

Assessment and accreditation process

Step 1

Play providers apply to Play England when they feel they have sufficient evidence to gain accreditation across all eleven quality areas. The provider must send in a completed application form and copies of the evidence outlined in the pre-assessment checklist. The provider, managing organisation or local authority must also complete the assessment contract and complete payment for assessment. Assessment fees as of October 2009 are as follows:

- £500 per assessment for all providers
- £450 per assessment if a Play England member

Step 2

Play England assigns an assessor, who will agree a timetable for the assessment process with the provider. The assessor will be someone who has no connection with the site as a paid worker, will not be their mentor, or have had any other personal, management or remunerative connection with them, or otherwise have a personal or professional interest in the provider gaining accreditation. This is to ensure that they are truly independent and can objectively assess the provision.

Play England will pass a copy of the application and the pre-assessment evidence to the assessor for checking prior to their visit. This is to enable them to carry out a fuller assessment of the portfolio of evidence and help them to understand how policy is put into practice when on site.

Step 3

The assessment visit will normally be between 1pm – 5pm, Mondays – Friday in term-time, and will consist of:

- two hours when the children aren't present, checking the portfolio, other evidence and talking to management and staff, using a checklist based on the quality indicators to record whether the standards and quality indicators are met
- two hours in contact time, observing non-documentary evidence of practice, such as suitability of the play environment, staff/child interactions and talking to children, parents and staff
- the assessor will give brief verbal feedback before they leave to clarify any action points needed to gain accreditation and the timescale for completing these. The assessor will not at this stage be able to say what their recommendation is likely to be.

The assessor will complete an assessment report form including:

- any action points required for accreditation and the timescale for response
- a short narrative section about evidence and their observation of the provision
- a checklist of each quality area viewed

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- the assessor's recommendation to accredit or not and any recommendations on areas of excellence
 - the report may also include suggestions for further development of quality, which are not necessary to gain accreditation at this point, but which will be expected by the time of re-accreditation.

Play England will send a copy to the provider for agreement or otherwise.

Step 4

If the play provider agrees with the assessment report, they sign and return the top copy to the Quality in Play Programme Manager who will take it for consideration at the next available accreditation panel meeting. The provider must also provide any further evidence required within the timescale given by the assessor.

If the provider disagrees with the assessment report, they must sign and return the top copy with reasons for the disagreement. Play England assessors are trained and experienced professionals, but we do acknowledge that mistakes can be made. The Quality in Play Programme Manager will investigate and may ask the provision to offer further supporting evidence for your disagreement. If it is clear that the assessor is at fault, it may be necessary to carry out a further assessment with a different staff member.

Step 5

The accreditation panel makes a decision to accredit or not, based on the assessment report and any outstanding actions completed. The accreditation panel includes Play England representatives and independent expert members from the children's play and childcare fields. Where any panel member has acted as a mentor or assessor for an accreditation applicant, they will not take part in the decision.

The panel chair takes no part in decisions and does not have a vote – their role is to provide external and independent quality assurance for the process, and to deal with the first stage of the appeals and complaints procedures.

Play England and independent panel members scrutinise the assessor reports, and aim to come to a consensus on whether to award or withhold accreditation, with the proviso that two independent members must concur with the decision. The independent members scrutinise the random sample of portfolios called in, where they offer feedback on the whole process.

The Quality in Play Programme Manager provides administrative support to the panel, confirms whether outstanding action points have been completed, reports on mentor and assessor development and any issues arising.

To award accreditation the panel needs to be satisfied that:

- the provider has consistently met the standards across all eleven quality areas and that they agree with the assessors recommendation

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- the provider has satisfactorily completed any action points
 - if registered with Ofsted, that the provider has been rated as satisfactory at least, and that all outstanding issues have been or will be addressed within the timetable.
 - five 'must see' documents have been located by the assessor without help from the provider and that they show evidence of improvement in six quality areas
 - if applying for an excellence award, the provider has completed that part of the application form and outlined clearly why they deserve the award.

To support the quality process, Play England will also call in a random sample of portfolios. This is to ensure that the process is fair for both the provider and the assessor, that the assessment process is properly carried out, and that the accreditation meets quality assurance standards.

Step 6

If the panel agree that the provider has met the quality standards, they will be sent a letter confirming this and asking the provider to return written agreement to the conditions of accreditation and to uphold the standards. Once they have returned this, Play England will send a certificate, a summary of the quality standards and details of how parents, carers or other users can contact Play England if they feel they are not being met. The provider must prominently display these.

If the panel does not agree that the provider meets the standards at this stage, it will set out the reasons for not accrediting the provider.

Accreditation period and notification of change

Accreditation lasts for two years. Before the end of **year one** the play provider must complete the accreditation update form giving details of any changes to their provision, provide a copy of their current Ofsted report, if registered, and confirm that they continue to meet the standards and conditions of accreditation.

They must provide details of any significant changes as and when they occur. Providers must inform Play England regarding any significant change in:

- overall objectives (changes to mission or aims)
- Ofsted registration (withdrawal, change to the total number of children registered for, change in grading, etc)
- premises (change in size or use, planning consent, anything that could effect the quality of provision for children)
- the person in charge (the registered person, senior worker, centre manager etc)
- other staff (any other changes, including volunteers)
- management or ownership (the committee, line management structure, proprietor or other owner)
- the children (age range, culture/ethnicity, gender, ability).

The provider must also immediately provide details of:

- any complaints received from users or anyone else
- any fraud or other malpractice
- any other significant change which could compromise the integrity of the Quality in Play accreditation.

Some changes will not necessarily affect accreditation, but some may, depending on their nature. The following examples given after each category are only indicative:

No change to your accreditation

- Reported changes that the Quality in Play programme manager is satisfied do not adversely affect the quality of provision for children;
- New action points in a satisfactory, good or outstanding Ofsted report;
- Minor adverse change(s) which the Quality in Play Programme Manager is satisfied will be addressed within one month.

Temporary suspension

- A complaint from a user that is not resolved during the initial investigation by the Quality in Play Programme Manager;
- A child protection complaint until resolved through the local Safeguarding Board procedure;
- A minor failure to comply with the conditions of accreditation.

The Quality in Play Programme Manager will decide whether a visit is necessary.

Re-approval needed

- Required actions or resolutions of complaints not completed within the agreed temporary suspension period;
- Reported change of the whole staff team, management or ownership and major changes to premises or the group of children;
- Significant changes not promptly reported or discovered during a visit.

A visit will always be required before re-approval can be given.

Withdrawal of accreditation

- Withdrawal of Ofsted registration:
- A user complaint upheld through the Play England complaints or local Safeguarding Board procedures;
- Unreported change of the whole staff team, management or ownership and major changes to premises or the group of children;
- Any other serious failure to comply with the conditions of accreditation.

A full assessment will always be required before restoration of accreditation can be considered.

Re-accreditation

Before the end of year two, providers must complete the accreditation update and re-accreditation application forms, and provide a copy of their current Ofsted report, if registered.

The Quality in Play Programme Manager will arrange a re-accreditation assessment visit. The assessor will look for evidence of improvement in a further six quality areas and will check that the provider continues to meet all the quality standards.

Play England will also look at how the provider has met any development points from the previous assessment; meeting them will in most cases count towards improvement in the additional quality areas, as mentioned above.

The greater part of the re-accreditation assessment will concentrate on talking to staff, children and parents about what has improved as a result of using Quality in Play, as we want to see there have been real benefits as a result of the quality process. The results will be used to evaluate the impact of Quality in Play and to make improvements over time to the system and accreditation process.

