



The EQAVET Network's approach to VET system level Peer Reviews: A Manual

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The EQAVET Network's approach to VET system level Peer Reviews: A Manual

Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion
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THE EQAVET NETWORK'S APPROACH TO VET SYSTEM LEVEL PEER REVIEWS: A MANUAL

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Introduction

What is a Peer Review?

The **2020 VET Recommendation**¹ defines a peer review as ‘a type of voluntary mutual learning activity with the objective to support the improvement and transparency of quality assurance arrangements at system level not leading to accreditation procedures, based on a specific methodology to be developed by the European Network for quality assurance in vocational education and training’.²

Peer Reviews aim to support the EQAVET network wide process of taking stock of “what is there” in terms of quality assuring national VET systems, where the main challenges are and decide how to take it forward in the EQAVET context – main strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement.

The Peer Review process enables the country hosting the peer review to reflect on its own practice, using peers as critical friends to draw out the lessons and identify areas for learning and further improvement to meet the current and future challenges. Ultimately, Peer Reviews aim to reinforce mutual trust between the EU countries and promote further collaboration and networking between the EQAVET Network members.

What is the purpose of this Manual?

This Manual has been developed as part of the methodology and procedure to carry out EQAVET Peer Reviews at VET system level and is intended to **assist you in designing and implementing peer reviews in your respective country context**.

The Manual presents the main principles of EQAVET Peer Reviews on VET system level; provides concrete guidance and tools for National Reference Points (NRPs) representatives to get familiar with the phases and practical steps each phase that a Peer Review entails; states the roles and responsibilities of the main parties involved; and provides the NRPs with the tools that can assist them in preparing and implementing Peer Reviews. The Manual can also be used by the broader EQAVET Network to get acquainted with the EQAVET Network’s approach to VET system level Peer Reviews.

Who is it for?

The Manual is written for EQAVET NRPs interested in engaging in EQAVET Peer Reviews at a VET system level. The Manual can be useful both for NRPs taking the role of host, and for NRPs acting as peer reviewers. As such, the Manual shares the benefits of participating in a peer review both, for hosts and peer reviewers:

- **NRPs acting as hosts** benefit from analytically self-assess the selected quality assurance measure, reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of their quality assurance system and become acquainted with an external perspective and gain experience in receiving and acting feedback as well as learning from other Member States’ practices. The measures to be reviewed should already be in place or in an advanced development stage;
- **NRPs acting as peer reviewers** will get a chance to gather in-depth knowledge about national quality assurance approaches and measures from other Member States and engage in mutual learning with other peers and representatives from the host country.

¹ [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32020H1202\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32020H1202(01)&from=EN)

² Cf. footnote No 36

Overall, the Manual outlines the main considerations in developing the peer reviews, proposes an EQAVET specific approach and serves as a practical manual or 'toolbox' that can assist the EQAVET Network members in preparing and implementing peer reviews.

How is the Manual structured and how do I navigate around the information?

The Manual is designed in a 'modular' way, so that NRPs and their representatives can get a thorough understanding of the preparation process to implement and participate in a peer review.

Section 1 sets out the main principles of EQAVET Peer Reviews, including a peer review definition, the aims and benefits of the peer review process for all kind of participants.

Setting up the scope of the peer reviews can follow two main approaches, these are:

- **Whole system approach**, covering the entire national (or regional) VET quality system and the whole EQAVET framework (four stages of the quality cycle, indicative descriptors at the VET system level and performance against common indicators).
- **Focused approach**, leading to less comprehensive scrutiny of the whole system.

Concerning the **nature of participation**, either an '**open-door**' or a '**closed-door**' **approach** can be followed. In some instances, external stakeholders and/or independent experts are also invited to the process and peer review results are usually made public ('open-door' approach) while in closed-door approaches, only institutional peers participate, and outcomes remain confidential.

To support the implementation of successful peer reviews, **the EQAVET Secretariat has prepared an online training for EQAVET NRP experts acting as hosts and peer reviewers**. Further details on the support and training available can be found in **section 1.4**.

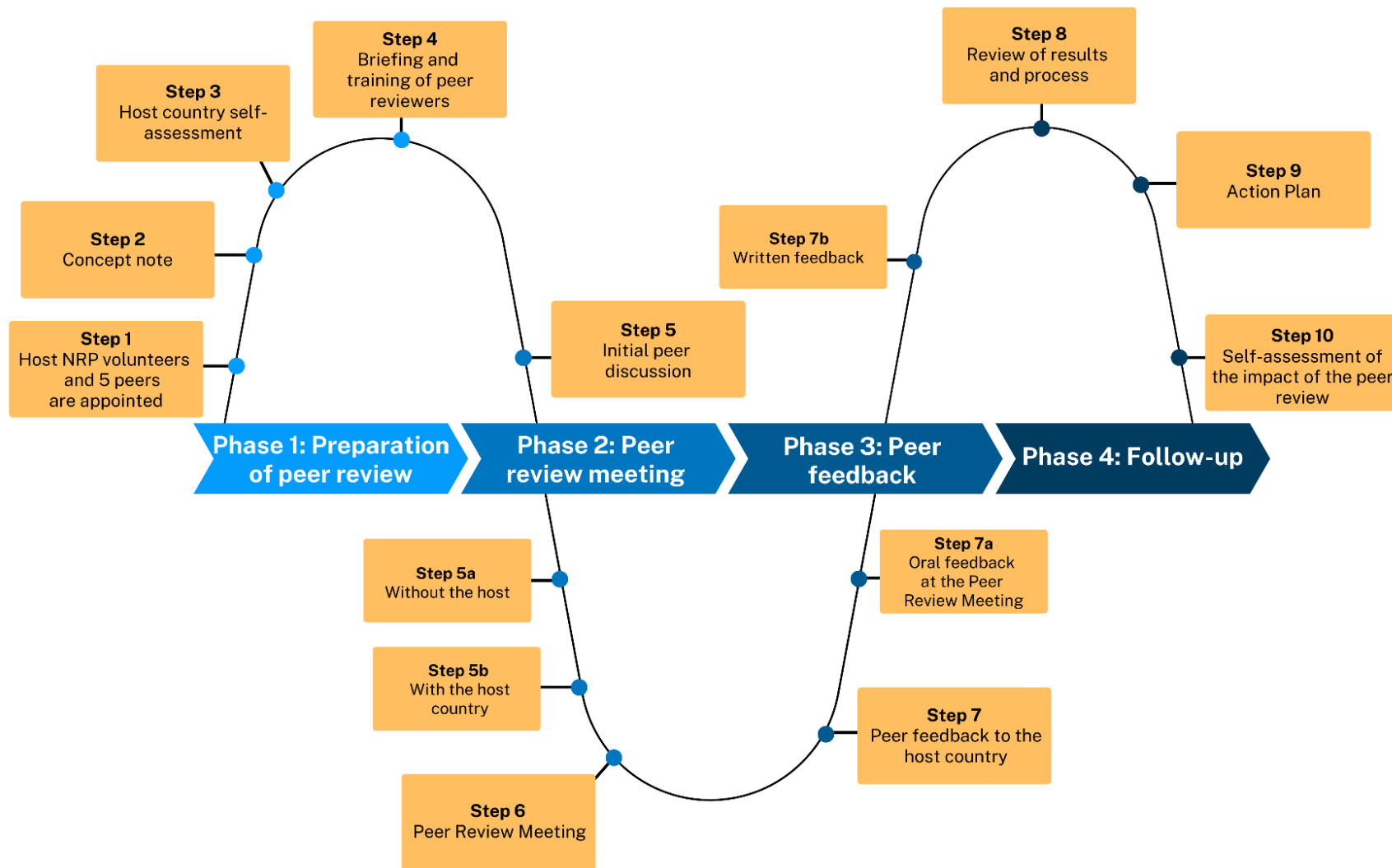
Section 2 sets out the phases and steps of peer reviews. The peer review process can be broken down in four main phases:

- **Phase 1: Preparation of the peer review** (preparatory analysis)
- **Phase 2: Peer review meeting**
- **Phase 3: Peer feedback**
- **Phase 4: Follow-up**

Each phase entails different steps and includes practical information, tools and templates and signposts for further information.

The peer review phases, and their steps are summarised in **Figure 1** below.

Figure 1. Overview of steps in the peer review process



Source: ICF.

This Manual is developed for people in a variety of roles (host country, expert, peer reviewer). You can navigate around the information in various ways depending on your role. The sections and their contents are summarized in **Table 1** below.

Table 1. Peer Review Manual sections and contents

SECTION	CONTENT
1. Main principles of EQAVET peer reviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aims and benefits of the peer review process • Scope of the peer reviews: focused approach • Nature of participation: voluntary and closed doors • Training of the peer reviewers
2. Phases and steps of peer reviews	<p>Phase 1: Preparation of the peer review</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Step 1: NRP volunteers for a peer review and peers are appointed • Step 2: Host develops the peer review concept • Step 3: Host prepares the host country self-assessment • Step 4: Briefing and Training of peer reviewers <p>Phase 2: Peer Review Meeting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Step 5: Initial peer discussion • 5a: without the host • 5b: with the host • Step 6: Peer review Meeting <p>Phase 3: Peer feedback</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Step 7: Peer feedback to the host country • 7a: oral feedback at the peer review meeting • 7b: written feedback <p>Phase 4: Follow-up</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Step 8: Review of peer review results and process • Step 9: Development of an Action Plan, implementation of change process • Step 10: Self-assessment of the impact of the peer review

1 Section 1: Main principles of EQAVET peer reviews

The 2020 VET Recommendation³ calls for the introduction of voluntary EU level peer reviews of quality assurance in VET at system level. It is stipulated that one of the tasks of the Quality Assurance National Reference Points is to *'engage in EU level peer reviews of quality assurance to enhance the transparency and consistency of quality assurance arrangements, and to reinforce trust between the Member States'*.⁴

In the Recommendation, a peer review is defined as *'a type of voluntary mutual learning activity with the objective to support the improvement and transparency of quality assurance arrangements at system level not leading to accreditation procedures, based on a specific methodology to be developed by the European Network for quality assurance in vocational education and training'*.⁵

The methodology outlined in the following sections is based on these definitions and assumptions, and aims, in its final version, to constitute the EQAVET Network's joint methodology for system level peer reviews.

1.1 Aims and benefits of the peer review process

The main aim of the peer review process is to support the country hosting the peer review (=the host country) to reflect on its practice of quality assuring the national VET system. Peers from other countries will act as critical friends and provide external feedback, based on specific 'guiding questions' developed by the host country. To prepare the process, the host country will reflect critically on (aspects of) their own VET quality assurance system by writing a self-assessment report on the strengths and weaknesses of QA systems at national level, against the 'guiding questions', using the EQAVET framework. This report is shared with a selected group of peers and experts, for feedback. The peers will read the self-assessment report, visit the host country institution, and give feedback on the selected QA measures during the peer review meeting. Jointly, the peer reviewers and the host country will identify areas for learning and further improvement to meet the current and future challenges. This can reinforce mutual trust between the EU countries and promote further collaboration and networking between the EQAVET members.

Peer reviews will take place in a member country of the EQAVET network or online. Experts of the EQAVET **National Reference Points (EQAVET NRPs) are the direct target group of EQAVET peer reviews and they will take on the role of the host, on behalf of their institution, or act as a peer.** This ensures that VET quality assurance expertise is shared between EQAVET Network members: peer reviews are a chance to support the process of taking stock of "what is there" in the Member States, identifying the main strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement in the national QA systems. This may allow to draw conclusions for EQAVET implementation at European level.

There are a number of important benefits to be realised from the participation in the peer review both for the hosts and peer reviewers.

The NRP that takes the role of host gets opportunities to (and thus benefits from):

- analytically self-assess the selected quality assurance measure by writing a self-assessment report, together with a national expert;
- reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of their quality assurance system by collecting feedback from peers and engaging in a mutual learning process with them;

³ [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32020H1202\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32020H1202(01)&from=EN)

⁴ Cf. Article 18

⁵ Cf. footnote No 36

- become acquainted with an external perspective (through the feedback from peers), and gain experience in receiving and actioning feedback;
- receive advice and discover good practices to further develop the QA system.

Experts of the National Reference Points taking part in peer reviews, **acting as peer reviewers**, will get opportunities to:

- learn about the national quality assurance approach and selected quality assurance measure(s) presented by the host country;
- share experiences and good practices that might be relevant to the host country;
- practise giving critical, but supportive and constructive feedback;
- engage in mutual learning with peers and representatives from the host country.

To ensure the focus of the peer review process, **a maximum of 8-10 participants from the appointed countries should take part in the peer review**. The number of participants per country (max. two per country) will depend on the budgetary arrangements of the host and peers involved in each peer review. National stakeholders can be involved in the peer review meeting but should not exceed the overall number of peers involved to ensure a balanced participation and fluency in the discussions.

1.2 Scope of the peer reviews: focused approach

As stated above, the 2020 VET Recommendation calls for peer reviews that focus on quality assurance arrangements at system level.

For the EQAVET network, **'a whole system approach'** covers the entire national (or regional) VET quality system and the whole EQAVET framework (four stages of the quality cycle, indicative descriptors at the VET system level and performance against common indicators). For instance, a peer review might be dedicated to evaluating the effectiveness of the quality system of VET institutions by reviewing the current elements of the system or reviewing to what extent a set of performance indicators should be reviewed to further develop the QA system. Depending on the country and the VET system, such arrangements could be very complex, which raises the question of how the scope of the peer review should be defined.

In contrast, **a focused approach** is likely to be more feasible to implement but would lead to less comprehensive scrutiny of the whole system. The focused approach could cover specific aspects of existing QA system that the host country would like to review and possibly reform, which are not working as well or where open questions on their effectiveness remain, using external assessment as inspiration/check for their further development. For instance, the evaluation of specific instruments of a national vocational education and training system, such as modularisation in IVET and CVET, the way in which the qualification and assessment standards of vocational qualifications in a national register of qualifications are developed or reviewing the implementation of a EQAVET quality assurance on the Planning level of the quality assurance cycle.

Given the diversity of situations in the EU countries with respect to their QA systems, the peer reviews will in most cases take a focused approach, with certain aspects of QA system being subject to the peer review. The decision which aspects of QA system to peer review will be for the host country to propose as the host country will determine the scope of the peer review.

It is also worth noting that the purpose of the peer review is not to co-create new measures but rather to review quality assurance measures that are already implemented or ready for implementation.

The host country will be asked to formulate specific questions in relation to the focus topic that they would like to discuss with their peers. To ensure that the peer reviews are based

on clear 'guiding questions' that are jointly understood, this manual includes a template to support the host country in formulating these 'guiding questions', available in [annex 1](#) and on the [EQAVET community space \(on MS Teams\)](#)).

1.3 Nature of participation: voluntary and closed doors

As set out in the 2020 VET Recommendation, participation in the EQAVET peer reviews is voluntary and it is up to the concerned EU country to manifest interest.

Existing peer review concepts apply either an '**open-door**' or a '**closed-door**' approach. In open-door approaches, besides peers, external stakeholders and/or independent experts are also invited to the process and peer review results are usually made public. This ensures fresh perspectives from externals, which can challenge the shared wisdom of peers. In closed-door approaches, only institutional peers participate, and outcomes remain confidential. This might generate the feeling of safe space, which in turn may lead to more openness and willingness to discuss less positive aspects of the focus topic. The risk, however, is to create closed feedback loops without any external challenge and would lead to a limitation of the benefits for the wider circle of peers.

For the EQAVET peer reviews, most host countries are expected to choose the closed-door approach: peers will be experts from other NRPs and the details of the results will remain confidential to the participants. However, when the host country agrees to publish the peer review material, the concept note, the self-assessment report and the feedback report will be published on the [EQAVET community space \(on MS Teams\)](#). Furthermore, the host country can also decide to invite external stakeholders, such as social partners, to the peer review process, if this would add value to the peer review (depending on the national context). In addition, observers can be nominated (for example, the representative of European Commission).

The exact way to go about will hence vary. A '**Memorandum of Understanding**' (MoU) can be used to specify the basic (confidentiality) agreements for every peer review (incl. questions of data privacy etc.). This MoU will be completed and signed by all participating parties ahead of the peer review upon request of the host. Alternatively, the host and the peers may decide not to use the MoU and rely on the trust relationship of the member of the EQAVET Network (e.g. applying the Chatham House Rules⁶). The MoU template is available in [annex 2](#) and on the [EQAVET community space \(on MS Teams\)](#).

1.4 Training of hosts and peer reviewers

To support the implementation of successful peer reviews, the EQAVET Secretariat will support the training of EQAVET NRP experts acting as hosts and peer reviewers.

To support NRP experts in their roles, a **standardised introduction webinar** is recorded by the EQAVET Secretariat and published on the [EQAVET community space \(on MS Teams\)](#). This webinar explains the peer review process, the different roles and expectations from the hosts and peer reviewers, the work to be undertaken, the outcomes and follow up to be expected and the deadlines and process. Upon request, the EQAVET Secretariat will organise training sessions in case further questions need clarifications (e.g.: including a short session on the EQAVET Peer Reviews method in the peer review preparatory meeting).

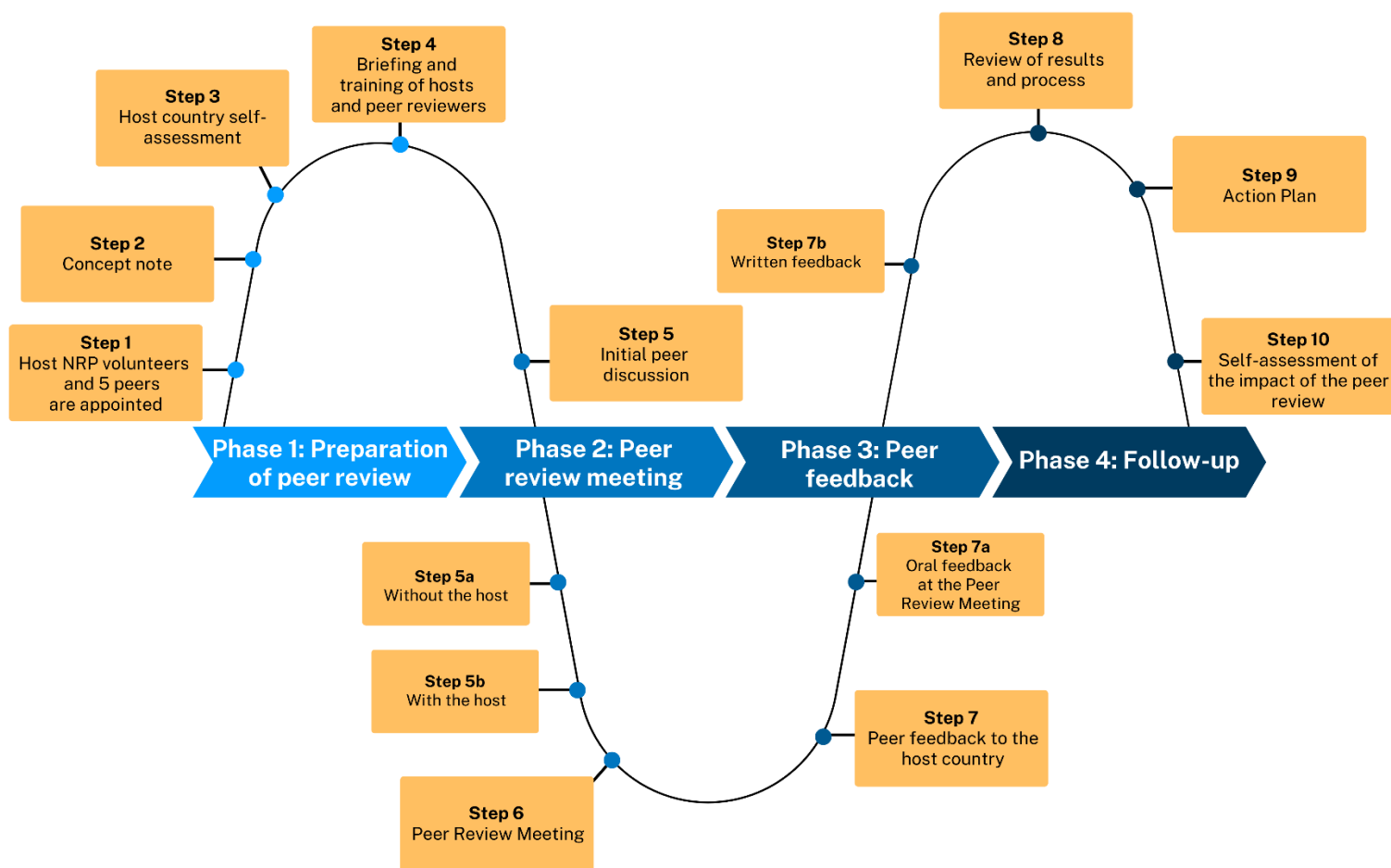
⁶ Under the Chatham House Rules Participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed.

2 Section 2: Phases and steps of peer reviews

Given that the peer reviews in the context of EQAVET Network will target strategic aspects of QA systems, **peer reviews will consist of four phases: preparatory analysis (including initial discussions with peers), actual peer review meeting, peer feedback and a follow up phase.**

Bringing the above suggestions together, a four-phase process for a peer review process will be based on the following steps, as shown in the diagram below.

Figure 2. Overview of steps in the peer review process



Source: ICF

Across the phases of the peer review, the parties involved in peer reviews (host country, peer reviewers, EQAVET Secretariat and external national expert), will have specific following roles. These are summarised in the table 2 below.

Table 2. Roles and responsibilities of the parties involved

Host country	Peer reviewers	EQAVET Secretariat	National expert
<p>An EQAVET NRP will take the role of the host country. The host country will organise the peer review meeting to get feedback from EQAVET peers on a selected aspect of their quality assurance approach and the selected quality assurance measure to be reviewed within the peer review.</p> <p>The host country responsibilities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organising the initial discussion meeting. • Organising the peer review meeting. • Identifying the key feedback from peer reviewers and prepare an action plan. • Taking responsibility for follow-up actions, deciding how and which peer feedback will be used for further improvements of the selected quality assurance measure. 	<p>Experts of EQAVET NRPs will take on the role of peers. Their role is to give critical but constructive and supportive feedback on the quality assurance measure presented by the host country.</p> <p>Peers are expected to refrain from acting in a judging or controlling way or manner. They should have a clear motivation to learn about the quality assurance approach of the host country and to engage in a reflective process, with the aim to give constructive and supportive feedback.</p> <p>The peer reviewer responsibilities include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accepting the invitation to become the peer reviewers and nominate the experts attending the peer review. • Signing the MoU prepared by the host (when applicable). • Reading the concept note, the self-assessment report and the agenda prepared by the host. 	<p>The EQAVET Secretariat will support the host country and the peers in organising the peer review.</p> <p>The EQAVET Secretariat responsibilities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting the nomination process of the peer reviewers. • Identifying (upon request) and engage the national experts, brief and support them in their assessment work. • Providing feedback on the draft concept note, capturing the main aspects to consider during the process. • Organising initial peer discussions with and without the host (step 5a and 5b) and assist them in the process. • Coordinating the preparation and 	<p>The role of the national expert is to support the host country in organising and facilitating the peer review.</p> <p>The expert can be external or internal to the NRPs organisation and can be nominated by the host country with the support of the EQAVET Secretariat. The national expert does not need to be a member of the EQAVET network but should have a good knowledge of the host quality assurance system.</p> <p>The national experts' responsibilities include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting the host country in preparing the self-assessment report. • Attending the initial peer discussion with the host NRP and the peers. • Attending the peer review meeting, supporting with presentations and facilitation. • Supporting to the preparation of the feedback report • Being fluent in technical English.

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Host country	Peer reviewers	EQAVET Secretariat	National expert
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implementing the action plan. Informing the EQAVET Network on the progress in implementing the action plan. Respecting the confidentiality of peer review process and outcomes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reflecting on the key guiding questions formulated by the host in relation to the status quo and recent developments in their own countries. Preparing their peer feedback in advance of the peer review meeting, reflect on the main areas for discussion and reflection during the peer review meeting. Actively participating and providing supportive and constructive feedback during the initial peers' discussions and the peer review meeting. Working together with other peers to give collective peer feedback after the peer review meeting. Assisting the host country in preparation of its action plan to follow up the conclusions of the peer review. Reflecting about the transferability of what they have heard and seen in the peer review into their own national context. Respecting the confidentiality of peer review process and outcomes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> organisation of the peer review. Circulating the peer review supporting documentation and material. Providing technical and administrative support before, during and after the peer review, including the onboarding of participants. Assisting with the facilitation and chairing of the peer review. Moderate the process of peers' feedback. Supporting the host in the self-assessment of the impact of the peer review process (Step 10). 	

2.1 Phase 1: Preparation of the peer review (duration 2-3 months)

There are **four steps related to the preparation phase**. The specific roles and responsibilities of the host and peer reviewers are detailed in table 3 below.

Table 3. Phase 1: Roles and responsibilities of the host and peer reviewers

Roles	Responsibilities
Host	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Select the existing QA system aspect to be reviewed in the peer review procedure. • Prepare the concept note for the peer review. • Prepare the MoU, sign it and request peer reviewers to sign it (optional). • Prepare the self-assessment report. • Prepare the peer review meeting agenda. • Confirm the peer review meeting dates to participants.
Peer reviewers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accept the invitation to become the peer reviewers and nominate the experts attending the peer review. • Sign the MoU prepared by the host (optional). • Read the concept note, the self-assessment report and the agenda prepared by the host. • Reflect on the key guiding questions formulated by the host in relation to the status quo and recent developments in their own countries. • Prepare their peer feedback in advance of the peer review meeting, reflect on the main areas for discussion and reflection during the peer review meeting.
EQAVET Secretariat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support host country in the choice of QA system aspect to be reviewed. • Support the nomination process of the peer reviewers. Identify (upon request) and engage the national expert.

2.1.1 Step 1: NRP volunteers for a peer review and selects peers

Host NRPs that volunteer for a peer review would come forward with a concrete idea of which aspect(s) of their QA system they would like to subject to a peer review (such as open questions requiring improvement)⁷.

To support this process, a template to formulate key 'guiding questions', with examples of appropriate peer review questions is provided in [annex 1](#) and on the [EQAVET community space \(on MS Teams\)](#). The box below offers guidance on how to formulate appropriate evaluation questions for the peer review. A template for the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) is also available in [annex 2](#) and on the [EQAVET community space \(on MS Teams\)](#).

The EQAVET Secretariat will organise a kick-off meeting with the host country to review the different phases and steps, roles and responsibilities, to frame the peer review topic and to answer any additional questions the host may have.

⁷ As the EAFA bench learning exercise already covers the aspects of quality assurance in work-based learning and apprenticeships, the scope for avoiding potential duplication needs to be considered in selecting the focus for EQAVET peer reviews

Selection of the QA system aspect for the peer review

In order to ensure a beneficial and constructive peer review, the host country has to decide on one or more QA system aspects that should be the focus of the peer review.

In selecting the aspect to be covered in the peer review, the host country should consider the following questions:

- Is there an existing quality assurance system aspect that urgently needs to be reviewed, because there have been problems with its implementation?
- Is there a quality assurance system aspect in an area undergoing reform that may also require updating or modernisation, for which peer feedback could be helpful?
- Is there a need for a new/renewed quality assurance system measure due to new developments (e.g., institutional change, increased VET provider autonomy, labour market change)?

In order to have some orientation and guidance in relation to the selection of a quality assurance aspect for the peer review, the host country can make reference to the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for VET.⁸

2.1.2 Step 2: Host develops the peer review concept

The host country will capture its initial thinking in the concept note for a particular peer review, which serves as a reference document for the peer review process. This note is sent by the host country to the peer reviewers, the European Commission and the EQAVET Secretariat for information. A template to support the preparation of the concept note can be found in [annex 3](#) and on the [EQAVET community space \(MS Teams\)](#).

As part of the concept note, the host country also prepares an indicative agenda. Nevertheless, it is recommended to develop the agenda of the peer review jointly with the peers during the initial peer discussion with the host country to reflect all the peer's needs for discussion.

The peer review meeting should normally take place over 1,5 days, involving presentations on the host country policy example and self-reflections, peer feedback and discussions with the peer reviewers. Overall, the event should be highly focused and interactive. The meeting agenda should allow plenty of room for interaction and critical debate, rather than focusing on long, formal presentations from host or peer reviewers.

The peer review meeting should normally take place over 1,5 days to 2 days if on-site visits are planned (see table 8 below). The peer review Meeting can also be implemented virtually. In that case, to avoid virtual fatigue and the dropping out of participants, it is important to avoid packing too much content into one session, and to make sure individual sessions never exceed two consecutive hours. Regular breaks allow participants to concentrate fully on the interactive sessions and exchange with peers, while still being able to catch-up with their emails, calls and other tasks during the day. A combination of plenary sessions and discussions in break-out rooms help making the meeting more interactive. Besides, virtual whiteboard tools, visual collaboration workspace, or Q&A and polling applications will be used to allow participants to post questions and ideas and to work together in similar ways they have been collaborating at face-to-face events.

To frame the agenda and help stimulate discussion, three or four key guiding questions will underpin the PR agenda. The host country will develop the key guiding questions in advance for the meeting. The template to formulate key guiding questions is available in [annex 1](#) and on the [EQAVET community space \(on MS Teams\)](#).

⁸ [Overview - EQAVET](#)

Example agendas are available for peer reviews in a face to face format in [annex 4](#) and on the [EQAVET community space \(on MS Teams\)](#) and for peer reviews in a virtual format in [annex 5](#) and on the [EQAVET community space \(on MS Teams\)](#). They include a description of the role of host country representatives (as chairs and speakers) and peer reviewers. Please note that this agenda is for illustration purposes only; as the host country will need to tailor it to the specific peer review.

The host country could also organise a study visit with the peer reviewers, to show to the peers how the QA measure works in practice, for example to a VET provider or a QA centre. This would depend on the specific peer review context. The study visit could be offered prior to Day 1, or as an afternoon activity on Day 1. It should occur in any case before the peer reviewers draw together their final summary feedback on Day 2. Further reflections are provided in the box below.

Organisation of a study visit

A study visit can be organised by the host country as part of the PR. Study visits can add value to the peer review process by giving a 'live' example of an issue or topic discussed, as well as opportunities to ask very detailed questions. Study visits are usually appreciated by participants in the peer review activities, but it is important to weigh up the added value of the study visit, compared to the resources and practicalities of making the study visit happen.

If it is decided that the study visit truly adds value to the discussion, the stakeholders receiving the peer reviewers and presenting their practices during the visit must be well briefed and be relatively fluent in English; otherwise, the interest of the participants is lost and the learning is undermined.

For study visits, the host country need to consider the following:

- Establishing the exact focus and topic of the study visit (in relation to the PR topic as a whole);
- Devising an agenda;
- Briefing the visit presenters;
- Facilitating the visit;
- Taking notes during the visit for use in the summary report and action plan.

2.1.3 Step 3: Host prepares the host country self-assessment

The quality and depth of analysis of the specific host QA system aspect(s) will determine the success of the peer review. Self-assessment is useful to support the change process.

A national expert can work with the host country to support their own self-assessment of the QA system prior to the peer review. The expert should have the knowledge of the host country VET system and its quality assurance arrangements and be familiar with the peer review process. The expert should also be familiar with the EQAVET framework, as – depending on the focus topic – the indicators and descriptors of the EQAVET framework will be used to guide and structure the assessment.

The expert will also support the organisation and facilitation of the peer review meeting and aid the host country in identifying the key action points and recommendations from the process and how are they followed up.

The host country is welcome to suggest a trusted external or internal expert with extensive country and topic experience. Where needed, the EQAVET Secretariat can support the selection of the expert with suggestions.

Following the nomination process, the EQAVET Secretariat will contract the expert and will brief and support the experts in their work, where necessary.

The expert supports the self-assessment report of the host country, using the EQAVET framework. A standard template is developed for this assessment in [annex 6](#) and on the [EQAVET community space \(on MS Teams\)](#). The indicative length is 20-30 pages, including specific headings and instructions for completing, and it should reflect the relevant EQAVET framework and indicators.

The self-assessment report is one of the core documents of the entire peer review procedure. It includes information about the quality assurance measure for which the host wants to receive feedback and it serves as a reference for both the host country NRP and the peer reviewers. The host country should prepare the report supported by the national expert and if relevant and appropriate in collaboration with relevant national stakeholders.

The self-assessment report supports the host country in:

- being clear and not too technical about the topic for the peer review;
- making a self-assessment by reflecting on the strengths and weaknesses of the selected quality assurance measure;
- establishing the selection and engagement of national stakeholders in the peer reviews;
- thinking about and providing key guiding questions for peer reviewers;
- serving as a basis for the final organisation of the Peer Review meeting (see template for the initial meeting agenda in [annex 8](#) and on the [EQAVET community space \(on MS Teams\)](#)).

The self-assessment report supports the peer reviewers to:

- get a clear picture regarding the topic for the peer review and prepare for it;
- think about the answers to the key guiding questions for peer reviewers;
- think about similar quality assurance measures and examples of good practice in their own countries;
- think about open questions in relation to the selected quality assurance measure, which could be asked during the peer review (phase 2) to get a better understanding of the host country context.

2.1.4 Step 4: Briefing and preparation of peer reviewers

Once the peer reviewers from the network of EQAVET NRPs are confirmed, they will be briefed initially on their role and expected inputs for the particular peer review by the EQAVET Secretariat through a standardised introduction webinar. The webinar explains the peer review process, the different roles and expectations from the hosts and peer reviewers, the work to be undertaken, the outcomes and follow up to be expected and the deadlines and process. The EQAVET Secretariat published the introduction webinar on the [EQAVET community space \(on MS Teams\)](#).

Upon request, the EQAVET Secretariat will organise training sessions for the host and peers in case further questions need clarifications.

To prepare for the peer review Meeting, the peers need:

- to be acquainted with the peer review procedure and the peer reviewer role, as set out in this manual;
- to read the concept note, the self-assessment report, the peer review Meeting agenda and any essential additional materials provided by the host NRP;
- to identify areas for investigation and evaluation for the peer review Meeting;
- to consider questions for discussion sessions and criteria for observations;

- to reflect on the key guiding questions that the host sets for the peers (as set out in the self-assessment report);
- to think about similar quality assurance measures and examples of good practice in their own countries.

The template in [annex 7](#) and on the [EQAVET community space \(on MS Teams\)](#) should be used by peer reviewers to analyse the self-assessment report and prepare questions and inputs for the peer review meeting.

2.2 Phase 2: Peer review meeting (1,5 to 2 days)

This phase includes the implementation of the peer review, during which the peer assessment will be carried out. There are two steps related to this phase.

The specific roles and responsibilities of the host and peer reviewers are detailed in the table below.

Table 4. Phase 2: Roles and responsibilities of the host and peer reviewers

Roles	Responsibilities
Host	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organise the initial peer discussion. • Finalise the peer review meeting agenda.
Peer reviewers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate in the initial peer discussion. • Finalise the preparation for peer feedback in advance of the peer review meeting. • Actively contribute to the peer review meeting.
EQAVET Secretariat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The external expert contracted by the EQAVET Secretariat will moderate and facilitate the peer review meeting. • Support the meeting organization if required by the host.

2.2.1 Step 5: Initial peer discussion

The initial discussion prior to the peer review serves to reflect on the peers' initial reactions to the host country concept note and self-assessment report. This informal meeting provides a first opportunity for peers to get to know each other, to share their first impressions and identify areas that need further clarification from the host.

The EQAVET Secretariat liaises with the peers to set a date for the initial peer discussions and sends out the invitations. These meetings are meant to take place in an online format and the EQAVET Secretariat can facilitate them.

2.2.1.1 Step 5a: Initial peer discussion without the host country

This step takes place prior to the initial discussion with the host country and involves only the peer reviewers and the EQAVET Secretariat. This additional meeting is informal and offers the opportunity to the peers to discuss their initial impressions on the self-assessment report and the agenda drafted by the host country. During this meeting, peers can identify the main issues they would like to raise or any areas where they would like to obtain further information from the host.

It is suggested for this meeting to take place online (max 2 hours), as it serves to prepare the initial peer discussion with the host. The objective of the meeting is to offer the peer reviewers an opportunity to exchange their impressions on the host's self-assessment report and discuss clarification needs.

2.2.1.2 Step 5b: Initial peer discussion with the host country

This step is meant to cover the main points raised in the host self-assessment (indicative duration 0.5 day) and involves hosts and peer reviewers. This meeting will take place online, as it will serve to prepare the actual peer review meeting, to introduce the peers to the host country situation and to provide food for thought prior to the Peer Review. Ideally, the initial peer discussion should be organized 3-4 weeks before the actual Peer Review meeting and all the material (concept note, self-assessment report and the agenda) should be sent sufficiently in advance to allow enough time to peer reviewers to read them and get familiar with the topic of the peer review.

An indicative agenda for the initial peer discussion is suggested in the [annex 8](#) and on the [EQAVET community space \(on MS Teams\)](#). This can be adapted due to the specific requirements per peer review.

2.2.2 Step 6: Peer review meeting

The peer review meeting takes place in the host country, involving five to ten peers, the host country delegation and national expert, the EQAVET Secretariat and other stakeholders. Suggested duration one and a half days to two days). Organising the peer review in an online format is also possible but face to face meetings are generally more appreciated by participants as they tend to be more interactive, enhance networking and facilitate the learning process.

Prior to the peer review meeting, the final agenda, will be shared with the participants at least two weeks in advance of the meeting. In addition, the EQAVET Secretariat will prepare in cooperation with the host country a facilitation plan to ensure a smooth running of the meeting. The facilitation plan gives a detailed overview of the timing, the methods of facilitation and the roles and responsibilities for each session of the peer review meeting (see example in the [annex 9](#) and on the [EQAVET community space \(on MS Teams\)](#)).

During the meeting, the host NRP experts and other national stakeholders or experts - following the agenda - present the quality assurance approach and the selected quality assurance measure for review. Peers will also check the accuracy of the information provided in the self-assessment report by gathering and assessing additional data related to the selected quality assurance measure. In general, peers should adopt an exploring attitude, characterised by curiosity, openness and acceptance as well as a confident demeanour. They should be prepared to deal with inconsistencies in the replies of presenters or interviewees. Peers are recommended to take notes of key information throughout the peer review meeting to have some written material to refer to during the peer feedback session (see Phase 3). A template for the note taking by peer reviewers is available in [annex 10](#) and on the [EQAVET community space \(on MS Teams\)](#).

Key to the success of the peer review will be the group discussions between the host and the peer reviewers around the key guiding questions. A standard approach will ensure that common criteria, principles and standards for the peer discussion are followed. This standard approach is illustrated in [annex 11](#) and on the [EQAVET community space \(on MS Teams\)](#) and will need to be tailored by the hosts and peer reviewers thematically, including specific headings and instructions for covering the discussion, reflecting the relevant EQAVET framework and indicators. Not all common criteria will be relevant to all evaluation questions.

2.3 Phase 3: Step 7: Peer feedback

Step 7 is dedicated to peer feedback: the peers will deliver their feedback and ideas for the improvement of the quality assurance measures to the host country.

The feedback exercise is a key phase of the peer review method. It is therefore important to include a dedicated session in the peer review agenda, where the peers can discuss and agree on critical, constructive and supportive feedback to the host, including, where possible, concrete ideas for improvement; based on everything they have read before, as well as what they have seen and heard during the peer review (1.5 - 2 hours session in the afternoon of Day 2, see example Agenda in [annex 4](#) and on the [EQAVET community space \(on MS Teams\)](#)).

The peer feedback phase consists of two sub-steps:

- **Step 7a: oral feedback at the peer review meeting:**
 - The peers meet without the host country, to gather their feedback and organize the process of giving feedback to the host country. It is preferred that peers give feedback as a group of peers, in a coordinated way, so that the feedback provided is consistent and integrated. To this end, a rapporteur should be nominated for each group of peers to report back at the final feedback session with the host. In case of a virtual peer review, breakout rooms sessions will be organized for the peers. The EQAVET Secretariat facilitates the process.
 - The peers and host country meet at the main plenary room (or plenary session if online format) to share with the peers' initial key messages to the host country.
- **Step 7b: written feedback:** Following the peer review, a full summary of the main outcomes (feedback report) will be prepared within two weeks, summarising the key messages, examples and topics discussed during the meeting. The feedback report summarises the initial questions of the hosts, the information gathered at the meeting and the feedback provided by the peers at the Peer Review. The EQAVET Secretariat organizes the process of drafting the report and agreeing written feedback between the peers. A template for peer review outcomes is available in [annex 13](#) and on the [EQAVET community space \(on MS Teams\)](#).

Further reflections on providing valuable feedback are provided in the box below.

Key principles to provide valuable feedback

Peers should follow a few key principles in preparing and providing their feedback:

- Give feedback to every quality assurance measure included in the self-assessment report of the host country
- Focus on strengths and weaknesses of the selected quality assurance measures
- Base your feedback on available evidence from different sources (e.g., national context report, information and observations included in the host country self-assessment report)
- Refrain from any type of feedback that could be interpreted as judgemental or condescending
- Take into account the host country situation and circumstances
- Try to use brief, clear and descriptive language

An overview of the roles and responsibilities of the host and peer reviewers during the feedback phase is detailed below.

Table 5. Roles and responsibilities of the host and peer reviewers

	Host Country	Peer Reviewers	EQAVET Secretariat
Peer Feedback Phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take part in the final feedback session. Listen to the feedback of the peers. Comment on the feedback of the peers, clarify open questions or provide additional information as necessary. Document the peer review, including the peers' feedback. 	<p>7a: oral feedback at the peer review meeting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take part in a peer reviewers' session to prepare for the final feedback. Give feedback as single persons and work on common results as a peers group. Present peer feedback to the host country and the other peer reviewers in the final feedback meeting (if nominated as rapporteur). <p>7b: written feedback</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read the peers feedback report prepared by the EQAVET Secretariat. Address comments or additional questions included in the report and send them back to the EQAVET Secretariat. 	<p>7a: oral feedback at the peer review meeting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Moderate the peers' feedback session at the peer review. Capture the main discussion points to support the preparation of the peers' feedback report. <p>7b: written feedback</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Draft the peers feedback report and circulate it among peers to gather their views. Finalise the report based on feedback received from peers. Share final version with the host.

2.4 Phase 4: Follow-up (duration 12 months)

This phase includes **immediate follow-up** to the peer review as well as a **self-assessment of the impact at a later stage**. There are three steps related to this last phase:

- **Step 8:** Review of peer review results and process
- **Step 9:** Developing an Action Plan and implementation of change process
- **Step 10:** Self-assessment of the impact of the peer review

2.4.1 Step 8: Review of peer review results and process

Peer reviews are only meaningful and worth the time, efforts and resources invested, if the host country reflects on and takes account of peer feedback when they work on their future developments. Therefore, in this step, the host country goes through a process of reviewing the feedback received and deciding on its response and way forward.

Please note: Peers reviewers are also expected to reflect on the results of the peer review meeting and think about opportunities to work with the results in their own national contexts, using the same templates.

As a first step, the peer feedback is analysed and reflected on, by the host institution and disseminated, as appropriate, to relevant stakeholders. Below are some questions for the host institutions (but also for peers) to reflect on after the peer feedback:

- What were the most important results of the peer review?
- What do the results mean to us?
- Have there been unexpected results?
- Are there good practices in other EU countries, which are worth thinking about when it comes to improvements?
- Which feedback/which proposals are not feasible for us and why?
- What could be changed easily and or quickly?
- What financial and other resources have to be considered when it comes to improvements?
- Which stakeholder groups should be informed about the feedback and which have to be informed when it comes to plans for improvement?

In addition, the host country reflects with the help of the external expert on the process of carrying out the peer review, its approach and methodology. This enables the host to reflect on the success and lessons learnt from the process of undergoing a peer review, informing the approach and methodologies of next peer reviews. The evaluation forms completed by the participants should also be used in this reflection.

The template to record the outcomes of this reflection is available in [annex 14](#) and on the [EQAVET community space \(on MS Teams\)](#).

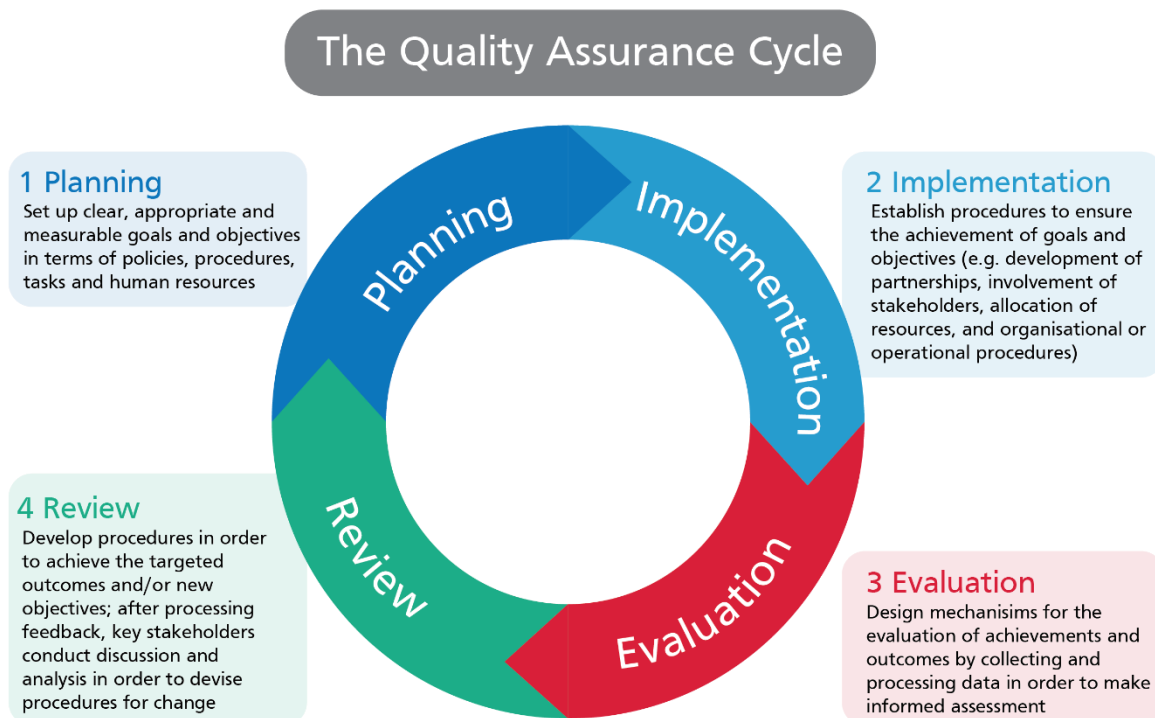
2.4.2 Step 9: Developing an Action Plan, implementation of change process

Concrete action points and recommendations are worked out together with the participants into an action plan for the host country. This could include further support from peers or other mutual learning services available through the EQAVET Secretariat support.

The **action plan** is not strictly mandatory or binding, it contains a list of concrete measures to follow up, with clear roles and responsibilities and timelines indicated. Once the action plan is agreed, the host country starts to implement the agreed changes.

A standard template for the action plan is provided in [annex 15](#) and on the [EQAVET community space \(on MS Teams\)](#).

The Action Plan template is a tool designed to help you to assess how you can make the best use in your country of what you have learned during the EQAVET peer review. The Action Plan seeks to transpose learning outcomes through the four phases (Planning, Implementation, Evaluation and Review), similar to the EQAVET quality cycle below.



Source: ICF

The Action Plan is intended to be flexible. The defined Actions will vary depending on what your country takes away from the peer review and what can be transferred.

Hence, not all sections of the template may be applicable in your case, and you may want to exchange sections or add new ones.

2.4.3 Step 10: Self-assessment of the impact of the peer review

12 months following the peer review, the EQAVET Secretariat will contact the host country and invite them to report back on the progress made against their action plan. This will take on the form of a brief self-assessment on progress made on the planned actions; and serves as a check on the impact of the peer review and action plan developed. A template for the reporting on the impact of the peer review is available in [annex 16](#) and on the [EQAVET community space \(on MS Teams\)](#).

Moreover, to collect feedback on the overall satisfaction of the EQAVET Network members with the peer review initiative, the EQAVET Secretariat will ask hosts and peers to complete peer review process evaluation forms. At regular intervals, hosts and peers can reflect on the effectiveness and efficiency of the peer reviews and provide ideas for improvement. The feedback will be used to inform the approach and methodologies of future peer reviews.

The template for the peer review meeting evaluation form can be found in [annex 12](#) and on the [EQAVET community space \(on MS Teams\)](#).

3 Annex - Templates

3.1 Annex 1. Template to formulate key 'guiding questions' with examples of appropriate peer review questions

Host country will formulate its key evaluation questions for the peer review. The key questions will need to reflect the particular Quality Assurance (QA) system aspect chosen for the peer review process. The number of questions will depend on the context of the peer review, typically 3-5 evaluation questions should be formulated by the host country.

Below are indicative examples of questions to support host country in developing its own evaluation questions. The examples are made referring to the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for VET.⁹

Quality criteria	Aspects of the VET system level to be included in the peer review (examples)	Evaluation questions (examples)
Planning reflects a strategic vision shared by the relevant stakeholders and includes explicit goals/objectives, actions and indicators	One or several goals/objectives of VET for the medium and long term are being reformed	Do the current VET goals/objectives fit the labour market needs? Do we need new VET goals /objectives to reflect the latest labour market developments?
	An information policy on the disclosure of quality results/outcomes requires revision	What new procedures should be incorporated into the new information policy? What disclosure arrangements would work best reflecting the latest stakeholder positions?
Implementation plans are devised in consultation with stakeholders and include explicit principles	The process of how the implementation plans are devised needs reform, including the consultation with stakeholders and new principles	What are the best new ways to involve stakeholders in developing implementation plans? Which new principles should be added to the implementation plans reflecting the latest VET developments?
	VET providers' responsibilities in the implementation process need to be reformed	How should the responsibilities of VET providers be re-allocated to maximise their participation?

⁹ Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 June 2009 on the establishment of a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training Text with EEA relevance (europa.eu)

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Evaluation of outcomes and processes is regularly carried out and supported by measurement	The national/regional standards and processes for improving and assuring quality require reform	How should the standards be updated to fit the new labour market needs?
	Early warning system requires updating	What new processes and actors should be introduced into the early warning system? What advice can you give us on improving the early warning system?
Review	Procedures, mechanisms and instruments for undertaking reviews, defined at all levels, need reform	Do these procedures require updating reflecting the latest developments at the levels covered? Which new, if any, procedures do we need?
	Information on the outcomes of evaluation which is made publicly available requires reform	How should the publicly available information be presented in the future to reflect the latest VET developments, VET provider and stakeholder needs? Should certain information categories be changed or new categories added?

3.2 Annex 2. Template for the MoU

Memorandum of Understanding

Insert: Country, peer review title, indicate dates for peer review

We, the undersigned host and peer reviewers agree to the following principles and roles and responsibilities for the host and peer reviewers.

Key principles of the peer review process

The peer reviews will take a focused approach, with certain aspects of QA system being subject to the peer review. The decision which aspects of QA system to peer review will be for the host country to propose as the host country will determine the scope of the peer review.

Host countries are expected to adopt the closed-door approach: peers will be experts from other NRPs and the details of the results will remain confidential to the participants. The outcomes of the peer review will be shared with the members of EQAVET network in a form of a summary report by the host country capturing the main points from the peer review. The results of the peer review will remain confidential to its participants.

Roles and responsibilities of the host country:

- Select the QA system aspect to be reviewed in the peer review procedure.
- Prepare the concept note for the peer review.
- Prepare the MoU, sign it and request peer reviewers to sign it.
- Prepare the self-assessment report.
- Prepare the peer review agenda.
- Organise the initial discussion meeting.
- Organise the peer review meeting.
- Identify the key feedback from peer reviewers and prepare an action plan.
- Take responsibility for taking action on the results of the peer feedback, deciding how and which peer feedback will be used for further improvements of the selected quality assurance measure.
- Implement the action plan.
- Report back to the EQAVET on the progress in implementing the action plan.
- Respect the confidentiality of peer review process and outcomes.

Roles and responsibilities of the peer reviewers:

- Accept the invitation to become the peer reviewers and nominate the experts attending the peer review
- Sign the MoU prepared by the host
- Read the concept note, the self-assessment report and the agenda prepared by the host
- Reflect on the key guiding questions formulated by the host in relation to the status quo and recent developments in their own countries
- Prepare their peer feedback in advance of the peer review meeting, reflect on the main areas for discussion and reflection during the peer review meeting
- Actively participate and provide supportive and constructive feedback during the initial peers discussions and the peer review meeting
- Work together with other peers to give collective peer feedback after the peer review meeting
- Assist the host country in preparation of its action plan to follow up the conclusions of the peer review

- Think about the transferability of what they have heard and seen in the peer review into their own national context
- Respect the confidentiality of peer review process and outcomes

Signed

For the host: name, institution, signature

Peer reviewer 1: name, institution, signature

Peer reviewer 2: name, institution, signature

Peer reviewer 3: name, institution, signature

Peer reviewer 4: name, institution, signature

Peer reviewer 5: name, institution, signature

3.3 Annex 3. Template for the concept note for the peer review (to be filled in by host country)

Country, peer review title

- **Name and contact information of the host country institution 0.5 page**

Name of the host member institution

Contact person (name and e-mail address)

Co-ordinator (name and e-mail address), if applicable

Date and venue of the peer review meeting, broad time schedule

- **Basic information about the selected quality assurance measure 1-2 pages**

Title of the measure, its key characteristics

Key evaluation questions for the peer reviewers (see annex 1)

- **Aims and purposes of the peer review for the host country 0.5 page**
- **Main results and outcomes expected by the host country 0.5 page**
- **Other national stakeholders to be involved in the peer review**

Host country NRP could decide to invite other national stakeholders, depending on the specific context of the peer review. They could have the opportunity to take part in the peer review meeting and be given the chance to ask questions or comment on the findings from the peer review. Depending on the focus of the peer review, it might be conducive to involve other national stakeholders and/or institutions at an early stage. Their collaboration might be needed when it comes to follow-up measures. Early involvement raises the chances for successful follow-up because commitment to change processes is fostered.

Name of the national stakeholder	Institution	Email

- **Peer reviewers**

Name of the peer	Institution, country	Email

- **Overview of the main steps in the peer review**

Key step	Date
Self-assessment report	
Initial peer discussion	

Peer review meeting	
Follow up	

- **External expert 0.5 page**

Name, institution, email

Key experience of the expert relevant to the peer review

- **Further comments (if necessary)**
- **Indicative agenda for the peer review meeting (see annexes 4 and 5)**

3.4 Annex 4. Template for the Agenda of the peer review meeting (to be filled in by host country)

Day 1: Key questions:	
Guiding Questions 1 and 2 – to be specified by the host country	
09:30 – 10:00	Welcome (host country) (up to 10 minutes) Rationale of the peer review - Putting the QA measure in the wider context of national VET policy (host country) (up to 10 minutes) Scene setting (host) (up to 10 minutes) Explaining the aims, objectives and format for the 1.5 days Highlighting the key evaluation questions
10:00-10:30	Presentation of on the host country QA measure reviewed Presentation from the host country NRP Presentation from the host country external expert
10:30 – 11:00	Discussion and initial reflection from the peer reviewers
11:00 – 11:30	Coffee break
11:30 – 13:00	Key Guiding question 1: group discussion between the host and peer reviewers to present their views and comments.
13:00 – 14:00	Lunch
14:00 – 15:30	Key guiding question 2: group discussion between the host and peer reviewers to present their views and comments.
15:30 – 16:00	Coffee break
16:00 -16:30	Day 1 wrap-up Short wrap-up session, bringing everyone together to take stock of the key outcomes/lessons/outstanding items from Day 1 as a springboard into Day 2.
	Optional evening activity (to be considered by the host country)
Day 2: Key questions:	
09.00	Start and welcome from the host to Day 2
09:05 – 10:30	Key guiding question 3: group discussion between the host and peer reviewers to present their views and comments.

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10:30 – 11:00	Coffee break
11:00 – 12:30	Key guiding question 4: group discussion between the host and peer reviewers to present their views and comments.
12:30 – 13:30	Lunch
Afternoon	An optional study visit offered by the host (see Box 2.10), if a study visit is offered on Day 2, the final part of the meeting needs to be postponed to Day 3 morning session If no study visit offered, peers proceed to the final assessment
13.30-15.00	Two parallel sessions: One discussion between the peer reviewers to draw together their feedback, prepare the final feedback, identify key suggested actions for host Second discussion amongst the host country representatives to reflect on the emerging findings of the peer review and first ideas for the action plan
15.00-17.00	Final peer feedback: summary final group feedback from the peer reviewers.
17.00-17.30	Reflections from the host, supported by peer reviewers: first sketch of the action plan, key action areas and priorities, roles and responsibilities
17.30	Close

3.5 Annex 5. Template for the Agenda of the online peer review meeting (to be filled in by host country)

EQAVET Peer Review on xxxxxxxx	
PEER REVIEW MEETING	
Country	
Online	
Dates	
Day 1	
9:00 – 13.00	
REGISTRATION LINK or ACCESS LINK to TEAMS/Zoom	
<u>Guiding question 1:</u>	
08.45-09.00	Participant onboarding and technical set-up (Microsoft Teams) Participants are asked to join the meeting at least 15 minutes before the beginning of the event to test their connection and ensure that all connectivity issues are addressed before the start of the meeting
09:00 – 9:15	Welcome and opening Objectives of the peer review virtual meeting
09:30 – 10:15	Presentation on the host country QA measure reviewed <i>From the host country NRP or from the host country external expert</i> Highlighting the key guiding questions
10:15 – 10:30	Virtual coffee break
10:30 – 11:30	Group discussion and reflection on key guiding question 1 (breakout rooms with the moderators)
11:30 – 11:45	Comfort break
11:45 – 12:15	Reporting back from discussions on the first guiding question
12.15-12.45	Peer reflection on Day 1
12:45 – 13.00	Short wrap-up session, bringing everyone together to take stock of the key outcomes/lessons learnt/outstanding items from Day 1
13.00	END of the Day 1
13.00-13.30	<i>NRP and the EQAVET Secretariat (reflection of the first day)</i>

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Day 2	
9:00 - 12:30	
<u>Guiding questions:</u>	
08.45-09.00	Participant onboarding and technical set-up (Microsoft Teams) Participants are asked to join the meeting at least 15 minutes before the beginning of the event to test their connection and ensure that all connectivity issues are addressed before the start of the meeting
09:00 – 9:10	Welcome and agenda including a summary from Day 1
09:10 – 9:30	Presentation on the policy or reforms
09:30 – 09:45	Highlighting the key guiding questions
09:45 – 10:45	Group discussion and reflection on key guiding question 2 (breakout rooms with the moderators)
10:45 – 11:00	Comfort break
11:00 – 11:30	Reporting back from discussions (evaluation question 2 and 3)
11:30 – 11:45	Short wrap-up session, bringing everyone together to take stock of the key outcomes/lessons learnt/outstanding items from Day 2
11.45-13.15	Peers Reflection session Peers' discussion in break-out room to reflect on conclusions from the Peer Review Reporting back from peers' group
13.15-13.30	Institutional closure Next steps: report and action plan Evaluation Closing remarks by NRP
13:30	END of the Day 2

3.6 Annex 6. Template for the self-assessment report, prepared by the host country with the support of external expert

Self-assessment report

Country, title of the peer review, dates

Section 1: 2-3 pages: General information on VET and quality assurance in VET in the host country

This provides general information about the host country. In this respect, the Cedefop 'VET in Europe' database¹⁰ is a good initial source and its information will be presented in a manner targeted to the topic in question. This information would also allow the peer reviewers to become aware of any cultural and institutional differences influencing the process and the feedback.

Section 2: 2-3 pages: Focus of the peer review (selected quality assurance measure, reasons for its selection, key stakeholders, expected outcomes)

Title of the quality assurance measure

Why did you select this quality assurance in VET measure for a peer review?

What are your expectations (desired/expected outcomes of the peer review)

Section 3: 3-5 pages Self-assessment of the selected quality assurance measure

Title of the quality assurance in VET measure:

Detailed description of the quality assurance in VET measure: 0.5 pages

What are the main strengths of this measures?

What are the main weaknesses of this measure?

Are improvements already planned for this measure? Specify whether the improvement measure is (a) under discussion, (b) planned or (c) already implemented

Which national stakeholders are involved in this measure? What are their roles and positions on the improvements?

Main national stakeholders	Their roles and responsibilities for the measure	Their views on improving the measure

Section 4: 1 page Key evaluation questions for peers according to the selected quality assurance measure (see also Box 2.4 for advice on questions)

Question 1

Question 2

Question 3

¹⁰ <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/vet-europe#:~:text=VET%20in%20Europe%20is%20the,common%20template%20designed%20by%20Cedefop.>

Add if necessary

Section 5: 1 page: First ideas/considerations for utilising the feedback after the peer review (Phase 4 Follow-up)

How are you planning to use the inputs from the peer reviewers?

Any areas of feedback which are key to you?

Annexes

Annex documents that will help peers to get a complete and adequate impression of the quality assurance measure to be assessed. References to these documents will allow to keep the self-assessment report short. Only annex documents or links in English language versions. Please also annex the concept note here.

List of key documentation about the measure (in English)

Main websites relating to the measure in English

Concept note

3.7 Annex 7. Template for the peer analysis of the self-assessment

Section	Your observations	Your questions to the host
Section 1: General information on VET and quality assurance in VET in the host country		
Section 2: Focus of the Peer Review		
Section 3: Self-assessment of the selected quality assurance measure		
Section 4: Key evaluation questions for peers according to the selected quality assurance measure	Question 1: Question 2: Question 3:	
Section 5: First ideas/considerations for utilising the feedback after the peer review		
Annexes		

3.8 Annex 8. Template for the agenda of initial peer discussion with the host country

Time	Agenda
9.30 – 9.45	Welcome by the host and tour de table amongst the peer reviewers
9.45-10.00	Overview by the host: selected QA measure, focus for the peer review, expected results
10.00-10.30	Peer reviewer questions and answer session: opportunity to clarify the description and status quo of the QA measure
10.30-10.40	Coffee break
10.40-11.20	<i>Discussion on the agenda for the Peer Review</i>
11.20-11.30	Next steps, final preparation of the peer review meeting, key action points for host, peer reviewers and the EQAVET Secretariat

3.9 Annex 9. Example of the facilitation plan

Time	Agenda	Roles and staff	Practical instructions
09:00 – 09:15	<p>Welcome and opening</p> <p>The aim of this session is to welcome the participants and set the context of the peer review</p> <p>Objectives of the peer review virtual meeting</p> <p>The chair from the host country explains the motivation for its organisation, its objectives and aims, as well as key guiding questions.</p> <p>In principle, there is no expectation of having questions from the audience during this session but questions to the host country can be asked during the next session.</p>	<p>Chair: host country NAME</p> <p>Presenters: host country name</p>	<p>Slides are shown</p>
09:30 – 10:15	<p>Presentation on the host country QA measure reviewed</p> <p>The host country will introduce the policy, the VET system and the QA measure to review</p> <p><i>From the host country NRP or from the host country external expert</i></p> <p>Highlighting the key guiding questions</p> <p>The Chair presents the first guiding question and informs them that in 2 minutes, they will be divided into 2 breakout rooms.</p> <p>In the breakout rooms, facilitators will ask someone to volunteer for the reporting. Participants can use Mural to facilitate the discussion and notes taking. If no volunteer, the EQAVET Secretariat or the national expert will report</p> <p>The chair informs the participants that the group discussion will be followed by a short comfort break of 15 minutes before coming back to the plenary for the reporting.</p>	<p>Chair: host country name</p> <p>Presenters: national expert</p>	<p>PowerPoint to show</p> <p>Breakout rooms to set up and send participants</p>

3.10 Annex 10. Template for the note taking by peer reviewers during the peer review meeting

Agenda topic	Key points raised by the peer reviewers	Evidence (e.g., self-assessment report, host country speakers, presentations, site visit)
Guiding question 1		
Guiding question 2		
Guiding question 3		
Add if necessary for additional questions		

3.11 Annex 11. Template for the group discussion between the host and peers

Agenda topic	Common criteria to structure the discussion	Instructions to hosts and peer reviewers
Evaluation question 1	<p>In relation to EQAVET framework and indicators</p> <p>In relation to best practice from similar measures from peer countries</p> <p>In relation to improvements needed and aspects raised by key national stakeholders</p>	Reflect how best to answer the evaluation question with respect to each common criteria
Evaluation question 2	Repeat as above or add new criteria	Reflect how best to answer the evaluation question with respect to each common criteria
Evaluation question 3	Repeat as above or add new criteria	Reflect how best to answer the evaluation question with respect to each common criteria
Add if necessary for additional questions		

3.12 Annex 12. Template for the peer review meeting evaluation form

You have been contacted because you participated in the EQAVET Peer reviews. This form is intended to get your feedback on the EQAVET Peer reviews process including the outcomes, the methods and the EQAVET Secretariat support to further improve the EQAVET Peer Reviews methodology.

The survey is sent to host and peers every 4 Peers Reviews so you will be probably asked to answer several times the same survey during the entire EQAVET Peer Review process. Regular feedback will help the EQAVET Secretariat to further improve the Peer Review methodology to better fit the host and peers' needs.

This survey is short and will not take you more than 15 minutes to answer all the questions. Answers are anonymised so feel free to share openly your feedback and comments.

General information

Which EQAVET Peer Review(s) did you attend? Please list the PRs attended as host and peers. Open textbox

Which country are you representing? (Select one option among the list of EU countries)

What was the format of the peer reviews? (Multiple choice, respondents can choose both options)

- Virtual (online) format
- Face to face format

Did you participate as:

- Host country (tickbox, multiple choice)
- Peer country (tickbox, multiple choice) respondents can choose both options
- Other (observer, national stakeholder etc.) (tickbox)

Have you participated in other Peer Reviews before the EQAVET ones? If so, what was the context, and how many Peer reviews did you attend? Open textbox

Feedback on the outcomes and the method of the peer review

Please circle the relevant number, remembering that 1= Dissatisfied and 5 = Very satisfied

Overall feedback

How satisfied are you with the overall EQAVET peer review method?	1	2	3	4	5
How satisfied are you with the overall outcomes of the peer review?	1	2	3	4	5
<i>How useful was the Peer Review meeting for your organisation/ country?</i>	1	2	3	4	5

How satisfied are you with the overall organisation of the peer review?	1	2	3	4	5
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Feedback to the phases and the steps of the peer review

Preparation phase:

Please circle the relevant number, remembering that 1= Dissatisfied and 5 = Very satisfied

How satisfied were you with the selection/matching of peers and hosts? (Step 1)	1	2	3	4	5
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For your preparation, how useful did you find:

A) the concept note prepared by the host country? (Step 2)	1	2	3	4	5
B) the host country self-assessment? (Step 3)	1	2	3	4	5
C) the training/briefing session for the peer review participants (Step 4)	1	2	3	4	5

Do you have any recommendations on how to improve the preparation phase?
Please write in the box below. (Open textbox)

Peer Review meeting

Please circle the relevant number, remembering that 1= Not at all useful and 5 = Very useful

To develop the Agenda and the guiding questions for discussion at the Peer Review Meeting, how useful did you find:

A) The peer meeting to reflect on the host country self-assessment (without the host country)					
B) The initial peer discussion (with the host country) (Step 5)					

At the peer review meeting (Step 6), how useful did you find (if applicable)

A) The presentations of the host country	1	2	3	4	5
B) The input of other (national) experts	1	2	3	4	5
C) The discussions with national stakeholders	1	2	3	4	5
D) The opportunity to ask questions to the host country	1	2	3	4	5
E) The discussions with/among peers	1	2	3	4	5

F) The facilitation style and methods	1	2	3	4	5
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Do you have any recommendations on how to improve the peer review meeting?
Please write in the box below.

Peer Feedback to the host country (Step 7)

Please circle the relevant number, remembering that 1= Dissatisfied and 5 = Very satisfied

As a peer, how satisfied were you with:

A) The quality of the discussions during the peer feedback session	1	2	3	4	5
B) The amount of time dedicated to the peer feedback session	1	2	3	4	5
C) The process of agreeing peer feedback	1	2	3	4	5
D) The quality of the agreed feedback	1	2	3	4	5
E) The process of sharing the feedback with the hosts	1	2	3	4	5
F) The process of developing the written feedback report	1	2	3	4	5
G) The quality of the written feedback report	1	2	3	4	5

As a host, how satisfied were you with:

A) The quality of the feedback received	1	2	3	4	5
B) The process of receiving feedback from the peers	1	2	3	4	5
C) The quality of the written feedback report	1	2	3	4	5

Do you have any recommendations on how to improve the peer feedback phase?
Please write in the box below. (Open textbox)

Feedback on the EQAVET Secretariat support

THE EQAVET NETWORK'S APPROACH TO VET SYSTEM LEVEL PEER REVIEWS:
A MANUAL

Please circle the relevant number, remembering that 1= Dissatisfied and 5 = Very satisfied

How satisfied are you with the overall support provided by the EQAVET Secretariat?	1	2	3	4	5
--	---	---	---	---	---

Please circle the relevant number, remembering that 1= Not at all useful and 5 = Very useful

How helpful did you find:

A) The EQAVET Secretariat support to the matching of host countries and peers	1	2	3	4	5
B) The EQAVET Secretariat support to find and contract a national expert	1	2	3	4	5
C) The ongoing EQAVET Secretariat support throughout the steps and phases of the Peer review	1	2	3	4	5
D) The EQAVET Secretariat support to the preparation of the content and the Agenda	1	2	3	4	5
E) The EQAVET Secretariat support to the moderation and facilitation of the event	1	2	3	4	5
F) The Peer Review Manual	1	2	3	4	5
G) The individual templates for certain tasks and steps included in the Peer Review Manual	1	2	3	4	5
H) (if applicable) The virtual meeting tools used (Microsoft Teams, MURAL whiteboard)	1	2	3	4	5

If you have any comments on the above, please write in the box below (Open textbox)

3.13 Annex 13. Template for peer review outcomes

Peer review report

Title of the peer review (hosted by country), dates

Section 1: Introduction to the topic of the peer review

This section provides general information about the host country and the purpose of the peer review. Information about the country context in relation to the national VET system should be included here.

It will also include information about the number of participants and participating peer reviewers.

Section 2: Key peer review discussion outcomes

The aim of this section is to reflect on the main discussion points covered during the peer review in relation to the topic of the peer review (e.g., challenges faced and possible solutions). Examples or evidence provided by the participating countries should be included.

Section 3: Conclusions and next steps

This section provides a list of the main findings.

3.14 Annex 14. Template for the reflection on the peer review methodology and process

Item	Expressed as numeric value 1-5 (1-very low/5=very high) ¹¹	Feedback
Overall content of the peer review		
Overall organisation of the peer review (venue, accommodation, catering)		
Overall support by the EQAVET Secretariat throughout the process		
Performance of the independent expert		
Utility of process and tools (Phase 1)		
Utility of process and tools (Phase 2)		
Utility of process and tools (Phase 3)		
Utility of process and tools (Phase 4)		

Follow-up Action Point: Please send the completed template to the EQAVET Secretariat (EQAVET.mutual.learning@icf.com)!

¹¹ from feedback form, or own assessment

3.15 Annex 15. Template for the Action Plan

Phase I: Planning phase

1	What have you learned from this peer review that is of specific interest to quality assurance of VET in your country and why? <i>[Note: if there are several areas of learning, each requiring a different area of change, please number them accordingly and cross-reference throughout the rest of the template]</i>
2	What would you like to take forward within your country/organisation? What type of change/new initiative do you want to introduce? Please describe how this directly affects the quality assurance of VET (i.e. skills assessment, tailored learning, validation). <i>[Please try to formulate your answer as one or several 'SMART' objectives (S - Specific, M - Measurable, A - Assignable, R - Realistic, T - Timebound)]</i>
3	For which priority target group(s) would this (these) initiative(s) be introduced?

4	Which stakeholders will be also affected by this change/initiative?
5	What are the specific expected benefits or improvements for your country?
6	What risks and/or challenges do you foresee in developing this initiative/change? How can you mitigate these?
7	What factors can drive and support the introduction of this initiative/change? How can you capitalise on these?

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Phase II: Implementation phase

8	Who will have overall responsibility for the development and implementation of the initiative/change? <i>[Note: please give the organisation and a name and job title]</i>	
9	Which other stakeholders will play a key role in developing the initiative/facilitating the change? What will their role(s) be? How will you involve them? <i>[Note: if possible, please give the concrete institutions and names / job title, as well as the anticipated role(s)]</i>	
10	What actions will be undertaken to successfully develop the initiative/facilitate the change within your country? What will be the timeframe for each action? Which delegation member will be responsible for each action? <i>[Note: example actions could include setting up a network, initiating a pilot, undertaking a feasibility study, etc.; please focus on the <u>main</u> areas of action, and the name and job title of the responsible person(s)]</i>	
	Actions	Timeframe
	Responsible person(s)	

THE EQAVET NETWORK'S APPROACH TO VET SYSTEM LEVEL PEER REVIEWS: A
MANUAL

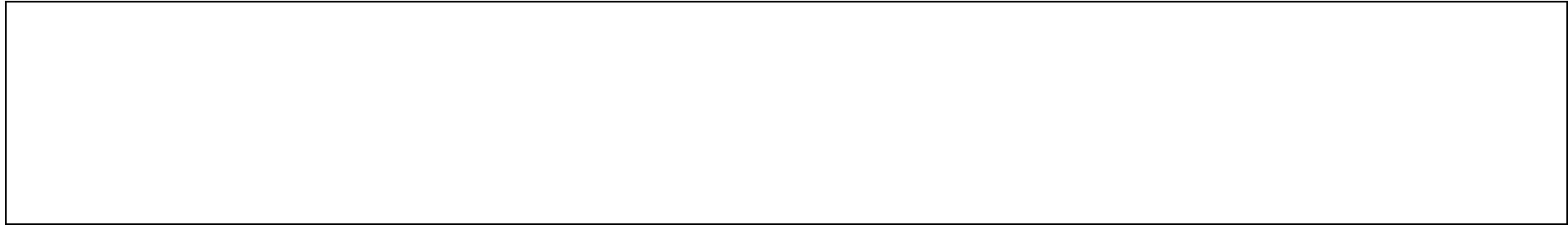
<i>You can add further rows, if needed</i>		
11	Are there any other country or international organisations with which you could envisage working in order to obtain additional insights and support during the learning/change process? If so, which ones and how will you collaborate with them?	

Phase III: Evaluation phase

12	How do you intend to measure the success of your initiatives?
13	What data/information will you collect and how will you obtain it?
14	Are there any key quantifiable indicators and/or milestones that you could use to measure success? If so, what are they?

Phase IV: Review Phase

15	How will you use the lessons learnt from the initial implementation to refine and reflect on your initiative going forward i.e. to achieve a cycle of continuous improvement?
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3.16 Annex 16. Template for the reporting on the impact of the peer review

1. Overview of general objectives and work steps agreed in the Action Plan

This section is to be completed 12 months following the PR.

1.1 General objectives

Please give an overview of the general objectives in relation to the outcomes of the PR that were set out by your country in the Action Plan.

1.2 Work steps

Please list the (most relevant) concrete work steps agreed in the Action Plan (please list 3-5 steps).

1.3 Expected impact of activities

For each of the steps mentioned in section 1.2, please describe its expected impact on improving QA in VET in your country (100-150 words).

1.4 Progress made after 6 months

Please describe the progress you made in relation to the Work Steps (section 1.2) (200-300 words)

1.5 Challenges and limitations encountered

Please describe any challenges and limitations you encountered in relation to the Work Steps (max. 200 words)

2. Progress update after 12/18 months

This section below is to be completed 12 and 18 months following the PR (hence twice in total). Please don't repeat any information from the previous phases but describe only the progress made in the current reporting period. If no activities have taken place, please mention this. If possible, explain (other pressing items to tackle, conflicting agendas, etc.).

2.1 General assessment of progress after 12/18 months

Please give a brief (ca. 200-300 words) assessment of progress in relation to the tasks specified in the Action Plan. What concrete steps were taken? Is this in line with the general objectives and the foreseen timing?

2.2 Success factors: What's helping to make progress?

Please give a brief (100-150 words) summary of the factors that were conducive for progress (e.g., 'Progress was facilitated by the national policy initiative x which helped to raise awareness of the topic.')

2.3 Challenges encountered: What's hindering progress?

Please give a brief (100-150 words) summary of the factors that were found to be detrimental (e.g., 'progress was hindered by a lack of funding/lack of coordination between ministries/other policy priorities etc...')

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