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ANNEX 2. TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR INSTITUTIONAL CONTRACT

REFERENCE	**LRPS-2026-9206022**
TITLE	Development of curriculum strengthening packs, online course, and a training manual for the National Curriculum Framework for children from birth to four years
LOCATION	South Africa
DURATION	4.5 months

1. BACKGROUND AND JUSTIFICATION

Early childhood development is a national priority in the country and is an integral part of the National Development Plan: Vision 2030. UNICEF works towards supporting the Government of South Africa in this priority area, in particular link to the Medium-Term Strategic Framework (MTSF) Outcomes 1(access to quality training reflected through improved educational outcomes) and 13 (an inclusive and responsive social protection system characterized by reduced poverty and inequality).

One of the key challenges being identified in early learning and development for children from birth to school-going age is the lack of understanding of the vital importance of play. Play is essential to lay a solid foundation for learning on which subsequent levels of learning are built (scaffolding of learning). The skills that children learn are becoming more important in the 21st century. This requires a national intervention that will strengthen parents and primary caregivers' skills and knowledge towards a playful approach towards learning and development.

The National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy (paragraph 5.3.3) requires that the Department of Basic Education develops accessible guidelines and resource materials for the implementation of the South African National Curriculum Framework for Children from Birth to Four in all settings.

In response to this, in 2023-2024 UNICEF supported the Department of Basic Education (DBE) in developing Learner and Teacher Support Materials (LTSM) for implementing the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) for children from Birth to Four years in 2023-2024. For purposes of this TOR, the LTSM will be referred to the curriculum strengthening pack. The curriculum strengthening packs were developed based on key grounding principles, including alignment with the National Curriculum Framework (NCF), flexibility, adaptability cultural and linguistic relevance. They are rooted in play-based learning approaches and pedagogies, promote gender equality, diversity, and the inclusion of children with disabilities, and support equitable learning opportunities for all children. The curriculum strengthening packs are designed for use across all early learning programme settings, ensuring broad applicability and accessibility.

The curriculum strengthening packs are divided into the following age-cohorts:

The developed curriculum strengthening packs includes,

(a) Practitioners' manual
(b) Big books
(c) Resource books
(d) Observational manual and assessment cards
(e) Quick start guide
(f) Weekly planner

(g) Posters
(h) Charts and friezers
(i) Videos and video booklets

The curriculum strengthening packs underwent 4 rigorous quality assurance processes to follow the same standards set out by DBE.

(a) Individual peer review of the curriculum strengthening packs by ECD specialists
(b) Quality assurance of the curriculum strengthening packs by provincial departments
(c) Revision of the curriculum strengthening packs based on the above comments
(d) Quality assurance of the versioned material by provincial education officials

The curriculum strengthening packs was developed in English, to ensure accessibility and effective utilization across South Africa, the English version is currently being translated and versioned into the following official languages: Afrikaans, isiNdebele, isiXhosa, isiZulu, Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, siSwati, Tshivenda, and Xitsonga. This supports the NCF's emphasis on teaching in children's home language which aligns with DBE's mother tongue-based bilingual education approach.

UNICEF's Annual Work Plan supports work in relation to pre-service training and the development of qualifications on Early Childhood Development and the Foundation Phase focusing on play-based learning.

2. SCOPE OF WORK

2.1. The purpose of this assignment is to develop a training manual and an online tool that supports the effective facilitation, quality delivery, and impact measurement of the curriculum strengthening packs.

2.2. Objectives

2.1.1. Conduct a high-level outcome evaluation research study to explore practitioners' current experiences, perceptions, and interactions with the play online platform.
2.1.2. Develop an online course, structured into clearly defined modules, on the effective use of the curriculum strengthening packs. The course should incorporate assessments to evaluate participant understanding and competency. This will be SACE endorsed.
2.1.3. Develop a user-friendly, practical, play-based training manual to support the orientation of early learning practitioners, caregivers, and other service providers on the use and implementation of the curriculum strengthening packs. The manuals should provide practical guidance and be suitable for diverse early learning contexts.
2.1.4. Pilot and field-test the online course content with a representative sample of target users to assess the design/format and effectiveness. Findings from the field-testing process should be used to refine and strengthen the course prior to final implementation.

3. PART I: Inception report

The assignment will commence with an inception phase to clarify principles for the execution of the assignment, an agreed detailed work plan and agreement of roles and responsibilities.

3.1. The service provider will be invited to participate in an inception discussion within five working days after the signing of the contract to clarify all matters related to the contract and provide general guidance with regards to the implementation of the assignment within the parameters of the contract. The following will be dealt with during the inception meeting:

(a) detailed brief on the conceptual understanding and approach within the parameters of the terms of reference and the proposal submitted by the service provider.
(b) the proposed workplan for the execution of the assignment;

(c) the specific support required from UNICEF in the execution of the assignment; and
(d) any other matters that pertain to this assignment.

The service provider will be required to submit an inception report (***Deliverable 1*** Inception report) (maximum 5 pages) based on the discussions and agreements during the inception meeting referred to above, and this report will include, as an annexure, a detailed work plan for the full duration of this assignment and all components thereof (***Deliverable 2***: Detailed work plan).

4. Part II: High level evaluation Study

4.1. The P.L.A.Y (Play, Learning, and Youth) Online Training platform was developed in 2016 through a collaboration between the Department of Basic Education (DBE), UNICEF, and Cotlands to strengthen the capacity of Early Childhood Development (ECD) practitioners, Foundation Phase educators, and caregivers to facilitate play-based learning approaches. The platform aims to bridge knowledge and skills gaps by promoting the effective implementation of Learning Through Play pedagogies in early learning environments.

4.2. To date, more than 390,000 ECD practitioners, educators, and other stakeholders have completed training through the P.L.A.Y platform. While course completion rates remain consistently high, understanding the extent to which the course design/format is user-friendly, relevant and translates into practical application within early learning settings will support future development content.

4.3. This will be achieved through the use of surveys (telephonically) to gather data and in exceptional cases focus group discussions

4.4. Findings from the evaluation study will inform the needs assessment and design of the orientation programme and training manuals, ensuring that the final products are responsive to user needs, grounded in practitioner experiences, and aligned with the realities of diverse early learning programme settings. The study will also provide recommendations for strengthening the effectiveness, usability, and impact of the online learning experience.

4.5. The implementation and outcome evaluation study should be guided by the following participant selection criteria to ensure that the findings are representative, credible, and relevant to the intended users of the PlaySA online learning platform and the proposed NCF curriculum strengthening packs orientation programme:

4.5.1. Course Completion: Participants selected for the study must have successfully completed the PlaySA online course within the past 5 years.

4.5.2. ECD Practitioner Representation: ECD participants should be ECD practitioners who are currently teaching, or who have taught, in an Early Learning Programme (ELP) in the past 6 years.

4.5.3. Recency of Participation: Participants should have completed the PlaySA course within the past five years to ensure that feedback and experiences are based on relatively recent engagement with the platform and its content.

4.5.4. Diversity of Early Learning Programmes: The study sample should include a fair representation of practitioners from a range of Early Learning Programme (ELP) settings, including but not limited to centre-based programmes, community-based programmes, home-based programmes, playgroups, and other registered or non-registered ELPs. This will ensure that the evaluation captures experiences across different operational contexts and learner populations.

4.5.5. Geographical and Contextual Diversity: Where possible, participants should be drawn from different geographical locations and socio-economic contexts to provide a broad understanding of the accessibility, usability, and relevance of the online course across diverse settings.

Data for this will be provided.

Deliverable 3: Evaluation study report

5. Part III: Development of the Online course

5.1. Develop two online courses with the following specifications:

a. Describe the target Audience Profile: Define prerequisites, technical skills, and demographics to ensure content is appropriately tailored.

b. Learning Objectives (LOs): for each module

c. Modular Structure: Break the curriculum into manageable modules

d. Introduction: Overview and specific objectives.

e. Core Content: Video, audio, text, or interactive slides.

f. Activities: Practical exercises including case studies

g. Assessment**:** Quizzes

5.2. The development of the online course content should include a clear overview and introduction to the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) for Children from Birth to Four Years, providing participants with an understanding of its purpose, principles, structure, and application within Early Learning Programmes (ELPs). The course should highlight the role of the NCF in supporting holistic child development and its alignment with play-based learning approaches and pedagogy.

5.3. Given that the NCF curriculum strengthening packs are organized according to five age-based cohorts, it should be noted that the materials for Cohort 1 (Birth to 1 Year) are structured differently from those developed for the remaining cohorts.

5.4. To accommodate these differences and ensure a user-friendly learning experience, two separate online courses will be developed, one for birth-1 years (Cohort 1) and one that combines 2-5 years (cohort 2-5).

5.5. The development of the online course should adhere to the following;

a. It should be presented in a manner that is easy and practical to understand and apply.
b. Designed for a person with at least grade 9
c. Be embedded in play-based learning and pedagogies appropriate for different ages in terms of early learning and development.
d. It should integrate sound principles to facilitate gender equality, diversity, inclusion of children with disabilities and other related matters
e. Be written and presented in a manner that flows logically and is easy to understand and implement.
f. Have different scopes of curriculum that include curriculum differentiation, multi-level teaching, curriculum adaptation and cooperative learning.
g. The online course will be integrated into the PlaySA website and hosted on the P.L.A.Y (Play, Learning, and Youth) Online Training Platform

Field test the course content with a group of 20 participants using the same indicators listed on the evaluation study.

Deliverable 4a: Birth- to 1-year online course

Deliverable 4b:2-5 years online course

6. Part 4: Development of a training manual

6.1. Based on the scope of work done on the online module, develop a *Training manual*:

6.1.1. Develop a 10-hour comprehensive training manual to equip ECD practitioners and other service providers with the knowledge, skills, and confidence required to effectively implement the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) curriculum strengthening packs in diverse Early Learning Programme (ELP) settings.

6.1.2. The training manual should be designed for use by training organisations, higher education institutions, non-governmental organisations, training providers, government departments, and other accredited entities responsible for building practitioner capacity in the early learning sector.

6.1.3. The manual should combine theory, practical application, reflection, demonstration, and assessment activities to ensure participants are competent and implementation-ready upon completion of the orientation.

6.1.4. The training manual should incorporate a high-level crash course outline /understanding of key features of the NCF

6.1.5. This shall include the following:

a. A facilitator's guide (accompanied by activities);

b. Essential handouts (if any)

c. Power point presentation

d. Training resources needed to facilitate the training.

Copy editing: Copy editing is required and in particular with regards to consistency in terminology, spelling of names, terms, and acronyms; grammar, spelling and typos; syntax; and consistency in the numbering and labelling, graphs, tables and charts, amongst others.

Deliverable 4: Training manual

Design and layout requirements: The manual should adhere to the following:

(a) The design should be visually appealing and readable, while maintaining each publication's integrity as a research report.

(b) The general "look and feel" shall encompass a professional look, while also reflecting that the content deals with early child. The service provided shall provide at least three samples of look and feel for the publication and the final "look-and-feel" shall be approved by UNICEF and DBE. In the case where none of the initial "look-and-feel" samples are acceptable, the service provider shall, after discussion with UNICEF and DBE, provide two additional "look and feel" samples for a final decision.

(c) The logos of the Department of Basic Education and UNICEF shall appear on the cover page of the manual.

(d) ***Artwork (illustrations/photos)***: Artwork needs to be sourced by the service provider for the cover page as well as inside pages, as appropriate to be visually appealing.

(a) ***General***: All artwork, including illustrations, photographs, and similar visual elements, must adhere to the following minimum standards:

i. *Subject matter and content*: Artwork will focus on young children (ages birth to 5 years) engaged in common daily activities, including but not limited to playing; expressing emotions; learning activities (e.g., reading a book, painting, identifying shapes); interacting with diverse caregivers and family members; routine activities (e.g., brushing teeth, eating, bedtime); amongst others

ii. *Age appropriateness*: Where children are depicted, the imagery must be age-appropriate for the birth to five years age group.

iii. *Diversity*: Artwork should reflect the demographic representation of the people of South Africa, including culturally and context appropriateness.
iv. *Gender*: *Gende*r: Artwork should present equal representation of gender across all artwork, and artwork needs to depict, as appropriate, non-stereotypical roles regardless of gender.
v. *Inclusion*: Artwork should sufficiently reflect young children with disabilities, including different types of disabilities, and where appropriate adults with disabilities, and the depiction shall be based on the principle of inclusion and how they engage in everyday life settings.
vi. *Authenticity*: Artwork needs to capture true-to-life depictions that reflects the South African context.
vii. *Style*: The style should be friendly, clean, bold, and engaging.
viii. *Consistency:* Artwork must be rendered consistently across all appearances for each publication.
ix. *Tone:* Artwork must convey a sense of joy, curiosity, and safety; avoiding excessive complexity or distracting background elements.
x. *Quality:* Artwork shall be of high quality.
xi. *Credits for artwork:* All photos, illustrations and images shall have credits as appropriate

(b) ***Illustrations***: If illustrations are used, the following is applicable:
i. All illustrations need to be sourced from the same illustrator to ensure consistency in the look and feel.
ii. Illustration depicting young children from birth to 5 years, which may require an illustrator that is experienced in the creation of illustrations for children across the age group.
iii. Illustrations should be realistic and not in cartoon or caricature format.
iv. Technical:
a. *File format*: Vector-based (preferred) (Adobe Illustrator or Scalable Vector Graphics (SVG)) for scalability and PNG.
b. *Resolution*: Minimum 300 DPI at the largest intended print size (A4 or equivalent), unless higher DPI is explicitly indicated in the description
c. *Naming convention*: will be agreed upon before commencement.
v. The illustrator be acknowledged as required under South African law.

(c) ***Photographs***: The following is applicable when photographs are used:
i. Photos shall be obtained from either the UNICEF photo bank or any other acceptable legitimate stock photo/image database.
ii. Stock photos/images shall depict the South African context and South African people.
iii. If photos are specifically sourced for the publication, the required permissions need to be obtained.

Revision and quality

(a) The service provider shall submit the copy-edited version of each report with track changes for review by UNICEF, whereafter UNICEF shall approve the copy-edited version as the final text to be used in the design and layout of each report. Any changes shall be communicated to be incorporated before the approval of the text.

(b) The service provider shall submit a draft of each design report for review, whereafter the feedback shall be incorporated.

(c) The service provider shall prior to finalizing the final publication employ its internal quality assurance and checking procedures to ensure that the manual meets industry standards.

(d) The material needs to go through internal cross-checking and quality assurance processes before the submission.

Final production files

(a) The service provider will provide the final production files electronically. These shall include the following:
   i. *Copy edited MsWord document*: Copy edited documents with track changes.
   ii. *Print-ready PDF*: High-resolution file, correctly optimized for professional printing (including bleed, crop marks, etc.).
   iii. *Web-optimized PDF*: Low-resolution, accessible file optimized for screen viewing and download.
   iv. *Source files*: Fully packaged design files (e.g., Adobe InDesign, artwork used in high resolution, including linked assets and fonts).

(b) Print specifications: The service provider will provide a detailed/clear description of the print specifications (millimeters should be used as the standard of measurement for size).

7. EXPECTED DELIVERABLES AND REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

7.1 The deliverables for this assignment are as follows

Work assignment	Deliverable/output	Estimated number of days	Estimated budget/payment
Inception report	Deliverable 1 (Inception report)	5	10% of total fee
	Deliverable 2 (detailed work plan)		
High level evaluation study	Deliverable 3 (study report)	18	20% of total fee
Online course	Deliverable 4 (Birth-1-year online course)	45	50% of total fee
	Deliverable 5 (2-5 years online course)		
Training manual	Deliverable 6 (Training manual)	15	20% of total fee

7.2. The service provider shall undertake to keep all information regarding the work assignment and the content thereof confidential.

7.3. The estimated costs for the assigned were calculated against the current rates

8. DESIRED COMPETENCIES, TECHNICAL BACKGROUND AND EXPERIENCE

8.1 The following desired competencies, technical background experience will be the basis to select and appoint a service provider for this assignment:

8.1.1. Demonstrated experience, capacity and knowledge of educational policies in early childhood development with particular emphasis on especially of children between the ages of birth-four years aligned to the curriculum.

8.1.2. Demonstrated experience, capacity and knowledge in course content development and assets

8.1.3. An understanding and knowledge of the South African early childhood development situation, in particular in relation to early learning in the various settings or programmes.

8.1.4. Highly qualified team experts for the different fields needed for this assignment, thus the team leader should possess a master's degree in education/social sciences.

8.1.5 At least six years of relevant professional experience related to the scope of this assignment.

Due to the need for the service to be provided need to have a strong reference to the South Africa context, preference will be given to South African service providers.

9. ADMINISTRATIVE AND RELATED MATTERS

9.1 The contract and the related actions and deliverables required for the service provider to execute will be managed by UNICEF.

9.2 The service provider shall have regular engagements with UNICEF, either in person or virtually. The necessity of all engagements will be discussed with successful service provider during the inception discussion to ensure that aspects of the work assignment are understood clearly. Meetings will be at times as agreed to discuss and agreed upon on matters pertinent to the implementation of this assignment.

9.3 UNICEF is responsible for the overall monitoring of the implementation of this assignment as described in the contract and shall execute this in a professional and consultative manner throughout the term of the contract.

9.4 The service provider shall at all times keep information obtained during the work assignment confidential and shall not circulate the documents or any part there-of, at any stage to any party without the explicit written permission of **both** UNICEF and the Department of Basic Education; and may not publish a document and/or report, any part thereof, or any reworked version thereof, without the explicit written permission of **both** UNICEF and the Department of Basic Education under such conditions that both parties will agree too.

9.5 UNICEF and/or Department of Basic Education reserve the right to subject any work done for external peer review as part of the quality assurance process in the implementation of this assignment. The service provider shall be informed if such an action is taken and will be duly informed on the outcome there-off.

9.6 The service provider shall ensure that all final deliverables adhere to the required language standards, which include a thorough grammar and spell check. The service provider shall ensure consistency in the use of terminology throughout the document.

10. CONDITIONS

10.1 The service provider will employ its own office and administrative system in the execution of this assignment.

10.2 The service provider's fee/budget shall be inclusive of all local (national) travel (at the most economical fare) associated with the execution of this assignment, if applicable. In extraordinary circumstances where UNICEF deems it necessary for the service provider to travel outside the ambit of the contractual agreement, air transport and airport transfers (where applicable) will be covered in accordance with UNICEF's rules and tariffs. Flight costs will be covered at economy class rate (at the most economical fare) as per UNICEF policies.

10.3 The drafts and final documents, as well related data, will be the property of UNICEF with full title rights after completion, which UNICEF may transfer to the Department of Basic Education without reservations. The service provider will be acknowledged for the work done in the draft documents as well as the final document, except if the document is published as official policy or document of the Department of Basic Education, then the discretion to do this lies solely with the Department of Basic Education in accordance with its policies and procedures.

10.4 As per UNICEF DFAM policy, payment is made against approved deliverables. No advance payment is allowed unless in exceptional circumstances against bank guarantee, subject to a maximum of 30 per cent of the total contract value in cases where advance purchases, for example for supplies or travel, may be necessary.

10.5 The team/consultant/firm selected will be governed by and subject to UNICEF's *General Terms and Conditions* for institutional contracts.

10.6 Applicants *not resident* in South Africa are responsible for their own travel and accommodation costs, visas and other related requirements and costs, should they be selected as the preferred candidate. *This is not included in the budget, neither should it be*.

11. TECHNICAL EVALUATION CRITERIA AND RELATIVE POINTS

11.1 Interest service providers are required to submit their proposal in two separate parts, i.e., a technical proposal and a financial proposal.

11.2 Technical proposal

11.2.1 The technical proposal shall contain the required information as indicated in the ensuing paragraphs, which shall relate directly to the terms of reference (non-inclusion of any components will lead to disqualification).

11.2.2 Profile of the service provider/institution.

(a) Portfolio of the organisation/agency and three reference letters demonstrating evidence of relevant capacity, qualification or specialized knowledge/experience.

(b) Information and credentials of the team lead and team members: including designated role of each team member and their resumé, experience in working on similar assignments.

11.2.3 Proposed approach that will be followed:

(a) This shall include the proposed implementation plan, detailing the proposed methodology, defining specific implementation steps and description of activities, indicating timeline for each activity, including estimated number of workdays necessary for each team member, amongst others.

(b) An indication of possible risk factors associated with this assignment, based on the perception and experience of the service provider.

11.2.4 Reference to similar work which shall include:

(a) Reference to at least 2 recent examples of similar work, preferably final products that are available and accessible either through email or on a website. In case of confidential work, indicate as such.

(b) The names and contact details of two persons that can be contacted as reference check related to the service provider's work.

11.2.5 The evaluation of the technical proposals will be based on the following criteria.

Technical Criteria	**Description of Technical Sub-criteria**	**Maximum points**
A. Overall Response	A.1: Response is complete, coherent and logically organised, and elaborates and articulates an understanding of scope, objectives and overall assignment requirements aligned with the scope work detailed in this TOR	20
	A. Maximum points	**20**
B. Institution	B.1: Range and depth of experience as required in this TOR with similar projects as reflected in portfolio with samples of work or links to sample of work	20
	B.2: Quality assurance mechanism and risk mitigation measures included	5

	B.3: Three client references, two/three recent examples of similar work relevant, to assess competency	5
	B. Maximum points	**30**
C: Competency	C.1: Team leader and team members with the required qualifications and experience to carry out this type of assignment.	20
	C. Maximum points	**20**
D. Proposed methodology and approach	D.1: Methodology and approach indicate ability to complete the assignment as per the TOR against the timelines.	10
	D. Maximum points	**10**
MAXIMUM SCORE (A+B+C+D) FOR TECHNICAL PROPOSAL		**80**
Minimum score of **60** out of 80 for technical proposal is required in order to be considered for appointment to this consulting assignment. A technical proposal that receives less than the minimum acceptable score will be deemed disqualified and not proceed further		

11.2.6 Notwithstanding whether the minimum acceptable score is above 55 or not, if a sub-score of 14 or less are achieved under *Technical Criteria C* (competency), the technical proposal will also be deemed disqualified.

11.2.7 UNICEF reserves the right to engage the Department of Basic Education in the assessment of technical proposals in accordance with UNICEF's policy.

11.3 **Financial proposal**

11.3.1 A separate *financial offer* detailing all activity expenses and logistics per each of the 3 jobs should be submitted and the associated costs should be itemised.

11.3.2 The financial proposal should indicate budget estimated in South African Rands (ZAR). Please note:

(a) Prices offered shall be all inclusive and shall remain fixed for the duration of the contract.
(b) VAT needs to be indicated *separately* (i.e. fees/budget needs to exclude VAT).

11.4 The final assessment of the proposal will be weighed as follows: Technical proposal at 80% and financial proposal at 20% to determine a final score.