

## Decision Regarding Institutional Accreditation

### Institute of Theology of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church

13/06/2016

**The Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education of the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher Education and VET decided to accredit the Institute of Theology of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church for seven years**

On the basis of clause 21 (3) 1 of the Institutions of Professional Higher Education Act, subsection 10 (4) of the Universities Act, point 3.7.3 of the Statutes of the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher Education and VET (hereinafter referred to as 'EKKA') and point 48.1 of the document, 'Conditions and Procedure for Institutional Accreditation', authorised in point 3.7.1 of the above-mentioned EKKA Statutes; the Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education of EKKA (hereinafter referred to as 'the Council') affirms the following:

1. On 3.06.2015 the Institute of Theology of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church and EKKA agreed upon a time frame to conduct institutional accreditation.
2. The Director of EKKA, by her order on 05.10.2015, approved the following membership of the committee for the institutional accreditation of the Institute of Theology of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church (hereinafter referred to as 'the Committee'):

<b>Aila Marjatta Lauha – Chair</b>	Professor, University of Helsinki (Finland)
<b>Heidi Maiberg</b>	Student member, University of Tartu (Estonia)
<b>Hendrik Michael Martijnse</b>	Director of Higher Education, Dutch Inspectorate of Education (Netherlands)
<b>Helen Thomas</b>	Freelance higher education consultant (United Kingdom)

3. The Institute of Theology of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church submitted a self-evaluation report to the EKKA Bureau on 18.12.2015 and the assessment coordinator forwarded it to the Committee on 30.12.2015.
4. An assessment visit was made to the Institute of Theology of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church during 01–02.03.2016.
5. The Committee sent its draft assessment report to the EKKA Bureau on 18.03.2016, EKKA forwarded it to the Institute of Theology of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church for its comments on 11.04.2016 and the Institute delivered its response on 15.04.2016.
6. The Committee submitted its final assessment report to the EKKA Bureau on 15.04.2016. That assessment report is an integral part of the decision, and is available on the EKKA website.

7. The Secretary of the Council forwarded the Committee’s final assessment report along with the Institute’s self-evaluation report to the Council members on 31.05.2016.
8. The Committee presented the following component assessments:

Organisational management and performance	Conforms to requirements
Teaching and learning	Conforms to requirements
Research, development and/or other creative activity (RDC)	Conforms to requirements
Service to society	Conforms to requirements

9. The Council with 10 members present discussed these received documents in its session on 13.06.2016 and, based on the assessment report, decided to point out the following strengths, areas for improvement, and recommendations regarding the Institute of Theology of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church.

**Strengths**

- The Institute is characterised by a strong sense of community with an ethos that reflects its mission and values.
- The Institute has responded appropriately to changes in the area of higher education in Estonia and adjusted its study programmes to meet the needs of society.
- The Institute’s purposeful external communications are expressed especially well through an active role in society, and in the way it organises debates and communicates through the Internet and local press reporting on its activities. The Institute contributes significantly to society due to its unique profile in Estonia. The Institute increases Estonian society’s awareness of theological issues and proactively addresses various topics of social importance.
- The activities of all staff of the Institute are student-centred and service-oriented. The work is well organised and managed at the Institute. A recently acquired Study Information System helps to improve administrative capabilities in managing the Institute.
- The Institute acknowledges the need for continuous development and is open to changes and feedback, engaging in active dialogues with stakeholders.
- The academic infrastructure and existing resources of the Institute are consistent with its size and profile.
- Many members of the teaching staff are active in their fields as practitioners, which fits well with the practice-oriented nature of the Institute and is highly appreciated by its students.
- Teaching staff are socially active and keep their congregations informed of the activities of the Institute.
- Teaching staff participate in national and international professional networks and conferences. Teaching staff members have close cooperative relationships with staffs at both the Faculty of Theology at the University of Tartu and Tallinn University. Due to the diverse range of opportunities for professional development, the working environment is valued highly by both academic and non-academic staff.
- Both employers and alumni are pleased with the specialised preparation of graduates. By virtue of the specifics of the specialty, graduates are competitive in the Estonian labour market. The Institute is the only higher education institution in Estonia which trains workers for clergy at the Lutheran Church, as well as for diakonia and pastoral care and counselling. Thus the Institute, to some extent, increases awareness of the value of pastoral care and counselling in the field of health care. The Institute is also pro-active in initiating discussions with prospective employers (e.g. the defence forces, the prison service) on potential new work opportunities for graduates.

- One of the outstanding strengths of the Institute includes the well-organised practical training in both professional higher education and master degree programmes.
- Various stakeholders contribute to study programme development.
- Both students and teaching staff value the Institute's attitude that supports and motivates learning. The large number of students graduating within the standard time frame and the relatively low dropout rate illustrate the students' high motivation.
- The system for recognising prior learning and work experience is clearly structured and works well.
- The main research themes of the Institute correspond to topical, societal or cultural needs in Estonia and are also consistent with the priorities of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Estonian Council of Churches. A strategic plan for R&D has been devised incorporating international activities as well. International cooperation in research is fruitful and active. The research activity also supports teaching at the levels of professional higher education, master degree studies and in-service training. The Institute has been successful in acquiring funding for its research activity from different sources.
- Students are pleased with the quality of supervision and the expertise of the teaching staff. The objective set by the Research and Development Strategic Plan, to develop a system of regular student supervision and spiritual mentoring, is commendable.
- The Institute offers a diverse selection of in-service training courses for both professionals and the general public; the courses take into account employer needs and have received positive feedback from the participants.
- The Institute's library, which has a large collection of theological literature, is open to any interested person.

#### **Areas for improvement and recommendations**

- It is recommended that the Institute apply a more systematic approach to its management and administrative systems (including personnel management) to ensure an appropriate balance between the formal and the informal.
- The salaries of both academic and non-academic staff are lower than the average salary levels in Estonia. The Institute should continue to seek ways to make salaries more competitive within the Estonian context.
- It is recommended that the Institute devise an action plan to achieve its objective of increasing student numbers, as set by the Development Plan.
- For the sake of equal treatment of students, the Institute should formalise uniform procedures for student assessment and feedback, and monitor implementation thereof consistently and systematically.
- Students of the Institute do not participate in international mobility.
- The Institute should gather feedback from their stakeholders in a more regular manner and more systematically review the feedback received.
- All teaching staff members should be included in discussions about study programmes.
- The study groups for Hebrew and Classical Greek are too large in relation to other classes and, given the complexity of these languages, this adversely affects the quality of learning. It is recommended that the Institute provide students with additional instruction in these subjects. It is also advisable to pay more attention to students' vocal development.
- The links between expected learning outcomes and the assessment criteria should be more explicit. It is advisable to avoid situations where the same member of the teaching staff designs a course, teaches the students and then assesses the achievement of learning outcomes. For the sake of greater objectivity and transparency of assessments, it is advisable

to establish a system of double-marking and/or moderation and also involve external assessors in the assessment process.

- Students should also be provided with opportunities to give formal feedback on their internship supervisors.
  - The Institute should analyse the availability of required resources and the market needs for a planned English master's programme in theology as well the feasibility of launching such programme.
  - At present it is not clear how research funds are distributed among the teaching staff. Allocation of research funds and student involvement in research projects should be transparent, and the Institute should ensure that all teaching staff and students have equal opportunity to participate in research activities.
  - The Institute's approach to marketing should be more focused and systematic, and better reflect its mission, vision and values.
  - The Institute should establish a set of priorities related to in-service training and, based on these priorities, develop courses that would reflect its mission, profile and values.
10. If all component assessments are provided as 'conforms to requirements', the Quality Assessment Council shall conclude that the management, administration, academic and research activity, and academic and research environment meet the requirements; and decide to accredit the institution of higher education for seven years.

11. On the basis of the foregoing, the Council

**DECIDED**

**to accredit the Institute of Theology of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church for seven years.**

The decision was adopted by 10 votes in favour. Against 0.

12. This accreditation will be valid until 13.06.2023, and the EKKA Bureau will coordinate a date for the next institutional accreditation with the Institute of Theology of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church no later than 13.09.2022.
13. The Council also decided to award the EKKA Quality Label to the Institute of Theology of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church for the period ending on 13.06.2023.
14. A person who finds that his or her rights are violated or his or her freedoms are restricted by this decision may file a challenge with the EKKA Quality Assessment Council within 30 days after the person filing the challenge became or should have become aware of the contested finding. A judicial challenge to the decision may be submitted within 30 days after its delivery, filing an action with the Tallinn courthouse of the Tallinn Administrative Court pursuant to the procedure provided for in the Code of Administrative Court Procedure.

**Tõnu Meidla**  
**Chair of the Council**

**Hillar Bauman**  
**Secretary of the Council**