

Sektion für Landwirtschaft
Section for Agriculture
Section d'Agriculture
Sección de Agricultura



International Biodynamic Advisory Services

Peer Review Quality System – Guidelines and Regulations

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1. Introduction and Vision

The impulse for the newly created Peer Review Quality System originally came from the Biodynamic Advisory Group and was implemented with the help of the Section for Agriculture and Demeter International. This Peer Review Quality System, which was developed in a participatory process, combines the needs of a wide range of stakeholders:

advisors seeking a certain common commitment, especially in international advisory work; prospective biodynamic farmers looking for advice who will find contact through this system, as well as more information and transparency; and even associations, trade or major project managers who can better obtain the information they need in the online directory.

The quality system also offers future advisors an overview of the specific requirements and greater transparency. While there are some minimum criteria that have to be met in order to participate in the quality system, it also takes account of the different individual advisory profiles. This kind of inclusive quality assurance and development demonstrates an appreciation of diversity as well as the demand for qualitative, self-responsible advice in biodynamics, as promoted by the Section for Agriculture and Demeter International.

As a transnational qualification tool, the Peer Review Quality System for International Biodynamic Advisors aims to create a common basis for qualitative advisory work in biodynamics. Together we wish to form a network of national and international advisers who aim to strengthen and further develop the biodynamic movement. Advisers therefore commit to the jointly agreed principles of the biodynamic advisory services by signing a **charter**.

1.1. Quality assurance and quality development

Participation is open to all experienced biodynamic advisors and trainers who wish to transmit biodynamic knowledge at a national or international level. Entry to the quality system requires a number of **minimum criteria** that must be fulfilled and documented.

High quality biodynamic advisory work can be provided through continuous self-reflection and periodic professional development. By evaluating and critically examining our own activity and working methods it is possible to identify gaps in knowledge and to promote our individual development through suitable further training courses. A personal **portfolio** serves as a tool to support this individual process.

A **Quality Development Review** with two colleagues takes place upon entry to the quality system and every three years thereafter, in order to guarantee and further develop the quality of the biodynamic advisory service and ensure the creation of transparency and trust. In the case of the **Demeter additional qualification**, a qualification committee decides the application for admission using the **an abstract from the advisors portfolio, the Verification checklist and the written report** from the Quality Development Review carried out with two qualified Demeter colleagues.

2. Application for participation

2.1. Applicability

Participation in the peer review quality system is open to all biodynamic advisors. Requirements are fulfilment of the minimum criteria, agreement with the principles of biodynamic advisory work (charter) and willingness to develop further.

2.2. The process

1. Reading the guide of the Peer Review Quality System for International Biodynamic Advisors;
2. Online registration and signing of the Charter.
3. Confirmation of the minimum quality criteria and application for inclusion in the quality system online, optional application for the Demeter additional qualification;
4. Creation of an individual portfolio with concept and competence profile (see section 5.);
5. Organisation of a Quality Development Review with two colleagues from the quality system (peer review). In the case of the Demeter additional qualification, this peer review must take place with two qualified Demeter advisors. The interview is based on the individual portfolio and the Verification checklist with the key questions and has to be reported.
6. Confirmation of or rejection from inclusion in the quality system must be officially communicated to the applicant by the colleagues via the confirmation/rejection link, received beforehand from the online system;
7. Creation of a public profile online;
8. The online profile of the advisor will be published when the admission procedure is complete. The admission is complete when the Quality Development Review has been carried out and has been positively confirmed in the system by the colleagues via email. In the case of the Demeter additional qualification, the verification checklist, the written summary/report and the abstract of Portfolio are forwarded to the responsible coordinator at Demeter International, and the admission decision is made by a qualification committee;
9. Quality assurance and development through continuous self-reflection and further training;
10. The peer review must take place every three years. The organisation of the review is the responsibility of the advisor and the portfolio should be updated accordingly;
11. The public profile should be updated continuously and at least once a year.

2.3. Financial Contribution

The recommended annual contribution for advisors amounts to **Euro 100** for participation in the Peer Review Quality System Standard and **Euro 300** for participation in the Peer Review Quality System with Demeter Qualification.

3. Charter of the International Advisory Group

This charter presents the jointly agreed principles of the biodynamic advisory method. It is the basis of the quality system and deals with ethical matters such as transparency, respect, freedom of choice and confidentiality, plus professional and personal dedication to the biodynamic movement. The charter was drawn up in the 2015. The current version is from March 2019 and can be downloaded from the website of the Section for Agriculture.

Note: If the charter is modified or rewritten, the advisor will automatically be called to check and re-sign the charter.

4. Quality criteria

Entry to the quality system requires a number of minimum criteria to ensure an adequate level of practical experience and professionalism:

- Practical experience in biodynamic agriculture (vocational training on a biodynamic/Demeter farm or experience as a biodynamic farmer)
- AND vocational training in agriculture OR a university degree in agronomy
- OR comparable training or experience

Verification and Decision

The minimum criteria must be fulfilled and documented. The documents must be presented at the first **Quality Development Review**. The quality check and admission will be carried out by two colleagues from the quality system using the **Verification checklist**. Confirmation of or rejection from inclusion in the quality system must be officially communicated to the applicant by the colleagues via the confirmation/rejection link, received beforehand from the online system.

4.1. Demeter additional qualification

The Demeter qualification can be acquired additionally. A Demeter qualification gives the option of performing conversion advisory work for Demeter International's farm certification. The basis for this agreement is the "vision, mission, principles and values" of Demeter International. The Demeter additional qualification will be visible in the advisory database and on the Demeter International website. The minimum criteria for the Demeter additional qualification are as follows:

Professional skills

- 5 years of practical experience in biodynamic agriculture, vocational training on a biodynamic farm/Demeter farm
- AND vocational training in agriculture OR a university degree in agronomy
- OR comparable training or experience

Knowledge of standards and conversion

- In-depth knowledge of the relevant organic regulations and Demeter Standards of the country of origin and export
- In-depth knowledge of the Demeter International Standards

Conversion process skills

- Ability to advise in specific situations on how the use of biodynamic preparations and other biodynamic practices can be sustainably integrated on the farm
- Ability to analyse the initial situation in relation to the Demeter International Standards, also taking into account the relevant Organic Regulation
- Ability to clearly formulate and communicate in writing the steps required for conversion

Verification and Decision

The minimum criteria for the Demeter Qualification have to be verified at the **Quality Development Review** using the **Verification checklist**. Confirmation of or rejection from inclusion in the quality system must be officially communicated to the applicant by the colleagues via the confirmation/rejection link. The final admission decision on the Demeter additional qualification will then be made on the basis of the **Verification checklist and the written report** (see additional

document “Template checklist and reporting Peer Review”) and the abstract of the advisors portfolio by a **Qualification committee** and communicated officially via the confirmation/rejection link received previously in the application email. The decision is followed by a brief statement of the reasons.

4.2. Advisory Qualification Committee

Aim

The aim is to decide upon individual requests for approval as a Demeter advisor within the International Advisory Quality system. The main task is to evaluate the assessment carried out by two accredited Demeter advisors using the completed Verification checklist, the written report and the Abstract of Portfolio and to decide on approval. The qualification committee makes decisions by a simple majority of the votes cast. The members of the committee shall determine whether a declared conflict of interest leads to an obligation to abstain in individual cases. All members of the committees sign a declaration of confidentiality.

Members

The qualification committee shall consist of at least three but not more than five members. The committee is composed of independent experts with experience in advisory work, certification and assessment in biodynamic agriculture. The members are obliged to act to the best of their knowledge and belief, i.e. they are appointed as individual, independent persons responsible for their own actions and not as delegates or representatives of their country. Representation by other persons is not allowed.

Working method

A coordinator from Demeter International shall be responsible for convening and preparing the agenda of the conference call meetings and, if relevant, the physical meeting. Conference call meetings take place once quarterly.

Appeals

Appeals must be made in writing within two weeks of receipt of the decision and must state the reasons on which they are based. The first appeal shall be dealt with by the qualification committee. If the appeal is not upheld, this must also be justified in writing.

In the event of a repeated appeal, it shall be dealt with by the Ombudsperson. The objection must be substantiated in writing and must be made within a period of two weeks after receipt of the first rejection. The Ombudsperson shall examine the existing documentation and may invite both parties to submit written or oral statements.

The decision of the Ombudsperson shall be made in writing, shall state the reasons on which it is based and shall not be subject to appeal. The decision shall be binding on all parties.

5. Portfolio

The portfolio is the adviser's working tool and should be updated regularly and at least every three years. The personal portfolio does not need to be emailed or uploaded but it provides a basis for the **Quality Development Review** which takes place every three years. The portfolio contains two basic elements:

5.1. Competence profile

The competency profile is based on the Curriculum Vitae with accompanying certificates and references, where the fulfilled minimum criteria (see section 4.) must be documented. The competence profile also shows the experience, competences and expertise in relation to biodynamic advisory work (professional skills, methodological skills, personal and social skills). Further training, participation in advisory meetings and reflection on current developments in biodynamics is expected. The competence profile should be updated regularly and at least every three years.

5.2. Concept

The advisory concept – as a further element of the portfolio – covers the important points of the adviser's own advisory practice. It can contain the advisor's basic attitude and advisory practice, reference to theory, aims, methodology, communication method, contract process, client feedback, evaluation, etc. The concept should be updated regularly and at least every three years.

6. Questions for self-reflection

In cooperation with biodynamic advisors, in February 2019 questions were worked out that could be of help in self-reflection and evaluation of one's own work, or in the creation of an individual portfolio. These questions can also be used to prepare for the Quality Development Review. The supporting questions can be found in the appendix.

7. Quality Development Review

A Quality Development Review done by two peers (colleagues) is the key element of the quality system and aims to guarantee and further develop the quality of the biodynamic advisory service, ensuring the creation of transparency and trust. In one sense participants are auditors and, in another, are being audited. Each participant thus assumes full responsibility for decisions and reports. This peer review fulfils an important part of the task of a superordinate authority.

The Quality Development Review takes place at the entry to the quality system and thereafter every three years and is always conducted by two colleagues from the quality system. The applicant/advisor are responsible for organising the meeting. The Quality Development Review is based on the personal **portfolio** and **the peer-review verification checklist**. The compulsory minimum standards and the documentation submitted are also reviewed within this framework. A written summary/report of the Quality Development Review must be made and agreed between all three parties. Confirmation of or rejection from inclusion in the quality system must be officially communicated to the applicant by the colleagues via the confirmation/rejection link, received beforehand from the online system.

7.1. Demeter additional qualification

For the Demeter additional qualification, the quality development review is conducted with two colleagues from the quality system who already hold Demeter qualification. The higher minimum criteria will be verified at the **Quality Development Review** using the Verification checklist which has to be sent with a written report of the Peer Review to the coordination at Demeter International. Additionally, the applicant for Demeter Qualification needs to create an abstract (max. 2 pages/6000 characters) from his or her CV and portfolio and is sent to his/her peer reviewers, to avoid the committee receiving very long portfolios. For further information please consult the additional document "Template checklist and reporting Peer Review" and the model for the abstract. The final admission decision will then be made by a **Qualification committee** using the completed

Verification checklist and the written summary and communicated officially via the confirmation /rejection link, received previously in the application email. The Demeter additional qualification gained will be visible in the advisory database. It is the advisor's own responsibility to fill in the public profile truthfully.

8. Peer-Review - Verification Checklist

The Verification Checklist is the basic tool of the Quality Development Review along with the portfolio. The Quality Development Review with two colleagues focuses on two aspects: a review of the minimum criteria and a development discussion on the individual advisory portfolio, including the advisory concept and competence profile. The Verification Checklist shows the minimum criteria as well as ways to check these. You will find the Verification Checklist as well as information on verification possibilities in an additional document.

8.1. Demeter additional qualification

If Demeter qualification is required, the completed Verification Checklist, the written summary report and the abstract of the advisors portfolio must be sent to the coordinator at Demeter International after the peer review. The final admission decision will then be made by a Qualification Committee. The written summary/report of the Quality Development Review therefore needs to be sufficiently detailed to ensure that the Qualification Committee can follow how the required minimum criteria were verified. This can be done via a description by the colleagues in the written summary/report and/or by adding appropriate annexes. In the case of a lack of clarity, the Qualification Committee may ask to see clear proof. To prevent such circumstances from arising, please ensure that there is sufficient information and clarity in the written summary/report to allow the interview and the criteria verification to be carried out. For detailed information, please consult the additional document "Template checklist and reporting Peer Review".

9. Financial contribution

The recommended annual contribution for advisors amounts to Euro 100 for participation in the Peer Review Quality System Standard and Euro 300 for participation in the Peer Review Quality System with Demeter Qualification.

10.Rejection/Exclusion

Applicants or advisors who do not meet the requirements or do not provide the required quality certificates and therefore do not succeed in the Quality Development Review may be (temporarily) excluded. This applies if, for example:

- Fulfilment of the minimum criteria could not be proved at the Quality Development Review
- The Quality Development Review has not been organised
- Common principles of the Charter for Biodynamic Advisers have not been respected
- The public profile has not been filled in truthfully
- The annual contribution has not been paid

11.Ombudsperson /right to appeal

If complaints cannot be clarified through the persons responsible at the Section for Agriculture or Demeter International, the complaint can be submitted in writing to the ombudsperson. The Ombudsperson has an advisory or mediating function and is authorised to carry out all necessary clarifications. Legal steps are reserved for the parties involved.

The ombudspersons elected during the advisory meeting in Dornach on 09.02.2020 are:

- Susanna Küffer Heer
- Thomas Lüthi

Appendix

Guiding questions for self-reflection

Professional skills

- How do I stay up to date on professional and associations issues? (e.g. DI newsletter, events)
- How do I develop my methodological and professional skills?
- What do I want to learn next year? What is my goal?
- How do I keep principles (Biodynamics, Demeter) alive?
- How do I deal with difficult advisory questions? Do I have the professional and methodological skills to do justice to the client? Do I know my limits?

Professional and methodological advisory skills

- How do I keep my portfolio and consulting concept up to date?
- How do I support my clients through the advisory process?
- What challenges do I face and how do I deal with them?
- How do I give my clients and others the chance to feedback to me?
- How do I myself judge the success of my advice?

Social and ethical skills

- With whom and how do I exchange advisory questions and biodynamic topics?
- How can I build an appropriate personal relationship with my clients and colleagues?
- What ethical, social or intercultural challenges do I face and how do I deal with them?