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The status of vocational education and training providers' quality management 2022

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The development and evaluation of vocational education and training providers' quality management was based on the Act on Vocational Education and Training (531/2017), national policies and the underlying policies of the European Union (Ministry of Education and Culture 2011 and 2012, European Parliament and Council 2009, Declaration of Bruges 2011–2020) and FINEEC's four-year evaluation plan (2020–2023). The purpose of the evaluation was to produce information on the status of VET providers' quality management systems and the implementation of the national quality strategy for vocational education and training (VET). The aim was also to encourage and support education providers in the continuous development of their own quality management and quality management systems, develop quality and evaluation competence, and to highlight and disseminate education providers' good quality management practices. The evaluation has previously been implemented once, in 2015.

The target group of the evaluation of quality management systems consisted of all those VET providers (N = 142) that at the time of the evaluation were providing VET and vocational qualifications referred to in the Act on Vocational Education and Training (531/2017) and in the Ministry of Education and Culture's authorisation to provide education. A total of 137 education providers participated in the evaluation, so the response rate was 97%.

The evaluation was based on the evaluation model and the set of evaluation criteria developed by FINEEC and on the underlying operating model for continuous improvement. The evaluation focused on the quality management of the following areas: management, preconditions for providing qualifications and education, provision of qualifications and education, and the results of the activities. The main evaluation and data collection methods were the self-assessment conducted by the education providers between 1 February and 30 April 2021 and the development seminars organised in October 2021.

According to the evaluation, the status of VET providers' quality management as a whole is good. Eighty-six per cent of the education providers estimated their quality management and quality management system to be at least at the developing level. In 2015, the corresponding proportion was 85%, estimated according to the criteria used in the evaluation at the time. A majority of the providers (87%) has been developing their quality management systematically for more than six years and most (79%) have participated in national or regional quality networks for more than six years.

A key factor explaining the good level of performance is how closely quality management is integrated into the management system. A good level of quality management is also linked with how advanced the education provider's quality culture is and what the relationship between factors promoting and preventing the implementation of quality management is in the education provider's operation. According to education providers, the implementation of quality management is best promoted by engaging staff, assigning responsibilities and harmonising practices. The development of quality and evaluation competence also plays a key role. Correspondingly, the implementation of quality management is prevented by an inconsistent operating culture, inconsistent practices and a lack of resources. Different internal and external changes also hinder or slow down the development of quality management.

The level of quality management as a whole is the best in the evaluation area of preconditions for providing qualifications and education and in the evaluation area of provision of qualifications and education. When comparing the results of this evaluation to the evaluation of quality management systems conducted by FINEEC in 2015 (Räisänen et al. 2015), the level of quality management continues to be good in strategic management and operations management. Progress has been made in the development of processes and the evaluation culture, and knowledge-based management and the capacity for change and anticipation have improved. There is still room for development in linking quality management to the management system, in the quality culture, quality management of partnerships and networks, quality management of training organised at the workplace, and in communicating the results to different target groups

The differences in quality management between education providers are still on the same level as in the former evaluation of quality management systems in 2015 (Räisänen et al. 2015). Only in the field of individualisation and student welfare has there been improvement while the differences continue to be wide in the quality management of partnerships and networks, management, financial resources, and demonstrations and assessment of competence. The differences between providers are also visible by type of educational institution and area of regional state administrative agency. In addition, there are differences in how closely quality management has been linked to the management system, how advanced the quality culture is and what the relationship between factors promoting and preventing quality management in the education provider's activities is.

As regards the implementation of the development measures defined for them in the quality strategy for VET (Ministry of Education and Culture 2019), education providers have made the best progress in the following matters: making the implementation plan for the assessment of competence part of the quality management system, ensuring data security and privacy in compliance with regulations, and providing education and training and education services that meet the customers' changing needs and make individual solutions possible. However, there is still room for improvement in involving the working life, stakeholders and guardians, and in communicating the results describing the productivity, effectiveness and quality of the activities to different target groups.

**Keywords:** quality, quality management, vocational education and training