

QUALITY AREA 8

Clear play aims and values

THE STANDARD

Our aims and values are clearly stated, and the objectives by which we will achieve them are based on the playing child being at the centre of everything we do. We have defined our users and potential users in a clear and unambiguous written statement, outlining how the service we provide is accessible and inclusive. Our policies are consistent with the Playwork Principles and any local play strategy or children's plans.

This standard is about making sure that everyone concerned is clear about your provision. It underpins other quality areas and means having an overall policy or service statement that shows how play provision in an individual setting, or as part of a wider service, aims to support children's play. It does not need to cover every bit of detail, but you should say in plain language how you aim to provide the best possible play opportunities for all children.

In the voluntary or private sector, it should link to your constitution, company articles or other governing document. In the public sector, it should link to the relevant play service overall mission statement or delivery plan. In all sectors, the policy and how it will be achieved should be consistent with the Playwork Principles and promote access and inclusion for all children.

The overall policy or statement should be very clear that the primary users of its services are children at play, so that in turn, the children, parents, staff, management, funders and the public are clear about what is and what is not provided. This is particularly important where your play provision is part of a childcare or other service for children and families. It might help to think about outcomes, outputs and inputs when working on how you aim to achieve your objectives. Consider, for example:

- outcomes — play as an outcome in itself, as well as contributing to other outcomes for children; what difference your provision intends to make in supporting children and how you would know it has happened.
- outputs — what you do to support children's play day-to-day and, over time, your activities and plans, reflection and review.
- inputs — your money, premises, play spaces, materials equipment, and staff and management knowledge.

Breaking it down in this way can help ensure that you are realistic about what you can provide, how you intend to create and maintain an environment that supports all children to play, and how this contributes to good outcomes for children's enjoyment of their childhood.

A quality play provider ensures that everyone concerned knows exactly what is and what is not provided; is clear about how they fit into the wider context and contributes to and keeps up-to-date with local, regional and national strategic play development and implementation.

Commitment and planning

a. We have a written governing or other document that contains a clear statement of the overall aims of our provision in relation to play.

Getting started
date

Nearly met
date

Fully met
date

b. We have a clear policy that sets out the type and range of our provision and what we do and do not offer.

c. We have clearly defined our aims in line with the inclusion principles and the values of full access and opportunities incorporated in our diversity or equal policy and implementation plan.

Action

a. We provide a range of play opportunities for local children and consistently achieve our service aims and objectives.

b. Our overall policy or service statement is discussed with children and families on first contact.

c. We have a clear understanding of the Playwork Principles and the values of access and inclusion and consistently put them into practice.

Review

a. Comments from children, families and other stakeholders are monitored and incorporated into our review processes.

b. The policy or service statement is updated and adapted in response to feedback, our reflective practice and any new developments.

c. Our aims and values are reviewed annually against the Playwork Principles and current legal and professional standards, including those related to access and inclusion.

Commitment and planning

- How does our governing document, mission statement or other statement of purpose support children's freely chosen play?
- How have we checked that our policy or service statement clearly describes our service?
- How can we show that our aims and objectives are consistent with the Playwork Principles, and what methods have we used to ensure access and inclusion is part of our policy and planning?

Action

- What is our evidence of how we provide a range of play opportunities and consistently achieve our aims and objectives?
- What examples could we give of how we go through the policy or service statement with children and families?
- How could we show our understanding and implementation the of Playwork Principles, access and inclusion?

Review

- How did we look back at how we consulted children, families and other stakeholders on our provision and on what difference we made as a result?
- Who was involved, and when, in updating the service statement, and how could we show that our reflective practice fed into the process?
- What evidence do we have that shows we continue to be consistent with the Playwork Principles and meet legal and professional standards, including those related to access and inclusion?

QUALITY AREA 9

Communicating effectively

THE STANDARD

We ensure that how information is created, displayed, circulated and communicated is right for our play provision. We use a variety of methods to ensure that existing and potential users, our staff and management, funders and the public have the information they need, and that the language and imagery we use is clear, accessible and inclusive. We respond promptly and effectively to messages we receive.

This standard is about looking at the two-way flow of information between children and families, staff and management and relevant external agencies. It recognises that play providers and their users will vary in their ability to access and use communication technology and resources, and that there needs to be a balance between too much and too little information for everyone concerned.

However, effective communication underpins nearly everything you do and poor communication is one of the biggest causes of problems, especially when comments suggestions and complaints are not taken up and acted upon. Therefore it is important to examine how well you are sending out your messages, how you respond to those you receive and check that 'the message sent is the message received' to ensure that you are communicating well internally and externally.

Written or other visual information aimed at the public, such as notices and displays, and how you communicate verbally and non-verbally, especially with children and families, send out powerful messages about overall quality. Equally, how you recognise and respond to children's play cues and the attitude of staff and management will have a major effect on how welcoming, accessible and inclusive your provision is for all children.

Internal communication systems and processes need to be clear relevant and up-to-date, and should ensure people get the information they need in good time so that they can act on it as needed. There should be a presumption that all information is in the public domain except in clearly defined, sensitive or confidential areas, in line with the law, regulation and good practice on data protection, safeguarding and sharing information.

A quality play provider thinks about who their external and internal audiences are and what information they need. Funders will want information about how their money has made a difference, while children, families and communities will be more interested in what is provided. Staff and management will need clear policies, procedures, accounting and reporting systems to help with planning and delivering the service.

Commitment and planning

a. We are committed to making sure that the language and images we use and our responses to the messages we receive, including comments, suggestions and complaints, are sensitive and right for everyone concerned.

Getting started
date

Nearly met
date

Fully met
date

b. We have clear internal communication systems so that our children and families, staff and management, funders and other stakeholders have the information they need to help us support children's play.

c. Our policy covers data protection and confidentiality, sharing information, safeguarding and responding to concerns in line with legal requirements and good practice.

Action

a. We provide information to our users and respond to external communications in a way that supports children's play as the priority, while meeting the needs of families, communities and other stakeholders.

b. We organise our internal systems to make sure that everyone concerned with our provision has the relevant, and up-to-date information they need and we respond to what children expressly or implicitly tell us through their play.

c. Our staff and management are clear about what information and communications are in the public domain and what is sensitive or confidential.

Review

a. We review our communications policy and practice to make sure they are accessible, accurate and reliable and we check that we have responded to comments suggestions and complaints.

b. We use our observations of children's play to improve how we communicate with children and families and to be an advocate for play to other stakeholders.

c. We ensure we keep up-to-date with legal requirements and good practice in how we use and share information internally and externally.

Commitment and planning

- What examples have we got that show how our language and images send out the right messages and are understood by everyone concerned?
- How do we share information internally to make sure that everyone has the information they need?
- How does our policy on how we handle information show that we meet legal requirements and good practice?

Action

- What information or images have we sent out or displayed, and how have we responded to what people tell us or ask us?
- How could we show that staff and management have the information they need?
- What have we done as a direct result of observing children's play or listening to what they tell us?
- How do we deal with and respond to comments, suggestions and complaints?
- How could we show that everyone knows how to be open and transparent while making sure that sensitive or confidential information is kept and shared securely?

Review

- How does our annual review show that we thought about and made any changes needed to our communications policy and practice?
- How could we show or explain how we have used our observations of children's play to improve our two-way communication with them, their families and other stakeholders?
- What have we done well in keeping up with good practice and how are we going to build on this?

QUALITY AREA 10

Working in the community

THE STANDARD

We actively seek the views of families and the community and involve them in how we plan, manage and deliver our service. We see our provision as part of a network of more and better play opportunities for all children in our area. We provide information about our own play provision and build links with other play opportunities and wider services for children and families and signpost the local community to them.

The local community is the sea in which play provision swims or sinks, and therefore should be invited to have a say in how play provision is managed and delivered to support children's play. Whether the management and delivery structure is in the public, private, voluntary, social enterprise or other sectors, local people should be actively engaged and their ideas taken into account.

As any individual play provider is unlikely to be able to provide a full range of play opportunities for all children all of the time in their community or neighbourhood, they need to see themselves as part of the wider play offer in the area. Playwork Principle 1 says that play is fundamental to the healthy development and well-being of children and communities, and this idea is increasingly being embedded in public policy at local, regional and national level.

Play providers should have good links with other staffed play provision and know about other designated play areas and informal playable space in their neighbourhood. Equally, as children's services are increasingly integrated, they need to make links with networks of professionals who work with children and young people in their area. This will enable play and other services to signpost children and families to each other and build community awareness of what is available.

Quality play providers make particular efforts to contact local families and children's services to ensure the inclusion of all children in a range of play opportunities in their neighbourhood, as part of any wider area plans for children and play.

Commitment and planning

a. Our written policy covers how we formally and informally engage with and involve families and the community in how we plan and deliver our service.

Getting started
date

Nearly met
date

Fully met
date

b. We have made links with other play provision in the area to ensure our service is part of the community and the wider play offer in the area.

c. We have a plan for how we make links with networks of children's service professionals and how we signpost our own and other services to children and families in the community.

Action

a. We create and maintain links with families and the wider community by providing good information, involving them in our planning and responding positively to both suggestions and complaints.

b. Our staff and management create and maintain links with other play provision and we know how we fit into any local play strategies or children's plans.

c. We keep in touch with others working with children to ensure everyone concerned knows what is provided in the area, especially accessible and inclusive play opportunities.

Review

a. The annual review focuses on how well we have engaged with and involved families and the community and how we fit into the wider picture of children's play.

b. We check what difference family community involvement in our planning and action has actually made.

c. We use the results of the annual review to check that we have good links with other people working with children and that we share information effectively.

Commitment and planning

- How can management and staff explain or show how we engage with and involve families and the community?
- What formal and informal methods do we use to do this?
- What links do we have with other play provision in the area and how could we show we fit into local planning for children and young people?
- How could we show that we plan to be part of a network of children's services professionals and share information about our own and other services with the community?

Action

- What information have we provided to families on how to get involved in our provision and how can we show or explain that we have responded positively to them?
- How did we link up with other play provision in our area and how can we explain or show where we fit into any local play strategy or plans for children and young people?
- How did we set up and maintain links with other people working with children to promote access and inclusion for all children?

Review

- How does our annual review show what difference we made over the last year in engaging with families and the community?
- What changes have we made as a result of looking at how we fit into the local community and the wider picture?
- What specific things are we going to do next year and beyond to refine and improve our links with families, the community and other children's services professionals?

QUALITY AREA 11

The bigger picture

THE STANDARD

Our staff and management have an understanding of how our provision fits in with our neighbourhood community and the wider local area and national play strategies. Our primary focus is on the playing child in our provision, but we also have links with other play and children's services agencies and keep up-to-date with play policy and practice development. We make sure we know about and try to influence wider agendas that have an impact on local children.

This standard is about looking outwards as well as inwards and thinking about how your provision sits within the wider local area and national play strategies as well as supporting children's play in the immediate neighbourhood. Having a good understanding of how you fit into the bigger picture helps you to plan more effectively and sustain funding, as play is commissioned or otherwise funded within local and national strategies for play and other children's services.

Good links with play providers and children's services agencies will help to spread the play message, raise the profile of play provision and share information that might not otherwise be easily accessible, for example specific needs of disabled, minority community or other potentially marginalised children. Other agencies responsible for planning, housing, regeneration, extended service schools and the wider public realm, that have an effect on children's play, also need to understand their input on your provision and children's play in general.

Playwork Principle 4 says that for playworkers the play process takes precedence and playworkers act as advocates for play when engaging with adult-led agendas. Keeping up with policy and practice development in the play sector and beyond will help in this influencing role. This is particularly important for play ranger, mobile and other projects working in the public domain, but site-based staffed provision also need to be an advocate for children's play in their neighbourhood and wider area.

As children's services are increasingly integrated, play providers need to be able to show how they contribute to children's well-being while keeping a focus on play as an outcome in itself. This will also help to develop good two-way relationships between play provision and area play service or other managers, those responsible for commissioning and other funders, and help them to have a strategic overview and understanding of play as central to children's well-being.

Commitment and planning

a. Management and staff are familiar with local play provision and are committed to working in partnership with other play providers.

b. We have a plan for making links with key people and agencies in the area, or elsewhere, to ensure we have the information we need, including keeping up with play policy and practice development, to be an advocate for children's play.

c. We have a plan for how we will sustain our funding by influencing other agendas.

Action

a. We have assessed how we fit within local and national strategies for children and young people, made contact with and fed back information to the local authority and other local forums for children and young people's providers.

b. We have made links with play and other agencies so as to have an overview of how children's play is supported in our neighbourhood, share good practice and keep up-to-date with play policy and practice to ensure that we can make the case for children's play.

c. We work with play and other service managers, commissioning, funding and other agencies to develop and implement our sustainable funding plan.

Review

a. We annually review how our provision fits in with the wider context and how we have influenced area-play and other relevant strategies.

b. We look at what difference our links with other agencies and sources of information has made to planning and practice.

c. We use the results to improve our service delivery and sustain our funding.

Getting started
date

Nearly met
date

Fully met
date

Commitment and planning

- How could we show our understanding of, and involvement in, local plans for children and young people's services and explain how our provision fits within it?
- What play and other agencies in our local area or elsewhere have we used to gather and share information on good practice with, and keep up with play policy and practice development?
- How does our planning show how we and others have thought about sustainable funding and how far ahead have we looked?

Action

- What information do we provide to the play partnership or other strategic forum on our provision and what could be improved on in the neighbourhood?
- Who have we contacted to find out about gaps in play provision and share good practice with; and what sources have we used to keep up with developments in play policy and practice?
- Who in our provision and other agencies was involved in our forward planning?

Review

- How does our annual review show where we fit into the bigger picture; and what other evidence do we have to show that play or other service managers know about and value our provision?
- What difference has sharing good practice and keeping up with developments in play made to our provision?
- How could we show that we are part of long-term strategies for commissioning or otherwise funding our provision?