

Career Development Service **Benchmarking Resource**

An all-sector quality improvement instrument for career development services

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Key terms

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Career development practitioner

refers to the person or people who deliver career development services, consistent with the Professional Standards for Australian Career Development Practitioners.

Client

refers to anyone receiving career development services, whether they are a student, jobseeker, employee, or member of the public.

Organisation

refers to the entity that delivers the career development service, whether a school, TAFE or registered training organisation, university, employment service provider, community organisation, government agency, or private practice.

Service

refers to the career development service or program being reviewed.

Staff in related functions

refers to people within the organisation who are not career development practitioners, but whose roles contribute to or interact with career-related outcomes for clients (e.g. teachers, academic staff, case managers, employment consultants, supervisors).

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The Career Development Service Benchmarking Resource is an all-sector quality improvement instrument that helps your organisation review and strengthen how it delivers career development services. It assesses performance against 5 elements and 14 outcome statements, rating each on a 4-point scale from Emerging to Embedding, so you can see where your service sits now and what to work on next.

Where this resource sits within Australia's National Career Development Quality Ecosystem

Australia's career development profession is supported by a quality ecosystem of 4 nationally consistent, interconnected frameworks, each maintained by the Career Industry Council of Australia.

Framework	Question it answers	Primary user
Australian Blueprint for Career Development	What should clients learn and be able to do?	Practitioners, curriculum designers, program developers
Professional Standards (5th ed., 2026)	Who is qualified to deliver career development services?	Individual practitioners, training providers, employing bodies
Guiding Principles (3rd ed., 2026)	Does this service or product meet quality standards?	Practitioners, managers, resource curators
Benchmarking Resource (this document)	How well does our organisation implement and sustain quality career development?	Organisational leaders, service managers, practitioners, review teams

The relationship between the Guiding Principles and the Benchmarking Resource

The Guiding Principles operate at the level of the service or product. They help you judge the quality of a specific service. The Benchmarking Resource operates at the organisational level. It helps an organisation consistently deliver quality services and know how to improve them. Both assessments are valuable, and neither replaces the other. For a detailed mapping between this resource's outcomes and the other CICA frameworks, see [Appendix C](#).

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What underpins this resource?

The Australian workforce continues to change in ways that have direct implications for career development clients. The emergence of AI, automation, and digital technologies is reshaping industries. The growth of the gig economy, remote and hybrid work, and portfolio careers means people are managing more complex career paths. Multiple career transitions across a lifetime mean that the ability to make good study and career choices, navigate change, and make the best use of a person's skills is essential for both individual prosperity and national productivity.

The aim of contemporary career development services is broader than helping people make a single career choice. It is to equip them with career self-management skills so they can respond flexibly to changing opportunities and circumstances across a lifetime.

Services need a way to check that their practice has kept pace with that shift, and this resource provides a structured basis for doing so.

This resource draws on common elements of contemporary business improvement models and is informed by the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) Model 2025.

The EFQM Model is a globally recognised management framework that supports organisations in managing change and improving performance. This resource does not address organisational governance systems such as business planning, legislative compliance, and risk management, which vary significantly across sectors and are generally addressed through other organisational mechanisms.

What are career development services?

Career development services offered by organisations include career education, career exploration, career information, career advice, and career guidance. These services can be delivered in a variety of ways and settings, including individual counselling or coaching sessions, group workshops and programs, classroom-based career education, experiential learning and work-based learning, careers information events, production and curation of career information resources, online and AI-assisted career tools, and facilitated connections with industry, education, and employer representatives.

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Why review your approach to career development service delivery?

Organisations, practitioners, and their clients benefit from career development services based on current evidence about what works. Reviewing and strengthening services can mean clients receive responsive services, practitioners can work more effectively with a clear continuum of services, organisational leaders can be confident their service delivers quality outcomes, and stakeholders are appropriately engaged in supporting client career development.

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This resource is a quality improvement instrument for organisations that deliver career development services. It helps managers, leaders, and practitioners review and strengthen service delivery, regardless of setting.

Career development services are assessed against performance criteria comprising 5 elements and 14 outcome statements. For each outcome, services are assessed on a 4-point scale: Emerging, Developing, Establishing, and Embedding.

5 elements, 14 outcomes

Element	Outcomes
1. Service purpose and direction	<ul style="list-style-type: none">a) Service purpose and direction are informed by an understanding of client and stakeholder needs and the service's operating environmentb) Service design supports the purpose and direction of the organisation
2. Client focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none">a) Client rights are defined, protected, communicated, and upheldb) The service responds to diversity, designs for accessibility, and engages clients who are difficult to reach or at risk of disengagementc) Client outcomes are monitored
3. People and resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none">a) Staff performance is aligned with the purpose and direction of the serviceb) Staff are supported to develop their capabilityc) Resources are appropriately targeted to client needd) Resources are accurate, and grounded in evidence and theorye) Digital tools and technology used by the service, including AI and generative AI, are contemporary, support the service purpose and direction, and protect data security and client records
4. Partnerships and community contribution	<ul style="list-style-type: none">a) The service builds and maintains partnerships to support career developmentb) The service is informed by input from clients and stakeholders, and contributes to the wellbeing and development of the broader community
5. Improvement and innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">a) The service reviews its performance and uses data and evidence to inform decision-makingb) The service monitors its operating environment and adapts its approach in response to change

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The 4-point scale

Emerging:

The service has limited or no formal systems, processes, or documentation in place for this outcome. Attention to this area is minimal, ad hoc, or not yet initiated.

Developing:

Documented systems and processes are in place for this outcome and are applied in practice, though they may not yet be consistently understood, reviewed, or linked to results.

Establishing:

Practitioners and managers responsible for the service understand how and why these systems were developed, apply them consistently, and can show how they are used and reviewed to achieve expected outcomes.

Embedding:

The role and strategic value of the service is evident across the wider organisation, in the understanding of staff and stakeholders beyond the service itself, and in organisational planning and review. Practice in this area is sustained and continually improved.

Each level builds on the one before it, consistent with the “...and” format used in the criteria tables.

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Getting started

The Benchmarking Resource works best when approached as a structured but manageable process. The following guidance for users wishing to benchmark their service is based on how organisations across different sectors have used similar quality improvement instruments.

Assemble your review team

Bring together 3 to 6 people: the manager responsible for the career development service, 1 or 2 practitioners, and at least one person from a related function. Solo practitioners can work through the resource individually.

Choose your scope

You don't need to cover all 14 outcomes in one review cycle. Focus on 3 to 4 outcomes that are most relevant to your current priorities.

Block out your time

Plan for 4 to 8 hours spread across 2 or 3 sessions for your first review cycle. Later cycles are generally faster once the process is familiar.

Set your review frequency

An annual review cycle works well for most organisations. Align it with your existing organisational planning and reporting calendar rather than creating a separate schedule.

Run your first review cycle

If this is your first cycle, the goal is to establish a baseline, not to get everything right. The review process itself will help you identify what evidence you already have and where the gaps are.

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The PDSA cycle

The resource uses the Plan–Do–Study–Act (PDSA) cycle as its organising framework. PDSA is a widely used quality improvement methodology that provides a structured but flexible approach to testing and embedding improvements.

PLAN	DO	STUDY	ACT
Assess where you are now and set improvement goals	Implement improvement actions	Monitor, measure, and learn from the results	Adopt, adapt, or try a different approach

Plan

The planning phase involves forming a review team, collecting materials required for the review, assessing current performance against the benchmarking criteria, and agreeing on priorities for improvement.

Establish the review team

Form a team with a variety of perspectives: organisational leadership, the manager responsible for the career development service, practitioners, and staff from related functions. Consider whether to appoint an external reviewer and whether to involve a stakeholder reference group including clients, employers, and community representatives.

Assess current performance

Ask review team members to work through the benchmarking criteria individually, consult with stakeholders for external feedback, then bring the team together to build a consensus view about where the service currently sits along the progressive performance criteria.

Set improvement goals

Draw on the performance criteria for ideas about what your service might look like if it were fully embedded. Prioritise elements and outcomes that are most important for your organisation and set specific, measurable improvement goals.

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Do

Develop an action plan with clear actions, timeframes, and assigned responsibilities. Start with manageable changes. The PDSA approach encourages testing improvements on a small scale before rolling them out more broadly. Collect data as you go and keep the review team and stakeholders informed.

Study

Review progress against the improvement goals established in the Plan phase. Use a mix of quantitative and qualitative measures. Talk to clients, practitioners, staff in related functions, and stakeholders. Identify what worked, what did not, and what unexpected outcomes emerged. Document findings for the next phase.

Act

Adopt changes that have worked well. Adapt changes that showed promise but need refinement. Abandon changes that did not achieve the intended results and develop alternative approaches. Communicate outcomes to the leadership team and stakeholders. Set a timeframe for the next review cycle.

Continuous improvement is not about achieving a perfect score against every criterion. It is about building an organisational habit of reflection, action, and learning that keeps the career development service responsive to changing client needs, workforce conditions, and professional expectations.

Performance criteria

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Each of the 5 benchmarking elements below is presented as a heading, with tables that assess its associated outcomes in turn.

For each outcome statement, the following tables describe progressive performance criteria on a 4-point scale. The criteria are flexible and describe outcomes rather than prescriptive processes, which means they can be fulfilled in a variety of ways to meet organisational and client needs.

Element 1: Service purpose and direction

Outcome	Emerging	Developing	Establishing	Embedding
1a. Service purpose and direction are informed by an understanding of client and stakeholder needs and the service's operating environment	The service does not have a documented purpose or direction informed by analysis of client career development needs. Any links to the organisation's wider strategic direction are absent or unclear.	Service purpose and direction are informed by analysis of client career development needs. They link to the organisation's purpose and strategic direction and are reflected in key organisational documents.	...and practitioners can describe how client needs analysis shapes the service purpose and direction, and how the service contributes to the wider aims of the organisation.	...and staff in related functions can describe the wider benefits the career development service delivers. The leadership team can outline the value the service contributes to wider organisational aims (e.g. client engagement, retention, successful transitions, employment outcomes).

Outcome	Emerging	Developing	Establishing	Embedding
1b. Service design supports the purpose and direction of the organisation	There is no documented service model, or the service operates on an ad hoc basis without a clear design linking activities to client or organisational needs.	The service has a documented service model designed to meet client and organisational needs and support the client outcomes defined in Element 2.	...and practitioners can explain how the service has been designed to meet the needs of all clients efficiently, and what evidence has informed the design (e.g. tiered model: universal, targeted, intensive).	...and practitioners can outline how the service model has been reviewed and reconfigured in response to changing client needs. Staff in related functions understand the service model and can refer clients appropriately. The leadership team can provide examples of changes they have supported.

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Element 2: Client focus

Outcome	Emerging	Developing	Establishing	Embedding
2a. Client rights are defined, protected, communicated, and upheld	Client rights are not defined or documented. Clients are not routinely informed of their rights, the service's scope and limitations, or how to provide feedback or raise concerns, and there is no documented process for communicating entitlements or managing complaints.	Client rights are defined and communicated. Clients are informed of their entitlement to a professional, respectful, and confidential service, the service's scope and limitations (including any use of digital or AI-enabled tools), and their right to make independent decisions. Information is provided about how to give feedback or raise concerns, and any fees or costs are disclosed before the service begins.	...and client rights are actively protected in practice. Practitioners can describe how client rights and protections are communicated at each stage, how they manage impartiality, including disclosure of potential conflicts of interest, and how client data is collected, stored, and used in accordance with privacy requirements, including when digital tools or AI are involved.	...and client rights are consistently upheld across the service. Clients report that they understand their rights and feel confident that the service acts in their interests. Staff in related functions can describe how they uphold client rights when referring clients, and the leadership team can describe how complaints and feedback mechanisms are reviewed and used to inform improvements.

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Element 2: Client focus (continued)

Outcome	Emerging	Developing	Establishing	Embedding
2b. The service responds to diversity, designs for accessibility, and engages clients who are difficult to reach or at risk of disengagement	Little or no data is collected about client diversity. There is no systematic approach to identifying clients who are disengaged or at risk of disengaging. Service information is available through limited channels only.	Data is collected about client diversity, including but not limited to (where relevant) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identification, cultural background, languages spoken at home, disability, neurodiversity, gender diversity, caring responsibilities, and other relevant factors. Systems are in place to identify clients who are disengaged or at risk. Service information is provided through a range of accessible channels.	...and practitioners can describe how client diversity data is used to tailor service delivery and promotional materials, with supporting evidence. Practitioners can describe outreach strategies for connecting with clients at risk and the evidence behind them. Practitioners can describe how they monitor effectiveness in meeting diverse client needs.	...and practitioners can describe strategies to remove systemic barriers to access (e.g. adaptive modifications, culturally safe approaches for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients, referral for support). Practitioners can describe how they have reviewed and improved their information, promotion, and outreach strategies. Staff in related functions understand the diverse client population. Organisational leadership communicates its expectation of inclusive service delivery.

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Element 2: Client focus (continued)

Outcome	Emerging	Developing	Establishing	Embedding
2c. Client outcomes are monitored	Client outcomes are not defined. There is no systematic process for monitoring client outcomes or collecting post-service data.	Client outcomes are defined and monitored. Expected client career self-management outcomes are documented, and systems are in place to monitor and review client outcomes at regular intervals. Outcome data is collected on post-service results (e.g. destinations, employment outcomes, transition rates, client satisfaction).	...and outcome monitoring is embedded in practice. Practitioners can explain how client outcomes link to evidence-based career self-management competencies (e.g. the Australian Blueprint for Career Development), how outcomes are measured and monitored, and how reviewing outcomes has led to service changes.	...and outcome monitoring informs wider organisational practice. Staff in related functions can describe their role in monitoring client career outcomes, and the leadership team can describe how they use outcome data to support changes or improvements.

Element 3: People and resources

Outcome	Emerging	Developing	Establishing	Embedding
3a. Staff performance is aligned with the purpose and direction of the service	Career development staff do not have performance agreements, or existing agreements do not reference the purpose and direction of the career development service. There is no formal link between staff performance management and service objectives.	Career development staff performance agreements link to the purpose and direction of the service. Position descriptions reflect the requirements of the role.	...and managers can describe how position descriptions and performance agreements are linked to the service purpose and direction, including the required skills, knowledge, and competencies.	...and managers can give examples of how position descriptions and performance agreements have been reviewed to improve client career development outcomes. The leadership team ensures that career development is reflected in relevant performance agreements across the organisation.

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Element 3: People and resources (continued)

Outcome	Emerging	Developing	Establishing	Embedding
3b. Staff are supported to develop their capability	Career development staff do not hold relevant career development qualifications, or qualifications are not a requirement of the role. There is no structured approach to professional development or capability building for career development staff.	Career development staff have relevant experience and qualifications. Professional development opportunities are available to support staff capability.	...and practitioners belong to a CICA Member Association and meet the Professional Standards for Australian Career Development Practitioners. Where eligible, staff are registered or working towards registration on the Australian Register of Professional Career Development Practitioners. Practitioners can describe initiatives to build the career development awareness and skills of staff in related functions.	...and managers can give examples of supporting continuing professional development in line with the Professional Standards. Staff in related functions can describe the benefits of professional development and learning opportunities provided by the career development service. The leadership team communicates that career development capability is valued across the organisation.

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Element 3: People and resources (continued)

Outcome	Emerging	Developing	Establishing	Embedding
3c. Resources are appropriately targeted to client need	There is no documented method for allocating resources across the service. Resource allocation is ad hoc or driven by historical patterns rather than an analysis of client need.	The service has a documented method for allocating resources across service elements and to individual clients or cohorts. Resource allocation supports the service aims (Element 1) and client outcomes (Element 2).	...and practitioners can explain how the resource allocation method supports efficient use of resources, including the use of digital tools to extend service reach. Practitioners can describe how resource allocation is monitored and reviewed in relation to client outcomes.	...and practitioners can give examples of changes to resource allocations and how these respond to monitoring and review findings. The leadership team can give examples of resourcing changes they have supported to improve client career self-management outcomes.

Outcome	Emerging	Developing	Establishing	Embedding
3d. Resources are accurate, and grounded in evidence and theory	The service has no process for verifying the accuracy of career information and resources, or for grounding them in recognised career development theory or evidence. Resources may be outdated, unreferenced, or informally sourced.	The service has a process for checking the accuracy of career resources before use. Resources reference recognised career development theories or evidence-based frameworks (e.g. the Australian Blueprint for Career Development). Sources are documented.	...and practitioners can explain how resources are selected, verified, and kept current, and how they align with recognised theory and evidence. Resources are reviewed on a defined cycle and updated when new evidence, theory, or labour market information becomes available.	...and staff in related functions understand and draw on the evidence base underpinning the service's resources. The leadership team can describe how investment in evidence-based, theory-grounded resources contributes to service quality and client outcomes. Practitioners monitor developments in career development theory and evidence to inform resource review.

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Element 3: People and resources (continued)

Outcome	Emerging	Developing	Establishing	Embedding
3e. Digital tools and technology used by the service, including AI and generative AI, are contemporary, support the service purpose and direction, and protect data security and client records.	The service makes little or no planned use of digital platforms or technology to support service delivery. There is no documented approach to storing, accessing, or disposing of client records, and data security is not considered when tools are selected. The ethical use of AI, generative AI, and digital career tools is not addressed in staff roles or professional development.	Digital tools and technology are selected to support the service aims and client outcomes, and career information is distributed through a variety of channels, including digital platforms. Client records are held in secure systems, with documented procedures for access, retention, and disposal in line with applicable privacy legislation. Data security and privacy are checked before new tools are adopted, including third-party and AI-enabled platforms. Effective and ethical use of technology, including AI and generative AI, is addressed in staff role descriptions and professional development.	...and practitioners can explain how tools are selected and used, including consideration of ethical use, data security, and the limitations of AI-generated career information. Practitioners can describe how client data entered into digital or AI-enabled tools is protected, where it is stored, and who can access it. Records management procedures are applied consistently, and practitioners can give examples of supporting staff in related functions to use career information and technology securely.	...and staff in related functions can describe how they use and integrate career information and digital tools into their work with clients, including their responsibilities for client data. Clients can demonstrate they are able to find and use career information, including digital tools, and understand how their information is handled. The leadership team can describe how data security and records management for the service are reviewed as part of organisational risk and privacy governance. Practitioners monitor emerging technologies, including generative AI, and can give examples of implementing new technology to improve service delivery and outcomes.

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Element 4: Partnerships and community contribution

Outcome	Emerging	Developing	Establishing	Embedding
4a. The service builds and maintains partnerships to support career development	The service has few or no formal partnerships with external stakeholders to support client career development. Any existing connections are informal, unplanned, and not linked to a partnership strategy or client needs analysis.	The service builds and maintains partnerships with relevant stakeholders, such as education and training providers, employers, industry groups, parent groups, alumni networks, and support services (e.g. disability agencies, migrant or refugee services, housing and financial support services), to support client career development.	...and practitioners can describe how partners support client career development through information, advice, experiential learning, work placements, or other activities. Practitioners can describe how the composition of the partnership network reflects the needs and aspirations of the client population.	...and network partners can give examples of how they have supported career development for clients. Staff in related functions can describe how they have linked partner information and experiences into their own work. The leadership team can give examples of new partnerships brokered and the outcomes achieved.

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Element 4: Partnerships and community contribution (continued)

Outcome	Emerging	Developing	Establishing	Embedding
4b. The service is informed by input from clients and stakeholders, and contributes to the wellbeing and development of the broader community	Information about the career development service is not readily available to clients, their families or support networks, or other stakeholders. There is no mechanism for clients or stakeholders to provide feedback or suggestions about the service.	Information about the career development service is available to clients, their families or support networks, and other stakeholders through both traditional and digital channels. All promotional material explains how to contact the service and provide feedback or suggestions.	...and the service can describe regular initiatives to build the capacity of clients' support networks (e.g. families, mentors, employers) to understand and interpret career information. The service can describe how feedback from clients, support networks, and the wider community has helped shape the service. The service encourages participation by representative clients and community groups.	...and clients and their support networks report confidence in accessing and interpreting impartial, up-to-date career information. Clients and community members can describe changes that have resulted from their input. Practitioners can give examples of how stakeholder and community input has improved the service's response to diverse client groups.

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Element 5: Improvement and innovation

Outcome	Emerging	Developing	Establishing	Embedding
5a. The service reviews its performance and uses data and evidence to inform decision-making	The service does not have a regular process for reviewing its performance. Performance data is not collected, or is collected but not reviewed or acted upon. There is no documented evidence base for the service's approach.	The service has a regular process for reviewing its overall performance, including but not limited to client outcomes. Performance data is collected and reviewed at defined intervals. The evidence base for the service's approach is documented and draws on relevant research, professional standards, and practice evidence.	...and practitioners can describe how performance review findings have led to specific changes or improvements. Practitioners can explain how data and evidence inform decisions about service design, resource allocation, and priorities. The service benchmarks its performance against comparable services or recognised standards.	...and the findings from performance reviews are shared with staff, leadership, and relevant stakeholders, and are used to inform planning and improvement. Staff in related functions can describe how evidence from performance reviews has influenced their work. The leadership team can describe how they use performance data and evidence to support changes and demonstrate value.

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Element 5: Improvement and innovation (continued)

Outcome	Emerging	Developing	Establishing	Embedding
5b. The service monitors its operating environment and adapts its approach in response to change	The service does not actively monitor changes in its operating environment. There is no process for identifying or responding to changes in labour market conditions, government policy, technology, client demographics, or emerging evidence that could affect service delivery.	The service monitors changes in its operating environment that could affect its work, including labour market trends, government policy, technological change, client demographics, and emerging evidence about career development practice. Staff are encouraged to identify and share information about changes in the operating environment.	...and practitioners can describe how changes in the operating environment have led to specific adjustments in service design or delivery. Practitioners can give examples of new approaches trialled in response to identified changes. The service creates structured opportunities for staff to contribute ideas for improvement and innovation.	...and staff in related functions can describe how changes in the operating environment have influenced the career development service and their own practice. The leadership team actively engages with the service on emerging trends and supports adaptation and innovation. The service can demonstrate a pattern of continuous learning and improvement.

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The following pages show how the review and self-assessment templates are used as part of the benchmarking process.

The **Review Template** guides your team through each outcome using the Plan–Do–Study–Act (PDSA) cycle outlined on page 15. It provides prompts to help you assess current practice, identify evidence, set improvement goals, agree on actions, and review progress.

The **Self-Assessment Summary Template** brings the ratings for all 14 outcomes together in one place, providing an overall picture of organisational performance and helping identify priorities for future improvement.

Blank versions of both templates are provided in [Appendix D](#) for printing, photocopying, or electronic completion.

Review template

Work through these questions for each outcome your team has prioritised for this cycle. The template is structured around the Plan–Do–Study–Act cycle, so work through each row as your review moves through that phase.

Record the evidence that supports your assessment (see [Appendix B](#) for suggested evidence sources by element) and, where relevant, identify who is responsible for agreed actions and the timeframe for completion.

PDSA Phase	Assessment / Actions	Evidence / Responsibility
PLAN: Where are we now?	At which stage of the scale is your service currently? (Emerging, Developing, Establishing, or Embedding?)	What evidence do you have of this?
PLAN: Where do we want to be?	At which stage would you like your service to be? What specific improvement goals will you set?	How will you know when you get there? What key performance indicators (KPIs) or other measures will you use?
PLAN: What has changed?	What changes in your organisational context, client population, or external environment are relevant?	How have these changes affected service delivery in this area?
DO: What will we do?	What actions are required? What is the risk if the organisation does not address this?	Who is responsible for these actions and over what timeframe?
STUDY: What did we learn?	What worked? What did not work? What unexpected outcomes emerged?	What does the evidence tell us about whether our improvement goals were met?
ACT: What next?	Will we adopt, adapt, or abandon this change? What will the next cycle focus on?	When will the next review cycle begin?

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Self-assessment summary template

Once you have worked through the Review Template for each prioritised outcome, use this template to record your ratings across all 14 outcomes in one place. This gives you an overall picture of performance and helps identify priorities for your next review cycle.

Worked example: Self-assessment summary

Organisation: Riverdale Community Employment Service

Sector: Employment services

Review cycle: First cycle (baseline)

Rating Scale: Emerging / Developing / Establishing / Embedding

Element	Outcome	Rating (Em / Dv / Es / Eb)
1. Service purpose and direction	a) Service purpose and direction are informed by an understanding of client and stakeholder needs and the service's operating environment	Developing
	b) Service design supports the purpose and direction of the organisation	Developing
2. Client focus	a) Client rights are defined, protected, communicated, and upheld	Establishing
	b) The service responds to diversity, designs for accessibility, and engages clients who are difficult to reach or at risk of disengagement	Developing
	c) Client outcomes are monitored	Developing *
3. People and resources	a) Staff performance is aligned with the purpose and direction of the service	Developing
	b) Staff are supported to develop their capability	Developing
	c) Resources are appropriately targeted to client need	Developing
	d) Resources are accurate, and grounded in evidence and theory	Emerging
	e) Digital tools and technology used by the service, including AI and generative AI, are contemporary, support the service purpose and direction, and protect data security and client records	Developing

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Rating Scale: Emerging / Developing / Establishing / Embedding (continued)

Element	Outcome	Rating (Em / Dv / Es / Eb)
4. Partnerships and community contribution	a) The service builds and maintains partnerships to support career development	Establishing
	b) The service is informed by input from clients and stakeholders, and contributes to the wellbeing and development of the broader community	Developing
5. Improvement and innovation	a) The service reviews its performance and uses data and evidence to inform decision-making	Developing
	b) The service monitors its operating environment and adapts its approach in response to change	Developing

* Reviewed in full this cycle using the Review Template (see [Appendix A](#)). Other ratings reflect the review team's preliminary consensus and will be tested through Review Templates in later cycles.

What the summary shows

Riverdale's profile is typical of a first review cycle: most outcomes sit at Developing, meaning systems exist but practitioners cannot yet consistently explain how and why they work. Client rights (2a) and partnerships (4a) are relative strengths, reflecting contractual privacy requirements and the service's established employer connections. Resource accuracy (3d) is the clearest gap, as career information is not routinely checked or linked to recognised theory. Together with 2c, it is a logical priority for the next cycle.

Adapting this resource for your sector

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This resource applies across all career development service settings.
 The following guidance may help you apply it in specific contexts.
 Worked examples showing how services in each of these sectors have applied the review process are provided in [Appendix A](#).

Sector	Key considerations
Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Client” will typically mean “student”. Services often operate within a wider student wellbeing structure. • Element 2b should reflect diverse student populations including cultural and linguistic backgrounds, disabilities, and students at risk of disengaging. • Element 4 should consider the role of parents, employer connections, and tertiary education providers. • The Australian Blueprint for Career Development provides a useful competency framework for defining student career self-management outcomes.
Higher education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Career services often serve both current students and recent graduates. • Element 1 should consider integration with curriculum, work-integrated learning, and employability strategies. • Element 3e should consider careers platforms, AI-assisted tools, and graduate outcome tracking. • Element 4a should consider alumni networks, employer panels, and industry advisory boards. • The Australian Blueprint for Career Development provides a useful competency framework for defining student career self-management outcomes.
Employment services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Career development services may operate alongside case management, job placement, and compliance functions. • Element 2c should align with program outcome measures and contractual requirements, while also capturing career self-management outcomes. • Element 2b should consider the specific needs of priority cohorts. • The Australian Blueprint for Career Development provides a useful competency framework for defining client career self-management outcomes.
Private practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solo practitioners and small firms can focus on the elements most relevant to their practice, particularly Element 2, Element 3b, and Element 3e. • Element 4 may focus on referral networks, professional associations, and connections with employers and education providers. • The Australian Blueprint for Career Development provides a useful competency framework for defining client career self-management outcomes.

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Sector	Key considerations
TAFEs and RTOs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Client” will typically mean “student” or “learner”, including apprentices and trainees. • Element 1 should consider connections with course counselling, recognition of prior learning, and pathways between vocational education and training and higher education or employment. • Element 4a should consider industry and employer engagement, group training organisations, and apprenticeship networks. • The Australian Blueprint for Career Development provides a useful competency framework for defining client career self-management outcomes.
Community organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Services often serve clients with complex and intersecting needs. • Element 2b (diversity and inclusion) may be particularly relevant, including culturally safe, trauma-informed approaches. • Element 3c should consider how limited resources are allocated to meet the needs of the most disadvantaged clients. • The Australian Blueprint for Career Development provides a useful competency framework for defining client career self-management outcomes.

Key questions for sector adaptation

Terminology: What language does your organisation use for clients, services, and outcomes? Substitute your terms consistently.

Service structure: Where does the career development service sit within your organisational structure? Who else contributes to career-related outcomes?

Reporting alignment: What reporting cycles and accountability frameworks already exist? Align your review cycle with these rather than creating a parallel process.

Outcome measures: What outcome data are you already required to collect? Where can career self-management outcomes be layered onto existing data collection?

Stakeholder engagement: Who are the key stakeholders for your service? The benchmarking process can be an opportunity to strengthen these relationships.

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The following worked examples show how career development services in 6 different sectors might complete the Review Template. Each example uses a different outcome. These examples are illustrative only.

Worked example: Employment service

Organisation: Riverdale Community Employment Service

Sector: Employment services

Outcome: 2c – Client outcomes are monitored

Review team: Service Manager, 2 career development practitioners, one case manager

PDSA Phase	Assessment / Actions	Evidence / Responsibility
PLAN: Where are we now?	Developing. Client outcomes are defined in our service plan and we collect destination data as required by our funding agreement. However, these outcomes focus almost entirely on job placement rates. We do not systematically track career self-management outcomes.	12-month service plan. Quarterly reports to funder. Practitioner feedback that current outcome measures do not capture the full picture.
PLAN: Where do we want to be?	Establishing. We want to define a broader set of client outcomes that include career self-management competencies drawn from the Australian Blueprint for Career Development.	KPIs: (1) Documented career self-management outcomes aligned with the Blueprint. (2) A short client self-assessment tool piloted with at least 30 clients over 6 months. (3) Practitioner feedback on the new measures.
PLAN: What has changed?	Increased proportion of clients with complex barriers. Funder has signalled interest in outcome measures beyond job placement. Two new practitioners have joined, one with Blueprint experience.	Funder communiqué, Q4. Staff meeting notes.
DO: What will we do?	(1) Select 4 to 6 career self-management competencies from the Blueprint. (2) Develop a short pre/post client self-assessment tool. (3) Pilot the tool across 3 practitioners over 6 months. (4) Collect practitioner feedback at mid-point and end of pilot.	Lead: Service Manager. Tool development: all practitioners, by end of Month 2. Pilot: Months 3–8. Review: Month 9.
STUDY: What did we learn?	[To be completed at end of pilot.]	[To be completed.]
ACT: What next?	[To be completed after Study phase.] Next review cycle: 12 months from completion.	[To be completed.]

Worked example: School

Organisation: Banksia Heights Secondary College (Years 7–12, metropolitan Melbourne, about 950 students)

Sector: Schools

Outcome: 4a – The service builds and maintains partnerships to support career development

Review team: Careers Leader (member of a CICA Member Association, registered on the Australian Register of Professional Career Development Practitioners), Assistant Principal (Student Pathways), Year 10 Coordinator, career practitioner network colleague, parent representative

PDSA Phase	Assessment / Actions	Evidence / Responsibility
PLAN: Where are we now?	Developing. Long-standing relationships with 3 universities and 2 TAFEs. A small number of employer contacts concentrated in a narrow range of industries. No documented partnership strategy.	Careers Expo records. Work experience register. Informal contact list. Year 10 Coordinator feedback.
PLAN: Where do we want to be?	Establishing. A documented partnership strategy aligned with student interests and local labour market needs. Broader employer/industry partners in health, digital/IT, and trades. Subject teachers involved in at least 2 structured industry engagement activities per year.	KPIs: (1) Documented partnership strategy by end of Term 2. (2) At least 5 new partnerships in priority sectors. (3) At least 2 cross-curricular activities with feedback collected.
PLAN: What has changed?	Year 10 subject selection data shows growing student interest in health and digital/IT, sectors not represented in current partnerships. Two long-standing work experience host employers have withdrawn. The school has created an Assistant Principal (Student Pathways) position, giving the careers function a formal link to school planning.	Year 10 subject selection data, current year. Work experience register. School leadership structure and position description.
DO: What will we do?	(1) Audit existing partnerships against student interest data and local labour market information. (2) Develop a one-page partnership strategy. (3) Approach local health network, IT employers, and group training organisations. (4) Design and deliver industry engagement activities in Terms 3 and 4. (5) Engage parent representative to identify alumni networks.	Lead: Careers Leader. Partnership audit: Terms 1–2. New partnerships: from Term 2. Cross-curricular activities: Terms 3–4. Parent/alumni outreach: from Term 2.
STUDY: What did we learn?	[To be completed at end of cycle.]	[To be completed.]
ACT: What next?	[To be completed after Study phase.] Next review cycle: Term 1 of the following year.	[To be completed.]

Worked example: University careers service

Organisation: Greenfield University Careers and Employability Centre (large metropolitan research university, about 75,000 students)

Sector: Higher education

Outcome: 3e – Digital tools and technology used by the service, including AI and generative AI, are contemporary, support the service purpose and direction, and protect data security and client records

Review team: Director of Careers and Employability, 2 Senior Career Development Consultants, Digital Engagement Manager, Manager of Employer Relations, one academic staff member (Associate Dean, Work-Integrated Learning)

PDSA Phase	Assessment / Actions	Evidence / Responsibility
PLAN: Where are we now?	Establishing. Mature digital infrastructure. AI-powered CV review tool with strong final-year uptake but low first/middle-year usage. Career self-assessment tool not formally evaluated. Website comprehensive but students skip career planning content. Staff AI use varies. No service-wide ethical AI position. Specialised streams use different referral processes.	Platform analytics. CV review tool reports. Website analytics. Staff PD records. Senior Consultant feedback.
PLAN: Where do we want to be?	Embedding. Documented technology strategy mapping tools to objectives. Ethical AI framework. All staff complete AI PD. Evidence students across all year levels use digital tools effectively. Consolidated tracking across all support streams.	KPIs: (1) Technology strategy approved Semester 1. (2) Ethical AI framework. (3) All staff AI PD within 12 months. (4) Student experience survey. (5) Two academic staff awareness initiatives. (6) Consolidated tracking.
PLAN: What has changed?	Student and staff use of generative AI tools has grown rapidly over the past 2 years. The university has released an institution-wide AI policy that the service has not yet interpreted for careers practice. Revised data security requirements now apply to third-party platforms holding student records. Two specialised support streams moved into the centre in the last restructure, each bringing its own referral process.	University AI policy, Semester 2. Vendor privacy and security assessments. Restructure documentation. Platform analytics showing usage growth.

PDSA Phase	Assessment / Actions	Evidence / Responsibility
DO: What will we do?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Audit all technology and map to service objectives. (2) Draft ethical AI framework. (3) Deliver tiered PD on AI in career guidance. (4) Student experience survey with disaggregated results. (5) Consolidated referral and tracking. (6) Present to Associate Dean (Work-Integrated Learning) and Faculty Boards. 	Lead: Director. Audit: Semester 1. Framework: Semester 1. PD: both semesters. Survey: Semester 2. Tracking: scoping Semester 1, implementation Semester 2.
STUDY: What did we learn?	[To be completed at end of cycle.]	[To be completed.]
ACT: What next?	[To be completed after Study phase.] Next review cycle: 12 months, aligned with university planning calendar.	[To be completed.]

Worked example: Private practice

Organisation: Clare Whitfield Career Consulting (sole practitioner private practice; individual and small-group clients)

Sector: Private practice

Outcome: 1b – Service design supports the purpose and direction of the organisation

Review team: Practitioner (sole practitioner), with peer consultation from 2 colleagues in a CICA Member Association or career practitioner network

PDSA Phase	Assessment / Actions	Evidence / Responsibility
PLAN: Where are we now?	Developing. The practice currently offers one-on-one career coaching only, delivered in person or by video call. Enquiries have grown steadily and the waitlist now runs to several weeks. Cost is a barrier for some prospective clients, including recent graduates and career changers between roles. There is no documented service model beyond individual sessions.	Client enquiry log showing waitlist length and enquiries lost due to cost. Session booking data for the past 12 months. Informal client feedback collected at the end of sessions.
PLAN: Where do we want to be?	Establishing. A documented service model that offers both individual coaching and a lower-cost small-group program for clients whose needs suit group delivery, with clear criteria for referring clients between the 2 formats.	KPIs: (1) Documented service model distinguishing individual and group offerings and the criteria for referring clients between them. (2) At least one group program piloted. (3) A reduction in average waitlist time for individual sessions.
PLAN: What has changed?	A noticeable rise in enquiries from recent graduates and career changers who have said cost is a barrier to booking individual sessions. Peer consultation with 2 colleagues in the local career practitioner network, both of whom run successful small-group programs.	Enquiry log analysis, Q1–Q2. Notes from peer consultation sessions.
DO: What will we do?	(1) Draft a small-group program curriculum drawing on the Australian Blueprint for Career Development. (2) Set clear criteria for referring clients to individual or group delivery. (3) Pilot one group program with 6 participants. (4) Collect participant feedback at the end of the pilot.	Lead: Practitioner. Curriculum draft: Month 1. Pilot delivery: Months 2–3. Feedback collection: end of pilot.

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PDSA Phase	Assessment / Actions	Evidence / Responsibility
STUDY: What did we learn?	[To be completed at end of pilot.]	[To be completed.]
ACT: What next?	[To be completed after Study phase.] Next review cycle: 12 months from completion.	[To be completed.]

Worked example: TAFE

Organisation: Coastal Institute of TAFE, Career and Course Advisory Service (multi-campus regional institute, about 18,000 enrolments)

Sector: TAFEs and RTOs

Outcome: 5a – The service reviews its performance and uses data and evidence to inform decision-making

Review team: Manager Student Services, 2 course and career advisers, Data and Reporting Officer, Head of Faculty (Trades), student representative

PDSA Phase	Assessment / Actions	Evidence / Responsibility
PLAN: Where are we now?	Developing. Substantial data is collected for compliance and funding purposes, including enrolment, completion, and student satisfaction results, and it is reviewed at set points in the reporting calendar. Very little of it is analysed at the level of the career and course advisory service. There is no documented evidence base for the advisory model, and no record of decisions that have followed from performance data.	Annual student satisfaction survey results. Enrolment and completion reporting. Service records held by campus rather than centrally. Adviser feedback that data rarely returns to them in a usable form.
PLAN: Where do we want to be?	Establishing. A regular review cycle for the advisory service itself, drawing on data the institute already collects rather than creating new collections. A documented evidence base for the advisory model. Advisers able to describe how review findings have changed practice.	KPIs: (1) A defined performance review cycle with 2 review points each year. (2) A one-page evidence base for the advisory model, referencing the Professional Standards and relevant research. (3) At least 2 documented service changes traced to review findings. (4) Adviser confidence in using data, surveyed at the start and end of the cycle.
PLAN: What has changed?	A new student management system now reports course enquiry, enrolment, and withdrawal data in one place. Two qualifications in the trades area have been superseded, changing the advice students need at the point of enrolment. The institute has appointed a Data and Reporting Officer with capacity to support service-level analysis.	Student management system implementation records. Training package update notices. Position description, Data and Reporting Officer.

PDSA Phase	Assessment / Actions	Evidence / Responsibility
DO: What will we do?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Agree a small set of service-level indicators drawn from existing data. (2) Establish 2 review points each year, aligned with the institute reporting calendar. (3) Document the evidence base for the advisory model. (4) Survey adviser confidence in using data at the start and end of the cycle. (5) Record the decisions and service changes that follow each review point. 	Lead: Manager Student Services. Indicator set: Month 2. First review point: Month 5. Evidence base: Month 6. Second review point: Month 11.
STUDY: What did we learn?	[To be completed at end of cycle.]	[To be completed.]
ACT: What next?	[To be completed after Study phase.] Next review cycle: 12 months, aligned with the institute reporting calendar.	[To be completed.]

Worked example: Community organisation

Organisation: Northmead Community Centre, Employment and Pathways Program (small not-for-profit; 2 part-time practitioners and a volunteer)

Sector: Community organisations

Outcome: 5b – The service monitors its operating environment and adapts its approach in response to change

Review team: Program Coordinator, 2 part-time career practitioners, one volunteer, one board member with local employment experience

PDSA Phase	Assessment / Actions	Evidence / Responsibility
PLAN: Where are we now?	Emerging. Practitioners notice changes in the local labour market and in government programs, but this knowledge sits with individuals and is not shared or recorded. There is no process for identifying or responding to change. Adjustments to the program have been made reactively, usually when a funding requirement or a referral pattern shifts.	No documented environmental scanning process. Program records showing unplanned changes to group session content over 2 years. Practitioner discussion at team meeting, Month 1.
PLAN: Where do we want to be?	Developing. A simple, sustainable process for monitoring the local operating environment that suits a small team. Information about labour market conditions, government program changes, and client demographics shared routinely and recorded in one place.	KPIs: (1) A standing operating environment item at monthly team meetings. (2) A shared one-page record of changes and their implications, updated at least quarterly. (3) Three information sources identified and monitored. (4) At least one program adjustment documented as a response to an identified change.
PLAN: What has changed?	Referrals from the local settlement service have risen sharply over the past 18 months. A major local employer has announced the closure of its distribution centre. Changes to the Commonwealth employment services model have altered where clients are referred from and what support they arrive with.	Referral logs, past 18 months. Employer closure announcement and local media coverage. Correspondence from the settlement service and the local employment services provider.

PDSA Phase	Assessment / Actions	Evidence / Responsibility
DO: What will we do?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Add a standing operating environment item to the monthly team meeting agenda. (2) Identify 3 information sources, including regional labour market data and the local employment services provider. (3) Keep a shared one-page record of changes and what they mean for the program. (4) Ask the board member with local employment experience to contribute at 2 meetings each year. (5) Review group program content against the record at the end of the cycle. 	Lead: Program Coordinator. Meeting item: from Month 1. Information sources: Month 2. Shared record: from Month 2. Program review: Month 12.
STUDY: What did we learn?	[To be completed at end of cycle.]	[To be completed.]
ACT: What next?	[To be completed after Study phase.] Next review cycle: 12 months from completion.	[To be completed.]

The following table suggests common sources of evidence for each element. These are suggestions, not requirements.

Element	Suggested evidence sources
1. Service purpose and direction	Service or business plan; strategic plan; documented service model; client needs analysis reports; organisational annual report; minutes from planning meetings; logic model or theory of change; position descriptions referencing service aims.
2. Client focus	Client outcome frameworks; pre/post client self-assessments; destination or transition data; client satisfaction surveys; feedback forms; case notes; diversity data; outreach records; referral logs; program participation data disaggregated by client characteristics; accessibility audit results.
3. People and resources	Resource allocation methodology; budget documentation; position descriptions; performance agreements; professional development records; staff qualifications register; CICA Member Association membership records; registration status on the National Register of Professional Career Development Practitioners; career information audit; technology and digital tools inventory; website analytics; records management procedures; privacy impact or vendor security assessments for digital tools; data access and retention logs; AI use guidelines or policy.
4. Partnerships and community contribution	Partnership register or stakeholder map; memoranda of understanding or partnership agreements; records of partnership activities; client and stakeholder feedback; community consultation records; promotional materials; family/support network engagement records; social media engagement data.
5. Improvement and innovation	Performance review reports; service evaluation findings; benchmarking data; environmental scan documents; labour market reports; policy updates; professional development records relating to emerging practice; innovation or pilot project records; staff feedback on improvement ideas; records of service changes and their outcomes.

Appendix C: Cross-references to CICA quality frameworks

The following table identifies where each benchmarking outcome connects to the Guiding Principles for Career Development Services and Career Information Products (3rd ed.) and the Professional Standards for Australian Career Development Practitioners (5th ed.). “Services Principle” refers to the principles for career development services and “Products Principle” to the principles for career information products. Numbers in brackets refer to specific criteria within a principle or elements within a competency.

Benchmarking Outcome	Guiding Principles (3rd ed.)	Professional Standards (5th ed.)
1a. Service purpose and direction	Services Principle 1	Core Competency 7 (7a needs assessment)
1b. Service design	Services Principles 5 and 7 (7.7 strategic or operational plan)	Core Competency 7
2a. Client rights and protections	Services Principle 2	Code of Ethics; Core Competency 4
2b. Diversity and inclusion	Services Principle 5	Core Competency 5
2c. Client outcomes	Services Principle 8	Core Competency 7 (7d evaluate the service)
3a. Staff performance alignment	Services Principle 7 (7.5)	Core Competency 4 (4b professionalism)
3b. Staff capability	Services Principles 2 (2.2, 2.3) and 7	All Core Competencies; CPD requirements
3c. Resources targeted to need	Services Principles 5 and 7 (7.3)	Core Competency 7 (7a)
3d. Resources accurate and evidence-based	Services Principle 3; Products Principles 2, 4 to 7, 10	Core Competencies 1 and 2
3e. Digital tools and technology	Services Principles 2 (2.7) and 3; Products Principle 15 (15.2)	Core Competency 6 (6e digital security); 4d
4a. Partnerships	Services Principle 6	Core Competency 6 (6d); Specialised Competency 6
4b. Client and stakeholder input	Services Principle 4	Core Competencies 3 and 7 (7d)
5a. Performance review	Services Principle 8	Core Competency 7 (7d)
5b. Operating environment	Services Principles 3 (3.4) and 7 (7.4)	Core Competencies 2 (2d) and 6 (6c)

This appendix contains the blank templates used to support the review and self-assessment process described in this resource. The templates are designed to help teams work systematically through each outcome, document evidence and discussion, identify improvement actions, and record an overall assessment of current practice.

They can be printed, photocopied, or completed electronically and may be adapted to suit your organisation's review process.

Review template (blank)

Use a separate Review Template for each outcome being assessed.

Work through the template with the people involved in delivering or overseeing the service. Use the questions under each Plan–Do–Study–Act phase to guide your discussion, record your assessment of current practice, identify the evidence that supports your conclusions, and agree on any actions required.

Where possible, record who is responsible for each action and any relevant evidence or information that will be used to monitor progress.

Appendix D: Review and self-assessment templates 50

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Complete the Review Template before assigning a rating to the outcome in the Self-Assessment Summary Template.

Outcome being reviewed:	
Review team:	
Date:	

PDSA Phase	Assessment / Actions	Evidence / Responsibility
PLAN: Where are we now?		
PLAN: Where do we want to be?		
PLAN: What has changed?		
DO: What will we do?		
STUDY: What did we learn?		
ACT: What next?		

Self-assessment summary template (blank)

Use the Self-Assessment Summary Template once you have completed the individual Review Templates.

For each of the 14 outcomes, consider the evidence, discussion, and conclusions recorded in the relevant Review Template and assign the rating that best reflects your organisation's current level of practice.

Rating Scale – Emerging / Developing / Establishing / Embedding

Record one rating for each outcome in the summary table.

The completed summary provides an overview of strengths and areas for improvement across the organisation. It can be used to identify priorities, track progress over time, and inform future planning and improvement activity.

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Element	Outcome	Rating (Em / Dv / Es / Eb)
1. Service purpose and direction	a) Service purpose and direction are informed by an understanding of client and stakeholder needs and the service's operating environment	
	b) Service design supports the purpose and direction of the organisation	
2. Client focus	a) Client rights are defined, protected, communicated, and upheld	
	b) The service responds to diversity, designs for accessibility, and engages clients who are difficult to reach or at risk of disengagement	
	c) Client outcomes are monitored	
3. People and resources	a) Staff performance is aligned with the purpose and direction of the service	
	b) Staff are supported to develop their capability	
	c) Resources are appropriately targeted to client need	
	d) Resources are accurate, and grounded in evidence and theory	
	e) Digital tools and technology used by the service, including AI and generative AI, are contemporary, support the service purpose and direction, and protect data security and client records.	
4. Partnerships and community contribution	a) The service builds and maintains partnerships to support career development	
	b) The service is informed by input from clients and stakeholders, and contributes to the wellbeing and development of the broader community	
5. Improvement and innovation	a) The service reviews its performance and uses data and evidence to inform decision-making	
	b) The service monitors its operating environment and adapts its approach in response to change	

CICA frameworks and publications

Career Industry Council of Australia. (n.d.). Australian Register of Professional Career Development Practitioners.<https://www.cica.org.au>

Career Industry Council of Australia. (2026a). Guiding principles for career development services and career information products (3rd ed.).
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National Careers Institute. (2022). Australian blueprint for career development (2nd ed.). Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, Commonwealth of Australia. <https://www.yourcareer.gov.au/theblueprint>

Quality improvement methodology

European Foundation for Quality Management. (2024). The EFQM model 2025.
<https://efqm.org/the-efqm-model/>

The W. Edwards Deming Institute. (n.d.). PDSA cycle.
<https://deming.org/explore/pdsa/>

