

OECD External Evaluation of FINEEC

FINEEC Self-Assessment Questionnaire

January 2023, FINEEC'S response 10th of March 2023 (updated 15.3.)

This questionnaire seeks to collect information about FINEEC's work and will be used as a basis and starting point for the subsequent evaluation stages.

This questionnaire can be completed in English or Finnish.

Please send a consolidated response to the questionnaire **by 1 March 2023** to Ricardo Espinoza (ricardo.espinoza@oecd.org) and Patricio Ruedi (patricio.ruedi@oecd.org)

For any information and/or queries with respect to its completion, please contact:
Ricardo Espinoza (ricardo.espinoza@oecd.org)
Patricio Ruedi (patricio.ruedi@oecd.org)

*Thank you for taking the time
to reply to this questionnaire*

Table of contents

Background and instructions	3
An external evaluation of FINEEC	3
Content of the questionnaire	3
Instructions	4
Dimension 1. Relevance	5
Sub-dimension 1.1. Responsiveness to needs, policies and priorities	5
Sub-dimension 1.2. Sensitivity and responsiveness to context	21
Sub-dimension 1.3. Quality of design	33
Dimension 2. Coherence	43
Sub-dimension 2.1. External coherence	43
Sub-dimension 2.2. Internal coherence	49
Dimension 3. Effectiveness	53
Sub-dimension 3.1. Achievement of objectives	53
Sub-dimension 3.2. Symmetry of results across levels of education and local authorities	75
Sub-dimension 3.3. Factors Influencing results	78

Background and instructions

An external evaluation of FINEEC

The OECD is conducting an independent evaluation of FINEEC. The main objective of this project is to assess **whether the outcomes of FINEEC's evaluation activities form a reliable base for making policy decisions and provide well-grounded and implementable policy recommendations.**

This evaluation will assess the performance of FINEEC in three dimensions:

1. **Relevance:** this dimension examines the extent to which FINEEC objectives, design and plan respond to the needs of beneficiaries, the country, and partner institutions' policies and priorities. It also assesses FINEEC's capacity to adapt to changing policy needs and priorities.
2. **Coherence:** this dimension examines the compatibility of FINEEC's objectives and tasks within FINEEC and with other actors in the system.
3. **Effectiveness:** this dimension examines the extent to which FINEEC achieved its objectives and its expected results, including differential results across services and groups.

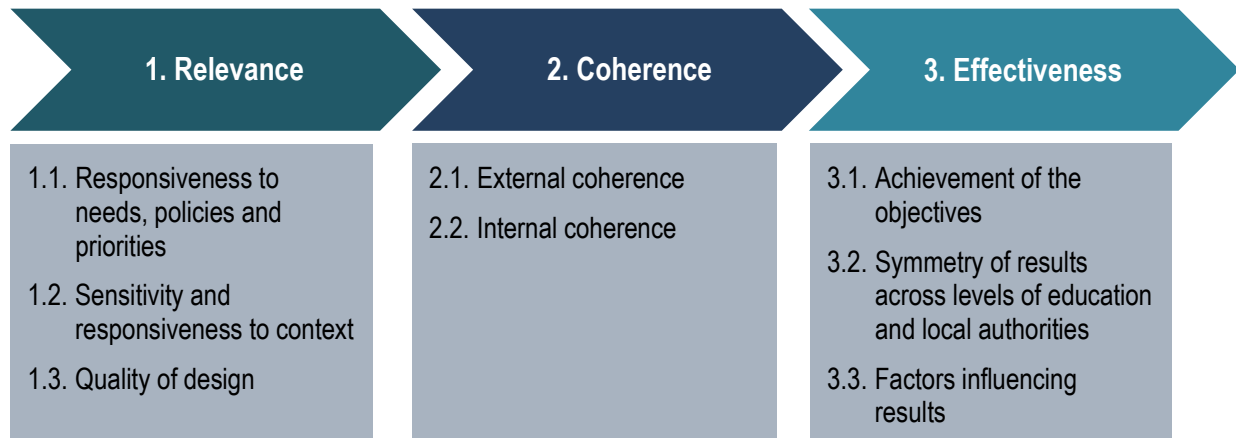
Content of the questionnaire

To facilitate this work, the OECD is requesting that FINEEC complete a self-assessment, provided below. The answers will be helpful for planning the OECD visits to Finland, bilateral meetings, and the workshops, as well as for guiding the analysis for the final report.

The success of the project will depend crucially on the quality of the information that is obtained from this questionnaire. Therefore, we would like to express our gratitude in advance for your cooperation and for the time you have taken to complete it.

The questionnaire contains 26 questions which are grouped in three sections, one for each of the evaluation dimensions that have been identified for this project: relevance, coherence and effectiveness. The questions are further grouped into sub-sections, which match the sub-dimensions of the analytical framework as shown in the figure below. Full definitions of these sub-dimensions can be found in the body of the questionnaire.

Figure 1. Assessment dimensions and questionnaire structure



Source: Own elaboration based on OECD (2021), Applying Evaluation Criteria Thoughtfully, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/543e84ed-en>.

Instructions

The steps to filling it out the questionnaire are the following:

1. Before answering, please ensure that all questions in the questionnaire are clear. If not, please ask the OECD team for clarification.
2. Send a copy of the questionnaire to **all relevant FINEEC officials**.
3. The questionnaire is in English. However, you can answer the questions in **English or Finnish**.
4. Whenever possible, please answer the questions using **full sentences**.
5. There is **no word limit** to answer the questions. Please use as much space as needed.
6. Whenever possible, when consolidating answers, please **indicate who provided the answers**. The OECD is particularly interested in **diverging opinions**.
7. Please share with us all the relevant publications or documentation cited in your response, if any.
8. Send the **consolidated questionnaire** answers back to the OECD (ricardo.espinosa@oecd.org and patricio.ruedi@oecd.org) **by 1 March 2023**

Dimension 1. Relevance

Definition: this dimension examines the extent to which FINEEC's objectives, design and plan respond to the needs of beneficiaries, the country, and partner institutions' policies and priorities. It also assesses FINEEC's capacity to adapt to changing policy needs and priorities.

Sub-dimension 1.1. Responsiveness to needs, policies and priorities

Definition: This sub-dimension addresses the extent to which FINEEC addresses stakeholders' needs and priorities.

1.1.1. To what extent are the goals and activities of FINEEC aligned with the needs and priorities of the Ministry of Education and Culture (OKM) and local authorities (e.g. municipalities)? Please provide evidence to support this answer.

Answer:

The task of the FINEEC and the legal basis of the operations – Actions are based on trust, openness, and interaction

The FINEEC is responsible for the evaluation of all levels of education from early childhood education and care to higher education and liberal adult education. FINEEC is an independent education evaluation authority. The aim of FINEEC is to produce educational knowledge, understanding and competence that enhance the development of education at the national, regional and local level. 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. Independence of the FINEEC refers to the freedom of third-party interests in terms of evaluation methods, organisation, results, conclusions drawn and development recommendations. The Finnish system of education evaluation is built on trust, openness and interaction. Provision of duties and organisation of FINEEC is laid down in Act 1295/2013 and Government decree 1317/2013.

FINEEC's task is

- to implement evaluations related to education and early childhood education and care, and the activities of 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;

- Support education and training providers and higher education institutions in evaluation and quality management matters
- to develop the evaluation of education; and
- to take care of other tasks that are issued or given to the FINEEC.

The Finnish education system is bilingual (Finnish and Swedish), and FINEEC conducts evaluations in the two languages, from early childhood education and care to higher education. The above tasks of FINEEC apply to both language groups. Assessments are also carried out in other national languages, such as Sámi-languages (3).

The national evaluation plan and its follow-up

FINEEC's activities are guided by the national education evaluation plan, which describes the evaluation activities during the four-year evaluation plan period. The Evaluation Council appointed by the Government is responsible for preparing the evaluation plan and any changes to the plan. ([The Act on the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre 1295/2013](#), [Government decree on the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre 1317/2013](#).)

The evaluation plan is prepared in extensive cooperation with key stakeholders. Issues considered in preparing the plan include FINEEC building a shared national knowledge base on education, utilising previously obtained data, and information produced by other actors, and promoting the impact of the evaluation activities.

[The four-year National Education Evaluation Plan](#) is prepared in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Culture; the Finnish National Agency for Education; regional and local authorities; municipalities; early childhood education and care (ECEC), education and training providers; higher education institutions; and other stakeholders. FINEEC is in constant dialogue with stakeholders and is open to new ideas and feedback on its activities.

Section 5 of Act 1295/2013 states that the Government-appointed Evaluation Council formulates a proposed evaluation plan, which is then submitted for approval to the Ministry of Education and Culture. The evaluation plan consists of the planned evaluations and a time schedule for the evaluations.

The criteria required for formulating evaluation plans are issued by government decree. Section 2(2) of Government Decree 1317/2013 states that key stakeholders shall be heard when formulating the evaluation plans.

The Evaluation Council monitors the implementation of the evaluation plan and if needed draws up proposals on amendments to the evaluation plan for the Ministry of Education and Culture. The evaluation plan may be revised and supplemented during the period of its validity in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Culture. A mid-term review of the evaluation plan is carried out in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Culture. This involves discussing the completed evaluations and their results as well as any revisions, additions and specifications to the evaluation plan.

Stakeholders needs, priorities and communication of evaluation results - FINEEC aims to be a customer-oriented evaluation provider

FINEEC's work is guided by a customer-centric and service-minded approach. The aim is that the evaluation information produced by FINEEC is used as a significant resource for developing and making decisions on education at the local and national level.

FINEEC's key stakeholders and users of evaluation information are the Ministry of Education and Culture, Finnish National Agency for Education, regional and local authorities, education and early childhood education providers, higher education institutions, advocacy organisations and research institutes as well as other professionals and organisations in the field of education in Finland and also internationally.

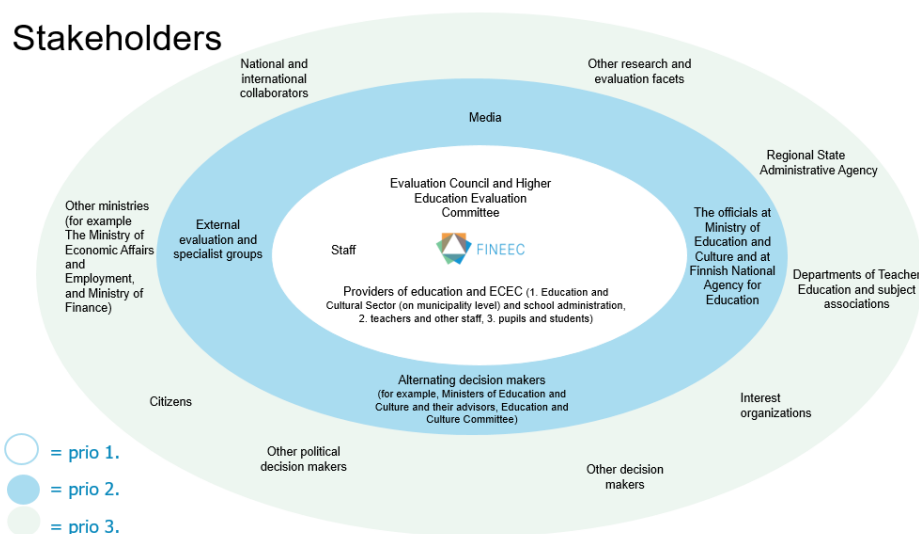


Figure 1. FINEEC's stakeholders and users of evaluation information

The aims of communication with the stakeholders are defined in the FINEEC's communications strategy:

Objectives of communications

- Influencing decision-making in society
- Focusing communications on development at the local level
- Clear evaluation data and communicating about it
- Increasing awareness and strengthening the brand
- Condensing FINEEC's internal communications

Focus areas of communications in societal debate

- Promoting equality in education
- Supporting continuous development of education
- Developing learning and competence
- Increasing functionality of the education system

Producing evaluation data to the national decision-making and development work

FINEEC draws on national statistics and knowledge base to produce analyses and cross-cutting overviews of all levels of education that are based on evaluation priorities and targeted at responding to different information users' needs. National level analyses and cross-cutting overviews could be further strengthened in the coming years.

FINEEC's evaluation activities influence societal decision-making and the societal debate from the level of decision-makers all the way to the field education and to other national actors. FINEEC therefore works as a societal "alarm clock" in terms of areas requiring development in education and brings problems into discussion in order to have them addressed. At the same time, it also communicates information about good practices.

Thanks to the evaluation activities, it is possible to monitor the state of education in Finland reliably and systematically. In addition to problem areas and good practices, the objective of FINEEC's communications is to bring up and promote discussion on and interest in the importance of education and learning to both the learner and society. FINEEC also promotes the value-based debate on education more widely and thus functions as a trailblazer. The debate is conducted in a dialogue in compliance with the principles of enhancement-led evaluation, which increases understanding. FINEEC also strives to interpret quiet signals about what topical issues and problems related to education it should produce information on or whether, for example, the developments around a specific theme should be monitored through evaluations.

Producing evaluation data to the local and regional decision-making and development work

The second task of evaluation activities is to support development work at the local level. Therefore, cooperation with local actors and influencers in the field of education is important. However, of all FINEEC's stakeholders, education and training providers are the group that is the least familiar with FINEEC's activities (stakeholder survey 2022). Efforts are made to promote the use of evaluation information at the local level by using targeted communication and enhancement-led evaluation. Communication targeted at the local level is aimed at increasing, for example, the awareness and understanding that teachers, principals, education providers and the municipal education administration have of the objectives, methods and evaluation results. This is done interactively and by building a shared view. Efforts will be made to increase encounters with stakeholders at the local level, and offering the right kind of information with regard to the needs of each stakeholder is always taken into account in communications. Communications are also aimed at supporting teachers and other local-level actors and at showing appreciation for the work they have done.

The aim is to increase awareness of enhancement-led evaluation among local actors as the participatory and interactive operating principle of enhancement-led evaluation promotes commitment to work by the party participating in the evaluation from the very beginning. This also increases the utilisation of evaluation results and recommendations. Enhancement-led evaluation therefore supports impact and change when the participants of the evaluation feel that the evaluation is carried out for their benefit.

Consideration of societal and education policy information needs in the evaluation plan - FINEEC is agile in tackling current evaluation issues

During the current evaluation plan period, FINEEC carries out several evaluations separately agreed with the Ministry of Education and Culture. These evaluate, for example, programs or reforms initiated by the government.

The current evaluation plan includes several evaluations on educational reforms. In addition, when preparing the Evaluation Plan 2020–2023, the top civil service management of the Ministry of Education and Culture proposed the implementation of two different evaluations: the evaluation of immigrants' educational paths and the ability of the education system to respond to sudden structural changes. The first of these evaluations was started immediately in accordance with the Ministry's wishes and was included in the National Education Evaluation Plan 2016–2019. The second was placed in the 2020–2023 evaluation plan to be implemented right at the beginning of the plan period, as the Ministry had hoped. Both evaluations were related to current educational policy themes, and the need for evaluation information was based on ongoing legislative reforms.

Other evaluations separately agreed with the Ministry of Education and Culture include, for example: Enhancement-led evaluation in the action plan supporting the capabilities for learning and attending school of students with an immigrant background, Evaluation of methods that prevent bullying and improve wellbeing and the working atmosphere, Evaluation of the new forms of student counselling 2022–2024, Survey of the current state of quality management in basic education, Evaluation of distance learning of Sámi languages, Evaluation of engaging school community work in basic education, Evaluation of quality of demonstration activities and the competence shown in vocational competence demonstrations and Evaluation of Government's key projects for higher education 2017–2022.

On its own initiative and immediately after the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, FINEEC carried out the Impacts of the exceptional teaching arrangements on the realization of equality and equity at different levels of education assessment at all levels of education. The evaluation also used information produced by other data producers, and FINEEC coordinated the data collection of different data producers.

Regarding early childhood education and care, the evaluations carried out by FINEEC meet well the information needs of the Ministry of Education and Culture and the field. Most of the evaluations carried out by FINEEC between 2017 and 2023 have been commissioned and funded by the ministry. On the one hand, evaluations carried out with development funding are associated with challenges (see chapter 1.2.1.). On the other hand, close cooperation between the Ministry, the Finnish National Agency for Education, regional administrative agencies and FINEEC's experts enables a targeted response to the information and development needs of early childhood education and care. Several evaluations of early childhood education and care in FINEEC produce information about the realization of the goals of the Right to Learn development program based on the government program. As part of the aforementioned program, the development of the national quality evaluation system Valssi and the task of drawing up quality indicators for early childhood education and care have also been assigned to FINEEC. The Ministry resourced and guided the development of the system before transferring it to FINEEC for maintenance on March 1, 2023.

According to a survey of FINEEC's stakeholders, early childhood education and care experts have been successful in their communication and communication with local actors as well. This has been helped in part by the topicality of the evaluation of early childhood education and care, information and training related to the Valssi quality evaluation system, and FINEEC's publication formats that meet the needs of operators, such as summary publications aimed at personnel. Since 2018, the publications of early childhood education and care have been consistently the most downloaded in FINEEC and show for their part that the evaluation work of early childhood education and care is current and that the information it produces is also utilized at the local and pedagogical level.

FINEEC conducted an evaluation on the quality of the competence demonstration activities of VET providers. The evaluation was commissioned by the Ministry of Education and Culture in 2022. The evaluation was a part of the Programme to Develop Equality and Quality in Vocational Education and Training. The evaluation report provides information on how well the VET legislation that entered into effect on 1 January 2018 is implemented in the education and training providers' competence demonstration activities.

The evaluation was carried out during 2022. In June 2022, FINEEC submitted an interim report to the Ministry of Education and Culture, which summarized the quality of the education providers' competence demonstration activities based on previously produced evaluation and investigation information. In December 2022, FINEEC submitted the final report of the evaluation to the Ministry, which, in addition to the information provided in the interim report, included comprehensive information regarding the competence demonstration activities of the national Koski register. The final report contains information about the design, implementation, evaluation and grades of the competence demonstrations. The evaluation was carried out without separate data collection and it utilized the results of evaluations and surveys carried out by FINEECs and other parties, national student and working life feedback and the Koski register, the material of which covered the data of approximately 350,000 students and 1,400,000 competence demonstrations. Link to the abstract of the final report: https://www.karvi.fi/sites/default/files/sites/default/files/documents/Tiivistelma_EN.pdf

The self-evaluation and audit reports of higher education institutions are public. FINEEC introduced a digital platform for the 3rd round of audits.

In 2021, compulsory education in Finland was extended so that compulsory education only ends when the subject turns 18 or when the subject has successfully completed an upper secondary qualification before this. In the preparation of the extension of compulsory education, the Ministry of Education and Culture made extensive use of the results of the evaluation carried out by FINEEC in 2020 on the study paths and guidance of young people in the joint phase of basic education and secondary education (see government proposal HE 173/2020). After the extension of compulsory education came into force, the Ministry of Education and Culture appointed a monitoring group and drew up a monitoring plan for the implementation of the expansion of compulsory education for the years 2021–2024, in which the implementation will be monitored for seven thematic entities https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/163531/OKM_2021_45.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y (in Finnish).

The monitoring plan includes several FINEEC evaluation projects that produce information to support monitoring. These include evaluations of the provision of special needs support in vocational education and training, individual study paths and evaluations of learning outcomes. In addition, the follow-up plan proposed that FINEEC carry out an evaluation of the new forms of student counselling. The evaluation focuses on new or enhanced forms of student counselling brought about by the extension of compulsory education. This evaluation was included as part of the Education Evaluation Plan 2020–2023 and FINEEC started the implementation of the evaluation in 2022.

The principle of enhancement-led evaluation - a participatory and interactive approach, tailored methods and supporting change

Enhancement-led evaluation is the main guiding principle in FINEEC's operations. There is more than 20 years of experience in enhancement-led approach in the education evaluation activities in Finland ([Huusko & Pyykkö 2022](#)). Enhancement-led evaluation has been considered such an

essential foundation for evaluation activities in Finnish education that is has been recorded in the legislation on education evaluation. FINEEC has defined goal-orientation and futures consciousness, a participatory and interactive approach, tailored methods and supporting change as the defining essential of enhancement-led evaluation. (<https://www.karvi.fi/en/about-us/about-our-evaluations/enhancement-led-evaluation>)

FINEEC has defined the principles of enhancement-led evaluation as follows:

- Enhancement-led evaluation promotes participation and interaction. It creates diverse opportunities to participate and contribute to the planning of the evaluation, the production of evaluation data and the interpretation of the results. Enhancement-led evaluation is based on trust between the implementer of the evaluation and the evaluation participant, and on the education provider's responsibility to enhance its activities.
- The methods of enhancement-led evaluation are tailored on a case-by-case basis to support the impact of the evaluations and the enhancement of the activities even during the evaluation process. They increase a shared understanding of the theme under evaluation.
- Enhancement-led evaluation produces a current state analysis, conclusions and recommendations that can be used both by actors at the national, regional and local level and by education and training providers, higher education institutions and stakeholders. As a result of the evaluations, the participants receive external feedback on their activities with regard to the areas requiring development, best practices and strengths. Enhancement-led evaluation supports impact and change.

Examples of enhancement-led evaluation

Below, we provide a few examples of how the principles of enhancement-led evaluation are being applied in evaluations and the planning of evaluation models and criteria. The examples particularly describe how various actors have been actively involved in the process.

FINEEC staff has actively been building a common understanding of the approach within the agency. An open culture for testing new methods in evaluations has allowed staff to test new participatory methods for collecting data and engaging stakeholders in evaluations.

Example 1. Development of quality indicators and quality evaluation system of early childhood education and care (ECEC)

The whole of ECEC evaluation has been built systematically as a part of FINEEC's statutory task since 2016. In 2016, a long-term plan was made for the entire evaluation, including working groups and hearings. The first national evaluation of ECEC (2017) focused on mapping the current state of ECEC evaluation as well as giving a national view of the state of evaluation for the field and the steering system. Based on the information obtained from this evaluation, FINEEC in cooperation with a multidisciplinary expert group (research, working life, administration) prepared research based ECEC quality indicators (2018). These quality indicators are based on Finnish and international research and describe the quality goals set for ECEC structures and processes. The quality indicators created a common knowledge base for quality evaluation at both national and local levels.

In the next step, based on the quality indicators, the development of the Valssi system began.

During the phase of system development in 2020-2023, several user workshops were organized. Additionally, the system's evaluation tools have been piloted in two phases. Evaluation tools, the system's user interface and evaluation processes have been developed based on the feedback received from the pilots. The principles of enhancement-led evaluation have been prioritized in the development of the system, especially from the view of local evaluation. FINEEC also maintains the ECEC evaluation network which informs about the development of Valssi and evaluation tools related to it. The network is used to organize webinars and trainings for different personnel groups, as well as sharing know-how and good practices to support the development and evaluation. Currently, there are more than 500 ECEC municipal and private service provider contact persons in the network. In the spring of 2023, Valssi will be widely piloted with 20 ECEC organizers. In the pilot, feedback is collected on, for example, the technical functionality of the system, the contents of the tools, the evaluation processes, and the functionality of Valssi's instructions. With the information obtained from the pilot, Valssi can be further developed before it opens to all service providers in August 2023. (see the attachment [Valssi – National quality evaluation system for early childhood education and care.](#))

Example 2. Evaluation of the implementation of the national core curricula for general education

The enhancement-led evaluation approach has been utilised in the comprehensive evaluations of the implementation of the national core curricula for early childhood education, basic education and general upper secondary education. The goal has been to create a collaborative, interactive learning process between the evaluators and various actors, resulting in information that is then used by the actors. Multiple methods of acquiring information have been used in the evaluations, including questionnaires, interviews, evaluation visits and documents. During the process, the results of the evaluations have been interpreted with the projects' evaluation teams. The preparation of the local curricula has been reviewed as a community-based learning process, supporting pedagogical development and changes in the operating culture. Enhancement-led evaluation has been implemented so that the needs of the beneficiaries have been considered during the evaluation processes, and the utilisation of the results has been discussed with various actors. Already during the evaluation process, information has been produced for the beneficiaries on the achievement of the curricula objectives. The beneficiaries of the evaluation data are various actors in the education steering system who have been involved in the evaluation process in various ways, starting from the planning phase.

Example 3. The development work of the evaluation model and criteria for the quality management systems of VET providers

The preparation of the evaluation model and criteria for the quality management systems of VET providers proceeded in stages. In the first phase, the evaluation model, and criteria as well as the data collection and analysis methods were developed. The development of the evaluation criteria involved experts in evaluation, vocational education and training, and quality management. The education providers and stakeholders participated in the development of the evaluation model and criteria. Consultation and discussion sessions were organized in various parts of Finland as well as in an expert group to ensure that the evaluation model is suitable for evaluating the quality management of different education providers who are at different stages of their quality work. In total, more than 300 people participated in these events. The feedback received and the development proposals gathered from the evaluation of the quality management systems in 2015 were utilized in the development of the evaluation model and criteria. After the

evaluation model and draft criteria were created, they were discussed in a national seminar organized for the education providers and stakeholders. Development work proceeded using feedback from the seminar. An evaluation manual was also prepared to support the evaluation at this stage. After the evaluation model, criteria and manual were completed, they were tested by volunteer education providers. The test phase was supported by organizing orientation and training for those who participated in the test. FINEEC collected feedback from those who participated in the test phase and the feedback was used in finalizing the evaluation model, criteria and manual.

Example 4. Audits of higher education institutions

The planning of the third-cycle audit framework was conducted in a participatory process in which representatives of key stakeholders were engaged and heard. A planning team with eight members was nominated to plan the new framework. Six of the members represented the university and university of applied sciences sectors, students and working life outside the HEIs. The Head of the Unit and an evaluation expert, also participated in the work of the planning team. The main tasks for the planning team were assigned by the Higher Education Evaluation Committee. These included incorporating ESG 2015 (Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area) into the new framework as well as drafting the evaluation areas and criteria and procedures for the new framework, criteria for the selection of audit teams, follow-up and reporting procedure.

The planning team begun its work in December 2015 and finalised its work by December 2016. Many different workshops and hearings were organised as part of the planning process in 2016 with Arene (Rectors' Conference of Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences), Unifi (Universities Finland), SYL (National Union of University Students in Finland), SAMOK (National Union of Students in Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences), Peda-forum (Higher Education Pedagogy seminar), the Ministry of Education and Culture, and the quality networks of universities and universities of applied sciences. A national seminar with participants from the higher education institutions, students and the labour market and other stakeholder organisations took place in October 2016. The aim of the seminar was to inform about the planned framework and provide the participants with an opportunity to influence the future framework. A small seminar was organized with ENQA and EUA to get external and international views on the framework.

FINEEC experts in the unit and members of the Higher Education Evaluation Committee were also given the opportunity to comment and discuss the framework during different phases of the planning process. The audit framework for the third cycle of audits was approved by the Higher Education Evaluation Committee in January 2017, and the audit manual was approved in June 2017. The Swedish and English manuals were approved in August 2017. A good practice was to work on the three language versions of the manual simultaneously.

The feedback from the pilot HEIs and audit teams was very valuable for the further development of the audit framework. Feedback from the two pilot audits was collected through an online questionnaire in spring 2019 from the audit teams and pilot HEIs. Feedback was also provided verbally by the audit team members as part of the audit process. In addition to the feedback questionnaires, a workshop was organised with pilot HEI and Higher Education Evaluation Committee representatives. Based on the feedback and the FINEEC experts' experiences, some changes were made in the audit manual. The changes especially concerned the criteria, assessment scale and self-assessment guidelines. The changes made to the criteria after the pilots were aimed at clarifying and removing overlaps in the criteria. The revised audit manuals were then discussed and approved by the Higher Education Evaluation Committee (Finnish in September, English in November and Swedish in December 2019)

During the second cycle of audits, FINEEC (and its predecessor, FINHEEC) systematically collected feedback from all audited HEIs and audit teams. HEIs also wrote follow-up reports three years after their audit in which questions related to the impact of the audits were covered. Based on the overall feedback from the sector, it was clear that more extensive changes to the framework were needed. Some voices were raised about the utility of the audits and audits not producing new information. On the other hand, the maturity of the HEIs' quality systems may also have been another reason for such results. It was also realised during the second cycle that the audit procedure was too heavy for the HEIs as well as for FINEEC. Therefore, one of the aims in the planning of the new framework was to make it less heavy. There are now four evaluation areas compared to six (eleven in practice) in the second cycle. Also, thanks to the new report structure, the reporting process has speeded up the reporting process and seems to have positively affected the workload of audit team members and the project manager in the reporting phase.

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. FINEEC has defined goal-orientation and futures consciousness, a participatory and interactive approach, tailored methods and supporting change as the defining characteristics of enhancement-led evaluation.

Some new methodology has been introduced in the third cycle of audits. Firstly, benchlearning is a new method applied in the audit. This was introduced because FINEEC wants to encourage HEIs in this type of activity. The purpose of benchlearning is for the HEI to receive feedback on its activities and to learn from the good practices of another organisation. The HEI selects a target and a partner for benchlearning. The partner can be an HEI or any other type of cooperation organisation. Secondly, during the site visit in FINEEC's quality audit, it is of crucial importance to hear and involve different groups of staff and students as widely as possible. Workshops are now used in parallel with interviews to diversify the data collection and to increase the interaction between the participants of the site visit. As a rule, a student workshop is always integrated into the site visit. <https://karvi.fi/en/higher-education/audits-higher-education-institutions-2018-2024/>

Example 5. Developing the system of learning outcomes evaluations in cooperation with the FINEEC's personnel and the central stakeholders during 2021-2022

The national system of learning outcomes evaluations, its processes and individual learning outcomes evaluations have been systematically developed since the beginning of the evaluations for some 20 years ago. The focus has been especially on analysing and reporting the results as well as on communicating the main findings to the relevant stakeholders. Digitalization of the evaluation system has been developed step by step since 2020s and since 2018 all the evaluations have been administered digitally. Years 2016–2021 may therefore be considered as a period of experimental culture: learning outcomes evaluations have had certain, well-established practices but also new and different approaches have been experimented in the evaluations. In addition, new ways of doing have been implemented during every evaluation round.

The broader development of the national system of learning outcomes evaluations for basic education was launched with a current state analysis in the autumn of 2020. The development team prepared models for implementing and scheduling learning outcomes evaluations based on the analysis. The models were discussed with FINEEC's management and counsellors of evaluation on various occasions. To support the development process, stakeholder hearings

were arranged in the autumn of 2021. In addition to the current state analysis conducted in the autumn of 2021, six events for hearings and discussion were arranged with FINEEC's Evaluation Council and key stakeholders. The discussions focused on the following topics: How should the achievement of the curricula goals be evaluated in the 2020s and 2030s? How should the evaluations be scheduled? How can the effectiveness of the results be further increased nationally and locally? Key beneficiaries of FINEEC's evaluations from the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Finnish National Agency for Education, the Trade Union of Education in Finland and the Association of Finnish Municipalities took part in the stakeholder hearings. In addition, separate events were organised for local actors in basic education. The participants in these events were representatives of the educational administration, principals and teachers. The takeaways from FINEEC's hearings to support digital development (e.g. teacher hearings) were also considered in developing the learning outcomes evaluations.

The hearings organised during autumn 2021 presented the background of the current system of learning outcomes evaluations and its development targets. The events focused on finding answers to the following questions:

1. How do the learning outcomes evaluations implement FINEEC's statutory task, strategy and information production on focus areas?
2. To what extent do the learning outcomes evaluations produce useful information for the key target groups for education development?
3. What is effective in the current system of learning outcomes evaluation, and what should be developed?

In addition to developing the learning outcomes evaluation system, the learning outcomes evaluation in various subjects has also been developed on a small scale. Other FINEEC employees have been engaged by organising meetings, workshops, questionnaires and small group discussions. The collaboration with FINEEC's digital team has also supported the development of the learning outcomes evaluations and the new digital system. The development team for learning outcomes evaluations has also started to prepare an internal manual to guide the implementation of learning outcomes evaluations. Communication is also being developed, and to support communication, a brochure has been created for the schools and stakeholders participating in the evaluations.

Communication during the evaluation process has also been developed. Communication has been made more interactive e.g. by organising webinars for the participating schools and teachers before and after the evaluations. The webinars have been popular. An on-call phone service has also been introduced to support communication. The schools participating in the evaluations can call the number during the evaluation days. As several FINEEC experts are answering the calls, schools receive help quickly by calling just one number. The feedback for schools and municipalities, prepared after the evaluation, provides more comprehensive information to the schools and education providers. Efforts have been made to automate the process of sending feedback, and webinars have been organised to showcase the results and to support the utilisation of the feedback provided to schools and municipalities. FINEEC has received very positive feedback from the webinars.

There are plenty of effective practices in the current system of learning outcomes evaluations. The evaluations produce reliable, national-level information on the achievement of the objectives of the curricula and students' competences. The evaluations produce information that is used to

support the development of education and decision-making in the educational administration and municipalities. Compared to international systems, the Finnish system is light and relatively economical. One integral feature of the system is that evaluation is based on sampling, which guarantees that Finnish schools cannot be ranked based on the results. The current system also does not encourage teaching to the test.

In addition to information production, the learning outcomes evaluations increase competence and understanding of competence and its development. The evaluation data benefits education development at the school level and supports teachers' assessment work and competence development. The school feedback provides schools with information about their competence in comparison with the national level of competence. An example of a successful practice is involving teachers and other subject matter experts in the evaluations, e.g. by including them in the expert and assignment design teams and the various phases of the entire evaluation process.

Example 6: Immigrants' educational pathways – Evaluation of the literacy training in liberal adult education, the new structure of basic education for adults and the more flexible language skills requirements in vocational education and training

The Government Integration Programme 2016–2019 and the Action Plan in Integration (2016) aimed to achieve faster education and employment paths for immigrants. The Government Integration Programme identified several factors that slowed down immigrants' education and employment. Immigrants' pathways to education, training and employment were long and sometimes contained waiting time, overlaps and inappropriate studies. During the government term 2015–2019, the services for immigrants were substantially reformed. Structural, legislative and financial reforms were also carried out in the education system, covering various levels of education. These included the following:

- The reform of basic education for adults
- The launch of literacy training in liberal adult education
- Enhancing the flexibility of language skills requirements in vocational education and training (VET)
- The financing criteria for instruction preparing for basic education and basic education for adults were reformed to enable more rapid response changes in the number of participants

A working group under the Ministry of Education and Culture that focused on immigration issues determined that the most significant education reforms were enhancing the flexibility of language skills requirements in VET, the reform of basic education for adults, and launching flexible literacy and Finnish language training in 25 liberal adult education institutions. The reforms took effect in early 2018.

Between 2019 and 2020, the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC) implemented an evaluation examining the effects of reforms aimed at accelerating the educational pathways of immigrants in literacy training at liberal adult education institutions, in basic education for adults and in vocational education and training (VET). The evaluation questions were:

- How well do the educational pathways of immigrants' function?
- Do literacy training at liberal adult education institutions, basic education for adults and VET meet the objectives set for the reform?

- What factors promote and hinder the viability of the educational pathways of immigrants?

The results of the evaluation consist of four different sets of material: surveys directed at education and training providers, surveys directed at teachers, the material of the events organised for the focus groups and the material of the webinars.

Summary: FINEEC adapts well and agilely to changing education policy needs. A focus for development is the monitoring of long-term objectives.

1.1.2. Are there activities carried out by FINEEC that have higher priority than others? If yes, which ones and why?

Answer:

Priorities carried out by FINEEC are **firstly** defined by Act 1295/2013 and are as follows:

- to implement evaluations related to education and early childhood education and care, and the activities of 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;
- Support education and training providers and higher education institutions in evaluation and quality management matters
- to develop the evaluation of education; and
- to take care of other tasks that are issued or given to the FINEEC.

The **second** level of prioritizing is the National Education Evaluation Plan which indicates the main areas of important subjects to be evaluated. These subjects are divided across four focus areas. These areas are Learning and competence development, Promoting equity, Improving the effectiveness of the education system and Supporting continuous improvement.

The evaluation plan is drawn up in a participatory process in which stakeholders, FINEEC staff and decision-making bodies are strongly involved. The plan is approved by the Ministry of Education and Culture and the document steers the evaluation activities of the agency.

Since the beginning of its operations, FINEEC has strived to increase the impact of its evaluations both at the level of organisations as well as locally, regionally and nationally. The clear target is that the evaluations that the agency produces should support the development of education in Finland. The evaluations and their results should support decision-makers and developers at all levels of the education system.

The **third** level of prioritizing emerge in the strategy of FINEEC. There the aims are defined to:

- produce educational knowledge, understanding and competence that enhance trust and lead to wise decisions.
- conduct evaluations that orient to the future, and that are enhancement-led, diverse and participatory.

- foster society's ecological, cultural, social and economic sustainable development.

Key values set out in the strategy to guide the work of FINEEC are trustworthiness, independence, openness and boldness.

On the **fourth** are the actual evaluation projects. The leading approach in these is the enhancement-led evaluation that is the central operating principle of FINEEC.

In general, following questions are of most interest:

Developing learning and competence:

- How well are the objectives set to learning and competence achieved?
- Which factors enhance or hinder learning and strengthening competence?
- How is the development of learning and competence towards future competence needs and continuous learning enhanced?

Promoting equality:

What is the state of equality and equal opportunities in education in Finland? Which factors enhance or hinder the implementation of equality in education?

Increasing the functionality of the education system: How does the education system work as a whole?

What have been the effects of the education reforms? What is the capacity of the education system to react to changes in the operating environment?

Supporting continuous development: How does quality management work and support the management and continuous development? How does the operating culture support the achievement of the goals set for the activities? How is sense of community and participation of various actors in the development efforts achieved?

On the other hand, if you look at the present budgeting of FINEEC it is quite obvious that great deal of it goes to build digital systems and platforms (Valssi and Joda).

1.1.3. What focus areas and activities that are not currently in the National Education Evaluation Plan (NEEP) could FINEEC develop to better support the Ministry of Education and Culture (OKM) and local authorities (e.g. municipalities)?

Answer:

National Education Evaluation Plan (NEEP) is produced in collaboration with different stakeholders of the Finnish education system. This procedure should ensure that the most important areas are covered in the NEEP. Also, the Ministry of Education and Culture is one of the parties to be heard. Usually, OKM also expresses acute evaluation needs during the ongoing NEEP-period. These are met if FINEEC only has resources available to carry out them.

On the other hand, ventures from the political establishment are typically of a shorter lifespan missing the long-term developmental approach of education.

FINEEC can further enhance the systematic and comprehensive system-level information production on indicators if sufficient resources are allocated to FINEEC to perform this task. The development of the education system must be based on research and systematic education evaluation.

As a living example of the results of the practise which FINEEC applies can following examples be mentioned:

Example 1:

At the joint workshop of the staff and the Evaluation Council on 20 February 2023, the following themes were raised for the next evaluation plan period:

- FINEEC could make more use of AI in its own evaluations.
- Cross-cutting themes in future evaluations could include digitalisation, internationalisation, including multiculturalism and sustainability skills.

Example 2:

In the stakeholder survey (2022), it was suggested that the following topics would be included in the next evaluation plan: Future competence needs, student well-being, evaluation of reforms, promoting equality, sustainable education and environment, challenges of skills differentiation, the state of national competences, support for quality management in different education sectors.

Also, FINEEC experiences following problems:

Problem 1: The challenge is that FINEEC does not have access to the local-level resource allocation (municipal autonomy). The municipalities' varying financial situations affect the organisation of education (e.g. support for learning). Recruiting problems and the shrinking of the school network affect the organisation of education.

Problem 2: An organisation consisting of 32 persons will not be able to meet more than a small proportion of the expectations and needs defined for national evaluation activities covering the entire education system from ECEC to higher education.

Plans to enhance the effectiveness of the learning outcome evaluations:

While the learning outcomes evaluations for basic education have been developed extensively (2020–2022), FINEEC has begun to update and systematise the equality indicators of the evaluations to align them with societal changes. Thus, the produced evaluation data will be more meaningful, and preparing syntheses will become more systematised. This will support both national and local actors. The reporting of results and comparisons between groups currently cover gender (girls/boys/others), the school's teaching language (Finnish/Swedish), the share of Swedish-speakers in the municipality, the type of municipality (rural, semi-urban, urban), the Regional State Administrative Agency, the guardians' educational background, applying for general upper secondary education, the share of pupils who are learning Finnish as a second language in the school (S2 pupils), the competence of S2 pupils, and three-tiered support. In the future, our goal is that large cities (school segregation) and enrolment in preparatory education for an upper secondary qualification can be better taken into account in the reporting. In addition, the following indicators produced by Statistics Finland will be considered: unemployment rate,

the share of foreign-language speakers, the number of children receiving free-of-charge early childhood education and care, and the amount of needs-based funding.

Sub-dimension 1.2. Sensitivity and responsiveness to context

Definition: This sub-dimension addresses the evolution of FINEEC's objectives and tasks in response to the changing context (economic, environmental, social, cultural, political economy and capacity).

1.2.1 What changes in the Finnish society and the educational system have had the greatest impact on the work of FINEEC? Why?

Answer:

Early childhood education and care

One significant change that has affected FINEEC's operations has been the changes made to the early childhood education and care administration and legislation. Early childhood education and care moved from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health to the Ministry of Education and Culture in 2013. The education sector of early childhood education and care became FINEEC's permanent statutory task in 2015. During 2016, operations were launched by hiring an early childhood education expert and mapping the needs of evaluation activities and establishing FINEEC's role in the early childhood education and care guidance system.

In Finland, the importance of early childhood education and care as the first step in the education system has grown after the change of administrative branch, and it is subject to increasing political and societal needs and expectations. Measured by the number of early childhood education and care organizers, the early childhood education and care sector is the largest and most diverse in FINEEC. Around 250,000 children are covered by early childhood education and care. The number is about 77% of children aged 1–6. In mainland Finland, there are approximately 3,700 daycare facilities, there are approximately 4,600 municipal family daycare providers and approximately 1,600 private ones. In early childhood education and care, the evaluation may include daycare activities, family day care, and open early childhood education and care. These can be organized either as a municipal or private service, and the autonomy of the organizers in the way they organize services and regional factors are significant.

Despite the permanent statutory position, FINEEC did not receive an increase in operating expenses in its budget with early childhood education and care. Because of this, all evaluations in the field of early childhood education and care have had to be carried out either fully or partially by the mandate and funding of the Ministry of Education and Culture. Responding to the needs and expectations of the developing early childhood education and care sector and implementing evaluations of early childhood education and care requires substantive expertise in the field, which FINEEC currently does not have enough of.

Pre-primary and basic education

During the current evaluation plan period, FINEEC has acted as an important producer of evaluation information about the trial of free early childhood education and care and its effects. The evaluation results will be used e.g. in reforming the early childhood education and care, and pre-primary and basic education legislation, which is recorded in the Education Policy Report of the Finnish Government to the parliament.

The national core curricula for pre-primary and basic education were reformed in 2014 and introduced gradually in ECEC units and schools in 2016. FINEEC conducted a four-year

evaluation of the implementation of the national core curricula for pre-primary and basic education during 2016–2020 to produce information about the functionality and effectiveness of the steering systems of education, as well as the factors that facilitate and hinder the achievement of the objectives of the curricula. The goal of the evaluation is that the steering system of education and the work carried out by schools are developed already during the evaluation process. The implementation of the national core curricula for pre-primary and basic education was evaluated at the national and local levels by examining the following: the achievement of national education goals, the practicality of the new distribution of lesson hours, the achievement of the objectives of the national core curricula in terms of both content and pedagogical goals, the preparation and introduction of the curricula and its effectiveness, and the suitability of the curricula as a tool for strategic and pedagogical development at the schools.

After Russia's war on Ukraine began in the spring of 2022, a large number of Ukrainian children and young people of school age moved to Finland. FINEEC conducted a national evaluation of the state of instruction preparing for basic education and instruction in the pupil's own mother tongue. The evaluation paid particular attention to the achievement of the objectives of the instruction and the forms of providing education. In addition, factors that facilitate and hinder teaching and learning were investigated. The evaluation produced information for the Government's Right to Learn development programme. The programme aimed to draw up measures for securing the learning potential and educational transitions of children and young people with an immigrant background, especially in the educational transition phases. Following the evaluation, the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Finnish National Agency for Education and FINEEC launched a joint action plan to support the basic skills and language skills of pupils with an immigrant background. With total funding of 12 million euros, 60 education providers and project partners across Finland are involved in the development projects. FINEEC is responsible for conducting enhancement-led evaluations of the projects.

During 2020–2022, the quality and equality of pre-primary and basic education have been developed through the Right to Learn development programme of the Ministry of Education and Culture. FINEEC has implemented various evaluations to support the development programme, including a study on the causes and background factors resulting in differences in learning outcomes between and within the genders, an evaluation of methods that prevent bullying and improve well-being and the working atmosphere, an evaluation of an engaging school community, a survey of the current state of quality management in basic education, and an evaluation of instruction in the pupil's own mother tongue.

General upper secondary education

FINEEC has launched a large-scale evaluation of general upper secondary education. The evaluation focuses on recent reforms of the general upper secondary education system and is included in [FINEEC's education evaluation plan for 2019–2023](#). Achievement of the objectives of the general upper secondary education reform will be evaluated in stages as the introduction of the National Core Curriculum for General Upper Secondary Education progresses, and the results of the sub-projects will be published regularly to support the development of general upper secondary education. The evaluation focuses on key amendments to the Act on General Upper Secondary Education, the objectives of which are to develop teaching at general upper secondary schools, promote transversal competence, and to improve guidance counselling, support for learning and student wellbeing. The aims of general upper secondary education also include promoting internationality as well as cooperation with higher education institutions, workplaces and other education providers. The update of the Act on the Matriculation Examination together with the amended Act on General Upper Secondary Education are at the core of the general upper secondary school reform launched in 2017.

The purpose of the LUKA project (2021 – 2024) is to produce versatile evaluation data on the general upper secondary school reform and 1) the attainment of its objectives, 2) its effectiveness and impacts, 3) factors that promote and hamper the achievement of the objectives as well as development needs, and 4) to propose practical solutions and good practices associated with the priorities of the reform. The evaluation will also produce information to support the introduction and implementation of the National Core Curriculum for General Upper Secondary Education (LOPS 2019) in the years to come. Additionally, its aims include evaluating accessibility and equality in general upper secondary education and the processes of education development.

Evaluation of the new forms of student counselling 2022-2024 is part of the Ministry of Education and Culture's Programme to develop student counselling. The evaluation focuses on new or enhanced forms of student counselling brought about by the extension of compulsory education. The extension of compulsory education imposed a shared responsibility for guidance and supervision not only on educational institutions and schools but also on municipalities. The amendment to the Act on Compulsory Education also brought about changes in student counselling and the resources allocated to it and enhanced personal student counselling was introduced in basic education. While the reform of vocational education and training (2018) had underlined the obligation to provide guidance in upper secondary vocational education and training, the expansion of compulsory education also extended the reform to guidance provided at the second transition phase to the work life or higher education.

Vocational education and training

Vocational education and training underwent an extensive reform in 2018. The goal was to develop competence-based and customer-oriented vocational education and training, and to enable students to have even more individual study paths and to increase the learning that takes place in working life and its quality. At the same time, we moved to a uniform way of completing the degree, where competence is demonstrated and evaluated in workplaces in real work tasks. With the reform, all students must draw up a personal competence development plan (HOKS), which takes into account the student's previous competence, plans what competence the student needs and defines the guidance and support services the student needs. The right to special support due to learning difficulties, illness or disability was extended to all vocational training. With the reform, the degree structure was also reformed by reducing the number of degrees and broadening them.

In the initial phase of the VET reform, FINEEC produced ex ante evaluation information about the risks and critical success factors related to the reform of vocational education and training https://www.karvi.fi/sites/default/files/sites/default/files/documents/Os-perusteisuus_politiikkatoimien-arviointi_KARVI_VNTEAS.pdf (in Finnish). The evaluation produced a broad overall picture of the success, risks and needs for change of policy measures related to the reform. The evaluation results and development recommendations were distributed to the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Finnish National Agency for Education, VET providers and other key stakeholders. In the evaluation plan period 2020–2023, FINEEC has evaluated the implementation of the reform in several evaluations. The evaluations have been related, for example, to the realization of individual study paths, special support, orientation towards working life, the ability of education to respond to sudden structural change situations, quality management of education and learning outcomes. In addition, a policy brief article has been prepared on the key results in FINEEC's publication series. In the coming years, FINEEC will produce more information to support the development of vocational training and training.

During 2023, an overall evaluation of the qualification system of VET will be carried out, which is also related to the evaluation of the effects of the law reform. In addition, there is an evaluation of education in the early childhood education and care sector, qualification-specific evaluations of learning outcomes, and an evaluation of competence provided by VET in relation to the requirements of studies at universities of applied sciences.

Higher Education

The development of higher education evaluation activities has been influenced by both national and European trends. The Bologna Process and both versions of ESG (2005; 2015) have had a clear impact on the external quality evaluation of Finnish higher education. The Finnish audit system was developed in parallel with the development of the ESG, and Finland joined the various European quality assurance organisations at a very early stage. On national level, the new university laws in early 2010's that guaranteed much larger autonomy to higher education institutions made the internal quality systems in institutions necessary and their external evaluation valuable.

The quality systems were built in the first audit cycle (2005–2011) and during the second cycle (2012–2018) the enhancement of the quality systems was in focus. The aim of the third audit cycle currently under way (2018–2024) is to assess whether the quality work of HEIs still meet European quality assurance standards and whether the quality system produces relevant information for the implementation of the strategy and the continuous development of HEIs' activities, and whether it results in effective enhancement activities. In addition, the aim of the third audit cycle is to encourage HEIs to enhance internationalisation, experimenting and a creative atmosphere as well as to accumulate open and transparent information on quality work at Finnish HEIs.

The aim of establishing FINEEC in 2014 was to assemble the key tasks and competences concerning the evaluation of education into a clearer, more efficient and effective whole. Synergy benefits were sought by bringing the activities together, and independent status of the evaluation activities were strengthened. The evaluation functions of the Finnish Education Evaluation Council, the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council and the Finnish National Board of Education were brought together.

FINEEC has taken on a strong role as a national producer of evaluation information, a forecaster of evaluation needs and a competence center for evaluation. Information that serves the development of education is produced from different perspectives with versatile evaluation methods. At first, FINEEC acted as a government agency in the administrative branch of the Ministry of Education and Culture. From 2018 onwards, FINEEC has operated as a separate unit within the Finnish National Agency for Education (EDUFI) with complete independence in terms of its operations.

The agency has made conscious efforts to improve the impact of its evaluation activities. This has involved co-development activities internally with staff and decision-making bodies, as well as engaging in a dialogue with external stakeholders and collecting feedback from them. From the start, it has been clear that to achieve its strategic objectives, evaluation objects, participants and stakeholders from different levels of the education system will need to be engaged in the agency's evaluation activities. During recent years, there has been increasing focus at FINEEC in widening and deepening the collaboration with various actors in society. This has been achieved through engaging stakeholders in different phases of the evaluation process and other

activities of FINEEC. Emphasis has also been put on communication activities through evaluations and FINEEC experts.

Since the beginning of its operations, FINEEC has strived to increase the impact of its evaluations both at the level of organisations as well as locally, regionally and nationally. The clear target is that the evaluations that the agency produces should support the development of education in Finland. The evaluations and their results should support decision-makers and developers at all levels of the education system. With the principle of enhancement-led evaluation, FINEEC is able to adapt its operations and evaluation in accordance with the changes in the operational environment.

Finland needs an educated population

One of the objectives outlined in the Education Policy Report of the Finnish Government is that 50% of young adults complete a higher education degree. To achieve this objective by 2035, higher education institutions must increase the intake of first-time applicants annually by more than 10,000 students compared to the level of 2019.

The Parliament's Education and Culture Committee sees the target state of 50% as an intermediate target towards a target state of 70% by 2040. Evaluations conducted on fields of study have indicated that study places must be increased in specific fields (e.g. in engineering). Special groups must also be considered in this context. For instance, FINEEC's evaluation of immigrants in higher education recommended supporting the access of students with an immigrant background to higher education and promoting their participation during their studies. The goal must be that immigrants integrate and find employment in Finland.

Impacts of and changes brought by the Covid pandemic

The impact of the Covid pandemic on the well-being of young people. In this sense, this theme is even more important. Teachers have been affected by the same phenomenon: the digital switchover.

FINEEC immediately carried out an evaluation in the acute phase of the pandemic, which analyzed the effects of exceptional conditions on the realization of educational equality and equality. The evaluation covered the entire education system.

Continuous learning is the solution to declining labour supply

The need for continuous learning, particularly the training needs of the working-age population, is permanently increasing as the demand for labour increases or decreases in specific industries or regions due to sudden structural changes. VET and higher education play a crucial role in meeting the training needs of the working-age population and responding to sudden structural changes.

During 2020–2022, FINEEC evaluated the education system's ability to respond to challenges of continuous learning in situations where sudden structural changes (i.e. rapid changes in the world of work) occur <https://www.karvi.fi/en/publications/ability-education-system-respond-challenges-continuous-learning-sudden-structural-changes> (the abstract in English and the report in Finnish). Focusing on VET and higher education, this evaluation was part of the National Plan for Education Evaluation. The evaluation established a situational picture through a survey targeted at all VET providers and higher education institutions. Two region- and sector-specific

case studies were also prepared. Information about structural changes related to these cases was collected by interviewing the following actors: legal entities for education; municipalities; regional councils; companies; municipally owned enterprises; Employment and Economic Development Services (TE services); and Centres for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment (ELY centres). The cases focused on the forest products industry (Lapland, the Oulu region and Central Finland) and battery industry (the Vaasa region, Uusikaupunki region and Satakunta).

In recent years, continuous learning and training opportunities for the working-age population have also been reviewed in other evaluations. For instance, the audits of higher education institutions and evaluations focusing on fields of study in higher education also cover continuous learning. Overviews of the audit results in terms of continuous learning are also prepared.

Access and quality in basic education are the challenges of the future

Matters such as demographic changes and declining pupil numbers pose a challenge to the municipalities' school networks and accessibility of education. Between 1990 and 2020, 55% of comprehensive schools were closed. The school network will shrink even further in the future. The shrinking school network and the closures of comprehensive schools have direct and indirect effects on fulfilling children's educational and social rights. The connection between the shrinking of the school network and regional vitality is complex. Changes in the school network may be connected to regional vitality, particularly in sparsely populated regions and the archipelago. Access to basic education, accessibility and quality are future challenges for various municipalities.

FINEEC has focused its recent evaluations on the well-being of children and young people

The increasing social disparity in Finnish society and the polarisation of children and youth's well-being significantly impact learning capabilities and challenge the education system's effectiveness locally and nationally.

The COVID-19 pandemic harmed the well-being of children and young people, but malaise was already increasing before the exceptional circumstances brought by the pandemic. There have been particular concerns regarding the increased mental health issues of children and young people, the increased school absenteeism already among comprehensive school pupils, and the loneliness and bullying experienced by children and youth. Policy actions related to these themes have also partly influenced the focus of the thematic evaluations conducted by FINEEC. For instance, during the current government term, the Ministry of Education and Culture implemented a comprehensive action plan to prevent bullying, harassment and violence in early childhood education and care, basic education, and educational institutions. FINEEC implemented two thematic evaluations regarding the programme. In 2022, for the first time in Finland, FINEEC evaluated the effectiveness and impact of anti-bullying methods used in basic education. As part of broader development at the national level, FINEEC is also implementing the 'engaging school community' evaluation project with the aim of evaluating the effectiveness of practices related to preventing and intervening in school absences and related local development efforts.

Perspectives related to the well-being of pupils and students have been raised in various thematic evaluations conducted by FINEEC in recent years. The impact of factors related to pupils' well-being has also been investigated in learning outcomes evaluations. Supporting and promoting

learners' well-being, participation and togetherness is one of the four recommendations highlighted in FINEEC's publication: [Equality and participation in education – an overview of national evaluations](#) .

The impact of the realisation of children's educational and social rights is the topical theme

FINEEC has evaluated how closures of comprehensive schools have impacted rural and archipelago areas. The focus was on how the shrinking of the school network has affected the realisation of children's educational and social rights and how the closures of comprehensive schools have affected national and regional vitality. The evaluation was commissioned from FINEEC by the Rural Policy Council (MANE) and the Island Committee (SANK) and the Office of the Ombudsman for Children. As part of FINEEC's evaluation, the consulting company MDI Public Oy conducted a statistical analysis on the impacts of the changes in the school network on the national, regional and local vitality. The statistical review focused on demographic development, economic development, municipal finances, education and well-being. The evaluation investigated how the concentration of basic education in school centres and comprehensive schools is connected to the well-being of children, the quality of teaching and equality of education, for example, when the journey to school becomes longer. The evaluation focused particularly on rural and archipelago areas, where the school network has been considerably reduced. The evaluation formed an understanding of the current situation in municipalities with regard to the provision of basic education, producing information on the operating environment in which decisions concerning the school network are made in rural and archipelago areas. The key points of interest in the evaluation were children's educational and social rights and how the child's best interest is taken into account.

Improving the well-being of children and young people is an important evaluation area

The Finnish model for leisure activities aims to increase the well-being of children and youth. The goal is to provide every child and young person with the possibility to participate in a free-of-charge leisure activity that they enjoy in connection with the school day. FINEEC is conducting an evaluation of the Finnish model for leisure activities. The evaluation aims to produce information on the achievement of the goals set for the Finnish model for leisure activities and the practicality and impacts of the model. Particular attention is paid to the experiences and opinions of children and youth. The evaluation also considers municipalities' and local actors' opinions and experiences about the practicality of the model. The evaluation produces information on the views and experiences of children and young people and on how their participation and agency are considered in the planning and implementing of activities in accordance with the Finnish model for leisure activities. The experiences of children and young people of different ages and regional coverage are taken into account in the evaluation.

FINEEC's evaluation results have brought to light issues that require attention at all levels of the education system.

1.2.2 What changes or adjustments has FINEEC made in recent years to adapt to the changing needs and challenges of the Finnish education system?**Answer:**

On the global level FINEEC has increased the use of digital systems in its activities. Especially COVID-19 accelerated the transition towards place-independent working and tools. This has widened use of teams, webinars and electronical data collecting tools,

Some examples of these procedures are presented here below:

New digital platforms

To enhance the data collecting procedures for the learning outcomes evaluation in basic education, FINEEC has developed a specific digital platform (Joda). FINEEC has also designed a national quality evaluation system (Valssi) to support the quality management of early childhood education and care organisers and service providers.

Operational changes during the pandemic

FINEEC evaluated the effects of exceptional conditions on equality and equality in education. FINEEC distributed the results of the evaluation of exceptional conditions as quickly as possible to the teaching and education providers as well as to the Finnish National Agency for Education and the Ministry of Education and Culture via webinars and by preparing visual summaries of the key results on the internet.

In the acute phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, FINEEC adapted its operations in such a way that the data collection schedules of evaluation projects were changed and some evaluations were canceled so that the workload on educational institutions could be reduced and they could focus on emergency arrangements in the organization of teaching.

In cooperation with the Finnish National Agency for Education, FINEEC participated in the preparation of guidelines for teaching and education providers during exceptional conditions.

With regard to the extension of compulsory education, FINEEC participates in monitoring its implementation through its evaluation projects and carries out an evaluation related to student counselling (see section 1.1.1 for more details).

The effects of the reform of VET on the evaluation system of the learning outcomes of vocational education and training

The evaluation system for the learning outcomes of vocational education and training was developed in 2016–2020 with the help of a meta-evaluation and a pilot implemented based on its results. The development of the evaluation system was deemed necessary because the operating environment and structures of vocational education were changing, especially due to the reform of VET and the new legislation that entered into force in 2018. In the meta-evaluation, the functionality, effectiveness, appropriateness and reliability of the evaluation system were evaluated, and information was produced for the development of the evaluation system. An external expert group was also assembled for the meta-evaluation, whose task was to plan and implement the external evaluation and to be involved in preparing a development proposal for the VET evaluation system together with FINEEC's experts. As part of the external evaluation,

the experiences of key users of evaluation data and stakeholders on the functionality of the learning outcomes evaluation system were collected, as well as views on the development needs of the system from representatives of the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Finnish National Agency for Education, the National Education Evaluation Center, the Koski service, as well as education providers and working life. As part of the meta-evaluation, a synthesis analysis of the evaluations of the learning outcomes and a survey for the education providers were also carried out.

In 2021, FINEEC prepared a plan for the qualifications to be evaluated in 2021–2026 in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Finnish National Agency for Education. Learning outcome evaluations according to the plan and the new evaluation system were launched in the fall of 2021. The new evaluation system strengthens the role of students and working life in evaluation and in producing evaluation information. With the reform, learning outcome evaluations cover not only vocational upper secondary qualifications but also further vocational qualifications and specialist vocational qualifications. In addition, the evaluations make use of a lot of national data reserves, such as the Koski register and materials from student and working life feedback.

In higher education, the focus in quality audits is institution's own ability to produce relevant information, the continuous development of activities and effective enhancement activities. The quality audit aims at developing HEI's capability to adapt to the changing needs and challenges of society.

Higher education institutions are increasingly interested in the accreditation of degree programmes as a method of external quality management – FINEEC is expanding its accreditation activities

Since 2014, FINEEC has conducted accreditations of four-year higher education degree programmes in engineering as part of its fee-paying services. The accreditations are voluntary for higher education institutions, complementing the external national-level quality management and evaluation. The accreditation method is based on the European Accredited Engineer (EUR-ACE) standard administered by the European Network for Accreditation of Engineering Education (ENAE). In 2021, FINEEC launched a pilot to receive a permanent authorisation to also accredit bachelor's and master's programmes offered by universities. The goal is to expand FINEEC's accreditation activities to serve the entire network of Finnish higher education institutions. The expansion of accreditation activities is based on the increasing interest of higher education institutions in accrediting degree programmes and the possibility of being awarded the international quality label. There are various advantages related to accreditation. Higher education institutions can use accreditation to develop a single degree programme or the field of study more widely. It can also be utilised in student marketing and gaining an external view of the institution's operations.

1.2.3 How capable is FINEEC to respond to the changing context, needs and challenges of the Finnish education system? In your response, please answer the following questions:

- i. What internal and external barriers hinder FINEEC's ability to respond to new challenges?**
- ii. What internal and external factors facilitates FINEEC's ability to respond to new challenges?**

Answer:

i: Scarce financial resources that lead to insufficient resources for comprehensive implementation of national education evaluation and responding to all existing challenges. As a result of the structural problem in FINEEC's financial situation, the number of its permanent experts will decrease to 32 in 2024. In 2015, there were 38 permanent experts working at FINEEC. As the available appropriations decrease, the level of FINEEC's staffing will decrease from the current 53 employees (including fixed-term employees), and the organisation's competence will fall under the critical limit. During 2018–2022, FINEEC's staff costs were around EUR 3.1 million per year. From 2024 onwards, staff costs will have to be reduced to EUR 2.5 million per year. If the appropriations for operating expenses are not increased, the total number of FINEEC's employees will decrease from 53 to 30-35.

The structural problem in FINEEC's finances must be corrected, and the continuance of national evaluation activities and sufficient human resources must be ensured by increasing the appropriations for operating expenses. Evaluation data on the state, equality and effectiveness of the education system covering the entire system from early childhood education and care to higher education cannot be produced without sufficient appropriations.

The lack of permanent experts specializing in early childhood education and care prevents the preparation of a long-term evaluation plan for early childhood education and care. After 2023a, only two experts specializing in early childhood education and care will work permanently. This also prevents the implementation of evaluations based on FINEEC's own initiative in early childhood education and care. The implementation of ECEC evaluations mainly with the Ministry's development funding creates a dependency relationship with the Ministry.

However, there is a need for the development of ECEC evaluation and evaluation methods. This is evidenced, for example, by FINEEC's internal statistics produced by communications: Guidelines and recommendations for evaluating the quality of early childhood education and care has been FINEEC's most downloaded for several years. People are interested in early childhood education and care pages and visit them often. Evaluation reports of early childhood education and care are the most downloaded and training videos are the most viewed.

ii: The high-level and interdisciplinary competence of the staff and external experts and its continuous and systematic development is a key asset. The staff has the ability and competence to implement demanding, multi-method evaluation projects and produce summaries, syntheses and statements based on the evaluations. FINEEC brings current evaluation data into public discussion and decision-making through its social impact communications.

FINEEC's active collaboration with stakeholders and other information producers, following current research and evaluation data, participation in social debate, and contributions to international discussion and development create the conditions for FINEEC to succeed in its task.

Hearings and discussions are organised at the beginning of evaluation projects to gather stakeholders' views about the evaluation's theme and how the usability of evaluation data could be improved. These events aim to involve and engage stakeholders in the evaluation. Takeaways from the events are utilised in the planning of the evaluation.

1.2.4 Finland has a highly decentralised education system. Has FINEEC made any changes in how it operates or in the scope of its work to reflect these opportunities and challenges associated with a decentralized education system? In your response, please explain what are the main advantages and challenges that this poses to the work of FINEEC?

Answer:

The decentralised education system is the basis for FINEEC's operations. FINEEC has a long history of working with education and training providers and higher education institutions. The evaluation results, conclusions and recommendations are discussed with various actors. FINEEC's publication events, webinars and seminars are very popular.

In higher education decentralization is handled by tailoring assessment methods in line with the institutional needs

In higher education evaluation FINEEC has developed methodology that allows institutions to partly tailor the quality audit to support the development of the institution. For evaluation area IV, the HEI will select an area which is central to its profile or strategy for which it would like to receive feedback for the enhancement of the selected area. In addition, the HEI selects a partner and target for benchlearning and signs an agreement with the benchlearning partner. The HEI and its partner plan and implement the benchlearning, and report about it to FINEEC in the self-assessment report.

In the external evaluation by ENQA, the review panel commended the introduction of benchlearning as part of the audit process. Benchlearning has the capacity to enhance the quality of the institution's chosen focus area and to bring additional value to the participating institutions. The review panel further found the practice of organising the follow-up in the form of an enhancement-focused seminar commendable, as it enables the higher education institutions to share good practices and learn from each other.

General education

In addition to legislative means and economic mechanisms, the Finnish education system is steered with information. Local education providers have a high level of autonomy to decide how they provide education, and there have been no significant legislative changes to their autonomy in recent years.

Participative methods are used to support the implementation of information steering. Education strategies are typically prepared in broad-based working groups, and education providers, various interest groups and research institutes are often consulted before making final decisions.

By engaging multiple actors, we can utilise their expertise, facilitate information flow and promote the understanding of education policy guidelines and the basis of related steering documents.

At the ministerial level, a light education administration can be considered agile. On the other hand, a light administration also leads to fewer resources for steering activities, diverging development activities in the sectors of education, and various challenges related to developing and monitoring the operations of education and training providers. Providers of basic education and general upper secondary education have a statutory obligation to conduct quality management. However, quality management (as well as its steering through legislative means) has not developed in the intended way. According to FINEEC's evaluations, quality management is at an initial or developing level. According to an evaluation released in 2017, not all education providers fulfil the requirements and expectations based on trust, as required in the 1998 education legislation reform. In a 2021 follow-up, the situation in basic education had not changed since the evaluation.

To promote quality management in basic education and general upper secondary education, various plans have been under preparation at the ministerial level, but the plans appear to be separate at the sectoral level as they are not in line with each other. A multi-annual programme to support quality management in basic education is being planned. One of its key objectives is to draw up quality criteria for basic education. To steer quality management in general upper secondary education, the Quality Strategy for General Upper Secondary Education 2030 was released in 2022. Funding has also been allocated to education providers to implement the strategy. Education providers are still responsible for developing quality management. The strategy provides quality management guidelines at a fairly general level, and local actors are responsible e.g. for drawing up the criteria describing the quality of upper secondary education.

From FINEEC's perspective, the evaluation, support and development of quality management are challenging without a uniform set of criteria. On the other hand, there is no sense for FINEEC to develop such criteria when the Ministry is already steering education providers to do so.

Sub-dimension 1.3. Quality of design

Definition: This sub-dimension addresses how FINEEC's structure and organisation foster its capacity to address relevant priorities and needs and whether goals were clearly specified.

1.3.1. Does FINEEC follow or base its work on international standards? If yes, what are these standards and how are they integrated into FINEEC's work?

Answer:

FINEEC's quality system supports the strategy, steering and management and enhances FINEEC's operations responsiveness to needs and priorities Quality management is an integral part of FINEEC's management and steering of its activities. Quality management supports FINEEC's strategy and the achievement of its strategic goals. The implementation of the strategy, activities and the achievement of goals are systematically evaluated. FINEEC's activities are continuously developed and improved, utilising information obtained from evaluation projects, feedback systems and external evaluations. FINEEC does not have a separate quality system or manual. Instead, quality management is built into FINEEC's steering of activities and the intranet, which brings together the key elements of quality management. The purpose is to maintain the agility of quality management in an organisation FINEEC's size. Another purpose is to make quality management a natural part of the daily activities of FINEEC's staff. Manuals, process descriptions and other support documentation support the quality management of evaluation activities.

The quality management is based on Deming's cycle of continuous improvement – the so-called PDCA cycle (Plan, Do, Study, Act). The model is a spiralling cycle of planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and development of activities. The goal is continuous learning and improvement in the organisation. In addition to the areas based on the cycle of continuous improvement, the key elements of the quality management are the external steering of activities, FINEEC's strategy and its management system. Responsibilities in ensuring and improving the quality of activities at the different levels of FINEEC's organisation are defined. (see more detailed description of the quality system https://www.karvi.fi/sites/default/files/sites/default/files/documents/KARVI_T1021.pdf)

The key elements of FINEEC's quality management have been visualised in the cycle of continuous improvement in the figure below:

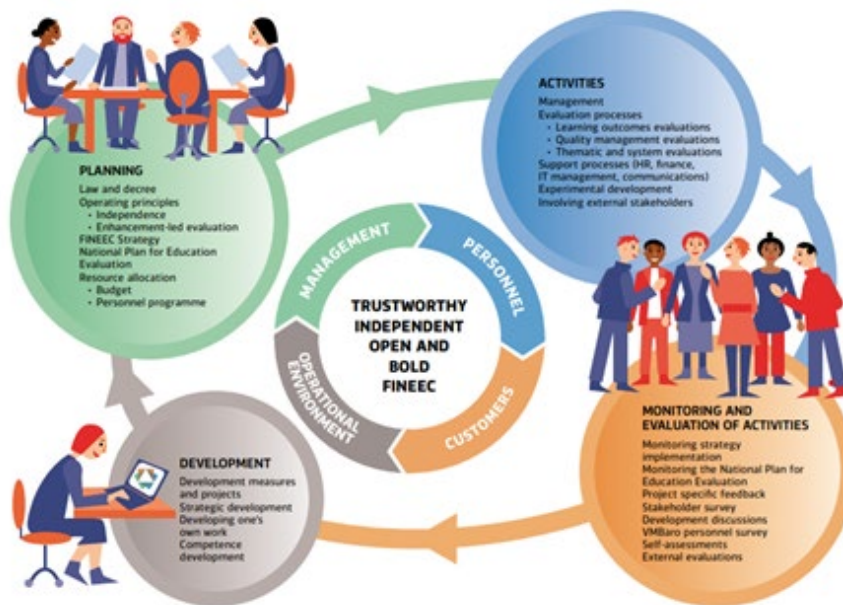


Figure 2. The quality system of FINEEC.

FINEEC has **three main feedback mechanisms**: (1) evaluation project feedback, (2) stakeholder survey and (3) VMBaro personnel survey.

At FINEEC, feedback is collected from all evaluations using common online questionnaires for evaluation objects (such as higher education institutions) and for evaluation teams. Most of the questions on the feedback questionnaires are the same regardless of evaluation type, producing monitoring data as well as information on strengths and improvement areas across FINEEC.

The FINEEC stakeholder survey covering all education sectors, including higher education, is conducted bi-annually. FINEEC regularly collects feedback about its operations. Every other year, FINEEC carries out a stakeholder survey for key stakeholders, such as ECEC, education and training providers, higher education institutions, representatives of the Finnish National Agency for Education, organisations involved in education and training, labour organisations and operators and other stakeholders. The purpose of the stakeholder survey is to determine stakeholders' views on e.g. how FINEEC's evaluations facilitate the development of the Finnish education system and how relevant the development suggestions provided in FINEEC's evaluations are. Furthermore, in connection with each individual evaluation project, FINEEC uses a standard feedback form to collect feedback from the parties participating in the evaluation on the implementation of the evaluation and the usefulness and effectiveness of the evaluation results. In addition, there is an open survey on FINEEC's website that anyone can use to submit evaluation initiatives. FINEEC also organises negotiations with the leadership of the Ministry of Education and Culture, its different departments, different authorities and other stakeholders for the purpose of presenting current evaluation information, which also contributes to the determination of future evaluation needs.

VMBaro is an annual job satisfaction survey for personnel working in governmental organisations. VMBaro measures and monitors the job satisfaction of personnel, the success of the leadership and immediate superiors, and the functioning of the salary system. Based on the results, annual development areas are selected together by the unit staff.

The unit-level annual clock visualises the operations development at the unit level. Another key purpose of the annual clock is to strengthen the systematic process of using the information produced by the FINEEC quality system, especially ensuring that the development actions agreed are followed up systematically across the organisation.

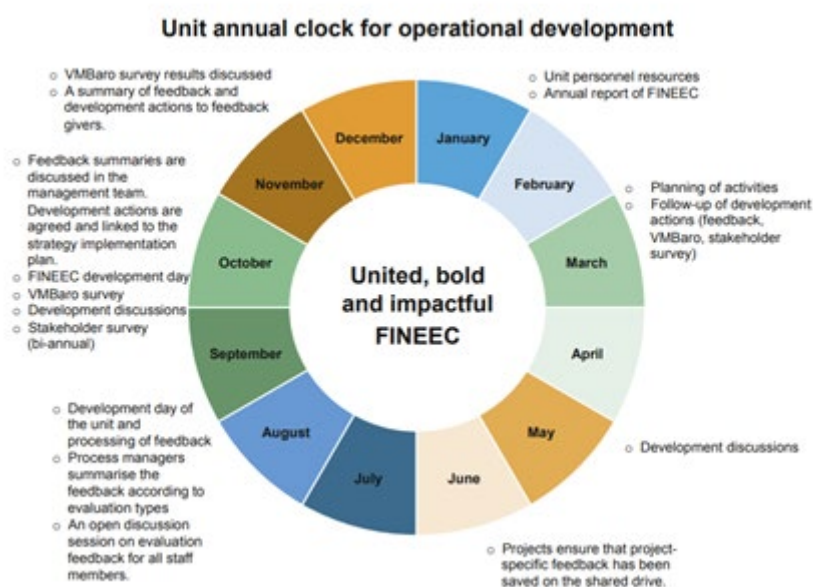


Figure 3. Unit annual clock for operational development

Higher education – European Standards and Guidelines 2015

Finland is a committed member of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and thus, regularly participates in the external evaluation of its higher education evaluation activities. FINEEC's activities are evaluated against the Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) that provide the European framework for internal and external quality assurance. They were adopted at the EHEA Ministerial Conference in 2015. The latest external evaluation of FINEEC's evaluation activities in higher education was carried out in 2021 by [European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education](https://enqa.eu/) (ENQA). An international panel of experts appointed by ENQA conducted the evaluation. FINEEC passed the review and had its full membership in ENQA reconfirmed and renewed its registration in [EQAR](https://enqa.eu/), the register of trusted European quality assurance agencies. More info: <https://karvi.fi/en/higher-education/external-evaluation/>

The ESG provide the minimum standard for systematic quality assurance in higher education in Finland. FINEEC is currently carrying out the 3rd cycle of quality audits. Since the 1st cycle of audits, the Finnish approach has gone beyond the ESG. ESG focuses primarily on quality assurance of teaching and learning, but FINEEC has included in its approach also the other

duties of higher education institutions, namely research, development and innovation activities, as well as the third mission, societal engagement and impact. The Finnish approach has been to support the continuous development and improvement of the activities of HEIs as a whole. The Finnish approach has been consistent, yet, the emphases of audit frameworks have changed and been developed for each audit cycle.

Higher Education – ENAEE standards on engineering degree programmes and their accreditation

Engineering programme accreditation is a degree programme specific evaluation which can lead to the international EUR-ACE Label. The accreditation aims to support the development of quality in engineering degree programmes and increase international comparability and recognition of Finnish engineering degrees in the industry. Higher education institutions (HEIs) may utilise engineering degree programme accreditations to get an external view on how well the students in a programme receive the knowledge and skills required by the industry. The accreditation method and criteria are presented in the [standards and procedures for engineering programme accreditation](#) (karvi.fi)

The accreditation method is based on [the European Accredited Engineer \(EUR-ACE\)](#) standard administered by [the European Network for Accreditation of Engineering Education \(ENAEE\)](#). Accredited programmes will be granted the EUR-ACE Label, which is valid for six years from the evaluation decision. The quality label shows that the programme has passed an internationally recognised accreditation in the field of engineering. Accreditations are voluntary for the HEIs and a fee covering the costs will be charged.

At the moment, FINEEC has the right to grant the EUR-ACE Bachelor Label to four-year degree programmes leading to a bachelor's degree. In 2022-2023, FINEEC pilots the accreditations of the three-year degree programmes as well as two-year degree programmes at the Finnish universities. FINEEC aims to extend its right to award the EUR-ACE labels to the engineering degree programmes.

Early childhood education and care

In early childhood education and care sector the national quality indicators drawn up by FINEEC are based on the framework prepared in the European CARE project (Moser et al. 2017) as well as on the European Quality Framework for Early Childhood and Care (European Union 2014). To ensure compatibility with the Finnish ECEC system, the European indicators were critically assessed by FINEEC and its expert group. The Finnish ECEC quality indicators and national quality evaluation model have been contextualised and the objectives are based on the Finnish legislation and ECEC curriculum.

Vocational education and training

The quality management and evaluation of vocational education and training has been developed in Finland on a long-term basis since the 1990s. The development work has been guided both by national policies and by the underlying policies of the European Union, such as the Vocational

Education and Training Act (531/2017), the VET Quality Strategy 2011-2020 and its update update (the VET Quality Strategy 2020-2030), the quality management recommendations for VET and apprenticeship training, and the joint European Quality Assurance Reference Framework EQAVET and EQAVET+, which complements it.

The EFQM Excellence model has also been used as a reference framework for the evaluation. In quality management, FINEEC's task is to provide information on the state of VET providers' quality management systems (evaluations of quality management systems) and to support VET providers in matters related to quality management and evaluation. The evaluations of quality management systems cover the entire operation of the VET provider, and they are targeted at all VET providers.

Secondary level education and higher education: standard-based regular external evaluation of the maritime education

FINEEC in cooperation with the Finnish Transport and Communications Agency (Traficom) conducted an evaluation of education in the maritime sector in 2020 – 2022. According to the STCW Convention, an evaluation is carried out every five years. The objective of the evaluation is to ensure that the Finnish organisations offering education in the maritime sector have functional quality management systems and procedures to provide education that fulfils the quality criteria of the STCW Convention and that the education unit fulfils the requirements of the STCW Convention. The latest evaluation of education in the maritime sector was based on a self-assessment conducted by the Finnish organisations offering education in the maritime sector, background material and an evaluation visit by an evaluation team. Maritime sector evaluation is part of FINEEC's fee-paid services.

1.3.2. Does FINEEC have sufficient physical, human, and financial resources to carry out all the activities in the National Education Evaluation Plan (NEEP) 2020 - 2023? If not, what additional resources are needed?

Answer:

Physical operating environment, premises

FINEEC's current premises in Helsinki and Jyväskylä are appropriate and make it possible to carry out independent evaluation activities. Since 2018, FINEEC has been a separate unit of the Finnish National Agency for Education and operated in shared premises with it. Until November this year, FINEEC also has access to a designated space that evaluation teams can use to carry out their work together and that can also be used to organise meetings and events for all FINEEC personnel. This space is important for the independence of evaluation activities, as FINEEC's evaluations also cover the activities of the Finnish National Agency for Education. The Finnish National Agency for Education is giving up an entire floor of its premises on 1 December 2023. This will also result in FINEEC losing its designated space. The lessor, Senate Properties, is planning on giving up the Hakaniemenranta office building in its entirety. The plan is to designate working space for FINEEC in shared central government premises. Workstations are to be

designated for approximately half of FINEEC's personnel.

Personnel resources, competence of personnel and external experts

FINEEC has a total of 53 employees, of whom 28 are fixed-term employees. As of the start of 2024, FINEEC will have to carry out evaluation activities covering the entire education system with an organisation consisting of only 32 employees, which is a very small number in terms of international comparisons.

FINEEC's small budget will force it to scale back its evaluation activities in a situation where evaluation information is needed more than ever and the information produced by FINEEC is considered reliable and effective based on received feedback.

Financial resources

FINEEC has sufficient resources to carry out the current National Education Evaluation Plan 2020-2023. FINEEC's budget has consisted of the annual appropriation for operational expenditure allocated to the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre in the State Budget, deferred appropriations, appropriations for development expenses granted by the Ministry of Education and Culture and other separate funding. FINEEC also receives funds from paid services. After 2024, FINEEC's budget will no longer include any deferred items and FINEEC has to reduce the costs of its core activities and downsize during the upcoming evaluation plan period of 2024–2027.

The Ministry of Education and Culture has approved the National Education Evaluation Plan 2020-2023 with the following resource-related definition:

The annual costs of the evaluations conducted under the National education evaluation plan are approximately EUR 4.8 million. The costs are covered with the annual appropriation for operational expenditure, allocated to the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre in the Budget, an appropriation for development expenses, and other separate funding. FINEEC also receives funds from paid services, which are divided into performances under public law (Decree of the Ministry of Education and Culture 87/2020, Section 3) and performances under private law. As paid services, FINEEC carries out evaluations and supports early childhood education and care providers, education and training providers, and higher education institutions in developing their quality management and evaluation activities. The different forms of paid services include learning outcomes evaluation services, commissioned evaluations and audits related to education and training, accreditations providing higher education institutions with the EUR-ACE quality label for degree programmes in engineering, and evaluations of education and training in the maritime sector. FINEEC may also carry out paid services outside of Finland.

The annual appropriation for operating expenses has been too small relative to the scope of FINEEC's tasks since its founding. In previous years, operating expenses have been covered with deferred appropriations and appropriations for development expenses granted by the Ministry of Education and Culture.

The structural problem with FINEEC's budget can be traced back to its founding. When FINEEC commenced operation, appropriations from three previous evaluation organisations

were deferred to its budget so that its budget for the first full operating year, 2015, included EUR 3,888,000 of appropriations and a total of EUR 5,801,366 of funding with deferred items included. After 2024, FINEEC's budget will no longer include any deferred items.

FINEEC's operations are funded with appropriations for development expenses from the Ministry of Education and Culture, some of which are decided upon and allocated separately. Being funded with appropriations for development expense affects the independence of national evaluation activities and also hinders the long-term planning of evaluation activities and finances. It has not been possible to allocate enough appropriations for development expense to cover FINEEC's labour costs, as a result of which labour costs have been covered with appropriations for operating expenses. Projects that are funded separately by the Ministry of Education and Culture also increase the general costs of FINEEC's operations tied to person-years (such as IT services, Palkeet finance and HR services and the Finnish National Agency for Education's administration and support services), which are covered with FINEEC's appropriations for operating expenses.

FINEEC's statutory duties expanded considerably when its evaluation activities were extended to cover ECEC in 2016. This has not, however, been taken into account in FINEEC's budget. Because of this, FINEEC has been determinedly streamlining its activities and implementing significant cost-cutting measures. The number of permanent employees has remained largely unchanged throughout FINEEC's activities and even decreased, even though its duties have expanded.

All FINEEC's evaluations are carried out digitally. Developing digital systems requires FINEEC to purchase various services.

The cutbacks of FINEEC's appropriations and deferred appropriations, the costs of administrative and support services, the costs of the central government's IT services and rising labour costs will require FINEEC to reduce the costs of its core activities and downsize during the upcoming evaluation plan period of 2024–2027, unless additional funding is secured.

The Finnish Education Evaluation Centre proposes that its appropriation for operating expenses be increased to ensure that the basic level of its activities can be maintained. The proposed appropriation for operating expenses for the period of 2024–2027 is EUR 5,722,000.

Increasing the appropriation for operating expenses is essential for FINEEC to be able to carry out its statutory duties, the scope of which covers the entire Finnish education system (ECEC, pre-primary, primary and lower secondary education, general upper secondary education, vocational education and training, higher education and liberal adult education).

1.3.3. Do you think that the process by which the National Education Evaluation Plan (NEEP) is developed involves the right set of stakeholders at the right time, and does it give due consideration to context and expected evolutions? In your answer, please explain the process by which the NEEP is developed, and which stakeholders are involved and at what stage.

Answer:

The statutory task of the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre is to carry out evaluations related to education and early childhood education and care, teaching and education providers and higher education institutions in accordance with the National Plan for Education Evaluation (Act on the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre 1295/2013, § 2). The Evaluation Council appointed by the Government formulates a proposed evaluation plan, which is then submitted for approval to the Ministry of Education and Culture. The evaluation plan consists of the planned evaluations and a time schedule for the evaluations (Act on the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre 1295/2013, § 5). The regulation on the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre specifies that the evaluation plan is drawn up for four years at a time and can be revised during the evaluation period. Key stakeholders must be consulted when drawing up the plan. (Finnish Education Evaluation Centre Decree 1317/2013, Section 2.) FINEEC's first evaluation plan covered the years 2016–2019 and the second 2020–2023. The evaluation plan for the years 2024–2027 is currently being prepared.

Preparation process for the Evaluation Plan 2020-2023

The evaluation plan was prepared side by side with the preparation of FINEEC's new strategy. Various stakeholders and FINEEC's personnel were widely consulted and participated in the preparation. The preparation process started in the late spring of 2018 in the summer of 2018 with the self-reflection of the Evaluation Council and the Higher Education Evaluation Committee, which ended their term of office in the summer of 2018. In the self-reflection, the Council and Committee considered, among other things, FINEEC's desired future directions and the implementation of the evaluation plan 2016–2019, as well as future evaluation needs. The Evaluation Council, which started its operation in the summer of 2018, dealt with the preparation of the evaluation plan regularly in its meetings until the proposal for the evaluation plan was submitted to the Ministry of Education and Culture. The Higher Education Evaluation Committee also dealt with the preparation of the evaluation plan in several of its meetings from the perspective of higher education. In addition to the Evaluation Council and the Higher Education Evaluation Committee, a temporary expert group on the evaluation of vocational education and training appointed by the Evaluation Council participated in the preparation of the evaluation plan. The group's task was to prepare proposals for national evaluations of vocational education and training in the planning period 2020–2023. The group of experts was appointed in 2017, and the background to the appointment was the extensive legislative reform of VET that came into effect in 2018 and the resulting need to examine the evaluation activities of VET as a whole and to ensure that the information needs of the various actors of vocational education, especially the education providers and working life, are also met in the best possible way in the future. The

expert group included representatives of VET providers, vocational teacher training, research, working life and students.

Evaluation initiatives were collected from stakeholders several times and in different channels during the spring and fall of 2018. Evaluation initiatives were collected at first at the Evaluation Forum organized by Karvi for actors in the education field in May 2018. As part of FINEEC's stakeholder survey conducted in September-October 2018, the respondents had the opportunity to state themes for which evaluation information should be produced. In November-December 2018, an online survey open to everyone was carried out on FINEEC's website about what FINEEC should evaluate. Stakeholders were also consulted extensively in three discussion meetings organized in December 2018, where they considered what are the key themes for the development of education in the coming years. Participants from a total of 51 organizations were invited to the events (ministries, trade associations, employer associations, student associations, advocacy organizations of education providers, regional administration authorities, research institutes). At the same time, FINEEC's units held discussions with their own stakeholders about future evaluation needs.

The views of political decision-makers on future assessment needs were mapped out in a referral discussion with the Parliament's Education and Culture Committee in November 2018.

During the evaluation plan preparation process, FINEEC's management and the chairmanship of the Evaluation Council met with the entire civil service leadership of the Ministry of Education and Culture twice: in the initial phase of the preparation process in November 2018 and in the final phase in April 2019. The November 2018 meeting was a referral discussion for the evaluation work, and the April meeting discussed the Evaluation Council's draft evaluation plan. In addition, in March 2019, the Director of FINEEC and the officials responsible for the preparation process met with the officials of the Ministry responsible for cooperation with FINEEC to discuss the current draft of the evaluation plan. In addition to this, FINEEC's and the Ministry's officials held separate education level-specific discussions about the Ministry's information needs. FINEEC also held separate discussions with the Management Team of the Finnish National Agency for Education and the agency's units about which themes the agency felt needed to be evaluated. The agency's management team and FINEEC's management team met twice, in January and March 2019.

FINEEC's entire staff was closely involved in the preparation of the evaluation plan. Right from the beginning of autumn 2018, the staff had the opportunity to anonymously tell which themes should be evaluated in the next planning period according to their views and the questions raised in previous evaluations. In addition, in order to involve the personnel, workshops were organized in all units in October 2018. In January 2019, a workshop was organized for all personnel, in which, based on the evaluation initiatives collected up to that point and the hearings organized, an effort was made to achieve an understanding of the key phenomena and themes to which the plan must respond.

The Ministry of Education and Culture approved the Evaluation Council's proposal for the Education Evaluation Plan 2020–2023 in December 2019. In accordance with the evaluation plan process, the Ministry of Education and Culture and FINEEC held a mid-term consultation for the evaluation plan period in 2021. The consultation examines the progress of the evaluation plan,

the effectiveness of the evaluation activities, and agrees on a possible update of the plan. Also in this evaluation plan period, the evaluation plan was updated in accordance with the Ministry's wishes after the mid-term negotiations in 2021. In addition, the evaluation plan was supplemented with new projects in 2022 as well.

A new National Education Evaluation Plan will be prepared in 2023

During 2023, the National Education Evaluation Plan (NEEP) for the period 2024-2027 will be designed. In preparing the evaluation plan, extensive consultation with stakeholders and staff will play an important role. The Evaluation Council started the NEEP by carrying out an analysis of the context in which it operates. Subsequently, new evaluation topics have been discussed with staff through community-based discussions and evaluation workshops. A section on evaluation themes was added/extended to the stakeholder survey, which was then refined/utilised in the wepropol survey and processed into that web-based tool, which was first used a joint workshop between the Evaluation Council and staff has been organised during the spring (20 February 2023).

Evaluation initiatives can currently be submitted on the FINEEC website and have been collected, for example, at Educa fairs and the Evaluation Forum. The NEEP is also discussed with, for example, the Higher Education Evaluation Committee and the Centre for Continuing Learning and Employment Services. The views of policymakers on future evaluation needs will be explored in a follow-up discussion with the Education Committee of the Parliament.

Staff has also been encouraged to collect evaluation initiatives for their own projects. Currently, 43 evaluation initiatives have been submitted and we are collecting initiatives from the society at large until the beginning of April. We will also organise a live event for 50 key stakeholders to brainstorm the evaluation plan and use a web-based tool to involve 300 people in brainstorming the evaluation plan. We hold discussions with key stakeholders such as the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Finnish National Board of Education in spring 2023.

The aim is for the Evaluation Council to propose to the Ministry of Education and Culture the adoption of the new National Education Evaluation Plan at the end of 2023.

FINEEC pays constant attention to ensuring that the process of developing the National Education Evaluation Plan (NEEP) involves the right stakeholders at the right time and gives due consideration to context and expected developments. It promotes stakeholder cooperation and develops ways to consult and engage stakeholders.

Dimension 2. Coherence

Definition: this dimension examines the compatibility of FINEEC's objectives and tasks within FINEEC and with other actors in the system.

Sub-dimension 2.1. External coherence

Definition: This sub-dimension addresses the consistency of FINEEC's objectives and work with other actors' interventions in the education sector nationally and abroad.

2.1.1. How does the work of FINEEC align with evaluations and assessments developed by other institutions in Finland? In your response, please answer the following questions:

- i. **What other educational evaluations and assessments exist in Finland besides those of FINEEC?**
- ii. **To what extent are these other evaluations and assessments and FINEEC's work complementary?**
- iii. **To what extent do these other evaluations and assessments and FINEEC's work overlap?**

Answer:

FINEEC's evaluation work is part of an information production structure comprising research, studies and evaluation activities. In this structure, evaluation activities have the special task of producing information on the state of education at the education system level as well as recommendations for developing the system. FINEEC has the capability to coordinate national, independent and reliable data production and this coordination task could be further strengthened.

Only FINEEC has the statutory task of carrying out evaluations related to education and early childhood education and care and the activities of early childhood education and care, teaching and education providers and higher education institutions, and to carry out evaluations of learning outcomes related to the achievement of the objectives of pre-primary and basic education core curricula or the learning objectives and vocational competence requirements defined in the qualification requirements.

Other entities that carry out education-related research and investigations include:

- National Audit Office of Finland, which from time to time conducts education-related audits from the point of view of state financial management. The task of the Audit Office is to check the legality and appropriateness of the state's financial management and compliance with the state budget.

- Finnish Institute for Educational Research conducts PISA studies.

The Ministry of Education and Culture sometimes orders reports or studies from different parties, such as universities or consulting companies, or conducts an investigation on a topic itself.

- The University of Helsinki's Education Evaluation Center HEA studies Finnish education and learning to learn skills.

- Research Foundation for Studies and Education Otus is a foundation that focuses on research of studies and education, everyday life and well-being and employment and professional skills.

- The Academy of Finland, which is an expert organization for research funding and science policy under the administration of the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture.

- National exams organized by different subject organizations (e.g. Association of Mathematical Subject Teachers MAOL).

- Universities' faculties and departments of educational and social sciences and economics.

In Finland, there is a common website for data collection (tiedonkeruut.fi), where information about future evaluation, research or investigation projects is collected. The website contains information on the data collection of early childhood education and care, pre-primary and basic education, upper secondary education and vocational education and training, their content and schedule, as well as the materials generated from the data collection. The service is maintained by a cooperation network, which includes FINEEC, the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Finnish National Agency for Education, the Institute of Health and Welfare, Statistics Finland, the Academy of Finland, the Association of Municipalities, the professional association of teachers OAJ, the Research Foundation for Studies and Education OTUS and the universities of Helsinki, Jyväskylä and Turku.

If some other entity has carried out an inspection (e.g. the National Audit Office) or a study (e.g. a university) on a phenomenon related to the same or a similar subject area as FINEEC in its own evaluation project (e.g. a thematic evaluation), then the existing information will be consulted during the planning phase of the evaluation. If, at the same time, another entity is carrying out an inspection or research on a phenomenon related to the same or a nearby subject area, then during the planning phase of FINEEC's evaluation project, information is obtained about the inspection or study in question (e.g. through a hearing) so that this information will be utilized in the planning of the evaluation.

As mentioned before, on its own initiative and immediately after the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, FINEEC carried out the Impacts of the exceptional teaching arrangements on the realization of equality and equity at different levels of education assessment at all levels of education. In the evaluation, as far as possible, the results of research and survey projects and materials were used, and thus an effort was made to avoid additional burden on early childhood education and care, schools, educational institutions and universities and duplication of data

collection. Furthermore, FINEEC coordinated the data collection of different data producers, e.g. in collaboration with student organizations and education providers.

Many of FINEEC's personnel have a research background and are actively involved in the field's researcher networks. For example, the quality indicators of early childhood education and care were built systematically at FINEEC in cooperation with a multidisciplinary expert group (research, working life, administration). These quality indicators are based on Finnish and international research and describe the quality goals set for early childhood education and research structures and processes. The quality indicators created a common knowledge base for quality evaluation at both national and local levels and provided a foundation for building Valssi which is a national quality evaluation system designed to support the quality management of early childhood education and care organisers and service providers.

In FINEEC's policies regarding data collection, it is recommended that the data for evaluation projects be collected in such a way that the goals of the individual evaluation can be met with the lightest possible data collection and that possible national register data is used, for example, and that data that is available from somewhere else is not collected. FINEEC itself produces dozens of materials every year and hands over the evaluation materials it collects for research use.

FINEEC has active interaction with other information producers, for example, by organizing joint seminars, where information is shared between national actors in education evaluation and research. The aim of the seminars is to promote mutual information exchange and utilization of education evaluation and research at the national level. The purpose is to strengthen national cooperation, prevent duplicate data collection and increase the multi-perspective, transparency and effectiveness of education evaluation and research. The next occasion will be organized in connection with the Evaluation Forum on 13 June 2023.

In its own activities, FINEEC has tried to avoid overlapping with other information producers, but the challenge is sometimes that, for example, the Ministry of Education and Culture orders different reports and studies partly on the same topics and at the same time as FINEEC is carrying out an evaluation.

2.1.2. How is FINEEC's independence safeguarded from third-party's interests?

Answer:

The independence of the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre is stated in the law. That gives the backbone to all declarations of independence in all FINEEC communications: web pages, training of experts, training of the new Evaluation Council and Higher Education Evaluation Committee members, the introduction of new staff members and discussions with the Finnish National Agency for Education, ministries and other stakeholders.

The independence statement in the law is adopted in FINEEC's activities so that FINEEC decides independently on the implementation of the evaluations, the methods used, the members of the evaluation teams, timetables, content of reports and other decisions pertaining to education

evaluations. Other interested parties (such as education providers, ministries and stakeholders) have no effect on FINEEC's decisions or evaluation results.

FINEEC operates as a separate administrative unit within the Finnish National Agency for Education. The financial independence from the host organisation is guaranteed by a separate sub-item in the state budget, which the agency can independently decide how to use. Unfortunately, the budget is inadequate to carry out all FINEEC's statutory duties. FINEEC is dependent on separate funding decisions. The lack of independence is most strongly felt in those units of FINEEC that operate to a large extent by appropriations for development expense from the Ministry of Education and Culture and has the biggest number of temporary staff.

FINEEC conducts its staff recruitment independently, utilising a recruitment database for governmental organisations. All positions longer than 6 months must be filled by open call. The Director decides on opening a new position and appoints a new employee. The financial constraints on the state budget do limit the right to appoint new staff. FINEEC's management team decides on the recruitment team that will carry out the interviews. Formally, the Head of the Unit proposes to the Director the result of the recruitment process.

The Evaluation Council's role is mainly strategic: supervising and developing the Centre's activities. The Government appoints the Evaluation Council for a maximum of four years at a time. The proposal is put forward by the Ministry of Education and Culture based on the nominations made by different actors in the education sector. The Director and staff representative of FINEEC hold the right to participate and speak in the meetings of the Evaluation Council. The Finnish Education Evaluation Centre chooses a representative from within its organisation to become a member in the Evaluation Council.

The Higher Education Evaluation Committee is responsible for the decisions concerning higher education: (1) Project plans and composition of planning and evaluation teams for evaluations of higher education institutions and (2) Outcomes of higher education institutions. The Higher Education Evaluation Committee is selected from the candidates put forward by the HEIs and student unions. The Evaluation Council proposes the composition to the Ministry of Education and Culture, which then appoints the Committee. Three of the members come from universities, three come from the universities of applied science, two are student members and one is a working life representative. The composition of the Committee is balanced as to gender and regional and official languages. The language balance means that at least one member comes from the Swedish-speaking minority. In case of a need to dismiss a committee member, the Evaluation Council takes the proposal to the Ministry of Education and Culture, which then acts upon it.

The independence of the Evaluation Council's and the Higher Education Evaluation Committee's decisions is reinforced by the emphasis on the policy that members of FINEEC's Evaluation Council and Higher Education Evaluation Committee are not representatives of their employers (e.g. the HEIs or the unions) but represent the whole field of Finnish education as independent experts. In addition, FINEEC has a non-conflict-of-interest policy, which is common to all Finnish civil services, whereby no person with a personal interest in the matter can have any role in the conduct of its evaluation or making decisions about it.

All external evaluators and auditors sign an agreement that covers the terms and conditions related to the task. According to the agreement, the expert shall be independent of any such

external factors that jeopardise the reliability of the evaluation, and the expert must not allow his/her own or any third party's interests to affect the evaluation.

FINEEC's independence in terms of higher education evaluations has been evaluated several times in ENQA's external review and found fully compliant every time.

2.1.3. Are there any institutional or governance elements that could be improved to achieve a higher level of independence of FINEEC?

Answer:

Increase in the annual appropriation for operating expenses would improve FINEEC's independence. It has been too small relative to the scope of FINEEC's tasks since FINEEC's founding. FINEEC has been able to operate by deferred appropriations, but now they have run out. Being funded with appropriations for development expense from the Ministry of Education and Culture affects the independence of national evaluation activities and also hinders the long-term planning of evaluation activities and finances. In addition, FINEEC's statutory duties expanded considerably when its evaluation activities were extended to cover early childhood education and care in 2016. This has not, however, been taken into account in FINEEC's budget. Due to this, FINEEC has systematically and determinedly streamlined its activities and implemented significant cost-cutting measures. The number of permanent employees has remained largely unchanged throughout FINEEC's activities and even decreased, even though its duties have expanded.

The Finnish Education Evaluation Centre has proposed that its appropriation for operating expenses be increased to ensure that the basic level of its activities can be maintained. The proposed appropriation for operating expenses for the period of 2024–2027 is EUR 5,722,000. Increasing the appropriation for operating expenses is essential for FINEEC to be able to carry out its statutory duties, the scope of which covers the entire Finnish education system (early childhood education and care, pre-primary, primary and lower secondary education, general upper secondary education, vocational education and training, higher education and liberal adult education).

FINEEC's independence might be under threat due to a proposed education agency structure reform in Finnish public administration. The Ministry of Education and Culture has set a consortium development project covering the entire sector's agencies, the aim of which is to ensure the quality and service capability of the Ministry and agencies in the coming years. FINEEC's management team carried out a SWOT-analysis in relation to the intended education agency structure reform. The main findings were the following issues:

Prerequisites for nationally and internationally credible and independent evaluation of education:

- FINEEC's mission and independent status under the Act on the Finnish Education

Evaluation Centre must be preserved.

- FINEEC must retain its power to make decisions on its strategy, organisation and management. The Evaluation Council's role and task are preserved. The four-year evaluation plan retains its status and significance in directing FINEEC's work as a document that corresponds to a performance agreement.
- FINEEC can continue to provide fee-based services as an authority.
- Any new solutions concerning FINEEC's relationship with the agency and performance guidance will be formulated openly and transparently, and with a clear structure that reinforces the starting points for FINEEC's independent work and impact.
- The agency will develop more cost-effective and high-quality administrative and support services that bolster the independent status of FINEEC's activities, effective work and impact.

FINEEC has identified the following risks related to agency structure reform:

- Performance guidance exerted and decisions made by the agency may jeopardise the conduct and development of national long-term, systematic, and independent education evaluation work that covers all levels of education as well as early childhood education and care. There is also a risk that FINEEC cannot secure its ability to carry out its current work and ensure the implementation of development plans or directions.
- The credibility of evaluation activities is eroded. An administrative and steering structure that strongly undermines FINEEC's independence will erode FINEEC's credibility and hamper its customer-centric approach.
- The availability of administrative services deteriorates, and the costs of administrative services increase due to organisational changes and amalgamations in the administrative sector. The process of providing administrative and support services and agreeing on their costs becomes cumbersome.
- Agency management creates ambiguity in relation to FINEEC's competence and management system. FINEEC's management, relationships of power and responsibility and organisation structure appear unclear to the personnel and stakeholders.
- In particular, unclear power and responsibility relationships are reflected in the productivity of work and impacts on personnel, for example personnel well-being. The impact of the evaluation activities and goal achievement are compromised.

FINEEC's status as a separate unit and essential prerequisites for national evaluation activities has to be secured and maintained in the reform of the agency structure of the Finnish education administration.

Sub-dimension 2.2. Internal coherence

Definition: This sub-dimension addresses the synergies and interlinkages between all the interventions carried out by FINEEC.

2.2.1. What synergies exist between the different activities carried out by FINEEC? How could these synergies be enhanced?

Answer:

The National Education Evaluation Plan is structured to four socially significant focus areas to support decision-making and development work at all levels ranging from Finnish society and the education system at large to the local level. During the plan period 2020–2023, the focus areas of the evaluation activities are as follows:

- Learning and competence development
- Promoting equity
- Improving the effectiveness of the education system
- Supporting continuous improvement

These focus areas create synergy in all different activities carried out by FINEEC. For example, the evaluation data aimed at promoting equality seeks to answer the following questions: What is the state of equality and equal opportunities in education in Finland? and Which factors enhance or hinder the implementation of equality in education? In December 2021, FINEEC published a summary publication on the topic: https://www.karvi.fi/sites/default/files/sites/default/files/documents/FINEEC_T1821.pdf

More info on focus areas: <https://www.karvi.fi/en/about-us/about-our-evaluations/information-production-focus-areas>

The Finnish law requires all levels of education to carry out systematic quality management and evaluation. FINEEC has an internal working group called Quality team, that forms the overall national picture of quality management in all levels of education. The team has participation from all FINEEC's units. The work of the team produces information to the focus area supporting continuous improvement. In spring 2023, FINEEC will publish a booklet that aims at making quality management of education simple. The target audience of the publication is especially those education providers that lack behind in fulfilling their legal duties in systematic quality assurance.

In the external review of higher education by ENQA, the review panel commended the way FINEEC conducts collaborative work across different units of FINEEC to make the most of the agency's human resources. This increases the knowledge capital of every individual FINEEC staff member and contributes to a broader understanding of education as a comprehensive system starting from early childhood education and care all the way to higher education. The panel further commended the effort FINEEC puts in the professional development for the staff,

which has a laudable experience. According to the ENQA report, FINEEC has a 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. <https://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/FINEEC-external-review-report.pdf>

At FINEEC, feedback is collected from all evaluations using common online questionnaires for education providers and for evaluation teams. Most of the questions on the feedback questionnaires are the same regardless of evaluation type, producing monitoring data as well as information on strengths and improvement areas across FINEEC. The feedback is discussed within units, possible development actions, responsible persons and timelines are agreed, and counter feedback is given to feedback providers. A summary of the feedback for the evaluation type is presented to the FINEEC management team that decides on FINEEC-level development actions based on the feedback summaries. The FINEEC-level development actions are integrated into the follow-up procedures of the FINEEC strategy carried out by the management team.

VMBaro is an annual job satisfaction survey for personnel working in governmental organisations. VMBaro measures and monitors the job satisfaction of personnel, the success of the leadership and immediate superiors, and the functioning of the salary system. The results are discussed at the FINEEC level and the unit level. Based on the results, annual development areas are selected together.

The Director, Secretary, the four Heads of Units and the staff representative form the management team that meets every two weeks and in collaboration manage, supervise and develop the activities of FINEEC. The minutes of the management team meetings are communicated promptly to the staff. In addition, the Director and the Heads of Units meet weekly on-line without an agenda to discuss any relevant topical issue. These informal meetings are useful in ensuring synergies and interlinkages between activities. Some of the everyday habits of FINEEC have synergy enhancing character. These events bring together the staff for informal exchange of ideas, for example Karvi-kahvit (FINEEC-coffee) and Arviointiporinat (Evaluation fizz).

FINEEC carries out, on a regular basis, evaluations that cover several levels and orientations of education. Examples of cross-sectoral evaluations in recent years:

- Impacts of the exceptional teaching arrangements on the realisation of equality and equity at different levels of education (Covid-19)
- Ability of education system to respond to challenges of continuous learning in sudden structural change
- Immigrants' educational pathways
- Best practices for the integration of immigrants into the educational system
- Immigrants in higher education
- Competence provided by VET in relation to the requirements of studies at universities of applied sciences
- Evaluation of education in the ECEC sector

- Evaluation of the new forms of student counselling
- Evaluation of student transitions and smooth study paths.

FINEEC has prepared process descriptions of all forms of evaluations, as well as manuals, uniform instructions, guidelines and support materials (e.g., for preparing budgets and plans, data collection, communication) to FINEEC's evaluation experts and project teams in order to unify operating methods and support project teams. The Process Manager for each form of evaluation

- is responsible for the process descriptions being up to date and the continuous improvement of the process,
- ensures that feedback on evaluation projects is collected in accordance with the feedback system, the feedback is analysed and processed, and development measures are followed up
- ensures that the project managers and others involved in the evaluation are briefed and introduced to the evaluation process.

For example, in 2016–2017, an internal working group produced The Manual for Thematic Evaluations to support FINEEC's evaluation experts and the external teams in planning and implementing thematic evaluations. The manual was updated in 2018–2019 and recently in February 2021 on data protection. According to the Manual for Thematic Evaluation, there are the following phases in FINEEC's thematic evaluation process:

1. **Preparation**
 - setting up a project team (FINEEC experts)
 - collecting background information
 - defining the expertise required by the project
2. **Planning and designing**
 - recruiting and nominating a planning team (FINEEC experts, external experts and representatives of education providers/HEIs)
 - stakeholder hearings
 - operationalisation of the evaluation theme and targets
 - defining the evaluation questions
 - selecting data collection methods
 - defining and choosing criteria
 - designing data collection
 - designing the project schedule and project plan for evaluation
3. **Implementation**
 - recruiting and nominating the evaluation/implementation team (FINEEC experts, external experts and representatives of education providers/HEIs)
 - data collection (participatory methods are often used)
 - coding the data
 - analysing the data
 - writing up results and recommendations
 - publishing the evaluation report
 - disseminating (and distributing) the results and recommendations
4. **Feedback and follow-up**
 - collecting feedback from the evaluation team and education providers/HEIs

- possible follow-up evaluation.

The synergy of the units and all activities has been a continuous development area since the establishment of FINEEC (2014) and great progress has taken place during the on-going planning period. The future steps include renewal of common focus areas in the next National Education Evaluation Plan, as well as further thematic evaluations that connect education sectors, levels and units of FINEEC.

2.2.2. What conflicts (e.g. overlaps, inefficiencies, conflicts of interest) arise between the different activities carried out by FINEEC? How could these conflicts be minimised?

Answer:

FINEEC has overcome many inefficiencies and conflicts of interest between different activities and today the work of FINEEC is quite coherent. In previous times, surveys were sent to the education providers without coordination and that caused evaluation fatigue in some schools. Nowadays, FINEEC utilizes the common website for data collection (tiedonkeruut.fi), where information about future evaluation, research or investigation projects is collected. Before any data collection begins, each project comes up with a project plan that is discussed in Evaluation Council or Higher Education Evaluation Committee. All Heads of Units participate in the meetings and are informed about the upcoming data collections. The management team follows up the implementation of the NEEP and coordinates the data collections and the evaluation projects.

Almost 40 % of FINEEC staff is employed with temporary contracts. They are financed by appropriations for development expense from the Ministry of Education and Culture. The situation is not only unequal but also threatens the continuing development of FINEEC's activities.

Digitalisation in public sector has led to various computer-based systems that are not user friendly, compatible or fully developed. In one working day, a civil servant might sign up to 20 different systems. The increased remote work has isolated colleagues, especially during the pandemic. VMBaro, the annual job satisfaction survey, identified psycho-social burden of work as a challenge. FINEEC jointly decided to address the challenge by recommending at least two working days at the office per week. Also, the monitoring of working on over-time is now under scrutiny.

Dimension 3. Effectiveness

Definition: this dimension examines the extent to which FINEEC achieved its objectives and its expected results, including differential results across services and groups.

Sub-dimension 3.1. Achievement of objectives

Definition: This sub-dimension addresses whether FINEEC's interventions have achieved their intended results (outputs, outcomes).

3.1.1. To what extent has FINEEC succeeded in producing high-quality knowledge, and a better understanding of the state of the education system in Finland and the main challenges it faces? Please provide evidence to support this answer.

Answer:

The strategy aims to steer the impact of national evaluation activities and to boost FINEEC's status as a reliable, expert and transparent producer of evaluation information in Finland. The goals set for the impact of FINEEC's evaluation work are associated with developing learning and competence, promoting equality, improving the effectiveness of the education system and supporting continuous development.

The goal of FINEEC's operations since its founding has been a better understanding of the state of the whole education system in Finland and according to the goal the production of information depicting the national state of education and related analysis functions are strengthened at FINEEC. FINEEC has regularly produced and published synthesis and analysis of the state of education in Finland and the summaries of evaluation results in accordance with the focus areas of its evaluation activities and concerning education offered in Swedish.

The impact and effectiveness of evaluation activities

The impact of FINEEC's evaluations is the result of the information and competence produced by the evaluation activities. The impact of FINEEC's evaluations is multi-layered and transversal, covering the development of education and competence as well as related decision-making from the societal and education system levels to the local level. The impact of evaluation activities emerges over a long period. On the other hand, the effects of the evaluation activities emerge already during the evaluation processes, based on the results of the projects, and FINEEC's evaluation activities on a whole. The evaluation projects also utilise enhancement-led evaluation approaches, whose effects include strengthening interaction and involvement as well as quality management among education providers.

Evaluation activities, results, and impact

Societal information needs and collaboration with information producers

FINEEC's activities	Results	Effects
The evaluation plan and evaluation projects Analyses and syntheses describing the state of education Support for assessment and quality control Communication and participation in public discussion Digital evaluation systems	Information Competence Understanding Wisdom -- Identification of strengths Recommendations for development Solutions and decisions	A broader knowledge base for development and decision-making at the local and national levels and in international cooperation -- Stronger competence in evaluation and quality control -- Increased interaction and participation in the development of ECEC and education -- Increased transparency and trust
Impact goals: Changes in learning and competence, equality, the functionality of the education system and the conditions for continuous development The realisation of sustainable development		

Figure 4. The framework of effectiveness of the FINEEC activities

FINEEC has enhanced the impacts of its evaluation activities through the use of digital evaluation systems and publication platforms, and the development of new forms of communications and interaction. For example, a new policy brief series was launched in 2022. The purpose of FINEEC's Policy Brief series is to support discussion and decision-making on education policy and societal issues and to promote the use of evaluation information in support of decision-making.

FINEEC has also worked actively together with other information producers in the field of education and participated e.g. in developing the website tiedonkeruut.fi, which supports the collection and use of information. FINEEC has also provided national evaluation data to universities and researchers. Cooperation between research and evaluation activities has been developed, in particular with regard to producing information on the consequences of exceptional and crisis situations. In evaluations of ECEC and education, cross-sectoral examinations are emerging as important. In a systemic and complex operating environment, causal relationships are also systemic and complex.

Digital solutions have contributed to improving the cost-effectiveness and customer-oriented approach of evaluations and the effectiveness of evaluation activities. The development project on a new digital system for assessing learning outcomes in basic education ([Joda](#)) was implemented in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Finnish National Agency for Education. The new system will be completed in 2024. [Valssi](#), the digital quality assessment system in ECEC, was developed with support from the Ministry of Education and Culture. All FINEEC's evaluations are carried out in digital format and online implementations of evaluations have been introduced widely.

The Finnish Evaluation Society has granted FINEEC an award in recognition of its efforts to develop evaluations and evaluation culture in Finland. The justifications for granting the award were the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre's role that transcends FINEEC's basic mission in developing the Finnish evaluation sector as an active participant and member of the evaluation community as well as the successful creation of a coherent culture of education evaluation that promotes the key values of Finnish education and guarantees its high quality. In addition, the award was based on FINEEC's evaluations produced during the coronavirus pandemic that were available to support the steering of education and decision-making while the pandemic was still ongoing.

More information in the FINEEC's Annual Report 2022 and the overview of evaluation activities, which are available on demand.

Key figures of FINEEC's activities (2020-2022)

Productivity and impact of activities

Productivity	2020	2021	2022
Completed evaluations (number)	16	25	26
All ongoing evaluations (number)	41	60	59
Number of publications in FINEEC's publication series	38	60	34
Publications and articles in publication series other than those of FINEEC's	42	33	13
Held presentations			
- international	15	13	25
- in Finland	46	84	72
Statements	9	21	25
Indicators for effectiveness of communication			
- media hits, online media Finnish	377	473	325
- media hits, online media Swedish	38	47	20
- number of visitors to websites	76,247	79,128	56,328
- social media hits without own publications	2,062	1,549	1,227
Organised events, seminars and conferences	45	95	165
- total number of participants in events	3,657	5,490	5,949
Visitors to FINEEC			
- total number of visitors	210	-	70
- Finnish visitors	130	-	47
- international visitors	80	82	23
Personnel's membership in external expert working groups	17	24	20
Number of education/training providers, educational institutions and higher education institutions that participated in evaluations	3,767	4,040	3,331

Resources used for activities

Resources	2020	2021	2022
Personnel resources (person years)	53	54	53
Number of evaluation team members/external experts in total	209	270	192
Number of Evaluation Council members	13	13	13
Number of Evaluation Committee members	9	9	9

Economic efficiency of activities

Economic efficiency	2020	2021	2022
Costs / Ongoing evaluations and audits	EUR 129,773	EUR 84,770	EUR 85,161
Total costs (net)	EUR 5,320,700	EUR 5,086,216	EUR 5,024,490
Number of evaluations	41	60	59

FINEEC's communications strategy enhances the effectiveness of FINEEC's operations

FINEEC's Communications Strategy guides FINEEC's overall communications and helps the organisation to communicate in a uniform manner regardless of the person's position. It clarifies the main objectives of communications during this strategy and evaluation plan period and what issues will be emphasised more intensively in communications. The Communications Strategy guides FINEEC's entire personnel in communicating in accordance with FINEEC's values and aims to encourage and motivate interaction both with FINEEC's stakeholders and internally.

The FINEEC's communication strategy defines the vision of the communication: FINEEC produces reliable information and understanding of the state of education in Finland. FINEEC is known as a proficient evaluator and bold debater. Our knowledge and expertise are used as the basis for developing education in Finland. (FINEEC's communication strategy 2022 – 2023 is in the evaluation background material).

FINEEC's communications strategy 2022–2023

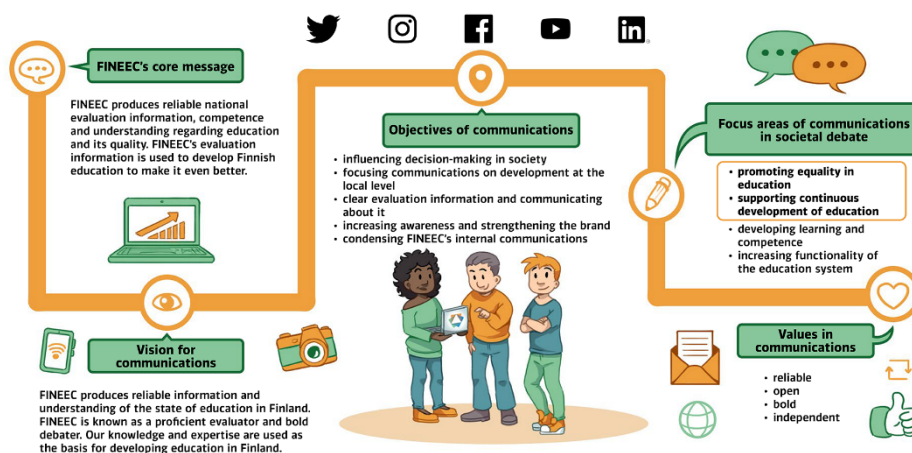


Figure 5. FINEEC's community strategy 2022 - 2023

Follow-up of the impacts and continuous development

Development of operations

It is very important for FINEEC to monitor and evaluate whether we have succeeded in producing high-quality knowledge, and a better understanding of the state of the education system in Finland and the main challenges it faces. To monitor its outcomes and to support the enhancement work of operations, FINEEC systematically gathers feedback on the evaluations it has conducted and requests feedback from its stakeholders.

The cycle of continuous improvement as the basis for FINEEC's quality management

Quality management is an integral part of FINEEC's management and steering of its activities. Quality management supports FINEEC's strategy and the achievement of its strategic goals. The implementation of the strategy, activities and the achievement of goals are systematically evaluated. FINEEC's activities are continuously developed and improved, utilising information obtained from evaluation and feedback systems.

FINEEC does not have a separate quality system or manual, but instead quality management is built into FINEEC's steering of activities and the intranet, which brings together the key elements of quality management. The purpose is to maintain the agility of quality management in an organisation of the size of FINEEC. Another purpose is to make quality management a natural part of the daily activities of FINEEC's staff.

The quality management is based on Deming's cycle of continuous improvement – the so-called PDCA-cycle (Plan, Do, Study, Act). The idea of the model is a spiralling cycle of planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and development of activities. The goal is the

continuous learning and improvement of the organisation. In addition to the areas based on the cycle of continuous improvement, the key elements of the quality management are external steering of activities, FINEEC's strategy and management system. The key elements of FINEEC's quality management have been visualised in the cycle of continuous improvement. The visualisation of quality management (pdf), the text equivalent of the image and the responsibilities of the quality management at FINEEC (pdf) are available on demand.

Collection of feedback on evaluations

FINEEC systematically collects feedback on all evaluations it has implemented. Feedback is collected from both the organisations evaluated and the evaluation teams. The aim of collecting feedback is to:

- Ensure that FINEEC's strategy and values are implemented in the evaluations.
- Provide information on how the evaluation processes work.
- Provide information on the strengths and development needs in FINEEC's activities.
- Strengthen the customer-oriented approach in the evaluations.
- Improve the use of the evaluation data.
- Ensure that FINEEC successfully carries out its statutory duty.

The feedback on our projects has been very positive. Education providers think that the topics of our thematic evaluations are current (an average score of 4.3 out of 5), the recommendations provided in the evaluations are usable (average score 4.3), and the information produced in the evaluation supports the development of one's activities (average score 4.0). The improvement suggestions are related to the presentation of the results. Education providers would like more syntheses, visualisations and easy-to-use summary presentations. The timing of the evaluations and tight schedules are also criticised to some extent. Education providers want more concrete recommendations and think monitoring their implementation would be beneficial.

FINEEC has received very positive feedback on the audits of higher education institutions. The participants have given high scores for all evaluation areas. The auditing model and criteria are considered to be effective, and self-assessment is seen as an excellent way to support development. The participants also feel that higher education institutions are treated equally in the audits.

A summary of the feedback from 2022 is provided in appendix x (in Finnish). https://tt.eduuni.fi/sites/karvi-intra/arviointi/Documents/Arviointien%20palauteyhhteenveto_2022.pptx

These feedback summaries provide useful information for developing evaluation processes, data collection and reporting in different forms of evaluation. Regular monitoring also allows for yearly comparisons of progress in the operations. There are designated persons responsible for compiling the feedback.

Stakeholder survey

A stakeholder survey is conducted every two years. The survey is commissioned from a research company specializing in providing business intelligence for public affairs. The stakeholder survey has been conducted three times since 2018: in 2018, 2020 and 2022. The target group of the survey includes early childhood education and care providers, teaching and education providers, higher education institutions, representatives of educational administration, NGO's, representatives of organisations involved in teaching and education, and representatives of working life. The results of the survey are used in the development of FINEEC's activities.

The purpose of the survey is to investigate how different stakeholders find their cooperation with FINEEC and what kind of information they hope FINEEC would produce. In addition, the survey is used to find out how successfully FINEEC has managed to cooperate and communicate with its stakeholders and what kind of reputation it has among the different stakeholders.

The latest stakeholder survey from 2022 shows that FINEEC's operations are well known, and awareness of FINEEC has improved compared to previous years. Most respondents think that we produce information on important and topical themes. The respondents also felt that FINEEC's evaluation data is useful. The information produced by FINEEC was considered to develop the quality of education and training, promote learning and competence, increase equality in education and improve the education system's functionality at least somewhat. The results regarding the usefulness of the information we produce were the same as in 2020, when this question was asked for the first time. Overall, the number of those who have used evaluation data has clearly increased compared to previous surveys: in 2022, 80% of respondents had used evaluation data produced by FINEEC. In the previous survey conducted in 2018, the share was 65%, and in 2020 it was 71%.

Our collaborators and stakeholders use the evaluation data produced by FINEEC to develop and plan operations. The evaluation data is also used as background information and to guide operations. Evaluation data is also used in communications and influencing and as source or training material. Areas for development also emerged in the responses. The respondents hope for clearer and more concise summaries of the results for further use, concrete development suggestions based on the results, and more communication about the evaluation results. The criticism received by FINEEC concerned heavy and time-consuming surveys.

FINEEC also has a good reputation among stakeholders. This result has improved across the surveys. FINEEC is seen as competent, reliable and cooperative. The results related to FINEEC's service-minded and participatory approach have improved in particular. Regarding FINEEC's current values, experimentation and boldness should be improved the most. Representatives of the educational administration gave slightly poorer scores than other respondents.

Our collaborators are also happy with their cooperation with FINEEC. The most positive feedback came from non-profit organisations and education and training providers. Social actors have the least cooperation with FINEEC. The most dissatisfaction was expressed in the sector of liberal

adult education. Satisfaction with cooperation has also improved compared to previous years' results.

In the survey, we also ask for suggestions for future evaluation. According to the respondents, the most important themes included future competence needs, the well-being of pupils and students and the evaluation of changes and reforms. The following topics were also brought up: preventing the increasing social inequality, sustainable education, challenges related to the differentiation of skills, the state of national competence and quality management.

For the first time, the survey also asked about the use of FINEEC's fee-paying evaluation services. Education and training providers (12%) and non-profit organisations (11%) were the most frequent users of these services. The same groups also show the most interest in using fee-paying evaluation services in the future.

A summary of the stakeholder survey results is provided in the appendix (see appendix x Stakeholder inquiry - summary of the results 2022).

FINEEC's management, staff and Evaluation Council have discussed the stakeholder survey results in a workshop. The development measures have been incorporated into the monitoring of strategy implementation. The stakeholder survey is also used in FINEEC's ongoing strategy work and in preparing the new evaluation plan.

The development targets are summarised below:

- Special attention must be paid to engaging with social actors when collaborating with stakeholders and preparing the strategy and evaluation plan.
- 'Social actors' should be defined more carefully, and a plan should be drawn up to reach them. We should also identify the occasions and events we should participate in to strengthen our impact.
- We should further investigate the demand for fee-paying services for the upcoming evaluation plan period.
- Evaluations should be planned as a whole so that the previously collected data and existing materials can be utilised even better than before.

When implementing learning outcomes evaluations in basic education, FINEEC conducts truly high-quality and versatile statistical analyses, even in comparison to international standards. The acquired data is reliable and comparable. FINEEC's methodology experts provide guidance and training for FINEEC's staff in applying methods.

Examples of the impacts of evaluation activities

Below, we will provide examples of how FINEEC's evaluation activities have produced information about the education system's state and its challenges.

FINEEC is seen as a reliable actor internationally

In Higher education sector, one of the key commitments has been the active participation in The European Higher Education Area (EHEA). FINEEC has successfully fulfilled this task. In the latest external review, the panel noted in its report that FINEEC is a well-respected actor in the Finnish higher education system and enjoys strong trust among higher education institutions and stakeholders. FINEEC received praise for its self-reflective, open and improvement-oriented approach. The panel found that FINEEC has succeeded in its improvement activities, and stakeholder cooperation can be regarded as a strength in the FINEEC's activities. In the panel's view, FINEEC has succeeded very well over the past years to establish and develop its role as a trusted partner in supporting the quality enhancement of the Finnish higher education institutions.

The evaluation of the implementation of the national core curriculum for pre-primary and basic education promptly produced information on the progress of the reform

The national core curricula for pre-primary and basic education were reformed in 2014 and introduced gradually in ECEC units and schools in 2016. FINEEC conducted a four-year evaluation of the implementation of the national core curricula for pre-primary and basic education during 2016–2020 to produce information about the functionality and effectiveness of the steering systems of education, as well as the factors that facilitate and hinder the achievement of the objectives of the curricula. The goal of the evaluation is that the steering system of education and the work carried out by schools are developed already during the evaluation process. The implementation of the national core curricula for pre-primary and basic education was evaluated at the national and local levels by examining the following: the achievement of national education goals, the practicality of the new distribution of lesson hours, the achievement of the objectives of the national core curricula in terms of both content and pedagogical goals, the preparation and introduction of the curricula and its effectiveness, and the suitability of the curricula as a tool for strategic and pedagogical development at the schools.

FINEEC's previous evaluations were considered in the reform related to the extension of compulsory education

In 2021, Finland extended compulsory education to last until the age of 18 or until the student completes an upper secondary qualification (a matriculation examination certificate or a vocational qualification). Evaluation data produced by FINEEC was utilised comprehensively in preparing for the extension of compulsory education. The Government proposal (HE 173/2020) includes several references to FINEEC's 2020 evaluation of study paths and the counselling of young people in the transition phase between basic and upper secondary education. When the extension of compulsory education became effective, the Ministry of Education and Culture appointed a monitoring group and prepared a monitoring plan for the implementation of extended compulsory education for the period of 2021–2024, according to which the implementation will be monitored from the perspective of seven thematic entities (https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/163646/OKM_2021_52.pdf). The monitoring plan includes several evaluation projects to be carried out by FINEEC for the purpose of providing information to support the monitoring. These include evaluations of special support,

individual learning pathways and learning outcomes evaluations in vocational education and training. Furthermore, the monitoring plan proposed that FINEEC carry out an evaluation of study guidance in basic education and upper secondary education. This evaluation was included in the National Education Evaluation Plan 2020–2023 and commenced by FINEEC in 2022.

The reform of vocational education and training was proactively evaluated

At the initial phase of the reform, FINEEC produced ex-ante evaluation data concerning the risks and critical success factors related to the VET reform. The evaluation also provided a complete overview of the successes and risks in the policy measures concerning the reform as well as change needs related to the measures. The evaluation results and recommendations for development were shared with the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Finnish National Agency for Education, VET providers and other key stakeholders. During the 2020–2023 evaluation plan period, FINEEC has assessed the implementation of the reform in various evaluations. The evaluations have concerned the realisation of individual learning pathways, special support, VET's work-oriented approach, the VET system's ability to respond to sudden structural changes, quality management in VET and learning outcomes. FINEEC has published a policy brief on the key results of these evaluations. In the coming years, FINEEC will produce more information to support the development of vocational education and training. In 2023, FINEEC will implement a comprehensive evaluation of the qualification system of VET. This evaluation is also related to the evaluation of the effects of the legislative reform. Currently, evaluations are also being implemented on training that provides eligibility to work in ECEC, qualification-specific learning outcomes evaluations, and how competence acquired in VET compares to the requirements of universities of applied sciences.

Summary: FINEEC has been able to respond to current education evaluation needs fairly comprehensively, producing high-quality information that is useful in the development of operations. Those who use the evaluation data consider it to be high-quality and reliable, but the data's usability and the results' presentation should still be improved. FINEEC is seen as a competent and reliable actor.

3.1.2. Please further elaborate on the previous question (3.1.1) but specifically in reference to each of the following areas of evaluation activities:

- i. Developing learning and competences;**
- ii. Promoting equality and equal opportunities in education in Finland;**
- iii. Increasing the functionality of the education system (e.g. participation, pathways, responsiveness to change, effect of reforms);**
- iv. Supporting continuous development (e.g. quality management, operating culture, sense of community)**

Answer:

To support reaching FINEEC's aims and as part of the implementation of the evaluation plan and the preparation of the strategy implementation plan, the management team has approved the focus area guidelines for the staff and appointed two responsible persons to coordinate the work:

Objectives of FINEEC's Plan to produce information on focus areas:

- In the production of information, already existing practices and operating models are strengthened and developed. We strive for linear and agile information production.
- From the contents of the priorities recorded in the evaluation plan, a common vision is formed in FINEEC, according to which the evaluation projects produce information about the priorities.
- Focus area information is produced in evaluation projects. The projects are responsible for data collection and reporting as part of the projects.
- A schedule is drawn up for the reporting of focus area information
- A responsible person(s) will be appointed who will plan and facilitate the initial phase of the joint discussion on determining the focus areas and communicate to the staff the common principles of producing focus area specific information.
- In addition to evaluation projects, teams, process supervisors and methodologies will play an important role in producing priority-specific information. The roles will be specified when the aforementioned joint discussion on the content of the priorities has taken place.

i. Developing learning and competences and ii., *Promoting equality and equal opportunities in education in Finland*

During the plan period 2020–2023 FINEEC has produced 9 evaluations focused specially on developing learning and competence and 10 evaluations focused on promoting equality and equal opportunities in education.

As a part of focus area work FINEEC published [Equality and participation in education – an overview of national evaluations](#) in 2021 which was FINEEC's second most read publication in 2022. Also connected to the focus area ii., *Promoting equality and equal opportunities in education in Finland*, FINEEC organized an equality-themed streamed event in spring 2022, targeted especially for the policy makers in Finland. Based on this event was produced also

material to support evidence-based policy making in national and local levels. The material was sent to political parties and their youth organizations.

The learning outcome evaluations of VET produce information on to provide information on how successfully students achieve the learning objectives and vocational competence requirements defined in the qualification requirements and what kind of skills they have for working life and further studies. At the same time, information is also produced on the quality of the pedagogical activities of the education providers. FINEEC has drawn up a plan for the qualifications to be evaluated in 2021–2025 in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Finnish National Agency for Education.

iii.: Increasing the functionality of the education system

During the plan period 2020–2023 FINEEC has produced 13 evaluations focused specially on this area.

To support education policy development and decision-making, FINEEC published its first system-level synthesis in 2019, focusing on describing the state of the education system and its strengths and development needs.

In 2021 FINEEC organised the national Evaluation Forum that focused on the functionality of the education system and the equality of education. The national Evaluation Forum attracted a large group of participants representing management, teaching and guidance staff, students and stakeholders at different levels of education. The purpose of the Evaluation Forum was to promote the use of evaluation and research data concerning education and to discuss the current state and future of equality in education from the perspectives of inclusion, differentiation of competence and equal accessibility. In this interactive forum, the audience was able to participate in the discussions through an online platform. The upcoming national Evaluation Forum in the summer of 2023 will also focus on the results of the evaluation of the education system's functionality and resilience.

FINEEC has implemented and is implementing several thematic evaluations of vocational education and training related to this focus area. Thematic and system evaluations include, e.g., workplace education and training and working life cooperation in VET, the realization of individual study paths and special support, and an overall evaluation of the qualification system. In these evaluations, comprehensive information is produced about the subject of the evaluation and development recommendations are given. Some of the recommendations are aimed at education providers and educational institutions, and some at the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Finnish National Agency for Education.

iv.: Supporting continuous development

During the plan period 2020–2023 FINEEC has produced 33 evaluations focused specially on this area.

FINEEC has produced a publication titled Quality management in the Finnish education system, which covers the tasks related to national evaluations of quality management systems and support for quality management at all levels from early childhood education and care to higher education. This summary publication supports national efforts to develop quality management and quality targets at different levels of education.

FINEEC prepares national-level meta-syntheses of HEI audits and organises annual quality seminars. Info sessions are also organised for HEIs before the audits.

Evaluations of VET providers' quality systems produce information on the state of the quality management systems of the education providers and support the providers in matters related to quality management and evaluation. Evaluations of the quality management systems of VET providers covering all the providers have been carried out in 2015 and 2022. FINEEC supported the self-evaluation phase by organizing self-evaluation clinics where the education providers had the opportunity ask questions, get support and share their experiences of carrying out a self-assessment. After the self-evaluation phase FINEEC prepared feedback reports based on the preliminary results for all those who participated in the self-evaluation to the education providers. With the help of feedback reports, the education providers had the opportunity to compare their own results with the to the national mean average. After the self-evaluation phase, FINEEC analyzed the preliminary results of the evaluation and organized three development seminars for the education providers, where the results of the self-evaluation were interpreted and deepened together.

One of the aims of the evaluation was to highlight and share good quality management practices. In connection with the self-evaluation, the education providers were asked for suggestions for good quality management practices. Proposals were received on more than 50 different themes, based on which a series of webinars open to all was launched already at the time of the evaluation. The themes of the events were chosen so that they supported the development of quality management in those areas where, according to the results of the evaluation, there was the most room for development. A total of five events were organized and approximately 600 people participated in them. Recordings and presentations of the events were saved on FINEEC's website, where they are available to everyone. A separate publication is also prepared on good quality management practices.

Valssi is a national quality evaluation system designed to support the quality management of ECEC organisers and service providers. Valssi is a feature-rich digital service that can be used to carry out the collection of evaluation data, obtain operator-specific evaluation reports, produce location-specific evaluation summaries and publish the statutory evaluation results of operators. Valssi will be opened to all ECEC organisers and service providers in August 2023. Before that, Valssi will be piloted with select ECEC organisers starting from March 2023.

3.1.3. To what extent has FINEEC developed concrete and actionable policy recommendations to the Ministry of Education and Culture (OKM), the local authorities (e.g. municipalities), and policy makers more broadly? Please provide evidence to support this answer for each actor.

Answer:

Impact at the national level (the Ministry of Education and Culture and policy makers)

The impacts of FINEEC's work are seen at the national, local and regional levels and in international forums. The summaries and system level analysis of the state of education and in

particular, the development recommendations produced by FINEEC have been widely used at the national level. FINEEC gives 20-25 statements every year to the Education and Culture Committee of the Parliament of Finland. Among other things, this information has been used for drafting legislation, implementing new national development programmes concerning ECEC, education and training, and higher education as well as for the purposes of national steering. One recent example of FINEEC's policy recommendation is the FINEEC's statement before parliamentary elections 2023: National evaluation results for educational discussion and social decision-making. In its statement, FINEEC made recommendations on how to stop the growth of skill gaps, strengthen learner support, dismantle the structures that produce inequality, and develop education in long-term.

In national development work focusing on setting quality targets and providing support for quality management, FINEEC has promoted cooperation between different levels of education and the development of effective solutions.

A great deal of positive feedback has been received on FINEEC's long-running evaluation work relating to Swedish-speaking education and reports on learning outcomes in Swedish-speaking schools. In recent years, FINEEC's evaluation results have sparked many discussions on societal issues and education and served as a knowledge base for the media.

At the regional level FINEEC's evaluations have, for example, made an impact through special examinations of Swedish-speaking early childhood education and care and education as well as an evaluation of a pilot on distance learning of the Sámi language and the development of ECEC evaluation tools for Sámi-language ECEC services. Assessments of learning outcomes also has provided significant information at the regional level.

More examples of the impacts of FINEEC's activities: FINEEC's Annual Report 2022 and the overview of evaluation activities, which is available on demand.

Impact at the local level (eg. municipalities, local authorities)

Individual evaluation feedback to ECEC and education providers as well as higher education institutions is used to develop teaching and education at the local level. Based on FINEEC's evaluations, workbooks and other material have been produced to support teachers. FINEEC's evaluation information has additionally been used to develop staff training for teaching and education staff. FINEEC has also supported evaluation competence and information use by organising training and workshops at the local level. For example, FINEEC has published support material aimed at ECEC personnel to support planning and assessment in ECEC.

FINEEC has enhanced the impacts of its evaluation activities both at the national policy level as well as at the local level through the use of digital evaluation systems and publication platforms, and the development of new forms of communications and interaction. For example, a new policy brief serie was launched in 2022. The purpose of FINEEC's Policy Brief series is to support discussion and decision-making on education policy and societal issues and to promote the use

of evaluation information in support of decision making.

According to the results of the stakeholder survey conducted in 2022, FINEEC's activities are well known and the recognition has continued to improve. Cooperation with stakeholders has been carried out successfully and FINEEC has been widely visible in its stakeholder field. The respondents' satisfaction of FINEEC's evaluations have improved year by year. FINEEC has a good reputation, which has also improved year after year. FINEEC is seen especially as expert and professional as well as trustworthy. The effectiveness of evaluation activities and communication thus has a good foundation. Respondents of the survey were generally satisfied with the cooperation with FINEEC, and the results have also improved in this area. In particular, the activity of interaction and communication has improved significantly throughout the measurement times. Awareness could be improved in the future, especially among social actors, because this group knows FINEEC the worst and has used FINEEC's evaluations the least. Within the teaching and education providers, early childhood education and higher education providers have slightly better results than others, so in the future more attention could be made on the actors of general education and vocational education and training.

91% of the respondents were of the opinion that FINEEC produces evaluation information on current and important topics and 82% were of the opinion that FINEEC's evaluations contribute to the development of the Finnish education system. 73% of the respondents found the development recommendations given in FINEEC's evaluations relevant and usable. 80 % of the respondents had utilized the evaluation information produced by FINEEC in its own work or organization. For example, 89 % of VET provider respondents and 91 % of HEI respondents had utilized the information produced by FINEEC. The respondents' satisfaction of the information produced by FINEEC has improved year by year.

3.1.4. Please further elaborate on the previous question (3.1.3) but specifically in reference to each of the following areas of evaluation activities:

- i. Developing learning and competences;**
- ii. Promoting equality and equal opportunities in education in Finland;**
- iii. Increasing the functionality of the education system (e.g. participation, pathways, responsiveness to change, effect of reforms);**
- iv. Supporting continuous development (e.g. quality management, operating culture, sense of community).**

Answer:

Some examples of the utility of evaluations and statements

FINEEC is very actively involved in influencing education policy. Examples of such influencing include FINEEC's various statements and contributions that synthesise the results and recommendations of various evaluations. Evaluation data on focus areas has supported the compiling and processing of information for policy influencing. It is challenging to measure the impact of these statements, as political decisions are formed based on comprehensive

consultations. Monitoring the impact of individual evaluations is also difficult because many simultaneous things affect the implementation of the recommendations. Below, we will nevertheless review the impacts of some of our evaluations and statements.

Based on FINEEC's learning outcomes evaluations in basic education, changes have been made, e.g. to the contents and goals of the curriculum (e.g. Finnish as a second national language and English). The evaluation has produced information to support the curriculum changes and reforms in basic education (e.g. adding final assessment criteria to cover more grades). FINEEC was also involved in evaluating the validity of the assessment criteria used for final assessment at the end of basic education.

Based on the *Evaluation of literacy training for immigrants (2022)* https://www.karvi.fi/sites/default/files/sites/default/files/documents/KARVI_2722.pdf .Ministry of Education and Culture is preparing a change in the law so that access to education for illiterate adults is based on need and not on time spent in the country and residence permit. The ministry is also working with other enhancement areas assigned to it in the evaluation.

Background matters. Students with an immigrant background in higher education -evaluation (2019) https://www.karvi.fi/sites/default/files/sites/default/files/documents/KARVI_2219.pdf has also been considerable. The evaluation's recommendations were widely used in the accessibility plan for higher education and higher education institutions (Kosunen 2021) based on the Programme of Prime Minister Marin's Government. The plan describes the state of accessibility in higher education in Finland and presents 38 objectives for promoting accessibility, inclusion and diversity.

In various learning outcomes evaluations, FINEEC has recommended that concrete action be taken to address the competence differences between schools. In 2022, needs-based funding (funding based e.g. on the level of education and employment in the area) was established in the Act on the Financing of Education and Culture. In 2023, the City of Helsinki has investigated the practices of organising weighted-curriculum education (i.e. education emphasising a certain school subject) in selective classes and the effects of those practices on school segregation. 'School shopping,' which applies to large cities in particular, has become a topic of much debate in the media. However, based on our evaluations, it appears to be a fairly small phenomenon nationally.

In accordance with FINEEC's recommendations, its evaluation concerning the effectiveness of a pilot project on distance learning of Sámi languages (2023) https://www.karvi.fi/sites/default/files/sites/default/files/documents/KARVI_0323.pdf will be utilised, e.g. in the Romani language. The results of the pilot can also be used more generally to develop distance learning models to support face-to-face teaching nationally and locally. (Read more <https://karvi.fi/en/2023/01/18/distance-learning-of-sami-languages-improves-the-linguistic-rights-of-sami-students/> The article is available on demand))

Due to the results presented in the interim report of FINEEC's 'engaging school community' evaluation project <https://karvi.fi/en/pre-primary-and-basic-education/thematic-system-evaluations/evaluation-of-the-engaging-school-community-work/>, section 26 of the Basic Education Act was amended in November 2022 so that, in addition to monitoring school absences and notifying the pupil's parent or carer about them, education providers will also be obligated to prevent school absences and systematically monitor and intervene in them.

Clarifications will be made to the national core curriculum based on the amendment: education providers will be required to strengthen a positive culture of interaction at the school and develop an operating model to support school engagement, prevent absences and intervene in them.

In the evaluations of learning outcomes in VET <https://karvi.fi/en/vocational-education/key-findings-of-evaluations-of-vocational-education-and-training-2021-2022/>, the education providers have generally considered the development recommendations given in the evaluations to be relevant and useful in the development of their pedagogical activities, such as work place education and learning and competence demonstrations in working life. This contributes to student learning and the quality of vocational education.

Examples of the impacts of FINEEC's statements:

- Based on FINEEC's statement, the length of the S2 programme was extended from 1.5 years to 5 years.
- The national literacy strategy: S2 pupils were better considered in the strategy.
- Statement (Kansallisen koulutuksen arviointikeskuksen lausunto sivistysvaliokunnalle poikkeustilanteiden vaikutuksista osaamis-, hyvinvointi- ja turvallisuusvajeeseen is available on demand) to the Education and Culture Committee on the Government Report on Gender Equality Policy Based on expert opinions, the Education and Culture Committee prepared a statement to the Employment and Equality Committee. The statement mentions FINEEC's expert opinion multiple times, referring to FINEEC's reports and using quotes from FINEEC's expert opinion regarding quality planning in schools and the polarising differences in learning outcomes among both boys and girls.

More examples of our statements in English are in the background material sent separately.

3.1.5. What are the main areas of improvement to increase the effectiveness of the services provided by FINEEC? Why?

Answer:

The implementation of FINEEC's strategy and the impact of its work are managed by means of a strategy implementation plan. The implementation plan consists of goals set for the strategy period and more detailed measures decided by FINEEC's steering group, drawing on the knowledge base of quality management and operative management. The feedback system included in FINEEC's quality system produces cumulative follow-up data to underpin systematic development of the evaluation activities. FINEEC's social and stakeholder survey on the effectiveness of its activities was carried out in autumn 2022.

FINEEC's communication strategy has also been updated and the focus areas for effective communication are defined.

The programme developing the evaluation competence of FINEEC's personnel is implemented

in accordance with the plan drawn up in 2021. This programme ensures the personnel's adequate competence related to enhancement-led evaluation, mastery of the evaluation process and project management, command of methodology, and interaction and communication skills.

Key areas for developing the effectiveness of FINEEC's operations:

- Systematic impact monitoring
- FINEEC's active participation in social debate and strengthening initiative
- Targeting communications more effectively at various groups
- Preparing concrete and clear recommendations for various target groups
- Harmonising project practices and ensuring that the staff is committed to the recommendations for project communications
- Involving the staff in the focus area work to make common guidelines a natural part of project processes
- Taking influencing activities into account in staff work plans and resourcing. The staff should have time to write blog posts, opinion articles, etc.
- Ensuring the competence development of the staff in terms of online communication: concrete examples, instructions and templates for blogs, infographics, etc.
- Increasing the number of employment relationships to ensure the impact and continuity of operations
- Developing regularly produced education or equivalent indicators for demonstrating development over time, thus providing information that other parties could better use
- Developing more permanent operations and evaluation models, producing information that can be better utilised at the local level

In the above-mentioned stakeholder survey carried out in 2022, respondents were asked how FINEEC could develop its evaluations so that the beneficiaries could better utilize the information produced by FINEEC. Just under a fifth of the respondents to this question (17%) wished for more compact reports and a clearer presentation of the results. A good tenth (12%) of those who answered the question wished to shorten surveys and evaluations and develop evaluations and results in a more concrete and practical direction.

Developing a system for the digital evaluation of learning outcomes in basic education

An integral part of digitalising learning outcomes evaluations in basic education is the development of an information system that enables the long-term and consistent implementation of learning outcomes evaluations in basic education, secure processing of evaluation data, and high utilisation of the accumulated evaluation data. The 'Joda' system for the digital evaluation of learning outcomes will replace all current pupil-related systems used by FINEEC in learning outcomes evaluations. Having just one digital system will make FINEEC's work easier and enable comprehensive long-term development.

The digitalisation project aims to develop a digital system that FINEEC can use to manage and conduct national learning outcomes evaluations and related evaluations conducted as part of FINEEC's fee-paying services. The Joda system must serve FINEEC's statutory tasks and its critical operations. The goal is to develop an efficient, reliable and user-friendly digital system, delivering multiple benefits to various users and target groups.

Project procedures and system features that deliver these benefits and support FINEEC's strategic goals are prioritised in the development of Joda.

The development of Joda aims to achieve the following:

- better communication between FINEEC and schools
- improved, more agile and wider opportunities for FINEEC to respond to evaluation needs
- the possibility to develop new diverse tasks to evaluate different areas in the curriculum's subjects
- manual work decreases and the customer experience improves

The achieved benefits and effectiveness can be measured only after the digital system has been used for a longer period, i.e., after the development project. The feedback system for learning outcomes evaluations in basic education, FINEEC's quality management system's customer and stakeholder surveys, and the methods of service design are used to collect information.

3.1.6. Please identify concrete measure to improve FINEEC's outputs in each of the following aspects:

- i. **Easiness of access to the information produced by FINEEC.**
- ii. **Timing of the information produced by FINEEC (i.e. is the information produced at the right time and when needed?)**
- iii. **Level of detail and thoroughness of analysis**

Answer:

i. Easiness of access to the information produced by FINEEC.

FINEEC uses communication and effectiveness metrics to monitor e.g. media hits, social media hits, website traffic and the downloads of evaluation reports. FINEEC's evaluation activities and communications are regularly developed based on the monitoring and feedback data. One example is the development of FINEEC's publication formats and the planning of new publication formats. The accessibility of FINEEC's website and documents have been systematically improved in accordance with legal accessibility requirements.

FINEEC will implement a comprehensive website renewal in 2023. A publication platform will also be released in connection with the renewal to improve various customer groups' access to the evaluation results.

There is a separate publishing platform for the audits of higher education institutions. The ENQA review panel commends FINEEC for 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. On the platform the reports are accessible and visually informative.

All evaluation reports and other publications covering the entire history of FINEEC's operations are available on FINEEC's website. FINEEC also has a comprehensive distribution list for sending newsletters and press releases about evaluation results to the media and stakeholders.

The goal is to promote the further utilisation of existing data resources and explore the possibility of incorporating FINEEC's evaluation data in Statistics Finland's FIONA system.

ii. Timing of the information produced by FINEEC

If necessary, FINEEC is able to respond quickly to information and statement requests regarding the different levels of education. FINEEC's fee-paying services also enable prompt responses to information and evaluation needs. Customers that use the fee-paying services include government organisations, e.g. ministries and agencies, as well as education and training providers and higher education institutions. FINEEC's customers also include private organisations in the field of education. FINEEC also provides fee-paying services internationally.

The digital systems supporting evaluation and quality management (the Joda and Valssi systems) enable more direct and faster information production for the needs of ECEC and basic education providers. The deployment of Joda will make evaluation processes quicker, as part of the manual work can be performed using a digital platform.

iii. Level of detail and thoroughness of analysis

Evaluations of learning outcomes are based on a methodical approach. Quantitative data production and analysis are carried out by our methodologist, all of them are quantitative analyst. National evaluation reports of learning outcomes, as well as the provider specific reports are thoroughness. Learning outcome evaluations are completed with complementary questionnaires of providers (teachers, student, working life representatives...). Our thematic evaluations are comprehensive, often multiple methods are used to cover the subject of the evaluation. The methodologist act as a consultant to each evaluation from the outset, from creating the framework of data collection up to reporting the results.

3.1.7. Does FINEEC provide differentiated support to local authorities (e.g. municipalities), which have more limited capacity to plan and carry out local assessments and evaluations? In your response, please explain how FINEEC assists local authorities in developing the technical skills they need to plan and carry out local assessments and evaluations.

Answer:

The utilisation of information produced in learning outcomes evaluations is supported widely

FINEEC's learning outcomes evaluations produce information about the level of competence of pupils in different grades, the development of competence and the achievement of the objectives set in the National core curriculum. The results of the evaluations can be used nationally and locally in the development of education and teaching. Different actors use the information of learning outcomes evaluations in different ways:

Teaching, education, and guidance staff

The feedback to schools shows the pupils' competence level in relation to the objectives of the curriculum. In addition, it reveals in which content areas of the subject the pupils' competence deviate from the national average. This helps teachers to target their teaching especially to the topics and objectives in which deficiencies are noticed. FINEEC is developing teacher assessment literacy by providing them targeted training in different school subjects.

Principals and other management of schools or early childhood education and care (ECEC)

The evaluation provides the schools with national comparison data on the pupils' competence. The principal can see from the results where the school has done particularly well and where more resources and support are needed.

Municipal decision-makers (directors of education and culture, heads of school development)

The information produced by the evaluation can be used in the planning and resourcing of education and in related decision-making. FINEEC organises low-threshold support webinars for schools and education providers on evaluation participation and how to interpret the evaluation results.

In connection with the learning outcome evaluations of vocational education and training, the education providers are provided with individual feedback on the results of the self-evaluations and information about competence demonstrations, such as the environments of competence demonstrations and information on grades. With the help of feedback, education providers can compare their own activities and results with the national level. On the basis of the feedback collected from the education providers, they have found the provider-specific feedback very useful in terms of developing their own activities.

The webinars for announcing the results of the learning outcome evaluations are development webinars where solutions to the development needs are discussed and thought about. Representatives of the education providers have also been invited to the webinars to share their own good practices for solving the issues that appeared in the development recommendations. FINEEC has prepared a plan for the qualifications to be evaluated during the years 2021–2025 in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Finnish National Agency for Education. The aim of the plan is to help the education providers to anticipate upcoming learning outcome evaluations and to integrate them into the quality management systems of the education providers.

In addition, free-form and voluntary support webinars have been implemented in both learning outcome evaluations of vocational education and training and thematic evaluations to support the implementation of self-evaluations. At the events, the contact persons of the education providers can, with a low threshold, ask questions about the survey or implementation of the self-evaluation and share good practices on conducting self-evaluations to other education providers. In the thematic evaluations of vocational education and training, efforts have also been made to improve the relevance of development recommendations, for example through webinars, where the relevance of preliminary recommendations has been specified in cooperation with stakeholders.

The digital Joda system for learning outcomes evaluations under development can enable various evaluation products to support municipalities.

Sub-dimension 3.2. Symmetry of results across levels of education and local authorities

Definition: This sub-dimension addresses the inclusiveness and equity of results achieved by FINEEC amongst beneficiary groups.

- 3.2.1 Does FINEEC deliver outputs and services that are of similar quality and relevance across all levels and orientations of education (e.g. vocational vs general)? If not, please answer each of the following questions:**
- i. Please explain these differences and why they arise.**
 - ii. Is it your perspective that these differences pose a problem? Why or why not?**
 - iii. If these differences pose a problem, what measures has FINEEC taken to address these differences?**

Answer:

The differences in the outputs and services that FINEEC delivers to different levels and orientations of education arise partly from the differences in the legislation. According to the law FINEEC's task is

- to implement evaluations related to education and early childhood education and care, and the activities of 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;
- Support education and training providers and higher education institutions in evaluation and quality management matters
- to develop the evaluation of education; and
- to take care of other tasks that are issued or given to the FINEEC.

Evaluation of learning outcomes

The law specifically orders FINEEC to carry out evaluations of learning outcomes relating to the distribution of lesson hours and the national core curriculum targets in Basic Education and General Upper Secondary Schools. The same is true with Vocational Education and Training: FINEEC is ordered by law to carry out evaluations of learning outcomes relating to targets of the national core curriculum and in the national qualification requirements.

In higher education such an expectation does not exist. FINEEC's predecessor in higher education (FINHEEC) did actively observe the OECD's attempt AHELO in assessment of higher education learning outcomes. FINHEEC's Chair of the time was a member of the national steering group and an expert from OECD was a member in FINHEEC's international advisory board. The assessment of higher education learning outcomes did not become established at the European level. The Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture has commissioned assessment of higher education learning outcomes from Finnish Institute for Educational Research in University of Jyväskylä. FINEEC staff naturally observed the exercise with great interest.

Supporting education and training providers and higher education institutions in evaluation and quality management matters

In quality management the law is more symmetrical: FINEEC is supposed to support providers of education and training and higher education institutions in matters related to evaluation and quality management. The Finnish law requires all levels of education to carry out systematic quality management and evaluation. FINEEC's internal working group Quality team forms the overall national picture of quality management in all levels of education.

Higher Education and Vocational Education and Training got an early start in the systematic development of quality management and are thus the forerunners in FINEEC compared to other levels of education. Similarity of processes is impossible to achieve, because the number of education providers differ greatly in different sectors. In higher education there are 39 institutions that can be handled individually, whereas in basic education there are around 390 providers (2 000 schools) and in early childhood education and care there are 293 municipal providers (6114 units) and 1938 private providers (totally 3620 day care centers and 6 200 family day carers). Despite the differences Quality team has worked diligently to form a common understanding of the quality management of education.

Do differences pose a problem or not? FINEEC does not believe that there could be a one quality assurance cookie cutter that could serve all levels of education at all times. The needs and trends in quality development change over time and in each sector. FINEEC is the body in the Finnish education system that brings together know-how of quality enhancement in education.

Thematic evaluations, system level evaluations and cross-cutting evaluations

FINEEC has carried out a wide range of thematic and system evaluations. Thematic evaluations focus on a particular theme within the education system. The target of evaluation may also be the state of a particular form of education. System evaluations focus on the education system as a whole or its part. In addition, the target may be educational policy and its implementation or the development of the education system. Thematic and system evaluations may focus either solely on one education level / sector or then simultaneously several levels of the education system. A variety of evaluation methods are used in thematic and system evaluations. The key is to take into account the perspectives of various stakeholders, to study the phenomenon critically and profoundly, and to form a comprehensive understanding of the evaluation target.

FINEEC's strategy and the focus areas of information production make it possible to combine

information obtained through different forms of evaluation. The framework of focus areas enables syntheses and formation of an overall picture of the state of education in Finland. Producing information on predefined and socially significant focus areas supports decision-making and development work at all levels ranging from Finnish society and the education system at large to the local level. The information production of focus areas and the systematic construction of the national evaluation knowledge base across the education system should be continued in the next evaluation plan period.

3.2.2 Does FINEEC deliver outputs and services that are of similar quality and relevance across local authorities (e.g. municipalities)? If not please answer each of the following questions:

- i. Please explain these differences and why they arise.**
- ii. Do these differences pose a problem? Why or why not?**
- iii. If these differences pose a problem, what measures has FINEEC taken to address these differences?**

Answer:

According to the legislation, the FINEEC always provides the evaluation results and feedback to those local authorities, education and early childhood education providers and higher education institutions that have participated in the evaluation. This rule applies to all evaluation types, learning outcomes evaluations, thematic evaluations and quality audits. The feedback is given in accordance with the principle of enhancement-led evaluation and their goal is to support development at the local level.

As the learning outcomes evaluations are sample based in basic education, not all the schools and education providers get feedback on their results and performance regularly. On average, the sample size in national evaluations is 10 % of all the schools. In addition, not all the school subjects are evaluated frequently. The sample-based nature of the evaluation of learning outcomes in basic education means that those who are not part of the sample or who do not buy the evaluation for a fee, cannot receive the same service and information (e.g. school feedback). Some subjects are assessed more often than others.

Sub-dimension 3.3. Factors Influencing results

Definition: This sub-dimension addresses the positive and negative effects arising from within FINEEC, the Ministry, the local authorities, or the national context, which contribute to achievement or non-achievement of FINEEC objectives.

3.3.1. What internal factors (e.g. management, human resources, financial resources, legal) have had the greatest impact on the achievement or non-achievement of FINEEC's objectives?

Answer:

The administrative and support services offered by the Finnish National Agency for Education to FINEEC are not fully functional, they are expensive and cause inefficiency in FINEEC's own processes, for example in relation to the development work of the digital systems Valssi or Joda. Furthermore, the division of responsibilities for administrative and support services does not seem to be clear within EDUFI, which is why things have to be handled with several units, and no one seems to take responsibility for handling and advancing things.

The table below summarizes FINEEC's self-evaluation of both internal and external factors that have the impact on the achievement of FINEEC's objectives.

Table 1. SWOT of factors influencing FINEEC's achievement of objectives

SWOT analysis	<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - FINEEC's mission and key operating principles are laid down in an act. Its core task is to serve as an independent expert organisation in charge of external evaluation of education and early childhood education and care in Finland. FINEEC has a clear position as a part of the education system. - FINEEC's work is guided by a four-year evaluation plan prepared by the Evaluation Council as well as a strategy aimed at steering the impact of national evaluation activities and bolstering FINEEC's status as a reliable, expert and open producer of evaluation information in Finland. - FINEEC promotes societal discussion from multiple perspectives on the development of education. Evidence of impact (systematic feedback). - Reputation as trusted organization and being expert in its field. Reliable reputation and wide acceptance of FINEEC approaches. - External experts find the work/process rewarding, educational and important, and want to re-participate - Strong participation of stakeholders through enhancement-led evaluation - Open atmosphere within the organization and will to develop - Experienced, skilled and motivated staff - FINEEC is development oriented, experimental and agile - FINEEC engages in effective cooperation with the Finnish National Agency for Education in the context of providing administrative services (including HR and legal services). 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - FINEEC should be able to produce more system level evaluations - Responsiveness to new evaluation topics is not always the best possible due to resources and urgency. - The current appropriations for FINEEC's work in the central government budget are inadequate. The funding model does not optimally support national information production tasked to promote equal and high-quality delivery of education in Finland. FINEEC's task is wide encompassing the whole education system from early childhood education to higher education. - FINEEC's performance guidance procedures are not clear in all respects.
	<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Extensive reforms of early childhood education and care and the entire education system will also be necessary in the years to come, and the national, independent and reliable evaluation information produced by FINEEC will be needed for preparing, implementing and monitoring these reforms and assessing their impacts. - Closer cooperation is needed in national information production in the field of education. Better utilisation and further analysis of existing evaluation data - Renewal of evaluation methods and more impact in the society - Joint development of digitalisation solutions in the administrative sector. - Increasing international cooperation. 	<p>Challenges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To produce evaluation information and development recommendations that serve both the field of education (education providers, educational institutes, teachers etc.) and political decision-makers. - Strengthening the awareness /utilisation of FINEEC results - Balancing with extensive and diverse needs of evaluation topics - In the future, branch-specific information production will not be adequate for solving broad societal challenges that affect several administrative branches. It will be necessary to rely on closer cooperation between administrative branches in information production.

3.3.2. What external (e.g. historical, social, legal, political) factors have had the greatest impact on the achievement or non-achievement of FINEEC's objectives?

Answer:

Establishing and launching the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre in 2014 by combining the learning outcomes evaluations under the Finnish National Agency for Education and the evaluations conducted by the Finnish Education Evaluation Council and the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council was an important historical factor behind the effectiveness of national education evaluation and FINEEC's current achievements. Merging these functions has enabled reinforcing education evaluation activities and ensured the independent status of external education evaluation. FINEEC's operations as an independent authority in the administrative branch of the Ministry of Education and Culture is a key factor in enabling reliable and useful evaluation activities. Concentrating evaluation activities in a single organisation has also enabled the development of evaluation methodology in a comprehensive and fairly balanced manner throughout the entire education system, covering different education levels and sectors. It has also made it possible to take on new obligations (e.g. the evaluation and quality assurance of early childhood education and care) and launch new activities swiftly.

Above, we have described how we have striven to produce meaningful evaluations for the needs of various beneficiaries and respond appropriately to the changes in the operating environment. This has required systematic development of our own practices and readiness to coordinate our evaluation activities with other information producers. Our goal is to strengthen the impact of our activities further and develop ways to monitor and show the results of our activities.

We have compiled the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that we consider having an impact on the achievement of our objectives in the SWOT analysis provided for the previous question (see answer 3.3.1). This analysis is taken into consideration in our current process of renewing our strategy. We also look forward to utilising the results of this external evaluation in the development of our operations.

Implementation of the self-assessment:

We have conducted this self-assessment as a joint effort of the entire staff. We have enabled answering the questionnaire through our shared communication channel, and the unit leaders have discussed the self-assessment within their units. In certain topics, specific experts were asked to be the responsible writer in that topic. The management team has written and reflected on the questions in workshops. The final answers have been produced using the process writing method. Some texts were written in English, and others were translated from Finnish to English.

To support our answer, we have included a table of background material describing FINEEC's activities.

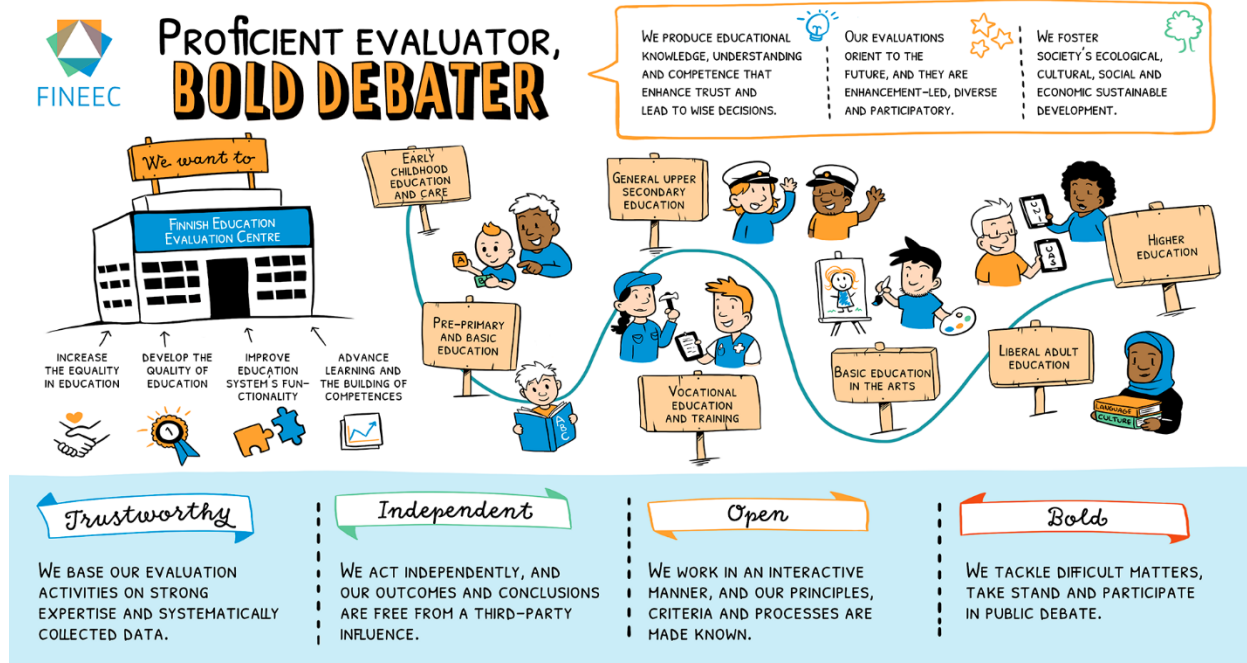


Figure 6. FINEEC's strategy