Play is what children and young people do when they follow their own ideas and interests, in their own way and for their own reasons.

Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2004
Introduction

Play is a serious business. It captures something essential about the human condition; a flight of imagination and creativity and a sense of exploration and ‘what if’. Unite counts playworkers amongst its varied membership and have been horrified at the threat funding cuts pose to the future of our play provision. Back in 2010 with spending cuts looming Demos and Play England published the wonderfully written ‘People make Play, an evocative walk through the experiences of children and parents in their use of six play centres. The foreword suggested that “We live in serious times. Politicians spend most of their time wearing grave expressions…” and in contrast to the serious, knotty problems of budgets and terrorist plots discussing play was seen as frivolous, something to be concerned -about in ‘better times’. Four years later and it is painfully clear that play has been seen as something frivolous and a luxury in these austere times, rather than an essential part of life. The unnecessary programme of spending cuts that has been embarked upon has fallen heavily on local government, and in turn the axe has fallen on playwork as a non-statutory service. Indeed, in 2014 a third of council chiefs are concerned they may no longer be able to even meet their statutory duties in future let alone ‘luxuries’ such as play services.

This document puts forward Unite’s view that it is a child’s right to play; and part of this right should be to experience good quality, staffed, local play provision that is free to all. We believe this has intrinsic value to children and has positive wider benefits for parents, young people and local communities. Threaded through this document are the comments of playworkers themselves who have seen their services placed under threat and pulled apart. Though not our main focus here, it should be noted that in making our argument for investment in playwork at the present time, Unite is not simply making a ‘NIMBYish’ case against cuts to this particular area of public spending. Our view is clear – we do not believe that the cuts are economically necessary, and are instead politically motivated. Unite believe we should be expanding, rather than contracting, our play provision as part of re-claiming and creating positive public spaces in our local communities and charting a brighter future, rather than our current austere times.

1People Make Play: The impact of staffed play provision on children, families and communities, Joost Beunderman, for Demos and Play England, 2010
2The MJ, ‘Exclusive: Third of chiefs fear for their council’s ability to deliver legal duties’, 6th February 2014
Play is what children and young people do when they follow their own ideas and interests, in their own way and for their own reasons.

Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2004

Play has been described as an ambiguity as well as a behaviour, drive and disposition, but a central tenet is that it is satisfying, fun and freely chosen by children. Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, recently enhanced by a General Comment, places a duty on governments to protect and promote play opportunities for all children and young people. It states that:

1. States Parties recognise the right of the child 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.

2. States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity.

The Charter for Children’s Play seeks to be a guide and framework for how the text of Article 31 can be transformed into reality in a national, regional and local context. It is underpinned by four key understandings – reproduced below – and has eight Principles, given in Appendix 1.

- Play is an essential part of every child’s life, vital to their development. It is the way they explore for themselves the world around them; the way they naturally develop understanding and practice skills.

- Play is essential for healthy physical and emotional growth, for intellectual and educational development, and for acquiring social and behavioural skills.

- Play may or may not involve equipment or have an end product. Children play on their own and with others. Their play may be boisterous and energetic, or quiet and contemplative, light-hearted or very serious.

- Children’s own culture is created and lived through their play.

It is worth reproducing these in full as children’s rights to play, and in the choice and control of the child in their play, rather than being steered or directed by adults, strongly informs the ethos and practice of playworkers. It is the basis for the Playwork Principles, the professional and ethical framework for playwork. Play can clearly happen anywhere where children are, in their homes, their streets, at school, in gardens. It does not require an adult presence, so what is playwork necessary for?

Much of our public space is constructed as adult space and is often hostile to children’s presence, with groups of children and young people often portrayed in a negative or problematic light. At the same time, growing parental fears over ‘stranger danger’, urban planning which does not sufficiently promote physical activity or safe public, collective spaces has led to a well documented decline of outside, unsupervised children’s play. In 2013 joint research by Play England, Play Wales, Play Scotland and PlayBoard Northern Ireland found that while over half of adults questioned played outside at least seven times a week when they were growing up, less than a quarter of children do so today. Reasons why were given as concerns about traffic and ‘stranger danger’, but also 1 in 4 adults cited tolerant neighbours, fear of being judged by neighbours if they allowed their children to play unsupervised outside and nearly a third believing that ball games and other noisy outdoor activities would cause problems with other residents. At the same time a third of adults and a fifth of children thought that more spaces to play within the local community would get more children playing outside.


General comment No. 17 (2013) on the right of the child to rest, leisure, play, recreational activities, cultural life and the arts (art. 31), United Nations, Charter for Children’s Play, Play England can be found at www.playengland.org.uk/charter

Playwork Principles Scrutiny Group, Cardiff, 2005


Play provision by local authorities and other — often local — organisations — occupies a variety of physical settings; adventure playgrounds, local parks, indoor and outdoor centres. Across all these differences in physical setting is the fact that there has been a drive to carve out and co-create a space that is a children’s space and seen as their space. It is not an institutional space, such as a school, but one that they feel is theirs, where they do not receive ‘instruction’ and where they can go to freely.

At the same time, Demos and Play England suggest “Children playing can be boisterous, cruel, sometimes violent. [Playworkers] see their role as striking a balance between allowing full expression through play and cultivating an atmosphere of safety, tolerance and mutual respect, intervening carefully only where necessary to ensure that the [play provision] sites are inclusive to all” 9. This is a complex, and delicate balance to strike. When done well and with sensitivity it can create environments where children of different backgrounds, ages and under-represented groups such as disabled children or Black and Minority Ethnic children, can mix and play together. Barriers erected outside of the play provision can be broken down within it. For these reasons, the Charter for Children’s Play includes two principles that specifically draw attention to the beneficial role of playworkers.

- **Children value and benefit from staffed play provision**
  Children should have access to a choice of staffed facilities where children’s play rights and needs are the first priority, such as adventure playgrounds, play centres, holiday play schemes, after-school play clubs, breakfast play clubs, toy libraries, play buses and play ranger services.

- **Children’s play is enriched by skilled playworkers**
  Qualified, skilled playworkers are trained to put children’s play needs at the centre of their work in a variety of settings, enhancing the range and quality of play experiences for all children. They are the best people to run staffed play provision for school-aged children. The role of the playworker is as important as that of any skilled professional working with children and should be respected and rewarded accordingly.

It is therefore a highly skilled, reflective practice underpinned by the Playwork Principles — see Appendix 2 — which sketch out the relationship between children’s play and playwork. While not denigrating the role of many adults and young people who volunteer in supervising children’s activities, there is a continued need for funded, trained and skilled playworkers to facilitate time and space for play where children and young people can have rich and varied experiences. This need did not disappear with the onset of funding cuts, and as part of resisting the implementation of funding cuts there is not only a need to make a cogent argument for play provision but also that it should be staffed by those qualified and trained in playwork. We want to resist any move to make ‘play’ a very narrow band of activities for children that adults believe children ‘ought’ to take part in, with the role and contribution of experienced, trained and qualified playworkers dismissed.

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9People Make Play, The impact of staffed play provision on children, families and communities, Joost Beunderman, for Demos and Play England, 2010, pg xv
What are the benefits of a playwork service?

There are a multitude of benefits to play for children, and as stated above play would continue without playworkers. But as also highlighted above, there are specific benefits to be gleaned from the provision of a space children feel is their own, and enables children from all backgrounds and ages to mix freely. The ‘Benefits of Play and Playwork: Recent evidence-based research (2001-2006) demonstrating the impact and benefits of play and playwork’\(^{10}\) gives an overview of these multifaceted benefits to children experiencing play and playwork as part of their childhood. These include instrumental benefits such as cognitive development, and contributing to education and lifelong learning; to physical health and emotional well-being; development of positive social relationships, and acceptance and understanding of diversity. Children participating range in age from 5 years to 14 years old, with many between 8 years and 12 years old, allowing a mix of children from across age ranges to learn from each other.

It is also worth putting play provision in its wider context. In many built-up, densely populated areas there is limited outdoor space, including private gardens, for households. Overcrowding of households has become a growing problem as the housing shortage has ballooned. As the Play England report ‘People make Play’ makes clear, the value of play provision to areas where there are high levels of economic deprivation is significant. Play provision is not just used by children who may have difficult home lives, but for those that do it can prove to be a place where they can enjoy being children – and mix with those whose lives are very different to their own. In this context, staffed play provision also allows the opportunity for children to build trusted relationships with a responsible adult who is on ‘their side’.

The history of staffed play provision, particularly adventure playgrounds, grew out of the urban landscapes of post-WW2 and was often seen as developing and promoting democratic values\(^{11}\) – and its ethos has meant it has been free to all. Its value as a staffed, safe yet adventurous space for children therefore can have several benefits for parents. It is unfair to say that parents see staffed play provision as ‘cheap childcare’ – the parents interviewed for the Play England report valued the enjoyment their children derived most of all – but it cannot be uncommented upon that staffed sessions do allow parents some ‘time-off’, whether that is for paid work, to do volunteering themselves, to meet, spend time with and build a supportive network with other parents, or simply because if you are in an overcrowded home there is benefit to the parent(s) of having their own time and space occasionally. Lone parents, and two parent households on low incomes, can struggle with being time poor, as well as financially stretched. These are all valuable benefits that also benefit the children. The free provision of play facilities also ensures that children and parents of all backgrounds do mix; as soon as some are excluded by cost you are restricting the social mix that comes together. Universal, high quality play provision means that at no point do facilities and activities become residual, to be stigmatised or acquire that horrible label as being for ‘problem’ or ‘deprived’ families.

As well as in a dedicated space – such as an adventure playground or after-school club – play provision and playwork also takes place in parks and open spaces. This brings an interesting, wider benefit to local communities. Such open spaces and parks can often be seen as bleak, and under-used, creating a feeling that it may not be safe and certainly not an enjoyable place to spend time. Play Rangers holding open play sessions in these spaces can change the atmosphere; the park is used, it is full of noisy children playing and sometimes parents grouping to catch-up with one another. It can be used not just to bring benefit to children but provide a catalyst for the wider enjoyment of our public open spaces.

These are all what may be called ‘instrumental’ benefits – they are the by-products of play and playwork. There is an intrinsic value that children derive from play for play sake and it is important that play and playwork is valued for the good it brings in and of itself. This makes sense as soon as you reflect on your own childhood, there is intrinsic good to having a happy as possible childhood. In an increasingly atomised society it is not hard to see the detriment that can be caused by being deprived of learning the skills that play teaches, of being less happy in childhood, of weakening community ties. Attempts to quantify the wider benefits of play and playwork have been resisted for fear that it would attract direction about what was appropriate, best, most value for society, the ‘right’ sort of play for children. That of course goes against the central point – it is through children determining the content of their play and their exploration of the world and forming relationships that all these wider benefits flow.

\(^{10}\)Beth Manwaring and Chris Taylor, The Benefits of Play and Playwork: Recent evidence-based research (2001-2006) demonstrating the impact and benefits of play and playwork, SkillsActive and CYWU

\(^{11}\)R. Kozlovsky, 2008, ‘Adventure Playgrounds and Postwar Reconstruction’ from M. Gutman and N, De Coninck-Smith (Eds.) Designing modern childhoods: history, space and the material culture of children, New Brunswick, N.J; London: Rutgers University Press
Impact of cuts on providing play

[There is a ] lack of understanding of the value of play facilities and having staff with the right qualifications for the job. Lack of funding to develop play opportunities and resources.

Assessor, North West

The profile of play in [in my town] is really low - the two adventure playgrounds (in two of the most deprived areas) are being threatened with closure.

Playworker, North East, Yorkshire and Humberside

In 2011 and 2013 Unite conducted an online poll of Playworkers, asking for their experiences of trying to deliver play provision in the current climate. The political and economic landscape changed drastically during these two years. Concerns about future funding which had begun to bite in 2011 have been realised and it has been made clear that austerity and funding cuts are planned to continue for many years ahead. Let’s look at this wider context to consider the survey results.

In 2008 the then government launched the Playbuilder and Play Pathfinder schemes, investing £235 million to provide 30 adventure playgrounds and up to 3,500 new or refurbished play areas in England. There was an additional £155 million Big Lottery programme for play provision in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland had their own programmes. This funding drew to an end in 2011 with the current government stating that “full responsibility for play will be returned to local authorities and their communities” 12.

Local authorities have of course been hit by the bulk of this government’s unnecessary spending cuts, and so play provision has been hard hit. A recent CYFNow investigation 13 found that total capital spending had dropped from £37.8 million in 2010 to £18.8 million in 2013. Of the 157 councils that responded to the Freedom of Information request these councils said they had been able to ‘limit’ the closures of unstaffed play areas – though 145 of these have still closed. However the cuts that have been visited on staffed play provision have been so deep that CYFNow reported that “one of the country’s most senior play experts to predict that all adventure playgrounds [in England] will be gone in three years”. Funding is definitely a primary concern in the future of play provision and playwork, but it is also worth noting two additional trends that work to erode playwork. Firstly, the drive to privatisation and contracting that has gained renewed impetus under the current government is a culture of quantifying financial cost and benefit, of potential profit and surplus. This may threaten to drive the financial quantifying of the instrumental benefits of playwork that has so far been resisted. Secondly, as Tim Gill noted in his comments on the CYFNow investigation “The government remains largely uninterested, if not hostile. Its proposed new legal thresholds around antisocial behaviour are so low that even the police are worried that they will criminalise children for being children” 14.

To help us look at the impact of funding cuts we can turn to the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings. This includes data collection on the occupational job code ‘playworker’ 15, such as numbers employed across the economy, hours worked, pay division between part-time and full-time and gender. While this occupational code is much wider than our definition of a playworker (it also includes nursery workers and playgroup leaders for example) it does give a clear indication of what is happening to the sector. We see a steady upward trend in the number of jobs until 2010, and a sharp decrease from then.

Chart 1 Number employed under the Standard Occupational Code ‘Playworker’

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13 Children and Young People Now, Outdoor play under threat from local facilities and funding cull, Gabriella Józwik, 7-20 January 2014
14 Children and Young People Now, Outdoor play under threat from local facilities and funding cull, Gabriella Józwik, 7-20 January 2014
15 Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings, 2013 provisional results, released December 2013, published by Office for National Statistics. Standard Occupational Code 6123; please note prior to 2010 this group was called ‘playgroup leaders/assistants’ though continued to cover the same job titles.
Although the number of respondents varied considerably between the two Unite surveys – 147 in 2011 and 35 in 2013 – both had a response from each geographic region in England and Wales and across local authority, voluntary and private sectors. In 2013 responses were from 28 employed staff and 6 volunteers, with one respondent not giving this information. The numbers prohibit the responses being treated as a representative sample, but they are an important snapshot into the sector and the comments and experiences of respondents chime with the wider trends we know are affecting playwork and play provision.

In 2011 over a third of respondents indicated their organisations were planning to cut services completely, while almost three quarters said their employers had made cuts or were planning to make cuts. A majority of respondents thought that even if their employers had not made cuts to play services yet, these were likely to happen. The end of the Big Lottery programme for play and the Labour government play programme in England meant that nearly half of respondents said that the cuts were due to funding finishing at the end of March 2011. Slightly over half of the cuts reported in 2011 were from main local authority budgets. These results tally with both the sharp drop in numbers of jobs recorded, in Chart 1 above, and Chart 2 below.

In our 2013 snapshot 18 respondents replied that play staff had been made redundant or were at risk of redundancy. Of these, 9 replied that between 1 and 4 people were affected in their organisation; 4 replied that between 5 and 10 people were affected and 1 replied that between 50 and 99 people were affected. Though in thirteen of these cases it could be argued that relatively small numbers of people are impacted upon these are in the main small organisations we are considering. Such a loss of posts represents a significant cut in playwork.

“**No camps, less equipment, unexperienced or skeleton staff:**

Adventure Playground worker, Wales

“**Less trips, higher ratios, less diverse arts and crafts activities, reduced paid training, more use of volunteers:**

Service Director, North East, Yorkshire and Humberside

Chart 2 illustrates the changes to the paid number of weekly hours worked by those recorded under the ‘playworker’ occupational code, and captures the changes in hours by those who have remained employed. It can be seen that a quarter of those working under the ‘playworker’ occupational code now work 8 paid hours a week or less (the 25 percentile line). Half work approximately 15 paid hours a week or less (the median line); this has remained relatively stable over time. Three quarters work 24 paid hours a week or less (the 75 percentile line). In all cases we can see a downward turn appearing at 2012.

In the 2013 survey there were 11 respondents whose organisations had reduced hours. Interestingly there were 10 respondents who said their organisation was planning to increase play services from April 2013. Of these, two organisations have no permanent staff and depend on between one and four temporary staff and volunteers. Five organisations have 10 or fewer staff, and the other three have between 11 and 24 staff. So none who are planning an increase are large employers.
Play is a serious business

While 14 replies indicated that their organisation had had to restrict what they offer children in some way, it is also clear that despite the cuts playwork continues to reach out and have a significant impact on the lives of children locally – we asked how many children regularly used the play provision offered by the respondents’ organisation. The responses below show that each of these organisations is an important feature of their local community. Play provision and playwork is faring badly under this government but there currently remain many positive organisations. It is a priority to campaign to keep this base if we are to win the bigger argument of the need to expand and widen play provision in the future.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of children that regularly use your play provision?</th>
<th>Number of responses</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>50 – 99</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>100 – 199</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>300 – 499</td>
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<td>500 – 999</td>
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<td>1000 – 1999</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
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<td>Over 2000</td>
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Worryingly, nine organisations had started charging for access to their services. While more than double were not charging – 24 responses – it is a significant minority that are. Six respondents said their organisation had started charging for items such as trips and snacks (two of these were also amongst the group charging for access to play provision). As funding pressures continue to bite harder over the coming years it is a number that may grow; this would be an alarming development. Financial pressures on households are set to continue for a number of years ahead also due to a combination of continued real wage stagnation and real benefits cuts. Charging for access to play provision or items such as snacks and trips removes the universality of play provision and will exclude children from being able to participate. Unite believe this is unacceptable.

Funding cuts and the continued financial pressure has also had a damaging impact on the quality of life of playworkers themselves. We can see from the ASHE data in Chart 3 that basic weekly pay – never particularly high – has also taken a downward turn. These are nominal amounts – if we were to take into account the increase in living costs the impact on standard of living would be significant. This is also unacceptable. If we are to invest and develop play provision for the benefit of children part of this funding and investment must go towards investing in, rewarding and valuing staff.

“**No funding for coach trips available. Less new equipment. Repairs not getting fixed on buildings.**”

Playworker, West Midlands

“**No trips due to the extra staff required, and the additional costs.**”

Playworker, South East

Chart 3 Basic weekly pay of Standard Occupational Code Playworkers
What we want to happen - the future of playwork

“[Unite should make] the public play providers and parents/carers aware of how the cuts are effecting the sector and why it is such an important part of a child’s life

Play Development Worker, South East

At Unite we are very clear about the importance of playwork and what we want to happen. To again quote the Charter for Children’s Play,”The role of the playworker is as important as that of any skilled professional working with children and should be respected and rewarded accordingly”. As an initial step we want playwork to become part of the JNC (Joint Negotiating Committee) for Youth and Community Work. This is the national agreement covering community and youth workers in local authority and not-for-profit organizations, with trade unions and employers negotiating pay, terms and conditions. Taking this step would provide clear benchmarks for the pay, terms and conditions for playworkers.

The severity of the cuts and the ease in which they are being implemented points to one obvious conclusion – that play provision should be a statutory responsibility of government and local authorities. Before the imposition of austerity measures, many local authorities had supported and funded extensive and long-standing networks of play providers, successfully blending their own services and the voluntary and private sector. A series of relatively modest national initiatives proved that comparatively small sums of money could go a long way and evaluations of funded programmes showed excellent results.

The Welsh Assembly is currently pioneering its establishment of a statutory duty on local authorities to provide play sufficiency as part of their anti-poverty drive; the Northern Ireland Executive endorsed a Play and Leisure Strategy and Implementation Plan for Northern Ireland in March 2011; and the Scottish Executive has given a commitment to developing Scotland’s first National Play Strategy. England has become the poor relation, with ‘no overarching vision or strategy for meeting Government obligations under the UNCRC Article 31’16. Unite believes there must be a vision that prioritises play provision as a cornerstone of government policy for children and young people.

We also feel that ultimately a license to practice needs to be established so that only trained and qualified people can call themselves playworkers. This will send a clear message to parents and employers that play is essential and that the people who facilitate play are to be valued and respected. Protecting the existing framework of playwork qualifications, under threat from decreased demand is essential, as is further developing this and growing the intellectual and academic basis for playwork, which the UK is currently an International leader.

At Unite we appreciate that we need to work together to achieve our goals; in fact the whole ethos behind the trade union movement is the belief that we need to work collectively and that this gives us strength. Playwork services have been vulnerable because individual playworkers have often felt isolated and vulnerable and have made personal sacrifices in order to keep their provision open and running. We believe that playworkers should not have to make personal sacrifices in order to prop up what is ultimately the failings of the government, and that there should not be a choice between paying playworkers what they are worth and offering quality services for children. Valuing playworkers and paying them appropriately is the only way to offer the best for our children. To this end we believe that all playworkers should belong to a trade union, and that at Unite we understand playwork and are prepared to fight for our playwork members.

Appendix 1:  
Key understandings and Principles of Charter for Children's Play

**Key Understandings**

- Play is an essential part of every child’s life – vital to his or her development. It is the way that children explore for themselves the world around them; the way that they naturally develop understanding and practise skills.

- Play is essential for healthy physical and emotional growth, for intellectual and educational development, and for acquiring social and behavioural skills.

- Play may or may not involve equipment or have an end product. Children play on their own and with others. Their play may be boisterous and energetic or quiet and contemplative, light-hearted or very serious.

- Children’s own culture is created and lived through their play.

**Principles**

**Children have the right to play**
All children and young people have the right to play and need to play: free to choose what they do – lively or relaxed, noisy or quiet – with the chance to stretch and challenge themselves, take risks and enjoy freedom. The right to play is enshrined in Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

**Every child needs time and space to play**
All children and young people – disabled and non-disabled – whatever their age, culture, ethnicity or social and economic background, need time and space to play freely and confidently with their peers, free of charge, indoors and outdoors, somewhere they feel safe. Play provision should actively include the widest range of children and seek to engage with those from minority groups.

**Adults should let children play**
Parents, carers and other adults can support children and young people’s play by respecting the value and importance of all types of play, playing with their children and by creating opportunities and allowing time for children to play independently with their friends, inside and outside the home.

**Children should be able to play freely in their local areas**
Children have the same right to use and enjoy public space as others. Local streets, estates, green spaces, parks and town centres should be accessible for children and young people to move around in safety and offer places where they can play freely, experience nature, explore their environment and be with their friends.

**Children value and benefit from staffed play provision**
Children should have access to a choice of staffed facilities where children’s play rights and needs are the first priority, such as adventure playgrounds, play centres, holiday play schemes, after-school play clubs, breakfast play clubs, toy libraries, play buses and play ranger services.

**Children’s play is enriched by skilled playworkers**
Qualified, skilled playworkers are trained to put children’s play needs at the centre of their work in a variety of settings, enhancing the range and quality of play experiences for all children. They are the best people to run staffed play provision for school-aged children. The role of the playworker is as important as that of any skilled professional working with children and should be respected and rewarded accordingly.

**Children need time and space to play at school**
The school day should allow time for children to relax and play freely with their friends. Young children learn best through play and, as they get older, play supports and enriches their learning. Children learn best if teaching is creative and enjoyable. In school, time and space for play and outdoor learning is as important as formal teaching. School grounds should be good places to play.

**Children sometimes need extra support to enjoy their right to play**
Children and young people living away from home or visiting unfamiliar or controlled environments such as hospital, prison, immigration centres, and residential homes and schools, sometimes experience fear, anxiety and discomfort. For these children it is especially important to ensure they have good play opportunities facilitated by trained staff and volunteers.
Appendix 2:
Playwork principles, Playwork Principles Scrutiny Group, Cardiff 2005

These Principles establish the professional and ethical framework for playwork and 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.

1. All children and young people need to play. The impulse to play is innate. Play is a biological, psychological and social necessity, and is fundamental to the healthy development and well being of individuals and communities.

2. Play is a process that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. That is, children and young people determine and control the content and intent of their play, by following their own instincts, ideas and interests, in their own way for their own reasons.

3. The prime focus and essence of playwork is to support and facilitate the play process and this should inform the development of play policy, strategy, training and education.

4. For playworkers, the play process takes precedence and playworkers act as advocates for play when engaging with adult led agendas.

5. The role of the playworker is to support all children and young people in the creation of a space in which they can play.

6. The playworker’s response to children and young people playing is based on a sound up to date knowledge of the play process, and reflective practice.

7. Playworkers recognise their own impact on the play space and also the impact of children and young people’s play on the playworker.

8. Playworkers choose an intervention style that enables children and young people to extend their play. All playworker intervention must balance risk with the developmental benefit and well being of children.