

Chwarae Cymru
Play Wales



Chwarae o Safon

Playwork quality mark

Guidance

Chwarae o Safon 

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Contents

Introduction	3
What is playwork quality assurance?	4
Types of quality assessment	5
Who is it for?	5
Supporting quality	6
Children's rights	6
Playwork Principles	7
Qualifications and training	7
Supporting policy	8
Reflective practice	9
Understanding the process	10
Using the <i>Self-assessment and evidence framework</i>	14
Understanding the quality indicators	14
Glossary	15

Introduction

Play Wales has worked with the sector to develop the Chwarae o Safon – playwork quality mark. Titled using the Welsh ‘Chwarae o Safon’, which means ‘Play of Quality’, its development has been supported by an expert reference group, including:

- Children’s Commissioner for Wales’ Office
- Clybiau Plant Cymru Kids’ Clubs
- Social Care Wales
- Care Inspectorate Wales
- Welsh Government
- Early Years Wales
- playworkers
- playwork trainers
- playwork employers from early years, open access playwork and out of school childcare settings.

Chwarae o Safon builds on, and replaces, *The First Claim ... a framework for playwork quality assessment* (2001) and *The First Claim – desirable processes* (2002). These publications are still available and continue to be useful reference material.

Chwarae o Safon is intended for use by playwork settings that are regulated by Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) as well as in unregulated settings and those doing playwork in non-dedicated playwork settings.

Chwarae o Safon consists of four sections that make up two quality marks:

Chwarae o Safon – playwork practice quality mark

1. Children’s play experiences
2. The playwork environment.

The playwork practice quality mark is suitable for all settings which use a playwork approach or have staff who have completed playwork training or qualifications and want to evidence good playwork practice. This would include dedicated playwork settings but may also include youth work, early years, education, sports or health provision.

Chwarae o Safon – playwork policy quality mark

3. Playwork policy and practice
4. The playwork organisation.

The playwork policy quality mark is suitable for settings where the main purpose is to support children’s play using a playwork approach. This includes regulated and unregulated settings that define themselves as:

- peripatetic or play ranger provision
- adventure playgrounds
- out of school childcare
- open access playwork.

This quality mark focuses on the policies, procedures and organisational ethos that supports the playwork practice. It is expected that settings will already have completed the playwork practice quality mark.

What is playwork quality assurance?

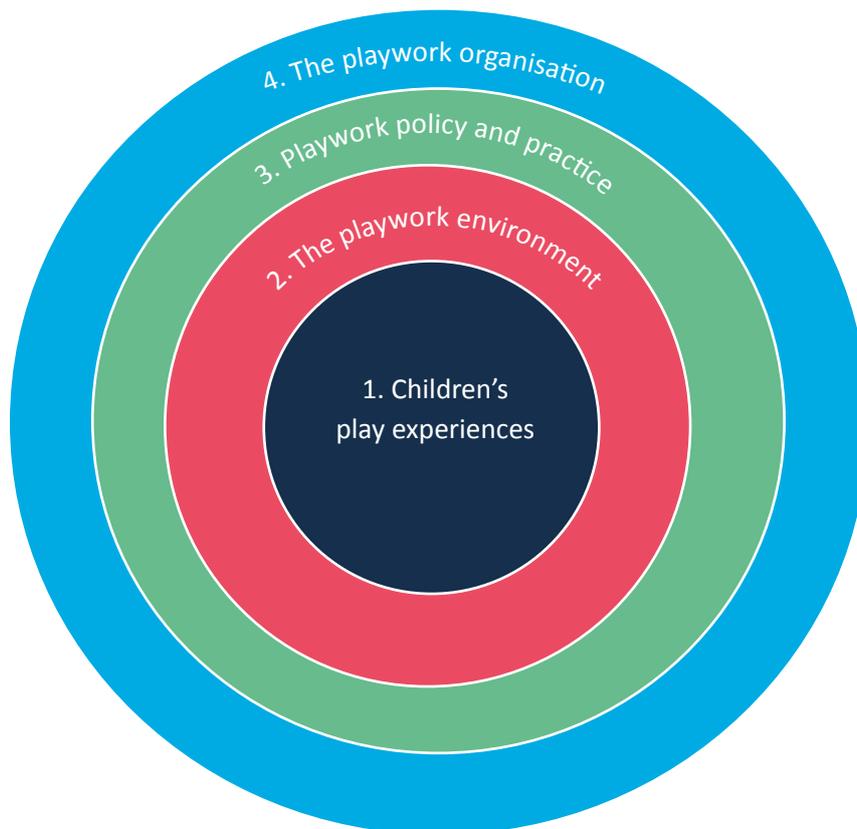
Playwork quality assurance is the process of looking deeply at our playwork practice to improve the quality of children's play experiences in the wide range of settings where playwork takes place. It builds on playworkers' qualifications, training, experience and knowledge of the Playwork Principles. It helps us to look critically at specific elements of our work (quality indicators) and how we ensure these elements are realised in principle and in practice. This process of critical analysis is built into our professional ethos through reflective practice.

Chwarae o Safon formalises this process so that we can evidence to ourselves and others that our practice fits with the quality expectations of our sector. It is

beneficial in its own right for our staff, setting and of course for children but also demonstrates to parents, funders, and legal and regulatory bodies that our setting is of quality. It should support other quality assurance processes.

Quality assurance is an ongoing process. Chwarae o Safon provides a framework for us to assess where we are currently by looking closely at the children's play experience, the environment we facilitate, how policy and practice support children's play and how our wider organisation supports these other elements. Once we know where we are (quality assessment) we can then plan for what we need to do to improve certain elements or to ensure that quality is maintained (quality assurance). The diagram below is a visual representation of this.

The Chwarae o Safon quality framework – with children's play experiences at its centre:



Types of quality assessment

Chwarae o Safon involves both self-assessment and external assessment, using the *Self-assessment and evidence framework* that is available alongside this guidance.

When we begin the process, we should start with the playwork practice quality mark and go through a process of self-assessment. This involves looking at all the quality indicators and using them to reflect on where we are as a playwork setting against each indicator. In addition to the quality indicators, Chwarae o Safon includes more objective measures for 'what children can expect' against each specific indicator. The 'what children can expect' elements should support us in our reflections and evidence gathering.

The process of self-assessment will help us to identify what evidence we already have against each quality indicator and subsequently generate further evidence if required. If we do not meet a quality indicator, we may need to make changes. This may involve:

- accessing training
- individual research
- giving consideration to collecting or collating information in different ways
- amending our practice
- focusing on our reflective practice for a few weeks to draw out different evidence.

This process of self-assessment is absolutely fundamental to our quality assurance – without knowing where we are, we cannot plan where we need to go next. Section 5 of the *Self-assessment and evidence framework* gives us a process to action plan to assure (maintain) quality over time.

Once we have undertaken the self-assessment process and are confident of our quality assurance, settings can register with Play Wales for external assessment. This process is explained in more detail later in this guidance.

Who is it for?

Chwarae o Safon requires us to engage with the whole staff team to ensure that the professional and ethical approach to children's play is understood and implemented by all.

Playwork practice

The playwork practice quality mark has been designed so that those who have completed level 2 playwork qualifications hold the underpinning knowledge to respond to the quality indicators. It requires us to reflect on our practice and the Playwork Principles to consider the tangible difference our practice is making to children's play. The playwork practice quality mark also requires that those who are ultimately responsible for the setting – employers or managers – understand and support the playwork approach so that practitioners can undertake their job effectively.

Playwork policy

The playwork policy quality mark takes this quality assurance to the next level and considers how the overall running of our organisation supports children's play. This includes our operational policies and procedures but also considers how we engage with other organisations, the wider community and how our governance and financial arrangements ensure a viable and sustainable provision for children. Whilst the concepts in the playwork policy quality mark should make sense to all staff, and therefore they should be involved in evidence gathering, the overall responsibility for many of the quality indicators will sit with managers or employers.

Chwarae o Safon does not include elements which are part of our existing legal responsibility, therefore doesn't focus on health and safety checks, safeguarding or staff checks, except when there is a direct link to our playwork practice or the quality of the children's play experiences. For this reason, it contains quality indicators about risk-benefit assessment of children's play but not for health and safety checks of buildings. Similarly, you will find indicators about staff suitability in terms of qualifications and experience but not about DBS checks.

Chwarae o Safon supports quality playwork practice, and therefore by undertaking this process, we ensure that all staff, including trainees, are supported to embed a playwork approach.

Supporting quality

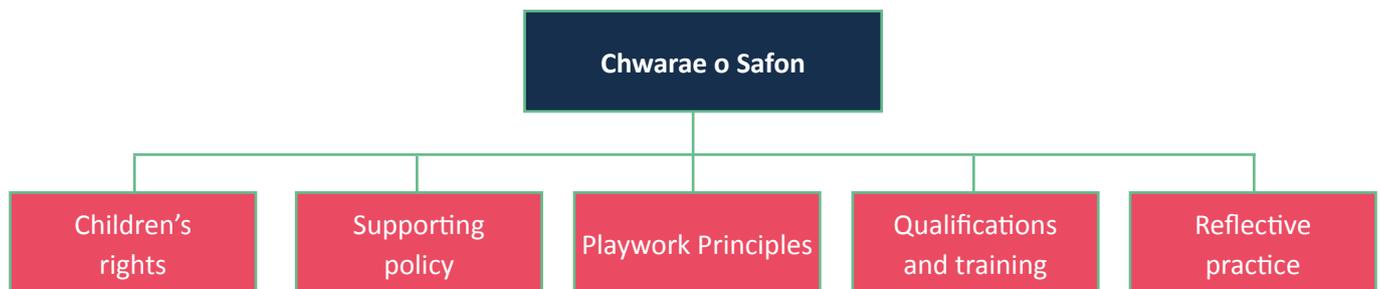
In this section, we explore the five elements that settings should be familiar with to embark on Chwarae o Safon. Whilst the quality indicators within Chwarae o Safon support us to think about how we ensure our setting is achieving quality playwork, the indicators are not intended to be considered in isolation.

We are supported in our playwork practice by:

- the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)
- the Playwork Principles

- professional training and qualifications
- supporting policy
- our own reflective practice.

Any consideration of quality playwork should begin with these five elements. By understanding these elements, we can better understand Chwarae o Safon and be more able to undertake the evidence gathering stage.



Children's rights

All children have the right to play as recognised in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). This is recognised both by the UK Government and the Welsh Government.

Article 31 of the convention says: 'Every child has the right to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.'

The right to play, as recognised within the convention, was clarified for governments worldwide in 2013 when the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child adopted General Comment no. 17 on the meaning and importance of Article 31.

A General Comment is an official statement that clarifies and elaborates on the meaning of a particular aspect of the convention. It aims to raise the importance of the article and increase accountability among the countries that have signed up to the convention.

General Comment no. 17 aims to raise awareness of play worldwide and provide guidance to governments on what they must do to implement it. Its three objectives are to:

- increase understanding of the importance of the article for children's wellbeing and development
- ensure respect for the rights under Article 31 as well as other rights in the convention
- highlight the obligations and implications for governments, the roles and responsibilities of the private sector, and guidelines for individuals working with children.



The Welsh Government upholds children's right to play in its Play Policy. The policy provides definitions and emphasises the need for the provision of play environments that compensate for the loss of spaces and opportunities to play that children and teenagers experience in today's world.

On their website, the Children's Commissioner for Wales' Office, which monitors and champions children and young people's rights, states that play is a right, not a privilege.

Playwork Principles

The Playwork Principles are fundamental to playwork practice and should be considered in their entirety to reflect on what is unique about play and playwork. The Playwork Principles are fundamental to Chwarae o Safon, so a thorough understanding of them is essential.

Play is important to all children, whatever their culture, impairment, gender, language, background, behaviour or need. Play has immediate, as well as longer-term benefits, and needs to be under the control of the child. The Playwork Principles support us in ensuring that our adult influence supports and enhances children's play whilst avoiding leading play unless children request it.

The Playwork 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 with 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.

The Playwork Principles are available at:
www.play.wales/playwork/the-playwork-principles

Qualifications and training

Playwork qualifications can help to ensure that staff gain the professional knowledge necessary to be a competent playworker. However, not all settings have a fully qualified staff team. This is due to a range of challenges that include funding, time and that many playworkers are not in full-time and/or year round roles.

All playworkers should be continually learning. This is a process known as Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and includes qualifications and other forms of learning, such as:

- private study
- training courses
- reflecting with others
- attending seminars, webinars and conferences.

To be occupationally competent, playworkers will combine their face-to-face practice with opportunities to learn from, and with, others about new and current research and thinking about play and playwork.

Constantly developing and updating our knowledge about play and playwork will help us to understand what quality playwork practice looks like. Those who have completed playwork qualifications will have been assessed on their knowledge and ability to do playwork. CPD ensures that this knowledge is not forgotten or out of date.

Wherever possible, employers should be encouraging and supporting playworkers to gain qualifications. This supports not only the quality of practice, but also the professionalisation of our workforce. Throughout Chwarae o Safon there are references to the current playwork qualifications developed by Play Wales and partners, that are available through the awarding body, Agored Cymru. This ensures that the quality indicators directly reference what playworkers will learn in their qualifications.

To support aligning Chwarae o Safon with other current and historic playwork qualifications, it also relates to the National Occupational Standards (NOS) upon which most playwork qualifications are based. This ensures that Chwarae o Safon mirrors what playworkers have learnt in their professional qualifications.

Staff who have completed competency-based qualifications can be deemed as occupationally competent at the time of gaining their qualification. To complete the Chwarae o Safon quality mark, we should consider the occupational competence of our staff using the range of factors below. All occupationally competent staff should be able to understand Chwarae o Safon and help with gathering evidence.

For the purposes of Chwarae o Safon, occupational competence includes consideration of:

- experience of working or volunteering in playwork settings, defined within the National Occupational Standards (NOS, 2026) for Playwork as 'Somewhere children and young people have the opportunity to play that is staffed by playworkers'
- understanding of, and commitment to, the Playwork Principles
- maintaining regular CPD relating to playwork
- an understanding of the differences between open access playwork provision and closed access provision, such as out of school childcare, recreation and sports provision
- the playwork qualifications held by staff and when they were gained.

Supporting policy

In considering the quality of our practice we should also consider the policy that supports us in our work. A list of relevant national policy for Wales is provided in Appendix 4 of the *Self-assessment and evidence framework*. An understanding of government policy that relates to play, education, early years, childcare and health and safety, all support our implementation of a playwork approach in our settings.

Playworkers, managers and employers benefit significantly from understanding the policy context and how relevant government programmes link with and support our work. This supports us in advocating for our playwork setting and for children's play more generally. Many playworkers work in other sectors as well, or engage significantly with those in other sectors, so a good understanding of how playwork fits with other policy areas is hugely beneficial.

Finally, government policies that specifically relate to playwork settings have their own role in directing what we can and can't do in our setting. These policies may either support or constrain our playwork practice.

Reflective practice

Facilitating children's play is a complex and demanding role. To help in our work as playworkers we can draw on our knowledge of the play process and be guided by policies and procedures specific to our role and setting. However, these alone aren't enough. The sheer variety of play behaviours by different children with different needs means we can never adopt a 'one size fits all' approach. Also, as individual playworkers, we each bring our own experiences and attitudes that influence our practice.

Reflective practice is a form of critical thinking that considers our experiences and beliefs. This increases our understanding and improves our practice. When we are reflective, we become more self-aware about the nature and impact of our role. This awareness creates opportunities for personal and professional development. When we try to understand a situation or event we draw on our own knowledge and feelings. We can also bring in ideas from different perspectives and theory. By analysing, comparing and combining these elements we can uncover new insights and improve our judgements.

Reflective practice is vital because:

- play is complex – children's play behaviour is governed by their natural instincts and the effects of the human and physical environment, a 'one size fits all' response from us is inappropriate.
- people may have different perspectives on play from other training or experience working in other sectors.
- no playworker begins (or ends) their career 'knowing it all'. We continually learn from our mistakes and successes and question our assumptions and the practices in our setting.
- as individuals we bring our own memories, experiences, emotions, preferences and agendas to the play environment. Unchecked, these can overwhelm the playing child so that they are no longer in control of their own play. The possible impact of this can often be assessed and corrected through reflection and closer examination of our practice.



Understanding the process

The flow chart below describes the process of undertaking Chwarae o Safon.



Planning stage

The setting management and staff team look at the framework and begin to research how to meet the evidence requirements. A decision needs to be made as to which quality mark is being undertaken:

- Playwork practice quality mark
- Playwork practice and policy quality mark combined.

The *Self-assessment and evidence framework* has been written so that anyone who has completed the Level 2 Award in Playwork Practice (L2APP) or is occupationally competent in playwork should be able to understand the quality indicators, including the 'what children can expect' indicators.

If management or staff have gaps in their knowledge then it may be necessary to access additional training, qualifications or support. Find out more at: www.play.wales/playwork/training

Play Wales has also produced a series of playwork guides that will help us to understand all aspects of a playwork approach. The guides are available to download at: www.play.wales/childhood-play-and-the-playwork-principles

Self-assessment

The whole staff team should be involved in the self-assessment stage, although this will probably require some degree of oversight and co-ordination by the manager or person responsible for collating the self-assessment for the setting. This will involve working through the *Self-assessment and evidence framework* and systematically reviewing each of the quality indicators in turn and identifying suitable evidence or developing new evidence if you identify any current gaps.

Settings should gather a broad range of evidence and where possible identify methods that they already use. Against each indicator, settings should select one or two pieces of evidence that clearly reflect both the aspiration to meet the indicator as well as its application in practice.

Appendix 1 of the *Self-assessment and evidence framework* gives examples of the range of evidence that settings can provide. The definitions are not an exhaustive list, but they provide an indication of the types of evidence that can be used to convey how the setting meets the quality indicators. The evidence provided should be as specific as possible.

The examples in Appendix 1 are not an exhaustive list and staff in the setting may have other ideas about how to evidence each quality indicator. If artificial intelligence (AI) is used to generate meeting notes or other evidence, this should be clearly stated.

The policy checklist in Appendix 5 of the *Self-assessment and evidence framework* can be used to cross reference the quality indicators to relevant setting policies. This can be useful where a policy is being used as evidence against multiple indicators. Where policies are used as evidence, the other evidence submitted with the framework should evidence that the policy is implemented in practice.

External assessment

Following the self-assessment and action planning process, settings wishing to gain the Chwarae o Safon quality mark will need to register with Play Wales. There is a cost for external assessment. For current information on costings, please contact us at workforce@play.wales

You will need to gather all of your evidence in one place. We recommend you do this using either:

- an electronic folder
- a lever arch file or ring binder.

An external assessor will be allocated to review all the evidence, including the action plan (if applicable). The external assessor will review the evidence and record their decision in the *Self-assessment and evidence framework* along with any feedback. The assessor will rate the evidence using a Red, Amber, Green (RAG status):

- **Red** – evidence insufficient or missing
- **Amber** – evidence partially meets quality indicator
- **Green** – evidence is sufficient no further evidence required.

Although this process may be quite dynamic, it is important to provide a complete portfolio of evidence at assessment stage. This helps to ensure that the final quality mark can be awarded in a timely and efficient manner.

Following initial assessment, the assessor will contact the setting to arrange interviews with staff, management and employers. These interviews will assist the external assessor in checking that the evidence provided meets the VARCS principles of assessment as set out in Appendix 2 of the *Self-assessment and evidence framework*.

Action planning

The action planning phase sets out what tasks the setting needs to undertake to maintain quality or to improve practice to meet the quality indicator. This is something to discuss with the external assessor as it may not be necessary to complete the action planning tool.

During the action planning phase, it is important to recognise any factors that may impact on the ability to fully meet the quality indicators. For some settings, the quality indicators may not be achievable in their entirety, and if there are good reasons for this it may be acceptable.

Playwork within a school setting, for example, may have different rules around behaviour to a staffed adventure playground. Similarly, a peripatetic

playwork project that moves around community parks will have different constraints on the playwork environment. These are 'factors that count against quality' and it is important that action planning and the evidence against the quality indicators reflect this. Part of recognising these barriers is to help us to identify how we can meet the quality indicators, as far as possible, for our own setting.

The list below is not exhaustive but factors that need to be considered are:

- the location of the setting
- the size of the space
- the amount of indoor/outdoor space
- staffing levels
- experience of staff
- training and CPD made available to staff
- shared space
- constraints put in place by premises managers or landlords
- cultural factors
- economic and social deprivation
- parental expectations
- community expectations
- what else is available/needed by the community
- requirements of funders
- availability of resources.



Award of quality mark

Once the external assessor has reviewed all of the evidence and conducted any interviews with the broader staff team (if they have deemed it necessary), the assessor will decide to award the quality mark, or not. If the setting has not provided enough satisfactory evidence, the assessor will recommend actions that need to be taken and a return to the self-assessment stage will be needed.

If the setting has completed the quality mark process to the satisfaction of the external assessor, they will receive:

- notification that the quality mark has been awarded
- feedback from the assessor
- a digital quality mark date stamped with the year it was achieved.

The digital quality mark can be used in email signatures and publicity, and on social media and websites. Please see the Chwarae o Safon logo guidance for more detailed information.

Appeals process

If settings are unhappy with the outcome, they may appeal against the decision of the external assessor in writing to Play Wales. The appeal must be submitted within three weeks of receiving the assessor's decision.

An appeals panel will be convened to look at the evidence provided to support the appeal and will make a decision to either overrule or uphold the appeal.

Once the appeals panel has made a judgement, the setting will be informed. The decision of the panel not to award the quality mark will not affect future attempts to complete Chwarae o Safon.

Using the *Self-assessment and evidence framework*

For the purpose of Chwarae o Safon, the following definitions are used:

- **Play** – play is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated (Playwork Principle 2). Play is any behaviour, activity or process initiated, controlled and structured by children themselves. It takes place whenever and wherever opportunities arise. The key characteristics of play are fun, uncertainty, challenge, flexibility and non-productivity. (General Comment no. 17).
- **Playwork** – ‘playwork is a unique approach to working with children of all ages in a range of settings. The key purpose of the playworker is to support and facilitate play as described by the Playwork Principles’ (Playwork National Occupational Standards, 2026). Playworkers may hold playwork qualifications.
- **Playworker** – a professional who uses the Playwork Principles as a central framework for their work with and on behalf of children.
- **Playwork setting** – any setting where playwork takes place.

Understanding the quality indicators

Staff should use the quality indicators alongside ‘what children can expect’ as points for reflection both individually and as a team.

Section 1 – Children’s play experiences

- Quality indicators articulate what playworkers are doing directly to support children’s play
- Quality indicators articulate what children are doing
- Practice is based firmly on the Playwork Principles
- Observations of children’s play, reflective logs and examples of children’s voices will form much of the evidence.

Section 2 – The playwork environment

- Quality indicators are based on features of a quality play environment included in *Wales – a Play Friendly Country* (2025) statutory guidance
- Quality indicators focus on how playworkers make the environment a space that supports play to happen
- Quality indicators focus on what children’s play behaviour looks like in the playwork environment
- Evidence is a blend of evidence from face-to-face practice as well as evidence of planning and preparation.

Section 3 – Playwork policy and practice

- Quality indicators focus on setting policies and procedures that support playwork practice
- How practice is underpinned by the UNCRC
- Particular focus on risk management, behaviour regulation, digital technology and community engagement
- Evidence will include examples of policies and other work products but needs to emphasise how they are implemented in practice.

Section 4 – The playwork organisation

This section does not include specific points against each indicator for what children can expect. Instead, generally children can expect a playwork setting that:

- is run effectively
- plans for sustainability
- delivers sessions as advertised
- has adequate safeguarding arrangements
- has a well-supported staff team
- complies with legal duties
- complies with expectations of funders.

Evidence will include examples of policies and other work products but needs to emphasise how they are implemented in practice.

Section 5 – Action planning

- Use the table to identify actions to maintain quality or areas for improvement. Here you can also identify any factors that count against quality.
- Action planning is a crucial part of the process to evidence you can continue to maintain quality in your setting.

Glossary

Chwarae o Safon	Chwarae o Safon is Welsh for ‘Play of Quality’ and is the name of the whole scheme. Chwarae o Safon comprises this guidance and the <i>Self-assessment and evidence framework</i> . The <i>Self-assessment and evidence framework</i> contains quality indicators for settings to use to undertake the self assessment, before external assessment takes place, to gain either one or two quality marks.
<i>Self-assessment and evidence framework</i>	The framework is a table made up of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • quality indicators • examples of what children can expect • what evidence can be used • links to supporting information. <p>This is the main document that settings will use to gather evidence to achieve the quality mark.</p>
Quality indicators	These are the indicators for settings to prove that they meet the requirements of Chwarae o Safon. For example, ‘Children choose how, what and with whom, they play’ – settings need to identify evidence which shows that this can happen in their setting.
Self-assessment	This is the process a setting will go through, involving all staff members, to look through the framework and assess how the setting is performing against the quality indicators.
External assessment	Play Wales will allocate an assessor, who will look at the evidence provided against each of the quality indicators, and make an independent decision as to whether the setting meets the requirements of Chwarae o Safon. It is a similar process to having coursework marked by an examiner or assessor when studying for a qualification.
Quality mark	This is a digital badge that will be stamped with the year the Chwarae o Safon quality mark was achieved. Settings can display the quality mark on publicity or use it in emails, and on social media and websites. Settings will gain either the Playwork practice quality mark or the Playwork practice and policy quality mark combined.



www.play.wales

Play Wales is the national organisation for children's play, an independent charity supported by the Welsh Government to uphold children's right to play and to provide advice and guidance on play-related matters.