



What?

Why?

How?

**Guide to Assessment and Curriculum Planning in
Practice**

Regulation 5 & Assessment and Planning

Assessment and Planning are practice areas that are integral to ongoing compliance under Regulation 5 of the Pre-school Regulations. Regulation 5 is concerned with the Health, Welfare and Development of the Child. This is at the heart of our work with the children in our care and is central to each child's learning and development. Compliance under Regulation 5 is a reflective and ongoing process.

Regulation 5 of the Child Care (Pre-school Services) (No.2) Regulations 2006 covers the Health, Welfare and Development of the Child. The regulation states:

"A person carrying on a pre-school service shall ensure that each child's learning, development and wellbeing is facilitated within the daily life of the service through the provision of the appropriate opportunities, experiences, activities, interactions, materials and equipment having regard to the age and stage of development of the child and the child's cultural context"

When assessing compliance with Regulation 5, the assessment is divided into four sections as follows:

Section 1: Examines the extent to which the personal care provided meets the basic needs of the infants and children

Section 2: Examines the extent to which relationships around the children are supported

Section 3: Examines the extent to which the physical and material environment supports the development of children

Section 4: Examines the extent to which the programme of activities and its implementation support children's development.

In order to meet the above needs and support the learning and development of the children we must implement an assessment and planning strategy in our services that includes informal and formal assessment methods. This assessment and planning must include:

- Written pre-planned broad and balanced programme of care and evidence that is periodically reviewed and progressed.
- Periodic written records of key observations on children's well being, progress and needs e.g. once a month

- Evidence that these observations feed into planning and are shared with parents.

The HSE have developed an Assessment Guide to Regulation 5 which can be downloaded from the HSE website and clearly outlines the areas/items that will be assessed under each of the four assessment sections.

This guide can be downloaded from www.hse.ie

The Regulation outlines what providers should do.

“In planning activities to support each child’s development, which are reflective of the philosophy and ethos of the service, as provided for in the Explanatory Guide to Regulation 14 (1) (f) and 25(a) at (iv), each child’s individual needs, interests and abilities should be considered. The provider should be pro-active in ensuring that appropriate action is taken to address each child’s needs in co-operation with his/her parents and following consultation, where appropriate, with other relevant services. Each child’s learning, development and well-being needs should be met within the daily life of the service through the provision of the appropriate opportunities, experiences, activities, interactions and materials. In meeting these needs, service providers should recognise how children affect and, in turn, are affected by the relationships, environment and activities around them. This approach is outlined in the National Children’s Strategy and is called the ‘Whole Child’ Perspective.”



A meaningful, ongoing and reflective assessment and planning strategy is integral in compliance for Regulation 5 so that we may fully respond to the needs of each child in our care.

What is Assessment?

Aistear, the National Curriculum Framework provides us with a definition for assessment which is as follows:

*“Assessment is the ongoing process of **collecting, documenting, reflecting on and using** information to develop rich portraits of children as learners in order to support and enhance their future learning”*



Why do we Assess?

Assessment provides us with the tools to find out what children understand, how they think, what they are able to do and what their dispositions and interests are. Once we have this information we can support children's further learning and development. We need to identify where each child is in their learning and development by building up a picture of each child over their time in our childcare setting. Assessment enables us to give on-going feedback to children about how they are progressing in their learning, to provide enjoyable and challenging experiences to develop that learning and to choose suitable supports, materials and experiences that interest them. Assessment also enables us to provide information to parents and to involve parents in the assessment process for their child.

“Children vary enormously in terms of their development, their background, prior experience and culture. This, combined with the importance of adult's responsiveness to healthy emotional and cognitive growth, suggests that what practitioners do to support learning and development must be based on what each child brings to the learning situation.” (Bowman et al., 2001)

Assessment is not about labelling children and should not be a judgement process that focuses on the difficulties that a child may be experiencing but should act as a support tool that provides information that will support the child's learning.

"Quality assessment in ECEC, therefore, is not about an objective mechanical process of measurement or test; neither does it involve checklists or precise explicit criteria determining incontrovertible scores, neither does it pinpoint deficits" (Drummond, Rouse and Pugh, 1993)

*"The focus of the assessment should be what the child **can do** and **knows** to develop a better understanding of child and their progress in order to assist their learning" (Geraldine French, *Supporting Quality: Guidelines for Professional Practice in Early Childhood Services*, 2008)*

It is important to understand that while we are not assessing with the sole aim of identifying difficulties, assessment information is a vital tool in alerting us to potential difficulties that children may be experiencing. Assessment can provide us with information on any concerns that we can bring to the attention of parents and other professionals. It can enable us to tailor appropriate supports that are required for the child to develop and learn and overcome any difficulties.

Assessment also allows us to build up a picture of the child's learning over time and not only can this be shared with parents and other professionals but with other staff in the childcare service. This is important for children who attend a setting over a long period of time as the assessment can support the child's transition from babies to toddlers to preschool stages and also guide the next childcare workers/key worker support strategy for each child.



So what do we Assess?

Aistear outlines that we should assess the following:

- **Dispositions:** e.g. curiosity, concentration, resilience, and perseverance.
- **Skills:** e.g. walking, cutting, writing, and problem-solving.
- **Attitudes and values:** e.g. respect for themselves and others, care for the environment, and positive attitudes to learning and to life.
- **Knowledge and understanding:** e.g. classifying objects using colour and size, learning “rules” for interacting with others, finding out about people in their community, and understanding that words have meaning.



There are many types of documentation that you may use in assessing each child's learning and development. You can document written notes, stories, photographs, video footage and samples of children's work, checklists of learning, observations and report templates.



How do we Assess?

Aistear outlines for us that there are four assessment actions – **collecting, documenting, reflecting on and using** information. It tells us that these actions overlap and often happen at the same time or we may, at times, undertake just one or two of these actions together. Sometimes we can assess within a few minutes or less and then we begin to plan with the information. Then at other times we may assess over days or weeks depending on our focus.



“Good early childhood assessment is based on observation of the children in everyday action and conversations with children while they are reflecting on their actions. These observations and conversations enable practitioners to understand children’s learning and then match their provision to the individual and idiosyncratic learning styles of children” (Drummond, Rouse and Pugh, 1993)

Aistear describes five methods of assessment which span from Child Led to Adult Led assessment methods. These include: self assessment, conversations, observation, setting tasks and testing. To build the best picture/story of the child’s learning and development a combination of these methods should be used.

Self Assessment: This involves children thinking about their own learning and development and looking at what they have done and achieved. The children can look at what they have said, done or made and make decisions about how they may do better next time. Childcare practitioners can help children develop these skills by spending time with them and looking back at events and activities that they have experienced. By using prompting questions the practitioner can guide the children in reflecting and talking about their experiences. This form of assessment can be used with babies, toddlers and young children.

Conversations: Conversations between the children and between children and adults can be used to identify what children understand and certain aspects



of their learning. Conversations can complement other assessment methods, such as using a conversation to follow up on an observation. Conversations can spontaneously happen or the childcare practitioner can plan for them. The adult can guide the children and invite them into conversations using questions, thinking aloud, responding to what the children are discussing, agreeing or disagreeing and at times remaining silent to allow children time to think and then respond. Props can be used to encourage conversations such as pieces of work, materials, books etc. This form of assessment can be used with babies, toddlers and young children.

Observation: Observations involve watching, listening to the children and recording what we see and hear to help develop the children's learning and development. Observations can be used with babies, toddlers and young children and are particularly helpful with non verbal and preverbal children. Like conversations, these can be planned or happen spontaneously. There are different methods of undertaking observations, which include:



- Time Sampling – the observer can observe a child, group or activity over a period of time at pre-specified time intervals and record what is happening.
- Frequency – the observer identifies an aspect of behaviour of a child or group and records every time this behaviour occurs.
- Duration Observation – the observer records how long a child or group spend at an activity or exhibiting certain behaviour.
- Focused Observation – this is when a child or group are chosen to observe because more information is needed and detailed notes are recorded
- Target Child Observation – this is when a particular child is the focus. Observation is recorded at pre-set intervals throughout a session or sessions so that a full picture can be built up over time on the child's interactions, learning and development.

- Anecdotal - involve a written narrative on examples of work such as photos of constructions, dances, outdoor activities etc or paintings and drawings. These are recorded after the event with another staff member, child or parent

Setting Tasks: This involves setting a task specifically for assessment where the practitioner develops an activity in order to gather specific information on an aspect of learning and development. This can be used with babies, toddlers and young children.

Testing: This involves using a set of tasks and/or questions to collect information about a child's learning and development. Normally they are commercial standardise tests based on developmental age ranges norms and information is scored. Testing is normally used with young children.

The following are best practice considerations that should be taken into account when starting the observation process:

- Parents should be informed of the observation process that the setting uses.
- Take the time to plan for the observation process that you will implement with the staff team.
- While some observations may be anecdotal and spontaneous, it is important to timetable when routine observations will take place.
- Decide on the observation method that will be used. Take into account the child's age, background, culture, family contexts and values, languages, abilities, interests and areas requiring additional supports.
- Decide who will do the observations.
- Decide whether the observation will be participatory or non-participatory. It is advisable to have a mix of both, where the observer can stand back to observe and also where the observer can be a participant in the child's play and interactions.
- Decide where the observations will take place, e.g. in the home corner, in the messy play area etc. It is advisable to do observations



in a variety of areas to build up a rich portrait of the child's learning and development,

- Decide when the observation will occur – settling in time, free play, circle time, meal time etc. It creates a richer portrait if the child's development and learning is observed at different times during the daily routine.
- Be sensitive to the children's personal space when beginning the observation process. If observations have not been undertaken previously children will be curious. If they are verbal you should seek their permission advise them why you are doing the observation. For younger children, be sensitive in keeping your distance until they have adjusted to the process. If you feel the child is showing signs that the observation needs to stop, do so, and recommence later.
- Be prepared – make sure that you have the materials you will need ready and in working order, paper, pens, camera, video recorder etc.
- It is advisable to always have a pen and notepad/post-its available for anecdotal note taking.
- Set a realistic daily/weekly number of observations to complete until you become more proficient.
- Be brief, factual, non judgemental and specific and focus on the child/children.
- Record what the children do, say, their physical gestures, facial



- expressions, what materials they are using, who they are with, what interactions they initiate and what/where they may move on to.
- Be practical about the information you record and its usefulness. Decide what information is particularly useful in highlighting and understanding children's progress in developing dispositions, skills, attitudes and values, knowledge and understanding.
- Avoid the use of judgemental words - use descriptive language relating to the physical aspects of what the child is doing.

- It is advisable to undertake the factual/note taking phase of the observation process and then input the information into the recording template at a later time in the session.
- Following the recording of the information, identify the learning and development and plan for the extension of this.
- USE the information gathered to plan for activities for the individual child and group.
- You should always come back to the observation template to review the plan of action you proposed - did it work, did it benefit the child/children, what worked well, what didn't work well, the child/children's feedback.
- Share the observations with the parents.
- Store the records and information confidentially.
- Consider the filing system you will use for the storing of observations. You may wish to have a manual folder for all child observations or you may wish to have a manual folder for each individual child. This is the child's learning portfolio which may contain observations, photos, examples of work, stories, records of care, checklists etc.



How often should we do observations on each child?



Assessment is something we do everyday as part of our interactions with the children in our care. We observe the children in every day action and conversations. We interpret what we see in terms of their learning and development and decide on activities, actions and changes to our environments based on this assessment on the individual child and the group. This form of assessment is often performed automatically without planning or without recording the observations we have made. Good assessment should be a continuous process that provides us with information to build a rich portrait of the child's learning and development so that we may tailor our programmes to support each individual child. To support this informal continuous assessment,

KCCC are advising that you undertake a more formal written and documented observation at least once a month on each individual child to support the portrait of the child's holistic development. This observation can help you to plan for each child's unique abilities and learning styles and provide you with the documentation that will support your assessment and your decision making.





There is often feedback from childcare practitioners that there is not enough time to undertake these documented observations. To support you and your staff team in implementing observations you must plan a schedule for documented observations and believe and acknowledge that this assessment is valuable to the child and that it is critical for your short and medium term planning. You must

develop a system for undertaking and documenting assessment that all staff needs to be involved in and most importantly ensure that the information that is documented is used.

- Take time to plan for the observation. Decide when it will take place, who will do the observation and what method will be used.
- Take time to do the observation ensuring you are prepared and are recording the necessary information.
- Take time with other staff members to use the information gathered to plan activities for the child/children. Show this in your curriculum planning sheet.
- Ensure that the observation and subsequent planning is shared with parents and encourage feedback from them.
- Finally review the observation and decide whether the objectives were met.



Assessment & Planning

Planning is the ongoing cyclical process of thinking and organising what, why, how and when things are going to happen. Planning for children involves building on their prior learning and development and accommodating their individual differences.

“Good plans are flexible, allowing children’s changing interests and responses to learning to be incorporated over time. This type of planning takes time and comes from knowing children well – their interests, needs, cultures, backgrounds and abilities. Assessment information is, therefore, at the heart of planning.” (Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework, 2009)



Planning can be organised over three time scales;



Long-term Planning: This outlines the aims and objectives of the service and usually span over a year of the service. It is broad based and may be based on a particular method e.g. Montessori, High Scope etc, and/or the National Frameworks, Siolta, the National Frameworks for Quality and *Aistear*, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework. The long term plan sets out the learning experiences for the children and should be based on a good understanding of developmental stages for the different age ranges of children in your care.

Medium-term Planning: This type of planning may focus on a term or a month within the setting. The planning is based on setting practical goals and activities for ensuring that the aims and objectives of the long term plan will be carried out. It allows for flexibility so that we can respond to the children’s emerging interests and needs. Assessment and consultation with children, parents and staff will guide the development of your medium-term plans.



Short-term Planning: This type of planning outlines the activities and experiences that will be organised on a weekly or daily basis. The plans are very specific and this planning involves being more responsive to the immediate needs and interests of the children. This type of planning allows you to focus on individuals as well as the group and highlight what activities will take place, when they will take place, what resources are needed, what changes to the environment are required and who will be involved. Assessment of the children will inform the consolidation and extension of the learning taking place.

According to Hutchin (1999), planning is most effective when:

- The child is at the centre of curriculum planning rather than the child having to fit in with demands of the service. This is equally important in all stages of planning: long, medium and short term.
- It is based on the understanding of how children learn and develop at this age.
- The medium and short term plans build on what we know about the children we are working with, their interests, existing knowledge and skills and their needs – emotional, physical, social as well as learning needs. In other words, it means using our records and assessments to help us plan.
- It is shared between all those who work with a particular group of children for whom it applies. (Although it may be difficult to involve

everyone on a regular basis, this should still be the aim, so that all can contribute and develop a common understanding of what has been planned. Everyone will have different strengths, ideas and perspectives to bring to it.)



- It involves regular evaluation, resulting in adjustments to medium and short term plans to meet the children's needs and interests while keeping the long term plans as the learning to which all are entitled.
- It covers different areas of provision, not just table activities. It includes the involvement of staff in play situations such as water and sand, outdoor play and role-play.
- The learning intentions for children are made clear to all but remain flexible enough to meet the needs of every child.

- It involves and informs parents, children and staff.
- It involves all aspects of learning. This means it values the *process* of learning, not just outcomes, and involves planning for developments in attitudes to self and learning.
- Successful practice doesn't rely on good planning, but needs to have effective assessment and record-keeping processes.

Aistear is the Curriculum framework for children from birth to six years in Ireland. It provides information for adults to help them plan for and provide enjoyable and challenging learning experiences, so that all children can grow and develop as competent and confident learners within loving relationships with others. *Aistear* describes the types of learning (dispositions, values and attitudes, skills, knowledge, and understanding) that are important for children in their early years, and offers ideas and suggestions as to how this learning might be nurtured. The Framework also provides guidelines on supporting children's learning through partnerships with parents, interactions, play, and assessment.

In supporting children's early learning and development *Aistear*

- identifies what and how children should learn, and describes the types of experiences that can support this
- makes connections in children's learning throughout the early childhood years and as they move from one setting to another
- supports parents as their children's primary educators during early childhood, and promotes effective partnerships between parents and practitioners
- complements and extends existing curriculums and materials
- informs practice across a range of settings, disciplines and professions, and encourages interdisciplinary

Aistear presents children's learning and development using four themes. These are:

- Well-being
- Identity and Belonging
- Communicating
- Exploring and Thinking.

The themes describe what children learn—the dispositions, attitudes and values, skills, knowledge, and understanding. Each theme begins with a short overview of its importance for children as young learners. The theme is then presented using four aims. Each aim is divided into six learning

goals. Some of these goals may be more suited to children as they get older.

Each theme offers some ideas and suggestions for the types of learning experiences that adults might provide for children in working towards *Aistear's* aims and goals. These ideas and suggestions are known as sample learning opportunities. They are presented in three overlapping age groups:

- babies (birth to 18 months)
- toddlers (12 months to 3 years)
- young children (2½ to 6 years).

Aistear provides lots of information on and examples of assessment-in-action in different types of early childhood settings. The Framework uses five assessment methods (self-assessment, conversations, observation, setting tasks, and testing) to gather evidence of children's learning and development across *Aistear's* themes. This evidence helps practitioners to build rich portraits of children as learners in order to celebrate their achievements and to help them take the next steps in their learning.

Aistear has recognised parents as the most important people in their children's lives and stresses the importance of partnerships between parents, families and practitioners.

The *Aistear* Toolkit has included a series of tip sheets for parents which give tips on helping parents play with their children. This is important for supporting parents in their child's early education as it will allow them give valuable information to the practitioner about their child's learning and development in the home.

www.NCCA.ie

Source – Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework, 2009



The observation and planning templates that KCCC have developed allow the childcare practitioner to use *Aistear* as a guiding tool to help you identify the children's learning and development using the themes, aims and learning goals and also to plan for the extension of the children's learning using these and the sample learning opportunities

***Síolta* & Assessment and Planning**

Síolta is a voluntary quality assurance programme that has been developed by the CECDE, in consultation with the wider early childhood care and education sector in Ireland. It is applicable to all settings in which children aged from birth to six years of age are present. *Síolta* has been developed in relation to the three strands of defining, assessing and supporting quality.

The main focus of the initial stages of the development process concentrated on the definition of quality, namely identifying and agreeing the core Principles, Standards and Components of Quality.

While the Principles, Standards and Components are applicable to all settings in which children aged birth to six years of age are present, the Signposts for Reflection are mediated in two different ways to ensure they are appropriate to the needs of all children.

First of all, they are differentiated for four distinct settings, which are:

- Full and Part-time Daycare;
- Sessional Services;
- Infant Classes of Primary Schools; and
- Childminding.

Secondly, where appropriate, they are mediated for three specific age ranges; from birth to eighteen months, one to three years and two-and-a-half to six years.

Síolta is designed to allow early childhood care and education settings to evaluate the quality of the service they are providing. Accordingly, the Framework recognizes elements of practice that are successful within the setting, as well as identifying aspects in need of attention and improvement. In this way, it acts as a tool to promote continuous quality improvement and planning.

Source: Síolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education 2009

síolta

**The National Quality Framework
for Early Childhood Education**

Assessment & Planning is linked to the following Standards and Components of *Síolta*:

Standard 1: Rights of the Child – Component 1.3
Standard 2: Environments – Components 2.1 – 2.7
Standard 3: Parents & Families – Component 3.1, 3.3, 3.4
Standard 4: Consultation – Component 4.1
Standard 5: Interactions – Components 5.1; 5.2
Standard 6: Play – Component 6.7
Standard 7: Curriculum – Components 7.5, 7.6
Standard 8: Planning & Evaluation – Components 8.1 – 8.4
Standard 10: Organisation – Components 10.5; 10.6
Standard 11: Professional Practice – Component 11.3
Standard 12: Communication – Component 12.2
Standard 13: Transitions – Components 13.1, 13.2

Source: Supporting Quality Book 2, Geraldine French, Barnardos 2008

References & Recommended Reading

Supporting Quality: Guidelines for Professional Practice in Early Childhood Services Book 1 & 2, Geraldine French, Barnardos 2008

www.barnardos.ie

Guiding Childcare Practitioners through Observations, Planning & Reflection, NCNA 2007

www.ncna.ie

Documenting the Early Childhood Curriculum, IPPA
Regulation 5: Assessing the Early Childhood Services, ECI 2011

www.ippa.ie

Child Care (Pre-school Services) (No.2) Regulations 2006
HSE Standardised Inspection Tool –Child Care (Pre-school Services) (No.2) Regulations 2006

HSE Child, Health, Welfare & Development Assessment Guide – Regulation 5

www.hse.ie

Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework, NCCA 2009

www.ncca.ie

Siolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education, CECDE 2006

www.siolta.ie