

## TERMS OF REFERENCE

### SHORT TITLE OF ASSIGNMENT

ECE Quality Standards Development, Review and Evidence Generation for Cross-Country Learning

### BACKGROUND

The 2023 Conference of Pacific Education Ministers Statement of Commitment agreed to the centrality of early childhood learning and development, and multiple countries have enacted policies that acknowledge and promote ECE as a critical foundation of the education system.

Over the past years, Pacific countries have secured gains in ECE access and are increasingly looking at expanding quality of ECE with an aim to ensure that all children build the foundations for learning needed for success in school and beyond. Concerns do remain, as regional assessment data show key challenges for learning outcomes. Year 4 Numeracy results showed 67% (72% female, 63% male) of students performed at or above the minimum proficiency level in numeracy. The results for reading are even more concerning with only 43% (49% female, 37% male) of Year 4 student performing at or above the expected standard. The fact that a substantial proportion of students at the end of early primary are not meeting minimum proficiency in numeracy and literacy is surely a result of many factors, yet global evidence on the link of quality ECE to later learning outcomes points to a need to ensure quality and inclusive teaching and learning in early childhood education.

Understanding what quality ECE looks like, the current situation, challenges and opportunities and pathways for change in the region will allow for both regional and nationally led strategies to be developed to improve quality ECE provision and ultimately improve outcomes for our youngest learners

Global (SDG 4.2), regional (PacREF) and national plans all demonstrate a mandate for and commitment to quality ECE. The Pacific Regional Education Framework (PacREF) policy area on quality and relevance seeks to ensure high quality and relevant education programmes are provided for learners at all levels. A Pacific Regional Early Childhood Education Taskforce (PRECET) comprising of government representatives from 15 Pacific is mandated to lead and guide regional ECE priorities under PacREF. UNICEF, as secretariat, provides technical support to PRECET.

Quality standards in ECE ideally articulate the element of pre-primary classrooms that are important for ensuring children's learning, healthy development and safety while attending ECE. In general, ECE quality standards typically address both process quality (curriculum implementation, classroom pedagogy, age-appropriateness of practices, responsiveness to children's needs, relationships and interactions between teachers and children, collaboration between teachers and parents) and structural quality (indoor and outdoor spaces, learning and play materials, health and hygiene, teacher qualifications and working conditions) that will ensure improved learning outcomes for children. The monitoring of progress and use of this data and/or information allows stakeholders to identify challenges, gaps and opportunities and make informed decisions on priorities and strategies for ECE provision, including changes in classroom practice and ECE centre improvement, as well as national-level planning.

Quality assurance is the system for promoting quality by ensuring that ECE services adhere to a set of standards or guidelines whose explicit aim is to promote the provision of quality early learning services. Quality assurance can involve a range of systems and procedures for collecting, analyzing and reporting information on ECE centres helping each to identify strengths and weaknesses as well as opportunities for improvement. At a systems level, quality assurance systems can also advance mutual accountability between national, local and

centre- levels, to ensure that data and a shared understanding of ECE quality can inform decision-making and improvements to ECE services.

The 2022 Status Report of ECE Systems in 15 Pacific countries shows that 12 Pacific countries have developed quality standards for ECE. FSM and Palau reported that they follow the minimum quality standards of the Head Start programme. Across all the PICTs, Niue and Vanuatu have harmonized the ECE minimum quality standards with those of the entire education system in their respective countries. Kiribati developed comprehensive ECE quality standards and uses these to monitor ECE and collect data annually. To an extent these are also harmonised in the overall QA system. Both Tonga and Tuvalu are planning to develop comprehensive quality standards building on minimum standards.

The Status Report shows that all Pacific countries have adopted at least one monitoring tool and/or mechanism to conduct quality assurance on ECE and assess teacher performance, with variations in the way these tools are used. Checklists and observation rubrics on school premises or in classrooms are the most common tools according to survey responses, used by 13 and 11 PICTs, respectively. In seven PICTs, self-assessments are utilized by the ECE centres to conduct performance evaluations. Tokelau, FSM, Niue, Samoa, Tuvalu and Solomon Islands have adopted all three of these different monitoring tools to ensure the quality of ECE teaching. However, in countries such as Fiji, Kiribati and Vanuatu, only one type of monitoring tool is used.

Despite the existence of different tools to monitor quality at the service delivery level, interview respondents from most countries noted monitoring as a challenge due to lack of sufficient ECE dedicated staff in MoEs. Financial limitations also affect the possibility of conducting regular monitoring visits to preschools, especially in remote areas or outer islands, as transportation to reach these locations is often very costly. There is a need to strengthen the process leading from quality assessment and quality improvement of ECE in most Pacific countries.

Under Policy Area 1: Quality and Relevance, the Pacific Regional Education Framework (PacREF) includes *regional good 3: Regional Quality Framework for ECE to enable countries to use definitions of quality and standards to improve delivery of ECE*. Within this area of work fall three contributing activities:

- QR 4.1.3 Development of national ECE quality standards.
- QR 4.2.1 Embed and implement ECE quality standards through existing systems
- QR 4.2.2 Regional review of best practice and opportunities to embed and strengthen ECE quality assurance

Building on existing national ECE quality standards and implementation experience, including under PacREF, UNICEF is looking for a consultant to review existing ECE quality standards and quality assurance systems, as well as best practices, challenges and opportunities for defining and strengthening ECE quality in the Pacific, and consolidate visions of ECE quality in an updated Regional Quality Framework for ECE.

## OBJECTIVE / SCOPE OF WORK

The purpose of this assignment is to support the Pacific countries effectively deliver quality ECE services through the development and/or review of ECE quality standards and quality assurance systems that supports children's learning outcomes and holistic development. Specifically, this assignment is to review existing ECE quality standards and quality assurance systems, as well as best practices, challenges and opportunities for defining and strengthening ECE quality in the Pacific and consolidate visions of ECE quality in an updated Regional Quality Framework for ECE.

**Phase 1 of consultancy: Deliverables to be completed by 30 April 2025**

**Inception phase**

The consultant is expected to start with an inception phase which will include defining a detailed scope of work, methodology and expectations for the final deliverables, specifically highlighting the use of Pacific methodologies and engagement of Pacific expertise from the region, including PRECET members. The scope of work and methodology will vary from country to country and country specific approaches will be defined in the inception phase in consultation with countries, ensuring country leadership in designing of the approach and methodology. The regional review will be guided by the PRECET and the consultant is expected to work closely with PRECET starting with defining the inception plan. The consultant is encouraged to define a scope of work that will allow parallel activity on the different streams of work, and to propose a travel plan to the countries that minimizes cost/time spent travelling (while still ensuring adequate time in-country). The consultant is expected to use highly participatory approaches that bring global and regional examples and best practice, but also center local perspectives, visions and context-relevant approaches. For country-specific work, this will ensure a wider consultative process, including ECE teachers, Head Teachers, MoE monitoring officers, supervisors, school management committees and others, ideally with stakeholders at national and provincial/district/island-levels.

During the inception phase, the consultant will hold planning discussions with UNICEF colleagues and core stakeholders in the multi-country office and in offices covering the countries targeted for in-country support. The consultant will further review relevant publications and frameworks at regional level, as well as those relevant for target countries.

Regional documents include but are not limited to the Pacific Regional Education Framework (PacREF), 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent, 2023 Status Report on Early Childhood Education Systems in 15 Pacific Island Countries and Territories, Pacific Guidelines for Development of National Quality Frameworks, Regional Review of ECE Curricula, regional ECE systems and planning tools and other related documents.

The consultant will also review national-level documents related to ECE quality standards and their use, which may vary by country, but education sector plans or documents, available relevant ECE quality data, ECE quality standards, and other, as relevant.

The consultant will share a first draft inception report that outlines the proposed approach and methodology. The consultant's approach and methodology as stated in the report will be reviewed by UNICEF and core partners, and agreed on with the consultant before consultant commences work on other deliverables in this ToR.

Once this is agreed, the consultant will advance to hold consultations with relevant stakeholders at both regional and national levels to more deeply understand the context, the need and progress made with ECE quality, and the role of ECE quality standards (and associated guidance and systems) and their implementation in advancing the same. A final inception report will draw on the full literature review and consultations completed.

### **Regional review of best practice and opportunities to embed and strengthen ECE quality assurance**

Despite the official title of this activity, the consultant is encouraged to look more broadly at the role of ECE quality standards and how they can effectively be implemented to strengthen quality of ECE delivery. The consultant will conduct a thorough review of ECE quality standard implementation in Pacific countries, including through quality assurance systems. Quality assurance systems are already in place in all Pacific countries, but these systems do not capture or cater for ECE effectively. During the review, the consultant should engage with relevant stakeholders involved in ECE quality assurance systems implementation, ECE teachers, Head Teachers and families and communities. The consultant is expected to design and implement a regional review with an option for all 15 Pacific Island countries to participate. This is expected to be guided by a systematic review framework to be developed and presented in the inception phase, in consultation with the PRECET.

This may include the organization/content of the standards, measurement tools, data collection systems (e.g. via one-off surveys, annual surveys, EMIS-based approaches, quality assurance systems, self-assessment for center-based use only, etc.), data compilation and use, linkages to other standards/competencies documents, use to inform plans, budgets, capacity building and other actions. The review should help bring out gaps, good practices, and opportunities for improved school management, monitoring and accountability measures, using data efficiently to promote compliance mechanisms and target support. The relevance of existing tools vis-à-vis supporting data collection, analysis, reporting and utilization should also be reviewed.

The regional review should provide stories, voices and case studies from diverse Pacific countries, as well as country-specific profiles and findings. The review should consider key cross-cutting issues in line with CPEM priorities and guidance from the Early Learning Taskforce, such as on climate change and resilience, culture, language, gender, inclusion, etc.

The regional review should also include a user-friendly and accessible overview of the document with key findings and recommendations, country-specific profiles, and PowerPoint presentation/s that can be used at regional and/or country-levels.

### **Country-Specific work to develop, embed and/or implement ECE quality standards**

Country-specific work in phase 1 of the consultancy is expected to include review, revision, pilot testing and finalization of quality standards in Tonga. Tonga has ECE Heilala Standards, which were being used by the ministry of education to monitor ECE quality, but as the number of ECE centres expand and with a new ECE curriculum in implementation, the ECE standards and implementation mechanisms need to be reviewed and a revised system to implement and monitor the standards need to be put in place. A clearer and more objective tool that can be used by a wider number of assessors may be needed, along with defined mechanisms and on technical support to the ministry of education in implementing and consistently monitoring ECE quality using the standards.

### **Phase 2 of consultancy: Deliverables to be completed by 31 December 2025**

#### **Development of Pacific regional ECE quality framework**

Building on the recommendations of the regional review, as described above, the consultant will support the PRECET to develop and updated version of Pacific regional quality framework which is expected to guide Pacific countries in developing and implementing quality assurance mechanisms. This will involve supporting PRECET to identify key dimensions of quality for ECE based on available evidence and best practices in the region, unpacking these dimensions further to define standards and indicators, defining a quality assurance systems and relevant set of processes, practical guidance on implementation of a well-functioning quality assurance system leading to quality improvement and comprehensive tools and processes to collect data systematically on ECE quality and learning as needed to better understand the situation of ECE quality and learning for all children, including the most vulnerable and to inform ongoing improvements to the ECE teaching and learning process for all. PRECET, UNICEF and relevant partners will review the draft framework. In addition, the framework will be piloted in at least one country to generate evidence from the ground based on which the framework will be finalized with endorsement from PRECET. The country for pilot testing will be decided in consultation with PRECET and decided at a later stage.

### **ACTIVITIES, DELIVERABLES AND TIMELINES, PLUS PAYMENT SCHEDULE PER DELIVERABLE**

ACTIVITY	DELIVERABLES	ESTIMATED TIME TO COMPLETE	PAYMENT (%)
<b>Phase 1 of consultancy: Deliverables to be completed by 30 April 2025</b>			

Inception consultations for regional review and country specific support.	Inception report for regional review and country specific work.		
Development and finalization of an inception report.			
Consultations conducted with PRECET including development and finalization of regional review framework.	Regional review framework developed.		
Develop first draft of the regional review report and conduct consultations for review and feedback.	First draft of regional review report developed.		
Based on feedback received develop a second draft of the regional review report and conduct validation consultations including workshop to co-construct recommendations.	Second draft of regional review report developed and validated.		
Finalize the regional review report including developing a power point presentation on the report.	Final report for regional review and power point presentation.		
As per inception report, work with Tonga to support review of existing Tongan standards and conducted consultations to carry out the revisions needed.	Review of existing standards completed and consultations conducted		
Undertake revisions of the standards as agreed in consultation and share draft for feedback.	Revised draft standards		
Support ministry to pilot the revised standards in select number of ECE centres document the feedback from the pilot.	Pilot testing completed and documented		
Based on the feedback from the pilot, undertake revisions needed and share back the document for final review. Based on the final review/feedback received, finalize the ECE quality standards.	Finalized ECE quality standards		
<b>Phase 2 of consultancy: Deliverables to be completed by 31 December 2025</b>			

Support PRECET to co-construct a regional quality framework draft building on the recommendations of the regional review. Ensure to capture feedback on the draft framework and incorporate the feedback before pilot testing.	Draft framework developed		
Based on the decision of the PRECET, support at least 1 Pacific country to conduct pilot testing of the framework and document feedback and lessons learned.	Pilot testing and documentation completed		
Share findings and feedback from the pilot and conduct further consultations to collect further feedback on the framework from PRECET and relevant partners.	Final version of Pacific regional quality framework in ECE and power point presentation		
Based on all the feedback received finalize the Pacific regional quality framework including a powerpoint presentation.			

#### QUALIFICATIONS, SPECIALIZED EXPERIENCE AND ADDITIONAL COMPETENCIES

Bachelors  Masters  PhD  Other

A masters degree would be indicative of the level of qualification required for this work, however a first degree with a combination of relevant other post graduate certificates/diplomas would also be considered.

Ideally consultants would be graduates in the area of education with some level of specialisation in one of the areas identified and/or policy and planning.

- Minimum of 10 years experience in educational planning, curriculum, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, with some relevant levels of specialisation
- Proven experience in research and analysis
- Proven ability to be innovative, think differently and engage others in transformation
- Demonstrated experience working with Ministries of Education and development partners
- Proven ability to produce high quality documentation.
- Knowledge of the Pacific Education system is an advantage
- Pacific experience, knowledge and culture are added advantages
- High level interpersonal and relationship-building skills
- Ability to communicate effectively with persons of various cultures and disciplines
- Ability to determine and review priorities and meet deadlines
- Diplomatic skills to liaise with counterparts and different stakeholders
- Good analytical, negotiating, and advocacy skills

## CONDITIONS OF WORK AND CLARIFICATION ON SUPERVISION

The consultant will be supervised on a day-to-day basis including contract management by the Early Childhood Education Specialist with relevant guidance, provided by the UNICEF Pacific Education Chief of Education. The consultant is expected to closely collaborate with ECE Officer at UNICEF Pacific and education specialists and officers at Field Offices, through out the consultancy for technical guidance.

The consultant is expected to travel for in-person work, including in-person engagement in key meetings and consultations, and may work remotely the remainder of the time. When working remotely, the consultant is expected to be available for discussions as required during working hours of the country. All costs associated with the travel (including living allowances and any other costs) are to be included in the total contract value. This will be based on the indicative list of countries included in this TOR, with a contract amendment required if travel plans or costs change significantly.

## ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES

- Individuals engaged under a consultancy or individual contract will not be considered “staff members” under the Staff Regulations and Rules of the United Nations and UNICEF’s policies and procedures and will not be entitled to benefits provided therein (such as leave entitlements and medical insurance coverage). Their conditions of service will be governed by their contract and the General Conditions of Contracts for the Services of Consultants and Individual Contractors. Consultants and individual contractors are responsible for determining their tax liabilities and for the payment of any taxes and/or duties, in accordance with local or other applicable laws.
- The selected candidate is solely responsible to ensure that the visa (applicable) and health insurance required to perform the duties of the contract are valid for the entire period of the contract. Selected candidates are subject to confirmation of fully vaccinated status against SARS-CoV-2 (Covid-19) with a World Health Organization (WHO)-endorsed vaccine, which must be met prior to taking up the assignment. It does not apply to consultants who will work remotely and are not expected to work on or visit UNICEF premises, programme delivery locations or directly interact with communities UNICEF works with, nor to travel to perform functions for UNICEF for the duration of their consultancy contracts. UNICEF offers reasonable accommodation for consultants with disabilities. This may include, for example, accessible software, travel assistance for missions or personal attendants. We encourage you to disclose your disability during your application in case you need reasonable accommodation during the selection process and afterwards in your assignment.
- No contract may commence unless the contract is signed by both UNICEF and the consultant/ contractor.
- Consultant/Contractor will be required to complete mandatory online courses (e.g. Ethics, Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Security) upon receipt of offer and before the signature of contract.

## GUIDANCE FOR APPLICANTS

- This vacancy is for an individual consultant only. Candidates are requested to submit a brief technical proposal and CV, with any indication of sub-contracted expertise (which would remain the responsibility of the contracted consultant)
- Candidates are asked to submit a **separate financial offer** along with your application. The financial proposal should be a **lump sum amount for all the deliverables** and should show a break down for the following:
  - Monthly / Daily fees: based on the deliverables in the Terms of Reference above
  - Travel: economy air ticket where applicable to take up assignment and field mission travel

- Living allowance: where travel is required
- Miscellaneous: to cover visa, health insurance (including medical evacuation for international consultants), travel insurance, communications, and other costs