

Press release: Government's key projects in higher education development strengthened cooperation between higher education institutions and resulted in permanent changes

The development work carried out as part of the Government's key projects for higher education strengthened cooperation between higher education institutions and staff competence. The development projects brought about several permanent changes. In the future, project development in higher education should strengthen the evaluation of the effectiveness of projects, and ensure that the results obtained are consolidated, and that the development continues after the projects have been ended. Ensuring the continuity of development funding will contribute to the development of cooperation networks and project expertise and support for the development of education, the consolidation of results and the evaluation of impact.

The Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC) has carried out the evaluation of Government's key projects for higher education 2017–2022. In 2017–2022, the Ministry of Education and Culture funded teacher education development projects (Key project 1) and higher education development projects (Key project 3) with a total of 92.7 million euros. Key project 1 included 45 development projects and Key project 3 included 36 development projects. The evaluation looked at the implementation of Key projects 1 and 3, the impacts and effectiveness of the results and the functionality of the development model of Key projects. The evaluation also makes recommendations for the future development of higher education and teacher education. The themes of the evaluation were 1) the impacts and effectiveness of the development projects in higher education and teacher education in the development of higher education, 2) the realisation of the objectives of the Teacher Education Development Programme and 3) functioning of the key project model and development of higher education in the future.

Cooperation between higher education institutions and staff competence strengthened in development projects

Cooperation between higher education institutions and higher education sectors developed in the key project work. Permanent changes brought about by the key projects included the increased opportunities for cross-studying and joint study provision, more uniform student admission practices in higher education institutions, new cooperation networks, stronger staff competence and more flexible study paths and online learning. Staff competences were strengthened especially in the networks established in the projects.

There were also challenges in cooperation between higher education institutions and development projects, in coordination of development projects and in the exploitation and communication of results. From the perspective of the management of higher education institutions, the overall framework was fragmented. The evaluation team therefore recommends that sufficient time be allocated to the preparation of collaborative project or other co-development activities between HEIs. The steering of projects should encourage greater use of existing development networks and cooperation rather than a competitive approach.

Support from the Teacher Education Forum was important for teacher education development projects

Teacher education development projects have promoted the long-term strategic development of teacher education and strengthened the research-based nature of teacher education. According to the evaluation team, it should be ensured that in the future work the results of the projects are disseminated in a systematic way. At the same time, it should be ensured that higher education institutions and stakeholders other than those involved the projects can also benefit from the results.

The evaluation found that the Teacher Education Forum, a body set up by the Ministry of Education and Culture and composed of representatives of higher education institutions and various stakeholders, played a significant role in the coordination, cooperation, monitoring and dissemination of teacher education development projects. The evaluation team recommends that the role of the Teacher Education Forum and other similar cooperation structures in project management be continued and that the use of field-specific networks be developed and extended to other sectors.

The development of higher education must pay attention to evaluating its impact and ensuring the continuity of development funding

The evaluation showed that no systematic evaluation of effectiveness was carried out in the development projects in relation to the objectives set out in the project plans. The evaluation of effectiveness focused mainly on activities during the project period, such as the involvement of target groups and stakeholders. The evaluation team suggests that in the future, the evaluation of effectiveness of development should be strengthened by using an impact chain approach throughout the project lifecycle. The evaluation of effectiveness should be separated from project activities as a separate process. The evaluation should be carried out a sufficiently long time after the end of the project.

The evaluation team considers it important to ensure continuity in funding for higher education development. This would contribute to the development of cooperation networks, project expertise and support related for the development of education, the consolidation of results and the evaluation of impact. Greater attention should also be paid to the synchronisation of the content and timing of higher education institutions' strategies and the steering of key projects or other steering instrument and to development themes.

- "In the development of higher education, it is important to identify key themes of national interest and social importance for which common solutions need to be developed. In addition to national development priorities, continuous development and joint experimentation in higher education should also be made possible," says Professor **Helka-Liisa Hentilä** from the University of Oulu, chair of the evaluation team.

Closing seminar

The results of the evaluation of Government's key projects for higher education 2017–2022 [will be published on Thursday, 17 August 2023 in a joint final seminar with the evaluation of the state and renewal of higher education pedagogy](#). Media representatives are requested to register and submit their requests for publication by 16:00 on Monday, 14 August 2023: Senior Evaluation Advisor Niina Nurkka, tel. +358 29 533 5573, niina.nurkka@karvi.fi.

Inquiries and requests for interviews

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Evaluation report

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