



# QUALITY IN PLAY

Standards, assessment indicators  
and evidence — a manual



*'It made staff more aware of what must be in place and what checks need to be done.'*

*'It ensured we maintain a quality provision, giving children many opportunities to make choices, be involved and experience a variety of play activities which will help them develop into confident, happy informed young people.'*

**Quality in Play is a quality assurance system developed by playwork practitioners to support supervised play and childcare provision for school-aged children**

**Tried and tested in practice by hundreds of providers for over 20 years, this fifth edition is free to download and use as a quality assurance framework and service development tool.**

**Quality in Play takes providers through a clear and systematic process of self assessment in every aspect of quality play provision with the option of a national quality award accreditation.**

**Whether starting out or well-established, working in the voluntary public or private sectors, Quality in Play is an essential tool for every play and childcare provider.**

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# FOREWORD

It is with great pleasure that Play England is publishing this latest edition of Quality in Play.

Quality in Play is the leading quality assurance system for play services and all those who work with the playing child at the heart of their service. It is designed by play providers for play providers.

For play providers the challenge is to demonstrate quality and value for money whilst designing and maintaining excellent staffed play environments. Quality in Play is, first and foremost, about helping providers to achieve this, and being able to demonstrate that achievement.

Play providers can use Quality in Play on its own as a management tool to support continuous self-assessment and improvement by working through the sections and working as a team to review and strengthen delivery in each area. It can be used by playworkers, playwork managers, local authority officers, charity trustees and all those with a role in supporting and delivering play services.

Play England also offers a Quality in Play assessment – a critical friend visit and report from an experienced assessor who can provide independent confirmation that quality standards are being evidenced, along with recommendations and advice for future development. The Quality in Play quality mark is nationally recognised as a credible and authoritative indicator of quality.

Quality in Play can be used by play providers to evidence quality to a wide range of stakeholders, including grant funders, commissioners and regulators. It also helps organisations to improve their management to meet children's play needs, with a focus on the playing child at the centre of the service. It is tailored for play providers and bespoke for their needs.

Quality in Play is based on key playwork theories and documents including the Playwork Principles, Manchester Circles, Play Types, the Theory of Loose Parts and the Play Cycle. It links closely to Playwork qualifications and National Occupational Standards.

As a play provider myself, I have found the Quality in Play process challenging but also extremely valuable in encouraging playworkers to reflect on and improve the services they deliver. It is often difficult for play providers to find the additional staff time to devote to developing Quality in Play, particularly in this time of austerity and cuts to play services. However, an investment in Quality in Play can also pay dividends in strengthening the play offer and making the case for greater investment in local play services.

In this edition of Quality in Play we have made very few amendments to the previous edition. Our aim is to keep things simple and to retain the focus on the playing child. Our aim for this edition is to make Quality in Play more accessible. So, for the first time, Play England's board of trustees have decided to make the Quality in Play manual free to download from our website.

All of us at Play England look forward to working with play providers as we continue on this next stage of the Quality in Play journey. We hope that you find this latest edition of the Quality in Play manual useful.

**Nicola Butler**

**Chair of Trustees, Play England**

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This edition of **Quality in Play** is dedicated to all the staff and volunteers who are committed to supporting local play services during this time of austerity and cuts.

Many hundreds of people have played a part in the development of **Quality in Play** over the years, including playworkers and managers, support and staff, mentors and assessors, trainers and thinkers across the play sector. Too many to thank individually, Play England owes you all a debt, but we must particularly acknowledge the contributions of the following organisations and individuals:

**Hackney Play Association** and **London Play** for their ground-breaking work in development and growth of the system and then having the vision to hand it on when the time was right.

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And once again, our thanks to all the hundreds of other committed play people who have helped to deliver and build **Quality in Play** and who work to sustain local play services.



# INTRODUCTION

Quality in Play was originally created by playworkers in partnership with Hackney Play Association in 1996 as the first ever play-specific quality assurance system. As it grew in popularity it was managed by London Play who published a new edition in 2001. Following an extensive pilot programme a third edition in 2004 was endorsed by Investors in Children.

The Quality in Play programme was then transferred to Play England, with the aim of rolling it out as the leading nationally recognised quality assurance scheme for play providers.

Quality in Play is designed to help supervised school-age play and childcare provision in the voluntary, public and private sectors to improve their policy and practice in supporting children's play. It can be used by any type of provider, whether starting out or well established; a small project in a village hall through to a large adventure playground in an urban area; extended service and out of school projects; mobile and outreach projects working across an area, and those with a specific focus or user group, such as hospital play. The system takes providers through a process of self-assessment of every aspect of quality play provision, with the option of external assessment and accreditation leading to certification to demonstrate attainment of a national quality award.

This edition of Quality in Play focuses on outcomes, with children being able to engage in freely-chosen play as an outcome itself. *The Playwork Principles* and the values of equality, access and inclusion are threaded throughout the quality areas, which are also mapped against the Quality Improvement Principles Framework that replaced the Investors in Children scheme.

It is based on the Manchester Circles model taken from *Play for Real*, Manchester City Council's quality assurance programme for out-of-school and play settings in which the theme of concentric circles depicting the playing child, the play environment, the organisational framework and the wider context is an important component. Play England is grateful to Manchester City Council for allowing us to use and adapt these ideas in Quality in Play.

# HOW TO USE THE MANUAL

Start by reading through the manual to get a feel for how Quality in Play works, and to get an idea of the evidence you should be thinking about to go through the process.

- Either photocopy the assessment, key actions needed and evidence sheets and put these in a ring binder or set up an electronic filing system with at least 11 sections that will become your Quality in Play portfolio.
- Your portfolio is a tool for ongoing planning, action and review as well as for collecting evidence for assessment and accreditation.
- It should show how staff and management have thought about what they do to support children's play, as well as contain key policy and other documents.

If any of the language or terminology is unfamiliar or unclear, look at the glossary of terms section where we explain what we mean by the words we've used. The thinking about play section summarises key play concepts, to help you think about how your provision links with theory as you go through the quality process.

## What's in each quality area

### The standard

A statement that sets out the overall quality standard with further information suggesting how this could relate to policy and practice. In many quality areas there are specific links to the Playwork Principles and access and inclusion issues, while others refer more generally to how your provision might fit with local area plans affecting children.

### Assessment sheet

This breaks down the standard into three parts:

- Commitment and planning
- Action
- Review

Each of these parts has three quality indicators detailing more specific criteria that unpick the full standard. Each quality indicator has three boxes (getting started, nearly met, fully met) where you enter the dates on which you assessed your progress against the indicator. Make sure you complete the commitment and planning, action, review sections for every area in your portfolio, revisiting areas as part of your on-going quality plan.

**You should get into the habit of having the portfolio at every staff, management, planning, mentoring and review meeting. This will help to avoid duplication and ensure that the whole staff and management team get things done and continuously monitor how well you support children's play.**



## Key actions needed

Use this to record what needs to be done, and by when, to move toward ‘fully met’. Meeting the quality standards is a team effort.

## Evidence sheet

Questions linked to the indicators are designed to help you think about your processes for improving quality. How does your policy or practice support children’s play and how you could show that it has happened?

Written policies and procedures are important, but how they are put into practice is even more important.

## Working through the process

### Step 1

Look at the Play England website for the latest information, resources and support available for Quality in Play.

### Step 2

Look at each quality indicator in the assessment sheet and decide which (*getting started, nearly met, fully met*) you can date as you go through the process. You will be able to date some *fully met* ones straight away, while for others you will move through them over time. Dating the boxes this way is evidence of your progress and improvement in itself, but make sure you have the evidence to back this up.

### Step 3

While individuals can take on particular pieces of work, it is important that all staff and management have an overview of the process. Try to ensure that part-time or sessional staff are involved as they will have a lot to say about how policy is put into practice and what difference this has actually made for the children.

Some providers start with a quality area for which they already have a lot of the evidence, as this helps to build momentum and confidence; while others start with a broad-brush approach across several quality areas.

You will almost certainly find that different people have different ideas on how well you meet the quality indicators. This does not mean that someone is getting it wrong — it is a useful pointer to where you really are in that particular quality area and will also help with assessing other areas, for example, in Quality Areas 8 (clear aims and values) and 9 (communicating effectively).

**Keep a record of all quality audits and ensure old ones are stored. Reference where they are kept as they are important evidence of for improvement.**



The focus of Quality in Play is on outcomes — what difference you have made and how you know you have done so. Think about how you can demonstrate that you ‘say what you do and do what you say’. Identify ways that you can show people have understanding and reflect on their practice and what users or others have said about your provision.

Don’t forget about the importance of informal or anecdotal evidence, for example, what children say about why they enjoy your play provision, or how it has got better for them.

- Think about the little things that are likely to be much more important to children. What’s the story of how your policies and practice actually support children’s play?

## Step 4

Put the key documents or other evidence in the appropriate section after the assessment and evidence sheets. Some evidence will be confidential or not physically possible to put in the portfolio, so clearly point to where it is held on file or where something is located.

Some evidence may relate to more than one quality area. You only need one copy of the key evidence in the portfolio, but make sure you clearly cross-reference it in other relevant areas so that someone not familiar with the portfolio can easily find it.

- An index at the start of each quality area in the portfolio that shows what evidence is in this area, or another part of the portfolio or elsewhere, works best.

**Where quality areas mention written policies, this does not mean that you need a lot of separate policies, but you do need to make sure that what is asked for is covered in an overall policy or other written information.**



# THINKING ABOUT PLAY

Providing a quality play offer that is genuinely centred on the child at play requires an understanding of key play concepts and principles that have been developed by thinkers from both within and beyond the play sector. These are summarised below. They can be difficult to grasp straight away but they are all based on the principle that play is a fundamental right and a process that children naturally engage as central to their well-being and enjoyment of childhood.

While these underpin the thinking behind Quality in Play, the quality standards recognise that play providers will vary in the extent to which they can put them into practice. However all play providers should aim to build them into their policy and practice through playwork training, continuous professional development and playwork qualifications for their workforce, to help ensure that everything they do is in support of children's play.

## The playing child is at the centre

There is wide agreement among play, early years and other experts that children need to enjoy their childhood as well as grow up prepared for adult life, and being able to engage in play is seen as central to children's well-being.

This means that play for its own sake is seen as an outcome in itself as well as contributing to other outcomes for children.



The Manchester Circles model (left), developed by Stuart Lester and Wendy Russell, places the playing child at the centre. It is based on a first principle that the playing child should have more influence on the play environment and the organisational framework, rather than the other way around. In other words, the play environment and the organisational framework must support rather than constrain children's freely chosen play.

A second principle is that the connections made within and between the circles are also important, as even small changes in these relationships could have a major effect on the playing child. Examples include new children arriving or older children moving on; minor changes to the physical play space; bigger changes in the staff team or opening times; and changes in the local neighbourhood or how the law and regulation is interpreted in policy and practice.

## Access and inclusion

A requirement that play provision is fully accessible and inclusive has been threaded through the standards as an underpinning theme and a fundamental right because 'all children' means exactly what it says. Play providers need to have a shared understanding of what prevents or discourages children and young people from fully participating in play opportunities through a process of identifying, understanding and breaking down the barriers to participation and belonging. Playworkers' use of observation and reflection is a crucial tool in understanding dynamics and adapting environments.

It is fairly easy to identify the 'hard' physical barriers, but attitudinal barrier can be more difficult to see or acknowledge. Understanding the causes and effects of unfair discrimination and how they are interpreted is a first step to creating a fully inclusive play environment. For example, families with disabled children are more likely to be living in poverty and be socially excluded, while disabled children from black and other minority ethnic communities often face double discrimination.

A number of tools and frameworks to help play providers create and maintain a fully accessible and inclusive physical and human play environment have been developed at national level and these are referenced or signposted in the support materials. Local networks and community groups are an equally valuable source of information and support to ensure access and inclusion.

## The Playwork Principles

Developed by the play sector as fundamental statements about the relationship between play and playwork, the Playwork Principles are held in trust by the Playwork Principles Scrutiny Group. They have been endorsed by SkillsActive and replace the Playwork Assumptions and Values. As many of the standards refer to them, the full text is reproduced below.

These principles establish the professional and ethical framework for playwork and as such must be regarded as a whole. They describe what is unique about play and playwork, and provide the playwork perspective for working children and young people. They are based on the recognition that children and young people's capacity for positive development will be enhanced if given access to the broadest range of environments and play opportunities.

1. All children and young people need to play. The impulse to play is innate. Play is a biological, psychological and social necessity, and is fundamental to the healthy development and well-being of individuals and communities.
2. Play is a process that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. That is, children and young people determine and control the intent of their play, by following their own instincts, ideas and interests, their own way for their own reasons.

3. The prime focus and essence of playwork is to support and facilitate the play process and this should inform the development of play policy, strategy, training and education.
4. For playworkers, the play process takes precedence and playworkers act as advocates for play when engaging with adult-led agendas.
5. The role of the playworker is to support all children and young people in the creation of a space in which they can play.
6. The worker's response to children and young people playing is based on a sound up-to-date knowledge of the play process, and reflective practise.
7. Playworkers recognise their own impact on the play space and also the impact of children and young people's play on the playworker.
8. Playworkers choose an intervention style that enables children and young people to extend their play. All playworker intervention must balance risk with the developmental benefit and well-being of children.

## Play types

Bob Hughes (1996) has identified up to 16 separate play types from published research literature, suggesting that these appear to be the building blocks for how and why children play. The extent to which children can engage in them deeply influences children in the here and now, as well as who and what they become as adults. These play behaviours have been consistently observed in children across different cultures and over many years, though with differences according to the culture and environment in which children play.

Research shows that playing has a fundamental effect on regions of the brain to do with emotions, motivation and reward systems, linking to cognitive brain function. This effect is on the architecture of the brain, building up neural networks and helping to develop flexible and adaptive responses to the things that children encounter. In other words, there is increasing evidence that a rich play environment helps to build brains as well as bodies.

A quality play environment offers the possibility for engaging in all the play types, but it is for children to decide whether and when they want to engage in them. It is the interplay between genes, brain, body and the environment that is important, not whether children engage in this or that play type.

## Play and the natural environment

*Play Naturally*, a research report from Stuart Lester and Martin Maudsley (2006), published by Play England, has shown that children's love of and affinity for the natural environment is intimately bound up with good physical and mental health through what has been described as affordances. These are the diverse, dynamic and flexible features in natural spaces that afford opportunities for play, determined by the child in interaction with the environment. They can be social as well as physical, and there can be affordances in any play environment, from a sheet or curtain draped over a table in a village hall, to the range of play challenges and opportunities in an adventure playground.

## The theory of loose parts

Developed by artist Simon Nicholson (1971), this theory describes the need for a play environment to contain any number and combination of loose materials which children can move around, manipulate, and use as props to change the environment. Nicholson became intrigued by his observations of the evidence that children played in much more creative, challenging, adaptive (and 'illegal') ways on house-building sites than on the 'fence, kit, surface' designated play spaces installed in the finished housing developments. The availability of loose parts — the bits and pieces of material and junk lying around the building sites — seemed to make the difference, and he went on to propose the beach as a near-perfect play environment.

Sand and water play, modelling using a variety of media, use of scrap materials, dressing-up boxes, camp and den building and so on are familiar examples of the use of loose parts in play provision, and indeed anywhere children play. But the child's need to explore the natural elements, the living and built environment and to grow an intuitive understanding of concepts such as the cycle of life, weight, motion, volume, balance: and how to use found or provided materials, also need to be supported in places where children play.

## The play cycle

Gordon Sturrock and Perry Else (1998) developed the concept of the play cycle containing 'play cues' and returns within a 'play frame,' leading to 'play flow', after which the frame is discarded or destroyed when it is no longer of use. A play cue is the signal the child gives that they want to play through spoken, facial or other body signal or by the use of materials. A child kicking a ball towards you is a play cue — you are expected to kick it back. Picking up a paintbrush, singing a song, starting a conversation, talking to snails, or running away as an invitation to chase, could all be play cues inviting participation in play by other children, adults or the environment by communicating feelings or thoughts.

The play return is the response by another person or thing to the play cue which is processed by the child issuing the cue who decides what to do about the return. The play cycle takes place in a play frame that can best be described as a flexible boundary around the cue, response and what develops. A play frame could include anything from just one child engrossed in contemplation, a few children playing together, a large group of children and adults playing, or any combination of these.

The play frame, which may be a theme like chasing or any play behaviour influenced by the physical indoor or outdoor environment, can last from a second to hours or days or even weeks — the play flow. When the frame is no longer useful to the children's playing intent, it is discarded or destroyed. Playworkers need to recognise the various elements of play cycles if they are to support children in setting up, developing, maintaining and renewing play frames and moving on when they are of no further use to their play.

## Play as an approach to activity

Jerome Bruner developed the concept of play as an approach to activity in which 'the main characteristic of play — child or adult — is not its content, but its mode. Play is an approach to action, not a form of activity.'<sup>\*</sup> Bruner's point is that play is not separate from activities like eating, walking, creating, learning, thinking, climbing and so on — it is a way of approaching them.

For example, a child digging a hole is just digging a hole, but the way they do it (its mode) is likely to be playful: going to Australia; digging for treasure or skeletons; just exuberantly flinging soil everywhere; suddenly and completely changing the purpose of the digging; or, by giving out cues, starting a short-term or longer-lived epidemic of hole-digging by other children. Similarly, many of us are familiar with how children playfully eat, pretend to be horses or dinosaurs while walking, and frequently ask playful but fundamental questions when they've been thinking about the world and their place in it.

## Playable space

The concept of playable space is increasingly being introduced to the planning system. It refers to space where play is a legitimate use, perhaps alongside other uses. Based on work by Tim Gill and the planning consultancy EDAW, the idea reflects the fact that children can and do play in many different types of space beyond dedicated play provision, including parks, streets, civic spaces, waste ground and natural environments. It aims to help planners, developers, highways professionals, public space managers and others who might not see play as part of their remit, to think about making the wider environment more play-friendly.

<sup>\*</sup> As quoted in Janet Moyles' 'Just Playing', Open University Press, 1989

The concept of playable space is also useful for play providers to help with thinking about just how playable the space is in their specific setting: how the playing child influences, relates to and interacts with the specific physical and human play environment, and how the organisational framework supports this and relates to the wider context.

For example, play providers might want to think about just how much say children have in the shaping and use of the play space; how children get to and from it, or get around the surrounding area: how playworkers reach out to all families and communities to break down any barriers that prevent children in the neighbourhood from using the space. This is particularly important for play ranger, mobile and other projects working in the wider public domain, but more traditional staffed provision also needs to look outwards to the wider context.



# THE PLAY ENVIRONMENT



# QUALITY AREA 1

## Children's freedom and control

### THE STANDARD

**We see children's freely chosen play as an outcome in itself as well as contributing to other outcomes. Children's freedom and control over how and what they play are at the centre of our approach. Our play environment and organisational policies and procedures are designed and reviewed to ensure they support and do not unduly constrain children's freely chosen play.**

The Playwork Principles say that all children and young people need to play and that it is a process that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. That is, children and young people determine and control the content and intent of their play, by following their own instincts, ideas and interests, in their own way, for their own reasons.

This means much more than children having choices between the opportunities or activities on offer in the play environment. The Manchester Circles model informs the Quality in Play structure, with the playing child at the centre of the play environment, the organisational framework and the wider context. A central principle is that the playing child should have more influence on the play environment and the organisational framework than the other way round, and that these should support rather than constrain their play.

This does not mean that absolutely anything goes. An individual child's freedom and control needs to be continuously considered within the context of other children's well-being. While much of children's freely chosen play is about negotiating and developing the 'rules' of their play, conflicts can and do arise.

The overall provision should be carefully assessed for how well it equally offers freedom and control to support all children's play. You should particularly look at how your equal opportunities policy supports the play of disabled and minority community or other potentially marginalised children.

Research suggests that being able to engage in freely chosen play has an effect on the areas of the brain to do with emotion, motivation and reward, leading to flexible responses to what children encounter in their environments. This helps to develop resilience, a way of coping with the world that includes dealing with primary and secondary emotions, developing healthy responses to stress and building attachments to people and places.

## Commitment and planning

**a.** We are committed to children engaging in play as a principal outcome in itself as well as an essential part of meeting other outcomes for children

Getting started  
date

Nearly met  
date

Fully met  
date

**b.** We have plans that ensure children have a real say in what we provide through looking at what works, using observation and reflection

**c.** We are committed to children's widest possible control of how, why and what they play

## Action

**a.** We have integrated Articles 12, 23 and 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the *Charter for Children's Play* into our practice,

**b.** We use current thinking about play, observation and listening to children as part of our daily playwork practice.

**c.** We adapt and improve our service to support children's play by using reflection and a minimum-intervention approach,

## Review

**a.** We evaluate how well we have supported children's freedom and control over their play, including access and inclusion in its widest sense.

**b.** Children's engagement in freely chosen and personally directed play is a focus of our annual review.

**c.** We use the results of the annual review to refine, adapt and improve our support for children's play.



## Commitment and planning

- How does our policy put play as an outcome in itself at the centre of what we do?
- How can management and staff explain or show how the policy works in practice?
- What plans, processes and techniques do we have or use to ensure children have a real say?
- How could we show that we meet the Playwork Principles in our planning and practice?
- What evidence do we have in other quality areas that could help to show how we meet this standard?

## Action

- Can we give examples of how we integrated the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Charter for Children's Play in our practice and who was involved?
- How can we show that there were real results for children as an outcome of listening and reflecting?
- Have we got actual examples of these results that children agree have happened?

## Review

- What have we done well that has supported children's play and how could we build on this?
- How do we know, and what do the children think?
- How does our equal opportunities policy and practice support all children to play?
- What are we going to do next year and beyond to refine and improve how we support children's play?

# QUALITY AREA 2

## The physical play environment

### THE STANDARD

**Our physical play environment supports children's freely chosen play to the greatest extent possible within our resources. We assess and reflect on how it provides enjoyment of play for its own sake and how children can influence and change it. We balance the benefits of challenging play opportunities against potential risk, and ensure that children are involved in the design and modification of a flexible playable space.**

Children are the experts in their play and should have a strong influence over the play environment, through shaping it as well as adapting to it. The play environment should as far as possible contain a variety of diverse and flexible features, play props, loose parts and sensory experiences that children can respond to, interact with and change as they play.

The standard recognises that every play environment is different and that what shared space in a community hall can offer will be very different from that in an adventure playground. This does not mean just settling for what you have, but rather making the best use of what you've got and thinking creatively about how to maximise what the physical play environment offers to the playing child.

Playwork Principle 5 describes the role of the playworker supporting all children and young people in the creation of a space in which they can play. This means enabling rather than directing or controlling, and a good test is to assess the extent to which children are able to influence the shape and content of the play space. How children get to and from, move around and feel included in an accessible, inclusive and playable environment is fundamentally important.

The physical play environment should be regularly assessed for the availability and range of loose parts; how children can move around interact with and change in natural and built elements; how they encounter challenge and manage risk for themselves; and how accessible and inclusive it is for all children. Benefit should be balanced with risk when carrying out risk assessments.

Research shows that children's well-being is greatly enhanced if they can play outdoors, experience the elements, interact with nature and have a full range of sensory experiences. In quality play provision this should be evident to the greatest extent possible.

# The physical play environment — Assessment

## Commitment and planning

**a.** We are committed to creating and maintaining a physical environment that supports all children’s play and their enjoyment of play for its own sake to the greatest extent within our resources.

Getting started  
date

Nearly met  
date

Fully met  
date

**b.** Our planning is based on observations of children’s use of the play environment and what children tell us explicitly or implicitly and we prioritise accordingly to support their play.

**c.** We have a plan to maintain and increase the range of diverse and flexible indoor and outdoor play opportunities and experiences, where possible.

## Action

**a.** We use a range of methods to assess how well our physical environment supports all children’s play.

**b.** We provide a range of loose parts and encourage children to change and adapt the play environment.

**c.** We observe children’s play, listen and respond to their ideas to make changes and improvements.

## Review

**a.** The annual review focuses on what we have done well and on what we could do more of in the physical environment to support children’s play.

**b.** We evaluate how well our physical resources have supported play for all children.

**c.** We use the results of the annual review to refine and improve our practice and financial planning.



## Commitment and Planning

- Where is the physical play environment covered in our written policy on play?
- How can management and staff explain or show how observations and children's wishes have been used in planning?
- How do we show that our planning and practice is consistent with Playwork Principles 5 and 7?
- What evidence do we have in other quality areas that could help to show how we meet this standard?

## Action

- What have we done to ensure that all children can access and play in our physical play environment?
- What examples could we give of how we ensure access and inclusion for all children?
- Who was involved in deciding priorities for change or improvement, and how can we show that these were based on what we learned from the children?
- How could we show that our budget and financial planning is consistent with our policy on the physical play environment?

## Review

- What difference have we made over the last year in the physical play environment, and what were the outcomes for children's enjoyment of play for its own sake?
- Have we made any changes to how we use assessment methods as a result?
- What specific things are we going to do next year and beyond to refine and improve our service delivery?

# QUALITY AREA 3

## The human play environment

### THE STANDARD

**The way we relate to, interact with and safeguard children creates and maintains a play environment that is emotionally warm and welcoming, fully inclusive and accessible. Our staff and management policy and practice is in support of the playing child to enhance the ambience or 'feel' of the provision as experienced by all children in the community, and our approach is fully consistent with the Playwork Principles.**

One of the most important aspects of quality play provision is that the people who manage and directly provide it relate to each other and to children. Personal relationships and attitudes experienced by children are fundamental to their well-being. The attitudes of staff and management to providing emotional warmth; a sense of inclusion in the widest sense, and opportunities to encounter and manage risk, uncertainty and challenge while keeping children safe, are what make the biggest differences for children and families.

In this quality area and others 'all children' means exactly what it says. Disabled, minority community or other potentially marginalised children have an equal right to engage in play behaviours and activities by themselves, or with others, according to their choice and to have a sense of being valued encouraged and supported both as an individual and as a member of their family and community.

There is a fine balance between providing human play environments that feel welcoming and safe while offering children the opportunity to test and push boundaries. Equally, play providers need to be skilled at recognising the difference between playful, challenging and unacceptable behaviour. Play provision needs to meet the need for emotional comfort as well as adventure, and recognise that children will differ, individually and as they grow, in what they perceive as comfortable, exciting or downright scary.

Playworkers and managers in quality play provision develop policy and practice that is consistent with the Playwork Principles to ensure that their vision considers the need and the right of all children to play, and communicates this well internally through effective teamwork. They use internal and external feedback to step back and reflect on how children, families and the community perceive their human play environment.

# The human play environment — Assessment

## Commitment and planning

**a.** We are committed to providing a welcoming, caring, stimulating, challenging, mutually respectful and inclusive play environment for all children, consistent with the Playwork Principles.

Getting started  
date

Nearly met  
date

Fully met  
date

**b.** We consider the ambience and 'feel' of our environment and recognise, in our planning, children's need for a range of emotional and sensory experiences.

**c.** We have written guidance for staff, children, carers and visitors on expectations about behaviour and relationships in the human play environment.

## Action

**a.** Management and staff work sensitively to support children's play and distinguish between playful, challenging and unacceptable behaviour so as not to unduly intervene in children's play.

**b.** Our management and staff attitudes in practice are consistent with our policy and support the playful feel of the setting for all children.

**c.** We ensure that the way people behave respects, values and supports children's play

## Review

**a.** We use our observations to identify areas for improvement in our policy and practice.

**b.** We consult children, carers and visitors and take into account their perspectives on the feel of the setting when planning.

**c.** We review our practice and build the results into our planning for organisational and professional development.



## Commitment and planning

- How can we show that our policy is fully consistent with the Playwork Principles and promotes accessibility and inclusion for all children?
- What methods do we use to consider the ambience and 'feel' of the play environment to ensure it supports a range of emotional experiences for all children?
- How was our written guidance developed, maintained and communicated and how do we support each other to meet shared expectations?

## Action

- How could we show or explain how our management and staff attitudes ensure our written policies, information and guidance are put into practice?
- What examples could we give to show how staff respond sensitively to children and that any interventions are based on principles of good playwork practice?
- What evidence do we have to show how expectations around behaviour and relationships have been developed jointly and shared with everyone concerned?

## Review

- What difference have we made over the last year in the human play environment, and where was this discussed and recorded?
- How did we gather feedback from children and others on the feel of the human play environment and what it felt like for people who work or visit here?
- What specific things are we going to do next year and beyond to refine and improve our management and staff development?

# THE ORGANISATIONAL FRAMEWORK



# QUALITY AREA 4

## Reflective playwork practice

### THE STANDARD

**We reflect on our individual and team playwork policy and practice to ensure that it is in support of children's play. We evaluate and analyse how children play and how we interact with children to improve play opportunities and identify areas for professional development.**

This standard is about connecting knowledge and understanding of play theory to policy, and individual and team practice. Staff and management need to keep up to date with developments in play theory and practice and reflect on, analyse and evaluate observations of children's play and playwork practice in their provision.

The Playwork Principles say that the playworker's response to children and young people playing should be based on a sound up-to-date knowledge of the play process and reflective practice. This means thinking about what you do, why you do it and sharing the results so that your provision supports children's play.

Playworkers also need to recognise their own impact on the play space and the impact of children and young people's play on the playworker. A good place to start is to ask yourself why you are involved in children's play and what this means both for yourself and the children in your provision.

The standard recognises that reflective playwork practice will involve challenge and change for both individuals and teams. You will need to think about how and where reflection, and giving or receiving constructive criticism, takes place. Genuine discussion and sharing what different people think will help with organisational and professional development and lead to better outcomes for children.

A quality play provider encourages reflective playwork practice which builds sufficient time and resources into planning to develop good practice that supports children's play.

## Commitment and planning

**a.** We are committed to supporting team and individual reflective playwork practice.

Getting started  
date

Nearly met  
date

Fully met  
date

**b.** We have plans to ensure that staff are supported in their reflective playwork practice.

**c.** We have processes that enable everyone to reflect on their playwork practice.

## Action

**a.** We reflect on, analyse and evaluate our observations of children's play and playwork practice.

**b.** We give and receive constructive criticism on playwork policy and practice.

**c.** Reflections are recorded and used as a tool for continuous improvement and for developing future practice.

## Review

**a.** Records from reflective practice are used in the regular review and planning processes.

**b.** Training and professional development needs for reflective practice are reviewed and addressed through annual planning.

**c.** Good practice is valued by identifying what works and building on it for future development.



## Commitment and planning

- How does our written policy explain the importance of reflective playwork practice and plan for how we will do it?
- What methods do we use, both individually and in teams, to support reflective playwork practice?
- How do we plan and resource time for individual reflective practice and ensure that team discussions take place to support professional development?

## Action

- What practical steps have we taken to link play theory to staff and management practice?
- How is reflective practice organised to ensure confidentiality and trust?
- How do we record individual and team reflection and how do we assess, learn from and use the information?

## Review

- What have we done well and can we do more of it?
- How have the results of our reflective practice been fed into our planning to support children's play?
- What areas have we improved upon and what difference has this made for all children?
- How are training and professional development needs identified, prioritised and achieved?

# QUALITY AREA 5

## Workforce development

### THE STANDARD

**We are committed to continuous workforce development for all our staff and managers, whether paid or unpaid, permanent or temporary. We recruit, induct, retain and develop our people through a cycle of supervision and appraisal, reflective practice, training and skills needs analysis, and plan resources to ensure continuous professional development. We work in partnership with relevant agencies to support children's play and develop our provision within an integrated children's workforce.**

The focus of this standard is on all of the people in the organisation, including management and administration as well as those working directly with children. Therefore it links to all the other quality areas and the wider children's workforce development agenda. Staff, volunteers and managers need training, support and development to support children's play, to develop their skills and knowledge and gain the playwork and other qualifications needed in an integrated children's workforce.

Effective recruitment, induction and support are the foundations of successful workforce development. These then need to be built on through supervision and appraisal, reflective practice, resource planning, and building in the time to ensure continuous professional development. How you identify training needs, plan, design and deliver learning opportunities and evaluate them should be part of your planning cycle and overall approach to quality.

This will help everyone concerned to work within the Playwork Principles and develop the theoretical knowledge, reflective practice and practical skills to support children's play. You also need to plan for how you will be part of the wider children's workforce development — for example, in areas like safeguarding, information sharing, common core skills and the Common Assessment Framework — while retaining a play-centred focus.

As an advocate for children's play, a quality play provider uses close working relationships with the key local and regional partner, and support agencies concerned with play and children's well-being, to ensure they develop all their people, whatever their role.

## Commitment and planning

**a.** There are systems to support recruitment, induction, supervision and appraisal procedures and reflective practice.

Getting started  
date

Nearly met  
date

Fully met  
date

**b.** We have a plan to identify and meet learning needs for all staff and managers, including entry level, skills training, education qualifications and continuous professional development.

**c.** Budgets and resources for training, education and skills development have been identified.

## Action

**a.** We have an induction process and information pack for all staff, volunteers and managers.

**b.** We provide support for each person working for the organisation through supervision, appraisal and an individual professional development plan with clear entitlements.

**c.** We implement an organisational workforce plan with resources linked to related local, regional and national initiatives.

## Review

**a.** We review how well our workforce development procedures are working annually and when new requirements or initiatives arise.

**b.** We monitor practice to evaluate the impact of training and identify further professional development needs.

**c.** We use the results of review and evaluation to inform future plans, allocate resources and link with partner organisations concerned with workforce development



## Commitment and planning

- What policies, procedures and recording systems do we have relating to recruitment, induction and supervision?
- What regulatory requirements and local, regional and national initiatives are relevant to our workforce development?
- What budget do we dedicate to training and what funding support, training provision or in-house delivery methods can we use?

## Action

- What information do we provide to new staff, managers and volunteers in order for them to understand the organisation and their role in it?
- How often does supervision and appraisal take place? What records do we keep and how are individual training plans developed? What external support can we access?
- How is the organisation's workforce development plan devised, monitored and recorded and how does it relate to plans in the wider context?

## Review

- How do we review and evaluate workforce development procedures and how do we identify new requirements or initiatives?
- What issues have come out of consultation with staff in relation to training?
- How do we monitor the impact of training?
- How have results been incorporated into future plans and which organisations have we reported to?

# QUALITY AREA 6

## The law and regulation

### THE STANDARD

**We meet the requirements of the law and regulation relevant to play provision and are clear about the difference between these and non-statutory guidance or standards. We keep up-to-date with developments and good practice, and focus on supporting children's play when considering how we comply with legal and other requirements.**

A range of specific legislation and associated regulations applies to children's services and play provision, as does more generic law, for example, on equality and human rights, health and safety, employment and insurance information sharing and data protection, that will continue to develop. They are supported by statutory and non-statutory guidance and standards that also develop and change over time.

Though complying with the law, regulations and statutory guidance must be a priority, you should always consider the benefit for children when thinking about how guidance is interpreted and applied in practice. This is especially important in relation to non-statutory guidance and standards, where over-zealous interpretation can sometimes be used as an excuse for not doing things that support children's play. Play providers should always question and challenge themselves and others to ensure that how the law, regulation, guidance and standards are interpreted supports children's play.

Playwork Principle 4 says that for playworkers the play process takes precedence and playworkers act as advocates for play when engaging with adult-led agendas. You need to keep up-to-date with changes and developments in professional practice so that you are able to use authoritative arguments and examples of good practice when advocating for children's play within the adult-led legal and other agendas.

A quality provider works within law, applies guidance and standards so that they support children's play and can clearly make the arguments for why they have done so, backed up by authoritative sources.

## Commitment and planning

**a.** Our staff and management are aware of the legal, regulatory and statutory requirements and the non-statutory guidance and standards relevant to our provision.

Getting started  
date

Nearly met  
date

Fully met  
date

**b.** We have a plan for how we keep up with changes and developments through using up-to-date and authoritative sources of information.

**c.** Our overall planning is consistent with good practice in how legal and other requirements are applied and we are committed to ensuring that how we do this supports children's play.

## Action

**a.** We induct, train and provide relevant information to all our staff and management on their specific and overall legal and other responsibilities.

**b.** We use local, regional and national networks and other sources of information to ensure that we keep up-to-date with changes and developments.

**c.** We implement good practice from authoritative sources so that the benefits of children's play remains central to risk and other assessments of compliance with legal and other requirements.

## Review

**a.** We annually review how we comply with legal requirements and how we have implemented guidance and standards.

**b.** We evaluate how our involvement with networks and links with information sources has helped to improve our practice in implementing legal and other requirements.

**c.** We use the results to question and challenge our own practice and other people and agencies where necessary to ensure that everything we do is in support of children's play, while working within the law.



## Commitment and planning

- What examples could we give to show how staff and management are made aware of legal and other requirements?
- How could we show that we plan ahead to ensure we have the latest information from the best available sources?
- What is our policy on how we apply legal and other requirements in a way that supports children's play?

## Action

- How could we show or explain how everyone concerned knows about the legal and other requirements that apply to their role?
- What networks and other sources of information do we use to make sure we keep up-to-date?
- What examples do we have that show how we have used good practice in risk or other assessments?

## Review

- Who was involved and what methods did we use?
- How does the review show that our practice has improved as a result of using our networks and sources of information? Can we give examples?
- Can we give examples of how we challenged ourselves or others when interpreting and applying legal and other requirements?

# QUALITY AREA 7

## Project and resource management

### THE STANDARD

**We manage our resources in line with our aims and values to support children's play. We have a clearly defined project management structure and systems that help us manage every aspect of our provision effectively. We make best use of what we have and plan for how we can make it better with a focus on the reliability and sustainability of our service.**

This standard is about making sure that you use your human, physical and financial resources effectively, efficiently and ethically in support of children's play. It covers play provision run by local authorities, the voluntary sector and private organisations, whether individual projects or provision centrally managed within a larger organisation. Your project management structure should have clear reporting lines so that everyone concerned knows who is responsible and how they are accountable, and are clear about shared or changing areas of responsibility. This includes deputising or other arrangements, for example, when a manager or team member is on leave or otherwise absent.

You need systems to manage your tangible assets such as money, premises, outdoor play area, equipment, materials, furniture, facilities, vehicles, records and files — not forgetting your Quality in Play portfolio! You should be able to demonstrate that your physical resources are well used to support children's play, in line with your aims, objectives and values.

Your planning should cover all aspects of premises and site security; maintenance and repair or replacement schedules for premises facilities and equipment; insurance, inventories and secure storage of equipment materials and records; cleaning and waste collection, and how you dispose of or recycle items when they are no longer needed. There should be contingency plans in place to deal with unforeseen circumstances.

A quality play provider has project management systems that are clear to everyone concerned: are regularly reviewed and evaluated for effectiveness; and used for effective forward planning. The overall aim is to ensure the efficiency, reliability and sustainability of the service in support of children's play.

## Commitment and planning

**a.** We are committed to managing all our resources effectively, efficiently and ethically in line with our aims and values as part of our overall business planning.

**b.** We have a clear project management structure with plans and systems in place that are understood by everyone.

**c.** Our resource management plans cover both current and future needs, with contingency plans for unforeseen circumstances, to maximise the reliability of our service.

| Getting started date | Nearly met date      | Fully met date       |
|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
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| <input type="text"/> | <input type="text"/> | <input type="text"/> |
| <input type="text"/> | <input type="text"/> | <input type="text"/> |

## Action

**a.** We involve staff and management at all levels in our resource management planning, and we take the views of users into account.

**b.** We use staff team, management and other planning meetings to make sure that everyone concerned is clear about roles and responsibilities, how our systems work and that they understand and implement our plans.

**c.** We implement a year or longer-term plan with schedules for who needs to do what by when and how we will deal with unforeseen circumstances.

|                      |                      |                      |
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| <input type="text"/> | <input type="text"/> | <input type="text"/> |
| <input type="text"/> | <input type="text"/> | <input type="text"/> |

## Review

**a.** We annually review our resource management plans and check with users and other stakeholders that they continue to be fit for purpose.

**b.** We review our structures and systems for what has worked well and what we could do to improve them.

**c.** We use the results to plan ahead so that our service continues to support children’s play to the greatest extent possible.

|                      |                      |                      |
|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
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| <input type="text"/> | <input type="text"/> | <input type="text"/> |
| <input type="text"/> | <input type="text"/> | <input type="text"/> |



## Commitment and planning

- How could we show or explain that how we manage our resources fits with our aims, values and overall planning?
- What is our evidence of a clear project management structure, and how could we show that our staff, management and other stakeholders understand our systems?
- Can we give examples of how our plans cover both routine project management and unforeseen circumstances to ensure we maintain a reliable service to children and families?

## Action

- Who was involved in our planning, and how did we take the views of children, families and other stakeholders into account?
- How could we show that our people are clear about their roles? What examples could we give of how they have put our plans and systems into practice to support children's play?
- Have we got examples of who did what, and by when, in order to deal with routine resource management and how we dealt with problems that we couldn't foresee?

## Review

- Who was involved in our annual review, and how could we show that how we manage our resources continues to meet the needs of our users and other stakeholders?
- What examples could we give showing how our structures and systems have worked well, and is there anything we have changed to improve them?
- How could we show that we plan ahead to sustain our service and, where possible, improve how we support children's play?

# THE WIDER CONTEXT



# QUALITY AREA 8

## Clear play aims and values

### THE STANDARD

**Our aims and values are clearly stated, and the objectives by which we will achieve them are based on the playing child being at the centre of everything we do. We have defined our users and potential users in a clear and unambiguous written statement, outlining how the service we provide is accessible and inclusive. Our policies are consistent with the Playwork Principles and any local play strategy or children's plans.**

This standard is about making sure that everyone concerned is clear about your provision. It underpins other quality areas and means having an overall policy or service statement that shows how play provision in an individual setting, or as part of a wider service, aims to support children's play. It does not need to cover every bit of detail, but you should say in plain language how you aim to provide the best possible play opportunities for all children.

In the voluntary or private sector, it should link to your constitution, company articles or other governing document. In the public sector, it should link to the relevant play service overall mission statement or delivery plan. In all sectors, the policy and how it will be achieved should be consistent with the Playwork Principles and promote access and inclusion for all children.

The overall policy or statement should be very clear that the primary users of its services are children at play, so that in turn, the children, parents, staff, management, funders and the public are clear about what is and what is not provided. This is particularly important where your play provision is part of a childcare or other service for children and families. It might help to think about outcomes, outputs and inputs when working on how you aim to achieve your objectives. Consider, for example:

- outcomes — play as an outcome in itself, as well as contributing to other outcomes for children; what difference your provision intends to make in supporting children and how you would know it has happened.
- outputs — what you do to support children's play day-to-day and, over time, your activities and plans, reflection and review.
- inputs — your money, premises, play spaces, materials equipment, and staff and management knowledge.

Breaking it down in this way can help ensure that you are realistic about what you can provide, how you intend to create and maintain an environment that supports all children to play, and how this contributes to good outcomes for children's enjoyment of their childhood.

A quality play provider ensures that everyone concerned knows exactly what is and what is not provided; is clear about how they fit into the wider context and contributes to and keeps up-to-date with local, regional and national strategic play development and implementation.

## Commitment and planning

**a.** We have a written governing or other document that contains a clear statement of the overall aims of our provision in relation to play.

Getting started  
date

Nearly met  
date

Fully met  
date

**b.** We have a clear policy that sets out the type and range of our provision and what we do and do not offer.

**c.** We have clearly defined our aims in line with the inclusion principles and the values of full access and opportunities incorporated in our diversity or equal policy and implementation plan.

## Action

**a.** We provide a range of play opportunities for local children and consistently achieve our service aims and objectives.

**b.** Our overall policy or service statement is discussed with children and families on first contact.

**c.** We have a clear understanding of the Playwork Principles and the values of access and inclusion and consistently put them into practice.

## Review

**a.** Comments from children, families and other stakeholders are monitored and incorporated into our review processes.

**b.** The policy or service statement is updated and adapted in response to feedback, our reflective practice and any new developments.

**c.** Our aims and values are reviewed annually against the Playwork Principles and current legal and professional standards, including those related to access and inclusion.



## Commitment and planning

- How does our governing document, mission statement or other statement of purpose support children's freely chosen play?
- How have we checked that our policy or service statement clearly describes our service?
- How can we show that our aims and objectives are consistent with the Playwork Principles, and what methods have we used to ensure access and inclusion is part of our policy and planning?

## Action

- What is our evidence of how we provide a range of play opportunities and consistently achieve our aims and objectives?
- What examples could we give of how we go through the policy or service statement with children and families?
- How could we show our understanding and implementation the of Playwork Principles, access and inclusion?

## Review

- How did we look back at how we consulted children, families and other stakeholders on our provision and on what difference we made as a result?
- Who was involved, and when, in updating the service statement, and how could we show that our reflective practice fed into the process?
- What evidence do we have that shows we continue to be consistent with the Playwork Principles and meet legal and professional standards, including those related to access and inclusion?

# QUALITY AREA 9

## Communicating effectively

### THE STANDARD

**We ensure that how information is created, displayed, circulated and communicated is right for our play provision. We use a variety of methods to ensure that existing and potential users, our staff and management, funders and the public have the information they need, and that the language and imagery we use is clear, accessible and inclusive. We respond promptly and effectively to messages we receive.**

This standard is about looking at the two-way flow of information between children and families, staff and management and relevant external agencies. It recognises that play providers and their users will vary in their ability to access and use communication technology and resources, and that there needs to be a balance between too much and too little information for everyone concerned.

However, effective communication underpins nearly everything you do and poor communication is one of the biggest causes of problems, especially when comments suggestions and complaints are not taken up and acted upon. Therefore it is important to examine how well you are sending out your messages, how you respond to those you receive and check that 'the message sent is the message received' to ensure that you are communicating well internally and externally.

Written or other visual information aimed at the public, such as notices and displays, and how you communicate verbally and non-verbally, especially with children and families, send out powerful messages about overall quality. Equally, how you recognise and respond to children's play cues and the attitude of staff and management will have a major effect on how welcoming, accessible and inclusive your provision is for all children.

Internal communication systems and processes need to be clear relevant and up-to-date, and should ensure people get the information they need in good time so that they can act on it as needed. There should be a presumption that all information is in the public domain except in clearly defined, sensitive or confidential areas, in line with the law, regulation and good practice on data protection, safeguarding and sharing information.

A quality play provider thinks about who their external and internal audiences are and what information they need. Funders will want information about how their money has made a difference, while children, families and communities will be more interested in what is provided. Staff and management will need clear policies, procedures, accounting and reporting systems to help with planning and delivering the service.

## Commitment and planning

**a.** We are committed to making sure that the language and images we use and our responses to the messages we receive, including comments, suggestions and complaints, are sensitive and right for everyone concerned.

Getting started  
date

Nearly met  
date

Fully met  
date

**b.** We have clear internal communication systems so that our children and families, staff and management, funders and other stakeholders have the information they need to help us support children's play.

**c.** Our policy covers data protection and confidentiality, sharing information, safeguarding and responding to concerns in line with legal requirements and good practice.

## Action

**a.** We provide information to our users and respond to external communications in a way that supports children's play as the priority, while meeting the needs of families, communities and other stakeholders.

**b.** We organise our internal systems to make sure that everyone concerned with our provision has the relevant, and up-to-date information they need and we respond to what children expressly or implicitly tell us through their play.

**c.** Our staff and management are clear about what information and communications are in the public domain and what is sensitive or confidential.

## Review

**a.** We review our communications policy and practice to make sure they are accessible, accurate and reliable and we check that we have responded to comments suggestions and complaints.

**b.** We use our observations of children's play to improve how we communicate with children and families and to be an advocate for play to other stakeholders.

**c.** We ensure we keep up-to-date with legal requirements and good practice in how we use and share information internally and externally.



## Commitment and planning

- What examples have we got that show how our language and images send out the right messages and are understood by everyone concerned?
- How do we share information internally to make sure that everyone has the information they need?
- How does our policy on how we handle information show that we meet legal requirements and good practice?

## Action

- What information or images have we sent out or displayed, and how have we responded to what people tell us or ask us?
- How could we show that staff and management have the information they need?
- What have we done as a direct result of observing children's play or listening to what they tell us?
- How do we deal with and respond to comments, suggestions and complaints?
- How could we show that everyone knows how to be open and transparent while making sure that sensitive or confidential information is kept and shared securely?

## Review

- How does our annual review show that we thought about and made any changes needed to our communications policy and practice?
- How could we show or explain how we have used our observations of children's play to improve our two-way communication with them, their families and other stakeholders?
- What have we done well in keeping up with good practice and how are we going to build on this?

# QUALITY AREA 10

## Working in the community

### THE STANDARD

**We actively seek the views of families and the community and involve them in how we plan, manage and deliver our service. We see our provision as part of a network of more and better play opportunities for all children in our area. We provide information about our own play provision and build links with other play opportunities and wider services for children and families and signpost the local community to them.**

The local community is the sea in which play provision swims or sinks, and therefore should be invited to have a say in how play provision is managed and delivered to support children's play. Whether the management and delivery structure is in the public, private, voluntary, social enterprise or other sectors, local people should be actively engaged and their ideas taken into account.

As any individual play provider is unlikely to be able to provide a full range of play opportunities for all children all of the time in their community or neighbourhood, they need to see themselves as part of the wider play offer in the area. Playwork Principle 1 says that play is fundamental to the healthy development and well-being of children and communities, and this idea is increasingly being embedded in public policy at local, regional and national level.

Play providers should have good links with other staffed play provision and know about other designated play areas and informal playable space in their neighbourhood. Equally, as children's services are increasingly integrated, they need to make links with networks of professionals who work with children and young people in their area. This will enable play and other services to signpost children and families to each other and build community awareness of what is available.

Quality play providers make particular efforts to contact local families and children's services to ensure the inclusion of all children in a range of play opportunities in their neighbourhood, as part of any wider area plans for children and play.

## Commitment and planning

**a.** Our written policy covers how we formally and informally engage with and involve families and the community in how we plan and deliver our service.

**b.** We have made links with other play provision in the area to ensure our service is part of the community and the wider play offer in the area.

**c.** We have a plan for how we make links with networks of children’s service professionals and how we signpost our own and other services to children and families in the community.

Getting started  
date

Nearly met  
date

Fully met  
date










## Action

**a.** We create and maintain links with families and the wider community by providing good information, involving them in our planning and responding positively to both suggestions and complaints.

**b.** Our staff and management create and maintain links with other play provision and we know how we fit into any local play strategies or children’s plans.

**c.** We keep in touch with others working with children to ensure everyone concerned knows what is provided in the area, especially accessible and inclusive play opportunities.










## Review

**a.** The annual review focuses on how well we have engaged with and involved families and the community and how we fit into the wider picture of children’s play.

**b.** We check what difference family community involvement in our planning and action has actually made.

**c.** We use the results of the annual review to check that we have good links with other people working with children and that we share information effectively.



## Commitment and planning

- How can management and staff explain or show how we engage with and involve families and the community?
- What formal and informal methods do we use to do this?
- What links do we have with other play provision in the area and how could we show we fit into local planning for children and young people?
- How could we show that we plan to be part of a network of children's services professionals and share information about our own and other services with the community?

## Action

- What information have we provided to families on how to get involved in our provision and how can we show or explain that we have responded positively to them?
- How did we link up with other play provision in our area and how can we explain or show where we fit into any local play strategy or plans for children and young people?
- How did we set up and maintain links with other people working with children to promote access and inclusion for all children?

## Review

- How does our annual review show what difference we made over the last year in engaging with families and the community?
- What changes have we made as a result of looking at how we fit into the local community and the wider picture?
- What specific things are we going to do next year and beyond to refine and improve our links with families, the community and other children's services professionals?

# QUALITY AREA 11

## The bigger picture

### THE STANDARD

**Our staff and management have an understanding of how our provision fits in with our neighbourhood community and the wider local area and national play strategies. Our primary focus is on the playing child in our provision, but we also have links with other play and children's services agencies and keep up-to-date with play policy and practice development. We make sure we know about and try to influence wider agendas that have an impact on local children.**

This standard is about looking outwards as well as inwards and thinking about how your provision sits within the wider local area and national play strategies as well as supporting children's play in the immediate neighbourhood. Having a good understanding of how you fit into the bigger picture helps you to plan more effectively and sustain funding, as play is commissioned or otherwise funded within local and national strategies for play and other children's services.

Good links with play providers and children's services agencies will help to spread the play message, raise the profile of play provision and share information that might not otherwise be easily accessible, for example specific needs of disabled, minority community or other potentially marginalised children. Other agencies responsible for planning, housing, regeneration, extended service schools and the wider public realm, that have an effect on children's play, also need to understand their input on your provision and children's play in general.

Playwork Principle 4 says that for playworkers the play process takes precedence and playworkers act as advocates for play when engaging with adult-led agendas. Keeping up with policy and practice development in the play sector and beyond will help in this influencing role. This is particularly important for play ranger, mobile and other projects working in the public domain, but site-based staffed provision also need to be an advocate for children's play in their neighbourhood and wider area.

As children's services are increasingly integrated, play providers need to be able to show how they contribute to children's well-being while keeping a focus on play as an outcome in itself. This will also help to develop good two-way relationships between play provision and area play service or other managers, those responsible for commissioning and other funders, and help them to have a strategic overview and understanding of play as central to children's well-being.

## Commitment and planning

**a.** Management and staff are familiar with local play provision and are committed to working in partnership with other play providers.

**b.** We have a plan for making links with key people and agencies in the area, or elsewhere, to ensure we have the information we need, including keeping up with play policy and practice development, to be an advocate for children's play.

**c.** We have a plan for how we will sustain our funding by influencing other agendas.

## Action

**a.** We have assessed how we fit within local and national strategies for children and young people, made contact with and fed back information to the local authority and other local forums for children and young people's providers.

**b.** We have made links with play and other agencies so as to have an overview of how children's play is supported in our neighbourhood, share good practice and keep up-to-date with play policy and practice to ensure that we can make the case for children's play.

**c.** We work with play and other service managers, commissioning, funding and other agencies to develop and implement our sustainable funding plan.

## Review

**a.** We annually review how our provision fits in with the wider context and how we have influenced area-play and other relevant strategies.

**b.** We look at what difference our links with other agencies and sources of information has made to planning and practice.

**c.** We use the results to improve our service delivery and sustain our funding.

Getting started  
date

Nearly met  
date

Fully met  
date



## Commitment and planning

- How could we show our understanding of, and involvement in, local plans for children and young people's services and explain how our provision fits within it?
- What play and other agencies in our local area or elsewhere have we used to gather and share information on good practice with, and keep up with play policy and practice development?
- How does our planning show how we and others have thought about sustainable funding and how far ahead have we looked?

## Action

- What information do we provide to the play partnership or other strategic forum on our provision and what could be improved on in the neighbourhood?
- Who have we contacted to find out about gaps in play provision and share good practice with; and what sources have we used to keep up with developments in play policy and practice?
- Who in our provision and other agencies was involved in our forward planning?

## Review

- How does our annual review show where we fit into the bigger picture; and what other evidence do we have to show that play or other service managers know about and value our provision?
- What difference has sharing good practice and keeping up with developments in play made to our provision?
- How could we show that we are part of long-term strategies for commissioning or otherwise funding our provision?

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# GLOSSARY OF TERMS

## (OR WHAT WE MEAN BY THE WORDS WE USE IN THE MANUAL)

**Access:** how children and families are able to know about, get to and from, move around in and use your provision.

**Accreditation:** the award of a certificate by the Quality in Play accreditation panel stating that your provision has met the quality standards.

**Appraisal:** how staff and managers are assessed for how well they carry out their duties against the job description, targets or tasks set the aims and objectives of the organisation.

**Assessment:** **(1)** self-assessment is where your provision checks your practice against the quality standards and indicators: **(2)** external assessment is where an independent person checks your evidence, visits your provision and makes a recommendation to the accreditation panel.

**Business plan:** a written document setting out who you are, what you've been doing over time and intend to do in the future, how this will be delivered and managed, and showing how it will be funded, with details of the expected flow of income and expenditure.

**Commissioning:** funding by local authorities and other public bodies such as children's trusts through a contract, service-level or other formal agreement, as opposed to grant aid.

**Complaints and suggestions:** a written step-by-step procedure for making complaints with detailed approach at each step, timetable for responses and, at least, an annual review of complaints received and how or whether resolved. The best way to avoid complaints in the first place is to have a system that everyone concerned can use to suggest improvements.

**Confidentiality:** you must keep confidential information such as details of children and parents, staff and management securely, and not disclose it to others without good reason, or as required by law or regulation.

**Contingency:** **(1)** thinking ahead and a 'what if' plan to deal with unforeseen circumstances, e.g., staff shortage in income or increase in expenditure **(2)** putting money aside or planning for known future liabilities, e.g., building or site maintenance, increases in staff or other costs.

**Data protection:** the law and regulation covering how personal information held in computer and manual systems must be controlled.

**Evaluation:** making a judgement about the success or otherwise of an activity or more general progress by using information collected through monitoring. There is no point in collecting monitoring information if it is not evaluated in some way.

**Formal:** a systematic, recorded process e.g. meetings are minuted, reports to management are discussed as part of an agenda, a policy or procedure is officially adopted.

**Funder:** an agency or body that provides money in the form of a grant or donation. While there may be conditions attached to how the money is spent it is not normally through a contract or service agreement.

**Governing document:** the document which sets out the structure, powers and responsibilities of an organisation **(1)** in the voluntary sector (depending on the type of organisation), the constitution, rules, memorandum and articles of association, trust deed or declaration of trust; **(2)** In local government, the statutory duties, legal powers, member approval or terms of reference under which a service is provided; **(3)** in the private sector, the company articles, partnership or other legal document under which the provider operates.

**Guidance:** **(1)** Statutory guidance gives clarification on how the law and regulation should be applied and must be followed. **(2)** Non-statutory guidance is advisory but should be followed to ensure good practice.

**Inclusion:** the principle that not only do you not discriminate against people, but that you take positive steps to ensure that they can participate to the fullest extent.

**Induction:** the process by which new staff, volunteers or management are familiarised with the organisation, its policies and procedures, services provided, etc.

**Integrated workforce/working:** play and other practitioners across children's services working together to improve outcomes for children, e.g., by sharing relevant information or using the Common Assessment Framework.

**Intervention:** **(1)** becoming involved in children's play when invited by children through a direct request or through a play cue; **(2)** becoming involved without an invitation e.g. to prevent harm, to set up or lead a planned activity, or help children extend their play.

**Management:** this covers trustees or management committee members in the voluntary sector, staff in management or supervisory roles in individual settings; service or area managers in local authority or other centrally managed provision; and owners or proprietors in the private sector. The point is that everyone has responsibility for quality, not just staff working directly with children.

**Monitoring: (1)** collecting and recording information for review or evaluation; **(2)** the process by which a funder, purchaser or regulatory body checks progress or services provided against a set criteria, conditions, targets or outcomes.

**Observation:** watching and thinking about what children are doing when they play, and/or how staff interact with children.

**Play strategy:** a document setting out the local district, county or unitary area strategic approach to supporting children's play.

**Policy:** a written statement setting out your overall approach or how you cover a particular issue, for example, safeguarding. Policies need to be put into practice, so should be as short, realistic and succinct as possible.

**Portfolio:** typically a ring binder containing evidence clearly cross-referenced to areas of a quality assurance system, which can be used for internal self-assessment and monitoring, as an overall project manual for induction and reference, and as evidence for external assessment and accreditation.

**Practice:** what actually happens (or doesn't happen) day-to-day and over time, ways of doing things.

**Procedure:** written statement setting out, step-by-step, how your policies will actually be carried out, by whom, and in what way.

**Professional development plan:** how you support the organisation as a whole and individual staff and managers to improve knowledge, skills and practice.

**Project management:** your systems for how the person in charge, senior member of staff or other post: (director, play manager, etc.) carries out day-to-day and longer-term management of the staff, facilities and resources.

**Provider provision:** in almost all cases the specific site where play is provided. Quality in Play accredits individual play projects, not wider area play services or large organisations providing play on multiple sites. Mobile and play ranger projects, or those with an outreach element from a main play base are normally the only exceptions.

**Review:** staff and management formally looking at what they have done well and what could be improved. It should be based on evidence of how you supported children's play and feed into planning for how you will improve outcomes for children.

**Risk assessment: (1)** legally required under the Health and Safety at Work Act (Management Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1992) where five or more people are employed, and under other legal and regulatory requirements, e.g. offsite activities, **(2)** balancing the potential harm to children and the likelihood of it happening, against the benefits to children of learning to recognise and manage risk for themselves.

**Safeguarding:** how you ensure the well-being of children across the whole spectrum of child protection, risk assessment, sharing information and preventing harm. You need to show that you comply with the law and regulation while not unduly restraining children's play.

**Service statement:** a clear and unambiguous document or leaflet with the key information about your service covering your and the users' expectations.

**Sharing information:** making sure that play and other children's services practitioners work together in the best interests of children, particularly vulnerable children, by sharing necessary information, for example through the Common Assessment Framework.

**Signposting:** pointing people to where information, resources or services are, rather than providing them directly or reinventing the wheel.

**Social enterprise:** an organisation that ploughs any profit from activities back into the business to support social goals.

**Staff:** anyone working for the organisation, whether on the payroll or unpaid volunteers, permanent or temporary, full-time or sessional. Some staff will have dual management and direct service delivery roles, for example, senior playworkers, play centre managers.

**Stakeholder:** anyone with a particular interest in the provision, e.g. children, families and the community, funders or commissioners, regulatory bodies, local or national government.

**Supervision:** the process by which staff and volunteers are managed and supported in their work, whether through line management or by other means.

**Sustainability:** making sure you plan ahead for how you will link into local area or other funding or commissioning sources to maintain core funding, or replace time-limited project funding. You should have at least an outline plan looking three years ahead.

**Tools and frameworks:** good practice materials or systems developed by play and other organisations, e.g. Play England on managing risk: Kids on disabled access and inclusion; and SkillsActive on workforce training, qualification and development.

**Values:** basically the same as principles, but we use values when talking about overall play aims or access, inclusion and equality issues to make sure there is no confusion with the Playwork Principles.

**Workforce development:** training, education and support for your staff and management supported by a national strategy and programmes to improve skills and build a qualified children's play workforce.

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