

Culture and Sport Improvement Toolkit

9. Validation

Validation process

A validation process has been developed and is available through the IDeA for organisations interested in an independent and external challenge of their self-assessment.

Validation is:

Review and challenge of the self-assessment and improvement planning process, including a sample assessment of the organisation against the 'excellence criteria', through interviewing staff, focus groups and review of documentary evidence. This is used to enhance the self-assessment results and improvement plan and the future self-assessment and improvement planning process.

As a result of the validation, the organisation adjusts the identified strengths, areas for improvement, judgements and improvement plan without losing ownership (it is still their work). The organisation gains insight into the effectiveness of its self-assessment and improvement planning process and the continuous improvement values and habits held by the team.

The validation can also develop recognition and confidence from internal or external partners that self-assessment and improvement planning has been carried out in a comprehensive way, with an adequate degree of objectivity and transparency, and therefore that the organisation will improve.

Validation provides a level of quality assurance that:

- ensures the robustness of the internal self-assessment process, and
- introduces elements of consultancy and development support to the overall process.

This can be highly valuable when important messages need to be communicated about improvement and service quality, or when the organisation wishes to increase intensity around improvement and improvement planning.

It is important that the decision to include validation is taken at the very beginning of the process. This is because an assessment of the breadth and appropriateness of scoping the self-assessment is part of validation. Validation cannot be introduced later or part-way through the self-assessment.

The validation process has four separate stages.

Stage one

Independent review and challenge of the organisation's understanding of the process, the proposed scoping, and the method of recording evidence. This would be done before the assessment begins. It can take up to a day, depending on the size of the organisation.

Stage two

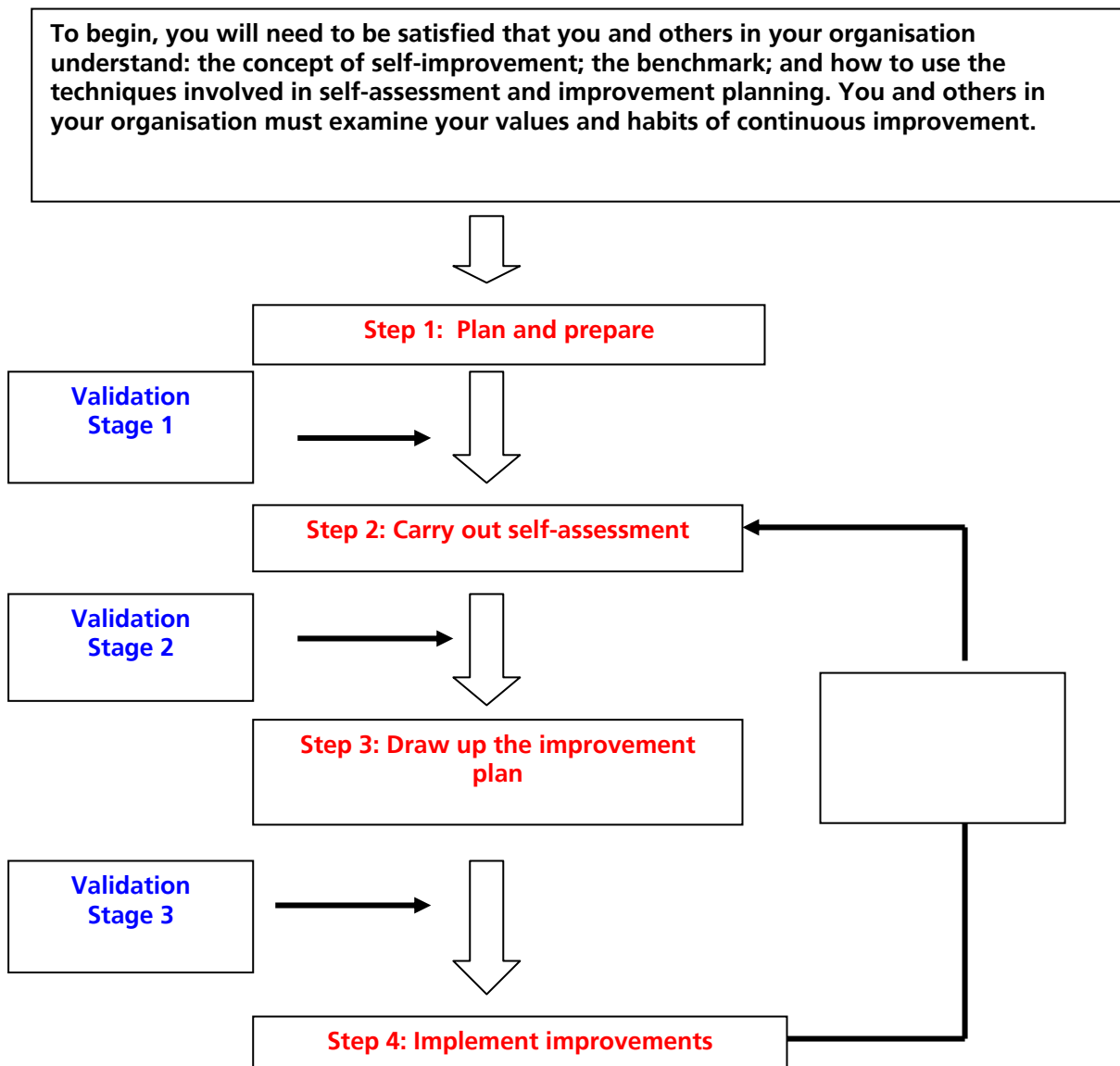
Independent review of the self-assessment, including random checking of selected criteria against identified evidence and reality checks. This will seek to validate the judgements made about the organisation. Depending on the size of the organisation, it is anticipated that up to three days would be required for this stage. Return visits would be required if validation could not be confirmed.

Stage three

Independent review of the improvement plan and critical friend role to ensure the plan adequately addresses the agreed weaknesses. It is anticipated that up to a day would be adequate for this stage, again depending on the size of the organisation.

Stage four

Once all the stages have been completed, the final validation report can be issued. This will include the final record sheets including observations and judgements made at each stage.



Details of the validation process are included in Appendix 1.

The validation is carried out by a minimum of two qualified and experienced external professionals, normally a consultant and an accredited peer. A nominated IDeA consultant will oversee all three stages and produce the final report, supported by a professional senior cultural services officer with experience of the service.

Although it is not a requirement for validation, including an elected member peer in the validation team is an option. This can be discussed at the outset, but will be particularly important where issues relating to political leadership and management are likely to be issues in the self-assessment.

The IDeA provides training for both the consultants and the peers. Peers will need to complete successfully an IDeA accreditation programme before undertaking validations. Information about becoming a peer is on the [IDeA Knowledge website at www.idea.gov.uk](http://www.idea.gov.uk).

The IDeA requires up to three months' notice before the validation in order to source a consultant and a peer. Councils seeking validation should therefore contact the IDeA as soon as possible.

To arrange validation contact the IDeA via its website or at:

IDeA
Layden House
76-86 Turnmill Street
Farringdon
London EC1M 5LG
telephone: 020 7296 6600

Organisations seeking validation must meet the costs themselves. The scale and costs of validation will vary depending on the size of the organisation and the scope of the assessment. They are normally about £6,400 (plus expenses).

Further support to help you with your improvement plan, or to arrange a further visit to review progress, can be negotiated separately through the IDeA.

Peer-led challenge

As an alternative to validation, the IDeA also offers a peer-based challenge and support process. This focuses on developing a network of organisations that can be trained to provide peer challenge and support to each other. Details will be available shortly on the IDeA Knowledge website.

Appendix 1: The validation process in detail

Stage 1: pre-self-assessment validation

The primary purpose of stage 1 is to ensure the organisation understands the self-assessment process and has prepared properly for it. This stage involves reviewing three key elements:

- planning the self-assessment
- scoping the self-assessment
- collecting the evidence.

Planning the self-assessment

The consultant carrying out the validation will want to see a clear plan and documented process for the self-assessment, with clear responsibilities and timescales. These should include actions:

- briefing the organisation fully, including managers, staff and members
- establishing the scope
- establishing and briefing the self-assessment team
- establishing the self-assessment method
- establishing the means of identifying evidence
- establishing focus groups with core staff, partners and customers
- feeding the above information into the self-assessment sessions
- the number, timing, date and content of self-assessment sessions
- when improvement planning will take place and who will complete it
- plans for an annual review and improvement planning process for the future, linked with the normal business planning processes.

Validation criteria

Is the methodology of self-assessment fully understood and is there a process in place to ensure the judgement will be as objective as possible?

Scoping the self-assessment

The consultant carrying out the validation will want to see that, before carrying out self-assessment, the following has been discussed, clearly defined and communicated to those involved in the self-assessment:

- Who is in the 'organisation', for example who is responsible for delivering your strategy and services?
- Should the scope include other sections of the organisation, including those that support you, external trusts or contractors, and voluntary organisations on which you depend on for service delivery?
- For the purposes of the self-assessment, who are the leaders of the organisation, managerially and politically?
- Who are the key partners?
- What services are provided by the organisation?
- Who comprises the community you engage with?
- Who are the customers of the organisation (ie. who receives the above services)?
- Which 'Towards an excellent service' (TAES) themes should apply to these other organisations?

Validation criteria

Is there a clearly articulated understanding of the scope and are all those involved in making the judgement likely to do so on the same basis?

Collecting the evidence

The consultant carrying out the validation will want to see that:

- there is a clear understanding that evidence will be required to substantiate the judgements, and that this evidence is available
- processes for achieving third-party input to the self-assessment have been considered and clear plans made to put them into place, and
- where other assessment processes such as Investors in People (IIP), Quest and Crystal Standard will be used, they are relevant, up to date, externally validated and fit for purpose.

Validation criteria

- **Is there is a clear understanding that judgements that have been, or will be, identified ahead of the process will need evidence to substantiate them?**
- **Is there a process for achieving third-party input into the assessment from staff service users and partners?**
- **If other accreditation systems are to be used in the assessment, are they up to date, externally validated and fit for purpose?**

It is anticipated that this first stage will take up to a day, depending on the size of the organisation and the amount of preparation work carried out ahead of the validation meeting.

It is essential that this first meeting is attended by the senior management team overseeing the self-assessment.

Stage 2: post-self-assessment validation

The primary purpose of the second stage of validation is to ensure:

- that the self-assessment has been properly carried out
- that an objective and realistic judgement about the organisation has been made.

This involves two elements:

- checking that the evidence reflects the judgements for each of the key criteria
- reality checking the judgements with staff, partners, senior managers and members.

a) Evidenced-based judgements

It will not be possible to rigorously check every judgement against the evidence provided in the time allocated for this stage. The validation team will not want to see files of documents and paper. It is not an inspection or a peer review. When carrying out the self-assessment the evidence used to make the judgements will have been identified on the assessment forms. These completed forms will be sent to the validation team so they can see how you have evidenced your judgement. They may wish to have copies of some of the key evidence either beforehand or while on site.

A cross-section of checks will be made across the themes. However, some criteria are considered critical and will always be checked against the evidence.

Validation criteria

Are the judgements made in the following criteria substantiated by the evidence available?

1.1 Leaders have a clear vision for culture and sport, position them in corporate and local strategic partnership priorities, and can demonstrate their impact on these priorities.

1.4 Leaders promote and maintain effective governance arrangements.

2.1 The organisation has a clear strategy which is delivering outcomes through culture and sport.

3.1 The organisation has maintained capacity for effective community engagement and used it to improve culture and sport opportunities.

4.1 The organisation has a mature and trusting relationship with its partnerships.

4.2 The organisation has maintained effective partnerships to meet its strategic objectives, and to support the local strategic partnership and other key partnerships.

4.4 The organisation has continuously reviewed and modified its involvement in partnership arrangements and is able to demonstrate their value.

5.1 Financial resources have been consistently matched with the changing strategic priorities of the organisation.

5.3 The organisation can demonstrate how it has continuously improved efficiency and achieved value for money in the use of resources.

6.1 The organisation can demonstrate the impact of having a strategy for people management to improve its performance.

6.2 Learning and development opportunities make a positive impact on how the organisation's objectives are achieved.

6.3 Equality of opportunity is integrated into people management strategies and organisational working practices.

7.1 The organisation consistently responds to what users want and need quickly, and maintains and extends customer choice.

8.1 The organisation has a culture of performance management running through all that it does.

8.5 The organisation promotes change and manages it well to achieve improvement.

8.6 The organisation has made a lasting impact on the lives of people and on where they live.

b) Reality checks

It will not be possible to carry out extensive reality checks by visiting facilities and taking separate evidence. It is suggested that a minimum of three focus group meetings should be held:

- a staff focus group to cross-reference the judgements made on the leadership, corporate governance and people management themes
- a stakeholder focus group to cross-reference the judgements made on the community engagement, partnership working and customer service themes, and
- a senior management and elected member focus group to cross-reference the judgements made on the policy and strategy, resource management and performance, achievement and learning themes.

It is anticipated that this stage will take up to three days involving both the consultant and the peer, depending on the size of organisation.

Validation criteria

- **Are judgements made about the organisation a fair reflection of its current position?**
- **Do the improvement priorities emerging from the self-assessment logically flow from the self-assessment and evidence provided?**

Stage 3: improvement planning

The final stage of the validation process is to ensure that the improvement plan that emerges from the self-assessment is appropriate and realistic – in effect, that it is capable of leading to improvement.

This involves scrutinising the improvement plan in terms of:

- the inclusion of all the areas requiring improvement, along with a sense of priority in terms of what will have the biggest impact
- the level of commitment and accountability for the actions required
- the resource availability to enable actions to be implemented in the timescales proposed, and
- the project management and monitoring arrangements in place to ensure the actions occur.

It is not anticipated that this will require further on-site visits. However, discussions with senior managers may be needed so that the consultant and peer can confirm that the improvement plan is appropriate and realistic.

It is anticipated that this stage will take up to a day, depending on the size of the organisation.

Validation criteria

- **Are all areas requiring improvement included in the plan, along with a sense of priority in terms of what will have the biggest impact?**
- **Is there enough commitment and accountability for the actions required?**
- **Are the resources available to enable actions to be implemented in the timescales proposed?**
- **Are there project management and monitoring arrangements in place to ensure the actions occur?**
- **Is the improvement plan therefore appropriate and realistic?**

Stage 4: final report

Once all the stages have been completed, the final validation report can be issued. This will include the final record sheets including observations and judgements made at each stage.

If the validation team is not prepared to sign off any of the stages, the reasons for this will be clearly set out along with recommendations for remedial action needed to complete that stage in the process. If necessary, a further visit may be needed at the validation team's discretion and at an extra cost. However, the point of the exercise is to help and support the organisation to improve and not make the process unnecessarily onerous or expensive, while retaining the integrity of the process.

Reporting back

The validation team will give feedback at the end of each stage to the self-assessment team. Once the second stage is complete the IDeA consultant will send a copy of the draft report to the organisation for comment. Subject to these comments, a final version of the report will be completed and returned. A similar process will apply to the final report once the whole validation is complete.

Problems with the validation report

If there is a disagreement between the validation team and the organisation seeking validation, the IDeA will encourage the parties to resolve this by informal discussion. If this fails the matter will be referred to the IDeA, which will organise informal arbitration through a third party.

Maintaining good relationships during validation

The impression created by those carrying out the validation during stages one to three will have a significant impact on the success of the validation.

It is important that people view the self-assessment and improvement planning as the basis for continuous improvement and the validation as a valuable part of both.

During the validation, the consultant and peer will work towards creating the right relationship by being:

- interested
- enthusiastic about the services
- courteous
- helpful
- trusting
- calm
- impartial
- not defensive or offensive.

They will instigate **discussions** with various people within the organisation to review and challenge the planning, self-assessment and improvement planning processes.

The consultant and peer should be seen as part of the self-assessment and improvement planning team, albeit a challenging one. Their goal is to help achieve an accurate self-assessment and add value to the improvement plan. This will lead to improvements in the way the organisation works and therefore to improve results for the community and for the people working in the organisation.