

# Play for Wales

Issue 16

PLAY IN SCHOOLS SPECIAL

SUMMER 2005

## Play in Wales - Changing Janes

**T**he Welsh Assembly Government cabinet reshuffle earlier this year means that play now lies within the brief of Jane Davidson AM, the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning. Some of us might have worried at the thought of play passing out of the safe hands of Jane Hutt AM, who has been a staunch ally and who oversaw the adoption of the Play Policy for Wales, but our new Jane proved that there would be no fumbling the catch in her first speech to the play sector in Wales at the Play Wales Spirit of Adventure Play conference in Cardiff:

First of all, can I stress that I support the Play Policy. Having been involved in setting up play schemes as a youth worker in a previous life, and supporting adventure play in Riverside (Cardiff) as a local councillor, I am delighted that Wales has taken a lead ... As Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning I am concerned with children's learning, development and well being in the widest sense. Our Play Strategy will continue to be founded on supporting play as "children's behaviour that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated". I want to see the values of play inform the experience children have at school, but I do not intend to subsume play policy within the agenda of formal education.

The Play Policy committed the Welsh Assembly Government to "the development in partnership of a strategy that will set out the way in which the principles in the Policy can be implemented". That is why we established a Play Policy Implementation Group to take forward the Strategy... The recommendations of the Group have been



the subject of a recent public consultation, and it was very encouraging to see the high number of detailed responses we received.

The play strategy must be founded on the notion of an entitlement for children and young people that builds on the Play Policy's foundation in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Across Government in Wales we have already asserted such an entitlement. Access to play is one of the Assembly's seven core aims for children and young people. Within our Extending Entitlement programme for young people, one of the ten entitlements is the "opportunity for recreational and social opportunities in a safe and accessible environment". That means we must build on the specific support that we have delivered through the original Play Grant and the Cymorth Grant to make play integral to mainstream services...

We believe young people also have a right to play in its widest sense... Extending Entitlement, together with the Assembly Government's Play Strategy, includes the expectation that all young people will have the opportunities to engage in activities appropriate to their age and maturity which allow them to test boundaries and enable them to explore their potential in a supportive environment. Youth work also has a vital role in ensuring the right

environment and encouragement to secure this entitlement for all our young people.

This week we launched our consultation "Working Together to Provide Young People's Entitlements" to map how the new Department we propose will support youth workers and other professionals who work with young people. As part of the "Working Together" consultation I have suggested that an Advisory Group of stakeholder organisations be established. To ensure links with the Play Strategy, representatives of play organisations will sit on the Advisory Group to ensure this important aspect of the work of youth workers is fully recognised. Meetings with youth workers across Wales have been set up to determine the new work plan and a copy of the consultation document can be found on the Assembly's Learning Wales Internet site. You will need to respond to the consultation by 31st July.

Local play strategies, youth work, integrated centres and community focused schools all play their part in delivering on the Play Policy's commitment to "extend the range of environments and opportunities available for children's play".

Wales has taken a lead in developing a new Foundation Phase for children aged 3 - 7, based on play and building on international

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# EDITORIAL

**A massive thank you to Jane Hutt AM. for all her support and belief in children's play – it is a pleasure to work with someone in a position of such authority who has demonstrated a strong appreciation of the issues that are important to us in the play field. It is reassuring to know that she is still Minister for Children and that there remains a very positive force for play within the Cabinet.**

Jane Davidson AM is now the Minister with the brief for Children's Play. Naturally, when you start working with someone new there is a mutual "getting to know you" period, so it has been a relief to find that we are now working with a new (to us) Minister who has a similar level of commitment and understanding. We anticipate that our new Jane will provide the leadership needed to ensure that the Play Strategy for Wales is as groundbreaking as our national Play Policy.

Given that play is now within the brief of the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning, it seems apt to focus on play in educational settings in this issue of Play for Wales. We recognise the fantastic opportunity afforded by the implementation of a play-based curriculum in the Foundation Phase for 3 – 7 year olds within our schools.

We also recognise the challenges of providing quality play opportunities for children and young people within the school day. As an organisation we are funded to provide expert advice and guidance on children's play provision, as well as to act as an advocate for children and young people and their play needs. We strive to work effectively to

support educators at all levels to ensure that children and young people have the best play opportunities within schools.

However, it is ironic that at the same time as there are very positive changes to our primary schools, that we hear of proposals for children and young people's right to play freely to be curtailed by local decisions to cut school playtime.

With fewer and fewer opportunities to play freely outside of school hours, children and young people's playtimes and lunch breaks are very precious to them, and vital to their rounded healthy development. Children and young people need time to have fun and relax as part of a their own work/life balance. Responding to challenging behaviour by reducing the time available for children to play when at school, or the introduction of structured playtime management packages, may be attractive to teachers and lunchtime supervisors who see themselves as struggling to keep a handle on children's behaviour, but to our knowledge, all of them compromise children's choices of how, why, where and with whom they play, and tend to be counterproductive. Play Wales would

suggest that a playwork approach to school playtime would benefit both children and schools. Furthermore it is well understood that children (and adults) have a limited attention span and benefit from opportunities for play, activity and rest during their 'working' day.

Play Wales is very concerned about this issue and is presently lobbying for provision of concise accessible information for all parents and carers in Wales on the value of their children's play, and how they can best support it. At the same time we are providing training for teachers on how they can provide quality play opportunities within schools, and providing information sheets that can help schools improve their play provision.

Improved play opportunities for children in schools figured high on the list of recommendations from the Welsh Assembly Government Play Policy Implementation Group. There is an opportunity for the forthcoming national Play Strategy to help address this issue.

**Mike Greenaway**  
Director, Play Wales

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best practice. The use of the outdoor environment is regarded as an important element for effective early years education. It is... an excellent resource to develop children's understanding of the world. Placing a greater emphasis on the use of the outdoor environment as a resource for learning would provide children with opportunities for first hand, experiential learning and real life problem solving. I well understand that play directed for learning is not the same as freely chosen play, but I know you will recognise that they are complementary.

One of the main challenges for play provision is society's current attitude to risk. The Play Policy committed us to foster "rich stimulating environments, free from inappropriate risk, and full of challenge". The Play Policy Group's report discusses the issue of risk in some detail and makes recommendations. It is a tragedy if potential

litigation deters local authorities or others from offering the adventurous experiences that offer children and young people so much benefit. The Report argued that the threat of litigation pushes up insurance premiums, creating a financial deterrent. It is not an easy area in which the Assembly Government can intervene. However, I am making a commitment to you that we will do all we can, because it is an issue affecting my whole portfolio. As well as play, I want to see the school trips and outdoor adventurous pursuits continue. We are in contact with central Government on the issue, (and we are) also working with the Welsh Council for Voluntary Action on this and (to develop) a DVD on risk management. We will also review the regulations for open access play provision inspected by the Care Standards Inspectorate for Wales. At present, those regulations can put an onus on providers to avoid risk. It would be better if the regulations put the emphasis on

assessing risk, and balancing it with the benefit to the child or young person.

The Play Policy Implementation Group's recommendations show strong linkage between policy areas within the Assembly. I expect to see the final Strategy that we intend to publish in September, reflect similar joined up government. To conclude, we are now working in partnership with Play Wales and others, and across Government, to get our Play Strategy right. We must continue to build on the foundations of the good work that has already been achieved, to ensure every success in the future and to move from a visionary Policy into accelerated change in the lives of children and young people.

**Please see a brief summary of the responses to the consultation on the Recommendations of the Play Policy Implementation Group on page 5**

## Play for Wales

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## Funding News - Big Lottery

One of the main requests that comes from our readership is one for more news on funding. We believe that this reflects a real need for a specific funding stream for children and young people's play in the principality, and we continue to negotiate with the Big Lottery in Wales to achieve this goal. As talks continue, we are cautiously optimistic, but have to wait until the new programmes are officially announced sometime in July. We have been informed that the first programme will be running by the end of 2005 and that all programmes will be in place by mid-2006.

We would like to thank all those who responded to the Big Lottery consultation supporting a dedicated funding stream for play.

**Mentor Allan** is a Big Lottery funding programme already up and running with the aim to make the less active population of Wales more active by increasing their recreational use of Wales's natural environment. It will pay for schemes that will make the parks, waterways, coasts and countryside more accessible to people who might otherwise never use them. It would seem that there is therefore scope to apply for funding to develop children and young people's play provision in natural environments.

The programme will be in two stages. In the first stage a grant will be given to an award partner to develop a range of schemes across Wales. We expect to announce who the successful partner is in June 2005, when the programme will

be opened up to local organisations.

The **Young People's Fund** is another Big Lottery programme worth investigating. We covered this in the last issue of Play for Wales.

Contact the **Big Advice Line** on 0845 410 2030 or go to [www.biglotteryfund.org.uk](http://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk) for more information on Big Lottery programmes and plans in Wales.

### Cymorth

What was once the Play Grant is now part of the Cymorth funding stream distributed via the Children and Young People's Partnerships who are directed to spend a proportion on "play, leisure and enrichment". The Cymorth indicative budgets suggest that some local authority areas will have their funding significantly increased, so there is a real opportunity to lobby Partnerships for extra funding for play provision at a local level around Wales.

### Cydcoed

Managed by the Forestry Commission, Cydcoed is a £16 million grant programme which gives 100% funding and support for properly constituted community groups in the Objective One area of West Wales, North Wales and the South Wales Valleys to use woods for community development. For detailed information visit [www.forestry.gov.uk](http://www.forestry.gov.uk) or contact Dominic Driver, Programme Manager on 01495 217326 [dominic.driver@forestry.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:dominic.driver@forestry.gsi.gov.uk)

## Play Wales' New North Wales Office - Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Mousetraps

Tony Chilton, our Senior Development Officer, and his assistant Annette Hennessy, have bid a fond farewell to the resident rodents at Station House and have moved up the road to a more accessible office with less wildlife.

Their e-mail addresses and telephone numbers remain the same; here are the details you need to change in your address book:

**Play Wales, North Office**  
Units 4/5, Tai Tywyn Business Centre  
Prestatyn, Denbighshire LL19 7SF

## SkillsActive Endorses Playwork Principles

Following a decision by the Playwork Education and Training Council at their meeting on the 24th May 2005, SkillsActive is endorsing the Principles as published on the Play Wales website. SkillsActive anticipate that the Principles will contribute to the understanding of the importance of play and the unique role of the playworker and will be following with interest how they are received and used by the Playwork sector and other stakeholders.

SkillsActive will now be reviewing the position of the Principles in relation to the Assumptions and Values that accompany the Playwork National Occupational Standards and that are crucial to their implementation. This will be carried out under the auspices of the Playwork National Occupational Standards Committee at the earliest opportunity.

[www.playwork.org.uk](http://www.playwork.org.uk)

## Play Wales at the National Eisteddfod

Marianne Mannello and Gill Evans of Play Wales are joining staff from the Children's Commissioner's Office, Funky Dragon and Children in Wales at the National Eisteddfod. Play Wales' display and leaflets will be available all week, and Marianne and Gill will be there on Tuesday 2nd and Wednesday 3rd August, hoping to link up with the media on Play Day.



# Open Access in Powys



(near Crossgates), Gilfach Farm (near St Harmon) and at Knucklas (near Knighton).

Although many of the workers involved were not trained playworkers, they were briefed on the use of minimum intervention and the importance of child-led play. Since there was little experience of open access play provision, there was some anxiety over the numbers who would attend, but in the end the programme engaged more than 130 children, with a total of 218 places being taken up. Around two-thirds of the children chose to attend more than once.

“The children resurrected an old mud slide during the morning and made an impressive effort of extending it by around 15 metres, smoothing out rocks, roots and brambles and “greasing” it with buckets of water brought up from the stream via a human chain. The slide became increasingly popular as the day went on and the playworkers tied a hefty rope to a tree at the top so the children could pull themselves back up.”

Some activities and play props were prepared beforehand (for instance, cut sticks for den-building at one of the forest sites) but the children were encouraged to play in their own way (and the den-building became a fantasy game where the children went “hunting”). Among many other opportunities at the forest site, children were shown how to light and manage a fire (and cooked their lunch on it) given support when they decided to “fly” off a hill using a parachute, and facilitated to fish (using blood worms dug out of the river bank and sycamore twig “rods”).

One of the pilots included a group of young people who have physical and mental impairments, some of whom experienced fires and mud for the first time.

At the forest sites, children made their own transport arrangements, and in some instances there was also access to a minibus that could collect and drop off from a meeting point on a first come first served basis. When the provision was based at a local community centre, children came and went on foot according to their own arrangements.

**It is clear from Nick's report that the pilot was great fun and a learning opportunity for both workers and children, who all grew in confidence as the programme progressed. It provides a solid case for developing more outdoor-based staffed open access play provision in Radnorshire. It shows that given funding for staffing and transport (plus determination and imagination) the open access model can be a success in rural areas.**

Contact Nick Waller on 01654 700352

**I**ntegrated Children's Centres (ICCs) are being set up in each local authority area in Wales, and staffed open access play is one of the core elements of the service they provide. This is the second in a series of articles that examines how Partnerships have approached this element.

**Nick Waller is Play Development Worker for Radnorshire, and he recently organised staffed open access play pilots funded by the Powys Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership as part of the Powys ICC:**

The programme we prepared aimed to establish whether the type of open access play model working in urban areas in the North and South of Wales could translate to Mid-Wales, and so overcome traditional obstacles (i.e. sparse and widely dispersed population, fragmented communication channels and a shortage of transport options).

A team of practitioners used to working with children and young people was assembled, including representatives from Forest Schools, the Forestry Commission, Dramatic Arts, Playwork, the Wildlife Trust, and Early Years Care and Education. Woodland sites and a community centre were chosen as locations and a programme drawn up. Children and young people aged 8 – 16 who lived locally enough to be able to reach the sites were invited to attend; information was posted in Youth Clubs and Community Centres, distributed in schools, and passed on through informal networking. The programme ran for six weeks, at Penybont



At the end of each session the children were given an evaluation form that included the question **“Make up a sentence that says what play is?”** Here are some of the answers:

Having a good time and enjoying yourself. **(Lisa, 12)**

Getting muddy. **(Nakita, 10)**

Time for freedom. **(Brad, 11)**

When you are happy and smiley. **(Sarah, 9)**

Having exercise and fun at the same time. **(Rhianwedd, 11)**

Play is something you do but it can be boring after a while. **(Amy, 12)**

Play is everything and especially football. **(Stephen, 10)**

It is wicked and beast. **(Joe, 9)**

The staffed open access play element of the ICCs has presented a challenge to some Partnerships. Play Wales' Development Officers are in a position to give expert advice, guidance and support on the development of this element. Please ring Marianne Mannello in Cardiff (029 2048 6050) or Tony Chilton in Prestatyn (01745 851816).

In many instances local authority or voluntary sector play development officers have been constructively involved from the outset in planning staffed open access play provision as part of the ICCs. Play Wales can supply the contact details of all the local play development staff in Wales, please ring our national office (029 2048 6050) or e-mail [info@playwales.org.uk](mailto:info@playwales.org.uk)



## Play Strategy Consultation Response

**The launch of the consultation on the recommendations of the Welsh Assembly Government Play Policy Implementation Group took place in the House of the Future at the Museum of Welsh Life in November 2004. Responses were accepted up until January 2005 and of the 1,241 copies sent out, 74 responses were received by the deadline (26 were too late). The Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) has passed on a summary of the responses - here is a quick round up of what the majority said:**

Overall there were very positive responses to all the twenty-four recommendations, and the chief recommendation that local authorities have a statutory obligation to provide for children's play to a minimum standard was supported by the majority.

In relation to playwork education, it was felt that one route to raising the professional perception of playwork would be if steps were taken to ensure the development of Higher Education training and qualification. It was also commonly felt that greater importance has to be placed on achieving appropriate pay scales.

Respondents welcomed the suggestion that all school staff should be educated to understand the value of play, and the suggestion that this should be incorporated into teacher training courses. An emphasis on the distinction between learning through play and teaching through play was also widely applauded.

The majority of respondents welcomed the proposal that outside areas within schools, not already dedicated to sports activities, should be transformed to provide children with a rich play environment, and felt that this should be available both within the school day and out of hours. Consulting children on this issue, as well as at local authority and national level, was commonly acknowledged to be of great importance.

Similarly, the recommendation to support the development of a coherent public education programme was widely regarded as being of great importance, as was the need for education within local authorities as to what constitutes quality play and play provision.

The biggest concern was that the Assembly should demonstrate a clear commitment to allocating Big Lottery funding specifically for children's play.

It was suggested that, due to the breadth and complexity of children's play needs, the co-ordination of provision of resources might be best achieved by the designation of one member who would attend all Partnership meetings and would have a high level of knowledge and expertise coupled with influence at strategic level.

On the subject of play deprivation, many stressed that this does not have to be linked to economic or social deprivation and that the actual term needs to be clarified for the purposes of the document.

The recommendation to protect areas of open space, wasteland and woodland where children play, was again widely supported, but concerns were raised over the resources required to realise this. As with a number of recommendations, the issue of funding, and where it would come from, was high on people's list of concerns.

A large number of responses emphasised the need to address the "compensation culture" and review the CSIW regulations to afford all children the opportunity to experience risk as an integral element of learning through play.

The final recommendation, that a programme for implementation of the recommendations be published, was regarded by the majority of respondents as the most important issue, as it was felt that it underpinned everything. It was suggested that there is a need for more personnel within the Assembly dedicated to support, advise, evaluate and monitor new guidance.

Thank you to everyone who took part – Play Wales has been told that it is one of the best responses the Assembly has received to a consultation. If you would like a copy of the full summary of responses to the consultation paper, contact Phillipa at our national office on 029 2048 6050 or e-mail [mail@playwales.org.uk](mailto:mail@playwales.org.uk)



# Play in School

**S**chool children throughout the British Isles appear to have had playtimes for longer than there have actually been schools in the way that we might recognise them. Even before the introduction of mass schooling in England and Wales in 1870, biographies and the records of a number of different types of schooling establishment reveal periods of the day set aside for play. Marc Armitage, an independent researcher and trainer, who is drawing to the end of a major review of the role of playtime in British and Scandinavian schools, reflects on the concept of playtime.

For example, the archaeologist John Robert Mortimer who was born in East Yorkshire in 1825, reports in his biography that he attended school in the free seats of the local Wesleyan Chapel from an early age. He writes, "We school boys in summer time often played at noon in the churchyard and a small grass field contiguous to it." He also says "In winter time our favourite pastime was to play and skate on the two meres near the front of the school." After the 1870 Act playtime in school records appears as a regular part of the school day, although not all children seem to have appreciated that the playground was the place for it. The school master George Moody writes in 1877, "Mr Richardson [a local neighbour] has forbidden the children to play in the street outside his house... I have told them to make the yard their playground in future".

Playtime in more recent years, however, seems to have come under threat. A comparison of the time set aside for playtime and lunchtime over the last thirty years shows a gradual reduction, to such an extent that a typical eight-year old of today may now receive only half the amount of time that an eight-year old did twenty years ago. The question is, why? Contrary to what people outside of school may realise, in the United Kingdom there are no regulations relating to the length of a school day, or to what time the school day begins or ends. Nor are there any regulations that say if there should be a playtime period in the day, or how long it should last. The people that really decide the answers to these questions are individual head teachers and governing bodies of schools. So, what do they give as the reasons for a reducing playtime?

Finding additional time for structured parts of the curriculum is one reason given. Another, though only occasional reason, is concern over health and safety. But by far the most common reason given is a concern over "bad" behaviour. The comments made by the head teacher of one Hull primary school are typical "Playtime? It's a nightmare. If I could, I would do away with it." Head teachers report playgrounds that are full of rough games, aggressive children, fights, squabbles and bullying. The blame for this seems to be given to a combination of a loss of 'traditional' games – the sort that they may remember playing when they were young – and the influence of TV. As one East Yorkshire head teacher said, "All children do now is shove and attack each other, copying their hero's on TV."

But there are a number of problems with this view. One of the most basic, is that similar complaints have been made about children's



apparent lack of 'nice' play throughout the period that we have had structured schooling, and indeed from before: prior to the TV it was the radio that received the brunt of the blame, before then it was the cinema. Even the introduction of the motorcar, the railway train, and the influence of war has apparently destroyed childhood games and rhymes. This is a view that even a short period of observation during playtime dispels: simply stand still, watch, listen, and do so over a period of time and the ebbs and flows of the playground become evident. In these ebbs and flows we will find the play that many believe to have been lost forever.

Perhaps the real reason why playtime suffers in most primary schools is the simple lack of debate about what is the real purpose of this part of the day. In fact, in my experience when asked what playtimes are for the first reaction of many primary head teachers seems to be a pause followed by a statement such as that made by a Nottinghamshire head teacher who said, "That's an interesting question? I've not really considered it before." Yet children themselves seem to have a very clear idea about what playtime is for. One 11 year old girl asked this question, said, "It's time to catch up with people and talk," and an eight-year old boy recently answered my question, "What is playtime for?" with the answer, "Well! It's for playing. Obviously!"

Professor Bronwyn Davies concluded in 1982 that primary school children know that school is a place for learning but that, "Mucking around, and having fun and interacting with each other were as much, if not more, part of the school day as learning lessons." She says that conflict often occurred in her study school when children felt that the balance between learning and mucking about and having fun rests more on the former. British research work with primary school children reaches similar conclusions.

Perhaps that's the answer – maybe we need to remind ourselves that even if we adults are not sure about what playtime is for, children have a very clear idea: it is to them, simply, the most important time of their school day.

**Marc Armitage**

June 2005

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*Play Wales is working with Marc to provide training on a play-led approach in the Foundation Phase - see more on page 10*

# Making Informed Choices in School

**S**chools all over Wales now have a school council of children representing their classmates who should be able to make decisions on issues that affect children within the school. Issues relating to playtimes and playgrounds are obvious areas where children can be consulted and involved in decision-making. At the same time, the draft Parenting Action Plan that the Welsh Assembly

Government has recently consulted on, calls for parents to be more involved and better included in decisions relating to their children in school. Both these initiatives can have enormous benefits, however, neither children nor parents can make informed decisions if they do not have knowledge of the range of choices available to them, or access to information that will help them argue their case.

## Disappearing Play Time

In a society where children's free time is increasingly colonised by adults, and where opportunities for outdoor play are steadily decreasing, school playtime is vital to children for their fun and relaxation - as part of the "work/life balance" - as well as for their health and wellbeing.

**A Play Development Officer in South Wales recently received this letter asking for help:**

*'I am writing to you as a parent of a child at \*\*\*\*\* Primary School.*

*"We have had a letter from the school proposing to cut the lunchtime play for the children by 20 minutes, so that the school day will finish earlier. My son, who is eight, is very upset about this, as it is the main part of the day that he enjoys - being outside and playing with the other children.*

*"As a parent I am really concerned that children are not being given enough opportunity to play and at how this change will effect their all round development.*

*"The school has stated that being in the yard for 40 minutes "can cause arguments and conflict amongst the children which takes time out of the teaching sessions to resolve". Do you have suggestions for the school how to manage the play time, rather than reduce it? The school yards are small and bare, with no equipment, and yet there is a massive school field adjacent which the children are rarely allowed to use."*

This is not an isolated case, it comes at a time when many schools are cutting the afternoon playtime because it is more convenient for staff, and playtime supervision is a challenge for those who do not have playwork training. Speaking to the parent concerned, it was clear that the Head teacher and Governors of the school had followed consultation procedures with children and parents, but the parent felt that the decision had really already been made.

There hadn't been time to research arguments against it and to pass relevant information to parents and children so that they could make an informed choice as part of the consultation.

Thinking people might ask themselves - is school for children or for adults?

The irony is that this decision directly counters the ethos of the forthcoming Foundation Phase where children are encouraged to play as part of the learning process, and it flies in the face of health and wellbeing strategies that look at ways to encourage children to be more physically active.

It would be wrong to see teachers and governing bodies as the "baddies" in the case. They too have limited access to training and information about the play needs of children and how they can best be supported within a school environment. They too need times in the day to relax so they can concentrate and perform to the best of their ability during lessons. There is a strong argument that playworkers are needed to facilitate children's freely chosen, self-directed play during playtimes. There are packages and schemes available for schools that wish to manage playtimes differently, but to our knowledge, all of them compromise children's choices of how, why, where and with whom they play.

For those parents who are struggling against decisions to cut their children's playtime, there is the back up of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Welsh Assembly Government Play Policy, and the local authority play strategy ought to include a statement that supports the provision and preservation of quality children's play in schools. Play Development Officer posts exist in either the public or voluntary sector in most local authority areas and they are a point of contact and support. Play Wales can offer examples of research that provides a case for quality play provision and playtimes within schools. Ultimately this may be a case for the Children's Commissioner for Wales who will challenge cases that curtail children's rights.



## Boring Playgrounds

It is fair to say (and a great many children, parents and teachers would agree) that many school playgrounds in Wales do not adequately meet the play needs of children. The Foundation Phase for 3 - 7 year olds puts a great emphasis on improving outdoor play and learning opportunities within school, so many schools are re-evaluating their school grounds and looking for advice and guidance on how to improve them.

Of course, children will be the main beneficiaries of more exciting and challenging play spaces in terms of their enjoyment and relaxation, but it is clear that providing a better quality play environment that meets children's play needs has a knock on effect on their behaviour, and regular access to such environments enhances their capacity to learn in the more formal setting of the classroom.

The improvement of playgrounds is another issue where children, parents and teachers need good quality information about children's play needs and the options available in order to make informed choices. Children often make decisions that they think are expected of them, and they associate playgrounds with the kind of local authority provision that has fixed play equipment - traditional manufactured items may not provide the best play value for the least amount of money, and when schools are strapped for funding this is a big consideration. As adults we tend to stick to traditional formulae and to forget what was really captivating and fun as children - so it is important that observation of the children and listening to their wishes is central to the process of change.





# Play in School in Denmark

**A** group of students from the Community Studies (Playwork degree course) at University of Wales, Newport, visited schools and pre-schools in Denmark on a study tour earlier this year. Sarah Southern, who is now Play Development Officer for Blaenau Gwent, tells of her experience.

It's cold in Denmark in January. As we got into the minibus to visit a Forest Kindergarten, one of the youth workers among us claimed it was cruel to take children into the forest "in this weather."

When we arrived a small group of boys, aged approx 5 – 6 were lying on their bellies in a rather damp sandpit, with buckets in their hands, shovelling water from a small pool into the sand. It was cold, it was raining, but this did not stop a walk into the forest to find a large fallen down tree. A group of the older boys ran ahead, often out of sight but within earshot, diving headfirst into muddy ditches and disappearing behind trees. They were "hiding" from us, although they stopped at designated trees to wait for the stragglers to catch up. Pedagogues\* accompanied them with a small trailer that was pushed along through the woods, packed up with all the paraphernalia needed for play in the Forest.

The pedagogues explained that the children play despite the weather conditions if dressed suitably. In fact, it was too cold to stand and watch the children for very long, so I kept warm by helping them saw logs to make narrow bridges over small ditches. Other children went to play on logs that were balanced over a muddy ridge - to their delight they discovered they had made an excellent see-saw.



The children (all aged between 3 and 7 years old) were allowed to roam as far as they wished as long as they could see the pedagogues. They had free access to handsaws, and could use them independently with minimum supervision. Several small rope swings were tied to the trees for them to choose to use or not, but mostly there was no programme of activities, and the children filled their time by playing on their own terms. At the end of the visit, the youthworker who had claimed "it was cruel to play in the rain", returned to our base camp amazed and full of wonderment at the experience she had just encountered.

\* In Britain a pedagogue is defined as an educator or teacher - the Danish concept does not translate well. In Children in Europe Issue 1 Jytte Juul Jensen and Helle Krogh describe the pedagogue as a professional worker, mostly employed to work with young children, who establishes and maintains different types of social, learning and developmental environments relating to the psychological and biological requirements of the individual.





Another visit was made to a local school for 7 – 14 year olds. Here we had lunch with a team of pedagogues, who explained that they worked in partnership with the teachers. Each day, after the children had received more formal teaching, the pedagogues worked to help realise the school's curriculum aims through providing play opportunities. The team of pedagogues were also employed to operate the free-time service (what we'd call an after-school club).

Within their school time spent with the pedagogues, children were expected to plan their own activity. They were asked to signify on a central board where they were going to be playing. It was claimed that the children's consideration and planning of their play activity had contributed to an improvement in their learning motivation. However, no activity was necessarily programmed within the classrooms, children simply chose which environment they wanted to use as a space for their play. Spaces were also provided within the school design so children could have time away from adult eyes. In fact, as we progressed through our visit and tour of the "free-time" service, we came across an eight or nine year old boy just sitting on an empty staircase, immersed in a private play script. This was seen as normal and acceptable.

Whatismore, the school grounds were completely open to the public - no gates or fences. The playground had a couple of swings, but it mainly comprised of a large central field, bordered by two manufactured "tumps" which, from their muddy and worn appearance were evidently well-used. There was a small wooded area that contained climbing structures made by lashing logs to trees with ropes, and a few rope swings. An undercover fire-pit was used at least three times a week for cooking.

The Danish perspective is based on the premise of the competent child - with children being trusted to make their own decisions and to find their own way. In Britain, we tend to view the child as an "empty glass", one that needs to be directed, and filled up with appropriate knowledge and meaningful experiences by adults.

Low level supervision was apparent in all the sites we visited. This is possible because there is general acceptance that children WILL encounter accidents when playing, and that clothes WILL get dirty. Every entry point into the school building was clogged up with muddy shoes, and the playground was awash with mud during the time of the visit, yet this had not prevented its use, not even for the sake of clean floors.

When we explained the difficulties of working in the UK within a culture of over-protection, a Danish pedagogue simply replied, "But life is dangerous".

Parents take out insurance so that if a child breaks a bone or a window whilst playing, there is compensation available, rather than blame for staff members.

The fact that the pedagogues are degree-qualified with extensive practice placement may allow a greater tolerance towards acceptable risk-taking within the settings where they work. This in turn facilitates a more consistent and coherent approach to working with children. Pedagogues share the same theory base regardless of the age of the child or the setting. Moreover, there was a healthy mix of male and female pedagogues. In fact we saw a far greater presence of men here than in Wales, particularly in provision for under-ten's, which appears to be the result of better pay and conditions and a greater professional status.

Denmark is not without its problems. I met a male kindergarten pedagogue in Copenhagen who reported similar



social deprivation to that experienced in this country. Also, there were conversations with pedagogues that implied that there were common misunderstandings about their roles; that they were seen by some to be "drinking coffee all day and having fun."

Returning to this country, I felt depressed by the prevailing British belief that children are incompetent and dependent on adults to train them to behave appropriately, to play "properly", to fill up their time with planned activities. We have what I believe to be a misguided work ethic that deems any fun or frivolity as wrong, even when children have 'free time'. I worry that our system creates a dependency that is counterproductive if we wish our children to develop the skills to be self-directed, self-motivated, self-regulated individuals in charge of their own lives.

Children's play can seem purposeless and ambiguous; there are no explicit goals or outcomes apparent that many adults understand. Yet, if we believe in our children as competent human beings as the Danish appear to, we should give them the choice of how they use their free time, and incorporate more free choice and greater freedom within the school day, which will mean that children will be doing what they want to do most – play.

Due to lack of space, we were unable to publish the entire piece, so this is an abridged version of Sarah's article – if you would like a copy of the original please get in touch.

**Contact Sarah on 01495 294035  
or e-mail [sarah.southern@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk](mailto:sarah.southern@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk)**

# Forest Schools and Play

**F**orest Schools are developing across Wales, and have captured the imagination of the Education Advisors within the Welsh Assembly Government. Introduced into Britain from Denmark in 1995, there is an increasing interest in what they offer children and young people as an alternative learning environment that complements classroom based education, and also as spaces and places for play. Mark Sainsbury tells us more ...

At a Forest School children and young people have timetabled progressive sessions with trained leaders (pedagogues if you will) in an "outdoor" classroom. The sessions centre around building self-esteem, resilience and competencies - children are free to ask, to challenge, take risks, stretch and grow in a safe outdoor environment. Forest Schools offer all who take part a chance to play, learn, discover, get wet, dry out around a fire, use tools, build shelters, work both individually and co-operatively, have fun, conquer their fears ... it really is about building special relationships, and making new connections that city life, school classrooms, and the built environment tend to hamper.

And do they work? Oh yes! Almost regardless of age, stage or ability (or how many trees there are) children go home grubby and smelling of smoke with one question in their mind - "When are we coming back?"

The training required to be a Forest School leader is evolving, and there are BTEC and Open College Network accredited courses. There will soon be a quality assurance scheme that all Forest Schools can sign up to. We also have a national organisation to support and lobby on behalf of Forest School Leaders in Wales.

And Play? Well, full on open access play opportunities might be hard to arrange in the middle of, say, the Brechfa Forest, but a successful pilot scheme took place in Powys last summer. [Registration of a scheme that has no toilets is a nettle yet to be grasped!] So there is potential to provide the kind of compensatory natural play environments advocated in the Welsh Assembly Play Policy.

But we have to ask ourselves a question: how do we reconcile the desirable outcomes approach of schools, with that wonderful process we call freely chosen, self-directed play? There is huge potential for cross-fertilisation between the Forest Schools approach and playwork theory and practice, and the playwork element of the Forest Schools training is being built into a core element of the new (NOCN) course that is being drafted.

**Interested? Forest Schools Wales are about to lose their Information and Development Officer, but if you are quick you can call 01792 367881 and speak to Holli Yeoman, or visit [www.foresteducation.org](http://www.foresteducation.org)**

**Mark Sainsbury**



## The Foundation Phase Outdoors

### – training for a play-led approach

**T**he Foundation Phase places great emphasis on learning through play in an outdoor environment, and it will be introduced into all schools for children aged between 3 and 7 years in Wales from 2008. Play Wales has arranged a one-day course that will support early years teachers and teaching assistants by providing ideas to create the best outdoor environment that centres on the value and integrity of children's learning through play.

We have invited Marc Armitage to work with us in Wales. Marc has extensive experience of helping schools to provide a stimulating environment for play. He works in both Sweden We have invited Marc Armitage to work with us in Wales. Marc has extensive experience of helping schools to provide a

stimulating environment for play. He works in both Sweden and the UK, and has carried out research on the outdoor play experience of disabled children in schools for Joseph Rowntree Foundation, and on school play times and other areas of school life for the Home Office.

This course has been welcomed by Jane Davidson, the Minister for Education and Life Long Learning, and is tailored to meet the particular needs of teaching staff preparing for the Foundation Phase in Wales. It is being delivered through Local Education Authorities. If you wish to know more, please get in touch with Gill Evans at our national office (029 2048 6050 or [info@playwales.org.uk](mailto:info@playwales.org.uk)).

## Richer Play in Schools

**The forthcoming implementation of the Foundation Phase and the recommendations of the Play Policy Implementation Group have sparked a great deal of interest in the benefits of improving play and outdoor learning opportunities within schools.**

Play Wales has received many calls from teachers wishing to improve play opportunities within their grounds – most of them are looking for advice on funding sources, or they are under the impression that Play Wales may be a funding body. So we have produced a new information sheet for schools as a first step in the process. Since we can't provide funding, it looks at

the most effective ways of making school grounds more play friendly, based on play theory and children's play needs, and incidentally these changes happen to be the most cost-effective for schools with few financial resources. It also provides pointers to other sources of information and help.

**Download Richer Play in Schools from our website at [www.playwales.org.uk/factsheets](http://www.playwales.org.uk/factsheets) or ring our office for the printed version.**



# The Spirit of Adventure Play

**T**here was a relaxed and friendly atmosphere at this year's Play Wales Spirit of Adventure Play Conference. Over a hundred delegates from all over the UK joined together on two sunny May days for a varied and stimulating programme that gave plenty of time for networking, discussion and debate. Unfortunately once again, the conference was oversubscribed and forty or so disappointed play professionals failed to make it off the waiting list. So next year please get your booking form in early.

Professor David Ball set the tone with a thought provoking presentation on risk assessment and health and safety on playgrounds that put current thinking and practice into context and supported the ethos of playwork and beneficial risk taking. The conference progressed with a wide range of workshops – from “Burnt on the Outside” a chance to look at how to support children to cook over an open fire, to “Adventurous Approaches to Working Inclusively”.

The feedback from delegates was very positive and we are already starting to plan for May next year. If you would

like to contribute to The Spirit of Adventure Play 2006 please get in touch. We are looking for presentations, workshops, and people who would pitch in ideas as part of a planning team.

Our thanks go out to everyone who helps make Spirit such a good conference.

Presentations and workshop notes from the Spirit of Adventure 2005 are available on a CD, please contact Kathy at our national office if you would like a copy (029 2048 6050 or e-mail [mail@playwales.org.uk](mailto:mail@playwales.org.uk))

## Inflatable Safety

**T**he first commercially designed and manufactured bouncy castle was produced in the UK in 1973. Bouncy castles and other inflatables are always a popular choice for children as part of play provision and at fairs and events, but they have never been covered by the same kind of safety standards as other play equipment. Play Wales is among a number of organisations that have been concerned at this state of affairs.

Play Wales' Senior Development Officer, Tony Chilton, has recently been in discussion with John Simmons, chair of the Inflatable Play Manufacturers Association (IPMA) about safety issues relating to the design, use and maintenance of inflatable play equipment. In the meantime, recently determined standards are being applied throughout Europe.

Play Wales will be providing training and awareness events on the new standards in the near future. Anyone with an interest should contact Tony Chilton at our North Wales office on 01745 851816.

### IPMA promotes the PIPA Scheme

The best inflatables in terms of imaginative designs, coupled with the very best play value, technology, durability and safety are provided in the UK. Importantly, all inflatables manufactured by members of the Inflatable Play Manufacturers Association (IPMA) are produced to the most up to date safety standards.

All members have adopted the draft European Standard prEN 14960 Inflatable Play Equipment – Safety Requirements and Test Methods which was issued in May 2004 and

subsequently adopted by the PERTEXA Play Accreditation Scheme (PIPA Inflatable Play Accreditation Scheme). PIPA was set up by the British inflatable industry and is endorsed by the Health and Safety Executive.

Under the PIPA Scheme each new inflatable delivered after January 2005 must have an initial inspection to ensure that it complies with the requirements of prEN 14960. In addition, each inflatable already in use in the UK must be given an independent annual safety inspection. These inspections will be carried out solely by Register of Play Inspector International (RPII) qualified inspectors.

To date, fifty UK based inspectors have passed the RPII inflatables examination. In the meantime the IPMA membership is wrestling with the implementation of the PIPA scheme. Thankfully, teething problems have been contained with simplification of computer input routines to the central database. One of the key issues that has arisen from improved inspection routines is that of improving the tags that anchor the inflatable to the ground. Consistent interpretation “of the rules” by all inspectors is critical, and consequently the RPII set up an Interpretation Seminar for all their Inflatable Inspectors in early June and will ensure an Interpretation Panel is in place before the end of 2005.

Thanks to the support of AIMODS (Association of Inflatable Manufacturers, Operators and Designers), PERTEXA (Inflatable Play Accreditation Scheme), BIHA and NAIH, the PIPA scheme is up and running, credited by the Health and Safety Executive as best practice and will be firmly established over the next year as annual inspections are carried out.

John Simmons

### Soft Play Standards

Another area of concern was the lack of standards for soft play equipment. The British Standards Institute has recently published a code of practice for Soft Indoor Play Areas. Play Wales holds copies in our Information Service in Cardiff and Prestatyn, which is open to visitors by prior arrangement, or order your own through the BSI by ringing 020 8996 9001, or e-mail [cservices@bsi-global.com](mailto:cservices@bsi-global.com)

# Playwork Educat

## Strategy for Wales



**F**or the first time there is to be a strategy for the delivery of playwork education and training in Wales. This is in the process of being drafted and will be published early in 2006. It will also form part of SkillsActive's new UK "Quality Training, Quality Play – New Horizons 2005-2010", with an umbrella UK strategy and individual implementation plans for each of the four nations.

SkillsActive is the national training organisation for playwork; an organisation with a UK brief that has hitherto struggled to meet the needs of the playwork sector outside England. Tanny Stobart has recently taken up a new SkillsActive post created in recognition of this struggle and the differing issues that affect the playwork sector in each of the four nations. She has thoroughly enjoyed her introduction to Wales, where she has found great enthusiasm and commitment among playworkers, trainers, and play development officers. Here she reports on the results of the consultation on the new playwork education and training strategy, and plans for the future:

Play Wales and SkillsActive have organised a number of consultation events across Wales over the last six months, to discuss how the new strategy might be implemented. Almost six hundred responses to the consultation have been received across the UK, with forty-one coming from Wales.

### The results have prioritised five key themes:

- Professional status
- Training and qualifications
- Cross sector working
- A UK approach
- Supporting the playwork sector

Respondents recognised that playwork has too low a status, and a priority will be to increase standing alongside other professions. There is substantial support for the development of a professional register of

playworkers. There is divided opinion about whether the strategy should be developing a cross sector skills approach. The common core developments in England, and pedagogy models were high on the agenda for discussion. This is in part due to concern about professional status and maintaining the values and principles of playwork.

Over half the responses from the sector say that it is important to maintain playwork qualifications separate from other qualifications for those working with children. It is also seen as important to train other professions in playwork principles and practice, particularly within the recreation and leisure sectors, and teaching and non teaching staff within schools.

Tremendous advances have been made in Wales to raise the profile of playwork, highlighted by the adoption of the national play policy and the work on the Play Policy Implementation Plan (Play Strategy). A significant number of those responding to the surveys felt that it was important that there is a qualification structure in place that allows upward progression to Level 4 (degree level) and beyond. There is also support for Continuous Professional Development opportunities covering play theory, practice and philosophy. The vast majority felt that the new Strategy should work to develop training for practitioners during working hours.

The next stage of the process is to consider the results and write the Implementation Plan for Playwork Education and Training in Wales. This will be jointly co-ordinated by Tillie Mobbs, Training and Education Development Officer at Play Wales, and colleagues from the sector, and SkillsActive. The playwork sector group will look at ways to develop a variety of pathways and opportunities to meet the needs of new and existing learners. It will consider the development of a coherent route for playwork training and qualifications in Wales. Working directly with employers it will help to put together a Playwork Education and Training Implementation Plan which will become part of the SkillsActive Sector Skills Agreement.

**If you would like to be part of the group, or to keep in touch with developments, please contact:**

**Tillie Mobbs at Play Wales - e-mail:**  
[tillie@playwales.org.uk](mailto:tillie@playwales.org.uk) or phone 029 2048 6050



# ion and Training

## AN EXCITING OPPORTUNITY TO FORGE NEW TRAINING

**S**ince the publication of 'The First Claim - a framework for playwork quality assessment' which is based on play theory, the observation of children, and reflective practice, Play Wales has been working on a project to create new training materials and qualifications for playworkers based on the same philosophy.

When we reviewed the playwork training currently available, we decided that rather than make compromises by trying to fit together the content and ethos of the First Claim with existing training packages, there was need for new induction level, and level two and three training that has children's play at its core and really engages with, and meets the needs of playworkers.

We expect that the training materials will be radically different from other learning currently available. It is anticipated that the training package will be more than just content, and will be delivered with a methodology that reflects the full range of participants' learning styles and makes gaining the qualification an exciting and diverse experience.

As announced previously in Play for Wales, we have the opportunity to undertake this exciting new project as part of the CWLWM partnership (Childcare Wales Learning and Working Mutually) and thanks to a successful funding application to the EQUAL European Social Fund.

We are now in the position to employ someone who shares our vision and can lead this project with energy and imagination as part of the Play Wales team. We will also be looking for a skilled financial administrator who (ideally) has experience of ESF practices and procedures, and who can ensure the return of monthly staff expenses claim forms without the undue use of thumbscrews.



### PLAY WALES HAS A VACANCY FOR A PROJECT MANAGER

**PO3, spinal points 38 - 41  
starting salary £28,173. This  
post is initially for two years.**

Play Wales has received funding from the Equal European Social fund enabling the development of a playwork training project, and is seeking to employ a project manager to lead this work. This project is one of a number being undertaken by the CWLWM partnership.

Applicants should be suitably experienced with good communication and interpersonal skills, and have significant experience of developing playwork education and training, and not being adverse to risk taking

The core of this project is children's play, and how it can be facilitated by playworkers.

The post is based in Cardiff. Play Wales is committed to offering a flexible working environment and proposals for a secondment would be considered.

Play Wales is funded by the National Assembly for Wales to influence the policy, strategic planning and practice of all agencies and organisations who have an interest in children's play by identifying needs and emphasising the profound importance of children's development through play.

For an informal discussion regarding the post please contact Mike Greenaway or Tillie Mobbs telephone: 029 2048 6050

**For further details and application form please contact Play Wales, Baltic House, Mt. Stuart Square, Cardiff Bay, Cardiff CH10 5FH. or email [jobs@playwales.org.uk](mailto:jobs@playwales.org.uk)**

**Closing date Friday, 22nd July 2005**



## Congratulations

**The first cohort of students to complete a degree in playwork in Wales recently graduated from the BA (Hons) Community Studies (Playwork) course at the University of Wales, Newport.**

Congratulations go to Barbara Howe (Multi Agency Parenting Co-ordinator, Torfaen), Jackie James (Development Worker, Young Children and Parents Project, Riverside, Cardiff), Deborah Jones (Play Development Worker, Valleys Kids), Michelle Jones (Play Development Officer, Caerphilly

Creative Play Project), Aimee Priest (Play Development Officer, Monmouthshire), Sarah Southern (Play Development Officer, Blaenau Gwent), and Lisa Williams (Playworker, Cardiff Children's Play Services).

# EVENTS

18-22 July, 2005, Berlin

## Education With Creativity and Diversity:

### 16th IPA World Conference

For further information see <http://www.ipa2005.de>

3 August, 2005

### Playday: Fit for Play?

For further information see [www.playday.org.uk](http://www.playday.org.uk)

24-26 August, 2005, Delft, The Netherlands  
Childstreet 2005

## An interactive conference on the development, design and evaluation of a child-friendly public space, geared for playing, walking and cycling.

For further information see [www.urban.nl/childstreet2005](http://www.urban.nl/childstreet2005)

9-11 September, 2005, Staffordshire

### Beauty of Play 3rd Annual Conference

A chance for playworkers to reflect on their practice in beautiful surroundings under canvas.

Contact: Perry Else

Tel: 01142 552 432

Email: [info.ludemos@virgin.net](mailto:info.ludemos@virgin.net)

13 October, 2005, London

### Playwork into the Future: Skillsactive Conference

Contact: Cheryl Francis

Tel: 020 7632 2020

## New Director for Play Matters Wales

**M**ark Sainsbury (formerly Play Strategy Officer for Neath Port Talbot) has recently taken up post as Director (Wales) for Play Matters, the National Association of Toy and Leisure Libraries, working four days a week, based in the office in Brecon.

His role is to support Toy & Leisure Libraries in whatever they are delivering and working strategically with partners across Wales. The current membership of 35 active Toy Libraries is providing more than the loan of toys; some are highly specialised, some are mobile, and all have children's need and right to play at the heart of their provision. Mark is keen to extend support to those running, or setting up, a toy library in North Wales.

For more information call Mark or Yvonne (Admin Officer) on 01874 622097

## Two New Trustees

**P**lay Wales welcomes two new Trustees who recently attended their first Board meeting.

Marc Phillips is currently National Co-ordinator (Wales) of BBC Children in Need and a member of the Welsh Language Board. He has been involved in the voluntary sector, and directly and indirectly in children's play provision over many years.

Dr Nigel Thomas is Senior Lecturer in Childhood Studies and Director of Research at Swansea University. He teaches and researches mainly in the areas of childhood studies and children's rights.

We also have a new observer, Daisy Seabourne, representing the Welsh Local Government Association.

# Play for Wales SURVEY

**T**hank you to everyone who returned the Play for Wales survey included in Issue 15.

It seems that we are including articles that you find relevant and Play for Wales helps you to keep updated on what is happening across Wales. As one person mentioned, "it's good to know there are like-minded people out there".

In particular features relating to local and national play news appear to be highly valued, with 85% of you marking them as 4

or 5, while 82.5% of you marked articles on funding as being 4 or higher. Some suggestions for future issues were articles on mobile play provision, play in hospitals and biographies of people within the playwork sector. Thanks for all your comments we will take your ideas on board when writing future issues.

All responses were entered into our prize draw. Congratulations to Dawn Hughes from Beaumaris Kids Club, Ynys Mon who wins a £20 Argos voucher.

We are always looking at ways of improving and ensuring that the information we include is both interesting and relevant to you. If you feel that you would like to contribute, either by giving us your feedback or reporting on local play issues from your area, please contact Gill Evans, Information Officer at [info@playwales.org.uk](mailto:info@playwales.org.uk).