concern and recommendations

- The panel was very concerned to hear from students that syllabus information is often not available at the start of a course, and to note that this situation persists despite a question about it on the student feedback form. Students cannot engage with courses effectively if they do not have information about the syllabus and assessment from the start. The seminary must ensure that full syllabus information for a course and all assessment information is available on the date that the course commences. There should be no exceptions to this. The Seminary should consider why this issue has not become apparent despite the present content of its survey and should update its student feedback mechanisms accordingly.
- The panel were concerned at the lack of evidence that there is a consistent approach to teaching at levels 4, 5, and 6 that will enable student progression through to degree level. The seminary should remain alert to the academic level at which a course is set and explicitly align teaching and assessment with this level.
- The Seminary should consider how it might ensure effective feedback from other Christian organisations and other charities that are (or might become) employers of Seminary graduates and that their feedback is also taken into account in the forthcoming review.
- The Seminary should consider ways to gather feedback in official ways from the students who fail to graduate and to identify themes for enhancement from it.
- The Seminary should ensure that where there are unavoidable differences between language groups (e.g., in learning resources), these are reflected in differentiated curricula.

## Opportunity for further improvement

- The Seminary can address more carefully the different types and amounts of literature available in different languages. The main way to do this is by differentiating the curricula to reflect these differences, especially in student assessments. However, the seminary may be able to make a small contribution to the development of theological literature in Estonian, including peer-reviewed literature and more popular scholarship. This will not replace the need to provide distinct approaches to different language groups, but it will be a further help.

### 1.2.3 Student academic progress and student assessment

#### **Requirements**

- ✓ Student academic progress is monitored and supported.
- ✓ Student assessment supports learning and is in line with learning outcomes.
- ✓ A higher education institution has an effective system for taking account of prior learning and work experience.

#### **Indicators:**

- *the average duration of study by its levels*
- *the proportion of dropouts*
- *other indicators depending on the HEI*

#### **Evidence and analysis**

The panel heard that Covid has caused some drop out in 2020 (SER, p. 34), however the panel welcomed the seminary's view that retention has improved since the admission requirements have been developed (Development Plan 2021-23, p.11).

#### **Academic Monitoring and Support**

The panel read that, since 2015, 60% of matriculated students have graduated as full-time students. 12% switched to part-time, 4% became external learners and 24% dropped out. The high dropout rate emphasises the importance for BMTS of monitoring student progress. The panel's response to these high dropout rates is discussed in various sections below. One point to be made under this heading is that, given the combined pressures of work and study it is unsurprising that a reasonable proportion of students switch to part-time study. A greater intentional focus on encouraging more students to matriculate as part-time rather than full-time may enable more students to begin studies with realistic expectations of how their time can be managed and how long it will take to graduate, thus relieving some of the pressure that may otherwise cause them to drop out.

The panel warmly welcomes the formation of the Academic Affairs Committee and the proactive monitoring and support it will provide. This Committee is referred to above (section 1.2.1). It will be important to monitor the effectiveness of this committee's work particularly closely in the first few years of operation and to develop and enhance the mentoring programme to ensure that it addresses issues of retention effectively. The success of this and other measures will be most clearly indicated by a fall in dropout rates.

#### **Effectiveness of Assessment**

The panel read the curriculum description and various sample syllabi provided by the seminary and agreed that in general student assessment is based on the learning outcomes of the curriculum. (SER, p. 43)

Following the previous review, The Academic Council formed a working group to look at types of assessment and noted three primary types of written assignment: reflection papers, essays, and research papers. The definition was provided for each of these, and they were included in guidelines

intended to balance flexibility and consistency. This move towards a more consistent approach that enables flexibility while also providing clarity and helpful constraints was welcomed by the panel. The panel heard that academic staff have updated their course descriptions to show which types of assessment are being used in which course, or they are in the process of making the changes following recent updates to the staff handbook. Staff noted the value of the discussion prompted by the introduction of these different types of assessment because it highlighted that in different languages titles can be interpreted differently. The panel welcomed this ongoing reflection and would encourage the general approach of agreed parameters to learning, teaching and assessment methods to provide consistency across programmes while enabling sufficient flexibility for individual course teachers to teach in a way that is aligned to the subject content. This process also emphasises the challenge and importance of ensuring that institution-wide criteria are interpreted consistently between language groups and thus the value of ongoing discussion to ensure that the same intentions are expressed effectively in each language. The panel noted that there may also need to be some consideration of how matters of standardisation are embedded within the Academic Regulations, and the relationship between this document and the Staff Handbook.

The panel would encourage the seminary to continue to move in a direction towards removing unnecessary ambiguity and inconsistency between courses, especially in the area of assessment. The definitions and key concepts for grading criteria of these central types of assessment task should be reviewed and enhanced collegially as the faculty gains experience in using them. As the seminary works towards a better balance between consistency and flexibility in individual courses, it may be appropriate to introduce regular staff development to enable good practice to be shared and enhancements to be identified and the seminary should consider this. The seminary should also watch out for assessment regulations that seem *ad hoc* and enable individual discretion in a way that has the potential to create unfairness. For example, the panel noted that in Academic regulation 3.10.8, whether or not a lecturer applies the penalty for work submitted late is at his or her discretion and in 3.10.9 a lecturer may agree that a student can re-do an assignment that has been passed. Such regulations create the potential for unfairness. Good practice followed in many institutions is that any potential mitigating circumstances around assessment are handled by an independent committee in a principled way, rather than leaving decisions to the discretion of individual lecturers. The panel recommends that the seminary consider this. It is generally the case that institutions make their academic regulations, including assessment regulations, openly available on the web and so BMTS can review good practice elsewhere and to incorporate it as appropriate.

One area of weakness in the present 'key concepts for grading criteria' is that they are generic across all levels of study. It would be valuable for the academic staff to consider together how these concepts will differ at Levels 4, 5 and 6 in order that each student's knowledge and skills will be assessed at the appropriate level. The panel recommends that the seminary considers levels of assessment in due course. Many institutions have made use of Bloom's taxonomy for this. This will also help BMTS to prepare itself towards teaching at level 7 in due course.

The panel noted during the review that it is rare for two markers to be involved in the assessment of an individual piece of work. The panel would encourage the seminary to reflect on its use of moderation and double marking, balancing this against the workload implications for staff, to ensure that the assessment of pieces of work that make a significant contribution to a student's profile are reliable. The panel also noted that work is rarely marked blind; i.e. the marker knows the identity of the student whose mark she or he is assessing. It is standard practice elsewhere for this not to be the

case, even in smaller institutions where the marker is more likely to be able to identify the student. The principle that the mark is being given for the quality of the work uninfluenced by any other characteristics of the student is an important one and this principle is often operationalised by implementing a blind marking system via Moodle or in other ways. The panel would ask the seminary to consider these developments in the quality of its assessment processes. Assessment regulations should be embedded at a programme or institutional level because this protects the academic standard of the award, ensuring that there is consistency in a student's attainment across courses, and a consistent value in the degree awarded across students.

### **Prior Learning & Work Experience**

The Seminary has APEL regulations that have been developed regularly since 2010 (<https://emkts.ee/index.php/en/apel>) and the panel read that decisions about APEL are governed by published APEL Regulations and the process functions in accord with these regulations (SER, p. 46; see also <https://emkts.ee/index.php/en/regulations>). The regulations refer to the Standard of Higher Education (Kõrgharidusstandard) of the Estonian Republic and establish the relevance and value of prior experience, as well as the use of an exam if required where a course is deemed to have expired. The application process is clear and requires the prospective student to provide evidence. The Committee is also empowered to request additional evidence, examination or interview to establish the suitability of prior learning for accreditation.

### **Conclusion**

The Seminary conforms to requirements in this area. The Seminary has made satisfactory development in this area and, in particular, it has begun to look carefully at an institutional level at the way that assessment takes place. The panel would encourage the further development of this approach.

### **Strength**

- The Seminary developed and implemented a consistent and objective approach of assessment criteria and methods

### **Area of concern and recommendations**

- The Panel was concerned that course teachers have individual discretion over matters that may unintentionally lead students to be disadvantaged. The Seminary should keep its regulations under review, ensuring that students are not unfairly disadvantaged by individual discretion that is given to lecturers in relation to the management of student assessment and mitigating circumstances.

### **Opportunities for further improvement**

- The Panel noted further opportunities to avoid disadvantaging students and to ensure fairness as the Seminary continues the work it has begun to do to increase consistency between courses in the area of assessment. Important examples of this are consistency in grading schemes, course mark calculations, and awarding of extensions. In general, a strong rationale should be provided that is evaluated by the Academic Committee if a course is to be structured in a bespoke way.

- The Seminary could enhance its provision by supporting intellectual progression of students from levels 4 – 6 through clearly differentiated assessment. The panel recommends that the Seminary should in due course ensure that assessments are differentiated by level (4, 5, 6) and that the newly introduced assessment criteria are differentiated by level to reflect this.
- The Panel noted that the Seminary has the opportunity to follow international good practice by making use of blind marking. The Seminary is encouraged to consider an approach to assessment in which the majority of work is marked blind (i.e., the marker is not given the identity of the student). It is recognised that implementing robust processes for this may take time.
- The panel noted during the course of the review that it is rare for two markers to be involved in the assessment of an individual piece of work. The panel would encourage the seminary to reflect on its use of moderation and double marking, developing a strategy that balances increased use of double marking against the workload implications for staff, to ensure that the assessment of pieces of work that make a significant contribution to a student's profile are reliable.
- The panel encourages the Seminary not to lose the momentum created by the pandemic and its other activities towards pedagogical innovation.

## 1.2.4 Support processes for learning

### Requirements

- ✓ The organisation of studies creates an opportunity for students to complete their studies within the standard period.
- ✓ A higher education institution provides students with counselling related to their studies and career.
- ✓ A higher education institution supports student international mobility.
- ✓ Modern technical and educational technology resources are used to organise educational activities.
- ✓ Students are periodically asked for feedback on learning and support processes (the organisation of studies, assessment, counselling, etc.); the results of surveys are taken into account in improvement activities.

### *Indicators:*

- *the proportion of foreign students and foreign guest students*
- *the number/ proportion of students who have studied at foreign institutions of higher education compared to the total number of current students and graduates*
- *the proportion of dropouts*
- *results of feedbacks*
- *other indicators depending on the HEI*

## Evidence and analysis

### Organisation of Studies and Completion Rates

The panel noted that the issue of combined work and study at BMTS means that the nominal study period (3 years) is exceeded in about 12% of cases (4 years+) (SER, p. 42). While this is not a matter of serious concern, the work/study combination allowable within Estonian Higher Education is also likely to be partly responsible for the unacceptably high dropout rates (see below). Taken together these two issues suggest that the model of delivery should be considered carefully to ensure that it is providing for students the best possible opportunity and support to complete their studies within the standard period, and the greatest likelihood that they will complete rather than drop out. BMTS has built a model with a strong rationale, based on that of other Estonian universities, but it is notable that dropout rates are often high within Estonia more generally and so it may be that BMTS needs to innovate further to address this issue. Four-day intensive study sessions can be challenging for students and independent study, while enabling flexibility of working practices, cannot be undertaken if students do not have the time available due to other responsibilities. The seminary's positive, proactive response to the pandemic, which seeks to be innovative, as outlined in the Development Plan 2021-23, may result in new uses of e-learning tools to support students whether studying in-person at BMTS or online. The panel would recommend intentionally seeking ways to use online tools to provide structure and support for students while off campus and ensuring that admissions process places a high priority on ensuring that students have sufficient availability to complete the attendance and independent study requirements of the programme.

The pandemic caused access to learning resources to become a challenge, but the panel heard that COVID-safe ways of accessing library books were developed and the panel was, in general, impressed by the significant and careful efforts of staff to respond to the pandemic situation.

The panel heard that the library orders books in response to lecturer demand and that, in general, library provision is good. The panel explored the issue of the relative amount of literature available in the three languages – Estonian, Russian, English. The panel heard that the greatest challenge is to find sufficient literature in Estonian. It was noted that while lecture notes and other resources may be provided equally across the three languages, it is more challenging for students to do independent study with a more limited resource of books. The panel heard that there is a regular inventory taken of books across languages and that this leads to corrections where possible. However, there is a remaining problem that the amount of literature in Estonian is low. The panel read that the seminary is working on its own textbook for all languages and has thought about opening three separate curricula to solve the literature and equal access problem. The panel welcomed the careful attention being given to this issue by the seminary. The panel would urge the seminary to be cautious about the production of textbooks unless it is clear that there is significant scholarly value for the staff concerned in doing so. This is *unlikely* to be the case. Text-book production and translation activities are likely to come at the expense of research-oriented publication. However, research publication is a higher priority for the Seminary.

If the Seminary remains concerned to produce a textbook, it might consider partnering with scholars in other Estonian institutions to produce a joint work that will serve multiple seminaries while reducing the burden on each. Such a project might be conducted under the guidance of a high-ranking academic publisher. In this and other ways the seminary might *encourage* the publication of theological

literature in Estonian while avoiding the significant amount of its time and attention that would be required to *produce* it.

In contrast to its concern about textbook production, the panel would encourage the seminary's thought that some differentiation of curricula may take place to reflect differences between language groups. The Seminary cannot redress the differences in levels of literature between language groups, but it can design individual curricula to facilitate learning within each language group given the resources available. The Seminary should consider that it might be better for distinct programmes to reflect the different levels of literature available to the associated language group.

### **Student Career Counselling**

The primary goal of BMTS' student counselling is to 'improve retention and to help students in finding their career in ministry.' (SER, p. 45). The panel found that the seminary is a small community with a friendly atmosphere, and this leads to a positive, informal atmosphere. However, the institution should not be satisfied with its dropout rate of 24%, which is unacceptably high, and poorer than other seminaries and institutions in Estonia. BMTS should prioritise action to address this area in particular. The panel welcomes the seminary's claim that, 'We are more focused on admissions activities and promotion and activities promoting retention.' (SER, p. 34) While some drop out in 2020 will inevitably be due to the pandemic, the issue of high dropout rates pre-dates that period and is a systemic issue. The seminary should not see drop out as a fact of life that cannot be addressed and the panel was encouraged by ongoing efforts to develop a response.

The panel welcomes the enhanced admissions process, which, if it proves effective, should be one systemic change that will have a positive impact on retention. While the seminary is active in this and various ways to address retention concerns, these activities should be judged not by the satisfaction of graduates and alumni (who are those who have succeeded) but in relation to changes in dropout rates and responding to feedback that is gathered from those who cease their studies prior to graduation (cf. SER, p. 45). The seminary should ensure that it is identifying clearly the issues that lead to drop out in each individual case in order to have the clearest possible picture of the reasons for drop out, and these reasons should be addressed.

The introduction of the Academic Affairs Committee and associated mentoring activity with students is a development that has the potential to reduce dropout rates and the panel welcomed this activity. The panel recommends that the seminary monitor these developing activities closely to assess how mentoring is best organised to address retention issues. For example, it may be that an increased number of meetings with students in the first year of the programme or at the start of each new year will be important. Such matters should be considered on an ongoing basis, with changes made as necessary.

The panel noted that it is not unusual for mature students to undertake theological study for personal benefit rather than career progression and, therefore, for students to leave a programme when they have received personal benefit from the teaching or when the workload becomes inconvenient or challenging. The panel learned that many of those who study at BMTS, whether or not they ultimately graduate, will go on to make a voluntary contribution in the local church rather than taking a professional role such as pastor and so it seems that many students who drop out nevertheless contribute to BMTS' larger mission. Given the value of the training being provided, the panel felt that the seminary should consider whether it presently has the right portfolio of courses and programmes



to enable the different types of prospective student that it serves to benefit from what it has to offer by completing a course or programme of study. For example, the panel welcomes the more limited training opportunities that are being offered to 'credential' pastors by allowing them to take a limited number of credits within the institution that will give them a helpful level of preparation to succeed in their present roles, but with the option to use this credit as part of a degree programme subsequently if the student wishes to continue and go further. The seminary may wish to consider other ways in which it can provide a staged approach to education that lowers the burden to which students must be committed at the outset and that therefore may reduce drop out and make visible the value it brings to some students even if they are not in a position to graduate with a degree. In doing this the seminary must be careful to insist on maintaining its academic standards, including standards of admission.

The panel notes that the stated aim of BMTS student counselling is to 'help students finding their career in ministry'. The panel noted that, quite rightly, the institution is focused on training pastors to lead churches in Methodist and other denominations. However, its mission is also to develop leaders of Christian organisations and charities. The seminary should consider whether its student counselling is suitably resourced and equipped to provide support for students who are not planning a future career within church-based ministry but for whom their destination after graduation will nevertheless be a consequence of their studies and experience at BMTS. The term 'career in ministry' may be interpreted in a narrow sense of professional church ministry or a broader, more inclusive sense of Christian service. Only the latter sense encompasses the breadth of BMTS' mission and so the seminary should reassure itself that its student counselling reflects this.

### **Student International Mobility**

The panel welcomed the seminary's goal to 'grow and nurture a culturally rich, international and ecumenical student body' (SER, p. 46) and the recent introduction of 'international mobility' as a separate focus of activity. It also noted activities undertaken just prior to the pandemic focused on inward mobility and the desire for an international trip in 2022. International mobility has been significantly hampered by the pandemic, but the panel were pleased to note the introduction of The Regional Hub for Leadership, Education, and Development in Europe at BMTS, which offers information and funding to support European collaboration and support student mobility (Development Plan, 2021-21, p. 12). The panel agrees with the seminary that take-up of these and other opportunities for student international experience should be encouraged. It is notable that some of these opportunities are online and thus unaffected by travel restrictions and available to those who cannot travel for reasons of work and other responsibilities. However, as travel becomes increasingly reliable and possible the international exchange possibilities should be encouraged where possible.

The panel recommends that the seminary should continue to seek ways to enable its full-time students to engage in outward international mobility but given the responsibilities of many of its students a significant emphasis should be placed on inward international mobility. The staff of the seminary is international in nature and the seminary is part of a global network of Methodist institutions and so there are opportunities for further developments in this area. In particular, the seminary may wish to consider how to enable staff to study internationally in institutions that will expand their understanding of higher education while also developing their scholarly activity.



## **Educational Technology**

The panel judged that the seminary's approach to the use of educational technology has developed substantially through the COVID pandemic. The seminary acted quickly and effectively at the start of the pandemic to ensure that teaching and assessment could continue online. The panel heard that continued careful reflection enabled the best tools to be selected for online delivery and rapid development in those tools and the seminary's facility with them led to a good experience for students. The panel experienced some of the fruit of this work as meetings were conducted via Zoom with effective translation from/to Estonian/Russian/English. It was clear that the excellent simultaneous translation work that had previously only been done in an in-person classroom format was now being effectively delivered in an online space. This is crucial for BMTS, given its USP as a multi-lingual seminary. The panel heard from students that the experience during COVID was good: 'I had the feeling that I'm in a classroom! They did everything to enable students to participate actively ... participation also comes through the online.'

The panel was encouraged to discover that the seminary has reflected significantly on the way forward, producing a 2021-23 Development Plan and accompanying Implementation Plan that assesses carefully how to move on from the present situation. To quote: 'The seminary will adapt together with the Methodist Church and Estonian society to operate in the world as it currently exists around us. And much has changed globally in 2020. The unforeseeable worldwide pandemic has mandated vast changes also in education and the church. Such a seismic shift requires (and liberates us for) rethinking and reimagining the future opportunities, possibilities and necessities. Since the crises [sic] is not yet over, we are in a phase where, as leaders, we are not yet ready to draw firm conclusions about what the "new normal" will look like. We are now in new territory.' In response to this, BMTS has become open to consider a wholly online option as part of a new understanding that reflects ongoing development in student expectations.

The panel were assured that ongoing work to develop e-learning continues in the seminary. For example, Moodle forums for Q&A have been developed, although these are not well used at present. This emphasises the need to consider online systems as an integrated part of the student experience and the importance of seeing e-learning development not only as a matter of introducing new possibilities but working to engage students in their use.

The panel thus judged that COVID has had a positive impact on the seminary in the following way: It has enabled fresh thinking and accelerated the impetus for change and development. The panel would encourage the seminary not to lose the momentum created by the pandemic and its other activities towards pedagogical innovation; bearing in mind that innovation is not merely doing things differently but doing things in new ways that are more effective than they were in the past.

The potential for e-learning to help with retention of students should be considered an important ongoing issue for the seminary since all students attend the seminary only infrequently and typically have other working responsibilities in addition to full-time study.

## **Feedback on Learning and Support Processes**

The panel read that there are a variety of ways in which students provide feedback for development. This includes representation to the Academic Council and Board of Trustees. It also includes a variety of surveys covering individual courses, graduate feedback, *ad hoc* student body surveys to address particular issues. An example of this final category is the series of surveys undertaken during the

pandemic to evaluate student readiness for online studies, lockdown study experience, ongoing monitoring of staff and students, and a retrospective view on the effectiveness of online teaching (SER, p. 47). The panel heard from students that they are invited to be involved in decision-making processes and that involvement in Academic Council is seen as a privilege. Student opinions are requested at the board and the seminary takes note of what is said. An example was given of a discussion relating to ensuring that all students can hear and be heard when teaching via Zoom and the student reported an improvement in experience on that basis.

In general, the seminary seeks to be attentive to feedback and surveys students at a course level and on graduation. Student involvement in the Academic Council is welcome and effective. The seminary should consider including student representatives on all academic committees unless there is a clear reason not to do so. The panel also heard in a number of meetings that the small size and friendly atmosphere of the seminary ensured that students are free to come forward with problems and concerns. However, the panel notes that such a positive culture can unintentionally suppress concerns and complaints that would otherwise help the student and seminary if they were expressed and resolved. The seminary should consider whether it has effective formal systems in place to enable students to raise minor concerns and complaints freely. For example, a Student Union and Staff-Student Liaison meeting can provide a formal context to enable the seminary to hear the collective student voice around issues that might otherwise not surface.

## Conclusion

In general, the Seminary has made satisfactory progress towards developing its support processes for learning and has done good work through the pandemic to support its students, which demonstrates effective outcomes in this area. However, the approach of maintaining identical programmes taught in different languages when the learning resources available in each language are different needs more careful consideration. This area partially conforms to requirements.

## Strength

- The Seminary is seen as a great place to study by students.

## Areas of concern and recommendations

- The Panel is very concerned that the differing types of literature available in each language, and the different amounts of literature available in each language are not reflected in differences in the Seminary's curricula and syllabi. The Panel recommends that the Seminary differentiate its curricula and its assessment tasks where necessary to reflect differences between the amount and type of literature available to each language group. While students may be taught together where appropriate, some differentiation of teaching may be appropriate and differentiation of assessment tasks and criteria based on the language group should be available.
- Dropout rates are a concern. The panel suggests that the Seminary reviews its model of delivery to ensure that it is providing for students the best possible opportunity and support to complete their studies within the standard period, and to continue to develop and implement a strategy to reduce dropout rates.
- The extent of outward international mobility remains a concern, although the Seminary is making some efforts in this area. The panel recommends that the Seminary should continue to seek ways to enable its full-time students to engage in outward international mobility

- The perception that students are deeply engaged in the Seminary should be reflected in representation on Committees. The panel recommends that the Seminary include student representatives on all academic committees unless there is a clear reason not to do so.
- While informality can be helpful, the extent of reliance on the informal culture of the College is a concern. The panel encourages the Seminary to consider whether it has effective formal systems in place to enable students to raise concerns and complaints freely.
- The Panel were concerned that work on translation of materials and production of pedagogical materials should be considered secondary to peer-reviewed research publications. The panel recommends that the Seminary prioritise the production of scientific publications over the production of a textbook.

#### Opportunities for further improvement

- The Seminary is encouraged to provide counselling and support to students who are not planning a future career within church-based ministry but for whom their destination after graduation will nevertheless be a consequence of their studies and experience at BMTS.
- The Seminary is reliant on its student feedback surveys and so these need to be considered and enhanced regularly to ensure that they ensure that they measure what is most important for the Seminary and that the measures used are valid and reliable.

### 1.3 Research, development and/or other creative activity (RDC)

Sub-areas	conforms to requirements	partially conforms to requirements	does not conform to requirements	worthy of recognition
1.3.1 RDC effectiveness		X		
1.3.2 RDC resources and support processes	X			
1.3.3 Student research supervision	X			

### 1.3.1 RDC effectiveness

#### Requirements

- ✓ A higher education institution has defined its RDC objectives and measures their implementation.
- ✓ A higher education institution monitors the needs of society and the labour market, and considers them in planning its RDC activities.

#### Indicators:

- *numerical data: (1) total research publications; (2) publications of categories 1.1., 1.2, 2.1, 3.1; monographs on national sciences; (3) public presentations of creative works; recognitions from international competitions; reviews in professional publications, etc.; (4) patent applications, patents; (5) text books, teaching tools for various media; (6) system development solutions, product development solutions, environmental solutions; (7) contracts with enterprises; (8) spin-off firms, etc.*
- *the number of research publications/creative works per member of the teaching staff and per member of research staff (calculated in full-time positions, by field)*
- *other indicators depending on the HEI*

#### Evidence and analysis

According to the Self-Evaluation Report (SER pp. 50-51), internal research culture is a priority for BMTS. Their aim is to improve academic quality, to develop learning environments (both distance education and face-to-face education) and to strengthen research skills among both staff members and students. Faculty members and students are encouraged to pursue (research) topics that are useful for UMCE or their own churches, and to apply research to serve a wider community.

The objectives of the Seminary – to create and support research culture – are in the right direction to raise the scientific level of publications and diploma papers. At present, when indicators to measure implementation are still being developed, the evidence that the targets have been met is not systematic. As measures for implementation, the Seminary states at least the following: BMTS staff must publish annually, with each member of staff setting his or her own personal goals. In addition, the schedule for Planned Publications 2021-2023 has been started. The rector has annual performance interviews with faculty members in which the research interests and publication plans of the staff members are examined.

According to the list of publications and the SER, a total of 22 publications were registered in 2019-2021. The total number of publications is the same as in the previous three-year period, 2016-2018. The seminar also provided information that 5 articles in journals or articles in proceedings are submitted to be published in 2022.

The Panel examined the academic quality and quantity of publications in more detail. No peer-reviewed international or national articles or monographs have been published. The Panel noticed, however, that the contributions to the international project of the *Central Eastern Europe Bible Commentary* (Langham Publishing House) are an important step forward in international scholarly

cooperation. The Panel also appreciates the publication of the textbook in Homiletics and observes that this textbook will stimulate theological education.

During the period under review, one textbook and three book chapters were published in works whose publisher is not recognized by the Estonian Research Information System (ETIS). A total of 16 articles have been published in the magazine *Koduteel*, which is the magazine of the Estonian Methodist Church. One non-academic text has been published on the UMC website, and one book review was found from the list of publications. The profile of forthcoming publications in 2022 is an improvement compared to previous years. There will be one peer-reviewed article published in a relatively high-quality journal and, in addition, lexicon or dictionary-type texts to be published in *Central and Eastern European Bible Commentary*.

During the period under review, the Seminary staff have been involved in current projects. For example, in 2020 a conference “*Planting Conference focusing on church growth*” involved several staff members. In the same year, an important project to *develop distance learning materials for small groups* was launched. Projects continuing into 2022 will also have stronger academic profiles. A good example of this is a joint Issue of *Usuteaduslik Ajakiri* (Journal of Estonian Academic Theology Society) with Tartu University Religious Department in the magazine. Another significant project that has started, but not yet been completed, is the Textbook of contemporary religions from the Scandinavian and north-European perspectives.

BMTS has also been involved in its own publishing. The core points of John Wesley’s theology and his sermons have been translated into Estonian for the needs of students and local churches. BMTS has published a guide booklet for ordination candidates, too.

The international contribution of the seminar has been quite narrow and thin. Staff have attended some international conferences. Much emphasis has been placed on MTSE cooperation. Due to the pandemic, participation has been limited.

## Conclusion

The Panel concludes that the RDC effectiveness partially conforms to requirements. The last three years has seen much effort in this area. Thanks to the cooperation with other schools (especially Asbury Theological Seminary) staff could join in with other scholars and consequently the Seminary is more visible. Overall, the quality of the Seminary has improved since the previous evaluation. The institute has set RDC goals, such as having a publication plan and advising the staff members to publish once a year, but from the academic and scientific perspectives their level should be more ambitious. Commitment to applied science or popular publishing does not mean that publications are devoid of research methodology and systematic review of material or research data. There is still room for improvement until the requirements of RDC effectiveness are totally conformed. The Seminary is better organized in relation to research and publishing. Among the staff members the Panel noted an increasing awareness of the need for publication and a decreasing fear of submitting work.

## Areas of concern and recommendations

- The Panel was concerned that there is still no evidence of the implementation of many of the plans during the assessment period. For example, it is an excellent idea to compile a list of publications on BMTS website, but this will not happen until 2023.

- The panel emphasizes the importance of cooperation. The panel looks forward to joint publishing. Writing together with colleagues could help specially those faculty members who have challenges to publish academic research articles. The scientific quality will also increase.

### 1.3.2 RDC resources and support processes

#### Requirements

- ✓ A higher education institution has an effective RDC support system.
- ✓ A higher education institution has financial resources needed for RDC development and a strategy that supports their acquisition.
- ✓ A higher education institution participates in different RDC networks.
- ✓ RDC infrastructure is being updated and used effectively.

#### Indicators:

- *results of employee satisfaction survey: satisfaction with RDC support services*
- *investments into the RDC infrastructure*
- *the proportion of RDC finances in the total budget, separately including finances received from international contracts, applied R&D contracts, grants for creative activity; trends, comparison with partners (partial overlap with management)*
- *RDC finances per member of research staff (calculated in full-time positions)*
- *other indicators depending on the HEI*

### Evidence and analysis

According to the Self-Evaluation Report, RDC support system in BMTS includes human, financial and time resources into RDC operations. It is also very important that the management of the Seminary communicates the increased expectations and higher goals. Otherwise, there will be no progress towards the objectives, and the institution-wide culture of research will not emerge.

The panel understood that BTMS is well aware that RDC development requires investment in infrastructure, people's working conditions, and other activities. The hire of Meeli Tankler to a 1/3 part-time Director of Research and Development is one good indicator of investment in RDC, which surely will benefit the Seminary far to the future. Financial resources for RDC were at their lowest in 2018, when 4,826 EUR was available. The following year, the investment was the largest during the period under review, total 28,367 EUR. In 2020, the financial RDC resources decreased (17,238 EUR). However, the forecast for 2021 is slightly higher, including the sum of 19,456 EUR. There are also many indirect costs in Development expenses (SER p. 58), such as translation equipment, furniture, marketing, and others. The RDC financial investments have varied from year to year, but budgets have typically been adequate.

The Development Fund, established in 2019, is an important investment in research. Its specific priority is to develop the Seminary library. Since 2019 LEaD Hub Europe has also supported development and research projects.

The self-assessment report lists two Methodist Church networks (MTSE and IAMSCU) and one International Evangelical Conference (ICETE) and the European Methodist Council (EMC). The number of networks could be expanded. In addition, most examples of activities in the networks above are from a period prior to the review period. Apparently, active networking has been more difficult during the period of the pandemic. However, it is notable that in other institutions the pandemic has provided opportunities for increased interaction through easily organised online conferences and events and so the Panel was not persuaded that BMTS had a sufficiently strong motivation in this area.

The Expert Panel saw from the document “BMTS Faculty and Staff membership in professional committees or related organizations or bodies” that BMTS regular faculty are very active in networking in various professional committees or related organizations or bodies. Many of those networks are national organizations, and most of them really can support RDC activities through seminar contribution, although they are not actually organizations focusing on research or development.

RDC infrastructures are quite well developed, and their financial base is sound. There is still room for improvement in networking. The Panel observed that the international network is rather strong, but mainly restricted to the Methodist and Evangelical fellowship. Perhaps, more resources could be devoted to setting up and supporting research teams. The panel suggests that the Seminary could encourage the staff members to network more with different and diverse academic organizations.

Based on results of the recent employee satisfactory survey the panel concluded that the Seminary supports the development of its employees. Employees are also satisfied with the conditions for work provided. These results confirm our conclusion that all investments to RDC have been profitable.

## Conclusion

The Panel concludes that the RDC resources and support processes conforms the requirements. The Seminary has shown significant financial investment in research and development, and as a result, the framework and infrastructures have evolved. Particular attention has been paid to the development of the library. According to the staff members, the Seminary provides good conditions for work.

## Strength

- The varied investments have been profitable: Infrastructures are developing. There are conditions for conducting academic research at the Seminary, library resources and IT support are adequate.

## Area of concern and recommendations

- The panel recommends increasing the number of scientific networks and engaging more actively in existing networks. The benefits of networks will improve the academic quality of the Seminary and facilitate publishing.

## Opportunity for further improvement

- It is important that the support of RDC infrastructures also will continue in the future. Also, the individual support to the ones researching and writing work must be at a sufficient level to maintain motivation.



### 1.3.3 Student research supervision

#### Requirements

- ✓ A higher education institution includes students of all academic cycles in research, creative or project activity and systematically surveys student satisfaction with their supervision.
- ✓ Professionalism, effectiveness and the workload of supervisors are reasonably balanced, which ensures the quality of research papers and positive graduation rates.
- ✓ Students are guided to recognize plagiarism and to avoid it.

#### Indicators:

- *the proportion of supervisors (including co-supervisors) from outside of the higher education institution, including from foreign countries*
- *results of student satisfaction survey: satisfaction with supervision*
- *other indicators depending on the HEI*

#### Evidence and analysis

In the Seminary, the process of writing the diploma paper has been renewed twice (starting in 2016 and in the academic year 2020-21). These reforms have extended the time students have to deal with the research and writing process. Students start doing their diploma paper in the spring of their second year of study. The reforms have required staff commitment and additional resources. Feedback from students has been good. When the panel interviewed the students, one of them stated that “the diploma paper is mentioned from year 1, and so there is extreme focus on it”.

The Seminary believes that the new system of writing diploma papers will raise the quality of research. This is verified by levels of satisfaction reported by students (4.74 on a scale of 1-5) and alumni (4.16 on a scale of 1-5) with their thesis supervisors. The panel looked at some diploma papers and made two observations. First, effective supervision was suggested by the selection of reasonable topics and a level appropriate to a bachelor's thesis. However, secondly, some papers were lacking a clear research task and a proper research method with data analysis. This was an area of concern.

Of the staff, two teachers have started doctoral studies, and two teachers already have PhD degrees. It seems that professionalism as a thesis supervisor improves over time. According to the Self-Evaluation Report five years ago many staff members participated in training in “Best practices in academic writing and mentoring”. While the panel commends this, it also recommends continuous training and learning for staff to ensure that training in such topics is reinforced and remains up to date, informed by recent good practice in the institution and elsewhere.

An individual faculty member supervises 2-3 students each year (SER p. 62). They can commit enough time to an individual student. In the interviews, the Panel formed the impression that the teachers are really dedicated to student supervision. One student told the Panel: “I wrote many letters to the teacher and to the person who deals with the diploma papers to ask for help because I had a lot of thoughts and personal understanding about what it should look like and they helped me. It helped me



to formulate my diploma work that I'm doing at this time." At the same time, some teachers are very overburdened due to the shortage of Russian-speaking supervisors. In an interview with teachers, time constraints emerged as a real problem. The Rector emphasized to the Panel how much time staff research and publishing take and so the overall burden on staff is significant.

The Panel read in the SER that the students are supported to avoid plagiarism, with special attention being paid to referencing. During the first semester two courses - "Introduction to Studies" and "Academic Writing" - introduce the students to good scientific practices. These courses also discuss plagiarism and the issues that might lead to it occurring. The teachers themselves provide excellent examples of a scrupulous approach to academic ethics. According to SER (p. 63) and the student's interview, the teachers are willing to discuss with the students of academic ethics and the rules of avoiding deception.

Panel members welcome adherence to academic standards and the proactivity to avoid all kind of deceit. Instead, the panel points out that diploma papers should also include reflection on research ethics and an explanation of the researcher's own position in relation to his/her research topic. These reflections not only prevent plagiarism, but also increase the reliability of research results.

## Conclusion

The Panel concludes that the Student Research Supervision sub-area conforms to requirements. Students trust the supervision they receive. Interviews revealed that students value their teachers' professionalism. Student research supervision is well organized, and the workload of the teachers remains reasonable.

## Strength

- The small size of the Seminary allows for close interaction between teachers and students. Teachers clearly want to invest in personal tutoring, as shown in the students' interviews. The positive mutual interaction between the students and the teachers improves results and it is reflected in the good results of the diploma papers.

## Areas of concern and recommendations

- It is a concern that some theses lack a proper research task, method and data analysis. The Seminary should ensure that students receive supervision that avoids this situation.
- The supervisors of diploma papers could require the students to reflect on research ethics. Both the reliability and the validity of the papers are improved if the students assess their own position and own approach to the issue at hand. A student should write, for example, how I ended up with this research topic and what is my own relationship to it.

## Opportunities for further improvement

- Constant pedagogical studies help to update teachers' know-how that can improve results further.
- Hiring a Russian-speaking person or hourly-paid worker helps to divide the workload of the faculty teaching staff.

## 1.4 Service to society

Sub-areas	conforms to requirements	partially conforms to requirements	does not conform to requirements	worthy of recognition
1.4.1 Popularization of its activities and involvement in social development		x		
1.4.2 In-service training and other educational activities for general public		x		
1.4.3 Other public-oriented activities	x			

According to the report published in 2019, the Expert Panel confirmed partially to requirements set for the service to the society section. They recognised BMTS in its integration work of students with different ethnic, cultural, and medical backgrounds (for instance, deaf students). Also, there were improvements compared to the assessment conducted in 2017 in public-oriented activities, such as organising recruitment event Open Days and participation in the national youth information event 'Teeviit' (Signpost). In addition, it was seen as a strength that the graduates work in different churches. The BMTS has offered young people who work with troubled children the chance to participate in their inductive Bible Study introductory course. However, there were several areas for improvement and recommendations regarding serving the society seen by the Panel. In 2021, some of them are fully met, while others need still some work. Gaps in strategic areas are why this Panel also sees that the requirements are generally partially completed.

### 1.4.1 Popularization of its activities and involvement in social development

#### Requirements

- ✓ A higher education institution has a system for popularising its core activities.
- ✓ Employees of an institution of higher education participate in the activities of professional associations, and as experts, in other social supervisory boards and decision-making bodies.

#### Indicators:

- *the number of people/enterprises (including students, separately) involved in activities of popularizing RDC, the number of events by type, trends*
- *employee participation in non-university bodies (the number and %)*
- *articles by employees in newspapers (the number of articles per employee), commentaries, interviews, etc.*
- *other indicators depending on the HEI*

#### Evidence and analysis

Two main things are necessary to popularize an HEI's activities and to involve it in social development: Firstly, a system is required for popularising its core activities. Secondly, the organization's employees should be participating in the activities of professional associations and as experts in other social supervisory boards and decision-making bodies.

The previous accreditation report suggests that the Seminary should create a system for popularising its core activities. The SER (p. 65-66) highlights core activities to popularise the BMTS. These include creating and updating its webpage and Facebook page, private Facebook group for students, open doors event and occasionally offering a free course for interested persons. The previous panel has seen the need for systematic activities.

The Panel learned from the meetings that the Seminary is working on popularising its core activities through organising events, courses, as well as employing a PR specialist. However, the specialist has been in the office for a short amount of time and has not had time to create clear, effective, evidence-based working methods and communication and marketing plans. Also, in the meeting with the staff, it was mentioned that the specialist has a rather low workload which makes it difficult to fulfil all the necessary tasks needed according to the development plan (e.g., growing the student body, involving the alumni into shaping seminary's future, communicate the opportunities of broad-based continuing education).

Additionally, it was discussed that the Rector approves the steps of the specialist. Therefore, it is understandable that in the early stage of the cooperation, the experienced colleagues support the PR specialist. However, the Panel sees that in the long run, the specialist should have the freedom to decide on the activities and wording of the communication and marketing messages. The confirmation line should be as short as possible to avoid micromanagement and increase efficiency and sustainability of the Seminary.

According to the previous report it was suggested that the Seminary upload the student papers on their homepage. Currently, the titles and years of diploma papers can be found on the Seminary's website. Nevertheless, interested counterparts could only read the papers at the Seminary's library but not online, which has been a recommendation of the previous accreditation Panel. Making papers publicly available online would increase the likelihood of students and other interested counterparts reading them, which will serve society by providing analysed thoughts and new ideas.

The second requirement is assessing how well-connected the Seminary employees are participating in the activities of professional associations. In previous assessments, the staff of BMTS were encouraged to increase the level of participation in professional organisations. The Panel sees the necessity of this activity and understands the difficulty of networking in these uncertain and resource-consuming times. Nevertheless, the Panel sees that the Seminary staff are well-represented within the professional organisations and (theological) associations within the Methodist networks (SER p. 66-67). Also, the Seminary's staff have increased their presence and participation in national and international professional networks and organisations, which is a necessary part of being an active member in academia. For instance, some lecturers are part of Estonian organisations focusing on theology and religious studies such as the Estonian Bible Society, Estonian Academic Theological Society, Estonian Council of Churches, and Estonian Evangelical Alliance.

From the SER and discussions with the Rector and Director of Research and Development, it seems that the Seminary has increased cooperation with the University of Tartu Institute of Theology and Religious Studies. However, collaboration with other Estonian higher education institutes and universities is scarce. For instance, no data was found about being in programme councils of other similar higher education institutions or decision-making bodies in society at large. The Panel wishes to see the trend of networking nationally and internationally with all the employees of BMTS. While there has been development, the assessed materials and discussions show that the current organisations are mainly connected to the Methodist Church. Also, the Seminary is invited to discuss within the organisation the roles of the Seminary in connection with the Church as well as the positions of the Seminary as a member of the Estonian academic field.

The Panel acknowledges that some employees and alumni of the Seminary are working as chaplains in prisons, at the Estonian Defence League, and Estonian Defence Forces. Furthermore, they have appreciated members of society who serve society with their work.

In addition, during the last assessment, the Seminary employees were encouraged to write more articles (scientific and popular scientific ones) and mention it in their profiles at the Estonian Research Information System (ETIS). The developments with publications were discussed above in the RDC section. In general, it seems that the number of publications has started to increase. The SER mentioned that some of the staff members have been on different national and Christian radio shows and Christian tv channel TV7 (p. 65). Being present in media, writing opinion articles or giving interviews as experts of the field when such matters are discussed in the society is a necessary part of serving the society. In this way, the experts can raise awareness and educate the general public on the discussed matter(s). Being present in media is also a good way of advertising the organisation. The Panel sees that the Seminary is visible in Christian channels or programmes meant for Christians. However, not as much on channels and media outlets that are meant for general audience.

In conclusion, it seems that the visibility of the Seminary has increased in last years within the Estonian Methodist Church, networks of the Methodist Church worldwide, and in the Estonian theological

milieu. However, the Panel sees space for improvement. Current cooperation and decisions are very much Methodist Church based, and it is not seen what the role of the Seminary for wider (secular) society is. Also, there is space to create connections and become members of networks in the Estonian academic area.

## Conclusion

The Seminary conforms to the requirements partially. Firstly, due to the short amount of time being an employee, the PR specialist has not had time to create a strategic communication and marketing plan to popularise Seminary's core activities based on the Seminary's development plan. Nevertheless, strategic communication and marketing are necessary parts of the work of every higher education institute and more resources are needed to develop current gaps. Secondly, although there are developments in professional organisations, the link with the wider Estonian academic sphere is scarce and needs improvement.

## Strength

- The starting PR specialist is an alumna of the Seminary. Therefore, the specialist knows the context very well.

## Areas of concern and recommendations

- Communication and marketing are fields that take a lot of time and planning. Therefore, the Panel advises increasing the workload of the PR specialist who is currently working part-time. This will support creating a sustainable work plan and ways in the Seminary. Additionally, the PR specialist is advised to make a clear plan for the communication and marketing activities and for these BMTS needs to ensure the necessary resource.
- The Seminary is recommended to give the specialist freedom to decide on the working ways and communication and marketing messages based on the Seminary's short- and long-term objectives. The idea behind the recommendation is to avoid micromanaging which is not sustainable and useful for the future of the Seminary, taking into account the international recruitment plans.
- The Seminary is encouraged to publicise student paper titles, years and authors on the Seminary's webpage with links to the documents. Making papers publicly available online would increase the likelihood of students and other interested counterparts reading them, which will serve society by providing analysed thoughts and new ideas.

## Opportunities for further improvement

- The Panel recommends the Seminary to actively become members of the Estonian academic sphere by creating bi-lateral cooperation with other universities and higher education institutes, especially with similar private institutes to distinguish the role of the owner and the role of the educational institution more broadly.
- The Panel encourages the Seminary to think through their media strategy and work on getting more coverage from the so-called mainstream media organisations (for instance, Postimees, ERR, Päevaleht). This helps to make the Seminary more visible in the society as well as the staff of the Seminary can contribute to the society with their expertise.

## 1.4.2 In-service training and other educational activities for general public

### Requirements

- ✓ A higher education institution has defined the objectives regarding continuing education and measures their implementation.
- ✓ Continuing education is planned in accordance with the needs of target groups as well as with the potentials and purposes of an institution of higher education.
- ✓ Participant satisfaction with the quality of in-service training is regularly surveyed and the results are used in planning improvement activities.

### Indicators:

- *the number of participants in continuing education (and in other forms of paid open learning) per hour, or the number of ECP per participant*
- *the proportion of money acquired from continuing education compared to the total scope of finances for educational activities*
- *other indicators depending on the HEI*

## Evidence and analysis

The section focusing on continuing education and other educational activities for the general public emphasizes three topics. Firstly, it asks whether the HEI has defined objectives regarding continuing education and measures their implementation. Secondly, it asks whether continuing education is planned in accordance with the needs of target groups as well as with the potentials and purposes of an institution of higher education. Lastly it considers satisfaction of participants with the quality of in-service training, as well as the regularly surveying of participants and use of results in planning improvement activities.

In the previous assessment report, the Seminary was recommended to clearly define its objectives regarding in-service training and to create a systematic plan for mapping the needs of target groups and broadening the activities aimed at the general public. Based on the SER (p. 67-68) the objectives of the in-service training are created in accordance with the interests of the UMCE. It is a good practice that the students are encouraged to consider contributing to a topic that fits into these areas of interest (p. 68).

As mentioned above, the Seminary works closely with the Methodist Church to develop in-service training events. The in-service training objectives were created based on the interests of the UMCE. Based on the findings it seems that regarding in-service training, the Seminary serves society by serving the UMCE and its needs. This creates a dissonance: On the other hand, it seems that the Seminary serves society by serving the Church since these can overlap. However, on the other hand, they do not always do so. With a fairly exclusive focus on the UMCE, the Seminary thereby leaves out the rest of society. It thereby misses one of the main aims of the higher education institute: which is to serve 'society' understood in a wide sense. While the emphasis on the needs of the UMCE is understandable – the UMCE being the owner of the Seminary – a dissonance has been created

between serving the society and serving the Church/Churches. The Seminary should do *both* activities *actively* and – if necessary – separately.

During the previous assessment, the Seminary was invited to evaluate the results of the in-service training activities periodically and make the summary of the feedback public. The SER (p. 68) states that the quality of training events is regularly surveyed, and results are used in planning to improve the activities. Also, that helpful feedback is given by some of the partners, for instance, the organizing bodies of *Koduteel* and Summer Conference. Nevertheless, the feedback cannot be found from the webpage that is an important source for the interested counterparts and public to receive information about the in-service trainings.

## Conclusion

The panel finds this sub-area to be partially conforming to requirements.

The Seminary surveys the continuing education trainings and feedback is received from some of the partners according to the requirements. However, there is a wider problem. The objectives of the continuing education training are set according to the needs of the UMCE. Although the objectives are clear and understandable, they leave out an important task that every academic institute has – private or not – which is serving wider society.

## Strength

- Strong cooperation between the Seminary and the UMCE, the owner of the HEI, manifests in sharing in-service training interests.

## Areas of concern and recommendations

- Currently, the Seminary's perspective on serving society is seen through the lens of the UMCE. Nevertheless, higher education institutes should see their role to serve society in its widest sense. Being a private and church-owned institute creates some specialities, however, the Seminary should not solely focus on the UMCE. Therefore, the Seminary is invited to define the term 'society' and to explain how the UMCE sees it. Most likely, the understanding of the UMCE is narrower than the Seminary's. Therefore, the Seminary is encouraged to research how other HEIs see 'society' and how they serve it (for instance, creating MOOC-s, writing opinion articles to public newspapers, etc.). Also, to map the needs of all the Christian churches, Christians, and secular people in Estonia in general and taking into account the developments in the state. The Panel sees that putting together the needs of the wider society and the strengths and opportunities of the Seminary could also increase the ways how to become more visible and needed in the whole society, in addition to the UMCE.
- The Panel sees that the continuing education in the development plan should include supporting the Methodist Church in offering broad-based continuing education and training in church planting and activities for other Christian Churches and secular members of society.
- In the previous assessment, the Seminary was encouraged to upload the feedback of the in-service training to their webpage for the general public. Currently, the feedback is not found from the homepage. The Seminary is recommended to upload and present the in-service feedback on their web page with the rest of the information about the training. Honest and accessible feedback provides information about the training, trainers, and the Seminary to the possible audience. In-service trainings are also one possible recruitment channels of possible students. Therefore, the Seminary would benefit from doing it.

### Opportunity for further improvement

- Currently, the perspective of serving the society is very Methodist Church centred. Which is understandable. Nevertheless, academic organisations should take into account the needs of the whole society while planning their in-service training. To support serving the so-called wider society, the Panel invites the Seminary to do cooperation with other Estonian private religious HEI-s to discuss the roles of the organisations and jointly create activities where their expertise as academic organisations (not members of their churches) is used for the benefit of the problems that the society or certain groups are facing.

### 1.4.3 Other public-oriented activities

#### Requirements

- ✓ Public-oriented activities are purposeful, the results of the activities are periodically evaluated, and improvements are introduced based on those evaluations.
- ✓ A higher education institution contributes to the enhancement of community welfare by sharing its resources (library, museums, sports facilities, etc.) and/or by organising concerts, exhibitions, performances, conferences, fairs and other events.

#### Indicators:

- *the number of public-oriented events by type, the number of participants (if measurable)*
- *other indicators depending on the HEI*

### Evidence and analysis

Other public-oriented activities include two requirements: Firstly, whether the public-oriented activities are purposeful, the results of the activities are periodically evaluated, and improvements are introduced based on those evaluations. Secondly, if and how is the institution contributing to the enhancement of community welfare by sharing its resources and/or by organising concerts, exhibitions etc?

The Seminary sees that they are contributing to the enhancement of the community by sharing their resources (SER, p. 71). For instance, the cafeteria is used weekly by Men's Prayer Breakfast which the faculty of BMTS lead. On Fridays, the same area is used to package food for families in need and for ministry to the homeless. The Seminary's library is open to the larger public at appointed times, and the Seminary has an official agreement with Nextstep Bible School to use the library regularly. Also, the Seminary rooms are rented out for concert groups, daycare, etc.

There are also events and initiatives that are more BMTS-centred. For example, the Seminary planned to host a community blood drive, which, unfortunately, was cancelled due to the pandemic. The atrium of the Seminary has been used for art exhibits, including the members of the BMTS faculty. Among the resources that academic organisations create is *knowledge*. In 2020, an internet counselling platform *Sinu Abi* (Help for you) was initiated by the Estonian Council of Churches (ECC).



The platform providing Christian mental health counselling is available to everybody and provides materials, contacts, and articles on mental health topics. Some of BMTS' lecturers contribute to this initiative. In Spring 2021, the BMTS (including their board, staff, faculty, students, and alumni) compiled a 40-day Lent Devotional. The devotional included formational stories and reflections to encourage people to find hope. The blog was conducted in English.

During the last assessment, the Seminary was invited to indicate on the website that the library is open to the public. This is not currently indicated on the website (it could not be found by Panel members). The Seminary is encouraged to serve society by providing their resources to interested counterparts. However, without clear communication about opportunities to do so, those outside cannot use them since they cannot become aware.

The Panel sees that while there are Seminary-based activities, a big number of public-oriented activities are in cooperation with the Church. Considering that the Church is the owner of the Seminary and they are functioning under the same roof physically and mentally, the close collaboration is understandable up to a certain point.

The second requirement is whether the public-oriented activities are purposeful, the results of the activities are periodically evaluated, and improvements introduced based on those evaluations. However, according to the SER (p. 71), the feedback from the activities is not regularly assessed due to the informal nature of the events and feedback. Because of that, the Seminary sees the need for systematisation. Hence, the Seminary has a plan to develop templates for feedback forms that can be adapted for differing types of events and saved in the Seminary's document management system. Nevertheless, currently, the activities are not periodically evaluated and therefore it is not easy to carry out and measure the improvements.

The Panel sees that the biggest question is related to the purposefulness of public-oriented activities. As discussed above, the connections between the Seminary and the UMCE cause some dissonances. On the one hand, the close cooperation between the aforementioned partners is inevitable due to the structure of the organisations and is a strength of the Seminary. The current arrangement provides cooperation and fast (informal) communication opportunities between the mentioned partners. Also, the Seminary is physically and mentally visible to the UMCE and its partners who are visiting the building. But, on the other hand, there is a threat that the Seminary focuses too much on serving the UMCE and loses its identity and role as an academic organisation.

Currently, the connection between the Seminary and the UMCE is very strong, and it seems that the Seminary is mainly serving the society through serving them. However, the close cooperation, connected identities and strategies, and living under the same roof raises questions and possible areas of concern regarding the use of physical space, official and unofficial ways of cooperation and communication, and personnel. For instance, will the cooperation change if the Seminary moves to another location? Will the current cooperation and methods of communication be systematic and sustainable enough to move from more physically close, informal ways to physically distanced and therefore more formal and slower channels? Furthermore, how will the relations between the two counterparts evolve then and how will the Seminary's strategy, development and action plan change? Also, the Panel read from the SER and heard from the meetings that several staff members (including lecturers) are working in addition to the Seminary in congregations. On the one hand, such a tendency is very welcome considering the practical focus of the Seminary. On the other hand, it might cause

conflicts of roles among the students and lecturers due to the size of Methodist (and other denominations) communities in Estonia and the countries of the students.

## Conclusion

Considering the size of the Seminary, the Panel is impressed by the number of public-oriented activities out of which only some were brought above as examples. The staff members take part in publicly oriented initiatives (e.g., sinuabi.ee), exhibitions and events organised by the Church and the Seminary take place in the rooms of the Seminary. Currently, the activities are not periodically evaluated and therefore, it is not easy to carry out and measure the impact of the events and improvements done by the Seminary. However, the HEI is aware of the need for improvement.

Taking the beforementioned into account, the Seminary conforms to the requirements in this sub-area.

## Strength

- The Seminary is in a very strategic location which is easily accessible for visitors from Estonia and abroad (e.g., nearby Tallinn port). This makes visiting the Seminary easy for local in addition to the foreign students, guest lecturers and other guests.

## Areas of concern and recommendations

- The Panel read from the SER and heard from the meetings that several staff members (including lecturers) are working in addition to the Seminary in congregations. While this trend has its benefits, due to the small size of the community, it can lead to conflict of interests. Moving from one role to another might be difficult for students and lecturers. For instance, there is a threat that the students find it difficult to critique the lecturer if they are active members of their congregation. Also, if the lecturer knows more about one student than another, it might be difficult for the lecturer to treat them equally due to the background knowledge, previous common experiences etc. Because of that, the Seminary is encouraged to analyse possible conflict of interests and its possible impact on the personnel and the students of the HEI. If there are cases of conflict of interests, the Seminary is invited to work through principles that the counterparts should follow.
- As mentioned in the previous accreditation report, the Panel continues to suggest that the Seminary clearly state that their library is open to everybody at certain times via approachable channels of the Seminary.

## Opportunity for further improvement

- Currently the public-oriented activities are linked with the Church. The Seminary is invited to create public-oriented activities for secular target groups independently or as joint-projects with some other Estonian higher education institute or university, for instance Tallinn University. In this way, the Seminary could increase their partners network, raise awareness about the Seminary and share their unique expertise with the society.

## Appendix: Accreditation Schedule

**Institutional Accreditation**  
**Assessment of secondary condition of the study programme group Theology**  
**Baltic Methodist Theological Seminary**

**SCHEDULE OF THE VISIT**  
**23 – 24 November 2021**

**Expert panel:**

Gerrit Immink (Chair)	Professor emeritus, Protestant Theological University, The Netherlands
Jonathan Loose	Director of Learning and Teaching, Heythrop College, University of London, United Kingdom
Antti Räsänen	Professor of Religious Education, Faculty of Theology, University of Helsinki, Finland
Aivar Sarapik	Orthodox Church of Estonia, Director of development and administration in Tallinn, Estonia
Heidi Maiberg	Student; Royal Holloway University of London, Criminology and Sociology, PhD, United Kingdom

**Coordinators from EKKK:**

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TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 23 <i>Discussions via Zoom</i>		
Time	Activity	Representatives of the Seminary
10.10 – 10.30	Round of introductions; <b>meeting with the compilers of the Self-Evaluation Report (SER)</b> <i>Topics: process of compiling the SER, most important changes compared to last accreditation</i>	<i>Dr. Külli Tõniste, Rector, 6 years IN PERSON room207</i> <i>Mag. Mark Nelson, Dean, 26 years ZOOM</i> <i>Dr. Meeli Tankler, Director of research and development, 22 years ZOOM</i> <i>Mag. Hindrek Taavet Taimla, Missiology and Spiritual Formation Faculty, 3 years ZOOM</i>
10.30 – 11.30	Meeting with the <b>Rector, Representative of the owner of the Seminary</b> <i>Topics: current position of the Seminary, plans for the future development, challenges, general and financial management; quality and personnel management (eg development interviews with staff).</i>	<i>Dr. Külli Tõniste, Rector, 6 years</i> <i>Robert Tserenkov, Superintendent of the UMC in Estonia, 3 years IN PERSON room 207 or ZOOM</i>
11.30 – 12.00	Break	
12.00 – 12.30	Meeting with <b>members of the Board of trustees</b>	<i>Dr. Christian Alsted, Bishop of the UMC Baltic Nordic Area, BMTS Chair of the Board of Trustees 12 years ZOOM</i> <i>Rev. Dr. Randy Frye, Lead pastor of the First Broad Street UMC, BMTS Member of the Board of trustees 24 years ZOOM</i> <i>Dr. Külli Tõniste, Rector, 6 years IN PERSON room 207</i>
12.30 – 12.45	Break	

12.45 – 13.45	<b>Teaching and learning</b> <b>Topics:</b> - Admissions (Estonian and International), study programme development, teaching and learning practices, feedback system.	Mag. <b>Mark Nelson</b> , Dean, 26 years (study program) IN PERSON room 207 or ZOOM <b>Taavi Hollman</b> , Rector's Assistant (lecturer, trustee), 19 years (admissions) IN PERSON room 207 Mag. <b>Rein Laaneser</b> , former Administrative assistant last 2 years, IT specialist 22 years ZOOM
13.45 – 14.45	Lunch	
14.45 – 15.30	<b>Discussion on research and development</b>	Dr. <b>Meeli Tankler</b> , director of research and development, 22 years ZOOM Dr. <b>Küllil Tõniste</b> , president, 6 years IN PERSON room 207
15.30 – 15.50	Break	
15.50 – 16.50	<b>Support systems for teaching and learning</b> (public relations, IT support, translators, study advisor, librarian)  <b>Topics:</b> support for learning and teaching (incl developing e-courses and using e-tools), student support and counselling, Study information system; organisation of translation; marketing, internal & external communication.	Mag. <b>Rein Laaneser</b> , IT specialist 22 years ZOOM Mag. <b>Tarmo Lilleoja</b> , translator 12 years - ZOOM Mag. <b>Marina Rütinen</b> , Translator, 4 years – ZOOM Mag. <b>Kaja Rüütel</b> , Translator (formerly lecturer, administor) 19 years ZOOM? <b>Kaire Lotamõis</b> , Administrative Assistant, PR leader (1 month), also in alumni leadership team (2 years – IN PERSON or ZOOM <b>Maiu Mäevere</b> , Librarian and Accountant 24 years IN PERSON or ZOOM. TRANSLATOR: Kaarel Lilleoja
16.50 – 17.10	Break	
17.10 – 18.10	<b>Meeting with the teaching staff</b>  <b>Topics:</b> Teaching and learning (e.g., teaching methods, teaching materials, e-courses, assessment of students etc.), professional development of staff, research and development activities,	Mag. <b>Anne Saluraid</b> , Inductive Bible Study & Greek Faculty 23 years IN PERSON room 207 or ZOOM Mag. <b>Hindrek Taavet Taimla</b> , Missiology & Spiritual Formation, Inductive Bible Study and Greek Faculty, 3 years ZOOM Mag. <b>Douglas Robb Childress</b> , Church History and Practical Theology Faculty, 6 years ZOOM Mag. <b>Tetyana Radomska</b> , Inductive Bible Study & Greek, 5 years IN PERSON room 207 or ZOOM. TRANSLATOR Anna Tovarnitski Dr. <b>Kelvin Friebe</b> , Briercrest College, Old Testament Visiting faculty at BMTS 3 years ZOOM?

	<i>activities related to service to society (incl. continuing education).</i>	<i>Dr. (cand.) Cpt. <b>Ago Lilleorg</b>, Chief Chaplan in Estonian Defence Forces also Church Planting Lecturer at BMTS, 3 years</i>
<b>WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 24</b> <i>Discussions via Zoom</i>		
<b>Time</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Representatives of the Seminary</b>
10.15 – 11.00	Meeting with <b>external stakeholders and employers of the Seminary</b>	<i>Mag. <b>Marjana Luist</b>, Assistant to the Superintendent and Koduteel Editor, BMTS graduates serve as ordained ministers in UMC churches IN PERSON room 207 or ZOOM Dr. <b>Üllas Tankler</b> General Board of Global Ministries Executive Secretary of Europe, Middle East and North Africa – (mission agency, BMTS partner and support organization, employer) ZOOM Mag. <b>Veronika Fjodorova</b>, Director of Children's Center Lighthouse (Lastekeskus Tähetorn) (BMTS volunteers, alumni serve on board) IN PERSON room 207. TRANSLATOR Anna Tovarnitski <b>Matvei Murin</b>, Pastor at New Beginning UMC (Russian), (EMK Uue Alguse kogudus) and leads a Post-Rehabilitation Adaptation Center (BMTS graduates work as pastors, administrators and volunteers at this church) ZOOM. TRANSLATOR Anna Tovarnitski <b>Meelis Maikalu</b> – pastor, Estonian Christian Pentecostal Church</i>
11.00 – 11.30	<i>Break</i>	
11.30 – 12.45	Meeting with <b>students</b>	<i><b>Ain Vares</b>, 3<sup>rd</sup> year, Russian programme (Board of Students representative) ZOOM TRANSLATOR Kaarel Lilleoja <b>Kadre Arikainen</b>, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, Estonian programme (Board of Students rep.) ZOOM <b>Herki Tomberg</b>, 1<sup>st</sup> year Estonian programme (Board of Students rep.) ZOOM <b>Stanislav Koziak</b>, 2<sup>nd</sup> year Russian programme ZOOM <b>Loida Hrapko</b> 1<sup>st</sup> year Russian programme (Board of Students rep.) ZOOM TRANSLATOR Anna Tovarnitski <b>Rafael Zayas</b>, 3<sup>rd</sup> year English programme IN PERSON room 207 or ZOOM <b>Inna Prysiashniuk</b>, 3<sup>rd</sup> year Russian programme IN PERSON room 207 or ZOOM</i>
12.45 – 14.00	<i>Lunch</i>	

14.00 – 15.00	Meeting with <b>alumni</b>	<p><b>Mai Unt</b> – pastor of Viljandi Estonian Christian Pentecostal Church (graduated 2021) ZOOM</p> <p><b>Esa-Pekka Mattila</b> – pastor of Nurmijärvi Pentecostal church in Finland (graduated 2021) ZOOM</p> <p><b>Oleksii Bulat</b> – Home church leader from Ukraine (graduated 2018) IN PERSON or ZOOM. TRANSLATOR Anna Tovarnitski</p> <p><b>Maarja Mänd</b> – in public service Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications, ZOOM (graduated 2020)</p>
15.15 – 16.15	<p><b><i>Inquiry of documents</i></b> (in case we have discovered during the visit that we need some more evidence) /</p> <p><b><i>“open doors”</i></b> – opportunity for those from Seminary who want to come to discuss various topics with the experts related to institutional accreditation /</p> <p><b><i>ad hoc interviews</i></b> (in case the panel have discovered during the visit that there is a need to talk (again) with someone).</p>	
16.15 – 17.00	<b><i>Panel meeting:</i></b> preparation for providing feedback to the Seminary	
17.10 – 17.30	Open meeting to staff and students: <b>presentation of preliminary conclusions by the panel</b>	