

XPLAY SCOTLAND



Raising the Bar

Findings of the Scottish Play Commission

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CONTENTS

Section	Page No.
1. Executive Summary	4
2. Background	5
3. The State of Play	8
4. Recommendations	20



FOREWORD

Children's play is one of those things we take for granted. It's only when it starts to disappear that we realise how important it is. Because it's when they're out to play that children develop independence, learn how to make risk assessments and grow in self-confidence and self-esteem. It's where they learn to get along with other children, developing the social skills to be neither bully nor victim in the future. It's how they become physically fit and develop the coordination and control that allows them to sit and learn in a classroom. And it's also where they learn, through first hand experience, about the world they live in – the common-sense understanding that underpins the lessons they learn at school.

Over the past 20 years or so the freedoms and opportunities to play that many of us enjoyed (and endured!) have disappeared as society has become increasingly risk averse and restrictive. Many parents have severely limited options to consider when encouraging their children to play and are often too scared to let them out. For those who do the choices can be stark and the risks all too real. ("I would rather my son was out the back with the rats than on waste ground with the needles. It worries me." Gillian/Marie, parents, North Glasgow.)

But there has never been a better time to reclaim and reinstate the child's right to play in Scotland. In 2006 the To Play or Not To Play parents group in North Glasgow lodged petition PE913 at the Scottish Parliament calling for a 'Play Strategy that recognises the right of all children in Scotland to a safe, accessible and challenging play environment'. In March 2006 history was made at the Scottish Parliament when 81 MSPs signed a motion endorsing the Importance of Play.

The Scottish Government has also made a manifesto commitment to a National Play Strategy and is currently examining a strategic approach to play in the Early Years Framework.

As a result of this, the Scottish Play Commission, funded by the Big Lottery, was set up in November 2007 by Play Scotland. As Chair of the Commission I welcome the findings and heartily support the recommendations outlined below.

Sue Palmer, Chairperson, Scottish Play Commission



1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Play Scotland received lottery funding in October 2007 to establish the Scottish Play Commission. The Scottish Play Commission, chaired by the author Sue Palmer, examined the 'state of play' in Scotland and heard evidence from leading academics and play specialists from around the world.

The structure of the Commission was designed to allow for maximum participation from the children's sector, parents, planners and service providers in local authorities, health, the private sector and voluntary sector. A number of key events were held in Edinburgh, Inverness and Glasgow with smaller workshops and focus groups held locally throughout Scotland. The 'Developing Play in Scotland' survey (Play Scotland 2008) also informed the findings of The Scottish Play Commission.

An online discussion forum was set up for 6 months, accessed through the Play Scotland website and linked to the UK World Café discussion forum on the Future of Playwork.

The findings led the Scottish Play Commission to recommend to the Scottish Government that they

1. Develop a National Play Strategy, 0-18 years, in consultation with children and young people, which will inform local play strategies and address the themes identified in this report
2. Create a national Play indicator, with minimum actions and standards, national monitoring and resources to support its implementation across all local authorities
3. Promote the critical role of Play in child development and raise public awareness of the value of Play
4. Build the capacity of communities to support a wide range of Play opportunities and monitor the benefits
5. Support the Playwork Profession to develop as a valued Workforce



2. BACKGROUND

2.1 Introduction

2.1.1. Play Scotland is the lead national body for Play in Scotland. It was formed in 1998 to promote children and young people's right to play in Scotland.

2.1.2. "State parties recognise the right of every child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts." (Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child)

2.2 Priorities for Play Scotland

2.2.1.

- Political lobbying for a Play Policy and a strategic approach to Play in Scotland
- Developing strategic resources to support the Play sector in Scotland
- Workforce development of the Playwork sector
- Research into Play provision in Scotland
(space to play, time to play, funding for play, best practice in play)

2.3 What is play?

2.3.1. The definition widely used by the Play Sector is that "Play is freely chosen, personally directed, intrinsically motivated behaviour that actively engages the child. Play can be fun or serious. Through play children explore social, material and imaginary worlds and their relationship with them, elaborating all the while a flexible range of responses to the challenges they encounter. By playing, children learn and develop as individuals, and as members of the community."¹

2.4 The Scottish Play Commission

2.4.1. The Scottish Play Commission was established by Play Scotland to examine the 'state of play' in Scotland and to develop high level recommendations for the Scottish Government to consider. It is hoped that the recommendations will inform and guide future policy and strategy on Play.

2.4.2. The Play Commission was funded by a grant from the Big Lottery's Investing in Ideas programme. The grant enabled a series of events and conversations to take place throughout Scotland and facilitated an interactive online dialogue across the UK. The Commission was supported by leading academics from across the world.

2.4.3. The Play Commission was launched at the Scottish Parliament by the Minister for Children and Early Years, Adam Ingram, with Kathleen Marshall, Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People, at an event sponsored by John Scott MSP. The Play Commission was chaired by Sue Palmer, author of Toxic Childhood.

¹ NPFA (2000). 'Best Play: What play provision should do for children'. London: NPFA/CPC/Playlink

2.4.4. Speaking at the launch, Adam Ingram MSP said “Having the chance to play and interact with others is great fun for children but it also teaches them vital life skills. Learning about relationships and risk is a key part of children’s emotional and physical development and we want to help all of our young people get the best start in life. That’s why we’re looking at how best to support play and welcome different views on the most effective way forward.”

2.4.5. Scotland’s Commissioner for Children and Young People, Kathleen Marshall, supports a strategic approach to Play. “The fears of parents for their children, the low priority given to play and open spaces in planning, and the trivialisation of play by those who do not understand how critical it is for child development, all point to the need for a strategic approach to play. We need a national play strategy, based on the right to play (article 31 of the UNCRC) that will inform local play strategies.”

2.5 Play Commission structure

2.5.1.

- Funding for the Play Commission was secured from the Big Lottery in October 2007.
- The Play Commission was established in November 2007. It was envisaged that it would run for a maximum of six months depending on the level of engagement in the process. The commission was extended to the end of May 2008 in response to the level of interest.
- The structure of the Commission was designed to allow for maximum participation from the children’s sector, parents, planners and service providers in local authorities, the private sector and the voluntary sector.
- An online discussion forum was set up for six months and accessed through the Play Scotland website. This forum was linked to the UK World Café discussion forum on the Future of Playwork. The Play Commission forum attracted thought provoking contributions; however the overall level of participation was lower than expected.
- The Kick Start event was held at Midlothian Innovation Centre on the 19th of November 2007. Participants took part in discussion groups to explore the themes emerging from evidence given by
 - Dr Roger Hart, Co-Director of the Children’s Environments Research Group and Professor, City University of New York, who presented ‘Participation in play’
 - Dr John McKendrick, Director, Scottish Poverty Unit, Glasgow Caledonian University, who presented ‘Beyond the playground: towards a play friendly Scotland’
 - Andy Dalziell and Sheila Dobbie OBE of The Institute for Neuro-Physiological Psychology (Scotland) Ltd, who presented ‘Neuro-developmental aspects of the child’
- The Scottish Play Commission was formally launched by Adam Ingram MSP, Minister for Children and Young People and Kathleen Marshall, Scotland’s Commissioner for Children and Young People at The Scottish Parliament on the 13th of December 2007. This event was hosted by John Scott MSP.

- The 'Highland Yak!' was held on the 29th of February 2008 in Inverness. Participants took part in discussion groups to explore the themes emerging from evidence given by
 - Tim Gill, Play Consultant and Author, who presented 'No fear – growing up in a risk averse society'
 - Arthur Battram, Play Trainer & Author, who spoke about 'the playing that runs through us all'.

A Question Time panel was chaired by Sue Palmer in the afternoon with the speakers and Cllr David Alston from Highland Council.

- Two free, participatory workshops were held to explore issues around play at a local and national level, on the 29th of April in Aberdeen and on the 2nd of May in Melrose.
- The draft findings of the Play Commission were sent to all members and contacts in the play sector on the 22nd of May and were also uploaded onto the Play Scotland website for comment.
- The 'Round Up' event was held on the 27th of May 2008 in Glasgow.
 - Sue Palmer presented on 'Toxic Childhood: how 'real play' is under threat in a market-driven world'.
 - Marguerite Hunter Blair, Chief Executive, Play Scotland, presented on 'Play in a Scottish context'
 - Adrian Voce, Director, Play England, presented on their campaign for a play strategy in England.

Participants commented on the draft findings through a workshop based approach.

- The findings and recommendations were presented to the Minister for Children and Early Years, Adam Ingram, at the Scottish Parliament on the 25th June 2008

2.6 Play Connects Scotland

2.6.1. Alongside the Play Commission process, Play Scotland carried out further research – a series of focus groups and a survey, 'Developing Play in Scotland' – also funded by Investing in Ideas, to support the 'Play Connects Scotland' project. The two processes were complimentary, with evidence from each supporting the other. (The focus groups were voice-recorded and transcribed which allows for direct quotes to be incorporated in this report.)

3. THE STATE OF PLAY

3.1 The decline of 'playing out' and unstructured play

3.1.1. The most frequently occurring issue was the decline of children playing out, and the predominance of structured, supervised play over 'free play'. This was the issue over which participants expressed the most concern.

"Most children are doing lots of activities but its not actual play. They're taking part in activities but they're not actually playing with each other and going out to play and running about, they're learning which is great, but it's not just 'go and play.'" (Edinburgh focus group)

"My biggest worry is that it is all structured things that they are going to and that it is all led. I think that it is great that they go to all these things but I think a lot of parents think, they are going to that club so it ticks that box but a lot of these clubs are adult led and the adults make the choices." (Glasgow focus group)

"I think children's ability to range has diminished. I mean I remember, going back to my childhood, we travelled quite far around the area we lived in." (Dundee focus group)

"Within certain guidelines, within certain parameters, yes, you can learn, but only within this room here. Not the park or the city." (Dundee focus group)

3.1.2. Speaking at the 'Kick Start', Dr Roger Hart outlined his concerns at the lack of free play opportunities for children and young people. "The erosion of freedom in play and parental involvement in directing and guiding play has increased dramatically in recent years because of safety concerns and concerns for children's futures and the belief that in order to learn or develop to their fullest they need guidance or programming in all aspects of their lives."

3.1.3. Sue Palmer explained that in the course of two years of research for her book 'Toxic Childhood' she discovered the biggest sea change has occurred in children's opportunities for free play. In one generation play for many children has become indoors, sedentary, screen-based and solitary.

3.1.4. Concern was expressed that 'playing out' is under threat, that it could be a dying culture, and that this must be addressed. Participants felt that outdoor play is a particularly unique and important childhood experience to preserve.

"I think whilst the full spectrum of play is important there is something special and unique, it is about exploring and finding your environment and pushing your boundaries and parameters which doesn't happen with indoors play." (Glasgow focus group)

"One of the biggest concerns I have got is this lack of, this fear that people have of children going out to play, and I just worry about the future of some children who don't have that social time." (Glasgow focus group)

3.1.5. Participants in the Play Commission said that these issues could be addressed through

community development work, community planning processes and addressing attitudes to risk and play. There is an upward spiral of playing out. Once somebody in the neighbourhood does it, other parents allow their children out too.

3.1.6. Dr Roger Hart outlined what is needed to encourage free play outdoors: safe spaces within which to explore and play; diverse landscapes offering alternative opportunities for activity within children's ranges and more freedom from control and supervision.

3.1.7. Play Scotland survey results found that the Play Sector almost unanimously considers that "children do not spend enough time playing outside" (95% of survey respondents). The vast majority also perceive that children 'do not spend enough time engaged in unstructured and unsupervised play' (85% of respondents). The Play Sector acknowledges that there are several barriers preventing children playing outside more often. Most respondents identified more than one barrier. Although parents' attitudes towards risk was the main barrier, the majority of the Play Sector perceived that the poor quality of spaces available for outdoor play (68%) and the attitudes of other adults in the community toward outdoor play (67%) were also barriers to children playing outdoors.²



² McKendrick, J. and Callaghan, M. (2008) 'Developing Play in Scotland'. Play Scotland

3.2 Environments for play

3.2.1. Two overarching issues were discussed throughout the Play Commission in relation to environments for play.

- Planning and maintenance
- The type of environments that meet children's play needs

3.2.2. Opportunities must be available for outdoor play, which requires a strategic approach that cuts across departmental remits such as planning, transport, leisure, childcare and education. Participants said that housing developments are using up available open space, and dedicated play spaces are often not built in to new developments. As play is not statutory, play spaces are susceptible to cuts. One discussion group concluded that housing developers should contribute to the ongoing maintenance costs of play areas. One of the most re-occurring themes was that there has to be a statutory requirement for the provision of play and play areas, with tighter planning controls. Participants highlighted that often planning is not undertaken with consideration of the needs of children and families.

3.2.3. Traffic is a barrier to children accessing the play spaces that do exist in their neighbourhood, including the street outside their front door. A related issue is the connectedness of play spaces and whether children can travel from one area to another on paths.

3.2.4. Planning for play has to take into consideration accessibility in every sense, to ensure that opportunities are inclusive, free, and that children can get to and from the play opportunity safely.

3.2.5. Playgrounds are often poorly maintained and children encounter vandalised equipment or used needles. Play areas must be properly maintained to ensure they are safe. The Play Commission found that there is a need to remove barriers to using play space and also to actively promote outdoor play, to tempt children away from the sedentary lifestyles they have become more accustomed to.

3.2.6. Participants recognised that a range of places can be beneficial for play, such as use of school playgrounds out of school hours, adventure playgrounds, community gardens, wild spaces or the street in front of their home. Often, public playgrounds that are designated for play are the least appealing spaces.

"We had a purpose built play park - that was the last place I went to play, because we went to play on the tops of the garage roofs and over the walls and things like that because that was much more enjoyable." (Glasgow focus group)

3.2.7. Dr Roger Hart emphasised that all over the world children have resisted playgrounds in favour of more interesting settings which offer them greater choice and control. Children continue to prefer playing in the street if they have a choice because they want to be close to home; they don't want to be segregated from the life and multiple interesting activities of the city; and they like the involvement of friendly (non-controlling) adults in their lives and on the sidelines.

3.2.8. Participants discussed that children need 'play spaces' not playgrounds full of equipment. There could be more creative use made of outdoor space to encourage children out, for

example, using bug trails. Participants also talked about the benefits of space that is designed for community use, including children, and which encourages intergenerational contact. Other innovative approaches could include funding a person to develop a space with the community, rather than funding the installation of equipment. There was a high level of interest in more imaginative approaches to creating opportunities for children to play than the standard equipment, rubber safety surfacing and fence.

3.2.9. The findings highlight that more stimulating, flexible and natural spaces for play are needed, designed with an understanding of play.

“If you talk to people about outside play there is probably more formal play equipment and facilities than there ever has been, but it is not meeting all the children’s needs. It is not providing the space for adventure and imagination. It is not providing the sort of natural and the wilderness play, but it is a kind of ‘tick box’ and it is the easy solution for people to do and it is responding to when there is funding available, and it is usually in the financial year and we will have a page 26 out of the catalogue, and so people aren’t going through the processes of actually auditing play provision, having an understanding of what children’s needs are and then creating the facilities that are appropriate to it.” (Glasgow focus group)

3.2.10. Budgets are used up on providing fencing and rubber safety surfacing which do not add to the play value of a space.

“Fencing appears to form a significant cost for any play scheme and wonder if it would not be useful to pilot a project which specifically designs a scheme that has no fencing enclosure. Analysis and evaluation of feedback would need to be conducted. Recommendations made thereafter, as money on fencing may well be better spent resourcing/researching more accessible play options that meet a range of child and family needs.” (Online discussion)

3.2.11. At the Highland Yak, Tim Gill advised that “40 per cent of the capital cost of a playground goes on hi-tech rubber safety surfacing. Put it another way: without this expense, we could get almost twice as many playgrounds for our money. Add up the sums and we have spent perhaps £300 million of public funds in the last decade on saving at the very most, two or three lives. The same amount spent on tried and tested traffic calming measures would probably have saved ten times as many lives.”

There is a need for a change of approach in how play spaces are created, to ensure that they meet children’s play needs. This also includes opportunities for children to test themselves and take risks.

“I think there's also a perception that public, open spaces need to be neat and tidy whereas children want to play with their park. And they want to climb spaces, without somebody taking an objection to it – and asking them to calm down or complaining to the parks department that you're not sort of supervising your parks and spaces as you should be. Children like to break off bits of bushes and bits of trees but there's a perception that they shouldn't be doing that... we should be encouraging natural play and using the natural resources as their play equipment.” (Dundee focus group)

3.2.12. The need to ensure play environments enable children to experience risk also applies to staffed provision. Arthur Battram emphasised that an effective play environment operates at 'the edge of chaos'. He talked about a spectrum of play which moves from order to chaos. Play tends to occur in the middle of this spectrum, a zone of complexity, on the edge of chaos. Playwork supports children to explore and play with that complexity, to stretch their abilities. Imposing too much order holds children back as personal growth necessarily involves pushing boundaries, flexibility and adaptation.

3.2.13. Participants in the Play Commission emphasised that play spaces should be developed with engagement from children, young people, voluntary organisations and the community. However, tensions were identified between what different groups in a community want and sometimes play spaces are not desired because of attitudes towards children playing out. Therefore it is important to also address public perception of play and to raise awareness of the benefits of play.

3.2.14. "Good quality, accessible and local space for play are essential for every family across Scotland. Good planning by decision makers and the involvement of local families at all stages of the planning process is essential. (This is) an issue that involves all ages and stages of human development... Children and adults being able to open their front doors and feeling able to access their local streets, greenspaces and public spaces for play and recreation is an essential aspect of community life and should be encouraged and developed by decision makers." (Email response to draft findings)

3.2.15. As reported in relation to 'playing out', respondents to the survey identified the poor quality of play spaces available as an issue. A quarter of respondents identified this as the main barrier to children engaging in unstructured and unsupervised play.

3.3 Play experiences at home and indoors

3.3.1. While participants were most concerned with the decline of outdoor play, it was recognised that indoor play and play at home also require attention.

3.3.2. In particular, the parent child interaction is important, however parents often do not have enough time to play with their children and some do not understand the importance of play, therefore information and support targeted at parents is needed.

"I am very keen that we do not lose sight of indoor play, both in the home and within play facilities. Play is vitally important to the whole family and can create and forge bonds with adults/children and siblings from a very early age. Board games, cards, kerplunk - you name it - these are some memories of play indoors that I had as a child. I revelled in the opportunity to spend some quality time with my parents and siblings and these are some of my happiest memories. Yes, I played outdoors, got wet, skinned my knees and fought with other kids like the best of them, and loved that too! Play is an in built mechanism to help us explore and learn and to prepare us for growing up into the adult world and, like it or not, our adult world is full of gadgets! From computers, sat navs, to the very homes we live in. Whilst there is a lot of discussion around children being allowed to take risks and playing in the streets and parks, there are also a many number of children who for a variety of reasons, cannot participate or access this type of 'free' play on a regular basis - the very young, those with complex physical or learning needs and a range of

children in exceptional circumstances. This has always been the case, and indoor play can and has supported these children to thrive and develop too” (Online forum contributor)

3.3.3. Children are missing out on some opportunities, for example, for messy play, because parents do not have time to tidy up afterwards, or do not want children’s branded clothing to be ruined or get dirty. (The Persil advert in which children get muddy playing helped to raise awareness of this.)

3.4 Play in schools

3.4.1. The issue of impoverished school playgrounds was raised. “It is a concern that education authorities are not drawing on the skills that exist within the landscape/grounds/play services of the local authorities. There is a perceived notion that education departments don’t want “outsiders” giving input. The problems of poor design, specification, installation and maintenance are obvious when I visit schools. Those areas where the local maintenance team are involved, or public access is allowed at all times, or the experience of landscape departments is used show improved provision, use and quality.” (Online forum)

3.4.2. Participants felt that some schools do not value play or recognise the ways in which play supports the goals of education. “I think one of the things I find hard is when I’m going through the corridor and children are kept in at break time and it’s because they haven’t worked in class. And it’s so unfair because they really should be out playing and they would work so much better if they were to get exercise. And it’s just... to use play as a punishment is really wrong. It happens a lot, though.” (Inverness focus group)

3.4.3. The issue of a lack of time to play due to pressures of the curriculum was raised. “There’s also a gap from nursery going into primary one, as well, because, you know, nursery’s very good at play, most nurseries are, and in primary one there isn’t opportunity to play as much. And I think that needs to be valued more.” (Inverness focus group)

Participants discussed that there are opportunities through the Curriculum for Excellence to bring more play into schools and that this opportunity should be maximised.

3.4.4. Links between schools and the community should be fostered and school grounds should be available for use out of school hours as these spaces are a wasted resource.

3.5 Physical literacy

3.5.1. Children whose movement is restricted experience knock on effects on their learning and development. Play opportunities provide the means by which children can develop physically.

“Within my current professional work I often see children of all ages lacking the balance, motor, visual and auditory skills that allow them to access play. This concerns me because if we do not provide the fundamentals of motor control we are not providing our children with the prerequisite tools that allow better access to the world of play and indeed learning and development. There is a significant body of literature and research stressing the importance that motor control has on

learning and development within the physical, social, emotional and educational contexts. There are many movement programmes that are accessible to schools. The implementation of such programmes requires careful thought and consideration but with the heightened concerns on the lack of physical activity in all of our schools in Scotland and indeed the UK is it not time that we address the movement poverty that prevents our children from being active!" (Online forum contributor)

3.5.2. Research evidence contributed by Professor Roger Mackett³ shows that to increase their energy expenditure children need to spend less of their free time in their homes. His research found that the best free-time exercise is walking and playing informal ball games (i.e. playing with friends rather than in clubs and classes) and that children get more exercise from outdoor play than they do from clubs and formal sports activities. Children who walked to their leisure activities and schools were more energetic when they got there.

3.6 Risk aversion

3.6.1. Risk averse attitudes can impact on the development of physical literacy and risk literacy. The role of risk in play is widely understood by the play sector but the general society trend has been towards a zero-tolerance approach to risk.

3.6.2. Tim Gill and Arthur Battram both reported on risk aversion and the impact of this societal attitude on play. Arthur advised that children are 'at risk from being safe' - only six out of a hundred thousand children die of accidents or injuries in a year but only one child in ten walks to school. The very characteristics of play (freely chosen, intrinsically motivated, actively engaging) mean that play unavoidably involves risk.

Speaking at the Highland Yak, Tim Gill shared news stories from within the UK.

- In February 2007 a primary school in Lincolnshire banned pupils from playing kiss chase and tag, because of staff concerns that playtimes were becoming too rough. In County Cork in Ireland, half of all primary schools have banned running in the playground altogether.
- In 2007 a junior league football referee in Ashford, Kent, banned parents from taking photographs of their children during matches, claiming that his actions were required by child protection procedures.
- In April 2007, two teenage girls in North Wales were given fixed penalty notices by police officers for drawing chalk hearts and rainbows on the pavement
- In Halesowen in 2007, police arrested and DNA tested three 12-year-olds for the 'crime' of climbing a cherry tree on public land. None of the children had ever been in trouble with the police before. West Midlands police explained that 'by targeting what may seem relatively low-level crime we aim to prevent it developing into more serious matters.'

3.6.3. Tim expressed concern that we are taking a zero risk approach to childhood "Our growing anxiety about harm to children, and harm by children, is taking us 180 degrees away from the kind of childhood that best nurtures children and that best serves the interests of the rest of us."

³ Mackett, Prof R (2004) 'Making children's lives more active.' Centre for Transport Studies, UCL

3.6.4. The change in attitudes impacts on children's opportunities to play out. Tim quoted figures showing that in 1971 the average seven-year-old was making trips to their friends or the shops on their own. By 1990 children were generally not allowed to do so until the age of ten. Over a single generation, children had lost up to three years of freedom of mobility. A survey by the Children's Society in 2007 found that nearly half of adults think that children should not be allowed to go out with their friends unsupervised until they are 14 years old.

3.6.5. Instead of a 'philosophy of protection', as a society we should move to a 'philosophy of resilience'.

3.6.6. This concern was shared by participants across the Play Commission events, who recognised that parents have a range of concerns for their children, including 'stranger danger', partly as a result of media coverage of rare and tragic cases. Parents and guardians need support and information about 'real risk', rather than perceived risk, to develop a balanced perspective.

"There are issues around wider society's perspective and this isn't just about parents, it is also about the constraints that are put on parents by other people's expectations, you let your children go out and play on their own, you know - horror - and it's that fear that parents have, they know they should let their children out to play but what if something happened, could I live with that, could I live with what people would say about me." (Glasgow focus group)

3.6.7. Participants suggested that social marketing approaches would help and also use of service such as play rangers, to encourage children out into public space and provide reassurance to parents.

3.6.8. 38% of Play Scotland survey respondents identified parents' attitudes towards risk as the main barrier to children playing outside.

3.7 Attitude towards, and understanding of, play

3.7.1. Play is often seen as anti-social. Tim Gill highlighted this with his presentation of news stories that show a criminalisation of behaviours that were once regarded as a normal part of childhood.

3.7.2. There are also issues around conflicting views of how public space should be used. "It's about use of space. Older people, as was suggested, don't always welcome young people in their space or adjacent to their space. And yet, there is a demand from young families for it, so there's a big tension there between people about how space is used." (Dundee focus group)

3.7.3. Discussions focused on the general undervaluing of play in society and a lack of recognition of its important role in child development. More subtlety in our understanding of the benefits of different types of play experiences is required. For example, the different benefits derived from playing in the woods compared to playing at the soft play centre. Again, the idea of a social marketing campaign was raised and that signs that prohibit play, such as 'no ball games' signs should be removed.

3.7.4. Positive action should be taken to promote positive attitudes to children playing out.

3.7.5. 67% of survey respondents thought that the attitude of other adults in the community towards children's play was a contributing factor to children not playing outdoors

3.8 Workforce development

3.8.1. The issue was raised in the workshops and in the focus groups that pay and conditions are poor, yet playworkers are required to obtain more and more qualifications. There is expertise in play in the sector but because the pay is poor and staff don't feel valued, they are leaving the sector and experience is lost. Participants identified a need for appropriate training to 'energise' staff, greater recognition of the play workforce and support to play organisations.

"We have staff that are post 60yrs and doing a great job as role models for children in out of school care. They attend training sessions to ensure they understand child protection, first aid, working with children from various backgrounds and how to offer varying types of play activities. Many feel that to undertake a qualification at this time in their life is not for them. This is not due to the fact that they have not been offered training nor a lack of ability of senior staff to put forward benefits primarily to meet the government's objectives. Yet we are told that all these staff can do when registration becomes mandatory is volunteer." (Online forum)

3.8.2. One of the workshop discussion groups particularly highlighted the role of cross-training and said that there should be more quality training in play for everyone, especially teachers and youth workers. Also, there should be more joined up working between play and youth work. Another discussion group highlighted the need for architects or designers to do CPD in play and landscapes, interdepartmental learning should be encouraged and structures should be developed that allow sharing. Ring-fenced funding for training is required.

3.8.3. There is a Playwork Education and Training Strategy for Scotland, developed with SkillsActive and PETC Scotland (Playwork Education and Training Council) which must be fully implemented.

3.9 Policy and strategy

3.9.1. Concern was raised about the current focus on 0-8 yrs and that the Government must consider the play needs of all children and young people, 0-18yrs. The lack of ring-fenced funding was also a concern.

"If the Play Strategy isn't there then it doesn't even get into the pot when you're making the decisions about limited resources. Unless it becomes health and safety then it goes into a different area so it's very, very difficult operationally to commit to the resources that you need to maintain, just to maintain, the current stock of play equipment. And often if it isn't a high priority it's removed because there isn't the money to replace it or it's not seen as a priority to be replaced. It's a challenge." (Dundee focus group)

3.9.2. In relation to policy, participants made the point that greater status should be given to the child's right to play (Article 31) and that the benefits of play need to be acknowledged and

recognised by all, at all levels.

3.9.3. Participants said there was a lack of vision for, and valuing of play and that there was a need

- for firm Government commitment and local authority commitment
- to promote the wider benefits to society
- for better integrated working

3.9.4. Participants throughout the Play Commission strongly identified the need for a National Play Strategy for Scotland. There should be Government targets/minimum standards and minimum actions for levels of play opportunity available. These could be built into the Single Outcome Agreements for local authorities and coordinated by Community Planning Partnerships.

3.9.5. Issues around regulation were raised and people felt there are conflicting messages from different public bodies. There is a need to ensure that risk assessment procedures are straightforward and proportionate and to reduce the bureaucracy involved in working with children.

3.9.6. There were concerns raised about the findings in the SCCYP report on why adults don't volunteer to work with children and young people. The research found four main barriers.

- The fear of accusations of harming children and young people;
- The reluctance of men to have contact, help or work with children and young people for fear of suspicion of their own motives;
- The fear of teenagers; and
- The perceived power of children and young people.

3.10 Equality and the poverty of play

3.10.1. Dr John McKendrick, speaking at the 'Kick Start', highlighted the inequalities in play opportunities for all children and young people. He reported that according to Government UK Child Poverty figures, 150,000 children in Scotland, that is almost 1 in 6, do not have access to a safe outdoor space for play. This disproportionately affects children from more impoverished backgrounds and the most vulnerable in Scotland.

3.10.2. Disabled children from benefit dependant families have particularly restricted play opportunities. (Barnardos, 2001)

3.10.3. Looked after children also suffer from a disproportionate restriction in their play opportunities.⁴

3.10.4. Homeless children and the children of asylum seekers held at Dungavel also experience extreme privation including play deprivation.

4 McGuinness, L., Stevens, I. and Milligan, I. (2007) 'Playing it safe: A study of the regulation of outdoor play for children and young people in residential care.' SCCYP/SIRCC

3.10.5. There are also financial barriers to accessing provision such as leisure centres, which must be overcome to ensure all children have access to a range of opportunities.

3.10.6. Ensuring play opportunities are available in isolated rural communities can be a challenge and the role of mobile community services in addressing this need, and the needs of under-resourced urban areas, was highlighted.

3.11 Health and play

3.11.1. There is wide concern about the captive childhoods that children and young people now experience. This is leading directly to significant delays in child development milestones such as language, pedestrian skills and conceptual development (knowledge/understanding of the world) probably due to the loss of opportunities for 'real play' (London University 2008).

3.11.2. Research cited in the 'Play Naturally' literature review supported the value of natural space for restoration and wellbeing. There is good scientific evidence that contact with nature can improve mental health and help in the restoration of physiological wellbeing.⁵

3.11.3. There was wide ranging discussion about the value of play therapy. Matthew Harvey⁶ this year queried if children diagnosed with ADHD were simply suffering from play starvation. This disturbing possibility emerged from studies carried out in America over the past 10 years. Scientists there have come to the conclusion that natural, unstructured play is vital to the development of young minds. Rats who were allowed to play abundantly showed considerably greater development in the cortex of the brain, where the majority of higher mental functions originate. As ADHD can be described as the relative failure of the higher brain to control impulsive urges coming from the lower brain, then play, by stimulating higher brain development, may reduce the impact of a genetic tendency to ADHD.

3.11.4. Play Scotland is concerned about the administration of liquid peppermint flavoured Prozac for babies with 'behavioural problems' who may simply need more playful interactions with key adults.

3.11.5. Today's children could live shorter lives than their parents due to the obesity epidemic. Researchers in Scotland found that today's three year olds are as inactive as office workers. Sue Palmer reported that compared to the 1990s, today's 10 and 11 year olds "are given a smaller and more closely specified area in which they can play freely, are monitored much more closely by their parents and have their free play curtailed at the first hint of danger."

3.11.6. "Letting children out to play is one of the best things that parents can do for their health." (Prof R Mackett).

⁵ Lester, S. and Maudsley, M. (2006). 'Play Naturally. A review of children's natural play.' Commissioned by the Children's Play Council for Playday (www.playday.org.uk)

⁶ Playing with their minds by Matthew Harvey in the Times Education Supplement. 01.02.08

3.12 Making it happen

3.12.1. Many of the issues reported on are interrelated and interdependent. For example, the lack of quality spaces for play also relates to societal attitudes, to community development, to planning, to equality, to policy and strategy and to workforce development. There is a need to take a multi-layered and multi-disciplinary approach to addressing the current 'state of play' in Scotland.

"It's taking, okay, societal attitudes, what influences those? How could we influence them? Societal attitudes link onto the community. How do we link? So I think this has to get bigger before it can hone down to what needs to happen, which is scary because it just blows it completely out." (Glasgow focus group)

"You can also then map who else should be involved in this area? And then you can maybe decide, well who needs to lead this, but who needs to be involved? That does take it much, much wider but I think that for a moment in time, where we're really going to change things, we have to accept there are no simple linear relations and no one solution's going to fix all of it." (Glasgow focus group)

"It's at different levels isn't it? Within the city, we look at things like community planning partnership where, I don't know where play sits at the moment, probably under life long learning or something I would imagine. And that's the sort of mechanism we would use for bringing the partners together. Taking it down to community level, each area has got a local community plan... So, it varies across the level, from city wide strategies down to local issues." (Dundee focus group)

"I think a critical part... is about how you share practice between sectors. Some of the things we've talked about are how you would influence traffic engineers or developers, and what frustrates me, quite often, is that we spend a lot of time talking to the converted and we don't actually then break out beyond our professional peer groups." (Glasgow focus group)

3.12.2. During the focus groups participants carried out a stakeholder analysis, to explore who has a stake in the child's right to play. Most of the groups concluded that everyone has a stake in the child's right to play and emphasised that there is a need to bring these groups of stakeholders together.



4. RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 High level recommendations

4.1.1. For all children and young people in Scotland to have equal access to diverse and quality play opportunities that meet their individual needs, the Scottish Play Commission recommends to the Scottish Government that they:

- 1. Develop a National Play Strategy, 0-18 years, in consultation with children and young people, which will inform local play strategies and address the themes identified in this report**
- 2. Create a national Play indicator, with minimum actions and standards, national monitoring and resources to support its implementation across all local authorities**
- 3. Promote the critical role of Play in child development and raise public awareness of the value of Play**
- 4. Build the capacity of communities to support a wide range of Play opportunities and monitor the benefits**
- 5. Support the Playwork Profession to develop as a valued Workforce**

4.2 Areas to consider

4.2.1. A Right's Based Approach

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child should inform the approach to all the areas outlined below in particular Articles 31, 12 and 23, e.g. including the development of a wide range of play opportunities appropriate to ages and stages of development, the meaningful involvement of children in planning, developing and evaluating play and the inclusion of every child.

4.2.2. A National Play Indicator

Identifying specific measures to record and monitor play opportunities in terms of accessibility, inclusion, affordability, quality and children and parents' satisfaction with provision.

4.2.3. Planning for Play

Community Planning Partnerships have a central role to play. Play can take place in both dedicated play provision and in any public space. A strategic planning approach would take both into consideration to ensure that all children have access to a wide range of places to play on their doorstep, in the local neighbourhood and further afield. The consideration of play in planning guidelines should be mandatory (PAN 65 and SPP11).

Initiatives could include

Home Zones ☺ Traffic Calming ☺ Play Rangers ☺ Mobile community play services ☺ New housing developments should be required to provide loosely supervised or 'overlooked' provision ☺ Removal of 'no ball games' signs ☺ Supporting community ownership of space suitable for play ☺ Guidance on play and community space should be available to ensure spaces meet children's play needs (e.g. nature, flexibility, 'loose parts')

4.2.4. A Philosophy of Resilience

In the development of any opportunity to play, staffed or unstaffed, the important role of risk in play must be considered. Opportunities need to be created for children to stretch themselves physically, socially and emotionally. This allows for the development of physical literacy, resilience and children to reach their full potential. A philosophy of resilience must be embedded in planning and in workforce development.

Children's independent mobility should be promoted, for example, by improving road safety. Action must be taken to promote positive messages on children's right to use public space for play. The benefits of challenges in play and unsupervised play should be promoted to parents and regulators. Parents should be supported to assess the real likelihood of children coming to harm, and the benefits of incremental challenges. Local authorities should be supported to be resilient in the face of a blame culture.

4.2.5. Health and Play

The important role of play in nourishing the physical and mental health and wellbeing of children and young people must better inform health services, professionals and government policy. This should include recognition of the important role of outdoor play and the restorative benefits of contact with nature. There is concern at the degree of medicalisation and the labelling of children's behaviour.

4.2.6. Workforce Development

Scotland's Playwork, Education and Training Strategy published by Skillsactive should be fully implemented. The recognition and development of playwork as a professional field should be supported through working to improve pay and conditions, career progression pathways and by promoting playwork as a career to young people and to career guidance professionals.

Training on free play (including environments and adult approaches that support free play) should be incorporated throughout the children's workforce (including playworkers, regulators, teachers, nursery staff, active schools coordinators, childminders, youth worker and health professionals). 'Cross professional' training should be arranged encompassing those professionals and also for those who plan, design and manage public spaces (including architects, designers, planners and transport professionals in local authorities). Volunteering should be supported. Regulation should be streamlined and an investigation undertaken to ensure that existing regulation does not put unnecessary burdens on groups wishing to develop play and recruit volunteers.

4.2.7. Play in Schools

Schools should be encouraged to place more emphasis on free play and creativity, linked to the Curriculum for Excellence, and 'playful' resources to support this produced. The benefits of play must be promoted and playtime should not be withdrawn as a punishment. Actions should be taken to support schools to develop their playgrounds to provide more stimulating spaces for play and learning.

The development of outdoor, nature nurseries should be supported and promoted and contact with nature through play incorporated into schools (or vice versa e.g. support the development of forest schools). More school grounds should be available for play out of school hours (evenings, weekends and holidays) as these can play a strategic role in building a range of play opportunities in the community.

4.2.8. Involving Everyone

“It takes a whole village to raise a child” (African proverb). Play is everyone’s responsibility. Funders must be supported to understand play as a unique entitlement and to create funding streams flexible enough to cater for ‘play for play’s sake’. Scottish society must be supported to develop positive attitudes to children and young people and to understand the value of play, for example, through a social marketing approach with media guidelines. Providing and promoting a strategic approach to play can be achieved successfully if everyone plays their part. It is essential that the Government creates the vision and a wide range of stakeholders play their part to make the child’s right to play a reality in Scotland.





We would endeavour to provide alternative formats and community language versions of this document on request.

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