



NCCA

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



Updating *Aistear*

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

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

Why is the NCCA updating *Aistear* now?

Aistear: the early childhood curriculum framework is now 12 years old, having been published back in October 2009. Ireland is now more socially, culturally and linguistically diverse than ever before. Since the framework was published there has also been considerable change in early childhood provision in Ireland in terms of national developments, policies and strategies, curriculum and assessment developments and in children's lived experiences. Significant developments have emerged through policy formation by, and initiatives of the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) and the Department of Education (DE). Added to this are our collective experiences as a result of the COVID 19 pandemic. You can understand why there is a need to see how the framework might be updated, so that it continues to support high-quality learning and development experiences for children from birth to six years in Ireland.

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

Some of the main changes in the early childhood context include the introduction of the two years of universal preschool provision (Early Childhood Care and Education [ECCE] programme), an increasingly qualified workforce, the introduction of early years education

inspections by DE inspectors, the establishment of Better Start National Early Years Quality Development Service and the availability of supports for young children with special educational needs to access the ECCE programme through the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM).

Will the experiences of COVID-19 be reflected in the updated *Aistear*?

The global crisis brought about by the pandemic has significant consequences for the early childhood sector, in common with the education sector more broadly. The diversity of experiences in the sector in Ireland in dealing with and adapting to new and more flexible approaches to learning and development will be particularly relevant. In addition, findings from national and international research evidence and analysis into the impact of COVID-19 on children's continuity of learning, development and well-being will further inform developments. While the more long-term impact of COVID-19 on education is uncertain, NCCA will continue to carefully consider the response that the updated framework can make in mediating a supportive and sustainable approach to learning and development in a post-COVID context.

When will the updating of *Aistear* be completed?

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted on the timelines for updating *Aistear*. However, it is anticipated that the updating process will continue throughout 2022 and 2023, with NCCA finalising our work by the end of 2023.

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

There is no intention to conduct a major review of *Aistear* which has become fundamental to the lived experiences of babies, toddlers and young children in Ireland. For example, a recent review of international early years and primary curricula commissioned by the NCCA in 2018 has indicated that *Aistear's* four interconnected themes of *Well-being*; *Identity and Belonging*; *Communicating*; and *Exploring and Thinking* remain broadly relevant and appropriate when compared with international early childhood education curricula. However, 12 years on from *Aistear's* development including our recent experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important to ensure the framework continues to support inclusive, emergent and inquiry-based

curriculum. A literature review has been commissioned to renew the research base for the four themes of *Aistear*, reflecting any advances made since 2009. This will be carried out by the Institute of Education in Dublin City University on behalf of NCCA.

What is the process for updating *Aistear*?

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

- Phase 1 began in May 2021 and will continue into 2022. It focuses on asking stakeholders, including children, parents and practitioners, what is working well with *Aistear* and what suggestions they have as to how it might be enhanced and updated. There is an online questionnaire (in English and in Irish), one for [professionals](#) and one for [parents/guardians](#) along with a [written submission template](#) on the NCCA website, and online consultation seminars will be held in late 2021 and into 2022.
- Phase 2 is scheduled to begin in late 2022 when NCCA will publish proposals on updating *Aistear*. A consultation to gather feedback on the proposals will follow.

How will parents/guardians be involved in updating *Aistear*?

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

How will children be involved?

Children from birth to six years are at the heart of *Aistear* and NCCA is very keen to hear from them about their experiences of the framework. In developing *Aistear*, NCCA conducted a portraiture study that facilitated children in contributing to the process. Since that ground-breaking initiative, the inclusion of child and student voice in matters that have an impact on their lives has become increasingly prevalent in Ireland and will be a feature of the updating *Aistear* process too. A consortium from Maynooth University Froebel Department, Early Childhood Ireland and Stranmillis University College will be consulting with babies, toddlers and young children on behalf of NCCA.

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

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

What is the relationship between *Aistear* and the *Aistear Síolta Practice Guide* and what implications will the updated *Aistear* have for the guide?

The purpose of the Practice Guide is to support practitioners in using *Aistear* and *Síolta* together to develop the quality of their curriculum and in doing so, to better support children's learning and development. The on-line Practice Guide includes a range of resources to help practitioners to critically reflect on their curriculum and to improve it. It is not intended to replace either *Aistear* or *Síolta* and any updates to *Aistear* will be reflected in the Practice Guide.

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

The ECCE programme, along with *Síolta* and *Aistear*, has led to changes in what children experience before beginning primary school. These changes set a new context for the experiences of children in infant classrooms. As set out back in 2009, it was envisaged that *Aistear* could be used with junior and senior infants to support teaching and learning through play, and *Aistear's* role in informing appropriate approaches to teaching and learning in infant classes was further emphasised by [Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life 2011](#). These developments have contributed to the rationale for the review and redevelopment of the primary school curriculum, particularly in terms of continuity between *Aistear* and the Primary School Curriculum. A significant component of this review are the proposals in the [Draft Primary Curriculum Framework](#) that set out a vision for primary education. Both the findings from the primary consultation and the finalised *Primary Curriculum Framework* will be relevant in updating *Aistear* to ensure continuity in children's experiences and progression in their learning as they move from the ECCE programme into primary school. A *Framework for Junior Cycle* has been in existence since 2015 and the focus on frameworks from early childhood, through primary and on to post- primary school will help ensure continuity and progression in children's learning and development.

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

Yes, *Aistear* will still be a curriculum framework rather than a curriculum. A curriculum framework sets out a clear vision and the principles for learning and development. It highlights what is important and why and provides a description of what should be prioritised. The *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* (2020) and the *Framework for Junior Cycle* (2015) are similar frameworks supporting children's learning in primary and post-primary school, supporting continuity and progression from early childhood onwards.

How will the research findings be communicated to me?

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

What supports will be made available to practitioners to support them to work with the updated *Aistear*?

A range of resources including examples of children's learning and development and support materials for practitioners will guide settings as they work with the updated *Aistear*. The ongoing consultation is an opportunity to identify the types of supports that you might need to assist in using the updated Framework.

How can I find out more?

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