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:	
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	Dr Sheila Garrity, Dr Colette Murray, Dr Maja Hals Brosnan, and Dr Margaret O'Donoghue, on behalf of PLE.
Email address:	
Name of organisation/group:	*PLÉ* – the Association of Lecturers in in Early Childhood Education and Care degree courses at Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) in Ireland

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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?
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? This comment will be found later in this submission; however, we are including it here, due to its relevance to the area of relationships. We feel it is of critical importance this framework outlines that all families, all parents, and other family members do not always have the same capacities, nor do they have the same presence in the lives of their babies, toddlers, and young children. While we acknowledge the effort to be more inclusive, and welcome the phrase, '*most important people in my life*' as being more inclusive and open-ended, we believe the wording in relation to families should also reference the challenges some families face. Further, the presence of guardians or other caregivers, in lieu of parents, is a reality for many children; parents are not always the most important people in a child's life. Therefore, we propose the use of 'family / families' as the default term as this is more encompassing of the diversity of family structures, than using 'parents' as the default. We also recommend that the decided terminology used be well explicated for the reader/user of the framework.
Do the proposals emphasise babies, toddlers and young children as citizens with rights to meaningfully participate and exercise influence on decisions that affect them? We welcome the strengthening of the baby, toddler, and young child as citizens, as active members of their communities and wider society. We are concerned, at times, the draft framework presents a universal depiction of a certain childhood, or (as above) makes

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assumptions about all families and parents. It is an imperative to recognise the universal rights that the child bears, but not to assume a *universal child*.

For example, the framework must highlight that children also learn that they don't have the same lived experiences of 'rights' as others and they experience negative reactions to themselves and their families. This needs to be stated, and become a prompt for reflection and action, otherwise it will get lost.

We are also of the view that the 'influence' of the child's voice and actions can be further enhanced, with greater guidance for educators on how this can be achieved, in lived practice.

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

While the area of diversity, equity and inclusion has been strengthened significantly, we do, however, feel this area requires enhancement and further development; we believe it requires a greater presence throughout the framework. For example, discussion related to DEI is still primarily to be found in the theme of *Identity and Belonging*; whereas the theme of *Communicating* should include references to and very explicitly advocate for multilingual learning and identities. Further, it should recognise the strength in having a diverse workforce in terms of supporting children's socio-linguistic profiles and multilingual development. Similarly, the theme of *Exploring and Thinking* should make reference to the connection between multilingualism/diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds and children's mathematical and geographical exploring and thinking. Research suggests a close link between cultural and linguistic profiles and mathematical concept development (see the body of literature relating to culturally responsive mathematics). Embedding the concepts of DEI is central to underpinning a child's positive sense of wellbeing.

In regard to terminology, we believe the framework should be more explicit in the language used, naming concepts and clearly defining these, based on evidence-based definitions, in the Glossary. This language should be used frequently to prompt educators to reflect on these areas, their own biases and values. For example, the word stereotype is mentioned twice in the document once under learning environments and once in the Glossary. Prejudice is mentioned twice in the Glossary and once under Identity and Belonging. Discrimination is mentioned once in the Glossary, once under Identity and Belonging, and once under sustainability. There is no mention of 'race' or racism, sexism, ableism, classism, homophobia. Further, there is no guidance on addressing these real issues when working with the children.

These are real issues that affect children's lives and should be a least mentioned in an introduction to the framework considering individuals, families, communities and society

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are dealing with these issues in daily life. For example, we offer the following suggested text:

Children who experience stigmatisation and discrimination with their families require educators to nurture children's optimism and address barriers through challenging practices that contribute to inequalities or discrimination which can include negative attitudes and practices.

Children's experiences such as stigmatisation, discrimination, racism need to be named and outlined clearly in the framework. The word barrier only appears twice in the document under DEI (pg. 12) and again Adopting an inclusive, rights-based curriculum framework (pg. 31).

There are many barriers babies, toddlers, and young children face; these need to be identified and explicitly named to enhance educators' understanding of those challenges. Not naming such areas means leaving them unspoken when educators use Aistear in practice; therefore, such areas are less likely to be addressed in practice, engaged with through reflection, or in communities of practice, etc. We appreciate that some of these areas may be addressed more fully in the practice guide, but they still need to be named upfront.

We also do not want to stigmatise children as all children are rich in potential, have rights and are actively constructing their identities in a multitude of ways, but many children are also challenged by systems out of their control. As a society we need to name them and recognise the gaps and challenges children face to achieve their fullest potential. Therefore, Aistear needs to name these challenges too.

Further comments related to the concepts of *Diversity, Equity and Inclusion* will be noted throughout this submission.

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

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

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:

We have structured this section using the proposed principles as headings, ordered as they are in the draft. We begin with some opening general comments related to the approach to and content of the principles, in the draft.

We are of the view that while the concepts underpinning some of the principles are important and relevant, it is not clear what they mean for educators to take on board in practice. There may be an assumption that there is a shared understanding of these terms and educators are comfortable engaging with them. As this framework document will be used by educators, students, lecturers and others with a wide range of knowledge(s), values, skills and experiences, then elucidation of terminology is necessary within the document, underpinned by a well-developed glossary that reflects evidence-based definitions.

Throughout the principles, there are many opportunities to explicitly connect to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and accompanying Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). We wonder then, why these global educational concepts are not explicitly named. We recommend that they are found throughout the document, and as above, are elucidated where appropriate. The intent is to support educators to grasp the critical, urgent nature of the Anthropocene, including matters of global climate change, social justice, and related issues of (in)equality. These need to be explicit and linked to areas of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), community and children's rights. Educators need to be supported to consider how the climate crisis is eroding children's rights and there is a need to include children in problem solving.

As noted previously, while the areas of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) have been strengthened significantly, we do, however, feel these require enhancement and further development. The childhoods experienced by babies, toddlers and young children in Ireland today are diverse across a range of areas, therefore there is an imperative for this document to reflect such variations. We feel the document can read at times as if there is one presumed child, one presumed childhood. We believe DEI should have a greater presence throughout the framework, including through the set of principles.

Finally, the imagery on the front of the draft document, and on pg.8, pg.11, reflect the sense of a framework wherein concepts and elements are interwoven, interrelated, holistic

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and reinforcing of each other. We find that 'interwoven' sense to be present at some points through the principles, however, there are lost opportunities at points to strengthen the interrelated nature of core concepts. Rather than being repetitive, these present opportunities to embed and reinforce ideas and strengthen their importance.

You state in the document that equality has been replaced by equity which is in keeping with policy and sectoral change. The state still uses equality of opportunity which reflects policy of access, participation, and outcomes. We would suggest not losing equality totally from the document as equality has many and more in-depth meanings. We recommend that equity is explained more thoroughly in the Glossary.

Agentic Global Citizens

We welcome the presence of this principle, strengthening a shared understanding of babies, toddlers and young children as autonomous beings, valued members of their community and wider society, building on the notion of agency, voice, and influence. These ideas reflect the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and accompanying Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), and as noted above, we wonder then, why these global educational concepts are not explicitly named here.

Further, Pt. 1, refers to 'equity, fairness, justice and respect.' Equity and fairness mean the same thing. Equity is about fairness and impartiality. Fair is a more accessible word, but it seems odd to use both together here.

Under pt.2, we suggest the inclusion of this wording: *I have the right to be protected from bias or prejudice or discrimination and harm and to know that you will actively help me when I need it.*

We also feel it should be reworded to be more explicit about forms of harm; for example, *the right to be protected from unfair comments or situations*.

We recommend the rewording Pt. 3, as follows: ..... *Provide meaningful opportunities for me to show empathy and live sustainably.*

We would suggest rewording Pt. 4, as it could be interpreted as a "them and us" situation, whereas this should be an all-inclusive statement. Perhaps loose the "also". We appreciate that you a making a statement about Irish culture however Ireland is a multicultural society.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

Under this principle, a list of seven features relevant to informing participation are given. Clarity on how this list was derived would be welcomed. There are nine grounds of discrimination

covered in the Equal Status Acts (2000-2018), and this list includes six of these. Some legislated grounds are omitted (i.e. disability) and other grounds are included here (i.e. worldview). We recommend the list is reviewed, in comparison to the "nine grounds" in the Acts, with the list in the draft augmented as relevant. Then as matter of clarity and as a way to inform readers of Aistear, a foot note should explain where these features came from, why some are omitted and why new characteristics are included. Without such clarity, this seems like an uninformed random list of grounds, absent from the wider contextual understanding. Consistency across the document is necessary, as this list is noted at several points.

Following on from the point above, we note this principle should also refer to socio-economic status, languages and cultures, ability/disability, as these aspects of intersecting identities are not necessarily captured by 'ethnicity' or 'worldview' (though we are not sure what is meant by a child's worldview).

We suggest the following edits to the wording in the draft (all found on pg. 12):
All babies, toddlers and young children have a right to access and participate safely and meaningfully in experiences to fulfil their potential as unique individuals.

•*Recognise my abilities, identities, needs and potential and respect my right to belong. Puts supports in place so that I feel safe and am empowered to participate and contribute in a meaningful way.*

•*My family, culture, home-language (s) and ethnicity are what make me Me! Recognise and respect me for who I am. Celebrate and value me, my family and community.*

Relationships and Interactions

Link to SDGs here too This principle builds on principles in the first draft of Aistear, strengthening the relational understanding of early childhood education and care. We welcome the phrase 'social worlds' as capturing the understanding that early years settings are but one of the many contexts babies, toddlers and young children inhabit.

Though critically important for positive wellbeing and development, not all the relationships in a child's life are strong, nurturing or secure and educators should be mindful of this. They should also be mindful of their role as a support to families and extended caregivers. Therefore, we suggest rewording of Pt. 2, pg. 13 as follows:
- *Strong, secure attachments with the important people in my life who take time to know me and be with me, are essential. You can support these attachments by developing a trusting, supportive and respectful relationship with the people who are most important to me, including my family and other caregivers.*

The value of a slow relational pedagogy can be developed as a separate point.

We recommend the inclusion of the following point:
- *You support me when my relationships are hard and ensure I have a safe space to be myself.*

Family and Community

This is a section that suggests all childhoods are similar, that all families have the same capacities and presence in the lives of their babies, toddlers and young children. While we acknowledge the effort to be more inclusive, and welcome the phrase, '*most important people in my life'* as being more inclusive and open-ended, we believe the wording here should also reference the challenges some families face. Further, the presence of guardians or other caregivers, in lieu of parents is a reality for many children; parents are not always the most important people in a child's life. Therefore, we propose the use of 'family / families' as the default term as this is more encompassing of the diversity of family structures, than using 'parents'.

We suggest the following wording:
The lives of babies, toddlers and young children are enriched by those who nurture and care for them: parents, extended family and friends, educators, other professionals, and community members. In turn...... lives of others. At times, these important people may need additional support and guidance in order to meet the needs of the babies, toddlers and young children in their lives; that is when a knowledgeable, reflective and agentic educator can play a critical role. Children's experiences....... understandings of diversity of place, gender, routines, ...

And for Pt.1, we suggest:
- *The members of my family are the most important people in my life.*

For Pt. 3, we suggest:
- *I want to share my family background, culture and....*

We suggest the inclusion of the following point:
- *Acknowledge that my family may experience challenges and I need support and empathy.*

Agentic Educators

Overall, we welcome the inclusion of the concept of agency / agentic, both in relation to the educator and to babies, toddler and young children; we feel this is an opportunity to develop shared understandings across the field, related to how these key actors are constructed. However, we are of the view that agency and agentic need to be explained in detail from the very outset and not introduced initially as footnotes. These are huge concepts, and in particular in relation to agentic educators, a new concept for many to consider and to develop efficacy of understanding. A statement to commence the framework should outline the understanding of Agentic Educator that is used in Aistear and how it speaks to existing terms such as responsive educator, reflective educator, etc. Further, this section should clearly describe what is meant by agentic child to inform agency-supporting practices.

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Under Agentic Educator (pg, 13) the opening reads awkwardly. It begins with '*Agentic Educator*' as its heading, then begins with '*Educators are agentic and support.....*' later in this document we make recommendations related to the 'Image of the Educator' as set out on pg. 9. Presuming this revision is undertaken, then at this point we recommend the following:

Use '*Agentic Educator*' as the proposed heading, then begin this section as: "*Educators, as imagined in the Vision for Aistear, support and facilitate.... *". This connects the principles to the vision and strengthens the developing understanding of the agentic educator.

We refer to this sentence: '*Through reflection and comhrá (conversation), educators can consolidate and extend children's learning and development through a rights-based, inclusive, informed and intentional pedagogy guided by professional knowledge and skills.*' It is not clear with whom this reflection and conversation occurs. Is it referring to educators coming together? We feel as stated, it reads as conversations with children. We believe this section should strengthen the role of reflection, peer-reflection and building communities of practice, as well as partnership building with the important people in the lives of babies, toddlers and young children.

We suggest the following wording for Pt. 3:
- *I trust you will find appropriate resources, to support my identity, and help me....*

And for Pt. 4:
- *It helps me when you are aware of your own biases and those of others and that you protect me if I am being hurt by being stigmatised, excluded or discriminated against.*

Transitions

As noted under the principle of DEI, in reference to the Equal Status act, the list of areas under transitions need to be amended.

Again, under this principle we have the sense of all childhoods, and all families being universal, rather than unique, with their own histories and experiences. When it comes to engagement with education, some families will be well informed based on their social capital and own beneficent educational experiences; however, it is widely accepted that many have survived negative, stigmatising and limiting educational experiences. In addition, those who are new to Ireland, or who underwent their own education in another jurisdiction, may have only partial knowledge of the system beyond early years. A greater sense of the role of early childhood education and care as a critical first step in the educational path of babies, toddlers, and young children, and the need for educators and settings to bridge the transition in an informed and supportive manner, is required.

We suggest the following:

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....in the best interest of the baby, toddler, and young child. Therefore, it is an imperative that educators and others with an insider knowledge of early childhood, primary and special schools, inform, sign-post and guide families in a supportive manner, to make appropriate decisions, and take actions, related to these transitions. Child-led play....

We also suggest the addition of the following point:

- *Recognise that my family members may not understand some systems and find transitions hard and may need extra supports to help me transition.*

Holistic Learning and Development

As noted at the start of this section, there are opportunities to weave concepts through the principles, as well as through other elements of the framework. Through this description, the child with agency and autonomy in their own learning is clearly present, however they are not named as such. We recommend the use of these terms – agency, agentic, autonomy, voice, choice, influence, – to impress on the reader the holistic nature of the concepts underpinning Aistear aligned as it is to understanding the holistic nature of learning and development.

We also suggest the addition of the following as the 4th point:

- *I enjoy experimenting, taking risks, trial and error; this is when I apply my working theories, emerging ideas and hypotheses, leading to the discovery of new ideas and theories.*

Learning Environments

We recommend you strengthen the place of play as the predominant method through which babies, toddlers and young children learn. Play is mentioned at one time, however, we recommend that the terms play, playing, playfulness, are woven through this principle. Further, in recognition of an emergent, child-led approach, and children as rights holders, choice and voice needs to be present through this section.

We suggest the following amendment:

'In consultation and collaboration, babies, toddlers, young children and educators plan, audit and create aesthetically pleasing, challenging, autonomy supporting, diverse and inclusive spaces. They....

We suggest the following wording for Pt. 3:
- *I have a right to see my family, community, background and culture represented in the play resources, music resources, books, images on the wall and mark-making materials provided. Through the learning environment, I develop an understanding of myself and of others as it affirms diverse backgrounds. These include different gender, cultural, linguistic, ethnic, socio-economic backgrounds, and ability groups and includes materials that actively challenges stereotypes.*

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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

Some of the language used to describe babies, toddlers and young children, and the overall theme of Wellbeing would benefit from revised phrasing at points. We appreciate Aistear offers a strengths-based vision of the child; however, some presumptions are present. For example: 'They are also respectful...'. We are of the view that babies, toddlers, and young children CAN BE respectful, but this should not be assumed. Consider '*They can also be respectful of themselves, others and their environment, particularly when respectful actions are modelled for them*'.

The use of the term agency and agentic also needs attention. For example, 'They have a right to be agentic...' We would argue they *ARE* agentic; consider this wording: '*They have a right to have their agency recognised and facilitated, to have a say....*'. And later, starting with 'Physical wellbeing enables...'; consider: '...be adventurous, display their agency and autonomy, challenge .....'.

Some terms have been introduced that need further explanation and context, for example *misniuil* (brave). Under wellbeing, it states that 'they are brave' without prior introduction of the term misniuil or brave and what this means. Bravery is a very culturally specific value that is here framed as an inherent quality in children. Not all cultures value bravery, in fact many do not, and some cultures have vastly different understandings of brave to that which one we might have here. This warrants first of all a description of what misniuil means as a quality or value in Irish culture and how misniuil may differ from bravery if they are not entirely the same in meaning. Second all, it should be recognised that children can be confident, competent and agentic and not be brave. Brave may suggest that children can't be shy or that children's shyness should be replaced with bravery as a contrasting disposition. Terms such as brave/misniuil, amongst others, need greater clarity and explanation (in the text itself, not in footnotes).

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We believe opportunities to embed the SDGs through ESD practices, language and prompts should be grasped through the theme of Wellbeing. We should assume the updated Aistear will have a similar lifespan of over a decade, therefore ESD must feature throughout the document, including in this theme and the follow-on Aims.

Theme: Identity and Belonging

The area of identity/belonging and diversity more broadly is still quite focused on celebrations and could be even stronger in terms of describing what a social justice approach and culturally responsive pedagogy would look like as it is laid out in the vision. The social justice approach is much more visible in the actual theme of identity and belonging. This includes describing in detail why equity is chosen over equality and then see this through in the whole document – for example, inequity is defined as inequality rather than in terms of inequity and there is still a focus on equality of opportunity (rather than for example Lynch's idea of equality of condition) or as in line with equity, a focus on what children need (with an associated focus on greater recognition of the difficulties experiences by many children in relation to homelessness, poverty and also having multiple languages and cultures at home), emphasising the need for a funds of knowledge approach.

In line with the change to equity, the wording in the final bullet point on page13 which focuses on protection, should also include reference to promoting anti-bias and justice more actively. Equity and equality (only once) are used in the document – either explain the difference or only use one term. Also explain inequity in more detail.

It would be helpful to really explain the notion of *meas* (respect) and link this in with identity and belonging. Like meitheal, meas should be central to identity and belonging. What makes *meas* a uniquely Irish concept and how can it help us with an understanding of inclusion?

There could also be a greater focus on gendered identities and how educators can challenge gender stereotypes and gendered play, which is still very prominent in some ECEC settings.

Following on from those points, we make the following recommendations for revised wording for this theme:

The Theme of Identity and Belonging is about babies, toddlers and young children, who are constructing their own identity through their relationships with their family, their peers and community, and in feeling supported by a sense of meitheal (community spirit of coming together). Educators are informed by their awareness of age, language, gender, family status, disability, socio-economic status, ethnicity, religion, worldview, or membership of the Traveller community [Refer back to comments re: Equal Status Acts and nine grounds of discrimination, in reconsidering this list, and /or clarify terms used]. *Children have a positive sense of who they are, feel recognised, valued and respected for who they are.*

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From birth babies, toddlers and young children develop a sense of who they are. Relationships with family members, other adults and children, friends, peers and members of their community play a key role in supporting them as they construct their identities. Babies, toddlers and young children can have multiple identities …..

Throughout Aistear, educators are encouraged to share positive messages of acknowledgement, meas (respect), grá (love), and encouragement with babies, toddlers and young children, to support them to have a positive sense of who they are; to have confidence in knowing that their voice is listened to, heard and responded to. These messages also give them confidence to express their views and opinions, to make choices, and to help shape their own learning. Aistear promotes practice that embraces diversity, reflects on attitudes in relation to equality and diversity. It recognises that such attitudes and values influence babies, toddlers and young children, thereby supporting educators in developing insights, self-awareness and skills to empower babies, toddlers and young children to develop a strong sense of identity and belonging. This helps ensure all babies, toddlers and young children are respected and valued and that they can recognise and respond to discrimination and prejudice.

This helps ensure all babies, toddlers and young children are respected and valued and that they can recognise and respond proactively to stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination.

On pg. 20, the draft framework states: 'T*his helps ensure children….. can recognise and respond to discrimination and prejudice'*.

We find this phrasing to be quite vague, even for educators. How is it envisaged that children 'respond' to discrimination? This needs more explanation.

Finally, we believe opportunities to embed the SDGs through ESD practices, language and prompts should be grasped through the theme of Identity and Belonging. We should assume the updated Aistear will have a similar lifespan of over a decade, therefore ESD must feature throughout the document, including in this theme and the follow-on Aims.

Theme: Communicating

The theme of communicating recognises children's multiple ways of communicating but there could be a greater focus on intercultural communication and multilingualism, which is not really referenced under this theme. Cultural diversity and inclusion should be woven throughout themes and not just related to the theme of Identity and Belonging.

Referring to the '…. importance of Gaeilge….' this is not everyone's cultural heritage, not those families who have come to Ireland nor all communities/ethnic groups who historically inhabited this island. As noted earlier, such phrasing creates an 'us and them' sense, and fails to promote inclusion. Therefore, we recommend this is amended as follows: *'…importance of Gaeilge as one*

part of the cultural heritage of this land'. We should also keep in mind that there are other historical languages related to the cultural heritage of Ireland, including Cant and Ulster-Scots/Ullan.

As with the previous themes, we believe opportunities to embed the SDGs through ESD practices, language and prompts should be grasped through the theme of Communicating. We should assume the updated Aistear will have a similar lifespan of over a decade, therefore ESD *must* feature throughout the document, including in this Theme and the follow-on Aims.

Theme: Exploring and Thinking

It would be helpful under the theme of exploring and thinking that there is greater acknowledgement that children's languages and linguistic profiles influence their thinking and engagement across subject areas, in particular in relation to mathematical and geographical knowledge, exploration and thinking.

Increasing research is showing the need for culturally responsive mathematics education, right from early childhood. The updating of Aistear is a very good opportunity to really strengthen the connection between children's socio-linguistic profiles and development and other areas of their thinking and exploration, such as mathematics.

We welcome the reference to education for sustainable development under this theme, however we recommend the following amendments.
Rather than phrase this as: '*They learn about geography and education for sustainable development*' we suggest: '*They learn about geography and the sustainable development goals, through education for sustainable development approach*'. The rationale here is that ESD is not a 'thing' to learn about but rather, a way of or approach to learning, a process of learning, and this can include how you learn about geography.

Secondly, to add to this sentence: '....*an awareness and understanding of their role in caring for the earth and for others, including other people and other living beings*'.

We also feel this theme and its underpinning aims can be further developed to reflect SDGS and ESD.

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

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We appreciate the intention here, to demonstrate the interconnected, holistic understandings of learning, being, developing, interacting, (and more), which draw on, enhance and are enhanced by the underpinning concepts, values and philosophies. In our reading, we are of the view that the principles of Aistear can frequently be found interwoven through the Themes, other times, it is not so evident. And we are coming to this document as researchers/lecturers/academics in the field. We wonder how evident this will be for the educator who is early in their career, or who completed their initial training many years before, as well as for the student-educator.

We recommend, that a more explicit – visible - method be considered to demonstrate the interwoven nature of the Principles and Themes. This could be manged through hyperlinks between the two; or as Síolta was designed, through 'Signposting' between Themes and Principles.

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

Image of the Framework:
Whereas we recognise that Aistear is a curriculum framework, developed to support early *learning* we feel the characterisation of the baby, toddler, or young child predominantly as a *learner* in the figures representing Aistear, detracts from their multiple identities and devalues other characteristics, by comparison. Children are much more than competent and confident 'learners'. If the framework is about addressing the rights of a child holistically, we would suggest just putting 'babies, Toddlers and Young Children' as the centre of the image (See Figure 2, pg. 11) and not agentic competent and confident *learners* as it situates children as learners only and not as creators or protagonists in their own emergence.

On pg. 8, Figure 1, presents the structure of the draft Aistear Framework. Here we have the overarching title/framework, underpinned by *Themes, Principles*. As noted, this figure as sets out the structure, rather than the content of Aistear; therefore, we recommend in the centre space, to replace *Agentic competent and confident learners* with '*Image of the Baby, Toddler, and Young Child*'. That is what we interpret to be the structural element this position reflects.

Underpinning Both Figs. 1 and 2, we recommend the inclusion of *Vision* and *Guidance for Good Practice*, as structural elements omitted from this version of the framework. Leaving out these elements renders them as unimportant in the overall framework, which we view them not to be.

General comments:

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What is <u>not made explicit</u> in the document is as important as what is in the document. It sends a noticeably clear message. There is a need to be explicit about the diversity in the country, about poverty, disadvantage, and exclusion, including racism, sexism, ableism, homophobia.....

We need to move beyond focusing on culture when we talk about diversity and representing diversity. It would be valuable to talk about gender, disability, family structures, languages, throughout the document, reflecting the intersectional understanding of multiple-identities.

There is nothing in the framework about elevated expectations. Having elevated expectations of 'all' children is important. There is ample research about educators having limited or low expectations of children from disadvantaged or diverse backgrounds. We therefore suggest that this is clearly named in the principles of Aistear.

We are living in the Anthropocene; as such the Introduction must comment on the very changing reality for babies, toddlers, and young children today. The SDGs and ESD in its broadest sense must have a central place in the Introduction Vision, Purpose as well as throughout the other elements of this framework. To omit such comments will deem this framework out of date, from the moment it is published.

Introduction of words in Irish: While we understand the move to introduce Irish terms and words throughout the document to emphasise Irish culture and language, this does not always work in practice, throughout the document. There are some terms such as *macnas* (playfulness) and *ionadh* (wonder), amongst others, that are not terms with particular Irish meanings that can't be properly translated but that are rather, conceptual ideas or theoretical terms taken from ECEC literature/thinking and translated into Irish. This is not very helpful when such conceptual ideas need to be promoted clearly and without confusion regarding meaning. We are of the view that in bringing these concepts int Aistear, it would be more helpful to situate the words in English within ECEC knowledge and pedagogy (to strengthen the sense of professionalism and strong theoretical foundations) rather than within Irish culture from whence these concepts do not necessarily stem. Many of the Irish phrases under 'supporting Aistear' work a little better but the cultural meanings and associations need to be described and explained (e.g. aoibneas croi / gladness of the heart). The ECEC workforce is very diverse, and many do not have Irish. As a curriculum framework document, it would become far more meaningful to non-Irish educators if these phrases and their cultural meanings were contextualised and explained to support a deeper understanding of 'Irishness' that can then be built into ECEC practice.

New, prevalent terminology needs to be introduced, a rationale for its inclusion given, and an explanation as to what it means, underpinned by an evidence-base that is also provided. This can be complemented by the Glossary of Terms (see more below on this) but still requires an initial description. For example, a *slow, relational pedagogy: w*e cannot assume a shared understanding of the meaning for this term. Similarly, 'agency' and 'agentic' (we discuss these below, under Vision).

We suggest use of 'families' rather than 'parents'; further, when it is used, we suggest a broader phrasing is offered, presenting the various people who may have a meaningful role for a child.

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Using a footnote, explain that the term 'family' will be used throughout the document, however, this broader understanding should not be presumed, but made explicit.

We found it disappointing not to see a reference/footnote to the DCEDIY (2016) Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Charter & Guidelines. We believe Aistear, Síolta and the DEI-C&G should be promoted as a trio of professional frameworks that complement each other and will scaffold educators' practice.

Specific Comments:

We recommend the opening line of the Introduction be amended as follows: '*From the moment they are born until they take their first step into….'*

The Introduction at the beginning of the document should address overarching issues and offer explanations on specific areas. We make the following recommended for inclusion in this section:

This section should have a statement on the changing demographics of the country and acknowledge Ireland as a multicultural society wherein 20% of the population was 'born elsewhere'.

This is also where the cultural heritage and first language of Ireland can be acknowledged. We welcome the greater focus on the 'cultural and linguistic history and story' (pg5) of Ireland, alongside that of the diversities of histories and stories shared by children, families and their varied communities. We are concerned, however with the use of the term 'our', as in '….. acknowledging our cultural…….' Pg.5). 'Our' in this context presumes all readers/users of Aistear, share one particular history/story. This privileging can be avoided by using the word 'the' and 'Ireland' in place of 'our', as in: There is a focus on acknowledging the cultural and linguistic history and story of Ireland, and as part of ……."

There should also be an acknowledgement of our indigenous minority ethnic community, the Traveller community. Ireland is now a vibrant multicultural country which embraces all sorts of ethnicities, blended multicultural families with multiple languages, Irish born children with many different cultural heritage connections. It will be important to acknowledge that diversity up front in the document.

As previously highlighted in this submission, the source of the list of characteristics included in the Introduction (pg7) needs to be explained. As noted earlier: *There are nine grounds of discrimination covered in the Equal Status Acts (2000-2018), and this list includes six of these. Some legislated grounds are omitted (i.e. disability) and other grounds are included here (i.e. worldview). We recommend the list is reviewed, in comparison to the "nine grounds" in the Acts, with the list in the draft augmented as relevant. Then as matter of clarity and as a way to inform readers of Aistear, a foot note should explain where these features came from, why some are omitted and why new characteristics are included. Without such clarity, this seems like an uninformed random list of*

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grounds, absent from the wider contextual understanding. Consistency across the document is necessary, as this list is noted at several points.

Additional terms to be considered include socio-economic status or class, languages, religion.

There is, at times, a sense of one universal childhood in Ireland today, that the diversities of lived experiences of children are not fully acknowledged. Therefore, we recommend an outline of the challenges for children living in adverse situation should be outlined in the introduction. Children living in poverty, disadvantage, unsafe spaces, direct-provision, in emergency accommodation, unofficial and official halting sites should be visible. Also, children who have experienced trauma and children living with protracted illness or disability need to be acknowledged. There is an absence of the realities for some children throughout the framework. Many of these children experience stigma, exclusion (mentioned once only), and trauma (mentioned only once). Children can't learn if they are unhappy, stressed, anxious, hungry or uncertain of their day-to-day situation. This reality needs to be identified in the curriculum framework to support critical discussion amongst educators.

There is an increasing focus on 'fun' and '*spraoi*' (these are not necessarily referred to together but scattered throughout, usually just in one language at a time). The notion of fun is something that is becoming more prevalent in policy (First 5, especially at the launch) and in practice since Covid. If there is a new 'trend' in pedagogy looking at 'fun', for example does it go hand in hand with 'slow pedagogy' (this also needs much more teasing out), this should be explained much more explicitly in the introduction/vision. Fun is new in Aistear and therefore needs to be contextualised.

The Vision:

The Vision would work better if it began with babies, toddler and young children and their capacity to engage in their own learning, development and creativity *or alternatively as protagonists with rights in their developing lives.* Then followed by the understanding that educators engage with Aistear to support/promote/empower children to be confident, creative and to engage actively in their world in all its diversity.

The highest expectations for *all* children should be mentioned in the vision of Aistear.

Image of the child: The section says Aistear views babies etc. We suggest another word (i.e. presents, constructs, guides educators to view the child...) is used as Aistear cannot *view* babies or toddlers etc.

We welcome the use of 'educators' in place of 'practitioners' however, a search and replace exercise is needed as a few 'practitioners' have survived the drafting.

The description of the educator is more focused on what they 'do' rather than who they 'are', as in what their qualities, values, skills and knowledge(s) are. The opening sentence, using

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'competent, confident, agentic and reflective' could be further developed, to better capture the necessary qualities, in an early childhood professional, to support the implementation of Aistear. This piece should refer to their skills, knowledge(s) and values, the imperative to engage in critical pedagogy, in order to uphold rights, promote equity, diversity and inclusion.

This section needs to acknowledge that educators also have their own different cultures and languages, and worldviews, and that there is space for these in practice – perhaps a note incorporated under 'agentic educator' that educators feel supported in interweaving their own cultural values and languages with those of the setting's and families. It needs to acknowledge that the educator profile in Ireland in particular is hugely diverse, in terms of cultural, socio-economic and socio-linguistic backgrounds and also in terms of qualifications (stemming from Ireland and abroad) and so educators are coming to Aistear with very diverse perspectives and from quite different subjective experiences of ECEC.

Suggested minor edits, though we recommend greater revisions, based on comments above:

Aistear ==views== (recommend change word) the educator as curious, competent, confident, agentic and critically reflective. Educators support learning by building on the unique life experiences of each baby, toddler and young child. They facilitate, empower and enrich holistic learning and development in safe inclusive environments. The educator recognises and acknowledges the importance of the family, culture, language(s), values, beliefs, traditions, experiences and interests that babies, toddlers and young children bring from their home and community. They also recognise and acknowledge the challenges that face many children in their world.

Purpose

We believe the *Purpose* of Aistear should be more than learning and development. It is also about demonstrating that children have rights and are protagonists in their own learning and development. It is also about creativity and joy and engaging with complexity. It is about being. We recommend these ideas are included in the Purpose, as are the following points:

- Supports addressing critical issues for and with children, families and communities from diverse backgrounds.
- There should be an addition which talks about embracing the diverse multicultural society we live in in Ireland today.
- Provide direction and inspire conversations between educators.
- Enabling educator and children to openly express their feelings and ideas in interactions with others.
- Missing is the language of safety and security under the theme identity and belonging

Glossary of Terms:

The inclusion of a *Glossary of Terms* is an essential element. It has the potential to offer a common professional vocabulary, with shared understandings, for students, educators, lecturers, researchers, and other key actors, within the Irish early childhood education and care context. Therefore, the terms included, and the definitions provided, must withstand scrutiny, reflect current knowledge(s), and offer an evidence base.

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We are of the view that some terms are not as well developed as others and would benefit from revisions. Some of these terms need re-examining and include equity, inequity, agentic, agentic educator, democracy, etc. Where possible, reference to a research/evidence/literature base, that influenced a proposed definition, is recommended. This will strengthen how the NCCA defines a term and support its acceptance as a common and shared understanding within the profession.

As this glossary is refined, look to the language of inclusion and diversity, noted earlier and see where terminology these can be used with greater frequency through the framework. The aim here is to strengthen educators' familiarity with these terms and promote reflection on practice, values and biases in this area.

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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.

Based on the significant feedback provided through the preceding sections, we will offer minor comments in these final sections.

Note the inclusion of 'Practitioners' rather than 'Educators' in title: _Building partnerships between parents and practitioners_ (pg. 30).

We question the presence of _Supporting Sustainability_ placed under _Building Partnerships..._ (pg 30); we are of the view that this area would fit better under _Learning and Development through Play_.

We are of the view that the section _Supporting Learning and Development through Assessment_ (pg.34) is quite brief. This is an area that early years educators frequently seek additional support; therefore, we believe giving further guidance here is an imperative.

Under _Learning and developing through interactions_, (pg. 31) the phrase, '_responsive and democratic model of education and care.'_ is included. It is unclear where this phrase originated and note it is not included in the Glossary of Terms (though 'democracy' is included; however, we question the definition give for _democracy_ there). Using terminology such as this, possibly new to many educators and certainly to ECEC students, must be grounded through explanations and citations to the evidence. We cannot assume shared understandings exist regarding such language/concepts.

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Further to this point, we strongly recommend referring as well (or instead) to the *anti-bias approach*, which has a history of presence in Irish practice literature (see Éíst, DEI guidelines from 2006, 2016 among others).

Creating inclusive learning environments (pg. 33): This section is missing an opportunity to address diversity within the environment more holistically. It mentions meaningful participation and representation which will be further developed as it is underlined, but this warrants further discussion, even if brief here. Suggestions about auditing, sourcing appropriate materials should be mentioned again here. This section is welcomed, but this piece should be more extensive in addressing inclusive environments.

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?

Appendix 1; Example 1: Documenting the Learning (pg. 38).
We believe the cyclical model of documenting the learning is a useful tool and an appropriate pedagogical process within early years practice. While familiar to educators from the previous iteration of Aistear, this model is further developed, evidencing the depth and richness of the educator's role, the place of their professional skills, knowledge(s) and values (SKV), in such complex processes. We were disappointed, therefore, to see the stage of 'reflecting' to be neglected. As described, 'Reflecting begins the process again....' It appears nothing more than the transition to the next cycle; however, we are of the view that the stage of reflection is far more involved than simply moving on. Reflecting is the culmination of what preceded it – it draws on the noticing, the observing, documenting, assessing, planning and implementing; it provides that necessary 'pause' wherein the educator makes meaning, them self, of what is happening for this child (or baby, or toddler), drawing on their SKV, past experiences, specific context, interactions with family, etc. We strongly encourage the revised/final draft to present 'reflecting' as the critical part of the documentation process, so that educators can appreciate its importance.

Also from Appendix 1:

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We encourage the acknowledgement and recognition of the child's multiple identities in the examples (background, ethnicity, language, cultural heritage, gender, religion and colour as appropriate). In this way educators can move beyond 'learning' to see the impact of family background on how the children is responding in a given situation. This needs to be outline more clearly in the framework.

We suggest you change the name from Sammy - *Sammy who is 15 months old* - as this may presume a particular identity. That said, there is nothing about their identity background, ethnicity, family status, even presumed gender, etc. This should be included in the process.

Appendix 1, Example 2, (pg 42) refers to *Slow relational pedagogy in practice*:
We welcome the inclusion of this example but wish to comment on the description. While comments capture the challenge of separation for Sadie and her mother, as she pursues further education. Given the uniqueness of this child, and her family's lived experience, it is also worth noting that the family may also be nervous of the adventure because of their fear of discrimination for themselves and in particular for their baby. This is a missed opportunity to name some of the challenges for Travellers in accessing ECEC.

Example 3 (pg 44-45). Examples of routines and activities to support sustainability in early childhood.
Under the Social-cultural pillar, photo frames are suggested
We recommend the building of a family wall (not tree) at the children's height (eye level). Use of Velcro to attach pictures to the wall (possibly laminated) so the wall can be an active tool in the setting and the children can take the photos from the wall when they choose. The family wall should be used as an active tool for the children on a daily basis.