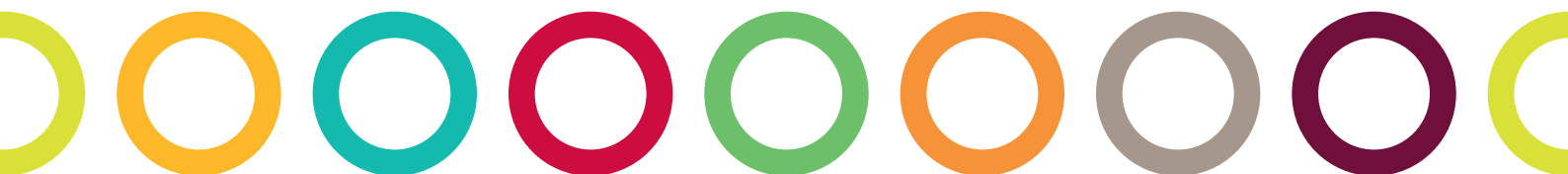




Playwork in extended school services

A guide for local authorities and advisors



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Children and young people possess an innate drive to play. Incorporating this within an adult facilitated extended school services environment can make a major contribution to a popular and successful 'core offer'. SkillsActive's national Playwork Unit and regional centres are working with the TDA, ContinYou, 4Children and the Children's Play Council to provide information and support to ensure extended services' staff working in playwork and childcare roles have appropriate education, training and qualifications.

All children are entitled to play; it is intrinsic to their quality of life and an important part of how they learn and enjoy themselves. It is also a key component of a healthy lifestyle, enabling good physical, emotional, mental and social development. At its most successful it offers children and young people as much choice, control and freedom as possible.

With the lengthening of time potentially spent under the school umbrella, it is crucial that sports, study support, and other activities offered are not at the expense of play opportunities. A commitment to this is often best expressed in a policy statement, and a strategy written to assist with funding and ensure action is taken and monitored.

The educational agenda is a challenging one; children benefit from before and after school activities which complement rather than duplicate this, and it is essential that they are able to access opportunities, space and time for free play, ideally facilitated and supported by a playwork framework.

Playwork supports children in creating and determining their own goals and outcomes through play. There is set of National Occupational Standards and an established framework of principles, qualifications and training developed by the sector; different but complementary to those offered in educational, early years, and other allied fields.

Schools already provide significant play opportunities, and many utilise playwork skills; some formally employ playworkers or provide play training for meal time supervisors, others use local adventure playgrounds or playcentres as extensions of school facilities, while still others support and develop play-rich school grounds and projects



SkillsActive is the Sector Skills Council for Active Leisure and Learning. SkillsActive is charged with leading the skills and productivity drive within the Sport and Recreation, Health and Fitness, Playwork, The Outdoors and Caravan industries.

"Play can be fun or serious. Through play children explore social, material and imaginary worlds and their relationship with them, elaborating all the while a flexible range of responses to the challenges they encounter. By playing, children learn and develop as individuals, and as members of the community"¹.

¹Best Play, What play provision should do for children, National Playing Fields Association, Children's Play Council, Playlink, 2000



Playwork can contribute to all elements of the core offer

Key contributions include:

Childcare: Numerous well-established providers offer high quality local provision. Many schools already have close links with these and these should be the first point of contact when setting up out-of-school provision. The best providers work to playwork principles, and employ staff with DfES and QCA approved playwork qualifications.

Varied menu of activities: Access to both outdoor and indoor environments provide a wide range of opportunities for different types of play, which complements more structured activities. Staffed provision in particular enables more adventurous opportunities to be provided safely and is also able to offer an expanded variety of activities. These could range from creating dens and go kart building, to learning how to use tools, making a garden, or devising dramatic productions. Clear demarcation is necessary however if staff work both in an educational and playwork capacity.

Parenting support: Play is a common language that can involve parents and carers, and many parenting organisations recognise the value of play in working with families and use it in their work. Playwork settings are also useful in building relationships with children, young people, their parents and carers and can act as a non-threatening point of contact.

Referrals to specialist services: Play specialists help children come to terms with traumatic issues such as dealing with cancer, and play therapy and therapeutic playwork deals with emotional and behavioural issues. Play also enhances support for vulnerable children and those most at risk through building of friendships and the therapeutic nature of play, especially facilitated play.

Wider community access to ICT, sports and arts facilities, including adult learning: Playwork encourages children to develop wider interests and new skills, which can lead to demand from them and their families for facilities and services. Playwork and childcare courses are in increasingly high demand, which backed up by high-quality childcare contributes to adult learning programs.



The Next Steps

A school policy on play and a strategy are essential first steps, and both SkillsActive regional centres and Children's Play Council can provide information on how to develop these. SkillsActive have also developed a specific guide to planning training and qualifications in extended schools, as well as offering support and guidance on playwork training, education, qualifications, workforce development and funding.



The Five Outcomes

Playwork contributes to achieving better outcomes for children, young people, their families and the wider community. Both play and playwork can support the outcomes framework's target indicators, and there are specific key judgements and supporting evidence directly applicable to playwork as well as others which play indirectly supports. SkillsActive have also developed a playwork module for Ofsted, and this has been successfully completed by more than 900 childcare inspectors.

Being Healthy:

Active play uses more calories than many organised sports², and is recommended in a number of DOH reports³. It also develops essential skills such as teamwork and co-ordination, providing a basis for participation in organised sports

Staying safe:

Play is a key element in children learning to appreciate, assess and take calculated risks, which is fundamental to the development of confidence and abilities in childhood. Children seek out opportunities for risk-taking and it is the responsibility of play provision to respond with exciting and stimulating environments that balance risks appropriately⁴.

Enjoying and Achieving:

Learning through play contributes to problem solving, language and literacy skills, and children develop self-esteem and positive outlooks on life through the enjoyment of play. Pupils are motivated by the additional activities in school and this can improve their learning⁵.

Play complements schooling by providing an opportunity for children to review, absorb and to give personal meaning to what they learn in formal educational settings.

Making a positive contribution:

Play empowers children and provides social tools to participate in decision making, especially relevant for student councils and playground peer mediation schemes.

Achieving economic wellbeing:

The increasing demand for qualified, trained playworkers provides employment for trainers and assessors as well as potential for parents to learn and become more economically active.



² Making children's lives more active, Professor Roger Mackett, Centre For Transport Studies University College London, 2004

³ Chief Medical Officer (2004) At Least Five a Week: Evidence on the impact of physical activity and its relationship to health, Department of Health. The Chief Nursing Officer's review of the nursing, midwifery and health visiting contribution to vulnerable children and young people, Department of Health

⁴ Best Play, What play provision should do for children, National Playing Fields Association, Children's Play Council, Playlink, 2000

⁵ Extended schools: a report on early developments, OFSTED, HMI 2453 May 2005

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