

Minister for Children, Young People and The Promise
Ministear airson Clann, Daoine Òga is An Gealladh
Natalie Don-Innes MSP
Natalie Don-Innes BPA



T: 0300 244 4000

Health, Social Care and Sport Committee

20 March 2025

Dear Convenor

I am writing to provide an advance copy of the Play Vision Statement and Action Plan 2025-2030, which will be published on 24 March 2025. I also have the pleasure of attaching a child friendly version of the Play Vision Statement and Action Plan 2025-2030 and two posters which are intended for use by younger and older children which we have developed in partnership with Play Scotland.

The Play Vision Statement and Action Plan 2025-2030 seeks to build on the excellent progress which has been made in Scotland since our first national play strategy in 2013. It aims to support parents and children of all ages to access play, where and when they need it. We have worked directly with public and third sector partners and academia to support the development and production of the Play Vision Statement and Action Plan 2025-2030, and our colleagues in Play Scotland engaged directly with children and young people to inform the development of the child friendly version.

The Play Vision Statement and Action Plan 2025-2030 reflects on the obstacles affecting children's ability to access play opportunities but also acknowledges the many positive developments that have taken place in Scotland since the publication of the 2013 Strategy. The Play Vision Statement and Action Plan 2025-2030 highlights our vision for Scotland where "play is welcomed, celebrated and nurtured. That every child is able to play across all stages and aspects of their life to support their social development, resilience, language and communication development, health, physical and mental wellbeing".

Scottish Ministers, special advisers and the Permanent Secretary are covered by the terms of the Lobbying (Scotland) Act 2016. See www.lobbying.scot

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Within the Play Vision Statement and Action Plan 2025-2030 we have included a Play Theory of Change which can be used by partners as a framework for further local and community improvements to play opportunities. Our Action Plan outlines some of the crucial steps we will undertake until 2030 that empower and support more play opportunities for all children in Scotland. The Scottish Government will lead on the ten actions in the plan in collaboration with key partners in their delivery.

Our Play Vision Statement and Action Plan 2025-2030 reinforces our commitment to children's rights and our focus on mitigating the impacts of poverty through the promotion and access to free outdoor play spaces and opportunities and I hope you find it of interest.

Yours sincerely,



Natalie Don-Innes MSP
Minister for Children, Young People and The Promise

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Play Vision Statement and Action Plan

2025-2030



Foreword





Natalie Don-Innes MSP

Minister for Children,
Young People and
the Promise

The Scottish Government wants every child in Scotland to grow up loved, safe and respected and to fulfil their potential. Play has a critical role in delivering this. I am delighted to publish Scotland's Play Vision Statement and Action Plan 2025-2030, building on our 2013 national play strategy. It sets out our vision for the future of play in Scotland, and the actions we will take in partnership with our public and third sector partners, to realise that vision.

One of my first events as Minister for Children, Young People and Keeping the Promise was to speak at the International Play Association World Conference, held in Glasgow in the summer of 2023¹. I was struck by the passion and dedication that people all across the world showed for play and its benefits for children's development. The conference impressed upon me the high standing in which Scotland is held internationally when it comes to play.

I was honoured to represent Scotland as the conference showcased the great work done by public and third sector organisations to support play opportunities in Scotland.

Across the country in homes, communities, early learning and childcare settings, schools, and all manner of children's clubs, groups and activities from professionals and volunteers, we can be proud of the time, resources and care that we dedicate to providing children and young people with the opportunities to play. I am proud too, of the Scottish Government's investment in play over the years, including our £60m commitment to playpark renewal.

Play, in all its forms, is an integral part of children's healthy development, learning, physical and mental wellbeing at all ages. Play is recognised as a child's right in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child but more than that, play can help to process emotions, build coping skills and help us navigate life events. Play is universal, it can connect cultures and generations in the simple act of having fun, creating bonds and memories that can last a lifetime.

I am hugely grateful to colleagues from the public sector, third sector and academia who informed and guided the production of the Vision Statement and Action Plan. Most importantly, I am grateful to children and young people for voicing their views on play in Scotland.

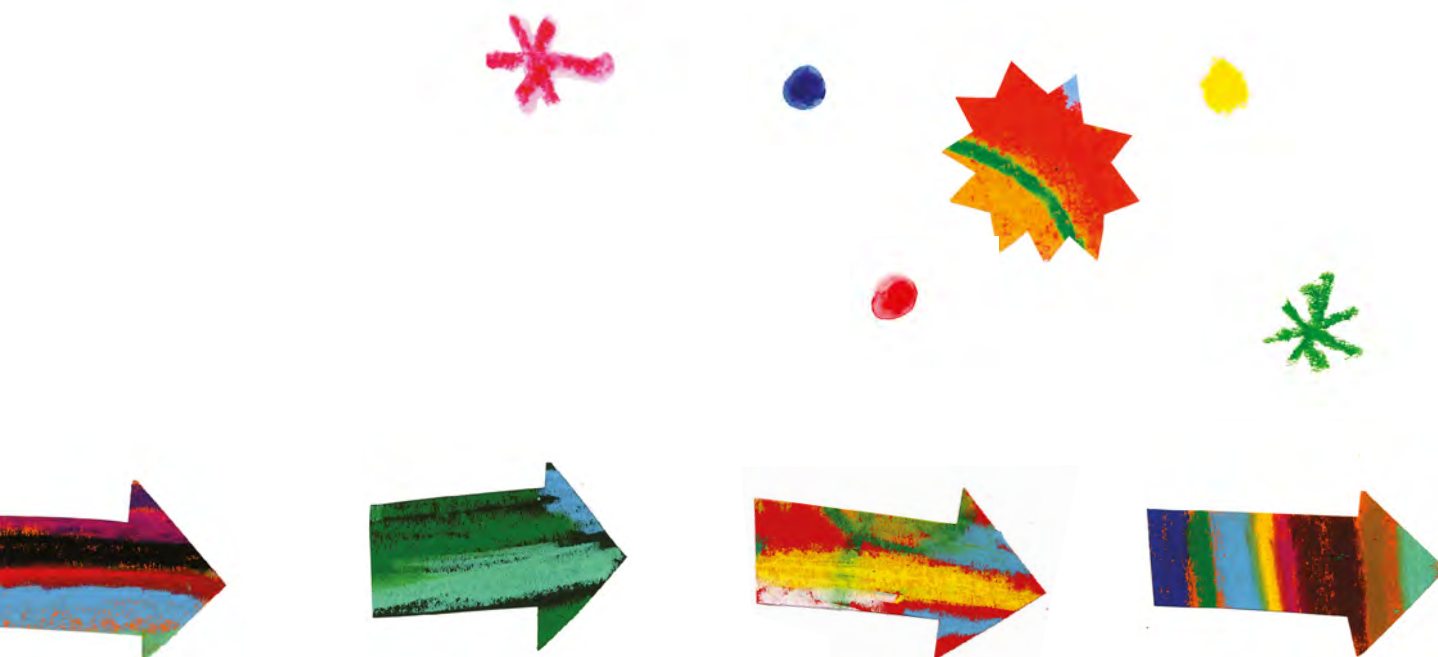
1 <https://www.ipascotland.org/ipaglasgow2023>



Executive summary

Scotland's first Play Strategy was published in 2013. It established Scotland as a world leader in recognising the importance of children's right to play. The 2013 Strategy set in train many positive changes. Scotland has become the first country in the United Kingdom to incorporate the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child² into its domestic law, including the right to play enshrined in Article 31. The importance of play has been embedded into Scotland's planning system, through the introduction of Play Sufficiency Assessments to help inform local development plan-making.

The Scottish Government has been supporting opportunities to access play across the country for thousands of children and parents and carers through our Bookbug and PlayTalkRead programmes. More broadly, Scotland has undertaken a review of historic child abuse in care and has made a promise³ to all care experienced children and young people in Scotland that they will grow up loved, safe and respected.



² [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child - UNICEF UK](#)

³ [What is the promise?](#)

The wider context has changed too. The COVID-19 pandemic, environmental changes, the cost-of-living crisis, Brexit and ongoing global conflict have all influenced the wider world that children grow, develop and play in. This Vision Statement and Action Plan seeks to build on progress which has been made and respond to the changed wider context in order to support children of all ages and parents to access play, where and when they need it. It sets out what the Scottish Government and key partners, working in collaboration, will do to achieve our vision for play in Scotland.

Vision for Play in Scotland

Our vision for Scotland is that play is welcomed, celebrated and nurtured. That every child is able to play across all stages and aspects of their life to support their social development, resilience, language and communication development, health, physical and mental wellbeing. Our Action Plan outlines some of the crucial steps we will undertake until 2030 that empower and support more play opportunities for all children in Scotland.

Play Theory of Change

The Play Theory of Change is intended to provide a framework for further improvement in play opportunities in Scotland and to offer a route map for all public and third sector bodies to use to create their own localised strategies, policies and projects.



Theory of Change

Vision Our vision for Scotland is that play is welcomed, celebrated and nurtured. That every child is able to play across all stages and aspects of their life to support their social development, resilience, language and communication development, health, physical and mental wellbeing.

Aim By 2030 we will have delivered our actions that empower and support more play opportunities for all children in Scotland.

Impact areas



Parents have knowledge, time and confidence to support nurturing and responsive play

We live in places that offer safe, welcoming and inclusive play opportunities for all children

Practitioners have the knowledge and the confidence to support and promote children's play opportunities

Parents

From pre-birth, Parents have the knowledge of the importance of play on their child's brain development.

From pre-birth, Parents have the confidence to play with their children and support independent play opportunities for children.

Parents can access the right information about play opportunities at the right time.

Parents know how to safeguard and support their children's play in the digital space.

Place

Play spaces are inclusive and accessible to all in a variety of settings.

Play spaces offer quality play experiences and are safe and welcoming for all.

Play opportunities are prioritised when creating all public spaces.

Play is encouraged in our cities, towns and communities, for people of all ages.

Practitioners

Children and Young People workforce feel valued and are recognised for their efforts to promote and facilitate play opportunities for all children.

Children and Young People workforce understand and support the importance of indoor and outdoor play for all children. Practitioners working with families and children promote play opportunities and engage with families and exchange ideas on play possibilities outside of organised settings.

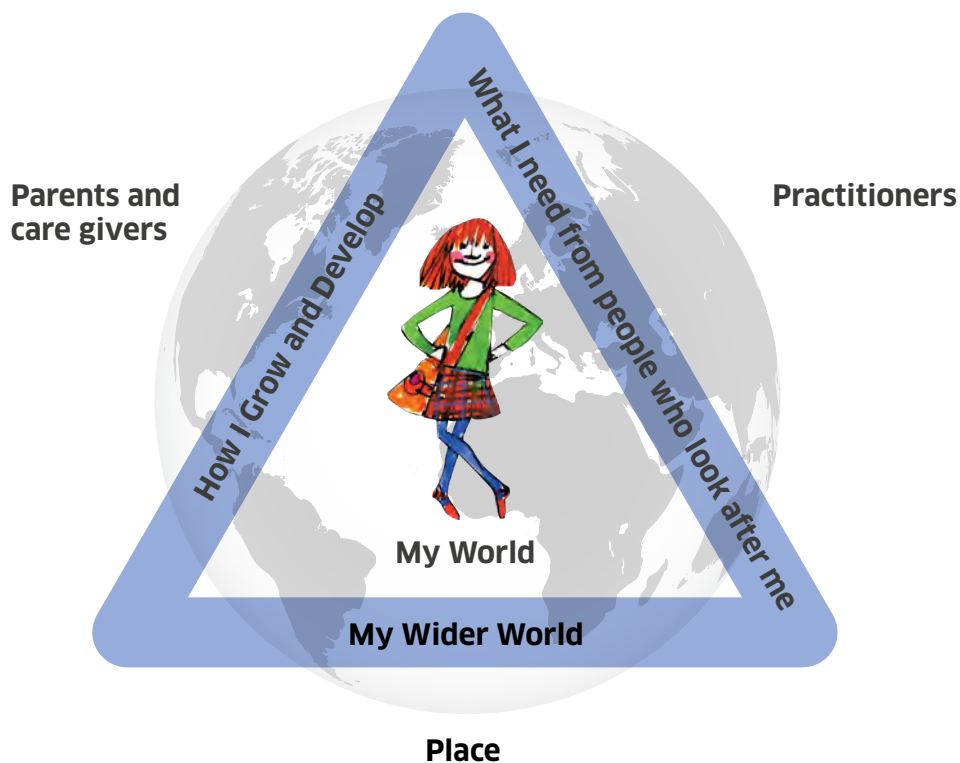
Practitioners are supported in taking a children's rights approach in the design and delivery of play services and play opportunities in their communities.

Vision Our vision for Scotland is that play is welcomed, celebrated and nurtured. That every child is able to play across all stages and aspects of their life to support their social development, resilience, language and communication development, health, physical and mental wellbeing

Aim By 2030 we will have delivered our actions that empower and support more play opportunities for all children in Scotland.

How we will achieve this
By delivering on our action plan and by engaging with children and families across Scotland.

Who will achieve this
The Scottish Government will retain overall responsibility for the delivery of all actions in our action plan. The Scottish Government will carry out regular reviews of the action plan with critical partners.



Why are we doing it this way
The Play Strategy 2013 emphasised the importance of play and provided the foundation for substantial developments in the play sector.

Substantial changes have transpired since 2013, all of which changed the play landscape.

Views of children and collaborative working with crucial partners have informed this refresh of the strategy.

What supports this approach
The primary drivers align with the Early Child Development Transformational Change Programme (ECD TCP) and Speech Language and Communication Transformational Change Programme (SLC TCP) drivers.

CEYRIS reports by Public Health Scotland (PHS)
Report by Dr Briege Nugent
"Children and Young People's views of play"

Research by the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University.

National practice guidance for early years,
"Realising the Ambition: Being Me" and others.

Action Plan

Working in collaboration with our partners, ten main actions have been identified which will support the delivery of the drivers within our Play Theory of Change and, ultimately, our aim and vision for play in Scotland. For each action, the Scottish Government will lead on delivery and will collaborate with key partners to achieve specific tasks or outcomes. The Actions will deliver additional support for parents and carers in supporting their children to access play opportunities, encourage the development of our public places that support children's health and wellbeing through play and strengthen the delivery of play by practitioners across the health, social care, education and third sector landscape.

As well as supporting the play vision and actions, the Scottish Government recognises that the aim of this Vision Statement and Action Plan for Play in Scotland can also support shared objectives in promoting Early Child Development; Speech, Language and Communication Development; Perinatal and Infant Mental Health; Physical and Mental Wellbeing; Children's Rights and can mitigate the impacts of child poverty.

The Vision Statement and Action Plan are designed to reflect the vision of play for Scotland for the next 5 years and the steps we will take within that time to achieve our vision and aim.



Glossary of definitions

Play – In line with the United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child (UNCRC) and General Comment 17, we define play as an activity which is chosen and directed by the child and undertaken for enjoyment and its own sake rather than as a means to an end. Play is a fundamental part of the pleasure of childhood, as well as essential for children’s physical, social, cognitive, emotional and spiritual development.

Children and young people – in line with the definition of the child in UNCRC when we refer to a child, we mean a person under the age of 18.

Parents – anyone who carries a care giving responsibility or role for a child in a formal or informal capacity. This might be biological parents, other related family members such as an aunt, uncle or grandparent, adopted parents, foster parents, etc.

Place – the physical environment around us, the streets we live on, the routes and paths we take, the natural or built spaces where we spend our time. The people within that environment (the social environment) and the interaction of the two, the physical place and people. Place can be perceived at different scales: from a playground to a street, a locality or a neighbourhood, a village, a town or a city.

Practitioners – an individual or a group of people working directly with children or with parents and families in relation to their children. This definition includes workforce required to have a professional qualification to carry out their roles as well as those that do not, those performing their roles in a paid for or unpaid capacity. E.g. teachers, early learning and childcare (ELC) staff, education support assistants, school age childcare providers, social workers, playworkers, youth workers, midwives, health visitors, child minders and more.

Barriers and support – Barriers to play will be experienced by all children in different ways and at different times. For some children, perhaps because of their age or because of complex additional support needs, more adult assistance may be necessary to support their right to play in a nurturing and responsive way.

Accessible – An accessible play space is a space which is barrier-free, allows users access to move around the space and offers participation opportunities for a range of differing abilities. Not every child will be able to actively use everything within an accessible play space⁴. Accessibility relates not just to the space itself, but also in how people might reasonably reach the space from their home.

Inclusive – An inclusive play space provides a barrier-free environment, with supporting infrastructure, which meets the wide and varying play needs of every child. All children will enjoy high levels of participation opportunities, equally rich in play value⁵.

4 <https://childrensplaypolicyforum.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/including-disabled-children-in-play-provision-2022.pdf>

5 ibid

Vision Statement for Play in Scotland 2025-2030

Our vision for Scotland is that play is welcomed, celebrated and nurtured. That every child is able to play across all stages and aspects of their life to support their social development, resilience, language and communication development, health, physical and mental wellbeing.





This Vision Statement and Action Plan reaffirms the recognition of the importance of play from the earliest stage of a child's life through to independent adolescence and a commitment to aiding children's development through all types of play. It aims to deliver collaborative actions that will support nurturing and encouraging play opportunities for all children in Scotland.

The importance of play

It's what makes children fun.

Girl, 8, Dunbar⁶

Playing is important because it builds friendship.

Girl, 7, Glasgow⁷

It gives you more energy.

Boy, 10, Dunbar⁸

Play is a vitally important part of childhood. It can be exhilarating, it can be exhausting. It can be joyful, it can be challenging. It can help us adapt to new places or situations, express ourselves to other people, and make friends. Play can support physical health, mental wellbeing and social, cognitive, emotional and spiritual development.

Play can be a release from daily pressure – while play will not solve such issues like child poverty it can help mitigate the worst effects of it and allow children time to enjoy being children.

Above all else, play is important for the joy and happiness it brings to us all. Play is for everyone. We play to make friends, to learn, to communicate, and to make sense of the world around us. Play can keep you active, fit and healthy. When life gets overwhelming, play can help us feel better. We do not need to learn to play, but we can forget how to do it and may need reminding. Anyone can play, and everyone should. In Scotland, we want everyone to appreciate that playing is living at its most rewarding.

For some children, experiencing the joy of play comes more easily than for others. Sometimes relationships can affect play, either through the support and encouragement from parents and other adults, or with other children and how easily they adapt to social situations. Sometimes opportunities are limited due to factors out with their control, such as location, cost, or accessing play that is suitable for their own stage of development. Play does not need to come with a cost attached; appreciating the opportunities available at home and in local communities can allow children to see their surroundings with fresh eyes. Play itself remains enjoyable but accessing it can be difficult and frustrating.

6 Elsley (2021) Children and young people's consultation 2021: MPlay in a COVID-19 context. Edinburgh: Play Scotland.

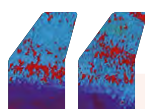
7 Burns, V. and Irvine, C. (2011) "I'd play all night and day if I could": A Report on Children's Views on their Right to Play. Edinburgh: The International Play Association and Children's Parliament.

8 ibid

The World Health Organisation (WHO) Nurturing Care Framework⁹ identifies opportunities for age-appropriate play as a key component to ensuring every child is able to develop to their full potential and no child is left behind. Of the five components identified in the framework, the WHO include play under *opportunities for early learning* and recognise that play interventions have a positive impact on children's cognitive and social development, and to their preparation for formal schooling.

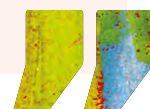
Play is particularly important in early child development when the brain and metabolic and immune systems develop the fastest, supporting emotional regulation and laying the foundations for a healthy life. From pre-birth to three, play and stimulation is one of four key factors, alongside nutrition, sensitive-response care giving and the avoidance of harm, that can shape a person's whole life. Nurturing and responsive adult interaction and play from pre-birth to three provides a strong foundation for healthy development and trusting relationships. We are integrating the work of embedding play into key stages of children's lives into our Early Child Development Transformational Change Programme¹⁰ which will bring together all of the policies and programmes that influence, impact and improve the lives of all our children with a goal of reducing the proportion of children reported with developmental concerns by 2030.

As well as supporting playful connections and promoting attachment during pregnancy, the preconception period is where the scene can be set in planning for playful environments and interactions in the months and years to come. In most cases, children's first environment for play is their home. Their family and those closest to them are instrumental in providing an environment where children can develop and flourish through play.



Play is one of the most important ways in which young children gain essential knowledge and skills... By choosing to play with the things they like to do, children actually develop skills in all areas of development: intellectual, social, emotional and physical.

[UNICEF-Lego-Foundation-Learning-through-Play.pdf](#)



Play is the basis of children's social development. When children play with their peers, they develop their communication skills, learn how to express themselves, share, take turns, appreciate other opinions, and practice for taking part in the adult world. It provides a relaxed context for children to rehearse and expand language through role play, negotiation, problem solving and planning, and by engaging with a range of experiences that support vocabulary development. These playful interactions, whether it is active play, stories or songs, or any activity, help to grow that child's vocabulary and boost their speech and language development.

⁹ <https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/272603/9789241514064-eng.pdf?sequence=1>

¹⁰ [Early child development transformational change programme - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

As children enter educational settings, from early learning and childcare, to starting primary school, through to secondary education and beyond¹¹, play offers vital support for their social, learning and physical wellbeing and affords children and young people time and space to explore their independence, build relationships and learn how to communicate.

There is a significant body of international research across a range of disciplines, indicative of the important relationship between play, learning and development¹² for children in the early years (0 to 8) and beyond¹³. It is clear that, play has a positive impact on children's health and their physical and cognitive development, including speech and language, early literacy, mathematical and spatial skills, creativity, self-regulation and other social competences and behaviours¹⁴.

It stops you getting stressed, if you are struggling with something in the class.

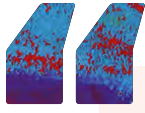
Girl, 11, Wester Ross¹⁵

Play is not just for young children. There is no age limit for play and as children get older their play may look different. The freedom to choose their own actions and have time to themselves is just as important as they navigate the pressures and changes that teenage years may bring. Play can also look different across the country, in cities, towns, islands or countryside.

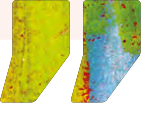
For children whose rights are most at risk – girls, disabled children, children with Additional Support Needs, care experienced children and children on the edge of care, young carers, children in hospital, children in temporary accommodation, asylum seeking children, minority ethnic children, children affected by poverty, and LGBT+ children – we want them all to feel they live in a country that minimises the barriers to their play, increases their opportunity to play, and has an open, supportive attitude and environment where they can play how they choose. In order to ensure that all children can play in ways that are enjoyable and beneficial to them, we need to recognise and celebrate different types of play and ensure that we meet the play needs of children with different developmental needs, neurotypes and children in different circumstances.

Making time to play together, creating dedicated play time, is not only beneficial to children but also benefits the physical and mental wellbeing of adults. Skills learned through play, such as problem solving, teamwork, critical thinking, creativity, assessing and managing risk, are essential tools for children as they grow and reach an independent adolescence and remain at the core of a healthy, thriving adult life.

- 11 [Bushby, R. \(2021\). Perspectives on Play: The role of play in breaktimes and transition to Secondary school. Learning through Landscapes and Play Scotland](#)
- 12 [The role of play in children's development: a review of the evidence. Whitebread, D. et.al. \(2017\)](#)
- 13 [Learning through Play: a review of the evidence. Zosh, J.M., et.al. \(2017\)](#)
- 14 [Making the Case for Play Policy: Research-Based Reasons to Support Play-Based Environments. Steglin, D.A. \(2005\)](#)
- 15 <https://www.childrensparliament.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Right-to-play-report-for-web.pdf>

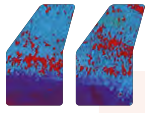


Play is considered a critical component to survival as well as the experience of feeling whole and well [throughout life]¹⁶



What are we doing?

The incorporation of the UNCRC into Scots law within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament ensures that all articles, including those most relevant to play such as articles 12, 15, 23 and 31, are considered not just in play policy, but across all national and local policies.¹⁷ Additionally, we are cognisant of the UN concluding observations to UK 2023¹⁸ set out in respect of play.

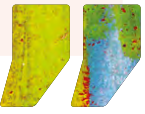


Adults are boring – they don't do much. When I'm out on my bike, he just walks with me – they should come out and play – be like a little kid.

Boy, 10, Edinburgh¹⁹

I love playing with my Granny and dressing up in all her clothes; we make the stairs our catwalk.

Girl, 9, Angus²⁰



Scotland has long recognised the importance of childhood in shaping a person's life and that play, prioritising children's independence of thought and decision-making is vital to their development. Most importantly, we place a great deal of value on allowing children to be children. Long before the incorporation of UNCRC, the Scottish Government has sought to follow the principles and aims of the articles in its laws and policies.

For example, in the case of place-based working the development of child friendly versions of the Place Standard tool supports children and young people to engage in the conversations about their places to influence their local environment on a wider scale,²¹ and helps to improve their ability to have their views heard on the shaping of their local places and community. And similarly, the national principles issued to local authorities for play park renewal, encourage children's involvement in national and local decision making. By making this introduction to public engagement in play, children can engage with local developments and in the renewed play parks and see the results of their contributions.

16 Ryan, C., & Pérez-Duarte Mendiola, P. (In press). Play Across the Life Course: An Anthropology of Play in Childhood and Old Age. In *Linking Ages: A Dialogue between Childhood and Ageing Research*/ Edited By Anna Wanka, Tabea Freutel-Funke, Sabine Andresen and Frank Oswald. (1st ed., pp. 135-147). Routledge.

17 <https://www.unicef.org/media/52626/file> and <https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/content/dam/global/reports/uncrc-child-friendly-version1.pdf>

18 <https://www.gov.scot/publications/united-nations-convention-rights-child-scottish-government-initial-response-concluding-observations-issued-un-committee-rights-child/pages/2/>

19 <https://www.childrensparliament.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Right-to-play-report-for-web.pdf>

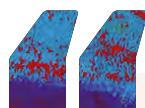
20 <https://www.childrensparliament.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Right-to-play-report-for-web.pdf>

21 [Place Standard Tool for Children and Young People | Our Place](#)



Local planning decisions are just one example from across the national and local portfolios where we want children to feel empowered by play, that they can independently choose how to spend their free time, that they have a voice in the decisions being made that affect them. The Scottish Government published guidance on taking a children's human rights approach²² to provide those involved in public service delivery in Scotland with an introduction to the UNCRC and support them to implement a children's human rights approach and give effect to children's rights in practice.

The recommendation for a refreshed strategy was one of the UN 2023 concluding observations, and it was also a conclusion of Play Scotland's play strategy progress report. This progress report²³, published in 2021, detailed the impact of the 2013 Play Strategy and the opportunities for further action. Play Scotland started their review in 2019 by engaging with the play sector and in March 2020 undertook consultation with over 340 children aged 0-18. The outcome of the progress report highlighted the growing body of evidence on the adverse impact of COVID-19 and the associated restrictions on children and young people's wellbeing. In responding to the consultation an overarching comment was that children asked for a "return to play, more play and better play".

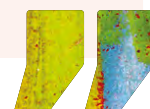


Children agreed that the choice of parks & green spaces within walking distance was the best feature of their local community.

Group response representing 95 6 - to 11-year old children from a primary school in Larbert²⁴

There is nowhere in my street that is safe to meet up with friends and play, my friends live 10/15 min walk from me, my mum won't let me out by myself because the traffic is busy and it's boring by myself if my friends aren't with me.

Boy, 9, Glasgow²⁵



Acting on the progress report and recommendations, we have created this Vision Statement and Action Plan by working collaboratively with public and third sector partners, building on the foundations of our 2013 Play strategy²⁶, listening to the views of children, considering the latest research on the importance of play and adapting to the 2024 landscape in Scotland, the UK and the world.

22 [Guidance on taking a children's human rights approach \(www.gov.scot\)](http://www.gov.scot)

23 [Play-Scotland-Play-Strategy-Review-Play-in-Covid-2021.pdf \(playscotland.org\)](https://www.playscotland.org/play-scotland-play-strategy-review-play-in-covid-2021.pdf)

24 [State-of-Play-in-Scotland-2023.pdf \(playscotland.org\)](https://www.playscotland.org/state-of-play-in-scotland-2023.pdf)

25 [State-of-Play-in-Scotland-2023.pdf \(playscotland.org\)](https://www.playscotland.org/state-of-play-in-scotland-2023.pdf)

26 [Play strategy for Scotland: our vision - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](http://www.gov.scot)

We supported Early Years Scotland to deliver Stay, Play and Learn sessions.

Lisa, a 26-year-old single mother, was referred to Stay, Play and Learn sessions by her social worker. Facing financial difficulties and isolated from her family, Lisa felt overwhelmed caring for her three-year-old son, Tom, who showed delays in speech and social skills. With limited support and a lack of resources, Lisa struggled to find ways to support Tom's development and often felt inadequate as a parent. Her own challenging upbringing left her uncertain about setting boundaries and creating a nurturing environment, leading to difficulties in managing Tom's behaviour at home. Through Stay, Play and Learn, Lisa and Tom found a welcoming community. Lisa was provided with parenting strategies, nutrition guidance, and activities to support Tom's speech and social skills. With time, Lisa grew more confident, learning to establish routines and engage Tom in play that encouraged his development. The sessions also connected her with other parents, reducing her sense of isolation and building her support network. As a result, Tom has shown significant progress in his communication and behaviour while Lisa feels empowered to support his growth.

"We love coming to our Stay, Play and Learn group every week, I've learned so much about helping Tom through the team and feel I can give him what he needs now."²⁷



Supporting action through play to mitigate the impacts of poverty

We know that poverty and low income can be a barrier to accessing play for children as families may be unable to participate in paid for activities, afford equipment or clothing, or meet the costs of food or associated travel. Through the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017, the Scottish Government set in statute ambitious targets to significantly reduce levels of child poverty in Scotland by 2030, with interim targets to be met in 2023-24.

It is estimated that Scottish Government policies will keep 100,000 children out of relative poverty in 2024-25²⁸, with our policies putting more money into the pockets of low-income families, supporting children's development, helping them to access essentials and to engage in play.

We have since published two Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plans, with our second Plan, entitled Best Start, Bright Futures²⁹, outlining wide ranging action to be taken across 2022-26 to reduce child poverty. We have already made considerable progress in supporting families, including by expanding free bus travel to all children and young people under the age of 22 – supporting children's access to play opportunities across their communities; almost doubling funded early learning and childcare to 1,140 hours for all three and four year olds and eligible two year olds – supporting our youngest children with more opportunities to engage in play both indoors and outdoors; and expanding Free School Meals to all children in primary 4 and primary 5 – providing health and nutritious food to give children the energy to engage in play. In addition, we have significantly strengthened financial support to families through our social security system, with our Scottish Child Payment worth £26.70 per child, per week for eligible families as of April 2024.

A key action in Best Start Bright Futures is our commitment to invest £60 million in renewing play parks in Scotland over the lifetime of this Parliament, to ensure all children have access to quality play in their own community. Since 2021³⁰ £35 million has been made available and a further £25 million committed in 2025-26. The funding is helping to accelerate local authority plans and make our parks welcoming, free and accessible spaces for children of all ages to enjoy.

In 2022, the Scottish Government provided local authorities with £10 million additional funding for the Summer Holiday Food and Childcare Programme³¹ designed to help provide opportunities to play, socialise, be active and be outdoors for children from low-income families. This built on the 2021 Get into Summer³² funding we provided to support families and aimed to mitigate the negative impact of Covid-19 restrictions.

To support the promotion of free, accessible opportunities for play the Scottish Government is funding the national universal programme PlayTalkRead, which is delivered by Smart Play Network. PlayTalkRead promotes the importance of the home learning environment for early language development and delivers key messages to parents and carers about playing, talking, and reading with their child from birth. PlayTalkRead tours across Scotland throughout the year, visiting all 32 local authorities with a priority on areas of multiple deprivation, providing free access to a mobile playground for children up to the age of five, with each parent given a free activity pack at the end of their play session full of play ideas and activities to try at home.

28 [Child poverty cumulative impact assessment: update - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/news/child-poverty-cumulative-impact-assessment-update/)

29 [Best Start, Bright Futures: tackling child poverty delivery plan 2022 to 2026 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/news/best-start-bright-futures-tackling-child-poverty-delivery-plan-2022-to-2026/)

30 [Renewing Scotland's play parks - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/news/renewing-scotland-s-play-parks/)

31 <https://www.gov.scot/news/summer-support-for-children/>

32 <https://www.gov.scot/news/get-into-summer/>

The Scottish Government is also funding a universal book gifting programme, Bookbug, delivered by the Scottish Book Trust. Bookbug ensures that every child in Scotland will receive 14 books from birth to when they reach primary one. Two books are gifted pre-birth via Scotland's Baby Box, with books and activity packs gifted at age 1, ages 1-2, age 3 and age 5. As well as laying the foundations of early literacy, Bookbug also aims to tackle the impacts of poverty by providing books and activities to families, as well as access to free online support that promotes reading, singing and playing together.

The Scottish Government is delivering Scotland's universal Baby Box Programme for all parents. Scotland's Baby Box provides essential items for the first 6 months of a baby's life, worth around £400. Within the Baby Box are items which are designed to support parents to play, talk and read with their children from before birth, embedding a play-focused culture for all families across Scotland.





What has changed/why do we need a refresh?

Since the publication of the Play Strategy in 2013, children and families have experienced large global impacts on society and the way that we play. The COVID-19 lockdown and associated measures highlighted the importance of play and socialising for children, young people and families of all abilities and backgrounds. Play helped with processing the changes in the world around us and in capturing positive moments in difficult times. It also highlighted that children's access to outdoor space to play can differ greatly and that regardless of circumstances, all children have the right to play.

During this unprecedented time, the children and young people's workforce came under additional pressures but continued to display their care and enthusiasm to support all children to play within their settings.

Within this globally challenging landscape we have seen many positive actions taking place in Scotland – the incorporation of UNCRC into domestic law and the increase in funded early learning and childcare to 1140 hours³³ in 2021 for 3, 4 and eligible 2-year-olds. We have also published the School Age Childcare Delivery Framework³⁴ which sets out our commitment to childcare and activities for school age children. This is supported by work to co-design a National Children's Charter for School Age Childcare³⁵, with the participation of children from across Scotland. The importance of play is apparent in this Charter, in which the children dedicated a chapter to activities they would enjoy in school age childcare settings. Equal access to play was a priority identified by the children, who shared an understanding of the barriers some children experience in accessing activities.

33 [Increasing free early learning and childcare - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot)

34 [1. Introduction to our delivery framework - School age childcare delivery framework - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot)

35 [School age childcare: national children's charter - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot)

Online Play

Online play is more prevalent than it was 10 years ago. We recognise that online play delivers many positive developmental benefits such as opportunities to practice teamwork, improve social skills, problem solving, escapism, experiencing a feeling of success or achievement as well as managing frustrations and learning to persevere. Digital play could be particularly helpful in improving mental health and maintaining relationships, particularly for children who live in remote communities and find it difficult to meet with their peers in person and for neurodivergent children, who may find difficulties in building friendships face to face in the first instance.

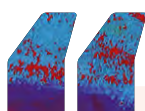
However, we recognise that there are risks associated with too much online play, with potential impacts on children and young people's mental and physical health.

It is therefore particularly important to consider the need for balance, for children themselves to be digitally literate, digitally aware and for young people and their parents to be supported to adopt good digital device use habits. Screen-based play is just one option for children when indoors or when not choosing active or outdoors play. Families should be aware of the benefits of it and when it can meet a child's play needs, alongside other forms of play away from screens that can meet children's needs in different ways.

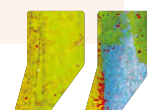
We recognise that in today's digital age, cyber threats are becoming more frequent and advanced. We all have a role to play in protecting ourselves, our families and communities online and we can do this from an early age. Technological developments have also meant that it is easier for children to access online forums, information, socialise and play games online. Ofcom reports that 41% of 5-7-year-olds in the UK are gaming online.³⁶ Online or screen-based games may be many children's first instinct when choosing how to play. Digital literacy is therefore becoming particularly important from a very young age.

The Scottish Government's Parent Club website also holds useful information regarding online safety for young children. The Scottish Government have also produced a book (*The Bongles and the Crafty Crows*³⁷) for all 54,500 Primary 1 children in 2023. Through storytelling and digital games, children can learn basic concepts of cyber security, passwords and passcodes. The success of the book has meant a second roll out to new P1s during 2024.

Online play should be a safe space, and these resources also help equip parents and guardians to safeguard and support children's play in the digital space.



My favourite thing at nursery is the computer because it draws pictures.³⁸



36 <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/research-and-data/media-literacy-research/childrens/childrens-media-lives>

37 <https://www.thebongles.com/thecraftycrows>

38 Dahl, S. and Aubrey, C. (2005) *Children's Views: What the Children of Bright Eyes Nursery Think about the Play and Learning Opportunities Available in their Setting*. Coventry: University of Warwick.



Evidence Base for the Vision Statement and Action Plan

In order to have the most well-rounded picture of children's views on play across all areas of Scotland, we have reviewed a number of published reference reports and commissioned, through our partners in Play Scotland, specific research on Children and Young People's views on play.

While these publications all paint a picture of life in Scotland for children, and more generally of the benefits of play, we recognise that there is a lack of hard data on the play opportunities available to everyone growing up in Scotland. We have identified actions to meet this gap and will work with our partners across the play system to address this. Further information on the evidence base and research reviewed can be found in Annex B.

Play Theory of Change

To better illustrate our ambition and focus on areas we aim to support and influence, we have developed the Play Theory of Change, which can be found on page 6. It identifies the primary drivers influencing play opportunities for children:

- parents,
- places,
- practitioners.

These drivers are the foundation of the Vision Statement and Action Plan. They reflect the findings of the working groups and interrogation of children's views on play opportunities available to them in Scotland today. They stand alongside the domains from the 2013 strategy at the heart of how we discuss and influence play opportunities. By considering these primary drivers in all the work that affects children's lives, we collaboratively can make an impact on children's ability to participate in play and embed play across all areas of their lives.

Action Plan



Play in all its rich variety is one of the highest achievements of the human species, alongside language, culture and technology. Indeed, without play, none of these other achievements would be possible³⁹.

The Scottish Government will lead on the actions in this plan and will collaborate with key partners in their delivery.

Primary Driver – Parent

1. Strengthen the support for play provided in the universal Baby Box Programme.
 - 1.1 Provision of information on the importance of play for brain development of children. (by end of 2025)
 - 1.2 Review the contents of the baby box, in particular items that aid parental bonding and play with babies, and how to encourage parents to incorporate them into their regular interaction with their baby. (by end of 2025)
2. Review and strengthen current programmes that support Early Child Development on the importance of play, engaging with parents and families to ensure we reflect and address lived experiences.
 - 2.1 In collaboration with NHS Education for Scotland's (NES) learning needs questionnaire with health visitors, which asked about their level of confidence discussing how play can support child development, respond appropriately to any health visitor learning needs around play which are identified through the questionnaire. (by Summer 2025)

39 <https://www.csap.cam.ac.uk/media/uploads/files/1/david-whitebread---importance-of-play-report.pdf>

- 2.2 Utilise mechanisms within the Scottish Government's forthcoming Health Visiting Action Plan to ensure that the Universal Health Visiting Pathway contains appropriate references to the value of play. (by end of March 2026)
- 2.3 Review the information contained in the Parent Club website on the importance of play to support positive mental health and wellbeing as well as physical health, for both parents and children, and the role and reach of Parent Club in effectively informing parents and families and supporting them to adopt play in their daily lives. (by end of 2025)
- 2.4 Review and update the Ready Steady Baby digital resource on the importance of play. (by end of Spring 2025)
- 2.5 Review information and resources available for parents on how to support early speech and language development through play. (by end of Spring 2026)
- 2.6 Collaborate with Public Health Scotland on the review and development of the Play@home package of resources with a focus on the value of universal provision and appropriate digitisation of content, an increased focus on outdoor play and understand need for capacity building around the relationship between play and health outcomes. Review how to integrate Play@Home Programme with existing Scottish Government universal resources. (by end of Spring 2026)
3. Map opportunities for play, as well as challenges to accessing play, for children in care and on the edges of care, refugees and asylum-seeking children and those not in settled housing. Identifying the specific barriers and obstacles for children and young people who have limited access to play opportunities and how to reduce them.
 - 3.1 Develop guidance and support for partners, including sharing local good practice identified through mapping, to aid children in care and on the edges of care, refugees and asylum-seeking children and those not in settled housing to better access play opportunities. (by end of 2027)
4. Review the support for families on safely adopting good habits for digital play where technology can play a part in meeting children's needs and aiding development.
 - 4.1 Review and update information available to parents on safeguarding and supporting children's play in the digital space via the Parent Club website (by Spring 2026).
 - 4.2 SG to work with key partners in NHS Scotland, third sector and academia to identify how we can further support children and parents to safely engage in digital play. (by end of 2026)

Primary Driver – Place

5. In recognition of the barriers faced by low-income families, support the development and provision of free, accessible, inclusive and safe public play spaces, developed in consultation with children and families and in line with the strategic delivery outcomes of the physical activity for health framework⁴⁰.
 - 5.1 Working with our partners in Play Scotland, Smart Play Network, Thrive Outdoors and other third sector organisations to signpost families to free and low-cost play opportunities locally. (by Summer 2025)
 - 5.2 Working with our partners in local government, play and third sector to monitor lived experience of children in accessing outdoor play opportunities in their local places. (by end of 2028)
6. Develop Guidance for Public Bodies to support access to play by specific groups of children, acknowledging their specific needs and obstacles they face.
 - 6.1 Work with relevant partners to identify the specific barriers preventing children in rural communities, older children and children with disabilities accessing play spaces. (by the end of 2027)
 - 6.2 Working with our partners in local government, share effective practice on maintenance and development of free, accessible and inclusive public spaces, including principles for design and maintenance of public spaces to create an environment where girls feel safe and welcome in public play spaces. (by end of 2026)

- 6.3 Working with NHS Boards, support the uptake of NHS Hospital accommodation for children and young people guidance on creating play spaces for children in health settings (throughout the timescale of this Vision Statement and Action Plan).
- 6.4 Work with partners in third sector and local government to continue to support delivery of Active Play, ensuring delivery in SIMD 1+2 and rural communities (throughout the timescale of this Vision Statement and Action Plan).

Primary Driver – Practitioner

7. Work with representatives from play and children's sector to share good practice and innovative ideas that support delivery of our vision for Play in Scotland (throughout the timescale of this Vision Statement and Action Plan).
8. Support the use of play pedagogy in ELC settings and schools, with a continued focus on consistent alignment of practice with the Realising the Ambition: Being Me⁴¹ guidance. This should support teachers and schools to use play pedagogy as children transition to early primary and throughout their time in school.
 - 8.1 Education Scotland will continue to provide information, local and national support and practical resources such as toolkits for practitioners on Play Pedagogy through their National Practice Guidance. (throughout the timescale of this Vision Statement and Action Plan)
 - 8.2 Play Scotland will continue to support practitioners to build their confidence in using play pedagogy in children's learning as part of Curriculum for Excellence (throughout the timescale of this Vision Statement and Action Plan).

40 <https://www.gov.scot/publications/physical-activity-health-framework/>

41 <https://education.gov.scot/media/3bjpr3wa/realisingtheambition.pdf>

9. Promote the provision of free learning opportunities for practitioners that emphasise the importance of play for all children regardless of background or personal circumstance and support the provision of play, outdoors and indoors.
 - 9.1 Provision of free online learning resources, by public and third sector stakeholders, to expand knowledge of importance of play, play pedagogy, gender equal play, and play that helps children work through trauma and difficult experiences (throughout the timescale of this Vision Statement and Action Plan).
 - 9.2 Review information, resources, and training available for early years practitioners, teachers, health visitors and other early years workers on how to support early speech and language development through play. (throughout the timescale of this Vision Statement and Action Plan).
 - 9.3 The Scottish Social Services Council will review existing training materials, introduce new materials where necessary and promote access to their online learning portal to support practitioner's learning on importance of play (throughout the timescale of this Vision Statement and Action Plan).
 - 9.4 The Scottish Social Services Council whilst undertaking a review of the National Occupation Standards (NOS) for Health and Social Care (HSC) and Child Care Learning and Development (CCLD) will ensure that these resources include suitable reference to play (due for completion December 2025).
 - 9.5 Continue to support the delivery of Active Play training to practitioners and volunteers who work with young people, and expand across local authorities, to enable them to embed a culture of physical activity through play in everyday practice (throughout the timescale of this Vision Statement and Action Plan).
10. Support a children's rights-based approach and children's right to play and recognise the specific needs that all children face to realising their right to play, in particular, those children whose rights are most at risk.
 - 10.1 Develop and promote a Skills and Knowledge Framework and accompanying training plan to support public authorities to embed children's rights in public services, aiding a transformation in service design and delivery (throughout the timescale of this Vision Statement and Action Plan).

Annex A

Publications, Programmes and Policies Delivered Since Publication of the 2013 Play Strategy

In 2013, we published Scotland's first ever National Play Strategy. This was a landmark publication as it set out for the first time the Scottish Government's recognition of the importance of play and our commitment to improving children's access to play.

In recognition of the important work delivered by the third sector in promoting and supporting play opportunities for children, the Scottish Government Children, Young People, Families Intervention and Adult Learning and Empowering Communities (CYPFEI & ALEC) Third Sector Fund has provided core funding to a wide range of play organisations since 2016 to implement the Play Strategy including Play Scotland (£1.6 million since 2016), the Yard (£634,500 since 2016) and Learning Through Landscapes (£400,000 since 2016).

The 2013 strategy detailed the benefits of play and identified the four domains in which we recognise play – play at home; play in the community; play in Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) and schools; and positive support for play. The strategy became a springboard for the following number of critical developments supporting play opportunities across Scotland.

| Domain | Year | Publication, Programme or Policy |
|------------------------------|-------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Play at Home | 2017 | Parent Club ⁴² was launched as the Scottish Government's online support for all parents and carers. The website, social channels and email programme offer advice and tips for raising children at each age and stage, including information on the importance of play for early child development and ideas for free play opportunities for children of all ages at home and in the community. |
| | 2020 | Play Scotland launched their Home Play Pack, Indoor Play Ideas and Active Play Ideas packs to support children and families during Covid-19 with play opportunities. More than 26,000 home packs were distributed. |
| Play in the Community | 2014 | Introduction of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act, which set out the Children's Services Planning duties. Children's Services Planning is Scotland's legislative approach to collaborative local strategic planning and delivery of services and support, delivered in a way which improves wellbeing outcomes for children, young people and families living in each area. |

42 <https://www.parentclub.scot/>

| Domain | Year | Publication, Programme or Policy |
|--------|-------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| | 2014 | In recognition of the specific needs of children receiving medical care in NHS settings, NHS Scotland published Health Building Note 23, Best Practice Guide to Hospital Accommodation for Children and Young People (HBN23) ⁴³ . The Guides offers direction on creating welcoming and play inclusive spaces for children. |
| | 2015 | The Play Map and Play Map Toolkit, published by Play Scotland, support Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs) in integrating play into their strategic plans. This resource helps CPPs achieve objectives that support the wellbeing of children, young people, and their families across communities. The toolkit also aids practitioners working with children in the Early Level to effectively use play pedagogy for learning and development. |
| | 2016 | Published the Play Out of Hours toolkit ⁴⁴ to help headteachers, parent councils and local organisations to work together to consider making school grounds available to local children out of teaching hours, allowing communities lacking dedicated play spaces locally to take advantage of the play spaces that the children are already familiar with through their learning. |
| | 2018 | In recognition of the specific needs of children receiving medical care in NHS settings, NHS Scotland published Mental Health - Facilities for children and adolescents (HBN 03-02) ⁴⁵ |
| | 2018 | The Free to Play Guide ⁴⁶ was produced by Inspiring Scotland, Play Scotland and the Nancy Ovens Trust in support of the Scottish Government's Play Strategy, to assist groups in developing or improving public play spaces. The guide helps plan from initial ideas to commissioning design and build of play spaces, with an emphasis on access and inclusion so that children of different ages, abilities and play preferences are able to play together. |
| | 2018 | Inspiring Scotland and the Scottish Government brought together a broad group of academics and organisations from education, childcare, healthcare, environment and government to create Scotland's Outdoor Play and Learning Coalition. |
| | 2019 | The Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 introduced an unprecedented new duty on planning authorities to consult children and young people when they prepare local development plans. |

43 <https://www.nss.nhs.scot/media/1997/hbn-23-oct-2014.pdf>

44 [00493571.pdf \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/00493571.pdf)

45 <https://www.nss.nhs.scot/media/1973/hbn-03-02-sep-2018.pdf>

46 <https://thriveoutdoors.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Free-to-Play-Guide-to-Accessible-and-Inclusive-Play-Spaces-Casey-Harbottle-2018.pdf>

| Domain | Year | Publication, Programme or Policy |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| | 2020 | Scotland's Outdoor Play and Learning Coalition published a position statement ⁴⁷ and since then over 100 signatories have committed to working together to embed playing and learning outdoors as an everyday activity and celebrate it as a fundamental part of growing up in Scotland. |
| | 2021 | The Place Standard tools for children and young people were developed by Play Scotland and A Place in Childhood, in consultation with children and young people in Scotland. These tools were used to assess places and provide a framework for discussions about them. The Play Toolkit helped local authorities ensure sufficient play opportunities and evaluate local attitudes towards children. |
| | 2022 | Since 2022 provided £850,517 funding to support the Active Play Development Programme which is an evidence-based programme that effectively helps children be more physically active and supports children's emotional, social, and cognitive development. This programme focuses on working in areas of higher deprivation or in isolated communities, and trains up local organisations and people to deliver Active Play. |
| | 2023 | The Town and Country Planning (Play Sufficiency Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2023 ⁴⁸ , provide for the form and content of Play Sufficiency Assessments (PSAs) to assess the sufficiency of play opportunities in their areas to help inform local development plan-making. |
| | 2023 | Included a key policy within our suite of national planning policies, set out in National Planning Framework 4 ⁴⁹ (NPF4), which encourage, promote and facilitate spaces and opportunities for outdoor play, recreation and sport in our natural and built environment, supporting health and wellbeing of our communities, including the healthy development of our children and the wellbeing of families. |
| | 2024 | Physical Activity for Health Framework ⁵⁰ published, based around 8 Strategic Delivery Outcomes which, if achieved, will lead to transformational change. It also provides a clear link to wider policy action to address Population Health challenges. |
| Play in Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) and schools | 2017 | Publication of 'The Expansion of Early Learning and Childcare in Scotland: Quality Action Plan' (2017) ⁵¹ . |

47 <https://www.inspiringscotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/National-Position-Statement-Dec-2020.pdf>

48 <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-government-planning-guidance-play-sufficiency-assessment/pages/5/>

49 [National Planning Framework 4 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/national-planning-framework-4/)

50 <https://www.gov.scot/publications/physical-activity-health-framework/>

51 [Expansion of early learning and childcare in Scotland: Quality Action Plan - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/expansion-of-early-learning-and-childcare-in-scotland-quality-action-plan/)

| Domain | Year | Publication, Programme or Policy |
|--------|--------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| | 2019 | Education Scotland published the Early Level Play Pedagogy toolkit. The multi-media toolkit supports practitioners working with children in the Early Level to appropriately use play pedagogy to support learning and development. |
| | 2019 - 2021 | Over the COVID-19 pandemic, the Scottish Government funded the Virtual Nature School to support more than 2,500 practitioners and 40,000 children and families to make greater use of the outdoors for learning and wellbeing and better understand the benefits of outdoor play for children's development. Additionally, Scottish Government grant funded Inspiring Scotland £103,000 to create and share outdoor play guidance and materials for the ELC sector to support play during COVID-19. |
| | 2020 | Scottish Government published the 'Out to Play' guidance ⁵² and advice for ELC settings and practitioners on how to access outdoor spaces to create safe, nurturing and inspiring outdoor learning experiences. |
| | 2020 | To support the ELC expansion, Education Scotland and the Scottish Government published the refreshed national practice guidance for early years education in Scotland 'Realising the Ambition: Being Me' (RtA) ⁵³ . |
| | 2021 | Increase in funded early learning and childcare to 1140 hours ⁵⁴ for 3, 4 and eligible 2 year-olds led to additional opportunities for children to engage in developmentally appropriate play and learning. |
| | 2021 | Inspiring Scotland administered a £1 million Outdoor Clothing Fund as part of the wider £100 million Winter Support Package. This fund enabled providers of funded early learning and childcare to purchase outdoor winter clothing for the children in their settings who were most in need to reduce inequalities and improve access to outdoor experiences in ELC. |
| | 2021 | Better Breaktimes, Better Transitions: supporting transitions through play. A project aimed at understanding how play can support positive transitions by enhancing breaktime experiences for primary pupils moving to secondary education. It was commissioned by Play Scotland and delivered in partnership with Learning through Landscapes and Falkirk Council. |
| | 2022 | NatureScot research reports that children are now spending, on average, 39% of their time in ELC outdoors. This represents an increase of 3% compared to the findings in the 2014 report. |

52 [Out to Play - creating outdoor play experiences for children: practical guidance - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

53 [Realising the Ambition | Resources | Education Scotland](#)

54 [Increasing free early learning and childcare - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

| Domain | Year | Publication, Programme or Policy |
|---------------------------------|------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| | 2023 | Scottish Government published guidance ⁵⁵ on caring for outdoor spaces to support early learning and childcare settings to make the most of their outdoor spaces and care for the environment through Learning for Sustainability ⁵⁶ . |
| | 2024 | Publication of The Early Learning and Childcare Expansion to 1140 hours: Interim Evaluation Report . Demonstrates that the programme is delivering high-quality care and learning experiences for children, as well as meeting the needs of the majority of families. |
| | 2024 | The Care Inspectorate published 'Space to Grow and Thrive', to provide a comprehensive and up-to-date framework for planning, designing and delivering high-quality ELC and School Age Childcare (SACC) settings that support children's wellbeing, learning and development. ⁵⁷ |
| General Support for play | 2013 | Provision of funding via the Outdoor Community Play Fund for charities to provide community-based outdoor play opportunities for children (up to the age of 17) and families in disadvantaged areas and offer children with Additional Support Needs access to local, outdoor play provision. |
| | 2017 | Play Scotland launched its Play Charter, a collective commitment to ensuring play opportunities for all babies, children, and young people in Scotland. The Charter was designed for parents, play providers, play champions, and anyone with an interest or responsibility in promoting play across the country. |
| | 2021 | Marketing campaign to encourage children and families to play outdoors over the winter months. The campaign featured videos and activity ideas to support parents with all-weather play and promoted outdoor experiences, not only as a restriction compliant way for children to be with their friends, but as a fun activity for the whole family. |
| | 2023 | The State of Play in Scotland report, authored by Dr Lily Fitzgibbon and Professor Helen Dodd for Play Scotland, consolidates findings from four previous studies on children's play, incorporating input from children and young people. The report highlights the unequal access to public play spaces. |

55 [Out to Play - caring for our outdoor spaces - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

56 [Learning for sustainability: action plan 2023 to 2030 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

57 <https://hub.careinspectorate.com/media/5784/space-to-grow-and-thrive.pdf>

Annex B

Evidence Base and Supporting Research

Play Scotland on behalf of the play strategy working group, commissioned Dr Briege Nugent to interrogate existing publications. Her final report “Children and Young People’s views on play⁵⁸” provides a summary of the views of children from across Scotland, from toddlers to teenagers, city centre to island life, taking account of a myriad of different situations, backgrounds and experiences.

There has also been increased focus on the importance of gender equality as we work towards making Scotland the best place in the world to grow up. Recent research has shown that gender inequality remains a problem, with girls’ right to play not being realised in Scotland (Nevens and Hutchinson, 2024)⁵⁹. Embedding gender equal play, which is free of stereotypes and genuinely child led, is a key priority in our Vision Statement and Action Plan for Play in Scotland.

Our Vision Statement and Action Plan are also influenced by:

- Covid-19 Early Years Resilience and Impact Survey (CEYRIS) reports published by Public Health Scotland;⁶⁰

- The Scottish Government’s “Every Child, Every Chance: tackling child poverty delivery plan 2018 to 2022”;⁶¹
- The Scottish Government’s “Best Start Bright Futures: tackling child poverty delivery plan 2022 to 2026”;⁶²
- Play Scotland’s Progress Report on Scotland’s Play Strategy;⁶³
- Save the Children report on Parents’ Experiences and Views on Supporting Early Learning and Development (At Home) November 2023;⁶⁴
- The research of Play in Education, Development and Learning (PEDAL) at University of Cambridge;⁶⁵
- The research of the Centre on the Developing Child at Harvard University;⁶⁶
- The Children’s Charter for School Age Childcare, co-designed with children and published in 2023;⁶⁷ and
- Starcatcher’s “Wee People Big Feelings – Practical Guide to Early Years Practitioners”.⁶⁸
- Highland Council Play Park action plan⁶⁹

58 https://www.playscotland.org/resources/print/Children-and-Young-Peoples-Views-of-Play-A-literature-review-to-inform-the-refresh-of-Scotlands-Play-Strategy-2024.pdf?plschtml_id=24685

59 <https://www.zerotolerance.org.uk/resources/Girls-rights-are-human-rights.pdf>

60 [Overview - COVID-19 Early Years Resilience and Impact Survey \(CEYRIS\) - COVID-19 and children research - COVID-19 data and intelligence - COVID-19 - Infectious diseases - Health protection - Our areas of work - Public Health Scotland](#)

61 [Every child, every chance: tackling child poverty delivery plan 2018-2022 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

62 [Executive Summary - Best Start, Bright Futures: tackling child poverty delivery plan 2022 to 2026 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

63 [Play-Scotland-Play-Strategy-Review-Play-in-Covid-2021.pdf \(playscotland.org\)](#)

64 [STC EY Final CV2 \(savethechildren.org.uk\)](#)

65 [Play in Education, Development & Learning \(PEDAL\) : Faculty of Education \(cam.ac.uk\)](#)

66 [Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University](#)

67 [School age childcare: national children’s charter - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

68 <https://starcatchers.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Wee-People-Big-Feelings-A-Practical-Guide-for-Families-and-Early-Years-Practitioners-1-compressed.pdf>

69 [Members agree to approve and adopt Highland Council’s Playpark Strategy and Action Plan 2023-33 | The Highland Council](#)

Resources

Realising the Ambition - realisingtheambition.pdf (education.gov.scot)

Play Pedagogy toolkit - [Early Level Play Pedagogy Toolkit | Resources | National Improvement Hub](#) (education.gov.scot)

Virtual nature schools - <http://www.virtualnatureschool.org/>

Out to Play Improvement - [Out to Play Improve - CYPIC 2023](#)

SSSC portal - <https://cpldirectory.elc.sssc.uk.com/> <https://learn.sssc.uk.com/cpl/>

Out to Play <https://hub.careinspectorate.com/media/3958/out-to-play.pdf>

Caring for Our Outdoor Spaces - [Out to Play - caring for our outdoor spaces - gov.scot](#) (www.gov.scot)

My World Outdoors <https://hub.careinspectorate.com/how-we-support-improvement/quality-improvement-programmes-and-topics/my-world-outdoors/>

Positive approach to risk in play <https://www.careinspectorate.com/index.php/guidance/9-professional/2961-positive-approach-to-risk-in-play>

Gender Equal Play in Early Learning and childcare <https://hub.careinspectorate.com/how-we-support-improvement/quality-improvement-programmes-and-topics/gender-equal-play-in-early-learning-and-childcare/>

Free to Play: A guide to creating accessible and inclusive public play spaces - Thrive Outdoors <https://thriveoutdoors.org.uk/resource/free-to-play-a-guide-to-creating-accessible-and-inclusive-public-play-spaces/>

Space to Grow and Thrive: Design guidance for early learning and childcare and school age childcare settings <https://hub.careinspectorate.com/how-we-support-improvement/quality-improvement-programmes-and-topics/space-to-grow-and-thrive/>

Voice of the Infant: best practice guidelines and infant pledge <https://www.gov.scot/publications/voice-infant-best-practice-guidelines-infant-pledge/pages/5/>

Growing my Potential <https://hub.careinspectorate.com/how-we-support-improvement/quality-improvement-programmes-and-topics/growing-my-potential/>

Getting Ready to Read <https://www.careinspectorate.com/images/documents/3662/Ready%20to%20read%20booklet%20low%20res.pdf>

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/guidance-taking-childrens-human-rights-approach/>

<https://www.pedalhub.net/resource-library/resource/item/play-in-the-face-of-adversity/>

<https://www.ourplace.scot/about-place/place-based-approaches>

<https://publichealthscotland.scot/media/16184/a-systems-based-approach-to-physical-activity-in-scotland.pdf>

Annex C

Play Strategy External Working Group

To consider the implications of the recent domestic and international developments on children's experiences of play in 2024, and how a play strategy would best serve them, the Scottish Government formed an external working group consisting of colleagues from public and third sector organisations. These members represent children and young people organisations, but also organisations working in areas such as poverty, disability and additional support needs and mental wellbeing. The group agreed with the recommendation of Play Scotland's Progress Report on Scotland's Play Strategy that it was necessary to refresh the Play Strategy 2013 to better reflect children's play experiences in the modern world.

| Organisation |
|---------------------------------------------------------|
| Child Poverty Action Group |
| COSLA |
| Early Years Scotland |
| Education Scotland |
| Family Fund |
| Mental Health Professional Advisor, Scottish Government |
| One Parent Families Scotland |
| Play Scotland |
| Public Health Scotland |
| Researcher/Writer |
| Scottish Government Play policy |
| Scottish Government, Mental Health policy |
| Scottish Government, Planning and outdoor spaces |
| Sport Scotland |
| Youth Link |

Annex D

Refresh of the Play Strategy Internal Working Group - Policy Member List

| |
|-------------------------------------------|
| Active Scotland |
| Affordable Housing |
| Architecture Place and Design Innovation |
| Child Protection |
| Children and Young People's Mental Health |
| Children's Rights Unit |
| Children's Services Planning |
| Culture |
| Curriculum Unit |
| Cyber Resilience |
| Digital Learning |
| Digital Policy and Strategy |
| Disabled Children and Young People |
| Early Child Development |
| Education Scotland |
| ELC Quality, Covid Safety and Recovery |
| ELC Sector Support and Workforce |
| Keeping the Promise |
| Parenting Support |
| Play, Parenting and Baby Box |
| School Age Childcare |
| Support and Wellbeing in Learning |
| Supporting Maternal and Child Wellbeing |
| Tackling Child Poverty |
| Youth Work |



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