**Methodological guide for
Institutional Assessment
of candidate
IUC universities**

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vliruos
SHARING MINDS, CHANGING LIVES

Written by C-lever.org

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1. Introduction

VLIR-UOS supports partnerships between universities and university colleges in Flanders (Belgium) and the South, looking for innovative responses to global and local challenges.

VLIR-UOS is the platform through which Flemish higher education stakeholders have been working together on university cooperation for development since 1998.

A new call for Institutional University Cooperation (IUC) has been launched in June 2019. This call is meant to select a maximum of 5 partner universities starting an IUC partner programme as of 1 January 2022. As part of the three-stage selection process, 8 potential IUC partner universities will undergo an institutional assessment. These institutional assessments will identify the strengths and weaknesses of the different, potential IUC universities considering the general principles of IUC cooperation. Further information on the selection process can be found in the VLIR-UOS IUC Call document.

2. Scope and objectives of the institutional assessment

As part of the selection process all candidate IUC universities will partake in an institutional assessment. The institutional assessment will consist of two stages:

1) Self-assessment by the university of its institutional capacity with a 1st round of data-collection

2) Joint assessment of the university's institutional capacity facilitated by external assessors. The same institutional assessment framework will be used for both stages of the institutional assessment.

The purpose of the institutional assessment is

1) To better understand the current institutional capacity of candidate universities. An IUC partner university is expected to be able to function adequately at all levels and be able to direct its own institutional destiny in a coherent manner. This assumes an adequate level of institutional planning and management, and an institutional environment that is transparent. This includes a sufficient exposure to research as well as the availability of trained human resources. There is need for institutional stability, and a minimum of own financial means. It also assumes a readiness to engage in a process of change management.

2) To assess the match of the institution with the IUC principles /characteristics

3) To verify data that was already shared in the initial concept note and to collect additional data needed
   o by VLIR-UOS and the selection commission for the selection of IUC partner universities
   o by IUC candidates and the Flemish IUC coordinator for the elaboration of the IUC extended concept note.
   o by VLIR-UOS, the IUC partner university, the Flemish IUC coordinator, Flemish project leaders and Flemish HEI during the implementation of the IUC programme.

These elements need to inform:

- o the selection commission, providing them with a more complete picture of the institution
- o the next steps in proposal development: the institutional assessment can help the potential IUC in setting priorities, in particular with regard to defining which transversal institutional strengthening domains could be targeted
- o stakeholders on the baseline situation (for later monitoring and evaluation)

It is in the candidate IUC partner university's own interest to provide an accurate/fair image of the institutional and organisational strengths and challenges of the university, as both understating or overstating the current situation might be counterproductive when embarking in an IUC supported institutional capacity building process. Higher scores on the institutional assessment will not necessarily be beneficial for the universities in order to be selected for the IUC programme. VLIR-UOS will consider all selection criteria mentioned in the IUC Call 2022 and will clarify the elements that receive extra attention during g the stage of Extended Concept Notes (Call to be launched).

A well-considered and realistic self-assessment conducted by the university will enhance its chances of being selected as IUC partner university, even if it implies acknowledging fundamental challenges. Ensuring that the institutional assessment leads to holistic and truthful insights in the (comparative) strengths, opportunities, challenges and/or risks of the university is crucial for providing a solid starting point for successfully further enhancing of the university's capacities and performance and of its societal and developmental outcomes and impacts. This is exactly what the IUC partnership aims to support.

3. Institutional assessment framework

3.1 Overall presentation of the 5 capabilities model

The institutional assessment framework is based on the 5 capabilities model developed by ECDPM[1].

The 5 capabilities model defines overall institutional capacity and performance in terms of 'producing social value'; the model distinguishes five complementary core capabilities which, by themselves, do not necessarily contribute to social change.

This model applies the following definitions:

- **Capacity** is referred to as the overall ability of an organisation or system to create value for others.
- **Capabilities** are the collective ability of a group or a system to do something either inside or outside the system. The collective skills involved may be technical, logistical, managerial or generative (i.e. the ability to earn legitimacy, to adapt, to create meaning, etc.).
- **Competencies** are the energies, skills and abilities of individuals.

Fundamental to all are inputs, like human, material and financial resources, technology, information and so on.

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[1] https://ecdpm.org/publications/5cs-framework-plan-monitor-evaluate-capacity-development-processes/

To the degree that they are developed and successfully integrated, capabilities contribute to the overall capacity or ability of an organisation or system to create value for others. A single capability is not sufficient to create capacity. All capabilities are needed and are strongly interrelated. Thus, to achieve its development goals, the 5Cs capacity framework says that every organisation/system must have five basic capabilities. These are:

1) The capability to achieve coherence
2) The capability to deliver on development objectives
3) The capability to relate to external stakeholders
4) The capability to act and commit
5) The capability to adapt and self-renew

3.2 Overall presentation of the institutional assessment framework

For the purpose of the institutional assessment, each capability comprises several domains, in turn every domain is characterised by a set of complementary aspects [2].

Below this approach is visualised for the 1st domain of the 1st capability:

CAPABILITY 1 - CAPABILITY TO ACHIEVE COHERENCE
Domain 1.1 There is a shared and coherent vision and strategy on university/faculty level
Aspects related to process and products   - *P1 - The university has a clear written vision and a mission statement which are widely known*   - *P2 - The university has a clearly written strategic plan in line with the vision and mission statement which guides work and is reviewed annually.*   - *P3 - The University's strategic plan is based on a systemic analysis of the university's context, capacities and potential roles*   - *P4 - The faculties have developed a faculty-level strategy in coherence with the vision and mission statement of the university*   **Aspects related to results**   - *R5 - There is coherence between the mission, the strategies, resources, processes, concrete actions and results of the university*

The institutional assessment implies discussing, assessing and documenting every domain, including the identification of its current maturity level, appreciated on a scale from 1 (absent or extremely weak) to 6 (a role model).

The institutional assessment framework, applying 6 maturity levels, allows transforming a qualitative assessment in a quantitative scoring per domain. The 6 levels used are:

➢ Level 1: Extremely weak - Totally absent - Not started yet

➢ Level 2: Very weak - Only initial implementation

➢ Level 3: Still weak - Some results achieved but still insufficient.

➢ Level 4: Acceptable - Partial good results - Still to improve.

➢ Level 5: Good - High level of implementation

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[2] The institutional framework was developed by VLIR-UOS and reviewed and adapted by C-lever.org in consultation with VLIR-UOS

➢ Level 6: Very good - Role model - Top level of implementation

3.3 Institutional assessment process

3.3.1 Institutional self-assessment

Conducting the institutional self-assessment is an important and effective form of enhancing management capacities, as key persons of the participating university are forced to discuss the capabilities of their own organization and to situate them across six maturity levels.

3.3.1.1 Preparation

During the preparation phase, the IUC candidate university (in particular the designated contact person) can request for remote assistance from C-lever.org and the identified lead assessor.

A standardized, distant, introductory work session will contribute to consistent, comparable and efficient self-assessment processes by the self-assessment team of the university involved. The scope of the institutional (self) assessment will be explained, participants will be introduced to the 5-C model and its application for the IUC institutional assessment framework. Key concepts of university level capacity development will be clarified when needed.

3.3.1.1.1 Composition of a self-assessment team

VLIR-UOS, supported by C-lever.org, suggest forming a team of (8 to12) persons from the board, management and academic staff to participate in the self-assessment. The members of the self-assessment team should also be available to participate during the external institutional assessment process. If possible, universities should strive for gender balance in the self-assessment team. The following criteria should be taken into account when selecting the self-assessment team.

  (i)   academics from both natural/experimental sciences and social sciences,
  (ii)   both faculty and research centers members,
  (iii)   both senior and junior academics,
  (iv)   at least one representant of the non-academic staff,
  (v)   one representant of non permanent staffs (external lecturer).

3.3.1.1.2. Individual assessment by the members of the self-assessment team

Each member of the self-assessment team will individually conduct a preparatory assessment of the university (including scoring of the maturity level of the different domains) from his individual perspective. This allows the team members to familiarize themselves with the institutional assessment tool.

3.3.1.2 Self-assessment workshop

We recommend either two half-day or one full-day self-assessment workshop, with key participants of different faculties/departments, to conduct a joint institutional self-assessment. The university's self-assessment team may call upon the C-lever.org team for flexible support if additional clarifications would be required when conducting the self-assessment.

For each domain, the self-assessment exercise comprises: (a) open discussion about the current situation, (b) selection of the applicable maturity level, thus scoring, (c) justification of the selected maturity level and (d) systematic additional data collection and documentation for specific assessment points.

3.3.1.2.1 Scoring – maturity levels

Score 1. Extremely weak. Totally absent. Not started yet	Score 2. Very weak. Only initial implementation	Score 3. Still weak. Some results achieved but still insufficient.	Score 4. Acceptable. Partial good results. Still to improve.	Score 5. Good. High level of implementation.	Score 6. Very good. Role model. Top level of implementation
			✓		

Remark: the level 4 is generally positioned as the benchmark, the targeted level of capacity and/or organisational / institutional performance.

For each of the domains within a capability, the (self) assessment team shall select the maturity level that best corresponds to the existing situation for the university.

Of course, in practice the real existing situation with respect to a domain rarely fully corresponds to one maturity level.

- For example, while overall the existing situation for a domain corresponds best to maturity level 3, one aspect might still only be at maturity level 1 and another aspect might already reach maturity level 5. The current situation might, for a domain or an aspect might, also vary greatly between faculties or departments.
- In such cases, the (self) assessment team will discuss and jointly agree on the maturity level that overall (on average) best corresponds to the existing situation for the whole university.
  - o This however does not require a detailed scoring per aspect and calculation of the average. It is more about a well-informed joint judgement by the self-assessment team.
  - o However, the field description of the existing situation and justification of the score may well be used to describe the existing situation and maturity level for aspects that differ clearly from the overall maturity level chosen for the domain. In other words, this field of the reporting format can be used to explain that a specific aspect has a lower or higher maturity level than the overall maturity level for the domain (assessed as a whole).
- Regularly it may be difficult to choose for one maturity level because the existing situation corresponds to a transition (a grey zone) between two maturity levels.
  - o In such cases the (self) assessment team shall still select one of the two adjacent maturity levels.
  - o However, the selection team may use a "+" (plus) or a "-" (minus) sign to indicate that the real situation corresponds to transition phase between the selected maturity level and the higher maturity level ("+" or plus sign used); or between the selected maturity level and the underlying lower maturity level ("-" or minus sign used).

3.3.1.2.2 Description of the existing situation and justification of the selected maturity level

For each domain, a short and concrete description of the current situation, with respect to the aspects of the domain, will be documented in the (self) assessment report; thus also providing a clear justification of the selected maturity level (scoring).

The following points of attention shall be considered when providing a short description of the existing situation and justifying the maturity level selected for the domain.

- If there is a high variation in performance for different aspects of a given domain, then the description should address the variation and explain the logic followed in attributing the score.
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3.3.1.2.3　Data-collection

The institutional self-assessment exercise also implies the collection of data required to vouch for the scores and statements given within the institutional (self) assessment.

The institutional self-assessment exercise also implies the collection of particular data required for the remaining IUC selection process and/or baseline documentation. The required data for each of the domains are identified in the institutional assessment framework.

3.3.1.3　Reporting

During the process of the institutional self-assessment exercise (workshop), the candidate IUC partner university shall complete an institutional assessment report, using the designated reporting template (§5.1.). The local coordinator should send the institutional self assessment report to the C-lever.org assessment team, at least 5 days before the start of the institutional assessment.

3.3.2　Institutional assessment by external assessors

Each institutional assessment exercise facilitated by external assessors will include: a preparation phase, a field phase and a reporting phase. The field phase generally implies a 9 calendar day visit of the candidate IUC partner university by a lead assessor (international expert). The lead assessor will be accompanied by a 2nd assessor, a national/regional expert, initially in a part-time or distant mode during the preparatory phase and the first part of the field phase and subsequently full-time at the candidate IUC partner university, during the 2nd part of the field phase, including for the feedback session and for the debriefing.

3.3.2.1　Preparation phase

3.3.2.1.1　Document review
The first step for each institutional assessment comprises a thorough desk study of all relevant documents. These include at least the following: the institutional self-assessment of the candidate IUC partner university, concept note of the candidate IUC partner university, additional documents on the candidate IUC partner university, contextual documents to be determined for each institutional assessment, in consultation with VLIR-UOS and with the candidate IUC partner university involved.

3.3.2.1.2　Detailed planning of the institutional assessment
In consultation with VLIR-UOS and the candidate IUC partner university, the C-lever.org team will elaborate a detailed schedule for the institutional assessment which will contain a timetable, the stakeholders to be consulted, the participants of group sessions, etc.

3.3.2.1.3　Distant consultation
In order to allow input from key stakeholders who's point of view may help preparing the field mission or who cannot be interviewed during the field visit (scheduled absence), the team may conduct some distant interviews in preparation of the field visit.

3.3.2.2 *Field phase*

The schedule below provides a general outline of the field phase. The schedule allows for some variation, considering the specific conditions of each institutional assessment and the availability of participants and other stakeholders. The schedule will be further elaborated by the assessment team in concertation with the candidate IUC partner university.

Each field phase of the external assessment generally covers 9 calendar days, including 7 working days. The schedule below provides guidance for planning those 7 working days. The weekend in between those working days will be used by the external assessors to analyze the results of the past working days, further document review and preparation of the remaining working days.

Day	Activity	Participants
Day 1	a) Courtesey visits b) Briefing and planning session c) Visit of the university campus d) Sharing relevant data/ documentation that had not yet been provided to the external assessment team	a) Chancellor, local IUC coordinator and other key persons of the university b) Key persons of the candidate IUC university including the institutional self-assessment team c) Lead assessors accompanied by local IUC coordinator and/or another person
Day 2	a) General introduction (this might already be held on Day 1) b) Group sessions	a) All envisaged participants to the institutional assessment exercise are welcome to participate in this general introduction b) Selected academic staff, non-academic staff, management and students
Day 3, Day 4, Day 5	a) Group sessions b) Interviews internal stakeholders c) Interviews with external stakeholders The planning will be established in consultation between the local IUC coordinator and the external assessment team, considering the availability of the participants and stakeholders to be consulted. This implies that some interviews may already be scheduled on Days 1 and 2, as needed to accommodate limited availability of the concerned interviewees.	a) Selected academic staff, non-academic staff, management and/or students – per faculty/ department or for a specific topic. b) To be selected by IUC candidate university in consultation with the external assessors c) To be selected by external assessors with support of IUC candidate university and VLIR-UOS
Day 6	Institutional assessment workshop	Institutional self-assessment team
Day 7	a) Additional consultation and/or data collection – verifying contradictory information or obtaining missing data. b) Feedback session c) Debriefing (strategic debriefing and closing meeting)	a) As needed after the assessment workshop b) All participants to the institutional assessment exercise are welcome to participate (as per introduction session) c) Chancellor, local IUC coordinator and other key persons of the university

3.3.2.2.1 Briefing and visit of the university campus

The field phase will start with a courtesy visit and a briefing with key persons of the candidate IUC partner university, including all members of the institutional self-assessment team. This briefing allows a final confirmation, finetuning and approval on the schedule and approach to be used for the institutional assessment. The assessment team will also visit the university campus to get a view of the university's infrastructure.

3.3.2.2.2 Introduction session

The institutional assessment process will commence with a dialogue on capacity development applied to IUC-partner universities and related concepts. As required, the introduction session allows to set the scope for the institutional assessment, to introduce participants to the 5-C model and to clarify key concepts of capacity development; in particular, for those participants of the assessment process who did not participate in the (distant) session in preparation of the self-assessment process.

3.3.2.2.3 Group-sessions

The objective of a first round of group sessions is to cross-check and to complement information from the institutional self-assessment. The composition of participant groups is to be determined for each of the institutional assignments. It is crucial to find a well-balanced mix between students, academic staff, non-academic staff and management/ board functions and between faculties and departments.

The institutional assessment methodology acknowledges that the institutional capacity may vary widely between faculties within the candidate IUC partner university. The institutional assessment methodology allows simultaneously obtaining a clear picture of such variations while also providing overall assessment conclusions for the whole university.

3.3.2.2.4 Interviews internal and external key stakeholders

In addition to the group discussions, the assessors will interview key stakeholders of the candidate IUC partner university; both individual interviews and grouped interviews (2, 3 or 4 persons at the same time) may be held.

The objective of these interviews is twofold.

1) To collect additional information on the candidate IUC partner university's capacity and context that will allow the assessors to triangulate data and hence increase the reliability of the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the institutional assessment.
2) To collect qualitative, analytic and complex information, which could be a great added value to the assessment. to appreciate the extent to which the candidate IUC partner University matches with the IUC principles.

Key external stakeholders of the potential IUC partner university are: (local/regional and potentially national) governments, private sector, communities or civil society organisations, academic and other partner organisations, other donors/funding agencies and the Belgian Embassy.

Where appropriate, additional interviews may also be held with key internal stakeholders (board members, academic staff, managerial support functions, student representatives). As needed such interview with key internal stakeholders may be combined with additional visits of specific infrastructures (training facilities, labs, offices, etc.) of the university.

To the extent possible, these interviews will be held in a face-to-face manner; otherwise the interviews may be conducted in a distant manner (by phone, WhatsApp, Skype, etc.). *(Remark: if needed, same additional distant interviews may be held after concluding the field phase.)*

3.3.2.2.5 Preliminary analysis by assessors

This step will start after the first days of the field phase and might (partly) be conducted during a weekend. This step implies compiling and making best use of the results of the preparatory phase and of the first part of the field phase.

Using all information obtained, the assessors will develop a first preliminary systemic mapping and assessment of the institutional capacity of the candidate IUC partner University. The team summarises the preliminary findings in response to the key questions and objectives of the institutional assessments. At this stage the assessors will also check to what extent the candidate IUC partner University matches with IUC principles as determined by VLIR-UOS.

The assessors participating in the field mission will also conduct a distant work session with the overall project team leader (or with a colleague lead assessor, if the project team leader is himself heading the field work). This step includes preparing a feedback session.

3.3.2.2.6 Institutional assessment workshop (with self-assessment team)

Following the preliminary analysis, the external assessors will facilitate an institutional assessment workshop with the institutional self-assessment team (this is the core team designated by the university for this institutional assessment).

This session allows for sharing preliminary findings as well as flagging blind spots for which key information is still lacking and/or data obtained still seems partial and/or contradictory. The session implies soliciting feedback from the participants as to ensure that the interpretation by the assessors of the available data and information is valid and appropriate and/or stimulate additional contributions that will further enrich the ongoing institutional assessment.

Per domain, the participants may also be invited by the external assessors to identify "blocking factors" and or "good practices".

The institutional assessment workshop will also be used for collecting missing data and/or doublechecking information that might seem contradictory with other information collected.

3.3.2.2.7 Feedback session

If considered appropriate by the University, the external assessors may facilitate a general feedback session for a broader audience (as per the introduction session).

This session will be prepared and facilitated by the external assessors in close collaboration with the local IUC coordinator. The feedback session allows for sharing the preliminary findings of the institutional assessment and obtaining some final feedback from (internal / external) stakeholders who were consulted during the field visit but who did not participate in the institutional assessment workshop.

3.3.2.2.8 Debriefing

The field phase will be concluded with a final (strategic) debriefing session with the key persons of the candidate IUC partner university, including the local IUC coordinator and potentially other members of the core team designated by the university for this institutional assessment.

3.3.2.3 Reporting phase

For each institutional assessment, the assessors will draft a separate institutional assessment report using the designated reporting templates (§5.2 and 5.3).

3.3.2.4 Peer review

In order to guarantee coherence between the institutional assessments of the 8 candidate IUC partner universities and to facilitate cross-learnings, each institutional assessment will be peer reviewed by 2 members of the external assessment team (including the overall team leader or another lead assessor) who were not participating in the field phase of the institutional assessment. The peer review intervenes when concluding the preparatory phase, during the field phase in preparation of the feedback session and when producing the draft and final reports.

4. Reporting templates

4.1 Institutional self-assessment report

The institutional self-assessment report will be completed by the candidate IUC university following the instructions described in §3.3.1. The institutional self-assessment report will be sent to the external assessors at least 5 days before the start of the expert visit.

For each of the identified domains of the institutional assessment framework the institutional assessment team is asked to select the corresponding level of maturity, to provide a justification for the selected maturity level and to identify corresponding good practices (maturity level 5 or 6) or blocking factors (maturity level (1,2 or 3). The institutional self-assessment team is also asked to identify action points for moving to the next maturity level for this domain.

Additionally, the format provides fields for collecting and documenting specific data required for the IUC selection and implementation process. This data may already available be from the first round of the IUC selection process or might need to be collected in preparation of the expert visit. It may also be required to list additional sources of information that could be used by the external assessors.

Below this approach is visualised for the 1st domain of the 1st capability:

Domain 1.1 There is a shared and coherent vision and strategy on university/faculty level	
Level of maturity	
Justification for the selected maturity level	

Data/documents[3] to be collected in preparation of the experts' visit
<u>Data</u>:
<u>Documents</u>: Vision and strategy documents

4.2 Institutional assessment report

The institutional assessment team (lead assessor and national expert) will draft an institutional assess-ment report for each of the IUC candidate universities using the reporting template provided by VLIR-UOS.

The institutional assessment report contains an assessment of each of the domains of the institutional assessment framework, an assessment of the match of the university with the IUC concept and an assessment of the potential for IUC cooperation.

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[3] Applicants may also include hyperlinks to online websites/documents if the requested information is available through these links.

4.3 IA scorecard

University				
Country				
Lead assessor				
2nd assessor				

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Capability	Domain	Domain_short	Self assessment maturity level	Expert assessment maturity level
1. capability to achieve coherence	1.1 There is a shared and coherent vision and strategy on university/faculty level	Vision and strategy	4	3
1. capability to achieve coherence	1.2 Existence of a set of simple principles which govern the university's/faculty's operations	Principles	4	3
1. capability to achieve coherence	1.3. University's/faculty's governance/management structures are effective	Governance	2	2
2. capability to deliver results	2.1. The university provides high quality, development relevant education	Education	4	4
2. capability to deliver results	2.2 The university is a multidisciplinary institution that produces cost-effective major amounts of high quality research	Research	5	4
2. capability to deliver results	2.3 The university is perceived as a real actor and driver of Change	Driver of change	3	3
3. capability to relate to external stakeholders	3.1. The university creates the condition for effective network development and is aware of the importance of formal institutional alliances	Conditions for networking	4	4
3. capability to relate to external stakeholders	3.2. The university has a vast network which is actively used	Network use	2	3
3. capability to relate to external stakeholders	3.3 The university obtains additional project funding	Additional funding	2	3
4. capability to act and commit	4.1. The university is able to make and implement decisions	Effective organisation	4	4
4. capability to act and commit	4.2. The university has adequate and well managed Human Resources	HR	6	5
4. capability to act and commit	4.3 The university has an adequate infrastructure	Infrastructure	5	4
4. capability to act and commit	4.4 The university has adequate and well managed financial resources	Financial management	4	4
4. capability to act and commit	4.5. The university has effective systems and processes for administration, and procurement and logistics	Administration, procurement, logistics	4	4
4. capability to act and commit	4.6. The university has effective systems and processes for project management and quality assurance	Project management and quality assurance	4	4
5. capability to adapt and self renew	5.1. effective management in shifting contexts	Adaptive management	3	3
5. capability to adapt and self renew	5.2. The university is continuously adapting and renewing	Continous improvement	3	3
5. capability to adapt and self renew	5.3 The university has an adequate knowledge management system	Knowledge management	5	4
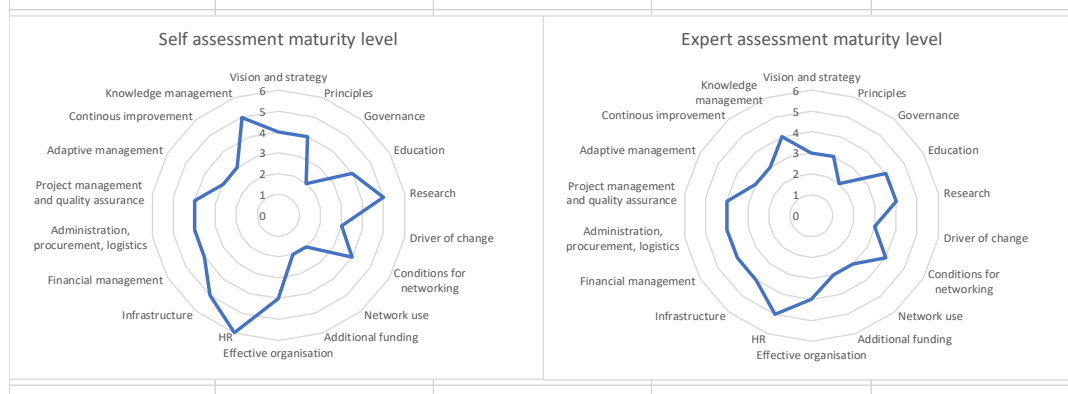
This form will be completed by the C-lever.org team.

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