

RESEARCH AND PRACTICE ORIENTED PROGRAMMES

This document is part of a set of guidelines that relate to accreditation. In particular it contains the *Guidelines for Distinguishing Research and Practice-Oriented Programmes*, providing some guiding principles for institutions designing new programmes and searching for appropriate programme orientation.

With the approval in 2019 of the new *Standards and Guidelines* for accreditation, the ECTE also introduced a new *ECTE Certification Framework* that asks institutions to further identify bachelor and master level programmes as being either ‘research’ or ‘practice’ oriented. Although this distinction is not reflected in the formal nomenclature which remains generic (‘Bachelor of Theology’ and ‘Master of Theology’), it must be clearly reflected in the programme design and certification documents.

The term ‘orientation’ is carefully chosen to indicate that programmes are normally *more* focused on one set of the descriptors. Surely, all research-oriented programmes normally also feature some practice, and all practice-oriented programmes normally include some research elements. Institutions should not therefore look for one to the exclusion of the other but determine which orientation prevails. A useful questionnaire is provided at the end of this document to help focus this orientation.

To be clear, the difference between research and practice orientation has nothing to do with levels, difficulty, status or the quality of a programme. It is, instead, vitally linked to the mission and vision of the institution and to defining its graduate profiles.

This document should be read in conjunction with the guidelines found in Appendix A of the *Standards and Guidelines* for ECTE Accreditation. The orientation of a programme will be specified in the accreditation application forms, in the Self Evaluation Report, in the institution’s public information, in the specific documents supporting standard ‘B.2 - Curriculum Development’ of the *Standards and Guidelines* for ECTE Accreditation and overall as pertaining to the application of institutional and programme standards to fit the chosen orientation.

ECTE Review committee

Dr Bernhard Ott, Chairman

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1. RESEARCH-ORIENTED PROGRAMMES

Research-oriented programmes (bachelor or master level) aim at providing students with comprehensive knowledge and critical skills in the field of theology as the basis for further research. They also generally place a greater emphasis on academic skills, research, analytical reasoning and advanced problem-solving skills related to the field of study. Normally, they include an initiation to the skills of exegesis of the Biblical text in the original languages and the preparation of a major final thesis.

The programme profile of a research-oriented Bachelor of Theology usually qualifies for access to a consecutive second degree in the field of theology and typical graduates might be theology teachers, future PhD students or writers.

In terms of learning outcomes, research-oriented programmes focus on knowledge, skills and responsibility and autonomy in the context of *study*¹.

2. PRACTICE-ORIENTED PROGRAMMES

Practice-oriented programmes (bachelor or master level) offer advanced knowledge in the field of theology as the basis for professional practice. They also generally place a greater emphasis on practical engagement and advanced problem-solving skills related to the field of work. Developing advanced professional skills, practical theology, missiology, behavioural sciences applied to ministry and practical application of theology are given priority. Normally, an important element of supervised practice and the completion of a final project or practice-related thesis is included.

This type of programme usually pursues the objective of qualifying for immediate professional employability and typical graduates might be church planters, pastors, youth workers, lay ministers but also Christians in secular professions and those preparing for cross-cultural/missionary engagement.

In terms of learning outcomes, practice-oriented programmes focus on knowledge, skills and responsibility and autonomy in the context of *work*².

¹ See the European Qualifications Framework for these distinctions <https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/content/descriptors-page>

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3. RESEARCH/PRACTICE QUESTIONNAIRE

The following questionnaire can help institutions understand whether their programmes are better described as having research or practice orientation³.

IF A PROGRAMME IS MORE RESEARCH-ORIENTED	IF A PROGRAMME IS MORE PRACTICE-ORIENTED
<input type="checkbox"/> Greater emphasis on the study of theology	<input type="checkbox"/> Greater emphasis on the preparation for work
<input type="checkbox"/> A major research paper is produced and critically evaluated (thesis defence)	<input type="checkbox"/> A major ministry evaluation internship/project focus paper is included
<input type="checkbox"/> The curriculum is heavily weighted towards Biblical exegesis and theological reflection	<input type="checkbox"/> The curriculum is heavily weighted towards practical theology
<input type="checkbox"/> Learning outcomes are typically related to study contexts	<input type="checkbox"/> Learning outcomes are typically related to work contexts
<input type="checkbox"/> Knowledge is offered as the basis for original thinking and/or research	<input type="checkbox"/> Knowledge is offered as the basis for professional occupation
<input type="checkbox"/> Problem-solving skills are applied to develop new knowledge	<input type="checkbox"/> Problem-solving skills are applied to develop new procedures
<input type="checkbox"/> The key word for graduate profiles is 'study'	<input type="checkbox"/> The key word for graduate profiles is 'work'
<input type="checkbox"/> Faculty research is aimed at progressing the field of study	<input type="checkbox"/> Faculty research is aimed at progressing the field of work (professional practice)
<input type="checkbox"/> Students produce a large research thesis and are required to demonstrate some critical thinking related to the discipline (theological reflection)	<input type="checkbox"/> Students either do not produce a final research thesis or produce a minor research thesis (mostly cumulative and descriptive) or a practice related project paper
<input type="checkbox"/> Students have some internships requirements, but they are a minor component of the programme	<input type="checkbox"/> The internship programme is a central feature with an important amount of credits assigned to it
<input type="checkbox"/> The programme aims at training researchers, exegetes and teachers	<input type="checkbox"/> The programme aims at training pastors, missionaries and other practitioners
<input type="checkbox"/> Most of your graduates are either teaching in theological education or conducting further research	<input type="checkbox"/> Most of your graduates actively serving in the church/para-church organisations as lay people or are in the ordained ministry
<input type="checkbox"/> Theory is the main emphasis of your programme, with relatively little practice	<input type="checkbox"/> Practice is the main emphasis of your programme with sufficient theory to support practice
<input type="checkbox"/> Most credits given for systematics, Biblical exegesis, historical theology and research modules	<input type="checkbox"/> Most credits given for Bible and theology survey, practical theology, mentoring and internships
<input type="checkbox"/> A majority of assignments requires abstract critical thinking and research	<input type="checkbox"/> The vast majority of the assignments in your modules are oriented on "knowing how " to apply knowledge in practice
<input type="checkbox"/> Graduates conduct analytical investigation to produce theories that are relevant to church and mission	<input type="checkbox"/> Graduates have skills in practical ministries that enable them to perform ministerial tasks
<input type="checkbox"/> Your programme would not be able to run without the teaching of Biblical languages	<input type="checkbox"/> You teach a minor amount of Biblical languages, but it is an optional activity
<input type="checkbox"/> Your students are engaged mostly in foundational, philosophical and normative theories	<input type="checkbox"/> Your students are engaged mostly with functional, pragmatic and "how-to-do" theories

³ As stated in the introduction to these guidelines, it will be common for institutions to be able to select items from both sides of the checklist. A prevalence, however, should normally emerge that will help determine whether a programme is research or practice oriented.

These Guidelines have been approved by the ECTE Council, 11 November 2020 and are valid until their revision.

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