A Practical Guide to Developing Policies, Procedures and Statements in Early Years Services

Contents

Foreword from National Service Director

I am delighted to introduce this guidance document which replaces 'Developing Policies, Procedures and Statements in Early Childhood Education and Care Services: A Practical Guide', which we originally published in conjunction with Barnardos in 2018. At that time, the requirements for policies had recently been set out in the Early Years Regulations (2016) and we provided our interpretation of what was required from registered providers in our Quality and Regulatory Framework (2018). Against this backdrop, and as the Regulator of Early Years Services, we wanted to provide specific and detailed information to support registered providers to develop their policies, procedures, and statements and the 2018 guidance documents were critical in supporting the sector with the development of policies, procedures, and statements specific to their service.

Eight years on, it is timely that we review our guidance to the early years sector. Much has changed, and the sector has evolved and developed in so many different, positive, and exciting ways since 2018. The Regulations relating to registration of School Age Services, and new regulations for Childminders are now in place. We know that most early years services are developing and implementing high quality and effective policies, procedures and statements and our Inspectors can see that they are reflected in the practices they observe on inspection in services. With the publication of our revised guidance, we want to further support the sector with policy development, and with the implementation of effective, well-thought-out policies and procedures. This guidance document, and the accompanying guidance notes for each policy area required by regulation, will provide the sector with an up-to date suite of resources to support policy development.

We recognise and support provider capacity and autonomy in the development and implementation of policies and procedures that reflect their own particular service profile, while meeting regulatory requirements. We hope that this guidance document will be a practical and supportive resource as we all work to achieve best outcomes for children. I would like to acknowledge Barnardos for their significant work in developing the original guidance document in 2018, and on which this resource is built on. I would also like to thank the contributions from the sector, the Inspectorate and our stakeholders, in particular the members of the Regulatory Consultative forum who provided feedback on the development of this updated and revised suite of resources. Tusla's Early Years Inspectorate looks forward to further collaborations with the sector and all our stakeholders to build the supports needed to provide learning which will have a positive impact on children and young people's experiences in the early years services we regulate and inspect.

Fiona McDonnell
National Service Director Children's
Services Regulation Quality and
Regulation Directorate

Section 1

1 | Before you begin

1.0   Before you begin

This guidance document is intended as a resource for the early years sector, whether for the purposes of developing a policy and/or statement for the first time, or for updating an existing policy and/or statement in line with regulation and best practice. This document can also be continuously consulted outside of policy development processes as a guide to reflective practice, and to support a principled approach towards practice in early years services.

This guidance document will support providers of registered early years services including pre-school and school age services with policy development. Specific reference will be made if there is a requirement that applies only to one service type. Childminders are welcome to engage with this guidance document but should refer to the Childminding Services Handbook in the first instance for more information on their policies.

While there are regulatory and legal requirements for registered providers of early years services to have certain policies and statements in place that we will cover in detail in this guidance document, knowing how to respond in various practice scenarios is necessary for safe, good quality, child-centred and effective early years provision. Creating standards of practice, consistency of care and perhaps new ways of thinking, should ultimately have a positive impact on the child's experiences within the service. This approach helps to promote practices that are underpinned by values and that recognise and endorse the rights of the child.

The policies, procedures and statements you need for your early years service depend on the registration type, size, and context of your service. The regulations[1] recognise different types of early years services through distinguishing factors such as the age of the children and young people attending (pre-school or school age) and/or the hours of operation (sessional, part-time, full day care, drop-in or temporary). For many services, care and education are offered to children of both pre-school and school age within the one premises.

While certain policies are regulatory requirements, the specific details of the policy, and the procedures and practices to support the policy will vary for each service. Having clear policies and procedures and referring to them when planning or making decisions about the service, will help to maintain effective management and operational practices. This will have a significant impact at all levels and in every aspect of the quality of the service that you provide.

This document is accompanied by guidance notes for each of the policies and statements that early years services are required to hold under the Early Years Service Regulations (2016) and the Registration of School Age Services (2018). Each guidance note sets out the core requirements for the specific policy and also offers considerations and prompts for each of the core requirements for the purposes of demonstrating regulatory compliance for both pre-school and school age services. If a policy requirement is intended specifically for one service type, that is made clear in the guidance note. Each guidance note outlines good

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[1] Childcare Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016, Part 12 of the Child and Family Agency Act, 2013 (Section 58 (G)), and/or the Childcare Act (1991) (Registration of School Age Services) Regulations 2018.

practice and quality considerations which can be reflected in the specific policy and also sign posts to further information relevant to the policy area.

1.1   How to use this guidance document

Disclaimer: *This document, and the accompanying policy guidance notes will be updated from time to time as required. Therefore, they are best accessed directly from the Tusla website. If they are printed/ downloaded, the version in use may not be the most up to date version. It is the responsibility of the service provider to ensure that they are working from the most up to date version. Information on significant updates only will be circulated to the sector.*

Along with this introductory section, there are four sections in this document.

[Section 2](#): **Factors to consider when developing and reviewing policies**

This sets out key considerations to guide early years services who are developing policies for the first time or who reviewing and updating their policies.

The section looks at what needs to be considered when developing a policy and who should be involved in policy development.

[Section 3](#): **Principles underpinning and informing policy and practice in early years settings**

This section sets out several principles to guide providers who are developing policies for the first time or who reviewing and updating their policies.

[Section 4](#): **Reasonable measures to support policy development and review processes**

This section sets out the policy development process, and guidance on how to communicate the policy and procedures effectively.

[Section 5](#): **Policy and procedures: Implementation and Training**

This section sets out how your policies can be effectively implemented in your service.

Throughout the document, we use hyperlinks and bookmarks – some words or phrases are underlined and in blue text. The blue text is a hyperlink. When reading on a screen, click on a hyperlink to bring you to further information on the topic in question – for example, it might link to the term in the [Glossary of Terms](#), or it might bring you to a website if your device has access to the internet.

If you would like to search for a particular word or topic, you can do this using the search or the 'find' windowpane. Hold down the 'Ctrl' button and then click the 'F' key. Or you can go to your toolbar and click on 'Edit' and select the 'Find' option from the drop-down menu.

This document is Tusla's Early Years Inspectorate's interpretation of the requirements for policies and statements as set out in the [Early Years Service Regulations (2016)](#) and/or [Registration of School Age Services Regulations (2018)](#).

1.2   Glossary of terms

Childminder: A person who runs a childminding service looking after other people's children (under the age of 15 years) for at least 2 hours per day, in the childminder's own home. This definition does not apply to people who care for children in the children's own home (such as nannies and au pairs). Childminders work by themselves and do not employ any other people to assist them with the children they are caring for.

Early Years Services: In this guidance document, the term 'early years services' is inclusive of pre-school and school age care. *Childminders should refer to the Childminding Services Handbook in the first instance for more information on policies.*

Equity: Aistear, the Early Years Curriculum Framework, says equity in early childhood is about fairness in addressing any challenges that a baby, toddler or young child might face because of their background or ability.

Ethos: In this guidance document, we use the term 'ethos' to refer to the ideas and attitudes of the people who operate and work in the service, and as the shared understanding of the service's mission, philosophy, purpose, values, principles, and beliefs.

Pedagogy: The pathways, methods and practices an early years educator, or a practitioner in a school age service, draws on to educate children in the service.

Policy: A policy sets out a service's stated and shared approach or response to an issue. Policies reflect the service's ethos. Policies provide the basis for agreed, consistent and well-thought-through decisions, determinations, and actions.

Procedures: Procedures spell out precisely what steps, actions and practices are to be taken, in accordance with the relevant policy. Clear procedures support the effective and safe implementation of policies, assist with decision-making processes, provide for consistency and transparency, and allow everyone to know what is likely to happen in a given situation.

Pre-school: An early childhood care and education service catering for children aged 0-6years who are not attending school. A pre-school can be delivered as a sessional service up to 3.5hrs a day, or be a part-time day-care service where children attend for up to 5 hrs or be full day care where they attend for longer. A pre-school can also be based in a drop-in centre, an over-night service, or operate as a temporary service. They may be more commonly known as playschool, naíonra, or creche. Childminders are not considered a pre-school.

Pre-school child: A child who has not attained the age of six years, and who is not attending a recognised school.

Registered provider: The person whose name is entered in the register in accordance with the Child Care Act, 1991, as providing an early years service.

Rights-based approach: An approach that ensures that children's rights are recognised and upheld in the service, and where children are valued, respected, and empowered to participate. This approach reflects the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which outlines the rights of every child. See also Aistear (2024) on a Rights-based Early Childhood Curriculum Framework.

School Age Service: A service that provides care, which includes a range of developmental and recreational activities for children under the age of 15 years, who are in primary or post-

primary education, outside of school hours. For example, an afterschool service or a breakfast club service.

Stakeholders: In this context, the service's stakeholders are those people who are affected by, or can affect, the service's actions, objectives and policies. The key stakeholders who will likely play a part in policy development include registered providers, committee members, managers, employees and other workers, parents/guardians, children attending the service, and other external stakeholders who can indirectly affect policy development such as regulatory and support agencies and the local community.

Statement: A formal written statement that addresses a specific area of practice and provides details relating to the individual service, which may include identification of possible risk and/or harm in the service and actions required to manage the risks. A statement may be a regulatory or a legislative requirement.

Section 2

2 | **Factors to consider when developing and reviewing policies**

2.0 Factors to consider when developing and reviewing policies

Early years services offer an essential service to children, their families and to society. The key role of providers of early years services is to work alongside parents and guardians in meeting the care, education, and development needs and rights of children, at a stage in life where their experiences and opportunities are crucially important. The policies in a service will directly impact on each child attending. Therefore, it is so important that policies are relevant to the individual service, the children attending, their parents/guardians and families, and the employees, contractors, and unpaid workers in the service.

Policies should detail the procedures which are followed by the service. This will allow for clear expectations on how the service approaches an issue and how it supports consistent and high-quality practice.

There are several areas that registered providers must consider when developing new policies or reviewing existing policies. Considering these as a team can be a useful way of involving and consulting the whole team in the policy development process. When all team members are aware of the consideration that goes into developing a policy, it helps to make sure that the policy and procedures will be put into practice. These considerations include the following:

- Why is the policy needed?
- What are the internal and external policy requirements?
- How does the policy protect and uphold the best interests of children attending?

In response, there are various factors which will influence the policies and the procedures of an early years service, and this document will support you as you engage with these factors. Essential considerations for the contents of a policy and the supporting procedures should include and reflect the following:

- Legal and regulatory requirements
- Communication and guidance from the Early Years Inspectorate and other statutory bodies
- National frameworks and good practice guidance
- The rights of the child
- The ethos of the service,
- The views of children attending and their individual needs,
- The views of parents and/or guardians,
- Staff team (including volunteers and students on placement),
- External supports

2.1 Legal requirements

The Early Years Inspectorate is legally obliged under the Child Care Act 1991 as amended, to ensure early years services are appropriately regulated and monitored. This is achieved through registration and inspection processes to verify the registered provider is providing a service which meets the requirements of the Childcare Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016, and/or the Childcare Act (1991) (Registration of School Age Services) Regulations 2018.

2.1.1 The Child Care Act (1991) and Part 12 of the Child and Family Agency Act, Section 58(G)

The Child Care Act (1991), and the amendments in the Child and Family Agency Act (2013) Section 58 (G) place a legal obligation on the registered provider of an early years service as follows:

'It is the duty of every person providing an early years' service to take all reasonable measures to safeguard the health, safety and welfare of children attending the service and comply with regulations made by the minister under this part'.

The responsibility is on the registered provider to ensure there are reasonable measures in place to safeguard all children attending the service. Safeguarding measures are specific to each service and must meet the safeguarding needs of the children attending. These measures, if not detailed within the prescribed policies as set out in Schedule 5 of the Early Years Service Regulations (2016), and/or Schedule 6 of the School Age Services Regulations (2018) should be documented and/or integrated into a policy, with the supporting procedures detailed.

Other policies are required in areas governed by other legislation or by other statutory regulators, for example, employment, health and safety and data protection. It is the registered provider's responsibility to make sure that they meet all such requirements.

2.1.2   Regulatory requirements

The early years regulations require registered providers to provide specific policies and statements. Pre-school services are required to have 20 policies, a child safeguarding statement and a statement of purpose and function in place, as set out in Schedule 5 of the Childcare Act 1991 (Early Years Service Regulations 2016) and a safety statement as set out in Regulation 6 of the Childcare Act 1991 (Early Years Service) Regulations 2016. School Age Services are required to have 6 policies, a child safeguarding statement, a safety statement and a statement of purpose and function in place, as set out in Regulation 10 and Schedule 6 of the Childcare Act 1991 (Early Years Service) (Registration of School Age Services) Regulations 2018.

Policies

For many services, there may be an overlap between policies and/or statements. The required policies can be stand-alone policies or incorporated within broader policies. For example, a Settling-in Policy could be included in the Transitions Policy, but it is the responsibility of the registered provider to indicate to parents, staff and to the Early Years Inspectorate where these policies are held.

A list of relevant policies is included in Appendix 3.

Statements

There are regulatory requirements for school age and pre-school services to have 3 statements. These statements are:

- Statement of Purpose and Function,
- Safety Statement,
- Child Safeguarding Statement.

Statement of Purpose and Function

Each early years service is unique, so a clear description of your service should be recorded in the Statement of Purpose and Function. A Statement of Purpose and Function is a requirement under the Early Years Regulations 2016 and means a description of the service. It must include the following:

- Who the service is aimed at:
- The type of service provided (for example - full day care, sessional, part-time, if it operates fully or substantially outdoors/ through the medium of Irish).
- The hours that the service is operational.
- The age range of the children catered for in the service.
- The activities provided within the service.
- The number of children that can be catered for in the service. This should include:
  - o The maximum number that can be catered for in the service
  - o The maximum number that can attend on a daily basis

In addition, services should consider including some or all of the following:
- The service's mission and philosophy (its aims, objectives, purpose, values, principles, ethos and beliefs).
- The fees of the service (if any) payable by parents/guardians.
- The list of policies, procedures and statements relevant to the type of service being provided that inform practice within the service.
- Contact details, such as the contact numbers and the name and position of the person who can be contacted by parents/guardians regarding the service.

The Statement of Purpose and Function should be freely available and accessible to anyone who wishes to access information about the service. All staff members should be aware of and familiar with, the Statement of Purpose and Function.

Further information on developing or reviewing the mission and philosophy of the service can be found in the Aistear Síolta Practice Guide - Element 4. Professional Practice

Child Safeguarding Statement

A Child Safeguarding Statement is required for all early years services by the Children First Act 2015. A Child Safeguarding Statement should provide an overview of the measures that your service has in place to ensure that children are protected from harm. When completed, the Child Safeguarding Statement must be shared with all staff members. It must be displayed in a prominent place and made available to parents and guardians, Tusla and members of the public upon request. Children should also be familiar with the statement. Síolta's 'Standard 9: Health and Welfare' has helpful advice under component 9.3 to support thinking and reflection when developing this statement.

The Child Safeguarding Statements should be organised to respond to the following:
- Service details
- Nature of service
- Principles for safeguarding children from harm within the service
- Risk Assessments (to contain the procedures to manage any risks identified
- Procedures as listed in the Children First Act 2015

- Implementation - Provide information on how your Statement will be implemented and when it will be reviewed.

Further information on Child Safeguarding Statements can be accessed [here](#).

Safety statement

Early years services are required to have a Safety Statement (with the exception of sole operators). The Safety Statement is defined in the [Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005](#). The Safety Statement should be developed in line with the Health and Safety Authority guidance: [A Guide to Risk Assessments and Safety Statements](#).

[Besmart.ie](#) is a free online tool that will guide you through the entire risk assessment process, using simple language and easy-to-follow instructions. On completion you will have a workplace-specific safety statement that can be downloaded, edited, printed, and implemented in your workplace. Register, select your business type and then work your way through a series of questions about the hazards in your workplace. You then need to walk around your workplace, consult with your employees and make sure that no hazards have been missed. When you have finished you can download, edit and print your safety statement.

2.1.3 Other legislative requirements

While the [Early Years Service Regulations (2016)](#) and the [School Age Services Regulations (2018)](#) set out the core policies and statements required, there are also policy requirements set out in other pieces of legislation that may require the development of a specific policy in addition to those required by early years regulations. It is the responsibility of the registered provider to ensure that all required policies are in place. Early years services may also decide to develop other policies that are not a regulatory or legislative requirement, but which are relevant to the specific provision and practices in the service.

2.1.4 Communication and guidance from the Early Years Inspectorate and other statutory bodies

Services should always refer to the requirements of statutory bodies as relevant to the specific service. In the case where national guidance is circulated by a statutory agency to safeguard the health, safety and welfare for children or adults attending the service (such as happened during the Covid pandemic), the required procedures should be integrated into the service's policies and fully implemented. More information on the relevant statutory bodies can be found in [Appendix 1.](#)

2.1.5 Early Years Inspectorate communication and resources

The [Early Years Inspectorate's website](#) contains up-to-date information and guidance required to ensure policies reflect communication from the Inspectorate. These include:

- [Resources/webinars](#)
- [Regulatory notices](#)
- [Guidance documents](#)
- [The Quality and Regulatory Framework (QRF)](#)

- [The Questions and Answers Document](#)

2.1.6 National frameworks and good practice guidance

Policy development and review processes should be guided by the national early years frameworks such as [Aistear](#) and [Síolta](#) and national early years strategies including [First 5](#). Following the standards, principles and good practice guidance set out in the frameworks and policy documents will help to ensure that your approach to policy development is reflective of the most up-to-date thinking and the evidence base for early years practice. Reflecting the national frameworks is a hallmark of an effective and good quality policy development process and supports regulatory compliance and high-quality practice. For example, [Siolta's](#) 'Standard 10: Organisation' highlights several considerations for services in relation to compliant statements and policies. The [Nurturing Skills](#) website offers supports and good practice resources which can enhance policy development and review processes.

2.2 Children's rights

Children's rights are set out in the [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (UNCRC) 1989. [Síolta](#)'s 'Standard 1: Rights of the Child' will support thinking and reflection on a rights-based approach and helps to strengthen the link between regulation and the national quality framework.


Children's participation rights are fundamental to a child-centred approach to early years service provision. Children of all ages have the right to participate in planning and decision-making about matters that affect them including policy development, as set out in the UNCRC.

Child participation is also a requirement of the [National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making (DCDE 2015),](#) [Young Ireland](#) (DCDE 2023) and [First 5](#) (DCDE 2023). In addition, it is a key point of note in the [National Standards for the Protection and Welfare of Children](#) by the [Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA)](#). Child participation is a hallmark of good quality early years service provision and children's involvement in policy development helps services to produce policies and procedures that better reflect children's needs and preferences.

While there are several models to support children's participation, the Lundy model (2007) is the model that is adopted by the Irish state. This model is set out as 4 interrelated elements that have a rational chronological order:

- **SPACE:** Children must be given safe, inclusive opportunities to form and express their view.
- **VOICE:** Children must be facilitated to express their view.
- **AUDIENCE:** The view must be listened to.
- **INFLUENCE:** The view must be acted upon, as appropriate.
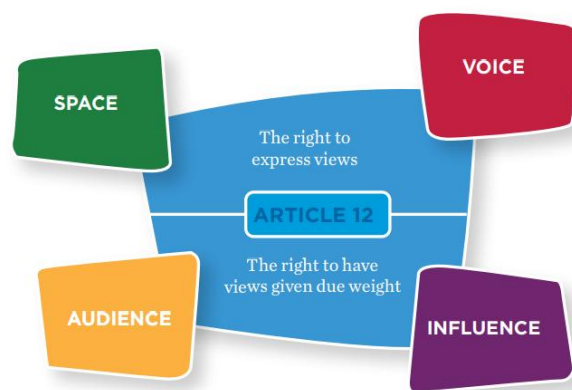
For more on the Lundy Model please read here.

2.3   The ethos of the service

To reflect the individuality of the service, policies should firstly capture what the actual approach of the service is, and then outline the practices and procedures that support the policy and all specific action(s) to be taken. Policies should be reviewed annually, or as required, to ensure the practices provided for are aligned to the ethos of the service. The ethos of each service will influence every aspect of how it does its work. The Aistear Síolta practice guide, under Curriculum Foundations has resources on the Image of the Child and the development of a curriculum statement and other professional development activities which may be helpful to consider when develop the ethos of the service.

2.4   Children attending and their individual needs

Policies and procedures should be inclusive of all children attending the service, considering their rights, strengths, needs, abilities, wishes and preferences. A rights-based approach will support consistency in providing quality care for all children and supporting their individual needs. It will provide staff with clear expectations and guidance in providing quality provision, underpinned by the ethos of the service.

The age and stage of development of the children attending the service should be considered in drafting, developing and reviewing any policy, taking any specific factors of mobility, individual needs, and care routines including meal-times and sleep/nap-times into account. For example, a fire safety policy may need to detail specific procedures for the safe evacuation of children who are sleeping.

The participation of children in the development and review of policies reflects a child-centred approach. It provides a voice to the child in matters which are relevant to them. Please read this section in conjunction with Sections 2.2 and 3.4.

2.5   Parents and guardians

Parents and guardians play the primary role in children's lives. The service's policies should provide parents and guardians with information, expectations and assurances about what the service does, and how it is done in broad practice areas including (for example) the recruitment of staff, managing illness, nappy changing, and outdoor play for babies. The role

of parents/guardians should be considered in the service's policies, including the ways in which parents/guardians are consulted (for example, surveys, notice boards, suggestion boxes, focus groups) invited to work together in policy development, and how policy matters are communicated to parents/guardians. Active partnership with parents/guardians will positively support the child and help to promote the child's voice within the service. It is important to consider different ways to share and communicate policies with all parents/guardians, for example for those for whom English/Irish is a second language or where there are literacy needs.

2.6   The staff team

When developing or reviewing policies, the staff team is an important factor for both the content of policies, and for the transformation of a policy to practice. The team should be provided with regular opportunities to review and reflect on their own practice, and on how they are implementing the procedures as set out in the policies. Where there are any variations or inconsistencies, or where a policy is not followed, the registered provider or person in charge should provide an opportunity for discussion and agreement. This professional dialogue should consider best practice, the needs of children in the service, and the values of the service. Where required, the services policies and procedures should be reviewed and amended as required. Training, induction, and staff supervision may also need to be reviewed.

2.6.1. Students on work placement

For services who may have a student on placement, the relevant policies should reflect the key aspects relating to the placement. Expectations for students should be outlined, including interactions, children's rights when completing observations as part of coursework, safeguarding, confidentiality, teamwork, and partnership with parents. Policies should also outline boundaries and differentiate between the role of the student and staff. This may include for example, reference to the adult to child ratio, carrying out duties relating to specific care needs and the completion of service records.

2.7   External agencies and supports

External agencies include other inspectorate bodies, support services for individual children, quality improvement, mentoring, advisory and support agencies, sectoral representative and membership organisations, community development agencies, trades unions, funding agencies or any other appropriate external agencies or organisations. These may need to be considered when developing specific policies.

`   The service should collaborate with these stakeholders to reflect practices relevant to their role. Where an external agency is delivering a service on-site, they should be familiar with the services relevant policies and procedures. See Appendix 1 for a list of relevant agencies and support organisations.

Section 3

3 | **Principles to underpin and inform policy and practice in early years settings**

3.0 Principles to underpin and inform policy and practice in early years settings

The principles set out here are suggested to guide policy development in early years services. They are intended to be complimentary with the principles of Aistear Síolta, the National Quality Guidelines for School Age Childcare Services, and the Pedagogical Principles of the Early Years Inspectorate document.

3.1 The best interests of the child at the centre of each policy

In all matters affecting children's lives, including policy development and implementation, the best interests of children should be the priority. This means taking a child-centred and a rights-based approach to practice and ensuring that everyone in the service is working in a way that puts the welfare, rights and best interests of the child at the core of their work. Child-centred and rights-based practice is supported in early years legislation, regulation, and national and international early years policy, frameworks and conventions.

3.2 Safeguarding of children's safety, health, and well-being

Safeguarding children is about protecting the child from harm and hazards, and promoting their safety, health and well-being and in doing so, creating an environment which enables children to grow, develop and achieve their full potential.

As set out in the service's Safeguarding Statement, policy development and implementation should reflect the principle of safeguarding, which means ensuring safe practices are in place across all areas of the service and that staff always respond appropriately to children attending the service and to their parents/guardians and their families.

3.3 Meeting children's care needs

Policy development and implementation should ensure children's care needs are met as a priority. As outlined in Maslow's Hierarchy of needs[2], children basic needs for food, sleep and rest, shelter, safety and security, and quality relationships must be met before a child can reach higher levels of wellbeing and development.

3.4 Participation of stakeholders including children and parents/guardians

Policy development and review processes should welcome the collaboration of all stakeholders including staff, parents/guardians and children. It is crucial to recognise children as the primary stakeholders in an Early Years service and their views, wishes and preferences should always be sought out, listened to, and taken seriously during the development of policies. You can access resources to support participation in the Participation Framework | Hub Na nÓg

Meaningful participation of children in policy development processes recognises and respects that they are experts in their own lives with a unique insight into their experiences and perspectives, and skilful communicators possessing a number of ways and languages to articulate their own views and experiences. Reggio Emilia describes this as the "hundred languages of children"; this sees children as active agents, influencing and interacting with the world around them, and as meaning makers, constructing and interpreting meaning in their lives.

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[2] Maslow, A. H. (1943). A theory of human motivation. *Psychological Review,* 50 (4), 370-96.

3.5 Partnership with parents and guardians

Creating positive and respectful relationships and interactions with parents and guardians is key to supporting and promoting young children's learning and development. The Aistear Guidance for Good Practice emphasises making time and creating space for relationships, conversations and interactions with parents and families.

The Aistear Síolta Practice Guide defines partnership working in the early years as involving parents, families and practitioners working together to benefit children. Each partner recognises, respects and values what the other does and says. Partnership with parents/guardians, and the pivotal role that parents/guardians play in the lives of young children should be at the heart of the ethos, policy and practices of the service.

This means regular and meaningful communication between parents/guardians and the service, an open-door policy that welcomes parents/guardian to the service, and the involvement of parents/guardians in policy, planning and decision-making processes. Supports for communication with parents/guardians may be required, for example if English/Irish is a second language.

3.6 Equity and inclusion

In an inclusive early years service, there is an awareness and respect for each child's individual strengths and areas of difficulty and challenge. Inclusive settings engage in meaningful collaboration with parents and other professionals to ensure access, equality, and full participation for all children. An inclusive and equitable service is a place where everyone is welcome and where children and families see themselves reflected in the environment. It is one where everyone feels safe, comfortable, valued and respected, and experiences a sense of belonging. It is also one where each child's individual circumstances are supported and celebrated. This includes their age, gender, ethnicity, culture, religion, language, sexual orientation, ability, disability and social circumstances.

The Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Charter and Guidelines has more information that will support policy development. The concept of equity is also set out as a principle in the revised Aistear Framework.

Policy documents should be developed using inclusive language. This means using appropriate and respectful language and terminology that demonstrate an awareness of and a respect for diversity on the basis of gender, culture, socio-economic background, religion, ethnicity, ability/disability, and family structure. When talking about specific groups of children, think about child-first terminology rather than identity-first language; child-first language tends to be the more respectful and inclusive option, with the child as the most essential element, e.g., "a child with a disability" instead of "a disabled child". For some groups, it is preferred that the identity or descriptor comes first so it is always best to check this when in consultation with stakeholders as part of policy development.

3.7 A commitment to evidence-informed, and high-quality practice

Policy development should be informed by the best available research related to the field of early years and school age learning and care. Integrating evidence and knowledge from professional experts to policy and practice will help to support best practice towards achieving positive outcomes for children and families.

3.8 Transparency and communication

Providers of services should ensure that all policy and practice related processes, plans and decisions are transparent and are communicated appropriately to parent/guardians, children, staff members and to anyone who is connected to the service.

3.9 Timelines

Providers should make sure that policy development and review[3] processes and implementation are managed within a reasonable timeframe and that children, parents and guardians and staff members are kept updated on developments and progress in a timely manner.

3.10 Fairness

Everyone involved in the service is entitled to be treated fairly and to have their entitlements to fair procedures upheld in policy development and implementation. A commitment to fairness should be clear within policy development and implementation processes.

3.11 Monitoring and review

Policy development and implementation processes should be subject to ongoing monitoring and review to uphold the service's commitment to providing safe and high-quality services for young children and their families.

3.12 Commitment to implementation

When policies and procedures are well thought out and, most importantly, well implemented they provide common understanding and agreement on how things should be done at the setting. To be effective, policies must be implemented in the service.

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[3] Policies should be reviewed at least annually, and more often if required. For pre-schools, this is a regulatory requirement (Regulation 14), and it is advised for other service types.

Section 4

4 | Reasonable measures to support policy development and review processes

5 | Policy and procedures: Implementation and training

4.0 Reasonable measures to support policy development and review processes

By now you will have engaged with the sections on the factors to consider when developing and reviewing policies, and the principles to underpin policy development. We hope that by engaging with the earlier sections, you have been able to respond to the following considerations:

- How the ethos of your service is reflected in the policy development process.
- What you want your policies to say about how your service values those who use the service, and the staff in the service.
- How your policies reflect the needs and requirements of children, parents/guardians and families, and the community is which your service is based,
- The way in which your policy development processes are forward-thinking, anticipating any given situation, but are also flexible enough to be developed as a response to events or issues that arise.

Remember, effective policies, procedures and statements will:

- Comply with legal and regulatory requirements,
- Be child centred and promote the best interests of the child
- Be in keeping with quality principles and standards as set out in the early years frameworks,
- Consider all stakeholders (including children, parents and guardians, staff members, management and external stakeholders),
- Be reasonable and practical,
- Provide guidance and tools for implementation as well as rules,
- Be in a format that is accessible to everyone and is east to update when required.

4.1   The policy development process

Stage 1:

Plan → Consider → Draft
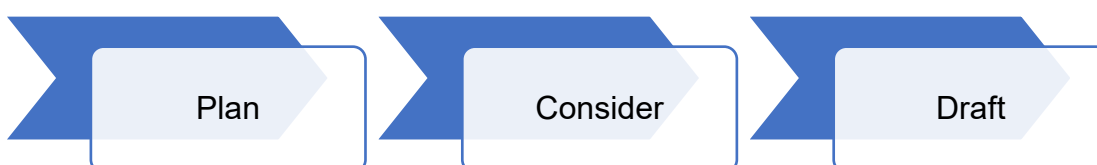
Plan: If staff resources allow, it is a good idea to convene a policy development group with representation from parents/guardians, the staff team and management. If this is not feasible, one person may take on this role, but they should be willing to engage with all stakeholders at this early stage. This stage involves the identification of policy areas that require development or review. The group/person will agree the policy development process and will set out the requirements for each policy under development.

Consider: The group/person will collect and consider all the relevent information on the policy topic or theme. Refer to Section 2 to support this step. Refer to the Policy Guidance Notes that accompany this guidance document for each policy under development.

Draft: The group/person will develop a first draft of the policy statements and related procedures and circulate this first draft to all relevant people, with a request for feedback by a set date. The will ensure that where appropriate, children are consulted on the contents of the first draft, using developmentally appropriate language and participatory activities to support their engagement with the process.

Stage 2:

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Reconsider  →  Redraft/approve  →  Communicate
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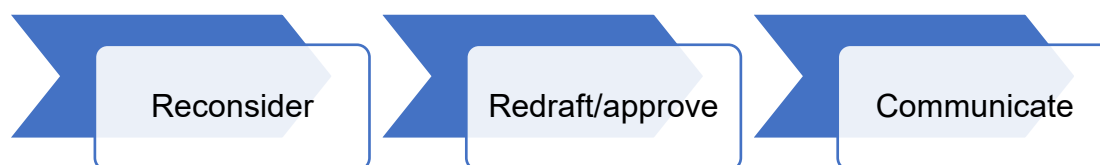
Reconsider: Following the receipt of feedback, bring the policy group back together to analyse feedback, agree on required changes, and make any necessary amendments. If there is no policy group, the person responsible for issuing the first draft will consider the feedback and make any amendments required.

Redraft/approve: The policy group/person will develop the second draft of the policy and ensure this is signed off by the registered provider/board of management. Section 2 will support this step. Refer also to the Policy Guidance Notes that accompany this guidance document for each policy under development.

Communicate: The policy group/person will develop specific communication and implementation action plans once the policy is signed off. They will communicate the policy and procedures to all relevant people, induct the staff team on the policy and plan training if necessary. In conjunction with the registered provider/board of management and/or management team, an evaluation process is set up so that implementation can be monitored and assessed.

4.2 How to format a policy

Having a consistent structure to all your policy documents is important. The policy format set out in the sample policy template in Appendix 2 will guide you on how to format policy documents. Use a consistent font style and font colour for all your policies. Inserting a table of contents and page numbers will improve the presentation of your policy documents.

4.3 Communicating the policy and procedures effectively

When the policy is ready to be signed off and implemented into practice, a communication plan is required so that everyone who needs to know about the policy and procedures is informed. An effective communication plan will consider and respond to the following:

- **The audience**: In an early years service, the audience will be management, staff, volunteers and contractors in the service, children, parents/guardians, any other stakeholders or interested parties. All these groups will need to be informed about the policy and provided with a copy. Information provided to children should be age and developmentally appropriate.

- **The context:** Sharing the policy without any context is not ideal for effective communication. Make sure everyone knows why they are receiving the policy and what if any responsibilities flow from this.
- **Key messages:** You may decide to summarise the policy and procedures for parents/guardians and children. In this case, you are only sharing the key messages in the policy statement.
- **Methods:** Think about the best ways to communicate the policy; for example, you may post a link to the policy statement online or print out copies for circulation and display with the service. Whatever means you chose, the result should be that policies are shared appropriately and are easily accessible, including for parents/guardians, children and other stakeholders who speak English/Irish as a second language.

4.4 Reviewing policies

Regulation 14 of the Early Years Regulations 2016 requires that the registered provider of a pre-school service reviews the quality and safety of the care and service provided to children, at least once a year. This includes a review of the service's policies, procedures and statements. A record of the review must be kept for three years. As well as being a regulatory requirement, the overall purpose of reviewing policies is to ensure that they continue to adequately meet support the quality and safety of service provision and meet the needs of the children and families who use it. To do this, the review must consider the most up-to-date legislation, regulation and quality standards.

The policy review process

The implementation and effectiveness of each policy should be continually monitored in the service. This will require the collection of data and evidence about how effective the policies are and may include for example. observations, audits, surveys and feedback, formal and informal consultations and discussions with children and parents/guardians, reviewing other documentation such as accident and incident records, complaints/compliments records, inspection reports and so on. Use these types of evidence to make any necessary changes to the policy or the way it is put into practice.

Having an open and transparent review process gives all involved the chance to reflect on their own practice and to be open to challenge, discussion and debate, and to use this exchange of learning, feedback, reflections and ideas to determine the effectiveness of practice, to troubleshoot areas that care challenging, to include new areas of practice, enhance or strengthen areas of concern and to overall improve practice in the service.

Here are some of questions that can support the review process:

- Does each policy meet or exceed current legislation, regulations and guidelines?
- Are the policies child-centered and designed to meet the needs of children attending?
- Are the procedures and practices as set out in the policy documentation effective?
- Have any concerns or issues been raised about a policy and/or a procedure?
- Are the policies and procedures reflective of the specific nature of the service provided to children?
- Are the policies and procedures consistent with the ethos of the service?
- Is the information in the policy up to date and relevant?

5.0   Policy and procedures: Implementation and training

Having worked through the policy development process, the next step in the overall process is to translate policies into practice. Policy implementation is essential in ensuring that high quality, safe and consistent early learning and care provision is afforded to young children.

Implementation requires effective communication ([see also 4.3](#))**.** Communication about policies, procedures and statements needs to be clear, accessible, accurate and appropriate. Registered providers should ensure that everyone involved in or affected by a service is informed about a new policy, an update to a policy or a revision of a policy. This includes all staff members, students, contractors and volunteers working in the service. It also includes membership of a Board of Management where that applies. Parents, guardians and other stakeholders should also be keep informed of any policy news or updates. Children in the service should be kept up to date on any policy news that may impact on their day-to day experiences in the service.

A structured and well thought out strategy for communicating policies will help make sure that accurate information is available to everyone involved. A policy folder for staff and a parent's handbook with summaries of policy statements and procedures are effective ways of sharing the detail of policies. Child friendly versions of policies, posters or infographics can be effective for sharing information with children.

Policy review meetings or a policy standing agenda item in team meetings can provide a good opportunity for staff to discuss the detail of a policy and its procedures and clarify roles and responsibilities towards the implementation of the policy. They also support implementation by providing opportunities for staff members to check the details in the policy and procedures and discuss their any implications or impacts on their practice.

For some policy areas, **a trial or pilot** will support the introduction of a new policy or procedure or an update to a policy. Once the trial period ends, look for feedback from staff, children, parents and guardians before you formally introduce the changes.

Draw attention to the detail of a policy or to specific policy and procedural requirements by displaying these in relevant areas in the service. For example, displaying the procedures for infection control and handwashing in the sanitary area will remind staff of the steps they need to take to demonstrate their compliance with the policy and procedures when they are changing nappies or supervising children using the toilet. Displaying the Healthy Eating Policy next to the menu, or the Outings Policy next to details about a forthcoming outing will confirm practices in the service.

Training - For some policies or updates to policies, there may be a need to provide training to some or all staff members so that they can fully implement the procedures that support the policy. The registered provider is responsible for making sure that necessary training is available.

Induct new staff members to the service's policies. It is important to ensure that new staff members are carefully introduced to the service's policies and procedures during the induction process. In a large service, it will help if you provide a mentor or buddy to support the new staff member. This person should be available to answer questions or clarify standard procedures and role model best practice. This will help the new staff member to

become familiar with service policies and help to ensure that they implement them consistently.

Monitoring and supportive supervision will provide staff members with clear expectations, immediate and honest feedback, and positive encouragement as they work to implement any changes.

Provide clear roles and responsibilities - Be clear about who will take responsibility for what, and who staff members should report to. This is essential because lack of clarity in the scope and responsibility of the job and the expectations of others can lead to confusion. Clearly state roles and responsibilities, especially in a large team. This will help staff to see where they fit into the day-to-day running of the service and to know who is responsible for each aspect of policy implementation.

Encourage staff to raise questions about how they should implement policies. Encourage staff to support each other to implement best practice standards. Make sure that you provide opportunities for ongoing feedback and two-way communication between management and staff. This is essential as it will help both management and individual staff members when they feel they need to raise any issues or concerns about how a policy is to be implemented. Staff members are in the best position to provide feedback to management about any challenges or issues that policy implementation may create.

Plan professional development opportunities for staff to learn about current best practice in specific areas of practice. Support new ideas and encourage the staff to research their understanding of different practices. A well-trained staff team gains the expertise and knowledge to identify when poor practice occurs. They also have the confidence to support their colleagues to value best practice. Staff members may need specialist training to implement some policies, for example, child safeguarding, manual handling, and administering medications.

Provide relevant resource materials to support policy implementation. Provide additional resources that back up and support policies. Give staff members enough information to implement policies successfully. This will encourage them to implement them consistently.

Make sure that the policy statements that are particularly relevant to parents and guardians are made easily accessible both to them and to all staff members. Remember that not all parents and guardians will be able to easily access your standard written communications. NALA, the National Adult Literacy Agency, provides tips to make your materials easier to read and understand, especially for adults with literacy difficulties NALA Writing and Design Tips. You may need to sit down with some parents or guardians and talk them through the main policy statements (the ones that are included in your handbook for parents and guardians in particular). Encourage them to ask questions. You could also consider having some of your key policy statements recorded as a podcast for parents and guardians.

Policy folder or manual - You need to keep your policy folder or manual in an accessible place. This can be in hard copy or electronic format. A hard copy should be easily available. If you use an electronic version, make sure that is easily accessible online. All those who use, work in or manage the service must know where to find your policy folder and be able to freely consult it at any time.

Appendix 1: Additional resources

In addition to the resources hyperlinked or signposted in this document and in the individual policy information sheets, the following statutory and voluntary/community agencies and organisations, resources and websites may also support policy development processes or aspects of same.

- AIM/Betterstart. Universal Design Guidelines
- Association of Childhood Professionals
- Barnardos. Library and Information Centre
- Betterstart. Quality Development Service
- Children and Young People's Services Committees
- Childminding Ireland
- City and County Childcare Committees
- Comhar Naíonraí na Gaeltachta
- Competition and Consumer Protection Commission
- Data Protection Commissioner
- Department of Education Inspectorate
- DCDE Nurturing Skills Hub
- DCDE. First 5.
- Early Childhood Ireland
- Food Safety Authority of Ireland.
- Gaeloideachas
- Health and Safety Authority
- Heath Service Executive
- Health Protection and Surveillance Centre
- HSE Babies and Children
- HSE. Environmental Health
- LINC Programme
- National Disability Authority: Children with disabilities in pre-school
- National Employment Rights Authority
- National Childcare Network
- NCCA: Early Childhood
- National Parents Council- Early Years
- Ombudsman for Children
- Pobal. Early Childhood Care and Education
- Pobal Managing Better - Guidance in how to Effect Good Governance in Practice
- Tusla. Early Years Inspectorate
- St Nicholas Montessori Society of Ireland
- Workplace Relations Commission

If you are aware of another resource, agency, or website that may support policy development, please contact rpdd@tusla.ie and request that it is included.

Appendix 2: Sample Policy template

1. Policy title and number	Pick a suitably simple and descriptive name and give each policy a number.
2. The rationale or context for the policy	Here you can outline the reasons for the development of a specific policy. This section should include relevant legislation and regulatory requirements, national early years policy including the early years frameworks, the rights, needs and requirements of children attending, and other stakeholders as appropriate, that the policy intends to meet, plus any other relevant contextual information.
3. Glossary of terms (if required)	You may decide to provide definitions and explanations of terms that are used in the policy, or terms that have a specific meaning in the context of a particular policy. It is important to write your policy using Plain English/Irish, and making it accessible to staff, parents/guardians and children as appropriate. You may also need to think about translation of the policy depending on the needs of the children and families availing of your service.
4. A Policy Statement.	The Policy Statement identifies the guiding principles for the policy and outlines the service's approach to an issue, or how the service intends to respond to an issue that may arise in the service. The policy statements can influence and determine decisions and actions to be taken that are within the scope of the policy. It will generally be quite short as it as a summary of the service's overall approach in response to the policy area.
5. The procedures, practices and protocols.	Reflecting the core requirements for the policy area as set out in the relevant Policy Guidance Note, outline the specific actions, steps and/or guidance to be followed in order to implement the policy. As well as actions or steps to be implemented and observed, this section should include timelines, identification of specific roles and responsibilities for the implementation/observation of actions and steps, and the ways in which these are recorded, monitored and evaluated. There should also be consideration of what actions will be taken if the policy is not implemented or not complied with.
6. Any related policies and procedures and any forms, templates or checklists required.	List the related documents required for the understanding and the effective implementation of the policy. These may be appendices to the policy document.
7. Additional information.	**Contact:** The name and contact details for who can provide more information on any aspect of the particular policy. **Date:** Give the date the policy was agreed and signed off for implementation. **Signatures:** Registered providers/managers who approved the policy and procedures should sign. **Review date:** When the policies will be reviewed and who will be responsible for this action.

Appendix 3: Policies for Pre-school and School Age Services

The required and optional[4] policies are:

Policy [5]	Pre-school Childcare Act 1991 (Early Years Service Regulations 2016)	School Age Services Childcare Act 1991 (Early Years Service) (Registration of School Age Services) Regulations 2018
Policy on Accidents and Incidents	Required	Optional
Policy on Administration of Medication	Required	Required
Policy on Authorisation to Collect Children	Required	Optional
Policy on Complaints	Required	Required
Policy on Dropping off and Collection of Children	Optional	Required
Policy on Fire Safety	Required	Required
Policy on Healthy Eating	Required	Optional
Policy on Inclusion	Required	Optional
Policy on Infection Control	Required	Required
Policy on Managing Behaviour	Required	Required
Policy on Outdoor Play	Required[6]	Optional
Policy on Outings	Required[7]	Optional
Policy on Overnight Services	Required[8]	N/A
Policy on Recruitment	Required	Optional
Policy on Risk Management	Required	Optional
Policy on Safe Sleep	Required	Optional
Policy on Settling In	Required	Optional
Policy on Staff Absences	Required	Optional
Policy on Staff Training	Required	Optional
Policy on Supervision	Required	Optional
Policy on the use of the internet and photographic and recording devices.	Required	Optional

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[4] While not required by regulation, some policies are optional/recommended in services.
[5] In a combined service, 1 policy can cover both
[6] Where such play is provided
[7] Where children attending are brought on outings
[8] Only where such a service is provided.

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