

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

Name	
Date	
E-mail	

Organisation submission details

Name	Áine Doody
Position	
Organisation	Irish Aid, Department of Foreign Affairs
Date	
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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).

The Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), through the Irish Aid programme, is committed to ongoing support for Global Citizenship Education (GCE) targeting learners of all ages in Ireland. Irish Aid, in its new strategy Global Citizenship Education Strategy 2021-2025 linked [here](#), defines GCE as a

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lifelong educational process to increase awareness and understanding of the rapidly changing, inter-dependent and unequal world which we live in. By challenging stereotypes and encouraging independent thinking, GCE helps people to critically explore how global justice issues interlink with their everyday lives and how they can act to build a better world. Ireland's cross-Government policy for international development *A Better World* states that fostering global citizenship will be a core component of implementing the policy and commits to dedicating more resources to implementing GCE programmes.

GCE has much in common with other forms of values education, in particular with Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). There are also synergies with human rights education, education for peace and conflict and intercultural education. Our newly launched Global Citizenship Education Strategy (2021-2025) supports education programmes in both the formal and non-formal education sectors. The focus has been on supports for primary, post-primary and higher level education in the formal sector in recent years but this strategy commits that, 'We will examine expansion of our work into early childhood education in the context of the review of the Aistear framework'.

Current Irish Aid supports to GCE in Early Childhood Education in Ireland include Early Childhood Education learning materials produced by GOAL and Trócaire, and some workshops provided for trainee Early Childhood Education practitioners by Trócaire.

In addition, Irish Aid has recently launched a new strategic partnership with the primary school sector. This partnership is a consortium of Trócaire, the Irish National Teachers' Organisation, the Irish Primary Principal's Network and Dublin City University. Part of the targets for the 20 month pilot phase of this partnership is a scoping study providing a preliminary assessment of GCE in Early Childhood Education. It is acknowledged that there is limited research in the area of GCE and Early Childhood Education and Irish Aid wishes to engage in this area to support the delivery of GCE in the sector.

We have worked closely with the Department of Education in the development of this new strategy as well as design of the new primary school programme.



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*

Irish Aid welcomes the opportunity to input to the updating of *Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* and acknowledges how much opportunity already exists for the integration of GCE into the current framework. It welcomes the centrality of the voice of the child in the learning experiences, the significance of making meaningful learning connections to their environment and the emphasis on the importance of each child's identity, culture and background being valued, respected and included in the learning. Irish Aid views these as integral to laying the foundations of life-long learning in GCE.

Oberman et al. (2012) states how easily negative stereotypes about the Global South can be reinforced unintentionally by educators or young children. Stereotypes can already be present in young children due to media influence and family conversations. Children already have concepts of fairness and can show empathy. Good quality GCE and informed practitioners can build on this to enable children to develop their sense of global justice and place in the world as global citizens. Irish Aid can see in the current *Aistear* framework that there is ample opportunity to do this work with young children and recommends that a global as well as local focus is included in this. Irish Aid also recommends that Early Childhood Education practitioners are supported professionally to provide quality GCE to the children they work with to ensure it is done in an empowering way.

Irish Aid agrees with Oberman et al. (2012) that learning materials and professional development in GCE at Early Childhood Education level need to be designed specifically for this sector and not just simplified resources for more senior pupils. DFA welcomes any

opportunities to engage with the NCCA in regard to the development of learning materials and professional development in GCE for Early Childhood Education.

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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.

Irish Aid sees many opportunities where the Principles of Aistear and quality GCE can connect. It is clear from the Principles of Aistear that there is much work already going on in the sector to prepare young children to be active and informed global citizens. Irish Aid welcomes the inclusion of education about justice, fairness and rights, the emphasis on the importance of all children's background and cultures being welcomed and included in their education and the role of the practitioner in educating themselves about this.

Irish Aid agrees with the Aistear framework that young children are ready to learn about concepts such as fairness, justice and respect, and suggests that a global justice perspective be included in this work in an age-appropriate manner. This can be the beginning of the life-long learning process of GCE. Research suggests that very young children can establish negative stereotypes about the Global South from media, family discussions, etc. Irish Aid believes that Early Childhood Education settings can provide children with an opportunity to learn about the wider world they live in, including the Global South, in a way that does not reinforce negative stereotypes and is appropriate to a multi-cultural setting. However, educators need support to do this. Additionally, further research into GCE in the Early Childhood Education sector is also required (Oberman et al, 2021; Mallon, 2018).

Another welcome aspect of the Principles is the emphasis on hands-on learning, play and active learning experiences that link to the child's environment. The focus on connection and exploration of the world around them is an excellent opportunity for young children to develop knowledge

and skills of how they look after and care for our world and each other, indoors and outdoors, and why they should do this. DFA acknowledges that this is already happening in many early childhood settings and would welcome references to education for sustainable development and global citizenship to be included in the updating of Aistear

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.

Well-being: Irish Aid believes that GCE can play a role in this theme in relation to the aim of enabling children to respect themselves and their environment, care for the environment and be active citizens. These aims can be supported through good quality GCE so that young children can understand how and why they should care for the world around them, and how their actions impact people around the globe.

Identity and Belonging: As per the current *Aistear* guidelines, children should receive ‘Positive messages about their families, backgrounds, cultures, beliefs, and languages’ in order to ‘develop pride in who they are. These messages also give them confidence to voice their views and opinions, to make choices, and to help shape their own learning.’ Therefore the types of images and messages that practitioners choose to show students, and the conversations around them, is very influential. Research has shown that, unintentionally, conversations about the Global South between educators and students can reinforce a deficit model (Oberman, 2012). Practitioners

should be supported to deliver GCE in the right way, to ensure that their GCE activities do not reinforce negative stereotypes and are appropriate to a multi-cultural audience. Irish Aid welcomes that this is acknowledged in this theme and would welcome any discussion with NCCA regarding gaps or needs in the sector to support this professional development for practitioners and the development of GCE learning materials to support this work, through our newly established primary school partnership.

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.

1. Building partnerships between parents and practitioners: Irish Aid believes that quality GCE can enable positive partnerships between parents from the Global South and practitioners in ECE settings as parents, and children, can see their family 'values, practices, tradition and beliefs' being included in a positive, affirming manner that promotes justice and equality.
2. Learning and developing through play: As per Oberman et al. (2012), learning through play is a suitable way for students to learn about the wider world in a way that does not promote a 'them and us' mentality. Through role-play, engaging with toys and stories from other cultures and guided by teacher-in-role discussions, cultures from around the world can be viewed in a positive and empowering light before global justice issues are examined further in an age-appropriate manner. As mentioned, in order to avoid reinforcement of negative

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stereotypes, CPD for practitioners would be important in this area. Irish Aid sees a role for the international development NGOs in developing learning materials to support this work which includes stories from families and children in the Global South. Digital learning such as use of on line games and virtual reality could also have a role. Trócaire's Early Years learning materials are examples of work supported by Irish Aid in this area. This work will be further supported through our new Primary School strategic partnership.

Bibliography:

- Oberman, R., Waldron F. and Dillon, S. (2012), *Developing a Global Citizenship Programme for Three to Six Year Olds*, International Journal of Development Education and Global Learning 4 (1): 38-60
- Mallon, B. (2018), DICE Literature Review: The Impact and Evaluation of Development Education in Irish Primary Schools. Dublin.

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