

SG-GETE – European church consultation report

March 2018

Overall conclusion

The responses concerning the quality of theological education came mostly from European church leaders. Overall, it is encouraging to see that overall satisfaction ranked high. The main areas of concern relate to providing more opportunities spiritual formation and character education, putting more emphasis on practice, developing a greater awareness and engagement with contemporary realities, broadening the present curricula and generally strengthening the relationship with the church. Other areas mentioned for improvement were hermeneutics, communication skills and delivery issues.

Concerning the ICETE SG-GETE accreditation standards, the response was very positive, with explicit praise for select standards and some concerns raised about feasibility, balance and relationship to context.

Suggestions for revisions of the SG-GETE following this consultation are found at the end of this report.

General information

- The survey ran for 4 months
- Invitees included individual contacts and a formal invitation to all EEA alliances
- 36 responded
 - 53% were church pastors
 - 3% church members
 - 21% were missionaries or mission leaders
 - 23% were other (leaders of alliances, elders, academics, church employees)
- 84% were European

A message to theological schools:

- The overall core for the relevance of theological education to the needs of church and society was very high: 3.8/4
- Few explicit comments were made about what is being done well
- Several themes emerged. They are ranked here in order, from the most to the least recurring in the comments:
 1. Theological education needs to do better in character education and spiritual formation. The two categories are mentioned separately but summed together under 'general formation' this is the most recurring theme. This includes integration of academics and spirituality, more emphasis on spiritual formation and disciplines, more help in maintaining spiritual health, but also a greater consideration for personal developing, general human flourishing, integrity, character formation and relational aspects.
 2. Theological education needs more emphasis on practice. This includes more practical placements, more opportunities for application, learning more practical methodologies, and integration between theories and practice.

3. Theological education needs to be better connected with contemporary social realities to not lose relevance. This includes more dialogue on current issues, more social and cultural analysis and engagement and efforts to make Bible and theology relevant to current contexts.
4. Theological education needs to broaden its curriculum. This includes more dialogue with other Christian traditions and other religions, engagement with other disciplines and more teaching in ethics.
5. Theological education needs stronger links with the local church. This includes working more with local congregations, involving church leaders in 'translating theology' into real life, more mentoring in churches, more direct input on church life in the taught curriculum.
6. Theological education needs more emphasis on biblical hermeneutics. This includes preparation in the original languages, exegesis and interpretation skills.
7. Theological education needs a greater focus on skill development, most notably related to communication skills of teaching and preaching.
8. Theological education also needs to improve delivery. This includes patterns of continued learning, more flexibility, more accessibility, lowered costs.

Comments on Rome Roadmap

- General feedback is very positive. Explicit mention of:
 - Well defined competencies for students
 - Clear identity statements that are integrated into the school
 - Development of healthy communities
 - Credit allocation for community-based pedagogies, experiential learning and service-learning
- Some concerns:
 - Over the use of the term 'evangelical' as not-inclusive
 - The extent to which the accreditation framework can be transferrable worldwide (especially where resources are limited)
 - Feasibility for small colleges that are financially vulnerable and lack the capacity to operate at this level. Perhaps alternatives should be provided for them.
 - That small colleges compete rather than cooperate
 - That academic integrity and the abilities of critical thinking that protect the church from error are lost in holistic education
 - Theological schools should be able to communicate to society why their training is important in order to help students take their place in a secularizing society
 - That schools have feedback mechanisms from the contexts where their graduates are ministering

Suggestions for revision of the Rome Roadmap

- Under A1 – that speaking of identity the use of the term 'evangelical' is reconsidered
- Under A1 – that the purpose statement of the identity of institution include reference to both church and society.
- Under A2 – that strategic planning make explicit reference to consultation of the church and stakeholders.
- Under A2 – that QA procedures include feedback mechanisms from the employment contexts of their graduates

- Under A3 – that it is specified that fitness for purpose of non-teaching staff and faculty includes, where possible, engagement with a local church.
- Under A3 – that Faculty can also include a contingent of non-academic experts to help in applying theories to practice (e.g. from the church)
- Under A4 – that Stakeholder community make reference to student engagement with local churches.
- Under A4 – that Civic community make reference to the school performing regular research into the social realities of its context and relating this research to its curriculum.
- Under A5 - that IT educational resources include training of students in digital literacy.
- Under B1 – that holistic integration be nuanced with a sentence that allows programmes and schools to have variable emphasis between the listed components.
- Under B1 – that practical training be specifically related to enquiry into, collaboration with and relationship to the context in which students will serve.
- Under B2 – that Context make reference to demonstrable, fresh research into the relevant social and religious contexts.
- Under B2 – that Content and level include a comment to encourage schools to broaden their curricula into new areas and interdisciplinary fields; also, that 'biblical and theological studies' include solid hermeneutical and exegetical components.
- Under B3 – that Delivery include and encouragement to seek delivery approaches that include innovation, patterns of continued learning, greater flexibility, more accessibility and lowered costs.

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