*European Peer Review Manual
for VET*

European Peer Review Manual for VET

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Preface

In the past decade, quality assurance and quality improvement have become increasingly important for institutions providing vocational education and training, and for education authorities throughout Europe. Different procedures have been introduced for evaluating quality at the level of VET institutions/providers. They include quality management schemes adapted from the business sector (such as ISO, EFQM, BSC, etc.), inspections and audits by government agencies, and self-evaluation.

One particularly promising instrument of quality assurance and development is Peer Review – the external evaluation of VET institutions/providers by Peers. Peer Review is prevalent in higher education but the use of Peer Review has so far been marginal in vocational education and training. Peer Review can build on quality activities already in place at a VET institution/provider, it is cost-effective and it fosters networking and exchange between VET providers.

The European Peer Review Manual describes a European standard procedure for carrying out Peer Reviews in vocational education and training. It was developed in the course of the Leonardo da Vinci Project "Peer Review in initial VET" by a team of experts from eight institutions in seven European countries. It has been tested over the past four years in three pilot phases (2006, 2007 and 2008/2009) in 25 transnational pilot Peer Reviews in eleven European countries. Recommendations based on the experiences of these pilot phases have been taken into account in the revision of the European Peer Review procedure. The European Peer Review Manual thus presents a procedure which has passed the test of practical implementation and capitalises on the experiences gleaned from the pilot Peer Reviews. Originally designed for use in initial VET, the manual was adapted for use in continuing VET in the project "Peer Review Extended II". The edition at hand therefore can be applied both in initial and continuing VET.

The European Peer Review procedure is in line with the principles of the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework (EQARF) and, in turn, also seeks to contribute to the further development of the EQARF. It takes a formative, development-oriented approach and aims at supporting VET institutions/providers in their efforts to offer high quality education and training. The focus lies on the promotion of a culture of continuing quality improvement in an atmosphere of openness and mutual trust that contributes to enhancing transparency and comparability in Europe. Good practice is valued and mutual learning encouraged in a dynamic and motivating process, from which both the VET institution reviewed and the Peers can benefit.

The European Peer Review Manual was developed for use by VET professionals across Europe. Its focus is on a practical approach: it offers directly implementable guidelines for VET providers who want to introduce Peer Reviews in their quality assessment and development procedures. The manual is complemented by a practical tool-box available from the project website www.peer-review-education.net, providing forms, checklists, additional information and recommendations in electronic format.

We hope that the European Peer Review will live up to our expectations and become a useful and attractive instrument for VET institutions/providers all over Europe. Since we are dedicated to the further improvement of the European Peer Review procedure, feedback on this manual will be very much appreciated!

For the teams of the projects "Peer Review in initial VET", "Peer Review Extended", and "Peer Review Extended II"

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I.   Introduction

I. 1   What is Peer Review?

Peer Review is a form of external evaluation with the aim of supporting the reviewed educational institution in its quality assurance and quality development efforts.

An external group of experts, called Peers, is invited to assess the quality of different fields of the institution, such as the quality of education and training provision of individual departments or of the entire organisation. During the evaluation process, the Peers visit the reviewed institution.

Peers are external but work in a similar environment and have specific professional expertise and knowledge of the evaluated subject. They are independent and "persons of equal standing" with the persons whose performance is being reviewed.

I. 2   Why Peer Review? Advantages and benefits of Peer Review as an instrument of quality assurance and development

European providers of VET can expect to benefit from a Peer Review, as proposed in this manual, by
- obtaining critical yet sympathetic feedback on the quality of their VET provision from colleagues in the field,
- becoming acquainted with an external perspective,
- ascertaining the quality of their provision,
- presenting their strengths and showcasing good practice,
- enhancing accountability towards stakeholders,
- detecting blind spots and weaknesses,
- receiving advice and discovering the good practice of Peers,
- engaging in mutual learning with Peers,
- establishing networks and cooperation with other VET providers, and
- obtaining an external evaluation report on the quality of their training and education at a comparatively economical cost.

I. 3   What are the aims and principles of the European Peer Review procedure?

I.3.1   Generals aims and principles

The general aims of the European Peer Review procedure are
- to promote quality assurance and development,
- to enhance transparency and comparability of quality in VET in Europe through a common European standard, and
- to support equal opportunities.

Important specific requirements and characteristics of the procedure are
- a focus on the people involved and their interests and needs,
- objectivity and impartiality of the Peers,
- transparency of all elements of the procedure to all persons involved,
- rules on confidentiality and on the use of results, to be set up in advance and adhered to by all persons involved,
- avoidance of conflicts of interest and direct competition between Peers (and the institution they come from) and the reviewed institution,
- promotion of openness, integrity and sincerity as a prerequisite for mutual learning,

- awareness of cultural influences both on vocational education and training provision and on evaluation, especially in transnational Peer Reviews,
- promotion of an enquiring and critical attitude both in the Peers and the reviewed institution, and
- the design and implementation of Peer Review not as a technical and bureaucratic procedure but as a dynamic and motivating process, from which both the reviewed institution and the Peers can benefit.

I.3.2   The European Peer Review as a voluntary and formative evaluation procedure

> The European Peer Review procedure has been developed for voluntary use by VET providers/institutions. It has a formative, development-oriented function and puts particular emphasis on the promotion of continuing quality improvement.

The European Peer Review assists the VET provider/institution in determining the status quo in terms of high-quality provision as well as providing valuable suggestions and recommendations for improvement. Thus, the primary addressees of the European Peer Review procedure are the reviewed VET providers themselves. The main focus of the procedure described in this manual is the stimulation of continuous quality development.

Graph 1: Continuous Quality Improvement with Peer Review

next Peer Review

Internal Evaluation/ Assessment

Implementation of measures to improve quality

Quality Plan based on results of Peer Review

Status Quo of Quality Assurance and Development

Preparation Documents, Organisation

Peer Review

Training Programme

Peers

I. 4 European Peer Review and the Common Quality Assurance Framework

The Peer Review procedure described in this manual corresponds to the Common Quality Assurance Framework (CQAF) developed by the Technical Working Group (TWG) on Quality in VET (Technical Working Group 'Quality in VET' 2003 and 2004) and adopted by the European Council in 2004.

Within the framework, Peer Review can be implemented as a new methodology for ensuring and improving quality. It can be used for an extended internal assessment as well as for external monitoring of the quality of VET provision. Additionally, quality criteria and indicators have been proposed for relevant Quality Areas.

The Quality Assurance Model formulated by the TWG is adhered to within the Peer Review methodology. Its elements comprise the quality management circle prevalent in state-of-the-art, quality management schemes. The European Peer Review as a systematic procedure can be depicted as follows:

Graph 2: The Quality Assurance Model of the CQAF and Peer Review

Self-assessment of VET providers (Self-Report)

Peer Review (Analysis of Self-Report; Peer Visit)

Peer Review Methodology

Peer Review Report (indicating strengths and areas for improvement)

Follow-up: Putting plans into action (Consequences of Peer Review Report and follow-up activities)
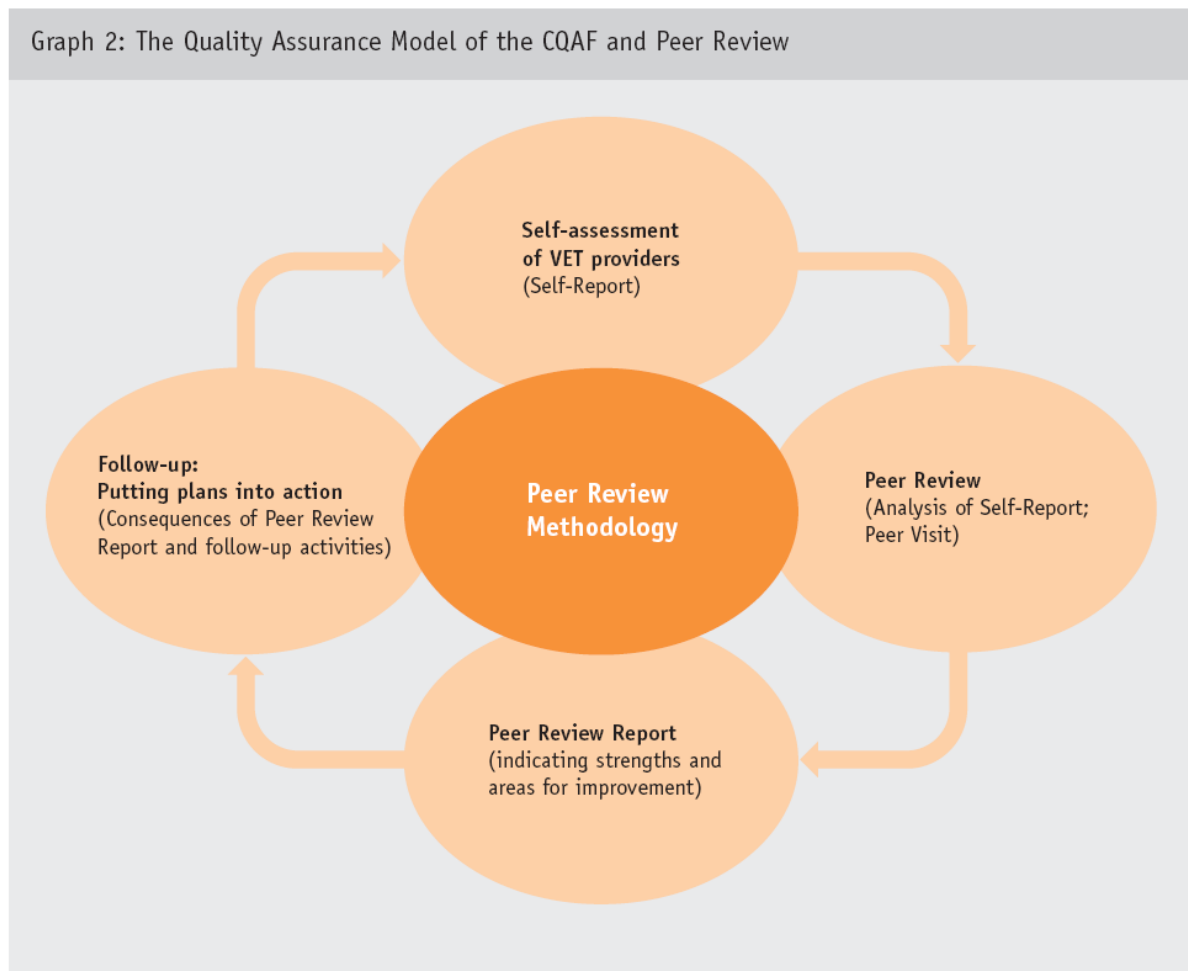
I. 5   European Peer Review and gender mainstreaming

Gender mainstreaming is a guiding principle of the European Peer Review procedure.

The Peer Review process should contribute towards the elimination of existing inequalities and promote equality between women and men in participation rates, in the distribution of resources, benefits, tasks and responsibilities in vocational education and training, and also in private and public life (in compliance with Articles 2 and 3 of the Treaty of Amsterdam 1999). An analysis of the value and attention accorded to "typically" male and female needs, roles, behaviour and interests should serve as a starting point for the investigation of how gender stereotypes and gender inequalities are socially constructed and reinforced through formal and informal structures and practices. All measures and activities must be scrutinised with regard to their potential for enhancing critical reflection and change. Thus, self-reflection on gender issues by everyone involved in the Peer Review is a prerequisite for implementing gender mainstreaming in the European Peer Review.

The following gender criteria and quality standards must be observed in the European Peer Review procedure:
- Gender mainstreaming should be integrated at all stages and levels within the Peer Review procedures.
- Gender-sensitive language must be used in all reports and during the Peer Reviews.
- Data collected are disaggregated by sex in order to represent women and men (female and male trainees; female and male staff).
- A gender analysis of the Quality Areas should be undertaken in the Self-Report and in the Peer Review process.
- A Peer with gender expertise (as an additional competence) should be included in the Peer Review team. The composition of the team should reflect an appropriate representation of women and men. Training needs in relation to gender and gender mainstreaming must be identified and met before the Peer Review.
- During the Peer Review, gender must be considered in the composition of groups of interviewees, in the preparation and conduct of interviews and observations (gender-sensitive formulation of questions and criteria for interviews/observations, gender-sensitive language and behaviour during interviews and observations) and in the analysis (avoidance of gender stereotypes in assessment, etc.).
- If budgets are scrutinised, a gender analysis of the VET provider's budget and the budget for training should be carried out.

Before any Peer Review is undertaken, a gender analysis should be carried out on
- the VET institution — the rights, resources, participation, values and norms related to gender (sex-disaggregated quantitative data, qualitative assessment as well, if possible),
- the review panel — composition, training needs in relation to gender and gender mainstreaming,
- the Self-Report — gender analysis of areas covered, use of language.

If measures are planned to counteract gender inequalities then a gender impact assessment should be carried out. Gender impact assessment means using gender-relevant criteria to compare and assess the current situation and trend with the expected development resulting from the introduction of the proposed policy. A gender impact assessment should be carried out at an early stage once it has been established that the review process has implications for gender relations. Criteria for gender impact assessment are the differences between women and men with respect to participation, resources, norms and values, and rights.

Gender mainstreaming can also be chosen as a Quality Area for the European Peer Review.

A **Gender mainstreaming checklist for policy indicators** can be found in the Tool-box.

I. 6 Who can use the European Peer Review procedure?

> The primary target group for the European Peer Review procedure is providers of initial and continuing VET in Europe with experience in quality assurance and development. The minimum experience recommended as a bacis prerequisite for conducting a Peer Review is that a VET provider has previously undergone a self-evaluation process at least once.

What is meant by the terms "institutions and/or providers of initial and continuing vocational education and training (VET)"?

In the Peer Review Manual, the terms "VET institution" and "VET provider" are used synonymously. They encompass the institutions responsible for quality assurance and development primarily at the training institution level but also at the level of the maintaining institution if this is where quality assurance and development takes place or is coordinated.

I. 7 Role of stakeholders in the European Peer Review procedure

The involvement of various relevant stakeholder groups in the whole review process is highly recommended. Stakeholders in VET are all the people working and learning within a provider of VET: teachers/trainers, learners, administrative staff; also cooperation partners of the VET provider; parents; graduates; (potential) employers and the labour market; educational authorities and social partners, and society at large.

It should be pointed out that particular consideration should be given to enterprises as cooperation partners in VET (apprenticeship scheme, internships etc.) and actual or future employers.

Stakeholders can be interview partners both during the self-evaluation and the Peer Review. They may also serve as Peers if their special experience and know-how contribute to the process. Additionally, (groups of) stakeholders may also be interested in the outcomes of the Peer Review (e.g. the Peer Review Report).

I. 8 Documentation of the European Peer Review

I.8.1 European Peer Review Portfolio

All relevant documents of the European Peer Review should be collected by the VET provider in a European Peer Review Portfolio. The European Peer Review Portfolio contains the Initial Information Sheet, the Self-Report, the Peer Review Report, and other important documents gathered during the Peer Review process. In the Leonardo da Vinci Peer Review projects, a certificate completed the portfolio.

I.8.2 European Peer Review Certificate

The coordinator of the Leonardo da Vinci Peer Review projects, in cooperation with the project steering group, has issued a European Peer Review Certificate to VET providers who have successfully carried out a Peer Review according to the requirements set out in this manual.

II.   European Peer Review Procedure – Overview

II. 1   Coordination and organisation of the European Peer Review

Peer Reviews can be organised in different ways – depending on 1) the networks available, 2) the resources (personnel and finances), and 3) the needs and requirements of VET providers.

A single Peer Review can be carried out by a VET provider who wants to obtain some external feedback from Peers and intends to network with other VET providers in an ad hoc and spontaneous way by making use of existing contacts. There need not be any further cooperation between the reviewed VET provider and the VET providers the Peers come from.

Mutual Peer Reviews between two VET providers are also possible, calling for stronger and steadier cooperation.

For the most part, Peer Reviews are carried out in a network of three or more partners. The networks either already exist or are set up for the purpose of carrying out Peer Reviews. This usually expands the cooperation from a one-off activity to more comprehensive networking: common preparatory activities like selection of Peers, training, matching Peers and VET providers, etc. may be introduced, as well as common reporting and monitoring schemes. A Peer Review network will usually also agree on common guidelines and indicators. All of this involves a more stable network and needs suitable structures and sufficient resources. The added-value of the network approach may be

- synergies concerning the conduct of Peer Review between the VET providers in the network,
- an extension of the number and institutional backgrounds of possible Peers,
- a wider external recognition of the Peer Review (which will be fully accepted, at least within the network)
- a higher chance of possible spin-offs in terms of further cooperative activities beyond the Peer Review.

If Peer Reviews are to be carried out in a larger network, a coordinating body will be needed to ensure high-quality Peer Reviews and effective coordination of the network members. This function can also be assumed by one of the VET providers in the network. The tasks of this coordinating body comprise, for example, managing the network, coordinating the development of common procedures (guidelines and indicators), giving support and advice to the individual VET providers, selecting and training Peers, and coordinating and monitoring the Peer Reviews.

This is why the tasks and responsibilities of a coordinating body are also delineated in the European Peer Review procedure.

European Peer Review in practice: coordination of Peer Reviews in the network

The first, very comprehensive pilot phase 2006, in the LdV project "Peer Review in initial VET was based on a network of 14 operative partners. The process was coordinated and monitored by four institutions that were responsible for the pilot phase within the overall project management structure:

- *öibf* (Austrian Institute for Research on Vocational Training) and FNBE (Finnish National Board of Education) were responsible for coordinating and monitoring the Peer Reviews;
- The University of Pécs was the responsible partner for processing Peer Applications and setting up a database of Peers for the project;
- Aberdeen College provided and administered a web-based training course for Peers.

Additionally, in countries with more than one operative partner, national coordinating partners in the network assisted the operative partners during the pilot phase.

In the pilot phases in the follow-up projects in 2007 and 2008/2009 similar structures were established for the coordination of 4 res. 6 pilot Peer Reviews.

Graph 3: Peer Review in the partner network of the Project "Peer Review in initial VET"

VET Provider · VET Provider · VET Provider · VET Provider · VET Provider · VET Provider · VET Provider · VET Provider · VET Provider · VET Provider · VET Provider · VET Provider

Support for VET providers

Training for Peers — Coordinating Partners — Pool of Peers

Timetable for Peer Reviews
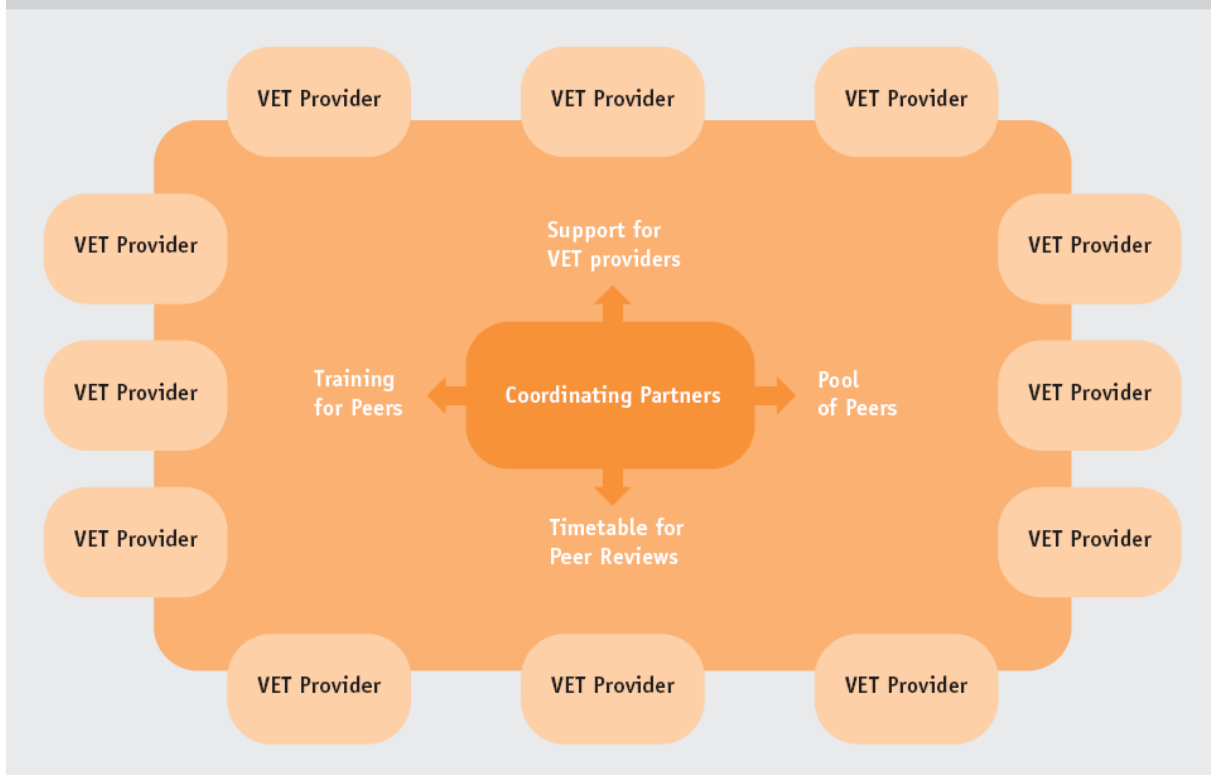
II. 2   Four phases of a European Peer Review

The Peer Review procedure comprises 4 phases.

1. The Peer Review starts with a preparatory phase. In this first phase, the Peer Review is organised and a Self-Report is written by the VET provider. Peers must be recruited and trained. A timetable for the review is drawn up and arrangements are made for the Peer Visit.

2. In the second phase, the Peer Visit, which is the core activity of the Peer Review procedure, takes place: Peers come to visit the VET provider and carry out an evaluation. This evaluation includes a tour of the premises and interviews with different groups of stakeholders. The Peers give initial oral feedback at the end of the Peer Visit.

3. After the Peer Visit, a draft report is drawn up by the Peers. This report is commented on by the VET provider and the final Peer Review Report is issued.

4. The fourth phase is crucial for the improvement of VET provision and organisational development: results and recommendations from the Peer Review are transferred into concrete actions for improvement, which are planned and implemented.

Graph 4: Four Phases of a European Peer Review

Next Peer Review

Phase 1
Preparation (min. 3 months)
• Getting started
• Inviting Peers
• Self-Evaluation and Self-Report
• Preparing the Peer Visit

Phase 2
Peer Visit (2-3 days)
• Collecting data
• Analysing data
• Oral feedback

Phase 3
Peer Report (4 weeks)
• Draft report
• Comments of the VET Provider
• Final report

Phase 4
Putting plans into action (6-12 months)
• Formulating targets
• Clarifying resources
• Action plan and implementation
• Planning next Review

II. 3   Estimated time needed for the European Peer Review

II.3.1   Time needed for preparation

Ample time is needed to adequately prepare and organise a Peer Review.

If a self-evaluation has already been conducted earlier, the Peer Review process can be started right away. At least three months, however, should be reserved for the preparation and organisation of the review. The Self-Report should be available at least one month before the Peer Review in order for the Peers to prepare adequately for the Visit.

If no self-evaluation has been carried out beforehand, a minimum period of six months should be scheduled for the self-evaluation, which must precede the Peer Review.

II.3.2   Time needed for Peer Visit and Report

The Peer Visit will usually take two to three days; it may also take up to five days, depending on the size of the institution reviewed and the scope of the Peer Review, i.e. how many Quality Areas are to be investigated. Experience gained in the pilot phases of the Peer Review projects suggests that Peer Visits of two to three days should be scheduled, with another half day of preparatory work in the Peer Team preceding the visit: while one day was deemed too short for conducting a comprehensive and meaningful evaluation (and if Peers need to travel, (limited) funds for travel should also be used efficiently), Peer Visits of more than three days would put considerable strain on Peers and VET provider alike. Note that the scope of the Peer Review, i.e. the number of Quality Areas investigated, must be in line with this time-frame (see also Chapters 3 and 7).

II.3.3   Time needed for the implementation of improvement measures and procedures for change

Within two months of receiving the final Peer Review Report, an action plan should be presented; at least six months to a year should be scheduled for follow-up measures to be implemented and take effect.

II. 4   Overview: timetable and responsibilities in the European Peer Review

Table 1: Tasks of the VET providers, Peers and coordinating body in the European Peer Review procedure, in chronological order

Phase 1 – Preparation

VET provider/institutions
Getting started:
- ☐ Decide to carry out Peer Review
- ☐ Decide on external organisation of Peer Review (single Peer Review, Peer Review Network)
- ☐ Decide on internal organisation of Peer Review (responsibilities and tasks)
- ☐ Decide on Quality Areas
- ☐ Send Initial Information Sheet (including a proposal for a rough time schedule) to the coordinating body
- ☐ Optional: organise coordination meeting of the VET providers/institutions in the network and the coordinating body.

Peers and Peer Team:
- ☐ Look for suitable Peers with regard to Quality Areas scrustinised
- ☐ Invite Peers to apply to the coordinating body
- ☐ Select Peers in consultation with the coordinating body
- ☐ Conclude contracts with Peers.

Self-evaluation and Self-Report:
- ☐ Conduct self-evaluation
- ☐ Write Self-Report
- ☐ Submit Self-Report to Peers and to the coordinating body
- ☐ Make other necessary documentation available to Peers and to the coordinating body.

Preparing the Peer Visit:
- ☐ Schedule Peer Visit: Set date and draw up Peer Review agenda
- ☐ Organise preparatory meeting of the Peers
- ☐ Prepare local organisation of the Peer Visit (rooms and equipment, interviewees, lunch, tour of the premises, etc.)
- ☐ **Recommended:** organise preliminary meeting of Peers with VET provider to clarify review assignments and to answer questions from the Peers ("Question and Answer Session").

Phase 1 – Preparation

Peers

Peers and Peer Team:
- ☐ Submit application to become a Peer
- ☐ Sign contract for Peer Review
- ☐ Prepare for Peer Review and undertake Peer Training.

Self-evaluation and Self-Report:
- ☐ Receive Self-Reports from VET providers
- ☐ Read and analyse Self-Report
- ☐ Identify areas for investigation and evaluation topics for the Peer Review.

Preparing the Peer Visit:
- ☐ Assist in the scheduling of the Peer Visit, especially in the drawing-up of the Peer Review agenda
- ☐ Exchange opinions in Peer Team on the content of the Self-Report, agree on evaluation topics for the Peer Review
- ☐ Prepare questions for interviews and criteria for observation
- ☐ Take part in preparatory meeting of Peers for team-building and to prepare the Peers Visit
- ☐ **Recommended:** take part in preliminary meeting of Peers with VET provider to clarify review assignments and to receive additional information, if necessary ("Question and Answer Session")

Coordinating body

Getting started:
- ☐ Send information on Peer Review procedure to VET providers/institutions
- ☐ Collect Initial Information Sheets
- ☐ Make an initial plan of the Peer Review schedule (master plan) by using the information on the Initial Information Sheets from VET providers
- ☐ Optional: organise coordination meeting of the VET providers/institutions in the network and the coordination body.

Peers and Peer Team:
- ☐ Look for suitable Peers – request, process and access applications
- ☐ Match Peers with the VET providers/institutions (with regard to Quality Areas to be scrutinised)
- ☐ Select Peers (in consultation with the VET providers/institution)
- ☐ Supervise and assist with contract with Peers.

Self-evaluation and Self-Report:
- ☐ Receive Self-Report of VET providers
- ☐ Forward Self-Report to Peers (if not sent directly).

Preparing the Peer Visit:
- ☐ Scheduling of Peer Visit (in consultation with VET providers and Peers)
- ☐ Organise preparation and training for the Peers.

Phase 2 – Peer Visit

VET provider/institution
Support Peers in the following activities:
- ☐ Make equipment and rooms available
- ☐ Facilitate interviews and observations
- ☐ Facilitate a tour of the premises
- ☐ Receive feedback from Peers
- ☐ Engage in communicative validation.

Peers
- ☐ Collect data
- ☐ Visit the premises
- ☐ Conduct interviews and observations
- ☐ Analyse and discuss findings in the Peer Team
- ☐ Carry out a professional assessment and come to common conclusions
- ☐ Give oral feedback to VET provider
- ☐ Engage in communicative validation
- ☐ Carry out meta-evaluation in the Peer Team.

Coordinating body
- ☐ Optional: involvement in Peer Visits.

Phase 3 – Peer Review Report

VET provider/instituto
- ☐ Comment on the draft Peer Review Report.

Peers
- ☐ Write Peer Review Report and submit it to the VET provider/institution
- ☐ Receive comments of the VET provider/institution and finalise Peer Review Report
- ☐ End of Peer involvement.

Coordinating body
- ☐ Optional: receive Peer Review Report
- ☐ Optional: involvement in writing or finalising the Peer Review Report.

Phase 4 – Putting plans into action

VET provider/institution
- ☐ Decide to follow up the findings of the Peer Review
- ☐ Plan improvement measures
- ☐ Implement improvement measures
- ☐ Plan and carry out the next Peer Review.

Coordinating body
- ☐ Optional: involvement in the follow-up.

III. European Peer Review Procedure – Preparation (Phase 1)

III. 1 Getting started

III.1.1 Decision to undertake a Peer Review

Starting a Peer Review involves

- the decision to carry out a European Peer Review with high commitment by the management and other important stakeholders,
- the decision on whether the Peer Review should cover the whole institution or only parts of it,
- the decision on the aims and purposes of the Peer Review,
- the distribution of tasks and responsibilities including the appointment of a Peer Review Facilitator and a quality team, and
- the decision on time and resources allocated to the Peer Review.

Efficacy in terms of quality improvement depends on the cooperation and participation of the people involved. From the start, a high commitment by management (director, department heads, etc.) must be ensured, but also by staff (teaching/training and administrative) and other relevant stakeholders. This must also include explicit dedication to implementing procedures for change as a follow-up to the Peer Review Report in Phase 4 of the Peer Review procedure (Putting Plans into Action).

Responsibility for the coordination of all activities concerning the Peer Review should be assigned to a Peer Review Facilitator. S/he, as a member of staff, will be the link between the VET provider/institution reviewed and the Peer Team reviewing the institution. S/he should be carefully selected because of the crucial role of the Peer Review Facilitator.

III.1.2 Decision on Quality Areas

The next step is to decide which Quality Areas should be dealt with in the Peer Review. The decision on the Quality Areas should be made by the management in agreement with staff and other important stakeholders, if possible. VET providers/institutions should only choose Quality Areas over which they have an influence. For an overview of the Quality Areas, please go to Chapter VII.

Issues that may be considered in the choice of Quality Areas are:[1]
- Are there Quality Areas that are essential due to national/regional/local, etc. quality requirements and standards?
- Are there Quality Areas that show examples of best practice and excellence?
- Are there Quality Areas that urgently need to be reviewed, i.e. because problems have been detected?
- Are there Quality Areas that are particularly important, i.e. because new developments are to be initiated?
- Are there Quality Areas where innovation has taken place, which calls for an evaluation?
- Are there Quality Areas that are of particular interest to important groups of stakeholders?

The overall guiding principle for the selection of Quality Areas is their relevance.

Additionally, feasibility should be taken into account: the broader the range of Quality Areas to be reviewed, the more time and resources will be necessary for the review. A policy of "small steps" will be suitable especially for VET providers with little previous evaluation experience. (These may also decide to test the

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[1] Additionally, the issue of obtaining a European Peer Review Certificate may be taken into account. It will only be relevant, however, if suitable structures (e.g. a coordinating body) exist to supervise and monitor European Peer Reviews and to issue Certificates to VET providers who have successfully conducted a Peer Review according to the requirements set out in this Manual (see also Chapter I.8.2).

procedure for parts of their institution only.) For a Peer Visit of two days, it is highly recommended that no more than two Quality Areas be chosen – only very experienced Peers will be able to deal with more Quality Areas within this time-frame. Note that too many Quality Areas will either lead to a rather superficial evaluation or will force the Peers to narrow their focus to selected topics within the Quality Areas.

Furthermore, it may make sense to include areas which have previously undergone internal evaluation in order to reduce the self-evaluation effort.

Additionally, special evaluation questions can be formulated for the Peers: in addition to the Quality Areas, VET providers can give "assignments" to the Peers to pay special attention to specific issues and questions that are of particular importance to the VET provider. This will enhance the usefulness of the results of the Peer Review.

III.1.3   Initial documentation and information

The basic decisions concerning the conduct of the Peer Review should then be documented by the VET provider in written format. The "Initial Information Sheet" serves as internal documentation and as external information for the coordinating body, the Peers, other VET providers in the network, etc. The form should be filled out and sent to the coordinating body in good time, i.e. at least three months before the Peer Review.

The "Initial Information Sheet" includes documentation of 1) contact information, 2) the starting situation and the decision to undergo Peer Review (and by whom it was taken), 3) the aims and purpose of the Peer Review, 4) how it is to be organised, 5) the internal distribution of tasks and responsibilities, 6) an overview of the procedure and a time schedule (which steps will be taken and when), 7) the Quality Areas, 8) Further Comments and 9) a list of possible Peers.

The form **Initial Information Sheet** can be found in the Tool-box.

III.1.4   Optional: Coordination Meeting

If the Peer Reviews are organised as reciprocal reviews or in a network of VET providers, a meeting between the representatives of VET providers (and, if applicable, also the coordinating body) will improve the whole process.

The following activities can be part of the agenda:
- Introducing each other, short self-portraits of the VET providers,
- Expectations of VET providers, motivation of management and teachers/trainers,
- Information on and discussion of the Peer Review procedure (purpose, targets, process and activities, resources and work-time for the persons involved),
- Competence profile for the Peers, mode of selection of the Peers,
- Commitment of the management and the staff involved,
- If applicable: information and/or decision on the involvement of authorities,
- If applicable: contractual relations between 1) the VET providers and/or 2) the VET providers and the coordinating body,
- Further steps, time scheduling, questions.

III.1.5   Recommended: Contracts between VET providers and coordinating body

If Peer Reviews are carried out on a larger scale, it is sensible to put the duties and responsibilities of the different parties into a mutual written agreement.[2] Important issues to be covered by such a contract are:

- Purpose of the agreement,
- Rights and duties, mutual expectations, conditions of network partners (and coordinating body, if applicable),
- Aims of the Peer Review procedure,
- Internal distribution of tasks and responsibilities,
- Costs,
- Data protection,
- Involvement of education authority (if applicable),
- Action plan and responsibility for the implementation of the action plan,
- Procedure, steps, time scheduling.

III. 2   Selecting and inviting the Peer Team

Once the decision on conducting the Peer Review and a selection of Quality Areas has been made, the VET provider and/or the coordinating body become active in recruiting Peers. Preliminary information on the Peer Review procedure and the tasks of the Peers may be sent out to prospective Peers.

The Peers may come from other VET providers or stakeholder institutions. The VET providers may suggest suitable Peers. Alternatively, Peers can also submit applications of their own accord. If a coordinating body does not exist or is only marginally involved, the VET providers may also select and invite the Peers themselves. The use of a standard application form for Peers is recommended.

Apart from the competences and experience of the Peers, availability is an important factor in setting up Peer Teams. Thus, the areas of expertise of the Peers must fit in with the Quality Areas to be reviewed while, at the same time, the time schedules of Peers and VET providers need to be compatible. The Peer Coordinator should be selected with great care: S/he will be the key person in the Peer Team with overall responsibility for the Peer Review process: communication and coordination in the Peer Team, time management, relations with the VET provider, etc. If an Evaluation Expert is to guide the Peer Review process, s/he must also be recruited.

Further information on Peers and the Selection of Peers can be found in Chapter VIII.

A **Peer Application Form** can be found in the Tool-box.

Either the VET provider or the coordinating body should also inform the Peers of their duties and tasks well in advance and conclude a contract. Peers should therefore receive the "Initial Information Sheet" as well as a summary of what will be expected of them during the Peer Review. This information may also be attached to a formal invitation letter which should be sent out as soon as the matching of Peers and VET providers has successfully been carried out and a time schedule for the reviews has been fixed.

A **Model Contract Form for Peers** can be found in the Tool-box.

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[2] In the European Peer Review projects, the partner contracts regulated these issues.

To sum up, the selection and invitation of Peers involves:

- soliciting applications from Peers using a standard application form,
- selecting Peers according to their expertise and matching them with VET providers,
- optional: recruiting an Evaluation Expert to guide the Peer Review process,
- nominating a Peer Coordinator,
- setting up a timetable for the Peer Reviews,
- sending out information to the Peers on 1) the Peer Review procedure, 2) the VET provider they are to review, and 3) their duties and tasks, and
- concluding a contract with the Peers and sending out an official invitation to the Peers.

III. 3   Self-evaluation and Self-Report

III.3.1   Recommendations for conducting a self-evaluation

A sound analysis of strengths and areas for improvement is a prerequisite for the Peer Review. A systematic self-evaluation of all Quality Areas selected for the Peer Review must therefore be carried out before the external Peer Review takes place and the results of the self-evaluation must be documented in a Self-Report.

The self-evaluation must be an investigation at institutional level (or at the level of departments, branches, etc. of an institution) but may be preceded and supported by individual evaluations of staff, especially teaching staff. For the individual evaluations, a Peer Review procedure between individual teachers/trainers can be introduced (cf. Gutknecht-Gmeiner, 2005: Part I: International Research and Analysis).

No specific self-evaluation procedure is prescribed for the European Peer Review. On the contrary, VET providers are encouraged to make use of assessments and evaluations already carried out in order to avoid duplication of efforts. Thus, if a self-evaluation has been conducted within a reasonable time (up to two years) before the Peer Review, the results can be used and need only be filled into the Self-Report. For areas or criteria not yet covered, additional evaluations must be carried out.

If a VET provider carries out a self-evaluation for the first time, recourse to guidance (and perhaps also consultation) is recommended. Suitable guidelines and handbooks on how to plan and carry out self-evaluations exist in abundance. To name only one example, which was created in European cooperation, the "European Guide on Self-assessment for VET providers" developed by the Technical Working Group on Quality in VET can be recommended[3].

III.3.2   Quality criteria for self-evaluation

The self-evaluation can be performed in different ways. VET providers may choose a suitable procedure according to their interests, needs, and experience. It is recommended, however, that a clear and structured procedure is employed, which focuses on relevant Quality Areas and evaluation questions. Apart from a clear commitment by management and staff, the responsibilities and tasks involved in the procedure should be transparent.

The procedure should

- be conducted in a transparent and fair way,
- involve all important stakeholders,
- employ suitable evaluation methods, and
- entail adequate sharing of information and results.

Feasibility of the self-evaluation in terms of time and resources must be ensured from the start.

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[3] Ravnmark, Lise-Lotte (2003): A European Guide on Self-assessment for VET providers, Technical Working Group on Quality in VET; available, for example, from http://communities.cedefop.europa.eu/quality in English, German, French and Italian.

III.3.3   Self-evaluation profile: assessing strengths and areas for improvement

During the self-evaluation, strengths and areas for improvement should be identified for the Quality Areas reviewed. Actions to be taken for improvement should also be discussed and indicated in the Self-Report. A SWOT analysis, for example, is a well-known, simple and time-efficient procedure for obtaining a profile of performance in the Quality Areas chosen. Strengths and areas for improvement should be identified at the level of the criteria of the individual Quality Areas (cf. Chapter VII).

III.3.4   Self-Report

The Self-Report is the central document of the Peer Review procedure: it should contain all information necessary to prepare the Peer Review. It must therefore tackle all the topics to be evaluated during the Peer Review.

While VET providers are free to chose their methods and procedures for the self-evaluation, the Self-Reports should be standard and uniform in order to promote comparability. The description of the self-evaluation results must be clear, concise and meaningful. Evidence to buttress the assessments provided in the Self-Report should be furnished in an Annex.

A **Self-Report Form**, which should be adhered to, can be found in the Tool-box.

The first part of the report is an update of the Initial Information Sheet, which contains all relevant data on the Peer Review procedure. The second part comprises a description of the VET provider and the study programmes offered, the mission statement, statistical data, and information on organisational issues. The third part contains the results of the self-evaluation of the Quality Areas chosen. It should provide an assessment of the strengths and areas for improvement and also indicate special evaluation questions for the Peers. The latter will help the Peers in targeting the Peer Review to the topics of particular relevance to the VET provider. Additional documents can be attached in an Annex.

III. 4   Preparing the Peer Visit

III.4.1   Tasks of the VET provider

After fixing the date for the Peer Visit and recruiting and inviting the Peers, the Peer Review Facilitator must make sure that the Peers receive the Self-Report and all necessary documentation no later than one month before the Visit.

III.4.1.1   Recommended: Meeting between the VET provider and the Peer Team

It is highly recommended, that a meeting be organised between the VET provider and the Peer Team in order to clarify questions from the Peers and discuss the agenda of the Peer Visit. This may comprise fine-tuning the evaluation questions for the Peers, making decisions on the evaluation methods and on the groups of stakeholders to be interviewed. Further information can be given to the Peers upon request. The outcome of the meeting is a detailed Peer Visit agenda.

III.4.1.2   Drawing-up an agenda for the Peer Visit

A detailed and realistic agenda for the Peer Visit should be drawn up by the Peer Review Facilitator. For this task, the Peer Review Facilitator should be aided by the Evaluation Expert and/or the Peers since the agenda will reflect the kind of evaluation methods that will be used and what stakeholder groups will be involved in the Peer Visit. Plan the agenda carefully to ensure a successful Peer Visit.

Examples of **Peer Visit agendas** can be found in the Tool-box.

III.4.1.3   Local organisation of the Peer Visit

The local organisation of the Peer Visit is undertaken by the Peer Review Facilitator, who is responsible for the smooth running of the Visit.

The local organisation entails

- selecting interviewees,
- reserving rooms and equipment,
- making a plan of the VET provider premises and putting up signs giving directions (optional),
- inviting interviewees,
- informing and inviting other involved stakeholders,
- preparing refreshments and lunch, conducting a tour of the premises, etc.

Rooms have to be suitable and free from disturbance. One room should be reserved for the Peer Team throughout the whole day for interim sessions by the Peers. One spacious room should be reserved for briefing and for the final meeting between the whole VET institution and the Peer Team.

III.4.2   Tasks of the Peers

III.4.2.1   Preparing for the Peer Review

To prepare for the review, the Peers need

- to read and analyse the Initial Information Sheet and the Self-Report (and ask for additional information, if necessary),
- to attend a pre-review meeting with the VET provider (recommended),
- to attend Peer training,
- to exchange opinions on the content of the Self-Report in the Peer Team and agree on evaluation topics for the Peer Review,
- to draw up an agenda for the Peer Visit together with the Peer Review Facilitator,
- to attend a pre-review Peer Team meeting (the day/evening before the Visit),
- to prepare interview questions and criteria for observation.
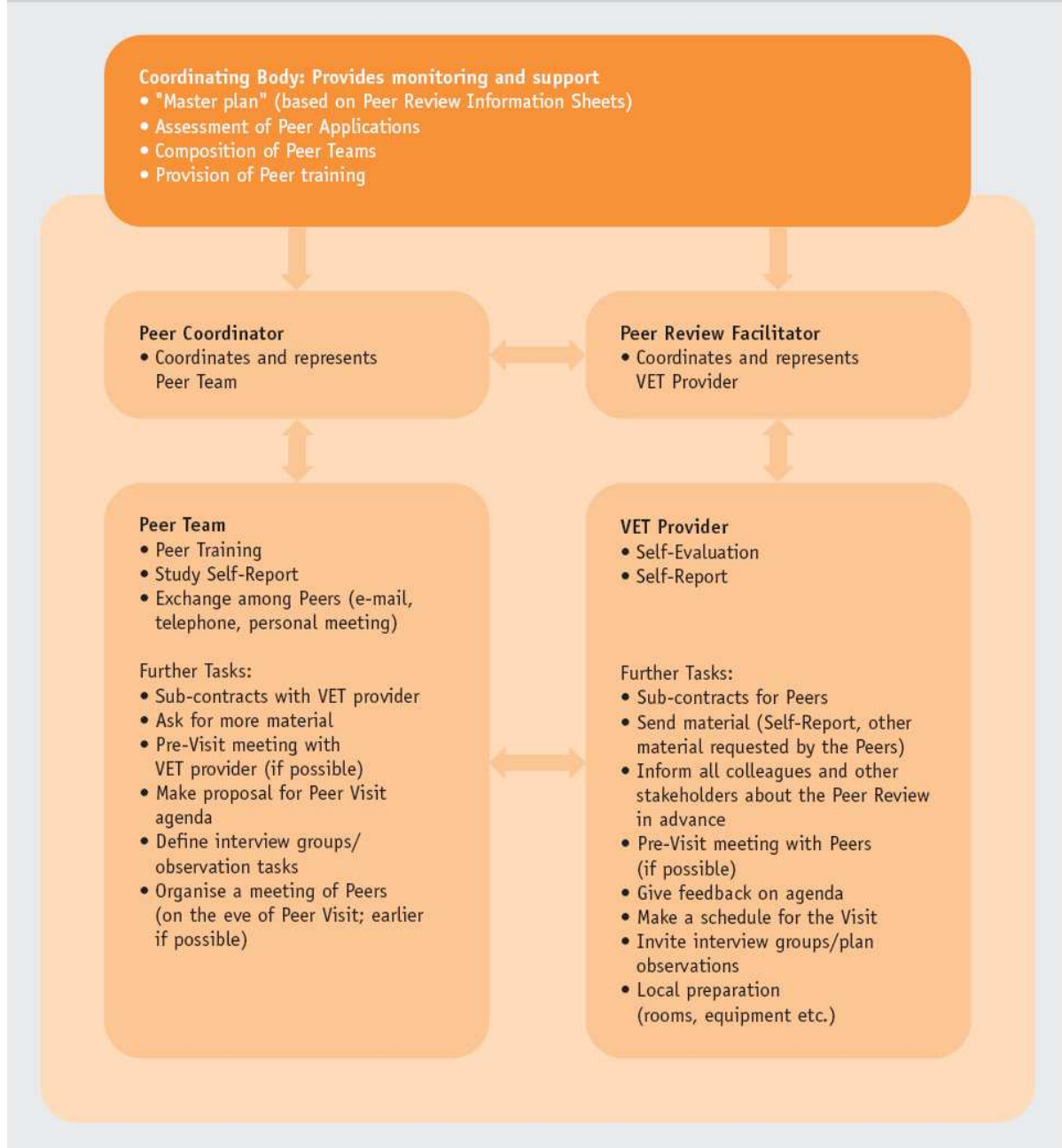
III.4.2.2   Peer Training Programme

Prior to the Peer Review, the Peers should undergo a "Peer Training Programme" that prepares them for their work as external evaluators (cf. Chapter VIII.7).

III.4.2.3   Preparatory meeting of the Peers and preparatory meeting with the VET provider

It is vital that the Peer Team meets before the Visit in order to get to know each other and to prepare the Visit together. This will enhance team-building and the efficiency of team cooperation during the review. It will make sense for the Peers to have read and analysed the Self-Report prior to this meeting so that first impressions can be exchanged and specific questions and topics for the Peer Visit can be discussed. If possible, this meeting should also take place on the day before the first day of the Peer Review. Additionally, the Peers may also meet with representatives of the VET provider to be reviewed (cf. above, Chapter III.4.1.1). Providing an opportunity for a "Question and Answer Session" with the VET provider, usually represented by the Peer Review Facilitator, may greatly improve the process.

For efficient organisation of the preparatory activities, both meetings can also be scheduled on the same day and, if possible, be linked to the Peer Training. Ideally, the whole Peer Team attends the face-to-face part of the Training Programme together. After or during the training, the Peers are joined by the Peer Review Facilitator (and perhaps other responsible staff of the VET provider). Subsequent to the discussion with the representative(s) of the VET provider, the Peers hold their team meeting.

Graph 5: Responsibilities and tasks in the preparation of the Peer Reviews

Coordinating Body: Provides monitoring and support
- "Master plan" (based on Peer Review Information Sheets)
- Assessment of Peer Applications
- Composition of Peer Teams
- Provision of Peer training

Peer Coordinator
- Coordinates and represents Peer Team

Peer Review Facilitator
- Coordinates and represents VET Provider

Peer Team
- Peer Training
- Study Self-Report
- Exchange among Peers (e-mail, telephone, personal meeting)

Further Tasks:
- Sub-contracts with VET provider
- Ask for more material
- Pre-Visit meeting with VET provider (if possible)
- Make proposal for Peer Visit agenda
- Define interview groups/ observation tasks
- Organise a meeting of Peers (on the eve of Peer Visit; earlier if possible)

VET Provider
- Self-Evaluation
- Self-Report

Further Tasks:
- Sub-contracts for Peers
- Send material (Self-Report, other material requested by the Peers)
- Inform all colleagues and other stakeholders about the Peer Review in advance
- Pre-Visit meeting with Peers (if possible)
- Give feedback on agenda
- Make a schedule for the Visit
- Invite interview groups/plan observations
- Local preparation (rooms, equipment etc.)

IV. European Peer Review Procedure – Peer Visit (Phase 2)

IV. 1   What happens during the Peer Visit?

During the Visit, the Peers conduct a brief and condensed evaluation, which focuses on the Quality Areas chosen by the VET provider. The basis for the evaluation is an analysis of the previously furnished Self-Report and other relevant documentation. During the Visit, the Peers check the accuracy of the findings of the self-evaluation documents and conduct their own investigation. All of this usually entails gathering additional data.

Different evaluation methods can be used. Apart from the analysis of the available documentation (which can be extended to encompass further written sources of information during the Visit), the most common methods are interviews and (focus) group discussions, as well as observations. The data collected must then be analysed and discussed by the Peers. Initial feedback is given to the VET provider at the end of the Visit. Depending on the aims of the Peer Review, the Peer Visit can also be used for a more extensive exchange between Peers and representatives of the VET provider, comprising elements of Peer consulting.

IV. 2   Collecting data

The most common methods used for collecting data are:

IV.2.1   Group and single interviews

Interviews are most often used in Peer Reviews. The aim is to collect as much information as possible from different stakeholders. Interviews may be conducted with single persons or with groups of persons (usually five to six, up to a maximum of about ten). Groups will be fairly homogeneous most of the time (focus groups), but groups with different stakeholder representatives are also possible. For important stakeholder groups, like students/trainees and teachers/trainers, two independent interview groups can be organised to gather comprehensive feedback.

Who is to be interviewed?

Usually representatives of all relevant stakeholders should be involved. The relevance of stakeholder groups depends on the Quality Area(s) reviewed. The VET provider will choose the types of stakeholders to be interviewed and can be aided in this decision by the Peers and the Evaluation Expert.

Groups of interviewees are usually
- managers (head of institution, head of departments, etc.),
- staff (teachers/trainers and other staff),
- students/trainees,
- former students/trainees, and
- other stakeholders, such as representatives of enterprises, suppliers, social partners, parents, other educational institutions, education authorities, etc.

Invitation of the interview groups lies within the responsibility of the VET provider who – for the sake of validity – has to make sure that a representative choice of interview partners is made within each group of stakeholders. The Peers, however, should furnish clear criteria for the composition of the interview groups and monitor compliance. When composing interview groups, particular attention must be paid to social aspects like formal or informal hierarchies, existing conflicts, diverse interest, etc., which can adversely affect the openness of the interviewees.

Forms for **Interview Minutes** and **Interview Analysis** for the Peers can be found in the Tool-box.

IV.2.2   Tour of the premises

On an accompanied, on-site visit, the whole Peer Team or a Peer Tandem (the Peer Coordinator, who also writes the Peer Review Report, should ideally be included) assesses the infrastructure and equipment. In addition, informal information can be collected during this tour of the premises.

IV.2.3   Peer observations (in classrooms, laboratories, workshops, sports grounds, etc.)

During a Peer Visit, observations can also be carried out. Classroom observations are most common but observations can also be conducted during practical training, i.e. in laboratories, workshops, etc., and in other social situations (breaks, etc.)

If observations are to be carried out, they must be prepared well. The aim(s) and the subject of the observation must be defined in advance (together with the persons reviewed, if possible) and a systematic procedure for note-taking must be drawn up. In the assessment, the evaluations of the individual situations must be aggregated so that conclusions will focus on the VET provider as a whole and not on individual teachers/trainers.[4]

Observations of specific teaching and learning activities can be linked to the tour of the premises, which will then take more time. Apart from the individual classroom visit, which usually focuses on a certain topic, whole classes may be shadowed throughout a day or all classes may be visited for a short time.

IV.2.4   Other methods

A wide repertoire of methods is possible in order to be able to align the process to the aim and content of the review. Apart from the most common central elements of a Peer Visit described above, other methods, such as (short) questionnaires and surveys, collection and analysis of relevant documents, shadowing, photo, video or picture evaluation, role play, etc., may also be employed.

IV. 3   Analysing data

A preliminary analysis and assessment based on the Self-Report must be made by the Peers before the Visit. During the Visit, it is advisable to sort through and discuss the findings of the individual sessions and activities immediately afterwards. Peers should not jump to conclusions but carefully weigh the evidence found and seek to gather additional information if findings are inconclusive. A communicative validation of findings — especially with learners, as the ultimate beneficiaries, or with the responsible management — can also help to challenge earlier judgements and to obtain a more comprehensive impression. In order to distil, analyse, and discuss the collected information, sufficient time must be reserved for repeated exchange in the Peer Tandems as well as for the final analysis of the findings in the whole Peer Team.

European Peer Review in practice: reserve time for analyses

The experience of the Peers in the pilot phases of the Peer Review projects indicates that ample time for analysis is crucial: if the Peer Visit agenda focuses primarily on collecting large quantities of data, too little time is left for analysing and making sense of this data. Peers feel overwhelmed, stressed, and frustrated and experience difficulties when they have to come to a final assessment. Thus, a balance must be found between the requirement to glean comprehensive data from different stakeholders (cf. below, "Triangulation") and the need for a thorough analysis and discussion of the findings.

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[4] If serious problems are detected which concern a single teacher/trainer, feedback should go directly to person concerned (and perhaps also the director) but must not be mentioned in the Peer Review Report.

IV. 4   Assessment and feedback

The central element of a Peer Review is the assessment, i.e. the professional judgement by the Peers. It is necessary to reserve ample time for the challenging task of organising and distilling findings, judging their reliability and relevance, discussing different perspectives and opinions in the Peer Team and arriving at common conclusions.

A final meeting of the Peers should be held before the feedback session with the VET provider. In this meeting, the collected data are reviewed and matched for relevance and representativity. Important issues may be selected and visualised on flip charts so that they can be presented to the VET provider in the feedback session. During the discussion meetings of the Peers, the different perspectives of the individual Peer Team members should be taken into account. It is recommended that the Peers come to consensual conclusions; statements of differing opinions should only be given if no agreement can be reached. All assessments must be substantiated.

A **Quality Area Assessment Form** can be found in the Tool-box.

IV.4.1   Oral feedback

A very useful element is the feedback session at the end of the Peer Review, in which the Peers communicate their findings (and perhaps also their recommendations) to the reviewed institution. This also allows for a communicative validation - direct comments from the institution, including the clarification of misunderstandings or irrelevant conclusions - and an exchange between the Peers and the reviewed institution.

Feedback can be fairly descriptive - merely describing the findings of the Peer Visit - or it can involve reporting an assessment, identifying strengths and areas for improvement. The latter will usually be the case in European Peer Reviews.[5]

Giving and receiving feedback is, of course, a delicate task. On the one hand, Peers must be fully aware of their responsibility to provide useful and critical feedback to the VET provider in a friendly and professional manner. When assessments are presented during the oral feedback session at the end of the Peer Visit, they must be prepared and formulated with great care so as not to offend the representatives of the VET provider and cause conflicts.

Representatives of the VET provider, on the other hand, should neither start defending themselves nor arguing their case against the findings, but accept the feedback as valuable information in their quest for development and growth. Coming to a full understanding of the feedback should therefore be the focus of this oral exchange.

Thus, both the Peers and the VET provider must collaborate in the constructive handling of feedback. It is helpful if the staff of the VET provider reviewed assumes a self-confident stance which also accepts criticism. The Peers need to refrain from any kind of sweeping statements or statements focusing on specific persons. An inoffensive form of language should be used by all involved, descriptions should be as clear as possible rather than abstract; Peers should concentrate on behaviour and not on assumed personal characteristics; positive aspects should be mentioned alongside the negative, and judgements and conclusions must be based on facts and observations.

A **Checklist for the Peers on reflective and constructive feedback** can be found in the Tool-box. (see Ground rules for Peers).

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[5] Descriptive feedback will be given if 1) the VET provider explicitly asks for this kind of feedback or 2) cultural attitudes towards feedback and/or the lack of or negative experience of the VET provider in the field of external evaluation suggest a cautious procedure.

IV.4.2   Final assessment

The final assessment should only be made by the Peers after the feedback session (including the communicative validation) so that comments and feedback from the VET provider can be taken into account. The assessments and conclusions will be included in the Peer Review Report.

IV.4.3   Recommendations

Recommendations are usually part of evaluation procedures. In a European Peer Review, the Peers will formulate areas for improvement in the Peer Review Report as an indication to the VET providers that action should be taken in these areas.

Recommendations beyond this indicative assessment should only be given by the Peers if the VET provider asks for them. If the VET provider does not seek recommendations from the Peers during the Peer Review this should be clarified before the Peer Review – when the assignment for the Peers is defined – or at least in due time before the feedback session.

If recommendations are desired, they can be presented and discussed during the Peer Visit in an open exchange between the Peers and the representatives of the VET provider. Such a discussion should then focus on mutual exchange and learning from good practice.

IV.4.4   Peer consulting

As has been pointed out before, useful feedback is the central agent for quality improvement and mutual learning in the Peer Review process. Feedback can be a one-way communication but may also develop into a dialogue between the Peers and the reviewed institution. In a discussion of strengths and areas for improvement, the Peers may also suggest advice on certain topics. This must be done carefully, though: Peers should focus clearly on the situation at hand and not try to "proselytise" the reviewed VET provider to adopt solutions successful in their home institutions. Again, Peers should only assume the additional role of consultants if the VET provider expressly asks them to.

IV.4.5   What happens if the Peers make important findings which were not called for?

Although the Peer Review should focus primarily on the Quality Areas chosen, it may happen that important findings by the Peers concern issues which are not covered by the (chosen) Quality Areas. In this case, the Peers and the VET provider should decide jointly on how to deal with these results. Although digressions from the agreed topics should be limited, essential feedback should not be suppressed automatically if it does not fit into the previously agreed scope. Additional findings can be presented merely orally (e.g. in the feedback session) or, if all parties agree, could also feature in the Peer Review Report as an addendum.

IV. 5   Meeting quality standards

IV.5.1   Triangulation[6]

Using different methods and different sources of information in the collection of data contributes to the quality of the evaluation in terms of objectivity, reliability and validity. Soliciting diverse points of view from different stakeholders during the Peer Visit will enable the Peers to gain a more accurate and complete picture.

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[6] In social research, the approach of including different methods and sources is called triangulation.

IV.5.2 Communicative validation

Communicative validation is also used in qualitative social research to enhance the validity of results: feedback on findings is systematically solicited from different stakeholders to challenge the data collected as well as its interpretation. A communicative validation can be carried out whenever necessary in the Peer Review process, in most cases it will used in the final stages of the Visit, e.g. shortly before, during or after the feedback session with the VET provider.

IV.5.3 Ground rules for Peers

Professional behaviour of the Peers is an essential quality requirement. They must assume a critical stance while remaining open and sympathetic.

A list of **Ground rules for Peers** can be found in the Tool-box.

IV.5.4 Time management

Good time management is pivotal for the success of a Peer Review. A realistic Peer Review agenda is a must since activities usually tend to take more time than planned: if the agenda is too tight, any slight delay may cause grave problems in the process (interview time is reduced, observations do not start on time, time delays add up, activities have to be postponed at short notice, etc.). Agendas should therefore also include some time (such as extended breaks) to buffer delays.

During the Peer Visit, time-keeping is essential. It is the Peer Review Facilitator who is responsible for local organisation – availability of interviewees and classes during the data collection period, organisation of final meeting, provision of catering and transport (if necessary) throughout the Peer Visit.

Last but not least, a high level of time-keeping discipline is required from the Peers. The Peer Coordinator (who may be aided by the Evaluation Expert) assumes central responsibility for time management in the Peer Team. S/he must make sure that the time-frame of the agenda is respected, that the Peers are punctual, that discussion sessions in the Peer Team are not overextended, and that decisions are made, if problems arise, on how to best use the limited time available.

IV. 6 Duration of the Peer Visit

The duration of the Peer Visit depends on the size of the VET provider, the scope of the Quality Areas and the time available. It is advisable to plan fairly short Visits since 1) a Peer Visit will to some extent disrupt the routine processes at the VET provider and 2) Peers will not be able to take leave for an extended period of time. Peer Visits of 2 to 3 days at the most are recommended.

IV. 7   Elements of the Peer Visit

A model **Peer Visit agenda** can be found in the Tool-box.

IV.7.1   Optional: "Question and Answer Session"

If the Peers still need information or clarifications from the VET provider – concerning the Self-Report, the evaluation topics or other relevant issues, for example – some time should be reserved for a "Question and Answer Session" with the Peer Review Facilitator and/or other representatives of the VET provider.

Ideally, this session should take place before the Peer Review, either in the meeting between Peers and VET provider when the agenda is discussed or, alternatively, before or after the Meeting of the Peers on the eve of the Peer Visit (if it is held at or near the VET provider). If this is not possible, some time should be reserved for questions and answers at the beginning of the Peer Visit, for example during the welcome session.

IV.7.2   Welcome and first session with the VET provider

The Peer Review Facilitator welcomes the Peer Team and makes sure that organisational preparations have taken place. The Peers introduce themselves to the VET institution. The Peer Review Facilitator gives a summary of the purpose and target of the Peer Review process and the time schedule. Directors/department heads may be present to welcome the Peers.

IV.7.3   Interviews, observations, on-site visit and analysis in Peer Tandem

The interviewees (stakeholders, such as students/trainees, former students/trainees, teachers/trainers, representatives of stakeholders, etc.) are interviewed in groups of about 5 people for 45-60 minutes. Do not prepare more than 5 or 6 interview questions for each group. If more people are included in interview groups, either the number of interview questions must be reduced or not everybody will be able to answer all the questions due to time constraints.

To support the smooth running of the different activities during the Peer Visit, it is advisable to plan the organisation of the interviews and the other activities and draw up a chart showing who is to be interviewed/observed by whom, when and where. This organisation chart can also be included in the Peer Visit agenda.

Model **Organisational charts for the Peer Visit** can be found in the Tool-box.

If observations are being carried out, observation guidelines should be filled out, and analysed and summarised after the end of the observation session.

Sufficient time should be reserved for the analysis of the interviews/observations. For an hour of interviewing, at least half an hour will be needed for a first analysis. Breaks must also be taken into account in order to draw up a realistic agenda.

IV.7.3.1   Meeting of the Peer Team to carry out a first internal analysis of the findings

During the internal analysis, the Peer Team aims to get an overview of the main results in order to prepare the final meeting with the VET provider. A structured discussion takes place, monitored by the Peer Coordinator or the Evaluation Expert. Concise and meaningful feedback to teachers/trainers, other staff and management is prepared. In a two-day Peer Visit, at least three hours should be reserved for this task.

IV.7.4   Feedback session

As has already been pointed out, the final meeting at the end of the Peer Visit is a vital element of the Peer Review. Its main purpose is feedback to the VET provider and communicative validation of the findings.

All Peers should take part in the feedback session. They may all be active in communicating the feedback (taking turns talking) or one person may be selected to present the feedback – usually this is the Peer Coordinator. The Evaluation Expert may chair the final meeting.

On the VET provider's side, management and the Peer Review Facilitator, at least, should be present during the final meeting. Participation can be extended depending on the internal strategy of the VET provider. Presenting the evaluation results to a large number of teachers/trainers and other staff of the reviewed VET provider can be helpful since it makes the whole process very transparent for all those involved and there can be immediate reaction. It probably also raises awareness of problems in an even more efficient way than a written report alone ("paper is patient"...). Furthermore, dissemination of results within the VET provider is ensured. Yet such a large meeting is expensive and may be an organisational challenge to the VET provider. Therefore other routes for disseminating the findings within the organisation may be pursued.

The Peers present the distilled findings and assessments for every evaluation area (e.g. through visualisation in a PowerPoint presentation, on flip charts, etc.). Teachers/trainers and management are invited to comment. If Peer consulting is one of the principal aims of the Peer Review, the meeting of the Peers and the VET provider should be extended to encompass further discussions.

IV.7.5   Reflection on results and meta-evaluation of the process

After the communicative validation, the Peers meet to revise their findings and assessments. The Peer Visit ends with the Peer Team looking back on the Visit. There are two aims for this final session of the Peers:

- Comments and questions of the final meeting have to be reflected upon and discussed again. Peer Teams revise their assessment of the Quality Areas.
- In a meta-evaluation, the members of the Peer Team reflect on their experiences, thus providing indications for further development of the Peer Review procedure.

A sheet for documentation of the **Meta-evaluation of the Peers** can be found in the Tool-box.

V. European Peer Review Procedure – Peer Review Report (Phase 3)

The Peer Review Report is the final document. All Peers should contribute to the report. The writing, however, can be done by one or two persons with the other Peers commenting. It is recommended that the Peer Coordinator, together with the Evaluation Expert, be responsible for producing the Report. Usually, Peers should come to common conclusions and recommendations through discussion and argumentation; if this is not possible, dissenting opinions can also be presented.

European Peer Review in practice: writing the report

The pilot phases of the Peer Review projects clearly showed that the writing of the report should be started during the Peer Visit: once the Peers are back in their usual working environment, finishing the report may be postponed for weeks and even months. In addition, direct communication between the Peers is usually not possible after the Visit.

It is therefore highly recommended that the Peers arrive at common conclusions during the Peer Visit and that the main results of the Peer Review are already inserted into the forms during the analysis phase (Quality Area Assessment Form; Peer Review Report). Should any (usually minor) adaptations be necessary after the communicative validation with the VET provider, they should also be made immediately so that – apart from some finishing touches – the draft Peer Review Report is ready at the end of the Peer Visit.

A draft report is issued, on which the reviewed VET provider should have the opportunity to give feedback. The final report should take these comments into consideration. In the European Peer Review, the final Peer Review Report is addressed primarily to the VET provider. All relevant internal stakeholder groups (teachers/trainers, students/trainees, other staff, etc.) should have access to the report.

Additionally, the VET provider may also pass on the Peer Review Report to relevant external stakeholders and/or education authorities. Often, parts of the report (usually the summary) are also made accessible to a wider public, e.g. over the internet.

V. 1 Structure of Peer Review Report

For reasons of consistency and transparency, the Peer Review should have the same kind of structure and format as the Self-Report. It should indicate strengths and areas for improvement and possibly – if asked for by the VET provider being reviewed – recommendations.

The Peer Review Report contains:

Title, table of contents (glossary and abreviations, if necessary)
1. Data sheet
2. Short portrait of the VET provider (about 1 page)
3. Peer Review procedure
4. Assessment of Quality Areas
5. Overall assessment
6. Annex: e.g. agenda for the Peer Visit, interview guidelines, observation guidelines

The **Peer Review Report** form can be found in the Annex.

V. 2 Principles for writing the Peer Review Report

After the Peer Coordinator (with the assistance of the Evaluation Expert) has written the report, the Peers revise it.

The report should provide a description of the findings of the Peer Review and an assessment of these findings given by the critical friends (the Peers). Strengths and areas for improvement are pointed out and conclusions are presented. If the VET provider agrees, recommendations can also be part of the report.

The report should only include results that have been presented to the VET provider (i.e. during the communicative validation). The report should not contain any surprises for the VET provider. Nor should the report include comments on individuals.

The draft report is read and validated by the VET institution, which may comment on it.

V. 3 From the Peer Visit to the final Peer Review Report

Graph 6: Procedure and time schedule for the Peer Review Report

1. Final meeting session of the Peer Visit
- Oral feedback of results
- Communicative validation

max. 2 weeks

2. Draft report
- Draft written by Peer Coordinator and Evaluation Expert
- Comments and revision by the Peers

2-3 weeks

3. Comments by VET provider
- Discussion within staff incl. management
- Comments and requests for changes

1 week

4. Final Peer Review Report
- Final report to the VET provider
- Within VET provider: information and communication of results to all internal stakeholders

5. Action plan
- Based on the evaluation results
- Implementation of improvement measures

Optional:
- Peer Review Report delivered to external stakeholders and/or authorities
- Publication of summary of Peer Review Report on the internet

VI. European Peer Review Procedure – Putting Plans into Action (Phase 4)

Evaluations should always have an effect on practical work: conclusions must be drawn and procedures for change must be implemented (cf. TWG for Quality in VET 2004, 9 f.) in order to justify the time and effort invested in the review process. Putting the results of the Peer Review into action is thus <u>the</u> critical element for the success of the Peer Review in terms of systematic, continuous and sustainable quality improvement. It lies within the responsibility of the management to ensure that the results of the Peer Review are used consistently (cf. also Chapter III.1.1).

VI. 1   How to make sense of the results of the Peer Review

Making sense of evaluation results is usually one of the main challenges of systematic improvement at the VET provider level. In the European Peer Review, several elements of the procedure directly enhance the definition of suitable goals and measures.

Areas for improvement will be indicated during the feedback session and in the Peer Review Report in an open and understandable manner; the communicative validation of the findings and the possibility of a dialogue between the Peers and representatives of the VET provider further deepen comprehension and appreciation of the feedback. If deemed appropriate, recommendations for the follow-up procedure can also be furnished by the Peers.

Additionally, the Peer Review process itself supports the qualitative interpretation of the self-evaluation data as well as of data collected during the Peer Visit: the feedback of the Peers should provide the VET provider with easily understandable and meaningful information as to the future course of procedures for change.

VI. 2   How to prepare procedures for change

For putting results into action, a systematic process is proposed, based on the quality circle. It should be supported by a candid and comprehensive information policy ensuring that all relevant stakeholders have access to the results of the Peer Review. If possible, an open debate within the organisation should precede the implementation of procedures for change. All of this will improve the quality of the decisions made and enhance motivation and commitment within the VET provider.

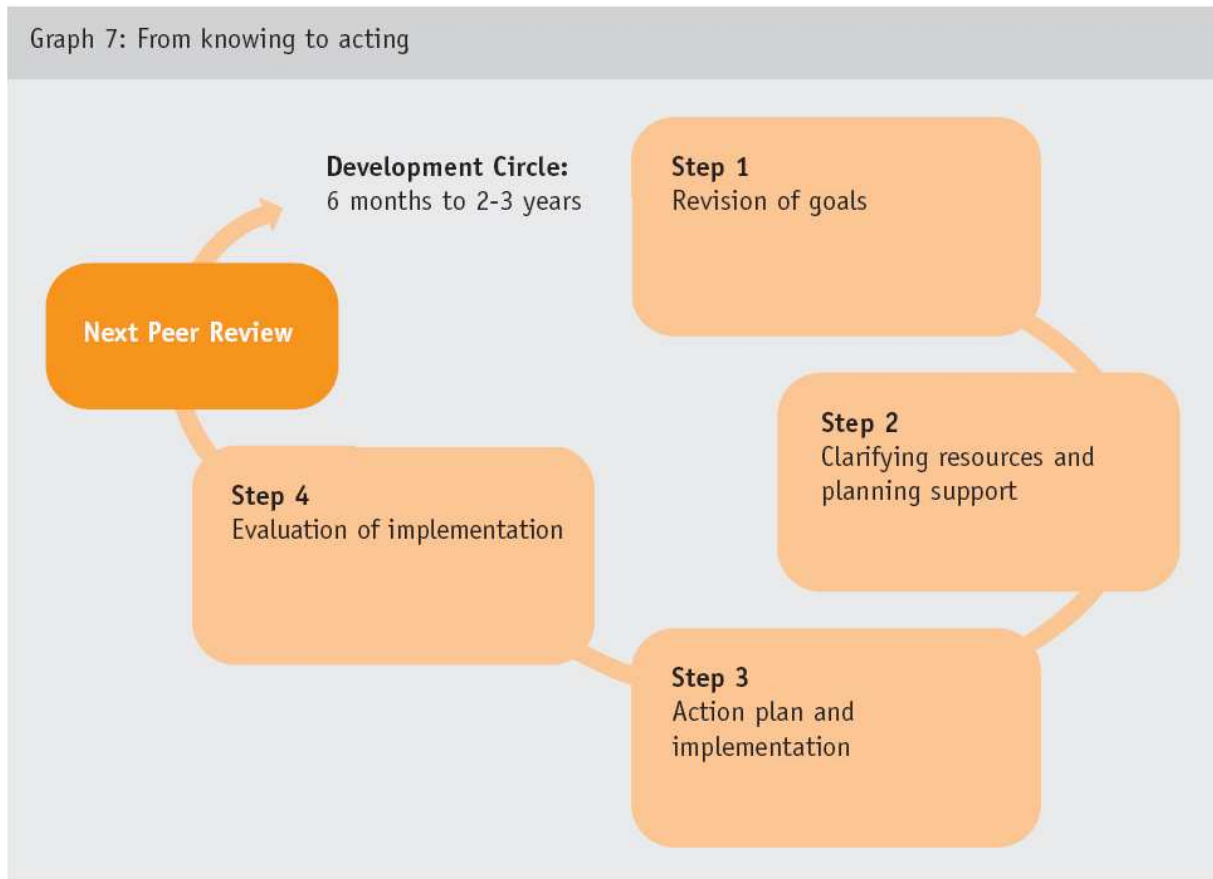## VI. 3   How to proceed - a systematic approach to procedures for change

VI.3.1   Revision of goals

If possible, procedures for change should be planned cooperatively within the VET provider. This should start with the revision of quality objectives and planning based on the results of the self-evaluation and the Peer Review.

The revision should encompass the strategic and the operational levels, which should be interlinked. Attainment of operational targets should be possible within a realistic time-frame of 6 months to 2-3 years. It is recommended that they be defined as SMART targets:

S	specific
M	measurable
A	attractive
R	realistic
T	time-related

Graph 7: From knowing to acting

Development Circle:
6 months to 2-3 years

Step 1
Revision of goals

Next Peer Review

Step 2
Clarifying resources and planning support

Step 4
Evaluation of implementation

Step 3
Action plan and implementation

VI.3.2   Clarifying resources and planning support

For putting a plan into action, it is necessary to clarify the available resources and integrate the plan in the whole development process of the institution. Individual and institutional needs have to be considered when doing this:

- Which supporting forces exist and can be used? (e.g. networks, teachers/trainers)
- Which supporting structures can be activated? (e.g. quality groups, mutual class observations, mentoring, supervision, peer coaching, project groups, etc.)
- Which financial, personnel (internal and external) and time resources are available?
- To which hindrances and stumbling blocks must attention be paid?
- How can we manage challenging situations?
- How do we deal with resistance?
- Do we need consultancy? Why? What for? Who could do it?
- Do we need educational training, new methods or new action models?
- Are training programmes for teachers/trainers suitable and sufficient?

A realistic and motivating action plan and schedule are drawn up, based on the information on resources and support.

VI.3.3   Action plan and implementation

The following guiding questions can be used when setting up an action plan:

- How do we start? What are the next steps? What are priorities?
- What do we have to do to reach the aim?
- Are midterm aims and milestones adequate?
- What resources (financial, personnel, time) are available?
- Who is involved or takes responsibility?
- Would it be convenient to appoint a steering group?
- Who has to approve the action plan?
- How can we communicate the action plan?

Development steps can be recorded in an action plan:

Table 2: Action Plan

Activities	Priority	Time Frame	Responsible Person	Resources
What should bedone?	What is urgent?	By when?	By whom?	What do we need?

VI.3.4   Evaluation of implementation – planning the next Peer Review

All development plans at an individual and institutional level call for another feedback loop. The evaluation must include the assessment of the achievement of the targets defined. Guiding questions to determine the success of the improvement measures may be:

- How do we know if we have made progress? How do we work out whether we have reached our aims? What criteria and indicators of success can be formulated? Which feedback methods do we apply?
- To whom are we held accountable? To whom do we have to report? Who reminds us to follow our aims and our plans if we neglect them?
- What positive consequences do we expect if we reach our aims? How do we reward ourselves if we reach our aims? What consequences are there if we do not reach our aims?

A self-evaluation of the implementation of procedures for change can again be complemented by external feedback through Peer Review – starting the next cycle of a continuous improvement process.

VII. Quality Areas

VII. 1 Quality of VET provision and the definition of Quality Areas

What is the "quality of VET provision"? The term "quality" is a generic term. Quality is context-dependent, i.e. the concrete context has to be known in order to define quality. A useful specification given by the Technical Working Group (TWG) on Quality in VET (cf. Faurschou, 2003) is to relate quality to the fulfilment of goals connected with VET provision, i.e. to analyse reality against expectations:

> **Quality = Experience (Reality) / Expectations (Goals)**

Thus, in order to determine what kind of VET provision is high quality and what is not, it must be clear what the context-specific goals of VET provision are. Goals can be found at different levels of the VET systems and vary to some extent from country to country and from VET provider to VET provider. Thus, there is no generally accepted definition or description of the key quality issues in VET.

The success of a Peer Review, however, depends on whether meaningful and relevant Quality Areas are being reviewed or not. In addition, transparency and comparability between different Peer Reviews can only be ensured if a common framework serves as the point of departure.

Thus, a framework of Quality Areas has been defined for the European Peer Review procedure, which

- comprises the crucial areas of a high-quality VET provider in a clear, practical and workable form, and which
- covers most of the national Quality Areas of the partner countries, thus facilitating its use at a European level, and
- serves as a tool for cross-reading different national quality frameworks, thus enhancing transparency and comparability within Europe.

VII. 2 Relation between the European Quality Areas for VET providers and institutional/national frameworks

The set of Quality Areas (including criteria and indicators, see below) should therefore by no means replace national frameworks. Instead, it is intended to support European cooperation in evaluation at VET provider level: a framework with common Quality Areas can be used for facilitating transnational Peer Review and/or can serve as a point of comparison for reviews carried out in a national context.

Special national/institutional quality elements can, of course, be added to this framework depending on national and/or institutional demands. For purely national use of the European Peer Review procedure, national frameworks can substitute the Quality Areas proposed below.

VII. 3   European Quality Areas for VET institutions

The **14 Quality Areas** proposed are:

Quality Area 1:	Curricula
Quality Area 2:	Learning and teaching
Quality Area 3:	Assessment
Quality Area 4:	Learning results and outcomes
Quality Area 5:	Social environment and accessibility
Quality Area 6:	Management and administration
Quality Area 7:	Institutional ethos and strategic planning
Quality Area 8:	Infrastructure and financial resources
Quality Area 9:	Staff allocation, recruitment and development
Quality Area 10:	Working conditions of staff
Quality Area 11:	External relations and internationalisation
Quality Area 12:	Social participation and interactions
Quality Area 13:	Gender mainstreaming
Quality Area 14:	Quality management and evaluation

These areas can be used for initial and continuing VET, the criteria and exemplary indicators, however, differ in some Quality Areas according to the different conditions in initial and continuing VET.

VII.3.1   Core and Optional Quality Areas

The 14 Quality Areas for initial VET comprise four Quality Areas that relate directly to the "key business" of VET institutions: the learning and teaching processes. They are thus called "Core Quality Areas". Since these four Quality Areas usually lie within the decision-making power at the institutional level, VET providers all over Europe will be competent to act on the results of external assessment in these areas. In order to highlight their importance, these Quality Areas are positioned as the first four areas within the framework proposed for quality at the VET provider level.

For a European Peer Review, it is recommended that at least one of the four "Core" Quality Areas be tackled.

Thus, the **4 Core Quality Areas** are:

Quality Area 1:	Curricula
Quality Area 2:	Learning and teaching
Quality Area 3:	Assessment
Quality Area 4:	Learning results and outcomes

The remaining 10 Quality Areas — Optional Quality Areas — are considered necessary for the operation of the VET institution, they support the processes of the Core Quality Areas.

In the Leonardo Peer Review projects, a "European Peer Review Certificate" was only issued to a VET provider/institution if at least Core Quality Area had been Core Quality Area reviewed. The Certificate indicates all Quality Areas dealt with.

VII. 4   The Quality Areas and the Quality Assurance Model of the CQAF

As has been pointed out in the Introduction to this manual, the European Peer Review procedure is based on the Quality Assurance Model of the Common Quality Assurance Framework. Peer Review is proposed as an innovative methodology for external evaluation of VET at provider level.

How do the Quality Areas relate to the Quality Assurance Model of the CQAF?

1) The Quality Areas themselves can be directly attributed to one of the elements of the model, e.g. planning, implementation, evaluation and assessment, and review. In this way, the Quality Areas are related to a logical framework of continuous improvement.

Graph 8: The Quality Areas within the Quality Assurance Model of the CQAF

Planning
Quality Areas: 5, 6, 7, 1

Implementation
Quality Areas:
2, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12

Evaluation & Assessment
Quality Areas: 3, 4

Review
Quality Areas: 13, 14

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2) Furthermore, within the European Peer Review procedure, all elements of the quality circle will be considered in an integral and systematic manner in the assessment of the Quality Areas. Planning, implementation, evaluation and assessment, and review and procedures for change must be part of self-evaluation as well as the Peer Review. This is to ensure that there is a coherent and comprehensive quality strategy and a systematic link between evaluation and improvement. Since Peer Review should promote continuing quality improvement, special emphasis lies on the follow-up process.

VII. 5   How the Quality Areas are specified

VII.5.1   Criteria

Each Quality Area is clarified by a set of criteria. These criteria identify the key aspects of quality in the relevant area. The criteria therefore represent the guiding principles for quality assurance and quality development efforts in the specific Quality Area.

In a European Peer Review, at least 2 criteria should be reviewed for each Quality Area selected. However, the list of criteria is not exhaustive, which means that further criteria can be added, depending on individual needs. All criteria to be reviewed must be dealt with in the self-evaluation and the Self-Report.

VII.5.2   Examples of indicators

Additionally, the criteria are further specified by indicators which serve to exemplify the criteria. They are merely suggestions and are not prescribed for the European Peer Review procedure. This means that they can be exchanged or complemented by other indicators, if necessary.

Some of the indicators are based on "hard" quantitative data, which can be measured and counted statistically (e.g. drop-out rate). Some of them will be provided by the VET provider/institution in the Self-Report. The majority of indicators outline "soft" qualitative indications of the existence of certain conditions or trends. The "soft" indicators presented in this manual are formulated in a precise way and prescribe requirements for the fulfilment of the individual indicator.

VII.5.3   Sources of evidence

This category is considered to be a support for both the VET institution and the Peers. The sources of evidence indicate examples and suggestions as to where and how the specific requirements for the indicators can be allocated and documented.

The whole list of the **European Quality Areas,** with criteria, indicators, and sources of evidence can be found in the Tool-box.

VIII. Peers

VIII. 1   Who is a Peer?

A Peer is a person
- who is an equal of or is on equal standing with the person(s) whose performance is being reviewed
- who works in a similar environment (and/or in a similar institution)
- who is external (i.e. from a different institution) and independent (has no personal/institutional "stakes" in the evaluation process)

and
- who has specific professional expertise and knowledge in the field (shares values, professional competence and attitudes, language, etc.)
- who can thus bring a degree of "inside" knowledge of the object of review into the process and combine it with the external view of somebody coming from a different organisation ("external insider").

Peers are sometimes also called 'critical friends'.

VIII. 2   Core task of the Peers

The core task of the Peers is to come to an understanding of the particular situation of the reviewed VET provider/institution and to give critical feedback. Recommendations and solutions to problems should only be given if expressly asked for by the VET provider.

VIII. 3   Composition of the Peer Team

European Peer Reviews should be carried out by teams of 4 Peers. It is recommended that the overall size of the Peer Team is an even number, because sets of two Peers (Peer Tandems) should be formed to conduct the interviews with the different stakeholder representatives. (If larger Peer Teams are employed, the number of Peers should not exceed 8).

The composition of the Peer Teams depends on the subject of the Peer Review since, first and foremost, Peers should have extensive expertise in the Quality Areas reviewed. It is important to note, however, that the team as a whole must cover the expertise and experience required and not necessarily any single team member. In detail, a Peer Team for a European Peer Review should consist of experts with the following occupational backgrounds:

At least half of the Peers should be "real" Peers, i.e. colleagues from other VET providers: teachers/trainers, counsellors, managers, quality experts, etc. These VET professionals should have the following expertise: 1) in the review topics under scrutiny, 2) in teaching and learning processes (at least 5 years of teaching/training experience), and 3) in quality assurance and quality development procedures (i.e. quality management approaches, evaluation methods, etc.). It is also recommended that two of the Peers currently work as teachers/trainers.

Additionally, a stakeholder representative (or representatives) can be included in the Peer Team. This Peer can come, for instance, from "external cooperation partners", such as institutions at other educational levels (e.g. lower secondary level, universities, polytechnics), from the closely related business world (representatives of enterprises) or from other relevant stakeholders (labour market experts, social partners, parents, etc.).

It is recommended that one member of the Peer Team be able to assume the role of an "Evaluation Expert" with expertise in evaluation, moderation and communication. This Peer may also come from an institutional background other than VET (e.g. evaluation, research, consulting, etc.). This person should, however, also have sufficient experience in VET since s/he will fulfil both the function of a "normal" Peer and the function of Evaluation Expert. The Evaluation Expert need not be recruited from outside VET, a "real" Peer from another VET provider, who has the required qualification and expertise may also assume the role of the Evaluation Expert.

VIII. 4   Roles within a Peer Team

Within a Peer Team, the following roles should be filled:
- Peers
- a Peer Coordinator[7]
- an Evaluation Expert
- a gender mainstreaming expert
- a transnational Peer (if applicable).

VIII.4.1   Peers

The Peers analyse the Self-Report, draw up an evaluation plan (who is to be interviewed, interview guidelines) and carry out the Peer Review (e.g. collecting information, interviewing, analysing findings, giving feedback, etc.).

VIII.4.2   Peer Coordinator

In addition to the tasks of a Peer, the Peer Coordinator is the leader of the Peer Team. S/he is the primary contact for the VET provider, coordinates and plans the activities of the Peers and is concerned with the moderation of the review process and time management. S/he is also responsible for the writing of the Peer Review Report.

The Peer Coordinator thus assumes a central role. S/he needs a high level of competence in evaluation, team-leading, communication, moderation, and time management and must therefore be selected carefully.

VIII.4.3   Evaluation Expert

The role of the Evaluation Expert should also be covered in the Peer Team to make sure that at least one person has comprehensive expertise in evaluation, moderation, and communication. This role can be assumed by the Peer Coordinator or one of the other Peers in the team.

If the Peer Team is not very experienced in evaluation, the Evaluation Expert will guide the Peer Team and support the Peer Coordinator in her/his tasks. In this event, the Evaluation Expert can be responsible for moderating the internal analysis meeting(s) of the Peer Team where the findings of the various Peer Tandems are discussed and the feedback to teachers/trainers, other staff and management is prepared. Furthermore, the Evaluation Expert may moderate the final meeting. S/he may also assist the Peer Coordinator in the writing of the Peer Review Report. If possible, the Evaluation Expert will also support the Peers with special evaluation expertise in the preparation phase by assisting them in the drawing-up of interview guidelines, for example.

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[7] The Peer Coordinator can be appointed either by the VET institution itself or by the coordinating body organising the Peer Review.

VIII.4.4 Gender mainstreaming expert

It is highly recommended that one Peer with special expertise in gender mainstreaming be included in the Peer Team. The gender mainstreaming expert ensures that gender aspects are duly considered throughout the process, i.e. from the planning of the review through data collection and assessment to feedback and reporting.

VIII.4.5 Transnational Peer

Employing a transnational Peer is optional. For a transnational European Peer Review, though, recruiting a transnational Peer is a requirement.

On the one hand, inviting a Peer from another country can be a very enriching experience for all parties involved – the transnational Peer, the VET provider and the other Peers. Confronting one another with different systems and practices can enhance mutual learning and innovation transfer. Additionally, the independence and evident distance of a transnational Peer often stimulates a special atmosphere of openness and critical reflection.

On the other hand, including a transnational Peer requires careful preparations and certain conditions on the part of the VET provider and the Peers. First of all, all parties involved must be aware of the additional efforts necessary: the language question, in particular, needs to be considered carefully as must the diversity of VET systems and cultural differences. Inviting a transnational Peer usually also calls for extra funding, for travelling, for example, or for translation costs.

Table 3: Composition of Peer Team: roles, occupational background and competences

Number of Peers (4 Peers)	Occupational Background	Required competences
2 "Real" Peers (minimum)*	**Professionals from other VET providers** (teachers, counsellors, managers, quality experts, etc.)	• Knowledge of Quality Areas under scrutiny • Experience in teaching & learning processes • Experience in QA and QD procedures
1 "Stakeholder" Peer **	**Representative from other stakeholder groups** (other educational levels, companies, social partners, etc.)	• Knowledge of Quality Areas under scrutiny • Experience in QA and QD procedures
1 Evaluation Expert*	**Professional evaluator/quality assessor** (e.g. from research institute/university, independent auditing/accrediting body, also from VET provider)	• Expertise in evaluation, moderation and communication • Knowledge of VET system
1 Gender mainstreaming expert*	**any of the above**	additional: • Expertise in gender mainstreaming
1 Transnational Peer (optional)***	**any of the above, usually a VET professional**	• Knowledge of Quality Areas under scrutiny • Experience in teaching & learning processes • Experience in QA and QD procedures

* required for a European Peer Review
** recommended for a European Peer Review
*** required for a transnational European Peer Review

VIII. 5   Required competences and expertise of Peers

Peer Teams as a whole should thus have expertise

- in teaching and learning,
- in quality assurance and development, and
- in the Quality Areas under scrutiny.

In addition, one Peer should have expertise in gender mainstreaming and one Peer should have the competences to fulfil the role of Evaluation Expert. As the Peer Review procedure presented in this manual is designed as a transnational instrument, it is recommended that at least one Peer from abroad is engaged. For the selection of a transnational expert, transnational experience, intercultural competences, and language skills are essential.

Thus, additional requirements are

- expertise in gender mainstreaming,
- expertise in evaluation, and
- transnational experience.

VIII. 6   Applying to be a Peer

The manual also provides an application form for persons who are interested in becoming a Peer and have the relevant expertise. Peers who want to take part in a European Peer Review are required to fill out and submit this application form.

A **Peer Application Form** can be found in the Tool-box.

VIII. 7   Preparation and training of Peers

Peers are obliged to analyse the VET institution's Self-Report and contribute to the preparation of the Peer Visit by attending meetings with the VET provider and the other Peers, by setting up an agenda for the Peer Visit and by formulating evaluation questions for the Peer Review.

Prior to the Peer Review, Peers should also undergo a "Peer Training Programme" that prepares them for their work as external evaluators. The training programme should introduce Peer Review as an evaluation methodology, explain in depth the different phases of the Peer Review, and clarify the role and tasks of the Peers. Additionally, training in quantitative and qualitative data analysis and in qualitative evaluation methods (e.g. interviews and observation) may be provided if needed. Training in soft skills, i.e. social, communicative and moderation skills should complete the training programme.

If face-to-face training is possible, the Peer training may also be used to support the Peers in the preparation of the Peer Visit, i.e. to provide guidance in the analysis of the Self-Reports and/or counselling in the preparation of the review design and the Peer Visit agenda (e.g. which methods to use for which topics, who to interview/observe, how to prepare questions for interview guidelines or grids with criteria for observations, etc.).

VIII. 8   Liaison with the Peer Review Facilitator

The primary contact person for the Peer Team during the whole process is the **Peer Review Facilitator.** S/he should make additional documentation accessible upon request and is responsible for the organisational preparation and conduct of the Peer Review (invitation of persons to be interviewed, reservation of rooms and other facilities needed, logistics during the review, etc.). Thus, the facilitator's core role is to ensure that the channels of communication between the VET provider/institution and the Peer Team (mainly in the person of the Peer Coordinator) work effectively. The facilitator is not a member of the Peer Team and will not make assessments about the topics under scrutiny. S/he should not be present during interviews or during internal discussions of the Peer Team.

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Gutknecht-Gmeiner, Maria (ed.) (2007b): Implementing Peer Review as part of the CQAF. Scenarios for Peer Review Implementation in Austria, Spain (Catalonia), Finland, Hungary, and Italy. Contributions by Koski, Leena; Molnar-Stadler, Katalin; Allulli, Giorgio; Tramontano, Ismene; Camps, Josep; Canyadell, Pere; Vienna.

IX.3.3   Peer Review Extended II

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Gutknecht-Gmeiner, Maria (ed.) (2009b): European Peer Review Reader. Developments and experiences 2004-2009. Vienna

Klemenĉiĉ, Sonja; Možina, Tanja; Viliĉ Klenovšek, Tanja (2009): Peer Review Manual for Guidance in Adult Education. Adapted from European Peer Review Manual for initial VET, Ljubljana, June 2009.

X.   Glossary

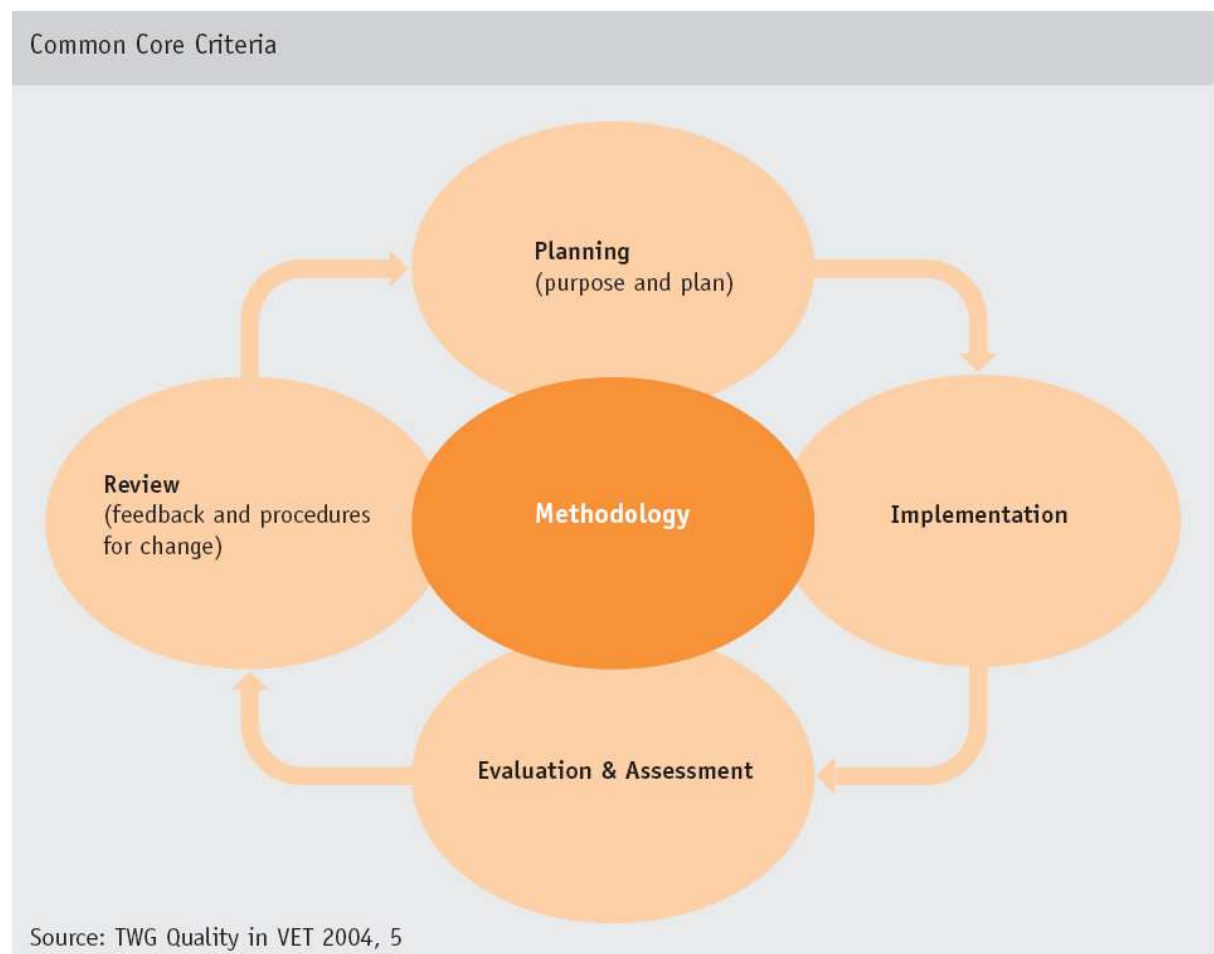**Common Quality Assurance Framework (CQAF)**

The Common Quality Assurance Framework (CQAF) has been developed by the Technical Working Group on Quality, a high-level European working group, following a mandate from the European Commission.

The CQAF constitutes a European reference framework to ensure and develop quality in VET, building on the key principles of the most relevant, existing, quality assurance models.

The CQAF comprises:
- a model (4 common core criteria)
- a methodology for assessment and review of systems: the emphasis has been given to self-assessment, combined with external evaluation;
- a monitoring system: to be identified as appropriate at national or regional level, and possibly combined with voluntary peer review at European level;
- a measurement tool: a set of reference indicators aiming at facilitating monitoring and evaluation by member states of their own systems at national or regional levels.

The model presents the 4 common core criteria for quality assurance: Planning, Implementation, Evaluation and Assessment, and Review (feedback and procedures for change).

Common Core Criteria

Planning (purpose and plan)

Methodology

Implementation

Evaluation & Assessment

Review (feedback and procedures for change)

Source: TWG Quality in VET 2004, 5

Communicative Validation

Communicative validation is used in qualitative social research to enhance the validity of results: feedback on findings is systematically solicited from different stakeholders to challenge the data collected as well as its interpretation. A communicative validation can be carried out whenever necessary in the Peer Review process; in most cases it will be used in the final stages of the Visit, e.g. shortly before, during or after the feedback session with the VET provider.

Coordinating Body for Peer Review

If a suitable structure and sufficient funding is available, the coordination of the Peer Review network can be carried out by a competent organisation/unit. For the purpose of this manual, this support structure will be called the "coordinating body". Establishing such a body is recommended for the management of complex (transnational) Peer Review networks.

The coordinating body can be central to the coordination and organisation of Peer Reviews. It can be either a coordination unit set up by a network of VET providers, the staff of a (publicly funded) pilot project on Peer Review or a (more or less) independent Peer Review agency established by education authorities.

The degree of influence and the scope of the tasks of the coordinating body may vary, depending on its set-up: it may process applications from Peers, select the Peers according to a predefined profile, match the VET providers with suitable Peers, draw up a timetable for the Reviews, collect and forward information, organise Peer training and provide consultation for the VET providers throughout the whole process.

"Critical Friends"

Synonym of "Peers".

Formative Evaluation

Formative Evaluation[8] is an ongoing evaluation that serves the purpose of improving ("forming") the evaluation object, which may be, for example, a Quality Area, an entire organisation, a programme, a project, a product, an intervention, a policy or a person. In the case of the European Peer Review, a formative evaluation is carried out of certain areas or departments of VET providers/institutions.

The main focus of a formative evaluation is to support further improvement and sustainable development (whereas a summative evaluation is geared towards quality assurance and control). It can be used to exchange and share information and to provide feedback to staff, students/trainees, participants and other persons involved. In the European Peer Review, the results of the formative review are addressed primarily to the reviewed institution, to be used for internal quality development.

Evaluation Expert

The Evaluation Expert is a Peer with additional knowledge and expertise in evaluation. In addition to the activities of a Peer, s/he will support the Peer Team in preparing interview questions for the Peer Visit, s/he will moderate the internal discussion sessions of the Peer Team during the Visit and also the communicative validation session with representatives of the VET provider at the end of the Visit. S/he may also coach/assist the Peer Coordinator in the writing of the Peer Review Report.

Management of a VET Provider

Person(s) responsible for managing the institution: these can be the directors, principals, general managers, etc. plus department heads and other managers (i.e. financial, quality managers, etc.).

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[8] Cf. Glossar wirkungsorientierte Evaluation, Univation - Institut für Evaluation Dr. Beywl & Associates GmbH, Köln (2004) and Nancy Van Note Chism: Peer Review of Teaching (1999).

Peers

Peers are mostly colleagues from other VET providers/institutions (teachers/trainers, managers, counsellors, other staff). They are external but work in a similar environment and have specific professional expertise and knowledge of the evaluated subject. They are independent and "persons of equal standing" with the persons whose performance is being reviewed.

Peers are sometimes also called "critical friends".

Peer Review

Peer Review is a form of external evaluation with the aim of supporting the reviewed vocational education and training institution in its quality assurance and quality development efforts.

An external group of experts, known as Peers, is invited to judge the quality of different fields of the institution, such as the quality of education and training provision of individual departments or of the entire organisation. During the evaluation process, the Peers usually visit the reviewed institution.

Peer Review Facilitator

The Peer Review Facilitator is the person responsible for the organisation and the smooth running of the Peer Review at the VET provider/institution. S/he will see to it that the Peers are selected and invited in due time, that the Self-Report is ready and forwarded to the Peers and that the Peer Visit is prepared. S/he will be also the primary contact person for the Peers during the whole Peer Review procedure.

Peer Review Report

The Peer Review Report is a written documentation of the Peer Review. It is drawn up by the Peers. Usually the Peer Coordinator, with the help of the Evaluation Expert, will write the report on the basis of notes taken by the Peers, internal discussions among the Peers and the outcomes of the communicative validation. All Peers will contribute to the report and the Peer Team as a whole is responsible for the Peer Review Report.

Peer Tandems

Peer Tandems are pairs of Peers. For all activities concerning data collection it is recommended that two Peers be present at any given time. This is an important precondition for a fair and equitable process since, with two peers involved, the probability of subjective and arbitrary judgements can be reduced substantially (principle of dual control). Two persons will also be able to take in more than one person. In practice, this means that the Peer Team splits up into pairs – Peer Tandems – and carries out different activities at the same time, thus making the process more efficient.

Peer Review Network

Peer Reviews are very often carried out in networks of VET providers/institutions. This network may have been established for the purpose of conducting Peer Reviews or, alternatively, an existing network may have decided to carry out Peer Reviews. Peer Review Networks can prove a valuable means of exchanging good practice and working jointly on the improvement of the whole sector of VET.

Provider/Institution of VET

In the Peer Review Manual, the term "VET provider/institution" is used to encompass the institutions who are responsible for quality assurance and development primarily at the vocational education and training institution level but also at the level of the maintaining institution if this is where quality assurance and development are coordinated. Throughout the manual, the terms "VET provider" and "VET institution" are used synonymously.

Quality of Vocational Education and Training

"Quality" is a generic and context-dependent term. It can be equated with the fulfilment of goals. In other words, quality is the experienced reality measured against expectations (goals). For the European Peer Review procedure, important Quality Areas have been defined to give an indication of what quality in vocational education and training is about.

Self-evaluation of a VET provider

Self-evaluation is an evaluation carried out by the VET providers themselves. It is an important approach for fostering quality assurance and quality development at an institutional level throughout Europe. For a Peer Review to take place, a self-evaluation must first have been carried out. Results of the self-evaluation are an important basis for the Peer Review. They are usually documented in a Self-Report.

Self-Report

The Self-Report comprises the findings of the self-evaluation of the VET provider carried out prior to the Peer Review. It is the basic document for the Peer Review.

Summative Evaluation

Summative evaluation[9] aims at arriving at final conclusions concerning quality and usefulness of the evaluation object, which may be, for example, a Quality Area, an entire organisation, a programme, a project, a product, an intervention, a policy or a person. Summative evaluation is geared towards quality control and external accountability. It often uses quantitative and comparative information to make recommendations on possible actions, such as retaining, enlarging or reducing the evaluation object. Summative evaluations thus also support the process of decision-making by political authorities and funding bodies.

Stakeholders (in VET)

Stakeholders in VET are
- students/trainees,
- staff (managers, teachers/trainers, counsellors, and administrative staff),
- enterprises (as cooperation partners in the provision of initial VET, as prospective employers in initial VET and as main beneficiaries in continuing VET),
- educational institutions leading to VET (institutions of compulsory education) or taking in graduates from VET (post-secondary/secondary sector of education),
- parents,
- social partners,
- vocational education and training authorities, etc.

The inclusion of various relevant groups of stakeholders in the whole review process is highly recommended. First of all, high-quality evaluation calls for the involvement of stakeholders in the process[10]. Secondly, the importance of stakeholders in quality assurance and development has repeatedly been emphasised as an important aspect of European and national VET policy.

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[9] Cf. Glossar wirkungsorientierte Evaluation, Univation-Institut für Evaluation Dr. Beywl & Associates GmbH, Köln (2004) and Nancy Van Note Chism: Peer Review of Teaching (1999).
[10] Cf. the Standards for Evaluation of Educational Programmes of the Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation (1994).

Students (of VET)

The term "students" is used to denote the participants in initial vocational education and training. Synonyms are: pupils, learners.

Trainees (of VET)

The term "trainees" is used to denote the participants in continuing vocational education and training. Synonym: learners.

Triangulation

In social research, the approach of including different methods and sources is called triangulation. Using different methods and different sources of information in the collection of data contributes to the quality of the evaluation in terms of objectivity, reliability and validity. Soliciting diverse points of view from different stakeholders during the Peer Visit will enable the Peers to gain a more accurate and complete picture.

VET

VET is the acronym for "**V**ocational **E**ducation and **T**raining".

XI. European Peer Review Network: Partners of the LdV Projects "Peer Review in initial VET", "Peer Review Extended", and "Peer Review Extended II"

Austria

Österreichisches Institut für Berufsbildungsforschung (*öibf*) (Project Management/DP/CP)
Austrian Institute for Research on Vocational Training
www.oeibf.at

Institut für Höhere Studien (IHS) (DP)
Institute for Advanced Studies, Employment-Qualification-Innovation (EQUI)
www.equi.at

Hertha Firnberg Schulen für Wirtschaft und Tourismus (OP)
Hertha Firnberg Schools for Business and Tourism
www.hertha-firnbergschulen.at

Höhere Technische Lehr- und Versuchsanstalt für Textilindustrie und Datenverarbeitung Spengergasse (OP)
Higher Technical Federal College and Research Institute for Textile Industry and IT
www.spengergasse.at

TGM Höhere Bundeslehr- und Versuchsanstalt Wien 20 (OP)
Institute of Technology Vienna
www.tgm.ac.at

Bundeshandelsakademie und Bundeshandelsschule Wien 12 (OP)
International Business College (ibc-:) Hetzendorf
www.ibc.ac.at

Berufsschule für Verwaltungsberufe Wien 5 (OP)
Vocational School for Business Administration
www.bs-wien.at

Höhere Bundeslehranstalt für Mode und Bekleidungstechnik sowie für künstlerische Gestaltung Herbststraße (OP)
College of Fashion and Dressmaking, College of Arts and Crafts
www.herbststrasse.at

Czech Republic

Národní ústav odborného vzdeláváni (NUOV) (CP/DP)
National Institute of Technical and Vocational Education
www.nuov.cz

Denmark

Syddansk Erhvervsskole Odense-Vejle (CP/OP)
SDE College
www.sde.dk

Kold College (OP/DP)
www.koldcollege.dk

Erhvervsskolen Nordsjælland (OP/DP)
College of Technology and Business North Zealand
www.esh.dk

Finland

Opetushallitus (OPH) (CP/DP)
Finnish National Board of Education (FNBE)
www.oph.fi

Ravintolakoulu Perho (OP)
Helsinki Culinary School
www.perho.fi

Jyväskylän ammattiopisto, Palvelualojen oppilaitos (OP)
Jyväskylä Catering Institute
www.jao.fi

Etelä-Karjalan ammattiopisto (OP)
South Carelia Vocational College
www.ekamo.fi

Germany

Univation – Institut für Evaluation Dr. Beywl & Associates GmbH (EP)
Institute for Evaluation Dr. Beywl and Associates GmbH
www.univation.org

Berufliche Schulen Odenwaldkreis (BSO) (OP)
Vocational Schools Odenwaldkreis
www.bso-michelstadt.de

Hungary

Pécsi Tudományegyetem Felnőttképzési és Emberi Erőforrás Fejlesztési Kar (CP)
University of Pécs, Faculty of Adult Education and Human Resource Development
www.pte.hu

M & S Consulting Tanácsadó, Szolgáltató és Kereskedó Kft. (CP)
M & S Consultancy, Service and Trading Ltd.

Hansági Ferenc Vendéglátóipari és Idegenforgalmi Szakiskola és Szakközépiskola (OP)
Ferenc Hansági Technical and Professional School for Catering and Tourism
www.hansagi.sulinet.hu

Italy

Istituto per lo Sviluppo della Formazione Professionale dei Lavoratori (ISFOL) (CP)
Institute for the Development of Vocational Training for Workers
www.isfol.it

Federazione Nazionale Centro Nazionale Opere Salesiane - Formazione Aggiornamento
Professionale (CNOS-FAP) (OP)
CNOS-FAP National Federation
www.cnos-fap.it

Istituto Professionale per l´Industria e l´Artigianato (I.P.S.I.A) Monza (OP)
www.ipsiamonza.it

Istituto di Istruzione Superiore "don Milani-Depero" (OP)
Vocational Institute of Administration, Tourism and Leisure, Social Services and Arts
www.mide.it

Centro Italiano Opere Femminili Salesiane - Formazione Professionale (CIOFS-FP) Puglia (OP)
www.ciofsfppuglia.it

Netherlands

ROC Aventus (CP/OP)
Regional Training Centre Aventus
www.aventus.nl

Portugal

Instituto de Soldadura e Qualidade (ISQ) (CP)
Welding and Quality Institute
www.isq.pt

Centro de Formação Profissional para o Comércio e Afins (CECOA) (OP/DP/CP)
Vocational Training Centre for the Trade
www.cecoa.pt

Romania

Institutul de Ştiinţe ale Educaţiei (ISE) (CP)
Institute for Educational Sciences
www.ise.ro

Colegiul Tehnic de Posta si Telecomunicatii "Gh.Airinei" (OP)
"Gh.Airinei" Technical College of Post and Telecommunication
www.ptcbuc.8k.com

Universitatea Politehnica Bucuresti
Polytechnic University of Bucharest (PUB)
www.pub.ro

Slovenia

Andragoški center Slovenije (ACS) (CP/DP)
Slovenian Institute for Adult Education (SIAE)
www.acs.si

Spain

Direcció General d'Ensenyaments Professionals, Artístics i Especialitzats, Departament
d'Educació, Generalitat de Catalunya (CP/DP)
Ministry of Education (Catalan Government), General Direction of VET and Lifelong learning
www.xtec.es/fp/
IES Quercus (OP)
Secondary School Quercus
www.iesquercus.com

Switzerland

Erziehungsdirektion des Kantons Bern, Zentralstelle für Lehrerinnen- und Lehrerfortbildung,
IPS "Intensivprojekt Schule"
Educational Directorate Bern
www.erz.be.ch

Turkey

Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart Universitesi (COMU) & Millî Eğitim Bakanlığı (CP/DP)
Çanakkale Onsekiz Mar University & Ministry of Education
www.comu.edu.tr, www.meb.gov.tr

United Kingdom (Scotland)

Aberdeen College (OP/CP/CP)
www.abcol.ac.uk

CP – Coordinating Partner
DP – Development Partner
OP – Operative Partner
EP – Evaluation Partner