



FINNISH EDUCATION
EVALUATION CENTRE

QUALITY MANAGEMENT IN THE FINNISH EDUCATION SYSTEM



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1 Introduction

The Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC) evaluates Finnish education and early childhood education and care (ECEC) as an independent expert organisation. FINEEC produces evaluation-based information to support decision-making on education policy and the development of education. FINEEC's statutory tasks also include supporting ECEC providers, education, and training providers as well as higher education institutions in matters concerning evaluation and quality management.

This publication describes FINEEC's tasks related to its evaluations of quality management systems and provision of support for quality management in different fields of education and training. The need for this publication stems from the fact that, despite the special features of different levels of education, the legislation on education providers' and higher education institutions' self-evaluations is mainly based on the same principles. However, evaluation and quality management are guided by the specific starting points of each level of education.

The publication begins with describing the marginal conditions, which direct FINEEC's work and quality management at each level of education system. Chapter 3 presents the principles of enhancement-led evaluation that guide FINEEC's evaluation work and, in this context, quality management in education and ECEC in general terms. Chapters 4 to 7 describe in concrete terms how FINEEC supports education providers, service providers and higher education institutions in their quality work, develops evaluation methods and produces information on the state of quality management at different levels of education and training.

2 Legislative basis of quality management

The task of evaluating Finnish education and ECEC was assigned to the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre in 2014. FINEEC's external evaluations produce information and development recommendations for local, regional, and national decision-making and development work as well as for international comparisons. In addition, FINEEC's tasks include:



to support providers of early childhood education and care, education and training as well as higher education institutions in matters related to evaluation and quality management (Act on the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre 1295/2013).

As part of this task, FINEEC develops evaluation methods and systems for education and ECEC. Various forms of support and guidance for quality management are provided as indicated by the needs of the different education sectors. The obligation of ECEC providers, education and training providers and higher education institutions to evaluate the education they provide, and their other activities is laid down in the legislation on education. However, the legislation does not specify in detail what the education providers and higher education institutions should evaluate or how the evaluation should be carried out.

Trust is at the core of quality management and development in Finnish education and ECEC. Transparency is essential to ensure the reliability of evaluations. Under legislation applicable to them, education providers and higher education institutions have an obligation to publish the key results related to quality management and evaluations. Yet, the legislation does not provide detailed instructions on how, where and in what scope the results should be published.

New legislation on evaluation in early childhood education and care

The Act on Children's Day Care (36/1973) did not lay down binding or uniform objectives for evaluating early childhood education and care. A legislative reform was initiated as the drafting of legislation on, and the administration and steering of, ECEC were transferred from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health to the Ministry of Education and Culture in 2013 (Act amending the Act on Child Day Care 909/2012).

The reform also extended to the evaluation of ECEC. Under the amended Act on Children's Day Care (540/2018), an obligation to conduct self-evaluations now applies to all ECEC providers as well as all operating forms. This means that the providers should systematically evaluate their activities, strengths, and development needs. Private service providers also have an obligation to evaluate their activities.



The purpose of ECEC evaluation is to safeguard the realisation of the intent of this Act, support ECEC development, and improve the preconditions for children's development, learning and well-being. An ECEC organiser and provider shall evaluate the early childhood education and care they provide and take part in external evaluations of their activities. Key findings of the evaluations shall be published. (Section 24 of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care 540/2018.)

While the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care does not contain a provision on quality management, education providers and private service providers cannot carry out systematic evaluations without effective quality management systems.

Legislative basis of quality management in basic and general upper secondary education

Since school inspection activities were discontinued, quality management in general education has relied on legislation passed in 1998. As in other levels of education, providers of basic education and general upper secondary education are obliged to evaluate the education they provide and to participate in external evaluation of their activities. The section on evaluation in the Basic Education Act has changed little since the Act was passed. Only the party responsible for external evaluation has changed over the years.



The purpose of the evaluation of education is to assure that the purpose of this Act is carried out, to support educational development and to improve conditions for learning. An education provider shall evaluate the education it provides and its impact and take part in external evaluations of its operations. Provisions on the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre are laid down in the Act on the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (1295/2013). The salient findings of evaluation shall be published. (Section 21 of the Basic Education Act 628/1998.)

The Act on General Upper Secondary Education was amended in 2018, and significant changes were also made to the section on evaluation. In addition to the obligation to carry out self-evaluations and to participate in external evaluations already contained in these provisions, general upper secondary education providers were now required to have an effective quality management system:



Education providers are responsible for the quality of the education they provide and for continuously developing quality management. Education providers shall evaluate the education they provide and its impact and engage in external evaluations of their operations and quality management systems. Education providers shall publish the key results of the evaluations they organise. (Section 56 of the Act on General Upper Secondary Education 714/2018.)

Legislative basis of quality management in vocational education and training

A legislative reform that entered into force in 2018 stressed the importance of quality management in vocational education and training. Under the Act on Vocational Education and Training, education providers shall evaluate the education and training they provide and its impact, participate in external evaluations of their activities and publish the key results of the evaluations.



VET providers shall evaluate the qualifications, vocational education and training and other activities provided, including their quality and their effectiveness. VET providers are responsible for the quality of the qualifications, vocational education and training and other activities provided and for continuous improvement of quality control. VET providers shall also regularly submit to an external evaluation of their operations and quality control systems and publish the key findings of such an evaluation. (Section 126 of the Act on Vocational Education and Training 531/2017.)

Legislative basis of quality management in higher education

Under the current Universities Act (558/2009) and the Universities of Applied Sciences Act (932/2009), higher education institutions shall participate in external evaluations of their activities and quality systems and publish the results of these evaluations.



The universities must evaluate their education, research, and artistic activities as well as the effectiveness thereof. The universities must also regularly participate in external evaluations of their activities and quality assurance systems. The universities must publish the results of the evaluations they have organised. (Section 87 of the Universities Act 558/2009.)



Universities of applied sciences are responsible for the standard of quality and for continuous development of the education provided by them and their other operations. In addition, the universities of applied sciences must evaluate their education, research, and artistic activities as well as the effectiveness thereof. The universities of applied sciences must also regularly participate in external evaluations of their activities and quality assurance systems and publish the results of the evaluations they have organised. (Section 62 of the Universities of Applied Sciences Act 932/2014.)

3 FINEEC'S support for quality management is based on enhancement-led evaluation

Enhancement-led evaluation stresses participation, trust between the evaluator and participants in the evaluation, and the education and training providers' and higher education institutions' responsibility for maintaining and improving the quality of their activities. Evaluation of education in Finland is based on the principle of enhancement-led evaluation. In keeping with this principle, FINEEC's evaluations emphasise participation during the evaluation process and usability of the results. (Moitus & Kamppi 2020.)

In national evaluations, the different parties participate extensively in information collection, and the education organisations that are the subject of the evaluations receive feedback on the strengths, areas of development and good practices in their activities. (Moitus & Kamppi 2020.) In addition to information related to the content of education and ECEC, FINEEC also produces a national overview of quality management at the education system level. The aim of FINEEC's evaluations focusing on quality management is to support education providers and higher education institutions in achieving their objectives and continuously developing their activities.

4 Early childhood education and care is taking its first steps in developing quality management

The key requirements placed on quality in Finnish early childhood education and care, its evaluation and its development stem from the legislation regulating ECEC, the National core curriculum for ECEC, and international expert knowledge and research evidence. While these political, legislative, and evidence-based sources of information guiding ECEC development are different, they complement each other. The national steering system offers ECEC providers broad autonomy but also assigns them responsibility for making high-quality services accessible to all residents. ECEC providers have an obligation to evaluate their activities, whereas the legislation does not specify how or by which methods such evaluations should be carried out. ECEC actors and providers consequently need support in planning their quality management. (Vlasov et al. 2018)

Public and private ECEC organisers and providers are at different stages in their quality management work and in developing practices for evaluating their activities. In 2017, FINEEC produced a study (Mikkola et al. 2017) aiming to map ECEC providers' quality management and self-evaluation practices. The study found that their self-evaluation practices did not fully meet the objectives set in the legislation and the National core curriculum. Regardless of the legislation, almost one out of three providers did not have an effective self-evaluation system, or a culture of systematic evaluations integrated into their quality management. A large share of the models used by providers were general quality management tools based on quality management systems developed for business and economic contexts and which provided few means for evaluating the content of ECEC. (Mikkola et al. 2017)

The diversity of evaluation practices highlighted in the study indicates not only a conceptual incoherence related to quality management and self-evaluations conducted by the providers but also differences between their operating environments and their different needs related to organising ECEC services. FINEEC supports ECEC providers in developing their evaluation and quality management practices, among other things by harmonising their understanding of what self-evaluation and quality in ECEC mean in keeping with the objectives of early childhood education and care.



National quality indicators for early childhood education and care point the direction for evaluation

The Act on ECEC (540/2018) and the National core curriculum (2018) set the objectives for ECEC and its contents. Rather than specifying objectives for the child's learning or knowledge and skills, these documents focus on guiding the delivery of early childhood education and care in a manner that supports the child's learning, development, and well-being. The evaluation of ECEC also primarily focuses on the child's early educational environment, the staff's pedagogical work and the operating culture as well as the prerequisites for the child's learning, development and well-being created as a sum of these factors. Evaluation objects relevant to these prerequisites may include interaction between the staff and children, the atmosphere and learning environment of the ECEC unit, the staff's pedagogical choices, and structures that support and regulate the activities. (Vlasov et al. 2018.)

In 2018, FINEEC published an analysis based on legislation and guidance documents of factors that affect the quality of ECEC (Vlasov et al. 2018). In this context, national quality indicators for ECEC were published, which were derived from the Act on ECEC, the National core curriculum, and national and international research on key factors influencing the quality of ECEC. The key concepts of the analysis and their meanings stem from Finnish and European quality definitions; the definitions given to the concepts may also vary by the level of education in Finland. In Finnish ECEC evaluations, indicators refer to quality recommendations that describe good and desirable early childhood education and care in a concise form and provide guidelines for uniform national evaluation. (Vlasov et al. 2018.)

FINEEC develops tools to support quality management in early childhood education and care

In 2021–2023, FINEEC will work together with the Ministry of Education and Culture to develop a digital quality evaluation system (Harkoma, Vlasov & Marjanen 2021). Researchers in the field, experts and FINEEC will work together to create national evaluation tools for this system. The tools will contain evidence-based quality evaluation criteria and self-evaluation questions to support the evaluation. The self-evaluation questions will help ECEC evaluations to delve deeper and produce qualitative evaluation data for the system. ECEC organisers and service providers will be able to use the system as part of their quality management.

FINEEC's evaluation tools will produce up-to-date information on how development work should be targeted at the local level and how it will improve ECEC. At the national level, the evaluation tools will make it possible to evaluate and improve quality as part of FINEEC's statutory evaluations. A precondition for planning, implementing, evaluating, and developing the evaluation process is that the providers allocate resources to quality management. Leadership is also needed in the evaluation work, and clear structures must be created for it.

As a concept, the quality of ECEC is relative and linked to the values prioritised in society at any one time. Rather than interpreting the model for evaluating and developing ECEC quality as a permanent structure, it will consequently be regarded as a starting point for the factors that define good and desirable early childhood education and care.

5 Quality management in basic and general upper secondary education is underpinned by self-evaluations and external evaluations

As school inspections were discontinued, self-evaluation was highlighted in Finnish general education from the 1990s on. In 1998, education providers' obligation to evaluate the education they deliver and to participate in external evaluations of their activities was laid down in the legislation on basic and general upper secondary education.

The idea is that education providers use the self-evaluation data produced by them to assure and improve the quality of their operations and teaching. External evaluations produce information on the state of teaching and education at the national and international level. In addition to this, the local level education providers and schools receive more detailed information to support their development work.

External evaluations include FINEEC's evaluations of learning outcomes and evaluations of how the education system functions. National evaluations of learning outcomes produce information on the achievement of objectives set in curricula as well as the level of students' knowledge and skills and any differences in them. Methodical, systematic and comprehensive evaluation makes it possible to monitor trends in learning outcomes at the national level. Recent learning outcome evaluations have indicated a slight increase in differences between basic education students' knowledge and skills (FINEEC 2020).

In addition to self-evaluations and external evaluations, the means used to maintain the quality of Finnish basic and general upper secondary education include teachers' evidence-based higher education and statutory eligibility requirements; teachers are required to have a Master's degree.

Scope for improvement in self-evaluation practices

Large variations can be seen how systematically self-evaluations are carried out. *The Evaluation of basic and general upper secondary education providers' self-evaluation and quality management practices* (2017) conducted by FINEEC found that the majority of providers (59%) were at an emerging level in their quality management, while 38% were at a developing level. No education provider was at an advanced level, and almost 4% were at the absent level. The conclusions of the evaluation noted:



The findings show that not all education providers by far have a functioning self-evaluation system or a systematic evaluation culture as part of their quality management. The evaluations of some providers, therefore, do not meet the criteria and expectations based on trust, which the 1998 reform of the educational administration would require. (Harjunen et al. 2017, 12.)

Systematic self-evaluations have not been mainstreamed as part of all education providers' operations. Their significance has partly remained unclear, and time, financial resources or competence for this work have not been found. Curriculum updates and, in general upper secondary education, the matriculation examination reform and digitalisation have taken up a great deal of education providers' resources.

Efforts have been made at the national level to support education providers' quality management and the conduct of self-evaluations by such means as the *Quality criteria for basic education* (Ministry of Education and Culture 2012). The Ministry allocated discretionary government grants to the introduction of the Quality criteria for basic education and for strengthening quality work in 2010–2013. In 2016, 41% of basic education providers were using the quality criteria (Harjunen et al. 2017). No separate quality criteria have so far been prepared to support the self-evaluations of general upper secondary education providers. However, the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities created its own quality management model for general upper secondary education in 2010 (Karvonen 2010).

Efforts to strengthen quality management

Previously, general upper secondary education providers were expected to meet the same obligations as basic education providers: To conduct self-evaluations and participate in external evaluations. The Act made no direct reference to actual quality management or, for example, a quality management system, nor were the education providers required to have them. The situation of general upper secondary education providers changed in 2018. The statutory obligation related to quality management was laid down on the new act.

In 2021, the Ministry of Education and Culture launched a quality and accessibility programme for general upper secondary education (Ministry of Education and Culture 2021). The objectives of this programme include producing a quality strategy for general upper secondary education, striving for systematic and sustained improvements in the quality and accessibility of general upper secondary education, and supporting general upper secondary education providers in strengthening quality management, continuous improvement of quality and developing an operating culture that supports continuous improvement of quality. FINEEC is represented in the monitoring group of the quality programme.

An effort is also being made to improve quality management in pre-primary and basic education. The Education Policy Report of the Finnish Government (2021) stated that clear, binding quality targets and indicators describing their attainment should be set for the organisation of pre-primary and basic education. The preparation of these quality targets is about to begin, and FINEEC is also involved in this work. The purpose of the quality targets is to specify the target level of services equally throughout Finland. This is essential as the quality of teaching and education, and consistently maintained and evenly distributed quality, should not be taken for granted. Systematic work is needed to safeguard the prerequisites for teaching and learning.



6 Quality management in vocational education and training has been developed over the long term

Quality management in vocational education and training (VET) is promoted by five actors at the national level: the Ministry of Education and Culture, VET providers, FINEEC, the Finnish National Agency for Education and working life committees. The Ministry of Education and Culture makes decisions on education policy and directs the activities through legislation and funding. VET providers are responsible for the quality of the qualifications they award, the education and training they provide and their other activities, and for continuous improvement of quality management. FINEEC's task is to produce information on the state of VET providers' quality management systems and to support the providers in making use of national evaluations. The Finnish National Agency for Education develops quality management in VET and supports VET providers in developing their quality management. The working life committees contribute to the quality management of competence demonstrations and the evaluation of competence. (Ministry of Education and Culture 2019.)

Background to developing quality management in VET

Sustained work to develop quality management in VET has gone on in Finland since the 1990s. This work was launched by the Finnish National Agency for Education's evaluation unit, which initiated the first national development projects in cooperation with VET providers. The development projects prepared national quality management recommendations and models for self-evaluation and external audits.

In the 21st century, the development of quality management in VET has also been guided by European policies, including the Lisbon and Copenhagen Processes. The aim of these policies was to harmonise vocational education and training in Europe, improve its quality, and increase the transparency of activities. The development work culminated in the creation of EQAVET

(the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training), which has guided the development of quality management in VET at both national and local levels. The current national policies, development measures and quality management system evaluations are based on EQAVET's principles of continuous improvement. A quality award for vocational education and training was also developed in the 2000s. Its aim was to encourage education providers to improve their quality management and quality management systems and to draw attention to good practices.

Since the 2010s, quality management and evaluation in VET have additionally been guided by national policies, including the National Quality Strategy for Vocational Education and Training 2011–2020 (Ministry of Education and Culture 2012) and the Education and Research Development Plan 2011–2016 (Ministry of Education and Culture 2011). A key objective of these policies was that VET providers should have an effective system in place to support their quality management and continuous improvement of quality by 2015.

New legislation and changes in the operating environment necessitated an update of the Quality Strategy for Vocational Education and Training in 2020. The importance of quality management was emphasised further as education providers' competence in directing the education offered by them and the organisation of education was expanded. The objective of the quality strategy is to harmonise the principles of and create a framework for different VET actors' quality management and leadership related to it (Ministry of Education and Culture 2019).

State of quality management has been evaluated regularly

The state of quality management was first examined in 2005 by the Finnish National Agency for Education's evaluation unit. The evaluation found that approximately one half of the education providers who responded to the survey had carried out systematic quality work, and 77% conducted self-evaluations as an established key method of developing their activities. (Löfström 2005.)

The following quality management system evaluation was conducted by FINEEC in 2015. The purpose of this evaluation was to determine if all education providers have an effective system to support their quality management and continuous improvement of quality as required under the Quality strategy. The data collection methods comprised education providers' self-evaluations and evaluation visits. The evaluation found that the majority (71%) of education providers had an effective quality management system, however with differences between providers in the state of their systems. A key factor that explained these differences was related to the length of the period during which efforts to develop quality management had been carried out. (Räsänen et al. 2016.)

FINEEC will evaluate the effectiveness of education providers' quality management systems in 2021–2022 with the objective of encouraging education providers to develop their quality management systems further and producing information on the extent to which the providers have fulfilled the requirements concerning quality management laid down in legislation. The evaluation will also produce information on how the quality management systems have developed compared to the corresponding evaluation conducted in 2015. The evaluation will also support the implementation, monitoring and development of the National quality strategy and highlight good quality management practices.

According to preliminary evaluation results, most education providers (86%) place their quality management at either the improving or advanced level. Examined by evaluation area, quality management is implemented best in the areas of leadership and operational management, financial resources and individualisation. Slightly poorer performance was found in the following areas: quality management as part of the management system, partnerships and networks, planning of education offered and services, and societal impacts.

In addition to evaluations of quality management systems, the learning outcome evaluations and thematic evaluations conducted by FINEEC support quality management in VET and its development.



Quality management of VET is being further developed

Long-term national and international development work of VET quality management systems has helped improve education providers' quality management. Changes in the operating environment, including those related to working life, digitalisation, age structure and regional disparity challenge all VET actors to develop their quality management further.

Quality strategy for vocational education and training 2030 (Ministry of Education and Culture 2019) creates a common basis for the development of quality management for different VET actors. Quality strategy for vocational education and training 2030 defines the key principles of quality management of VET as:

- customer orientation
- innovativeness, ability for renewal and learning from others
- flexibility, foresight and ability to react
- evidence-based decision-making and continuous improvement
- consistent quality and striving for excellence
- trust, openness and transparency



7 External evaluation of quality management of higher education institutions is based on audits

The national quality evaluation system of higher education consists of three areas: different forms of steering by the Ministry of Education and Culture, higher education institutions' (HEIs) statutory autonomy and responsibility for the quality of their activities, and FINEEC's higher education evaluation activities. The Academy of Finland is responsible for maintaining and evaluating the quality of research. Quality management in Finnish higher education institutions and its external evaluation are guided by the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG 2015). In addition, an enhancement-led approach to evaluation and audits is stressed in the external evaluation of quality management. The third cycle of audits is currently under way in Finland.

The audits of HEIs are independent evaluations carried out by an external audit team, in which the effectiveness and impacts of the HEI's activities and quality management are assessed. The focus is on the procedures by which the HEI ensures and develops the quality of its activities. Compared to many European countries, the Finnish approach is comprehensive, as the audits cover not only educational provision, but also research, development, and innovation activities as well as societal engagement and impact.

Evaluation of Finnish higher education institutions' quality management began with institutional evaluations

The first experiments in conducting institutional evaluations of universities started in 1991. They began as voluntary pilot evaluations, the aim of which was to obtain experience of evaluating universities and the suitability of foreign evaluation methods

for Finnish HEIs. Higher education evaluations were institutionalised in Finland with the establishment of the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC) in 1996 and the new Universities Act and Universities of Applied Sciences Act that were passed in 1997. (Huusko 2009; Pyykkö 2010.) The work of FINHEEC covered both universities and universities of applied sciences. Self-evaluations and institutional evaluations of HEIs became more common. FINHEEC also continued to apply the earlier adopted method of enhancement-led evaluation.

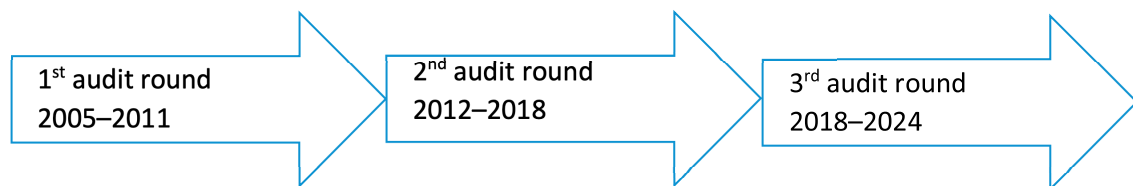
At the turn of the millennium, European influences increasingly affected the activities of Finnish HEIs. The so-called Bologna Process began in June 1999. *The European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education* (ENQA) was established in 2000 to support European cooperation in the evaluation and quality management of education. This process was expanded in Berlin in 2003 and building comparable qualifications and quality management systems had a key role in the Berlin Communiqué. As Finland signed the Communiqué, this marked a strong commitment to requiring higher education institutions to have accreditation, certification or other similar systems. In its memorandum, the working group on Quality management in higher education appointed by the Ministry of Education and Culture in 2004 recommended that the quality management systems of Finnish higher education institutions be systematised and that audits evaluating quality management to be initiated. (Huusko 2009; Pyykkö 2010.)

Quality systems were stressed in the first and second audit cycles

FINHEEC started conducting pilot audits of quality management systems in 2005. The audits were instrumental in embedding quality management in Finnish higher education institutions. (Huusko 2009.) In the first (2005–2011) and second audit cycles (2012–2018), quality systems and systematic quality management were stressed. The objective of the first audit cycle was to support the development of HEIs' quality systems, ensuring that they would fulfil the European principles of quality management. In the second audit

cycle, the role of HEIs' self-evaluations was emphasised further, and attention was paid to quality culture. Ensuring the participation of the higher education community (staff and students) and stakeholders in quality management was assigned an increasingly important role. Compared to the first cycle, the second cycle emphasised more the role played by strategic leadership and guidance in the quality system and operational development. Increasingly, the HEIs were also asked to provide concrete examples of the impacts of their quality work. (Moitus et al. 2020) In the second audit cycle, the focus was also more strongly on quality management in education, which was evaluated using a sample of degree programmes as examples of how quality management works in practice.

The key finding of the second audit cycle was that Finnish HEIs to a large extent had effective quality management systems linked to operational management and strategic objectives. The HEIs' quality management systems produced information that supported the continuous improvement and targeting of activities. The key development areas were systematic quality management, harmonisation of procedures and addressing inconsistencies in quality management. Other important development areas in higher education institutions included collecting, monitoring and feedback data to support the attainment of strategic objectives, mainstreaming excellent practices and drawing on competence within HEI communities. (Nordblad et al. 2020.)



Third audit cycle encourages renewal and innovation

The third audit cycle (2018–2024), which is currently under way, encourages the higher education institutions to promote internationalisation, experimentation and a creative atmosphere at the HEIs. A key starting point for planning the new audit framework was the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG 2015), which stresses competence, student-centred teaching and learning and research-based education. In addition to a student-centred approach, the third-cycle audits emphasise higher education institutions' societal engagement and impact. An effort has been made to link the audit framework's evaluation areas more strongly to higher education institutions' development priorities compared to the previous frameworks. An important viewpoint in audits is how higher education institutions maintain and develop the quality of their activities related to their core duties and how the information produced by quality management systems is used to achieve strategic objectives and develop the activities. In addition to analysing the current state, the audits also look to the future. One of the tasks of evaluation is also making successful enhancement activities visible. (FINEEC 2019; Moitus et al. 2020.)

When the third cycle of audits is approaching its end, it will again become topical to plan the framework for the following cycle of external evaluations of quality management of HEIs. The continuing Bologna Process, alliances of European universities, micro-credentials, and continuous learning are some aspects that challenge Finnish higher education institutions to develop their quality management systems. Evaluation frameworks should also in the future be closely linked to the current development priorities of the higher education sector and developed together with HEIs, students, employers, and other key stakeholders to support the development of Finnish higher education institutions.

8 Conclusion

FINEEC's goal is to produce information, understanding, and competence related to education, thus building trust, and leading to wise solutions at both the local and the national level. The objective of supporting education providers' and higher education institutions' quality management and conducting external evaluations of quality management systems is to enhance the functioning of the Finnish education system, support the development of education, and promote equality for learners.

Quality management as an activity extends from early childhood education and care to higher education. Based on this publication, it can be stated that quality management and evaluation of quality management systems are at different stages in different education sectors. In higher education and vocational education and training, evaluations of quality management systems have been systematically carried out for a long time. European processes and quality management frameworks have had a guiding effect, especially in quality management in higher education but also in vocational education and training. However, in ECEC, basic education and upper secondary education the current focus is on supporting the providers' own quality work. The key starting point for FINEEC is to link quality management support and evaluation to the development priorities of each education sector.

Based on the principles of enhancement-led evaluation, FINEEC's evaluations look to the future and the methods used are diverse and participatory. In enhancement-led evaluation, the evaluation process itself, and the results of evaluation are of great importance, because evaluation is genuinely intended to support the development of activities

Involving local actors and key stakeholders in quality management and in the design and implementation of evaluation is important. The goal is that quality management and evaluation is linked to the activities of education providers and higher education institutions, and to support the development of education and to enhance continuous improvement of quality in the best possible way. The quality culture in ECEC centres, schools, and higher education institutions is the result of joint efforts and participatory work.

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