



European Quality Assurance
in Vocational Education and Training

Supporting the implementation of the
European Quality Assurance Reference Framework
for Vocational Education and Training

Peer Review Methods & Principles

EQAVET Peer Review at System Level

The EQAVET Annual Meeting – December 2020

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USERS OF PEER REVIEWS





DEFINITIONS - 1

Peer review in the education and training sector means the evaluation of an institution, activity or product by one or more peers i.e. by someone who does the same or a similar job to those being assessed.

Peer reviews may be conducted on systems [on parts or all of national/regional policies], institutions [providers of education and training e.g. universities, VET schools, quality assurance agencies, etc.] and/or on individual products [academic articles, etc.] (EQAVET, 2019).

Peer review is *the systematic examination and assessment of the performance of a State by other States, with the ultimate goal of helping the reviewed State improve its policy making, adopt best practices, and comply with established standards and principles* (OECD, 2003).



DEFINITIONS - 2

A **peer review** is a learning event hosted by a European country wishing to present a good practice example or an emerging policy or practice to a group of peer countries (up to 10 guest countries) and EU organisations. (EU Mutual Learning Programme).

Peer visit is a form of an external feedback from peers, with the aim of supporting a Forum member acting as host in the enhancement of quality assurance. An external group of peers is invited to give feedback on the quality assurance measures selected by the host institution (ETF Peer Learning Visits).

Peer review can be described as the systematic examination and assessment of the performance of an organisation by peers. The goal is to help the reviewed organisation improve its policy making, adopt best practices, and comply with established standards and principles. The examination relies heavily on mutual trust among the organisations involved in the review, as well as their shared confidence in the process (UN Evaluation Group, UNEG).



PURPOSES & AIMS OF PEER REVIEWS - 1

- Improve quality assurance
- Support, coordinate and encourage mutual learning
- Discuss, identify and adapt good/best practice
- Comply with established standards and principles
- Opportunity for international cooperation
- Advance trust, transparency and understanding
- Facilitate the emergence of important but often hidden issues
- Promote mutual reflection
- Receive constructive suggestions from peers
- Increase the understanding of your own practice (both partners)



PURPOSES & AIMS OF PEER REVIEWS - 2

Policy dialogue

Systematic exchange of information and opinions

Transparency

Present national rules, practices and processes

Capacity building

Mutual learning both for the peers and for the host

Compliance

Ensure that countries comply with internationally agreed policies, standards and principles

ALTERNATIVES TO PEER REVIEWS

Internal development
Formal external evaluations
Accreditation
Inspection





UNIT OF ANALYSIS IN PEER REVIEWS - 1

Good practice – improvement – both
Levels/topics

Scope of the peer review: should it encompass the entire QA national system, or just parts of it? Should it focus on good, controversial or innovative practice? Should it request a deep analysis before, during and/or after the visit? And who should do the analysis?

And who decides the scope?



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UNIT OF ANALYSIS IN PEER REVIEWS - 2

DAC peer review reference guide

Components of analysis

Dimension	Components of analysis
1. Global efforts for sustainable development The member has a broad, strategic approach to global sustainable development, encompassing global challenges, policy coherence for sustainable development and awareness raising at home	1.1. Efforts to support global sustainable development 1.2. Policy coherence for sustainable development 1.3. Global awareness
2. Policy vision and framework Clear political directives, policies and strategies shape the member's development co-operation and are in line with international commitments, including the 2030 Agenda.	2.1. Framework 2.2. Principles and guidance 2.3. Basis for decision-making
3. Financing for development The member's international and national commitments drive its ODA volume and allocations and its other financing efforts to support the 2030 Agenda.	3.1. Overall ODA volume 3.2. Bilateral ODA allocations 3.3. Multilateral ODA allocations 3.4. Financing for sustainable development
4. Structure and systems Organisational structures and management systems for development co-operation are fit for purpose, with appropriate capabilities.	4.1. Authority, mandate and co-ordination 4.2. Systems 4.3. Capabilities throughout the system
5. Delivery modalities and partnerships The member's approach to delivering in partner countries and through partnerships is in line with the principles for effective development co-operation.	5.1. Effective partnerships 5.2. Country level engagement
6. Results management, evaluation and learning The member plans and manages for results, in line with the SDGs, building evidence of what works and using evidence to learn and adapt	6.1. Management for development results 6.2. Evaluation system 6.3. Institutional learning
7. Fragility, crises and humanitarian assistance The member contributes to reducing the risk of crises and conflict, minimising the impact of shocks and conflicts, managing forced displacement flows and supporting affected populations, and increasing resilience to shocks and stresses, including through prevention. (Section A) The member contributes to minimising the humanitarian impact of shocks and crises; and saves lives, alleviates suffering, and maintains human dignity in crisis and disaster settings. (Section B)	A 7.1 Strategic framework 7.2 Effective programme design and instruments 7.3 Effective delivery and partnerships B 7.4 Humanitarian assistance strategic framework 7.5 Effective humanitarian programming 7.6 Effective delivery, partnership and instruments of humanitarian assistance 7.7 Organisation fit for purpose 7.8 Communication

Source OECD, Development Co-Operation Directorate, DAC Peer Review Reference Guide, 2019–20, DCD/DAC (2019)3/FINAL



PRECONDITIONS OF PEER REVIEWS

Careful preparation

A clearly defined policy context, clear objectives, and the participation of key actors at system level

Trustworthy peers who have expertise on the EU process and the EQAVET Framework.

An open minded host that want to listen to the peers



PHASES OF PEER REVIEWS - 1

The four phases of a ETF Peer Visit

- Phase 1. Preparation for the Peer Visit
- Phase 2. Peer Visit in the country of the host Forum member institution
- Phase 3. Peer feedback to the host Forum member institution
- Phase 4. Follow-up: consideration of improvements based on the feedback.

Each peer review in Member States and EFTA/EEA countries is conducted by three reviewers and consists of four phases (**Eurostat**):

1. Completion of a self-assessment questionnaire by a country
2. Assessment of the questionnaire by peer reviewers
3. A peer review visit, and
4. The preparation of reports on the outcomes.



PHASES OF PEER REVIEWS - 2

The European Peer Review Manual in VET:

1. The peer review starts with an organising phase
2. The peer visit, which is the core activity, is conducted in this phase.
3. After the peer visit, a draft report is prepared by peers.
4. Results and recommendations from the peer review are expressed in concrete actions aimed at improvement.



DURATION OF PEER REVIEWS

Time

How much time should be devoted to peer review by the host country, by peers and by the coordinator?

How long should the peer visit last?



PEERS IN PEER REVIEWS

Who are “peers” of peer review? Number, coordinator?
Who should be peers? The NRPs or other experts/institutions?
What actors and organisations should also be involved?
Peers are “persons of equal standing”, who usually come from a similar environment and have specific knowledge and expertise. This makes it easier to accept the findings of the evaluation in comparison to other external forms of review (EQAVET, 2019).



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DOCUMENTATION OF PEER REVIEWS

What kind of documentation is needed?



RESULTS OF PEER REVIEWS

Outcomes/outputs

Is the learning shared publicly or not?

Shall the recommendations be followed or not?

Both parties know there is no obligation to accept recommendations (OECD – Development Assistance Committee).

MAIN METHODOLOGIES OF PEER REVIEWS

No “one size fits all” model

A “**grassroots model**”: grassroots activities by VET providers with no European coordination and support.

A “**decentralised coordination model**”: a coordinating body at European level would provide technical and administrative support primarily.

A “**transnational cooperative model**”: more active and thorough cooperation between the different actors is involved, with a coordination body that also provides expert support for both the national lead bodies (coordination, dissemination, cooperative support of transnational peer reviews) and the VET providers involved (training, peer database, matching).

SWOT ANALYSIS OF PEER REVIEWS - 1

Critical success factors	“Killers”
Observation of the requirements of the Peer Review procedure in order to ensure a high quality evaluation	Hidden conflicts in the institution of relevance to the topics of the Peer Review
Openness of management to evaluation findings and commitment to use results	Lack of commitment of management to follow-up of results which are not convenient or are critical of management or of previous actions
External evaluation as opportunity to stimulate change	External evaluation as mere marketing event
Realistic expectations	
Clarity of intended users and competence of intended users to act upon Peer Review results	
Appropriate evaluation questions	
Shared understanding between VET Provider and Peers of the topics to be evaluated	
Involvement of relevant (mainly internal in most cases) stakeholders in all phases of the Peer Review (esp. staff)	

Source: Gutknecht-Gmeiner

SWOT ANALYSIS OF PEER REVIEWS - 2

Strengths

Soft

Easily accepted

Facilitate critical issues

Self-critical attitude

No rigid

Facilitate all topics

Adapted to the national
context

Coherent with the EQAVET
QA-cycle

Weaknesses

Demand resources

Travel and accommodation

Need planning

Need follow-up on the
recommendations

Need experienced peers

SWOT ANALYSIS OF PEER REVIEWS - 3

Opportunities

International cooperation
Networking
Exchange of knowledge
Promote evaluation aimed
at improvement
Foster European
integration and awareness
of others systems
Contribute to trust and
transparency

Threats

Selection of peers
Lack of commitment at both
sides (peers and host)
One or two visits might not
be enough to contribute
Lack of insight and focus
Lack of openness and
honesty

EQAVET PEER REVIEWS AT SYSTEM LEVEL – 4 Soft or Hard?

- 1) *The choice of the field or **topic** to be reviewed*
 - 2) *The **Scope** of the review*
 - 3) *Who **decides** the topic/s?*
 - 4) *The **involvement** of national (or regional) stakeholders*
 - 5) *Principles, **criteria** and standards to follow when assessing the performance of the reviewed institution*
 - 6) *The choice of **peers** and their training*
 - 7) *Number of peers*
 - 8) *The choice of the peer coordinator*
 - 9) *Preparation of **documentation***
 - 10) *Management of the visit*
 - 11) ***Conclusion** of the peer review*
 - 12) *Checking the **impact** of the review*
 - 13) *Summarising the results*
- (EQAVET, 2019)



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EQAVET PEER REVIEWS AT SYSTEM LEVEL

Topics within quality assurance

Learning in all contexts & flexible pathways
Digital transition
Sustainable, green and clean economy

THE QUALITY CYCLE

of the European Quality Assurance Reference
Framework for Vocational Education and Training

1. Purpose and Plan

Set up clear, appropriate and measurable goals and objectives in terms of policies, procedures, tasks and human resources.

2. Implementation

Establish procedures to ensure the achievement of goals and objectives (e.g. development of partnerships, involvement of stakeholders, allocation of resources, and organisational or operational procedures).



4. Review

Develop procedures in order to achieve the targeted outcomes and/or new objectives after processing feedback, key stakeholders conduct discussion and analysis in order to devise procedures for change.

3. Assessment and Evaluation

Design mechanisms for the evaluation of achievements and outcomes by collecting and processing data in order to make informed assessment.

IF YOU WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT PEER REVIEWS

Sources:

<https://www.eqavet.eu/Eqavet2017/media/StudyPeerReview/FINAL-Study-on-Peer-Review-and-the-work-of-the-EQAVET-Network-Nov2019.pdf?ext=.pdf>

<http://www.peer-review-network.eu/pages/manual/manual-vnfil.php>

ETF Forum for quality assurance in vocational education and training Peer visit guidance and training manual summary version, 2018.

M. Gutknecht-Gmeiner, Peer Review Impact Analysis Report- Analysis of 14 transnational European Peer Reviews carried out in eight European countries 2006–2009 Final report, Vienna, Nov. 2010

Enqa-Vet, Proposal for a structure and process for transnational European peer reviews Results of the work undertaken by the thematic group on Peer Review, FETAC 2009.

UNEG Framework for Professional Peer Reviews of the Evaluation Function of UN organizations. UNEG/REF(2011).

EQAVET PEER REVIEWS AT SYSTEM LEVEL Key Questions

- 1) *What shall be the field or **topic** to be reviewed?*
- 2) *What shall be the **Scope** of the review?*
- 3) *Who **decides** the topic/s?*
- 4) *Who (peers, hosts) shall be **involved** in the peer review?*
- 5) *Which principles, **criteria** and standards to follow at the peer review?*
- 6) *What shall be the profile of the **peers** and their training?*
- 7) *How to prepare the **documentation** for the peer review?*
- 8) *How to make the **Conclusion** of the peer review?*
- 9) *How to check the **impact** of the peer review?*



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Thank you for your attention!

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