

Play Scotland – Promoting the Child's Right to Play

Response to Scotland's Commissioner for Children & Young Peoples Policy Priority Consultation 2005

Play Scotland welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Consultation Paper. Play Scotland believes that providing stimulating play opportunities for all children in the community contributes enormously to all three themes proposed by the Commissioner. The organisation is confident that additional resources directed at quality play opportunities for all children and young people will improve: family support, particularly in the area of respite; it will promote social inclusion by ensuring, among others that disabled children from benefit dependant families who have the least play opportunities will have increased access opportunities; and as the Prime Minister recognises, it is essential that children have the opportunity to manage risk in play in challenging environments. Interestingly, when the Northern Ireland Children's Commissioner Nigel Williamson consulted with children and young people, Play was their number three priority.

Background

Play is a fundamental right for children (Article 31 United Nations Convention on the Rights for the Child). Play Scotland works to promote the importance of play for all children and young people, and campaigns to create increased Play opportunities in the Community. Play Scotland is a voluntary organisation and children's charity established in December 1998. Play Scotland seeks the support of the Scottish Parliament for a 'Play Agenda' for the nation. *(See Appendix 1 enclosed).*

Current Position

Play Scotland held a National Play Seminar in November 2005, *Prioritising Play – A Play Strategy for Scotland*. The urgent need for clear policy guidelines and a comprehensive Play Strategy for all children and young people in Scotland was strongly endorsed by all the participants from a wide range of sectors and providers: (private, public & voluntary). The main themes explored included

- Inclusion
- Children & Young People's Voices
- Mainstream Funding
- Play Environments

- Consultation, Training, Innovative Investment
- Risk, Challenge and Safety
- Need for Research in Scotland, Creating Baselines and measuring Benefits of Play
- Making the case for Play

In Scotland it is clear that current play provision is patchy, there is lack of leadership and ownership of the Play Agenda and little evidence of good practice outcomes being celebrated and disseminated.

After six years of lobbying Play Scotland believes that significant progress can only be achieved with a non party political high level play champion for Scotland. This is a view shared by a number of NGOs who provide and promote play opportunities for children and young people in Scotland.

Resources

Play Scotland receives a very small budget of £55,000 per annum from the Scottish Executive which funds 2 staff and supports a small office. Play Scotland is seeking additional funding for a Research & Information Post and a small team of development officers who would create a network of Play cluster groups throughout Scotland – to develop Play Resources and record and promote Best Practice in innovative Play provision for 0 - 18 year olds. The development team would also assist in recording baseline information and developing indicators to measure the benefits of increased quality play opportunities for children and young people and their communities.

Policy

Article 23 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights for the Child

- 1. States Parties recognize that a mentally or physically disabled child should enjoy a full and decent life, in conditions which ensure dignity, promote self-reliance and facilitate the child's active participation in the community.*
- 2. States Parties recognize the right of the disabled child to special care and shall encourage and ensure the extension, subject to available resources, to the eligible child and those responsible for his or her care, of assistance for which application is made and which is appropriate to the child's condition and to the circumstances of the parents or others caring for the child.*
- 3. Recognizing the special needs of a disabled child, assistance extended in accordance with paragraph 2 of the present article shall be provided free of charge, whenever possible, taking into account the financial resources of the*

parents or others caring for the child, and shall be designed to ensure that the disabled child has effective access to and receives education, training, health care services, rehabilitation services, preparation for employment and recreation opportunities in a manner conducive to the child's achieving the fullest possible social integration and individual development, including his or her cultural and spiritual development

- 4. States Parties shall promote, in the spirit of international cooperation, the exchange of appropriate information in the field of preventive health care and of medical, psychological and functional treatment of disabled children, including dissemination of and access to information concerning methods of rehabilitation, education and vocational services, with the aim of enabling States Parties to improve their capabilities and skills and to widen their experience in these areas. In this regard, particular account shall be taken of the needs of developing countries.*

Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights for the Child

- 1. States Parties recognize the right of the 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.*
- 2. States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity.*

In Scotland there is no clear Play Policy Direction. Early support from the Scottish Executive sounded promising but commitment from the Executive has been limited and uncoordinated.

A clear policy statement supporting Play is required, under pinned by a strategic approach to providing for Children's Play needs throughout Scotland.

Recommendations

- 1. A Play policy statement under pinned by a national strategy for providing for children's play needs is urgently required.***
- 2. As a matter of priority resources must be made available to support Inclusive Play.***

3. Play Scotland contends and would fully support the Commissioner for Children and Young People becoming Scotland's Leading Play Champion.

- *The Commissioner could request that Scottish Ministers identify a senior civil servant in each Department to be an advocate for children and young peoples play in that Department. Each Play Advocate could attend a Play Policy and Practice Forum convened three times per year by the Commissioner. (Proposed: January to consider Policy and Funding, May to consider Holiday Provision and PlayDay activities; September to consider Training Programmes.) The Commissioner could seek nominations from Local Authorities, The Voluntary and Private Sector to serve on the Forum, together with key funders such as the Big Lottery. Play Scotland could provide secretariat.*

4. Full consideration given to the Frank Dobson Play Review Recommendations:

Play Scotland facilitated the Scottish response to this consultation in 2003 (see appendix 2 attached). The Dobson report was launched in January 2004 and was designed to provide recommendations to the Government regarding dedicated Lottery funding for new and improved children's play facilities.

The full report can be accessed by email: Tiffany.Denny@culture.gsi.gov.uk. The key recommendations are listed at the end of this document. (Hard copy attached see appendix 3).

4.1 While England now has a dedicated lottery fund of £155million to support these recommendations, Scotland has still to agree to prioritise funding for play.

5. Academic research. The Commissioner could commission university led research on the impact on of Play deprivation in Scotland.

5.1 Making the Case for Play – Consequences of Play deprivation for Children and Young People in Scotland

- ❖ *Poor ability and motor skills*
- ❖ *Lower levels of physical activity*
- ❖ *Unable to deal with stress and trauma*

- ❖ *Unable to assess and manage risk*
- ❖ *Lack of social skills*
- ❖ *Poor ability in handling conflict and cultural difference*
- ❖ *Lack of PlaySpace and Mobility*
- ❖ *Adulterated Play Narratives*
- ❖ *Risk Averse*
- ❖ *Negative Stereotypical Images absorbed at an early age*
- ❖ *Childhood Obesity, Mental Health Problems and Bullying*
- ❖ *Medicalisation of Challenging Behaviour*

5.2 Research Commissioned by The Royal Bank of Scotland NatWest 2004

(see appendix 4 attached)

- ❖ *More than one-third of children never play outside*
- ❖ *Almost half of children spend more than three hours a day watching television or playing computer games*
- ❖ *More than 1 in 10 spend at least five hours or more a day watching television or playing computers.*
- ❖ *nearly two-third of parents are worried about letting their children play outside*
- ❖ *Three-quarters of parents feel that children face increased risks from playing outside unsupervised compared with five years ago*
- ❖ *97% of children have been warned about the dangers of playing outside*

Executive Summary

“Children need and want to take risks when they play. Play provision aims to respond to these needs and wishes by offering children stimulating challenging environments for exploring and developing their abilities”

The Play Safety Forum

- Lack of play opportunities is a major issue for children and young people
- Issues such as insurance, funding, parental fears about children's safety, the changing nature of children's play and an increasingly less child friendly environment, need to be addressed in Scotland. Scotland is lagging behind in this respect.
- The benefits to children and young people and the community from a strategic approach to play are profound. Children will:
 - ❖ *Enjoy better physical, emotional and mental health*

- ❖ *Develop social skills and responsibility*
 - ❖ *Appreciate the environment*
 - ❖ *Understand risk and challenge*
 - ❖ *Grow identity and self esteem*
 - ❖ *Participate in sports, arts and culture*
 - ❖ *Be less likely to offend and engage in anti-social behaviour*
- A play champion such as the Children's Commissioner could put play firmly on the Government agenda, make it a cross departmental issue and ensure that there was routine consideration of policy impacts on children and young peoples right to play.
 - Play Scotland believes that play is intrinsically and inextricably linked to the three priorities under consultation by the Children's Commissioner.

"Play is older and more original than civilisation"
Johan Huizinga, Homo Ludeus

FRANK DOBSON PLAY REVIEW 2004

Getting Serious About Play - Recommendations

VITAL

The common elements of many successful play opportunities were captured in the acronym VITAL – Value based, In the right place, Top quality, Appropriate, Long term. Criteria based on these five elements should be used to assess priorities for finding.

Characteristics of VITAL play opportunities

Value based

- * Children and young people's interests and rights respected*
- * All children and young people, whatever their ability or background welcomed, especially those from disadvantaged groups*
- * Children and young people's competences and abilities respected*

In the right place

- * Close to children and young people's homes and schools, on well-used travel routes, in safe locations*
- * Located in places that children and young people and the wider community are happy with*

Top quality

- * Safe, welcoming and providing choice and variety*
- * Well-designed in relation to the surrounding space and community*
- * Taking a balanced approach to managing risk*
- * Well-managed*

Appropriate

- * Shaped by local needs and circumstances*
- * Complementing other local opportunities*
- * Taking account of all sectors of the local community*
- * Well-planned*

Long-term

- * Sustainable beyond the lifetime of the funding programme*
- * Set up to be valued and respected parts of the social fabric of the neighbourhood*

PROGRAMME DELIVERY

The Funding programme should devote the bulk of the funding – around 80 per cent – to 'VITAL spaces' strand, drawing on the criteria set out above. Alongside the main VITAL Spaces strand, the funding programme should devote up to 20 per cent of the funding to create a 'Playful Ideas Strand' to develop and support projects that create play opportunities in innovative ways, or in 'non-traditional' settings.

PLAYFUL IDEAS STRAND

The 'Playful Ideas Strand', while reflecting the VITAL criteria, should be devoted to developing innovations These might include:

- * Play provision as part of the new schools*
- * Play opportunities in new housing developments*
- * Playful elements in public spaces, museums and other cultural centres*
- * Play provision with community access in childcare/early years services*

The Playful Ideas would be valuable in stimulating innovative ways to include disabled children and young people, children in care and other groups excluded from mainstream provision. It is hoped that the Government will encourage good practice in the comprehensive planning and delivery of play opportunities across local authority areas.

Play Scotland
Midlothian Innovation Centre
Pentlandfield
Roslin EH25 9NR

January 2006