Invitation to tender – Consultation on the development, implementation and evaluation of parenting and home learning environment programmes

INVITATION TO TENDER for mixed methods research consulting early years teams in local authorities, parenting programme developers and parents on the parenting support ecosystem in England

A fairer start

Deadline for submissions: 11:00 am (GMT), 1 December 2026

58 Victoria Embankment, London EC4Y 0DS +44 (0)20 7438 2500 nesta.org.uk

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Registered address: 58 Victoria Embankment, London EC4Y 0DS. Registered as a charity in Scotland no. SCO42883.

1. Background to Nesta

Nesta is the UK's innovation agency for social good. We design, test and scale new solutions to society's biggest problems, changing millions of lives for the better. We help people and organisations bring great ideas to life. We do this by providing investments and grants and mobilising research, networks and skills. We are an independent charity (registered with charity number 1144091).

Nesta's fairer start mission is that from 2030 every child has the same chance of developing to their full potential in the early years. More information about our mission team's work can be found at https://www.nesta.org.uk/fairer-start/.

2. Background to the project

Nesta, alongside a consortium of public and philanthropic funders, is currently scoping a forthcoming early years innovation initiative designed to strengthen the UK's parenting and home learning environment (P&HLE) ecosystem. The initiative focuses on three mutually reinforcing workstreams:

- **Programme improvement: s**upporting programme developers to strengthen programme design, increase family engagement, and build evaluation readiness.
- **Evaluation:** enabling robust impact and implementation evaluations of P&HLE programmes in real-world settings.
- **Evidence mobilisation:** translating evidence into actionable guidance to help local authority commissioners and practitioners implement programmes that best match local family needs.

Please note: Without limiting the Terms and Conditions included at Annex 2, the execution of resulting contracts from this ITT is subject to final funding confirmation from our funding partner. We anticipate having this confirmation in place by the project start date.

3. What is being commissioned through this invitation to tender

This invitation to tender (ITT) has been prepared by Nesta's fairer start team for the purposes of inviting proposals from candidates for the provision of a fast-paced and comprehensive mixed-methods research project. The successful supplier will consult

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P&HLE programme developers, local authority (LA) early years/parenting support teams and parents and caregivers in England.

Research aims and project context

This research will provide the foundational intelligence for the Early Years Innovation Initiative. We are seeking to answer a series of high-priority research questions to uncover the specific needs and barriers to effective parenting programme development and improvement, alongside commissioning, and delivery. More specifically, we want to understand:

- the needs and experiences of families (particularly disadvantaged groups), how the ecosystem currently responds to them and what further support is needed from local authorities and programme developers to address families' unmet needs and provide better, more effective support.
- the enablers, barriers and gaps in support LAs face when designing, implementing and evaluating their parenting support offers and translating evidence around effective parenting programmes into practice.
- the enablers, barriers and gaps programme developers face in adapting, improving, scaling, and evaluating their programmes.

This intelligence will ensure the initiative's three work streams are highly tailored to add maximum value to the early years sector and parenting support ecosystem, ensuring support is rooted in the realities of both developers and commissioners.

Proposed length of contract: 15 January 2027 to 30 April 2027.

Please note: Due to funding constraints, payment and delivery milestones must be structured so that £100,000 is invoiced by 31 March 2027, with the remaining balance (£20,000) allocated for the final phase of work/outputs completed after this date.

Proposed methodology

We require a purposive, mixed-methods approach structured in three iterative phases. Each phase must strategically build upon the last to ensure all pertinent knowledge gaps are fully addressed by the end of the project.

Phase 1 (January to February 2027): Quantitative surveys targeting a minimum of 45 LAs in England and 30 programme developers. This phase will capture broad trends, establish a baseline understanding of the landscape, and identify key themes to explore in depth during Phase 2.

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Phase 2 (February to March 2027): This phase will uncover the more nuanced, in-depth narrative behind the Phase 1 survey data and will ideally involve:

1. Focus groups with approximately five to seven LA early years teams (including strategic leads, commissioners, and practitioners), alongside interviews/focus groups with five to seven teams who develop parenting & HLE programmes.

2. Interviews or focus groups (online or in person) with approximately 15-20 parents or caregivers of children aged zero to five years old who have accessed support via Family Hubs and/or parenting programmes in England. This activity might seek to capture their experiences and perspectives on the support they received; what they valued and what could be improved.

Phase 3 (March to April 2027): Targeted 'filling in the blanks' through smaller-scale activities (eg, follow-up surveys, two-to-three targeted focus groups, or workshops). The exact design of this phase must remain flexible to resolve any remaining knowledge gaps or to test emerging recommendations for work directly with stakeholders.

Sampling requirements

Suppliers must propose a stratified sampling framework that achieves high engagement while hitting specific diversity matrices across all three participant groups. Nesta will work with the successful bidding organisation to help identify and agree on an appropriate sampling framework.

Local authorities

Sampling should represent a spread of geographies (eg, urban, rural, coastal etc.), population sizes, and family demographics, with a deliberate, intentional weighting toward LAs with higher levels of economic disadvantage. If feasible, in later phases of data collection, the sample might also reflect varying levels of "service maturity," including LAs with highly diverse and developed vs. more limited parenting programme offers.

Programme developers

Sampling must focus on parenting & HLE interventions suitable for families with three-to-four-year-olds that are actively delivered in England (see the Department for Education's menu of parenting & HLE programmes and Foundations Guidebook). Sampling should include both programmes with national/ regional reach and smaller-scale models. The sample should capture varying strengths of existing evidence of impact (from robustly evaluated to unevaluated), different delivery models (digital or in-person), and differing intervention intensities (light-touch to highly intensive). We are

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also very interested in programmes that target underserved populations (eg, fathers, parents from minority ethnic backgrounds, families with SEND). As mentioned above, Nesta will work with the successful bidding organisation to identify and agree relevant parenting & HLE programmes to include in this sample.

Parents and caregivers

Sampling should aim to particularly focus on parents and caregivers of children aged three to four, with all participating parents and caregivers having children aged zero to five years old. It would be particularly desirable for parents to have experience of participating in a parenting or HLE programme. Sampling should aim to include parents and caregivers from a diverse range of backgrounds, including both mothers and fathers, parents from minority ethnic backgrounds and a range of geographies. As with LAs, there should be intentional weighting toward parents living in higher levels of economic disadvantage. Recruitment could be arranged via local authorities and programme developers participating in the earlier stages of the research and Nesta will support with publicising this opportunity.

Deliverables

The following deliverables are expected by the successful bidder:

1. Sampling framework for LAs, programme developers and parents and caregivers.
2. Data collection tools (survey, interview and or focus group guides) for phases 1, 2 and 3.
3. Report of interim findings.
4. Final report and a summary of findings.

Each of these deliverables should be shared with Nesta, with the opportunity for Nesta to give feedback before they are finalised.

The final report

A final written report and a short standalone summary (slide deck/document) suitable for external publication should be produced at the end of the project.

These outputs should highlight key takeaways across all phases, ideally including:

- programme developers' support needs and gaps in effectively designing, adapting, promoting, and preparing for robust evaluation of their programmes
- local authorities' support needs and gaps in designing, implementing, adapting, and evaluating an impactful, evidence-based parenting support offer across the entire pathway (recruitment, engagement, data collection, evaluation)

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- local authorities and programme developers' perceptions of which family needs are well catered to by parenting & HLE programmes and where there are gaps in support for the families they wish to reach
- parents and caregivers' perspectives on their families' needs and experiences on parenting support
- macro-enablers/barriers to achieving positive impact for families with young children, especially disadvantaged families
- concrete, actionable recommendations tailored for each of the three EIP workstreams on how to respond to these findings

Nesta's role

This project will be highly collaborative, with Nesta actively involved at each stage of the research process. Specifically, Nesta will provide input on the successful bidder's research design, which includes reviewing the sampling framework and advising on data collection tools such as surveys and interview topic guides. Throughout the data collection phase, Nesta will support the successful bidder by leveraging its networks to contact local authorities, programme developers and parents and caregivers to publicise the research and encourage participation.

During the analysis and drafting phases, Nesta will review interim reports and provide feedback on preliminary findings prior to the completion of the final report. Nesta will retain overall editorial responsibility and manage the publication of the final outputs. Additionally, the successful bidder will be expected to attend fortnightly meetings with the Nesta team to report on progress, share emerging insights, and receive ongoing strategic steer and feedback.

4. Indicative timetable

Set out below is the proposed procurement timetable. This is intended as a guide only.

DATE	TIMETABLE
10 November2026	Issue ITT
1 December 2026	Deadline for receipt of tenders (11:00 am GMT)
1-8 December 2026	Review submissions and evaluate against selection & award criteria (written proposals only, no interviews)

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9 December 2026	Announcement of successful applicant
15 January 2027	Commencement of work

5. Milestones and indicative budget

Payments will be released in stages alongside agreed milestones, providing these have been satisfactorily met. The final milestones shall be clearly documented in the contract entered into as a result of this ITT exercise, and in accordance with the terms and conditions of this ITT.

The proposed budget for this project is up to a maximum of £120,000 GBP including all expenses, travel costs, and participant incentives (though excluding VAT).

6. How to apply

Proposals should be in English and comprise a complete return of Annex 1 of this ITT.

Your entire proposal including all supporting documentation should be e-mailed as a single document to simran.motiani@nesta.org.uk by no later than 11:00 am GMT on 1 December 2026.

Please submit your proposal to Nesta in accordance with all the instructions and the terms and conditions set out below.

The questions suppliers must respond to and the applicable selection and award criteria that will be applied to proposals is set out in Annex 1 of this ITT (Evaluation of Proposals). Suppliers must fully respond to all questions set out in Annex 1 under both the selection and award criteria at the time of submission in response to this ITT. Annex 2 sets out the Terms and Conditions.

If you have any questions about the application or project prior to the submission deadline, please email simran.motiani@nesta.org.uk.

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Annex 1 - Evaluation of proposals

1. Evaluation process

Nesta will run this procurement process in a manner which is open and transparent and ensures equal treatment of all participants during the process. Decisions will be made on the basis of the stated criteria only. Bidders must fully respond to all questions set out in this Annex 1 under both the selection and award criteria at the time of submission in response to this ITT.

1.1 Selection criteria – Stage 1 (Short-listing)

At the first stage of this process your proposal will be evaluated against the selection criteria listed below.

Selection criteria	**Scoring/weighting**
1. Domain expertise Please describe your team's skills and or past experience that equip you to carry out this work to a high standard. We are ideally looking for a team with a strong understanding of programme evaluation and applied research, experience conducting wide-scale consultation exercises with decision-makers and families using mixed methods, and domain expertise in the early years system, parenting programmes and or the home learning environment. **[Max 500 words]**	20%
SUPPLIER RESPONSE:	
2. Project team & capacity Provide team roles, relevant experience, and internal capacity to undertake this work under the specified timeline. Outline management of subcontractors (if any). Please include the CVs or profiles of your core project team members. **[Max 500 words]**	10%

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SUPPLIER RESPONSE:	
3. Existing networks Describe any existing warm relationships or previous work with early years/family support service leads in local government and parenting programme developers. Outline how you might use this network throughout the research, or your clear outreach plan to build this network rapidly. **[Max 350 words]**	5%
SUPPLIER RESPONSE:	
4. Ethics & information governance Detail your GDPR compliance, data management plans, and timeline for securing rapid ethical approvals without delaying project kickoff. Outline how you will ensure data security when storing and sharing personal data between organisations. **[Max 400 words]**	10%
SUPPLIER RESPONSE:	
Conflicts of interest Please confirm if you are aware of any potential or actual conflicts of interest which may prevent you from working with Nesta. If you consider a conflict may exist, please provide details in your response and explain how such potential conflict may be reasonably managed.	Not scored

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SUPPLIER RESPONSE:

1.2 Selection criteria – Stage 2 (Award criteria)

This is the second stage of the evaluation process.

AWARD CRITERIA	Scoring/weighting
1. Proposed approach & methods Outline the details of your mixed-methods approach to meet Nesta's objectives. Reference the prescribed three phases of research activities. Specify how you will: a) Design surveys and focus groups/interviews to ensure research rigor/reliability and validity for all participant groups. b) Recruit participants and achieve high levels of engagement while hitting the required diversity targets (eg, IMD deciles) across all phases. c) Ensure each phase informs subsequent research phases. **[Max 1,000 words]**	25%
SUPPLIER RESPONSE:	
2. Delivery timelines & risk management Explain how you will work within the timeline of January to April, meeting the deadline of 30 April 2027, including milestone tracking, points for collaboration with Nesta and proactive mitigation	20%

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strategies for recruitment risks. Please include a Gantt chart. **[Max 500 words]**	
SUPPLIER RESPONSE:	
3. Commercials & budget breakdown Please provide a full cost breakdown within the £120,000 range, demonstrating value for money. Include staff daily rates, days allocated per task, participant incentives or any other delivery costs including travel, and VAT status. **[Include as an attachment]**	10%
SUPPLIER RESPONSE:	

1.3 Scoring methodology

The following scoring methodology will be applied to responses: Reviewers will evaluate each question independently using the 0-5 scale below and provide a written justification for every score they award.

Score	Commentary
0	**Non-compliant:** Fails to address the question entirely, omits mandatory details, or proposes a fundamentally unviable approach.

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1	**Unsatisfactory:** Provides minimal detail, leaves significant knowledge gaps, or raises serious concerns regarding quality, resourcing, or the ability to meet the tight deadline.
2	**Adequate:** Fully addresses the prompt with a clear, realistic plan. The approach is standard and achievable, with risk management plans that are acceptable but generic.
3	**Satisfactory:** A comprehensive, high-quality response. Demonstrates strong understanding of the sector, proposes well-thought-out risk mitigations, and provides a highly detailed methodology.
4	**Good:** Exceeds satisfactory standards. The methodology is robust and innovative, the team demonstrates superior domain expertise, and the proposal offers demonstrable high value for money.
5	**Exceptional:** An outstanding response that provides immense confidence in the supplier's ability to execute flawlessly.

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Annex 2

Terms and conditions

This appendix provides the terms and conditions which will govern your submission of a proposal to Nesta. You are required to read this appendix carefully together with the Invitation to Tender (ITT) brief (including all its annexes) before submitting a proposal. By submitting a proposal, you accept these terms and conditions and you agree to abide by them. If you do not agree to these terms and conditions, please do not submit a proposal.

1. Submitting a proposal

1.1 By submitting a proposal you confirm that:

1.1.1 you have legal capacity to submit a proposal in response to this ITT and are acting lawfully, ethically and in good faith in your dealings with Nesta;

1.1.2 you have sufficient time, skill, experience and resources to carry out the services to the highest professional standards expected of a competent supplier of services identical or similar and are able to obtain all necessary rights, licences, consents, waivers, approvals, permissions, permits, certificates and insurances necessary to provide the services to Nesta;

1.1.3 your tender will remain open for acceptance for a period of 90 days. A tender valid for a shorter period may be rejected;

1.1.4 all information contained in your proposal is true, accurate and not misleading;

1.1.5 you have no actual or potential conflict of interest with Nesta (including Nesta's Trustees, officers or employees or any group company). If at any time during the ITT process you discover an actual or potential conflict of interest, please inform Nesta promptly; and

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1.1.6 Nesta may share your proposal with any third party as Nesta in its absolute discretion deems necessary for the purpose of evaluation. For the avoidance of doubt, this includes, but is not limited to sharing details of your proposal with any member of the Nesta group of companies from time to time.

2 Compliance

2.1 In its sole discretion, Nesta reserves the right to reject or disqualify your tender where:

2.1.1 you fail to comply with the requirements of this ITT (including but not limited to these terms and conditions), your tender is incomplete, or you are guilty of a misrepresentation in supplying information in response to this ITT;

2.1.2 your tender is received after the deadline set out in this ITT. Nesta will not consider any requests for an extension of the time or date fixed for the submission of responses;

2.1.3 there is a change in your identity, control, financial standing or any other factor impacting on the selection and/or evaluation of your tender;

2.1.4 you are or become insolvent or have a petition issued against you;

2.1.5 you do not have the economic and financial standing and/or the technical and professional ability to carry out the services;

2.1.6 you are suspected either directly or indirectly of behaving in a collusive, canvassing, or anti-competitive manner or you offer or accept an inducement or reward in order to gain a commercial, contractual, regulatory or personal advantage; and/or

2.1.7 you (or if you are a commercial entity, a trustee, director or person who has the power of control or power to make representations or decisions on your behalf)

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have committed any offence relating to conspiracy, corruption, bribery, fraud, money laundering or any other criminal offence related to your course of business or profession.

2.2 Nesta reserves the right in its absolute discretion to:

2.2.1 refuse any tender submitted;

2.2.2 disqualify any potential tenderer who has been convicted of any of the offences listed at Regulation 23(1) of the Public Contracts Regulations 2006;

2.2.3 extend the time or date for fixed submission. In such circumstances Nesta will endeavour to notify all tenderers of such change;

2.2.4 amend any aspect of this ITT (including but not limited to the goods/services sought, the evaluation criteria and the timeline) or cease the process at any time;

2.2.5 negotiate the award of additional services which are a repetition of the services advertised in this ITT to the successful bidder;

2.2.6 limit the number of proposals invited to participate in any follow-up activity (for example, interviews) or to dispense with any follow-up altogether; and/ or

2.2.7 require that you clarify your tender in writing and/ or provide additional information and/or adequate references to Nesta's satisfaction. A failure to respond adequately may result in you not being selected.

3 Tenderer responsibilities

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3.1 You shall be responsible for all of your own costs, expenses and losses which may be incurred in relation to the preparation of your tender response, attendance at interviews, site visits or similar.

3.2 You shall at all times treat the contents of Nesta documentation as confidential, as well as any information regarding Nesta imparted to you by any other means, and only disclose such information as may be necessary for the preparation of a compliant response to this ITT. At Nesta's request you shall return or destroy all documents, other materials, working papers relating to this ITT and all copies thereof including all electronic copies. When completed you shall confirm such to Nesta in writing.

3.3 You shall not before the date and time specified within the ITT documentation disclose to any person the amount of your proposal except where the disclosure in confidence is necessary to obtain insurance premiums or guarantees required as part of any proposal to Nesta.

3.4 Any contract entered into as a result of this ITT will be on Nesta's standard terms and conditions (copy available on request).

4 Intellectual property

4.1 All intellectual property rights in this ITT and all materials provided by Nesta or any third party acting on its behalf shall remain the property of Nesta.

4.2 Any intellectual property arising out of the provision of the services shall belong absolutely and exclusively to Nesta.

5 Warnings/disclaimers

5.1 Nothing contained in this ITT or any other communication made in respect of it between Nesta or its representatives and any party will constitute an agreement, contract or representation between Nesta and any other party. For the

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avoidance of doubt, receipt by you of this ITT does not imply the existence of a contract or commitment by or with Nesta for any purpose.

5.2 The information contained in this ITT does not purport to contain all the information which you may require. While Nesta has taken reasonable steps to ensure, as at the date of this ITT that the facts contained in it are true and accurate in all material respects, Nesta does not make any representation or warranty as to the accuracy or completeness or otherwise of this ITT.

5.3 Nesta accepts no liability to you whatsoever and however arising and whether resulting from the use of this ITT, or any omissions from or deficiencies in it.

6 Waiver

Failure or neglect by Nesta to enforce at any time any of the provisions of these terms and conditions shall not be construed nor shall it be deemed to be, a waiver of our respective rights hereunder, nor in any way affect the validity of the whole or any part of this agreement, nor prejudice our respective rights to take subsequent action.

7 Jurisdiction

This ITT shall be governed by and interpreted in accordance with the laws of England and Wales and subject to the exclusive jurisdiction of the English courts.

10 November 2026

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