
Senedd Cymru | Welsh Parliament

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Ymateb gan: Chwarae Cymru | Evidence from: Play Wales

Equality and Social Justice Committee

SeneddEquality@senedd.wales

Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015: Post-legislative scrutiny

About Play Wales

Play Wales, the national charity for play in Wales, advocates for the right and need for all children to play. Our key areas:

- raising awareness
- promoting good practice
- providing advice and guidance across all sectors.

Our work includes:

- Policy: Working with others to inform the development of policy and other children's play issues
- Information service: Promoting the value of children's play by providing timely and current information
- Advice and support: Providing specialist knowledge about all issues that affect children's play
- Workforce development: Contributing to the professional development of the playwork and play workforces.

We worked closely with the Welsh Government to develop its *Play Policy*¹, *Play Policy Implementation Plan*² and on its groundbreaking play sufficiency legislation. Section 11 of the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010³ places a duty on local authorities to assess and secure sufficient play opportunities for children in their area.

¹ <https://play.wales/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Play-Policy.pdf>

² <https://play.wales/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Play-Policy-Implementation-Plan.pdf>

³ <https://play.wales/play-policy-legislation/play-sufficiency/>

We also drafted the report for the Ministerial Review of Play Steering Group (2022) and accompanying background paper.⁴

Play Wales is pleased to have an opportunity to input into this inquiry. Our contribution is informed by the work of the Ministerial Review of Play.

The importance of play for health, wellbeing and happiness

Playing is central to children's physical, mental, social and emotional health and wellbeing. When they play, children contribute to their immediate wellbeing and to their own development.

There is a well-established body of solid evidence⁵ that shows the contribution that play, particularly self-organised play, can make to children's long-term and immediate wellbeing, to their physical health and to their mental health and resilience. Various studies have concluded that play:

- supports socialisation: when they play children interact with others, develop friendships and attachments with peers, deal with conflict, and learn respect and tolerance.
- builds resilience: playing boosts children's emotion regulation, confidence, creativity, enabling them to cope with stress and challenges throughout life.
- is crucial for good health and wellbeing: being active through play helps children physically and emotionally, contributing to their health and happiness.
- supports children to feel part of their neighbourhoods and wider communities: playing allows children to learn about the world around them, make connections, and develop a sense of identity and belonging.
- supports learning and development: building the structures of the brain and skills such as critical thinking.

Playing is the most natural and enjoyable way for children to be active, keep well and be happy. It is fundamental to children's wellbeing and healthy development as articulated in the Welsh Government Play Policy.

Internationally, the importance of play is recognised and protected in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Article 31 of the UNCRC explicitly states that the child has the right to play and to join in other recreational activities and that States Parties should recognise these rights. The United Nations' General Comment no. 17 on Article 31 provides further guidance on the

⁴ <https://www.gov.wales/written-statement-ministerial-review-play-publication-steering-group-report>

⁵ Russell, W., Barclay, M. and Tawil, B. (2024) *Playing and being well. A review of recent research into children's play, social policy and practice, with a focus on Wales*, Cardiff: Play Wales.

legislative, judicial, administrative, social and educational measures necessary to ensure its implementation.

Ministerial Review of Play

In November 2019, the then Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services decided to take forward a Ministerial Review of Play. The aim of the review was to assess the Welsh Government's work with respect to play policy and to inform how the Welsh Government develops and progresses the play agenda. The review considered the progress made in achieving the Welsh Government's vision for play, as articulated in its *Play Policy*, and sets out a number of key recommendations that need to be implemented.

The review was managed by the Play Policy Team within the Childcare, Play and Early Years Division of the Welsh Government. The review took a collaborative approach, recognising the knowledge and experience of key stakeholders in identifying and understanding the issues and in looking at options for the future. A cross-professional steering group of play and playwork specialists and policy officials from across the Welsh Government was set up to support the review.

Ministerial Review of Play: Alignment of key legislation impacting on the right to play theme

As part of this review, the steering group identified a range of sector specific national legislation, policies, initiatives that support children's play. The review considered the need for alignment of national play policy and the Play Sufficiency Duty to other key primary and over-arching pieces of legislation – including the Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015.

The *Ministerial Review of Play Background Paper*⁶ highlights that successful implementation of the Play Sufficiency Duty aligns well with the both the five ways of working and the seven wellbeing goals of the act. We draw the committee's attention to pages 15 to 18 of the *Ministerial Review of Play Background Paper*.

Supporting children to play can help in realising the aims of other policies. Equally, other policies can facilitate this by explicitly including the Play Sufficiency Duty and children's play in guidance and strategies.

Play sufficiency and integrated approaches

Four small-scale research studies, commissioned by Play Wales, have been undertaken since the commencement of the Play Sufficiency Duty⁷. The research studies have applied an assets-based approach to play sufficiency, by articulating throughout the reports that play is what children do when the conditions are right and establishing it as their way of maintaining their own health and wellbeing.

⁶ <https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/inline-documents/2023-10/ministerial-review-of-play-background-paper.pdf>

⁷ See Play Wales website: [Play Sufficiency Research](#)

This is most evident in the 2020 study⁸, which aligns the process of play sufficiency with the approach taken in the Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015, the Social Services and Well-being Act (Wales) 2014 and by Public Health Wales, highlighting that ‘an assets approach identifies factors that support good health and well-being and relies on working locally with communities’.⁹

Implementation of the play sufficiency process has required meaningful engagement with children and relied on a view that sees children as competent individuals with capacity to influence positive developments with regards to their play. Across Wales, as part of statutory Play Sufficiency Assessments, children have provided views about their opportunities to play¹⁰ and when supported to do so can provide rich knowledge and information about their neighbourhoods. Actively engaging with children gives us an opportunity to take an assets-based approach to meeting children’s play needs.

Play and Well-being Plans

Public Services Boards (PSB) are required to analyse and assess the economic, social, environmental and cultural wellbeing of their areas and plan together to improve and deliver on the wellbeing of those areas.

Through Play Sufficiency Assessments, local authorities must assess report progress on a range of criteria, including:

- A named person on the Local Public Service Board who champions children’s play
- The extent to which the Play Sufficiency Assessment and Play Action Plan contribute to, and are incorporated within, the Well-being Plan.

Considering play in local wellbeing assessments can help public bodies to identify and reach wellbeing goals for children and communities. However, our analysis of Play Sufficiency Assessments indicates that how this works in practice varies across Wales.

Application of the Play Sufficiency Duty

As mentioned earlier, the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 places a legal duty on every local authority in Wales to assess and secure sufficient play opportunities for children in their area. The Ministerial Review of Play discussed the limitations of the duty applying to local authorities only. Key recommendation 6 of the review was for the Welsh Government to consider applying the Play Sufficiency Duty more widely to include a range of other bodies.

⁸ Russell, W., Barclay, M., Tawil, B. and Derry, C. (2020) *Making it Possible to do Play Sufficiency: Exploring the conditions that support local authorities to secure sufficient opportunities for children in Wales to play*, Cardiff: Play Wales.

⁹ Cited *ibid*, p.16.

¹⁰ Dallimore, D. (2022) *What children say about play in Wales*, Cardiff: Play Wales.

Mindful that extending statutory Play Sufficiency Duty to other bodies beyond local authorities would require legislative change, the review recommended the establishment of a Play Sufficiency Charter (or similar) and actively encourage a commitment to the Play Sufficiency Duty by public bodies that are not included in it.

In its Ministerial Review of Play progress report¹¹, the Welsh Government commits itself to commission a review to consider progress against play sufficiency statutory duties and identify key themes. The report notes that this will help inform exploration on the potential development of a Play Charter and the Ministerial Review of Play Steering Group Report recommendation of widening the scope of the statutory duty.

Conclusion

All four play sufficiency research studies recognise that the Play Sufficiency Duty and the supporting documents produced by the Welsh Government – regulations, statutory guidance, and toolkit – agree that: play is what children do when the conditions are right and establishing it as their way of maintaining their own health and wellbeing. Every aspect of children’s lives is influenced by their urge to play, and self-directed, self-determined playing increases children’s opportunities to build their own resilience and support their own health and wellbeing.

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 requires public bodies in Wales to take a joined-up approach, helping to create a Wales we all want to live in, now and in the future. Successful implementation of the Play Sufficiency Duty aligns well with the act’s five ways of working and its seven wellbeing goals. The duty should be explicitly incorporated into guidance for wellbeing assessments at national and local levels to help public bodies identify and reach wellbeing goals for children and communities.

The synergy between the benefits of a successful Play Sufficiency Duty and the wellbeing goals of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 can and should be optimised, through more explicit guidance for wellbeing plans. Many of the act’s wellbeing goals and indicators resonate with the Play Sufficiency Duty and spatial justice for children, including a Wales that is healthier, more equal, has coherent communities, has a vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language and is globally responsible. For example, making neighbourhoods more child-friendly by reducing traffic volume, traffic emissions and the space that cars take up would support many of the wellbeing goals as well as spatial justice for children. Although it might be assumed that children are included in the indicators relating to safe and cohesive communities, public bodies are unlikely to think about children’s very different relationships with their neighbourhoods unless they are explicitly mentioned.

Explicitly incorporating play and the Play Sufficiency Duty into wellbeing guidance at national and local level can help public bodies to identify and reach wellbeing goals for children and communities.

¹¹ <https://www.gov.wales/ministerial-review-play-progress-report-february-2025-html#:~:text=The%20Ministerial%20Review%20of%20Play%20Steering%20Group%20Report%20made%20key,people%20sufficient%20opportunities%20to%20play>

Play Wales
Park House
Greyfriars Road
Cardiff CF10 3AF



www.play.wales

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