QAA Action Plan January 2020

While the process of regular review by the QAA is onerous, it always provides a good opportunity to ensure that our structures and procedures are in line with the Revised Quality Code for Higher Education as we continue to offer theological education at ETS.

The last major Higher Education Review (Plus) took place in September 2016.

There were four main areas on which the review was focused. These are listed below together with appropriate action points, and any additional areas identified for action in the QAA Review 2019.

1. The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies.

This met UK expectations. Thus, the Seminary has secure frameworks to ensure that standards are maintained at appropriate levels and that the definitive record of each programme is used to govern the award of academic credit and qualifications.

*Action*

**2016.** Continue to maintain the frameworks in line with the QAA Quality Code for Higher Education, applying these standards rigorously to our present programmes: B.Th, and M.Th (by Taught Courses) and M.Th (by Research); and to the proposed postgraduate degree – Master of Theology in Missiology.

**2019-20 update.**

ETS is in the process of addressing and engaging with the revised Quality Code. The Seminary identifies that the Quality Code’s Expectations for Standards and for Quality are the key overarching principles that shape the delivery of its provision. We have set out a detailed description in our Annual Return in 2019 showing how these are addressed through its policies and procedures.

We have reviewed the Expectations for Standards and for Quality and the related Core and Common Practices; subsequently, we have reflected on the extent to which current activity is convergent with the requirements of the revised Quality Code. This has included consideration of validation activity, engagement with Subject Benchmarks, content of Staff and Student Handbooks, admissions, assessment, committee structure, student engagement, and resourcing.

At present, with particular reference to the revised Quality Code’s Common Practices, the Seminary is reviewing and restructuring its Senate. Its aim is to strengthen the use of external expertise, along with student and stakeholder representation, in the management of quality.
The strengthening of the Senate is due to take place over the 2019-20 academic session. Once complete, the Seminary intends to set up a full review of programme design and delivery with a view to ensuring that the revised Quality Code is fully engaged with, and that students are engaged individually and collectively in the design of new programmes. The restructuring of the Senate commenced in May 2019 and now includes the Student Council President as a full member. In addition, the Seminary anticipates that it will involve student year representatives in its review activities, where appropriate.

Further implementation was originally intended to take place early in 2020. However, due to a combination of unforeseen administration staff pressures, and the extensive preparation required for teaching and learning during the COVID pandemic, implementation of the review was postponed. It is expected to resume in June 2020.

2. The quality of student learning opportunities.

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

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

**Action**

2016. Continue to ensure that our use of information technology is effectively used within our distance learning programme to deliver the same student learning experience for all our students, on and off campus.

Continue to maintain a collegial ethos at ETS where all students are able to develop academically, personally and vocationally. We commend the student initiative in introducing a 'buddy' system for all new students, and the variety of social functions which help to build collegiate bonds which will often follow through into future areas of employment and service.

2019-20 Update. Our IT for Distance Learning was further refined with the introduction of class microphones in Summer 2019. These have proved effective for conducting class discussions with both local and remote students.

As the student body continues to grow, it is more challenging to ensure that the collegial ethos is maintained. We work with the SRC and its President very closely to ensure that this remains a strength of the learning experience at ETS.

The review team made three recommendations in respect of the quality of student learning opportunities.

The first recommendation relates to the need to strengthen the process for internal moderation of marks.
**Action**

**2016.** The Senate have updated their General Assessment Policy ensuring that the process of internal moderation is clearly laid out. All Course Organisers will take note of the updated policy. This will also be reported to the Board of Studies at its next meeting.

**2019-20 Update.** The General Assessment Policy is always kept under review. It was renamed the Bachelor of Theology: Code of Assessment in 2018. It is incorporated into the BTh Programme Handbook and the Staff Handbook.

**The second recommendation follows from the lack of formal oversight of placement provision.**

**Action**

**2016.** Professor Akroyd has drawn up an updated Placement Policy which has been agreed by the Senate. Following consultation with the student body, this will be implemented in the second semester of the 2016-17 session. This will also be reported to the Board of Studies at its next meeting.

**2019-20 Update.** The Seminary reviewed its updated Placement Policy, and, in response to the 2018 Annual Monitoring Visit, introduced an approach to risk assessment in 2019. However, it has not yet been implemented because to date, no student has chosen an elective that includes a placement. The Seminary has therefore completed the requirement from the last monitoring visit, and it will have the opportunity to evaluate its effectiveness or impact when a placement is undertaken.

**The third recommendation is in respect of the development of an annual cycle of professional development opportunities for staff.**

**Action**

**2016.** While the Senate regularly discuss and take action on professional development opportunities for staff, the Senate agreed that it would be appropriate to draw up a formal ETS Staff Development Policy. This will also be reported to the Joint Board and to the Seminary Board.

**2019-20 Update.** The ETS Staff Development Policy continues to be implemented. Reports are now brought to the Senate and appropriate one-to-one feedback is now expected to be given to each Staff member by the Chairman of the Seminary Board who conducts the reviews along with the ETS Principal. Attendance at academic conferences takes place in a manner that takes account of the main ETS teaching timetable.

**3. The quality of the information about learning opportunities.**

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

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

**Action**

2016. The Senate agreed to ensure that the information provided is constantly updated and accessible to all staff and students as appropriate.

2019-20 Update. The Senate continue to ensure that all appropriate documentation is reviewed and updated before the next academic session.

4. The enhancement of student learning opportunities.

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

**Action**

2016. The Senate agreed to ensure that students are included in any proposed enhancement of student learning opportunities, the Vice-Principal to ensure that the SRC President is informed of all developments, and invited to all committee meetings as appropriate in order that he, in turn, might communicate providing a means by which administrative and academic staff may benefit from and communicate with the student body.

2019-20 Update. The Senate review of student learning opportunities is due to take place over the 2020-21 academic session. As the SRC President is now formally part of the Senate, it is expected that consultation with the student cohorts will be even more extensive.