

Standing order of the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council

14.4.2011

In force: 1.1.2010 - until further notice

1. General

The operation of the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council is governed by Section 87.2 of the Universities Act (558/2009), Section 9.2. of the Polytechnics Act (351/2003; Amendment 564/2009) and the Government Decree on the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (794/2009).

Under the Universities Act and the Polytechnics Act, "Attached to the Ministry of Education is an independent expert body called the Higher Education Evaluation Council, further provisions on which shall be enacted by Government Decree."

In the preamble to the Universities Act, the independence of FINHEEC is described in the following way:

According to the provision, the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council is an independent expert body, which means independent responsibility for its operation. Further, 'independence' means that the evaluation findings, conclusions and recommendations are independent from the influence of third parties, such as the higher education institutions, ministries or other parties concerned. In operating in the Evaluation Council, the members of the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council are independent experts. They do not represent their own background organisation but seek to promote quality enhancement in all the higher education institutions under review and the development of the Finnish higher education system as a whole.

The Higher Education Evaluation Council (subsequently FINHEEC) is attached to the Ministry of Education and uses the Ministry's infrastructure and follows the Ministry's regulations in regard of the financial and information management, facilities, official journeys, annual and other leave, and occupational health care.

Further, the operation of FINHEEC is governed by the national evaluation plan and the FINHEEC Quality Manual.

2. FINHEEC organisation and the tasks and competence of its parts

In this standing order, the term 'Higher Education Evaluation Council' denotes the entity composed of the Evaluation Council and the Secretariat. The FINHEEC organisation further includes possible subcommittees and an international advisory body. For the planning and implementation, FINHEEC appoints planning and evaluation groups for a fixed term.

Duties of the Evaluation Council

Under the Government Decree, the mission of FINHEEC is to:

- 1) assist higher education institutions and the Ministry of Education in matters relating to evaluation;
- 2) organise evaluations relating to the operation and quality assurance systems of higher education institutions;
- 3) support quality assurance and enhancement in higher education institutions; and
- 4) participate in international evaluation activities and cooperation.

In addition, FINHEEC performs the duties assigned to it in the Presidential Decree (548/2005) on polytechnic degrees awarded in the Province of Ahvenanmaa/Åland.

FINHEEC may accept other assignments relating to evaluation from Finnish or foreign operators.

FINHEEC shall regularly participate in an international evaluation of its own operation. FINHEEC shall submit an annual report on its own activities and the salient findings of the evaluations.

Organisation

The Ministry of Education appoints the members of the Evaluation Council for four years after consulting the higher education institutions and different interest groups. At its first meeting after appointment, the Evaluation Council shall elect a chairperson and a vice-chairperson from amongst its members for the four-year term. Before the election of the chairperson, the Evaluation Council shall be chaired by its longest serving member or, should there be several long-serving members, by the oldest in age.

To begin with, the Evaluation Council shall elect a chairperson. The members may propose chairpersons. An election shall be held if there are more than one seconded candidate. If none of the candidates receives a simple majority in the first round, another round shall be held between the two chairperson candidates with the most votes. If the votes are equal, the election of the chairperson shall be decided by lot.

The elected chairperson shall chair the meeting. The vice-chairperson shall be elected. The members may propose vice-chairpersons. If there are more than one seconded candidate, an election shall be held. If none of the candidates receives a simple majority in the first round, another round shall be held between the two vice-chairperson candidates with the most votes. If the votes are equal, the chairman shall have the casting vote.

Meetings

The Evaluation Council shall convene at the invitation of the chairperson or, if he/she is prevented, at the invitation of the vice-chairperson. The Evaluation Council shall have a quorum when six members, including the chairperson, are present. Matters

shall be decided by simple majority. When the votes are equal, the chairman shall have the casting vote.

Minutes shall be written of the Evaluation Council meeting. The minutes shall be signed by the chairperson of the meeting and confirmed by the secretary. The minutes shall be checked at the following meeting. Documents drawn up by a decision of the Evaluation Council shall be signed by the chairperson or vice-chairperson and the Secretary General. Project-specific documents shall be signed by the chairperson and the Secretary General or one of these and the Chief Planning Officer, a Senior Adviser or the Administrative Assistant.

Operation

The Evaluation Council shall decide on

- the FINHEEC standing order and quality manual
- the action plan for the term of office and the annual work plan and budget and adopt the annual report
- its subcommittees and international advisory body
- the evaluations to be undertaken
- the project plans for the evaluations
- the chairpersons and members of the planning groups
- the chairpersons and members of the evaluation groups
- the result and consequences of an audit based on the reports
- centres of excellence in education based on an evaluation, on Ministry of Education assignment
- evaluation and education subsidies granted to higher education institutions
- proposals to the Ministry of Education concerning the filling of vacancies in the Secretariat
- opinions given in the name of the Evaluation Council that have primary consequence in terms of higher education policy or the operation of FINHEEC.

FINHEEC shall keep in regular contact with Finnish and foreign stakeholders named in a separate stakeholder document.

Subcommittees

Working committee

The Evaluation Council shall elect from amongst its members a working committee composed of a chairperson, a vice-chairperson and representatives of the polytechnic and university sectors and students. The working committee shall prepare matters for the Council meetings and handle matters delegated to it by the Council, when needed.

Other subcommittees

The Evaluation Council may appoint subcommittees to prepare matters that come before the Council. The Evaluation Council shall appoint the chairperson, vice-chairperson and members of the subcommittee. Where needed, separate guidelines

shall be issued concerning the duties of the subcommittee. The subcommittees shall report on their activities to the Evaluation Council in conjunction with the annual report.

Persons external to FINHEEC may also be appointed to the subcommittees.

International advisory body

In order to support and develop its operation and to boost international cooperation, the Evaluation Council may appoint an advisory body composed of international and national experts. Its duty is to support and provide consultancy to the Evaluation Council. It is to assist the Council in the strategic directing of activities, especially by bringing perspectives concerning the international development of the higher education sector and evaluation activities.

The advisory body consists of the chairperson and vice chairperson of the Evaluation Council and of 5-7 foreign members. The body is chaired by the chairperson of the Evaluation Council. The term of office of the foreign members of the advisory body is two years. A member may be re-appointed once.

The advisory body shall convene at the invitation of the chairperson, usually twice per year. In addition to the regular members, the advisory body's meetings are attended by the Secretary General of the Evaluation Council and by the body's secretary as appointed by the Secretary General from among the Secretariat.

Secretariat

For the preparation and implementation of matters deliberated by it, the Evaluation Council has a Secretariat. The Secretariat shall be directed by a Secretary General. The Secretariat shall comprise chief planning officers and senior advisors responsible for evaluation projects. In addition, the Secretariat shall have an administrative assistant who acts as secretary at the meetings, secretary to the Secretary General and manages financial and administrative matters. The members of the Secretariat shall have job descriptions, which are reviewed at the annual performance and development review meeting. The division of work among the Secretariat shall be recorded in a work assignment document. Each project is assigned a senior advisor responsible for it and a deputy. The chief planning officers, together with the Secretary General, shall be responsible for annual reporting on the activities.

The Secretary General shall direct and develop the activities of the Secretariat, be responsible for the administration and finances of the unit, the planning of the activities, the preparation of matters and overseeing their implementation, act as editor of the FINHEEC publication series.

The Secretary General shall conduct annual performance and development reviews with the personnel and make performance assessments, and in this connection also agree on personal training schedules.

Each new employee in the Secretariat shall be assigned a personal induction mentor. The Secretariat shall maintain induction materials for new employees.

Planning and evaluation groups

The Evaluation Council shall appoint planning and evaluation groups for evaluation projects and chairpersons to the groups. Deputies may also be appointed for the group members. The chairperson of a planning group is generally elected from the members of the Evaluation Council, which promotes the flow of information between the planning group and the Council. Student organisations usually propose the student members to the planning and evaluation groups.

In the composition of the groups, the aim shall be as diverse and comprehensive expertise as possible in regard of the field, theme, higher education institution or higher education sector to be evaluated. The members shall be representatives of higher education institutions, stakeholders, the labour market and student organisations. Depending on the evaluation, the evaluation group may also have foreign experts as members. Written contracts shall be concluded with the group members on the assignment. In regard of disqualification, the appointment of members to the groups shall be governed by the provisions of the Administrative Procedure Act (434/2003, Chapter 5, Sections 27–29).

The planning group shall chart the area to be evaluated and make a proposals as to its delimitation. In addition the planning group shall define the aims, content and method of the evaluation project, in other words, draw up a project plan submitted to the Evaluation Council for approval, propose the composition of the evaluation group and arrange a discussion and orientation event for the evaluation group, where the project plan is talked through.

In its conclusions, the evaluation group shall be independent and autonomous. Depending on the evaluation, the evaluation group shall

- acquaint themselves with the assignment, specify the evaluation assignment in more detail and define possible evaluation criteria
- acquaint themselves with the target of evaluation with the help of the project plan adopted by the Evaluation Council and background material provided by the Secretariat
- participate in the orientation arranged by FINHEEC
- scrutinise the self evaluation reports or other materials submitted by the higher education institutions
- based on the self evaluation reports, specify the matters to be inspected during the site visit
- determine possible need for additional information
- organise the site visit and possible other events relating to the evaluation process, such as thematic discussions
- make the site visits
- based on the self-evaluation reports, other materials and site visits, formulate a view of the quality of the phenomenon under review both in the national scale and in the higher education institutions participating in the evaluation
- put forward recommendations for quality enhancement relating to the object of review
- prepare a final report or evaluation and development feedback.

The Evaluation Council may also appoint steering groups for its projects. The purpose of the steering group is to follow the project as it proceeds and direct it with its expertise, where needed.

3. Processing of matters

The Evaluation Council shall make decisions on referral. The matters are presented by the Secretary General and/or an official appointed by him/her for each matter. Matters concerning the Secretary General shall be presented by the chairperson of the Evaluation Council. Otherwise the presenting of matters shall be governed by established administrative procedures.

A matter to be submitted to the Evaluation Council shall be delivered to the decision-makers sufficiently in advance. The meeting materials shall be posted one week before the date of the meeting.

4. Finances and fees

The Higher Education Evaluation Council shall receive its annual appropriations as part of the state budget in an item for educational evaluation. In addition, it may accept other assignments relating to evaluation from Finnish and foreign operators.

The fees and compensation for experts used in evaluations shall be decided annually as part of the FINHEEC budget.

The grounds for determining the fees and compensation of the chairperson and members of the Evaluation Council and its subcommittees shall be determined by the Ministry of Education.

The Secretary General shall approve the invoices arising from the operation of FINHEEC and issue travel assignments. Travel assignments to the Secretary General shall be issued by the Director of the Department Office of Department for Education and Science Policy of the Ministry of Education and Culture.

5. Appeals

The decisions issued by FINHEEC concerning the results and consequences of evaluations are expert opinions by nature. They are not administrative decisions and cannot be appealed against. They do not contain an address for appeals. In audits of quality assurance systems, the institutions under review and FINHEEC conclude a written agreement, which sets out possible consequences to which the parties commit themselves.

The FINHEEC Secretariat members are civil servants and the Secretariat shall follow good administrative practice.

6. Review of the FINHEEC standing order

The FINHEEC standing order shall be revised by a decision of the Evaluation Council, when needed.