



Let us PLAY...
make play your
#Election16 priority

A Manifesto for PLAY



#LetusPLAY16

www.playboard.org/letusplay



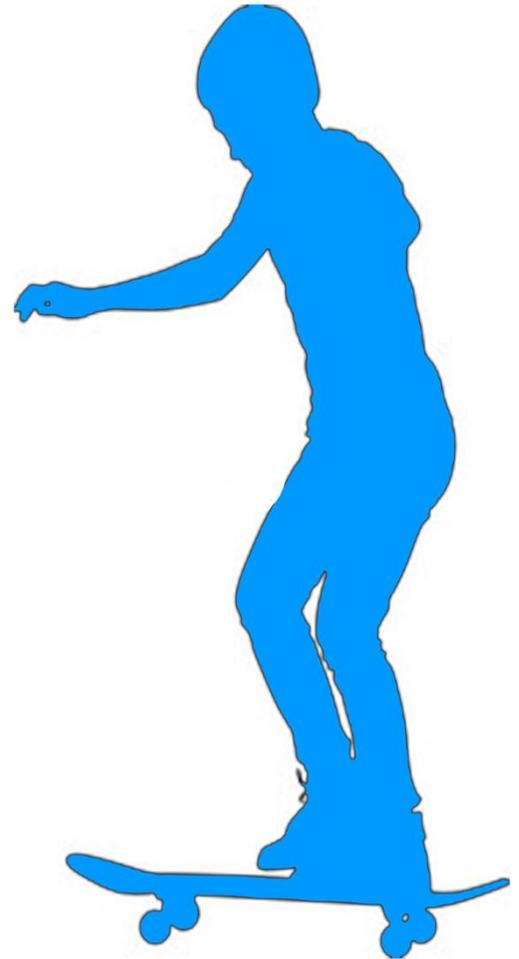
#LetusPLAY16 – make play your #Election16 priority @playboard_

About PlayBoard NI

Established in 1985 PlayBoard is an independent charity and the lead organisation for the development and promotion of children and young people's play in Northern Ireland.

PlayBoard is committed to supporting Article 31 (the child's right to play) of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989). We do this through a combination of: service delivery, service development; campaigning, lobbying; awareness raising and working in partnership with others to put play on the agenda of policy makers and resource providers. The organisation takes great pride in promoting best practice in Play, Playwork and play based School Age Childcare services.

PlayBoard's mission is to drive the play agenda, ensuring that at every level of decision making across society, the child's right to play is not only recognised but is made a reality within the lives of children, young people, families and communities. Children and young people's views, aspirations and perceptions of themselves and the environment in which they live, are at the heart of PlayBoard's work. Our vision is of a society where the right to play is realised.



PlayBoard's 'Let us PLAY' campaign

In 2013 PlayBoard's Young Research Team (a group of children aged between 8 and 12 years) designed and undertook a peer research study with children from across Northern Ireland. The aim of the study was to identify the obstacles that children face in fulfilling their right to play.

Informed by the Young Researcher's findings, PlayBoard's '**Let us PLAY**' campaign was launched in May 2014 to impress upon politicians and policymakers the need to ensure that the right to play for all children and young people is realised.

The campaign is founded upon Article 31 (the Right to Play) of the UNCRC, and its General Comment 17 released by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in February 2013. General Comment 17 highlights the significance of play within the lives of children and young people as well as setting out the obligations of government and government bodies to realise article 31 rights.

Through the '**Let us PLAY**' campaign PlayBoard aims to achieve:

- an improved level of recognition for the importance of play across government and wider society;
- respect for the views of children and young people in the decision making process; and
- a commitment across government to the adoption of more creative and imaginative approaches to play provision.

#LetusPLAY16 is the current iteration of the campaign and has been developed specifically for the Assembly Elections in May 2016. In the #LetusPLAY16 manifesto we identify 4 key asks, which we believe when acted upon, will make a meaningful difference to children and young people's lives. We want to make sure that #LetusPLAY16 is an election issue and going forward all play opportunities are fit for the purpose of play.

#LetusPLAY16 is informed by the Four Nations Children's Play Policy Forum's, '4 Asks for Play' campaign, Tim Gill's report, 'The Play Return', the two reports published by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on a Fit and Healthy Childhood, 'Play' and 'The National Obesity Framework' and DHSSPS 2014 'Making Life Better'.



PLAY is initiated, controlled and structured by children themselves, it is undertaken for its own sake (UN, 2013)

We are **ASKING** for all legislation and policy development pertaining to, or impacting upon, children and young people's lives to be play-proofed and outcomes focused. The implementation of policy, both at strategic and operational levels must shift us from the current status quo - rhetoric needs to be translated into reality for the betterment of all of our children and young people. A comprehensive awareness, understanding and appreciation of play is required across government to ensure that policy making and policy delivery best meets individual children's needs (UN, 2013).

Evidence confirms that the social and economic returns of investing in play will support our children and young people to realise their full potential.

HELP US to make the child's right to play integral to education, health and community planning policies by prioritising play in:



Formal and informal education:- We call upon the Department of Education, school principals, teachers, Boards of Governors, childcare services and youth service providers to ensure that successful learning takes place both inside and outside of the classroom. Play supports the development of children's social, physical, intellectual, cultural, creative and emotional skills enabling them to set and achieve goals, work with others and regulate and manage emotions. The OECD (2015) is unequivocal that social and emotional skills are just as important as cognitive skills. ***We ask that play be prioritised during both curricular and non-curricular time, in formal and informal education.***



Health and wellbeing:- Play provides a natural, instinctive way for children to develop and maintain good health and wellbeing. Through physical play children can build active and healthy bodies, reducing obesity and helping to establish life-long physical activity patterns. Play contributes to healthy and confident children whilst enhancing learning capacity and supporting resilience (DHSSPS, 2012, 2014). Health professionals, communities, parents and carers all have a key role in supporting children to engage in play. ***We ask that play be embedded within the Public Health commissioning framework to maximise the health and wellbeing outcomes associated with play.***



Open space, recreational space, our parks and public spaces:- We call upon local councils and professionals tasked with developing and shaping our public realm - our parks, shopping centres, public buildings and civic spaces – to ensure that children and young people's voices and views are integral to local government reform and all civic reshaping agendas. ***We ask that play is embedded within the emerging community planning structure.***



Stormont's wider child policy agenda:- We call upon the next Assembly to build upon all existing commitments to play including: the implementation of the Executive's Play and Leisure Policy framework, the Children's Services Co-operation Act, and the development of the new Children and Young People's Strategy and the incorporation of these key drivers into the Programme for Government. ***We ask that all political parties and MLAs drive the play agenda and ensure Executive commitments are fulfilled.***

PLAY supports physical activity, improves health, learning and wellbeing providing a strong foundation for skills development

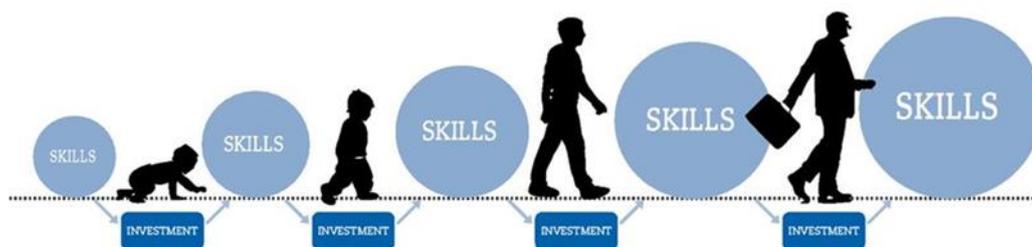
Having more skills today helps develop more skills tomorrow (OECD, 2015:74)

The process of social and emotional development

One of the most salient features of skill development is that skills beget skills

Developing skills is like making a snowball. Children gather a handful of snow and start rolling it on the ground. It gets progressively bigger; the bigger the snowball, the faster it grows. Children need to start early with a small and solid snowball, if they are to develop a sizeable snowball before the end of adolescence. Snow begets snow, and skills beget skills. Figure 4.1 illustrates this point.

Figure 4.1. Skills beget skills



OECD (2015). Skills for Social Progress: The Power of Social and Emotional Skills, OECD Skills Studies, OECD Publishing <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264226159-en>

If you can do one thing - **PRIORITISE PLAY!**

In our SCHOOLS Children spend a considerable amount of their waking hours at school. Pupils in OECD countries receive on average 7,475 hours of compulsory instruction during primary and lower secondary education (OECD, 2014).

In Northern Ireland one in four girls and one in six boys in Primary One are obese or overweight (CYPSP, 2014; source DHSSPS).

22% of P7s say they do not have enough time to play in their school and 24% report not having a good choice of things to play with (Kids Life and Times, 2015).

Play must be integrated throughout the school day.

or OUR COMMUNITIES Implement 20 mile per hour speed limits in place of 30mph limits. This is one of the cheapest and most effective methods for improving public health, supporting the creation of more play friendly communities, and reducing inequalities in built up areas due to the volume of car users (Doring, 2014).

or PUBLIC HEALTH MESSAGING Play is critical to achieving the recommended daily guidelines for physical activity - All children and young people aged 5-18 years should engage in moderate to vigorous intensity **physical activity for at least 60 minutes** and up to several hours every day (Department of Health, 2011).

Our manifesto identifies 4 key asks, which we believe when acted upon will make a real and meaningful difference to children and young people's lives. We want all children and young people in Northern Ireland to realise their right to play in:

1. FORMAL AND INFORMAL EDUCATION



WE ASK THAT PLAY IS PRIORITISED DURING BOTH CURRICULAR AND NON-CURRICULAR TIME, IN FORMAL AND INFORMAL EDUCATION.

Children and adolescents spend a substantial proportion of their waking hours at school. Noncurricular time, such as school lunch/break time and extra-curricular activities, provide opportunities for children to be physically active within the school environment. Of these contexts, break time periods may provide the single greatest opportunity during the school day to affect physical activity levels. However, a recent trend has been to reduce the frequency and duration of school break times, often because of academic pressures. Consequently, it is important that break time be included in school-based physical activity programming and policy and that the break time environment is conducive for pupils to make physically active choices. Although the scheduling and duration of break times vary, schools should provide social and physical environments that facilitate enjoyable and safe physical activity engagement in this context (Ridgers et al., 2012). Play in formal and informal education can be prioritised by:

- Introducing statutory guidelines for a standard minimum amount of time for play during the school day (mandated break and lunchtimes which allow adequate time for both eating and playing).
- Ensuring all school staff and break-time supervisors are provided with professional training and guidance on the provision of beneficial play experiences to include training in access and inclusion for disabled children.
- Ensuring the Department of Education and other educational bodies take ownership of the message that play is not just for the early years Foundation Stage but is a critical tool for development, learning and wellbeing throughout primary education (see BELB, 2008).
- Considering the inclusion of play provision to be a grading factor in Educations and Training Inspectorate's Inspections.
- Ensuring that all schools fully utilise their outdoor environment in support of broadening active and social play opportunities.
- Facilitating children and young people to participate in all decisions affecting their lives, consistent with article 12 of the UNCRC (UN, 2009).



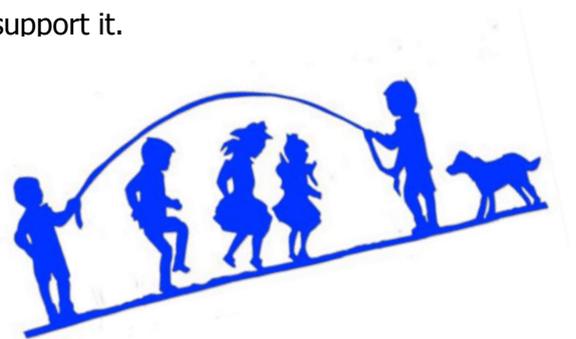
2. HEALTH AND WELLBEING



WE ASK THAT PLAY BE EMBEDDED WITHIN THE PUBLIC HEALTH COMMISSIONING FRAMEWORK TO MAXIMISE THE HEALTH AND WELLBEING OUTCOMES ASSOCIATED WITH PLAY.

*"Physical activity through the presence of green space not only reduces the risk of heart disease (by up to 50%), but also has positive impact on stress, obesity and a general sense of wellbeing" (DHSSPS, 2012, p.22; see also DHSSPS, 2014). **In practice play is physical activity.** Northern Ireland's Chief Medical Officer, Dr Michael McBride has described play as being "fundamental to our quality of life" highlighting that it is "vital that we encourage and enable play and physical activity from an early age. ...Play is a vital component of a child's physical and mental development. Going out for a family walk in the park, playing sports or kicking a football around, even just trying to reduce the amount of time your child spends sitting down watching TV or playing computer games will make a positive impact on their physical and mental health. Positive mental wellbeing helps a person to maintain good physical health, develop their potential, work productively, build strong relationships, develop a sense of self-worth, and contribute to their community" (Playday, 2015). Policymakers, decision-takers and resource providers can encourage and support active play by:*

- Providing timely, straightforward and trustworthy information and advice to professionals and families about how best to enable and facilitate active play.
- Making parents, carers and the wider community aware of the health and wellbeing benefits to be derived from play and playing for children and families.
- Providing clear information and advice to parents on the benefits of play in and around the home and how best to support it.
- Providing stimulating play opportunities that allow children to test; explore and challenge their capabilities whilst enabling them to develop risk management skills, resilience and self-reliance.
- Supporting parents, carers and community groups to encourage children to play more on their streets and in their communities.





3. OPEN SPACE, RECREATIONAL SPACE, OUR PARKS AND PUBLIC SPACES



WE ASK THAT PLAY IS EMBEDDED WITHIN THE EMERGING COMMUNITY PLANNING STRUCTURE.

The introduction of Community Planning provides an opportunity for communities and individuals to have a real say in the way they are governed; in the decisions that affect their lives and their communities; the ways in which decisions are made; and how public money is invested. In every community, all services impacting on the lives of children, young people and families have an obligation to support play as a means of ensuring positive development and growth. In order to ensure that community planning benefits children and young people, it is critical that play is prioritised by:

- Using “*urban design and planning in delivering green infrastructure, play areas and active travel routes*” (DHSSPS, 2012, p.22).
- Issuing residential developers with planning guidance statements that are play-proofed to ensure there is provision for play within new residential developments.
- Providing training for professionals such as planners, landscape architects, architects, engineers, housing developers and housing managers to help them to develop an understanding of the importance of play in the outdoor environment and how to plan, design and manage it.
- Encouraging play providers to adopt a ‘risk benefit’ as opposed to a ‘risk assessment’ approach to creating innovative and challenging play opportunities.
- Ensuring children with disabilities are always included and integrated. All children and young people must be consulted on how they want to play and have an input into the process to design play facilities and opportunities.
- Supporting the development of natural play areas and initiatives designed to enable older children to extend play up through the ages (YLT, 2011).
- Implementing traffic calming initiatives in built-up areas such as ‘Home Zones’.



4. STORMONT'S WIDER CHILD POLICY AGENDA



WE ASK THAT ALL POLITICAL PARTIES AND MLAs DRIVE THE PLAY AGENDA AND ENSURE THAT THE EXECUTIVE'S COMMITMENTS TO PLAY ARE FULFILLED.

Northern Ireland's MLAs are ideally placed to put play on the policymaking agenda. The new Assembly's plan of action must be to build upon all existing commitments to play including: the implementation of the Executive's Play and Leisure Policy framework, the Children's Services Co-operation Act, the development of the new Children and Young People's Strategy and the incorporation of these key drivers into the Programme for Government. The new Co-operation Act has the potential to create the required synergy and inter-relatedness between different policies - combining urban design, land use patterns, and transportation systems to promote play and help create active, healthier, and more liveable communities (DHSSPS, 2012). We urge MLA's to make a real difference by:

- Using the powers contained within the Children's Services Cooperation Act to prioritise and deliver outcomes for play within regional and local government.
- Ensuring that Play and Leisure is recognised as a high level outcome within the emerging Children and Young People's strategy and becomes a firm commitment contained within the pillars of the new Programme for Government.
- Ensuring that the lead department for the Children and Young People's strategy is fully engaged and supportive of delivering a framework of outcomes for Play.
- Establishing a robust measurement framework to capture play and physical activity levels at a regional and local level.
- Fulfilling resource commitments and ensuring that all publically announced funding commitments are fulfilled to provide innovative and novel play and leisure opportunities.
- Facilitating children and young people to participate in all decisions affecting their lives, consistent with article 12 of the UNCRC (UN, 2009).

Working with Queen's University Belfast we raised a module on the 2014 Kids Life and Times Survey. We asked P7s: ***what do you think could be done (in your school or in your community) to make sure that all children can enjoy playing as much as they can?*** They told us:

LET US

"MAKE LUNCH AND BREAK TIME MUCH LONGER"

"Children should have more time to play more space to play and on grass instead of concrete"

"Let the kids be kids"

"The school should ask how people are feeling more"

"I WOULD LIKE IF WE COULD DO HANDSTANDS AGAIN"

"More stuff to play with like skipping and chalk"

"Nature play area"

"Skipping ropes"

"THEY COULD BUY MORE THINGS FOR THE OLDER CHILDREN TO PLAY WITH OTHER THAN CONCRETE"

"More equipment"

"Football"

"Be able to go on grass"

"We need a park or grassy area"

"To let people play what they want"

"Make sure cars do not go too fast and take care"

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Support #LetusPLAY16...

1. Sign our online manifesto



Visit our website and leave us a message of support to help make #LetusPLAY16 an Election priority. We will collect these and share them on our website and social media.

2. Write to your prospective

MLA's



Contact your local MLA candidates to tell them why play is important to you. This is your opportunity to have your say by telling MLA candidates why play is so important and ask them to raise this issue with ministers and colleagues who can make a difference.

You can find your local MLA's contact details on our [website](#). You can also download a template letter to email to prospective MLA candidates.

3. When canvassed, highlight

PLAY as YOUR issue.



You can tweet us [@playboard](#) and tell us why play is important to you. Don't forget to use #LetusPLAY16 in your tweet and share the "Let children and young people choose how they PLAY" picture.



PlayBoard NI

7 Crescent Gardens, BELFAST, BT7 1NS Northern Ireland

Tel: 028 90803380 - Fax: 028 90803381 - Web: www.playboard.org

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