

# **EIGHT YEARS OF QUALITY ASSURANCE PEER LEARNING**

## Disclaimer

This report has been prepared by the European Training Foundation.

Authors: Mounir Baati, Nadezda Solodjankina (ETF)

When citing this report, please use the following wording: European Training Foundation (2025), 8 Years of Quality Assurance Peer Learning, Turin

The contents of the report are the sole responsibility of the ETF and do not necessarily reflect the views of the EU institutions.

© European Training Foundation, 2025

Except otherwise noted, the reuse of this document is authorised under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 international (CC BY 4.0) licence (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>). This means that reuse is allowed provided appropriate credit is given and any changes are indicated. For any use or reproduction of photos or other material that is not owned by the European Training Foundation, permission must be sought directly from the copyright holders.

# PREFACE

This working paper presents a comprehensive overview of the Peer Visit methodology as implemented within the European Training Foundation (ETF) Quality Assurance (QA) Forum, with a particular focus on its application and lessons learned in the field of Vocational Education and Training (VET). Peer Visits have emerged as a valuable mechanism for external feedback and mutual learning, designed to support participating countries in enhancing their quality assurance practices through structured collaboration and professional exchange. Drawing on experiences gained since 2017, this text offers insights into the practicalities of organising Peer Visits, from preparation and delivery to feedback and follow-up, outlining both the benefits for host institutions and visiting peers. It further explores the critical elements that underpin successful visits—including clarity of focus, openness to feedback, and effective communication with stakeholders—highlighting the importance of a robust framework and reflective practice. By sharing the accumulated knowledge and recommendations arising from numerous visits across diverse national contexts, this document aims to inform and inspire Forum members, policy-makers, and practitioners committed to advancing quality assurance in VET systems across Europe and neighbouring regions.

# CONTENTS

---

PREFACE	3
---------	---

---

CONTENTS	4
Overview of Peer Visits	5
1. Organisation of the Peer Visit	5
2. Lessons Learned from the Organisation of Peer Visits	6
3. Recommendations for Organisers of Peer Visits	7

---

## Overview of Peer Visits

A Peer Visit, within the framework of the European Training Foundation (ETF) Quality Assurance (QA) Forum, serves as a form of external feedback in which a group of peer experts is invited to support a Forum member with the development of its quality assurance practices. The peers are the national contact persons appointed by their institutions (Ministry of Education, VET, qualifications or quality assurance authorities etc.) to represent them in the forum. The primary aim is to facilitate the improvement of selected quality assurance measures through the sharing of expertise, constructive critique, and mutual learning among Forum members. This process not only promotes the exchange of information and discussion but also provides opportunities for participants to strengthen their competencies in quality assurance, reflect on their approaches, and offer support to other countries.

Peer Visits were specifically designed to advance the core objectives of the ETF QA Forum in Vocational Education and Training (VET). These objectives include promoting quality assurance at a system level across member countries, enhancing transparency and comparability, fostering trust and intercultural communication, and encouraging networking and cooperation among member institutions. Unlike Study Visits, Peer Visits place a strong emphasis on professional feedback delivered by peers through a structured procedure. The intention is that the peer feedback and counselling outcomes are beneficial for the host institution and can provide valuable insights for improving the chosen quality assurance measures.

By hosting a Peer Visit, Forum members undertake an analytical self-assessment of their selected quality assurance measure. This involves preparing a national context report in collaboration with national stakeholders, reflecting on strengths and weaknesses, and seeking feedback from peers. The process introduces hosts to external perspectives, helps them learn to receive and implement feedback, and exposes them to good practices that can further enhance their quality assurance initiatives.

Peer visitors gain exposure to the host's national quality assurance approach and its selected measure. They receive guidance and learn about effective practices that can be adapted for improvement in their own countries. Additionally, they have the opportunity to practise delivering critical yet constructive feedback and participate in mutual learning with their peers and the host institution's representatives.

### 1. Organisation of the Peer Visit

The Peer Visit is structured into four distinct phases:

#### Phase 1 – Preparation

This phase typically spans three to five months. The host Forum member institution, in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, plans and organises the Peer Visit. A national context report is produced, serving as the key document that outlines all relevant aspects of the visit. The peers are briefed and prepared for their roles and responsibilities, and a detailed timetable (agenda) is established for Phase 2.

#### Phase 2 – The Peer Visit

Phase 2 lasts two to three days, during which the Peer Visit occurs. The host institution presents its system-level quality assurance approach, highlighting the measure selected for review. A clearly defined agenda guides the activities, which may include presentations by stakeholders and on-site visits to relevant organisations. Peers observe, participate in discussions, and deepen their understanding of the selected measure for peer feedback.

## Phase 3 – Feedback Process

In this phase, which usually takes two to three hours, peers provide feedback to the host institution during a moderated final session. Suggestions for improvement are made regarding the quality assurance measure. The host institution may opt to receive feedback from individual peers or from the group collectively, depending on its preference.

## Phase 4 – Follow-up

The final phase focuses on the analysis and application of the feedback to drive improvements at the VET system level. The follow-up process is divided into two steps: first, the host institution analyses and communicates the feedback to relevant stakeholders; second, appropriate aspects of the feedback are incorporated into reform processes. To facilitate this, a systematic approach based on the quality cycle (Plan-Do-Check-Act) is recommended.

# 2. Lessons Learned from the Organisation of Peer Visits

## Overview of Peer Visits Organised

Since the first peer visit in 2017, the ETF QA team has coordinated a total of seven peer visits, with the most recent held in May 2025. Further visits are scheduled for November 2025 and two more in 2026. These peer visits have been hosted by Tunisia, Montenegro, Georgia, Moldova, Armenia, Serbia, and North Macedonia. Through these experiences, the team has acquired valuable insights into the organisation and execution of peer visits.

## The Value of a Structured Framework

A key lesson learned is the significance of having an established framework for organising peer visits. The ETF QA team developed a manual specifically to guide the Peer Visit procedure. This manual walks users through each phase of the process (as specified in the previous section), outlining the roles and responsibilities of host Forum member institutions, peers, and observers. It also provides detailed instructions for host institutions on preparing a national context report, which should cover the national approach to quality assurance in vocational education and training and describe the selected quality assurance measures.

The role of observers is to observe and reflect on the process, especially phase 2 (Peer Visit) and phase 3 (peer feedback). Their main task is to observe if the Peer Visit procedure was implemented effectively and efficiently. Observers can provide valuable feedback on the procedure itself and areas for improvement.

Additionally, the manual supports peers in preparing for visits and in providing critical yet supportive feedback. The guidance, the templates and the worksheets contained within the manual proved highly beneficial in organising the peer visits and addressing various issues encountered during the process.

## Significance of the Preparatory Phase

The preparatory phase is crucial for the overall success of a peer visit. During this stage, the host country is encouraged to identify the specific quality assurance measures to be reviewed. Some measures, such as accreditation processes or the assessment of schools, are clearly related to quality assurance. Others, particularly those concerning work-based learning (WBL) or continuous professional development (CPD), may be less directly associated.

The host country should determine which quality assurance processes are linked to WBL, such as certification of tutors or companies hosting learners, as well as those connected to CPD, like the assessment of trainers and the tools and methodologies used.

It is also essential for the host to identify the assessment questions that reviewers should address. Clearly defined, focused questions are more likely to yield useful answers, whereas broad questions tend to result in broad, less actionable responses.

### **Gathering Information During Peer Visits**

During the peer visit itself, peers are tasked with collecting information that will enable them to provide meaningful feedback and answer the established assessment questions. It is vital that peers have the opportunity to engage with a broad range of stakeholders from both the public and private sectors. Across the visits organised by the ETF, peers particularly valued the exchanges with learners and former trainees, which enriched their understanding of the context and effectiveness of the quality assurance measures under review.

### **Challenges and Approaches in Providing Feedback**

Providing effective feedback at the end of a peer visit can be challenging. Peers are asked to identify both strengths and weaknesses—areas for improvement—as well as to propose suggestions for future enhancements. It is essential that feedback and conclusions are grounded in facts and evidence. Peers are encouraged to offer reflective, constructive, and motivating feedback, acting as critical friends who recognise that well-considered criticism can drive positive change. However, feedback must always be delivered sensitively and appropriately.

Experience has shown that it often takes forum members several participations in peer visits before they are able to provide truly constructive feedback. Initially, there was a tendency among peers to focus predominantly on weaknesses within the system, sometimes neglecting aspects that were working well. In some cases, recommendations offered by peers were unrealistic or not feasible to implement. Over time, participants have become more adept at striking a balance and ensuring that feedback is both actionable and supportive.

## **3. Recommendations for Organisers of Peer Visits**

### **Willingness to Receive Feedback**

A peer visit serves as a form of external evaluation conducted by peers. As such, the host country must be prepared to accept feedback, including both positive and negative aspects. It is vital that the host fully comprehends the importance of being open to this feedback in order to gain the most benefit from the peer review process.

### **Clearly Identifying the Area to Be Reviewed**

It is highly improbable that peers can comprehensively review an entire VET system during a brief visit to a country. Therefore, it is strongly recommended to concentrate on a specific issue or dimension of the VET system for the peer review. Clearly defining the focus area ensures the visit is productive and manageable within the available timeframe. The use of assessment questions is instrumental in shaping and clarifying the precise area to be reviewed.

### **Managing and Sharing Feedback**

The final phase of the peer visit involves determining how to address the feedback received. Some recommendations may be straightforward to implement, while others may prove more challenging and could require changes to existing regulations. Regardless of the complexity, it is highly recommended that the outcomes and recommendations resulting from the peer visit are shared with a broad range of stakeholders. Planning for this dissemination should begin in the initial phase of the process, ensuring that sharing the results is integrated into the overall approach from the outset.

## Annex 1: Overview of the peer visits already organised by the ETF QA team, countries and quality assurance measures reviewed

[Peer visit to the North Macedonia](#), 13-15 May 2025 on quality assurance of work-based learning

[Peer visit to Serbia](#), 19-21 November 2024 on the quality assurance mechanisms supporting career guidance and counselling

[Peer visit to Armenia](#), 21-23 May 2024 on the formative assessment and employer's role in preparation of assignments for students

[Peer visit to Moldova](#), 16-18 May 2023 on evaluation of the effectiveness and efficiency of external quality assurance mechanisms for the implementation of vocational training/vocational retraining programs

[Peer visit to Georgia](#), 6-8 December 2022 on evaluation of the effectiveness and efficiency of external quality assurance mechanisms for the implementation of CVET (Continuous VET) vocational training/vocational retraining programs

[Peer visit to Montenegro](#), 30-31 May 2022 on the methodology for external evaluation in VET schools

[Peer visit to Tunisia](#), 10-12 April 2019 on the certification process of pedagogical competences of trainers

Links to the resource page on OpenSpace: [Group Resources](#) | [Open Space](#)

## Annex 2: ETF approach to quality and quality assurance

### [Promoting quality assurance in vocational education and training: The ETF approach | ETF](#)

The European Training Foundation's (ETF) approach to promoting systemic and systematic quality assurance in vocational education and training (VET) is set out in this working paper. Quality assurance in VET is summarised by the ETF as the measures established to verify that processes and procedures are in place, which aim to ensure the quality and quality improvement of VET. The ETF uses the following definition of VET: 'education and training which aim to equip people with knowledge, know-how, skills and/or competences required in particular occupations or more broadly on the labour market'.