



department for
culture, media
and sport

Time for

play

Encouraging greater play opportunities
for children and young people

improving
the quality
of life for all

DCMS's aim is to improve the quality of life for all through cultural and sporting activities, support the pursuit of excellence, and champion the tourism, creative and leisure industries.



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Foreword

I am delighted to put my name to this document, which sets out the Government's work on play. There is no doubt that over the past few years the importance of play, because of the benefits it can bring to children, has been increasingly recognised.

This document signals Government's ongoing commitment to play and demonstrates the extent of current activity across departments. It also recognises the hugely significant changes over the past two years with the Big Lottery Fund strategic play initiative, the work to develop a regional infrastructure for play and the network of local play strategies which will evolve out of the Big Lottery Fund's investment.

We have been working across Government through the cross departmental group on play, to ensure we make the most of how play can support and underpin other policies. We have also seen significant changes in service delivery, with emphasis on delivery at local level through children's trust arrangements; Children and Young People's Plans; Local Area Agreements; and local offers. The opportunity for the play sector to establish itself and to maximise the new opportunities which these changes offer has never been greater.

The information on the following pages aims to reinforce that message and support the debate about the importance of local play strategies.

I am firmly of the view that play is a necessity not a luxury. After all, some of the children playing today may be our Olympic champions in 2012!

We in national Government will continue to do our part to support play and I look forward to seeing the play sector go from strength to strength.



David Lammy MP
Minister for Culture

A message from the Local Government Association

Providing positive, well managed and stimulating places for children to play has always been an important aspect of the work of local authorities. From adventure playgrounds, to support for voluntary sector play centres and out-of-school provision, local authorities have played a leading role in the development of play opportunities for children of all ages.

All children benefit from opportunities to play but for disadvantaged children it is particularly important. Local authorities know that access to play offers children opportunities to learn and develop new skills, including physical activity. Combining play strategies with wider programmes for health, regeneration, childcare, extended schools and youth offending, will provide a powerful platform for local authorities - capable of reducing inequalities and helping children to reach their potential.

That's why it is so important that opportunities for children to play are a key aspect of local authorities' strategic planning. This is integral to the delivery of the "Every Child Matters" framework through children's trusts and Children and Young People's Plans. And with new money coming from the Play England programme, funded by the Big Lottery Fund, local authorities have even more support to make it happen.



Councillor Les Lawrence

Chair: Local Government Association
Children and Young People Board



1.

Introduction: time for play

The focus of this document is on Government action to encourage the promotion of greater play opportunities for children and young people. It concentrates on the importance of play, as well as some of the key issues relating to it.

The document is not exhaustive. There are many other excellent publications which cover play in more detail and a selection of these is listed at the end of this document, with links to useful organisations.



What do we mean by play?

For the purposes of this document, we are using the definition used in the play review *Getting Serious About Play* published in 2004, and on which the Big Lottery Fund play programme is based. It is that:

"Play means what children and young people do when they follow their own ideas and interests, in their own way and for their own reasons."

Play provision is defined in that same document as:

"...a space, some facilities or equipment or a set of activities intended to give children the opportunity to play as defined above. At its most successful, it offers children and young people as much choice, control and freedom as possible within reasonable boundaries. This is often best achieved with adult support, guidance or supervision. The children and young people may themselves choose play involving certain rules or, in some cases, informal sport."

Why does play matter?

"At the end of the day, I have never heard of any difference of opinion between the Government and the sector about the importance of play."

Estelle Morris¹

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) gives all children the right "to rest and leisure; to engage in appropriate play and recreational activities". More recently in 2005 the Labour Party Manifesto said that together with £155 million from the Big Lottery Fund, Government would ensure that children who have little access to play facilities and those with a disability are given the opportunity to enjoy safe, modern playgrounds.

It is clear that "things to do, places to go" are vitally important. In fact, the much quoted 2001 Mori poll for the Audit Commission and the follow up report in 2005 showed that "activities for young people" were ranked by adults as the most requested improvement in local services; and "facilities for young children" scored ahead of health, education and housing and almost level with crime reduction.

"Young people want to play and spend time outside and it is important that we provide suitable spaces for them. Alongside learning more about themselves and each other, play facilities will help keep children fit and healthy, help tackle the growing issue of obesity and provide parents with places where they are happy to let their children spend their free time."

Tessa Jowell, Secretary of State, Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2002

¹ Adjournment debate Hansard 26 January 2005, cols 117WH – 124WH.



As Tessa Jowell has explained, the Government recognises that play is of fundamental importance for children and young people's health, well-being and learning. Good play opportunities are essential to children's development. Play provides enriching experiences that can help develop children's emotional and social skills. Research highlights the importance of children being able to learn about risks and use their own initiative. It also suggests that it is essential for them to have opportunities to practice making and consolidating friendships and to deal with conflict – the basic skills needed in order to become "emotionally literate". This is borne out by children who say that meeting and spending time with their friends is one of the most important opportunities offered by play and play provision.

Research also shows that play is particularly relevant to children's health. Advice from the Chief Medical Officer states that "children and young people should achieve a total of at least 60 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity each day". There is growing evidence that unstructured play is the most effective way to achieve this. A recent study by University College London (in 2004) highlighted its benefits. Play came second only to PE in calorific intensity, and the study concluded that "walking and playing provide children with more physical activity than most other activities".

There are also links to mental health. In *Read the Signs* (Department of Health, 2003) the Mental Health Foundation reported that the increasingly limited amount of time children have to play outside, or to attend supervised play projects, was one factor causing the rise of mental ill health in young people.

Play provision can help stimulate economic growth and build social cohesion. It can empower parents and carers and help the development of self-supportive community networks.



2.

What Government is doing

Department for Culture, Media and Sport

As the lead department for children's play, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) has had links with the play sector for many years. Play contributes to two of its Strategic Priorities² (children and young people; and communities) as well as the Public Service Agreement that it shares with the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and the Department of Health (DH) on reducing the rise in childhood obesity (see page 11).

While DCMS does not directly fund or deliver play provision it has contracts with three organisations that are active in the field of children's play. These are intended to support at a national level the development of a local play infrastructure. They are:

- The Children's Play Council (CPC) to provide policy and research activities
- SkillsActive to develop a national framework for training and qualifications in play and provide regional training centres (SkillsActive is also funded by DfES)
- The Children's Play Information Service (CPIS) to provide information to professional sectors and to the public on play-related issues.

(Both CPC and CPIS are managed by the National Children's Bureau.)

More information about these organisations can be found on pages 15 and 16.

In 2002 DCMS and DfES asked Frank Dobson MP to carry out a review of children's play in England. His report, *Getting Serious About Play* was published in early 2004. In welcoming the review, Culture Secretary Tessa Jowell highlighted the need for a more strategic, cross-departmental approach to play policy. DCMS responded by setting up a cross-Whitehall group on play which included representation from Department for Education and Skills; Department for Communities and Local Government (formerly Office of the Deputy Prime Minister); HM Treasury; Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; Department of Health; Home Office; Department for Transport; Local Government Association; Children's Play Council; Big Lottery Fund; and Kids, (an organisation which promotes and provides play opportunities for disabled children).

This group has met regularly to discuss a range of issues affecting play and to promote discussion and strategic working. Following publication of this document the group will evolve into a network which will meet on an ad hoc basis where there are specific issues to discuss.

In addition to its policy role on play, DCMS has much to offer through the mainstream work of its other sectors. Play is an early form of culture and many of the activities provided by our sector bodies contain elements that reflect this. Full information on these activities is available on the relevant websites (see list at page 45) but currently include:

² SP1: Further enhance access to culture and sport for children and give them the opportunity to develop their talents to the full and enjoy the benefits of participation. SP2: Increase and broaden the impact of culture and sport, to enrich individual lives, strengthen communities and improve the places where people live, now and for future generations.

Arts

The arts provide opportunities for exploring the world and using imagination through play. Arts and creative activities can be structured for specific learning outcomes, as well as providing child-initiated play activities. These include experimenting with textures, colours, sounds, movement, character and making objects. Children learn about themselves and the world around them, as well as gaining important social skills.

Many arts organisations work with families, children and young people in their own venues and in community settings. A number of these arts activities include playwork and, like the following example, are supported by Arts Council England.

Children's Links Reclaim the Streets

Children's Links is a children's charity based in Lincolnshire. The Reclaim the Streets project set out to provide challenging and creative play opportunities in four communities in East Lindsey during 2005/6. Recognising the importance to children of 'free' play opportunities in outdoor locations, Children's Links developed a programme of creative activity experiences. Professional artists were employed to create four memorable one-day events. With the help of local children they transformed an urban street, a community green and a garden into temporary play spaces.



Sport

Sport and play should not be confused. Sport is organised and usually played within “structured” rules, whereas play is what children do of their own volition, often making up their own rules. But there are still clear links between the two and both are essentially about having fun while taking part in some sort of physical activity. It is through play that children have their first experiences of sport and develop basic sporting skills such as kicking a ball around, racing their friends or climbing.

Children spend around 25 percent of the day in playgrounds which can be dull, uninspiring and intimidating for many children. Since 2001 Government has been working with the Youth Sport Trust to support playground development in primary schools across England through the creation of Zoneparcs. These are intended to transform primary school playgrounds, in areas of high deprivation, into vibrant and exciting spaces for all children that provide improved opportunities for pupils to take part in physical activity.

The key components of Zoneparcs are :

- Zoning the playground into three coloured activity areas
- Introducing and managing innovative play equipment
- Training pupils and lunchtime supervisors to guide activities
- Providing activity resources.

As part of the National School Sport strategy (PESSCL), DCMS is providing £2 million to provide a further 90 Zoneparc projects within 30 School Sport Partnerships. This is in addition to the £10 million invested by DfES to develop over 600 playground projects, including around 320 Zoneparcs.

Tackling obesity

The shared Public Service Agreement between DCMS, DH and DfES aims to “halt the year on year increase in obesity among children under 11 by 2010, in the context of a broader strategy to tackle obesity in the population as a whole”. The Public Health White Papers *Choosing Health* (2004), *Delivering Choosing Health* and *Choosing Activity* (both 2005) all identified the contribution that play can make to improving children’s fitness, health and well-being.

Low levels of physical activity and increased sedentary behaviour contribute to an energy imbalance and the increased risk of obesity. Play is therefore an important part of the Government’s strategy to increase physical activity and meet our shared target.

In terms of tackling obesity locally, Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) are already working with local authorities through children’s trusts to coordinate activities to improve children’s health. The PCT’s Local Development Plan and the local authority’s Children and Young People’s Plan agree shared priorities to tackle child obesity. These will feed into the Local Area Agreements with Government Offices and Strategic Health Authorities. Local play partnerships will of course have an important role in these arrangements.

Active England – Tooting and Mitcham Hub, London

The Tooting and Mitcham Hub Playzone is an Active England project. It gives young children the opportunity to develop their activity and movement skills from an early age using soft play equipment through to participating in more adult-based activities as they grow up. There is also a multi-sensory room for disabled young people. Tooting and Mitcham United Football Club has utilised the space in its north stand to create a community facility, which includes provision for play, sport and health, for the local community, many of whom are from deprived backgrounds.



Museums and libraries

Museums and libraries offer children access to safe, bright and stimulating play spaces with opportunities to explore and develop their imagination and creativity. They are increasingly involving children and young people in the design and development of these services to ensure they are creative and dynamic.

Many museums and galleries offer interactive displays, object handling and creative trails that promote imaginative play.

Libraries offer children and young people free access to a wide range of quality books that stimulate the imagination. Books are often the starting point for play, whether the catalyst is a boy wizard or a big friendly giant. Many libraries provide large play equipment, story sacks and specially designed play furniture to encourage children to explore and discover the resources on offer. In Sutton, for example, the picture book area is set out as a jungle with images of trees, cuddly snakes, lions and giraffes on the walls. In Dorset, giggle mirrors are being installed in libraries so that children are encouraged to view them as fun places to go.

Toy libraries can also be a useful resource, enabling children to play with a much wider range of toys than they might otherwise be able to. Middlesbrough runs special "tots and toys" sessions to promote library use for the under fives.

The Horniman Museum in London is part of the Curiosity and Imagination group of institutions, which encourage informal learning through creative play and music-making. Their Hands On Base includes Discovery boxes containing sets of fascinating objects which inspire children and families to play and explore using all their senses.

Big Art for Little Artists – Liverpool

In Liverpool, the Walker Gallery's "Big Art for Little Artists" is a new, dedicated children's gallery which opened in April 2006. It focuses on stimulating imaginative play based on art, including dressing-up and using puppets.



English Heritage

From 2004-2005 English Heritage (EH) education staff developed a series of family-friendly learning resources at over 40 sites to enrich visitor experience and offer opportunities for play, and learning through play. These include traditional toys and games for family use at selected sites such as Tilbury Fort and Eltham Palace; interactive 'story boxes' which feature stories written about key characters who also have objects associated with them, with replicas of objects in the boxes for people to handle; 'book boxes' which are collections of relevant books suitable for a range of ages that can be borrowed. For example Audley End House has books on Victorians, houses, homes and gardens. Similarly copies of the 'Big Book of Castles' are installed at key EH sites for children to use as a way in to questioning and understanding key themes and questions around castle sites. These resources offer fun, informative and interactive activities for adults and children to use together on a drop-in and informal basis. There is also a range of handling objects, including costumes for dressing-up, as part of existing displays and education spaces at sites. For example, integrated into the new interpretation displays and education spaces at Kenilworth Castle, interactive tools are provided to encourage hands-on investigation such as handling objects and making activities. EH already has playgrounds at three of its sites – Battle Abbey, Osborne House and Marble Hill House.

EH is currently in the process of scoping further potential pilot sites for children's play opportunities which have the space and grounds to accommodate such developments. Possibilities are being pursued at Brodsworth Hall and Gardens in Yorkshire and Witley Court and Gardens in West Midlands. EH hopes that as part of the visitor experience and family resources, the provision of children's play will provide an extra dimension to visits to sites, encourage more school and family groups to visit the sites, and provide more accessible and user-friendly resources.

As the Government's adviser on the historic environment, EH is also very much involved in the renaissance of our public park heritage as part of DCLG's Cleaner, Safer, Greener programme. EH will be working with the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) (see below) and CPC on providing advice about play in our public parks and green spaces.

The built environment

The quality of the design of our towns and cities directly affects children and young people's options for outdoor play. The quality of parks and green spaces is also important if they are to be places for play, sport and relaxing. Research shows that given the opportunity, children use the whole environment for play and spend much of their time moving between a variety of locations.

If a building or space is well-designed and links to a network of high quality and accessible spaces for play, children are more likely to use it. Funded by DCMS, CABE promotes and supports the best of architecture and urban design, with particular concern for those living in deprived areas. It achieves this by making the case for change, gathering evidence, providing education opportunities and offering advice and support to those who create, manage and use the built environment.

Coram's Fields, London

On the site of the Foundling Hospital, built in 1739 as a home for destitute children, is now a unique seven-acre children's space. Adults are only allowed to enter if accompanied by a child. Listed buildings have been refurbished and a centre for younger children has been added, with more indoor space for children's play and community use. New play equipment includes items for children with special needs, and an art room and quiet room are used for after school and school holiday activities.



Culture Online

Part of DCMS, Culture Online uses the internet and other digital technology to encourage more people to become involved in cultural activities. Its Playground Fun project offers children practical suggestions and ideas about how they can get outside and start playing. By including tips about games played in other countries and cultures, the site helps children to try out new games as well as offering them the chance to share their favourites.

DCMS has contracts with the following three play organisations

Children's Play Council

CPC was founded in 1988. It is an alliance of national and regional voluntary organisations, local authorities and partnerships, promoting children's right to play and the development of play provision in England through work programmes managed by the National Children's Bureau.

Through a contract with DCMS, CPC conducts a policy and research programme, including production of *Playtoday*, a free magazine for the sector.

CPC services the Play Safety Forum, an independent body made up of the key agencies involved in regulation and good practice guidance; and the Play Policy Forum, a UK multi-agency group of national organisations from the public, private and voluntary sectors with an interest in children's play. It sits on the cross-departmental group on play, which is led by DCMS.

In 2005, the Big Lottery Fund announced the setting up of a £155 million play programme in England – the Children's Play initiative. As part of this, in January 2006 CPC (as part of National Children's Bureau) was awarded a grant to deliver the Play England Project. This is a five year programme to help local agencies develop play strategies as the basis for applying for funding from the Children's Play Programme. The project will also assist in the identification, development and dissemination of best practice and promote the long-term strategic and sustainable development of play provision as a free service to children. More information on the play programme can be found on page 33.

As part of its contract with DCMS, CPC is developing a small number of strategic indicators. These will assess local authority performance in ensuring the availability of quality facilities for all children's play across their area. They will have the potential for use within the culture block of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) and in the Joint Area Reviews of Children's Services. Draft performance indicators will be piloted during 2006.

Children's Play Information Service

CPIS is the national library and information service on children's play, focusing on school age children. It has a large number of resources, including over 10,000 books, reports, pamphlets, journal articles and audio-visual materials on all aspects of children's play. CPIS is funded by DCMS and forms part of the National Children's Bureau Library and Information Service which has extensive resources on all aspects of children's lives.

CPIS provides a number of services, including:

- Free access to its reference library
- A website
- Telephone, letter and enquiry service
- A series of fact-sheets on key play topics
- Student reading lists
- Customised literature searches
- Contact details for play consultants, play organisations and play equipment manufacturers.

CPIS produces *Play Abstracts* and *Play Conferences & Events*, two free monthly email bulletins listing new books and journals, conferences and events related to play.

CPIS answers enquiries on play-related topics, including funding, play policies, equipment, safety, risk and challenge, and playwork. The majority of enquiries come from the play sector, playworkers, community groups and local authorities.

SkillsActive

SkillsActive is the Sector Skills Council for Active Leisure and Learning. Within SkillsActive sits the Playwork Unit which is responsible for:

- Improving children's lives by setting standards of excellence in education, training and qualifications, and developing opportunities for playworkers to access education, training and qualifications
- Raising the level of understanding about the importance of children's play
- Improving access to good quality play provision throughout England.

With an estimated 70,000 playworkers providing out-of-school services for children in England, SkillsActive has a vital role. Its recently published five year UK strategy *Quality Training, Quality Play 2006-11* aims to support and develop education, training and qualifications for playworkers across the workforce. SkillsActive has produced National Occupational Standards for playwork and the Foundation Degree.

The playwork sector is also a popular choice for those wishing to become involved in volunteering and their contribution is highly valued. In 2004 around 13 percent of the playwork sector was made up of volunteers, while nearly 40 percent said they worked as volunteers in addition to having paid roles in playwork.

Department for Education and Skills

Underpinning all that the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) does is its key aim of helping children and young people develop into healthy and active citizens who have a sense of their own self-worth and an awareness of the contribution that they can make to their community.

In pursuing this aim DfES is engaged in a range of initiatives that impact directly or indirectly on children's play. These are mostly, but not exclusively, part of the Every Child Matters: Change for Children Programme, underpinned by the Children Act 2004.

DfES also shares a public service agreement target with DCMS and DH on obesity (see page 11).

The Children Act 2004

The Act covers the universal services which every child accesses, such as education, and more targeted or specialist services for those with additional or special needs.

Local authorities are required, under Section 17 of the Act, to produce a single strategic Children and Young People's Plan for all services affecting children and young people, including play and leisure. The plan should set out a vision for children and young people and detail the priorities and actions for delivering it. The local authority must consult widely and include children, young people and their parents or carers, the voluntary and community sector, as well as the key partners within the children's trust.

Every Child Matters: Change for Children Programme

Every Child Matters: Change for Children is the Government's overarching approach to the well-being of children and young people. It is founded on five key outcomes: being healthy; staying safe; enjoying and achieving; making a positive contribution; and achieving economic well-being. Along with culture and sport, play organisations have a central role in helping to deliver these five outcomes.

Children's Trusts

Children's trusts are the partnership arrangements which bring together, under Section 10 of the Children Act (the duty to cooperate) all services for children and young people. Government expects all areas to have a children's trust by 2008. By working with the children's trust, the Director of Children's Services and the council Lead Member for Children's Services, the play sector can encourage local authorities to recognise the benefits that good play opportunities can offer. The children's trust (or other partnership arrangements eg Children and Young People Strategic Partnership), will serve as the main vehicle of delivery for the Children and Young People (CYP) block of the Local Area Agreement (LAA). LAAs deliver national outcomes in a way that reflects local priorities – giving local authorities and their partners the freedom and flexibilities to find local solutions to local problems.

Sure Start Children's Centres

Flagship Sure Start Children's Centres provide good quality flexibly-tailored early years services. These include integrated early education and childcare (including opportunities for learning through play) and a diverse range of health and family support and health services for children up to five years old and their families. They also offer parenting education, outreach services to parents, childminder networks and links with Job Centre Plus.

These Centres (there will be 2,500 by 2008, and 3,500 – one for every community – by 2010) are being developed from Sure Start Local Programmes, Neighbourhood Nurseries, Early Excellence Centres, Maintained Nursery Schools, health centres and family centres and will make considerable use of local private and voluntary sector providers to help offer services. They act as a service centre at the heart of their communities, including and providing links to other facilities or sources of help and support such as out-of-school clubs, extended schools (see page 19) and toy libraries.

Play activities in Children's Centres have a vital role in contributing to the range of early learning and development opportunities on offer for young children.

Play within children's learning and development

Play underpins all learning and development for young children. It is a key way young children learn that is both enjoyable and challenging. Encouraging learning through play enriches children's early years and gives them a good start to life. Play is a safe and pleasurable way of finding out about the world they have been born into, and where new people, places and experiences are an almost daily occurrence.

You can't get play 'wrong' and so children will try things they might normally feel anxious about by developing at their own pace and in their own time. Play is the natural route for children to enhance their physical and cognitive ability as well as providing opportunities for their social and emotional development. From an early age, play is important to a child's development and learning. It isn't just physical. It can involve cognitive, imaginative, creative, emotional and social aspects. It is the main way most children express their impulse to explore, experiment and understand.

The philosophy underpinning the *Birth to Three Matters* and the *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage* is that learning should be carefully planned, with an emphasis on activities that are fun, relevant and motivating for each child. Practitioners therefore support children's learning through planned play and extending and developing children's spontaneous play. The Government plans to create a single quality framework to support children's learning and development from birth to five. Early years settings will be required to deliver the Early Years Foundation Stage from September 2008.

The Early Years Foundation Stage Framework aims to raise quality in the early years by removing the existing artificial distinction between care and education in the early years, to reflect better the way young children learn and develop. The single, coherent document will recognise the importance of play in young children's learning and development. It will require practitioners to use observational assessment and knowledge of child development to plan systematically for individual children's progression at a pace that is right for them.



Extended schools

Extended schools provide access to extended services including a wide range of fun and developmental activities which could easily include play. Individual local authorities will be working with schools and other partners in Primary Care Trusts, Strategic Health Authorities and the private and voluntary sectors. They will plan and lead change and help schools make links with their children's trusts and, through consultation with the community, develop easy access to extended services. It will be for schools, parents, local authorities, other children's services and the voluntary and private sectors to work together to shape the provision in individual schools.

SkillsActive has produced a leaflet on play and extended schools.

Building Schools for the Future

Although this programme is focused on school premises, children will benefit from having more and better access to good quality play provision during the school day (and with the advent of extended schools, beyond the school day). Over the three years 2005-08, more than £6.6 billion has so far been committed to the Building Schools for the Future programme. This has the aim of rebuilding or renewing every secondary school in England over the next 15 years. The Government has just finished consulting on how to improve primary schools. The target here is to rebuild or refurbish at least half the primary schools and primary-age special schools over a 15 year period. Additional funding for this programme will be available from 2008-09.

Youth Matters

The Green Paper *Youth Matters* was published in July 2005, and a *Next Steps* document was published in March 2006. Recognising the need to ensure that young people have “things to do and places to go” *Youth Matters* proposed new national standards for positive activities for young people as well as new legislation to clarify local authorities’ duty to secure young people’s access to positive activities. Local authorities will be expected to integrate their planning for positive activities with the local Children and Young People’s planning process, and to work with key partners, including district councils and voluntary and community sector organisations to implement this.

The national standards are as follows:

- Access to two hours per week of sporting activity
- Access to two hours per week of other constructive activities in clubs, youth groups or classes
- Opportunities to contribute to their communities through volunteering
- A wide range of other recreational, cultural, sporting and enriching experiences
- A range of safe and enjoyable places in which to spend time.

Sometimes described as an Every Child Matters for teenagers, Youth Matters is intended to address the needs of older children. The importance of providing positive activities for young people is reinforced by the Government’s *Respect Action Plan* published in January 2006.

Statutory guidance is currently being developed to set out what is expected of local authorities and will confirm the importance of recreational activities and facilities under the duty.

Contract funding

DfES provides funds to SkillsActive (together with DCMS, see before) to develop and promote playwork education, training and qualifications. DfES also provides grant funding to Kids to deliver a programme of training, consultancy and support which, among other things, will result in more play opportunities for disabled children in out-of-school settings.



Department for Communities and Local Government

As the lead department for place, the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) is responsible for leading the delivery of better public spaces, which are fundamental to inclusive and sustainable communities.

Cleaner, safer, greener public spaces, in which play opportunities can flourish are central to the Government strategy to improve the quality and safety of public spaces and local surroundings, and people's enjoyment of them.

What matters most to people is often what they experience on their doorstep. Too many people still live in poor quality local environments, where unsafe or poorly managed public spaces limit opportunities for play. Enhancing activities for children and young people is often the top local concern for children and young people, as well as their parents.

Therefore the approach of DCLG is to encourage joint working between Government departments, local Government and the voluntary and community sector in making a noticeable difference. Our priorities include creating attractive and welcoming public spaces, engaging and empowering local people and communities and tackling inequalities.

Under the Cleaner, Safer, Greener "How To" programme, DCLG is seeking to encourage practitioners across a range of disciplines to come together and share good practice and ideas on improving public spaces. The programme includes a series of good practice guides signposting key issues and information sources and workshops that offer clear advice on issues, such as neighbourhood safety and creating quality parks.

Creating attractive and welcoming places

Good quality play space needs to be planned. Planning can be a tool for:

- Protecting and enhancing existing play-space and associated facilities
- Identifying needs and opportunities for improvements.

Planning Policy Guidance note 17 (PPG17) on Open Space, Sport and Recreation provides the national planning policy framework for the protection of existing children's play-spaces which are required to meet the needs of local communities.

Planning authorities are expected, through their local development frameworks, to set standards of provision for all types of open space, including play-space for children. These should be drawn up on the basis of an assessment of current and future local need and an audit of the quality and quantity of existing facilities.

PPG17 covers a broad range of open spaces and includes provision of open space for children and young people and the wide range of provision they might need. This includes play areas, skateboard parks, outdoor basketball courts, hoops and other more informal spaces, such as "hanging out" areas and teenage shelters, and opportunities for play.

PPG17 also states that where planning permission is granted for new developments (especially housing), authorities should ensure that provision is made for local sports and recreational facilities. This is either through an increase in the number of facilities or through improvements to existing facilities.

There is much work that can be done to promote play opportunities through development and regeneration, particularly in deprived areas, but the planning of new residential and mixed use developments calls for consideration of the specific needs of different localities. The 'Mixed Communities' approach is central to the aims of DCLG. It is an approach that brings together housing and neighbourhood renewal strategies to ensure disadvantage is tackled comprehensively and in a sustainable way.

The promotion of 'mixed communities' as a framework for tackling disadvantage provides a useful template for planners to include sufficient space for informal and unstructured play.

CABE Space (part of CABE) is funded by DCLG to inspire, influence and improve the quality of public spaces. As part of this remit, CABE provides direct support and advice to local authorities on developing a strategic approach to green spaces, building on PPG17 audits. It will be working with CPC to ensure that play strategies are integral to and inform wider green space strategies and local area development frameworks.

CABE also advises clients on public space projects including those for play space and has published *What would you do with this space?* a guide to working with children and young people in the creation and maintenance of public spaces. This helps to ensure a high quality approach to design and management.

The Greater London Authority work on planning

The Greater London Authority is developing standards for children and young people's play and informal recreation provision. The research is intended to provide sound evidence and clear draft policies for inclusion in the review of the London Plan, together with draft supplementary guidance on qualitative and quantitative standards for the provision of play space and recreational facilities for young people. The standards are for master planners, architects and developers of residential or mixed use with residential schemes and for planning officers assessing them.

Staff supporting play

CABE's Parkforce campaign is calling for more staff in open spaces, in a variety of roles including play rangers. Staff can provide reassurance, but also supervise activities so that children and their parents are encouraged and supported to use them.

Neighbourhood Wardens are ideally placed to encourage the right environment for play. Having reduced the fear of crime in areas where they operate, their presence has led to increased satisfaction among local residents. Warden patrolled areas have helped reduce graffiti, fly-tipping, litter, dog-fouling and abandoned cars, thereby making play spaces more attractive and usable.

Engaging and empowering communities

Groundwork is a federation of trusts in England, Wales and Northern Ireland each working with their partners to improve the quality of the local environment, the lives of local people and the success of local businesses in areas in need of investment and support.

Groundwork trusts are made up of representatives from the public, private and voluntary sectors, with the aim of building sustainable communities in areas of need, through joint environmental action. This approach means that communities are actively engaged in making decisions about their area, including the design, implementation and management of projects.

Various Groundwork projects, for example, "Youth Works", focus on engaging young people to improve their neighbourhoods, as well as providing them with opportunities to develop new skills.

Groundwork is sponsored by DCLG. This funding helps to support 7,000 projects each year, transforming over 6,000 hectares of local spaces and engaging over 50,000 local people.

The organisation has recently been awarded £1.5 million from the Big Lottery Fund through the People's Millions contest. Groundwork's winning proposal "Safe and Sound" will bring together people of all ages in 25 neighbourhoods to improve play areas, build skateparks, create community gardens and enhance nature reserves.

DCLG's £30 million Living Spaces programme was designed to give communities the opportunity to transform their local spaces. More than 1,000 projects have been supported with 50 percent of them being play areas, skate parks and kick-about areas. The project has been a great success with young people who have been involved in planting trees, cleaning up neglected land and helping to design play facilities.



Tackling inequalities

Living Places: Cleaner, Safer, Greener (ODPM 2002) recognised that there was insufficient guidance to help ensure that disabled children were entitled to the same play opportunities as other children. As a result their interests have not always been adequately considered when planning and designing public play spaces.

Working with a range of partners, including disabled children and their parents, play space providers, designers and equipment manufacturers, the DCLG has produced a guide called *Developing Accessible Play Spaces – A Good Practice Guide*.

The guide emphasises the importance of assessing the existing provision of public play space and of consulting disabled children and their families. It explains that while not every piece of play equipment needs to be accessible to every child, it is important that all children are able to access the social experience of play. For example, the natural environment can be used to maximise the sensory experience of play through the use of plants, water, natural resources, light and shade.

The guide provides practical examples, checklists, thinking points and signposts for further information and contacts. It also considers the implications of disability discrimination legislation. While the guide is primarily aimed at local authorities, town and parish councils, developers, housing associations and open space trusts, families with disabled children will also find it full of useful information.

(For inclusion also see pages 37 and 38.)

Gorse Hill City Farm, Leicester

Gorse Hill City Farm is located in an area with little play space. As well as providing a much needed play area, it was felt that new equipment would help enhance the city farm facilities, encouraging young children to visit this free educational site more often. Volunteers helped to clear the site of rusty old play equipment at an evening barbecue, which was attended by regular visitors, local people and a group of long-term unemployed people. After the new play area had been installed, fencing was erected by trainees on a work experience scheme.



Department of Health

The aim of the Department of Health (DH) is to improve the health and well-being of people in England.

DH recognises that play is important for keeping children healthy. Outdoor play encourages them to be active and can have a significant impact on their general health and fitness. Play can help to tackle the rising levels of obesity among children and young people, so has an important place in the delivery of key objectives for both DH and the Government more broadly.

The *National Healthy Schools Programme* promotes physical activity across the school day, including play. DH is producing guidance for schools on how they can meet the *National Healthy School Standard* physical activity core theme. This will include the promotion of free play.

DH shares a public service agreement target with DCMS and DfES to "halt the year on year increase in obesity among children under 11 by 2010 in the context of a broader strategy to tackle obesity in the population as a whole".

DH published an *Obesity Care Pathway* in April 2006 to guide health professionals in the management of obesity. This highlights the need to discourage sedentary behaviour among children and encourages families to play together.

The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) is producing guidance on the prevention and management of obesity, due for publication in November 2006. This document promotes the provision of active play in pre-school and childcare settings to minimise risk of weight gain among young children. It suggests active play should be encouraged among overweight and obese children.

NICE will also produce guidance in 2007 on how the NHS, local authorities and others can meet the Chief Medical Officer's recommendations on physical activity (see page 7). This will look at the effectiveness of environmental interventions to support physical activity. It will include the impact that provision of play facilities has on activity as well as the impact on play and physical activity of intermediate measures, such as local transport and planning policies. There will be opportunity to comment on drafts during 2007.

DH is leading a cross-Government obesity social marketing campaign with the focus on children under 11, their carers, families and influencers. This will be launched in 2007. The campaign will encourage parents and carers to reduce their children's sedentary behaviour and to encourage active play, either alone/with friends, or as a family if children are young or if the local environment is considered too dangerous.



HM Treasury

Children's play has an indirect but important contribution to the Treasury's objectives of increasing economic productivity and expanding economic and employment opportunities.

Early years activities, such as drawing and playing with letters, numbers and shapes, encourage children to develop intellectually and socially. These skills can help children to do better at school and can ultimately lead to greater employment opportunities. From the wider perspective of public benefit, play has a role in producing a better qualified workforce which in turn, contributes to long-term economic performance and rising living standards.

The Treasury is also committed to eradicating child poverty by 2020. It is tasked under a public service agreement, held jointly with the Department of Work and Pensions, with halving the number of children suffering income poverty and material deprivation by 2010. The importance of play in achieving this target is reflected in the fact that play features in the suite of indicators of material deprivation against which success will be measured.



Home Office

The Home Office policy area most relevant to play is “to reduce crime and the fear of crime including youth crime, anti-social behaviour and re-offending by young people”. Tackling youth crime and reducing anti-social behaviour are key priorities for the department. One of the main aspects of this is the provision of positive activities, which divert young people away from crime and help them develop the skills and behaviours to make the right choices, many of which include recreational activities. *The Youth Inclusion Programmes*, delivered by the Youth Justice Board, include a strong diversionary element, as do the *Positive Futures projects* and *Positive Activities for Young People*.

Respect

Published in January 2006 the *Respect Action Plan* makes it clear that young people have much to be proud of, and that it is only a minority of those who face serious problems. It specifically refers to the enormous benefits of providing constructive and purposeful activities for young people, and echoes the commitment made in *Youth Matters* to ensure that all young people have access to activities that they find interesting and exciting in their local area. This should include a full range of cultural, arts, sport, environmental and community based activities.

Play in prison

In supporting the maintenance of family ties and recognising the importance of play in child development, a number of prisons run family and children’s visiting sessions in which play is a key activity.

Part of the *National Reducing Re-offending Action Plan* is a *Children and Families Pathway*. Each region has been required to produce its own Pathway. These enable mainstream providers and voluntary and community organisations to work together on helping offenders and their families to reduce re-offending.

There are many examples of effective support practices for prisoners and their families where providing opportunities for children to play is part of the support offered. These include:

KIDS VIP

KIDS VIP supports children who have a parent or close relative in prison. In partnership with the National Offender Management Service they have produced a comprehensive guide for practitioners on the needs of children and how best to support them. Entitled *Children Visiting Prisons*, it contains advice on how to set up and run supervised play areas and successful “extended” or “special” family visit days.

Action for Prisoners Families (APF)

This Prisoners’ Families Helpline is a free and confidential service for anyone who is affected by the imprisonment of a close family member or friend.

In summer 2005, APF invited the country’s prisons to take part in the Family Friendly Prison Challenge. Play related activities included sports, family yoga, birthday parties with games and the time and space for families to enjoy a degree of ‘normality’.

Askham Grange Family Centre

Through a contract with a *City Council Early Years Service* Askham Grange supports mothers in custody with babies from 0-18 months. This includes access to an Ofsted registered nursery which is also available to outside users.

HMP Send

This female resettlement prison in Southern England is currently developing a sensory activity garden where families can have fun, learn through an accredited nature and wildlife programme and have space to be together in a safe environment.

Ormiston Trust

Time for Families promotes greater awareness and more effective responses to the needs of children of prisoners. The initiative is managed by Ormiston and funded through a unique collaboration between the Lankelly Chase Foundation, HM Prison Service and Ormiston Trust.

Prison Advice and Care Trust (PACT)

PACT is an independent national charity working with prisoners and their families. Current services include child friendly centres which provide support for visiting children and families of prisoners, a children's service inside prison visit halls and project work with prisons to help maintain family relationships.

South West Prisons, Children and Family Support Unit

The play element funded by Big Lottery Fund's Better Play Programme was part of a much wider project to re-align prison visiting regimes, so that the needs of visiting family members were met. The play provision allowed imprisoned fathers the time and opportunity to play with their visiting children. The overall project was deemed a great success by all stakeholders, including visiting families, prisoners, prison warders and the Governor, and is being extended throughout the majority of prisons in the South West.



Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

The Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' (Defra) interest and commitment to children's play is embedded within two of its five strategic aims. As part of the plan to safeguard sustainable rural communities, Defra encourages regeneration in disadvantaged rural areas. This includes a commitment to promoting social inclusion and reducing deprivation, and ensuring higher quality and more accessible public services. One of the processes to be included is an assessment of local parish plans where play areas will be assessed.

Defra's aim to protect the countryside will encompass more and better access to the natural environment. It supports a number of organisations whose work has a significant impact on children's play:

The Forestry Commission

The Forestry Commission is heavily engaged in supporting children and young people's play and leisure. Many of their sites provide play spaces, structures and trails. Some offer supervised play and leisure schemes. Others promote or run activities for families and groups. They also offer structured adventurous activity provision for children and adults. In addition, forest schools on Forestry Commission sites often contain a strong play and leisure component even though they are usually run by educational institutions.

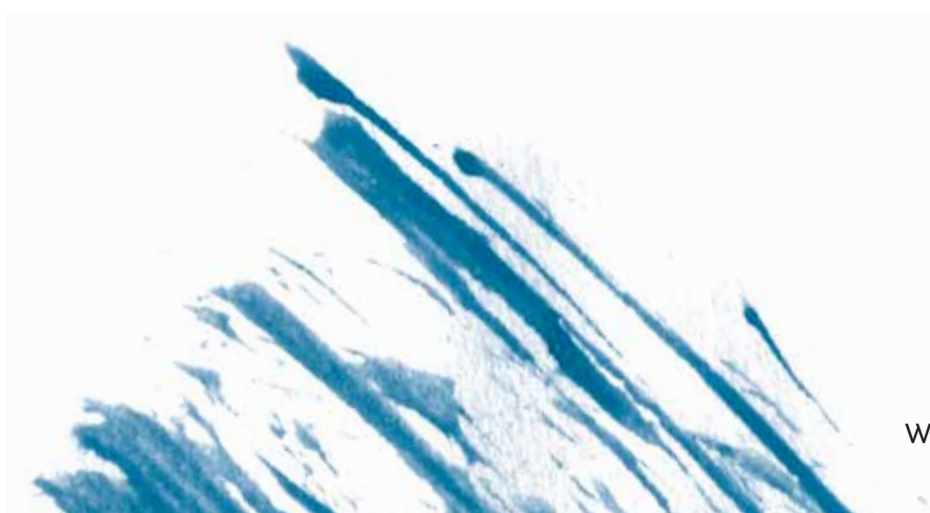
Growing Adventure is a year long project to develop the Forestry Commission's work around children and young people's play and recreation. The central theme is to promote the use and enjoyment of woodland and to help children and young people make their own choices about activities, risks and access to independent play.

It proposes a cultural change in the approach to play rather than structural changes to existing play spaces or play programmes. Crucially it is children and young people being engaged in spontaneous, independent self-led activities, that represent the ultimate goal of the initiative.

The Countryside Agency

Country Parks, as well as providing formal play areas, particularly encourage their use for play. They are a popular play destination for families and a wide range of people because of the range of support facilities they provide. The Countryside Agency, along with Natural England, is promoting a project to raise standards in Country Parks, and through its challenge grants can fund activities that enhance sites for children's play.

In addition, the Green Start programme aims to make the countryside more accessible for parents and young children, encouraging outdoor play and learning.



English Nature

Children's play is supported by English Nature's overall aim to make local natural open spaces more welcoming and accessible places for people to visit.

English Nature also supports children's play by working to break down the barriers that prevent some young people from using green open spaces whether for fear of safety, lack of awareness or lack of opportunity to experience the natural outdoors.

Urban Greenspace standards ensure that people living in towns and cities have access to green spaces within reasonable distance from their homes.³

English Nature also runs a variety of grant schemes aimed at encouraging children and young people to make greater use of the natural environment.

Natural England

A new statutory agency, Natural England, comes into being in October 2006, and is currently being created through a partnership of the Countryside Agency, English Nature and the Rural Development Agency. It will take on work of English Nature; the Landscape, Access and Recreation remit of the Countryside Agency; and the environment activities of the Rural Development Agency arm of Defra.

Natural England's aim is to conserve and enhance the value and beauty of England's natural environment and promote access, recreation and public well-being for now and future generations. It is anticipated that promoting outdoor play will be an important aspect of this.

Key areas of Natural England's work which relate to play are:

- *New Outdoor Recreation Strategy*. In partnership with the Forestry Commission, Natural England aims to provide information, activities and funding support focused on widening the appeal of the outdoors and attracting those groups currently missing out on the health, well-being and enjoyment benefits which it offers
- *Learning Strategy*. One of the key aims is to promote a greater public understanding and awareness of natural environments, which may encourage children and young people to use the natural environment for play and recreation
- *Wild Adventure Space*. A scoping study on the benefits of exploring in natural environments, including developing awareness and the ability to deal with risk, for children and young people
- *Natural Environments for All*. A proposed grant scheme, which will include promotion of green spaces to a greater diversity of people for recreation and enjoyment.

³ For further information see English Nature's *Space for Nature* booklet and English Nature Research Report 153: Accessible Natural Greenspace in Towns and Cities.

Department for Transport

Using a mixture of education, training and publicity, the Department for Transport (DfT) is working to reduce the number of children killed or seriously injured.⁴ As part of this drive, local authorities are advised to pay particular attention to roads where users might expect to find children. This includes places where children play.

Home Zones turn streets into valued public spaces, providing safer areas for children to play in their local environment. In a Home Zone in Camden, for example, 82 percent of residents said that more children were playing in the streets as a result of the scheme. This, in turn, led to children meeting others with whom they had not had the opportunity to mix before.

Home Zones – challenging the future of our streets was published in 2005 by DfT. It shares good practice in Home Zone design and scheme development, drawing particularly on the experience gathered from the Home Zones Challenge. It complements the Institute of Highway Incorporated Engineers' (HIE) Home Zone Guidelines, published in 2002.

No amount of quality play provision will make a difference to a child who is not able to access it. To combat this, DfT encourages local authorities to pay particular attention to tackling issues of accessibility for those from disadvantaged groups, such as those living in deprived communities. It is the responsibility of local transport authorities and their partner organisations to decide whether access to play facilities is a priority in their area. If it is, the authority and its partners work together to identify solutions.



⁴ The Targets for Reduction in Road Safety: In 2000, the Government published a safety strategy in *Tomorrow's Roads Safer for Everyone*. By 2010, the aim is to achieve, compared with the average for 1994-98:

- 40 percent reduction in the number of people killed or seriously injured in road accidents
- A 50 percent reduction in the number of children killed or seriously injured (children are defined as being those aged under 16)
- A 10 percent reduction in the slight casualty rate, expressed as the number of people slightly injured per 100 million vehicle kilometres.



3.

Lottery funding for play

The Big Lottery Fund

The Big Lottery Fund was launched in June 2004 as a result of reforms to make the Lottery more accessible and responsive to the needs of communities.

The Big Lottery Fund has developed several new programmes in England including the £155 million Children's Play initiative which was launched in March 2006. 80 percent of this fund is to be used to develop free, open-access play provision in areas of greatest need. In November 2005 the Big Lottery Fund announced allocations for every local authority area in England under the Children's Play Programme. The remaining 20 percent is divided between:

- Playful Ideas, an innovation fund which will develop innovative practice in planning, design and delivery
- An England-wide regional support and development infrastructure under the title of the Play England project. This work is being undertaken by CPC (see page 15).

The Children's Play initiative will:

- Create, improve and develop children and young people's free local play spaces and opportunities throughout England, according to need
- Support innovation and new ways of providing for children's play
- Create a support and development infrastructure to ensure local agencies have the resources and skills to achieve the first two aims
- Promote the long-term strategic and sustainable provision for play as a free public service to children
- Ensure that local authorities work with other local stakeholders to develop children's play strategies and plans
- Ensure that good, inclusive and accessible children's play services and facilities are provided locally.

In March 2006, CPC and the Big Lottery Fund published *Planning for Play*, good practice guidance on the development and implementation of a local play strategy. This is available on the Play England website.

In addition, the Big Lottery Fund's joint parks programme with the Heritage Lottery Fund – Parks for People – is worth up to £160 million (with £90 million contribution from the Big Lottery Fund). The long-term vision of the programme is that every community should have access to a well designed and maintained public park with opportunities for enjoyment and recreation for all. The outcomes of the programme are:

- Increasing the range of audiences
- Conserving and improving the heritage value
- Increasing the range of volunteers involved
- Improving skills and knowledge through training
- Improving management and maintenance.

Aside from the Big Lottery Fund, there are very many lottery funded projects which support play and recreation for children and young people.

The Heritage Lottery Fund

The Heritage Lottery Fund has funded new or refurbished play spaces in 98 historic public parks and green spaces; and has also funded a range of projects involving play and run by museums, conservation organisations and other heritage bodies. These include children's explorer backpacks at Norfolk Wildlife Trust; and a 'heritage play' project in Nottingham where children and young people rediscover traditional games, rhymes and songs.

Awards for All

Awards for All is an important source of income for smaller, community led projects and funds a wide range of projects including children's play activities. It is a joint lottery distributor programme administered by the Big Lottery Fund, the Arts Council and Sport England. It makes grants of between £300 and £10,000. Examples of play projects funded under this programme are an award of £5,000 to a project to build a skate park in Bishops Castle, South Shropshire; and another £5,000 award to a local group in New Cross, London, for building a climbing structure around a tree, designed by local children.

Tower Gardens, Boston and Skegness

Many original features from these 1878 pleasure grounds had gone and the park had become derelict. Following the restoration project by the Heritage Lottery Fund, there are now popular cultural events such as art competitions, plays and puppet shows. A fully equipped play facility has been especially designed for youngsters, including an adventure run for young people, one of only a handful of free play spaces in Skegness.





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4.

Play:
some key
themes

Sustainability

"...lottery money runs out, by definition. It was never meant to be long-term funding. Lottery money should serve to yank more money into play. It should lever more money from local authorities and the community, private and voluntary sector. Otherwise, it does not do its purpose. It is an injection, a shot in the arm, for play: getting that evidence base, getting good practice, building capacity and making the argument. By 2012, however, the rest of society must have been sufficiently persuaded that the question "Shall we now stop funding play?" would be a very silly one to ask, because communities could not imagine a time without it". Estelle Morris, January 2005

The issue of sustainability affects all projects that receive funding, but play projects, like other free community based provision, are unlikely to be able to generate significant income. So, to paraphrase the report *Getting Serious about Play* (see page 9), the long-term future of projects is likely to depend upon embedding them into local community provision. Demonstrating how proposals fit and engage with other local services, plans and strategies will be crucial to this. The length of funding for the Big Lottery Fund's play programme should allow enough time for effective planning and preparation to take place and for projects to become established.

Much has happened since the play review was published. Developments such as children's trusts, Local Area Agreements, Local Strategic Partnerships, Children and Young People's Plans - and perhaps most significantly the emerging regional infrastructure for play, are mechanisms which should make it easier for play to become embedded in local provision and to reach the stage described above by Estelle Morris.

But it is important not to underestimate the amount of effort that will be needed from the play sector to reach that position. Guidance and support will be essential. It is for that reason that DCMS funded CPC to produce a guide *Playing on – sustaining play provision in changing times* which contains useful advice and guidance for the play sector.

Inclusion

Play is vital to the healthy development of all children, all of whom are entitled to have access to play provision and opportunities. However, children from certain groups are often disadvantaged and have poorer access than others. Hence the commitment in the Labour Manifesto in 2005 that together with £155 million from the Big Lottery Fund, Government would ensure that children who have had little access to play facilities and those who are disabled have much better access to safe, modern playgrounds.

The Big Lottery Fund's £155 million Play initiative will target those who are more likely to face disadvantage in access to play provision: children in rural areas, disabled children, girls of school age, children in care and children from ethnic or religious minorities.

The Play Inclusion Project (PIP), run by the charity Kids, promotes and provides play opportunities for disabled children. It is funded through a strategic grant from DfES. PIP works to increase the number of disabled children in play settings and to promote inclusion amongst play providers. Results of the project were showcased at a 2006 national conference: *Changing Practice, Changing Lives: the Impact of PIP*. The Project publishes briefing papers on aspects of inclusive play policy and practice.

These are available on the Kids website.

For information on work by the Department for Communities and Local Government on accessible play, see page 21.

The Better Play partnership between Barnardo's and CPC, which distributed Big Lottery Fund funding to 225 projects for school aged children, produced briefing papers on a number of topics. These included *Inclusive Play* and *Working in Culturally Diverse Communities*. All can be downloaded on the Barnardo's website. The Better Play partnership ended in 2005.

PIP playschemes in Bury

The summer of 2005 saw an increase in the numbers of disabled children and young people accessing mainstream playschemes throughout Bury. This was achieved through a three pronged approach: working in partnership; inclusive play training and ongoing support.

The Play Inclusion Co-ordinator worked closely with other departments within the local authority to involve children and young people and their parents/carers to choose their community play schemes. The Children's Information Service, Children's Disability Team, Area Social Work

Teams and Youth Teams all played a vital role in this. A comprehensive inclusive play training programme had been offered and in some instances was a condition of funding, before the summer schemes began. A number of staff undertook the Kids Planning Inclusive Play course, and throughout the summer the schemes had the support of the Early Years Team and the Access and Inclusion Scheme who visited all the playschemes.



Risk and challenge

Getting Serious About Play recognised the growing blame culture and fear which can leave play providers worried about being taken to court, even for minor accidents. Those responsible for providing play facilities to children often speak of the challenges they face in trying to offer activities that are stretching and fun yet do not expose children to undue risk.

The play review observed: **"Play facilities which offer no challenges will not contribute much to a child's development. Worse still, they can become so boring that children seek excitement elsewhere, often at much greater danger to themselves and other people. This is an obvious possible result when play facilities are closed because of fear of litigation or because insurance premiums have been increased."**

It was for these reasons that the Children's Play Safety Forum published a position statement on Managing Risk in Play Provision in 2002. The full text of this statement (which was endorsed by the Health and Safety Executive) is set out at appendix 3.

The Forestry Commission has produced a guidance note: "Rope swings, dens, tree-houses and fires: a risk based approach for managers facilitating self-built structures and activities in woodland settings". More information is available from the Forestry Commission's website.

The Department for Constitutional Affairs (DCA) is leading on the Government's work in tackling perceptions of a compensation culture. As part of this work a stakeholder group is looking at appropriate and proportionate risk management and promoting affordable insurance. The group has identified a need to give those seeking insurance a better understanding of how the insurance market works and to give insurers a better understanding of the needs of the various sectors and the size of potential markets. With this aim in mind, insurance representatives and those from the voluntary and other sectors will meet shortly to discuss these issues.

Older children and play

"If we want young people to flourish and if we want to divert (them) from anti-social behaviour, thinking about what the community can provide really counts. Some adults perceive teenagers on the streets as a problem and teenagers want safe spaces to hang out. Surely we must somehow be able to square that circle." Margaret Hodge MP, then Minister for Children, Young People and Families, speech to the IPPR (Institute for Public Policy Research), January 2005

Play is generally associated with young children, but it is broader than that: the needs of older children are just as important and should not be forgotten.

While few teenagers would describe what they do as play, they too need the time, space and freedom associated with play for younger age groups, yet their needs can often be overlooked. Playgrounds are often provided for younger children with little or no provision for older children.

We know that provision for young people is what communities really want. We also know from work done by CAFE Space that "place making", improving the design, maintenance and supervision of parks and other public spaces, is a more effective solution to anti-social behaviour than simply increasing security measures. (CAFE Space – Preventing Anti-social Behaviour in Public Spaces – policy note 2004.)

The *Youth Matters* Green Paper, published in 2005 (see page 20) also provides an Opportunity Fund in each local authority to be spent on local projects that young people want. The key aim is for young people themselves to decide how to spend it. The type of facilities considered for this age group include skate-parks, BMX tracks, basketball courts, kickabout areas, multi-use games areas and youth shelters. Often all that is wanted is somewhere to hang out.

Play provision

The most familiar type of outdoor play provision is playgrounds, with the conventional range of slides, swings and roundabouts. However, there is now a move towards more innovative and creative designs for these traditional play spaces. Increasingly this involves a trend towards using natural materials such as wood, sand, rock, integrated where possible, with the surrounding natural environment. Other materials such as tyres, nets and ropes also contribute to making more exciting play spaces.

Children do not just want designated play areas. They want to roam, to explore and be free to create their own play opportunities within their local environments. The Better Play partnership between Barnardo's and CPC, which distributed Big Lottery Fund funding to 225 projects for school aged children, produced briefing papers on a number of topics, including Environmental Play. This can be downloaded at the Barnardo's website.

Further interesting reading is provided by *Growing Adventure*, Tim Gill's final report to the Forestry Commission on developing its activity around play and leisure; and *Design Guidance for Play Spaces* published by the Forestry Commission. For further information visit the Forestry Commission website.





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5.

Conclusion: what now for play?

There has been real progress for the play sector since the publication of *Best Play* in 2000, *Making the Case for Play* in 2002 and *Getting Serious About Play* in 2004. The period up until the Government response to *Getting Serious About Play* was a time of great uncertainty within the play sector. It had huge concern about funding, the level of Government commitment and the overall future of play.

We have come a long way and recent developments in the delivery of children's services mean that the play sector now finds itself in a completely different place; in fact there is everything to play for. This section considers these developments and their implications.

There have been huge changes for the play sector through the Big Lottery Fund's Play initiative and the establishment of Play England. These have been taking place at the same time as the increased recognition of the importance of play at a national level. The contributions to this document from across Government clearly demonstrate the amount of play-related work going on in departments. The concept of play is now embedded in a way that it never was before, thanks in no small measure to the work of CPC. This is particularly true in relation to the joint public service agreement on childhood obesity, where the provision of play opportunities is a hugely important aspect of the drive to increase the level of children's physical activity. It is also an integral part of the Government's Safer, Greener agenda.


Play is key to the Change for Children programme. The five outcomes, enjoy and achieve; stay safe; be healthy; make a positive contribution; achieve economic well-being, are all relevant to play, and CPC successfully lobbied for a change in the Children Act to ensure that "recreation" was included. It was made clear during the debate in the House of Lords that "recreation" included "play" and this in itself is a very positive message.

The importance of play was also reinforced by guidance produced by the Department for Education and Skills to support the production of Children and Young People's Plans (2005). This states that play strategies should link to the CYPPs, helping to meet the requirements of the Joint Area Review of the Ofsted Children's Services Inspection Framework. The Framework includes specific judgements and evidence directly relating to play provision. We believe that the area review assessment process will spur on local authorities to provide play opportunities.

All the new developments, the Change for Children programme, *Youth Matters* and Extended Schools, are related to local delivery of children's services. In particular, they develop a play "offer" through consultation and partnerships, including the voluntary and community sector. More than ever before local authorities will establish local needs and decide how best to meet these needs through different delivery routes.

Local Area Agreements (LAAs)⁵ represent a radical new approach to delivery based on local need. They represent central Government's aspirations for sustainable communities. A clear advocacy role exists for CPC and others at regional level to articulate how opportunities for play in LAAs should progress.

⁵ based on local Sustainable Community Strategies, that set out the priorities for a local area, agreed and endorsed by the Government Office) and a local area (represented by the lead local authority and other partners). Information on LAAs can be found on the DCLG website.



These changes to the delivery framework through Every Child Matters and Local Area Agreements, have coincided with the Big Lottery Fund Play initiative and the establishment of a regional infrastructure for play through Play England. They complement each other extremely well. Lottery funding is the beginning of a process of change for play – local authorities can use it a starting point, perhaps with funding from other sources. If local authorities wish to access the money which has been allocated to them by the play initiative, they must produce a play strategy. And in turn play strategies should be part of the overall Children and Young People's Plans.

The strategies are important as they will set out the vision for play in each local authority area. This also means that the play sector, through its regional infrastructure, will be able to feed into these strategies and benefit from changes, which until now would have been almost impossible.

At the start of this publication, Councillor Les Lawrence, the Chair of the LGA Children and Young People's Board, states that local authorities now have a crucial opportunity to develop play opportunities as part of their integrated strategy for children. Through Play England the play sector also has a crucial opportunity to influence and encourage local authorities to do just that. The Children's Play initiative will provide an opportunity to build relationships between the play infrastructure and local authorities; as well as building the evidence base to prove play's worth; and to encourage future funding after the initiative comes to an end.

As the regional infrastructure begins to exert its influence, and as the changes to service delivery settle, we would hope to see play provision becoming a service which local authorities provide as a matter of course. This would be because they are convinced of the benefits, both short and long-term, of providing play opportunities for all ages, and also because public pressure ensures that ceasing to deliver play opportunities would fail to meet what people want.

National Government will continue to do all it can to support play. Local authorities must maximise the opportunity to begin the process of developing and improving accessible play provision – for all ages. The play sector must work with local authorities to make sure that it takes full advantage of its new structure and of the opportunities offered: the Big Lottery Fund's funding for play; Children and Young People's Plans; children's trusts; Local Area Agreements; extended schools; and local youth offers. This is to ensure that play will become one of the children's services that will continue to be offered, once lottery funding ends.

Appendix 1: Links

Government Departments and related agencies

Arts Council England

www.artscouncil.org.uk

Cleaner, Safer, Greener Communities

www.cleanersafergreener.gov.uk

Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment

www.cabe.org.uk

Countryside Agency

www.countryside.gov.uk

Culture Online

www.cultureonline.gov.uk

Department for Communities and Local Government

www.communities.gov.uk

Department for Culture, Media and Sport

www.culture.gov.uk

Department for Education and Skills

www.dfes.gov.uk

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

www.defra.gov.uk

Department for Transport

www.dft.gov.uk

Department of Health

www.dh.gov.uk

English Nature

www.english-nature.org.uk

Forest Education

www.foresteducation.org/forest_schools.php

Forestry Commission

www.forestry.gov.uk

Groundwork UK

www.groundwork.org.uk

Growing Adventure

www.forestry.gov.uk/england-play

HM Treasury

www.hm-treasury.gov.uk

Home Office

www.homeoffice.gov.uk

Local Government Association

www.lga.gov.uk/home.asp

National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence

www.nice.org.uk

Natural England

www.defra.gov.uk/rural/ruraldelivery/natural-england.htm

Neighbourhood Renewal

www.neighbourhoods.gov.uk

Neighbourhood Wardens

www.neighbourhood.gov.uk/wardens.asp

Sport England

www.sportengland.org

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

www.unhcr.ch/html/menu2/6/crc/treaties/crc.htm

Zoneparcs

www.number-10.gov.uk/output/Page7419.asp

Play organisations

Children's Play Council
www.ncb.org.uk/cpc

Children's Play Information Service
www.ncb.org.uk/library/cpis

Children's Play Policy Forum
www.ncb.org.uk

Kids
www.kids.org.uk

Learning Through Landscapes
www.ltl.org.uk

London Play
www.londonplay.org.uk

Play England
www.playengland.org.uk/Page.asp

Play Northern Ireland
www.playboard.org

Play Scotland
www.playscotland.org

Play Wales
www.playwales.org.uk

Playground Fun
www.playgroundfun.org.uk

Playlink
www.playlink.org.uk

SkillsActive
www.skillsactive.com/bysector/playwork

Others

Awards for All
www.awardsforall.org.uk

Better Play
www.barnardos.org.uk/what_we_do/work_with_the_community/better_play.htm

Big Lottery Fund
www.biglotteryfund.org.uk

Breakout!
www.culture.gov.uk/breakout/fl/index.htm

CABE Space
www.cabe.org.uk

Curiosity and Imagination group
www.curiosityandimagination.org.uk

Heritage Lottery Fund
www.hlf.org.uk/English

Mixed Communities Approach
www.renewal.net/mc

National Playing Fields Association
www.npfa.co.uk

Appendix 2: Further reading

Suggested further reading

Please note that this is not an exhaustive list. If you would like more information on play-related publications, then please contact the Children's Play Information Service (www.ncb.org.uk/library/cpis)

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, UNICEF (1989)

Planning for Play: guidance on the development and implementation of a local play strategy, Children's Play Council/Big Lottery Fund (2006)

Guide to Preparing Play Strategies, Planning inclusive play spaces and opportunities for all London's children and young people, Mayor of London, Greater London Authority (2005)

Best Play – what play provision should do for children, National Playing Fields Association/Children's Play Council/PLAYLINK (2000)

Getting Serious About Play – a review of children's play, Department for Culture, Media and Sport (2004)

Making The Case for Play – building policies and strategies for school aged children, Issy Cole-Hamilton and Tim Gill, Children's Play Council (2002)

Play as Culture, PLAYLINK and the Children's Play Policy Forum (2002)

More than Swings and Roundabouts – Planning for Outdoor Play, Children's Play Council (2002)

Developing Accessible Play Space – a good practice guide, Department for Communities and Local Government (formerly Office of the Deputy Prime Minister) (2003)

All of Us, Inclusive checklist for settings and inclusive framework for local authorities, Kidsactive (2004)

Managing Risk in Play Provision – a position statement, Play Safety Forum (2002)

Quality Training, Quality Play 2006 – 11, the First UK Strategy for Playwork Education, Training and Qualifications, SkillsActive (2006)

Home Zones – challenging the future of our streets, Department for Transport (2005)

Playing On – sustaining play provision in changing times, Children's Play Council (2006)

What would you do with this space? Involving young people in the design and care of urban spaces, CABE Space (2004)

Appendix 3: Play safe

Managing risk in play provision: A position statement

Play Safety Forum August 2002

"We consider *Managing Risk in Play Provision* to be an important document that will contribute to the debate on the provision of children's play."

Health and Safety Executive

Introduction

The Play Safety Forum, a grouping of national agencies involved in play safety, has produced *Managing Risk in Play Provision* to support the work of those involved in play provision of any kind (for example play areas, playgrounds, adventure playgrounds, play centres and holiday playschemes). These include local authorities, voluntary organisations, play equipment manufacturers and inspection agencies. The statement has relevance to other settings and environments in which children play, such as childcare provision, schools, parks and public open spaces. It will also be of interest to those involved in insurance and litigation in relation to play provision.

The statement has equal relevance to children and young people of all ages from 0 to 18, and it uses the term "children" to cover the whole age range.

It focuses on physical injuries resulting from accidents. However, the overall approach, namely that a balance should be struck between risks and benefits, is also relevant to agencies concerned with other issues such as the personal safety of children.

The statement is in two forms: a summary and a full statement. The summary aims to state the key points of the full statement in a more accessible form, for a non-technical audience.

Summary Statement

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. In doing this, play provision aims to manage the level of risk so that children are not exposed to unacceptable risks of death or serious injury.

Context

There is growing concern about how safety is being addressed in children's play provision. Fear of litigation is leading many play providers to focus on minimising the risk of injury at the expense of other more fundamental objectives. The effect is to stop children from enjoying a healthy range of play opportunities, limiting their enjoyment and causing potentially damaging consequences for their development.

This approach ignores clear evidence that playing in play provision is a comparatively low risk activity for children. Of the two million or so childhood accident cases treated by hospitals each year, less than 2 percent involve playground equipment. Participation in sports like soccer, widely acknowledged as 'good' for a child's development, involves a greater risk of injury than visiting a playground. Fatalities on playgrounds are very rare – about one per three or four years on average. This compares with, for instance, over 100 child pedestrian fatalities a year and over 500 child fatalities from accidents overall.

In response to this situation, and in order to ensure that children's needs and wishes are properly acknowledged, the Play Safety Forum has prepared this statement.

Full Statement

Acceptable and unacceptable risk

In any human activity, there is an element of risk. Three factors are central to determining whether or not the level of risk is acceptable or tolerable:

- The likelihood of coming to harm
- The severity of that harm
- The benefits, rewards or outcomes of the activity.

Judgements about the acceptability of risk are made on the basis of a risk assessment. Risk assessment and management are not mechanistic processes. They crucially involve making judgements about acceptability based on an understanding of the balance between risks and benefits. Even where there is a risk of fatal or permanent disabling injury, this risk may sometimes be tolerable. For instance, going paddling at the seaside involves an unavoidable risk of fatal injury, but this risk is tolerable for most people because in most circumstances the likelihood of coming to harm is very low and there are obvious benefits. Social and psychological factors are also important in risk assessment. Risks that are acceptable in one community may be unacceptable in another, and policies should take this into account.

Almost any environment contains hazards or sources of harm. In many cases the existence of hazards can be justified, perhaps because they are impossible to remove or perhaps because their removal would have undesirable consequences or be too costly. Where the existence of a hazard can be justified, measures should be in place to manage it. In a controlled environment such as a workplace or a playground, those responsible are required by law to identify, and make informed judgements about, the hazards to which people are exposed. They must take steps to ensure that the risks are managed and controlled so far as is reasonably practicable while allowing the potential benefits to be delivered.

Children and risk

All children both need and want to take risks in order to explore limits, venture into new experiences and develop their capacities, from a very young age and from their earliest play experiences. Children would never learn to walk, climb stairs or ride a bicycle unless they were strongly motivated to respond to challenges involving a risk of injury. Children with disabilities have an equal if not greater need for opportunities to take risks, since they may be denied the freedom of choice enjoyed by their non-disabled peers.

It is the job of all those responsible for children at play to assess and manage the level of risk, so that children are given the chance to stretch themselves, test and develop their abilities without exposing them to unacceptable risks. This is part of a wider adult social responsibility to children. If we do not provide controlled opportunities for children to encounter and manage risk then they may be denied the chance to learn these skills. They may also be more likely to choose to play in uncontrolled environments where the risks are greater.

Any injury is distressing for children and those who care for them, but exposure to the risk of injury, and experience of actual minor injuries, is a universal part of childhood. Such experiences also have a positive role in child development. When children sustain or witness injuries they gain direct experience of the consequences of their actions and choices, and through this an understanding of the extent of their abilities and competences. However, children deserve protection against fatal or permanently disabling injuries, to a greater degree than adults.

Children have a range of physical competences and abilities, including a growing ability to assess and manage risk which adults arguably tend to underestimate. However, children typically have less experience than adults of assessing the broad range of risks and hazards that they may encounter. So it is important to give them appropriate controlled environments in which they can learn about risk.

Play provision and risk

Risk-taking is an essential feature of play provision, and of all environments in which children legitimately spend time at play. Play provision aims to offer children the chance to encounter acceptable risks as part of a stimulating, challenging and controlled learning environment. In the words of the play sector publication *Best Play*, play provision should aim to “manage the balance between the need to offer risk and the need to keep children safe from harm”. While the same principles of safety management can be applied both to workplaces generally and play provision, the balance between safety and benefits is likely to be different in the two environments. In play provision, exposure to some risk is actually a benefit: it satisfies a basic human need and gives children the chance to learn about the real consequences of risk-taking.

Therefore it is acceptable that in play provision children may be exposed to the risk of minor and easily-healed injuries such as bruises, grazes or sprains. On the other hand, play provision should not expose children to significant likelihood of permanent disability or life-threatening injuries. However, it may on occasions be unavoidable that play provision exposes children to the risk – the very low risk – of serious injury or even death. But this would only be tolerable in the following conditions:

- The likelihood were extremely low
- The hazards were clear to users
- There were obvious benefits
- Further reduction of the risk would remove the benefits
- There were no reasonably practicable ways to manage the risk.

For example a paddling pool, even if shallow, involves a very low but irremovable risk of drowning (even with parental supervision), but this is normally tolerable. The likelihood is typically extremely low; the hazard is readily apparent; children benefit through their enjoyment and through the learning experience of water play; and finally, further reduction or management of the risk is not practicable without taking away the benefits.

Providers should strike a balance between the risks and the benefits. This should be done on the basis of a risk assessment. Crucially, this risk assessment should involve a risk-benefit trade-off between safety and other goals, which should be spelt out in the provider’s policy. Given children’s appetite for risk-taking, one of the factors that should be considered is the likelihood that children will seek out risks elsewhere, in environments that are not controlled or designed for them, if play provision is not challenging enough. Another factor is the learning that can take place when children are exposed to, and have to learn to deal with, environmental hazards. Play provision is uniquely placed to offer children the chance to learn about risk in an environment designed for that purpose, and thus to help children equip themselves to deal with similar hazards in the wider world.

Good practice

Clear, well-understood policies, together with procedures that put these policies into practice, are the key to good practice in risk management in play provision. Policies should state clearly the overall objectives. Procedures, including risk assessment, should state how these policies are put into practice, giving guidance but also recognising the need for professional judgement in setting the balance between safety and other goals. Such judgements are clearly multidisciplinary in nature. For example, while they may contain an engineering dimension, of equal or greater importance is likely to be a knowledge of child development and play itself. The Children's Play Information Service (see References below) has information on sources of authoritative, relevant guidance on good practice.

One valuable approach to risk management in play provision is to make the risks as apparent as possible to children. This means designing spaces where the risk of injury arises from hazards that children can readily appreciate (such as heights), and where hazards that children may not appreciate (such as equipment that can trap heads) are absent. This is particularly useful in unsupervised settings, where the design of the equipment and the overall space has to do most of the work in achieving a balanced approach to risk.

Conclusion

Safety in play provision is not absolute and cannot be addressed in isolation. Play provision is first and foremost for children, and if it is not exciting and attractive to them, then it will fail, no matter how 'safe' it is. Designers, managers and providers will need to reach compromises in meeting these sometimes conflicting goals. These compromises are a matter of judgement, not of mechanistic assessment. The judgements should be based on both social attitudes and on broadly-based expert opinion informed by current best practice. They should be firmly rooted in objectives concerned with children's enjoyment and benefit. And they should take into account the concerns of parents. Ultimately the basis of these judgements should be made clear in the policies of the play provider as written down in policy documents. These policies should in turn be understood and embodied in practice by all the key stakeholders.

"We consider *Managing Risk in Play Provision* to be an important document that will contribute to the debate on the provision of children's play. It articulates the balance between the benefit and the need for children to play against the duty of play providers to provide safe play. It makes clear that the safety must be considered at all stages of play provision but that, inevitably, there will be risk of injury when children play, as there is risk of injury in life generally. We must not lose sight of the important developmental role of play for children in the pursuit of the unachievable goal of absolute safety. The important message is though that there must be freedom from unacceptable risk of life-threatening or permanently disabling injury in play." Health and Safety Executive

References

Ball D (2002) *Playgrounds – risks, benefits and choices*, Contract Research Report No. 426/2002, Health and Safety Executive.
British Standards Institute (1998) *BS EN 1176-1 Playground Equipment – Part 1*, British Standards Institute
National Playing Fields Association, Children's Play Council and PLAYLINK (2000), *Best Play: What play provision should do for children* (available from National Children's Bureau)

Information on these and other relevant publications, and contact details for Play Safety Forum members, can be obtained from the Children's Play Information Service, National Children's Bureau, 8 Wakley Street, London EC1V 7QE (tel: 020 7843 6303, email cpis@ncb.org.uk, website www.ncb.org.uk/library/cpis)

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The Play Safety Forum

The Play Safety Forum brings together the main national organisations in England with an interest in safety and children's play. Members include representatives from providers, regulatory bodies and expert agencies. The aim of the Play Safety Forum is to build consensus on issues around risk and safety in relation to play provision. It is an independent body hosted by the Children's Play Council at the invitation of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

Play Safety Forum members

Association of Play Industries
Child Accident Prevention Trust
Children's Play Council
Health and Safety Executive
Institute for Sport and Recreation Management
Institute of Leisure and Amenity Management
Kidsactive
Local Government Association
National Early Years Network
National Playing Fields Association
National Family and Parenting Institute
National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
PLAYLINK
Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents

Adviser: David Ball, Centre for Decision Analysis and Risk Management, Middlesex University

Observer organisations: Department for Culture, Media and Sport, Play Wales

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