



FINEEC'S FOLLOW-UP REPORT TO ENQA 2024



1 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 ongoing (2018-2024). The third cycle of audits is ending in 2024.

In 2021, FINEEC was reviewed against the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG 2015). This was the third external review of FINEEC (and its predecessor FINHEEC) conducted by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). The 2021 ENQA panel assessed FINEEC to be fully compliant with all but one standard of the ESG. The panel assessed FINEEC to be substantially compliant with the ESG 2.7. FINEEC renewed its full membership in ENQA on 8 March 2022 and its listing in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) on 27 June 2022.

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

- its engagement with a wide range of stakeholders through its consultation processes and dissemination activities,
- its openness and willingness to react to demands of the sector,
- the way FINEEC conducts collaborative work across different units of FINEEC to make the most of the agency's human resources,
- the effort FINEEC puts in the professional development for the staff, which has a laudable experience,
- its solid and well-functioning approach to internal quality assurance and offers all the relevant documents which are designed taking in consideration the experience and the vision of a diverse group of stakeholders,
- introduction of benchlearning as part of the audit process, which was considered to have the capacity to enhance the quality of the institution's chosen focus area and to bring additional value to the participating institutions,
- the practice of organising the follow-up in the form of an enhancement-focused seminar, as it enables the higher education institutions to share good practices and learn from each other,
- the practice of publishing all national audit reports, comprising both the institutional self-evaluation report and the external expert group report as well as the audit decision on a separate FINEEC audit platform, in which the reports are accessible and visually informative.

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. The next chapter presents the panel's recommendations and FINEEC's actions addressing the panel's recommendations.

2 Follow-up recommendations and actions taken by FINEEC

ESG 2.7 Complaints and appeals	
Recommendation	Actions taken by FINEEC
<p>The agency is recommended to establish a formal complaints procedure. The procedure should be made known to all concerned parties.</p> <p>FINEEC is encouraged to open its appeal process in a way that all decisions can be appealed.</p>	<p>FINEEC has established a formal complaints procedure for evaluations concerning higher education. The procedure is described on the FINEEC website, and an online form has been created for the complaints procedure.</p> <p>The procedure has been made known to all interested parties by email, newsletter, and information on the website. Information on the complaint procedure has been disseminated to and through the quality managers of higher education institutions.</p> <p>FINEEC systematically collects feedback from evaluation objects and evaluation teams in all evaluations. A stakeholder survey, also covering higher education, is conducted biannually. A general feedback channel has been created on the FINEEC website. In addition, information has been added on FINEEC's website on the centralised external reporting channel of the Office of the Chancellor of Justice. This reporting channel is meant for oral and written reports of potential breaches and suspected misconduct of authorities.</p> <p>The FINEEC appeals procedure for audits is linked to the current third cycle of audits 2019-2024 (Process described on FINEEC's website). FINEEC will review the process for the next cycle and consider ENQA panel's recommendation of widening the appeals process as part of the review.</p> <p>EUR-ACE has a similar appeals procedure as audits. The next expert group for EUR-ACE appeals is nominated at the June 2024 meeting of the Committee for Engineering Education. The EUR-ACE appeals process will be reviewed</p>

	as part of the review of the audit appeals process mentioned above.
ESG 3.1 Activities, policy, and processes for quality assurance	
<p>Recommendation</p> <p>While the core focus of the agency within the scope of the ESG rightly continues to be institutional audit, the agency may build on its successful experience of programme accreditation in the context of EUR-ACE to anticipate further demands for programme accreditation from HEIs. These may arise in the context of fields of study, such as medicine, or modes of provision, such as international joint programmes.</p> <p>FINEEC is encouraged to consider including foreign / international stakeholders in their structure to assure some outside ideas feed in the system and enable input from a different perspective.</p>	<p>Actions taken by FINEEC</p> <p>FINEEC has been trying to get funding from the Ministry of Education and Culture to begin accreditations of medical education, so far without success. As part of the planning process of the fourth cycle, FINEEC will do a wide consultation of key stakeholders to map out the needs of the Finnish higher education system in terms of the purpose, approach, scope, methods, and process of external quality assurance.</p> <p>An international advisory board will be set up in connection with the planning of the fourth cycle of external quality assurance. The panel will be consulted during the planning process. The international advisory board is expected to bring international input, insights, and trends into the planning of the fourth cycle framework in Finland. The planning of the fourth cycle starts in autumn 2024.</p>
ESG 2.1 Consideration of internal quality assurance	
<p>Recommendation</p> <p>FINEEC is encouraged to consider weighing ESG 1.9 more explicitly in its methodology and thus also raising the level of expectations of Finnish higher education institutions regarding monitoring and review of study programmes.</p>	<p>Actions taken by FINEEC</p> <p>The monitoring and review of study programmes is included in the current third cycle framework criteria related to 1.3 The evaluation and enhancement of education.</p> <p>FINEEC has internally discussed the panel's recommendation and disseminated information on it to the wider public in its press release on the ENQA external review outcomes. FINEEC's annual quality seminar of 2023 focused on the topic of internal and external monitoring and review of study programmes. The quality seminar, among others, highlighted good practices of different HEIs.</p>

	Monitoring and review of study programmes will be included as a topic in the planning of the fourth cycle framework.
ESG 2.4 Peer-review experts	
<p>Recommendation</p> <p>FINEEC is encouraged to consider advance preparation of student and external stakeholder reviewers by providing e.g., short videos on certain specific aspects (the system, the role etc) before the review case specific training. These could be available for all categories of experts.</p>	<p>Actions taken by FINEEC</p> <p>Auditors are provided training and support by the FINEEC project managers throughout the audit process. In addition, FINEEC has produced concrete Tips for auditors addressing some of the key issues from the auditor's perspective. The set of tips include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What do you need to know about audits? 2. FINEEC audit framework 3. Reading the audit material 4. Evidence-based and criteria-based evaluation 5. Interviews 6. Reporting 7. Key concepts for first timers 8. Students' tips for preparing for the audit. <p>FINEEC staff met with former student members of audit teams to learn from their experiences and to get their views on how students could be better prepared for the audits. The tips for students (topic 8) were put together by the students as part of this process.</p> <p>A student member has also made a video of his audit experience on his own initiative, which FINEEC can use, e.g., when recruiting student members to audit teams.</p>