AGENCY REVIEW REPORT:

European Council for Theological Education

COORDINATED by ASIIN

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This review report analyses the compliance of the European Council for Theological Education (ECTE) with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). The report is based on a desk analysis (a study of the SAR and other material provided to the review panel) as well as a virtual site visit conducted between the 14th-17th of June 2021 using online tools. The review process was coordinated by the ASIIN e.V., based in Germany.

The European Council for Theological Education, founded in 1979, is a transnational, subject specific quality assurance network related to the discipline of evangelical theology. It serves a pan-European constituency, consisting of approximately 80 Higher Education Institutions from around 30 countries, mainly from Europe but also from the Middle East. Originally, it followed the model of North American accreditation agencies, but with the introduction of the Bologna Process started to align itself with the European Standard and Guidelines. Its members in 2019 passed a new Strategic Plan and in line with it commissioned this first time EQAR review process to lend further credibility to the agency and to enhance the public recognition of the theological institutions. It is important to note, that for many of these specific type of educational institutions, ECTE´s accreditation is the only way to obtain institutional and programme recognition in their respective national setting and within the international context.

After conducting the review, the expert panel is of the opinion that ECTE is an ambitious, well-functioning, pro-active agency with a long tradition based on the voluntary contribution and enthusiasm of its stakeholders, which has made considerable progress especially since initiating this review procedure for obtaining listing in the European Quality Assurance Register. As regards compliance with the European Standards and Guidelines, the panel reaches the following overall conclusions:

ESG Part 3	Degree of compliance
Standard 3.1 Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance	Substantially compliant
Standard 3.2 Official status	Fully compliant
Standard 3.3 Independence	Partially compliant
Standard 3.4 Thematic analysis	Fully compliant
Standard 3.5 Resources	Substantially compliant
Standard 3.6 Internal quality assurance and professional conduct	Substantially compliant
Standard 3.7 Cyclical external review of agencies	Fully compliant
ESG Part 2	
Standard 2.1 Consideration of internal quality assurance	Non-compliant
Standard 2.2 Designing methodologies fit for purpose	Substantially compliant
Standard 2.3 Implementing processes	Fully compliant
Standard 2.4 Peer-review experts	Substantially compliant
Standard 2.5 Criteria for outcomes	Fully compliant
Standard 2.6 Reporting	Substantially compliant
Standard 2.7 Complaints and appeals	Substantially compliant

INTRODUCTION

This report analyses the compliance of the European Council for Theological Education (ECTE) with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). It is the results of an external review conducted in June 2021.

BACKGROUND OF THE REVIEW AND OUTLINE OF THE REVIEW PROCESS

The EQAR Procedure for Applications requires new applicants to undergo an external cyclical review, at least once every five years, in order to verify that they act in substantial compliance with the ESG as adopted at the Yerevan ministerial conference of the Bologna Process in 2015.

For ECTE, membership in ENQA/the listing in the European Quality Assurance Register has been a prerogative for a long time. First attempts are dating back as far as 2010, but only in 2018, the organization started with a strategic approach and a lot of enthusiasm to tackle the associated challenges and to achieve full compliance with the European Standard and Guidelines. As a European organization, European recognition via registration in the European Quality Assurance Register is of primary importance, because for many of its members accreditation in their various national context is not always a feasible option.

As is foreseen in the EQAR review process, the panel on the one hand checked compliance with the Standards of ESG part 2 and 3. At the same time, the panel adopted a developmental approach with a view to the enhancement of the agency's processes and operations.

REVIEW PROCESS

The primary purpose of the 2021 external review of ECTE is to verify that the reviewed organization acts in compliance with the European Standard and Guidelines. While executing this task, the review panel also took into account EQAR's use and interpretation of the ESG. The review itself has been conducted in line with the process described in EQAR Procedure for Applications and in Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews and according to the timeline set out in the Terms of Reference. The panel for the external review of ECTE was appointed by ASIIN and was composed of the following members:

- Dr. Anne Flierman (Chair), Former President of the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO).
- Prof. Dr. Patrick Becker (Panel Member), Professor for Systematic Theology, RWTH Aachen, Germany.
- Dr. Martin Prchal (Panel Member), Vice-Principal, Royal Conservatoire, The Hague, Netherlands/Czech Republic.
- Anna Klampfer, (Panel Member - Student Representative, Technical University of Vienna, Austria.
- Dr. Iring Wasser, (Panel Member, Secretary), Managing Director of ASIIN, Germany

Iring Wasser coordinated the review from the side of the ASIIN, Carmen Crouse was the responsible external review coordinator on the part of the ECTE.

Self-assessment report

ECTE´s Self-Assessment Report was drafted by an editorial group of ECTE composed of Dr. Marvin Oxenham (General Secretary) and Carmen Crouse (External Review Manager). After comments obtained from the ECTE-Chairman, the Quality Assurance Coordinator as well as the Review Secretary, the revised version of the SAR was approved in the meeting of the ECTE Council in March 2021.

A further revision was undertaken after collecting feedback from other subject-specific accreditation agencies such as the Association of Theological Schools (USA), the Asia Theological Association (Asia) and the Middle East and North Africa Association for Theological Education (Middle East and North Africa) as well as from ECTE accredited HEI's from various countries such as Austria, Egypt, Germany, Greece, Lebanon, and the Netherlands. Subsequent to completing this collective effort, the final version of the SAR was officially submitted to ASIIN and the panel in April of 2021.

The overall assessment on the part of the panel pertaining to the SAR is that it is comprehensive, well structured and well written. It contains detailed information on

- The history, activities, the set-up of the organisation as well as its internal quality assurance system and management
- ECTE´s Standards and Guidelines as well as Criteria and Procedures for ECTE institutional and program accreditation procedures
- Guidelines for conducting site visits, instructions for the Visiting Evaluation Teams as well as for the production of review reports
- A considerable number of policy documents including appeals and complaints policies, consistency guarantee, data protection policy, conflict of interest and intolerance prevention, the ongoing review and monitoring policy, staff policies (including professional codes and ethical requirements), stakeholder involvement and development policy, student council member policy, VET development policy and visitation feedback policy
- Online forms pertaining to no conflict-of-interest declaration forms, the annual staff review forms, accreditation application forms and review worksheets for VETs.
- Manifold Surveys such as ECTE SAR stakeholder responses, Stakeholder survey 2020-21, Student satisfaction survey 2020-21 Stakeholder consultation 2018
- The ECTE Strategic Plan 2021-2027, a comprehensive ESG Compliance Action Plan as well as Budget Plans, Audited Financial Report and Fiscal Year Results
- A SWOT analysis

The review team had access to all of these documents on a reserved domain on the ECTE website. Prior and during the review the expert team was asking for additional information, all of which was provided in due time and with high quality.

Overall, the review panel considered the SAR (in combination with the annexes) to be very well composed and very informative, with substantial evidence provided about ECTE´s structures, procedures and context, as well as compliance with all standards of the ESG.

Site visit

A three-day site visit took place on the 14th, 16th and 17th of June 2021, following a number of internal preparatory meeting of the review panel in late May and early June. Due to the pandemic measures in place at the time, the site visit took had to take place in an online mode, to which all the panel members explicitly agreed. During the online site visit, the panel had the opportunity to talk with the full range of representatives of ECTE`s main bodies, clients and stakeholder groups. The site visit programme can be found in the annexes to this report. Among the interviewed parties figured the

- ECTE Secretary general

- The group of ECTE Staff Members
- The members of the ECTE Council
- Members of ECTE´s Visiting Evaluation Teams
- Rectors, QA officers and Deans of accredited HEIs from a range of different countries
- Student representatives in ECTE´s bodies and in expert panels
- Representatives of various stakeholder groups

The panel was happy to note that without exception the stakeholders interviewed during the review process demonstrated a high level of cooperation and openness providing the panel with valuable information and insights into the agency's structures and operations. The panel thanks all ECTE representatives for the efficient and timely communication making it possible to organise a site visit, albeit virtual, that was highly useful for the panel's work and to respond to all requests from the panel.

BACKGROUND REGARDING THE HIGHER EDUCATION AND QUALITY ASSURANCE ENVIRONMENT OF THE AGENCY

The ECTE was officially founded by delegates of originally 23 institutions on October 31, 1979, at St. Chrischona (Switzerland) as an early example of a peer-review based, subject-specific cross-border quality assurance agency in Europe. It drew on the example of the North American educational and accrediting system (especially the Criteria of the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada). As there was no comparable institution in Europe at the time, the well-developed North American system of external peer-reviews was adopted.

In 2005, the ECTE applied and was recognised as a member by the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE). In 2006, as the Bologna-Process further progressed, the ECTE began a major shift to align its accreditation standards to those of the EHEA and the newly introduced ESG. In 2007, the ECTE became an affiliate member of the European Network for Quality Assurance (ENQA).

When the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) was set up in 2008 to provide reliable information on quality of European higher education and its assurance, the ECTE realized, according to its own account, the need for a better connection to other quality assurance agencies as well as recognition by national authorities. The ECTE self-assessment process consequently started in 2010 with an enquiry to ENQA to be reviewed for full member status and subsequently register on the EQAR. A self-study was subsequently initiated, however later suspended over uncertainties at the time around the official status of cross-border QA agencies in Europe.

A comprehensive internal SWOT Analyses in relation to ESG1, ESG2 and ESG3 was conducted at the end of 2018 to identify necessary improvements regarding structures, tasks, processes, measures and resources. The complementary Strategic Plan together with a set of seventy-nine action points as part of a multi-dimensional ESG Compliance Action Plan was passed by ECTE´s General Assembly at the end of 2019 and has ever since been used to monitor their implementation. It played a major role during the review of the expert group.

In line with this process, a detailed self-study of the ECTE Manual for accreditation against the ESG (especially ESG1) was initiated in 2018, culminating in a full revision and the production of a complete set of documents to align standards, guidelines and procedures with the ESG. The main document resulting from this exercise was a revised version of the Standards and Guidelines for ECTE accreditation approved by the General Assembly in 2019 and replacing the previous version of the

ECTE Manual. Further documents, notably a new manual on Criteria and Procedures and the Supplemental Guidelines series, were published to reflect and summarise further areas of development and compliance to ESG2 and ESG3. Other initiatives targeted a comprehensive development of internal QA policies, greater involvement of ECTE´s stakeholders, implementing structures and policies to ensure independence, conducting thematic analyses and restructuring its human resources and financial footing.

The ECTE website has been kept updated to reflect these changes. The 2019 General Assembly in the presence of EQAR Senior Policy Analyst, Melinda Szabo, according to ECTE representatives was a keystone event in the review process with the approval of a strategic plan including the EQAR external review, together with a timeline and a budget to empower the Council and staff to achieve full compliance with the ESG.

Since then, the ECTE Council and staff have continued to work through the ESG Compliance Action Plan, making further revisions and introducing new policies and documents. These have included, for example, designing specific criteria for online and distance education, elaborating procedures for online site visits (propelled by the Corona-Pandemic), refining independence policies, formulating stakeholder plans and thematic analysis strategies and developing policies for internal quality assurance, staff resources and monitoring and improvement policies.

After approximately two years of work, the ECTE Council assessed that all seventy-nine action points of the ESG Compliance Action Plan had been appropriately addressed. Consequently, the application for registration in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) along with the final terms of reference was submitted on 11 September 2020. The ECTE asked ASIIN to coordinate the review. The definition of the terms of reference between ASIIN, EQAR and ECTE was completed on 23 November 2020 when EQAR confirmed the eligibility of ECTE's application for inclusion in the register (the agreement forms part of the annexes).

The ASIIN expert group during the review could not but note the extraordinary dynamic of this process with substantial chances being implemented especially over the course of the past two years. In this transition phase, a considerable number of the recently developed or revised new instruments, procedures and criteria and their related internal and external quality assurance circles start to reap their positive benefits.

PROFILE AND MAIN AREAS OF ACTIVITIES OF THE ECTE

The ECTE is a pan-European body serving institutions in 29 countries across Europe and the Middle East, representing a multiplicity of political systems, higher education systems, socio-cultural and educational traditions and languages. The ECTE can thus be characterised as a cross-border, professional, subject-specific accreditation agency. As a discipline-specific agency, it focuses on the discipline of evangelical theology and theological education. Through its activities, the ECTE strives to contribute to the continuous enhancement of the quality of higher theological education in Europe and the Middle East. All of ECTE´s members are non-state educational providers from the private sector. Many of the members are very small institutions with no more than 20-50 students; other members have an enrolment of several hundred students.

The ECTE as a membership organization according to the Self-Assessment Report and the subsequent interviews has three main functions: accreditation, networking and further development of its member institutions. Accreditation is reported to be the dominant pillar among those three operational activities. Registration with EQAR serves the main purpose of allowing ECTE members to obtain an internationally recognized accreditation, which is "validated" by the listing of ECTE in the EQAR. In the discussion with the experts, a number of

interviewees alluded to the fact that they could not obtain accreditation in their national context for various reasons.

ECTE engages in institutional as well as programme accreditation. It is important to note that accreditation within ECTE is a completely voluntary process, not required by any legal stipulations. There are, however, specific features to ECTE´s processes that can be summarized as follows:

- The ECTE is offering its accreditation services exclusively to its members. Non-member organizations cannot ask to be institutionally or programme accredited.
- Membership in the ECTE is not connected to the requirement of being accredited by the ECTE, a majority of ECTE members are either accredited by other national authorities or do not dispose of an accreditation status. For completeness sake, it must be noted that the membership admission procedure in one form or another contains criteria and a review which can be seen as a precursor to more detailed and in-depth accreditation procedures.

There have been major changes in the ECTE´s accreditation process being implemented in the course of the past 2-3 year in view of its quest to be listed in the EQAR, so that the review panel was confronted with the challenge to evaluate a system clearly in transition.

In the former system (prior to 2020), institutional and programme accreditation by ECTE were conducted together in one combined procedure. Starting in 2021, the system and the associated procedures and criteria have been changed: now and in the future, there will be first an institutional review; in case of success, the institutionally accredited ECTE members subsequently can then ask for a programme accreditation.

Whereas the "old accreditation system" in a range of different aspects was clearly in obvious non-conformity with the European Standards and Guidelines (e.g. non-participation of students in the Visiting Evaluation Teams etc.), ECTE has worked hard in the past two years in its quest to fully comply with the ESG.

The ECTE also conducts reviews in cooperation with national QA requirements and, at the request of an ECTE member institution, a joint procedure with a national agency is being put in place.

THE ECTE´S ORGANISATIONAL SETUP

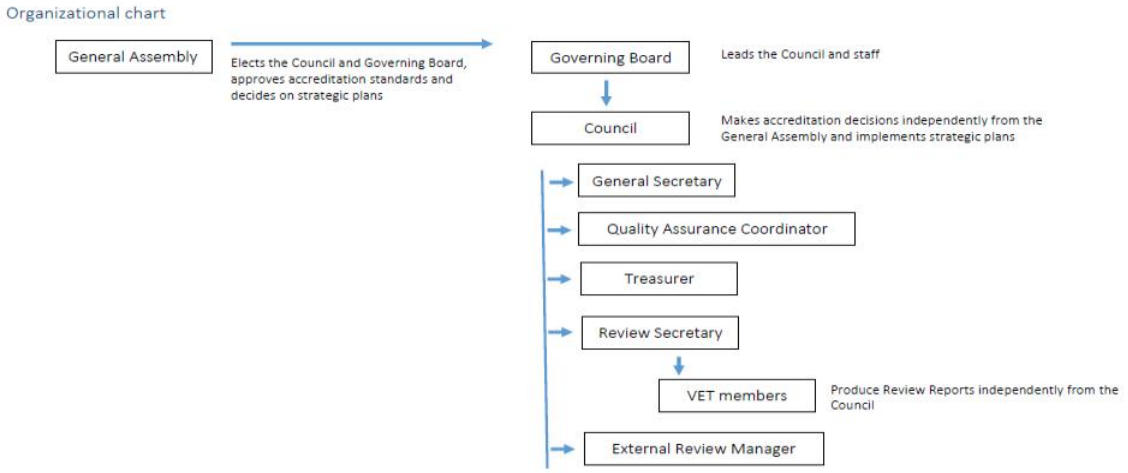
According to §4 of its Statues, ECTE has the following organizational bodies with their associated functions:

The General Assembly	Composed of ECTE members: regular and associate (voice but no vote) • Elects the Council as well as its Governing Board • Approves the budget • Accepts the report of the Council • Commissions independent expert to audit the accounting and to report his/her findings to the General Assembly • Discharges the treasurer, Council and governing board • Approves accreditation standards • Discusses and decides on future activities of the association
The Governing Board	Composed of Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Council • Represents and leads the association • Leads the staff
The Council	Composed of Governing Board, core staff (voice but no vote) and elected members • Formulates, monitors and implements the association's strategic plan • Makes quality assurance decisions • Gives instructions to the employees • Decides on the admission of new members to the association • Prepares the General Assembly and elections • Monitors the handling of finances of the association and elects the treasurer • Selects staff, such as a General Secretary.

It is fair to say, that overall, ECTE´s disposes of a very lean organizational set up with ECTE´s Council being the driving force behind most of its activities. It is notable that the ECTE Council assumes multiple roles as a governing body as well as that of an accreditation commission. It is thus in charge of nominating experts for the study programmes and institutions to be accredited, participating in the training of the reviewers, examining and deciding upon reports of the review panels and assisting in the creation of expert pools. Moreover, members of the council participate in visiting panels themselves.

As will be seen in subsequent parts of this report, the concentration of powers and functions within the ECTE Council, which is assuming functions of a supervisory governing board in combination with a range of operational responsibilities and while acting like a fully-fledged accreditation commission,

has been subject to intensive discussions and analysis. In the following chart, the organizational set-up of the ECTE is graphically depicted:



Apart from the specific feature of the ECTE´s organizational setup with the dominating, multitasking functions of the ECTE council comes a philosophy and longstanding tradition to rely heavily on voluntary contribution instead of paid staff functions.

ECTE´S FUNDING

ECTE is generating its income from various sources. The most important sources of funding (around 80%) are revenues from institutional and programme accreditation procedures for their own members (HEI´s not belonging to the ECTE member base are not eligible for accreditation). These revenues are based on service fees charged from a soliciting institution, which are being paid on an annual basis and depend on the number of enrolled students in accredited programs. In other words, the financial capacities of the reviewed institutions are part of the equation when defining the accreditation fees. Other significant sources of funding are ECTE´s membership fees, which amount to around 20% of the income.

The comparatively small budget is predominantly used to cover the staff costs as well as the costs of conducting the accreditation procedures and remunerating the Visiting Evaluation Teams. Further details are elaborated in subsequent parts of this report.

FINDINGS: COMPLIANCE OF ECTE WITH THE STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA (ESG)

This report is first covering compliance of ECTE with ESG part 3, followed by an analysis of compliance with ESG part 2. As this is a first time review, there are not recommendations and requirements form previous reviews.

ESG PART 3: QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCIES

ESG 3.1 ACTIVITIES, POLICY, AND PROCESSES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

Standard:

Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities as defined in Part 2 of the ESG on a regular basis. They should have clear and explicit goals and objectives that are part of their publicly available mission statement. These should translate into the daily work of the agency. Agencies should ensure the involvement of stakeholders in their governance and work.

Evidence

ECTE engages in external quality assurance activities on a regular basis and has in fact done so for the past 40 years since the late 1970s. Among its currently 76 member organizations, 36 have been accredited by ECTE itself (the other member institutions usually have been accredited by their national authorities/accreditation agencies).

In ECTE´s projection for 2021, 10 accreditation procedures will be executed, seven of them cyclical review visits (reaccreditations), and 3 new accreditation requests. For 2022-2024, the overall projected number of accreditations amounts to 6, 7 and 15 respectively with a rising trend.

In the discussions, ECTE representatives emphasize that among the three goals of the network (accreditation, networking, development), the first one is by far the most prominent of all activities, 90% of the organizational focus is being put on EQA activities according to its own account. The representatives of the ECTE clearly see the provision of External QA for their members as the most important service. In the Strategic Plan of the ECTE, there is clear aspiration to further develop into a more mature accreditation agency.

The leadership as well as member organizations and stakeholder representatives emphasize, that the EQAR review and the aspired listing in the EQAR has been identified as a necessary step to further upgrade its EQA activities, its standing in the community, the service for its member institutions and the trust in the sector.

The goals and objectives of the QAA activities are accurately described on the website of ECTE as in the scope of the agencies work. The main elements of ECTE´s work can be summarized as follows:

- ECTE is offering its accreditation services exclusively to its members. Non-member organizations cannot ask to be institutionally or programme accredited.

- Membership in ECTE on the other hand is not connected to the requirement of being accredited by ECTE, roughly two thirds of ECTE members are either accredited by other national authorities or do not dispose of an accreditation status.

- ECTE offers as alternative to a formal accreditation review procedure a shortened membership review which in some cases assumes the function of a precursor to more detailed and in-depth accreditation procedures.

Recently the accreditation system underwent a number of important changes, a transition from the "old" to the "new system". Prior to 2020, institutional and programme accreditation by ECTE were conducted together in one combined procedure. Only in the course of last year, the system changed: now and in the future, there will be first an institutional review. In case of success, the institutionally accredited ECTE members subsequently can then ask for a programme accreditation.

Whereas the "old accreditation system" in many aspects was in obvious non- conformity with the ESG, the organization has worked hard in the past two years to fully align with the ESG. In the old system, there was also not a clear distinction between EQA and other fields of work, the fine line between consultancy and accreditation at times blurred.

The ECTE has stated on its website its mission and vision statement as well as the main goals and objectives of the organization. The mission of ECTE accordingly contains the following two core objectives: "to assist evangelical theological education in Europe to become and to be 'fit for purpose' and to "equip the church for God's mission".

Further Goals and objectives expressed in the ECTE's Mission statement are the following:

- **Excellence and fitness for purpose**. The ECTE's entire network of people and services should strive for excellence, aiming at fitness for purpose in all that God has put into our care.

- **Evangelical**. The ECTE is privileged to serve the entire Evangelical Church community and to inspire by its example its institutions to work in harmony with all evangelicals for God's greater glory. The ECTE, in the spirit of the European Evangelical Alliance, respects denominational particularities and traditions, but considers them as secondary to the fundamentals of the Christian faith. The ECTE seek to maintain a balance between clear beliefs held under the Lordship of Christ and an attitude of "gentleness and respect" (1 Peter 3:16) towards all those outside of the evangelical tradition.

- **Contextual and Relevant**. The ECTE network, located in Europe with its own particular history and context, should serve its constituency in light of the uniqueness and needs of today's European peoples and cultures, while meeting the highest European educational standards. Located in Europe, in a climate of religious and social diversity and freedoms and serious challenges to the Christian faith, the ECTE also exists to meet the diverse leadership needs of the European churches and ministries by empowering and encouraging evangelical theological training institutions in our network.

- **Missional.** The ECTE does not conceive evangelical theological education as an end in itself, but rather as a means for contributing to the kingdom of God in Europe and beyond through the qualitative and quantitative growth of the Church in Europe. The ECTE believes that theological education must not only produce knowledge and understanding in the minds of students, but also a deep spiritual, life-changing impact that will prepare graduates for effective service and healthy Christian living. The ECTE also believes that European churches and ministries will benefit as evangelical institutions of higher and vocational theological education collaborate and network more closely.

- **Flexible and Developing**. The ECTE is committed to assisting its member institutions in adapting to the innovations within higher and vocational education in Europe and to the changing needs of the evangelical community and the world they are called to serve. The ECTE is also committed to assisting its member institutions in creating a flexible and developing network that will respond to needs and opportunities as they arise.
- **Accountable**. The ECTE does not accredit on behalf of itself, but on behalf of the evangelical churches of Europe, seeking to encourage the training of workers and leaders in response to the needs and ideas of the evangelical community in Europe, while recognising the dynamic input and contributions of evangelical theological institutions to those churches. The ECTE also seeks to remain accountable to the standards and guidelines for quality in higher and vocational education in Europe.

As regards the aspect of stakeholder involvement in their operations, ECTE´s SAR as well as the interviews conducted are testimony to the fact that ECTE is striving to open and broaden the organization. There is a self-proclaimed drive to involve non-church constituents as well as women to a greater degree in the activities of the organization. In the ECTE´s Self-Assessment Report one can read (p. 23): "It (ECTE) has noticed that females are underrepresented in the VET members list and that employers, and other stakeholders are outnumbered by academics." ECTE commits itself to working on these reforms by inviting additional persons with varying educational and professional backgrounds to join the VET members list as well as bodies. A "stakeholder involvement" plan is listing the necessary steps to this regard.

Analysis

The experts take note of the fact that external quality assurance is indeed the raison d´étre of the ECTE and the core activity of the organization. Related goals and objectives are publicly available and accessible to all stakeholders of the ECTE. They also form part of the mission statement of the organization.

The experts however observe that the mission and vision statement is rather narrow given the variety of educational needs and occupational aspirations of the student populations ECTE members are seeking to serve. According to its own survey results among its student intake, the ECTE and its institutions are serving a student population that is diverse in the following sense:

Only around one-third of its graduates is seeking a profession in a European church or in a ministry, another third is looking for occupation in the non-profit charity, social work or in the educational sphere and one third is enrolled for reasons of personal development. Against this background, the "missional part" of the mission statement in the experts´ opinion seems to be too dominant whereas the "flexible and developing aspect" rather underrepresented in the opinion of the experts.

This imbalance is also reflected in the stakeholder composition of ECTE membership and bodies: ECTE in the past has not managed to engage the "non-church" employment sector to the aspired degree. This applies e.g. for the composition of the currently "limited" ECTE pool of experts/reviewers, which then translates also in the composition of ECTE´s Visiting Evaluation teams, where more representatives of future employers of theological graduates (outside the churches) are needed. The experts positively note that ECTE has identified reforms in this regard as a matter of priority and is in the very process of implementing a stakeholder recruitment policy that should broaden stakeholder involvement in the future. This also applies to an active recruitment of women in the future. The panel recommends to quickly implement the full range of its Stakeholder Involvement Plan with a focus to increase the participation of outside the core church community and to increase the number of non-

church representatives and women in the ranks of their organizational bodies as well as Visiting Evaluation Teams. This point is taken up again under ESG 2.2.

The experts also appreciate ECTE´s new awareness of putting in place a clear distinction between External Quality Assurance and other fields of work, such as consultancy. In the discussion with the ECTE, the panel learns that in the old system a clear separation between consultancy and subsequent accreditation was not in all cases fully observed. In the "new system", this should no longer materialize, as in order to avoid any issues of independence, the ECTE recently suspended its occasional consultancy services. The panel strongly supports this decision to heave a clear distinction between consultancy and general activities towards members in terms of development (the 3rd goal of ECTE) to which there is no objection.

The panel notes that the ECTE is also accrediting programmes, which are not covered by the ESG (e.g. programmes such as a Certificates in Theology, Diploma in Theology or the Postgraduate Certificate in Theology, which can be found in Appendix A of the Standards and Guidelines). In case that the ECTE accredit institutions, which are not "higher education institutions" in the sense of the ESG, and programmes which are belonging to the category of post-secondary courses/programmes., this should be clearly differentiated on its website.

Panel commendations

- The panel commends ECTE for providing External Quality Assurance/Accreditation Services as a much-needed service to its theological schools and programmes which in many instances are not able to secure this service in the national higher education contexts.
- Due to its nature as a European /international network, the composition of ECTE bodies and commissions brings together international experts from many different countries with many positive side effects for the organizational culture of ECTE.

Panel recommendations

- The panel recommends that ECTE is rebalancing the "missional part" of the mission statement with the "flexible and developing aspect" which currently is underrepresented.
- The panel advises the ECTE to clearly separate accreditations of higher education programmes on the level of Bachelor and Master programmes from those on the post-secondary level.

Panel suggestions for further improvement

- The panel encourages the ECTE offering its accreditation services to non-member organizations.

Panel conclusion: Substantially compliant

ESG 3.2 OFFICIAL STATUS

Standard:
Agencies should have an established legal basis and should be formally recognised as quality assurance agencies by competent public authorities.

Evidence

ECTE is a quality assurance network serving evangelical theological institutions operating at tertiary level primarily in Europe and furthermore in some parts of the Middle East.

The Association operates under the name "European Council for Theological Education", abbreviated as ECTE. The Association has its legal address in Korntal-Münchingen, Germany and is registered in the German registry of non-profit organisations (Registration Number VR 201286). ECTE is a non-profit organization, its purpose the promotion of religion and education. This is achieved both at home and abroad, in particular by:

- promoting and securing the quality of the theological training of the member institutes based on uniform standards
- promoting and supporting the development of theological training primarily in Europe through publications, conferences, training and the provision of further resources
- strengthening the significance of evangelical theological education through the networking of the members among themselves, with European higher education, with international theological education and with churches.

The association pursues exclusively and directly non-profit purposes within the meaning of the section "Tax Beneficiary Purposes" of the German Tax Rules & Regulations. The association does not pursue primarily economic purposes. Funds of the Association may be used only for the purposes stated in the statutes.

The ECTE publishes a description of its official status and identification as a cross-border QA agency on its website.

Apart from being registered as a non-profit organization according to German regulations, ECTE is also member of a number of important international organization. Since 2005, the ECTE has been recognized as a member by the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) and has become an affiliate member of ENQA in 2007.

The ECTE also has important connections with the wider international world of theological education. It is a founding member of ICETE in 1980, which has become the established forum for dialogue and cooperation among evangelical theological educators internationally. ICETE has also taken a leading role in fostering renewal and excellence in evangelical theological education globally (through its ICETE Academy). ICETE is a Global Partner within the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA).

Analysis

ECTE status as a German registered non-profit organization provides the basis for offering external quality assurance to institutions and programmes. Competent authorities recognise ECTE as a legitimate QA agency. The panel finds the ECTE well-connected in its discipline with other regional/continental accreditation networks in the field.

In the discussion with stakeholders during the audit, it becomes apparent that member institutions of the ECTE are keen that their mother body also is successful in being listed on the EQAR register of recognized accreditation agencies as a means to further increase its international recognition and to upgrade its standing in the sector. This is of particular importance as for HEIs in some countries there is no other way of obtaining official recognition within their country and internationally.

Panel conclusion: fully compliant

ESG 3.3 INDEPENDENCE

Standard:
Agencies should be independent and act autonomously. They should have full responsibility for their operations and the outcomes of those operations without third party influence.

Evidence

The ECTE presents a policy in which its organizational independence from other bodies, its full responsibility for its operations and outcomes in the absence of external influence or interference from institutions that are the beneficiaries of accreditation or from other stakeholders is clearly stated.

The ECTE Statutes furthermore entails a governance distinction between the General Assembly of member institutions and the ECTE Council, assuring that the former does not interfere with the accreditation decisions of the latter.

Peer experts (VET members) are selected, recruited, nominated and deployed by the ECTE Council independently from third parties such as higher education institutions, governments and other stakeholders. Institutions being evaluated have no direct influence on the evaluators and VET members involved in a substantial way with an institution will be excluded from site visits to that institution for at least 5 years following their involvement. After discussions, the panel learns that it is not the ECTE Council, but the review coordinator as a staff member who in his own responsibility selects the members of the VETs.

VETs make recommendations to the ECTE Council by means of written Review Reports following on-site visits, but do not participate in the accreditation decision-making processes. ECTE Council members participating in a site visit will refrain from discussion and do not participate in the accreditation decision related to the reviewed institution. The panel takes note of the fact that when it comes to the fulfilment of requirements and recommendations, it is the quality assurance coordinator (QAC) by himself who makes a decision about these without involvement of the experts. The QAC also is in charge of evaluating and commenting on the Annual Progress Reports (APR) handed in by the reviewed institutions to present evidence of improvement within the institution/programme.

The ECTE also informs the panel that anyone contributing to external quality assurance activities of ECTE (e.g. as expert) is informed that they are acting in a personal capacity and are not representing their constituent organisations when working for ECTE. All ECTE Council members, staff and VET members commit to independence by signing the no conflict of interest and intolerance prevention statement. These forms are regularly monitored.

In 2020, in order to avoid possible issues of independence, the ECTE suspended occasional consultancy activities. However, as indicated in section 3.3 above, the ECTE still has other activities beyond quality assurance and that includes networking and development. Specific policies in the Independence and Conflict of Interest Policy are in place to safeguard independence between the ECTE's quality assurance activities and these other activities.

Analysis

The panel is of the opinion that the ECTE has anchored the aspect of organizational independence appropriately in its official documents. Measures are in place to safeguard the agencies work from third parties, such as higher educational institutions and other stakeholder organisations. As a transnational organization, ECTE is largely immune against interventions from national governments.

The panel is however concerned by the distribution of tasks related to the accreditation procedure in some areas, which touch on the issue of independence. They see that individuals might take undue influence on the decision-making process. They note in that regard, that it is currently the exclusive privilege of the (new) review secretary to choose suitable experts for the various accreditation procedures and to identify the team leaders. The tasks mentioned above are routinely considered being the task of a selection committee or an accreditation commission, but not of an individual. This point is taken up again under ESG 2.4.

Another concern relates to the functions and authority of the ECTE´s Quality Assurance Officer, next to the Review Secretary another important resource person with considerable power and responsibilities. The QAR has the authority to officially release/open the procedure. He is also the person in charge of receiving the annual progress reports and responding on his own authority to the Institutions handing them in in spite of the fact that he did not participate in the reviews and thus has no first-hand knowledge related to the executed accreditation procedures. The panel learns that the Quality Assurance Officer and in some instances the Council is deciding about the fulfilment of requirements without involvement of the Visiting Evaluation Team or any other body such as an accreditation commission. This topic also relates to ESG 2.3 Implementing Processes and the Follow-Up Processes.

A central concern is related to the composition and the manifold and overlapping functions of the ECTE Council which is at the same time engaged in operational activities (hiring employees e.g.), assuming the role of a governing body while also simultaneously assuming the role of an accreditation commission. Some of the problematic overlaps are vested in the fact that staff persons are formal member of the Council with voting rights. Council Members also participate as VET members in site-visits (even if they refrain from discussion and do not participate in the accreditation decision related to the interested institution). The panel identifies this structure as a potential source of conflicts of interest and comes in summary the following conclusions:

Panel recommendations

- The Panel recommends restructuring the composition and functions of the ECTE´s Council. Members of the Council should abstain from becoming part of the Visiting Evaluation Teams. Staff Members of ECTE should not be simultaneously voting members of the Council.
- The ECTE should consider the establishment of an independent accreditation commission, which is in charge of collectively organizing the accreditation process including the composition of the Visiting Evaluation Teams, the decision-making and the follow-up processes.
- Members and Team Leaders of the Visiting Evaluations teams should be selected collectively by an appropriate body and not by an individual.
- The members of the respective VETs and potentially the accreditation commission should be involved in the decision making process whether a requirement or recommendation has been fulfilled.

Panel conclusion: Partially Compliant

ESG 3.4 THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Standard:

Agencies should regularly publish reports that describe and analyse the general findings of their external quality assurance activities.

Evidence

ECTE by its own account only recently started fully attending to this particular exigency of the European Standards and Guidelines. There have been some precursors in the years before, albeit more in the sense of general publications in the field of interest (examples in case are publications such as "The Challenges of Quality in Theological Education" or "European Government and Theological Education: where is the Bologna Process Going?" or "Developing Alumni Programmes" etc.).

Two years ago, following a formal discussion in the ECTE Council the so-called "Thematic Analysis Strategic Plan" was passed. This Plan lists a considerable array of different topics, which will be/ could be subject to a Thematic Analysis in the period until 2025. Among the proposed topics figure themes such as:

Trends in rating the most critical areas of the ECTE Standards and Guidelines collected every year from APRs (system-wide analysis)", trends toward online delivery post COVID-19 etc., trends in models of blended learning etc. Some of the proposed topics have a clear connection to some of the ESG such as trends in vigilance against academic fraud (ESG 1.1), the involvement of students, alumni and other stakeholders in international programme design (1.2) etc..

In terms of rhythm, the ECTE representatives state that they will identify a minimum of one topic in June of every year. In the succeeding year, follow-up actions from the previous thematic analysis are discussed. The chosen topics will on the one hand be debated with member institutions and on the other hand be part of the reporting obligations in the yearly Annual Progress Reports (APRs), which have to be submitted by the accredited Higher Education Institutions every year. In concrete terms, this procedure was first successfully implemented in 2020, when the first three pieces of thematic analysis were published on "Development of Teaching Staff", "Gender Distribution in Theological Education" and "Peer Expert Perspectives".

ECTE explained to the panel the implementation of its approach taking the "Development of Teaching Staff" topic as an example. As part of the thematic analysis, ECTE thus requested it members and its accredited institutions to report on teaching staff developments in their 2021 APR as well as requesting the submission from all schools of their teaching developments plans for discussions in autumn of 2021. In addition, ECTE´s Visiting Evaluation Teams subsequently have been requested to pay particular attention to this area during visits this year to close the quality circle.

Analysis

The experts positively note that ECTE recently has passed a Thematic Analysis Plan systematically directing its attention to the necessity of critically reflecting on the outcomes of its activities. While it is true that the ECTE is still in the process of developing a routine for its Thematic analyses in a more regular fashion, ECTE nevertheless has to be commended on the organization on the principal design as exemplified by its best practice "Development of Teaching staff" analysis. Here the panel sees the quality circle closed in an exemplary fashion:

The topic first is identified and decided upon in the Council and endorsed by membership assembly of ECTE. The ECTE then obliges its member organizations to comment on their reforms/activities in this area, using the interim Annual Progress Reports requested from each accredited institution every year

as an instrument to learn about the impact of its findings. In addition, they sensitized the accreditation review teams to pay particular attention to this perceived area of improvement.

The experts take note of the existence of more than a dozen different themes that are scheduled to be executed in the 2021-2025 time-period. It should however be further specified, how these different topics are prioritized and when exactly they are executed in the mid- and long turn.

Panel commendations

- The panel commends the ECTE for its Thematic analysis plan and the excellent design of these activities. The use of mandatory Annual Progress Reports on the part of accredited institutions as a tool to monitor progress and to analyse sector-wide developments is laudable.

Panel suggestions for further improvement

- The panel suggests that the ECTE Council and the General Assembly more systematically identify in advance the topics for the upcoming next years, prioritizing the manifold areas of analysis listed.

Panel conclusion: Fully Compliant

ESG 3.5 RESOURCES

Standard:
Agencies should have adequate and appropriate resources, both human and financial, to carry out their work.

During the review and the virtual on-site visit, the experts discussed with the colleagues from ECTE the status quo as well as the plans for upgrading its human, financial and physical resources.

Evidence

Human Resources

Current human resources of ECTE includes a staff team (six persons), a pool of peer experts (25 VET members) and the ECTE Council.

As regards ***staff resources***, the ECTE in the past 40 years relied to a considerable degree on the contributions of voluntary personnel. It traditionally disposes of a very small number of part time staff, which usually are holding other (full or part time) jobs aside. Currently the ECTE staff team is composed of six part time staff members with the following denominations, job descriptions and workload:

The General Secretary is employed under a part time service contract. In his job description, the following functions are listed:

The General Secretary provides leadership as C.E.O., holds archives with documentation and manages general correspondence, prepares, organises and follows-up annual Council meetings as an ex officio member (voice but nor vote) and is in charge of organizing the biennial General Assembly of the association. In addition, he maintains and develops the website of the organization as well as the membership and accreditation databases. He coordinates and manages staff meetings, produces draft documents for policy and procedures for Council approval and provides QA advice to schools on procedural matters of accreditation as requested. Furthermore, he coordinates connections of the ECTE with other networks,

In addition, ECTE employs a so-called **Quality Assurance Coordinator** who oversees all accreditation activities and chairs the accreditation "working group" within the ECTE Council. He is presented as being the 'gatekeeper' of ECTE standards, preparing the accreditation agenda for the Council, overseeing its accreditation decisions as well as their follow up. He is the contact person for accreditation applications, authorizes visits and is in charge of follow-up on all matters of accreditation with the institutions. He also is responsible for examining APRs, participates in all Council and General Assembly meetings (voice and vote).

A new position that was only established less than a year ago is that of the **Review Secretary**. The Review Secretary oversees all accreditation visits, coordinates the Visitation Evaluation Teams (VET) and overseas the production and publication of accreditation review reports. He is in charge of organizing and participating (currently remotely) in site visits. He assembles briefs and manages VETs, monitors the quality of site visits and feedback, oversees the production of review reports and submits them to the ECTE Council. He has been hired to manage the quality of VETs, oversees the breath of perspectives in VETs and facilitates recruitment. He is accountable to the Council for work-related issues (but not for the content of the review reports).

The fourth Staff position for ECTE is that of the **Treasurer**. The Treasurer is responsible for the ECTE budget. She prepares and presents budgets and financial reports to the Council and then to the General Assembly, makes sure that all financial transactions are properly executed and documented. She invoices institutions for membership, accreditation and visitation fees, disburses honoraria and expense reimbursements and is accountable to the Council.

Finally, there is the function of an **Administrative Assistant** responsible for the production and mailing of ECTE student certificates to institutions and for holding a database of graduating students receiving the certificates.

Apart from these part time staff, there are (part time) staff hired for a specific one-time job assignment. An example in case it the so-called **External Review Manager**, who has been hired to prepare for and to oversee ECTE external reviews (in this case the EQAR ESG listing procedure). She produces SAR for external reviews, coordinates site visits for external reviews and monitors the follow up on requirements and recommendations.

In spite of having six part time staff members nominally on its payroll, the ECTE employs only 1 Full Time Equivalent. The total estimated hours/FTE per staff correspondingly are as follows:

for the General Secretary: 750h/year 0,41 FTE, for the Quality Assurance Coordinator: 250h/year 0,15 FTE, for the Review Secretary: 300h/year 0,16 FTE, for the Treasurer 95h/year 0,05 FTE , for the External Review Manager 300h/year 0,16 FTE and for the Administrative Assistant 95h/year 0,05 FTE, in sum one full staff equivalent.

In the Self-Assessment Report and during the review, the experts learn that additional staff can be appointed/subtracted by the ECTE Council and remunerated according to need. All subcontracts are regulated by no-conflict of interest and independence clauses. Tasks directly related to accreditation and review activities are excluded. In 2020, for example, the digital scanning of the ECTE paper-based archives was outsourced.

As regards ECTE´s pool of experts (the members of the so-called Visiting Evaluation Teams), it is currently composed of 25 VET members with a variety of educational and occupational background. Finally, there is the ECTE Council, including the Governing Board, comprised of 7 members, representing a variety of stakeholders and language groups.

Financial Resources

On request of the experts, ECTE has provided the following two budget tables, describing the income and expenses for the past three years and giving a projection until 2025:

Income

Projections of future per-student-fee income is based on a conservative average of 10 students, since the size of schools varies widely.

Year	Income total***	Members only		Accredited Schools		per student fee		Fees (visits)*	
	€	€	%	€	%	€	%	€	%
2019	61583,18	16275,00	26,43	29221,00	47,45	12614,00	20,48	3473,18	5,64
2020	70771,50	13650,00	19,29	23947,50	33,84	31174,00	44,05	2000,00	2,83
2021**	130550,00	16100,00	12,33	31950,00	24,47	60000,00	45,96	22500,00	17,23
2022	140050,00	16100,00	11,5	31950,00	22,81	78500,00	56,05	13500,00	9,64
2023	142050,00	16100,00	11,33	31950,00	22,49	78500,00	55,26	15500,00	10,91
2024	165350,00	17500,00	10,58	33850,00	20,47	80500,00	48,68	33500,00	20,26
2025	152300,00	18550,00	12,18	35750,00	23,47	82500,00	54,17	15500,00	10,18
2026	178300,00	21350,00	11,97	38450,00	21,56	85000,00	47,67	33500,00	18,79
2027	174950,00	23100,00	13,2	40350,00	23,06	87000,00	49,73	24500,00	14,00

* Income for site visits are based on the assumption that half of the visits will be on-site, the other half online.

** The approved budget (in 2019) was calculated on the lower fees of site-visits at the time- this projection is based on the current fee schedule approved by the GA in 2019.

*** Total income includes membership fees, fees accredited schools and visitation-fees.

Expenses

Personnel cost is calculated at €20/hour, assuming that on average 150 workhours are needed per review.

Current (2021) available workhours as budgeted are sufficient to sustain up to seven reviews per year. Additional visits will increase budgeted personnel expenses in 2021. This expense will be offset by visitation fees, thus not affecting the bottom line.

Year	Expenses total*	Transfer to VET-Teams**	Personnel	
	€	€	€	%
2019	37942,46	-	23732,90	62,55
2020	49390,99	-	35970,10	72,83
2021	93860,00	15000,00	58860,00	62,71
2022	96880,00	9000,00	65880,00	68,00
2023	105400,00	10500,00	72900,00	69,17
2024	134950,00	22500,00	90450,00	67,02
2025	105400,00	10500,00	72900,00	69,17
2026	134950,00	22500,00	90450,00	67,02
2027	125440,00	16500,00	86940,00	69,31

* Total expenses include all costs except for General Assembly.

** This transfer refers to travel costs and honorariums for VET-members. The amount is included in the total expenses.

These budget figures reveal the following:

ECTE disposes of a limited, however rapidly growing budget. Whereas in 2019 the total income of the organization amounted to a little more than 60000 EUR, the income for the current budget year is scheduled to more than double to 130000 EUR. This increase is projected to continue albeit with a reduced speed. For the budget year 2027, the projected income is in the order of 170000 EUR.

The notable increase in financial income is due to the introduction of a new fee structure by ECTE for its two main sources of income, on the one hand, membership fees (20%) and on the other hand accreditation fees (80%).

As regards the first source of income it is furthermore important to note, that two different rates apply for members, depending on the fact whether they have been accredited by ECTE or not:

The non-accredited "members only" solely pay an annual membership fee of 350 EUR, an amount that remains unchanged also for the coming years. For accredited members by contrast, the fee structure prior to 2021 foresees an amount of 650 EUR annually for institutional accreditation, 150 per accredited program as well as 10 for each student in the accredited institution.

The General Assembly of the ECTE at the end of 2020, recognizing the need to stabilize and increase the financial underpinning of the organization, unanimously voted in favour of a new financial scheme. In the framework of this new financial model, the first two figures remain the same, the amount for enrolled students in accredited programs however has been significantly raised from 10 EUR to 30 EUR (2020), 40 EUR (2021), and 50 (2022). This adaption in the "per student fee" has been one of the decisive factor in doubling the income of ECTE in the current financial year 2021. Putting these three elements together translates in an income of around 10-15000 EUR for each accredited institution over the course of the accreditation period of 5 years depending on its size.

The other factor is that in the coming year the number of new accreditation visits as well as the upcoming cyclical reviews is projected to increase generating additional income in the process. A potential listing of the ECTE in the EQAR is also seen as a driving factor in surpassing these goals.

Concerning the expenses side, the figures for the current budget year foresee an amount of around 94000 EUR, which is scheduled to increase to around 125000 EUR in 2027, projecting a positive balance for each year to come in the range of 30-50000 EUR. The main items on the expenses side relate to staff resources, which consume close to 70% of the income, as well as the remuneration of the members of the VET teams.

After the visit, the experts asked for more information on the financial reserves, which were subsequently provided by ECTE. ECTE, according to these figures, has financial reserves of around 150000 EUR.

Physical and Operational Resources

ECTE, in spite of being registered in Germany, is operating from different offices throughout Europe. The General Secretary e.g. is working out of Rome, the Chair of the Council is located in Switzerland, other staff members of ECTE are spread around the world. Given its nature as a cross-border agency, ECTE does not have a dedicated office space but operates out of the offices of each staff member in different countries of Europe. This according to ECTE´s account entails a substantial investment in IQA resource, digital communication tools, cloud storage and data security provisions, a functional website and access to a Moodle-based virtual learning environment.

Analysis

As regards the analysis of the human resource capacities of the ECTE, the panel commends ECTE on its long history as a volunteering association. In the past as well as in the present the organization largely relied and relies on the contribution of volunteers, who provide much needed services to ECTE and kept and keep the organization going. Also today, only a very small number of part time employees are on the payroll of ECTE assuming core functions outlined above, but in summary, as documented in the SAR and evidenced in the interviews, ECTE has no more than one Full Time Staff Equivalent. The expenses of professional staff in the current budget year 2021 correspondingly amount to around 50000 EUR.

The experts take note of the fact, that roughly a year ago, in a drive to further professionalize its services, ECTE has hired for the first time a permanent review secretary, who is now working as a programme manager and in this function assists in executing the accreditation procedures in a consistent and efficient manner. Given the fact, however, that the newly appointed staff is only employed on a part-time basis, further investment in this area is advisable, given the fact that the number of accreditation procedures is scheduled to increase in the future in line with ECTE´s Strategic Plan. During the interviews, it furthermore becomes evident that the review manager is not able to attend all accreditation related meetings (virtual or on site) in person, in spite of the fact that he is in charge of compiling and finalizing the full report on the basis of the input of the Visiting Team.

The experts conclude that the transition from an organizationbased largely on voluntary contributions to a professionally working accreditation body requires further sustained professional support. In its Self-Assessment Report, the ECTE points to its Strategic Plan, outlining intensions and provision to secure viability and sustainability. This Strategic Plan foresees three phases: "consolidation and capacity building", "retention and recruiting" and "improvement and increase". It is furthermore mentioned, that "currently the budgeted amount for staff remuneration is not being fully activated, thus providing a cushion for this current work-intensive period." The expert group commends the ECTE on the enthusiasm of its current staff. Given the challenges ahead, taking into account the aspirations of the

Strategic Plan, and having in view the current age structure of the employees, the ASIIN experts nevertheless see a definite necessity to increase professional staff capacity in the future as is the plan of the ECTE itself.

Concerning the availability the quantity and quality of qualified experts that compose ECTE´s Visiting Evaluation Teams, further diversifying the ECTE´s expert pool would benefit the organization.

As regards the analysis of the financial standing and perspectives, the panel recognizes that the decisions by the General Assembly at the end of last year have been instrumental in significantly improving the final situation already in the current financial year. In combination with the projected (slight) increase in new members as well as in the considerable increase of new and cyclical accreditations, the basis is laid for financial stability and for hiring new personnel and to move gradually to an organization with more permanent staff. The experts conclude that the financial reserves and the change in the income structure is sufficient to guarantee sustainable operations of ECTE in the future.

As regards the analysis of the physical operational resource, the panel comes to the conclusion, that ECTE´s model of relying on office space of its staff members (including the members of the Council) while at the same time saving money for an expensive Central Head Office provides the necessary physical resources. The operational resources in terms of IT infrastructure are also sufficient to operate as a transnational entity.

Panel commendations

- The panel commends the ECTE on its long tradition of securing voluntary contributions from member organizations that have been instrumental in running the ECTE organization during the past 40 years.

Panel recommendations

- The panel recommends, that ECTE further invests in upgrading its staff capacities in line with its Strategic Plan and in its quest to further professionalize and extend its accreditation services.
- The panel recommends further increasing the number of experts and diversifying the profile of its expert's pool.

Panel conclusion: Substantially compliant

ESG 3.6 INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AND PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

Standard:
Agencies should have in place processes for internal quality assurance related to defining, assuring and enhancing the quality and integrity of their activities.

Evidence

According to its own account, ECTE is relatively new to systematic development and implementation of its IQA instruments and actions. The quest to undergo this review procedure however has jumpstarted an impressive array of activities designed to fully implementing a sound Internal Quality Assurance System in line with the ESG.

The ECTE's published definition of quality in professional accreditation serves as the "umbrella" for all subsequent IQA reforms. The notion is defined as "a set of well-regulated activities that take place in line with published standards, policies and processes for the ongoing monitoring, evaluation and

enhancement of educational institutions and programmes." The ECTE moreover has defined a set of core values defining its underlying commitment to quality assurance and integrity.

This has been the starting point for its thorough and extensive review processes in recent years resulting in a complete revision of key documents, including the meanwhile 7th edition of the current Standards and Guidelines and Criteria and Procedures for accreditation (2019). This has been complemented by a revised set of policy documents, including policies for appeals and complaints, consistency guarantee, data protection, independence, conflict of interest and intolerance prevention. Furthermore, upgraded staff, stakeholder involvement and extension, student council member, thematic analysis, VET development as well as visitation feedback policies have been passed and implemented.

The ECTE continuously monitors its internal quality assurance through the Monitoring and Improvement Policy. The policy entails data and feedback collection and monitoring through the Annual Internal Review, Improvement and Monitoring Council session (AIRIM) and cyclical external monitoring. The policy lays out specific monitoring questions that correspond to ESG 2 and 3. This includes a general review of compliance to QA policies, compliance to stated goals and objectives, strategic plans and progress, activities, scope and daily work, staff reviews, stakeholder involvement, visitation feedback, VET composition and improvement, external review outcome and plans, operational and human resources, revision of key facts, reports on thematic analysis, budget analysis, appeals and complaints statistics etc..

A yearly Annual Internal Review, Improvement and Monitoring Report is published with indications of areas of weakness and improvement and corresponding action points. The action points are followed up during the year and reported on in the successive AIRIM exercise. The AIRIM was conducted for the first time to monitor the year 2020. Corresponding improvement strategies as of March 2021 are now being regularly introduced, discussed and approved by the ECTE Council.

Analysis

After reviewing the Internal Quality Handbook of ECTE and the various components of its IQA system, the experts are impressed by much has been achieved with limited manpower by the contributions of its members and stakeholder in the course of the past years. Notwithstanding the fact, that not all action lines have been established on a routine basis the experts commend ECTE on this enormous progress. In an overall judgement, the experts conclude that ECTE´s IQA is well developed with a noticeable number of best practice examples and that persons involved on the side of ECTE are competent and act professionally and ethically. There are multiple evidences that IQA and EQA feedback mechanisms lead to a continuous improvement within the agency. The ECTE procedures guard against intolerance of any kind of discrimination, are clearly communicated and publicly accessible. While the most important internal quality assurance processes are in place, they are however still rather scattered and further reflection is needed with regard to who takes the outcomes of the processes forward – some of them might be best taken care of by the accreditation commission to be formed.

Another important area of attention has been the revision of the review reports. According to its own account, the ECTE reports in the past were lacking in completeness and consistency. This has been one of the reasons, why ECTE has hired a professional review manager to support the Visiting Evaluation Teams in drafting and finalizing the reports. After a SWOT analysis was conducted and in spring of 2020, the new review report template in the Guidelines for Site visits has been passed by the ECTE Council. The winter of 2020-2021 witnessed the first production and publication of a full review report in the new format. This exercise now needs to be fully implemented in the upcoming review cycle.

Panel commendations

- The panel commends ECTE´s staff and Council for its success in the thorough revision of its Internal Quality Assurance Systems, policy documents, criteria and procedures,

Panel recommendations

- In spite of the fact that all IQA processes are in place they are still rather scattered and it should further be clarified who is in charge and takes the processes forward.

Panel conclusion: Substantially compliant

ESG 3.7 CYCLICAL EXTERNAL REVIEW OF AGENCIES

Standard:

Agencies should undergo an external review at least once every five years in order to demonstrate their compliance with the ESG.

Evidence

The first attempts to undergo an external review date back to the year 2009, when for the first time the organization considered to become an ENQA members and being listed on the EQAR.

After an initial preparation phase the organization came to the conclusion that is was not yet ready and postponed the cyclical review. In 2018 however, the issue came to the forefront of ECTE´s strategic agenda and a systematic approach was chosen as described in other parts of this report. In a systematic manner, a self-review as conducted regarding ECTE´s compliance with the ESG and almost 80 areas identified where reforms and further activities needed to be implemented. A task force was established to prepare ECTE for a EQAR review with a long preparation phase.

Analysis

The experts commend ECTE on the tremendous effort and its strategic approach in performing a thorough internal compliance review regarding multiple action lines to secure compliance with the ESG. This is all the more impressive, as it has been a voluntary process involving many stakeholder groups of the ECTE while operating with very little permanent staff in the process.

Panel conclusion: Fully compliant

ESG PART 2: EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

ESG 2.1 CONSIDERATION OF INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

Standard:

External quality assurance should address the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part 1 of the ESG.

Evidence

As a subject specific quality assurance agency, the ECTE makes use of two sets of standards. On the one hand, it has defined general accreditation criteria related to the accreditation of institutions, Part A, as well as separate general criteria for the accreditation of programmes Part B of the key document Standards and Guidelines for ECTE accreditation. On the other hand, additional disciplinary criteria,

the sector-specific ICETE Standards and Guidelines for Global Evangelical Theological Education (SG-GETE) also are used in its accreditation procedures.

In the Self-Assessment Report and during the discussions with the panel, the ECTE representatives provide evidence of a mapping exercise, which mirrors its general accreditation criteria part A and B with the ESG 1. The ECTE Standards and Guidelines 'Part A: Institutional Standards' (A1-A6) cover 6 standards and 29 explicatory guidelines. In line with these standards, institutions applying for an ECTE accreditation are requested to demonstrate compliance of its internal quality assurance system *to a subgroup of standards of ESG 1*. The demonstrated mapping is related to the ESG Criteria 1.1, 1.5, 1.6., 1.7, 1.8 and 1.10., whereas the ESG criteria 1.2, 1.3 and 1.9 are not covered. By the same token, ECTE presented a mapping exercise regarding its programme accreditation procedures as depicted in ´PART B" of its Standards; here again a subgroup of ESG criteria, namely 1.2, 1.2., 1.4 and 1.9 are covered. In summary and conclusion, the ESG have been spread across two separate documents and are thoroughly checked in the combined institutional and programme review, which used to be in place in the ECTE´s "old accreditation system" set up prior to 2020.

In 2020 however, the ECTE moved to its "new system", in which its member institutions can choose and can contract an institutional or a programme review separately. In such a case, part of the European Standard and Guidelines would not be checked in their entirety.

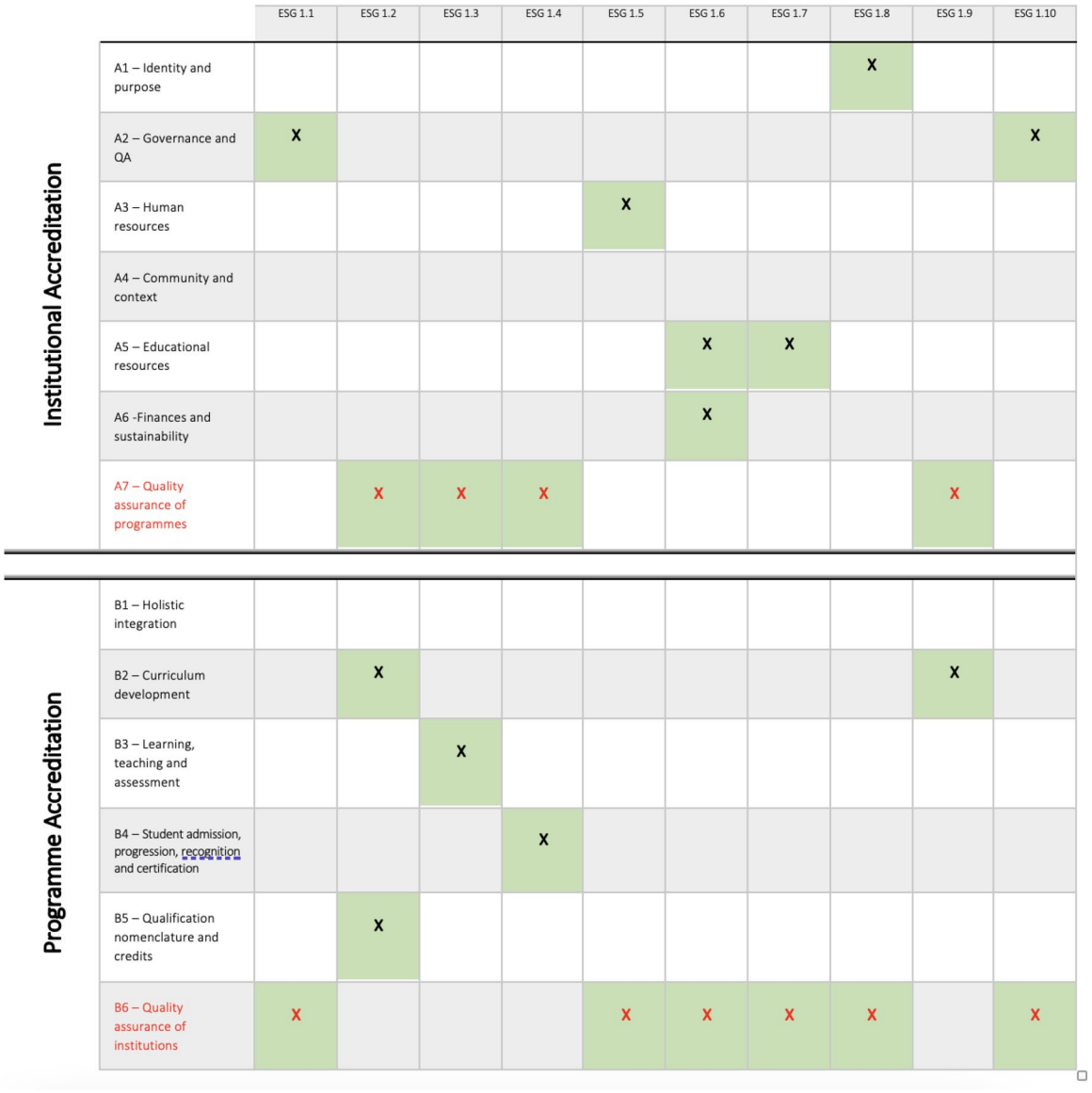
As regards the interpretation of its role as an external accreditor, the ECTE takes pride in defining itself as a partner of institutions rather than a supervisory authority. The ECTE *Standards and Guidelines* explicitly require institutions to develop internal quality assurance policies and procedures while promoting internal cultures of integrity, self-assessment, self-improvement and quality development. In line with its philosophy of fostering dialogue and enhancement in their member institutions, the ECTE has produced *Guidelines for Internal Quality Assurance Policies* in its quest to strengthen their self-monitoring ability and to promote their inner quality cultures. As a further contribution, the ECTE is giving guidance by presenting *Guidelines for Producing Self-Evaluation Reports.* With this document, HEIs are encouraged to compile reports that are critical and analytical, constructive and realistic in evaluating both weaknesses and strengths.

The compliance check of the internal quality assurance policies against the ESG is the task of ECTE´s Visiting Evaluation Teams (VET). Prior to visiting, the experts are trained to be familiar with the ECTE *Standards and Guidelines* and are provided with worksheets and review report templates with specific sections on compliance.

Analysis

The panel takes note of ECTE´s mapping exercises, but identifies the following problem: Due to the conversion to the new accreditation system, the *formerly combined* institutional and programme review scheme (covering all ESG) now has been separated. In spite of the fact, that in most instances, the ECTE is dealing with requests for both institutional and programme accreditation, it nevertheless could in practical terms mean e.g. that in case of a separate Institutional or Programme Review request only part of the ESG 1 are checked. The panel notes, that this approach in their view is not compatible with the compliance exigencies of the ESG.

Following the virtual visit and the exit interview, the ECTE handed in a revised Mapping Chart of its Standards related to the ESG 1. These two new charts are depicted in the following



		ESG 1.1	ESG 1.2	ESG 1.3	ESG 1.4	ESG 1.5	ESG 1.6	ESG 1.7	ESG 1.8	ESG 1.9	ESG 1.10
Institutional Accreditation	A1 – Identity and purpose								X		
	A2 – Governance and QA	X									X
	A3 – Human resources					X					
	A4 – Community and context										
	A5 – Educational resources						X	X			
	A6 -Finances and sustainability						X				
	A7 – Quality assurance of programmes		X	X	X					X	
Programme Accreditation	B1 – Holistic integration										
	B2 – Curriculum development		X							X	
	B3 – Learning, teaching and assessment			X							
	B4 – Student admission, progression, recognition and certification				X						
	B5 – Qualification nomenclature and credits		X								
	B6 – Quality assurance of institutions	X				X	X	X	X		X

The ECTE gives on record, that as regards its Institutional Criteria, it has meanwhile added a new Standard A 7 which now covers the before missing ESG 1 Standards 1.2., 1.3, 1.4 and 1.9. By the same token a new Standard B 6 has been added to the programme standards to cover the missing ESG standards 1.1, 1.5., 1.6, 1.7, 1.8 and 1.10.

The revised new Standards will be submitted to ECTE´s next General Assembly in November of 2021 for approval. Subsequently it will be then used for the upcoming accreditation cycle in 2022. The panel is satisfied with this proposal and approach.

Provided that the General Assembly in November 2021 is amending the standards in the proposed way, the panel sees full compliance, but currently it has to evaluate what has been presented at the time of the audit.

Panel recommendations

- The panel asks the ECTE to guarantee, that the entire range of the ESG are covered in both its institutional and programme accreditation scheme.

Panel conclusion: Non-compliant

ESG 2.2 DESIGNING METHODOLOGIES FIT FOR PURPOSE

Standard:

External quality assurance should be defined and designed specifically to ensure its fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for it, while taking into account relevant regulations. Stakeholders should be involved in its design and continuous improvement.

Evidence

The ECTE has published aims and objectives for quality assurance, related to institutional and programme accreditation. The main document outlining the ECTE's methodologies is the aforementioned Criteria and Procedures for ECTE accreditation. This document lays out the criteria for accreditation and details the necessary procedures to obtain accreditation, including descriptions of the methodologies, roles, necessary documentation, timelines and ongoing review processes. The document references more detailed methodologies and procedures as found in the document Guidelines for Site Visits and VETs.

In addition to the main procedural documents (see Criteria and Procedures), the ECTE has issued a number of supplemental guidelines such as the Guidelines for internal QA policies, for dual and joint accreditation, for recognition of formal, non-formal and informal learning, for distance and online education, to name but a few.

The ECTE representatives explain, that as a cross-border QA agency, ECTE methodologies are designed in consideration of the sometimes differing regulations in the multiple European higher education systems, in which its members operate. The ECTE according to its own account responds to this challenge by trying to identify common European methodologies while leaving room for discretion and observation of national regulations where appropriate. Areas of common methodologies related to institutional accreditation have been investigated by the ECTE and include, for example, the introduction of the Diploma Supplement, the distinction between formal, non-formal and informal learning and the use of common qualification frameworks.

As regards the involvement of its stakeholders, the ECTE presents an array of examples for stakeholder feedback in important quality assurance cycles. HEIs are contacted and their feedback collected following site visits to identify areas of peer-expert training e.g.. In 2019, HEIs were consulted during the General Assembly concerning the new Criteria and Procedures and in 2020 they responded to surveys indicating their (high) satisfaction rating of ECTE's work and methodologies. Direct stakeholders in ECTE´s terminology also include peer experts (VET members). They provide ongoing feedback following site visits and were surveyed in 2021.

Implementation of stakeholder involvement is monitored yearly during the Annual Internal Review and Internal Monitoring Council session. The ECTE has recently passed a Stakeholder Involvement Plan to increase the participation of women and employer representatives from the non-Church sector, which have thus far not been adequately represented in the stakeholder setup of the organization.

Another example of designing methodologies that are fit for purpose which are presented to the panel revolves around ECTE's response to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. The ECTE published a specific

guidance on QA that included policies allowing temporary emergency changes in delivery, innovation, assessment and practicums, providing a guidance request form, designing a specific COVID-19 Annual Progress Report and pointing to specific emergency-response educational resources that were being developed in the ICETE Academy. In light of the impossibility of conducting physical site visits due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the ECTE also gathered information on good practice from other EU QA agencies and produced specific guidelines and protocols for online site visits.

Finally yet importantly, the ECTE has implemented a follow-up procedure, which allows an accredited institution or programme to demonstrate its improvement. The name of the corresponding tool is the Annual Progress Report and requires a reviewed institution to annually report on areas of improvement identified in the cyclical accreditation reports. There is also a connection between the APRs and the Thematic Analysis, as is described in more details under 3.4 of this report.

Analysis

The panel is impressed by the dynamic of the manifold reform processes. It is fair to say, that the organization left almost no stone unturned to upgrade its methodologies. As was mentioned before, a ESG compliance plan containing almost 80 action lines has been implemented in the past couple of years. This work was done mostly by volunteers and committed individuals among the ranks of ECTE member representatives. Essential was furthermore the commitment of a very small group of dedicated staff, who prepared the related documents and stakeholder feedback where needed.

In the discussion with the representatives of these stakeholders, the panel observes, that while higher education institutions are reporting to have been contacted in the past, the representatives of employer groups (within but especially those outside the core church community) are more hesitant in that respect. According to the feedback collected by the panel, they indeed are in favour of establishing closer contacts with the ECTE organization. As regards the involvement of students, they now for the first time are consistently represented in all Visiting Evaluation Teams, which was not the case in the "old accreditation system" prior to 2020. The student representative in the Council of ECTE is provided with financial means to build up a student network among the ranks of ECTE´s member institutions.

The panel furthermore positively notes, that the ECTE has taken up this important networking issue by passing and implementing a Stakeholder Involvement Plan, which in the future should foster the ties with stakeholders which are currently not engaged to a sufficient degree. The panel commends the ECTE for the implementation of its Annual Progress Reports. These APRs are considered to be suitable mechanism to allow HEIs demonstration of continuous improvement processes and to engage them in discussion about new developments in the community.

Panel commendations

- ECTE is commended on its innovative follow up processes as exemplified by its Annual Progress Reports.
- ECTE is commended on passing a Stakeholder Involvement Plan thereby addressing the need to broaden its stakeholder involvement beyond its core constituents in the church community.

Panel recommendations

- It is recommended to increase the number of ECTE´s representatives in ECTE decision making bodies and its Visiting Evaluation Team among the ranks of the non-church employment sector in line with its Strategic Stakeholder Involvement Plan

Panel conclusion: Substantially compliant

ESG 2.3 IMPLEMENTING PROCESSES

Standard:

External quality assurance processes should be reliable, useful, pre-defined, implemented consistently and published. They include:

- a self-assessment or equivalent
- an external assessment normally including a site visit
- a report resulting from the external assessment
- a consistent follow-up

Evidence

The ECTE's institutional and programme accreditation procedures are in line with globally accepted expectations on how External QA procedures are to be executed. They entail the production of a written self-assessment report against a predefined set of criteria, complemented by extended interviews with stakeholders during a site visit, on site expert verification and observation, the production of reports from external assessment and consistent follow up with recommendations and requirements. The ECTE also collects feedback of its processes, as described in prior parts of this report. Institutions report annually and undergo a full cyclical review every 5 years.

The ECTE claims having in recent past implemented processes that are "reliable, useful, pre-defined, implemented consistently and published". This claim applies to the "new set up" of the new accreditation cycle starting only in the course of 2020/2021. The need to press the "re-start" button was provided by a thorough internal analysis, which revealed important gaps in reaching full compliance with the European Standards and Guidelines. It resulted in a revision of practically all documents (criteria, procedures, guidelines, policy papers and so forth). One of the important elements of reaching quality and consistency consisted in hiring additional and much needed professional support. The creation of the new position of a (part-time) review secretary is considered a milestone in this regard. The newly appointed Review Secretary is in charge of compiling and finalizing the accreditation report and to upgrade and guarantee the quality and consistency of the new reporting format, which are published on the ECTE website together with the accreditation decision of the ECTE Council. The number of accreditation reviews performed by the ECTE averages about 8 per year. In the new cycle starting in 2021 visits are planned for Germany, Croatia, Jordan, Netherlands, UK, Austria, Ukraine as well as Greece.

The ECTE in recent past has implemented processes to assist various groups in the accreditation process to perform better. Institutions receive guidance on producing consistent institutional self-evaluation reports. The corresponding guidelines emphasise supporting internal quality assurance processes a (e.g. establishing a committee, setting a timetable, collecting and analysing data, producing a final document), and an institutional SER template. Peer experts (and institutions) receive guidance and training in preparation of the external assessment via the ICETE academy. The ICETE Academy is a partnership service offered by the International Council for Evangelical Theological Education that offer short, certified, online educational courses to theological educators globally. The ECTE is a founding agency of the ICETE Academy and all faculty in ECTE member schools benefit from full access (free) to all courses. The ICETE Academy is a key resource in the ECTE for the development of teaching staff, for the dissemination of good practice and understanding of quality assurance and for the training of peer-review experts. The VET Training course also provides training in the production of review reports. Procedures for production of full reports involve the use of Review Report Worksheets by the VET during the visit, a final panel meeting to discuss findings and the completion of a first draft of the Review Report by the VET panel. The Review Secretary is in charge of writing a

second draft with approval or amendment by the VET panel; he will send the final draft to the institution for comment on factual accuracy. In a next step, he will transmit the final Review Report to the ECTE office and to the Quality Assurance Coordinator (QAC) for presentation to the ECTE Council for decision, finally the report containing a list of commendations, recommendations and requirements as well as related decisions are published.

Further guidelines define the role of the Review Secretary in the process and the specific contribution of student reviewers. During 2020, a section was added to provide a protocol for online site visits, including notions of general good practice, definition of roles, Zoom conferencing instructions, additional pre-visit documentation and overall scheduling suggestions.

As regard the issue of consistency in the implementation of ECTE processes, the interviewed parties point to the interaction between the General Secretary, the Review Secretary and the Quality Assurance Coordinator in the process. A published Consistency Guarantee statement includes procedural assurances. Published procedures are also in place for consistent follow-up of site visits, including the distinction between follow-up with recommendations and requirements, the provisions for annual review and monitoring and for institutions 'under review'.

Online forms are provided on the ECTE website to support, standardise and simplify processes. These include institutional accreditation application forms, annual progress reports (APRs), templates for peer-reviewers, visitation feedback forms, and honoraria and reimbursement request forms.

A consistent follow up in ECTE´s argumentation comes via the mentioned Annual Progress Report (APRs), through which institutions report on major changes, communicate planned changes and respond to recommendations and requirements from their last review. All APRs are reviewed mainly through by the Quality Assurance Coordinator responding to institutions with an evaluation letter.

Analysis

The panel commends ECTE on "pressing the reset button" and to put all processes to a test. It considers the ECTE now as an organization much better prepared to live up to its high expectations, that all External Quality Assurance procedures are carried out professionally, consistently and transparently in the new accreditation cycle starting this very year. They also applaud the ECTE for its decision to upgrade its staff capacity by hiring a newly appointed professional and creating the much-needed position of a review secretary. They also note the progress made in a range of reinforced training courses offered in cooperation with the ICETE academy.

The panel sees the recruitment of a professional review secretary as a much-needed step forward in the quest to write reports of high quality and consistency, though currently it is merely a part-time position.

Panel conclusion: Fully Compliant

ESG 2.4 PEER-REVIEW EXPERTS

Standard:
External quality assurance should be carried out by groups of external experts that include (a) student member(s).

Evidence

ECTE relies on a pool of experts which form part of its so-called Visitation Evaluation Teams (VETs). A VET roster with currently 25 members are kept updated on the ECTE website and is comprised of

representatives of HEIs, students as well as the labour market. As regards the latter category, the number of experts are limited, few are coming from a non-church related occupational environment.

Inclusion of ECTE VET members into the roster is done by decision of the ECTE Council to ensure the appropriate skills, competences and attitudes necessary for their task. Consistent processes are in place for their nomination and the ECTE has established and published criteria for VET selection, recruitment and nomination as well as provisions for VET briefing, training and development. All experts are requested to sign an independence, not conflict of interest form prior to going on an audit.

Whereas VETs in the past did not include student representatives on a regular basis, this has been now changed for the new review cycle. Members of the VETs are appointed by the Review Secretary (RS) and configured to include the following: VET Leader; - VET member(s); - Student VET member; - Review Secretary. Due to the international character of the ECTE, international experts are always engaged. ECTE has a policy of including representatives from the region with adequate language skills into their audit teams whenever possible.

Training Sessions are regularly offered for the VET members. This is done in cooperation and partnership the International Council for Evangelical Theological Education and its ICETE Academy. It offers a broad range of certified, online educational courses to theological educators and accreditors globally. As the ECTE is a founding agency of the ICETE Academy all faculty in ECTE member schools and experts benefit from full access (free) to all courses. The training format for student experts are shorter/more condensed than that of the other groups.

Analysis

The panel positively notes that in the "new system" as of 2020 the composition of the Visiting Evaluation Teams is now in compliance with the ESG. In each future team, there will be a student representative as part of the VETs. There is also one student representative in the Council who is in charge of further building up resilient student networks across ECTE constituencies.

In view of the comparatively small number of accreditation visits per year, the number and qualifications of experts in the peer roster are sufficient with one reservation. Given the fact, further elaborated in prior parts of this report, that up to two-thirds of the graduates from ECTE´s accredited member's institutions are looking for an occupation outside the church community, there is a necessity to further increase and diversify the number of suitable experts. This however already is on the reform agenda of the ECTE and forms part of its Stakeholder Involvement Policy.

A strong point of the ECTE is the fact that international experts are carefully selected and the VET´s are composed reflecting the cultural and language backgrounds of the reviewed institutions in various countries/regions in which ECTE operates.

The partnership with the ICETE Academy is bringing considerable benefits for the ECTE, its stakeholder, representatives and experts. It also opens the door for strong interactions with representatives of other accrediting bodies united in the International Council for Evangelical Theological Education. The panel notes that there are different (shortened) training sessions for student experts and consider this to be acceptable as long as these longer and more intensive training sessions are principally open to them.

The panel however considers it problematic that the selection of the members of the Visiting Evaluation Teams is the task of one individual (currently by the newly appointed review manager) without involvement of a selection committee or an accreditation commission as it is usually the case. Also the reviewed university currently has no possibility to ask for replacement of an expert for justified reasons. No detailed information about the persons in the expert groups is given.

The panel considers it good practice and necessary that the reviewed institution can comment on the composition of the panel and can ask for a replacement in case of concerns – this procedural step however is not foreseen in current ECTE´s procedures. The tasks mentioned above are routinely considered to be the task of a selection committee or an accreditation commission, but not of an individual. This point is taken up again under 2.4, where the panel´s conclusions are summarized.

Panel commendations

- The panel commends the ECTE for its partnership with the ICETE international academy which provides access to a professional peer training with a broad range of courses
- The panel commends the ECTE for the inclusion of international experts in its Visiting Evaluation Teams.

Panel recommendations:

- The composition and background of the panels should be communicated to the reviewed HEIs beforehand with a procedural possibility in place to ask for substitution in case of justified reasons.

Panel suggestions for further improvement

- Students should be invited to undergo the same extensive training session than the other expert groups.
- The ECTE Council should consider cooperating more closely with the other regional accrediting bodies as regards the recruitment of a broad range of qualified experts with different backgrounds.

Panel conclusion: Substantially Compliant

ESG 2.5 CRITERIA FOR OUTCOMES

Standard:
Any outcomes or judgements made as the result of external quality assurance should be based on explicit and published criteria that are applied consistently, irrespective of whether the process leads to a formal decision.

Evidence

On the Website of the ECTE, separate directories for Institutional and Programme Accreditation have been published. In the published document Criteria and Procedures, ECTE makes an explicit distinction between standards for institutional and programme accreditation.

As regards the consistency in the application of these criteria, ECTE representatives point to the positive impact of training measures for members of the Visiting Evaluation Teams, the use of standard templates and the input of the Review Secretary who ensures coherence and comparability of reports (including issues of style, format and language).

Concerning the decision-making procedures, ECTE follows a consistent approach, which is laid down in its documents Standards and Guidelines to ensure consistency in writing review reports and in decision making. Partial compliance in an ECTE accreditation procedure automatically results in a requirement, a substantial compliance in a recommendation, both of which have to be followed up in

the Annual Progress Reports. The ECTE Council meets regularly to come to accreditation decisions based on these documents.

Analysis

The panel commends ECTE for the progress made. The consistency in the reports was an issue for the ECTE in the past. The ECTE pro actively tackled this challenge by investing in further training of its Visiting Evaluation Team members. On the other hand, it invested as of 2020 in the recruitment of a professional review secretary with the task to draft and finalize the report, ensuring consistency in the process.

Panel suggestions for further improvement

- The panel suggests establishing a database of accreditation decisions in the future also in light of the increasing number of upcoming accreditation decisions.

Panel conclusion: Fully Compliant

ESG 2.6 REPORTING

Standard:
Full reports by the experts should be published, clear and accessible to the academic community, external partners and other interested individuals. If the agency takes any formal decision based on the reports, the decision should be published together with the report.

Evidence

ECTE has an approved reporting policy. The accreditation reports are published on the website of ECTE under http://ecte.eu/qa/reports. The formal decision of the ECTE Council with summary commendations, recommendations and requirements are also published.

While the process of publishing the report and the related decisions are in place, it is worth mentioning that in the past ECTE reports were not fully covering all ESG 1 requirements. Also, the structure of the old report scheme did not clearly distinguish between a descriptive and an analytical part. The ECTE has now taken up this challenge and only recently changed its reporting structure and format to be fully compliant with the European Standard and Guidelines 2.1. in combination with ESG 1.

The new *Review Report Template* in other words only has been in use since the beginning of 2021. As a result, the experts only had access to one single report of an ESG compliant report, which was send to the experts beforehand on their request. Until the end of 2021 there will be up to seven other reports following the new template design/report structure.

In addition, the ***process*** of report writing by ECTE has been adapted: whereas the Visiting Evaluation Team in the past was in charge of compiling an interim report, ECTE in 2020 for the first time hired a "review secretary" in order to professionalize the report writing and to secure consistency across all published reports. This newly appointed review secretary during the past year assisted in the (due to Corona online-monitoring, virtual) visits. He is now in charge of compiling all final reports, taking the input of the VET members into account. Within the process, the reviewed institution has a chance to comment on the factual accuracy of the report.

Analysis

The experts see that ECTE publishes full expert's reports including accreditation decisions. They however note, that in the decisions the duration of the accreditation is only implicitly mentioned.

The new report format is a significant improvement in comparison to the reports written prior to the 2020 reforms. It now takes into account previous requirements and recommendation, lists evidence of compliance, distinguishes between a descriptive and an analytical part as well as between commendations, recommendations and requirements. The report also ends with the panel conclusions with a summary of commendations, recommendations and requirements.

The experts are also presented with the related formal decisions of the ECTE Council (assuming the role of an accreditation commission) with a formal decision, though the experts at the time of the audit do not see the formal duration of the granted accreditation decision neither in the report, nor in the information regarding the reviewed institution on the website. (this e.g. applies for the only available decision in the new format regarding the European Theological Seminary at Freudenstadt/Kniebis in Germany). The validity of the accreditation for all accreditations has meanwhile been amended by the ECTE on its website.

The panel acknowledges the progress initiated by the introduction of the new reporting format with a clear distinction between the descriptive and analytical part. They moreover commend ECTE on its decision to further professionalizing the conduct of its accreditation procedure including the report writing by employing for the first time a review secretary in charge of compiling the final report. In their opinion, this will contribute to further improving the quality of the reports (especially regarding its analytical parts) and strengthen consistency in judgement and decision-making. They at the same time see a need of further investing in staff capacity/review secretaries who in this capacity should be present throughout the entire accreditation process. This currently is not always the case due to a lack in HR capacity (see 3.5 of this report). It is also important that the accreditation decision and the published accreditation reports contain the exact duration of the accreditation period.

While ECTE is heading in the right direction with the new reporting format, the mode of report writing, and the communication of the final decision to external stakeholders needs consistent implementation in the upcoming new review cycles.

Panel commendations

- The Panel commends the ECTE for introducing the new Report Format and for professionalizing the report writing by hiring a professional review secretary of the first time in ECTE´s history.

Panel recommendations

- The Panel recommends that the validity/duration of the accreditation is clearly marked in all accreditation decisions.

Panel conclusion: Substantially Compliant

ESG 2.7 COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS

Standard:
Complaints and appeals processes should be clearly defined as part of the design of external quality assurance processes and communicated to the institutions.

Evidence

Before the preparation for the review, ECTE according to its own account did not distinguish between complaints and appeals. This distinction now is being made and has been laid down in separate procedures, published on the website of ECTE. ***A formal complaint procedure*** allows a higher

education institution to state its dissatisfaction with the conduct or the consistency of the process or persons involved. In addition, there is also an "informal complaint" system in place related in particular to site-visits, which are collected through the so-called Visitation Feedback forms.

By contrast, ***a three level appeals system*** has been established and published to allow members and clients to question the formal outcome or the decision of the accreditation or admission process:

First Level appeals with a low threshold are to be handed in in written form to the General Secretary of ECTE. He will discuss the appeal with the Review Secretary and the Quality Assurance Coordinator and reply in written form to the institution. *Second Level appeals* are to be directed towards the Council itself, which will discuss the appeal and reply in written form to the institution. *Third Level appeals* are transferred to the so-called External Appeals Committee, which in line with the Appeals and Complaints policy consists of one representative from a member school with national accreditation, one representative from another ICETE institution with good knowledge of the ECTE constituency and finally one student in the field of theological education with international experience.

It is notable, that the representatives of this External Appeals Committee are not known beforehand as this body is configured as an "ad hoc"-committee. Only when an appeal reaches the "third level", the search for the actual representatives starts. According to the Self -Assessment Report and the discussion with ECTE leadership, no formal appeal has been registered to date, which means in turn, that the appeals committee has never been convened, nor its members known.

Appeals and complaints are published and monitored in the Annual Internal Review Improvement Monitoring session and the resulting report is published. The experts learn that in 2020, HEIs were surveyed on their satisfaction with appeals and complaints procedures with a reported "high" satisfaction rate of close to 90%.

Analysis

The panel acknowledges the considerable progress as documented in the Appeals and Complaints Policy. The panel commends the ECTE on the fact that there are internal, lower threshold processes in place below the level of escalating it to legal action. They positively note that stakeholder satisfaction with the new policies are high. They at the same time do not consider it a good solution that in the current set-up the General Secretary, being (a non-voting) member of the Council is involved in the accreditation procedure on level 1 of the appeals procedure. In a new setup with an Accreditation Committee or a similar body, the first level could be this committee and the second level the external appeals committee

As regards level 3, the panel sees a necessity to identify and publish the names of the representatives of the members of the External Appeals Committee instead of working with an "ad hoc"-solution. ECTE´s members of clients undergoing an accreditation procedure should know beforehand who to deal with and who to address in case that it is warranted.

Panel recommendations

- The Panel recommends establishing a **permanent** External Appeals Committee whose members are known to ECTE´s Stakeholder and made public on its website.
- Before the External Appeals Committee is formally approached, a lower threshold solution involving potentially the accreditation commission or a similar body should be implemented.

Panel conclusion: Substantially Compliant

CONCLUSION

SUMMARY OF COMMENDATIONS

ESG 3.1:

- The panel commends ECTE for providing External Quality Assurance/Accreditation Services as a much-needed service to its theological schools and programmes which in many instances are not able to secure this service in the national higher education contexts.
- Due to its nature as a European /international network, the composition of ECTE bodies and commissions brings together international experts from many different countries with many positive side effects for the organizational culture of ECTE.

ESG 3.4:

- The panel commends the ECTE for its Thematic analysis plan and the excellent design of these activities. The use of mandatory Annual Progress Reports on the part of accredited institutions as a tool to monitor progress and to analyse sector-wide developments is laudable.

ESG 3.5:

- The panel commends the ECTE on its long tradition of securing voluntary contributions from member organizations that have been instrumental in running the ECTE organization during the past 40 years.

ESG 3.6:

- The panel commends ECTE´s staff and Council for its success it the thorough revision of its Internal Quality Assurance Systems, policy documents, criteria and procedures

ESG 2.2:

- ECTE is commended on its innovative follow up processes as exemplified by its Annual Progress Reports.
- ECTE is commended on passing a Stakeholder Involvement Plan thereby addressing the need to broaden its stakeholder involvement beyond its core constituents in the church community.

ESG 2.4:

- The panel commends the ECTE for its partnership with the ICETE international academy which provides access to a professional peer training with a broad range of courses
- The panel commends the ECTE for the inclusion of international experts in its Visiting Evaluation Teams.

ESG 2.6:

- The Panel commends the ECTE for introducing the new Report Format and for professionalizing the report writing by hiring a professional review secretary of the first time in ECTE´s history.

OVERVIEW OF JUDGEMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

ESG 3.1: Substantially compliant

Panel recommendations:

- The panel recommends that ECTE is rebalancing the "missional part" of the mission statement with the "flexible and developing aspect" which currently is underrepresented.
- The panel advises the ECTE to clearly separate accreditations of higher education programmes on the level of Bachelor and Master programmes from those on the post-secondary level.

ESG 3.2: Fully compliant

ESG 3.3: Partially compliant

Panel recommendations:

- The Panel recommends restructuring the composition and functions of the ECTE´s Council. Members of the Council should abstain from becoming part of the Visiting Evaluation Teams. Staff Members of ECTE should not be simultaneously voting members of the Council.
- The ECTE should consider the establishment of an independent accreditation commission, which is in charge of collectively organizing the accreditation process including the composition of the Visiting Evaluation Teams, the decision-making and the follow-up processes.
- Members and Team Leaders of the Visiting Evaluations teams should be selected collectively by an appropriate body and not by an individual.
- The members of the respective VETs and potentially the accreditation commission should be involved in the decision making process whether a requirement or recommendation has been fulfilled.

ESG 3.4: Fully complaint

ESG 3.5: Substantially compliant

Panel recommendations:

- The panel recommends, that ECTE provides further invests in upgrading its staff capacities in line with its Strategic Plan and in its quest to further professionalize and extend its accreditation services.
- The panel recommends further increasing the number of experts and diversifying the profile of its expert's pool.

ESG 3.6: Substantially compliant

Panel recommendations:

- In spite of the fact that all IQA processes are in place they are still rather scattered and it should further be clarified who is in charge and takes the processes forward.

ESG 3.7: Fully compliant

ESG 2.1: Non-compliant

Panel recommendations:

- The panel asks the ECTE to guarantee, that the entire range of the ESG are covered in both its institutional and programme accreditation scheme.

ESG 2.2: Substantially compliant

Panel recommendations:

- It is recommended to increase the number of ECTE´s representatives in ECTE decision making bodies and its Visiting Evaluation Team among the ranks of the non-church employment sector in line with its Strategic Stakeholder Involvement Plan

ESG 2.3: Fully compliant

ESG 2.4: Substantially compliant

Panel recommendations:

- The composition and background of the panels should be communicated to the reviewed HEIs beforehand with a procedural possibility in place to ask for substitution in case of justified reasons.

ESG 2.5: Fully compliant

ESG 2.6: Substantially compliant

Panel recommendations:

- The Panel recommends that the validity/duration of the accreditation is clearly marked in all accreditation decisions.

ESG 2.7: Substantially compliant

Panel recommendations:

- The Panel recommends establishing a **permanent** External Appeals Committee whose members are known to ECTE´s Stakeholder and made public on its website.
- Before the External Appeals Committee is formally approached, a lower threshold solution involving potentially the accreditation commission or a similar body should be established.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

ESG 3.1:

- The panel encourages the ECTE offering its accreditation services to non-member organizations.

ESG 3.4:

- The panel suggests that the ECTE Council and the General Assembly more systematically identify in advance the topics for the upcoming next years, prioritizing the manifold areas of analysis listed.

ESG 2.4:

- Students should be invited to undergo the same extensive training session than the other expert groups.
- The ECTE Council should consider cooperating more closely with the other regional accrediting bodies as regards the recruitment of a broad range of qualified experts with different backgrounds.

ESG 2.5:

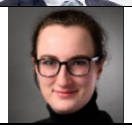
- The panel suggests establishing a database of accreditation decisions in the future also in light of the increasing number of upcoming accreditation decisions.

ANNEXES

ANNEX 1: PROGRAMME OF THE SITE VISIT

All Interview Sessions are usually followed by discussion time of the panel. All persons per meeting are listed in alphabetical order, not role or function, with the exception of the first meeting.

The ASIIN-Panel

	Current context	**Relevant roles outside of this visit**
Prof. Dr. Patrick Becker	Professor for SystematicTheology, RWTH Aachen	Formerly with AKAST
Dr. A. Herman Fliethmann, **Team Leader**		Outgoing President of NVAO
Anna Klampfer 	Student Representative	Student: Master of Science Technical University of Vienna
Dr. Martin Prchal	Vice-Principal, Royal Conservatoire The Hague (2015-2020)	Former board member of MusiQuE
Dr. Iring Wasser, ASIIN Staff Person	Managing Director of ASIIN	

Due to the online nature of this visit, the schedule includes more information than usually. Since many **ECTE-colleagues** have various roles within and without ECTE three columns provide relevant (and hopefully helpful) information:

Primary Role for THIS meeting Other roles within ECTE Pertinent Roles outside of ECTE

Focus Group	**interview Participants**	**Primary role in THIS meeting**	**Other roles within ECTE**	**Roles outside ECTE**	**Issues to be discussed (insert ESG's)**	**Lead panel member**
Mon June 14, 2021 - 12.30 – 14.00 Uhr - Internal Meeting of Experts						
Mon. June 14, 2021 - 15.00 – 16.00						
Meeting with the CEO and the chair of the Council Combined with Meeting with the team responsible for the self-assessment report	Dr. Bernhard Ott	Chairman of the Council	Reviewer	Member of ICETE board		
	Dr. Marvin Oxenham	General Secretary		Director of ICETE Academy		
	Carmen Crouse	External Review Manager	Reviewer	Director of Institutional Development at AWM/CIU/ESCT		

Focus Group	interview Participants	Primary role in THIS meeting	Other roles within ECTE	Roles outside ECTE	Issues to be discussed (insert ESG's)	Lead panel member
Mon. June 14, 2021 - 16.15 – 17.15						
Meeting with the ECTE Staff	Grace Al-Zoughbi	Thematic Analysis Report - Researcher	VET-Member – Student Representative	PhD Student at LST		
	Silke Brohl	Treasurer	Vice-Chairwoman of the Council			
	Dr. Graham Cheeseman	Review Secretary				
	Carmen Crouse	External Review Manager	Reviewer VET-Member	Director of Institutional Development at ESCT		
	Dr. Hubert Juergensen	Quality Assurance Coordinator (QAC)	Council Member, VET-Member			
	Dr. Marvin Oxenham	General Secretary		Director of ICETE Academy		
17.15 – 18.00 Internal Panel Meeting						

Focus Group	interview Participants	Primary role in THIS meeting	Other roles within ECTE	Roles outside ECTE	Issues to be discussed (insert ESG's)	Lead panel member
Wednesday June 16, 2021 - 10.00 – 11.00						
Senior Management Team – Accreditation	Dr. Graham Cheeseman	Review Secretary				
	Dr. Hubert Juergensen	Quality Assurance Coordinator (QAC)	Council Member, VET-Member			
	Dr. Marvin Oxenham	General Secretary		Director of ICETE Academy		

Focus Group	interview Participants	Primary role in THIS meeting	Other roles within ECTE	Roles outside ECTE	Issues to be discussed (ESG's)	Lead panel member
Wed. June 16, 2021 - 11.15 – 12.15						
Senior Management Team = ECTE Council	Silke Brohl	Vice-Chairwoman of the Council	Treasurer			
	Mirko Fritzlar	Student Representative	Student Reviewer	Student at BTA Wiedenest		
	Dr. Hubert Juergensen	Council Member	QAC, Reviewer			
	Dr. Bernhard Ott	Chairman of the Council	Reviewer	Member of ICETE board		
	Dr. Marvin Oxenham	General Secretary (voice but no vote)		Director of ICETE Academy		
	Dr. Joachim Pomrehn	Represents - Member HEI - Academic Faculty	Reviewer	Director of Doctoral Programs ESCT		
	Mrs Rana Wazir	Council Secretary Represents - accredited HEI - Administrative Leadership	Reviewer	Registrar at ABTS		

Focus Group	interview Participants	Primary role in THIS meeting	Roles outside ECTE	Issues to be discussed (ESG's)	Lead panel member
Wednesday June 16, 2021 -- 14.30 – 15.30					
Meeting with representatives from the reviewers' pool	Grace Al-Zoughbi	1 visit in last 3 years Student Representative	Palestine, PhD Student at LST		
	Dr. Marcel Macelaru	2 visits in last 3 years, Expertise: Academic faculty and leader	Rumania, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences - "Aurel Vlaicu" University member of the Romanian National Council for the Validation of Titles, Diplomas and Certifications in Higher Education (CNATDCU		
	Dr. Joachim Pomrehn	3 visits in last 3 years Expertise: Academic faculty, Leadership in academic context, Cooperation with global TE networks,	Germany Director of Doctoral Programs at ESCT		
	Dr. Paul Sanders	5 visits in last 3 years, Expertise: Academic faculty, Leadership in academic context, Governing board, Administrator in academic context	France Cooperation with other peer, subject-specific QA agencies, Cooperation with global TE networks		

	Dr. Lina Toth	5 visits in last 3 years, Expertise: Academic faculty, Leadership in academic context, Administrator in academic context	UK, Assistant Principal & Lecturer in Practical Theology Scottish Baptist College University of the West of Scotland		
	Mrs Rana Wazir	3 visits in last 3 years, Expertise: academic & administrative leadership, administrator in academic context	Lebanon, Registrar at ABTS		

Focus Group	**interview Participants**	**Primary role in THIS meeting**	**Issues to be discussed (ESG's)**	**Lead panel member**
Meeting with student representatives (includes student on Council)		Student at ETSC Cairo???		
	Fritzlar, Mirko	Student at BTA Wiedenest (Student on Council)		
	Gatea, Rahella	Student at European Theological Seminary, Kniebis		
	Gorbacheva, Anastasia	Student at European Theological Seminary, Kniebis		
	Panteliou, Irini or Emmanouil Tsoutsas	Student at Greek Bible College, Pikermi, Greece		
	Simon, Sven	Student at European Theological Seminary, Kniebis		

Focus Group	interview Participants	Position/Title at HEI	Issues to be discussed (ESG's)	Lead panel member
Meeting with heads of HEIs (and/or QM person)	Baldwin, Jeffrey	President Greek Bible College, Pikermi, Greece (may not be able to attend due to health situation)		
	Dahl, Jim	Vice President of Academic Affairs, Tyndale Theological Seminary, Netherlands		
	Hanscamp, Renata	Academic Dean, Cornerstone, Netherlands		
	Markusse, Gabi	QA at PARS Theological Centre, UK		
	Mihalios, Stefanos	QA at Greek Bible College, Pikermi, Greece		
	Otniel, Pesel	QA at European Theological Seminary, Kniebis, DE		
	Rosson, Tom	President European Theological Seminary, Kniebis, DE		
	Schulte, Steffen	President Theologisches Seminar Rheinland, DE		
	Simpson, Carl	Dean at European Theological Seminary, Kniebis, DE		
		QA, Evangelical Theological Seminary, Cairo, Egypt		

Focus Group	interview Participants	Position, organisation, Country/Region (ECTE HEI)	Issues to be discussed (ESG's)	Lead panel member
Meeting with employer representatives	Hinkelmann, Frank	Chairman, European Evangelical Alliance (multiple ECTE HEI's), pan-european		
	Ozolinkevics, Agris	Regional Bishop (ETS) Latvia		
	Pfau, Wolfgang	Director WEC Germany (Cornerstone) Worldwide		
	Radovanovic, Miroslav	Regional Bishop (ETS), Serbia		
	Someone from Egypt	(ETSC Cairo), Egypt		
	Romeas, Fotis	Denominational Leader (Greek Bible College), Greece		

Focus Group	interview Participants	Primary role in THIS meeting	Other roles within ECTE	Roles outside ECTE	Issues to be discussed (insert ESG's)	Lead panel member
Thursday June 17, 2021 - 14.00 – 15.00						
CEO/self-assessment group to clarify any pending issues	Dr. Marvin Oxenham	General Secretary		Director of ICETE Academy		
	Carmen Crouse	External Review Manager	Reviewer	Director of Institutional Development at AWM/CIU/ESCT		

Focus Group	interview Participants	Primary role in THIS meeting	Lead panel member
Exit Meeting with CEO, senior management and self-assessment group to inform about preliminary findings Open to entire Council + Staff	Grace Al-Zoughbi	Staff	
	Silke Brohl	Vice-Chairwoman of the Council	
	Dr. Graham Cheeseman	Staff	
	Carmen Crouse	Staff	
	Mirko Fritzlar	Student Representative	
	Dr. Hubert Juergensen	Council Member	
	Dr. Bernhard Ott	Chairman of the Council	
	Dr. Marvin Oxenham	General Secretary	
	Dr. Joachim Pomrehn	Council Member	
	Mrs Rana Wazir	Council Secretary	

ANNEX 2: TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE REVIEW

External review of the European Council for Theological Education (ECTE) against the ESG

TERMS OF REFERENCE

The present Terms of Reference were agreed between ECTE (applicant), ASIIN (coordinator) and EQAR.

1. Background

The European Council for Theological Education (hence ECTE) is a cross-border, subject-specific quality assurance agency in the discipline of theology. The ECTE (formerly the European Evangelical Accrediting Association) is registered as a non-profit organisation in Germany and has operated in Europe since 1979. Its staff and Council operate from various countries of Europe.

To date the ECTE counts approximately 80 member institutions in 29 countries in Europe and the Middle East. About half of the member institutions are subject to the ECTE accreditation processes.

The ECTE is a full member of INQAAHE and an Associate of ENQA. It is globally connected to the disciplinary sector through the International Council for Evangelical theological Education and to its stakeholders through networks such as the European Evangelical Alliance.

The ECTE is applying for EQAR registration for the first time.

Applicant's Independence from the coordinator

Applicant organization and coordinator confirm, that the coordinator has not provided remunerated or unremunerated services to the agency during the past 5 years, or vice-versa. Furthermore, the coordinator guarantees to take appropriate measures in preventing conflicts of interests within his own staff as well as expert reviewers. Both the applicant and coordinator officially commit themselves not to be reviewed (in the next 5 years) by the agency for which it coordinates the review.

2. Purpose and scope of the evaluation

This review will evaluate the extent to which ECTE fulfils the requirements of *the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)*. Consequently, the review will provide information to EQAR to support ECTE's application.

2.1 Activities of ECTE within the scope of the ESG

This review will analyse all activities of ECTE that are within the scope of the ESG, i.e. reviews, audits, evaluations or accreditation of higher education institutions or programmes that relate to teaching and learning (and their relevant links to research and innovation). This is independent of whether the activities are carried out within or outside the EHEA and whether they are obligatory or voluntary in nature.

The following activities of ECTE have to be addressed in the external review:

1. Institutional Accreditation

2. Programme Accreditation

The review will also address the way in which ECTE prevents conflicts of interests related to its training and partnership activities taking into account Annex 2 of the Policy on the Use and Interpretation of the ESG. The ECTE also carries out activities of development and networking that are not within the scope of the ESG and are not addressed by the external review.

3. The review process

The review will be conducted in line with the requirements of *the EQAR Procedures for Applications*.

The evaluation procedure consists of the following steps:

- Formulation of the draft Terms of Reference for the review between ECTE and ASIIN;
- Agreement on the Terms of Reference by EQAR;
- Nomination and appointment of the review panel by ASIIN;
- Self-assessment by ECTE including the preparation and publication of a self-assessment report;
- A site visit by the review panel to ECTE;
- Preparation and completion of the final review report by the review panel;
- Analysis of the final review report and decision-making by the EQAR Register Committee.

3.1 Nomination and appointment of the review team members

The review panel consists of 4 (at least 3) members:

- Academia:
  - one representative of Higher Education Institutions with experience in institutional accreditation
  - one representative of Higher Education Institutions with a professional back-ground in Theology
- QA Agency:
  - one representative of an accreditation agency not related to ECTE
- Student:
  - One student of theological studies.

ASIIN Consult GmbH as coordinator of the review process ensures the selection of the Review Panel. The coordinator takes responsibility for selecting qualified experts in a fair and transparent procedure. ASIIN, as a membership organization recruits among its members committee members and honorary expert panel members for the association's activities. Therefore, ASIIN can dispose of a pool of about 1.000 experienced reviewers in the general field of institutional review and accreditation as well as in the subject-specific fields of ASIIN's accreditation activities. ASIIN organizes on a regular basis trainings for the experts. Thus, we ensure that all experts are experienced in working with the ESG and criteria sets based on the ESG, performing site-visits and leading stakeholder discussions.

Consequently, ASIIN will ensure that all panel members have either completed a formal

training for agency reviews against the ESG 2015, or have participated in at least two reviews of quality assurance agency against the ESG that were accepted to support an application to EQAR.

ASIIN ensures that experts are selected from a wide variety of different backgrounds and at least one expert from a different country. The coordinator does not select experts who have been previously involved in providing services to the applicant quality assurance agency or otherwise have a real or apparent conflict of interest as defined in §4 of EQAR's Code of Conduct.

ASIIN panel members are selected with the support of the relevant Technical Committees and appointed by the Accreditation Commissions for either degree programmes or institutions. While recruiting student representatives, ASIIN cooperates with the German student pool for accreditation as well as with the European student association. In case ASIIN reviews programmes or institutions related to subject-specific fields that are not within the traditional ASIIN expertise, we cooperate closely with a variety of other, subject-specific organizations and networks, especially through the European Alliance for Subject-Specific and Professional Accreditation and Quality Assurance (EASPA).

ASIIN will provide ECTE with the list of suggested experts and their respective curricula vitarum to establish that there are no known conflicts of interest. The experts will have to sign a non-conflict of interest statement as regards the ECTE review, covering at least the cases of interest defined in the EQAR Code of Conduct.

Once appointed, ASIIN will inform EQAR about the appointed panel members.

Among the panel members a Chair and a Secretary is chosen. At least one member of the Review Panel has an international background not related to the country/countries of residence of the agency under review. The selected panel members are completely independent from the agency under review.

The panel will be supported by an ASIIN project manager who will monitor the integrity of the process and ensure that EQAR's requirements are met. The project manager will take care of the organization of the procedure and the site visit, take notes of the discussions with ECTE and draft a proposed review report for the discussion among the review panel members.

3.2 Self-assessment by ECTE, including the preparation of a self-assessment report

ECTE is responsible for the execution and organisation of its own self-assessment process and shall take into account the following guidance:

- Self-assessment includes all relevant internal and external stakeholders;
- The self-evaluation report shall reflect on the applicant's compliance with each of the ESG in parts 2 and 3. The report is a critical reflection on the activities, strengths and weaknesses of the applicant and the added value they provide for quality improvement of higher education institutions.
- The self-assessment report is broken down by the topics of the review and is expected to contain, among others: a brief description of the national HE and QA

system; background description of the current situation of the Agency; an analysis and appraisal of the current situation; proposals for improvement and measures already planned; a SWOT analysis; each criterion (ESG part 2 and 3) addressed individually, and considerations of how the agency has addressed the recommendations as noted in the previous EQAR Register Committee decision of inclusion/renewal (if applicable).

- All of the above listed external QA activities (whether within their national jurisdiction or outside of it, and whether obligatory or voluntary) will be described and their compliance with the ESG analysed.

- The report is well-structured, concise and comprehensively prepared. It clearly demonstrates the extent to which ECTE fulfils its tasks of external quality assurance and meets the ESG and thus the requirements for EQAR registration.

- ASIIN offers to ECTE the option of have the SAR formally scrutinized before submitting the final version of the report. This scrutiny does not involve an assessment of the content itself but merely the formal adequacy and completeness of the report and its annexes.

- The report is submitted to the review panel at the latest 6 weeks prior to the site visit.

3.3 A site visit by the review panel

The review panel will draft a proposal of the site visit schedule which shall be submitted to the agency at least two months before the planned dates of the visit. The schedule is to include an indicative timetable of the meetings and other exercises to be undertaken by the review panel during the site visit, the duration of which is usually 2 to 3 (typically 2 to 4) days. The approved schedule shall be given to ECTE at least one month before the site visit, in order to properly organise the requested interviews.

The site visit will close with a final de-briefing meeting outlining the panel's overall impressions but not its judgement on the ESG compliance of the agency.

3.4 Preparation and completion of the final review report

The review report will be drafted in consultation with all review panel members and correspond to the purpose and scope of the review as defined under articles 2 and 2.1. In particular, it will provide a clear rationale for its findings concerning each ESG. When preparing the report, the review panel should bear in mind the EQAR Policy on the Use and Interpretation of the ESG to ensure that the report will contain sufficient information for the Register Committee for application to EQAR[1].

The external report will reflect reality at the time of review.

A draft will first be submitted to ECTE usually within 6 weeks of the site visit for comment on factual accuracy. If ECTE chooses to provide a position statement in reference to the draft report, it will be submitted to the chair of the review panel within 2 weeks after the

[1] See here: https://www.eqar.eu/assets/uploads/2018/04/UseAndInterpretationOfTheESGv2.0-2015.pdf

receipt of the draft report.

Thereafter, the review panel will take into account the statement by ECTE and finalise and submit the document to ASIIN and EQAR. All panel members will sign-off on the final external review report of ECTE. ASIIN will sign and provide to ECTE the Declaration of Honour together with the final report.

The report is to be finalised within 10 weeks of the site visit and will normally not exceed 50 pages in length.

4. Publication of the report

ECTE will receive the expert panel's report and publish it on its website. The report will also be published on the EQAR website together with the decision on registration, regardless of the outcome.

5. Decision-making on EQAR registration

The agency will submit the review report via email to EQAR. The agency will also include its self-assessment report (in a PDF format), the Declaration of Honour and the full curriculum vitae (CVs) of all review panel members. In addition, ECTE may provide any other relevant documents to the application (i.e. annexes, statement to the review report).

EQAR is expected to consider the review report and the agency's application at its Register Committee meeting in (September, 2021).

6. Indicative schedule of the review

Agreement on Terms of Reference	November/2020
Appointment of review panel members	April/2021
Self-assessment completed	May/2021
Preparation of site visit schedule and indicative timetable	May/2021
Briefing of review panel members	May/2021
Review panel site visit	June/2021
Draft review report	August/2021
Statement of ECTE to review panel (if applicable)	August/2021
Submission of final report to ASIIN and EQAR	September/2021
EQAR Register Committee meeting and decision on the application by ECTE	Month/2021

ANNEX 3: GLOSSARY

ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
AIRIM	Annual Internal Review, Improvement and Monitoring
APR	Annual Progress Report
ASIIN	Akkreditierungsagentur für Studiengänge der Ingenieurwissenschaften, der Informatik, der Naturwissenschaften und der Mathematik
C.E.O	Chief Executive Officer
COVID-19	Corona Virus Disease 2019
ECTE	European Council for Theological Education
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
EQA	External Quality Assurance
EQAR	European Quality Assurance Register
ESG	Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, 2015
FTE	Full Time Equivalent
GA	General Assembly
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
ICETE	The International Council for Evangelical Theological Education
INQAAHE	International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies
IQA	Internal Quality Assurance
IT	Information Technology
NVAO	Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders
QA	Quality Assurance
QA	Quality Assurance
QAA	Quality Assurance Agreement
QAC	Quality Assurance Coordinator
QAR	Quality Assurance Officer
RS	Review Secretary
RWTH	Rheinisch-Westfälische Technische Hochschule
SAR	Self-Assessment Report
SER	Self-Evaluation Report
SG-GETE	Standards and Guidelines for Global Evangelical Theological Education
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats
UK	United Kingdom
VET	Visitation Evaluation Team
WEA	World Evangelical Alliance

ANNEX 4. DOCUMENTS TO SUPPORT THE REVIEW

DOCUMENTS PROVIDED BY ECTE

Primary documents

- ECTE Self-Assessment Report 2021
- 2021-06-05 ECTE SAR Follow-Up Aspects
- Introducing the ECTE, featuring the identity, activities, organisation, internal QA management and fact sheets of the ECTE.
- Standards and Guidelines for ECTE accreditation, featuring ECTE's accreditation standards related to ESG1 and ESG 2.1.
- Criteria and Procedures for ECTE accreditation, featuring the procedures for QA.

Additional quality assurance documents

- Supplemental Guidelines series, featuring a set of documents on specific QA guidelines.
- Guidelines for Site Visits and VETs, featuring site visit procedures, matters concerning peer-experts (VETs) and the production of review reports

Policy documents

- Appeals and Complaints
- Consistency Guarantee
- Data Protection Policy
- Independence, Conflict of Interest and Intolerance Prevention Policy
- Ongoing Review and Improvement Monitoring
- Stakeholder Involvement and Extension Policy
- Staff Policy (including professional codes and ethical requirements)
- Student Council Member Policy
- Thematic Analysis – Strategic Plan 2020-2025
- VET Development policy
- Visitation Feedback Policy

Forms

- Institutional Accreditation Application
- Programme Accreditation Application
- Cyclical Review Request
- AIRIM Reporting Form
- Annual Progress Report 2020-21 (APR)
- Annual Staff Review
- GDPR Commitment
- No Conflict of Interest Declaration
- Review Report Worksheets and Review Report Worksheets for Distance and Online Education

Surveys

- ECTE SAR Stakeholder Responses
- Student Satisfaction Survey 2020-21

- Stakeholder Survey 2020-21
- Stakeholder Consultation 2018
- Peer expert satisfaction survey 2021 of ECTE's Work and Methodologies

Additional documents

- ECTE Strategic Plan 2021-2027
- AIRIM 2020 Report
- ESG Compliance Action Plan
- SWOT Analysis vis ESG
- Formal registration Vereinsregisterauszug
- Staff job descriptions: External Review Manager, General Secretary, Review Secretary Quality Assurance Coordinator, Treasurer
- Council Minutes
- General Assembly Minutes
- ECTE VET training course
- Occasional Student VETs online training course

Finances

- Approved Budget 2020-2021
- 2020 Fiscal Year Results
- Development of Funds 2024-2020
- Fee development overview 2014 – 2026
- Audited financial reports: Prüfbericht 2017, Prüfbericht 2018
- Treasurer Report to General Assembly 2019 Financial-Report-GA-2019