



Questionnaire

UK COVID-19 Inquiry: Module 2B - Rule 9 Request to Play Wales Reference: M2B/PW/01

Please provide the following information:

***1. A brief overview of the history, legal status and aims of the organisation or body.
Please explain whether the work of the organisation or body is UK wide, or is instead confined to Wales only.***

Play Wales is the national charity for play in Wales. Established as a registered charity in 1998, we advocate for the right and need for all children to play. We focus on three key areas:

- raising awareness
- promoting good practice
- providing advice and guidance across all sectors

Our work includes:

- **Policy:** Working with individuals, organisations and networks to inform the development of policy and other children's play issues.
- **Information service:** Promoting the value of children's play by providing timely and current information to everyone who is interested in, or has a responsibility for, children's play.
- **Advice and support:** Providing specialist knowledge about all issues that affect children's play.
- **Workforce development:** Contributing to the professional development of the playwork and play workforces.

Our primary area of work is Wales. We collaborate with UK play organisations on specific themed work and we are active members of the International Play Association (IPA). We were recently instrumental in establishing IPA Cymru Wales, a branch of the association.

2. A brief description of the group(s) which the organisation or body supports or represents.

Play Wales is primarily interested in supporting more children to be satisfied in their opportunities to play. We represent the views of children (when we have them).

We support the workforce that supports play to help them to recognise that play is valued in Wales for being crucial to a healthy and happy childhood. This includes those working in:

- play sufficiency
- play development
- childcare
- parks, open spaces and play areas
- local and National Government
- town and country planning
- highways
- health and social care
- education
- community development and youth work

We also provide briefings and respond to queries those elected to positions in Welsh Government, Local Authorities and Town and Community Councils.

We were report writers for the Ministerial Review of Play Steering Group. The Review was commenced in November 2019 and stalled for over a year due to Covid 19. When it restarted the Review in winter 2021, Welsh Government asked Play Wales to co-ordinate the reporting process. The report and Background Paper that supports it that can be found via this [link](#).

We also co-ordinate a *Playful Childhoods* campaign. This includes a dedicated [website](#) aimed at supporting parents, caregivers and communities.

3. A brief overview of the work of the organisation or body in supporting or representing the relevant group(s) between January 2020 and May 2022 as it relates to the response to Covid-19 of the Welsh Government.

From January-March 2020, we ensured that we shared the range of public health information from Welsh Government and Public Health Wales with our networks, supporters and social media followers.

In March 2020, the Play Wales team became entirely home based. We reviewed our working practices and took steps to ensure the staff team was able to work from home as efficiently as possible. We reviewed and amended our operational plan to ensure identify ways of working that would respond to the emerging pandemic and still meet our objectives (mentioned above).

Work between March 2020-May 2022 included:

- undertaking a range of activity directed at supporting families In particular, The Playful Childhoods | Plentyndod Chwareus website provided practical and useful resources to support parents to provide good and varied play opportunities in and around the home as part of the guidance relating to social distancing and self-isolation. We restructured the website to better reflect the information that parents were looking for during the crisis. We added timely and relevant content, such as a new indoor play section, blog posts, and several Top Tips listings for a range of wide-range of issues and ideas. The Children's

Commissioner's website and many local authorities directed parents and carers to our Playful Childhood websites

- worked with colleagues to move all workforce development training and playwork qualification delivery on line
- participated in Welsh Government working groups established to address the challenge of Covid 19 and consider and determine actions to mitigate its impact; representing the needs of children with particular attention to the importance of playing to their physical and mental health; endeavouring to promote a balanced approach that mitigated the negative impact of the measures adopted to contain the progress of the infection, on children's opportunities to play.

Other work with Welsh Government included:

- actively engaged with working groups set up by Welsh Government to support the playwork and childcare sector
- commenting on specific sector operating guidance being drafted by Welsh Government
- commented on funding guidance produced by Welsh Government (Summer of Fun, Winter of Wellbeing and Playworks Holiday Project)
- shared survey results and views of the playwork sector with Welsh Government researchers
- lobbied for financial support for play sufficiency, play and playwork when responding to the *Our Future Wales* consultation (exploring how Welsh Government policies might support future post-Covid recovery and reconstruction in Wales)
- providing expertise and advice for Welsh Government official developing guidance for the re-opening of playgrounds and provision
- ensured networks continued to meet online and communicate virtually
- surveyed the network of community based playwork providers to identify issues and concerns
- held surgeries for playwork providers
- updated our Children's Play Satisfaction survey to include questions relating to Covid-19
- ran a series of online webinars, including supporting trauma informed approaches to working with children
- Using our *Wales – a play friendly place* manifesto for the 2020 Senedd elections to highlight the need for Welsh Government to both capitalise on the positives of Covid-19 and address the inequalities to provision that the pandemic highlighted
- took part in various Delphi reviews and contributed to research projects looking at the impact of Covid-19 on children
- developed a Coronaplay initiative which included:
 - a dedicated section of the Play Wales website with information for professionals, parents and settings
 - published a range of publications:
 - Focus on play briefing note which provided guidance for the re-opening of parks and playgrounds
 - Focus on play briefing for guidance on play for the re-opening of schools
 - Various top tips relating to the role of play in supporting mental health and wellbeing
 - A Reading List for teachers

- Play for Wales magazines which focused on play and being well, highlighting the views of children, case studies and good practice examples of play and playwork provision
- Briefing note and risk assessments for street play projects
- Briefing note for the use of school grounds for play in areas with little open space
- Risk assessment support for playwork provision
- *The therapeutic superpowers of play* information sheet
- Contributions and blogs to external publications
- With the University of Manchester, published a [*Prioritising play to promote wellbeing blog*](#)

Through our Coronaplay initiative, Play Wales was the recipient of an International Play Association Special Award on the Right to Play in Times of Crisis.

4. A list of any articles or reports the organisation or body has published or contributed to, and/or evidence it has given (for example to Senedd Select Committees) regarding the impact on the group(s) which the organisation or body supports or represents of the response to Covid-19 by the Welsh Government. Please include links to those documents where possible.

We provided an evidence paper to National Assembly for Wales' Children, Young People and Education Committee's consultation exploring how the outbreak of COVID-19 is affecting all aspects of life for children and young people. We noted, that in guidance there was a necessary focus on work, shopping and exercise as essential activities. For children, there has also been an emphasis on continuing their education, as far as possible. We highlighted that playing must also be seen as essential activity. We also raised these issues:

- Children's access to outdoor space for play, exercise and enjoyment differs greatly across Wales and this is heightened in the current situation. Some children live in accommodation with outdoor gardens, ample outdoor community space and supportive carers with time to support play, whilst others don't. We asked Welsh Government to consider actions that addressed these inequalities.
- When children return to school, efforts to improve well-being in schools should focus on providing sufficient time and space for play. This will enable children to be given time to rebuild relationships, social skills and connections with the school environment. We asked the Committee to pay attention to Play First: Supporting Children's Social and Emotional Wellbeing During and After Lockdown, a letter to the four nations' government Ministers written by academics with expertise in children's mental health. The letter, endorsed by Play Wales, urged the governments to prioritise children's play and socialising with friends over formal lessons and academic progress when schools reopened, and restrictions are eased.
- We also drew Committee's attention to *Improving safe access to street space for children's play and physical activity*, a short paper that explores the evidence for families with children to be allowed greater access to very local neighbourhood space, to allow children to play safely within physical distancing rules. Some of the changes proposed in the paper include temporary changes to speed limits on residential streets and giving priority to non-motor vehicle road users on some roads. The paper discusses how the changes have the potential

to make the coronavirus crisis less damaging to children and more bearable for families. The paper had also been shared with the Deputy Minister for Economy and Transport and Welsh Government officials working on Active Travel. Subsequently, Play Wales was invited to attend and contribute to an Extraordinary Active Travel Board meeting which provided an opportunity to discuss communication messages around exercising (walking and cycling) during Covid-19, which had been prompted by the exercise guidance.

- As a member of the Wales United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child Monitoring Group (UNCRC MG), we highlighted the legal requirement for Welsh Ministers to pay close attention to the interests of children in the management of Covid-19 arising as a consequence of the duty to have due regard to the UNCRC under Section 1 of the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011. One important aspect of due regard is the requirement to undertake a Child Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) of any legislation or policy which will have a direct or indirect impact on children as set out in the Children's Rights Scheme 2014. The UNCRC MG was concerned that as far as we are aware this obligation has not been met in the drafting of Covid-19 emergency regulations or guidance in Wales.

On a UK basis, we worked with the UK Play Safety Forum and UK Children's Play Policy Forum to produce [research papers and statements](#). These provided evidence on the effects of play restrictions in terms of a) reducing the risk of COVID-19 transmission in the population and b) the detriments to children resulting from the restrictions. These were shared with Welsh Government officials who were drawing up guidance for the re-opening of playwork provision and playgrounds/play areas.

Internationally, we worked with the International Play Association (IPA) and played a key role in the development in a new Play in Crisis resource for parents and carers. This resource was based on the Access to Play in Crisis Toolkit which was developed by Play Wales for IPA in 2017.

5. The view of the organisation or body as to whether the group(s) it supports or represents was adequately considered when decisions about the response to Covid-19 were made by the Welsh Government. Please also explain the reasons for the view expressed by the organisation or body in this respect.

Through various consultation responses and in meetings, Play Wales shared our concern that the regulations and guidance would have a direct and significant short and long-term impact on children. We highlighted, that, they would have a great impact on children as they imposed restrictions on a population group undergoing unavoidable physical, social, and emotional development. We shared concerns that social distancing and social isolation would have had a particular effect on children, and we therefore urged that special attention should be given to children in all decisions regarding direct response to virus control/prevention and recovery post-Covid.

6. Whether the organisation or body raised any concerns about the consideration being

given to the group(s) which it supports or represents with the Welsh Government, when the Welsh Government was making decisions about its response to Covid-19. Please provide a list of any such correspondence or meetings with the Welsh Government, including the dates on which the body or organisation wrote or such meetings were held, to whom the correspondence was addressed or with whom the meeting was held, and any response received from the Welsh Government addressing such concerns.

As noted above, Play Wales shared our concern that the regulations and guidance would have a direct and significant short and long-term impact on children.

We were particularly concerned that advice Welsh Government's *Leaving home to Exercise guidance* provided a very adult-centric view of exercise. As much as they will enjoy long walks and cycling, children get most of their physical activity from playing. Scooting, exploring, jumping, climbing on walls can still happen within the official physical distance guidance – children will need some gentle guidance with this and parents need permission to allow it. We were pleased that FAQ's related to this guidance later referenced play, playing and children's safe use of streets for play.

Whilst we understood the rationale and need to place on hold some play policy work, we asked Welsh Government to remain committed to *the Ministerial Review of Play* and also to ensure that it considered funding for open-access staffed playwork provision (the *Holiday Hunger Playworks Project* was also placed on hold) was prioritised.

Correspondence included:

- the response to National Assembly for Wales' Children, Young People and Education Committee's inquiry- referenced in depth above (11 May 2020)
- *Improving safe access to street space for children's play and physical activity*, was shared with the Deputy Minister for Economy and Transport and Welsh Government officials working on Active Travel. This short paper explored the evidence for families with children to be allowed greater access to very local neighbourhood space, to allow children to play safely within physical distancing rules was shared with the Deputy Minister for Economy and Transport and Welsh Government officials working on Active Travel. Subsequently, Play Wales was invited to attend and contribute to an Extraordinary Active Travel Board meeting (14 May 2020) which provided an opportunity to discuss communication messages around exercising (walking and cycling) during Covid-19, which had been prompted by the exercise guidance. Guidance for Welsh Government's Active Travel Fund now includes a play, arts and culture element as eligible criteria for funding.
- Response to the *Our Future Wales* consultation, which explored how Welsh Government policies might support future post-Covid recovery and reconstruction in Wales. We provided some information for consideration regarding children's play and closed our response with some recommendations. (27 July 2020)

Despite the above engagement there is some uncertainty as to how much heed was paid to the needs of specific groups of children when successive versions of guidance were developed.

7. A brief summary of the views of the organisation or body as to any lessons, if any, that can be learned from any consideration which was given to the group(s) that the organisation or body supports or represents by the Welsh Government when they were making decisions about their response to Covid-19

Children's rights

Welsh Government's Covid-19 emergency regulations and guidance placed restrictions on children's rights as articulated in Article 15 (right to assembly ()) and Article 31 (to engage in play and recreational activities) of the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). These rights are directly linked to the right to development (Art.6(2)) as a fundamental principle of the UNCRC.

Whilst restrictions on movement and exercise represented a curtailment of these rights, a Children's Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) would have helped the Welsh Government better appreciate the extent to which restrictions may (or may not) be necessary, including as emergency measures are gradually lifted. This might have better helped to address the situation of those children who did not have proximate access to facilities where opportunities to play and exercise may be taken.

Access to open space

In the early days of lockdown restrictions, Welsh Government never specifically closed children's play areas; however, all local authorities and town and community councils in Wales did. We were pleased to see that Welsh Government acted to provide evidenced advice to support the re-opening of children's playgrounds in July 2020. There was also capital funding for play areas which was awarded to local authorities via the All Wales Play Opportunity Grant.

Regardless, there were some areas that did not re-open these spaces. Welsh Government could have taken steps to ensure that children with limited access to outdoor space were not compromised or further deprived of the right to play. These steps include:

- Directing local authorities and other playground managers to re-open these spaces
- Where neighbourhood playgrounds were deemed unsafe, direct the use of other community assets-such as school grounds

Information for parents

More could have been done through various channels to provide information about play to parents and caregivers. We were disappointed that Welsh Government did not share our resources aimed at parents about children and their play as comprehensively as we had hoped.

We provided comprehensive updates to Welsh Government [play policy] officials regarding the specific bilingual resources we published as part of our support to mitigate the impact of the coronavirus crisis. However, there was a delay in including reference to play, its importance to children and its role in contributing to mitigating the impact of the lockdown measures to in any

Welsh Government messaging to parents or briefings to those providing childcare for vulnerable children and children of critical workers.

We noted that the Irish government, which has no national play organisation, set up a website specifically to raise the profile of the importance of play to parents during this time, using the Play in Crisis resource (*as already mentioned developed with the support of Play Wales*) as its primary source of information. It had also been used for the same purpose by the Turkish Ministry of Education.