

Welcoming the Play Charter

Play Debate, 14th March 2017

Committed to PLAY



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*)

Children's Right to Play

Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)

1. *Every child has the right 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. *Member governments 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.*

What is play?



“Children’s play is any behaviour, activity or process initiated, controlled and structured by children themselves; it takes place whenever and wherever opportunities arise.”¹

Play comes in many forms. It can be active, passive, solitary, independent, assisted, social, exploratory, educational or just for fun. Moreover, it can happen indoors or outdoors, it can be structured, creative, messy, entirely facilitated by the imagination or can involve using the latest gadget. **Scotland’s Play Strategy** (2013:13)

There is a consensus on three areas to focus action so that all children in Scotland have sufficient space and time to play

- Embedding children’s right to play
- Inclusion
- Participation and planning.

UN Committee on the Rights of the Child Concluding Observations on art.31 (2016)²

Article 31 Concluding Observations can be summarised as:

- Strengthen effort to guarantee the right of the child to play.
- Provide children, including those with disabilities and children in marginalized and disadvantaged situations, with safe, accessible, inclusive and smoking-free spaces for play.
- Fully involve children in planning, designing and monitoring the implementation of play policies and activities relevant to play and leisure, at the community, local and national levels.

¹ Legal analysis of article 31, UN Committee on the Right of the Child, 2013, para.14c

²http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRC%2fC%2fGBR%2fCO%2f5&Lang=en

Current issues in brief

- **Closing the attainment gap** – with mounting evidence of the importance of play in learning, and the requirement for play throughout the school day (UNCRC), how can ground-level initiatives be scaled up to the whole education system?
- **Planning and environment** – how can space for play be protected and enhanced long term?³
- **Street play** - how can community efforts to extend all forms of street play / regular sessional road closures in residential streets, be supported by consistent, implementable guidance?
- **Inclusion** – how can we ensure all children can access play everyday without facing significant barriers?
- **Risk and challenge** – how can we ensure risk-benefit approaches are used consistently and inclusively across Scotland?
- **Policy practice gap** - where is the bridge which will help to embed policy in practice?



The way children and young people spend their time has changed significantly over the last thirty years, with a reduction in the time spent playing outdoors, a massive contraction in their independent mobility and a huge increase in screen-based entertainment.



Play is a social justice issue – planning for play reduces inequality

Access to play is not equally distributed in Scotland (McKendrick, 2016)⁴. Challenges faced by children – poverty, disadvantage or disability discrimination – intersect with each other and compound inequality of opportunity.

There are inequalities across household socio-economic groups.⁵ Children from higher socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to play for longer on a weekend, take part in a greater variety of play activities, play together with a parent and to have 'positive' barriers to play such as extra-curricular activities and homework.

Children from lower socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to experience 'negative' barriers to play such as a lack of suitable and safe local spaces.

National Play Strategy and National Youth Work Strategy⁶

There are high-level commonalities between these strategies and both are grounded in the UNCRC. The core demand and the services of many youth organisations cover the 8-12 age group. For older young people the boundaries are blurred between the two disciplines.

The sectors have come together to develop fresh thinking and understanding of play in the lives of young people (moving beyond early years).

³ Consultation Places, People and Planning: A consultation of the future of the Scottish Planning System. Deadline 4 April 2017.

⁴ McKendrick, JH (2016) Promoting play in Scotland: <http://www.lgiuscotland.org.uk/briefing/promoting-local-play-in-scotland-what-local-authorities-need-to-know/>

⁵ Scottish Home Play Survey (Play Scotland, 2016).

⁶ <http://www.playscotland.org/wp-content/uploads/Playing-Together-Report-2016.pdf>

Play, Planning and Place

“Planning for play requires a comprehensive approach with collaboration across sectors and policy areas. Relevant sectors include those dealing directly with children, such as health and education, and also those concerned with housing, architecture, parks, transport, environment and planning etc., all of which have a significant impact on children’s play opportunities.” (National Play Strategy Action Plan, p9)

Observations

- Adequate outdoor space to play is in decline throughout the UK including Scotland.
- Free play in outdoor environments is essential for the wellbeing of children and for their healthy development.
- Young people can be perceived by the public as engaging in anti-social behaviour when in public spaces.
- Children identify general lack of cleanliness, dog fouling, unimaginative play areas, distance to parks and anti-social behaviour as the most common reasons preventing play outdoors.
- There is a need for spaces where young people can play, gather, and be social and active.
- There is a need for inclusive play spaces which meet the needs of young people with a disability.

“Children’s play and learning, their close relationships and social interactions are dependent on the quality of spaces and places they inhabit”. (Brooker and Woodhead, 2013)⁷



Independent mobility

The freedom of children to get out and about in their local neighbourhood without adult supervision has been shown to be important to their wellbeing and development. Children have far less independent mobility now than they did in the past.

Importance of children’s independent mobility:

- Greater level of physical activity
- Higher levels of sociability and improved mental wellbeing
- Intrinsic value of children’s play and independence: enabling independent mobility is an important element of delivering the rights of children to rest, leisure and play (art. 31 UN CRC).

Funding for Play

Scottish Government has invested £7m over five years through Go Play and Go2play to support direct play provision for children in disadvantaged communities.

Children’s organisations report that access to suitable funding has reduced annually; there is no statutory duty for play which may prevent the effective implementation of the Play Strategy and make this an area vulnerable to budget cuts.

“Investing in children’s play is one of the most important things we can do to improve children’s health and wellbeing in Scotland.” Former Chief Medical Officer, Harry Burns

⁷ Brooker, L. and Woodhead, M. eds. (2013). *The Right to Play*. Early Childhood in Focus, 9. Milton Keynes: The Open University with the support of Bernard van Leer Foundation.

Embedding Children's Right to Play "Play essential to a happy childhood" (Play Charter)	Inclusion "No one is left out" (Play Charter)	Participation and Planning "Supporting children's participation" (Play Charter)	Promote and support ways for involving and supporting parents and carers in enriching opportunities for children's play		
What can you do?			Improve play training and practice in early learning, childcare and schools		
Create area-wide Play Strategies which focus on equality and inclusion; give significantly more attention to coordination across services and geographic areas to achieve inclusive opportunities			Provide support for staffed play provision to test innovative community-based health and well-being initiatives		
Improve the data we have on children's play, with indicators that can track progress		Protect and prioritise wild and natural play spaces	Manage barriers such as high traffic volumes and unwelcoming public spaces to effectively protect children's right to play		
Open school playgrounds for play outside school hours	Provide equality training for all members of school communities	Extend and enforce 20 mph zones across areas	A strong high-level lead 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		
Develop a network of Play Champions at local and regional levels	Recognise the need for play throughout the school day	Support community efforts to extend all forms of Street Play /regular sessional road closures in residential streets			
Remove No Ball Games signs & promote positive play messages	Promote the use of the principles of Universal Design in making spaces for play		What do children say? ⁸		
Use the Play Map, Place Standard and Getting It Right for Play resources (& share learning)			<p>Play: we learn, grow, experiment and do so much more when we're playing. Even though where and how we play may have changed from when you were a child, what we need most is time to play and adults to spend time with us when we play. Play is the best thing about being a child!</p> <p>Environment: we need the environment to be the best it can because with a poor environment we all have a poorer quality of life. It's up to us as well as adults to protect it for the future.</p>		
			<p>Play projects and places For great examples in Scotland see: www.nancyovenstrust.org.uk/winners/</p>		
			<p>For further information, contact: Marguerite Hunter Blair CEO Play Scotland 0131 313 8859 077 9595 4856 Marguerite@playscotland.org</p>		
			http://www.playscotland.org		

⁸ <http://www.childrensparliament.org.uk/our-work/past-work/mapping-our-future/>