

Conclusions and Next Steps

The research confirms that play is an important part of the everyday experience of children in staffed provision throughout Scotland. The vast majority of children spend the majority of their time playing when attending staffed services. Free play and outdoors play are being facilitated, although there may be opportunities to expose more children, more often to the benefits that these play experiences afford. Training opportunities are available, although it must be questioned whether general training will provide practitioners with the necessary skills and knowledge to facilitate 'free play' and to capitalise on the array of opportunities for outdoors play.

Lessons for Play Scotland

- Play is commonplace across staffed provision in Scotland. Play Scotland must continue to devise effective ways to support the playwork of staff and volunteers in a wide range of settings. In particular, more free play training is required and more training is required that emphasises Playwork Principles. There is a need to communicate that the play element in many childcare or youth qualifications, does not address these issues in sufficient depth. Play Scotland's 'Powerful Play' training course can address these training needs.
- The research hints at a lack of staff training opportunities in small enterprises and in more rural locations. Play Scotland is well placed to investigate the nature of these training demands and to attend to these needs.

Lessons for Providers and Practitioners

- Staffed provision has a key role in facilitating outdoor play (in winter and summer time) and 'free play' among children in Scotland.
- There is scope to broaden the range of opportunities for volunteers to undertake play-specific training, for example in the Playwork Principles.

What More do we Need to Know?

- The research demonstrates the importance of free play and outdoors play in staffed provision across Scotland. There may be merit in undertaking further research to find out the prevalence of other types of play in these settings.
- Further research is required to confirm the tentative suggestion that children in more rural parts of Scotland have greater access to outdoor play than those living in urban areas.

About the Study

The research is based on an online survey of 20 questions. The survey was administered in November and December 2011. Initially, childcare providers in Glasgow, East Ayrshire, West Lothian and the Shetland Isles were invited to participate, using a contact list provided by the Care Commission. Youth Scotland and the Scouts promoted awareness of the research through their ezines. Similarly, the Smartplay Network brought the research to the attention of toy library contacts. 135 responses were received from across the length and breadth of Scotland, representing a wide range of care, youth/leisure and play settings. The survey was designed and administered by Jane Crawford and Sharon McCluskie (with advice offered by John McKendrick and Susan Elsley), preliminary analysis was undertaken by Jane, and data quality checks and a more detailed analysis were completed by John. Amanda Godsell provided support throughout.



Play Scotland
Midlothian Innovation Centre
Pentlandfield, Roslin, Midlothian EH25 9RE
t: 0131 440 9070 e: info@playscotland.org

Company Number: 017885 Scottish Charity Number: SC029167. Registered at the above address.

PLAY IN STAFFED PROVISION: The Scottish Experience



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Play Scotland Research Briefings No.1

Foreword

"Investing in children's play is one of the most important things we can do to improve children's health and wellbeing in Scotland," (Sir Harry Burns, Chief Medical Officer, Scotland).

Play Scotland was delighted to secure funding from the Scottish Government's Go Play Fund (administered by Inspiring Scotland) to help build the capacity of the Play Sector to facilitate free play. This provided an opportunity to engage a wide range of organisations to ascertain the importance that they place on play, and to identify the particular training needs that they have. Given the Scottish Government's long-term commitment through the Early Years Framework to "increase outdoor play and physical activity", it was also important to canvass opinion on outdoor play.

In 2011 Play Scotland surveyed a wide range of staff to find out about their experience of facilitating free play and outdoor play. Their responses demonstrate a firm commitment to children's play across Scotland from a wide variety of providers.



Marguerite Hunter Blair
Chief Executive,
Play Scotland

Key Findings

- **Play is clearly valued and is an important part of the service provided by staffed provision in Scotland.** Children are reported to spend a significant proportion of their time playing – 70% of respondents reported that children spend at least 80% of their time playing when using their service.
- **Free play and outdoor play**, two play types that are highly valued by Play Scotland, are also **found to be commonplace in staffed provision.** Two thirds of respondents (66%) reported that their children spend at least half of their play time engaged in free play and 88% of respondents reported that their service routinely provides opportunities for outdoor play.
- **Access to outdoor play is seasonal.** Staffed provision is more likely to provide more opportunities for outdoor play in the summer time – almost one fifth of respondents reported that their children do not play outdoors in the winter (18%), while the proportion of settings in which children spend at least half of their play time outdoors falls from 59% in summer time to just 17% in winter time.
- **Play is a particularly important part of the experience in 'care' settings** (such as childminders, nurseries, and out of school care clubs) – 92% of respondents reported that children spend at least half of their time playing; 82% of respondents reported that children spend more than half of this play time in 'free play'; and virtually all care providers reported that their service "routinely provides opportunities for outdoor play" (97% of respondents).
- **A range of training opportunities is offered to staff and volunteers.** However, one in five settings do not offer Induction training. Where training is available, volunteers are less likely than staff to have access to play-specific training (30% of volunteers have access to Induction training in Playwork Principles, compared to 45% of staff). However, there is no disinterest in training among staff and volunteers; only 7% of respondents report that 'lack of interest' is a barrier to uptake of 'free play' training opportunities.



Jane Crawford



Sharon McCluskie



Dr John H McKendrick

Introduction

Play Scotland promotes the right to play, rest and leisure for children and young people. Although play is often spontaneous and child-initiated, it also takes place in regulated settings. Through this research, Play Scotland sought to better understand the importance, character and support for play in staffed provision in Scotland. What is the nature of play in childcare centres and nurseries? Does play matter to organised youth and community groups? How do these play experiences contrast with those in which formal play services are provided?

Importance of Play

Play matters. Virtually all respondents reported that playing “made up a significant proportion of the experience that their service provided”. Indeed, almost three quarters of those responding suggested that children using their service spend at least 80% of their time playing.

The amount of time that is spent playing in both care settings (such as a nursery) and in play-oriented services (such as a playscheme) was higher than that for leisure-oriented services (such as a youth club). Similarly, play was reported to be more common where the service catered for pre-school aged children than school-aged children. However, these differences should not undermine the key finding that play was reported to feature strongly across all settings and across services for all age groups.

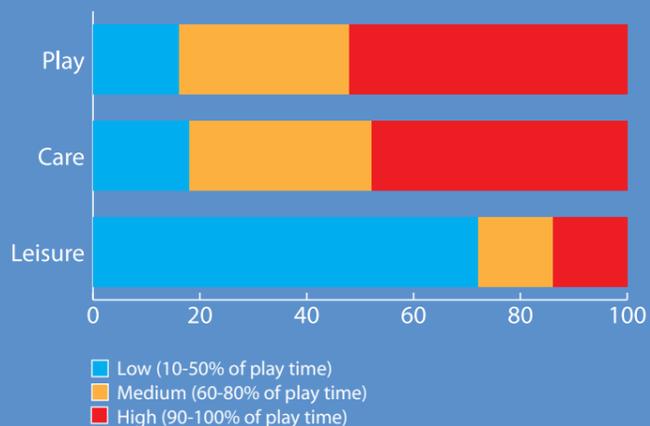
Free Play

Free play is highly regarded by play professionals. It is widely understood to be “freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated”. In this respect, it would appear to be the opposite of what staffed provision is all about. Not so – virtually all of those respondents from both the play and care sectors acknowledged that they provided opportunities for free play, as did the vast majority of those from leisure-oriented settings.

Respondents were asked to estimate the proportion of play time that was given over to free play. This further confirmed the importance of free play - almost two thirds of respondents reported that their children spend more than half of their play time engaging in free play.

Services for pre-school aged children (compared to those for school aged children), and play/care services (compared to leisure services) were those in which free play was most likely to be common. Figure 1 summarises differences in the amount of free play experienced by children in different settings.

Figure 1: Children in care and play settings spend more of their play time engaged in free play (% of respondents)



Outdoor Play

As well as the sensory benefits and physical challenges that outdoor play offers to children, it might also be argued that outdoor play is good for communities. Encouraging greater use of the outdoors promotes health and makes our public spaces feel safer and more welcoming.

Access to outdoor play

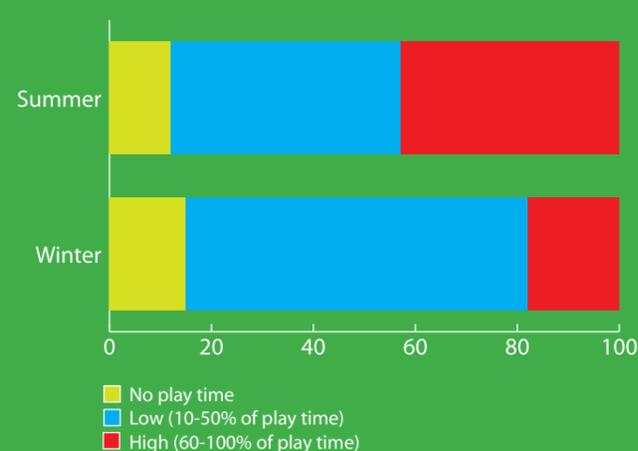
Given the importance of outdoor play, it is reassuring that the vast majority of services are reported to provide “routine opportunities for outdoor play” (88% of all respondents).

Interestingly, opportunities for outdoor play were more common among care settings and in leisure/youth settings, compared to staffed play provision. Although a clear majority of almost two thirds of the play providers reported that they offered outdoor play, this was significantly less than was reported in these other sectors. Outdoor play, in particular, is not the preserve of the staffed play sector. Furthermore, a lack of access to outdoor play was more notable in urban play settings than rural play settings, although the small sample size makes this a tentative observation, rather than a key finding.

Seasonal variation in playing outdoors

Figure 2 provides evidence that suggests that children play outdoors more often in summer than in winter. To some extent (given weather and hours in darkness), this is to be expected. More positively, even in the winter, the majority of staffed provision permit children a degree of access to outdoor play.

Figure 2: Children spend significantly more time outdoors in summer, compared to winter (% of respondents)



On the other hand, there are significant differences in access to outdoor play. The staffed play sector is less likely than the care and leisure sectors to provide access to outdoor play in the summer. Care settings are most likely to report that their children spent the majority of their play-time outdoors in summer. Somewhat in contrast to other findings, outdoor play in summer is more common to those providing for school age children, than those providing for pre-school age children.

In winter time, the patterns of access to outdoor play change slightly. No access to outdoor play remains most common in the staffed play sector (two in every five play providers). Similarly, there is a strong tendency for a low proportion of play time in care settings and youth/leisure settings to be spent outdoors (over seven in every ten providers in these sectors). On the other hand, the outdoors is where children spend most winter play-time in about one in every five care providers and play providers.

Training

Induction training

A wide range of induction training opportunities is currently available to support staff and volunteers within their first six months of service (Figure 3). Although volunteers are as likely as staff to have access to training opportunities, there are two problems to note. First, volunteers are significantly less likely than staff to have access to play-specific training (for example, Playwork Principles). Second, in a significant minority of settings, both staff and volunteers are reported not to have access to any induction training (just over one in five settings).

Lack of staff training opportunities was more likely to be reported in rural/island areas, compared to urban areas. Staff training was also more likely when the service catered for a greater number of children, or had a higher number of staff.

Figure 3: Staff and volunteers have access to a wide range of induction training (% of respondents)



Free play training

Respondents were asked to account for the main barriers to uptake of ‘free play’ training, where such training was available. The main ‘barrier’ that was reported was that staff or volunteers were already trained to a higher level and therefore had no need for free play training (43% of cases). Lack of interest is most certainly not a barrier to training, with fewer than one in ten respondents noting this as a barrier (7%). As Figure 4 suggests, a range of barriers to free play training are identified, although no single barrier is particularly commonplace.

Figure 4: Barriers to induction training experienced by staff and volunteers (% of respondents)

