



FINNISH EDUCATION
EVALUATION CENTRE

AUDITS OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS 2025–2030

Pilot phase audit manual

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1

The premises of FINEEC audits

This manual presents the objectives, principles, criteria and process of the pilot phase (2025–2026) of the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre's (FINEEC) fourth audit cycle for higher education institutions (HEIs). A designated planning team developed the audit framework in close collaboration with FINEEC. The planning process involved extensive consultation with key stakeholders and an international group of experts.

The audit is rooted in national legislation and aligned with European quality assurance standards

A central starting point for the FINEEC audits is the statutory duties defined in higher education legislation, alongside the HEIs' responsibility for their operations and the quality thereof. The Universities Act (558/2009) and the Universities of Applied Sciences Act (932/2014) include binding provisions requiring HEIs to undergo external evaluations of their operations and quality systems regularly and the publication on the results of these evaluations.

In addition to the requirements of national legislation, the audits have a strong European dimension. They integrate the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG, 2015). A successful audit by FINEEC demonstrates that the HEI's operations and quality system meet both FINEEC's national and European criteria.

As the national evaluation body for higher education, FINEEC also undergoes external evaluation in accordance with the ESG. The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) carries out an external evaluation of FINEEC every five years. FINEEC has successfully passed all evaluations conducted by ENQA. FINEEC is listed in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR).

The audits are based on the principles of enhancement-led evaluation and common criteria

FINEEC's audits of HEIs are guided by the principles of enhancement-led evaluation. The audit supports HEIs in developing their operations, considering each institution's distinctive characteristics, profile and objectives. The enhancement-led evaluation, which considers both the audit process and its outcomes, places emphasis on trust, engagement and a respectful approach to the evaluation subject. In the audit, both the HEI and audit team identify strengths and areas for development in the HEI's operations.

In the audit, the external audit team assesses the HEI's operations in relation to the national audit criteria. The audit findings are based on data collected during the evaluation process. The FINEEC Higher Education Evaluation Committee decides on whether the HEI passes the audit based on the report prepared by the audit team.

2

Purpose and objectives of the audit

The purpose of the audit

- To ensure that HEIs maintain and develop the quality of their operations, and to support their continuous, comprehensive and long-term development.
- To ensure that the quality work of HEIs comply with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).
- To support strategic management in HEIs, and the implementation of their institutional profiles and core mission objectives.
- To provide stakeholders with information on the operations of HEIs and the development of their quality.

The objectives of the audit

- To support the competitiveness and attractiveness of the Finnish higher education system.
- To support HEIs in identifying their strengths and improvement areas.
- To support HEIs' foresight and readiness for change.
- To promote and support the planning, implementation, evaluation and development of high-quality education, research, RDI¹ activities, artistic activities and their societal impact.
- To promote and support the well-being, equity, engagement and openness of higher education communities.
- To encourage the internationalisation, collaboration and responsibility of HEIs.
- To promote the development of HEIs' operations by disseminating good practices.

¹ Research, development and innovation activities.

3

Assessment scale and audit decision

3.1 Assessment scale

The audit team assesses the evaluation areas I and II as entities and uses the assessment scale: excellent, good, satisfactory and insufficient. Evaluation areas I and II must be at least at a satisfactory level for the HEI to pass the audit.

Excellent

At the level of excellent, the HEI meets all the criteria for the level of good and, in addition, has carried out strategic, long-term and effective development in the evaluation area. The development of the HEI's operations benefits both the HEI and its internal and external stakeholders. The HEI has an innovative and widely inclusive organisational culture, where diverse forms of information are utilised in the management and development of operations. The HEI serves as an example to other HEIs, either nationally or internationally.

Good

The level of good for evaluation areas I and II is described in Chapter 4.

Satisfactory

At the level of satisfactory, the HEI's operations partially meet the criteria for the level of good. However, in some sub-areas there are clear development needs requiring action to reach the level of good.

Insufficient

At the level of insufficient, there are major shortcomings in the quality of the HEI's operations or its practices for ensuring and developing the quality of its operations are inadequate.

3.2 Audit decision

The Higher Education Evaluation Committee, operating in connection with FINEEC, makes the final decision on the outcome of the audit based on the proposal presented by FINEEC's presenting officer.

There are two possible audit decisions.

Fail (*insufficient*)

The HEI is required to undergo a re-audit in 2–3 years. The re-audit focuses on the sub-areas of the evaluation areas (I-II) recorded in the Higher Education Evaluation Committee's decision. If the HEI passes the re-audit, it will receive a FINEEC Quality Label valid for six years from the date of the positive re-audit decision.

Pass (*satisfactory, good, excellent*)

The HEI is awarded the FINEEC Quality Label, which is valid for six years from the decision of the Higher Education Evaluation Committee. The HEI receives an audit certificate and is included in the register of audited HEIs maintained on FINEEC's website.

If the audit team assesses evaluation area I or II as *satisfactory*, the HEI must report to the Higher Education Evaluation Committee on the development measures undertaken one year after the audit decision. The Higher Education Evaluation Committee will specify in its decision which areas the reporting concerns. If the HEI fails to submit its report, the Higher Education Evaluation Committee has the option to re-examine the outcome of the audit.

Excellence award

The HEI is granted the FINEEC Quality Label with a special mention of *Excellence* when evaluation areas I and II are both assessed at the level of *excellent* by the audit team.

The task of the Higher Education Evaluation Committee is to ensure the fairness of audit decisions. The Evaluation Committee bases its decision on the report prepared by the audit team. At the Evaluation Committee meeting concerning the audit decision, the chair or vice-chair of the audit team presents the key results of the audit and responds to the Evaluation Committee's questions. The Evaluation Committee may also reach a decision that differs from the proposal of the audit team or the presenting officer.

4

Evaluation areas and criteria

The criteria for evaluation areas I and II at the level of *good* are described below.

4.1 Evaluation area I: Strategic management supported by the quality system

Evaluation area I assesses the HEI's quality system and its connection to strategic and knowledge-based management. It also assesses how the HEI analyses and anticipates changes and risks in its operating environment, as well as its organisational culture.

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

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

The HEI has effective practices to ensure and develop the quality and societal impact of its education

- The HEI has defined its pedagogical guidelines, model or an equivalent framework.
- The HEI regularly evaluates its degree programmes.
- The HEI identifies the strengths and improvement needs of its educational activities. The HEI actively addresses insufficient quality and identified problems in its operations. The HEI can provide follow-up data on the impact of development measures on its educational activities.
- The HEI monitors and develops the societal impact of its educational activities in line with its strategy.

The HEI has effective practices to ensure and develop the quality and societal impact of its research, RDI or artistic activities

- The HEI identifies the strengths and improvement needs of its research, RDI or artistic activities. The HEI actively addresses insufficient quality and identified problems in its operations. The HEI can provide follow-up data on the impact of development measures on its research, RDI or artistic activities.

- The HEI monitors and enhances the societal impact of its research, RDI or artistic activities in line with its strategy.

The HEI's organisational culture is inclusive and open

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

The HEI promotes diversity, well-being at work and in studies, the development of staff competence and transparent recruitment

- The HEI promotes diversity and monitors the realisation of equal treatment in its higher education community.
- The HEI systematically supports the integration of international staff and students into the higher education community and Finnish society.
- The HEI monitors and supports well-being at work and in studies.
- The HEI applies transparent procedures in staff recruitment.
- The HEI identifies the competence development needs of its staff and develops their competence in a goal-oriented manner. It also systematically monitors and records the teaching staff's pedagogical competence development.

4.2 Evaluation area II: Learning supported by teaching and guidance

Evaluation area II assesses how the HEI plans, implements and develops its degree programmes and continuous learning provision to support education that is student-centred, research-based and connected to work life.

Degree programme refers to all degree education, including doctoral education (as applicable).

Continuous learning refers to all educational provision other than degree education.

The quality assurance and enhancement of the HEI's degree education and continuous learning also include educational provision commissioned or offered by networks.

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

- The degree programmes have been reviewed to ensure that they correspond with the National Framework for Qualifications and Other Competence Modules.
- The planning processes ensure that the degree programmes are up-to-date, student-centred, research-based, include work-life perspectives and are aligned with the HEI's profile.

- Education is based on research. The HEI integrates its research or RDI activities in degree programmes.
- Degree programmes have clearly defined learning outcomes. The planning ensures that teaching and learning methods, learning environments and assessment enable the achievement of learning outcomes in a diverse manner.
- Degree programmes ensure that degree students have opportunities for international mobility and internationalisation at home.
- The students' workload is defined according to the principles of the ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System).
- The HEI has systematic and effective practices for approving new degree programmes, including the consideration of existing educational provision nationally.

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

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

Teaching and guidance support goal-oriented studies and the active role of students in their learning process

- The HEI follows openly available regulations, guidelines and principles regarding student admissions, studies and graduation.
- The delivery of teaching and guidance, along with the assessment of learning, is purposeful and actively supports the students' engagement in the learning process.
- The degree programmes have purposeful practices to accommodate the needs of diverse student groups in teaching.
- The students' work-life skills are supported and developed during their studies.
- The HEI has clear procedures to ensure the recognition and validation of prior learning, the credit transfer of completed studies or the integration of other previously acquired competence into formal education.
- The HEI ensures adherence to good scientific practice in studies.
- Study guidance, counselling and other support services help students complete their studies. The needs of both students and staff are considered in the development of support services, which are developed based on feedback and evaluation data.

Continuous learning is systematically led and organised

- The HEI has institutional objectives for continuous learning.

- The planning of continuous learning provision is systematic and considers the provision of continuous learning nationally, different target groups and the connection to degree education.
- The continuous learning provision encompasses defined learning outcomes for each module, and considers the needs of diverse learners. The achievement of learning outcomes is supported through a variety of teaching, completion and assessment methods.
- The continuous learning is developed based on feedback and evaluation data.

4.3 The cross-cutting strategic theme selected by the HEI (optional)

The HEI selects a cross-cutting theme that is central for its profile or strategy, and for which it wishes to receive feedback from the audit team. The theme concretely highlights the HEI's profile and its ambitions. Examples of themes include RDI activities, internationalisation, sustainable development, cooperation with work life, social responsibility, digitalisation, well-being, sense of community, multi-location work and study or a key improvement area identified in the previous audit.

The theme is integrated into the HEI's self-assessment (see Appendix 2). The cross-cutting strategic theme selected by the HEI does not affect the audit's outcome.

5

Audit process

FINEEC conducts audits in Finnish, Swedish and English. The language of the audit is agreed upon in the audit agreement between FINEEC and the HEI.

5.1 Audit process

- **Registration for the audit:** The HEI registers for the fourth cycle audit with the contact person informed by FINEEC.
- **Start-up meeting and audit agreement:** FINEEC organises a start-up meeting with the HEI to discuss the audit and sign an agreement at least one year before the planned audit visit. The agreement specifies the schedule, language and the cross-cutting theme of the audit (optional).
- **Self-assessment report:** The HEI prepares a self-assessment report according to the audit manual guidelines (see Appendices 1 and 2) and submits it to the FINEEC audit project manager at least three months before the audit visit.
- **Audit team:** The Higher Education Evaluation Committee appoints the audit team and its chairperson based on a proposal from the FINEEC audit project manager. Before their appointment, the HEI may comment on any potential conflicts of interest regarding the team members.
- **Audit team training and meetings:** FINEEC trains the audit team on their duties and organises their meetings.
- **Meeting between the audit team and the HEI:** FINEEC arranges a meeting between the audit team and the HEI leadership, where the HEI introduces its organisation, management and quality systems and current topics affecting its operations. The auditors may ask background questions, for instance, related to the HEI's management and quality systems.
- **Audit discussion event:** The HEI may organise with FINEEC an open discussion event for its HEI community before the audit visit. The purpose of the event is to discuss audit's objectives, themes and audit visit. The FINEEC audit project manager may also be invited to other HEI events to present the audit process.
- **Audit visit programme:** The FINEEC audit project manager sends the audit visit programme and requests for participants to the HEI and organises a meeting with the HEI's audit contact person to discuss the programme. The HEI has at least one month to finalise the visit programme with the details of participants.
- **Requests for additional materials:** The audit team may request any additional documents it deems necessary from the HEI before or during the audit visit.
- **Audit visit:** The audit team visits the HEI.
- **Audit report:** The audit team drafts a report based on the data collected during the audit process. In the report, the audit team evaluates the HEI's activities and their development in relation to the audit criteria and the gathered data, highlights strengths and provides recommendations for improvement. The HEI may comment on any factual errors before the Higher Education Evaluation Committee's decision meeting. FINEEC offers information on the corrections made to the report. The final report is published on FINEEC's website www.karvi.fi within three working days of the Evaluation Committee's decision.
- **Audit outcome:** The Higher Education Evaluation Committee decides on the audit result.

- If the HEI passes the audit, it receives a quality label and is included in FINEEC's register of audited HEIs. The quality label is valid for six years.
- If the HEI does not pass the audit, a re-audit is required within 2–3 years of the decision.
- **Audit final seminar:** The HEI, in cooperation with FINEEC, organises a final seminar within approximately one month of the Evaluation Committee's decision. The seminar aims to discuss the audit results and recommendations with the HEI community. The HEI decides on the format of the event.
- **Feedback to FINEEC:** Both the HEI and the audit team provide feedback on the audit process to FINEEC. This feedback is used to improve FINEEC's activities. FINEEC informs HEIs about any development measures taken based on feedback.
- **Follow-up of audit:** The HEI participates in the audit follow-up activities.

5.2 Re-audit process

Focus of the re-audit

HEIs commit to the re-audit process in the audit agreement with FINEEC. If the HEI fails the initial audit, a re-audit is required and is conducted within 2–3 years. When the Higher Education Evaluation Committee mandates the HEI to undergo a re-audit, its decision specifies the sub-areas of the evaluation areas (I–II) to be re-evaluated. By the time of the re-audit, the HEI is expected to have developed its operations in the areas evaluated to at least a good level. The same evaluation criteria, as well as the principles for appointing the audit team, its operations and decision-making, apply as in the initial audit.

Re-audit process

- **Discussion meeting:** FINEEC organises a discussion meeting with the HEI about six months after the initial audit decision. In this meeting, the HEI receives instructions for preparing the self-assessment report.
- **Agreement:** FINEEC signs an agreement with the HEI regarding the implementation of the re-audit.
- **Appointment of audit team:** The Higher Education Evaluation Committee appoints a 3–4-member audit team for the re-audit. The re-audit is conducted in the same language as the initial audit. If possible, at least one member of the initial audit team is included in the re-audit team. The focus of the re-audit influences the composition of the team. Before the appointment, the HEI may comment on any potential conflicts of interest regarding the team members.
- **Self-assessment report:** The HEI compiles a self-assessment report according to FINEEC's guidelines and submits it to the FINEEC re-audit project manager no later than three months before the audit visit. In the report, the HEI is asked to describe and assess its development measures in the areas subject to re-audit since the initial audit. The HEI must provide concrete examples of improvements and current practices.

- **Auditor training:** FINEEC offers training for the audit team. The training covers the auditors' duties and working principles, with a focus on re-audit targets and the practical implementation of the audit.
- **Audit discussion event:** The HEI may organise an audit discussion event in cooperation with FINEEC.
- **Visit programme:** FINEEC delivers the audit visit programme to the HEI. The HEI has at least one month to finalise the programme.
- **Requests for additional material:** The audit team may request any additional materials it deems necessary from the HEI before or during the audit visit.
- **Audit visit:** The audit team visits the HEI. The visit typically lasts 1–2 days. At the end of the visit, the team gives the HEI's leadership preliminary feedback.
- **Audit report:** The audit team drafts a report based on the data collected during the audit process.
- **Re-audit outcome:** The Higher Education Evaluation Committee decides on the outcome of the re-audit.
 - If the HEI passes the re-audit, it receives a FINEEC quality label and is added to FINEEC's register of audited HEIs. The quality label is valid for six years.
 - If the HEI does not pass the re-audit, the implementation of the next audit will be agreed separately.
- **Publication of the audit report:** The re-audit report is published on FINEEC's website within three working days of the Evaluation Committee's decision.
- **Final seminar:** The HEI may organise a final seminar of the re-audit in cooperation with FINEEC within approximately one month of the Evaluation Committee's decision.
- **Feedback to FINEEC:** Both the HEI and the audit team provide feedback on the audit process to FINEEC. This feedback is used to improve FINEEC's activities. FINEEC informs HEIs about any development measures taken based on feedback.
- **Follow-up of audit:** The HEI participates in the audit follow-up activities.

5.3 Audit visit

The audit visit is primarily conducted as an on-site visit lasting two days. For the largest HEIs (over 20,000 students), the visit lasts three days. The visit programme reflects the specific characteristics of the institution. FINEEC gives the HEI a draft programme for the visit, along with the audit team's requests regarding the groups and persons to be invited. The HEI has at least one month to complete and finalise the programme.

The purpose of the audit visit is to supplement the material submitted by the HEI and to discuss themes related to the audit's evaluation areas. A key aspect of the audit visit is to gather diverse perspectives and experiences from everyday life at the HEI, while also evaluating the audit themes within the institutional context. The audit team meets with the institution's leadership, as well as representatives of various staff and student groups, members of the HEI board and key stakeholders. The visit concludes with a feedback session attended by at least the HEI's leadership, the audit contact person and a representative from the student union.

The size of the HEI is considered when planning the audit visit, for instance, with respect to the number of interviewees and workshop participants.

5.4 Follow-up of enhancement work after the audit

FINEEC's audits include a follow-up procedure in line with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ESG). Each year, the procedure involves the HEIs that were audited two years earlier. Its purpose is for the HEI to report on and receive peer feedback regarding its post-audit enhancement activities. The follow-up report also collects information on the impacts of the audit.

Stages of the follow-up

- The HEI prepares a follow-up report on post-audit enhancement activities with particular emphasis on the main recommendations from the audit and submits it to FINEEC by the agreed deadline. The report is reviewed by FINEEC's Higher Education Evaluation Committee.
- FINEEC organises a peer discussion event for the HEIs reporting in the same year.

6

Complaints and appeals procedure

HEIs can submit a complaint or appeal concerning the FINEEC's evaluation activities following the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).

Complaints procedure

The complaints procedure allows an HEI to express dissatisfaction with the implementation of the evaluation process or the conduct of the individuals who carried out the evaluation—that is, to provide feedback on the activities.

The principles of FINEEC's complaints procedure concerning audits of HEI:

- The complaint must concern the audit process or the conduct of the individuals who carried out the audit.
- The HEI must submit the complaint. Anonymous complaints will not be processed.
- The complaint must be submitted within six months of the publication of the audit in question.
- FINEEC will only process complaints that fall within its official responsibilities as an authority.

Appeals procedure

An HEI that has participated in an audit or a re-audit conducted by FINEEC may request a reassessment of the audit outcome. The appeals procedure aims to ensure that HEIs are treated fairly in audits and that decisions on audit outcomes are made impartially.

The request for reassessment may concern the following outcomes, as decided by the Higher Education Evaluation Committee:

1. The HEI does not pass the audit and is required to undergo a re-audit.
2. The HEI does not pass the re-audit.

A request for reassessment may be submitted if the audit has not been carried out in accordance with the audit manual, and this may compromise the fair and equal treatment of the HEI. The decisions of the Higher Education Evaluation Committee on the outcomes of audits are expert opinions. They are not administrative decisions and cannot be appealed under the Administrative Procedure Act.

More information on the complaints and appeals procedures related to FINEEC's audits is available on FINEEC's website: www.karvi.fi.

7

Audit team

7.1 Composition and selection criteria of the audit team

Independent and impartial peer reviewers conduct the audit. The HEI may choose either a national or an international audit team. The roles and number of international auditors are determined on a case-by-case basis. The audit team typically consists of four members: two representatives from the higher education sector, one student representative, and one representative from the world of work outside higher education. For large HEIs (with more than 20,000 students), the team includes a fifth member. A FINEEC project manager participates in the audit process as an expert in audits, supporting the team's work.

The Higher Education Evaluation Committee appoints both the audit team and its chair, based on a proposal from the project manager. Before the appointment, the HEI has an opportunity to comment on the proposed team composition, specifically regarding potential conflicts of interest.

The audit team must collectively have expertise in the following areas:

- The Finnish higher education system
- Quality systems
- Strategic management
- Planning, implementation, evaluation and development of HEIs' core functions
- Perspectives of students and the world of work
- Evaluations or audits

In addition, the chair must have prior experience in evaluating HEIs and possess a broad and in-depth understanding of the higher education system.

All audit team members are equal in their role as evaluators. The team selects a vice-chair from among its members.

A person is disqualified from serving on the audit team if they are involved in the matter or if their impartiality is otherwise compromised. The provisions on disqualification in the Administrative Procedure Act (434/2003, Chapter 5, Sections 27–29) apply. Good administrative practice requires that disqualified individuals do not participate in any way in the processing or evaluation of the matter. Disqualification may arise, for instance, if a person is employed by the HEI under audit or has previously served in one of its decision-making bodies. Auditors must inform FINEEC of any factors that may affect their eligibility. The HEI may also comment on potential conflicts of interest before the team is appointed.

7.2 Audit team training

The project manager is responsible for training the auditors during the audit process. Auditors are introduced to FINEEC's activities, the audit's objectives, criteria and methodology, as well as the roles and working practices of the audit team. International auditors also receive an introduction to the Finnish higher education system. If needed, the project manager offers additional training for the chair on their specific responsibilities.

7.3 Auditors' fees

Auditors' fees are based on FINEEC's remuneration policy.

8

Responsibilities and principles

8.1 Responsibilities of FINEEC, the HEI and the audit team

Responsibilities of FINEEC

FINEEC's responsibility is to conduct the audit in keeping with the agreement made with the HEI. The agency carries out the audit with rigour, professionalism and adequate resources. FINEEC adheres to the principles of good governance, as well as to the ethical guidelines and evaluation practices outlined in the audit manual (see Section 8.2).

Responsibilities of the higher education institution

The HEI is responsible for providing FINEEC with accurate and sufficient information necessary for conducting the audit and for ensuring the reliability of this information. The HEI must facilitate the professional and timely conduct of the audit. It is responsible for preparing the self-assessment report, providing any requested supplementary materials and organising the practical arrangements for the audit visit and related activities, such as arranging facilities and coordinating interviewees.

Responsibilities of the FINEEC project manager

- Oversees the entire audit process and manages project communications.
- Organises and delivers the training for auditors.
- Guides and supports the work of the audit team.
- Acts as the liaison between the HEI and the audit team.
- Participates in the audit team's discussions as an expert.
- Ensures the audit is conducted according to the criteria and based on evidence.
- Guarantees equal treatment of HEIs.
- Responsible for the timely delivery of the audit report and communication of the results.

Responsibilities of the auditors

- Familiarise themselves with the HEI's audit materials.
- Decide on the implementation of the audit visit, including the groups and individuals participating in the visit.
- Identify and request any additional materials needed from the institution.
- Prepare questions related to their area of responsibility for the audit visit.
- Conduct the audit visit according to the plan.
- Contribute to the preparation of the audit report.
- Make an assessment to the Higher Education Evaluation Committee on whether the HEI should pass the audit or undergo a re-audit.

Responsibilities of the chair of the audit team

- Chairs the audit team's meetings and leads the audit visit, unless otherwise agreed.

- Participates, when organised, in the pre-audit discussion event at the HEI alongside the project manager.
- Shares responsibility with the project manager for overseeing the overall audit process and preparing the audit report.
- Presents the audit findings to the Higher Education Evaluation Committee and at the HEI's final seminar.
- Takes part in communicating the audit results.

8.2 Working principles of FINEEC and the audit team

FINEEC and the audit team follow the principles and ethical guidelines below in their evaluation activities.

Fairness and impartiality

- Auditors must act fairly and impartially.
- Auditors must be aware of their position of authority and the responsibility that comes with it.

Reliability and transparency

- The evaluation must be based on FINEEC's published criteria and the information collected during the audit.

Confidentiality and data protection

- All information obtained during the process, apart from what is published in the final report, is confidential.
- Materials containing personal data are treated as confidential.

Professionalism

- Auditors and FINEEC must act professionally and responsibly.

Respect and interactivity

- The audit is conducted in good cooperation and interaction with the HEI.
- All persons involved in the audit are treated respectfully.

APPENDIX 1. Self-assessment guidelines

Principles of self-assessment

The purpose of the HEI's self-assessment is to support the continuous development of its operations. Self-assessment is the HEI's assessment of its activities and how it improves its activities. Through this process, the HEI identifies its strengths as well as areas requiring improvement. The insights gained enable the HEI to set meaningful objectives and guide the development of its operations accordingly. The HEI can enhance the effectiveness and impact of the audit by conducting the self-assessment in an inclusive and participatory manner. This should involve diverse groups of staff and students, as well as HEI leadership and key stakeholders.

In the audit, self-assessment refers both to the process itself and the resulting self-assessment report. The self-assessment report supports the work of the audit team and helps them prepare for the audit visit.

Instructions for preparing the self-assessment report

- The self-assessment report is a reflective document that includes both description and assessment of the HEI's activities. A good self-assessment report provides an honest analysis of the HEI's current state, provides a comprehensive overview of its activities, and identifies both strengths and achievements, as well as challenges and areas for improvement. It also highlights the HEI's profile, strategic priorities and positioning within the broader operating environment.
- The HEI must submit the self-assessment report to FINEEC's project manager by email (in PDF format) by the deadline specified in the audit agreement.
- The self-assessment report should be 20–50 pages in length.
- The self-assessment report is not published as part of the final audit report, but it is referenced as audit material. FINEEC encourages HEIs to publish the report on their intranet or website.

Attachments to the self-assessment report

In addition to the self-assessment report, the HEI submits the following documents to FINEEC or provides access to the intranet if the documents are available there:

- The strategy and its implementation plan (including any indicators), and progress toward strategic objectives (trend data from the strategy period)
- Rules of procedure or equivalent regulations
- The HEI's operations or annual plan, and examples of unit-level operations or annual plans from the past three years

- Quality manual or equivalent description of the HEI's quality and management systems
- Pedagogical policy or pedagogical model
- The HEI's equality and non-discrimination plan
- Access to the curricula of the degree programmes
- Guidelines on the recognition and validation of prior learning (RPL)
- Summary of results from institution-level staff surveys (last three rounds)
- Summary of student feedback by study field (based on the HEI's quality system, from the past three years)
- Summary of work-life/external stakeholder feedback (based on the HEI's quality system, from the past three years).

In addition, FINEEC will compile statistics from the Vipunen data portal for the audit team: Bachelor's feedback or AVOP feedback, career monitoring feedback, degree completion times and mobility data (under and over 3 months) (by steering field for the past three years) and the number of completed credits for continuous learning.

APPENDIX 2. Structure of the self-assessment report and supporting questions

Introduction

A brief description of the self-assessment process and how it was prepared.

The HEI's profile, objectives and organisation

A brief presentation of the HEI

- What are the HEI's vision, profile and core values?
- What are the HEI's key strategic objectives?
- What are the HEI's most important objectives at the regional, national and international levels?

Include in the text a link to the HEI's strategy, organisational chart, and key numbers.

The cross-cutting strategic theme of the audit (chosen by the HEI)

Briefly describe the theme and justify its selection.

Evaluation area I: Strategic management supported by the quality system

1. Briefly describe your activities in relation the audit criteria, using the thematic areas listed below.
2. Assess what you do exceptionally well in relation to the criteria, and which areas could be improved and why.
3. Optional: Assess, regarding the chosen strategic theme (where applicable), what you do exceptionally well and what could be improved and why.
4. Summarise the key strengths and improvement areas in a table for the entire evaluation area.
5. Use descriptive subheadings throughout the text.

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

Principles, objectives and responsibilities of quality management

Knowledge-based management

Foresight and readiness for change

Internationalisation and responsibility

Optional strategic theme

The HEI has effective practices to ensure and develop the quality and societal impact of its education

Pedagogical principles or model

Quality management and strategic development of education

Societal impact of education

Optional strategic theme

The HEI has effective practices to ensure and develop the quality and societal impact of its research, RDI or artistic activities

Quality management and strategic development of research, RDI or artistic activities

Societal impact of research, RDI or artistic activities

Optional strategic theme

The HEI's organisational culture is inclusive and open

Participation of students, staff and stakeholders in the development of operations

Overall feedback system and feedback culture

Optional strategic theme

The HEI promotes diversity, well-being at work and in studies, the development of staff competence and transparent recruitment

Diversity, equity and internationalisation

Well-being at work and in studies

Recruitment and competence development of staff

Optional strategic theme

Evaluation area I: Key strengths and improvement areas

| Strengths | Improvement areas |
|-----------|-------------------|
| | |
| | |
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| | |
| | |
| | |

Evaluation area II: Learning supported by teaching and guidance

1. Briefly describe your activities in relation to the audit criteria, using the thematic areas listed below.
2. Assess what you do exceptionally well in relation to the criteria and which areas could be improved and why.
3. Optional: Assess, in relation to the chosen strategic theme (where applicable), what you do exceptionally well and what could be improved and why.
4. Summarise the key strengths and improvement areas in a table for the entire evaluation area.
5. Use descriptive subheadings throughout the text.

The planning of degree programmes is systematic and ensures student-centred, research-based education, work-life perspectives and internationalisation

Brief description of the curriculum process

Learning outcomes, alignment of degree programmes and student-centered learning and teaching

Research-based education and integration of research or RDI into degree programmes

Work-life perspectives in degree programmes

Internationalisation

Optional strategic theme

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

Participation of staff, students and work-life representatives in the development of degree programmes

Knowledge-based development of degree programmes

Students' workload

Optional strategic theme

Teaching and guidance support goal-oriented studies and the active role of students in their learning process

Supporting goal-oriented learning

Students' work-life skills

Recognition of prior learning (RPL) procedures

Good scientific practice in studies

Relevance and development of support services

Optional strategic theme

Continuous learning is systematically led and organised

Planning of continuous learning

Implementation of continuous learning

Evaluation and development of continuous learning

Optional strategic theme

Evaluation area II: Key strengths and improvement areas

| Strengths | Improvement areas |
|-----------|-------------------|
| | |
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| | |
| | |

Conclusions

The conclusions chapter summarises the HEI's key success factors and improvement areas based on the chapters of the self-assessment report.

Reflect on the key factors contributing to the main successes in education, research, RDI or artistic activities and the societal impact of your activities.

Reflect on the underlying reasons for the key improvement areas. What are the most critical issues to address in the short term?

Reflect on what you aim to achieve and what changes you need to make in your HEI in the longer term to reach your strategic objectives.

APPENDIX 3. Definitions of audit concepts

Competence-based education focuses on the knowledge and skills students are expected to acquire by the end of a learning process. It emphasises clear and measurable learning outcomes that guide teaching, assessment and pedagogical planning. This approach supports student-centred education and aims to develop students into professionals with current and future-relevant competences.

Continuous learning refers to the development and renewal of competences throughout different stages of life and career. It primarily encompasses forms of education offered to individuals other than degree students.

Emergency situation is an unexpected and abnormal event or condition that disrupts routine operations and requires special measures to manage the situation. Examples include pandemics, cyber-attacks, wars, societal crises, natural disasters and major accidents.

Feedback-on-feedback (or counter feedback) means providing feedback to those who have given feedback. It supports the development of education in collaboration with students, highlights the value of feedback and makes its effects visible. It can also increase students' motivation to give feedback, and it fosters interaction, trust and the effectiveness of feedback.

Good Scientific Practice (GSP) refers to honest, diligent and ethically sustainable conduct in higher education studies, teaching and all phases of research. According to the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (TENK), it includes, among other things, honesty, care and precision, transparency in methods and reporting, proper dissemination of results and citation practices, fair attribution of authorship, compliance with ethical guidelines and legislation and responsibility for supervision and research team conduct. Violations of GSP include fabrication, falsification and plagiarism.

Internationalisation at home refers to internationalisation taking place domestically. It includes a variety of activities, such as organising and participating in international events, tutoring international students, engaging with immigrant students, learning languages and gaining exposure to foreign cultures. In some HEIs, curricula include a dedicated window for international mobility.

Knowledge-based management refers to the systematic collection, analysis, management and use of information to support decision-making and operations management in line with the HEI's strategy.

Learning outcomes describe what a student is expected to know, understand and be able to do after completing a specific learning process.

Organisational culture refers to the historically and culturally shaped ways of operating within an HEI. It encompasses shared values, norms, practices and forms of interaction that guide everyday actions, decision-making and collaboration. It is visible, for example, in how teaching and research are conducted and how members of the community engage in the HEI's activities and development.

Pedagogical leadership supports the implementation of high-quality higher education. Its key processes include curriculum development and quality management in education.

It highlights management and development of staff competence, as well as the purposeful allocation of resources for teaching and learning.

Periodic review of degree programmes refers to the ESG standard 1.9 requirement for periodic evaluation as part of quality assurance and enhancement of degree programmes. The HEI determines how the evaluation is conducted and whether it is internal or external. The evaluation must involve individuals without affiliations to the programme being reviewed.

Research-based education means that education, teaching and learning are grounded in current research knowledge, scientific thinking and critical inquiry. Students may engage in research or RDI activities and develop research competences as part of their studies. Teaching is aligned with the latest research findings and takes place partially in research environments.

Societal engagement refers to mutual and goal-oriented interaction between HEIs and various societal actors, such as industry, the public sector, the third sector and citizens. The aim is to share knowledge, experiences and resources for mutual benefit, to address societal challenges, and to strengthen the relevance and impact of education, research, RDI and artistic activities.

Societal impact refers to the positive effects of an HEI's research, RDI, education, artistic and other activities on society. It may be reflected in social, economic, cultural, or political development, influence on public decision-making, increased well-being or the promotion of sustainable development. It highlights the applicability of knowledge and the HEI's ability to respond to societal challenges and contribute to the common good in cooperation with societal actors.

Student-centred education is an approach that encourages students to take an active role in their own learning. It supports motivation, self-assessment and well-being and allows for flexible learning pathways.

Well-being in studies refers to the overall well-being of students, influenced by the study environment, smoothness of study processes, social relationships, mental and physical health and the experience of inclusion and availability of support.

Well-being at work refers to the physical, psychological and social well-being experienced by staff in the workplace. Influencing factors include the content of work, working conditions, leadership, organisational atmosphere and work-life balance.

Work-life relevance refers to activities that connect education with the world of work outside the HEI. These include workplace collaborations in teaching, internships, project-based learning, commissioned education, RDI projects and thesis work. It also involves the development of employability skills.