

# Finnish Education Evaluation Centre

Annual Report 2021

## Overview of national evaluation activities

In 2021, the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC) conducted a total of 60 evaluations of the effectiveness and quality of the education system, equality in education and competence. The evaluation activities focused on the implementation of the National core curricula for early childhood education and care and basic education, learning outcomes in basic education and vocational education and training, evaluations of specific fields of higher education, the quality of and development of quality criteria for early childhood education (ECEC) and care and higher education, and the impacts of exceptional teaching arrangements at all levels of education.

Representatives of ECEC, teaching and education providers, educational institutions and higher education institutions totalling 4,040 different actors participated in producing national evaluation data. In total, FINEEC organised 95 events intended to promote the use and impact of evaluation data for different groups of actors at the local and national level. These events were organised as webinars, making larger participant numbers and better regional coverage possible. The events attracted a total of 5,490 participants.

## FINEEC's impact

FINEEC's second evaluation plan covers the years 2020–2023. It is based on a strategy aiming to steer the impact of national evaluation activities and to boost FINEEC's status as a reliable, expert and transparent producer of evaluation data in Finland. The goals set for the impact of FINEEC's evaluation work are associated with developing learning and competence, promoting equality, improving the effectiveness of the education system and supporting continuous development.

FINEEC produces overviews and syntheses that describe the state of education for discussions and decision-making on education policy. In 2021, FINEEC published a synthesis describing the state of equality in education that covered the entire education system and was based on evaluation results and national analyses. FINEEC also produced a publication titled Quality management in the Finnish education system, which covers the tasks related to national evaluations of quality management systems and support for quality management at all levels from early childhood education and care to higher education. This summary publication supports national efforts to develop quality management and quality targets at different levels of education.

A Policy Brief article series was launched to promote the use of evaluation data in discussions and decision-making on education policy and societal issues. The first article in this series focused on the impacts of the pandemic and differentiation of learners' knowledge and skills. FINEEC also worked actively together with other information producers in the field of education and participated in developing the website tiedonkeruut.fi, which supports the collection and use of information. Cooperation between research and evaluation actors was developed, in particular with regard to producing information on the consequences of the



exceptional situation. In evaluations of early childhood education and care and education, cross-sectoral examinations are emerging as important. In a systemic and complex operating environment, causal relationships are also systemic and complex.

The national Evaluation Forum organised in September 2021 attracted a large group of participants representing management, teaching and guidance staff, students and stakeholders at different levels of education. The purpose of the Evaluation Forum was to promote the use of evaluation and research data concerning education and to discuss the current state and future of equality in education from the perspectives of inclusion, differentiation of competence and equal accessibility. In this interactive forum, the audience was able to participate in the discussions through an online platform. FINEEC also participates in the Hyvin sanottu/Well Said project organised by Yle and the Timeout Foundation. This project launched in 2021 helps to promote different groups' participation in developing education.

Digital solutions have contributed to improving the cost-effectiveness of evaluations. The development of a new digital system for assessing learning outcomes in basic education was launched in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Finnish National Agency for Education. The new system will be completed in 2024. The development of a digital evaluation platform for early childhood education and care and a digital evaluation and publication platform continued. All FINEEC's evaluations were carried out in digital format in 2021, and online implementations of evaluations were introduced widely.

The Finnish Evaluation Society granted FINEEC an award in recognition of its efforts to develop evaluations and evaluation culture in Finland. The justifications for granting the award were the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre's role that transcends FINEEC's basic mission in developing the Finnish evaluation sector as an active participant and member of the evaluation community as well as the successful creation of a coherent culture of education evaluation that promotes the key values of Finnish education and guarantees its high quality. In addition, the award was based on FINEEC's evaluations produced during the coronavirus pandemic that were available to support the steering of education and decision-making while the pandemic was still ongoing.

### **FINEEC's impact at the national, local and regional levels and in international forums**

The impacts of FINEEC's work are seen at the national, local and regional levels and in international forums. In 2021, the overviews of the education system and, in particular, development recommendations produced by FINEEC were widely used at the *national level*. Among other things, this information was used for drafting legislation, preparing new national development programmes concerning early childhood education and care, education and training, and higher education as well as for the purposes of national steering. In national development work focusing on setting quality targets and providing support for quality management, FINEEC has promoted cooperation between different levels of education and the development of effective solutions. A great deal of positive feedback has been received on FINEEC's long-running evaluation work relating to Swedish-speaking education and reports on learning outcomes in Swedish-speaking schools. In 2021, FINEEC's evaluation results sparked many discussions on societal issues and education and served as a knowledge base for the media.



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*At the regional level* FINEEC's evaluations have, for example, made an impact through special examinations of Swedish-speaking early childhood education and care and education as well as an evaluation of a pilot on distance learning of the Sámi language and the development of ECEC evaluation tools for Sámi-language ECEC services. Assessments of learning outcomes also provide significant information at the regional level.

Individual feedback to ECEC and education providers as well as higher education institutions is used to develop teaching and education at the *local level*. Based on FINEEC's evaluations, workbooks and other material have been produced to support teachers. FINEEC's evaluation data have additionally been used to develop continuing education for teaching and education staff. FINEEC has also supported evaluation competence and data use by organising training and workshops at the local level.

National evaluation results are further used at the *international level*. By comparing international models, evaluation activities can be developed. Findings concerning different levels of education serve as a knowledge base for conferences, networks and similar. In 2021, FINEEC engaged in active cooperation in such forums as the Sici network, Erasmus projects and the ENQA as well as in diverse collaboration and information exchanges in Nordic and European networks.

The implementation of FINEEC's strategy and the impact of its work are managed by means of a strategy implementation plan. The implementation plan consists of goals set for the strategy period and more detailed measures decided by FINEEC's steering group, drawing on the knowledge base of quality management and operative management. The feedback system included in FINEEC's quality system produces cumulative follow-up data to underpin systematic development of the evaluation activities. Particular aims in 2021 were strengthening the unity of the organisation, compliance with jointly agreed operating methods and consistent development, promoting a team-based mode of work and the sharing of good practices and expertise, and enhancing the impact of evaluation work and improving evaluation and communication skills.

FINEEC introduced a new development programme of evaluation competence in 2021. This programme ensures the personnel's adequate competence related to enhancement-led evaluation, mastery of the evaluation process and project management, command of methodology, and interaction and communication skills.



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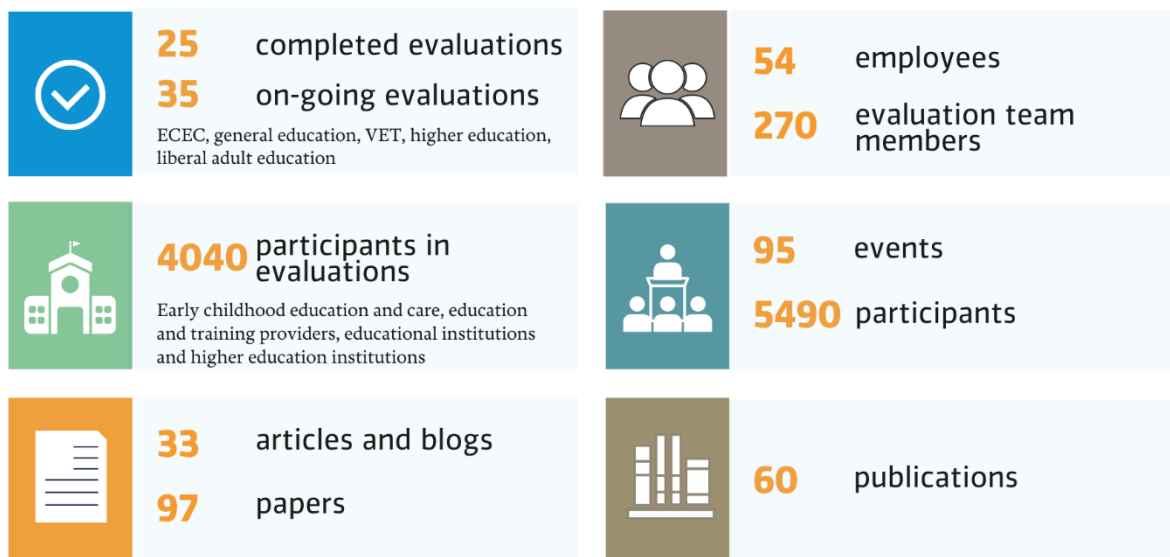
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## Effective evaluations in 2021



### Early childhood education and care

The following evaluations related to ECEC were completed in 2021: Evaluation of the experiment for free of charge early childhood education and care for five-year-olds, phase 3; Leadership in early childhood education: The current state, strengths and areas of development, phase 1; and Evaluation of pedagogy for five-year-olds as well as the current state and development needs of skills and art education in early childhood education and care. A project titled Developing early childhood education and care quality evaluation and supporting ECEC providers in quality management was underway. As part of this project, a national quality assessment system and evidence-based evaluation tools will be developed for ECEC. In addition, the evaluation titled Leadership in early childhood education: The current state, strengths and areas of development proceeded to its phase 2.

### General education

Five projects were completed in 2021, including the following thematic and system evaluations: Evaluation of the experiment for the distribution of lesson hours in general upper secondary education; Evaluation of the implementation of the national core curricula for pre-primary and basic education, sub-project 4; Study on the causes and background factors resulting in differences in learning outcomes between and within the genders; and Students' growth into active and critical citizens in upper secondary education. As part of the work carried out by the Ministry of Education and Culture's quality task force, FINEEC also completed a Survey of the current state of quality management in basic education.

Three assessments of learning outcomes in basic education were under way: an assessment of learning outcomes in A syllabus of English in basic education grade 9, the data collection for which took place in March and April 2021, and an assessment of learning outcomes in mathematics at the end of basic education, the

data for which were collected in spring 2021 and whose initial results were reported in December 2021. More in-depth findings will be published in 2022. Data collection for an assessment of learning outcomes in A and B syllabi in Swedish, which will be conducted in 2022, was also underway. Efforts to develop a digital system for assessing learning outcomes were launched in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Finnish National Agency for Education. The new assessment system will be commissioned in 2024.

The following thematic evaluations were launched in 2021: Evaluation of engaging school community work; Evaluation of methods that prevent bullying and improve wellbeing and the working atmosphere; and State and effectiveness of preparatory education and instruction in the pupil's own mother tongue. The planning of an evaluation project that focuses on a distance learning pilot of the Sámi languages and an evaluation of the general upper secondary education reform were additionally initiated.

### Vocational education and training

The following projects were completed in 2021: assessments of learning outcomes in the Vocational Qualification in Logistics and Vocational Qualification in Social and Health Care; Provision of special support in vocational education and training; and Students' growth into active and critical citizens in upper secondary education. Efforts to develop a system for assessing learning outcomes in vocational education and training were continued. The following evaluations were in progress: Evaluation of the quality management systems of vocational education and training providers; Ability of the education system to respond to challenges of continuous learning in sudden structural changes; and Evaluation of education in the maritime sector. Evaluations launched in 2021 included the following: Individual learning pathways in vocational education and training; Working life orientation and cooperation in vocational education and training; and Evaluation of the vocational, further vocational and specialist vocational qualifications in the electrical and automation industry.

### Higher education

Seven audits of higher education institutions' quality systems were completed during the year, all of them online. Three of the audits were conducted by an international evaluation team, and the audit of the Austrian University of Graz was carried out as a fee-based service. Ten audits of higher education institutions' quality systems are under way in Finland. In the spring, the Higher Education Evaluation Committee awarded the first Quality Label for Excellence to a higher education institution audited by FINEEC. It was granted to JAMK University of Applied Sciences for the evaluation area HEI enhances quality and well-being.

Evaluations focusing on the fields of social and health care and law were completed during the year. A large national audience followed the online seminars at which the results were published. The evaluation titled Ability of the education system to respond to sudden structural changes continues in cooperation with vocational education and training. FINEEC was able to carry out some of the visits to higher education institutions related to evaluating education in the maritime sector. FINEEC accredited two degree programmes in technology at universities of applied sciences based on the European EUR-ACE standard. In addition, FINEEC launched a process in hopes of obtaining the rights to grant accreditations in compliance with the EUR-ACE standard to degree programmes in technology implemented by universities.



In the autumn, an online visit organised by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) took place to assess the consistency of FINEEC's evaluation work with the common European Standards and Guidelines (ESG). The evaluation visit was preceded by an extensive self-assessment process. The final evaluation report will be published in March 2022. Based on the draft report submitted for a factual check, it can be concluded that FINEEC passed the external evaluation successfully.

### Liberal adult education

The situation of liberal adult education was discussed in an evaluation titled Impacts of exceptional teaching arrangements on the realisation of equality. An evaluation of literacy training for immigrants was additionally launched to complement the findings of the evaluation titled Immigrants' educational pathways.

### Fee-based services

In addition to the evaluations cited in the National education evaluation plan, FINEEC also conducted evaluations as a fee-based service. The fee-based services include both public (university audits) and commercial services. Seven evaluations were carried out as a public service, while eleven were initiated as commercial services. Assessments of learning outcomes, commissioned evaluations related to the education and training sector, accreditations of degree programmes in technology leading to a EUR-ACE quality label and evaluations of maritime education were carried out as commercial fee-based services. Fee-based services were also provided in the international context. Criteria for audits of international schools following the Finnish education model were approved for piloting, and a manual on the auditing model was published. FINEEC's fee-based services have expanded over the past few years.