



1. Basic information

Country name: Finland

Structure of organisation: The Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC) is a separate unit responsible for the external evaluation at all levels of education in Finland.

Age of organisation: FINEEC has been in operation since May 2014. It is a combination of three previous organisations: the Unit for learning outcomes at the Finnish National Board of Education, Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council at the Ministry of Education and Culture and Finnish Education Evaluation Council. First, FINEEC was an independent government agency. From 1st January 2018, FINEEC was attached to the organisation of the Finnish National Agency for Education as a separate unit. In practice, this means that FINEEC will retain financial and substance independence as an independent evaluation authority, but will use the common support services of the administration of the National Agency.

Size: The overall number of staff is approximately 60.

Remits: The evaluations of FINEEC cover the education system in its entirety, from early childhood education and care (ECEC) to higher education.

Unit of evaluation: FINEEC does not inspect schools or providers. We implement external learning outcomes evaluations for pre-primary, basic, upper secondary and vocational education. Moreover, FINEEC's duties include supporting education and ECEC providers as well as HEIs in issues related to evaluation and quality assurance, as well as to develop education evaluation. The aim of the evaluations is to develop education and to support learning while ensuring the quality of education. The evaluations also produce information for local, regional and national decision-making on education as well as development work and international comparison.

What is your strapline? "Foresight and effective evaluation"

Relationship with government: FINEEC is an independent evaluation authority. The Ministry of Education and Culture is the first one we are obligated to inform about results of evaluations. However, independence is the key operating principle of FINEEC. It refers to the freedom of evaluation methods, organisation and results from the influence of, for example, the ministry, National Agency or other parties. We are allowed to report on government policy and publish reports without government approval.

Accountability: The evaluations are set out on the National Plan for Education Evaluations (current plan: 2016-2019). FINEEC was accountable to the Ministry of Education and Culture and was obligated to report annually. From 2018 the annual report will be delivered to the Finnish National Agency for Education.

2. Types of evaluation, some examples

Instead of external inspections of schools or education providers, the Finnish quality assurance system emphasises e.g. self-evaluation as well as learning outcomes and thematic evaluations. Until the early 1990s, quality assurance of Finnish education system was largely based on norms and inspections. Since then, school and textbook inspections were abolished.

FINEEC has evaluated the attainment of learning outcomes related to the objectives of pre-primary and basic education core curricula since 1998. Learning outcomes are evaluated based on sampling so that they can be extrapolated to apply to the entire age group in pre-primary and basic education. Approximately 5–10% of the pupils in the age group to be evaluated will participate in the evaluation. The sample of schools providing education in Swedish is larger to improve comparability. The sample may also be larger in some syllabuses. The core objective of national evaluations is to develop education and to support learning while ensuring the equality and quality of education.

Thematic and system evaluations focus on some content package or theme. The target may also be the evaluation of the state of a certain form of education. System evaluations may also study a whole education system or some part of it. The evaluation target may be education policy and its implementation or the renewal and development processes of the education system. Evaluations may target one educational level, or cover several educational levels. A multidisciplinary planning and evaluation group will be formed for the evaluation project. The evaluation will use inclusive and varied methods. The key is to take into account the perspectives of various stakeholders, critical and profound study of the phenomenon to be evaluated and to get a comprehensive understanding of the evaluation target.

The process of evaluation can include also school visits. In most cases, the visit is preceded by enquiry and/or document analysis, and the schools are chosen on the basis of the results. School visit can contain e.g. observation of lessons, discussions with pupils and the personnel as well as the representative of the provider. School visits serve deeper understanding of the theme in thematic evaluations. In spite of that, the schools can receive feedback of the results which is done of the base of the school visit.

Audits of the quality systems of higher education institutions have been implemented in Finland since 2005. The objective of the audits has been to support Finnish institutions in developing quality systems that correspond to the European principles of quality assurance and to demonstrate that functional and consistent quality assurance procedures are in place in Finland both in institutions and on the

national level. Audits encompass quality management of all core duties of higher education institutions. In accordance with the European quality assurance principles, FINEEC audits consist of the following main stages: the higher education institution first carries out a self-evaluation and prepares the audit material; a team of experts then reviews the material, after which it visits the institution; and finally, the results are published in a report. Higher education institutions that pass the audit receive a quality label that is valid for six years.

Self-evaluation is one of the most important methods of enhancement-led evaluation at FINEEC. Self-evaluation supports institutions and other providers of education to identify the strengths, and especially to determine areas in need of development.

Examples:

- FINEEC evaluated in 2015 the quality management systems of vocational education providers according to the evaluation criteria drawn up by a working group on quality management appointed by the Ministry of Education. The evaluation was based on self-evaluation reports from education providers, and evaluation visits that were carried out in order to assess the reliability of the evaluation and receive additional information. In addition to the group of evaluators, a number of experts in vocational education and quality management took part in the evaluation visits.
- In the external evaluation of “Self-evaluation and quality management practices, employed by the providers of basic education and general upper secondary education” (2017), the main data was collected by the means of criteria-based self-evaluation of the providers – and completed with an enquiry.
- In ECEC, the objective of national evaluation is to promote the preconditions for children’s well-being, development, and learning. Instead of measuring child outcomes, evaluations are directed to the pedagogical work of the professionals, and self-evaluation is thus greatly emphasised. The foci of the recent national ECEC evaluation was in the local processes related to the implementation of the National Core Curriculum for ECEC. The evaluation data was partially based in ECEC providers’ self-evaluation of the curriculum processes.

3. Consequences of evaluations

In Finland, we have information based steering, and the objectives of evaluation are:

- 1) to produce knowledge for national education policy, for decision making and development at local level.
- 2) to support students’ learning, school personnel’s work, development of schools
- 3) to improve preconditions of learning – also at local level

Example: In learning outcomes evaluations of basic education, schools and providers receive their own results compared with the national results and can use them on their development work. The school-wise results are not published nationally.

Early Childhood Education and Care Act 1973, Basic Education Act and General Upper Secondary Education Act 1998 state that education providers have a duty to evaluate the education they provide, to participate in external evaluations and to publish their results.

What is the stated purpose of your organisation? Finland develops education based on the versatile and up-to-date evaluation information produced by the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre.