



FINNISH EDUCATION  
EVALUATION CENTRE

# ENHANCEMENT-LED EVALUATION AT THE FINNISH EDUCATION EVALUATION CENTRE



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**We found certain methods of enhancement-led evaluation used in our quality audit so beneficial that we decided to adopt them.**

**(Vice president of a university of applied sciences)**



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# TO THE READER

The Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC) is a national evaluation agency responsible for evaluations at all levels of education from early childhood education and care to higher education and liberal adult education.

There is more than 20 years of experience in enhancement-led approach in the education evaluation activities in Finland. Enhancement-led evaluation has been considered such an essential foundation for evaluation activities in Finnish education that it has been recorded in the legislation on education evaluation.

FINEEC wants to further strengthen enhancement-led evaluation as a national operating practice in Finnish education and as an international brand.

In this leaflet, we explain what FINEEC means by enhancement-led evaluation. In addition, we describe the defining characteristics, the underpinning values and the theoretical background of enhancement-led evaluation.

FINEEC's strategy for the period 2020–2023 has an even stronger emphasis on the need for evaluations to have impacts and be effective.

Our aim is to enable enhancement-led evaluation to have an impact, promote renewal and renew itself!

Harri Peltoniemi Director, FINEEC

# 1 Definition of enhancement-led evaluation



**It is very healthy to stop to assess the current state and think about possible improvement proposals. (Teacher in early childhood education and care)**

**The evaluation questionnaire was an eye-opening experience for me. I gave me a reason to think about how I could further improve my work. (Class teacher)**



1

Enhancement-led evaluation promotes participation and interaction. It creates diverse opportunities to participate and contribute to the planning of the evaluation, the production of evaluation data and the interpretation of the results. Enhancement-led evaluation is based on trust between the implementer of the evaluation and the evaluation participant, and on the education provider's responsibility to enhance its activities.

2

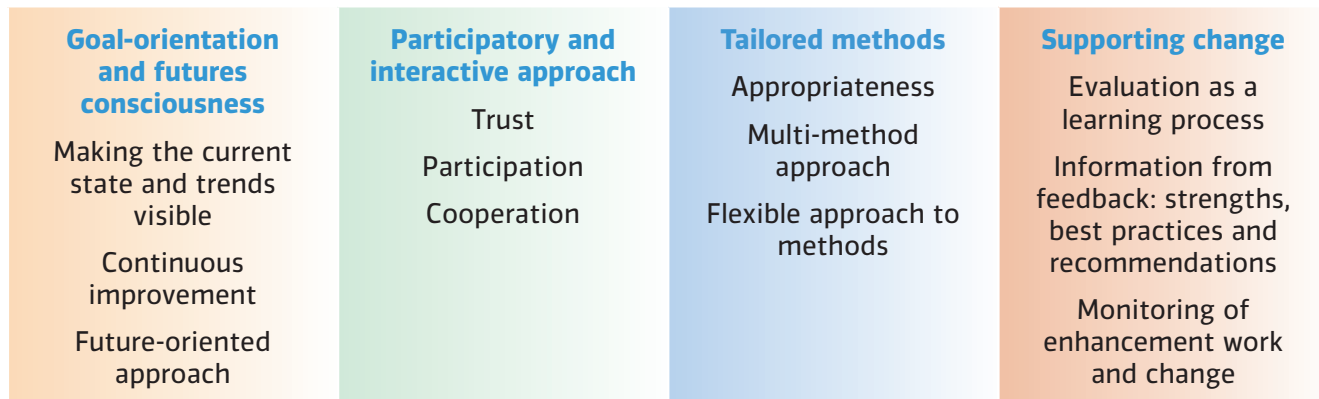
The methods of enhancement-led evaluation are tailored on a case-by-case basis to support the impact of the evaluations and the enhancement of the activities even during the evaluation process. They increase a shared understanding of the theme under evaluation.

3

Enhancement-led evaluation produces a current state analysis, conclusions and recommendations that can be used both by actors at the national, regional and local level and by education and training providers, higher education institutions and stakeholders. As a result of the evaluations, the participants receive external feedback on their activities with regard to the areas requiring development, best practices and strengths. Enhancement-led evaluation supports impact and change.

## 2 The defining characteristics of enhancement-led evaluation

FINEEC has defined goal-orientation and futures consciousness, a participatory and interactive approach, tailored methods and supporting change as the defining characteristics of enhancement-led evaluation.



**FIGURE 1. Key principles of enhancement-led evaluation at FINEEC (cf. Atjonen 2015)**

These principles are visible in FINEEC's evaluations in the following ways:

## **Goal-orientation and futures consciousness**

FINEEC's evaluations produce information on current practices, possible development trends and factors that promote and prevent development.

Our evaluations support the continuous improvement of activities. Continuous improvement is often described using the PDCA cycle (Plan-Do-Check-Act). It is essential that the PDCA feedback loop is closed and evaluations lead to enhancement measures.

In addition to the current state analysis, FINEEC's evaluations and recommendations also focus on the future.

## **Participatory and interactive approach**

By trust we mean that the evaluation participant can talk openly about successes, development needs and shortcomings without having to fear sanctions. We collect and use evaluation data for the benefit of those who are evaluated. FINEEC does not compile any ranking lists. We publish the grounds or the criteria for the evaluation in advance, base our conclusions only on the evaluation material (evidence-based approach) and publish the evaluation results, making them available to everyone.

We offer opportunities for the evaluation participants and those using the evaluation data to contribute to the content and methods of the evaluation. This way we will strengthen the formation of ownership and commitment to the implementation of the evaluation, its outcome and utilisation.

We collaborate with education and training providers, higher education institutions, principals, teachers and other personnel groups, learners and students, parents, and stakeholders. We organise hearings, workshops, development seminars and seminars for analysing the evaluation data. Furthermore, we use the existing data from evaluations, research and statistics and collaborate with researchers.

## **Tailored methods**

We select the evaluation methods on a case-by-case basis so that they are as appropriate and useful as possible from the points of view of the evaluation participants, the objectives of the evaluation and impact.

We use several evaluation methods and ways of collecting information side by side, thus producing evaluation data from several different perspectives.

We specify our methods and data collection as necessary based on information acquired as the evaluation process progresses and in the earlier stages of the evaluation.

## **Supporting change**

We implement evaluations in a way that promotes learning from the evaluations, participation, awareness of whether own and/or national objectives have been achieved and the creation of effective evaluation data. We support interaction between the evaluation participants and their learning from each other.

Our evaluations provide participants with feedback on the strengths, the areas requiring development and best practices in their own activities and in the activities of their peers, thus supporting future enhancement work. We link the evaluation results to a wider national and/or international frame of reference.

We monitor the utilisation of the development recommendations and the impact of the evaluations by carrying out feedback surveys and follow-up evaluations.



# 3 Values underpinning enhancement-led evaluation

Evaluation is associated with giving a value. The themes and phenomena selected for the evaluations are ones that are considered nationally important and it is therefore desirable to support their enhancement.

Those invited to participate in an evaluation are representatives of early childhood education and care, education and training providers, higher education or liberal adult education to whom the theme in question is relevant. In addition, a wide variety of actors and stakeholders with an understanding of the current state of the evaluation theme and a role in the future enhancement work related to it are engaged in the evaluation.

Enhancement-led evaluation is based on FINEEC's four shared values: reliability, independence, openness and boldness.



**FIGURE 2. The values underpinning enhancement-led evaluation at FINEEC**

## 4 Tasks of FINEEC's evaluations

FINEEC implements learning outcomes evaluations in basic education and VET, evaluations of fields of study in higher education, thematic and system evaluations, and audits of quality systems.

The areas evaluated in FINEEC's evaluations include:

- the current level of competence of the pupils and students in relation to the learning outcomes set at the level of education concerned
- reforms of different parts of the education system, legislative reforms or curriculum reforms
- the ability of the education system to strengthen educational equality and participation
- flexible learning pathways at different levels of education, including immigrants' educational pathways
- pedagogic management at different levels of education
- guidance related to students' transitions and the transition points
- the state of quality management and the continuous improvement of education at different levels of education.

FINEEC implements all of its evaluations with the purpose of enhancing activities. However, the degree of enhancement varies according to the task and purpose of each evaluation. Some of the evaluations produce information related to accountability, others information related to performance and still others emphasise the perspective of enhancement. Some of the evaluations include all of these perspectives simultaneously.

The number of the units or education and training providers participating in the evaluation also restricts the choice of methods.

The aim is to form an evaluation system consisting of FINEEC's different types of evaluations that complement each other and together produce information to enhance learning and competences, promote equality, improve the functioning of the education system and support continuous improvement.

**TABLE 1. Different tasks of FINEEC's evaluations**

EVALUATION PERSPECTIVES	FOR WHAT PURPOSE IS EVALUATION DATA PRODUCED?	EXAMPLES OF HOW THE PERSPECTIVE IS VISIBLE IN FINEEC'S EVALUATIONS
1. Accountability	The objective is to control whether certain criteria or quality requirements are met	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Audits of quality management systems assess whether the passing criteria set for quality systems are met while also supporting education and training providers and higher education institutions in identifying their own strengths and areas for development</li> </ul>
2. Knowledge provision perspective	The objective is to understand or explain the area evaluated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning outcomes evaluations produce information on trends in the achievement of the intended learning outcomes</li> </ul>
3. Enhancement perspective	The objective is to achieve changes and enhance activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thematic and system evaluations produce information on themes that are topical or significant in terms of education policy</li> </ul>

# 5 The frame of reference of enhancement-led evaluation

## COMPLEXITY AND CONTINUOUS CHANGE

Changing operating environments challenge the traditional evaluation models. In addition, the phenomena evaluated are increasingly complex, the speed of the changes has intensified and anticipation has become more difficult. The approach used in the evaluations must simultaneously be holistic and provide real-time evaluation<sup>1</sup>.

## THE RENEWING METHODS OF ENHANCEMENT-LED EVALUATION

We target the methods of enhancement-led evaluation to support early childhood education and care providers, education and training providers and higher education institutions both in solving challenges and in the continuous improvement work based on strengths, successes and opportunities.

Our theoretical basis for enhancement-led evaluation includes perspectives from participatory approaches and the view that evaluation is a learning process (e.g. Atjonen 2015, Patton 2002, Scriven 1987, Uusikylä 2019). In our evaluations, we strengthen especially the methods that are aimed at impact<sup>2</sup>.

## SITUATION-ORIENTED AND FLEXIBLE APPROACH TO METHODS

Depending on the objectives and emphases of the individual evaluations, we use different frames of reference or their combinations in the evaluation projects:

- Realistic evaluation<sup>3</sup>
- Empowerment evaluation<sup>4</sup>
- Process and project evaluation<sup>5</sup>
- Impact evaluation<sup>6</sup>

## LEARNING FROM METHODS

We monitor and evaluate the functionality of the methods by obtaining both external and internal feedback.

## 6 Towards effective evaluation activities

The feedback received at the end of the evaluation visit was comprehensive, diverse and clear. It focused on relevant issues and complemented the self-evaluation. We have benefited a lot from the report. (Education provider)

FINEEC's report highlights the strengths and areas requiring development in VET and provides information to decision-makers. The education provider can compare its own activities with the strengths and areas for development at the national level. It can show the direction for quality management. (Ministry of Education and Culture)



## **FINEEC's activities and their outputs**

The outputs of FINEEC's activities include evaluation reports, self-evaluation tools, and analyses and syntheses of the state of education and the education system. FINEEC supports the impact of the evaluations with the processes of enhancement-led evaluation, by producing various types of reports and analyses, and by organising interactive situations related to the evaluations.

## **Evaluation results and actions taken by beneficiaries**

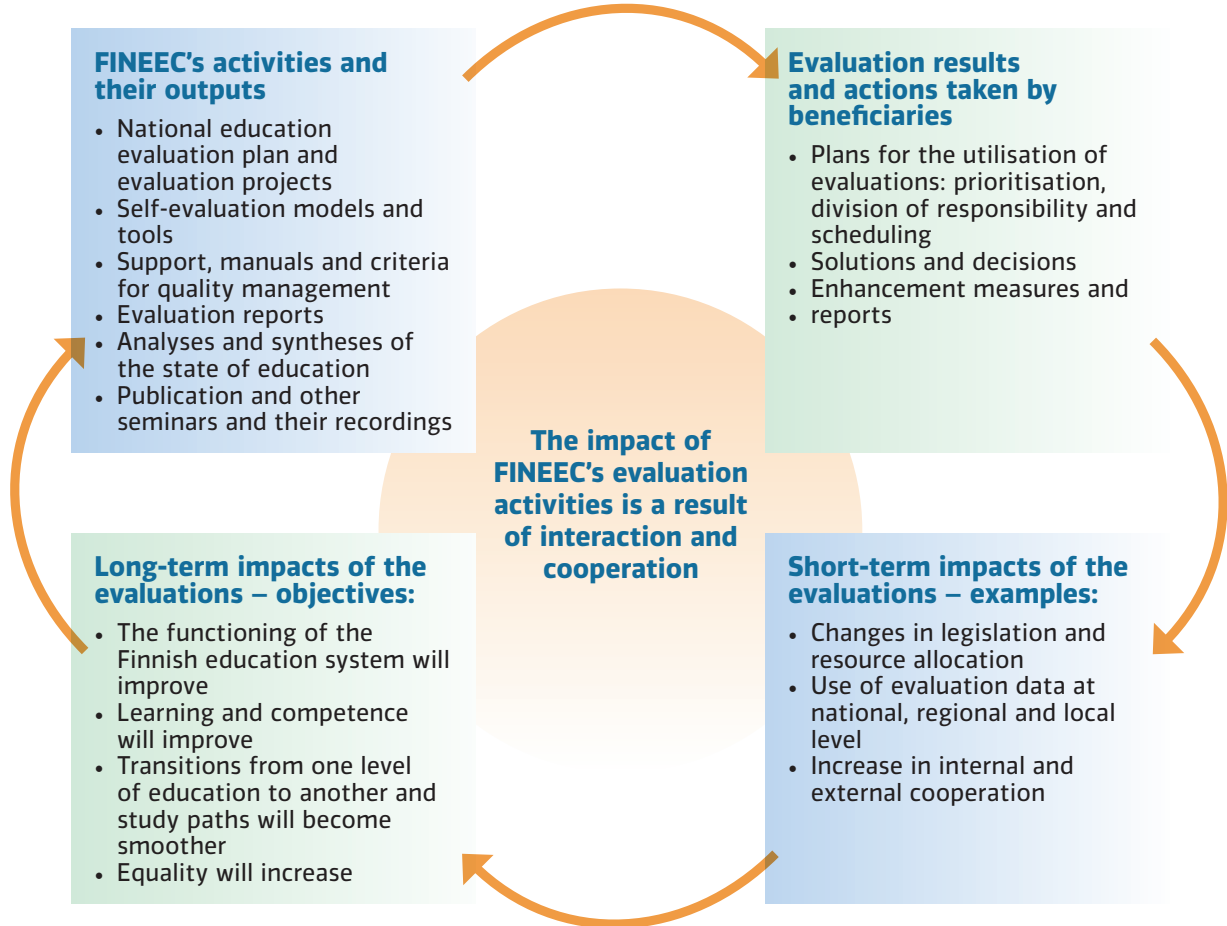
After the evaluations, the decisions and solutions concerning how the evaluations will be utilised do not come about on their own but require conscious and active work by those who benefit from the evaluations. At best, the evaluation results are used in the long term at the national, regional and local level. For the evaluations to be effective, those who benefit from them – irrespective of whether they are decision-makers, directors, principals, personnel, teachers, students or stakeholders – need to discuss the evaluation reports, prioritise the recommendations, allocate the responsibilities and schedule the enhancement measures. Similarly, the strengths and best practices highlighted in the evaluations can lay an important foundation for future work. The enhancement measures implemented on the basis of the evaluations should be reported as part of institutions' own quality management systems.

## **Short-term impacts of the evaluations**

The impacts of the evaluation activities within a period of 1–3 years include the understanding, decisions and solutions produced by the evaluation data and competence, as well as the development measures taken at the national and local level. FINEEC believes that reliable evaluation data improves the knowledge base of decision-making. The impacts of the evaluation activities emerge during the evaluation processes, based on the results of the projects and from FINEEC's evaluation activities as a whole.

## **Long-term impacts of the evaluations**

The long-term impact of FINEEC's evaluation activities is broad-ranging and visible at many levels. It covers the enhancement of education and competence as well as the related decision-making from the level of society and education system to the local level. FINEEC's desired impact is based on the information and knowledge produced by the evaluation activities. It is visible as changes in learning, competence, equality and the functionality and continuous improvement of the education system.



**FIGURE 3. Impact of FINEEC's evaluation activities**

## FINEEC employees' points of view on enhancement-led evaluation



Enhancement-led evaluation makes our work meaningful: *"We can contribute to the enhancement of education in Finland."*



This is not just one method, but a set of values underpinning evaluation work: participation, trust and appreciation of the evaluation participants: *"Fortunately, FINEEC has such a sustainable approach."*



Future orientation is also part of enhancement-led evaluation: *"It combines early childhood education and care organisers, education and training providers, higher education institutions, liberal adult education and FINEEC."*



Enhancement-led evaluation has a positive tone. This improves the evaluation participants' commitment to the evaluation: *"The evaluation participants get the feeling that this is done for their benefit."*





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**Further information on FINEEC's evaluations: [www.karvi.fi/en/](http://www.karvi.fi/en/)**



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