

# **Terms of Reference: Research to inform the design of a national early learning quality assurance and support system**

## **Background and purpose**

The Department of Social Development, supported by Ilifa Labantwana, seeks to appoint a service provider to conduct research to inform the design of a quality assurance and support system for early learning programmes that gives expression to the priorities and principles of the National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy (2015), drawing strongly from local and international research and leading practices.

The ECD Policy recognises that early childhood development (ECD) programme registration is not a sufficient condition to guarantee the level of quality required to drive good programme outcomes, though it remains an important milestone. The Policy therefore calls for the development of a national ECD quality control and improvement system.

Government recognises that an important factor in improving the quality of early learning services is to put in place systems to provide registration support, training, coaching and mentoring, monitoring, oversight and quality assurance of early learning services. The emphasis on monitoring non-profit organisations for compliance with the terms of their service level agreements needs to be complemented by an emphasis on programme monitoring accompanied by mentoring and support. A quality assurance and support system is therefore best suited to achieve the policy imperatives of increasing the availability and quality of early learning services. The registration support component will serve to incentivise unregistered programmes to identify themselves to DSD. In the absence of such a system, registration will remain out of reach for a large proportion of programmes, and continue to be a punitive system.

The ECD Policy lays out some of the envisaged details of a national quality control and improvement system. It articulates that the system should be based on adequate quality and safety standards to ensure and measure the quality of all services, and that it should support equitable outcomes for all children and access for vulnerable children in particular.<sup>1</sup> It also articulates that a standardised external monitoring system will be linked to a quality improvement process based on a programme of self-assessment, in-service support and accreditation.<sup>2</sup>

This system has to provide clear pathways and linkages from supporting unregistered programmes to achieve registration compliance, through to assessing programme outcomes. Such a system would have many different components. Apart from the workforce required to implement this system, a range of standardised requirements, support packages, assessment processes, monitoring and evaluation tools and a robust data system are required. The system also needs to be able to respond to the different early learning modalities defined in the ECD Policy. It should be systemically embedded within government, and its implementation should be standardised nationally. The system must be designed within the existing legislative and policy framework.

Although there is no government-wide comprehensive and systematic quality support system in place yet, several organisations have independently established systems for supporting ECD services to achieve quality. Models of quality assurance and support therefore already exist in the sector and provide useful lessons and good practices that can inform a national system for quality.

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<sup>1</sup> National Integrated ECD Policy, 2015: p21-22

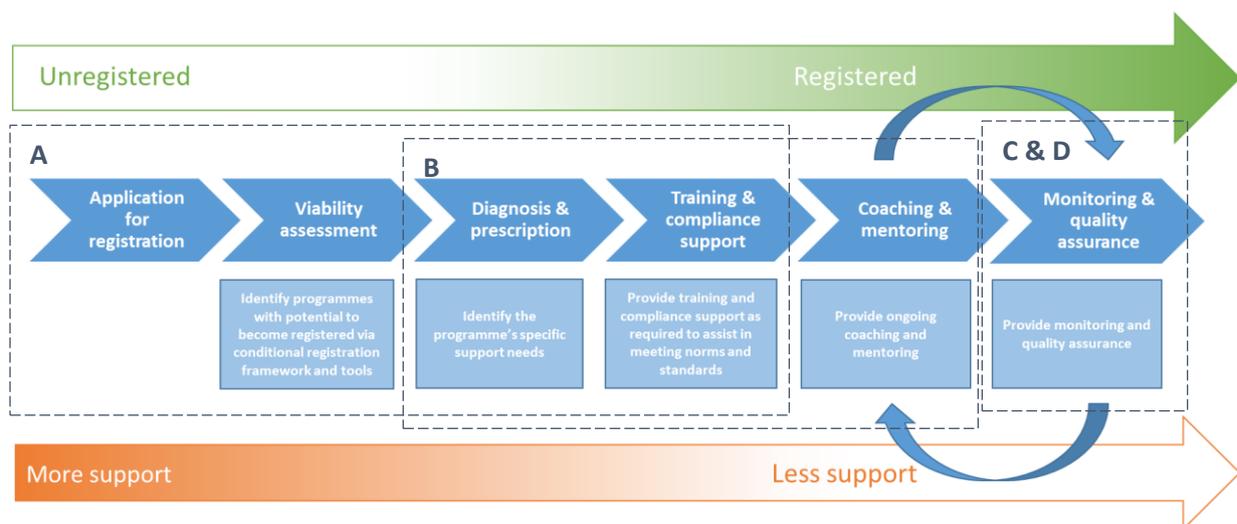
<sup>2</sup> National Integrated ECD Policy, 2015: p63, p96-99

Typically, these systems include one or more of the following components:

- A. The registration of ECD programmes**
  - Identification and selection of currently unregistered ECD facilities and programmes to bring them into the regulatory net
  - Support to ECD facilities to be compliant with norms and standards
  - Support for registration
- B. Support for the delivery of quality ECD programmes**
  - Support for programme delivery
  - Support joint learning and sharing of best practices
  - Overall practitioner capacity building and ongoing mentorship
  - Support with accessing funding
  - Support and capacitation on financial management and governance
- C. Monitoring and measurement of the delivery of ECD programmes**
  - Reporting and monitoring
- D. Quality programme outcomes for children**
  - Assessment of programme outcomes

The figure below illustrates how these components might work together to develop a pipeline of registered programmes, and to provide ongoing quality support and assurance.

**Figure 1: Illustrative Quality Assurance and Support System process flow**



### Proposed scope of work

The section below details two project phases. This call for applications applies only to Phase 1 of the project. Once Phase 1 has been completed, a further call for applications for Phase 2 will be issued. Consultants who choose to submit proposals for Phase 1 may also submit proposals for Phase 2.

#### **Phase 1: Research**

##### **1. Literature review**

Conduct a desktop study to inform the components and design of a national quality assurance and support system. This should constitute an analytical synthesis of the available literature (including grey literature). The review should outline current evidence regarding the factors underpinning quality in early learning programmes, as well as those that impede quality provision, and explore global and

local leading practices in quality support and assurance for early learning or related services at scale. Lessons should be sought from both private and public systems and be applicable to the South African context. Lessons should cover all envisioned components (A-D above) of a quality support and assurance system and be inclusive enough to respond to a range of ECD modalities.

## **2. Lessons from existing systems (primary research)**

Various government departments and non-government organisations currently deliver or support different discrete quality support or assurance interventions. Engage with relevant government and non-government stakeholders to document and map existing interventions and systems in the early learning sector, identifying leading practices and lessons for the design of a national system. The consultant should undertake a process to identify key government departments and ECD organisations for inclusion in the research, in consultation with the Project Steering Committee. It is proposed that this is best done through existing ECD networks, which provide platforms of organisations, many of which may already be involved in some form of quality assurance and support.

Research on existing interventions should be conducted using a template approved by the Project Steering Committee. This process should seek to identify the following for each intervention reviewed:

- a) The overall programme:
  - i. The department/organisation delivering the intervention
  - ii. The type of intervention
  - iii. The overall purpose, objectives and design of the intervention
  - iv. The type(s) of ECD programme that the intervention supports (e.g. centres, playgroups, childminders)
  - v. Key achievements and challenges
  - vi. Key lessons learnt
  - vii. The perceived importance and impact of the quality support activities
  - viii. How they might structure/ design the programme differently to attain better results if given the opportunity
  - ix. Tools, frameworks, guidelines etc. used in the intervention
  - x. Partnership arrangements with government or non-government stakeholders
  - xi. Funding arrangements
  
- b) Programme operations:
  - i. Describe in detail the different components and activities of the intervention. For example, does it include registration support, training, mentoring, compliance and programme monitoring, etc.?
  - ii. The structure and frequency of their support activities. For example, how long is each contact session, and how many contact sessions are provided? Are sessions provided on a one-on-one basis, or to a group? If a group, what is the average/desired size of the groups? How frequently does monitoring occur? When do interactions occur (weekdays or weekends, during or after hours)? Etc.
  - iii. What are the management and oversight structures and processes?
  - iv. The structure of the workforce that delivers the intervention. What are the skills/qualifications, and the number of staff required to deliver each component/ activity of the intervention, as well as those that are required for management and oversight?
  - v. Current scale and reach (by number of programmes and number of practitioners and children, where applicable)

- vi. The projected/ planned reach of the programme/intervention? What factors is growth in the reach of the programme/interventions dependent on and/ or limited by?
- vii. How are participants/ beneficiaries identified and selected? What are the criteria for participation, if any? Are there any obligations/ actions required from participants/ beneficiaries before, during or after participation?
- viii. The costs breakdown of providing the support.

Findings synthesised in an analytical report, which should include at least the following sections:

- Map of organisations/ departments providing different components of quality support and/or assurance and description of target beneficiaries
- Analysis of existing interventions
  - Summary of each intervention
  - Analysis of findings
  - Key insights and good practices identified across interventions and the tools supporting them
  - Emerging recommendations for a quality assurance and support system for early learning
- List of people and organisations/departments consulted

## **Phase 2: Design**

### ***Design a national quality assurance and support system for early learning***

Based on lessons from the research conducted, design a national quality control and improvement system, including:

- a) Describing, detailing and justifying each component of the system
- b) How the system will encourage programmes to identify themselves to government
- c) How the system will support registration and quality programming
- d) What support is required for unregistered, conditionally and fully registered programmes, respectively
- e) How the system will deliver ongoing coaching and mentoring
- f) How the system will measure and assure programme quality
- g) How each component will work, and how they are intended to work together as a holistic system for different types of programme (centres, playgroups, childminders, mobiles)
- h) How the system will leverage and link with existing interventions where relevant
- i) Produce a process and decision tools to detail the operating model for the system, including how it will identify and target participants, eligibility criteria for support, decisions around dosage and exit.
- j) The workforce required across the components and for implementation, management and oversight
- k) How the system will integrate with or leverage existing related government interventions
- l) The roles and responsibilities of government departments and other entities in the delivery of the different components of the system
- m) Estimated unit costs associated with the various inputs of the system
- n) Provide recommendations in terms of the strategic priorities of the quality control and improvement system. For example, how should government balance the priorities of expanding registered programmes (i.e. supporting unregistered and/or conditionally registered programmes), versus improving the quality of already registered programmes, versus providing quality assurance?

## Timeframe, deliverables and payment schedule for Phase 1

Phase 1 of the project should be completed in **18 weeks**. The following deliverables are expected from the project:

	<b>Deliverable</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Payment</b>
1.	Inception report detailing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Overall project plan for Phase 1</li><li>• Approach to the literature review</li><li>• Key government departments and organisations to be consulted</li></ul>	Week 1	20%
2.	Draft analytical synthesis of literature	Week 4	
3.	Fieldwork plan detailing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Template for data collection</li><li>• Confirmed and provisional meetings</li></ul>	Week 4	
4.	Fieldwork progress report outlining meetings conducted and confirmed, and initial findings	Week 7	30%
5.	Completed templates on each individual organisation engaged	Week 12	
6.	Draft research report including updated literature review	Week 14	
7.	Revised research report including recommendations for the design of a national quality assurance and support system for early learning	Week 16	
8.	Approved research report and presentation	Week 18	50%

## Management of contract

Payment on each deliverable will only be effected upon the satisfactory completion of the outputs, and on approval by the Project Steering Committee (see below).

Extension of the final date will only be allowed under exceptional circumstances, and will only come into effect by written approval by Ilifa Labantwana should there be cost implications.

The contract will be managed by Ilifa Labantwana, supported by the DSD.

The service provider will be expected to have regular consultations with the Departments of Social Development and Basic Education and the Project Steering Committee as needed, either in person or telephonically. This includes an inception discussion to ensure that aspects of the work assignment are understood clearly, as well as the presentation on the draft research report.

There will be an initiation meeting to discuss and agree on matters pertinent to the implementation of this assignment.

## Project administration

This project will be managed and executed in collaboration with a **Project Steering Committee** made up of representatives from the following:

- Department of Social Development (DSD);
- Department of Basic Education (DBE);
- Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET);
- Education, Training and Development Practices (ETDP) SETA;
- Ilifa Labantwana;
- ECD Centre of Excellence – University of Fort Hare;
- BRIDGE;

- National ECD Alliance (NECDA); and
- South African Congress for Early Childhood Development.

The Project Steering Committee will meet at times as agreed to discuss and agree upon matters pertinent to the implementation of this assignment.

Note that organisations affiliated with networks represented on the PSC are not excluded from submitting proposals.

### Contractor expertise

The service provider will need to demonstrate the following through providing examples of previous work done:

- a) Knowledge of the ECD sector and drivers of quality programme outcomes
- b) Knowledge of quality support and assurance systems
- c) Experience conducting primary and secondary research
- d) Stakeholder management and consultation skills, including engagement with senior government officials
- e) Sound writing and presentation skills

### Proposal and budget

Qualified individual contractors/ consultants are invited to submit a well-developed proposal based on the criteria below that reflects an understanding of the assignment and capacity to execute the assignment within the required timelines. The proposal shall include the following:

- Executive summary of proposal (150 words maximum)
- The contractor's understanding of the assignment, (what the contractor thinks the assignment entails). (300 words maximum)
- The approach that the contractor will follow in executing the assignment (400 words maximum).
- An indication of the intended timelines envisaged to complete each of the components of this assignment (within the timeframe provided in terms of this terms of reference) and an undertaking that the contractor will be able to complete the assignment within the timeframes required.
- Reference to similar work. Preferably final products that are available and accessible either through email or on website. In case of confidential work, indicate as such.
- References that can be contacted. Indicate the name of the person, telephone number, email address and short description of the work that contractor has done for this individual. (*Two sentences maximum*)
- An indication of possible risk factors associated with this assignment, based on the perception and experience of the contractor. (100-word maximum)

The budget needs to be submitted and must include the following:

- Proposed pricing in accordance with the TOR and in South African Rand.
- VAT needs to be indicated separately

All applications must be submitted to [laura@ilifalabantwana.co.za](mailto:laura@ilifalabantwana.co.za) with subject line "**PROPOSAL FOR RESEARCH TO INFORM THE DESIGN OF A QUALITY ASSURANCE AND SUPPORT SYSTEM**" by 13 September 2019 before 17h00.

## Proposal evaluation

Proposals will be evaluated by the Project Steering Committee against the following matrix:

	Criteria	Score
1.	<p><b>Proposal demonstrates extensive knowledge of the ECD sector, the policy context, programme environment, and quality systems</b></p> <p>1 = Very poor 2 = Average 3 = Good 4 = Very good 5 = Excellent</p>	
2.	<p><b>Proposal demonstrates a clear understanding of the assignment</b></p> <p>1 = Very poor 2 = Average 3 = Good 4 = Very good 5 = Excellent</p>	
3.	<p><b>The proposed approach includes a literature review and primary research that respond to the research questions and deliverables required in the TOR</b></p> <p>1 = Proposed approach did not meet requirements of TOR 2 = Proposed approach partially addresses requirements of TOR 3 = Proposed approach meets minimum requirements of TOR 4 = Proposed approach exceeds minimum requirements of TOR 5 = Proposed approach exceeds minimum requirements set out in the TOR and proposed value-add items such as interesting approach for undertaking the project</p>	
4.	<p><b>Team demonstrates the following expertise:</b></p> <p><b>a) Knowledge of the ECD sector and drivers of quality programme outcomes</b> <b>b) Knowledge of quality support and assurance systems</b> <b>c) Experience conducting primary and secondary research</b> <b>d) Stakeholder management and consultation skills, including engagement with senior government officials</b> <b>e) Sound writing and presentation skills</b></p> <p>1 = Team does not meet the requirements 2 = Team meets 1-2 of the requirements 3 = Team meets 3 of the requirements 4 = Team meets 4 of the requirements 5 = Team meets all 5 of the requirements</p>	
5.	<p><b>The proposal makes reference to similar or relevant work conducted by the team members</b></p> <p>1 = No evidence that the bidder has undertaken similar or relevant projects 2 = Bidder has successfully undertaken 1 similar or relevant projects 3 = Bidder has successfully undertaken 2 similar or relevant projects 4 = Bidder has successfully undertaken 3 similar or relevant projects 5 = Bidder has successfully undertaken 4 or more similar or relevant projects</p>	

<b>6.</b>	<b>Overall impression of the proposal</b> 1 = Poorly put together 2 = Minimal thought put into proposal 3 = Some effort made in putting proposal together 4 = Significant effort with minimal mistakes 5 = Significant effort including further background research	
	<b>TOTAL SCORE</b>	

Shortlisted candidates may be invited to present their proposals to the Project Steering Committee. Proposal evaluation scores will make up 60% of the overall score, and interview scores will make up the remaining 40%.

### Enquiries

Please direct any enquiries by email to [laura@ilifalabantwana.co.za](mailto:laura@ilifalabantwana.co.za)

Only written enquiries will be responded to.

Please refrain from sending any enquiries directly to individuals from Department of Social Development and the Project Steering Committee. Such enquiries will not be responded to and not be deemed valid.

Mark all enquiries in the email heading: "ENQUIRY: RESEARCH TO INFORM THE DESIGN OF A QUALITY ASSURANCE AND SUPPORT SYSTEM". This will assist with the expeditious handling of enquiries.

Enquiries received less than 2 working days before the closing date may not be responded to due to high volumes.

Enquiries on the outcome of the bid will only be dealt with once the contracting is completed.