Foreword

The mission of the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC) as expressed in the relevant Decree is to assist Finnish universities and the Ministry of education in matters relating to evaluation. The main aim of FINHEEC is to improve Finnish higher education institutions and their international competitiveness through evaluations, support for quality work, provision of benchmarking data, improvement recommendations and the dissemination of best practices. The responsibility for utilising and applying the evaluation information rests with the higher education institutions (HEIs).

Since its creation in 1996, All FINHEEC’s operations have been based on enhancement-led evaluation. The method is based on trusting the HEIs to be responsible for the quality of their own activities, and the HEIs have found that it supports their activities and autonomy.

Currently, the main types of evaluations conducted by the FINHEEC are: audits of quality assurance systems of higher education institutions, subject-field specific, thematic evaluations and Centres of excellence evaluations in education.

The audit model was implemented in 2005–2007, and in November 2007, FINHEEC published a new edition of the audit manual, which defines the objectives, focus, methods, criteria and outcomes of the audit. According to the feedback and audit reports, the audits have clearly accelerated the systematic development of QA systems and measures in HEIs. Quality assurance has provided both tools for the internal management of the HEIs and guided them towards developing their activities in a comprehensive manner.

Programme and thematic evaluations are conducted in areas or fields that are either significant with regard to education and society, rapidly growing, developing, or problematic. Centres of Excellence evaluations are conducted separately on both higher education sectors. They are the only part of FINHEEC’s operations where financial incentives are utilised – selection of Centres of Excellence is a significant funding indicator for the Ministry of Education. The selection method has been reformed several times, in 2009 considerably.

The choice of Centres of Excellence and ongoing audits of higher education institutions’ quality assurance systems complement each other. While the audits are focused on the processes, the selection of Centres of Excellence evaluates the quality of the operations and their results.

All evaluation groups include representation from both sectors of higher education, students and working life. The involvement of students as full
members of evaluation groups has been a significant factor in all evaluation processes of FINHEEC from the very beginning, as has been the involvement of external stakeholders. Regardless of the close stakeholder co-operation, any decisions regarding evaluations are taken independently in accordance with predetermined criteria.

FINHEEC is actively involved in cooperation at the international and the European level in particular, and builds and maintains ties with evaluation organisations and networks in various countries. Also the audits of the QA systems aim to support the Finnish higher education institutions while they are developing their QA systems to meet European quality assurance principles.

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1 Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council in the National Context

1.1 The Higher Education System in Finland

In Finland, the Ministry of Education 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.

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. After national elections, every four years the Finnish government adopts 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, a strong continuity can be found 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). Universities conduct research and provide undergraduate teaching and postgraduate education based on it. The mission of the UAS is to train experts to serve the world of work and carry out research and development (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

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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 uses the traditional term of Polytechnic. FINHEEC uses the term University of Applied Sciences for the sake of clarity.
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.

Figure 1. The Finnish education system
1.1.1 Universities

According to the new Universities Act (558/2009), universities promote free research and education, provide higher education based on research, and educate students to serve their country and humankind. In carrying out this mission, universities are expected to interact with the surrounding society and strengthen the impact of research findings and artistic activities on society. All Finnish universities are public universities. From the first of January 2010, they comprise ten multidisciplinary universities, one school of economics and business administration, two universities of technology, and three art academies. Universities receive about two thirds of their funding directly from the budget of the Ministry of Education, while the rest of the funding is based on competition from different, mainly public, sources. The guiding principles of the university education and research are institutional autonomy and academic freedom, which are guaranteed in the Constitutional law and in the Universities Act.

University degrees

Universities confer Bachelor's, Master's and Doctoral degrees. In the new degree system introduced in 2005, students first study for the first-cycle Bachelor's degree and then for the second-cycle Master's degree. The scope of studies is determined in ECTS credits. One year of full-time study is equivalent to 60 ECTS credits. Bachelor's and Master's degrees carry 180 (normative study time 3 years) and 120 (normative study time 2 years) respectively. In some fields, such as Medicine, degrees are more extensive and take longer to complete (nor are these degrees yet part of the two-cycle-system). The first-cycle degree consists of basic and intermediate studies in the main subject (or degree programme), including a Bachelor's thesis, and studies in one or more subsidiary subjects. For the second-cycle degree, students must complete advanced studies in the main subject and prepare a Master's thesis, in addition to the Bachelor's programme. In the arts, the thesis may also be artistic proof of learning and skills.

University degrees are regulated by Government Decree on University Degrees. The scopes of degrees are stipulated in the decree pertaining to degrees and the university degree regulations. Universities and their faculties decide on degree regulations and curricula.

In most fields, it is also possible to take a pre-doctoral, third-cycle Licentiate degree, which takes about two years after Master's degree. The full-time studies for Doctor's degree take four years after the completion of a Master's degree. A student who has been admitted to complete the Doctor's degree must complete a given amount of studies, show independent and critical
thinking in the field of research and write a Doctor’s dissertation and defend it in public.

All students in higher education must complete courses in the native language (Finnish or Swedish), in the other national language (Swedish or Finnish) and in one or two foreign languages. Degrees may also comprise either compulsory or optional practical training. In addition to the compulsory studies, students may include extra courses in their degree. Universities also normally offer a fairly wide variety of courses and modules in English.

**Doctoral education**

Finnish doctoral education is based mainly on the system of the doctoral schools\(^2\) established by the Ministry of Education in 1995, with the following aims: to improve the quality and efficiency of doctoral education, to shorten the time-to-degree, to lower the average age of new doctors, to improve supervision, and to increase cooperation between research groups and internationally. The doctoral school system is a tri-partite system between the Ministry of Education, the Academy of Finland and universities. It has been expanded gradually, and the number of schools has doubled during the last 15 years. At the moment, the system comprises 112 doctoral schools with over 6,000 full-time and salaried doctoral students (out of approx. 20,000 in total engaged in doctoral education) working on their doctoral dissertations in these schools.

Most doctoral schools are national, network-type joint programmes among several universities, and possibly research institutes and university hospitals. They comprise fixed-term programmes. These doctoral schools have been selected by the Academy of Finland on the basis of peer-review assessment. The Ministry of Education has granted up to 42 million euros annually to the doctoral schools. In addition, the Academy allocates annually more than 4 million euros to the doctoral schools for their course activities, coordination and internationalisation.

**1.1.2 Universities of applied sciences**

According to national legislation, the mission of universities of applied sciences is to provide higher education based on the requirements of working life and its development as well as on research and artistic premises and to prepare students for professional expert assignments. In addition, the

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\(^2\) Most sources in Finland use the term *graduate school* for the Finnish *tutkijakoulu*. Since this term is generally misunderstood in international context, this report uses the term *doctoral school*. 
universities of applied sciences carry out applied research and development work that supports the world of work and regional development and takes the economic structure of the region into account.

The universities of applied sciences were established as polytechnics in 1991 through merger operations of former vocational and higher post-secondary colleges with the aim of raising the level of education. The first polytechnics were established as experimental higher education institutions in 1991–1992 following the Finnish tradition of gradual reforms. However, these ‘experiments’ were soon expanded into a system-wide practise and the first universities of applied sciences began to operate on a permanent basis in 1996. There are 25 universities of applied sciences, six of which are maintained by municipal organisations, six by joint municipal organisations and 13 by private organisations (situation 1.1.2010).

In addition these Universities of Applied Sciences operating under the Ministry of education, there are also Åland University of Applied Sciences, operating in the autonomous Åland Islands, and the Police College of Finland, which is subordinate to the Ministry of the Interior. Universities of applied sciences are currently being consolidated into stronger entities. In their objectives, universities of applied sciences emphasise the development of learning processes, quality enhancement, innovation and internationalisation.

In addition to all these higher education institutions, there is also a National Defence University with a strong vocational orientation in military education operating under the supervision of the Ministry of Defence.

UAS degrees

The first-cycle UAS degree consists of 210 or 240 credits (3 to 4 years of full-time study) depending on the study field. The degree titles indicate the field of study, e.g. Bachelor of Engineering or Bachelor of Health Care. Studies leading to UAS degrees are organised as degree programmes comprising core and professional studies, elective studies, work placement and a Bachelor’s thesis. Holders of the Bachelor-level UAS degree, who have additionally gained work experience, can upgrade their degree in a second-cycle UAS Master’s programme consisting of 60 or 90 ECTS credits. The UAS do not confer doctoral degrees, since the responsibility of doctoral studies rests solely on universities.

The government decree on UAS (352/2003 including amendments) defines the objectives, extent and overall structure of UAS degrees. The Ministry of Education confirms the degree programmes of UAS, and within the framework of these regulations, the UAS decide on the content and structure of their degrees in more detail. The UAS also decide on their annual curricula and forms of instruction.
1.2 Entrance to higher education

Universities select their students independently by means of different types of entrance examinations. An admitted student may only accept one student place in degree education in a given academic year. With a view to simplifying student selection procedures, a joint universities application system was adopted in the 2008/2009 academic year.

Student admission may be based on:

- the grades attained in the matriculation certificate (and in the general upper secondary school (Finnish: lukio, Swedish: gymnasium) leaving certificate) together with the results of an entrance, which is the most common procedure;
- the results of an entrance test only; or
- the grades attained in the matriculation certificate and in the upper secondary school leaving certificate only.

In addition, some fields may place additional emphasis on work experience, studies, practical training, etc. Entrance tests are designed by the university, faculty or department in question to assess the applicants’ motivation, suitability and aptitude in the field concerned. The tests are often based on required reading. There may also be interviews or material-based examinations, and students may be required to demonstrate their skills (for example, at art academies), etc. Students without the certificate of matriculation are usually selected on the basis of the entrance test. Being autonomous institutions, universities decide on the intake of their students.

The entry requirement to education leading to a UAS degree is a secondary school-leaving certificate or the matriculation examination, a vocational qualification or equivalent studies abroad. All students apply to universities of applied sciences through a national application system. Universities of applied sciences themselves decide on the selection criteria, the arrangement of entrance examinations and student admissions. Practically all applications are submitted in electronic format via the Internet.

Upon completion of all the studies required for a degree, the student is granted a degree certificate. The certificate is awarded by the university or faculty and the form of the certificate is decided by the university. The university can also provide students with a certificate for the studies they have completed while still continuing on the degree programme. Students will also receive a Diploma Supplement in English. Each student’s study credits are registered on the credit record, of which the student may request a transcript, where necessary. The UAS’s grant students a degree certificate when they complete a degree. On request, students may also be granted a certificate for the studies they have completed while still continuing on the degree
programme. UAS also grant a diploma supplement intended especially for international use for people who have completed a UAS degree or studies. The supplement includes the necessary information on the institution as well as studies and credits referred to on the degree certificate and their level and status in the education system.

1.3 Recent developments in Finnish higher education

National Qualifications Framework
In August 2009, a committee appointed by the Ministry of Education submitted its report for a National Qualifications Framework. The report defines the levels of degrees in terms of knowledge, skills and competences and proposes which levels Finnish qualifications should be placed on in the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). Furthermore, the report describes the quality assurance procedures for Finnish degrees and education, the current state and practices of recognising learning, and the measures that have been taken in different administrative sectors to promote the recognition of learning. The NQF places degrees on to eight levels. Finnish postgraduate degrees are placed on level 8, Master’s degrees on level 7, Bachelor’s on 6 and so on. The report further recommends that a law should be made on the qualifications framework, which would combine the legislation on Finnish degrees. By 2012 every Finnish degree certificate and Europass must include a statement on the level of the degree in EQF.

University reform
The aim of the new Universities Act (effective 1.1.2010) is to extend the autonomy of universities by giving them the status of an independent legal personality, either as public corporations or as foundations under private law. In addition, the management and governance of universities will be changed in order to make the decision-making more efficient. Consequently, university rectors will be made executive managers responsible for the university board which consists of at least 40 per cent of external (to university) members. Members of the university community (professors, other personnel, students) will continue to be represented in the board. All members of the university board are elected by the university collegiate body, which may also decide to have an external majority on the board, if it so wishes. The chair and the vice-chair of the board are elected from amongst the external members.
Parliament passed the Universities Act in 16 June 2009 and the new law will come into force on January 1st 2010 replacing the Universities Act of 1997. Simultaneously with the new act, the number of universities is also changing. The universities of Joensuu and Kuopio have merged into the University of Eastern Finland, the Turku School of Economics is merged with the University of Turku, and the Helsinki University of Technology, Helsinki School of Economics and University of Art and Design are merged into Aalto University. All these mergers aim to increase efficiency and effectiveness of Finnish higher education.

The reform will change considerably the whole university sector. University staff will no longer be civil servants but they will become contracted employers. According to the legislator, the universities will be able to pursue independent human resources policies and improve their attractiveness as an employer.

The universities have more autonomy in using their income from capital and to supplement their financing with donations and business activities. It is hoped that this will facilitate the targeting of research and education resources and allow the universities to develop stronger profiles on the basis of their strengths. In turn, it is hoped that this will improve their capacity for operating in the international environment. The government may also make financial investments for the universities. University administration and management are being reformed to enable universities to respond more flexibly and independently to the challenges arising from their new financial status.

As legal entities, the universities will have full financial liability, which emphasises the importance of strategic management. The aim of the reform is to consolidate the influence, societal relations and financial skills of the boards of universities subject to public law.

Finnish Government will continue to guarantee sufficient core funding tied to the rise in costs for the universities. In addition, the universities will be able to apply for competed public funding and use the revenue from their business ventures, donations and bequests and the return on their capital for financing their operations.

Universities are facing mounting challenges posed by the increased fiscal responsibility and changing administration and internal steering. Information on good practice and useful solutions provided by FINHEECs evaluations are likely to be needed more than ever in this transformative period.
1.4 Steering of higher education

Universities and UAS receive most of their funding from the Finnish government. Direct government funding covers the majority of HEI budgets. The resources allocated by the Ministry of Education consist of core funding and performance-based funding. Core funding is calculated by means of a core funding formula. HEI activities are governed by three-year performance agreements signed with the Ministry of Education based on performance negotiations. The agreements specify the objectives of HEI operations, such as degree targets, resources, monitoring and evaluation of target achievement, and development targets. Financing is mainly based on the number of students. During the annual performance negotiations, the HEIs receive feedback, first orally and later in writing, on their previous year’s performance and on development needs.

Performance-based funds are used to reward HEIs for the quality, effectiveness and efficiency of their operations. Basic university research in the Ministry of Education sector is largely financed by the Academy of Finland. The Academy is also responsible for the evaluation of research. Universities receive substantial external funding from various external sources for research projects and other purposes. Universities and UAS also have income from commercial services, such as continuing professional education.

1.4.1 Higher education databases

Monitoring the performance of the universities and the UAS is one of the cornerstones of the present steering system. In order to have correct data on the institutions of higher education two databases have been established one for the universities and one for the UAS. The universities and UAS report on the attainment of their objectives in their operating reviews and by entering the relevant statistics into the databases maintained by the Ministry of Education (KOTA database for universities (http://www.csc.fi/kota/kota.html) and AMKOTA-database for UAS (http://www.csc.fi/amkota). The databases are both open to public in Finnish, Swedish and English.

The databases contain e.g. the following data:

- Applications and admissions
- Students
- Foreign students
- Degrees
- Target number of degrees
- Duration of studies
- Graduate placement
- Teaching staff
- Other staff
- Appropriations
- Costs per result area
- Premises
- Continuing education
- Open university instruction
- Researchers and teachers visiting abroad
- Scientific publications
- Courses taught in a foreign language in undergraduate programmes.

1.4.2 Evaluation in the context of Finnish Higher Education system

Performance-based, quantitative funding began in the 1980s hand in hand with the development of KOTA and later AMKOTA databases. Most of the performance indicators relate to amounts of degrees, full-time students and so on. Since measuring quality of education quantitatively is notoriously difficult, a qualitative component is seen as necessary to complement the quantitative steering based on performance indicators. The division of labour in quality assurance places the main steering and decision-making power in the Ministry of Education. The role of FINHEEC is to assist higher education institutions in development of higher education and quality assurance
systems by evaluation and other activities. The main responsibility for the quality of education, research and other activities, however, firmly resides in the institutions of higher education themselves.

1.5 The history of FINHEEC and evaluation in Finnish Higher Education

Since 1966, the predecessor of FINHEEC, the Higher Education Council (Korkeakouluneuvosto) worked as an advisory body to the Ministry of Education in matters related to development of the higher education system. The Higher Education Council (HEC) had a broad mandate to prepare and handle important matters dealing with planning and developing Finnish Higher Education. In practice the HEC gave statements on HEI’s budgetary proposals but also conducted study field-specific evaluations to develop degrees, proposed the first Centres of Excellence in education and developed performance criteria for the HEIs.

In the 1990s the steering of higher education shifted towards performance agreements between the ministry and HEIs and the need for the expert opinion changed. Meanwhile the Finnish Council of University Rectors and Rectors’ Conference of Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences emerged to represent the higher education institutions on a national scale. Evaluations of research had been conducted since 1983 by the Academy of Finland. The Academy conducts, coordinates and commissions international evaluations of research with a view to improving both its performance and the quality and impact of Finnish and research. The results of these evaluations are put to extensive use in various development projects. Research evaluations and assessments tie in closely with foresight efforts.

The Ministry of Education had financed institutional evaluations of universities and universities of applied sciences. In addition, most of the study field-evaluations had been conducted by the HEC or by a single expert. HEIs had also financed and coordinated institutional evaluations for themselves.

FINHEEC was founded when the decree (1320/1995) for Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council became effective on 1.1.1996. On the same date the first FINHEEC Council was appointed. Its tasks and goals have remained largely unchanged to this day. The logic was to separate evaluation of higher education from the Ministry to ensure independent evaluation.

Initially the objective of the FINHEEC was defined as the development of evaluation procedures in the HEIs nationwide. FINHEEC assisted in institutional evaluations by training experts, providing consultancy services for
the institutions, building a database of information about Finnish and foreign evaluation practices, developing evaluation methodology, promoting research into evaluation, intensifying international co-operation and publishing related literature.

The second important objective was to commence systematic evaluations. In the university sector, FINHEEC’s role was to conduct institutional evaluations of operations, where the university could choose a relevant field for the focus of the evaluation. Thirteen out of twenty Finnish universities decided to take part in the exercise. The University of Helsinki chose administration as the focus of the evaluation, for example, while the University of Tampere chose teaching. In the university of applied sciences sector however, FINHEEC conducted evaluations of quality assurance mechanisms until 2004.

The third main duty was the accreditation of universities of applied sciences. The ultimate power of decision was to remain, however, with the Government. FINHEEC established an accreditation sub-committee consisting of representatives of teachers, students and world of work outside higher education institutions. In 1995–1996 the accreditation and extension of universities of applied sciences were evaluated on the basis of applications. Between 1997–1999 a more in-depth evaluation was added to the procedure; site-visits became part of accreditation procedures. The Accreditation Subcommittee members visited each temporary university of applied sciences applying for accreditation, including HEIs which had applied to be extended by the incorporation of a new educational establishment. The Accreditation Subcommittee compiled reports of each evaluation, which were published in FINHEEC’s publication series.

From 1999 to 2007 a subcommittee of the Council, the Accreditation Board of Professional Courses was responsible for accreditation and keeping a register. The register is still available on the FINHEEC website.

So far, the last audits of quality work and institutional evaluations were conducted in 2003–2004. Since then FINHEEC has been conducting three types of evaluations: audits of quality assurance systems of Higher Education Institutions, evaluations of centres of excellence in education and thematic and educational field-specific evaluations.
The Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC)\(^3\) is an independent expert body, the task of which is to assist higher education institutions and the Ministry of Education in performing higher education evaluations, thus promoting the quality of higher education. The 12 members of the Evaluation Council are selected for a maximum four-year term of office. The nomination is made by the Minister of Education from the individuals put forward by the higher education institutions and student unions. The Evaluation Council comprises individuals working in universities, universities of applied sciences, student unions and in the world of work outside higher education institutions. The Council independently chooses its chair and vice-chair for the duration of the term in office.

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 national 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 is 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 (see 3.2 in this report). Some of the Council members are re-elected to ensure continuity of practical knowledge and experience of activities. The decisions of the Evaluation Council are implemented by an 11-member Secretariat led by the Secretary General. The Secretary-General 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

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\(^3\) This document refers to the Council when referring to the 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 of the Evaluation Council and the Secretariat.
foster international cooperation. The Board may consist of national and international experts under the chairmanship of the chair of the Evaluation Council.

The Official Status of the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council


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.

Under Decree 548/2005, the Evaluation Council is also in charge of the tasks allocated to it with regard to UAS qualifications completed in the autonomous province of Åland. The remit of FINHEEC additionally encompasses the development of evaluation methods, enhancing expertise, training provision, publishing, and information services.

The FINHEEC Council

The Council in 2010 consists of the following persons:

Chair: Professor Riitta Pyykkö, University of Turku

Vice-chair: Rector Pentti Rauhala, Laurea University of Applied Sciences

Members:
Vice-Rector Ulla-Maija Forsberg, University of Helsinki
Educational officer, Juhana Harju, The National Union of University Students in Finland (SYL)
Secretary of Educational Affairs Mikko Heinikoski, The National Union of Finnish University of Applied Sciences Students (SAMOK)
Director of Development Päivi Jaatinen, Satakunta University of Applied Sciences
Entrepreneur Piia Kolho, Papima Oy

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

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

- Audits of quality assurance systems of higher education institutions
- Evaluations of Centres of Excellence in education (on both university and UAS sectors)
- 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 assure and 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.5

Evaluations of centres of excellence are conducted separately in both the university and universities of applied sciences sectors. FINHEEC chooses the centres of excellence for each three-year performance agreement period. The latest centres of excellence were selected for 2010–2012 in university sector and UAS sectors. The Ministry of Education takes the selected units into account in its appropriations to the UAS.

Thematic evaluations and evaluations of educational fields are conducted in important, fast-growing and developing or problematic fields with regard to educational or social policy. FINHEEC may also undertake evaluation projects under a mandate from the Ministry of Education. 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, provided that these fit thematically into FINHEEC’s strategy. In practice, contracted evaluations have concerned only higher education institutions that are not administered

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5 See http://www.kka.fi/Audit
by the Ministry of Education (the National Defence University, the Police College of Finland and the Åland University of Applied Sciences).

FINHEEC’s activities also go beyond conducting evaluations. FINHEEC organises seminars, where the principle of enhancement-led evaluation is further promoted and good practice is 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 active co-operation with a number of stakeholders, such as the rectors’ conferences on university and UAS sectors, student unions and the ENQA secretariat. 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 other stakeholders.

Action plan and Standing order

FINHEEC, the Ministry of Education, Finnish Education Evaluation Council⁶ 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 the focus areas and general policies of its activities at the start of its term of office. 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. In addition, the Secretariat draws up an annual work plan, which describes the distribution of labour for the year.

⁶ The Finnish Education Evaluation Council (Koulutuksen arviointineuvosto) conducts evaluations of education in basic, upper secondary, vocational and adult education.
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.

Quality manual

FINHEEC’s internal quality assurance system is described in the Quality manual. Many parts of this self-evaluation are identical with the manual. It describes the goals of FINHEEC and the quality assurance system, processes and the monitoring of results. The Quality manual is updated as necessary. It works as a tool to steer activities and increase transparency. The Manual is published on FINHEEC’s website.

Operational principles

Under the Decree on FINHEEC, the mission of agency is to assist higher education institutions and the Ministry of Education 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 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, 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 drivers 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 Compliance with the European standards and guidelines for the external quality assurance of higher education

2.1 Use of internal quality assurance procedures

Standard:
External quality assurance procedures should take into account the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part 1 of the European Standards and Guidelines.

Guidelines:
The standards for internal quality assurance contained in Part 1 provide a valuable basis for the external quality assessment process. It is important that the institutions’ own internal policies and procedures are carefully evaluated in the course of external procedures, to determine the extent to which the standards are being met. If higher education institutions are to be able to demonstrate the effectiveness of their own internal quality assurance processes, and if those processes properly assure quality and standards, then external processes might be less intensive than otherwise.

FINHEEC Compliance:
The Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council conduct audits of quality assurance systems of Higher Education Institutions. Auditing focuses on two levels: the HEI’s QA system as a whole and the quality assurance related to the HEI’s basic mission. The target of the audit is the HEI’s QA system, developed by each HEI starting from its own premises and objectives. Auditing assesses the comprehensiveness, performance, transparency, and effectiveness of the QA system, as well as the way in which the HEI monitors, evaluates and develops its own QA system.
2.2 Development of external quality assurance processes

Standard:
The aims and objectives of quality assurance processes should be determined before the processes themselves are developed, by all those responsible (including higher education institutions) and should be published with a description of the procedures to be used.

Guidelines:
In order to ensure clarity of purpose and transparency of procedures, external quality assurance methods should be designed and developed through a process involving key stakeholders, including higher education institutions. The procedures that are finally agreed should be published and should contain explicit statements of the aims and objectives of the processes as well as a description of the procedures to be used. As external quality assurance makes demands on the institutions involved, a preliminary impact assessment should be undertaken to ensure that the procedures to be adopted are appropriate and do not interfere more than necessary with the normal work of higher education institutions.

FINHEEC Compliance:
The European Ministers of Education, convening in Bologna in 1999, set a target to realise a coherent and cohesive EHEA by 2010. Finland is involved in this process along with 44 other countries. Held in Berlin in 2003, the third Bologna follow-up meeting set an intermediate development objective for 2005, with quality assurance of higher education as one of the priorities. The Berlin Conference of Ministers of Education in 2003 invited the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and European higher education co-operation bodies to prepare European standards, procedures and guidelines for quality assurance in higher education for the Bergen Conference of European Ministers responsible for Higher Education. The report submitted to the ministerial conference put forward proposals for European co-operation, principles of national quality assurance, best practices of HEI quality assurance audits or comparable procedures, and general standards and guidelines for quality assurance.

The Finnish response to the aims and objectives set out in the Berlin communiqué was deliberated by a committee on quality assurance representing HEIs, their students, the Ministry of Education and FINHEEC. The committee found that, as regards different components of quality assurance set out in the communiqué, the Finnish system includes a division of responsibilities between various bodies and institutions; the evaluation of HEIs and degree programmes; student participation; and participation in international
co-operation. On the other hand, Finland has not used accreditation as such, certification, or any other clearly demonstrable system as a quality assurance procedure. In its 2004 report, the committee proposed that the universities and universities of applied sciences develop quality assurance systems covering all their operations and that these be regularly evaluated by FINHEEC. With a view to a clearer national system, the committee recommended a system in which 1) the HEIs are responsible for their own quality assurance, 2) the Ministry of Education determines the evaluation criteria and procedure used in instituting or terminating programmes, and, in special cases, evaluating existing education, and 3) FINHEEC is responsible for evaluating the quality of education and institutional performance.

The audit process and the criteria were further developed in a large seminar held by FINHEEC with some 200 participants from HEIs. The explicit aims and objectives of the audit process were published in the report: Audits of Quality Assurance Systems of Finnish Higher Education Institutions, Audit Manual for 2005–2007. The report was also available on the FINHEEC website.

A revised version of the audit manual was developed for 2008–2011. The audit criteria were improved by changing overlapping criteria and clarifying the criteria descriptions. Also a number of technical improvements were made for the second audit manual based on the feedback of HEIs and experience accumulated by the FINHEEC. The development for the audit model for 2012 onwards has already been started at FINHEEC. A substantial amount of feedback on the current model has been gathered from individual audits and a follow-up seminar held in Spring 2009 will be used in this development process. In addition, minor changes to the audit process have also been made in line with the principle of continuous development.

FINHEEC Council conducted a self-evaluation in August 2009 on the current audit model for the development work of the second round of audits to begin in 2012. Inclusiveness and flexibility were considered to be among the strengths of the model which allows various different types of quality assurance systems to be evaluated using the same criteria. The audits were seen as highly developmental for the institutions in question, providing substantial amount of useful feedback. The participation of working-life representatives and students was also seen as extremely beneficial for the model. The Council did, however, note that a strong emphasis is placed in the criteria on functioning of the quality assurance system as a whole. Furthermore, the model emphasises the role of external stakeholders in the quality assurance work of the institutions, when in reality the stakeholders are rarely keen to co-operate in this field, but rather comment on the
substance of education instead. In addition, the Council considered written reports somewhat problematic as a means of presenting the results. Open discussion in the publication seminars complements the various points stated in the reports and should be encouraged.

### 2.3 Criteria for decisions

**Standard:**

Any formal decisions made as a result of an external quality assurance activity should be based on explicit published criteria that are applied consistently.

**Guidelines:**

Formal decisions made by quality assurance agencies have a significant impact on the institutions and programmes that are judged. In the interests of equity and reliability, decisions should be based on published criteria and interpreted in a consistent manner. Conclusions should be based on recorded evidence and agencies should have in place ways of moderating conclusions, if necessary.

**FINHEEC Compliance:**

All formal decisions made by the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council on outcomes of evaluations are based upon published criteria. In case of audits, the criteria are published in the Audit Manual. Conclusions of the audit group are based on written documents and interviews at the HEI. The decision made by the FINHEEC Council is based on the information provided by the audit group. The chair of the audit group gives a presentation at a meeting of the council and is available for questions. The uniform interpretation of audit criteria is also assured by audit training which all audit groups receive. For Centres of Excellence evaluations, the criteria are published in Project Plans, available on the FINHEEC website.

### 2.4 Processes fit for purpose

**Standard:**

All external quality assurance processes should be designed specifically to ensure their fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for them.

**Guidelines:**

Quality assurance agencies within the EHEA undertake different external processes for different purposes and in different ways. It is of the first importance that agencies should operate procedures which are fit for their own defined and published purposes.
Experience has shown, however, that there are some widely-used elements of external review processes which not only help to ensure their validity, reliability and usefulness, but also provide a basis for the European dimension to quality assurance. Amongst these elements the following are particularly noteworthy:

- insistence that the experts undertaking the external quality assurance activity have appropriate skills and are competent to perform their task;
- the exercise of care in the selection of experts;
- the provision of appropriate briefing or training for experts;
- the use of international experts;
- participation of students;
- ensuring that the review procedures used are sufficient to provide adequate evidence to support the findings and conclusions reached;
- the use of the self-evaluation/site visit/draft report/published report/follow-up model of review;
- recognition of the importance of institutional improvement and enhancement policies as a fundamental element in the assurance of quality.

FINHEEC Compliance:

In audits, the FINHEEC Council appoints the audit group. The audit group is normally composed of five members, three of whom are from HEIs, one a student representative and one a work life representative. In appointing the groups, care is taken to include representatives of both higher education sectors, as well as the expertise of various of the HEI’s staff groups (management and administration, teaching and research as well as support services). The audit group should also include people with previous audit experience.

The auditors must meet the following criteria:
1. sound knowledge of the higher education field
2. experience in evaluation/auditing
3. knowledge of quality management/QA systems
4. participation in auditor training organised by FINHEEC.

The FINHEEC has also recruited audit group members from different HEIs in order to spread the experience and expertise gained as widely as possible in the higher education system. Typically some members will be persons who have served in an audit group before in order to strengthen the uniformity of evaluation from one audit process to another.

Before the appointment of the audit group, the HEI can comment on its planned composition. The HEIs have a choice of a national or an international audit group. The role and number of foreign auditors can be determined separately for each audit. So far, very few HEIs have chosen an international audit since much of the material in HEIs is in Finnish.
FINHEEC expects, however, to see more international audits in the second round starting in 2012.

FINHEEC contracts with the auditors on the following aspects:
1. expert tasks
2. report writing obligation
3. fee
4. any other terms and conditions of the assignment.

The secretary of the audit group is a member of the FINHEEC Secretariat.

The HEI involved in an audit process collects the audit material from its own QA system, the purpose being to provide the audit group with sufficient information and evidence to assess the comprehensiveness, performance and effectiveness as well as transparency of the QA system. The HEI must compile the audit material to allow the auditors to get a picture of the HEI organisation, the QA system and its links to the operative steering system, as well as evidence of the QA system performance.

The audit material must include the following documents:
- basic material for the audit and
- evidence and samples chosen by the HEI to substantiate the performance of the QA system.

After becoming acquainted with the audit material the Audit group will conduct a site-visit to the HEI. One objective of the audit visit is to verify and complement the picture of the HEI’s QA system, obtained on the basis of the audit material. Another is to make the audit visit an interactive event, thus contributing to the development of the HEI’s quality assurance. Depending on the size of the HEI, the duration of an audit visit is two to five days. During the visit, the group will interview various groups including management, teachers, other staff members, students and external stakeholders.

In Centres of Excellence (CoE) evaluations, thematic evaluations and evaluations of educational fields, the FINHEEC Council also appoints the evaluation group. The groups also include a student representative and a work life representative. Other members are from the two higher education sectors and must meet the same criteria as auditors, however, the knowledge of quality management/QA systems is not required. Special training is also provided for members of these evaluation groups. International experts are used when necessary.

The HEIs also produce a self-evaluation document for CoE and thematic evaluations. Site-visits are also normally utilised in FINHEECs evaluations. In CoE evaluations written feedback is produced to all HEIs which take part in the exercise. In thematic and study-field specific evaluations the feedback provided is normally more general since the focus is a wider phenomenon.
The methods for these types of evaluations are determined on a case-by-case basis since the topics and specific objectives of the evaluations vary a great deal. A follow-up evaluation is undertaken three years after the completion of a thematic or a study-field specific evaluation.

2.5 Reporting

**Standard:**
*Reports should be published and should be written in a style which is clear and readily accessible to its intended readership. Any decisions, commendations or recommendations contained in reports should be easy for a reader to find.*

**Guidelines:**
*In order to ensure maximum benefit from external quality assurance processes, it is important that reports should meet the identified needs of the intended readership. Reports are sometimes intended for different readership groups and this will require careful attention to structure, content, style and tone. In general, reports should be structured to cover description, analysis (including relevant evidence), conclusions, commendations, and recommendations. There should be sufficient preliminary explanation to enable a lay reader to understand the purposes of the review, its form, and the criteria used in making decisions. Key findings, conclusions and recommendations should be easily locatable by readers. Reports should be published in a readily accessible form and there should be opportunities for readers and users of the reports (both within the relevant institution and outside it) to comment on their usefulness.*

**FINHEEC Compliance:**
**FINHEEC** publishes all its reports on its website in full. The majority of reports are also printed and sent to the relevant stakeholders including HEIs.

Audit reports follow a uniform structure including:
- a description of the audit process
- a description of the HEI under review and its QA system
- audit findings, itemised by audit targets
- conclusions
  - strengths and best practices
  - recommendations
  - a proposal by the audit group as to whether the HEI’s QA system should pass the audit or be subjected to a subsequent re-audit.

The audit report ends with the FINHEEC decision on whether the HEI passes the audit or whether its QA system needs to be re-audited. The audit report is published in the language used in the audit with abstracts in Finnish, Swedish and English.
Other evaluation reports generally have a similar structure where description of the process, findings and conclusions are divided into different chapters and key findings, strengths and weaknesses are clearly stated in the final chapter of the report. All reports include abstracts in Finnish, Swedish and English. The HEI has an opportunity to check the report for factual errors before the report is sent to the Council. The report is made public at a seminar held at the HEI, where staff, students and stakeholders are present. The key findings are presented by the chair of the audit group. The chair of FINHEEC also attends all publication seminars. The report is published online on the FINHEEC website well before the seminar so that all parties have an opportunity to acquaint themselves with the document. The process of report publishing has greatly benefited from HEIs’ feedback.

2.6 Follow-up procedures

Standard:
Quality assurance processes which contain recommendations for action or which require a subsequent action plan, should have a predetermined follow-up procedure which is implemented consistently.

Guidelines:
Quality assurance is not principally about individual external scrutiny events: It should be about continuously trying to do a better job. External quality assurance does not end with the publication of the report and should include a structured follow-up procedure to ensure that recommendations are dealt with appropriately and any required action plans drawn up and implemented. This may involve further meetings with institutional or programme representatives. The objective is to ensure that areas identified for improvement are dealt with speedily and that further enhancement is encouraged.

FINHEEC Compliance:
The audit group issues an appraisal of the development stage of the QA system by each audit target, using this criteria to make a proposal to FINHEEC as to whether the HEI passes the audit or whether a re-audit is needed. The audit group can propose that the HEI passes the audit if all audit targets meet the minimum criteria of an “emerging” system, and that the QA system as a whole (audit target 7) is at least “developing”. On the basis of the proposal of the audit group, FINHEEC will decide whether the HEI’s QA system passes the audit or whether a re-audit is needed. Furthermore, FINHEEC may decide to deviate from the proposal of the audit group. If a re-audit of the HEI’s QA is required, it will take place in about two years from the audit
proper, and it will focus particularly on the improvement proposals made. A separate report on the re-audit will also be published in FINHEEC’s series. FINHEEC maintains a register on its website of HEIs that have undergone an audit. FINHEEC issues an audit certificate to the HEIs passing the audit. The audit of the HEI’s QA system is repeated every six years.

FINHEEC organises audit follow-up seminars to support the development of the HEIs’ QA systems three years after the audit. The first seminar was held in Spring 2009 and the next will take place in Spring 2010. One purpose of the seminars is to provide feedback on the QA system development work to the HEIs within about three years from the latest audit. The participants also prepare for the seminar by submitting a short self-evaluation on their developments. The occasion also provides an excellent opportunity to assess the impact of the audits and of quality assurance in Finnish higher education in general. Another purpose is to exchange experience and best practice in QA among the HEIs. The seminars are open to all HEIs.

FINHEEC normally conducts a follow-up three years after all thematic and study-field specific evaluations. The Council appoints a new, more compact evaluation group consisting of the members of the original group. The focus of the follow-up is to evaluate measures undertaken in the field concerning the findings and recommendations of the original evaluation. Site-visits are normally not conducted in the follow-ups but the information is gathered through questionnaires or short self-evaluation reports. The evaluation group writes a report which is published on the FINHEEC’s website.

### 2.7 Periodic reviews

**Standard:**
External quality assurance of institutions and/or programmes should be undertaken on a cyclical basis. The length of the cycle and the review procedures to be used should be clearly defined and published in advance.

**Guidelines:**
Quality assurance is not a static but a dynamic process. It should be continuous and not “once in a lifetime”. It does not end with the first review or with the completion of the formal follow-up procedure. It has to be periodically renewed. Subsequent external reviews should take into account progress that has been made since the previous event. The process to be used in all external reviews should be clearly defined by the external quality assurance agency and its demands on institutions should not be greater than are necessary for the achievement of its objectives.
FINHEEC Compliance:
The audit of the HEI’s QA system is valid for six years. The audit is therefore repeated in six years. As stated above, FINHEEC organises a follow-up seminar three years after the audit to spread good practice and follow the development of the QA system. The development for the next round of quality audits is currently underway.

2.8 System-wide analyses

Standard:
Quality assurance agencies should produce from time to time summary reports describing and analysing the general findings of their reviews, evaluations, assessments etc.

Guidelines:
All external quality assurance agencies collect a wealth of information about individual programmes and/or institutions and this provides material for structured analyses across whole higher education systems. Such analyses can provide very useful information about developments, trends, emerging good practice and areas of persistent difficulty or weakness and can become useful tools for policy development and quality enhancement. Agencies should consider including a research and development function within their activities, to help them extract maximum benefit from their work.

FINHEEC Compliance:
FINHEEC has produced a number of summary reports or system-wide analyses on its activities. In 2003 FINHEEC published an impact assessment on accreditations of professional courses. In 2004 the Council published an extensive description on all different evaluation methods and a comprehensive analysis on the impact of study-field specific evaluations carried out between 1997–2003. FINHEEC has also drafted a summary report of the results of audits carried out between 2005–2008. The 40-page report will be translated in to English and published on the website. In addition, a summary of all the good practice stated in audit reports between 2005–2009 has been published on the website. From 2010, FINHEEC will publish an annual report of activities, which also includes a summary of key findings from evaluations.

The internal quality assurance system of FINHEEC also produces an annual summary of improvements based on feedback from evaluation groups and HEIs. FINHEEC has also supported research related to evaluation of higher education by financing a researcher for a two-year-project. The research on evaluation of higher education however remains a topic for further development for FINHEEC.
3 Compliance with the European standards and guidelines for external quality assurance agencies

3.1 Use of external quality assurance procedures for higher education

**Standard:**
The external quality assurance of agencies should take into account the presence and effectiveness of the external quality assurance processes described in Part 2 of the European Standards and Guidelines.

**Guidelines:**
The standards for external quality assurance contained in Part 2 provide a valuable basis for the external quality assessment process. The standards reflect best practices and experiences gained through the development of external quality assurance in Europe since the early 1990s. It is therefore important that these standards are integrated into the processes applied by external quality assurance agencies towards the higher education institutions. The standards for external quality assurance should together with the standards for external quality assurance agencies constitute the basis for professional and credible external quality assurance of higher education institutions.

**FINHEEC Compliance:**
As the described in the previous section, FINHEEC’s processes and procedures are based on the Part 2 of the ESG.

3.2 Official status

**Standard:**
Agencies should be formally recognised by competent public authorities in the European Higher Education Area as agencies with responsibilities for external quality assurance and should have an established legal basis. They should comply with any requirements of the legislative jurisdictions within which they operate.
FINHEEC Compliance:


Evaluation of higher education and FINHEEC are also recognised in the new Universities Act 24.7.2009/558:

Section 87. Evaluation
1. The universities must evaluate their education, research and artistic activities and the impact of those activities. The universities shall also take part in external evaluation of their activities and quality assurance systems on a regular basis. The universities must publish the findings of the evaluations they undertake.

2. 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.

Evaluation of universities of applied sciences is also recognised in the Polytechnics Act 9.5.2003/351. The 9th Section was changed on 24th July 2009:

Section 9. Quality assessment (Amendment 564/2009)

1. A polytechnic shall be responsible for the quality standard and continuous improvement of the education and other activities it provides. The polytechnic shall evaluate its education and other activities and their impact. The polytechnic shall also participate in external evaluation of its operation and quality assurance system on a regular basis and publish the findings of its evaluations.

2. Attached to the Ministry of Education is an independent expert body called the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council, further provisions on which shall be enacted by Government Decree.

7 In accordance with the 2005 Decree, the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council is responsible also for tasks pertaining to evaluation of higher education in Åland.
3.3 Activities

**Standard:**
Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities (at institutional or programme level) on a regular basis.

**Guidelines:**
These may involve evaluation, review, audit, assessment, accreditation or other similar activities and should be part of the core functions of the agency.

**FINHEEC Compliance:**
FINHEEC undertakes institutional audits in six-year-cycles at all Finnish HEIs. It also conducts Centres of Excellence evaluations in education at both university and university of applied sciences sectors on a regular basis. The aim of these is to develop the quality of education in HEIs, spread good practice and provide useful feedback to those institutions which take part. The Ministry of Education has provided performance-based funding to the selected Centres of Excellence. In addition, FINHEEC undertakes thematic evaluations and evaluations of specific study fields. Examples are evaluations of the currently ongoing evaluation of the national implementation of the Bologna process and evaluation of doctoral training completed in 2006.

FINHEEC’s activities also reach beyond conducting evaluations. FINHEEC organises seminars, where the principle of enhancement-led evaluation is further promoted and good practice is 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 actively co-operates with a number of stakeholders, such as the rectors’ conferences for 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 other stakeholders.
3.4 Resources

Standard:
Agencies should have adequate and proportional resources, both human and financial, to enable them to organise and run their external quality assurance process(es) in an effective and efficient manner, with appropriate provision for the development of their processes and procedures.

FINHEEC Compliance:
The activities of the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council are funded by the Ministry of Education. 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. The University and Universities of Applied Sciences sectors have their own chief planning officers, who also double as deputies for the secretary general. One chief planning officer has also been appointed to concentrate on producing system-wide analyses. 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 and working life representatives. They have extensive experience of evaluation, quality assurance systems and higher education. FINHEEC’s secretariat has also gathered a fairly solid experience during the last thirteen years of higher education evaluation. Systematic training in evaluation methods and quality assurance processes 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.

3.5 Mission statement

Standard:
Agencies should have clear and explicit goals and objectives for their work, contained in a publicly available statement.

Guidelines:
These statements should describe the goals and objectives of agencies’ quality assurance processes, the division of labour with relevant stakeholders in higher education, especially the higher education institutions, and the cultural and historical context of their work.
The statements should make clear that the external quality assurance process is a major activity of the agency and that there exists a systematic approach to achieving its goals and objectives. There should also be documentation to demonstrate how the statements are translated into a clear policy and management plan.

FINHEEC Compliance:

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 on its website. The goals are divided in three categories: Evaluations, stakeholder co-operation and internal activities.

First, FINHEEC ensures effective and well-managed evaluation processes and realisation of the principle of developing evaluation. This is done by producing clear, unambiguous and relevant evaluation reports. From these, FINHEEC highlights new and effective enhancement and development visions, good practice and comparison data for developing the activities of higher education institutions. Thus, FINHEEC’s goal is to consolidate the HEIs’ own culture of continuous development.

Second, the central aim of FINHEEC’s 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 and provides qualitative data on HEI activities. It is the trendsetter for national stakeholders in quality assurance and in the international development of the field. Thus, the FINHEEC goals of stakeholder cooperation are concentrated on the consolidation of the social significance of higher education evaluation activities.

Third, the goals related to FINHEEC’s internal activities include equal treatment of higher education institutions in all FINHEEC activities, the 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, and its culture of continuous development as well as the secure employment and encouraging work environment of the Secretariat.

FINHEEC aims to be the national and international forerunner in evaluation activities. The main aim of its 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, 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.

3.6 Independence

Standard:
Agencies should be independent to the extent both that they have autonomous responsibility for their operations and that the conclusions and recommendations made in their reports cannot be influenced by third parties such as higher education institutions, ministries or other stakeholders.

Guidelines:
An agency will need to demonstrate its independence through measures, such as:

- its operational independence from higher education institutions and governments is guaranteed in official documentation (e.g. instruments of governance or legislative acts);
- the definition and operation of its procedures and methods, the nomination and appointment of external experts and the determination of the outcomes of its quality assurance processes are undertaken autonomously and independently from governments, higher education institutions, and organs of political influence;
- while relevant stakeholders in higher education, particularly students/learners, are consulted in the course of quality assurance processes, the final outcomes of the quality assurance processes remain the responsibility of the agency.

FINHEEC Compliance:
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 effect on FINHEEC’s decisions or evaluation results. FINHEEC is an independent expert body, operating in conjunction with the Ministry of Education. 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 the 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.

3.7 External quality assurance criteria and processes used by the agencies

Standard:
The processes, criteria and procedures used by agencies should be pre-defined and publicly available. These processes will normally be expected to include:

- a self-assessment or equivalent procedure by the subject of the quality assurance process;
- an external assessment by a group of experts, including, as appropriate, (a) student member(s), and site visits as decided by the agency;
- publication of a report, including any decisions, recommendations or other formal outcomes;
- a follow-up procedure to review actions taken by the subject of the quality assurance process in the light of any recommendations contained in the report.

Guidelines:
Agencies may develop and use other processes and procedures for particular purposes. Agencies should pay careful attention to their declared principles at all times, and ensure both that their requirements and processes are managed professionally and that their conclusions and decisions are reached in a consistent manner, even though the decisions are formed by groups of different people. Agencies that make formal quality assurance decisions, or conclusions which have formal consequences should have an appeals procedure. The nature and form of the appeals procedure should be determined in the light of the constitution of each agency.

FINHEEC Compliance:
The evaluation processes, criteria and procedures are all pre-defined and publicly available. FINHEEC’s evaluations include a self-assessment procedure for the HEI and an external assessment by a group of experts with a student representative. In most cases the evaluation group also includes a representative of the working life. A report is published on each evaluation and it is
published in full length on FINHEEC’s website. Procedures for follow-up are used both in audits for quality assurance systems and thematic or study-field specific evaluations. Centres of Excellence evaluation do not have follow-up mechanisms in place, but the evaluations are undertaken every three years.

Decisions made by the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council are not administrative decisions and therefore appeals procedures stated in the Finnish legislation do not apply to them. FINHEEC follows good administrative practices and the Administrative Procedure Act (434/2003) in all its activities. However, a citizen has the right to make a complaint about the activities of a government body to the Parliamentary Ombudsman. FINHEEC’s external feedback mechanism also helps to raise potential problems prior the need to appeal.

### 3.8 Accountability procedures

**Standard:**

Agencies should have in place procedures for their own accountability.

**Guidelines:**

These procedures are expected to include the following:

1. A published policy for the assurance of the quality of the agency itself, made available on its website;

2. Documentation which demonstrates that:
   - the agency’s processes and results reflect its mission and goals of quality assurance;
   - the agency has in place, and enforces, a no-conflict-of-interest mechanism in the work of its external experts;
   - the agency has reliable mechanisms that ensure the quality of any activities and material produced by subcontractors, if some or all of the elements in its quality assurance procedure are subcontracted to other parties;
   - the agency has in place internal quality assurance procedures which include an internal feedback mechanism (i.e. means to collect feedback from its own staff and council/board); an internal reflection mechanism (i.e. means to react to internal and external recommendations for improvement); and an external feedback mechanism (i.e. means to collect feedback from experts and reviewed institutions for future development) in order to inform and underpin its own development and improvement.

3. A mandatory cyclical external review of the agency’s activities at least once every five years.
FINHEEC Compliance:  
FINHEEC’s accountability procedures are outlined in its Quality Manual, available online. FINHEEC has, so far, not used subcontractors in any of the elements of its quality assurance activities.

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 evaluation group members 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.

Internal feedback mechanism  
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. The secretariat utilises the Common Assessment Framework model for internal reflection. In addition, the Secretary General holds separate annual performance and development reviews with the personnel.

External feedback mechanism  
Data acquisition on the activities, their 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, 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.

**Utilisation of feedback**

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 proposals are decided upon by the FINHEEC Council and changes are made to the processes. The Evaluation Council also organises its own development seminar, during which a long-term view of the higher education evaluation activities is taken and evaluation methods are developed.

**Implementation**

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 comments. This provides “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. The internal quality assurance system is described in FINHEEC’s Quality manual.

**External review**

FINHEEC intends to undergo a mandatory cyclical external review of its activities at least once every five years in order to confirm continued membership of ENQA. The next external review will therefore take place in 2015.
4 Views of external stakeholders

The Ministry of Education asked the opinions of Finnish universities, UAS and student unions in the process of updating the decree concerning FINHEEC in 2009. The respondents also expressed views on the changing status of FINHEEC as the national evaluator of higher education. The Ministry kindly shared the answers received.

The respondents expressed confidence in the expertise in FINHEEC on matters relating to evaluation of higher education. The reports produced have strengthened the overall development of HEIs. The FINHEEC’s activities are seen as “systematic, target-oriented and successful.” Respondents were pleased with the impact of evaluations and the shown sensitivity shown to HEIs’ needs and requests.

Regarding the new decree on FINHEEC, the respondents considered the maintenance and affirmation of FINHEEC’s independence to be of utmost importance. The decree is seen as cementing the integrity of the evaluation council’s decisions from external interference. Supporting elements include the membership of the Council members with backgrounds in higher education, student unions and working life. Also, FINHEEC’s duty to take part in external reviews was seen as strengthening its independence. The respondents also supported the possibility of engaging in evaluations of foreign HEIs as a way to increase internationalisation of quality assurance and evaluation.

FINHEEC has collected feedback from HEIs and evaluation groups that have taken part in evaluations. FINHEEC publishes annually a summary of the feedback material in addition to changes made to the evaluation methods based on the feedback. The answers to the feedback questionnaires also reflect the views of FINHEEC’s most important stakeholders, the higher education institutions.

In 2007–2008 FINHEEC received some criticism on the audit criteria. The criteria were seen overlapping in parts and the descriptions were not always uniformly clear. These reflections were used when updating the audit criteria for the Audit manual for 2008–2011. FINHEEC adapted slightly the programme of audit visits and the publication procedure of an audit report, which were both very well received. In 2008–2009 the audit groups complained about burdensome amounts of audit materials sent by the HEIs. It
was felt that the amount of material should be limited more strongly. It was
decided to include this in the planning of the next cycle of audits in Spring
2010. The evaluation groups and members of the FINHEEC secretariat
received extremely positive feedback on their performance during 2007–
2009. Also, the HEIs regard very highly the quality of feedback given to the
HEI in evaluation reports. Nearly all respondents consider the feedback
encouraging and coherent.

Cohen, B., Jung, K. & Valjakka, T.: From Academy of Fine Arts to University. Same name, wider ambitions


Harlio, R., Harvey, L., Mansikkamäki, J., Miikkulainen, L. & Pehu-Voima, S.: Audit of Quality Work. Swedish Polytechnic, Finland


Kinnunen, J.: Korkeakoulujen alueellisen vaikuttavuuden arviointi. Kriteerejä vuorovaikutteisuuden arvottamiselle

Löfström, E.: Benchmarking korkeakoulujen kieltenopetuksen kehittämisessä


Welander, C. (red.): Den synliga yrkeshögskolan. Ålands yrkeshögskola


Miettinen, A. & Pajarre, E.: Tuotantotalouden koulutuksen arvioinnin seuranta


Miettinen, A. & Pajarre, E.: Tuotantotalouden koulutuksen arvioinnin seuranta


Miettinen, A. & Pajarre, E.: Tuotantotalouden koulutuksen arvioinnin seuranta


7:2003 Kauppi, A. & Huttula, T. (toim.): Laatuja ammattikorkeakoulujin
8:2003 Parjanen, M.: Amerikkalaisten opiskelijoiden arvioinnin suvelammin suomalaiseen yliopistoon
9:2003 Sarala, A., Seppälä, H.: (toim.): Hameen ammattikorkeakoulun kokonaisarviointi
14:2003 Kantola, I. (toim.): Harjoittelun ja työelämäprojektien benchmarking