



National Play Strategy consultation response

About Parenting across Scotland

Parenting across Scotland (PAS) is a partnership of voluntary organisations working together to provide a focus for issues and concerns affecting parents and families in Scotland.

The PAS partners are CHILDREN 1ST, Aberlour Childcare Trust, Capability Scotland, Families Outside, One Parent Families Scotland, Relationships Scotland, Scottish Adoption Association, and SMC (formerly Scottish Marriage Care).

The Parenting across Scotland partners work with thousands of disadvantaged families throughout Scotland. Partners provide services to families living in poverty, lone families, families affected by disability, families affected by substance abuse, kinship carers, adoptive families, separated families, stepfamilies and many others. We use the views and experiences of those using partner services to inform our policy responses.

PAS provides **information and support** to parents through

- its website www.parentingacrossscotland.org
- its partner helplines (Parentline, Lone Parent helpline, Advice Service Capability Scotland and Stepfamily helpline)
- our Ten Top Tips publications for parents

PAS works on **policy** through consultation responses, engagement with politicians and decision-makers, participation in government working groups, conferences and seminars, and its e-mail newsletter for practitioners.

PAS uses **research** to inform its policy and information work. We commission research and work with others to inform their research.

Surveys of parents - PAS conducts representative surveys of parents in Scotland (undertaken on behalf of PAS by Ipsos-MORI); we feedback parents views on a wide range of issues to policymakers and decision-makers. The results of our MORI polls can be found on the PAS website (<http://www.parentingacrossscotland.org/publications/polls-and-surveys.aspx>).

About Families – the About Families project (www.aboutfamilies.org.uk) examines the evidence base around parenting with a particular emphasis on the inclusion of families affected by disability. It provides user-friendly topic reports which help services to use evidence to inform service provision and improvement.

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Parenting across Scotland response to consultation on a National Play Strategy for Scotland

We welcome a National Play Strategy for Scotland and are pleased to be asked to comment on the first draft. Play is absolutely necessary for people of all ages to replenish our batteries and enhance our well being. For children it is even more crucial as the means by which they engage with and work out their world.

Given the importance of play and the planned introduction of a play strategy, we would fully expect there to be commitments to play and duties within the forthcoming Children and Young People's Bill. Part of regulations or guidance on wellbeing must include reference to play as the necessary means by which children's wellbeing is maintained and enhanced.

The UNCRC should be at the forefront of the Play Strategy – the Convention's statement on play and the recent comment should introduce the strategy.

There is already a recognition that a wide range of agencies need to be involved in a Play Strategy; we would suggest that within the strategy there needs to be a clear emphasis on planning as a conduit for ensuring that local neighbourhoods contain safe environments for children's play opportunities.

Within the strategy, there needs to be some recognition of inequality and its effects on opportunities to play and ways of playing. For example, the pressure that consumerism puts on all parents to purchase expensive toys and games, has a greater detrimental effect on parents without the income to purchase them. Additionally, parents on a greater income are generally more likely to have better access to safe spaces for their children to play eg houses with gardens than parents on low incomes where the neighbourhood may be more built up and with less safe space, and while we encourage families to make better use of the outdoors with the maxim 'there's no such thing as bad weather, only inappropriate clothing', for many inadequate clothing may be all they possess.

A startling omission is the lack of mention of disability; we know that families affected by disability face very real barriers to inclusion and any strategy which is part of Getting It Right For Every Child must get it right for those affected by disability. Similarly, there is no mention in the document of the important place therapeutic play has in helping children and young people recover from trauma and abuse.

Also, useful linkages could be made between this Strategy and the Curriculum for Excellence to stress the importance of play based learning, particularly, but not exclusively in the early years of primary education.

Introduction

In our polls of parents (<http://www.parentingacrossscotland.org/publications/polls-and-surveys.aspx>) parents have consistently told us without being prompted that what they want is safe places and activities for their children, and particularly that there is a dearth of activities for young people. Accordingly, a Play Strategy which seeks to address these concerns is very welcome.

In terms of 'why we need a strategy' reference needs to be made to the erosion of safe play areas and the move away from outdoor play, and to the increasing use of new technology and screen based activities. Additionally, the current low level of investment in play should be stated, and it should be affirmed that higher levels of investment are necessary to rebuild our play infrastructure.

Usefully, the introduction mentions the importance of wider policies and initiatives. With regard to planning, in particular, there should be a children and young people's impact assessment of any new developments to ensure that safe play spaces are provided by, for example, providing designated spaces and traffic calming measures, such as 20's plenty zones .

Currently the introduction says 'It is imperative that children understand they have an equal role in society and their voices are heard.'. Perhaps it would be more encouraging to say that, 'It is imperative that children's voices are heard and their concerns are acted upon.' It's important, not only that children's voices are heard, but that once they are, the adults who are the agents of change in society take their voices into account and act upon them. Children and families should be involved in deciding and designing play the play spaces which they will use.

The statement 'Using existing powers... we can achieve much more' seems redundant here and a statement of politics rather than strategy; it remains unclear which powers could allow us to do more of what precisely. Perhaps if this statement needs to be included as a political statement, it should be included in the Ministerial foreword rather than in the body of the strategy.

Section 1: What is play?

As well as academic quotations on what play is, it would be useful here to have quotations from children and young people themselves, and perhaps to include illustrations of different types of play (to include traditional and non-traditional).

Section 2: Why play matters

The final two paragraphs of section 3, from 'Play helps children... younger children to participate' fit more appositely here than in the rights section, as they are more about why play matters and its positive effects than about rights..

Section 3: Every child's right

In paragraph 1, relating to the UNCRC it would be more useful to say that the Scottish Government has responsibility for implementing the UNCRC in Scotland with the Dept of

Education in England holding the responsibility for UK-wide reporting (it doesn't seem necessary to say whose responsibility it is in England).

The third paragraph refers to the recent general comment on play but neither quotes nor explains it. In order to justify its inclusion, it needs to include more information about what it is (for those reading it who are not steeped in either the UNCRC or play).

The final two paragraphs about why play is important are very supportive, but perhaps as indicated above more properly fit in section 2.

Section 4: Play today

As it stands, this section does not fully state the changing nature of play today and why it matters. There needs to be more about the reality of play today. This needs to state the move away from outdoor play and explore why it is important for children to play outside. We welcome the reference to materialism and consumerism and feel that these could usefully be linked to poverty and inequality.

The importance of outdoor play is constantly stated by advocates for play, and we fully support this. Nonetheless, it is also important to recognise and start from the reality of people's lives. The strategy needs to state what play looks like today. For many that reality is indoors, in front of a screen, be it TV, computer or phone. That needs to be stated and to be recognised as one of a variety of options, and guidance given to parents about use. While a move towards outdoor play and physical activity is to be encouraged, parents need more information on indoor play too, particularly in terms of screen time. Parents don't know what limits they should set on use or what the effect of prolonged screen time can be. More information needs to be provided to parents about the impact of protracted screen-time and computer use on, for example, sleep, and about the impact of TVs and computers in bedrooms, and about ways of monitoring online time.

Currently, there is a section 6 on independence and boundary setting, but perhaps this might work better as a subsection of this section bringing together information about play today and how this has changed, its impact and the strategies we need to adopt to work towards more healthy play.

In terms of play today, it would be useful to refer to other changes which impact on families and consequently on play; for example, a higher proportion of single parent families and more families working. Also, within this section there needs to be overt recognition of the effects of inequality of income and opportunity on play, and some policy intention on how this imbalance can be addressed. Further, in this section (as in the rest of the strategy) the lack of reference to children with disabilities is a worrying omission which needs to be remedied before the strategy is finalised.

Section 5: Outdoors

We welcome the statement that children should be encouraged to play outside more and the recognition that we have moved away from this as a society.

There does, however, need to be safe places in neighbourhoods where children can do this – and in some neighbourhoods spaces are not conducive to safe play, whether this be because of local crime, pollution or traffic. For some the option of 'appreciating your natural

surroundings and breathing in fresh air' is not their everyday experience; instead playing outside may mean playing among discarded needles and broken glass while breathing in traffic fumes. In order to ensure that all children have access to play we need to ensure that environments which are safe and conducive to play are available to all Scotland's children. In local authorities, play needs to be as much on the agendas of departments such as planning and housing as leisure and recreation. Any action plan attached to the strategy should look at prioritising addressing provision of outdoor play space in areas that have the highest incidence of road traffic accidents involving children.

Section 6: Independence and boundary setting

We welcome the statement that parents have a key role in supporting their children to become independent by setting boundaries and encouraging children to take steps towards independence, and recognise this as a key part of the parental role. We agree that parents are their children's gatekeepers into the adult world and need to keep that gate open so that their children can develop into resilient, healthy adults. Along with their duty to keep their children safe, parents need to balance the need for their children to make their own decisions and take risks.

There has been a great deal of anxiety about Britain becoming a risk averse society and one where increasingly our children are wrapped in cotton wool. This is restated here, and we would agree that this is accurate.

The perception of risk among parents now seems much elevated from perceived levels of risk in the past. The incidences of 'Stranger danger', for example, are no higher than in the past, but people's perceptions of this are much higher with consequent restrictions on their children's activities.

There is nothing here that we disagree with. However, this is a statement of the situation rather than a strategy for changing it and moving it towards a healthier alternative. There needs to be more of the 'how' here. In particular, we would welcome efforts to inform parents better of the benefits of play and to understand risk. Also, discussions with/guidelines for the media around reporting of children and risk would be welcome: the elevated pitch of much reporting substantially contributes to parental anxiety and their perception of risk.

Outcomes and objectives

The section on outcomes for families says that there are two main outcomes for families. However, given that most parents want the best for their children, surely the best outcome for families must align with the outcomes for children and be that their children grow up to be healthy, happy individuals.

Section 8: Coordinating our efforts

Currently it is not possible to give any comprehensive comments on this section given its outline status. However, we are encouraged by the framework and inclusion of many key groups. We would, however, suggest the inclusion of the police as a key stakeholder.