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*****PRESS RELEASE*****

GOVERNMENT HELD TO ACCOUNT OVER PLAY & RECREATION

The Government has amended the Every Child Matters Inspection Framework to specifically mention the word 'play', having been prompted by consultation comments from the play sector.

Now judgements may be made in inspections of children's services against whether there are safe and accessible places where children can play and socialise.

Further, Baroness Andrews agreed to meet with children's groups over the issue of the absence of play and recreation from guidance relating to the Children Act to discuss their concerns.

When Lord Pendry successfully amended the Children Bill last summer to include the word recreation, he was given an assurance by the Government that the term recreation by definition included play, and that this would be made clear in guidance relating to the Children Act.

Lord Pendry's amendment meant that Local Authorities would have to take account of recreation alongside other children's services when considering children's well being.

However, as the Government consulted on the Every Child Matters Inspection Framework it became clear that children's groups, (including SkillsActive and the Children's Play Council) were disappointed with the limited extent to which recreation and play had been included.

In the House of Lords this week Lord Pendry questioned the Government on the issue and managed to get an assurance from the Minister that she would agree to meet with interested groups to hear their concerns.

Responding for the Government Baroness Andrews said: "We continue to value the consultations that we have with the voluntary sector. The noble Lord might like to know that the Minister has written to him today, to tell him that the inspection guidance which is now being looked at in relation to consultation will clarify that play is within the scope of the key judgments on recreational provision. That is the first time that inspection will make reference to play and recreation. That is an important step forward."

The letter to Lord Pendry from Margaret Hodge, children minister, confirmed that play has now been incorporated into the inspection framework.

Paul Bonel, Director of Playwork, SkillsActive, said: “It certainly sounds like excellent news that play is to be included in the Every Child Matters Inspection Framework after all and it shows the Government are keen to maintain their fruitful dialogue with the play sector. I await sight of the final inspection framework document in the hope that as the letter suggests play has been included in a meaningful capacity.”

“We were initially disappointed that recreation was mentioned so little in the Every Child Matters (ECM) Inspection Framework, especially after all the hard work to get recreation included during the passage of the Children Bill. Even more disheartening was the fact that play was not mentioned at all, despite assurances it would be made clear that recreation included play. We thought the Children Act meant that recreation must be considered on an equal footing alongside other important children’s services. Although I have yet to see the finished guidance, perhaps now we can ensure this is the case.”

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NOTES TO EDITORS

1. SkillsActive is the Sector Skills Council (SSC) for Sport and Recreation, Health and Fitness, Playwork, The Outdoors and the Caravan industries.
2. SkillsActive’s mission statement is: “To ensure best quality, best business and best value within the Sector to achieve its economic and social potential.”
3. SSCs are employer-led organisations that aim to tackle the skills and productivity needs of their sector throughout the UK. SSCs provide employers with the opportunity to provide leadership to meet their sector’s skills and business needs. In return they receive substantial public investment and greater dialogue with government departments across the UK.
4. For more information about SkillsActive, please visit our website @ www.skillsactive.com
5. SkillsActive is currently developing a Sector Skills Agreement for the Active Leisure and Learning Sector which will define the Sector’s skills needs and ultimately form an agreement between employers, Government and funding partners to shape the workforce for the next ten years.