

Culture and Sport Improvement Toolkit

2. How the tool works: guidance notes and how to get the best from the toolkit

Frequently asked questions

1. What is the toolkit?

CSIT amalgamates elements of three improvement tools in the sector:

- 'Arts at the strategic centre'
- 'Library peer review'
- 'Towards an excellent service'.

Arts Council England, MLA, Sport England and the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) own and promote these tools.

CSIT is branded and promoted by a range of organisations across the culture, sport and tourism sectors, and is intended to support self-improvement. It was developed in response to requests from the sector for a more coordinated and simpler set of improvement tools.

CSIT is also important for the sector in relation to the emergent national improvement and efficiency strategy for local government and is intended to support culture and sport agencies in the challenges and opportunities offered in self-improvement.

2. Where can it be used?

CSIT can be used to assess:

- a single culture or sport service
- a range of services, or
- part of or a whole department in a council.

It can also be used across external agencies such as culture partnerships or trusts.

3. How can I make sure the toolkit provides a fair assessment of my organisation?

CSIT uses an evidence-based approach to self-assessment; for a true and accurate outcome there is **no** requirement to write new documents or draw up policies against any of the themes in the benchmark. This would be counter-productive and would not help the process in any way.

The real benefit of using CSIT comes from the accuracy, openness and objectivity of the process. The judgements made for each theme need to be an honest assessment of the organisation's position at this particular time. This enables the user to identify current strengths – and reasons to celebrate success or progress – and priorities for improvement that then form the basis of an improvement planning process.

The process will be flawed and less than useful if the organisation sets out to remedy potential weaknesses by writing new documents and creating new working practices. Tell it as it is – the result will be better for it and it won't take half as long!

4. How can the toolkit be used?

The basis of CSIT is a benchmark that can be used for:

- self-assessment
- 360-degree feedback to identify external perceptions and views about the organisation
- peer-led challenge
- peer-supported improvement, and
- a validation of the self-assessment where the organisation wants to check the robustness of the process.

The benchmark can also be used as the basis of a peer review.

To find out more about peer review, peer-supported improvement, peer-led challenge, and validation, [visit the peer reviews page on the IDEA Knowledge website](#).

CSIT uses the benchmark approach across eight themes that have a direct effect on:

- the quality of the services provided
- how, and whether, they contribute to the achievement of corporate outcomes.

The themes also help identify how management of these services can be improved.

Themes

The themes will be familiar to those who have used the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) Excellence Model or other assessment frameworks. They are:

1. Leadership and corporate governance
2. Policy and strategy
3. Community engagement
4. Partnership working
5. Resource management
6. People management
7. Customer service
8. Performance, achievement and learning.

Criteria and key features

Each of the eight themes contains criteria that define the key elements of an excellent culture and sport organisation. Equality and fair access to services are integrated into every theme. The number of criteria in each theme varies, and each criterion contains key features that provide a more detailed description of the features of an excellent organisation. Altogether there are 32 criteria and 149 key features in the benchmark. A summary is shown in Table 1.

How do I assess services against the benchmark?

Each of the key features, criteria, and themes is assessed at one of four levels:

- 1 = poor
- 2 = fair
- 3 = good
- 4 = excellent.

This enables you to build up a picture of the organisation.

For example:

A **poor** organisation would be one where there is little or no evidence of the criteria, or no awareness or commitment to develop the criteria, for example:

- there is little or no evidence of leadership
- policy frameworks have not been developed
- there is no attempt to engage with communities or work in partnership
- there is no evidence of setting and maintaining high standards of service or monitoring the performance of the organisation.

- A **fair** organisation would be one where there is evidence that the processes of planning and developing the criteria has begun and is progressing, for example:
 - the organisation is committed to and developing an improvement agenda
 - the leadership shows some commitment to improvement

- policies and service planning are being developed
- consultation and community engagement structures and processes are being put into place, including the development of effective partnership arrangements
- budget and service planning are being integrated to support improvement and different procurement options are being investigated
- plans are being put into place to develop and train people and achieve levels 1, 2 or 3 of the Equality Standard
- service standards and customer care policies are being developed and structures and processes are being put into place to monitor performance.

A **good** organisation would be one where there is evidence that demonstrates the key criteria are in place, for example:

- there is strong leadership driving improvement
- clear policy frameworks driving national and local priorities have been influenced and shaped by effective community engagement
- policies are delivered in partnership with other organisations including the voluntary and community sectors, linked to local strategic partnerships (LSPs) and other partnerships
- the use of resources demonstrates value for money
- staff are well trained and positive about what they do and level 3 of the Equality Standard has been achieved
- standards of service are improving in the light of user opinion
- there is a culture of performance management throughout the organisation.

An **excellent** organisation would be able to evidence all the aspects of a good organisation. It would also be able to demonstrate that the key criteria have been in place long enough for it to demonstrate the impact of what it has achieved in terms of real outcomes.

An excellent organisation would also be able to demonstrate how it has learned from review and evaluation. It can evidence continuous improvement and show how it promotes the value of culture and sport to the rest of the organisation or those outside the service.

An excellent organisation would be proactive in developing and disseminating good policy and practice and demonstrating innovative service delivery.

5. Evaluating the positioning of culture and sport through a 360-degree feedback

A separate 360-degree benchmark is available for use with external and internal partners and stakeholders outside the scope of the assessment. The 360-degree feedback process requires an objective approach in order to obtain an accurate and useful position statement on how others view the organisation.

External partners, internal partners and key stakeholders should be invited to make an appropriate assessment of the organisation. This will help identify and demonstrate how culture and sport services are managed, the extent to which they are seen as core and whether they are positioned at the strategic heart of the organisation.

Not every theme in the 360-degree benchmark will be relevant to every partner, and careful choice needs to be made about which theme to use with which partners. For example, the resource management theme is more relevant to a corporate or finance department or team than to the voluntary sector, and the reverse may be true for the partnerships theme.

To provide 360-degree feedback partners and stakeholders use a modified benchmark – which is taken from the benchmark used in the self-assessment - to assess and score the organisation. These views are then included in the overall assessment and are a valuable way of informing improvement planning.

6. Scoring

At first sight the number of criteria and key features can appear overwhelming and you may think that scoring the benchmark will be difficult. Please be assured that this isn't the case and there is clear guidance to help you with this.

To score the self-assessment you need to make a decision about which of the four levels – 'poor', 'fair', 'good' or 'excellent' – most accurately reflects each of the key features. You then allocate a score on the scale of 1 to 4. This is aggregated to produce a score for each criterion and a score for each theme.

A separate guidance note is available which goes through the scoring in detail and includes a scoring template.

Scoring enables you to easily identify the key areas for improvement. This is the most important and valuable outcome from the self-assessment process.

This feeds into and informs the improvement planning stage, which is an important aspect of the self-assessment process and vital to continuous self-improvement.

7. A 15-step guide

The following staged guidance is provided as a prompt and not as a prescriptive method of delivery.

Stage one: initiation

Step one: develop the business case

Before using CSIT, consider why you want to use it and what the anticipated benefits are. You may wish to include representatives from the service areas you would like included in the development of the business case. This will encourage early commitment and positive discussion.

Step two: identify the services to be assessed – scoping the assessment

The self-assessment will only provide useful analysis of strengths and areas for developing improvement planning if the team responsible for doing it is clear and agrees on the points below.

- The extent of the organisation being assessed. This should be defined primarily by reference to those responsible for achieving agreed outcomes and delivering your culture and sport strategies. It should define the specific range of services being assessed. The scope should include other sections of the organisation, including those below. The extent of the organisation being assessed. This should be defined primarily by reference to those responsible for achieving agreed outcomes and delivering your culture and sport strategies. It should define the specific range of services being assessed. The scope should include other sections of the organisation, including: those that support you, such as finance or HR; and external trusts, contractors and voluntary organisations that you depend on to deliver services.
- The leadership of the organisation, managerially and politically.
- Key partners and stakeholders.
- The community with which you should engage.
- Those who use your services.

The exact scope will depend upon the nature of your services and organisation. However, the following factors should be borne in mind.

- The potential value of the self-assessment grows as the scope widens, but this has to be balanced against the increasing time and complexity.
- When deciding which services will be included, view the service through the eyes of the customer, rather than from the perspective of your organisation's current structure; avoid including facilities or locations but overlooking the activities taking place in them (for example, play facilities, events).
- While assessing the organisation on a service-by-service basis may seem a logical approach, this may help emphasise service silos and promote competition rather than shared learning. If you do assess in this way, be prepared to come together to produce an overall judgement of the service. Identify parts of the service that are good and can help others and services that are less good and need support.
- Consider including all council functions involved in delivering the identified services, even if they fall into different departments (for example, . finance and HR).

- Ideally, include contractors, trusts, and outsourced providers (where they are directly involved in providing services) in the self-assessment process so that you assess performance together. Alternatively, involve them in the 360-degree feedback, defining them as key partners or stakeholders commenting on your services or partnership working.
- Ensure that all functions included in the scope are represented on the team. This team will collectively assess how well all the different functions are working together to deliver, develop and improve the service.

You may not need to assess all of the functions or organisations in the scope against all eight themes. For example, you may only want to assess sport and leisure contractors against 'customer service' or the department's finance section against 'resource management'. So you could have different self-assessment teams for each theme.

Use the templates provided (tables 2 and 3) to decide and agree on: who the leaders are; which service areas will make up 'the organisation'; who the partners are, internal and external; who users and the communities are; and what the intended outcomes are for the services covered.

Throughout this process of defining the scope, remember to keep the end in mind. The success of the approach can only be judged by how the organisation improves.

Step three: project management

Develop a comprehensive project management document to deal with questions of time, approach, scale and methodology. The document will need to identify how you will obtain the views and input of service users, the community – including those from hard to reach groups, internal and external partners and stakeholders – which documentary evidence you will provide, and what external accreditations you have received.

Step four: invest time in planning and communication

It is often said that there can never be enough communication. This can also be said for planning. It is important to invest adequate time and resources in the planning stage of the project. A particular focus on communication, both of the adopted approach and the benefits of using CSIT, is equally important.

CSIT includes 360-degree feedback. It is important that all partners and stakeholders understand the context for the self-assessment and do not see it as part of an inspection or external assessment process. To aid communication, a simple briefing sheet may be a useful method of explaining the business case and project approach.

Step five: seek top-team commitment

It is crucial to have commitment from senior political and managerial leaders in the organisation before using CSIT. This is an opportunity to sell the benefits of the tool, to get buy-in and position culture and sport in the wider organisation, and secure early engagement with improvement planning.

Stage two: preparation

Step six: assign a project manager and project administrator

Once you have commitment to begin, it is important to identify and assign a dedicated project manager who has the appropriate capacity and can access the required resources. Consider people who have previous project management experience, good communication and organisational skills, and are empowered to make decisions and drive the project forward. Allocating a project administrator to support the project manager, depending on available resources, may also help you.

Step seven: establish a cross-service project board

Once you have agreed the scope of the assessment project, invite representatives from all the services included to be part of a project board. It may be beneficial to include the political leader(s) with responsibility for culture and sport on the project board. The project board will act as ambassadors for the project, oversee its overall direction and offer support and advice to all stakeholders.

If these representatives were included in Step 1: Developing the business case, they will already understand the process and anticipated benefits. It is important to ensure that all board members have the capacity to undertake the task, and there may be opportunities to include other staff to develop their understanding of the wider culture and sport improvement agenda.

Step eight: critical friend challenge

Recruit an internal or external stakeholder to challenge assumptions and the evidence provided during the self-assessment. This may be an opportunity to include a representative from the corporate centre who perhaps has limited knowledge of the culture and sport agenda but has wider knowledge of assessment and improvement; or, alternatively, someone from a neighbour authority or relevant organisation.

Step nine: don't reinvent the wheel

Usually there is no need to introduce new processes and systems for the self-assessment. You may be able to use existing team meetings. Existing meetings and networks could be used for focus groups and to raise awareness of the process both internally and externally.

Using existing staff development days and team sessions, again for focus group work, will help fully engage staff and may prevent overload. Finally, to be most effective, the outcomes of the assessment should be fed into annual service planning to ensure that improvement actions are mainstreamed.

Step 10: a positive experience

Now you are ready to use CSIT, remember to make this a positive experience. Have fun and use the tool as a way of engaging and bringing together elected members, staff and partners from across the whole of culture and sport services.

Stage three: action

Step 11: doing the self-assessment

The self-assessment can seem a complex and time-consuming phase. However, investment in Stages 1 and 2 can pay huge dividends, and Stage 3 can be completed by holding a series of eight half-day project board meetings to review each benchmark theme.

Strong facilitation is needed to avoid over-analysis and debate and to meet the tight timescale. This is where the project manager's skills come in. Evidence can be presented and reviewed in line with the themes being assessed, and here the project administrator can provide valuable support in collating evidence for each theme.

Step 12: engaging staff in the self-assessment

The people who work in the organisation are its most valuable asset. They have a vital contribution to make in assessing and improving the services they work on. Staff focus groups are recommended, to:

- explain why CSIT is being used
- engage people in the process
- seek their views on service strengths and areas for improvement.

Step 13: engaging internal stakeholders

It is recommended that a workshop or focus group be held to involve internal stakeholders, such as directors and assistant directors from other departments and divisions in the organisation. This is to:

- help position culture and sport in the heart of the organisation
- provide a holistic picture of culture and sport services through the 360-degree feedback process.

Step 14: using the 360-degree feedback component

A realistic and valid assessment of a culture and sport organisation requires a detached, objective perspective. CSIT invites external partners and stakeholders to undertake an assessment of the organisation using an abridged version of the benchmark. This is a key aspect of the assessment process and can reap additional dividends through investing appropriate time and resources.

CSIT is not prescriptive about which partners and stakeholders should be involved in the assessment. The organisation should decide who best to include. Some suggestions are:

- councillors who have, or could have, an interest and stake in culture and sport, such as those involved with children and young people, vulnerable adults or the environment
- representatives from the local strategic partnership (LSP), trusts or cultural partnerships
- representatives from regional bodies for Sport England, Arts Council England, MLA, English Heritage, and others.
- local community representatives and those from the community, voluntary and faith sectors.

As there are a number of ways to engage with partners and stakeholders, the organisation can decide on its preferred approach. Experience suggests that this element requires detailed communication, to ensure partners and stakeholders understand exactly why they are being invited to participate, and a sensitive approach when dealing with the challenge of scoring the features and criteria in the benchmark.

As referred to earlier, not all the external benchmark is relevant to all partners and stakeholders, and there needs to be careful choice about which themes and criteria to use with which partner.

Step 15: scoring

It is better to score the assessment as you go depending on how you have decided to carry out the assessment. If you have set out to assess the organisation as a whole you will be coming to shared judgements against each criterion as you go. If you have chosen to assess service by service (sport, arts, libraries) you will need to come together to produce a composite score. This may be quite challenging, particularly where one service consistently performs below the others. Unfortunately, this means the organisation as a whole may be only 'fair' rather than 'good' and this service may be the focus of the improvement plan and able to learn from the others. Remember, whatever way you assess to achieve a 'good', the criteria need to be consistent and prevalent across the service and not just in one or two places. If the criteria are not consistent, the score can only be 'fair'.

The **360-degree** feedback can be scored separately and then either:

- used to regulate your score up or down based on the external perception (for example, if you have consistently scored yourself higher at partnership working than your partners you may wish to review), or
- used to stimulate a discussion at the end of the process about the different perceptions and the reasons for them.

Step 16: improvement planning

Once the views and scores have been collated and prioritised, you will have information that will enable you to move to the most important stage of the process – improvement planning. More detailed guidance is available on improvement planning.

Self-assessment indicative timeline

Stage 1 – Initiation

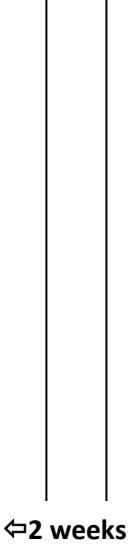
- Step 1: Develop a business case
- Step 2: Project scoping
- Step 3: Project management
- Step 4: Planning and communication
- Step 5: Securing commitment

Project start-up



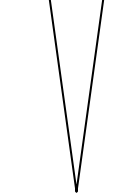
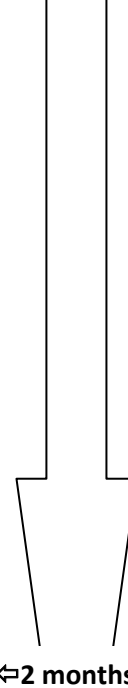
Stage 2 – Preparation

- Step 6: Assign a project manager
- Step 7: Establish a project board
- Step 8: Recruit a critical friend
- Step 9: Identify existing process
- Step 10: Promote positive experience



Stage 3 – Action

- Step 11: Undertake self-assessment x 4
- Step 12: Engage staff
- Step 13: Engage internal stakeholders
- Step 14: Complete 360-degree assessment
- Step 15: Collate and prioritise views



3 months

Table 1: summary of the benchmark showing themes, criteria, and key features

Themes	Criteria	Summary of key features
1 Leadership and corporate governance	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.	The role of leaders in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ aligning services with corporate and partnership priorities ▪ strategic partnership activities ▪ advocating on behalf of culture and sport ▪ promoting equal opportunities.
	1.2 Leaders consistently engage with the community and with partners, and can demonstrate the value of engaging with them in achieving agreed outcomes.	The role of leaders in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ promoting the value of the third and private sectors ▪ collaborating with partners and the community ▪ cross-boundary working.
	1.3 Leaders consistently motivate and support people to improve services and recognise and champion success in culture and sport.	Leaders as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ role models for continuous improvement ▪ a source of empowerment, innovation and creativity ▪ figureheads celebrating success.

	1.4 Leaders promote and maintain effective governance arrangements.	<p>The role of leaders as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ promoters of good governance ▪ figureheads in corporate management arrangements
2 Policy and strategy	2.1 The organisation has a clear strategy that is delivering outcomes through culture and sport.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ clarity of purpose and direction ▪ underpinning strategy with effective consultation including with hard-to-reach groups ▪ creating a 'golden thread' of planning to delivery ▪ contribution of cultural services to corporate and partnership strategic plans and local area agreements (LAAs).
	2.2 The organisation is setting ambitious targets to achieve its aims and objectives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ use of equality and improvement targets to measure delivery ▪ use of benchmarking ▪ maintaining focus. ▪ equal opportunities, child protection and environmental sustainability.
3 Community engagement	3.1 The organisation has maintained capacity for effective community engagement and used it to improve culture and sport opportunities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ building effective means of engaging with communities with other partners ▪ managing appropriate success and risk factors ▪ developing skills to engage effectively ▪ building capacity to enable communities and voluntary sector bodies to engage
	3.2 The organisation can demonstrate how consulting with and involving local communities, the voluntary and business sectors has improved culture and sport opportunities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ consulting coherently particularly with hard-to-reach groups ▪ embedding equal opportunities in consultation and communications

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ enabling local councillors to represent their communities ▪ using consultation to shape service and feeding back effectively ▪ achieving satisfaction and building support and influence
4 Partnership working	4.1 The organisation has a mature and trusting relationship with its partnerships.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ understanding of partnership working and roles and responsibilities ▪ confident devolved decision making
	4.2 The organisation has maintained effective partnerships to meet its strategic objectives and support the local strategic partnership and other key partnerships.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ clarity of purpose in partnerships ▪ using partnerships to shared and mutual advantage ▪ working in cross boundary partnerships ▪ building confidence within the LSP ▪ working effectively with regional culture and sport agencies
	4.3 The implications and impact on partnership arrangements have been at the forefront when policy and budget decisions have been taken.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ respecting partnerships when planning services and taking budget decisions
	4.4 The organisation has continuously reviewed and modified its involvement in partnership arrangements and is able to demonstrate their value.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ maintaining relevant partnership arrangements through effective review ▪ understanding the value and impact of partnership arrangements
5 Resource management	5.1 Financial resources have been consistently matched with the changing strategic priorities of the organisation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ aligning service, budget and other resource planning decisions
	5.2 The organisation can demonstrate how it has effectively controlled its use of financial resources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ managing financial resources effectively
	5.3 The organisation can demonstrate how it has continually improved efficiency and achieved value for money in the use of	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ achieving efficiency and value for money

	resources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ maximising the benefits from strategic procurement ▪ managing projects and risk effectively ▪ applying innovation and creativity
	5.4 The organisation has continually attracted external resources that have enabled it to achieve improvement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ attracting and maximising the impact of external funding opportunities
	5.5 The organisation can demonstrate the benefits of efficiently managing its physical assets (land and premises).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ managing land and physical assets effectively
	5.6 The organisation can demonstrate how it has used new technologies to achieve its strategic objectives and improve services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ using information technology effectively
6 People management	6.1 The organisation can demonstrate the impact of having a strategy for people management to improve its performance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ managing people effectively to achieve improvement and business objectives
	6.2 Learning and development opportunities make a positive impact on how the organisation's objectives are achieved.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ managing people effectively to facilitate their learning and development ▪ addressing skill shortages ▪ enabling effective engagement with key corporate and partnership agendas ▪ building confidence among partners and transferring learning
	6.3 Equality of opportunity is integrated into people management strategies and organisational working practices.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ achieving equality of opportunity in learning and development ▪ achieving diversity in the workforce ▪ enabling people to improve their own performance

	6.4 Managers have been effective in leading, managing and developing people to a degree where improvement can be evidenced.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> enabling managers to become effective leaders
	6.5 People take ownership and responsibility by being involved in decision making.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> creating a culture of empowerment in which people can share and take decisions enabling people to understand the wider issues and context in which they are working
	6.6 The impact of people's contribution to the organisation has been recognised, celebrated and valued.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> enabling and valuing the contribution people make to the organisation
7 Customer service	7.1 The organisation consistently responds to what users want and need quickly and maintains and extends customer choice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> listening and understanding the needs of service users and non-users achieving customer satisfaction by extending choice and personalisation
	7.2 The organisation has maintained high standards of service and customer satisfaction.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> establishing and maintaining effecting service standards
8 Performance, achievement and learning	8.1 The organisation has a culture of performance management running through all that it does.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> championing performance management and creating the right culture across the organisation building the skills and capacity to measure performance embedding equity in performance measurement
	8.2 The organisation maintains a well-balanced range of high-quality data and information that it uses to demonstrate how it performs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> achieving the right mix of performance information applying the appropriate indicators for equality and diversity building the right systems to collect and use data to measure performance
	8.3 The organisation can demonstrate the impact of actions taken as a response to performance information.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> taking action based on the data and information available

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ reallocating resources based on performance ▪ dealing with poor performance ▪ recognising and celebrating success
	8.4 The organisation can demonstrate the impact of knowledge-based learning in its service planning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ capturing and transferring learning including from partners ▪ learning from best practice ▪ managing knowledge effectively. ▪ using self-assessment and external challenge to improve performance
	8.5 The organisation promotes change and manages it well to achieve improvement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ recognising and managing change effectively
	8.6 The organisation has made a lasting impact on the lives of people and on where they live.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ evidencing the achievement of agreed outcomes and impact.

Table 2: scoping template

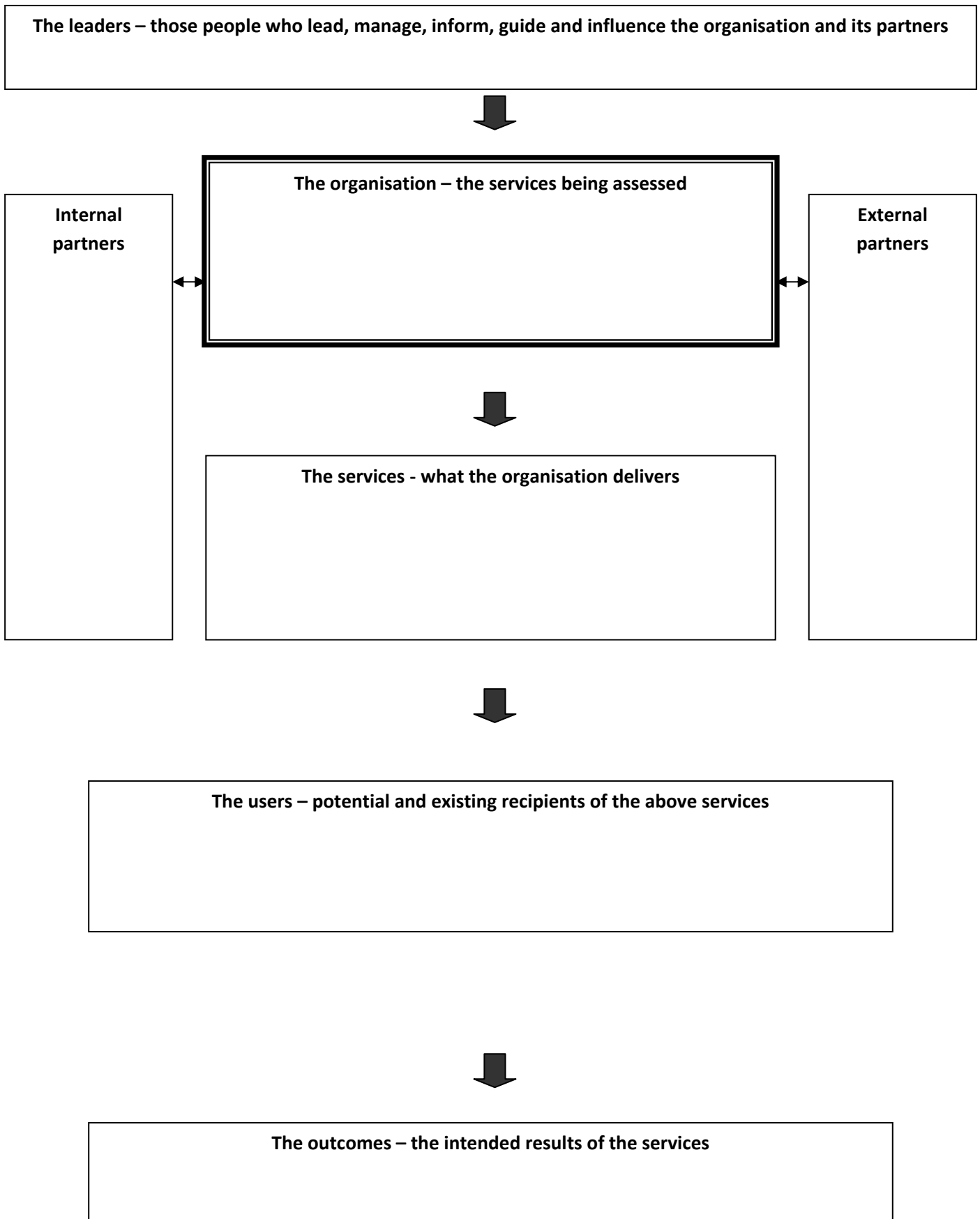


Table 3: planning schedule

Theme	Functions to be included in the self-assessment	Self-assessment team members	Team leader, challenge agent, and scribe	Meetings and other key dates
Leadership and corporate governance				
Policy and strategy				
Community engagement				
Partnership working				
Resource management				
People management				

Customer service				
Performance achievement and learning				