RAN Rehabilitation

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CONCLUSION PAPER
RAN Rehabilitation WG Meeting – Peer- and self-review in Exit work
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Peer- and self-review in Exit work: Tackling the challenges

Key outcomes

Self- and peer review in Exit work (and the larger work field of rehabilitation) can be a crucial part of quality management processes in daily practice. Unfortunately, in large parts of the P/CVE field, a lack of 'culture' of quality control, in which systematic reviews could be implemented, persists. Instead, high external pressure has lead to a very practical hands-on tradition in the work field, which now needs to be supplemented with space for critical reflection. Experiences from first-line practitioners show, that in many projects, approaches and organisations, a number of – often structural – issues are still hindering the implementation of meaningful peer- and self-review processes in order to conduct meaningful self- and peer-review, sufficient staff and time capacities need to be available. Therefore, in order to overcome remaining obstacles and enable practitioners to implement continuous self- and peer review processes, the following conditions for success are pivotal:

- Peer- and self-review processes should already be included in the design of Exit programmes as they are a key factor for sustained internal quality management and control. Sufficient staff and time capacities to carry out peer- and self-reviews need to be included in the design processes.

- Project designs need to allow for flexibility to adapt and change based on relevant developments.

- An articulated theory of change, based on clear objectives of the work, is necessary – both for the larger project and the work with individual clients.

Interestingly, these conditions align very well with the prerequisites for peer- and self-reviews defined in the **RAN Peer and Self Review Manual**, further indicating the practical relevance of the manual.

The following pages will provide a short overview of the discussions on the implementation of peer- and self-review processes. Based on this, some recommendations in support of further implementation of such processes in Exit projects and programmes across the EU will be provided.

Highlights of the discussion

The discussion revolved around two main topics. The first one was:

1. **Which change is needed to achieve the objectives of 'my' project?**

   a. Which tools and/or actions are needed to implement this change?

   b. How can I understand whether these tools and/or actions have had an actual impact?

A number of different **objectives** were discussed as potential common goals for Exit programmes. They span from safeguarding society, further crime prevention, prevention of recidivism as well as behavioural disengagement via deradicalisation (behavioural and cognitive) and support for living a self-determined life to harm reduction and the prevention of stigmatisation.

Tools and actions to reach these objectives are varied and should always be tied to the individual in question and the objectives defined for their Exit process. But not only the objectives, also the respective individuals' characteristics and needs should be taken into account when selecting tools (and objectives). A key element that should be part of every approach's toolkit is meaningful multi-agency cooperation. Only if all relevant actors are being consulted and involved in the process in a manner in which they and their respective tools and actions are implemented coherently, can a comprehensive Exit process be successful. Unfortunately, lack of coherence has led to contradictory actions of some actors in the past. This needs to be avoided in the future and should ideally be developed into complementarity in the long-run. The actors relevant for the process include local authorities, like the housing office, employment services, etc., but also potentially other non-governmental organisations specialising in other areas (e.g. legal advice for persons with unstable legal statuses), mental health experts, and also law enforcement (for a more detailed description of the actors relevant to Exit and rehabilitation processes, please consult the **RAN Rehabilitation Manual**). The improvement of communication skills was mentioned as another key tool in order to improve an individual's chances at leading a life away from violence, crime and extremism. This of course includes elements such as working on impulse and emotional control.

The question of how the **impact** of these tools and actions can be understood, reiterated a now well-known fact with regards to impact assessment in the context of P/CVE and especially Exit and rehabilitation work: All projects and the work field as a whole need to invest in improved, scientifically grounded ways of collecting and understanding data. What is especially needed are long-term studies of the life paths of participants of such programmes, which, to date, do not exist. As a first step towards tackling this issue, cooperation with researchers, from universities or think tanks, should be established to complement internal self- and peer-review processes with more comprehensive evaluations. Such evaluations do not have to focus on impact. Instead, they can be process-oriented and formative, or developmental, thereby directly contributing to a projects/programmes work and simultaneously increasing the scientific understanding of Exit and rehabilitation work.

The second main part of discussion revolved around the following set of questions:

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2. Which insights should a review provide to practitioners?

  a. Who should/needs to be involved?

  b. What are the prerequisites?

Participants articulated the need for clarity in a number of regards. For example, a clearer idea of how practitioners can understand authentic processes of change in the individuals they work with. This aspect – especially relevant in the prison and probation context – concerning the question of when individuals would be ready for release, or a loosening of probation measures and restrictions. There never can be 100% certainty even after having built a good working relationship. Some level of trust is always necessary. However, some practitioners still lack processes, tools, or mechanisms to understand change and to justify actions.

To carry out self- and peer-review, there was a consensus on involving both current and past staff members, whenever possible, and ideally also (former) participants of the programmes, to include their perspective and experience. Additionally, partner organisations could be involved, potentially also funders. The latter, however, should only be involved if it can be guaranteed that the honest internal peer- and self-review process will not have negative consequences on the programme's funding. If this cannot be guaranteed, they should not be included as their participation might result in a lack of trust in the overall process and will likely not lead to reliable outcomes.

The most relevant precondition discussed is trust. Trust in either the peer reviewer tasked to conduct the process, but also trust in all participating colleagues and partners. Additionally, a long-term perspective should be preferable to short-term reviews, and ideally, a type of continuous review mechanism should be established. Of course none of the above can be implemented, as long as there are not sufficient staff and time capacities to organise and implement a review. This, and the necessity to allow for change and the revision of approaches throughout their duration are among the most pivotal prerequisites. These need to be included already in the planning and designing stages of any new approach and funding institutions need to be made aware of this necessity early on.

Recommendations

The following boxes provide recommendations to practitioners and policy makers intended to create room for and begin with setting up peer- and self-review processes in practice. For a detailed step-by-step guide to implementing peer- and self-review, please refer to the manual.

> **For practitioners:**
>
> - Dare to initiate debates on peer- and self-review processes in your project and/or organisation. Begin by defining your project's initial overarching theory of change and the one you currently are working with in daily practice. Are they the same? Do they align?
>
> - Build positive relations with researchers who may be able to support your internal review processes.
>
> - Whenever possible, include time capacities for review and quality control in your project(s).
>
> - Treat self- and peer-review as it should be: A tool to help you improve your work and the support you can give to the persons you work with. It is **not** an external evaluation tool and should not be used to determine funds.

For policy makers:

- When funding programmes and projects, allow room for changes and amendments throughout their duration. Fast-paced developments and changing circumstances necessitate such flexibility.

- Provide enough resources for sufficient staff and time capacities to actually plan and implement internal self- and peer-review.

- Do not put the pressure on practitioners to inform you about their internal reviews, as this will decrease the likelihood of their relevance.

- Do not treat peer- and self-review as a cheaper and quicker form of evaluation on which future funding decisions can be based.

Follow up

Two main points can be highlighted as potential follow-up from the discussion:

1) Further discussions about the '**theory of change**' concept, potential methods to control and improve those already in place and effective methods and tools to develop new theories in cases where this has not been done yet. This could be done in the scope of smaller expert meetings, but also in the form of webinars from topical experts directed at the audience of this working group.

2) Implementing **peer exchanges** between Exit and probation workers of different programmes and from different MSs. This could increase the impact of the working group significantly, as it would allow practitioners to further develop their own work by observing inspiring approaches implemented by colleagues in related contexts.

Further reading

The **RAN Peer and Self Review Manual for Exit Work** has been developed to facilitate the process of improving exit work and assessing its impact. By looking at the work of colleagues or one's own work in a structured way, practitioners can identify potential for improvement, the need for innovation or adaptation to the current/emerging challenges, and/or see whether the initial rationale behind the work is still being respected in daily practice, or if it should be adjusted. Available in English, French and German.

The **RAN Rehabilitation Manual** offers guidance for practitioners working to rehabilitate radicalised and terrorist offenders, both within and outside prison. It provides a comprehensive overview of the chronological phases of rehabilitation. The various actors contributing to rehabilitation processes are offered a structured assessment of important points of attention. Available in English, French and German.

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