

PLAYING TOGETHER

A Post-Symposium Report 2016

✓ Play is

FOR ALL AGES



We get old because
we stop playing

ABOUT

Play Scotland

Play Scotland is the national Play organisation for play and playwork, working to make children's right to play a reality in Scotland. Formed in 1998 it is a registered charity and membership organisation. 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.

Our Mission:

- To increase awareness of the importance of play and the contribution play makes to the development and wellbeing of children and young people in Scotland.
- To ensure that all children and young people in Scotland have equal opportunities to participate in diverse and quality play experiences that meet their individual need.
- Play Scotland's work is underpinned by Article 31 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the UNCRC General Comment No17 (article 31) which articulates the "the need to create time and space for children to engage in spontaneous play, recreation and creativity, and to promote societal attitudes that support and encourage such activity."

YouthLink Scotland

YouthLink Scotland is the national agency for youth work. We are a membership organisation, representing over 100 regional and national youth organisations from both the voluntary and statutory sectors. We champion the role and value of youth work and represent the interests and aspirations of our sector.

We have a vision of a youth work sector which offers sustainable, dynamic and accessible youth work opportunities that support young people to become successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens.

Our vision is of a nation which values its young people and their contribution to society, where all young people are supported to achieve their potential.

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The images used throughout this document have been adapted from the live graphic recording of the symposium event as captured by Emer O'Leary of Collected Works Graphic Facilitation, Training and Consultancy: www.emeroleary.com

FOREWORD

“Playing Together Symposium was a landmark event for the coming together of two well established sectors impacting on the lives of Scotland’s children and young people. We share the vision of Scotland being the best place to be young and grow up. The symposium and this report is an opportunity for our two sectors to ‘join the dots’; to make the connections; and to begin a conversation of how the play and youth work strategies can complement one another and that our practices and provisions for children and young people do so too. It was a delight for both organisations, Play Scotland and YouthLink Scotland to collaborate in hosting the symposium and in the publication of this report we reinforce our commitment to jointly progress our shared interests.

This report is intended to give an overview of the symposium’s themes and to prompt further meaningful debate, dialogue and collaboration between the two sectors. As national membership organisations for play work and youth work we are committed to ensuring that there is further time and space for continued conversation and action to progress the steps identified in this report.

To this end, we will continue to work in partnership with the Scottish Government in the delivery Scotland's Play Strategy and National Youth Work Strategy; with our goal of turning this ripple in to a wave for the benefit of all of Scotland's children and young people."

July 2016



Jim Sweeney

Jim Sweeney, MBE
Chief Executive,
YouthLink Scotland



Marguerite HB

Marguerite Hunter-Blair
Chief Executive,
Play Scotland

BACKGROUND

In March 2016, the Scottish Government funded YouthLink Scotland and Play Scotland to convene a joint symposium for Scotland's youth work and play work sector. This opportunity emerged from the sectors themselves, and under the leadership and influence of YouthLink Scotland's Policy Forum.

Since 2014 the YouthLink Scotland Policy Forum has taken interest in exploring the commonalities in national policy for youth work and play. This was driven by the need to ensure that no child or young person misses out on an entitlement to play or to youth work because of their age or stage. The opportunity to collaborate on this matter was identified and support was received from the staff and trustees of YouthLink Scotland and Play Scotland to pursue dialogue and initiate conversation for the best interests of young people in Scotland. It is believed that the two sectors can work together to close the policy gap, which will result in closing the provision and practice gap in the lives of young people, but that this must be achieved within a climate where resources are reducing.

“Scotland is rich with a professional, qualified and well-led play workforce who are passionate and driven and have our children’s health and wellbeing at the very core of their professional lives. Beyond that, our health workers, early learning and childcare staff, teachers, youth workers and plethora of out of school care professionals all have a key role in delivering the outcomes of this Strategy.”

(Play Strategy, page 9)



SCOTLAND'S POLICY LANDSCAPE



Our Ambitions for Improving the Life Chances of Young People in Scotland: National Youth Work Strategy 2014-19

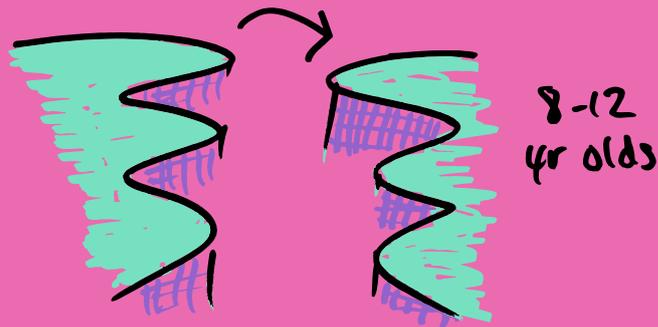


Play Strategy for Scotland: Our Vision

Nationally the play and youth work sectors, it could be argued, have never had it so good when it comes to Scottish Government policy. Both sectors have their strategy that contributes to the national outcome of ensuring that *Scotland is the best place to grow up*. Whilst each strategy has its own origins, purpose and intentions there are a number of high level commonalities which can be identified, in addition to the achievement of the national outcome. It is significant that both are grounded within the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)*, a theme which is explored further in this report. Additionally the general purpose of each strategy is a concern with the provision of services, improving outcomes for young people, and building workforce capacity. The age range of each strategy overlaps: the Play Strategy from birth to 18 years; and the Youth Work Strategy from 11-25 where if early intervention is required youth work will work with those under the age of 11 or in the case of the long established uniformed youth organisations they have been working with children from as young as age 5. There is

evidence that younger children are presenting themselves to workers and are looking for and demanding their support and services, particularly after school and during school holidays. Age (or stage) is an important factor in this discussion, in particular for those aged 8-18 years.

□ MASSIVE POLICY and RESOURCING GAP



The *Early Years Framework* specifically highlighted play as being one of the key elements to helping the Scottish Government achieve its vision of improving outcomes and children's quality of life – and specified a need to improving play opportunities and addressing barriers to play. Early years has continued to be a driver and the 'policy home' for the action on play, and in 2015 Play was accepted as a Key Change within the Early Years Collaborative.

There are actions in the Play Strategy that explicitly reference the contribution of youth work, youth workers, and community spaces including youth clubs. The collective challenge and opportunity is about moving past the early years and to develop fresh thinking and understanding of play in the lives of young people, and for the sectors to come up with ideas and opportunities to create change by removing whatever barriers are holding us or young people back from recognising and realising their right to play.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CHILD RIGHTS

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 31 sets out 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.” This right goes beyond play: it gives space and recognition to the child and young person’s free choice to participate in recreation, culture and the arts. It is for this reason that this article can provide the shared platform from which play and youth work can cooperate and collaborate.

The UNCRC provides an international framework within which dialogue for the youth work and play sectors can take place. The sectors identified the following areas for exploration:

- Breadth of Article 31, which is often summarised or given brevity and written as the ‘Right to Play’ – this is problematic as it does not account for the entirety of the obligation within the Convention. This matter is explored more fully in General Comment¹ 17.
- Ensuring that Article 31 is realised for all young people up to the age of 18, and that play is not just an activity for those in the early years
- Ensuring that Duty-Bearers fulfil their obligation to Article 31 for young people up to the age of 18
- Ensuring Article 31 is inclusive of all young people including those with a disability or other barriers to participation

□ ARTICLE 31 13

not an
aspiration
- it's what we
should and
must be
doing

- More than
just play



“In respect of play and recreation, the age of the child must be taken into account in determining: that sufficient free time is afforded; the nature of spaces and environments available to children; forms of stimulation and diversity; and the necessary degree of adult oversight and engagement to ensure that children are properly protected from hazards, while exercising their rights to play and recreation. As children grow older, they move from wanting settings that afford play opportunities, to places offering opportunities to socialise, to be with their peers, or to be alone. They will also explore progressively more opportunities for risk-taking and challenge. These experiences are developmentally necessary for adolescents, contributing to their discovery of identity and belonging.”

(General Comment 17)

¹: General Comments provide interpretation or analysis of a specific article of the CRC. They provide an authoritative interpretation for state parties.

ABOUT THE SYMPOSIUM

The Playing Together Symposium was held on 23 March 2016 and brought together leaders, practitioners, funders, and influencers of the youth work and play work sectors. This was the first opportunity for joint dialogue, learning, and discussions between the two sectors. The symposium received funding and support from the Scottish Government's Play Strategy. The symposium followed the agenda shown below.

Opening remarks	Fraser Falconer, <i>Chair of YouthLink Scotland Policy Forum and Chair of the Play Strategy</i>
Keynote Speaker: <i>Professor of Playwork</i>	Dr Fraser Brown, <i>Leeds Beckett University</i>
Keynote Presentation: <i>(Re)Imagining Youth - youth leisure and free time activities</i>	Dr Lisa Whittaker and Dr Susan Batchelor, <i>Glasgow University</i>
Expert Panel	Jim Sweeney, <i>CEO, YouthLink Scotland</i> Marguerite Hunter Blair, <i>CEO, Play Scotland</i> Juliet Harris, <i>Director, Together</i> Rory Mitchell, <i>Good Place Better Health Information Strategy Lead, NHS Health Scotland</i>
Discussion Round	<i>Delegates are invited to consider a series of themes and questions, which are inspired by the contributions</i>

<p>Youth Work and Playwork Practice: YMCA Scotland</p>	<p>Kerry Reilly, Chief Executive – National General Secretary, YMCA Scotland</p>
<p>Community Play Spaces: Grounds for Learning</p>	<p>Matt Robinson, Training and Development Officer, Learning through Landscapes/Grounds for Learning</p>
<p>Inclusive Play: The Yard</p>	<p>Rachel Mathers, Head of Operations, The Yard</p>
<p>Discussion Round</p>	<p><i>Delegates are invited to consider and reflect on the day and identify next steps for them individually and their organisations</i></p>
<p>Round Up and Closing Remarks</p>	<p>Fraser Falconer, Chair of YouthLink Scotland Policy Forum and Chair of the Play Strategy</p>

The symposium brought together a range of high profile and experienced speakers from academia, as well as practitioners and managers from the play and youth work sector to present their experiences. From the presentations and the discussion rounds that took place across the course of the day the following themes emerged:

- Understanding of what is common and what is different for Play and Youth Work
- Play Spaces and young people in the public realm
- Age (or Stage) Appropriate Play

UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT IS COMMON AND WHAT IS DIFFERENT FOR PLAY AND YOUTH WORK



Statement on the Nature and Purpose of Youth Work

The purpose of youth work is as follows:

- Build self-esteem and self-confidence
- Develop the ability to manage personal and social relationships
- Create learning and develop new skills
- Encourage positive group atmospheres
- Build the capacity of young people to consider risk, make reasoned decisions and take control
- Develop a 'world view' which widens horizons and invites social commitment

It has three essential and definitive features:

- Young people choose to take part
- The work must build from where young people are
- Youth work recognises the young person and youth worker as partners in a learning process

Play Work Principles

1. All children and young people need to play. The impulse to play is innate. Play is a biological, psychological and social necessity, and is fundamental to the healthy development and wellbeing of individuals and communities.
2. Play is a process that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. That is, children and young people determine and control the content and intent of their play, by following their own instincts, ideas and interests, in their own way for their own reasons.
3. The prime focus and essence of playwork is to support and facilitate the play process and this should inform the development of play policy, strategy, training and education.
4. For playworkers, the play process takes precedence and playworkers act as advocates for play when engaging with adult led agendas.
5. The role of the playworker is to support all children and young people in the creation of a space in which they can play.
6. The playworker's response to children and young people playing is based on a sound up to date knowledge of the play process, and reflective practice.
7. Playworkers recognise their own impact on the play space and also the impact of children and young people's play on the playworker.
8. Playworkers choose an intervention style that enables children and young people to extend their play. All playworker intervention must balance risk with the developmental benefit and wellbeing of children.

OUTCOMES



The strongest areas of commonality between the play and youth work sector was identified as the ethos of both approaches being informal, allowing free-choice and being led by the needs, interests, will and experiences of the young person. Both sectors utilise methods which promote peer based learning, often facilitated in groups and which promotes leadership and choice.

Play and youth work activities are fun and engaging, and the opportunities which the young person experience will have often required planning and adult intervention/facilitation - even if this is unseen by the young people participating.

Not only was the ethos and approach seen as an area of commonality, but so was the challenge of identifying, quantifying and evidencing the outcomes and impact of the activities undertaken in play work and youth work. It was identified that the outcomes of both activities were often regarded as 'soft outcomes'.



The place for play and youth work within a range of services for children and young people are traditionally on the periphery of public services – with neither service having any statutory footing. Both sectors are therefore reliant on funding from other sources such as philanthropy, grants, and local fundraising. It was apparent that both sectors would like greater opportunities to be engaged and active in local community planning and strategic service design.

Through this event some differences and distinctions were also identified, which reflect the origins, environment and cultures within which play and youth work sectors have evolved. This is particularly evident when the continuum of approach in both play work and youth work practice and activities are considered. For example comparing a youth work employability programme with free unstructured play, there would be many differences; but this might not be in the case when considering play ranger and detached youth workers, or a play scheme compared to a youth work street soccer event. This rich diversity of methods, settings and contexts within each sector makes it more challenging to compare. It was clear that the two sectors are and should continue to work distinctively, but that there was scope to explore support and collaboration between the sectors to further areas of common interest and benefit.

OUTCOMES

✓ LACK OF CHALLENGE



Outcomes for Young People from Youth Work

(YouthLink Scotland)

- Young people broaden their perspectives through new experiences and thinking
- Young people consider risk, make reasoned decisions and take control
- Young people participate safely and effectively in groups
- Young people express their voice and demonstrate social commitment
- Young people create, describe and apply their learning and skills
- Young people manage personal, social and formal relationships
- Young People are confident, resilient and optimistic for the future



Short to Medium Term Outcomes for Children from Play

(Play Strategy for Scotland: Evidence, Outcomes and Logic Models)

- Enjoyment and Opportunities to interact with others
- Increased risk management skills
- Increased understanding and capacity for health
- Increased adaptability and flexibility to uncertain situations
- Increased self-esteem and self-efficacy
- Increased ability to survive and thrive in social and physical environment
- Increased ability to regulate emotions
- Increased resilience to uncertain and unexpected events
- Increased resistance to stress and anxiety
- Improved physical fitness
- Development of a flexible cognitive approach of problem solving
- Development and maintenance of neural plasticity (the ability to learn)
- Development of language
- Increased ability to form strong attachment relationships
- Increased ability to form and maintain friendships
- Decreased chance of children finding more dangerous ways to seek risky behaviour

PLAY SPACES AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE PUBLIC REALM

A significant area and issue which was shared by both sectors was the matter of the public perceiving children, and more so young people at play or in public spaces as anti-social behaviour.

Presenters throughout the symposium continued to echo the need for fit for purpose spaces and places for young people to play, gather, be social and be active. Recent research conducted in Northern Ireland found that 97% of 16 year olds believed that teenagers should have access to play and leisure spaces (*Life and Times Survey, 2010*).

Meeting the play needs of young people of different ages was also considered in the discussion, with practitioners reflecting on new play spaces which have been designed locally for younger children and which did not take account of the potential use of the space by young people. Anecdotal examples were shared of young people being made to feel unwelcome in play spaces, often being told to move on or that they were intimidating younger children.

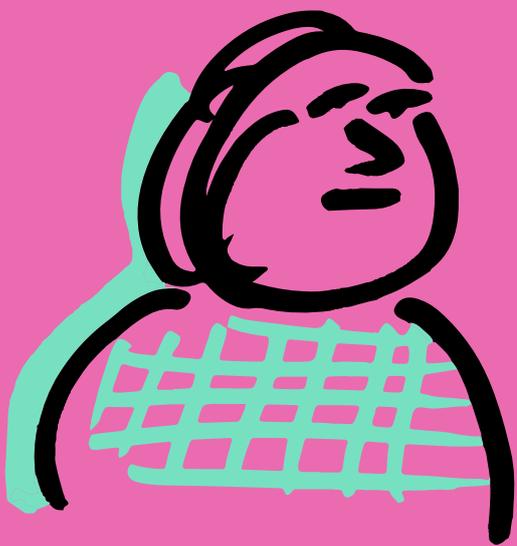


Also brought to the attention of the symposium was the need for inclusive play spaces to meet young people's needs, particularly those affected by disability. The Yard have an adventure play ground in Edinburgh for children and young people up to the age of 25 and provide facilitated play for older young people affected by disability.

✓ LOCAL CONSTRAINT

to place + play

That's not for us



ENTS



Extract from General Comment 17:

Resistance to children's use of public spaces:

"Children's use of public space for play, recreation and their own cultural activities is also impeded by the increasing commercialization of public areas, from which children are excluded. In addition, in many parts of the world, there is decreasing tolerance of children in public spaces. The introduction of, for example, curfews on children, gated communities or parks, reduced tolerance of noise levels, playgrounds with strict rules for acceptable play behaviour, and restrictions on access to shopping malls, builds a perception of children as 'problems', and serves to demonise them. Adolescents, in particular, are widely perceived as a threat by widespread negative media coverage and representation and discouraged from use of public spaces.

The exclusion of children has significant implications for their development as citizens. Shared experienced of inclusive public spaces across the age span serves to promote and strengthen civil society and encourage children to recognise themselves as citizens with rights. Therefore, States are encouraged to promote dialogue between older and younger generations to encourage greater recognition of children as rights holders and of the importance of networks of diverse community spaces in a local area which can accommodate the play and recreational needs of all children."

AGE (OR STAGE) APPROPRIATE PLAY

▷ SOLITARY PLAY
is often just
as important



The nature of play activities was also a theme of discussion at the symposium. The delegates had the opportunity to hear the findings of the (Re) Imagining Youth research study, which was a historical and cross-cultural comparison of youth leisure in Glasgow and Hong Kong. One of the findings of the research was to show a shift in the meaning of young people's leisure – from 'free time' to 'personal space' with increasing importance being placed on online spaces where young people can explore, interact and engage in creative play. The YMCA contribution



identified that young people often enjoy having the opportunity to engage in play activities which might typically be reserved for younger children when the environment is made to be safe and non-judgemental. This included young people willingly engaging in parachute games, bouncy castles or other inflatables. The Yard contributed that play activities which have increased dimensions for risk taking can be more appealing and attractive to older children and young people. There was an identified gap that neither sectors truly understood young people's attitude towards play, how they define play, or what play activities they would most like to engage with and in what settings.

WHAT SHOULD HAPPEN NEXT?

Need an ACTION PLAN
for older young people
and play



The symposium gave the sectors the opportunity to consider the question of what could happen next which would foster greater collaboration and partnership working between youth work and play work. This would require developing new ways of working and thinking.

- Supporting effective transition between provisions/services within local communities e.g. through play work in to youth work
- Knowledge and practice exchanges – joint training and events, identifying common competencies and youth-led practices
- Exploring or piloting locality approaches with geographic collaboration for sharing and maximising resources such as volunteers, facilities, materials, equipment
- Establish local youth work and play work networks
- Engage in research with young people around their experiences and understanding of play for their age group
- Utilising community development approaches to explore parental and family engagement in play for all ages, challenging attitudes, fears and risks
- Utilising community development approaches to challenge public perception of young people using play spaces or engaging in play activities
- Developing joint messages from national agencies/organisations to support both sectors and to influence policy and strategy (nationally and locally)
- Youth services to develop a play policy statement, created in partnership with young people

Play is a
SOCIAL
JUSTICE
ISSUE



WHAT CAN I DO? INDIVIDUAL ACTIONS

In addition to areas which would require coordination and partnership, delegates identified 'sparks' that they could progress individually that would bring about change and progress this agenda.

- Champion for the development of outdoor spaces when refurbishing centres and secondary schools.
- Challenge negative perceptions and views of children and young people playing or utilising the public realm, and encourage and facilitate inter-generational dialogue to engage play memories and the value of play.
- Ensuring children and young people voices listened to and reflected in policy / decision making, and advocating for children and young people's right.
- Increase personal understanding of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

WHAT IS STOPPING US?

- Mindset and lack of opportunities for structured dialogue between two sectors
- A constructed divide between the two sectors regarding policy, governance and planning
- Uncertainty of funding for play and youth work and potential for competition for the same funds. Funding criteria may preclude the provision of play services for older children/young people.
- Gap in research or evaluation of linking the two approach that we can learn from to do or think differently
- Perception of youth work having too much structure/red tape/bureaucracy to enable young people to be free to play
- Competing demands and priorities, makes forming new collaborations more challenging

CHALLENGE QUESTIONS:

More COLLABORATION across sectors



Does the play and youth work sector truly understand one another? What can you do to build this understanding?

We need to reframe ONLINE PLAY for the benefit of children and young people



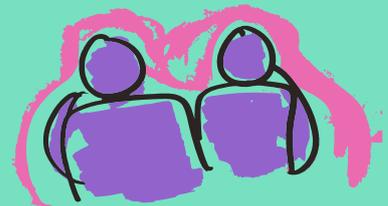
How do you understand and value play spaces which take place online?

Why are schools EMPTY half the day?



What can we do collectively to increase use of the school estate, including school play grounds for play work and youth work?

Pledge to WORK CLOSELY TOGETHER



How could you start the conversation in your local area about joining up play and youth work services and activities?

✓ Adolescents are
hardwired to
TAKE RISKS



□ We **YOUTHIFIED**
something that
was traditionally
seen as play

□ What is your level of understanding of
and the significance of adolescent brain
development to the experience of play
for young people?

□ How can you influence the design
and use of spaces suitable for play
in adolescence; and the creation of
inclusive play spaces?

□ Do we feel
UNCOMFORTABLE
about play for people
other than
children?



□ What action or cultural shift is required
to make play for older children normal?

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Useful Websites:

- **(Re) Imagining Youth:**
<https://reimaginingyouth.wordpress.com/>
- **Ground for Learning:**
<http://www.ltl.org.uk/scotland/>
- **Play Scotland:**
www.playscotland.org
- **The Yard:**
www.theyardscotland.org.uk
- **YMCA Scotland:**
<https://www.ymcascotland.org/>
- **YouthLink Scotland:**
www.youthlinkscotland.org

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**The Scottish
Government**
Riaghaltas na h-Alba

**Scotland's
Play Strategy**
Valuing play, every day



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