



NCCA

An Chomhairle Náisiúnta
Curaclaim agus Measúnachta
National Council for
Curriculum and Assessment



Updating *Aistear*

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

This set of questions and answers have been developed in response to questions from stakeholders during the on-going consultation on the Updating of *Aistear*. The FAQs will be updated and reviewed regularly to respond to further questions from stakeholders.

Why is the NCCA updating *Aistear* now?

Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework is now 14 years old, having been published back in October 2009. Ireland is now more socially, culturally and linguistically diverse than ever before. Since the Framework was published there has also been considerable change in early childhood provision in Ireland in terms of national developments, policies and strategies, curriculum and assessment developments and in children's lived experiences. Significant developments have emerged through policy formation by, and initiatives of the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) and the Department of Education (DoE). Added to this are our collective experiences as a result of the COVID 19 pandemic. You can understand why there is a need to see how the Framework might be updated, so that it continues to support high-quality learning and development experiences for babies, toddlers and young children in Ireland.

What is the process for updating *Aistear*?

Updating *Aistear* involves engagement with a range of stakeholders, including babies, toddlers and young children, to gather perspectives on the Framework. The process began in late May 2021 and is being carried out over two phases:

- Phase 1 began in May 2021 and concluded in April 2022. It focused on asking stakeholders, including babies, toddlers, young children, parents and educators, what is working well with *Aistear* and what suggestions they have as to how it might be enhanced and updated. This is the NCCA [Consultation Report](#) from Phase 1.
- Phase 2 begins on 11 September 2023 when NCCA will publish proposals for an updated *Aistear*. A consultation to gather feedback on the proposals will follow. The Phase 2 consultation will conclude in November 2023.

What notable changes have taken place in early childhood provision since the publication of *Aistear*?

Some of the main changes in the early childhood context include the introduction of the two years of universal preschool provision (Early Childhood Care and Education [ECCE] programme), an increasingly qualified workforce, the introduction of early years education inspections by DoE inspectors, the establishment of Better Start National Early Years Quality Development Service and the availability of supports for young children with special educational needs to access the ECCE programme through the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM).

When will the updating of *Aistear* be completed?

A phase 2 consultation with the early childhood sector to update *Aistear* takes place from September to November 2023. NCCA will then finalise the updated *Aistear* in 2024.

Will updating *Aistear* result in significant changes to the Framework's current structure and content?

No. This is not a major review of *Aistear* which has become fundamental to the lived experiences of babies, toddlers and young children in Ireland. The table below illustrates the structure and content of the original *Aistear* Framework and the proposed updated Framework:

| <i>Aistear (2009)</i> | <i>Proposed updated Aistear</i> |
|---|--|
| Introduction: Purpose of <i>Aistear</i> | Introduction: Vision Purpose |
| Principles of early learning and development: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The child’s uniqueness • Equality and Diversity • Children as Citizens • Relationships • Parents, Family and Community • The Adult’s Role • Holistic Learning and Development • Active Learning • Play and Hands-on Experiences • Relevant and Meaningful Experiences • Communication and Language • The Learning Environment | Principles of early learning and development: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agentic Global Citizens • Diversity, Equity and Inclusion • Relationships and Interactions • Family and Community • Agentic Educators • Transitions • Holistic Learning and Development • Play and Hands-on Experiences • Learning Environments |
| <i>Aistear’s Themes</i> | <i>Aistear’s Themes</i> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Well-being • Identity and Belonging • Communicating • Exploring and Thinking | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wellbeing • Identity and Belonging • Communicating • Exploring and Thinking |
| Supporting <i>Aistear</i> Guidelines for Good Practice (available online in the <i>Aistear</i> Toolkit) | Supporting <i>Aistear</i> Guidance for Good Practice Guidelines for Good Practice (available online in the <i>Aistear</i> Toolkit) |

What has informed the proposals for updating *Aistear* in Phase 2 of the consultation?

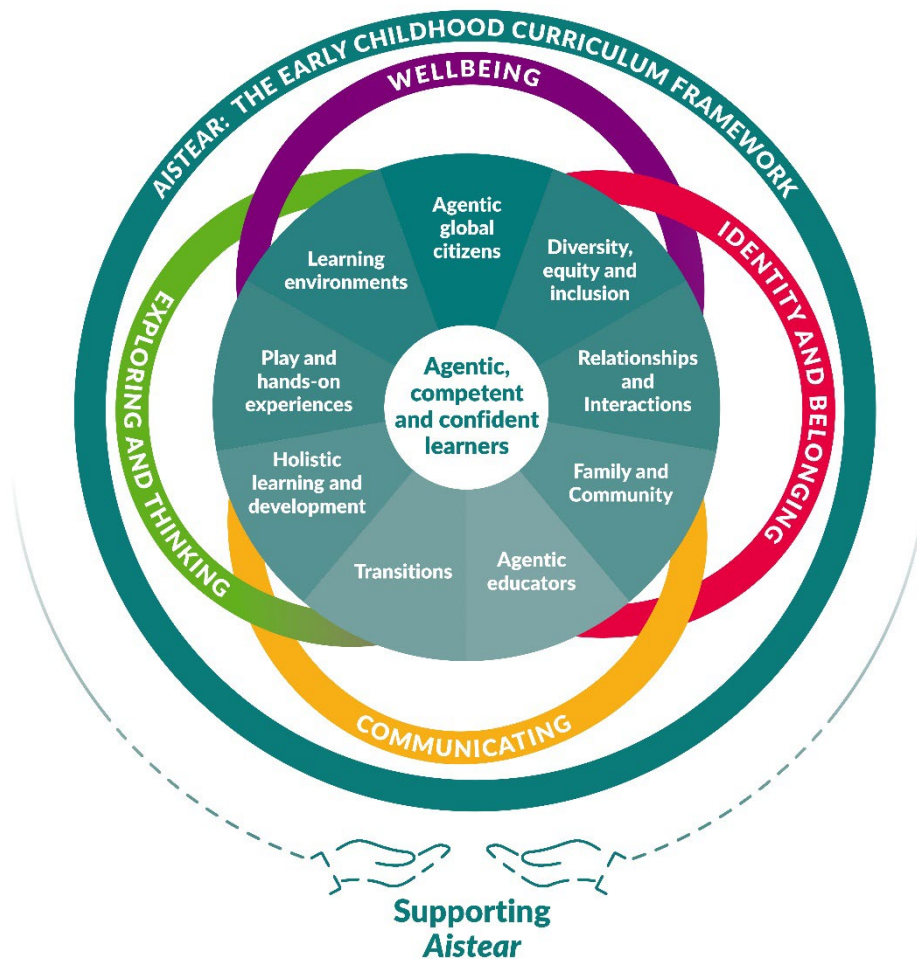
Like the original Framework, the proposed updates have been developed in consultation with stakeholders including babies, toddlers and young children, parents and educators. The update is also informed by a [literature review](#) (French and McKenna, 2022) and is guided by a [Consultation with babies, toddlers and young children](#) (O’Toole, Walsh, Kerrins, Doherty, Forde, Kelleher, McCartney, Stafford, Stokes, Matson and Mooney, 2023) and the NCCA [Consultation Report](#) from Phase 1.

What are the key messages in the proposals for an updated *Aistear*?

The proposals for an updated *Aistear*:

Embed inclusion, diversity, rights, voice, wellbeing, nurturing relationships, play, connections, continuity and progression of learning and sustainability throughout the Framework

- **View the baby, toddler and young child as:** agentic, competent and confident
- **View the educator¹ as:** competent, confident, agentic and reflective
- **Keep the structure of Aistear (See Figure below) but update individual sections by:**
 - Retaining, updating and giving increased visibility to the Principles
 - Retaining and updating the Themes, while also interweaving the Principles through them
 - Retaining but updating the Guidelines for Good Practice



- **Draw greater attention to the importance of interactions and relationships by:**
 - Focusing on building trusting relationship with babies, toddlers and young children through a slow relational pedagogy
 - Re-affirming the importance of a key person approach
 - Fostering enhanced connections with friends, communities and neighbourhoods.

¹ Reflects the professional role of those working in the early childhood setting but can also be understood as a reference to other adults who engage with the Framework with the intention of supporting learning and development of the baby, toddler or young child in their care.

- **Further emphasise babies, toddlers and young children as citizens with rights by:**
 - Enhancing the focus on the right to due consideration for their views including the right to meaningfully participate and exercise influence on the decisions that affect them. Replaces the term 'children' with the overlapping age ranges of babies' (birth to 18 months), 'toddlers' (12 months to 3 years) and 'young children' (2.5 to 6 years) to recognise the importance of each distinct stage in its own right.
 - Providing greater acknowledgement of different and various voices/languages of babies, toddlers and young children.
 - Promoting the importance of both rights and emerging responsibilities including exploring and identifying their place in the world and learning to live sustainably.

- **Further embed the concepts of diversity, equity and inclusion by:**
 - Giving greater awareness of and appreciation for diverse contemporary Irish society including diversity of age, gender, family status, religion, worldview, ethnicity including membership of the Traveller community.
 - Focusing on respecting and celebrating diversity while also noticing and valuing our similarities and connectedness.
 - Focusing on Irish cultural and linguistic history and story.

- **Emphasise and reaffirm the centrality of learning through play and hands-on experiences by:**
 - Encouraging a wide variety of types of play and hands-on experiences indoors and outdoors.
 - Highlighting the importance of time, space, freedom, choice and resources.
 - Emphasising outdoor play and learning, highlighting the benefits of enjoyable, challenging, adventurous play.

- **Support greater continuity of experience and progression in learning by**
 - Further highlighting the learning that takes place in the first three years of life.
 - Indicating more clearly the importance of supporting all transitions – into and out of settings, during the day, room-to-room and preschool to primary and special school.
 - Focusing on curriculum alignment between *Aistear* and the *Primary Curriculum Framework (2023)*
 - Reaffirming the importance of noticing, observing, documenting, planning and assessing holistic learning and development including positive learning dispositions.

How will parents/guardians be involved in Phase 2 of Updating *Aistear*?

There is an online questionnaire for parents / guardians who wish to share their views on the proposals for an Updated *Aistear*, along with a written submission template for more extended feedback. Parents will also be offered the opportunity to attend an online consultation event.

Consultation materials are available here: <https://ncca.ie/en/early-childhood/early-childhood-education-developments/updating-aistear/consultation/>.

How are babies, toddlers and young children involved in Phase 2 of Updating *Aistear*?

Babies, toddlers and young children are at the heart of *Aistear* and NCCA is very keen to hear from them about their experiences of the Framework. A consortium from Maynooth University Froebel Department, Early Childhood Ireland and Stranmillis University College, Belfast is consulting with babies, toddlers and young children on behalf of NCCA. This consultation includes the interpretation of the different ways that babies, toddlers and young children communicate, whether by words, body language, actions and reactions to indicate what they like and what is important to them. Their key person who knows them well, plays a valuable part in this research, by listening to and responding to the voice of the child. A [Report on the Consultation with Babies, Toddlers and Young Children](#) from Phase 1 has been published. A consultation with babies, toddlers and young children took place in Phase 2 to hear their views on the proposals for an Updated *Aistear*, and a will be published in 2024.

Will the updating of *Aistear* have an impact on the alignment with *Síolta*?

The relationship between *Aistear* and *Síolta*, as the two national frameworks for early childhood provision is an important consideration in the updating process, and NCCA will maintain a focus on continued alignment and synergy between the two frameworks.

What is the relationship between the updating of *Aistear* and the review and redevelopment of the Primary School Curriculum?

The ECCE programme, along with *Síolta* and *Aistear*, has led to changes in what children experience before beginning primary school. These changes set a new context for the experiences of children in infant classrooms. While the updated *Aistear* will be for the early childhood sector and the *Primary Curriculum Framework* for Primary and Special schools, they are now aligned to support continuity and progression for all children as they make the transition from preschool to primary and special schools. This alignment is particularly evident in the focus in both frameworks on a pedagogy of play.

Will *Aistear* still be a curriculum framework rather than a curriculum?

Yes, *Aistear* will still be a curriculum framework rather than a curriculum. A curriculum framework sets out a clear vision and principles for learning and development. It highlights what is important and why, and provides a description of what should be prioritised. The Themes describe aspirations for what babies, toddlers and young children will learn. Learning goals are broad, yet observable statements, which support the development of a curriculum to work in a variety of settings and with the different age-groupings.

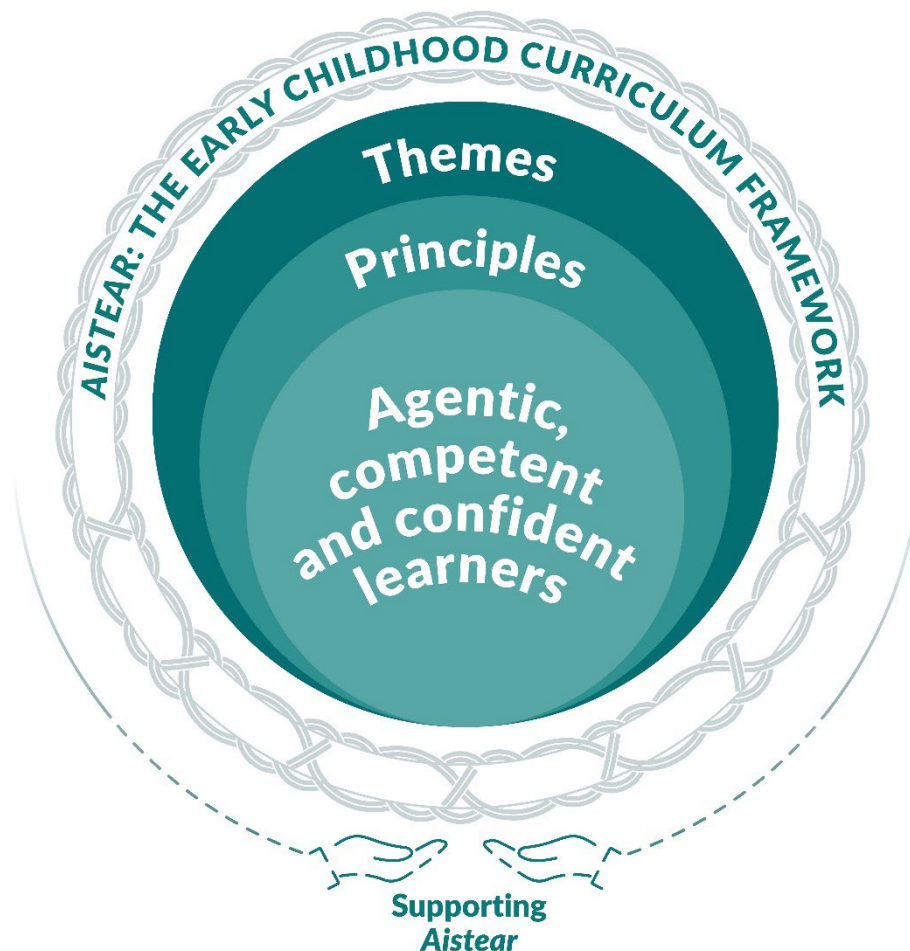


Figure 2 *Aistear: the early childhood curriculum framework*

The *Primary Curriculum Framework* (DoE, 2023) and the *Framework for Junior Cycle* (Department of Education and Skills, 2015) are similar frameworks supporting children's learning in primary and post-primary school, supporting continuity and progression from early childhood onwards.

How will the research findings be communicated to me?

The research is published and made available in the early childhood section of the website: www.ncca.ie/early-childhood.

What supports will NCCA make available to educators to support them to work with the updated *Aistear*?

NCCA will support educators to work with *Aistear* through the online [Aistear Toolkit](#). The Guidance for Good Practice outlined in the Supporting *Aistear* section of the proposals expand on some of the important ideas introduced in the Principles and Themes. These big ideas are intended as a platform to update and extend the current [Guidelines for Good Practice](#) in the *Aistear* Toolkit. Key terms are highlighted in the Guidance to indicate the potential development of future resources in these areas and the consultation processes invite feedback relating to these potential supports and resources.

Will the *Aistear* Toolkit replace the *Aistear Síolta* Practice Guide?

No. The intention is that the [Aistear Toolkit](#) and the [Practice Guide](#) will complement each other. The purpose of the Practice Guide is to support early years educators in using *Aistear* and *Síolta*, (CECDE, 2006) **together**. The *Aistear* Toolkit focuses on *Aistear* **alone**. The Toolkit supports early years educators in understanding and engaging with *Aistear*'s Principles, Themes, Aims and Learning Goals.

How can I find out more?

For information on events and updates during the updating of *Aistear*, follow us on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook. You can also [sign up to receive updates](#) from NCCA.