



This review method
is ESG-compliant

Educational Oversight Review

Free Church of Scotland t/a
Edinburgh Theological Seminary

April 2025

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About this review

This is a report of an Educational Oversight Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Free Church of Scotland t/a Edinburgh Theological Seminary.

EOR consists of a number of components. The Full component is a review of a provider's arrangements for maintaining the academic standards and quality of the courses it offers against the 12 Sector-Agreed Principles contained within the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (2024) (the UK Quality Code). A Full component review will assess a provider against the core requirements of the Home Office in relation to educational oversight and the UK Quality Code as common UK framework. Further information about the Full component of EOR can be found in the [Educational Oversight Review Guidance for Providers](#).

The review took place from 8-10 April 2025 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Ms Alison Jones (Reviewer)
- Dr Peter Rae (Reviewer)
- Mrs Sarah Mullins (Student reviewer).

The QAA Officer for this review was Dr Margaret Johnson.

In Educational Oversight Review (Full component), the QAA review team:

- determines an outcome against each of the Sector-Agreed Principles outlined in the UK Quality Code for Higher Education
- identifies features of good practice
- makes recommendations
- identifies areas of enhancement activity
- determines an overall judgement as to whether the provider is fully aligned with the Sector-Agreed Principles of the UK Quality Code.

The QAA website gives more information [about QAA](#) and its mission. A dedicated section explains the method for [Educational Oversight Review](#) and has links to other informative documents. QAA reviews are evidence-based processes. Review judgements result from the documents review teams see, and the meetings they hold, and draw upon their experience as peer reviewers and student reviewers.

The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) provide the framework for internal and external quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area. QAA's review methods are [compliant with these standards](#), as are the [reports we publish](#). More information is available on our [website](#).

This review was conducted in compliance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).

Executive summary

Edinburgh Theological Seminary (the Provider) is an institution formerly known as the Free Church of Scotland College. The name was changed in 2014 to create a more wide-reaching brand. The Provider is a Validated Institution having Associate Status of the University of Glasgow and seeks to share its rich historic theological heritage by providing unique theological learning opportunities to a wide range of students through its non-validated and validated programmes. FCS continues to act both as parent company and stakeholder. The Provider is governed by the FCS through 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.

The strategic aims and priorities of the Provider are the provision of high quality, degree level theological education for students who wish to engage in church ministry and other related Christian work. This is done principally through the undergraduate programme and postgraduate programme and provides individual degree level courses to students who may not wish to achieve a full degree.

The Provider currently has a total of 80 students with 40 enrolled on the Bachelor of Theology, and 40 across the Master of Theology (taught and research) programme. There are nine full-time and part-time members staff, of who six are academic and three are administrative.

There has been one major change since the last review with a revision of the Bachelor of Theology (BTh) curriculum, approved by the University of Glasgow in February 2024. The revision develops the previous curriculum by providing greater modular flexibility for students who wish to diversify and allows part time (minister-in-training) students the flexibility to attend classes for three days per week while working in local churches on Mondays and Fridays.

The key challenges to the Seminary are the UK-wide shortage of students wishing to study theological education and the challenge of providing a robust distance learning education that maximises its benefits while responding to the challenges of a more isolated learning experience.

In reaching conclusions about the extent to which the Free Church of Scotland t/a Edinburgh Theological Seminary meets the Sector-Agreed Principles, the QAA review team followed the evidence-based review procedure as outlined in the guidance for Educational Oversight Review (July 2024). The Free Church of Scotland t/a Edinburgh Theological Seminary provided the review team with a self-evaluation and supporting evidence. During the review visit, which took place from 8 – 10 April 2025, the review team held a total of six meetings with the Principal, the senior management team, academic staff, professional support staff, students, alumni and external stakeholders.

In summary, the team found one feature of good practice and identified two recommendations for improvement.

Conclusions

The QAA review team reached the following conclusions about the higher education provision at the Free Church of Scotland t/a Edinburgh Theological Seminary.

The QAA review team determines that the Free Church of Scotland t/a Edinburgh Theological Seminary:

- **is fully aligned** with the Sector-Agreed Principles of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education.

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following feature of **good practice**:

- The provider's extensive and detailed engagement and collaboration with key stakeholders, in conceiving and delivering modifications to the revised Bachelor of Theology programme, resulting in enhancement of the student experience, and their progression opportunities. (**Sector-Agreed Principle 7**).

Recommendations

For recommendations that relate to areas for development and enhancement that do not impact on the Sector-Agreed Principle being met the QAA review team makes the following recommendations:

- Enhance the mechanisms to systematically record the actions and outcomes from all monitoring and evaluation activities to ensure transparency and consistency (**Sector-Agreed Principle 5**).
- Take steps to clarify the process to deal with alleged cases of Academic Misconduct by documenting it separately from the Code of Student Conduct to ensure transparency for students (**Sector-Agreed Principle 11**).

Financial sustainability, management and governance

The financial sustainability, management and governance (FSMG) check has been **satisfactorily** completed. The outcome of the FSMG check for **institution** is that **no** material issues were identified.

Explanation of the findings – Sector-Agreed Principles

Principle 1: Taking a strategic approach to managing quality and standards

Providers demonstrate they have a strategic approach to securing academic standards and assuring and enhancing quality that is embedded across the organisation.

Findings

1 The Provider was established in 1843 as the Free Church College and has a clearly identified institutional mission that informs its strategic approach to managing quality and standards. This is delivered through a well-articulated and clearly communicated governance structure. The Seminary Board, which is appointed by the Free Church of Scotland (FCS) and includes external specialist representatives, addresses strategic governance issues. Institutional and academic strategic management is approved and directed by the ETS Senate, which is composed of all full-time staff, a student representative, and external members and advisors. It is collectively responsible for providing the teaching required by the Seminary curriculum and for the maintenance of academic standards.

2 The Provider has a rolling five-year plan developed by the Seminary Board in conjunction with the Senate, that is reviewed and updated annually by the Board. It sets out “the identity, vision and mission of ETS, the values it cherishes, the context in which it operates, the courses it offers to meet its mission objectives, and the resources required to deliver these objectives in terms of personnel, accommodation and finance.”

3 The Provider’s Board of Studies, which reports to the Senate, is responsible for overseeing the Bachelor of Theology (BTh) and Master of Theology (MTh) programmes. Included in its remit is the review of academic regulations, the review of programmes of studies, the consideration of assessment procedures, and receiving reports and recommendations from external examiners. It is responsible for ensuring programmes meet national qualification standards, and the requirements of its validator, the University of Glasgow (UoG).

4 The Provider’s Board of Examiners meets annually, reviews grades and decides on final awards. It is composed of all internal and external examiners, and a representative of the validating university.

5 The Joint Board represents the UoG and the Provider and is chaired by the Clerk of Senate of the University. It meets annually, oversees the validated programmes offered by the provider, receives annual course monitoring reports, considers external examiner reports, and receives a report from the elected student representative.

6 The reports of external examiners are systematically received by the Board of Studies, and responses are periodically noted in the minutes of those meetings. There are external members (both academic and professional) on the Senate, and one or more student representatives on the Provider’s Board, the Senate, the Board of Studies, and the Joint Board.

7 The evidence demonstrates that the Provider has deliberate structures in place which allow it to meet the Principle. The design of systematic processes for review and revision, as demonstrated in the ETS documentation and confirmed in meetings, indicates a strategic intention to ensure academic standards are upheld and reviewed. This is effective because it offers a clearly articulated and implemented governance structure.

8 Overall, the review team concluded that the provider demonstrates that it has a well-developed strategic approach to securing academic standards and assuring and enhancing quality that is embedded across the organisation and therefore **is aligned** with the Sector-Agreed Principle.

Principle 2: Engaging students as partners

Providers take deliberate steps to engage students as active partners in assuring and enhancing the quality of the student learning experience. Engagement happens individually and collectively to influence all levels of study and decision making. Enhancements identified through student engagement activities are implemented, where appropriate, and communicated to staff and students.

Findings

9 Students are provided with clear and robust information on the opportunities available to actively engage in the quality of their educational experience within the Student Partnership document, the website, and in student handbooks, each of which clearly outline the Student Representative Council (SRC) and student feedback mechanisms (see paragraph 17). Robust information for staff on ETS governance, including the Staff Student Liaison Committee (SSLC), and the student survey mechanisms is also available within the Staff Handbook.

10 Students are engaged collectively through an active SRC which includes the SRC President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer and 5 Class Representatives. The SRC President sits on the Joint Board and has a seat on the ETS Senate and the Seminary Board of the Free Church of Scotland. Active engagement from the SRC President is confirmed through ETS Senate minutes, Joint Board minutes, which includes a report from the ETS Student Representative, and the Seminary Board minutes.

11 The Board of Studies also includes student membership with three undergraduate and one postgraduate student. The Board of Studies minutes **confirm** student representatives are present and actively engage in discussions, within a dedicated section for student feedback. Actions related to feedback are noted and assigned to individuals, with updates provided at subsequent meetings, allowing the feedback loop to be closed.

12 SSLC is an opportunity for the entire student body to provide feedback on a range of topics relevant to their educational experience. SSLC minutes **show** some discussion by students, and comments are generally positive and therefore do not consistently result in identified actions. SSLC feeds into the ETS Senate where there is an agenda item to discuss matters referred from committees, including SSLC. There is some evidence of feedback and action resulting from meetings of the SSLC, with one meeting discussing a proposal to change the Course Quality Questionnaires and one meeting including an appendix outlining more robust feedback.

13 SRC roles and representatives are elected at the SRC General Meeting and the SRC Council Constitution **states** that at least one member must be female to encourage diversity. Whilst there is no formal training, the SRC President is supported through a handover process, which is being enhanced for future years and student representatives are supported by the SRC President and members of the ETS team. Student representatives and the SRC President confirmed that they felt supported to undertake the roles effectively.

14 Students are engaged individually through Course Quality Questionnaires (CQQ) and the Student Satisfaction Surveys (SSS). CQQs include questions related to all aspects of the student educational experience such as teaching, learning, assessment, resources and

facilities and there is also a question on inclusion. A CQQ summary is developed for each course, which identifies the outcomes and includes a response from the course lecturer. Whilst participation rates are low for the examples provided, the feedback is positive and therefore does not generally result in stated actions. The provider is working to improve participation rates by delivering the relevant questionnaires during teaching sessions. The CQQs are subsequently reviewed annually at the Board of Studies.

15 The Student Satisfaction Survey also takes place annually and includes questions relevant to the overall student experience. This did not take place in the last academic year due to staff absence, however the staff team felt that they received general student feedback through the remaining informal and formal mechanisms and the intention is to continue with the survey in future years.

16 Both the CQQ and the SSS feed into annual reporting indicating that student feedback is considered within monitoring and evaluation. This is shown in the Annual Course Monitoring Forms which has a section for student feedback from both informal and formal sources, and in the ETS Joint Board Annual Report. However, there is limited written evidence to show that the provider responds to the feedback gathered from these sources and it would be beneficial to have a more systematic approach to recording and monitoring actions to enhance the student experience. (see Principle 5; paragraph 43).

17 Staff and students were able to identify some impacts resulting from student engagement and feedback including changes made to CQQs, changes to course content and changes to course scheduling. The Student Submission is positive about the relationship between staff and students, and students confirmed that informal opportunities to provide feedback and add to discussion are strong and that their voice was valued. The review team noted that students do feel they are engaged as partners, particularly in relation to the role of SRC President, which is supported by the clear and active engagement at all levels, including the Seminary Board within the Free Church of Scotland.

18 Overall, the review team concluded that students are engaged both individually and collectively in assurance and enhancement of the quality of the student learning experience through the Student Representative Council and engagement with student satisfaction surveys, alongside informal discussion which is facilitated by the accessibility of the ETS team. Although there is inconsistency in the approach to recording and monitoring feedback students feel that their voice is valued, and clear examples were given that indicate there is impact. The provider therefore **is aligned** with the Sector-Agreed Principle.

Principle 3: Resourcing delivery of a high-quality learning experience

Providers plan, secure and maintain resources relating to learning, technology, facilities and staffing to enable the delivery and enhancement of an accessible, innovative and high-quality learning experience for students that aligns with the provider's strategy and the composition of the student body.

Findings

19 The Provider states its strategic objectives within the ETS: The Next Five Years document, that sets out a rolling programme of planned developments for theological education and training that is aligned to the vision of the Free Church of Scotland. The main planned initiatives for the next five years include; development of ETS Engage to present solutions to theological, ethical and pastoral issues presented by the churches served by ETS, the development of joint projects with the University of Glasgow, to develop meaningful partnerships with like-minded local ministry training churches, development of the Women in Ministry Module and the Centre for Mission to partner with mission agencies, partner churches and the Free Church of Scotland Mission Board, and to develop PhD level Postgraduate supervision in partnership with the University of Glasgow.

20 The document also specifies clear requirements for learning resources to support delivery of programmes, including staffing, facilities, financial resources, and student number planning to reflect new developments, such as the BTh by distance learning, to enhance recruitment and income.

21 The Seminary Board maintains strong oversight of resourcing through the annual approval and on-going review of the ETS: The Next Five Years document. The Board also maintains responsibility for funding and work allocation, staff appointments and specific role responsibilities.

22 A review of the quality of learning resources is provided within the Annual Report to the Joint Board 2023-24 with action identified to provide assurance and enhancement of the quality of the student experience related to technology, facilities and staffing to both the University and the Provider. Resources that support the delivery of programmes are also standing items for discussion and resolution at Senate meetings. At a recent revalidation event, the UoG, whilst respecting the current ecclesiastical staff profile, recommended that ETS seek greater diversity and staff confirmed that robust discussions were on-going in governance meetings.

23 The Risk Register acknowledges the impact on learning resources arising from the Provider's strategic objectives to increase student numbers by approximately 25% by 2027. Mitigating action was identified to assure the quality of the student's learning experience, including student access to New College Library and MyCampus electronic resources at the UoG and the appointment of part-time staff, including an IT Administrator. The need for continual updating of equipment had also been identified on the Risk Register due to increased popularity of remote learning by students which was reflected in student feedback to the Board of Studies. To mitigate the risk, the Register identified the infrastructure, staffing and training IT needs to support development plans for distance learning delivery within the ETS: The Next Five Years. The 2025 Annual Report to the Joint Board and Senate minutes confirmed that IT facilities were upgraded as required to reflect the increased number of students accessing classes remotely.

24 The ETS Portal is an efficient one-stop shop for students to access information and staff communications. This also holds student, staff and assessment information, providing the benefit of reducing staff workload in inputting data into different systems. Whilst the Portal has its own VLE, staff confirmed that Moodle would be maintained separately as the Portal VLE did not provide plagiarism detection technology to support maintenance of

academic standards of assessment.

25 Students confirmed that learning resources were good in supporting their learning needs, including access to library, online databases, Moodle and IT facilities. Their experience of online learning was positive, allowing them to join remotely and interact with other students attending classes delivered at ETS.

26 Due to the size of the institution, staff advised that learning resource issues are readily identified and addressed at the Course Organisers' Subgroup and reported to Senate. Additional resourcing was captured at annual performance reviews that enabled staff to raise support requirements with the Principal and the Chair of the Seminary Board.

27 Staff confirmed that the College Endowment Fund generously supported staff Continuous Professional Development (CPD) activities and that they were actively engaged in research, funded to undertake degree and PhD study as well as attending conferences and seminars. Staff were required to log activities, which was used to inform annual staff reviews and reporting to Senate and the Seminary Board. Whilst academic staff had access to UoG internal development opportunities, additional access was being sought for professional staff.

28 Overall, the review team concluded that the provider plans, secures and maintains resources relating to learning, technology, facilities, and staffing that enables the delivery and enhancement of an accessible, innovative, and high-quality learning experience for students that aligns with the ETS: The Next Five Years strategic document and reflects the needs of the student body. Students confirmed that they were well-supported in their studies by the availability of accessible learning resources and staff outlined the clear mechanisms in place to maintain oversight and regularly review and enhance resources as required. The provider therefore **is aligned** with the Sector-Agreed Principle.

Principle 4: Using data to inform and evaluate quality

Providers collect, analyse and utilise qualitative and quantitative data at provider, departmental, programme and module levels. These analyses inform decision-making with the aim of enhancing practices and processes relating to teaching, learning and the wider student experience.

Findings

29 ETS is fully aware of its responsibility to collect and store data in accordance with agreed and explicitly communicated data protection policies. Based on the Provider's Data Protection Policy and on staff and student privacy notices the Seminary clearly explains its data protection principles to students and staff in the student and staff handbooks. They identify the data collected, the way it is collected, how it is used, how it might be shared, how it is secured, and how long it is retained. The rights of students and staff, and the process for making complaints about data use are clearly explained.

30 The Provider collects data on patterns of enrolment, progression, withdrawal and retention that is included as part of the Annual Report considered at the Joint Board. Although aggregated data is not formally reviewed by internal committees, individual student performance and progression is carefully considered by Boards of Examiners. The Provider holds data on student characteristics, but it does not examine progression or success data resulting from that information, as the validating university does not require such analysis to be undertaken as part of the review process.

31 The Provider operates two types of student questionnaires: CQQ's collect student feedback on each module or course, while SSS's cover the whole student experience. Faculty members respond to the CQQ's in a written response which is then made available to the class and discussed with the Senate Year representative. Students report that they feel the Seminary is responsive to student feedback. The outcomes of the CQQ's are considered by the Board of Studies and reported on in the Annual Report to the Joint Board. A summary of the SSS is reported to the Seminary Board and is also considered by the Senate. The cycle of student feedback data is clearly illustrated and documented showing the Seminary's attention to the student voice.

32 Overall, the team concluded that the Provider has robust structures and systems in place and that the careful documentation of data protection policies, and their communication to both students and staff, indicates the Seminary's awareness of its responsibilities. Whilst the Self Evaluation Document focuses mainly on collection, management, and storage of data rather than its use, this is covered in the supporting evidence. The granular attention to the student experience is evident in the focus on course monitoring forms, which includes an individual faculty response, and engagement by the Senate and the board of studies and can also be seen in the detailed review of individual performance in the boards of examiners meetings. The provider therefore **is aligned** with the Sector-Agreed Principle.

Principle 5: Monitoring, evaluating and enhancing provision

Providers regularly monitor and review their provision to secure academic standards and enhance quality. Deliberate steps are taken to engage and involve students, staff and external expertise in monitoring and evaluation activity. The outcomes and impact of these activities are considered at provider level to drive reflection and enhancement across the provider.

Findings

33 The Annual Report to the Joint Board provides assurance to both the Provider and UoG, that regular monitoring and review of the Provider's provision is undertaken to secure academic standards and enhance quality.

34 To inform the Annual Report to the Joint Board, standing agenda items for discussion at Senate provide opportunities for regular reporting of matters referred for its consideration by other committees through formal monitoring and review mechanisms that are set out in the Staff Handbook. In considering the evidence provided, it was unclear how the various issues identified through the monitoring and review mechanisms that led to actions and outcomes were captured and reported through the various committees. While committee minutes reflected actions being progressed between meetings, it was difficult to ascertain the timeliness and reporting back to the original source to ensure that the action had been completed.

35 In completing Annual Course Monitoring Forms (ACMF) Course Organisers reflect on feedback received from students and external examiners to identify actions to be taken forward, as well as enhancements to the course delivery and student engagement. Student outcomes are also reported within the ACMF with evaluative comments on student performance and outcomes.

36 Course Organisers meet regularly as a sub-group of Senate to review the operation of the programmes each term, and to consider the SRC President's written report that draws on feedback canvassed from students about the identified positives and challenges over the term. An annual report for each course is also shared with the Seminary Board.

37 Students are actively engaged and involved in monitoring and review activities through SSLC meetings which elicits feedback on the student experience for reporting to Senate. Individual student feedback is drawn from annual CQQ's, a summary of which is considered by Course Organisers and Student Representatives. Student representatives present the CQQ outcomes to the Board of Studies as part of their wider reporting to highlight positive areas as well as matters for further action. Students were complimentary regarding their involvement in review and monitoring activities and felt that positive changes had been made in response to their feedback.

38 In addition to student feedback, the Board of Studies meets twice a year to review external examiner reports and the ACMFs, and on feedback from the Course Organisers Sub-Group on the operation of the programme. It refers matters arising from the reviews to Senate for approval, as well as addressing issues remitted from Senate and the Joint Board. Meetings with staff held during the visit confirmed that the Board of Studies' meetings were a useful mechanism to discuss issues and identify action to be implemented for enhancement. Examples of areas discussed included amendments to assessment methods, changes to textbooks and a more consistent approach to providing feedback across the Provider.

39 External examiners are engaged appropriately in examination processes but there is currently no systematic process by which recommendations from examiners are considered, responded to, and embedded in future practice. However, the team noted that the Provider has committed to introduce such a system from the new academic year (September 2025), in response to its latest validation review, and its implementation will be reviewed by the validating body. An annual review of programmes is produced for UoG, and these are discussed at meetings of Senate prior to their submission and consideration at meetings of the Joint Board.

40 The Joint Board has oversight of the programmes, undertaking periodic reviews, and making recommendations to Senate based on the outcomes of its discussions, including programme validation. Student representation at the Joint Board allows for feedback on their learning experiences and to raise any matters for attention. In addition to the Annual Report, the Joint Board also considers external examiner reports, the Seminary responses to the reports and student achievement, progression and retention.

41 Opportunities are available for employers/stakeholders to contribute to enhancements to the curriculum and student experience. During the visit, stakeholder representatives advised that the Provider was flexible in meeting the needs of students and receptive to feedback, including online delivery of its programme. Stakeholders had been fully involved in the updating of the ETS: The Next Five Years and updating the curriculum and timetabling as part of the 2024 revalidation of the BTh and MTh programmes.

42 The updating of programmes for the revalidation event was a recent example of an enhancement initiative (see Enhancement initiatives paragraph 100) at Provider level that drew upon feedback from all staff, students, and stakeholders to produce the revised curriculum and increase modular flexibility. Staff advised that the revised programmes would be reviewed after the first year of operation to determine impact upon students and the learning environment and the recommendations contained within the Revalidation Report.

43 Evidence considered throughout the Review confirmed that regular monitoring and review activities took place to secure academic standards and enhance quality. Minutes of meetings capture discussion of issues and actions arising for implementation at each level that are assigned to designated personnel. However, information on actions and outcomes were not consistently collected for each activity in a way that clearly showed the timeline for progress and closure. The Review Team therefore **recommends** that the Provider enhances the mechanisms to systematically record the actions and outcomes from all monitoring and evaluation activities to ensure transparency and consistency.

44 Overall, the review team concluded that there are well-established mechanisms that allow reporting and reflection on activities undertaken at all levels that engages staff and students and draws on feedback from external examiners, and in most cases, identifies actions and enhancements for implementation. The provider therefore **is aligned** with the Sector-Agreed Principle.

Principle 6: Engaging in external review and accreditation

Providers engage with external reviews to give assurance about the effectiveness of their approach to managing quality and standards. External reviews offer insights about the comparability of providers' approaches and generate outcomes that providers can use to enhance their policies and practices. Reviews may be commissioned by providers, form part of a national quality framework or linked to professional recognition and actively include staff, students and peers. They can be undertaken by representative organisations, agencies or professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) with recognised sector expertise according to the provision being reviewed.

Findings

45 The Provider engages regularly with three external bodies; the UoG, QAA, and the FCS, which involve the Seminary in systematic, regular review processes, and which offer external critique and assurance about the Seminary's approach to managing quality and standards.

46 The provider is subject to regular review by its validating body, as detailed in the Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) and the Code of Practice for Validated Provision. The Seminary has been validated by the UoG since 2001-2, and the most recent revalidation event took place in February 2024, resulting in an extension of validation for a further six years. Where University reviews highlight recommendations for change, the Seminary has been swift to consider these, and to move to implement such recommendations.

47 The Seminary produces an annual report for the University, which is discussed and reviewed internally, and then considered by the Joint Board. Programme review and revision is undertaken following the framework provided by the University and shows the Seminary's own familiarity with the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF), whose level descriptors are reflected in programme aims and learning outcomes. The recently revised BTh programme shows that the Provider is aware of the need to ensure outcomes are consistent with the appropriate level of the SCQF, and the relevant subject benchmarks.

48 The Seminary has been subject to QAA review since 2012 and has systematically responded to and implemented the recommendations of review teams. The Provider is fully supportive of QAA requirements, and ETS staff regard these as helpful pointers to an ever-improving provision of theological education. The Provider is aware of and has implemented the revised Quality Code for Higher Education 2024 and regularly reviews its practices and procedures to ensure alignment with relevant Core and Common practices.

49 The Free Church of Scotland is 'both parent company and stakeholder,' and acts as a professional body in determining the Seminary's effectiveness in serving its key constituency. It undertakes a quinquennial review, which is presented to the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland. The purpose of the review is to ascertain the fitness of the education and training provided by ETS to equip students for various types of pastoral ministry. The 2019 review resulted in the recommendation of wide-ranging structural changes to the Seminary, all of which have been considered, and many of which have subsequently been implemented. These include changes to the structure of internal committees, revisions to teaching patterns to enable greater flexibility for ministerial students, and the development of new programme initiatives.

50 The Provider is fully committed to embracing the value of external review, and regular reviews are key to the institution's strategic direction. Internal monitoring activity is shaped to respond to the three bodies who undertake these regular reviews, and an awareness of the expectations of the QAA, the UoG, and the FCS is evident throughout the academic staff. Students are also aware of the various external review and accreditation bodies to which the Provider is accountable, and value the contribution that these bring to the Seminary. The expectation of the QAA and the UoG are explicitly referenced in revision and review of programmes, in discussions at Senate, and in the key documents which express the Seminary's identity and practices. External review and accreditation are well understood by the provider and embedded in their practices.

51 Overall, the review team concluded that the assiduous attention to external review and validation bodies, and the comprehensive adoption of recommendations produced by such external review processes, is evidence that the provider is fully compliant in this regard. The provider therefore **is aligned** with the Sector-Agreed Principle.

Principle 7: Designing, developing, approving and modifying programmes

Providers design, develop, approve and modify programmes and modules to ensure the quality of provision and the academic standards of awards are consistent with the relevant Qualifications Framework. Providers ensure their provision and level of qualifications are comparable to those offered across the UK and, where applicable, The Framework of Qualifications for The European Higher Education Area.

Findings

52 The Provider consistently frames and shapes its programmes and modules in line with the appropriate level of the SCQF, and considers the relevant benchmark statements, which are referenced in the documentation. Programme handbooks offer comprehensive information on the nature of the relevant award and describe the assessment processes and outcomes of study. These documents are readily available to students in hard copy, and through the Seminary's student portal. ETS is also mindful of its accountability to the FCS, its parent body, and the professional ministerial formation that is required to ensure graduates are 'fit to practice' in professional ministry settings.

53 The Seminary's Staff Handbook clearly indicates that the responsibility for reviewing and approving the programmes of studies and any proposed alterations, and the reviewing and approving of individual courses within the programme of studies, rests with the Board of Studies. Where programmes are reviewed and revised, they are done so within the design of the appropriate framework and subject benchmarks, and definitive documentation is both lodged with the UoG, and, when approved, with the Seminary itself. The approved specifications form the basis for the programme handbooks which are designed for each award. Members of Faculty are made aware of the responsibilities of validation, and of the importance of knowing the UK Quality Code and are expected to be familiar with the Code's expectations and principles.

54 The Provider produces definitive documents where programmes are developed or revised, and these are formally approved by the validating university. Subsequently, these documents are the basis for the programme specifications provided to students in the relevant programme and course handbooks, and through the student portal on the ETS website.

55 The Provider clearly articulates its commitment to equality of opportunity and, recognising the diversity of staff and students, aims to provide a work, learning, research, and teaching environment free from all forms of discrimination. The Seminary "offers safe spaces for all, regardless of identity, background or disability." The process of revising the BTh has been driven by the attempt to ensure flexibility of access for all students, ensuring part time students, or those with ministry assignments, are not disadvantaged.

56 The processes of review and revision of programmes involve both academic partners at the UoG and external engagement and evaluation, facilitated primarily through the participation of external members on the Senate, the input of external examiners, and the consistent engagement of key stakeholders. Several of the recent structural revisions to the BTh degree were initiated by these external stakeholders, who were key participants in the exercise. Student involvement in programme revision is secured both through the inclusion of student voices on all pertinent Seminary committees (including four student representatives on the Board of Studies) and, where appropriate, through SSLC meetings to consult directly with affected students. The provider's extensive and detailed engagement and collaboration with key stakeholders in conceiving and delivering the

modification of the revised Bachelor of Theology programme, resulting in enhancement of the student experience, and their progression opportunities, **is a feature of good practice.**

57 Overall, the review team concludes that the Provider's effective engagement with its validating partner, employer and partner bodies, and its intentional and thorough engagement with student representatives, is evidence that the provider **is aligned** with the Sector-Agreed Principle.

Principle 8: Operating partnerships with other organisations

Providers and their partners agree proportionate arrangements for effective governance to secure the academic standards and enhance the quality of programmes and modules that are delivered in partnership with others. Organisations involved in partnership arrangements agree and communicate the mutual and specific responsibilities in relation to delivering, monitoring, evaluating, assuring and enhancing the learning experience.

Findings

58 The MoA sets out the mutual and specific responsibilities of the partnership arrangement between ETS and UoG that have been agreed in relation to the delivery, monitoring, evaluation, assurance and enhancement of the learning experience. The minutes of the Joint Board noted that a successful Partnership Review and Renewal of the MoA took place in September 2023.

59 The Provider is defined as a Validated Institution of the University of Glasgow within the MoA, with associate status that requires University involvement in a range of academic processes as part of the validation arrangement, including approval of external examiners, and the conferment of awards. Involvement includes a university representative on the Board of Studies and Board of Examiners. The Provider's policies and procedures are required to conform to those of the University's and to be approved by the University, with some exceptions delegated to the Provider's Senate.

60 The University's Code of Practice for Validated Provision sets out the procedures for programmes to be developed and delivered in partnership. Under the terms of the MoA, the Provider has limited delegated responsibility for academic standards and quality assurance of the validated programmes. As specified in the MoA, the Joint Board maintains oversight of the annual review and monitoring of the validated programmes through the production of an Annual Report.

61 The ETS Risk Register highlights the potential risk to ETS if its validated status was ended by the University, noting that the MoA provides for existing students to complete their studies and allow time for the Provider to seek an alternative partner. The Principal confirmed the strong relationship with the University, notwithstanding the limited opportunities for engagement between the two institutions due to time constraints.

62 Staff confirmed that the main point of contact with the University was through the Joint Board, which enabled useful discussion, and the University link person who provided insight into university processes. Although academic staff had opportunities to undertake University CPD activities, access to these activities was still being negotiated for professional/support staff. Students confirmed that they did not visit the University, but that they had met University staff at induction events and at the Joint Board meetings.

63 Whilst there is a formal relationship with the FCS, the Provider also engages with stakeholder partners to support student recruitment and provide support for delivery of academic programmes. Wider partnerships are fostered with training churches to produce ministries in line with its mission and students undertake practice training in church placement settings alongside their academic studies. Student placements are monitored by the supervising minister in each church to ensure ministerial skills are implemented effectively, but this does not contribute to the award of academic credits.

64 Overall, the review team concluded that the Provider and the UoG have agreed proportionate arrangements for effective governance to secure the academic standards and enhance the quality of programmes and modules that are delivered under the partnership

agreement. Mutual and specific responsibilities between the two institutions are clearly set out in the MoA in relation to delivering, monitoring, evaluating, assuring and enhancing the learning experience. The Provider therefore **is aligned** with the Sector-Agreed Principle.

Principle 9: Recruiting, selecting and admitting students

Providers operate recruitment, selection and admissions processes that are transparent, fair and inclusive. Providers maintain and publish accurate, relevant and accessible information about their provision, enabling students to make informed choices about their studies and future aspirations.

Findings

65 The MoA between the provider and the UoG clearly states the provider has full responsibility for recruitment, selection and admissions.

66 Prospective students are provided with information through the website, Open Days, which are advertised on the website, and marketing materials. The provider website has robust information that introduces prospective students to the provider and the courses on offer. This includes clear and accessible information related to entry requirements and admissions processes, supported by relevant policies, as well as clear overviews of the courses on offer and general information regarding the student experience and student support.

67 The website and marketing materials are checked regularly for accuracy and currency, with further checks undertaken by the partner university, which is evidenced through the Joint Board minutes. Students stated that they felt supported through the application process and that the information available to them enabled them to make informed decisions. Staff also confirmed they felt supported to engage in recruitment activity through the information provided and regular discussion, and that they were updated regularly in relation to any changes to ensure currency.

68 General admissions information is outlined in the ETS Admissions Policy including the roles and responsibilities for admissions and the commitment to operating a consistent and fair process. This is further supported by the Undergraduate Admissions Policy and Postgraduate Admissions Policy which provide detailed information on the specific processes, enabling consistency within the approach, and provides expected timelines. The commitment to an inclusive admissions process is outlined in the Disability Policy, which also notes the process for identification of additional support during the application process. This is supported by relevant questions within the online application form (see paragraphs 79 – 81).

69 ETS Policy and Procedure for the Recognition of Prior Learning for Admissions clearly defines the procedure for and consideration by the relevant Director of Studies of prior certified and prior experiential learning. This was confirmed by relevant staff at the review visit and both the Joint Board minutes and Senate minutes include confirmation of approval of credit transfer.

70 All prospective students complete an online application and are invited to an online or face-to-face interview. The provider ensures fairness and consistency through a clear Undergraduate and Postgraduate Applicant Interview Policy and interview templates for both undergraduate and postgraduate interviews. Staff involved in the interview process confirmed they felt supported to ensure fair and consistent admissions decisions through the interview guidance and templates, and through consistency of interview panel constitution.

71 Applicants have access to a clear and transparent process to request feedback or appeal an admissions decision through the ETS Policy and Procedure for Admissions Feedback, Appeals and Complaints. While students are directed to this on request, the review team noted that signposting to this could be clearer in information provided to unsuccessful students.

72 Overall, the review team concluded that policies and procedures for recruitment, application, selection and admissions are clearly articulated, fair and easily accessible to students. Prospective students are provided with detailed information prior to commencing their studies, which is checked for accuracy and currency, and students confirm that this is sufficient to enable them to make informed choices. Fairness and consistency in the selection and admissions processes are ensured and staff feel supported to undertake relevant activity effectively. The Provider therefore **is aligned** with the Sector-Agreed Principle.

Principle 10: Supporting students to achieve their potential

Providers facilitate a framework of support for students that enables them to have a high-quality learning experience and achieve their potential as they progress in their studies. The support structure scaffolds the academic, personal and professional learning journey, enabling students to recognise and articulate their progress and achievements.

Findings

73 The Director of Studies role is a key mechanism for supporting students' academic, personal and professional development. As outlined in the Director of Studies remit, each student is assigned a Director of Studies by the Principal and students are informed of the name as part of the registration process. The Directors of Studies are expected to meet with each student within the first fortnight and then at least once more during the academic year. Staff and students confirmed that regular contact with the Director of Studies takes place, enabling relevant support to be provided at key transition points.

74 Information on award outcomes and processes is provided to students in student handbooks, and to potential students through the ETS website. [\[www.ets.ac.uk\]](http://www.ets.ac.uk) Definitive documents, approved by the validated partner, act as the primary source of information on programmes, and are communicated to students through the respective student handbooks.

75 Students' academic development is also supported within the curriculum, through various resources made available through the library and on the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), and through the 'Writing Labs' which provide the opportunity for support with upcoming assessments. Students were positive about the support available to them to develop academic skills and noted the value of the Writing Labs.

76 Students' personal development is supported predominantly by the Director of Studies but students were also positive about the accessibility of the wider ETS staff team who are well qualified to provide support with pastoral issues. Both staff and students were able to give examples of further support that was provided where required, such as support to access external counselling services.

77 Students' professional development is again discussed with the Director of Studies at key transition points, and is further supported through sharing of relevant opportunities, such as upcoming relevant vacancies, networking through events and seminars and advice and guidance related to further study.

78 The Accessible and Inclusive Learning Policy showcases a commitment to ensuring all students can equally participate in all aspects of teaching and learning through an inclusive learning environment for all. This is further supported by the Disability Policy which outlines the role of the Disability Coordinator in supporting students with additional support needs and the process for implementing reasonable adjustments. Reports from the Disability Coordinator/Officer are a standing item on the Senate meeting, and minutes evidence reporting of planned screenings, outcomes and sharing of advice to staff.

79 Students are asked to state any additional support needs at the point of application, enabling early identification, as well as throughout their studies. The Disability Coordinator can confer with the UoG Student Disability Service to arrange a dyslexia screening assessment if required and facilitates any reasonable adjustments.

80 Information is available and accessible to all students on the support services available, including for additional support needs, within the undergraduate and postgraduate student handbooks and students were able to provide examples of the process being followed and resulting in appropriate reasonable adjustments. Staff are also clearly informed about the support available within the Staff Handbook. Staff confirmed that they understood their role in relation to supporting students to succeed and were able to provide examples of reasonable adjustments made because of the processes outlined, including technological support and additional time for assessments.

81 Overall, the review team concluded that students are supported to achieve their potential through the Director of Studies, who has a key role in supporting students' academic, personal and professional development, and through access to resources and relevant services. Students with additional support needs are supported by the Disability Coordinator, with access to the UoG Student Disability Service, and reasonable adjustments are made where required to ensure inclusivity. Students feel that they are supported effectively through both the formal and informal mechanisms. The Provider therefore **is aligned** with the Sector-Agreed Principle.

Principle 11: Teaching, learning and assessment

Providers facilitate a collaborative and inclusive approach that enables students to have a high-quality learning experience and to progress through their studies. All students are supported to develop and demonstrate academic and professional skills and competencies. Assessment employs a variety of methods, embodying the values of academic integrity, producing outcomes that are comparable across the UK and recognised globally.

Findings

82 The Provider's collaborative and inclusive approach to enable students to have a high- quality learning experience and progress through their studies is set out in the Staff Handbook. The validation document for the BTh and MTh programmes outlines the specific learning and teaching strategies, and assessment and progression requirements for each programme that are approved through UoG processes.

83 The Accessible and Inclusive Learning Policy was implemented in response to the recommendations of the Validation Panel in 2018 to enhance existing inclusive practices, as noted in the Annual report. The Disability Policy also promotes an inclusive, accessible and supportive learning environment with reasonable adjustments made to accommodate individual students' needs for access, study and examinations.

84 A review of the quality of the learning opportunities is included in the Annual Report to the Joint Board, noting the variety of methods used across programmes to achieve an appropriate balance between didactic and consultative delivery. Technological developments, including Moodle and the Portal, have improved inclusivity and accessibility of learning materials and course information. The benefits of online learning, particularly for part-time students, those with family and church-based training scheme commitments were acknowledged in meetings with students, staff and stakeholders.

85 The Staff Handbook identifies Peer Review as a key staff development component to enhance teaching practices. Staff confirmed that Senate ensures observation of teaching is undertaken once every two years, and also determines which member of staff is observed, and by whom, using Peer Review questionnaires. The opportunity for Course Organisers to identify how staff effectiveness as teachers may improve is provided in the ACMF's which are then considered by the Course Organisers' Sub-Group and reported to Senate.

86 Enhancements to course delivery and student engagement are reflected in the ACMF that enables Course Organisers to consider opportunities for students to develop and demonstrate their academic and professional skills and competencies. Students advised that the revised timetable allowed them to time to gain employment as well as enhancing their ministry skills alongside their academic studies.

87 Assessment and progression requirements are agreed at programme validation. The Programme Handbook and the Code of Assessment set out the key points that includes the General Assessment Policy, which follows the University's Code of Assessment. Within their reports, University appointed External Examiners comment on the assessment and feedback processes, together with the standard of marking, alignment with benchmarks and comparability of outcomes with other institutions. External Examiners attend the Board of Examiners to review and confirm student grades and programme awards, including consideration of any individual cases.

88 Students confirmed that the Student Handbooks provide clear information on assessment requirements and grading, including extensions and penalties applied for late

submission of coursework. They agreed that the quality of feedback on their work was very helpful with the opportunity to discuss this with their tutors to help them improve as they progress through their programme. Whilst they were aware of the opportunity to submit an academic appeal, no students had made use of the process.

89 Students confirmed that they receive guidance on good academic practice in lectures, in the Code of Student Conduct and within Programme and Student Handbooks, supplemented by guidance on Moodle. They were required to submit their coursework through Turnitin in Moodle to identify possible plagiarism but were unaware of any identified cases of academic misconduct. Whilst a specific Policy on the use of Artificial Intelligence has been introduced to uphold academic integrity practices, the academic misconduct procedure is subsumed within the Code of Student Conduct. In view of the rising cases of academic misconduct across the sector and the importance of upholding good academic integrity, the Review Team **recommends** that the provider take steps to clarify the process to deal with alleged cases of Academic Misconduct by documenting it separately from the Code of Student Conduct to ensure transparency for students.

90 Overall, the review team concluded that the Provider facilitates a collaborative and inclusive approach to enable students to have a high-quality learning experience and to progress through their studies. All students are supported and provided with opportunities to develop and demonstrate academic and professional skills and competencies within their programmes. Varied assessment methods are used which uphold the values of academic integrity. Monitoring and review mechanisms confirm that student outcomes are comparable across the UK and recognised globally. The Provider therefore **is aligned** with the Sector- Agreed Principle.

Principle 12: Operating concerns, complaints and appeals processes

Providers operate processes for complaints and appeals that are robust, fair, transparent and accessible, and clearly articulated to staff and students. Policies and processes for concerns, complaints and appeals are regularly reviewed and the outcomes are used to support the enhancement of provision and the student experience.

Findings

91 Student concerns can be raised through the student engagement mechanisms that are outlined under Principle 2 Engaging students as partners and through informal discussion facilitated by the accessibility of the ETS staff team.

92 As outlined in the MoA, the provider has shared responsibility for student complaints. The Provider is expected to operate a complaints procedure that aligns with the university partner and report any complaints within the Annual Report.

93 The Student Complaints procedure clearly articulates what is included in the policy and encourages informal resolution with information on relevant staff to approach. The procedure then sets out a 2-stage formal process. The first stage is a formal complaint in writing to the Principal. If the student is not satisfied with the outcome of the Principal's investigation, then the second stage is to submit a complaint in writing to the Seminary Complaints Committee, through the Secretary of the Seminary Board. Each stage is clearly outlined, and clear timeframes are provided.

94 Academic appeals are a shared responsibility, with a Joint Appeals Committee established by the Joint Board. The grounds for appeal are clearly set out in the Codes of Procedure for Appeals within the University of Glasgow Academic Regulations noting that students are not able to appeal marks or decisions by examiners but are able to appeal on the grounds of unfair procedure or medical evidence. Candidates must appeal in writing to the Clerk to the Joint Board within 14 days and a preliminary disposal takes place where the Convenor, with 2 members of the Joint Appeals Committee, can dismiss the appeal, refer it to a full meeting of the Joint Appeals Committee which meets within 20 days, or refer it directly to the Board of Examiners. The Joint Appeals Committee then decides on the matter and a report is made to the Joint Board. The process is fair and transparent, with appropriate timelines and the ability to appeal to the University Senate is noted.

95 Students are informed about student complaints procedures and are signposted to the Code of Procedures for Appeals in relevant handbooks and staff are provided with information in the Staff Handbook ensuring these are accessible and transparent. Students and staff confirmed that they were aware of the formal processes, noting their accessibility in the relevant handbooks.

96 A summary of academic appeals and academic related complaints is recorded in the Joint Board Annual Report. However, as there have been no appeals or complaints since the previous review visit the review team have not been able to explore the procedures in practice.

97 Overall, clear, transparent procedures are available to students that outline the process for both complaints and appeals. Whilst no academic appeals or complaints have been made, and therefore the review team were unable to explore this in practice, meetings with both staff and students confirmed awareness of policies and provided confidence that students would be supported to access these effectively. The Provider therefore **is aligned** with the Sector-Agreed Principle.

Enhancement initiatives

Commentary on institutional approach to enhancement

98 The Annual Report to the Joint Board provides assurance to both the Provider and the UoG, that regular monitoring and review of the Provider's provision is undertaken to secure academic standards and enhance quality. To inform the Annual Report, standing agenda items for discussion at Senate provide opportunities for regular reporting of matters referred for its consideration by other committees through formal monitoring and review mechanisms that are set out in the Staff Handbook. In completing Annual Course Monitoring Forms (ACMF) Course Organisers reflect on feedback received from students and external examiners to identify actions to be taken forward, as well as enhancements to the course delivery and student engagement.

99 Students are actively engaged and involved in monitoring and review activities through SSLC meetings that elicits feedback on the student experience to be reported to Senate. Individual student feedback is drawn from annual CQQ's, a summary of which is considered by Course Organisers and Student Representatives. In addition to student feedback, the Board of Studies meets twice a year to review external examiner reports and the ACMFs, and on feedback from Course Organisers on the operation of the programme. It refers matters arising from the reviews to Senate for approval, as well as addressing issues remitted from Senate and the Joint Board. Meetings with staff held during the visit confirmed that the Board of Studies' meetings were a useful mechanism to discuss issues and identify actions to be implemented for enhancement. Examples of enhancement included changes to the CQQ's, enhanced course content and course rescheduling to accommodate student needs.

100 The updating of programmes for the revalidation event (February 2024) is an example of an enhancement initiative at provider level that drew upon feedback and discussions with all staff, students, and stakeholders to produce the revised curriculum and increase modular flexibility. The revised curriculum responds to all of the deficiencies of the old one and provides an enhanced offering, more suited to the requirements of the marketplace. Staff advised that the revised programmes would be reviewed after the first year of operation to determine impact upon students and the learning environment and the implementation of the recommendations contained within the Revalidation Report.

101 Enhancements to the membership and remit of the Senate and Seminary Board have been introduced including, two additional academic members of Senate that provide enhanced external input, and a student representative that further ensures regular student input in the design, delivery and overall management of validated and other courses within the Seminary. The Senate has also devoted a greater proportion of its attention to more reflective and pedagogical discussion on aspects of its educational strategy. A continued attention to these aspects has further enhanced the overall quality of ETS provision and has sharpened the focus of its mission.

102 The success and impact of these enhancement activities will be measured and evaluated through employer/stakeholder reaction, student feedback, analysis of recruitment numbers and progression to further studies and successful employment in ministerial settings.

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

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