



Local Authority
Play Provision in Scotland, 2006

Executive Summary

Background

Play Scotland commissioned a Play Provision Questionnaire to gather baseline information on play in a local authority context. A two-page questionnaire was distributed to all local authorities in Scotland in 2006 to collect key information on play policy, funding and training. 27 of the 32 local authorities in Scotland responded before the survey end date.

Purpose

Play Scotland was also keen to determine the level of support, policy and planning for play within the local authorities in the absence of a statutory duty for play.

Play in Scotland

Local authorities fulfil a critical role in providing quality opportunities for children's play in Scotland. With one million children living in Scotland in 2006, this represents a significant challenge.

Future Research Priorities

Interpretation of the Play Scotland survey was hindered by evidence that some of the questions were not interpreted by respondents in a consistent manner, nor in a manner which the wider community of play professionals would consider to be valid. The most immediate research priority is to establish more robust baseline measures for play in Scottish local authorities.

There is a need for further research to better understand the grounds for judging 'play to be a priority' in local authorities. The high percentage of local authorities for which play was reported to be a priority sits uncomfortably with the low proportion of local authorities with play policies, play strategies, strategic play development officers, Playday events and free access to key opportunities.

Although references were made to play as a corporate service, it often seemed that play was understood only from a single service department viewpoint, typically Education or Leisure. There is a need to detail the ways in which play features – or should feature – in the remits of a range of departments (if not all departments) in Scottish local authorities, in addition to being a corporate matter.

Key Findings

The survey highlights that good practice in play provision, support and management is commonplace among local authorities in Scotland.

Most notably:

Play is perceived to be a priority in 68% of local authorities

At least £7,816,497 was spent on direct play provision in Scotland by local authorities in 2006.

More than two thirds of local authorities - 68% have a physical activity strategy for children

There are, at least, 4,156 playgrounds in Scotland

Three fifths of local authorities - 59% - provided opportunities for career development for playwork staff

On the other hand, for some issues, the majority position among local authorities in Scotland is negative. Most notably:

Only 22% of local authorities have a play policy

Only 31% of local authorities have a play strategy

Only 38% of local authorities in Scotland have either a play strategy or a play policy and only 16% have both a play policy and a play strategy

Only 25% of local authorities offered children free access to leisure centres

Only 41% of local authorities have at least one strategic play development officer

See over for specific policy recommendations

Five specific policy recommendations are made on the basis of the survey evidence.

1. There is clearly a wide variation in approaches to play across local authorities in Scotland. A National Play Policy statement underpinned by a Statutory Duty on local authorities (with ring fenced funding for Play) would be a progressive step in assisting local authorities to provide adequate opportunities and resources to support children's play in Scotland.

2. Children's play is primarily – although not exclusively – a neighbourhood matter. The survey provided little evidence of a 'local focus' for play. A new requirement should be placed on Community Planning Partnerships to develop and implement a Play Strategy for their area.

3. The survey highlighted that free access to play was not commonplace for after school clubs, leisure centres and community buildings. Although it could be argued that free access is not essential to facilitate participation among children from low income households, there is a need for all local authorities to formulate a play strategy which would set out their approach to facilitating inclusive opportunities for play for all children.

4. The survey highlighted problems in establishing basic counts of playgrounds, playing fields and other spaces for play. Comprehensive national and local records of all spaces for play are required.

5. The survey highlighted an uneven approach to staffing issues across local authorities. There is a need for all local authorities in Scotland to recognise the value of playwork qualifications, playwork staff and to commit sufficient resources to ensure continuous professional development for all staff with a play remit. Furthermore, there is a need for local authorities to have a single point of contact – or play champion – to progress play development in a strategic manner.

Authors: John McKendrick, Delma Byrne, Marguerite Hunter Blair

©Play Scotland 2007

Extract from Local Authority Play Provision in Scotland, 2006

Report produced by Play Scotland

ISBN: 978-0-9556647-0-0

Play Scotland

Midlothian Innovation Centre
Pentlandfield
Roslin
EH25 9RE

Tel: 0131 440 9070

Fax: 0131 440 9071

Email: sharonforrester@playscotland.org

www.playscotland.org