



Updating *Aistear* Phase 2 Consultation

Written submission template for organisations, groups and individuals

This template is intended to help you (and your colleagues) develop a written submission in relation to Updating *Aistear*. Please e-mail your completed submission to updatingaistear@ncca.ie.

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

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

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

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

Name	Kirstie McAdoo
Email address:	
Name of organisation/group:	Airfield Estate
Does your organisation wish to be listed as a contributor to this consultation on the NCCA website?	Yes

Please email your submission to updatingaistear@ncca.ie



Does your organisation wish to have this written submission published on the NCCA website?

Yes

Key Messages of the Proposals

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

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

It is encouraging to see how integrated the vision, principles and themes are to all parts of *Aistear* and how the child as a learner is at the centre. The updates and inclusion of sustainability beyond an appreciation of the environment is also welcome as is the recognition that nutrition is a key component of wellbeing and exploring and thinking. Reduction from 12 to 9 is also welcomed as it allows for increased focus and easier attainment of aims.

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?

The more holistic and inclusive awareness and attitude to the circle of educators a child has is very promising. In drawing greater attention to them there is increased opportunity for the learning environment to embrace new methods of integrating these relationships into the child's learning.

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

Yes.

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

Yes.

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

Yes, much more explicitly than in the past.

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

Yes.



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:

Airfield welcomes the condensing of principles from 12 to 9 and sees the wide-ranging impact of the implementation of these principles as positive. However, Airfield Estate has conducted its own research into the integration and use of food as a common thread between all aspects of learning within the Early Learning Environment and was disappointed to see that there was no explicit inclusion of sustainability or food education as part of the principles.

Sustainable food and food in general could easily form a thread through the 'Learning Environments', 'Holistic Learning and Development' and perhaps within the 'Play and Hands on Learning Experiences' principles, and it could be an integral part in the 'Diversity, Equity and Inclusion' principle where it could embrace a significant part of the diversity within the early learning community.

With 1 in 5 children overweight or obese in Ireland currently, the complete lack of referrals to nutrition within the principles of *Aistear* is impermissible and will not be enough to move the dial towards improving these numbers. Children in early learning settings and in primary school with afterschool care can consume up to 70% of their meals and snacks in these settings and so to exclude specific reference to nutrition and food should be ameliorated immediately.

Sustainability, especially around food, should be a principle, or included within a principle rather than only within the Guidance for Good Practice and the Appendix examples.

Airfield Estate would ask that food, as an integral part of culture, sustainability, and health of the child, be included within the principles as a matter of urgency.

Themes of *Aistear*

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

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

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

Theme: Wellbeing

Within this theme Airfield notes and welcomes the reference to food as "...Promoting babies', toddlers' and young children's good overall physical health is important. Learning to make healthy choices about nutrition..." as well as also making reference to "Active physical play and



outdoor experiences support their holistic wellbeing” and that AIM 2 does explore the concept of food in a nutritional manner, and that food is used within the AIM 4 exemplar in the appendices.

Airfield Estate believes that 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.

Theme: Identity and Belonging

Food as part of young children’s cultural identity has the capacity it has to foster pride in their identity, create opportunities for discussion and exploration of their unique backgrounds and traditions, and increase their acceptance of others.

Again, without explicit mention within the descriptor and aims, food could easily be excluded or not used as a learning opportunity within this theme.

Theme: Communicating

An integral part of food is the social aspect of its consumption. The opportunity to converse over meals, discuss contents of lunch boxes, likes/dislikes etc. again offers the opportunity to use events like break-time and lunch-time as moments to improve conversation and communication skills. It would be well received if within 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.

Theme: Exploring and Thinking

Food is an excellent way of conducting learning within this theme. With Aim 3 specifically looking at connecting children to nature and spending meaningful time in the outdoors, planting and growing food, then exploring and playing with it are meaningful ways which fulfil this theme, whilst also incorporating the some of the aims held within wellbeing and communicating.

Airfield has conducted research around sensory play with food and has found that, through play students’ intake of vegetables increased significantly when compared to just being asked to try it. The same increase in intake was seen when we compared growing food to storytelling around food. It would be advantageous to all children if food was specifically outlined as an aim for this theme.

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

Yes.



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

At this critical, formative stage in the child's life there is an exceptional opportunity to create a positive relationship with food. By facilitating positive experiences around food education, children will be able to move forward with informed food choices, benefitting our communities, not least through the potential reduction in the global issue of overweight and obesity (almost 1 in 3 children in Europe). By studying the food environment in 5 pre-schools across Ireland, Airfield found that there was a wide range of language used by staff around food and the communication methods of staff to parents around food education. The impact of growing food and playing with food on trying and consuming new foods was found to be overwhelmingly positive. By making food a central part of the themes and principles of Aistear we can profoundly change the landscape of children's health and awareness of food and the part it plays in STEM, communications, wellbeing and communication.



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.

Airfield's own research into communication between parents and staff demonstrates that the vast majority of parents are open to conversations around all aspects of their child's progressions and interactions. However, the restricted time at collections and drop-offs have meant that conversations are less fluid and have, by necessity become more structured. Creating an environment of community and conversation through food has been identified by Airfield as a method of increasing contact with parents and improving the child's health and wellbeing within the home.

The addition of sustainability here is also critical to the underpinning of the themes and principles of Aistear. However, Airfield was disappointed that despite the mentions of climate awareness and biodiversity the idea of sustainable food (which is key to both of these things) was not mentioned. Nor was it mentioned in relation to the effects on community or socio-economics. Sustainable food systems are critical for the management and continuation of our communities and cities and should be explicitly mentioned within this section so as to be used in the themes and principles.

Within the Learning and developing through interactions section, Airfield was pleased to see the inclusion of inquiry based learning as we believe that this teaching methodology contributes to a much deeper understanding for the child. We were also pleased to see learning and development through play as foundational and fundamental in the child's learning environment.



As mentioned previously, the research and interventions Airfield have conducted around using sensory play with food to be extremely positive.

Part 2: Supporting Educators

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

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

Children of preschool age depend on their caregivers to provide food and model positive eating habits. With some children attending preschools and creches fulltime, up to 70% of their meals can be provided in these locations. There is currently only a small amount of training available to early childhood practitioners around the nutritional needs of children in their initial training, and even less available as CPD throughout their careers. There are also almost no guidelines around how to establish positive food environments or on how to establish positive, free flowing communication between staff, parents, and children around food and sustainability. Airfield Estate would like to see toolkits and training become available to practitioners to help them establish methods of communication between staff, parents and children around sustainable food habits and the integration of food as a learning topic throughout the themes. Airfield, through our own research and interventions have created some of these and are more than willing to help contribute towards the inclusion of these in the resources available to practitioners.