



European peer review



European Network for Quality Assurance
in Vocational Education and Training

Introduction

European peer review has the potential to become one of the main pillars of European vocational education and training (VET) quality policy in the coming years and will assist in the implementation of the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for VET (EQARF). It is a practical, tangible and concrete tool encompassing all the relevant VET stakeholders of the participating Member States.

This brochure presents a proposal for a structure and process for transnational European peer reviews produced by the ENQA-VET thematic group on peer review. The proposal responds to a high demand from VET providers to undertake transnational peer reviews in order to support quality assurance of VET.

What is peer review?

Peer review has been defined as a voluntary external evaluation which supports European VET providers in their efforts to improve the quality of their provision.

In peer review, a group of peers (external group of experts) is invited to review the quality of various aspects of the education and training provision of a department or the whole organisation. In the main, this involves the peers visiting the institution in question after which they prepare feedback on a list of topics agreed in advance.

Peers are “persons of equal standing”, who usually come from a similar environment and have specific knowledge and expertise of the evaluated subject. The advantage of this equal standing is that the peer review process tends to be more accepted by VET providers than other external forms of control such as inspection or testing.

- Peer review builds upon the self-assessment of VET providers as part of their internal efforts for quality assurance - combined with an external evaluation. Contrary to other external assessments, evaluations, and inspections, peer review is voluntary and focuses on quality development and improvement.
- It taps into the professional know-how of the VET practitioners and ensures that the know-how and results generated in a peer review remain within the profession and are easily disseminated. Both the reviewed institution and the peers (and the institution they come from) benefit from a peer review.
- It contributes to the professional development of the teachers, trainers, counsellors and other practitioners from VET who act as peers.

- It is a professional, open and improvement-oriented procedure of external evaluation which directly contributes to the build-up of a professional quality ethos and culture within VET.
- Because of the inherent cooperation between VET providers from different countries, transnational peer review additionally fosters cooperation and mutual understanding between Member States.

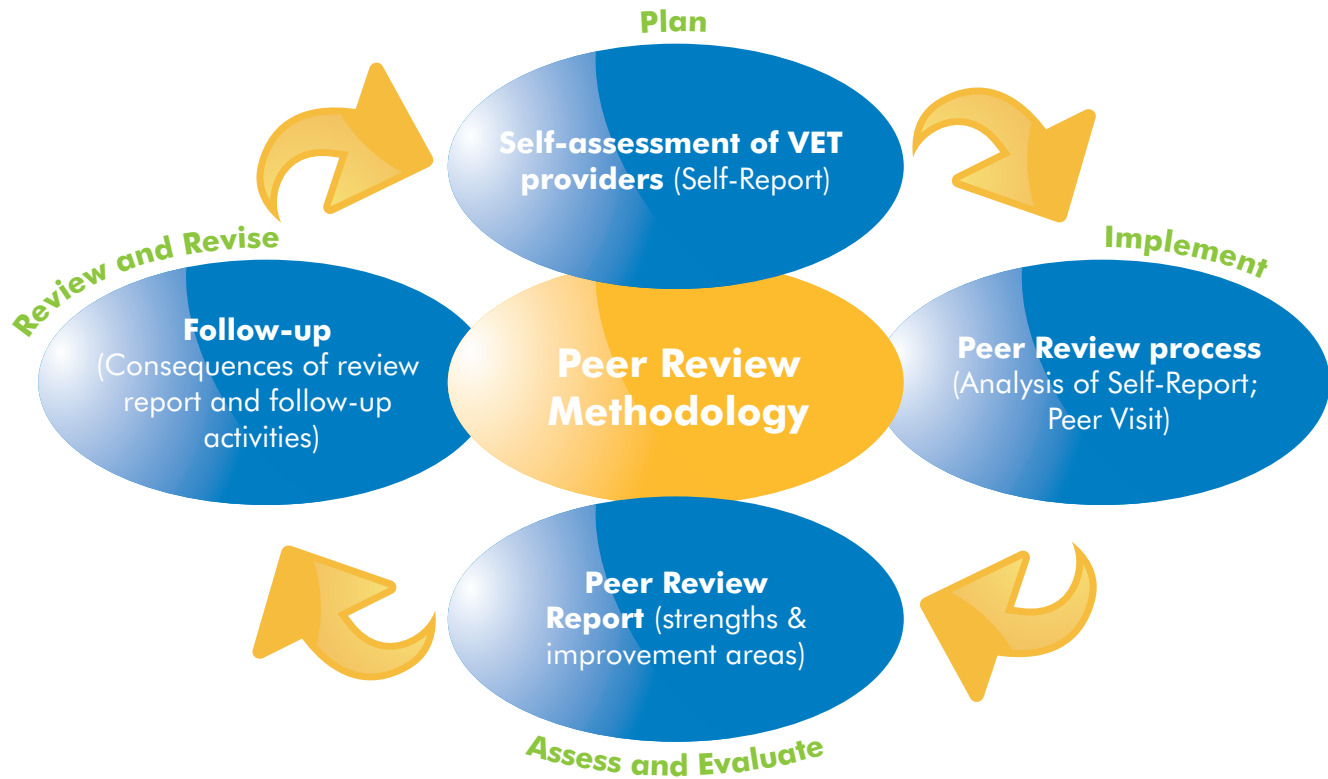
European peer review

European peer review is a form of external evaluation which aims to support education and training providers in their efforts for quality development and quality improvement.

The success of previous peer review projects, the growing interest of Member States and its potential to support the successful implementation of the EQARF and related European VET tools such as the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and the European Credit System for VET (ECVET) have created a new impetus for a more generalised approach to the implementation of transnational peer reviews at the European level.

The diagram below illustrates the relationship between European peer review and the EQARF. (Plan, Implement, Assess and Evaluate, Review and Revise)

Figure 1: EQARF and European peer review



Scenarios to support transnational peer review

Work in the thematic group has identified three possible scenarios which could be used to implement transnational peer review at a European level as follows:

Scenario 1 - “grass-roots model”

In this “grass-roots model” no coordination or support for peer reviews is provided at the European level. It will be up to the individual VET providers to build up their own networking and coordination structures and to acquire funding for transnational peer reviews. Conduct of transnational peer reviews will be ad hoc; no systematic sharing of experiences and joint learning will be possible and there would be no systematic or coherent involvement of VET stakeholders such as the Social Partners.

This model would be relatively straightforward to implement as there is no additional European level coordination required. In countries where peer review is being implemented, VET providers could be assisted in the above tasks by national bodies such as the Quality Assurance National Reference Points (QANRPs) or other suitable institutions. The QANRPs could take up coordination and support functions at the national level and give individual support for transnational activities, through bilateral agreements with similar bodies from other countries.

Scenario 2 - “decentralised coordination model”

The decentralised coordination model involves a coordinating body on the European level providing a basic framework for transnational European peer reviews. This body coordinates the national lead bodies, gives technical support and ensures that common procedures (including quality criteria for peer reviews) are followed in all participating countries. It is also responsible for setting up appropriate monitoring and evaluation schemes on a European level. It does not, however give expert support for the preparation and conduct of peer reviews or organise training or other supportive activities. This responsibility lies with the national bodies.

The QANRPs could play a decisive role as national lead bodies in this scenario by managing and coordinating the practical political and operative issues of peer reviews on a national level. They would also be responsible for the integration of the Social Partners and other important VET stakeholders in the implementation, revision and further development of transnational European peer reviews.

With the right expertise this model could be also relatively easy to implement but the whole approach would depend on the commitment and capacities of the national lead bodies. Additionally, no provision is made to encompass VET providers from countries without national lead bodies or VET providers who have started their own peer review network and want to integrate it into a larger framework.

Scenario 3 - “transnational cooperative model”

In this third scenario the coordinating body at European level plays a more comprehensive role. While operative tasks and responsibilities by and large remain with the national bodies, extra European level support in the form of European peer training and workshops for example are made available by the coordinating body.

Extensive monitoring (including collaborative self-evaluation of coordinating structures and processes) is provided by the coordinating body who may also commission a central external evaluation of transnational peer review implementation. The coordinating body would be responsible for maintaining a database of peers and peer reviews and possibly recruiting new peers in countries with no history of peer review.

The QANRPs would be responsible for VET provider participation and the involvement of other stakeholders such as the Social Partners at national level. Participation of VET providers from countries with no national coordination body is foreseen. Coordination between the QANRPs at a European level will be facilitated by the coordinating body.

This model requires an initial investment and consistent levels of commitment by the all Member States involved. There would be higher costs incurred in maintaining a coordinating body and structure at European level. However through this approach transnational peer review has the potential to become one of the most important pillars of VET quality improvement at the European level in the future, by building on experiences on the ground, providing common approaches, and facilitating cross-fertilisation between national and European levels.

Further information

For more information on this topic please see the full report "Proposal for a structure and process for transnational European peer reviews" available for download from the ENQA-VET website www.enqavet.eu



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