



**REPORT
of the Expert Panel
on the
RE-ACCREDITATION OF
THE CATHOLIC FACULTY OF THEOLOGY IN DAKOVO,
“JOSIP JURAJ STROSSMAYER” UNIVERSITY OF OSIJEK**

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INTRODUCTION

This report on the re-accreditation of the Catholic Faculty of Theology in Đakovo Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek was written by the Expert Panel appointed by the Agency for Science and Higher Education, on the basis of the self-evaluation of the institution and supporting documentation and a visit to the institution.

Re-accreditation procedure performed by the Agency for Science and Higher Education (ASHE), a public body listed in EQAR (European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education) and ENQA (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education) full member, is obligatory once in five years for all higher education institutions working in the Republic of Croatia, in line with the Act on Quality Assurance in Higher Education.

The Expert Panel is appointed by the ASHE Accreditation Council, an independent expert body, to perform an independent peer review based evaluation of the institution and their study programs.

The report contains:

- a brief analysis of the institutional advantages and disadvantages,
- a list of good practices found at the institution,
- recommendations for institutional improvement and measures to be implemented in the following period (and checked within a follow-up procedure), and
- detailed analysis of the compliance to the Standards and Criteria for Re-Accreditation .

The members of the Expert Panel were:

- Professor Tina Beattie, The Digby Stuart Research Centre for Religion, Society and Human Flourishing, Digby Stuart College University of Roehampton, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
- Professor Lucien Van Liere, Universiteit Utrecht, Republic of Netherlands
- Professor Annemarie Mayer, Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies, Catholic University of Leuven, Kingdom of Belgium
- Karlo Kovacic, student, Catholic Faculty of Theology University of Zagreb, Republic of Croatia

In the analysis of the documentation, site visit of the report the Panel was supported by the ASHE staff:

- Marina Grubišić, coordinator
- Vlatka Derenčinović, translator

During the visit to the Institution the Expert Panel held meetings with the representatives of the following groups:

- The Management;
- The Working Group that compiled the Self-Evaluation;
- The students, i.e., a self-selected set of students present at the interview;
- The Vice-Dean for Teaching and Students' Affairs, programme co-ordinators and teachers;
- The Vice-Dean for Scientific Activity and International Cooperation and research projects' leaders;
- Heads of Institutes;
- Administrative staff;
- Teaching assistants and junior researchers.
- ect.

The Expert Panel also had a tour of the library, IT rooms, student register desk, and the classrooms at the Catholic Faculty of Theology in Đakovo, where they held a brief question and answer session with the students who were present. In case the Panel visited workplaces for practical teaching, this should be stated in the Report.

Upon completion of re-accreditation procedure, the Accreditation Council renders its opinion on the basis of the Re-accreditation Report, an Assessment of Quality of the higher education institution and the Report of Fulfilment of Quantitative Criteria which is acquired by the Agency's information system.

Once the Accreditation Council renders its opinion, the Agency issues an Accreditation Recommendation by which the Agency recommends to the Minister of Science, Education and Sports to:

1. **issue a confirmation** to the higher education institution which confirms that the higher education institution meets the requirements for performing the higher education activities or parts of activities, in case the Accreditation Recommendation is positive,
2. **deny a license** for performing the higher education activities or parts of activities to the higher education institution, in case the Accreditation Recommendation is negative, or
3. **issue a letter of recommendation** for the period up to three (3) years in which period the higher education institution should remove its deficiencies. For the higher education institution the letter of recommendation may include the suspension of student enrollment for the defined period.

The Accreditation Recommendation also includes an Assessment of Quality of the higher education institution as well as recommendations for quality development

SHORT DESCRIPTION OF THE EVALUATED INSTITUTION

NAME OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION: Catholic Faculty of Theology in Đakovo
Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek

ADDRESS: Petra Preradovića 17, 31400 Đakovo, Croatia

NAME OF THE HEAD OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION: Prof. dr. Pero Aračić, Full
Professor, Dean

ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE (e.g. chairs, departments, centres); The Faculty consists
of the following departments:

- Department of Philosophy and History;
- Department of Biblical Sciences and Patrology;
- Department of Systematic Theology and
- Department of Practical Theology.

LIST OF STUDY PROGRAMMES (and levels);

1. Integrated university study of Philosophy and Theology -203 students (9 part-time)
2. University postgraduate specialist study of Pastoral Theology -19 (all part time students)

NUMBER OF TEACHERS (full-time, external associates); 15 full-time

NUMBER OF SCIENTISTS (doctors of science, elected to grades, full-time); 14

TOTAL BUDGET (in kunas): .7.781.839,64 kn

MSES FUNDING (percentage): .6.912.702,49 kn (state budget)- 89%

OWN FUNDING (percentage): 869.137,15 kn – 11%

SHORT DESCRIPTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION:

The Faculty of today continues the nearly two hundred year old tradition of the study of philosophy and theology in the diocesan town of Đakovo. On 6 November 1806, in the building of former Franciscan monastery, Bishop Ante Mandić opened the Theological Seminary and Lyceum episcopale. The spirit of renewal of the Second Vatican Council introduced new courses, we have a new generation of teachers, and the model of education is the highest theological institution in Croatia, the Catholic Faculty of Theology (CFT) in Zagreb. The Statute of CFT in Zagreb, in 1974, served as the base for the Statute of the School of Theology in Đakovo. By the decision of the faculty of the School of Theology and on the request of the diocesan bishop and the CFT in Zagreb to the Congregation for Catholic Education, on 10 January 1987, the affiliation to the CFT in Zagreb was approved. With the return of the Catholic Faculty of Theology in Zagreb to the state University, the School of Theology in Đakovo also underwent certain reforms, and with it, in 1994, came the name change. The School of Theology changed its name to the Theology in Đakovo - Affiliate Study of the Catholic Faculty of Theology in Zagreb. The Statute of Theology in Đakovo, aligned with the church and state regulations, with the Statute of the University of Zagreb and with the Statute of the Catholic Faculty of Theology in Zagreb, came into force on 28 February 2000.

After the request made by the diocesan bishop, Dr. Marin Srakić, from 7 November 2003, to the Congregation for Catholic Education in Rome on the pastoral need to elevate the Theology in Đakovo to the level of the Catholic Faculty of Theology in Đakovo, the Congregation accepted the request and in 2005 founded the Catholic Faculty of Theology in Đakovo as part of the Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek. The first Statute of the Faculty that was approved »ad experimentum« for five years by the Congregation for Catholic Education on 4 June 2005, ceased to be in force on 20 April 2010. On that day, the new Statute came into force, which was approved by the Congregation for Catholic Education on 25 March 2010.

CONCLUSIONS OF THE EXPERT PANEL

ADVANTAGES OF THE INSTITUTION

1. A strong sense of community, with a high degree of student and staff satisfaction.
2. A number of young and promising teaching staff with a clear ability to relate well to students, and with a commitment to the personal development and well-being of students.
3. A strong practical/pastoral emphasis in terms of teaching and research.
4. An attractive and well-equipped learning and teaching environment.
5. Openness to discussion of the challenges faced by the Faculty as a result of its incorporation into the public higher education system.
6. The Faculty provides a significant theological presence sensitive to the wider community it serves and with a clear sense of social responsibility.
7. Awareness of the challenge of inter-church and inter-religious relations (Orthodox and Islam respectively) in the context of the geographical location of the Faculty and the history of the region.

DISADVANTAGES OF THE INSTITUTION

1. Some confusion between objectives and accountability relating to academic freedom and scientific objectivity in teaching and research, and objectives and accountability relating to spiritual formation, training for the priesthood and conformity to Church teaching.
2. The practice of teaching and publishing research primarily in Croatian limits opportunities for international collaboration and restricts students' ability to access scholarly sources.
3. Limited access/reference to relevant contemporary literature in the library and in course reading lists.
4. Lack of peer review, monitoring and second-marking with regard to teaching and assessment.
5. More effective forms of assessment needed, including written assessment.
6. A lack of a clear vision and forward-planning relating to ongoing staff training and development with regard to research and teaching.
7. Under-representation of women on the academic teaching staff.

FEATURES OF GOOD PRACTICE

1. A strong pastoral ethos with evidence of good relationships between staff and students.
2. A commitment to relate teaching and research to practical issues of pastoral care relevant to the cultural and religious context.
3. Openness to interdisciplinarity and to making Catholic higher education relevant to the challenges and changes of European culture and politics.
4. A clear sense of valuing the human, raising awareness and promoting an ethos of responsibility and care.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

1. Management of the Higher Education Institution and Quality Assurance

Develop a post-2015 strategic plan which should address the following recommendations:

- Achieve a greater sense of coherence and integration between standards of academic freedom and scientific objectivity appropriate to a public institution of higher education, and the ethos and values of a Catholic faculty with responsibility for training priests and teaching Catholic doctrine. This should include greater transparency in terms of addressing the challenges that this poses in potential situations of conflict between the two.
- Set in place more effective systems for evaluating and monitoring performance of teaching staff.
- Introduce more careful oversight of marking standards and assessment procedures to ensure fairness and consistency.
- Promote international collaboration and dissemination of research, including translation facilities and language training for researchers.
- Ensure that students are fully informed about procedures for appeals and complaints.

2. Study programmes

- Develop effective strategies and outcomes for programme development and improvement, including scope for greater interdisciplinarity and for wider coverage of contemporary debates in theology and philosophy. These should be in accordance with internationally recognized standards of scientific teaching and research.
- Introduce more diverse assessment procedures, including written coursework.
- Encourage greater diversity of teaching methods and independent student learning, including opportunities for internships and other practice-based forms of learning.

- Improve access to a wider range of academic literature, including more contemporary books and journals, through library resources and online databases. This should be reflected in course reading lists.

3. Students

- Explore ways of using the facilities and venue of the Faculty to encourage a wider range of extracurricular activities.
- Provide more counselling, mentoring and professional development courses, including the reintroduction of internships.
- Ensure channels for open and honest communication between staff and students. This includes making sure that students are fully aware of complaints and appeals procedures.

4. Teachers

- The new strategic goals should include the recruitment of a more diverse range of teaching staff with skills relevant to the interdisciplinary needs of a public faculty committed to internationally recognised, scientific levels of teaching and research. Encourage the recruitment and promotion of young researchers, including women.
- Provide incentives and encouragement for staff to engage in wider international research collaboration and dissemination, including communicating and publishing research in an international language, and keeping abreast of contemporary debates and publications.

5. Scientific and professional activity

- Ensure that the new strategic plan reflects the need to conform to international standards of scientific teaching and research through the promotion of greater diversity of staff profiles and research interests, wider language training facilities for staff and students, and the availability of a wider range of contemporary academic sources in teaching programmes and library resources.
- Foster a more collaborative research culture, including the promotion of a more active research community within the Faculty, the development of funded research projects, and greater international collaboration and

dissemination, including publishing research in peer-reviewed journals. Where necessary, language training should be provided to ensure that every researcher is proficient in at least one international language as well as Croatian.

6. International cooperation and mobility

- Create more opportunities for student exchange with European and non-European universities, including credit transfers for study abroad programmes and the development of Erasmus-type exchanges.
- Promote research networks through institutional affiliation with relevant international bodies, in order to create a more outward-looking and ambitious research strategy.
- Introduce an international language as a teaching and research medium, to facilitate international cooperation and mobility and to attract non-Croatian speaking students.

7. Resources: administration, space, equipment and finances

- Make a significant investment in library resources, including the purchase of relevant contemporary scholarly literature and subscription to online databases and journals.

DETAILED ANALYSIS OF INSTITUTIONAL COMPLIANCE TO THE STANDARDS AND CRITERIA FOR RE-ACCREDITATION

1. Institutional management and quality assurance

- **1.1 Mostly implemented.** Strategic plan stops in 2015 – too early to predict future performance and strategy – and fails to explain reasons for not achieving certain targets. However, during the visit the evaluators were given a much fuller and more satisfactory account of strategic plans.
- **1.2 Fully implemented.** Organisational structure and processes were good.
- **1.3 Partly implemented.** There is inconsistency between the mission and visions of an ecclesial faculty, and the aims and objectives of a public university.
- **1.4 Mostly implemented.** The self-evaluation report failed to integrate sufficiently the sometimes conflicting aims of an ecclesial education programme aimed primarily at training priests, and the demands of a public university. However, in discussion the evaluators were persuaded that there was awareness of the need for such integration and for respecting standards of academic freedom and scientific objectivity through the cultivation of critical thinking. Due to the preset format of the self-evaluation report no information was included about the content of any programmes, but information was provided during the visit.
- **1.5 Mostly implemented.** It was difficult to assess exactly what procedures were in place for quality assurance, but the evaluators were satisfied that general procedures were in place for evaluating and maintaining quality.
- **1.6 Partly implemented.** Plans are in place to introduce evaluation by committee of theses, but procedures need to be introduced for monitoring and improving teaching quality, and to ensure consistency in marking and assessment.
- **1.7 Starting phase of implementation.** There is scope for developing a coherent research strategy, and for wider international collaboration in research. The Faculty is aware of the need to develop this, but as yet no procedures are in place.
- **1.8 Mostly implemented.** Procedures were in place and explained in student literature, but students seemed unaware of these procedures. We thought this might be partly because the close community spirit of the Faculty might deter students from using official channels of complaint

2. Study programmes

- **2.1 Starting phase of implementation.** There is an awareness of the advantage of interdisciplinarity and of the benefits of opportunities for combined degrees, but there was no indication that this had been translated into effective strategies for programme development and improvement, and no sense of which areas of programme content might benefit from revision and redesign in consultation with stakeholders.
- **2.2 Fully implemented.** Enrolment quotas reflect the excellent capacity of the Faculty to meet the needs of the local community.
- **2.3 Fully implemented.** There is a good ratio of staff to students and good pass rates.
- **2.4 Starting phase of implementation.** In terms of the Faculty's mission to educate priests, outcomes are satisfactorily defined, but more work must be done on defining objective academic outcomes which might be expected from a public faculty with a diverse student body.
- **2.5 Starting phase of implementation.** Students expressed concern about the number of courses, and there is scope for more diverse assessment procedures, including written coursework.
- **2.6 Mostly implemented.** Some students complained about workloads, but the evaluators were satisfied that these were consistent with ECTS standards.
- **2.7 Partly implemented.** In terms of Catholic ecclesial standards, the Faculty conforms to international expectations. However, as a public faculty committed to scientific standards of research, much remains to be done to show that this is being implemented.
- **2.8 Mostly implemented.** Based on verbal accounts and levels of student satisfaction, the evaluators were satisfied. However, there was no concrete evidence of different teaching methods and independent student learning.
- **2.9 Partly implemented.** Resources were adequate and consistent with the self-declared mission of the Faculty – i.e. primarily orientated towards training priests. However, access to journal databases was minimal, and students were unaware of basic search engines (e.g. Google Scholar, Web of Science). Reading lists and library sources were poor in terms of contemporary international sources and academic debates.
- **2.10 Not implemented.** Although there had been some internship arrangements in the past, we understood from students and staff that these had been discontinued and received no information about plans to reintroduce them as part of the learning process.

3. Students

- **3.1 Mostly implemented.** Although the curriculum is primarily designed for the theological education of priests, the Faculty was clearly committed to the education and future careers of all students it admitted. This could be improved by the introduction of a wider range of courses dealing with contemporary issues, in engagement with relevant academic sources.
- **3.2 Partly implemented.** The evaluators were impressed to hear of an annual concert and performance event for students to showcase their talents, but thought that the excellent facilities and venue of the Faculty could be used to encourage a wider range of extracurricular activities.
- **3.3 Starting phase of implementation.** There is a clear concern for the pastoral wellbeing of students, but this could be enhanced through the provision of a wider range of counselling, mentoring and professional development courses, including the reintroduction of internships.
- **3.4 Mostly implemented.** Generally this requirement is satisfied, with scope for making students more aware of appeals processes, and for the introduction of more written forms of assessment.
- **3.5 Fully implemented.** Information about employment was made available, and staff clearly maintain an interest in the ongoing development of students after graduation.
- **3.6 Fully implemented.** The faculty seems to have very good channels of communication with the local community, largely owing to the pastoral activities of priests and others associated with it.
- **3.7 Partly implemented.** Although students generally expressed high levels of satisfaction, some expressed concerns over the attitudes of some members of staff.
- **3.8 Partly implemented.** Again, levels of satisfaction were good overall, but the evaluators discerned some dissatisfaction in the meeting with students which suggested scope for greater openness and improved communication.

4. Teachers

- **4.1 Partly implemented.** Strategic goals were not set out beyond 2015, and not all of those in the current plan had been achieved. No explanation was offered where goals have not been achieved by the date specified. Teaching provision is satisfactory in terms of the stated ecclesial mission of the Faculty, but seems inadequate in terms of new disciplinary needs arising as a result of its transition to a public Faculty.
- **4.2 Partly implemented.** There was evidence of awareness of the need to ensure continuity in terms of the senior management and oversight of the Faculty. However, no evidence was offered of attempts to widen recruitment opportunities to diversify teaching staff, nor of forward-looking plans for research projects and the promotion of young researchers.
- **4.3 Fully implemented.** The ratio between staff and students is good.
- **4.4 Starting phase of implementation.** Staff should be encouraged to engage in wider international collaboration around research, including communicating and publishing research in an international language, and to keep abreast of contemporary debates and publications and include these in teaching resources and bibliographies.
- **4.5 Fully implemented.** Workloads seemed fair with ample time for research.
- **4.6 Fully implemented.** Many members of staff are involved in pastoral activities and community-based projects, but these external commitments enhance the performance of teaching and practice-based research.

5. Scientific and professional activity

- **5.1 Starting phase of implementation.** There is a clear vision in place, but no concrete plans for evaluation and review in terms of a strategic plan. We note that the current strategic plan ends in 2015, so comments here relate to future planning.
- **5.2 Partly implemented.** There is willingness and enthusiasm for wider cooperation, but this has still to be formalised and incorporated into a strategic plan.
- **5.3 Partly implemented.** There are good researchers associated with the Faculty, but there is no formal research plan to consolidate and promote their research as a community affiliated with the Faculty.
- **5.4 Starting phase of implementation.** There is a good record of publication in Croatian and occasionally in translation, but there is a need to develop a much more coherent vision of possibilities for international dissemination. This includes attending to language training and the need for every researcher to be proficient in at least one international language as well as Croatian.
- **5.5 Not implemented.** The ethos of the Dakovo faculty is such that collaboration and community are emphasised more than competitiveness and rewards. This is an ethos which serves the Faculty well and enables its work in the local community, but the Dean and Vice Deans must be aware of the changing environment they are moving into, which might demand a more competitive ethos. The evaluating team encourages the Faculty administration to preserve their ethos of community and solidarity, while recognising the need to meet the requirements of Bologna and the standards of international scholarship in a global world.
- **5.6 Starting phase of implementation.** The Faculty recognises the need to raise their profile in terms of peer-reviewed international journals.
- **5.7 Partly implemented.** Domestic projects are good and tailored to the pastoral needs of the local community and surrounding regions, but the public status of the Faculty requires more scientifically focused research, and more commitment to funded research with an international perspective and with dissemination through international peer-reviewed journals.
- **5.8 Mostly implemented.** Current research provides valuable knowledge for Church institutions and practices. There was no evidence that this has been engaged with by the Church hierarchy, though we saw clear evidence of a desire on the part of researchers to make their findings available for the good of the wider community.

- 5.9 Not applicable. This is a small Faculty primarily orientated towards the training of priests, and therefore not currently engaging in income-generating projects.
- 5.10 Not applicable. The Faculty participates in the supervision of doctoral students at other universities (mainly Zagreb and Osijek).

6. International cooperation and mobility

- 6.1 **Partly implemented.** The evaluators saw some evidence of regional student exchange, but there is scope for wider involvement in this area.
- 6.2 **Not implemented.** Students need to be encouraged to take advantage of Erasmus exchange and similar programmes, through the formal recognition of credits acquired during periods of study outside of Croatia.
- 6.3 **Partly implemented.** There is clear mobility in terms of regional study centres (Rome, Vienna), but scope for a wider vision of international mobility and cooperation with other European and non-European universities.
- 6.4 **Starting phase of implementation.** Individual researchers are affiliated, but the Faculty needs to develop institutional affiliation with relevant international bodies. This relates to the wider perception of the evaluators that the Faculty is still too inward-looking and needs to be more ambitious in its visions and strategic plans, in order to fully promote its considerable strengths in research and academic expertise.
- 6.5 **Starting phase of implementation.** Institutional facilities are in place, but a limited language as the main medium of teaching and research makes it difficult to attract international students. This relates to the evaluators' recommendation that the Faculty promotes the use of at least one international language in teaching and research.
- 6.6 **Starting phase of implementation.** As above.
- 6.7 **Starting phase of implementation.** As above.

7. Resources: administration, space, equipment and finances

- 7.1 **Mostly implemented.** Facilities are excellent, but library resources are very limited in terms of contemporary literature and international publications.
- 7.2 **Fully implemented.** There is a very good balance between teaching and non-teaching staff.
- 7.3 **Fully implemented.** Good staff satisfaction and training facilities.
- 7.4 Not applicable.
- 7.5 **Fully implemented.** The Faculty has excellent equipment and facilities.
- 7.6 **Fully implemented.** Library space and equipment are excellent, even if actual resources are poor in terms of books and journals.
- 7.7 **Fully implemented.** Student recruitment was consistent with financial resources.
- 7.8 **Partly implemented.** There is evidence of self-funded activities and facilities and equipment were excellent, but this is marred by a lack of financial commitment to the development of library resources, including books, journals and electronic resources.