



Updating *Aistear* Phase 2 Consultation

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 updatingaistear@ncca.ie.

The template is structured according to the Principles, Themes and Supporting *Aistear*. Each section is briefly summarised as a support for working on the submission. Before completing the template, please read the draft updated *Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* at this link: <https://ncca.ie/en/early-childhood/early-childhood-education-developments/updating-aistear/consultation/>.

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*If you are contributing your views as an **individual**, please provide details below*

Name:	
E-mail address:	

Please email your submission to updatingaistear@ncca.ie



Do you wish to be listed as a contributor to this consultation on the NCCA website?	Yes/No
Do you wish to have your written submission published on the NCCA website?	Yes/No

*If you are contributing your views on behalf of an **organisation or group**, please provide details below*

Name	Kate McDonnell, Daniel Mullings, Eoin Lenihan
Email address:	
Name of organisation/group:	4BCP – Early Childhood Studies and Practice
Does your organisation wish to be listed as a contributor to this consultation on the NCCA website?	Yes
Does your organisation wish to have this written submission published on the NCCA website?	Yes

Key Messages of the Proposals

Phase 1 indicated that *Aistear* has stood the test of time and remains broadly relevant. However, it was indicated that some areas could be updated. This section seeks to understand your views on the proposed updates.



To what extent do the proposals keep the structure of *Aistear* but update individual sections? ¹

The principles have been restructured reduced from 12 to 9. They've kept all of the themes but broadened the learning from 6 to 3 to include the different voices of the child.

Instead of being referred to as the adult, parents and practitioners are now known as educators. The group finds this confusing while parents are the first educator the child (CECDE, 2006), there is no provision made to differentiate the professional educator from the parent.

Do the proposals draw greater attention to the importance of interactions and relationships between babies, toddlers, young children, parents, educators, and other important people in their lives?

Yes. Key person approach is maintained. Special bonds and trusting relationships with the educators are crucial. *Aistear*'s move towards 'slow relational pedagogy' is synonymous with quality practice. Slowing things down and keeping practice calm. French (2023, para 3) draws on the 'value of babies and toddlers experiencing secure, consistent relationships with the adults in the lives' and calls for 'centred based care' where interactions with babies are limited to a few educators nurturing and fostering learning thus slowing down the process of caring and playing so children are not hurried through early years.²

¹

CECDE, (2006). *Siolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education*. Dublin: CECDE.

²

French, G., (2023). *Early Childhood Ireland*. [Online]
Available at: <https://www.earlychildhoodireland.ie/scealta-blog/the-value-of-slow-relational-pedagogy/>
[Accessed 11/11/2023 November 2023].



Do the proposals emphasise babies, toddlers and young children as citizens with rights to meaningfully participate and exercise influence on decisions that affect them?

Yes, the proposal exemplifies them as agents for change, citizens with rights and embracing the various and different voices that children have that should be heard and listen to as in Article 12 of UN convention of the rights of the child.³

Do the proposals embed the concepts of diversity, equity, and inclusion?

Yes. Respecting and celebrating equity and diversity through cultural celebrations and appreciating children's first languages. Facilitating children to notice their similarities in each other and how they are connected e.g. playing football (DCYA, 2016). The Irish language is neatly integrated into Aistear through Gaelic words and phrases. Non-verbal communication through sign language and 'lámh' are also present pointing to a more inclusive classroom especially for children with additional needs.⁴

3

United Nations, (1989). *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*. New York: United Nations.

4

DCYA, (2016). *The Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Charter*, Dublin: Department of Children and Youth Affairs.



Do the proposals emphasise and reaffirm the centrality of learning through play and hands-on experiences?

Yes.

- Emphasises all weather play and facilitating outdoor play.
- Learning to live sustainably.
- Embracing children's creativity through messy play
- Suggests creating provocations with many different themes e.g. the beach with shells, sand, dry crabs, seaweed.

Do the proposals support greater continuity of experience and progression of learning for babies, toddlers, and young children?

'The beneficial effects of getting just a little true play can spread through our lives.... making us...happier in everything we do' (Brown, 2009) cited in (Kark, 2011).⁵ The enquiry-based curriculum supports this and the educator notices, observes the learning and development, plans for it and expands upon the learning, assesses the learning.

- Enrols the 'slow relational pedagogy' that supports continuity of experience and learning.
- Acknowledges the child's voice.
- Empowers children with emerging responsibilities to experience democracy.
- Respecting and celebrating every aspect of the diversity and family home of the community Valuing our similarities and connectiveness (home language).

5

Kark, R., (2011). Games Managers Play: Play as a Form of Leadership Development. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 10(3), pp. 507-527.



- Empowering and creating inclusive environments that provide opportunities for meaningful participation.
- Proofing the setting (for inclusion and diversity) to represent all of children’s social worlds.

Understanding transitions that occur within play for example, an infant playing ‘peek-a-boo’ and any time. So, the baby initiated the ‘peek-a-boo (games with rules)’ while investigating a fabric bracelet (exploratory play) (NCCA, 2023, p.53)⁶. The document states that children experiencing different types of play ‘supports their learning and development across the four themes’ of Aistear (NCCA, 2023, p.53).⁷ In Phase 2, our group welcome the cubby hole as children’s personal space with their personal things in it and meeting the needs of a diverse and changing society for a sustainable future.

Principles of *Aistear*

The number of Principles has been revised from 12 to 9 and reframed. Additionally, the proposals aim to integrate the Themes of *Aistear* in a seamless manner across the Principles. We are interested in receiving your feedback about these changes.

Please insert your feedback on the Principles of *Aistear* here:

- Acknowledges the child’s voice.
- The parents are the most important people in the child's life.
- The importance of parents working with educators to help the child reach their full potential.

⁶ National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), (2023). *Consultation report on updating Aistear: Phase 2*. Dublin: NCCA.

⁷ National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), (2023). *Consultation report on updating Aistear: Phase 2*. Dublin: NCCA.



- Empowering and creating inclusive environments that provide opportunities for meaningful participation.
- Making the child feel secure in their learning environment to provide meaningful experiences for them to reach their full potential (slow-relational pedagogy).
- Meeting the needs of a diverse and changing society for a sustainable future.
- Respecting and celebrating every aspect of the diversity and family home of the community and valuing our similarities and connectiveness (home language)
- Proofing the setting to represent all of children's social worlds.
- The importance of the connections of the child's social worlds i.e., pre-school and home.
- Empowers them with emerging responsibilities to experience democracy.
- The overall learning experiences of the child influences their understanding of diversity.
- It is the child's right to play.
- Being aware of children's dispositions and encouraging positive dispositions, attitudes, and skills
- Facilitating children to risk assess is a valuable skill for them throughout their lives.
- Encouraging the child to actively use their senses to explore and learn about the world around them.
- Parents know children best, find out what you need to know.
- Putting positive light on transitions as a means for ensuring the progression of learning and development.

The more you know the child, the more you would be able to support the current transitions that occur throughout the day. Ongoing assessment of the child helps the educator to plan a rich variety of experiences shaped by previous learning experiences with the family and community while fostering a great sense of self. Reflecting children's diverse backgrounds



through language and print of their home language and aspects of their culture displayed in the environment (travelling community) e.g. pictures of horses and caravans (DCYA, 2016)⁸.

Themes of *Aistear*

Aistear is underpinned by four Themes of learning and development. It is proposed that the Learning Goals within each Theme remain broad, but observable statements that support babies, toddlers and young children's learning and development. It is also proposed that the Principles of *Aistear* be interwoven and visible throughout *Aistear*'s Themes.

This section seeks your detailed feedback as to whether these key changes are visible within the draft proposals. The draft proposals are available here for your information.

Please give specific feedback in relation to each of the Themes of *Aistear*.

Theme: Wellbeing

In Learning and development, babies, toddlers, and young children are supported to be:

- Healthy and active.
- Children will be creative, spiritual, and compassionate.

They've changed the phrase to make strong attachments instead of building secure relationships.

Argument: Losing the ' in Partnership with adults' means that certain phrases need to be supported by educator. For example, children should be supported by the educator to manage risk, the group feels this needs to be address as children need to be supported to take calculate risks. According to Curtis (2010) educators can pursue risky activities with children if adequate supervision is provided to foster the learning processes while ensuring the children's safety.⁹

⁸ DCYA, (2016). *The Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Charter*, Dublin: Department of Children and Youth Affairs

⁹ Curtis, D., (2010). 'What's the risk of no risk?'. *Exchange Magazine*, Issue (March-April), pp. 52-56.

**Theme: Identity and Belonging**

- Their voices are to be listened to and responded to
- In Partnership with adults has been removed to achieve broader statements
- Children are respected and seen as ‘agentic learners.’

Our position: the group values giving children learning opportunities about other cultures in a holistic way (family and community principle) and there should be more Children should share their stories based on their backgrounds and culture. The documents have become more inclusive to include minorities as well as travelling communities.¹⁰

Theme: Communicating

- The loss of the phrase ‘in partnership with adults’ is now replaced with ‘educators.’
- Communicating through various aspects of language.
- The acknowledgement of the diverse communities and the different languages is welcome They use multiple ways of communication.
- The emergence of literacy and numeracy experiences is welcome.

¹⁰ DCYA, (2016). *The Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Charter*, Dublin: Department of Children and Youth Affairs.



Position: the group agrees that children communicate innately and use their ability as agentic learners to give, receive and make sense of information of the world around them is a great addition. 'A child in play acts as though he were a head taller than himself' (Vygotsky, 1978, p.102)¹¹

Theme: Exploring and Thinking

- Partnership with adults.
- Emphasis on learning about the Irish past.
- Focuses on the Inclusive environment.
- Assessing on their learning and reflecting as they play.
- Building knowledge through investigation and discovery.
- Facilitating a safe environment for creative expression.
- Using all the senses to explore and think about the world.

Position: the group agrees with the introduction of sustainability and accountability themes here and children being responsible for caring for their environment¹². It really emphasises a right-based curriculum framework that will provide continuity in learning that continue into primary school.

¹¹ Vygotsky, L., (1978). *Mind in society*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

¹² NCCA, (2009). *Aistear: The early childhood curriculum framework - Guidelines for good practice*. Dublin: NCCA.



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In your reading of the proposals, are the Principles of *Aistear* interwoven and visible throughout *Aistear*'s Themes?

Yes, increased visibility of principles in Identity and Belonging about children sharing their cultural stories, the addition of sustainability and care for the environment in Exploring and Thinking, including multiple ways of communicating in Communication and Wellbeing focuses on strong attachments and the bond between educators and babies, toddlers, and young children clearly interwoven and visible in the Aistear themes.



Please insert any additional feedback that you would like to share with us about the proposals here:

Welcome use of 'children' for babies, toddlers, and young children' includes children of different ages recognising that learning also takes place in the first three years of life. (Government of Ireland, 2019)¹³. More emphasis on building a bond with babies, toddlers, and young children. The document acknowledges the importance of embracing diversity because 'how we address diversity has an impact on how children see and engage within their own world' and fostering children's 'funds of knowledge' each child has through everyday interactions in the setting (DCYA, 2016, p.16).¹⁴ The adult's role is now the educator and parents are the child's first educator (CECDE, 2006)¹⁵ but it is confusing the professional role of the educator. 'Play is a catalyst' (Brown, 2009) cited in (Kark, 2011)¹⁶, positive focus on facilitating play-based early learning in all weathers. Learning to live sustainability is an asset to society. Embracing other languages, voices and respecting babies, toddlers, and young children as citizens with rights and agents for change. Inclusion of the Irish language in the document is a way to teach other cultures about who we are so they are included. Positively, the learning goals have been broadened to be more observable of modern society

¹³ Government of Ireland, (2019). *First 5: A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families (2019-2028)*, Dublin: Stationary Office.

¹⁴ DCYA, (2016). *The Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Charter*, Dublin: Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

¹⁵ NCCA, (2009). *Aistear: The early childhood curriculum framework - Guidelines for good practice*. Dublin: NCCA.

¹⁶ Kark, R., (2011). Games Managers Play: Play as a Form of Leadership Development. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 10(3), pp. 507-527.



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and the Aistear curriculum framework has remained a framework aligning with both preschool and primary/special school. Emphasis is on supporting all transitions. Notably fostering connections and building on local community liaisons e.g. trip to firehouse with the children.



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Supporting Aistear

Part 1: Guidance for Good Practice

Pages 27 to 33 describe the Guidance for Good Practice. The Guidance for Good Practice expands on some of the important ideas introduced in the Principles and Themes. It also reflects other important messages, or big ideas, from Phase 1 of the consultation to update Aistear, as well as from research and wider societal and policy changes. The big ideas are organised according to Aistear's original Guidelines for Good Practice.

Partnerships between Parents and Practitioners

Learning and Developing through Interactions

Learning and Developing through Play

Supporting Learning and Development through Assessment.

It is proposed that these will be extended and supplemented through resources developed for the online *Aistear* Toolkit. Sample resources are available in Appendix 1 of the draft proposals.

Please give your overall feedback in relation to the Guidance for Good Practice.

Partnership between parents and practitioners:

Themes of identity and belonging and communication are foremost. Our group agrees that in the partnership with parents, the aim is to provide rich experiences for children so they feel happy, belong, and can reach their potential. The proposal relates to the environment: parents and practitioners should work together to share information ('contribute'), make decisions and be invested in the setting to provide rich experiences for children. The big idea

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is recycling, creating a shared goal and relationship for sustainability with the parents and practitioners, where recycling products, pre-loved items, and other materials that are donated by diverse families, so they become part of the process of making crafts while creating a sustainable and inclusive future for the children.

The most positive addition is inviting parents to be proactive in funding the setting, sharing their culture and traditions and providing specialist knowledge about their child. A support framework needs to facilitate parents to 'contribute' and to be proactive in the setting. Another big idea suggested is a coffee and play morning to support parents embracing inclusion of language, cultures, and backgrounds of families to help with many transitions. Further communication through newsletters, notebooks, phone calls and text messages are welcome additions.

Learning and developing through interactions:

The proposal reiterates the importance of secure relationships where children should enjoy being around people. The implementation of the inclusive right based curriculum is a positive step to embrace Ireland's diverse society where children are involved in an interconnected global family. The reflection on babies' toddlers and young children's views empowers each individual child and it also gives them the responsibilities towards themselves and the environment. Agreeably, parents and practitioners are viewed as confident, competent, and 'agentic' educators modelling positives dispositions to 'babies, toddlers and young children.'



The key person approach is valued. 'The Aistear framework is adaptable and flexible to support the creativity of the educators and values the different lenses and interpretations' (NCCA, 2023, p 31)¹⁷ of those who support early learning and development.

The importance of being present with the child and expanding play through informed intention is crucial. Children might need more support thus the proposal acknowledges the new cultural differences and traditions in the Irish landscape by embracing cultural celebrations and traditions. More clarification needed around social visits by grandparents.

Big idea is learning life skills through interactions, cooking and gardening should be a big part of the curriculum to help young children understand nature and the origins of food and how educators can build on this understanding of nature that is respectful and sets them on their path as active global citizens.

Learning and developing through play:

According to Aistear 'Play is a way of 'doing things' and children's play develops over time and is enhanced when given the right kinds of support (scaffolding). The document identifies different types of play. 'Children love to play and play often mirrors what is important in their lives' so it is notably here that Phase 2 needs to add that play is a communal way of communicating with educators and peers additional to the mentioned building or strengthening of relationships with young children. Children play for different reasons. Sometimes they are exploring or learning new things (p.53).

¹⁷ National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), (2023). *Consultation report on updating Aistear: Phase 2*. Dublin: NCCA.



Phase 2 suggests educators need to provide time and space to facilitate play and educators should know when to step in and when to take a step back as children play. Our group thinks this is a great point which is compounded by Cremin, et al. (2006)¹⁸ who identifies that facilitating the agency of the learner, enabling time and space for children to play and creates the right conditions for children to claim ownership of their learning Hence, ‘they are consolidating existing learning or practising a skill’ (NCCA, 2023, p.53)

In the original Aistear, Dr Nimmo suggests a way of supporting parents is to explain what practitioners are focusing on and keeping parents informed of how the environment is set up and why (NCCA, 2015).¹⁹ Phase 2 identifies two roles for the educator are organising and resourcing the play environment.

Big idea is to provide funding to all setting for all weather play facilities and outdoor seating, funding to parents for all weather clothes to build resilience in children and wellbeing and once a year, the families come together for a weekend date of all-weather play.

Supporting learning and developing through assessment:

The introduction of the ‘slow relational pedagogy’ is welcomed as it ensures that the educator is present and aware of what the child is doing and guarantees that the child's voice

¹⁸ Cremin, T., Barnard, P. & Cratt, A. (2006). Pedagogy and Possibility Thinking in the Early Years. *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, 1(2), pp. 108-119.

¹⁹ Aistear Siolta Practice Guide, (2009). *Planning, documenting and assessing an emergent and inquiry-based curriculum; Dr. Nimmo*. [Online]
Available at: <https://www.aistearsiolta.ie/en/curriculum-foundations/element-1-developing-your-curriculum-and-curriculum-statement/planning-documenting-and-assessing-an-emergent-and-inquiry-based-curriculum-with-dr-john-nimmo-1.html>
[Accessed 12 November 2023].



is heard as French (2023)²⁰ explains; to build a special bond with babies and toddlers, care should be calm, consistent, and secure.

Phase 2 highlights the importance of meaningful documentation when observing the child so that the child's learning is visible for them and their families. *Aistear the curriculum framework* (DoE, 2023)²¹ is now aligned with the primary school curriculum which is a huge step in the right direction as it confirms a direct connection between the early years sector and primary/special schools.

These transitions and lifelong learning help produce positive experiences for young children. This will ensure children's continuity and progression of learning and development leading to more seamless transitions from preschool to primary. It is our responsibility as educators to have a clear picture of the child to share the information with the teachers in the primary/special schools. This can be done through the "Mo sceál" books of each individual child making the big transition from preschool to primary/special school easier and favourable for the child.

²⁰ French, G., (2023). *Early Childhood Ireland*. [Online]
Available at: <https://www.earlychildhoodireland.ie/scealta-blog/the-value-of-slow-relational-pedagogy/>

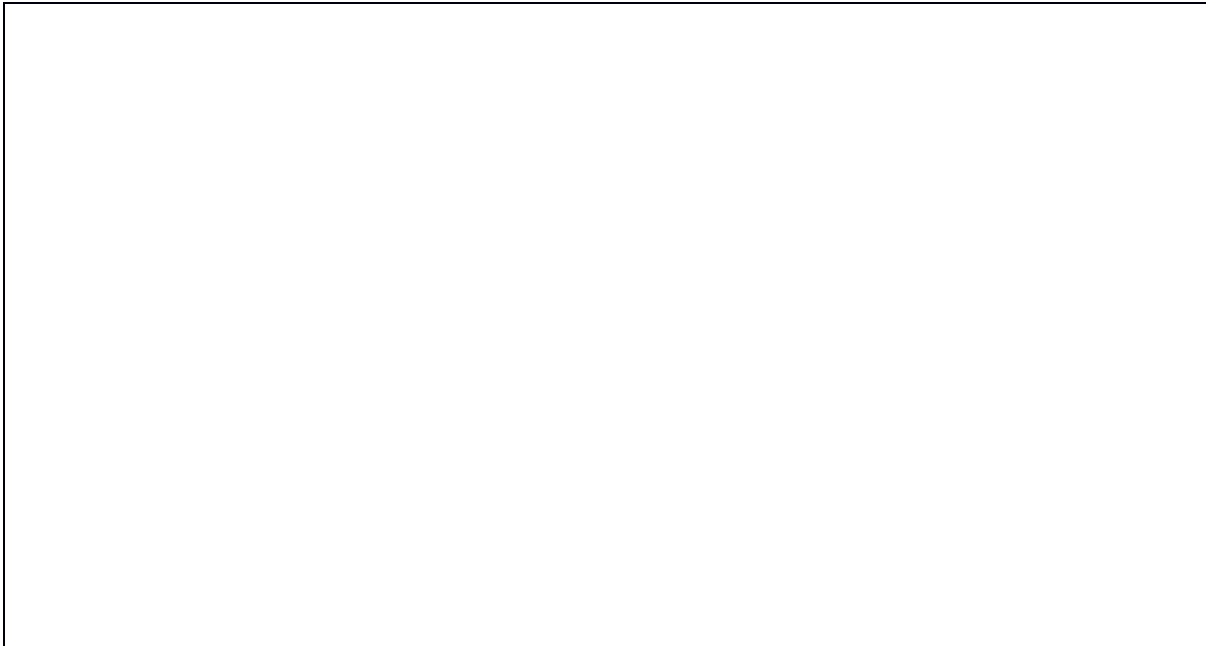
[Accessed 11/11/2023 November 2023].

²¹ Department of Education, (2023). *Primary Curriculum Framework*. Dublin: National Council for Curriculum Assessment.



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Part 2: Supporting Educators

Page 34 of the proposals explains how this consultation is an opportunity to gather information on the nature of supports required to support the early childhood educators in working with the curriculum framework.

Please provide feedback on how early childhood educators can be supported in working with the curriculum framework. For example, what resources would be helpful to include in the Guidance for Good Practice?

Providing a mini booklet to help simplify the aims and goals of the themes of Aistear. Due to staff shortages and busy settings' workload. The rationale is that it would be a pocket guide. The resource would help practitioners to keep on top of their Aistear documentation making it more efficient and easier to remember. The area of practice would be planning and documenting children's learning and development.

The use of I Pads in daily practice for digital documentation. The rationale is to have all the children's information and documentation in one place. The resource is needed to file

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photographs, to access calendar, rollcall and enrol partnerships with parents at the tip of the finger. It will provide an opportunity for digital learning for children. The area of practice it will make the process of assessment more efficient as observations, assessments and planning for children's learning and development will be in the one place along with pictures of their work. In addition, I Pads will be a great resource for all areas of practice cutting down on unnecessary paperwork, reverting to ticking boxes instead. Additionally, the resource can be used for policy revision and management for example, the collection policy knowing who is allowed to pick up the child.

Early childhood education in the form of CPDs. The rationale is to provide additional education to support practitioners. The resource is needed to ensure quality, care and education of the early years sector. Mandatory CPDs should be offered to keep the learning continuous for practitioners. According to (DCEDIY, 2021).²² EYP's should engage in continuous professional development courses to keep professional practice current. Moreover, engaging in regular CPD courses keeps students abreast of current professional practice in ECCE both at home and internationally.

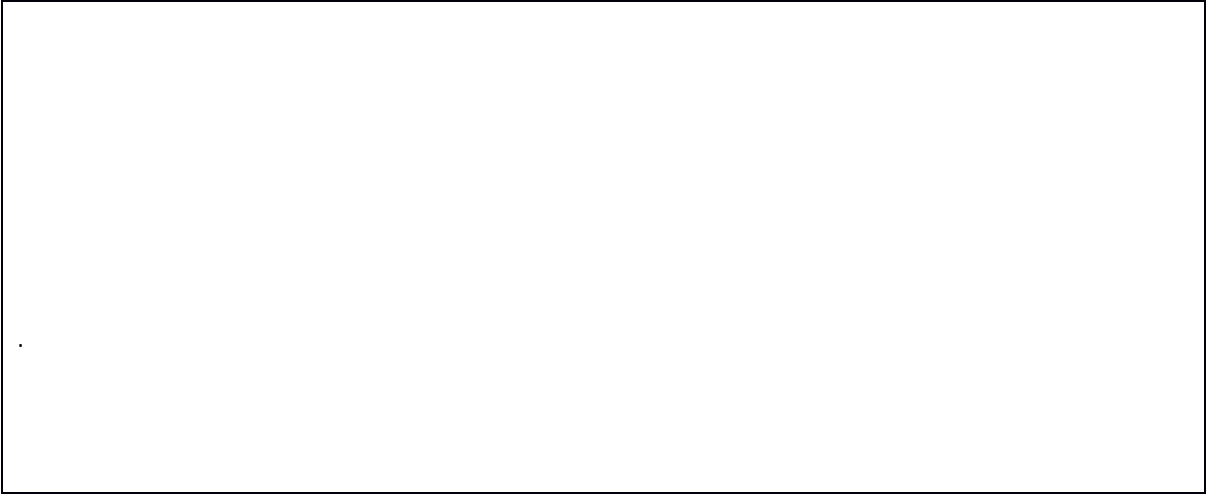
A practitioners' professional platform to confer with other practitioners. The rationale is to reinforce good practice guidelines. The resource is needed for practitioners to engage in emotional support, advice, obtaining new ideas from each other to keep up to date with the curriculum such as crafting ideas, behaviour management, policy revision and inspectorate guidelines. It would support all areas of practice.

²² Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth , (2021). *Nurturing Skills: The Workforce Plan for Early Learning and Care (ELC) and School-Age Childcare (SAC), 2022-2028*. [Online] Available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/97056-nurturing-skills-the-workforce-plan-for-early-learning-and-care-elc-and-school-age-childcare-sac-2022-2028/> [Accessed 11 November 2023]



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