

SPECIFICATION

Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA): Quantifying the Scale of Online-Facilitated Child Sexual Abuse (CSA)

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Research Project at the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) is seeking to commission a Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) to identify what is known about the scale of online-facilitated child sexual abuse.
- 1.2. IICSA is seeking a Contractor with expert knowledge of the subject area, a good understanding of relevant data sources and stakeholders, and a proven track record of delivering high quality REAs for government or other high profile clients.

2. IICSA Background

- 2.1. IICSA was established in 2015 to investigate whether public bodies and other, non-state institutions have taken seriously their duty of care to protect children from sexual abuse in England and Wales. IICSA will identify institutional failings where they are found to exist, demand accountability for past institutional failings, and support victims and survivors to share their experience of sexual abuse. IICSA will also make practical recommendations to ensure that children are given the care and protection they need.
- 2.2. IICSA is composed of three strands: the Public Hearings, the Truth Project and the Research Project.
- 2.3. The Research Project aims to generate new insight into both current and non-recent child sexual abuse that will help to inform IICSA's recommendations, as well as leaving a legacy of research reports and tools/approaches on which other researchers and practitioners can build. This aim will be achieved through a combination of drawing together existing research and extracting new learning from the synthesised evidence base; conducting secondary analysis of existing datasets; and undertaking primary research to fill key evidence gaps and broaden our knowledge about child sexual abuse. During the course of its work the Inquiry will be examining data

on the perspectives and experiences of victims and survivors, perpetrators of child sexual abuse, and professionals working with children in the institutions under investigation, amongst other groups.

- 2.4. The Research Project is being developed and delivered by an experienced research team, working in partnership with IICSA colleagues. It is being overseen by an independent Academic Advisory Board (AAB), chaired by Professor Jenny Pearce OBE from the University of Bedfordshire. The AAB is responsible for providing advice and guidance on topics, methods and outputs as well as granting the Research Project's ethical approval. The Research Project will be delivered through a combination of in-house and externally commissioned work.
- 2.5. Further information about IICSA, including the Research Project, can be found at: www.iicsa.org.uk
- 2.6. The REA to which this Invitation to Tender relates will inform IICSA's investigation into the Internet and Child Sexual Abuse. More information about the scope of the investigation into the Internet and Child Sexual Abuse can be found at:
<https://www.iicsa.org.uk/sites/default/files/the-internet-and-child-sexual-abuse.pdf>

3. Research aim and research questions

- 3.1. IICSA is investigating institutional responses to child sexual abuse including child sexual exploitation facilitated by the internet and other digital communications technologies ("online-facilitated CSA" or "online CSA").
- 3.2. Online child sexual abuse (CSA) includes: the sharing of child sexual abuse material; viewing or directing the abuse of children via online streaming or video conferencing; grooming or otherwise coordinating contact offences against children.
- 3.3. To inform this investigation, IICSA wishes to commission an REA to address the overarching research question: 'What is known about the scale of online-facilitated child sexual abuse?'
- 3.4. IICSA's terms of reference extend to England and Wales. The investigation into the Internet and child sexual abuse is therefore concerned with online CSA where either the victim or the perpetrator is located in England or Wales.
- 3.5. For the purpose of this REA, IICSA is interested in all measures and data sources relating to online CSA that are: (i) international, (ii) from England or Wales, or (iii) from any comparable jurisdiction.
- 3.6. The REA should address the following sub-questions:

- 3.6.1. What measures are available for quantifying the scale of online child sexual abuse? Measures to be considered might relate to: number of identified perpetrators; number of identified victims; number of recorded offences; volume of child sexual abuse material.
- 3.6.2. What are the strengths and limitations of different measures?
- 3.6.3. What does each of these measures tell us about the scale of online CSA in England and Wales (i) currently, and (ii) over time?
- 3.6.4. What data sources are available for quantifying the scale of online CSA? Sources to be considered might include: crime statistics; other data held by law enforcement and partners (eg. the Internet Watch Foundation); academic research, such as large- and small-scale survey data.
- 3.6.5. What are the strengths and limitations of different data sources?
- 3.7. As far as such information is available within the identified literature, the study should also consider how the measures and data sources under discussion are used to inform policy and practice, and to highlight their relevance to UK policy and practice.
- 3.8. IICSA recognises that the state of the evidence may not allow these questions to be fully and robustly answered within the scope of this REA. Part of the purpose of the REA is to identify and clearly articulate gaps in the literature. We welcome responses that demonstrate an understanding of how to approach an analysis of evidence gaps, and of how the appointed Contractor will present this in their research outputs.

4. Scope

- 4.1. The purpose of this contract will be to synthesise the existing evidence base relevant to the questions in section 3.6 above, extract the key findings, and identify any pertinent gaps in our current evidence that IICSA or other parties may wish to seek to fill in the future.
- 4.2. It is critical that the review is comprehensive and robust, but also timely. The appointed Contractor should therefore use an REA methodology (see section 5 for more information).
- 4.3. The appointed Contractor will not be required to undertake any primary research.
- 4.4. In light of the rapidly changing nature of online offending, and the existence of recent, high quality literature reviews, priority should be given to research published in the last five years. Where older evidence is considered, the written report should identify any potential limitations to its relevance to the present context.

- 4.5. Where the REA draws on research from other jurisdictions, the written report should identify any salient differences that could affect the relevance of the findings to England and Wales.
- 4.6. The written report should extract evidence relevant to the range of institutions, systems and governance arrangements under investigation by IICSA, including, but not limited to: government, regulators, internet service providers, providers of online platforms and other relevant software companies, law enforcement agencies, and the criminal justice system.

5. Approach

Method

- 5.1. The research questions should be answered using an REA methodology. REAs are routinely used by government and other bodies as a means of identifying, assessing and synthesising the existing evidence base in a rigorous and structured way. They are not as exhaustive or time consuming as full systematic reviews. An REA toolkit produced by the UK Civil Service (containing extensive information about the REA approach) can be found at: <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20140305122816/http://www.civilservice.gov.uk/networks/gsr/resources-and-guidance/rapid-evidence-assessment>
- 5.2. REAs involve the development of a comprehensive search strategy (including search parameters, terms and databases/sites) which should be piloted, and refined if necessary, before use.
- 5.3. Tenderers are required to provide details of their proposed search strategy in their tender submission. The final strategy will need to be refined following the inception meeting and signed off by IICSA before use.
- 5.4. The appointed Contractor should carry out searches of 'grey' literature that is published by organisations other than academic journals. All literature, whether published or unpublished, should be assessed against agreed quality criteria.
- 5.5. The appointed Contractor should also be prepared to carry out a targeted call for literature to collect any relevant material (whether published or unpublished) that may not be identified by the academic or grey literature searches. The call for literature will be disseminated to academic, government and third sector stakeholders, as agreed with IICSA.
- 5.6. REAs also involve the systematic sifting of identified literature for relevance and quality prior to inclusion in the review. The appointed Contractor will be expected to use the quality assessment criteria for REAs used by the Research Project, which will be shared and discussed at the project inception

meeting. Tenderers are also required to outline, as part of their tender submission, details of their proposed inclusion / exclusion criteria.

- 5.7. On completion of searches, and prior to the report-writing stage, the appointed Contractor will be required to share a database of search results and a populated quality assessment spreadsheet with the Research Project.
- 5.8. In the event that there is insufficient high quality literature to address one or more of the research questions, inclusion and exclusion criteria may be relaxed. Any such proposed change to criteria or search strategy should be subject to agreement with IICSA.
- 5.9. Tenderers are also required to outline in detail in the proposal their approach to analysing the sifted literature, identifying the key themes and writing them up in the final report. This should include discussion of how the relative weight of evidence will be reflected in the written report.

Ethics

- 5.10. The proposal should include an assessment of any ethical considerations that might arise in the course of this work, and how these will be addressed. Tenderers must comply with the IICSA Research Code of Ethics and ethical approval process, and must complete the ethical approval form (Appendix A of this Specification). IICSA also expects the appointed Contractor to go through their own internal ethics approval process before the literature identification process begins, and to submit evidence of internal ethical approval to IICSA.

6. Outputs and Performance Measures

- 6.1. The main outputs of this contract will be as follows:
 - 6.1.1. Work plan (methodology, timeline, search strategy including terms and databases to be used and inclusion/exclusion criteria, ethical approval form)
 - 6.1.2. A zipped file containing all documents summarised and synthesised as part of the review (where electronic copies are available), along with a completed evidence template for each reviewed document, and the final populated grid (or other tool) used for data extraction and analysis.
 - 6.1.3. A detailed report structure for approval by the IICSA Project Lead prior to the report writing phase.
 - 6.1.4. A draft written report for submission to the IICSA internal review process. This must be a near-final version, with all sections (see (v) below) complete, except for the executive summary, which may be

completed following the first round of comments, subject to negotiation with the IICSA Project Lead. Draft reports submitted with missing or incomplete sections will be returned without comment.

- 6.1.5. A concise and accessible written report of publishable quality that addresses the research questions in section 5 above and draws out key findings for IICSA, as well as flagging gaps in the current evidence base. The report should contain an executive summary; introduction; brief methodology section; substantive chapters; and conclusion. The appendices should contain detailed methodological information, a summary (including quality assessment) of all included literature, and the research instruments.
 - 6.1.6. A table (supplied as an appendix to the report) summarising the measures and statistical sources reviewed, key associated findings, and their limitations as evidence.
 - 6.1.7. Presentation of findings and knowledge-sharing session at IICSA's London offices, including a slide pack for internal use.
- 6.2. Tenderers are asked to outline the quality assurance and business continuity procedures in place within their organisation(s) and the mechanisms by which they will ensure the project outputs delivered to IICSA are consistently high quality, and any risks to quality delivery are anticipated and mitigated. If Tenderers hold any quality accreditation (such as ISO 9001 or ISO 20252) it should be stated in their bids.
 - 6.3. The Research Project has an established quality assurance process for research reports which includes inviting feedback from internal colleagues and IICSA's Academic Advisory Board (AAB), and quality assurance through external peer review. The process will involve receipt and incorporation of three rounds of comments on the report; two from IICSA staff and the AAB, and one from the external peer reviewers. Tenderers should refer to Appendix B for further details. **Tenderers must reflect the time required for completion of this process in the timescales and costings proposed in their bid.**
 - 6.4. IICSA anticipates that the report will be branded as the Contractor's publication, with authorship fully attributed to the Contractor. IICSA will however provide the appointed Contractor with guidance on format and style of the report and it should be noted that the document's ownership will remain with IICSA. The report will initially and primarily be available for internal use by IICSA, but it may later be published on the IICSA website and/or disseminated more widely by IICSA.

7. Partnership working and project management

- 7.1. The Research Project takes a collaborative, partnership approach to working

with its providers in order to ensure the research outputs meet its needs and are of the highest possible quality. IICSA therefore expects to have the opportunity to provide advice and guidance at every stage of project delivery, as well as to sign off key elements of the methodology and outputs before use (including the search strategy, quality assessment criteria and presentation slides, as well as the final report).

- 7.2. The Research Project will share details of research already undertaken, in progress, or planned internally with the appointed Contractor as appropriate, for the avoidance of duplication. The appointed Contractor will be expected to treat any such details of unpublished research confidentially. Providers may also wish to note that IICSA has recently commissioned two complementary REAs on (respectively) perpetrators and victims of online-facilitated child sexual abuse. These are currently in progress and are likely to be relevant to this specification.
- 7.3. The project will be managed on the IICSA side by a member of the Research Team (the 'Project Lead') who will also be the primary day-to-day contact for the appointed Contractor. The appointed Contractor will be expected to provide regular updates to the Project Lead. This will likely be a brief weekly written report, followed up by a phone call as necessary. The precise format of updates will be agreed at project inception.
- 7.4. In addition to the interview, Tenderers are required to factor in at least two face-to-face meetings at IICSA's London offices (for the inception meeting and presentation of findings). There will also be a wrap-up meeting at the end of the project. If the appointed Contractor is based outside London or is otherwise unable to attend the wrap-up meeting in person, tele- or videoconferencing will be possible.
- 7.5. With the exception of the face-to-face meetings described above, the location of the Services will be at the appointed Contractor's premises.

8. Provider skills, experience and resource

- 8.1. IICSA is seeking a research provider with expert knowledge of the subject area of online child protection and child sexual abuse, a good understanding of the data sources and stakeholders in this area, and a proven track record of delivering high quality REAs for government or other high profile clients. Tenderer proposals should include evidence of this expertise and experience.
- 8.2. Tenderers should state the qualifications of their proposed staff assigned to this project. It is expected that staff nominated to the project have at least a Masters level qualification in a relevant subject and / or relevant experience to deliver the Contract.
- 8.3. The appointed Contractor shall ensure that their proposed staff understand the IICSA vision and objectives and shall ensure that they provide excellent

customer service throughout the duration of the Contract.

- 8.4. IICSA requires the appointed Contractor to provide a sufficient level of resource throughout the duration of the contract in order to consistently deliver a quality service to all Parties.

9. Consortium bids

- 9.1. IICSA encourages tenders from consortia, who bring together subject matter expertise with strong project delivery experience.
- 9.2. Where two or more organisations wish to tender for this project as a consortium, one must be designated as the Lead Contractor. The Lead Contractor will be the main point of contact for IICSA.
- 9.3. The proposal should make clear how responsibilities will be split between the Lead Contractor and members of the consortium, and should outline how effective partnership delivery will be managed.
- 9.4. Consortium members will be required to attend the project inception meeting, presentation of findings and wrap-up meeting.
- 9.5. As outlined in the Instruction to Tenderers, the Lead Contractor must declare conflicts of interest that may apply to both itself and / or any consortium member, and also confirm that they adhere to the requirements outlined in the IICSA Research Code of Ethics (Appendix A of this Specification).

10. Payment milestones

- 10.1. Tender prices should be exclusive of travel and subsistence (T&S) and exclusive of Value Added Tax (VAT). T&S costs are payable at the rates shown at Annex D of this Invitation to Tender (ITT), for exceptional circumstances where travel is required outside of the usual place of work and must have the approval of IICSA prior to booking.
- 10.2. Payment by IICSA will be in accordance with the successful delivery of outputs at the particular milestones outlined in the table below.
- 10.3. Timescales are indicative.

Milestone	Description of Milestone Activity	Timescale (indicative)	Payment
1	Detailed work plan submitted and approved by IICSA	w/c 22nd May	10%
2	Searches completed. Database of results with inclusion / exclusion assessments submitted	w/c 26th June	30%
3	Draft report submitted to IICSA	w/c 17th July	40%

4	Report accepted by IICSA to be satisfactory and of publishable quality	w/c 9th October	20%
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10.4. To be deemed 'successful' the outputs must be delivered within agreed timescales, demonstrate due attention to ethical considerations, and be of a quality acceptable to IICSA.

10.5. Before payment can be approved, each invoice submitted must include a detailed elemental breakdown of work completed and the associated costs.

10.6. Final decisions about whether the required quality thresholds have been met, will be the responsibility of IICSA. Payment will not be made until these thresholds are met.

11. Definitions

11.1. Tenderers should have reference to IICSA glossary: <https://www.iicsa.org.uk/sites/default/files/glossary.pdf>. Terms not included in the glossary are defined below.

Expression or Acronym	Definition
Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA)	A methodology used in the identification, quality assessment and synthesis of existing literature on a particular topic. It is more structured and rigorous than a standard literature review, but not as exhaustive as a systematic review.
Child Sexual Abuse (CSA)	Sexual abuse of children involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities. The activities may involve physical contact and noncontact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, sexual images, watching sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways, or grooming a child in preparation for abuse including via the internet. Child sexual abuse can be carried out by an adult or another child (known as peer abuse). Child sexual abuse includes child sexual exploitation.
Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)	Sexual exploitation of children is a form of child sexual abuse. It involves exploitative situations, contexts and relationships where a child receives something, as a result of them performing, and/or another or others performing on them, sexual activities. Child sexual exploitation can occur through the use of technology. As with other forms of child sexual abuse, the exploitation can be carried out by an adult or another child.
Online- / internet-facilitated child sexual abuse	Child sexual abuse where the online environment is involved at any stage of the offence. This includes both: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The production, preparation, consumption, sharing, dissemination or possession of child sexual abuse material. ■ The online sexual solicitation of children (sometimes called 'grooming'), whether or not this results, or is intended to result, in a contact offence.

APPENDIX A

REFERS TO 'IICSA RESEARCH CODE OF ETHICS' ATTACHED SEPARATELY

APPENDIX B

REFERS TO THE 'PEER REVIEW PROCESS' ATTACHED SEPARATELY