



# Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) of Free Church of Scotland College t/a Edinburgh Theological Seminary

September 2016

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## About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at the Edinburgh Theological Seminary. The review took place from 27 to 29 September 2016 and was conducted by a team of two reviewers, as follows:

- Dr Terence Clifford-Amos
- Professor Clare Milsom.

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by the Edinburgh Theological Seminary and to make judgements as to whether or not its academic standards and quality meet UK expectations. These expectations are the statements in the [UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#) (the Quality Code)<sup>1</sup> setting out what all UK [higher education providers](#) expect of themselves and of each other, and what the general public can therefore expect of them.

In Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) the QAA review team:

- makes judgements on
  - the setting and maintenance of threshold academic standards
  - the quality of student learning opportunities
  - the information provided about higher education provision
  - the enhancement of student learning opportunities
- provides a commentary on the selected theme
- makes recommendations
- identifies features of good practice
- affirms action that the provider is taking or plans to take.

A check is also made on the provider's financial sustainability, management and governance (FSMG) with the aim of giving students reasonable confidence that they should not be at risk of being unable to complete their course as a result of financial failure.

A summary of the findings can be found in the section starting on page 2. [Explanations of the findings](#) are followed by numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 5.

The QAA website gives more information [about QAA](#) and its mission.<sup>2</sup> A dedicated section explains the method for [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\)](#).<sup>3</sup> For an explanation of terms please see the [glossary](#) at the end of this report.

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<sup>1</sup> The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: [www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code)

<sup>2</sup> QAA website: [www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us).

<sup>3</sup> Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers): [www.qaa.ac.uk/en/ReviewsAndReports/Pages/Educational-Oversight.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/ReviewsAndReports/Pages/Educational-Oversight.aspx)

## Key findings

### QAA's judgements about Edinburgh Theological Seminary

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at Edinburgh Theological Seminary.

- The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of the information about learning opportunities is **commended**.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

### Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following features of **good practice** at Edinburgh Theological Seminary:

- the innovative use of information technology which preserves the Seminary's strong communal identity within the distance-learning programme (Expectation B3)
- the collegial nature of the student experience which creates the strong sense of fellowship between students and the Seminary (Expectation B4)
- the comprehensive and detailed information provided to staff and students exemplified by the Staff and Course Handbooks effectively underpinning the student learning experience (Information).

### Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to Edinburgh Theological Seminary.

By January 2017:

- strengthen the process for internal moderation of marks in order to ensure consistency and transparency (Expectation B6)
- formalise oversight of placement provision in order to ensure the quality of learning opportunities and to ensure that any risks are identified and mitigated (Expectation B10).

By September 2017:

- develop and implement an annual cycle of professional development opportunities for staff to support the Seminary's Five Year Plan (Expectations B3 and A3.4).

### Financial sustainability, management and governance

Edinburgh Theological Seminary has satisfactorily completed the financial sustainability, management and governance check.

Further explanation of the key findings can be found in the handbook available on the QAA webpage explaining [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\)](#).

## About Edinburgh Theological Seminary

Edinburgh Theological Seminary (the Seminary) is a theological institution that seeks to provide learning opportunities for a wide range of students in keeping with its mission to provide the spiritual training and theological education by which men and women can bring the historic gospel of Jesus Christ to Scotland, the UK, Europe and the wider world.

The Seminary is an integral part of the Free Church of Scotland, and operates under the oversight of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland. In respect of its higher education provision, it is a validated institution of the University of Glasgow, which has accorded it Associated Status. Its current Memorandum of Agreement with the University dates from 2015 and remains effective until 2018. The University has validated three programmes for delivery by the Seminary, namely the Bachelor of Theology, the Master of Theology (by research) and the Master of Theology in Scottish Church History and Theology. These programmes additionally serve as training to candidates for ministry, missionary work and evangelism in the Free Church of Scotland and in other churches. As denominational clients of the Seminary, these churches have expectations regarding the courses which candidates for their ministry are expected to complete which may be additional to the academic requirements of the degree programme itself.

The Seminary has 52 students enrolled on the programme leading to the award of Bachelor of Theology, of whom 37 are full-time and 15 part-time, and 14 students enrolled on postgraduate programmes, of whom three are full-time and 11 part-time. The Seminary employs four full-time members of academic staff, and also makes use of the services of a number of part-time teaching staff.

Recent changes at the Seminary include the appointment of a new full-time Principal in 2015 and a change of name in 2014, intended to support more effective marketing of its programmes. Additionally, the Seminary has established a distance-learning route for its undergraduate programme, which began operation in 2016, and which is intended, by use of technology, to offer distance-learning students an experience comparable to that enjoyed by those studying on the Seminary's premises.

The Seminary has a Five Year Plan that sets out its values and mission and identifies its objectives and the resources required to meet them. It sees its current key challenges as being to secure equity of learning opportunities in relation to the introduction of distance-learning, and to maintain academic standards while widening access in the admission of students to its programmes, within the context of increased costs and minimal full-time staffing levels.

The Seminary's most recent full review by QAA, the Review for Educational Oversight (REO) in September 2012, resulted in positive judgements in all judgement areas and identified five features of good practice and two recommendations. The subsequent monitoring visit of September 2014 found that the Seminary was making commendable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its provision. It has continued to make an effective and thorough response to the recommendations and to build upon the features of good practice identified in the previous REO.

## Explanation of the findings about Edinburgh Theological Seminary

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

Terms that may be unfamiliar to some readers have been included in a [brief glossary](#) at the end of this report. A fuller [glossary of terms](#) is available on the QAA website, and formal definitions of certain terms may be found in the operational description and handbook for the [review method](#), also on the QAA website.

## **1 Judgement: The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies**

**Expectation (A1): In order to secure threshold academic standards, degree-awarding bodies:**

**a) ensure that the requirements of *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ)* are met by:**

- **positioning their qualifications at the appropriate level of the relevant framework for higher education qualifications**
- **ensuring that programme learning outcomes align with the relevant qualification descriptor in the relevant framework for higher education qualifications**
- **naming qualifications in accordance with the titling conventions specified in the frameworks for higher education qualifications**
- **awarding qualifications to mark the achievement of positively defined programme learning outcomes**

**b) consider and take account of QAA's guidance on qualification characteristics**

**c) where they award UK credit, assign credit values and design programmes that align with the specifications of the relevant national credit framework**

**d) consider and take account of relevant Subject Benchmark Statements.**

**Quality Code, Chapter A1: UK and European Reference Points for Academic Standards**

### **Findings**

1.1 The Seminary offers programmes validated by its awarding body, the University of Glasgow. The programmes accord with the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) whose level descriptors are reflected in programme aims and learning outcomes. The Memorandum of Agreement with the awarding body sets out the areas of responsibility delegated to the seminary, outlining both shared and sole responsibilities.

1.2 The responsibilities, policies and procedures of the Seminary would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.3 Principally, the review team considered the memorandum of agreement established between the awarding body and the Seminary. The review team also considered SCQF alignments and benchmarking [Ev: 008], arrangements for validation of programmes, and programme specifications. Additionally, the team explored the application of these processes with senior managers and teaching staff.

1.4 The Seminary has worked with its awarding body since 2002 and regards itself as having an excellent working relationship with it. While the awarding body is responsible for setting academic standards, the Seminary is responsible for the delivery of programmes and for maintaining academic standards in accordance with the awarding body's requirements.

1.5 The Joint Board, comprising representatives of the University of Glasgow (the University) and of the Seminary and chaired by the Clerk of Senate of the University, oversees the validated programmes. It receives an Interim and an Annual Report from the Seminary so that it may be assured that academic standards and quality of learning opportunities are being maintained. The interim report for 2015 confirms that the Vice-Principal of the Seminary is tasked with ensuring alignment of its provision with the Quality Code Quality Code.

1.6 The Seminary's policies and processes, including those in relation to programme validation, annual monitoring, programme amendment, the management of external examiners and other vocational church external reference points and influences, are in accordance with its responsibilities towards its awarding body and are sufficient to confirm that the Seminary maintains the required academic standards. The Expectation is met and the associated risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

**Expectation (A2.1): In order to secure their academic standards, degree-awarding bodies establish transparent and comprehensive academic frameworks and regulations to govern how they award academic credit and qualifications.**

**Quality Code, Chapter A2: Degree-Awarding Bodies' Reference Points for Academic Standards**

**Findings**

1.7 The awarding body is responsible for the setting of academic standards. Its relationship with the Seminary is governed by a Memorandum of Agreement. The Seminary adheres to the University's regulations and has policies, protocols and arrangements governing its academic programmes. The Memorandum of Agreement affirms that the Seminary will ensure that the academic standard for each award, credit or qualification is rigorously set and maintained at the appropriate level, and that student performance is equitably judged against this standard.

1.8 The policies and procedures of the Seminary would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.9 The review team considered the Memorandum of Agreement, awarding body regulations, validation arrangements programme specifications, course descriptors, and examined the work of the internal governance groups, the Senate, the Seminary Board, the Joint Board and the Board of Studies. In addition, it met senior staff and teaching staff of the Seminary. The Seminary's constitution has been provided by the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland, and much of the day-to-day activities of the Seminary take place in liaison with three committees of the Free Church of Scotland: the Seminary Board, the Board of Ministry and the Board of Trustees. These collectively provide the governance of the Seminary, while the Seminary Board itself is responsible for strategy and overall operation.

1.10 The Seminary's policy and practice conform to the awarding body's regulations regarding assessment. The Seminary's assessment policy is aligned with the Quality Code and also with the awarding body's 22-point grading scale.

1.11 The Seminary scrupulously follows the regulations and guidance provided by its awarding body, is competent in its senior administrative capacity and is supported by the appropriate internal management groups and their systems and processes. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**



**Expectation (A2.2): Degree-awarding bodies maintain a definitive record of each programme and qualification that they approve (and of subsequent changes to it) which constitutes the reference point for delivery and assessment of the programme, its monitoring and review, and for the provision of records of study to students and alumni.**

**Quality Code, Chapter A2: Degree-Awarding Bodies' Reference Points for Academic Standards**

**Findings**

1.12 The awarding body has developed regulations for each programme delivered by the Seminary. The regulations, which are reviewed annually, are to be found in programme handbooks and in the University calendar, and in addition are accessible to current and prospective students through the Seminary's website and on the Seminary's virtual learning environment (VLE). Programme specifications are the Seminary's source for the definitive records for each validated programme and qualification.

1.13 The policies and procedures of the Seminary would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.14 The review team examined the University regulations, saw examples of programme specifications and course descriptors and discussed these with staff and students of the Seminary.

1.15 Students were familiar with the University's regulations, programme specifications and module descriptors and confirmed that the information was easy for them to locate prior to applying through the website for admission to a programme. The Seminary's programme specifications contain key details on course content, assessment and matters concerning a student's approved curriculum, progress and final award. Information on programme delivery, learning outcomes and other academic matters is contained in the course descriptors, which follow in the specification.

1.16 Although programme specifications are not available on the public website, details about programme and module structure are available for prospective students (see Part C). Enrolled students have access to the definitive programme specification through their course handbooks.

1.17 The Seminary has effective procedures to ensure that definitive records of each programme and unit descriptors are accurate and available to prospective and current students. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

**Expectation (A3.1): Degree-awarding bodies establish and consistently implement processes for the approval of taught programmes and research degrees that ensure that academic standards are set at a level which meets the UK threshold standard for the qualification and are in accordance with their own academic frameworks and regulations.**

**Quality Code, Chapter A3: Securing Academic Standards and an Outcomes-Based Approach to Academic Awards**

## **Findings**

1.18 The awarding body has overall responsibility for the approval of programmes delivered at the Seminary, and for assuring itself that appropriate standards are achieved. The design and development of the curriculum is mainly driven by the Seminary.

1.19 Programme approval follows the framework and regulations of the University, which ensures that UK threshold standards are maintained. The Memorandum of Agreement sets out the process for any proposed changes to the validated programmes.

1.20 The design and development of programmes is undertaken by course teams with external representation from external examiners and denominational clients. The Seminary works closely with its awarding body through the Joint Board, whose role is to ensure that programmes are at the appropriate level. Programme information, including the curriculum and programme specification, are included in the programme handbooks. These structures allow the Expectation to be met.

1.21 The team reviewed documentation relating to the approval of the distance-learning version of the Bachelor of Theology and held discussions with senior and academic staff.

1.22 The Seminary has a clear understanding of the University's regulations and approval processes and is fulfilling its responsibilities for programme approval as outlined in the Memorandum of Agreement. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

**Expectation (A3.2): Degree-awarding bodies ensure that credit and qualifications are awarded only where:**

- **the achievement of relevant learning outcomes (module learning outcomes in the case of credit and programme outcomes in the case of qualifications) has been demonstrated through assessment**
- **both UK threshold standards and their own academic standards have been satisfied.**

**Quality Code, Chapter A3: Securing Academic Standards and an Outcomes-Based Approach to Academic Awards**

**Findings**

1.23 While the responsibility for ensuring the achievement of learning outcomes resides with the awarding body, the Seminary is responsible for the design of assessments which it fulfils in accordance with the University's Code of Assessment. The Code of Assessment requires the Seminary to produce a scheme of assessment which assesses performance against the intended learning outcomes. The marking and moderation of assessments is the responsibility of the Seminary as outlined in the Seminary's Assessment Policy and includes the use of external examiners in external moderation. Each programme has a programme specification which details programme aims, learning outcomes and teaching, learning and assessment strategies.

1.24 External examiners comment on all summative assessment instruments and report on the relationship between the standards, the programme specifications and published Subject Benchmark Statements.

1.25 The review team examined assessment-related documentation including the University's Code of Practice; the Seminary's Assessment Policy; programme validation documentation; Annual Reports and external examiner reports. The team also discussed the Seminary's assessment arrangements with staff and students.

1.26 The evidence demonstrates that the Seminary's assessment arrangements are effective. Programme and staff handbooks include the assessment regulations, assessment guidance, and marking criteria. Handbooks also include a Students' Guide to the Assessment Criteria which details level requirements. Seminary staff work closely with external examiners who approve assessment and inform the design of assessment tasks. All summatively assessed work is internally and externally moderated and teaching staff showed a broad understanding of the moderation processes. Students confirmed their awareness of the assessment arrangements and knew what was expected of them in each task. Students also showed an understanding of the link between intended learning outcomes and assessment, and the assessment regulations.

1.27 The Seminary manages its responsibilities for the award of credit and qualifications effectively. The achievement of intended learning outcomes is demonstrated through assessment. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

**Expectation (A3.3): Degree-awarding bodies ensure that processes for the monitoring and review of programmes are implemented which explicitly address whether the UK threshold academic standards are achieved and whether the academic standards required by the individual degree-awarding body are being maintained.**

**Quality Code, Chapter A3: Securing Academic Standards and an Outcomes-Based Approach to Academic Awards**

## **Findings**

1.28 The Seminary is responsible for programme annual monitoring, while periodic review of programmes is the responsibility of the awarding body. The Annual Report which is the outcome of annual monitoring is received and reviewed by the Joint Board and the Senate, which is charged with oversight of validation programmes. The process ensures that programmes are delivered according to their specifications and that any minor modifications are reported within the Annual Report.

1.29 Periodic review takes the form of revalidation which takes place on a six-yearly cycle using a procedure set out in the University's Code of Practice. The revalidation panel includes staff from the awarding body and from the Seminary as well as external specialists.

1.30 The review team considered a range of documents related to annual monitoring and review including recent Annual Reports, documentation relating to programme approval and external examiners' reports and minutes of the Joint Board. The team also met senior staff, teaching staff, professional support staff and students.

1.31 The processes for monitoring and review operate effectively. The Annual Report to the Joint Board reflects on external examiners' reports which confirm by reference to published external benchmarks and the qualifications framework that standards are appropriate and provide comment on the relevance and validity of the content in the context of developing knowledge in the discipline. Progression data are considered as part of the Annual Report: as cohorts are generally small the progress is described at the level of the individual. General Course Quality Questionnaires, completed anonymously by students, inform the review and help direct the identification of areas for improvement. The Annual Report also reviews progress on actions determined in the previous year.

1.32 The Annual Report is discussed with students and staff at the Board of Studies and the Senate. In meetings staff demonstrated a clear understanding of the processes and the separation of responsibilities between the Seminary and the University. Oversight of the Annual Report is effective: actions are identified in the Joint Board and progressed through the Senate.

1.33 Overall, the Seminary manages its responsibilities for programme monitoring and review in accordance with the requirements of the University. Its processes address the achievement and maintenance of standards. Staff are aware of these processes and they are implemented effectively. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

**Expectation (A3.4): In order to be transparent and publicly accountable, degree-awarding bodies use external and independent expertise at key stages of setting and maintaining academic standards to advise on whether:**

- **UK threshold academic standards are set, delivered and achieved**
- **the academic standards of the degree-awarding body are appropriately set and maintained.**

**Quality Code, Chapter A3: Securing Academic Standards and an Outcomes-Based Approach to Academic Awards**

**Findings**

1.34 The awarding body has the ultimate responsibility for making use of external and independent expertise in the setting and maintenance of academic standards through validation and revalidation procedures. External examiners are nominated by the Seminary, confirmed at the Joint Board and appointed by the University in accordance with its internal procedures.

1.35 External examiners' annual reports detail whether academic standards are successfully achieved and maintained. These reports are received by both the University and the Seminary. The Seminary is responsible for considering the reports, through their annual review processes, and responding to any matters raised.

1.36 The Seminary's programmes are subject to periodic validation by the awarding body on a six-yearly basis. The procedures for revalidation are set out in the University's Code of Practice. The Seminary makes formal use of external expertise in the validation of its programmes, for instance through external membership of the revalidation panel for the Bachelor of Theology and Master of Theology in 2012. The development of the distance-learning version of the Bachelor of Theology was informed by the views of denominational clients.

1.37 The review team considered documentation including the Memorandum of Agreement between the Seminary and the awarding body, external examiners' reports, the Annual Report to the Joint Board, and documents relating to programme validation and revalidation. The team held meetings with senior and academic staff; professional support staff, students and denominational clients.

1.38 The Principal and the Vice-Principal work closely with designated staff of the University to ensure that academic standards are maintained. The Seminary's Annual Report to the Joint Board describes how academic standards and quality have been secured, making reference to externality in the form of external examiners' reports. Denominational clients confirmed that the Seminary consults them to ensure that programmes are relevant to their needs. While there is evidence of engagement with external expertise in the form of external examiners and denominational clients, a wider range of opportunities for academic discipline-related professional development of its staff may enable the Seminary to strengthen its use of external expertise in maintaining academic standards and thereby also to assist it in addressing the recommendation in Expectation B3.

1.39 The Seminary and the awarding body work cooperatively and effectively together to ensure appropriate use of external expertise in the maintenance of academic standards. The Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

## The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies: Summary of findings

1.40 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. All Expectations in this judgement area are met with a low level of risk.

1.41 There are no features of good practice, recommendations or affirmations in this judgement area.

1.42 The Seminary has secure frameworks to ensure that standards are maintained at appropriate levels and that the definitive record of each programme is used to govern the award of academic credit and qualifications.

1.43 The review team concludes that the maintenance of academic standards at the Seminary **meets** UK expectations.

## 2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

**Expectation (B1): Higher education providers, in discharging their responsibilities for setting and maintaining academic standards and assuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities, operate effective processes for the design, development and approval of programmes**

**Quality Code, Chapter B1: Programme Design, Development and Approval**

### Findings

2.1 The responsibility for programme development and approval is shared with the University, which is responsible for the approval and validation of programmes offered at the Seminary, in line with the procedures set out in its Code of Practice. The Seminary is responsible for the maintenance of academic standards and for assuring the quality of learning opportunities.

2.2 Programme development is fully discussed and documented at the Board of Studies Meetings and the Senate. Minor changes to validated programmes are initiated by the Seminary, and are subject to approval at the Board of Studies and reported to the Joint Board. Recent programme changes have focused on the inclusion of additional electives and the development of the Bachelor of Theology with Distance Learning Options. The Seminary discussed this programme in detail internally with staff and students and externally with denominational clients, and also sought advice from the University of the West of Scotland in relation to the technology to be used for its delivery. Its development was considered by the awarding body to constitute a major change and required a full validation. To date the Seminary has not discontinued a validated programme or module.

2.3 The Seminary's adherence to the awarding body's procedures and its own internal processes enable this Expectation to be met.

2.4 The team reviewed the effectiveness of the Seminary's arrangements by examining minutes of the Senate, Joint Board, and Board of Studies, programme approval documentation for the Bachelor of Theology with Distance Learning Options; Joint Board annual reports, and the Seminary's Five Year Plan. The team also met Seminary staff and students.

2.5 Overall, the review team found that the arrangements are effective in practice. The relationship between the Seminary and its awarding body is long standing and strong. Senior staff of the Seminary have a clear understanding of the processes and the responsibility of the Seminary for programme development and for the maintenance of standards, as evidenced by the detailed documentation provided for the validation of the distance-learning programme. Staff also respect and comply with the University's formal validation procedures.

2.6 The Seminary has effective arrangements to ensure adherence to the awarding body's procedures for programme development and approval. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

**Expectation (B2): Recruitment, selection and admission policies and procedures adhere to the principles of fair admission. They are transparent, reliable, valid, inclusive and underpinned by appropriate organisational structures and processes. They support higher education providers in the selection of students who are able to complete their programme.**

**Quality Code, *Chapter B2: Recruitment, Selection and Admission to Higher Education***

**Findings**

2.7 The undergraduate and postgraduate admissions policies set out the criteria for entry to the Seminary's programmes and the process for application. These arrangements are consistent with the policies of the University in respect of entry requirements, including English language proficiency and in respect of the rigour and fairness of the admissions process, and would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.8 The review team considered the undergraduate and postgraduate admissions policies and consulted the prospectus. In meetings with senior staff, support staff, teaching staff and students, the review team explored the application of these processes, particularly in the context of the Seminary's mission, applicants' motivation and suitability.

2.9 The Seminary monitors and reviews the admissions process for all programmes so that it is able to ensure that applicants are treated fairly and to ensure that only applicants who are considered capable of completing a programme successfully are permitted to enter. For instance, the review carried out in 2013-14 resulted in changes to the admissions' procedures for the Bachelor of Theology designed to test applicants' motivation to study, while the review in 2014-15 led to a reconsideration of the level of qualification in English language required for entry to a postgraduate programme.

2.10 English language competence for all students is required for study at the Seminary, particularly for undergraduates undertaking the lecture-intensive Bachelor of Theology programme. The application process is transparent regarding language-competence requirements. Interviews and statements from referees are necessary for all applicants, including those intending to study through distance learning. The Seminary has limited the number of distance-learning students, partly because of technological issues, but mainly because of the wish to encourage attendance in person and to maintain equality of learning opportunities for all students.

2.11 Students expressed satisfaction with the help they received in completing the application process, drawing attention in particular to help in relation to visa arrangements, induction, accommodation, and provision of a city guide. Students also expressed appreciation of the fullness and accuracy of information about the programme, and of the sense of belonging that this created.

2.12 The Seminary interviews each candidate for admission. Interviews are conducted by two members of the Senate, either face-to-face or by videoconference, and may be supplemented by a request for a piece of written work. Although the Seminary has not established any written guidance for interviewers, students confirmed that they had found the admission process to be clearly described and accessible.



2.13 The Seminary has satisfactory arrangements for the selection and admission of students. The Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

**Expectation (B3): Higher education providers, working with their staff, students and other stakeholders, articulate and systematically review and enhance the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices, so that every student is enabled to develop as an independent learner, study their chosen subject(s) in depth and enhance their capacity for analytical, critical and creative thinking.**

### **Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching***

#### **Findings**

2.14 Although the Seminary has no explicit learning and teaching strategy, the Senate is responsible for monitoring the work of teaching staff who support students' learning in a variety of ways. Programme handbooks provide detailed information regarding the learning opportunities available to students; each student is allocated to a member of staff as Director of Studies; a course organiser is responsible for managing each programme; the 'buddy' scheme enables Year 1 students to be mentored by Year 3 students; the Senate reviews each programme annually; students are also supported by learning material provided in the VLE; newly-appointed staff are mentored by course organisers; and support is available to students with disabilities. The Staff Handbook outlines opportunities for the professional development of staff, including the peer-review process for teaching staff which may include external peers. These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.15 The review team examined programme and course handbooks, the Staff Handbook, the Seminary's Five Year Plan, and discussed approaches to learning and teaching with a range of staff and students.

2.16 Students reported their satisfaction with the teaching and learning environment, acknowledging in particular the Seminary's commitment to academic rigour in its approach to scholarship and the availability and approachability of teaching staff. Students receive feedback for all assessments, and teaching staff provide one-to-one sessions, though the take-up for these is variable.

2.17 The Senate's annual review of each programme is intended to ensure that necessary changes can be made for future academic sessions. The Vice-Principal reports back from the Staff-Student Liaison Committee to the Senate or to the Board of Studies on any matters which might impact on learning opportunities. For example, in 2015 the Seminary made adjustments to arrangements for final assessments in response to students' concerns about the amount of time allowed for them.

2.18 The distance-learning Bachelor of Theology programme, validated in 2016, is delivered via synchronous learning with Seminary students who are attending classes. This is achieved through software technology which enables distance-learning students to participate in classroom work, allowing them to speak, question and interject as though attending in person. The Seminary gained advice on synchronous learning and on the use of the chosen technology from the University of the West of Scotland, and advice on the practice of distance learning by the University. Technical staff of the Seminary have provided training for teaching staff in the use of the technology. Students confirmed that distance-learning students participate effectively in taught classes for every course in Year 1 of the Bachelor of Theology. The review team recognised that the innovative use of information technology which preserves the Seminary's strong communal identity within the distance-learning programme is **good practice**.

2.19 Although its process for peer review is not fully documented, the Seminary expects its academic staff to engage in regular peer review of their teaching. Staff confirmed that

they found this to be beneficial in developing their approaches to teaching saying also that the process develops trust for colleagues to advise each other. Teaching staff have access to the staff development programme at the University: six staff from the Seminary are recorded as having undertaken professional development offered by the University. Although the Seminary offers support to staff in respect of study for further qualifications and of attendance at conferences, there is no internal annually organised schedule of in-service training opportunities. The review team noted that the Seminary's Five Year Plan includes plans to design, develop and deliver a range of new programmes. It identifies the impact of the risk of adding new programmes without adequate preparation as being potentially high in terms of poor teaching quality due to inappropriate appointments, insufficient training (induction, mentoring and peer review) and insufficient time to develop key skills. The team **recommends** that the Seminary develop and implement an annual cycle of professional development opportunities for staff to support its Five Year Plan.

2.20 The Seminary takes a conscientious and collegiate approach to the development and monitoring of its arrangements for teaching and learning. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

**Expectation (B4): Higher education providers have in place, monitor and evaluate arrangements and resources which enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential.**

**Quality Code, Chapter B4: Enabling Student Development and Achievement**

**Findings**

2.21 The Seminary aspires to build up 'pastors and carers ... who will in turn train and equip future pastors and carers in their own spheres of community and ministry'. It aims to offer a close collegiate community with a caring philosophy for students as individuals and towards each other. Within this spirit, all students are expected to join together in the dining room for communal meals and, where appropriate, for acts of corporate worship. Directors of Studies are expected to ensure whole person pastoral care as a model for future practice and behaviour. The Seminary acknowledges that an increase in student numbers and the recently established distance-learning programme may make additional demands on student support.

2.22 The review team considered the Seminary's Five Year Plan, its support policies and a range of physical and human resource structures to determine the overall approach to student development and achievement. There is no single policy in relation to student support, but there are several aspects of ongoing practice, including feedback processes, annual programme review, student satisfaction questionnaires, meetings between students and their Directors of Studies, Staff-Student Liaison meetings, input from stakeholders and support for distance-learning students. The team also considered minutes from the Senate and from the Staff-Student Liaison Committee, and met staff and students. These policies and procedures would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.23 Directors of Studies provide academic and pastoral support for students. Meetings between Directors of Studies and students are central to the monitoring of student progress and are expected to take place at least twice per semester. The Board of Ministry also meets annually with each student of the Free Church of Scotland to monitor their academic studies. Students confirmed their view that the Seminary succeeds in providing a supportive collegiate community. They draw attention, in particular, to the close interest of staff in the well-being and progress of students, and to the inspiring, welcoming and caring environment which they regard the Seminary as providing, as expressed, for instance, through mentoring and buddy scheme support, the open-door staff policy and an overall family feeling. The collegial nature of the student experience which creates the strong sense of fellowship between students and the Seminary is **good practice**.

2.24 The Seminary takes the view that the amount of class contact time made available to students is relatively high in comparison with other institutions, in that modules are allocated not less than four class contact hours per week. The academic rationale aims to ensure that adequate time is given to delivery in order to enable intellectual, personal and professional assimilation. This process is aided by support from Directors of Studies, whose role is to ensure that the whole of the student body is helped and guided as appropriate. In enabling a full and rounded approach to students' development, the Seminary's curricula incorporate material suited for employment in church ministry, including courses in Greek and Hebrew as required by the Free Church of Scotland.

2.25 The Seminary acknowledges the challenge of ensuring that distance-learning students receive the same learning experience as those on campus. The system in use is based on software technology from staff desktop to student desktop, which staff regard as working well: the Seminary now considers itself competent to offer and support learning by this method. Postgraduate students, while acknowledging the risk of loss of collegiality,

recognised that distance learning offers a learning method better suited to the needs of some students and expressed positive views about the Seminary's innovative use of technology.

2.26 In respect of professional support services, the Seminary arranges for access to specialist services as required and additionally the University provides access for students of the Seminary to its own student support provision including careers advice and welfare counselling. The Seminary is responsible for providing resources to support learning, including teaching and learning accommodation, library resources and IT facilities including a VLE.

2.27 Students spoke positively about the Seminary's IT resources, noting that the VLE is widely and effectively used by staff and that they value the access to research tools which it provides. The Seminary ensures the currency of library materials by relying on teaching staff to identify literature whose purchase would be desirable. Students were positive about the quality of library facilities, drawing attention to the ready availability of articles from online journals and the usefulness of access to the New College library of the University of Edinburgh.

2.28 In enabling the development of academic, personal and professional potential, the Seminary offers a high level of individual student support, pastoral care and encouragement, supported by a range of learning resources and technologies. The Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

**Expectation (B5): Higher education providers take deliberate steps to engage all students, individually and collectively, as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience.**

### **Quality Code, Chapter B5: Student Engagement**

#### **Findings**

2.29 Formal opportunities for student engagement are set out in the Memorandum of Agreement which outlines the Seminary's responsibility to engage all students individually and collectively as partners, and to operate suitable mechanisms for student representation and feedback consistent with those of the awarding body. Students are fully represented in the deliberative structures of the Seminary through the Student Representative Council; the Staff-Student Liaison Committee; Board of Studies Student Representation; Joint Board Student Representation; Seminary Board Representation; and Senate Student Representation. The Seminary, in keeping with its collegiate tradition, also offers opportunities for informal engagement including discussions between students and staff, for example over the communal lunch and within the fellowship which forms part of daily worship.

2.30 Student engagement opportunities are detailed in programme handbooks. Elected course representatives are currently drawn only from full-time students but the Seminary has plans to include course representatives from the part-time and distance-learning programmes. Students not enrolled on full-time programmes confirmed that their views were solicited by course representatives and that they felt represented within the Seminary's formal structures. The collegiate and collaborative Seminary environment and the range of formal measures taken to engage students enables the Seminary to meet this Expectation.

2.31 The review team explored the effectiveness of the arrangements in place to engage students by examining documentation including collated summaries of responses to the General Course Quality Questionnaire, committee minutes, and Annual Reports. The review team also held meetings with staff and students.

2.32 Students provide feedback on their studies through the General Course Quality Questionnaire and Student Satisfaction Questionnaire. The General Course Quality Questionnaire is a comprehensive anonymous survey that covers a wide range of academic issues including the VLE; course information; teaching quality and assessment; and feedback. Although response rates dropped in 2015-16 following a change in the format of the questionnaire from paper-based to online, plans are in place to increase engagement in the survey in 2016-17. Questionnaire outcomes are discussed at Senate and used to directly inform changes to provision, for example, the development of the online assessment timetable to address issues around deadline bunching. Students confirmed that they have been kept informed of changes to courses based on outcomes of this questionnaire.

2.33 The evidence demonstrates that arrangements for student representation are effective in enabling the student voice to be heard. Committee minutes show full attendance of course representatives at meetings of the Staff-Student Liaison Committee. Annual Reports show how feedback has been used to directly inform programme improvements, for example, the evaluation of the two-hour teaching blocks and the development of the assessment timetable. Students expressed a strong sense of partnership in the assurance and enhancement of their learning, and particularly valued the collegial environment and the extensive range of opportunities open to them to discuss their learning with staff.

2.34 A wide range of formal and informal arrangements enables students to be represented at all levels of the Seminary's deliberative structure. Students and staff

expressed a strong, authentic sense of working in partnership. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

**Expectation (B6): Higher education providers operate equitable, valid and reliable processes of assessment, including for the recognition of prior learning, which enable every student to demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved the intended learning outcomes for the credit or qualification being sought.**

**Quality Code, Chapter B6: Assessment of Students and the Recognition of Prior Learning**

**Findings**

2.35 The Seminary is responsible for the development of policies and procedures covering all aspects of the assessment process which conform to the codes and published policies and procedures of the awarding body. It is also the responsibility of the Seminary to ensure that the academic standard for the award of credit or qualification is maintained at the appropriate level and that student performance is equitably judged against this standard.

2.36 The Seminary's General Assessment Policy is designed to ensure that standards expected of and achieved by students are 'appropriate, reliable and consistent'. The policy covers marking, moderation and the provision of feedback to students on their work, and is included in programme handbooks and the Staff Handbook. The requirements for the recognition of prior learning are set out in the Bachelor of Theology Degree Regulations and the Admissions Policy. The Seminary's Assessment Policy and its compliance with the University's frameworks and regulations would allow this Expectation to be met.

2.37 The review team reviewed the effectiveness of policies by scrutinising documentation including assessment guidance, the Staff Handbook, programme handbooks, and relevant committee minutes. In addition, the team met students, academics and senior staff.

2.38 Oversight of assessment at the Seminary is provided by the Vice-Principal, who is responsible for ensuring that Seminary policy complies with the requirements of the awarding body and that there is a coherent, equitable assessment approach across the academic programmes. The Vice-Principal also approves the assessment timetable. Academic staff set individual course assessments for approval by external examiners, while course organisers ensure that assessments are mapped to the intended learning outcomes. Criteria for marking and intended learning outcomes are provided in the programme and course handbooks and in the Staff Handbook. All work is marked anonymously; arrangements for students with disabilities are outlined in the General Assessment Policy.

2.39 The General Assessment Policy outlines the procedures for marking and moderation of summative assessment. All assessed work is double marked and a sample provided for the external examiner. Differences in marks between the first marker and the internal moderator are resolved internally. However, there is no formal process for agreeing marks internally: the current informal arrangements are applied inconsistently and lack transparency. The review team **recommends** that the Seminary strengthen the process for internal moderation of marks in order to ensure consistency and transparency.

2.40 Students expressed satisfaction with the arrangements for assessment and commented positively on recent improvements, including the development of the assessment timetable available at the start of the academic year. Although the Assessment Policy does not set out a clear timescale for the provision of feedback on assessed work, students nevertheless expressed satisfaction with turnaround times and agreed that feedback is helpful. Students reported that the Seminary had been responsive to issues



in relation to bunching of assessment deadlines, which had been resolved with the production of the annual assessment timetable. The Seminary's approach to academic misconduct is understood by students and details are provided in programme handbooks. Most written work is submitted electronically through the VLE using plagiarism-detection software.

2.41 The Seminary monitors the effectiveness of assessment practices through the General Course Quality Questionnaire and external examiners' reports. The questionnaire includes specific questions on course workload, assessment and feedback and external examiners are required to confirm that assessment tasks have covered the intended learning outcomes.

2.42 The Seminary's policy in respect of recognition of prior learning is aligned with that of its awarding body. The evidence available to the review team demonstrated that the practice was consistent with the policy and was based on the scrutiny of relevant documents.

2.43 The Seminary follows a valid and reliable assessment process which is understood by staff and enables students to demonstrate the achievement of learning outcomes. The shortcoming in respect of procedures for internal moderation of marks is indicative of a lack of rigour in applying assessment processes. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is moderate.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Moderate**

## **Expectation (B7): Higher education providers make scrupulous use of external examiners.**

### **Quality Code, Chapter B7: External Examining**

#### **Findings**

2.44 The Seminary nominates external examiners for approval by the Senate of the awarding body. Following approval, the Seminary is responsible for their appointment and assumes the full role of the employer of the external examiner. The Seminary has three external examiners covering the range of academic disciplines across the taught undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. The responsibilities of external examiners are set out in the awarding body's code of assessment. This information is included in the Staff Handbook and programme handbooks, which also contain the name of the external examiner.

2.45 The Seminary involves external examiners throughout the academic year. Examiners are invited to comment on the course handbooks, which detail the range of assessments and link with the intended learning outcomes. They are also sent a summary of responses to the General Course Quality Questionnaire and input into programme development, for example the inclusion of additional elective modules within a programme. External examiners attend the Board of Examiners whose minutes include a record of their views.

2.46 External examiners' annual reports are discussed within the Seminary at the Board of Studies and the Senate. The Seminary plans to share these reports more widely through the internal pages of the VLE in part to ensure that students have access to them. The arrangements for external examining allow the Expectation to be met.

2.47 The team reviewed evidence of the work of external examiners through examination of assessment policy and processes, minutes of meetings of the Board of Studies and of the Board of Examiners, external examiners' reports and annual reports. The team also held meetings with students and academic staff.

2.48 External examiners' reports are discussed at Boards of Studies, Senate and, in detail, within the Annual Report. Issues raised by external examiners are addressed within the academic year where possible. Detailed reports record the engagement of examiners in the course delivery and identify areas for enhancement.

2.49 While the Seminary engages in dialogue and discussion with its external examiners throughout the academic year, external examiners' reports make only limited reference to the richness of this engagement. For some courses the external examiner's report fails to take advantage of the opportunity to contribute to quality enhancement of the programme, although others do evidence stronger engagement with the programme.

2.50 The Seminary makes scrupulous use of its external examiners. It engages thoroughly with their work and has a process for addressing issues raised within their reports. The Seminary shares their reports with students at the Board of Studies and has plans for them to be widely available through the VLE. The Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

**Expectation (B8): Higher education providers, in discharging their responsibilities for setting and maintaining academic standards and assuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities, operate effective, regular and systematic processes for monitoring and for review of programmes.**

**Quality Code, Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review**

**Findings**

2.51 The responsibility for periodic review of the Seminary's programmes lies with the awarding body, and takes the form of revalidation at intervals of six years. The process evaluates the rationale, demand and design of the programmes and is informed by external advice in the form of consultation with students, denominational clients and external examiners. Recommendations arising from the process are progressed and monitored through Senate and action is reported to the Joint Board. The Seminary's taught programmes were most recently revalidated in 2012.

2.52 Annual monitoring of programmes is managed through the Senate, through a process whose main aim is to secure academic standards and assure quality. Operating at a number of levels, the process reflects on progress against actions in the previous year and identifies areas for improvements as well as successes. Monitoring is informed by a range of student feedback mechanisms including responses to the General Course Quality Questionnaire, feedback from the Staff-Student Liaison Committee, and external examiners' reports. The resulting annual report is received and discussed in detail by the Joint Board which records actions and confirms plans for improvement.

2.53 The design of these policies and processes allow the Expectation to be met.

2.54 The review team considered minutes of relevant committees, including the Staff-Student Liaison Committee, Senate and the Joint Board. The team also examined documentation relating to the validation of the Seminary's programmes in 2012 and Annual Reports and held meetings with students, senior and teaching staff.

2.55 The process and timeline for annual monitoring are well understood by staff who confirmed that they view the process as providing an opportunity for collegial reflection on and sharing of good practice. The student voice features strongly in the Seminary's approach to annual monitoring: the content of the Annual Report is discussed with students at the Board of Studies before being received by Senate. The Annual Report includes an action plan, execution of which is overseen by the Joint Board. Students were able to identify their contribution to the quality processes, citing their opportunities to be direct and specific in comments made in feedback questionnaires, the good working relationships between student representatives and senior staff, and the opportunities for informal contact with staff arising from the Seminary's small size and collegial nature. In addition, the annual General Course Quality Questionnaire enables anonymous feedback to be given on each course and makes a significant contribution to the areas for improvement identified in the annual report. The course-based summaries of the questionnaire outcomes show evidence of conversations with student representatives and include plans for improvement: for instance the development of the online assessment timetable took place directly in response to feedback which had identified bunching of assessment deadlines as a problem.

2.56 Periodic review is the responsibility of the awarding body. Programmes are subject to periodic revalidation every six years: the most recent such revalidation took place in 2012. The procedures for revalidation are set out in the University's Code of Practice. The University produces a report which is approved by its Academic Standards Committee.

Recommendations made in the report are progressed through the Joint Board which maintains oversight of the process.

2.57 The Seminary effectively manages its responsibilities for annual monitoring of its programmes. It has effective, regular and systematic review processes at course and programme levels which make a significant contribution to the maintenance of academic standards and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

**Expectation (B9): Higher education providers have procedures for handling academic appeals and student complaints about the quality of learning opportunities; these procedures are fair, accessible and timely, and enable enhancement.**

**Quality Code, *Chapter B9: Academic Appeals and Student Complaints***

**Findings**

2.58 The Seminary's Code of Student Conduct, Student Complaint Procedure and Code of Procedure for Appeals are based on those established at the University. Information on complaints and appeals is contained in programme handbooks. These policies and procedures are transparent and accessible to staff and students and would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.59 The review team considered the above-mentioned policies, the information provided to students in handbooks and on the VLE, and explored their application in meetings with students, teaching staff and senior staff.

2.60 The seminary has no history of appeals or complaints to date. Its policies are readily accessible to students, are appropriately based on the policy and practice of the awarding body, and are set out in procedures which are fair and timely. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

**Expectation (B10): Degree-awarding bodies take ultimate responsibility for academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities, irrespective of where these are delivered or who provides them. Arrangements for delivering learning opportunities with organisations other than the degree-awarding body are implemented securely and managed effectively.**

**Quality Code, Chapter B10: Managing Higher Education Provision with Others**

**Findings**

2.61 The Seminary's module in Practical Theology includes a requirement for students to undertake 10 hours of work placement which contributes to the award of credit. Students who are candidates for ministry in the Free Church of Scotland undertake an additional work placement which does not contribute to the award of credit and is not considered in this report. The policies and procedures of the Seminary in respect of the module in Practical Theology require students to complete at least 40 hours of practical ministry, in the context of either a church or a community-based organisation, and under the guidance of an appointed local supervisor. Supervisors and students meet regularly for discussion and feedback, following which the supervisor prepares a written report and awards a grade for the student's work. These policies and procedures would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.62 The review team read documents relating to work placements including the policy on placement assessment, the Practical Theology Course Handbook and two external examiners' reports containing comments on placements. In addition, the team met members of staff including supervisors currently involved in vocational practice related to Practical Theology, and representatives of denominational clients.

2.63 Seminary staff offer help to students in finding and organising work placements, drawing on their knowledge of placement opportunities within established working relationships. Each placement is assessed by a local supervisor, who is not a member of staff of the Seminary but is typically a minister of a congregation: the Seminary provides training for local supervisors, including training through email for supervisors who are remote. The local supervisor is responsible for writing a report on student progress and achievement, using the Seminary's grade descriptors. The Seminary's policy is that all such reports are subject to moderation by staff of the Seminary. In addition to assessment by the local supervisor, students are assessed on a reflective essay about the placement itself as well as on additional coursework required for the elective course, such as research essays or reflective reading reports.

2.64 Currently the Seminary's arrangements for the management of work placements are informal, in that it has no documented policies in relation to planning, oversight, supervisors' roles, visits by Seminary staff, moderation and evaluation, and in that it takes no steps to exercise oversight of the level of risk posed by each work placement. The review team **recommends** that the Seminary should formalise oversight of placement provision in order to ensure the quality of learning opportunities and to ensure that any risks are identified and mitigated.

2.65 Despite the absence of documented procedures governing aspects of the management of work placements, the Seminary's arrangements are currently effective and the Expectation is met. The absence of documented procedures is indicative of a shortcoming in the rigour with which the Seminary's procedures are applied, therefore the level of risk is moderate.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Moderate**

**Expectation (B11): Research degrees are awarded in a research environment that provides secure academic standards for doing research and learning about research approaches, methods, procedures and protocols. This environment offers students quality of opportunities and the support they need to achieve successful academic, personal and professional outcomes from their research degrees.**

## **Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research Degrees***

### **Findings**

2.66 The Seminary offers two research degrees: the Master of Theology (by research), approved by the University in November 2005 and revalidated in 2013; and a taught Master of Theology in Scottish Church History and Theology, which includes a research component and which was validated in 2010 and, under new arrangements, revalidated in 2013.

2.67 The regulations for postgraduate research students, are contained in the Memorandum of Agreement with the awarding body and set out the Seminary's responsibility for the admission and registration of research students in liaison with the awarding body. The regulatory framework, in accordance with the University's calendar, is set out in the Master of Theology Programme Handbook.

2.68 The Seminary considers that it provides a good research environment through its on-site facilities and through access to the New College Library of the University of Edinburgh. Internal supervision is provided by the Seminary and externally by the awarding body. Students for either award are monitored by the Director of Postgraduate Studies and by the internal supervisor. Students pursuing the research option undergo an annual progress review according to the awarding body's regulations. Provision is monitored by means of Interim and Annual Reports. Recent changes to the PGR Annual Progress Review Guidelines are intended to help both research students and supervisors in the more effective setting and monitoring of research goals. The structure, procedures and facilities for the current levels of research study at the seminary would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.69 The review team examined arrangements for the oversight of research degree provision as described in programme handbooks and in discussion with senior staff and students. The team also met senior staff, teaching staff and postgraduate students.

2.70 While the Seminary wishes to be known primarily as a teaching institution, it intends to develop and strengthen its research environment. The Principal's vision for its future includes the further development of research provision and the encouragement of academic staff to carry out research. The Seminary's Five Year Plan outlines one of the major purposes of the Master of Theology by research as being to prepare missionaries for work in Europe and beyond. Staff are expected to develop and maintain expertise in their discipline and to engage with and publish research. Senior staff affirmed that all full-time staff carry out research, attend conferences and engage in preaching and lecturing. Some staff have pursued doctoral study with support from the Seminary.

2.71 The Handbook for the master's programmes contains full information including an explanation of the library's research databases, IT provision, degree information and regulations and information on research. Advice on academic writing is available; some students have published in the Seminary's in-house journal.

2.72 Regular supervision feedback and support takes place on a one-to-one basis either in person or through videoconferencing technology. The Seminary acknowledges that better use might be made of the external supervisor at earlier stages in the research, largely to

ensure consistency in cases of internal staff illness or unavailability. Students expressed positive views of the quality and rigour of the Seminary's research culture, drawing particular attention to the commitment to excellence in scholarship shown by academic staff. Annually, the Dean from the awarding body's College of Arts Graduate School attends the Seminary to deliver training on research student supervision.

2.73 Research students contribute to the academic life of the Seminary through writing articles for publication in its in-house journal. The Seminary acknowledges the challenge posed by the number of off-campus research students in establishing a programme of regular research seminars, but anticipates that videoconferencing technology will help it to address this lack.

2.74 The Seminary ensures and encourages an organised and nurturing research environment for students and staff, and has clear arrangements for the supervision of research students. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**



## The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.75 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. All Expectations in this judgement area are met. Two Expectations (B6 and B10) are associated with a moderate level of risk. The level of risk was judged to be low for all other Expectations.

2.76 There are two features of good practice in this judgement area, relating to the innovative use of information technology within the distance-learning programme and to the collegial nature of the student experience.

2.77 The review team made three recommendations in respect of the quality of student learning opportunities. The first relates to the need to strengthen the process for internal moderation of marks. The second follows from the lack of formal oversight of placement provision. The third is in respect of the development of an annual cycle of professional development opportunities for staff.

2.78 The review team concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities at the Seminary **meets** UK expectations.

### **3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities**

**Expectation (C): UK higher education providers produce information for their intended audiences about the higher education they offer that is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.**

#### **Quality Code, Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision**

##### **Findings**

3.1 The Seminary aims to provide information about its provision for the general public, for prospective and current students, for graduates and for staff who have responsibility for academic standards and quality. It publishes information about itself and its provision on its website, which provides information on all of its programmes, and in its prospectus, produced every two years, which highlights its programmes, mission and ethos. The website gives access to the admissions policy and to application forms, and clearly sets out tuition fees. The Seminary also provides testimonials from previous students and an introductory video incorporating interviews with staff and students. Programme specifications are, however, not available online.

3.2 Programme leaflets provide details including aims, entrance qualifications, language qualifications, a summary of course content and how fees are structured. The Bachelor of Theology, the Master of Theology (by research) and the Master of Theology in Scottish Church History and Theology are all outlined in separate leaflets, as is the distance-learning version of the Bachelor of Theology programme.

3.3 The Vice-Principal is responsible for signing off publicly available information. These policies and procedures would allow the Expectation to be met.

3.4 The review team considered the information available through the website, as well as those in printed media such as course and programme handbooks, the prospectus and programme leaflets. The team explored the management of information in meetings with senior staff, and in meetings with students explored how the information was viewed by them.

3.5 The website and the prospectus contain three sections for provision of information to applicants in relation to the Seminary, its life and culture, supported by an introductory video. Information for current students is provided mainly through programme handbooks, course handbooks, the 'MyETS' section on the website, and the VLE. A dedicated database contains information intended for graduates and alumni.

3.6 Teaching and administrative staff who are expected to be involved in maintaining academic standards and quality are also provided with a Staff Handbook which includes information on mission and vision, governance and the relationship with the awarding body and a range of information in relation to learning, teaching, the Quality Code and the Seminary's learning resources.

3.7 A shared online information folder for staff gives access to Seminary policies including Assessment Policies, the Code of Student Conduct, Complaint and Appeals Procedures, the Memorandum of Agreement with the University, the Disability Policy, and information and regulations for all validated programmes.

3.8 Students confirmed that the information provided to prospective students and course-based information in handbooks is comprehensive, accurate and helpful. The

Seminary also provides a handbook intended specifically for international students, and an induction handbook for newly appointed members of staff. The names of external examiners are included in programme and course handbooks.

3.9 The annual General Course Quality Questionnaire includes a question specifically on the usefulness of handbooks, and this has led to generally very positive outcomes in 2015-16. Students attending the revalidation meeting in 2012 also confirmed that the handbooks offered comprehensive information and advice.

3.10 Programme and course handbooks are reviewed by the Senate and Joint Board. Discussion also takes place with the Year Representative, which is recorded in the summary of outcomes of the General Course Quality Questionnaire and includes a commentary on course and programme handbooks. This process demonstrates the strengths of the Seminary's commitment to student engagement in the infrastructure which supports the learning environment.

3.11 The comprehensive and detailed information provided to staff and students, exemplified by the Staff and Course Handbooks effectively underpinning the student learning experience is considered **good practice**.

3.12 The Seminary has effective procedures for managing its wide range of detailed information for various audiences. The Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

## The quality of the information about learning opportunities: Summary of findings

3.13 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The single Expectation for this judgement area is met and the associated level of risk is low.

3.14 There is one feature of good practice in this judgement area, relating to the comprehensive and detailed information provided to staff and students which effectively underpins the student learning experience.

3.15 There are no recommendations or affirmations in this judgement area.

3.16 The review team found that managing the needs of students in respect of the provision of information is a clear focus of the Seminary's policies. It concludes that the quality of the information produced about learning opportunities at the Seminary is **commended**.

## 4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

**Expectation (Enhancement): Deliberate steps are being taken at provider level to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities.**

### Findings

4.1 The Seminary takes deliberate steps to improve the quality of the student learning opportunities through outcomes of its monitoring and review processes which are considered in detail by the Senate and the Board of Studies and are used to inform enhancement activity at the institutional level as well as to directing improvements to specific programmes. Annual processes, including the General Course Quality Questionnaire and the Annual Report are in place to inform quality enhancement and cover a full range of the Seminary's provision.

4.2 The Five Year Plan sets out the strategic intention of the Seminary to enhance its provision based on its commitment to theological excellence. Strategic enhancements identified in the plan include the development of an online journal, the establishment of a Mission Study Centre and a range of programme developments including PhDs. The development of the distance-learning Bachelor of Theology programme was identified through the institutional enhancement processes.

4.3 The Seminary also identifies and addresses quality enhancement opportunities through its own and the awarding body's quality assurance processes, including those for gaining student feedback. External examiners' reports and comments, as well as issues identified through the annual monitoring process and through programme validation inform enhancement opportunities.

4.4 The approach taken by the Seminary enables the Expectation to be met.

4.5 The review team considered minutes of meetings of the Senate, of the Board of Studies, and of the Joint Board. It reviewed documentation that related to the Seminary's and the University's quality assurance processes including annual monitoring reports and outcomes of validations. The team also met senior staff, teaching staff and undergraduate and postgraduate students.

4.6 The Seminary has plans for the enhancement of student learning opportunities. The Principal articulated clearly his vision for the Seminary, a vision which was shared and supported by the senior leaders in the Seminary. While the vision for the Seminary is well defined, its intentions regarding the strategic implementation of its Five Year Plan are less clear: there is potential for greater integration of the objectives of the plans with annual monitoring and review, and for outcomes of quality assurance processes to more explicitly inform the Seminary's enhancement agenda. Nevertheless, plans to develop a strong research identify and to raise the profile of the Seminary nationally and internationally were affirmed by all staff. The development of the distance-learning programme exemplifies the commitment to the enhancement of the student learning opportunities, as does the consideration of a Gaelic Theology programme.

4.7 Students referred to the Seminary's 'ethos of continual improvement' and reported that they were extremely satisfied with improvements to provision that the Seminary has put in place, including development of the VLE, and of the library and IT resources. Students expressed appreciation of the care which the Seminary took in improving facilities and of the Seminary's commitment to students at all levels and at all modes of study.

4.8 The Seminary achieves a clear identification of institutional issues and solutions through its annual cycle of quality assurance processes. The Annual Report makes clear the systematic approach the Seminary takes to quality enhancement. The Seminary takes deliberate steps at the institutional and programme level to ensure the enhancement of student learning opportunities. The Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

## The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.9 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The Seminary takes deliberate steps at provider level to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities. The single Expectation for this judgement area is met and the associated level of risk is low.

4.10 There are no features of good practice, recommendations or affirmations in this judgement area.

4.11 The review team concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities at the Seminary **meets** UK expectations.

## Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Definitions of key operational terms are also given on pages 22-25 of the [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\) handbook](#)

If you require formal definitions of other terms please refer to the section on assuring standards and quality: [www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality)

User-friendly explanations of a wide range of terms can be found in the longer **Glossary** on the QAA website: [www.qaa.ac.uk/Pages/GlossaryEN.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Pages/GlossaryEN.aspx)

### Academic standards

The standards set by **degree-awarding bodies** for their courses (programmes and modules) and expected for their awards. See also **threshold academic standard**.

### Award

A qualification, or academic credit, conferred in formal recognition that a student has achieved the intended **learning outcomes** and passed the assessments required to meet the academic standards set for a **programme** or unit of study.

### Awarding organisation

An organisation authorised to award a particular qualification; an organisation recognised by Ofqual to award Ofqual-regulated qualifications

### Blended learning

Learning delivered by a number of different methods, usually including face-to-face and e-learning (see **technology enhanced or enabled learning**).

### Credit(s)

A means of quantifying and recognising learning, used by most institutions that provide higher education **programmes of study**, expressed as numbers of credits at a specific level.

### Degree-awarding body

A UK higher education provider (typically a university) with the power to award degrees, conferred by Royal Charter, or under Section 76 of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, or under Section 48 of the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992, or by Papal Bull, or, since 1999, granted by the Privy Council on advice from QAA (in response to applications for taught degree awarding powers, research degree awarding powers or university title).

### Distance learning

A course of study that does not involve face-to-face contact between students and tutors but instead uses technology such as the internet, intranets, broadcast media, CD-ROM and video, or traditional methods of correspondence - learning 'at a distance'.

See also **blended learning**.

### Dual award or double award

The granting of separate awards (and certificates) for the same **programme** by two **degree-awarding bodies** who have jointly delivered the programme of study leading to them. See also **multiple award**.

### e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning



### **Enhancement**

The process by which higher education providers systematically improve the quality of provision and the ways in which students' learning is supported. It is used as a technical term in our review processes.

### **Expectations**

Statements in the **Quality Code** that set out what all UK higher education providers expect of themselves and each other, and what the general public can therefore expect of them.

### **Flexible and distributed learning**

A programme or module that does not require the student to attend classes or events at particular times and locations.

See also **distance learning**.

### **Framework**

A published formal structure. See also **framework for higher education qualifications**.

### **Framework for higher education qualifications**

A published formal structure that identifies a hierarchy of national qualification levels and describes the general achievement expected of holders of the main qualification types at each level, thus assisting higher education providers in maintaining academic standards. QAA publishes the following frameworks: *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and *The Framework for Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland* (FHEQIS).

### **Good practice**

A process or way of working that, in the view of a QAA review team, makes a particularly positive contribution to a higher education provider's management of academic standards and the quality of its educational provision. It is used as a technical term in QAA's audit and review processes.

### **Learning opportunities**

The provision made for students' learning, including planned study, teaching, assessment, academic and personal support, and resources (such as libraries and information systems, laboratories or studios).

### **Learning outcomes**

What a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after completing a process of learning.

### **Multiple awards**

An arrangement where three or more **degree-awarding bodies** together provide a single jointly delivered **programme** (or programmes) leading to a separate **award** (and separate certification) of each awarding body. The arrangement is the same as for **dual/double awards**, but with three or more awarding bodies being involved.

### **Operational definition**

A formal definition of a term, establishing exactly what QAA means when using it in reviews and reports.

### **Programme (of study)**

An approved course of study that provides a coherent learning experience and normally leads to a qualification.

### **Programme specifications**

Published statements about the intended **learning outcomes** of programmes of study, containing information about teaching and learning methods, support and assessment methods, and how individual units relate to levels of achievement.

### **Quality Code**

Short term for the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, which is the UK-wide set of **reference points** for higher education providers (agreed through consultation with the higher education community, and published by QAA), which states the **Expectations** that all providers are required to meet.

### **Reference points**

Statements and other publications that establish criteria against which performance can be measured.

### **Self-evaluation document**

A report submitted by a higher education provider, assessing its own performance, to be used as evidence in a QAA review.

### **Subject Benchmark Statement**

A published statement that sets out what knowledge, understanding, abilities and skills are expected of those graduating in each of the main subject areas (mostly applying to bachelor's degrees), and explains what gives that particular discipline its coherence and identity.

### **Technology enhanced or enabled learning (or e-learning)**

Learning that is delivered or supported through the use of technology.

### **Threshold academic standard**

The minimum acceptable level of achievement that a student has to demonstrate to be eligible for an academic **award**. Threshold academic standards are set out in the national **frameworks** and **Subject Benchmark Statements**.

### **Virtual learning environment (VLE)**

An intranet or password-only interactive website (also referred to as a platform or user interface) giving access to **learning opportunities** electronically. These might include such resources as course handbooks, information and reading lists; blogs, message boards and forums; recorded lectures; and/or facilities for online seminars (webinars).

### **Widening participation**

Increasing the involvement in higher education of people from a wider range of backgrounds.

## **QAA1777 - R5096 - Dec 16**

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