

1st November 2007
VC9

Lewis McNaughton,
Deputy Committee Clerk,
Legislation Office,
National Assembly for Wales,
Cardiff Bay, CF99 1NA.

Email: legislationoffice@wales.gsi.gov.uk.

Dear Lewis

Consultation Vulnerable Children LCO Committee

Play Wales is the national organisation for children's play. We are the charity that provides advice, support and guidance for all those in Wales who have a concern or responsibility for any environment where children and young people might play. We uphold children's right to play. Freely chosen play is critically important in the healthy development of all children and young people. All children are entitled to quality play provision within their communities and we work strategically to achieve this goal on their behalf. We have been closely involved in drafting the national Play Policy (2002) and in providing recommendations for Play in Wales (2006) the Welsh Assembly Play Policy Implementation Plan.

Play Wales strongly suggests that the following addition be applied to the draft Bill.

Under

Interpretation of this field

“well-being”, in relation to individuals, means well-being so far as relating to any of the following—

- (a) physical and mental health and emotional well-being;*
- (b) safety from harm and neglect,*
- (c) education, training, recreation **and play***

The Welsh Assembly Government Play Policy states that ‘play is a fundamental and integral part of children’s healthy development.’ It states ‘Play is so critically important to all children in the development of their physical, social, mental, emotional and creative skills that society should seek every opportunity to support it and create an environment that fosters it.’

Whilst it is recognised that recreation is important for all in society, recreation as a term, is generally regarded as encompassing pastimes, entertainment and fun, and is described as an indulgence. It does not represent, for example competitive sport, art, and more importantly, in this context, the essential process that is children’s play.

This is not intended to diminish the importance of recreation, it is intended to contextualise it, and as such if there were a scale of importance for factors relating to children’s wellbeing recreation would feature after play.

Play is a such a vital component of a child's life that the child's capacity for positive development will be inhibited or constrained if denied free access to the broadest range of environments and play opportunities.

Furthermore the Welsh Assembly Government policy statement is predicated upon the principles that:

- every child is entitled to respect for their own unique combination of qualities and capabilities;



National Office
Baltic House
Mount Stuart Square
Cardiff
CF10 5FH

Swyddfa Cenedlaethol
Ty Baltig
Squar Mount Stuart
Caerdydd
CF10 5FH

Tel (029) 2048 6050
Cymraeg (029) 2043 6924
Fax (029) 2048 9359

mail@playwales.org.uk
post@chwaraecymru.org.uk

www.playwales.org.uk
www.chwaraecymru.org.uk

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- the perceptions of the child, their views and opinions should always be respected for each child is connected to, and a bearer of, a wider culture; AND IMPORTANTLY IN THE CONTEXT OF THE CHILDREN BILL
- the child's free choice of their own play is a critical factor in enriching their learning and contributing to their well being and development.

Were children to be asked (as they have been in the recent past) what measures would improve their wellbeing, there is clear evidence that their response is to ask for greater and wider opportunities to play.

The Welsh Assembly Government states that 'Decision making at all levels of government should include a consideration of the impact of those decisions, on children's opportunities to play.' Accordingly it follows that the 'Children Bill' should have reference to children's play and its importance to their wellbeing.

When debated in the Lords, Amendment 81 to the Children Bill proposing the inclusion of play was supported by Baroness Finlay of Llandaff and received considerable support when debated, however at the time the Minister was not prepared to concede on this point.

During the debate, Baroness Finlay argued that *'the position would be considerably strengthened and better reflect the Welsh Assembly Government's commitment to meeting children's play needs if children's play is explicitly defined within the Bill's list of criteria related to children's wellbeing. The Welsh Assembly Government Play Policy states that 'play is a fundamental and integral part of children's healthy development.' And most pertinently "the child's free choice of their own play is a critical factor in enriching their learning and contributing to their well being and development.'*

It is also pertinent that the Welsh Assembly Government does not have a Recreation Policy – it does have a Play Policy, and this Bill offers an opportunity for this policy to be developed upon as a key part of a strategy to translate this policy into a reality for all children in Wales.'

The Assembly Play Policy states 'Play is so critically important to all children in the development of their physical, social, mental, emotional and creative skills that society should seek every opportunity to support it and create an environment that fosters it. ' That is not to say that opportunities for education, training etc. are not important, on the contrary they are critically important, but arguably 'play' is at least as important, if not transcending them. It is worthy of note that whilst the earlier amendments and debate have referred to 'recreation and play' considerably more time has been dedicated to the debate on the importance of play, whilst recreation has had very limited attention. This in itself is a clear indication of their respective importance.'

I should be happy to give oral evidence to the Committee should it be considered appropriate and I am interested in being part of future consultations. I look forward to your reply.

Best Regards



Mike Greenaway

Director