

FOURTH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF SCUOLA DEMOCRATICA

OPERATIONALISING QUALITY AREAS: A COMPETENCE MAPPING MODEL FOR PEERS IN VET

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ROADMAP

PROBLEM

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

RESEARCH DESIGN AND FRAMEWORK

RESULT: SYNOPTIC MAPPING

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS



Problem & Research Objectives

- Since 2009, EQAVET has progressively shaped national quality assurance systems for VET across EU Member States
- Peer Review: distinctive external evaluation by trained professionals (Peers), structured around Quality Areas (UE 2020)
- **The gap: Peers' competence profile remains insufficiently defined — in policy documents and in the academic literature**
 - What competences must Peers possess to evaluate the Quality Areas rigorously and consistently?

Research objectives

- Obj. 1 — Reconstruct a structured competence framework for Peers (4 macro-categories)
- Obj. 2 — Systematically map the framework onto the Quality Areas → identify gaps and priorities



16 Quality Areas in Three Tiers

4 Central Areas (teaching & learning)

- Curricula · Learning and Teaching · Assessment · Learning Results and Outcomes

10 Optional Areas (organisationally essential)

- Institutional governance, strategic planning, infrastructure, staff, working conditions, external relations, gender mainstreaming, quality management...

2 Strategic Areas (EU 2025 priorities)

- Digital Transition · Environmental Sustainability
- Formative process: institutional improvement — not accreditation or ranking
- Quality Areas embody normative principles: transparency, participation, inclusion, accountability, continuous improvement



Peer Review as a Professional Practice

- Stake (2003): responsive evaluation requires methodological competence + domain knowledge + reflective judgement
- **Gutknecht-Gmeiner (2013): three models of Peer evaluators**
 - Amateur: limited training, informal judgement
 - Expert: high technical specialisation, less participatory
 - **Reviewer: domain knowledge + methodological rigour → evidence-based evaluative judgements**

The research gap: no systematic competence framework exists for the Reviewer model



Two-Stage Methodology & Four-Category Framework

Stage 1 — Literature Review

- International + Italian literature on evaluation theory, VET quality assurance and Peer Review
- INAPP Atlante del Lavoro (national occupational framework)

→ **Output: 4 macro-categories of competences**

Stage 2 — Systematic Mapping

- Competence descriptors matched against quality criteria and evidence indicators
(Peer Review Manual, INAPP 2026, Fonzo et al.)

→ **Goal: verify correspondence + identify gaps**

CK-VET

Contextual Knowledge of the VET System

MS-PR

Method-Specific Competences in Peer Review

ME

Methodological-Evaluative Competences

TC

Transversal Competences (Soft Skills)



Central Quality Areas (AQ1–AQ4)

AQ1 Curricula

- Strong alignment with CK-VET · no link to MS-PR or TC

AQ2 Learning and Teaching

- Relies on CK-VET · gap in orientation and vision-mission alignment competences

AQ3 Assessment

- Strongest alignment with MS-PR in the entire matrix

AQ4 Learning Results and Outcomes

- ME + TC in equal measure: methodological rigour + critical judgement



Optional Quality Areas (AQ5–AQ14)

- **AQ7 Institutional Ethos & Strategic Planning ← major gap**
 - Entrepreneurial and strategic competences absent → need to integrate EntreComp
- **AQ8, AQ10, AQ11 — domain-specific gaps**
 - Safety/quality systems · HR management · marketing & funded project management
- **AQ13 Gender Mainstreaming — absence of gender-specific knowledge and competences**
- **AQ14 Quality Management & Evaluation — exclusively MS-PR (intrinsic to the methodology)**

Overall: organisational, strategic, financial and equity-related competences are the weakest dimensions



Strategic Areas: Digital Transition & Environmental Sustainability

- **AQ15 & AQ16: cross-cutting across CK-VET, ME and TC simultaneously — the most analytically complex areas**
- **AQ15 Digital Transition**
 - Digital pedagogies · data governance · GDPR compliance · digital evaluation methods
- **AQ16 Environmental Sustainability**
 - Sustainability policies · evaluation of sustainable practices · sustainability mindset
- → **Structural integration of DigComp, GreenComp and EntreComp required**



Four Structural Findings

1

MS-PR: consolidated but narrowly distributed:

Present in only 2 of 16 Quality Areas → procedural training alone is insufficient

2

CK-VET: broadest coverage, largest gaps

Organisational, gender, digital, sustainability knowledge missing → structural weakness

3

TC: most frequent, but mostly partial

Ethical reasoning, metacognition, epistemological awareness systematically underrepresented

4

AQ15 & AQ16: an emerging competence frontier

→ Structural integration of DigComp, GreenComp, EntreComp required



Repositioning Peer Review

- Findings point to a genuine repositioning:
 - from procedural quality assurance tool → fully professionalised evaluative practice
- Not isolated technical gaps: structural misalignment between the normative ambitions of the Quality Areas and the actual Peer competence profile
- Stake & Gutknecht-Gmeiner: rigorous external evaluation demands
 - epistemic humility · value-informed judgement · critical reflexivity
- The competence mapping model: a systematic framework for training curricula, selection criteria and institutional capacity building



Conclusions & Future Research

Three Contributions

Methodological

Transparent, replicable mapping approach — applicable across national VET systems

Substantive

Specific gaps identified → inform Peer training and selection systems

Conceptual

Peers as reflective professionals who embody QA principles, not merely apply tools

Limitations

- Framework: derived from literature review — not yet empirically validated
- Strategic areas (AQ15–16): evolving rapidly → living model to be updated

Future Research

- Empirical studies with practising Peers
- INAPP Atlante del Lavoro (national grounding)
- DigComp · GreenComp · EntreComp





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