

Peer Review in Education

Part I: International Research and Analysis

Part II: Recommendations for the development
of the European Peer Review Manual

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**Peer Review in initial VET
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Introduction

The Leonardo da Vinci project "Peer Review in initial vocational education and training" aims at transferring and adapting peer review as an instrument of quality assurance and development from the higher education sector – where it is prevalent – to the initial vocational education and training sector where experiences with the instrument have so far been marginal.

To this end, a European Peer Review Manual will be developed and tested in a pilot phase. The manual will introduce a European standard procedure for the use of peer reviews in initial vocational education and training institutions. It will provide a practical guideline for implementing peer reviews in quality assurance and development.

The procedure proposed in the manual should be useable, acceptable, and attractive. It should meet the needs of the target groups to ensure that it will be used by VET providers and possibly also implemented on the system level in the participating countries. Additionally, it should enhance European understanding and co-operation as well as comparability and transparency between the diverse vocational education and training systems (cf. Project Proposal).

With these objectives in mind, a guideline for the development of the Peer Review Manual must take into consideration the quality systems of the partner countries as well as relevant experiences and innovations on the institutional, local, regional or national level. National reports have been drawn up in the partner countries and are compiled in a transnational synopsis report.

Additionally (good) practice in the application of peer reviews must be identified in order to be able to take advantage of and learn from the expertise of other education sectors and other countries (especially the Anglo-Saxon countries) where know-how and experience concerning peer reviews is extant. As the international research has shown, peer review is already also being piloted on the level of initial education and training. The experiences from these pilots are also to be included.

The following report complements the transnational synopsis report. It will comprise two parts.

- In the first part, an overview of the application of the peer review instrument will be provided and different variations of uses will be described in an exemplary manner (case studies).
- In the second part, a tentative guideline for the development of the European Peer Review procedure will be presented.

Both parts also draw upon the national reports where applicable. This is primarily important for the formulation of recommendations for the Peer Review Manual.

Part 1

International Research and Analysis

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I. Scope, aims and method of the peer review research and analysis

Extensive research on the scope of application of peer reviews has shown that there is a vast amount of experiences with peer reviews in various contexts within education but also within other areas of provision of professional services. In this report, **typical, exemplary models of peer review** from the **realm of education** (and in some instances science and research) have been chosen for further investigation. Other contexts will also be mentioned briefly to put the experiences with peer review in education into a broader perspective.

Additionally, peer reviews can be carried out on different levels of the educational systems. Since the providers of vocational education and training are the primary target group of the project, the main focus will lie on the **institutional review**. Aspects of individual review (especially of teachers and trainers) will also be considered.

In addition to the analysis of European experiences (as far as they have not been already been described in the national quality reports), an international research has been carried out, considering in particular countries like the United States, Australia etc. where the procedure is much more prevalent. There have been no limitations as to the education sector. Special emphasis, however, was placed on the detailed description and analysis of **models of peer review already applied in initial (vocational) education and training** since it is likely that these models will be especially useful for the further development.

The investigation and analysis of a variety of different procedures and forms of implementation should provide a starting point for the development of the European Peer Review Manual by highlighting the scope and variety of peer review in education and exemplifying different possibilities with regards to the overall design as well as to the specific details of a peer review. Furthermore, an analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of certain options will be furnished based on the findings of meta-evaluations (if available).

Thus, the peer review research complements the national quality reports and the transnational synopsis reports which focus on the national and institutional quality assurance systems and the specific needs of the partner countries of the project.

Research was carried out as desk-top research through the internet and through traditional literature analysis and interviews. Content found in the internet as well as relevant publications and material also including "grey literature" such as handbooks, guidelines, project reports etc. have been investigated.

II. Tentative definition of peer review – core concept and variations

At its core, a peer review is a (seemingly) simple procedure. As a working definition, the central concept of a peer review can be formulated thus:

Peer review is a form of external evaluation carried out by peers, i.e. "persons of equal standing", who usually also visit the reviewed institution during the evaluation process. Areas of assessment may be the quality of education and training provision of individual departments or the entire organisation.

This definition, however, is only a common denominator of the various models of peer reviews applied in practice which in fact may differ considerably from each other as regards

- the aims and scope of the review,
- the overall procedure and evaluation methods used,
- the definition and selection of the peers (including the number of peers)
- preparatory work and documentation by 1) the reviewed institution/person(s) and 2) the peers
- the duration of the whole process
- the duration and process of the peer visit
- the intensity and the means of communication between the reviewed and the referee(s)
- the integration into the overall quality strategy and the consequences of the peer review.

It seems evident that the actual conception of the various aspects of the peer review procedure outlined above has a considerable impact on the implementation and the success of the procedure. Important determinants for the design of the process are the aims and objectives of the review – whether the review is oriented towards control or towards development, whether it has a formative or a summative purpose, whether the intrinsic motivation at self-improvement or accountability towards an external public is the driving force. Most of the time, the orientation of an evaluation is a balance of these different aims.

Thus a primary prerequisite is that the main aims of the review are clearly defined. A further challenge then lies in defining the details. Additional factors that will have to be taken into account when developing a European peer review procedure for initial VET are:

- the overall quality assurance system in place (national, regional, local, institutional level),
- the scope and degree of responsibilities and influence on the institutional level,
- aspects of cultural attitudes toward evaluation and critical feedback (national culture, but also organisational culture),
- prior experiences with quality assurance and development including the qualification of staff,
- resources available,
- competition between providers and possible conflicts of interest,
- involvement of stakeholders in decision-making and planning.

III. Areas of application of Peer Reviews

III. 1 Application in areas other than education

Peer reviews are being used in various professional contexts in the service sector. Besides education, areas of application are e.g. professions such as medicine and nursing or social work but also more business-related fields such as accounting. In these contexts, peer reviews relate to the performance of individuals and/or organisations. They serve to **assure and maintain (high) standards within the profession**.¹ Additionally, they are also used to improve the services rendered through critical assessment by the peers and through learning from each other (e.g. in medicine, nursing, social work).

In social work, peer counselling between clients is also increasingly employed. The rationale for using peers in this context is that clients are expected to be more responsive to peers and will more readily accept advice from them than from professional counsellors (cf. below peer education)

III. 2 Application of peer review in research and in research funding

Peer review plays a major role in research. The refereeing by peers of **research findings submitted for publication in renowned scientific journals** is well known. The drawbacks of this procedure have been the topic of a heated academic debate for some decades. While only fellow experts and colleagues seem to be able to adequately judge the merits of research in a given field, the procedure used is asymmetrical and does not appear to be suitable to guarantee objectivity: the procedure is not transparent to the reviewed, often there is only one peer who moreover remains anonymous (blind procedure), assessments are not sufficiently substantiated and not communicated to the reviewed, the peers are not prepared for the evaluation activity, there are no explicit criteria for assessment and there is no validation of the assessment with the reviewed etc. (cf. e.g. Gerhard Fröhlich 2002a and 2002b) The situation in the assessment of **research proposal submitted for funding**, another common area of application of expert review, may display similar pitfalls.

While the model used to critically assess and pass judgement on research proposals and research findings differs in central elements from the procedure envisaged in the project "Peer Review in initial VET", some conclusions may be drawn on the prerequisites for administering objective peer reviews and enhancing acceptability.

- The procedure should be transparent. This comprises the transparency of the aims of the review, the methods used, the peers selected as well as possible consequences.
- Criteria for assessment need to be clarified before the review.
- If possible, there should be ample possibility for the reviewed person(s) to comment on the findings of the evaluation and these comments should be taken seriously.

¹ cf. e.g. the description of "The Accountant's Guide to Peer and Quality Review": "Inferior quality service threatens the accounting profession's existence. To reduce instances of substandard service, the profession requires firms to have a system of quality control - this book shows how to develop a quality control system, prepare for an annual review and earn a good report."

- Peers need to undergo training with regard to their role in the evaluation process and the necessary analytical and soft skills (constructive feedback, appreciative attitude, moderation skills etc.)

III. 3 Different levels and areas of application within education

Peer reviews may be carried out

- on the macro level (system level): usually on the national level (countries refereeing each other), possibly also on the regional, local, sectoral level
- on the meso level (institutional level): on the level of the providers of education and training
- on the micro level (individual level): teachers, students

Peer reviews on the **macro level** of the vocational education and training systems are being organised and carried out on the European level in education e.g. by the Technical Working Group on Quality in VET. In 2004, four reviews were conducted in different countries, each centring on a specific priority topic relevant to the work of the TWG and supported by a cross-country analysis.² Since the visits, the preparatory and the follow-up work were geared towards an exchange of (good) practice and mutual learning, the procedure has been renamed "Peer Learning".

On the **meso level**, educational institutions are being assessed. This may entail review of subject areas or study programmes (the unit of review may also be the departments) or and/or the review of the entire organisation.

On the **micro level**, peer review assesses the actual performance of individual teachers. This may include class-room observations – the method commonly associated with peer review – but also a plethora of other evaluation methods.

Additionally, peer review is also increasingly practiced in student assessment, usually at college/university levels and especially in subjects such as (creative) writing. There, peer review is recognised as a pedagogical tool to encourage collaborative learning and improve students' skills. Both the referee and the reviewer benefit: "While simply incorporating and practicing key lessons in their own work can bring great results, creating an atmosphere in which students are encouraged to evaluate the writing decisions made by others helps develop the

² Topics were: indicators (Finland), matching of supply and demand (France), self-assessment (UK), the use of the Common Quality Assurance Framework (Denmark). For further information, cf.

European Commission (2004): 'Copenhagen Process'. Quality Assurance in VET. Technical Working Group Progress Report, December 2004, 9 – 14 or

Kim Farschou (2005): Peer Learning. Experiences from Practice, presentation held at the conference "Quality Assurance in VET. Exchange of Good Practices and Promotion of Institutional Co-operation", Espoo, Finland, February 11, 2005
<http://www.oph.fi/english/pageLast.asp?path=447,490,35909,38122>, 22.2.2005

All 'peer learning' visits are documented thoroughly, information on the visits as well as the TWG progress report can be found on the virtual community platform:
<http://communities.trainingvillage.gr/quality>

The peer review methodology is also applied in OECD reviews as well as in various other policy areas by the European Commission. e.g. in the assessment of countries in preparation of their accession to the European union. European peer learning is also practiced in the field of social inclusion policies and employment policies.

critical thinking and editorial skills that translate into increased effectiveness in their own writing." (www.turnitin.com; 24.2.2005)

Peer review usually also comprises elements of peer learning, assistance and counselling, especially in formative quality evaluations. Learning from peers, however, can also exist in its own right and is becoming increasingly popular on all levels indicated above. On the individual level of students, learners or clients, peer programmes exist in education as well as in other contexts such as social work. Peer assistance may also be a main feature of staff development in teaching. On the meso and macro level, any peer review programme may shift its main focus on the formative and developmental aspects – as has happened in the peer visits organised by the Technical Working Group on Quality in VET.

IV. Peer review of teaching (and learning)

A review of teaching and learning is the central issue of evaluation and quality assurance in education. Within the review of teaching, aspects of learning – which may comprise a range of different factors from pedagogical concepts, curricula and contents, didactic methods, accommodation of learning and learning processes, materials etc. to the measurement of learning outcomes – are usually included. The extent to which learning is explicitly included varies though. The underlying assumption is that the quality of teaching directly influences the quality of learning and that teachers and teaching activities should be the primary focus. For the sake of the peer review project, the focus on teaching and learning should be made explicit.

Peer review of teaching can be both conducted on the individual level – teachers' performance is reviewed by colleagues – and on the organisational level through an overall assessment of the quality of teaching and learning at an educational institution (or parts of it).

Peer review of teaching on the individual level can exist as a programme in its own right or can be part of the overall quality assurance and development system of an institution. In the latter case, peer review of teachers is usually conducted during the self-evaluation phase (e.g. collegial classroom observations in IPS, peer review of teachers in the UK Academic Peer Review and HMIE inspections see below). The results of peer reviews of individual teachers can then be included as a valuable source of information in the institutional self-report or serve as additional documentation during the institutional peer review. However one-off classroom observations which are included in site visits during external peer reviews tend to be controversial. Whether embedded in the institutional review or as a stand-alone programme, peer reviews of teaching can, of course, be performed for summative and/or formative purposes.

V. Peer review of teaching on the organisational level

Teaching and learning is by and large the central unit of review in all the procedures analysed for this report. Thus, peer review of teaching and learning on the organisational level is dealt with in the subsequent chapters in detail. Depending on the aims and set-up of the review procedure, the organisational review of teaching and learning can be carried out in the level of the entire institution and/or at the level of departments/subject areas/study programmes.

Different strategies for implementing peer review of teaching and learning can be discerned: teaching and learning can be one area of scrutiny alongside others such as management, infrastructure, human resources and staff development etc. In this concept, the other areas are on par with teaching and learning and are usually judged against the overall mission of the institution (which usually has a very strong stance on education goals since this is the "main business"). The prominent position of teaching and learning can, however, be made still more transparent if all other quality areas are assessed directly in terms of their contribution to teaching and learning.

VI. Peer review of individual teachers

VI. 1 Procedures and methods

If peer reviews are conducted on the individual level, they are usually laid out for a longer period of time. The minimum duration suggested in relevant literature is approximately a semester. Many peer review programmes, especially in the school sector, are designed to run for a year or even longer.

An **extended period of review** is deemed necessary to assure that there is an adequate basis for judging the teaching performance. "Snap-shot" reviews are not deemed sufficient for an in-depth analysis and a fair and objective assessment. Moreover, since most of these programmes have a strong developmental purpose, a longer period of time for assistance and guidance is needed in order for teachers to learn and improve in a sustained way.

In many cases, a **mentor-mentee relationship** develops, the reviewed person being a less-experienced teacher and the reviewer being a person with a long standing and renown in the profession. The peer review process is then of supervisory nature. In other peer review programmes, the **relationship is symmetric** and stimulates **mutual learning**.

If the peer review entails a **summative evaluation** which may also contribute to personnel decisions (recruiting, promotion), then a **two-step procedure** may be implemented: a formative peer review is carried out over a longer period of time focusing on the development of teaching competencies. This review is then supplemented by a summative evaluation. For reasons of fairness, the summative review is conducted by a different set of peers, especially in cases where personnel decisions are involved (cf. below University of Wisconsin-Madison, Peer Review of Teaching). Documentation from and results of the formative evaluation, however, are usually taken into consideration in the course of the summative review. In some cases, peers who conduct formative reviews and provide assistance and counselling are also responsible for making final recommendations for retention and/or promotion decisions (cf. e.g. Case study: Peer Assistance and Review Programmes in U.S. Schools). Conclusions and recommendations from summative peer reviews often have a considerable influence on personnel decisions; yet as a rule, decision-making bodies are separate authorities and findings of peer reviews are only one element, albeit an often very influential one, in the decision-making process.

The **method** most commonly associated with peer review of teaching is classroom observation, usually in the form of an open, non-participatory observation. This is, however, only one technique among many. For the sake of objectivity, validity and fairness, it is argued that **classroom observation** should only be used for assessment of individual teachers if carried out over a longer period of time (see above). Observations are, of course, very valuable since they provide first-hand information on actual behaviour. However, it is argued that the method is not as simple as it may seem at first sight. In order for its potential as an evaluative method to be fully made use of, the method requires careful preparation, a very structured and focused procedure (clarification of the aims of the observation, what kind of behaviour will be studied etc.) and observation skills.

Other methods commonly employed are teaching portfolios, collaborative course development, external review of course content, interviews with students, reciprocal classroom visits, mutual mentoring, teaching circles/pedagogical colloquia

(a group of colleagues meet periodically to discuss teaching), a teaching library (collection of departments syllabi, exams, student projects etc.) etc.

Portfolios are increasingly used at U.S. universities both for the documentation of teaching performance by individual teachers and as a basis for review. They can cover a specific course (course portfolio) or give a comprehensive overview of the teaching activities and skills of teachers (teaching portfolio). Both variants can be put to a variety of uses, including both summative and formative evaluations. At its most basic level, the teaching portfolio represents a course-by-course archive of syllabi (contents and didactical concept), student assignments and responses, course handouts, and evaluations from peers and/or students. Its chief advantage is that it makes the structure of a given course visible to readers of the portfolio by displaying what the teacher was trying to accomplish. Depending on what is included in it, a teaching portfolio can also document how well the instructor succeeded in his or her teaching. Also, included in many cases is a reflective statement containing a discussion of the teacher's core beliefs about learning and teaching and her/his pedagogical aims and methods. Finally, portfolios can also document the specific efforts made by an instructor to improve his or her teaching; indeed, assembling and maintaining the portfolio is one such effort. In most cases, portfolios are assembled by the instructor, although collaborative possibilities exist. For example, portfolios can be assembled and discussed with the consultation of a faculty mentor, or as part of a teaching round table.

VI. 2 Utilisation, aims and effects of peer review of teaching programmes

Peer review of teaching may be carried out by internal colleagues or external peers depending on the purpose and the specific evaluation task of the review. It may be a form of personnel evaluation. If this is the case, peer review is usually employed alongside other evaluation methods since a sound methodological approach (inclusion of multiple perspectives and data) is particularly important if decisions on (further) employment or promotion are to be buttressed by the review. Furthermore, peer review of teaching is also used in induction programmes and for further development of pedagogical staff.

One important aspect is that peer review of teaching is one way of **opening up the black-box of teaching processes** (which still by and large are a more or less private affair between the individual teacher and her/his students) and gaining insights into what actually happens in the classrooms, laboratories, workshops, etc. Peer review may support a sound evaluation of teaching performance. Additionally, it stimulates collaboration **and team-work between teachers** thus diminishing the isolation of teachers.

Another effect is that through peer reviews, teachers are involved in reviewing and improving their own professional standards and practices in a self-regulatory process. Teachers take a more active role and assume responsibility to **self-police their profession**. (cf. e.g. Hertling 1999) It is expected that this may contribute to raising the esteem of the profession. At the universities, teaching activities have been assigned an inferior role when compared to research: a university teacher is usually assessed primarily according to her/his research record and standing in the research community. Peer reviews of teaching may help to improve the quality of teaching at universities and at the same time **increase the**

appreciation for good teaching – also in terms of reward systems and promotion³.

VI. 3 Case 1: Peer Assistance and Review Programmes in U.S. Schools

Peer review of teachers has been practised in some U.S. school districts since the 1980s on the level of elementary and secondary general education.⁴ Mostly known as "Peer Assistance and Review" (PAR), the programmes are negotiated and run jointly by the educational authorities as well as the teachers' unions and mainly serve the purpose of induction and remedial schemes. They answer to two needs: the absence of a structured induction programme in the U.S. school system – it is argued that "the induction process in the U.S. is customarily a 'sink-or-swim' experience" (AFT/NEA Handbook 1998, A2); and the deficiency of the system in effectively assessing and improving teacher competence (or as public opinion perceives it "the inability to remove inadequate teachers from the classroom" (AFT/NEA Handbook 1998, 7)). The overall rationale behind the establishment of such programmes was a concern about the quality of education and the notion that "improving teacher quality is essential to improving student achievement" (AFT/NEA Handbook 1998, 6).

Peer review and peer assistance are perceived as two separate components. Yet, while peer assistance can exist without peer review, the unions believe that "peer review without intensive peer assistance for the teachers in the program does not represent sound educational policy". (AFT/NEA Handbook 1998, 3). It is primarily the review aspect which still remains controversial. However, "while much [public] attention has focused on the idea of teachers helping to dismiss incompetent colleagues, most programs devote more time and resources to mentoring new teachers." (Hertling 1999)

The Peer Review and Assistance Programme is based on a contract negotiated by the district board of education and the teachers' union (who for a long time have partly been opposed to such programmes). It is designed to support and assess

- new teachers (first-year teachers or teachers new to a school system) and
- "veteran teachers experiencing serious problems with their teaching who have been referred into the programme for 'intervention' through a carefully safeguarded process". Job-related deficiencies" include "chronic deficiencies in instructional skills, classroom management, knowledge of subject, or related aspects of teaching performance" (AFT/NEA Handbook 1998, F12).

In some cases, also veteran teachers in good standing may sign up for the peer assistance programme voluntarily (a review, however, is not deemed appropriate in these cases).

³ cf. e.g. the projects concerning the scholarship of teaching and learning at U.S. colleges and universities (http://www.aahe.org/projects/campus_program/, 10.2.2005)

If not indicated otherwise, the information provided in this case study is taken from the AFT/NEA Handbook 1998.

⁴ Toledo Plan (established 1981); Cincinnati; Cleveland; Columbus, Ohio; Rochester, NY; New York City; Minneapolis; Pittsburgh and Philadelphia; In California, a peer assistance and review law (in force since 2000) allocates incentive funds for school districts that negotiate peer review programmes.

If not indicated otherwise, the information provided in this case study is taken from the AFT/NEA Handbook 1998.

The peers (called consulting teachers) are very experienced teachers (5 to 10 years of experience) who are selected by the programme governing bodies (i.e. the school district and the union) through a rigorous selection procedure. In the N.Y. City Peer Review Programme e.g. specific qualification requirements also include

- demonstrated outstanding classroom teaching ability;
- demonstrated knowledge of, and successful experience with, adult learners;
- exemplary knowledge and evidence of creativity and initiative with respect to curriculum content, materials and methods;
- knowledge of current research in educational methodology and the change process;
- demonstrated ability in oral and written communication; and
- background demonstrating ongoing use of effective interpersonal skills

Consulting teachers may be from the same school as the "participating teacher" but also from another school in the district. Peer and peered teachers are matched according to subject expertise or other expertise needed in a specific case. The function as a consulting teacher is usually a full-time position with one peer supervising several participant teachers. After their term, the peers are obliged to return to the classroom and have a one-year waiting period for application to administrative positions. This is to ensure that the peers are actually teachers and not administrative staff.

A variety of methods may be applied during the peer assistance and review programme, including personal counselling of the participant teacher. Classroom observations are usually also part of the exercise. In the Columbus, Ohio, PAR programme e.g. "consulting teachers [...] are required to make at least twenty visits to the classroom and conduct one-on-one conferences with the participating teacher to set the goals. At the end of the year, consulting teachers recommend to a panel whether the employment of the new and veteran teachers in their caseload should be continued". (Hertling 1999, based on Gutloff 1997)

In a summative peer review process, there will be consequences for the individual teacher as to her/his retention and further employment. The consulting teacher issues a formal recommendation to the local union and the school district who in turn make recommendations to the district administration about continuing employment of teachers receiving peer assistance. The final employment decision concerning continued employment, however, is made by the district administration and the board of education. Nonetheless, the recommendations of the joint affiliate/ school district governing body should be routinely accepted by the school district or the programme does not truly perform a peer review function. In both peer assistance and peer review, the local affiliate [of the union] is responsible for ensuring that all aspects of the process are fair and equitable to participating teachers.

VI. 4 Peer review of teaching – a project of the American Association for Higher Education

Encouraging peer review of teaching has been a central policy area of U.S. universities in the past decade(s). In the 90s, the American Association for Higher Education (AAHE) for instance coordinated a national project. "From Idea to Prototype: The Peer Review of Teaching" which "focused on shaping strategies for peer collaboration and review that are intellectually rigorous, appropriate to their

disciplines, and practically useful in improving the quality of teaching and learning"⁵. Faculty teams from the pilot departments of math, chemistry, history, English, business, engineering, and music implemented peer review projects in their own departments, and then shared the results and implications with colleagues on their campus and, through their scholarly societies, across the country. The disciplinary and professional associations were active partners in the project and project-wide disciplinary clusters were formed.

Arguments for the introduction of peer review of teaching were:

- "Student evaluations of teaching, though essential, are not enough; there are substantive aspects of teaching that only faculty can judge.
- Teaching entails learning from experience, a process that is difficult to pursue alone. Collaboration among faculty is essential to educational improvement.
- The regard of one's peers is highly valued in academe; teaching will be considered a worthy scholarly endeavour -- one to which large numbers of faculty will devote time and energy -- only when it is reviewed by peers.
- Peer review puts faculty in charge of the quality of their work as teachers; as such, it's an urgently needed alternative to more bureaucratic forms of accountability that otherwise will be imposed from outside academe."
(Hutchings 1994)

The project conceived peer review broadly to comprise reviews for tenure and promotion as well as collaborative learning and improvement of teaching. It aimed to "broaden the range of strategies for peer review, as well, to include not only classroom observation (which is, on many campuses, synonymous with peer review) but also a variety of processes faculty can use to document and explore their teaching, be it with colleagues next door or across the country" (Hutchings 1994). Peer evaluation should become one of the means for effectively **evaluating teaching** and integrating the quality of teaching into the reward system at universities.

A special role is accorded to the **disciplines** for elaborating standards and stimulating exchange between university teachers. One lesson learnt from the AAHE project was that "even faculty whose first identity is as researchers are eager to talk about teaching when it means talking about their own fields, as encountered by their own students". (Hutchings 1994) While most teaching improvement efforts are typically organised across disciplines and cross-disciplinary discussion, of course, has its merits, **intra-subject exchange** between teachers seems a powerful motivation to learn from and with each other.

Currently, there is a variety of different peer review of teaching programmes at higher education institutions in the U.S. (and in other parts of the world), with a good number of the U.S. programmes using the teaching portfolio as a central element. Due to the number of programmes, only an exemplary case can be presented. The case described in the following takes a rather comprehensive approach to the use of peer review in the improvement of teaching and learning.

⁵ http://www.aahe.org/teaching/Peer_Review.htm, 24.2.2005

VI. 5 Case 2: Peer review of teaching at the University of Wisconsin-Madison

At the University of Wisconsin-Madison peer review of teaching "refers to the participation of colleagues in the development and/or evaluation of one's teaching activities".⁶ Peer reviews are conducted both for formative and summative purposes. Addressees of formative reviews are the teachers themselves. The results of summative reviews are made available to a wider group of persons. Peer reviews are seen as one method to obtain information on teaching. To get a complete picture, peer reviews should be complemented by other data available e.g. from student interviews (questionnaires, personal interviews), interviews with graduates, student performance measures etc.

The university does not prescribe one specific model or procedure. Instead, they emphasise that there should be "as many kinds of peer review of teaching programs possible as there are departments at UW-Madison (or maybe more)". A method for designing, planning and implementing peer review is proposed by the university which should enable departments to create their own tailor-made programmes. In order to foster improvement, the whole process should be as participatory as possible. As a starting point, departments or persons who want to undergo peer review need to define a set of fundamental questions:

- "What kinds of information would the group like to get from a peer review process and what will they do with it?"
- Who should get to see this information?
- Is peer review, as the group understands it, a good way to get this information?
- What other (non-peer review) information does the group need to make a complete picture?
- What are the major impediments to implementing a peer review process in this group?
- Is the group, in general, enthusiastic about using peer review for information gathering?
- How will the group organize itself to take the next steps toward implementation?"

In general, peers are "persons who engage in the same or similar kinds of educational activities, persons who share content expertise, or persons who bring relevant specialized skills to the task of peer review". They may be internal or external. Since the individual university teacher being reviewed is an integral part of the process he/she should play a role in selecting or providing names of reviewers.

Depending on the aim and purpose of the individual peer reviews, the criteria for selecting peers and the methods employed may vary:

"An important consideration in selecting a reviewer is the purpose of the review. If an individual is seeking to use the review to improve teaching, the status of the reviewer with regard to professorial rank and membership in the same department may not be important. A review focused on assessment of content requires an expert in the same discipline. One focused on effectiveness of teaching

⁶ If not indicated otherwise, all information in this case study is taken from <http://www.provost.wisc.edu/archives/ccae/MOO/index.html>.

methodology requires a reviewer with experience in employing those methods. If the purpose of the review is to provide evidence for a personnel decision, considerations that may be important in selecting reviewers include professorial rank, objectivity (reviewer outside the department, college, or perhaps, the institution), and credentials (recognized expert in the discipline or teaching methodology)."

Whatever the actual evaluative methods used, the peer review process always entails a pre-review meeting between the reviewer and the reviewed to clarify the purpose of the review, the specific aspects to be scrutinised and the review technique to be used. After the review, or in some cases, several times during the review, the peered person receives feedback. If a formative review is followed by a summative evaluation, a different reviewer will be asked to perform in the latter.

Peers are prepared and trained for their function. There are faculty development programs and other teaching resources available for peer reviewers. Additionally, the university website gives in-depth information on how peer reviews can be implemented focusing on questions such as definition of the purpose of the review, design and planning, methods used and the interaction between the peer and the refereed. There are also special workshops that address various aspects of conducting reviews, e.g. how to include the colleague being reviewed in the process, how to deliver feedback effectively, etc.

A peer review usually takes one semester. How the review is conducted depends on the aims of the review and the techniques employed. The University of Wisconsin lists and explains in detail a wide range of methods: collaborative course development, course portfolios, external review of course content (a colleague from outside UW-Madison reviews course materials), interviewing students about their learning experience (a colleague talks with the students about what is contributing to their learning), interviewing students about what they are learning (a colleague with content expertise talks with the students about what they are learning), mentor's role, observing teaching, reciprocal classroom visits, research on a course in progress, supervising individual student research, teaching circles, teaching portfolios.

VII. Peer review in higher education

The experiences with peer review at the university level are one of the major starting points for the development of the procedure for European vocational education and training since the instrument is most widespread in higher education.

Peer review has been applied for quite some time in universities in many countries to assess the research performance. Subsequently, in the last ten, fifteen, twenty years approximately -- depending on the country⁷ and with the Anglo-Saxon countries clearly taking the lead -- peer review activities have been extended to include teaching and learning. Subject areas and departments are not only judged by their research activities and results but also by the quality of educational provision. Additionally, institutional reviews have been introduced so that peer review is now a central part of the overall quality assurance system.

In Europe, according to a survey carried out by the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education in 2002, the "four-stage model" is "today generally accepted as the shared foundation of European quality assurance"(ENQA Occasional Papers 5, 2003, 23)⁸. The four-stage model comprises the following elements:

1. procedures and methods that autonomous and independent from government and from higher education institutions (often supervised and/or organised by an independent quality agency)
2. self-assessment
3. external assessment by a peer-review group and site visits, and
4. publication of a report.

With the extension of the application of the peer review, the concept of the peer as an academic representative of the academic field evaluated (puristic definition, single professional definition) has been widened to encompass a wider range of different experts. Peers can be experts in the field but also experts representing similar institutions, members of quality assurance agencies, representatives of stakeholders (students, graduates, employers), representatives of professional organisations (multi-professional peer concept). In most peer teams, international experts are also included. Additionally, in some countries the evaluation tasks of the peers have been extended to include more than just the site visit. (cf. ENQA Occasional Papers 5, 2003, 23 ff.; concerning the definition of peers also Kozar 1999, 44)

Objects of the evaluations in higher education may be subjects (i.e. academic fields), study programmes, institutions and specific themes (i.e. horizontal themes like ICT or student counselling). The ENQA survey shows that programme evaluations are most common in Europe followed by institutional evaluations. Evaluations of quality assurance mechanisms (called "audit" in the ENQA terminology) are most common on the institutional level (cf. ENQA Occasional Papers 5, 2003, 17 ff.)

The average duration of the site visits in European higher education is between one and five days with two days as the most common duration. Evaluations at the institutional level tend to take longer. Common elements of the site visits are

⁷ In some countries peer reviews of teaching and learning are also still in a pilot phase.

⁸ Additionally, the application of the four-stage model is a criterion for ENQA membership "(ENQA Occasional Papers 5, 2003, 23).

interviews, a tour of the facilities, a final meeting with the management, and examination of documentary evidence. Classroom visits are also conducted in one of four cases -- they seem to be the "most controversial element of the site visit" (ENQA Occasional Papers 5, 2003, 31). There is general agreement that interviews should be conducted with teaching staff and students. In about 70% of the cases, administrative staff is also interviewed and in half the cases graduates are interviewed.

With the emergence of quality agencies in higher education, the interplay and distribution of responsibilities and tasks between the peers and the agencies becomes an important factor. Typically, the agencies provide the overall framework and start the process, i.e. the choice of the basic methodology, the preparation of guidelines, and the evaluation concept lies with them. As the review process advances, the peers gradually take over. The crucial point for the involvement of the peers is the site visit in which the peers are prominent. Peers also contribute extensively in the reporting phase.

To sum up, peer review nowadays is at the core of most quality assurance systems in higher education. As a consequence, there is an abundance of peer evaluation programmes at university level. In their core they follow the pattern described above: self-evaluation followed by an external evaluation through peers which involves a site visit and an evaluation report which usually comprises recommendations for improvement.

The concrete provisions for the conduct of the review, however, may differ from institution to institution and and/or from country to country. Variations regard for instance the aims of the review, content and structure of the self-report, selection of peers (who and by whom?), evaluation methods and feedback procedures to the reviewed institution (what kind of feedback do the reviewed receive and when; can they comment on findings? are these comments considered for a final report?). When conducting the site visits common elements such as interviews with teaching staff and students, a tour of the premises etc. can be identified, the actual content of these elements, however, may in fact differ considerably.

Additionally, in some countries/universities, the peer review regulations are quite detailed, in others peer reviews are less structured. Concerning the period of time between reviews, peer reviews are usually only conducted every few years (often in intervals between 4 and 8 years), while self-evaluation is carried out on a more regular basis (yearly, biannually).

Since less standardised practices of peer review can also be found within vocational education and training and are described there, this chapter will focus on highly regulated procedures, presenting an example from the university sector and one from non-tertiary post-secondary education (polytechnics).

VII. 1 Case 3: Academic peer review of higher education in the United Kingdom

In the United Kingdom⁹, peer reviews are the methodology used by the government bodies responsible for funding to assure, with the support of a specialised

⁹ The peer review system described is valid in England; Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland which have identical or almost identical provisions.

If not indicated otherwise, information cited in this case study is taken from the Handbook for academic review (2000), of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education.

agency, that quality standards are met. While primary responsibility for the establishment, maintenance and enhancement of academic standards lies with the higher education institution, the funding councils have a statutory responsibility to secure that provision is made for assessing the quality of education they fund. The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education acts on behalf of the funding bodies in this respect by organising and conducting academic peer reviews.

Points of reference for the higher education institutions as well as the reviewers for the assessment of quality are a "Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education", a qualifications framework and subject benchmarks.

The reviews are summative and aim at safeguarding and enhancing the quality of provision and standards of awards in higher education with a view to

- securing value from public investment,
- encouraging improvements in the quality of education through the publication of reports and through the sharing of best practice;
- promoting public confidence by providing, through the publication of reports, effective and accessible public information on the quality of high education.

The peer review process is a **two-step procedure**: the main unit of review is the **subject**. Subjects are defined in broad terms (there are 42 subject areas), the programmes delivered within the subject are included in the review. Additionally and based on the subject reviews, an **institutional review** is carried out on the effectiveness of the institutional quality assurance process. There is exchange of information between the subject and the institutional review processes thereby reducing duplication to a minimum. All subjects are reviewed within a six-year cycle and an institutional review is also conducted once within this cycle.

Internal peer review of teaching may be part of the self-evaluation. Results may be enclosed in the documentation for the subject review. Peer review of teaching is voluntary and no specific procedure is described.

Scope

Subject review: the subject is the main unit of review. Programme outcome standards and the quality of learning opportunities are the two areas reviewed.

1. programmes: programmes outcome standards – appropriateness of intended learning outcomes; effectiveness of curricular content and assessment arrangements, student achievements
2. quality of learning opportunities in the subject: the quality of curricular delivery and student learning, student support and progression, learning resources and student achievement.

Institutional review: review of institutional management of standards and quality is concerned with the robustness and security of institutional systems relating to the degree awarding function. This involves arrangements for dealing with the approval and review of programmes, procedures for acting on the findings of external examiners, subject reviews and other external reviews, the management of institutional credit and qualification arrangements, the management of collaborative arrangements with other institutions, and the management of assessment procedures.

Peers

There are three types of academic reviewers used by the agency:

- subject specialist reviewers, with current teaching experience in the discipline concerned, or experience of relevant professional or occupational practice;
- review coordinators, who lead subject review teams and have extensive experience of quality assurance and programme approval in higher education, usually gained by working with such procedures in more than one discipline. Review coordinators are expected to perform a number of duties -- of which managing reviews and writing reports are the major responsibilities. Opportunities to contribute to other activities such as editing reports, training subject specialist reviewers and producing subject overview reports may also be available.
- institutional reviewers, who hold, or have recently held, senior management positions in higher education institutions.

Review coordinators and subject specialist reviewers are employed in subject reviews; institutional reviewers for institutional reviews.

The following general qualities are required:

- demonstrable commitment to the principles of quality assurance in higher education;
- an enquiring and sceptical disposition;
- powers of analysis and sound judgement;
- personal authority and presence coupled with the ability to act as an effective team member;
- good time management skills including experience of chairing meetings;
- the ability to make appropriate judgements in the context of complex institutions different from their own;
- experience of organisation and management, particularly in relation to teaching and learning matters;
- high standard of oral and written communication, preferably with experience of writing formal reports to published deadlines.

In addition, reviewers are expected to have a clear knowledge and understanding of the whole review process and the "Code of practice".

Other functions in a review process are:

A facilitator is appointed by the HE institution to facilitate liaison with the peer review team. She/he will be invited to attend all reviewers' meetings except those with current and former students, employers and meetings where judgements are discussed. She/he will also be available to the reviewers if further documentation is needed.

Institutional review secretaries: some reviews will require particular administrative support which may be provided by a review secretary. A typical review secretary is an institutional administrator with at least three years' experience of academic administration, including committee support. Supporting a review activity as secretary is often a valuable staff development opportunity.

Peer reviewers are recruited by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education from individuals nominated by institutions or other organisations and from individuals who reply to advertisements. A register of reviewers is published by the

agency. The agency selects the review team and notifies the institution which may voice concerns e.g. because of conflict of interests.

Preparation and organisation

The process begins with colleges supplying the Quality Assurance Agency with information about their programmes. This information is used by the agency to establish a programme of reviews (timetable) and to select the proposed review teams. The college submits its self-evaluation including programme specifications to the agency no later than two months before the agreed initial meeting date.

The self-evaluation document is central to the process of subject review. It fulfils two main functions: firstly, it encourages the provider to reflect on and evaluate the quality of the provisions and the standards achieved. Secondly, it is a framework for the review which tests and verifies the statements in the self-evaluation documentation. The document should reflect on current provision in a manner that evaluates both strengths and weaknesses, indicates the changes that have taken place since earlier reviews, and considers changes to be made in the future. Programme specifications are annexed.

The self-evaluation document for the subject review should be concise (6000 words) and includes:

- a short statement of the range of provision
- overall aims of the subject provision
- evaluation of the subject provision (learning outcomes, curricula and assessment, quality of learning opportunities, maintenance and enhancement of standards and quality)
- factual information (programme specifications etc.) is annexed.

For the institutional review, a self-evaluation document is drawn up (30-40pp.) by the institution which comprises:

- a description and analysis of any developments since the last quality audit/institutional review;
- a description and analysis of its responses to individual subject reviews and the ways in which lessons learnt from these have been taken into account in the enhancement of institutional practice;
- a brief description of the key features of its processes for assuring the academic standards of its awards and the quality of its programmes
- identification of any precepts in the "Code of practice" to which it is not adhering, explaining what alternative approaches have been taken to ensure an effect equivalent to that intended by the precept;
- a view on the perceived strengths and limitations of its current institutional quality assurance arrangements; and
- a description and discussion of its intended strategy for the next three years to further enhance practice and remedy any shortcomings it has identified.

The documents are passed on to the specialist reviewers who read and comment upon the self-evaluation; the review coordinator uses their comments to help plan and set priorities for the review.

Training of peers

Subject reviewers are recruited and trained to ensure that they are capable of carrying out their duties effectively. Training of reviewers is carried out on behalf of the Quality Assurance Agency by means of two-day residential courses.

Because of the complexity of their role, review coordinators undergo a longer induction and training. In addition to the subject specialist reviewer training course, review coordinators also attend workshops and conferences arranged by the Quality Assurance Agency. For the institutional reviewer a training programme is provided by the agency which includes an opportunity to observe part of a review in progress.

Peer review and visit(s)

Subject review: reviews are spread over a longer period of time and involve comprehensive scrutiny of the self-documentation. The peers test the quality and standards achieved against the statements in the self-evaluation documentation.

Often more than one visit will be conducted. At least two persons (peers) should be present in any on-site visit. A number of meetings take place during the review both among the peer team (preparatory meetings, review meetings for discussion and evaluation, final meeting to arrive at judgements) and with groups of stakeholders (staff, students, former students, employers). The facilitator will be present at all meetings except for those meetings /or parts of meetings where judgements are made. Since the review extends over a longer period of time, there is no concluding session at which oral feedback is given to the institution.

Evaluation methods employed are meetings and discussion groups, interviews as well as other methods (further document analysis: student work, tests etc., observations etc.) seen as appropriate. Judgements are made on academic standards (confidence, limited confidence, no confidence) and on the quality of learning opportunities: exemplary, commendable', 'approved' or 'failing'.

Institutional review: institutional reviews usually take 2 to 3 days, depending on the size of the institution and results of prior reviews (cf. below consequences). During the visit the peer team will test and verify the judgements made in the self-evaluation; review any specific concerns arising from the subject reviews and gather any further evidence if necessary.

Peer report

Subject review: based on the self-evaluation, notes taken by all reviewers and the final meeting of the reviewers where findings are discussed and final judgements made, the peer review coordinator produces the draft of the report immediately after the review. This draft is checked by the other reviewers and is then sent to the reviewed institution. Subject review reports are about 4000 words.

Institutional review: a report will be published on the effectiveness of an institution's system for managing the quality of its provision, the standards of its awards and the security of its awarding function. The report identifies good practice and action points. Action points may be categorised as 'essential', 'advisable' or 'desirable'. The report will also contain a statement of the degree of confidence (confidence, limited confidence, no confidence) placed in the continuing effectiveness of the institution's quality assurance arrangements. Exemplary features of the arrangement will also be described, if applicable.

Results are published and available to the public as summaries of individual subject reviews, as subject overview reports upon completion of all reviews in a particular subject area, and as reports on institutional reviews.

Consequences

In theory, a statement of no confidence in the institutional review could lead to the withdrawal of accreditation as a higher education institution, withdrawal of funding and withdrawing of the degree awarding function. No specific follow-up

procedures, however, are mentioned for the case of a "no confidence" statement in the Academic Review Handbook -- merely that a "statement that confidence cannot be placed in institutional arrangements for the management of quality and standards should be a rare occurrence".

A positive consequence in the form of a lower intensity of review (a 'lighter touch') can be expected if a review was successful and the agency has confidence in an institution's ability to assure quality and standards.

VII. 2 Case 4: Peer review at Austrian Polytechnics (Fachhochschulen)

The case of peer reviews at Austrian Polytechnics has already been mentioned in the Austrian national report. It is a very structured model in which details of the process are regulated to a very large extent. Moreover, the procedure is monitored scientifically and the institutional evaluation has already undergone meta-evaluation. This is why the system of peer reviews at the Austrian Polytechnics will be described in more detail and relevant findings of the meta-evaluation will be presented.

The Fachhochschulen (FH) are a new educational sector in Austria: the Fachhochschule Studies Act became effective on 1 October 1993 and the first 10 programmes started in the academic year 1994/95. While the course-providing bodies are, with rare exceptions, privately organised (legal persons under private law, e.g. companies with limited liability, associations or public foundations), they are financed through public funds. Legal control remains with the government and external quality assurance is carried out by the Fachhochschul Council (Fachhochschulrat).

All FH programmes (Bachelor's, Master's and Diploma programmes) are subject to **accreditation** which is granted for an approval period of a maximum of 5 years. Initial accreditation is compulsory in order to receive the approval for a FH programme (accreditation is equivalent to approval). The decision on initial accreditation is carried out by the members of the FH Council. After this period, the Fachhochschulen must apply for re-accreditation. Each decision of the FH Council on the re-accreditation of programmes is, in turn, based on a previously conducted evaluation. As a result, there is a tight connection between the decision on initial and re-accreditation of programmes and the evaluation of programmes and institutions.

The evaluation procedure used is a peer review procedure based on a self-evaluation. The underlying quality concept is "Fitness for Purpose". The quality of an evaluated unit (Fachhochschule or FH degree programme) is measured by the degree to which the aims, requirements and expectations, as predefined in the topics of the evaluation, are met. The procedure is a **summative evaluation** which also identifies **areas of improvement**. The implementation of quality improvements recommended in previous evaluations is taken into account in the re-accreditation.

Peer evaluations have been carried out since 1997. Between 1997 and 2002, the evaluations focused on individual **study programmes** only. Since 2003, both reviews of the study programmes and **institutional reviews** have been conducted. The institutional evaluation focuses on the measures, processes, resources and contents to ensure that the quality of the institution as a whole is guaranteed. The degree-programme-related evaluation focuses on the connection between the vocational fields of activity, the related qualification profile and the curriculum.

There is no (explicit) link between the study programme and institutional evaluation as e.g. in the academic review system set up in the United Kingdom (cf. below).

The review must include the following **areas** (FH Evaluation Regulation 2004):

Fields of institutional evaluation	Fields of degree programme-related evaluation
<p>1 Strategy and organisation (public mission statement, decision-making and organisational structure, integration of faculty and students in decision-making; corporate identity)</p>	<p>1 Educational goals and teaching methods (clear definition of educational goals; educational goals and implementation of placements, knowledge and skills to be acquired are documented and transparent; adequate curriculum and teaching methods)</p>
<p>2 Quality management and HR development (quality management system in place, human resources development plan, external communication, job profiles for academic staff; transparent appointment procedures)</p>	<p>2 Students (admission procedures, study conditions; teacher/student ratios; transparent examination requirements and modalities; student participation in reflecting on the programme; international mobility)</p>
<p>3 Degrees and programmes (systematic development of programmes based on scientific developments and professional requirement; quality of the educational provision and placements; educational mandate implemented by appropriate teaching principles and concepts; transparent requirements for degrees; contact with alumni)</p>	<p>3 Organisation and quality assurance (definition of decision-making processes, competences and responsibilities; instruments for continuing improvement; parts of the study programmes are coordinated, harmonised and connected, examination dates are announced on time; course-progress analysis – drop-out rates, failure to complete a degree programme within the regular study period)</p>
<p>4 Students (systematic feedback from students; admission procedures; teacher/student ratios; transparent examination requirements and modalities; infrastructure for students; student participation in reflecting on the programme)</p>	<p>4 Staff (academically and professionally qualified staff with relevant teaching experience, transparent selection procedures, weighting of individual teaching and research activities; composition of faculty corresponds to development plan; qualified staff in administration and technology; international mobility of teachers)</p>
<p>5 Applied research & development (research strategies and goals in line with strategy of the institution; effective and efficient use of resources; know-how and technology transfer to external partners – industry, business, non-profit organisations)</p>	<p>5 Infrastructure and applied research & development (financial resources, sufficient and adequate equipment and rooms; fields of research in line with strategy of the institution; adequate structures and resources for research and development (R&D))</p>
<p>6 Resources, infrastructure and funds (financial and physical resources; rooms, library; transparent budgeting and implementation of the budget)</p>	

7 Internationalisation, co-operation and communication

(contribution to Bologna process; strategy for internationalisation; establishment of national and international contacts; efficient and consistent overall communication and public relation)

The **overall process** includes

- an internal evaluation by the Fachhochschule/study programme
- the external evaluation by a Peer Review Team
- a statement by the evaluated institution/study programme on the evaluation report of the peer review team
- submission to the Fachhochschul Council and appraisal of the evaluation reports by the FH Council
- follow-up procedure
- publication of the results

The structure prescribed for the **self-evaluation report** (30 to 40 pages) comprises an introduction which contains a description of the self-evaluation process as well as the names of the persons involved. The self-evaluation report covers and is structured in accordance with the evaluation topics defined in the FH Regulation (cf. below). Within each of the given quality areas, the following aspects must be highlighted:

- description of the actual situation;
- analysis and appraisal of the actual situation with regard to the predefined aims, requirements and expectations;
- proposals for improvements and planned measures;
- summarising analysis of strengths/weaknesses.

The internal evaluation is carried out by a team (usually of 3 to 5 persons). The process should start at least 5 to 6 months (3 months for the evaluation of a study programme) before the external review and involve staff as well as students.

Who are the peers?

A general requirement is that the members of the review team need to be independent and unbiased. Conflicts of interest must be avoided. Another basic requirement is that it has to be ensured that peers are knowledgeable enough to assess the evaluation topics. Additionally, at least one member of the review team must be familiar with the Austrian FH sector and at least one member must be experienced in performing evaluation procedures.

For the institutional evaluation, the review team consists of at least three members and one assistant:

- one peer with a background in organisational development,
- one peer with a didactical qualification in higher education
- one peer who holds a management position in a similar institution abroad and
- one peer who holds a management function in an enterprise or non-profit organisation

The review team must comprise one member who fulfils an academic management function at a foreign higher education institution in a similar field as well as one member with management experience gained in a business or non-profit organisation.

For the degree-programme-related evaluation, the review team consists of at least three members and one assistant. The review team comprises one member who has an academic management function for a foreign degree programme in a similar field, one member with relevant practical experience as well as one member with sufficient teaching experience and the knowledge to assess the design of the curricula with respect to teaching methods. Often, a direct peer, i.e. a director of another FH study programme is part of the review team.

The course-providing body selects the peers and informs the FH Council of the constitution of the review team in due time before the review. If the review team's constitution does not comply with the provisions set by the FH Evaluation Regulation, the FH Council can reject the proposal for the review team. In such a case, the course-providing body must immediately name to the FH Council one (or more) new member(s) of the review team. The peers are invited by the course-providing body.

There are **three functions**: The role as a group leader (Gruppenleitung), the "normal" peer role and the function of the assistant. The assistant, however, is not a member of the peer team but has a supportive role.

The group leader is responsible for coordinating the work of the review team (elaboration of a catalogue with evaluation questions, distribution of specific tasks, collaborative writing of the report), compliance with the time schedule and contact with the institution. All meta-evaluation results point to the necessity and usefulness of such a function within the group. Equally positive assessment is accorded to the role of the assistant. The assistant (formerly "secretary") is an administrative employee from another polytechnic, usually the institution of one of the peers. S/he is responsible for support work and organisation and makes the first preparations and suggestions for the report. S/he plays a key role for the smooth running and the efficiency of the review procedure and the writing of the report. Organisational and professional writing skills as well as some knowledge of the review procedure and the sector investigated are recommended competences of the assistant. Due to her/his importance, the assistant sometimes also assumes the role of a "fifth peer": S/he has the right to make suggestions but has no actual vote.

Peer training

According to the FH evaluation regulation, the members of the review team are to be prepared for their activity in a timely and suitable fashion prior to their onsite visit concerning questions of content, methods and organisation of the performance of the external evaluation.

The main element of preparation and training are **workshops** (of about ½ day) which are held separately for the peers and for the institutions to be reviewed. The main aim of the workshop is the clarification of the evaluation tasks and assignments. During the workshop, participants are acquainted with the specific features of the Fachhochschulen and the peer methodology used. Questions can be posed and discussed. Additionally, the workshop is to be used by the peers to build-up a team and start planning the evaluation. The meta-evaluation has shown that peers would welcome more methodological instructions and support on how to proceed in the peer review. Also, more time should be reserved for

team-building in order to ensure a smooth and efficient cooperation between the peers.

For the institutional peer review, many peer teams conduct one or more internal preparatory meetings. Both for the study programme review and for the institutional review meta-evaluation has shown that it facilitates the work of the peers in the review if they already meet on the evening before the review starts to make final preparations.

Peer visit

The site visits usually take 2 to 4 days. The duration of the visits seems sufficient according to the meta-evaluation. However, if an institution has several educational sites, it is not always possible or recommendable to visit all of them due to time restrictions. The meta-evaluation has shown that there should be a **direct relation between the scope of the provision** (number of study programmes and sites) and the **duration of the visit**. It is, however, questionable whether a duration exceeding 4 days would be acceptable for the FH institutions whose ordinary processes are usually disrupted during the review. (Kozar 1999, 42ff., 48ff., 54f.)

Common methods employed during the review are a visit to the premises and interviews with different persons and groups. Careful planning and a realistic schedule for the visit with some possibilities to buffer delays are also mentioned as important factors of success. Another recommendation is to plan **internal meetings of the peers** in between the interviews in order to enable them to discuss the findings immediately and start forming and formulating first (common) judgements. Usually the results of the day are always assessed and summarised in the evenings. The efficiency of reporting is increased considerably if rough draft has already been completed at the end of the review (Clementi et al 2004, 177). There is considerable time pressure on the peers during the review -- work days between 12 and 14 hours are common.

Other findings concerning the review visit were: if peers were from (local) industry and business, they often could not manage to attend all review sessions which caused disruptions in the process. Peers close to the institution reviewed (cooperation partners etc.) were sometimes found to take a protective stance especially when critical topics came up (Kozar 1999, 107). Other problems faced during the visits concern tensions due to absences of peers and tendencies of peers not to listen but to use the review as a forum for highlighting and presenting their own expertise (Kozar 1999, 125).

In order to ensure an appropriate feedback process between the review team and the institution evaluated, the on-site visit is completed with a **final meeting** between the entire review team and the representatives of the evaluated institution in which the impressions gained and conclusions reached by the members of the review team are presented and discussed.

Peer report and publication of results

The evaluation report of the review team follows the structure of the self-evaluation report and should not exceed 20 pages. It contains a summary and, for each field of evaluation, assessments of strengths and weaknesses as well as recommendations. The evaluation's time schedule as well as a list of the persons interviewed is attached. The report is drawn up in agreement with all members of the review team. Dissenting opinions may also be given (but rarely are). The summary of the review team's evaluation report is the basis for the publication and should not exceed three pages. The summary consists of a substantiated general impression of the institution evaluated as well as the most important

results for each field of evaluation. The reviewed institution may comment on the evaluation report.

In the meta-evaluation, a sufficient time-frame for the feedback phase between the review team and the institution is recommended. A clear and open communication on positive as well as negative aspects should be facilitated. Institutions should receive the possibility to comment, clear up misunderstandings and complement with additional information (Clementi et al 2004, 177).

The evaluation results are published on the website of the FH Council in the form of a summary. The consent of the course-providing body must be obtained prior to the publication. If the course-providing body does not give its consent in time, the results shall not be published. However, the information that the result of the evaluation is not published in the absence of the course-providing body's consent shall be published.

Follow-up procedure

The follow-up procedure safeguards that the results of the evaluation are implemented, i.e. that adequate measures for improvement are carried out. An improvement plan must be submitted to the FH council. In the next application for re-accreditation measures taken in the wake of the peer review must be delineated. There are, however, no direct consequences of the review in terms of personnel or funding decisions (cf. Kozar 1999, 126).

Selected general findings of the meta-evaluation

On the one hand, there is a repeated call for still more structured and detailed guidelines and assessment criteria in order to enhance comparability of the individual reviews. On the other hand, regulations are also deplored as too tight.

The interface and the interconnectedness of the institutional review and the review of the study programmes need to be clarified.

In 1998, in 12 reviews of study programmes, there was only one female peer (of 48) employed (cf. Kozar 1999, 110). In the meta-evaluation of the institutional review, 2/3 of the peers were men and 1/3 women (Clementi et al, 22).

VIII. Peer reviews in initial VET

Different models of peer reviews in initial vocational education and training can be discerned. In most cases, the use of peer reviews is still very experimental and the procedure does not follow fixed standards and structures. Rather, the core idea of a peer review is adapted (in an often very creative way) to current needs and demands of the individual educational institutions.

Thus one common model is the **easy-to-implement voluntary peer review** in which initial VET providers invite persons from outside the institution which they see fit to give valuable feedback on issues of importance to the school. Peers can therefore be **anyone suitable for the task**: colleagues and head-teachers from other educational institutions, officials from the educational authorities, representatives of enterprises and labour market agencies, representatives of local/regional government, experts from universities and research institutions, specialists in organisational change management and quality assurance etc. The peers as well as the subject of the peer reviews may change from one visit to the next.

If peer reviews are used in this way, the feedback from the peers is central to further developments at the VET institution and further action on it is intended from the outset. In some cases, the peer review can additionally assume features of an **open house day** in which the educational institution also makes a **show-case of the quality of its education provision** to the public which is represented by the peers. Alongside the "normal" teaching and learning activities, cases of **good practice and innovative projects** are presented to the peers during the visit.

VIII. 1 Case 5: Peer review at Heideschule, Germany

The Grund- und Hauptschule Buchholz – Heideschule (a primary and lower secondary school) carries out yearly peer reviews as part of their quality evaluation concept "QueK" (**Qualitätsevaluations-Konzept zur Qualitätssicherung und –entwicklung**).¹⁰

The peer evaluation is formative. The invitation of peers or critical friends serves the purpose of receiving feedback and advice while at the same time presenting the achievements of the school. Addressees of the review findings are the whole school, in particular the school management and the teachers. The peer visit is called "Hauptschultag", it is a one-day visit and covers a review of the whole school.

The **topics** of the evaluation vary from one review to the next. They are defined by the schools according to current needs and interests. The topics of a peer review visit conducted in November 1999 were teaching in general, vocational guidance and new technologies, natural sciences and technology, an innovative school project called, remedial education (for immigrants from Russia (Aussiedlerförderung) and learning to learn), school life / rooms / breaks.

Likewise, the definition and invitation of **peers** varies according to the needs of the school and the objectives of the evaluation. In 1999 peers were:

- a teacher from a vocational school (from the dual system)

¹⁰ Information for his case study is taken from http://www.heideschule.de/peer_review.htm.

- a director of a neighbouring lower secondary school (Hauptschule)
- director of another type of lower secondary school (Realschule) who is also in charge for the sciences
- head of department of the school provider (Dezernent der Schulabteilung des Schulträgers)
- a former head representative of the parents who also has a qualification in social pedagogy
- parents' representatives of all 9 classes
- 2 representatives of a youth welfare service organisation
- 1 representative of the enterprises in Buchholz
- 1 representative of the local employment office
- the head of the department of youth and family at the regional government
- an editor of the "Hamburger Abendblatt" (local newspaper)
- the head of department of the district government
- the expert on equal opportunities of the city (Frauenbeauftragte)
- a representative of the local trades.

Of the 24 peers invited, 22 came to the visit. The school itself (Hauptschul-Dienstbesprechung) selected the critical friends. The peers were informed and asked for confirmation of the date of the visit about 4-5 weeks before the visit. About 2 weeks before the visit, invitations went out containing the agenda and organisation of the peer visit, a description of how to get to the school, a floor-plan of the school, the schedule for the 2nd and 3rd classes on the day of the visit, and an excerpt of the school programme [school programme = usually short description of the mission and organisation of the school and the education offered]. Other than that there was no preparation or training for the peers.

The **peer visit** took half a day. It started with a reception of critical friends through students and school-band in the morning (8:00 am). The director presented the aim of the visit, the agenda and important parts of the school programme. Small groups were formed spontaneously and voluntarily by the peers.

For two hours, the peers visited the class-rooms. There was no schedule and the peers decided themselves where they wanted to go and whether they wanted to just observe silently or ask questions. Peers were, however, asked to take notes on cards. The classroom visits were therefore carried out in different manners: There was one group of three who visited six classes and there was also the expert who only visited two classes and had intensive discussions in class.

After the classroom visits, the peers and teachers convened again. A buffet (prepared by the students) was served and first discussions started between the peers and the school. At the same time, the peers' observations (cards) were visualised on 6 pinboards – one for each quality area. In a first plenary session (held in a circle), every teacher presented the aims of the school in his/her subject and the statements of the peers (without justifications), peers had the opportunity to comment again. In a second plenary, everybody had the opportunity to give short statements on the review and its results ("Blitzlicht"). The peer review ended on time at 12:30.

Subsequent to the visit, the teachers gathered in the teachers' room for a first exchange and backslapping. Following the experiences from the previous year it was deemed important that the teachers get together again after the peer visit to close the evaluation jointly.

Seven days after the review, the results (statements on cards, documentation of the plenary sessions) were further analysed by the "Hauptschuldienstbesprechung" (body within the school). The results were communicated to all teachers and to the critical friends.

Since the peer review is part of the overall quality assurance and development system of the school, within about 6 months the measures planned following the peer review and first results of implementation are to be reported to the quality steering group.

No critical assessment in the form of a meta-evaluation has been carried out. Yet, positive **experiences** were mentioned:

- the reception of the peers by the students and the welcome by the school band contributed to a good working atmosphere right from the start of the visit.
- a very positive factor was also that the time schedule was kept. This increased acceptance by those involved in the procedure.

It was also noted positively that the students had been eager to make a good impression – so that what the peers saw was not exactly "business as usual". This statement reveals that besides the desire to receive critical feedback in order to improve, the school also hoped to create a positive impression upon the peers as representatives of local stakeholders and co-operation partners.

VIII. 2 Case 6: Evaluating quality in school education. A European pilot project

From September 1997 to November 1998, the European Commission, DG XXII (today DG Education and Culture) carried out a European pilot project on "Evaluation quality in school education" 101 schools from 18 countries (EU and EFTA) took part.¹¹ The project focused on initial general education but can be taken as an example of a transnational initiative which involves peers in self-evaluation. The project promoted exchange concerning

- methods of self-evaluation and
- use of evaluation results for school improvement.

A general procedure was laid out which was to be followed by the participating schools.

- Step 1: schools were asked to review their state of 'organisational health' involving key stakeholder (for example pupils, teachers and parent).
- Step 2: schools chose 5 areas for further investigation (1 area from each of the 4 quality dimensions, 1 additional area of free choice) and drew up a final self-evaluation profile.

Additionally, transnational exchange and networking was offered through two conferences.

Key instruments for the self-evaluation was a Self-Evaluation Profile (SEP) comprising 12 quality areas and guidelines for self-evaluation.

During the self-evaluation, a '**critical friend**' was a common methodology and a central element. The peers were an additional resource in the self-evaluation process, not external reviewers. 86 schools employed a critical friend.

¹¹ If not indicated otherwise, the information for this case study was taken from: European Commission (1999): Evaluating quality in school education. A European pilot project. Final Report

Apart from that, peer observations of teaching ('processes at classroom level') could be carried out by colleagues. All peer activities, both on the institutional and the individual level, were completely voluntary and self-organised.

Scope of the review

For the school evaluation, 12 areas were defined which were grouped into 4 strands:

Outcomes

1. Academic achievement
2. Personal and social development
3. Pupils destinations

Processes at classroom level

4. Time as a resource for learning
5. Quality of learning and teaching
6. Support for learning difficulties

Processes at school level

7. School as a learning place
8. School as a social place
9. School as a professional place

Environment

10. School and home
11. School and community
12. School and work

In the peer review of (individual) teaching learning, teaching and support for learning difficulties or other aspects of classroom life were investigated. It was deemed important to define the focus of observation beforehand, the nature of feedback and the instruments of observation. This could be decided by the teachers themselves or as part of a wider school initiative. As an example, the implementation at an Icelandic school can be cited: "In an Icelandic school eight teachers divided themselves into pairs and visited one another's classrooms. Beforehand, they met to discuss and plan the visit, making a list of nine different observation points to feedback on. Each made three visits, allowing time to become familiar with the procedure and overcome any initial inhibitions." (Evaluating quality in school education, A European pilot project, 2-17)

Peers

For the institutional evaluation, peers were critical friends who look upon the school from the outside. They were external, but not from the "control system". Usually, only one person served as a critical friend and there were no transnational peers. The school selected and invited the peer.

Possible critical friends came

- from education authority (preferably without direct authority in relation to the school in question)
- from a university
- from another school
- from a private agency
- or were a parent.

The role and function of the peer was described thus: "While this person should be first and foremost a friend and ally of the school he or she should also be prepared to critique and to challenge what the school is doing. The critical friend has to ask incisive and informed questions so that the schools are stimulated to re-examine what they are doing. Wherever possible the critical friend should have expertise in self-evaluation and experience working with schools in advisory capacity. Above all, he or she should be acceptable to the school as someone with credibility and trust." (1–9) "The critical friend was not in a neutral role but acted in a support role and as advocate of the school, working alongside management and teachers to provide the school with critical input as appropriate. He/she was 'an outsider who was nevertheless familiar with the school' as one school phrased it." (3–29)

In the peer review of teaching, teachers joined with a colleague of the same status to observe and give feedback on learning, teaching, support for learning difficulties or other aspects of classroom life. Findings of the meta-evaluation were that "[T]he value of this being conducted on a peer basis was that teachers could work together with colleagues in a climate of trust but also with a willingness to challenge each other. [...] The keys to the success of this strategy are trust, honesty, planning, agreement on areas of focus, and feedback which is both affirming and challenging." (Quote)

Contrary to other peer review formats, there was no predefined method on how and when the peer should be involved. He or she could work in different contexts and with different groups of stakeholders during the self-evaluation. Most of the peers had a very high involvement with teachers and other staff (in 73 schools) as well as with the management (71). About 40% worked with pupils (36) and parents (33).

Meta-evaluation

The role and impact of the critical friend (n=88) was evaluated according to the following criteria: openness, being a good listener, understanding the context of the school, giving helpful advice, having good relation to teachers, communicating ideas well, helping in challenging practice, being a useful resource. Best marks were given on listening, openness, understanding, communication, and good relation to teachers; the marks on advice, help and usefulness were a little lower. "The findings show that the openness of the critical friend was rated very highly by the 88 school [...]. Being clear about roles and purposes and having no hidden agendas is a key principle for the acceptance of an outside person. The critical friends were also rated as very sensitive to the needs of different individuals and groups of stakeholders in the school by being good listeners, by communicating their ideas well, by getting on well with the teachers and by understanding the complexity of the school life. In the areas "challenging the school", "offering helpful advice" and "being a resource" the rating is slightly lower, but still in the positive range." (3–30)

During the self-evaluation, critical friends could assume the roles of

- scientific advisor: giving useful advice and information on self-evaluation and school development, providing methods, sharing knowledge
- organiser: moderation of meetings, time-keeping, preparation of meetings, etc.
- motivator: giving reassurance and encouragement, good listener
- facilitator: handle emotions, balance between personal and professional matters,

- networker: suggest possible partners from outside, help in team-building, co-operation between school and work, school and teacher training / university and most notably the role of an
- outsider: "who brings in an outside view, is critical of the 'ordinary', occasionally brings in counter arguments, creates multiple perspectives, mirrors one's own perceptions,, enhances coherence among diverse viewpoints, calls the school into question in terms of its organisational aspects, analyses the school having the perspective of another enterprise" (quote)

Success criteria for the work with a critical friend were:

- a clear definition of the relationship between the school and the critical friend
- the supportive role of critical friend (not dominating the process)
- the identification with the work of the school
- a healthy relationship of critical friends with inspectorate (influence of critical friends reduced if involvement of inspectors is high)
- a culture of positive critique (not offensive).

In the overall assessment, the meta-evaluation found that: "All in all, the concept of the critical friend as a support structure (outside the control system) has proved to be one of the strongest features of the project. Whatever his/her competencies, they should remain flexible according to the needs of the schools as identified by schools themselves." (3–32)

Additionally, there are also pilot projects in which a more structured procedure is implemented. One example is the German project *eiver*, which seeks to establish networks/clusters of VET schools. These clusters work together on specific quality areas in that they define common criteria and indicators. The peer visits are also carried out within the clusters which both support and critically examine each other. One main feature therefore is the **continuity** of the **peer network**.

VIII. 3 Case 7: Project *eiver* – Evaluation im Verbund

eiver –Evaluation im Verbund als Beitrag zur Qualitätsentwicklung beruflicher Schulen in regionalen Bildungsnetzwerken (evaluation in a network/cluster) is a three-year pilot project on peer reviews in vocational schools in Hessen, Germany, carried out by the Institut für Qualitätsentwicklung (IQ) in Wiesbaden. Scientific evaluation and support is undertaken by the Institut für Allgemeine Pädagogik und Berufspädagogik, Technische Universität Darmstadt.¹² *eiver* started in January 2004 and will end in December 2006. The project is currently in the development and testing phase, a first set of peer reviews have already been carried out in the first quarter of 2005.

The pilot project is based on three elements: the formation of networks between schools (Verbünde), the internal evaluation of the schools and the external evaluation by the peers. The key concept of the project is the **creation of networks/clusters** (Verbünde) on specific topics. Nine VET schools have formed 3

¹² The information cited in this case study is taken primarily from the project's website s1.teamlearn.de/QuickPlace/b-1-evaluation/Main.nsf/h_Toc/4df38292d748069d0525670800167212/?OpenDocument and an interview with the Dr. Giebenhain, the person responsible for the scientific support, cf. the bibliography for further details.

evaluation networks (Evaluationsverbände). Every network focuses on a special theme:

- Education and training networks (Ausbildungsverbände) in initial education and training
- Further education (Fortbildung)
- Regional networks (Regionale Netzwerke) in continuing education and training (Weiterbildung).

The **aim** is an external formative review of schools with regard to specific pre-defined quality areas (including evaluation criteria and indicators) not by educational authorities but by network partners ("Verbundpartner"). The external review aims at

- enriching the internal view of the schools through the external perspective from the network partners
- offering the opportunity to the schools to learn with each other and from each other
- giving an incentive for further development to the schools involved.

Addressees of the evaluation are the schools themselves, the team of the scientific meta-evaluation but also political decision-makers in the federal state Hessen.

Scope

Each of the three networks concentrates on a specific pre-defined area:

1. quality of teaching concepts and the co-operation between schools and enterprises in education and training;
2. impact of further education and training of teachers on the quality of teaching and learning, transfer of knowledge acquired in further education by individual teachers to colleagues and its use within the school;
3. matching of supply and demand: meeting the needs of the regional labour market demands (inclusion of stakeholders such as enterprises and other schools in regional networks).

Within the evaluation networks, the school teams ("evaluation-teams", selected persons in each from the participating schools) of the network partners jointly develop evaluation concepts including aims, evaluation criteria, quality indicators and evaluation methods. The schools collect data, analyse and interpret it and draw up self-reports (Selbstreports).

Three peer review cycles will be conducted in the project: In the first evaluation cycle which has already been completed, the self-report and peer visit focused on the evaluation plan and methods (no data collection and analysis yet), the second and the third evaluation cycle will comprise the complete evaluation cycle.

Peer reviews of individual teachers are not carried out.

Peers

Peers are teachers (BerufsschullehrerInnen) who are not involved in the processes under scrutiny. They are external, i.e. colleagues from another school participating in the project.

Peers are nominated by the schools. They are members of the school teams involved in the evaluation network. School teams comprise at least three persons, in many schools 6 to 7 persons who elaborate the evaluation plan and meet regu-

larly (once a week). They are to some extent relieved of their teaching responsibilities. The school teams are selected by the schools themselves.

The peers are selected by the visiting schools. There are two representatives of the other schools in the network and the scientific (meta-) evaluation team involved in every peer review so that the peer visits are conducted by 6 to 8 persons. The expert from the scientific support team is not part of the peer team but silent observer.

Preparation and organisation

The peer reviews are carefully prepared and organised. Evaluation concepts are developed in collaboration with the network partners for the whole network and self-reports drawn up by the schools.

Parallel activities in preparation of peer reviews:

- network teams define evaluation concepts – schools carry out evaluation and write self-reports
- peers are nominated – peers receive training and form evaluation groups.

The self-report by the school is the central document in the review process. It is the basis for both the internal evaluation and the peer evaluations. The self-report

- aims to increase self-reflection (internal effect) and accountability (external effect)
- is a working paper for the school to document the evaluation
- is the basis for co-operation with external project networks (peers) and for communication of the quality team with colleagues in the school.

A detailed structure for the self-report has been elaborated. The self-report should not be more than 8 to 10 pages and cover general information on the school, a description of the planned evaluation (for the 1st evaluation; 2nd and 3rd: follow-up, complete evaluation cycle described) as well as a conclusion and future plans. Supporting documents can be attached. A checklist for the peers on how to analyse the self-report has been developed. Additionally, some peers developed interview guidelines for the peer visit. These interview guidelines should reflect the evaluation tasks and questions the school to be reviewed has asked them to work on.

All peers have received **training** concerning evaluation competencies already during the preparatory phase ("Startphase") of the project (aims and objects of evaluation, evaluation criteria, quality indicators). Additionally, the peers have undergone training at a 2-day workshop (Arbeitstagung). The training included the following topics:

- conditions for success of external evaluations
- evaluation questions and tasks of the school teams
- analysis of self-reports
- contract of the network schools on the preparation and conduct of the visits
- methods of data collection and documentation
- feedback talks: ways and methods of giving feedback, opportunities, stumbling blocks ("dos and don'ts").

The **peer visits** are one-day events and follow a very structured agenda which is drawn up in advance by the peers. The agenda usually comprises a visit of the school premises, interviews with different stakeholders (interview guidelines pre-

pared in advance by the peers in some cases) and a short meta-evaluation by the peer team. A structured session with feedback from the peers involving the whole staff is not part of the agenda (yet).

Topics dealt with during the visit are:

- presentation of the reviewed school and its evaluation project
- feedback of the peer evaluators
- joint analysis of problems (school and peers)
- agreement on measures, action plan and timetable for measures.

The peers identify conditions for failure and success on the level of the school and furnish recommendations and agreement on objectives for further improvement which are elaborated in a communicative process with the school. Besides the visit, peers may also analyse further documents and conduct additional interviews and observations.

Recommendations and goals for further improvement are provided to the schools by the peers during the visit. There are minutes of the peer visits and a feedback to the schools from the scientific evaluation team (TU Darmstadt) concerning the peer visit. The eiver-teams in the schools are responsible for the internal transfer of the results of the peer review to colleagues. The drawing-up of final peer reports by the peers and addressed to the school is not foreseen yet.

Concerning the peer visits, the first experiences have shown that the success of the review is dependent upon 1) the formulation of specific evaluation questions before the visit and 2) a well structured agenda for the visits.

The network as the basis for peer reviews is also the starting point of a Catalan project. In this project, peers are called in by vocational colleges to support each other in **preparing for an ISO 9001 audit**, i.e. during the self-audit. In the use of the peers as external supporters, the project also resembles the European self-evaluation of schools project. The further proceedings, however, are different since they entail a formal ISO 9001 audit.

VIII. 4 Case 8: ISO-based peer review in initial VET in Catalonia, Spain

The project "Qualitat i millora contínua a la formació professional" (Quality and Continuous Improvement in VET) is coordinated and supported by the General Directorate of Vocational Education of the Ministry of Education of Catalonia. The project started in 2000. Eight networks have been set up which include 39 colleges of initial vocational education of the public sector. Colleges participating offer either the whole range of secondary education (lower secondary, higher secondary (baccalaureat) and vocational education and training) or only on the secondary level II (higher secondary and vocational education and training. All fields of VET are represented in the networks, usually a VET college covers 2 to 3 different VET branches. The networks aim at supporting the continuous improvement of the colleges using the ISO 9001:2000 and the EFQM Model.

The peer methodology is used for the development of the internal audit related with ISO 9001. The internal audit is coordinated by the reviewed college and an external expert in quality assurance from another college (in the same network) participates in the review. About 80 peer reviews have been conducted since 2000. There is a yearly evaluation of the project in a joint network meeting of all the colleges.

Aim

The internal audit is a formative evaluation to stimulate quality improvement. Additionally it supports and prepares external auditing.

Scope

The scope of the internal review corresponds to the requirements of the ISO 9001 audit. The operation of the entire organisation is reviewed:

- Strategic processes (curricular planning, budget planning, quality planning etc), as well as
- Key processes (communication, learning, etc.) and
- Support processes (computers, teacher training, quality assurance, health and safety, etc.)

Preparation and organisation

The peer review is organised by the reviewed college. The college prepares documentation (which may be accessible on the Internet). It contains the documents of the system and the results of the self-review of the system. The college draws up the audit plan and invites the peer. The final report is made jointly by the peer and the quality coordinator of the reviewed college.

Peer

The peer is an external expert who has in-depth knowledge of the organisation of a VET college and who knows the ISO 9001:2000 and EFQM Model. Only one peer is involved in the review. The peer supports and assists the college in the internal audit and in the self-evaluation. The peer is selected jointly by the network and by the reviewed college. Every peer must participate in training sessions.

Peer training comprises:

- a Master's degree on quality in VET (organised by the network and the university)
- continuous training monthly in the network.

The **review** takes 2 days. It includes several meetings, first with the head team, then with members of the organisation such as the secretary, financial manager, quality manager, pedagogical coordination, heads of department, and teachers. A check list is used for the review and the results are presented in a report.

The **results** of the review are compiled by the external expert and the internal quality coordinator and the report is addressed to the principal of the college. After the peer review, the colleges make an action plan in order to improve the weak spots. The peer visits the college each year in order to check the improvement of the college.

Experiences in the project have shown that Peer Review is a good system to:

- achieve improvement,
- exchange knowledge between the peer and the college.

VIII. 5 Peer review practices within the project partnership

The peer review experiences and practices of the project partnership by and large fit in with the models described above.

In **Finland**, peer reviews have been used on a voluntary basis by VET providers. Apart from the internal use of peers to assess and improve teachers' skills and know-how, peer reviews have also been employed on the institutional level. Ex-

amples are a co-operation network where peer reviews have been used systematically for several years to assess the operation of the entire organisation of VET providers. In other cases, peer reviews have been used to further develop specific areas. The application of peer reviews has so far been entirely voluntary and self-organised by the VET institutions (cf. Koski 2005, National Report Finland).

In the **Canton Berne in Switzerland**, peer reviews are a central part in the school development project IPS – Intensivprojekt Schule, which was launched and coordinated by the educational authorities (Erziehungsdirektion). During a comprehensive evaluation process which lasts five years, internal evaluation is linked with external evaluation and follow-up measures. Schools start with a self-evaluation in the first year which is followed by an external evaluation involving peers from other schools in the second year. The topics of the external evaluation are chosen by the schools themselves. There are three formats: "Peer Review Formative" which is an extended self-evaluation, a "Peer Review Sustained" which is an external assessment supporting systematic and sustained improvement, and a "Peer Review Extended" which also involves the educational authorities. The peers are "real" peers, i.e. colleagues from other schools. Other external experts may also be called in, e.g. experts from school boards, educational authorities, etc. in variants of the procedure which have a stronger focus on accountability and quality control (Peer Review Extended). Visits usually take one day and are very tightly planned with a visit of the premises and interviews with different groups of stakeholders. Emphasis is laid on follow-up measures: Based on the results of the peer review, the schools draw up a written contract on future development plans. Improvement measures are carried out within the next two years. During the fifth year, the next evaluation cycle starts with a self-evaluation and a peer review of the efficiency and sustainability of the planned measures. Similar peer review projects are also under way in other Swiss cantons. (cf. Strahm, Elisabeth and Peter, National Report Switzerland)

The peer review procedure established in the **Italian** CNOS-FAP association (Federazione nazionale "CNOS/FAP - Centro Nazionale Opere Salesiane - Formazione Aggiornamento Professionale", Piedmont) resembles the Catalan project described earlier in the report. It is also based on 1) the international standardised quality management system ISO 9001:2000 and 2) a network of VET providers. In the CNOS-FAP case, the 10 vocational training centres were already associated. In addition, a regional quality committee which is made up of the persons responsible for quality in the individual training centres, was set up in 2000 to coordinate the process of ISO certification. Peer reviews are used for internal review of the quality system of the whole organisation with the quality staff of neighbouring training centres assuming the role of external consultants (cf. Allulli and Tramontano 2005, National Report Italy).

Under the terms of the Adult and Vocational Education Act (WEB), the VET institutions in the **Netherlands** are required to set up a quality assurance system of their own choice and carry out self-evaluations on a regular basis (reports published least every three years). The inspectorate examines the data from the self-evaluation for compliance with its own assessment framework in 1) annual visits of limited scope and 2) a major inspection every three years, primary focus is the quality of teaching. Hence the self-evaluations of the VET providers by and large coincide with the inspections framework. The quality system most commonly in use in Dutch initial VET is an EFQM-adaptation called **INK/EFQM**. Within this system, external audits are carried out involving **external experts** who (also for economical reasons) often are peers. The audit guidelines used may vary between the VET providers. The procedure applied by ROC Aventus is very structured and

detailed. In its scope, it follows the framework of the inspectorate and involves the typical sequence: self-evaluation, review (audit) and report. It is similar to instruments used by other ROCs. A number of VET institutions using the peer review procedure work together and have teamed up into groups.

The peer review system for VET colleges used in the **United Kingdom** is very similar to the one used for academic review. It is **mandatory** and **part of the external inspection framework**. It is thus distinctly different from all other forms of peer reviews employed in initial VET and may serve as a possible model for what a strictly regulated obligatory peer review system could look like where peers visit the VET institutions "without invitation" (cf. Hollstein 2005, National Report United Kingdom)

IX. Literature and material

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Project description by Pere Canyadell and Josep Camps, Coordinators of the project "Quality and Continuous Improvement In VET". General Directorate of Vocational Education, Ministry of Education, Catalonia, Spain.

e-mail correspondence with Josep Camps February-March 2005

X. Grid for analysing and describing peer review procedures

Name of the project or the programme (if applicable):

Educational institution(s) involved (name, number of institutions etc.)	Country/Region	Educational Sector (VET, general, level)

Description (general description of the project/programme: who is responsible, who is involved, what are the overall aims and procedures)

Institutional Review/Individual Review:

Is the peer review concerned with the assessment of the whole institution or certain departments/subject areas? yes/no

Are individual teachers also reviewed? yes/no

Further comments and explanations

Aim of peer review: specific aims, summative/formative, who will receive the results of the review?

Scope of peer review: what quality areas/evaluation questions are dealt with in the peer review?

Peers: who are the peers? Who selects the peers?

Overview and duration of peer review process: what happens when, who is involved? How are the peer reviews prepared and organised? What are the results of the peer review (i.e. a report?)

Preparing documentation: what kind of documents are prepared for the peer reviews? (i.e. self-report etc.)

Training of peers: do the peers receive training, if yes what are the contents and the duration?

Visit: duration and conduct of visit, evaluation methods used, communication with the reviewed

Documentation of review: how is the review documented? Is there a final report?

Integration of peer reviews in overall institutional, local, regional, national quality assurance system, provision for continuing quality development: how does the peer review fit in with the overall quality assurance system? Is it integrated into a continuing quality cycle?

What are the consequences of the peer review, if any? (internal, external; financial resources, personnel decisions etc.)

Experiences, findings of meta-evaluation: what are the experiences with peer review so far? What works, what does not? How does peer review compare to other quality assurance methodologies you use (EFQM, ISO, BSC, self-assessment etc.)?

Other comments

Source(s)

Part II
**Recommendations for the development of the Euro-
pean Peer Review Manual**

Maria Gutknecht-Gmeiner

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I. A tentative guideline for the development of the European Peer Review Manual

In the following I will propose a tentative guideline for the development of the European Peer Review Manual. It is based on 1) the national reports of the partner countries (and also discussions between the partners at various occasions) and 2) the international research on peer review. Included are recommendations, suggestions and open questions which need to be decided by the development team and the project partnership.

For clarification: In some countries the term “VET provider” is used to indicate the bodies (communities, municipalities, private enterprises) which maintain the educational sites (colleges, schools etc.) (e.g. Finland). In other countries a school or college is meant by the term VET provider. In the following, the term is used to encompass the institutions who are responsible for quality assurance and development primarily at the school/college level but also at the level of the maintaining institution if this is where QA&D takes place or is co-ordinated.

II. General requirements for the European Peer Review Manual

It should not be too long. In the proposal we suggested about 50 pages as a maximum.

It should be easy to understand and provide useful information on how to conduct peer reviews in initial VET.

It should be easily accessible.

III. Overall aims and basic principles of the European Peer Review

It seems desirable to define some basic principles and our overall philosophy. This should include

1) the general aims of the Peer Review Manual as laid out in the project proposal (or an adaptation thereof) e.g.

- to promote quality assurance and development,
- to ensure compatibility with current quality management systems like ISO, EFQM, BSC but also with self-evaluation procedures developed by VET providers,
- to develop a usable and attractive instrument which meets the VET providers needs,
- to enhance transparency and comparability in Europe through a common European standard,
- to support equal opportunities,

and

2) important general requirements and characteristics of the procedure, e.g. the necessity to

- ensure objectivity and impartiality,
- ensure transparency,
- set up and adhere to confidentiality rules and rules on the use of results,

- avoid conflicts of interest and direct competition between peers (and the institution they come from) and the peered institution,
- promote openness, integrity and sincerity as a prerequisite for mutual learning,
- design and implement peer reviews not as a technical-bureaucratic procedure but as a dynamic and motivating process which should lead to a win-win situation for both the peers and the peered institution.

IV. Aims and target group of Peer Review

IV. 1 Quality development vs. quality assurance / formative vs. summative review

It is advisable to clearly define from the start the position of the European Peer Review procedure within the "evaluation landscape" (cf. Peter Strahm's presentation at the first meeting, the matrix is taken from John Nisbet 1990).

The two axes of the matrix are

- control vs. growth and development and
- internal perspective/professionalism vs. external perspective/accountability.

While the partnership has a strong tendency towards favouring quality improvement and development of professionalism, the questions of quality control and accountability should also be dealt with since in most countries external quality assurance (beyond traditional inspection) is becoming increasingly important. Hence there should be at least some suggestions how the Peer Review procedure could be adapted to serve as a method in summative quality evaluations (cf. also the description of the Manual in the project proposal). Different formats of Peer Review, perhaps similar to the ones developed in IPS (Peer Review Formative, PR Sustained, Peer Review Extended) could be pointed out as examples or could also be further developed.

IV. 2 Meta-evaluation of quality system vs. evaluation of quality areas

External reviews may concern the assessment of specific quality areas or a meta-evaluation of the quality assurance and development system in place or a combination of both. Peer Reviews can be used for both the meta-evaluation approach and/ or the evaluation of specific issues. In the Peer Review Manual, the aim of the peer review procedure with regard to this question should be clarified.

Since quality improvement is an important focus of our work in this project, it seems advisable to **include the whole quality circle** (e.g. PDCA, the QCAF etc.) in the review, even if only certain quality areas are assessed. This is to ensure that there is a systematic link between evaluation and improvement. Moreover, using the quality circle in an integral and systematic manner is state-of-the-art in quality assurance and development.

Additionally a **meta-evaluation of the quality management system on the institutional level** could (and should) also be part of the European Peer Review procedure if we benchmark with the more sophisticated peer review procedures. This would correspond to the practice in higher education to conduct subject specific and institutional review. In our case, the review of the entire quality management system of an institution could be one quality dimension or a separate review process (cf. below quality areas).

IV. 3 Qualitative vs. quantitative evaluation?

The Peer Review procedure is inherently a qualitative evaluation which nevertheless may rely on quantitative data. Quantitative data may be the basis for part of the self-report (cf. also below indicators).

IV. 4 Target Group

In the project proposal (and hence also the contract), the target group for the European Peer Review procedure has been defined as VET providers who have experience with quality assurance and development. This was also the starting point for the selection of the operative partners in the project who belong to the vanguard in quality assurance and development in their respective countries.

Two questions arise:

1. Degree of experience?

How can "experience" be further defined and what recommendations should be issued on when it is advisable for a VET provider to engage in Peer Review?

According to the project plan, at least a self-evaluation of some part(s) of the educational institutions must have been carried out as a prerequisite. This requirement is also underlined by most participating countries.

2. Inclusion of inexperienced institutions?

And/or should dispositions in the Peer Review Manual be made on how institutions who are just starting a quality process can use the Peer Review procedure?

There are several arguments in favour of considering the participation of inexperienced institutions in the Peer Review Manual:

1) Quality assurance and development in initial VET is not that widespread yet in initial VET in Europe. There are some countries where traditional input-oriented inspection is still the main method. And even in those countries where new procedures are being adopted, they are often not that widely used yet. So the question is whether we only want to develop a procedure for the vanguard institutions in Europe thus excluding (probably) the majority of European VET providers?

2) Peer Review is a very flexible instrument which can be easily adapted to individual needs and preconditions. This should be taken advantage of and the procedure should not be defined in a way which would unnecessarily exclude institutions.

3) Feedback from the national reports has also indicated that a Peer Review could be a good starting point for implementing a quality system (National Reports from Finland and Italy). Because of the collaborative aspect, Peer Review has a high motivating potential. Furthermore less-experienced institutions are afforded the possibility to learn from colleagues with more experience.

One possibility to start such a process could be to have VET providers working on how they should design, plan and carry out the initial self-evaluation. The first review thus would focus on the self-evaluation plan. In subsequent reviews, when a self-evaluation has already taken place, the peer review could then focus on the whole quality cycle (cf. project eiver).

The different formats of Peer Review developed by IPS could serve as an example for dealing with different levels of experience of the involved institutions and different purposes of the review. In Bern, there are three variants: a complex procedure which is geared towards external accountability and involves external

experts from the authorities (PR extended), a comparably easy-to-implement procedure which is an "extended self-evaluation" and serves only internal purposes (PR formative) and a procedure in between which aims at a sustained improvement on the part of the reviewed institution thus focusing on actions taken in the wake of a review (PR sustained). (cf. also below "Who are the Peers?")

V. Procedure

The basic elements of the peer review procedure as suggested in the project proposal have been corroborated by the national reports and the international research on peer review.



There are, however, a number of questions to be solved.

One issue is whether we should envisage some kind of institution which facilitates and co-ordinates Peer Reviews ("**Peer Review Support Structure**") and perhaps also ensures that standards are met. In the pilot phase, this function will be assumed by the responsible partners (FNBE, University of Pécs, *öibf*).

Another question is how and by whom the concrete **quality areas/issues** to be dealt with in the Review are chosen. Presumably, this will be done by the VET provider according to current needs but based on a framework provided by the European Peer Review Manual.

A very important factor is the **preparation** of the peer reviews. Once the peers have been selected how will they prepare for the review? Will they elaborate detailed interview guidelines and checklists for the review? Or will the guidelines and checklists be supplied by the institution to be reviewed and the Peers will

just complement them? To what extent will these checklists and guidelines be supplied in the Peer Review Manual?

Should the Peers **meet with each other and/or the provider** before the review in order to further clarify the assignments and tasks of the review? It has also been pointed out that **team-building** is essential for the peer members to function as a group and complement each other's qualification during the peer review (e.g. Kozar 1999). Otherwise the peer report may only be a compilation of different loosely connected fragments and not a consistent and comprehensive document.

Should a **meta-evaluation** in the peer team be included (cf. the IPS model)? In terms of quality assurance this seems highly advisable for the pilot project. Since peer review should be a dynamic instrument, continuing reflection on the method should probably also be included in the standard procedure to be developed (what can be learned for future peer reviews?).

Even **though follow-up activities** implementing measures to improve quality will not be part of the pilot phase due to time limits, provisions and requirements concerning further quality development should be outlined in the Peer Review Manual. Central elements are the dissemination of results within the peered organisation and the drawing up and implementation of a "quality plan". Follow-up activities might be reported in a **comprehensive portfolio** which documents the whole quality process from the internal evaluation to the external peer review to measures of quality improvement (cf. also the IPS procedure).

The **selection of the peers** and the **peer training** as well as the **feedback to the VET provider** are dealt with in separate chapters (see below).

VET provider	Peers	"Peer Review Support Structure"?
VET provider decides to undergo peer review, fixes a schedule	↔	Planning of review schedule
VET provider undergoes self-evaluation and draws up a self-report		
VET provider defines the scope of the review and the evaluation questions – if the scope of the review is not pre-defined	↔	"Peer Review Support Structure" receives information
	Peers are selected	Responsibility for matching peers and VET providers? Or merely assistance by recommending suitable peers?
	Peer Training	↔ Involvement in peer training?
	Peers prepare for re-view: Read and analyse self-	

	report Meeting of peers for team-building and to prepare review? Preliminary meeting of peers with VET provider to clarify review assignments and tasks?	
<i>Peer Review Visit</i> Visit of the premises Interviews / Discussion Groups Analysis and discussions in the peer team Communicative validation Meta-evaluation in the peer team		Involvement?
Receives report	Written feedback – Peer Review report	Also addressed?
Follow-up: quality plan to implement improvement measures		
	Follow-up review?	Involvement?

VI. Scope of Peer Review

The scope of the Peer Review should be comprehensive and flexible at the same time. It should allow for the adaptation to the specific needs of a diversity of VET providers in Europe. It should be compatible with different baseline situations: with standardised international systems like ISO, EFQM, BSC etc. and with "home-made" self-evaluations. It should allow VET providers with little experience and/or resources to carry out a very focused, brief and narrow review. It should also afford a comprehensive framework which covers all relevant quality dimensions and serves as a European reference point (cf. proposal). The review of certain departments or subjects areas should be possible as well as the review of the entire organisation (institutional review).

Transparency and (some degree of) comparability could be ensured by defining quality areas (which in turn should be further specified by quality criteria and indicators). Providers can then choose which and how many quality areas they will tackle during the review. It would be transparent from the peer report how comprehensive the review had been.

Besides a spectrum of core quality dimensions (which need to be defined) additional/voluntary quality dimensions could be established to account for special institutional/regional/national interests, needs and requirements.

VET providers could also "work off" the whole set of core quality areas step by step in repeated reviews. In order to get a European Peer Review certificate a number of mandatory quality areas must then have undergone review successfully.

VI. 1 Quality areas/dimensions

As has been mentioned above, the quality areas also need to be compatible with standardised quality management systems like EFQM, BSC and ISO. Additionally, partner countries expect the procedure to fit in with their national/regional/local/institutional quality systems. It remains to be seen if a perfect congruence can be achieved with all the extant systems and models. Various efforts have been made to synthesise core quality areas from the different quality systems. One example is the Guide to self-evaluation put forth by the Technical Working Group on Quality.

Why should we define quality areas if it might turn out to be difficult? First and foremost, the procedure will be discretionary and arbitrary, if there is no framework against which to measure the scope of individual reviews. Furthermore, transparency and comparability depend on a common framework of core quality areas. Last but not least in the project contract a reference framework for Peer Reviews in Europe is specified as one of the project outcomes.

The core quality areas should be comprehensive so that

- the assessment of an entire organisation is possible within the framework of the core quality areas and
- the largest part of the issues which might come up in VET may be related to and located in one of the quality areas.

On the other hand it would probably be advisable to define not more than 15 to 20 quality areas at the most so as not to make the framework too extensive and complex.

Not all quality areas will be applicable to all VET providers/countries (there may also be "country versions" derived from the overall framework) and as has been pointed out before there will also be the possibility to add further areas to cover special issues and requirements or even to adapt core quality areas.

An open question is how to integrate different subjects / study programmes and departments in the review procedure. As in higher education, there could be reviews for subjects, study programmes or departments besides the overall (institutional) review. This may, however, only seem necessary in large institutions with a range of different divisions. It should also be clarified whether merely the teaching-and-learning related quality dimensions should be applicable if only a certain strand/division of a VET institution is evaluated or other quality dimension (which are horizontal themes) as well.

There is an overall agreement in the partnership that the central quality dimension will be **teaching and learning**, which is, of course, the "core business" of any educational institution.

Based on the suggestions in the national reports and various education-specific quality systems the following, by no means exhaustive, list might give a first overview of possible core quality areas.

Tentative list of quality dimensions:

Teaching and Learning

- Curricula and curricula development,
- teaching methods and materials,
- individual learning plans,
- facilities,

- learner assessments/examinations,
- learners' performance: competencies of learners upon entrance and graduation etc. etc.)
- relevance of skills and competencies acquired for employability

Mission statement and strategy

Teaching and learning resources (can perhaps be subsumed under "Teaching and Learning" and/or "Infrastructure")

School climate and social relations

Learner access (recruitment), transfer and progression (if applicable – perhaps this could be an additional quality area since many VET providers cannot really select learners and policies for transfer and progression are established through legal provisions)

Human Resources

- Recruitment of teachers and other staff
- Teacher and staff development

Cooperation with enterprises in VET provision (especially dual education and training; internships and practical training in enterprises)

External relations, i.e. communication and cooperation with relevant stakeholders and institutions, e.g.

- parents
- "supplier" and "recipient" educational institutions
- local communities
- labour market/enterprises
- educational authorities
- science and research

Leadership and Management (including also administrative processes)

Innovative projects (showcase peer reviews as a first, non-threatening step to peer reviews, present good/best practice to foster mutual learning)

Quality Assurance and Management (quality policy, systematic and adequate evaluation procedures which lead to continuing quality development, involvement of different groups of stakeholders etc.)

Equal Opportunities in general

Gender Mainstreaming

Infrastructure and work and study environment (Buildings, classrooms, laboratories, libraries, leisure and sports facilities, common rooms, other facilities etc.; maintenance of infrastructure)

Guidance and counselling

Finances, purchasing, efficiency of the use of resources (measured e.g. against the aims)

Learners with special needs (disabilities, migration)

Internationalisation

An open question is **how to integrate different subjects / study programmes and departments** (sectors/branches) and whether only the teaching-and-learning

related quality dimensions or also other quality dimensions / processes will be applicable if only a certain part (subject, study programme, department etc.) of a VET institution is evaluated.

VI. 2 Quality criteria and performance indicators to further define the quality areas

In the project proposal the further specification of the quality areas through quality criteria and performance indicators has been suggested. Again there exist innumerable quality frameworks with different sets of criteria and indicators. The practice in initial VET is so diverse that no recommendations can be drawn from existing experience. It will be up to the development group to find a viable way of dealing with this issue.

A first task will be to come up with a common understanding of what is meant by criteria/indicators and how detailed they should be. Then lists of criteria/indicators for the quality areas might be drawn up which need not and will not be exhaustive: A reduced set of minimum standard criteria might be defined for each quality area, or exemplary criteria and indicators. Indicators can be qualitative or quantitative. In order to reflect the qualitative nature of the review, there should be qualitative indicators (cf. HM Inspectorate of Education 2002; TWG on Quality: European Guide on Self-assessment for VET providers) complemented and buttressed by quantitative indicators.

It might be pointed out specifically that objectives should be formulated by in SMART terms (specific, measurable, acceptable, realistic, and terminated) so as to ensure that an assessment of whether they have been reached or not is possible (National Report Netherlands).

VI. 3 How are the quality areas to be dealt with?

The most common procedure is to carry out an analysis of strengths and weaknesses both in the self-evaluation and in the peer review. Areas of improvement are defined and an action plan for improvement is drawn up.

VI. 4 Benchmarking and ranking

Many partners expect Peer Review to be more useful than benchmarking since it has a more qualitative approach leading from the comparison of performance indicators to comparison of processes (cf. National reports Finland and UK). Peer Review is also less competitive and not only good practice is the object of assessment and comparison but also areas of improvement may be discussed directly. Those countries and partners who already have experience with benchmarking contend that benchmarking could also be part of the peer review thus linking the two methods.

Rankings based on peer reviews are rejected, however, by the partners since rankings increase competitiveness and thus reduce openness and exchange. (Finland) Furthermore, Peer Review is a qualitative instrument and comparison of institutions (especially when it's done on a wider scope, i.e. nationally or even internationally) will not be sufficiently stringent and sound.

VII. Peers

VII. 1 What functions and roles need to be defined for the peer review?

The functions of peers in the peer review practice investigated comprise

- **Peers** (usually more than one)
- a **Moderator / Coordinator** and
- a **Rapporteur**

Additional functions in the peer review process may be

- a **Facilitator/Assistant/Secretary** and
- an **external Evaluation Expert**

The moderator/coordinator is the "team leader". S/he co-ordinates the peer team and may also be responsible for the moderation of discussion and feedback sessions. In some peer review formats, the moderator is also in charge of synthesising the assessments of the peer team into a common report (UK Academic Review, Austrian Polytechnics, ROC Aventus). The moderator might also be the person who is the primary contact person for the VET provider.

The responsibility to furnish the report may also lie with a "rapporteur" who is a member of the peer team and assumes this special role.

In many cases, the peer teams draw up the report jointly, however. Still it might be sensible to assign one person the overall responsibility for the report (make sure that is written and delivered in time).

The facilitator/assistant/secretary is a staff member of the VET provider to be reviewed. He/she liaisons with the peer team, makes accessible additional documentation upon request and is responsible for the organisational preparation and conduct of the peer review (invitation of persons to be interviewed, reservation of rooms and other facilities needed, logistics during the review etc.) (e.g. Academic Review UK). Administrative support can also include preparation and first formulation of the peer report (Austrian polytechnics, ROC Aventus).

Additionally, an **external evaluation expert** may also be included in the peer team. An external evaluation expert may afford additional credibility to the process and may also assume some kind of leading role (cf. Peer Review IPS).

VII. 2 How many peers?

Usually at least two peers are involved at any given time in the peer review process (peer tandems for interviews). This is an important precondition for a fair and equitable process since with two peers involved at any given time, the probability of subjective and arbitrary judgements will be reduced considerably (principle of dual control).

In an average peer review, about 3 to 4 peers are involved, there are, however, also examples of peer reviews with ten or even more peer team members.

It might also make sense to adapt the number of peers to the scope of the provision to be reviewed in order for the review visit to remain within a certain manageable time even if very large institutions are assessed (cf. UK Handbook).

With more than about 10 reviewers, however, the team functions of the review team (exchange between peers, discussion of findings, arriving at common judgements) will probably be hampered.

In some cases, when peers are only used in an extended self-assessment without any function of external judgement i.e. only for formative and advisory purposes, one peer may suffice (IPS, Peer Review in Catalonia).

VII. 3 Who are the peers?

Definition

Following the tentative definition by the project management¹, a peer is a person

- who is an equal of / on equal standing with the person(s) whose performance is reviewed,
- who works in a similar environment (and/or in a similar institution),
- who is external (i.e. from a different institution),

and

- has specific professional expertise and knowledge in the field (shares values, professional competence and attitudes, language...)
- thus bringing to some extent "inside" knowledge of the object of review into the process and combining it with the external view of somebody coming from a different organisation ("external insider").

By and large, this rough definition has been corroborated by the national reports and the international research.

With regard to the aims of the project Peer Review in initial VET to promote quality improvement, it is advisable that peers should in fact be '**critical friends**'. This means that peers must assume a critical stance to the institution reviewed while at the same time remaining highly sympathetic and supportive.

In a "puristic" approach only peers who are from the same professional field are employed. In an "extended" peer definition, persons with other relevant qualifications may also be included as peers. The decision on whether only a puristic or an extended definition of peers is admissible has far-reaching consequences. Due to a number of shortcomings of too homogeneous peer teams, the extended definition of peers is commonly in use at the present time. The advantages are that 1) the group of possible peers is enlarged and 2) persons with special expertise can be called in for specific questions and topics. (Kozar 1999, 44; cf. also ENQA Occasional Papers 5, 2003, 23 ff)

Questions have therefore arisen as to

1. whether peers must in all cases be of equal standing and
2. whether they must in all cases come from a similar environment
3. whether they should in all cases be external.

When answering these questions, much depends on the aims of the concrete review.

Ad 1) It is questionable whether of "equal standing" should exclude **persons** who are specially recognised or have a **status of (high) renown in the profession** (and who would thus probably be "more than equal"). Since both the external credibility and the internal benefits of a peer review depend on the expertise and the qualifications of the peers it seems advisable to include such persons, probably even to actively seek their participation in certain cases.

¹ cf. Project Presentation by Maria Gutknecht-Gmeiner at the 1st Transnational Meeting of the Project Peer Review in Initial VET, Nov. 25-26, 2004, Amsterdam

Another question is whether the peer team should comprise **persons from educational authorities** who in fact are superiors. This might be necessary if a peer review is to be carried out for summative purposes within a national, regional etc. quality assurance system. While it might be desirable to involve the authorities in such cases, there are still several ways how this can be achieved. Inspectors or other persons with supervising functions may, for instance, be included as "full-fledged" peers or take part in a more observing role, safeguarding and monitoring the process. If the educational authorities are heavily involved in a Peer Review this might also be made transparent by branding a special name for this kind of Peer Review. The IPS, for instance, offers a "Peer Review Extended" for such purposes.

Ad 2) This question will be dealt with in detail below when the required expertise and qualifications of the Peers are discussed.

Ad 3) If the Peer Review procedure is defined as an external evaluation, then the Peers should come from a different institution. However, during the self-evaluation process, also internal peers may be employed. An example would be internal peer reviews of teachers.

VII. 4 What expertise and qualifications are expected respectively mandatory?

General Requirements

General requirements for the nomination of peers are that peers must be

- **independent** and **objective** (no conflicts of interests exist, peers are not from competing institutions),
- **trustworthy, respected, and accepted** by the institution to be reviewed,
- **interested** in performing review tasks and **curious** to get to know other institutions and their practices.

Acceptance and credibility of the peers by the peered is a crucial factor for the further use of the outcomes of the review especially in formative processes. This entails that the peers must be competent to conduct the review.² The central competence required is that the Peers are **persons who understand the topic under scrutiny**. It is self-evident that a **careful matching** of the peers with the aims and the topics of the review are of utmost importance.

Qualifications and expertise of the Peer Team

A Peer Team need not be a homogeneous group. On the contrary, it seems advisable to benefit from a diversity of different qualifications, experiences and perspectives. Thus, Peers may come from different backgrounds and bring different expertise into the process. It has been argued that the peer teams' work and success can be attributed to distribution of the evaluation tasks and topics among the group according to the different qualifications of the team members (Kozar 1999, 130 ff.). Especially when a wider scope of topics is reviewed, a broad range of experiences and qualifications is needed in order to come to adequate judgments.

Yet, at least a certain number of peers should actually come from a similar institution since this "insider" knowledge contributes to a large extent to the attrac-

² cf. the Evaluation Standards of the Joint Committee: U2 Evaluator Credibility: "The persons conducting the evaluation should be both trustworthy and competent to perform the evaluation, so that the evaluation findings achieve maximum credibility and acceptance."

tiveness of the procedure, i.e. that a review is carried out by persons who actually understand the procedures, challenges and strengths of the provision and who are therefore able to interpret findings in an adequate way.

To sum it up, it is important to ensure that the peer team comprises diverse qualifications and experiences so that the team as a whole (and not necessarily the single team members) covers all the know-how and experience necessary.

What kind of qualifications and expertise are required?

If "Teaching and Learning" is the central topic of review (cf. quality areas) a Peer should be a person who understands the subject to be reviewed and who is familiar with teaching and learning processes. Relevant competence may be further defined (e.g. 5 years of experience in the field ...). However, not all Peers must necessarily have a teaching background.

Additionally Peers should have knowledge of and practical experience with the quality assurance and development system in use in the institution to be peered (self-evaluation, EFQM, ISO, Balanced Score Card, etc.). It remains to be decided 1) whether all members of the Peer Team must have this expertise or whether one (or two, three) Peer(s) with this expertise will suffice and 2) what is to be considered adequate and sufficient expertise (e.g. peer must have carried out a self-evaluation at least once, must have been a member of an internal quality team for at least a certain number of years etc.).

It is also necessary that at least one Peer is familiar with the special requirements and conditions of the educational provision to be reviewed (i.e. legal provisions and framework, requirements of the inspectorate etc.). This is particularly important for transnational reviews since knowledge of the special conditions, responsibilities and requirements (e.g. of legal nature) cannot be automatically presumed. Without this special knowledge and experience findings and recommendations of the Peer Team might actually be irrelevant or infeasible.³

To sum it up, **central areas of professional competence** of the Peers thus are

- expertise concerning the subject under scrutiny,
- expertise concerning teaching and learning processes,
- expertise concerning quality assurance and development (quality management, evaluation methods etc.), and
- familiarity with the special characteristics and conditions of the educational provision to be reviewed.

In order to encompass a gender mainstreaming perspective at least one Peer should bring in **gender competence** concerning VET provision alongside the expertise defined above. It also seems advisable to consider the representation of women and men in the composition of the review team.

In an **international Peer Review**, Peers from another country must be involved. It needs to be decided whether an international perspective is a central element in the European Peer Review procedure or whether this is recommended but voluntary. Additional, requirements for international peer reviews (e.g. how many peers, from which country etc.) should also be made explicit.

"Soft skills" are of secondary importance in many peer review procedures since the primary focus lies on the "hard skills". It is usually implied that knowledge and experience in a certain professional field automatically qualify to function as

³ This has actually happened during institutional review at Austrian Polytechnics when peers from abroad (usually Germany) made recommendations which were not in line with the Austrian legal situation. cf. Clementi/Hoyer/Ziegler 2004, 75 and 176)

a member of a review team. While this may be true to a certain extent, requirements like objectivity, reliability and validity as well as acceptability of the findings call for a professional methodology and special personal and social skills. Points of reference can be the skills and qualifications necessary e.g. for qualitative social research, organisational development, and quality management.

Additionally, the **functioning of the peer team** is also commonly taken for granted, although this is by far not a realistic expectation if experts who do not know each other are to work together without a possibility to meet and co-ordinate before the review. Research has shown that the facilitation of an adequate team-building process among the peer team members contributes to the smooth running of the review process and the cooperative writing of the report (Kozar 199, 124f.).

Soft skills necessary for the participation in a Peer team thus include

- communicative and social skills (be able to create and sustain a productive and open climate of discussion, know how to formulate questions, know how to listen effectively, appreciate and respect other team members and the colleagues from the reviewed institution...),
- moderation skills (plan and conduct interviews, co-ordinate peer team sessions, make sure that all persons involved can participate actively, analyse and visualise findings etc.),
- feedback skills (give constructive and acceptable feedback) and
- the ability to deal with the tension between a critical attitude and giving support to the reviewed institution.

The necessary soft skills can be part of the selection criteria for peers. Additionally, soft skills may also be imparted during the peer training.

Depending on the purpose and the content of the review, **additional areas of expertise** might be relevant. For an institutional review, i.e. a special advanced expertise in quality assurance might be relevant and/or management experience. Representatives of stakeholders might be included as Peers if the review focuses on quality areas where certain stakeholders dispose of relevant expertise. An example would be a review of co-operative training provision with enterprises (placements, apprenticeship scheme etc.) in which one or more representative(s) of local business are included. Or representatives of educational institutions which recruit former students of the reviewed institution (e.g. universities) may be peers in a review dealing with learning achievements and outcomes.

Other competences like expertise in organisational development, in the vocations and professions (i.e. experts from professional associations), in public relations, or in any other special field relevant to the reviewed institution may also be included through corresponding peers.

Different functions within the peer team

The different possible functions within the peer team also may have an influence on qualification requirements. In those peer review models which have defined the function of a moderator/peer review co-ordinator, this person must meet higher requirements both in terms of professional competence and experience and in analytical and soft skills (evaluation and quality management experience, moderation skills etc.) than the "ordinary" peers.

Composition and profile of the Peer Team

The Peer Team can be made up of

- staff from other VET providers, like experienced teachers, quality managers, and possibly also head-teachers (directors) and
- peers with special expertise who may also come from institutions other than VET providers.

One possibility is to define core peer team members (e.g. at least one person with experience in quality management from another VET provider, at least one experienced teacher with in-depth knowledge of the subject...) and facultative peers. The latter can be chosen by the institution from a wider range of possible candidates with an extended profile according to the purposes of the review.

To sum it up, I would like to quote as a general guideline the definition of peers by the University of Wisconsin: "We also emphasize [...] the importance of a reviewer being a person who engages in the same or similar kinds of educational activities, shares content expertise, or brings relevant specialized skills to the task of peer review. The selection of an appropriate colleague is completely dependent on the intent of the review."

<http://www.provost.wisc.edu/archives/ccae/MOO/definitions.html>

VII. 5 Who selects the peers?

One possibility is that the institutions themselves select the peers according to a defined profile. They may receive assistance from a "Support Structure" (see above). During the pilot phase this support structure will be the partnership of the project, most notably the responsible partners (University of Pécs, FNBW, *öibf*).

If the support structure is to assume a more active role, appointments based on 1) nominations from institutions to be peer-ed and 2) applications from individuals can be processed through the support structure. An application procedure could be designed and implemented.

VII. 6 Peer Register

The establishment of a pool of peer experts during the pilot phase is one of the project's results. Together with the set-up of peer review networks (cf. below) the establishment of a peer register could be prepared for use in further peer review activities.

VIII. Peer Training

There is a general agreement among the partners that Peers should undergo a training prior to the review. Training is also provided in all Peer Review formats which follow a systematic structure. In principle, the duration of 1-2 days as suggested in the proposal seems feasible and adequate if compared to existing practice.

Peer trainings usually comprise

- an introduction into the procedure, the role and function of the peers, the assignments and tasks,
- a training in evaluation methods (perhaps also including ethical questions and the tension between support and critique),
- a training in social, communicative and moderation skills: e.g. how to listen actively, how to give constructive feedback, how to formulate questions etc.

For the preparation of the transnational peer reviews, the trainings could also include cultural differences in behaviour and attitudes.

The trainings could also be a first opportunity for exchange and discussion between the Peers. This would improve the preparation of the reviews and enhance team-building.

One suggestion put forth is that the peer training should be comparable to the EFQM award assessor training (National Report UK).

IX. Self-report

Some kind of self-report is used in all peer evaluation procedures. The self-report will be the central document on which the Peer Review is based. It should be concise and not too long, additional documentation can be attached.

It will probably contain

- a short description of the institution: the VET provision offered, organisational structure, the mission statement etc.,
- the purpose of the review,
- how the self-evaluation was carried out and by whom, and
- an analysis of the quality areas which will be the topics for the Peer Review.

The analysis of the quality areas could be conducted according to the quality circle and present strengths and areas for improvement.

X. Evaluation methods, elements of the site-visit

In the methods used during the evaluation procedure, a wide repertoire is possible and advisable in order to be able to align the process to the aim and content of the review.

Central elements are the study and analysis of documents (self-reports plus supporting documentation) and the on-site visit.

During the visit, the following methods usually are employed:

- a **walk around the premises** (the actual site-visit) and
- **interviews** with different groups of stakeholders.

Who is interviewed?

Usually all relevant stakeholders should be involved (cf. below "Stakeholder participation"). If interviews are conducted, groups of interviewees are

- staff (teachers and non-teaching staff),
- learners,
- former learners, and
- other stakeholders like representatives of parents, employers, suppliers, social partners, other VET institutions, educational authorities etc.

The composition of interview groups is rarely discussed in manuals and guidelines. For sake of validity it seems advisable to recommend a **representative choice of interview partners** within each group of stakeholders.

Sometimes **observations** are carried out. As has been pointed out (cf. Part 1) observations during external peer review are snap-shot impressions and have limited significance. Therefore they are usually only employed if specific evaluation questions demand it. (cf. Handbook of Academic Review, UK)

The peers may also benefit from **opportunities to discuss** their findings and conclusions within the peer team during the review. At the end of the review, a **closing session with the peers and the peered** is recommendable.

XI. Feedback and dialogue

Useful feedback is the central agent for quality improvement and mutual learning in the Peer Review process. Adequate feedback procedures are therefore of utmost importance. Feedback actually should not be a one-way communication but develop into a dialogue between the peers and the reviewed institution.

XI. 1 Communicative validation

A very useful element is the communicative validation/feedback workshop/debriefing session at the end of the peer review in which the Peers communicate their findings and recommendations to the reviewed institution. This allows direct comments from the institution (including the clarification of misunderstandings or irrelevant conclusions) and a discussion between the peers and the peered. Guidelines for reflective feedback might be helpful for the Peers in this task.

Guidelines may focus on

- the organisation and co-ordination of the feedback session (How long should it take? What is the procedure? Is there to be an open dialogue or a certain order (e.g. peers presenting their findings followed by the comments from the VET provider)? Will the feedback be open for everything the peers observed or will it concentrate only on the questions formulated by the school in advance (e.g. in the self-report). Should the peers and the peered come to a consensus on the results of the review?) and
- how to give and receive constructive feedback (e.g. inoffensive language and attitude, judgements based on facts and observations; concrete instead of general/abstract statements, begin with strengths and then move to areas of improvement, mention positive aspects alongside the negative etc.).

XI. 2 Peer Review Report

The Peer Review Report is the final document. It is written by the Peer team in a joint effort (or one of the Peers if there is a "rapporteur"). Usually, Peers should come to common conclusions and recommendations through discussion and argumentation, if this is not possible, dissenting opinions can also be presented.

In many cases, the procedure foresees that a draft report is issued which the reviewed institution may comment upon. The final report may consider this comments or the comments may be attached.

The final Peer Review Report is addressed to the institution and possibly also to educational authorities. Often parts of the report (usually the summary) are also made accessible to a wider public, mostly over the internet nowadays.

For reasons of consistency and transparency, the Peer Review will in all likelihood have the same kind of structure and format as the self-report. It should include recommendations for quality improvement as a mandatory section.

XII. Use and publication of results

The addressees of the results of the peer review need to be defined beforehand, clear rules on confidentiality and on allowable uses of documents, products, and communications arising from the review have to be established.

XIII. Stakeholder participation

Participation of relevant stakeholders in a review process is state-of-the-art in the evaluation of educational programmes (cf. Educational Programme Evaluation Standards). It is central for the success of a review in terms of 1) compilation of comprehensive and valid data and 2) for the acceptability of the process and the sustained support of all relevant persons and groups.

Stakeholders may be

- the learners,
- potential or former learners,
- staff (educational, but also technical and administrative),
- parents,
- employers, suppliers, contractors,
- social partners,
- other VET providers,
- educational authorities (on different levels: national, regional/provincial, local), and
- society at large (local community, press etc.)

The peer review research has also shown that stakeholder participation is in fact a central element in existing peer review procedures in different countries and in different educational sectors. A point has also been made in most national reports that stakeholders need to be involved in the process. Stakeholder participation will therefore be a crucial element in the peer review procedure to be developed.

There are basically two different ways (which are by no means mutually exclusive) how stakeholders can be involved in the review:

- 1) They may be involved in the self-assessment or during the review as members of interview and discussion groups, i.e. their views and opinions are considered during the collection of information on which the assessment is based.
- 2) They may also be part of the peer team thus giving advice and judging the VET provider.

An important factor in deciding how to involve stakeholders is the assumed actual extra contribution that stakeholders can make to the review process when they act as peers compared with their more passive role as interviewees. One example would be the inclusion of a representative of an enterprise as peer if the review focuses to a large extent on the cooperation with enterprises.

XIV. Peer Review Networks

Analysis of the existing peer review practice, especially in initial VET, has shown that networks are a central element in the set-up of a peer review procedure. This is particularly true if peer reviews are to be integrated into a comprehensive continuing quality improvement process (as opposed to one-off reviews which tackle only specific questions). Network structures allow for mutual support and common developments. Over time, the network partners gain in-depth knowledge of each other's operation and can bring a thorough understanding into a peer review.⁴

Networks may develop through repeated co-operation in peer reviews or may be set up deliberately in order to support quality development. In the Peer Review Manual, this aspect of implementation of peer reviews should be dealt with, perhaps including some recommendations concerning network building.

Additionally, the further development of networks in the Leonardo Project Peer Review in initial VET should be dealt with. A first transnational network of training providers has been set up in the partnership. As of now, the network exists mainly on paper. Three issues should be dealt with:

- How can we build up and use the existing transnational network in the project?
- How can networks be established on the national levels?
- How can we conceive a future peer review network beyond the scope of the project?

XV. Considerations for further use and applicability

XV. 1 Integration into national/regional etc. quality assurance schemes, degree of government control

XV.1.1 Research findings

Research carried out so far has shown that there are three basic relations between the instrument peer review and the overall quality assurance scheme in a country.

1) Peer Reviews can be conducted on a completely voluntary basis and stimulated by the intrinsic motivation of the institution to receive an external validation of its endeavours towards quality. Authorities responsible for quality assurance may take note of these quality activities (or even acknowledge them in some way). There are, however, no external consequences. Most of the experience with Peer Review in initial VET belongs to this category.

2) VET providers are required to establish some system of quality assurance and development but are free to choose (as long as it meets certain standards). Conducting Peer Reviews is one possible way of fulfilling this requirement. Peer Review can also be embedded in other standardised quality management systems as an element of external review. The authorities may carry out a meta-evaluation.

⁴ This asset may, however, also become problematic if it hampers the 'external' view of the peers. It therefore seems advisable to e.g. rotate peers periodically or to take in one or two peers from outside the network.

There may in principle be some consequences if a quality management system is not implemented and/or the results are unsatisfactory. The Dutch system of external audits for VET providers could be assigned to this category.

3) Peer Reviews are mandated by the educational authorities who have a strong say on how precisely and how often the reviews are conducted, what the quality areas should be and who the peers are. There may be external consequences. The Scottish/UK system of peer reviews falls within this category.

Theoretically, the three basic forms of government control (no control, some control, complete control) can be seen as points in a continuum with additional models of government involvement conceivable.

XV.1.2 Suggestions for the European Peer Review procedure for initial VET

All partner countries stress the **voluntary nature** of a European Peer Review procedure. Peer Review should be designed as an **optional instrument** which supplements external and internal quality assurance already in place. External consequences of the Peer Review are rejected.

Although it is evident that it is not likely that the instrument will be adopted as a general mandatory quality assurance tool in any of the participating countries in the near future (apart from the UK, where peer review already is the mandatory external procedure for quality control), there is a definite interest of the educational authorities in the Peer Review instrument. The further application thus will largely depend on its usefulness to the target group.

XV. 2 Experience, Scope & Resources

In line with the recommendation that the European Peer Review procedure to be developed must be flexible to integrate and cater to the different degrees of experience with quality assurance and development in vocational education and training, the purpose and scope of the review as well as the available resources probably are central determinants for the further use of the procedure. In particular, the careful and efficient use of resources needs to be promoted.

The three different elements are interrelated, i.e. the experience of a VET provider with quality assurance and development has an influence on the purpose and desired scope (and hence also duration) of the review. There is also a direct connection between scope and resources and in some cases also between experience and resources: the more experienced a VET provider is and the higher the emphasis on quality assurance and development, the more resources are likely to be available.

Applicability of Peer Review for VET provider

