

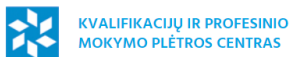


PEER REVIEW FOR
GREEN AND DIGITAL
VET

Digital Peer Review for green and digital VET

WP 4 : Impact Assessment & Policy Recommendations

Deliverable: Policy recommendations



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About the project

The *Digital Peer Review for Green and Digital VET (DIGITAL PR)* project, co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme, was launched to modernise and digitalise the European Peer Review methodology used in vocational education and training (VET). Coordinated by the Lithuanian Qualifications and VET Development Centre (KPMPC) with partners from Lithuania, Italy, Portugal and Belgium, the project combines long-standing European experience with the priorities of the digital and green transitions.

Its main objective is to adapt the established European Peer Review methodology to current realities by embedding sustainability and digital readiness into every phase of the review. The project has produced:

- An updated EU Manual integrating digitalisation and green education into the Peer Review quality areas;
- A digital platform and toolbox simplifying the process and enabling online and hybrid reviews;
- Comprehensive peer training materials for both newcomers and experienced reviewers;
- Piloting and validation activities in three countries, confirming the methodology's effectiveness, flexibility, and policy relevance.

Through this work, DIGITAL PR has created a bridge between traditional quality assurance approaches and the demands of modern, future-oriented VET systems. It has built a European community of trained peers, fostered institutional trust and transparency, and demonstrated that peer review can drive both quality improvement and cultural change within education systems.

The Peer Review Methodology: Principles and Purpose

Peer Review is a formative, collaborative approach to quality assurance and development in vocational education and training (VET). Unlike inspections or audits, which often focus on compliance, Peer Review emphasises **mutual learning, professional dialogue, and trust**. It is carried out by peers – professionals from similar educational or organisational contexts – who observe, analyse, and provide constructive feedback to one another on selected aspects of quality.

The methodology is built on four fundamental principles: **voluntariness, equality, transparency, and development**. Institutions choose to engage in Peer Review because they wish to learn, not because they are obliged to. Reviewers and reviewed institutions stand on equal footing, ensuring openness and credibility. All stages are transparent, from self-evaluation to reporting, and the purpose is always developmental rather than judgmental.

Typically, the Peer Review process follows four phases reflecting the quality cycle:

1. **Preparation** – the institution undertakes self-evaluation and selects the focus areas;
2. **Peer Visit** – external peers observe, interview, and collect evidence;

3. **Reporting** – peers provide oral and written feedback highlighting strengths and improvement areas;
4. **Follow-Up** – the institution implements an improvement plan and reflects on progress.

Because it combines **external perspective and internal ownership**, Peer Review fosters both accountability and capacity building. It encourages institutions to look critically at their practices, learn from others, and continuously improve. Over two decades of implementation in Europe have shown that this approach strengthens professional communities, enhances transparency, and builds a shared culture of quality based on dialogue and trust — values that the *Digital and Green Peer Review* project brings into the digital age.

The Digital Peer Review Platform

At the heart of the *Digital Peer Review for Green and Digital VET* project lies the **Peer Review Platform** <https://www.peerreviewplatform.eu/>, a digital environment designed to make the entire peer review process more accessible, efficient, and sustainable. It translates the traditional paper-based methodology into an interactive online workflow that connects institutions, peers, and stakeholders across Europe.

The platform serves several key functions. All core documents—the Initial Information Sheet, Self-Report, Peer Report, and Improvement Plan—are integrated and interoperable, ensuring smooth data transfer and avoiding duplication. Built-in templates and guiding questions ensure methodological consistency while allowing for national adaptations.

The platform supports **hybrid and fully online reviews**, reducing travel costs and the ecological footprint of activities. It includes scheduling tools, secure file sharing, and communication functions for preparatory meetings and feedback sessions. Each user—peer, coordinator, facilitator, or institutional representative—has a tailored dashboard that tracks progress through all phases of the review.

Guidelines for Implementation of Digital and Green Peer Review

The implementation of the Digital and Green Peer Review methodology requires careful preparation, structured organisation, and a shared understanding of its formative nature. The process begins with institutional commitment. Participation in a peer review must always be voluntary and supported by the institution's leadership, which should designate a facilitator responsible for coordination, communication, and overall organisation. This facilitator ensures that all staff are informed, that sufficient time is allocated, and that the review is embedded within the provider's internal quality assurance cycle.

In the planning phase, each institution selects one or two Quality Areas from the European framework that are most relevant to its development priorities. These might include, for instance, teaching and learning, digitalisation, or green education. The focus areas should

reflect the outcomes of internal self-assessment or stakeholder feedback. Once selected, the institution carries out a structured self-evaluation, summarised in a concise Self-Report prepared through the Digital Peer Review Platform. The report should provide clear and factual information on the chosen areas, including evidence, data, and reflections on strengths and challenges. To ensure transparency and ownership, teachers, learners, and external partners are encouraged to contribute to the self-evaluation process.

Building an effective peer team is essential for the credibility and quality of the review. Typically, the team consists of three to four peers, combining both experienced and newly trained reviewers, with balanced professional and gender representation. All peers are expected to have completed accredited training on the Digital and Green Peer Review methodology and to act independently and objectively. The team is coordinated by a Peer Coordinator who leads the process and ensures that tasks are distributed fairly, while the institutional facilitator supports communication and logistics. A preparatory online meeting is held in advance to clarify expectations, agree on the scope and questions to be addressed, and finalise the agenda for the visit.

The peer review visit itself is the central moment of the process. It normally lasts one and a half to two days and includes a sequence of structured activities such as introductory briefings, interviews with staff, learners, and external partners, observation of teaching or facilities, and document analysis. Throughout the visit, the atmosphere should be collegial and based on trust. Peers act as “critical friends,” engaging in open dialogue, verifying evidence, and formulating balanced feedback that acknowledges both good practices and areas for improvement. The visit concludes with an oral feedback session in which peers share their preliminary findings with the institution’s representatives in a constructive and transparent manner.

The methodology integrates digital and sustainable practices into all stages of implementation. The Digital Peer Review Platform is used for documentation, note-taking, and communication between peers and institutions. It allows most preparatory and follow-up meetings to be organised online, reducing travel and thus lowering the ecological footprint of the process. All forms and reports are completed digitally, following the principle of “paperless quality assurance.” In this way, the peer review procedure itself becomes an example of how environmental and technological responsibility can coexist with professional quality work.

Within two weeks after the visit, the peer team prepares the final Peer Review Report. This report, written in a concise and professional style, summarises the process, the findings, and the main recommendations. The reviewed institution is invited to check the factual accuracy of the draft report before it is finalised. Once approved, the report may be shared internally for improvement purposes or, with mutual agreement, published on the Peer Review Platform to contribute to the wider European community of practice.

The institution then develops an Improvement Plan based on the peer feedback. This plan should identify concrete actions that are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound, ensuring that findings translate into tangible progress. The plan becomes part of the institution’s regular quality assurance cycle and should be monitored during the following academic year. To reinforce learning, a meta-reflection meeting is recommended three to six months after the review. Such meetings allow the institution and peers to discuss progress, identify lessons learned, and capture good practices that can inform future reviews.

Successful implementation of peer review depends on respecting certain quality standards. The process must remain transparent, independent, and evidence-based, while all participants adhere to confidentiality and ethical principles. Peers should act with competence and professionalism, and feedback must be constructive and focused on improvement rather than evaluation. The digital and green dimensions should be visible throughout the process, and inclusion and gender balance should be actively promoted. Above all, peer review should be treated not as a one-off event but as part of a continuous cycle of institutional learning and development.

When properly implemented, the Digital and Green Peer Review becomes a strategic instrument for strengthening quality culture in vocational education and training. It complements inspections and accreditations by focusing on reflection, dialogue, and professional exchange. For institutions, it provides credible external perspectives and inspiration for development; for peers, it represents an opportunity for professional growth and cross-border collaboration; and for national systems, it offers a formative mechanism aligned with the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework. Ultimately, the success of the methodology depends not on procedures alone but on the mindset it cultivates—one based on trust, openness, and shared responsibility for quality improvement across the European VET community.

Policy Recommendations

Institutional Level (VET providers, schools, validation centres)

At the institutional level, the Digital and Green Peer Review methodology should become an integral component of quality assurance and development strategies within vocational schools, training providers, and validation centres. The following recommendations outline the main directions for embedding peer review as a sustainable, structured, and value-adding process aligned with European and national quality frameworks.

1. Integrate Peer Review into Institutional Quality Assurance Cycles

Institutions are encouraged to formally embed peer review within their regular self-evaluation and planning cycles. This integration ensures that feedback from peers is systematically linked to the institution's quality management system, rather than implemented as an isolated activity. Such an approach is consistent with the Council Recommendation on VET (2020, Article 15), which calls for continuous improvement and evidence-based quality development. In Lithuania, peer review should be recognised as part of the procedures established under the *Order of the Minister of Education, Science and Sport on Quality Assurance in VET (V-15, 2017)*. In Italy, it should align with regional quality assurance frameworks coordinated by the EQAVET National Reference Point (NRP), and in Portugal, it is recommended that it complement the Portuguese System of VET Providers Quality Assurance and

Certification run by DGERT, ensuring coherence between institutional and national evaluation instruments.

2. Establish Dedicated Peer Review Leadership Teams

To guarantee sustainability and professional coordination, each institution should establish a dedicated peer review steering group or leadership team. This team should oversee the full review cycle—from self-assessment and preparation to follow-up and improvement planning—reflecting the EQAVET principle of stakeholder participation. In Portugal, such teams could include, depending on the type of qualification via and services offered, teachers/trainers, pedagogical coordinators, managers, mentors, tutors, instructors, assessors, counsellors reflecting, also the principle of stakeholders involvement.. In Lithuania, school-based quality teams should follow the participatory approach prescribed in the *General Education Quality Assurance Framework (2020)*, involving representatives of management, teachers, learners, and local community stakeholders.

3. Narrow the Scope of Each Review to Ensure Depth and Focus

Each peer review cycle should concentrate on one or two Quality Areas to allow for thorough analysis and meaningful feedback. The *EU Peer Review Manual* (Cedefop, 2015) recommends this focused approach to enhance the depth and quality of reflection. In Italy, institutions could prioritise teaching and learning, or partnerships with external stakeholders, in line with *Regione Umbria* guidance on dual VET. A limited scope ensures that reviews are feasible within realistic timeframes and that feedback is actionable, evidence-based, and aligned with institutional improvement priorities.

4. Strengthen the Role of the Self-Assessment Report

The self-assessment report should serve as the central reference document throughout the peer review process. Institutions are advised to develop concise, well-structured, and evidence-based reports that clearly outline strengths, challenges, and planned improvements. This approach is aligned with EQAVET Indicator 1, which emphasises the relevance of systematic self-evaluation to quality assurance. In Portugal, DGERT requires explicit links between evidence, pedagogical practice, and organisational management—these should be reflected in the structure of institutional self-assessment reports. In Italy and Lithuania, reports should similarly be grounded in factual data and linked to measurable outcomes, providing a robust foundation for peer dialogue.

5. Embed Digitalisation and Sustainability Across Pedagogical and Organisational Practice

Embedding digital and green principles in pedagogy and management is essential to align with both the *Digital Education Action Plan (2021–2027)* and the *European Green*



Deal (2019). In Italy, VET providers should align their digital teaching strategies with the *Piano Nazionale Scuola Digitale* and promote the use of blended learning environments. Portuguese training centres should demonstrate progress in the dematerialisation of administrative processes as part of the *Plano de Ação para a Transição Digital*. Lithuanian schools should systematically integrate sustainability principles and green competences into curricula and daily operations, in line with the *National Education Strategy 2021–2030*. By integrating these dimensions, peer review contributes not only to institutional improvement but also to environmental responsibility and technological readiness.

6. Invest in the Professional Development of Staff as Peers

Institutions should recognise participation in peer review as a structured form of professional development for teachers, trainers, and managers. This aligns with the *Council Recommendation on Teachers and Trainers (2019)*, which identifies peer learning as a key method for professionalisation and competence enhancement. Providers are encouraged to allocate specific time and resources for staff to participate in peer training, both at national and European levels, and to formally acknowledge peer reviewer roles within professional appraisal systems.

7. Ensure Active Stakeholder Participation

Effective peer review depends on inclusive participation of all relevant stakeholders, including employers, learners, and community representatives. The *Council Recommendation on VET (2020)* highlights such partnerships as essential for improving quality and relevance. In Italy, peer reviews should include input from regional employer associations and local training networks. In Portugal, DGERT and VNFIL policy makers (example: ANQEP, I,P) are encouraged to participate as external observers or peers to ensure methodological coherence. In Lithuania, learner councils and representatives of local labour-market institutions should be systematically involved, promoting shared ownership of outcomes and decisions.

8. Reduce Duplication and Streamline Documentation

Institutions are advised to simplify documentation procedures and ensure that information provided during peer review is directly transferable to internal and national quality assurance tools. This recommendation reflects the EQAVET principle of efficiency and the digital transformation goals of the *Digital Education Action Plan*. Lithuanian schools may align their peer review templates with KPMPC's existing online QA instruments; Portuguese providers are encouraged to harmonise peer review documentation with DGERT certification procedures and templates and QUALIFICA Centers Quality Charter guidelines (for VNFIL providers); and Italian regions could integrate peer review reporting formats into regional QA databases.

9. Translate Feedback into Concrete Improvement Plans





The results of peer reviews must lead to measurable change. Institutions should translate the feedback and recommendations received into concrete, *SMART* improvement plans (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound), ensuring that actions are realistic and progress is monitored. Cedefop's *Handbook on Peer Review (2015)* provides a model for drafting such plans. In Lithuania, improvement actions derived from peer review should be integrated into annual school improvement documents; in Portugal and Italy, they should be reported to the relevant regional, national or sectoral quality authorities as evidence of continuous development.

10. Promote Reflective Practice Through Structured Follow-Up

Sustained impact depends on regular reflection and follow-up. Institutions should schedule structured follow-up meetings three to six months after each review to assess progress, share experiences, and document lessons learned. This practice corresponds to Phase 4 of the EQAVET quality cycle—review and evaluation. Lithuanian pilots under the DIGITAL PR project have already demonstrated the value of meta-reflection sessions for developing a deeper culture of trust and learning. Italian and Portuguese providers are encouraged to adopt similar approaches, using reflection sessions to consolidate learning and to ensure that peer review becomes a permanent feature of institutional quality culture.

National Level (ministries, agencies, national reference points, regional authorities)

At the national level, the successful mainstreaming of the Digital and Green Peer Review methodology depends on the commitment of ministries, quality assurance agencies, and national reference points to formally recognise and support its use. The following recommendations aim to ensure that peer review becomes a stable, regulated, and well-resourced component of national quality assurance ecosystems across participating countries.

1. Recognise Peer Review within National Quality Assurance Systems

National authorities should officially embed peer review in legislation, strategic frameworks, and procedural guidelines governing quality assurance in vocational education and training. This formal recognition ensures that peer review is acknowledged as a valid and complementary method of formative evaluation alongside inspections and accreditation/certification mechanisms. In Lithuania, this would entail incorporating peer review into the national VET Quality Assurance system under *Order V-15* and subsequent regulations of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport. In Portugal, recognition could be granted through the Portuguese System of VET Providers Quality Assurance and Certification Framework or through the QUALIFICA Centers Quality Charter (for VNFIL providers), while in Italy, peer review





should be referenced EQAVET NRPs actions, regional quality assurance decrees and training standards aligned with the *EQAVET* principles. Such institutionalisation reinforces credibility and promotes consistency across providers and regions.

2. Develop National Registers of Trained Peers

To build sustainable capacity and professionalise the practice of peer review, national authorities should establish and maintain national registers of trained peers. This recommendation directly responds to the *Council Recommendation on VET (2020, Article 17)*, which emphasises capacity building for quality assurance. In Lithuania, the *National Reference Point (KPMPC)* could host and update the register as part of its QA coordination mandate. In Portugal, EQAVET NRP could be mobilised to make available a list of certified peers, while Italian regional authorities could maintain corresponding registers through their EQAVET NRPs. The creation of such registers ensures transparency, enables systematic matching between peers and institutions, and supports ongoing professional recognition.

3. Accredite Peer Review Training Programmes

National frameworks for continuing professional development should formally accredit training programmes for peer reviewers and facilitators. This ensures that peer training meets recognised quality standards and leads to certified learning outcomes, consistent with the *European Approach to Micro-Credentials (2022)*. In Italy, the *Legge 107/2015* framework on teacher training provides the appropriate structure for recognising peer review courses within CPD portfolios. In Portugal, integration with the offer of continuing training for trainers run by *Centro Nacional de Qualificação de Formadores* would allow VET trainers to acquire certified competences linked to peer evaluation. In Lithuania, peer training should be included in the *Teacher Professional Development Programme*, granting participants recognised certificates or micro-credentials. This approach strengthens the quality and consistency of national peer pools and ensures the long-term sustainability of the methodology.

4. Provide Financial and Workload Support for Implementation

The long-term success of peer review depends on adequate financial and administrative support. National authorities should ensure that institutions and staff participating in peer reviews have access to dedicated funding and workload flexibility. This recommendation reflects *Article 22 of the Council Recommendation on VET (2020)*, which calls for sufficient resources to ensure quality assurance effectiveness. In Italy and Portugal, funding could be drawn from *European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)* allocations for continuous quality improvement. Lithuania could allocate national improvement grants via the Ministry of Education. Recognising peer review participation as eligible for official workload time ensures that it is seen not as an additional burden but as an integral part of quality development.



5. Publish National Templates and Guidelines for Peer Review Documentation

To promote coherence, comparability, and transparency, national agencies should provide standardised templates and guidance for peer review documentation. These templates should follow the EQAVET principle of transparency and allow adaptation to national contexts. In Portugal, the alignment need to be with the Portuguese System of VET Providers Quality Assurance and Certification and the QUALIFICA Centers Quality Charter (for VNFIL providers). In Lithuania, templates should be compatible with existing school self-assessment formats to ensure integration within national QA tools. In Italy, national authorities should harmonise templates with regional QA reporting systems. The adoption of unified formats ensures clarity, reduces duplication, and facilitates the aggregation of data for national and European reporting.

6. Invest in Interoperable National Digital Platforms

National digital platforms are essential for managing peer review processes efficiently and ensuring alignment with the *Digital Education Action Plan (2021–2027)*. Each country should invest in the interoperability of its existing QA systems with the Digital Peer Review Platform developed under the DIGITAL PR project. In Lithuania, this could be achieved by linking peer review tools with *KPMPC* databases and existing institutional QA portals. In Portugal, the interoperability could be feasible by linking DGERT certification platform with peer review functionalities, and in Italy, regional EQAVET systems should be upgraded to include digital peer review modules. Interoperability promotes data coherence, reduces administrative workload, and supports the transition to fully digital quality management processes.

7. Integrate Peer Review Results into National Monitoring and Policy Feedback Loops

National monitoring systems should incorporate the results of peer reviews as a valid source of evidence for assessing institutional quality and informing policy development. This aligns with *EQAVET Indicator 10*, which calls for the use of feedback and results in policy-making. Peer review findings and improvement plans can provide valuable qualitative insights that complement quantitative indicators, allowing policymakers to identify emerging trends and capacity-building needs. In this way, peer review becomes not only a local developmental tool but also a strategic mechanism for national policy learning and system improvement.

8. Support and Finance National Communities of Practice

National authorities should actively promote and fund the creation of peer review communities of practice, thereby strengthening collaboration, networking, and continuous professional learning. The *Council Recommendation on VET (2020, Article 19)* encourages such communities as vehicles for innovation and mutual support. In Italy, sectoral and regional associations could serve as conveners of peer networks. In Portugal, VNFIL centres could function as hubs for peer learning and exchange, while



in Lithuania, teacher associations and VET provider networks could take on similar roles. These communities enhance sustainability, maintain engagement among trained peers, and create mechanisms for sharing good practice beyond project frameworks.

9. Link Peer Review to Teacher and Trainer Professional Standards

National teacher and trainer standards should explicitly include competences related to peer review and quality assurance. In Lithuania, the *Teacher Professional Standards (2022)* should be updated to recognise peer evaluation skills as part of professional growth and leadership. In Portugal, trainer profile is defined under *Ordinance n.º 214/2011* and foresees different ways to assure the development and continuous update of trainers' competences, one being the continuing training of trainers where peer evaluation competences could be incorporated, reinforcing that peer learning is acknowledged as an element of professional excellence. In Italy, the Ministry of Education and regional education authorities should integrate peer review participation within the continuing professional development (CPD) obligations set by *MIUR* regulations. By embedding these competences in formal standards, peer review becomes a mainstream component of professional identity and teacher quality culture.

10. Publish Annual National Synthesis Reports on Peer Review Outcomes

Finally, national reference points and quality agencies should compile and publish annual synthesis reports based on anonymised peer review data. This practice aligns with EQAVET's system-level evaluation principles and ensures the circulation of knowledge and experience gained through peer review. It would be beneficial that Italy's EQAVET NRP, Portugal's DGERT and/or EQAVET NRP, and Lithuania's KPMPC prepare national summaries highlighting trends, common challenges, and examples of good practice. These reports would inform both national policy and European-level cooperation, serving as an evidence base for future reforms, training needs, and strategic planning.



European Level (European Commission, EQAVET, Erasmus+, networks)

At the European level, the *Digital and Green Peer Review* methodology represents a tested and transferable model that supports EU strategies on quality assurance, sustainability, and digital transformation in vocational education and training (VET). To ensure its long-term impact, the following measures should be undertaken within the European policy framework, promoting coherence, scalability, and recognition across Member States.

1. Endorse the Digital and Green Peer Review Methodology as a European Reference

The European Commission is encouraged to formally endorse the revised Digital and Green Peer Review methodology as a European reference tool within the framework of the *European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for VET (EQAVET)*. Integration into official EQAVET guidelines and documentation would ensure its visibility and encourage adoption across Member States. This endorsement would also contribute to the implementation of the *Council Recommendation on VET (2020)*, which calls for innovative, collaborative, and developmental approaches to quality assurance that foster trust, transparency, and mutual learning in European VET systems.

2. Publish European Guidance on the Organisation of Peer Reviews

The European Commission, in cooperation with EQAVET and Cedefop, should prepare a concise set of European guidance notes on the organisation and implementation of peer reviews. These guidelines should build upon the lessons learned from the *DIGITAL PR* pilots and earlier European peer review projects, ensuring consistency of standards while allowing national adaptation. The guidance should be aligned with the *European Education Area Strategic Framework (2020)* and include examples of good practice, recommended quality areas, templates for documentation, and indicators for measuring impact. Such a document would provide Member States with a clear and coherent reference point for integrating peer review into their national quality assurance policies.

3. Establish a European Peer Academy

The creation of a European Peer Academy would strengthen the professionalisation of peer reviewers, promote mobility, and ensure the sustainability of the methodology across borders. This initiative could be embedded within the *European Skills Agenda (2020)* and linked to the *Council Recommendation on Teachers and Trainers (2019)*. The Academy could coordinate training courses, workshops, and certification programmes for peers, provide opportunities for international exchanges, and support mentoring between experienced and new reviewers. It would also serve as a resource centre for research, innovation, and dissemination related to peer review, fostering a genuine European community of practice in VET quality assurance.

4. Develop a Common European Digital Platform

The European Commission need to invest in the development of a centralised, open-access digital platform for peer review, interoperable with national systems and consistent with the *Digital Education Action Plan (2021–2027)*. This platform should enable institutions across Europe to find peers, manage review processes, and share improvement results securely and efficiently. It should be based on open-source standards to ensure flexibility and sustainability, and include user-specific dashboards for providers, peers, and national authorities. A European platform would facilitate cross-border cooperation, support multilingual access, and reinforce transparency and comparability across Member States.

5. Support Thematic Cross-Border Clusters of Peer Reviews

The European Commission and Erasmus+ National Agencies should promote the organisation of thematic, cross-border peer review clusters focusing on key policy areas such as digitalisation, green competences, inclusion, or innovation. These clusters would operationalise *Erasmus+* priorities on cooperation and peer learning, allowing VET institutions from different countries to jointly analyse and improve specific aspects of provision. Clustered reviews could also serve as pilot initiatives for new European quality indicators and contribute directly to the *European Year of Skills* objectives, deepening mutual understanding and creating tangible European added value.

6. Link Peer Review Findings to Micro-Credentials and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF)

Peer review outcomes need to be connected to the broader European frameworks on skills recognition and professional development. This includes establishing links between peer review competences and the *European Qualifications Framework (EQF)* and recognising peer reviewer training as certified learning in line with the *Council Recommendation on a European Approach to Micro-Credentials (2022)*. Such integration would allow teachers, trainers other pedagogical staff and QA professionals to receive formal recognition for their engagement in peer learning and review activities, contributing to professional mobility and the creation of a transparent European skills ecosystem.

7. Incorporate Peer Review Findings into EU Policy Cycles and Monitoring

The European Commission, through EQAVET and Cedefop, should integrate synthesised peer review findings into annual and multiannual reports on the state of VET in Europe. This practice would provide qualitative insights to complement statistical indicators and inform EU policy guidance on digitalisation, sustainability, and inclusion. Regular analysis of anonymised data from national and cross-border reviews would strengthen evidence-based policymaking and support the alignment of national QA reforms with European strategic goals.

8. Promote the Inclusion of Smaller, Remote, and Less-Resourced Providers

European-level funding instruments, particularly within *Erasmus+* and *ESF+*, should explicitly support the participation of smaller, rural, or less digitally advanced VET providers in peer review activities. This measure aligns with the *Erasmus+ Inclusion and Diversity Strategy (2021–2027)*, ensuring that the benefits of peer learning are equitably distributed and that no institution is excluded due to size, location, or limited resources. Targeted support for these providers would contribute to territorial cohesion and enhance the representativeness of the European Peer Review community.

9. Align Peer Review with the European Green Deal and the Council Recommendation on Learning for Environmental Sustainability

Finally, European-level guidance should require peer review processes to explicitly assess and promote sustainability across all aspects of VET provision. Reviews should examine how institutions integrate environmental awareness, green competences, and sustainable operational practices into their teaching and management. This aligns directly with the objectives of the *European Green Deal (2019)* and the *Council Recommendation on Learning for Environmental Sustainability (2022)*. By embedding sustainability indicators within peer review frameworks, the European Commission would reinforce the commitment to a climate-neutral Europe and ensure that quality assurance contributes actively to the green transition of education and training systems.

Conclusions

The Digital and Green Peer Review project has demonstrated remarkable impact at multiple levels, proving that a methodology originally designed as a formative quality assurance tool can evolve into a catalyst for institutional change, professional development, and policy innovation. By embedding digitalisation and sustainability into the very fabric of the peer review process, the project has aligned itself not only with the priorities of participating institutions, but also with the wider European policy agenda.

At the **institutional level**, the project has helped schools, vocational training centres, and adult learning providers build stronger cultures of reflection and trust. Teachers, trainers, other pedagogical staff and managers reported that the process transformed evaluation from an external control mechanism into an opportunity for professional dialogue and learning. Improvement plans generated after reviews were not abstract documents, but concrete roadmaps for enhancing pedagogy, integrating digital tools, and embedding sustainability into everyday practice. Learners and employers were also brought into the process, ensuring that peer review contributed to a wider ecosystem of collaboration.

At the **professional level**, more than one hundred and thirty peers across Italy, Portugal, and Lithuania acquired new competences in quality assurance, digital methods, and green education. For newcomers, the project opened pathways into a new professional role; for experienced peers, it provided a valuable opportunity to update their skills and engage with emerging European priorities. The sense of belonging to a professional community of practice was consistently highlighted as one of the greatest achievements, contributing to motivation, confidence, and long-term engagement.

At the **system level**, the project made significant progress in linking peer review to national quality assurance frameworks. In Italy, collaboration with the National Reference Point strengthened regional recognition. In Portugal, the involvement of DGERT brought peer review into the mainstream of quality assurance processes. In Lithuania, the National Reference Point facilitated integration with school self-evaluation frameworks and supported the spread of reflective practice. In each case, the project demonstrated how peer review can complement inspections and accreditations, while remaining focused on developmental improvement.

At the **European level**, the project has validated a common methodology for digital and green peer review that is flexible enough to adapt to national contexts, but robust enough to provide a shared identity across borders. The development of training programmes, digital tools, and shared quality areas has created a European framework that supports transparency, mutual trust, and comparability. The project has also contributed directly to the implementation of major European initiatives, including the Council Recommendation on VET (2020), the Digital Education Action Plan (2021–2027), and the European Green Deal.

Most importantly, the project has delivered evidence that peer review is not only a technical exercise, but a driver of cultural change. Institutions involved in the piloting reported increased openness, greater willingness to share both strengths and weaknesses, and a deeper commitment to continuous improvement. These cultural shifts are critical for building resilient, innovative, and inclusive vocational education and training systems in Europe.

In conclusion, the Digital and Green Peer Review project has had a transformative impact: empowering institutions, professionalising peers, enriching national frameworks, and advancing European cooperation. It has shown that when digitalisation and sustainability are woven into quality assurance processes, they cease to be distant policy ambitions and become part of everyday educational practice. The project's legacy is therefore not only a validated methodology, but also a strengthened community of educators and institutions committed to shaping the future of VET in Europe.