



Risk control

Play: The Universal Language of Children



Introduction

The “Play Strategy” (The Scottish Government. 2013a) was an initiative launched by the Scottish Government back in 2013 as part of their wider ambition for Scotland to be the best place in the world to grow up. The strategy promotes the value of play as a life-enhancing experience for all children and young people – not just at home but in nurseries, schools and within the community. The strategy sets out the Scottish Government’s desire for children to be able to play freely and safely whilst learning to manage risks for themselves and begin to make choices.

Why is it important?

The Strategy makes reference to Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland. 2018.) which states "that every child has the right to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and participate freely in cultural life and the arts".

Play is the universal language of children and a fundamental part of any childhood. Its deeper benefits are that children who experience a rich play experience concentrate better in class and have better break time behaviour in school. By investing in children in their early years; the Scottish Government believes it will reap the rewards economically and socially in later years.

"Play creates a brain that has increased flexibility and improved potential for learning later in life". - - Lester & Russell, 2008 (Parent Zone Scotland. 2018.)

Bringing the Strategy to Life

This National Play Strategy was accompanied by an Action Plan (THE SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT. 2013b). The plan which was informed by children and young people; set out the activities that are needed to be delivered by multiple bodies, including local authorities in order to achieve the aims of the Strategy to improve the play experiences of ALL children and young people; including those with disabilities or from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The timeline for delivering the actions ranged from 6-12 months through to 3+ years which is why the actions within the Play Strategy are still actively being implemented today. There were many actions for local authorities to deliver. These included:

- Investigate and review good practice in reaching all parents and carers with clear messages and guidance on cost effective resources and suggestions for play suitable for children of all ages, stages and abilities.
- Audit current levels of community access to school grounds (including the wider school environment of streets and routes to school) and identify key influencing factors. Consider options for increasing community access to school playgrounds out of school hours. Put forward recommendations for piloting, evaluating and sharing good practice.
- Work to achieve high quality school grounds in new build schools which are consistent with the Good School Playground Guide.
- Task a working group to identify steps required to support the development of a Play Policy in every local authority including reference to the six priorities of single outcome agreements.

Local Authority Role ...

The Scottish Government has invested significantly in the provision of financial funding for infrastructure and projects to bring the strategy to life. A progress update report published by the Government in 2016 details positive progress has been made in its implementation (Scottish Government. 2016). A particular mention is given to Aberdeen City Council and its partners for their decision to remove all 'No Ball Games' signs but there is still much work to do - of which Scottish Councils have a fundamental role to play.

Each local authority is tasked with developing a Play Policy which should include the design and build of outdoor play equipment in school grounds and in natural and wild spaces.

Whilst the benefits of these provisions are clear, local authorities must be mindful of the property and liability risks which can attach.

Where the erection or installation of a play area or play equipment foreseeably introduces either a casualty or property risk; the council must ensure a suitable and sufficient risk assessment is in place to control any hazards. If the expertise in conducting the assessment of the hazards is out with the competence of council officers, then reference should be made to the relevant property or casualty consultants appointed to ensure controls are adequate to prevent injury or loss.

How can we support you?

RMP Risk Control have experience in assisting clients in all areas of risk including play equipment and play areas. More specifically, we have experience in assisting local authorities in the following areas:

- Casualty review of management systems designed to control the risk of pupil injury from playground equipment.
 - Note: the duty to ensure the area and equipment are risk assessed and controlled is the responsibility of the local authority and we are unable to complete the risk assessments on behalf of the council.
- Where disputes arise between the education authority/schools and parents over the safety of equipment or play areas, we have reviewed the play area and provided recommendations on resolution steps.
- Training for school staff on the risk assessment process to support them in carrying out required risk assessments on their play areas.

References

1. The Scottish Government. 2013a. PLAY STRATEGY FOR SCOTLAND: OUR VISION. [ONLINE] Available at: <https://www2.gov.scot/resource/0042/00425722.pdf> [Accessed 30 October 2018]
2. Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland. 2018. UNCRC: Article 31. [ONLINE] Available at: <https://www.cypcs.org.uk/rights/uncrcarticles/article-31> [Accessed 30 October 2018].
3. Parent Zone Scotland. 2018. Learning Through Play. [ONLINE] Available at: <https://education.gov.scot/parentzone/learning-at-home/Learning%20through%20play> [Accessed 30 October 2018].
4. THE SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT. 2013b. PLAY STRATEGY: OUR VISION. [ONLINE] Available at: <https://www2.gov.scot/resource/0042/00425722.pdf> [Accessed 30 October 2018].
5. Scottish Government. 2016. Play Strategy for Scotland - Progress Report. [ONLINE] Available at: <https://www2.gov.scot/Publications/2016/03/9995/2> [Accessed 30 October 2018].

Further RMP Resources and Articles

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Get in touch

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