



**Finnish Higher Education
Evaluation Council
(FINHEEC)**

Quality Manual

5 August 2010

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Introduction

In Finland, the Ministry of Education and Culture is responsible for implementing the education policy adopted by Parliament and the Government. The Ministry drafts legislation pertaining to education and training, prepares the education and culture for the state budget proposal and drafts government decisions relating to education. Almost all forms of publicly funded education and training are subordinate to or supervised by the Ministry of Education and Culture.

The objective of higher education policy is to meet society's educational needs and train a sufficient number of highly educated experts to meet the needs of society, business and industry. The appropriations and the objectives, direction, evaluation and development of higher education operations are determined in performance agreements concluded by the higher education institutions and the Ministry of Education and Culture. After national elections, Finnish government adopts every four years an Education and Research Development Plan, which is based on the education and science policy aims recorded in the Government Programme and the Government's Strategy Document. Typical to Finland, there can be found a strong continuity in higher education policy objectives between different governments.

The Finnish higher education system consists of two parallel sectors: universities and universities of applied sciences (UAS)¹. Universities conduct scientific research and provide instruction and postgraduate education based on it. The mission of the UAS is to train experts to serve the world of work and carry out R&D in support of education and regional development. In line with the Bologna Declaration, the Finnish higher education institutions are actively participating in the creation of the European Higher Education Area. In order to strengthen the position of Finnish higher education institutions in EHEA, Finland reformed the university degree structure in 2005 and has devised a strategy for the internationalisation of higher education institutions for 2009-2015.

The Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC) has implemented evaluations of universities and universities of applied sciences (UAS) since 1996. FINHEEC ensures the continuous development of its activities and the equal treatment of higher education institutions in all evaluations through its accountability procedures. The procedures are used to collect and utilise information to develop the activities as well as to ensure the quality of the activities from one evaluation to the next. Quality work undertaken in FINHEEC is also significant for the international comparability of audit results. The European network of evaluation organisations, *European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education* (ENQA), together with other European cooperation bodies has published a *European Standards and Guidelines* (ESG) document which presents, inter alia, the principles of internal quality assurance in higher education institutions. In addition, the ESG includes principles of quality assurance in evaluation organisations. The FINHEEC procedures have been created with these policies in mind.

¹ The English translation for Finnish term *ammattikorkeakoulu* is a politically problematic issue in Finland owing to the fact that the institutions themselves have adopted the term University of Applied Sciences. However, the Ministry of Education and Culture uses the traditional term of Polytechnic. FINHEEC uses the term University of Applied Sciences for the sake of clarity.

1 Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council

1.1 The structure and organisation of FINHEEC

The Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC)² is an independent expert body, the task of which is to assist higher education institutions and the Ministry of Education and Culture in performing higher education evaluations, thus promoting the quality of higher education. FINHEEC operates in connection with the Ministry of Education and Culture. The 12 members of the Evaluation Council are selected for four-year terms of office. The nomination is made by the Minister of Education from the individuals put forward by the higher education institutions. The Evaluation Council comprises individuals working in HEIs, student unions and in the world of work outside higher education.

According to the Decree on the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (794/2009), the members have to be individuals versed in evaluation of higher education and the majority of them must be affiliated with some higher education institution. Each higher education institution and student organisation may nominate one male and one female candidate. Good knowledge of higher education institution activities, the higher education system and policy, as well as international experience in the field, are taken into account when selecting the candidate. Equality in gender and geographical distribution between higher education institutions in different areas are also ensured as far as possible when deciding on the members of the Council. Traditionally, the Council has also had at least one Swedish-speaking member.

The members of the Evaluation Council do not represent their background organisations. The independence of the Council is further strengthened by the Section 87 of the new Universities Act. Some of the Council members are re-elected so that its activities are long-term in nature and practical knowledge is transferred to the next Council. The decisions of the Evaluation Council are made and implemented by an 11-member Secretariat led by the Secretary General. The General Secretary and other members of the secretariat present the Council decisions. According to the Decree 794/2009, the Evaluation Council may set up an International Advisory Board to support the development of activities and foster international cooperation. The Board may consist of national and international experts under the chairmanship of the chair of the Evaluation Council.

1.2 The Official Status of the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council

² This document refers to the Evaluation Council when saking of the 12-member decision-making body. The Secretariat refers to the body preparing and implementing the decisions made by the Evaluation Council. The term Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC) comprises the whole made of the Evaluation Council and the Secretariat.

In Finland, higher education evaluation is based on legislation. The tasks of FINHEEC have been stipulated in decrees 1320/1995, 465/1998, 548/2005, 965/2007 and recently passed 794/2009³.

Duties of the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council:

- 1) *assisting higher education institutions and the Ministry of Education in matters concerning evaluations;*
- 2) *conducting evaluations of activities and quality systems of higher education institutions;*
- 3) *supporting the assurance and development of quality of higher education institutions; and*
- 4) *engaging in international evaluations and cooperation in evaluation.*

Further, the Higher Education Evaluation Council shall perform duties assigned to it in the Presidential Decree concerning university of applied sciences degrees awarded in the Province of Åland (548/2005).

The Higher Education Evaluation Council may accept other commissions relating to evaluation from Finnish and foreign operators.

The Higher Education Evaluation Council must participate in international evaluation of its own activities on a regular basis. The Higher Education Evaluation Council must annually submit an account of its own activities and the salient findings of the evaluations.

The duties of FINHEEC additionally encompasses the development of evaluation methods, enhancing expertise, training provision, publishing, and information services.

1.3 Activities

The Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council conducts three principal types of evaluations:

- Audits of quality assurance systems of higher education institutions
- Evaluations of educational centres of excellence
- Thematic evaluations and evaluations of educational fields

Audits of quality assurance systems are higher education institution specific evaluations. The higher education institute quality assurance system refers to the procedures, processes or systems which the higher education institute maintains in order to develop the quality of education and its other activities. The audit process has been described in detail in the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council audit manual.⁴

Evaluations of centres of excellence are conducted separately in both the university and UAS sectors. FINHEEC selects the centres of excellence for each performance agreement period. The Ministry of Education and Culture takes the selected units into account in its appropriations.

Thematic evaluations and evaluations of educational fields are conducted in important, fast-growing and developing or problematic fields with regard to educational or social

³ The full text of the Decree is here in Finnish: <http://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/alkup/2009/20090794>

⁴ See <http://www.kka.fi/Audit>

policy. FINHEEC may also undertake evaluation projects under a mandate from the Ministry of Education and Culture. FINHEEC usually performs a follow-up evaluation of the educational field or theme three years after the evaluation proper.

Moreover, FINHEEC conducts evaluations as contract work under commissions from HEIs and the Ministry of Education and Culture, provided that these fit thematically into FINHEEC's strategy. In practice, contracted evaluations have concerned only higher education institutions that are not administered by the Ministry of Education and Culture (the National Defence University, the Police College of Finland and the Åland University of Applied Sciences).

FINHEEC's activities also reach past conducting evaluations. FINHEEC organises seminars, where the principle of enhancement-led evaluation is further promoted and good practices are shared between HEIs. Members of the Council and secretariat participate actively in key seminars in Finland and abroad in order to stay in touch with the latest developments in higher education and to network with actors in the field. FINHEEC conducts fairly active co-operation with a number of stakeholders, such as the rectors' conferences on university and UAS sectors, student unions and the ENQA secretariat. FINHEEC has also identified its most important national and international stakeholders and divided the responsibility of maintaining these contacts among secretariat and Council members. The role of FINHEEC in relation to HEIs is not simply one of an evaluator, but FINHEEC also supports the quality assurance activities of HEIs by creating opportunities for benchmarking between HEIs and promoting discussion on QA. FINHEEC acts as an international bridge builder by importing the information on latest developments and trends in QA to HEIs, Ministry of Education and Culture and other stakeholders.

The role of higher education institutions in quality assurance

The responsibility for the quality of their activities rests with the higher education institutions. FINHEEC's role is to support higher education institutions while they are developing the quality of their activities. When planning the evaluation criteria and methods, higher education institutions' views are sought in advance, for example in writing or at seminars. Moreover, the higher education institutions also give feedback after evaluations, which is utilised in planning future evaluations and developing evaluation methods.

The higher education institution prepares self-evaluation or audit materials for use by the audit group appointed by FINHEEC. The higher education institution's personnel, students and stakeholders participate in interviews and thematic discussions during the auditing visit. The higher education institution then receives a written report from the audit group, which contains observations on its strengths and development targets. However, the responsibility and freedom for deciding on development measures introduced after the evaluation rests with the higher education institution.

1.4 Resources

The activities of the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council are funded by the Ministry of Education and Culture. The overall budget of the Evaluation Council in 2009 was approximately 1.4 million euro, of which 700,000 euro represented labour costs. The Secretariat of the Evaluation Council comprises the secretary general, three chief planning

officers, six senior advisors and an administrative assistant. University and Universities of Applied Sciences -sectors have their own chief planning officers, who also double as deputies of the secretary general. A doctoral degree is a requirement for appointment as the secretary general, while chief planning officers and senior advisors are expected to have a Master's degree.

The Council includes members from both sectors of the higher education system in addition to the student representatives and persons from the working life. They have extensive experience of evaluation, quality assurance systems and higher education. FINHEEC's secretariat has also gathered a fairly solid experience in evaluations of higher education institutions since 1996. Systematic training in evaluation methods and quality assurance processes and orientation to the work has greatly strengthened the skills and expertise of FINHEEC as a whole. Human resources are also continuously utilised in evaluations, seminars and other activities to their full potential.

1.5 Action Plan and standing order

FINHEEC, the Ministry of Education and Culture, Finnish Education Evaluation Council⁵ and the National Board of Education have jointly created a National Plan of Evaluation of Education for 2009-2011 which outlines the evaluations planned. This National Plan provides the background for FINHEEC's more detailed Action Plan, which is created for each Council period.

The duties of the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council are stipulated by decree. Within its bounds, the Council defines at the start of its term of office the focus areas and general policies of its activities. The action plan is reviewed annually and it is supplemented by an annual work plan of the Secretariat. Evaluations which are intended to be conducted during the term of office are entered into the action plan. In addition, the plan includes an analysis on the situation of the higher education sector and challenges for which the evaluations are a partial answer.

The action plan is published in the FINHEEC publication series in Finnish, Swedish and English. The plan is supplemented with annual planning and an annual budget jointly drawn up with the Ministry of Education and Culture. In addition, the Secretariat draws up an annual work plan, which describes the distribution of labour for the year.

FINHEEC prepared a Standing Order which came in effect with the new Decree on FINHEEC, from beginning of 2010. The document outlines the protocol of Evaluation Council meetings and duties of the secretariat. The tasks of evaluation and steering groups are also provided in detail.

1.6 Independence

The Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council decides independently on the implementation of the evaluations, methods used, the members of the evaluation groups, timetables, content of reports and other decisions pertaining to evaluations. Other interested parties, such as higher education institutions, ministries or stakeholders have no

⁵ The Finnish Education Evaluation Council (*Koulutuksen arviointineuvosto*) conducts evaluations of education in basic, upper secondary, vocational and adult education.

effect on FINHEEC's decisions or evaluation results. FINHEEC is an independent expert body, operating in conjunction with the Ministry of Education and Culture. It utilises the Ministry's infrastructure, such as IT services, invoicing and payroll. FINHEEC has a separate sub-item in the state budget of which the Council has independence upon.

Suggestions for evaluation can and do come also from the HEIs and other stakeholders in the field. FINHEEC can also conduct evaluations commissioned by the Ministry. The members of FINHEEC Council are not representatives of their employers, (eg. the HEIs) but represent the whole field of Finnish higher education as independent experts. The independence of the members and the organisation of FINHEEC is further strengthened by the Section 87 of the new Universities Act.

1.7 Operational principles

Under the Decree on FINHEEC, the mission of agency is to assist higher education institutions and the Ministry of Education and Culture in matters relating to evaluation. The aim of FINHEEC is to improve Finnish higher education institutions and their international competitiveness through evaluations, support for quality work, the provision of benchmarking data, improvement recommendations and the dissemination of best practices. The Ministry of Education and Culture and other stakeholders are provided with up-to-date evaluation data to support decision making and development.

FINHEEC observes the following principles:

Independent action

Decision making at FINHEEC and the contents of the evaluations are independent. Regardless of the close cooperation with stakeholders and the funding from the Ministry of Education and Culture, any decisions regarding evaluations are taken independently in accordance with predetermined evaluation criteria, giving FINHEEC national and international credibility as an evaluation body.

Enhancement-led evaluation

The FINHEEC evaluations use an enhancement-led approach. The aim is to help higher education institutions to identify the strengths and good practices in their operations as well as development targets. Enhancement-led evaluation supports the institutions in realising their own strategic aims and targeting their future development and also engenders constant development. The key procedures in enhancement-led evaluation are varied, inclusive evaluation methods and the incorporation of external evaluation into the everyday work and normal development of the higher education institutions. The enhancement-led approach is used in all the phases of the FINHEEC evaluation process: as part of planning, implementation, reporting and follow-up.

International bridge-building

FINHEEC is actively involved in cooperation in the sector at the international and the European level in particular. FINHEEC builds and maintains ties with evaluation organisations and networks in various countries. FINHEEC serves as a bridge-builder between the European Higher Education Area and the higher education sector in Finland, especially with respect to evaluations.

Proactive influencing

In its activities, FINHEEC seeks to anticipate the national and international needs for change. FINHEEC wishes to make a strong Finnish contribution to the construction of the European Higher Education Area and to lead the way in the development of evaluation in cooperation with actors in the field of higher education in Finland.

2 Accountability Procedures

2.1 The aims of accountability procedures

The aim of the accountability procedures of FINHEEC is to ensure the quality, effectiveness and usability of knowledge derived from the FINHEEC evaluations particularly for the use of the higher education institutions but also that of other FINHEEC stakeholders (rectors' councils, the Ministry of Education and Culture, student organisations, etc.). Another key task of the accountability procedures is to ensure the equality of FINHEEC decisions in particular with regard to quality assurance system audits and evaluations of educational centres of excellence. Moreover, the aim of the accountability procedures is to help recognise development targets and problems in the activities. The systematic approach serves to highlight many such development targets which are not necessarily evident otherwise in everyday work. The systematic description of the activities and operating models enables the systematic development of methods and practices.

2.2 The goals of the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council

The main goal of the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council is to support the development of the quality of Finnish higher education and international competitiveness. FINHEEC aims to attain this goal by realising its role as a forerunner in higher education evaluation activities. The goals of FINHEEC are stated in its Quality Manual, publicly available at its website. The goals are divided in three categories: Evaluations, stakeholder co-operation and internal activities.

**The goal chart of the
Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council**

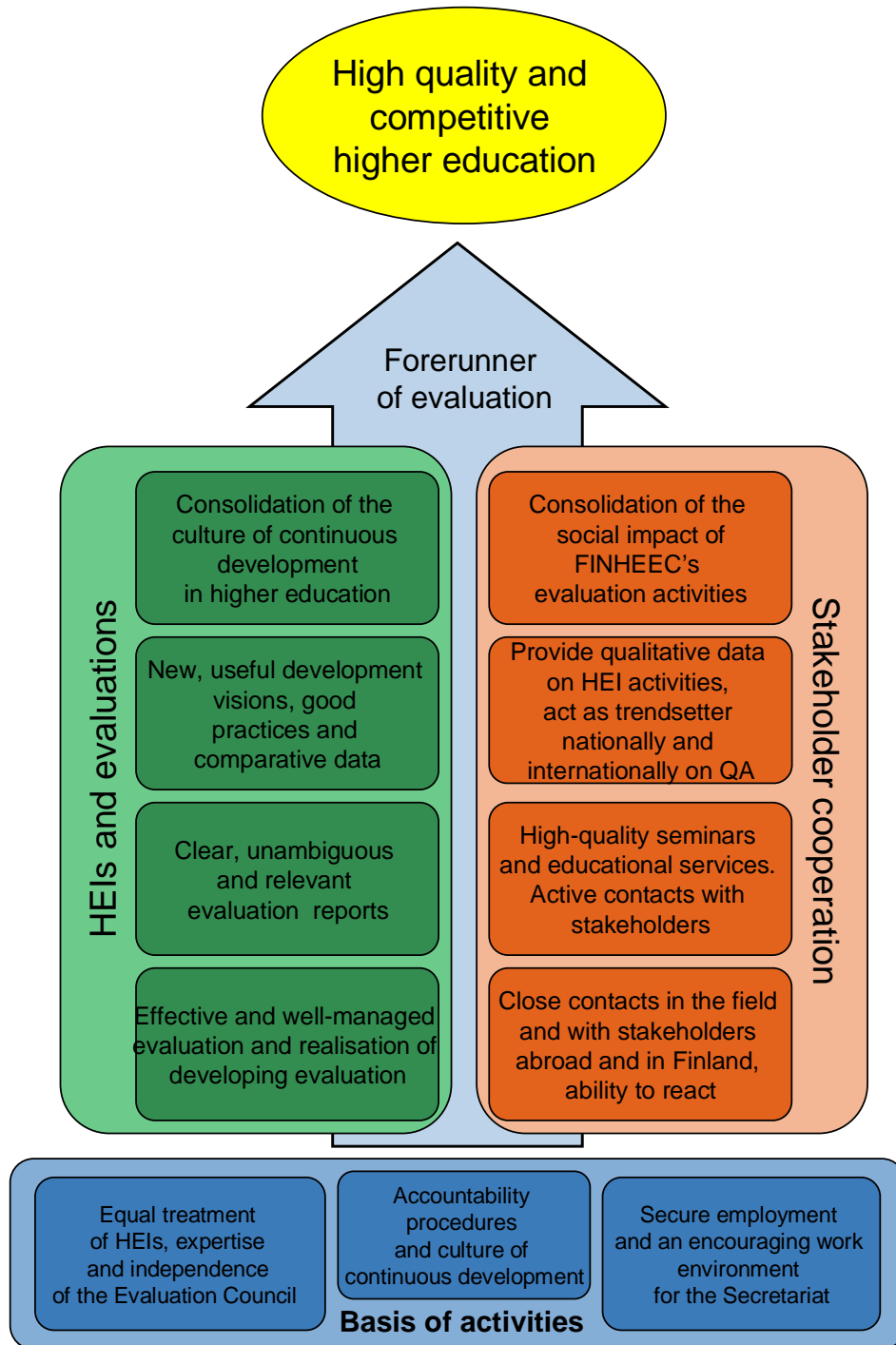


Figure 1: The goal chart of the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council

The goals presented at the bottom of the chart in blue are those pertaining to the basis of activities that enable the attainment of other goals. These include equal treatment of higher education institutions in all FINHEEC activities, strong expertise of Evaluation Council members, and independence of FINHEEC activities and decision making in particular. In addition, the basis for attainment of other goals is provided by FINHEEC's accountability procedures, its culture of continuous development as well as the secure employment and encouraging work environment of the Secretariat.

Higher education institutions and evaluations

The main duty of the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council is the evaluation of higher education institutions. Goals pertaining to it are presented in the green boxes on the left in the figure. Goals presented nearer the bottom of the chart always enable the realisation of goals above them. FINHEEC aims at ensuring effective and well-managed evaluation processes and realisation of the principle of enhancement-led evaluation. The aim is made concrete in evaluations as clear, unambiguous and relevant reports. Therefore, the aim is also to produce new, usable development visions, good practices and comparison data for developing the activities of higher education institutions. Thus, FINHEEC aims at consolidating the HEIs' own culture of continuous development.

Stakeholder cooperation

Another important duty of FINHEEC is stakeholder cooperation, the goals of which are presented in orange boxes on the right in the chart. The Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council has defined its key national and international stakeholders, which include the HEIs, the Ministry of Education and Culture, rectors' councils and student organisations as well as various evaluation organisations and their networks such as the *European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)*.

The central goal of stakeholder cooperation is to maintain close contacts with the higher education sector and other stakeholders and the ability to react to observations received from these sources. Relationships are maintained by participating in various events and by organising high-quality seminars and education services. FINHEEC maintains active contact with the most important stakeholders.

FINHEEC's goal is to engage in mutually developing cooperation and to provide qualitative data on HEI activities. The aim is to be the trendsetter for national stakeholders in quality assurance and international development of the field. Thus, the aims of stakeholder cooperation are concentrated on the consolidation of the social significance of higher education evaluation activities.

FINHEEC aims at being the national and international forerunner in evaluation activities. The bottom line of the activities is to promote high-quality and competitive higher education. These goals are closely linked to FINHEEC's evaluations and other activities through the Action Plan, which is publicly available on FINHEEC's website. FINHEEC, the Ministry of Education and Culture, Finnish Education Evaluation Council and the Academy of Finland have jointly created a National Plan of Evaluation of Education for 2009–2011 which outlines the evaluations planned. This National Plan provides the background for FINHEEC's more detailed Action Plan, which is created for each Council period.

2.3 Processes

The Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council has summed up its key activities in process charts appended to this document. The relationship between processes and activities is illustrated in the process chart below.

Process chart

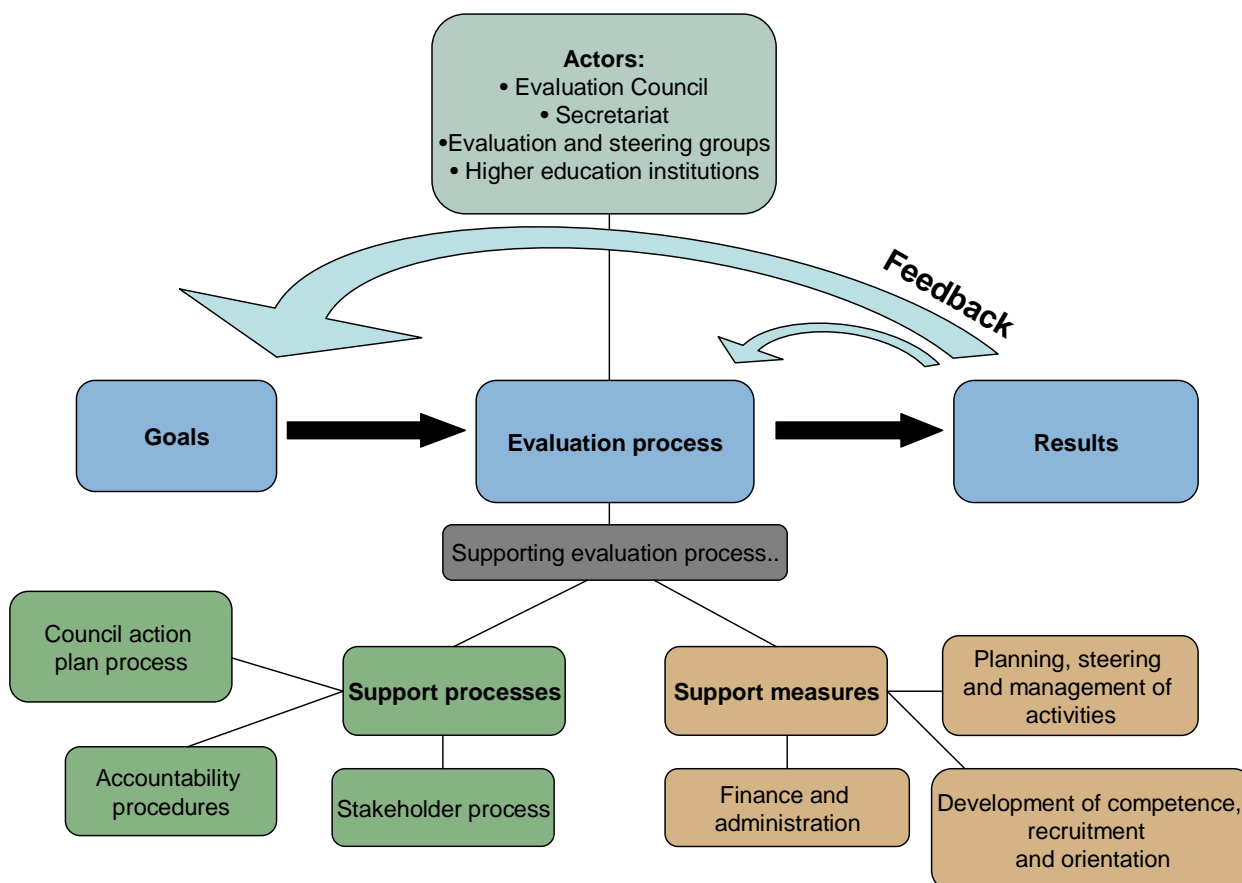


Figure 2: Process chart

The starting points are FINHEEC's goals derived from relevant decrees and FINHEEC's duties. Processes and activities are used to attain the goals. The most important process of the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council is the evaluation process. This process has been described so that it is suited for examining both audits and evaluations of centres of excellence and evaluations of educational fields and themes. The 2009 evaluation process is appended to this document (Appendix 1). The evaluation process also produces feedback from HEIs and audit groups which is utilised in developing the activities.

The activities produce results, or completed evaluations. Feedback from evaluations is received from HEIs and audit groups. In addition, the Evaluation Council and the Secretariat assess their activities, for example at the annual development seminar for the Secretariat and the Council. The feedback received is utilised and FINHEEC goals, processes and operating models are updated accordingly.

There are three FINHEEC support processes: The Council's action plan process (Appendix 4) describes the participation of various actors in the preparation and approval of the Council's action plan. The stakeholder process (Appendix 2) describes how

FINHEEC annually reviews its stakeholder relationships with national and international stakeholders and makes a decision on the bodies on which cooperation resources are focused.

The quality assurance process (Appendix 3) describes the implementation of the Evaluation Council's annual accountability procedures. Moreover, the implementation of the evaluation process is supported by support functions, including finance and administration, planning, steering and management of activities, recruitment and orientation.

Different individuals are responsible for the successful implementation of various processes. The responsibility for the evaluation process always rests with the project manager of the evaluation in question. The Secretary General is responsible for the Council's action plan and stakeholder processes. Updating and maintaining the quality assurance process is the responsibility of the planner in charge of FINHEEC accountability procedures. Processes are updated when needed and in conjunction with the Secretariat's development seminar. The members of the Evaluation Council are jointly responsible for their decisions and their impartiality.

2.4 Accountability procedures

The quality assurance system of the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council comprises four parts under which most of FINHEEC's accountability procedures fall (see Fig. 3). The parts comply with W. Edwards Deming's *Plan-do-check-act* (or *Plan-do-study-act*) circle.

The accountability procedures of FINHEEC

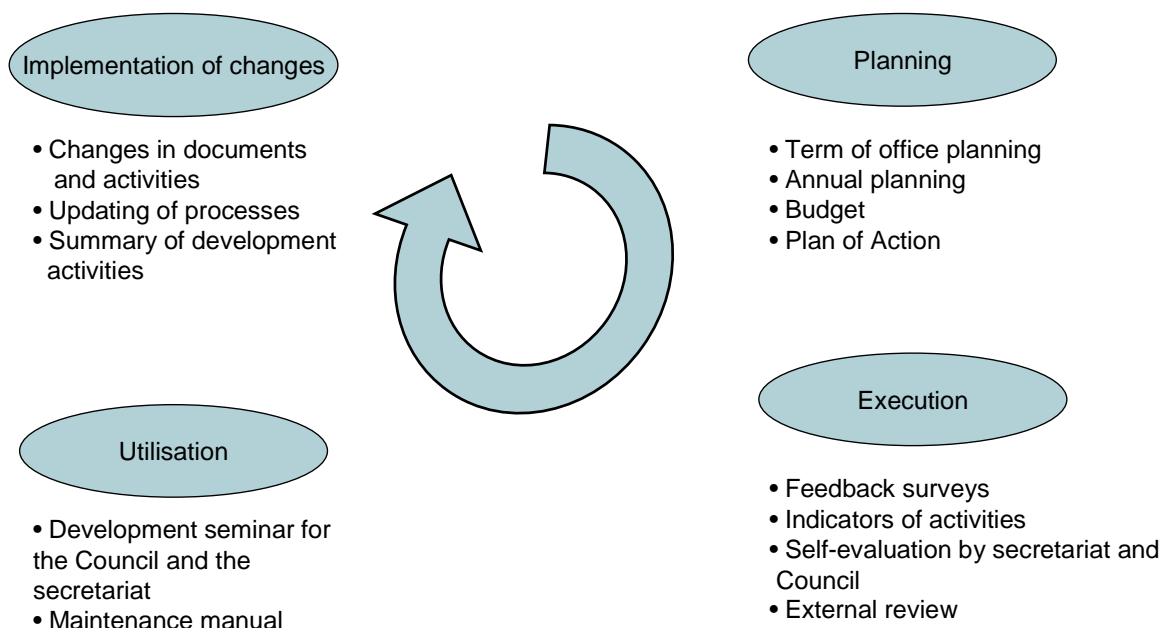


Figure 3: The accountability procedures of FINHEEC

Planning

The Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council draws up an action plan for its term of office which focuses on the evaluations to be implemented during the term of office. The action plan is published in the FINHEEC publication series in Finnish, Swedish and English. The term of office plan is supplemented with annual planning and an annual budget jointly drawn up with the Ministry of Education and Culture. An education evaluation plan is drawn up together with other national evaluation organisations and it is published in the Ministry of Education and Culture publication series. In addition, the Secretariat draws up an annual work plan, which describes the distribution of labour for the year.

Execution

Data acquisition on the activities, its results, quality and impact is an essential part of the quality assurance system. The Secretariat sends feedback questionnaires to all HEIs participating in the evaluations as well as to the members of the audit group which implemented the actual evaluation. Feedback data are collected not only about the usefulness of the evaluation but also on the evaluation method used by FINHEEC and opportunities to develop it further.

Some of the questions in questionnaires sent to HEIs are always the same (see the section entitled 'Monitoring results' below), so that, for example, the success of new evaluation methods between various evaluations can be studied. Questions in the questionnaires are linked with the various stages of the evaluation process, which enables examining the success of FINHEEC at various stages of the process in the light of these indicators. The aim is to collect as useful information as possible on the results of the activities without unnecessarily burdening the various respondent groups.

In addition to feedback from the HEIs and audit groups, information is collected also from within FINHEEC. At the end of its term of office, the Evaluation Council draws up a self-evaluation which examines procedures used and the impact of the activities. Thus, the Evaluation Council stepping down can use its experiences to instruct the members of the new Council about how to embark on its term of office. The self-evaluation by the secretariat also plays a major role. What is significant in it is not so much individual performance of duties but the personnel's view on the success of evaluation activities, good practices and development targets. In addition, the Secretary General holds separate annual performance and development reviews with the personnel.

Utilisation

The utilisation stage is about using information collected in the execution stage to develop the activities. The majority of daily method development takes place in Secretariat and audit meetings and various working group meetings. Observations and solutions expressed in these meetings are incorporated into the FINHEEC Maintenance Manual. It is a list of perceived development targets in the activities and measures to be taken. The aim of the Maintenance Manual is to record and make transparent the continuous development work taking place in FINHEEC.

Information collected in a variety of ways is discussed once a year at the Secretariat development seminar. During the seminar, observations with regard to FINHEEC aims and process descriptions are discussed in small groups. Observations and improvement proposals are raised, for example, on the basis of feedback from HEIs and audit groups. The Evaluation Council also organises its own development seminar, during which a long view of the higher education evaluation activities is taken and evaluation methods used by FINHEEC are developed.

Implementation of changes

After processing feedback, it is decided what kinds of changes are necessary on the basis of the observations. The changes may pertain, for example, to documentation and procedures or evaluation criteria. A summary of development activities based on the development measures done during the Secretariat and Council development seminars and through the year is drawn up for the Council. This summary is sent to all HEIs and members of audit groups who have provided feedback as a form of feedback on feedback. The meaning of the summary published online is to make the continuous development of the Evaluation Council activities transparent and to motivate HEIs and auditors to participate in this work.

2.5 Monitoring results

The Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council monitors its activities with a variety of indicators. The most important indicators have to do with feedback from HEIs participating in the evaluations, which is collected through questionnaires after the completed evaluations. Some of the questions in the feedback questionnaire presented to the HEIs are the same for all, which enables monitoring of the various stages of the evaluation process from one evaluation to another. The questions are multiple choice questions where the respondents choose the most appropriate alternative (between 'completely agree' and 'completely disagree').

Communications	FINHEEC communications and guidelines in the evaluation were clear.
Use of time:	Sufficient time was reserved for the various parts of the evaluation.
Feedback:	The feedback given by the audit group was relevant and useful.
Competence:	The FINHEEC audit group was professionally competent.
Criteria:	The audit criteria were clear and well functioning.
Materials:	Collection of the audit material was very useful for the development of our activities

Answers given to attitudinal claims provide directly the majority of the indicators pertaining to the activities, which FINHEEC then uses for monitoring its activities. However, the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council also follows other areas of its activities that can be measured quantitatively. These indicators include the number of completed evaluations and publications, the number of auditors and especially non-Finnish experts, papers given at seminars and participation of the members of the Secretariat in external training. With the help of these indicators it is possible to make rough estimations on, for example, the internationalisation of evaluation activities and the mobility of the Secretariat in the higher education sector. The website is among FINHEEC's most important communications channels. Counters are used to monitor the use of the website. Monitoring the visits on the website can provide information on internationalisation of FINHEEC (on the basis of visits from abroad) or, for example, changes in interest expressed towards auditing (on the basis of how often the audit manual has been downloaded).

2.6 Other factors contributing to quality assurance

In addition, some other factors contribute to quality assurance of the activities of the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council. The activities of the auditors used by the Evaluation Council, the Secretariat and FINHEEC are steered by various documents, such as the Decree on the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council, the Action plan for the term of office, Standing order and the Audit manual.

A great deal of attention is paid to the orientation of Evaluation Council members, the Secretariat and the auditors, and it is continuously being developed. In addition, the Secretariat aims to ensure the quality of evaluation processes through internal procedures, such as working in pairs, in which each project manager is provided with a deputy who monitors the progress of the project. Thus, the implementation of the evaluation can continue even if the project manager, for example, gets ill.

The Secretariat of the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council and the Secretary General meet monthly to go through matters pertaining to the Council and to exchange information on the progress of the processes. The Secretariat holds its own weekly meetings, which are used for communicating about ongoing projects, exchanging good practices arising from evaluations and developing evaluation processes.

Quality assurance in the evaluation process

Various procedures ensure the quality of FINHEEC evaluations. The aim is, first and foremost, to ensure the impartiality of evaluations from the perspective of the HEIs being evaluated, whether it is a question of an audit, evaluation of a centre of excellence, an educational programme or a thematic evaluation. Evaluations use evaluation criteria published in advance to survey the quality of the activities.

The evaluation and audit groups are assembled from experienced and expert members of the higher education community and working life experts external to the HEIs. The audit groups usually include a few individuals who have already taken part in audits and who have experience of auditing the quality assurance system of another HEI. According to the audit manual, members of the audit group are expected to possess sound knowledge of the higher education sector, evaluation experience, knowledge of quality management/quality assurance systems and have participated in auditor training organised by FINHEEC. The training acquaints the audit group members with the audit criteria and the audit process.

Quality deviations

If an issue, defect or situation, significantly detrimental to the quality of the evaluation is noticed during the evaluation, the evaluation can be interrupted. The decision is made by the FINHEEC Secretary General. If the deviation is connected with the evaluation visit, the visit can be interrupted by decision of the Secretary General. If the situation is caused by an individual auditor's inability or lack of opportunity to fulfil his/her role in the evaluation, it is first determined if the other members of the group can compensate for the work input of the auditor in question. If the deviation pertaining to a member of the audit group is perceived before the visit, he/she can be replaced by another individual by decision of the Evaluation Council.

If the quality deviation is connected with the quality of the report produced by the audit group, the Secretary General, in the role of the editor-in-chief of the FINHEEC publication series can send the manuscript back to the audit group for further work or decide not to publish the manuscript at all. If the deviation is so severe that the quality of the entire evaluation is compromised, the evaluation can be conducted again by decision of the Evaluation Council.

The role of the Evaluation Council in quality assurance

The Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council makes decisions based on the results of the evaluations. It appoints the centres of excellence in the university and UAS sectors and decides whether a HEI meets the criteria set for HEI quality assurance systems. The FINHEEC members receive a draft of the audit report or written feedback given to the HEI approximately a week before their meeting. On the basis of the audit report, the Evaluation Council can come to a different conclusion than what is proposed by the audit group. It is the Evaluation Council's duty to ensure the impartiality and uniform quality of evaluations and audits.

The Evaluation Council participates in the continuous development of FINHEEC's activities. It organises its own annual development seminar and conducts a self-evaluation at the end of its term of office. After the annual Secretariat development seminar, the Secretariat draws up a memorandum on the development measures and reports the key indicators

pertaining to the activities. The memorandum and the report are presented to the Council. Thus, accountability procedures of both the Secretariat and Evaluation Council complement each other.

2.7 Non-conflict of interest mechanism

It is a part of good administration that a person with a conflict of interest does not in any way participate in the handling or evaluation of a matter. According to the Administrative Procedure Act, the provisions on the disqualification of officials apply also to members of multi-member bodies and other persons participating in the decision of a matter, as well as inspectors in their inspection duties (Section 27.2). These include the chairpersons and members of evaluation and audit groups. Thus, the disqualification of Council members, the Secretariat and experts is based on the Administrative Procedure Act, which for its part contributes to the credibility and objectivity of evaluation activities. The members of the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council or of evaluation or audit groups appointed by it do not participate in the evaluation of their own HEI or decision making pertaining to it in any way.

2.8 Appeals Procedure

Decisions made by the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council are not administrative decisions and the appeals procedure does not apply to them. The Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council follows good administrative practices in all its activities. However, a citizen has the right to make a complaint on the activities of a government body to the Parliamentary Ombudsman.

2.9 Development of the accountability procedures

The same development methods are applied to the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council accountability procedures as to other FINHEEC activities. The accountability procedures are continuously developed, for example in Secretariat meetings, and the quality assurance process is updated annually in the Secretariat development seminar.

Particular focus areas of quality assurance include verification of impact, target setting of indicators, charting and documenting stakeholder cooperation. In addition, communications produced by accountability procedures must be developed.

The FINHEEC quality manual is updated when needed. The Secretariat may make technical changes to the text and figures but all policy and content-related changes must be approved by the Evaluation Council. Significant changes are entered in the version history appended.

Appendices:

Appendix 1: Evaluation process

Process stage	Planning	Self-evaluation	External evaluation (incl. decision-making)	Reporting	Feedback and follow-up
Strategic aim	Suitable criteria, timetable, aim and method	HEI's understanding and production of relevant materials for the evaluation group	Verification and supplementation of data, making new observations	Clear presentation of findings	Receiving usable feedback / evaluation of impact (for HEI, auditing group and the secretary)
Success factors	Choosing the right evaluators and recognition of the most important themes. Utilisation of previous feedback data.	Clear guidelines provided for the HEI, relevant questions (in themes)	Organised and well-run site-visit, asking the right questions.	Distribution of labour and taking responsibility (in auditing group and secretariat)	Right timing and motivation / recognition of themes to be tailored in the survey
Indicator	HEI's feedback on the auditing group and criteria	HEI's feedback on guidelines provided for self-evaluation	HEI's feedback on auditing group and visitation arrangements	HEI feedback on quality of the report.	Response rate and in addition a qualitative indicator, with which the planner evaluates the usefulness of feedback
Means, measures, resources, responsibilities and competence	Development of communications and emphasising the importance of internal communications to the higher education institution	Aim at providing as clear guidelines as possible	Writing the report text in advance and instructing the chair properly	Emphasis on distribution of responsibility and work	Giving feedback to evaluators, survey conducted as early as possible

Appendix 2: Stakeholder process

Process stage	Recognition and choice of the most important stakeholders	Cooperation with national and international stakeholders	Evaluation of cooperation
Strategic aim	Annually, to recognise and choose the most important national and international stakeholders with whom to cooperate.	<p>To keep up a functioning contact with national and international partners.</p> <p>To stay in touch with the most recent development trends in the field in Finland and abroad and to influence, in particular, European evaluation activities.</p> <p>To build bridges between national and international higher education evaluation activities.</p>	To perceive the most important changes in national and international stakeholder relationships.
Success factor	The ability of focusing resources on the most useful relationships with regard to evaluation activities.	Well-functioning and useful contacts with networks and partners.	The ability to observe cooperation relationships objectively and open-mindedly.
Evaluation	The usefulness of cooperation relationships is evaluated annually in the secretariat development seminar. This is then compared with resources used for the maintenance of various cooperation relationships, for example, in the form of travel expenses and person-days.		
Means, measures, resource, responsibilities and competence	National and international partnerships are divided in two groups: the most important ones and others. Resources are focused in accordance with this classification.	Cooperation is done in the form of arranging and participation in various meetings and seminars and joint projects.	The list of previous year's most important national and international stakeholders assessed.

Appendix 3: Quality assurance process

Process stage	Production and acquisition of evaluation materials	Working with the materials	Analysis stage	Practical implementation
Description	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Evaluation of feedback •Indicators •Self-evaluation by the secretariat and the Council •Findings about secretariat and audit meetings •Annual report •Findings in development discussions •Website visits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Collating the evaluation materials •Summarising the most relevant information in comprehensive documents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Realised during the development seminar and secretariat and audit meetings •Going through the core and support processes by group, what are the results, what could be improved? •Going through the most relevant findings from the data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •New development focus areas and changes to documents •Recording the changes
Strategic aim	To acquire usable information on the activities as a basis for development	To summarise the essential in order to facilitate the analysis	To make key findings about the activities, solve problems and recognise good practices	To implement recognised development needs
Success factor	An appropriate number of evaluation mechanisms that do not encumber unnecessarily	Careful preliminary analysis of data	Active participation, sticking to the subject, eliciting commitment	Comprehensiveness of changes in documentation (ensuring all necessary changes are done)
Evaluation	A qualitative evaluation of the functioning of the accountability procedures given in the secretariat and Council self-evaluations and in the external evaluation of FINHEEC			
Means, measures, resource, responsibilities and competence	Annually evaluating what data is necessary, what else is needed, what is needed less?	Enough time, appropriate line-up involved	Group work as method, advance preparation	Recording as early as the analysis stage to which documents the matter pertains

Appendix 4: The Council action plan process

Process stage	Preparation of action plan / annual plan	Implementation of of action plan / annual plan	Evaluation of action plan
Evaluation Council	<p>Decisions and feedback of the previous FINHEEC The evaluation initiatives of the new FINHEEC</p> <p>Confirmation of the action plan</p>	<p>FINHEEC meetings: national evaluation policies, monitoring of international developments, appointment of planning and auditing groups, deciding on evaluation support, decisions on evaluation results</p> <p>Cooperation with Ministry of Education and HEIs</p>	<p>Evaluation of evaluation methods, e.g. auditing</p> <p>Evaluation of term of office Self-evaluation of FINHEEC activities</p>
Secretary general and the secretariat	<p>Analysis of initiatives and international challenges Cooperation with various bodies</p> <p>Proposal for action / annual plan</p>	<p>Preparation of projects Cooperation with Ministry of Education and HEIs</p> <p>Practical implementation and coordination of projects</p> <p>Reporting, informing of results, collecting feedback, follow-up</p>	<p>Analyses of feedback to FINHEEC</p> <p>Implementation of development measures</p>
Ministry of Education	<p>National evaluation plan Project initiatives</p> <p>Confirmation of FINHEEC budget</p>	<p>Annual negotiations between FINHEEC and Ministry of Education</p>	
Higher education institutes and external stakeholders	<p>Project initiatives Feedback on previous term of office evaluations</p> <p>Participation on the planning of evaluations</p>	<p>Participation in evaluations as an object of evaluation and members of auditing groups</p> <p>Giving feedback, participation in follow-up activities</p>	

Appendix 5: Version history of the quality manual

15 Jan 2009

Changes made to goal and process charts. Added Finnish higher education system in a nutshell, HEIs' role in quality assurance, responsibilities in the quality assurance system, grounds for deviating from the proposal of an audit group, updating of 'description of quality assurance system' document, and version history.

22 Jan 2009

Approved in the Evaluation Council meeting.

5 June 2009

The name of the document changed to Quality Manual. Changes made to goal chart. Added text on quality deviations, results and Evaluation Council development seminar. Updated 2009 evaluation process.

25 January 2010

Document updated with a number of new texts from FINHEEC's Self-evaluation for ENQA external review. English figures and process descriptions added.

5 August 2010

Document updated with more new texts from FINHEEC's Self-evaluation.