

29 APRIL 2026

## FROM MISCONCEPTION TO METHODOLOGY: STRENGTHENING PUBLIC UNDERSTANDING OF NON-TENDER EDUCATIONAL MATERIAL SCREENING MECHANISMS

With all that's going on in South Africa about tender irregularities, which we see playing out in commissions: let us set the record straight about the catalogue process, because an impression is being created by the article that the department ran a tainted process. For starters, the textbook screening process is **NOT A TENDER** and therefore does not entail tender processes like submission of tender bidding documents, company profiles or how the publisher intends to develop materials. There are no **BECs** nor **BACs** appointed for this process. The **DBE** has been granted deviation from following a tender process by National Treasury. It's worrying therefore to see this narrative being pursued even after explaining this to News24. The misconception being created here therefore needs to be corrected.

### WHAT IS THE TEXTBOOK SCREENING PROCESS?

It is a submission of manuscripts with no publisher name, logos, author names, or any identifying details that could reveal the identity of the publisher or author. This approach facilitates a "blind screening" process, ensuring that only the quality of the content influences the outcome and protecting the process from undue influence.

Screeners who evaluate these materials therefore have no way of knowing who the publishers or authors are, their track record, or their status. Their assessment focuses solely on the quality of the books and their alignment with the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS).

These teams engage directly with the materials, dedicating time to thoroughly read and evaluate the manuscripts against a defined set of criteria. **Processes are also informed by the pedagogical knowledge of screeners**, alongside their curriculum and policy expertise, enabling them to conduct evaluations without bias.

Following the assessment, screeners produce a detailed screening report, which is then subjected to established quality assurance processes.

### WHO SCREENS?

Screeners are subject experts released by provinces to come and screen the materials. To protect the integrity of the process, the screeners are required to NOT have participated in the writing of the materials submitted. They sign a declaration to this effect.

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The screening is therefore a massive undertaking, which included more than 150 subject advisors who came from nine provinces. To make sure these teams work efficiently, they nominate their own team leaders who are the first quality assurers and are also responsible for managing time on task. To maintain their impartiality, Chief Education Specialists from DBE provide oversight by reading their reports to make sure they are sound and that what has been written about the materials has been substantiated.

Further quality assurance levels are put in place to also make sure that the reports are clear, do not make unsubstantiated statements and communicate clearly what the publishers should do. In most cases, the reports would be communicating what have been found as areas of weakness which would need to be strengthened for materials to be considered.

## WHO IS ELIGIBLE TO SUBMIT?

To facilitate an open and fair process that seeks to test the book development market far and wide, so that we can put a quality book in the hands of the teacher and learner, the submission process is open to everyone. Since the advent of the national catalogue process, there have been all kinds of publishers submitting. Some are affiliated with the two main publishing associations, PASA and APA, while others come in as self-publishing or independent publishers. We have even had universities, language boards, NGOs and everyone else submitting. The department has never looked at the particulars of publishers, including when they were established as that is not a requirement in the screening of materials for quality. Doing that would defeat the purpose of screening for quality *blindly*.

## OUTCOME OF THE PROCESS

Only materials that had passed the rigorous screening and rescreening processes could be considered for listing in the catalogue. Since the catalogue could only list a maximum of three titles, the selection of the three was then done on the basis of price.

## BRIEF HISTORY REGARDING THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE NATIONAL CATALOGUE

Prior to 2011, the responsibility for provisioning Learner Teacher Support Material (LTSM) rested solely with Provincial Education Departments (PEDs), which independently developed catalogues and managed procurement with minimal involvement from the National Department.

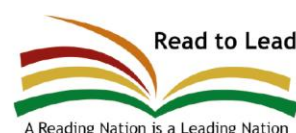
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Following recommendations from the 2009 Ministerial Task Team, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) assumed responsibility in 2011 for developing national catalogues, while PEDs retained responsibility for procurement and delivery to schools, with oversight shared between the DBE and PEDs.

The catalogues were progressively introduced across grades between 2011 and 2018, ensuring standardized access to approved textbooks nationwide. World Bank's policy on LTSM guides that the shelf-life of books should be between 5 and 6 to balance cost efficiency with durability against the need to update the content. This guidance is therefore meant to reduce frequent reprints while maintaining quality learning resources. It should be noted however that this catalogue has not been updated since 2011.

## ISSUED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF BASIC EDUCATION

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