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Evaluation of Government's key projects for higher education 2017–2022

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The evaluation of Government's key projects for higher education 2017–2022 was implemented between 2022 and 2023. The evaluation concerned the impacts and effectiveness of the teacher education development projects (Key project 1) and the higher education development projects (Key project 3) funded by the Ministry of Education and Culture. The evaluation produced an overall picture of the implementation of Key projects 1 and 3, the impacts and effectiveness of the results, and the functioning of the development model. In addition, recommendations for the development of higher education and teacher education in the future were given in the evaluation. The evaluation questions had been divided into three main themes:

- The impacts and effectiveness of the development projects in higher education and teacher education in the development of higher education.
- The realisation of the objectives of the Teacher Education Development Programme.
- Functioning of the key project model and development of higher education in the future.

A variety of data was used in a versatile manner in the evaluation. The evaluation data consisted of the project documents of the development projects in teacher education and higher education, a survey targeted at higher education institutions and focus group interviews, in which representatives of higher education institutions, stakeholders and students participated. In addition, answers to the questions on the key projects in the teacher and student surveys carried out in the The evaluation of the state and renewal of higher education pedagogy (Toom et al. 2023) were used in the evaluation. At the final stage of the evaluation, the preliminary conclusions and development proposals were discussed in a development webinar. The notes taken on the discussions in the seminar also served as evaluation data.

## Key strengths

- In the development based on the key projects, cooperation and co-creation worked well. The networks strengthened the cooperation.
- The project work and the networks created by the projects strengthened the personnel's competence. In addition, the personnel employed to the projects strengthened competence in the higher education institutions.
- The Teacher Education Forum played a significant role in the coordination of the development projects in teacher education, the cooperation conducted in them, their monitoring and the dissemination of their results.
- New project ideas and proposals for further development and research were generated in the development projects.

## Key development recommendations

- The participation of personnel, students and stakeholders should already be strengthened in the preparation of the projects. The ways of participation in the different stages of the project should be written in the project plan.
- The evaluation of effectiveness should be strengthened by taking advantage of impact chain thinking during the entire lifecycle of the project. Quantitative and qualitative indicators should be developed to support evaluation. The evaluation of effectiveness should be separated from the project activities and made into a separate process, and evaluation must be carried out a sufficiently long time after the end of the project.
- An entity should be formed of projects related to a specific theme and interaction between these projects should be ensured.
- The development funding for higher education should have continuity, which would also promote the development of project competence and project support related to the development of the cooperation networks and the education, the establishment of the results and the evaluation of effectiveness.

**Keywords:** development based on key projects, development project, effectiveness, evaluation, higher education, higher education institutions, impacts, key project, teacher education, teacher education development programme, universities, universities of applied sciences