

Assessment Report

Theology Study Programmes

University of Tartu

The Institute of Theology of the Estonian
Evangelical Lutheran Church

2018

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Introduction

Quality assessment of a study programme group involves the assessment of the conformity of study programmes and the studies and development activities that take place on their basis to legislation, national and international standards and developmental directions with the purpose of providing recommendations to improve the quality of studies.

The goal of quality assessment of a study programme group is supporting the internal evaluation and self-development of the institution of higher education. Quality assessment of study programme groups is not followed by sanctions: expert assessments should be considered recommendations.

Quality assessment of a study programme group takes place at least once every 7 years based on the regulation approved by EKKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education [*Quality Assessment of Study Programme Groups in the First and Second Cycles of Higher Education*](#).

The aim of the assessment team was the evaluation of the Study Programme Group (SPG) of Theology in two higher education institutions: University of Tartu and Institute of Theology of the Estonian Evangelical Church.

The team was asked to assess the conformity of the study programmes belonging to the study programme group and the instruction provided on the basis thereof to legislation and to national and international standards and/or recommendations, including the assessment of the level of the corresponding theoretical and practical instruction, the research and pedagogical qualification of the teaching staff and research staff, and the sufficiency of resources for the provision of instruction.

The following persons formed the assessment team:

Joke van Saane (Chair)	Vice-dean Faculty Religion and Theology, Professor of Psychology of Religion, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (The Netherlands)
Antti Räsänen	Dean Faculty of Theology, Professor of Religious Education, University of Helsinki (Finland)
Mervi Kalmus	Departmental leader in the Estonian Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church (Estonia)
Eva Liina Kliiman	Student, Tallinn University (Estonia)

The assessment process was coordinated by Liia Lauri and Jekaterina Masenko (EKKA).

After the preparation phase, the work of the assessment team in Estonia started on Monday, 5 November 2018, with an introduction to the Higher Education

System as well as the assessment procedures by EKKA, the Estonian Quality assurance organization for higher and vocational education. The members of the team agreed the overall questions and areas to discuss with each interview group. The distribution of tasks between the members of the assessment team was organized and the detailed schedule of the site visits agreed.

During the following days, meetings were held with the representatives of the University of Tartu (Tuesday 6 November) and Institute of Theology of the Estonian Evangelical Church (Wednesday 7 November).

On Thursday, 8 November, the team held an all-day meeting, during which both the structure of the final report was agreed and findings of team meetings were compiled in a first draft of the assessment report. This work was executed in a cooperative way and the members of the team intensively discussed their individual views on the relevant topics.

In the following two sections, the assessment team summarize their general findings, conclusions and recommendations which are relevant across the whole SPG. In so doing, the team provides an external and objective perspective on the programs and the contexts within which they are delivered. Ultimately, the intention is to provide constructive comments and critique which may form the basis upon which improvements in the quality of the programs may be achieved. In formulating its recommendations, however, the assessment team has not evaluated the financial feasibility associated with their implementation.

General findings and recommendations

At a global level, the domain of Theology and Religious Studies is developing from a church related denominational theology to the wider field of religion. This development is of importance at both the University of Tartu as the Institute of Theology of the Estonian Evangelical Church. The challenges resulting from this development are dealt with in different ways, due to the different history and mission of both institutions. In this process, the focus of the School of Theology and Religious Studies of the University of Tartu lies in the transition from theology to religious studies. For the Institute of Theology of the Estonian Evangelical Church, the sustainability of theology and church is very important.

As a consequence, both programs are under permanent construction. Both institutions are recommended to adapt constructively to the societal and global environment, maintaining their own unique identity.

1. Assessment report of SPG at the University of Tartu

1.1. Introduction

In 2018, the University of Tartu (UT) celebrates the 386th anniversary of its founding. The University of Tartu that was established in 1632 as Academia Gustaviana has been reborn a number of times throughout its history. In the Swedish era, Latin was the language of the university. During wars, the university was forced into exile in both Tallinn and Pärnu. The university was even closed from 1710 until 1802 when it was reopened as the Imperial Tartu University (Kaiserliche Universität zu Dorpat), being the only university in the Russian Empire to teach in German. In 1893, in the wave of russification, the university was renamed Universitas Jurjevensis. In 1919, the imperial university was reformed as Tartu University of the Republic of Estonia with Estonian as the language of instruction. Starting from 1944, Tartu State University operated under Soviet rule. As Estonia regained its independence, the curricula of the university were modernized, studies systematically reorganized and the university restored its name, the University of Tartu.

The Faculty of Theology and the Faculty of Philosophy are among the oldest at the UT. Before 2016 the Faculty of Philosophy, the Faculty of Theology and Viljandi Culture Academy (a college) were separate academic units. Within the Faculty of Philosophy, the College of Foreign Languages and Cultures was established on January 1, 2015 by uniting the Institute of Germanic, Romance and Slavonic Languages and Literatures, and the Language Centre. In 2016, structural reform incorporated the faculties and colleges into the Faculty of Arts and Humanities. In that process the former Faculty of Theology was renamed the School of Theology and Religious Studies. The Faculty consists of 4 institutes, one school, and two colleges.

The main focus of the School is research and education in theology and religious studies. Theology has a long and complex history in Tartu, extending back to the Middle Ages and it has been taught at the UT since the university was founded in 1632. Religious studies as a separate field of research and education has developed in the past few decades. The School tries to build upon longstanding traditions as well as adapt to the modern world around it, creating an intricate, but productive environment for present and future development. Both theology and religious studies are represented in the curriculum at the BA, MA, and PhD level. The School of Theology and Religious Studies is the only institution in Estonia that teaches theology and religious studies on all three levels of higher education.

The School is organized into the Chair of Church History, Chair of Systematic Theology, Chair of Practical Theology, Chair of New Testament Studies, Chair of Old Testament and Semitic Studies and Chair of Comparative Religious Studies. School of Theology and Religious Studies is responsible for all of the curricula under assessment:

1. Theology and Religious Studies (2439) BA
2. Theology and Religious Studies (194378) MA

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3. Theology (2563) MA
4. Religious Studies (2562) MA

Changes in the curriculum group within the higher education institution in the period between assessments:

1. The MA curricula of Theology (2536) and Religious Studies (2562) were closed in 2017 and a new curriculum of Theology and Religious Studies (194378) was opened, with admission from autumn 2018.
2. The BA and PhD curricula were renamed in the same way: Theology and Religious Studies.
3. BA curriculum was reorganized, with the option of studying religious studies as an extended major.

Table 1. Data on the students enrolled in the curricula

Curriculum	10.11.2013	10.11.2014	10.11.2015	10.11.2016	10.11.2017
Theology and Religious Studies (2439) BA	92	60	42	30	37
Religious Studies (2562) MA	51	44	40	32	40
Theology (2563) MA	25	18	16	14	11

Table 2. Admitted students

Curriculum	2012/2013	2013/2014	2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017
Theology and Religious Studies (2439) BA	14	4	10	10	17
Theology (2536) MA	4	2	4	4	2
Religious Studies (2562) MA	8	15	12	7	21

Table 3. Graduating students

Curriculum	2012/2013	2013/2014	2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017
Theology and Religious Studies (2439) BA	16	18	13	10	5
Religious Studies (2562) MA	7	7	7	1	7
Theology (2563) MA	3	6	2	2	6

Table 4. International mobility

Curriculum	2012/2013	2013/2014	2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017
Theology and Religious Studies (2439) BA	1	2	1	1	1
Religious Studies (2562) MA	2	2			
Theology (2563) MA					

1.2. General findings and recommendations at the study programme group level

From the documents and the site visit arises the impression of the University of Tartu as a well-organized, highly academic and contemporary international institute of higher education, fully committed to and aware of the needs of the Estonian society. The School of Theology and Religious Studies, as part of the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, benefits from this environment, enabling to offer interdisciplinary study programs, meeting all the standards in the field concerning both for the sake of theology and education.

The impact of the newly developed programs is potentially very high, with significant impact on society, but the results must be proved in the future.

The School reflects well to the changed society, resulting in the development of study programs characterized by contemporary educational and pedagogical insights. The focus of these programs transformed from a narrow concept of theology to the societal impact of religion.

The staff members show striking self-confidence about the programs, articulated by high rates of personal commitment between students and teachers.

The panel's conclusion based on the documents and the site visit: the School of Theology and Religious Studies meets all standards of higher education.

General recommendations

The School should reflect upon the consequences of a more diverse audience for educational matters; a more diverse audience requires the implementation of more diverse learning and teaching methods.

1.3. Strengths and areas for improvement of study programmes by assessment areas

1.3.1. Theology and Religious Studies (BA); Theology (MA); Religious Studies (MA); Theology and Religious Studies (MA)

Study programme and study programme development

Standards

- ✓ The launch or development of the study programme is based on the Standard of Higher Education and other legislation, development plans, analyses (including labour market and feasibility analyses), and professional standards; and the best quality is being sought.
- ✓ The structure and content of modules and courses in a study programme support achievement of the objectives and designed learning outcomes of the study programme.
- ✓ Different parts of the study programme form a coherent whole.
- ✓ The study programme includes practical training, the content and scope of which are based on the planned learning outcomes of the study programme.
- ✓ The study programme development takes into account feedback from students, employers, alumni and other stakeholders.

Comments

The study programs are very recently redeveloped, due to both external and internal pressures. Changes in society on a global level, and the consequences for the position of religion and theology have led to a reform of the Faculty of Theology to the School of Theology and Religious Studies within the Faculty of Arts and Humanities. The School is very recognizable as part of the Faculty; the Faculty and University act as encouraging partners for the School, providing a stable and sustainable context.

In the process of innovation and development, the staff members were actively committed to the process, resulting in a high level of ownership. Both teachers and students, as well as members of the management team were convinced of the promising character of the new programme. Feedback from teaching staff and students is taken very seriously, the feedback process is firmly regulated.

As any school of theology, the School is struggling with the balance between embedded theology and the academic neutrality. Students and teaching staff are satisfied with this balance in the new programs. The status of this balance should be monitored in the future, as part of the evaluation of the newly started programs.

Strengths

The study programs are designed with a focus on society and societal impact. This results in an innovative programme, attracting alternative student populations. Not only students with an ambition within the churches are involved, but also students with a more general interest in religion and society.

The programs for Theology and Religious Studies are clearly distinct from each other with their own profile. This results in a strong and coherent Theology programme, enabling different churches to participate. The programme for Religious Studies is more diffuse in nature, but has its own strong value in the contribution to society.

One of the strengths of the curricula lies in the interdisciplinarity, embedded in the larger academic structure of the School. Students have the opportunity to develop competencies beyond the strict domain of Theology and Religious Studies.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

The alignment of individual courses to the general learning outcomes could be presented more coherently. There is no doubt about the coherence of the programme but awareness of the alignment improves both teaching strategies and learning activities.

Although the feedback process for the evaluation of the study programmes is quite satisfactory, the alumni seem to be missed in this process. Assembling their feedback can be very helpful for the relation of the study programmes to the labour market.

The impact of these study programmes is potentially very high but the students will benefit from more practical guidance in establishing their position within society.

The flexibility of the programmes for individual students should be limited. The students need more structure and guidance; too much flexibility enhances students' uncertainty. Related to the flexible study paths is the risk for students to experience a lack of social cohesion. Investment in community building is required.

The School is well adapted to the new environment of the Faculty of Arts and Humanities. We recommend retaining the own identity as well. Theology and religious studies may be necessary for the churches, but in academia one should remain aware of the vulnerability of these specific scientific domains.

Resources

Standards

- ✓ Resources (teaching and learning environments, teaching materials, teaching aids and equipment, premises, financial resources) support the achievement of objectives in the study programme.
- ✓ There is a sufficient supply of textbooks and other teaching aids and they are available.
- ✓ Adequacy of resources is ensured for changing circumstances (change in student numbers, etc.).
- ✓ Resource development is sustainable.

Comments

Both the self-assessment report and the site-visit confirm that the School of Theology and Religious Studies possesses substantial teaching and learning environments. Relating to the size of the School and the number of students, there are enough lecture rooms and classrooms and they are equipped to meet the standards of modern teaching and learning situations. There is moveable furniture in the classrooms so the space can easily be used for example for teamwork.

The interviews strengthened the information given in the self-assessment report that the School has succeeded in overcoming the previous financial difficulties by the support of the Faculty of Arts and Humanities. Many interviewees stated that the principle of solidarity between the Faculty and the School keeps the budget in balance: the weaker units are supported by the resources of the Faculty. The aim is that all units of the University of Tartu will achieve a good or satisfactory financial state by 2020.

At the moment there is a sufficient supply of textbooks and other teaching aids. The situation has been bad for the last few years due to the prolonged renovation of the library. At the moment both students and staff have access to the most important databases. SIS was welcomed, and Moodle is used as a platform for teaching.

According to the interviews, there are more substantive resources and teaching resources available after the structural renovation and curriculum reform at UT. Panel members concluded that the School of Theology and Religious Studies has, together with the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, sufficient substantive and teaching resources, and the School is able to teach even a larger number of students.

Strengths

The infrastructure is of good quality. It supports well the higher education study processes. The School uses the financial resources from the UT's developmental fund mainly (one exception) for fair development projects. The most important resources – the staff and the students – are committed to their work and studies.

They all seem to feel good in their small and familiar unit of Theology and Religious Studies.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

The School uses UT's developmental funds for curriculum development, including internationalization and engagement especially with German universities. The panel proposes the inclusion of English-speaking universities (British, Continental, and Scandinavian) in international co-operation. The interviews showed that, in fact, the students know English language the best.

While online resources and e-books are available, hard copy literature for teachers is less available due to the very limited budget. This needs improvement either from the resources of the Faculty or from the library.

The School encourages the teaching staff to apply for research grants to improve the financial status of the School. The panel recommends that the teachers participating in calls should get systematic and financial support for their intentions. Especially internationally funded research will increase the visibility and attractiveness of the School of Theology and Religious Studies.

The information regarding the physical accessibility of the premises should be available and easily found. Therefore, the panel recommends the School to provide information on accessibility of the premises on their webpage or on University of Tartu's webpage.

Teaching and learning

Standards

- ✓ The process of teaching and learning supports learners' individual and social development.
- ✓ The process of teaching and learning is flexible, takes into account the specifics of the form of study and facilitates the achievement of planned learning outcomes.
- ✓ Teaching methods and tools used in teaching are modern, effective and support the development of digital culture.
- ✓ Practical and theoretical studies are interconnected.
- ✓ The organisation and the content of practical training support achievement of planned learning outcomes and meet the needs of the stakeholders.
- ✓ The process of teaching and learning supports learning mobility.
- ✓ Assessment of learning outcomes is appropriate, transparent and objective, and supports the development of learners.

Comments

In the UT School of Theology and Religious Studies, the students are sufficiently involved in the study processes. A whole variety of teaching and learning

methods are utilized to support students' individual learning processes. Based on the self-evaluation report and interviews, the panellists noticed that during sessional learning periods and in e-learning context the social development of students could be taken into account better.

It seems that the process of teaching and learning may be slightly too flexible, in the regard that it gives too much freedom and space for individual responsibility of the success of one's studies.

On one hand, close and familiar student-teacher relationships definitely create a good learning environment but on the other hand, they can prevent somebody from indicating negative feedback, as was highlighted in the report of the School. Therefore, it is important to put into operation the new student feedback system which is currently in preparation.

Teaching methods support digital culture and are well-developed in UT. E-learning platforms clearly help students with different kind of needs, even with special needs. The panellists recorded some comments concerning the interrelation of practical and theoretical studies but the self-evaluation report gives good examples of integrating theoretical and applied studies, and different teaching methods.

Practical training is especially well-organized for students who study Religious education but is less constant in other specialities as the internship depends on co-operation between the student, his/her supervisor, and the place of practice. The School of Theology and Religious Studies reported of students' positive internship experiences, and the stakeholders strengthened the profitability of internships on their part.

Mobility is still in a process of development. Students need encouragement, and the staff could consider new strategic ideas and, to be practical, seek for new partners.

Assessment of learning outcomes is mostly appropriate and transparent, only the use of oral examinations raised some questions of the openness and objectivity of assessment. Criteria for the assessment of final thesis are appropriate.

The voluntariness of the use of plagiarism detection systems is one critical point.

Strengths

A positive attitude towards development and improvements reflects the working culture, even though there have been reform processes that have demanded a lot of energy and resources. UT School of Theology and Religious Studies has good initiatives in making their programmes even better in the future. For example, they intend to increase their visibility in society, and develop their programmes in interaction with Estonian religious and societal partners.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

Avoid the use of oral examinations.

The panellists warmly recommend launching the plagiarism recognition system. Mobility is a challenge to overcome.

New openings and contracts to new universities are recommended.

The panellists' recommend that the appropriate counselling should accompany the flexibility in studies so that students do not feel alone with the planning and implementation of their studies.

The panel recommends to continue the work on feedback system. Further implementation of student-centered perspective also in feedback system can be vital in quality feedback and students comprehending their role in the learning process.

Teaching staff

Standards

- ✓ There is teaching staff with adequate qualifications to achieve the objectives and planned learning outcomes of the study programme, and to ensure quality and sustainability of the teaching and learning.
- ✓ Overall student assessment on teaching skills of the teaching staff is positive.
- ✓ The teaching staff collaborate in the fields of teaching and research within the higher education institution and with partners outside of the higher education institution (practitioners in their fields, employers, and staff members at other Estonian or foreign higher education institutions).
- ✓ Recognised foreign and visiting members of the teaching staff and practitioners participate in teaching the study programme.
- ✓ The teaching staff is routinely engaged in professional and teaching-skills development.
- ✓ Assessment of the work by members of the teaching staff (including staff evaluation) takes into account the quality of their teaching as well as of their research, development and creative work, including development of their teaching skills, and their international mobility.

Comments

The teaching staff has the adequate qualifications which enable them to achieve the objectives and learning outcomes of the study programs. The teaching methods are varied and their use encourages active participation from the students' side: in the Master's programme, which is primarily taught through session study, the contact hours are mostly used for seminars, in the Bachelor's programme more classical lecture form is also being used.

The teaching staff is highly motivated. Based on the interviews, the panel has the impression that the mutual interaction of the teaching staff is very cordial and supportive. This results in the high level of satisfaction with the working environment within the School. When assessing the quality of teaching, students'

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feedback is taken into consideration. As a result, student feedback is valued among teaching staff. The assessment criteria for these are transparent.

There are various courses of development of teaching skills offered both within the School as well as on university level.

No negative effects of the recent curricula and administrative changes on the teaching staff could be detected during the interviews. On the contrary, the contribution of the School of Theology and Religious Studies teaching staff to the Faculty of Arts and Humanities' wider programme has increased in recent years. The teaching staff appreciates the financial stability the administrative reform has brought about.

Strengths

The teaching staff is encouraged to form groups and participate in each other's lectures, mutually giving and receiving feedback. This is a commendable practice which encourages the development of teaching skills and active participation outside their own narrow research field.

With rather small student numbers, the teaching staff is able to take a more personal approach to students, giving them extra feedback when needed and also adapting their teaching methods to suit any particular group or course.

Students' satisfaction with the teaching staff is very high according to the interviews. Student feedback is valued by the teaching staff and management and vice versa.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

There seem to be enough courses to help with the development of different professional and teaching skills but the process of directing the teaching staff to participate in these courses could be regulated better. This applies to regular long-term teaching staff as well as the visiting lecturers and newly elected staff members. The panel is of the opinion that teaching skills development ought to be more regular and systematic.

Students

Standards

- ✓ Student places are filled with motivated and capable students.
- ✓ The dropout rate is low; the proportion of students graduating within the standard period of study is large.
- ✓ Students are motivated to learn and their satisfaction with the content, form and methods of their studies is high.
- ✓ As part of their studies, students attend other Estonian and/or foreign higher education institutions as visiting or international students.

- ✓ Employment rate of alumni is high.
- ✓ Alumni and their employers are pleased with their professional preparation and social competencies.

Comments

Based on the interviews students of the BA and MA programmes are very motivated and capable. Students' satisfaction with the content, form and methods of their studies is high and they are confident in their academic capabilities. The teaching staff's dedication inspires them and they value their teachers highly according to the interview. The students are pleased with the various forms of feedback they receive on their academic progress and appreciate the opportunity to shape the courses. During the interviews, the students expressed some concern over the small number of students and the need for more structure – in a flexible curriculum proactive counseling could be useful.

Student dropout rate is relatively high but the problem is acknowledged and the new programmes are hoping to tackle the issue by offering more flexibility and options as well as sessional study in MA level.

The mobility rate of the students of the School of Theology and Religious Studies is low but the problem is acknowledged and university is implementing a mobility window to the programmes. During the interview, a student mentioned problems with graduating with nominal time when going abroad for a semester due to the mandatory courses being read only in certain semesters.

Alumni and the stakeholders are pleased with graduates' professional preparation and value highly the education offered in the School of Theology and Religious Studies. The alumni and stakeholders believe that the graduates are well-functioning and valued members of society even when not working directly in the field of theology. According to the interview alumni's experiences could be used more in the programme development, i.e. including alumni periodically to the council of studies.

Strengths

Students find the teaching staff inspiring and see them as role models. Student body is satisfied with varied methods used in teaching and learning and are aware of their role and responsibility as learners.

Students are pleased with the individual support offered in the office of School of Theology and Religious Studies and with the overall friendly atmosphere.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

The admissions to the MA programme do not take into account the candidates' motivation. This was not considered as a problem during the interviews. But since the self-assessment report mentions the following as the reasons for dropping out: "Some discover that they have entered the wrong major, some face changes in family circumstances, some find that although they had passed the entry requirements, their skills are not sufficient for successful studies", the panel suggests considering implementing interviews in the new MA programme.

Although the students value the flexibility the programs and the teaching staff are offering, the flexibility as a risk also needs to be considered. The students expressed during the interview the need for structure and guidance. It was mentioned in self-evaluation report that there is a need for support in realizing the individual study paths of the students. Additionally, the panel would recommend the School to provide students with guidance on their career opportunities inside the curricula.

The panel encourages the School to continue working on providing better support for students' international mobility, including the proper implementation of the mobility window. In addition to this, the panel strongly recommends The School of Theology and Religious Studies to increase the number of formal Erasmus partners.

2. The Institute of Theology of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church

2.1. Introduction

The Institute of Theology of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church (Institute) has a unique history, which began already on 01.02.1943 in Tartu, and studies became permanent after 1946 in Tallinn. A tradition that valued classical theological education, published books and research materials, well known among Estonian intelligentsia, has developed and flourished during the period of almost 70 years. In the last years, the scope of the Institute has widened, because of the changes in the Estonian higher education system, which have brought about merger of different schools of theology, as well as reorganizing of the Institute into professional higher education institution (PHEI) at the end of 2011. During the last years, the institute has experienced many positive developments that have opened new perspectives for the future. Tartu Academy of Theology (TAT) and the Institute merged in 2013 which added pastoral care and counselling (PCC) teaching know-how, and the curricula was complemented with PCC specialty. In 2014, in co-operation with Orthodox Church of Estonia (OCE), we opened the Chair of Orthodox Theology with the goal to train priests for OCE. Such co-operation between Lutheran and Orthodox Church is unique in the whole world.

All study programs of the Institute belong to the theology study programme group and the theology faculty is responsible for carrying out the studies. PHE and theology MA study programs have placed an emphasis on the New Testament, the systematic theology with ethics and practical congregation work in the context of Estonia. Here the cooperation with the FTUT's Old Testament and oriental cultures and religion sociology areas support achievement of synergy. Also, cooperation with Estonian Business School for deepening the management skills and in the ethics area. Contact points with the Baptist and Methodist Church lie in the higher educational institute pedagogy and refreshment courses.

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Table 1. Data of students.

STUDENTS	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Number of all students	119	133	136	130	131
PHE Theology	62	73	79	77	75
Specialties					
: Lutheran Theology	31	39	34	35	34
PCC	31	32	42	38	38
Orthodox Theology	-	2	3	4	3
MA Theology	33	33	32	31	32
Specialties					
: Theology	10	15	15	11	12
Religious Pedagogics	11	9	5	5	5
Diakonia	12	9	8	8	8
DPCC	-	-	4	7	7
MA Studies in Christian Culture	24	27	25	22	24
Average age of students	42	44	43	44	46
Graduates	3	12	17	17	9
PHE	1	3	6	6	6
MA Theology	2	3	4	6	1
MA Studies in Christian Culture	-	6	7	5	2
Admission	38	33	33	36	19
PHE	20	19	18	23	12
MA Theology	4	6	8	5	2
MA Studies in Christian Culture	14	8	7	8	5
Admission of international students	-	-	-	-	-
Students Dropout*	8%	9%	13%	11%	7%
PHE	10%	5%	13%	18%	12%
MA Theology	3%	9%	13%	0%	0%
MA Studies in Christian Culture	4%	4%	16%	9%	4%
International mobility	4	7	2	3	2
PHE	-	1	-	-	-
MA Theology	4	4	1	2	1
MA Studies in Christian Culture	-	1	1	1	2

*Dropout % relative to student body.

2.2. General findings and recommendations at the study programme group level

The institute turns out to be a strong and significant partner for the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church. The church relies highly on the Institute, offering a stable and sustainable context for the study programs. And mutually, the Institute relies highly on the Lutheran Church. This obvious strength results in an enduring process of balancing between meeting all international academic standards of higher education and feeding the needs of the church.

The panel's conclusion based on the documents and the site visit: the Institute of Theology of the Estonian Evangelical Church meets all standards of higher education.

General recommendations

Develop a long term vision on visibility in the Estonian society, including the recruitment of the younger generation. Due to practical issues like salary and availability of church positions, the majority of the students are adults with a societal position outside the churches. Younger fulltime students could be more sensitive to societal issues, newly developed theological positions and self-reflective processes.

2.3. Strengths and areas for improvement of study programmes by assessment areas

2.3.1. Theology (Professional HE); Studies in Christian Culture (MA); Theology (MA)

Study programme and study programme development

Standards

- ✓ The launch or development of the study programme is based on the Standard of Higher Education and other legislation, development plans, analyses (including labour market and feasibility analyses), and professional standards; and the best quality is being sought.
- ✓ The structure and content of modules and courses in a study programme support achievement of the objectives and designed learning outcomes of the study programme.
- ✓ Different parts of the study programme form a coherent whole.
- ✓ The study programme includes practical training, the content and scope of which are based on the planned learning outcomes of the study programme.
- ✓ The study programme development takes into account feedback from students, employers, alumni and other stakeholders.

Comments

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The study programs can be characterized as coherent. The programmes are matching with the international developments in theology and the changing position of theology in society. A strong feeling of mutual trust between the Institute and the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church provides a solid base for cooperation. The Lutheran Church relies heavily on the Institute, and vice versa. This clear focus of the programme translates into a strong commitment, both from the side of management and staff of the Institute, as well as from the side of Church leadership.

For the development of the study programmes, the students are taken very seriously. According to the self-evaluation report and interviews several concrete improvements are initialized by the students, i.e. making groups smaller for language classes. The same can be noticed about the stakeholders from the church: they are committed participants in the processes of programme development and renewal.

Strengths

Given the interconnections with the Lutheran Church, the target audience can be clearly described. Marketing for this audience seems to be very effective.

The relation between practice and theory is very strong.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

The alignment of individual courses to the general learning outcomes could be presented more coherently. The study programmes meet the standards but is not so clear from the documents how individual courses add up to the general learning outcomes of the programme. More developed awareness of this alignment improves both teaching strategies and learning activities.

To develop a more sustainable study programmes, new student audiences should be found. In order to reach that goal, some of the marketing resources should be invested differently. Attracting students of a younger generation is especially recommended to maintain societal impact and to be able to contribute to the building of church communities as well.

The current focus of the Institute is quite internal. One recommendation is to develop a certain pride in the organization. The value to society can be immense if a new student audience can be recruited and if the staff members develop their skills to participate in societal debates.

The study programs are too limited to the restricted domain of theology and church. Students will benefit from the incorporation of soft skills (communication, teamwork etc.) and research skills.

The feedback system within the Institute is adequate but predominantly informal. To avoid biases, the formal systems of feedback should be implemented.

Stakeholders other than the ones from the church and students, like hospitals, military and other public institutions should be actively included in the programme development.

Resources

Standards

- ✓ Resources (teaching and learning environments, teaching materials, teaching aids and equipment, premises, financial resources) support the achievement of objectives in the study programme.
- ✓ There is a sufficient supply of textbooks and other teaching aids and they are available.
- ✓ Adequacy of resources is ensured for changing circumstances (change in student numbers, etc.).
- ✓ Resource development is sustainable.

Comments

The Institute of Theology ensures favourable resources for academic activities and independent work facilities. In the Institute there are nine classrooms (174 seats). Classrooms are equipped with technical equipment for learning. One of the classrooms has two organs, and there are two pianos as well, for the usage of Church Music Department.

A library is located in the Institute with sufficient work-areas, besides visitors' area. According to self-assessment, the library is the biggest theological library in Estonia with total of 67 000 units. Staff and students have access to databases of the University of Tartu.

Overall, there is a sufficient supply and availability of teaching aids and textbooks. But even if the framework is good, the language skills of students can become a limiting factor. The panellists recommend investing in and encouraging language study. Of course, it needs to be mentioned that the staff of the Institute has been proactive in producing learning materials in Estonian language.

It is for the benefit of the Institute that the financing is based on many pillars. Nevertheless, the extension of the financial base is an important and topical issue. The budget of the Institute has been in deficit for the years 2015–2017, and even if the deficit can be covered by earlier surpluses, a balanced budget should be set as a target. Economically, and maybe also ecumenically, it is a strength of the Institute that they can turn towards many denominations and Churches that operate in Estonia.

One consequence of the tense economy is the modest salary of teachers. However, the panel commends the Institute for providing funding for research and travel to teachers as a kind of compensation.

Strengths

The Institute has good and compact facilities for studying. The staff is committed and has good expertise even though the pay is probably not the best motivator for the job. Efforts to develop the funding base of the Institute show interest in developing the Institute also in the long term. Both self-assessment feedback and interviews indicate that facilities, infrastructure and location are the best strengths of the Institute.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

The average age of students has been rising, at the moment it is 46 years. The panel recommends that the Institute seek to recruit young students. The wider use of digital learning environments is another panel's recommendation. Some of the Institute's teachers need orientation in this regard. The Institute has to improve on the diversification of the funding base, and panellists recommend that a balanced budget be set as a target.

The self-evaluation report describes the physical accessibility of the premises in Tallinn as poor since there is no elevator. Tartu's premises are fully accessible according to the report. However, the information regarding the physical accessibility of the premises should be available and easily found. Therefore, the panel recommends to the Institute to provide information on accessibility of the premises on their webpage.

Teaching and learning

Standards

- ✓ The process of teaching and learning supports learners' individual and social development.
- ✓ The process of teaching and learning is flexible, takes into account the specifics of the form of study and facilitates the achievement of planned learning outcomes.
- ✓ Teaching methods and tools used in teaching are modern, effective and support the development of digital culture.
- ✓ Practical and theoretical studies are interconnected.
- ✓ The organisation and the content of practical training support achievement of planned learning outcomes and meet the needs of the stakeholders.
- ✓ The process of teaching and learning supports learning mobility.
- ✓ Assessment of learning outcomes is appropriate, transparent and objective, and supports the development of learners.

Comments

At the interviews with the teachers and the students, it was noted that mentoring supports learners' development in many respects. Mentoring could well be extended to all programmes. The process of teaching and learning in the Institute

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of Theology is flexible due to blended learning. From the students' point of view, flexibility has strengths and weaknesses: it is mostly a necessity for an adult student but it does not necessarily take into account the special needs of all students (such as learning difficulties or lack of language skills). Successful distance learning requires a good feedback system that is under development at the Institute. According to the interview, students seemed to need more supervision and time from the teachers.

The interviews confirmed what was written in the self-assessment report that the digital skills need strengthening. This applies to both teachers as well as students. As a whole, teaching is relatively versatile and the teaching methods are varied.

Theory and practice are well interconnected in the studies of the Institute. The internship network is wide and well organized. The theory and practice combine creatively, of which PHE programme's course *Pastoral Counselling and Crisis Intervention* is a good example.

There is a lot to be done in the area of student mobility. The reasons for the low level of mobility are quite clear but the programme could systematically support short exchange periods which are not overwhelmingly difficult to organize.

Evaluation of final work is done thoroughly in the Institute. In the cases of complaints, external evaluators are used in order to increase transparency. The panellists warmly recommend launching the plagiarism recognition system.

Strengths

The strength of the Institute is a strong link between studies and working life, i.e. theory and practice. This is especially evident in internships. A small number of students allows a close and familiar atmosphere as well as effective study monitoring.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

It is recommended to use plagiarism detection programme. The panel recommends examining student's workload. According to students' interview some courses are overloaded. Mentoring could be a great place to discuss how much the studies can take time and resources. The continuous development of the feedback system (both on the courses, curriculum and support system) is necessary. A formal feedback system is vital for quality assurance even if the informal systems seem to be working. It is also important to develop ways and methods for giving feedback to students. Mobility is a challenge to overcome.

Teaching staff

Standards

- ✓ There is teaching staff with adequate qualifications to achieve the objectives and planned learning outcomes of the study programme, and to ensure quality and sustainability of the teaching and learning.
- ✓ Overall student assessment on teaching skills of the teaching staff is positive.
- ✓ The teaching staff collaborate in the fields of teaching and research within the higher education institution and with partners outside of the higher education institution (practitioners in their fields, employers, and staff members at other Estonian or foreign higher education institutions).
- ✓ Recognised foreign and visiting members of the teaching staff and practitioners participate in teaching the study programme.
- ✓ The teaching staff is routinely engaged in professional and teaching-skills development.
- ✓ Assessment of the work by members of the teaching staff (including staff evaluation) takes into account the quality of their teaching as well as of their research, development and creative work, including development of their teaching skills, and their international mobility.

Comments

The teaching staff has the adequate qualifications to achieve the objectives and the learning outcomes of the study programme. The teaching staff is very committed to the Institute and its mission. Most of the teaching staff is engaged in other fields and responsibilities which results in dividing their attention and energy between several fields. Yet, this does not seem to affect their commitment nor academic research. Teaching staff themselves perceive their workload and working condition satisfactory. The research funds available to the staff are highly valued since its use is fairly free.

Student feedback is taken into consideration when electing the teaching staff. Overall student assessment of teaching skills of the teaching staff is very positive.

The teaching staff collaborate in the fields of teaching and research with partners outside of the Institute (mainly, with partners from University of Tartu).

Strengths

Many staff members have a wide personal research network.

As the Institute prepares the future clergy for the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church, the staff's practical knowledge and involvement in congregational life is important and appreciated. Many members of the teaching staff are well known specialists in the practical field (pastoral carers, chaplains, pastors, etc) which adds credibility to their position in the Institute.

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Overall student assessment on teaching skills of the teaching staff and methods they use of is very positive based on interviews. Students' feedback is taken into account when electing the teaching staff.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

It is recommendable for the Institute to consider and implement a long-term strategy which would result in increasing the number of teaching staff with the terminal degree. Currently, less than 50% of the teaching staff holds a PhD.

The Institute uses the expertise of a number of external practitioners. Their teaching skills and methods could be monitored more closely to ensure high quality teaching. Also, the regular teaching staff might benefit from more systematic and regular development of professional teaching skills.

Not all of the members of the teaching staff are acquainted with different e-learning possibilities. The level of expertise could be increased by specific courses.

The panel recommends including international staff members to teaching and research in the Institute to give the students some international perspective and motivation enhance their English skills.

Students

Standards

- ✓ Student places are filled with motivated and capable students.
- ✓ The dropout rate is low; the proportion of students graduating within the standard period of study is large.
- ✓ Students are motivated to learn and their satisfaction with the content, form and methods of their studies is high.
- ✓ As part of their studies, students attend other Estonian and/or foreign higher education institutions as visiting or international students.
- ✓ Employment rate of alumni is high.
- ✓ Alumni and their employers are pleased with their professional preparation and social competencies.

Comments

The Institute's students are motivated and capable. The interview demonstrated high student satisfaction with the teaching staff, content of the studies and methods used in teaching and learning. Students are also pleased with the feedback they get from the teaching staff on their academic progress. The teaching staff is considered inspiring and their experiences outside the academic sphere are valued by the students.

The drop-out rate of the MA programme is relatively low but PHE programme has high drop-out rates. The main reasons for the dropouts: 1) academic

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requirements are too high, 2) matching the studies with the daily life is too complicated.

The mentor groups for students were piloted in 2017 and in 2018 all the new students were involved in the mentoring system. The students consider the system useful and necessary.

Students mobility rate is problematic. Some MA students from both of the programs have used opportunities to take part in international conferences and trainings. As there are no international students in the Institute of Theology, the students' participation in mobility (in international exchange, internships, conferences, training etc.) is essential.

Alumni and the stakeholders are generally pleased with the preparation of the graduates and see the society's need for the graduates in diverse fields.

Strengths

The students of the Institute are dedicated and have realistic career goals. The teaching staff's dedication is highly valued by the student body. Students are also satisfied with methods teaching and learning methods used and promoted by the teaching staff. Students feel valued, for example they acknowledge the importance of giving feedback and are aware of the improvements that have been made based on it.

The mentor groups are considered to be significant and necessary support by the students.

Stakeholders foresee a high demand for the graduates.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

The panel recommends the Institute to go further in targeting younger candidates in order to enlarge and diversify the student body. During the interviews, the panel heard about plans for opening a high school, but also the use of more diverse communication channels could help reaching the younger generation.

Based on the interviews, the students would benefit from more contact hours. Due to the specific composition of the student body, the session study is indeed adequate and optimal way to manage the contact hours. However, the students expressed the need for more frequent sessions or some contact in between the sessions; this would offer additional support for achieving the learning outcomes.

The drop-out level in PHE programme is high, inadequate expectations were mentioned as the frequent cause for dropping out. The self-assessment report states that the motivation and goals of a candidate are clarified during the admission interview. In addition to this, the interview should be used for explaining the Institute's expectations and introducing the requirements which students will have to fulfill.

The mentor groups were piloted in 2017 and in the future all the students should be involved in the mentoring system. Trainings to facilitate mentoring should be offered regularly for the teachers.

Although the panel recognizes the difficulties of encouraging the Institute's students to participate in mobility, we strongly recommend taking further steps to support and motivate students. One way to encourage students to spend a semester abroad either studying or doing an internship is to introduce mobility windows to the programs. Taking part in international conferences or short-term trainings is encouraged and could be encouraged even more. There are also other options for broadening the perspectives of the students, for example MOOCs or other e-learning trainings.

Although the stakeholders were generally satisfied with the graduates of the programmes (especially with their practical experience), they also expressed the need to focus more on the students' transferable and soft skills.