

State of Play 2011-2012

Conclusion and priorities for Play Wales

Conclusion

It is clear that the Play Theme within Cymorth has made a difference to the development of play opportunities in all Local Authorities. There has been a growth in innovative responses, particularly with respect to mobile, outreach play provision and supporting children to access outdoor space in their own communities. There has also been a growth in partnership working between parks and play development teams that appears to have contributed to an improvement in the development of play spaces.

During the review period, Play Wales documented a demand in queries from community groups, schools and parents suggesting advice and support for play space development and design. Our current capacity impacts on our ability to effectively respond to this increased demand.

Local Authorities and their partners continue reporting the significant difficulties they are finding to fund qualifications and access qualified workers. The Melyn Report identified a backlog of approximately 2,600 staff seeking access to Level 2 and 3 qualifications.

The increase in local play strategies with a clear link to Children and Young People's Plans and in play officers and play associations creates an opportunity to ensure that the related increase in provision is sustained and developed further.

Analysis of the review returns indicates that the development of Children and Young People's Plans has served as a national driver for the planning of play provision locally. The development of Core Aim 4 groups (or similar) has contributed to the development of a more joined up approach to planning for children's play, with greater interaction between those with responsibility for staffed play provision and play/open space.

The rationalisation of statutory partnerships through the Single Integrated Plans is welcomed. The Single Integrated Plans will better enable better cross-sector working with regards to children's play. The rationalisation of plans and the Single Integrated Planning mechanism will make it more realistic for Local Service Boards to better respond to the Play Sufficiency Duty.

Developing strategic partnerships continues to have a significant impact on provision for children's play in Wales. We are confident that developing and maintaining this approach will have a long lasting influence on children's play provision, and encourage better use of existing resources.

The BIG Child's Play programme's investment in infrastructure and play projects continues to be a catalyst for a more strategic approach to planning for children's play provision. Whereas partners in the past may have been reluctant to engage in strategy development, the emergence of a funding stream appears to have eased that process.

Although most local strategies have been developed in line with the national implementation plan, progress operationally at a national level since the previous two *State of Play* reviews continues to be disappointing. We do, however, welcome the progress made to place a duty on Local Authorities to assess and secure sufficient play opportunities for children.

The Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 can potentially result in the more effective use of resources. Very often we have witnessed significant investments being made without adequate or informed evaluation of the diversity of local play needs and without due regard to 'play value' for money. Because 'play' is a term that is open to wide interpretation (particularly when coupled with 'recreation') we have also witnessed resources for play provision being diverted to meet other needs.

The Statutory Guidance to Local Authorities on assessing sufficiency is worded appropriately to ensure that the environment in its entirety is considered for its contribution in supporting children's play. We are of the opinion that all public space should be 'playable' space, since children are members of the public. This change in approach may not need significant investment; it can be affected by installing 'signals' to both children and adults that children are welcome to play in a place.

Priorities for Play Wales

Play Wales should make every effort to identify ways to sustain engagement with Local Authorities and their partners to establish strategic approaches for the development of play opportunities in their areas.

We should continue to make the case for dedicated Welsh Government funding for level 2 and 3 playwork qualifications.

We should identify ways to influence training and professional development for those tasked with inspection to ensure that they have appropriate professional knowledge and occupational competence.

We should continue to seek funding to develop cross-professional training to help the professionals who plan, design, build and manage our communities, to understand the importance of children's play and their role in creating child-friendly public spaces. This would bring together voluntary and public sector senior managers, managers and professionals working for, and with, the Local Authority, including:

- Planners and developers
- Landscape architects and designers

- Highways and transport professionals
- Health professionals
- Regeneration and housing professionals
- Schools and children's services staff
- Police
- Parks and leisure staff
- Community engagement professionals
- Inspectorate staff

We should identify ways to support the delivery of Quality in Play quality assurance scheme in Wales to raise the standard of staffed play provision.

We should continue our wider policy work nationally to ensure that other initiatives that impact on access to places to play (such as Community Safety, Physical Activity Action Plans) incorporate an understanding of children's right and entitlement to play.

We should continue to promote *Managing Risk in Play Provision: an Implementation Guide*, commissioned by the Play Safety Forum and published in 2008. Furthermore, Play Wales should continue to work with the Welsh Government in order that they can endorse and adopt the guide.

We should seek funding to develop capacity to provide concept advice, guidance and training to support the development of new play spaces.

We should seek funding to produce, develop, publish and disseminate a toolkit to support the use of school grounds for children to play outside of learning hours.

We should continue to work closely with Welsh Government officials to make the legislation regarding Play Sufficiency fit for the purpose of creating a play friendly Wales.



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