

Updating *Aistear*

Written submission template for organisations, groups and individuals

This template is intended to help you (and your colleagues) develop a written submission in relation to Updating *Aistear*. Please e-mail your completed submission to aistearsubmissions@ncca.ie

Individual submission details

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Date	
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Organisation submission details

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Do you consent to this submission being posted online including your name and organisation*?

Yes

No

Please provide some brief background information on your organisation (if applicable).

Barnardos works with children and families across Ireland. During 2020, Barnardos worked with almost 18,000 children, young people and their families, providing supports through our 41 centres, in families' own homes, early years settings, schools and other community settings, and online. During 2020, we continued to progress the delivery of our trauma informed approach, which recognises the impact of adverse childhood experiences on children's lives, present and future.

Barnardos plays an important role in supporting the professional development of the Early Learning and Care (ELC) and School Age Care (SAC) workforce. We provide information, resources, advice and support to parents and professionals. We deliver training and develop practice resources to support those working with children, and we provide mentoring and development supports directly to ELC settings on all aspects of quality practice and provision.

Please email your submission to aistearsubmissions@ncca.ie

The remainder of the template includes two sections. Section 1 invites your overall comments and observations on *Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*. Section 2 is structured according to the Principles, Themes and Guidelines for Good Practice. Each section is briefly summarised as a support for working on the submission.

Please email your submission to aistearsubmissions@ncca.ie

Section 1

Please outline your overall comments and observations on updating *Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*

Barnardos very much welcomes this opportunity to contribute to the consultation process that will inform the review of *Aistear*, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework. The revision of *Aistear* will be important to the quality of young children's wellbeing, learning and development. Our submission is based on the following understanding:

Curriculum frameworks are documents that set out principles, goals, guidelines, values and approaches to children's development, learning and well-being in a country or jurisdiction... For early childhood education and care, they generally cover knowledge, competencies and skills areas, the characteristics of children's interactions with staff and other children, and the experiences and resources that children are offered within the ECEC setting and sometimes in the home-learning environment... They often provide guidance to help staff organise their practices to address developmental goals and may also include guidelines on pedagogies.

Pedagogy¹ is considered to both inspire and support curriculum, having a direct effect on children's experiences and interactions in ECEC.

(OECD, 2021)

The publication of *Aistear*, Ireland's first national early childhood curriculum framework, by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) in 2009, influenced and guided by the early years sector, children, parents and training and education institutions, was a welcome, positive and major milestone in the development of the education system in Ireland. Prior to *Aistear*, Irish providers looked to other countries for curriculum guidance. *Aistear* recognised education as a lifelong process that begins at birth and Ireland was one of few countries at that time to develop a common curriculum framework for the whole age range from birth to six and to support all those who care for and educate young children, including parents and childminders.

Ireland can be justifiably proud of *Aistear*. The country has, however, changed a lot in the last 12 years, with strategy, policy, legislative and regulatory changes among the many significant developments impacting on the early childhood sector. The knowledge and understanding of childhood and child development has also developed further in that time and the plan to review

¹ The OECD define pedagogy as 'the practices and methods employed by staff to support children's development, learning and well-being...the set of strategies and techniques implemented by staff to provide opportunities for young children's development in skills, attitudes and dispositions within a particular social and material context' stating 'With this definition, pedagogy can be considered as subsidiary to curriculum, and a variety of pedagogical practices may be employed within a given curriculum framework. In the broader sense, pedagogy can denote the theoretical foundation of a curricular approach, setting principles and values for specific methods of teaching or interacting. In this perspective, pedagogy reflects the meaning and purpose of education as well as informs the specific modes of learning across activities. Thus, taken in this sense, pedagogy can both inspire and support curriculum.'

Aistear in light of all of the developments and changes that have come about, as well as the experience of its implementation since its inception, is now timely.

In the face of an increasingly volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous world, education can make the difference as to whether people embrace the challenges they are confronted with or whether they are defeated by them. And in an era characterised by a new explosion of scientific knowledge and a growing array of complex societal problems, it is appropriate that curricula should continue to evolve, perhaps in radical ways.

(OECD, 2018)

The early childhood curriculum framework needs to reflect new knowledge and the many changes in Irish society and in technology and its uses. For example, the pedagogical use of digital technologies to support and enhance learning and teaching and the development of children's digital competences (e.g. reading digital books, exploring nature and science with devices, experiencing and producing art using digital forms of expression, playing games on computers, communication, creating digital content, accessing information and online safety) needs much consideration for inclusion in the revised Framework.

Today's information and communication technologies are an integral part of children's lives. Finding ways to use these technologies to optimise and extend children's development and learning must therefore be considered. Consideration must also be given to environmental issues and sustainable living that impact significantly on children's lives and are key features of children's concept development.

(Council of Australian Governments Productivity Agenda Working Group – Education, Skills, Training and Early Childhood Development, 2008)

This is just as true in Ireland and even more so today and, of course, needs to be done in a way that ensures that opportunities are harnessed while minimising any potential risks.

The early childhood curriculum framework also needs to reflect the experiences of adversity among babies and young children both in the framework content and the associated practice guidance.

There are babies and young children all over Ireland experiencing discrimination, homelessness and poverty, living in households where there is addiction, mental health problems and/or domestic violence. There are children of all ages, including babies, who are subject to chronic neglect, and physical, sexual and emotional abuse. Many children are experiencing a combination of adversities. There are families, early learning and care settings and schools based in communities that have experienced a significant amount of adversity including intergenerational poverty, social and economic disadvantage, neighbourhood violence and discrimination. The impact of adverse experiences on young children is highly likely to have a negative effect on their learning and development, leading to poor outcomes and lifelong social, emotional and physical issues over the course of their lives.

The curriculum framework needs to not only be here-and-now oriented, but also have a clear perspective on the future. For example, education for sustainable living and sustainable development needs to be fully embedded within the framework in an age appropriate way. Much more emphasis is needed in curriculum guidance on the value of time, opportunities and experiences in nature and the outdoors, and on nurturing young children's love of nature.

If students are to play an active part in all dimensions of life, they will need to navigate through uncertainty, across a wide variety of contexts: in time (past, present, future), in social space (family, community, region, nation and world) and in digital space. They will also need to engage with the natural world, to appreciate its fragility, complexity and value.

(OECD, 2018)

A quality early childhood curriculum framework must also fully and carefully address the comprehensive needs and rights of babies and young children, including their psychological needs. In a good learning environment, both care and education are highly important. The Aistear Framework's original philosophy, vision and aims included looking at the relationship between care and education within the Framework with a view to emphasising the educative nature of care and the caring nature of education. However, for early childhood professionals, whether centre- or home-based, to integrate care and education well, and particularly to recognise the educative aspect in the first three years, requires both initial and ongoing training, and up to date high quality information supports and resources. 'Research indicates that the brain sensitivity to language, numeracy, social skills and emotional control all peak before the age of four, which suggests that ECEC matters greatly for children's development of key skills and abilities' (Taguma, Litjens & Makowiecki, 2013)

Feedback from the consultation that took place when Aistear was being developed highlighted that the extent of professional development and support provided would significantly impact on the success of the Framework (Daly & Foster, 2009). In our work of supporting early years educators and providers throughout the years since the launch of Aistear, we have seen a clear need for the availability of more of such support, especially in the form of more easily accessible, quality, standardised in-service mentoring and training that is delivered within settings and with a bespoke agreed setting plan.

As well as identifying desired learning goals for children, a stronger focus on the expected inputs from staff and staff performance requirements may be necessary for fully successful implementation of Aistear and fidelity to the Framework in its implementation.

Raising Awareness of the Importance of Early Years Education

The visibility and importance attached to the development of early childhood care and education is gradually growing into a more significant part of the educational and social system in Ireland thanks in large part to Síolta and Aistear, as well as to the work of many passionate early years advocates.

The crucial nature of early years care and education as the foundation of all later health, wellbeing and learning, however, still needs to be more clearly and distinctly articulated for parents, early years educators and providers, teachers and school managers, as well as those who provide supports to educators and providers, policy makers, inspectorates, funders and society in general.

The UK's Royal Foundation Centre for Early Childhood landmark public survey on early childhood, conducted by Ipsos MORI in 2020, revealed that recognition of the importance of the early years in the UK is low (Centre for Early Childhood, 2021). We believe that the same is true in Ireland. There is some indication of this in a survey of Irish early years practitioners carried out as part of the Department of Education Consultation for the Review of Education and Training Programmes

in Early Years in 2016 (DES, 2016). It was clear from the responses that practitioners did not feel that their contribution to children's education and development was sufficiently valued by society. 'Cultures hold particular values about children, and the values and traditions of a community influence the ultimate form in which pedagogy is enacted, beyond what is stated in countries' formal curriculum frameworks' (OECD, 2021).

Although Aistear presents a clear set of principles and values, any lack of real awareness and recognition of these positive values within the community will influence and impact on adults' interactions with children and children's experiences in general.

Knowledge of the importance of the early years is low. We need to increase societal understanding of the transformative impact of early childhood. We also need to change the way we think about the first five years — ensuring that emotional development is given due focus and attention by all and that caregivers have sufficient understanding and knowledge to support healthy development.

(Centre for Early Childhood, 2021)

Parents need more awareness of the fact that Aistear is also intended to help them to 'plan and provide challenging and enjoyable learning experiences enabling children to grow and develop as competent and confident learners'. We recommend that there be an Aistear awareness raising campaign for parents following the publication of the revised Framework. Such a campaign could help to inform parents' expectations of quality provision by the paid educators of their child (both centre based and childminders) as well as parents' own use of the Aistear resources to inform the support they provide for their children's learning at home.

The level of 'societal understanding of the transformative impact of early childhood' and cultural values about children also influence and impact on the ways in which childminders interact with and provide experiences for the children they care for. Childminders as a specific group need more awareness of the benefits of Aistear and its resources for the quality of their work with children.

Meeting Children's Psychological and Emotional Needs

OECD advises that curricula covering broad age ranges, such as in the case of Aistear, in order to be effective, need to demonstrate their ability to adapt practices to children's developmental needs. (OECD, 2021). There needs to be significantly more emphasis and more information on babies' and young children's emotional needs and especially on relationships. The Aistear Framework speaks much of interactions which, of course, are hugely important but there is less emphasis on the significance of relationships for babies and young children's wellbeing, learning and holistic development.

Supporting Continuity

For babies and very young children, continuity and stable relationships are an extremely important basis for their learning. Unless they feel secure, they will not be able to learn well. Continuity for children under three years needs to be embedded within the curriculum and associated guidelines.

For children moving to primary school, the alignment of curriculum and pedagogical practices and of pedagogical understanding of early years educators and primary school teachers plays an

important role in enabling successful transitions by bridging the discontinuities in pedagogy between ECEC and primary education (OECD, 2017).

Continuity is important for young children, especially during major transitions. As well as sharing information about children across the settings, curriculum plays an important role in ensuring continuity and progression from early childhood education and care to primary education. Pedagogical alignment and continuity between early childhood education and primary education is important to facilitate ease of transitions and continuity for young children. There remains a significant distinction between pedagogical practice in early learning and care settings and the early years of primary school even in relation to Aistear, which makes the transition from preschool to school more difficult than it should be for young children.

High-quality ECEC aims for a comprehensive approach to children’s development that includes cognitive, social and emotional development, while primary school tends to be more academically oriented...However curricular alignment across ECEC and primary school can be done in ways that maintain the holistic and child-centred approaches that are typical in ECEC.

(OECD, 2021)

Aligning the revised primary curriculum with the principles and methodologies of Aistear will undoubtedly benefit children. Given the knowledge and understanding of the impact of stress on young children, the transition also needs to be made less stressful, with specific supports for implementation for early years providers, schools and parents and for better ongoing connections across both types of setting. Alongside initiatives that support sharing information across settings children need to see the same respect for their feelings, interests and choices in primary school as in the early years setting. They also need better continuity in their outdoor curriculum across both types of setting. Specific measures to support children to cope with significant change also need to be included in practice guidance.

Curriculum frameworks can cover specific or broad age groups of children. Those that cover broad age ranges (from 0 to primary school entry) have clear mechanisms to ensure continuity and progression within ECEC levels. However, to be effective, such frameworks need to demonstrate their ability to adapt practices to children’s developmental needs depending on age.

(OECD, 2021)

How does Aistear clearly demonstrate its ability to adapt practices to children’s developmental needs depending on age? While the sample learning experiences are mediated for different age groups within the age range for the Framework, some learning goals are framed at such high levels that many adults have not reached them, whereas others are framed at more developmentally-appropriate levels. For example, the language used in Learning Goals under the theme Identity and Belonging includes: ‘Have a sense of social justice and recognise and deal with unfair behaviour’ (LG5) and ‘Demonstrate the skills of co-operation, responsibility, negotiation’ (LG6), which are very high level goals for a child aged six years. The language used in the Learning Goals under the theme Exploring and Thinking’ is more realistic and age appropriate, using terminology such as ‘growing understanding’, ‘develop an understanding’, ‘learn about’, ‘come to understand’, ‘take increasing responsibility for’.

'Implementing a complex and rich curriculum successfully is linked to the quality of support for ECEC staff and to their training and qualifications, in particular their opportunities for professional development on relevant pedagogical practices' (OECD, 2021).

An effective system of training and continuing professional development is essential to support individual early years educators, teams and teachers in implementing Aistear. The Framework needs a package of standardised training resources that offer both initial and ongoing support to educators and teachers as they learn to use it. A package of accessible in-service training resources (such as Head Start's ECLKC 15-minute In-service Suites, which provide easily accessible and short training resources that focus on specific topics and provide resources such as videos, presenter notes and learning notes) added to the Aistear Síolta Practice Guide, could be used by trainers, mentors, service managers and early years educators to support in-service CPD. (Link to examples: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/teaching-practices/article/engaging-interactions-environments>)

Section 2

Principles of *Aistear*

Aistear is based on 12 Principles of early learning and development. Each principle is presented using a short statement. This is followed by an explanation of the Principle from the child's perspective. This explanation highlights the adult's role in supporting children's early learning and development. The Principles can be accessed [here](#).

Please give your feedback in relation to updating the Principles of *Aistear*. Please indicate what is working well with the principles and what might need to be enhanced or updated.

We recognise the Principles of Aistear as being extremely important as the basis of the Framework. There are a few areas where we see a need to enhance and update the Principles:

- We suggest a change from the use of 'he/she' to 'they' and 'his/her' to 'their' to be fully inclusive and to read more easily.
- Relationships
Children have a fundamental need to be with other people. They learn and develop through loving and nurturing relationships with adults and other children, and the quality of these interactions impacts on their learning and development.

Suggest changing this to read '*Children have a fundamental need to be with other people. They learn and develop through loving, nurturing **and responsive** relationships with adults and other children, and the quality of these **relationships** impacts on their learning and development*'.

We also recommend including among the Principles the significant fact that 'early experiences affect the development of brain architecture, which provides the foundation for all future learning, behavior, and health' (Center on the Developing Child – Key Concept).

The fact that young children need whole body movement in order to learn well also needs to be expressly included within the Active Learning Principle.

The need for young children to experience a language rich environment and two-way 'conversation' from birth in order to develop their speech and language skills needs to be expressly included within the Communication and Language Principle.

Section 3

Themes of *Aistear*

Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework presents children’s learning and development using four Themes. These are:

1. Well-being
2. Identity and Belonging
3. Communicating
4. Exploring and Thinking.

The themes describe what children learn—the dispositions, attitudes and values, skills, knowledge, and understanding. Each theme begins with a short overview of its importance for children as young learners. The theme is then presented using four aims. Each aim is divided into six learning goals. *Aistear*’s Themes can be accessed [here](#)

Please give your overall feedback in relation to the themes of *Aistear*. Please indicate what is working well with the themes and what might need to be enhanced or updated.

Describing young children’s learning and development through the four *Aistear* themes is very positive and helpful for the provision of holistic learning and development opportunities. Planning for learning and development using the themes as a guide is really valuable in ensuring that young children’s learning opportunities are well balanced and provide for all of their developmental needs in a holistic way.

There are just a few specific areas where we see that updating the aims and learning goals would further enhance the framework.

Wellbeing

- We suggest making it clearer how care and education are interconnected from birth e.g. A1 LG1 includes attachment with relationships in general. Attachment is crucial for very young children especially babies. There needs to be clear and distinct goals for a baby’s need for stable ongoing relationships, sense of security and attachment. This is an essential foundation for learning.
P18 Sample Learning Opportunities states *‘encourages babies to do things for themselves, encourages their initiatives and choices, and reacts positively to their endeavours so that they develop positive dispositions to learning:*
→■ *assists, encourages and affirms babies’ efforts, for example says, Look, you’re drinking your milk all by yourself*
We suggest that this example is not appropriate as until a year old, babies should receive the close comfort of an adult while they take a bottle and the example may be misconstrued.
- In A1 LG4 we suggest the wording be changed to ‘become confident’ and ‘become self-reliant’. Dependence begets independence. Babies and very young children need to be

able to rely on attuned, responsive adults in order to develop the foundations of self-reliance.

- The interconnection between mental and emotional health and wellbeing, physical health and learning is not clearly recognised. A1 refers to being 'strong psychologically' but does not use the term 'health' in relation to psychological wellbeing.
- Under A3 LG 5 'Care for the environment' we suggest that for very young children there needs to be a learning goal that relates to supporting and enhancing their instinctive love of nature before they are expected to care for the environment.
- A3 LG6 Spirituality is not only about beliefs and values – it is about a sense of connection to something bigger than ourselves, a sense of purpose and meaning, a sense of peace and hope, wholeness and balance.

Identity and Belonging

- A connection to place is important for children to develop and outdoor experiences are especially important and valuable in developing a connection to place.
- Children's developmentally appropriate awareness of the world beyond their own community is also important.
- The virtual world young children experience – tv, phones, devices – will also influence children's view of themselves and others
- We suggest adding to A1 LG that young children also have their own points of view
- A2 LG2 2. 'know that members of their family and community are positively acknowledged and welcomed' This needs to clarify that this applies to within the setting
- A3 aims – LG5. have a sense of social justice and recognise and deal with unfair behaviour and LG6 demonstrate the skills of co-operation, responsibility, negotiation – are very high level aims for children up to age 6 years. A4 LG3 refers to showing 'increasing confidence...' which is a more realistic for goals for this age group

Communicating

- "The theme of Communicating is about children sharing their experiences, thoughts, ideas, and feelings with others with growing confidence and competence in a variety of ways and for a variety of purposes" This does not clearly include that being able to make their needs known is important for young children.
- "While most children eventually master spoken and written language as their key means of communicating, they continue to speak through their gestures, body movements and expressions to a greater or lesser extent." This doesn't make clear how children also communicate through their behaviour.
- "The adult encourages children to communicate by listening to them, interpreting what they are saying, responding to them, and by modelling..." Although this includes responding to children it doesn't make clear that meeting a young child's expressed needs and wishes also encourages them to communicate.

Exploring & Thinking

- "They gather information and develop new skills, including thinking skills" We suggest that this also refer specifically to reasoning skills.
- We suggest, in the introduction to this theme, referring more specifically to developing an understanding through direct, physical, three dimensional, hands-on experience of concepts (weight, volume, number, size etc) as a foundation to understanding symbols (incl. numbers & letters) mathematical concepts and higher order thinking.
- The language used in the learning goals under this theme is more realistic/age appropriate than in other themes e.g. 'growing understanding'; 'develop an understanding'; 'learn about'; 'come to understand'; 'take increasing responsibility for'

- We recommend that A1 LG4 be clearer about this goal being met through hands-on, direct experience especially of natural materials and the natural environment

Section 4

Guidelines for Good Practice

Aistear has four sets of guidelines, focusing on different aspects of practice:

1. Building partnerships between parents and practitioners
2. Learning and developing through interactions
3. Learning and developing through play
4. Supporting learning and development through assessment

These describe how the adult can support children’s learning and development across *Aistear’s* principles and themes. *Aistear’s* Guidelines for Good Practice can be accessed [here](#)

Please give your overall feedback in relation to updating *Aistear’s* Guidelines for Good Practice. Please indicate what is working well with the guidelines and what might need to be enhanced or updated.

The aspects of practice covered in the current four sets of guidelines are all really important and useful.

We suggest that as well as highlighting relationships in the Principles of *Aistear* a further focus on developing relationships and stability in relationships be highlighted as well as embedded across all guidelines and training associated with *Aistear* – in particular for small babies.

Children’s rights and the need for understanding young children’s behaviour (including the impact of adverse childhood experiences and trauma on young children) are also important aspects of practice that need to be further highlighted within guidance on interactions.

Rights of the Child

There needs to be more awareness and a clearer understanding of the direct relationship of children’s rights to successful implementation of the Framework.

Young children need more and better recognition as citizens with their own rights, interests and points of view, and democracy needs to be further embedded within the curriculum framework. Ways to listen effectively to babies and young children before they can speak need to be seen, not only as a highly important aspect of responsive care and planning for their learning experiences, but as their right.

More specific and detailed practice guidance on developmentally appropriate, individualised pedagogical strategies is needed, especially for children under the age of three.

The early childhood curriculum framework is an important tool to foster inclusion, equity, diversity and multilingualism (OECD, 2021). There needs to be more information on the anti-bias approach embedded within the sample learning experiences as well as further information for educators on how to embed an anti-bias approach across the curriculum.

There also needs to be more recognition of children's differing temperaments and varied learning styles and how these affect learning and behaviour, with guidance for reflection on how these are accommodated within curriculum planning.

Language Supports

More specific support is needed for early years educators on supporting children and families whose first language is not English or Irish. The amount of growth in the connections in the brain related to language development is at its peak at under 12 months, and this growth depends on the kinds of experiences the child has both at home and in an early years setting. The value of home languages for a young child's development needs to be recognised by both parents and early years educators.

A better understanding of how to support language development is needed by those who care for and educate young children, particularly children under three years. Additional language supports for young children who have communication difficulties are crucial. The NEYAI project 'Happy Talk' in Cork, for example, demonstrated how, with appropriate training, early speech and language supports can be provided by early years educators within the curriculum and in partnership with parents, to help prevent speech and language delays becoming bigger difficulties for children as they get older.

Meeting Children's Psychological and Emotional Needs

'Extensive research on brain development highlights the crucial role of relationship based experiences for the child's future mental health' (Maguire, n.d).

When parents and professionally staffed early childhood care and education programs all pay attention to young children's emotional and social needs as well as to their mastery of literacy and cognitive skills, they have maximum impact on the development of sturdy brain architecture

(National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2007)

There is a need to provide more information and resources for early years educators (including childminders) and parents to build their knowledge and emotional literacy and skills, so that they fully engage in nurturing relationships with young children and provide nurturing experiences within the curriculum. Supports are needed within the curriculum framework materials and associated resources to build the capacity and capability of early years providers and educators to facilitate and foster stable, healthy and consistent relationships with babies and young children, starting with strong bonds of attachment. This will support the foundations for children's mental wellbeing and resilience and their learning. We suggest that there be explicit reference to the role of Key Person in the framework and the learning examples as well as detailed guidance on the role of Key Person in the practice guidance.

Responding positively to young children's emotional needs with respect, warmth and empathy, and understanding their behaviour and social skill development as well as acting to proactively prevent and redirect challenging behaviour needs to be directly linked with meeting their learning needs. Young children need their feelings to be understood, acknowledged, accepted and co-regulated in order to be able to learn well. 'Despite references to the need to balance the care

and educational aspects of early education there is a tendency to underestimate the educative role of caring' (Hayes, 2007).

We believe this tendency still pertains in parts of the early years sector and in society as a whole.

Early childhood educators need more specific Aistear implementation supports and on-going training so that they are better equipped to understand and support the emotional and social development of very young children alongside their physical and cognitive development.

In her research paper commissioned by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, Dr Geraldine French recommends that the NSAI:

Provide materials on pedagogical strategies to promote secure attachment and play materials that promote specific pedagogical strategies for 'secure' attachment organisation and positive infant mental health to be developed and included in the CPD programme and resources.

Components could include: attunement, being an interesting playful companion with babies and toddlers; supporting babies' and toddler's emotion-regulation through interactions; and, ultimately, responsive communication with babies and toddlers. These are all strategies to support the development of attachment and positive infant mental health.

(French, 2019)

The importance of providing optimal experiences – especially sensitive, responsive and stable relationships with a small number of familiar people – for children from birth to three in particular, needs to be more clearly and strongly articulated.

Guidance on Assessment and Planning

A child-centred approach requires that curriculum planning is informed by a good knowledge of each child's individual development and learning progress. Effective assessment is essential for creating optimum conditions for learning, for supporting and challenging children in their learning, and for ensuring that provision meets the needs of all children. Although there are many excellent resources available in the Aistear Síolta Practice Guide (NCCA, 2015), more specific guidance is needed on the use of children's portfolios, the purpose and use of observations and the types of pedagogical documentation – how to observe, what to observe, when to observe and how to use documented observations in day-to-day and long-term curriculum planning for individual children and groups. This also needs to include further guidance on involving children in the assessment process.

In relation to the understanding of emergent curriculum and the fact that a child's interest and engagement is the base for learning, the ways in which a child's interests can be raised or developed needs to be considered. While much of their interest comes from their home and social context, interest also comes from the context a child is in here and now.

Educators must consciously take the responsibility for generating and developing children's interest in the tasks or contents children need to learn about, for example, through the design, layout and resourcing of the environment and the opportunities provided. The educator's task must include sometimes directing children's awareness towards the objectives or areas of learning that they want children to come to know and understand, in a way that respects each child, their choices and their way of learning and developing understanding.

Specific supports on supervision practice for those who supervise curriculum implementation are also needed to help develop a culture of supervision and support in a sector where this has not yet become established standard practice in all settings.

Parent Involvement in Curriculum and Planning

Partnership between parents and educators is important at all times not only during times of change. Families are essential to children's educational success. Family engagement strategies that encourage families to participate directly in their child's learning and promote two-way communication, and that enable parents to share with early years educators the unique strengths and talents of their child are a hugely important aspect of early years education.

Strategies that recognise the diversity of children and families, and information and resources that encourage more engagement with families in an inclusive and reciprocal way to better understand children's needs as well as their families' values and culture, will also inform the development of more responsive learning experiences for children.

Practice guidance on Partnership with Parents needs to recognise the possibility that some parents may be experiencing significant adversities and barriers to engaging with educators while others may be very informed and fully engaged in partnership in their child's learning and care.

The language of Partnership with Parents needs to be inclusive and in no way patronising.

It needs to be expressed much more clearly in guidance and strategies for early years settings to communicate with parents, that parents and guardians have both the right and the responsibility to make decisions about their children's health, welfare and education, and that others cannot make any such decisions without parents' express consent.

Wording used in the Framework also needs to reflect the fact that while some parents may benefit from advice and support it should not be assumed that all parents are less knowledgeable than early years educators or teachers.

We suggest the addition of further resources and information that support educators in understanding the connection between their vision, mission and principles and their setting's curriculum, its principles and its implementation – the link between the setting's outputs and outcomes for children, information that makes clear the connection between overall service planning and curriculum planning.

Aistear promotes a balance of child-led and adult-led learning and we suggest the inclusion of more detailed guidance on the educator's role in establishing the conditions for emergent curriculum including stable educator-child relationships and choosing and providing appropriate open-ended toys, materials and equipment for young children, as well as detailed guidance on both indoor and outdoor space planning and layout as it relates to emergent curriculum, recognising the environment as the 'third teacher'.



Data Protection

The NCCA fully respects your right to privacy. Any personal information which you volunteer to the NCCA will be treated with the highest standards of security and confidentiality, strictly in accordance with the Data Protection Acts. If you require further information related to data protection please visit <https://www.ncca.ie/en/privacy-statement> or you can contact the NCCA's Data Protection Officer at dpo@ncca.ie.

Please email your submission to aistearsubmissions@ncca.ie

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