

**LEARNER-LED**

**REVIEW**

**MANUAL**



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# PART I : INTRODUCTION

Underrepresented and disadvantaged learners in VET institutions are often facing special circumstances or burdens that foresee or hinder their full and effective inclusion and participation in the study process. Many learners in VET institutions face challenges that limit their full participation and success. These challenges can range from difficulty affording tuition, study materials, transportation, lack of exposure to VET opportunities, or inadequate information about pathways to difficulty connecting with peers or teachers and other staff members due to cultural differences, social anxieties, or lack of support networks.

The [InclusiVET](#) Learner-led Review Manual provides a step-by-step guide for implementation of a learner-led review process in your VET institution. The main goal of the manual is to inform the facilitator/the selected learner support staff and learner-reviewers about the points that need to be taken into consideration before, during, and after the learner-led review within a VET institution. Through this process, learners play a key role in evaluating the institution's engagement practices and propose improvements that benefit all learners, especially those facing challenges. This manual outlines the essential steps, from planning and gathering data to analyzing results and developing action plans.

## You'll find



**training materials,**



**review questions,**



**interview and focus group guides,**



**templates,**



**facilitator and learner-reviewer guidelines**

**– everything you need to conduct a successful review and make a real difference in your institution.**

This manual is intended for participants engaged in the process of learner-led review in a Vocational Education and Training (VET) Institution.

- **Direct users:** facilitator/learner support staff
  - Although the Manual is aimed at facilitator/learner support staff, it can also be distributed to the learner-reviewers to help them understand the whole process better.
  - The only part to be distributed to learner-reviewers is : Part V and its annexes. These are expected to be read by learner-reviewers.
- **Final beneficiaries:** learners, staff, managers, the VET institutions
- **Indirect users:** NGOs, society

## Theoretical Background

Existing learner representation systems in VET often miss the mark. While some VET institutions have systems for learner representation and engagement, they often fall short of many learner groups. These systems tend to cater to a narrow segment: typically white, middle-class, able-bodied, and full-time learners. VET learners are much more diverse than this idealized group. A large proportion come from underrepresented and disadvantaged backgrounds, including adult learners, parents, immigrants, individuals with disabilities, and LGBTQIA+ learners.

VET also has features that impact learner engagement in ways often ignored in higher education discussions. For example, short courses and extensive time spent on apprenticeships outside the institution create unique dynamics. Underrepresented learners often face specific barriers due to their backgrounds and circumstances. This prevents them from fully experiencing the benefits of learner engagement, which can enrich their learning journey beyond academics. Systemic barriers: Even beyond individual challenges, many institutions lack a systematic approach to understanding and catering to the diverse needs of underrepresented learners. Building an inclusive learner engagement system requires a shift in perspective. VET institutions need to compare their policies and practices with alternative systems to identify gaps and opportunities. Unfortunately, information and tools to help VET institutions critically assess and improve their engagement systems are scarce. By filling these gaps, InclusiVET project empowers VET institutions to create truly inclusive learner engagement systems that serve all their learners, regardless of background or circumstance.

The first phase of our project laid the groundwork by mapping the landscape and developing a [mapping report](#) which aims to contribute to the sector's awareness and understanding of the often undervalued role and opportunities engagement. In the second phase of the project, we believe in using learner-led reviews (with the help of this Manual) to encourage VET institutions to reflect on their engagement, inclusion, and diversity practices. This ensures that policies and practices truly reflect the needs of the diverse learner population.

# PART II : UNDERSTANDING LEARNER-LED REVIEW

## a. What is a learner-led review?

A learner-led review empowers learners to actively assess and make recommendations on their inclusive learner engagement experiences at the VET institution.

Learners, supported by staff/facilitator :

- ✓ choose a relevant topic,
- ✓ gather data through various methods, and
- ✓ present their findings and recommendations in a report which will be presented to the leadership/governing board of the institution.

According to the idea behind this method, a team of learners is recruited as reviewers, trained, and prepared to assess one of the topics that they choose and related to inclusive learner engagement in VET institutions. At the end of the assessment, they prepare a learner-led report which is a recommendation on strengths & weaknesses of inclusive learner engagement in their VET institution.

## b. What are the benefits of a learner-led review?

Learner-led review enables leaders and staff of the organization to receive the evaluation made by their own learners. Therefore, the learner-led review can lead to action plans for the VET institutions on concrete enhancements in their diversity, inclusion policies, practices related to its learner engagement. Learner-led reviews can inform evidence-based decisions, ensuring policies and practices truly address learner needs and preferences. Participating in the review process develops valuable skills like critical thinking, research, and communication, beneficial for academic and professional success. Reviews can specifically benefit marginalized groups by ensuring their voices are heard and represented in addressing inclusivity gaps.

Learner-led review can also be a powerful activity for both learners and staff. Thanks to this review process, while learners are allowed to evaluate the inclusive learner engagement, staff and managers have a chance to stand back, listen and discover the recommendations of their own learners.

As a result, a learner-led review is highly recommended to implement in a VET institution to develop its inclusive learner engagement.

# PART III : START FOR LEARNER-LED REVIEW

In this section, all the steps to conduct a learner-led review and what to do in each step is explained.

There are four steps to conduct a learner-led review process :

**STEP 1 :** Nomination of facilitator/learner support staff

**STEP 2 :** Recruitment of learner-reviewers

**STEP 3 :** Training for learner-reviewers

**STEP 4 :** Start for review process

**STEP 5:** Follow-up

## STEP 1 : Nomination of facilitator/learner support staff

The learner-led review process is a detailed process. At the very beginning of the process, the VET institution needs a learner support staff, which is also called as a facilitator, to manage this process carefully and successfully from beginning to end.

- A facilitator for the learner-led review process can be either an internal learner support staff member/teacher already existing in your VET institution or an external learner support staff/teacher to implement the review process with learner-reviewers for your VET institution. It is essential that the facilitator is a person who is considered to be neutral and trusted by the learners who undertake the review.

**NOTE:** *If you are planning to hire an external learner support staff, please take the required recruitment time into consideration.*

- In both cases, you should introduce your school to this staff well, explain why your VET institution aims to launch/test/improve its inclusive learner engagement and what your school expects from this learner-led review.
- The facilitator should understand well what the learner-led review is and this Learner-led Review Manual is a good start for the facilitator to understand the steps needed.

- The roles of the facilitator should be defined together between manager and facilitator(s) with the help of this manual and especially by reading [Part IV : Guidelines for Facilitator](#) below.
- A timeline for the learner-led review process should be prepared with the facilitator to manage all roles and steps in an order. [ANNEX 1 : Learner-led Review Timetable](#) can be used to list all tasks to complete from the beginning until the end of the process. Therefore, the managers in the VET institution will be able to follow the ongoing process through this timeline, even if they are not directly involved in the processes such as recruitment, training, review with learners etc.

## STEP 2 : Recruitment of learner-reviewers

This step is the first role of the learner support staff/facilitator : recruitment of 5-10 learners to be reviewers in the learner-led review process.

- In the recruitment stage, the learners should be informed well and it should be highlighted that this is a voluntary process.
- The tips to encourage learner participation is listed in the [Part IV : Guidelines for Facilitator](#) below.

## STEP 3 : Training for learner-reviewers

Effective learner-led reviews rely on well-trained reviewers who understand the process, provide constructive feedback, and create a positive learning environment. One of the biggest problems when starting a learner-led review may be losing the reviewers in a process that they have never experienced before so they do not know where to start and how to implement the process. Fortunately, there are different solutions and tricks to overcome this challenge. That's why the roles of facilitator can be divided as 'before, during and after training' as explained in [PART IV : Guidelines for Facilitator](#) in detail.

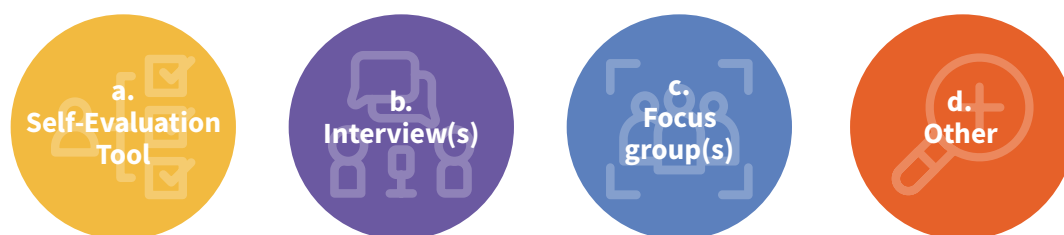
The main points at this step are briefly listed below:

- Deciding how much time you need to train them,
- Planning the schedule/timeline (When are the learners present at the school? Do they have many exams or internships during this time?),
- Analysing the profile of your reviewers (Have they done a learner-led review before? Do they have any experience?),
- Reminding them that this is a voluntary process,
- Informing the learner-reviewers about the structure of their VET institution,
- Clarifying the goals of learner-led reviews, highlighting how they enhance learning, peer support, and self-reflection,

- Organizing group discussions based on real or simulated review scenarios to analyse effective and ineffective feedback,
- Informing them about the types of information gathering listed below,
- Distributing the document 'Guidelines for Learner-Reviewers', the steps before review,
- Informing the reviewers that they should choose a topic/subject that they would like to develop in their VET institution. [ANNEX 3 : List of Questions](#) can be a good source that makes them brainstorm and discover what type of challenge/question that they would like to focus on.
- Simulating the review process with them,
- Informing the reviewers about the **information/data gathering phase**.

### i. Data Gathering Phase

The learner-reviewers can gather information during the learner-led review through diverse ways. In this manual, the forms are explained below. **Depending on their decision of how to implement their information gathering phase, the reviewers can choose only one, two or all of them listed below.** These are:



### ii. Self-evaluation tool

The InclusiVET consortium has created a self-assessment tool to help VET institutions to evaluate how well they're doing with inclusive strategies for learner engagement and if these strategies fit with the VET institution's goals. It also helps them keep an eye on their progress and check if their policies support learners with different needs, whether they are overrepresented or underrepresented in key parts of education. The main aim of self-assessment is to use data to guide the VET institution's plans and make improvements.

There are two self-assessment tools, one is for learners and another is for staff/managers in individual VET institutions. Both tools/questionnaires have five categories about inclusive learner engagement. Each category has different statements. The self-assessment gives reports for each institution.

If the learner reviewers would like to evaluate their VET institution through a questionnaire/self-evaluation tool in which they answer questions about inclusive learner engagement, the self-assessment tool for learners can be accessed [here](#).



### iii. Interview(s)

During the information gathering phase, the learner-reviewers may like to collect data by interviewing different actors (individually or as a group) such as learner-support staff, managers, teachers and (a diverse range of) other learners in the VET institution.

#### Interviews Guidelines

##### Objective

Interviews intend to review the institution's learner engagement, inclusion, and diversity policies & practices. The interviews are verbal interchanges where the Interview Moderator(s) who will be the learner-reviewers attempts to elicit information from different actors within the VET institution, by asking questions. Interviews are conducted to gain a thorough insight into a particular issue, in our case future improvements.

##### Interview Moderator(s)

The interview shall be conducted by learners-reviewers. Interviewees will talk more when they feel more relaxed and at ease, so the questions are not asked in any given order, rather they are asked in a way that develops the conversation.

##### Interviewee

Interviews are done with key VET institution employees (Manager, staff, teachers, tutors...), as well as with other learners in the institution.

##### Duration

Typically, a semi-structured interview lasts between 30–60 minutes. This gives enough time to allow for deeper conversations to take place but does not run too long which can lead to interviewee fatigue.

##### Before the interview

- When inviting participants, let them know you're happy to accommodate their preferred time and location (online or in-person) for the interview. This shows respect for their schedules and preferences.
- As the interview date approaches, send a friendly reminder confirming the time, date, and online platform (if applicable). This ensures everyone's on the same page and avoids last-minute confusion.
- Before delving into the interview, clearly explain your intention to record the conversation digitally.
- Remind them this is a voluntary process, the whole interview will respect the confidentiality rules and the data will be kept anonymous, so they can feel comfortable while explaining their opinions.



### During the interview

- Pay close attention, as answers might not directly hit the mark. Unravel vague responses with gentle follow-ups like “Could you expand on that?” or “Tell me more.”
- Remember, patience is key. Don’t rush the process, and avoid interrupting participants mid-sentence or during thoughtful pauses.
- “Could you tell me?” is a powerful tool. Use it to start the interview, guide explanations, and delve deeper into key points.
- Respect confidentiality. Never divulge past interviewees’ statements or identities. If asked, keep it general: “Many participants mentioned...”
- Have your notepad and pen ready because sometimes interviewees can say the most insightful things when the digital recorder has been switched off.



### After the interview

- Fresh memories are invaluable. Write your report soon after the interview when details are still clear.
- Leverage the recorded audio as your trusted ally. Use it to recall specific responses, nuances, and key moments to create an accurate representation of the interview.
- Each interview is a valuable learning experience. Use your insights to refine your approach for the next one. What questions worked well? How can you make participants feel even more comfortable?



### Themes/questions

A semi-structured in-depth interview is usually one in which the Interview Moderator(s) has a checklist of topic areas or questions. The topics that we would suggest are:

- 1: Icebreakers
- 2: Underrepresented learners
- 3: Learner Engagement
- 4: Good Practices and Solutions
- 5: Sense of belonging
- 6: Additional Statements for discussion

To conduct a well-organized interview, the learner-reviewers can use the [ANNEX 4: Interview Report](#).

## iv. Focus Group(s)

During the information gathering phase, the learner-reviewers may like to collect data from a group of people such as a group of learners, a group of learner-support staff, teachers, or managers by listening to their ideas, discussions and experiences.

### Focus Group Guidelines

#### Objective

The main objective of the focus groups is to discuss and report on specific challenges and barriers to inclusive learner engagement in the VET institution context, with a focus on identifying the most prevalent challenges faced by different learner groups, institutional policies, practices, and physical environments that contribute to these challenges as well as learner perspectives on potential interventions or solutions that could be implemented by VET institutions to improve inclusivity. We want them to speak freely and not be swayed by preconceived notions they may have about what are deemed desirable answers as there are no wrong answers.

#### Focus Group Moderator(s)

The focus group should be moderated by learner-reviewers (Focus Group moderator(s) to create a comfortable and trustful atmosphere which enables open reflection and discussion. We recommend experienced moderators familiar with creating a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere.

#### Participants

The learner-reviewers/moderators can organize one or more focus groups. The diversity in terms of VET institutions' size shall be taken into account. The optimal size of each focus group is 5 to 10 participants which allows all members to participate and enables the moderators' time to be able to explore the nuance behind participants' answers.

For online focus groups where plenary discussions/interactions are less straightforward a slightly lower number of participants (minimum of 5) is acceptable to ensure there is an opportunity for all participants to have their say, remain engaged, and reduce strain on the moderator.

#### Duration

Typically, a focus group lasts between 60–90 minutes. This gives enough time to allow for meaningful discussions to take place but does not run too long which can lead to participant fatigue. In the case of online focus groups, it's advisable to keep the session time to a maximum of 60 minutes as it's just a little bit harder for people to stay focused.



### Moderation

The learner-reviewers/moderators will navigate the discussion, using questions and deeper dives to explore ideas. Participants will chat amongst themselves, sparking new angles and richer insights into different topics.

Online groups need some extra guidance to keep things flowing, making the moderator's role key.

The moderator(s) will give an overview of the topic and its purpose, ask questions, follow up with more questions, and keep the conversation on track and subject. Make sure you keep it relaxed so that participants are at ease and feel comfortable and safe in opening up and sharing their thoughts. Reminding participants that there are no right or wrong answers is a good way to make sure they aren't self-censoring.



### Themes/questions

Based on experience with similar focus groups, we should have time to address three to four different themes with open-ended questions, follow-up questions and, especially, discussion between participants. The topics that we would suggest are:

- 1: Icebreakers
- 2: Underrepresented learners
- 3: Learner Engagement
- 4: Good Practices and Solutions
- 5: Additional Statements for discussion



### Equipment/facilities

- Chairs set up in a circular pattern around a table is the ideal setup for a focus group as you want all the participants to be able to easily see each other.
- For online sessions, your team can create a Zoom room for convenient participation.
- While taking notes, capturing the nuance of side conversations and interactions is crucial.
- To ensure comprehensive data analysis, audio and video recording of the focus group is recommended.
- Remember to obtain informed consent from participants beforehand, emphasizing anonymity and data confidentiality in the report.

To conduct a well-organized focus group, you can use the [ANNEX 5 : Focus Group Report](#).

## v. Other

All received information is a valuable resource for VET institutions interested in implementing learner-led reviews to improve their inclusive learner engagement practices. By incorporating learners' feedback suggestions, VET institutions can further enhance the document's usefulness and impact.

After the **information gathering phase**, the identified challenges from the interviews/focus groups/self-evaluation tool etc. can be listed by using this template to summarize all identified data and challenges.

## STEP 4 : Start for review process

- Start the learner-led review process according to your timeline
- Distribute the ANNEX 2 : Review Process Timetable to the learner-reviewers so that they can schedule their own review process in a timeline
- If you would like to have an attendance list, you can use ANNEX 7 : Attendance List. Be sure that the learner-reviewers do not want to participate in this review process anonymously.
- Allow the reviewers to choose a question that they would like to answer through this process
- Remind them there are different types of information gathering processes **as explained in detail above**. They should choose what kind of information gathering that they would like to implement to collect data
- Be sure that the learner support staff does not intervene the reviewers too much
- Remind them that they are expected to recommend a solution as an answer to their question. They can use this Recommendation Template (see ANNEX 6 : Recommendation Template) and present it to the learner support staff at first and to the VET institution at the end of the process. The role of the facilitator during this stage is to be sure of the clear explanation of learner recommendations.

## STEP 5 : Follow-up

- After collecting all recommendations made by learner-reviewers, the facilitator should transfer the Recommendation Report to the VET institution.
- Make the learner-reviewers evaluate the effectiveness of the review process and action plans, it is important to gather and analyse data on their impact.
- Keep an effective communication between the VET institution who will create the action plans according to the recommendations of learner-reviewers.
- You can ask learners to explain their plans and recommendations to relevant stakeholders, if more detailed information and ideas are needed.
- Be sure to reward your learners for their time and involvement in this Learner-led review process. For example: bookmarks, mugs, tickets for cinema, art supplies, reusable bottles, extra points for their class activities etc. You can use Annex 8 Certificate of Attendance model.

# PART IV : GUIDELINES FOR FACILITATORS

## Being a facilitator

A typical facilitator in this process would be a learner support staff member who works in the institution or an external learner support staff member hired from outside the institution.

## Role of the facilitator

- The main role is to recruit and train the learner-reviewers at the beginning of the learner-led review process and guide them throughout the process.
- The facilitator is meant to support the learner-reviewers, acts as a guide and resource, empowering learner reviewers to conduct the review effectively, while ensuring a fair, inclusive, and learner-centred process.
- A facilitator should be careful not to intervene during the review process and allow learners to take the reviewer role to implement an evaluation and formulate recommendations as independently as possible.



### Before Review

- Recruitment
- Training
  - ⇒ Before Training
  - ⇒ During Training



### During Review



### After Review

- Collecting the report of learner-reviewers
- Feedback and Follow-up

## a. Before Review

Facilitator has two main roles before the review process starts: recruiting and training the learner-reviewers.



### Before Review

- Recruitment
- Training
  - ⇒ Before Training
  - ⇒ During Training

### Recruitment:

Your main role is to recruit the learners who are willing to evaluate the inclusive learner engagement in their institution.

#### Here are some tips to encourage participation:

1. Show what are the benefits of participation and how the knowledge acquired can be used in different fields of life and how their feedback turns into action plans in the VET institution.
2. Treat the people you are working with as you would like to be treated yourself and create a space where everyone is comfortable and equal.
3. Create an inclusive environment. This means that the review process should be barrier-free, not only in terms of accessibility but also being respectful and accepting everyone.
4. While inviting the participants use invitations (different forms are possible, mailing, leaflets, information in classrooms etc). This allows participants to know that they are important and that they can contribute as well.
5. Timing of the recruitment is important, so take into account the other events happening in participants' lives. For example, you shouldn't try to recruit learners when they are not available or the facilitator should not plan to conduct a learner-led review during the exam season. As you have apprentices in your VET institution, you should consider the time that they need to be in the enterprises and not at the institution.
 

**NOTE:** It is important to send reminders to participants of the timeline so they don't forget about it.
6. You should inform them about the timeline and the content of training and review processes because participants should know what specifically is going to happen and what is being asked from them in order to participate.

## Training:

One of the biggest problems when starting a learner-led review may be losing the reviewers in a process that they have never experienced before so they do not know where to start and how to implement the process.

After recruiting the learner-reviewers, the second role of the facilitator is to train and prepare them for an effective learner-led review.

The training phases can be divided into ‘before, during and after training’ as explained below.

### Before training:

**1.** Make a training schedule. You can divide your training timeline into parts.

#### For example:

**PART 1:** Ice-breaking activity

**PART 2:** Presentation of the VET institution, structure of the institution (Learner Support Department, organigramme etc.), Inclusion and Learner Engagement Strategies of the VET institution

**PART 3:** Definition of learner-led review, the whole process of learner-led review and its timeline, the types of information gathering that reviewers can apply during the review

**PART 4:** Clarify the roles and responsibilities of learner reviewers, facilitators

**2.** According to the topics/parts that you choose to give as an information for the learner-reviewers, the facilitator should decide how long the training will take (1 week, two days. etc).

**3.** Inform all selected reviewers about the timeline, take their confirmation for the training days. Structure the training session thoughtfully, considering the ideal duration, content delivery methods, and time for questions and discussions.

**4.** Gather all information from the VET institution and prepare all the templates that you will distribute to the learner-reviewers. Develop necessary materials for the training session, such as training modules, handouts, or digital resources, to equip reviewers with the necessary knowledge and tools.

### During training:

To make the training more effective, it is recommended to use interactive methods such as discussions, polls, and group work. These methods promote active participation and help with knowledge retention. Additionally, incorporating multimedia elements such as videos, infographics, or presentations can enhance clarity and engagement among the participants. It is important to foster a safe and respectful learning environment where diverse perspectives and experiences are valued. Encourage open communication and active listening among the participants. Finally, it is essential to be adaptable and adjust the training content based on the participants’ needs and interests. This will help ensure that the training is relevant and useful for everyone involved.



## b. During Review

Encourage learner-reviewers to take ownership of the review process and express their ideas freely. Abstain from expressing personal opinions or biases that could influence the review. Offer support and answer questions as needed without directing the learners' evaluations.

It's important to be well-prepared with all the relevant information and materials that learners might need. The facilitator also has a practical role in taking notes during the interview and helping the learners to analyse the information obtained and draw conclusions and recommendations from that. You should also anticipate potential questions and have resources on hand to address them. If learners get stuck or deviate from the review guidelines, gently steer them back on track with procedural reminders instead of offering solutions. For instance, instead of saying, "You should focus on this next," you can ask, "Let's consult the review rubric – what does it indicate as the next step?" To encourage reflection, when learners express frustration or uncertainty, prompt them to reflect on the process. You might ask, "What have you learned so far from the review?" or "What strategies can be employed to help move forward?" This should be done in a way that it's entirely led by the learners themselves who have the sole responsibility for the final conclusions and recommendations.

## c. After Review

### Collecting the report of learner-reviewers

It is important to inform learner reviewers of the deadline for submitting their reports. This can be done through an appropriate communication channel such as email or the learning management system. Detailed instructions on how to submit the reports should be provided, including the preferred format (physical copies or online submissions), labelling, and any specific requirements. It may be helpful to provide a report template, especially if there are specific sections or formatting requirements, to ensure consistency and facilitate analysis.

To ensure that all reports are submitted on time, a system should be organized for collecting the reports. This can involve designated drop-off boxes for physical copies or a designated folder/portal for online submissions.

Once the reports are received, it is important to acknowledge receipt of the reports and thank the reviewers for their contributions and time. This can be done either individually or through a general announcement. Additionally, it is recommended to conduct brief exit interviews with learner reviewers to gather feedback on their experience with the review process and any suggestions for improvement. An optional debriefing session can also be facilitated after the report collection deadline to provide a platform for reviewers to share their experiences, discuss key findings, and ask any remaining questions. It is

essential to maintain the confidentiality of individual learner reviewers and their reports. Reports should be stored securely, and personally identifiable information should not be shared without explicit consent. Prompt action is necessary in collecting and reviewing the reports to move forward with the feedback analysis and follow-up stages efficiently.

### Feedback and Follow-up

As in the earlier stages, the facilitator should remain neutral, avoiding personal opinions or biases during feedback discussions and follow-up processes. After collecting all recommendations of learner-reviewers, it is important to transfer this recommendation report to the VET institution. The facilitator should also make learner-reviewers evaluate the effectiveness of the review process and action plans, because it is important to gather and analyse data on their impact. As a facilitator, the effective communication between the VET institution who will create the action plans according to the recommendations of learner-reviewers should be followed-up. In case of any detailed information, the facilitator can ask learners to explain their plans and recommendations to relevant stakeholders.

## ANNEXES

**Annex 1** [Learner-led Review Timetable for Staff](#)

**Annex 2** [Review Process Timetable for Learners](#)

**Annex 3** [List of Questions/Topics](#)

**Annex 4** [Interview Report](#)

**Annex 5** [Focus Group Report](#)

**Annex 6** [Recommendation Template](#)

**Annex 7** [Attendance list](#)

**Annex 8** [Certificate of Attendance model](#)



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