Clarification questions for reception baseline assessment

QU 1: Who will be in the stakeholder group?

ANS: The stakeholder group will be primarily composed of representatives from trade unions, early years experts and head teachers.

QU 2: Are key stage 1 (KS1) national curriculum assessments going to be removed as a progress measure?

ANS: Yes, we intend for the reception baseline assessment to replace KS1 assessments as the starting point for the progress measure. This means that the KS1 national curriculum assessments will continue until the 2022 to 2023 academic year, by which point pupils who will have been assessed using the reception baseline assessment will have reached the end of KS1. Further consideration is currently being given to how to ensure effective accountability arrangements for infants, middle and junior schools.

QU 3: Does the figure of £9.8m given in the invitation to tender (ITT) include the optional year extension to the contract?

ANS: No, the estimated figure of £9.8m does not include the optional year extension (for academic year 2022 to 2023).

QU 4: The ITT specifies that the assessment should take no longer than 20 minutes per pupil. Does this include the self-regulation component?

ANS: Yes, the self-regulation component should be included within the assessment time of no longer than 20 minutes. As we continue to develop the reception baseline assessment, we might be more flexible about this time if we discover after trialling, and in discussion with the stakeholder group, that the self-regulation items need more time to function successfully. However, at this stage, you should aim to include the self-regulation items within the 20 minute time limit.

QU 5: Must the assessment be completed in one block of 20 minutes? Or can it be split into two 10 minute sections?

ANS: As part of our access arrangements for the national curriculum assessments, we allow rest breaks for pupils who can’t complete a test or check in a single sitting. It is at the discretion of the school to decide whether to give rest breaks to pupils. We expect this to be the same for the reception baseline assessment.

QU 6: The ITT states that the assessment can be either paper-based or onscreen. Can it be mixed mode as another alternative?

ANS: Mixed mode is likely to add unnecessary complexity to the schools’ delivery of the assessment. While there might be a rationale for the use of mixed mode in specific circumstances (for example, an onscreen assessment might include an item that requires a paper prop to aid completion of the task), we don’t want schools to have to manage an assessment that is unnecessarily complicated. So while we are not ruling out mixed mode, there would need to be clear rationale for including both a paper-based and onscreen component within one assessment.

QU 7: How will self-regulation contribute to the progress measure?

ANS: If included in the final assessment, the result from items assessing self-regulation will form a part of each pupil’s overall score (along with the results from items assessing communication, language and literacy and mathematics) used for the progress measure.

QU 8: Communication, language and literacy, and mathematics are clearly contained within the curriculum through the primary key stages and are taught within schools. Self-regulation isn’t something that is necessarily taught across these key stages. It seems a bit odd to measure self-regulation in the reception baseline assessment.

ANS: The proposal to measure self-regulation was reached after reviewing the responses received to the primary assessment consultation. We have committed to exploring whether it is possible to assess self-regulation for the purpose of the progress measure. We will work with the supplier during the trial and pilot to review the data generated on these items to decide whether they provide a sufficiently valid and reliable measurement to be used in the assessment.

QU 9: If there was greater uptake than 75% of schools wanting to be involved in the pilot, will the supplier get paid for the increased numbers participating?

ANS: Yes, if over 75% of schools participate in the pilot then we will pay the supplier for the extra schools. The figure of 75% is being used in the cost sheet to ensure there is comparability between suppliers for evaluation of the bids.

QU 10: Can there be any overlap in membership between the DfE’s stakeholder panel and the supplier’s practitioner panel? Or must they be separate and distinct?

ANS: There should be no overlap between the two panels. Whoever agrees to be in the DfE’s stakeholder panel should not then also work with the supplier as this would cause a conflict of interest.

QU 11: As it is the supplier’s responsibility to ensure schools administer the assessment, this sounds like quite a challenge where schools might opt to boycott the assessment.

ANS: The supplier should ensure that schools know how to administer the assessment and have access to everything they need to complete it in the time specified. The supplier will be responsible for asking schools for data if they were expecting data from the school but don’t receive it. Schools must fulfil their statutory duties and complete the assessment for their pupils. If a school were to reply that they were boycotting the assessment then this would become a DfE/STA responsibility. The supplier wouldn’t be penalised if there was a boycott. Investigations into maladministration are the responsibility of STA, so the supplier would be expected to pass on incidences of maladministration to us.

QU 12: It will be important to win over ‘hearts and minds’ of the sector to ensure participation in the reception baseline assessment. In the last baseline, the DfE stood back from that. What is the DfE going to do this time?

ANS: Last time we introduced the reception baseline assessment in 2016 it was optional and not a statutory assessment. We created a market place for schools to choose a supplier that had met our required standards. The Department was clear that we would not get involved in influencing which supplier the schools were choosing. This time around, the assessment will be branded as STA and will be statutory. Legislation will be enacted so that it is in place for the 2020-21 academic year. We will therefore be working with a partner to deliver this assessment, rather than enabling a market as was the case in 2016. The stakeholder group will form a key part of our work as we give the sector the opportunity to be involved in the ongoing development of the assessment and keep them informed of the results from the trial and pilot.

QU 13: Does the Department envisage establishing a website on the reception baseline assessment or is this the supplier’s responsibility?

ANS: During the trial and pilot, it will be the supplier’s responsibility to communicate with schools about the reception baseline assessment. Once the assessment becomes statutory, STA will assume responsibility for communications which will be on our GOV.UK website and will form part of such documents as the assessment and reporting arrangements, with the supplier helping to provide content.

QU 14: What are the DfE’s security expectations for the assessment and the items in the assessment?

ANS: Only schools should have access to the content of the assessment. As the same assessment is likely to be used throughout the contract, the level of security is less than for the key stage 2 national curriculum assessments. However, security of the items is still important, but the security of the data is vitally important.

QU 15: What should a supplier do if they receive odd data from schools?

ANS: The supplier should flag with DfE/STA any instances where there are concerns about data from a school. The DfE/STA then will investigate any potential maladministration.

QU 16: Once the assessment becomes statutory should the data delivered to the DfE just be a score per pupil?

ANS: Document 4 Attachment 5 of the ITT contains a full list of DfE’s data requirements. If your assessment provides item level data and/or sub-scores, we would like to have these. Over the course of the contract, STA might also want to undertake psychometric analysis of item/assessment data to make sure the assessment is functioning. This data requirement will be separate from the final data outcome that will be delivered to DfE.

QU 17: One of the government’s digital service standard requirements is to make all new source code open. Is that in conflict with the clauses on intellectual property rights?

ANS: We have been working with the Government Digital Service so they are aware and in agreement with the procurement strategy taken for this assessment. We will continue to work with them and, once appointed, the supplier, to consider the assessment on an individual case basis. For example, it is a requirement to make all new source code open, but for existing systems we may be able to provide a rationale as to why this is not possible. Tenderers should familiarise themselves with the IPR clauses within the ITT document set and ensure their responses comply with these clauses.

QU 18: If it is an onscreen assessment, will the supplier have responsibility for ensuring that the school has IT resource/connectivity?

ANS: We have been working to understand schools’ IT facilities as part of the development of the multiplications tables check, but this will not be a requirement for the supplier of the reception baseline assessment. However, the assessment solution will have to be feasible for use in all the different types of schools nationally.

QU 19: Does the cost spreadsheet ask suppliers to break down costs in detail for all elements of the assessment?

ANS: The cost spreadsheet asks suppliers to provide DfE/STA with costs per pupil for the 2 years that the assessment will be statutory (academic years 2020-21 and 2021-22). Suppliers should wrap all elements of their costs, such as helpdesk costs, etc, into this figure per pupil. For the trial and pilot years we have split the spreadsheet into a more detailed breakdown to reflect that the costs are more fixed as they are based less on variable numbers of pupils.

QUESTION 20: Will consideration be given to extending the submission date for the tender as some bidders will need to partner with others?

ANSWER: Due to the timescales for delivering the reception baseline assessment, we will not be extending the submission date for the tender.

QUESTION 21: Paragraph 3 of the ITT Document 3 – Specification states that, “Suppliers may plan to adapt an existing assessment or develop an entirely new one as long as they can meet the delivery timeline requirements.” However, Document 5 – Technical Questions requirement A: Assessment Content & Validity asks for information on which the bid will be evaluated that seems to imply that the bidder is proposing to use an existing instrument. For example, having to submit an existing assessment framework, providing evidence that the items correlate to the KS2 outcomes, and providing references to published research or reports on the validity of the assessment.

Similarly, requirement C: Accessibility and Minimising Bias asks bidders to provide evidence from qualitative or quantitative studies that demonstrates the performance of subgroups of the population on the assessment. Also, requirement D: Scoring & Reliability asks bidders to “provide details of the scoring approach and the scale that is used to report outcomes from the assessment, including demonstrating how:  the full range of attainment is appropriately distributed across the range with fewer than 2.5% of children achieving full marks. (Please provide details of the distribution of scores for a broadly representative sample of children obtained either through trialling or live administration.)”

Will a bidder who proposes to develop an entirely new assessment be marked down in each of these requirements since they will not be able to provide such evidence?

ANSWER: We are anticipating that, given the timeline for delivery, suppliers are more likely to achieve the delivery requirements by using / adapting an existing solution (e.g. an existing delivery platform and / or existing items). As a result, the ITT has been written to reflect this anticipation. However, if a supplier believes that they can develop a new solution in the time available then this has not been ruled out.

Requirement A: For new solutions, we would expect a draft assessment framework to be provided with a rationale for why it has been proposed. This will include why the supplier believes the content will correlate with KS2 outcomes and any evidence they believe will support their validity argument. They should also include details of the work that would need to be undertaken to confirm the assessment is appropriate and how they will minimise the risk that the trialling does not produce an appropriate assessment.

Requirement C: For new solutions, we would expect suppliers to explain what they believe to be the threats to fairness, how they will attempt to minimise bias and their experience of achieving this for assessments of pupils of this age group.

Requirement D: For new solutions, we would expect suppliers to propose what the approach to scoring and reporting scale would be and how they would ensure appropriate spread on the assessment. The response should also explain how the proposal will be refined through trialling.

A supplier will not be marked down if evidence from an existing assessment is not available, as we do not expect any supplier to have evidence drawn from an accountability context and as such any evidence is likely to be indicative only. However, suppliers will be marked down if their plans for gathering evidence are not deemed appropriate.

QUESTION 22: Has consideration been given to extending the scope of the Test Operations Services (TOpS) contract to include the activities required for the Reception Baseline Assessment? If no, is there an opportunity to revisit this procurement and extend the scope of the TOpS contract?

ANSWER: The STA will be procuring services for the Reception Baseline Assessment separately from the contract that will deliver national curriculum assessments for phonics, key stage 1 and key stage 2 (ie the ‘TOpS’ contract).

QUESTION 23: The ‘important information’ for the technical questions states: “Please only upload the information requested and where directed to do so. Any additional documentation will not be evaluated”. In some cases, we would like to provide an answer by attaching or embedding certain documents that demonstrate particular aspects of our work. Could you please confirm if this is permissible?

ANSWER: If you are providing information that answers a technical question through attaching or embedding a specific document then we will include this document in our evaluation. However, please be aware of the word limits applicable for each requirement. Attached or embedded documents will contribute towards the word count for the requirement they are being used to evidence. The only exception to this will be in those instances where we have specified in the requirement the documents that will not be included in the word count (for example, in requirement A: Assessment Content & Validity we have stated that the copy of your assessment framework will be excluded from the word count).

QUESTION 24: The final, bulleted requirement in technical question F (“how you will manage pupil registration to ensure that all pupils entering reception in England take the assessment”) appears to be inconsistent with a statement made at the supplier briefing that no-one, other than schools, would know the pupils who have entered reception until the census. How does the DfE envisage the supplier being able to meet the requirement?

ANSWER: At the supplier briefing day, we recognised that census data is not available for each term until after the assessment window for the reception baseline assessment (so for example, for the autumn term, the census data is not available until December). We are therefore asking the supplier to tell us as part of requirement F how they propose to manage pupil registration given that the DfE cannot provide to the supplier a list of all pupils to sit the assessment at the start of each term.

QUESTION 25: Some of the pupils who start school in September will have temporary UPNs, which schools will need to upload in order for the pupils to take the assessment. When the real UPN is known, is the onus on the schools to upload it, correcting the temporary UPN?

ANSWER: There will be one submission of data from schools for each pupil who has taken the reception baseline assessment. We would not expect schools to go back and resubmit anything because a new UPN was provided.

QUESTION 26: Will STA / DfE be able to provide a list of schools that have a January / April intake for Reception class and the anticipated size of these intakes per school?

ANSWER: The STA will be able to provide the successful supplier with a list of schools who previously have had a January / April intake and who therefore are likely to continue to do so. Using data from previous years, we will also be able to provide an estimated number of pupils for the January / April cohort – although it would be an estimate rather than anticipated size of the intake per school.

QUESTION 27:

a) Please would you confirm if there is a size limit on the attachments that can be included in the email containing the proposal?

b) If there is a size limit, please confirm that it is acceptable to split the proposal over two or more emails?

ANSWER: We can receive up to 25MB per email. Please send one email listing attachments and then send the attachments through separately as necessary.

QUESTION 28: How is the cost being scored for section I? Is it using the evaluation criteria of 0-4 or the equation on page 36 of the ITT?

ANSWER: The cost is not evaluated using the 0-4 criteria (which is used for sections A-H of the technical requirements). Instead, as the ITT states on page 36, the price score = 100 x (Lowest price / Tenderer's price).