



NCCA

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

Consultation report on updating *Aistear*: Phase 2

May 2024

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An overview of key findings from the phase 2 consultation

The following key findings have emerged from the Phase 2 consultation process to update *Aistear- the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*:

- **Overall positive response:** Overall, respondents conveyed a positive response to the draft updated *Aistear* document.
- **Familiarity and structure:** The proposed updates were recognised as creating a reassuring sense of familiarity, with improved accessibility and ease of navigation.
- **New concepts and terminology:** Respondents broadly welcomed the replacement of terms like 'children' with 'babies, toddlers and young children' and 'practitioner' with 'educator.' The introduction of new concepts like 'slow relational pedagogy', the 'agentic educator', and 'agentic child' was also positively received. However, there were calls for greater clarity and explanation of new terms. The definition of 'parent' offered in the proposals was identified as presenting a somewhat limited and 'traditional' view of family with a broader definition of this term was suggested.
- **Who is *Aistear* for?:** The use of educator to describe all who use *Aistear* was reported by some respondents to be confusing and requires further consideration. In particular, there was a call for greater visibility of childminders and parents in the Framework. In addition, some respondents requested greater visibility for the educator in the vision of *Aistear*.
- **Irish language:** There was an overwhelmingly positive reaction to including the Irish language, seen as central to cultural and linguistic history. Some respondents suggested a clearer rationale for using Irish terms and integrating them more effectively into the document. There were also calls for greater recognition of the importance of the other languages children are exposed to in their communities.
- **Interactions and relationships:** The majority agreed that the proposals draw greater attention to the importance of interactions and relationships. Slow relational pedagogy was well-received, emphasising the importance of quality relationships and interactions.
- **Recognition of children's rights:** The majority of respondents agreed that the proposals emphasise babies, toddlers, and young children as citizens with rights. Concerns were raised about presenting a universal depiction of childhood and the need to move beyond participation rights. Concerns included the potential universality of the Framework, contested terminology around citizenship, tension between rights and responsibilities, and the need to broaden the definition of a rights-based approach were highlighted by respondents. Recommendations included explicit inclusion of international frameworks, such as the *United Nations Convention on*

the Rights of the Child (1989) (UNCRC) and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (2015). Emphasis on global citizenship was also suggested and respondents recommended specific references to the UNCRC and Ireland's responsibilities in this regard.

- **Further explanation and glossary:** Respondents suggested additional explanations for new terms, with the majority calling for a comprehensive glossary of terms.
- **Diversity, equity, and inclusion:** The majority of respondents agreed that the proposals embed the concepts of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Concerns did arise in relation to the removal of the term 'equality'. Some respondents stated that inclusion could be more seamlessly woven throughout the document. It is important to acknowledge the voices that are not as strongly represented in this consultation. The perspectives of babies, toddlers and young children from communities who are often lesser heard are not as visible as others in the consultation. While parents from these communities did take part, NCCA's continued engagement with communities reflecting the broad diversity of lesser heard voices will be essential as the updated Aistear is introduced to the early childhood sector in the years ahead. This work will help to ensure that the resources NCCA develops to support early childhood educators' work with the updated framework, include examples of inclusive practices and draw attention to what makes these practices inclusive.
- **Learning through play and hands-on experiences:** The majority of respondents agree that the proposals emphasise learning through play and hands-on experiences. The emphasis on play for its own sake and the explicit recognition of the right to play was welcomed. There was a call for a broader definition of the arts within the document, emphasising creative expression. References to the outdoor environment were welcomed and some respondents called for even more emphasis to be placed on connecting children with the natural world. Some respondents expressed concerns that the emphasis on play might overshadow the intentional role of the adult in supporting learning.
- **Continuity of experience and progression of learning:** Transitions were recognised as important and respondents welcomed a greater focus on transitions across the day and from pre-school to primary school. However, there was a call for clarity on the perceived move away from using *Aistear* in primary school settings and the role of childminders in daily transitions. Concerns were raised about the continuity of experience and progression in learning, particularly in the transition from early childhood to primary school.
- **Principles of early learning and development:** The majority of respondents welcomed the reduction in the number of principles from twelve to nine. Feedback suggests that Principles and Themes are interwoven, but there are calls for clearer visual representation of these

interconnections. Concerns were raised about the removal of sample learning opportunities and there were calls for a consistent developmental approach.

- **Areas for further consideration:** A number of areas were noted by respondents as requiring further consideration. These included:
 - STEM
 - Digital Literacy/ Technologies
 - Literacy
 - Numeracy
 - Assessment, planning and documenting.

- **Supporting educators:** Respondents identified a number of conducive conditions which they deemed necessary for the realisation of an updated *Aistear* in practice. Examples include: the need for time to become familiar with the updated *Aistear*, continuous professional development (CPD) and a coordinated national rollout of training.

Section 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework is now 15 years old, having been initially published in October 2009. Recognising significant changes in early childhood provision in Ireland, encompassing national developments, policies, strategies, curriculum and assessment advancements, and children's lived experiences, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) embarked on updating *Aistear*. The aim of the update is to ensure that the Framework continues to support high-quality learning and development experiences for babies, toddlers, and young children in Ireland for the years ahead.

This document presents the outcomes of Phase 2 of the consultation process. This phase of the updating process focused on actively engaging with stakeholders to gather their perspectives on the proposed updates to *Aistear*. Phase 1 took place from May 2021 to April 2022, during which stakeholders, including babies, toddlers, young children, parents, educators and others were invited to share their views about the strengths of *Aistear* and their suggestions for enhancements and updates. The consultation report from Phase 1 is available [here](#).

Phase 2 commenced on September 11, 2023, with the publication of [draft proposals](#) for an updated *Aistear*. Subsequent to this, a consultation was conducted to collect feedback on the proposals, concluding in November 2023. This report outlines the findings from that consultation and discusses their implications for finalising the updates to *Aistear*. As with Phase 1, a separate consultation with babies, toddlers and young children was undertaken by a consortium of researchers from Maynooth University, Stranmillis University and Early Childhood Ireland on behalf of NCCA. The report from the consultation with babies, toddlers and young children during Phase 1 (O'Toole, Walsh, Kerrins, Doherty, Forde, Kelleher, Matson, McCartney, Mooney, Stafford, and Stokes, 2023) can be found [here](#).

A research design was developed and a significant amount of data, the basis for this report, was gathered through a variety of methods. These are outlined in Section 2: Methodology which gives details of the research design, data collection methods and data analysis process. Section 3 presents the findings from the focus groups, questionnaires and submissions. All the data from these various data collection methods was analysed through a rigorous and robust process to identify the significant themes arising, with each data set reported separately. The findings need to be viewed in light of an important limitation. Even with the tailored, focused work to encourage and support communities who are often lesser heard in curriculum consultations, representation from those communities was relatively small. This highlights the importance of continued and enhanced engagement by NCCA, and those working on its behalf, with the communities and with those working closely with them. This engagement will help us, as an organisation, to better understand how we can improve the design of our consultations and research to enable and encourage wider participation in curriculum development, and how we can effectively communicate the outcomes to participants from the communities. Notwithstanding this limitation, the findings provide clear recommendations which will inform the final iteration of an updated *Aistear*.

1.2 The policy context for an updated *Aistear*

Aistear is currently undergoing an update during a period of substantial change and growth in the early childhood sector. In addition to the policy initiatives and developments highlighted in the Updating *Aistear* Consultation Report from Phase 1 (NCCA, 2022), there continues to be significant developments in this space that the update is cognisant of. Notable developments

include the updated *First 5 Implementation Plan for 2023-2025*, outlining actions for the next three years. Amidst these transformative changes in the early childhood sector, the ongoing update of *Aistear* proposes important key messages, the feedback on which will be discussed in the following section.

1.3 The key messages for an updated *Aistear*

The proposals for the updated *Aistear* were grounded in several key messages that emerged during Phase 1. These messages were derived from various sources, including a literature review by French and McKenna (2022), a consultation involving babies, toddlers, and young children conducted by O'Toole, Walsh, Kerrins, Doherty, Forde, Kelleher, McCartney, Stafford, Stokes, Matson, and Mooney (2023), and NCCA's Consultation Report from Phase 1 (2023). These served as the foundation for guiding the development of the updated proposals, and they are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1: The key messages that informed the proposals for an updated *Aistear*

1	View the baby, toddler and young child as: agentic, competent and confident.
2	View the educator as: competent, confident, agentic and reflective.
3	Keep the structure of <i>Aistear</i> but update individual sections by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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.
4	Draw greater attention to the importance of interactions and relationships by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focusing on building trusting relationships 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.
5	Further emphasise babies, toddlers and young children as citizens with rights by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 Replacing 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

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promoting the importance of both rights and emerging responsibilities including exploring and identifying their place in the world and learning to live sustainably.
6	<p>Further embed the concepts of diversity, equity and inclusion by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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.
7	<p>Emphasise and reaffirm the centrality of learning through play and hands-on experiences by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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.
8	<p>Support greater continuity of experience and progression in learning by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 <i>Aistear</i> and the <i>Primary Curriculum Framework (2023)</i> Reaffirming the importance of noticing, observing, documenting, planning and assessing holistic learning and development including positive learning dispositions.

1.3 Communication strategy

The process of updating *Aistear* endeavoured to engage stakeholders from across the education and care sector, including more seldom heard voices. NCCA focused on supporting broad, far-reaching and inclusive awareness of, and engagement in, Phase 2 of the updating *Aistear* process. Various communication tools were used and the [Early Childhood Education Developments](#) section of the NCCA website was updated so that all information and associated materials and tools were easily accessible. A short information video on the proposed changes, along with a Frequently Asked Questions document (in English and Irish) were made available on the website.

NCCA's e-communication info@ncca regularly contained information on how individuals and organisations could get involved in the various consultation events and activities. Information articles were included in professional publications and key updates and information were shared on NCCA's social media platforms (X, Facebook and Instagram) to ensure the highest possible participation in Phase 2 of the updating process. Information was disseminated through various channels, including the networks of the [Updating Aistear Development Group](#), the [Board for Early Childhood and Primary Education](#), and County and City Childcare Committees (CCCs). Additionally, the message was circulated more broadly through parent and toddler groups and libraries were enlisted to share the information with families.

1.4 Overview of the report

Section 2 of the report provides a detailed overview of the data analysis conducted on three distinct sets of data: focus groups, written submissions, and online questionnaires. In Section 3, the report outlines the main findings from the consultation process. Moving to Section 4, there is an executive summary summarising the outcomes of the phase 2 consultation involving babies, toddlers, and young children (O'Toole, Ward, Walsh, Stokes, McCartney, Forde, Doherty and Winter, 2024). Section 5 concludes the report and presents several key actions and considerations necessary for finalising the updated *Aistear*, based on insights gathered during the consultation. Finally, it highlights conducive conditions identified by respondents for the successful realisation of the updated *Aistear* and outlines the next steps in finalising the Framework.

Section 2: Methodology

2.1 Design

The purpose of the Phase 2 consultation was to ensure that any person or organisation that wanted to express a point of view on the proposed update to *Aistear* would have a way of doing so and this was achieved through a range of methods for providing feedback. The design of the methodology was structured around the key messages that emerged from Phase 1 of the consultation (see Table 1). These were the basis for all data collected during the consultation and ensured consistency across all the data gathering methods as well as contributing to coherent communications.

The NCCA worked in teams, including independent note-takers and researchers, for both data gathering and analysis to enable peer evaluation and reflexivity (Chenail, 2011). As an example, at each online focus group, the team consisted of a facilitator from the NCCA and an independent note-taker. Following each of the online focus group, a de-briefing meeting of the facilitators and notetakers took place. In relation to the analysis, two members of the early childhood education team in NCCA worked with an independent researcher in relation to the focus group data, online submissions and questionnaire data. The team members met regularly with the independent researcher, participating in 'reflexive dialogue' as described by Braun and Clarke (2022). During these sessions, NCCA personnel collaborated with the researcher to discuss emerging themes and make decisions, aiming to minimise the potential impact of researcher bias. As the data gathered included both qualitative (focus group data/submissions) and quantitative (questionnaires) material, different methods of data analysis were used.

2.2 Data gathering

Data gathering during Phase 2 involved different modes for providing feedback (see Table 2). Two online questionnaires, differentiated for professionals and parents/guardians, served as the primary quantitative tools accessible on the NCCA website. A total of 735 professional questionnaire responses were received, with 725 in English and 8 in Irish. Parent/guardian questionnaire responses amounted to 248, all in English.

Qualitative online submissions were contributed by 23 authors, comprising 5 individuals and 18 organisations. One submission from an organisation was in Irish and was translated for analysis, providing the researcher with both Irish and English versions. Both online and face-to-face focus groups were conducted, where participants shared their feedback on *Aistear* based on the key messages outlined in Table 1. The focus groups included early years educators, academics, advocacy groups, parents, primary school teachers, National Voluntary Childcare Organisations, support services, and other interested groups and individuals. Between September 2023 and November 2023, a total of 11 focus groups were held, with 10 in English and one in Irish.

Additionally, a face-to-face stakeholder consultation event took place in Dublin on November 14, 2023, attracting 69 attendees representing various organisations within the Early Childhood sector, along with a number of educators.

Table 2: Overview of data gathering in Phase 2 Consultation

Consultation method	Participants/ Respondents	Number
Online focus group	49	7
In-person focus group	29	4
Online educator questionnaires	735	n/a
Online parent/guardian questionnaires	248	n/a
Written submissions	23	n/a
In-person event	69	1

2.2.1 Including lesser heard voices in the consultation

The findings from Phase 1 highlighted the need to work with and hear from communities who are often lesser heard in curriculum consultations. Concerns were noted about the lack of specific reference to children from diverse cultures, abilities, and backgrounds (NCCA, 2023, p. 54). In response to this insight from Phase 1, the Phase 2 research design intentionally incorporated purposive sampling to identify babies, toddlers, young children¹, parents, and educators who could offer a different perspective.

The Early Childhood Team in NCCA organised four face-to-face focus groups in socio-economically disadvantaged areas in Cork, Dublin, and Limerick to engage with educators and parents. A key aspect of the sampling process was the need to protect and respect the voices of participants. Purposive sampling involved working with colleagues from organisations working with and supporting these target groups, who acted as gatekeepers to ensure participants felt safe and valued in contributing to the consultation.

Participants in the focus groups included parents living in a Direct Provision Centre, educators and managers from two settings in areas of socio-economic disadvantage working with babies, toddlers, young children, and their families, with a focus on Traveller families, minority groups, and children with additional needs. A separate focus group was conducted with parents of babies, toddlers and young children attending a community service. Beyond providing feedback on the draft Framework, educators in these sessions were specifically asked about how *Aistear* could support their work with babies, toddlers and young children, and their families. For parents, questions about the proposed updated *Aistear* were reframed to inquire about what they

¹ In Phase 2, the process of consulting with babies, toddlers, and young children continued through the collaborative efforts of the consortium team comprising Maynooth University, Early Childhood Ireland, and Stranmillis University (O’Toole *et al.*, 2024). The consortium was specifically tasked with being mindful of ensuring that their sample for Phase 2 encompassed voices that are less frequently heard.

considered important experiences and learning opportunities for their children in early years settings so that they could contribute without knowing the detail of the Framework.

2.3 Data analysis

This section outlines the process of data analysis for each data set: focus groups, written submissions and online questionnaires.

2.3.1 Focus groups

Focus group data included the feedback from the face-to-face consultation event, in addition to the seven online and four face-to-face focus groups. An independent researcher, Dr Jennifer Pope, Mary Immaculate College, worked with members of the Early Childhood team in NCCA in an iterative, sense-making process. Within the focus groups, the facilitators addressed the four prompted areas:

- What are your take-away points from the Key Messages of the proposals?
- What are your views on the proposed vision and purpose of *Aistear*?
- What are your views on the proposed updated Principles and Themes of *Aistear*?
- Guidance for Good Practice and Supporting Educators.

The purpose of the analysis of the focus group data was to identify patterns (themes/topics) in the data collected. Thematic analysis, as defined by Braun and Clarke (2022) and outlined in Table 3, was the methodology adopted.

Table 3: An overview of Braun and Clarke’s (2022) six steps of data analysis

1	Becoming familiar with data, through interview transcripts, survey data and noting initial ideas
2	Systematically generating initial codes across entire data set
3	Searching for themes by collating codes into categories
4	Reviewing themes and generating a thematic map to analysis
5	Defining and naming themes by refining categories and discovering the overall story of the data
6	Producing the report - final opportunity for analysis in the selection of extracts for inclusion

In the first step, the focus group notes and summaries were analysed and coded in their entirety rather than question by question initially using Reflexive Thematic Analysis. In step 2, the data was systematically coded throughout and then recoded in step 3. Step 4 involved the generation of initial themes and developing visual maps. These themes developed in step 4 were refined in line with further coding and distilling of the data. Sub themes were also identified to provide a genuine representation of the data. The final overarching themes developed in step 5 were then

written up for step 6. Key extracts from the dataset of focus group notes were identified that best represented or told the story of the data within the themes and subthemes.

While reflective thematic analysis was considered a useful method of analysis to capture the patterns and essence of a dataset, further qualitative discourse analysis was used to provide a more comprehensive and representative analysis of the data. This led to the formation of specific tables collating specific recommendations in terms of terminology, presentation or words changes for example. The rationale for this was to generate useful signposts to inform the next stage of the process in updating *Aistear*. From an ethical perspective, it was also felt that it was important to give a voice and listen to participants that had specific concerns and to document them accordingly. Thematic analysis alone would not have given the full scope to do this.

2.3.2 Written submissions

The 23 written submissions, including translations of the one Irish submission, were shared with an independent analyst, Dr Mary Moloney, Mary Immaculate College. The written submissions template had 4 sections. The first section was an opportunity to provide overall comments about *Aistear*, the second section focused on the Principles of *Aistear*, the third section on the Themes of *Aistear* and the fourth section on the Guidelines for Good Practice. Given the scope of the submissions received and the rich feedback shared by organisations and individuals, the analysis of the written submissions mirrored the sequence of the template for clarity and presentation. Using the six-step process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2022) and referenced above in relation to the analysis of the focus group data, an iterative and rigorous thematic analysis was undertaken by the analyst who worked with members of the Early Childhood Team in NCCA. The coding process involved applying codes to data segments (chunk-coding) or line-by-line as appropriate. Detailed data tables were developed and updated throughout the data analysis process. These tables included salient commentary from each submission providing the context for the codes applied, as well as the overarching topics, developed from consolidating the codes over time. At this juncture, themes/topics featuring in only one or two written submissions were eliminated, leaving codes which were further consolidated.

As with the focus group analysis an additional process was employed. A summative content analysis was conducted, involving counting and comparing key words and content throughout the report. The combination of these data analysis approaches enhanced the rigor and trustworthiness of the analysis. This approach not only addressed specific questions in the NCCA consultation template but also provided comprehensive insights into the breadth and depth of attitudes and opinions regarding the proposals across different domains. It is also important to note that in addition to this analysis, all submissions, for which consent to publish has been given, will be published online alongside this consultation report on the NCCA website.

2.3.3 Questionnaires

Two questionnaires, one for professionals (735 responses) and the other for parents/guardians (248 responses), were completed. These were hosted on the Survey Hero platform. Both questionnaires were divided into five categories of questions:

- Identifier Questions
- Key Messages of Proposals
- Principles
- Themes

- Supporting *Aistear*.

The professional questionnaire provided a sixth section on alignment between the updated *Aistear* and the *Primary Curriculum Framework* (Department of Education, 2023) and also provided a link to the written submission template for anyone wishing to provide additional information. The parent/guardian questionnaire provided a section at the end for additional comments on how educators could be supported in using an Updated *Aistear* and another section for any other comments they wished to make.

All responses were downloaded using Microsoft Excel into Tabulated response and Individual response files both for the Professional and Parent/Guardians surveys for analysis by an independent researcher, Ms. Sarah Murphy, working with members of the Early Childhood team in NCCA. The data in the Tabulated responses Excel file was analysed and cross checked with the Individual responses excel file using the COUNTIF formula and then the data was used to produce graphs representing the findings. The Free Text questions were analysed in the Individual response files for both Professionals and Parents/Guardians and then tables and charts were created to illustrate the data. Descriptive text is included below each chart illustrating the particular significance of the chart.

Section 3: Findings

3.1 Focus group

Through the process of thematic analysis, four overarching themes were identified that best capture the overall story of the focus group data. As outlined in Figure 1, these themes were 'Recognition', 'Relationships', 'Recommended revisions' and 'Realising an updated *Aistear* in practice'. Several sub-themes also emerged, and each theme and sub-theme will now be described with sample accompanying data².

Figure 1: Themes and sub-themes from focus group analysis

Recognition	Relationships	Recommended revisions	Realising an updated <i>Aistear</i> in practice
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognition of the very young child • Recognising children as citizens with rights • Recognising agency • Recognising the educator as an agentic professional • Recognition of a changing society • Recognition of the positives of <i>Aistear</i> and building on strengths • Recognition of the importance of transitions • Need for further recognition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenges to building and maintaining relationships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive language • Concerns about particular language/terminology • Use of the Irish language • Accessibility • Infographics • The vision of <i>Aistear</i> • The purpose of <i>Aistear</i> • The principles of <i>Aistear</i> • The themes of <i>Aistear</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documentation, assessment and planning • Diversity, agency, rights & multiculturalism • Guidance and support for the Irish language • Suggested resources • The <i>Aistear Síolta</i> Practice Guide • Further guidance and support for parents • Shared vision and coordinated response to roll-out • Recognising the challenges to realising <i>Aistear</i> in practice

3.1.1 Recognition

The first theme identified across the focus group data comes under the heading of 'Recognition'³. Overall, there was a very positive response to the updating of *Aistear*. Key aspects within the theme of 'Recognition' were addressed throughout the focus group discussions, however, this theme was particularly evident when the focus groups discussed the key messages within the updated *Aistear* and when asked about the vision in *Aistear*.

3.1.1.1 Recognition of the very young child

² Please be aware that the quotes in this section include both direct statements from participants and notes taken by the focus group notetakers.

³ In this report, recognition is defined as per Merriam-Webster: 'the action of recognising, the state of being recognised'. It encompasses acknowledgment, knowledge or the feeling of encountering someone or something previously and receiving special notice or attention.

In terms of the child, it was noted that the updated Framework has recognised the importance of early childhood with particular reference to those from birth to three. Across the focus groups there was strong consensus for the use of 'babies, toddlers and young children'. It was also recognised that this was consistently used throughout the Framework. It was noted that this was a *positive move to see all stages mentioned*. It was noted that the updated Aistear gives *under 3s the visibility that they may not have had before*. Another focus group noted that *policy often focuses on older children, so the inclusion of babies is appreciated*. Similarly, another group noted that *the introduction of the ECCE scheme meant there was a focus placed on pre-school age children, emphasising the under 3s is very important*. Another group noted that *it great to see that is broken down into babies, toddlers and young children. They are visible in all areas of the Framework particularly in the themes. Policy tends to look at the older age range of children so great that babies are included here*. From an international perspective, it was noted within another focus group that *this revised terminology was welcomed as it will mirror the different ages and stages of development of babies, toddlers and young children. It is reflective of best practice in NZ, Australia and Norway*.

3.1.1.2 Recognising children as citizens with rights

Very much aligned to the recognition of the visibility of birth to 3 and the stages of development, was the positive recognition that young children are citizens with rights. This was also strongly welcomed across focus groups particularly in relation to babies. For example, one group noted that *it is great to see our youngest children recognised as citizens with rights*. Another focus group mentioned that *a rights-based approach was welcome with a move away from a needs-based approach*. In another group it was noted that *it was very positive to see the language of children's rights embedded in the Framework noting links to the UNCRC and children's right to play, to free thought, to development etc*. It was also positively noted that *there is an implicit thread of children's rights at the core*.

Similarly, another focus group felt that *the updated documents emphasise young children as citizens with rights and is especially attuned to children*. While another discussion was also positive and documented the following:

Babies, toddlers, and children are not future citizens – not citizens of tomorrow – but are citizens now.

However, during a discussion in one focus group, there was a query raised about whether all educators are aware of the rights of all children:

[It's] positive that Aistear highlights that babies, toddlers and young children are citizens with rights. However, do all educators know the rights of all children?

3.1.1.3 Recognising agency

Throughout the focus groups, the term 'agency' was a prominent topic of discussion. Participants strongly embraced the concept of the 'agentic child' and recognised the significance of children's agency. One group commented that:

For babies, they are citizens through community involvement and family – see themselves of a citizen – part of the community and have agency and listened to heard, valued, and empowered.

In one focus group, it was expressed that they *'like the term agentic global citizens with rights'* to describe children as *we often take for granted just how much children know and can do*. In reference

to the term 'agentic,' another group found it *a very interesting term* and appreciated its recognition of the rights of children. Another group positively acknowledged the *emphasis on promoting certain language evident e.g. agentic educator, agentic child, slow relational pedagogy* and requested its consistent use throughout the document.

While participants across various groups welcomed the inclusion of child agency, expressing sentiments like *Welcome the addition of agentic to the image of the child* and *Welcome for inclusion of child agency*, there were several concerns raised about the concept of agency.

Firstly, concerns were raised about the interpretation of the term 'agency' and how it would be applied in practice. Despite explanations provided in footnotes and the glossary, several groups felt that further clarification was necessary. One group expressed agreement with the term 'agentic' but emphasised the need for more explanation:

Agreement for the word 'agentic' but more teasing out/explanation is required.

Questions were raised about the accessibility of the term to everyone, including parents and those with English as a second language. Some wondered if people would overlook or not engage with the Framework/ concept if they found the term inaccessible: *If agentic is too big an ask, it could be ignored?*

Participants also raised concerns about the potential professional exclusivity of the term and its impact on parents and educators who might find it inaccessible:

Is this term accessible to everyone? Parents? Those with English as a second language? What does it mean? Will people gloss over it or not engage with the framework on seeing such a word in the vision? Is 'agentic' a professional term only?

Suggestions included incorporating a clearer definition of the term into the text along with examples rather than referring to it in a footnote. Some participants recommended placing an explainer in the document for a better understanding of the term, in addition to relying on a glossary.

Another concern highlighted was the need for educators to nurture children's agency, recognising potential challenges in practice. One group emphasised the time and nurturance required for a child to develop agency, stating that it takes confidence for a child to express views, with the role of the educator being crucial:

Takes time for a child to be agentic, needs nurturance of the educator – takes confidence to express views, the role of the educator is key here.

The reciprocal nature of agency, involving both the agentic child and agentic educator, was acknowledged, and welcomed in some groups, with a mention of how *Aistear* empowers educators to use slow relational pedagogy, contributing to the empowerment of agency in the child.

3.1.1.4 Recognising the educator as an agentic professional

The term 'educator' was welcomed across the focus groups. It was noted that this was an important step in terms of acknowledging and recognising the professional status of those working with young children. In one group it was noted that *it was agreed that this is a well-rounded universal term to describe those connected with children's learning and development*. It was noted that the Department of Education use the term *Early Years Educator* and *it is good to have*

consistency within the sector. In another group it was noted: *Like the term educator – adds consistency to nurturing skills and good to see it is inclusive of parents and childminders.*

One group highlighted that the term educator is *Important for educators in terms of professional identity and belief in the importance of their own role and function in the education system.* One focus group noted the *empowering – positive language will be welcomed by educators and reinforce what they are doing.* Similarly, other groups mentioned that *the role of the educator is professionalised – acknowledgment of the skills, knowledge and attributes required to carry the role out.*

Another group noted that *as the role is so important and acknowledging that the professional is led by theory informed practice.* Overall, the image of the educator was welcomed. Key aspects of the image of the educator that were welcomed included: the agentic educator, the educator as a reflective professional and the recognition of professionalisation.

The term agency in relation to the educator was very positively welcomed. It was evident that the focus groups felt that the concept of the agentic educator positively reflected the professional status of the educator. One group noted, *it is a reflective and ethical way to think about our practice – supports educators to be confident in their professional ability.* One group welcomed *the change of language, how positive the phrase ‘agentic educators’ is in terms of how we speak about those working with babies, toddlers and young children.* While in another group it was noted that there was *welcome for ‘agency’ in both the vision of the child and the educator. Very clear and concise statements.*

In another focus group, it was noted that:

Participants were happy with the word ‘agentic’ and thought it was a good thing that the term is used in relation to both children and educators. It recognises the professionalism of educators - they can be confident in the decisions they make when they are allowed to be agentic. It was mentioned that the term gives better recognition to the educators.

Another group commented that in relation to *agency and the educator – Aistear is not just a book on a shelf but rather supports educators to take on these titles.*

In relation to agency and inspection, participants in one focus group stated that for educators to utilise their agentic capabilities effectively, it would be important for Inspectors and others to acknowledge and appreciate their agentic capacity when providing support:

Sometimes, educators are under pressure. It was said that the emphasis on agentic capacity gives educators the opportunity to move at the children’s pace, which prioritises the needs and strengths of the child.

However, there was a query in one of the focus groups about how *the proposals speak to a ‘confident’ educator but there is a lack of confidence among educators. They have received mixed messages over the years. There may be a resistance to further change and the new language.*

3.1.1.5 Recognition of a changing society

Throughout the focus groups, it was recognised that the updated Aistear is timely and better reflects changes within Irish society in recent years. It was acknowledged that we have a more diverse Irish society, and the language of the updated Aistear now more accurately reflects this.

Although in this regard, there were also several suggestions made particularly in relation to terminology. In terms of changing family structures, the term parent was queried in several focus groups. One group noted that *the term ‘parent’ may be quite limiting, presenting a somewhat limiting*

and 'traditional' view of family. Sometimes the primary caregiver is not a biological parent. It was felt that this needs to be reflected.

It was noted that it is positive to see the emphasis on the diversity of cultures in Ireland. Within another group it was noted that participants were of the opinion that there is now a significant reference to it (diversity) in Aistear, that the emphasis on the community (broad community) is also good. However, one group noted that there is a need to emphasise and stress that all cultures need to be celebrated in a multicultural environment as it was mentioned that it has often been reported that Traveller and Roma children, in particular, are often expected to develop the dominant culture of the setting. They suggested that more mention of multicultural, diverse stories and folklore, stories from various cultures, that reflect the cultures of the children in the respective settings may help in relation to this. There were several further suggestions to consider regarding the terminology used within this context of a more diverse society and these are highlighted specifically in Appendix 1: Suggestions from focus groups to change terminology / language (focus groups).

Societal change in relation to climate change and sustainability was also highlighted although this was only mentioned briefly rather than forming a theme:

Aistear is really adapting to societal changes such as climate change and sustainability and Aistear links it back to the Irish context and the importance of community including grandparents.

However, the need for further support and guidance in this area was also mentioned: *Sustainability feels so big, and I struggle to make it real, and I need to learn more and explore it as a lived experience for children.* In another group it was highlighted that there was welcome for inclusion of sustainability – *but uncertainty about how this would be realised in practice and wondered about how educators would be supported to engage with this.* The specific reference to the outdoors was welcomed by some of the focus groups. The importance of experiences that children have outdoors was also highlighted within the focus groups with parents for example, it was noted that *Outdoor access is very important here. We live in apartments with no gardens and tiny balconies.*

3.1.1.6 Recognition of the Irish language, heritage and culture

Overall, the inclusion and recognition of the role of the Irish language and Irish heritage was welcomed. One group noted that it was *Good to see the addition of Irish culture – our culture as story tellers is important, enabling children to learn about their identities through story. Want more Irish in the English version like Te Whariki.* Another group noted that it was *agreed that the vision gives us an opportunity to be thankful for our language and our heritage.* Other comments across focus groups are outlined in Table 4.

Table 4: A selection of comments about the recognition of the Irish language, heritage and culture

Very welcome to have more Irish and our identity as Irish citizens expressed in Aistear (as reflected by other frameworks/curricula in other countries). Celebrating ourselves and an introduction to it in EY [Early Years] settings if it has not been celebrated in the home.

Respect to Irish language and culture reflected in Aistear.

Purpose of Aistear – welcome for the use of Irish throughout the document and important that we acknowledge the national language. It is done in a user-friendly way and would support services to use the cúpla focal [few words].

Love the incorporation of Irish into the framework, it is our language.

Irish woven throughout authentically – phrases and seanfhocail.

The participants also liked the greater emphasis on Irish heritage. However, there was a few reservations and suggestions across focus groups including:

The use of Irish terms throughout the Framework – this is reflective of discussions in Phase 1 (focus groups) of keeping our culture and language alive. This could go further however in bringing Irish into the names of the principles and the themes to make it more meaningful.

Would love to see similar approach to Te Whariki framework of the themes being in Irish, so it can be a useable tangible language put into practice. If the key parts of Aistear that they have to talk about and engage in are in Irish, then there's a meaningful way to use Irish and bring it into Aistear.

In one focus group it was noted that *it was agreed that the vision gives us an opportunity to be thankful for our language and our heritage*. Participants were happy that Irish culture is now specifically mentioned but in a way that doesn't exclude other people, something which is important. It was suggested that the definition of 'heritage' be made wider - *there is more to it than 'Storytelling' (e.g. developing a wealth of language in the Gaeltacht areas as part of the heritage for this community)*.

While the use and encouragement of the Irish language throughout the Framework was praised, it was mentioned that it would be good to see more mention of using and celebrating the other languages present in the setting more so that babies, toddlers and young children get a multi-lingual experience early on where possible.

3.1.1.7 Recognition of the positives of Aistear and building on strengths

Through the focus group discussions, it was evident that there was a lot of positivity towards Aistear. There was a recognition that the process of updating Aistear was not trying to incorporate too many changes but would represent best practices and current developments within the field of early childhood nationally and internationally. There was an acknowledgment that Aistear was well-respected within the field and this process of updating is timely as it builds on what was working well rather than changing too many aspects. A selection of comments from across the focus groups which highlight this can be seen in Table 5.

Table 5: Building on the strengths of Aistear

Aistear is such as positive story in the early childhood sector.

It was felt that there is a degree of familiarity between the proposed updates and the original Aistear, and this will be welcomed by the sector.

There was also recognition for the flexibility and adaptable nature of Aistear in practice. It was noted that this was maintained in the updated Aistear.

Everything we do here has to be bespoke, a framework like Aistear facilitates that.

Another focus group welcomed how *Aistear guides, enhances and extends existing curriculum approaches*. It was noted that there is not a one shoe fits all approach: *This point acknowledges other curriculum approaches and shows how Aistear will help/support educators.*

3.1.1.8 Recognition of the importance of transitions

The recognition of transitions and relationships was welcomed by the focus groups as a critical component of children's early experiences. It was welcomed that transitions were framed in terms of the smaller but still significant transitions daily, along with the traditionally seminal transitions from home to the early childhood setting and to primary school.

The following was noted in one group:

Leading on from slow pedagogy, you can see the importance of the key person approach where you can slow down and get to know your group which helps with transitions and building connections with home and community. Knowing children well helps with transitions.

In other groups it was noted:

Welcome for the addition of 'transitions' as it will remove the focus from just September and June, transitions occur throughout the day, what they look like, slow down and signal the transitions.

Love emphasis on transitions-broadened out to daily transitions. It will give students the opportunity to focus on this in their day-to-day work.

This was also linked to policy, *Good to see how Transitions is emphasised – aligning with contemporary policy regarding departmental work around transitions and the different forms they take*. In terms of transitions to primary school, it was acknowledged that 'Mo Scéal' is a good resource and an addition in this space. The following comments were also noted:

Emphasis on transitions provides opportunity to encourage and normalise links to be made between EC [early childhood] settings and primary schools'.

Transitions are positive inclusion – good to see more awareness of the importance of transitions, particularly in linking with primary school teachers.

Although in some of the groups, further emphasis was suggested in terms of transitions:

Transitions – is there more NCCA could say about this? Not only the transition from preschool to primary but moment to moment transitions across a child's experience.

In another group it was noted that *the transition from child-minder to preschool needs more attention*. It was also suggested that the transition to School Aged Childcare (SAC) could be acknowledged and included. The link between adult child ratios and transitions was also noted, *it also means an adult can do a one to one with a child when they need it. The good ratios allow this responsiveness. The ratios facilitate responsive transitions for all children.*

3.1.1.9 Need for further recognition

The focus groups were very positive about these key aspects highlighted above being recognised within the updated *Aistear*. There were, however, several points made across the focus groups that highlighted the need for the following areas to be acknowledged further within an updated *Aistear*.

3.1.1.9.1 Further development of the image and description of the educator

Clarifying the terminology of the educator sparked discussions within the focus groups. One group expressed concerns about the term 'significant others', citing negative connotations and advocating for more inclusive language, especially with the inclusion of childminders in the sector. It was emphasised that childminders should see themselves represented in the documents.

In a separate group, there was a debate about viewing childminders as *other adults*, with a strong emphasis that *childminders are educators*. Some participants questioned the use of 'educator' in relation to *Aistear* and primary school teachers, wondering if it was limited to early childhood education, given that it was previously for children from birth to 6 years.

Various concerns arose regarding the term 'educator' in relation to parents. While recognising parents as the primary educators within the Constitution, there were suggestions for a separate version of *Aistear* for parents. One group questioned, *Who is the educator?* and stressed the need for recognition of their professional role:

Who is the educator? We worked very hard for our professional title and want recognition of this professional role- can parents have their own version of Aistear?

Additional points raised by different groups included the need for a separate section for parents in *Aistear*, questioning whether parents make *professional* decisions, and concerns about the expectation placed on parents regarding access to support and services. On the positive side, some participants viewed 'educator' as a universal term for a diverse sector, aligning with research recognising parents as primary educators. They emphasised the importance of aligning changes from 'practitioners' and updating the *Aistear Síolta* Practice Guide (ASPG). However, there were also reflections on the burden placed on parents and the need to carefully frame expectations, especially when considering the perspective of parents:

Need to align change from practitioner and update Practice Guide. The glossary describes educator and is broad enough to cover everyone connected with children's learning and development.

A recurring question emerged regarding the audience of *Aistear*, with discussions on whether it is for parents, educators, or childminders:

Is Aistear for parents? Can it be accessed by parents? Are we producing a document that can really support parents or is it mediated through the care setting.

Some participants called for different versions of the document to cater to those seeking information and those intending to use it with their child:

While it was agreed within the focus group that it is for parents, educators and childminders, all agreed that there is a need to consider different versions of the

document, so it is accessible for parents who want to know more; as distinct from those who want to use it with their child.

As noted earlier, key aspects of the image of the educator that were welcomed included:

- the agentic educator
- the educator as a reflective professional
- the recognition of professionalisation.

While the term educator was very positively welcomed across the focus groups, there were also several calls to develop the image and visibility of the educator further within the updated *Aistear*. In terms of further recognition, it was noted that the complexities of the role could be recognised further. For example, work with other agencies, challenging situations and that some of the positive terms used in the vision of the child could also be applied to the educator to give recognition to the wider role of educators.

It was pointed out by some that there was an imbalance in the vision towards the child and that should be reconsidered. One group noted that the updated *Aistear* was *more focused on the baby, toddler and young child than it is on the educator and perhaps there should be more of a balance here*. They felt that *This is reflective of the entire Framework and needs to be considered*.

One group noted that there is *great progress and gives educators good visibility within the vision but again, could be strengthened throughout the document*. Another group felt that *the visibility of educators is not strong enough through the document. There needs to be balance with the visibility of educators and that of babies, toddlers and young children*. Similarly, another group noted that the *Image of the child [...] within loving relationships, secure attachments, nurturing relationships are noted but they are not noted in the image of the educator*.

Another focus group felt that the *Image of educator was underdeveloped in the update*. This group also made the following recommendation:

Move down some of the nice words in the view of the child to the educator (the care focus, professional love, respect). Child nestled in relationships – educators need the same – they need support, to be valued, to acknowledge the funds of knowledge and unique life experiences they bring.

While another group pointed out that *there needs to be a focus on the value of the educator throughout the entire Framework*. It was noted that *the child voice statements are only about the child – where is the educator in this?* This same group also highlighted the importance of the *skills and knowledge of the educator key especially for children in trauma. They need support to be reflective – to take an anti-bias approach – the educators need to be nurtured, to be cared for too*.

In one group there was a query regarding ‘agentic educators’ *supports and services may not be available*. It was also highlighted that the support role of families in a broader sense needed further acknowledgment. One group noted the:

Need to embed the role of educator in family support in Aistear. EC settings are a gateway to help, you might be the only person they can ask, you have to be empathic. You have to be a conduit to other services.

Parents within a focus group also noted how they *value the advice and support from the educators, and also note how the settings also provide support like helping them to find a solicitor or to send home food or other resources to families.*

3.1.1.9.2 Recognition of wider issues

While the focus groups were overall very positive about the updating of *Aistear*, throughout the discussions, there was a strong undercurrent of the need to recognise the wider issues and possible challenges to implementing an updated *Aistear* in practice. In terms of understanding and implementing an updated *Aistear* in practice, the variations in qualifications and experience in the field was noted. Focus groups felt that it was important to recognise the variations in qualifications and experience within the field and how aspects of *Aistear*, such as the concept of agency, could be open to interpretation or worse, ignored, if misunderstood. One group asked:

How accessible will the ideas in Aistear be to all educators? The new terminology introduced will need explanation and support (training).

It was noted in one group that *while there was welcome for the consistency of new language throughout the document, a concern was raised that some terminology may be challenging for educators, and they will need support in this area.* There was praise for the glossary.

While the focus groups were consistently positive about key aspects of best practice such as slow relational pedagogy (discussed in the next section), there was a call to recognise that staffing issues and conditions, administrative duties and inspection requirements may mitigate against what an updated *Aistear* is endorsing. Focus groups noted that in order for the key messages in an updated *Aistear* to be realised, there needs to be strong wider alignment and collaboration across all the stakeholders including inspection and support agencies, and policy needs to be in place so that everyone is *singing off the same page.*

In terms of the vision, one group noted that *it is good to see a strengths-based approach to the vision for educator, but there is also a need to speak to collaborations that exists between educators and between educators and outside agencies. This vision shouldn't be seen in isolation.*

While the focus groups were positive about the recognition of the early childhood profession, there was a call for the need to be further recognised by society and for parents to recognise the value of play more. One group suggested TV advertisements to highlight the role of play. An educator in one of the focus groups gave an example of parents in the setting not always seeing the value of play.

3.1.1.9.3 Recognising the home and wider environment

It was noted that not all young children, particularly in the birth to 3 age group, are in early childhood settings. Greater recognition for the role of the home environment or experiences outside of settings was called for in some of the focus groups. For example, in one group it was noted that *not all children from birth to 3 are in settings so it was noted that this should also be recognised and a focus on this is important. Takes organisations outside settings to work on this.*

While another group mentioned that *families need to be included more, that the Framework has to give a strong message that the education and care of babies, toddlers and children is wider than what happens in the settings.*

One focus group noted that *how the sector is beginning to look, caring for children at home is going to become a lot more professionalised and regulated so what we have to be conscious of is that this curriculum can be home-based.*

While another group mentioned the *need to bring Aistear out of the setting, especially for 0-3 year olds. Not every parent has access to settings/information about Aistear so we need to bring Aistear's vision into the community to shift society's views/mindset (how we value the child and the child as a citizen).*

3.1.2 Relationships

The second theme identified from the focus group data was 'Relationships'. The *fundamental importance of relationships* was noted. From an ecological systems approach (Bronfenbrenner, 2000) relationships were identified as important across all the systems, involving children and families directly and also wider professional and interagency relationships.

In terms of the microsystem directly involving young children, there was a key focus on slow relational pedagogy. Some examples from the focus groups are noted here:

Slow relational pedagogy stands out for me, taking moments to enjoy the little things.

Welcome for the slow relational pedagogy – the need for educators to slow down, be in the moment, watching children. The day can be so fast and task orientated, routine focussed and slow pedagogy will require a change in mindset – the need to think ahead about the day and find time to slow down.

Slow relational pedagogy – so much warmer and gentler – and children will thrive in that type of environment. It will be important to enable parents to notice the change in practice with their own children – simple elements and the importance of relationships being recognised now.

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic was also noted in terms of relationships, *need to re-focus on relationships with parents and families in the aftermath of Covid and important to see this emphasis in Aistear re: the centrality of these connections.*

One focus group highlighted the importance of an open-door policy and nurturing relationships with parents and recommended the following, *some settings keep parents out especially after Covid, Aistear needs to set out that parents must be welcome in the settings, can't be kept at a distance. We have a challenging group of parents, and we can make it work. Always treat parents with respect – do it meaningfully.*

In another group it was also noted that:

Children's personalities emerge when this pedagogy is used, which supports educators in building relationships with the children. Services should be supported so that the educators are able to make the right use of slow relational pedagogy. Slow relational pedagogy gives educators a better opportunity to make connections between the things that children are doing. It also gives them the opportunity to help children develop language. Children have more of an opportunity to develop and work at their own pace when slow relational pedagogy is used. It was said that it was important that it was now written down that it is possible to slow down - not every interaction between the educator and child needs to have a specific goal/ 'box to tick'. Inspectors' understanding of the concept was mentioned.

Although within another group it was noted that in relation to slow pedagogy, *staff are unsure about this as they are afraid to be seen as "doing nothing"- support them and reinforce the message all interactions are part of this and need to pull it back to the importance of relationships. Slow should not be seen as 'lazy' – make this message explicit – slow is valued.*

The importance of respect was also noted repeatedly. Several focus groups welcomed the term 'professional love':

Great to see slow relational pedagogy and positive relationships ('professional love') foregrounded.

The key person approach was also positively endorsed, *the importance of Attachment, key person, was identified as being explicit now not implicit as per 2009 version.* It was also commented that *noticing is so important and while we see things, noticing is different to seeing.*

Within a focus group parents highlighted the importance of the educators working with their children, particularly in terms of trauma. In relation to mixed age groups, it was noted that *childminders may have a unique opportunity to support relationships across mixed age groups.*

From a parental perspective, they mentioned the positive relationships they also had with the staff, providing guidance and support for them. Parents in a direct provision centre highlighted the positive relationships that their children had with their educator:

The teachers are so good, very kind, never shout, [name of educator removed] - 'she is magic'. We all have a very good relationship with [name of educator removed] the children and parents love [her] and trust the staff'... [the children are] learning lots especially communication.

Within another focus group with parents, it was noted that *owing to being a one-parent family, there is a real reliance on the settings to support families as many do not have the support elsewhere.* It was also noted that *the importance of connections with friends, communities and neighbours, it's like Bronfenbrenner, with the child at the centre interacting with so many.* The importance of relationships with the local community was also noted. It was highlighted that this should be a reciprocal relationship.

3.1.2. 1 Challenges to building and maintaining relationships

While there was strong consensus about the importance of relationships and slow relational pedagogy, challenges in practice were also identified.

One focus group noted the following:

The centrality of building and maintaining relationships underpin the work done in the community. Educators discuss the need for Aistear to highlight that children only learn if they feel socially and emotionally well and if their parents are ok and are supported by the EC setting. Government can't look at work with parents/family support as an add on for EC settings. It is central to supporting the children's learning and development.

It was also noted that an updated Aistear should also acknowledge the challenges that can also occur in terms of relationships with children with challenging behaviour and with families.

In terms of relationships and the macrosystem impacting practice, it was noted in one of the focus groups that *we try to do slow relational pedagogy, very important here, takes time to build trust. How can you do this with the ratios set out by Tusla? Must relook at them especially when you have additional needs or children who have experience trauma, act out etc.* Educators working in a designated disadvantaged area highlighted how they need to have more staff working with young children, exceeding the ratios, to ensure that they provide the interactions the children and families that they work with require.

3.1.3 Recommended revisions, considerations and specific suggestions

The third theme identified was 'Recommended revisions, considerations and specific suggestions'. While the overall responses within the focus groups was one of positivity towards the updated *Aistear*, there were several issues, concerns and specific revisions highlighted throughout the focus groups. These general recommendations and specific suggestions have been further collated using qualitative discourse analysis. The key areas to consider have been collated in Appendix 1: Suggestions from focus groups to change terminology / language (focus groups) to facilitate further consideration in the updated *Aistear*.

While there were differences of opinion within and across focus groups around particular terminology, the overall consensus across the focus groups is presented in this section. Focus groups highlighted positives and potential concerns in terms of language in the following areas summarised below:

- Positive changes to language, terms and phraseology/terminology were acknowledged including the inclusion of the glossary
- Updated language to reflect changing society and current best practices internationally
- Considering accessibility and audience
- New terms that will require further explanation, clarification and support
- Concerns were raised about certain terms
- Specific changes or amendments to text were suggested.

3.1.3.1 Positive language

As mentioned earlier, there was a positive response to terminology used in relation to young children notably referring to babies, toddlers and young children. The use of the term 'agency' and 'agentic' in relation to children and educators was welcomed. The term 'respect' was also highlighted as a positive. Some focus groups highlighted the very positive references to play and the significance of play. The terms 'professional love' and 'joyful' were also welcomed.

3.1.3.2 Concerns about particular language/ terminology

The term 'parents' was queried several times as potentially being too narrow. Suggestions included using the term caregiver or family more broadly. The term 'educator' was questioned in relation to parents and the professional role. The term 'equity' was mentioned many times through focus group discussions. Overall, the term equity was welcomed, however, there were some queries regarding the rationale for the removal of the term equality. For example, the following were noted:

Equity – not a good idea to lose equality – need to be more clearly defined.

Welcome for change in terminology from equality to equity - should 'justice' be included?

Several concerns were raised about the language of diversity and ensuring that the Framework was as inclusive as possible, cognisant of changing society and family structures. The specific

detailed points regarding language and terminology that were raised across the focus groups have been collated and are presented in Appendix 1: Suggestions from focus groups to change terminology / language (focus groups)

3.1.3.3 Use of the Irish language

Overall, inclusion of the Irish language was welcomed across the focus groups, but there were some cautionary points made regarding tokenism and concern about exclusion for those who are new to the country or do not speak the language. However, overall, this was seen as a positive addition and welcome initiative. There were some calls to increase the focus on Irish terms for example, having the themes *as Gaeilge* [in Irish] in a similar vein to *Te Whariki* in New Zealand or to include additional words such as 'sugradh' throughout the Framework. In relation to Irish translations and meanings of terms, some potential inaccuracies or issues with the interpretation of words, the translation of proverbs etc. were identified (see Appendix 1: Suggestions from focus groups to change terminology / language (focus groups)).

3.1.3.4 Accessibility

While there was positive feedback regarding the tone and presentation of the updated *Aistear*, there were some queries raised about the accessibility of *Aistear* and some concerns about the academic tone to the document. This was raised in relation to the English and Irish versions of the document. In line with Universal Design for Learning, and to embrace a diversity of learners, it was suggested to include multiple modes of *Aistear* such as more visuals etc. There was concern raised over the accessibility for educators with varying levels of education and qualifications. It was also suggested that there should be translations of *Aistear* into different languages. Maintaining the colour-coding of themes was also recommended by one focus group.

It was also suggested on several occasions that there should be a version designed specifically for parents. It was noted that some parents have English as an additional language, some may have literacy issues and it was recommended that the National Adult Literacy Association (NALA) be engaged in the process of writing an accessible document. However, it was stressed that the document should be respectful to parents rather than a *dumbed down* version. It was suggested that it should be written in a style that a parent could explain it to another parent.

It was also suggested that there should be a version of *Aistear* specifically designed for children perhaps using social stories to ensure that it is relatable and child friendly.

3.1.3.5 Infographics

The revised overall infographics were welcomed very positively. It was suggested to include or develop further infographics. Including:

Could the links between the principles be shown in some way in a diagram?

The vision should be represented in the diagram.

A visual/graphic for assessment would be helpful and useful.

3.1.3.6 The vision of *Aistear*

When asked about the vision of *Aistear* in the focus groups overall, there was a very positive response particularly in relation to the vision of the child. As highlighted earlier, the image of the child as agentic, as a citizen with rights from a strengths-based perspective was welcomed. The direct mention of babies, toddlers and young children throughout the Framework was also

positively welcomed. The importance of friendships and relationships were all identified as being very positive. Although it was noted in some groups that the capacity of children could be stressed further:

The vision is one of empowerment and respect – not a narrative of children as vulnerable.

Lovely/gentle phrasing on the image of the child – their individuality, their story together with the kindness and consideration.

However, it was acknowledged in one focus group that while the strengths-based approach to viewing the child was positive, *we also need to recognise that some children will need support and access what they need to learn and feel well.* One group also noted that:

We should look at children’s capacity to engage in their own learning’ and felt the update was ‘not strong enough in relation to children’s capacity.

The term educator was welcomed and the image of educator as agentic was positivity noted. However, there were questions as to how encompassing the term is, the question ‘who is the educator?’ was asked. Is the term a professional one or can it represent all adults including parents? Several focus groups asked for the image of the educator to be developed further throughout the Framework to better reflect the complexity of the work to acknowledge skills and knowledge of the educators and the wider remit in relation to family support and work with external agencies. The importance of relationships to the educators was also identified with the suggestion to use some of the similar terminology in relation to relationships for educators, e.g. (the care focus, professional love, respect). It was also suggested that the vision of the educator needs to be wider to better reflect the role, one group noted that *it is good to see a strengths-based approach to the vision for educator, but there is also a need to speak to collaborations that exists between educators and between educators and outside agencies. This vision shouldn’t be seen in isolation.* In one group, it was also queried whether care is prioritised enough in vision.

3.1.3.6 The purpose of Aistear

In relation to the purpose specifically, the point was welcomed that *it guides, enhances and extends existing curriculum approaches – not a one shoe fits all approach. This point acknowledges other curriculum approaches and shows how Aistear will help/support educators.* However, a few queries were raised within the focus groups.

In one group it was noted that:

In relation to the last bullet point in the Purpose: Appreciates our cultural and linguistic history and story and introduces terms as Gaeilge (in Irish) as part of this, one of the groups felt it was positive to emphasise Irish culture but that an additional bullet should be added to encompass other cultures and help develop self-identity for all.

Another group also noted the last point as exclusionary. They suggested the removal of the word ‘our’ would make this stronger. They noted the fine line between respecting our own language and culture and nationalism. It was also felt that the term ‘linguistic history’ is too narrow, and it was suggested that *Traveller language/Irish sign language could be other options mentioned alongside Gaeilge.*

In one group, the participants noted that *the purpose acknowledges parents as primary educators – this, however, is not replicated throughout the document. They felt that the document reads as if it is for educators in a setting. One of the focus groups noted that parents might think Aistear is not really for them as the first line says it is for educators, however the purpose of Aistear does read well identifying key principles.*

Other comments on the purpose included:

From one setting to another' in the third bullet point suggests external transitions only, there is a need to foreground internal transitions (within a room, within a setting and with other settings).

Aistear could address transitions to SAC [school aged childcare]. The fifth bullet point is very broad 'encourages interdisciplinary work' – will there be a guide on how this will happen? Cannot make a statement like this without supporting it.

3.1.3.7 The Principles of Aistear

Overall, the focus groups were positive about the Principles in general. There was very positive support for reducing the number of Principles from 12 – 9. The reduction in Learning Goals was also welcomed. One group noted that *reducing the number of Principles makes the information more accessible. Integrating content of the Themes within the Principles is welcome – Principles should impact all aspects of learning experiences for children. The LGs will support educators in planning learning experiences.*

It was felt that the principles were woven more explicitly throughout the Framework document. It was noted, *if you look at the way the design is put together it has the themes interwoven with the principles, the 9 are interrelated, it's done very well.*

Another group liked how *the language used in the principles reflected back on the word 'agentic', they embed the vision of the child and the language used throughout the document creates a flow – concepts are not just mentioned in one place.*

A range of Key points about the Learning goals and Principles are set out in Table 6.

Table 6: Key points about Learning Goals and Principles

1	Welcome for the reduction in learning goals and the removal of numbers.
2	There was a welcome for the reduction of principles from 12 – 9. It was noted that CCI carried out a mapping exercise and they believed that all 12 original principles were still visible in the updated 9.
3	By reducing the learning goals, there is a more open and obvious space for reflective conversation as opposed to tick boxing.
4	The principles are very focused, 12 was overwhelming for learners/students. Groupings made it manageable but because the diagram is so clear, it's not necessary for grouping anymore. So clear in connection with each other. Before you had principles and themes and trying to figure it all out but now its more concise and jointed and integrated.
5	Reducing the principles and goals makes it more accessible to parents as well but also descriptive enough to show there is value in what educators are observing.

6	The condensing of the principles from 12 to 9 will facilitate educators working with them.
7	The reduction in the number of Learning Goals is welcomed. They are not as prescriptive as previous ones and gives greater autonomy to educators to meet children where they are at. They are concise in language and will encourage critical reflection by the educator to plan appropriately.

There were many specific suggestions relating to the Principles directly, these have all been collated using qualitative discourse analysis and are detailed in Appendix 2: Addressing the Principles (focus groups).

Throughout the focus groups there were, however, several suggestions and comments in relation to accessibility in relation to the Principles and Themes. There was a suggestion to combine some Principles further e.g., play and hands on experiences could go into holistic learning and development. In terms of the presentation of the Principles, the following suggestions, outlined in Table 7, were made in terms of content and visual presentation.

Table 7: Suggestions to improve accessibility of the Principles

Visual Presentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Could the links between the Principles be shown in some way in a diagram?</i> • <i>Welcome for the new graphic. There was some discussion around whether the graphic implicitly implies that some Principles are directly linked to themes. It was agreed that when the graphic is viewed in colour, this confusion does not apply but when viewed in black and white it does.</i> • <i>Use of pictures</i> • <i>Welcome for the visibility of the Principles in the infographic and within the themes. Felt part of the reason they were overlooked in the past was due to the infographic that was used that only highlighted the themes.</i> • <i>Connections evident between Principles and Themes. Colour association is very important – not evident in the draft proposals e.g. the four themes and associated colours.</i> • <i>In terms of presentation, each principle should be on one page to give more space visually, and in people’s minds, to understand the Principles</i>
Wording	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Content enhanced but not lost. Always good to simplify – less is more. Important to get key messages right.</i> • <i>It was suggested that how they are presented could be looked at. There was a call, from some participants, for the groups to come back – perhaps 3 groups of 3</i> • <i>Positive that the aims, themes and learning goals language is more clearly linked to principles. In last iteration it was harder to align principles and themes. Now the language is clearer.</i> • <i>Principles – there are still a lot despite some being absorbed into others. It was noted that the 3 sections from the 2009 version were very helpful to compartmentalise them and make them accessible to readers.</i>

There was welcome for the child voice statements in each Principle – and in particular the last one in each Principle are all based in social justice. It was also suggested that ‘communicate’ could be used instead of ‘voice’ in child statement. While another group noted that the *child voice statement includes ‘needs’ – should we move away from a deficit model?* It was also noted that the child voice statements are only about the child, it was asked *where is the educator in this?* It was commented that slow relational pedagogy was also not reflected in the child voice statements.

3.1.3.8 The Themes of Aistear

Limited discussion directly addressed the Themes, but there was positive feedback about keeping the learning goals and maintaining the four themes. Concerns about the layout were raised in one group, suggesting a preference for the previous version's readability and colour-coding.

Regarding the outdoors, participants welcomed the connection between Exploring and Thinking's Aim 3 and outdoor activities, acknowledging the changing attitudes toward outdoor spaces post-COVID. The term 'adventurous play' was praised for promoting children's agency.

Sustainability was recognised throughout the document, with challenges noted in the baby room due to the Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016:

Sustainability, in the traditional sense, in the baby room is difficult with Tusla regulations.

In the Wellbeing theme, the importance of educator wellbeing was emphasised. Some participants highlighted the absence of the term 'movement' and suggested foregrounding the reference to self- and co-regulation. 'Consent' was identified as a crucial element in respecting and nurturing bodies.

Concerns were raised about the term 'spiritual dimension' in the Wellbeing theme, with suggestions to consider alternatives like 'wonder' or 'mindfulness'. Empathy, and gratitude were proposed as elements that could be further emphasised.

For Exploring and Thinking, there was a suggestion to use the term 'STEM' for awareness and inclusion of more math-related terms. The need for cohesion among STEM concepts was stressed:

It separates STEM but it should be drawing from one another and it makes it more confusing, they are linked.

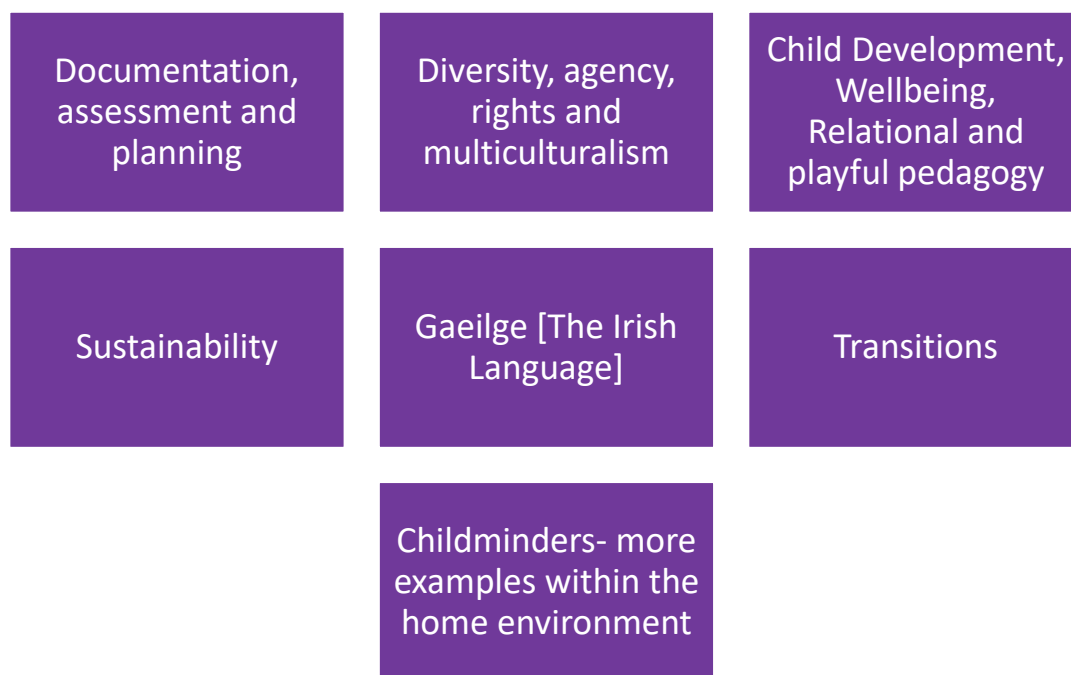
In Identity & Belonging, an example highlighted the importance of recognising and supporting the identity of Traveller families, including their connection to the Catholic Church. The document was urged to ensure inclusivity and resources for Traveller families.

Additional suggestions related to the Themes can be found in Appendix 1: Suggestions from focus groups to change terminology / language (focus groups).

3.1.4 Realising *Aistear* in practice

The fourth and final theme identified in the analysis of the focus group data was 'Realising *Aistear* in practice'. Although participants were specifically questioned about guidance and support, these aspects emerged organically throughout the discussions at different points. Therefore, the entire dataset was examined to derive the findings presented below. The key issues related to realising *Aistear* in practice are outlined in Figure 2. Additionally, several systemwide conditions that would facilitate the implementation of *Aistear* were identified.

Figure 2: Key areas that should be addressed for further guidance and support



3.1.4.1 Documentation, assessment and planning

Overall, the key priority area identified most often that required further guidance and support was in relation to documentation, assessment and planning. It was noted that there is confusion around this area in general, with different interpretations of the role of observations and potential negative connotations around the concept of assessment. One group noted the *need for a common, shared understanding of what assessment means in the Early Years' setting*. For example, one group noted:

Need clarity around what is being talked about when we refer to assessment. The purpose of observations – observing is for observing not an observation for an inspection – intentional rather just having a photo for a file.

It was recommended that the NCCA should take a lead role in this area and that other agencies should follow this lead to facilitate a common, shared understanding of what assessment means. Guidance addressing key aspects such as the role of documentation generally, the role of technology and documentation, using digital portfolios etc. was highlighted. One group noted,

give educators language and evidence to show play. This table⁴ below highlights the particular aspects of assessment, documentation and planning that participants felt should be addressed.

Table 8: Specific suggestions relating to documentation, assessment and planning

General	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>NCCA should lead on planning and assessment</i> • <i>Planning and assessment – critical that NCCA lead here</i> • <i>Aistear should set out assessment processes and others should follow it (e.g. the DE).</i> • <i>Supporting Learning and Development through assessment – not enough guidance on ‘planning and assessing’</i> • <i>Guidelines on assessment are essential for educators</i> • <i>Guidance on observation/documentation</i> • <i>Confusion in the sector about planning, documenting and assessing</i> • <i>Need for a common, shared understanding of what assessment means in the Early Years’ setting</i>
Suggestions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Infographic for assessment</i> • <i>Materials need to be conscious of the negative connotations of assessment out there and need to make clear what is being talked about when we refer to assessment</i> • <i>More guidance on documentation in the final document e.g. templates</i> • <i>Develop templates for observations to share with parents</i> • <i>Documentation- learning journal</i> • <i>Documenting the child’s journey, Aistear....pedagogical documentation, a picture of the child’s ‘Aistear’ / journey</i> • <i>How children record and self-assess through play</i> • <i>Give educators language and evidence to show play</i> • <i>Digital portfolios/assessment</i> • <i>Getting balance right between being in the moment and assessing, using technology</i> • <i>Observing is for observing not an observation for an inspection – intentional rather just having a photo for a file</i>
Wider issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Paid non-contact time for documenting and assessment</i>

3.1.4.2 Diversity, agency, rights & multiculturalism

Another key area identified as requiring further guidance and support was in the area of promoting diversity, rights and agency. As highlighted in the earlier discussion, further exemplars of agency in practice were called for across focus areas and it was felt that this was an area that would require further guidance. As detailed in the table below, there were also called to support equity, diversity to ensure meaningful implementation.

⁴ The tables in this section have been generated from content discourse analysis and provide excerpts from the notes across focus groups that are indicative of the area and are not exhaustive.

Table 9: Specific suggestions relating to diversity, agency, rights & multiculturalism

General	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Is it possible to train early years practitioners to have greater awareness of multiculturalism?</i> • <i>Support for working with diverse families</i> • <i>Within direct provision there is a challenge to link to the wider community</i>
Suggestions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Agency – explain it and show it</i> • <i>Global citizen needs support for meaningful implementation</i> • <i>Reflective tool signposts checks re: diversity equity and inclusion</i> • <i>Explaining equity with examples</i> • <i>Develop materials for the new pieces of the framework (e.g. heritage)</i>

3.1.4.3 Guidance and support for the Irish language

The need for further guidance and support in terms of Gaeilge/Irish was also highlighted. It was felt that it was necessary to develop various supports to support the wide range of services in relation to the promotion of the Irish language. There was also a query in one group about how to include Irish words with babies. The table below highlights a representation of comments and suggestions in terms of further guidance and support.

Table 10: Specific suggestions relating to Gaeilge/Irish

General	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Supports for services in English that want to promote the Irish language</i> • <i>Complete beginners were mentioned with regards to the promotion of the Irish language in the services with educators that don't have Irish from school</i> • <i>Transition from English speaking preschools to Irish-speaking schools needs supports</i>
Suggestions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>In terms of every setting and the piece on Irish, it was recommended that more resources be made available for the promotion of Irish - videos etc. demonstrating practice in the Gaeltacht and outside of it</i> • <i>Demonstrate immersion education with a video</i> • <i>Develop specific resources for Naíonraí, and for preschools that are promoting Irish</i> • <i>Develop materials about dialects for the Gaeltacht areas, develop other materials for Irish for complete beginners</i> • <i>Materials to support parents in a full-Irish/half-Irish setting (materials for both those who can and can't speak Irish)</i>

3.1.4.4 Other areas for further guidance and support

Throughout the focus groups, there was some mention of sustainability and the need for support in practice and queries about how this might look like in practice which can be seen in Table 11.

Table 11: Specific suggestions relating to sustainability

General	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>How educators would be supported to engage with sustainability in practice</i>• <i>Issues such as sustainability, (and others that need further explanation and support), should be reflected in the Guide</i>• <i>Challenge with sustainability in practice</i>• <i>Concern was expressed about how to make sustainability 'real' for children</i>• <i>Sustainability feels so big, and I struggle to make it real, and I need to learn more and explore it as a lived experience for children.</i>
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The focus groups also highlighted additional areas that require support concerning child development, wellbeing, play, and learning. There was a specific request for guidance and examples tailored for childminders within home settings. The identified needs encompass guidance on developmental milestones, support for understanding the diverse ways children express themselves, strategies for fostering language development, a comprehensive overview of wellbeing with supported examples, guidance on emergent and inquiry-based curriculum, and the application of slow relational pedagogy. Additionally, there was a call for specific guidance on inquiry-based learning that builds on children's interests and progresses their learning, continued emphasis on play with a recognition that educators may need further professional development in this area. Furthermore, participants expressed the need for guidance on supporting children aged from birth to 3 years, incorporating slow relational pedagogy, and providing specific examples applicable within a home environment.

3.1.4.5 Suggested resources

Suggestions emerged from the focus groups regarding resources to enhance and guide practice. These recommendations include the incorporation of diverse contexts in videos, showcasing a range of practices, offering various resources for consideration (with a caution against duplicating existing materials), ensuring educators have the option to obtain hard copies of *Aistear* at cost and on-demand, emphasising the use of videos and pictures for effectiveness, providing real tangible examples during professional development, and advocating for assessment guidance that features numerous practical examples rather than relying solely on exemplars.

3.1.4.6 The *Aistear Síolta Practice Guide*

There was praise for the ASPG. It was noted that it was a model for curriculum support, and it was useful for students. There was some concern raised and confusion as to whether it would now be obsolete. There were calls for it to be maintained and updated in line with the updated *Aistear* and that it could be a useful vehicle for support and guidance in the topics highlighted above. It was suggested that there could be hyperlinks within the updated *Aistear* to specific elements and resources within the ASPG.

3.1.4.7 Further guidance and support for parents

In the focus groups, there was a consensus on the importance of providing support and guidance for parents, emphasising the essential need for effective communication with parents. Key areas

identified for addressing parental needs include creating resources to inform parents about the benefits of play and outdoor activities, showcasing the learning that occurs through play, and providing guidance on sharing documentation with parents.

The discussion also led to suggestions on how best to support parents, particularly those lacking a network of support or specific skills. Proposed strategies include conducting workshops for parents about *Aistear* and organising sessions for parents within early childhood settings. Additionally, participants highlighted the importance of NCCA providing explanations of *Aistear* to parents in accessible language, incorporating visuals, graphics, and terms that are easy for parents to understand without oversimplifying the content.

Key considerations in providing guidance and support for parents encompassed addressing diversity and accessibility issues. Recommendations included organising training events for parents from various cultural backgrounds, increasing resources for parents, offering support for new parents or those entering the system from other countries, and recognising the specific needs of parents from diverse cultural backgrounds.

3.1.4.8 Shared vision and coordinated response to roll-out

In terms of realising an updated *Aistear* in practice, there were discussions across focus groups about the need for coordination and collaboration across all stakeholders involved. The focus groups made several suggestions and recommendations in relation to supporting *Aistear* on the ground. It was noted in one group that, *they highlighted the importance of a shared vision, reaching beyond typical educational settings to embed Aistear's principles into the wider community and society.* Another group mentioned that it was *important to have a shared understanding of Aistear - Everybody on the same page e.g. parents, practitioners, during initial training and other qualifications, Inspectorate.*

While it was noted in another focus group that *support services also need to understand Aistear and have a strengths-based approach - bring this up from the roots and advocate for children not just in settings or when they leave the settings.*

It was stressed that the NCCA should take a lead role in the roll-out of the updated *Aistear* and there would be a centralised hub for resources and coordinated and timely training nationwide. Participants emphasised the necessity for a fully funded national rollout plan to coincide with the publication of the revised *Aistear* framework. There were strong calls for the establishment of a centralised hub serving as a one-stop-shop for all online supports. This hub would play a crucial role in providing easy access to validated information on resources, CPD, and other essential details for early years educators. Additionally, discussions have highlighted the importance of the NCCA's affiliation with training, including linking with other agencies, especially in relation to the Irish language (Gaeilge). A sample of the suggestion that arose from the focus group data regarding wider alignment and the coordinated roll out of an updated *Aistear* can be seen in Table 12.

Table 12: Suggestions for wider alignment and a coordinated roll out of an updated *Aistear*

- *Consistency in messaging across platforms*
- *Proposal for specialist training with national consistency*
- *System supports to actualise the Framework's vision*
- *Professionalising the sector emerged as a need, emphasising equitable upskilling opportunities, enhanced funding for adult-child ratios, and leadership development*
- *Endorsement from major stakeholders required to embrace Aistear - lots of people involved and all need to be on board and vocal*

- *The importance of a shared vision, reaching beyond typical educational settings to embed Aistear's principles into the wider community and society.*
- *Important to have a shared understanding of Aistear - Everybody on the same page e.g. parents, practitioners, during initial training and other qualifications, Inspectorate. There is a fear that Inspectors won't get it, particularly with students on placement. We need to build a culture with a shared understanding*
- *Suggested to make an advert about the importance of play on tv/social media campaigns and connecting dots with other services e.g. First 5*
- *Communicating and supporting this version successfully across the sector - with lecturers, educators, policy makers*
- *Emphasis on the need for a coordinated response to developing resources*
- *Supports needed for those going into settings to support educators*
- *CCCs, Better Start, NSAI - all require training, explain the language and what it means/looks like in practice*
- *Alignment between external agencies*
- *More communication and collaboration needed between DE, Tusla, Better Start and other agencies that support settings*
- *Needs to be a full stakeholder approach*
- *Threaded through qualifications and policy documents*
- *Need for partnership in roll-out*
- *Everyone training- whole setting, whole country*
- *Policy - things keep changing - hard to keep up, funding, inspections, keep adding more to what they want us to do*
- *Collaboration across organisations is needed, and mutual understanding is also needed in the form of resources , essential supports etc. It was said that this would be of particular importance to the Irish language community*

The focus groups also highlighted the importance of coordination and alignment for an updated Aistear with inspection agencies, as is highlighted in the sample responses in Table 13.

Table 13: Sample responses regarding regulation and inspection

- *Need alignment with better ratios*
- *Role of the EY Inspectorate*
- *People who are inspecting need to be aware of the context within which they work - non-compliance fears can be overbearing and prevent full engagement with Aistear*
- *Inspection was also mentioned with regards giving time to educators to get used to the changes*
- *Alignment with inspections? Autonomy for educators?*
- *Reflected in terms of educational inspection?*
- *Will there be supports for those going in to inspect to support the document in practice?*

In relation to professional considerations, education and CPD, the focus groups were very vocal and had a range of suggestions. Overall, the areas of time, space and payment/time in lieu and shared CPD with primary schools to facilitate transitions further were identified. Professional development on the ground was also identified as meaningful CPD opportunities. Communities of Practice were highlighted in focus groups and drawing on international models such as New Zealand to have centres of excellence or real examples from practice. Reference was also made to

the 'Aistear in Action Initiative'. Several suggestions were offered across focus groups in terms of professional development on the ground in practice such as Communities of Practice.

Table 14: Sample responses regarding CPD

- *Time and space to engage*
- *Recognition of the usefulness of communities of practice*
- *New Zealand model with 'centres of excellence'*
- *mentoring for curriculum engagement*
- *This would be best delivered over a short, focused period of 3 or 4 hours*
- *Pay for staff to attend professional development/time in lieu*
- *Need paid CPD (should be set out in contracts as part of terms and conditions on working days etc).*
- *Settings need to close for mandatory CPD*
- *Common CPD events for pre-school educators and primary school teachers to facilitate relationship building and information sharing*
- *A joint training session for educators and primary school teachers regarding what constitutes a good transition*
- *The difficulties of providing CPD for educators were discussed (a service cannot be closed to provide training for example)*
- *Importance of Blended learning, practical*
- *Communities of practice with opportunities to observe one another's practice.*
- *Communities of practice and places for reflection on Aistear would be very welcome once led by the right people*
- *PD in settings/on the ground*
- *Professional development could take place in settings. For example, running an afternoon in an example setting and allow people to come in and observe Aistear in practice*
- *Options to reach out and share good practice*
- *Onsite mentoring*
- *Peer relationships, use those who are good at something for modelling purposes*
- *Continuous professional development and mentoring opportunities were seen as essential for effective implementation and to bridge theory and practice*

3.1.4.9 Recognising the challenges to realising Aistear in practice

In terms of realising Aistear in practice, concerns were raised in relation to the capacity of early years educators on the ground at present. Concerns in relation to variations in training and qualifications were highlighted in terms of the need for guidance and support. However, further concerns included capacity in terms of time and staffing issues. It was noted in one group that *supports, investment and CPD were mentioned so that the high 'expectations' for the educators in the draft document can be achieved.* Concerns were expressed that there was *a lot going on in sector* and that professionals were *feeling overwhelmed in practice.* The staffing crisis was raised, issues with staff retention and how it is *hard to retain and get staff.* Some further examples are noted in Table 15 below. As mentioned earlier, there was a call for further recognition, value and respect for the professionalisation of the sector. It was noted in one group that *recognition of the professional nature of the sector and the fundamental role of educators in enacting Aistear but a way to go still in terms of recognition of early childhood educators.*

Table 15: Sample responses regarding realising Aistear in practice

- *Time constraints in settings hinder engagement with Aistear, requiring allocated time and support*
- *Support for additional staffing key – this would allow enactment of principles. The group felt that it may not be enacted fully with low ratios of staff to children*
- *Challenges for providers rolling out new initiatives*
- *Time to understand and see how the framework can be practically used*
- *Educators need time to reflect and think*
- *Time for reflection in the setting is more important*
- *Building confidence among educators is important*
- *Concern re timely introducing Aistear with challenges in Sector*
- *Educator wellbeing needs nurturing*
- *Enhancing practice not changing it*
- *Need very good ratios and we want staff to be able to spend quality time with the children*

Ensuring consistency and collaborative alignment across all levels of education and training within the field of early childhood was highlighted. Further and Higher education examples were noted and the importance of having everyone well-versed in the updated Aistear, training for trainers so to speak. Similarly, training for support agencies such as Better Start and Inspection agencies were also highlighted.

Table 16: Sample responses regarding wider training

- *How Third Level can support students observe quality practice was noted as a challenge*
- *Creating a system similar to Droichead*
- *Some degrees are not giving the foundation of understanding that is needed about Aistear*
- *Where students do placement very important – must be following Aistear properly and supports needed for staff from overseas to engage with Aistear like the Te Whariki model.*
- *Ensure consistency in relation to Aistear information and modules across degree programmes and courses*

The focus groups identified the importance of leadership in terms of realising an updated Aistear in practice. Leadership was identified in many guises from the ground level within early childhood practice up to policy level.

Table 17: Sample responses regarding Leadership and the realisation of Aistear in practice

- *NCCA to take a lead role*
- *The importance of a shared vision, reaching beyond typical educational settings to embed Aistear's principles into the wider community and society*
- *A designated leadership role focusing on Aistear*
- *Calls for key educators in practice to be involved like the Te Whariki curriculum champions.*
- *Ethos of board and manager important, not just the educator*
- *Leadership to drive curriculum and assessment*
- *School leadership and setting leaders need to have a solid understanding of the value of Aistear*
- *Each room needs a lead educator and a curriculum development officer*
- *Inclusion officer role Inco – important too*
- *Language assistants*

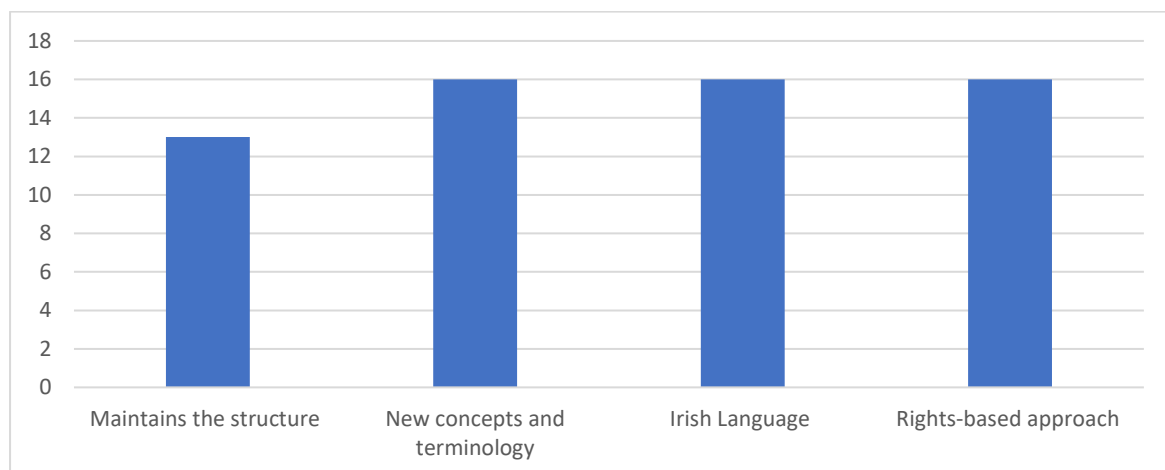
3.2 Written submissions

In total NCCA received 23 written submissions. The written submission template can be found in Appendix 9: Written submission template.

3.2.1 General response to the updated *Aistear*

Submissions conveyed a positive response overall. As illustrated in Figure 3, thirteen submissions indicated, *the structure and integrity of the document remains*, with the majority of submissions (n=16, 70%) welcoming the introduction of new concepts and terminology, use of the Irish language, and the rights-based approach evident throughout the document.

Figure 3: Overview of positive response to proposals

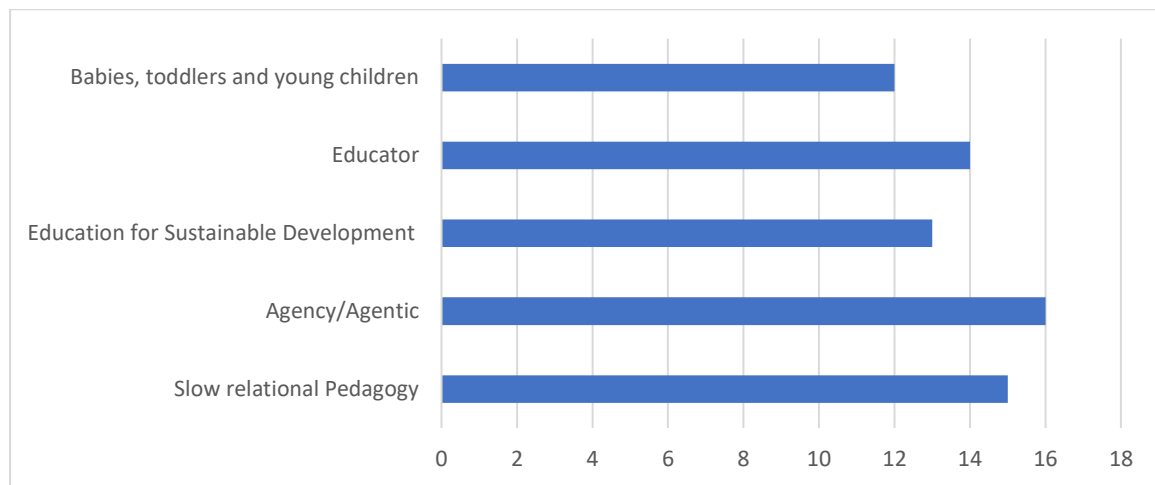


The proposed updates create a *reassuring sense of familiarity* that will support those who *have worked with the original Aistear since 2009*. Noting that the proposed updates are *very much in keeping with the structure of Aistear*, one respondent felt, *it is more transparent and easier to navigate*. Respondents welcomed a *single framework to support parents and teachers...[which]...provides clarity, and supports cohesion with the Primary Curriculum*. As such, the updated *Aistear should serve to foster a shared vision for early years learning*. Acknowledging its child-centred focus, one respondent noted how the document maintains *a holistic focus, the recognition of learning as a lifelong journey, and the importance of responding to societal changes in Ireland and Internationally*.

3.2.2 New concepts and terminology

Submissions underscore a broad welcome for new concepts and terminology (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Concepts and terminology



As shown, respondents welcomed replacement of the term ‘children’ with ‘babies, toddlers and young children’; and the term ‘practitioner’ with ‘educator’, the introduction of new concepts, including slow relational pedagogy, agentic educator and agentic child. They suggested that changes to terminology reflect the changes within the early childhood sector *that are more commonly used today and demonstrates commitment of national policy makers in ensuring the...sector remains current, whilst encompassing societal changes.*

- **Babies, Toddlers and Young Children:** Individually naming babies, toddlers and young children, *supports greater continuity of experience and progression throughout the document overall, ensuring that due attention is afforded to their care and education in early childhood curricula, within and across early childhood settings.*

[it] shows the progression but also how to respond to the individuality of each baby, toddler and young child and giving them the time, freedom and space to develop at an unhurried pace within a slow, nurturing pedagogy

All of which, supposes process and working in the here and now rather than a focus on the end product.

- **Educator:** This term *reflects recent policy initiatives, notably, First 5 (Government of Ireland, 2018), Nurturing Skills (Government of Ireland, 2022), and the Guide to Early Years Education Inspections (Department of Education (DE) 2022).* This term, *which is broadly associated with someone who teaches or educates, more accurately reflects the professional identity of those working within the ECEC profession.* However, one respondent felt that using educator *as an all-inclusive term for parents and childminders would not be appropriate, suggesting that the Framework explicitly and consistently uses the terms parents, early years educators and childminders...throughout..., or a broader term such as ‘adult’ (as used in the original Aistear).* Additionally, another respondent felt

that referring to the adult as educator and the parent as the child's first educator, *is confusing the professional role of the educator*, with another, signifying the need to *clearly distinguish the role of parents and ECEC educators in terms of spontaneity and intentionality, spread of responsibility, knowledge domain*. Considering the National Action Plan for Childminding, two submissions called for greater visibility of childminders, whose *unique pedagogy should be apparent in the document*. If they are to *fully use Aistear, they have to see themselves in the documentation*.

- **Agency:** There was a broad welcome for the introduction of this concept. As a *core aspect of the vision...it is very much welcomed*, as illustrated here:

It underlines that meaningful learning and developmental experiences take place when children and educators have the space and trust to shape their journeys as they learn

The use of the word "agentic" in the new proposal really highlights the importance of children having their own voice, and the educator being agentic, highlights the importance of their role too.

In one instance, a respondent suggested the term 'agentic' was *over-used*, recommending it be replaced *in some places by the term 'autonomous'*. In another instance, a submission recommended removal of the term agentic, saying:

It is important that language throughout the framework is accessible and where appropriate plain English should be used. It is important to acknowledge the diverse educational levels of those who will be expected to use Aistear, including childminders (for whom there is no qualification requirement), staff in centre based...services (who are required to have a minimum Level 5 Qualification on the NFQ) and parents.

Although there was an overall welcome for the term 'agentic', many submissions felt that because it is relatively new terminology, that may be unfamiliar to those working in the sector, additional explanation is required throughout the document *to ensure it is fully understood*. Respondents highlighted the need to explain new terms within the document, e.g., Agentic global citizen, slow relational pedagogy, education for sustainability, STEM. The majority (n=12, 52%) called for a comprehensive glossary of terms.

3.2.3 The Irish Language

There was an overwhelmingly positive reaction to including the Irish language; seen as central to *our cultural and linguistic history and story*, and as *critical to children’s developing sense of identity and belonging*, as illustrated further here:

*Tá fáilte go mór roimh na nathanna Gaeilge a úsáidtear sa churaclam comh maith.
[The Irish expressions used in the curriculum are also very welcome.]*

Tá a lán focal as Gaeilge comhtháite san 'document'. Tá béim ar dteanga- ní fhaca mé é riomhe seo agus tá sé an deas é a fheicáil. [Many Irish words are integrated into the 'document'. There is an emphasis on language - I haven't seen it before and it's nice to see it.]

Nonetheless, two respondents, called for consideration of *other historical languages relative to the cultural heritage of Ireland*. Both recommended including Traveller language; Cant/Gammon, a *traditional language spoken by Irish Travellers*, as well as *Ulster-Scots/Ullan*. Two suggested providing a *clear rationale for when Irish language terms are used*, for example, *as the first language*. It is important to know why *Irish is being included and how it might be used*. As shown in Table 18, one submission highlighted how the use of Irish integrates *Gaeilge and Irish culture*.

Table 18: Integrating Gaeilge and Irish Culture

Term	Integrates Gaeilge and Irish Culture
Meas	<i>While also highlighting young learners their rights in this space</i>
Ionadh	<i>While also highlighting the importance of wonder in the life of a young learner</i>
Aoibhneas croí and bród	<i>While also capturing beautifully the essence of belonging</i>
Meitheal	<i>While also capturing a critical condition for learning in the young learner’s life</i>

Conversely, while acknowledging that Irish terms and words *emphasise Irish culture and language*, one respondent suggested, *this does not always work in practice throughout the document...terms such as macnas [playfulness] and ionadh [wonder]...are not terms with particular Irish meanings that can’t be properly translated* rather, they are *conceptual ideas or theoretical terms taken from ECEC literature/thinking and translated into Irish*. As such:

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.

Another respondent also indicated that *Macnas is not a universal term across the dialects for playfulness*, recommending the use of the word ‘*spráíúlacht*’ instead. Further suggestions for changes to terms are included in Appendix 8: Proposed alternative Irish translations.

While two respondents felt the Irish language *is neatly integrated into Aistear and incorporated in a way that is interwoven into the document*, five queried the use of *random simple words, phrases and proverbs, which may appear tokenistic*. Such an approach is *unlikely to lead to their use and contribute to embedding Irish as intended*:

The Irish words used throughout the framework must make their way into daily practice within settings to avoid tokenism.

While there is an emphasis on *valuing the Irish language and Irish culture in the introduction to the communicating theme*, this emphasis should feature *throughout the four themes of Aistear and the associated learning goals, rather than solely in the communicating theme*. Respondents recommended:

- Promoting the Irish language *within the principles also, as it supports Irish children to feel bród (pride) in their home language*
- Presenting the principles and themes, and the terms ‘babies, toddlers and young children’ *in both Irish and English throughout the framework*.

Noting that *Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is a meaningful intervention to embed Irish*, one respondent indicated that services could be supported to embed Irish by *engaging with such a planned approach*.

One written submission, focussed solely on the Irish language, asked that:

a clear and obvious distinction be made in the new version of Aistear between early immersion settings - playschools in the Gaeltacht and outside it that operate entirely through the medium of Irish - and English-medium settings where some Irish is used (including settings where CLIL is in place). [emphasis in submission]

Further feedback relating to the implications of the use of Irish terms and phrases are noted in Appendix 7: Implications for Early Immersion/English Medium Settings.

The remainder of the section now presents the findings in the format of the NCCA consultation template (see Appendix 9: Written submission template).

3.2.4 Interactions and Relationships

The majority of submissions (n=16, 70%) agreed 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. They especially welcomed *acknowledgement of a broad range of relationships, adding the word interactions, and the highlighting of promoting partnerships, collaborations and connections with babies', toddlers' and young children's peers, families and communities*. Using the term 'interactions', *supports alignment with the PLC while also acknowledging the breadth and depth of interactions that babies, toddlers and young children have with others in their lives*. Also, of note, is the phrase *caring connections alongside pedagogical practice, which suggests a hand in glove approach, and aligns with the Teaching Council's core values*.

Overall, respondents welcomed the increased focus on building positive relationships, responding to individual children's needs, and involving families and communities in the learning process, which will *ultimately support the holistic development of children through play, learning and nurturing relationships*.

While they welcomed retention of the *key person approach*, one respondent recommended this approach should be referenced in the following sections of the document:

- Relationships and Interactions
- Agentic Educators
- Family Community.

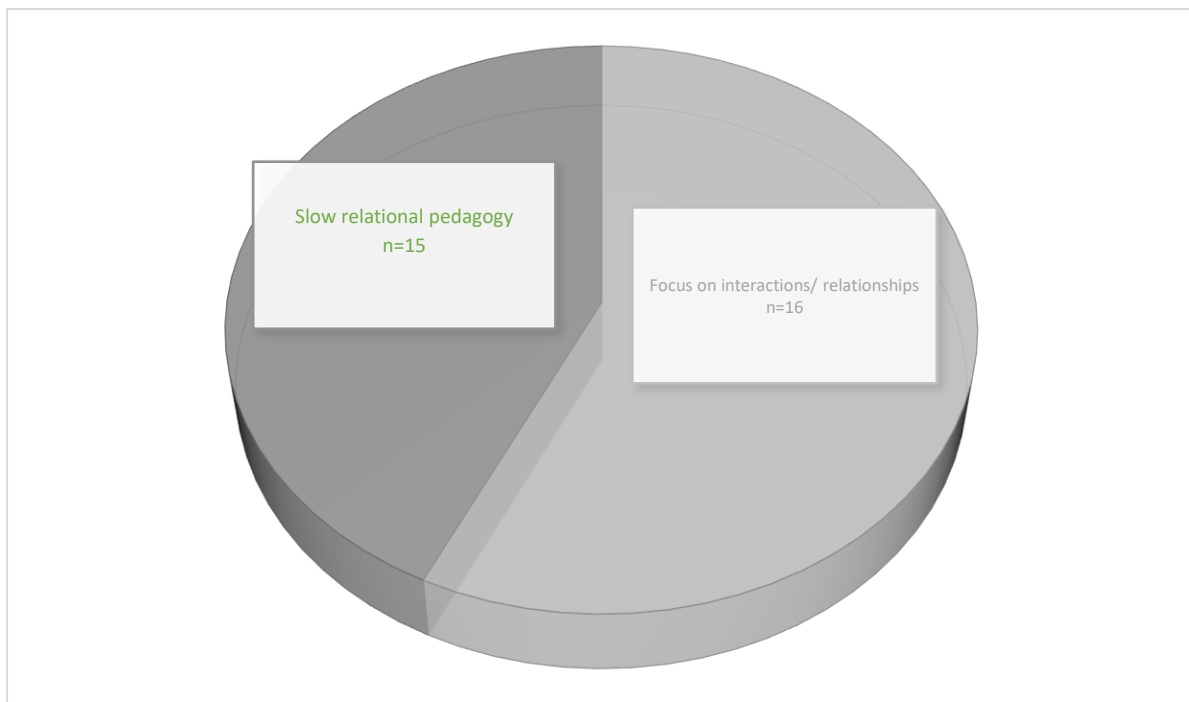
Concerning childminders, because they are *the key person for the children in their care*, a more inclusive, context relevant description of the key person approach is warranted. Moreover, there are instances when the childminder drops off and collects children from the early childhood setting. Therefore, the key person within the early childhood setting *may not have regular contact with the family, it may be with the childminder*. Consequently, *partnership with parents and the key person approach should specifically reference this context*.

In the main, respondents felt the concept of slow relational pedagogy, considered to be *synonymous with quality practice*, is central to quality relationships and interactions.

Slow relational pedagogy, slows things down, keeping practice calm. It recognises the individuality of each child and their right to learn at an unhurried pace, as each child is unique, and their development is complex and holistic.

As shown in Figure 5, the majority (n=15, 65%) welcomed the introduction of Slow Relational Pedagogy.

Figure 5: Attitudes toward interactions, relationships and slow relational pedagogy



The key-person approach was further referenced here, with a suggestion that slow relational pedagogy *could be supported through further reference to the importance of the key-person approach, including the role of the key-person in supporting the development of relationships with families, transitions into, within and from the setting and, in children's learning.* One respondent called for Aistear to highlight the *benefits of having one strong adult in their life.*

In addition to drawing *greater attention to the importance of quality interactions,* the proposals *successfully highlight the importance of the relationship between service and parents.* However, five respondents questioned the reference to parents as the most important people in the child's life. They argued that while this may be accurate for *the majority of babies, toddlers and young children,* the statement is *not fully inclusive of the increasing diversity of family make-up in Ireland, nor of the challenges some families face.*

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.

Referring to parents only, *marginalises others: carers, guardians, and other family members such as grandparents, who make valuable contributions to the lives of babies, toddlers and young children.* Consequently, the term 'family/families' is more *encompassing of the diversity of family structures, rather than 'parents.'*

3.2.5 Recognising babies, toddlers and young children as citizens with rights

The majority (n=16, 70%) concurred the proposals emphasise babies, toddlers and young children as citizens with rights to meaningfully participate and exercise influence on decisions that affect them. Table 19 presents the aspects identified by respondents as particularly pertinent.

Table 19: Babies, toddlers and young children as citizens with rights

<i>Language change from needs to rights, shows the document is now speaking to a children's rights perspective, and acknowledges children having a democratic right to participation</i>
<i>Emphasises the wider global context within which babies, toddlers and young children live and learn, and their own agency to make a difference.</i>
<i>Highlights babies, toddlers and young children's choices, opinions and needs.</i>
<i>Emphasises the child's voice as important and in acknowledging what is important to them.</i>
<i>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 UNCRC.</i>
<i>Use of global citizen and active participation again speaks to a rights-based approach.</i>
<i>Naming the young learner as agentic is critical in recognising them as an individual in the learning experience.</i>

However, respondents also highlighted the following concerns:

- 1. A universal child:** One respondent suggested that *at times, the draft framework presents a universal depiction of a certain childhood, or...makes assumptions about all families and parents. As such, this respondent argued, it is imperative to recognise the universal rights that the child bears, but not to assume a universal child.* Similarly, another stated that in addition to learning about their own rights, children need to learn about *the limited rights of others. As children often experience negative reactions because of their background, ethnicity, and identity, the framework must highlight that children also learn that they don't have the same lived experiences of 'rights' as others...[and]...this needs to be stated explicitly in the framework.*
- 2. Terminology around citizenship:** Three respondents cautioned that terminology around citizenship can be *contested, confusing, and at times used in a narrow and restricting manner.*
- 3. Tension between rights and responsibilities:** Aligned with issues of terminology around citizenship, three respondents raised concerns about the *linkage between rights and*

responsibilities, which could create tensions and challenges in practise. These tensions are associated with:

- Risk of suggesting (and teaching children) that rights are conditional
- Tendency for educators to emphasise responsibilities over rights (due to confusion about the relationship between rights and responsibilities).

To address this tension, there is a need to *explicitly detail that human rights are inherent and inalienable, i.e., rights are not conditional – in exchange for responsibilities, and as noted, even if you don't take on responsibilities as outlined in the framework, your rights can't be taken away from you.* While it is *appropriate* to acknowledge that children have *emerging responsibilities*, this should be *separated as much as possible from children's rights.*

4. **Moving beyond participation rights:** Two respondents highlighted the need for the proposals to move beyond participation rights, with one suggesting *It's not about just listening to children, but acting on what they are communicating*, while the other two, pointed to *missed opportunities to emphasise children's rights beyond participation.*

Rights are not mentioned in the Introduction, Vision, Purpose, or the visual that presents the Themes and Principles.

The language of rights is rarely used in the themes, aims and goals.

The definition of a rights-based approach is quite narrow (focus on participation) and children's rights are not as visible as it could be.

One respondent called for the introduction of the Framework to *acknowledge/recognise the child's right to access quality ECEC in line with Principle 11 of the European Pillar of Social Rights (European Commission, 2018)*, while another recommended broadening the definition of rights-based. For example:

An understanding of babies, toddlers and young children as right's holders who are provided with meaningful opportunities to learn about, through and for rights, and influence decisions about their lives.

The image of the baby, toddler and young child, could recognise children as rights-holders, similar to the reference under 'agentic global citizens'.

Of the sixteen respondents that welcomed the recognition and focus on babies, toddlers and young children as citizens, nine called for explicit inclusion of international frameworks: The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (2015); Target 4.7, in particular. Some also suggested

greater links with the Lundy (2007) model of participation, *to make visible what children's rights to participate in decisions looks like*. In creating a rights-based framework that *contributes to building the capacities of children as rights holders and adults as duty-bearers could be strengthened by including references to specific or relevant articles and the four core principles of the UNCRC*. In particular, Articles 2, 13, 14, 16, 28 and 29 *should be highlighted explicitly and listed as rights in the updated framework*.

Yet again, one respondent indicated that *Global Citizenship* could be stronger within the proposals, especially in the context of *group learning*. Not only is this *important within contemporary understanding of child development and learning, but also in relation to global citizenship*. One respondent stated, *it can be challenging to consider babies and toddlers, who naturally are very dependent on primary care givers to have their needs met, as citizens with rights*. Therefore, describing how to actualise the UNCRC for *the baby/toddler by the agentic educator [would] support babies and toddlers as Agentic global citizens*.

Regarding the 'agentic global citizens' principle, respondents recommended specific reference be made to the UNCRC, and Ireland's *responsibilities* in this regard. They indicated the need to highlight concepts such as *sustained shared thinking, supporting children's working theories, and funds of knowledge...as a vehicle for supporting children's participation rights and active agency in their education*.

3.2.6 Diversity, equity and inclusion

The majority of respondents (n=15, 65%) agreed that the proposals embed the concepts of diversity, equity and inclusion, noting a *visible and stronger focus which again speaks to the rights of children*. Table 20 summarises respondents' perspectives on how the proposals embed the concepts of diversity, equity and inclusion.

Table 20: Embedding diversity, equity and inclusion

<i>Demonstrates a more inclusive language around diversity and equality.</i>
<i>An awareness of and an appreciation of diverse contemporary Irish society, including age, gender, family status, religion, world view, ethnicity including membership of traveller and Roma community is embedded in the framework, in particular within the theme of identity and belonging.</i>
<i>Focus on celebrating and respecting diversity, while also noticing and valuing our similarities and connectedness.</i>
<i>Naming the young learner as agentic is critical in recognising them as an individual in the learning experience.</i>
<i>Explicit use of the word 'agentic' in terms of both the learner and the educator supports the ecological approach to agency and the need for both parties to have agency in terms of curriculum enactment.</i>
<i>Prioritising child's 'voice' is very welcome and supports alignment with the DCEDIY Participation Framework and the work of Laura Lundy.</i>
<i>Recognises the Irish cultural and linguistic history, and the incorporation of phrases as Gaeilge throughout the framework.</i>
<i>Highlights the importance of home language as the child's first language...this recognises the need to value other languages and ethnicities.</i>
<i>Addition of 'inclusion' in the naming of the principle supports policy alignment.</i>
<i>Acknowledges the young person's innate sense of fairness.</i>
<i>Questions dominant paradigms from the outset, and throughout all curriculum development and implementation.</i>
<i>The phrase 'participate meaningfully' supports equitable and accessible opportunities for all young learners.</i>
<i>Use of 'multi-modality of children' in the principles and themes is very effective.</i>

Non-verbal communication through sign language and 'lámh' ...point to a more inclusive classroom especially for children with additional needs.

Changing terminology from *Equality* to *Equity* caused disquiet. While this shift reflects *policy and sectoral change*, some respondents indicated they *would not like to see the term 'equality' dropped*. They felt it is important for educators *to be able to make the distinction between the two*. It was suggested that diversity should be embedded across *Aistear* and not only in Identity and Belonging, and other themes, especially *Communication and Exploring and Thinking can make reference to multilingual learning and identities*. For example, *the Traveller community and their language could be included and named*. One respondent suggested, *the terminology of diversity is limited in the framework when it comes to exclusion and discrimination*. Although one respondent observed that the proposals highlight the importance of inclusion, they noted *inclusion is mentioned only 7 times*. Commenting that *inclusion is crucial and should be seamlessly woven throughout the document*, they asked *how the importance of inclusion can be intertwined throughout the document and supported in a holistic approach*.

3.2.7 Learning through play and hands-on experiences

Here again, the majority of respondents (15, 65%) agreed that the proposals emphasise and reaffirm the centrality of learning through play and hands-on experiences. They welcomed *the continued emphasis on play* with one commenting on *the explicit and clear recognition of the right to play, and the use of rights-based language across the updated Framework*. Again, however, respondents felt that this rights-based approach could be strengthened by explicit reference to the UNCR. Overall, respondents welcomed a focus on *play for plays sake, children doing things for themselves*, and the emphasis on *the importance of time, space, freedom, choice and resources*. One especially welcomed *explicit acknowledgement that children learn and develop in their own time and in their own unique way*, with another praising the recognition of *early childhood as a time of being rather than a time of actively preparing for the next phase*.

As illustrated in Figure 6, respondents felt that *the continued focus on play gives great freedom to early childhood educators to engage in a range of play and hands on experiences*, indoors and outdoors, which *not only includes the senses, motor memory but also give the importance of holistic development and how it supports the psychosocial importance as well as the learning its self*.

Children's right to play and their right to participate in the arts and culture are very closely linked both in practice and in policy, protected under a shared article in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. We warmly welcome the play-based and hands-on approach of the curriculum – this provides great scope for open-ended engagement with the arts as a joyful and playful process that is shaped by those who are taking part.

Figure 6: Types of play



Three respondents highlighted how the emphasis on play supports children’s engagement with the arts. However, three submissions also called for a broader definition of the arts within the document, with one noting, *Creativity is a process: which may see the creation of products or artefacts, but not always.*

It was recommended that the following statement from *Working Principles for Engaging with the Arts in ELC* be incorporated into the following Learning Goal:

Communicate and develop early literacy experiences through creative expression using skills such as mark-making; cutting; drawing; transient art; sticking; painting; building; printing; sculpting; and threading, sewing and weaving, emphasising the process over product’ (p.24).

While the updated *Aistear* is aligned with the *Working Principles for Engaging in the Arts in Early Learning and Care...it does not address the Working Principles comprehensively.* As such, it should make reference and hyperlink to the *Principles*, which will be published in Q1 2024.

Even though respondents believed the proposals place a greater emphasis on outdoor play, they stressed the need for *more emphasis on the outdoor environment*, so that *babies, toddlers and young children could be connected and part of the natural world and not separate from it.* Linking with the SDGs, they suggested enhancing the outdoor learning environment by strengthening the link between play and *the concept of stewardship of the Earth.*

In one case, while agreeing that the proposals emphasise and reaffirm the centrality of learning through play and hands-on experiences, a respondent suggested *this is at the expense of the intentional role of the adult in supporting babies’ toddlers and young children’s learning.* Some respondents suggested that the educator’s role in play required additional emphasis, as follows:

- Creating an environment to meet the needs of all children to ensure meaningful child led play and sustained play

- Nurturing interactions in play and getting involved in play with children
- Providing or guiding or facilitating play experiences, for example, designing *Conceptual Play world Experiences*

Additional commentary concerning the educator's role in play related to:

- Exploring when adult involvement in play *is appropriate in the child's best interest and when to step back from children's play*
- Highlighting that play is fundamental for supporting and enhancing social and emotional learning
- Including an example of hands-on experiences and *inquiry-based play* to help educators understanding of the term and what it looks like in practice.

Regardless of the importance of play, one respondent cautioned that *Aistear is about more than play alone and it is vital that play is understood as both a principle and pedagogy*. Mirroring earlier commentary about the intentional educator, this respondent stated:

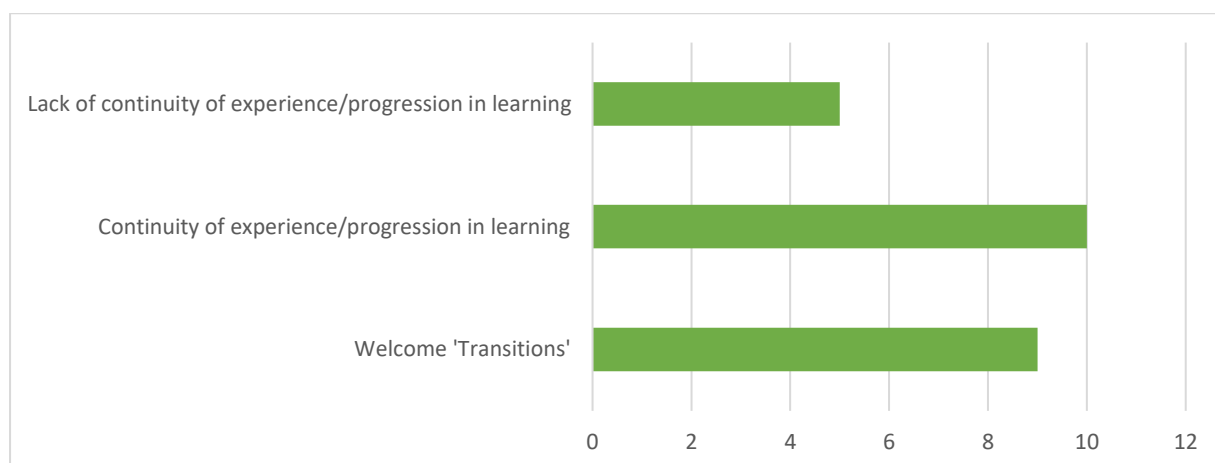
The understanding of play is complex and requires support for practitioners in order for them to move beyond merely providing opportunities for play, structured or otherwise.

Therefore, pre-service and in-service educators *need time and support to understand play-based pedagogy if the vision of these frameworks are to be realised in practice*.

3.2.8 Continuity of experience and progression of learning

Of the 23 submissions, 70% (n=16) provided feedback relating to whether the proposals support continuity of experience and progression of learning for babies, toddlers and young children. As illustrated in Figure 7, while 10 submissions agreed that the proposals supported continuity of experience and progression of learning, and nine welcomed the introduction of a principle on *transitions*, five queried continuity of experience and progression of learning, particularly in the context of transition from early childhood to primary school.

Figure 7: Continuity of experience and progression in learning



Respondents associated the new principle 'transitions' with:

- Recognising the importance of transitions for babies, toddlers, and young children
- Highlighting the importance of facilitating movement between pre and primary school settings in a safe and secure manner
- Supporting the importance of supporting children's progression of learning
- Supporting alignment and cohesion with the *Primary Curriculum Framework*
- Highlighting the importance of transitions not just from home to pre-school/ pre-school to primary school but throughout the day.

Ensuring progression learning and development and continuity of experiences requires consistent relationships with a shared responsibility between families, childminders and early years educators.

Given the emphasis on partnerships, further consideration must be given to *how the partnership with parents is developed*. Furthermore, in recognition of *the significant transition for some children from home to their childminder, and often to a pre-school for ECCE, the role of the childminder in such transitions should be explicitly acknowledged*.

In terms of progression in learning and development, two respondents questioned:

How might a baby, toddler and young child engage with the caregivers, others and the environment as they progress in their learning and development?

How might progression be seen to develop during key moments of transition? (i.e from pre-school to primary school)?

How will the framework be further supported through the development of curriculum documents for preschool setting?

They felt the proposals would benefit from *further details on how progression may be realised within the Aistear Framework*. One asked if consideration could be given to *provision of progression continua for early years*, while another, asked if a document similar to *Mo Scéal* could be developed to foster *a similar learning progression in the everyday experiences of babies, toddlers and young children*.

Three respondents identified alignment between the Framework and the *Primary Curriculum Framework*, indicating this *promotes consistency across the education continuum*. Another referenced *continuity of language, shared principles and prioritisation of play and active learning...across the Frameworks*, while another suggested such continuity *will be welcome for practitioners, particularly those in early years primary who support both Frameworks*.

As indicated in Figure 7, five respondents raised concerns about continuity of experience and progression in learning across early childhood and primary school. Specifically, they sought clarity on a perceived *move away from using Aistear within the primary school setting*, referencing the statement, *Aistear is the curriculum Framework for all children from birth to six years in all settings other than primary and special schools*. They, therefore, expressed concern that separating *Aistear* and the *Primary Curriculum Framework* *does not embrace the smooth transitions that should exist between pre-school and primary school*, which could result in continuity of experience and progression not being *fully realised*.

3.2.9 Principles of Early Learning and Development

Of the fifteen submissions providing information relating to the Principles of Early Learning and Development, nine welcomed reduction in the number of Principles from twelve to nine, suggesting it is *more user friendly and consolidates the information for users, offering a more manageable yet focused Framework*. More broadly, respondents described the Principles overall as *clear and more in line with recent research and current practice* (See Appendix 4: Feedback relating to the Principles of Early Learning and Development for further feedback on the Principles).

Twelve of the twenty three respondents (52%) agreed that that the Principles and Themes are interwoven and visible throughout Aistear’s Themes. Principles such as the importance of play and hands-on experiences are quite evident, while others such as diversity, equity and inclusion are more subtly mentioned throughout:

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.

One respondent praised *continuity of language* when reviewing the themes alongside the principles, noting its usefulness *in supporting understanding of the document and ensuring cohesion between Themes and Principles*. While providing positive feedback generally, one respondent indicated the Principles *can frequently be found interwoven through the Themes, other times, it is not so evident*. Accordingly, an early career educator, an educator who had completed initial training many years before, or a student-educator may not identify the interwoven nature of the Principles and Themes. Consideration of a *more explicit – visible – method...to demonstrate the interwoven nature of the Principles and Themes* is required. This could be *manged through hyperlinks between the two; or as Síolta was designed, through ‘signposting’ between Themes and Principles*.

While one respondent suggested Figure 2, on page 11 of the draft proposals (see infographic in Appendix 10: Infographic depicting Aistear’s Principles for Early Learning and Development), *provides a strong graphic of the interwoven nature of the Themes and Principles*, others called for *greater visual acuity*, as illustrated in Table 21. Other concerns relate to removal of sample learning opportunities, the need for a consistent developmental approach across the education continuum, increased emphasis on inclusion and equity, and the principles of Global Citizenship.

Table 21: Suggestions for change

Visual Acuity	<i>The diagram shows how the principles are at the core with the themes looping around them. An additional chart showing the linkages as well would be useful.</i> <i>Review...the busy and text-heavy infographic lacking clear theme and principle outlines</i>
Sample Learning Opportunities	<i>Removal of sample learning opportunities is criticized, seen as valuable for understanding play and positive outcomes for children. Key principles highlighted are 3, 8, and 9. Suggestions include clearer separation of aims,</i>

	<i>further clarification on the principle of Transitions, and reducing academic language.</i>
Consistent Developmental Approach	<i>A consistent developmental approach from pre-school to primary school is emphasized, with language adaptations for better understanding</i>
Inclusion and Equity	<p><i>Positive feedback on using the Irish language..., but need for increased emphasis on inclusion and equity</i></p> <p><i>There could be a greater focus on gendered identities and how educators can challenge gender stereotypes and gendered play</i></p> <p><i>There is no mention of race or racism, sexism, ableism, classism, homophobia</i></p>
Principles of Global Citizenship	<i>The principles of global citizenship can be integrated further</i>

3.2.10 Areas for improvement

This section details areas for improvement broadly, in the areas of STEM and the Arts, Digital Technologies and Digital Literacy. As commented in one submission, *support for science, digital literacy, process-focused STEM learning such as engineering, and progression in mathematics is absent*. Numeracy, literacy, assessment, and the image/role of the educator were also identified as areas requiring attention (See Appendix 5 for further details).

3.2.10.1 STEM and the Arts

While one respondent welcomed 'the addition of STEM and the emphasis on *exploration through play*, they queried how *the terminology is presented, scientific vs. science, to technological vs technology etc*. Additionally, this respondent queried the absence of the STEM acronym, which is especially important in terms of continuity across the learning continuum: *Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) Education' is referenced within the Primary Curriculum Framework*.

Two respondents proposed embedding STEM and the Arts, rather than STEM within the theme of Exploring and Thinking:

There is an opportunity to demystify the term 'STEM (& the Arts)' and to provide concrete examples of the types of learning opportunities possible within each area.

The individual terms of science, technology, engineering and maths are mentioned in this theme; however, the point of STEAM is to not separate out the individual siloed areas...[which]...doesn't support the transdisciplinary nature of STEAM and the interplay between the areas which is really so conducive as an approach that can span the early childhood Framework.

It was also indicated that early childhood settings *are being inspected using criteria that relate to STEM/ STEAM (DOE Inspectorate, 2022). For consistency across government departments and documents...the term 'STEM/ STEAM'...should explicitly appear in Aistear*.

3.2.10.2. Digital technologies and digital literacies

As technology *impacts how children interact with, perceive and learn about the world...it should be reflected in our Curriculum Framework*. Moreover, certain references to digital technologies in the updated Aistear require further explanation and clarification regarding age appropriateness, namely:

- Positive attitudes and choices that value their preferences in relation to nutrition, hygiene, exercise, rest and sleep, digital technologies and routines (p.19)
- Experiencing digital technologies for enjoyment (p.24).

Indicating that the proposals mention digital technology, *at least 10 times*, one respondent suggested that *it is over referenced*. While acknowledging the benefits of using digital technology as part of the curriculum as a resource, they indicated that this could be *highlighted within certain examples or with a note to specify measured or balanced use? e.g. light boxes, lines of inquiry vs screen time (for passive viewing activities)*.

Likewise, another suggested that if the updated Aistear includes digital technologies, it must *define terms (e.g., electronic toys, digital tools such as calculators and weighing scales, unplugged technology*

or watching on a screen); outlining the age appropriateness of each. In making this recommendation, the respondent noted the guidance from the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the Health Service Executive (HSE) in relation to screen time for children from birth to five years.

3.2.10.3 Numeracy

Key areas from the current *Aistear* (2009) in relation to numeracy and mathematics are missing. Considering the focus on the development of numeracy with the impending *Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy* (due for publication by April 2024), the updated *Aistear* should further highlight the importance of numeracy in early childhood. While respondents welcome the addition of 'Emergent Numeracy' within the glossary, they requested retention of the broader definition of 'numeracy' ('Numeracy involves developing an understanding of numbers and mathematical concepts') ...from the original iteration, to support the alignment with the forthcoming *Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy*. Table 22 present further concerns and associated recommendations.

Table 22: Numeracy concerns and recommendations

Concern	Recommendation
Pattern referenced only in relation to communication	Reference pattern recognition and making connections within the learning goals
References to counting skills omitted	Reference counting, number and mathematical language within the learning goals
Number is only referenced in terms of coming to know symbols	Include the concept of number in the definition of emergent numeracy within the glossary
Use of mathematical language no longer referenced	
Developing a sense of time and space have been omitted	Reinstate

3.2.10.4 Literacy

One respondent recommended retention of the broader definition of literacy from the original iteration of *Aistear*, to support the alignment with the forthcoming *Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy*.

Literacy is more than having the ability to read and write. The updated Aistear omits a definition of 'pre-reading or early reading skills.' This must be retained and expanded, "to include print motivation, developing love of books, print awareness-knowing that text has meaning, and making reference to critical literacy skills".

While the addition of *oral language* in the following sentence is welcome: *A strong foundation in oral language(s) is important and babies, toddlers and young children quickly learn about the power and meaning of symbols, through extensive experience with books* (p.23), it is important to emphasise the

essential function of interaction (warm responsive adults, serve return etc.) in the development of oral language.

3.2.10.5 Assessment

Three respondents welcomed the *proposed cyclical process of assessment*, described as *a useful tool and an appropriate pedagogical process within early years practice*. Respondents commented on how the updated Aistear highlights the role of the educator *many times in reference to 'notice/noticing' as a starting point for getting to know children*. They indicated that the word notice invites the educator to *tune in and take the time to become aware of the child, reinforcing the notion of a slow relational pedagogy*. However, one respondent expressed disappointment, and considered the stage of 'reflecting' as being *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...

This respondent *strongly encourage[s] the revised/final draft to present 'reflecting' as the critical part of the documentation process, so that educators can appreciate its importance*.

Two respondents highlighted the challenge of assessment for educators, and in common with others, requested clarification *as to what is meant by assessment*. Focusing on formative assessment, another respondent stated, *nobody talks about how you do this?*, with another suggesting the term 'assessment' *may have more formal or academically based connotations*.

Using the term 'ongoing observation' instead of 'ongoing assessment' may be less daunting.

One submission highlighted the updating of Aistear as an opportunity to support a shared, system-wide understanding of assessment. Further recommendations regarding assessment are outlined in Table 23.

Table 23: Recommendations re: assessment

<i>Provide more focused evaluation tools alongside the existing broad ASPG self-evaluation tools</i>
<i>Provide more concrete examples of how to document assessment in a meaningful way</i>
<i>Enhance educator's knowledge and understanding in the use of digital portfolios</i>
<i>Include clear reference regarding the role of the educator in noticing significant learning and in subsequently documenting this information and using it to inform the next steps in children's learning</i>
<i>Reflect that children may document their own learning using digital devices...these can also enable parents to provide feedback which can help extend children's interests and allow adults to understand children's funds of knowledge/working theories</i>
<i>Express clearly inclusion of the child and their family in the planning and assessment process is integral to the process</i>

3.2.10.6 Image and role of the educator

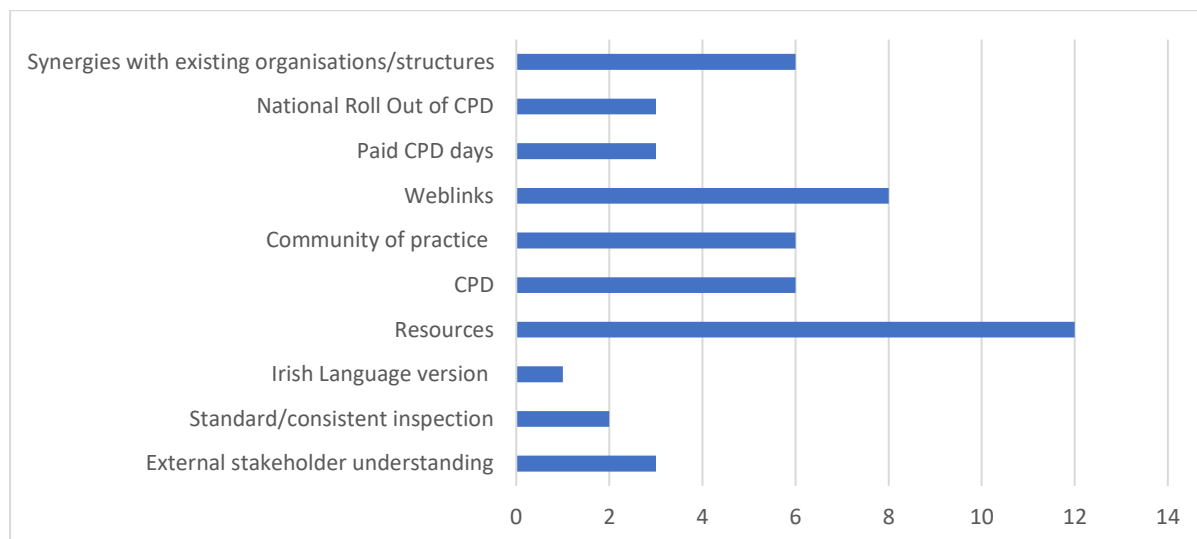
Even though, the *vision of Aistear, as a tool of empowerment, rather than directive, resonates with the capability and competence of each educator*, respondents indicated the need to enhance the image of the educator. While acknowledging and supporting *the positioning of the educator as competent, confident, agentic and reflective*, one respondent stated, *this says nothing about the intentional role of the adult in guiding play, designing learning environments, planning curricula*. Within the proposals, the image of the educator *describes predominantly what they will do, meaning it is limited*. Similarly, another would like to see the educator portrayed *more as a facilitator...rather than the presenter*. Considering the *rich history, life experiences and skills they bring to their role*, one respondent recommended further development of the educator's image, whereas another suggested, *a focus on the educator in terms of the valuable role they play could provide opportunity for feelings of empowerment when Educators read it*. More broadly, one respondent suggested *incorporating the educator's role in all four themes, while a second, saw their role in terms of being the catalyst through which rights are realised*.

The next subsection presents findings relating to how early childhood educators can be supported in working with the curriculum Framework.

3.2.11 Supporting Educators

Almost all submissions (n=22) addressed how to support educators to work with the updated *Aistear*.

Figure 8: Supports required to help educators



Clearly, the majority identified the need for resources, including time, materials, toolkits, equipment, and exemplars. Aligned with this, eight respondents suggested including weblinks to existing resources, such as guidelines for best practice from the ASPG, the *Tusla Quality and Regulatory Framework* and the *DE Inspection Guidelines*, within both the Framework, and the practice guide. This would *provide a cohesive integrated approach, resulting in educators continually accessing appropriate and up to date information as websites are updated etc.*

Three respondents called for a *cohesive and strategic roll out of training* nationally, that would involve training for those involved in the *professional formation of educators in further and higher education*. As shown in Figure 8, six respondents identified the need for CPD, of which, three also stressed the need for a community of practice (CoP), also referenced by another 3 respondents (n=6 overall). As such, CPD could take a variety of formats, workshops, webinars, podcast series and so on. One respondent suggested CPD *for all involved within the ECEC profession (e.g., educators; training and education providers)*. Moreover, an Irish edition of the Framework should be available as well as CPD *through Irish, which could be done on a cluster basis with playschools outside of the Gaeltacht*.

Three respondents recommended paid CPD days *in line with the entitlement of other professionals in the educational continuum*, while three stressed that all external stakeholders (e.g., Inspectorates) should be aware of and understand the Framework, so there is shared understanding, leading to *standard and consistent inspection*. In relation to Irish medium settings, inspection should *take into account the immersion context in which the playschools operate*.

Finally, six respondents suggested synergies with existing organisations and support structures, and two specifically stressed the need to fully explore synergies between existing supports, especially the ASPG. They stressed that *development of additional supports without due regard to existing resources may result in a lack of clarity for those using Aistear and ultimately limit engagement with existing and/or new supports*.

3.3 Online questionnaires

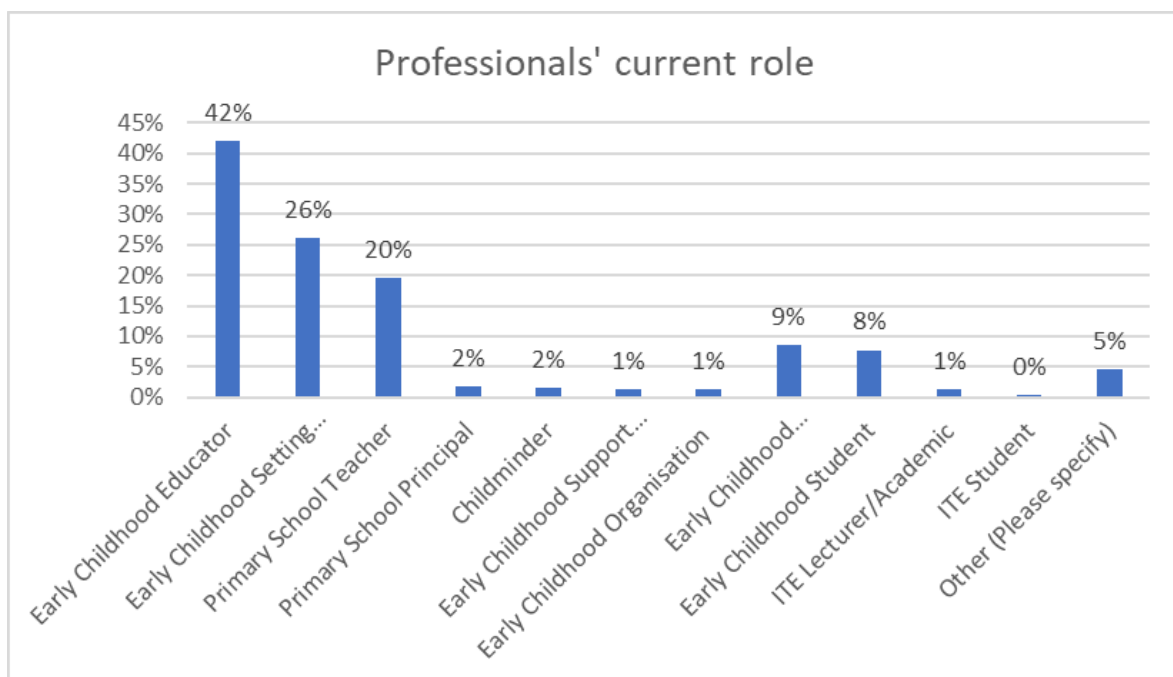
Two separate questionnaires, one for professionals and one for parents/guardians were conducted using Survey Hero. 735 professionals responded to one or more questions in the professional questionnaire, while 248 parents/guardians responded to one or more questions in the parent/guardian questionnaire.

3.3.1 Professional questionnaire

3.3.1.3 Identifier questions

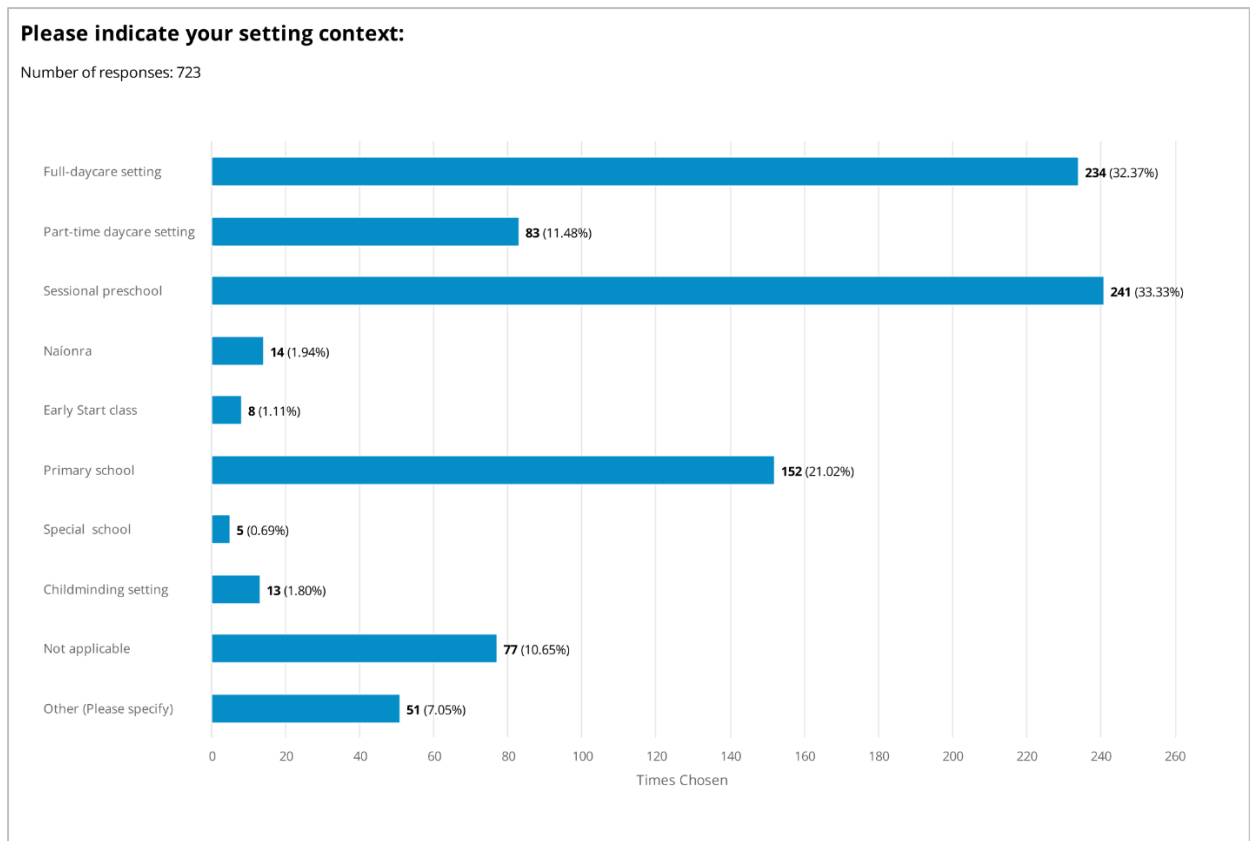
Both professionals and parents/guardians were asked a series of identifier questions. Professionals were invited to identify their role and had the choice to select more than one option. When asked about their current role, 42% of professionals selected Early Childhood Educator as their current role, followed by Early Childhood Setting Manager (26%), and Primary School Teacher (20%).

Figure 9: Professionals' current role



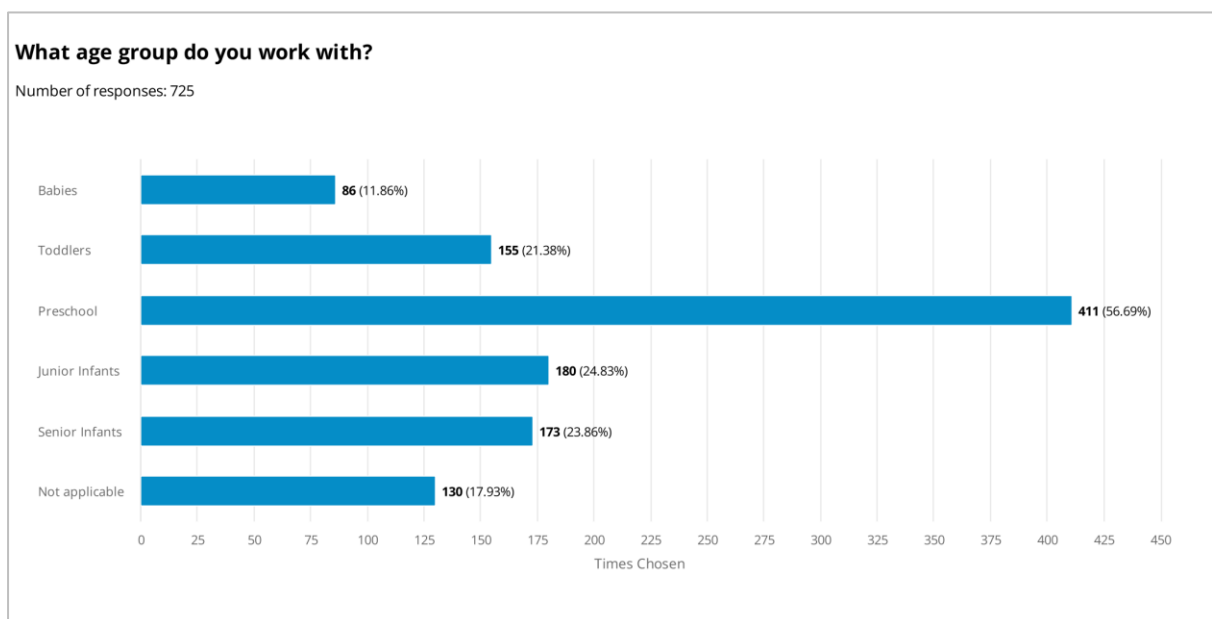
Professionals were invited to indicate their setting context and had the option to make more than one selection. 33% of respondents indicated Sessional preschool, followed by Full-daycare setting (32%), and primary school (21%).

Figure 10: Setting context



Professionals were also asked to indicate the age group they worked with and had the option to make more than one selection. 66% indicated 'Preschool', followed by 'Junior Infants' (22%) and 'Senior Infants' (21%).

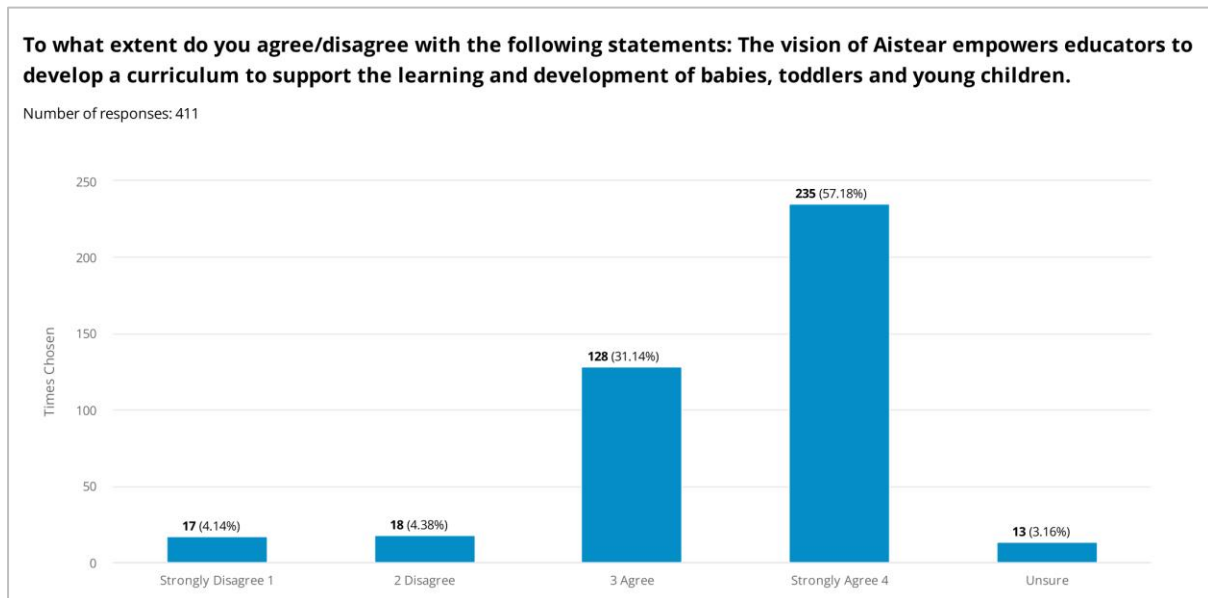
Figure 11: Age group



3.3.1.2 The vision of Aistear

57% of professional respondents strongly agreed that 'the vision of Aistear empowers educators to develop a curriculum to support the learning and development of babies, toddlers and young children', followed by 31% of respondents who agreed. There were 411 responses to this question.

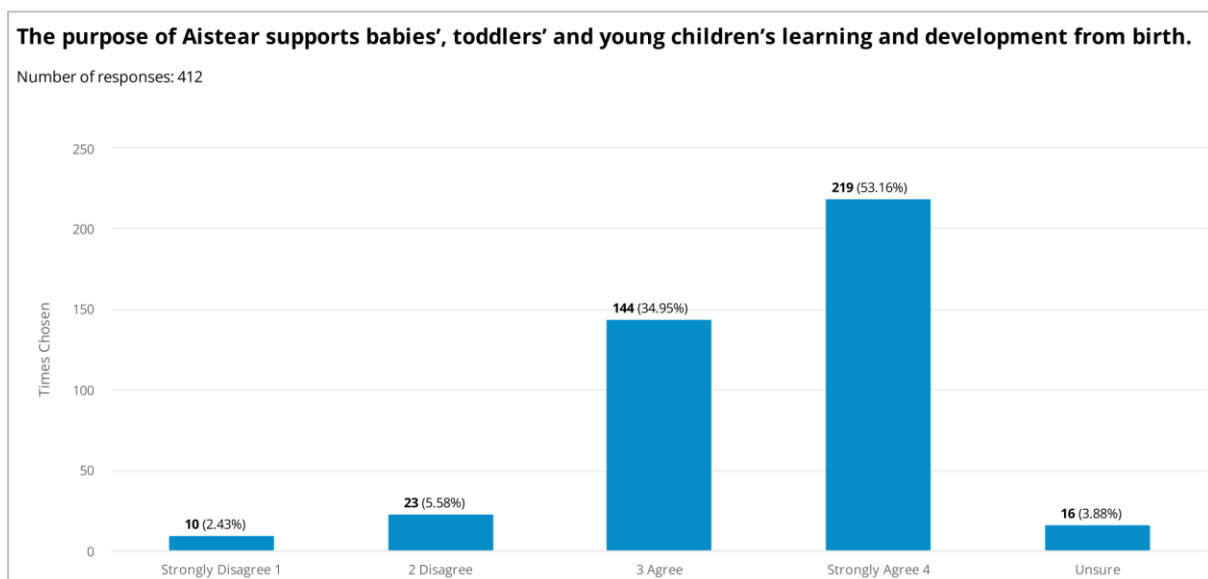
Figure 12: The vision of Aistear (professionals)



3.3.1.3 The purpose of Aistear

53% of professional respondents strongly agreed that 'the purpose of Aistear supports babies', toddlers' and young children's learning and development from birth', followed by 35% of respondents who agreed.

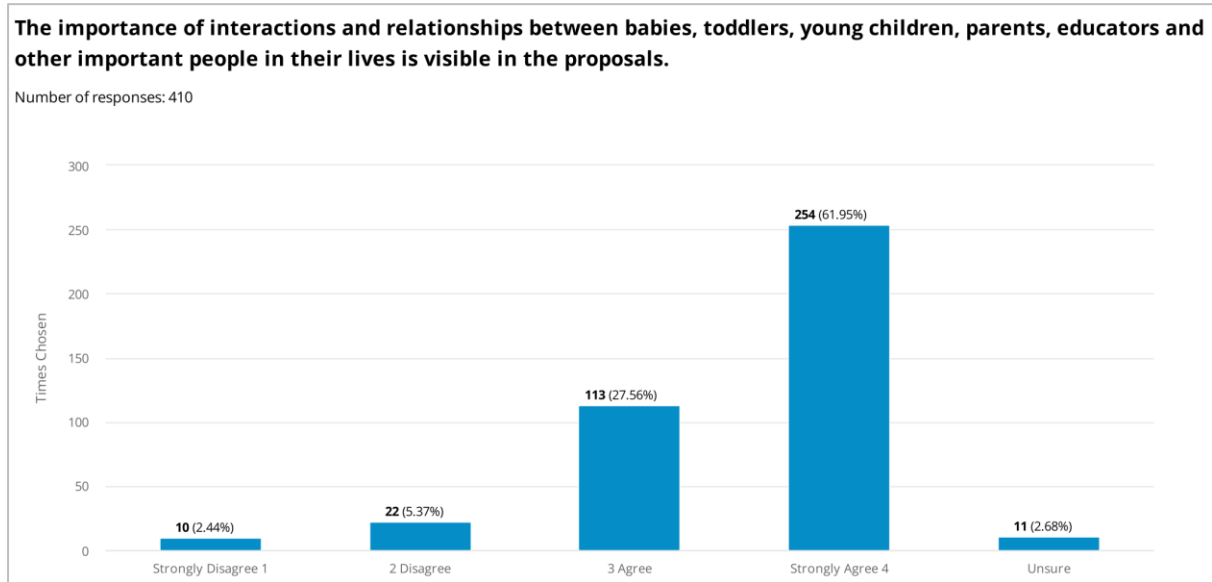
Figure 13: The purpose of Aistear (professionals)



3.3.1.4 The importance of interactions and relationships

62% of professional respondents strongly agreed that 'the importance of interactions and relationships between babies, toddlers, young children, parents, educators and other important people in their lives is visible in the proposals', followed by 28% of respondents who agreed.

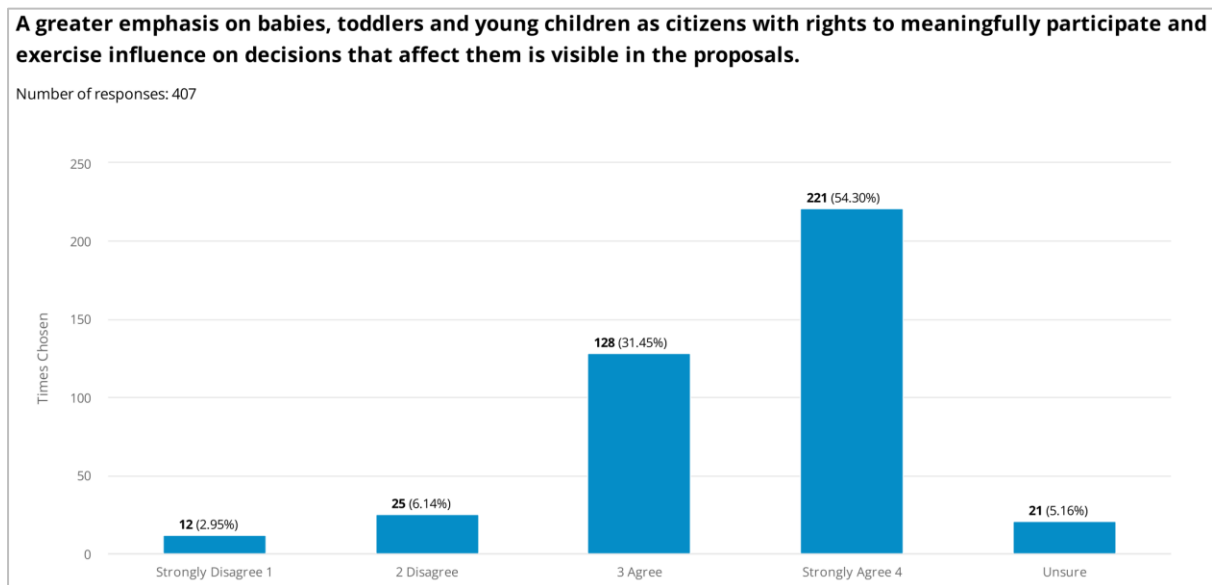
Figure 14: The importance of interactions and relationships (professionals)



3.3.1.5 A greater emphasis on babies, toddlers and young children as citizens with rights

54% of professional respondents strongly agreed that 'a greater emphasis on babies, toddlers and young children as citizens with rights to meaningfully participate and exercise influence on decisions that affect them is visible in the proposals', followed by 31% of respondents who agreed.

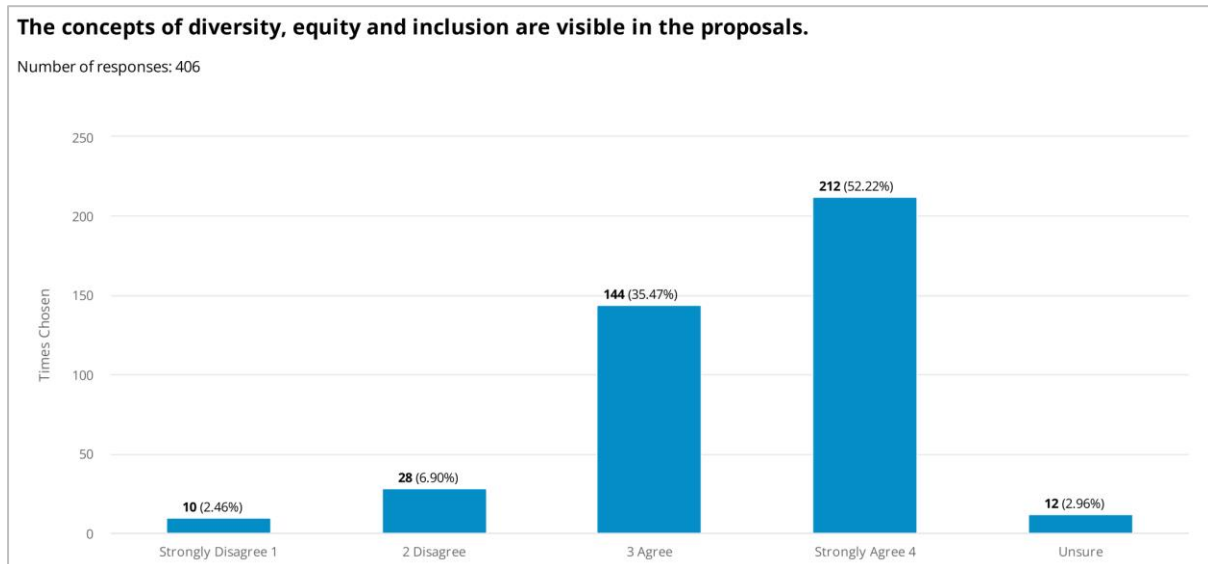
Figure 15 A greater emphasis on babies, toddlers and young children as citizens with rights (professionals)



3.3.1.6 The concepts of diversity, equity and inclusion

52% of professional respondents strongly agreed that 'the concepts of diversity, equity and inclusion are visible in the proposals', followed by 35% of respondents who agreed.

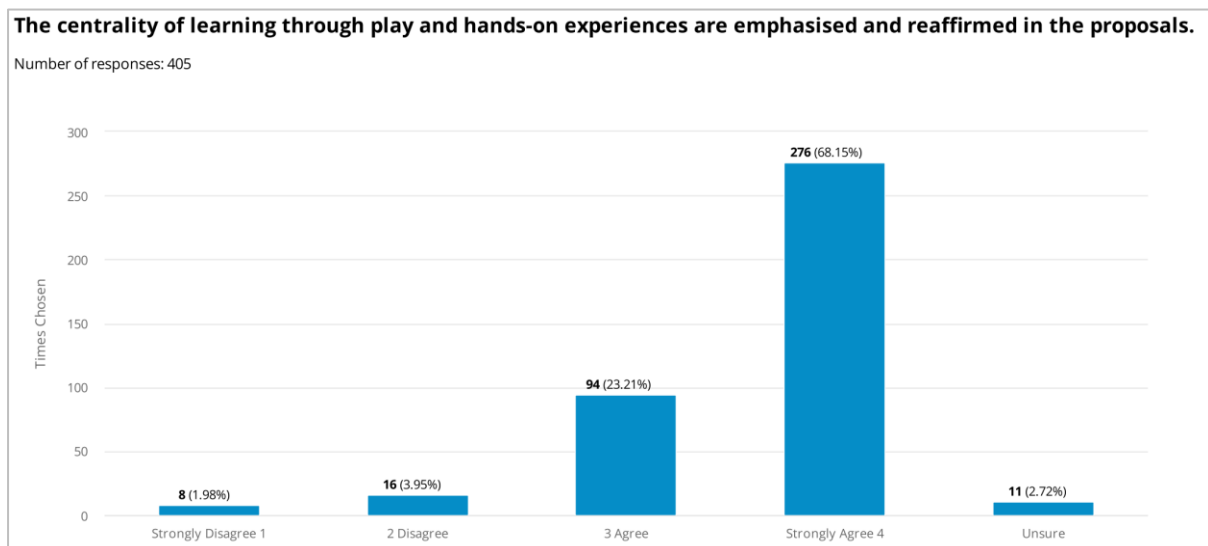
Figure 16: The concepts of diversity, equity and inclusion (professionals)



3.3.1.7 Centrality of learning through play and hands-on experiences

The greatest proportion of respondents (68%) strongly agreed that the centrality of learning through play and hands-on experiences are emphasised and reaffirmed in the proposals.

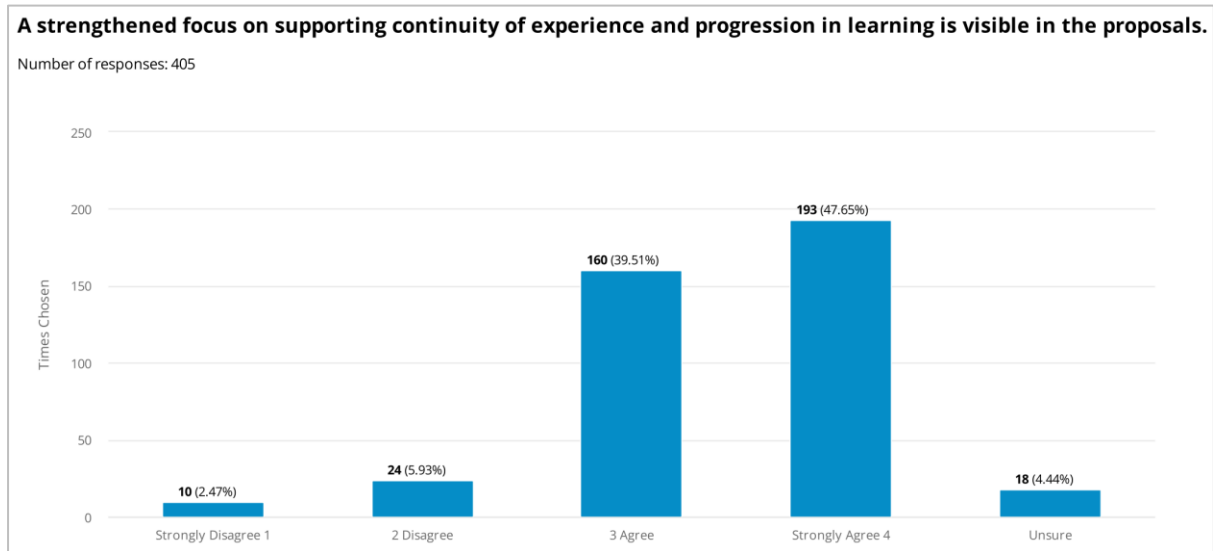
Figure 17: Centrality of learning through play and hands-on experiences (professionals)



3.3.1.8 Strengthened focus on supporting continuity of experience and progression

48% of professional respondents strongly agreed that ‘a strengthened focus on supporting continuity of experience and progression in learning is visible in the proposals’, followed by 40% of respondents who agreed.

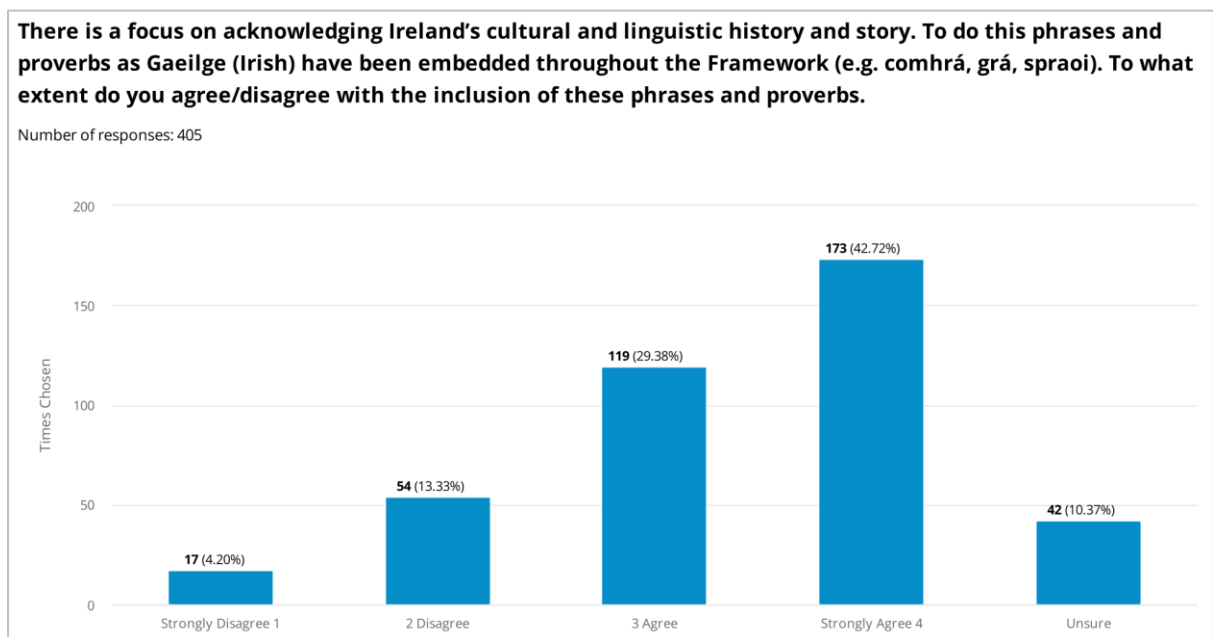
Figure 18: Strengthened focus on supporting continuity of experience and progression (professionals)



3.3.1.9 Inclusion of phrases and proverbs in Irish

There is a focus on acknowledging Ireland’s cultural and linguistic history and story. To do this phrases and proverbs as in Irish have been embedded throughout the Framework (e.g. *comhrá, grá, spraoi*). 43% of respondents strongly agreed that phrases and proverbs in Irish should be included/embedded throughout the Framework, followed by 29% of respondents who agreed, 13% disagreed, 4% strongly disagreed and 10% were unsure.

Figure 19: Inclusion of phrases and proverbs in Irish (professionals)



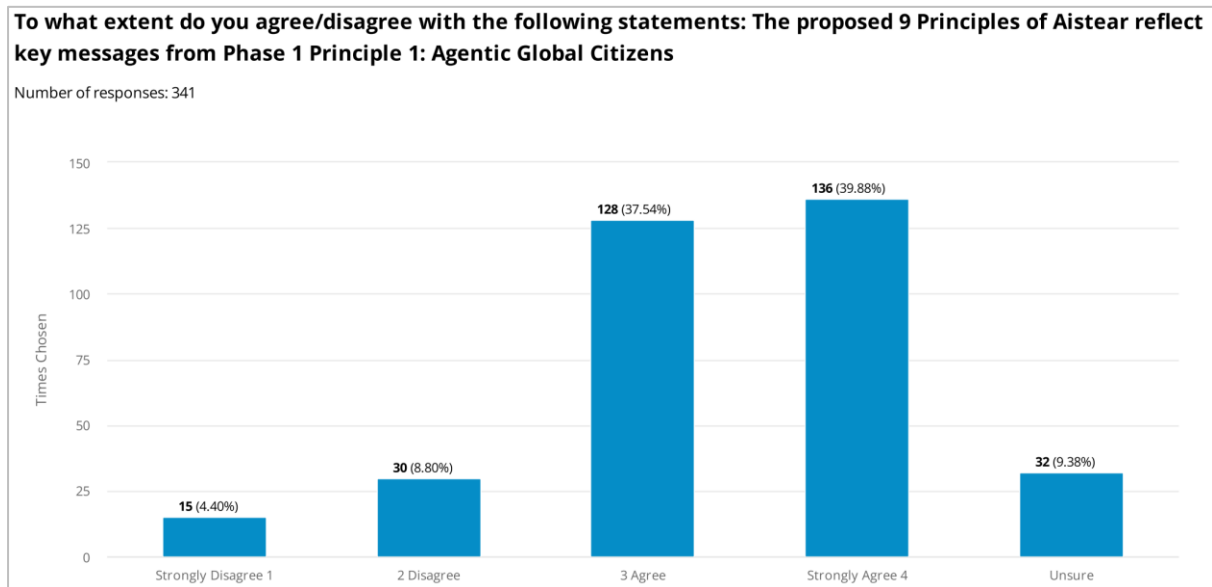
3.3.1.10 The Principles of Aistear

The Principles have been updated and reframed from 12 to 9. This section presents professionals views on the proposed Principles of Aistear and specific statements regarding these principles. There were 340 responses to this section.

Principle 1: Agentic Global Citizens

40% of professional respondents strongly agreed that 'the proposed 9 Principles of Aistear reflect key messages from Phase 1, Principle 1: Agentic Global Citizens', followed by 38% of respondents who agreed.

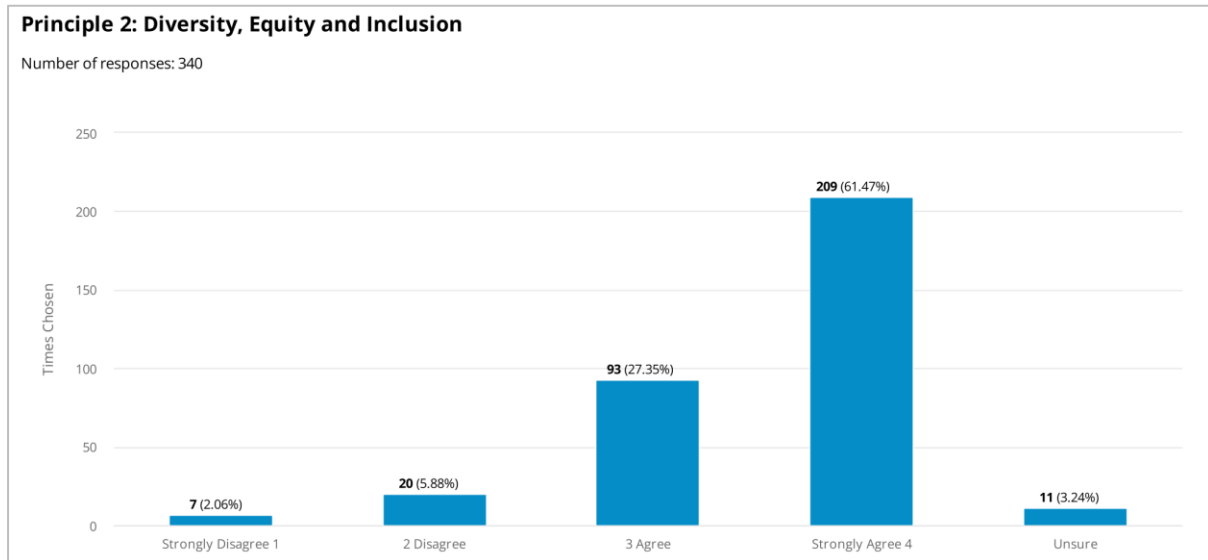
Figure 20: Principle 1 – Agentic Global Citizens (professionals)



Principle 2: Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

61% of respondents strongly agreed that 'the proposed 9 Principles of Aistear reflect key messages from Phase 1, Principle 2: Diversity, Equity and Inclusion', followed by 27% of respondents who agreed.

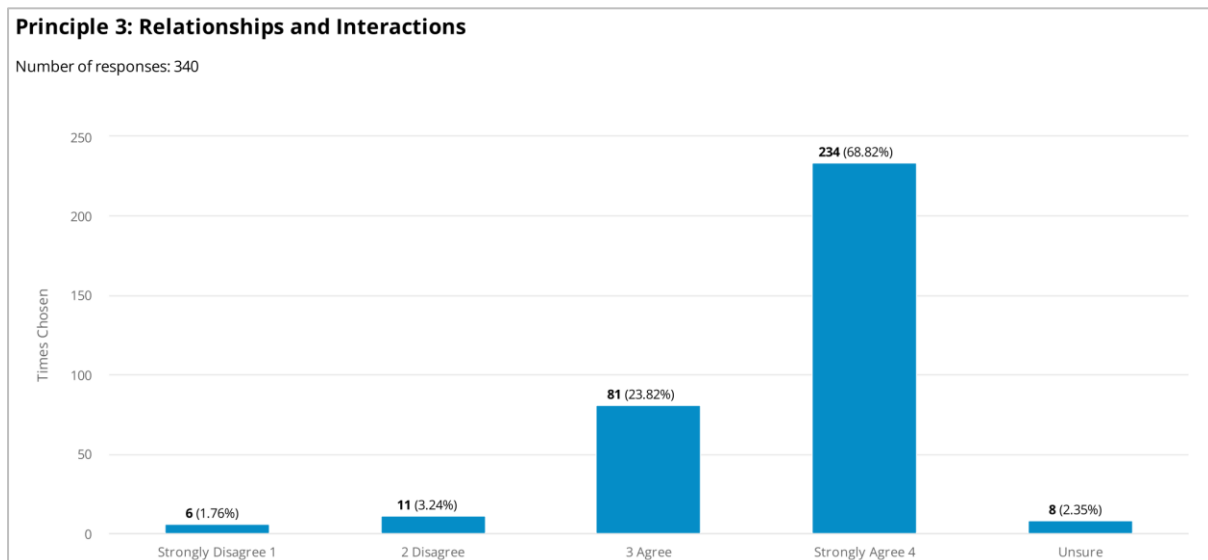
Figure 21: Principle 2 – Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (professionals)



Principle 3: Relationships and Interactions

69% of respondents strongly agreed that 'the proposed 9 Principles of Aistear reflect key messages from Phase 1, Principle 3: Relationships and Interactions' followed by 24% of respondents who agreed.

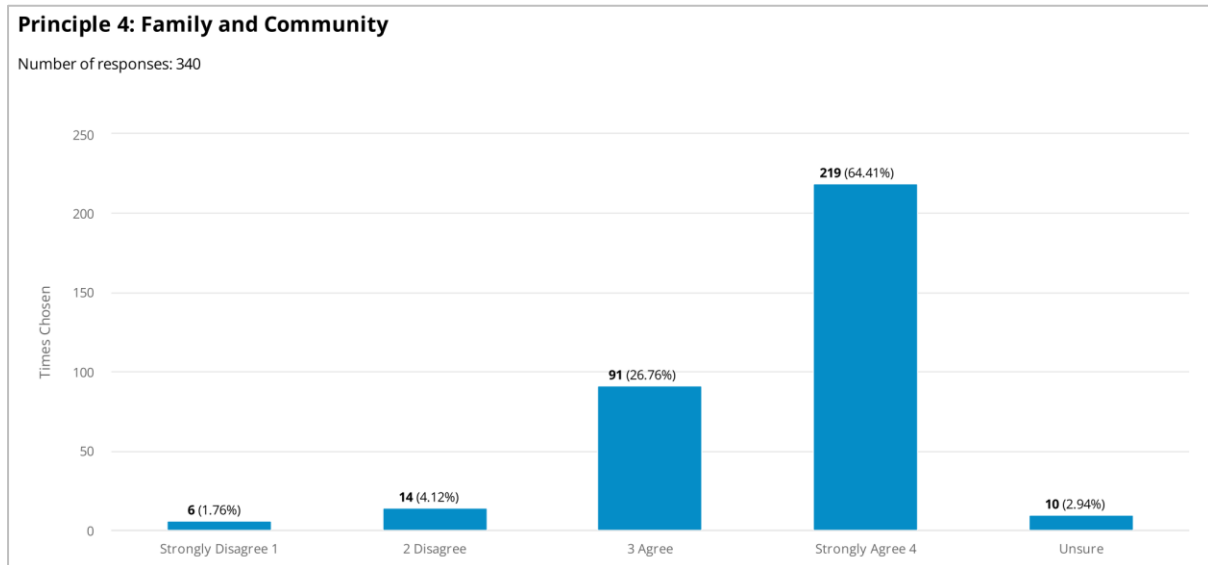
Figure 22: Principle 3 – Relationships and Interactions (professionals)



Principle 4: Family and Community

64% of respondents strongly agreed that 'the proposed 9 Principles of Aistear reflect key messages from Phase 1, Principle 4: Family and Community', followed by 27% of respondents who agreed.

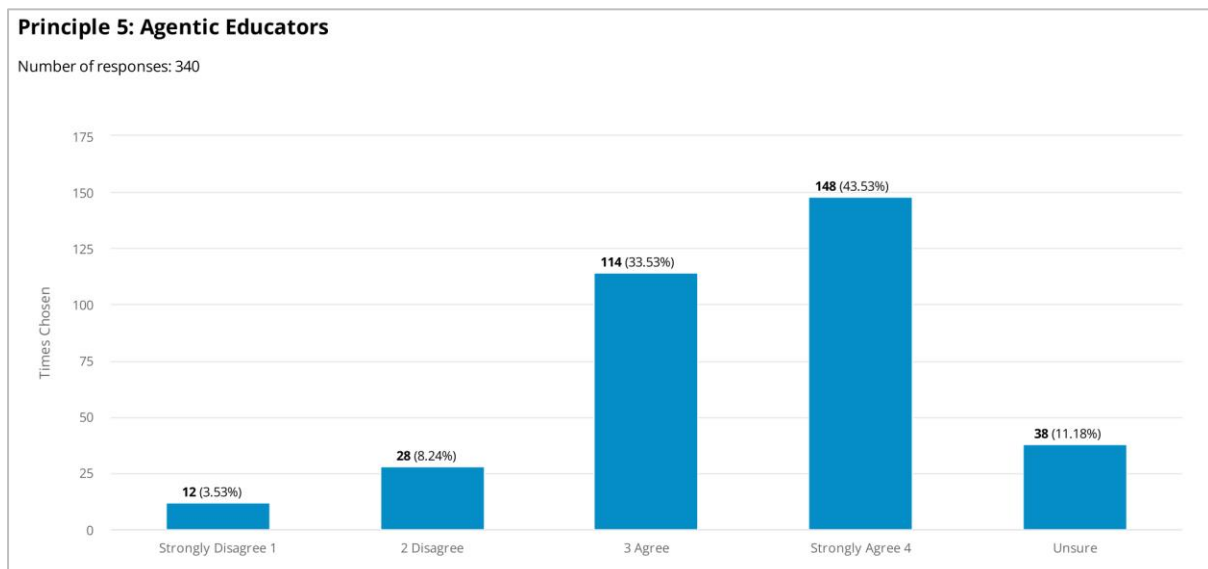
Figure 23: Principle 4 – Family and Community (professionals)



Principle 5: Agentic Educators

44% of respondents strongly agreed that 'the proposed 9 Principles of Aistear reflect key messages from Phase 1, Principle 5: Agentic Educators', followed by 34% of respondents who agreed, 8% disagreed, 4% strongly disagreed and 11% were unsure.

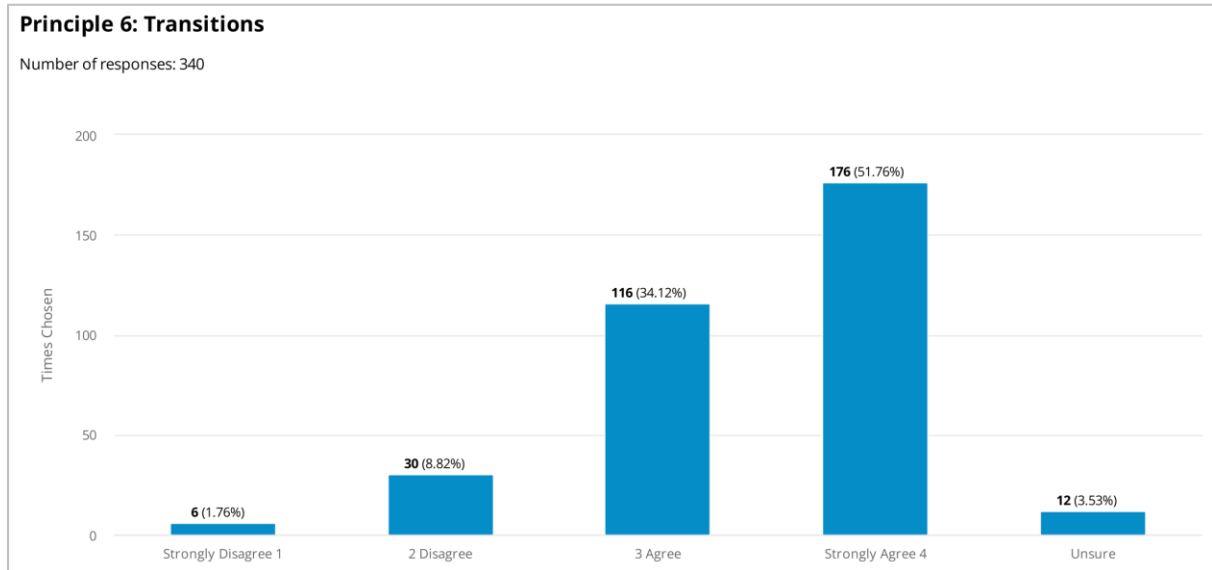
Figure 24: Principle 5 – Agentic Educators (professionals)



Principle 6: Transitions

52% of respondents strongly agreed that 'the proposed 9 Principles of Aistear reflect key messages from Phase 1, Principle 6: Transitions', followed by 34% of respondents who agreed.

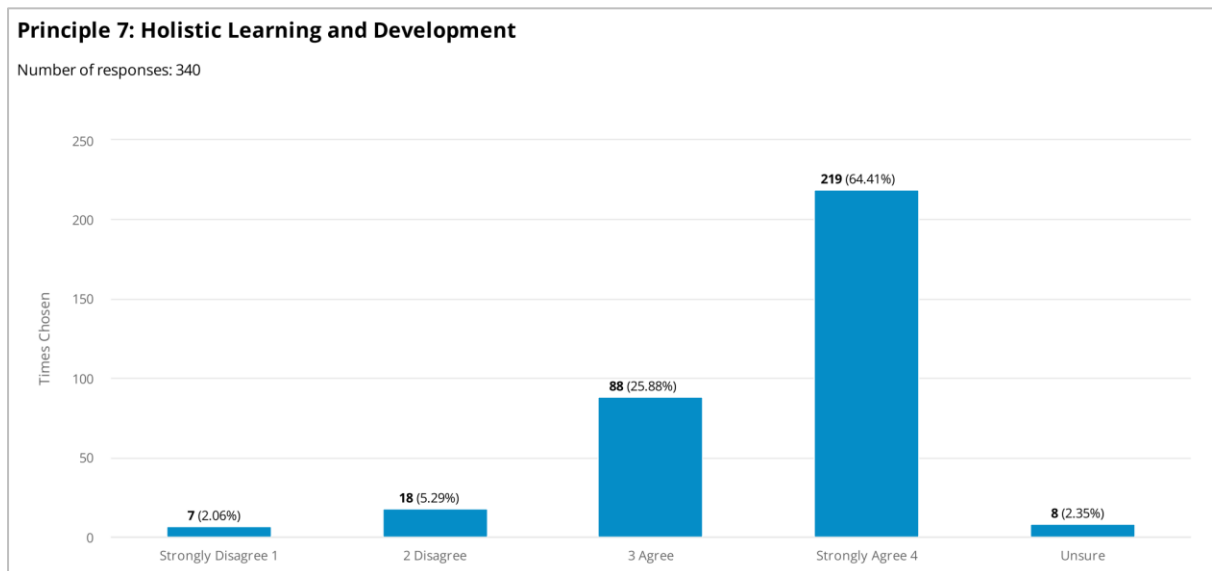
Figure 25: Principle 6 – Transitions (professionals)



Principle 7: Holistic Learning and Development

64% of professional respondents strongly agreed that 'the proposed 9 Principles of Aistear reflect key messages from Phase 1, Principle 7: Holistic Learning and Development', followed by 26% of respondents who agreed.

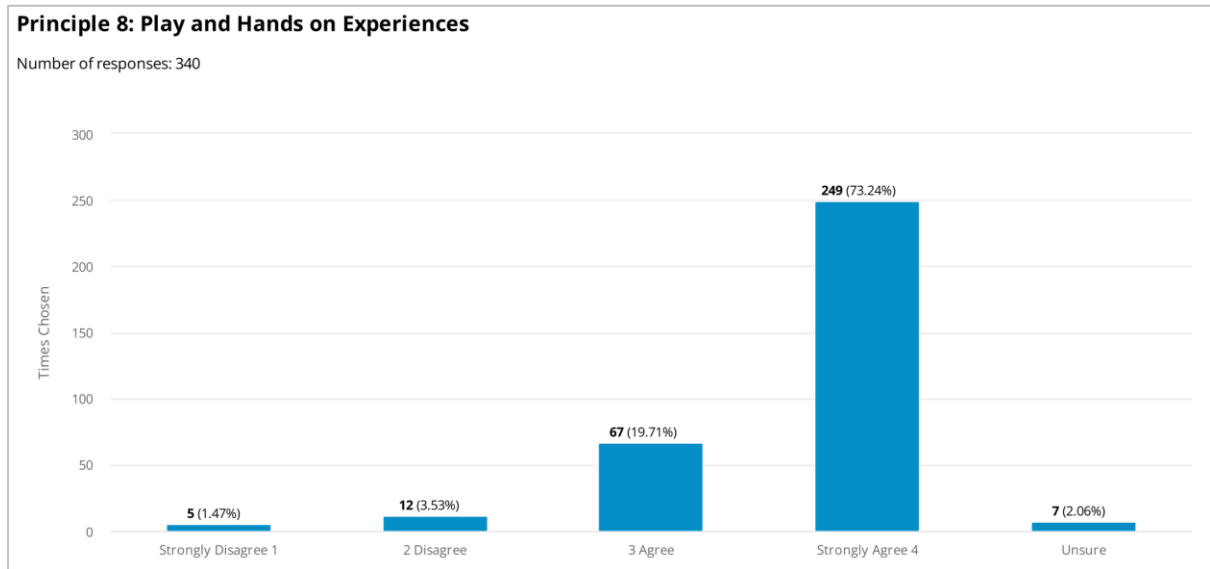
Figure 26: Principle 7 – Holistic Learning and Development (professionals)



Principle 8: Play and Hands on Experiences

73% of respondents strongly agreed that ‘the proposed 9 Principles of Aistear reflect key messages from Phase 1, Principle 8: Play and Hands on Experiences’, followed by 20% of respondents who agreed. This represented the highest proportion of respondents who strongly agreed with a statement in this section.

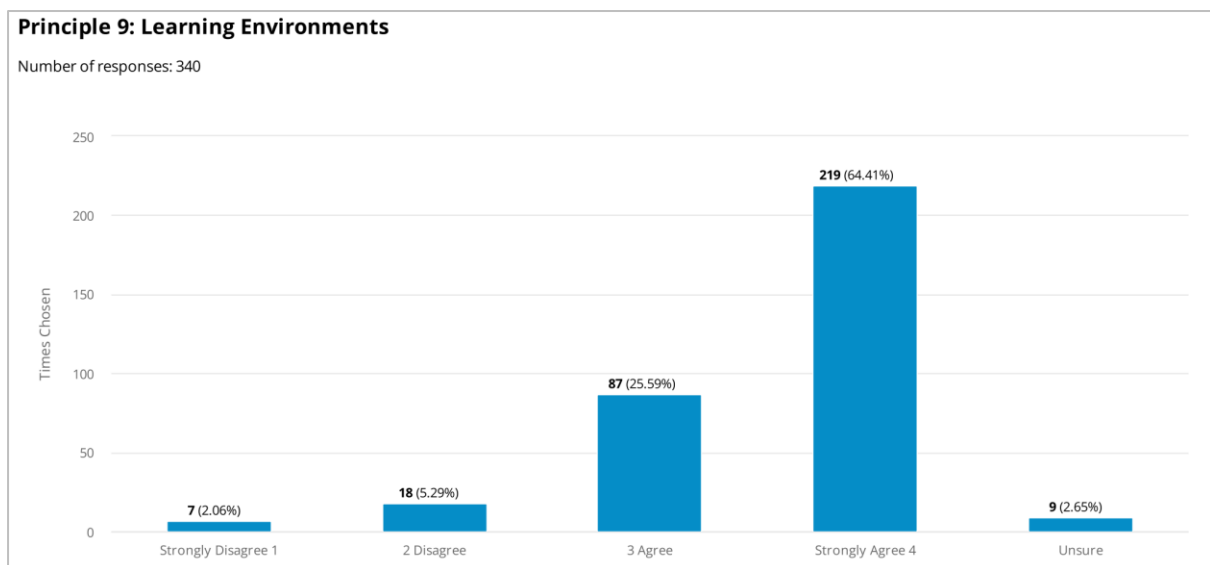
Figure 27: Principle 8 –Play and Hands on Experiences (professionals)



Principle 9: Learning Environments

64% of respondents strongly agreed that ‘the proposed 9 Principles of Aistear reflect key messages from Phase 1, Principle 9: Learning Environments’, followed by 26% of respondents who agreed.

Figure 28: Principle 9 –Learning Environments (professionals)



3.3.1.11 The Themes of *Aistear*

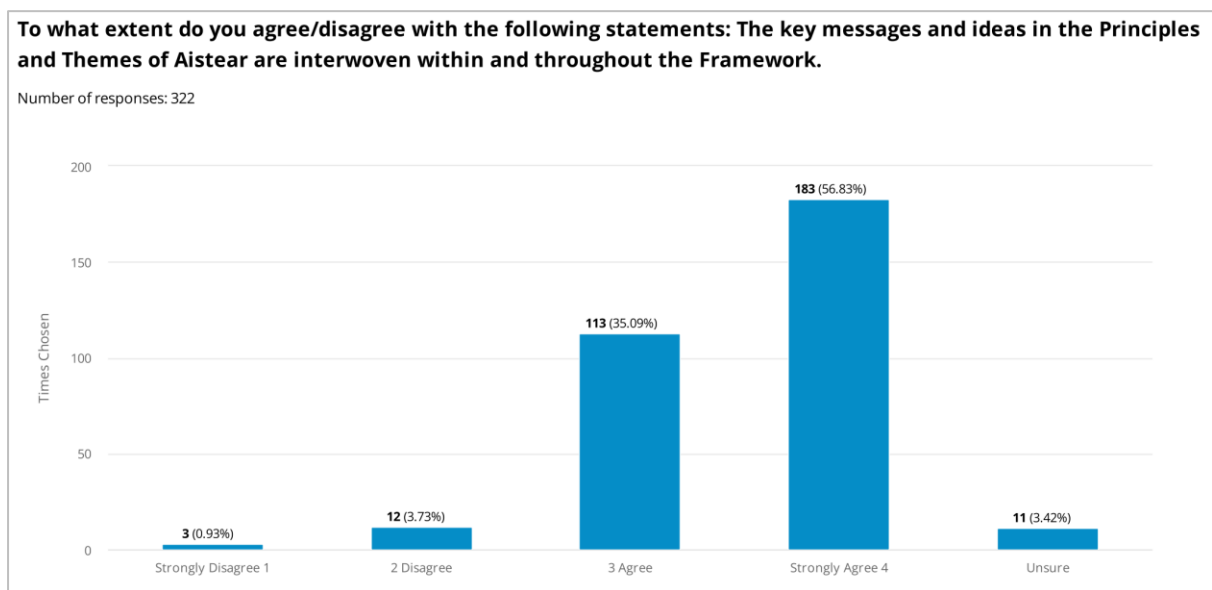
This section presents professionals' views on the proposed Themes of *Aistear*.

Aistear is underpinned by four Themes of learning and development. Phase 1 indicated that they remain broadly relevant. They have been updated to reflect key messages from Phase 1. There were 322 responses to this section.

The key messages and ideas in the Principles and Themes

57% of respondents strongly agreed that 'the key messages and ideas in the Principles and Themes of *Aistear* are interwoven within and throughout the Framework', followed by 35% of respondents who agreed. This represented the highest proportion of respondents who strongly agreed with a statement in this section.

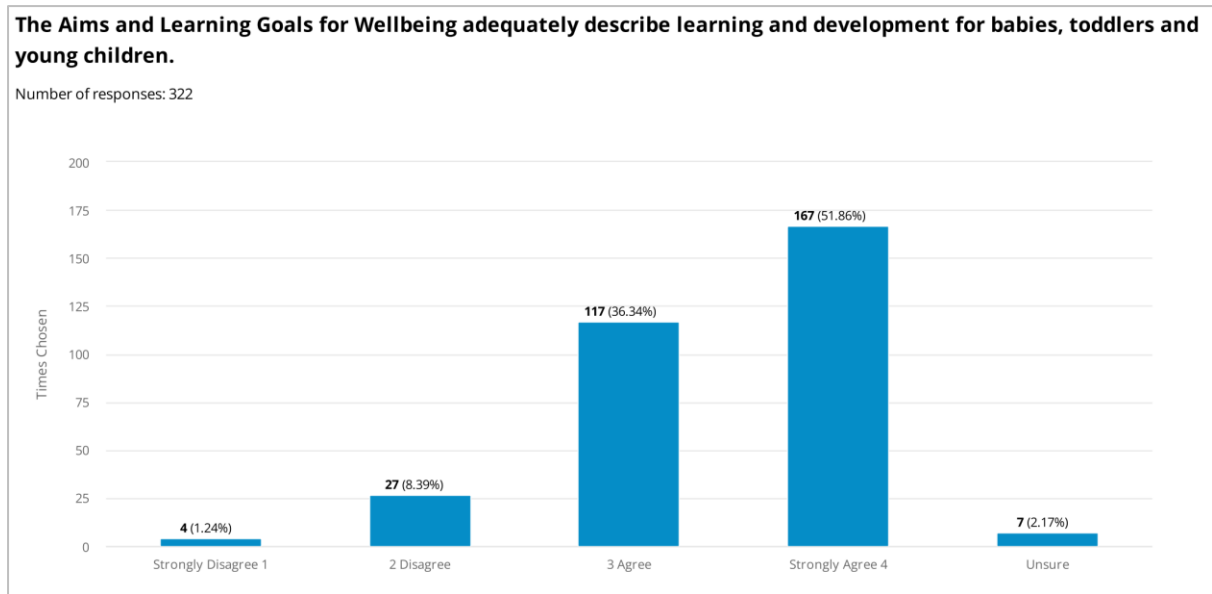
Figure 29: Key messages and ideas (professionals)



Aims and Learning Goals for Wellbeing

52% of respondents strongly agreed that ‘the Aims and Learning Goals for Wellbeing adequately describe learning and development for babies, toddlers and young children’, followed by 36% of respondents who agreed.

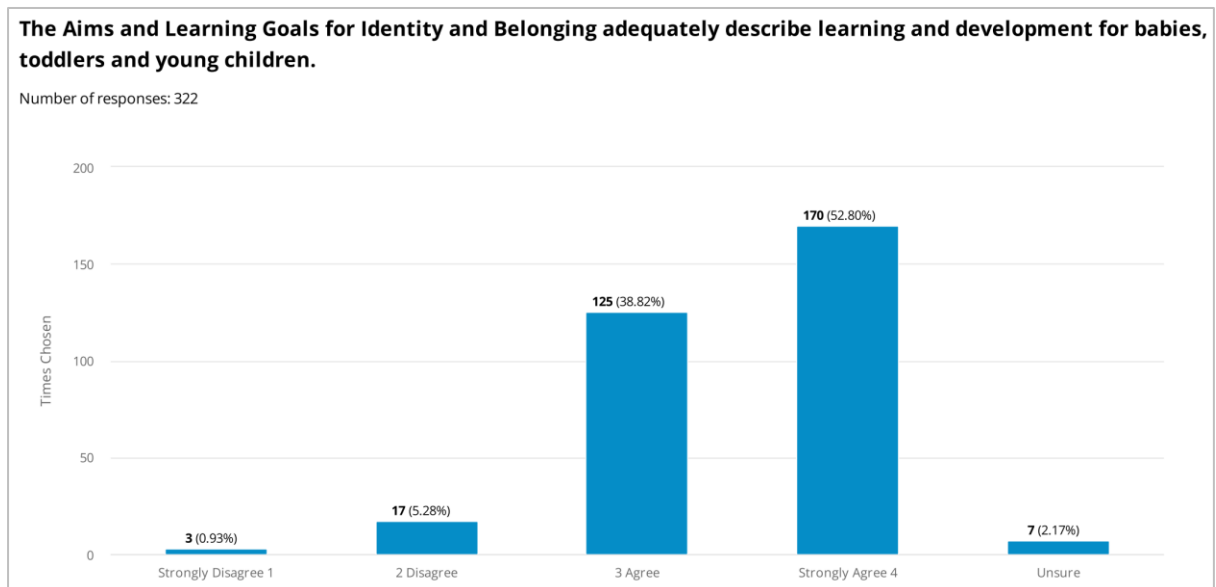
Figure 30: Aims and Learning Goals for Wellbeing (professionals)



Aims and Learning Goals for Identity and Belonging

53% of respondents strongly agreed that ‘the Aims and Learning Goals for Identity and Belonging adequately describe learning and development for babies, toddlers and young children’, followed by 39% of respondents who agreed.

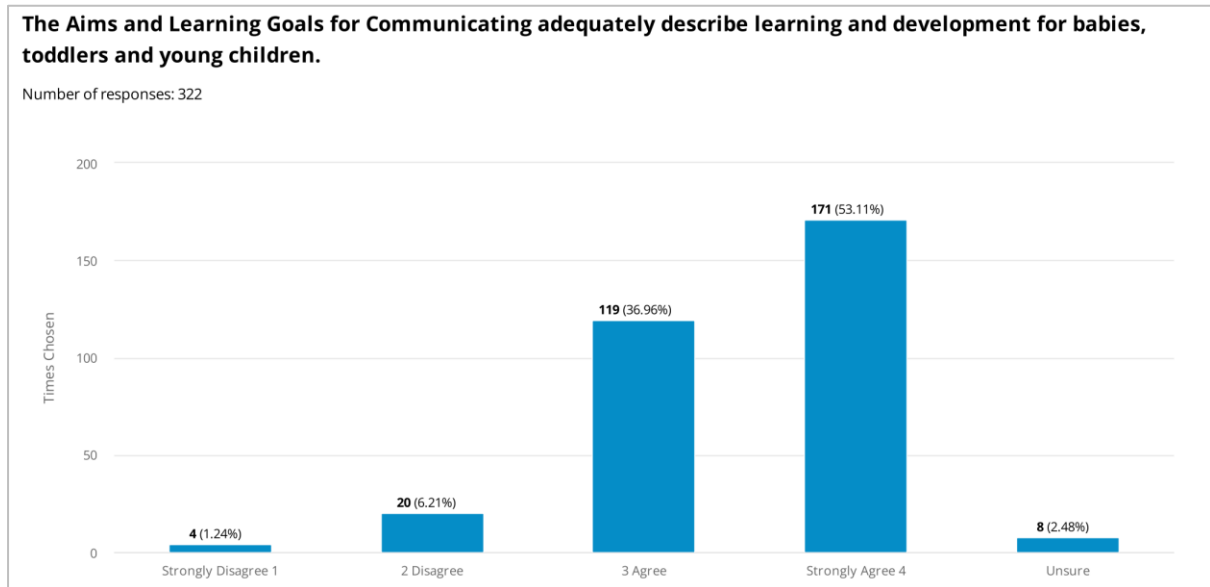
Figure 31: Aims and Learning Goals for Identity and Belonging (professionals)



Aims and Learning Goals for Communicating

53% of respondents strongly agreed that 'the Aims and Learning Goals for Communicating adequately describe learning and development for babies, toddlers and young children', followed by 37% of respondents who agreed.

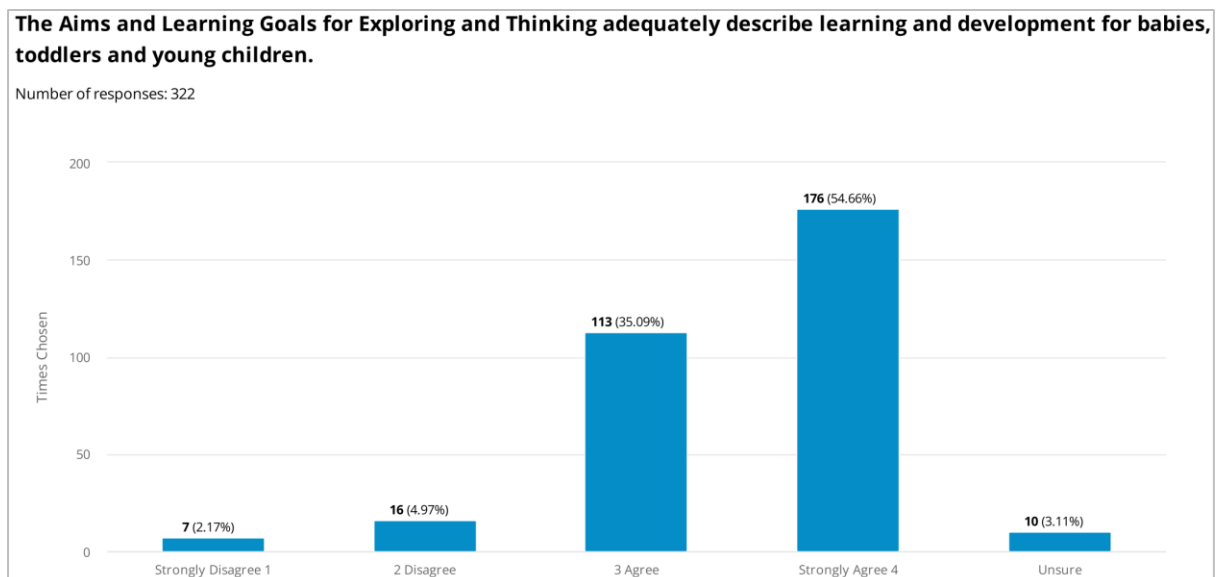
Figure 32: Aims and Learning Goals for Communicating (professionals)



The Aims and Learning Goals for Exploring and Thinking

55% of respondents strongly agreed that 'the Aims and Learning Goals for Exploring and Thinking adequately describe learning and development for babies, toddlers and young children', followed by 35% of respondents who agreed.

Figure 33: Aims and Learning Goals for Exploring and Thinking (professionals)



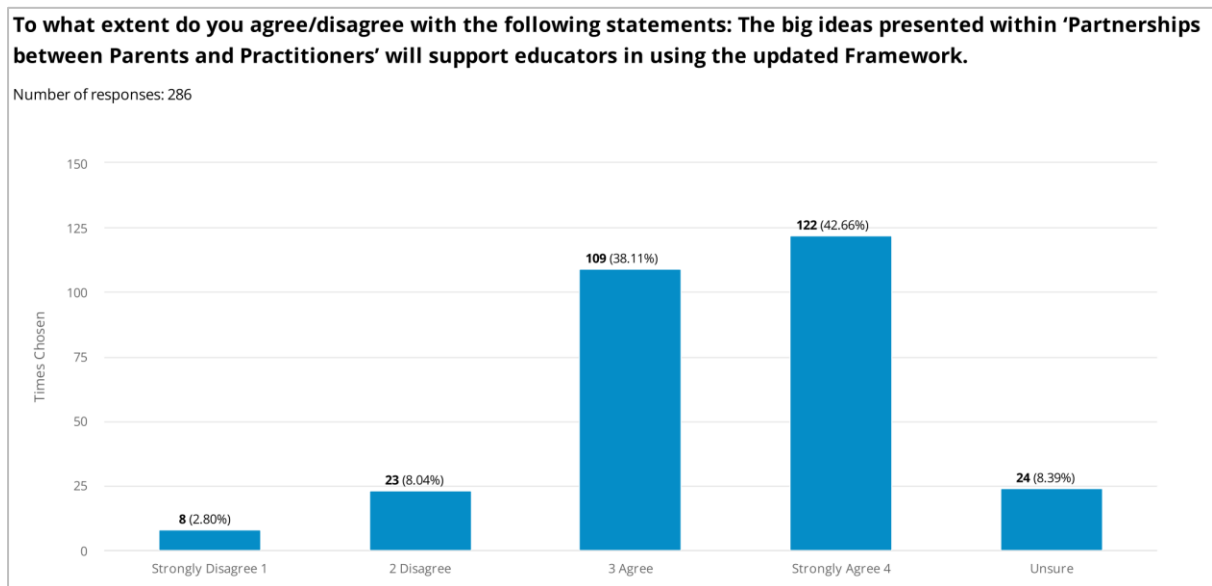
3.3.1.12 Supporting *Aistear* - Guidance for Good Practice

This section presents professionals' views on the Guidance for Good Practice. The updated Framework proposes that *Aistear* can be supported through the Guidance for Good Practice, the *Aistear* Toolkit, the ASPG, and attention to the wider conditions in which *Aistear* is enacted. There were 286 responses to this section.

The big ideas presented within 'Partnerships between Parents and Practitioners'

43% of respondents strongly agreed that 'the big ideas presented within 'Partnerships between Parents and Practitioners' will support educators in using the updated Framework', followed by 38% of respondents who agreed.

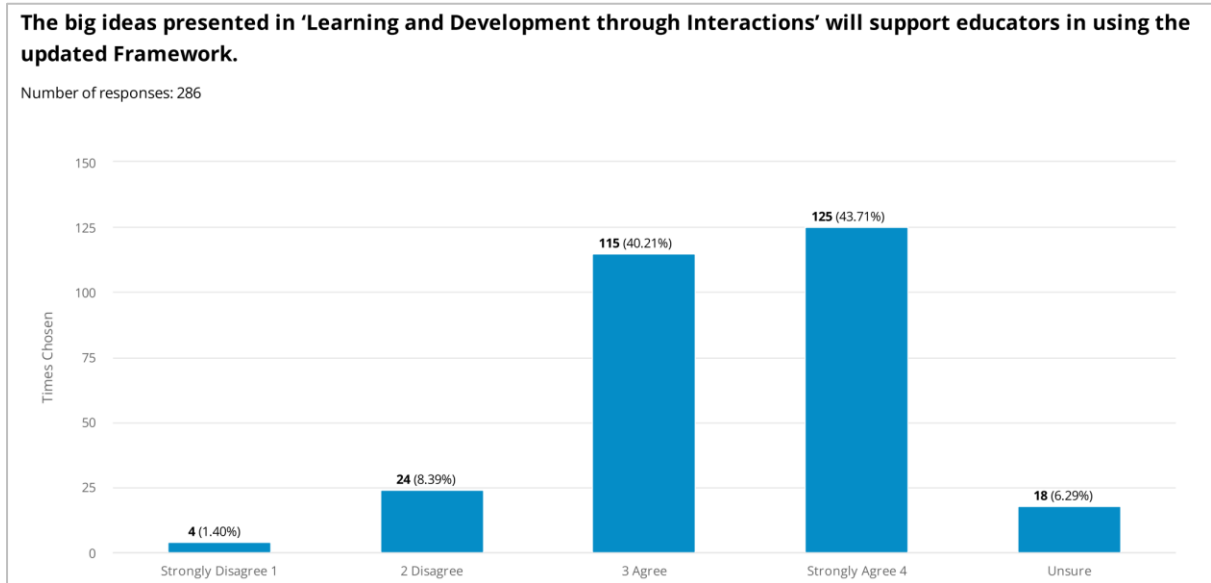
Figure 34: The big ideas presented within 'Partnerships between Parents and Practitioners' (professionals)



The big ideas presented in 'Learning and Development through Interactions'

44% of respondents strongly agreed that 'the big ideas presented in 'Learning and Development through Interactions' will support educators in using the updated Framework', followed by 40% of respondents who agreed.

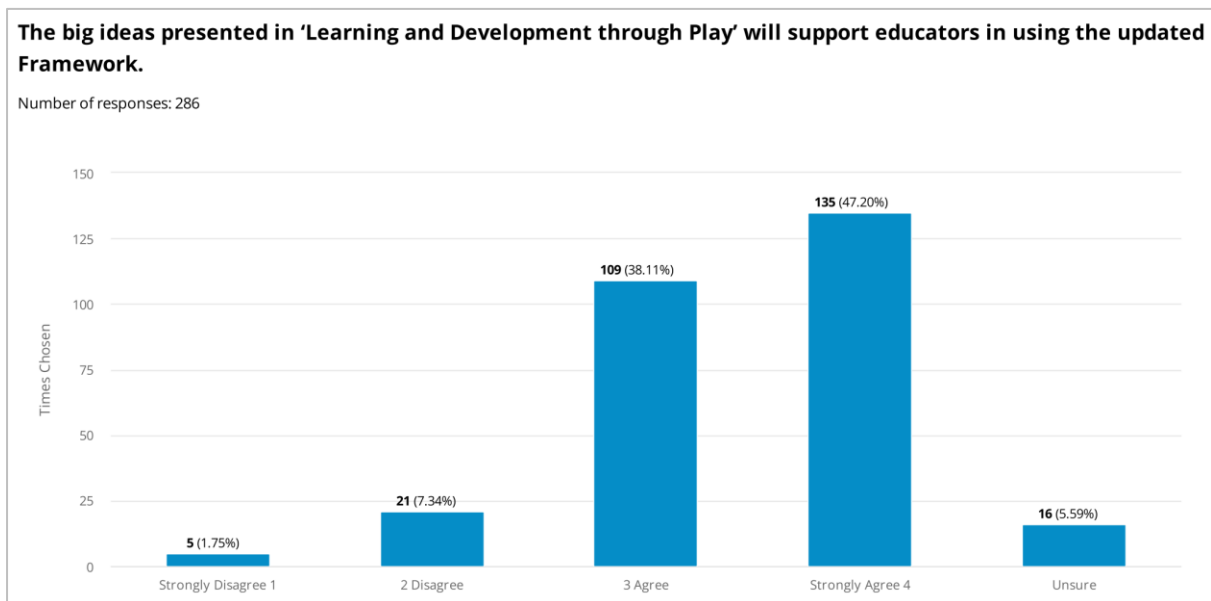
Figure 35: The big ideas presented within 'Learning and Development through Interactions' (professionals)



The big ideas presented in 'Learning and Development through Play'

47% of respondents strongly agreed that 'the big ideas presented in 'Learning and Development through Play' will support educators in using the updated Framework', followed by 38% of respondents who agreed. This represented the highest proportion of respondents strongly agreeing with a statement in this section.

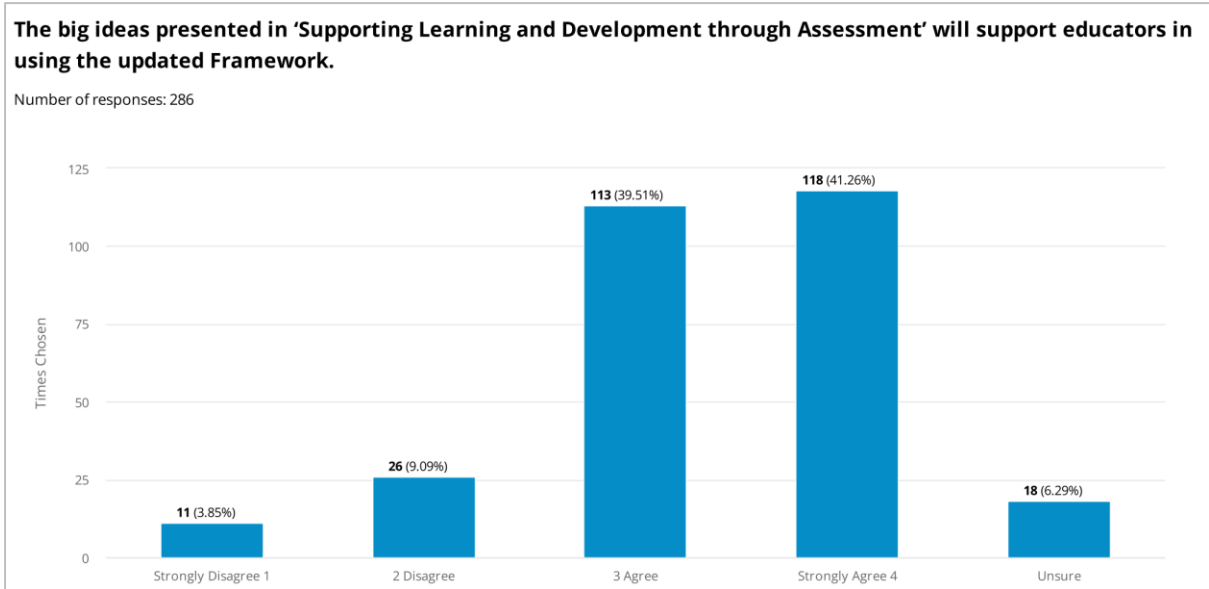
Figure 36: The big ideas presented within 'Learning and Development through Play' (professionals)



The big ideas presented in 'Supporting Learning and Development through Assessment'

41% of respondents strongly agreed that 'the big ideas presented in 'Supporting Learning and Development through Assessment', will support educators in using the updated Framework', followed by 40% of respondents who agreed.

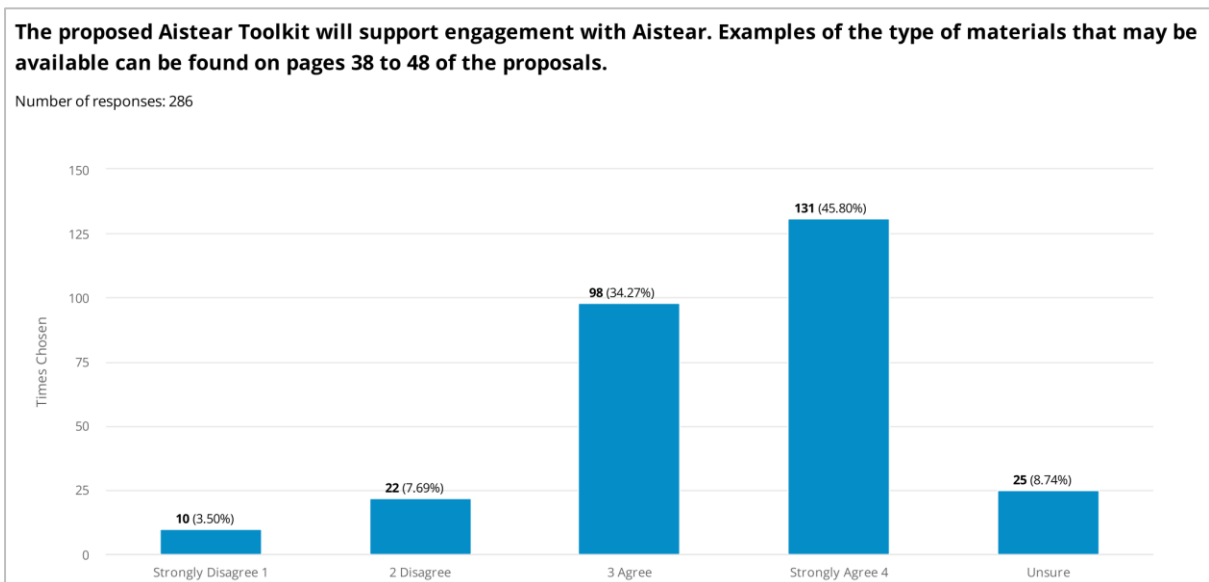
Figure 37: The big ideas presented within 'Learning and Development through Assessment' (professionals)



The proposed Aistear Toolkit will support engagement with Aistear

46% of respondents strongly agree that 'the proposed Aistear Toolkit will support engagement with Aistear', followed by 34% of respondents who agreed.

Figure 38: The proposed Aistear Toolkit will support engagement with Aistear (professionals)



3.3.1.13 Supporting Aistear – Supporting Educators

This section presents professionals' views on the nature of supports required to support the early childhood educators in working with the curriculum Framework.

How early childhood educators can be supported?

Professionals were asked how early childhood educators could be supported in working with the curriculum Framework. There were 200 free text responses to this question. The following themes were prevalent throughout the responses with 118 or 59% of responses identifying 'Training' in some form.

Table 24: How early childhood educators can be supported (professionals)

Themes	Respondents	% of total
Training	118	59%
Make Framework more user-friendly	13	7%
More non-contact time	12	6%
Provision of toolkits	11	6%
Provision of examples	9	5%
More resources	5	3%
More funding	5	3%
Promotion/ Launch	4	2%
Less administration	4	2%
Networking	3	2%
Better wages	3	2%
Inspections	2	1%
Feedback	1	1%
Misc	10	5%
Total	200	100%

Many of the free text responses related to **Training** included the following terms: CPD, Webinars, Workshops, Courses, Mandatory, Face-to-Face, Guidance. Responses related to training included requests for the following:

- *In-person training with a uniform approach*
- *Regular, high-quality, evidence-informed CPD*
- *Practical training on how to implement inclusion strategies in the settings*
- *Training classes that allow educators to get a sense of some activities they could do that are in the line with newly proposed curriculum Framework*
- *Professional training on incorporating Aistear into settings, including workshops for educators to better develop their knowledge and expertise*
- *Establishment mandatory training days for all early childhood educators, similar to primary school teachers, i.e. in-service days for learning and development.*

The next most prevalent theme could be categorised as **'Make the Framework more user friendly'** with 13 or 7% of responses identifying this theme in some form. Many of the free text responses related to this theme included the following terms: Easier to understand, more user friendly, easy to follow videos, less paperwork, user friendly terminology, use simple language.

The next most prevalent theme could be categorised as **'More non-contact time'** with 12 or 6% of responses identifying this theme in some form. Many of the free text responses related to this theme included the following terms: non-contact time, given more time to fully understand, given time to plan properly, more planning time.

The next most prevalent theme could be categorised as **'Provision of Toolkits'** with 11 or 6% of responses identifying this theme in some form. Many of the free text responses related to this theme included the following terms: provision of toolkits, practical ideas and examples, materials that can be shared with staff, access to relevant resources such as lesson plans, activity ideas, and assessment tools.

The next most prevalent theme could be categorised as **'Provision of Examples'** with 9 or 5% of responses identifying this theme in some form. Many of the free text responses related to this theme included the following terms: More examples for activities, examples of planning and implementation tools, more real-life examples, plenty of examples, realistic examples.

The next most prevalent theme could be categorised as **'More resources'** with 5 or 3% of responses identifying this theme in some form. The free text responses related to this theme included the following terms: More resources and funding, Funding for resources, Funding for decent resources in every infant classroom and preschool, Teachers in J1 to 1st Class need a classroom assistant, The children's learning experiences are greatly enhanced when the teacher has another adult in the room to help the children engage.

The next most prevalent theme could be categorised as **'More funding'** with 5 or 3% of responses identifying this theme in some form. The free text responses related to this theme included the following terms: Better funding, Funding for services to allow for non-contact working hours to adequately plan and prepare for, Provide specific funding for Aistear, More funding, More staff, better funding.

The next most prevalent theme could be categorised as '**Promotion/ launch**' with 4 or 2% of responses identifying this theme in some form. The free text responses related to this theme included the following terms: A universal accessible roll out of *Aistear* in Action...and using these for advertising and awareness campaigns is really important, ensuring there is a positive promotion of *Aistear*, A formal roll out of *Aistear* so that it is valued by parents, practitioners, community, a national rollout.

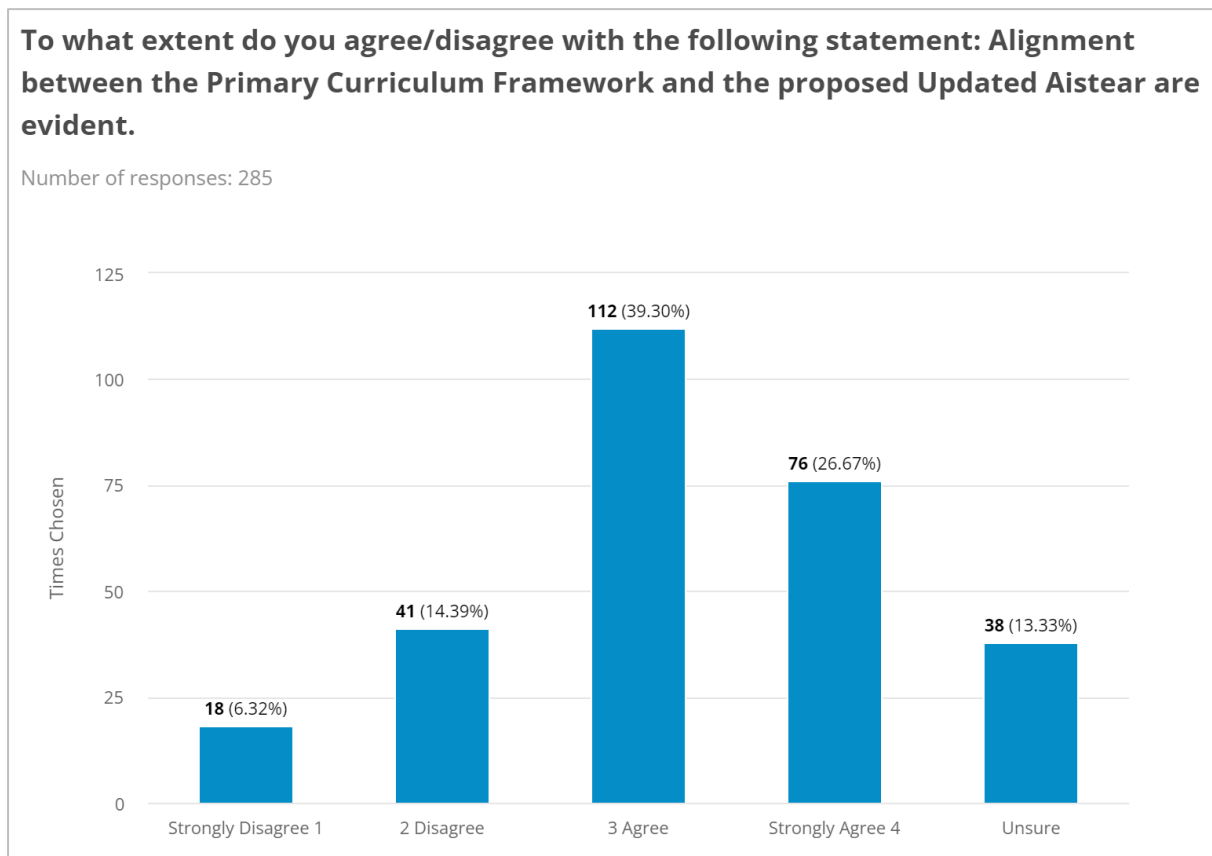
The next most prevalent theme could be categorised as '**Less administration**' with 4 or 2% of responses identifying this theme in some form. The free text responses related to this theme included the following terms: Less paperwork - increasing admin causing burnout, less paperwork, more learning stories, Less paperwork please, Staff spend far too much time linking daily activities to *Aistear* that there is no time left to develop meaningful relationships because we are forever documenting links.

The remaining themes that emerged were **Networking, Better wages, Inspections and Feedback** with a total of 9 responses being categorised as one of these four themes. The remaining 10 responses are categorised as **Miscellaneous** and are difficult to categorise.

3.3.1.14 Alignment with the *Primary Curriculum Framework*

Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework and the *Primary Curriculum Framework* are for different sectors. 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. Participants were asked 'to what extent do you agree/disagree with the following statement: Alignment between the *Primary Curriculum Framework* and the proposed Updated *Aistear* are evident'. 27% of respondents 'Strongly Agree' that 'Alignment between the *Primary Curriculum Framework* and the proposed updated *Aistear* are evident' followed by 39% of respondents who 'Agree'.

Figure 39: Alignment with the *Primary Curriculum Framework* (professionals)

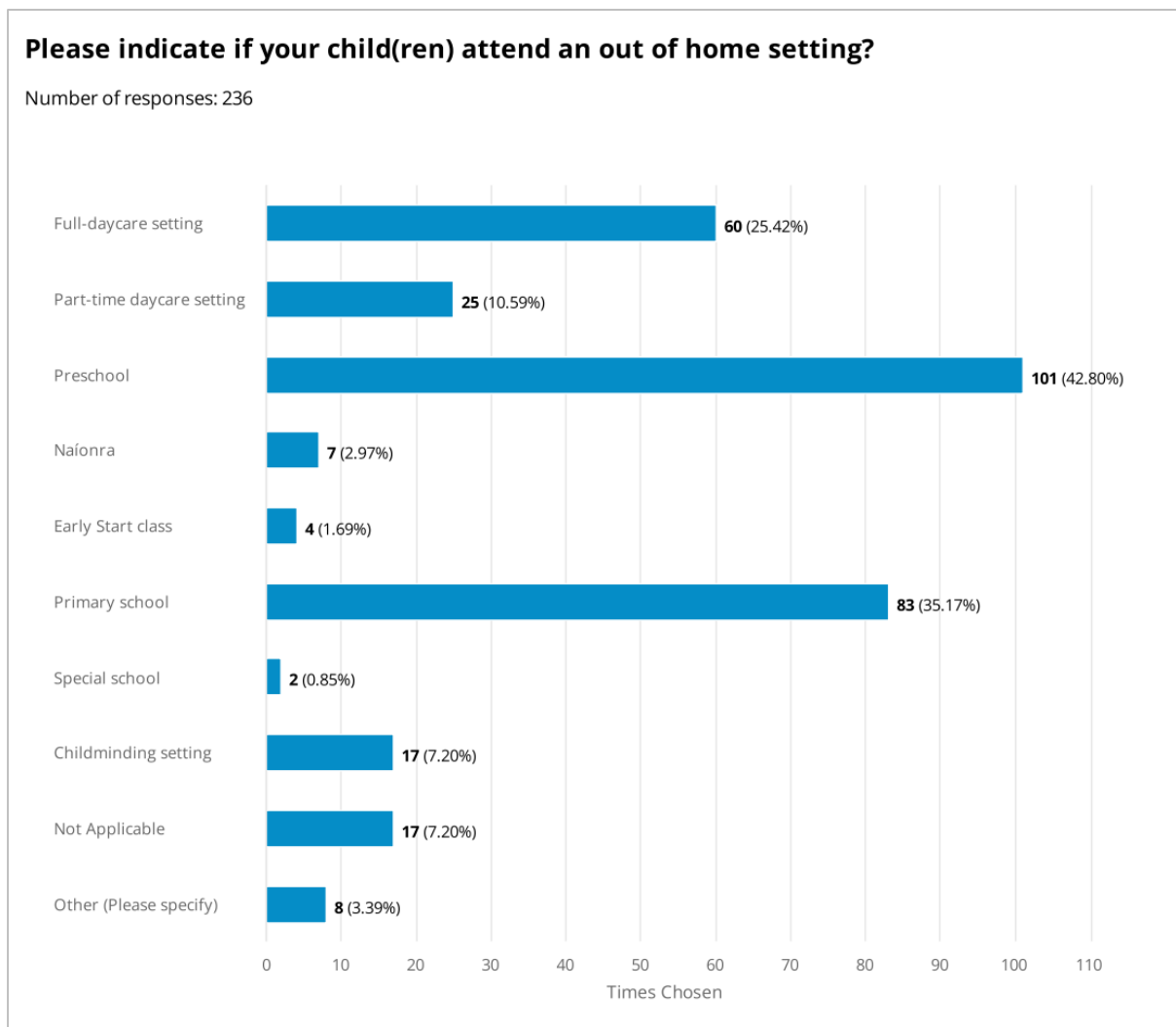


3.3.2 Parent/Guardian questionnaire

3.3.2.1 Setting the context

There were 248 responses recorded in the parents survey. Of those, 236 parents responded to this question with some respondents selecting multiple answers. When parents were asked about their child(ren)s setting context, 43% of respondents indicated preschool followed by primary school (35%) and Full-daycare setting (25%).

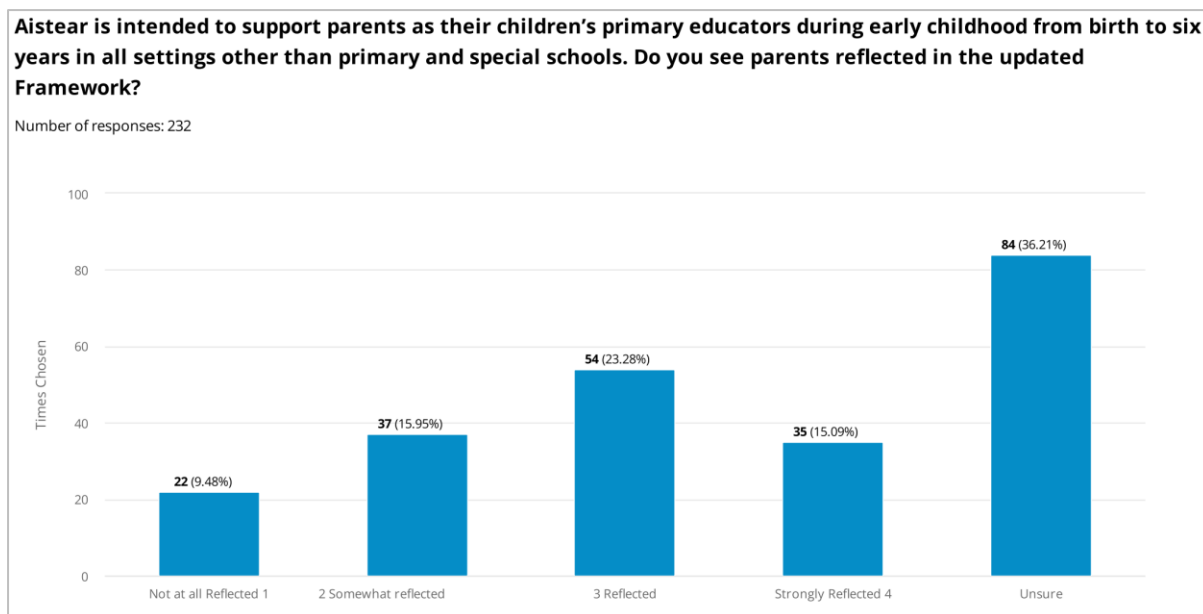
Figure 40: Type of setting child attends (parents)



3.3.2.2 Do you see parents reflected in the updated Framework?

Aistear is intended to support parents as their children's primary educators during early childhood from birth to six years in all settings other than primary and special schools. Parents were asked whether they see parents reflected in the updated Framework? There were 232 responses to this question. When parents were asked whether they see parents reflected in the updated Framework 36% of respondents were Unsure followed by 23% who agreed that they were reflected and 16% who felt parents were somewhat reflected.

Figure 41: Do you see parents reflected in the updated Framework? (parents)



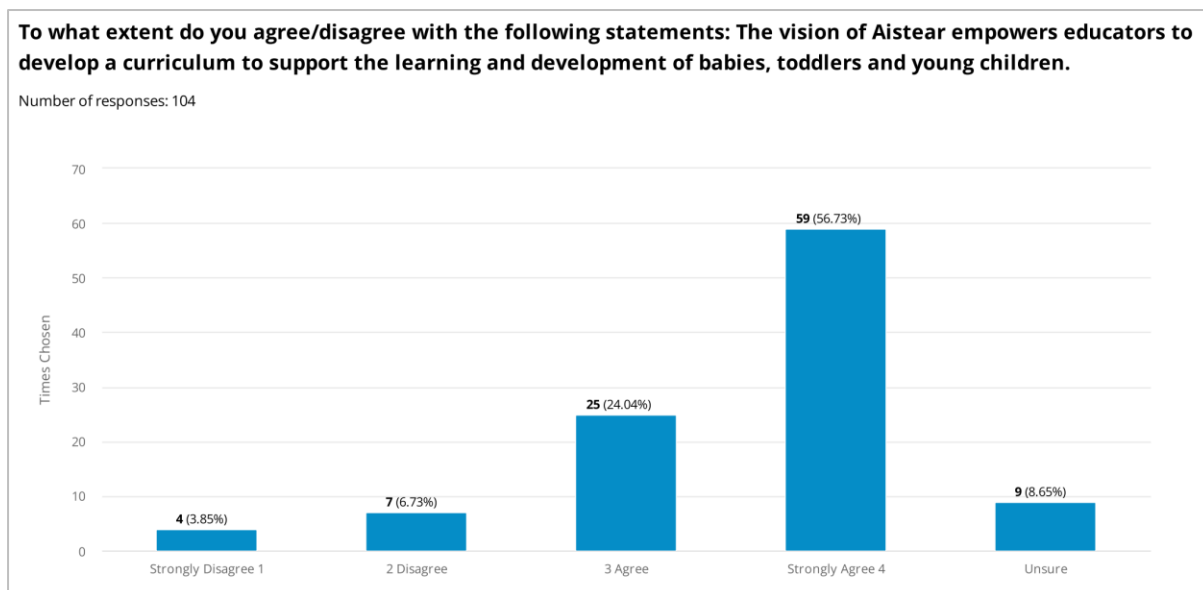
3.3.2.2 Key Messages of the Proposals – Parent/Guardian perspectives

Phase 1 indicated that *Aistear* has stood the test of time and remains broadly relevant. However, responses indicated that some areas could benefit from being updated. This section presents parents' views on the proposed updates.

The vision of *Aistear*

57% of parent respondents strongly agreed that 'the vision of *Aistear* empowers educators to develop a curriculum to support the learning and development of babies, toddlers and young children', followed by 24% of respondents who agreed. There were 104 responses to this question.

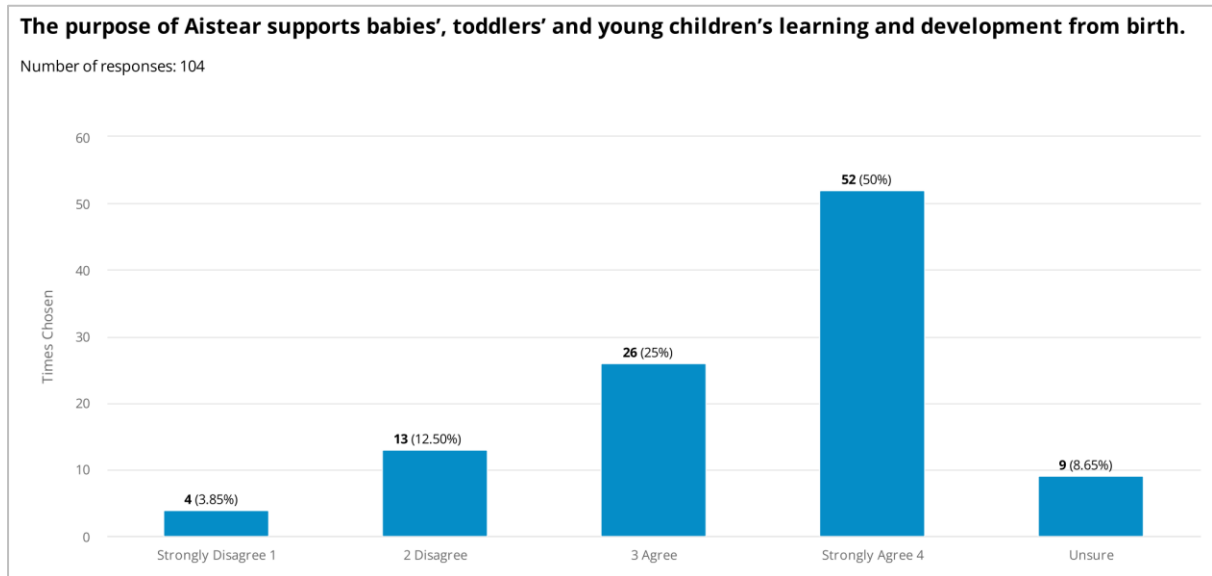
Figure 42: The vision of *Aistear* (parents)



The purpose of Aistear

50% of parent respondents strongly agreed that 'the purpose of Aistear supports babies', toddlers' and young children's learning and development from birth', followed by 25% of respondents who agreed. There were 104 responses to this question.

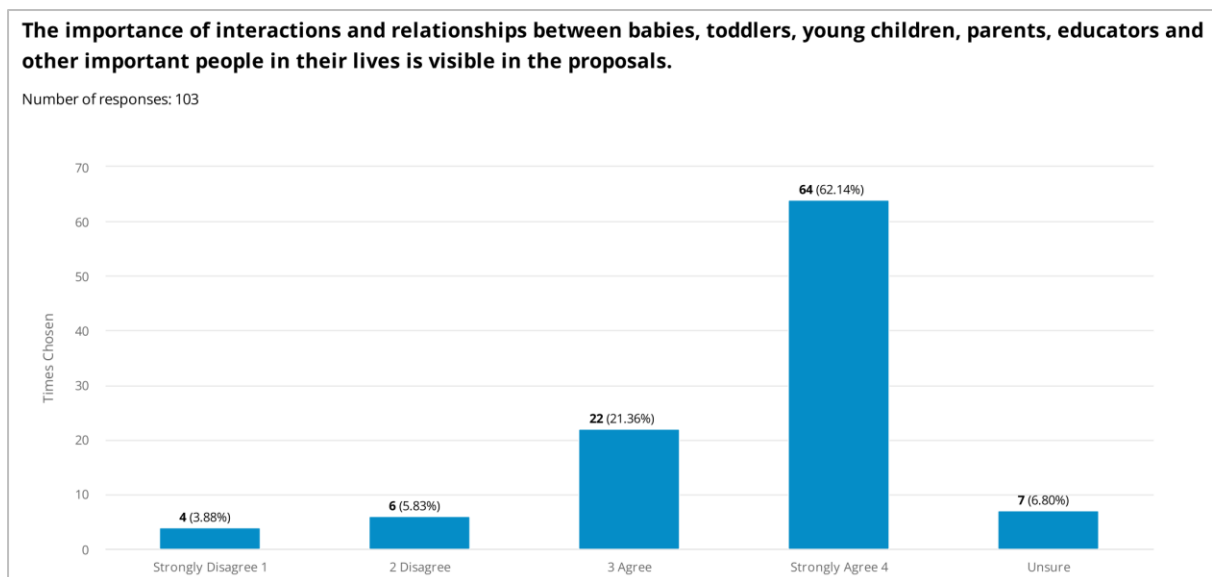
Figure 43: The purpose of Aistear (parents)



The importance of interactions and relationships

62% of parent respondents strongly agreed that 'the importance of interactions and relationships between babies, toddlers, young children, parents, educators and other important people in their lives is visible in the proposals', followed by 21% of respondents who agreed. There were 103 responses to this question.

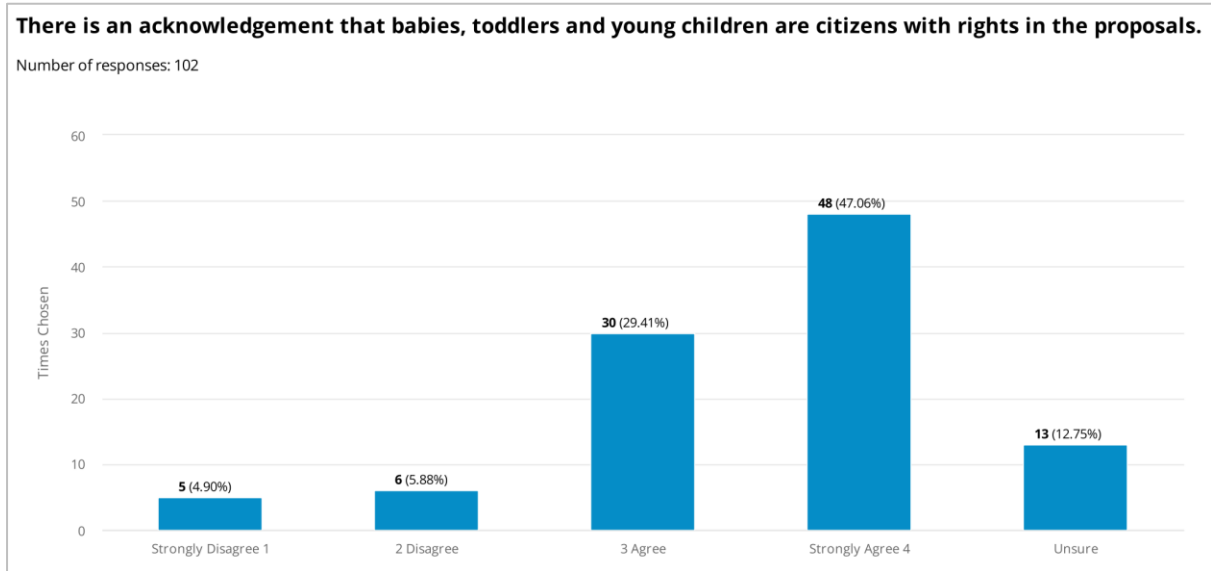
Figure 44: The importance of interactions and relationships (parents)



Acknowledgement that babies, toddlers and young children are citizens with rights

47% of parent respondents strongly agreed that 'There is an acknowledgement that babies, toddlers and young children are citizens with rights in the proposals' followed by 29% of respondents who agreed. There were 102 responses to this question.

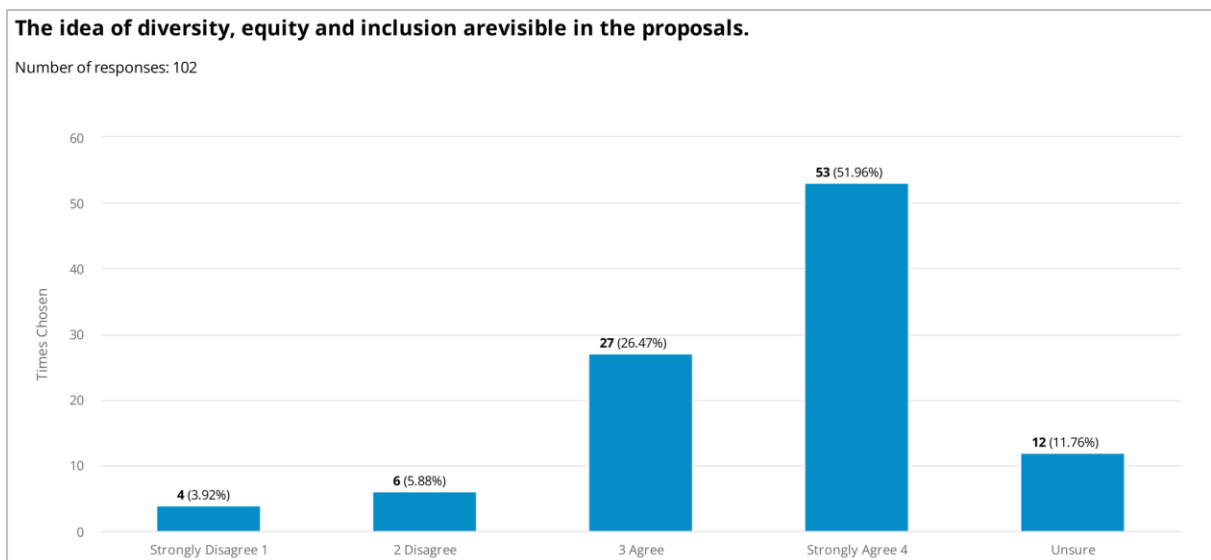
Figure 45: Acknowledgement that babies, toddlers and young children are citizens with rights (parents)



The idea of diversity, equity and inclusion

52% of parent respondents strongly agreed that 'the idea of diversity, equity and inclusion are visible in the proposals', followed by 26% of respondents who agreed. There were 102 responses to this question.

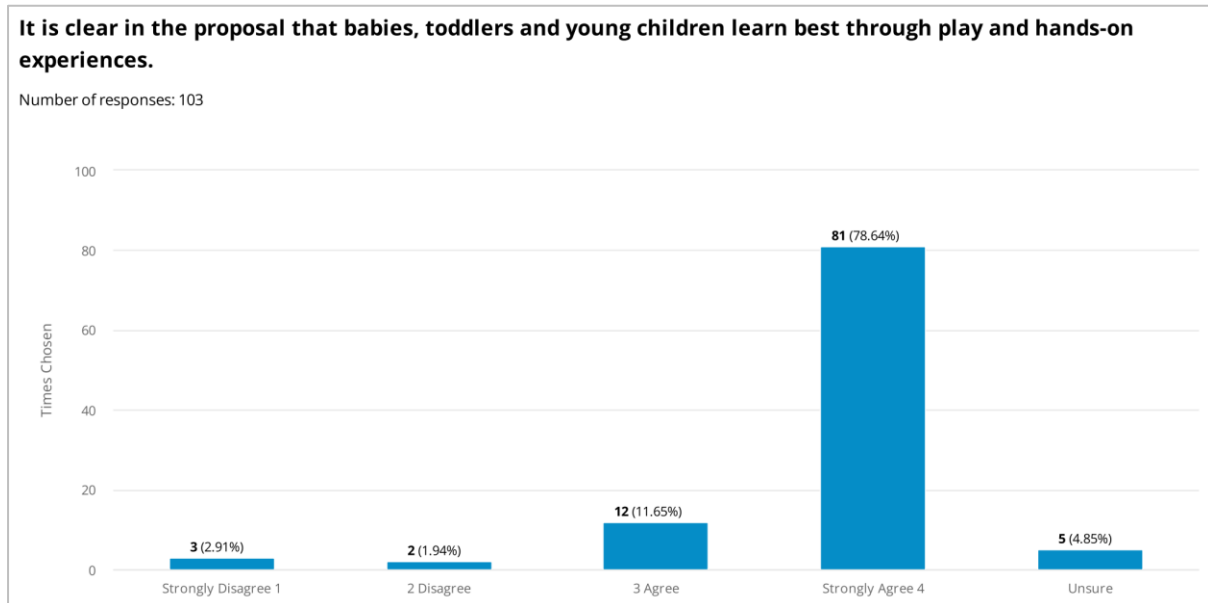
Figure 46: The idea of diversity, equity and inclusion (parents)



Clear that babies, toddlers and young children learn best through play

The greatest proportion of respondents (79%) strongly agreed with the statement, 'It is clear in the proposal that babies, toddlers and young children learn best through play and hands-on experiences', followed by 12% who agreed. There were 103 responses to this question.

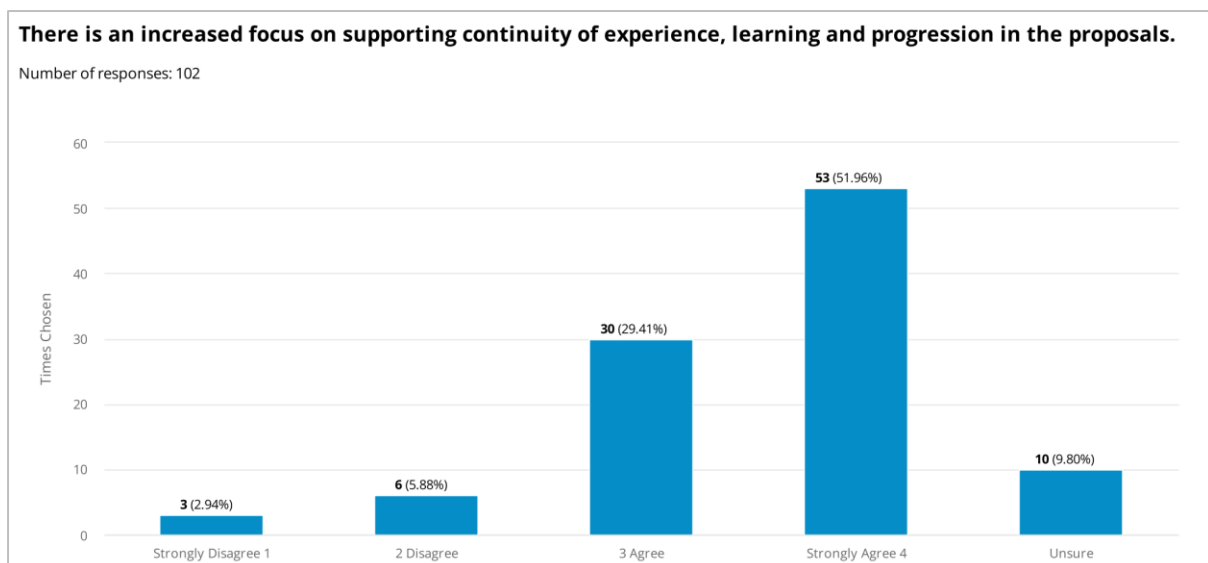
Figure 47: Clear that babies, toddlers and young children learn best through play (parents)



Increased focus on supporting continuity of experience, learning and progression

52% of parent respondents strongly agreed that 'There is an increased focus on supporting continuity of experience, learning and progression in the proposals', followed by 29% of respondents who agreed. There were 102 responses to this question.

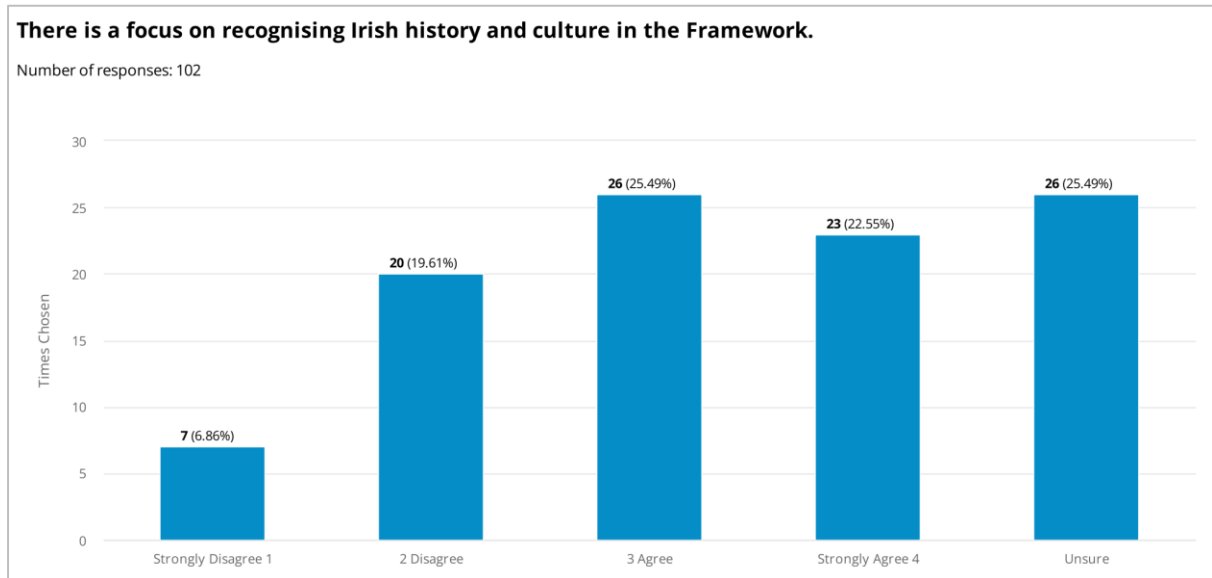
Figure 48: Increased focus on supporting continuity of experience, learning and progression (parents)



Focus on recognising Irish history and culture

25% of respondents agreed that 'There is a focus on recognising Irish history and culture in the Framework', followed by 25% of respondents who were unsure, 23% who strongly agreed, 20% who disagreed and 7% strongly disagreed. There were 102 responses to this question.

Figure 49: Focus on recognising Irish history and culture (parents)



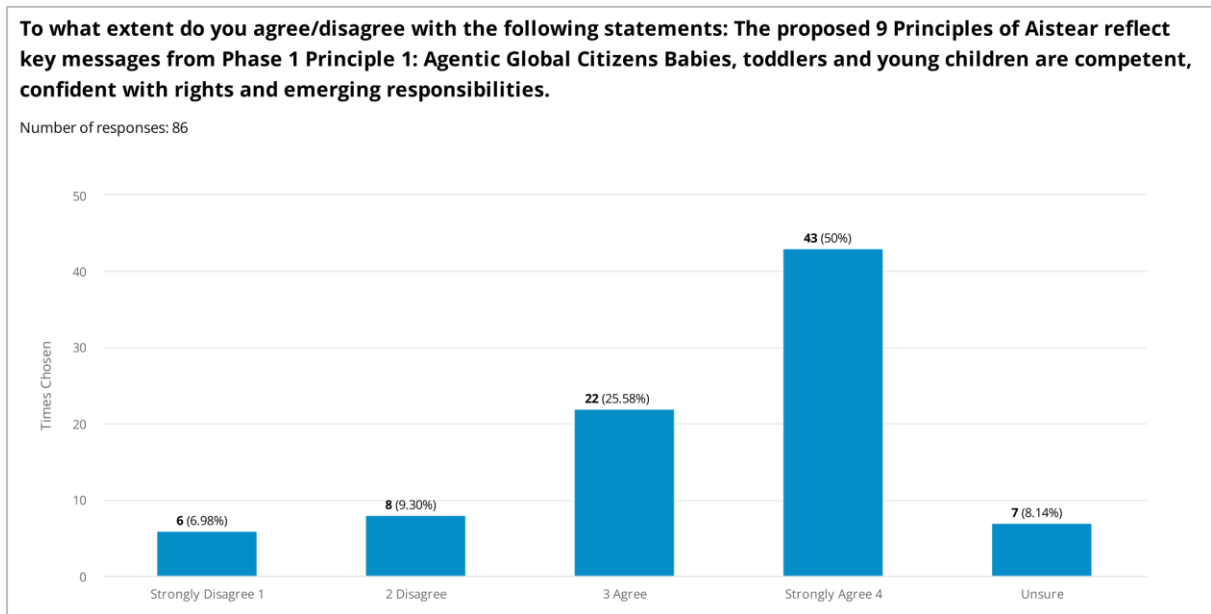
3.3.2.3 Principles of *Aistear* – Parent/Guardian perspectives

The Principles have been updated and reframed from 12 to 9. This section presents parents views on the proposed Principles of *Aistear* and specific statements regarding these principles.

Principle 1: Agentic Global Citizens

50% of parent respondents strongly agreed that ‘the proposed 9 Principles of *Aistear* reflect key messages from Phase 1, Principle 1: Agentic Global Citizens’, followed by 26% of respondents who agreed. There were 86 responses to this question.

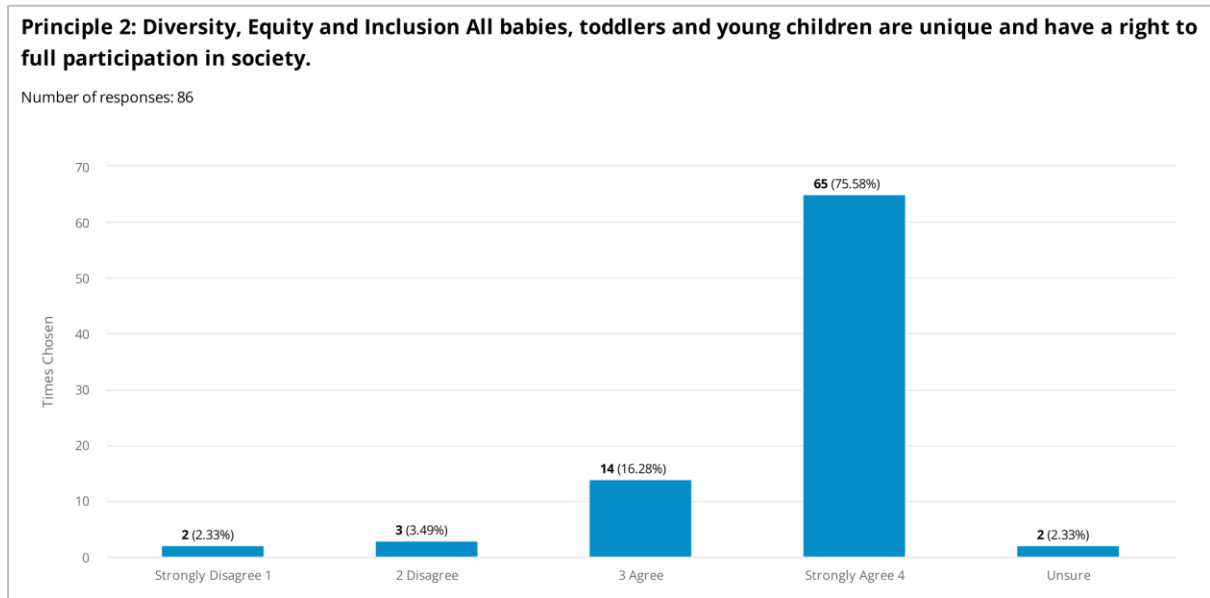
Figure 50: Principal 1 – Agentic Global Citizens (parents)



Principle 2: Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

76% of parent respondents strongly agreed that 'the proposed 9 Principles of Aistear reflect key messages from Phase 1, Principle 2: Diversity, Equity and Inclusion', followed by 16% of respondents who agreed. There were 86 responses to this question.

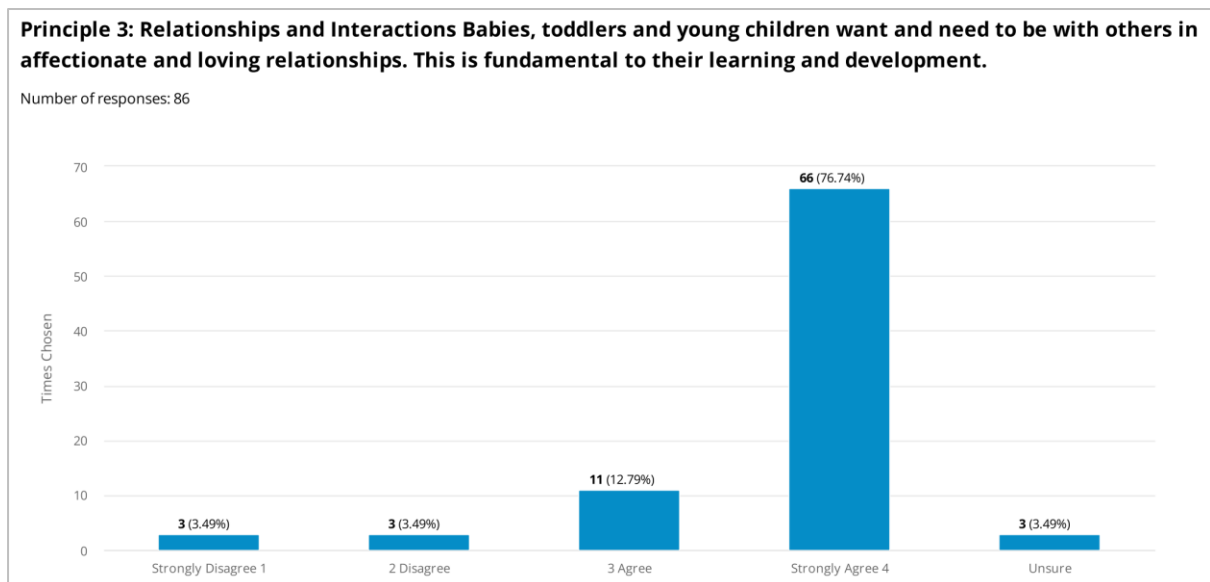
Figure 51: Principal 2 – Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (parents)



Principle 3: Relationships and Interactions

77% of parent respondents strongly agreed that 'the proposed 9 Principles of Aistear reflect key messages from Phase 1, Principle 3: Relationships and Interactions' followed by 13% of respondents who agreed. There were 86 responses to this question.

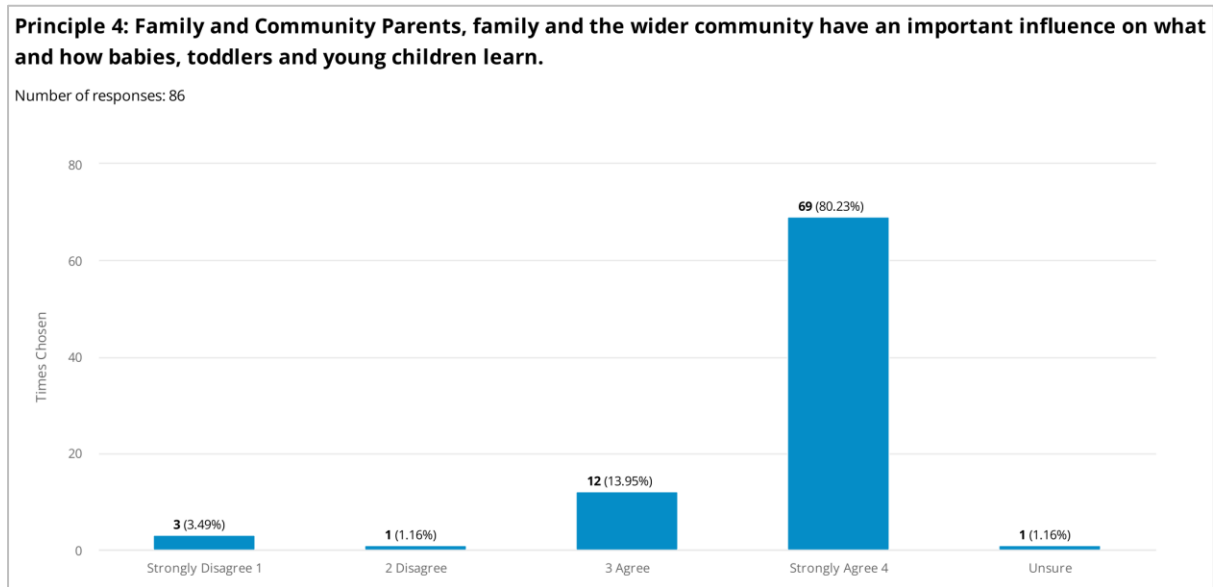
Figure 52: Principal 3 – Relationships and Interactions (parents)



Principle 4: Family and Community

80% of respondents strongly agreed that 'the proposed 9 Principles of Aistear reflect key messages from Phase 1, Principle 4: Family and Community', followed by 14% of respondents who agreed. There were 86 responses to this question.

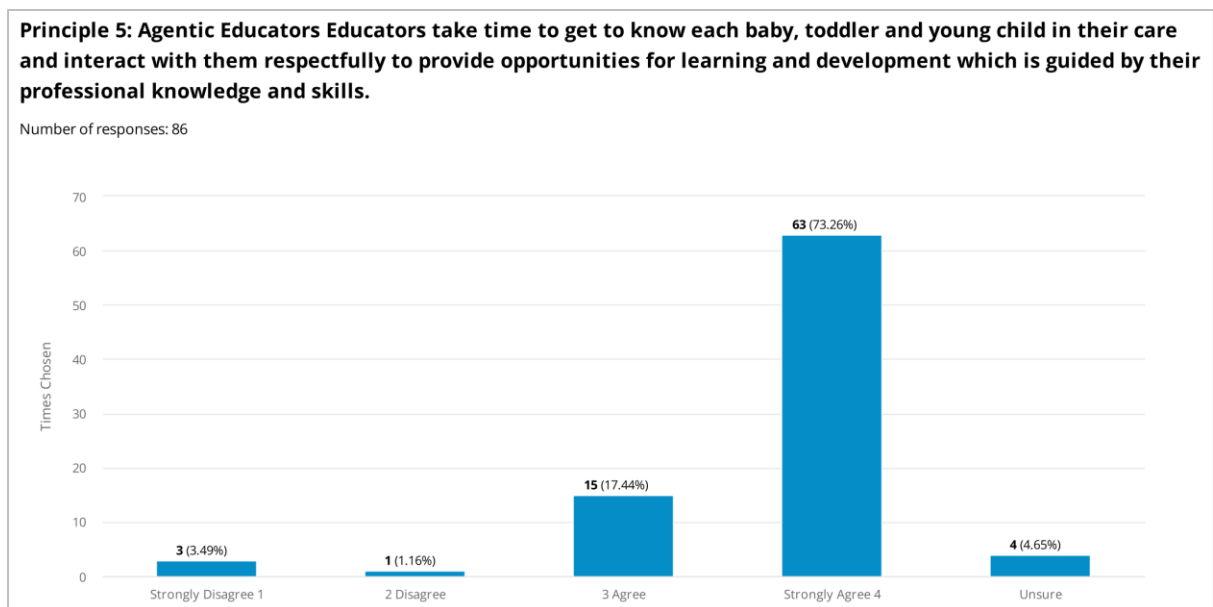
Figure 53: Principal 4 – Family and Community (parents)



Principle 5: Agentic Educators

73% of parent respondents strongly agreed that 'the proposed 9 Principles of Aistear reflect key messages from Phase 1, Principle 5: Agentic Educators', followed by 17% of respondents who agreed. There were 86 responses to this question.

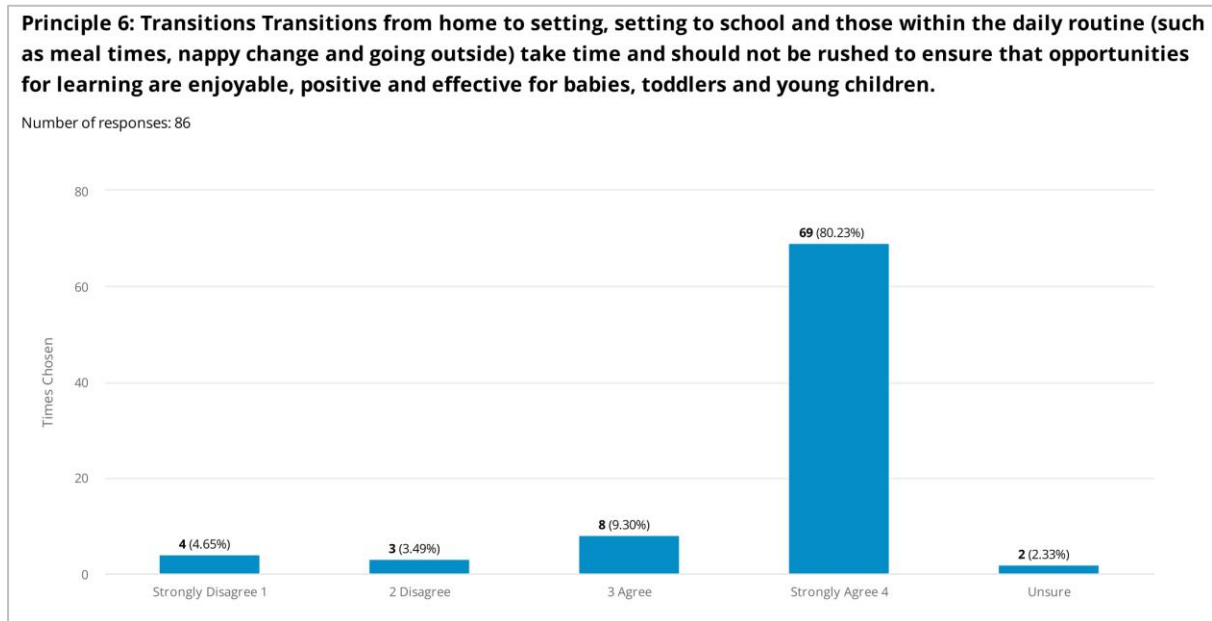
Figure 54: Principal 5 – Agentic Educators (parents)



Principle 6: Transitions

80% of respondents strongly agreed that 'the proposed 9 Principles of Aistear reflect key messages from Phase 1, Principle 6: Transitions', followed by 9% of respondents who agreed. There were 86 responses to this question.

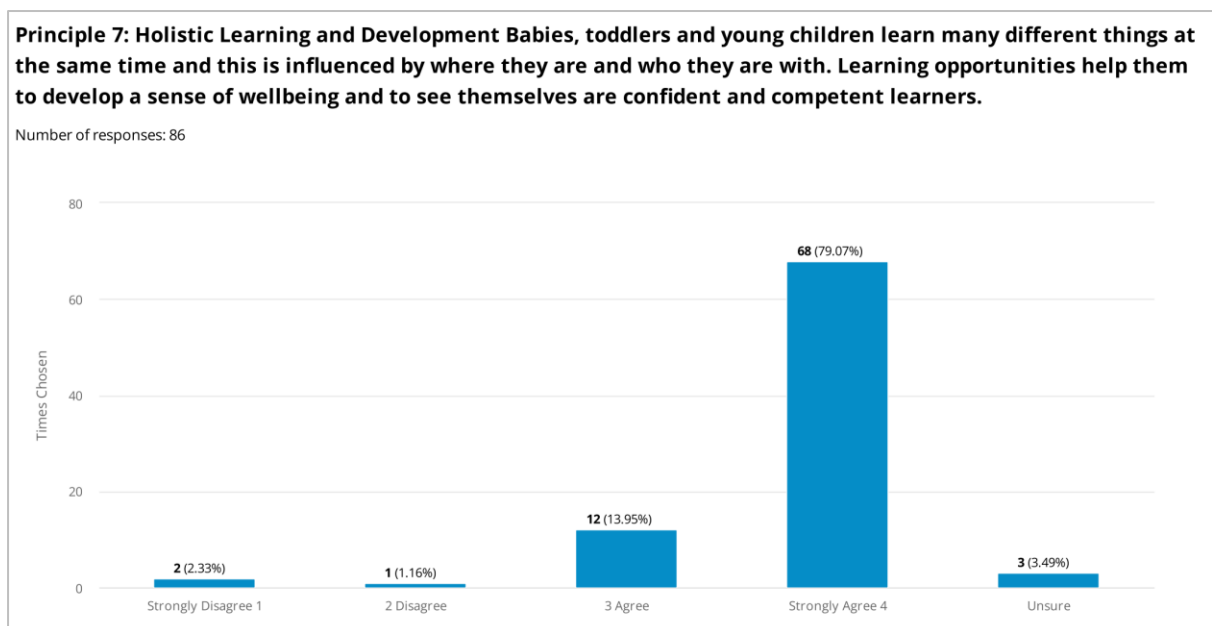
Figure 55: Principal 6 – Transitions (parents)



Principle 7: Holistic Learning and Development

79% of parent respondents strongly agreed that 'the proposed 9 Principles of Aistear reflect key messages from Phase 1, Principle 7: Holistic Learning and Development', followed by 14% of respondents who agreed. There were 86 responses to this question.

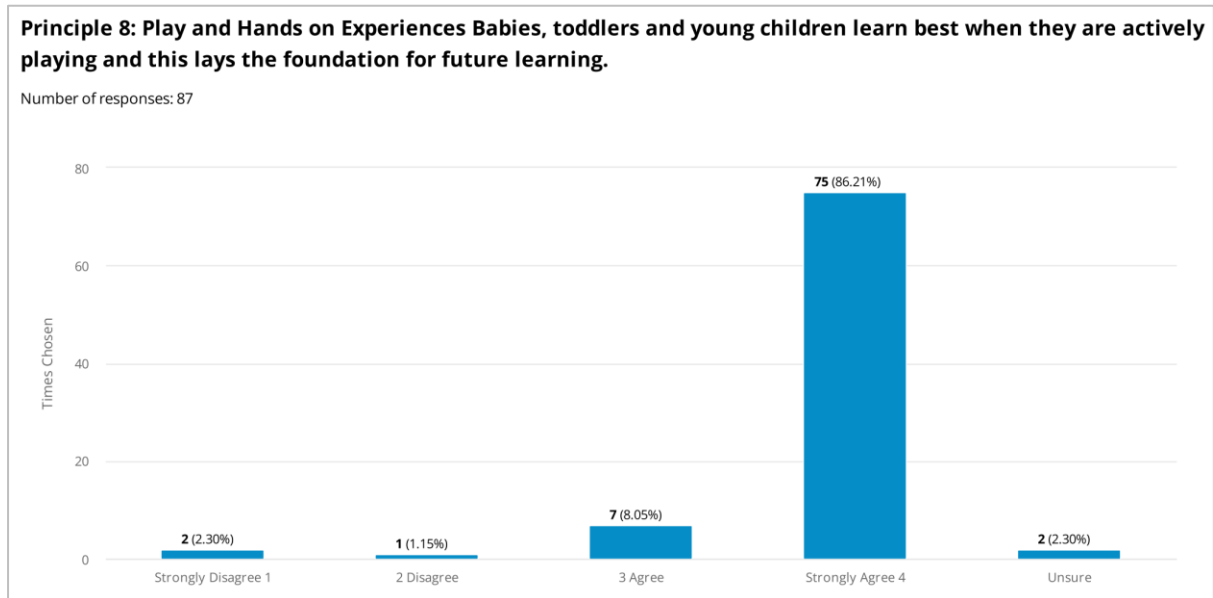
Figure 56: Principal 7 – Holistic Learning and Development (parents)



Principle 8: Play and Hands on Experiences

86% of respondents strongly agreed that ‘the proposed 9 Principles of Aistear reflect key messages from Phase 1, Principle 8: Play and Hands on Experiences’, followed by 8% of respondents who agreed. This represented the highest proportion of respondents who strongly agreed with a statement in this section. There were 87 responses to this question.

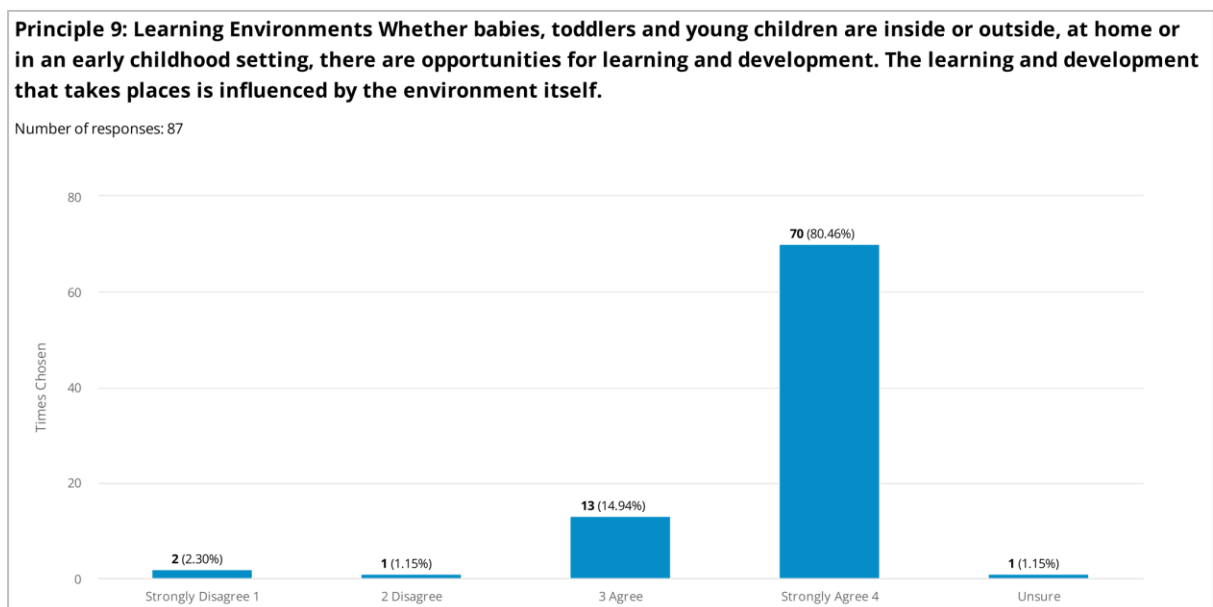
Figure 57: Principal 8 – Play and Hands on Experiences (parents)



Principle 9: Learning Environments

80% of respondents strongly agreed that ‘the proposed 9 Principles of Aistear reflect key messages from Phase 1, Principle 9: Learning Environments’, followed by 15% of respondents who agreed. There were 87 responses to this question.

Figure 58: Principal 9 – Learning Environments (parents)



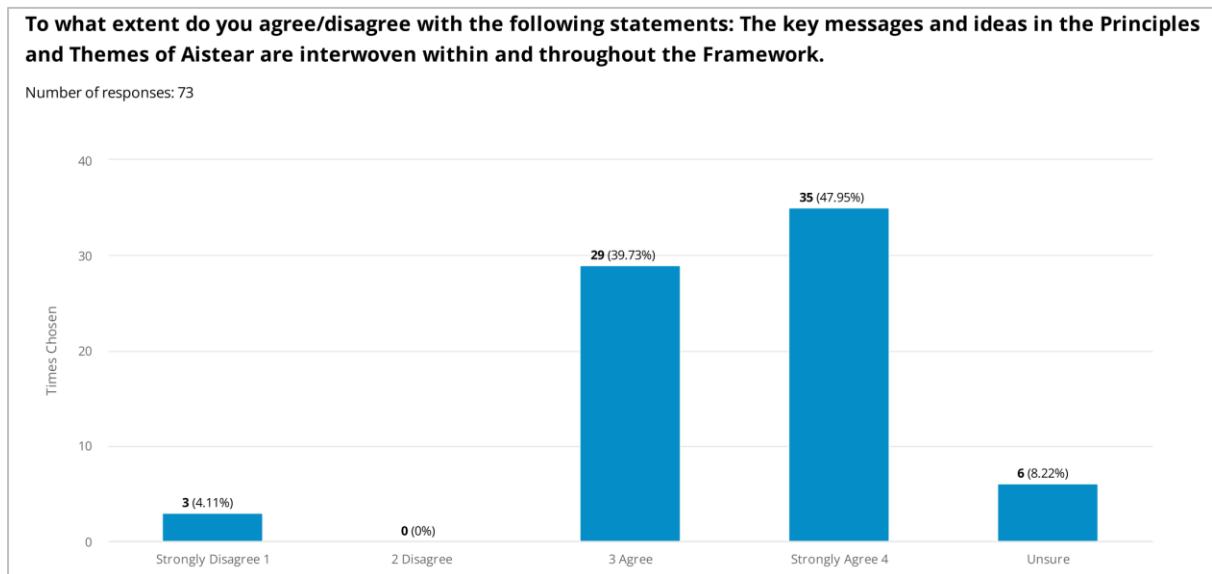
3.3.2.4 Themes of *Aistear* – Parent/Guardian perspectives

This section presents parents' views on the proposed Themes of *Aistear*. *Aistear* is underpinned by four Themes of learning and development. Phase 1 indicated that they remain broadly relevant. They have been updated to reflect key messages from Phase 1. The number of Learning Goals has been reduced. It is proposed that they remain broad, but observable statements that support babies, toddlers and young children's learning and development.

The key messages and ideas in the Principles and Themes

48% of parent respondents strongly agreed that 'the key messages and ideas in the Principles and Themes of *Aistear* are interwoven within and throughout the Framework', followed by 40% of respondents who agreed. There were 73 responses to this question.

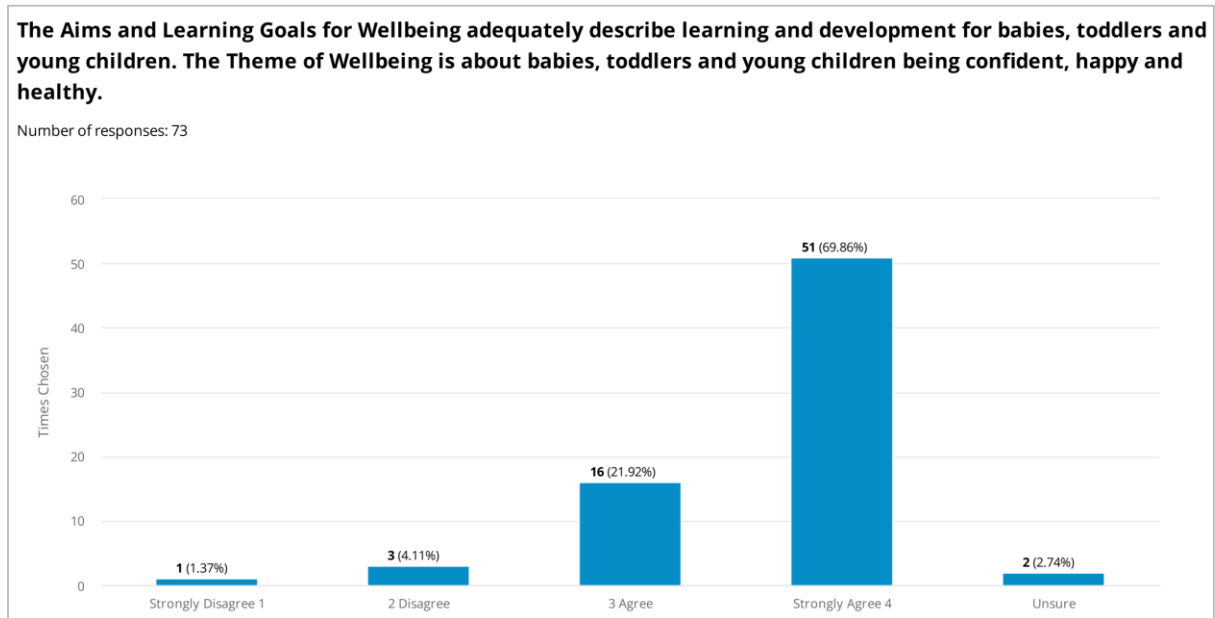
Figure 59: The key messages and ideas in the Principles and Themes (parents)



Aims and Learning Goals for Wellbeing

70% of respondents strongly agreed that 'the Aims and Learning Goals for Wellbeing adequately describe learning and development for babies, toddlers and young children', followed by 22% of respondents who agreed. There were 73 responses to this question.

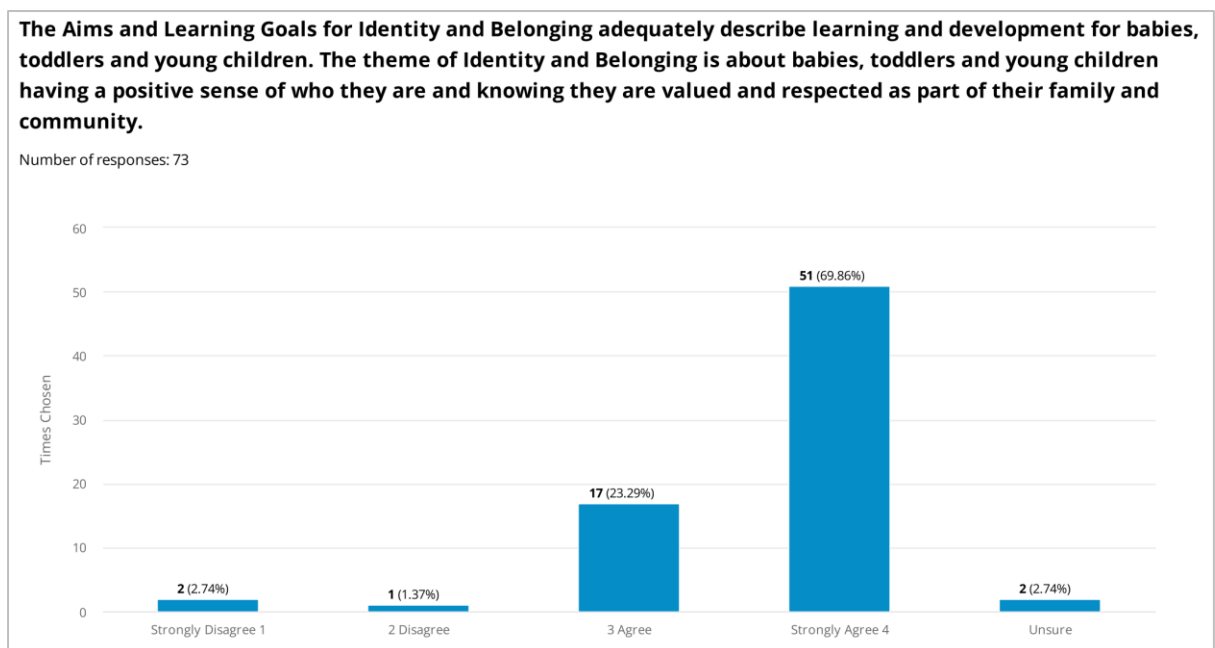
Figure 60: Aims and Learning Goals for Wellbeing (parents)



Aims and Learning Goals for Identity and Belonging

70% of parent respondents strongly agreed that 'the Aims and Learning Goals for Identity and Belonging adequately describe learning and development for babies, toddlers and young children', followed by 23% of respondents who agreed. There were 73 responses to this question.

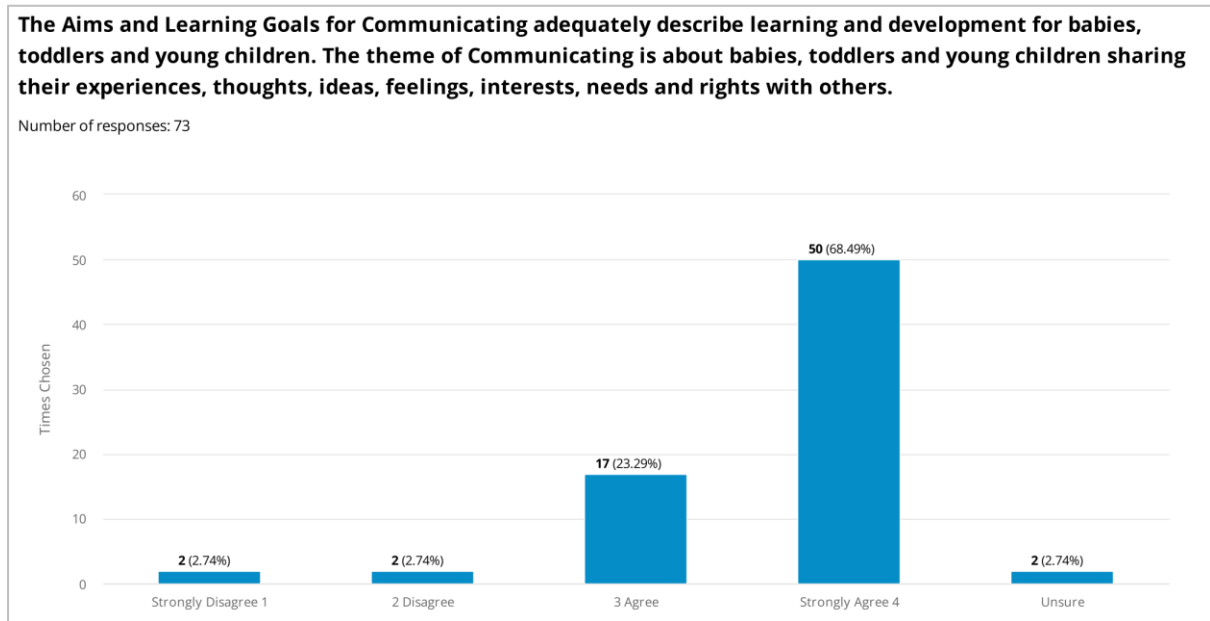
Figure 61: Aims and Learning Goals for Identity and Belonging (parents)



Aims and Learning Goals for Communicating

68% of parent respondents strongly agreed that 'the Aims and Learning Goals for Communicating adequately describe learning and development for babies, toddlers and young children', followed by 23% of respondents who agreed. There were 73 responses to this question.

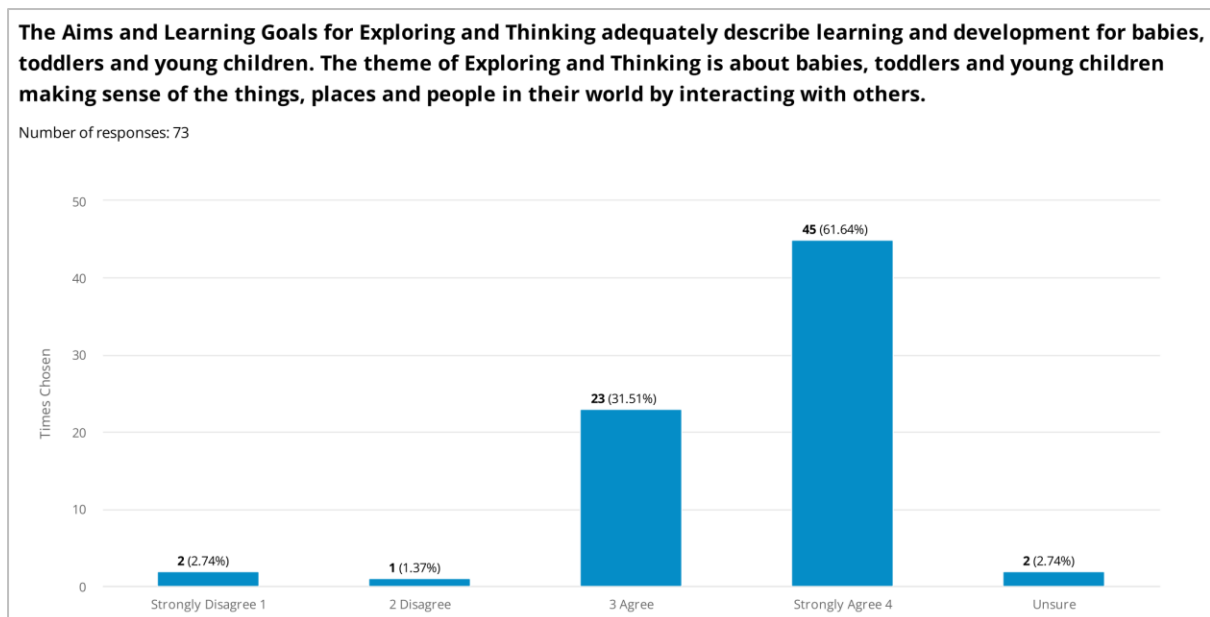
Figure 62: Aims and Learning Goals for Communicating (parents)



The Aims and Learning Goals for Exploring and Thinking

62% of respondents strongly agreed that 'the Aims and Learning Goals for Exploring and Thinking adequately describe learning and development for babies, toddlers and young children', followed by 32% of respondents who agreed. There were 73 responses to this question.

Figure 63: Aims and Learning Goals for Exploring and Thinking (parents)



3.3.2.5 Supporting Educators – Parent/Guardian perspectives

This section presents parents' views on the nature of supports required to support the early childhood educators in working with the curriculum Framework.

How early childhood educators can be supported?

Parents were asked how early childhood educators could be supported in working with the curriculum Framework. There were 41 free text responses to this question. The following themes were prevalent throughout the responses with 20 or 49% of responses identifying 'Training' in some form.

Table 25: How early childhood educators can be supported (parents)

Themes	Respondents	% of total
Training	20	49%
Resources	5	12%
Communication	5	12%
Misc	3	7%
Unknown	8	20%
Total responses	41	1

Many of the free text responses related to **Training** included the following terms: Online courses, learning support, regular training, CPD, professional development, hands on training, better education. Responses related to training included requests for the following:

The next most prevalent theme could be categorised as 'Resources' with 5 or 12% of responses identifying this theme in some form. Some of the free text responses related to this theme included the following terms:

The next most prevalent theme could be categorised as 'Communication' with 5 or 12% of responses identifying this theme in some form. Some of the free text responses related to this theme included the following terms:

The remaining themes that emerged were Non-contact time (1), Examples (1), Make more accessible (1). The remaining 8 or 20% of responses are categorised as Unknown and are difficult to categorise.

Parents other comments on the proposals to update Aistear

Parents were asked whether they had any other comments on the proposal to update Aistear. There were 23 free text responses to this question as follows:

- *It's too structured there is so much research to suggest structured play is not as good as exploratory play and child led play. Our Aistear has become too conditioned. Children are expected to do as teacher/childcare worker sets it up*
- *More childcare facilities un Achill*
- *Entice educators to keep up to date and read relevant information as needed and do refresher courses, so they are always up to date and will work with the Framework better as it will stay fresh*
- *Can be great variance between different childcare settings in what is being implemented*
- *EY teachers should be paid for non-contact time and training times*
- *Time with the kids. Educators are pressured into having organised activities and less exploratory from kids. It's a way of managing time for them too, a tick the box that they done something. Especially with managers. Let the kids roam freely and explore. Educators do not under the importance of transitions when they are against time. Staff have lunches to take but yet kids have to sleep to get these. Empathise with parents on leaving their children at your service. Its emotional and heartbreaking*
- *Aistear will only be as good and effective as the understanding and ability to implement of the educator*
- *The whole agentic global citizen interwoven theme is social engineering rather than delivering benefits that children need. The focus should continue on valuable learning evident throughout Aistear. A baby does not need indoctrination. Diversity and inclusion is naturally critical to meet essential needs of belonging and healthy development of the individual. By pushing global citizenship, you undermine diversity, inclusion and free thinking. Unsustainable*
- *More consultation needed with educators*
- *Remove all gender ideology, critical race theory and sexual content from curriculum*
- *I think the proposals are great. The preschool that my daughter attends follows the Framework really well. However I am only really aware of Aistear through my own studies as an early childhood educator and not as a parent. I don't think my husband is aware of Aistear at all. So while saying parents are important in the framework I think it might need to be introduced or platformed to parents also*
- *More communication with parents on what the children are doing in the classroom or preschool on week-to-week basis. More focus on Aistear in preschools rather than trying to teach writing and letters.*

Needs to be more of a preschool curriculum to focus on Aistear principles, social skills, pre reading and prewriting. Too much variation between preschools. Some teaching jolly phonics before junior infants even begin to teach phonics. Some pushing handwriting before muscles in children's hands are developed

- *I think it's a solid proposal and I particularly like that Irish is now included. I would have kept the all the goals as I felt all were relevant and gave a broad view of each theme for educators*
- *Unsure what Aistear is. Never heard of it before*
- *It would be important to keep parents updated on the framework also*
- *Why is NCCA developing another website for the practitioners to use. They tell me they barely have time to use the Practice Guide as it is. This seems unfair and a waste of resources. Surely all supports can be situated in the same place. The principles and themes are very good. I feel like I could use these at home but would like some ideas on how to do this. I would like support to use Irish too. I don't think adding some words to the text is helpful but I like the idea of celebrating Irishness.*
- *I'm not supportive of the use of Irish words sporadically throughout the text. I am an Irish speaker and don't feel this supports the language. Time and resources need to be invested in upskilling educators to support Irish through play in preschools and creches. Additionally, I note with disappointment that NCCA intends to develop another website. It seems from the FAQ this is in addition to the Practice Guide. This is not helpful and has potential to send mixed messages to the sector.*
- *The idea of an Aistear Toolkit in addition to an Aistear Síolta Practice Guide is confusing and unfair to the sector. Educators are bust enough without navigating two different websites. Please reconsider. The addition of Irish phrases in the document is confusing. To support Irish culture resources detailing how to do this are required rather than once off words here and there.*
- *Not all parents are aware of Aistear or either they have no interest*
- *Would like to see CPD mandatory, incentivized and conditional of employment*
- *Yes, be more explicit. Highlight thrift into practice better. Transitions must be supported by how? Relationships are central but are they? Make the key person mandatory. What about community engagement? What about cultural sensitivity? What about healing the hurt?*
- *I'd like to see an increase and diversity of the types of learning experiences open to young children.*

Section 4: Executive summary of the ‘Phase 2 consultation with babies, toddlers and young children’⁵

This is a report based on a national research project which aimed to consult with and access the voices of babies, toddlers and young children to inform the updating of *Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* (NCCA, 2009). The overall project was structured in two phases. Phase 1 involved consultation with babies, toddlers and young children on their experiences of *Aistear*, and Phase 2 involved asking babies, toddlers and young children their opinions on the changes proposed by NCCA to update *Aistear*.

4.1 Summary of Phase One

In Phase 1 of this consultation, the voices of babies, toddlers and young children were listened to, documented, and collated in a bid to critique *Aistear* and inform how it might be enhanced. Phase 1 employed a Participant Action Research (PAR) design, in partnership with early childhood educators known to the children, and with whom they felt comfortable and at ease.

Drawing on approaches to pedagogical documentation developed through Reggio Emilia (Edwards et al., 2011), and the concept of a Mosaic approach (Clark and Moss, 2008), early childhood educators collected data using their pedagogical skills to document the perspectives of babies, toddlers and young children. The role of these ‘co-researcher educators’ was conceptualised as interpreters of the ‘hundred languages of children’ (Malaguzzi, 1996). It was important that they were viewed by researchers and viewed themselves as *interpreters of children’s voices* rather than direct informants to ensure that the focus was always on children’s perspectives, rather than adults’ experiences. Various data sources including learning stories, photographs and observations were gathered to create an insight into the views of babies, toddlers and young children. These views were shared with NCCA in the [phase 1 report](#) and informed a series of developments for *Aistear*.

Babies, toddlers, and young children communicated that *Aistear* provides an excellent framework for the practice of adults who support their learning and development through relationships, play, self-direction and access to rich learning environments, both indoors and outdoors. They also communicated that some areas to consider for updating *Aistear* are: to focus more on their friendships; to help educators understand what a slow relational nurturing pedagogy looks like, and to empower them to implement it; to focus on wider aspects of identity beyond family and local culture; to further explore their rights and responsibilities as democratic citizens; to continue to extend the focus on modes of communication beyond language, and support educators to document this; to foreground children’s freedom of movement and choice regardless of the specific setting in which they are accessing *Aistear*; to continue the emphasis on play, and extend the focus on inclusive materials; and to reconsider the role of ICT in Early Childhood Education and Care.

4.2 Phase 2

On completion of Phase 1 of the consultation process, NCCA incorporated the findings from all consultations, including that with babies, toddlers and young children, into a new draft updated

⁵ To cite this report: O’Toole, L., Ward, C., Walsh, G., Stokes, T., McCartney, S., Kelleher, F., Forde, D., Doherty, A. and Winter, F. (2024). *A consultation with babies, toddlers and young children to inform the updating of Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* (NCCA, 2009): Phase 2. Dublin: NCCA.

Aistear. The central research questions for Phase 2 of the consultation with babies, toddlers and young children are:

- Do babies, toddlers and young children agree with the key changes proposed by NCCA in the draft updated Aistear?
- Are there any proposed changes with which they disagree?
- Are there any additional considerations that would be important in an updated Aistear from the perspective of babies, toddlers and young children that have not been included in the draft?

For consideration by all contributors to the Phase 2 consultation, including babies, toddlers and young children, the key areas noted for development in Aistear by NCCA were as follows (see Appendix 1 for more detail):

- Relationships and Interactions
- Citizenship: My Rights and Emerging Responsibilities
- Diversity, Equity and Inclusion
- Play and Hands-on Experience
- Transitions: Continuity of Experience and Progression in Learning

The aim of this phase of the consultation therefore was to access the views of babies, toddlers and young children on these key proposed changes to Aistear.

4.2.1 Methodology

As highlighted in Phase 1, there is a growing critique of consultation processes as being largely superficial and tokenistic in style, particularly when engaging with the youngest children (Wall et al., 2019). Drawing on the Lundy participation model (Lundy, 2007), four separate factors were considered: Space, Voice, Audience and Influence to ensure that babies and children's views are not only listened to, but also heard and acted upon. Like Phase 1, Phase 2 of the consultation employed a Participant Action Research (PAR) design (Chevalier and Buckles, 2013; O'Toole, 2020), with early childhood educators in the role of 'co-researchers'. The [Phase 1 report](#) provides a detailed elaboration of the rationale for this approach and how it has been enacted in the consultation, so we have not reiterated this in detail in the Phase 2 report. Briefly, partnership with practising educators who know children well, and with whom children are comfortable, supported this consultative research with babies, toddlers, and young children, giving them space to feel at ease to express their own views and opinions. Educators accessed their perspectives using their existing approaches to pedagogical documentation, including photographs, observations, children's artwork, videos, etc.

To initiate Phase 2, co-researcher educators were provided by NCCA with an advance copy of the proposals to update Aistear. They engaged in an online workshop (see Appendix 2) led by NCCA to help them understand the proposed changes so that they could identify the perspectives of babies, toddlers and young children on these changes. To structure data collection for Phase 2, a child profile form (Appendix 3) and guiding document (Appendix 4) were co-constructed with the co-researcher educators with the following guiding objectives:

1. Ensuring to access the genuine perspectives of babies, toddlers and young children, without being overshadowed by adult interpretations and agendas;
2. Ensuring that the babies, toddlers and young children had the opportunity to both agree and disagree with the proposed changes to Aistear;
3. Ensuring the diversity of the sample of babies, toddlers and young children was not hidden by the inclusive practice of the educators, without of course impinging on the inclusivity of that practice.

Data collection was structured in the child profile form around the key topics identified by NCCA for change within an updated Aistear, but with direction in the guiding document to enable framing the inquiry on each topic from the perspective of the child.

Both the child profile form and the guiding document also had sections on “other opinions / experiences / perspectives of significance to the baby, toddler or young child,” asking “What significant experiences have I had that do not fit in the above categories? Are there any struggles or challenges that are not visible in Aistear?” In this way we hoped to capture the ‘silences’ or the ‘gaps’ that may not have been adequately covered in the proposed changes. As a result of the child profile and guiding documents, educators were supported to submit rich data on children’s responses to each of the identified topics and the related changes, with diversity foregrounded. A focus group was also held with educators to ensure we were clear on the messages being communicated by the babies, toddlers and young children, as they understood them. Data were analysed and categorised under each key change, interpreted to centre the voice of the child, and triangulated against the findings from an educator focus group.

4.2.2 Sampling

In further developing our sampling for Phase 2, we took a similar targeted approach to that taken in Phase 1, with the aim of ensuring a rigorous, valid, and diverse sample. A detailed rationale for the purposive approach used for sampling is provided in the report for Phase 1. Again, for Phase 2, we do not make any claim to have provided a statistically representative sample, but rather the sampling strategy enabled the research team to select ECEC settings that would support the NCCA’s requirement to represent diversity. All Phase 1 settings were invited to take part in Phase 2. Of eleven invited settings, eight initially agreed to take part but one (Gaeltacht naíonra) withdrew over the course of the research. In expanding our sample settings for Phase 2, we reflected on gaps that needed to be filled to ensure we met the requirement for diversity:

- We had been unsuccessful in Phase 1 in gaining consent for inclusion of any Traveller/Roma babies, toddlers and young children, and they urgently needed representation in Phase 2;
- The Phase 1 and initial Phase 2 sample was skewed in favour of children in the age range 3-6 years, so more babies and toddlers needed to be included;
- Phase 1 did not include a large privately-owned daycare chain setting, and babies, toddlers and young children experiencing Aistear in such a setting needed to be represented.

In Phase 1, we were unable to garner consent for working with any Traveller/Roma children within the sample settings in spite of efforts to do so outlined in the Phase 1 report. Only 18% of ECEC settings have children from Traveller backgrounds accessing their services (Pobal, 2020), and so a more detailed, targeted sampling approach, developed in collaboration with the Traveller Community was required for Phase 2, for this dimension of diversity. As a research team, we were highly committed to addressing this acknowledged limitation in the Phase 1 methodology. We

began by meeting with a member of the Traveller community with expertise in the area of education and curriculum development. We engaged in joint exploration of the aims of the consultation in the context of the potential reluctance of Traveller parents to trust or engage with a settled-led piece of research due to generational experiences of marginalisation. With the support of this expert, the research team then identified and met with representatives of a Traveller Health and Community Engagement project and again explored possibilities for genuinely accessing the voices of Traveller babies, toddlers and young children within a culturally responsive approach. They agreed to support the research team to engage with a preschool with a high proportion of Traveller children which is also led by educators from the Traveller community. This setting in turn agreed to take part in Phase 2 of the consultation. The co-researcher educator from the Traveller-led preschool and a representative from the Traveller Health and Community Engagement project took part in the workshops on the updated Aistear delivered by NCCA and the aforementioned sessions, co-constructing the methodologies. Unfortunately, however, the Traveller-led preschool withdrew without specifying a reason and with insufficient time to seek an alternative setting with a significant proportion of Traveller children attending, as is their ethical right. This presented a thorny ethical dilemma (Koushoults and Juhl, 2021) to the researchers because on the one hand the right to withdraw is a key cornerstone of the ethical underpinnings of this research and on the other, exclusion of the voices of an entire cohort of babies, toddlers and young children brings ethical concerns of its own. After much critical reflection, the researchers approached this issue with the mindset of both/and rather than either; we needed to find a way to both honour the right of the Traveller-led preschool to withdraw and also find a way to include the voices of Traveller babies, toddlers and young children within the very limited timescale remaining to us. This was achieved by leveraging pre-existing relationships between the research team and a setting with Traveller children in attendance, but by necessity the methodology employed needed adaptation, with direct support for the co-researcher educator from the research team, and a shorter timescale for data collection.

It is also worth noting that the voices of babies, toddlers and young children in Irish-medium settings are missing from the Phase 2 data. The non-Gaeltacht naíonra from Phase 1 declined to continue with Phase 2, and we did not seek to replace this setting as the Gaeltacht naíonra was initially still committed to Phase 2, ensuring the Irish language perspective would be represented. Unfortunately, however, as aforementioned, the Gaeltacht naíonra withdrew towards the end of the process with insufficient time to seek an alternative Irish language setting. Again, the right to withdraw is a key cornerstone of the ethical underpinnings of this research, and the experiences of babies, toddlers, and young children in Irish language settings are very well represented in Phase 1 of the consultation to which two such settings contributed. All other elements of diversity are well represented in the sample, including gender, language, cultural background, family structure, socio-economic status, and disability / neurodiversity. A detailed overview is provided in the full report, but briefly, the sample included 30 babies, toddlers and young children with:

- 11 settings
- Age range 12 months to 6 years
- 19 male / 11 female
- 11 cultural / linguistic backgrounds
- Disabilities represented including physical delays (gross motor and fine motor), speech delays / disorders, sensory difficulties, behaviour difficulties, allergies, attachment difficulties, and anxiety.
- Multiple family structures including traditional family units with male and female parent, living with extended family, one-parent families and families with parent and step-parent.

4.2.3 Data Analysis

Data collected from the participating babies, toddlers, and young children were analysed thematically, structured around the key topics identified by NCCA for change in the updated Aistear, as well as an additional topic to allow for areas of value to babies, toddlers and young children that were not included in the proposed changes to emerge:

- Relationships and Interactions
- Citizenship: My Rights and Emerging Responsibilities
- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
- Play and Hands-on Experience
- Transitions: Continuity of Experience and Progression in Learning
- Other opinions / experiences / perspectives of significance to the baby, toddler, or young child

Data analysis was conducted in four layers.

1. The initial layer of data analysis was completed by the co-researcher educators. They categorised each item of raw data by their interpretation of its relevance to a specific theme.
2. The data for each theme were synthesised from across all settings by the core research team, separating out the experiences and perspectives of babies and toddlers (birth to 3 years), from those of young children (3-6 years).
3. The core research team then returned to the raw data to triangulate possible interpretations of what the babies, toddlers, and young children may have been communicating. This layer of data analysis was particularly relevant to the theme of 'Citizenship'.
4. The findings were then triangulated against the data from the educator focus group to incorporate the elaborations given by educators on their interpretations of the messages being communicated by the babies, toddlers, and young children.

4.3 Main Findings

Babies, toddlers, and young children expressed in a myriad of ways, that 'Relationships and Interactions' and 'Play and Hands-on Experiences' were important to them. These were the most salient themes in the data.

This consultation repeatedly shows the value that babies, toddlers and young children place on trusting relationships with adults, such as parents and educators, highlighting that relationships between homes and settings are paramount to them. The importance babies, toddlers and young children attach to friendships and connections with peers was also a recurring theme. Thus, **relationships and interactions** with educators, peers, family and the wider community matter greatly to the babies, toddlers, and young children who took part in the consultation. Focusing on building trusting relationships through a slow relational pedagogy and fostering enhanced connections with friends, communities, and neighbourhoods emerged as a particularly visible aspect in this consultation.

A variety of **play and hands-on learning** permeated babies, toddlers and young children's experiences and the findings highlight the importance they place on being agentic, having their own space, being afforded the freedom to make choices, being given access to resources, as well as time to explore their interests.

Citizenship, and the importance of instilling values of responsibility, empathy, respect, and active participation in babies, toddlers and young children, laying the foundation for them to become engaged members of a democratic society as they grow older was a complex theme in the consultation. Educators initially found it challenging to identify how this area applied to children, particularly the youngest babies and toddlers. However, deeper analysis demonstrated that showing respect for the views of babies, toddlers and young children and allowing them to make their own choices is important to them, helps them feel secure as they explore new experiences, and facilitates the beginnings of citizenship from the earliest days. Additionally, one of the strongest messages from babies, toddlers and young children in Phase 2 in relation to citizenship was their activism on behalf of the environment, the natural world and sustainability.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) as crucial principles in early childhood settings to lay the foundation for promoting fairness, respect, and belonging among babies, toddlers and young children from various backgrounds was also a notable theme, especially with regards to participants with a migratory background and those with additional needs. In the former case, babies, toddlers and young children were provided with opportunities to represent their cultural knowledge. It was often remarked how celebrating and acknowledging their families' traditions had a positive impact on both their confidence and their relationship with their peers and families. Moreover, the children and families were in control of how their cultural identity was represented, thereby avoiding cultural stereotypes. Awareness and appreciation of diversity also emerged as central to the successful inclusion of babies, toddlers and young children with additional needs. The new methodology employing the child profile form and guiding document was successful in foregrounding elements of diversity throughout the data, across settings and age groups, and across the key topics for proposed change.

Overall, the progression of learning in early childhood settings is a dynamic and child-centred process that honours the individual strengths, interests, and developmental trajectories of babies, toddlers and young children while providing the support and guidance needed for them to reach their full potential. The Aistear principle of **Transitions** was most evident in references transitions into a new ECEC setting, transitions that occur as part of everyday ECEC routines, and transition into primary school. The participating babies, toddlers and young children showed that they benefit if they are allowed to settle into a new environment on their own terms. They communicated that they like their own space and time to settle in whether it be into setting for first time but also into and out of their play.

Additional areas for consideration highlighted by babies, toddlers and young children that fall outside of the 'key changes' identified by NCCA relate to areas that are proposed to be retained, such as Identity and Belonging, or further developed, such as Technology and Digital Learning. The one additional area for consideration in an updated Aistear may be to incorporate mechanisms for children to be consulted with, and to participate in decision-making within their early childhood settings.

In summary, while babies', toddlers' and young children's day-to-day communications provided substantial data on the principles of "Relationships and Interactions" and "Play and Hands-on Experiences", less data were accessible on "Citizenship", "Diversity, Equity and Inclusion", and "Transitions". The educator focus group confirmed this finding, with educators stating that the principles of "Relationships and Interactions" and "Play and Hands-on Experiences" resonated most strongly with the participating children. For the most part, the views of the babies, toddlers and young children participating in this consultation showed approval for the key changes to Aistear proposed by NCCA, albeit with a need for support for educators to identify and enact the concept of citizenship in their work, particularly with the youngest children.

Chapter 4 of the report moves beyond the consultation process to analyse, from the perspectives of the researchers, informed by the views of NCCA, the key implications of Phase 2 of the consultation for curriculum framework development going forward.

Section 5: Conclusion

This report documents Phase 2 of the consultation on updating *Aistear*. The purpose of updating the curriculum framework is to ensure it continues to support quality early childhood education in Ireland in the years ahead. The consultation set out to gather feedback from individuals and organisations on the proposals for an updated *Aistear*. The consultation afforded a range of opportunities for individuals and organisations to have their say on the future of the Framework and there was widespread engagement across the consultation formats.

As with previous early childhood consultations conducted by NCCA, it was important to hear directly from babies, toddlers and young children about the kind of learning experiences that they value in their lives. This strand of the consultation is central to the updating process and the range of voices, offering a variety of perspectives, evidenced through the consultation are valued. It is also important to acknowledge the voices that are less represented than others. In particular, the perspectives of babies, toddlers and young children from communities which are often lesser heard are not as visible as others in the consultation. While parents from these communities did take part, continued and enhanced engagement with the communities—children and their parents—will be essential as the updated *Aistear* is introduced to the early childhood sector in the years ahead.

The consultation presents a set of findings which, along with the Literature Review to support the Updating of *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*, lays the very important groundwork for the next steps in the updating process.

The proposed update of *Aistear* has garnered positive responses, with many stakeholders expressing the view that the changes are not only well-received but also deemed necessary for the continued enhancement of early childhood education in Ireland. The feedback underscores the centrality of *Aistear* in shaping the experiences of babies, toddlers, and young children, highlighting its pivotal role in the sector. Professionals within the early childhood sector hold the Framework in high regard, considering it a cornerstone that significantly contributes to quality learning in early childhood. However, as with any consultation process, a diverse array of opinions has emerged. Varied perspectives on terminology, the role of childminders, supports for *Aistear*, and the prominence of children's rights have been presented. This diversity of views, while reflecting the extensive nature of the consultation, emphasises the need for careful consideration and deliberation in addressing the different aspects of the proposed updates.

5.1 Actions and key considerations arising from the consultation

The analysis of data derived from focus groups, written submissions, online questionnaires and consultation with babies, toddlers and young children serves as a guiding foundation for the Early Childhood team at the NCCA to progress the updating of *Aistear*. The following are key considerations and actions that will support the updating process:

1. Strengthen children's rights within the framework:

- Examine the updated *Aistear* with a focus on strengthening children's rights, ensuring explicit integration within the Framework concerning their rights to protection, provision, and participation. Align these considerations with the holistic nature of early childhood education and care.

- Further consider the concept of 'agency'/'agentic' through a rights-based perspective, examining how this concept is presented and explained throughout the document.

2. Consideration of terminology:

- Examine and clarify terminology used throughout the document with a view to improving overall accessibility for all who use it. Special attention should be given to the term 'educator', ensuring a nuanced presentation and understanding that takes into account the central roles of parents, guardians, and childminders.
- Focus particularly on the use and explanation of equality/equity.
- Reconsider the definition of 'parent' used in the document.

3. Greater recognition of the educator in the vision of *Aistear*

- Address calls for further development of the image of the educator within the vision of *Aistear*. Reconsider the balance in the vision and focus of the updated *Aistear*, ensuring that the document equally emphasises the importance and visibility of educators alongside the focus on babies, toddlers, and young children.
- Deliberate on the intended audience of *Aistear*, recognising the need for clarity on whether it is primarily for parents, educators, or childminders. Address the suggestions for different versions of the document to cater to those seeking information and those intending to use it with their child.

4. Language considerations:

- Examine the consistent and meaningful use of Irish words and phrases throughout the document and provide guidance/examples of how Irish can be integrated into daily routines.
- Explore ways to authentically recognise and encourage the respect and utilisation of children's home languages, alongside English and Irish, within the Framework.

5. Further integration of the Principles:

- Further explore ways to integrate the Principles throughout the Themes, enhancing visibility and accessibility for educators.

6. Supporting *Aistear* section:

- Offer detailed support and information regarding new concepts introduced in the Supporting *Aistear* section. Provide accessible descriptions of key terms and concepts, emphasising interconnected ideas related to rights, agency, global citizenship, and sustainability.

7. Relational pedagogy and play:

- Expand on the concept of slow relational pedagogy as a means to realise the Principles and Learning Goals of *Aistear*.
- Embed a rights-based perspective on play and elucidate how this perspective manifests in practical implementation.

8. Literacy and Numeracy:

- Consider the definitions of literacy and numeracy utilised within the Framework, aligning with national policies.
- Review the Learning Goals of *Aistear* to ensure the essential literacy and numeracy learning outlined in *Aistear* (2009) remains.

9. Greater recognition of the diversity of contexts within which *Aistear* will be used:

- Recognise the diversity of early childhood education contexts, especially for children from birth to 3 years, by explicitly acknowledging the role of home environments and experiences outside formal settings.
- Anticipate the professionalisation and regulation of home-based care for young children, particularly in the birth to 3 age group, and ensure the Framework's relevance in various settings.

10. Assessment, planning and documentation:

- Prioritise further guidance and support in the key area of assessment, planning and documentation, as identified as a frequent and critical need.
- Establish a common, shared understanding of assessment in the early childhood setting, emphasising clarity on the purpose of assessment and work with other agencies to facilitate a unified understanding.

11. Continuity of experience and progression of learning:

- Address concerns raised regarding continuity of experience and progression in learning across early childhood and primary school. Specifically, provide clarity on the perceived shift away from using *Aistear* within the primary school setting, considering the statement that designates *Aistear* as the curriculum framework for all children from birth to six years in all settings other than primary and special schools.

12. STEM:

- Provide clarity on the STEM terms within the Framework.

- Include the STEM acronym within the Framework, emphasising the transdisciplinary nature of STEM and its ability to foster the interplay between the disciplines of Science, Mathematics, Engineering and Technology.

13. Digital technologies and digital literacies:

- Respond to recommendations calling for the explicit definition of terms related to digital technologies, such as electronic toys, digital tools like calculators and weighing scales, and unplugged technology. Outline the age appropriateness of each, taking into account guidance from authoritative sources such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Health Service Executive (HSE).
- Provide examples to support educators in understanding the balanced and measured use of digital technology in early childhood education.

5.2 Conducive conditions for realising an updated *Aistear*

Working towards the Vision, Principles, Themes and Learning Goals in an updated *Aistear* brings opportunities, new thinking, and possibilities. However, change also brings challenges, uncertainty, and disruption. During the Phase 2 consultation process, all stakeholders were asked about their opinions on the supports necessary to successfully realise an updated *Aistear* in practice. Arising from this consultation a number of conducive conditions were identified by respondents and which the deemed necessary to enable and support educators to work successfully with the Framework:

1. Time and space to become familiar with the new ideas and changes in the updated *Aistear*.
2. Ongoing access to, and opportunities for, high-quality, funded CPD that is available in a variety of formats, such as workshops, webinars, podcast series, etc., to cater to different learning preferences. Reference was also made by some participants to the importance of provision of CPD in Irish.
3. Coordinating the contribution of the wider education partners, the Inspectorates, and support services in working together to enact curriculum change by building a shared understanding of the Framework.
4. Provision of high-quality resources and exemplars to support educators in working with the updated *Aistear*.
5. The implementation of a cohesive and strategic national rollout of training, involving educators and professionals in further and higher education.
6. The establishment of a community of practice (CoP) to facilitate ongoing professional development and collaboration among educators.

7. Exploration of synergies with existing organisations and support structures within the early childhood sector, especially those provided by the ASPG, to avoid duplication and ensure clarity for users of *Aistear*.
8. The development of particular support for parents who wish to use *Aistear* in the home.

5.3 The next phase in updating *Aistear*

The findings from the two strands of Phase 2 – (1) Consultation with the early childhood sector; and (2) Consultation with babies, toddlers and young children will be used in the coming months to finalise the updated Framework. This work will be supported by, and progressed with, the education partners through NCCA's *Aistear* Development Group, Board for Early Childhood and Primary, and Council. Following this period of deliberation across NCCA's structures, the updated Framework will be published.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Suggestions from focus groups to change terminology / language (focus groups)

Suggestions to change terminology/language	
General	<p>Not sure that <i>Aistear</i> can 'view' children or educators...perhaps change the language to 'presents/ represents'</p> <p>We have lost the word 'meaningful'. Needs to be added back in (making sense to the child, their context).</p> <p>'Documenting the learning ' needs to be revisited, it is very ambitious and high level for educators who may not be engaging with this in practice.</p> <p>Dispositions could be highlighted more</p> <p>Is care prioritised enough in vision?</p>
Agentic Global Citizens	<p>Ambiguity of the term 'agentic ' - not enough to have this in glossary but to place explainer front and centre in the document so there is explicit reference and understanding of the term.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Is there a need for the word 'global '? <p>The use of 'I' statements- could this neglect the collaboration /collective experience of children. Could we use 'we' and frame as the voices of children.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · It's important in the support section that 'global citizen ' unless it's broken down into how can we do this in a hands on way and in a meaningful way, because if you don't understand what that looks like you will skip past it and not implement it. It needs to be explained how to implement these in a non-tokenistic way. <p>Global citizen needs support for meaningful implementation</p>
Child Voice Statements	<p>Suggestion that communicate could be used instead of 'voice' in child statement the child voice statements are only about the child – where is the educator in this?</p> <p>SRP not reflected in the child voice statements</p> <p>Child voice statement includes 'needs' – should we move away from a deficit model?</p>
Diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Is the wording 'member of' appropriate? " · Should the word 'just' be included with the description of a 'fair society'? · 'inclusive environment' – perhaps include 'learning' or ' holistic' as the environment is not the physical environment "•It was felt that 'empathy of others' is missing"

	<p>"•There is an individual over a societal emphasis here – what about friends and being part of a community?"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Is the reference to participation accurate in this Principle ? Participation is more than engagement (in terms of rights). It's more about 'the right to be heard'. Maybe Article 2 – Right to Equality / Non-discrimination would be appropriate. · Glossary needs some work – equity – not a good idea to lose equality – need to be more clearly defined Welcome for change in terminology from equality to equity - should justice be included? · the inclusion and identification of 'Travellers '. Two differing viewpoints 1. Why isolate them, are they not included in ethnic minorities? VS 2. Name and empower them. Welcome acknowledgement of different cultures, including that of the Traveller community · Is the wording 'member of ' appropriate? <p>Purpose – welcome most of it but...the last point is exclusionary . Removal of the word our would make this stronger.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Unclear definition of "Worldview," needing more explanation . <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · It was suggested that 'identity ' may be missing/merit further consideration for inclusion in the vision section <p>The group discussed the last bullet in purpose section 'Appreciates our cultural and linguistic history and story and introduces terms as Gaeilge (in Irish) as part of this' extensively. The group felt it was positive to emphasise Irish culture but that an additional bullet should be added to encompass other cultures and help develop self-identity for all</p> <p>Review culture piece – perhaps it is better worded as a diversity of appropriate cultures</p> <p>Family & Community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · It was suggested that the last 4 lines of the blurb may need to be rephrased as they are quite long · First bullet – Rather than 'My parents are the most important people in my life' – it needs to be a broader and use the word family, to showcase a broader understanding of family than just the parents · Perhaps reconsider use of the term 'reach potential ' – implies this is a static concept but instead something like 'keep learning' to show we keep progressing and not about reaching an end point
Educator	Image of educator underdeveloped in the update. Move down some of the nice words in the view of the child to the educator (the care focus, professional love, respect)

	<p>educators supporting learning – do they not lead it? This is related to agentic and intentional pedagogy. They do more than support . Educators guide learning, they are co-collaborators (work in partnership)</p> <p>The proposals speak to a ‘confident’ educator but there is a lack of confidence among educators.</p> <p>felt that the use of the term ‘significant others’ is problematic, with some negative connotations. It was felt that more inclusive language would be needed here especially as ‘childminders ‘ are being brought, professionally into the sector.</p>
Family and Community	<p>question 'parent'</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Definition of ‘educators’ is problematic as parents are included but there are contradicting messages in the document . <p>Maybe the document could acknowledge the complex nature of this principle</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Is the reference to participation accurate in this Principle ? Participation is more than engagement (in terms of rights). It’s more about ‘the right to be heard’. Maybe Article 2 – Right to Equality / Non-discrimination would be appropriate.
Holistic Learning and Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Word ‘make ’ - how will this be interpreted? Unsure what is meant here. What is understood by ‘good ’ – engaged/proactive were suggested as alternatives · Is there a sense of ‘connectedness’ missing – is it too much about the ‘I’? · There is a need for a piece on ‘active, ongoing consent’, ‘informed choice’
Irish (Gaeilge) and other Languages	<p>Want more Irish in the English version like Te Whariki Foclóir for Irish phrases or use more widely would be welcome.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · that the term ‘Linguistic history’ is too narrow - Traveller language/Irish sign language could be other options mentioned alongside Gaeilge <p>Yes it gives Irish language visibility but does it need to more explicit for example also having the themes and principles in Irish or using súgradh instead of play. Other words such as meas were suggested as words that people use as the English word doesn’t quite capture the meaning the same way</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Bród– often associated with LGBT community, however it was seen in a broader context here as ‘constructing own self and own journey’ with a focus on developing their own sense of self and identity <p>Will it be available in other languages? Consider accessibility of language Language in document not accessible for parents – need a version for them, critical they know about and understand <i>Aistear</i> – write it so a parent could explain it to another parent. Accessible but don’t dumb it down. Themes in Irish - similar to Te Whariki Suggest Irish names in principles and themes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · feedback suggested some of the translations were forced – particularly in terms of the sayings towards the end. Could old proverbs be revisited and used. There was discussion about the word ‘enacting’ in the English version and about the Irish language version ‘cur i bhfeidhm’ – the participants felt that the English version had more strength. <p>A mistake was pointed out with regards the translation of an Irish language proverb on pg. 33.</p>

	<p>The word 'meitheal' was also mentioned, and one participant was of the opinion that people wouldn't always associate positive things with it.</p>
<p>Learning Environment</p> <p>Outdoors</p>	<p>What is aesthetically pleasing to one person may not be to another. NCCA needs to spell out what they want the environment to be calm, inclusive, with natural materials, sensorial, flexible, adaptable, accessible for all. Aesthetic is too subjective.</p> <p>Change making to creating the environment</p> <p>Add in the power of the environment as the third teacher -its potential is under played at present.</p> <p>Connected is in the principle but connected to what – not clear? The text provided an overly narrow interpretation of a 'Learning Environment'. · 'inclusive environment' – perhaps include 'learning' or 'holistic' as the environment is not the physical environment</p> <p>Outdoors – emphasised in play only – outdoor/indoor experiences should be free flowing not just play related</p>
<p>Parent</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent is a blanket term used that perhaps merits expansion, for example, highlighting that this encompasses caregivers etc also? • Foot note 'refers to professional' decisions – do parents make professional decisions? • Be very clear what you mean by parent – lots of children cared for by nannies (protective orders) be as inclusive as possible. • should it acknowledge primary care givers instead of just 'parents' – terminology. • the term educator could exclude parents. • A simplified version would be good as the language can be intimidating.
<p>Play</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tone is very educational, move from play to playful is concern • Not sure that you can see slow relational pedagogy in play and hands on experience principle. • We want play not playful activities – they are not the same. This is very important and something for the NCCA to address. Playful is in the update 9 times. This lessens the importance of play!! Playful not the same as play • Should risky be included – is adventurous and challenging watering it down? • Welcome for use of adventurous play as opposed to Risky Play as that term can be an inhibitor to adventurous play in some settings. • like the use of the term 'adventurous play' • It was mentioned that there is an important piece missing from the Framework in terms of sharing the understanding of the importance of play with parents • Play referred to as inquiry-based play in the proposals. An emergent and inquiry-based curriculum has caused confusion in the sector • Suggestion that the word 'uninterrupted' play be included in the Framework for greater clarity on what play looks like <p>Positive- Very positive references to play and play-based learning – re-affirming what is in the original <i>Aistear</i></p>

Principles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflective questions within the document are missing and were suggested as a possible addition to the principles and themes.
Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purpose – welcome most of it but...the last point is exclusionary. Removal of the word ‘our’ would make this stronger.
STEM/Maths	<p>use the word STEM to create awareness of the term Need more ‘Maths terms’</p> <p>‘joy exploring Science Technology Engineering Maths’ concepts, it separates STEM but it should be drawing from one another and it makes it more confusing, they are linked.</p>
Transitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some transitions may be missing from this piece. For example, hospital-based children may be missing from this piece on transitions (long or short term) and perhaps they need to be represented? • When we ‘talk’ about transition – as noted in the last bullet point, it should not just be about talking. It needs to be more than just talk and involve discussion and practical support. <p>The importance of transitions was mentioned, especially in the Irish-medium education system in terms of the standard of the children's Irish when they enter primary school. It was suggested that something should be developed in relation to the transition from the home to preschool. important to acknowledge the emotional and behavioural aspect of transitions</p> <p>Purpose: ‘From one setting to another’ in the third bullet point suggests external transitions only, there is a need to foreground internal transitions (within a room, within a setting and with other settings).</p>
Traveller Families/Travelling Community	<p>Conversation focused on the inclusion and identification of ‘Travellers’. Two differing viewpoints 1. Why isolate them, are they not included in ethnic minorities? VS 2. Name and empower them.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Is the wording ‘member of’ appropriate? <p>Welcome acknowledgement of different cultures, including that of the Traveller community. Emphasis on the need for a coordinated response to developing resources.</p> <p>It was felt that the term ‘Linguistic history’ is too narrow - Traveller language/Irish sign language could be other options mentioned alongside Gaeilge</p> <p>It was felt that there is a need to emphasize and stress that all cultures need to be celebrated in a multicultural environment as it was mentioned that it has often been reported that traveller and Roma children, in particular, are often expected to develop the dominant culture of the setting</p> <p>Travelling community- we should bring their language and culture in too</p> <p>Open door policy – the relationship with the parents is as important as the children. They have to trust you and sometimes you have to reach out eg went to the halting site to encourage Traveller children to attend.</p> <p>The Catholic church is very important to Traveller families, have setting on the halting site, have statues, say prayers, have a magazine called voice – has photos of wedding christening etc. children love looking at it, grandmothers come in to tell stories about begin nomadic. Huge shortage of resources to support Traveller</p>

	<p>inclusion, books, Framework needs to make sure there is scope to include what is important to them.</p> <p>Traveller families want connections with other travellers, their identity really important to them, want to see and their culture protected</p> <p>Traveller parents don't use app so share info with them as they collect children.</p>
Wellbeing	<p>The self- and co- regulation reference is welcome and wonder if this could be foregrounded a little further.</p> <p>One word that I didn't read which is important in wellbeing in relation to 'respect and nurturing bodies' is 'consent' 'active consent' mentioned.</p> <p>Theme of well-being- is the wording of 'spiritual dimension' too closely aligned with religious connotation, don't see any inclusion rationale? Reconsider, potentially using Wonder or mindfulness</p> <p>Where is movement?</p> <p>Could the word gratitude be included?</p> <p>Time is very important – needs to be reiterated more. Time to slow down, time to be mindful – maybe more of this could be dotted throughout?</p> <p>It was felt that 'empathy of others' is missing"</p>

Appendix 2: Addressing the Principles (focus groups)

*Please note that the following excerpts from the focus group notes are indicative rather than exhaustive and many not represent every reference within the dataset.

Principle	Concerns/Suggestions/Reflections
<p>Agentic Global Citizens</p>	<p>Language of gender should be added to this principle Agentic Global Citizens</p> <p>Acknowledge that global is already local for many children – diverse towns and cities they live in</p> <p>Multilingualism needs to be mentioned</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I live in Ireland”... perceived as othering - reword to make more inclusive and don’t use the term “our culture” <p>Is there a need for the word ‘global’?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do we need ‘agentic’ – this term is problematic - what does it mean? other than giving children a choice, what is meant here? <p>What is understood by ‘good’ – engaged/proactive were suggested as alternatives.</p> <p>Welcome for democratic stance, anti-bias, empowerment in the Principle</p> <p>Is there a sense of ‘connectedness’ missing – is it too much about the ‘I’?</p> <p>Suggestion that communicate could be used instead of ‘voice’ in child statement</p> <p>There is a need for a piece on ‘active, ongoing consent’, ‘informed choice’</p> <p>There was a question as to whether this is this too strong a statement for babies and toddlers. Consideration needs to be given to what is meant by this.</p> <p>It’s important in the support section that ‘global citizen’ unless it’s broken down into how can we do this in a hands-on way and in a meaningful way, because if you don’t understand what that looks like you will skip past it and not implement it. It needs to be explained how to implement these in a non-tokenistic way.</p>
<p>Diversity, Equity and Inclusion</p>	<p>Te Whariki acknowledges indigenous groups – it is important to celebrate culture, heritage.</p> <p>Child personality missing – it can impact on this Principle</p> <p>Welcome for the inclusion of ‘barriers to education’ – important to acknowledge</p> <p>Should the word ‘just’ be included with the description of a ‘fair society’?</p> <p>Welcome for positive and inclusive language</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘inclusive environment’ – perhaps include ‘learning’ or ‘holistic’ as the environment is not the physical environment! <p>It was felt that ‘empathy of others’ is missing.</p> <p>Child voice statement includes ‘needs’ – should we move away from a deficit model?</p>

	<p>There is an individual over a societal emphasis here – what about friends and being part of a community?</p> <p>Is the reference to participation accurate in this Principle? Participation is more than engagement (in terms of rights). It's more about 'the right to be heard'. Maybe Article 2 – Right to Equality / Non-discrimination would be appropriate.</p> <p>Like the idea of moving from equality to equity (not treating all children the same) but it will need support.</p> <p>What is meaningful in the local context? Could the update embrace an anti-bias approach more. Is there enough about context and place-based education?</p> <p>Review culture piece – perhaps it is better worded as a diversity of appropriate cultures. The group noted that some cultural practices are not appropriate in Irish society, and this may be a consideration in the wording of the text.</p> <p>Equity – very important that this is in the title</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This principle, while it is threaded through PCF and post primary frameworks, it begins here in early childhood. <p>There is an opportunity to look at this in a diff lens as seeing the value of diversity for learning. Sometimes there is a deficit approach - “they don't have English” – move to seeing the strengths that they bring – value what new families in our community can bring to us – Valuing difference – opportunity to build on this</p> <p>Acknowledge that it can be a challenging for settings e.g. language and communication</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There can be an 'Assimilation mindset' – 'they' (people who have moved to Ireland) have to integrate into our culture <p>Irish words in <i>Aistear</i> – this also shows we have a heritage – sometimes the focus can be on other languages and cultures – using the Irish language in <i>Aistear</i> allows us to bring this into focus too</p> <p>Word diversity – people are unsure how to bring it into our setting. It starts with “building relationship with the community” – real examples of how this enacted in the setting - There is more diversity in the workforce in early years rather the Primary – we should value this and use this more.</p> <p>New Zealand was given as an example of valuing the role of staff where there is diversity in educators and their knowledge is valued and used</p> <p>parents want to see things in practice. Are there opportunities to celebrate cultural diversity events? Making Irish early years practitioners to be more aware of different culture as Ireland diversifies. Would make for better relationships with children and parents from other cultural backgrounds. Is it possible to train early years practitioners to have greater awareness of multiculturalism? To support relationship building.</p>
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	<p>inclusion and identification of 'Travellers'. Two differing viewpoints 1. Why isolate them, are they not included in ethnic minorities? VS 2. Name and empower them. • Is the wording 'member of' appropriate?</p> <p>Travelling community- we should bring their language and culture in too</p> <p>Identity The Catholic church is very important to Traveller families, have setting on the halting site, have statues, say prayers, have a magazine called voice – has photos of wedding christening etc. children love looking at it, grandmothers come in to tell stories about begin nomadic. Huge shortage of resources to support Traveller inclusion, books, Framework needs to make sure there is scope to include what is important to them.</p> <p>Traveller families want connections with other travellers, their identity really important to them, want to see and their culture protected.</p>
Relationships and Interactions	<p>It is important to attract people to the profession that have a nurturing and caring disposition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • However, there are currently a lot of staffing challenges and a shortage of staff • It would be great for children to be able to see and interact with their key person after they move on from them <p>There is a lack of focus on children for whom it is more challenging to establish a relationship with/ interact with – e.g. those with serious behavioural needs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledge that relationship building is not always straight forward in the document <p>The importance of the 'key person' approach was mentioned - The importance of relationships with a key group of children / peers could be nurtured</p> <p>Childminder may have a unique opportunity to support relationships across mixed age groups in a small group setting. Bringing children out into their local community more. - Also mentioned was taking the opportunity to bring the community into Early Years' settings, by bringing in people from different professions to tell their stories</p>
Family and Community	<p>Wording around 'parents' generated discussion. Research indicates when fathers read 'parents' in connection with education, the associate it with mothers and may feel excluded. • Definition of 'educators' is problematic as parents are included but there are contradicting messages in the document. • 'funds of knowledge' – where children come from, who children come from – e.g. honour deceased family members, storytelling, a sense of identity and belonging – give a nod to generational trauma. • Is the Principle too individualistic in identity – we have multiple identities.</p>

	<p>Drawing on the Reggio Emillio approach and seeing families as co-partners in curriculum, to what extent is this realised ‘on the ground’ in Ireland? Maybe the document could acknowledge the complex nature of this principle – particularly as parents are seen as educators in the curriculum. Bringing external speakers/community leaders into the setting can be really beneficial. The ratios for adult:child can be a barrier to inviting community members into the setting</p> <p>The group like the use of the word joyful in this section</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It was suggested that the last 4 lines of the blurb may need to be rephrased as they are quite long <p>First bullet – Rather than ‘My parents are the most important people in my life’ – it needs to be broader and use the word family, to showcase a broader understanding of family than just the parents</p> <p>Perhaps reconsider use of the term ‘reach potential’ – implies this is a static concept but instead something like ‘keep learning’ to show we keep progressing and not about reaching an end point</p> <p>Second bullet ‘It helps me to reach my potential when my educator(s) work in partnership with my family, respecting and valuing their opinions and expertise. They want the best for me and know about me and what I like and don’t like.’ –Perhaps consider some way of showing within the wording that children are a central stakeholder alongside family and educators</p> <p>Connections with the neighbourhood/community is positive – the idea of ‘funds of knowledge’ was in the Literature Review and now this can be brought into settings through the ‘Family and Community’ principle. It makes ‘funds of knowledge’ tangible for educators.</p>
<p>Agentic Educators</p>	<p>The term agentic educator needs a clear and concise definition that is visible within the text and not as a footnote. It needs to acknowledge that educators have professional knowledge, but they need to feel empowered. <i>Aistear</i> allows and guides this, but this needs systemwide support.</p> <p>I trust that you will find appropriate resources and to help me to get access to professional support and services when I need it’ – in some cases the setting and educators may not be able to support children with diverse needs (the supports may not be available). When taking this statement from a parental lens, it places a huge burden on parenting and expectation of what parents may or may not be able to access – we need to be careful about how we frame this expectation. The use of ‘I’ statements- could this neglect the collaboration/collective experience of children. Could we use ‘we’ and frame as the voices of children. ‘Agentic Educators’ empowers the educators, and this leads to being able to impact good relationships etc.... - A need for</p>

	<p>educators to slow things down and become comfortable with slowing things down to realize the slow relational pedagogy - A need for educators to accept that it is okay to sit back, listen, observe and to be confident that these are active and important processes Play -</p>
<p>Transitions</p>	<p>There was a real welcome for the addition of Transitions</p> <p>Some transitions may be missing from this piece. For example, hospital-based children may be missing from this piece on transitions (long or short term) and perhaps they need to be represented?</p> <p>When we ‘talk’ about transition – as noted in the last bullet point, it should not just be about talking. It needs to be more than just talk and involve discussion and practical support.</p> <p>The participants thought that Mo Scéal is working well. According to them it gives professional recognition to the educators. It was said that overall, there is a good working relationship between preschools and primary schools within the Irish-medium education system, but that this needs to be improved outside of this system.</p> <p>Welcomed its inclusion. Transitions weren’t standing out as it wasn’t a theme on it’s own</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More work done now in relation to transitions • A key piece – moving throughout the day • Also important to acknowledge the emotional and behavioural aspect of transitions • Vital to reduce amt of transitions – slow them down (SRP) • Welcomed that all transitions are included rather than just a focus on ‘big’ transitions • Just because they are settled today doesn’t mean it will be the case tomorrow – transitions are not a moment in time but are ongoing and everyday • We have expectations of children that we don’t have of ourselves • Children dont always have control or understand what goes on during transitions • Key person is hugely important and benefits transitions • During the walkaround, other people contributed to this topic: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Transitions for 0-3 – sometimes overlooked with a focus on using visuals to support older children during transitions, but 0-3 need a different approach to support them e.g. using music and movement to build familiarity and support them to anticipate regular transitions o The important role of key worker should be emphasised further o Transition to primary – children should the opportunity to visit the school to support this transition (It seems that this changed during Covid for this particular setting and has not resumed). There should be policy to ensure this happens. o

	<p>Educators don't always make the links between behaviour/emotions and transitions.</p> <p>Transition to primary school Transition to primary this is where things fall down. Get on well here, have AIM support, have good ratios, can go out side, know the strategies that work. Move to school and it's a disaster. No transfer of information or skills or support to the primary school. Many of our children end up on reduced timetables, even suspended, have very negative experiences in school. The work in preschool is not built on when they go to school. Need more connections and contact between settings and schools. <i>Aistear</i> should outline what needs to be done. Why can't AIM person go with them for the first years? Need a lot more help with the transition to school- put more information in the framework so that the move is better. Kids get on grand here but not so well in school. Parents needs more information on how to help their children be ready for school – should they be able to recognise or spell their name. Should they be doing writing? Very good here for helping them to be independent. They pour drinks, tidy up, have jobs. They support them to be independent and to have choices. The move from the baby room to the next room is very hard too. They handle it better as they get older. Moving from one room to another handled well – 3 weeks to get used to new room old staff go with them for a while. The move to school often doesn't go well. Too many in the class.</p>
<p>Holistic Learning and Development</p>	<p>Word 'make' - how will this be interpreted? Unsure what is meant here.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bród– often associated with LGBT community, however it was seen in a broader context here as 'constructing own self and own journey' with a focus on developing their own sense of self and identity • Love the word holistic – Word can be a huge support to slow pedagogy • Wording used puts the child at the centre – the learning comes from the child • Whole body experience – the whole body is learning – exploring with our whole body is especially important
<p>Play and Hands-on Experiences</p>	<p>Not sure that you can see slow relational pedagogy in play and hands on experience principle. Time is very important – needs to be reiterated more. Time to slow down, time to be mindful – may be more of this could be dotted throughout?</p> <p>Would be wary of using the word playful not the same as play. A playful pedagogy is not play and we must protect play in <i>Aistear</i> for the babies, toddlers and young children. Might be ok for primary but not for us. We want play not playful activities – they are not the same. This is very important and something for the NCCA to address. Playful is in the update 9 times. This lessens</p>

	<p>the importance of play!! Playful not the same as play. Should risky be included – is adventurous and challenging watering it down?</p> <p>The ‘prepared environment’ is such a simple and yet powerful concept. ‘Risk taking’ is important and so are assessments – insurance can be a chilling effect on this.</p> <p>Play’ is a complex concept and the role of the educator in supporting paly could be highlighted more. Play can be extended and enhanced by the educator.</p>
Learning Environments	<p>Positives</p> <p>Overall, it is positive to see the emphasis on outdoors</p> <p>The importance of the learning environment for parents- A parent noted ‘Atmosphere here very positive, lots of stress at home, feel relaxed when you come in here. Opportunities to develop here – no outdoor space no room to run at home. Great opportunities for physical development here. Friends – they love playing with and learning from each other.’</p> <p>Concern</p> <p>Outdoor is essential but also important that indoor has prominent role. For example, after spending a significant amount of time outdoors. Must be careful to avoid misinterpretation that is an outdoor only emphasis.</p> <p>about the availability of freedom between outdoors/indoors areas due to the practicalities of required staff/child ratios</p> <p>Use of term ‘well kept’ could be misinterpreted, do not want a situation whereby an educator was stopping play/learning to ‘tidy up’</p> <p>Suggestions</p> <p>More emphasis on families being represented in the environment is required</p> <p>The whole setting should be thought of with the possibility for mixed age groups throughout the day</p> <p>Wider Issues</p> <p>However, there is a need for consistency of message between <i>Aistear</i> and wider policy – lack of alignment currently – highly regulated environments do not lend themselves towards agency</p> <p>The importance of benefiting from the local community was discussed between going out into the community with the</p>

	<p>children and inviting people from the community to come in. The library, local shop, parks etc. were mentioned.</p> <p>The indoors needs to lend itself towards the outdoors</p> <p>What is aesthetically pleasing to one person may not be to another. NCCA needs to spell out what they want the environment to be calm, inclusive, with natural materials, sensorial, flexible, adaptable, accessible for all. Aesthetic too subjective.</p> <p>Change making to creating the environment Add in the power of the environment as the third teacher -its potential under played at present. Connected is in the principle but connected to what – not clear? Place and context matter</p> <p>the text provided an overly narrow interpretation of a ‘Learning Environment’. The group commented that the environment is not always just a physical thing and it can encompass things like ethos, people within it, the feelings we get etc.</p>
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Appendix 3: General amendments to text as suggested by respondents in the online submissions

Introduction to the updated *Aistear*

Repeat the statement: 'situating the *Aistear* updates in "an everchanging and globally inter-connected and inter-reliant world" (p.5) in the Introduction to the updated Curriculum Framework (p.7).

Suggested Wording:

Aistear recognises that the families and education settings within which babies, toddlers and young children learn and develop, are situated in an everchanging and globally inter-connected and inter-reliant world. Humanity is currently facing multiple crises (climate, biodiversity, social), which must be grappled with for the sake of the health and wellbeing of current and future generations and of the planet. *Aistear* sets out to establish a foundation for lifelong learning and for engagement with these global challenges, by fostering Global Citizenship Education values including empathy, solidarity, inclusivity, and learner agency.

Expand the purpose (p.10)

Suggested wording:

Recognises that babies, toddlers, and young children have agency, and should be empowered to better understand their engagement with, and positive contribution to, the world around them as global citizens'

The purpose of *Aistear* is to support babies', toddlers' and young children's learning and development' (p.9). We suggest an addition of 'in a complex ever-changing and interconnected global world'.

Appendices in the Framework

Appendix 1: Presentation of the examples in the current format suggests that each are 'lesson plans'. This may be in the formatting or due the fact that documenting the learning is the first example and is likely not the intention.

Suggestion: Further consideration given to how these individual examples are presented to best reflect their intended learning for practitioners.

Appendix 2 is more related to professional learning around slow relational pedagogy

Suggestion: Consider presenting as a *practitioner guide to slow relational pedagogy* as opposed to an example

Documenting, planning and assessment

Wary of the potential pitfalls of the message been taken as product over process. The risk that practitioners perceive the 'scrap book' as the most valuable part. Important and challenging to get the balance right in this area to ensure that assessment is meaningful and reflective, rather than simply a compliance piece.

Graphics in the Framework

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 this figure sets out the structure, rather than the content of *Aistear*; 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.

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.

Information sharing

Suggestion: Give attention to the sharing of information between ECCE and primary as a formal recommendation- like the transition to secondary school.

Glossary

Extend the definition of a global citizen in the glossary to include strong emphasis on global justice, recognition of the need to challenge inherently unequal global systems and an emphasis on critical thinking skills, empathy, solidarity, and collective action.

Suggested wording: *A global citizen is aware of and understands the wider world – and critically reflects upon their place in it. Each baby, toddler and young child is a citizen in the world. They take an active role in their local community and engage with national and global justice initiatives to challenge systemic inequalities. They are empathetic and work in solidarity with others to make our planet more peaceful, sustainable and fair.*

- Pt.2. Include 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.
- Consider rewording so it is more explicit about forms of harm; for example, the right to be protected from unfair comments or situations
- Pt. 3. Recommend rewording as follows: Provide meaningful opportunities for me to show empathy and live sustainably
- Pt. 4. Wording could be interpreted as a 'them' and 'us' situation, whereas this should be an all-inclusive statement. Lose the 'also'

STEM

Pedagogical approaches for inclusion in the framework or guidance for practice

- Challenging children's thinking through the use of provocations

- Encouraging practices such as questioning, predicting and hypothesising as children seek to 'figure out' their immediate environment,
- Using failure as an opportunity for deeper learning and understanding - what do we now know? (Problem-solving)
- Encouraging creative thinking - thinking in possibilities, being flexible and playful
- and thinking new connections/ combinations.
- Open ended questions; What if...? So you think that...?What is the same about these things...? What do you think will happen if...? Do you think this is the only way...? Can you tell me how...?
- The importance of open ended questions, thinking aloud, 'I wonder?' questions
- provocations, sustained shared thinking, justification, maths talk.
- Concrete examples of STEAM provocations in the guidelines are required with examples of appropriate questions to extend and support children's thinking

Appendix 4: Feedback relating to the Principles of Early Learning and Development

Principle	Area for Concern	Recommendation
<p>Agentic Global Citizen</p> <p>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 SDGs and accompanying ESD</p>	<p>Under this principle, a list of seven features relevant to informing participation are given.</p> <p>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).</p>	<p>Review the list and provide clarity on how this list was derived</p>
	<p>This principle seems quite broad in the context of very young children.</p>	<p>Consider reframing as Agentic Local and Global Citizen</p>
	<p>It would help to make a specific mention within this principle of the UNCRC thematic areas: survival rights; development rights; protection rights; & participation rights and how these rights may be actualised for the baby/toddler by the Agentic Educator in order to support babies and toddlers as Agentic Global Citizens</p>	<p>Root the framework in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child to guide practitioners in how best to support babies, toddlers and young children in becoming active global citizens</p>
	<p>The principle references 'opinions, choices and needs.' There is potential to make more explicit links with the PLC which uses the term 'Request and Questions'.</p>	<p>Include 'preferences' and 'requests' in the text accompanying this principle to mirror the descriptor of the learning outcome in the oral language strand of the PLC</p>

		Acknowledge that 'culture' includes children's digital lives/living in a digital world. Acknowledging children's digital lives in this principle creates opportunity for educators to build on the digital funds of knowledge children bring from their home lives to the setting as reflected in the principle Agentic Educators, Holistic Learning and Development
		Provide examples of how these principles will translate into practice to assist educators
Child Voice	The bulleted italic points written in the child's voice has impact and reinforces the message of the child as agentic	Include a short sentence before these bullet points, e.g., 'Illustration of this principle is in the voice of the baby, toddler, young child' or alternatively label these as learning outcomes or learning objectives so that practitioners can refer to these descriptors in their planning and reporting
	I am an agentic citizen and use my 'voice' to show you what is important to me (p.12) Voice suggests verbal communication. This is not the only way children 'voice' their opinion Provide meaningful opportunities for me to live sustainably (p.12)	Include a reference to the 100 languages of children Expand to read: Provide meaningful opportunities for me to <i>appreciate the environment and learn how to live sustainably</i>

	I am an agentic citizen and use my 'voice' to show you what is important to me' (p.12).	Change to 'I am an independent global citizen and I use my 'voice' to show what is important to me'. Suggest a further explanation of 'voice' to include non-verbal sounds, gestures, creative, digital, physical movements or expressions.
	Diversity of family, home and community are respected and celebrated while also noticing and valuing our similarities and connectedness' (p.12).	We suggest 'connectedness to our local, national and global communities.
	'Help me to learn and to recognise and challenge injustice and to stand up for myself and others' (p.12)	This could be an opportune space to highlight the injustices and inequalities that exist in our society and in the wider world.
Relationships and Interactions Builds on principles in the first draft of <i>Aistear</i> , strengthening the relational understanding of ECEC...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		Extend the descriptor to include the relationship between the baby, toddler, young child and the natural world, to signal that <i>Aistear</i> understands that we as humans are part of and interconnected with the natural world, rather than distinct from it. Extend the descriptor to include elements of the guidance for Good Practice in the section 'Supporting Sustainability' could bolster the innate <i>fiosracht agus grá</i> that young children possess for the natural world
		Add linkage to examples of what a slow relational pedagogy is

<p>Recognises the importance of early strong relationships and attachments – the value of a slow relational pedagogy is underlined here.</p>		<p>Provide a description of the term pedagogy as it may not be a term some educators may be familiar with.</p>
	<p>Babies', toddlers' and young children's fundamental need to be with others is embedded in caring connections and pedagogical practice where loving and responsive relationships and interactions are nurtured with key people in their lives. Early friendships with other babies, toddlers and young children are noticed and celebrated (p.12)</p>	<p>Change to: Babies', toddlers' and young children's fundamental need to be with others is embedded in caring connections and relational pedagogical practice where loving and responsive relationships and interactions are nurtured with key people in their lives. Early friendships with other babies, toddlers and young children are noticed, nurtured and celebrated.</p>
		<p>Change wording pg.12</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>My family, culture, home-language (s) and ethnicity are what make me Me! Recognise and</p>

		respect me for who I am. Celebrate and value me, my family and community.
		Pt. 2, pg. 13, reword 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 proposal could highlight the role of the adult in interactions across all areas of <i>Aistear</i> with greater emphasis on the quality of the interactions. It could also be adapted to include interactions for children who are neuro-diverse. .	Use term 'additional needs' rather than with 'disability' as the approach in settings is not diagnosis led – many children have additional needs e.g. trauma, social emotional that are not covered by 'disability'
Child Voice	I benefit from time and space to be with others – family, friends, peers and educators as well as coming to know others in my local community (p.13)	Change to: I <i>need</i> time and space...
	You support me to co-regulate and self-regulate my emotions and help me to learn to be with others, to handle conflicts and to solve problems (p.13)	Change to: <i>Help me</i> to co-regulate...
	I benefit from time and space to be with others - family, friends, peers and educators as well as coming to know others in my local community' (p.13).	Suggest 'I benefit from time and space to be by myself, with others and in the natural environment'.

		Broader relationships with the planet and with the global community could also be included here.
	I want to share my family culture and celebrations with you and my friends' (p.13). .	Include the words 'to acknowledge our connections, and similarities, as well as the richness in our differences'
Diversity, Equity and Inclusion	There is a change in language from equality to equity	Define the distinction between those two words so that educators understand the impact that equity has
	A focus on the concept of equity is important; the line "Diversity, equity and inclusion are about creating a fair society where barriers are identified and addressed within empowering and inclusive environments."	The proposals provide a meaningful baseline statement; however further information on specific examples of how this is done would provide further merit to this vision
	The state still uses equality of opportunity which reflects policy of access, participation, and outcomes How will not using the term 'equality' impact on the use of the Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Charter published in 2016? It is an excellent resource for AIM support workers, Inclusion Coordinators and Educators alike?	Retain the term equality Differentiate more clearly between equality and equity in the <i>Aistear</i> documentation, to support understanding on the purpose and impact of this and to show how existing guidelines e.g. Diversity, Equality, Inclusion Charter (2016)
	The childhoods experienced by babies, toddlers and young children in Ireland today are diverse across a range of areas	Reflect these variations in the document
	The document can read at times as if there is one presumed child, one presumed childhood...	DEI should have a greater presence throughout the framework, including through the set of principles.

	The equal status act 2000-2018 is reflected in the summary section, and all its elements bar 'disability'	Discuss phrasing with potential inclusion of this element.
	All babies, toddlers and young children have a right to access and participate meaningfully in experiences to fulfil their potential as unique individuals (p.12)	Change to: to help them reach their potential as unique individuals
	Meaningful participation is informed by an awareness of age, gender, family status, ethnicity, religion, worldview, and membership of the Traveller community (p.12)	Include disability here also to fully encapsulate the concept of inclusion
Child Voice	Recognise and celebrate my achievements at every age and stage of development (p.12)	Move away from ages and stages
Agentic Educators The inclusion of this principle places value and weight on the important role educators play		Emphasise the educator in terms of the valuable role they play to provide opportunity for feelings of empowerment when Educators read it.
	Acknowledge and support the positioning of the 'educator' as competent, confident, agentic and reflective. This says nothing about the intentional role of the adult in guiding play, designing learning environments, planning curricula	The guidance of the adult (for example to support ZPD, sustained shared thinking) is particularly important in relation to STEM subjects and children's meta-cognition
	In practice the educator intentionally includes the principles of curriculum for young children, such as a balance and integration of active and passive domains of curricula; child led and teacher led curricula, integration of rest and timeliness, structured and unstructured activities	Make intentionally explicit the agentic role of the educator Stress that ECEC educators are agentic professionals and not 'in loco parentis' Clearly differentiate the educator's professional role from that of parents.

		Add inclusion of 'needs' alongside abilities, interests, identities and experiences under agentic educators bullet point 2
	Are there a few words missing from the 3rd bullet point/ sentence: 'I trust that you will find appropriate resources and to help me to get access to professional support and services when I need it'.	Include the words to support my learning and development after appropriate resources to strengthen/make this point in respect of Agentic Educators a bit clearer
		Pt. 3. Revise wording: I trust you will find appropriate resources, to support my identity, and help me....
		Pt. 4. Revise wording: 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
Child Voice	I learn more and better when you recognise and build on my abilities, interests, identities and experiences (p.13)	Explain what 'learn more and better' means - may be open to misinterpretation (risk of schoolification)
	I trust that you will find appropriate resources and to <i>help me to get access to professional support and services when I need it</i> (p.13).	Reframe as: And in partnership with parents and families, help me to get access to professional support and services when I need it
Transitions This principle eloquently: Summarises the presence of transitions throughout the day	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 -	Suggested wording: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

<p>for a baby, toddler and/or young child and the importance of supporting each child during times of transition.</p> <p>Lays foundation for understanding that transitions are ongoing and a process</p> <p>Emphases the importance of transitions and the need to handle them properly</p>		<p>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....</p> <p><i>Add: Recognise that my family members may not understand some systems and find transitions hard and may need extra supports to help me transition</i></p>
		<p>Reference the importance of preparation for transitions, which should be in partnership with families</p> <p>Reference how to support transitions and how to support the child with transitions, practical strategies could be included e.g. A picture of a visual schedule.</p>
		<p>Correct typo in this sentence: 'Learn about me and know what I want and need (at the moment it reads as ned) to make my transitions as positive and effective as they can be'.</p> <p>Correct typo in the foot note at the bottom of the page in the year 2018, which is presented as 20218</p>
	<p>Given the significance Transitions has been given as it is now a principle in the updated <i>Aistear</i>, it would be important for <i>Aistear</i> to still apply to all children between the ages of 0-6 in all</p>	

	settings so that transitions between early years, special schools and junior primary settings can be effectively supported	
	Ensuring progression in learning and development and continuity of experiences requires consistent relationships with a shared responsibility between families, childminders, educators, settings and schools in the best interests of the baby, toddler and young child (p.14)	Recast as two sentences so there is no connection/association made with babies/toddlers and school
Play and Hands-on Experiences		
Including this principle recognises and emphasises the value of play in early childhood learning		Further expansion on 'play' would support reader's understanding of its importance and understanding of how play is a vessel for learning in itself.
	The points in this principle guide educators to set up for play, but don't identify the valuable role educators have in being a play partner, or guiding play as part of supporting children's inquiry, or responding to the emergent interests and inquiry.	Be more explicit in mentioning the value of guided play and supporting children's play skills; some children need strategies to access and extend their play Mention guided play, i.e., 'I want to play but sometimes need support from you...' or 'I benefit from guided play opportunities to help me explore, use my imagination, extend my thinking, inquiry, and play with others; I benefit from provocations or invitations to play....'
	These experiences help them to regulate and co-regulate their feelings, develop as thinkers and language users, develop socially, be happy, creative and imaginative, and lay the foundations for becoming effective communicators and	Reference augmentative communication etc., here Reference relevant and meaningful learning experiences Reference an emergent inquiry-based curriculum

	explorers (p.15). Use of the term 'language users' warrants attention	
Learning Environments	The terms play, playing, playfulness, should be woven through this principle...in recognition of an emergent, child-led approach, and children as rights holders, choice and voice needs to be present through this section	Amend as follows: 'In consultation and collaboration, babies, toddlers, young children and educators plan, audit and create aesthetically pleasing, challenging, autonomy supporting, diverse and inclusive spaces. They.... <i>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</i>
		Provide links to opportunities for CPD – or – visuals from practice to support readers to understand how aesthetically pleasing; challenging and inclusive spaces present themselves
	The environment, both indoors and outdoors, influences how and what children learn. In consultation and collaboration, babies, toddlers, young children and educators plan and create aesthetically pleasing, challenging and inclusive spaces (p.15).	Emphasise an emotionally supportive environment here also, taking account of the temporal aspects
	They also embrace possibilities in the local environment. There is an emphasis on natural spaces and resources, a commitment to sustainability and to active, adventurous play (p.15).	Provide a definition of adventurous play, which should also be included in a glossary of terms

	These environments support babies', toddlers' and young children's meaningful participation, holistic development and learning about place (p.15). The reference to learning about place seems out of place and tokenistic – sense of an 'add-on'	
Child Voice	I like being in spaces that allow me freedom of movement between the indoors and outdoors. I benefit from being outside in all kinds of weather! (p.15)	Change to: I like being in spaces that allow me freedom of movement between the indoors and outdoors, <i>as much as possible</i> . This qualifier is essential, as depending on the setting, it may not be possible, or appropriate to allow unlimited freedom of movement between indoors and outdoors
Family and Community Provides the opportunity to help readers understand the importance of early relationships in a child's life as well as the importance of these relationships/networks being interconnected – Ecological Systems Theory perspective in the sense that the child's contexts hold influence on one another		Reference to the fact that parents are viewed as children's primary educators.
	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	Reference the challenges some families face Use 'family / families' as the default term
Holistic Learning and Development		Include:

<p>Provides understanding of the uniqueness of every baby, toddler and young child</p>		<p>For me (child) care is education – I need regular sleep, and routines to develop my brain and vitality. I am developing a sense of myself, including my skills and habits, and learning to managing my body – I can have accidents and take time to self-regulate and develop skills. I need exercise along with wholesome and nutritious food to nourish my body and mind</p>
		<p>Include information as to what is meant by ‘assessment’ as often this word may have more formal or academically based connotations for readers Consider using the word ‘ongoing observation’ instead of ‘ongoing assessment’</p>

Appendix 5: Feedback relating to the Themes of Aistear

Wellbeing	
A very comprehensive theme. It is visionary while also complementing the primary curriculum with evidence of cross-curricular themes. It reflects the importance of home-school links and acknowledges the importance of home. It also recognises the importance of outdoor learning. We value that it is holistic in its approach to wellbeing	
Expand the descriptor to explicitly acknowledge that our health and wellbeing are enhanced by being connected to each other and nature, that humanity is interconnected by nature, and that we are interdependent with the rest of the natural world. State that there is a direct link between environmental health and human mental and physical health, and that social connection and meaning derived from collective endeavours is an essential component of human health and wellbeing. Include reference to the Sustainable Development Goals (especially SDG3 Good Health and Wellbeing).	
Issue	Recommendations
Change in the phrasing 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, e.g., children should be supported by the educator to manage risk.	Address within the theme as children need to be supported to take calculate risks.
Wellbeing for babies, toddlers and young children goes far beyond the topic of "healthy" eating and that what should actively be pursued is the concept of creating a positive relationship to food. This can be facilitated with outdoor learning and play around planting and growing food, adding to and enhancing their physical outdoor experiences and adding the concept of learning outdoors (rather than just that outdoors is for play, and indoors is for learning).	Ideally, food and the positive relationship that can be built with it at this pivotal developmental stage should be explicitly mentioned within the introduction and aims of this theme.
Concerns raised about the length and clarity of the new goals. - Preferred the replacement of 'fit' with 'active.'	
Challenges highlighted with terms like 'meaning maker' and intermittent Irish usage	

Questioning the necessity of the term 'rituals.'	
Questioning the relevance of referencing digital technology under Aim 2 Learning Goal 1	
Suggestions for improved text layout, numbering of learning goals, and standalone emphasis on children's developing emotions	
A call for more examples, particularly for toddlers and young children.	
Aim 1	Separate transitions and emotions in Aim 1 and clearer highlighting of agentic educators
Aim 2	Maintain phrasing from the original <i>Aistear</i> document and providing more detailed descriptions
Aim 3	Question the necessity of the term 'rituals' Label emotional well-being
	Explicit labelling of emotional well-being in Aim 3 and a more accessible language style for Aim 4. - Emphasis on the broad focus of the aims, covering relationships, self-awareness, physical wellness, community spirit, and global citizenship. - A desire for sample learning activities to supplement the broad language used in the document
Aim 4	Use a more accessible language style
The term 'healthy choices' used here implies that children require protection from harm in relation to digital devices. This is the first mention of the use of technology in the document and it immediately implies danger. While screen time concerns are valid, young children growing up in Ireland are digital natives. We agree it is the responsibility of the educator to support children's safe and limited use of these	Include a positive reflection of how technology can support learning and investigation to provide a more measured and realistic perspective. The idea of post digital play (see Marsh et al 2019) where children use traditional and digital materials together, seamlessly moving back and forth between the two, should be acknowledged. This is increasingly part of children's play and should be reflected in EC settings and our curriculum framework

materials. However, technology can also support and sustain children's interests and funds of knowledge in immediate and meaningful ways.	
	Expand the descriptor to explicitly acknowledge that our health and wellbeing are enhanced by being connected to each other and nature, that humanity is interconnected by nature, and that we are interdependent with the rest of the natural world.
	State that there is a direct link between environmental health and human mental and physical health, and that social connection and meaning derived from collective endeavours is an essential component of human health and wellbeing.
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 <i>Aistear</i> will have a similar lifespan of over a decade	ESD must feature throughout the document, including in this theme and the follow-on Aims. Include reference to the Sustainable Development Goals (especially SDG3 Good Health and Wellbeing), which has the potential to overlap and connect with wider national policy concerning the 'whole-of Government' approach to the implementation of the SDGs, as well as the objectives of the National Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development- ESD to 2030 (Department of Education, 2022).
	Provide exemplars and good practice accounts that show slow relational pedagogy in practice to support educators
	Explicitly reference mental health and/or mental wellbeing when considering the phrase 'life can also include challenges and struggles' Highlight explicitly that there is a need for children to be supported in forming close relationships and recognising and expressing emotions.
Transitions can be an area of extreme challenge for some children particularly those with additional educational needs.	Explicit referencing of the potential challenges to wellbeing presented at times of transition could be considered.

Aim 3: Use of the word 'celebrating' is problematic.	Use respecting and valuing as alternatives.
	Aim 4: Point 1 would benefit from making explicit reference to children not only 'expressing' but 'making' choices regarding their own learning
There is an inconsistency in the presentation of the aims. Aim 2 includes the qualifier 'as they can be', while the other three aims do not include this. It could be argued that the presentation of the themes makes some assumptions about the experiences and ability of the young learner. The sentence stem 'through nurturing relationships within a supportive environment' could be seen to presuppose a positive home background and positive attitudes of parents, which although optimal is not always a given.	
The word 'spirit' is too closely aligned with religion and church.	Remove the term 'spiritual' as it is exclusionary to those who are atheist with not spiritual faith. Refer to wellbeing, wonder, mindfulness etc instead.
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 <i>Aistear</i> 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'.

<p>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</p>	<p>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.</p>
	<p>Highlight social connections more to emphasise how we are relational and social beings and that our relationships with others are an essential component of our human health and wellbeing</p>
	<p>Emphasise empathy more strongly emphasised in this theme, especially in terms of demonstrations and practices of empathy.</p>
<p>Active physical play and outdoor experiences support their holistic wellbeing (p.18).</p>	<p>Consider the addition of 'play for play's sake' to encourage play that has no adult influence.</p>
<p>Build secure attachments and experience consistent, reciprocal, nurturing relationships that support confidence and connectedness with family, friends, educators, and community' (p.19).</p>	<p>Add 'nature' to this.</p>
<p>'Use their bodies to move/be active, experience, discover and explore, and extend their physicality through enabling, inclusive environments and fun experiences that encourage practice, challenge, adventure and mastery' (p.19).</p>	<p>Add outdoor play to this.</p>
<p>They have a right to be agentic and to have a say in matters that impact on them (p.18). The two clauses are not absolutely related</p>	<p>Consider separating these two clauses</p>
<p>They have a right to be agentic and to have a say in matters that impact on them. They are also respectful of themselves, others, and their environment. Expressing themselves creatively and experiencing a spiritual dimension in life enhances babies', toddlers' and young children's wellbeing. It provides opportunities for them to enhance their</p>	<p>Suggest changing to: As agentic competent and confident learners, babies, toddlers and young children have a right to have a say in matters that affect them.</p> <p>Include the term 'spiritual' in a glossary of terms</p>

<p>sense of ionadh (wonder), awe, ritual, gratitude and taitneamh a bhaint as an saol (to get enjoyment from life) (p.18)</p> <p>Promoting babies', toddlers' and young children's good overall physical health is important (p.18)</p>	<p>Suggest changing to: Promoting babies', toddlers and young children's physical health and well-being is important</p>
<p>Identity and Belonging</p> <p>Stronger language used with regard to children's rights approach, understanding their value, building resilience, empathy and compassion highlighted well. Grounded in a children rights perspective focussing on what supports I need to be able to achieve and how the Early years educator support what I need.</p> <p>There are strong ideals in this theme, reflective of the SPHE curriculum at primary level. The emphasis is on both inclusion and diversity alongside identity and fostering a sense of belonging, including respect for both themselves and others, has strong connections with the strands of the SPHE curriculum</p>	
<p>Revised wording for this theme</p> <p><i>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.</i></p> <p><i>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</i></p>	

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.

Adult Role

Incorporate the adult role in all four themes, specifically addressing how educators can support Identity and Belonging

(see page 20): to acknowledge their role in developing children’s identity and belonging. For example: “It’s important to me (child) that you patiently communicate, appreciate, and respect my home, family. You are a bridge between my home and other places where I spend time.”
 “Communicate about me (child) and my family respectfully, even when I am not there...”

Neurodiversity

Highlight the importance of neurodiversity, providing explanations and examples of strategies. Stress the need for children to learn about neurodiversity alongside adults

Environment

Emphasize the significance of an appropriate environment meeting every child's needs, including neurodiverse children. Consider integrating neurodiversity throughout the framework and potentially under the theme of new communities

Inclusion and Equity

Equity doesn’t appear to have been mentioned in the introduction to this theme, but equality features twice

<p>Question re: mention of equality's mention when equity is the identified principle</p> <p>We note the word 'disability' is included in this instance</p> <p>Home language is acknowledged later in communicating theme, however, it may also have a place here</p> <p>There is still a focus on equality of opportunity rather than a broader equality of condition (Baker et al, 2001) response which reflects the challenges in many children's lives in relation to poverty, direct provision, homelessness, discrimination</p>	<p>Diversity Equality and Equity should feature in this theme because so much of a child's sense of who they are is associated with childcare provision that promotes diverse, equal and equitable practices</p> <p>Use language consistency</p> <p>Should also appear in the diversity, equity and inclusion principle.</p> <p>An opportunity here to specifically reference Language Diversity in recognition and appreciation of home language playing a significant role in a child's formation of identity and sense of belonging</p> <p>Emphasise the need for a funds of knowledge approach</p> <p>Stress the need to highlight individual needs, emphasizing strong reflection on inclusion and equity</p> <p>The framework should link directly to the DEI Charter and Guidelines to support joined up thinking and continuity. In fact, reference to anti-bias</p>
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	<p>education should be made. It is important to think about the phrasing of some of the points and make them more explicit especially in relation to responding to discrimination and racism for example. Important to address the why and how of some of the phrases. SDG's should be imbedded here</p>
<p>Learning Goals and Aims</p> <p>There remains a strong focus on celebrations</p>	<p>Include the term "unique" in Aim 4 to capture a more meaningful aspect of identity</p> <p>Separate social justice from Wellbeing to emphasize its importance</p> <p>Recommend fewer learning goals for each aim for improved readability</p> <p>'creativity' is worthy of inclusion alongside the other dispositions listed in the descriptor of Aim 4</p> <p>Recommend a stronger focus on a social justice approach and culturally responsive pedagogy</p> <p>Reconsider the word 'celebrate' within the descriptors of aim 2</p>
<p>Community Theme</p>	<p>Emphasize the theme's importance regarding community, family, and diversity. Suggest placing more emphasis on inclusion and welcoming new families into educational settings</p> <p>Draw attention in this descriptor to the influences of the interconnection and inter-reliance of the global community on babies, toddlers and young children's sense of identity and belonging. This would further integrate the principle of 'agentic global citizens' throughout the framework</p>

<p>Traveller Community</p> <p>There is an opportunity here to replace a negative narrative with a positive one of inclusion and visibility for Travellers and Roma</p>	<p>Include images that Traveller and Roma relate to; something as simple as including an image of a Caravan/Trailer in the <i>Aistear</i> framework. In addition, the use of Traveller and Roma specific materials in Early Years will enhance a strong sense of belonging among Travellers and Roma in Early Years Education. Materials such as jigsaws that depict a Traveller or Roma ways of life, and books that depict Traveller and Roma culture</p> <p>Seek clarification on why members of the traveller community are specifically identified in the document</p>
<p>STEM</p> <p>Growing understanding of the importance of establishing STEM identity early in a child's life...particularly important for girls and children from minority backgrounds...reflected in multiple DOE policy documents since 2016.</p>	<p>Digital resources and devices can support children's identity and belonging. Apps can be used to record words in children's home language, images of home can be collected and shared using digital cameras or software like padlet. Children can also use technology to make connections with the local and wider community using apps such as Zoom</p>
<p>STEAM</p>	<p>Need to reference to STEAM in this theme.</p>
<p>Gendered Identities</p> <p>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</p>	<p>Recommend revised wording for this theme... Throughout <i>Aistear</i>, 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. <i>Aistear</i> 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</p>

	<p>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</p>
<p>Page 20 states: 'This helps ensure children...can recognise and respond to discrimination and prejudice'. We find this phrasing quite vague, even for educators. How is it envisaged that children 'respond' to discrimination?</p>	<p>This needs more explanation</p> <p>Recommend breaking down the long sentence on page 20 for improved readability and communication</p>
	<p>Revise p.20 as follows:</p> <p>"It's important to me (child) that you patiently communicate, appreciate, and respect my home, family. You are a bridge between my home and other places where I spend time."</p> <p>"Communicate about me (child) and my family respectfully, even when I am not there..."</p>
<p>SDGs - A stronger focus is needed on our identity and belonging to the planet; our responsibilities towards the planet and as a global citizen</p>	<p>Opportunities to embed the SDGs through ESD practices, language and prompts should be grasped through the theme of Identity and Belonging</p> <p>ESD must feature throughout the document, including in this theme and the follow-on Aims</p>
<p>Communicating</p> <p>Communicating as a theme is considerably demonstrated throughout the document, again highlighting the importance of the child at the centre and a children's rights perspective evident. The addition of multiple ways of communicating and a range of methods of expression is very welcome. While acknowledging the myriad ways in which children communicate it also offers potential for considering multiple ways to communicate and express</p>	

<p>their learning in the early years setting. The recognition that communication can be imaginative is an important one and we think the intention of creating an 'inclusive and rich communicative environment' will be an empowering one.</p> <p>Theme explores the emphasis of fostering meaningful interactions and creating an environment that promotes enquiry learning. Emphasis placed on the individual needs of children and sensory learning. The description of educators and children as agents in their own learning supports the whole concept of exploring, thinking and curiosity</p>	
<p>Literacy</p> <p>They use multiple ways of communicating..... cooing; babbling; language(s)... and augmentative and alternative communication' (p.23).</p>	<p>'Crying is the first stage of language development and is often overlooked as a key form of communication - Recommend changing to "crying, cooing, and babbling..."</p>
	<p>Extend the emphasis on books to include a "print-rich environment," promoting literacy</p>
<p>Aims</p>	<p>Aim 3: Babies, toddlers and young children will broaden their understanding of the world by making sense of their world through emergent literacy and numeracy experiences, food and mealtimes could be clearly identified as opportunities</p>
	<p>Aim 3: care and critical thinking should be applied to the selection of stories shared with babies, toddlers, and young people. These stories should be selected and used not to reinforce stereotypes and dominant paradigms, but to foster critical analysis, understanding of different perspectives and the pursuit of empathy, solidarity, equity, and justice. GCE provides myriad ways to support this critical analysis, and also to enhance Aim 4, which focuses on creativity and imagination, each of which is a core feature of GCE.</p>
<p>Technology</p>	<p>Include digital technology as one of the many ways that children can develop their communication and digital literacy skills</p>
	<p>Address concerns about the strong emphasis on technology, providing clear guidance on safe and healthy use</p>

	<p>Highlight the need for a balance between digital and screen-free activities, acknowledging the digital age children are growing up in</p> <p>Request further examples and explanations on the use of "digital technologies" to avoid misinterpretation and promote meaningful engagement</p>
Math /Numeracy	<p>Make specific reference to children and adults communicating through Maths talk (as per Dooley et al., 2014 published by NCCA) and using scientific language within the Aims, to make valuing of STEM within the curriculum framework more explicit. Numeracy is only touched on once in the communication section yet is widely recognised as a means of children communicating their understanding of the world in EC settings</p>
STEM	<p>The importance of children's representations of their thinking and knowledge for STEM which contributes to their metacognitive skills and can also support the Arts and creativity in a whole variety of ways.</p>
Aim 3 LG 3	<p>Recommend clarity on using digital technology for enjoyment</p>
Aim 4 LG 2	<p>Provide an explanation of "transient art" in brackets</p>
Home Language Integration	<p>Stress the importance of knowing a child's home language and incorporating it into the curriculum</p> <p>Encourage partnerships with parents for language support, including consultation on pronunciation and key words</p>
Inclusivity	<p>Emphasize the importance of inclusivity in communication, especially for preverbal children</p> <p>Highlight the significance of recognizing various means of communication, including sign language and alternative communication methods</p>

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion	DEI should be woven into the theme of communication and could have a greater focus on multilingualism. There is a need to be inclusive of multilingualism therefore reference to Gaeilge in this section needs to be thought through. There are also other cultural heritage languages in Ireland such as Traveller Cant and Gammon. Include SDG's here
	Include 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. Such phrasing creates an 'us and them' sense, and fails to promote inclusion	Amend as follows: '...importance of Gaeilge as one part of the cultural heritage of this land' Keep in mind that there are other historical languages related to the cultural heritage of Ireland, including Cant and Ulster-Scots/Ullan.
Process Over Product Note the insignificance of the emphasis on process over product in the text	Reinforce this concept in other parts of the framework
Transitions	Add transitions and explaining the concept of mark making in a concise manner
Touch	Include communication through touch as this is a very powerful communication technique
Gaeilge	Scope for the reference to be made stronger through explicit referencing to the promotion of Gaeilge and the importance of fostering a positive disposition towards the language through appropriately playful experiences from the early years onwards. Include reference to other home languages in the introductory piece also - Although they are referenced in the aims, their centrality to a child's sense of belonging,

	ability to communicate and understanding of language warrants their inclusion in the introductory section
'Aistear supports learning about the importance of Gaeilge in our cultural heritage' (p.23).	Include how our heritage is connected to the wider world or an acknowledgment of other cultures that enrich our own heritage
Children's Safety and wellbeing	Touch on the importance of ensuring children's safety and well-being, both physically and emotionally in their learning environments in terms of communicating and expressing their needs, ideas and feelings to others
SDGs	Opportunities to embed the SDGs through ESD practices, language and prompts should be grasped through the theme of Communicating. ESD must feature throughout the document, including in this Theme and the follow-on Aims
Slow relational pedagogy	Include a mention in the introduction to this theme of how slow relational pedagogy would be of particular importance when it comes to communicating with children. The concept of sustained shared thinking (Siraj Blatchford et. al, 2002) would be important to mention here also and why it is important to engage with it when working with young children.
Free Expression The acknowledgement of creative pursuits such as 'art, mark-making, dance, drama, music, poetry, pictures, writing and stories' (p.23) is welcome as a form of communication and expression	Include free expression in these forms to acknowledge the time to create in a way that the baby, toddler or young child desires
Communication Strategies 'Combine different communication strategies to express choices, ideas and opinions' (p.23).	Include 'and to respect the choices, ideas and opinions of others'
Although this theme acknowledges multi-modal communication, it retains an inordinate focus on oral language and verbal communication	

Exploring and Thinking	
Emphasises a right-based curriculum framework that will provide continuity in learning that continue into primary school	
Aims	It would be advantageous to all children if food was specifically outlined as an aim for this theme.
Aim 1	Here STEM experiences are given equal footing with geography and history but we have received no guidance on those areas and based on emphasis on STEM in Government policy, they do not have an equal footing in terms of importance
Aim 1	Recommend including the term STEM in Aim 1 and making the aim more concise
Aim 2 LG 1	Change 'theories' to ' their working theories'
Aim 2 LG 2	
Question the use of digital technology as an example in Aim 2 LG 2.	Suggest emphasizing open-ended materials and real-life experiences/resources to prioritize them over digital technology
Aims 2 and 4	Suggest using clearer and more concise language
Aim 3	Highlight the importance of outdoor experiences
	Introduce the words 'science' and 'maths' here
Identification of Mathematical Ideas	Suggest naming and identifying specific mathematical ideas and concepts within aims/learning goals or in guidelines/supplementary resources
Age and Development Stage	Request rephrasing of a sentence to reflect the age and stage of development rather than chronological age

Clarity in Language	Suggest ensuring transparency by avoiding potentially unfamiliar terms like "flora and fauna."
Agentic Educators and Transitions Note the visibility of agentic educators and transitions in specific themes	Suggest improvements for better visibility
Language	Suggest simplifying language in a theme to convey the core message more effectively.
STEM/STEAM The lack of reference to STEAM is notable. While the individual areas are mentioned in the framework...this approach is contrary to the concept of STEAM as an integrated or transdisciplinary approach, which draws upon knowledge and skills from across the individual domains in a practical sense conducive to problem solving, and critical thinking etc through hands on play-based experiences	
Phrasing	Rather than phrase 'They learn about geography and education for sustainable development,' use They learn about geography and the sustainable development goals, through education for sustainable development approach' 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'

Appendix 6: Guidance for Good Practice

General	Ensure user friendly and adaptable and flexible have the ability to be individualised to services to ensure that this doesn't become another template to fill out
Big Ideas	As part of Learning and Developing through Play, a big idea to include would be early childhood STEM. At the moment the principles and themes or glossary do not explicitly identify STEM, however they do include dispositions, ways of thinking, play and creativity, curiosity etc., which are found in STEM learning experiences
	Other big ideas to include as part of Learning and Developing through Play are digital literacy and computational thinking as an element of digital literacy, play-based pedagogies involving digital technologies, project-based learning experiences in ECEC, and the use of robotic kits and unplugged approaches to computational thinking. See: OECD (2023) Starting Strong: Empowering Young Children in the Digital Age, Available: https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/empowering-young-children-in-the-digital-age_50967622-en #page112 pp. 112-134
	Review and update the naming of the big ideas in light of the changes to the framework
	Include the phrase 'agentic, competent and confident learners' to the big idea. Alternatively, presenting the big ideas within the Supporting <i>Aistear</i> graphic on page 11 could indicate how these fit within or outside of the framework
Home Language	Suggest explicit mention of the importance of facilitating play at home in the home language (p.29-35)
Terminology	Suggest grounding through explanations and citations. Shared understandings exist and should be used in the Framework.
DEI	Refer as well (or instead) to Anti-bias education
	The educator acknowledges the importance of the family culture, language(s), values, beliefs, traditions, experiences and interests that babies, toddler and young children bring from their home and community' (p.9). Include the words 'ever changing and globally interconnected and inter-reliant world' (p.5)
	Appreciates our cultural and linguistic history and story and introduces terms as Gaeilge as part of this' (p.9). Suggest an addition of 'and recognises the connections we have to the wider world'.
Creating inclusive learning environments (pg. 33)	Essential for implementing DEI in practice. A stronger focus on equality proofing the ECEC setting is necessary. Develop this piece further and be more visible. Appendix 1, Example 2, (pg 42) refers to Slow relational pedagogy in practice: We welcome the inclusion of this example with reference to Travellers however we see it as a missed opportunity to name

	<p>some of the challenges for Travellers in accessing ECEC. The comments capture the challenge of separation for Sadie and her mother, as her mother pursues further education. It is also worth noting that the family may also be nervous of this new experience because of their fear of discrimination for themselves and in particular for their baby. Important to have images of Traveller and Roma children in the practice guide. Use examples from practice throughout on how to support the inclusion of Traveller and Roma.</p>
	<p>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.</p> <p>Suggestions about auditing, sourcing appropriate materials should be mentioned again here.</p>
<p>Building partnerships between parents and practitioners (pg. 30).</p>	<p>Question the presence of Supporting Sustainability placed under Building Partnerships...this area would fit better under Learning and Development through Play</p>
	<p>Provide practical examples and guidelines on how to build partnerships between parents and practitioners</p>
<p>Supporting Learning and Development through Assessment (pg.34)</p>	<p>Section is too brief - further guidance here is an imperative</p>
<p>Learning and developing through interactions, (pg. 31)</p>	<p>Unclear where the phrase, 'responsive and democratic model of education and care.' originated - 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</p>
<p>Example 1: Documenting the learning</p>	<p>Overly detailed and can seem complicated overwhelming. Educators time constraints, knowledge and skills should be considered carefully when designing such resources</p>
<p>Formative Assessment</p>	<p>Provide guidelines on how do you do this</p>
<p>Example 2: Building Relationships through a slow</p>	<p>Requires a tighter structure with key heading and focus</p>

relational pedagogy	
Example 3 Supporting sustainability in Early Childhood	Needs to be more streamlined as it takes from the principles and themes and adds more layers
	Suggests that being involved in fundraisers is an appropriate activity for showing empathy. Fundraising activities can reinforce stereotypes and systemic inequality whereas acts of solidarity such as campaigning for change or learning about root causes can be more beneficial.
Example 4 Valuing child- led play with babies	Takes from the themes and principles and disconnects from the core of <i>Aistear</i> . Suggest the title comes from the original guidelines and main heading and sub heading then link to principles and themes and a brief description and/or photo of how they link
Sustainability and the natural world	Provide practical examples and case studies to help support educators in everyday experiences
	'As global citizens, each baby, toddler and young child has an emerging responsibility for sustainability' (p.30). It is important to say here that it is the settings/practitioner's responsibility also to think about the materials used, who produces them, how they are sourced and how they are recycled or reused
	Integrate the content on sustainability into the guidance on Principle 1- Agentive Global Citizen
Role of the adult	Removal of the role of the adult in principles requires that this important position be clarified elsewhere. The adult role in play, planning and curriculum development needs to be underscored within the guidelines
Hyperlinks	Include hyperlinks to relevant support materials throughout (e.g., QRF)

Appendix 7: Implications for Early Immersion/English Medium Settings (written submissions)

One submission recommends:

- Development of an Irish version of the updated *Aistear*
- The Irish version be discussed with a panel from the playschools to ensure that it is legible and usable, and that it is not necessary to rely on the English version to derive meaning from it
- Adaptation instead of direct translation may be more appropriate in certain cases, as is done in other jurisdictions that have native languages. A guide relating to this may be available from the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA).

Examples of alternative versions of text that may be more appropriate for the language context in which playschools operate	
<p>With <i>Aistear</i>, early childhood is viewed through three overlapping age ranges to reflect the differences in how babies, infants and young children progress because each one of them learns and develops in a unique, complex and holistic way</p>	<p><i>Aistear</i> views early childhood through three different age ranges which overlap with each other to reflect the differences in the way babies, infants and young children progress, because the overall learning and development they experience is complicated, and each one of them are unique</p>

Considerations for Early Immersion Settings

1. Different facilities and supports may be needed based on the language context of the playschool (e.g., whether or not it is located in the Gaeltacht)
2. Educators may have varying levels of proficiency in Irish necessitating continuous professional development that is appropriate to the level the person is at to help them acquire richness in the language
3. There are serious shortfalls in the supports available for playschools outside of the Gaeltacht, especially at the present time. There is a need to build on these supports to preserve and strengthen the playschools

Considerations for English Medium Settings

4. Facilities already available for early immersion settings may not necessarily be relevant and usable for them

5. Some teachers will be complete beginners, who come from different language backgrounds and have no previous experience in the Irish language
6. Voluntary organisations providing support services for early immersion settings may not necessarily have the capacity to provide support for English-medium settings relating to promoting the Irish language

Appendix 8: Proposed alternative Irish translations (written submissions)

Page no.	Current	Suggested Translation
30	Tógann sé meitheal chun leanbh a thógáil It takes a village to raise a child	An African Proverb that does not lend itself well to direct translation and indeed the meaning is quite different in the Irish translation Leave the African Proverb as a standalone phrase without translating into Irish
31	Ní neart go cur le chéile There is nothing we cannot do together	There's no strength without unity'
33	An áit a bhfuil do chroí is ann a thabharfas do chosa thú Your feet will bring you to where your heart is	Query re: relevance
34	Mol an óige agus tiocfaidh sí Praise the youth and they will succeed	Praise the young and they will flourish

Appendix 9: Written submission template

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/>

Data Protection Statement

The NCCA is committed to protecting your privacy and does not collect any personal information about you through this template, other than the information you provide. Any personal information you volunteer to the NCCA will be respected in accordance with the highest standards of security and confidentiality in accordance with GDPR (2016) and the Data Protection Act (2018).

NCCA, as a public body operating under the Open Data and Public Service Information Directive (2021), is required to publish publicly funded research. All data from this survey will be further anonymised and aggregated before being published and only made available after the final report on this consultation is completed. Further information on the NCCA's Data Protection Policy can be found [here](#).

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	
Email address:	
Name of organisation/group:	
Does your organisation wish to be listed as a contributor to this consultation on the NCCA website?	Yes/No
Does your organisation wish to have this written submission published on the NCCA website?	Yes/No

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?
Do the proposals emphasise babies, toddlers and young children as citizens with rights to meaningfully participate and exercise influence on decisions that affect them?
Do the proposals embed the concepts of diversity, equity, and inclusion?
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:

--

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 <i>Aistear</i>.

Theme: Wellbeing

Theme: Identity and Belonging

Theme: Communicating

Theme: Exploring and Thinking

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

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

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.

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 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 10: Infographic depicting Aistear’s Principles for Early Learning and Development

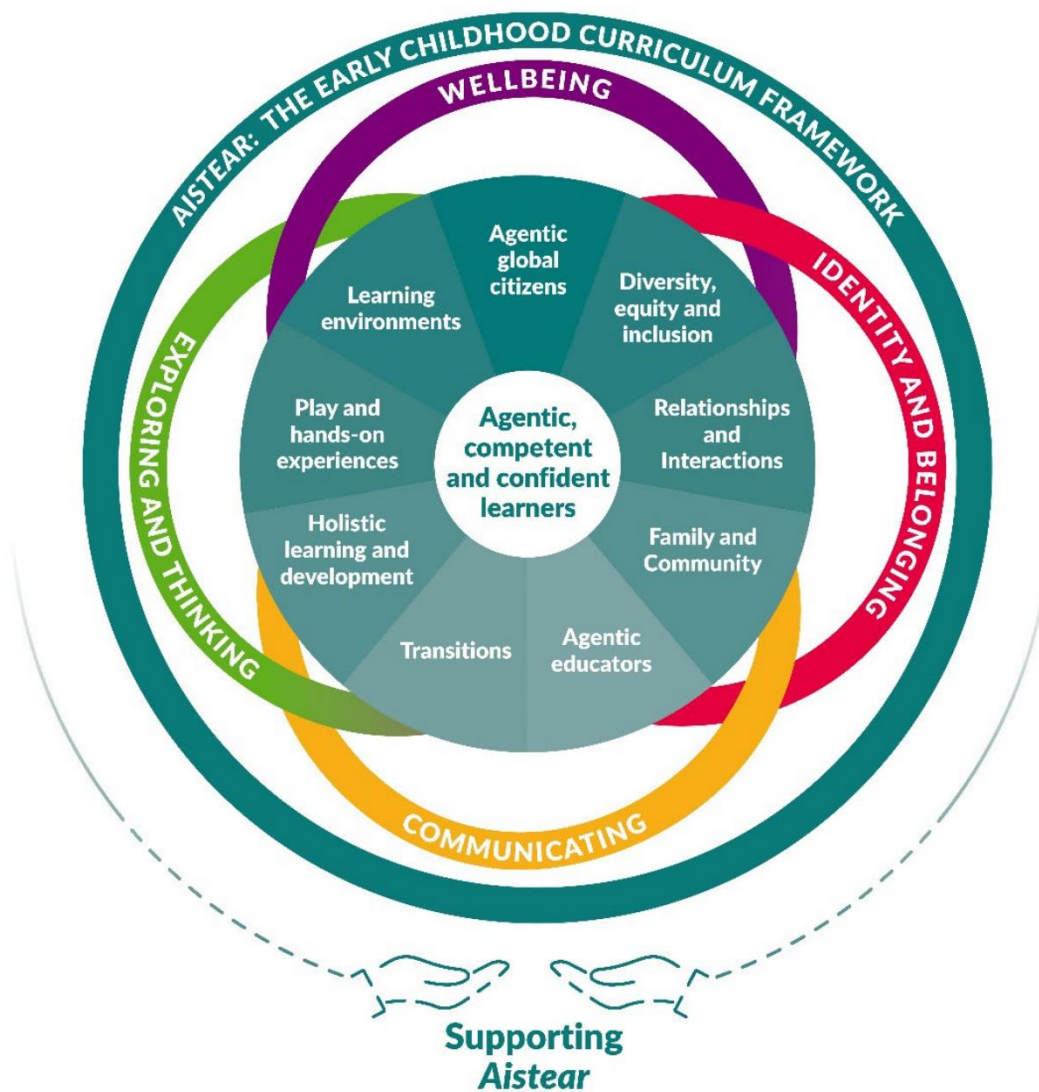


Figure 2: Aistear’s Principles for Early Learning and Development



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