

How peer review can support the quality assurance of VET provision

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Types of external quality assurance

Across Europe, there are a wide range of approaches used for external quality assurance of VET providers e.g.

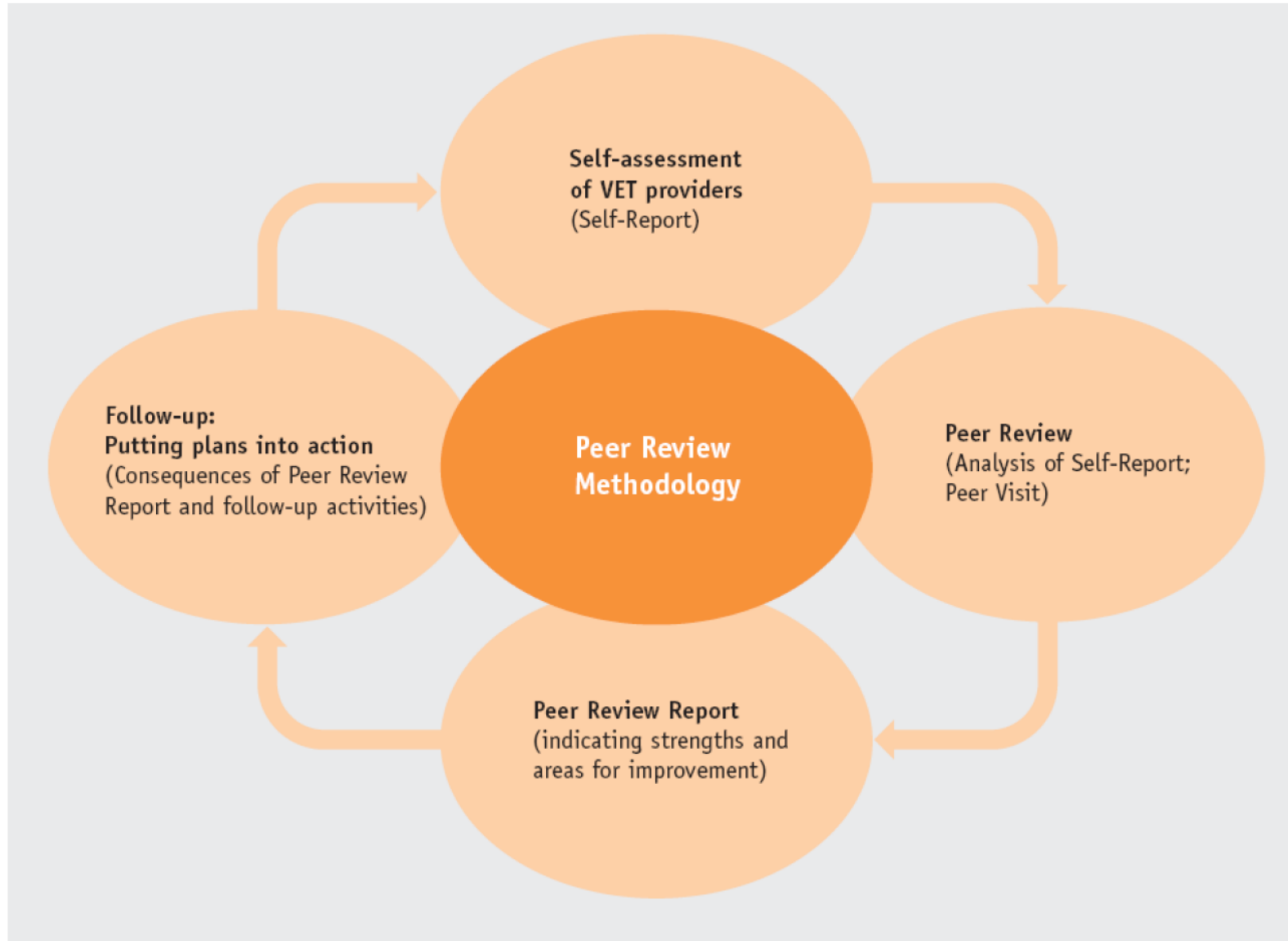
- inspection
- national statistics arising from national or regional examinations
- external monitoring teams comprised of consultants, experts and peers
- peer review at the regional or national level
- support and guidance from national/regional agencies or ministries
- the exchange of senior staff between VET institutions
- coaches or mentors for senior VET staff
- external staff on governing bodies, councils and boards of directors
- international peer reviews

Characteristics of peer reviews

Peer reviews, at the system and provider levels, include a number of common characteristics e.g.

- participation is **voluntary**
- it is part of an external quality assurance process which invites **peers** to support VET providers or the VET system
- the focus is on mutual learning which identifies the **strengths and weaknesses** of a particular quality assurance issue
- the peers provide **feedback** which the host uses to improve the quality of provision
- the peer review processes is based on the EQAVET quality assurance cycle of ***Planning – Implementation – Evaluation – Review***
- it usually involves a **site visit** (it could be on-line or a hybrid model)

How are peer reviews organised?



Types of peer reviews

- provider level models where all the peers are from the same VET system
- provider level models where at least one peer is from another VET system
- system level peer reviews where all the peers are from the same VET system
- system level peer reviews where at least one peer is from another VET system

The VET and higher education sectors use all four types of peer review.

Our focus is on international peer reviews at the VET provider level

- there are many examples of international peer reviews at the VET provider level - almost 20 years of experience
- there is a great deal of consensus on the methodology
- the peer review include stakeholders and partner organisations
- the focus is on discussion and interviews with the hosts
- there is a non-judgemental approach to the advice given by the peers
- usually the peer review lasts for 2-3 days
- the peers' report has to be checked for factual errors and accuracy, agreed by all the peers. It often remains confidential and for the sole use of the hosts

How to ensure the success of a peer review

The **European Peer Review Quality Areas and Criteria for VET** manual highlights the following 15 areas of quality

- QA 1 Strategic planning and development
- QA 2 Quality Assurance
- QA 3 Knowledge Management
- QA 4 Management and Leadership
- QA 5 Management of infrastructure, facilities, and finances
- QA 6 Planning and Management of Human Resources
- QA 7 Equality and Equal opportunities
- QA 8 Internal relations
- QA 9 External relations
- QA 10 Internationalisation
- QA 11 The Pedagogical framework and planning the pedagogical processes
- QA 12 Teaching and learning
- QA 13 Work-based learning (WBL) outside the school
- QA 14 Assessment and Certification
- QA 15 Learning results and outcomes

Example - QA1 Strategic planning and development

Each of the quality areas in the **European Peer Review Quality Areas and Criteria for VET** manual includes criteria, a set of indicators and sources of evidence e.g. in Quality Area 1 on Strategic planning and development:

Quality Criteria

- identifying the external and internal environment
- strategic planning
- monitoring and evaluation of strategic planning and development
- improvement of strategic planning and development

The potential benefits for the hosts

- receive feedback on the quality of provision
- support feedback from critical friends
- identify strengths
- increase public accountability
- strengthen mutual learning and the creation of networks
- help to share good practice
- additional external quality assurance measure
- the focus is on needs of the VET provider hosting the peer review

The potential benefits for the peers

- opportunity to ‘safely’ consider another VET provider’s approach
- challenges assumptions about how to approach quality assurance
- strengthens the creation of networks and mutual learning
- helps to share good practice
- strengthens peers’ ability to provide non-judgemental feedback and interviewing skills
- develops the peers’ ability to prepare reports which highlight strengths and weaknesses (areas for development)

In some peer reviews, the follow-up evaluation records that the benefits to the peers exceed those of the hosts.

EQAVET and peer reviews (1)

The Quality Assurance Cycle

1 Planning

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

Planning

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)

Implementation

4 Review

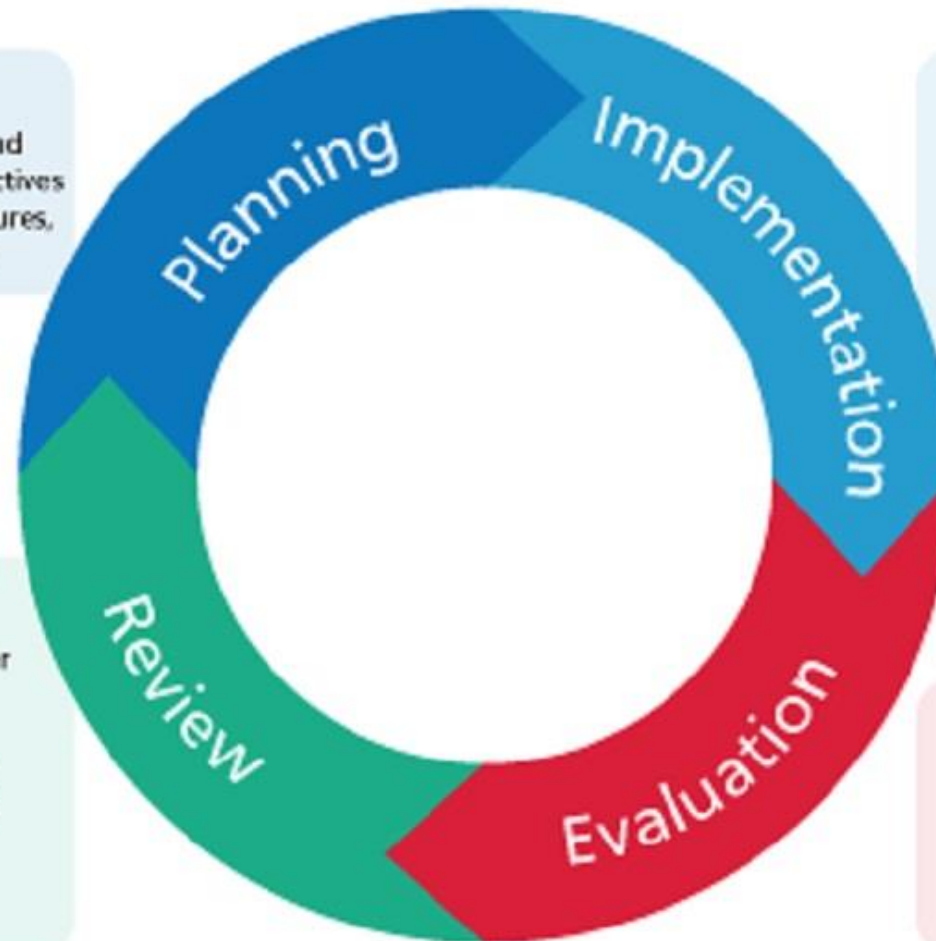
Develop procedures in order to achieve the targeted outcomes and/or new objectives; after processing feedback, key stakeholders conduct discussion and analysis in order to devise procedures for change

Review

3 Evaluation

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

Evaluation



EQAVET and peer reviews (2)

- the four phases of the EQAVET quality assurance cycle match the four activities in the peer review methodology (e.g. planning in the EQAVET quality assurance cycle matches the self-assessment activities of the peer review)
- EQAVET's indicative descriptors at the VET provider level align with the quality areas for the peer review (e.g. in EQAVET *Explicit goals/objectives and targets are set and monitored, and programmes are designed to meet them* aligns with Quality Area 1 on *Strategic Planning and Development* in peer reviews)
- peer reviews can provide data and information which contributes to the EQAVET indicators e.g. indicator numbers 4 and 5: *completion rates in VET programmes* and *placement rates in VET programmes*

The ten EQAVET indicators (1-5)

1	2	3	4	5
<p>Relevance of quality assurance systems for VET providers:</p> <p>a) share of VET providers applying internal quality assurance systems defined by law/at own initiative</p> <p>b) share of accredited VET providers</p>	<p>Investment in training of teachers and trainers:</p> <p>a) share of teachers and trainers participating in further training</p> <p>b) amount of funds invested, including for digital skills</p>	<p>Participation rate in VET programmes: Number of participants in VET programmes, according to the type of programme and the individual criteria</p>	<p>Completion rate in VET programmes: Number of persons having successfully completed/abandoned VET programmes, according to the type of programme and the individual criteria</p>	<p>Placement rate in VET programmes:</p> <p>a) destination of VET learners at a designated point in time after completion of training, according to the type of programme and the individual criteria</p> <p>b) share of employed learners at a designated point in time after completion of training, according to the type of programme and the individual criteria</p>
<p>This measures context and inputs</p>	<p>This measures inputs and processes</p>	<p>This measures inputs, processes and outputs</p>	<p>This measures processes, outputs and outcomes</p>	<p>This measures outcomes</p>

The ten EQAVET indicators (6-10)

6	7	8	9	10
<p>Utilisation of acquired skills at the workplace: a) information on occupation obtained by individuals after completion of training, according to type of training and individual criteria</p> <p>b) satisfaction rate of individuals and employers with acquired skills/competences</p>	<p>Unemployment rate according to individual criteria</p>	<p>Prevalence of vulnerable groups:</p> <p>a) percentage of participants in VET classified as disadvantaged groups (in a defined region or catchment area) according to age and gender</p> <p>b) success rate of disadvantaged groups according to age and gender</p>	<p>Mechanisms to identify training needs in the labour market:</p> <p>a) information on mechanisms set up to identify changing demands at different levels</p> <p>b) evidence of the use of such mechanisms and their effectiveness</p>	<p>Schemes used to promote better access to VET and provide guidance to (potential) VET learners:</p> <p>a) information on existing schemes at different levels</p> <p>b) evidence of their effectiveness</p>
<p>This measures outcomes</p>	<p>This measures context</p>	<p>This measures context</p>	<p>This measures context and inputs</p>	<p>This measures processes</p>

What's next for quality management at a European level?

- VET providers increasingly face international competition and mutual learning helps to stay 'ahead of the game'. Peer review at the provider level is a 'safe' and 'manageable' way to achieve this
- VET providers are becoming much larger organisations (due to mergers and national/regional policies) and the importance of an objective, external perspective is increasing
- the success of the higher education sector, through the EHEA, in creating a European approach to mutual learning is something that can be replicated in the VET sector
- the importance of quality assurance in the creation of 'zones of mutual trust' in Europe depends on inviting external reviews from international peers. There are limits to the improvements that can be made when you only look inside your own VET system

Conclusions

- international peer review at the VET provider level will continue, and will build on almost 20 years of experience
- improving the quality of VET provision needs an external perspective
- peer reviews at a VET provider level require funding, organising and commitment but the benefits can be really significant
- learning from others, particularly from peers who have different ways of looking at quality assurance, is a 'safe' and 'manageable' way to improve the quality of VET provision
- international peer reviews at the VET provider level can be part of a national, system-wide approach to external quality assurance