



Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of the Free Church of Scotland t/a Edinburgh Theological Seminary, January 2023

Outcome of the monitoring visit

1 From the evidence provided in the annual return and at the monitoring visit, the review team concludes that the Free Church of Scotland t/a Edinburgh Theological Seminary (ETS; the Seminary) is making commendable progress with continuing to maintain, review and improve/enhance its higher education provision since the January 2022 [monitoring report](#).

Changes since the last QAA monitoring visit

2 There have been no significant changes to the staffing at ETS since January 2022. However, the Chair of the Seminary Board has changed and is now an entrepreneur who runs a publishing company. This provides a further external reference point for ETS. There are 15 members of staff; six are full-time academics, two are full-time administrators and seven are part-time lecturers - one of whom teaches a whole course while the remaining six each teach a six-week module. This compares with 21 staff in January 2022. The change in staff from 21 to 15 reflects the reduction in the number part-time staff - including supervisors on the Master of Theology, and an increase in full-time staff appointments - including the appointment of a full-time Course Organiser in Church History. ETS currently has: 52 (38 full-time equivalent (FTE)) students on the Bachelor of Theology; 13 (7 FTE) students on the Master of Theology (by Research); 7 (4 FTE) students on the Master of Theology in Scottish Church History and Theology; and 11 (7 FTE) students on the Master of Theology in Missiology. This gives a total of 52 (38 FTE) undergraduate students and 31 (18 FTE) postgraduate students. These figures are lower than those for January 2022 when there were 61 (47 FTE) undergraduate students and 36 (21 FTE) postgraduate students. The Seminary attributes the decrease in student numbers to the effects of the pandemic, but states that recruitment for the 2022-23 intake has increased and future enrolment looks promising. The University of Glasgow continues to be the awarding body for all ETS degrees.

Findings from the monitoring visit

3 The review team concluded that the provider is making commendable progress with continuing to maintain, review and improve/enhance its higher education provision through meetings with staff and students, analysis of the annual monitoring return (AMR) and scrutiny of the accompanying evidence. ETS has implemented fully all actions in respect of the two recommendations and the area of good practice identified in the HER Report of 2021, and this has led to improvements in the provider's management of its higher education. The Seminary continues to develop its close pastoral support of students (paragraph 4) and has effectively addressed the two recommendations in respect of the remote learning policy (paragraph 5) and the recording of staff development activities (paragraph 6).

4 Staff and students confirmed that ETS continues to provide a comprehensive pastoral and personal community which fosters a supportive learning environment and encourages excellent relations with staff.

5 The policy for remote teaching and assessment that reflects changes to practice due to the global pandemic, was reviewed in November 2022 to take account of feedback from students and staff, and to encourage in-person attendance while continuing to provide online lectures. In response to comments made by students, the number of 'on-screen' hours through Zoom has been reduced from four to three hours with one hour allocated to personal study. Students and staff spoke positively about the adoption of a hybrid approach to teaching and learning which provides some flexibility for students with personal commitments. Students are supported in their online assessments through detailed feedback from their teachers.

6 Continuing professional development activities for staff are recorded and evaluated. The report for 2021 was signed off by the Seminary Board in September 2021. Staff appraisal for the academic year 2022-23 has been undertaken, and the outcomes will be discussed at the next meeting of the Seminary Board. Opportunities for staff development are identified through appraisal, and staff are fully supported to undertake their staff development activities. A system of peer review was approved by Senate in August 2022 and the first round of peer review took place at the end of 2022. Staff reported that this was beneficial to their own continuous professional development.

7 Students and teaching staff are represented on Senate, the Board of Studies and the Seminary. Regular meetings take place with the Student Representative Council (SRC). The Staff Student Liaison Committee meets annually. The size of the organisation enables students to raise issues with the Principal through the President of the SRC and, in some cases, directly with their tutors. The various sub-groups of Senate which include course organisers, operational resources and programme design provide an opportunity for staff and students to be closely involved with the design and delivery of programmes.

8 ETS monitors quality and standards, and identifies further areas for enhancement through its committees. The Seminary Board addresses major strategic issues and Senate identifies actions required from the review of courses and processes. The minutes of the Seminary Board, the Board of Studies, Senate and its various sub-groups demonstrate that ETS continually reflects on and reviews its processes and programmes. Minutes of meetings include action to be taken which is followed up at the next meeting. Senate formally reviews each programme annually.

9 Students participate in the monitoring and review process through the Staff Student Liaison Committee, the SRC, the Course Quality Questionnaire (CQQ) and the Student Satisfaction Questionnaire. The outcomes of these surveys and meetings are discussed at Senate and the Board of Studies. The small size and collegiate nature of ETS enables students to directly interact with their tutors, identifying any areas of concern. Action required in response to feedback is recorded in the committee meeting minutes and reviewed at the next meeting.

10 ETS effectively responds to recommendations from annual monitoring by QAA, the outcomes of revalidation by the University of Glasgow, and the Quinquennial Review. The recommendations from these reviews are considered by the Board of Studies, Senate and the Seminary Board, and effective action is taken.

Progress in working with the external reference points to meet UK expectations for higher education

11 ETS has effectively embedded the Expectations, and Core and Common practices of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code) in its procedures and policies. This is evident in the format of the AMR which clearly links the procedures and processes of ETS to the Expectations of the Quality Code. To ensure the expectations for standards and quality shape the delivery of the degree programmes, ETS has increased external expertise and stakeholder representation on Senate, and established subgroups which address specific areas of the Quality Code. These subgroups report directly to Senate and include programme delivery and assessment, programme design and programme quality and review.

12 The University of Glasgow, which validates all the programmes at ETS, acts as the key external reference point. Standards are directly linked to the *Scottish Qualifications and Credit Framework*, and the relevant Subject Benchmark Statements have been used in the programme design process. In line with the Expectations of the Quality Code, programme specifications identify the expected learning outcomes, the structure, level, assessment and awards for each programme. The curriculum is contained in course specifications which are included in the student handbooks.

13 At the time of the monitoring visit, ETS was preparing for revalidation of its programmes by Glasgow University in autumn 2023. Both staff and students indicated that they are involved in the programme and course design process, and believed this will provide an opportunity for a more flexible modular approach to the curriculum.

14 External examiners provide a further external reference point for ETS and effectively monitor the assessment process. The annual reports which they provide for both ETS and the University of Glasgow are positive. Staff and students have access to the external examiner reports through their membership of Senate.

Background to the monitoring visit

15 The monitoring visit serves as a short check on the provider's continuing management of academic standards and quality of provision. It focuses on progress since the previous review. In addition, it provides an opportunity for QAA to advise the provider of any matters that have the potential to be of particular interest in the next monitoring visit or review.

16 The monitoring visit was carried out by Brenda Eade, Reviewer and Julian Ellis, QAA Officer on 24 January 2023.

QAA2745 - R13472 - Mar 23

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Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

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