

# 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](mailto:aistearsubmissions@ncca.ie)

### *Individual submission details*

<b>Name</b>	
<b>Date</b>	
<b>E-mail</b>	

### *Organisation submission details*

Joint contribution from Fighting Words and Graffiti Theatre Company

<b>Name</b>	Colm Ó Cuanacháin
<b>Position</b>	
<b>Organisation</b>	Fighting Words
<b>Date</b>	
<b>E-mail</b>	

<b>Name</b>	George Hanover
<b>Position</b>	
<b>Organisation</b>	Graffiti Theatre Company
<b>Date</b>	
<b>E-mail</b>	

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

 YES

Please email your submission to [aistearsubmissions@ncca.ie](mailto:aistearsubmissions@ncca.ie)

Yes

No

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

Fighting Words was established in 2009 to provide creative writing experiences for children of all ages. The programme is run from 20 centres countrywide and includes a teacher education and research initiative on creative education at the Institute of Education, DCU.

Graffiti Theatre Company was founded in Cork in 1984 and creates theatre and quality arts experiences to help children to imagine a better world. Graffiti hosts and runs the Fighting Words programme in Cork.

BEAG is Graffiti's Early Years Arts programme for children (birth to 3 years) and their carers. It designs and develops high quality, rich artistic experiences that are artist led, child centred, play-based, multi-sensory and interactive.

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.

# Section 1

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

*Creative Arts in the Lives of Young Children draws together two essential strands in contemporary educational discourse: the importance of high quality care and education in the early years; and the central role that imaginative arts experiences can and should play in the lives of all young children.*

Prof Robyn Ewing, University of Sydney

We welcome this initiative to review Aistear and appreciate the opportunity to provide input. The Aistear/Síolta Framework has had a significant and positive impact on the quality and breath of Early Years education in Ireland over the past decade, and it is promising to see this current effort by the NCCA to strengthen the programme.

There is a significant and important emphasis on creativity as a central element to Early Years learning and development in the Aistear programme. The focus on being creative under the wellbeing theme (aim 3) provides an umbrella for creative activities with early years learners.

It is notable that the importance of creativity is acknowledged as a core aspect of the Early Childhood Curriculum. We would advise the NCCA to retain and build on this creative education and engagement dimension to Aistear.

It is important to note that creative methodologies and approaches nurture the imagination of Early Years children and strengthen their capacity to explore and learn across the full range of Aistear themes and curriculum pillars, not only around wellbeing. The ultimate curriculum objective of developing creative competencies in young people as they grow through the entire education system in Ireland (Being Creative) will be better served when creative learning approaches are encouraged across all themes and subjects from the earliest opportunity.

The education and training programmes and related qualifications provided for those working in Early Years education are critical to the successful delivery of the Aistear and Síolta outcomes, as acknowledged in the Early Childhood Care and Education scheme. The

BEAG programme in Cork has successfully piloted a training programme in creative education and the arts for Early Years practitioners.

This teacher education element provides a training opportunity to ensure Early Years facilitators and teachers have the understanding and confidence to use creative methodologies. We perceive that there is a gap here currently, and while teacher education may go beyond the remit of the Aistear review, ensuring the childcare and Early Years training courses include creative methodologies and participatory arts is essential.

The focus on the Rights of the Child as Standard 1 in the Aistear/Síolta standards is important. It would be useful to follow this through with more specific links to relevant children's rights. Specifically, in the references to creativity and the arts in the Aistear Framework, where it could be useful to reference Article 31 of UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

**Article 31**

1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the Arts.
2. States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity.

## 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.**

Overall, the 12 principles remain strong, and relevant, and work well. Our comments focus on some additional detail that would be important.

The point about holistic and integrated learning applies in terms of a joined-up approach to implementing these 12 principles of course. Stating this when the principles are first listed would be positive. In this way, it would be clearer that creative and participative approaches to learning are important in achieving outcomes across all three groupings.

We note the reference to creative learning in the principle on holistic learning and development. An even greater emphasis on creativity and the creative child across the principles is warranted given what we know about the enabling impact that creative engagement generates.

Looking at how children learn and develop, it would be important to add references to stories, storytelling, picture stories, as examples of the powerful creative tools available to develop cognitive, social, emotional, and personal capabilities. Expression as an element of active learning is also important to enable creativity and the imagination.

## 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.**

In the all-important thematic focus on wellbeing, creativity is highlighted in Aim 3. We know from research carried out on the Fighting Words model that creative engagement and participatory arts provide significant beneficial outcomes for young children related to well-being, self-efficacy, communications skills, and sense of happiness.

*The experience of participating in Fighting Words, with its fundamental belief that anyone can be creative, has given students an increased sense of confidence, improved communication skills, enhanced self-efficacy and belief in their own creative ability.*

Fostering Creativity through the Participatory Arts, Dr Irene White, DCU (2021)

Accordingly, the importance of imagination, wonder, ideas, exploration, and the centrality of culture and the arts in Early Years, needs to be illuminated in a more tangible and comprehensive way in the *Aistear* Framework. For example, it would be appropriate to have more specific references to the use of creativity and the arts with Early Years children in the overview on Principles and Themes. It would be important to incorporate a specific section on creativity, which gives a fuller picture of the integrated and cross-

curricular importance of the arts and creativity for Early Years, with connections, examples and using some of the evidence of impact that is available.

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## 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.**

In the Guidelines for Good Practice thematic manual on wellbeing, under Aim 3 - Children will be Creative and Spiritual - there is a need to provide guidance on creative methodologies in the 'learning opportunities'. These are sample learning opportunities we realise; however, we believe it would be very useful for practitioners to have some specific guidance on creative education. For example, stories, drawing, drama, song, dance and other creative play and activity can allow Early Years children to be imaginative and creative. Resultantly their ideas are encouraged, the children are enabled to express themselves, and the children have fun and enjoy learning. These development tools can be used across all themes, help build a sense of confidence and communications skills for children and are a foundation for the greater use of creative approaches later in primary school.

We would encourage some reflection on the connection between creativity and spirituality under Aim 3. Spirituality here is linked to respect for others' beliefs which is of course fundamental, but could confuse the focus on imagination, investigation, and creativity. Expression and creative processes are very different to belief systems and orthodoxies that children must accept. Understanding and celebrating difference; respecting, and upholding others; fairness, and friendship; are all inherent elements of creative learning approaches and rights-based approaches at Early Years, certainly. Directly linking creativity to spirituality in this curriculum context should be reviewed, we suggest.



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