



Peer Review in Adult Learning  
to Improve formal and Non-formal Education

# *European Peer Review Manual for Adult Learning*



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# ***European Peer Review Manual for Adult Learning***

Adapted from the “European Peer Review Manual for VET”

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## Preface

The European Union has decided to invest on a *smart, sustainable and inclusive growth* for the years to come and specific **strategic objectives** to be reached by 2020 have been set also for education and training – Education and Training 2020. Coherently with this policy framework, and on the basis of the challenges highlighted in the 2015 Joint Report by the Council and the Commission, the following priority areas have been identified for 2015-2020 in the field of Adult learning:

- Governance
- Supply and take up
- Flexibility and access
- Quality

Furthermore, as emerged from the conclusions of the Thematic Working Group on the Quality Assurance in Adult Learning, an important challenge that arises from the renewed policy agenda is the definition of a **comprehensive quality assurance framework** able to account for the heterogeneity and specificities of Adult learning, as well as to be valid for the whole spectrum of education domains.

PRALINE partners have decided **to accept the challenge of boosting the implementation of quality assurance strategies in the Adult Learning** (Panteia, *Developing the Adult Learning Sector*, 2013) and, as the Peer Review methodology has proven to be effective for other education domains and also for non-formal education providers, have worked on the adaptation of the methodology. **The result is the European Peer Review in Adult Learning Methodology, which methodological approach and standard procedure is illustrated in this Manual.**

Indeed, the methodology, first developed and tested in the field of initial VET during the LLP - Leonardo da Vinci project “Peer Review in initial VET”, is coherent with the QA principles inspiring the EQAVET framework and is based on a development-oriented approach able to support AL providers in the process of continuous quality assessment and improvement.

The Manual is complemented by the **European Peer Review Tool-box for AL**, a ready-to-use set of instruments and support documentations to be used throughout the Peer Review implementation process, including forms, checklists and recommendations. It is the result of a strong cooperation between various relevant stakeholders within the PRALINE partnership i.e., social partners, formal and non-formal AL providers, QA experts and universities. Therefore, the added value of the manual and of the toolbox lies in the **adapted criteria and indicators able to reflect a shared and Europe-wide perspective**. The Tool-box is available in electronic format from the project website [www.praline-project.eu](http://www.praline-project.eu).

The team of the PRALINE project

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# I. Introduction

## I.1 What is Peer Review in Adult Learning?

Peer Review in Adult Learning is a form of external evaluation with the aim of supporting the reviewed adult learning provider in its quality assurance and quality development efforts.

An external group of experts, called Peers, is invited to assess the quality of different fields of the adult learning provider, such as the quality of adult learning provision of individual departments or of the entire organisation. During the evaluation process, the Peers visit the reviewed adult learning provider.

Peers are external but work in a similar environment and have specific professional expertise and knowledge of the evaluated subject. They are independent and "persons of equal standing" with the persons whose performance is being reviewed.

## I.2 Why Peer Review in Adult Learning? Advantages and benefits of Peer Review as an instrument of quality assurance and development in Adult Learning

European adult learning providers can expect to benefit from a Peer Review, as proposed in this manual, by

- obtaining critical yet sympathetic feedback on the quality of their adult learning provision from colleagues in the field,
- becoming acquainted with an external perspective,
- ascertaining the quality of their provision,
- presenting their strengths and showcasing good practice,
- enhancing accountability towards stakeholders,
- detecting blind spots and weaknesses,
- receiving advice and discovering the good practice of Peers,
- engaging in mutual learning with Peers,
- establishing networks and cooperation with other adult learning providers, and
- obtaining an external evaluation report on the quality of their adult learning provision at a comparatively economical cost.

## I.3 What are the aims and principles of the European Peer Review in Adult Learning procedure?

### I.3.1 General aims and principles

The general aims of the European Peer Review procedure are

- to promote quality assurance and development,
- to enhance transparency and comparability of quality in Adult Learning in Europe through a common European standard, and
- to support equal opportunities.

Important specific requirements and characteristics of the procedure are

- a focus on the people involved and their interests and needs,
- objectivity and impartiality of the Peers,
- transparency of all elements of the procedure to all persons involved,
- rules on confidentiality and on the use of results, to be set up in advance and adhered to by all persons involved,

- avoidance of conflicts of interest and direct competition between Peers (and the organisation they come from) and the reviewed adult learning provider,
- promotion of openness, integrity and sincerity as a prerequisite for mutual learning,
- awareness of cultural influences both on adult learning provision and on evaluation, especially in transnational Peer Reviews,
- promotion of an enquiring and critical attitude both in the Peers and the reviewed adult learning provider, and
- the design and implementation of Peer Review not as a technical and bureaucratic procedure but as a dynamic and motivating process, from which both the reviewed adult learning provider and the Peers can benefit.

### 1.3.2 The European Peer Review in Adult Learning as a voluntary and formative evaluation procedure

The European Peer Review in Adult Learning procedure has been developed for voluntary use by adult learning providers. It has a formative, development-oriented function and puts particular emphasis on the promotion of continuing quality improvement.

The European Peer Review assists the adult learning provider in determining the status quo in terms of high-quality provision as well as providing valuable suggestions and recommendations for improvement. Thus, the primary addressees of the European Peer Review procedure are the reviewed adult learning providers themselves. The main focus of the procedure described in this manual is the stimulation of continuous quality improvement.

Graph 1: Continuous Quality Improvement with Peer Review





#### I. 4 European Peer Review in Adult Learning and the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET)

Since the European Peer Review was originally developed for vocational education and training (VET) the procedure described in this Manual is aligned with the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) as defined in the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council published in June 2009.

This framework is specifically applicable to VET but according to the “Conclusions on quality assurance supporting education and training” from the Council of Europe (20 May 2014), “EQAVET could serve as the basis for the development of a comprehensive approach to quality assurance in the field of adult learning”. In fact, the EQAVET Framework provides a general approach to quality assurance that is valid for any kind of education and training context: It comprises a quality assurance and improvement cycle of planning, implementation, evaluation and review, supported by common quality criteria, indicative descriptors and indicators. This is the reason why it is used as a benchmark in the context of this Manual.

A quality assurance and improvement cycle is embedded within the European Peer Review in Adult Learning methodology, too. Its elements comprise the quality circle prevalent in state-of-the-art quality management approaches and also referred to in the EQAVET framework.

Within this context, European Peer Review can be implemented as a new methodology for ensuring and improving quality in the Adult Learning sector. It can be used for an extended internal assessment (self-assessment) as well as for external evaluation of the quality of Adult Learning provision. Additionally, Adult Learning specific quality criteria and indicators have been proposed for relevant Quality Areas (see Chapter VII).

The European Peer Review in Adult Learning as a systematic procedure can be depicted as follows:

Graph 2: The Quality Assurance Cycle of the EQAVET Framework and the European Peer Review



## **I. 5 European Peer Review in Adult Learning, gender mainstreaming and diversity**

Mainstreaming diversity and gender equity is a guiding principle of the European Peer Review procedure.

The Peer Review process should contribute towards the elimination of existing inequalities and promote equality between women and men in participation rates, in the distribution of resources, benefits, tasks and responsibilities in vocational education and training, and also in private and public life (in compliance with Articles 2 and 3 of the Treaty of Amsterdam 1999). An analysis of the value and attention accorded to "typically" male and female needs, roles, behaviour and interests should serve as a starting point for the investigation of how gender and other kind of stereotypes and inequalities are socially constructed and reinforced through formal and informal structures and practices. In fact, diversity refers to gender identity but also to nationality, ethnic background, social status, values, attitudes, cultural perspectives, beliefs, sexual orientation, health, abilities and skills and other specific personal characteristics. All measures and activities must be scrutinised with regard to their potential for enhancing critical reflection and change. Thus, self-reflection on gender and diversity issues by everyone involved in the Peer Review is a prerequisite for implementing a gender and diversity perspective in the European Peer Review.

The following gender and diversity criteria and quality standards must be observed in the European Peer Review procedure:

- Gender mainstreaming and sensitivity to diversity should be integrated at all stages and levels within the Peer Review procedures.
- Gender-sensitive and non-discriminating language must be used in all reports and during the Peer Reviews.
- Data collected are disaggregated by sex in order to represent women and men (female and male adult learners; female and male adult learning staff).
- Data collected regarding adult learners participation are disaggregated by background and different needs in order to represent the diversity of the adult learning provider target groups.
- A gender and diversity analysis of the Quality Areas should be undertaken in the Self-Report and in the Peer Review process.
- A Peer with gender and diversity expertise (as an additional competence) should be included in the Peer Review team. The composition of the team should reflect an appropriate representation of women and men. Training needs in relation to gender and diversity must be identified and met before the Peer Review.
- During the Peer Review, gender and diversity of backgrounds and needs must be considered in the composition of groups of interviewees, in the preparation and conduct of interviews and observations (gender-sensitive and non-discriminating formulation of questions and criteria for interviews/observations, gender-sensitive and non-discriminating language and behaviour during interviews and observations) and in the analysis (avoidance of stereotypes in assessment, etc.).
- If budgets are scrutinised, a gender and diversity analysis of the adult learning provider's budget and the budget for training should be carried out.

Before any Peer Review is undertaken, a gender and diversity analysis should be carried out on

- The adult learning provider – the rights, resources, participation, values and norms related to gender and diversity (disaggregated quantitative data, qualitative assessment as well, if possible),
- the review panel – composition, training needs in relation to gender and diversity,
- the Self-Report – gender and diversity analysis of areas covered, use of language.

If measures are planned to counteract gender and diversity inequalities then a gender and diversity impact assessment should be carried out. Gender and diversity impact assessment means using relevant criteria to compare and assess the current situation and trend with the expected development resulting from the introduction of the proposed policy. A gender and diversity impact assessment should be carried out at an early stage once it has been established that the review process has implications for gender and diversity-based relations. Criteria for gender and diversity impact assessment are the differences between the different categories of groups, always using gender as cross-cutting dimension, with respect to participation, resources, norms and values, and rights.

Gender mainstreaming and diversity can also be chosen as a Quality Area for the European Peer Review in Adult Learning.



A **Gender mainstreaming checklist for policy indicators** can be found in the Tool-box.

## **I. 6 Who can use the European Peer Review in Adult Learning procedure?**

The primary target group for the European Peer Review in Adult Learning procedure are adult learning providers in Europe with experience in quality assurance and development. The minimum experience recommended as a basis prerequisite for conducting a Peer Review is that an adult learning provider has previously undergone a self-evaluation process at least once.

## **I. 7 Role of stakeholders in the European Peer Review in Adult Learning procedure**

The involvement of various relevant stakeholder groups in the whole review process is highly recommended.

Stakeholders in adult learning are all the people working and learning within an adult learning provider: adult learners, adult learning teaching staff (teachers and trainers) and adult learning support staff such as counselors, tutors and coaches, managers, quality management (QM) and evaluation staff, other staff; also cooperation partners of the adult learning provider ranging from other learning providers to employers; regional and local authorities; education and training authorities; social partners; society at large.

A more detailed list of relevant stakeholders can be found in the Glossary (cf. Chapter X).

Stakeholders can be interview partners both during the self-evaluation and the Peer Review. They may also serve as Peers if their special experience and know-how contribute to the process. Additionally, (groups of) stakeholders may also be interested in the outcomes of the Peer Review (e.g. the Peer Review Report).

## **I. 8 Documentation of the European Peer Review in Adult Learning**

### **I.8.1 European Peer Review Portfolio**

All relevant documents of the European Peer Review should be collected by the adult learning provider in a European Peer Review Portfolio. The European Peer Review Portfolio contains the Initial Information Sheet, the Self-Report, the Peer Review Report, and other important documents gathered during the Peer Review process. A certificate can complete the portfolio.

## II. European Peer Review in Adult Learning Procedure – Overview

### II. 1 Coordination and organisation of the European Peer Review in Adult Learning

Peer Reviews can be organised in different ways – depending on 1) the networks available, 2) the resources (personnel and finances) available, and 3) the needs and requirements of adult learning providers.

A single Peer Review can be carried out by an adult learning provider who wants to obtain some external feedback from Peers and intends to network with other adult learning providers in an ad hoc and spontaneous way by making use of existing contacts. There need not be any further cooperation between the reviewed adult learning provider and the adult learning providers the Peers come from.

Mutual Peer Reviews between two adult learning providers are also possible, calling for stronger and steadier cooperation.

For the most part, Peer Reviews are carried out in a network of three or more partners. The networks either already exist or are set up for the purpose of carrying out Peer Reviews. This usually expands the cooperation from a one-off activity to more comprehensive networking: common preparatory activities like selection and training of Peers, matching Peers and adult learning providers, etc. may be introduced, as well as common reporting and monitoring schemes. A Peer Review network will usually also agree on common guidelines and indicators. All of this involves a more stable network and needs suitable structures and sufficient resources. The added-value of the network approach may be

- synergies concerning the conduct of Peer Review between the adult learning providers in the network,
- an extension of the number and institutional backgrounds of possible Peers,
- a wider external recognition of the Peer Review (which will be fully accepted, at least within the network),
- a higher chance of possible spin-offs in terms of further cooperative activities beyond the Peer Review.

If Peer Reviews are to be carried out in a larger network, a coordinating body will be needed to ensure high-quality Peer Reviews and effective coordination of the network members. This function can also be assumed by one of the adult learning providers in the network. The tasks of this coordinating body comprise, for example, managing the network, coordinating the development of common procedures (guidelines and indicators), giving support and advice to the individual adult learning providers, selecting and training Peers and coordinating and monitoring the Peer Reviews. If compliance to the procedure has been assessed through monitoring and evaluation, the coordinating body may also issue a European Peer Review in Adult Learning Certificate for those adult learning providers who successfully carried out a Peer Review according to the requirements set out in this Manual.

This is why the tasks and responsibilities of a coordinating body are also delineated in the European Peer Review in Adult Learning procedure.

Graph 3: Peer Review in a network

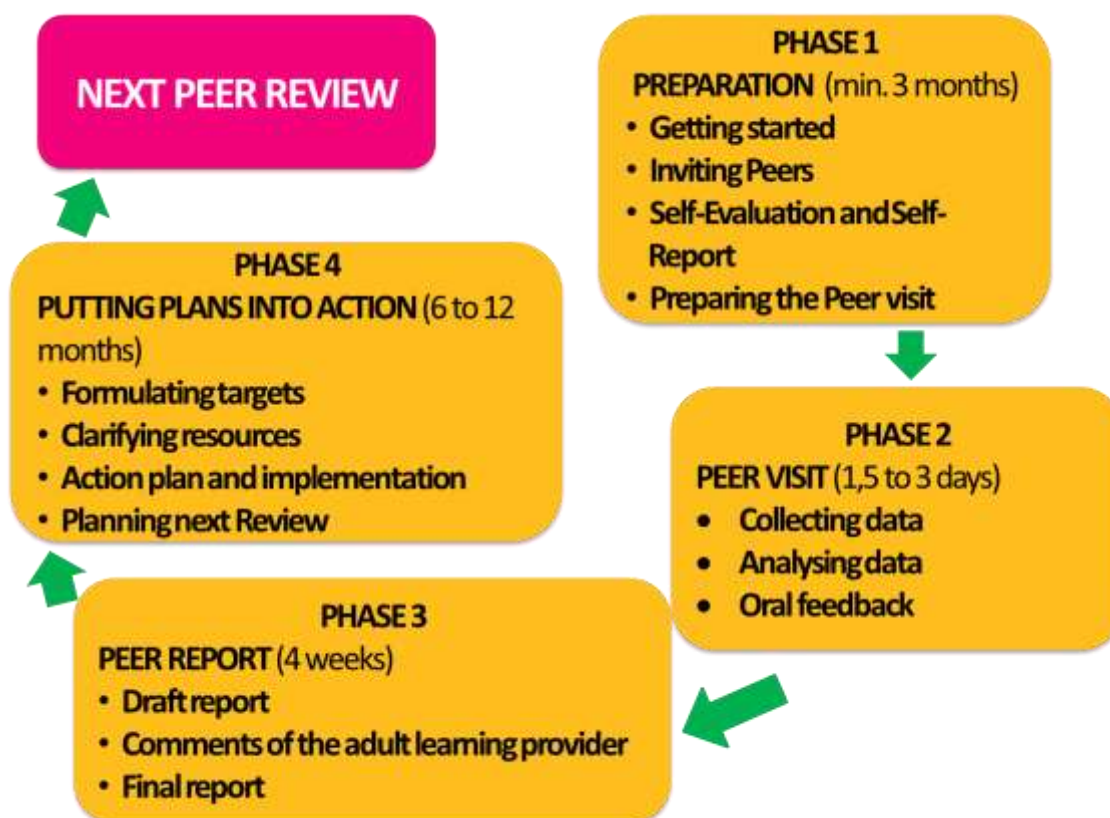


## II. 2 Four phases of a European Peer Review in Adult Learning

The Peer Review procedure comprises 4 phases.

1. The Peer Review starts with a preparatory phase. In this first phase, the Peer Review is organised and a Self-Report is written by the adult learning provider. Peers must be recruited and trained. A timetable for the review is drawn up and arrangements are made for the Peer Visit.
2. In the second phase, the Peer Visit, which is the core activity of the Peer Review procedure, takes place: Peers come to visit the adult learning provider and carry out an evaluation. This evaluation includes a tour of the premises and interviews with different groups of stakeholders. The Peers give initial oral feedback to the reviewed adult learning provider at the end of the Peer Visit.
3. After the Peer Visit, a draft report is drawn up by the Peers. This report is commented on by the adult learning provider and the final Peer Review Report is issued.
4. The fourth phase is crucial for the improvement of adult learning provision and organisational development: results and recommendations from the Peer Review are transferred into concrete actions for improvement, which are planned and implemented.

Graph 4: Four Phases of a European Peer Review in Adult Learning



## II. 3 Estimated time needed for the European Peer Review in Adult Learning

### II.3.1 Time needed for preparation

Ample time is needed to adequately prepare and organise a Peer Review.

If a self-evaluation has already been conducted by the adult learning provider earlier, the Peer Review process can be started right away. At least three months, however, should be reserved for the preparation and organisation of the review. The Self-Report should be available at least one month before the Peer Review in order to allow the Peers to prepare adequately for the Visit.

If no self-evaluation has been carried out beforehand by the adult learning provider, a minimum period of six months should be scheduled for the self-evaluation, which must precede the Peer Review.

### II.3.2 Time needed for Peer Visit and Report

The Peer Visit will usually take one day and a half to three days; in special circumstances it may also take more days, depending on the size of the adult learning provider reviewed and the scope of the Peer Review, i.e. how many Quality Areas are to be investigated. Experience gained in various pilots of the Peer Review methodology suggests that Peer Visits of one and a half to three days, with another half day of preparatory work in the Peer Team preceding the visit, provide enough time for conducting a comprehensive and meaningful evaluation while at the same time they do not put too much strain on Peers and reviewed providers. Note that the scope of the Peer Review, i.e. the number of Quality Areas investigated, must be in line with this time-frame (see also Chapters III and VII).

Time to write the draft report, to wait for and process the comments made by the adult learning provider and to write the Final Peer Review Report needs also to be considered in the overall time needed, although no precise indications on the time needed are prescribed. Indications on the maximum acceptable time between each of the steps are presented in the manual (see Chapter V for the detailed time schedule).

### II.3.3 Time needed for the implementation of improvement measures and procedures for change

Within two months of receiving the final Peer Review Report, an action plan should be presented; at least six months to a year should be scheduled for follow-up measures to be implemented and take effect.

## II. 4 Overview: timetable and responsibilities in the European Peer Review in Adult Learning

Table 1: Tasks of the adult learning providers, Peers and coordinating body in the European Peer Review procedure, in chronological order

### Phase 1 – Preparation

#### Adult learning provider

##### Getting started:

- Decide to carry out Peer Review
- Decide on external organisation of Peer Review (single Peer Review, Peer Review Network)
- Decide on internal organisation of Peer Review (responsibilities and tasks)
- Decide on Quality Areas
- Send Initial Information Sheet (including a proposal for a rough time schedule) to the coordinating body
- Optional: organise coordination meeting of the adult learning providers in the network
- Optional: contract with other adult learning providers or coordinating body

##### Peers and Peer Team:

- Look for suitable Peers with regard to Quality Areas scrutinised
- Invite Peers to apply to the coordinating body
- Select Peers in consultation with the coordinating body
- Conclude contracts with Peers

##### Self-evaluation and Self-Report:

- Conduct self-evaluation
- Write Self-Report
- Submit Self-Report to Peers and to the coordinating body
- Make other necessary documentation available to Peers and to the coordinating body

##### Preparing the Peer Visit:

- Schedule Peer Visit: Set date and draw up Peer Review agenda
- Organise preparatory meeting of the Peers
- Prepare local organisation of the Peer Visit (rooms and equipment, interviewees, lunch, tour of the premises, etc.)
- Recommended:** organise preliminary meeting of Peers with the adult learning provider to clarify review assignments and to answer questions from the Peers ("Question and Answer Session")

## Phase 1 – Preparation

### Peers

#### Peers and Peer Team:

- Submit application to become a Peer
- Sign contract for Peer Review
- Prepare for Peer Review and undertake Peer Training

#### Self-evaluation and Self-Report:

- Receive Self-Report from adult learning provider
- Read and analyse Self-Report
- Identify areas for investigation and evaluation topics for the Peer Review

#### Preparing the Peer Visit:

- Assist in the scheduling of the Peer Visit, especially in the drawing-up of the Peer Review agenda
- Exchange opinions in Peer Team on the content of the Self-Report, agree on evaluation topics for the Peer Review
- Prepare questions for interviews and criteria for observation
- Take part in preparatory meeting of Peers for team-building and to prepare the Peers Visit
- Recommended:** take part in preliminary meeting of Peers with adult learning provider to clarify review assignments and to receive additional information, if necessary ("Question and Answer Session")

### Coordinating body

#### Getting started:

- Send information on Peer Review procedure to adult learning providers
- Collect Initial Information Sheets
- Make an initial plan of the Peer Review schedule (master plan) by using the information on the Initial Information Sheets from adult learning providers
- Optional: organise coordination meeting of the adult learning providers in the network and the coordinating body

#### Peers and Peer Team:

- Look for suitable Peers – request, process and access applications
- Match Peers with the adult learning providers (with regard to Quality Areas to be scrutinised)
- Select Peers (in consultation with the adult learning providers)
- Supervise and assist with contract with Peers

#### Self-evaluation and Self-Report:

- Receive Self-Report of adult learning providers
- Forward Self-Report to Peers (if not sent directly)

#### Preparing the Peer Visit:

- Scheduling of Peer Visit (in consultation with adult learning providers and Peers)
- Organise preparation and training for the Peers.
- Monitoring and support for preparation of Peer Visits
- Collecting of Peer Visit agendas



## Phase 2 – Peer Visit

### Adult learning provider

Support Peers in the following activities:

- Make equipment and rooms available
- Facilitate interviews and observations
- Facilitate a tour of the premises
- Receive feedback from Peers
- Engage in communicative validation

### Peers

- Collect data
- Visit the premises
- Conduct interviews and observations
- Analyse and discuss findings in the Peer Team
- Carry out a professional assessment and come to common conclusions
- Give oral feedback to adult learning provider
- Engage in communicative validation
- Carry out meta-evaluation in the Peer Team

### Coordinating body

- Collect meta-evaluation of Peers and other pertinent documentation of Peer Visits
- Optional: direct support and/or involvement in Peer Visits

## Phase 3 – Peer Review Report

### Adult learning provider

- Comment on the draft Peer Review Report

### Peers

- Write Peer Review Report and submit it to the adult learning provider
- Receive comments of the adult learning provider and finalise Peer Review Report
- End of Peer involvement

### Coordinating body

- Collect Peer Review Reports
- Optional: Support for Peers during this phase
- Optional: Analysis of documentation and monitoring data, evaluation of the Peer Reviews
- Optional: Issue the European Peer Review in Adult Learning Certificate based on successful evaluation of the Peer Review


## Phase 4 – Putting plans into action

### Adult learning provider

- Decide to follow up the findings of the Peer Review
- Plan improvement measures
- Implement improvement measures
- Plan and carry out the next Peer Review

### Coordinating body

- Optional: Support for follow-up
- Optional: Monitor and evaluate follow-up

 A **Checklist for Adult Learning Providers – Forms to fill out** can be found in the Tool-box.

 A **Checklist for Peers – Forms to fill out** can be found in the Tool-box.

### III. European Peer Review in Adult Learning Procedure – Preparation (Phase 1)

#### III. 1 Getting started

##### III.1.1 Decision to undertake a Peer Review

Starting a Peer Review involves

- the decision to carry out a European Peer Review with high commitment by the management and other important stakeholders of the adult learning provider,
- the decision on whether the Peer Review should cover the whole organisation or only parts of it,
- the decision on the aims and purposes of the Peer Review,
- the distribution of tasks and responsibilities including the appointment of a Peer Review Facilitator and a quality team, and
- the decision on time and resources allocated to the Peer Review.

Efficacy in terms of quality improvement depends on the cooperation and participation of the people involved. From the start, a high commitment by management must be ensured, but also by the adult learning staff (teaching and support staff) and other relevant stakeholders. This must also include explicit dedication to implementing procedures for change as a follow-up to the Peer Review Report in Phase 4 of the Peer Review procedure (Putting Plans into Action).

Responsibility for the coordination of all activities concerning the Peer Review should be assigned to a Peer Review Facilitator. S/he, as a member of staff, will be the link between the adult learning provider reviewed and the Peer Team reviewing the adult learning provider. S/he should be carefully selected because of the crucial role of the Peer Review Facilitator.

##### III.1.2 Decision on Quality Areas

The next step is to decide which Quality Areas should be dealt with in the Peer Review. The decision on the Quality Areas should be made by the management in agreement with staff and other important stakeholders, if possible. Adult learning providers should only choose Quality Areas over which they have an influence. For an overview of the Quality Areas, please go to Chapter VII.

Issues that may be considered in the choice of Quality Areas are:<sup>1</sup>

- Are there Quality Areas that are essential due to national/regional/local, etc. quality requirements and standards?
- Are there Quality Areas that show examples of best practice and excellence?
- Are there Quality Areas that urgently need to be reviewed, i.e. because problems have been detected?
- Are there Quality Areas that are particularly important, i.e. because new developments are to be initiated?
- Are there Quality Areas where innovation has taken place, which calls for an evaluation?
- Are there Quality Areas that are of particular interest to important groups of stakeholders?

The overall guiding principle for the selection of Quality Areas is their relevance.

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<sup>1</sup> Additionally, the issue of obtaining a European Peer Review in Adult Learning Certificate may be taken into account. It will only be relevant, however, if suitable structures (e.g. a coordinating body) exist to supervise and monitor European Peer Reviews and to issue Certificates to adult learning providers who have successfully conducted a Peer Review according to the requirements set out in this Manual (see also Chapter II.1).

Additionally, feasibility should be taken into account: the broader the range of Quality Areas to be reviewed, the more time and resources will be necessary for the review. A policy of "small steps" will be suitable especially for adult learning providers with little previous evaluation experience. (These may also decide to test the procedure for parts of their institution only.) For a Peer Visit of one day and a half, it is highly recommended that no more than two Quality Areas be chosen – only very experienced Peers will be able to deal with more Quality Areas within this time-frame. Note that too many Quality Areas will either lead to a rather superficial evaluation or will force the Peers to narrow their focus to selected topics within the Quality Areas.

Furthermore, it may make sense to include areas which have previously undergone internal evaluation in order to reduce the self-evaluation effort.

Additionally, special evaluation questions can be formulated for the Peers: in addition to the Quality Areas, adult learning providers can give "assignments" to the Peers to pay special attention to specific issues and questions that are of particular importance to the adult learning providers. This will enhance the usefulness of the results of the Peer Review.

### III.1.3 Initial documentation and information

The basic decisions concerning the conduct of the Peer Review should then be documented by the adult learning provider in written format. The "Initial Information Sheet" serves as internal documentation and as external information for the coordinating body, the Peers, other adult learning providers in the network, etc. The form should be filled out and sent to the coordinating body in good time, i.e. at least three months before the Peer Review.

The "Initial Information Sheet" includes documentation of 1) contact information, 2) the starting situation and the decision to undergo Peer Review (and by whom it was taken), 3) the aims and purpose of the Peer Review, 4) how it is to be organised, 5) the internal distribution of tasks and responsibilities, 6) an overview of the procedure and a time schedule (which steps will be taken and when), 7) the Quality Areas, 8) Further Comments and 9) a list of possible Peers.



The form **Initial Information Sheet** can be found in the Tool-box.

### III.1.4 Optional: Coordination Meeting

If the Peer Reviews are organised as reciprocal reviews or in a network of adult learning providers, a meeting between the representatives of adult learning providers (and, if applicable, also the coordinating body) will improve the whole process.

The following activities can be part of the agenda:

- Introducing each other, short self-portraits of the adult learning providers,
- Expectations of adult learning providers motivation of management and adult learning teachers/trainers,
- Information on and discussion of the Peer Review procedure (purpose, targets, process and activities, resources and work-time for the persons involved),
- Competence profile for the Peers, mode of selection of the Peers,
- Commitment of the management and the staff involved,
- If applicable: information and/or decision on the involvement of authorities,
- If applicable: contractual relations between 1) the adult learning providers and/or 2) the adult learning providers and the coordinating body,
- Further steps, time scheduling, questions.

### III.1.5 Recommended: Contracts between adult learning providers and coordinating body

If Peer Reviews are carried out on a larger scale, it is sensible to put the duties and responsibilities of the different parties into a mutual written agreement.<sup>2</sup> Important issues to be covered by such a contract are:

- Purpose of the agreement,
- Rights and duties, mutual expectations, conditions of network partners (and coordinating body, if applicable),
- Aims of the Peer Review in Adult Learning procedure,
- Internal distribution of tasks and responsibilities,
- Costs,
- Data protection,
- Involvement of education authority (if applicable),
- Action plan and responsibility for the implementation of the action plan,
- Procedure, steps, time scheduling.

## III. 2 Selecting and inviting the Peer Team

Once the decision on conducting the Peer Review and a selection of Quality Areas has been made, the adult learning provider and/or the coordinating body become active in recruiting Peers. Preliminary information on the Peer Review procedure and the tasks of the Peers may be sent out to prospective Peers.

The Peers may come from other adult learning providers, other kind of lifelong learning providers or stakeholder institutions. The adult learning providers may suggest suitable Peers. Alternatively, Peers can also submit applications of their own accord. If a coordinating body does not exist or is only marginally involved, the adult learning providers may also select and invite the Peers themselves. The use of a standard application form for Peers is recommended.

Apart from the competences and experience of the Peers, availability is an important factor in setting up the Peer Teams. Thus, the areas of expertise of the Peers must fit in with the Quality Areas to be reviewed while, at the same time, the time schedules of Peers and adult learning providers need to be compatible. The Peer Coordinator should be selected with great care: S/he will be the key person in the Peer Team with overall responsibility for the Peer Review process: communication and coordination in the Peer Team, time management, relations with the adult learning provider, etc. If an Evaluation Expert is to guide the Peer Review process, s/he must also be recruited.

Further information on Peers and the Selection of Peers can be found in Chapter VIII.

 A **Peer Application Form** can be found in the Tool-box.

Either the adult learning provider or the coordinating body should also inform the Peers of their duties and tasks well in advance and conclude a contract. Peers should therefore receive the "Initial Information Sheet" as well as a summary of what will be expected of them during the Peer Review. This information may also be attached to a formal invitation letter which should be sent out as soon as the matching of Peers and adult learning providers has successfully been carried out and a time schedule for the reviews has been fixed.

 A **Model Contract Form for Peers** can be found in the Tool-box.

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<sup>2</sup> In the European Peer Review projects, the partner contracts regulated these issues.

To sum up, the selection and invitation of Peers involves:

- soliciting applications from Peers using a standard application form,
- selecting Peers according to their expertise and matching them with adult learning providers,
- optional: recruiting an Evaluation Expert to guide the Peer Review process,
- nominating a Peer Coordinator,
- setting up a timetable for the Peer Reviews,
- sending out information to the Peers on 1) the Peer Review procedure, 2) the adult learning provider they are to review, and 3) their duties and tasks, and
- concluding a contract with the Peers and sending out an official invitation to the Peers.

### **III. 3 Self-evaluation and Self-Report**

#### **III.3.1 Recommendations for conducting a self-evaluation**

A sound analysis of strengths and areas for improvement is a prerequisite for the Peer Review. A systematic self-evaluation of all Quality Areas selected for the Peer Review in Adult Learning must therefore be carried out before the external Peer Review takes place and the results of the self-evaluation must be documented in a Self-Report.

The self-evaluation must be an investigation at institutional level (or at the level of departments, branches, etc. of an organisation) but may be preceded and supported by individual evaluations of staff, especially teaching staff. For the individual evaluations, a Peer Review procedure between individual teachers/trainers can be introduced (cf. Gutknecht-Gmeiner, 2005: Part I: International Research and Analysis).

No specific self-evaluation procedure is prescribed for the European Peer Review in Adult Learning. On the contrary, adult learning providers are encouraged to make use of assessments and evaluations already carried out in order to avoid duplication of efforts. Thus, if a self-evaluation has been conducted within a reasonable time (up to two years) before the Peer Review, the results can be used and need only be filled into the Self-Report. For areas or criteria not yet covered, additional evaluations must be carried out.

If an adult learning provider carries out a self-evaluation for the first time, recourse to guidance (and perhaps also consultation) with existing coordinating bodies or evaluation experts is advisable.

#### **III.3.2 Quality criteria for self-evaluation**

The self-evaluation can be performed in different ways. Adult learning providers may choose a suitable procedure according to their interests, needs, and experience. It is recommended, however, that a clear and structured procedure is employed, which focuses on relevant Quality Areas and evaluation questions. Apart from a clear commitment by management and staff, the responsibilities and tasks involved in the procedure should be transparent.

The procedure should

- be conducted in a transparent and fair way,
- involve all important stakeholders,
- employ suitable evaluation methods, and
- entail adequate sharing of information and results.

Feasibility of the self-evaluation in terms of time and resources must be ensured from the start.

### III.3.3 Self-evaluation profile: assessing strengths and areas for improvement

During the self-evaluation, strengths and areas for improvement should be identified for the Quality Areas reviewed. Actions to be taken for improvement should also be discussed and indicated in the Self-Report. A SWOT analysis, for example, is a well-known, simple and time-efficient procedure for obtaining a profile of performance in the Quality Areas chosen. Strengths and areas for improvement should be identified at the level of the criteria of the individual Quality Areas (cf. Chapter VII).

### III.3.4 Self-Report

The Self-Report is the central document of the Peer Review in Adult Learning procedure: it should contain all information necessary to prepare the Peer Review. It must therefore tackle all the topics to be evaluated during the Peer Review.

While adult learning providers are free to choose their methods and procedures for the self-evaluation, the Self-Reports should be standard and uniform in order to promote comparability. The description of the self-evaluation results must be clear, concise and meaningful. Evidence to buttress the assessments provided in the Self-Report should be furnished in an Annex.



A **Self-Report Form**, which should be adhered to, can be found in the Tool-box.

The first part of the report is an update of the Initial Information Sheet, which contains all relevant data on the Peer Review in Adult Learning procedure. The second part comprises a description of the adult learning provider and of its provision, the mission statement, statistical data, and information on organisational issues. The third part contains the results of the self-evaluation of the Quality Areas chosen. It should provide an assessment of the strengths and areas for improvement and also indicate special evaluation questions for the Peers. The latter will help the Peers in targeting the Peer Review to the topics of particular relevance to the adult learning provider. Additional documents can be attached in an Annex.

## III. 4 Preparing the Peer Visit

### III.4.1 Tasks of the adult learning provider

After fixing the date for the Peer Visit and recruiting and inviting the Peers, the Peer Review Facilitator must make sure that the Peers receive the Self-Report and all necessary documentation no later than one month before the Visit.

#### III.4.1.1 Recommended: Meeting between the adult learning provider and the Peer Team prior to the Peer Visit

It is highly recommended, that a meeting be organised between the adult learning provider and the Peer Team in order to clarify questions from the Peers and discuss the agenda of the Peer Visit. This may comprise fine-tuning the evaluation questions for the Peers, making decisions on the evaluation methods and on the groups of stakeholders to be interviewed. Further information can be given to the Peers upon request. The outcome of the meeting is a detailed Peer Visit agenda.

#### III.4.1.2 Drawing-up an agenda for the Peer Visit

A detailed and realistic agenda for the Peer Visit should be drawn up by the Peer Review Facilitator based on the Peers proposal. The agenda will reflect the kind of evaluation methods that will be used and the stakeholder groups that will be involved in the Peer Visit. Plan the agenda carefully to ensure a successful Peer Visit.



*Examples of **Peer Visit agendas** can be found in the Tool-box.*

#### III.4.1.3 Local organisation of the Peer Visit

The local organisation of the Peer Visit is undertaken by the Peer Review Facilitator, who is responsible for the smooth running of the Visit.

The local organisation entails

- selecting interviewees,
- reserving rooms and equipment,
- making a plan of the adult learning provider premises and putting up signs giving directions (optional),
- inviting interviewees,
- informing and inviting other involved stakeholders,
- preparing refreshments and lunch, conducting a tour of the premises, etc.

Rooms have to be suitable and free from disturbance. One room should be reserved for the Peer Team throughout the whole day for interim sessions by the Peers. One spacious room should be reserved for briefing and for the final meeting between the whole adult learning provider and the Peer Team.

#### III.4.2 Tasks of the Peers

##### III.4.2.1 Preparing for the Peer Review

To prepare for the review, the Peers need

- to read and analyse the Initial Information Sheet and the Self-Report of the adult learning provider (and ask for additional information, if necessary),
- to attend a pre-review meeting with the adult learning provider (recommended),
- to attend Peer training,
- to exchange opinions on the content of the Self-Report in the Peer Team and agree on evaluation topics for the Peer Review,
- to draw up an agenda for the Peer Visit together with the Peer Review Facilitator,
- to attend a pre-review Peer Team meeting (at the latest the day/evening before the Visit),
- to prepare interview questions and criteria for observation.

##### III.4.2.2 Peer Training Programme

Prior to the Peer Review, the Peers should undergo a "Peer Training Programme" that prepares them for their work as external evaluators (cf. Chapter VIII.7).

##### III.4.2.3 Proposal for an Agenda for the Peer Visit

Making a proposal for a Peer Visit agenda is one of the key tasks of the Peers. In its preparation they need to take into account the quality areas and findings of the self-report as well as relevant stakeholders in order to define interview sessions and observation tasks. It is recommended that adult learners should always be included in the Peer Review even if they are not all the time in the premises, as they are a fundamental stake-



holder and their feedback is a key element for obtaining relevant results. The agenda must allow for enough time for data collection, analysis and preparation of the first feedback.

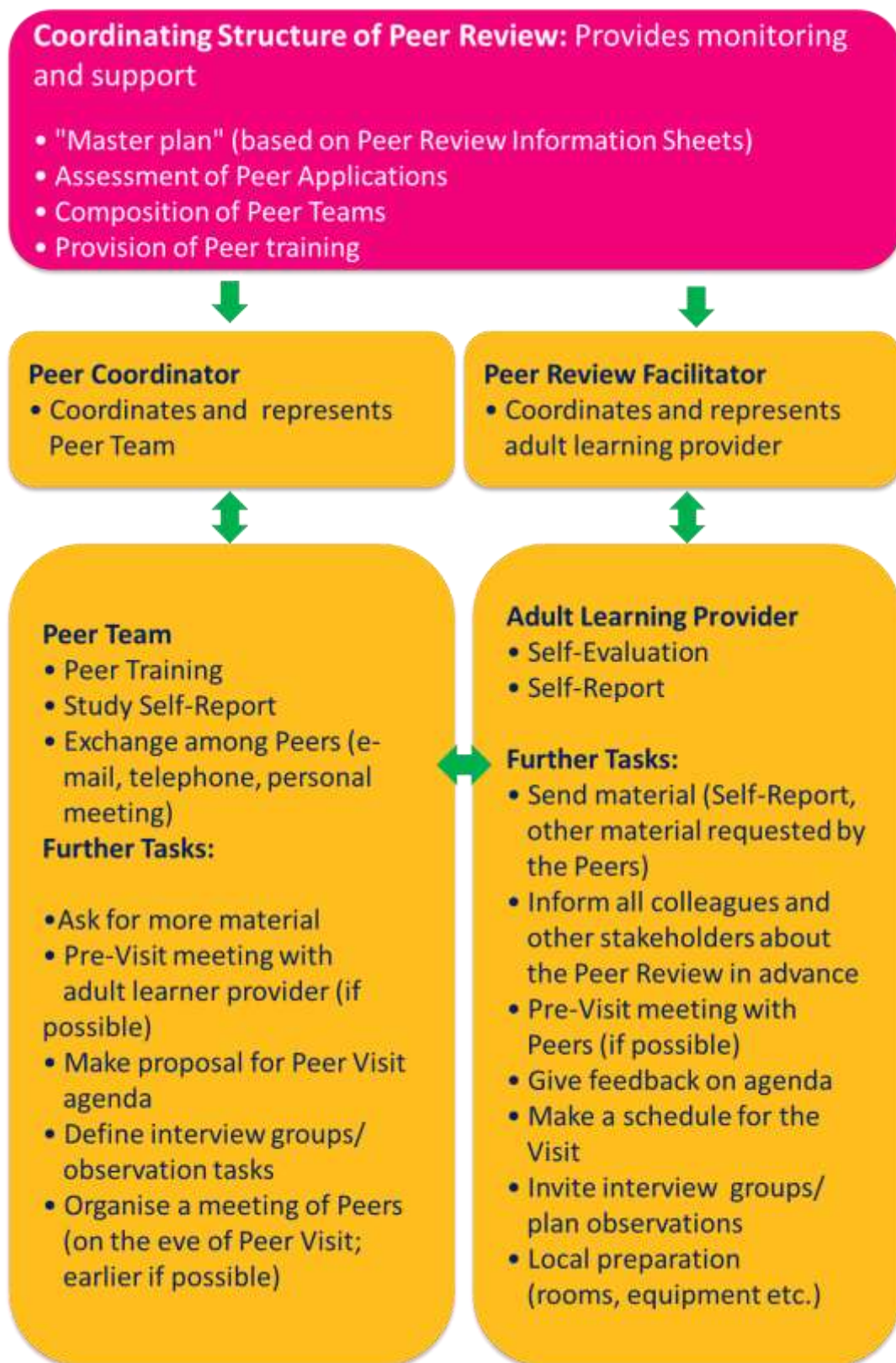
#### III.4.2.4 Preparatory meeting of the Peers and preparatory meeting with the adult learning provider

It is vital that the Peer Team meets before the Visit in order to get to know each other and to prepare the Visit together. This will enhance team-building and the efficiency of team cooperation during the review. It will make sense for the Peers to have read and analysed the Self-Report prior to this meeting so that first impressions can be exchanged and specific questions and topics for the Peer Visit can be discussed. If possible, this meeting should take place sometime before the Peer Visit in order to have enough time for preparation afterwards. In any case, it is recommended that Peers meet on the day before the first day of the Peer Review for last preparations.

Additionally, the Peers may also meet with representatives of the adult learning provider to be reviewed (cf. above, Chapter III.4.1.1). Providing an opportunity for a "Question and Answer Session" with the adult learning provider, usually represented by the Peer Review Facilitator, may greatly improve the process. This meeting is also recommended to take place ahead of time. If not otherwise possible, this exchange can take place on the day before the first day of the Peer Visit.

For efficient organisation of the preparatory activities, both meetings – the internal meeting of the Peers and the meeting of Peers and reviewed adult learning provider can also be scheduled on the same day and/or, if possible, be linked to the Peer Training. Ideally, the whole Peer Team attends the face-to-face part of the Training Programme together. After or during the training, the Peers are joined by the Peer Review Facilitator (and perhaps other responsible staff of the adult learning provider). Subsequent to the discussion with the representative(s) of the adult learning provider, the Peers hold their team meeting.

Graph 5: Responsibilities and tasks in the preparation of the Peer Review in Adult Learning



## IV. European Peer Review in Adult Learning Procedure – Peer Visit (Phase 2)

### IV. 1 What happens during the Peer Visit?

During the Visit, the Peers conduct a brief and condensed evaluation, which focuses on the Quality Areas chosen by the adult learning provider. The basis for the evaluation is an analysis of the previously furnished Self-Report and other relevant documentation. During the Visit, the Peers check the accuracy of the findings of the self-evaluation documents and conduct their own investigation. All of this usually entails gathering additional data.

Different evaluation methods can be used. Apart from the analysis of the available documentation (which can be extended to encompass further written sources of information during the Visit), the most common methods are interviews and (focus) group discussions, as well as observations. The data collected must then be analysed and discussed by the Peers. Initial feedback is given to the adult learning provider at the end of the Visit. Depending on the aims of the Peer Review, the Peer Visit can also be used for a more extensive exchange between Peers and representatives of the adult learning provider, comprising elements of Peer consulting.

### IV. 2 Collecting data

The most common methods used for collecting data are:

#### IV.2.1 Group and single interviews

Interviews are most often used in Peer Reviews. The aim is to collect as much information as possible from different stakeholders. Interviews may be conducted with single persons or with groups of persons (usually five to six, up to a maximum of about ten). Groups will be fairly homogeneous most of the time (focus groups), but groups with different stakeholder representatives are also possible. For important stakeholder groups, like adult learners and adult learning teaching staff, two independent interview groups can be organised to gather comprehensive feedback.

#### Who is to be interviewed?

Usually representatives of all relevant stakeholders should be involved. The relevance of stakeholder groups depends on the Quality Area(s) reviewed. The adult learning provider will choose the types of stakeholders to be interviewed and can be aided in this decision by the Peers and the Evaluation Expert.

Groups of interviewees are usually

- adult learners (current, former or future)
- adult learning teaching staff (teachers and trainers)
- managers (head of adult learning provider, head of departments, etc.)
- adult learning support staff such as counsellors, tutors, coaches, etc
- other stakeholders, such as representatives of other learning providers, enterprises, social partners, regional and local authorities, education and training authorities, etc.

Invitation of the interview groups lies within the responsibility of the adult learning provider who – for the sake of validity – has to make sure that a representative choice of interview partners is made within each group of stakeholders. The Peers, however, should furnish clear criteria for the composition of the interview groups and monitor compliance. When composing interview groups, particular attention must be paid to social aspects like formal or informal hierarchies, existing conflicts, diverse interest, etc., which can adversely affect the openness of the interviewees.

Forms for **Interview Minutes** and **Interview Analysis** for the Peers can be found in the Tool-box.

#### IV.2.2 Tour of the premises

During an accompanied, on-site visit, the whole Peer Team or a Peer Tandem (the Peer Coordinator, who also writes the Peer Review Report, should ideally be included) assesses the infrastructure and equipment. In addition, informal information can be collected during this tour of the premises.

#### IV.2.3 Peer observations (in classrooms, laboratories, workshops, etc.)

During a Peer Visit, observations can also be carried out. Classroom observations are most common but observations can also be conducted during practical training, i.e. in laboratories, workshops, etc., and in other social situations (breaks, etc.)

If observations are to be carried out, they must be prepared well. The aim(s) and the subject of the observation must be defined in advance (together with the persons reviewed, if possible) and a systematic procedure for note-taking must be drawn up. In the assessment, the evaluations of the individual situations must be aggregated so that conclusions will focus on the adult learning provider as a whole and not on individual teachers and trainers.<sup>3</sup>

Observations of specific teaching and learning activities can be linked to the tour of the premises, which will then take more time. Apart from the individual classroom visit, which usually focuses on a certain topic, whole classes may be shadowed throughout a day or all classes may be visited for a short time.

#### IV.2.4 Other methods

A wide repertoire of methods is possible in order to be able to align the process to the aim and content of the review. Apart from the most common central elements of a Peer Visit described above, other methods, such as (short) questionnaires and surveys, collection and analysis of relevant documents, shadowing, photo, video or picture evaluation, role play, etc., may also be employed.

### IV. 3 Analysing data

A preliminary analysis and assessment based on the Self-Report of the adult learning provider must be made by the Peers before the Visit. During the Visit, it is advisable to sort through and discuss the findings of the individual sessions and activities immediately afterwards. Peers should not jump to conclusions but carefully weigh the evidence found and seek to gather additional information if findings are inconclusive. A communicative validation of findings – especially with adult learners, as the ultimate beneficiaries, or with the responsible management – can also help to challenge earlier judgements and to obtain a more comprehensive impression. In order to distil, analyse, and discuss the collected information, sufficient time must be reserved for repeated exchange in the Peer Tandems as well as for the final analysis of the findings in the whole Peer Team.

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<sup>3</sup> If serious problems are detected which concern a single teacher/trainer, feedback should go directly to person concerned (and perhaps also the manager) but must not be mentioned in the Peer Review Report.

### **European Peer Review in Adult Learning in practice: reserve time for analyses**

The experience of the Peers in the pilot phases of the Peer Review methodology indicates that ample time for analysis is crucial: if the Peer Visit agenda focuses primarily on collecting large quantities of data, too little time is left for analysing and making sense of this data. Peers feel overwhelmed, stressed, and frustrated and experience difficulties when they have to come to a final assessment. Thus, a balance must be found between the requirement to glean comprehensive data from different stakeholders (cf. below, "Triangulation") and the need for a thorough analysis and discussion of the findings.

## **IV. 4 Assessment and feedback**

The central element of a Peer Review is the assessment, i.e. the professional judgement by the Peers. It is necessary to reserve ample time for the challenging task of organising and distilling findings, judging their reliability and relevance, discussing different perspectives and opinions in the Peer Team and arriving at common conclusions.

A final meeting of the Peers should be held before the feedback session with the adult learning provider. In this meeting, the collected data are reviewed and matched for relevance and representativity. Important issues may be selected and visualised (flip charts, powerpoint presentation etc.) so that they can be presented to the adult learning provider in the feedback session. During the discussion meetings of the Peers, the different perspectives of the individual Peer Team members should be taken into account. It is recommended that the Peers come to consensual conclusions; statements of differing opinions should only be given if no agreement can be reached. All assessments must be substantiated.



A **Quality Area Assessment Form** can be found in the Tool-box.

### **IV.4.1 Oral feedback**

A very useful element is the feedback session at the end of the Peer Review, in which the Peers communicate their findings (and perhaps also their recommendations) to the adult learning provider. This also allows for a communicative validation - direct comments from the adult learning provider, including the clarification of misunderstandings or irrelevant conclusions - and an exchange between the Peers and the reviewed adult learning provider.

Feedback can be fairly descriptive - merely describing the findings of the Peer Visit - or it can involve reporting an assessment, identifying strengths and areas for improvement. The latter will usually be the case in European Peer Reviews in Adult Learning.<sup>4</sup>

Giving and receiving feedback is, of course, a delicate task. On the one hand, Peers must be fully aware of their responsibility to provide useful and critical feedback to the adult learning provider in a friendly and professional manner. When assessments are presented during the oral feedback session at the end of the Peer Visit, they must be prepared and formulated with great care so as not to offend the representatives of the adult learning provider and cause conflicts.

Representatives of the adult learning provider, on the other hand, should neither start defending themselves nor arguing their case against the findings, but accept the feedback as valuable information in their quest for development and growth. Coming to a full understanding of the feedback should therefore be the focus of this oral exchange.

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<sup>4</sup> Descriptive feedback will be given if 1) the adult learning provider explicitly asks for this kind of feedback or 2) cultural attitudes towards feedback and/or the lack of or negative experience of the adult learning provider in the field of external evaluation suggest a cautious procedure.

Thus, both the Peers and the adult learning provider must collaborate in the constructive handling of feedback. It is helpful if the staff of the adult learning provider reviewed assumes a self-confident stance which also accepts criticism. The Peers need to refrain from any kind of sweeping statements or statements focusing on specific persons. An inoffensive form of language should be used by all involved, descriptions should be as clear as possible rather than abstract; Peers should concentrate on behaviour and not on assumed personal characteristics; positive aspects should be mentioned alongside the negative, and judgements and conclusions must be based on facts and observations.



A **Checklist for the Peers on reflective and constructive feedback** can be found in the Tool-box. (see Ground rules for Peers).

#### IV.4.2 Final assessment

The final assessment should only be made by the Peers after the feedback session (including the communicative validation) so that comments and feedback from the adult learning provider can be taken into account. The assessments and conclusions will be included in the Peer Review Report.

#### IV.4.3 Recommendations

Recommendations are usually part of evaluation procedures. In a European Peer Review in Adult Learning, the Peers will formulate areas for improvement in the Peer Review Report as an indication to the adult learning providers that action should be taken in these areas.

Recommendations beyond this indicative assessment should only be given by the Peers if the adult learning provider asks for them. If the adult learning provider does not seek recommendations from the Peers during the Peer Review this should be clarified before the Peer Review – when the assignment for the Peers is defined – or at least in due time before the feedback session.

If recommendations are desired, they can be presented and discussed during the Peer Visit in an open exchange between the Peers and the representatives of the adult learning provider. Such a discussion should then focus on mutual exchange and learning from good practice.

#### IV.4.4 Peer consulting

As has been pointed out before, useful feedback is the central agent for quality improvement and mutual learning in the Peer Review in Adult Learning process. Feedback can be a one-way communication but may also develop into a dialogue between the Peers and the reviewed institution. In a discussion of strengths and areas for improvement, the Peers may also suggest advice on certain topics. This must be done carefully, though: Peers should focus clearly on the situation at hand and not try to "proselytise" the reviewed adult learning provider to adopt solutions successful in their home institutions. Again, Peers should only assume the additional role of consultants if the adult learning provider expressly asks them to.

#### IV.4.5 What happens if the Peers make important findings which were not called for?

Although the Peer Review should focus primarily on the Quality Areas chosen, it may happen that important findings by the Peers concern issues which are not covered by the (reviewed) Quality Areas. In this case, the Peers and the adult learning provider should decide jointly on how to deal with these results. Although digressions from the agreed topics should be limited, essential feedback should not be suppressed automatically if it does not fit into the previously agreed scope. Additional findings can be presented merely orally (e.g. in the feedback session) or, if all parties agree, could also feature in the Peer Review Report as an addendum.

## IV. 5 Meeting quality standards

### IV.5.1 Triangulation<sup>5</sup>

Using different methods and different sources of information in the collection of data contributes to the quality of the evaluation in terms of objectivity, reliability and validity. Soliciting diverse points of view from different stakeholders during the Peer Visit will enable the Peers to gain a more accurate and complete picture.

### IV.5.2 Communicative validation

Communicative validation is also used in qualitative social research to enhance the validity of results: feedback on findings is systematically solicited from different stakeholders to challenge the data collected as well as its interpretation. A communicative validation can be carried out whenever necessary in the Peer Review process, in most cases it will be used in the final stages of the Visit, e.g. shortly before, during or after the feedback session with the adult learning provider.

### IV.5.3 Ground rules for Peers

Professional behaviour of the Peers is an essential quality requirement. They must assume a critical stance while remaining open and sympathetic.



A list of **Ground rules for Peers** can be found in the Tool-box.

### IV.5.4 Time management

Good time management is pivotal for the success of a Peer Review. A realistic Peer Review agenda is a must since activities usually tend to take more time than planned: if the agenda is too tight, any slight delay may cause grave problems in the process (interview time is reduced, observations do not start on time, time delays add up, activities have to be postponed at short notice, etc.). Agendas should therefore also include some time (such as extended breaks) to buffer delays.

During the Peer Visit, time-keeping is essential. It is the Peer Review Facilitator who is responsible for local organisation – availability of interviewees and classes during the data collection period, organisation of final meeting, provision of catering and transport (if necessary) throughout the Peer Visit.

Last but not least, a high level of time-keeping discipline is required from the Peers. The Peer Coordinator (who may be aided by the Evaluation Expert) assumes central responsibility for time management in the Peer Team. S/he must make sure that the time-frame of the agenda is respected, that the Peers are punctual, that discussion sessions in the Peer Team are not overextended, and that decisions are made, if problems arise, on how to best use the limited time available.

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<sup>5</sup> In social research, the approach of including different methods and sources is called triangulation.

## IV. 6 Duration of the Peer Visit

The duration of the Peer Visit depends on the size of the adult learning provider, the scope of the Quality Areas and the time available. It is advisable to plan fairly short Visits since 1) a Peer Visit will to some extent disrupt the routine processes at the adult learning provider and 2) Peers will not be able to take leave for an extended period of time. Peer Visits of 1,5 to 3 days at the most are recommended.

## IV. 7 Elements of the Peer Visit

 A model **Peer Visit agenda** can be found in the Tool-box.

### IV.7.1 Optional: "Question and Answer Session"

If the Peers still need information or clarifications from the adult learning provider – concerning the Self-Report, the evaluation topics or other relevant issues, for example – some time should be reserved for a "Question and Answer Session" with the Peer Review Facilitator and/or other representatives of the adult learning provider.

Ideally, this session should take place before the Peer Review, either in the meeting between Peers and adult learning provider when the agenda is discussed or, alternatively, before or after the Meeting of the Peers on the eve of the Peer Visit (if it is held at or near the adult learning provider). If this is not possible, some time should be reserved for questions and answers at the beginning of the Peer Visit, for example during the welcome session.

### IV.7.2 Welcome and first session with the adult learning provider

The Peer Review Facilitator welcomes the Peer Team and makes sure that organisational preparations have taken place. The Peers introduce themselves to the adult learning provider. The Peer Review Facilitator gives a summary of the purpose and target of the Peer Review process and the time schedule. Managers/department heads may be present to welcome the Peers.

### IV.7.3 Interviews, observations, on-site visit and analysis in Peer Tandem

The interviewees (stakeholders, such as current adult learners, former adult learners, adult learning teaching staff, representatives of stakeholders, etc.) are interviewed in groups of about 5 people for 45-60 minutes. Do not prepare more than 5 or 6 interview questions for each group. If more people are included in interview groups, either the number of interview questions must be reduced or not everybody will be able to answer all the questions due to time constraints.

To support the smooth running of the different activities during the Peer Visit, it is advisable to plan the organisation of the interviews and the other activities and draw up a chart showing who is to be interviewed/observed by whom, when and where. This organisation chart can also be included in the Peer Visit agenda.

 Model **Organisational charts for the Peer Visit** can be found in the Tool-box.

If observations are being carried out, observation guidelines should be filled out, and analysed and summarised after the end of the observation session.



Sufficient time should be reserved for the analysis of the interviews/observations. For an hour of interviewing, at least half an hour will be needed for a first analysis. Breaks must also be taken into account in order to draw up a realistic agenda.

#### IV.7.3.1 Meeting of the Peer Team to carry out a first internal analysis of the findings

During the internal analysis, the Peer Team aims to get an overview of the main results in order to prepare the final meeting with the adult learning provider. A structured discussion takes place, monitored by the Peer Coordinator or the Evaluation Expert. Concise and meaningful feedback to adult learning teaching staff, adult learning support staff and management is prepared. In a two-day Peer Visit, at least three hours should be reserved for this task.

#### IV.7.4 Feedback session

As has already been pointed out, the final meeting at the end of the Peer Visit is a vital element of the Peer Review. Its main purpose is feedback to the adult learning provider and communicative validation of the findings.

All Peers should take part in the feedback session. They may all be active in communicating the feedback (taking turns talking) or one person may be selected to present the feedback – usually this is the Peer Coordinator. The Evaluation Expert may chair the final meeting.

On the adult learning provider's side, management and the Peer Review Facilitator, at least, should be present during the final meeting. Participation can be extended depending on the internal strategy of the adult learning provider. Presenting the evaluation results to a large number of teaching staff and support staff of the reviewed adult learning provider can be helpful since it makes the whole process very transparent for all those involved and there can be immediate reaction. It probably also raises awareness of problems in an even more efficient way than a written report alone ("paper is patient"...). Furthermore, dissemination of results within the adult learning provider is ensured. Yet such a large meeting is expensive and may be an organisational challenge to the adult learning provider. Therefore other routes for disseminating the findings within the organisation may be pursued.

The Peers present the distilled findings and assessments for every evaluation area (e.g. through visualisation in a PowerPoint presentation, on flip charts, etc.). Adult learning teaching staff, management, adult learning support staff are invited to comment. If Peer consulting is one of the principal aims of the Peer Review, the meeting of the Peers and the adult learning provider should be extended to encompass further discussions.

#### IV.7.5 Reflection on results and meta-evaluation of the process

After the communicative validation, the Peers meet to revise their findings and assessments. The Peer Visit ends with the Peer Team looking back on the Visit. There are two aims for this final session of the Peers:

- Comments and questions of the final meeting have to be reflected upon and discussed again. Peer Teams revise their assessment of the Quality Areas.
- In a meta-evaluation, the members of the Peer Team reflect on their experiences, thus providing indications for further development of the Peer Review procedure.



A sheet for documentation of the **Meta-evaluation of the Peers** can be found in the Tool-box.

## V. European Peer Review in Adult Learning Procedure – Peer Review Report (Phase 3)

The Peer Review Report is the final document in the European Peer Review in Adult Learning procedure. All Peers should contribute to the report. The writing, however, can be done by one or two persons with the other Peers commenting. It is recommended that the Peer Coordinator, together with the Evaluation Expert, be responsible for producing the Report. Usually, Peers should come to common conclusions and recommendations through discussion and argumentation; if this is not possible, dissenting opinions can also be presented.

### **European Peer Review in Adult Learning in practice: writing the report**

The pilot phases of the Peer Review methodology clearly showed that the writing of the report should be started during the Peer Visit: once the Peers are back in their usual working environment, finishing the report may be postponed for weeks and even months. In addition, direct communication between the Peers is usually not possible after the Visit.

It is therefore highly recommended that the Peers arrive at common conclusions during the Peer Visit and that the main results of the Peer Review are already inserted into the forms during the analysis phase (Quality Area Assessment Form; Peer Review Report). Should any (usually minor) adaptations be necessary after the communicative validation with the adult learning provider, they should also be made immediately so that – apart from some finishing touches – the draft Peer Review Report is ready at the end of the Peer Visit.

A draft report is issued, on which the reviewed adult learning provider should have the opportunity to give feedback. The final report should take these comments into consideration. In the European Peer Review in Adult Learning, the final Peer Review Report is addressed primarily to the adult learning provider. All relevant internal stakeholder groups (adult learning teaching staff, adult learners, other adult learning support staff, etc.) should have access to the report.

Additionally, the adult learning provider may also pass on the Peer Review Report to relevant external stakeholders and/or education and training authorities. Often, parts of the report (usually the summary) are also made accessible to a wider public, e.g. over the internet.

### **V. 1 Structure of Peer Review Report**

For reasons of consistency and transparency, the Peer Review should have the same kind of structure and format as the Self-Report. It should indicate strengths and areas for improvement and possibly – if asked for by the adult learning provider being reviewed – recommendations.

The Peer Review Report contains:

Title, table of contents (glossary and abbreviations, if necessary)

1. Data sheet
2. Short portrait of the adult learning provider
3. Peer Review procedure
4. Assessment of Quality Areas
5. Overall assessment
6. Annex: e.g. agenda for the Peer Visit, interview guidelines, observation guidelines



The **Peer Review Report** form can be found in the can be found in the Tool-box.

## V. 2 Principles for writing the Peer Review Report

After the Peer Coordinator (with the assistance of the Evaluation Expert) has written the report, the Peers revise it.

The report should provide a description of the findings of the Peer Review and an assessment of these findings given by the critical friends (the Peers). Strengths and areas for improvement are pointed out and conclusions are presented. If the adult learning provider agrees, recommendations can also be part of the report.

The report should only include results that have been presented to the adult learning provider (i.e. during the communicative validation). The report should not contain any surprises for the adult learning provider. Nor should the report include comments on individuals.

The draft report is read and validated by the adult learning provider, which may comment on it.

## V. 3 From the Peer Visit to the final Peer Review Report

Graph 6: Procedure and time schedule for the Peer Review Report



## VI. European Peer Review in Adult Learning Procedure – Putting Plans into Action (Phase 4)

Evaluations should always have an effect on practical work: conclusions must be drawn and procedures for change must be implemented in order to justify the time and effort invested in the review process. Putting the results of the Peer Review into action is thus the critical element for the success of the Peer Review in terms of systematic, continuous and sustainable quality improvement. It lies within the responsibility of the management to ensure that the results of the Peer Review are used consistently (cf. also Chapter III.1.1).

### VI.1 How to make sense of the results of the Peer Review in Adult Learning?

Making sense of evaluation results is usually one of the main challenges of systematic improvement at the adult learning provider level. In the European Peer Review, several elements of the procedure directly enhance the definition of suitable goals and measures.

Areas for improvement will be indicated during the feedback session and in the Peer Review Report in an open and understandable manner; the communicative validation of the findings and the possibility of a dialogue between the Peers and representatives of the adult learning provider further deepen comprehension and appreciation of the feedback. If deemed appropriate, recommendations for the follow-up procedure can also be furnished by the Peers.

Additionally, the Peer Review process itself supports the qualitative interpretation of the self-evaluation data as well as of data collected during the Peer Visit: the feedback of the Peers should provide the adult learning provider with easily understandable and meaningful information as to the future course of procedures for change.

### VI.2 How to prepare procedures for change?

For putting results into action, a systematic process is proposed, based on the quality circle. It should be supported by a candid and comprehensive information policy ensuring that all relevant stakeholders have access to the results of the Peer Review. If possible, an open debate within the organisation should precede the implementation of procedures for change. All of this will improve the quality of the decisions made and enhance motivation and commitment within the adult learning provider.

### VI.3 How to proceed - a systematic approach to procedures for change

#### VI.3.1 Revision of goals

If possible, procedures for change should be planned cooperatively within the adult learning provider. This should start with the revision of quality objectives and planning based on the results of the self-evaluation and the Peer Review.

The revision should encompass the strategic and the operational levels, which should be interlinked. Attainment of operational targets should be possible within a realistic time-frame of 6 months to 2-3 years. It is recommended that they be defined as SMART targets:

**S** specific  
**M** measurable  
**A** attractive  
**R** realistic  
**T** time-related

Graph 7: From Knowing to Acting



#### VI.3.2 Clarifying resources and planning support

For putting a plan into action, it is necessary to clarify the available resources and integrate the plan in the whole development process of the adult learning provider. Individual and institutional needs have to be considered when doing this:

- Which supporting forces exist and can be used? (e.g. networks, teachers and trainers)
- Which supporting structures can be activated? (e.g. quality groups, mutual class observations, mentoring, supervision, peer coaching, project groups, etc.)
- Which financial, personnel (internal and external) and time resources are available?
- To which hindrances and stumbling blocks must attention be paid?
- How can we manage challenging situations?
- How do we deal with resistance?
- Do we need consultancy? Why? What for? Who could do it?
- Do we need adult learning training, new methods or new action models?
- Are training programmes for teachers and trainers and other adult learning support staff suitable and sufficient?

A realistic and motivating action plan and schedule are drawn up, based on the information on resources and support.

### VI.3.3 Action plan and implementation

The following guiding questions can be used when setting up an action plan:

- How do we start? What are the next steps? What are priorities?
- What do we have to do to reach the aim?
- Are midterm aims and milestones adequate?
- What resources (financial, personnel, time) are available?
- Who is involved or takes responsibility?
- Would it be convenient to appoint a steering group?
- Who has to approve the action plan?
- How can we communicate the action plan?

Development steps can be recorded in an action plan:

Table 2: Action Plan				
Activities	Priority	Time Frame	Responsible Person	Resources
What should be done?	What is urgent?	By when?	By whom?	What do we need?

### VI.3.4 Evaluation of implementation – planning the next Peer Review

All development plans at an individual and institutional level call for another feedback loop. The evaluation must include the assessment of the achievement of the targets defined. Guiding questions to determine the success of the improvement measures may be:

- How do we know if we have made progress? How do we work out whether we have reached our aims? What criteria and indicators of success can be formulated? Which feedback methods do we apply?
- To whom are we held accountable? To whom do we have to report? Who reminds us to follow our aims and our plans if we neglect them?
- What positive consequences do we expect if we reach our aims? How do we reward ourselves if we reach our aims? What consequences are there if we do not reach our aims?

A self-evaluation of the implementation of procedures for change can again be complemented by external feedback through Peer Review – starting the next cycle of a continuous improvement process.

## VII. Quality Areas

### VII. 1 Quality of adult learning provision and the definition of Quality Areas

#### Quality in Adult Learning

What is “quality in adult learning”? Quality is a complex, multi-dimensional and flexible concept. All definitions of quality are context-bound in terms of place, topic under discussion, expectations and purpose.

**Quality = Experience (Reality) / Expectations (Goals)**

Thus, in order to determine what kind of adult learning provision is of high quality and what is not, it must be clear what the context-specific goals of adult learning provision are. Goals can be found at different levels of the education and training systems and vary to some extent from country to country and from adult learning provider to adult learning provider. Thus, there is no universal definition of quality in adult learning provision.

There are, however, widely accepted cross-cutting aspects of quality as e.g. the following four core dimensions of quality in adult learning <sup>6</sup>:

- Equity (in access and participation),
- Efficiency (the ratio of costs to benefits),
- Effectiveness (positive means-end relationships),
- Relevance (provision of an effective route to and support for, personal and social change).

The success of a Peer Review depends on whether meaningful and relevant Quality Areas are being reviewed or not. In addition, transparency and comparability between different Peer Reviews can only be ensured if a common framework serves as the point of departure.

Thus, a framework of Quality Areas has been defined for the European Peer Review Procedure in Adult Learning that

- takes into account the four quality dimensions identified above
- comprises the crucial areas of a high-quality adult learning provider in a clear, practical and workable form
- covers a wide range of Quality Areas used in the Europe, thus facilitating its use at a European level
- serves as a tool for cross-reading different national quality frameworks, thus enhancing transparency and comparability within Europe.<sup>7</sup>

### VII. 2 Relation between the European Quality Areas for Adult Learning and institutional/national quality assurance frameworks

The set of Quality Areas (including criteria and indicators, see below) should therefore by no means replace existing national framework. Instead, it is intended to support European cooperation in evaluation at adult learning provider level: a framework with common Quality Areas can be used for facilitating transnational Peer Review and/or can serve as a point of comparison for reviews carried out in a national context.

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<sup>6</sup> Adapted from „Global Report on Adult Learning (GRALE) (CONFINTEA VI December 2010) UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning” and the “Thematic Working Group on Quality in Adult Learning – Final Report, October 2013”.

<sup>7</sup> A plethora of quality frameworks and research finding on quality in adult learning have been used in the definition of the quality areas and indicators.

Special national/institutional quality elements can, of course, be added to this framework depending on national and/or institutional demands. For purely national use of the European Peer Review in Adult Learning procedure, national frameworks, if available, can substitute the Quality Areas proposed below.

### VII. 3 European Quality Areas for Adult Learning

The **11 Quality Areas** proposed are:

Quality Area 1:	Learning offer
Quality Area 2:	Information, guidance and enrolment
Quality Area 3:	Learning and teaching
Quality Area 4:	Learning results and outcomes
Quality Area 5:	Strategy and leadership
Quality Area 6:	Management and administration
Quality Area 7:	Human resources
Quality Area 8:	Infrastructure and financial resources
Quality Area 9:	External relations and internationalisation/European cooperation
Quality Area 10:	Gender mainstreaming and diversity
Quality Area 11:	Quality management and evaluation

Diversity and heterogeneity are characteristics of adult learning provision. Adult learning is diverse in terms of several aspects: types of learning; structure; type of providers in terms of organisational structure, size and operational rules; learning contexts; training and learning contents. The Quality Areas proposed are comprehensive and intend to embrace this diversity; they were designed to be used by all kind of adult learning providers (formal, non-formal and informal adult learning providers, professionally-oriented and general adult learning). The relevance of some criteria and exemplary indicators, however, may differ according to the different formats and conditions of adult learning provision.

#### VII.3.1 Core and Optional Quality Areas

The 11 Quality Areas for adult learning providers comprise four Quality Areas that relate directly to the “key business” of adult learning providers: the learning and teaching processes. They are thus called “Core Quality Areas”. Since these four Quality Areas usually lie within the decision-making power at the organisational level, adult learning providers all over Europe will be competent to act on the results of external assessment in these areas. In order to highlight their importance, these Quality Areas are positioned as the first four areas within the framework proposed for quality at the adult learning provider level.

For a European Peer Review, it is recommended that at least one of the four "Core" Quality Areas be tackled.

The **4 Core Quality Areas** are:

Quality Area 1:	Learning offer
Quality Area 2:	Information, guidance and enrolment
Quality Area 3:	Learning and teaching
Quality Area 4:	Learning results and outcomes

The remaining 7 Quality Areas – Optional Quality Areas – are considered necessary for the operation of the adult learning provider; they support the processes of the Core Quality Areas.

A "European Peer Review in Adult Learning Certificate" can only be issued to an adult learning provider if at least one Core Quality Area had been reviewed. The Certificate indicates all Quality Areas dealt with.



## VII. 4 How the Quality Areas are specified

### VII.4.1 Criteria

Each Quality Area is clarified by a set of criteria. These criteria identify the key aspects of quality in the relevant area. The criteria therefore represent the guiding principles for quality assurance and quality development efforts of an adult learning provider in the specific Quality Area.

In a European Peer Review in Adult Learning, at least 2 criteria should be reviewed for each Quality Area selected. However, the list of criteria is not exhaustive, which means that further criteria can be added, depending on individual needs. All criteria to be reviewed must be dealt with in the self-evaluation and the Self-Report.

### VII.4.2 Examples of indicators

Additionally, the criteria are further specified by indicators which serve to exemplify the criteria. They are merely suggestions and are not prescribed for the European Peer Review in Adult Learning procedure. This means that they can be exchanged or complemented by other indicators, if necessary.

Some of the indicators are based on "hard" quantitative data, which can be measured and counted statistically (e.g. retention rates drop-out rate). Some of them will be provided by the adult learning provider in the Self-Report. The majority of indicators outline "soft" qualitative indications of the existence of certain conditions or trends. The "soft" indicators presented in this manual are formulated in a precise way and prescribe requirements for the fulfilment of the individual indicator.

### VII.4.3 Sources of evidence

This category is considered to be a support for both the adult learning provider and the Peers. The sources of evidence indicate examples and suggestions as to where and how the specific requirements for the indicators can be allocated and documented.



The whole list of the **European Quality Areas for Adult Learning**, with criteria, indicators, and sources of evidence can be found in the Tool-box.

## VIII. Peers

### VIII. 1 Who is a Peer?

A Peer in the European Peer Review in Adult Learning procedure is a person

- who is an equal of or is on equal standing with the person(s) whose performance is being reviewed
- who works in a similar environment (and/or in a similar organisation)
- who is external (i.e. from a different organisation) and independent (has no personal/organisational "stakes" in the evaluation process)

and

- who has specific professional expertise and knowledge in the field (shares values, professional competence and attitudes, language, etc.)
- who can thus bring a degree of "inside" knowledge of the object of review into the process and combine it with the external view of somebody coming from a different organisation ("external insider").

Peers are sometimes also called 'critical friends'.

### VIII. 2 Core task of the Peers

The core task of the Peers is to come to an understanding of the particular situation of the reviewed adult learning provider and to give critical feedback. Recommendations and solutions to problems should only be given if expressly asked for by the adult learning provider.

### VIII. 3 Composition of the Peer Team

European Peer Reviews in Adult Learning should be carried out by teams of 4 Peers. It is recommended that the overall size of the Peer Team is an even number, because sets of two Peers (Peer Tandems) should be formed to conduct the interviews with the different stakeholder representatives. (If larger Peer Teams are employed, the number of Peers should not exceed 8).

The composition of the Peer Teams depends on the subject of the Peer Review since, first and foremost, Peers should have extensive expertise in the Quality Areas reviewed. It is important to note, however, that the team as a whole must cover the expertise and experience required and not necessarily any single team member. In detail, a Peer Team for a European Peer Review in Adult Learning should consist of experts with the following occupational backgrounds:

At least half of the Peers should be "real" Peers, i.e. colleagues from other adult learning providers: adult learning teaching staff (teachers and trainers) and other adult learning support staff such as counsellors, tutors and coaches, managers, QM and evaluation experts, etc. These professionals should have the following expertise:

- 1) in the review topics under scrutiny, 2) in adult teaching and learning processes (at least 5 years), and 3) in quality assurance and quality development procedures (i.e. quality management approaches, evaluation methods, etc.). It is also recommended that two of the Peers currently work as adult learning teaching staff (teachers/trainers).

Additionally, a stakeholder representative (or representatives) can be included in the Peer Team. This Peer can come, for instance, from "external cooperation partners", such as lifelong learning providers coming from other education and training subsectors (e.g. schools, VET providers, universities, polytechnics), from the business world (representatives of enterprises) or from other relevant stakeholders (employment services, labour market experts, social partners, institutions providing guidance for adults or assessment and validation of prior learning, regional/local authorities, etc.).

It is recommended that one member of the Peer Team be able to assume the role of an "Evaluation Expert" with expertise in evaluation, moderation and communication. This Peer may also come from an institutional background other than adult learning (e.g. evaluation, research, consulting, etc.). This person should, however, also have sufficient experience in adult learning since s/he will fulfil both the function of a "normal" Peer and the function of Evaluation Expert. The Evaluation Expert need not be recruited from outside adult learning, a "real" Peer from another adult learning provider, who has the required qualification and expertise may also assume the role of the Evaluation Expert.

#### **VIII. 4 Roles within a Peer Team**

Within a Peer Team, the following roles should be filled:

- Peers
- a Peer Coordinator<sup>8</sup>
- an Evaluation Expert
- a gender mainstreaming and diversity expert
- a transnational Peer (if applicable).

##### VIII.4.1 Peers

The Peers analyse the Self-Report of the adult learning provider, draw up an evaluation plan (who is to be interviewed, interview guidelines) and carry out the Peer Review (e.g. collecting information, interviewing, analysing findings, giving feedback, etc.).

##### VIII.4.2 Peer Coordinator

In addition to the tasks of a Peer, the Peer Coordinator is the leader of the Peer Team. S/he is the primary contact for the adult learning provider, coordinates and plans the activities of the Peers and is concerned with the moderation of the review process and time management. S/he is also responsible for the writing of the Peer Review Report.

The Peer Coordinator thus assumes a central role. S/he needs a high level of competence in evaluation, team-leading, communication, moderation, and time management and must therefore be selected carefully.

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<sup>8</sup> The Peer Coordinator can be appointed either by the adult learning provider itself or by the coordinating body organising the Peer Review.

#### VIII.4.3 Evaluation Expert

The role of the Evaluation Expert should also be covered in the Peer Team to make sure that at least one person has comprehensive expertise in evaluation, moderation, and communication. This role can be assumed by the Peer Coordinator or one of the other Peers in the team.

If the Peer Team is not very experienced in evaluation, the Evaluation Expert will guide the Peer Team and support the Peer Coordinator in her/his tasks. In this event, the Evaluation Expert can be responsible for moderating the internal analysis meeting(s) of the Peer Team where the findings of the various Peer Tandems are discussed and the feedback to teachers/trainers, other staff and management is prepared. Furthermore, the Evaluation Expert may moderate the final meeting. S/he may also assist the Peer Coordinator in the writing of the Peer Review Report. If possible, the Evaluation Expert will also support the Peers with special evaluation expertise in the preparation phase by assisting them in the drawing-up of interview guidelines, for example.

#### VIII.4.4 Gender mainstreaming and diversity expert

It is highly recommended that one Peer with special expertise in gender mainstreaming and diversity be included in the Peer Team. The gender mainstreaming and diversity expert ensures that gender and diversity aspects are duly considered throughout the process, i.e. from the planning of the review through data collection and assessment to feedback and reporting.

#### VIII.4.5 Transnational Peer

Employing a transnational Peer is optional. For a transnational European Peer Review in Adult Learning, though, recruiting a transnational Peer is a requirement.

On the one hand, inviting a Peer from another country can be a very enriching experience for all parties involved – the transnational Peer, the adult learning provider and the other Peers. Confronting one another with different systems and practices can enhance mutual learning and innovation transfer. Additionally, the independence and evident distance of a transnational Peer often stimulates a special atmosphere of openness and critical reflection.

On the other hand, including a transnational Peer requires careful preparations and certain conditions on the part of the adult learning provider and the Peers. First of all, all parties involved must be aware of the additional efforts necessary: the language question, in particular, needs to be considered carefully as must the diversity of education and training systems and cultural differences. Inviting a transnational Peer usually also calls for extra funding, for travelling, for example, or for translation costs.

**Table 3: Composition of Peer Team in a European Peer Review in Adult Learning: roles, occupational background and competences**

<b>Number of Peers (4 Peers)</b>	<b>Occupational Background</b>	<b>Required Competences</b>
2 "Real" Peers (minimum) *	<b>Professionals from other adult learning providers</b> (teachers and trainers, counselors, tutors and coaches, managers, QM and evaluation staff, other adult learning provider staff)	-Knowledge of Quality Areas under scrutiny -Experience in adult teaching and learning processes -Experience in QA and QD procedures
1 "Stakeholder" Peer **	<b>Representative from other stakeholder groups</b> (lifelong providers coming from other education and training subsectors, companies, social partners, institutions providing guidance for adults or assessment and validation of prior learning, regional/local authorities, employment services, etc)	-Knowledge of Quality Areas under scrutiny -Experience in QA and QD procedures
1 Evaluation Expert *	<b>Professional evaluator/quality assessor</b> (e.g. from a research institute/university, independent auditing/accrediting body, also from another adult learning provider or other lifelong provider)	-Expertise in evaluation, moderation and communication -Knowledge of the education and training system, particularly adult learning
1 Gender Mainstreaming and Diversity Expert *	<b>Any of the above</b>	Additional: -Expertise in gender mainstreaming and diversity management
1 Transnational Peer (optional) ***	<b>Any of the above</b> , usually an adult learning professional	-Knowledge of Quality Areas under scrutiny -Experience in adult teaching and learning processes -Experience in QA and QD procedures
* required for a European Peer Review in Adult Learning ** recommended for a European Peer Review in Adult Learning *** required for a transnational European Peer Review in Adult Learning		

## VIII. 5 Required competences and expertise of Peers

Peer Teams as a whole should thus have expertise

- in adult teaching and learning processes,
- in quality assurance and development, and
- in the Quality Areas under scrutiny.

In addition, one Peer should have expertise in gender mainstreaming and diversity and one Peer should have the competences to fulfil the role of Evaluation Expert. As the Peer Review in Adult Learning procedure presented in this manual is designed as a transnational instrument, it is a requirement that at least one Peer from abroad is engaged whenever a transnational European Peer Review is planned. For the selection of a transnational expert, transnational experience, intercultural competences, and language skills are essential.

Thus, additional requirements are

- expertise in gender mainstreaming and diversity management,
- expertise in evaluation, and
- transnational experience.

## VIII. 6 Applying to be a Peer

The manual also provides an application form for persons who are interested in becoming a Peer and have the relevant expertise. Peers who want to take part in a European Peer Review in Adult Learning are required to fill out and submit this application form.



A **Peer Application Form** can be found in the Tool-box.

Where applicable, please refer to possible existing national Registers of Peers or to the EU-level Register of Peers managed by the European Peer Review Association (EPRA).

## VIII. 7 Preparation and training of Peers

Peers are obliged to analyse the adult learning provider's Self-Report and contribute to the preparation of the Peer Visit by attending meetings with the adult learning provider and the other Peers, by setting up an agenda for the Peer Visit and by formulating evaluation questions for the Peer Review.

Prior to the Peer Review, Peers should also undergo a "Peer Training Programme" that prepares them for their work as external evaluators. The training programme should introduce Peer Review as an evaluation methodology, explain in depth the different phases of the Peer Review, and clarify the role and tasks of the Peers. Additionally, training in quantitative and qualitative data analysis and in qualitative evaluation methods (e.g. interviews and observation) should be provided if needed. Training in soft skills, i.e. social, communicative and moderation skills completes the training programme. A European Peer Training Programme that meets these requirements was developed in the project Peer Review Extended II.<sup>9</sup>

If face-to-face training is possible, the Peer training may also be used to support the Peers in the preparation of the Peer Visit, i.e. to provide guidance in the analysis of the Self-Reports and/or counselling in the preparation of the review design and the Peer Visit agenda (e.g. which methods to use for which topics, who to interview/observe, how to prepare questions for interview guidelines or grids with criteria for observations, etc.).

Peers can take advantage of training opportunities existing at national or at European level through, for instance, the European Peer Review Association (EPRA).

## VIII. 8 Liaison with the Peer Review Facilitator

The primary contact person for the Peer Team during the whole European Peer Review in Adult Learning process is the **Peer Review Facilitator**. S/he should make additional documentation accessible 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.). Thus, the facilitator's core role is to ensure that the channels of communication between the adult learning provider and the Peer Team (mainly in the person of the Peer Coordinator) work effectively. The facilitator is not a member of the Peer Team and will not make assessments about the topics under scrutiny. S/he should not be present during interviews or during internal discussions of the Peer Team.

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<sup>9</sup> Maria Gutknecht-Gmeiner, Leena Koski, Pirjo Väyrynen, Anette Chur, Anette Halvgaard, Rick Hollstein, Josep Camps, Pere Canyadell (2009): European Peer Training, Vienna.

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Gutknecht-Gmeiner, Maria (2007a): Peer Review and the CQAF. Peer Review as an innovative methodology for external evaluation in VET and its contribution to the further development of the "Common Quality Assurance Framework" (CQAF). Contributions by Allulli, Giorgio; Koski, Leena; Väyrynen, Pirjo; Molnar-Stadler, Katalin; Camps, Josep; Canyadell, Pere; Vienna.

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#### IX.3.3 Peer Review Extended II

~~Gutknecht-Gmeiner, Maria (ed.) (2008): Peer Review in der Berufsbildung. Projekte und Erfahrungen – ein Reader, Wien.~~

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Transnational Partnership of the EuroPeerGuid project (2012): European Peer Review Manual for Educational and Vocational Guidance for Adults, Lisboa.

## X. Glossary

### **Adult Learner**

*(synonymous of Participant)*

Any person aged 16 or over participating in adult learning.

### **Adult Learning**

*(synonymous of Adult Education)*

Formal, non-formal and informal learning activities undertaken by Adults which can include learning for personal, civic and social purposes, as well as for employment reasons. It can take place either in formal education and training systems or other settings and leads to the acquisition of new knowledge, skills and competences varying from the improvement of basics skills, to the acquisition of new qualifications, to the up-skilling or re-skilling for employment or to personal development and fulfilment and societal participation.

### **Adult Learning Provider**

In the Peer Review Manual for Adult Learning, the term "adult learning provider" is used to name the organisations that are responsible for quality assurance and development primarily at the adult learning provider level but also at the level of the maintaining institution if this is where quality assurance and development are coordinated. In the framework of this Manual, individual teachers/trainers or networks of teachers/trainers are not considered adult learning providers.

Adult learning providers can be as varied as adult learning activities themselves and refer to (among others) any kind of organisation that may provide learning activities / services /opportunities for Adults:

- Adult education centres,
- Associations, Foundations,
- Centres for liberal studies,
- Centres for popular adult education,
- Centres for senior citizens education,
- Centres of lifelong education,
- Civil society organisations,
- Continuing education and training providers,
- Enterprises,
- Folk high schools,
- Higher education establishments,
- Local and regional authorities, municipalities,
- Local and regional development organisations,
- Media,
- NGO - non-governmental organisations,
- People's universities,
- Popular or open universities,
- Secondary education schools,
- Social partners in particular trade unions,
- Vocational training centres,
- Vocational/professional schools,
- Etc.

## **Adult Learning Staff**

Adult Learning staff includes adult learning teaching staff (e.g. teachers and trainers) as well as adult learning support staff (e.g. counsellors, tutors and coaches, managers, QM and evaluation staff, other adult learning provider staff).

## **Adult Learning Support Services**

Adult learners usually have a wide range of important priorities besides adult learning activities. Support Services are defined as services and resources that help adults to succeed in their lifelong learning paths while still handling responsibilities at home and at work. Examples of Support Services facilitating the participation and maximising the impact in terms of personal and professional competences developed are e.g.:

- Flexible arrangements (timetables, modules, etc.)
- Better ICT infrastructures – virtual or blended provision
- Childcare
- Etc ...

## **Assessment of Learning Outcomes**

(Related term: prior learning assessment)

The process of appraising knowledge, know-how, skills and/or competences of an individual against predefined criteria (learning expectations, measurement of learning outcomes). Assessment is typically followed by validation and certification.

## **Communicative Validation**

Communicative validation is used in qualitative social research to enhance the validity of results: feedback on findings is systematically solicited from different stakeholders to challenge the data collected as well as its interpretation. A communicative validation can be carried out whenever necessary in the Peer Review process; in most cases it will be used in the final stages of the Visit, e.g. shortly before, during or after the feedback session with the adult learning provider.

## **Coordinating Body for Peer Review**

Although the role of coordinating and organising Peer Reviews can be assumed by one of the adult learning providers involved in the application of the procedure (see Chapter II.1), if Peer Reviews are to be carried out in a larger network and sufficient funding is available, the coordination of the Peer Review network can be carried out by a competent organisation/unit. For the purpose of this manual, this support structure will be called the "coordinating body". Establishing such a body is recommended for the management of complex (transnational) Peer Review networks.

The coordinating body can be central to the coordination and organisation of Peer Reviews. It can be either the coordinator of a (publicly funded) project on Peer Review, a coordination unit set up by a network of adult learning providers, a professional association or an independent Peer Review agency established by authorities in charge of adult learning policies. Also structures like the Quality Assurance National Reference Points (QANRP) may assume this role at national level. Supervisory bodies (inspectorates, accreditation authorities, funding agencies, auditing bodies) are usually not suitable for this role because of conflicts of interest.

An example of a coordinating body at European level is EPRA – the European Peer Review Association ([www.peer-review-network.eu](http://www.peer-review-network.eu)).

The degree of influence and the scope of the tasks of the coordinating body may vary, depending on its set-up: it may process applications from Peers, select the Peers according to a predefined profile, match the adult learning

provider with suitable Peers, draw up a timetable for the Reviews, collect and forward information, organise Peer training and provide consultation for the adult learning providers throughout the whole process, monitor and evaluate the Peer Reviews and, based on an evaluation, issue certificates for adult learning providers who successfully carried out a Peer Review according to the requirements set out in this Manual.

### **"Critical Friends"**

Synonym of "Peers".

### **Educational Guidance**

Educational Guidance is defined as a range of activities that help people make informed educational and career choices. Activities may include one-to-one and group guidance, assessment (psychological or competence-/performance-related); information on learning and labour market opportunities and career management; consultation with peers, relatives or educators.

Considering the heterogeneity of the Adult learning provision, guidance and counselling can be provided by professionals at schools, training centres, job centres, the workplace, the community or in other settings.

### **European Quality Assurance Reference Framework (EQAVET)**

EQAVET is a reference framework set out in 2009 through a Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (2009) to help Member States to promote and monitor continuous improvement of their VET systems based on common European references.

The Framework:

- comprises a quality assurance and improvement cycle of planning, implementation, evaluation/assessment and review/revision of VET, supported by a model of common quality criteria, indicative descriptors and indicators,
- recommends a monitoring and quality improvement process, including a combination of internal and external evaluation mechanisms, review and processes for improvement, supported by measurement and qualitative analysis,
- supports the use of measuring tools to provide evidence of effectiveness,
- is due to be applied at the VET-system, VET-provider and qualification-awarding levels,
- gives a strong emphasis on further development based on a solid cooperation at European, national, regional and local levels,
- gives a strong emphasis on the exchange of best practices not only at national but also at local and regional levels in all relevant networks, including the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework network. The importance of this networking among stakeholders is as much as the acronym of the network and the acronym of the framework are used indistinguishably.

### **Evaluation Expert**

The Evaluation Expert is a Peer with additional knowledge and expertise in evaluation. In addition to the activities of a Peer, s/he will support the Peer Team in preparing interview questions for the Peer Visit, s/he will moderate the internal discussion sessions of the Peer Team during the Visit and also the communicative validation session with representatives of the adult learning provider at the end of the Visit. S/he may also coach/assist the Peer Coordinator in the writing of the Peer Review Report.

## **Formal Learning**

Learning which takes place in an organised and structured environment, specifically dedicated to learning, and typically leads to the award of a qualification, usually in the form of a certificate or a diploma; it includes systems of general education, initial vocational training and higher education.

## **Formative Evaluation**

Formative Evaluation<sup>10</sup> is an ongoing evaluation that serves the purpose of improving ("forming") the evaluation object, which may be, for example, a Quality Area, an entire organisation, a programme, a project, a product, an intervention, a policy or a person. In the case of the European Peer Review, a formative evaluation is carried out of certain areas or departments of adult learning providers.

The main focus of a formative evaluation is to support further improvement and sustainable development (whereas a summative evaluation is geared towards quality assurance and control). It can be used to exchange and share information and to provide feedback to staff, adult learners and other persons involved. In the European Peer Review, the results of the formative review are addressed primarily to the reviewed provider, to be used for internal quality development.

## **Informal Learning**

Learning resulting from daily activities related to work, family or leisure and is not organised or structured in terms of objectives, time or learning support; it may be unintentional from the learner's perspective.

## **Learning Outcomes**

The set of knowledge, skills and/or competences an individual has acquired and/or is able to demonstrate after completion of a learning process, either formal, non-formal or informal.

## **Management of an Adult Learning Provider**

Person(s) responsible for managing the provider: these can be the directors, general managers, etc. plus department heads and other managers (i.e. financial managers, quality managers, etc.) or any other person(s) in charge of the decision-making process inside an Adult Learning Provider.

## **Non Formal Learning**

Learning which takes place through planned activities (in terms of learning objectives, learning time) where some form of learning support is present (e.g. student-teacher relationships).

## **Peers**

Peers are mostly colleagues from other adult learning providers, i.e., adult learning teaching staff (teachers and trainers) and adult learning support staff such as counsellors, tutors and coaches, managers, QM and evaluation staff, other adult learning provider staff, etc. They are external but work in a similar environment and have specific professional expertise and knowledge of the evaluated subject. They are independent and "persons of equal standing" with the persons whose performance is being reviewed.

Peers are sometimes also called "critical friends".

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Glossar wirkungsorientierte Evaluation, Univation - Institut für Evaluation Dr. Beywl & Associates GmbH, Köln (2004) and Nancy Van Note Chism: Peer Review of Teaching (1999).

## **Peer Review in Adult Learning**

Peer Review in Adult Learning is a form of external evaluation with the aim of supporting the reviewed adult learning provider in its quality assurance and quality development efforts.

An external group of experts, known as Peers, is invited to judge the quality of different fields of the adult learning provider, such as the quality of the adult learning provision of individual departments or of the entire organisation. During the evaluation process, the Peers usually visit the reviewed adult learning provider.

### **Peer Review Facilitator**

The Peer Review Facilitator is the person responsible for the organisation and the smooth running of the Peer Review at the adult learning provider. S/he will see to it that the Peers are selected and invited in due time, that the Self-Report is ready and forwarded to the Peers and that the Peer Visit is prepared. S/he will be also the primary contact person for the Peers during the whole Peer Review procedure.

### **Peer Review Network**

Peer Reviews can be carried out in networks of adult learning providers. This network may have been established for the purpose of conducting Peer Reviews or, alternatively, an existing network may have decided to carry out Peer Reviews. Peer Review Networks can prove a valuable means of exchanging good practice and working jointly on the improvement of the adult learning sub-sector. An example of a transnational network is the European Peer Review Network maintained by the European Peer Review Association (EPRA).

### **Peer Review Report**

The Peer Review Report is a written documentation of the Peer Review. It is drawn up by the Peers. Usually the Peer Coordinator, with the help of the Evaluation Expert, will write the report on the basis of notes taken by the Peers, internal discussions among the Peers and the outcomes of the communicative validation. All Peers will contribute to the report and the Peer Team as a whole is responsible for the Peer Review Report.

### **Peer Tandems**

Peer Tandems are pairs of Peers. For all activities concerning data collection it is recommended that two Peers be present at any given time. This is an important precondition for a fair and equitable process since, with two peers involved, the probability of subjective and arbitrary judgements can be reduced substantially (principle of dual control). Two persons will also be able to take in more than one person. In practice, this means that the Peer Team splits up into pairs – Peer Tandems – and carries out different activities at the same time, thus making the process more efficient.

## **Quality in Adult Learning**

Quality is a complex, multi-dimensional and flexible concept. All definitions of quality are context-bound in terms of place, topic under discussion, expectations and purpose. Four core dimensions of quality in adult learning are generally accepted namely:

- Equity (in access and participation),
- Efficiency (the ratio of costs to benefits),
- Effectiveness (positive means-end relationships),
- Relevance (provision of an effective route to and support for, personal and social change).

For the European Peer Review in Adult Learning procedure, 11 Quality Areas have been defined to review and assess the quality of adult learning provision.

### **Recognition of Learning Outcomes**

Process of attesting officially achieved learning outcomes through the awarding of units or qualifications.

### **Recognition of Prior Learning**

Validation of learning outcomes, whether from formal education or non-formal or informal learning, acquired before requesting validation.

### **Self-evaluation of an Adult Learning Provider**

Self-evaluation is an evaluation carried out by the adult learning providers themselves. It is an important approach for fostering quality assurance and quality development at an institutional level. For a European Peer Review to take place, a self-evaluation must first have been carried out. Results of the self-evaluation are an important basis for the Peer Review. They are usually documented in a Self-Report.

### **Self-Report**

The Self-Report comprises the findings of the self-evaluation of the adult learning provider carried out prior to the Peer Review. It is the basic document for the Peer Review.

### **Stakeholders (in Adult Learning)**

Stakeholders in Adult Learning are:

- Adult learners (current, former and future),
- Adult learning teaching staff (teachers and trainers),
- Adult learning support staff (counsellors, tutors and coaches, managers, QM and evaluation staff, other staff, etc),
- Other adult learning providers as well as other kind of lifelong learning providers coming from other education and training sub-sectors ranging from schools, to VET providers to Higher Education (as cooperation partners in the provision of adult learning, providing participants, taking in participants),
- Enterprises (as cooperation partners in the provision of formal adult learning, as current and prospective employers of adults and as providers of non-formal learning in the form of work based training),
- Education and training authorities in general, especially adult learning authorities,
- Institutions/service units providing assessment and validation of prior non formal and informal learning,
- Institutions/service units providing educational and vocational guidance for adults,
- Social partners,
- Regional/local authorities res. municipalities,
- Awarding bodies for qualifications and recognition of prior learning,
- NGOs and civil society organisations,
- Employment services,
- Experts and researchers,
- Volunteering associations, actors from the cultural sector.



The inclusion of various relevant groups of stakeholders in the whole review process is highly recommended. First of all, high-quality evaluation calls for the involvement of stakeholders in the process<sup>11</sup>. Secondly, the importance of stakeholders in quality assurance and development has repeatedly been emphasised as an important aspect of European and national education and training policies.

### **Summative Evaluation**

Summative evaluation<sup>12</sup> aims at arriving at final conclusions concerning quality and usefulness of the evaluation object, which may be, for example, a Quality Area, an entire organisation, a programme, a project, a product, an intervention, a policy or a person. Summative evaluation is geared towards quality control and external accountability. It often uses quantitative and comparative information to make recommendations on possible actions, such as retaining, enlarging or reducing the evaluation object. Summative evaluations thus also support the process of decision-making by political authorities and funding bodies.

### **Triangulation**

In social research, the approach of including different methods and sources is called triangulation. Using different methods and different sources of information in the collection of data contributes to the quality of the evaluation in terms of objectivity, reliability and validity. Soliciting diverse points of view from different stakeholders during the Peer Visit will enable the Peers to gain a more accurate and complete picture.

### **Validation of Learning Outcomes**

Process of confirmation by an authorised body that an individual has acquired learning outcomes measured against a relevant standard.

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. the Standards for Evaluation of Educational Programmes of the Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation (1994).

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Glossar wirkungsorientierte Evaluation, Univation-Institut für Evaluation Dr. Beywl & Associates GmbH, Köln (2004) and Nancy Van Note Chism: Peer Review of Teaching (1999).

## XI. Project Partnership

### **PROMOTER**

**Associazione FORMA.Azione SRL (Italy)**

Website: [www.azione.com](http://www.azione.com)

Contact: Sylvia Liuti, Chiara Palazzetti (euprojects@azione.com)

### **PARTNERS**

**Regione Umbria, Regional Governmental Body (Italy)**

Website: [www.regione.umbria.it](http://www.regione.umbria.it)

Contact: Antonietta Petetti (apetetti@regione.umbria.it)

**LETU – Lithuanian Education Trade Union (Lithuania)**

Website: [www.svietimoprofsajunga.lt](http://www.svietimoprofsajunga.lt)

Contact: Tatjana Babrauskiene (tania.bab@gmail.com)

**CECOA - Centro de Formação Profissional para o Comércio e Afins (Portugal)**

Website: [www.cecoa.pt](http://www.cecoa.pt)

Contact: Cristina Dimas ([cristina.dimas@cecoa.pt](mailto:cristina.dimas@cecoa.pt))

**EPRA – European Peer Review Association (Austria)**

Website: [www.peer-review-network.eu](http://www.peer-review-network.eu)

Contact: Maria Gutknecht-Gmeiner ([info@peer-review-network.eu](mailto:info@peer-review-network.eu))

**MUT – Malta Union of Teachers (Malta)**

Website: [www.mut.org.mt](http://www.mut.org.mt)

Contact: Kevin Bonello ([info@mut.org.mt](mailto:info@mut.org.mt))

**Corvinus University of Budapest – Observatory Center for Educational Development (Hungary)**

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