



FINNISH EDUCATION EVALUATION CENTRE

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1 Quality assurance system in Finland

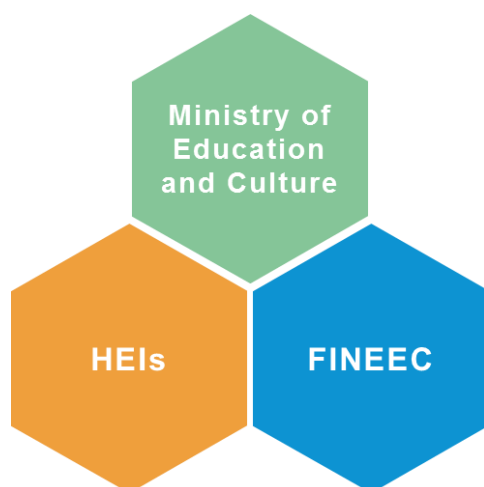
Finland has a dual higher education system and an extensive network of higher education institutions (HEIs) covering the whole country. Finland is geographically large in relation to its population and offering opportunities for higher education in the whole country has been a part of overall regional policy. Higher education is offered by 14 universities and 23 universities of applied sciences (UASs). Most of the HEIs operate under the governance and steering of the Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC). In addition, there is Åland University of Applied Sciences in the self-governing Province of Åland, Police University College under the steering of the Ministry of Interior, and National Defence University under the steering of the Ministry of Defence.

The role of FINEEC is to assist higher education institutions in the development of higher education and quality management by conducting external evaluations. The higher education institutions carry the main responsibility for the quality and development of education, research and other activities. The institutions also have a legal obligation to regularly undergo an external evaluation of their operations and quality system. The HEIs have the option to choose another external evaluator apart from FINEEC.

The national quality assurance system is described in the figure 1 below.

Higher education institutions

- **Main responsibility for quality** and the improvement of education and other activities
- Establish their **own QA systems**
- **Participate in external evaluations** of their operations and quality systems



Ministry of Education and Culture

Steering and decision-making

- Legislation, negotiations and performance agreements, performance-based funding, operating licenses (UAS), educational responsibility etc.

FINEEC

National responsibility

- Quality audits and other evaluations
- Assist HEIs in evaluation activities and quality management

Figure 1: The national quality assurance system in Finland

Quality audits

FINEEC conducts institutional quality audits, which has been the only EQA method applied since 2005. The third cycle of quality audits (2018-2024) is underway in Finland. The Finnish approach has since the first cycle covered not only the quality assurance and enhancement of education, but also research and societal engagement/impact. Other evaluations of higher education covering a wide variety of themes are also carried out. For instance, evaluations of fields of study are currently conducted in the fields of social sciences, technology, economics and business as well as humanities.

A central premise for the audit is the autonomy of HEIs to develop their quality systems according to their own needs and goals. Enhancement-led evaluation is the main guiding principle in FINEEC's audits. The goal of enhancement-led evaluation is to involve staff, students and stakeholders of the HEI in recognising strengths, good practices and development areas in the HEI's operations. The aim is also to support HEIs in achieving their own objectives, thus creating a premise for the continuous development of HEIs.

The first and second cycle of quality audits in Finland had a strong focus on the quality system of HEIs. There has been a slight shift away from this approach in the new model for 2018-2024. In the new audit model, there is a stronger emphasis on student-centred approach and societal impact of activities. Still, the focus of the audit is on the procedures used by the HEI to maintain and enhance the quality of its operations.

The purpose of the FINEEC quality audit 2018-2024 is to

- evaluate whether the quality work in the HEI meets the European quality assurance standards,
- assess whether the quality system produces relevant information for the achievement of the HEI's strategy and the continuous development of its activities, and whether it results in effective development activities,
- encourage internationalisation, experimenting and a creative atmosphere at HEIs, and
- accumulate open and transparent information on quality work at Finnish HEIs.

Some of the new aspects introduced in the third cycle of quality audits are benchlearning as a method, an audit platform (including a digital audit report and a public HEI self-assessment), and a Quality Label of Excellence.

FINEEC audits are carried out in Finnish, Swedish and English. FINEEC may also carry out audits outside Finland as paid services. HEIs that pass the audit receive a Quality Label, which is valid for six years.



FINEEC's audit model 2018-2024

2 Responsibilities and structure of FINEEC

The Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC) acts as an independent expert organisation responsible for the evaluation of education and early childhood education and care. FINEEC produces evaluation-based information to support decision-making in education policy as well as the development of education and early childhood education and care.

FINEEC's task is

- to implement evaluations related to education and early childhood education and care, and the activities of early childhood education and care providers, education and training providers, and **higher education institutions** in accordance with the education evaluation plan;
- to carry out evaluations of learning outcomes in accordance with the national core curricula and qualification requirements issued under the Basic Education Act and General Upper Secondary Schools Act, the Vocational Education and Training Act and the Act on Basic Education in the Arts;
- to support early childhood education and care providers, education and training providers, and **higher education institutions** in matters concerning evaluation and quality management;
- to develop the evaluation of education; and
- to take care of other tasks that are issued or given to the FINEEC.

FINEEC's activities are guided by a four-year national education evaluation plan¹. The main types of evaluations carried out by FINEEC are: thematic and system evaluations, learning outcome evaluations and quality audits. FINEEC also conducts EUR-ACE engineering programme accreditations as paid services.

Organisation

FINEEC is a government funded agency and it operates as a separate unit within the Finnish National Agency for Education. The operational work of FINEEC is carried out in four units: The General Education and Early Childhood Education Unit, the Vocational Education Unit, the Higher Education and Liberal Adult Education Unit, and Development Services Unit. The main office of FINEEC is located in Helsinki, and some of the agency's operations are located in Jyväskylä. The overall number of staff is approximately 50 of which 8 currently work in the HE unit.

FINEEC has two decision-making bodies, which members are stakeholder representatives. The Evaluation Council appointed by the Government is among others responsible for preparing the national evaluation plan. The Higher Education Evaluation Committee decides on evaluation plans as well as planning and evaluation teams for higher education evaluations. The Evaluation Committee also decides on the outcomes of quality audits of higher education institutions. The Evaluation Committee is appointed by the Ministry of Education and Culture and consists of representatives of universities, UASs, student organisations and working life outside the HEIs.

¹ [National Plan for Education Evaluation 2016-2019](#). The national education evaluation plan for 2020-2023 has been approved but is yet to be published.

Operating principles

The key operating principles of FINEEC are the independence of evaluation and enhancement-led evaluation. Other core values as emphasised in FINEEC’s new strategy for 2020-2023 (see Figure 2) are trustworthiness, openness and boldness.



Figure 2 The core values of evaluation as stated in FINEEC’s strategy for 2020-2023.