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An integrated Peer Review at provider level: results of a national experimentation and its evaluation

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European VET Recommendation 2020 – the relevance of self-evaluation and Peer Review

A Quality Assurance National Reference Point for vocational education and training brings together all relevant stakeholders at national and regional levels to:

- take concrete initiatives to implement and further develop the EQAVET Framework;
- inform and mobilise a wide range of stakeholders, including Centres of Vocational Excellence, to contribute to implementing the EQAVET framework;
- **support self-evaluation as a complementary and effective means of quality assurance to allow the measurement of success and the identification of areas for improvement**, including with respect to digital readiness of VET systems and institutions;
- participate actively in the European network for quality assurance in vocational education and training;
- provide an updated description of the national quality assurance arrangements based on the EQAVET Framework;
- **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.**

Self-evaluation (or self-assessment) of education providers and systems

The education providers and systems evaluation research has tended to consider schools/training centres as **social organisations** (Hedges & Schneider 2005) while inquiring into the processes associated with improvement.

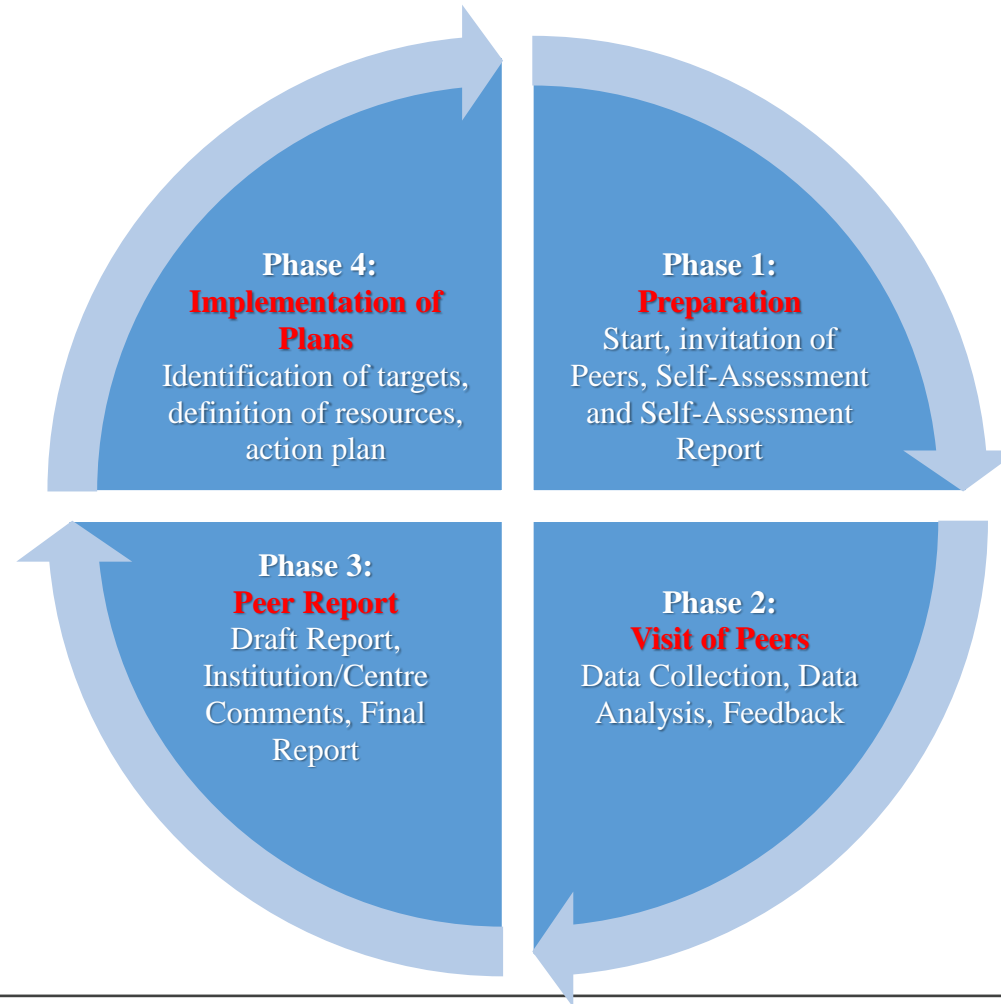
School improvement research and practice is concerned with **making schools 'better' places for students, teachers and the wider community** (Reynolds et al., 1996) and practice has tended to rely on the **engagement of teachers** through continuing professional development.

This approach has often drawn on the principles of inquiry, reflection and self-review (or self-evaluation or self-assessment) as an incentive to improvement (Hopkins et al., 1994).

By the mid-1990s, researchers (Hopkins et al., 1994) had drawn on their experiences of researching, and working with, schools on the school's capacity to manage change and enhance student outcomes. Essentially, **teachers and school leaders** are the **key agents of change** (Fullan, 1991; MacBeath, 1999). These agents contribute to the importance of inquiry and school self-review as a driver for school improvement.



Self-assessment is a crucial step in the 4 phases of the Peer Review of an Education or Training provider:



Peer Review has been:

- used as a long tradition in the evaluation of research (Handbook for academic review, 2000);
- adapted for use in other areas which call for the assessment and development of professional activities;
- implemented in professional contexts when knowledge and expertise in a particular field of work are essential for an adequate evaluation (European Peer Review Association, 2015).

What is a Peer Review of an Education or Training provider? “A Peer Review of a provider is an **evaluation** carried out by **Peers** (in total 4), i.e., colleagues working in similar institutions or environments, who participate in a **Peer Review visit** at the premises of a Peer Review host which is the organization evaluated by the Peers. For the Peer Review, the evaluated organization will prepare a **Self-Assessment Report**, as basis for the Peers’ evaluation, and the Peers will draft the Final **Peer Review Report** (EQAVET, 2021)”.

“The European Peer Review methodology as set down in the European context of the EQAVET network is a **mix of internal and external evaluation** (Fonzo, Evangelista, 2023) and a **procedure for quality assurance** in Vocational Education and Training systems in various European countries (European Commission, 2022) - among which Italy is included”.



In 2019, INAPP launched a pilot experimentation **establishing a National network of schools and vocational training centers**, aimed at testing a **new Peer Review model** that involved both vocational training centers and schools with the following objectives:

- to facilitate the relationship, comparison and integration between the education and vocational training system, among different bodies - indeed - but which deal with similar targets in terms of age and training needs with a view to mutual growth;
- to verify the applicability of the model in a "mixed" context of public-private relationship;
- to raise the quality of the supply of education and vocational training;
- to disseminate operational tools aimed at encouraging continuous improvement of the quality of the training supply: in particular, self-assessment and external evaluation by Peers.

The activities planned for achieving the goals set for the national experimentation were the following:

- **implementation of a Network** of actors in line with an integrated education and training system;

- **training of teachers and trainers** on the new Peer Review model (about 50 among teachers and trainers);

- **exchange and integration** between education and training structures operating in completely different territorial contexts.



RESULTS



With the start of the National experimentation, a first training session for Peers was held followed by 2 hours online (reproduced in 3 editions to facilitate participation). The second training session of the Peers took place with a second part which, due to the closure of the schools during the lockdown, was carried out online in 2 training sessions.

The training of each Peer lasted an average of 12 hours, with a specific dedicated agenda.

At the end of all the training sessions, 69 teachers/trainers from 22 different institutions including schools and vocational training centers were involved.

The visits of the Peers of the national experimentation began in April 2021 and ended in March 2022. **A total of 14 Pilot Peer visits took place** according to a specific calendar.

As required by the procedure, **the Peer visits took place with a daily schedule of 2.5 days**. Due to the difficulties linked to the health emergency, a Peer' visit was held entirely online.

During the experimentation, the Peer visits were monitored using the following tools:

-meta-evaluations. In general, the tool proved to be effective in gathering the impressions and suggestions of the participants.

- observations.** An observation form was drawn up aimed at evaluating:
- the organizational and management requirements of the visit;
 - the functioning of the Peer Review;
 - the relational dynamics between Peers;
 - the relational dynamics between Peers and the host organization (school/VET center).

This form was used by 2 observers who made a total of 6 direct observations (2 for each Region involved), trying to supervise both educational and training institutions.



The experimentation has fully highlighted the opportunities and strengths of self-assessment carried out by VET providers and schools and the Peer Review methodology, which each of the Peers has directly acted and personally confirmed: **friendly approach, low costs, immediate feedback of meaningful and usable data, sharing of points of view and broadening of the horizons of the organization.**

A theme placed at the center of reflection in the implementation of the pilot experimentation was **the possible cultural and linguistic gap between the world of education and training**, which could have forced the Peers to a preliminary negotiation of meanings or to a tiring 'simultaneous translation'. During the course of the experimentation, it was possible to ascertain that this generally did not occur.

The central moment of the methodology, that of the visit on which expectations, hopes and fears are concentrated, was actually the most agile and fruitful moment. **Facilitated by the preliminary online meetings**, the visits took place within the foreseen times and methods and with the interested participation of school managers, teachers, trainers, stakeholders and students interviewed.





THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION !

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