

How countries can use the I-WORK Benchmarking Tool to review quality and effectiveness of apprenticeship systems and shape practical action

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Background

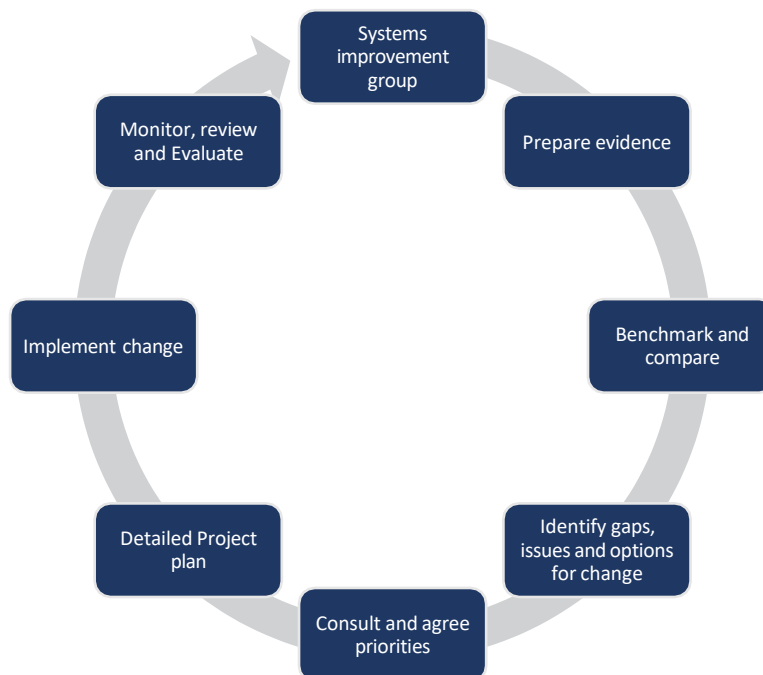
As part of our I-WORK project and in collaboration with partners from the UK, Ghana, India, Malaysia and South Africa we have developed the I-WORK apprenticeship system benchmarking tool. This tool poses a series of questions which cover policy, implementation and evaluation which - when answered - show the characteristics of your apprenticeship system when compared with others from around the world.

We understand there is no, one, right, way to organise an apprenticeships system and this is not a method of ranking but more showing how different countries have different building blocks in place to address challenges and it will hopefully provide some insight into how your system work compared to others and some ideas for new things you might try.

You could fill the tool out yourself, but our groups have found it most useful to draw together expert panels representing government, education and industry to discuss in depth the answers they will provide and agree on one benchmarking for the nation or region. This also helps to start a dialogue within, as well as between, countries about how the apprenticeship system works and key areas for future development.

The Approach

As a result of the experience and learning from the I-WORK project, we suggest the following practical steps to help countries review the quality and effectiveness of their current apprenticeship system or to begin the process of apprenticeship systems design. These are set out below:



Set up a Systems Improvement Group

- Set up a small team of people who are committed to system improvement and can bring leadership, balance and objectivity to the process
- An apprenticeship expert to facilitate the work, gather evidence and provide insight
- A wider steering group or committee to gain buy in to the process and commit to taking the necessary change actions with government backing at the highest level.

Prepare evidence

- An initial workshop to scope the work, examine the structure of the benchmarking tool and agree to its use.
- Work as a team and with the apprenticeship expert, to gather evidence and data about each of the 13 main criteria that make up the tool.

We would suggest each member of the working group reviews the tool and then brings their version to the main discussion for agreement and debate.

We would suggest finalising the response by delivering at least a half day workshop that covers:

- Introductions of team members
- An agreement on how the discussion will be conducted and how answers will be settled upon (for example by majority vote) in the case where there is disagreement
- Agree the procedure for further information gathering if required
- Time for discussion of priorities for development and scheduling a further discussion to review the results compared to the global report

Suggested Approach

- Complete the benchmarking tool, challenging each other about whether there is strong enough evidence against each response and ensuring you have consensus about your responses.
- We understand that providing a definitive answer may not be straightforward in a binary sense for some questions, however we hope that the exercise of considering this is useful in and of itself. We would guide you that answering 'yes' generally should mean that it is in place (not being developed unless the questions specifies that) and commonly used or implemented by the intended target audience

Identify Gaps and Issues

Review your full set of responses for each main section of the tool (Policy, Implementation and Monitoring and Evaluation) and then draw together an overall Action Plan that identifies:

- Strengths
- Gaps and challenges
- Existing and planned initiatives (to avoid duplication of development effort)
- Practical opportunities and options for further development

Consult and agree priorities

- Consult the steering group on your draft benchmarking responses and seek their approval, updating the tool as necessary
- Debate the possible options for development and where best to start. It is important to untangle cause and effect. Asking why/how questions, or using problem analysis tools, is useful to check you are not just chasing the symptoms of deeper problems
- Test the options for development with stakeholders and agree with the steering group:
 - Which are the priorities?
 - What actions are likely to generate the most positive improvement at ground level for employers, training providers and apprentices?
 - Which option is most realistic and achievable within time and resource constraints?
- Confirm completion of the on-line tool so that results can be added to the international database for comparison purposes

Develop project plans

- Discuss with the British Council how plans and implementation might be developed and use British Council planning tools. Look at other countries who have identified the area you are working in as a strength and learn from their experience.

Implement change

- Drive forward the change programme drawing on advice and support. Be prepared to adjust course as necessary.

Monitor, review and evaluate

- Have a process in place to regularly review progress and consider what changes are necessary to the project. Formally evaluate the outcomes and impact of the work including to re-use the benchmarking tool to identify what has changed.