

FINEEC's self-assessment report for the ENQA targeted review 2026

4.1 ESG Standard 2.1 Consideration of internal quality assurance - Institutional quality audit

Standard

External quality assurance should address the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part 1 of the ESG.

ENQA Review 2022 – suggestion for further development

FINEEC is encouraged to consider weighing ESG 1.9 more explicitly in its methodology and thus also raising the level of expectations of Finnish HEIs regarding monitoring and review of study programmes.

Institutional quality audit compliance

FINEEC conducts institutional quality audits with the same audit framework applied to universities and universities of applied sciences. The same framework is also available to non-Finnish HEIs commissioning an audit from FINEEC. The FINEEC audit framework is broad and covers the three core functions of HEIs: education, research or research, development and innovation (RDI) activities, artistic activities, and societal engagement.

The fourth cycle audit framework 2025-2030 (see Figure 1) has two evaluation areas:

- Evaluation area I: Strategic management supported by the quality system
- Evaluation area II: Learning supported by teaching and guidance

Evaluation area I assesses the HEI's quality system and its connection to strategic and knowledge-based management. It also assesses how the HEI analyses and anticipates changes and risks in its operating environment and organisational culture. Evaluation area II assesses how the HEI plans, implements and develops its degree programmes and continuous learning provision to support education that is student-centred, research-based, and connected to the labour market. The criteria for the evaluation areas are described in detail for the level *good* in the fourth cycle [Audit Manual](#) (FINEEC, 2025a).

The HEI may also choose an optional cross-cutting theme for the audit that is central for its profile or strategy, and for which it wishes to receive feedback from the audit team. The theme should concretely highlight the

HEI's profile and its ambitions. The theme is integrated into the HEI's self-assessment. The cross-cutting strategic theme selected by the HEI does not affect the audit's outcome.

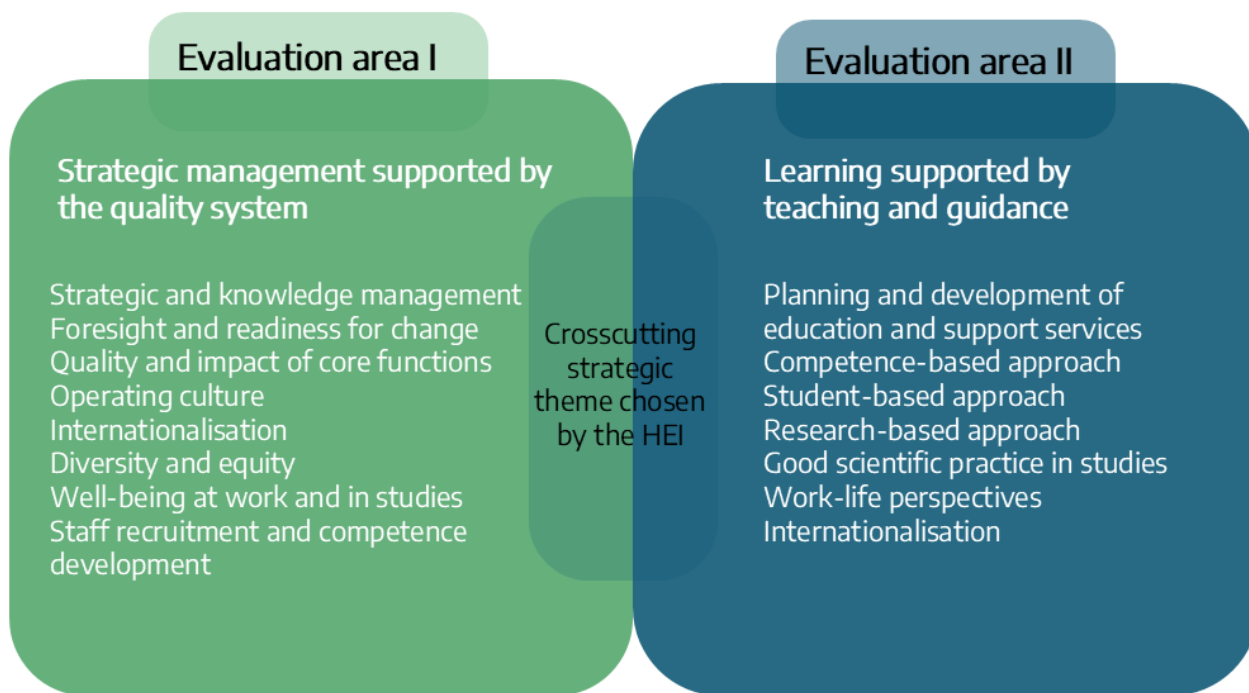


FIGURE 1. FINEEC fourth-cycle audit framework 2025-2030

The FINEEC audit criteria compliance with the ESGs is presented in the table below.

1.1 Policy for quality assurance

Institutions should have a policy for quality assurance that is made public and forms part of their strategic management. Internal stakeholders should develop and implement this policy through appropriate structures and processes, while involving external stakeholders.

The HEI's management and quality systems support the achievement of its strategic objectives and the development of its operations

- The HEI has established the principles, objectives and responsibilities of its quality system, which supports its strategy and forms the basis of its quality work. The core principles of the quality system are openly accessible.
- The HEI identifies societal changes and risks and analyses and applies foresight information to support its strategy implementation and to ensure operational continuity.
- The information needs of the HEI's management have been identified, and the necessary data is readily accessible to both the leadership and the higher education community. The HEI has defined clear responsibilities for using monitoring, evaluation and foresight data to support the development of its operations. The information supports the HEI's management and strategic objectives.
- The HEI has a risk management plan or equivalent and ensures the continuity of its education and research/RDI activities in exceptional circumstances.
- The HEI promotes internationalisation in line with its strategic objectives, and it has defined principles for responsible internationalisation.

The HEI's organisational culture is inclusive and open

- The HEI's organisational culture and leadership are open and participatory.
- Staff, students and external stakeholders participate in and have opportunities to influence the planning and development of the HEI's activities.
- The HEI has effective practices for giving and receiving feedback regularly. The higher education community follows up on the feedback as part of the HEI's management processes, implements development measures and monitors their impact.

1.2 Design and approval of programmes

Institutions should have processes for the design and approval of their programmes. The programmes should be designed so that they meet the objectives set for them, including the intended learning outcomes. The qualification resulting from a programme should be clearly specified and communicated and refer to the correct level of the national qualifications framework for higher education and, consequently, to the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area.

The planning of degree programmes is systematic, and it ensures student-centred and research-based education, labour market perspectives and internationalisation

- The degree programmes have been reviewed to ensure that they correspond with the National Framework for Qualifications and Other Competence Modules.
- The planning processes ensure that the degree programmes are up-to-date, student-centred, research-based, include labour market perspectives and are aligned with the HEI's profile.
- Education is based on research. The HEI integrates its research or RDI activities in degree programmes.
- Degree programmes have clearly defined learning outcomes. The planning ensures that teaching and learning methods, learning environments and assessment enable the achievement of learning outcomes in a diverse manner.
- Students' workload is defined according to the principles of the ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System).
- The HEI has systematic and effective practices for approving new degree programmes, including the consideration of existing educational provision nationally.

The development of education, teaching and guidance is based on data and engagement

- Teachers and students actively participate in the planning and development of degree programmes.
- Degree programmes have established practices for interaction with the labour market, and the results of this cooperation are used in the development of degree programmes.
- Degree programmes utilise monitoring, evaluation and feedback data to develop the programmes, teaching and guidance.
- Degree programmes systematically monitor student workload and make changes when necessary.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Degree programmes systematically monitor and assess the achievement of the learning outcomes.
<p>1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment</p> <p>Institutions should ensure that the programmes are delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in creating the learning process, and that the assessment of students reflects this approach.</p>	<p>Teaching and guidance support goal-oriented studies and the active role of students in their learning process</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The delivery of teaching and guidance, along with the assessment of learning, is purposeful and actively supports the students' engagement in the learning process. • Degree programmes have purposeful practices to accommodate the needs of diverse student groups in teaching. • The HEI has defined its pedagogical guidelines, model or an equivalent framework.
<p>1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification</p> <p>Institutions should consistently apply pre-defined and published regulations covering all phases of the student "life cycle", e.g. student admission, progression, recognition and certification.</p>	<p>Teaching and guidance support goal-oriented studies and the active role of students in their learning process</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The HEI follows openly available regulations, guidelines and principles regarding student admissions, studies and graduation. • The HEI has clear procedures to ensure the recognition and validation of prior learning, the credit transfer of completed studies or the integration of other previously acquired competence into formal education.
<p>1.5 Teaching staff</p> <p>Institutions should assure themselves of the competence of their teachers. They should apply fair and transparent processes for the recruitment and development of the staff.</p>	<p>The HEI promotes diversity, well-being at work and in studies, the development of staff competence and transparent recruitment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The HEI promotes diversity and monitors the realisation of equal treatment in its higher education community. • The HEI systematically supports the integration of international staff and students into the higher education community and Finnish society. • The HEI monitors and supports well-being at work and in studies. • The HEI applies transparent procedures in staff recruitment. • The HEI identifies the competence development needs of its staff and develops their competence in a goal-oriented manner. It also systematically monitors and records the teaching staff's pedagogical competence development.
<p>1.6 Learning resources and student support</p> <p>Institutions should have appropriate funding for learning and teaching activities and ensure that adequate and readily accessible learning resources and student support are provided.</p>	<p>Teaching and guidance support goal-oriented studies and the active role of students in their learning process</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The delivery of teaching and guidance, along with the assessment of learning, is purposeful and actively supports the students' engagement in the learning process. • Degree programmes have purposeful practices to accommodate the needs of diverse student groups in teaching. • Study guidance, counselling and other support services help students complete their studies. The needs of both students and staff are considered in the development of support services, which are developed based on feedback and evaluation data.
<p>1.7 Information management</p> <p>Institutions should ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their programmes and other activities.</p>	<p>The HEI's management and quality systems support the achievement of its strategic objectives and the development of its operations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The HEI identifies societal changes and risks and analyses and applies foresight information to support its strategy implementation and to ensure operational continuity. • The information needs of the HEI's management have been identified, and the necessary data is readily accessible to both the leadership and the higher education community. The HEI has defined clear responsibilities for using monitoring, evaluation and foresight data to support the development of its operations. The information supports the HEI's management and strategic objectives. <p>The HEI has effective practices to ensure and develop the quality and societal impact of its education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The HEI identifies the strengths and improvement needs of its educational activities.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The HEI actively addresses insufficient quality and identified problems in its operations. The HEI can provide follow-up data on the impact of development measures on its educational activities. • The HEI monitors and develops the societal impact of its educational activities in line with its strategy. <p>The development of education, teaching and guidance is based on data and engagement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Degree programmes utilise monitoring, evaluation and feedback data to develop the programmes, teaching and guidance. • Degree programmes systematically monitor student workload and make changes when necessary. • Degree programmes systematically monitor and assess the achievement of the learning outcomes. <p>The HEI's organisational culture is inclusive and open</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The HEI has effective practices for giving and receiving feedback regularly. The higher education community follows up on the feedback as part of the HEI's management processes, implements development measures and monitors their impact.
<p>1.8 Public information</p> <p>Institutions should publish information about their activities, including programmes, which is clear, accurate, objective, up-to date and readily accessible.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The audit team visits the audited HEI's website and often the intranet site as part of the assessment process. • The Finnish HEIs have well-developed websites with key information on their activities and programmes. All degree programmes offered by the Finnish HEIs are also published on national platform Studyinfo.fi where applications to programmes are also submitted. Opin.fi is a new national platform that brings together the open study offerings of all Finnish universities and universities of applied sciences. • Finland has also a well-developed and open system for statistics collected by the Statistics Finland, the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Finnish National Agency for Education. Vipunen.fi is Finland's official national education statistics service. It is maintained by the Finnish National Agency for Education and provides comprehensive, detailed data on HEIs such as on applicants, enrolled students and graduates, placement after graduation, research publications, international activity, feedback and career monitoring.
<p>1.9 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes</p> <p>Institutions should monitor and periodically review their programmes to ensure that they achieve the objectives set for them and respond to the needs of students and society. These reviews should lead to continuous improvement of the programme. Any action planned or taken as a result should be communicated to all those concerned.</p>	<p>The HEI has effective practices to ensure and develop the quality and societal impact of its education.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The HEI regularly evaluates its degree programmes. • The HEI identifies the strengths and improvement needs of its educational activities. The HEI actively addresses insufficient quality and identified problems in its operations. The HEI can provide follow-up data on the impact of development measures on its educational activities. • Degree programmes utilise monitoring, evaluation and feedback data to develop the programmes, teaching and guidance. • The HEI has effective practices for giving and receiving feedback regularly. The higher education community follows up on the feedback as part of the HEI's management processes, implements development measures and monitors their impact. • The planning processes ensure that the degree programmes are up-to-date, student-centred, research-based, include labour market perspectives and are aligned with the HEI's profile.
<p>1.10 Cyclical external quality assurance</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finnish universities and universities of applied sciences are required by law to regularly participate in the external evaluation of their operations and quality systems. HEIs select the external agency conducting the external evaluation/s. FINEEC conducts institutional quality audits in line with the ESGs on a cyclical basis. The quality label is valid for six years, and thus, the FINEEC procedure requires an audit of the HEI to take place every six years.

One of the premises of the planning of FINEEC's fourth cycle framework was to incorporate ESG 2015 in the framework and clarify criteria which needed clarification. The ESGs were also discussed with the international experts that were consulted twice during the planning in spring 2025.

In the ENQA external review conducted in 2021–2022, FINEEC's third-cycle audit framework was assessed as fully compliant with ESG 2.1. Nevertheless, the ENQA review panel encouraged FINEEC to give more explicit weight to ESG 1.9 in its methodology, thereby raising Finnish higher education institutions' expectations regarding the monitoring and periodic review of study programmes. While the periodic review of degree programmes was included in the criteria for the third audit cycle, FINEEC has further clarified and strengthened its expectations regarding the ongoing monitoring and periodic review of degree programmes in line with ESG 1.9. These strengthened expectations are reflected both in FINEEC's communication on the ENQA review outcomes and in the design and implementation of the fourth-cycle audit framework.

The FINEEC Annual Quality Seminar 2023 focused specifically on the internal and external monitoring and periodic review of study programmes, showcasing good practices from various HEIs. The fourth-cycle audit manual now includes a glossary of key concepts, and the Q&A section on FINEEC's website (currently only available in Finnish) further clarifies expectations related to periodic programme reviews.

FINEEC requires HEIs to have a system for the periodic review of their degree programmes. Institutions are free to design a review process that best serves their needs, and reviews may be either internal or external. FINEEC, however, requires that the processes include reviewers without affiliations to the programme being reviewed. A self-assessment conducted by the programme is not sufficient. The entire evaluation framework including audit criteria have been renewed for the fourth cycle. In terms of teaching and learning, the evaluation area 2 criteria is a continuation on the third-cycle evaluation area 1. The framework continues to emphasise student-centred, competence-based, and research-based education, while integrating labour market perspectives.

Areas improved in audits

- The framework places greater emphasis on pedagogy, the consideration of diverse student groups, and internationalisation and the engagement of stakeholders.
- The criteria include an own sub-area for continuous learning.
- There is more focus on knowledge or data-driven management and quality improvement. Efforts have also been made to clarify expectations in specific areas, such as the periodic review of programmes.
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The areas to be improved will be informed by the pilot audits. FINEEC also collects annual feedback from both audited HEIs and audit teams and smaller changes to the process can be made throughout the cycle.