

Theology Study Programme Group assessment decision Baltic Methodist Theological Seminary

26/02/2019

The Higher Education Assessment Council of the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education decided to approve the report of the Assessment Committee and to carry out the next quality assessment of the first level of higher education of the Theology Study Programme Group of Baltic Methodist Theological Seminary with a secondary condition

Pursuant to clauses 41.1 and 42 of the document “Quality Assessment of the Study Programme Group at the First and Second Levels of Higher Education” established on the basis of the authorization contained in § 21¹ (2) of the Institutions of Professional Higher Education Act, § 10 (4) of the University Act and clauses 3.7.3 and 3.7.1 of the Statutes of the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education, the Higher Education Assessment Council of the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education (hereinafter the Council) states the following:

1. Baltic Methodist Theological Seminary (hereinafter EMKTS) coordinated with EKKA the time of accreditation of the quality assessment of the Theology Study Programme Group on 09.09.2017.
2. By the order of 14.08.2018, the Director of EKKA approved the Committee for Institutional Accreditation and Quality Assessment of the Theology Study Programme Group of the Baltic Methodist Theological Seminary and Estonian Free Church Theological Seminary (hereinafter the Committee) in the following composition

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| Gerrit Immink (Chairman) | Professor Emeritus, Protestant Theological University (Holland) |
| Jonathan Loose | Director of Learning and Teaching, Heythrop College, University of London (UK) |
| Trygve Elliv Wyller | Professor, Faculty of Theology, University of Oslo (Norway) |
| Heiki Haljasorg | Project Manager, Estonian Council of Churches (Estonia) |
| Ringo Ringvee | Adviser, Ministry of the Interior (Estonia) |
| Heidi Maiberg | Student, University of Tartu (Estonia) |

3. EMKTS submitted the following professional higher education study programmes for assessment in the Theology Study Programme Group:

Theology and Mission (Estonian as the language of instruction)

Theology and Mission (Russian as the language of instruction)

Theology and Mission (English as the language of instruction)

4. EMKTS submitted a self-analysis report to the EKKA office on 16.08.2018, which was sent to the Committee by the assessment coordinator on 16.08.2018.
5. The assessment visit at EMKTS took place on 09.–10.10.2018.
6. The Committee sent the draft assessment report to the EKKA office on 26.11.2018, which EKKA forwarded to the institution of higher education for comment on 30.11.2018 and to which EMKTS submitted a reply on 12.12.2018.
7. The Committee submitted the final assessment report to the EKKA office on 17.12.2018. The assessment report is an integral part of the decision. The report is available on the EKKA website.
8. The Secretary of the Assessment Council forwarded the final assessment report and self-analysis report to the members of the Assessment Council on 14.02.2019.
9. The Council discussed the received documents at the meeting of 26.02.2019 with the participation of 10 members and decided to highlight the following strengths, recommendations, and areas for improvement concerning the first and second levels of higher education of the Theology Study Programme Group of the EMKTS.

Strengths

- 1) Studies are conducted simultaneously in three languages. An open and ecumenical learning environment has been created in the Seminary.
- 2) The use of simultaneous interpretation is efficient and allows teaching ethnically diverse study groups together, and then have discussions with each other. The interpretation equipment is of a high standard, and the interpreters are not only highly qualified in the relevant languages, but also in theology.
- 3) The integration of different ethnic groups, and the creation of the possibility of social cohesion. The Seminary creates opportunities for graduates to work with different language groups.
- 4) The Seminary prepares clergy for leadership roles in chaplaincy and churches and helps to improve the quality of the work of clergy already working.
- 5) The Seminary's faculty and management are committed to their students. Students are enthusiastic and satisfied with their studies.
- 6) The support of EMKTS for students with special needs deserves recognition. Among other things, sign language interpreter is also used to ensure the studies of deaf students.
- 7) There is a caring ethos in the Seminary, and students are offered strong informal support.
- 8) The dropout rate is low.
- 9) Cooperation with various academic and church bodies on the topics of graduation theses and the involvement of students is very positive. The students' graduation theses have often grown out of their practical activities in congregations and the needs of congregations.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

- 1) Achieving and maintaining international higher education standards is one of the main challenges for the Seminary. In order to ensure compliance of higher education with national and international standards, EMKTS must enhance and further develop cooperation with other Estonian and foreign higher education institutions (including the Asbury Theological Seminary). In order to ensure international competitiveness, it is necessary to pay more attention to the exchange of lecturers and research cooperation.
- 2) The Seminary has not defined its applied research profile. In order to ensure that teaching is carried out at the higher education level, the research work of lecturers needs to be strengthened. An applied research strategy needs to be developed that is in line with the mission of the Seminary. Funding must be provided for the planned research activities, among other things, it is advisable to apply for funding for research plans from the United Baltic and Nordic Methodist Church and the CCTEF (Central Conference Theological Education Fund).
- 3) The participation of lecturers and students in foreign mobility is low. A strategy for the foreign exchange of lecturers and students should be developed.
- 4) According to students and alumni, the e-learning skills of lecturers (especially the older generation) need to be developed.
- 5) The library of the Seminary is quite limited. Cooperation with the Tallinn University Library must be developed, and the creation of an e-library must begin.
- 6) The EMKTS must develop its teaching-related activities in such a way that they are more systematic, strategically planned, and clearly documented, for example, in student support processes.
- 7) The admission process needs to be streamlined to ensure international competitiveness by assessing candidates' intellectual capacity and potential for critical analysis and reflection.
- 8) Cooperation with the Asbury Theological Seminary and other educational institutions should be continued and expanded, and the academic standards of the Asbury Seminary should be regularly compared with those of the EMKTS.
- 9) There is little study literature in Estonian and Russian. The availability of advanced e-learning resources also varies by language. Efforts must be continued to provide comparable learning experiences for students with different mother tongues, including books and other teaching aids. As learning resources (literature, availability of supervisors) differ in the language of instruction, the Committee recommends that these differences be made clear in the study programme as well.
- 10) According to the students, in some cases, the teaching consists of reading the lecture texts from paper, and there is a lack of group work and discussions. Opportunities for regular development of academic staff, including the sharing of innovative solutions and good practices among lecturers, with the involvement of external experts, need to be developed and enhanced.
- 11) It must be ensured that all academic staff are aware of the activities that are mandatory in their roles. It must be ensured that employees also comply with these requirements (especially with regard to e-learning) by supporting them in this process.
- 12) In many cases, the students' graduation theses submitted to the Committee lack a theoretical basis and depth. The students' skills of analysis and critical thinking need to be developed. This, in turn, requires strengthening the research capacity of lecturers and should be based on a clear, documented, and realistic strategy. This would also help to enrich diploma theses and make them methodologically stronger.
- 13) The development of international mobility of students must be continued in cooperation with universities of high academic level, with which the Seminary can compare itself. The Seminary could also create more opportunities for students to come into contact with research, for example, by providing opportunities to participate in research conferences.
- 14) In terms of student assessment, lecturers are given a great deal of freedom. However, this leads to inconsistencies in the assessment. It is necessary to develop objective, clear, uniform

assessment criteria corresponding to the level of higher education, which would be unambiguously understood and applied by all lecturers. To ensure the objectivity of assessment, double assessment by several teachers should also be used more.

- 15) As students' study periods at the Seminary take place only four days a month, the necessary study resources for independent study must be provided, such as electronic versions of the study literature and audio recordings of the lectures.
- 16) The implementation of the Russian version of the study information system must be ensured as soon as possible.
- 17) The Seminary does not have a longer-term research plan. It is necessary to develop a longer-term research plan (5-7 years). The content and methodology of applied research need to be more clearly defined. The Seminary must choose its research priorities and allocate more resources to research to achieve concrete results.
- 18) According to the Estonian Research Information System, very few lecturers of the Seminary have published during the last five years (2014-2018). There are nine publications, seven of which belong to the former rector of the Seminary (mostly ETIS level 6). The lack of publishing lecturers is a clear weakness of the Seminary. All lecturers should be required to conduct research and issue publications. It must be ensured that sufficient time is allocated for research in the workload of lecturers and that the necessary resources for research are available to lecturers.
- 19) The Seminary does not have a strategy (apart from verbal support) to stimulate lecturer' research. The Seminary could initiate a mentoring system by bringing in high-level international research methodologists to supervise younger staff and co-author articles.
- 20) Only two lecturers have a doctoral degree. The management should support another 1-2 employees to obtain a doctoral degree.

10. Clause 41 of the document "Quality Assessment of the Study Programme Group at the First and Second Level of Higher Education" stipulates that the Assessment Council shall approve the assessment report within three (3) months after its receipt. The Council will consider the strengths, areas for improvement, and recommendations identified by the Assessment Committee and decide to carry out the next quality assessment of the Study Programme Group in seven, five, or three years.

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

- Pursuant to § 6 (7) 2) of the Government of the Republic Regulation "Standard of Higher Education"(SHE), *a lecturer (including a guest lecturer) or researcher conducting studies in a specific subject must have the necessary teaching competence and his or her qualification to support the achievement of objectives and learning outcomes of the study programme.* According to the students, in some cases, the teaching consists of reading the lecture texts from paper, and there is a lack of group work and discussions. Opportunities for regular development of academic staff, including the sharing of innovative solutions and good practices among lecturers, with the involvement of external experts, need to be developed and enhanced.
- Clause 2.1 of Annex 1 to SHE stipulates that in order to obtain a diploma of professional higher education, a student must *be able to formulate problems related to the specialty and analyze and evaluate various solutions, and be able to independently collect and critically interpret information using appropriate methods and tools.* In many cases, students' graduation theses

submitted to the Committee lack a theoretical basis and depth. Students' skills of analysis and critical thinking need to be developed. This, in turn, requires strengthening the research capacity of lecturers and should be based on a clear, documented, and realistic strategy.

- Clause 5.3.7 of the Regulation "Quality Assessment of the Study Programme Group at the First and Second Level of Higher Education" provides the requirement that the *assessment of learning outcomes is appropriate, transparent and objective, and supports the development of the learner*. In terms of student assessment, lecturers are given a great deal of freedom. However, this leads to inconsistencies in the assessment. It is necessary to develop objective, clear, uniform assessment criteria corresponding to the level of higher education, which would be unambiguously understood and applied by all lecturers.
12. Pursuant to § 53 (1) 2) of the Administrative Procedure Act (APA), *a secondary condition to an administrative act is an additional obligation related to the basic regulation of the administrative act and pursuant to clause 3 also an additional condition for the right arising from the basic regulation of the administrative act*. § 53 (2) 2) and 3) of the APA provide that a *secondary condition may be imposed on an administrative act: if the administrative act cannot be issued without the secondary condition or if the issue of the administrative act must be decided on the basis of administrative right of discretion*. The Council considered that, without the secondary conditions, the next quality assessment of the study programme group should be carried out in five years and on the basis of clauses 41.1 and 42 of the document "Quality assessment of the study programme group at the first and second level of higher education."

DECIDED

To approve the assessment report and to carry out the next assessment of the quality of the first and second level of higher education of the Theology Study Programme Group of the Baltic Methodist Theological Seminary in seven years with the following secondary conditions:

Baltic Methodist Theological Seminary shall submit an English language report on the elimination of the deficiencies described in clause 11 by 01.09.2021 at the latest. Compliance with the secondary condition will be assessed in the context of the next institutional accreditation in three years' time.

The decision was adopted by ten votes in favor, none opposed.

13. The Council proposes to Baltic Methodist Theological Seminary to submit to EKKA no later than 01.09.2021 an English language action plan on also taking into account the other areas for improvement and recommendations presented in the report.
14. A person who considers that the decision has violated his or her rights or restricted his or her freedoms may file a challenge with the Assessment Council of EKKA within thirty (30) days after the appellant became aware of or should have become aware of the contested act. The Assessment Council shall send the challenge to the challenge committee of the Assessment Council of EKKA, which shall submit a written, impartial opinion to the Assessment Council on the reasoning of the challenge within five (5) days of receipt of the challenge. The Assessment Council shall resolve the challenge within ten (10) days of receipt, taking into account the reasoned position of the appeal committee. If the challenge needs to be further investigated, the Assessment Council may extend the term for reviewing the challenge by up to thirty (30)

days. Contestation of a decision in court is possible within thirty (30) days as of its service by submitting an appeal to the Tallinn Courthouse of the Tallinn Administrative Court pursuant to the procedure provided for in the Administrative Court Procedure Act.

Eve Eisenschmidt
Chair of the Council

Hillar Bauman
Secretary of the Council