# Home Learning Environment Early Years Apps Pilot Additional Information

**July 2019**

# Background

On 31 July 2018, the Secretary of State announced that the Department would be launching a quality assurance process to identify high quality mobile/tablet apps, with the ambition of making some accessible free of charge for disadvantaged families. This commitment fits within the context of a Departmental priority to reduce by half the proportion of children who do not achieve at least expected levels across all goals in the 'communication & language' and 'literacy' areas of learning at the end of reception year by 2028.

# Expert Panel

We know that, whilst there are lots of high-quality early learning apps in the market, parents aren't always able to make informed choices about which app is suitable for their child. The department recently (Jan 2019) appointed an Expert Panel, made up of early years and ed-tech experts, to develop criteria for educational quality in early years literacy, language and communication apps. The expert panel members are:

- Professor **Jackie Marsh** - Professor of Education, University of Sheffield *(Chair)*

- **Olivia Dickinson** - Digital Consultant at Digital Olive Ltd - Sky Kids, Turner, Discovery Education, Nickelodeon *(Deputy-Chair)*

- **Peter Robinson** – Chief Operating Officer, KidsKnowBest

- **Antonio Gould** - Teach Your Monster to Read (The Usborne Foundation), Executive Director

- **Dr Rosie Flewitt** - Reader in Early Communication and Literacy, UCL Institute of Education

- **Sandra Mathers** - Senior Researcher, University of Oxford Department of Education

- **Jonathan Douglas** - National Literacy Trust, Director

- **Jane Lewis** - Head of UK Programme Development and Quality, Save The Children UK

The Department is also in the process of appointing an external specialist provider to support the technical assessment aspect of this process.

The Department for Education takes the issue of conflict of interest very seriously. All members of the Panel were invited on the basis of their expertise and not commercial or other interests, and, as such, were required to sign a terms of reference which includes a section on declaring any potential conflicts of interest. Panel members will not therefore, be responsible for assessing an app in which they are a shareholder, have personal associations with or materially/ financially benefit from that organisation/ app.

## Quality Criteria

The **educational criteria** will be used to assess apps and award an indication of quality to those apps meeting the standard.

The criteria were developed following a review of existing literature in the field, and includes elements which were found to be consistently identified across research studies as being applicable to high quality educational apps. A wide range of stakeholders including teachers, researchers, app producers and parents were consulted and contributed to the development of the criteria.

Apps which are submitted for assessment will also be assessed against a set of **technical criteria** in regards to, for example, GDPR and security standards. The technical criteria will be published on this page later this month.

## Quality Assurance Process

App developers will be invited to submit their app for assessment from the end of July. Developers will need to complete a submission form in order to be considered for assessment; the form will be published on this page later this month.

Following the assessment process, apps which are deemed to have met the criteria will be provided with a quality mark, which the DfE is currently developing. Successful developers will be able to use the quality mark to promote their app and will then have the opportunity to apply for the Local Authority pilot and research project ascertaining take-up, usage and impact on outcomes.

## Pilot of free app access for disadvantaged families

The Department plans to procure two apps to be delivered free of charge to disadvantaged 2-4 year olds within 12 Local Authority areas as part of a pilot. Any procured app would first need to have been awarded the quality mark as part of the assessment process outlined above.

For the pilot, we will procure the expertise of an independent research organisation, to initially test the take up and usage of the apps in the 12 Local Authority areas. Once we have gathered this initial data, another research organisation will be appointed to carry out an impact assessment to test the role apps play in a child's educational attainment.

We will provide more information in due course around timescales for this procurement process, but anticipate this to begin in the autumn.

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