



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

March 2021

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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 Free Church of Scotland t/a Edinburgh Theological Seminary. The review took place from 19 to 21 January 2021 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Dr Terence Clifford-Amos
- Dr Helen Corkill
- Ms Sally Dixon.

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provision and to make judgements as to whether or not academic standards and quality meet UK expectations. These expectations (and the associated Core and Common practices) are the statements in the [UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#) (the Quality Code)¹ 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 academic standards
 - the quality of student learning opportunities
- makes recommendations
- identifies features of good practice
- affirms action that the provider is taking or plans to take.

The QAA website gives more information [about QAA](#)² and explains the method for [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\)](#).³ For an explanation of terms see the glossary at the end of this report.

The impact of COVID-19

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the review of Free Church of Scotland t/a Edinburgh Theological Seminary was subject to an interim outcome in June 2020 and was concluded in January 2021. The review was conducted online and included meetings with the senior management team, academic and support staff, and students. The scope of the evidence considered, and the nature of the judgements and operational milestones have remained the same but with some adjustments due to the online format and availability of students. A risk assessment was carried out prior to the review to identify and mitigate any potential risks. Annual monitoring will resume in 2021-22.

¹ The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code

² QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk

³ Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers): www.qaa.ac.uk/reviewing-higher-education/types-of-review/higher-education-review

Key findings

Judgements

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision.

- The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of the degree-awarding body **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following features of **good practice**.

- The comprehensive pastoral and personal community which fosters a supportive learning environment and encourages excellent relations with staff. (Q9)

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations**.

By September 2021:

- Ensure that all continuing professional development activities for staff are recorded and evaluated. (Q3)
- Provide an updated policy for remote teaching, learning and assessment that reflects changes to practice due to the global pandemic. (Q4)

About the provider

The Free Church of Scotland t/a Edinburgh Theological Seminary (ETS) is a Validated Institution having Associate Status of the University of Glasgow. Formerly known as the Free Church College, it became ETS in 2014.

The Free Church of Scotland continues to act both as parent company and client. ETS is governed by the Free Church of Scotland via a governing board (the Seminary Board) which is appointed by the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland. Regular management is the responsibility of the Senate which is composed of all full-time staff (with the Principal as Chairman), a student representative, the Chair of the Seminary Board, two external members and two external advisers.

ETS currently has 61 students on the Bachelor of Theology, 15 on the Master of Theology (taught) programme, and 18 students on the Master of Theology by Research programme. Of the 17 students who graduated in 2020, 10 gained employment in pastoral ministry and one continued in education. There are 18 full-time and part-time members of academic staff.

ETS underwent an Annual Monitoring Review in October 2019 at which no recommendations were made and acceptable progress was reported.

Explanation of findings

This section explains the review findings in greater detail.

1 Judgement: The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and/or other awarding organisations

Core practice (S1): The provider ensures that the threshold standards for its qualifications are consistent with the relevant national qualifications frameworks.

Findings

1.1 One undergraduate and three postgraduate degree programmes are validated by the University of Glasgow. The Bachelor of Theology programme has been run in partnership with the University of Glasgow since 2002, and the three masters-level programmes added between 2005 and 2018. ETS also delivers non-validated courses to provide part-time learning opportunities for church workers: preachers and lay workers in Theology and Biblical Studies; and in-service training for ministers, missionaries and others which, if taken at degree credit level, can be used through a credit transfer arrangement in partial fulfilment of the Bachelor of Theology degree.

1.2 The team looked at the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework, the Memorandum of Agreement between the University of Glasgow and ETS, University of Glasgow Academic Regulations for undergraduate and postgraduate provision, and definitive programme documentation for the Bachelor of Theology and Master of Theology, and degree regulations as set out in programme handbooks. The partnership and the achievement of threshold standards were discussed with staff from the institution and the University.

1.3 ETS operates all its awards within the frameworks provided by the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) as indicated in validation approval. It also adheres to the Quality Code. Threshold standards expected of all undergraduate and postgraduate students at ETS are the same as those maintained for corresponding or comparable awards at the University of Glasgow, and are required to be compatible with any relevant benchmark information recognised in the UK. Programmes are validated for a period of six years.

1.4 Standards are confirmed by external examiners proposed by ETS and appointed by the University. A Joint Board is operated to manage the validated partnership between the University and ETS. Students met by the team were all well aware of the University of Glasgow as being the validating body for their programme and the information is clearly presented on the front cover of every degree programme handbook.

1.5 ETS adheres to the relevant requirements of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework and of its validating partner, the University of Glasgow. This ensures that the Core practice is met and that the level of risk is low.

Core practice: Met
Level of risk: Low

Core practice (S2): The provider ensures that students who are awarded qualifications have the opportunity to achieve standards beyond the threshold level that are reasonably comparable with those achieved in other UK providers.

Findings

1.6 ETS follows the University of Glasgow academic regulations and assessment frameworks and has limited delegated responsibility for the quality and standards of its teaching provision, subject to adherence to the University's regulations and QAA Core practices. The Board of Studies and Joint Board is responsible for reviewing these processes.

1.7 The team explored the approach to, and opportunities for, the achievement of standards beyond threshold level with students and staff. Documentary evidence was scrutinised to triangulate discussions.

1.8 ETS endeavours to be proactive in helping students to prepare thoroughly for assessment and to facilitate achievement above threshold level. A variety of assessment methods is included in programmes to allow for different capabilities and skills. Grading criteria are provided ahead of assessment. External examiners note that commendable care is taken on the specification of marking criteria in assignments and specific guidance on achieving higher grades. Details of achievement of learning outcomes are provided in the handbooks. The requirements for the achievement of higher grades are outlined, and guidance given on self-assessment of achievement levels. The comprehensive and easily accessible Writing Lab facility is used to enhance the standards of well-referenced and crafted essay writing from draft to final copies. ETS has developed new feedback forms to ensure that feed-forward is provided to help raise attainment above threshold level. Particular attention is paid to the role of constructive feed-forward within the mechanisms for assessment feedback, and ETS has developed new feedback forms to ensure that this is provided to help raise attainment above threshold level. Students considered that they were made aware of how to achieve beyond the threshold level within feedback provided to them. Strategic thinking on achievement occurs at course committee. Grade profiles are examined by the Senate to identify any issues. Enhancement of student achievement is in the remit of the Programme Delivery and Assessment sub-group.

1.9 Strategic thinking on achievement occurs at course committee. Grade profiles are examined by the Senate to identify any issues. Students were aware of what is required to achieve beyond the threshold level, and the role of grading criteria and assessment feedback in helping them to achieve this. They understood the threshold mark for undergraduate programmes including the University of Glasgow's use of a 22-point grading scale and that these criteria were set out in course and student handbooks and included in feedback on assessment.

1.10 Neither the undergraduate nor postgraduate distance learning Student Handbook 2020-21 refers explicitly to achievement at and beyond threshold level. Some individual programme handbooks provide generic course grading criteria, which give an indication of what is required to achieve the higher-level grades. Programme handbooks provide clear guidance on the general criteria required to produce a high-scoring essay.

1.11 The provision of appropriate information on grading criteria and marking scales, along with proactive support for assessment preparation and a focus on constructive feed-forward would allow the Core practice to be partially met. At a strategic level, ETS

also monitors the provision through course committees and the Board of Studies. Together, these actions would allow the Core practice to be met, with an associated low risk.

Core practice: Met

Level of risk: Low

Core practice (S3): Where a provider works in partnership with other organisations, it has in place effective arrangements to ensure that the standards of its awards are credible and secure irrespective of where or how courses are delivered or who delivers them.

Findings

1.12 ETS is a validated institution of the University of Glasgow and is accorded Associate Status. It follows the academic regulations and policies of the University in line with the Memorandum of Agreement with clear indication of understanding of responsibilities. It has no partnership arrangements for delivery of programmes by other institutions and does not offer higher education awards in its own name.

Core practice: Met

Level of risk: Low

Core practice (S4): The provider uses external expertise, assessment and classification processes that are reliable, fair and transparent.

Findings

1.13 ETS adheres to the regulations and processes for external expertise, assessment and classification that are laid down by the University of Glasgow in the Memorandum of Agreement. The review team looked at external examiner reports, Board of Studies and Joint Board minutes. The role of the external examiner was discussed with staff, along with that of other types of external expertise.

1.14 An external examiner is assigned to each course in the degree programme at ETS. In order to help to safeguard standards, external examiners are sent copies of the University of Glasgow Guide for External Examiners, all course outlines, programme handbooks, formative and summative assessments, and changes to assessment methods. All external examiners are provided with the relevant Codes of Assessment developed by the University, the University's 22-point grading scale, and guidance on grading student performance produced by the University. External examiners check that assessments are designed with due regard to the achievement of the intended learning outcomes. External examiner reports confirm that assessments adequately cover learning objectives, marking criteria are consistently applied and useful feedback is given to students.

1.15 External examiners have sight of the ETS Course Quality Questionnaire summary and action plan. They have sight of all assessments, which are all double marked. External examiners verify that standards achieved are appropriate to those required by the University of Glasgow, and are comparable with those in other institutions with which the examiner is familiar. They produce an annual report, which is presented to the Board of Examiners, to ETS and to the University. ETS is responsible for responding formally to external examiner comments, and these are presented to the Joint Board and the Senate at ETS. Students have access to all external examiner reports. ETS is currently reviewing and restructuring its Senate to strengthen and extend the use of external expertise.

1.16 During the summer of 2020, assessments had to be modified due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and external examiners were consulted about the challenges of modified assessments. Students were aware of the role of external examiners in assuring that modified assessment methods, such as open-book examinations, were of an equivalent standard.

1.17 Students regard academic standards as high, but fair. All exams, coursework, formative and summative assessments are double-marked internally, internally moderated, and externally moderated by external examiners. Assessment practices follow the ETS Assessment Policy, and the University's Code of Assessment. Assessment outcomes are reported through the deliberative structures of both ETS and the University of Glasgow.

1.18 The engagement of rigorous internal marking and moderation processes, the involvement of external examiners in all degree programmes, including greater input during the pandemic and the production of annual reports which are scrutinised through the deliberative processes and their contribution to assessment and classification processes would allow the Core practice to be met, with a low level of risk.

Core practice: Met

Level of risk: Low

Common practice (Standard 1): The provider reviews its Core practices for standards regularly and uses the outcomes to drive improvement and enhancement.

Findings

1.19 Under the Memorandum of Agreement with the University of Glasgow, ETS is responsible for the monitoring and review of its programmes, and for the engagement of students in these quality processes. Monitoring and evaluation processes are required to be consistent with those of the University.

1.20 The team discussed engagement with monitoring and feedback processes with students and staff. Analysis of student feedback on course quality and student satisfaction was scrutinised, together with minutes of Joint Board meetings and written responses from ETS.

1.21 The Memorandum of Agreement with the University of Glasgow sets out a requirement that ETS administers Course Quality Questionnaires, Students Survey Questionnaires, Annual Course Monitoring Feedback and that findings from these are presented to the Board of Examiners and the Joint Board. ETS does not have a formal policy or extensive processes for the annual monitoring of programmes. Instead, ETS is required to provide the University Senate with an Annual Report, which is presented to the autumn meeting of the Joint Board.

1.22 Students complete evaluations at the end of each module, which feed into the ETS overall self-assessment. Students were aware that self-assessment reports are fed into course committees. Student satisfaction surveys, course quality questionnaires, and course committee minutes are examined formally by the Board of Studies and the Senate. ETS is currently expanding its Senate to include more external expertise. Members of the Senate advise on and assist in the monitoring of programmes.

1.23 ETS reviews its Core practices for standards on an annual basis, and in accordance with its partnership agreement with the University of Glasgow. Student evaluation

contributes to this process. Consideration by various deliberative committees completes a quality cycle and allows enhancement to be carried through. This allows the Common practice to be met, and the associated level of risk is low.

Common practice: Met

Level of risk: Low

The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and/or other awarding organisations: Summary of findings

1.24 The review team concludes that the setting and maintenance of the academic standards of awards/the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of the degree-awarding body at ETS meets UK expectations.

2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

Core practice (Q1): The provider has a reliable, fair and inclusive admissions system.

Findings

2.1 ETS operates admissions and registration processes which relate to each validated programme through which all students on validated programmes can be registered as associated students of the University of Glasgow. References are taken up for all applicants and all applicants are interviewed. The design of Admissions at ETS is a careful, sensitive and thorough process which is reliable, fair and inclusive and allows the Core practice to be met.

2.2 The team tested the evidence through scrutiny of related documents pertaining to admissions and recruitment and widening access, including the General Admissions, Admissions Feedback and Appeals, Recognition of Prior Learning, and Admissions of Students with Declared Disabilities policies. There are separate admissions policies for undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. These were considered together with evidence gleaned from team meetings with students and staff.

2.3 The approach to admissions is transparent, fair and inclusive with training provided for admissions staff. The seminary maintains responsibility for all aspects of admissions and advises the University in respect of any withdrawals. Concerning widening participation in admissions, ETS provides an Access to Theology Course and the Certificate in Theology/ Diploma in Christian Studies. Both routes can result in places being offered on the Bachelor of Theology (BTh) programme. There are separate admissions policies for both undergraduate and postgraduate students and dedicated policies for appeals, complaints and prior learning. Student numbers for the BTh programme have seen a healthy increase. There is now a second intake for postgraduate students, enabling postgraduate students to start either in September or in January.

2.4 Students are provided with an induction pack and various induction events are offered. Students are provided with a postgraduate handbook. Supervision in small groups and individually takes place to a pre-arranged and published schedule; these sessions are monitored and recorded. Supervision is provided by an internal supervisor and a second supervisor from the University of Glasgow.

2.5 Performance data falls within expected limits. Withdrawals are few and tend to be for personal or financial reasons. COVID-19 caused two Master of Theology (MTh) international students to put their studies on hold during 2019-20, but both intend to recommence their studies when feasible. Reliability, fairness and inclusivity are maintained by the Senate which monitors and reviews the entire admissions process. The admissions process is covered by a range of policies and procedures (see paragraph 2.2) including candidates for whom English is an additional language. Specialist admissions staff are trained on admissions procedures.

2.6 Students met by the team were very satisfied with the admissions processes they had experienced. An uncomplicated procedure was considered important in the application method. Detailed information is transparent, current and fit-for-purpose, and provided during the process together with opportunities to visit for consultation and taster days. There are facilities for telephone exchanges and results of interviews follow on very quickly.

2.7 The system works effectively in that ETS recruits the students it believes will benefit to their own advantage and to the advantage of the institution. Potential students are treated with respect and courtesy within a positive and encouraging environment and culture. The comprehensive admissions policies and procedures carried out by trained staff enable the Core practice to be met with a low-level of risk.

Core practice: Met

Level of risk: Low

Core practice (Q2): The provider designs and/or delivers high-quality courses.

Findings

2.8 ETS has delegated authority from the University of Glasgow to design and deliver programmes. The University recognises the autonomy of ETS with respect to programme development. ETS is responsible for the delivery of high-quality provision.

2.9 ETS has procedures in place for the design and delivery of high-quality courses. ETS follows the University of Glasgow policies and processes for the development and modification of courses, as set out in the Memorandum of Agreement. When a programme development need is identified, whether a validation for a new programme, a revalidation, or a major modification to an existing programme, ETS follows the University of Glasgow (UoG) policies and procedures. An internal examination is held, is discussed at the Joint Board and a validation process is initiated. This proceeds to a formal validation event with UoG. Minor changes can be made with the approval of an external examiner and reported to the University within the Annual Report. The Student Representative Council President is involved in the design of new programmes. When new programmes arrive at the Senate for approval, via the recently-established working sub-groups, there are now opportunities for more students to be involved in the process and also in feedback and review. Two external members of Senate also provide external input into the process, and external examiners are consulted on draft documentation.

2.10 The onset of the pandemic in March 2020 of necessity led to the introduction of remote delivery for all programmes. While ETS has sought to maintain an approach of normality as far as is practicable, there have had to be changes in order to adjust to online learning. Since 2016, ETS has been running one programme by distance learning, which helped to facilitate the transition to online learning for all programmes. Synchronous and recorded online delivery for a greater number of programmes has resulted in changes to the video conferencing system used, and more high-quality electronic resources being placed on the virtual learning environment (VLE). Lecture sessions are now more interactive and less focused on the lecturer, and include more prepared discussion.

2.11 ETS designs and delivers courses of high quality, assured by alignment with the expectations of the University. Students consider their courses to be of excellent quality - very professional, rigorous, stimulating and engaging. External examiners confirm the rigour and quality of the courses. While delivery of courses has had to move online during the COVID-19 pandemic, ETS has taken steps to ensure that delivery of courses and support for student learning remain of high quality. The Core practice is met as ETS has thorough procedures in place for the design and development, and delivery of appropriately high-quality programmes.

Core practice: Met

Level of risk: Low

Core practice (Q3): The provider has sufficient appropriately qualified and skilled staff to deliver a high-quality academic experience.

Findings

2.12 ETS ensures that staff members are appropriately qualified to deliver programmes at the associated academic level. The awarding body formally recognises staff as Associated University Lecturers. The Seminary Board is required to manage the appointment of full-time teaching staff and endorse the nomination of part-time teaching staff. The appropriate level of qualification and skills of staff is considered by UoG at approval for delivery of awards. ETS has a staff development policy, mentoring in place for new staff and there is an annual review of all teaching staff. These procedures and systems provide a support framework for staff.

2.13 The review team considered the effectiveness of these practices and procedures by examining minutes of meetings, policies and staff development activity. The team also held meetings with senior and teaching staff, and a representative of the University.

2.14 The appointment of all teaching staff is formally recognised by the awarding body. The Staff Development Policy outlines how new staff are supported, access to professional development and conference attendance. There is a staff handbook which provides information for teaching staff which is updated annually. ETS has put in place informal virtual networks during the pandemic to allow staff to meet at least every two weeks. The review team noted that although staff development had been highlighted to staff during the pandemic the uptake and impact was not recorded.

2.15 The Principal and the Chairman of the Seminary Board undertake an annual review of all teaching staff. The reviewers noted that, due to the pandemic in March, this has not been fully carried out and there are plans to reintroduce this annual review. Staff stated that some CPD has taken place on an informal basis this had not been formally recorded or evaluated. The review team recognises the impact of the pandemic on staff development, however, the review team recommend that ETS ensures that all continuing professional development activities for staff are recorded and evaluated.

2.16 Academic staff maintain and enhance their expertise through staff development and peer reviews. ETS maintains a range of support staff which include administration, library and IT personnel, all dedicated to student learning. Programme and course handbooks are in electronic format through Moodle, a resource used by all departments and highly praised by the student body as an effective portal. Learning outcomes for both the programme and each of the component courses and modules are outlined in handbooks. Smartboard software has been installed in all classrooms.

2.17 All undergraduate lectures and seminars are recorded in audio and video. Other resources include the Writing Lab which involves a Diagnostic Test to identify students who could benefit from additional help in their writing. The 'buddy' system operated by the Student Representative Council helps to socialise and integrate new students to seminary life.

2.18 Directors of Studies are provided for all undergraduates and there are supervisors dedicated to the care of postgraduates. The smallness of the Seminary allows for each full-time member of staff, including the Principal, to be accessible to the entire student body. Various handbooks contain information on the range of support services available. There is a handbook specifically dedicated to distance learning. Students stated that they are 'very satisfied with the standard of education that is provided at ETS'. During interview they

mentioned that handbooks are very comprehensive and that any queries are answered promptly by telephone or email.

2.19 The facilities, resources and support structure reveal a system that is operating effectively, which allows the Core practice to be met with a low-level of risk. The review team recommend that ETS ensures that all continuing professional development activities for staff are recorded and evaluated.

Core practice: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

Core practice (Q4): The provider has sufficient and appropriate facilities, learning resources and student support services to deliver a high-quality academic experience.

Findings

2.20 The Seminary Board maintains oversight of the resources and support available to students and has adapted or improved resources including changes to library services and the introduction of a Writing Lab. The team considered documents relating to internal provision and space, library provision, remote learning and IT, staff expertise and development, peer reviews, handbooks, classroom technologies and support structures such as the buddy system, the writing lab and student support, and interviews with students and staff.

2.21 The review team evaluated the arrangements in place through scrutinising minutes of meetings, student guidance information and programme specifications, and through discussions with a range of staff and students. The review team explored student access to, and the availability of, books and IT resources, following commentary within the student submission to this review. ETS has adapted the availability of resources online and available through click and collect from the library to support students during the pandemic.

2.22 ETS has experience of delivery of distance learning prior to the pandemic and has adapted their delivery model to online using a video conferencing platform due to the increase of remote delivery. The students met by the review team spoke positively about their experience of study during the pandemic. While ETS has adapted its delivery to meet the changes required to meet the remote delivery of all provision, the practices of online learning have not been updated in the distance learning handbook to reflect these changes. The review team recommends that ETS updates a policy for remote teaching, learning and assessment that reflects changes to practice due to the global pandemic.

2.23 The learning resources are housed in accommodation with more than adequate lecture and seminar space, library provision and personal space for teaching and learning. The internal space includes the Centre for Mission and postgraduate research. There is excellent provision in resources and student support. The design in facilities, learning resources and student support services allows for the Core practice to be met.

2.24 The Chalmers Hall includes spaces for IT equipment and social distancing. In agreement with library staff, there is circulation of library books including short-term loans and access to the University of Edinburgh Library. A new video conferencing system has been introduced which offers remote and distance-learning which now works to the greater benefit of seminars. There are also additional microphones to enable smoother student interaction for online interaction.

2.25 Academic staff maintain and enhance their expertise through staff development and peer reviews. ETS maintains a range of support staff which include administration, library and IT personnel, all dedicated to student learning. Programme and course handbooks are in electronic format through the VLE - a resource used by all departments and highly praised by the student body as an effective portal. Learning outcomes for both the programme and each of the component courses and modules are outlined in handbooks. Smartboard software has been installed in all classrooms.

2.26 All undergraduate lectures and seminars are recorded in audio and video. Other resources include the Writing Lab which involves a Diagnostic Test to identify students who could benefit from additional help in their writing. The 'buddy' system operated by the Student Representative Council helps to socialise and integrate new students to seminary life.

2.27 Directors of Studies are provided for all undergraduates and there are supervisors dedicated to the care of postgraduates. The smallness of the Seminary allows for each full-time member of staff, including the Principal, to be accessible to the entire student body. Various handbooks contain information on the range of support services available. There is a handbook specifically dedicated to distance learning. The review team heard in meetings with students that they are 'very satisfied with the standard of education that is provided at ETS'. During interview they mentioned that handbooks are very comprehensive and that any queries are answered promptly by telephone or email.

2.28 ETS has Directors of Studies to provide pastoral support for undergraduate students who have continued to support students on a one-to-one basis before and during the pandemic. In addition, there are trained counselling staff who deliver on some programmes who provide support for students and also have an arrangement in place for direct referrals to external agency if required. There is a 'buddy' system which is implemented by the Student Representative Council to support new students. Students spoke positively about their experience of the buddy system prior to the pandemic. Facilities and support are available for students with specific needs in terms of disabilities with a comprehensive Disability Policy available to students.

2.29 No new remote learning policy has been developed in response to the current pandemic situation and ETS is using the policy developed for the distance-learning provision in 2016. The team consider it advisable for ETS to provide an updated policy for remote teaching, learning and assessment that reflects changes to practice due to the global pandemic.

Core practice: Met

Level of risk: Moderate

Core practice (Q5): The provider actively engages students, individually and collectively, in the quality of their educational experience.

Findings

2.30 The team considered student involvement outlined in the Student Submission, student feedback mechanisms and procedures. These included course quality questionnaires, the Student Satisfaction Survey, student representation on committees, including the Senate, its sub-groups and Seminary Board, new programme design and involvement of students and interviews with students and staff. Students provide feedback on their experience through the student self-review form. Students met by the team were positive about the quality and effectiveness of both training and supervision and about the ways in which ETS engages with them collectively and individually.

2.31 ETS has an established culture based on support and care. Student personal and spiritual growth and development works in tandem with their growth in knowledge and understanding. Experience in pastoral ministry is readily found within the professional lives of Seminary staff. Students can consult with the Principal at any time during their studies. ETS considers students to be partners in the educational experience, which includes the quality assurance and enhancement of the educational provision. Student representation and feedback mechanism are consistent with those of the University of Glasgow.

2.32 The team considered wide-ranging evidence including interviews with students and staff. Students are well represented throughout the work of Seminary through the Student Representative Committee President as the student representative. The SRC President has a seat on the ETS Senate and the Joint Board with the University of Glasgow, and a seat on the Seminary Board within the Free Church of Scotland.

2.33 Seminary staff are aware of the representatives for each year group and work closely with them. There are three undergraduate students (one each from first year, second year and final year), and one postgraduate student nominated annually by the SRC who serve on the Board of Studies. The Board of Studies is responsible for the management of the BTh and MTh programmes.

2.34 The Staff-Student Liaison Committee meets no less than once per year and a senior member of staff meets with the whole student body. A report from this Committee is received by the Senate on any issues relevant to the quality of learning opportunities. There is a Course Quality Questionnaire and at the end of the academic year, students complete an online Student Satisfaction Questionnaire. The Seminary has a Student Representative Council (SRC) which consists of all students. It appoints a President, Secretary and Treasurer and year or class representatives for undergraduate and postgraduate programmes.

2.35 During a meeting with the review team, students stated that there is an effective year-group system and that staff respond well to the student voice. There are many opportunities for representation and to present views, and students are aware of their representatives. Student representation is proactive in gathering information and recommendations. Lecturers are claimed to be more like colleagues and there are opportunities for direct questioning to ensure students have comprehensive understanding. Academic staff made it clear that within this collegiate culture, academic rigour is paramount in the pedagogical relationship and partnership.

2.36 Throughout the pandemic, the SRC president has been excellent both in maintaining contact and with student welfare. The 'no detriment' policy from the University of Glasgow, has been adapted much more as COVID-19 has continued. Staff mentioned that the online partnership continues as naturally as possible. Feedback is either written or digital. Paradoxically, at this moment, students who are not in face-to-face attendance, now have better opportunities for virtual face-to-face contact with tutors. These processes and engagements work effectively within a spirit of inclusivity and enable the Core practice to be met with a low-level of risk.

Core practice: Met
Level of risk: Low

Core practice (Q6): The provider has fair and transparent procedures for handling complaints and appeals which are accessible to all students.

Findings

2.37 ETS operates separate procedures for complaints and appeals for undergraduates and postgraduates as set out in its students' complaints procedure. There are separate regulations for complaints and appeals associated with admissions. Complaints cover issues concerning services relating to quality of teaching, library, computing, dining, administration, support and general student facilities. Together with the University of Glasgow, the Seminary operates a Joint Appeals Committee. The design of the practices for Complaints and Appeals allows the Core practice to be met.

2.38 The team considered all documents relating to complaints and appeals, their protocols and procedures, and evidence from student and staff interviews.

2.39 In any complaints, informal resolution is the preferred course of action. If a complaint remains unresolved informally, there are two formal procedures: the first is via the Principal of the Seminary and the second is via the Seminary Complaints Committee. Any complaint which is unresolved by ETS can be referred to the University of Glasgow for further consideration.

2.40 The Seminary Complaints Committee will hear details of the complaints within two weeks of the date of receipt of the complainant's letter. This leads to the complainant receiving written confirmation of any conclusion and possible action within five working days. The hearing and any subsequent documentation, as far as possible, will remain confidential. Any decision will be final and closure will follow.

2.41 The Joint Appeals Committee, established between the University of Glasgow and ETS, pertains solely to academic matters, including Examination Board decisions and student progress. The jurisdiction does not cover proceedings relating to the Code of Discipline. Appeals are not heard in relation to marks or decisions of examiners, or other matters of academic judgement, but are heard in relation to grounds concerning unfair procedure, medical matters or adverse personal circumstances. In all cases, appropriate evidence must be submitted for consideration. An appellant who is dissatisfied with the decision of the Joint Appeals Committee can exercise a further appeal to the University Senate on the following grounds: new evidence not otherwise available to Committee; a procedural defect at committee level, or unreasonableness in the disposal of the Joint Appeals Committee.

2.42 Staff acknowledged their familiarity with the procedures for complaints and appeals, even though student engagement with them is rare. Students were not familiar with the existing documents, as no students met had ever complained or appealed but were aware of how to find them on the VLE. The Seminary mentions that appeals and complaints are 'extremely rare.' The thorough procedures in place have a strong capacity for effectiveness, enabling the Core practice to be met with a low-level of risk.

Core practice: Met

Level of risk: Low

Core practice (Q7): Where the provider offers research degrees, it delivers these in appropriate and supportive research environments.

Findings

2.43 Although ETS is mainly a teaching institution, it offers a Master of Theology degree by research. It was validated in 2005, and again in 2013 and 2018 by the University of Glasgow. The degree is available to full-time students (one year) and those who wish to study part-time (two years). There is a strong commitment to research. The design of the ETS research degree programme, in being delivered in appropriate and supportive research environments, enables the Core practice to be met.

2.44 The team read all documents relating to the Master of Theology (research) and met with students and staff. Research degrees at ETS are franchised from the University of Glasgow. The University of Glasgow has a postgraduate code of practice which ETS follows.

2.45 For all research students, the first supervisor will be a member of the Seminary academic staff. The second will normally be a member of the University of Glasgow's Department of Theology and Religious Studies. The University requires that every student has at least two points of academic contact. The University provides codes of practice pertaining to research degrees for prospective and current research students and staff. These set out particular responsibilities and expectations concerning all involved parties throughout the course of study.

2.46 ETS houses a substantial physical library within various rooms of the Seminary building. Each academic department has a budget for the purchase of new books and resources each year. ETS students are able to borrow books from the New College Library, Faculty of Divinity, University of Edinburgh. The University of Glasgow offers a range of digital resources and access to its broad range of academic journals.

2.47 ETS research students benefit from postgraduate seminars. These seminars provide opportunities for students to develop critical engagement at an advanced level. The Seminary invites renowned speakers of national and international standing who have presented topics across the disciplines. The seminars provide an academic community spirit and a scrutinising culture for higher learning, thinking and writing. Video conferencing facilities have, in recent months, widened participation from academics outside the Seminary.

2.48 Several academic supervisors are actively engaged in academic societies and are well-published with books and journal articles. Research students are encouraged to publish and present papers at academic conferences. Towards increasing research activities, the Seminary intends to appoint a new staff member and, through consultation with the University of Glasgow and University of Edinburgh, enhance the overall research provision. The small community of research students is well provisioned and supported, and enables postgraduate research to operate effectively.

2.49 Overall, ETS provides an appropriate research environment and opportunities for students on research degrees. The team therefore concludes that the Core practice is met and the level of risk is low.

Core practice: Met
Level of risk: Low

Core practice (Q8): Where a provider works in partnership with other organisations, it has in place effective arrangements to ensure that the academic experience is high-quality irrespective of where or how courses are delivered and who delivers them.

Findings

2.50 ETS is validated by the University of Glasgow as a partner institution. It does not work in partnership with any other organisations to deliver programmes. Since ETS is not itself a degree-awarding body, the only relevant aspects of the Core practice are those related to delivering learning opportunities with third parties. ETS delivers one elective module where a work placement is required to meet learning outcomes. The review team examined the ETS Practical Placement Guidelines document and met staff with responsibility for placements. However, due to the small number of students who complete a placement, the team did not meet any students completing the elective module.

2.51 There were small numbers of students who studied the elective work placement module - one in 2019-20 and one in 2020-21. ETS ensures that students follow the practical placement guidelines. Due to the pandemic, the 2020-21 placement was adapted to ensure that risk assessments were in place and regular contact was maintained remotely.

2.52 The practical placement guidelines provide information for the supervisor and students. The guidelines provide information on the 10% of the overall assessment for the placement which is based on a grade provided by the placement supervisor and monitored by ETS placement staff.

2.53 ETS has procedures in place to support students on placement and academic staff maintain close contact with supervisors and students during the placement. The review team, therefore, concludes that the Core practice is met and the associated level of risk is low.

2.54 In terms of, appointments, teaching, quality practices, validation, revalidation, evaluation and other related practices, ETS complies with all the regulations and requirements set out in a Memorandum of Agreement with the University of Glasgow.

Core practice: Met
Level of risk: Low

Core practice (Q9): The provider supports all students to achieve successful academic and professional outcomes.

Findings

2.55 The current degree programmes run by ETS are intended to provide the theological and academic basis for future professional work in the church or allied professions. This includes the development of professional and transferable skills. These skills are embedded within the learning outcomes of the degree programmes.

2.56 The team discussed the inclusion and achievement of academic and professional outcomes with students and staff, and examined programme documentation. The 'buddy' system continues to be implemented by the Student Representative Council. This will help integrate new students to seminary life and ethos. Each academic session, students will continue their own Student Pastoral Care Team with staff support. In addition, Directors of Studies (DOS) are provided for all undergraduate students, while the postgraduate

supervisors provide support for postgraduate students. The DOS remit is sufficiently wide to ensure support is provided for both academic and non-academic issues which can so easily affect the student learning experience. It was recently agreed at Senate, that students were recently encouraged to make more use of the DOS, if needed. It is also within the DOS policy that Directors of Studies make a point of regularly contacting and meeting with students. As a relatively small institution, each full-time member of staff, including the Principal, is accessible to the whole student body.

2.57 Students consider the study environment at ETS to be very professional. They also consider themselves well supported in terms of academic outcomes and preparation for work beyond their studies. Support and guidance is provided in preparing for work in mission, careers in the church, or in caring professions such as childcare. One student met by the team had previously taken part in a placement at a local church in support of achieving enhanced professional outcomes.

2.58 Work placements are typically undertaken by students on vocational programmes who are intending to go into missionary work. They may already be working in a church, either as an employee or as a volunteer, or be sponsored by a church. A Bachelor of Theology degree, normally taken over three years, has the option to be taken part-time over four years and for students to undertake some apprenticeship within a congregation. This work experience is not assessed and does not contribute to the overall grade of the degree programme. Depending on prior academic learning, students may be able to opt out of some academic modules and opt in to practical training. There are several elective modules and one is designed to be parallel to the Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies (RMPS) programme offered in schools in Scotland.

2.59 The services provided to support student development and achievement are regularly monitored and evaluated. The Seminary Board has oversight of facilities, learning resources and student support services. The Directors of Studies provide support for all undergraduate students and postgraduate supervisors provide support for postgraduate students.

2.60 ETS offers a comprehensive supportive environment, which enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential. The review team recognised the comprehensive pastoral and personal community which fosters a supportive learning environment and encourages excellent relations with staff as good practice. The review team concludes that the Core practice is met and the associated level of risk is low

Core practice: Met

Level of risk: Low

Common practice (1): The provider reviews its Core practices for quality regularly and uses the outcomes to drive improvement and enhancement.

Findings

2.61 The ETS Senate is the hub which drives the review of Core practices for quality. The Senate body reviews comments made by external examiners both in their annual reports and comments made at the annual meeting of the Board of Examiners. The Senate considers all Seminary practices, makes recommendations where appropriate and enables strategic planning in practice, standards, strategy and enhancement, in accordance with both institutional developments and the revised Quality Code. The focus on sharpening internal moderation and developing staff peer reviews in reviewing and driving improvement and enhancement, allows the Common practice to be met.

2.62 The team considered wide-ranging evidence in relation to quality improvement and enhancement and interviewed students and staff. The new enhanced Senate membership is enabling a more rigorous application of the revised Quality Code in all areas of Seminary work. QAA periodic reviews are taken seriously as an external means of improvement and enhancement. Admissions, the involvement of students, appeals, appropriately-qualified and skilled staff, facilities, learning resources, student support and the provision of research degrees are all regularly reviewed and enhanced where appropriate.

2.63 Improvement and enhancements largely stem from Senate developments. This body reviews each academic programme in detail annually to enable any necessary changes in readiness for the following academic session. This has been further enabled by the newly-established Senate sub-groups and its student membership of four such groups. The Senate has enabled alternative online provision of literature.

2.64 In teaching and learning, the introduction of the Writing Lab, incorporation of class microphones, and updated inputs on plagiarism are among the newest outcomes of internal reviews. To meet the urgent response to Covid circumstances, adjustments in course delivery and in associated pedagogy are examples of how the Seminary is reviewing practice in meeting crisis needs while maintaining a steady and confident culture in teaching and learning. Online is now more interactive, synchronous delivery takes place and normality, as far as possible, continues. Students are being taught how to handle material more efficiently.

2.65 The newly-established Centre for Mission and the promotion of World Mission Days at ETS (four times in the academic year) is broadening practice and assisting in ensuring the enhancement of academic and professional outcomes.

2.66 For Church History, the Seminary Board has provided part-time provision for the coming academic year (Church History: postgraduate) until a full-time appointment can be made. There is a Staff Development Policy which includes an annual appraisal with the Chair of the Seminary Board and the Seminary Principal.

2.67 Student facility has been improved through Assessment Timetables which are now accessible via the ETS Portal and enable students to make comments on the design in relation to their study time and feasibility. For postgraduates, new supervision forms allow for an improved paper trail to aid both monitoring and review, particularly in respect of the second supervisor. There is a monthly review of all postgraduate support, which is reviewed by the Senate and the Postgraduate Board of Studies. Through such reviews, postgraduate documentation has been revised with greater clarity through the VLE system. More study space has been made available for postgraduates.

2.68 A full review of programme design in relation to quality and standards (Core and Common practices) in relation to ETS's mission will be a future priority. The exercise will include external representation and student membership.

2.69 Evidence confirms that ETS reviews its Core practices for quality regularly and uses the outcomes to drive improvement and enhancement. However, the absence of an up-to-date policy on remote teaching, learning and assessment could pose a potential risk and the team consider it advisable for ETS to produce an updated policy. The team also consider it advisable that ETS ensures that all continuing professional development activities for staff are recorded and evaluated.

Common practice:Met
Level of risk:Low

Common practice (2): The provider's approach to managing quality takes account of external expertise.

Findings

2.70 Managing quality takes account of external expertise through liaison with external examiners, benchmarking, validation and other stakeholders, including external representation on the Senate. There is a network of higher education colleagues, representatives from the University of Glasgow and stakeholder involvement with the Centre for Mission and the promotion of World Mission Days. Student counselling is also an external source of consultancy in relation to quality.

2.71 The team considered documents in relation to external examiners, SCQF, validation, the enhanced Senate membership, Quality Code mapping, the Centre for Mission and World Mission Days, external counselling and interviews with Seminary staff.

2.72 External examiners receive nomination by the Seminary and are subject to approval by the University of Glasgow. There is an annual external examiner's report sent to both the University of Glasgow and the Seminary. The Joint Board considers the Seminary's response to the report. The external examiner receives course handbooks, along with samples of assessments to moderate. External examiners perform their duties in accordance with the practice of the University of Glasgow. The team examined samples of external examiner reports in which all areas were met and positive comments made.

2.73 As part of the ETS guarantee that the academic standards expected of the BTh and the MTh are the same as the awards made by the University to its own students, relevant external benchmarks are engaged. ETS functions in accordance with the benchmarks outlined by the SQCF. BTh is set at SCQF Level 9 and the MTh is set at SCQF Level 11 of the SCQF Framework. The Seminary's validation process also includes external representation.

2.74 Internally, the newly-enhanced Senate includes external members who advise and monitor the work of the seminary. These additional members have a representative role with regard to external stakeholders, including the Free Church Group and the University of Glasgow. External members also assist to ensure the relevance of programmes, preparation ministry and community work. External members are also included in the scrutiny of learning outcomes.

2.75 While the Quality Code and its mapping remain the Principal's responsibility, there is also a network of staff who examine each element and its implementation. Input from external examiners, colleagues from other higher education institutions and the University of Glasgow are other external sources. The Joint Board also considers the Quality Code's requirements and internal deliberations.

2.76 The recent provision for the Centre for Mission and the promotion of World Mission Days at ETS are also external enhancing initiatives in developing academic and professional outcomes. These new ventures enable contact with influential stakeholders and employers. The provision of specialists in student counselling, where required, is also an external source of quality in maintaining the psychological health of the Seminary's students. Externality is central to practice at ETS and is effective in its contributions and influence. The design of ETS's approach to managing quality in taking account of external expertise allows the Common practice to be met.

Common practice: Met

Level of risk: Low

Common practice (3): The provider engages students individually and collectively in the development, assurance and enhancement of the quality of their educational experience.

Findings

2.77 ETS operates procedures which include the setting and maintenance of academic standards, programme approval, monitoring and review in which there are appropriate arrangements for the engagement of students in the quality management processes. Collective and individual involvement in the development, assurance and enhancement of quality matters takes place across the student body.

2.78 Student involvement includes extensive student feedback and representation. The Seminary reviews these processes through the Board of Studies. The Board of Studies includes a representative from the University of Glasgow. Staff-Student Liaison Committees meet regularly and are examined by the Senate. The design of the Seminary's approach in engaging students individually and collectively in the development, assurance and enhancement of the quality of their educational experience allows the Common practice to be met.

2.79 A Course Quality Questionnaire is given to students annually. Students also have the opportunity to provide feedback to the Seminary Board through an online Student Satisfaction Survey. The SRC President, a member of the Seminary Board and the Joint Board of the University of Glasgow, is now a newly-elected member of Senate. This appointment further assists regular student input in the design, delivery and overall management of validated and other courses.

2.80 Students are engaged with the recommendations from previous external reviews through the Principal, who brings relevant Senate matters to the SRC President for discussion with the student body. The Principal then reports to the Senate. Prior to the onset of COVID-19, student and staff lunches provided a further informal arena for discussions on aspects of quality. The Senate sub-groups which include student membership, ensure the widest and most senior consultation. Consultation with the sub-groups includes matters of quality review, programme design, feedback and review. Findings from student questionnaires are summarised by the Chairman of the Seminary Board for discussion at the May Seminary Board meeting.

2.81 The SRC President often makes contact with the representatives for each year group as a further source of support. Full-time staff are knowledgeable about the representatives for each year group. The SRC President's particular involvement in the design of new programmes was appropriately illustrated at the Senate's meeting in June 2020 when he provided input into the new electives for Practical Theology. The collective and individual involvement of students in quality matters works effectively, enabling the Common practice to be met with a low-level of risk.

Common practice: Met
Level of risk: Low

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.82 The review team concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities at ETS **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 21-24 of the [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\) handbook](#).

User-friendly explanations of a wide range of terms can be found in the longer Glossary on the QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/glossary.

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**).

Common practices

Practices included in the UK Quality Code that will be applied by providers in line with their missions, their regulatory context and the needs of their students. These are practices common to the underpinning of quality in all UK providers but are not regulatory requirements for providers in England (registered with the Office for Students).

Core practices

Practices included in the UK Quality Code that must be demonstrated by all UK higher education providers as part of assuring their standards and quality.

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**.

Expectations

Statements in the **Quality Code** which clearly and succinctly express the outcomes providers should achieve in setting and maintaining the standards of their awards, and for managing the quality of their provision.

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* (FQHEIS).

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** (and associated, applicable, Core and Common practices) that 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.

QAA2593 - R13079 - Apr 21

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Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB
Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

Tel: 01452 557000
Website: www.qaa.ac.uk