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## Institutional Evaluation Programme

*Ready for innovating, ready for better serving the local needs - Quality and Diversity of the Romanian Universities*

## PROTESTANT THEOLOGICAL INSTITUTE OF CLUJ-NAPOCA

### *EVALUATION REPORT*

*August 2014*

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## Table of Contents

1. Introduction .....	3
2. Governance and institutional decision-making.....	9
3. Teaching and learning.....	14
4. Research .....	17
5. Service to society .....	20
6. Quality culture .....	21
7. Internationalisation .....	23
8. Conclusion .....	24



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## 1. Introduction

This report is the result of the evaluation of the Protestant Theological Institute (PTI) of Cluj-Napoca. The evaluation took place in 2014 in the framework of the project “Ready to Innovate, Ready to Better Address the Local Needs - Quality and Diversity of Romanian Universities”, which aims at strengthening core elements of Romanian universities, such as their autonomy and administrative competences, by improving their quality assurance and management proficiency.

The evaluations are taking place within the context of major reforms in the Romanian higher education system, and specifically in accordance with the provisions of the 2011 Law for Education (Law 1/2011) and the various related normative acts.

While the institutional evaluations are taking place in the context of an overall reform, each university is assessed by an independent IEP team, using the IEP methodology described below.

### 1.1 The Institutional Evaluation Programme

The Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) is an independent membership service of the European University Association (EUA) that offers evaluations to support the participating institutions in the continuing development of their strategic management and internal quality culture. The IEP is a full member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and is listed in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR).

The distinctive features of the Institutional Evaluation Programme are the following:

- A strong emphasis on the self-evaluation phase
- A European and international perspective
- A peer-review approach
- A support to improvement

The focus of the IEP is the institution as a whole and not the individual study programmes or units. It focuses upon:

- Decision-making processes and institutional structures and effectiveness of strategic management.
- Relevance of internal quality processes and the degree to which their outcomes are used in decision-making and strategic management as well as perceived gaps in these internal mechanisms.

Rather than using a standardised, externally defined set of criteria, the evaluation is guided by four key questions, which are based on a “fitness for (and of) purpose” approach:



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- What is the institution trying to do?
- How is the institution trying to do it?
- How does the institution know it works?
- How does the institution change in order to improve?

## 1.2 Protestant Theological Institute's profile

### *The status*

The Protestant Theological Institute of Cluj-Napoca (PTI) is the legally accredited academic institution of three Protestant historical churches in the Carpathian Basin, namely the Reformed Church in Romania (including its two branches, one for the church district of Transylvania and one for the church district of Királyh Mellék), the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Romania and the Hungarian Unitarian Church (hereinafter, “the supporting churches”).

According to Law 1/2011 (art. 114, par. 3), higher education institutions in Romania may be public, private or religious (and non-profit in any case). It is worth noting that the English translation of Law 1/2011 also uses in other articles the term “confessional universities” instead of the term “religious universities”, while the Romanian text uniquely uses the term “universitățile confesionale”. During its meetings at PTI the evaluation team was informed that the same meaning can be found also in the English terms “ecclesiastical universities” or “denominational universities”. Nevertheless, for the needs of the present report the term “religious” will be used.

The above stipulation of Law 1/2011 generates some kind of ambiguity regarding the nature or the status of a religious university. Is it public? Is it private? Does it belong to a third category? This ambiguity made it difficult for the evaluation team to understand what the real status of PTI is. PTI is not funded by the state; it is founded, owned and funded by the supporting churches. The question, therefore, is whether the supporting churches can be considered as entities that belong to the private sector. Furthermore, it should be taken into account that the students of PTI do not pay any fees. Its primary mission is to educate ministers (priests) for the needs of the supporting churches. The above characteristics are hardly in favour of considering PTI a private university. However, the evaluation team was informed during its meetings in PTI that the Romanian Government considers it a private higher education institution. From another point of view, the people of PTI (and the supporting churches) do not consider PTI as either a private university or a public university.

### *The history*

The founding roots of PTI go back to 1622 when the “Academicum Collegium”, its predecessor, was founded at Alba Iulia (Gyulafehérvár). Apart from minister training for the Protestant churches, this academy was also responsible for providing the principality with educated people in all the important scientific fields including medicine, law, mathematics,



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natural sciences etc. In 1662, the academy was moved from Alba Iulia (Gyulafehérvár) to Aiud (Nagyenyed), where it continued its wide-ranging academic activity for two and a half centuries. In the year 1895, the “Academicum Collegium” was again moved from Aiud (Nagyenyed) to Cluj (Kolozsvár) into the building in which PTI is currently situated, its principal mission being the training and formation of reformed ministers and theological researchers.

The Protestant Theological Institute as such was founded in 1948 through the merger of all pre-existing educational structures related to the three Protestant churches. According to the Self-Evaluation Report, the main reason behind this forced merger was the aim of the communist regime “to gain an easier control over the training of the Hungarian Protestant ministers”. Instead, “a living community of academics was formed, promoting an ecumenical spirit of inter-confessional dialogue”. It is for this reason that after 1989 the supporting churches decided to keep this unified structure. As stated by the representatives of the supporting churches during their meeting with the evaluation team, they aim to further improve the family, ecumenical spirit within the institute, focusing on all issues that unite them and ignoring all issues that separate them. In this regard, no theological debates take place in PTI concerning the differences between the three churches. Thus, the SER states that “the existence of one unique institute for three different churches (different Protestant denominations), the existence of an independent confessional institution training the pastors of Protestant churches is a good sign — a potential of Ecumenism”.

### ***Academic features***

Following the changes in 1989, PTI continued its activity, in the beginning under the jurisdiction of the State Secretariat for Cults and later on, in the 1990s, under the jurisdiction of the Romanian Ministry in charge of education. PTI was initially accredited as a higher education institution in 2002 by the predecessor of ARACIS, the current Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education. In August 2009, PTI was subject to an external institutional evaluation by ARACIS and was granted the rating “university of limited confidence” (“grad de încredere limitat”) for the period 2009-2013. Re-accreditation of PTI at institutional level is expected to take place in 2014. Furthermore, in 2011 PTI was subject to the classification procedure of all Romanian universities according to Law 1/2011, and was classified in the category of “universities mainly for education”.

PTI has only one faculty, the Faculty of Theology, which operates with three departments related to the three supporting churches: the Reformed Department, the Lutheran Department and the Unitarian Department. Currently there is a four-year Bachelor programme in “Protestant Pastoral Theology” (240 ECTS) and a two-year Master programme in “Applied Protestant Pastoral Theology” (120 ECTS). Each programme is implemented by the three departments mentioned above. Both study programmes are accredited by ARACIS; re-accreditation is expected to take place in 2014 for the Bachelor programme and in 2016 for the Master programme. Currently, there are no PhD programmes operating in PTI. Finally,



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according to the ranking of study programmes procedure in Romania (2011), the PTI's study programmes have been ranked in category C in the study domain of theology.

### ***Basic statistical data***

Due to its mission to educate ministers for the supporting churches, PTI has always been a small higher education institution. The number of students was always around 140-160 (for both Bachelor and Master programmes), while it always had a total number of 12 to 15 full-time university teachers (13 in the academic year 2013-2014) and almost the same number of part-time teaching staff as well as a limited number of administrative and auxiliary staff (around nine members). It should be mentioned in this point that the number of new students is determined every academic year by the supporting churches, which take into account their needs for new ministers. This means that there is *numerus clausus* for PTI. In the academic year 2013-2014 there were in total 139 students in both programmes distributed among the three churches as follows: 100 reformed, 26 Unitarians and 13 Lutherans. In general there are about 30 new entrants (first-year students) every year distributed as follows: 20 reformed (for both reformed churches), 5 to 6 Unitarians and 2 to 4 Lutherans.

## **1.3 The evaluation process**

### ***The self-evaluation process***

The self-evaluation process was undertaken by a self-evaluation group consisting of six members (three members of the academic staff, two students and the general secretary). The self-evaluation group (chaired by the vice-rector) prepared the Self-Evaluation Report (SER), which was made available to the evaluation team with the related annexes on 17 December 2013, in due time before the first site visit. As it was explained to the evaluation team, the self-evaluation process was an inclusive one. In the course of preparing the SER, the self-evaluation group consulted with the members of the institute (academic staff, students and administrative staff) as well as with the relevant governing bodies of the supporting churches.

The evaluation team appreciated the work done in the SER, which covered almost all issues and was supplemented with informative appendixes and annexes. The evaluation team considered the SER a comprehensive, informative, frank and critical analysis which reflected, on the one hand, the specific case of PTI as a small religious higher education institution and, on the other hand, the strong commitment of PTI members towards improvement, presenting at the same time the vision and the expectations of PTI for the future. Furthermore, it is worth noting that a critical approach to the principles of the Bologna Process and their implementation in PTI was present in the SER.



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### ***The two site visits***

The two site visits of the evaluation team took place on 29 to 31 January 2014 and on 28 to 30 April 2014, respectively. During the visits, the evaluation team had the opportunity to discuss the situation of PTI with many of its actors, namely:

- the leadership of PTI at institutional and faculty level;
- members of the Academic Senate;
- academic staff members;
- student representatives, with a view also to the social engagement of students;
- staff in charge of quality assurance;
- staff in charge of scientific research;
- staff involved in internationalisation matters.

The evaluation team had also the opportunity to meet representatives of the supporting churches, who are the founders and the beneficiaries of the institution.

There were also intense and in-depth discussions with the Rector, Associate Professor Elek Rezi, and with the self-evaluation group. Therefore, the evaluation team had the opportunity to meet the broad spectrum of actors at PTI. All meetings and discussions were efficiently organised by the Vice-Rector, Associate Professor István Pásztori-Kupán, who acted as the liaison person between the institution and the evaluation team. At the end of the second visit, the oral report of the evaluation team was presented by its chair to a wide audience composed by almost all the members of the academic staff and almost all the students of the institution.

The evaluation team would like to express its gratitude to the people of PTI, especially to its students, for the openness and willingness to discuss all issues during all our meetings. Finally, the evaluation team would like to express its sincere thanks to the Rector, Associate Professor Elek Rezi, and his team for the organisation before and during our two visits.

In between the two visits the institution provided the evaluation team with all requested additional documentation.

### ***The evaluation report***

The present evaluation report is harmonised with the aims of IEP as outlined above. In this respect, it focuses on the current strengths and weaknesses of PTI regarding its capacity for change, in view of the specific characteristics of the institution, but also of the external opportunities and threats; it expresses a number of recommendations that may be taken into account for the future development of the institution.

The evaluation report takes into account all the data provided to the evaluation team in the SER and corresponding additional information. Furthermore, it should be taken into account that the overall analysis, the comments and the recommendations are based on two intense



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but rather short site visits to the university: a two-day first visit and a two-day second visit. The recommendations, together with the corresponding reasoning and analysis, appear in italics in the text of the evaluation report, while a summary of recommendations is presented in the last section of the report. Finally, it should be noted that throughout the body of the report many ideas of the evaluation team appear which should not be considered as real recommendations but as reflections, which PTI may wish to consider.

#### 1.4 The evaluation team

The evaluation team (hereinafter “the team”) consisted of the following members:

- Lucija Cok, former Rector, University of Primorska, Slovenia, as team chair.
- Ladislav Mirossay, Rector, P.J.Safarik University in Kosice, Slovakia.
- Annakaisa Tikkinen, Master student, University of Oulu, Finland.
- Dionyssi Kladis, professor emeritus, University of the Peloponnese, Greece, former Secretary for Higher Education in Greece, as team coordinator.





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## 2. Governance and institutional decision-making

### 2.1 Philosophy of PTI: norms and values / vision - mission - strategy

The mission of PTI is outlined in its Strategic Plan 2010-2014, as follows:

PTI has the unique mission to train Reformed, Lutheran and Unitarian ministers and scholars. Its goal is to train faithful and trustworthy theologians, who have a clear sense of identity, are open to modern sciences and values as well as to denominational variety, theologians who will be worthy partners of intellectuals in Transylvania and Romania, and can become respected personalities and spiritual leaders of contemporary ecclesiastical life and society. Apart from minister-training, PTI focuses also on scholarly research in the domain of Christian theology and the publication of reference works.

The above description covers all three missions of higher education fully, namely education, research and service to society, and this is something strongly appreciated by the team. Furthermore, the team had the opportunity to realise the commitment of all members of the community of PTI towards the fulfilment of the above mission. In this regard, the team appreciated the commitment of PTI to educate ecumenically and culturally open-minded ministers, theologians and researchers, to form trustworthy community leaders with a clear sense of Christian ethos, practice and social awareness and to look forward facing new challenges in the society, maintaining in parallel a traditional family spirit within the institute.

As mentioned earlier in this report, PTI is a small institute and it does not see any reason to become a big, oversized university. The educational philosophy of PTI is described in the SER (p. 8) as follows:

[To become a big university...] would fit neither our mission, nor our educational philosophy, which presupposes the existence of a classic “universitas magistrorum et scholarium”, a true community of teachers and disciples. Such a form of education is better performed in a smaller community, where people know each other personally, than in the impersonal environment of mass education.

In parallel, it is worth noting that the above philosophy is also in accordance with the willingness of PTI and the supporting churches to conserve the status of independent higher education institution. This is why they oppose various recommendations that had been addressed to them in the past to be integrated as a faculty in a big university.

In view of the mission of PTI, its strategic plan focuses rather on qualitative than quantitative objectives. As mentioned already, the number of students is determined by the supporting churches on the basis of anticipated ecclesiastical vacancies. This means that the number of students will remain small and therefore the size of the institution will remain small as well. It is worth noting here that the supporting churches are at the same time the founders, the owners, the funders of PTI, the beneficiaries of its operation and the employers of its



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graduates. This situation creates an extraordinary relationship between the institution, the supporting churches and the students.

The PTI Strategic Plan 2010-2014 is in its final stage of implementation. It contains short-term and long-term objectives. The main short-term objectives have already been achieved: the Master programme has already been re-accredited; the target of having by 2014 at least five members of the teaching staff at the two highest academic ranks (professors and associate professors) has also been achieved; the further improvement of the quality assurance system is under way. The mid-term and the long-term objectives of the Strategic Plan 2010-2014 of PTI quite reasonably extend beyond 2014.

The team discussed PTI strategy in many of its meetings, both with the key actors of PTI and with the representatives of the supporting churches. More particularly, the team wishes to emphasise the educational strategic objectives of PTI. Beyond its well-established mission, the aim to widening the educational offer in direction other than simply educating the future Protestant ministers was clear in the various meetings. The main idea was to establish study programmes in theology both at Bachelor and Master levels, which would target lay students who simply want to study theology without becoming priests. Other ideas were to establish new study programmes in disciplines other than theology, for example a programme for social workers (a mid-term objective) and a programme for church music (a long-term objective). These latter ideas were accompanied with ideas for establishing also a second faculty (e.g. Faculty of Education or Faculty of Social Sciences). The team appreciates all those ideas which signify the existence of really open minds in PTI.

The widening of the educational offer can also function as a significant additional source of income for PTI through fees from the students who will not study in the programmes for future ministers. The team is aware that raising its financial resources is among the strategic objectives of PTI; of course, this requires more active engagement in national and international funding programmes; however, student fees under the above mentioned conditions can also be a solution to the problem.

The team is also aware that the re-establishment of the doctoral school is among the strategic objectives of PTI. It seems that this objective is achievable since five members of the academic staff are expected to get promoted soon to higher ranks. This means that a key legal requirement for the re-establishment of the doctoral school will be fulfilled soon. The development of a PhD programme is important not only for completing the educational cycle of PTI but also for improving its research capacity. The team is aware that the issue of deepening research is also among the strategic objectives of PTI. However, the overall issue of research will be elaborated later in the corresponding section of the report.

Finally, internationalisation and investment in facilities are two more issues that appear to be high on the strategic agenda of PTI.



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The team endorses the above strategic objectives of PTI. These objectives seem to be quite reasonable and feasible, aiming to further improve the unique positioning of the institution in the Romanian system of higher education. However, and given the shortages in human resources, the team considers necessary that the strategic planning for the next period should be elaborated in a more systematic and efficient way, including priorities, quantification and performance indicators materialised through concrete action plan and monitoring. More specifically, *the team recommends that PTI should concretise its strategic plan for the next period through an action plan or operational plan in which the actions will not appear in a horizontal and neutral manner as a simple list of actions but will be prioritised (in order to indicate which objective is important and which is less so), linked to specific and realistic timelines (in order to make the overall process manageable), quantified through performance indicators (in order to make the implementation and the achievement measurable) and, finally, assigned to personalised tasks and responsibilities (in order to show the real owner/carrier of the respective action).*

## 2.2 Governance and decision-making

The ambiguity of Law 1/2011 regarding the status of the religious universities reflects also its governance issues. In the past, PTI was under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Cults but now it is under the jurisdiction of the Ministry in charge of education. In the past, the supreme collective governance body was the Senate alone in which the supporting churches were represented.

Today, PTI follows the dual governance structure provided by Law 1/2011, with two supreme collective governance bodies, the Senate and the Administration Board. In this dual model the Senate is considered the highest decision-making body at university level, while the Administration Board, chaired by the rector, ensures the operational management of the universities and implements the strategic decisions of the Senate. A significant difference is that the supporting churches were represented in the Senate in the past, which is not the case anymore, since it is not allowed by Law 1/2011. Today, the representatives of the supporting churches participate in the Academic Council, which for PTI is the equivalent of the Administration Board provided by Law 1/2011. The representatives of the supporting churches explained to the team that in the beginning this was considered to be a step backward, while now it is going well and a very good relationship has been established between the two supreme governance bodies of PTI. This should also be attributed to the fact that the representatives of the supporting churches participate in the meetings of the Senate as invited members without voting rights.

The team was impressed to hear that the governance philosophy of PTI is determined by a corporate spirit. According to the SER (p. 9), “Based on the many centuries old tradition of corporate governance of Protestant academies, all the important executive decisions are taken not by individuals, but by the appropriate governing bodies.” The team would like to point out that this traditional corporate Protestant spirit should be considered as related to



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collegiality and should not be confused with the corporate approach and philosophy as it appears in the world of business and the modern management theory.

This corporate spirit affects also the good communication and cooperation between the two supreme governance bodies at institutional level as well as between the central bodies and the management bodies at faculty level (faculty council). It is worth noting here that the rector, the vice-rector and the dean are members of both the Senate and the Academic Council. However, they participate in the Senate as three out of the nine elected members of the academic staff and not in their management capacities. Another interesting issue to be mentioned here is that PTI uses elements from the legislation for both public and private universities as regards the composition of the Academic Council. The members of the Council are nominated by the founders of the institution (the supporting churches in the case of PTI) according to the stipulations of Law 1/2011 for private universities (art. 211, par. 7). However, the composition of the Council is defined in the PTI Charter (art. 33), and includes the rector, the vice-rector, the dean, the general administrative director, the chief accountant, the Bishops and delegates of the supporting churches and one student representative. The team understands that this composition has been included in the Charter after a decision of the supporting churches. However, the team would like to point out that this composition of the Council (apart from the representatives of the supporting churches and the chief accountant) is precisely the same as the one provided in Law 1/2011 for the public universities (art. 211, par. 6). As for the composition of the Senate, it follows the general principles of the Law 1/2011 according to which students' participation should be at least 25%. PTI's Senate comprises 13 members, including nine members of academic staff and four students.

Due to its small size, its overarching family spirit and its collegial philosophy, it is also worth noting that the representatives of the supporting churches are always invited to participate in the meetings of the Senate without voting rights. The team would like to praise PTI for its practice to include or to simply invite the key actors of the university management in the meetings of the Senate or the Council. This practice promotes communication among the various governance and decision-making bodies at all levels and facilitates understanding and acceptance of decisions.

The overall impression of the team is that the governance system of PTI operates well, efficiently and effectively. The small size of the institution is both an advantage and a disadvantage. It is an advantage because it makes the management and the communication easier. It is also a disadvantage because of the small number of academic staff who can be involved in management. As it was explained to the team, one of the most serious problems in PTI is its legislative obligation to establish parallel structures and procedures on consultative or monitoring basis (e.g. Senate committees), which are designed for big universities without any specific considerations for the small ones like PTI. This fact combined with the small number of academic staff results in multiple responsibilities and tasks for the staff, which restricts substantially the time available for pure academic work.



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The team understands this problematic situation. It also understands that the legislative requirements cannot be neglected. The only feasible solution is to minimise the negative consequences of this situation. In this regard, the team had the opportunity to realise that the collegial spirit helps; and, furthermore, that the strong engagement of the staff (both academic and administrative), the partnership attitude and commitment of the students and the strong supportive role of the three churches help ensure the efficient and effective operation of the governance system of PTI beyond the above difficulties.



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### 3. Teaching and learning

#### *Fulfilling the educational mission*

The issues related to teaching and learning should be considered in relation to the overall context of studies in PTI. As mentioned above, the mission of PTI is to educate ministers and scholars for the supporting Protestant churches. This means that PTI graduates are employed as ministers by the supporting churches. Consequently, the supporting churches define the number of students according to their needs for ministers, so that theoretically all students are employed after graduation. The Master degree is required in order to be employed as minister. This means that practically all Bachelor students continue their studies to the Master level. Indeed, currently 98% of Bachelor graduates continue to the Master programme, while 95% of Master graduates are normally employed as ministers. Theoretically the Bachelor degree is not a requirement in order for an applicant to be accepted in the Master programme. However, this is practically the case so far.

As the team was informed, respecting the *numerus clausus* requires entrance examinations, which, according to the people of PTI and the supporting churches, are strict compared to the other Faculties of Theology in Romania. In this regard, the *numerus clausus* not only keeps the employment ratio of the graduates close to 100% but it also ensures the high quality level of the enrolled students. An additional consequence is that the students enrolling in PTI are young people who are committed to choosing this path for their lives and, accordingly, to their studies.

Under these circumstances, the relevance of studies to employment and the employability of the graduates are fully ensured in PTI through the close cooperation of the employers (here, the supporting churches) with the institution and their active involvement in curricular development. It is worth noting here that this communication of the supporting churches with the institution for issues related to the study programmes takes place both at the level of the central bodies and at the level of the departments which are responsible for the development and the implementation of the study programmes. In that sense, it can be argued that two of the key principles of the Bologna Process (relevance of studies and employability) are certainly fulfilled in the case of PTI.

#### *Building an academic community*

The living and studying conditions of the students is another important issue affecting their studies. As mentioned already, the students do not pay any fees in PTI. Furthermore, students and most professors spend their days in the institute. In this point it is worth noting that another Bologna principle (Berlin Communiqué, 2003) is to ensure “appropriate studying and living conditions for the students, so that they can successfully complete their studies within an appropriate period of time without obstacles related to their social and economic background.” And this principle is undoubtedly fully implemented in PTI.



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As mentioned already, the involvement of students in governance and management is quite strong in PTI. From the meetings with the students, the team had the opportunity to realise the commitment of students in meeting these challenges. At least 25% of students participate in the Senate and the Faculty Council in accordance with Law 1/2011. They also participate in all Senate commissions. Furthermore, it is worth noting that one student representative participates in the Academic Council too, and this is not something prescribed by the law. The team was also impressed by the internal organisation of the students. They have their own governing body, called “Youth Presbyterium”. There is also one senior student elected in each department. In the Reformed Department (which is the biggest one) there are two vice-senior students. The above imply that two other Bologna principles providing that “students are full members of the higher education community” (Prague Communiqué, 2001) and that “students are full partners in higher education governance” (Berlin Communiqué, 2003) are fully implemented in PTI.

The team had the opportunity to observe the spirit of community in PTI characterising its everyday life, its day-to-day activities. The same spirit characterises the teaching and learning matter. The concept of the “learning community” is a reality. A threat could appear if this community spirit and reality was transformed into a “closed system”. However, the PTI community has found ways to avoid this threat. Improving steadily its relationship to society, its offer toward society is the most effective way to keep the system “open”; and the team is satisfied to see that PTI has an excellent policy in this area, involving both students and staff (cf. Chapter 4 for details).

### ***Student-centred learning***

PTI emphasises these community features, especially with regards to teaching and learning. The institute believes that these features are a real guarantee for the quality and the efficiency of education, the preservation of the academic and ethical values, and the fulfilment of the mission of the institution. The team shares many of these views and believes that these community features and the close relationship between students and academic staff reinforce the capacity and the potential of PTI for a genuine and proper implementation of the basic Bologna principles for teaching and learning as they are reflected in the concept of “student-centred learning” and the use of ECTS as genuinely reflecting the student workload on the basis of learning outcomes and the intended competences of the graduates.

The concept of student-centred learning has nothing to do with formalities; it has to do with methodologies, but primarily it has to do with a new attitude of both students and teachers, it has to do with personal contact between students and teachers. As mentioned in the SER:

It goes without saying that the very educational philosophy and aim of our institution is to attract all our students to become “inner disciples”, or as Aristotle would have put it ‘esoterikoi’, and not merely “external hearers”, i.e. ‘akroamatikoi’ or ‘exoterikoi’. If there is any “student centred learning” approach to be found in our educational methods, this is where it can and should be identified. (SER p. 24)



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The team is pleased to note that these conditions as mentioned above are largely in place in PTI. *Perhaps what is missing, and what is recommended by the team, is a better adaptation of ECTS to the real student workload. This is a recommendation, which does not aim for simple numerical re-calculations but to make the overall relationship “curriculum - learning outcomes - ECTS - student workload - assessment of students” more fair and more pragmatic.*

### **Practice-oriented education**

In line with its mission, education is practice-oriented in PTI. In this regard, the practical instruction is a constituent element of the regular curriculum starting with the first year of studies. An additional specific programme takes place during summer (“summer practice”). It includes four weeks of practice in various church-related facilities (congregations, etc.) usually with a well-established mentor. Before matriculating for the new academic year, students have to provide evidence for their participation in these summer training programmes. This means that during their studies the students acquire the necessary theoretical and practical basis for performing their duties after graduation. The team is satisfied to note the positive view of the students regarding their practical training, especially with regards to the summer practice. *The students would be happy to see this summer practice programme part of their curricula. The team is not aware of the potential legal restrictions regarding this. However, it shares the views of the students in that direction and recommends that PTI should explore the legal possibilities in order to integrate student summer practice into the curricula.*

Interestingly, the role of PTI in the practical training of its graduates does not end with their graduation. After obtaining the Master diploma in applied pastoral theology, a transitional year aims to strengthen practical training by placing the new graduates in real-life situations, under the mentorship of a more experienced minister trained specifically for this task. The mentor introduces them gradually into the various types of work they have to deal with during their career. During this first year of mentorship, the new graduates meet twice a year for a weekly seminar (in the autumn and in the spring period) to reflect upon their activities together with other fellow students, their teachers of practical theology from PTI as well as their mentors. This threefold connection — former fellows, former teachers and current mentors — is essential in keeping theoretical and practical training in constant correlation with each other. After completing their seventh year, the new graduates are visited by a committee, which examines them in their concrete locations, focusing on how they implement in practice what they have learned. Following this visit, they undergo an examination before a mixed committee formed by the deputy Bishops of the churches, other church leaders responsible for pastoral training, as well as teachers of PTI specialised in practical theology. Passing this double examination in the congregation and at PTI entitles the new graduates to become regularly ordained ministers in the church with full rights. From this moment onwards they can be invited and elected by any congregation or any church-related institution.





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## 4. Research

Scientific research and publications hold a central position in PTI's mission. According to the Strategic Plan 2010-2014, "Apart from minister-training, PTI focuses also on scholarly research in the domain of Christian theology and the publication of reference works" while PTI's Charter stipulates that "Within the PTI there is an ample research activity in various domains of theology" (art. 148) and that "Research is a basic obligation of every teacher" (art. 150).

The team had the opportunity to discuss research issues in depth and to observe the commitment of the majority of the academic staff in this area. However, the small number of academic staff members (only 13) makes both the performance and the organisation of research challenging. The team was informed of the progress achieved in research since 2009 (the year of the last institutional accreditation by ARACIS) despite the limited access to financial sources for research, the number of scientific publications produced by PTI's academic staff during this period, and PTI's policy to promote the students' participation in research activities.

Nevertheless, the team wishes to stress that research activities in PTI are organised on an individual basis in that every academic conducts his/her own research in isolation. It was explained to the team that this is due to the small number of staff and to the lack of critical mass for a research group to be created. However, the team was informed that such research synergies do not exist even in the context of wider scientific areas where research groups could be established. For example, there are four staff members working in the area of biblical studies/biblical theology, three in the area of systematic theology and four in the area of practical theology. However, these three areas have not established research teams. In the evaluation team's view, the isolated research paths are not only an issue of lack of critical mass but are also related to the organisational culture. Under these circumstances, *the team recommends that a team spirit is built in PTI with regards to its overall research activity; PTI research-active staff should join their forces in a "one plus one equals three" perspective in order to become more efficient and more successful in their research performance.*

According to the PTI Charter (art. 149), research activity is coordinated by a research centre, which is aided by various libraries and archives both on PTI's premises and elsewhere. The PTI Charter stipulates also (art. 153) that research management is assured by the Faculty Council. Furthermore, the Scientific Research Council (Charter, art. 154-156) is a consultative body, established as a Senate's committee, the primary tasks of which include "direct the activity of scientific research within the PTI towards the fulfilment of the strategic plan and to watch over the improvement of research process" and "to evince and evaluate the research activities". And, finally, PTI's research strategy is approved by the Senate on proposals from the Faculty Council (Charter, art. 157).

The team considers the above structure concerning research too complex given the size of PTI. Taking into account that there are only 13 staff members, the team understands that



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practically the same staff members appear in all the above bodies and structures and they are the same persons who conduct the research activities. In other words, the same persons coordinate and manage research activities; evaluate their own research performance; the same persons (as members of the faculty council) propose to themselves (as members of the Senate) the research strategy of PTI. Things become even more complicated if it is considered that the same persons who are involved in the research activities and the assessment of research performance are also the editors or the members of editorial boards of the scientific journals that publish their own research. PTI also considers this complexity as a sign of a bureaucratic approach, the operation of which is time and energy consuming and resulting in staff overload. However, the team considers the problem to be much more complex and serious, since the small number of academic staff does not allow for the distinction of roles between coordinating or monitoring bodies and performing persons. And things become even more complicated given the individualised way that research activities are carried out.

In the previous paragraph the complexity of the tasks of academic staff was described only with regards to their research activity. Of course, it must be taken into account that the abovementioned 13 staff members also have to deal with a variety of other tasks, like teaching, tutoring, participation in management bodies (Senate, Academic Council, faculty and department councils) and in consultative or monitoring bodies (Senate committees). As it is written in the SER (p. 14), “the teaching activities can be fulfilled satisfactorily by the present corpus of teachers.” It seems therefore that the shortage in human potential affects primarily the research activity in PTI. The team understands that education is the primary concern of PTI in accordance also with its mission. However, for the team, research should be of equal priority for PTI. The reason is not only for the personal scientific and academic development of the teaching staff; or to fulfil the accreditation requirements of ARACIS; or to improve the international reputation of the institution; or to attract research funding from external sources nationally or internationally. The basic reason is that research should be perceived as a necessity for the improvement of theological science itself (in its Protestant approach) and for a broad, advanced knowledge base to be created and maintained in this respect. The questions to be answered are the following: “Where should research in Protestant Theology be performed if not at PTI? Where should the study/scientific field of Protestant Theology be improved if not at PTI?” In this regard, reinforcing PTI’s capacity for research is an issue to be addressed for consideration and financial support to the beneficiaries, i.e. to the supporting churches.

Taking due consideration of the above necessity, of the mission of PTI and of the existing conditions regarding understaffing and lack of financial resources, *the team recommends that PTI puts more emphasis on its research activity and further improves its research performance by building appropriate conditions. In this regard, the team recommends that PTI should rationalise its structures for coordinating and monitoring research and that it should ensure its capacity for research management and for being successful in attracting national and European research funds. In this regard, the appointment of one or two persons who should be focused on research management (including also project design and grant applications)*



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*should be considered. In parallel, the team repeats its earlier recommendation that a team spirit be built in PTI with regards to its overall research activity.*

Linked to the above recommendation, *the team considers necessary and recommends that PTI undertake all the necessary actions in order to fulfil the requirements for establishing a doctoral school and developing a PhD programme.* The team has been informed that the legal requirement for the existence of at least three professors authorised to supervise PhDs in the sense of article 166, clause 1 of Law 1/2011 will be soon fulfilled in PTI. For the team the establishment of a doctoral school is quite necessary for PTI; on the one hand it will signify its educational integration with all three Bologna cycles and on the other hand it will ensure the self-reliance of PTI in producing its own doctorates.



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## 5. Service to society

Establishing strong and close links with society is one of the major aims of any university nowadays, notably because offering services to society is considered as the third mission of modern universities. The team is aware that offering services to society is a task integrated in the overall mission of PTI. Educating future ministers, and more specifically “ecumenically and culturally open-minded ministers” (SER, p. 10), is a mission addressed jointly to the Church and to society. In the SER (pp. 10-11) the role of the ministers in a contemporary society is further analysed, as follows:

In our contemporary society the ministers still have an important role in setting the standards for a morally upright lifestyle as well as to provide spiritual comfort in an already troubled world overflowing with all kinds of information.... We are keen to remain relevant not only for our ecclesiastical communities, but for the very fabric of our society – not in the least in a moral sense.

However, and apart from this indirect link of the institution with society, the team had the opportunity to examine the direct offer to society made by PTI’s students and staff on a daily basis. In this regard, the team was impressed by the way in which the students organise their social activities autonomously. As was explained during a meeting focused on the social engagement of students, they now undertake ten missions (e.g. with orphans, the elderly, the homeless, children with disabilities, in nursing homes, etc.) while some years ago they had only three such missions. These social missions have been distributed among the four years of study in the Bachelor programme, with each class having its own supervisor and facilitator from the academic staff. The team was also impressed by a new mission called “Reformed Telephonic Charity Service”, initiated by one PTI student, which has now spread nationwide and beyond, thanks to more than 40 volunteers.

The team praises PTI for the commitment of its members (especially the students) to fulfil their social mission. This commitment will be further developed, as clearly stated in the SER (p. 13): “The social relevance and service of our activity can and should be developed further.” The team would also like to refer to a different aspect of the social offer of the PTI’s students as it was expressed in the above mentioned meeting: “It is not only an issue of offer to society; it is also an opportunity for us to see what happens in real life, in the field of our future work”. Given the above reality, *the team would recommend that PTI seek to increase visibility regarding all of its successful missions to society. It is not a question of reward, recognition, reputation or accreditation; nor a question of appreciation by society; it is a question of accountability to society.*

From the above analysis it becomes evident that PTI is quite successful in accomplishing the third mission of higher education, i.e. offering service to society, from various perspectives. In this respect, *the team believes that PTI has strong arguments to seek state funding on the basis of its social offer and would recommend that it work out a properly grounded request.*



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## 6. Quality culture

The term “quality culture” defines the overall attitude of a university regarding the concept of “quality”, which applies to issues like quality assurance, quality assessment, quality improvement, etc. In the context of the IEP methodology, quality assurance offers the means through which a university is in a position to know whether it is doing well and it is accomplishing its chosen mission and goals. It comes from the necessity of going beyond data, figures, statistics, quantitative elements and it deals with the qualitative dimension. Quality assurance is a central element in European higher education today. Furthermore, it has also assumed a key role in the Bologna Process: the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)*, adopted by the European ministers in Bergen in May 2005, have built a European perspective and a European context for quality assurance in higher education.

In the European Higher Education Area, universities are required to implement their own internal quality assurance mechanisms and to develop a quality culture shared among universities throughout Europe. As stated in the Berlin Communiqué (2003), “consistent with the principle of institutional autonomy, the primary responsibility for quality assurance in higher education lies with each institution itself and this provides the basis for real accountability of the academic system within the national quality framework”.

The above two paragraphs outline the overall context of quality in the European higher education nowadays. This context is conceptualised by the word “culture”; however, it is realised and assured through structures and processes. The case of PTI could be considered as somehow extraordinary. In this case, the concept of quality culture is directly and strongly connected with the mission of the institution. It would never be possible for the institution to fulfil its mission without quality. This is a real strength for PTI; which at the same time turns to be a real difficulty for a typical external evaluation procedure. It is known that one of the purposes for the development of quality assurance has been to meet the challenges of mass higher education. However, PTI is not a mass higher education institution and it does not intend to be in the future. The question for the team, also raised in the SER too, was how to assess, how to audit the internal quality assurance processes in such an institution. In fact, the team had to deal with an institution that cannot exist without fulfilling its mission and that cannot fulfil its mission without quality. Furthermore, the team had to deal with an institution where quality was not only assured from its mission (i.e. from the existence of the institution itself) but also from its day-to-day operation through the close and sustained relationship between teachers and students who have in fact established a classic “universitas magistrorum et scholarium”, a true academic community. Finally, the team had to deal with an extraordinary situation where quality is a constituent part of the existence of the institution and of its day-to-day operation.

Nevertheless, the team had to search for evidence for the typical requirements for quality culture in the context of the current European framework. Evidence was found indeed in the



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existing internal quality assurance structures and processes; the Senate Committee for Quality Assurance which has the overall responsibility for quality assurance in PTI; the procedures for the evaluation of the study programmes; the evaluation of the research performance by the respective Senate Committee and the publication of the results in the various scientific journals; the procedures for the multiple evaluations of academic staff (self-evaluation, evaluation by the colleagues/peers, evaluation by the students, evaluation by the Dean, and final decision by the faculty council). The team had the opportunity to appreciate the transparency of the whole quality assurance processes in PTI. However, the question raised above still remains unanswered: Are the typical processes for assessing internal quality assurance applicable to an institution like PTI? Having no answer to this question, the team does not have any recommendations concerning quality culture in PTI.



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## 7. Internationalisation

Internationalisation is a key issue in the European Higher Education Area; consequently, it should be high on the strategic agenda of any European university today. An internationalisation strategy may be based on the relationships established by a university with international partners at various levels. This relationship may be built at institutional level (e.g., interuniversity relationships, relations with international organisations, partnership in international networks and consortia), at faculty level (e.g., joint or dual study programmes and degrees), at the level of research units/activities (e.g., participation in international research projects and international funding) or at the level of individuals (e.g., student and staff mobility exchange, attracting international students and staff, involvement of students and staff in international events and activities). Therefore, an important part of the internationalisation strategy of a university will be to develop the appropriate conditions that will help establish and further improve the above aspects.

The team is aware of the traditionally good individual contacts of PTI internationally with scholars in the field of Protestant theology, especially in the Hungarian and German-speaking countries. This relationship is built primarily on the research activities of PTI's academic staff and their engagement in various international events. From the various meetings in PTI, the team understood that the reinforcement of the international dimension of the research performance and, accordingly, the change of attitude of academic staff in that direction are among the major concerns of PTI's leadership. In parallel, the international dimension of education (mainly through Erasmus mobility for students and staff) is also high on the agenda of PTI. The team was satisfied that the efforts of the institution to enhance the attitude of students and staff for Erasmus mobility are already showing good results. The number of 24 applications for student mobility and placements, and seven applications for staff mobility during the current academic year is quite promising. It is worth noting that almost all students whom the team met during the two site visits were competent in English.

The team endorses PTI in its efforts towards enhancing internationalisation with regards to both research and education. *A recommendation of the team in this respect would be that these efforts should become more systematic. A specific issue for the team is the low number of incoming international students (much lower than the number of outgoing students). The team recommends that PTI should develop a policy to improve its capacity to attract incoming Erasmus students. To that aim, PTI should develop an effective online information package for potential incoming students, promoting at the same time the existing facilities for their accommodation and the overall community spirit of the institution.*



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## 8. Conclusion

PTI is a small institution with a clear mission and with leadership, staff and students who are strongly committed to the fulfilment of the mission. The supportive role of the founding churches is decisive for the existence, the operation and the improvement of PTI. At the same time, the mixed role of the founding churches as beneficiaries and as employers of the graduates ensures the regular flow of students from education to employment.

PTI is an institution which addresses all three missions of higher education, i.e. education, research and service to society. PTI is an institution in which quality is a constituent part of its existence and its mission, with a real sense of academic community (“universitas magistrorum et scholarium”) and, for that reason, where the concept of “student-centred learning” is exercised in daily practice.

However, PTI faces significant constraints: the restricted financial resources; bureaucratic and inflexible organisational structures not suitable to a small higher education institution; the ambiguities of the Romanian legislation with regards to the religious higher education institutions; and the lack of experience and capacity in attracting research funds from national and European sources.

Taking due consideration of the above constraints, PTI has to take the necessary steps regarding its future. The team has made various recommendations in the main body of the report and wishes to stress in this concluding part that PTI need to reinforce its research capacity and to enhance its research performance, as the predominant institution where the science of Protestant theology can be taken forward through scientific research. This reinforcement of research capacity has to take place with a view to internationalise and ensure PTI’s capacity to organise doctoral studies.

*Furthermore, to meet future challenges, PTI may have to consider the ambiguity of the legislation regarding religious higher education institutions in Romania, among other issues. To that end, the team recommends that PTI consider establishing alliances with similar institutions at national level and try to influence the policy makers to clearly define the position of religious institutions in the national legislation.*

The team believes that PTI has the willingness to improve and that it has the capacity, the potential and the dynamism to improve. The team uses the term “improve” abstaining deliberately from using the term “change”. In making this decision, the team has been stimulated by the approach of PTI to the concept of “change” as it appears in the SER (p. 25-26).

It became a catchphrase of the postmodern world, that change is needed for improvement. Although this is indeed a valid affirmation, change should be implemented only for the sake of betterment – and never for the sake of change itself.  
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In a certain sense, in order to improve, we should not only change, but in some cases we should change back to our old selves as an ecclesiastical institution of higher education. At the same time, we also have to look forward, and whilst we are facing some new challenges on the way, we should keep in mind the very kernel of our educational mission: the formation of learned, trustworthy and free-minded community leaders and researchers with a clear sense of Christian ethos, practice and social awareness. [...]

In some areas we need to change, whilst in others we need to stay the same in order to improve.

The recommendations contained in the present report are intended to be the team's own contribution to improvement and to assist PTI in making the most of the opportunities open to it and to deal with the threats it may face in the future. At the same time, this evaluation report aspires to be an inspiration for PTI as a whole, but more specifically for all those members of the PTI community — leadership, students and staff — who are interested in its future. The team hopes that the evaluation process, including this report, will contribute to PTI's future steps.

### Summary of recommendations

In this section of the report the main recommendations are summarised as they appear in italics in the respective sections of the text. In order for the recommendations to be able to stand autonomously in this specific section of the report, a slight rephrasing was necessary in some cases.

1. The team recommends that PTI concretise its strategic plan for the next period through an action plan or operational plan in which the actions will not appear in an horizontal and neutral manner as a simple list of actions but will be prioritised (in order to indicate which objective is important and which is less so), linked to specific and realistic timelines (in order to make the overall process manageable), quantified through performance indicators (in order to make the implementation and the achievement measurable) and, finally, assigned to personalised tasks and responsibilities (in order to show the real owner/carrier of the respective action).
2. The team recommends that PTI proceed to a better adaptation of ECTS to the actual student workload. This is a recommendation which does not aim to require simple numerical re-calculations but making the overall relationship "curriculum - learning outcomes - ECTS - student workload - assessment of students" fairer and more pragmatic.
3. The students would be happy to see the summer practice programme as part of their curricula. The team is not aware of the potential legal restrictions in this regard. However, it shares the views of the students and recommends that PTI explore the legal possibilities in order to integrate student summer practice into the curricula.



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4. The team recommends that a team spirit is built in PTI with regards to its overall research activity; PTI research-active staff should join their forces in a “one plus one equals three” perspective in order to become more efficient and more successful in their research performance.
5. The team recommends that PTI put more emphasis on its research activity and further improves its research performance by building appropriate conditions. In this regard, the team recommends that PTI rationalise its structures for coordinating and monitoring research and that it should ensure its capacity for research management and in successfully attracting national and European research funds. In this regard, the appointment of one or two persons who should be focused on research management (including also project design and grant applications) should be considered. In parallel, PTI repeats its earlier recommendation that a team spirit is built in PTI with regards to its overall research activity.
6. Consistent with the previous recommendation, the team considers necessary that PTI undertake all the necessary actions in order to fulfil the requirements for establishing a doctoral school and developing a PhD programme.
7. The team recommends that PTI should try to increase visibility regarding all of its successful missions to society. It is not a question of reward, recognition, reputation or accreditation; nor is it a question of appreciation by society — it is question of accountability to society.
8. The team believes that PTI has strong arguments to seek state funding on the basis of its social engagement and would recommend that it should work out a properly grounded request.
9. The team recommends that efforts towards internationalisation become more systematic. A specific issue for the team is the low number of incoming international students (much lower than the number of outgoing students). The team recommends that PTI develop a policy to improve its capacity to attract incoming Erasmus students. To that aim, PTI should develop an effective online information package for potential incoming students, promoting at the same time the existing accommodation facilities and the overall community spirit of the institution.
10. In its further steps to meet future challenges, PTI may have to consider, among other issues, the ambiguity of the legislation regarding religious higher education institutions in Romania. To that end, the team recommends that PTI consider establishing alliances with similar institutions at national level and try to influence the policy makers to clearly define the position of religious institutions in the national legislation.