



FINNISH EDUCATION  
EVALUATION CENTRE

# FINNISH EDUCATION EVALUATION CENTRE'S FOLLOW-UP REPORT

3 April 2019

## Introduction

The Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC) is responsible for the external evaluation of universities and universities of applied sciences (UAS) in Finland. The three key evaluation types are the quality audits of higher education institutions (HEIs), thematic evaluations and engineering programme accreditations. FINEEC has conducted two full cycles of quality audits of Finnish higher education institutions (2005-2011 and 2012-2018) and the third cycle of quality audits is underway (2018-2024).

In 2016, FINEEC was reviewed against the new Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG 2015). The external review panel appointed by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) found that FINEEC was fully compliant with most of the areas in the ESG and partially with one of the ESG. FINEEC renewed its full membership in ENQA on 13 February 2017 and is listed in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR).

The panel report by the ENQA review panel identified several commendations for FINEEC, such as:

- *The ongoing efforts of FINEEC to involve its stakeholders in its work and development activities.*
- *The introduction of audit processes in English is a major innovation. It has made the use of international experts in audit and accreditation teams possible, which is of great value to the institutions which can now benefit from a completely external view on their systems and processes in audits and accreditations.*
- *The commitment of FINEEC in ensuring gender equity in its governing bodies and in the audit and accreditation teams.*
- *Summaries in Finnish, Swedish and English are always included in FINEEC's evaluation reports.*

The panel also identified recommendations that would support FINEEC in its efforts to enhance the quality and raise the impact of its quality assurance activities. In the table below, the panel's recommendations and FINEEC's actions addressing the panel's recommendations are described.

## Follow-up recommendations and actions taken by FINEEC

### ESG 3.1 ACTIVITIES, POLICY AND PROCESSES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

#### Recommendation:

*To increase the relevance of its work also for other actors beyond the HE institutions, the panel recommends FINEEC to consider, how it could strengthen the involvement of social partners in its governing bodies and ensure a transparent and systematic dialogue and coordination with key stakeholders at the national level, especially the most important labour market organisations, and even with the relevant officials in the Ministry of Education and Culture.*

#### Actions taken by FINEEC:

- Since the ENQA review in 2016, several parallel actions have been taken to further improve FINEEC's interaction with its stakeholders. Dialogue, interaction and well-maintained partnerships with stakeholders have been emphasised in FINEEC's strategic aims and new approaches have been adopted in order to increase the impact of evaluations.

- The enhancement-led approach is applied in all evaluations conducted by FINEEC. Stakeholder involvement in different phases of the evaluation projects has been strengthened.

- FINEEC has intensified its contacts with key stakeholders, especially the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Finnish National Agency for Education, in connection with evaluation projects. National, regional and local development needs and essential evaluation questions have been mapped more systematically and embedded in the design of evaluation projects. In addition to publication seminars, audit and evaluation results have been presented to key officials in order to increase the use of evaluation information in national decision-making as well as policy and steering processes.

- Furthermore, FINEEC has further increased the use of interactive methods as a part of systematic development of evaluation methods. Recently e.g. online workshops, hearings, focus-group discussions and seminars have been organised as a part of the planning and implementation phases of evaluation projects. These have led to more versatile evaluation data and increased networking.

- FINEEC's recently appointed (2018-2022) Evaluation Council includes several social

	<p>partners in its composition. The Council monitors and develops the operations of FINEEC and draws up its strategic policies. The members of the Evaluation Council are listed on <a href="#">FINEEC's website</a>.</p> <p>- The National Plan for Education Evaluations 2020-2023 is currently being planned. FINEEC has a key role in determining the themes and targets of evaluation, since it draws up the proposal on the National Plan for Education Evaluations to the Ministry of Education and Culture. In the planning process FINEEC has actively involved several stakeholders including relevant officials in the Ministry of Education and Culture. Several hundreds of evaluation initiatives were collected from education providers and stakeholders through hearings, seminars and web-based feedback.</p> <p>- FINEEC conducts a bi-annual stakeholder survey to gather stakeholder feedback on its activities. A further aim of the survey is to improve the effectiveness of FINEEC's communications as well as to enhance the quality and raise the impact of its quality assurance activities. The first stakeholder survey was carried out in 2018. The survey responses were widely discussed at FINEEC and development actions are taken based on the results.</p> <p>- According to FINEEC's new Communications Strategy which is published in spring 2019, the use of various communication channels and forms of reporting, such as summary reports, article-based reporting, blogs and podcasts will be increased to improve how evaluation results are communicated to education providers and stakeholders.</p>
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## ESG 3.4 THEMATIC ANALYSIS

### Recommendation:

*The panel recommends FINEEC to quickly initiate and complete the planned thematic analyses and allocate the necessary resources to this activity so that the development of the audit model for the third round can be based on solid knowledge and reflections on the results and experiences from the second round.*

### Actions taken by FINEEC:

- FINEEC has completed a thematic analysis covering all audit targets and audit reports of the second round of quality audits (2012-2018). The results of the analysis have been presented at different seminars, conferences and other events. A publication presenting the main findings is soon to be published in Finnish, Swedish and English.

- The experiences and feedback from the second audit round were incorporated in the planning of the third round of audits (2018-2024). The new audit criteria include several areas that were considered as areas to be developed in HEIs in the second round of audits.

- A new model for the thematic analyses of quality audits is being designed. After the pilot phase of the new audit model, thematic analyses will be conducted on an annual basis. Summaries will be published presenting the audit findings. The thematic analyses and the themes to be covered are described in the upcoming National Plan for Education Evaluations 2020-2023.

## ESG 2.1 CONSIDERATION OF INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

### Recommendation:

*The panel recommends that FINEEC actively supports initiatives that would lead to Finland's adoption of a national qualifications framework as soon as possible as expected in the Bologna Process. The panel also recommends FINEEC to take into account the new ESG when developing the new audit model for the third round, so that a clear link between the audit targets and the ESG part 1 is established.*

### Actions taken by FINEEC:

- The Decree on the National Framework for Qualifications and Other Competence Modules in Finland came into force in March 2017.

- *HEI creates competence*, which is one of the four evaluation areas of FINEEC's new audit model (2018-2024) is very much in line with the ESG 2015. As regards the national qualifications framework, it is stated in the new audit criteria that in the planning of education HEIs should ensure that the degrees correspond with the National

	Framework for Qualifications and Other Competence Modules.
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## ESG 2.2 DESIGNING METHODOLOGIES FIT FOR PURPOSE

<p><b>Recommendation:</b></p> <p><i>The panel recommends FINEEC to supplement its comprehensive efforts in engaging the broad higher education community in the development of the next audit model with more direct consultations with the main stakeholders at the national level, e.g. the rectors' conferences, the social partners and the Ministry, in order to ensure support and consensus about the model.</i></p>	<p><b>Actions taken by FINEEC:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The main stakeholders were consulted during the planning of the new audit model in 2016. Numerous consultation meetings, seminars, workshops and other events were organised during the planning phase (see attachment 1) and later to present and discuss the model. For instance, FINEEC staff members have presented and discussed the new model at several HEIs.</li> <li>- The new audit model has also been introduced and discussed at annual seminars organised by FINEEC (2016-2018). The participants of these national seminars included a multitude of HE representatives such as quality managers, rectors and students.</li> <li>- The new audit model is currently in a pilot phase. After the pilot phase, changes will be made to the model based on feedback and experiences from the HEIs audited using the new model. Feedback is also gathered from the audit teams conducting the pilot audits. In addition, general feedback from Finnish HEIs and key stakeholders will also be considered in this process. The possible revisions to the new audit model will be made by early autumn 2019.</li> </ul>
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## Attachment 1:

# Planning phase 2016 - Stakeholder meetings

