



## **Increasing Sustainable Development of Quality in Vocational Education and Training by Adopting Peer Review – The Project PRISDOQ**

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### **1. Introduction**

High quality VET has a crucial role to play in ensuring European countries' capacity to respond to the economic challenges they face. Excellence, creativity and learning-to-learn skills must be developed in all systems and levels of education and training. Schools and VET can play a key role in facilitating innovation. High quality VET, for example, can contribute to innovation at the workplace.

The need to continue efforts in European countries to improve the quality and attractiveness of VET is a key priority of the Copenhagen process and of the Europe 2020 strategy. While some countries have established advanced and comprehensive quality assurance systems, much more work needs to be done to develop a culture of quality assurance and development within VET systems.

Mutual trust in quality assurance processes is a crucial part of this process.

In 2009 the Thematic Group on Peer Review of the European Network for Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (EQA-VET) made a survey that reflects a high demand of European VET providers to start transnational Peer Reviews by 2010. The final results of Thematic Group show that "If implemented properly, European Peer Review as a practical, tangible and concrete tool to implement the EQARF recommendation has the potential to become one of the main pillars of European VET quality policy in the next 5 to 10 years encompassing all relevant actors – VET providers, social partners and other stakeholders as well as the VET systems of the participating Member States" [1].

The EQA-VET network will provide a basis for a structured and sustainable platform for members to exchange information and experience, to engage themselves in a process of mutual learning and consensus building which will lead to the further development of common principles, reference criteria and indicators as well as tools for quality improvement in VET at national, regional and local levels as appropriate.

Peer Review can be one of the concrete tool to be developed and widely used by VET providers in each Member States to promote a bottom-up approach to Quality Assurance and a cooperative learning method as recommended by EU.

Peer Review was defined as a voluntary external evaluation tool that supports European VET providers in their efforts to improve the quality of their provision and enhance their accountability. Peer Review combines self-evaluation with an external professional assessment conducted by peers – experts of equal standing with those being externally evaluated. [2]

### **2. The project “Peer Review: Increasing Sustainable Development of Quality”**

How can VET providers, policy makers and social partners reach a wide use of Peer Review in their Quality Assurance systems? Which are the strategies and concrete procedures that they can promote and adopt to achieve this goal?

The EU project P.R.I.S.D.O.Q. intends to develop strategies and procedures to concretely promote the adoption of Transnational Peer Review at European level by involving VET System key players of different European countries - as recommended by the EU Commission.

The 1<sup>st</sup> step:

Implementation of Transnational Peer Review at European level by testing it in VET provider organizations from Italy (Associazione FORMA.Azione srl), Germany (PERSPEKTIVwechsel), Turkey (OPAL) and in a Education Trade Union (Social Partner from Lithuania). Involving a policymaker at Regional level (Regione Umbria - Italy) supports the sustainable implementation in the national system. It is also to be considered as a crucial factor to assure the respect of the strategic objectives of the EU Recommendation that encourage the Member States to strengthen their quality assurance systems at national level and make the best use of the Reference Framework involving the Social Partners, regional and local authorities and other relevant stakeholders as appropriate.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> step:

Sharing of criticism and strengths about the application of Transnational Peer Review including an “Executive plan for a sustainable management of the Transnational Peer Review”. By using a SWOT analysis on the Peer Review experimentation, P.R.I.S.D.O.Q. also aims to define and apply solutions and process to concretely increase the use of Transnational Peer Review in each partner country involved. Using the Executive Plan as a guideline to correctly implement Transnational Peer Review, other European VET providers can overcome possible criticisms already pointed out by P.R.I.S.D.O.Q. partners.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> step:

Dissemination of all project results including training of future peers and good practices in both bottom-up and top-down approaches.



The expected results concern improvement of quality – especially concerning the offer of VET providers, the attractiveness of VET and the mutual understanding of VET systems including cultural and structural differences.

### 3. The approach

Peer Review is a highly recognized and longstanding instrument of external quality assurance in the realm of higher education. Within vocational education and training, however, its use has so far been marginal. “In the past years quality assurance and development have evolved into a central objective of vocational education and training (VET) policy in Europe. Traditional input-oriented central quality control through inspection is increasingly recognised as insufficient for ensuring high-quality VET provision and meeting new challenges ... Peer Review is seen as an innovative and promising instrument of quality assurance and development.” [3] In PRISDOQ we want to stress the relevance of working with a bottom-up approach, starting from self-evaluation and continuing in developing review methods to concretely introduce modifications and improvements derived from the evaluation process.

Reviewing process can be considered one of the most important element that the EU Recommendation intends to implement in each Member State. Actually the European project QALL

“Peer review builds upon the self-assessment of VET providers and combines the internal efforts for quality assurance with an external evaluation. Contrary to other external assessments, evaluations and inspections, Peer Review is voluntary and focuses on quality development and improvement. Furthermore it taps on the professional knowhow 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.” [4]

The European peer review Manual for VET describes the following procedure for Transnational Peer Reviews[2]: “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 basis prerequisite for conducting a Peer Review is that a VET provider has previously undergone a self-evaluation process at least once. (p.5)

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. (p.6)”

The Peer Review procedure comprises 4 phases:

1. The Peer Review starts with a preparatory phase. In this first phase, the Peer Review is organized 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 organizational development: results and recommendations from the Peer Review are transferred into concrete actions for improvement, which are planned and implemented. (p.7)

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. (p.17)

Prior to the Peer Review, the Peers should undergo a "Peer Training Programme" that prepares them for their work as external evaluators.” (p.17) At least a web based training should be attended [5]. Of course a face-to-face-training with future peers is even better and can be requested by the project partners/authors or the National Reference Points for Quality Assurance in VET [6].

### 4. Sustainable implementation of Peer Reviews

During the 1<sup>st</sup> step of PRISDOQ we implement Transnational Peer Reviews on an organizational level within the partner organizations. Each partner is once a hosting peer and at least three times a visiting peer. These practical



experiences will facilitate the partners very well for supporting others in all the necessary steps and phases of quality development.

During the 2<sup>nd</sup> step own experiences are reflected and strengths / weaknesses of the approach are used for the development of an executive plan for the sustainable management of Transnational Peer Reviews. On national level recommendations for the sustainable implementation will be developed and provided to decision makers from politics, stakeholders and the interested public.

During the 3<sup>rd</sup> step several events (e.g. meetings, trainings and conferences), online devices (e.g. website and blogs) [7] and printed materials will support the dissemination and valorization of PRISDOQ.

## References

[1] [4] Proposal for a structure and process for transnational European peer reviews. Results of the work undertaken by the thematic group on Peer review. © European Network for Quality Assurance in VET, 2009

[2] Peer Review Extended II / Österreichisches Institut für Berufsbildungsforschung (2009). European Peer Review Manual for VET.

[3] [http://www.peer-review-education.net/index.php?class=Calimero\\_Webpage&id=12739](http://www.peer-review-education.net/index.php?class=Calimero_Webpage&id=12739)

[5] available here: [http://www.peer-review-education.net/wbt/Start\\_here.htm](http://www.peer-review-education.net/wbt/Start_here.htm)

[6] <http://www.eqavet.eu/gns/about-eqavet/network-members/national-reference-points.aspx>

[7] <http://pwprisdq.wordpress.com/>