

University of Glasgow

Academic Standards Committee – Friday 25 May 2018

Summary Report of the Validation Event for the Re-Validation of the Bachelor of Theology and Master of Theology, and Validation of the Master of Theology in Missiology held at Edinburgh Theological Seminary, The Mound, Edinburgh on 19 February 2018

Robbie Mulholland, Clerk, University of Glasgow and Edinburgh Theological Seminary Joint Board

Panel Members

Professor Alice Jenkins, School of Critical Studies, Convener
 Dr Sean Adams, Lecturer, Theology and Religious Studies
 Professor Mark Elliott, University of St Andrews
 Ms Joanne Ramsey, School of Law
 Mr Robbie Mulholland, Academic Collaborations Office (Attending)

Programme Staff in Attendance

Rev Iver Martin, Principal (for items 5 and 6)
 Professor John A MacLeod, Vice-Principal, New Testament (for items 5 and 6)
 Professor John R McIntosh, Church History (for item 5)
 Professor Bob Akroyd, Systematic and Practical Theology (for item 5)
 Mr Daniel Sladek, Old Testament (for item 5)
 Dr Alistair Wilson, New Testament and Mission (for item 5)
 Ms Heather Watson, ETS Secretary and Administrator (for item 5)

1. Summary

The Validation Panel **agreed to recommend** to the University of Glasgow (UoG) Academic Standards Committee (ASC) that the following programmes offered by ETS be revalidated for a period of six years, from September 2019:

Bachelor of Theology
 Master of Theology (Research)
 Master of Theology in Scottish Church History and Theology (Taught)

The Panel also **agreed to recommend** to ASC that the following proposed programme be validated for a period of six years, from September 2018:

Master of Theology in Missiology (Taught)

2. Introduction

2.1 The Free Church of Scotland College (subsequently renamed Edinburgh Theological Seminary) was approved as a partner institution on 8 November 2001. The Bachelor of Theology (BTh) programme was revalidated on 7 May 2007 for a period of five years which was extended to six under revised University regulations in 2010. In June 2010 the College submitted for validation a one year full-time or two year part-time programme

leading to the degree of Master of Theology (MTh). In 2010 approval was given for the University to validate the Master of Theology programme being provided by the College for a six year period.

2.2 Following a validation event in December 2012, the University's Academic Standards Committee approved the revalidation of the BTh and MTh degrees for a further six year period commencing September 2013. In accordance with the University's validation procedures, ETS programmes must be revalidated on a rolling six-year cycle. Thus, a Validation Panel, including an external representative, visited the Seminary on Monday 19 February 2018 to consider the revalidation of the Bachelor of Theology and Master of Theology programmes for an award of the University for a further six year period commencing September 2019. The Validation Panel also considered the validation of a proposed MTh in Missiology (taught) for an award of the University for a six year period commencing September 2018. The role of the Validation Panel was to:

- consider the programme proposals in detail;
- make recommendations to the Academic Standards Committee and then to Senate.

2.3 The timetable for the visit is appended.

3. Private Meeting of Panel

3.1 The Panel wished to explore the following areas:

- Nomenclature of the MTh in Missiology programme title
- Staffing
- Staff Development
- Assessment and Feedback
- Mission Centre

4. Meeting with Students

4.1 The Panel met with one full-time and one part-time student on the Bachelor of Theology (BTh) programme; one full-time international student on the Master of Theology (MTh) by Research and one recent graduate from the Master of Theology (MTh) in Scottish Church History and Theology (taught).

4.2 The Panel heard that students had a diverse range of educational and professional experience prior to coming to ETS. Many had first degrees and some had extensive work experience. In the case of several students, the programmes offered at ETS had been recommended to them by current students, recent graduates or friends who had knowledge of ETS provision. The student on the part-time BTh programme had also been attracted by the flexibility offered by part-time study.

4.3 The students expressed a high degree of satisfaction with their programmes, finding their studies to be comprehensive, beneficial and challenging. They valued, in particular, the combination of academic expertise and practical experience that staff brought to areas such as preaching and practical theology. Students also valued the commitment which staff showed to the student learning experience, exemplified by the open-door policy operated by most staff and the communal taking of meals. Students also valued highly the

range of networking opportunities and external perspectives to which they were exposed through a regular lecture series involving leading scholars and external academics.

- 4.4 The Panel enquired about the range of the curriculum and whether it met with students' expectations. Students confirmed that they were very satisfied with the scope of theological teaching available to them and confirmed that they were encouraged to engage critically with world views on religion. They were encouraged to be open to a wide variety of perspectives and a broad sweep of theological interpretation. Students also considered that courses such as Practical Theology offered a good framework for engaging with wider societal issues.
- 4.5 The Panel enquired about the level of support offered and the opportunity for the development of learning skills. The students advised that learners who required support with English skills were offered good support and ETS had engaged the services of an EFL teacher to deliver classes. Staff were very willing to offer support on good academic practice and a writing club had been organised to help students develop their writing skills. Students also considered that the student handbook offered useful advice on issues around good academic practice.
- 4.6 Students spoke positively about the Seminary's IT resources noting that the VLE was widely used by staff. Students had access to the University's MyCampus portal and they had not experienced any difficulties using it. The Panel heard that students were encouraged to familiarise themselves with the Seminary's relationship with the University of Glasgow and to also be aware of sources of information regarding relevant University regulations and procedures. The students reported that they valued the Seminary's link with the University very highly and several confirmed that the prospect of graduating with a University of Glasgow degree had been a major contributory factor in them applying to the Seminary.
- 4.7 The Panel noted that assessment was mainly essay or exam-based and enquired whether students would welcome the introduction of other methods of assessment. The students were generally satisfied with the range of assessment practice on offer and noted that assignments were double-marked. Students considered that the assignment feedback they received was both timeous and very informative. Students also reported that they were given opportunities to do group work and undertake peer observation in some classes which involved presentations eg Greek.
- 4.8 The Panel enquired if students had any issues they wished to draw to the attention of the Panel. One MTh student noted that he had experienced a slight delay in receiving a progress update following the submission of his dissertation but he understood this to have been a minor liaison issue between ETS and the University's College of Arts Graduate School Office rather than an assessment issue. Two students also considered that they had quite a high lecture load (16 lectures a week) compared to other programmes, but conceded that this level of contact time brought with it other clear benefits. The students reported that, in general, they considered the student experience at ETS to be excellent. They valued the collegiate learning environment and the sense of community at ETS very highly and considered that these factors helped to produce motivated and confident graduates.

5. Meeting with Programme Staff

MTh in Missiology

- 5.1 The Panel asked staff if the term Missiology was still widely used in the literature and whether the term World Christianity might be a better title for the proposed programme. The staff considered that the term Missiology still had wide currency and represented mission which was outward-looking, inclusive and diverse. The aims of the programme were to develop an overall knowledge, at an advanced level, of missiological issues within a biblical, theological and historical framework. The programme would also provide students with a contemporary understanding of missiological studies in recent scholarship. The Panel questioned whether the bibliography for the programme was sufficiently up to date and reflected the breadth of modern scholarship in the field. The staff confirmed that programme bibliographies were updated annually and the Seminary library was continually replenished with new volumes. Furthermore, students could use the first class library facilities at New College, Edinburgh.
- 5.2 The Panel noted that the MTh programme would be delivered in the main by two staff who were semi-retired and wondered if staff had considered future staffing arrangements. Staff confirmed that they were very conscious of this matter and would shortly be making a case to the ETS Board of Trustees to appoint another member of staff. Their case would highlight the clear link which existed between adequate staffing levels and successful student recruitment, and staff were confident that they would be successful. *The Panel suggested that the matter of succession planning for staff delivering the MTh in Missiology programme be kept under review.*

Staff Development

- 5.3 The Panel explored the issue of staff development. It noted that, in 2016, the Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) had recommended that the Seminary develop and implement an annual cycle of professional development opportunities for staff to support the Seminary's Five Year Plan. The staff explained that, in response to the recommendation, the Seminary had introduced a formal staff development policy to replace the previous informal version. The new policy reinforced practice in areas including monitoring of part-time lecturing staff; peer review and staff engagement with the University of Glasgow's Learning Enhancement and Academic Development Services (LEADS).

Staff reported that they also took advantage of external sources of information and advice on staff development such as that provided by external examiners, New College, Edinburgh and conference attendance. The staff pointed out that many Seminary departments consisted of one member of staff and this sometimes presented a challenge in harmonising staff development opportunities across the Seminary. The staff noted that academic staff activity was mostly based around teaching and scholarship rather than teaching and research. The Seminary received regular online circulars from the College of Arts Graduate School Office on research matters which were very informative, and staff agreed that they would welcome the opportunity to work more closely with University staff on postgraduate and research matters. The Panel was aware that the Seminary was already working closely with the Theology and Religious Studies Subject Area on a number of collaborative activities, which included efforts to promote greater collaboration in joint supervision and research between the two institutions. The Principal also advised that the Seminary hoped to introduce a Gaelic module in collaboration with the Celtic and Gaelic Subject Area at the University. The proposal was currently in abeyance but it was

hoped that it might be taken forward again in the future. The Panel invited the Clerk to set up a meeting between relevant Seminary staff and Ms Claire Smith, College of Arts Postgraduate Administrator to examine ways by which Seminary staff could link in to sources of information and advice on research activities undertaken in the College of Arts.

[Action: Clerk]

Assessment and Feedback

- 5.4 The Panel enquired whether staff considered that they used a wider range of assessment and feedback methods since the last validation event in 2012. Staff confirmed that the Seminary's General Assessment Policy had been amended to further ensure consistency and transparency in this area. The Seminary had accessed the University's Disability Services and this had helped in diagnosing cases of dyslexia among students and in advising regarding individual student requirements e.g. provision of a note taker, assignment extensions and technical support. Reflective writing had also been introduced and this was seen as a useful aid to students' experience of practical, self-directed activities. This also encouraged a wider assessment of writing style and learning methods. Regarding feedback, the Seminary used an online Course Quality Questionnaire and recently agreed the questionnaire would be offered to students after the 6-week Practical Theology modules with a view to receiving feedback sooner after completion of the course/s. A Student Satisfaction Questionnaire was also utilised and students were e-mailed individually to prompt anonymous feedback.

Mission Centre

- 5.5 The Panel heard that the MTh in Missiology would be located in the new Mission Centre. Development work on the Mission Centre was progressing well and it was anticipated that the new facility would add considerably to the capabilities of the Seminary. It would impact positively on student employability, the local community and provide a centre for lifelong-learning and professional development. Its main aim would be to provide an environment for the training of top level educators who would go on to shape the future of the mission sector. The Centre would also be an educational resource for students not on University of Glasgow programmes and staff expected local church and community groups to also use the facility. It would be embedded in ETS but also act as a focus for the exchange of ideas and experience across a wide range of stakeholders. It would also serve as a venue for regular seminars and networking events.

The majority of applications received so far for the MTh in Missiology were from international students and the staff considered that the new Centre would be highly attractive to overseas students. Staff wanted to increase the profile of the Seminary on the international stage and the Mission Centre was pivotal to that ambition. The project to deliver the Centre had presented challenges and ETS was particularly pleased that Dr Alistair Wilson, recently appointed lecturer in New Testament and Mission, would help to co-ordinate its activities going forward.

6. Meeting with the Principal and Vice-Principal

- 6.1 The Panel heard that the Seminary was a small institution but considered itself to have a highly sustainable educational model. The Seminary fostered a strong sense of community and identity amongst its students and it encouraged them to be self-confident but open-minded at all times. It had strong connections both locally and internationally and it strived to set itself apart from competitor institutions with new initiatives such as the MTh in Missiology; the Mission Centre; the BTh by distance-learning and the increasing use of

remote learning technologies. The institution was expanding the pool of applicants from which it had traditionally drawn its students and the student body now encompassed a wide range of ages and social backgrounds. The Seminary was also increasingly using new technologies and social media to raise its profile internationally.

7. Commendations, Areas for Enhancement and Recommendations

7.1 Commendations

The Validation Panel commends Edinburgh Theological Seminary on the following:

- the strong sense of satisfaction and positive engagement with learning that is displayed by its students
- the clear efforts that staff are making to foster a strong sense of community and collegiality within the Seminary
- the very positive interactions that exist between staff and students at all levels of the Seminary
- in respect of the Mission Centre, the efforts that are being made to introduce greater internationalisation of the student experience
- in respect of the Mission Centre, the efforts that are being made to bring new voices and external perspectives to bear on the student experience
- the increased variety of assessment (both formative and summative) which has now been introduced across ETS

7.2 Areas for Enhancement

The Validation Panel highlights the following as areas for enhancement:

- going forward, keep under review matters linked to consistency and variety of assessment and feedback, and as part of this, continue to engage with the student voice through the Seminary's Student Association

7.3 Recommendations

The Validation Panel recommends that Edinburgh Theological Seminary:

- Consults with the University's Learning Enhancement and Academic Development Service (LEADS) with a view to strengthening its staff development policy
- Implement an inclusive learning policy, if one is not already in place
- Regularly review course bibliographies for all courses to ensure that new scholarship is taken account of
- Evaluate the practice of students on the MTh in Scottish Church History and Theology auditing undergraduate classes and, instead, consider introducing regular training opportunities, such as fortnightly issue-based seminars
- In support of the very positive efforts being made to increase international recruitment, the Seminary considers formalising all recruitment activity (home and overseas) within a senior management role

Strong Recommendation:

- The Seminary puts in place (by early in session 2018-19) a process to allow all academic staff to maintain regular and direct contact with colleagues involved with postgraduate and research activities at the University.

**Meeting Timetable: Re-Validation of the Bachelor of Theology and Master of Theology
and Validation of the Master of Theology in Missiology**

Edinburgh Theological Seminary, The Mound, Edinburgh
19 February 2018

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| 1030 | Arrive at Edinburgh Theological Seminary <i>Preliminary introductions and tea/coffee</i> | 0:15hrs |
| 1045 | Private meeting of Panel <i>To identify key issues and themes for discussion</i> | 0.30hrs |
| 1115 | Meeting with students | 0:45hrs |
| 1200 | Lunch and Private meeting of Panel | 1:00hrs |
| 1300 | Meeting with Staff <i>To discuss the proposal and identify key issues and themes</i> | 1.00hrs |
| 1400 | Private meeting of the panel | 0.30hrs |
| 1430 | Meeting with Principal and Vice-Principal | 0:30hrs |
| 1500 | Private meeting of the panel | 0.30 hrs |
| 1530 | Finish | |