

ASSESSMENT REPORT FOR INSTITUTIONAL ACCREDITATION

Institution: The Institute of Theology of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church

Assessment committee:

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Dates of the assessment visit: 01 – 02. 03. 2016

Assessment committee sent the preliminary report to EKKA: /18/03/16/

Assessment committee received the comments of the institution under accreditation: /15/04/2016

Assessment committee approved the final version of component assessment with 4 votes in favour and 0 votes against.

Date: /15/04/16/

I Summary of the assessment (mark with 'X'):

	conforms to requirements	partially conforms to requirements	does not conform to requirements	worthy of recognition
Organisational management and performance	x			
Teaching and learning	x			
RDC	x			
Service to society	x			

Comments:

The private, higher education Institute of Theology of the Estonian Evangelical Church (the Institute) dates back to 1946. Since its foundation the scope of the Institute’s work has broadened, particularly in the last four years with the merger with the Tartu Academy of Theology and with the cooperation with the Orthodox Church of Estonia. In the context of changes in the Estonian Higher Education Framework, the Institute became a Professional Higher Education Institution in late 2011 which influenced the scope of the Institute’s work.

The Institute has specialisms in Lutheran Theology; Pastoral Care and Counselling; and Orthodox Theology in professional higher education; in Theology; in Diakonia and Pastoral Care and Counselling, and in Studies in Christian Culture at master's level. The Institute also offers studies in church music in professional and vocational education. There are currently 136 students studying across the different programmes with an average student age of 43. The Institute employs 50 staff, including visiting lecturers; there are 9.5 FTE academic staff.

The Institute has premises in both Tallinn and Tartu, with staff based in both premises and students attending courses on both sites. The senior leadership of the Institute and the main administrative functions are Tallinn-based.

The Institute is the only institution offering training for Lutheran clergy, training for the Orthodox Church of Estonia and courses in Diakonia and Pastoral Care and Counselling in Estonia. This mix of professional training courses makes the Institute unique in Estonian Higher Education.

The Assessment Committee appreciated the comprehensive Self-Evaluation Report (SER) which accurately described the Institute's provision, outlined its evolution and provided a critical appraisal of the Institute's view of its strengths and weaknesses. The SER also provided a picture of its unique role in Estonian society and located the mission of the Institute in an ecumenical and social context. It was clear from discussions with students that they had been actively engaged in developing the SER as had the leadership, staff and relevant councils and owners of the Institute. Overall the Assessment Committee was of the view that the SER gave an accurate picture of the activities of the Institute but felt, at the same time, that it would have benefited from more explicit focus on the provision in PHE. The Assessment Committee also felt that, in places, the SER undersold the Institute.

The Assessment Committee appreciated the open and courteous way in which all those involved in the visit approached the discussions and requests for information.

Commendations:

The Institute has created and maintained a strong sense of community with an ethos that reflects its mission and values.

The Institute has responded positively and appropriately to changes in the Estonian Higher Education environment and expanded its curriculum to ensure it meets the needs of society.

The way the Institute recognises the need for continuous development in the light of active discussions with stakeholders.

The high level of research activity and activities to serve society, particularly in the context of the small size of the Institute.

The development of a strategic plan for research and development which incorporates international initiatives.

The openness of the Institute to feedback and change.

The balanced and realistic nature of the budget which secures the Institute's future in the medium term.

Recommendations:

The Institute should develop a systematic, transparent and documented approach to externality and to moderation and second marking in its assessment processes.

The institute is encouraged to continue to develop more systematic approaches to its management and administrative systems, including personnel management, and ensure an appropriate balance between the informal and the formal.

The Institute is encouraged to develop a more explicit focus on its PHE provision.

The Institute should develop a more systematic approach to marketing and promotion which is in line with its mission, vision and values.

The Institute should ensure that all opportunities for research activities are consistently made known across the community and allocated transparently.

II Assessment areas and sub-areas

1 ORGANISATIONAL MANAGEMENT AND PERFORMANCE

General comments:

The evidence seen by the Assessment Committee led to the conclusion that the Institute has defined its principle role in Estonian society as the preparation of academically educated Lutheran theologians for the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church (EELC) with a broadening out of scope to areas that are linked with theology.

The Institute's mission is formulated against the background of its status as an Institution for Professional Higher Education (PHE). This requires an appropriate balance between the first cycle and the master's programmes. The labour market has different demands for graduates of the first cycle and those of the master's programmes which the Institute meets.

The Institute has formulated its goals and ambitions in a development and an action plan. It is important that the Institute continues to work on how best to achieve the goals and ambitions it has outlined. Maintaining a sharp eye on the needs of labour market for graduates from both the first cycle and from the master's programmes, as well as on the needs for continuous education, are important to facilitate the realisation of the Institute's goals.

The Institute is small and many of its procedures are characterised by a level of informality. In this context personnel management is effective and supportive of both the developmental needs of individuals and the requirements of the Institute.

The management of finances and other resources is sufficient for the size of the Institute. Particular attention needs to be paid to the issue of salary levels. The Institute is aware of the problem and should explore strategic considerations of how to best address it.

The Student Information Service (SIS) is in development, and is already proving a very valuable tool for strategic decisions based on key indicators, including student assessments.

1.1 General management	conforms to requirements	x	partially conforms to requirements		does not conform to requirements		worthy of recognition	
<p>Requirements:</p> <p><i>A higher education institution has defined its role in the Estonian society.</i></p> <p><i>The development plan and the related action plans of a higher education institution arise from the concrete purposes that are built on its mission, vision and core values, and that consider the country's priorities and society's expectations.</i></p> <p><i>Key results of a higher education institution have been defined.</i></p> <p><i>The leadership of a higher education institution conducts the preparation and implementation of development and action plans and includes the members and other stakeholders in this work.</i></p> <p><i>Liability at all management levels has been defined and described, and it supports the achievement of institutional purposes and the coherent performance of core processes.</i></p> <p><i>Internal and external communications of a higher education institution (including marketing and image building) are purposeful and managed.</i></p>								
<p>The Institute has defined its main role in Estonian society as the preparation of academically educated Lutheran theologians for the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church (EELC). The provision has expanded to include areas that are closely linked with theology.</p> <p>The Institute's mission is formulated against the background of an important change in its position within the Estonian higher education system as an institute for professional higher education. This change demands a balanced approach between the first cycle and the master's programmes, particularly because the labour market has different demands from the first cycle and from the masters' graduates which the Institute caters for. The objectives and role of the Institute were clearly described in the SER.</p> <p>The Institute has a development plan and an action plan which describe the steps the Institute will take to further enhance its</p>								

activities. These steps correspond to and underpin the mission, vision and core values of the institute, as defined in the SER.

One of the key characteristics of the Institute, clearly recognised in the SER, is its small size. From discussions with different groups during the Assessment Committee's visit, the impact and the positive benefits of this size were clearly expressed. In particular, it was clear that staff and students know each other well: there are many opportunities for personal contact whether on matters related to the study programmes or on matters of management and the functioning of the Institute. Resolutions to potential problems are often reached on the basis of this personal contact and this was viewed positively.

The small size of the Institute also means that many procedures are characterised as informal. This can be an advantage because unnecessary bureaucracy is avoided and red tape kept to a minimum. However, there are situations where a more formal approach is needed to ensure robustness and consistency.

The Institute's external communications are purposeful. This is especially visible in the Institute's active role in society, and the way it organizes debates and communicates through the internet and (local) newspapers about these activities. It is also visible in discussions with employers of the Institute's alumni.

Academic and non-academic staff have a clear understanding of their responsibilities and are willing to work together. All staff are student and service oriented, and this is much appreciated by students. Overall the Assessment Committee concluded that the Institute is organised and managed effectively, that this reflects the SER and that the Institute conforms to requirements in this area.

Commendations

The overall management of the Institute which ensures consistency with its vision, mission and values.

The way that the Institute's ethos enables decisions to be reached quickly and effectively.

Recommendation

The Institute should ensure that it has an appropriate level of formal procedures, which are fully documented.							
1.2 Personnel management	conforms to requirements	x	partially conforms to requirements		does not conform to requirements		worthy of recognition
<p>Requirements:</p> <p><i>The principles and procedures for employee recruitment and development arise from the objectives of the development plan of a higher education institution, and ensure academic sustainability.</i></p> <p><i>When selecting, appointing and evaluating members of the academic staff, their past activities (teaching, RDC, student feedback, etc.) are taken into account in a balanced way.</i></p> <p><i>The principles of remuneration and motivation of employees are clearly defined, available to all employees, and implemented.</i></p> <p><i>Employee satisfaction with the management, working conditions, flow of information, etc., is regularly surveyed and the results used in improvement activities.</i></p> <p><i>Employees participate in international mobility programmes, cooperation projects, networks, etc.</i></p> <p><i>Employees base their activities on principles of academic ethics.</i></p>							
<p>The recruitment and development of academic staff were clearly described in the SER and the Assessment Committee learned that these processes are applied in practice. Regular staff appraisal has been recently introduced as part of the ongoing development of more formal systems. This is now conducted on an annual basis. In the still relatively early stages of implementation it was clear that the appraisal system is helping to ensure a more effective job allocation and to enhance the working environment for staff.</p> <p>The number and profile of staff was clearly outlined in the SER. This included the proportion of visiting, both national and international, teaching staff. Many staff practise in their particular area of expertise something that is highly valued by the students</p>							

as well as effectively reflecting the applied nature of the Institute's curriculum. A high proportion of academic staff are eminent in their fields, both as practitioners and researchers. It was clear to the Assessment Committee that staff are fully committed to a strong ethical base for all their activities, whether research, teaching or administration.

The Assessment Committee saw detailed information on staff participation in a wide range of national and international networks. They are also encouraged and supported to take part in national and international conferences, as well as in other exchanges which involve teaching and learning in the field of Theology. Staff have good relationships with staff at the Institute of Theology at Tartu University as well as with Tallinn University.

The processes for personnel management and their implementation are appropriate and adequate for a small institution. These are complemented by a number of fora, including monthly staff meetings, which support the management of the staff. The Institute offers a range of staff development activities; staff reported that these encourage and support them in the development of their professional and pedagogic skills.

The Tallinn premises have guest rooms which staff who travel from Tartu can stay in free of charge. This enables them to participate in overnight training sessions and meetings in Tallinn.

The Institute raised the challenge of the low salary level in the SER. The salaries of both academic and administrative staff are lower than the average salary-level in Estonia. The budget for 2016 includes a 10% salary increase for all Institute staff which is a positive step but will still not see the average coming into line with the Estonian average. The Institute does not envisage that it will be in a position to give further rises in 2017 but plans to do so in 2018. Although staff did not raise this issue in meetings with the Assessment Committee, the Institute is encouraged to continue to explore ways of making the salaries more competitive.

Commendations

The skill level of staff.

The opportunities afforded to staff to participate in professional networks and to undertake continuing education which helps create a valued working environment for both academic and non-academic staff.

The strong ethical principles which underpin the work of all staff in the Institute.

Recommendation

The Institute is encouraged to continue to explore ways of making the salaries more competitive within the Estonian context.

1.3 Management of financial resources and infrastructure	conforms to requirements	x	partially conforms to requirements		does not conform to requirements		worthy of recognition	
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Requirements:

The allocation of financial resources of a higher education institution as well as the administration and development of infrastructure are economically feasible, and are based on the objectives of the development plan of an institution of higher education and national priorities (except private institutions).

A higher education institution uses information systems that support its management and the coherent performance of its core processes.

The working conditions of the staff, and the learning and RDC conditions of students (library, studios, workshops, laboratories, etc.) meet the needs arising from the specifics of an institution of higher education and the expectations of members.

As the owner of the Institute, the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church (EELC) is the main source of funding. This funding is

expected to increase in the future by 10-15%. Funding also comes from the merger with the Tartu Academy of Theology, from the agreement with the Orthodox Church of Estonia, from student tuition fees, from letting the premises to outside organisations and from external project funding. The income from tuition fees has increased steadily as has the income from rent and externally funded projects. Overall the Assessment Committee found that funding is reasonably stable and that the budgetary plans are realistic and secure for current needs and those of the medium term future. They are also appropriate for the size of the Institute.

Student numbers are an important source of income. The Assessment Committee learned that there are plans to increase student numbers to about 200. However, it is not clear where these students will come from. The current student average age is 43, and the Assessment Committee learned that, whilst the Institute would welcome younger students, younger students would struggle to pay the tuition fees of a private institution. It was not clear whether the current sources of scholarships from the congregations and from the Church are likely to increase and thus provide support for potential students, whether younger or in line with the current age profile.

In seeking to increase the student numbers the Assessment Committee felt that it was important for the Institute to ensure that it continues to work on how best to achieve the targets and ambitions it has outlined in the development and the action plan. This includes keeping a sharp eye on the needs of labour market for graduates from both the first cycle and from the master's programmes, as well as on the demands for continuous education both from graduates and from the church.

Overall the Assessment Committee was of the view that the infrastructure of the Institute is in harmony with its size and that the allocation of financial resources, together with the administration, are economically feasible and based on the objectives of the development and action plan.

The leadership expressed the view that it was important not to let any future growth in student numbers result in higher staff costs and greater administrative burdens. The leadership was also keen to ensure that any growth would not have an adverse effect on the 'family' atmosphere of the Institute.

The Institute has recently bought a Student Information System (SIS) which is a good example of how IT solutions can be used to

guard against greater administrative work in a growth environment. In addition to SIS, the Institute is applying for the electronic document management system Amfora which they hope to have in place for the 2016-17 academic year. The Institute uses other electronic systems, including the obligatory Estonian Education Information System (EHIS).

The formal teaching and learning spaces in Tallinn, including the library and computer facilities, are functional. In addition to the formal learning spaces there are facilities for students and staff to meet together informally, including a dining room. These facilities were clearly valued by staff and students and support the Institute's ethos. The Assessment Committee did not visit the Tartu premises.

Overall the Assessment Committee was of the view that the Institute uses information systems to support the management and the coherent performance of its core processes and that the working conditions of both staff and students meet the needs of the Institute's educational and research activities.

Commendations

The realistic and feasible nature of the budget.

The coherence between the academic infrastructure, the resources, size and profile of the Institute.

The use of the newly acquired SIS to support the management of the Institute.

Recommendations

The Institute develops a well-founded plan for the development of its student profile and numbers.

2 TEACHING AND LEARNING

General comments:

The Institute is clear about its educational objectives and the curricula offered support the achievement of these objectives. The curricula prepare graduates for their chosen fields. Both employers and graduates are satisfied with the skill and knowledge base that the Institute provides. A particularly strong feature of the curricula is the internships both in the PHE and in master's programmes. These are well managed and appreciated by the students and the providers. Student learning is supported through feedback from staff which is both oral and written. The provision of feedback is not consistent and this is an area that the Institute needs to work on further.

The Institute is open to all students, irrespective of their confession, or lack of it; student recruitment processes support this open approach. A range of stakeholders contribute to the development of the curricula and views are sought both formally and informally. Students value the teaching and support offered by the staff.

Assessment regulations are explicit and clear with assessments outlined in the module descriptors. However, there is no explicit link made between the learning outcomes of the modules and the assessment criteria. The marking of assessments is a vulnerable area where there is not only a lack of externality but is often undertaken by the same member of staff who designs, delivers and assesses all the students on the course.

Students and staff value the ethos of the Institute which provides strong support to learning and enhances motivation. This is demonstrated by the high numbers of students completing their studies in the standard time and the relatively low numbers of drop outs.

2.1 Effectiveness of teaching and learning, and formation of the student body	conforms to requirements	x	partially conforms to requirements		does not conform to requirements		worthy of recognition	
<p>Requirements:</p> <p><i>A higher education institution has defined its educational objectives and measures their implementation.</i></p> <p><i>A higher education institution educates students so they are nationally and internationally competitive.</i></p> <p><i>The number of student places is planned in accordance with the social need and the potentials and purposes of an institution of higher education.</i></p> <p><i>The admission rules are consistent with the mission and purposes of an institution of higher education and support the formation of a motivated student body.</i></p> <p><i>Students are provided with opportunities to study at a higher education institution regardless of any special needs.</i></p>								
<p>The Institute has explicit statements for its educational objectives. These are</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the training of ministers for the EELC; • raising the qualification level of individuals working in relevant fields in society; • developing the field of Pastoral Care and Counselling and the supply of those qualified in this area to the labour market; • ecumenical co-operation; • continued development in the field of diakonia; • providing for the needs of the chaplaincies through continuing education provision. 								

The curricula offered, both for the first cycle and for master's programmes, correspond appropriately to these objectives. The curricula offered for the training of EELC clergy and for clergy for the Orthodox Church of Estonia is unique in the Estonian context as is the provision of programmes for pastoral care and counselling. This results in the Institute having a very specialised educational profile.

The specific nature of the training ensures graduates are fit for the Estonian context. The Assessment Committee heard from alumni and employers that they were fully satisfied that graduates were not just competitive in the Estonian labour market but that the Institute was the only source of graduates for the clergy, and for diakonia and pastoral care and counselling roles.

The Institute is aware of the demand for graduates in the labour market. For example, there is a stated need for 7 trained clergy for the Orthodox Church of Estonia over the next 10 years. In the Lutheran Church the Institute has a long term picture of the demand for trained clergy. In the field of pastoral care and counselling the Institute is, to some extent, stimulating awareness of the value of these roles in the medical context and anticipates growth in demand. The Institute is also pro-active in initiating discussions with employers, including the defence forces and the prison service, on potential new graduate work opportunities. This is fully in line with the objectives of the Institute.

Admission rules for students are clear and there is rigour in the interviews and tests that the Institute carries out as part of the recruitment process. The profile of the majority of students as mature adults who are seeking to acquire specific skills and knowledge sets and/or to change career direction appears to result in a very high level of motivation across the student body.

The Assessment Committee established that the opportunity to study is open to all. There is no requirement to be of a particular confession to enter theological studies and there are students who profess to be atheists or agnostics. The Assessment Committee also learned that there is a female student in the orthodox theology programme, which is a good demonstration of the Institute providing equality of opportunity to study. The Institute has successfully provided access for students with some disabilities but is not able to cater for wheel chair users due to the listed nature of the building and the fact that they cannot install a lift.

Commendations

The match between the curricula and the stated educational objectives of the Institute.

The pro-active work by the Institute to engage employers in discussion about potential new labour markets

The clearly demonstrated equal opportunities that the Institute provides.

Recommendations

The Institute should continue to work closely with employers to identify new programme areas.

2.2 Study programme development	conforms to requirements	x	partially conforms to requirements		does not conform to requirements		worthy of recognition	
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Requirements:

A higher education institution bases its new study programmes on its purposes and the needs of the labour market, and takes into account the strategies of the country and expectations of the society.

Development activities related to study programmes are systematic and regular, and different stakeholders are involved in the development of study programmes.

Graduate satisfaction with the quality of instruction and employer satisfaction with the quality and suitability to the requirements of the labor market of graduates are surveyed and analysed; the results are considered in the development of study programmes.

In the last two years the Institute has developed its study programmes significantly; the adding of new curricula has resulted in the current profile. These programmes were developed in the context of the Institute becoming an Institute of Higher Professional Education and in the light of mergers and agreements with other institutions. The Estonian legal framework shaped the curricula, particularly those of the first cycle which include a substantial percentage of internship/work-based learning. The master's programmes in pastoral care and counselling and the pastoral seminary programme also include internships which ensure the development of skills needed by practising clergy. The master's programmes provide the required academic knowledge and study skills for graduates to continue on to PhD studies in a university and thus conform to national expectations.

The Institute monitors the curriculum through observation and feedback from students and employers and makes modifications. The Assessment Committee heard that employers receive written letters asking for their views on the development of new curricula which they welcomed and responded to. Students also mentioned that their views on the curriculum were listened to. However, whilst monitoring does take place and result in adjustments, the process of modification and development is not entirely systematic. The Institute would benefit from developing their systems further to ensure that views of stakeholders are consistently and regularly sought and systematically reviewed.

The SER referred to the Institute's ambition to set up an English master's programme in theology in the Research and Development Strategic Plan (RDSP). The RDSP aim is to establish the "possibilities of creating a sustainable and realistic MA programme" and identifies some of the questions that it will need to explore, including academic, social, financial and legal preconditions. The Assessment Committee encourage the Institute to ensure that it has carried out a full exploration of the potential market and established a very clear picture of the capability and resource requirements for such a masters' programme. The RDSP does not include the important question of staff capacity to deliver in English.

Overall academic staff considered that the curriculum was well-balanced for the Institute as a whole. They did, however, tend to see this from the perspective of their own, small, departments and, in two cases, the view was expressed that the particular areas would benefit from having a higher profile in the Institute including having more personnel. It was not clear whether there were Institute-wide fora where such views could be and were discussed. The Institute is encouraged to ensure that discussions on the curriculum

do engage the views of all staff in a systematic way.

Graduates and current students of both cycles informed the Assessment Committee that they were very satisfied with the quality of the learning experience. They praised, in particular, the expertise and knowledge of the teaching staff, the knowledge, skills and insights they gained during their studies and their ability to apply these in the working context. Employers expressed their satisfaction with the skills and knowledge of the graduates. Those employers who offered jobs to graduates of the PHE programmes indicated that they were satisfied with the level of knowledge and skills of the graduates. At the same time, they welcomed the fact that the Institute offers master's studies where graduates could further develop their skills and that this could be done alongside their work.

Students observed that the classes for Hebrew and Classical Greek were larger than for other subject areas and this impacted on the quality of the learning in an area that was challenging. Whilst recognising the limited availability of staff, the Assessment Committee would encourage the Institute to consider whether they could offer more teaching provision in these subjects. The Assessment Committee also learned that vocal coaching was offered as an elective in the curriculum but on a limited scale. Alumni and employers commented on the importance of the voice for the graduates' professions. The Institute is encouraged to consider whether it could increase the attention paid to vocal development within the curriculum.

A particular feature of PHE programmes is the requirement for internships. The Institute offers a range of opportunities for students to meet the internship requirements of their programme in a relevant professional area. There is a formal agreement with Tartu University Hospital, which offers internships for students on the pastoral care and counselling programme. There are also agreements with the prison service, the defence forces, the EELK consistory and the Orthodox Church of Estonia. Internships are geographically dispersed with a particularly strong centre in the Diakonia Hospital in Tallinn. From the meetings with students, alumni and employers, it was clear that students are supported in identifying an internship but can also identify one independently, if they so wish. It was also clear that there are appropriate agreements with the internship providers which outline the process, supervision, assessment and confidentiality requirements. Both students and providers were very positive about this aspect of the provision. Providers indicated that the processes include feedback from the provider to the Institute about the internship. The

providers also indicated that they would welcome formal feedback from the student on their experience of the internship. The provision and management of internships is to be commended. The Institute may also like to consider facilitating the provision of formal feedback from the student to the provider.

Commendations

The curricula conform to national expectations.

The curricula are informed by the views of stakeholders including students, staff and employers.

The level of knowledge and skills of the Institute’s graduates and their readiness for the labour market.

The provision and management of internships across all programmes.

Recommendations

The Institute is encouraged to be more systematic in its collection and analysis of stakeholder views in the development of the curriculum.

The Institute is encouraged to explore fully the marketing, resource and capability needs for the proposed English master’s programme in Theology.

The Institute is encouraged to explore a way for students to give formal feedback to the providers on their internship.

2.3 Student academic progress and student	conforms to requirements		partially conforms to	x	does not conform to		worthy of recognition	
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assessment			requirements		requirements			
<p>Requirements:</p> <p><i>Student academic progress is monitored and supported.</i></p> <p><i>Student assessment supports learning and is in line with learning outcomes.</i></p> <p><i>A higher education institution has an effective system for taking account of prior learning and work experience.</i></p>								
<p>The small size of student cohorts and of the Institute overall lends itself to close personal contact between staff and students in a caring ethos. Within this, the Institute is able to monitor the student’s academic progress and provide one to one support for students to help them with any difficulties, whether these are strictly academic or personal/spiritual in nature as reflecting the focus of the Institute. The Institute has recently introduced a student information system, SIS, which enables both staff and students to monitor progress through their studies. The SIS provides information to the student on their curriculum, which courses they have taken and which they still have to take, their assessments and the grades for those assessments. Students welcomed the introduction of the SIS and noted that it is still new. They also expressed confidence that the system would be further developed to provide additional functionality. Senior staff expressed satisfaction with the SIS, noting that academic staff are taking to it more slowly than students. The Assessment Committee welcomed the introduction of the SIS as a way to ensure that student progress is systematically recorded and monitored, whilst not replacing the personal contact so important to the ethos of the Institution.</p> <p>The module descriptions include information about assessment, both the kind of assessment that the unit requires and the kind of marking, differentiated or non-differentiated, that will be used. It was not possible to confirm from the documents that the assessments matched the stated learning objectives. However, both staff and students were confident that they were assessed on the stated learning outcomes. The Institute is encouraged to make explicit in relevant documentation the link between assessment and the stated learning outcomes. The study regulations are clear on assessment and on the opportunity to resit an examination</p>								

once.

As identified in the self-assessment report, the quality of feedback on assignments varied from teacher to teacher. On the whole students reported that they could receive feedback both orally on a one to one basis and in written form. They also noted that if they wanted more feedback, they could ask for it. However, the Assessment Committee could not find a formal statement or policy on feedback that staff should implement. The Institute is encouraged to develop a policy on feedback to students on assessed work and to obtain systematic and regular views on its implementation in the interests of consistency of practice across the Institute and fairness of treatment of students.

The Assessment Committee learned from students and staff that it is frequently the case that the same single member of staff both teaches and assesses the students on a course. Students and staff appeared to be comfortable with this. However, the Assessment Committee noted that this is not a rigorous system and is not in line with international quality expectations. International standards of assessment in higher education in the twenty-first century expect that more than one person will be involved in assessing a student. It is also a widespread expectation that there is a level of externality which may be external to the specific course/member of staff or to the institution. The current practices in the Institute leave it vulnerable. Whilst the Institute provided examples of how, in some cases, a second marker had been brought in to look at PHE theses, this was neither consistent nor systematic. A case was cited where a student had appealed about a mark awarded. The work was reviewed by a second, internal person and subsequently a third. However, this was exceptional. The use of external supervisors at master's level was more common but the Assessment Committee could not confirm that externality was consistently used at master's level. In order to be fully accountable for their academic awards and their value, the Institute should introduce a system for moderation and/or second marking and a clear and transparent element of externality for the marking of all assignments that contribute to the final award. This should be implemented systematically. The Institute may find the notion of 'four eyes' helpful in this regard.

Students are enabled to use prior learning to provide exemption from areas of the curriculum. The application form is available on SIS and students can submit an application with the relevant evidence at any time during their studies. The Assessment Committee met students who had gained credit for prior learning and were informed that the system was clear and helpful.

<p><u>Commendations</u></p> <p>Procuring and developing the SIS.</p> <p>The opportunity for and the management of APEL.</p> <p><u>Recommendations</u></p> <p>The Institute should introduce a system for the moderation and/or second marking of assignments to ensure it is compatible with international expectations.</p> <p>The Institute should also develop and implement systematically a process for ensuring an element of externality in the marking of all assignments that contribute to the final award.</p> <p>The Institute is encouraged to continue the development and implementation of the SIS.</p> <p>The institute is encouraged to provide support for staff to use the SIS more widely and consistently.</p> <p>The Institute is encouraged to develop a policy on feedback to students on assessed work and to obtain systematic and regular views on its implementation.</p>							
2.4 Support processes for learning	conforms to requirements	x	partially conforms to requirements		does not conform to requirements		worthy of recognition
Requirements:							

The organisation of studies creates an opportunity for students to complete their studies within the standard period.

A higher education institution provides students with counselling related to their studies and career.

A higher education institution supports student international mobility.

Modern technical and educational technology resources are used to organise educational activities.

Students are periodically asked for feedback on learning and support processes (the organisation of studies, assessment, counselling, etc.); the results of surveys are taken into account in improvement activities.

A relatively high proportion of students complete their studies within the standard time and the Institute's record on this is better than the average for Estonia. This may partly reflect the very high motivation of the students. It may also reflect changes that the Institute has made to the timing of delivery which is more supportive of students who study alongside other commitments, both work and family. Given the very high level of student motivation and the rigour of the interview process, it is perhaps surprising that the drop out rate is not lower than it is. However, the figures are not high in the context of mature students in Estonia. The Institute is encouraged to continue to monitor the numbers of drop outs and the reasons for them; review the information gathered on a regular and systematic basis, and take action which the data and its analysis may suggest.

The Institute offers extensive pastoral support and counselling which creates strong cohesion with the mission of the institute and the nature of its programmes. There is a palpable ethos of care and respect between staff, students, and staff and students creating a community which is highly valued. This creates an excellent learning environment and provides an example for the graduates to follow in their future careers. The senior staff talked of the 'family of the Institute' and the Assessment Committee commends the achievement and maintenance of this sense of community.

Whilst there are examples of staff mobility, the Institute could not give any examples of international student mobility. The Institute is a member of ERASMUS and active in DORA and thus provides opportunities for students to undertake study internationally. The low take up of this is not unexpected given the profile of the student body as predominantly mature students with work and family

commitments. The Assessment Committee was confident that the support and encouragement for students to undertake international study was appropriate and solid.

The Institute is open to receiving and responsive to feedback from students at any time. This is a reflection of the personal nature of the Institute as a whole and has worked effectively. However, the Institute recognises the potential weakness of such informality and has taken a number of steps to ensure that there are formal channels for students to give feedback. This includes meetings of the student council and the inclusion of the facility for giving formal, anonymous and regular feedback through the SIS. The Institute is encouraged to continue to use and strengthen these formal channels and to ensure that they close the feedback loop by making explicit what actions have been taken in the light of feedback from students.

Commendations

The high percentage of students completing their award within the standard study time.

The exceptional ethos within the Institute between staff and students.

The openness and responsiveness of the Institute to feedback from students.

Recommendations

The Institute is encouraged to continue to monitor the level of, and analyse the reasons for, student drop outs.

The Institute is encouraged to continue to use and strengthen formal feedback channels and to ensure that they close the feedback loop appropriately.

3 RESEARCH, DEVELOPMENT AND/OR OTHER CREATIVE ACTIVITY (RDC)

General comments:

Research is considered important for the Institute’s identity. There is a significant amount of research activity relative to the size of the institution and its staff base. The Institute has recently taken a more strategic approach to its RDC activities as outlined in the new Research & Development Plan 2016-2019 for which it has received funding. The foci for research activity in this plan correspond to the topical, societal or cultural needs in Estonia and also reflect the academic expertise of the staff. The priority research areas are in line with the priorities of the EELC and the Estonian Council of Churches.

Overall the Institute has active and fruitful international contacts in the field of research. The research activity clearly benefits the educational provision both at professional higher education and master’s levels as well as in the continuous education provision.

3.1 RDC effectiveness	conforms to requirements	x	partially conforms to requirements		does not conform to requirements		worthy of recognition	
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Requirements:

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

The Institute has recently developed a Research and Development Strategic Plan 2016–2019 which identifies three important foci for its RDC activity: Biblical Studies including Studies of Antiquity; Church History including Lutheranism, and Sociology of Religion and Practical Theology including Pastoral Counselling and Diakonia. These foci reflect the mission of the Institute, the needs of the

present curricula as well as the societal needs. The principle objectives of the plan are that: academic staff will be trained to publish articles, create research projects and raise funds; the Institute has a system of supervision and spiritual mentoring; and that the scholastic proficiency of the students is improved and graduation rates are higher.

The plan has built on the foundations of a broad sweep of both national and international research activity that has already been carried in the Institute. For example, one of the academic staff is currently leading an ecumenical research group which is conducting a survey "About Life, Faith and Faith life". The topic is expected to provide information on the religious attitudes, preferences and convictions of Estonian people. The Institute has published widely in Church History and Sociological research and some of the recent publications are valuable for society and governmental organisations. Staff have been active in international networks including the British New Testament Society, the Network for Ecumenical Learning in Central and Eastern Europe and the European Network of Health Care Chaplaincy. The level of activity was high compared to the size of the Institute and its staff base. However, it was timely for the Institute to take a more strategic approach building on the solid foundation with the development of a strategic plan.

Input to the plan came from development interviews that the Academic Dean held with all academic staff, in part to identify their research interests, as well as from knowledge of the owner's needs. The cost of implementing the Research and Development Strategic Plan is 64,000 Euros and the Institute has been successful in securing this funding from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Northern Germany. The development of the plan and the successful bid for funding are commended by the Assessment Committee. The Institute is encouraged to ensure that research activity is in line with the strategy and to monitor the outputs.

Students and internship partners are also involved in research. The main area is Practical Theology, including Pastoral counselling and Diakonia, which are important study areas especially in the Professional Higher Education programmes. It was clear to the Assessment Committee that students value highly the research activity of their teachers which they feel enriches their learning and enhances the level of the teaching.

Commendations

The development of the Research and Development Strategic plan which provides a concise presentation of the areas of focus and targets for 2016-2019.

The breadth and focus of research carried out by the Institute.

Recommendation

The Institute is encouraged to ensure that research activity is in line with the strategic plan and to monitor its implementation.

3.2 RDC resources and support processes	conforms to requirements	x	partially conforms to requirements		does not conform to requirements		worthy of recognition	
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Requirements:

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

The Institute has been successful in securing funding in the past from a range of sources in order to support its research activity. From 2016 on, in addition to the funding secured for the Research and Development Strategic Plan, the institute has committed 4-5% of its annual budget to RDC and will continue to undertake research and development projects with targeted financing.

The Institute has provided financial support for academic staff to enable them to participate in the work of international networks and attend relevant conferences. During the 2015-2016 academic year funds are allocated to publications, including 200 euros for a publication corresponding ETIS ranking and 200 euros for research that has been recognized by EELC. The Institute has been able to secure funds for one or two researchers a year from the Evald Saag Foundation and staff have also received research funding from the Estonian Science Foundation. It was not clear to the Assessment Committee how transparent the allocation of funds to individual staff was, and the Institute is encouraged to ensure that all staff have equal opportunity to apply for research funding and to participate in research activities.

The well-kept library supports and is important for staff research activities as well as for students. The cooperation with Tartu University library in obtaining new books is well organized and provides additional material to support research activity.

Commendation

The level of funding secured for research activity

Recommendation

The Institute should ensure that all staff have equality of opportunity to apply for research funding and participate in research activity.

3.3 Student research supervision	conforms to requirements	x	partially conforms to requirements		does not conform to requirements		worthy of recognition	
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Requirements:

A higher education institution includes students of all academic cycles in research, creative or project activity; and systematically surveys student satisfaction with their supervision.



Professionalism, effectiveness and the workload of supervisors are reasonably balanced, which ensures the quality of research papers and positive graduation rates.

Students are guided to recognize plagiarism and to avoid it.

It was clear from documentation and from meetings with students and staff that supervision is provided to students in both PHE and master's levels studies and is appropriate for the applied research that the students engage in. Students expressed their satisfaction with the level of supervision provided and with the expertise of the staff supervising them. The Institute has recognised the need for supervision to be systematic and consistent and the Assessment Committee commends the objective of the Research and Development Strategic Plan for the Institute to have a system of supervision and spiritual mentoring.

Some students have the opportunity to work with staff on small research projects. Such collaboration between students and professors is fruitful and commendable. It was not clear to the Assessment Committee, however, whether all students had the opportunity for such collaboration nor how transparent the process was for selecting a student to participate. It would be helpful for the Institute to develop a statement or policy that is accessible to students and clear to staff on this.

Programmes at both PHE and master's levels include research methodology elements. For PHE this is in the Introduction to Academic Writing course and in the master's programme in the Theory of Science, Research Methods and Theses course. At master's level this provides support for the writing of the thesis. The courses also cover ethical questions which are important across the range of disciplines in the Institute. The issues of academic misconduct, including plagiarism, are also outlined in the study regulations.

Although instances of academic misconduct are rare, the Assessment Committee learned of one instance from which it was clear that the Institute has mechanisms for dealing with such cases and applies them appropriately. The Institute is planning to join the plagiarism recognition system KRATT to support systematic management of plagiarism detection.

Commendations

The effectiveness of supervision.

The inclusion of supervision and mentoring development in the Research and Development Strategic Plan.

The opportunity for students to collaborate with staff in research projects.

Recommendation

The Institute should ensure that the opportunity for students to participate in research projects is equitable and transparent.

4 SERVICE TO SOCIETY**General comments:**

By virtue of its unique profile in Estonia in offering education and training for roles within the EELC, the Orthodox Church of Estonia and roles associated with the church and pastoral care and counselling more broadly, the Institute contributes significantly to society. The Institute meets a long term need for church employees, including diakons, chaplains and those engaged in church music and pastoral care and counselling. The Institute offers in-service training and continuing education courses for the general public across a range of topics. In-service training courses are developed with employers and thus take account of their needs. There is a wide range of courses for the general public. The Institute's library is open to any interested person and has a large collection of theological literature. The Institute also collaborates with other organisations in setting up conferences. The level of activity in this area is significant, especially when seen in the context of the small size of the Institute.

4.1 Popularization of its activities and involvement in social development	conforms to requirements	x	partially conforms to requirements		does not conform to requirements		worthy of recognition	
<p>Requirements:</p> <p><i>A higher education institution has a system for popularising its core activities. Employees of an institution of higher education participate in the activities of professional associations, and as experts, in other social supervisory boards and decision-making bodies.</i></p>								
<p>There are a number of ways in which the Institute serves society. Its primary function of training workers in the fields of theology, social work and pastoral care and counselling is, in itself, a significant contribution to society. The scholarly and scientific work that staff carry out in developing Estonian theological thought is of importance in Estonia, where there is a lack of religious knowledge. The Institute’s courses ensure that students, and Estonian society more broadly, gain knowledge and understanding of theology. Understanding the religious roots and heritage of Estonia is an important foundation to initiate dialogue with people from different cultural and religious backgrounds. No other institution in Estonia provides this particular service.</p> <p>In academic and clerical circles, the staff of the Institute are well known for their scholarly activity, both in Estonia and Internationally. Staff have an increasingly high profile in areas related to pastoral care and counselling too. The Institute undertakes a number of activities aimed at raising awareness of its activities. These include Institute staff visiting congregations, and disseminating information about the Institute through the media. However, the Assessment Committee learned from discussions with alumni and students that the Institute is still relatively unknown and would encourage the Institute, to raise its profile both in the interests of increasing student numbers and in promoting its role more broadly in Estonian Society.</p> <p>The Assessment Committee learned that the Institute’s graduates are highly competent in their fields and this meets the needs of employers across a wide range of specialisms. Graduates have the opportunity to further develop their knowledge and skills. The</p>								

Assessment Committee learned that, although there is no governmental order for pastoral care and counsellors, a growing number of hospitals has created places for counsellors following successful student internships. This in turn leads to additional training needs which the Institute is meeting.

Commendations

The contribution that the Institute makes to raising awareness and developing knowledge of theology in Estonian society.

The way staff engage with congregations to promote the work of the Institute.

The competency of the students and graduates which stimulates opportunities in the labour market.

Recommendations

The Institute is encouraged to develop a more strategic approach to the identification of priorities in the service to society.

The Institute is encouraged to think of ways to generate further digital library projects and funding for such projects.

The Institute should take a more strategic approach to its marketing and develop an appropriate marketing plan.

The Institute should monitor the effectiveness of the plan.

4.2 In-service training and other educational activities for the general public	conforms to requirements	x	partially conforms to requirements		does not conform to requirements		worthy of recognition	
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Requirements:

A higher education institution has defined the objectives regarding in-service training and measures their implementation.

In-service training is planned in accordance with the needs of target groups as well as with the potentials and purposes of an institution of higher education.

Participant satisfaction with the quality of in-service training is regularly surveyed and the results are used in planning improvement activities.

The Institute offers in-service training for church workers and these are open to those from different confessions. For example, in the field of church music, courses attract participants from all denominations. The Assessment Committee learned from alumni and employers that the Institute meets the needs of employers and develops appropriate in-service courses to meet needs as they arise. Both alumni and employers appreciated the flexible approach that the Institute takes in developing courses to meet identified needs of target groups.

The in-service training provision includes courses that enable graduates of both the PHE and master's level programmes to build further on their skills and knowledge; this enhances their abilities to carry out their work and raises their level of specialisation. The Institute also offers supervision to clergy and is seeking to increase this work to meet the needs of those carrying out pastoral roles. The Institute offers open courses to the general public, including in church music and counselling and these are valued by participants.

The Institute's in-service training is significant for the target group. The collection of feedback through an electronic questionnaire enables the Institute to understand the expectations of the target group and gather ideas for the improvement and development of training. Careful consideration is given to the feedback provided. Overall feedback has been positive with returns received from between 50 and 70% of participants.

The Institute focuses on educational activities that reflect the strengths and expertise of its staff. The Institute is quick to identify

areas where it can use these strengths to make a contribution. For example, the Assessment Committee learned that, in the light of the refugee crisis and in anticipation of Estonia receiving refugees in the future, the Institute initiated a public debate and undertook some initial work. One outcome of the work was the recognition that a major issue is the public's fear of the refugees; the Institute is now working to address this issue.

Whilst the Institute is clearly undertaking significant and relevant activity in continuing education and claims that it has a systematic and coordinated approach to it, the Assessment Committee could not find a strategic plan which ensured this systematic and coordinated approach. It is recommended that the Institute identifies its priorities and develops a strategy for this area of work which reflects its mission, values and profile.

Commendations

The relevance of in-service courses offered across a wide spectrum of specialisms.

The positive feedback received from participants indicating the value and relevance of the in-service training courses.

The flexible approach the Institute takes to developing courses.

The pro-active approach the Institute takes in addressing current issues in Estonian society.

Recommendation

The Institute should identify its priorities and build a strategy for providing courses which are in accordance with its mission, values and profile.

The Institute is encouraged to seek ways of increasing the percentage of participants giving feedback to support more effective and relevant analysis.

4.3 Other public-oriented activities	conforms to requirements	x	partially conforms to requirements		does not conform to requirements		worthy of recognition	
<p>Requirements:</p> <p><i>Public-oriented activities are purposeful, the results of the activities are periodically evaluated, and improvements are introduced based on those evaluations.</i></p> <p><i>A higher education institution contributes to the enhancement of community welfare by sharing its resources (library, museums, sports facilities, etc.) and/or by organising concerts, exhibitions, performances, conferences, fairs and other events.</i></p>								
<p>Although the Institute is small, it organises conferences and events on topics related to society and religion. The primary objective of this activity is for the Institute to be recognised for its work within the Church and ecumenically. The second objectives is for the Institute to be nationally recognised as a centre of education, professional training and development. To support these objectives, the Institute offers a range of publicly-oriented activities including annual conferences on Biblical Studies and Diakonia, Open House Days and participation in longer radio talk shows. For example, in 2014 the Institute held a conference on “Christian values in Estonian society” where members of four different political parties participated. Not only does this contribute to society but it also helps raise the profile of the Institute. The Assessment Committee would encourage the Institute to continue to undertake this kind of activity.</p> <p>In undertaking this activity, the Institute assess the needs for and the impact of them through dialogue with participants and other stakeholders. However, a more systematic, periodic review and evaluation would help to prioritise its activities and formalize strategies in the field of public service.</p> <p>Academic staff are involved in public discussions on important events. For example, the Assessment Committee learned that the Institute’s lecturer of pastoral care and counselling was the first port of call for pastoral assistance following a school shooting in</p>								

Viljandi.

The Institute is well placed to initiate dialogue which focusses on the inter-relationships between politics, religion and society. The Assessment Committee learned in discussion with staff that they are well aware of the importance of contributing to commentary on religious issues and of the value of writing articles for the general public. However, it was not clear how often they do this and the Institute may be missing opportunities to raise the level of religious knowledge in Estonia. The Assessment Committee recommends that the Institute is more consistent in its activities in this area and systematically seeks opportunities to educate the general public on its areas of strength. This in turn will raise the profile of the Institute and potentially attract more students.

The Institute holds a large and rich library collection which includes valuable archives as well as a wide collection of theological literature. The library is open to all and enables those interested in theology to pursue their interests in greater depth.

Commendations

The level and relevance of publicly-oriented activities particularly within the context of the small size of the Institute.

The setting up of conferences which bring organisations working in different fields together to undertake public debate.

The involvement of staff in providing comment and practical help in events in Estonia

Recommendation

The Institute should prioritise its activities and formalise strategies on when and how to initiate or participate in a public dialogue.

The Institute should periodically evaluate the impact of its publicly-oriented activities and, within its limited resources, undertake developments and improvements based in the analysis of the evaluation.