RAISING THE NATION PLAY COMMISSION

STATE OF PLAY

An interim report from the Raising the Nation Play Commission

February 2025

CENTRE FOR YOUNG LIVES

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THE RAISING THE NATION PLAY COMMISSION

The Raising the Nation Play Commission ('the Commission') is chaired by entrepreneur and author, Paul Lindley OBE, in partnership with Baroness Anne Longfield CBE, the Executive Chair and Co-Founder of the Centre for Young Lives.

Launched in June 2024, the Commission has convened 20 expert commissioners alongside Paul and Anne to spark a national conversation about how to encourage and support children and families in England to play more. Through the lens of seven themes, the commission is investigating the benefits of, and barriers to, play through a call for written evidence, oral evidence sessions with expert witnesses, a series of visits, and by consulting children, young people, and families.

Our 20 expert commissioners are:

- **Dr Amanda Gummer** – CEO, FUNdamentally Children and Chair, Association of Play Industries
- **Anne-Marie Canning MBE** – CEO, The Brilliant Club
- **Arti Sharma** – CEO, Nurture UK
- **Eugene Minogue** – Executive Director, Play England
- **Harry Hobson** – Director, Neighbourly Lab
- **Prof. Helen Dodd** - Professor of Child Psychology, University of Exeter Medical School
- **Ingrid Skeels** – Co-Founder, Playing Out
- **Jo Rhodes** – Founder, Challenge 59
- **Julika Niehaus** – Portfolio Manager, Children's Mental Health Programme, Impact on Urban Health
- **Kadra Abdinasir** – Associate Director of Policy, Centre for Mental Health
- **Laura Henry-Allain MBE** – Educationalist, storyteller, producer, and consultant
- **Prof. Mark Mon Williams** - Chair in Cognitive Psychology, University of Leeds & Prof of Psychology, Bradford Institute of Health Research
- **Martin Allen Morales** – CEO, Institute of Imagination
- **Dr Naomi Lott** – Assistant Professor in Law, University of Reading
- **Prof. Paul Ramchandani** – Professor at PEDAL, University of Cambridge
- **Dr Rob Hughes** - Clinical Research Fellow, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine & CEO, TANDEM
- **Sue MacMillan** – COO, Mumsnet
- **Tim Gill** – Author & Independent Consultant
- **Tom Bridges** – Director, Arup
- **Zelda Yanovich** – CEO & Co-Founder, Fam Studio

The Commission is acutely aware that nobody knows what play looks like, appreciates its benefits, and understands barriers to it better than children and young people themselves. Indeed, many of the barriers to play which we highlight in this report are a consequence of children and young people's needs and perspectives being ignored. We are firmly committed to listening to and being guided by children's voices throughout our research and development of recommendations.

In the coming months, we will continue to engage with children and young people across the country to hear their experiences and ideas, and to test the emerging recommendations laid out in this interim report.

FOREWORD FROM PAUL LINDLEY

We launched the Raising the Nation Play Commission last year, shortly after the publication of my book: Raising the Nation: How to Build a Better Future for Our Children (and Everyone Else) and right in the middle of the General Election campaign. In the months since, we have seen a new Government elected with new priorities and fresh missions and milestones to boost opportunities for all children to thrive.

Thriving childhoods are an essential part of building a thriving society and a crucial part of the Government's Opportunity Mission. We believe play has a vital role in that mission and that it should be central to political decision-making. The way children explore, experiment and build an understanding of the world really matters for their own development, but also to society.

Our Commission's work is not taking place in isolation. There are many influential campaigners, evidence-laden academics, local initiatives, and national lobbyists pressing the case for more playful childhoods. Our approach is to work with as many experts as possible and embrace, distil, recognise, and highlight their work, whilst focusing all knowledge, evidence, and ideas into a tight, deliverable, whole system framework.

As such, our interim report lays down some of the foundations for a Play Strategy for England, which we will put forward to the Government in our final report in June.

So much has changed in the 17 years since the then Children, Families and Schools Secretary, Ed Balls, and Culture Secretary, Andy Burnham launched the last Government play strategy in 2008, including the growing number of barriers to play.

Many of the opportunities and spaces for children to play have been lost. Hundreds of playgrounds have closed, along with more than half of all youth centres and nearly all Sure Start Centres. School playing fields have been sold, there are more cars and vans, moving and parked, on our roads and public spaces and streets feel less safe for children to play. Both primary and secondary schools have also reduced break time, and it feels like the education system has been subtly encouraged to devalue the tool of play in learning. Parents have less time to play with their children too.

At the same time, we continue to experience an ever-rising growth in children's use of smartphones, online gaming, and social media.

It is unsurprising that the physical and mental health of many children has rapidly declined over the last decade and a half. Around four in ten children now live with an unhealthy weight and more than 25% are obese, whilst one in five have a

probable mental health issue.

Despite the fantastic and innovative work being done by many different organisations and experts to boost children's access to play and to keep play on the policy agenda, there has been a notable absence of vision for optimising opportunities to play from recent governments. The Raising the Nation Play Commission is working to change that, building on the work that Play England and other leading play organisations have done to make the case for a more playful future in England.

We are focusing on seven themes: learning through play; places to play; time to play; right to play; digital play; parents and play; and play and health. At the time of writing, with the support of our 20 expert Commissioners, we have heard from 55 witnesses during our oral evidence sessions. We've also received over 150 pieces of written evidence following our call for evidence last year. We've visited inspiring play schemes and schools too and talked to children themselves about their experiences of play – what they like about playing, what are the barriers to play, what would they like to see change. We have also visited, and learned from, programmes that enable more, better and easier play in South Africa and the United States.

Our interim report focuses predominately on our first three key themes of evidence-taking: learning through play (which we have broadened out to 'play as a foundation of life'), places to play, and time to play. It sets out some of the evidence and experiences we have heard, and been part of, over the first months of the Commission, alongside some emerging recommendations.

Our final report will add to these recommendations and put forward a final set of policy proposals that recognise the importance of the Government's key missions, and the current economic climate.

From the evidence we have taken so far, we are clear that to get all of our children playing again we need to see a cross-Government National Play Strategy for England, potentially led by the Department for Culture, Media & Sport, which includes a long-term vision to ensure all children can easily access local formal and informal places to play at home, in school, and in the public realm. We also think local authorities need new guidance on how to provide sufficient play opportunities and how to communicate them to parents and families, as well as a commitment to embed play within their local priorities.

We want to see a plan to re-establish a skilled workforce of playworkers, ensure play is covered as part of initial teacher training and as part of all teachers' continued professional development, and we'd like to see Ofsted include play sufficiency as a measurement of school performance. Schools also need clearer guidance of what constitutes quality play-based learning and how it benefits children within the Curriculum. We should move away from the idea that play-based learning stops when children start school.

Most importantly, we believe the Department for Education should look at how to ringfence time to play within the school day for breaktimes and lunchtimes, how to incorporate play as a ubiquitous lesson learning technique and how to discourage schools from using the withdrawal of playtime as punishment for bad behaviour.

Parents need support too. We propose a low-cost national campaign aligned with the International Day of Play to encourage and support parents to play with their children, and to provide opportunities for children to play with others, as part of the Government's drive to improve school readiness. Let's remind parents of the huge value of play, but also the good fun and enjoyment that comes from playing with your children.

During our evidence sessions, and building on the work of the recent parliamentary inquiry into children and young people in the built environment, we've heard how the current planning system routinely ignores children's right to play when new developments are built. Some forward-thinking developers do consult with children to co-create genuinely playful neighbourhoods – but why not all?

We also need a culture change in how we view children playing outside – let's consign the 'No Ball Games' signs to the past and update bylaws for Parks and Open Spaces to create public spaces that encourage children to play, not put up even more barriers. They have, and they must feel that they have, as much right to be in every public space as any other citizen; which is every right.

Our streets also need to become more play-friendly – many residents close their street to traffic, at specific times, for street play with the support of their local council, but it should be much easier to do.

These are just some of the ideas we are developing and which we will flesh out in our final report in June.

Before then, we have more work to do. In March, we will be travelling to Denmark and Finland to see, and learn from, the excellent work those

countries have done to embed play into childhoods and society. We also have plans for further visits to other parts of the UK and have more evidence sessions.

We're determined to grasp this moment of change to put forward a framework to enable a fresh National Play Strategy for England that is fit for the 21st century. We can't just sit and watch while children spend less and less time playing, becoming more unhealthy and unhappy, as well as less ready to start school or to learn. We cannot have another generation deprived of honing critical life skills, so naturally acquired when children experiment, explore, and understand the world through opportunities to play.

If there's one clear message that we've heard over the last eight months it's this: our children love playing, they want to play more, and they want us – the adults – to find new and better ways of helping them to do what they love.

Let's pull down the barriers that are holding them back.

Keep smiling!

Paul Lindley OBE
Chair of the Raising the Nation Play Commission

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report covers the first three of the Commission's seven themes: learning through play, places to play, and time to play. Through an extensive call for written evidence and oral evidence sessions with expert witnesses, we have gathered evidence of countless barriers to play and have developed a number of emerging recommendations to overcome them.

Much of this evidence and many of these recommendations build on the work of others in the play sector, who have worked tirelessly to uphold children's right to play long before, and ever since, the dismantling of England's Play Strategy of 2008.

Children in England are increasingly unhealthy and unhappy. Compared to previous generations, they are spending less time outdoors, less time with their friends, and less time playing. This goes against the natural instinct in all children to play, but barriers at school, in public, and in their homes are severely limiting their opportunities to play.

In the other nations of the United Kingdom, play has been recognised as a policy tool across their devolved governments to deliver better outcomes in health and education, as well as to tackle inequality and poverty. Above all, in Wales and Scotland, children's right to play is recognised by law.

In England however, play continues to be overlooked as a policy priority, despite the fact that maximising the opportunities for children to do so is the most natural and easiest way to improve their mental and physical health.

PLAY AS A FOUNDATION FOR LIFE

The most obvious conclusion from all the evidence we have received to date, is that the fundamental value of play is in laying the foundations for life. Nothing else comes so naturally to a child as play, and the creativity and curiosity that it involves.

The benefits for children and young people's health and development are as unmatchable as they are irreplaceable. Play develops cognitive skills, such as memory or problem solving, and social skills, such as leadership and conflict resolution. It equips children with motor skills and the opportunity to be active, boosting their mental and physical health as a result.

In the early years, it is true that all of the above contribute to a child's school readiness, a welcome and necessary focus of the current Labour Government. However, the desire and need to play does not disappear as soon as children reach school age; children and young people of all ages need to play and the benefits of doing so are felt for life. This play may look different for different children, so opportunities and spaces to play must be adapted and provided accordingly.

PLAY IN THE SCHOOL DAY

At school, play-based learning within the classroom can be used to engage all children in their learning, overcoming barriers which some children – particularly those with special education needs – may face in engaging with the National Curriculum and its reliance on rote-learning techniques. The National Curriculum, with its often unwieldy content and narrow focus on assessment, prevents many schools and teachers from employing play-based learning techniques.

The de-prioritisation of play within the education system has also manifested itself in shorter breaktimes which in many schools are sometimes withheld for behavioural reasons. As a result, children are missing out on the opportunity to play freely outdoors and to apply and further their learning.

PLACES TO PLAY

In the public realm, formal spaces to play - such as local playgrounds - have been closed at an alarming rate. Playing out on local streets in the community has also declined, as a result of more cars now occupying these spaces and concerns about crime growing.

At home, gardens provide a crucial haven for many children to play safely outdoors, yet many children, especially those from lower-income and ethnic minority backgrounds, do not have gardens or other suitable spaces to play in.

Across all spaces, whether it be local playgrounds or public space, the planning system often overlooks the needs and views of children, creating spaces which are inaccessible, unsafe, or even unwanted. Typically, this disproportionately impacts girls, children with special educational

needs and disabilities (SEND), children from low-income backgrounds, and ethnically minority children.

SUMMARY OF EMERGING RECOMMENDATIONS

To realise the many fundamental benefits of play and to enable more children to play, the Commission has drawn together a number of emerging recommendations which would establish a policy landscape in England which uses play to overcome many of the generational challenges facing children and young people.

Firstly, we propose that the Government establish a **National Play Strategy for England**. Led by the Department for Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) but working cross-departmentally across government, a play strategy would ensure that the power of play to improve children's health, wellbeing, and development is realised across the policy landscape, including in the education, planning, and healthcare systems.

The strategy would set out a clear, long-term vision to ensure children can easily access and enjoy places to play in public, at school, and at home. This vision should emphasise inclusion and equity, ensuring that space exists for all children to access.

To **boost learning through play opportunities** and to **support schools to get children playing**, we recommend that the Department for Education ringfences time in the school day for breaktimes and lunchtimes. It should also issue guidance discouraging the punitive withdrawal of playtime, and issue guidelines - in the revised National Curriculum - for how primary schools can and should employ play-based learning in the classroom. To reward schools that value play highly, we also propose that Ofsted includes a measure of time to play in schools in its assessment of them.

To ensure children have **safe places to play**, we support the introduction of a Play Sufficiency Duty, to provide a framework and guidance for local authorities to protect and provide opportunities to play. This should encourage creativity at a local level to adapt and evolve places, such as by opening school playgrounds for wider community use outside of the school day.

We also recommend a realignment of the planning system, so that it is able to serve children and young people's needs. This includes requiring developers to consult children on their views on the spaces which they will live in and use, as well as ensuring that they recognise the need of all children and young people to have access to outdoor and green space.

INTRODUCTION

England needs a play strategy. Our children are becoming unhealthier. In 2013, Public Health England warned that sedentary lifestyles were affecting children's wellbeing. Over ten years later, children are spending even longer in front of screens, from an increasingly young age, and are less physically active than any previous generation. They are less likely to play away from home in the way that previous generations felt safe doing, and many parents recognise and worry that their own children are playing out less than they did as children.

We also hear from a broad swathe of experts and professionals who work with children, such as teachers and youth workers, how some of the biggest challenges facing young people – especially since the pandemic - is a dearth of essential skills, particularly communication and co-operation.

The impact on our nation's health, on our services, our economic prosperity, and our future wellbeing is clear.

Image: Impact on Urban Health

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY PLAY?

For children and young people of different ages or in different environments, play may look very different. There are, however, several characteristics of play which can be used to define it.

We like Frank Dobson's definition in his 2004 seminal review of children's play, Getting Serious About Play. In it the then Labour MP for Holborn and St. Pancras and former Secretary of State for Health, defined play as

> "what children and young people do when they follow their own ideas, in their own way and for their own reasons". [1]

In a similar vein, the previous National Play Strategy for England and the present strategies and policies in Scotland and Wales, all refer to play as an activity which is **"freely chosen, personally directed, and intrinsically motivated"**. [2,3,4]

Notably for both definitions, age is not a condition of a person playing. We have consistently heard how it not just children in the early years who play; older children and teenagers need to, and benefit from, play and often face their own unique barriers to doing so. As such, the focus of the commission falls on all children and young people up to the age of 18.

1 Frank Dobson (2004) Getting Serious About Play: A review of children's play, https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/jZ2wL4

2 Play Scotland (2013) Play Strategy for Scotland: Our Vision, https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/6wVlgM

3 Welsh Assembly Government (2002) Welsh Assembly Government Play Policy, https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/Xkl06t

4 Department for Children, Schools and Families (2008) The Play Strategy, https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/mPMPWG

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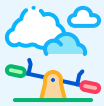
Boosting children's play should be a vital part of reversing these trends and a crucial part of creating a healthier and happier nation. Supporting and encouraging children to play has become a neglected policy area, to the detriment of their health, wellbeing, education, learning, and social skills. Play must be a central part of childhood again, in a way that it was in the pre-digital era and which it still largely is in, for example, Scandinavian countries today.

Knowing this state of play, our year-long Commission was imagined by Paul Lindley, founder of Ella's Kitchen and author of Raising the Nation: How to Build a Better Future for Our Children (and Everyone Else), and established through his partnership with Baroness Anne Longfield, former Children's Commissioner for England, and her thinktank, The Centre for Young Lives. The Commission brings Paul and Anne together with 20 other experts from the world of play, academia, and children's rights as well as education, the built environment, and communities as Commissioners. Our Commissioners meet regularly throughout the year to provide advice, as well as taking part in the series of evidence sessions.

We have organised our work around seven core themes, being:

LEARNING THROUGH PLAY

How to boost learning through play, including the benefits of free and structured play, formal and informal play environments, and child, parent, and teacher-led play.



PLACES TO PLAY

Exploring the availability of safe public spaces (parks, playgrounds, streets, youth centres, early years settings, schools, and private (gardens, houses, businesses).

TIME TO PLAY

Exploring the changing school day and year (breaks, after school, half term, and holidays) and changing environments outside school.

RIGHT TO PLAY

Consideration of national and local council responsibilities, tenancy agreements, no ball games signs, and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

DIGITAL PLAY

How and where children can play in the digital and real realms.

PARENTS AND PLAY

How parents' own relationships to play, and their views on safety, impact on how their children play.

PLAY AND HEALTH

How play is an integral component of a healthy childhood, and how play can be used in healthcare settings and by healthcare professionals.

We have been consulting widely, inviting submissions from across society and drawing on the rich network of contributors who have written essays for Paul Lindley's recent book. We also actively engage with, and support, many organisations and bodies that exist to promote more, better, and easier play opportunities. Above all we are consulting with, listening to, and learning from children and young people directly, through multiple relationships and opportunities. The voice of children and young people is absolutely central to our work.

This interim report provides an overview of the current context of the play policy landscape, examines key evidence around our first three topics, and makes some early recommendations. We will consult further with stakeholders and experts on these proposals in the coming weeks. Our final report will be published on the International Day of Play 2025 (June 11th).

STATE OF PLAY: THE POLICY LANDSCAPE

Image: Nurture UK

The diverse and far-reaching benefits of play which will be outlined in this report reinforce the well-established body of evidence demonstrating the immense value of play to children's development and to communities. In fact, it was this evidence which laid the foundations for England's previous Play Strategy, back in 2008, which was developed by the Labour Government alongside Play England.[5]

As the two Secretaries of State then responsible for the strategy, Children, Families and Schools Secretary Ed Balls and Culture, Media & Sport Secretary Andy Burnham, wrote in its opening lines:

> "Time and space to play safely is integral to our ambition to make England the best country in the world for children and young people to grow up – it is vital to children's physical, emotional, social and educational development."

Backed by £235 million and informed by an extensive consultation, Fair Play, the then Government's 2008 Play Strategy aimed to ensure that all children would be able to enjoy local, safe, and exciting places to play. It would achieve this through investing in new facilities, the co-design of these spaces with children and communities, support for the play workforce through a new qualification, and by embedding play as a priority on a local level.

The Tellus4 survey by the National Foundation for Education Research, carried out in November 2009, found that children and young people's satisfaction with their parks and play areas increased from 45% in 2008 to 54% in 2009. Whilst the exact impact of the Play Strategy on these results is not clear – other factors such as funding from the BIG lottery's Children's Play programme also led to investment in play provision at the time – it nevertheless shows that investing in play spaces was having a positive impact.[6]

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE 2008 PLAY STRATEGY?

In the first few years, the strategy's goal was to increase the availability of play facilities where children needed them most. Its 12-year vision would culminate in all children having access to "world-class play and recreation spaces".

These were excellent, well evidenced ambitions, but they were not followed through by national Government after 2010, and there was little encouragement, incentive, or funding for local areas to implement the strategy either.

Firstly, the Play Strategy was disarmed of its financial power. The Coalition Government, and its newly renamed Department for Education, removed the ringfence for play programme budgets and scrapped play facility targets for local authorities. The loss of play-specific funding was compounded by broader cuts to local authorities, limiting their ability to plug the gaps.

Secondly, beyond the loss of financial backing for play, there was also a cultural shift in attitudes towards play - from the education system to

5 Department for Children, Schools and Families & Department for Culture, Media and Sport (2008) The Play Strategy, https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/4jKpQz
6 National Foundation for Educational Research (2010) Tellus4 National Report

the planning system – which had seen play consistently deprioritised and children's need to play sidelined. The impact on play spaces has been devastating and children now have fewer opportunities to play, despite play remaining vital to their physical, emotional, social, and educational development.

THE NEED FOR A NEW NATIONAL PLAY STRATEGY

The Labour Government elected in 2024 has placed a welcome emphasis on children's wellbeing and outcomes. 40% of children now live with an unhealthy weight and more than 25% are obese. The number of children not 'school ready' is also a huge cause for concern, as are the numbers of children who are absent from school.

Children's wellbeing and happiness in England are also at record lows. We should be extremely concerned that one-in-five children and young people in England have a diagnosable mental health condition. The crises in young people's physical and mental health are felt at their sharpest within under-served communities.

These trends, whilst not unique to England or the UK, are far worse in this country than in most others. The UK had the lowest average overall life satisfaction among 15-year-olds completing PISA across 27 European countries in 2022, with one-in-five boys and nearly one-in-three girls reporting low life satisfaction.

There has been a renewed focus on children from the new Government, acknowledging that an NHS at breaking point and a school attendance crisis are two issues, among many, which cannot be resolved without improving children's health and wellbeing.

The drive to play is innate in children, and enabling more play is the most natural and easiest way to improve children's physical and mental health. We need to tackle the cause of the rise in inactivity and isolation at source.

Encouraging play and tackling the barriers to play also align with much of the Government's mission-led agenda:

- growing the economy (by ensuring we have a fit, healthy, skilled workforce in the future and cutting the cost of social and health problems);
- an NHS fit for the future (by cutting the costs of ill-health in adulthood by addressing problems earlier in childhood and developing innovative ways of reducing waiting lists);
- safer streets (by providing places and opportunities for children and young people to play and be active); and
- opportunity for all (by boosting learning through play, school readiness, attendance and behaviour at school, skills and development).

A national play strategy would boost the Government's chances of delivering on these aims.

BARRIERS TO PLAY

There are now so many barriers restricting play. More cars on the roads (both parked and moving), the closure of playgrounds, the dominance of screentime, shortened school breaktimes, and a default use of 'No Ball Games' signs in so many communal spaces, are all restrictions to children's freedom and opportunities to play.

As a result, children are spending less time outdoors than previous generations, less time socialising with friends, and less time playing.

Reversing these trends must be a priority if we are to tackle the crises in young people's physical and mental health. Children tell us that they want to play more and that it improves their wellbeing – indeed, more than 9 in 10 children agree that "being in nature makes me very happy".[7]

The Government's Opportunity Mission aims to break the link between a child's background and their future success delivering across 4 key areas:

- set every child up for the best start in life;
- help every child to achieve and thrive at school (with a particular focus on disadvantaged children);
- build skills for opportunity and growth so that every young person can follow the pathway that is right for them; and
- building family security.

The Prime Minister has also set out a particular focus on children starting primary school ready to learn, a challenge which has grown since the Covid pandemic. Ensuring children have the best start in life is the foundation of the Opportunity Mission, and the Government has set a target of 75% of 5-year-olds reaching a good level of development in the Early Years Foundation Stage assessment by 2028.

Among the proposals to achieve this are new and expanded school-based nurseries, reforming

7 Natural England (2024) The Children's People and Nature Survey for England: 2024 update, https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/YpLqgU

training and support for the workforce to drive up standards, and a stronger early years system. This includes investing in Family Hubs and Start for Life programmes, parenting and home learning programmes, and improved early identification of special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), creating a Child Poverty Taskforce, a review of the National Curriculum, funding for breakfast clubs, cutting waiting lists for mental health services, and the adoption of the Young Futures programme – local hubs to provide safe and positive places for teenagers. A new Youth Strategy is also in development, and there is a renewed focus on boosting school readiness.

However, government in England has yet to fully embrace the transformative power of play to help tackle some of these new and generational problems and is playing catch up with the devolved nations when it comes to implementing play policies that support children to play.

PROGRESS IN THE DEVOLVED NATIONS

Under their devolved powers, the Welsh and Scottish Governments and the Northern Ireland Executive have adopted policies and fostered a culture of political prioritisation of the needs of children and young people. As a result, there are numerous examples of best practice and inspiration from across the devolved nations that the Raising the Nation Play Commission has been able to draw upon.

Wales has been a trailblazer, publishing the world's first play policy in 2002.[8] This policy statement - underpinned by a commitment to children's right to play established in the UNCRC – has been the foundation of much of the Welsh Government's play-related policy since. The policy statement affirms the Welsh Government's belief that:

> "play is so critically important to all children in the development of their physical, social, mental, emotional and creative skills that society should seek every opportunity to support it and create an environment that fosters it"[9]

In 2004, the Welsh Government formally adopted the UNCRC as the basis of policy making relating to children and young people and enshrined these rights in Welsh law in 2011 through the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011.[10] In doing so, Wales became the first country in the UK to integrate the UNCRC into domestic law.

This came a year after Wales became the first country in the world to legislate for play: the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 introduced a Play Sufficiency Duty.[11] Against the backdrop of the Government's bid to tackle poverty, the legislation acknowledged that children could have a poverty of 'experience, opportunity, and aspiration'.[12]

The duty in its current form came in two phases: the first, in 2010, requires local authorities to assess whether there are enough opportunities to play within their jurisdiction. Since 2014, local authorities have also been required to secure enough opportunities, should their assessment find they are insufficient.[13]

Like Wales, Scotland also has a dedicated Minister for Children, and a policy framework that protects children's right to play. Scotland's Play Strategy, published in 2013, recognises the breadth of the benefits of play across several policy priorities in Scotland, including in health, education, and reducing inequality.[14]

Through the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019, the Scottish Government introduced a play sufficiency duty on local authorities. Alongside the Play Sufficiency Assessments which also are a feature of the Welsh duty, the legislation in Scotland requires local authorities to consult children on local place plans.[15]

In January 2024, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act incorporated UNCRC law into Scottish law.[16]

In both Wales and Scotland, play strategies are delivered by independent expert sector organisations Play Scotland and Play Wales, who ensure the strategies are needs- and evidence-led, and campaign for and represent children's right to play.

8 Welsh Government (2002) Welsh Assembly Government Play Policy, https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/2HJpkw
9 Ibid.
10 Welsh Government (2022) Children's rights in Wales, https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/vDqH5p Accessed: 24.01.25
11 Welsh Government (2010) Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010, https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/1HkTgB
12 Play Wales (2020) Right to play workshop, https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/3FdRjK
13 Play Wales. (n.d.) Play Sufficiency, https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/2EmTzQ Accessed 24.01.25
14 Play Scotland. (n.d.) Policy Landscape, https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/4XkYlN Accessed: 31.01.25
15 UK Government. (2019) Planning (Scotland) Act 2019, https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/1AqRjK Accessed: 29.01.25
16 Scottish Government (2024) United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024, https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/3BvNqR

Play policy in Northern Ireland is similarly underpinned by the right to play established in the UNCRC, outlined by the Play and Leisure Policy Statement of 2009.[17] As a result, the Department of Education has led the Play Matters campaign, which aims to increase understanding and recognition of the importance of play through specific training sessions to professionals working with children, and support for parents and carers to build their confidence in playing with their children.[18]

Play was also maintained as a policy focus in the 2011 Play and Leisure Implementation Plan, published by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister.[19] More recently, the Children & Young People's Strategy 2020-2030 has sustained this focus on children's opportunities to play.[20] The implementation plan and children and young people's strategy were developed with the support of PlayBoard NI.[21]

England is clearly the United Kingdom's outlier. English children have fewer protections around their play, and a significantly reduced right to play, than their Welsh, Scottish and Northern Irish - but fellow British - young citizens. This must be addressed.

17 Northern Ireland Executive (2009) Play and Leisure Policy Statement for Northern Ireland, https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/5CfzLp

18 Playboard NI. Raising the Nation Play Commission call for evidence submission. 31.10.24

19 Department of Education NI. (n.d.) Play Matters, https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/4KjTqP Accessed: 03.09.24

20 Northern Ireland Executive (2020) Children & Young People's Strategy 2020-2030, https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/2XyBrT

21 Playboard NI. Raising the Nation Play Commission call for evidence submission. 31.10.24

PLAY AS A FOUNDATION FOR LIFE AND LEARNING

Play is an intrinsic component of a happy, healthy childhood.

Children have a natural urge to play anywhere and everywhere. It can be guided by adults but it should not be prescribed; it is self-initiated and motivated only by the innate need to play, rather than a desire to obtain any of its benefits.

However, it is easier to comprehend the importance of play when viewed through the lens of these benefits, such as improving educational attainment or lowering obesity rates. Whilst these are undoubtedly significant benefits of play, which we will explore in this report, its significance is not limited to improving specific outcomes but rather laying the foundations for all children to have happy and healthy lives.

> "if we want to find out how children play and how important that is, we must stop trying to translate that into GCSE results... what we're actually evaluating are the building blocks"
>
> Professor Dr Ger Graus OBE[22]

These building blocks are the relationships, skills, freedom, and, most importantly, the joy that only play can foster from a young age.

PLAY, FREEDOM, AND RISK

Risk is an essential part of childhood, and it is crucial for development. Without it, children are unable to extend their abilities and build new capabilities. For some children, it may be climbing a tree and for others it may mean speaking or singing in public, but all children must be able to embrace this risk if they are to become "fully realised individuals".[23]

In Norway, freedom, and failure, are core components of any childhood. As Andy Welch writes, there is a "tacit understanding" that a child might make a mistake but that they will learn from it, even if that failure means a fall from a tree.[24]

> "The risks of grazed knees and the odd broken bone pale into insignificance when set against the long-term health problems facing sedentary and overweight young people"
>
> Ben Highmore[25]

Freedom in childhood does not just mean the freedom to make a mistake but it also of self-determination and responsibility. Children in Norway can often be seen walking to school alone at the age of six, or out at the weekend with just a door key and a vague time by which they need to be home.[26]

There are, of course, some conditions which must be in place for 'free-range parenting' to be successful. There must be the infrastructure in place for children to get around independently without cars, and there must be a shared sense of safety and understanding among the community. If these exist, the freedom children have to explore and play is hugely beneficial for their health, development, and happiness.

PLAY, HEALTH, AND DEVELOPMENT

Children love to play, and by its very nature learning is constantly happening whenever play takes place. This can range from a child learning basic numeracy or literacy skills to the learning and development of 'life skills', such as problem-solving, communication, self-regulation, negotiation or resilience, as well as vital social skills. Whilst this is never a conscious aim when children play freely - which is characterised by its means rather than its ends - it is nevertheless an important and inseparable by-product.

22 Professor Dr Ger Graus OBE. Raising the Nation Play Commission learning through play evidence session. 09.09.24
23 Ben Highmore. Raising the Nation Play Commission call for evidence submission. 12.09.24
24 Andy Welch (2024) How to be a Norwegian parent: let your kids roam free, stay home alone, have fun – and fail, https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/rg45dc Accessed: 12.07.24
25 Ibid.
26 Andy Welch (2024) How to be a Norwegian parent: let your kids roam free, stay home alone, have fun – and fail, https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/rg45dc Accessed: 12.07.24

> "Play is the start of learning... from the youngest of ages, we learn through curiosity"
>
> Professor Dr Ger Graus OBE[27]

Even though the role of play in developing these skills and capabilities should not be understated throughout childhood and adolescence, the body of research tends to focus on the early years. The LEGO Foundation compiled studies demonstrating a positive relationship between play and the development of "holistic skills" in children from birth to 12 years of age. Of the 369 studies included in their review, 225 focused on children between birth and five years-old.[28]

This is not without good reason: approximately 80% of brain development is completed by age 3 and 90% by age 5, making it all the more important that we understand how to make this vital stage of development as healthy as possible.[29,30]

Play is an integral and irreplaceable component of this development, acknowledged by the Department for Education's 'Early years foundation stage statutory framework'[31]:

> "Play is essential for children's development, building their confidence as they learn to explore, relate to others, set their own goals, and solve problems"

The framework lays out three "prime areas" of learning and development in the early years which lay the foundations for children to thrive:

- communication and language;
- physical development; and
- personal, social, and emotional development.

In relation to the first of these three areas, communication and language, there is a wealth of evidence to show play is beneficial. The LEGO Foundation found studies around the world which linked play to language skills. For example, children love to copy others when they play and mimicking others can enhance expressive vocabulary. Similarly, symbolic play and storytelling have both been found to boost language skills and play with peers can improve receptive vocabularies.[32]

Play is equally important for a child's physical development; it can improve "core strength, stability, balance, spatial awareness, co-ordination and agility".[33] Free play, where children have the most agency in their play, has been shown to have a positive link with gross motor skills development.[34]

Finally, play is also a core component of a child's personal, social, and emotional development, which is crucial if children are to be able to understand other people's and their own needs, be empathetic, work collaboratively, and develop pro-social skills.[35] Growing up in a society where one-in-five children has a probable mental health condition, it has never been more critical that every child has every chance to understand and self-regulate their emotions and feelings through play.

Dr Michael Yogman – a former Assistant Professor of Paediatrics at Harvard Medical School – told us how the skills which play can develop are especially pertinent for the current generation:

> "[Play develops] all the aspects of executive function, the inhibitory control, the cognitive flexibility, the working memory, these are critical 21st century skills"[36]

Play is the foundation of creativity, curiosity, and problem-solving. It nurtures the imagination, strengthens emotional resilience, and builds critical cognitive skills. The modern challenges we face demand more than technology; while AI is transforming life, human creativity—and the capacity to explore through play—will drive progress and lasting change.

By contrast, the Education Development Trust warns how "play deprivation" can lead to a fall

27 Professor Dr Ger Graus OBE. Raising the Nation Play Commission learning through play evidence session. 09.09.24
28 The LEGO Foundation (2022) Learning Through Play and the Development of Holistic Skills Across Childhood, https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/c2cwn4
29 Theirworld. (n.d.) .) Learning through play (early childhood development), https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/XV2x5a Accessed: 27.01.25
30 NHS. (n.d.) Early learning and development, https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/6t8wpz Accessed: 27.01.25
31 Department for Education. (2014) Early years foundation stage (EYFS) statutory framework, https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/r3k7t9 Accessed: 26.01.25
32 The LEGO Foundation (2022) Learning Through Play and the Development of Holistic Skills Across Childhood, https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/c2cwn4
33 Department for Education (2024) Early years foundation stage (EYFS) statutory framework, https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/2z7yw4 Accessed: 23.01.25
34 The LEGO Foundation (2022) Learning Through Play and the Development of Holistic Skills Across Childhood, https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/c2cwn4
35 Ibid.
36 Dr Michael Yogman. Raising the Nation Play Commission learning through play evidence session. 09.09.24

in brain and muscle development and reduced communication, problem-solving, and social skills, all of which have long-term consequences beyond childhood and into adulthood.[37]

Above all, play offers children agency, as they learn that what they do has an impact on the world. This "agency", writes Paul Ramchandani in Raising the Nation, "is one of the most powerful driving forces behind children's development", as children learn to associate their actions with an effect.[38]

Whilst the early years framework's three prime areas provide a useful lens through which to view the main benefits of learning through play, this is not to say that they are limited to the early years. The benefits are felt far beyond simply equipping children with skills and competencies for school but rather, for life.

Equally, children's desire to play is not diminished as soon as they pass this milestone in life: it is an integral part of their lives long after their first day at school, continuing through childhood and adolescence and into adulthood.

Older children and teenagers may hesitate to refer to their actions as 'play', but their activities still meet the criteria in the sense that they are often freely chosen, self-directed, and intrinsically motivated – and having fun.

Professor Sarah Jayne Blakemore - Professor of Psychology and Cognitive Neuroscience at the University of Cambridge and Co-Director of the Wellcome Trust PhD programme in Neuroscience at University College London - gave evidence to the Raising the Nation Play Commission, explaining how crucial development of the brain continues in adolescence. Cognitive development and processes are still occurring, particularly relating to executive functions such as decision-making, self-awareness, self-identity, and social functioning.[39]

PLAY-BASED PEDAGOGY

So far, this section has covered the broader, developmental benefits of learning through play, which are essential for children to thrive both inside and outside of school. However, there are also instances where play can be used more purposefully in the curriculum and in the classroom to achieve better learning outcomes, which we will refer to as 'playful learning'. This extends beyond free play to include guided play and structured games.[40] A significant number of submissions to our call for evidence and several of our expert witnesses during our oral evidence sessions referred explicitly to play within schools.

This is particularly valuable in tackling the increasing levels of pupil dissatisfaction with school: less than a third of all pupils (28%) say they often find their learning interesting, whilst less than half (47%) say they are quite or very happy at school.[41] The Big Education Multi-Academy Trust has linked this boredom in school with the attendance crisis, and with difficulties in retaining teachers.[42]

This position was echoed to us by Kim Foulds, Vice President of Content Research & Evaluation at Sesame Workshop:

> "playful learning supports children's development holistically but also supports teacher training and teacher job satisfaction and teacher retention... when you have teachers who are happy in their job they're better at their job."[43]

There is a need, then, for learning and the school environment to adapt to become more inspiring and engaging for teachers and for all pupils.

Greater use of play-based learning has the capacity to achieve this; 92% of children say they learn better when it is made playful.[44] During a focus group with Year 6 pupils at a primary school in South London that we visited, one participant described how being playful and a bit silly in the classroom "makes me more excited and awake", and therefore more engaged in the lesson.

During one of our time to play oral evidence sessions, Amber Ogunsanya-William, an inclusive play specialist, told the Commission how play can make learning more inclusive. Creating a story alongside the curriculum, for example by using a treasure hunt to find the answers for maths questions, can help all children to engage in a

37 Education Development Trust. Raising the Nation Play Commission call for evidence submission. 24. 10.24
38 Paul Ramchandani (2024) Making space for play. In: Lindley, P. (2024) Raising the Nation: How to build a better future for our children
39 Sarah Jayne Blakemore. Raising the Nation Play Commission evidence session. 25.11.24
40 NAEYC. (2022) The Power of Playful Learning in the Early Childhood Setting, https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/BF8svG Accessed 27.01.25
41 Edurio (2024) High-Quality, Inclusive Education, https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/kFOTqW
42 Big Education. Raising the Nation Play Commission call for evidence submission. 09.09.24
43 Kim Foulds. Raising the Nation Play Commission learning through play evidence session. 09.09.24
44 Real Play Coalition (2018) Value of Play Report, https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/Rz9pG

lesson, who may otherwise struggle with more 'traditional' teaching techniques.[45]

At a pre-school level, the value of a play-based pedagogy is particularly clear. The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project was the first major longitudinal study in Europe of children's development between the ages of 3 and 7. It found that most effective pre-school centres used play-based environments as the foundation for a mixture of 'teaching' and "freely chosen yet potentially instructive play activities".[46]

The project also found that free play can provide the best environment for children's thinking to be extended and is therefore likely to be the most effective vehicle for learning when coupled with teacher-initiated group work.[47]

Multiple witnesses during our learning through play evidence sessions, including Dr Soizic Le Courtois, Anna Scott Marshall, and Susan Sandouka Husemeyer highlighted how training for teachers and a wider pro-play culture within schools is needed if teachers are to be able to confidently deliver more play-based learning. Only 29% of primary school teachers feel well or very well prepared to facilitate play after their initial training, a figure which falls further to 16% for lower-secondary school teachers.[48]

In March 2025, the Commission will visit Denmark to see first-hand how teachers receive training about how to facilitate playful learning in the classroom, which was shown to not only improve well-being but also to help teachers find new ways to improve educational outcomes.[49]

45 Amber Ogunsanya-William. Raising the Nation Play Commission time to play evidence session. 07.10.24

46 Sylva, K. et.al. (2004) The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project: Findings from Pre-school to end of Key Stage1, https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/2v7Kr2

47 Ibid.

48 Department for Education (2019) The Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) 2018: Research report, https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/7j2Lgq

49 Bo Stjerne Thomsen (2024) Reforming teacher education towards playful learning. In Paul Lindley (2024) Raising the Nation: How to build a better future for our children

PLACES TO PLAY

Image: @drewfussphotography and Hornimans Adventure Playground, London W10

Children can theoretically play anywhere, if the conditions allow. Where children do play, and how, varies based on factors such as age, gender, and interests. Similarly, their ability and freedom to get around also varies, although this tends to grow as children get older. There is a need then to not just consider individual spaces in isolation of each other, but how they can come together to form playful neighbourhoods which are safer and more inclusive for all children and young people.

Play spaces can broadly be separated into two categories: formal and informal spaces. The former refers to spaces which are dedicated to play, such as playgrounds (in public and in schools) and play centres. The latter encapsulates all other spaces, where children and play must co-exist alongside the other users of the space: for example, streets and pavements, estates, public buildings and spaces, shopping centres, open spaces, and the countryside.

OUTDOOR PLAY

Play in all settings can make a vital contribution to a child's development, but there is evidence to show the particular importance of children being able to play in outdoor space. Time spent outdoors is associated with the improved mental wellbeing of children and their cognitive development. Specifically, there is a growing body of research showing that access to green space has been found to enhance children's memories and self-discipline, enable them to moderate stress, and form supportive social groups.[50]

> "For children, outdoor play is as basic a need as sleep, a nutritious diet, supportive care, education and interaction"
>
> Association of Play Industries[51]

Outdoor play can also help develop children's language, oracy, and communication skills; they can often talk louder outdoors and with more freedom, which can grow confidence and help children to find their voices.[52] We heard from the CEO of Voice 21, Dr Kate Paradine, how the evidence is growing to show that "play is a really key part of developing your voice from a young age", which can then have benefits for a child's confidence.[53]

Outdoor play, especially when close to home, develops children's independence, sense of community, and belonging.[54]

CASE STUDY: THE VALLEY PROJECT[51]

The Valley Project is a large adventure playground in Bradford, where children are encouraged to build structures, be messy, try arts and crafts, and explore. Led by, and run for, the local community, young people and their families have the freedom to shape and co-produce the space.

As a result, the project is highly responsive to local needs: there is a focus on free active play to tackle to above average local child obesity rates. It also aims to reinvigorate an area which was "unloved" and prone to anti-social behaviour.

Being an inclusive project with activities requiring co-operation, the project supports integration within the community. By developing social competence, self-esteem,

and positive relationships, the project aims to boost out of school mixing, lowering the chance of future gang involvement and boosting life chances.

The project also operates a flourishing Young Leaders programme, developing young people's confidence and leadership skills and encouraging pro-social behaviours.

A whole-family approach

The Valley Project has grown to offer services for the entire family unit, with food parcels for struggling families, clothing provided, and emotional and practical support on hand.

The project also offers access to external support agencies through introductions, referrals and advocations via The Valley Project.

Whilst there are unique benefits to outdoor play, there are also a number of unique barriers. The issue of hygiene poverty was raised in evidence submitted by In Kind Direct and is particularly pertinent in the context of outdoor play where children may be more active and getting muddy and wet. With 1 in 4 households in hygiene poverty – unable to afford basic toiletries such as deodorant or laundry products – some children are at risk of isolation due to embarrassment: children in 1 in 10 households report feeling anxious as a result of not being clean.[56]

LOCAL PLAYGROUNDS

Playgrounds can hold a special place within local communities. As well as being places to play they can be a meeting point for parents, catalysts for friendships,and a heartbeat of the community. As a result, the decline in play opportunities has been most noticeable, and felt most viscerally, in the loss of local playgrounds.

Data relating to the provision of playgrounds is held at a local level, making it difficult to paint a comprehensive national picture. However, the data that is available, as well as evidence heard by the Commission, depicts a clear trend of a decline in formal public places to play. Councillor Job Hubbard, the Vice-Chair of the Children and Young People's Board at the Local Government Association (LGA), told us how some local authorities have found innovative ways to keep delivering play facilities without funding, but on the whole cuts to budgets are a significant barrier to improving access to play.[57]

Freedom of Information requests sent to every local authority revealed that 429 playgrounds closed across England in the decade to 2022, with the actual number likely to be even higher given that not every local authority responded to the request.[58] Now, over 2 million children in England (32%) who are aged up to nine do not live within a ten-minute walk of a playground.[59]

Where playgrounds do exist, many have fallen into states of disrepair due to a lack of regular maintenance. Over the past decade, over half the population (56%) have noted that the quality of their local park or play area has declined.[60]

> "There is glass on the floor in the local park, and the monkey bars are too low down. I fall and hurt my head."
>
> Girl in Year 4[61]

50 McCormick, R. (2017) Does Access to Green Space Impact the Mental Well-being of Children: A Systematic Review, https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/y3gSn5
51 Association of Play Industries. Raising the Nation Play Commission call for evidence submission. 22.08.24
52 National Literacy Trust. (2024) The power of play to boost early language, https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/2a4Jxq
53 Dr Kate Paradine. Raising the Nation Play Commission learning through play evidence session. 09.09.24
54 Playing Out (2023) Resident survey report 2023, https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/4q8KxW
55 The Valley Project. Raising the Nation Play Commission call for evidence submission. 08.10.24
56 In Kind Direct. Raising the Nation Play Commission call for evidence submission. 30.10.24
57 Cllr. Jon Hubbard. Raising the Nation Play Commission evidence session. 25.11.24
58 Aggregate Industries (2023) FOIs reveal a continuing decline in play park facilities in the UK, https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/3a9Df1 Accessed: 28.01.25
59 Fields in Trust (2024) Green Space Index 2024, https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/5z7FyT
60 Fields in Trust. Raising the Nation Play Commission, Call for Evidence. 01.11.24
61 Liverpool City Council. Raising the Nation Play Commission call for evidence submission. 30.10.24

CASE STUDY: LIVERPOOL PRIMARY SCHOOL'S PARLIAMENT [62]

Liverpool City Council consulted children from the city's Primary School Parliament to understand their perspectives on play. They stated that they wanted play spaces which:

- have good facilities and interactive play;
- allow everyone to take part;
- are safer and have nice environments;
- are sensory; and
- have 'adult playleaders' to support.

When asked to expand on the above, children stated a desire for more diverse equipment beyond football goals, soft and safer surfaces, and more inclusive equipment for girls. Some children also expressed a desire to combine play with educational opportunities, with one child suggesting a library within a park would provide space for reading, drawing, and imaginative play.

Image: Institute of Imagination

The primary cause for decline are cuts to local budgets: the collective annual park budgets for England, which accounts for local authority play provision, fell by more than £350 million in real terms between 2011 and 2023.[63]

A survey of London's local authorities, carried out by London Play in 2023, found that revenue budgets to fund staff and maintain play areas were forecast to fall or stay the same in two-thirds of the local authorities which responded to the survey. The outcome for many of the capital's playgrounds is that "future neglect seems almost certain".[64]

Similarly, the Association of Play Industries' (API) Nowhere to Play report revealed the collapse in spending on play facilities across England: spending fell by 44% between 2017/18 and 2020/21.[65]

The Play Gap Report also found a significant fall in revenue expenditure across the UK, but it also identified a dramatic divergence in local funding for playgrounds between different areas. Between 2018/19 and 2022/23, Manchester saw a 35% fall, whereas the largest fall in revenue expenditure was 88%.[66]

> "This 'postcode lottery' perpetuates systemic inequity, denying countless children the enriching play environments they deserve."
>
> The Play Gap Report

This 'postcode lottery' in funding of play provision inevitably translates into a postcode lottery of provision. Research by the API as part of the Equal Play campaign found some areas of the UK to be well-served by playgrounds, and other considerably less so. In the West Midlands, there are 929 children per playground – the most in the UK - and also the highest rates of child obesity in England.[67] London has the second highest density of children per playground (866), more than double the density in Wales (392).[68]

Beyond simply funding, the decline is symptomatic of the wider loss of time and opportunities to play for children, which have implicitly been de-prioritised on a national level by an absence of guidance or requirements for play to be accounted for within the education and planning sectors, and local government more broadly.

WALES: PLAY SUFFICIENCY DUTY

In Wales, the Play Sufficiency Duty is framed as part of its Government's anti-poverty agenda; which recognises that children can have a poverty of experience, opportunity, and aspiration. The Duty is included in the 'Play Opportunities' section of the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010. It has two parts:

1. In 2012, a requirement was introduced that all local authorities must assess whether their local area offers enough opportunities to play.
2. Two years later, a second requirement was introduced that local authorities must secure enough opportunities to play, as far is reasonable and practical.

The Duty requires local authorities to:

- complete and submit Play Sufficiency Assessments (PSAs) every three years to the Welsh Government;
- publish online the action they are taking to ensure children have sufficient opportunities to play; and
- develop and submit Play Action Plans to the Welsh Government every year, along with progress reports.

Analysis of PSAs by Play Wales found that the Play Sufficiency Duty "has served as a national driver for the planning of play provision locally". It also found across all PSAs a continued commitment to the principles of consultation, participation, and engagement with children and parents.[69]

Image: Association of Play Industries

Mike Barclay and Ben Tawil, founders of Ludicology, and Dr Wendy Russell, have carried out several reviews of the Welsh Play Sufficiency Duty, four of which were commissioned by Play Wales. They found that the duty's requirement to work cross-departmentally has been particularly effective, with play sufficiency officers able to engage with colleagues in planning, housing, landscape architecture, highways, active travel, parks and recreation, green and blue space, public health, and education.[70]

Russell et. al. Have also seen value in working on a hyperlocal neighbourhood level; whilst there is a wealth of general evidence which helps us to understand the barriers to and benefits of play, a localised approach helps adults to understand the specific challenges of specific spaces facing specific children.[71]

Whilst the challenges facing England's playgrounds are great, the reward for investing in them is even greater: their presence is the single most important factor in encouraging children and young people to go into natural spaces, especially for younger children aged 8-11.[72]

Adventure playgrounds can be particularly effective in encouraging children and young people into natural spaces, and we have received a wealth of evidence specifically about their importance and how they can differ from the typical 'local playground'. We are planning to hear more from adventure playground practitioners ahead of our final report publication in June.

62 Liverpool City Council. Raising the Nation Play Commission call for evidence submission. 30.10.24
63 The Guardian (2023) England's playgrounds crumble as council budgets fall, https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/1j2XaY
64 London Play. (2023) Ghostly future looms for London playgrounds, https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/8g3HrY Accessed: 13.10.24
65 Association of Play Industries (2017) Nowhere to Play https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/2k8JnP
66 ESP Play (2024) The Play Gap Report
67Association of Play Industries. (2022) Equal Play Press Release, https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/3b9FgK Accessed 10.02.25
68 Association of Play Industries (2022) Equal Play, https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/XUGxao
69 Play Wales (2022) State of Play 2022, https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/8t4JzQ
70 Russell, W., Barclay, M. & Tawil, B. Raising the Nation Play Commission call for evidence submission. 01.10.24
71 Ibid.
72 Natural England (2024) The Children's People and Nature Survey for England: 2024 update https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/2s9BzT

SCHOOL PLAYGROUNDS

Breaktimes and lunchtimes at school make up a significant amount of the time that children spend playing and provide a vital opportunity for free play and for children to realise the benefits that accompany it, as well as indirectly improving learning outcomes within the classroom.

Playtimes which are physically active can help children to concentrate better in the classroom,[73] which is consistent with the findings from our first focus group of children which we held with groups of Year 6 students in July 2024. Several children spoke about struggling to complete sedentary tasks for 1-2 hours at a time and that they found their movement breaks to be a welcome and necessary rest.

Over the course of the school year, playtimes account for up to 22% of time spent in school, yet there is no requirement of schools to have dedicated staff or a strategy to maximise the benefits of the time that children spend in the playground.[74]

Effective design and resourcing of school playgrounds is as essential as giving children the time to explore them.

Recent polling by Teacher Tapp found that only 7% of children can bring ropes or elastic for jumping games in the playground, a fall over 17% over the previous six years, and that under three-quarters of schools (74%) have markings for games such as hopscotch, compared to 81% in 2019.[75]

Active spaces, such as facilities for basketball or volleyball, are just one of the features of an effective playground set out in the good school playground guide.[76] The guide, published by Learning through Landscapes, also encourages the use of trees and shrubs, varied topography, logs and boulders, sand, and loose materials to provide different sensory experiences, physical challenges, and spaces to explore.

There has been a clear message in the evidence submitted to the Commission that effective school playgrounds – and play provision more broadly – does not necessarily have to mean fixed play equipment which can be more costly; trees, mounds, and ditches can provide the perfect places for imaginative play too.

Image: Nurture UK

CASE STUDY: OUTDOOR PLAY AND LEARNING PROGRAMME (OPAL)

The OPAL Primary Programme helps schools to improve their culture of play through mentoring and practical support. Schools are supported to develop a play policy and equip their staff with training in play work.

Michael Follett, Founder and Director of OPAL, places particular importance in schools having a dedicated play lead: in the same way that a school would employ a literacy coordinator to improve literacy outcomes in school, a play lead is necessary to ensure that breaktimes are being effectively and strategically planned to maximise benefits for pupils and the school environment.[77]

Participating schools report ten minutes more teaching time a day, improved behaviour, and happier playgrounds.[78]

An independent study of OPAL and non-OPAL participating schools found that OPAL schools had higher levels of school satisfaction, and that teachers were more aware of the benefits of breaktime for cognitive development.[79]

The Raising the Nation Play Commission has visited OPAL partner schools and seen its programmes being delivered first-hand. For example, during a visit in July 2024, the school was making use of scrap material for children to play with, including spare tyres, food crates, and buckets and spades.

Removing inequalities in play

A senior member of staff at Ivydale Primary School – a different school which is the subject of an OPAL case study[80] - believes the biggest impact of the programme has been the removal of the gender divide in the playground.

Previously, boys showed little interest in anything other than football and a rota system had to be used for the sports cage and climbing frame to prevent arguments. The rest of the space was just used for running around and staff were mainly there to help with injuries.

OPAL removed these gender barriers in the playground, with all children now partaking in all types of play from fancy-dress to digging in the dirt. The staff member found that conflict has also been reduced as there is less fighting over limited equipment and space, particularly the sports cage which is now far less dominant. Overall, the atmosphere is now "one of joy and delight".[81]

Well-resourced and well-designed playgrounds have the potential to be an asset not just during the school day but for the whole community to use all-year round.

> "During weekends, evenings and school holidays, some school grounds could become community playgrounds, parks or growing spaces"[82]

In Scotland, some local authorities are already employing school playgrounds for wider, community use, whereas others raise concerns about vandalism and site security. The solution proposed in the good school playground guide is to move toward cross-departmental asset planning and management, to ensure that schools and education budgets don't have to bear the costs that arise out of wider use.[83]

During one of the places to play oral evidence sessions, Carley Sefton, CEO of Learning through Landscapes, told us how opening school playgrounds in evenings and at weekends can be the easiest way of enabling children to enjoy unsupervised play time, and that this is common practice in other countries such as Australia, France, and the Netherlands. The key to keeping these spaces safe and maintained is to nurture a protective attitude among the children themselves, which is achieved through co-creation and supportive messaging around loving the space.[84] Studies carried out as part of the UNICEF Child Friendly Cities campaign found that young people are more likely to take ownership of, and engage with, spaces when they are involved in the design process.[85]

INCLUSIVE PLAY SPACES FOR ALL CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

When the design of spaces does not incorporate the views and needs of all their future users, large groups of the population are excluded from the benefits. We heard frequently throughout written and oral evidence submissions that public playgrounds, parks, and other play spaces do not meet the needs of all children, rendering them inaccessible or even dangerous to some users. We also heard how families in poverty and ethnic minority families are less likely to have access to private gardens to play, making public play facilities all the more important for these children. There is a clear need for an emphasis on equity and inclusion in play strategy and planning at a national and local level.

Too often, play spaces are not designed with the needs of girls in mind. Make Space for Girls, for

73 Smith, P. & Pellegrini, A. (2023) Learning Through Play, https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/3p6NkV In: Encyclopaedia on Early Childhood Development
74 OPAL (2021) The Case for Play in Schools: A review of the literature, https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/1d7GpX
75 Teacher tapp. (2025) Sleep and habits, playground games and ECT expectations vs reality, https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/4a2RmJ Accessed 06.02.25
76 Learning through Landscapes (2019) The good school playground guide, https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/2b5HxJ
77 Michael Follett. Raising the Nation Play Commission learning through play evidence session. 16.09.24
78 OPAL. (2021) The OPAL Primary Programme: Supporting school improvement through better play and playtimes, https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/3f8KsL
79 Baines, E., Piercy, W. & Sak Acur, M. Raising the Nation Play Commission, Call for Evidence. 31.10.24
80 OPAL. (n.d.) Ivydale Primary School Case Study, https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/zeDl4p Accessed: 05.09.24
81 Ibid.
82 Learning through Landscapes (2016) The good school playground guide https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/6k9HgT
83 Learning through Landscapes (2016) The good school playground guide https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/6k9HgT
84 Carley Sefton. Raising the Nation Play Commission places to play evidence session. 16.09.24
85 UNICEF (2022) Effective, representative, and inclusive child participation at the local level https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/2r7ZxV

example, found that skateparks, BMX tracks, and Multi-use Games Areas (MUGAs) make up 94% of facilities provided 'for teenagers' in parks, and of the teenagers using these facilities, 88% are boys, rising to 92% for MUGAs.[86] The majority of other facilities are shelters, which are often next to the skate park or MUGA.

Existing research shows that where alternative facilities to MUGAs and skateparks are provided in parks, girls are three times as likely to use them.[87] When we spoke to young people, we heard that girls experience a stereo-typed expectation around what they want from play spaces when they are not making use of spaces like football pitches and MUGAs:

> "for girls, there's this expectation that you're supposed to be sitting down gossiping or something"
>
> Girl in Year 7

Many girls may be more likely to use skateparks or MUGAs if they were less male-dominated spaces; whereas others may prefer different types of play facilities. It is evident that further research and engagement with girls to understand and deliver what they want from parks is needed at a national and local level.

MUGAs are, however, a rare example of a play space being designed with teenagers in mind, even if they are dominated by boys. Play remains vitally important in adolescence, yet few other spaces exist for teenagers; the number of youth clubs has fallen dramatically by more than two-thirds across England and Wales since 2010.[88] As a result, many young people congregate in public spaces, feeding a stigma around young people 'hanging out' in public spaces and anti-social behaviour.

The stigmatisation of adolescent play has been a recurring theme in evidence submitted to the Commission. We have heard how teenagers "get a lot of bad press", with adult expectations placed upon a group of people who aren't adults and still have a lot of development to do.[89]

WeMindTheGap - a social mobility charity working with young people to provide opportunities and improve life chances - has witnessed adults express concern about young people, simply for meeting friends in the street and "being a teenager".[90]

We also know that many playgrounds and other places to play are not accessible to children with SEND. Research by Scope found that only 1 in 10 playgrounds are accessible to disabled children and nearly three-quarters of playgrounds are places where it would be difficult for disabled and non-disabled children to play together.[91] As a result, more than half of families with disabled or seriously ill children report that it is difficult to find play and leisure equipment which meet the needs of their children.[92]

Family Fund's evidence to the Commission highlights how discrimination can be just as much of a barrier to disabled children playing out. 94% of families have experienced a negative reaction to their disabled or seriously ill child whilst on a family outing, and one parent told Family Fund how places don't provide thought for disabled children and "unfortunately, other members of the public don't either".[93]

PLAYING OUT

Whilst the loss of playgrounds is a highly visual marker of the loss of opportunities to play in communities across England, there has also been a subtler decline in informal play space which has had an equal, if not greater, impact on children's day-to-day lives.

Gemma Hyde, Projects and Policy Manager at the Town and Country Planning Association, explained to the Commission how children are inevitably going to want to play everywhere from houses to institutions, on the way to school, in spaces with fixed equipment and open spaces in nature. The problem is therefore not just that there is an insufficient quantity of spaces, but that we have lost focus on the fact that all these spaces are for children and young people.[94]

> "There's value in talking about children and young people as a reason for doing things; they get to play outside and experience things. We've taken that away"
>
> Gemma Hyde[95]

Doorstep play, which refers to play in spaces immediately outside of homes, provides a valuable opportunity for children to play informally and regularly in their community and has long been falling. The number of children playing out in the street has been steadily declining over several decades. Play England's 2023 report, Trends in Children's Street Play, found that 81% of adults aged between 55-64 agree with the statement 'I regularly played out in my street' when asked about their childhood, which is of stark contrast

to the 27% of children who said that they currently play out on the street.[96] Time spent playing outdoors more broadly, not just on the street, has declined by 50% in a generation.[97]

Evidence and testimonies point towards a range of factors behind this decline. Expansion of the built environment, increased road traffic, and safety concerns among children and parents alike have all featured heavily in evidence submissions to the Commission, and were the subject of an inquiry by the Levelling Up, Housing, and Communities Committee last year.[98]

Above all, a proliferating culture hostile to young people and their freedom to roam has emerged which, at its most brazen, manifests itself in 'No Ball Games' signs, noise and disruption complaints, and community groups uniting to prevent children from playing. Almost one-in-three parents believe that allowing their child to play outside would trigger complaints from neighbours.[99]

> "The right of older people to peace and quiet trumps the right of children to play"
>
> Louise Watson[100]

Even where children are allowed to play outside on the street or in a public space, they or their parents must overcome a perceived – but more often, a very real – lack of safety. We spoke to a group of children in Year 6, who attend an inner-London primary school. When we asked them what stops them from playing outside, the reason was clear: "it's probably fear".

For some, this fear is a response to cars on the road. Over half of parents (53%) view traffic as a barrier to play, with a record 41 million vehicles now driving on the UK's roads, and 80% of public space being given over to streets.[101,102] Children are at a greater risk of injury from these vehicles than adults, so parents and carers are understandably worried as a result.[103]

In addition to safety concerns, the rise in vehicles on the road – moving or parked – has displaced children and young people from many streets by physically occupying spaces which used to be free for them to play in.

For others, the fear is of other people, anti-social behaviour, and crime. Our focus groups with children revealed the anxiety that they feel at going to the very spaces where they should be able to play happily with their friends and family. Helen Lomax and Kate Smith's research, Children's Lives in Changing Places, had similar findings. They found that both boys and girls have fears of gangs and violence but they generally have different strategies to manage the risk. Whilst boys may still venture outside in groups, girls were more likely to say that they don't feel comfortable going out without an older male family member.[104]

> "we're in East London; the reality is there's gangs and crime everywhere"
>
> Girl in Year 7

These concerns are shared by adults: almost half the population (48%) rank crime and anti-social behaviour as their biggest concern about their local area.[105] Again, this has a disproportional impact on girls and young women; Lomax and Smith found "parents are much more likely to restrict girls' independent spatial mobility".[106]

86 Make Space for Girls (2023) Parkwatch Report, https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/3fYvLm
87 Make Space for Girls (2023) Parkwatch Report, https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/3fYvLm
88 UNISON. (2024) Closure of more than a thousand youth centres could have lasting impact on society, https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/7eKxJq Accessed: 05.02.25
89 Sarah Jayne Blakemore. Raising the Nation Play Commission evidence session. 25.11.24
90 WeMindTheGap. Raising the Nation Play Commission, Call for Evidence. 05.09.24
91 Scope. (n.d) Let's Play Fair, https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/TgToLG Accessed 27.01.25
92 Family Fund (2023) Family Poll, https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/2HkXpR Accessed: 29.01.25
93 Family Fund. Raising the Nation Play Commission call for evidence submission. 30.10.24
94 Gemma Hyde. Raising the Nation Play Commission places to play evidence session. 16.09.24
95 Gemma Hyde. Raising the Nation Play Commission places to play evidence session. 16.09.24
96 Play England (2023) Trends in Children's Street Play, https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/3KdJpG
97 Real Play Coalition (2018) Value of Play Report, https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/1ZxQhR
98 UK Parliament. (2023) Children, young people and the built environment - Levelling Up Committee launches inquiry, https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/xr Accessed: 12.12.24
99 Playday. (2013) 2013 opinion poll, https://cfyl.org.uk/re/unQt6j Accessed 29.01.25
100 Louise Watson. Raising the Nation Play Commission places to play evidence session. 17.09.24
101 RAC. (2024) New data reveals record 41.4 million vehicles on UK roads, https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/V9DsBF Accessed: 29.01.25
102 London Play. Raising the Nation Play Commission call for evidence submission. 01.11.24
103 Town and Country Planning Association (2024) Raising the healthiest generation in history: why it matters where children and young people live https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/80dOSH
104 Lomax, H. & Smith, K. Raising the Nation Play Commission call for evidence submission. 20.12.24
105 Home Office. (2023) Public polling on community safety, https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/XyZtWQ Accessed 01.02.25
106 Lomax, H. & Smith, K. Raising the Nation Play Commission call for evidence submission. 20.12.24

CASE STUDY: PLAYING OUT

Playing Out is a parent-led initiative dedicated to restoring children's freedom to play in the streets and public spaces around their home. The movement celebrates the power of play streets to bring communities together and enjoy the benefits of playing out.

Playing Out have supported over 100 local authorities to put in place supportive play streets policies and have published a toolkit to support parents to take advantage of them. As a result, 25,000 parents and residents have been able to create a play street since 2009, with direct benefits for 50,000 children.[107]

Bristol City Council has supported Playing Out through the UK's first Temporary Play Street Policy, established in 2011. The policy simplifies the process for residents to temporarily open play streets for up to three hours a week. As of August 2024, 287 streets and estates have benefitted from the scheme, which equates to approximately 8,000 children playing out.[108]

Image: Playing Out

MOBILITY AND PLAY

As well as being places where play can take place, equal consideration must be given to how these informal places to play – such as streets, town centres, and fields – are spaces which children and young people must move through. This movement can in and of itself be playful, which gives rise to two questions: how can this movement be enabled, and how can we ensure it is playful.

The first question is relevant because an inclusive and well-designed playground or town square is of little value if it is not situated somewhere which is accessible to its intended users, and with doorstep play on the decline, it is crucial that children are still able to independently access other spaces instead. However, a lack of safety combined with often insurmountable distance, inhibits children's mobility.

As Create Streets put it in their evidence to the then Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee Inquiry into children, young people and the built environment:

> "we continue to design for a 'backseat generation' that needs to be driven to be able to play and be active rather than being allowed to do this in their own street"[109]

Dr William Bird MBE, CEO of Intelligent Health, conducted research with a family in Sheffield, and found that over four generations, the distance children are allowed to roam at the age of eight had fallen from six miles in 1919 to just 300 yards in 2008.

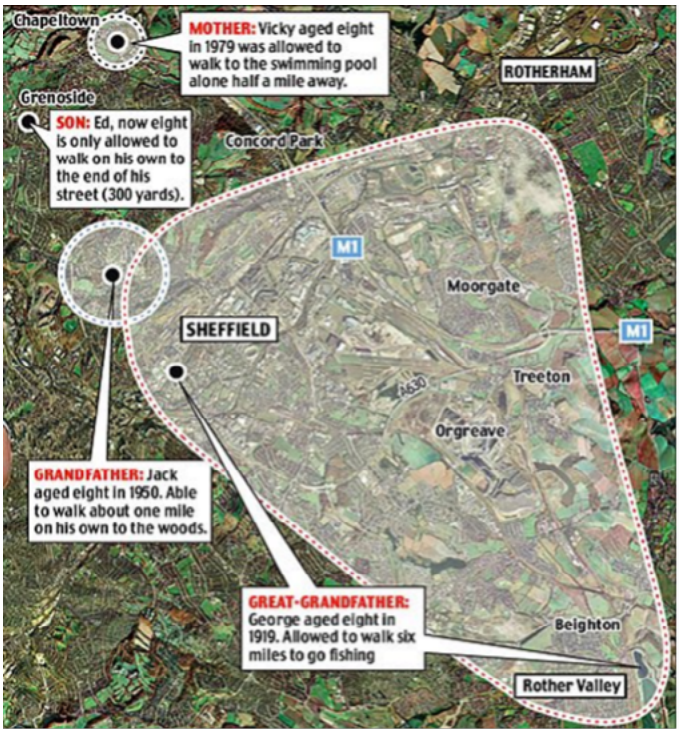


Figure 1: Diagram of a family's roaming by generations. As pictured in the Daily Mail (2007)[110]

Vicky, the mother referenced in the polling, attributed the shrinking distance to a lack of safety, with areas such as the woods now only accessible by crossing a busy road.[111] Children can become dependent on parents and carers to take them to space where they can play – and even then, not all parents and carers are able to do this.

Such dramatically reduced freedom to roam not only limits access to other spaces but it also deprives children and young people of an opportunity in itself to play. Several written and oral evidence submissions have highlighted how children don't distinguish between travel and play – they may 'play on the way' or simply explore an area with no intended destination.[112]

> "children don't see it as mobility, they see it as playing"
>
> Ben Addy, Sustrans[113]

Image: David Butler - TOWN

CASE STUDY: BEAT THE STREET[114]

Beat the Street is an innovative community tool to encourage children and young people to explore their local neighbourhood, developed by Intelligent Health.

With the support of local partners, 'Beat Boxes' are placed at a variety of locations which participants are able to tap with special cards to collect points. In doing so, participants are encouraged to travel actively and autonomously around their local neighbourhood, developing their confidence and independence.

Whilst cards are typically distributed to children through local schools, they will often encourage their families to participate too, making it an initiative which involves the whole community.

PLAY AT HOME

Children spend more time playing at home than any other location and spend more time playing in their gardens – where they have them - than they do anywhere else outdoors.[115,116] It is therefore crucial that homes and neighbourhoods are designed with the intention of creating a safe and healthy environment which has adequate space for children to play. When this doesn't happen – as is often the case – we exacerbate existing inequalities for children who do not have access to a garden.[117]

Currently, one-in-eight British households have no garden, which rises to more than one-in-five in London.[118] In England, Black families are nearly four times more likely than White families to have no access to outdoor space at home and 2.4 times more likely even after factors such as the higher ethnic diversity of urban areas – where garden access is likely to be lower – are accounted for.[119]

Unsurprisingly, garden access also varies by income: a survey by Natural England found children from higher income households (£50,000+) are more likely to have access to a garden than those from low- or mid-income households.[120]

107 Playing Out. Raising the Nation Play Commission call for evidence submission. 31.10.24

108 Bristol City Council. Raising the Nation Play Commission call for evidence submission. 29.10.24

109 Create Streets. (2024) Written Evidence to the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee Inquiry into children, young people and the built environment [CBE 074] https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/3kLgFh

110 Intelligent Health. Raising the Nation Play Commission call for evidence submission. 26.10.24

111 Ibid.

112 Playing Out. Raising the Nation Play Commission call for evidence submission. 31.10.24

113 Ben Addy. Places to Play Evidence Session. 17.09.24

114 Intelligent Health. Raising the Nation Play Commission call for evidence submission. 26.10.24

115 Dodd, H., FitzGibbon, L., et al. (2021) Children's Play and Independent Mobility in 2020: Results from the British Children's Play Survey, https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/1a2b3c

116 Helen Dodd. Raising the Nation Play Commission, Call for Evidence. 31.10.24

117 Dodd, H., FitzGibbon, L., Hesketh, K., Nesbit, R. & Oliver, B. (2024) Written evidence to Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee inquiry into children, young people, and the built environment [CBE 027] https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/2dFgHj

118 Office for National Statistics (2020) One in eight British households has no garden, https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/4hRjT9 Accessed: 12.12.24

119 Ibid.

120 Natural England (2024) The Children's People and Nature Survey for England: 2024 update, https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/3nKjOp

CASE STUDY: THE LONDON PLAN

The London Plan includes a range of principles to improve development in the interests of children, whilst also bringing in specific policies that must be followed, so that:

- Development proposals for educational and childcare facilities must link to existing footpaths and cycle networks so that children can travel actively to school more easily and safely.
- Facilities must have entrances designed in a specific way to encourage walking and cycling there safely.
- Individual boroughs must prepare development plans that are informed by a needs assessment of children and young people's play and informal recreation facilities, to help increase provision of key facilities for play and recreation, especially in residential developments.
- A specific amount of play space of 10 sqm per child should be provided, giving a clear metric of success.
- Boroughs should do more to ensure children and young people are included in decision making, so that their needs are better understood.
- Developments should encourage children and young people to move around freely through safe streets and footpath networks that connect to more formal play provision, green spaces, and parks.

UNICEF: CHILD-FRIENDLY CITIES[121]

The Child Friendly Cities initiative was launched in 1996 by UNICEF and UN-Habitat, to support municipal governments to help realise the rights of children – established by the UNCRC - at the local level. UNICEF has since published a handbook with a framework to establish a Child Friendly City. The guiding principles are:

- equity and inclusion;
- accountability and transparency;
- public participation;
- effectiveness and responsiveness; and
- adaptability and sustainability.

Many cities with the accreditation focus on upholding the right to play in particular. Cardiff, the first city in the UK to be a UNICEF Child Friendly City, prioritises play through the play streets scheme, championed by Playing Out.

The council is also working with Cardiff University and a community group, Grange Pavilion, to repurpose abandoned and run-down alleyways, giving them a new lease of life for children to play.[122]

Image: @drewfussphotography and Hornimans Adventure Playground, London W10

PLAY AND PLANNING

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) outlines the Government's planning policies for England and how they should be applied. It must be taken into account in preparing development plans and is a "material consideration" in decisions taken by local planning authorities.[123]

Evidence submitted to the Commission echoes evidence heard by the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee inquiry into children, young people and the built environment, which highlights that, because the NPPF demands consideration of so many priorities (for example, net zero, affordability, and biodiversity), any priorities not specifically written into the NPPF will be ignored.[124]

Children are mentioned just once in the NPPF. Evidence and testimonies submitted to the Commission, such as those of Playing Out and Fields in Trust, highlight how the absence of a requirement to look at new spaces through a children's lens is at the heart of the reason why so many spaces are not safe or welcoming for children and young people. "The role of planning is crucial" in rectifying this.[125]

Evidence to the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee inquiry into children, young people and the built environment highlighted the unique perspective that children and young people have of their local communities, which must be captured in meaningful consultation with young people in the design of their communities, if they are to meet their needs and the needs of future generation.[126]

> "If you get it right for children, you get it right for everyone else"
>
> Gemma Hyde, TCPA[127]

As well as a legal requirement to consider and seek children's views and needs, children and professionals within the development sector must be supported in the process: currently, children are largely unaware how they could share their opinions on these matters which affect them, and many developers may not know how to ethically and constructively involve youth voice in their work. In oral evidence to the Commission, Dr Wendy Russell highlighted the positive examples of the Place Standard School in Scotland and the *Voice. Opportunity. Power* toolkit developed in England.[129]

Image: ©brionycampbell

CASE STUDY: SCOTLAND'S PLACE STANDARD TOOL[130]

In Scotland, the Place Standard Tool is a framework designed to structure a conversation about place. It encourages consideration of the physical aspects of the space, as well as whether the community feels connected to the space and whether they have been included in its creation.

The tool is intended to support communities and the public and private sectors to collaboratively assess places which already exist, are underdoing change, or are in development.[131]

121 UNICEF. (n.d.) Child Friendly Cities Initiative, https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/2qFv5i Accessed: 07.01.25

122 UNICEF. (n.d.) Beyond the playground: repurposing urban spaces, https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/x8KjT2 Accessed 10.02.25

123 Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (2023) National Planning Policy Framework, https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/7tHjLk

124 Sarah Scannell. (2024) Oral Evidence to the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee Inquiry into children, young people and the built environment [HC 49] https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/9JhKq7

125 Helen Griffiths. Raising the Nation Play Commission Places to Play evidence session. 16.09.24

126 Town and Country Planning Association (2024) https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/2KjLq8

127 Gemma Hyde. Raising the Nation Play Commission places to play evidence session. 16.09.24

128 Public Map Platform. Written (2024) Evidence to the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee Inquiry into children, young people and the built environment [CBE 017] https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/9JhKq8

129 Russell, W. Raising the Nation Play Commission, Places to Play evidence session. 17.09.24

130 Scottish Government. (n.d.) Place Standard: How Good is Our Place? https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/3HgKq2 Accessed: 29.08.24

131 Inclusive Design Hub. (n.d.) Place Standard Tool, https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/5GhKq1 Accessed: 28.01.25

Of its 14 themes, one is play and recreation. Others include moving around, traffic and parking, natural space, and identity and belonging.

There is also a version of the tool for children and young people, which contains the same themes but the theme names, questions, and prompts have been adapted to be more accessible and appropriate for younger users.

Encouraging all members of a community to participate in discussions about the design and use of local spaces is a first step towards creating spaces which meet their needs.

CASE STUDY: VOICE. OPPORTUNITY. POWER.[132]

The *Voice Opportunity Power* toolkit is a free resource for developers, designers, and planners, with practical guidance for how to include young people in the building and maintenance of places. The toolkit was designed by ZCD Architects, Grosvenor, the Town and Country Planning Association, and Sport England.

Dinah Bornat, Co-Founder of ZCD Architects, told the Commission how children are a "marginalised group", which is apparent at every level of the development sector. Developers and architects need to constantly be reminded to consider how a child may use and move through their space, or how families with children of different ages may use it.[133]

The *Voice Opportunity Power* toolkit provides practical instructions for how children and young people can be consulted and brought into the system.

Image: Nurture UK

The Government has reformed the NPPF in order to deliver 1.5 million new homes and critical infrastructure which will drive economic growth.[134] The revised framework includes the protection of 'formal play spaces', which is a welcome addition. Now, the planning system must go further to ensure children have access to space to play in and around their homes, as well as having safe routes to walk and cycle to spaces nearby.

"I live in a block of flats with a courtyard in the middle, I've met a lot of close friends there...a lot more properties should have space... so that it's easier and safer if kids need to let out their energy"

Girl in Year 7

132 ZCD Architects, Grosvenor, tcpa & Sport England. (n.d.) https://www.voiceopportunitypower.com/ Accessed 05.11.24

133 Dinah Bornat. Raising the Nation Play Commission, Places to Play evidence session. 17.09.24

134 Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government. (2024) https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/proposed-reforms-to-the-national-planning-policy-framework-and-other-changes-to-the-planning-system/outcome/government-response-to-the-proposed-reforms-to-the-national-planning-policy-framework-and-other-changes-to-the-planning-system-consultation Accessed: 25.12.24

TIME TO PLAY

Image: @drewfussphotography and Hornimans Adventure Playground, London W10

Whether it be in school or in their spare time, the time children have to play is competing with an increasing number of other responsibilities, distractions, and demands. In school, the time children have to play, unwind, and widen their experiences beyond the curriculum has been slowly squeezed out of the school day. At home, screens and the online world are filling the void left by the time children used to spend playing outdoors, and homework adds further demands on children's time as they grow older. With limited places to play outdoors and restricted mobility to independently reach the space that there is, children have come to be dependent on often time poor parents to take them to play opportunities.

TIME TO PLAY AT SCHOOL

Despite the immense benefits of breaktimes highlighted in the previous section, the time afforded for children to rest and reset ahead of their next lesson has consistently been eroded over the last 30 years. This is predominantly a result of growing direct, and indirect, pressure on schools to deliver a cumbersome curriculum with a narrow focus on rote-learning, examination, and assessment. Directly, the burgeoning curriculum is squeezing time out of the school day for anything that isn't coverage of the curriculum's content. Indirectly, the curriculum's narrow focus sends an implicit signal to schools that play is to be de-prioritised.

Surveys carried out in 1995, 2006, 2017, and 2021 reveal the extent to which the time reserved for children to play at school has declined.[135]

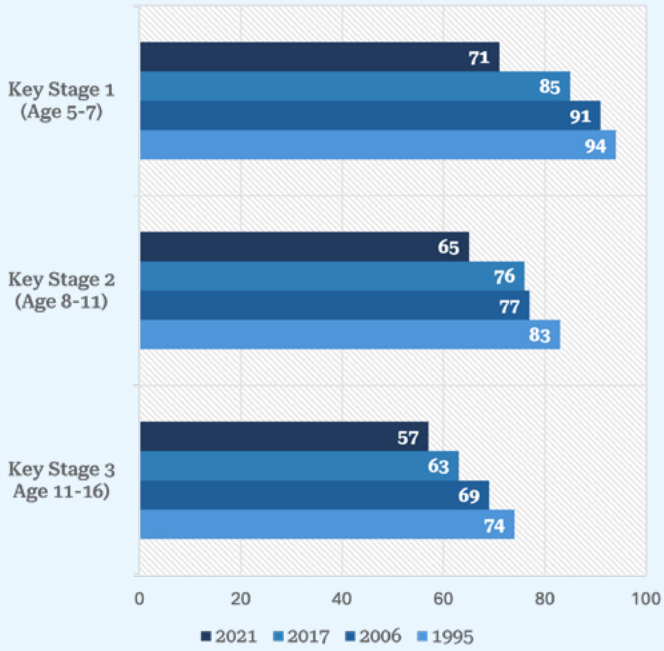


Figure 2: Average total breaktime in minutes per day in England's schools across four national surveys

Children at Key Stage 1 enjoyed 23 minutes less breaktime a day on average in 2021 compared to their counterparts in 1995. The average total time dedicated to breaktime in a day fell by 18 minutes over the same period for Key Stage 2, and 17

135 Baines, E., Piercy, W. & Sak Acur, M. Raising the Nation Play Commission, Call for Evidence. 31.10.24. The 2021 survey was carried out after schools had fully re-opened following the Covid-19 pandemic.

minutes for Key Stage 3.

Whilst average breaktimes have fallen across the board, schools in under-served areas are more likely to have seen a fall in the total time allotted for breaktimes. At primary school level, and to a lesser extent at secondary level, schools with a higher proportion of children in receipt of free school meals – an imperfect measure of child poverty – have shorter breaktimes. At secondary level, a significant gap can be observed between maintained and independent schools, with breaktimes in the latter not having experienced any discernible decline since 1995.[136]

There are several explanations for this concerning trend. Firstly, we heard from several witnesses and in submissions to our call for evidence how the pressure of curriculum coverage and the emphasis on knowledge acquisition and academic assessment have impacted the school day. Galiema Amien-Clote, the headteacher of Rotherhithe Primary School in London, told us how the time required to cover the curriculum is too overbearing, so schools must sacrifice playtime which can hone skills and provide the opportunity for children to apply their learning.[137]

A curriculum with such a narrow emphasis on rote learning and examinations, reinforced by a highly pressurised accountability system, has led many schools and teachers to view breaktimes as nothing more than a loss of valuable teaching time which could be given over to further coverage of the curriculum's content.

The surveys of school breaktimes also captured changes in teacher attitudes over time as well: 71% of secondary school teachers in 2017 – an increase from 68% in 2006 - felt that the main value of breaktimes is the opportunity they provide for pupils to eat and drink.[138] In other words, they are a chance to merely re-fuel before re-entering the classroom.

In comparison, the percentage of secondary teachers who believe the main value of breaktimes to be in the opportunity they provide for pupils to socialise with their peers has fallen from 69% in 1995 to 60% in 2006 and further to 57% in 2017.[139]

It is vital that the time that is left in the school day for pupils to play is protected. However, a significant number of schools punitively withhold breaktimes from children, preventing them from benefiting from the time they do have during the school day to play and rest. The 2017 survey uncovered the extent to which this is common practice in schools: 53% of secondary schools and 58% of primary schools withhold some of or even entire breaktimes for behavioural reasons.[140]

As with the total time allowed for breaktime, the practice of withholding breaks also varies with economic disadvantage: primary schools that carry out this practice are statistically more likely to have a higher proportion of pupils receiving free school meals, especially when the reason for the break being withheld is poor behaviour.[141]

The 2017 survey also sought the views of pupils in Years 5, 8, and 10, which revealed that over 80% said there are times when they have missed a breaktime. Pupils attributed this to their own misbehaviour 28% of the time, but to others misbehaviour almost half the time (49%). The survey also found that boys were more likely to have missed a breaktime than girls.[142]

These findings reflect those of the focus group we conducted with a group of Year 6 students in July 2024. Several students spoke about their difficulties completing sedentary tasks for an hour or more at a time and that "movement breaks" provided a welcome and necessary rest. However, these breaks were sometimes withheld from individuals or even the entire class for bad behaviour, which they felt was counterproductive to their learning.

TIME TO PLAY OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL

The surveys carried out by Dr Ed Baines and Professor Peter Blatchford also provide a window into children's social lives outside of school, revealing that children and young people are spending less playing or hanging out with their peers.

In the 2006 and 2017 surveys, children and young people in Year 5 (age 9-10), Year 8 (age 12-13), and Year 10 (age 14-15) were asked how often they spend time with their friends outside of school.

136 Ibid.
137 Galiema Amien-Clote. Raising the Nation Play Commission time to play evidence session. 07.10.24
138 Baines, E., Piercy, W. & Sak Acur, M. Raising the Nation Play Commission, Call for Evidence. 31.10.24.
139 Ibid.
140 Ibid.
141 Baines, E. & Blatchford, P. (2019) School break and lunch times and young people's social lives: A follow-up national study, https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/8FkLg3
142 Ibid.

Overall, the percentage who said they do spend time with their peers fell from 91% to 86% over the 11 years, but it is the fall in the frequency that children meet up with their friends that is even more alarming.[143]

Between 2006 and 2017, the percentage of young people who said they meet with their peers every night outside of school halved from 18% to 9% and the percentage who said they meet a few times a week feel from 46% to 36%. Conversely, 17% said they meet up less than once a week in 2017, up from 6% 11 years earlier. The percentage who 'rarely' meet up also rose from 9% to 14%.[144]

Children and young people spending more time alone is hugely damaging for their health, now and in the future. There is a clear and cyclical relationship between loneliness and poor mental health, whereby loneliness can damage self-esteem and confidence to socialise, which can in turn lead to further withdrawal.[145] Childhood loneliness is also associated with anxiety and depression in adulthood.[146]

If the crisis in children and young people's mental health is to be addressed, and a future crisis in the nation's adult's mental health is to be avoided, children and young people must be supported to spend more time outside with their peers. To do this, many of the barriers to play which we have highlighted in this report need to be removed. The increasing dominance of screens in our lives is undoubtedly a factor in keeping children and young people indoors, which we will explore further in the Commission's final report through the 'Digital Play' theme.

143 Ed Baines & Peter Blatchford (2019) School break and lunch times and young people's social lives: A follow-up national study, https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/9KHqP2

144 Ibid.

145 Department for Culture, Media & Sport (2022) Mental health and loneliness: the relationship across life stages, https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/J2Lx88

146 Xerya, Y. Rescorla, LA. Shanahan, L. Tiemeier, H. & Copeland, WE. (2023) Childhood loneliness as a specific risk factor for adult psychiatric disorders, https://cfyl.org.uk/ref/Y8KjR3

CONCLUSION

The fundamental benefits of play are clear. It is the cornerstone of children's physical and mental wellbeing and their cognitive, social, and emotional development. This is as much the case in later childhood and adolescence as it is in the early years. Play may look different as children get older, and they may be reluctant to call it play, but the benefits still exist, and they must still have the opportunity and freedom to do it.

Despite the benefits, children face barriers to play in almost every direction that they turn. At school, their breaktimes are being curtailed and sometimes even withheld. At home, many children don't have access to outdoor space, especially children from minority ethnic communities and children living in under-served areas. In the public realm, playgrounds left in a perpetual state of disrepair and unsafe streets are keeping children indoors.

Above all, a culture which, at best, is ambivalent towards children's needs and, at worst, is actively hostile towards them, has embedded itself in communities and the policy that shapes them.

We asked many of the expert witnesses who attended our oral evidence sessions about the cost of not acting now to change this culture and tear down the barriers to play. Time and again, we heard the same response:

> "Devastating, it's fracturing communities and limiting opportunities. It is taking away a young person's freedom"
>
> Ben Addy, Sustrans[147]

But we have been inspired by the dedication of the play sector, in the face of cuts to funding and other challenges, and we have seen countless positive examples of schools, community groups, charities, and parents doing what they can to fill the void left by national and local policy. Parents and carers are taking matters into their own hands, opening up play streets and some schools are developing play strategies with the support of resources like the OPAL programme.

The respective play strategies and play sufficiency duties of Wales and Scotland can provide lessons and inspiration for England and show what can be achieved when consideration of children's health and wellbeing underpins policy and practice.

The Government has set out to ensure that the current generation of children are the happiest and healthiest yet. A policy landscape which listens to children and young people and caters to their need and right to play would provide an opportunity to effect a generational change in children's health and wellbeing, at a time when little else is working.

It will not be able to do this without a shared commitment across Government to creating a policy landscape which listens to children and caters to their need and right to play.

Our research is not yet complete, but our emerging recommendations begin to set out what this new policy landscape could look like and above all, the difference it could make to our children.

147 Ben Addy. Places to Play Evidence Session. 17.09.24

RECOMMENDATIONS

We are hugely grateful to the experts who have shared their knowledge with us during our initial oral evidence sessions and in response to our call for written evidence submissions. Their evidence and ideas, together with insights from the focus groups we have held with children, desktop and market research undertaken by the Centre for Young Lives, visits we have made to programmes and projects across the country and beyond, and the invaluable expertise and support we have had for all our Commissioners and partner organisations, has allowed us to develop a set of emerging recommendations. These recommendations and the recommendations we will draw up following the remaining visits, evidence sessions, and group engagements, will form the basis of the framework for a National Play Strategy for England that we will publish in our final report in June.

The last Labour Government's 2008 Play Strategy and the failure for most of its policies to be subsequently implemented offers two important lessons. Firstly, with political leadership Government can produce a strategy and develop a vision to boost play. Secondly, it requires a long-term commitment and further political capital to implement that strategy.

RECOMMENDATION 1

We recommend the Government develops a cross-departmental National Play Strategy for England by the end of this Parliament, led by the Department for Culture, Media & Sport, building from its landmark Youth Strategy.

It should include:

- A long-term vision to ensure all children can easily access local formal and informal places to play at home, in school, and in the public realm. This should be developed in partnership with children and young people, building on the strong focus on youth voice in the Youth Strategy. There should be a strong emphasis on equity and inclusion as part of the strategy, ensuring that all children and families have access to places to play that meet their needs and interests.
- A legally binding requirement for local authorities to provide sufficient play opportunities and to communicate them to parents and families.
- Ringfenced funding for local authorities to maintain and renovate playgrounds and provide new ones in playground deserts.
- A commitment to embedding play within local priorities.
- The Government's Young Futures programme, Family Hubs, and youth club plans should incorporate dedicated age-appropriate play spaces, as well as support for families to play with their children through hubs. The Child Poverty Taskforce should consider how to open up opportunities to play to families in poverty - who are less likely to have access to private gardens and other play spaces - including through a new infrastructure of family hubs.
- The Government should develop a costed plan to re-establish a skilled and sustainable play workforce, including through extra education, training, and qualifications which are underpinned by professional standards.
- To support the Play Strategy, DCMS should establish a cross-departmental implementation taskforce led by Secretary of State for Culture, Media & Sport. The taskforce should meet quarterly and include representatives of Department of Health and Social Care, Department for Education, Ministry of Housing, Communities, and Local Government, DEFRA, Department for Transport, and the Home Office. This approach fits foursquare with the Government's mission-led approach, the cornerstone of its delivery mechanism.

RECOMMENDATION 2

To boost learning though play opportunities and to support schools to get children playing, we recommend:

- New statutory Department for Education guidance to ringfence time within the school day for breaktimes and lunchtimes. We also support The British Psychological Society's call for an extra 10 minutes of play to be restored to the school day.
- Guidance to discourage the withdrawal of playtime as punishment for bad behaviour.
- Ofsted includes play sufficiency – specifically time to play - as a measure of school performance. This would encourage schools to boost play in school time and reward those schools who value play highly.
- The National Curriculum for primary schools includes clear guidelines for high-quality play-based learning which sets out how it benefits children including after they reach school age.
- The introduction of minimum requirements for new school playgrounds to ensure that they are safe and accessible for all children and have enough space for them.
- A requirement for and guidance to support schools to develop their own play plan, which includes trained play coordinators and a recognition of the importance of play within the curriculum.
- Primary Schools have an annual 'Day of Play' (we suggest 11th June: the United Nations' International Day of Play), during which learning takes place through free and guided play.
- School teachers, staff, and supervisors receive high-quality and mandatory play training to enable healthy and active breaktimes and playful learning within the classroom.
- Activities at breakfast and after-school clubs in Primary Schools and in community settings such as holiday programmes be predominantly free play-based.
- A national campaign to encourage and support parents to play with their children, as part of the drive to improve school readiness.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Our children need more safe places to play. We recommend:

- The Government adopts a Play Sufficiency Duty for England, bringing us into line with Scotland and Wales, to ensure that all children and young people in England have the time and places to play. This would protect opportunities for play at home, school, and in the public realm, and guarantee opportunities for provision where they are found to be lacking.
- Children's right to play to be accounted for within planning policies and guidance, and for developers to be required to consult with children - and then co-design with them - during the creation of both play-specific and other public spaces, as part of a Play Sufficiency Duty. There should be a clear emphasis on equity and inclusion as part of all play planning and strategy at a local authority level.
- Local authorities encourage widespread use of existing community assets such as school playgrounds, making them available for use outside of school hours. School playgrounds are secure and maintained spaces for play but are often unused during weekends and the school holidays.
- New housing developments and street designs should aim to create more playful neighbourhoods and enable doorstep play. There should also be greater investment in street and neighbourhood designs that reduce the speed and volume of traffic and promote walking and biking, building on

good practice from Active Travel England and others. We also echo the call of Fields in Trust, Play England, and others to ensure everyone has access to a park or other green spaces within a safe 10-minute walk of their home.

- A Review of the use of 'No Ball Games' signs and update the model byelaws for Parks and Open Spaces to create a more welcoming, heathier, and active environment.
- The MHCLG and Department for Transport establish a national framework for Play Streets – including a formal definition of Play Streets, Street Play, and School Streets - to ensure that residents everywhere can easily open their street for play. This is already possible for some residents but for too many the process is too difficult, if not impossible.
- New neighbourhood police and Police Community Support Officers monitor playgrounds and other play spaces and commit to protect them from vandalism and anti-social behaviour.

Image: @drewfussphotography and Hornimans Adventure Playground, London W10

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to express our gratitude to the Association of Play Industries, Impact on Urban Health, and Tesco for their continued support of the Play Commission, which has greatly enhanced the breadth and depth of research and engagement.

We are immensely grateful to everyone who took the time to make a written submission to our call for evidence or joined us for one of our thematic oral evidence sessions. We would also like to thank Hogan Lovells, for their continued and generous contribution of their time as we explore the theme of children's right to play. Our particular thanks go to the children and young people who shared their thoughts and perspectives as we developed our key findings and recommendations for this interim report. We are also grateful to our expert commissioners for their ongoing guidance and feedback and their tireless work to promote the importance of play.

ORAL EVIDENCE SESSIONS – EXPERT WITNESSES

- Adrian Voce, Starlight and Playful Planet
- Aida Cable, Thrive at Five
- Ali Oliver, Youth Sport Trust
- Amber Ogunsanya, Inclusive Play Specialist
- Anna Scott Marshall, British Paralympic Association
- Ben Addy, Sustrans
- Candice James, Max Roach Centre
- Carley Sefton, Learning Through Landscapes
- Ceri Gibbons, Clarion Futures
- Cllr Helen Hayden, Leeds City Council
- Cllr Jon Hubbard, Vice-Chair, Children and Young People's Board at the Local Government Association
- Daisy Greenwell & Joe Ryrie, Screen Free Childhood
- Dinah Bornat, ZCD Architects
- Dr Abi Miranda, Anna Freud
- Dr Elizabeth Kilbey, Child Pyschologist
- Dr Kate Paradine, Voice 21
- Dr Lynn McNair, University of Edinburgh
- Dr Michael Yogman, Harvard Medical School
- Dr Monica Lakhanpaul, UCL
- Dr Soizic Le Courtois, PEDAL
- Dr Wendy Russell, University of Gloucestershire
- Eamon O/Connor, Gehl
- Ed Baines, UCL Institute of Education
- Galiema Amien-Clote, Rotherhithe Primary School
- Gemma Hyde, Town and Country Planning Association
- Gillian Mahon & Ellen Fesseha, Right to Play
- Hannah Keegan, Fortuna School
- Harriet Grant, The Guardian
- Helen Griffiths, Fields in Trust
- Helena Good MBE, Daydream Believers
- Jasmine Hoffman, parent and resident
- Jen Lexmond, Easypeasy
- Kate Robinson, Sir Ken Robinson Legacy Foundation
- Kim Foulds, Ph.D., Sesame Workshop
- Louise Watson, Private resident
- Marianne Mannello, Play Wales
- Mark Lawrie, Street Games
- Michael Follet, OPAL
- Paul Gilchrist, University of Brighton
- Peter Grigg, Home Start
- Professor Dr Ger Graus OBE, Education Advisor
- Professor Eunice Lumsden, University of Northampton
- Sarah Jayne Blakemore, University of Cambridge & Wellcome Trust PhD programme, UCL
- Sarah Macshane and Lucy Dormandy, The Lego Group
- Shahneila Saeed, Ukie
- Sophia Giblin, Treasure Time
- Stephanie Cook, Author
- Susan Sandouka Husemeyer, Wild About Play

WRITTEN CALL FOR EVIDENCE SUBMISSIONS

- A Place in Childhood
- Active Dorset
- Adele Cleaver
- Angela Ben-Arie
- Assemble Play
- Association of Play Industries
- Bethan Morgan & Cath Prisk
- Big Education
- Birth to 19
- Blossom Federation
- Boromi
- Bristol City Council
- Chester Zoo
- Children's Alliance
- Children's Play Advisory Service
- City of Doncaster Council
- Community Playthings

- Coram
- Council for Learning Outside the Classroom
- Digital Futures for Children
- Dr Amanda Norman
- Dr Angela Colvert
- Dr Ben Highmore
- Dr Ed Baines, Will Piercy, & Mine Sak Acur
- Dr Janine Coates, Dr Helena Pimlott-Wilson, and Dr Verity Postlethwaite
- Dr Michael Martin
- Dr Ryan Bramley & Professor Jennifer Rowsell
- Dr Sally Watson
- Dr Soizic Le Courtois, Manogya Sahay, & Qiming Liu
- Dr Wendy Russell, Mike Barclay, & Ben Tawil
- Dreams Network
- EasyPeasy
- Education Development Trust
- Ellen Weaver
- Emily Adlington
- Evelina London
- Family Action
- Family Fund
- Fatherhood Institute
- Fields in Trust
- Football Foundation
- Groundwork UK
- Gwealan Tops Adventure Playground
- Haringey Play Association
- Health Professionals for Safer Screens
- Helen Lomax & Kate Smith
- Home Start UK
- Hugh Dames
- Impact on Urban Health
- In Kind Direct
- Institute of Imagination
- Intelligent Health
- International Play Association
- Internet Matters
- Jackie Boldon
- Jaspar Khawaja
- Jules Gilleland
- Jupiter Play
- Kumsal Kurt
- Laura Richardson
- Lawn Tennis Association
- Lego Group
- Liverpool City Council
- Local Trust
- London Play
- Luke Billingham
- Matt Hickford
- Matt Robinson
- Mine Sak Acur, Professor Kerstin Sailer, Dr Ed Baines, & Professor Alan Penn
- National Childbirth Trust
- NCS Trust
- OPAL
- Outdoor Play Canada
- PACT Creative Training
- Pitsmoor Adventure Playground
- Place2Be
- Play England
- Play Gloucestershire
- Play Included
- Playboard NI
- Playful Futures
- Playing Out
- Professor Alison Stenning
- Professor Bertha Ochieng & Christopher Owens
- Professor Helen Dodd
- Professor Monica Lakhanpaul
- Professor Tracy Harwood
- Richard O'Neill
- Roman Road Adventure Playground
- Rowen Smith
- Save the Children
- Shiremoor Adventure Playground
- Slade Gardens Adventure Playground
- Sport England
- Sporting Communities
- Starlight
- Stevie Bode
- Street Games
- The Children's Society
- The Open University Centre for Children and Young People's Wellbeing
- The Valley Project
- Town and Country Planning Association
- Triple P
- UK Adventure Playground Network
- UK Children's Play Policy Forum
- UK Coaching
- WeMindTheGap
- West Cliff Primary School
- Wild About Play
- Wildlife and Countryside Link
- Youth Sport Trust

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