



**Scotland's
Play Strategy**

Valuing play, every day

Playing with quality and equality: a review of inclusive play in Scotland

Executive Summary

Action 9.6: **Positive Support for Play**

The Play Strategy Implementation Group
March 2015



Introduction

The Play Strategy for Scotland: Our Vision (Scottish Government, 2013) draws particular attention to the play rights of disabled children and those from disadvantaged backgrounds. The principle of inclusion runs as a thread throughout the Strategy and its accompanying Action Plan. It is well documented however that there are children and young people, individually or in groups, who are excluded or hindered from participating fully in play due to physical, social or cultural circumstances and it is with these children and young people in mind that the Inclusive Play Review was undertaken.

Emergent themes

In the course of the survey and consultations, a number of themes began to emerge. These themes were examined more closely in the events that were held with children, young people and adults in different parts of the country.

The themes themselves interlink. A connected approach to quality and equality in play would attempt to reduce the negative factors which hold back high quality play opportunities while really trying to build on positive practice and examples which exist.

It was continually emphasised that quality matters.

Summary of themes that emerged in the course of the review

Disabled and disadvantaged children and young people in Scotland face **multiple barriers** to being able to play at home, at nursery, school, early learning and childcare and in the community

Significantly more attention should be given to **coordination** across services and geographic areas to achieve inclusive opportunities

Low-key, every day actions make a big difference

The **time** available to practitioners is a significant factor in their ability to put into practice inclusive actions and approaches

The quality of **physical environments** makes a hugely significant difference to the quality of children and young people's experience and opportunities for play

The application (and misapplication) of **rules and regulations** negatively impacts on the quality opportunities for play

Building **confidence and awareness** around the value of play would support inclusive play opportunities for all children.

Addressing a gap in **training and ongoing support** for practitioners and professionals in a number of disciplines would help to ensure all our children and young people have the play opportunities to which they have a right.

Review process and methodology

A Review of Literature, Inclusive Play in Scotland: context, concepts and current research, Scottish Government (2014), established the existing evidence available as a basis for the Review as a whole. As well as the Literature Review, some key ideas had already been established in the Play Strategy Action Plan which helped to provide a common language and understanding on which to base the review.

The Review Team went on to gather information in five ways: inviting submission of existing information, online surveys for adults and for children and young people, interviews and conversations to consult on the topic, consultation packs provided to children's groups, and four review events to test preliminary findings.

Summary of participation in the review

Online survey:

- There were 594 respondents to the adults' survey, with respondents from every local authority area in Scotland.

- There were 79 respondents to the children and young people's survey, with respondents from 19 of Scotland's 32 local authority areas

Direct consultations were carried out with 12 groups and 16 individuals

Consultation packs: 19 packs were returned, involving 161 children and young people

Events: 66 children, young people and adults participated

Working Definitions: a Revised Set of Propositions

The Review of Literature indicated that Inclusive Play – although a term commonly used – is a difficult concept to define and has been interpreted differently by different people in different contexts. A set of Working Definitions was presented for scrutiny within the review. They received an extremely high level of agreement as descriptions or narratives of inclusive opportunities in play however the idea of ‘inclusive play’ as a discrete concept remained problematic.

As a result, the Review proposes that the more concrete concepts of quality and equality should be brought to the fore.

Further, provision for play, play environments and support to play opportunities in whatever form (infrastructure, training, advice, campaigns, service provision, policies) should locate non-discrimination, equality of opportunity and participation as standing principles in every action, programme or measure.

Key findings

The review considered play in the four domains of the Play Strategy from the perspectives of children and young people, parents and carers, professionals and other interested individuals.

Key findings from across the review were summarised in one of the themes that emerged:

Disabled and disadvantaged children and young people in Scotland face multiple barriers to being able to play at home, at nursery, school, early learning and childcare and in the community, as part of their everyday lives. Many of these barriers are faced by children and young people across the board and are amplified by the intersections between poverty, disadvantage, disability and environment.

The review began from a position that very many children and young people in Scotland face barriers to play. Given the extent of responses to the review and depth of feeling expressed it is appropriate to re-state that this is indeed the current situation for children and young people in Scotland.

The barriers faced by many children and young people impact on their rights in relation to health and wellbeing, optimum development, inclusion in society and their right to enjoy their childhood. Positive play experiences are now well understood to have long term benefits and to nourish us as adults. The impact of negative experiences – in our local neighbourhoods, communities, schools – also remains with us and can provoke powerful

memories and feelings which impact on the way we see ourselves. Both being left out and being ‘forced’ to join in seem to have a lingering negative impact when recalled by young people we spoke to.

“It’s very lonely and alienating seeing all the ‘mainstream’ kids playing out or taking part in organised activities when your own child can’t.”

“...for children to play freely is still a long way off without them feeling continuously vulnerable.”

The complexity of feelings around inclusion in provision and opportunities for play was highlighted in the Literature Review. It indicated that while the large majority of parents (of disabled children) thought that activities should be accessible to all, almost as many of the same parents also thought that special programmes were necessary.

This situation was illustrated by observations made by participants in the review.

“The group provides separate services which are used as a stepping stone and practice for entering mainstream (if appropriate). Most of the children say that they have no friends and have experienced bullying. Most have tried mainstream groups and it hasn’t worked. They feel safe at the group.”

Throughout the review this tension has been apparent but positive examples were also offered.

“Through our outreach work we discovered a gap in facilities for children and young people with autism and Asperger’s... We then sought funding allowing us to employ qualified staff to run an evening club to suit the age and needs of the individual children, through attending this club parents now feel more confident for them to join various sessions within our park and indoor facility.”

It is acknowledged that this can be a complicated topic and since everyone is different no one service, opportunity or style of play provision can meet the needs of every individual. However, there are many positive examples of inclusion in practice which work really well.

The degrees of complexity involved should not mask the underlying principles of non-discrimination, equality of opportunity and participation, so that children and young people report feeling safe and welcome in mainstream provision rather than the opposite.

This is the vision

“We want Scotland to be the best place to grow up. A nation which values play as a life-enhancing daily experience for all our children and young people; in their homes, nurseries, schools and communities.”
Play Strategy for Scotland: Our Vision (2013) Scottish Government.

In order to achieve this, it would help if:

- In every Local Authority/Community Planning Partnership area Play Policies, Strategies and accompanying Action Plans were developed which include explicit aims, objectives and actions to make tangible progress towards inclusive practices, programmes and environments.
- Further and long term investment was made in capacity building models of support to play providers in order to include disabled children and young people.
- Indicators for children and young people’s play rights under Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child were fully taken into account in the new duties to report on progress on children’s rights and wellbeing included parts 1 and 3 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014.
- There was a large scale, properly resourced campaign undertaken to promote the importance of play to parents and carers, and to those who work with them (taking into account of quality and equality in play, and therefore the play rights of disabled children and young people).
- A central Online Hub of information was developed to support inclusive practice in relation to play and to provide information about specific skills, knowledge and practices which can be utilised in mainstream, inclusive children’s settings. This should be easily accessible to all those who work for or with children with input from children and young people, third sector play and disability organisations.
- Equality training was undertaken by all the members of school communities – adults, children and young people.
- A strong high-level lead was given by the Scottish Government and Community Planning Partnerships to implementing the Risk-Benefit Assessment approach to play in all settings in which children spend time, encompassing clear support for the Risk-Benefit approach to disabled children’s play opportunities.
- A positive lead was given by the Play Strategy Implementation Group to development of a network of “play champions” underpinned by the principles set out in the Play Strategy for Scotland and the UN Convention article 31, with explicit reference to progress on inclusion – non-discrimination, equality of opportunity, participation – as integral to the role.
- Established play principles and the principles of Universal Design () were promoted and implemented when creating spaces to play.
- The Place Standard was taken into account in reporting on the new duties to report on progress on children’s rights and wellbeing included parts 1 and 3 of the Children and Young People’ (Scotland) Act 2014.
- A set of “Test Questions” was developed and introduced for play programmes, practice and environments which encourage progressive action and accountability on quality and equality.

This is an Executive Summary of Casey, T (2015) Playing with quality and equality: a review of inclusive play in Scotland. Edinburgh: Scottish Government.

The review was led by Capability Scotland on behalf of the Play Strategy Implementation Group (PSIG). For further information contact Eric Mitchell, Capability Scotland on **0131 337 9876** or email eric.mitchell@capability-scotland.org.uk. The full report and accompanying case studies can be found at [Scottish Government microsite address to follow](#)