



Report on PlayBoard's 2015 Conference:

'Playing Out' – How can the public realm support better outcomes for children's holistic development?

6th November 2015

Venue: Ramada Plaza, Belfast

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Appendix 1: Workshop Responses by Table



"Ever feel like you're playing alone? Come to PlayBoard's conference and you will leave with more friends to play with!"



"This conference was in my opinion fun, engaging, enlightening but most importantly inspiring - it has given me a renewed passion to take what I have heard back into the classroom and reignite this powerful tool, namely play."



PlayBoard's Annual Conference

'Playing Out'

How can the public realm support better outcomes for children's holistic development?



AGENDA

Ramada Plaza Hotel 26th November 2015

- 09.00am – 09.30am **Registration – Tea/Coffee (poster presentations ongoing)**
- 09.30am – 09.40am Welcome and Introduction: PlayBoard CEO, Jacqueline O'Loughlin
- 09.40am – 10.00am Opening: Koulla Yiasouma, N.I. Commissioner for Children and Young People - 'All children and young people have the right to play'
- 10.00am – 10.20am Keynote: Dr Michael McBride, N.I. Chief Medical Officer – 'The game-changer for healthy adults'
- 10.20am – 10.40am Dr Tony Cassidy – 'Children's play pattern and opportunities: a factor in adult health'
- 10.40am – 11.15am ***Strategic Discussion***
- 11.15am – 11.35am **Break – Tea/Coffee (poster presentations ongoing)**
- 11.35am – 11.55pm Paul McTernan – 'What might a playful public realm look like? Time for systemic change'
- 11.55pm – 12.15pm Harry Harbottle – 'The old adage – time, space and permission to play'
- 12.15pm – 12.50pm ***Strategic Discussion***
- 12.50pm – 13.35pm **Lunch with Tea/Coffee (poster presentations ongoing)**
- 13.35pm – 13.55pm Joe Loughlin – 'Post Lunch Session with the Gathering Drum'
- 13.55pm – 14.15pm Prof Laura Lundy – 'Getting it right: listening to and acting upon the views of children and young people'
- 14.15pm – 14.35pm Peter McCartney – 'What makes playWORK'
- 14.35pm – 15.10pm ***Strategic Discussion***
- 15.10pm – 15.55pm Panel Plenary
- 15.55pm – 16.10pm **Next Steps, Prize Draw Winner & Conference Close**
- 16.30pm – 17.00pm PlayBoard AGM – with tea/coffee

Introduction and Background

Introduction

As part of celebrations to mark 30 years working to promote play, playwork and play-based school age childcare services across Northern Ireland, PlayBoard NI held its 2015 conference entitled '**Playing Out**' in Belfast on Friday 6th November.

The conference brought together over 100 delegates from a range of sectors and included policy-makers, play providers, council representatives and academics.

The focus for the day was firmly on:

- Highlighting the importance of play for children and young people's physical and mental health and wellbeing;
- Reflecting on the current policy environment for play; and
- Considering the real life challenges and barriers which restrict or prevent children's play across Northern Ireland.

In addition to presentations from a range of speakers, all recognised experts within their field, delegates had an opportunity to visit poster displays from Early Years, OPAL Outdoor Learning (QUB), Belfast Healthy Cities and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.

Workshop discussions provided an opportunity for a more in-depth examination of the importance of play and the wider implications of policy and practice developments in Northern Ireland.

Background

Play is central to the lives of all children and young people. Through play they explore the physical and social environment in which they live; learn and develop new skills and abilities; test out ideas and concepts; and learn how to assess and respond to risk or situations that trouble them.

Play supports learning; enhances health and wellbeing; supports the development of self-confidence; enables children and young people to make sense of the world around them; and gives them a sense of themselves as individuals. *Most importantly play is fun.*

Despite increasing recognition of the importance of play to their growth and development, children and young people are all too often unable to fulfil their natural play drive as a result of restrictions placed on them by wider society.

The theme for the conference - '*Playing Out*' - was therefore particularly timely, offering as it did an opportunity for attendees to come together to:

- Learn about the importance of play to the lives of children, young people, parents and communities;
- Hear and reflect on the knowledge experiences of others; and
- Discuss how as a society we can work to ensure that better outcomes for children, young people, families and wider society can be delivered through play.

Strategic Context for Play

Increasing recognition of the importance of play to the health, wellbeing, learning, development and growth of children and young people has led to the development of a number of significant strategic drivers at local and international levels.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)

The UNCRC is an international human rights treaty that grants all children and young people (aged 17 and under) a comprehensive set of rights. Ratified by the UK government in 1991, the UNCRC commits all branches of government to ensuring that children are afforded the rights and protections contained within its articles. The child's Right to Play is specifically highlighted in Article 31 which states:

- a. "That every child has the right to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.
- b. "That member governments 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".

UNCRC General Comment 17 on Article 31

Published in 2013, General Comment 17 highlighted the UN committees concern at the lack of progress being made towards realisation of the right to play. The general comment affirmed the importance play highlighting that it is: "*...essential to the health and well-being of children and young people; the development of creativity, imagination, self-confidence, self-efficacy and physical, social cognitive and emotional strength and skills.*"

Further, General Comment 17 highlighted a number of key areas requiring focused attention across all branches of government, namely:

- A general lack of awareness and recognition of the importance of play to the health and development of children and young people;
- The impact of poor and hazardous environments in restricting children and young people's play and recreation experience;
- The negative impact of community resistance to the use of public spaces for play and negative stereotyping by government agencies;
- An overemphasis on risk prevention in play and recreation as opposed to a balanced appraisal of risk-v-benefit; and
- A lack of access to natural, free play opportunities.

The NI Children and Young People's Strategy (2006 – 2016)

The strategy, entitled 'Our Children and Young People – Our Pledge' is based around 6 key outcomes areas, outcomes which if achieved will ensure that children and young people thrive and look forward with confidence to the future:

- Healthy
- Enjoying, learning and achieving
- Living in safety and with stability
- Experiencing economic and environmental well-being
- Contributing positively to community and society
- Living in a society which respects their rights.

The strategy recognises the importance of play highlighting its role in supporting healthy growth and development; emotional resilience; improved educational capacity; and the wider community benefits which come from children and young people being visible and active through outdoor play.

NI Play and Leisure Policy & Implementation Plan

In March 2011 the Executive endorsed the NI 'Play and Leisure Policy' and implementation plan. Developed on a cross-departmental and cross-sectoral basis, the policy and implementation plan focused on four key areas:

1. Places and Spaces for Play and Leisure;
2. Championing Play and Leisure;
3. Access to Play and Leisure; and
4. Workforce Development.

At the heart of the policy is a recognition that play is not only critical to the individual child in terms of their health and wellbeing; but also that play has a key role in creating cohesive communities and tackling a range of issues including anti-social behaviour, inter-generational issues and the legacy of community division left over by the troubles.

Community Planning

A new responsibility for Councils introduced through local government reform in April 2015, the introduction of community planning brings local authorities in Northern Ireland into line with their counterparts in England, Scotland and Wales.

Community Planning will provide a framework for councils, government departments and other public bodies to engage with local communities and the voluntary community with a view to developing and implementing a shared vision for the area.

NI Child Poverty Strategy

The Executive's Child Poverty Strategy aims to *"Provide the opportunity for all of our children and young people to thrive and to address the cause and consequences of disadvantage"*.

The strategy recognises that addressing child poverty is a long-term issue and sets out a number of key action areas which impact on the issue of children and young people's play, namely:

- To promote affordable, accessible play and leisure provision for all children and young people
- To provide learning environments through youth services which complement formal learning and focus on personal and social development
- To improve opportunities for low income families to participate in arts, cultural, sporting and leisure activities.

DHSSPS Fitter Future for All Framework (2011)

The overarching aim of 'Fitter Future for All' is to support people to make healthy choices, reducing overall levels of obesity and improving health and wellbeing amongst the general population.

The Strategy recognises the critical role of play in reducing childhood obesity levels and highlights the importance of rural and natural landscapes as well as urban design and planning in delivering playable, green infrastructure (which encourages outdoor activity levels), accessible play areas and play activities, and active travel routes.

Sport Matters: NI Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation

The NI Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation (2009 – 2019) sets out a shared vision of "a culture of lifelong enjoyment and success in sport" and outlines 3 underpinning areas to guide the direction of future investment – Participation, Performance and Places. Using this strategic framework the NI Executive aims to:-

- Promote the value, importance and priority of sport and physical recreation;
- Promote increased participation in sport and physical recreation among underrepresented groups;
- Promote community cohesion through sport and physical recreation.

Conference Proceedings

Conference Opening – Jacqueline O’Loughlin, PlayBoard CEO

Conference proceedings were opened by PlayBoard’s Chief Executive Officer Jacqueline O’Loughlin. Jacqueline welcomed speakers and delegates to the conference, setting out her vision for play and highlighting the need to achieve progress across a number of policy agendas in order to drive the play agenda in Northern Ireland.



"Play is an essential part of childhood. At a time when the Executive is seeking to develop a new Children and Young People’s Strategy, this conference gives stakeholders a real opportunity to identify the barriers obstructing play, how best to address these barriers and in doing so, to inform how Northern Ireland’s play landscape should develop in the coming years."

Jacqueline O’Loughlin, PlayBoard NI CEO

Jacqueline provided an overview of the presentations highlighting that speakers had been chosen not only because of their expertise and knowledge, but because of their connection to and understanding of policy in Northern Ireland. As such they were ideally suited to exploring the most pertinent issues impacting on children’s play locally whether they be public health, public realm, children’s rights or play based.

Jacqueline closed by outlining that by the end of the conference the aim was to have explored a number of key questions including:

- Why is play important to children and young people across Northern Ireland?
- How can we best facilitate play opportunities within our communities and across the public realm?
- What is the role of child-centred and playwork approaches in seeking to achieve optimum play outcomes?

'Play is not a Luxury, it is a Right!'

Koulla Yiasouma, Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People

Koulla took up appointment as NI Commissioner for Children and Young People on the 2 March 2015 having previously been the Director of Include Youth for almost 17 years. Koulla trained as a social worker and previously worked in probation and with NI Women's Aid.

Koulla is a passionate advocate for the rights of all children especially those with the most challenging behaviours and has represented these issues on a number of strategic bodies. Koulla has been a Board member of the Patient and Client Council, a school governor, a member of the NI Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership and the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland.

Northern Ireland's Commissioner for Children and Young People, Koulla Yiasouma got conference proceedings underway highlighting that **'Play is not a luxury – it is a right!'**

In opening her presentation the Commissioner discussed the changes that have taken place in society over recent years and their impact on children's play highlighting *"We all had a playroom growing up - It was called outside"*. Unfortunately for many of our children and young people the outdoors is becoming an increasingly alien environment for play.

The Commissioner went on to highlight the many issues affecting children and young people across Northern Ireland, exploring the role of policy and legislation and how, when applied appropriately it can help to promote the right to play for children and young people.

Koulla highlighted Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) which states *"The child has a right to rest, leisure, play and participation in cultural and artistic activities"*. The Commissioner went on to welcome the UN Committee's General Comment 17 which provides a clear definition of Play and articulates how governments can seek to ensure that the right to play is realised.

The Commissioner highlighted that *"with the sole exception of Wales, the right to play and leisure is not fully enjoyed by all children in the State party (UK)"*, calling upon the government *"to strengthen its efforts to guarantee 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"*.

The Commissioner provided an overview of statistics collected through the 2010 Young Life and Times Survey which highlighted prevailing negative societal attitudes towards children and young people highlighting that:

- 85% believe that they are judged negatively because of their age
- 87% have personally experienced discrimination because of their age
- 59% have been told to move on when standing outside with friends
- 67% of young people frequently experience age-related discrimination in shops
- 79% of young people feel that the media portrayal of young people is mostly negative.

With regards to the recent changes in local government under the Review of Public Administration the Commissioner highlighted the role of the Local Government Act (NI) 2014, quoting from section 6.8 of the Community Planning Guidance which states that local government has:

"... a particular responsibility to encourage and promote the role that can be played by children and young people in community planning. The Community Planning Partnership should seek to do this through reference to the structure set out in the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People's (NICCY) proposal for a Northern Ireland regional model of engagement. The Partnership should also consider an appropriate method of engagement to involve children and young people and should use a mechanism such as youth forums or other similar arrangements." Community Planning Guidance, (section 6.8).

In closing the Commissioner highlighted the critical need for government to ensure that not only is progress made on delivering the right to play, but that there are no regressive measures taken to dilute the advances that have already been made highlighting comment No.5 of the UNCRC which:

"..... imposes on States Parties the specific and continuing obligation, even where resources are inadequate, to 'strive to ensure the widest possible enjoyment of the relevant rights under the prevailing circumstances.' No regressive measures in relation to the article 31 rights are permitted."

'Children Playing: A Game Changer for Healthy Adults' **Dr Michael McBride, Chief Medical Officer for Northern Ireland**

Dr Michael McBride was appointed to the post of Chief Medical Officer for the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety in September 2006. Prior to joining the department he had been Medical Director at the Royal Group of Hospitals from August 2002.

Dr McBride graduated with Distinction from Queen's University Belfast in 1986 and completed his undergraduate and postgraduate training in Northern Ireland. In 1991 he attained a Research Fellowship at St Mary's Medical School and Imperial College London, where he carried out research into new drug treatments for HIV. Dr McBride has been a Consultant in the Health Service since 1994 when he was appointed Consultant Physician in HIV medicine at the Royal Group of Hospitals and has more than 10 years health service management experience.

Northern Ireland's Chief Medical Officer (CMO), Dr Michael McBride delivered the second keynote address entitled '**Children Playing: The Game-Changer for Healthy Adults**' in which he underscored the importance of play for physical and mental health and wellbeing highlighting that "*Empowering children to decide and control their own play helps to develop self-confidence*".

The presentation focused on the role of play in contributing to the prevention of chronic health problems in later life with active play shown to not only reduce childhood obesity but to establish activity patterns which persist into later life. The benefits of regular physical activity through play at an early age cannot therefore be underestimated, helping as they do to build up a lifetime of good habits and contributing to an overall healthier lifestyle.

As well as being important to physical health the CMO highlighted the critical contribution play makes to good mental health and emotional growth. The foundation of positive mental health is laid before birth and during the first months and years of life. This period, when the brain is in its most responsive and adaptable phase of growth is crucial for children's cognitive, social and emotional development.

Positive mental wellbeing helps a person to maintain good physical health, develop their potential, work productively, build strong relationships, develop a sense of self-worth, and contribute to their community. It is fundamental to our quality of life and it is therefore vital that we as a society encourage and enable play and physical activity from an early age.

Dr McBride highlighted that, with a view to enhancing health and wellbeing play opportunities should aim to encourage young children to:

- Use their large muscle groups;
- Practise a wide range of different physical movements;
- Experience a variety of play space types and make use of range of play equipment;
- Have the freedom set up their own play areas;
- Be able to make up their own active play activities; and
- Have fun and feel good about themselves and what they can do and achieve through play.

Dr McBride provided an overview of '*Making Life Better: A Whole System Strategic Framework for Public Health 2013 – 2023*'. The 'Making Life Better' strategic framework is designed to provide both direction for policies and direct actions to improve health and wellbeing and reduce health inequalities. For example under the theme of 'Give Every Child a Good Start':

Focus of Actions	Outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child health • Parenting & family support • Preparing for school • Literacy & numeracy • Skills for life • Play and leisure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good quality parenting & family support • Healthy & confident children & young people • Children & young people skilled for life

The Chief Medical Officer also gave an overview of the *A Fitter Future for All: 2012-2022 strategy*. Which encourages the empowerment of the population of Northern Ireland to make healthy choices, reduce the risk of overweight and obesity related diseases and conditions and improve health and well-being by creating an environment that supports and promotes a physically active lifestyle and a healthy diet.

The short term outcomes for the strategy include:

- All early years settings provide a supportive environment for young children to achieve the CMO recommended levels of physical activity
- Training delivered to support the interpretation of the early years section of Start Active, Stay Active guidelines for those who work in these settings, particularly through Early Movers and Start to Play training
- Campaign delivered to raise public awareness of healthy eating, physical activity and weight management aimed at parents of children aged 2-12

- Increased awareness of the CMO’s recommended levels of physical activity amongst children and young people
- Increase opportunities for participation in play and physical activity for children and young people, particularly in areas of deprivation
- Increased participation in active travel to and from school through the Active School Travel programme and other initiatives.

In closing the CMO provided an overview of ‘*Start Active, Stay Active: CMO UK Physical Activity Guidelines 2011*’, a UK-wide report which provides guidelines on the volume, duration, frequency and type of physical activity required to achieve general health benefits, and the barriers to achieving them.

Start Active, Stay Active Guidance	Barriers to Achievement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical activity should be encouraged from birth, particularly through floor-based play and water-based activities in safe environments • All under 5s should minimise the amount of time spent being sedentary (being restrained or sitting) for extended periods (except time spent sleeping) • Children of pre-school age who are capable of walking unaided should be physically active daily for at least 180 minutes (3 hours), spread throughout the day. <p>Most UK pre-school children currently spend 120–150 minutes a day in physical activity, so achieving this guideline would mean adding another 30–60 minutes per day.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existing health conditions • Time restrictions • Limited information • Perception of risk • Access to safe play facilities

**'Children's Play Patterns and opportunities:
A factor in Adult Health'**
Dr Tony Cassidy

Dr Tony Cassidy is a Reader in Psychology at Ulster University and a Registered Health and Sport & Exercise Psychologist whose main research focus is on child and family health and well-being.

Dr Cassidy completed a PhD at the Ulster University and went on to a research post in St Andrew's Hospital, Northampton before moving into academia. He has lectured at the University of Northampton, University of Coventry, University of West London, DeMontfort University and the University of Limerick. He was Professor and Head of Department at the University of West London, DeMontfort University and the University of Limerick.

Tony has been active in the development of psychology in the UK contributing to a wide range of sections and divisions within the BPS, most recently as Chair of the DHP and founder Chair of DHP NI. He is also a member of a range European and International Psychology Societies including APA, EHPS, IAAP, ISBM, EAWOP, and ECHA, of the New York Academy of Science, and both the British and American Associations for the Advancement of Science. He is a Fellow of the RSA.

Dr Tony Cassidy concluded the first part of the conference by providing an insight into his on-going work which is focused on connecting play types to a range of behavioural outcomes including health, resilience and the locus of control. Dr Cassidy's presentation was entitled '***Children's play patterns and opportunities: A factor in adult health'***

Dr Cassidy provided an overview of his research exploring children's play patterns and play opportunities focusing on the implications of play deprivation and highlighting the role of play as both an operational and protective factor in childhood.

Over the past few decades play opportunities have changed considerably for children and young people. A growth in fear of crime combined with increased traffic and the erosion of safe play areas has meant that many children no longer experience the freedom to play that many older adults remember (Blatchford, 1998).



"Children's play is essential for normal development and may be as fundamental as good parenting"
McArdle (2001)

In addition increased pressure of work at school alongside concerns about bullying, the removal of play areas, and increased pressure for new buildings has meant that break time play opportunities in schools have been reduced (Blatchford, 1998).

Research has not however as yet addressed the impact of changing patterns of play in childhood on the developmental process and in particular on the establishment of stable behaviour patterns in childhood, adolescence or adulthood.

As part of Dr Cassidy's on-going work fifteen focus groups were convened with adults from a range of different age groups. Some were made up of participants in a similar narrow age range and some were mixed across a range of ages. The main aim of these groups was to explore perceived changes in child play patterns and if these are seen to be related to health.

Themes and Dimensions Identified
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Creative/imaginative play• Outside/free play• Active – passive play• Social – lone play• Technology and play• Avoidance of exercise;• Play opportunities – barriers to play• Generational change in play urban versus rural• Socioeconomic status• Play Exercise• Play Obesity and• Play Child health

A retrospective survey was then conducted and assessed (n=505 young adults) on demographics of age, sex, weight, height, and opportunities for play, and on measures of:

- Health behaviours
- Health locus of control (HLOC)
- Play patterns as children
- Age range (18-30)

Child Play Patterns Scale

47 items were devised and subjected to Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with Varimax rotation. Six clusters of child play were identified - active play, passive play, creative play, lone play, exercise avoidance, and social play. A separate measure of play restriction was also produced.

Results

Play factors were shown to be differentially associated with health behaviour (health action & cognitive= affective health behaviours) and Body Mass Index (BMI).

A retrospective survey assessed (n=1,256) young adults on demographics of age, sex, weight, height, and opportunities for play, and on measures of:

- Health behaviours
- Health locus of control (HLOC)
- Resilience
- Play patterns as children
- Age range 18-38

Main Findings

Creative play and passive play directly predicted cognitive affective health behaviours, engaging in health action and also had an indirect impact through health locus of control and resilience HLOC.

This retrospective study supports the suggestion that child play patterns influence adult health and points to the need to more fully understand how the changes in child play patterns may be causally related to the changes in health that we are witnessing. The role of child play opportunities and behaviours in the development of health habits and behaviours needs to be better understood and may provide a useful focus for creating a healthier society.

'What might a Playful Public Realm look like?
Time for systemic change'
Paul McTernan

Paul McTernan is a chartered town planner with 28 years' town planning experience. He has specialist knowledge in development management, strategic planning, regeneration, development consultancy, statutory plan preparation, rural and urban renewal projects, and urban design and master planning.

Paul leads SLR's master planning team in the UK and Ireland. Based in Belfast, his team is the current holder of the UK Place making Award 2015 and the Scottish Place making Award 2015. Paul is the lead author of the Belfast City Masterplan and the 'Building on Tradition' sustainable design guide for the Northern Ireland Countryside as published by DOENI. He is a retained advisor to the Land Trust, the national open space charity in the UK and is currently advising on the implementation of a range of open space masterplans for the Trust. Paul focused on the importance of getting the public realm right – what are our deficits and opportunities.

Paul McTernan brought delegates on an insightful journey, showcasing some of the more creative play spaces around the globe; highlighted how play could be integrated into the public realm and unpicked the shortcomings of Northern Ireland's planning policies.

At the outset Paul showcased a number of examples from around the world of how different communities were seeking to integrate play more effectively into the public realm, creating playful spaces to be enjoyed by all ages.



Peak Experience - San Francisco, USA



Bourges, France



Park am Gleisdreieck - Berlin, Germany



The Green – Yorkshire, England



Treehuts – Bruges, Belgium



21 Swings – Montreal, Canada



Piano Stairs – San Francisco, USA



Keys to the Street: Vancouver, Canada



Custom House Square - Belfast



Having explored creative examples of playful public realms, Paul went on to highlight the critical role of a strategic and partnership based approaches to the development of playable spaces and playful public realms. Additionally, it is critical that we make the planning system work more effectively for play and that we nurture and develop play champions. Paul made the further point that good advice and design guidance is available, we simply do not utilise it.

An effective Play Strategy should...

- Be cross-cutting incorporating input from, by way of example Health, Education, Planning and Community & Voluntary sectors;
- Have strong leadership with a named and properly resourced lead officer able to deliver change and creation/transformation of playable spaces;
- Have high level support with named champions' at senior officer and member level capable of instigating high level change as required;
- Have a sound basis – the strategy should be underpinned by a comprehensive review and audit of existing play opportunities and demographic need;
- Should be participative with the participation of children and young people, parents and community members at the core of the process;
- Be inclusive, ensuring that it addresses the needs of all groups of children and young people
- Have a clear commitment to change including for example a timetabled action plan and budget;
- Be resourced with an explicit commitment to resourcing and sustaining play and playful approaches; and
- Provide learning through regular monitoring, review and reflective practice.

Paul highlighted the importance of the emerging community planning process which offers members of the community including children and young people with an opportunity to shape decisions regarding how we meet play need and how we shape our public realm.

With regards to planning, it is essential that play is embedded within the planning system including, by way of example a % contribution for play from section 76 planning agreements.

The Children's Service's Cooperation Bill (which became an act in December 2015) was highlighted as a particularly important piece of legislation. The identification and prioritisation within the bill of the 'enjoyment of Play and Leisure' as one of the

key factors underpinning health and wellbeing provides a mechanism for ensuring that all statutory bodies act proactively to deliver more playful communities and public realms.

In closing, Paul suggested that the development of a Pilot Play Strategy and PPS8 replacement policy for one local authority could pave the way for systemic change across Northern Ireland.

Such a pilot would demonstrate how a committed play partnership could work together on a cross-sector basis to transform children's – and communities – experiences of play whilst providing a template for others to follow.



'The Old Adage – Time, Space and Permission to Play' Harry Harbottle

Harry Harbottle is Chair of Play Scotland and a consultant in Play and Risk Management. Harry has experience of working at a high level in statutory, voluntary and private sectors so he is well placed to understand the benefits and frustrations of working in all three when it comes to generating quality public places. For 20 years he was appointed as an expert to the European Commission in consumer safety and child safety, sitting as an independent member of the European Standards Organisation (CEN) technical committee on the safety of playground equipment. He is also a co-author of a guide to the European Standard for the Safety of Playground Equipment, published by DIN, the German Standards Organisation and now available in 6 languages. He more recently sat on a CEN working group looking at playground safety in relation to children with special needs. Through working with Richter Spielgeraete, operating out of Bavaria, Harry spent much of his time helping to establish innovative and exciting play spaces across Europe. His home is in SW Scotland which he uses as the base for his other business activities in Britain and Ireland through his company, CATE Consultancy. He is currently the chair of Play Scotland, a national organisation lobbying on the child's right to play. He is a frequent speaker on the international scene, from Moscow to Melbourne, particularly on the subject of the balance between play value and safety and passionately believes in allowing all children the chance, through play, to reach their full potential whatever their ability or circumstances. He considers that if all adults had a mission to improve the independent mobility of children then they, and all of humanity, would have a better world in which to live and thrive. After many years of campaigning, he remains committed to promoting the opportunities for children to develop self-protecting behaviour through being allowed to explore the world in which they live within a framework of managed risk taking.

Concluding the second part of the conference, Harry Harbottle highlighted some of the key components required to successfully implement meaningful play opportunities and highlighted the importance of risk and challenge in play as tool in health promotion.

Throughout his presentation, Harry reinforced the need for the audience and those in a position of influence within the decision making process to see children as the experts when it comes to play.

Society's aversion to challenge and risk was a recurrent theme, with Harry highlighting that exposure to risk and challenge through play is both natural and

important, especially for older children.

Harry highlighted that for many children and young people the play landscape has changed considerably over recent years. Parents have become increasingly anxious about the safety of outdoor environments and wider community settings for play often citing fears around traffic, the potential for injury and abduction. As a result children's free-play opportunities have been curtailed and many are being introduced from an early age to electronic devices (tablets, game consoles etc.) that, whilst providing entertainment fail to provide the developmentally important experiences provided by active, outdoor play.

The creation of innovative, accessible and challenging play opportunities is therefore not the only solution to the problem we face. We must also work to build parental confidence, enabling them to allow their children more freedom to play within the community in which they live.

At a societal level we also need to bring about a change in how we view children and young people at play. For teenagers in particular play and leisure activities are often group based and to adults in the community can be perceived as noisy, excitable even anti-social. There is a very real need to change adult's perceptions of, and understanding of the culture of young people.

Harry highlighted the developments that have taken place across the UK in relation to play:

UK Policy and Legislative Developments	
Northern Ireland	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Play and Leisure Strategy• Children's Service Co-operation Bill – the enjoyment of play and leisure seen as key to achieving good health and wellbeing
Scotland	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Play Strategy• Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014
Wales	➤ Play Sufficiency
England	➤ All Party Group on Fit and Healthy Childhood

In 2007 Professor John McKendrick outlined five goals aimed at making space for play in European cities:

- Embrace diversity – Play provision should meet the needs of all children regardless of gender, ethnic background, ability etc.
- Play space standards – Whilst common standards have been established for play safety, there remains a need to establish a single overarching framework guiding play space standards;

- Design – Effective play space design increases physical activity and encourages positive social interaction. It is critical in designing play spaces that a partnership approach is adopted – with children’s voices at the core of the process;
- Playful Space’s – Spaces provided for play should present opportunities for the full range of play types and not be limited to locomotor play.
- Playful cities – Play should be an integral part of city life with opportunities for play provided throughout the city in spaces hitherto not associated with play through, for example open spaces and street furniture that affords opportunities for play.

Play Strategy Action Plan

All Children and Young People have sufficient time and space (Physical and Social) for playing within their community and have contact with nature in their everyday lives. Play is valued, encouraged and supported in communities, as are providers of community play opportunities such as out of school care, playgroups, therapeutic and specialist settings and community champions of play.

Scottish Government

Harry provided an overview of the approach being adopted by the Scottish Government through their Play Map process. The Play Map was developed to support Community Planning Partnerships to build consideration of play into strategic plans by:

1. Committing to principles which support a Child’s right to play;
2. Providing leadership in developing strategic priorities and appointing play champions;
3. Listen to children, young people, families, and communities enabling them to inform CPPs;
4. Map existing provision and explore gaps in current services and opportunities
5. Consider approaches to developing play in communities and share effective practice.
6. Review play’s contribution to CPPs locality plans.

In 2013 United Nations General Comment 17 on Article 31 (the Right to Play) clarified governments’ obligations to “promote, protect and fulfil” the child’s right to play by means of appropriate “legislation, planning and budgets”.

In closing Harry left delegates with a challenge:

How can you... as a public servant/politician/parent/teacher/journalist work to improve the independent mobility of children by enhancing play opportunities?

**'Getting it Right: Listening to and Acting upon the views of
Children and Young People'**
Professor Laura Lundy

Laura Lundy is a Professor of Education Law and Children's Rights in the School of Education at Queen's University, Belfast and a Barrister at Law. She is the Director of the Centre for Children's Rights at Queen's (www.qub.ac.uk/ccr), an interdisciplinary research collaboration on children's rights.

Laura's expertise is in law and children's rights, with a particular focus on the implementation of the UNCRC, education rights, children's right to participate in decision-making and children's rights-based participatory research methods.

Professor Lundy opened the afternoon session of the conference by emphasising the critical need for policy and decision makers to listen to children and young people in a meaningful way. Reiterating comments made by previous speakers, Laura highlighted that when it comes to the issues that impact directly upon their lives children and young people are the experts and are therefore in the best place to guide decision making.

Through a number of examples from her work she referred to situations in which children and young people had worked together to identify and disseminate information on a series of key and often sensitive issues. As a result of being able to lead the process, children and young people had been able to establish key messages and identify communication mechanisms that allowed them to get their message across to their peers on how to deal more effectively with the issues impacting upon their lives.

How well we listen to children and act upon their views is a good barometer of how far we have progressed as a society. Referring to examples of her work, Laura highlighted the critical and non-negotiable requirement for decision makers to genuinely listen to children, take on board what they have to say and act upon those views as far as possible.

Reflecting on UNCRC Article 31 (the Right to Play) Professor Lundy discussed her own model of children's participation. On a wider basis she reflected on the strategic approach that is being taken in the Republic of Ireland with regards to children and young people's participation.

The participation of children and young people should be fundamental to all policies that affect the lives of children and young people. Enabling and ensuring that children have a voice (through consultative processes) is not enough; it is vital that children are involved in the decision making process and that they are fully empowered to influence decisions.

Such an undertaking in Northern Ireland would not only be very welcome, it would be extremely beneficial to children and young people, particularly given that the new Children and Young People's Strategy is currently under development.

With regards to Article 31 of the UNCRC, Laura highlighted that arguably the Right to Play is the chain that links or connects the four general principles of the UNCRC:

- Article 12 (voice): Every child has the right to say what they think in all matters affecting them, and to have their views taken seriously;
- Article 2 (non-discrimination): The Convention applies to everyone: whatever their ethnicity, gender, religion, abilities, whatever they think or say, whatever type of family they come from;
- Article 3 (best interests): The best interests of the child must be a top priority in all things that affect children; and
- Article 6 (life, survival and development): Every child has the right to life. Governments must do all they can to ensure that children survive and develop to their full potential.

In addition to connecting the four general principles, Article 31 arguably augments many of the other 40 articles.

In closing, Laura shared the work of young people in producing an online video highlighting the issues of child sexual abuse from a young person's perspective explaining:

"Our experience at the Centre for Children's Rights tells us that, in order to produce 'child-friendly' material, we need to involve children in authorship. Sexual abuse and exploitation is a sensitive topic and the Lanzarote Convention is a detailed legal document. That made it even more important to take children's advice on how to explain these issues to other children in ways that are appropriate, accurate and engaging."

'So What makes Play...Work?' Peter McCartney

Peter McCartney, a lecturer at Belfast Metropolitan College, looks after the Childhood Studies department and is a member of PlayBoard's Board of Directors. He started work in PLAY when was in his teens (although he started to play before he was born – or so his twin brother tells him!) with a Children's Holiday Organisation, and then Belfast City Council. He started developing and delivering Playwork training in the College many years ago, and the courses that are on offer now range from Level 2 to Level 5. He is very passionate about Play, and supporting all those who make play WORK!

Closing the conference was Peter McCartney's lively and energetic address which brought the reality of play work to life by taking the audience through a journey to better understand the role of the play worker as a facilitator of play for play's sake.

Peter McCartney discussed the importance of Playwork in practice with children and young people exploring both what play is and why children play.

What do we mean by Play?

Play is a spontaneous and active process in which thinking, feeling and doing can flourish; when we play we are freed to be inventive and creative.

In play everything is possible with reality often disregarded and imagination and free-flow thinking taking precedence.

Peter explained that all too often adults view play as being something that children and young people do when they have nothing better to do. This is fundamentally incorrect.

The simple reality is:

- Children play because that's what children do!
- Children play so that 'something' can happen
- Play is what children do when they are left to their own devices.

In 1991 Catherine Garvey, recognising the difficulty in balancing play and non-play and the reliance of one upon the other, identified five key characteristics of play:

- Play is pleasurable, enjoyable. Even when not actually accompanied by signs of mirth it is still positively valued by the player;

- Play has no extrinsic goals. Its motivations are intrinsic and serve no other objectives. In fact it is more an enjoyment of means than an effort devoted to a particular end;
- Play is spontaneous and voluntary. It is not obligatory but if freely chosen by the player;
- Play involves some active engagement on the part of the player; and
- Play has certain systematic relations to what is not play.

Play is so critically important to all children in the development of their physical, social, mental, emotional and creative skills that society should seek every opportunity it has to support it, creating a range of environments in which it can take place naturally. To that end decision making at all levels should include a consideration of the impact of those decisions on children’s opportunities to play.

Having considered the importance of play, Peter moved on to consider the importance of playworkers and to explore the role of playworkers in connecting people and place in order to enable play to happen. The fundamental role of the Playworker is to create an environment in which children are freely able to fulfil their play need at that point in time. This includes:

- Helping to create the play space;
- Helping to resource the play space;
- Stimulating the play experience;
- Assessing what play opportunities are there and what are not; and
- Protecting the play space and campaigning for additional play spaces.

W	Children know <u>What</u> play is and Children <u>Want</u> to play
O	Playwork should be: <u>Organic</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Playworkers go with the flow! • Child led and child centred <u>Organise Others</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocate for child led play
R	<u>Resource</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide ‘Stuff’ • Space to play <u>Reflect</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play Value • Range of Play types available
K	<u>Keep out of it! Only intervene:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Because the child asks you to • To enhance or add value to the play • When the benefit/risk balance is unhealthy • To protect the play or play space

In closing Peter re-emphasised the importance of play and the importance of Playworkers. If we are to transform the landscape for play we need to recognise that playwork does not just happen by accident – it happens by design and therefore requires a skilled play workforce.

As the final speaker on the day, Peter posed a question to delegates 'What can you do to make play WORK for children or workers' and encouraged them to think about how they could make a practical difference to children's play experiences.

Strategic Discussion Workshop Overview

Over the course of the 'Playing Out' conference, three strategic discussion workshops took place. The aim of the workshops was to provide an opportunity for delegates to engage open discussion and debate, exploring key issues and sharing good practice from across Northern Ireland and beyond.

Strategic Workshop 1 Barriers and/or issues that currently restrict or prevent play	Groups were asked to consider the full range of environments in which children play or may seek to play including the home, wider community, school, within childcare or after-schools settings, Youth Clubs, in public buildings, commercial locations etc.
Strategic Workshop 2 Addressing the Barriers	Building on workshop 1, groups were asked to revisit the barriers/issues identified and agree a programme of action for how to address each.
Strategic Workshop 3 Setting actions to address the barriers	Building on the previous workshops, groups were asked to agree a set of actions to address the barriers/issues identified; identify which – if any - government strategies, policies or mechanisms could provide the basis for removing each barrier or issue; and identify which stakeholders should be involved in addressing the barrier or issue.

A complete breakdown of workshop responses from each of the groups at the conference can be found in Appendix 1 of this report. To access the appendix please click [here](#).

Workshop 1: Barriers and/or issues that currently restrict or prevent play

Risk and Challenge in Play

- Increasingly risk averse society
- Lack of understanding of importance of benefits of challenge and risk in play
- Limited opportunities for C&YP to lead their own play experience
- Focus on Health and Safety as opposed to risk and opportunity
- Fear of litigation by providers
- Result can be a lack of autonomy in teenage years

Environments for Play

- Reduction in green and natural spaces due to house building and development
- Lack of facilities that acknowledge and meet the play and leisure needs of teenagers
- Fixed play is not always the answer – need to offer a range of alternative environments for play
- Lack of play spaces which meet the needs of children with disabilities
- Public Realm development does not consider or seek to meet C&YP's play needs

Societal

- Changing family structure/time pressure for parents
- Negative community attitudes to play and teenagers in public spaces
- Lack of understanding on plays importance
- Disappearance of community play – traffic, intolerance, parental fears for safety, impact of technology etc.
- Claim culture reducing challenge in play provision
- Community differences limiting where children can play (lack of shared spaces)

Schools

- Time and academic pressures for children to do well in education
- Lack of play opportunities in schools – are we missing an opportunity to use play to deliver the curriculum
- Issues of lack of space on site (what's more important – a car park or a play area?)
- Risk averse approach limiting challenge in play
- Need to recognise that PE is not play!

Policy

- More communication and clarity for required on key policies and how they link to providers (e.g. childcare provision, education, councils etc.).
- Lack of understanding by policy makers of challenges facing providers
- Inappropriate policies in place in some organisations which restrict play opportunities

Workshop 2 – Addressing the Barriers

Having identified the barriers and/or issues that currently restrict play opportunities, delegates identified a number of *key actions* in which they felt could address these barriers:

Lack of knowledge and understanding of play and the importance of risk benefit

- More training with key professionals such as social workers
- Communication and education needed to educate parents on the importance of play and the benefits of challenge and risk in play
- Government need to be more involved with raising awareness and education
- Advertisements about play on the TV
- All staff within service provision should be trained about play and how best to facilitate play
- Key people in different sectors should be advocating and to push on play issues
- Stand up and fight for the rights of play and playwork

Fear of litigation and claim culture

- Give parents knowledge and training
- Fight litigation - go to courts and contest claims
- Highlight the positives of play
- Re-introduce acceptable risk to formal play
- Inform parents from the outset
- Give practitioners confidence
- Societal education highlighting low risk of injury from play
- Risk assessments in line should be with play friendly concepts – not too rigid or H&S focused
- Insurance companies need to become more responsible – no win, no claim etc.
- In other jurisdictions children by parents removing risk of litigation from councils and schools etc.

Reduction in green and natural spaces due to house building and development and more playful opportunities

- Be creative with the space we have, fully utilising green spaces for play
- Planners should consider population needs at core of regeneration programmes
- More vocal/proactive planning which allows children a voice and reinforces the right to play
- Pro-active use the media to enhance and promote the importance of play, need for more accessible play opportunities and better use of green-spaces for play
- Enforce the planning legislation and ensure it is followed through
- Get input from specialist architects, learn from other countries and seek to apply locally
- Doesn't have to cost money – recognise value of free-play approaches
- Develop welcome, inviting open spaces and play parks; promote and advertise existing parks and free spaces; provide 'let's play' signs and take down the 'no ball games' signs
- Small things impact e.g. water fountains, different textures on pavements etc.
- Promote the feel good factor of being outside in the natural environment

Lack of facilities that meet the play and leisure needs of all children and teenagers

- Community planning being involved
- Engage with the council
- Being creative about play spaces
- Get children and young people's ideas
- Playability audit of what is available - identifying opportunities and gaps – and taking into consideration children's ages, stages and abilities
- More provision for children with disabilities is needed
- "Pop" up play areas
- Clean up the parks, broken glass, razor blades etc.

Reduce pressures for parents

- More flexible working hours for parents
- Less homework for children outside of school hours taking up play time
- Ensure that children bring appropriate clothing to schools to support and allow for outdoor play

Lack of play opportunities in schools – both formal and informal

- Communication with education authority re: play in schools, play to support delivery of the curriculum and play training for teachers
- Ensure children aren't swamped with homework
- Parents more informed – providing appropriate clothing and given notice that children will get dirty
- Provide appropriate clothing and equipment through the school budget
- Provide storage and use existing facilities, implementing budget friendly measures
- Introduce information on play and improve life skills, parenting skills into the curriculum for teenagers

Impact of technology on play – how do we achieve a balance

- We should embrace technology and embed it into play experiences
- Utilise it to encourage free play
- Can be used to encourage social play, over a very wide scope
- Challenge adult perception of technology

Strategic and Policy Level

- Create a play partnership or put play on existing partnerships agenda
- Introduce play information into bounty packs
- Recognise and support National play day and celebrate childhood days
- Collect data to inform strategies highlighting that play is intrinsic to health, wellbeing, education etc.
- Educate decision makers on the benefits of play by provide training and raise awareness
- Bring more children into urban areas by creating play friendly environment – if they are more welcoming families will stay longer, impacting positively on the local economy
- Community planning – should ensure that play is at the heart of the process with a focus on ensuring child friendly spaces within communities
- Ensure that there are appropriate inclusions in planning legislation to support and recognise plays critical role
- Communication with the community is key – we must adopt a joined up approach
- Consulting with children and young people should be at the heart of the process
- Children should have opportunities to influence the agenda - taking part in conferences/debates etc. outlining what they need

Workshop 3 - Setting actions to address the barriers

Strategies and Policies	Mechanisms	Stakeholders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play and Leisure Policy • Children’s Services Co-operation Bill/Act • Community Planning Order • Children and Young Peoples Strategy • Strategic Framework for Public Health: A Fitter Future for All • Health and Safety Policy • Childcare Strategy • DEL Education works • Individual Council Play policies • Minimum Standards for Childminding and Daycare • Health and Safety Executive Policies • New and emerging policy and legislation (e.g. community planning) • Extended schools • Road traffic Bill – reducing speed limits • UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) • School Playground policies • Age Goods, Facilities and Services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education and training inspectorate • Community policing and housing authorities • Law/court services • Innovative projects e.g. PEEK and Reclaiming play spaces • Training strategies for organisations • Risk/benefit mechanisms to support more challenging play • Children’s participation mechanisms in place • Parents partnerships • Media campaigns/remove negative stereotyping of children and young people • Play policy should be an Executive Priority and embedded across government • Through applying technology outdoors • 11 play strategies needed across councils • Play Staff in parks and community (local council employed) • UNCRC and the Right to Play • Information on play from health visitors for parents • Engage parents in ‘play’ mode – how important play is for development and health • Reduction in Public Transport costs encouraging less traffic (bus/trains) • Working Families Tax Credits • Reflect on European examples (e.g. forest schools in Helsinki giving lots of choice to children and letting them explore through play) • Planners to look more holistically at embedding playful approaches to public realm, schools, community developments etc. enabling play more widely in community • Planners and architects already promote café culture – they should also promote as standard playable spaces within new development • More closing of the streets for play • Parents take ownership • Encourage walking to school initiatives like Sustrans • Older children and young people buddying younger ones • Having neutral/shared spaces for play 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PlayBoard NI • Early Years teams • Play workers • Teaching and non-teaching Staff within School • Parents • Council Officers and Councillors • Health Board/Public Health Authority • Public Transport Providers • OFMDFM • Education Authority • PSNI (Community policing) • General public understanding of play • Children and Young People • Health and safety advisors • Voluntary and Community Sectors • NICCY • Afterschool clubs • NICMA • Play area designers and developers • Media • Local MLA, MP’s, MEP’s • DEL • Roads service • Business Community • Legal Profession



Thanks

PlayBoard would like to thank all those who contributed to the 'Playing Out' conference including:

The speakers

Koulla Yiasouma, N.I. Commissioner for Children and Young People

Dr Michael McBride, N.I. Chief Medical Officer –

Dr Tony Cassidy – University of Ulster

Paul McTernan – SLR Consulting

Harry Harbottle – Consultant in Play and Risk Management

Prof Laura Lundy – Queens University, Belfast

Peter McCartney – Belfast Metropolitan College

Delegates from the statutory, voluntary and community sectors across Northern Ireland, the UK and the Republic of Ireland.

The PlayBoard staff team

About PlayBoard NI

Established in 1985 PlayBoard is an independent charity and the lead organisation for the development and promotion of children and young people's play in Northern Ireland.

PlayBoard is committed to supporting Article 31 (the child's right to play) of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989). We do this through a combination of: service delivery, service development; campaigning, lobbying; awareness raising and working in partnership with others to put play on the agenda of policy makers and resource providers. The organisation takes great pride in promoting best practice in Play, Playwork and play based School Age Childcare services.

PlayBoard's mission is to drive the play agenda, ensuring that at every level of decision making across society, the child's right to play is not only recognised but is made a reality within the lives of children, young people, families and communities. Children and young people's views, aspirations and perceptions of themselves and the environment in which they live, are at the heart of PlayBoard's work. Our vision is of a society where the right to play is realised.