

Play for Wales

Issue 49 Autumn 2017

Play news and briefing
from the national
charity for play



Play: a healthy childhood



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Thank you

A heartfelt thank you to everyone who contributed to this magazine – we couldn't do it without you.

This issue of *Play for Wales*, as well as previous issues, is available to download at www.playwales.org.uk

Editorial

From an evolutionary perspective play has served us well in its contribution to children's health and wellbeing and for that matter the survival of our species. So, it should not come as a surprise that it also has a significant contribution to make to the current health agenda. Play is what children do in their own time – doing what they want, how they want, and with whom they want. They don't think about it – it's what they need to do and thankfully it is being increasingly recognised in policy as essential to healthy childhoods.

The recognition of the key role of children's play in Public Health Wales' *Every Child Wales* programme, concerning children under the age of five is welcome. However, despite this explicit statement of how playing contributes to physical and mental health, it continues to be overlooked by mainstream health policy elsewhere.

Society's concern about children's health is reflected in two inquiries undertaken by National

Assembly for Wales Committees during the summer of 2017. The Health, Social Care and Sport Committee is considering children and young people's physical activity and the Children, Young People and Education Committee is considering the emotional and mental health of children and young people.

Play Wales' responses to both inquiries, whilst sharing evidence and good practice regarding the role that play has in physical and mental wellbeing, reiterate the child's right to play as outlined in Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). As well as identifying the role playing has in increasing physical activity levels and its contribution to children's mental health, we continue to advocate for a rights based approach to policy making regarding play.

The evidence of the health benefits of play and its contribution to the physical and mental wellbeing of children is overwhelming. For many years, as a society we have unwittingly and progressively constrained opportunities for

children to play, whether it's limiting playtime at school or giving priority to drivers rather than pedestrians. Children have lost space, time and permission for playing. Enabling children to do what comes naturally – to play – must be a public health priority. Not just as a component of interventionist programmes but as an underpinning principle of public health.

Much social and health policy views childhood as a preparation for adulthood, conveniently defined by developmental milestones and outcomes. This is not good enough.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child's assertion articulated in General Comment 17, that play is a fundamental and vital dimension of the pleasure of childhood is reflected by the value children place on their play. Policy and programmes aimed at children and communities must consider children's perspectives of their wellbeing for the here and now, as well as preparation for adulthood.

Mike Greenaway,
Director, Play Wales



News

Welcome

Welcome to our new Communications Assistant, Lowri Roberts.

Lowri is supporting the work of the Information Service, which includes sharing news on our website and social media accounts, distributing regular email updates and responding to enquiries. Prior to joining our team Lowri worked for the youth organisation, Urdd Gobaith Cymru.

We would also like to welcome new members to our Board of Trustees.

David Egan is Emeritus Professor of Education at the Cardiff Metropolitan University's School of Education. His research expertise focuses on Welsh education policy.

Prior to retirement Professor Elspeth Webb was a Professor of Paediatrics and Child Health at Cardiff University. She holds an Honorary Chair at Cardiff University's School of Social Sciences.

Helen Hughes is a Charity Coordinator for Dowlais Community Centre. She has recently undertaken our Managing a Holiday Play Scheme (MAHPS) qualification.

Catherine Davies is representing the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) as an observer organisation. Catherine is Children's Policy Officer at the WLGA.



Finally, a farewell from the Board and thank you to Brenda Davies and Ben Tawil. Brenda was a founder trustee of Play Wales and Ben previously a member of staff. Their role as critical friends to Play Wales has been much valued.

More information about our team and Board: www.playwales.org.uk/eng/about

Play for children in crisis - a toolkit



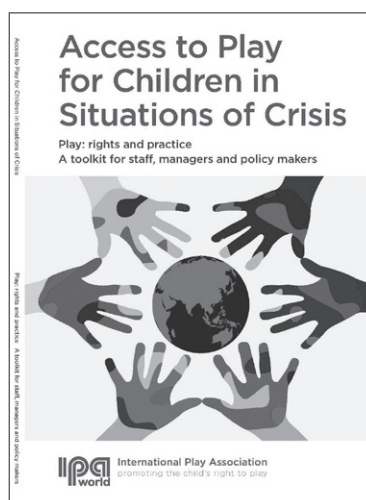
The International Play Association (IPA) has published a new toolkit – *Access to Play for Children in Situations of Crisis* – which has been written by Play Wales' Marianne Mannello and Martin King-Sheard.

The toolkit has been produced to support people and agencies working in crisis situations so that they are better able to understand and support children's everyday play. It provides clear and concise information to individuals and organisations, and practical, step-by-step tools and templates.

The toolkit is part of the IPA's Access to Play in Crisis 2015-2017 project, which also includes an international research project.

Project teams have spent time with children and families in six diverse locations (Thailand, Nepal, India, Turkey, Lebanon and Japan), working to understand how children exercise their right to play when faced with various forms of crisis.

The findings challenge many preconceptions surrounding play, such as where there is or isn't



opportunity to play ('sneaking' the chance to play appears to be a universal coping mechanism), and what makes a 'good' environment for play.

The findings have identified two significant and stubborn challenges:

- 1) The varying levels of understanding of the importance of play in children's lives and very different interpretations of what we mean by play (IPA uses the UN Committee on the Right of the Child definition)
- 2) The prevailing trend to accept the greater importance of adult-organised recreational and educational activities.

For more information visit: <http://ipaworld.org/what-we-do/access-to-play-in-crisis/>

Introducing L2APP to the world

In the last issue we reported on a successful pilot of the new Level 2 Award in Playwork Practice (L2APP) qualification. Since then we have worked with Addysg Oedolion Cymru | Adult Learning Wales and partners across Wales to deliver a further seven courses covering north, south and mid Wales with positive feedback from learners.

Further afield...

Our Workforce Development Officer, Martin King-Sheard and our Assistant Director, Marianne Mannello attended the International Play Association (IPA) world conference in Calgary, Canada to deliver a presentation on the development of L2APP as well as a sold out pre-conference workshop for 35 delegates from Canada, North America, Australia, Hong Kong and New Zealand.

The delegates who attended represented a range of settings and it was clear that there is significant international interest in the playwork approach. During the full day pre-conference workshop, delegates sampled a shortened

version of the L2APP course content, which is usually delivered over three days. We explored the Playwork Principles, discussed the Play Wales film *Pushing Eddie in the Nettles with Connor* and addressed concerns around safety by sharing the risk-benefit approach to risk management.

The workshop was well received and there was positive discussion about how the approach may be embedded into settings where registration and inspection requirements may not fully support a playwork approach. Practitioners from the Calgary area were pleased to be able to network and build on a growing interest in playwork within Canada.

'Awesome playwork practice workshop – amazing kick-off to IPA Calgary with our friends from Play Wales.'

More information about L2APP: www.playwales.org.uk/eng/l2app

Whilst at the IPA conference, Martin and Marianne also delivered a workshop on the *Access to Play for Children in Situations of Crisis* toolkit that they wrote with IPA, delivered a research paper on play in schools and contributed to a workshop on dynamic risk-benefit assessment with Tim Gill and Ellen Sandseter, among others.

Playwork qualifications 2017-2018

Play Wales works with Addysg Oedolion Cymru | Adult Learning Wales to deliver a range of playwork qualifications, including the new Level 2 Award in Playwork Practice (L2APP) and the Level 3 Award in Managing a Holiday Play Scheme (MAHPS).

Following a successful year of delivering high quality qualifications, Addysg Oedolion Cymru | Adult Learning Wales has been allocated funding to provide the following courses:

- Introduction to Playwork (Level 1) – four courses
- L2APP – eight courses
- MAHPS – four courses.

The courses will be fully funded and delivered across Wales, to meet demand from the sector, from October 2017 to the end of July 2018. An additional three courses are available depending on the needs of school staff, learning support assistants, childcare staff and youth workers.

The courses will be planned for the next year to ensure staff, volunteers and communities are given plenty of notice and organisers have enough time to publicise locally.



To register your interest in delivering or undertaking a course in your area please complete the online application form: <http://bit.ly/PlayworkApplicationForm>

For more information contact ALW's Curriculum Delivery Officer, Jane Hawkshaw: jane.hawkshaw@adultlearning.wales

Mud and Sparks

for South Wales Fire and Rescue Service

We have facilitated a successful two day workshop with the South Wales Fire and Rescue Service who approached us to deliver Mud and Sparks training to their staff who work directly with young people involved in fire crime.

The aims of the workshop were to understand a playwork approach to playing with the elements (earth, air, fire and water) and how we use risk-benefit assessment as part of the process. Twelve participants took part in the practical Mud and Sparks workshop which was originally developed to support playworkers to facilitate elemental play. We also explored how a playwork approach could be adapted to South Wales Fire and Rescue Service's early intervention scheme when working with a range of primary age children in schools, clubs or targeted holiday activities.

Participants discussed how to build in educational elements around fire safety while giving children the opportunity for self-directed play and exploration with all of the elements. This was in recognition that giving children positive experiences of engaging with fire would support their understanding of fire safety whilst also building positive relationships with staff from the fire service.

Whilst there were challenging discussions around some of the deliberate fire setting in the area, where young people have been known to use social media to compete about who can set the biggest fire and get it reported, there was a recognition that the factors that contribute to this behaviour are varied and are not directly caused by children's experience, or lack of, playing with fire in other contexts.

As a result of the workshop, South Wales Fire and Rescue Service is now developing an interactive session to engage primary school aged children in playing with the elements with the objectives of:

- Supporting children to understand fire, using playwork intervention, through direct experience of playing with the elements
- Building positive relationships between children and the fire service
- Influencing the attitudes of adults in relation to children experiencing fire.

Laura Thomas, South Wales Fire Service's Fire-setting Intervention Scheme Manager said:

'Staff attending the training had an energetic, fun and thought provoking two-day workshop. We all remembered what it was like to be a child and just play and how kids these days don't seem to play like we used to. We also learned about the importance of letting children play and how children can learn (often more effectively) through play and through being outdoors (not in a classroom!). South Wales Fire and Rescue Service will be taking this training forward and will be working with school children and youth groups across the service area giving them interactive, fun ways of learning about fire and the other elements in the outdoors.'

Gwasanaeth Tân ac Achub
De Cymru



South Wales
Fire and Rescue Service

Play Wales really welcomes this enlightened approach to thinking about children and fire and will be continuing to work with South Wales Fire and Rescue Service to evaluate the experience of children and adults involved in sessions to pilot this approach.

More information about our Mud and Sparks workshop: www.playwales.org.uk/eng/mudandsparksworkshop

For further examples of current Play Wales projects go to pages 14-15

Social media



www.facebook.com/PlayWales



twitter.com/PlayWales

Keeping children safe means letting them take risks

Dr. Mariana Brussoni shares her expertise about the importance of allowing children to take risks as part of their play for their health and wellbeing as well as to develop important life lessons. She is calling for risk management in children's play to be based on evidence and a child-centred approach – not fear and worry.

'Be careful!' 'Not so far!' 'Get down!' Most parents can relate to having shouted these words. Children typically react with disappointment that their fun was cut short, or worry that they are less capable than they thought, or confusion as to what their parent is warning them about.

This risk-averse approach is part of a societal trend that views children's risk taking as unmistakably negative. Not long ago the sound of children playing outside was a regular fixture on most residential streets. Now, children on the streets are an endangered species. Overprotection has become the norm and risk is considered equivalent to danger.

After spending several years reviewing child injury statistics and researching injury prevention, it's clear to me that we are putting excessive limitations on children's

play despite the fact serious injuries are rare.

Children need the freedom to play how they choose, including taking risks and engaging in risky play. My own and others' research points to the importance of risk taking opportunities in play for children's health and development, including promoting self-confidence, social development, physical activity and resilience. Risky play helps children learn about the world and how it works, learn about themselves and what their limits are, and learn how to keep themselves safe. When we try to limit children's risky play, we rob them of these fundamental opportunities, which ironically, could result in them being less safe. Children learn risk management skills through exploring risk in play that they can then apply to other situations. If an adult is doing all the risk management for them,



children will not learn how to do this for themselves.

Over the years, our efforts to curb risks have resulted in children's play spaces that are increasingly uniform, standardised and boring. Access to nature and natural materials has been reduced, while fixed plastic and metal play equipment that meet safety standards but have limited play value have become ever present. Safety standards apply an engineering approach that is more suited to factories and complex engineering problems than to children's play. Standards are voluntary, yet have been widely and unquestionably applied to limit liability. This is despite research on

Recent research showed that children would have to play outside for three hours per day for approximately 10 years before they were likely to have one medically-treated (and likely minor) injury. Many injury prevention initiatives are driven by fear and worry, rather than research evidence and child-centred decision-making.



the safety benefits of the standards being mixed. Serious injuries are so rare that studies that have examined injury rates before and after change in standards have not shown significant changes. In contrast, other research suggests that when equipment becomes too boring, children use it in unsafe ways to maintain challenge.

The widespread adoption of safety standards and the fear of liability has helped discourage use of nature and natural play materials in children's play spaces, even though they provide rich and varied play opportunities and are ideal venues for children's risky play. Research also shows that exposure to nature comes with a multitude of health benefits to children and their parents and carers, including improving mental health and promoting physical activity and other measures of wellbeing.

Encouragingly, concerns over current conditions has been

receiving increasing media attention and has led to efforts to redress the imbalance. For example, Canada's *Position Statement on Active Outdoor Play*, launched by a consortium of organisations and academics, includes a summary of the supporting research and recommendations for action from relevant sectors, and has already proven influential in shifting policies. It advocates a new approach to injury prevention that seeks to keep children as safe as necessary, rather than as safe as possible.

As an example of this approach, the risk-benefit assessment process developed by the UK Play Safety Forum allows for a more balanced and child-centred consideration of the play space or activity. The risk-benefit assessment process could replace or supplement equipment standards and would facilitate inclusion of nature and natural materials in children's play spaces.

A major barrier to children's play is parents and carers' fears and worries. To help parents and carers gain the confidence and skills to let children out to play, my lab (Brussoni Lab) has created the online tool *OutsidePlay.ca*. It takes users through a series of tasks designed to help them reflect on

their attitudes and fears and apply the ideas to develop a personalised plan for making changes to their approach. We sought to create an easy-to-use tool that could be widely shared to help parents and communities start the necessary conversations for change.

We are experiencing an unprecedented reduction in children's outdoor play and opportunities to take risks as part of their play that is already impacting children's health and development.

It is up to all of us to help provide children with the opportunity to develop those life lessons and skills that are so important in shaping their future – helping them develop a view of the world as a place of possibility, rather than of danger.

Mariana is an Associate Professor at the University of British Columbia, Canada and investigator with British Columbia Children's Hospital Research Institute and the British Columbia Injury Research & Prevention Unit. She investigates child injury prevention, including developmental importance of children's risky play.

Helpful resources

Position Statement on Active Outdoor Play
<http://bit.ly/activeoutdoorplay>

What is the Relationship between Risky Outdoor Play and Health in Children? A Systematic Review
<http://bit.ly/RiskyOutdoorPlayResearch>

OutsidePlay.ca – an online tool to help parents gain the confidence to allow their children to play outside
<https://outsideplay.ca>

Managing Risk in Play Provision: Implementation guide
<https://playsafetyforum.wordpress.com/resources>

Nature and Why It's Essential For Kids' Brains: Information for Parents and Caregivers
<http://bit.ly/NatureMentalHealth>

Taking risks in the early years

Professor Ellen Sandseter's research focuses on children's physical play, outdoor play and risk in early years settings in Norway. We interviewed her about her research into young children encountering risk and challenge as part of their play.

Your PhD research focused on play and early years, in particular risk and challenge. What did you observe?

I observed children's play in indoor and outdoor environments but soon discovered that risky play was the kind of play I was interested in, most often done outdoors. I tried to find out what risky play is and how to categorise it: children climbing to great heights, play with high speed, using knives and saws and axes, rough and tumble play where they were play fighting and wrestling, and play near dangerous elements that could impose a risk for children. Also, play where they can explore on their own where there were no fences.

I observed children both in nature and outdoor pre-schools and ordinary pre-schools. The amount of risky play situations wasn't higher in nature and outdoor pre-schools, but the quality and the level of risk and challenge that they could find in their play was much higher. They had unpredictable environments with trees to climb instead of bars on a climbing tower so it was more unpredictable and they could climb higher.

Did you think there were differences in the way staff interacted with the children in the nature and outdoor pre-schools and the non-specific pre-schools?

In all the pre-schools the staff were distant. I thought the staff in the ordinary pre-schools would be more afraid of risks and tell the children what to do and not to do. But that wasn't the case. They were relaxed and kept a distance. I didn't find any big differences between the two different types of pre-school.

It was more about gender and personality – it depends who's working there. Male pre-school

teachers or practitioners are often much more liberal to risk and surveys with them indicate that is because they are more risk seeking themselves.

What do you think motivates young children to seek out challenge?

What motivates them is very physical. It's difficult for children to explain why they do things so when I talked to them it was about the feelings they got. Almost all of them said, *'It's just so exciting it tickles in my tummy that I almost have to puke'*. One of the boys said, *'My heart goes like this: boing, boing, boing,*



being'. It's their way of expressing a very physical sensation. The younger children tried to tell me where they felt it and showed me how they physically felt.

What they are explaining is an adrenalin kick – it's the same as adults feel when they are doing something risky. Some people jump with a parachute to get this feeling, for children it's not about that, they will get this feeling just by balancing on a fallen branch for instance. It's about doing and mastering something that you didn't think you'd dare to do.

Did you observe children manage the challenges for themselves?

They would back down, say enough is enough and withdraw. Compared to sport where there's competition, in play, the other children accepted that withdrawal. It wasn't something others commented on or bullied about. One said, *'I can climb to the fourth branch but my friend can climb to the sixth because he's been practising much more than me. He dares to do that and I'm working on it'*. The children didn't think it was unfair that they didn't do the same things, they understood that they were just different.

When children were testing if they could get to the fourth, or the fifth or the sixth branch, was there a feeling with the practitioners that the children are competent to do that themselves?

There's very little instruction from the practitioners. There's a rule in childcare that if you can't reach it yourself, you're not ready, so you wouldn't lift a child up to the first branch. When you're able to get up there yourself, you're ready. They start managing things for themselves from when they are one year old so they are quite skilled by the age of four or five. They know what level of risk they are handling and the practitioners know the children. They are observing the children in terms of what they can do – rules are based on children's individual competence rather than age. Age appropriate is not a description we use in Norway in early childhood education.

When you were in the settings you interviewed children aged three to six. Are they together most of the time or are they separated by age?

They'll all be together in the setting, with the youngest being one year olds. Usually in Norway the one to six year olds are in the same setting (then they start school). They have departments,

probably one for the one to three year olds, then a department or several departments from three to six. It varies but they always have the same outdoor area, and some shared indoor areas. In the playground they are all together at the same time.

Did you identify any barriers to children accessing challenge?

No. Of course, there will always be challenges – some parents that are extra conscious about risks – but it didn't affect the practice in pre-schools. When I interviewed the practitioners and pre-school teachers they were resistant to the safety hysteria and didn't want to be restricted by it.

In a 2013 study, when pre-school head teachers were asked about how a focus on safety has affected their practice, some said, *'We have stopped allowing our children to climbing trees'*. That was a big surprise for me because I didn't know that pre-schools existed that didn't allow children to climb trees! It was mostly because of pressure from the parents. We are moving, slowly, in the wrong direction but we are working hard to pull the brake.

Our new curriculum, which every pre-school in Norway has to follow by law, says children should have the opportunity to engage in risky play and learn how to manage risks through outdoor active play. Ninety five percent of Norwegian children attend pre-school so it's a good step to prevent us from ending up like some other countries. We are trying to stop this development before there's actually a problem.

When you talk about the curriculum, what does practitioner training look like?

Outdoor play and risky play is a big part of their training and it's not just theoretical. The students are taken out on hikes and they are up in the forest doing practical work. We invite pre-schools with all their children so that our students can practice with children in nature. It's a very important factor when pre-school teachers and practitioners are keeping a distance, they are not intruding in children's play. They are keeping an eye on them, but letting them freely play by themselves. When they start working as pre-school teachers they know they are not in structured settings, acting as instructors, rather they take the role of facilitators.

Ellen is a Professor in the Department of Physical Education and Health at Queen Maud University College of Early Childhood Education in Trondheim, Norway. She has also been involved in research on Norwegian children's experiences of participation and wellbeing.

Public Health Wales to give every child **the best possible start**

In July 2017, a new Public Health Wales programme, *Every Child Wales*, was launched to improve the health and wellbeing of children.

Every Child Wales, brings together information and advice to support parents in giving children a happy and healthy start in life. The *Every Child Wales* website will help parents from when they are planning their pregnancy to when their child is five.

Dr Julie Bishop, Director of Health Improvement for Public Health Wales said:

'Every child deserves the best possible start in life. If a child spends their early years healthy and happy, they are more likely to grow into healthy and happy adults. Many parents may not realise that their child is overweight, or they may not be aware that it's something to take seriously. When children are a healthy weight, they feel better about themselves, and they find it easier to play and learn. Starting from birth, helping children stay a healthy weight is the best approach.'

The programme was launched as new survey results* reveal that parents do not always recognise when their child is overweight. In the survey, four per cent of parents with children aged four to five described their child as being overweight for their age and height. However, the 2015/16 Child Measurement Programme results show that just over a quarter (26 per cent) of children aged four to five are overweight or obese in Wales.

A child who is overweight at five is more likely to be obese by the time they are eight, and could grow up to develop long term health problems like type 2 diabetes or asthma.

EVERY CHILD

Playing outdoors

During the first weeks of the *Every Child Wales* campaign, the importance of outdoor play was brought to the attention of parents and guardians across Wales.

Public Health Wales revealed that while almost all parents in Wales (97 per cent) think it is important for their child to play outdoors every day, nearly a third of children under-five (29 per cent) aren't getting the time outdoors that they need.

The recommendation from Public Health Wales is to give children the chance to play outdoors every day, with children under five who are able to walk having at least three hours of active play per day.





Every Child Wales recognises the importance of outdoor play as part of the 10 Steps to a Healthy Weight. Children who are active and play from a young age are more likely to be active as they get older and more likely to be a healthy weight.

The benefits of outdoor play do not stop there. Being active outside also helps children develop mentally and emotionally. Children who have regular opportunities for playing outdoors are more likely to engage well with others, learning complex social skills and conflict resolution. Playful children have been found to show greater problem-solving abilities, imagination and creativity.

Dr Julie Bishop, added:

'Playing outdoors every day is a great way to help your child grow into a fit and healthy adult and will encourage them to stay active beyond their childhood. There is increasing concern about the mental and physical health of children and young people. Research suggests that given the opportunity, children get wide-ranging exercise as well as significant mental health benefits from freely chosen play. Time outside is a wonderful way to spend quality time with your child as well as being a great stress reliever from the busy life of a parent.'

The launch of Every Child Wales is the first stage of a long term programme of work to increase the proportion of children who start school a healthy weight.

For more information visit:
www.everychildwales.co.uk

Join the conversation on Twitter and Facebook
@EveryChildWales.

* Beaufort Research undertook a survey on behalf of Public Health Wales consisting of 1,503 telephone interviews with parents and carers of children aged eight to five in Wales, between 11 April and 6 June 2017.

The Every Child Wales programme will help parents to ensure their children stay a healthy weight, starting with the 10 Steps to a Healthy Weight.

10 Steps to a Healthy Weight

10 Steps to a Healthy Weight provides advice to parents and carers on subjects such as the importance of playing outdoors, how to cut down on sugary drinks, how to make sure children get enough sleep, and how to manage the amount of screen time their children have. These are all factors that can increase the risk of a child becoming overweight or obese.

The 10 Steps to a Health Weight programme includes:

1. Aim to be a healthy weight when you start a family
2. Avoid putting on too much weight when you are pregnant
3. Breastfeed your baby if you can
4. Wait until your baby is around six months before starting solid food
5. Help your baby grow steadily
6. Play outdoors everyday
7. Try to limit screen time as much as you can
8. Give your child five portions of fruit and vegetables every day
9. Help your child get enough sleep
10. Stick to milk and water

To support the Every Child Wales programme Play Wales has produced a range of new publications – all of which are available to download on our website:

- *Helpful tips for parents support children's play*
- *Everyday adventures* – simple ideas to make play part of our daily routines
- *Play, playwork and food* – information sheet including case studies
- *Focus on play* – a briefing for public health professionals

www.playwales.org.uk/eng/everychildwales

Creating accessible play spaces

All children are morally and legally entitled to play within their own community whatever their culture, impairment, gender, language, background, behaviour or need. Children and young people need and are entitled to quality places and time for play as part of their everyday life within their own community.

Disabled children and young people face barriers from 'lack of provision, lack of support, poor access to buildings and negative attitudes which, notwithstanding legislation and policies, prevent them from participating like non-disabled children and young people'¹.

Following a growing number of queries from parents, politicians and providers, Play Wales, working with Alison John Associates, is developing a toolkit to support local authorities, town and community councils, politicians at all levels, open space planners, housing associations and other playground managers. The toolkit will assist them in meeting the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 in terms of developing and upgrading accessible play spaces. It will also be useful for playground manufacturers, parents and community members to understand the opportunities and challenges.

This toolkit is designed to provide clear and concise information that helps to create play spaces that enable all children to play in, along with friends and family.



It contains information intended to help understand and address issues of concern and it provides practical, step-by-step tools and templates for undertaking work linked to removing barriers to access play spaces faced by disabled children and their families.

A small focus group of parents, local authority play area managers, play development officers and representatives of children's organisations attended a meeting facilitated by Play Wales and Alison John Associates and their views have informed the content of the toolkit.

The current basis to removing barriers mainly focuses on the physical environment. This toolkit aims to focus on the sensory and social environments associated with playing. Considering physical, social and sensory factors increases the quality of play spaces for all children, offering a rich play environment for all. The toolkit aims to support responsible partners to

take reasonable and anticipatory steps to ensure that children with impairments can make good use of playgrounds and play spaces.

Removing barriers to quality play spaces:

- Ensures that they are accessible to the greatest number of children and their carers
- Supports children of all ages and abilities to play together
- Enhances the local sense of community and supports community engagement and wellbeing
- Enables children to benefit from all the positives of playing – contributing to their overall sense of health and happiness.

The Creating accessible play spaces toolkit will be available on our website soon.

¹ Winckler, V. (2011) *Fair play for disabled children and young people in Wales*. Ebbw Vale: The Bevan Foundation

'An easy to follow guide to get started with loose parts play'

We asked Helen Borley, Headteacher at Mount Stuart Primary School in Cardiff to review our new *Resources for playing – providing loose parts to support children's play* toolkit. Here's what she had to say.

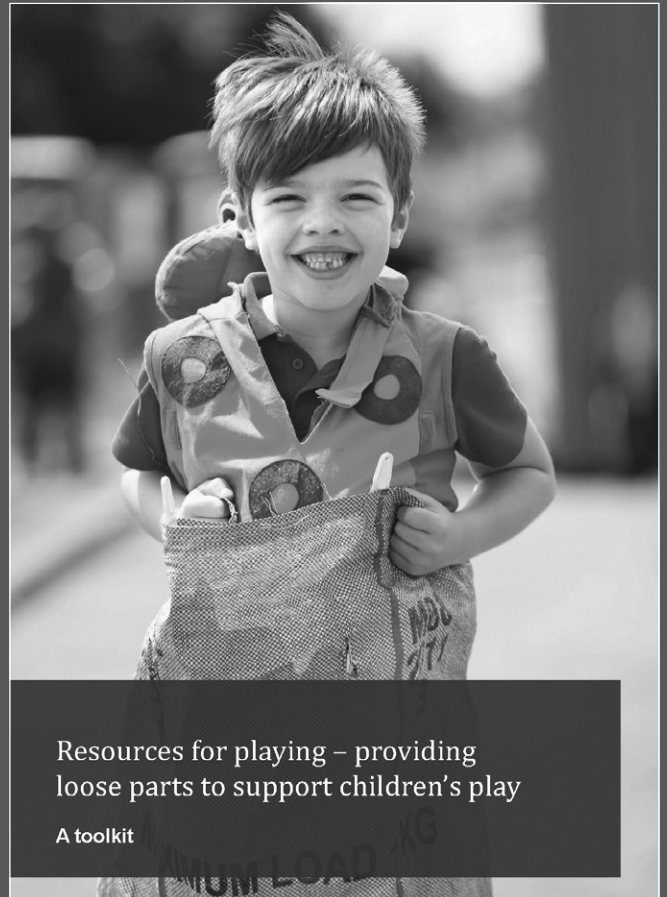
This new toolkit produced by Play Wales aims to demystify loose parts play and provide teachers and schools with a handbook to get started. Essentially, the toolkit describes the history of loose parts play. It goes all the way back to Simon Nicholson's 1971 paper which advocates for children playing with everyday objects and that children's perceptions are often quite different to our own. To children a brick wall is a jumping zone, a balance beam, a hiding spot – to adults it is simply dividing space.

Secondly, the toolkit provides an easy to use guide outlining the main steps that need to be taken to get started: auditing current provision, what to collect and how to store it, training for the adults and children, an example action plan, risk assessment and policy work.

The core message is to start small and the project will grow, engage the children at every stage and let the children lead the play. Talking and debriefing are essential to the programme's success – discussing what went well and what the next steps might be. These sessions are vital in addressing concerns from parents about the safety of what might be seen as children playing with rubbish.

The toolkit aptly provides useful research based evidence for the benefits of loose parts play both through web links and academic papers. This is useful for all of us who will need to research the evidence for ourselves and find examples of where it is working well. Furthermore, it provides a good basis for finding beneficial evidence to explain to parents or school governors why children are, to all intents and purposes, playing with 'junk'.

The toolkit focuses on loose parts play as part of the traditional playtime and unstructured school day. It can also be used as part of the curriculum and is integral to a play based curriculum. There are many positives to providing space and time for professionals to observe social interaction and development of



Resources for playing – providing loose parts to support children's play

A toolkit

relationships in classes. The imaginative and co-operative play that loose parts provides allows adults to both observe from a distance and then play alongside when modelling or support is needed.

So, in a move away from all the brightly coloured plastic toys and poor-quality playground equipment that quickly gets broken and lost after the first flush of excitement, read this toolkit!

Resources for playing ... is just what it says on the tin – an easy to follow guide to get started with loose parts play which you can then grow into a sustainable, free or very cheap playground resource that will enthuse and energise children into more imaginative and co-operative play.

The *Resources for playing – providing loose parts to support children's play* toolkit is available to download for free at:
www.playwales.org.uk/eng/loosepartstoolkit

Spotlight on Play Wales projects

Play Wales works across Wales by supporting community and county wide projects and initiatives. Here's an update on a selection of projects we are currently working on to improve and increase play opportunities for children in their communities.

Conwy – supporting foster carers

Play Wales and Conwy's Play Development Team have been working together over the last two years on an innovative approach to upskilling the play workforce within Conwy Social Services Looked After Children's Team.

This work began with delivering a play and playwork training session for foster carers which was well received. However, foster carers raised concerns about children risking injury through playing and the potential liability issues around this for children who are looked after by the local authority.

To address these concerns there has been considerable work with senior managers and team managers within social services to develop risk management guidance that reflects Conwy County Borough Council's play policy and makes a coherent argument for allowing children to play and experience and learn to manage challenge and uncertainty for themselves. This guidance will support foster carers to make reasonable judgements about risk when children are playing.

The next step is to deliver training to the Looked After Children's Team social workers to enable them to more effectively support foster carers in thinking about play, before the roll out of more play training for foster carers.

Play Wales has been keen to work with Conwy's Play Development Team on this work because it represents a whole local authority departmental approach to upskilling the wider play workforce.

Cardiff – street play

Over the summer, Play Wales worked with local residents in Cardiff to make streets and communities play friendlier places for children and young people. Using the *Playing Out* model – street play sessions led by neighbours for neighbours – residents in Ely and Whitchurch closed their streets to traffic for part of the afternoon on 2 August 2017 to celebrate national Playday.

Children came together to play on their streets along with their families – they brought their scooters, footballs, space hoppers, chalk and skipping ropes while local adults helped manage the traffic.

In Ely, children and parents skipped with a long blue rope one of the children had borrowed from her father. Children made a huge 'Road Closed' banner, and when the wind tried to take it away, another child ran home to fetch four bricks from her garden to help keep it in place. Local organiser Beth Salter, said afterwards, *'There's quite a buzz in the street this evening. I know two more people than I did yesterday'.*

The local organiser in Whitchurch, Toni Morgan, tells us why she thought street play sessions might work in her area:

'I wanted to kick start the project in my street as I was aware of the many families living in the street, however I had never actually encountered any children at any time playing outside in the three years of living here. I wanted my own children to have more of an "organic" child led play experience growing up and all the benefits it brings ... this was the closest, safest option, without it being too contrived and ruined by adults! Plus, the words "play date" give me the shivers! I am also extremely nosey and like to know who I'm living around and like the idea of closeness within a community.'



Through consultations undertaken across Wales, children report that they encounter many barriers that stop them playing in their community, such as parked cars and traffic intensity and speed, fear of strangers, and unwelcoming attitudes and environments.

Play Wales got involved with the play sessions with a view to working with Cardiff Council and other local authorities to help them to consider supporting resident led street play in their areas to help address these barriers.

The street play sessions have been highlighted as a case study within *Moving forwards: Healthy travel for all in Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan*, the 2017 annual report of the Director of Public Health for Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan.

Dr Sharon Hopkins, Director of Public Health for Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan, said:

'An environment which supports people of all ages to be physically active and socialise and children to play outside, is essential in keeping people fit and well, reducing levels of obesity and improving mental wellbeing. Play is incredibly important to children's physical development and mental wellbeing.'

Blaenau Gwent – School Life conference

In partnership with Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council, Play Wales organised a multi-agency conference aimed at exploring ways in which we might better cultivate the conditions for children's play within schools in the county.

Speakers included researchers presenting their findings from studying the effects of rich playtimes, and representatives from Willowtown Primary School and St Mary's School discussed their experiences of Blaenau Gwent Play Friendly Schools programme.

The Welsh Government's play sufficiency duty places a statutory duty on all local authorities to assess and secure sufficient play opportunities for children. To meet this duty the Welsh Government recommends that schools are supported to provide high quality play spaces and sufficient time for children to play during the school day and to give consideration to opening this provision during out of teaching hours.

We were keen to support this event as we recognise that there are challenges to schools associated with some of these requirements. The event helped to share what has worked in other areas and identified ways to tackle some of the barriers schools face.

Play and health rights: making the links

All children have the right to play as enshrined in Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

In 2013 the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child adopted a General Comment that clarifies for governments worldwide the meaning and importance of Article 31 of the UNCRC. A General Comment is an official statement that elaborates on the meaning of an aspect of the UNCRC that seems to require further interpretation or emphasis. It also aims to raise the importance of an article and increase accountability among countries that have signed up to the Convention.

The General Comment on Article 31 puts emphasis on the role of children's opportunity to play in their own way. It also positions the right to play within the fuller context of the other relevant articles in the UNCRC as it sets out how the right to play is crucially linked with the rights to be healthy, particularly in Articles 24 and 27.

Article 24 (health and health services) states that children have the right to good quality health care, to safe drinking water, nutritious food, a clean and safe environment, and information to help them stay healthy.

Article 27 (adequate standard of living) declares that children have the right to a standard of living that is good enough to meet their physical and mental needs. Governments should help families and guardians who cannot afford to provide this, particularly with regard to food, clothing and housing.

In the General Comment the UN Committee asserts that the realisation of the rights provided for in Article 31 contribute to the health, wellbeing and development of children, as expressed in Article 24. It also notes that appropriate provision for children to enjoy their right to play when they are ill or hospitalised will play an important role in facilitating their recovery.

With regards to Article 27, the UN Committee is concerned that inadequate standard of living, unsafe and unsanitary environments, and inadequate food, will potentially limit children's opportunity to enjoy and achieve their right to play. The Committee encourages governments to consider the implications for children's right to play when developing policies relating to social protection, employment, housing and access to public spaces for children. In particular, the Committee asserts that '*children need access to inclusive spaces that are free from inappropriate hazards and close to their own homes, as well as with measures to promote safe, independent mobility as their capacities evolve.*'



A particular challenge, according to the Committee, is that children's right to engage in play and the fundamental importance of playing for children's wellbeing, health and development are poorly understood and undervalued. When play is recognised, it is usually physical activity and competitive games (sport) that are valued above other types of play that encourages socialisation, imagination and creativity. The Committee emphasises that greater recognition of providing for play for older children is particularly necessary. Young people often seek places to meet with their peers and explore their emerging independence and transition to adulthood. This is an important dimension for the development of their sense of identity and belonging and should be better recognised and provided for.

To address the challenges relating to the fulfilment of the right to play, the UN Committee recommends a number of measures, such as cross departmental collaboration in national and local government. It advises that planning for children's play requires a broad and comprehensive approach involving cross-departmental collaboration and accountability between



- Including the support of play provision for all children in health or related strategies and plans including Local Development Plans, child poverty strategies and health, social care and wellbeing strategies.
- Considering impact on children's play in Health Impact and Health Equity Impact assessments.
- Providing information to parents which highlights the value of playing and its role in a healthy lifestyle.
- Creating links with local play services. Trained playworkers facilitate opportunities that support children to play freely with their friends in their own communities.
- Identifying partnership funding to appoint playworkers in communities.

Despite the obvious and well accepted views regarding the role playing has in increasing physical activity levels and improving mental health and wellbeing, it is important to continue to advocate for a rights based approach to policy making. Differentiating types of play, to support those deemed to be more supportive to health outcomes for children, might have the unintended outcome of neglecting the other very important elements of playing.

Interventionist programmes can be useful in encouraging and supporting healthy lifestyles in childhood. However, they must be complemented by a focus on supporting children to be active participants in building their own resilience and resourcefulness. We know that every aspect of children's lives is influenced by their urge to play, and that self-directed, self-determined playing offered by quality play provision increases children's opportunities to build their own resilience and support their own health and wellbeing.

national, regional and local authorities. Relevant departments include not only those dealing directly with children, such as health, education, social services, child protection, culture, recreation and sports, but also those responsible for housing, parks, transport, environment and city planning. It strongly asserts that all of these services impact significantly on the creation of environments in which children can realise their rights under Article 31.

A further recommendation involves training and capacity-building. The Committee advises that all professionals working with or for children, or whose work impacts on children (such as government officials, educators, health professionals, social workers, early years and care workers, planners and architects) should receive systematic and ongoing training on the human rights of children, including the rights represented in Article 31. Such training should include

guidance on how to create and sustain environments in which the right to play can be most effectively realised by all children. The General Comment coherently makes the obvious links between playing and healthy childhoods. As adults, we need to help children by raising play on the agenda at every appropriate opportunity – with parents and carers, decision makers and planners. We need to support the provision of sufficient time and space for children to play every day within their communities. Children with impairments in particular may need support to access play and socialise with their friends.

In practice, there are several ways for health professionals and those who take an interest in, or have a responsibility for, children's health and wellbeing can contribute, such as:

- Promoting the importance of play in health publicity campaigns.

Playing out as a community development tool



Judith Langdon, Whole Place Officer for Monmouthshire County Council shares her experience of supporting street closures for increased play opportunities and community development.

Challenges to building connected communities

My role is to support the council's vision of building sustainable, resilient communities across Monmouthshire. My team is focused on growing social benefits in the areas that are most in need of support, whilst helping communities to make the best use of their extensive social resources in the more prosperous parts of the county.

The climate of constrained resources that all local authorities are facing poses real challenges in terms of continuing to provide the same level of service that people have come to expect. As a rural county, Monmouthshire has the added challenge of a geographically dispersed population, with the county's four main towns each situated at the corners of the county.

In common with many places across the country, we have also witnessed a kind of slow-motion social break-up, where over a period of decades we've sleep-walked into a situation where social fabric is less strong. And we know that, nationally, trust in public institutions is also dwindling.

Playing out sessions: asset based community development?

In Monmouthshire, we are doing our best to meet the challenges by investing in our communities and by working with them to achieve great things together. In our county, we're clear that we want people to have a belief that the council stands for them – that we're all on the same side.

In partnership with our citizens, we are exploring using the Playing Out model – street play sessions organised by neighbours – as part of a suite of activity that is simply designed to bring people together.

For us it's a form of traditional community development: small-scale, local, creating the conditions for people to connect and find common ground with other people where they live. We don't want to own it or do it for people.

Of course, if we really wanted to have twenty play streets up and running by next month, as a council we could make that happen – but that would be to seriously miss the point. For our communities to be resilient and sustainable, they need to build on their own existing assets.

The council's role in supporting playing out

We're happy to take our time and to let playing out in Monmouthshire grow organically. We don't want to own it or do it for people, but we will absolutely support and encourage any residents who want to make it happen where they live.

We can help people organise street play on their streets by providing a straightforward road closure application process, publicising the scheme, providing training and helping with road signs.

This article originally appeared in Playing Out's newsletter for local authority officers and community organisations.

One model of street play is the Playing Out project – out of school street play sessions led by neighbours for neighbours. Started by parents in Bristol in 2009 to restore street play as a normal and healthy part of everyday life, the emphasis is on free, unstructured play and children usually bring out their own toys. A residential road is closed to traffic to ensure safety, with volunteer stewards at each road closure point to redirect traffic and give parents peace of mind.

<http://playingout.net>

Wales – A Play Friendly Place

Wales – A Play Friendly Place is a Play Wales campaign to help build a network of support for play across Wales. Share what's happening locally which is either protecting or prohibiting children's right to play on the Facebook page: on.fb.me/playfriendlyplace

Food deliveries in the summer holidays

Volunteers within a network of churches across Wrexham and Rhyl make and deliver packed lunches throughout school holidays to ensure children visiting play centres receive a healthy meal.

The project is part of the Diocese of St Asaph's commitment, in partnership with local authority play teams, to help tackle holiday hunger. The delivery of lunches to existing provision means that children are able to continue attending community play provision that meets their play needs. Karen Maurice, Communications Officer for the Diocese of St Asaph tells us more about the project.

'We became aware of the issues caused by holiday hunger and the lack of provision in north Wales to help tackle this. Having learnt of the need, we felt we couldn't ignore it – these children and their families are part of our communities and we wanted to show them that we cared.'

As the play teams already have an excellent relationship with the children, it was important for us to work in partnership with them. They can easily identify those children requiring extra support and could approach them and their families in sensitive ways. In addition, it was important for us to support the playworkers in the excellent work they do. This small contribution helps them to deliver their service and can add an additional, complementing element to the work they do.'

According to Colin Powell, Manager at Gwenfro Valley Adventure Playground in Wrexham, playworkers distributing the lunches means that all children are offered food. However, those who need it most can be targeted in an informal way, with no stigma attached.

He adds, *'We had by far one of our least problematic summers when it came to dealing with challenging behaviour. Most families will know that when their young children become tired and hungry they become*



difficult to manage and unreasonable when trying to achieve something. The same can be said for older children and young people. However, the staff on the playground specifically wanted it stated that instances of bad behaviour were very much the exception rather than the norm and they put this fact largely down to the food available during the course of the day.'

NEW

Information sheet

Our updated *Play, playwork and food* information sheet explores the current health agenda, play and health, how food can be provided in a playwork setting as well as attitudes and values towards food. As well as the example above it includes case studies from Meriden Adventure Playground in Birmingham and Glamis Adventure Playground in London.

Available to download at:
www.playwales.org.uk/eng/information sheets

Workforce development

Welsh Government qualifications update

Welsh Government has released a circular letter that clarifies the qualification requirements for childcare and play providers who are registered to work with children aged eight to twelve. Previously, childcare and play settings were registered to work with children up to the age of eight.



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Following the regulatory changes, staff working with children up to the age of twelve in childcare settings will require playwork qualifications in addition to their childcare qualifications (for example Children's Care Learning and Development – CCLD).

The letter refers to the SkillsActive *List of required qualifications to work within the Playwork Sector in Wales* which has been updated to reflect the changes and simplified with the intention of making the qualifications requirements clearer. To summarise:

- For existing registered childcare settings who only work with children up to the age of eight there is no change and will require a qualification from the Social Care Wales *List of required qualifications to work within early years and childcare in Wales*.
- Staff in existing registered childcare settings who work with children up to the age of twelve have until September 2021 to gain the appropriate playwork qualifications featured in the SkillsActive *List of required qualifications*.

- For existing registered playwork settings there is no change, the requirement has always been that staff hold the relevant playwork qualifications from the SkillsActive *List of required qualifications*.

Both qualifications lists are available at:
www.playwales.org.uk/eng/requiredqualifications

For playwork, childcare and other settings that are exempt from registration and work with children up to the age of twelve, there is no qualification requirement. However, Play Wales recommends that settings refer to the SkillsActive *List of required qualifications* for guidance to access quality playwork training that could lead to a qualification and enable staff to work in registered settings.

Welsh Government's circular letter is available to download at: <http://bit.ly/WGcircularletter>

To support employers and learners to understand the qualifications landscape, Play Wales has developed frequently asked questions (FAQs):
www.playwales.org.uk/eng/qualificationsfaqs

Health, social care and childcare qualifications reform



Following a sector review in 2016 Qualifications Wales is using its regulatory powers to reform health, social care and childcare qualifications by funding the development of a new suite of qualifications which will be available from September 2019.

The new qualifications will replace more than 200 health, social care and childcare qualifications which are currently available. Current qualifications will continue to be funded until the new qualifications are available. There will also be a transition period to allow learners who are already undertaking qualifications to be funded to complete their qualifications.

Qualifications Wales has appointed a consortium of City & Guilds London Institute and WJEC as the awarding body partner to develop the new qualifications. The new

Children's Care, Learning Development and Play (CCLDP) qualifications will include knowledge and understanding of children's play, as this was highlighted as lacking during the sector review. This will not replace any of the existing playwork qualifications or current regulatory requirements for staff to hold playwork qualifications.

Qualifications Wales said:

'This consortium brings together expertise in qualification development, assessment design and delivery from a general and vocational qualification perspective. Furthermore, we are assured that this partnership will ensure parity between qualification and assessment provision across the two official languages of Wales along with providing a strong change management strategy to support the qualification system with effective training, support and resources.'

Play Wales will keep the sector informed of opportunities to contribute to the content of the new qualifications.

Workforce development

A play friendly workforce for Wales

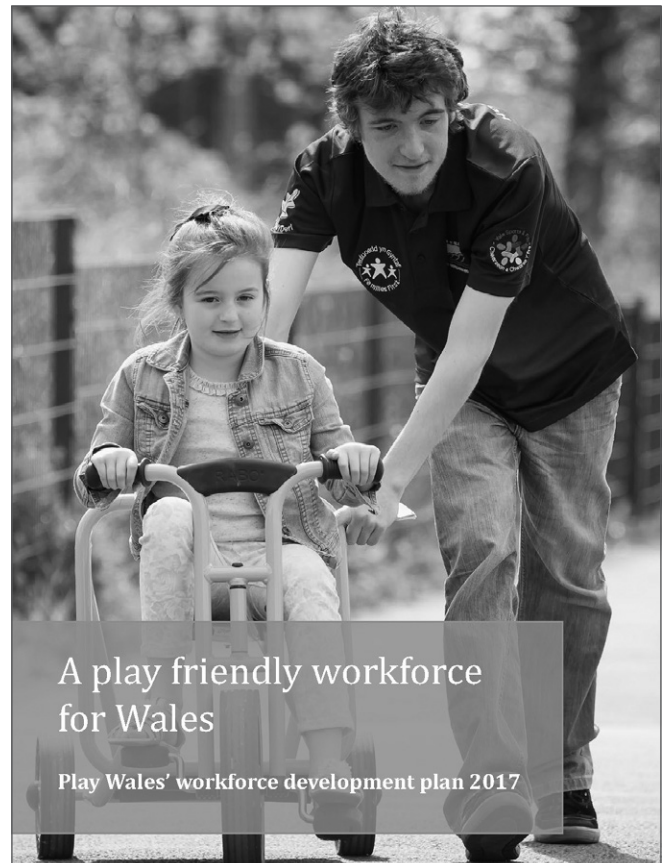
Play Wales has developed a development plan to respond to a wide range of priorities for the play and playwork workforces. A *play friendly workforce for Wales* defines the difference between the play workforce and the playwork workforce and sets out a range of strategic and operational priorities for Play Wales over the next 18 months when it will be reviewed to respond to the next round of local authority Play Sufficiency Assessments in 2019.

Key priorities for the play workforce include:

- Work with Welsh Government to ensure that training and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for the play workforce are given priority alongside initiatives to upskill and qualify the early years, childcare and playwork workforce
- Work with Welsh Government to develop a better understanding of the needs of the play workforce, how to assess their needs and practical ways of supporting upskilling and CPD
- Support local authorities and third sector play organisations to upskill the play workforce.

Key priorities for the playwork workforce include:

- Work with Welsh Government to identify funding for playwork qualifications that reduces the burden on learners and employers and allows for increased uptake and accreditation of playwork learners
- Increase the delivery infrastructure for playwork qualifications in Wales especially in relation to the numbers and levels of competence of tutors and assessors
- Work with Qualifications Wales to ensure that playwork is embedded in qualifications for early years and childcare
- Support the development of CPD and qualification options that allow playworkers to upskill whilst remaining at the same level.



A play friendly workforce for Wales

Play Wales' workforce development plan 2017

Priorities within the workforce development plan have been established through consultation with the sector and as a response to priorities identified through:

- Play Wales' review of the 22 local authority Play Sufficiency Assessments 2016
- The All Wales Strategic Play Network
- The Playwork Education and Training Council for Wales (PETC Wales)
- Individual discussions with stakeholders
- The review of Health and Social Care, Childcare and Playwork Qualifications in Wales (Qualifications Wales, 2016).

A play friendly workforce for Wales is available to download at:

www.playwales.org.uk/eng/workforceplan

Celebrating play in Wales

Having time, space and permission to play out with friends is important to children in Wales. When we asked about their play experiences this is what children across Wales told us*:

How often do you go out to play or hang out with friends?

Most days **41%**
A few days each week **35%**
Hardly ever **15%**
I don't play or hang out with friends **9%**

Do you have enough time to play out?

Yes **80%**
No **20%**



Can you play out on your own?

Yes **83%**
No **17%**



Are there enough opportunities to play out?

Yes **83%** No **17%**

Where is your favourite place to play or hang out when you are not in school?

1. Field or local grassy area
2. Park
3. Garden or friends garden

Playing and hanging out makes me feel...



1. Happy
2. Excited
3. Active



www.playwales.org.uk

* 5478 children aged 5 to 12 surveyed – information gathered from local authority Play Sufficiency Assessments across Wales (2016 – 2017).