A journey, not a destination:
Evaluating the impact of Quality in Play
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An evaluation report by Ludemos for Play England

Written by Perry Else with Julia Sexton and Eddie Nuttall

Play England aims for all children and young people in England to have regular access and opportunity for free, inclusive, local play provision and play space.

Play England provides advice and support to promote good practice, and works to ensure that the importance of play is recognised by policy-makers, planners and the public.

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Purpose of the work
The overall aim of this evaluation was to assess the impact of Quality in Play (QiP) on:

- providers’ practice and the quality of provision for children's play
- organisational standards for the provider
- the engagement of providers with the wider community
- the influence QiP had for play providers in working with funding bodies, inspectors and other agencies.

This was to be done by interviewing and visiting active and lapsed providers using the case study method.

We are very grateful to everyone who participated in this project, especially the setting practitioners, management members and support staff who made the time to talk to us, often at length, about their work. We hope we have represented accurately their views and passion for their work.

Perry Else, Julia Sexton and Eddie Nuttall – July 2010
Summary of key findings

Play England commissioned an evaluation to assess the impact of Quality in Play (QiP) for providers undertaking the programme, on their:

- practice and quality of provision for children’s play
- organisational standards
- engagement with the wider community
- the influence QiP had in working with funding bodies, inspectors and other agencies.

This was done by interviewing and visiting active and lapsed providers using the case study method.

- Thirteen varied settings were consulted for the evaluation, with views collected from practitioners, management members and support agencies
- Active and lapsed users of QiP were visited and interviewed

Thirteen different settings were involved in the research, from different geographical locations and with different forms of management and support. A total of 29 individuals were interviewed for their views of the process and the difference it made to the provider’s practice and to children’s play. Most settings were still active in the QiP assessment, though three sites that no longer used the scheme were contacted for their views on the process. There was remarkable consistency in the comments across the sites and areas.

In conclusion, two main views were reported by participants to the effect that QiP had made a difference to their practice:

1. The first was that QiP had validated current practice and highlighted areas where settings could make improvements in order to work towards good practice.
2. The second was that it had led to a wholesale review of providers’ practice and had led to changes on the ground that had fundamentally improved children’s access to freely chosen play opportunities.

QiP has a number of playwork perspectives that underpin the standards and approach. These are explained in the QiP guidance material in the section ‘Thinking about play’; it is therefore understandable that playwork practitioners feel that the QiP approach validates their practice.

By requiring settings to provide evidence consistent with these perspectives, QiP is building upon received wisdom in the field, so helping practitioners confirm their playwork methods.

In playwork, the ‘plan-do-review’ cycle has long been adopted. This method is apparent in QiP where providers are asked to collect evidence showing what they did and how it links to the key standards. It was clear from the views collected that many practitioners found this process invaluable, as part of the ‘positive learning journey’ taken by their teams and themselves.

Reflective practice helps explain the ‘light bulb’ moments that some practitioners described, when the model or paradigm that they had been using was seen to be inadequate to describe the actions of children playing in settings, and practitioners’ thinking became more playwork focused.

A significant factor in the implementation of QiP is the requirement to adopt a team-based approach to portfolio preparation.

In the context of playwork, given its focus on playing children and their supporting environments, many processes are emergent, self-organising and constantly evolving, suggesting a process of ‘ensemble improvisation’, where the staff teams are designers and co-authors of processes rather than architects or managers with a set plan.

Clearly the introduction of QiP may start as an administrative task, yet as may been seen in the data, those practitioners who embraced the process and made it their own, enjoyed the
process more and made greater connections in their work. The work was no longer top-down as it had been undertaken for its own sake and for the rewards that staff teams identified within it. Conversely, those teams who reacted to it as an imposed task experienced it more negatively and mainly identified the functional elements of the process.

A summary of the key findings from the evaluation is shown below.

Many staff considered QiP to be additional work at first, though it was also useful evidence for funders and inspectors – and for building staff confidence in their practice; knowing what they were doing and why. The process was better if treated as one for continual improvement; it was easier and better the second time around. Staff who had experience of other quality assurance systems and portfolio building found the process relatively easy to complete. The improvements on the QiP process over the years since it was introduced were welcomed.

In completing the portfolio, many considered that a team approach worked best, building relationships both internally and externally. Crucially, the team needed to make time for the process and a systematic approach was better than adopting a one-off/last minute attitude. Mentoring support, whether internal or external to the setting was considered vital as long as it was high quality. Those agencies, local authority or voluntary sector, which had taken a ‘whole system’ approach, had found QiP more valuable and easier to implement.

With regards to a playwork approach or playwork ethos, QiP was found time-and-again to have made a significant difference in practice to individuals, their teams, to children and in one case a whole authority. Individuals reported how their attitudes had been changed as a result of being required to demonstrate reflective practice. Those who had embraced the process described how ‘the light bulb was switched on’ for them, or how they had been on a ‘learning journey of team understanding’. They and their colleagues reported the many benefits for children, staff, the setting and the wider community. This was in terms of additional play opportunities, better quality of work, more fun, good use of time and more play opportunities in the wider community, such as increased events and mobile or detached work with a playwork approach.

The QiP portfolio was found useful by providers in bringing external requirements for inspection and policy together in one place to make sense of them and to help answer questions that arose from inspection or policy agencies.

Overall, QiP was thought to offer considerable added value to settings and was well worth the time and effort required (and the £500 cost of assessments). The benefits were greatest for those settings that were fully subscribed to the quality assessment process and were prepared to reflect whole-heartedly on their practice and on themselves.
What is Quality in Play?

Quality in Play (QiP) is a quality assurance scheme for out-of-school play and childcare provision to ensure quality play opportunities for children. The scheme was originally developed by Tony Farley and Mick Conway for London Play and is based on established playwork values. Recent editions have been based on the Playwork Principles 2005 (see Appendix 4). Play England took over administration of the scheme in 2007.

In order to gain QiP accreditation, providers contact Play England to order a manual. Providers then work through each quality area in the manual, ensuring that policies and procedures are up-to-date, documents easily accessible, and that standards of good practice are in place on site. Most settings work with a mentor to help them through the process. Mentors are trained and supported by Play England, though work independently once appointed. Settings decide whether to purchase the support of a mentor or not (some use experienced staff as internal mentors). Evidence is collected in a portfolio for review during the QiP assessment. The criteria for QiP used in this evaluation are shown in Appendix 2.

A QiP assessor visits the site to discuss the contents of the portfolio and observe how staff interact with children. The assessor prepares a report based on their visit, which is sent to the provider for agreement, along with requests for any further information required before accreditation could be granted. An independent QiP panel then reviews the assessments to decide whether to grant accreditation. Once accredited, the QiP team sends a certificate to the successful setting to display on site. Accreditation is valid for a period of two years, though a move to three years was being considered as part of the continuous revision of the QiP manual.

As of October 2009, the costs of accreditation were £50 for the manual, £500 for the assessment process plus any costs incurred by using a mentor. Mentor support varied according to the time used and the rates charged by the mentor.

In early 2010, there were 80 play providers accredited with QiP, of which 60 were local authorities and 20 were from the voluntary and community sector. In addition, there were 40 lapsed play providers whose accreditation had not been renewed.

As QiP was originally developed and promoted by London Play, many providers were London based, though the move to Play England had led to a national roll out of the scheme with some significant take up by other regional providers.

Playwork theories underpinning QiP

QiP has a number of playwork perspectives that underpin its standards and approach. It is therefore understandable that playwork practitioners feel that the QiP approach validates their practice.

These playwork perspectives are as follows:

- The playing child is at the centre of the process, and should have more influence on the play environment and the organisational framework than they do on the child (Lester and Russell 2004, Manchester Circles (an adaptation of Bronfenbrenner’s ecology of human development, 1979)).

- Access and inclusion – ‘all children’ means exactly what it says; play provision should be fully accessible and inclusive. Play providers need to have a shared understanding of what prevents or discourages children and young people from participating in play opportunities.

- The Playwork Principles establish the professional ethical framework for playwork; they aim to describe what is unique about playwork. The eight principles define play and describe the focus of playwork and the role of the playworker (see Appendix 4).

- Play types (Hughes 1996, 2002, 2006) describe the play behaviours that may be seen in playing children. A quality play environment offers the possibility for engaging
in all the play types but it is for children to decide whether and when they want to engage in them.

- Play and the natural environment – Lester and Maudsley (2006) have shown that children’s desire to be in a natural environment is linked to their physical and mental health; the more diverse, dynamic and flexible features there are in natural environments, the more opportunities or ‘affordances’ for play there will be.
- The theory of loose parts (Nicholson 1971) explained how the ‘bits and pieces’ lying around environments often make them more creative and challenging for children.
- The play cycle (Sturrock and Else 1998) described how when playing, children decide on the focus, scale and manner of their play, communicating this to others in subtle or sometimes very obvious ways. Understanding the elements of the play cycle helps playworkers support playing children.
- Play as an approach to activity was explained by Bruner (1966) as not a different activity but a way of approaching an activity – sport can be ordered or playful, painting can be methodical or playful, eating can be playful.
- Playable space is a concept that aims to help adults think about the spaces that children use for play. Play is a legitimate use of many spaces, whether they are designated play areas or not. Playable space is useful in helping adults consider the factors that may make a space more play-friendly.
A statement of methods

- A case study approach was used, with 13 varied settings consulted for the evaluation.
- Active and lapsed users of QiP were contacted and views collected from practitioners, management members and support agencies.

In discussion with Play England, it was agreed that the evaluation would comprise case studies covering a variety of organisations and settings that had undergone the QiP process. The case study approach provides information pertinent to the given settings and is a multi-method tool for ascertaining a rich picture of data for each setting. From that data, collected through visits, interviews with a variety of staff and support agencies, observations and examination of evidence, conclusions may be reached on the validity of the QiP tool within the settings. By using a spread of case studies some common conclusions may be reached, though reaching an overall truth applicable to all settings is always difficult on such a small-scale study. At best it was expected that the evaluation would indicate areas of strength and areas to improve on the use of QiP by settings.

The original plan was for 8–10 case studies of providers with a regional spread and illustrating the different types of play provision offered. It was expected that at least one case study would cover multiple settings supported by a local authority and voluntary and community groups. In addition to case studies from currently accredited play providers, evidence was to be gathered from lapsed providers, to find out why they were no longer using the process.

Play England identified the settings, both current and lapsed, that were to be approached to conduct the research. An introductory letter was sent to the providers, outlining the project, the planned method and the likely time commitment. This was followed by phone conversations and email confirmations with supporting paperwork.

In practice, 20 settings were contacted and of those 13 case studies were prepared from a range of providers in local authorities, the voluntary sector, and the community and hospital sector. The geographical spread of settings was largely London-based, with a local authority group (three settings) from Birmingham and two settings in Wakefield. Of those case studies, three were lapsed providers working in the same authority. Three private providers were approached but none agreed to take part. The other four providers that chose not to take part reported other demands in the workplace as the reason for not participating. As the study was focused on the impact of the QiP process on individual settings, no approaches were made to settings that had no experience of the programme.

It was planned to carry out the following:

1. Field interviews with setting practitioners, representatives of management teams, parents and users where available.
2. Telephone interviews with funders, inspectors and other agencies where available and with lapsed users of QiP.
3. Collection of a sample of documentary evidence from settings, including reports, reviews, portfolio evidence, photos, and consultation with children.

The project team comprised three members who were skilled in field techniques and interviews. For consistency of approach an outline of questions for sites was prepared to form the basis of data collection and semi-structured interviews with participants (Appendix 1).

In preparing to assess settings using the case study method, it was agreed to consider provision holistically, looking at objective and subjective factors in order to form a view of practice in the setting (Wilber 1998, Else 1999, Bolman and Deal 2003). By assessing procedures, documents and portfolios, human and environmental provision, and views from a range of internal and external stakeholders, it was planned to form a view of the work and the influence of QiP on practice. This approach is summarised in Figure 1.

Figure 1 – The approach to data collection
Some settings had been through the QiP process several times, some only once. The QiP criteria have evolved over the years so settings may have used Version 2 or 3 in responding to the research. A comparison showing the similarities and differences between the versions is shown in Appendix 2. Overall, it was decided that there was sufficient similarity of approaches for the data sets to be comparable in terms of impact.

Due to the short term nature of the project (undertaken within four months) a decision was taken not to involve children and young people in a fully inclusive fashion; the view being taken that such work needs to be undertaken face-to-face by practitioners on a continuing basis. A case study approach necessarily involves the collection of feelings ‘in the moment’ with recollections of earlier times and comparisons between the two. This is clearly an adult process. Playwork Principle 4 states that when working with children, ‘the play process takes precedence and playworkers act as advocates for play when engaging with adult-led agendas’. To do otherwise risked adulterating the children’s experience, however, it was felt it was possible to reflect the feelings and wishes of children and young people through the project. This was to be achieved by evidence of the regular and continuing involvement of children in the setting, and the absence of that in documentation would indicate an area of improvement for the setting.

In practice, the evidence available from each setting was varied. For example the lapsed settings did not want to give up two hours to be interviewed about a process they no longer used. Likewise, support agencies may have only had limited information on the impact of QiP. In those cases, telephone interviews were used. In all settings, at least two perspectives were gained from participants, though most had three or more; in one setting there were seven contributors. Most settings supported their views with documentary evidence. All interviews were recorded and later transcribed in line with the interview format. The records were then scanned for key themes and views collated to form the basis of the final report and key findings.

All participants agreed to take part in the research. In summarising the data below, much of it is presented anonymously – unless the context is significant. Direct quotes are given in a few places, and all respondents gave permission for their names to be used.
Results
The results are presented consistently in line with the interview format (shown in Appendix 1); this follows the key areas used within QiP Version 4 (see Figure 2).

Figure 2 – Research themes matched to QiP criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research themes</th>
<th>QiP criteria v4</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The experience of the QiP process</td>
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<tr>
<td>Practice and the quality of provision for children’s play</td>
<td>Children’s freedom and control</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Reflective playwork practice</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Communicating effectively</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Clear play aims and values</td>
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<td>The human play environment</td>
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<td>The physical play environment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Organisational standards for the provider</td>
<td>Project and resource management</td>
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<td>Workforce development</td>
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<td>The law and regulation</td>
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<tr>
<td>The engagement of providers with the wider community</td>
<td>Working in the community</td>
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<tr>
<td>Working with other agencies</td>
<td>The bigger picture</td>
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Finally, participants were asked to summarise the overall strengths of QiP and what they felt could be changed for the better. To help with understanding how QiP was implemented in whole teams, detailed case studies are included for sites in Birmingham and Tower Hamlets, London.

The experience of the QiP process

- The QiP process was considered a positive use of time and resources by most respondents
- The first time through the process was the hardest to undertake and became easier with experience
- A systematic approach with planned support was most valuable

The experience of the QiP process varied according to the approach that individuals took to quality assurance. Some saw it as vital to their practice of continuous reflection and improvement, others saw it as ‘another bureaucratic task’.

As one respondent stated:

Instead of someone sitting there telling you what you need to do, you need to think for yourself. Some people like it, some people don’t.

One local authority setting found the process ‘really stressful’, especially the first time through as the setting had not done anything like QiP before, it was changing work practice and all the staff took some time to get used to it. The second time it was done as a team and they did not have to work at the last minute, they already had most of the information that was needed for the portfolio from the previous submission.

A senior member of a voluntary sector staff team put it this way:
It was a lot of additional work, like doing a degree or an exam when you are working, I suppose. But once the information was collated, I had a moment when I looked at it and thought: crikey, this is a really useful tool. It wasn’t a case of re-inventing the wheel, it was often stuff that we had arrived at beforehand but maybe in a different way.

Another setting agreed that the team had to take full ownership of the process and be prepared to learn from their mistakes, updating existing evidence and adding to it regularly. The process was described as ‘quite an eye opener for all of us’. One respondent had thought that the process would not be repeated after the initial two-year period expired, yet said that it was a much better experience the second time around.

A practitioner in an independent setting felt the process was quite repetitive with a lot to do. She stated that it took a long time to find the evidence and build the portfolio. She said that too much depth was required in the criteria.

The perception of the time taken varied according to how engaged the staff were. For some, six months was a long time, for others it was not long enough. The time that people took to put together their portfolios varied from 6 to 18 months. One service made the process easier by holding monthly meetings for staff to support one another as part of QiP process. Not all sites attended every meeting, but it was a useful support system. Another approach used was for a team to decide to spend around 15 minutes a day on QiP over four to five months. This process was considered ‘worth doing’ and they enjoyed getting the QiP certificate as a reward.

Some teams had not assembled a portfolio before and had no idea how to go about the task. Mentors were considered vital at that point, though not by all. Some teams both active and lapsed had decided to use an internal mentor. One team member reported that this resulted in a good level of support and allowed for the sharing of ideas. It was different for a smaller voluntary sector group which did not use an external mentor, and it was the service manager who took the lead on the process. The same team reported that the process was ‘quite long winded and repetitive’.

Overall, the support of mentors was judged very positively by most settings:

- Fantastic! We didn’t see them that much, but they were there if we needed them.
- Very good, approachable, supportive and helpful. Meeting other settings doing QiP was also good.

A local authority support worker commented on the process of trying to change people’s views on play. She felt that some staff had a ‘totally different mindset’ to that required for playwork and that QiP helped with the shift to reflective practice required to help people change.

**Case Study 1: Birmingham City Council**

- QiP was used as the authority-wide playwork standard for some districts
- The standard was used to help create service change
- Additional benefits and support to teams were identified and resourced

Rose Jewkes works as the Play Development Officer for Birmingham, and is part of the city’s Community and Play Central Strategy and Support Team. Rose explained that Birmingham’s Community and Play services advocated QiP for its play settings in 2005.

Up to that point, the city had its own generic quality assurance scheme, which was good on management processes but had very little in terms of good playwork practice. Some sites were using the Aiming Higher quality assurance framework. After a review of the available quality assurance systems, the service identified QiP as their preferred quality assurance system, because of its focus on play and the playing child.
The Central Strategic Team identified four people to take up mentoring roles, and they went to London to access the training. Initially, sites were mentored via centrally held meetings where all sites came together to look at the quality areas. Sites were also allocated their own individual mentor whose role was to offer on-site mentoring support. As the process became familiar to staff, mentors took a more general support role, helping when asked by settings.

Once the programme started, it was relatively easy to roll out, though there were still two sites not accredited within the scheme, mainly due to staff changes at critical times in the process. The service’s aim was to try to get people to change the way that they thought about play in order to increase the play opportunities with children. Skills gaps were identified and training courses developed to help staff understand and implement the basic theories that support QiP.

In addition to the personal changes people were being encouraged to make, there were organisational issues to overcome. The Community and Play Strategic Team was part of the Environment and Culture Directorate, whereas play centres were managed by the Housing and Constituencies Directorate, and most other children’s services were in Children, Young People and Families Directorate.

The Community and Play Strategic Team has made links with local further and higher education centres to help develop and offer other qualifications in play. The success of the approach had been recognised in other local services, and the city’s Quality Improvement Team, which used to endorse Aiming Higher with out-of-school clubs, was to move over to the QiP scheme.

For Birmingham, QiP had been fundamental to an increase in the quality of play provision in their children’s services and to the personal development of key staff. This is exemplified in Case Study 2 about Cloverlea Play Centre.
Practice and the quality of provision for children’s play

- QiP helped change staff’s approach to work with children
- The process developed staff and gave them evidence to show others the benefits of their work
- QiP helps staff offer more and varied play opportunities for children

Settings were asked to comment on how their practice had changed as a result of using QiP. One independent support worker said that some colleagues had changed their practice and their mind sets. The offer to children had changed and staff were providing play opportunities rather than a programme of activities. This comment was supported separately by one of the wider team members who felt that the main changes as a result of QiP was that the service did not use a programme, provision had become more flexible, less adult dominated, and more child led:

We offer more risk now. We balance risk with health and safety issues. We have developed the use of loose parts and the play environment.

You can’t do QiP by yourself it has to be a team effort. It brought the team together. It changed how we reflect, record, do things as a team. We see the bigger picture now and we collate information.

We are all on that journey and we look at play types, how often we see them and where they are. The new QiP it is more comprehensive, more thought provoking. The team is on a journey of team understanding.

A local authority manager, who was not a playworker himself, commented powerfully on practice at a local authority setting:

Play is vital for families, for their mental health. We don’t want to be farming children, we want our service to be more than just income generation and playcare, we want to develop opportunities for play and QiP helps with this because it stimulates and challenges the staff.

QiP has boosted staff confidence, helps to measure what staff are doing. Now staff are looking at developing the play centre with an interactive area, for children to regain the space (in the park and community).

QiP provides a measure to judge services against, and aids developing quality provision. It helps to make the argument at different levels for support for play and for the services by helping make links with other agencies.

It also helps develop the opportunities for children. In diverse communities such as ours we need to develop and improve the quality of play provision. The framework helps staff consider cultural aspects and why to develop opportunities for girls and boys; especially looking at what opportunities there are for girls and working on this.

[Our] play centre had a good Ofsted report in response to good practice developed through QiP. It helps when trying to get funding, and links with what playbuilders are doing.

As another worker put it:

I knew I did my job but I had no evidence of it. We now have substantial evidence to back it up, we are a lot better at reflecting and looking at our work practice, there was very little reflection in the past.

Many staff reported that organisationally things had improved as result of using QiP. Little things like improved labelling of resources, and filing:

Everything used to be quite hodgepodge in my mind, and getting it sorted for QiP showed me how I could organise that information better.

One service stated that QiP reinforced their resolve to try and explain play theory to their staff. Play theory highlighted the importance of what the service was for and gave providers
an understanding of why children need play. As a consequence, they wanted children to experience things they had not done before, but in an environment where staff knew when to step back if they were not needed.

**Children’s freedom and control**

- By going through the QiP process some staff changed their work style with children
- QiP helped them focus on playwork intervention styles

At many of the settings interviewed there was clear evidence that children and young people had an influence on the setting, though there were also cautions. One support worker felt that responses to children needed to be appropriate and should not encroach on children’s play. Good practice should involve good observation and active listening to children.

Rashta Butt from Cloverlea Play Centre, Birmingham (see Case Study 2) explained how her own view changed as a consequence of what she had become aware of through the QiP process:

> The light bulb switched on when I arrived one day and there was a child on the roof and there was a crash mat underneath [with a staff member close by]. Things changed for me that day. Children will take risks and how are they going to learn if they don’t take risks? Kids now put the programme together.

Foster Darby (also from Birmingham) listed the changes made to provision for children’s play as a result of using QiP:

> Loose parts, natural play, developing awareness of creative provision, offering soil, water, flour, develop a natural area, wind, fire, exploring different ways of playing.

Staff from an independent setting commented specifically on play cues:

> We have always responded to play cues but QiP flagged up that we have to do it. It made me [aware] that I needed to make sure play cues were consistently understood and responded to by the staff.

Rashta commented on the child-led approach that had developed in their setting after understanding the requirements of QiP:

> We used to do Eid and Christmas celebrations then we realised we were doing it for our reasons. Now we let the children decide. If they want to make cards or have a party we support them but we don’t organise it anymore.

The other changes in practice made to her setting as a result of adopting QiP are shown below in Case Study 2.

**Case Study 2: Cloverlea Play Centre**

- The QiP process was challenging at first, though easier for teams with support
- It was more useful to adopt a team-based approach
- The process of continuous reflection and improvement added value inside the setting and wider afield

Cloverlea Play Centre provides stimulating and challenging play activities for children aged 5–12 years living in or attending schools within Hodge Hill Constituency, Birmingham. It offers open access provision [term time Monday to Friday 3.15pm–5.30pm] and a holiday scheme [10.00am till 3.00pm]. Cloverlea is one of 15 different centres in the city using or working towards QiP. Everyone associated with the centre talked about how the process of preparing for assessment was one of great change.

Rashta Butt, the coordinator, explained how they had not done a portfolio before and had no idea how to approach it the first time:
We did have a mentor but it was a new process and the mentors were new too. Our local mentor had experience of National Vocational Qualification portfolios and gave us advice but at 12 midnight [when you are collecting evidence] the mentor isn’t there!

The second time, I was thinking I couldn’t do it again but in fact it was better... because we had done it before, I learnt from my mistakes and I was updating the existing evidence, adding to it.

Sharon Thompson, play scheme coordinator at the centre, felt that the process was quite an eye-opener for all of the team:

> When you have been in a role for so long, you need something to challenge your practice and I think that QiP definitely challenged us and made us re-focus. Going through the process actually brought the team closer together.

Rashta agreed:

> We are a lot better at gathering evidence, better at reflecting and looking at our work practice. I knew I did my job but I had no evidence of it. There was very little reflection in the past. We now have substantial evidence to back it up.

She was also very open about how her own practice had been challenged by the process and had become more play centred:

> Historically when we delivered play I wanted structure because I am a very structured person. I had to have things organised and all of that has changed because of QiP. Staff were saying: ‘this is brilliant, we can now do a bit more [provision for] loose parts’, and I thought: ‘no’. There was not exactly conflict within the staff team but there were lots of discussions.

Eventually it became a losing battle because the kids would challenge me and the staff would challenge me. I had to step back and look at it because everybody other than me was having a brilliant time. It was me being challenged.

My confidence has grown as my knowledge has grown because of QiP. Play types, *Play Principles*, play cues and play environments, all of those things we put into place now and we have more awareness of it.

Another playworker, Khalid Sadiq, reminded Rashta of the day there was a paint fight at the centre and how she reacted:

> Before I looked at everyone having fun I thought: ‘parents are going to pull my hair out when they come tonight’. There was always an element of me that would go back to that point of responsibility. We took lots of photographs that day to show to parents [and say]: ‘how many of your kids are going to have this opportunity at home?’

There was only one parent who made a fuss that day. Everyone else thought it was brilliant. We had no paint left in the building. Everything was covered in paint. The staff were covered in paint, the kids were covered in paint!

The team is now constantly evaluating parts of the service that they would not have necessarily reviewed before. There is no structured programme, and children come in and decide what they are doing. The new system helps children take responsibility for their play and the equipment they use. Children ask for things and if staff can realistically provide them they will.

> We give them a budget out of our budget, maybe they want board games but the children choose them. If one person is messing around with the game, the children will say: ‘don’t you remember we went to get those and we haven’t got any money to buy new ones.’ This way they manage those resources.

The changes have also spilled out onto the estate. Sarah Cooper, a local community worker commented on changes in the estate:
Over the last six years things have changed here. It was very fragmented, people were dispirited, they did not want to engage with the police in particular and there was much anti-social behaviour.

The work here has helped build strong community networks, we have set up a play forum for the constituency, and there is now the detached play team. Rashta went to help lead another play scheme at Easter and there have been swaps with different sites. This gave them a bit more experience.

Sharon reported one downside of QiP:

Now we are known in the community for being a good provider, we are oversubscribed. There were queues of children who wanted to attend and we had to say: ‘no’ to some, only allowing the first 40 through the door.

This led onto work with voluntary services using QiP to develop their provision so we could confidently refer children to them. Some of their workers came here and some of our workers went there. We brought the kids together so they all had a different experience. That wouldn’t have happened had we not gone through the process of QiP.

Reflective playwork practice

- QiP helped staff improve through individual and team reflection
- The reflection helped with the expansion of play-based practice
- The process helped staff collect appropriate evidence of their work

The QiP process was considered helpful in order to improve practice through individual and team reflection. Many sites used a site log book and site diaries to record incidents and staff responses; many organised formal or informal end of day and end of scheme evaluations.

Several sites commented on how it was necessary to use a team-based approach. To help with that, one local authority had introduced evaluation sheets for recording practice and incidents and to form the basis of a critical evaluation of the sessions carried out. This process was supported at the end of each session by a debriefing. One senior worker explained how the process was concluded:

At the end of a play scheme, I will write a small report just to say how I think it went, what were the highlights, what can we learn for next time...

Others described how the introduction of a site log helped with reflection. Staff were encouraged to make notes of their thoughts and observations throughout the day and then discuss those at the staff meeting. One site commented that before QiP’s introduction staff had made notes but: ‘not in the same way, not perhaps a playwork way’. The evaluation sheet helped staff focus on play types, children’s needs, the use of loose parts, as well as data necessary to justify to funders and management how the setting was being used. The same team had also introduced peer observations, and had regular supervisions and annual appraisal with the full time staff.

In Birmingham (see Case Study 1), the central training team helped local settings look at their policies, helped them prepare volunteer handbooks and showed them how to support play. As Foster Darby put it:

It’s a positive learning journey. We now know about play types, play cues, intervention styles, and play environments.

In a different setting, a voluntary sector worker described how the QiP process had given her a sense that they were doing things correctly, that they were heading along the right lines:

Yes it has had an impact in every standard. You have criteria to meet and if you haven’t met those criteria you put actions into place – things that you need to do to meet the standard.
Staff from an independent setting explained how they had learnt to observe more and use photos:

QiP flagged up the use of photos, one photo can speak volumes. It helped us to develop planning, and was helpful with meeting the EYFS.

All the sites interviewed provided evidence and varied examples of reflective practice. Some believed that the approach was one they had always been using, others realised that it was a necessary change brought about as a requirement of preparing the QiP portfolio.

Communicating effectively

- Children’s and young people’s views were important and practice reflected their needs and wants
- Varied methods and techniques were used for hearing children’s and young people’s views

Many settings visited had examples of children’s views on the walls. Evidence of their involvement in activities was shown. Several settings had a children’s committee, in which they discussed any issues they wanted to raise, such as things that they were not enjoying, or things that they would like more of. One provider was deciding how to spend money on new equipment:

We created a tally chart [for what we should spend the money on] and the children would mark down what they would like the most.

Other children drew pictures, some used Makaton to communicate, and others used social time or meal times as opportunities for informal feedback and discussion. In many settings there was evidence that communication was approached holistically:

- You have to come to the child’s level, rather than on your level, as a voice of authority. You have to choose your words carefully – do they understand you? And it’s the same visually with posters. Will the child understand it? Is it child friendly?
- You have to understand where they are coming from as a human being. If a child is aggressive towards another child, it is happening for a reason. And it is about understanding that.

Examples of other informal approaches were given by workers from separate settings in the same local authority:

Staff find out by listening and observing and then writing on the whiteboard the children’s suggestions of what they would like to do

We don’t have a structured programme, and the children come in and decide what they are doing. They ask for things and if we can realistically provide them we will.

A related but different approach was used in a voluntary sector setting where children with different needs attended:

We would draw that from our knowledge of the children and how we have witnessed them using the space. We know that from watching [a non-verbal wheelchair user of 15] and seeing her do stuff that that girl has got the devil in her for risk, and being cheeky.

This example highlighted the need for staff to be sensitive in responding to the individual needs of children. The same worker commented on consultation being an abstract concept that may be difficult to understand for some children:

Do you want to do this thing in the future? What do you think of this thing that you cannot see? Those are very difficult concepts to get across for some children.

Some settings used more formal methods of communication such as a children's newspaper, creative consultation activities and a constituency-wide process which was also organised as
a partnership event. There was clear evidence that the QiP requirement had helped practitioners think more about communicating effectively.

**Clear play aims and values**

- Settings had a clear statement about play provision
- Often that statement was a service or district-wide policy or strategy

Many settings in this study had a clear written statement of their commitment to play provision, some individual to the setting, though many had a localised play policy or play strategy that they supported or followed.

Most settings had a statement of intent based on the commonly accepted play definition as described in *Best Play* and the *Playwork Principles*:

> Play is a process that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. That is, children and young people determine and control the content and intent of their play, by following their own instincts, ideas and interests, in their own way for their own reasons.

In several places this was clearly displayed on the setting’s notice board, though a more practical application of the statement was shown through the setting’s practice and work with children, as described in other sections of this report.

**The human play environment**

- QiP helped staff think about how to make all the children and young people welcome
- Staff became familiar with playwork terminology and processes

‘Play opens a door to an expression of feeling,’ was how one practitioner described his setting’s approach to providing a supportive play environment that was welcoming, caring, stimulating, respectful and inclusive. This staff member from a voluntary sector setting believed that it was important to ‘read from the kids’ so that service responses could be immediate and spontaneous, and the activities would therefore be more child led.

Another practitioner explained how she did not have to be in control, that the adults and resources were provided and that children could take what they wanted from what was on offer. Part of that process involved using a play audit to identify the setting’s strengths and weaknesses. Observation sheets were developed to aid the staff identifying play types. Processes were then evaluated and the next steps agreed. Before using the QiP standards much of this work was noted informally, rather than being recorded for team discussion and evaluation.

Another practitioner illustrated how the setting was a changing space:

> There is always a range of activities and loose parts... so children come in and pick up whatever they want and do whatever they want with it.

The importance of partnership help for meeting varied needs was shown by staff from an independent setting who explained how the children’s charity, KIDS, had visited the setting and provided a worker to help support a child with additional needs. Staff from both agencies met with the child and their family to agree the level and type of support needed in each case.

Many of those interviewed made a direct link between the opportunities offered in the environment and through interaction with adults.

**The physical play environment**

- The process helped staff record and implement changes
Some changes were immediate, others more long term

The case study approach meant it was not possible to compare sites before and after the QiP process, though many settings reported changes that had taken place. These fell into three types of change – immediate, medium and long term.

Immediate changes included those day-to-day events and opportunities that staff portrayed as part of good playwork practice:

- Play does not have to be about having loads of resources...
- Things like temporary stuff, such as boxes and scrap and bubbles – some of the kids just love blowing bubbles, up high, low on the ground.

More medium term included the introduction of new items of equipment:

- A cargo net was installed [at height] so the kids can get up there and lie on their stomachs. We have had a new swing installed, there are the camps, the allotments are about a year old... a climbing wall, the stage, multicultural instruments, keyboards, all created from a wish list made up by children and staff. The new pieces of play equipment were decided upon through consultation with the children.

A local authority practitioner described how long term changes to the environment sometimes raised challenges for adult designers who may not be working from a child’s perspective:

- All the adults went: ‘oh no, you can’t build on the bit of grass, it’s nice to have grass.’
- So I said: ‘but it is what the children want, and that’s where they want it, and the children don’t really care whether there is grass or not...’
- So when I said to the children: ‘well, there is no space to build a new swing’, the children went: ‘what about that bit?’

In the Birmingham local authority, a detached (mobile) team of workers had been created and trained to go out into the environment and work with children using loose parts. On being asked what they provide for children, one member said: ‘nothing, the children decide on what they want to do’. The authority planned to extend the use of QiP standards to the detached team (this type of team might be called ‘play rangers’ in another authority).

There was plenty of evidence that engaging with the QiP process had helped staff reflect on the human and physical environments provided for children.
Organisational standards for the provider

- It was rare for QiP to influence established standards for providers
- QiP became the recognised playwork standard for some districts

With one or two differences, most practitioners were clear in their opinions that QiP had not influenced the provider’s organisational standards. Those standards were seen as well established and that while QiP encouraged staff to reflect on the standards, some staff (for example those in large organisations or agencies) felt unable to change the organisational standards.

However, in a few cases, notably Birmingham and Tower Hamlets (see case studies 1 and 3), QiP had become the recognised playwork standard for the whole district. An additional example was given by a mentor supporting a local group in Tower Hamlets:

  Local management committee ideas about the work were changed, with a clear understanding of the role of play in the setting emerging.

Other workers from Birmingham stated:

  It was evident from the Ofsted report that doing the QiP course had influenced our practice and our standards of practice.

Workers from a variety of settings commented that QiP simply captured good playwork practice:

  That’s what staff meetings are about, isn’t it. Every day you think about what you do, about what you did... and look forward to the next day. I think it is ongoing. Standards have not changed.

Project and resource management

- QiP helped providers record and reflect on their processes for resource management

When considering how to demonstrate that resources were managed effectively, efficiently and ethically (fairly), most settings referred to established financial and accounting procedures.

In some larger agencies there was a central procurement policy so that the management decisions were taken out of the direct providers’ responsibility. Some providers recognised their responsibility to be creative about how they spent their allocated budget. While some involved children and young people as described earlier, others saw the need to extend resources by using scrap stores and by ‘scavenging’ in the local area. All settings understood the need to be responsible for the resources under their control.

Workforce development

- The QiP portfolio was useful as a framework to induct new staff

Similarly, with systems for recruitment, induction, supervision, appraisal and reflective practice, many settings reported that a management or central team was responsible for the recruitment and formal induction of new staff.

However informal induction, supervision, appraisal and reflective practice were down to staff on the ground. This was especially evident in the case of part-time or short-term staff. QiP was reported to be useful in these situations for highlighting and providing a framework of steps for staff to go through. Collecting evidence or referring to the portfolio was cited as a means of sharing information with new staff.

The law and regulation

- The QiP portfolio helped providers identify and record the policies and standards that impacted on their setting

The production of the QiP portfolio had enabled the settings to create a detailed picture of the policy and standards they were following in their practice.
No two settings involved in the research reported operating to identical legal, regulatory or statutory requirements. In addition to overarching legislation such as health and safety, and equalities of opportunity and access, settings reported the following formal requirements:

- The Children Act 2004
- Every Child Matters Five Outcomes Framework
- Child Protection Procedure (and the requirement for a criminal record disclosure)
- Local Council, NHS or lead agency guidelines and requirements: equality and diversity policies, participation and inclusion policies
- Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education)
- The Common Assessment Framework (CAF)
- Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)
- Food Handling Hygiene Certificates (not all staff)

Similarly, a broad range of non-statutory guidance and standards were used in some settings:

- *Best Play*
- *Charter for Children’s Play*
- *Playwork Principles*
- First Claim framework
- Children’s Workforce Development Council – playwork management and leadership course
- Localised policies and codes for play practice

Some settings were aware of the contradictions and challenges that such a broad range of guidance created for their practice. Those settings that had a clear vision and approach to their work reported greatest satisfaction with documenting this for the QiP process. Others saw it as ‘another box to tick’. One setting that saw the benefits for staff and management of the QiP process was SPLASH Play.

**Case Study 3: Tower Hamlets, London**

- A partnership approach to provision in Tower Hamlets used QiP as a common standard
- The standard was adopted by a funding agency for settings to use in their practice
- The quality of local provision was fundamentally changed

SPLASH Play aims to establish high quality play opportunities in highly deprived areas and estates in their borough. Being based in a church created problems as some communities did not want to go into a place of worship, and as a listed building messy play was difficult to offer. However, the team did a lot of outreach work with children and their communities. QiP had a big impact on them.

Mohima Kamaly, the lead worker takes up the story:

> All the staff participated and children were involved in the QiP. It was a long process – six months – but we enjoyed it. It helped us take play seriously and respect what we were doing. We feel stronger as a team, having collected the evidence together. Our local play support agency was excellent; they helped us get to know about play.

> We went through each QiP section carefully, collecting evidence to put in the folder. There has definitely been an impact on provision. Practice is now more systematic, we now work to the *Playwork Principles.*

*A journey, not a destination:* Improving quality in play | 20
Parents and children are happier, we provide more of what they want, and we link to other play services in the area like the adventure playground and the city farm. We also organised our own fun days where we get the whole family involved. It raised awareness of what we do and helped us promote our service.

Our funders are more impressed with what we do, we can explain our achievements and make them more aware of what we offer and why we do it.

Overall, the strengths for us were that it focused the whole team and the kids were involved. It took time to do it right but we really enjoyed it.

Hilarie Kerr works for PATH, the local play association – a voluntary organisation promoting and supporting children's play opportunities throughout the borough. They organise training and provide information about training, offer an ideas exchange between projects, and promote good models of playwork practice. She explained that using QiP was not an accident for SPLASH Play:

We suggested to the funding bodies that QiP be used for quality assessment of grant-aided groups. It was a good standard to use; it helped the organisations get on track more quickly and get extra points towards being grant aided.

The providers found the first time through QiP the hardest, with some new policies being prepared, but then an element of competitiveness crept in and they really wanted to progress and show improvement. An added bonus was that the setting’s voluntary management committee came to understand play more as a result of the team going through the QiP process (though there is still some work to do).

Key lessons for us were that we should update everything; it’s an ongoing tool, not a one-off. You can’t stand still. QiP has helped put play on the map in the borough through the joint work we do with funders and providers.

The funding agency in this case was the Healthy Borough Team. The team promotes the national programme Change4Life, aiming to reduce obesity in the area. Kelda Lyons is the local officer:

For us as a funding body, QiP helps the team give evidence of their practice. The benefits of that are that it makes the team look at all their areas of work, it helps create a quality checklist so they can see if anything is missed out.

Practice has changed, the group is now well organised, more play and child focused, with more provided outdoors. The team is high energy and positive. They respond well to the children and help extend playing outdoors. They are constantly developing.

Services from small organisations can be difficult to measure, often there is no right way, but this process helps to show that they are doing it the best way they can.

While in very different circumstances to the settings in Birmingham, a similar pattern of organisation was used in Tower Hamlets. Mentoring and support were offered by an independent group, the QiP quality standard was required by a funding body, and the providers responded positively to the standards, using a team-based approach to assemble evidence for their portfolio. Practice on the ground became more play focused as a result.
The bigger picture

Working in the community

- The QiP process was useful for validating and supporting a community-based approach to playwork
- The portfolio helped settings collate and evaluate the wider impact of their work

Improved engagement with providers in the wider community in the previous year was demonstrated at practice, management and support levels for many settings.

One play centre in Birmingham reported working with different ethnic groups in the area. Local events had been held in play centres, including local, female and men’s groups, detached workers, and, significantly for some communities, wedding parties.

Clearly not all this work was directly attributable to using QiP, however, in requiring these events to be recorded for the portfolio, it validated and supported the community ethos underlying many playwork settings.

Other examples given included:

- contact with schools
- NHS road shows
- advertising with local management and commissioning services
- pyramid meetings
- distributing fliers
- developing people’s awareness
- making links with a partnership project for holiday clubs
- signposting to other providers
- links with other holiday providers and sharing good practice and Ofsted experience
- meeting the local play council, the outreach play team, local gardens projects and the community police.

One provider stated that their manager sat on the children’s panel for the area, advising on policy and practice.

More locally, settings also gave evidence of how families and the wider community had been engaged in their work. A play centre based in a park spoke about a sports centre pavilion development, the creation of a MUGA (multi-use games area) for older children, the development of outreach workers, and natural play sessions or playing in the environment. Other settings spoke about how local people supported Playday, open days, fun days, Halloween parties, a graffiti art project with young people, and joining the setting for trips out of the area to local attractions or the seaside.

Another provider had formed a walking bus service from the local primary school, citing support from local organisations.

As reported earlier (Case Study 1), the influence of QiP has been across different directorates in Birmingham, where there was recognition that the focus on play was what made QiP different to other quality assurance schemes. Also in Birmingham, the development of practice through the QiP team-based work had led to a partnership with a local training provider to offer enhanced playwork courses and access to a playwork foundation degree for staff.
Working with other agencies
- QiP helped the team to challenge others’ perceptions about play
- The evidence collected was useful for funders and inspectors (such as Ofsted)

Looking at how using QiP had changed the way the setting worked with funders, inspectors, and other agencies, one support worker said that it helped the arguments they were making to other agencies. For example, QiP helped the team to positively challenge others’ perceptions about play including the Early Years team, officers in Housing and Constituencies, and the Health and Safety team’s views on risky play and loose parts.

That view was echoed by a senior manager from the same authority:

Endorsing QiP and encouraging our play services to undertake it was intended to protect the service, but also educate senior managers of the value of working with children.

Over the last three to four years, play has raised its profile in the district and I think it is because they have got this badge, if you like, and all of a sudden people have started to take much more notice and realise it is a bit more than just playing with groups of kids.

Sites reported that the QiP process had helped them collect much more detailed evidence that was useful to strengthen funding applications. As one practitioner put it:

I am able to say we have got our QiP. I don’t know if people know enough about it yet but they know that we have this [quality indicator] and that we have passed this level. It would be useful if more settings had it and it was mandatory…

But we have used it in our short breaks funding, and I am saying to Social Services: ‘well, our QiP assessor says that…’

It strengthens providers’ arguments when challenging others who do not work to a playwork ethos. Similarly, several settings reported that Ofsted inspectors were made aware of the QiP portfolio as part of the inspection. One setting found that a lot of things that Ofsted required were in place because it had been required for the portfolio:

What was put in the report reflected the development of staff’s practice as a result of QiP, ie observations, play opportunities offered, and that helped us get a good Ofsted report.
Key lessons that emerged from the QiP process

At the conclusion of the interviews, settings were asked to comment on their overall perceptions of the QiP process.

Overall strengths of QiP

- The QiP process was helpful in improving play opportunities for children.
- Reflection on action helped staff view their practice differently.
- The collaborative method was good for improving team practice.

It ‘did what it said on the box’ – it improved play opportunities for children. One team was asked for the benefits of the QiP process, here is a summary of their views:

Staff and partners and children were involved, resulting in more play, more fun. Staff learnt much more, it boosted self esteem, and enhanced their creativity, increased confidence and assertiveness – an amazing journey for all.

A front line worker commented that:

The profile of play has risen in the area. Previously we did not present what we do enough, photos are useful to create records. Everything is a process.

Another worker in a different setting had a similar view:

It lifted the profile of play, city wide. It changed parental expectations of play, children’s expectations of play and staff team’s expectations of play. Staff now know they are there to facilitate play and have an observing role. It helped them offer more opportunities for risk taking in play.

A senior manager for the area added:

QiP helped raise the profile of play, so that it is valued and recognised as an important part of children’s development. For children, it has added to and improved the quality of their lives.

Many people said that QiP made them think about what they do, that the process was a chance to share good practice and be proud about what they were achieving. It was ‘training in action’ – involving people in developing policies and procedures made the work ‘a lot more real’ rather than simply receiving the material from supervisors and managers. QiP gave space and a process for support workers to use different approaches to engage people in a process that they may not otherwise willingly be involved in. Staff put it slightly differently:

QiP made us look at ourselves and our service. It helped us improve the service to be more child centred and with less contamination of the children’s play.

It validates our practice, and commits us to keeping up-to-date.

I think it has the potential to make you think about your practice; how to lay it out, the explanation of what you are doing to other people and the justification for why you do it.

[QiP] encouraged me to take off my parent/carer/accountable person’s hat, letting children have the opportunities I had as a child. I have gone back into my own childhood. It has given me a sense of excitement because I can offer these opportunities.

Some felt that QiP was a very good tool for linking training with practice; that simply teaching someone something does not show how it is going to work in practice:

The process of developing a file and collecting evidence was useful. We developed a deeper playwork ethos. There was reassurance that practice was good through positive feedback.
We were picked up on things and initially I thought: ‘urgh’, but they were things we hadn’t done or hadn’t thought of, and now we have done them, so that is good. We hadn’t gone down the playwork path enough.

But not alone, many people recognised that QiP was a collaborative effort and required the whole team and managers to be involved:

The team has to all be on the journey... and there has to be evidence of change, this needs to be demonstrated.

Everyone was involved in the development of QiP and we were always reflecting.

The systematic layout to QiP was a helpful way of organiseing playwork and making sense of the systems and mechanisms surrounding the playwork role. Those with experience of earlier versions of the standards commented on the changes:

The new QiP is a bit more comprehensive, more challenging, a bit more demanding. We use central team support. It is not a scheme you can do by yourself.

It is user friendly – the new version is less threatening and staff in our parent organisation are all committed to it.

Others spoke about the added value of QiP:

One of the strengths for me has been the ability to say on funding bids: 'we have QiP'. Some of the bigger trusts and foundations have asked: 'do you have a quality assurance certificate?' So it is very helpful to be able to say: 'yes.'

QiP is a useful system for guiding Ofsted, and it means that information does not need to be gleaned from scratch.

QiP shows to people outside what we do in our work.

Several users commented on the assessment process:

Having positive feedback was good.

I was pleasantly surprised, I felt able to say what I wanted rather than run to a script.

One practitioner noticed that the feedback loop was continuing:

It is also good to be able to talk about QiP [for this report] and be asked for our feedback on it.

And finally, practitioners summed up the process for many with their comments about the time and effort involved in producing the QiP portfolio:

The internal QA system didn’t have any real value, QiP has real weight. I do think it is a very useful tool in that it is trying to get recognition for play and playwork and that is important in our field I think.

Receiving accreditation was good; it reassured us that we were a good setting. It gave us a sense of achievement.

I enjoyed doing it and I liked the sense of achievement when it was done. It was a refresher.

Did I think it was a benefit to us? Ultimately I do. Would I encourage other people to do it? Yes, absolutely I would – I would love it to be more nationally recognised. Would I do it again? Yes. Would I do it differently? I think I would have tried to be more systematic and set time aside a day or week for the process.

What could be changed for the better?

- QiP worked better if approached positively
- The process itself needs to be subject to continuous evaluation and improvement
• Acceptance of QiP as the national playwork provision standard was regarded as important
• Consideration should be given to the cost of accreditation and its duration

As with any process, QiP is better for continuous reflection and evaluation. Users commented on the things they would like to see improved.

Some of the issues were personal motivation:

Getting past: ‘oh, we’ve got to do it’... the initial fear of it.
Portfolio building was difficult at times; meaty work and tight deadlines.
It does take a lot of time but it should always be there. It is no good if you can’t embed it into everything.

Quite a few users commented on the use of language in the QiP guidance:

Language in the new standards could be made easier to read and understand.
Use plain English, and provide a checklist of key points.

Some comments indicated the need for proper use of mentors, in that they were asking for more feedback during the process. One setting with multiple sites did not feel that the assessors saw them at their best and asked that assessors spend more time looking round sites.

And while several providers felt that QiP being located in Play England helped with recognition of the schemes, they would welcome some government agency endorsement of the standards as part of the national roll out.

Finally, while the comments on the whole were very positive, and those who had been through the process found it helpful, for some providers the £500 fee for an independent assessment was considered steep. One authority addressed that issue by requiring income generating services pay their own costs. A move to the accreditation lasting three years was considered helpful in providers seeing it as value for money.

Lapsed users

• Sites stopped using QiP because of circumstantial factors not because of a weakness in the tool
• Changes of personnel made it difficult to maintain internal support for the process
• Benefits were similar to those for sites still using QiP

To gain balance in the experience of users of the process, providers who had previously used QiP but who did not do so currently were interviewed. Staff on three sites and a support worker from the same local authority were interviewed.

The QiP process originally started in the borough in 2004 with three play centres working to develop portfolios and support one another through internal mentoring. The process was considered successful so it was rolled out to all centres in the area. The last assessment was carried out in July 2009 with six play centres. As in the Birmingham case study, when the process was operating, staff supported one another and shared materials through staff meetings and joint training.

It was stated that some staff were not keen on the process. Those who had done a portfolio for National Vocational Qualification found it easier to follow. Comments from workers suggested some of their views on the process:

Cross-referencing took the longest time. Preparing the folder was fine. The evidence existed but I felt we had to double up on everything – it felt a pointless exercise.
It’s a bit of work that provides proof for what we do with children.
Asked specifically about the time taken for the portfolio, views were varied across the teams:

It’s demanding on time, with some staff feeling it takes too long.

It’s ongoing, with lots of duplication.

Like Birmingham, this authority had worked without external mentoring support. The aim was for senior workers to understand the process then roll it out to all staff. Experiences in the team were diverse. Some reported good team interaction, while others felt they did not have the support they needed (especially staff who were working part time, 15 hours per week).

Those who had been through the assessment process commented that it was ‘excellent’ – though one site felt that an assessor’s experience of adventure play was inappropriate as the setting was an after-school club.

Even though the sites were no longer using QiP they felt that it had made a difference to their practice. As with the active sites, there were two types of responses – it validated existing practice, or it helped staff view their work through a playwork lens:

- We were doing most of it anyway, but it made us look at SPICE etc.
- Practice was always high, but we now review on a daily basis. It’s good for new staff.
- Our work has more impact and is more professional, more focused on what we should be doing for children. It has become more strongly focused on play and the quality of the environment.
- Teams are more focused after using QiP. It was used as a tool to help build good practice.

QiP contributed to helping children and young people have more of a voice through the establishment of a children’s committee in each setting:

- Children contribute ideas for the centre’s programme and through a suggestion box.
- We have a small budget for equipment that they help us spend.
- We get feedback as a team especially after consultation sessions with children. We recently introduced fruit and veg as healthy options for snacks and thought the kids would hate it, but the feedback has been good.

QiP was not considered influential on the providers’ organisational standards as all settings had to work to the local borough’s standards.

The process was acknowledged as contributing to improved engagement with providers in the wider community. Joint working had created more links with other providers in the area, resulting in joint local play briefings and shared leaflets. Like with the active sites, the QiP portfolio was useful for Ofsted inspectors who ‘seemed very impressed’ with the content.

Despite no longer using QiP, the lapsed sites had many good things to say about the tool:

- Preparing the portfolio helps you see the benefits of what you do, the amount of work you get done and the variety of things you do.
- It shows you where you are and what you might do in the future.
- As a working tool, it’s good. It is helpful to look back at practice and refresh it, linking play types to the programme.
- It’s based on the ‘playwork bible’, the Playwork Principles, and we use it as a standard for all providers in the area.

Their suggested improvements included minimising the need for cross-referencing in the portfolio, and giving a longer timescale for completion (which suggested some confusion between the requirements of QiP/Play England and local managers). Other comments highlighted local pressures in completing the information gathering:

- It’s time consuming and the content is confusing for some staff, especially part-time workers who do not have a lot of time to get around it.
The focus of the portfolio is on outdoor settings and many of ours are school based at inner-city settings – we can't answer all the points.

Finally, the lapsed sites were asked why they were no longer using the QiP system. A variety of elements seemed to combine to cause the lapse in accreditation. These were: a change of staffing support for the programme, the planned new version of the QiP system and the fact that the service was subject to budget cutbacks so people were questioning the cost of the assessment. With many settings, the £500 fee per site would be a large outlay for the whole authority.
Final comments

- Play England commissioned this evaluation to assess the impact of QiP on:
  - providers’ practice and the quality of provision for children’s play
  - organisational standards for the provider
  - the engagement of providers with the wider community
  - the influence QiP had for play providers in working with funding bodies, inspectors and other agencies.

This was done by interviewing and visiting active and lapsed providers using the case study method.

- Thirteen varied settings were consulted for the evaluation, with views collected from practitioners, management members and support agencies
- Active and lapsed users of QiP were visited and interviewed

Thirteen different settings were involved in the research, from different geographical locations and with different forms of management and support. A total of 29 individuals were interviewed for their views of the process and the difference it made to the provider’s practice and to children’s play. Most settings were still active in the QiP assessment, though three sites that no longer used the scheme were contacted for their views on the process. There was remarkable consistency in the comments across the sites and areas.

In conclusion, two main views were reported by participants to the effect that QiP had made a difference to their practice:

1. The first was that QiP had validated current practice and highlighted areas where settings could make improvements in order to work towards good practice.
2. The second was that it had led to a wholesale review of providers’ practice and had led to changes on the ground that had fundamentally improved children’s access to freely chosen play opportunities.

These conclusions will be explained below. First there will be a discussion on the theoretical views that support these claims on the benefits from QiP.

Playwork theories underpinning QiP

QiP has a number of playwork perspectives that underpin the standards and approach. It is therefore understandable that playwork practitioners feel that the QiP approach validates their practice.

These playwork perspectives are as follows:

- The playing child is at the centre of the process, and should have more influence on the play environment and the organisational framework than they do on the child (Lester and Russell, 2004, *Manchester Circles* (an adaptation of Bronfenbrenner’s ecology of human development, 1979)).
- Access and inclusion – ‘all children’ means exactly what it says; play provision should be fully accessible and inclusive. Play providers need to have a shared understanding of what prevents or discourages children and young people from participating in play opportunities.
- The *Playwork Principles* establish the professional ethical framework for playwork; they aim to describe what is unique about playwork. The eight principles define play and describe the focus of playwork and the role of the playworker (see Appendix 4).
- Play types (Hughes 1996, 2002, 2006) describe the play behaviours that may be seen in playing children. A quality play environment offers the possibility for engaging
in all the play types but it is for children to decide whether and when they want to engage in them.

- Play and the natural environment – Lester and Maudsley (2006) have shown that children’s desire to be in a natural environment is linked to their physical and mental health; the more diverse, dynamic and flexible features there are in natural environments, the more opportunities or ‘affordances’ for play there will be.

- The theory of loose parts (Nicholson, 1971) explained how the ‘bits and pieces’ lying around environments often make them more creative and challenging for children.

- The play cycle (Sturrock and Else, 1998) described how when playing, children decide on the focus, scale and manner of their play, communicating this to others in subtle or sometimes very obvious ways. Understanding the elements of the play cycle helps playworkers support playing children.

- Play as an approach to activity was explained by Bruner (1966) as not a different activity but a way of approaching an activity – sport can be ordered or playful, painting can be methodical or playful, eating can be playful.

- Playable space is a concept that aims to help adults think about the spaces that children use for play. Play is a legitimate use of many spaces, whether they are designated play areas or not.Playable space is useful in helping adults consider the factors that may make a space more play-friendly.

By requiring settings to provide evidence consistent with these perspectives, QiP is building upon ‘received wisdom’ in the field, so helping practitioners validate their playwork methods.

**Developing reflective practice**

In playwork, the plan-do-review cycle has long been adopted. There are other approaches that demonstrate the benefits of developing reflective practice (eg Argyris and Schön 1974, Gibbs 1988, Johns 1994) yet this is the model that has been adopted in playwork. It is a simplified version of Kolb’s learning cycle (1984), which states that four activities are needed for learning to be successful and integrated into practice (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3 – Reflective practice**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Doing</th>
<th>Concrete experience – full involvement in carrying out an activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reviewing</td>
<td>Reflective observation – looking objectively at that activity and reflecting on what happened, with feedback from others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Abstract conceptualisations – thinking about the activity in terms of logical theory that is understood by the reflector, so that ownership of the activity develops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>Active experimentation – where those theories are tested by application to new problems</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This method is apparent in QiP where providers are asked to collect evidence showing what they did and how it links to the key standards. It was clear from the views collected that many practitioners found this process invaluable, as part of the positive learning journey taken by their teams and themselves.

The benefits of reflective practice in playwork have been discussed at length by Hughes (2001) and Palmer (2003).

Hughes introduced playworkers to reflective analytical practice with this challenge to both individuals and the field: ‘Unless we begin, what will inevitably be a difficult and demanding personal and professional journey, playwork will remain an intellectually impoverished discipline’ (Hughes 2001 p182).
Palmer, in her work on reflective practice emphasised that: ‘Reflective practice cannot be taught and is something that some people either have or do not have (Palmer 2003 p190).

These ideas build on the work of Rogers (1969) and an approach to person-centred learning, focusing on the needs of the individual rather than those of systems or society. Rogers argued that an openness to experience, creativity and freedom of choice were key elements for individuals in making sense of their world; characteristics that are reminiscent of Playwork Principle 2 (see Appendix 4).

Argyris and Schön made clear the distinction between what we say we do (espoused theory) and what we actually do (theory-in-use):

When someone is asked how they would behave under certain circumstances, the answer they usually give is their espoused theory of action for that situation. This is the theory of action to which they give allegiance, and which, upon request, they communicate to others. However, the theory that actually governs their actions is this theory-in-use (after Argyris and Schön 1974: 6–7).

They stated that the key to full understanding was the conscious link between the two states; a link that reflective practice helps reveal to the practitioner, and helps them recognise where their thinking is different to good practice. Schön (1983) later added to this work and made the distinction between thinking about practice while doing it (‘reflection in action’) and thinking about practice afterwards (reflection on action). These concepts strongly underpin Playwork Principles 6 and 7 (see Appendix 4).

These theories help explain the light bulb moments that some practitioners described, when the model or paradigm that they had been using was seen to be inadequate to describe the actions of children playing in settings, and practitioners’ thinking became more playwork focused.

Team working

A significant factor in the implementation of QiP is the requirement to adopt a team-based approach to portfolio preparation. While beyond the scope of this paper, the characteristics of introducing change – whether personal, individual or organisational – have been discussed extensively in the management literature. Close and Raynor (2010) summarise many of these views (see Figure 4). When speaking about leadership skills, Close and Raynor argue that an understanding of the ways of thinking, or traditions, is necessary to critique and develop ideas.

Figure 4 – Five literatures of organisation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ways of thinking</th>
<th>Organisational focus</th>
<th>Team role</th>
<th>Change themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thinking rationally</td>
<td>Plans and structures</td>
<td>Architect, analyst</td>
<td>Linear steps, lines of accountability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinking psychologically</td>
<td>Support and participation</td>
<td>Coach, facilitator</td>
<td>Personal transition and resistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinking culturally</td>
<td>Meanings and routines</td>
<td>Visionary, storyteller</td>
<td>Role modelling, interpretation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinking politically</td>
<td>Power and influence</td>
<td>Negotiator, advocate</td>
<td>Establishing legitimacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinking paradoxically</td>
<td>Complex responsive processes</td>
<td>Designer and co-author</td>
<td>Ensemble improvisation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Close and Raynor 2010, after Bolman and Deal 2003 and Shaw 2002)

In the context of playwork, given its focus on playing children and their supporting environments, many processes are emergent, self-organising and constantly evolving. They are often uncertain and paradoxical – stable and unstable, predictable and unpredictable, known and unknown all at the same time. This suggests a process of ‘ensemble
improvisation’, where staff teams are designers and co-authors of processes, rather than architects or managers with a set plan.

This view is supported by Uhl-Bien and others (2007) who state that rational, ‘top-down control (ie administrative leadership) can hamper the effective functioning of... systems’. Clearly the introduction of QiP may start as an administrative task, yet as shown in the data, those practitioners who embraced the process and made it their own, enjoyed the process more and made greater connections in their work. The work was no longer top-down as it had been undertaken for its own sake and for the rewards that staff teams identified within it. Conversely, those teams who reacted to it as an imposed task experienced it more negatively and mainly identified the functional elements of the process.

A summary of the key findings from the evaluation is shown below.

Positive impact and added value of QiP

The QiP process was considered a positive use of time and resources by most respondents. Some practitioners felt that the process captured the good practice that was already present in the setting. Preparing the portfolio helped them see the amount and the variety of work done and the benefits of what they did for children. Many staff reported that organisationally, things had improved as result of using QiP.

- QiP helped change staff’s approach to work with children

Practitioners had changed their practice and their mind sets; the offer to children had changed and staff were offering play opportunities rather than a programme of activities.

- The process developed staff and gave them evidence to show others the benefits of their work
- QiP helped staff offer more and varied play opportunities for children

One service stated that QiP reinforced their resolve to try and explain play theory to their staff. Play theory highlighted the importance of what the service was for and gave providers an understanding of why children need play. As a consequence, they wanted children to experience things they had not done before, but in an environment where staff knew when to step back if they were not needed.

- The process of continuous reflection and improvement added value inside the setting and wider afield

Settings reported how the change in practice helped build strong community networks, such as a local play forum and a detached play team. Skills and ideas had been shared with different sites.

- QiP helped staff improve through individual and team reflection
- The reflection helped with the expansion of play-based practice

Many sites used log books and diaries to record incidents and staff responses. Many organised formal or informal end-of-day and end-of-scheme evaluations. Staff were encouraged to make notes of their thoughts and observations throughout the day to discuss at staff meetings. One site commented that the introduction of QiP had helped staff make notes with a focus on playwork practice.

- QiP helped staff think about how to make all the children and young people welcome

The QiP process helped sites improve their approach to providing a supportive play environment that was welcoming, caring, stimulating, respectful, and inclusive.

- Children’s and young people’s views were important and practice reflected their needs and wants
- Varied methods and techniques were used for hearing children’s and young people’s views

A journey, not a destination: Improving quality in play | 32
Many settings visited had examples of children’s views on the walls. Evidence of their involvement in activities was shown. Several settings had a children’s committee, in which children discussed any issues they wanted to raise such as things that they were not enjoying, or things they would like more of.

- Settings had a clear statement about play provision
- Often that statement was a service or district wide policy or strategy

Many settings in this study had a clear written statement of their commitment to play provision, some individual to the setting, though many had a localised play policy or play strategy that they supported or followed.

- The process helped staff collect appropriate evidence of their work

All the sites interviewed provided evidence and varied examples of reflective practice. Some believed that the approach was one they had always been using. Others realised that it was a necessary change brought about as a requirement of preparing the QiP portfolio.

- The process helped staff record and implement changes

Some changes were immediate, others more long term. Immediate changes included day-to-day events and opportunities that staff portrayed as part of good playwork practice. More medium term changes included the introduction of new items of equipment or the identification of new services.

- QiP was used as the authority-wide playwork standard for some districts
- The standard was used to help create service change

In a few cases, QiP had become the recognised playwork standard for the whole district. When used across a district, it was found that standards in the district were raised through the added benefits of sharing knowledge and experience, finding joint solutions to common problems and by pooling resources such as mentor support and training. In one borough, the QiP standard was adopted by a funding agency as a requirement for settings to use in their practice.

**Advocating playwork principles and approaches**

- QiP helped the team to challenge others’ perceptions about play
- The QiP process was useful for validating and supporting a community-based approach to playwork

Looking at how using QiP had changed the way the setting worked with funders, inspectors, and other agencies, workers said that it helped the arguments they were making to other agencies. Improved engagement with providers in the wider community was demonstrated at practice, management and support levels for many settings.

- The QiP process was helpful in improving play opportunities for children
- By going through the QiP process some staff changed their work style with children
- QiP helped staff become familiar with playwork terminology and processes, such as playwork intervention styles

With regard to a playwork approach or playwork ethos, QiP was reported time and again, and with great passion to have made a significant difference in practice to individuals, their teams, to children and in one case a whole authority. Individuals stated how their attitudes had been changed as a result of being required to demonstrate reflective practice. Those who had embraced the process described how ‘the light bulb was switched on’ for them, or how they had been on a ‘learning journey of team understanding’.

- The quality of local provision was fundamentally changed
- The portfolio helped settings collate and evaluate the wider impact of their work
Playworkers and their colleagues reported many benefits for children, staff, setting and the wider community. These included additional play opportunities, better quality of work, more fun, good use of time and more play opportunities in the wider community, such as increased events and mobile or detached work with a playwork approach.

- The QiP portfolio helped providers identify and record the policies and standards that impacted on their setting
- The evidence collected was useful for funders and inspectors (such as Ofsted)

External requirements for inspection and policy varied tremendously, as did the variety of informal standards that settings used in their work. This variety was dependant on the nature of the site. However, the QiP portfolio was useful to providers in bringing those requirements together in one place to make sense of them and to help answer questions that arose from inspection or policy agencies.

**Common factors for getting the best out of QiP**

- QiP worked better if approached positively
- A systematic approach with planned support was most valuable
- The first time through the process was the hardest to undertake and became easier with experience

Many staff considered QiP to be additional work at first, though it was also useful evidence for funders and inspectors – and for building staff confidence in their practice; what they were doing and why. The process was better if treated as one for continual improvement; it was easier and better the second time around. Staff who had experience of other quality assurance systems and portfolio building found the process relatively easy to complete. Those teams that approached the task in a functional manner often spoke more negatively of the process and did not get as many benefits from it.

- The QiP process was challenging at first, though easier where a team-based approach was adopted
- Additional benefits and support to teams were identified and resourced

In completing the portfolio, many considered that a team approach worked best, building relationships both internally and externally. Crucially, the team needed to make time for the process and a systematic approach was better than adopting a one-off/last minute attitude. Mentoring support, whether internal or external to the setting, was considered vital as long as it was high quality. Those agencies, local authority or voluntary sector, which had taken a ‘whole system’ approach, had found QiP more valuable and easier to implement. Such an approach helped staff work together to solve common problems and generate materials that other teams found useful. Common standards were set that everyone – staff, support agencies and funders, could work towards.

- Reflection on action helped staff view their practice differently
- The collaborative method was good for improving team practice

QiP was training in action. Involving people in developing policies and procedures made the work more relevant than simply receiving the material from supervisors and managers. This activity is an example of what Mezirow (1977) described as 'reframing', where the individual comes to realise that their activity is not the only way to do actions and that new approaches can be used or borrowed from others. QiP gave space and a process for supporting workers to use different approaches to engage people in a process that they may not otherwise willingly be involved in.

**Lessons and challenges**

With one or two differences, most practitioners were clear in their opinions that QiP had not influenced general organisational standards, such as financial systems, recruitment or other common standards that were in place before the process was used. Those standards were seen as well established and that QiP encouraged staff to reflect on them, some staff (for
example those in large organisations or agencies) felt unable to change the organisational standards.

- Sites stopped using QiP because of circumstantial factors not because of a weakness in the tool

It was reported that QiP had made a difference to all sites that used it, even those that felt it was a bureaucratic requirement. The process of continual reflection supported by evidence made the portfolio useful for a variety of reasons. However time, resources and support were vital to helping complete and maintain the process. Changes of personnel made it difficult to maintain support for the process in some areas.

**Recommendations for improving QiP**

- The process itself needs to be subject to continuous evaluation and improvement

The improvements on the QiP process over the years were welcomed by users, and to contribute to the next version they offered the following comments:

- Use clear direct language to explain key requirements, and provide a checklist of key points to help staff implement the standard
- Create cross-referencing guides to avoid duplication of work or documentation
- Time requirements should be clarified for portfolio development and assessment to help with work planning and support
- Assessor and mentor time should be increased where possible and practical
- Consideration should be given to the cost of accreditation and its duration
- Acceptance of QiP as the national playwork provision standard was regarded as important

Overall, QiP was considered to offer considerable added value to settings and was well worth the time and effort required (and the £500 cost of assessments). The benefits were greatest for those settings that fully subscribed to the quality assessment process and were prepared to reflect whole-heartedly on their practice and on themselves.
Appendices

Appendix 1: Outline of questions for sites using QiP


Outline of questions for sites using QiP

The overall aim of this evaluation was to assess the impact of Quality in Play (QiP) on:
- providers’ practice and the quality of provision for children’s play
- organisational standards for the provider
- the engagement of providers with the wider community
- the influence QiP had for play providers in working with funding bodies, inspectors and other agencies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date:</th>
<th>Participant:</th>
<th>Role:</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Setting practitioner</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Representative of management team</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Parent and user</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Funder, inspector/other agencies</td>
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Researcher: Setting:

Evaluation Key Questions QiP Current Users

The questions I’d like to cover are these:

- The overall aim of the evaluation is to assess the impact of QiP on:
  - When did you complete your QiP assessment?
  - Would you outline your experience of the QiP process and how were you involved?
  - Could you comment on:
    - The process?
    - The time taken?
    - The support from your mentor and assessors?
  - How has practice changed as a result of using QiP?

- Practice and the quality of provision for children’s play
  - How do children and young people have a real say in what you provide?
  - How do you support individual and team reflection?
  - What examples do you have of inclusive communication?
  - What has been the impact on the quality of provision for children's play as a result of using QiP?
  - What format is your written statement of your commitment to play provision?
  - Please give examples of how the environment is welcoming, caring, stimulating, respectful, and inclusive?
  - What have you done in the last year to increase the range of diverse and flexible play opportunities?

- Organisational
  - How has QiP influenced the provider’s organisational standards?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>standards for the provider</th>
<th>How do you demonstrate that resources are managed effectively, efficiently and ethically?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What are your staff systems? Would you give us a few examples? recruitment/induction/supervision/appraisal/reflective practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What legal, regulatory and statutory requirements do you operate to?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What non statutory guidance and standards do you also use?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What key lessons emerged from the QiP process for you?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The engagement of providers with the wider community</th>
<th>Could you give us some examples of improved engagement with providers in the wider community, in say the last year?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How do you engage families and the wider community in your work?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Could you give us some examples of any additional benefits there have been for children's play in the wider community in the last year?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The influence it has had for play providers in working with funding bodies, inspectors and other agencies.</th>
<th>How has using QiP changed the way the setting works with:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Funders?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inspectors?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other agencies?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Could you give us some examples of how the status of play with stakeholders has been improved by using QiP?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Finally</th>
<th>Overall, what were the strengths of QiP? And what could be changed for the better?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anything else you’d like to ask or add?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Thank you for your time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A summary report will be available from Play England in August 2010</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Permission**

I hereby give permission for:

- my comments to be used in the final research report
- my voice to be recorded for research purposes only
- my image to be used in the final research report only.

I understand that should I choose to do so my permission may be withdrawn at any time up to the production of the final report.

Signed:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date:</th>
<th>Participant:</th>
<th>Role:</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Funder, inspector/other agencies</td>
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</table>

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<tr>
<th>Researcher:</th>
<th>Setting:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

It would be helpful to view a sample of documentary evidence showing the impact QiP has had in your setting. Examples may include:

- reports from before and after the QiP assessment
- reviews from before and after the QiP assessment
- portfolio evidence for the QiP assessment
- photos from before and after the QiP assessment
- consultation with children/young people.

**Appendix 2: Comparison between versions of QiP**

This table shows the criteria by which settings were judged through the QiP process. The table suggests where comparisons between the two versions may be made.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QiP 2008 (version 4)</th>
<th>QiP 1999 (version 3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children’s freedom and control</td>
<td>Choice and range of activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The physical play environment</td>
<td>Opening times and days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicating effectively</td>
<td>Information, notices and displays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear play aims and values</td>
<td>Clear aims, objectives and values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project and resource management</td>
<td>Working with the management committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Project management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Financial management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Resource management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Keeping on top of the administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The human play environment</td>
<td>Equalities and inclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Behavioural boundaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workforce development</td>
<td>Staff and volunteers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Qualifications, training, professional development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflective playwork practice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working in the community</td>
<td>Working with families and the community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The law and regulation</td>
<td>Personal and physical health and safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The bigger picture</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix 3: Playwork terms or processes used in the text

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term or process</th>
<th>Explanation and further information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adulteration</td>
<td>As explained in the ‘Colorado Paper’ (Sturrock and Else 1998), in playwork this is the term for what occurs when the adult dominates or takes over a child’s play for their own purposes, whether those purposes are conscious (working to educational or safety standards) or unconscious (fear, embarrassment, domination). See also Playwork Principles 7 and 8 – Appendix 4. <a href="http://www.ludemos.co.uk/Psycholudics.htm">www.ludemos.co.uk/Psycholudics.htm</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Adventure play  | ‘An adventure playground can be described as a space dedicated solely to children’s play, where skilled playworkers enable and facilitate the ownership, development and design of that space – physically, socially and culturally – by the children playing there.

‘The indoor and outdoor area is enclosed by a boundary which signals that the space within is dedicated to children’s play and that activities such as digging, making fires or building and demolishing dens – activities not normally condoned in other spaces where children play – are provided for and encouraged.’

| Aiming Higher   | Aiming Higher is 4Children’s quality assurance framework for all childcare settings and integrated centres for young people within the 0–19 age range. [www.4children.org.uk/whatwedo/view/node/160](http://www.4children.org.uk/whatwedo/view/node/160) |
| Best Play       | *Best Play - What play provision should do for children* (2000) is the title of a report that set out the benefits of play for children, as well as the consequences of inadequate play provision. Commissioned by a partnership between the National Playing Fields Association, PLAYLINK and the Children’s Play Council, *Best Play* was in part a response to the challenge issued by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport for the play sector to work together to develop a statement of the benefits which are derived from play and play provision.

*Best Play* provided a focus for the play sector and helped support the arguments for an increase in play provision and the development of standards that Play England was created to deliver. |
| Change4Life     | This is a national programme sponsored by the National Health Service aimed at helping people and especially children, to eat better, be more active and so improve their quality of life. [www.nhs.uk/change4life/Pages/Default.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/change4life/Pages/Default.aspx) |
  
There are two key aims of the charter:  

- ‘The *Charter for Children’s Play* sets out a vision for play and aims to be a catalyst for individuals and organisations to examine, review and improve their provision for children’s and young people’s play and informal recreation.’  
  
- ‘The charter may also serve as a guide and framework to all those involved in developing, revising and implementing play strategies.’  
  
| Colorado Paper, The | The Colorado Paper is the informal title by which the paper *The playground as therapeutic space: playwork as healing* (Sturrock and Else 1998) is generally known. It was the introduction of psycholudics – the study of the mind and psyche at play – to a wide audience. The Colorado Paper states that play of itself is a therapeutic process for those playing and that play is of fundamental importance to human development and not just diversion from ‘more important’ activities.  
  
This paper first brought into the public arena the following key terms: play cues, play returns, play frames, ludic ecology, the metalude, play drive or ludido, playwork containment, dysplay, play adulteration, contamination, playwork authenticity, playwork interventions.  
  
[www.ludemos.co.uk/COLFULLa4%20final%2007.pdf](http://www.ludemos.co.uk/COLFULLa4%20final%2007.pdf) |
| Contamination | Contamination in play occurs when the children’s freely chosen play is affected adversely by the actions or comments of others (usually adults). Contamination may occur through concerns about safety, expected compliance with cultural norms or through an attempt to guide or teach the child how to play or behave.  
  
  
Sturrock G and Else P (1998) *The playground as therapeutic space: playwork as healing* (see above) |
| Early Years Foundation Stage | Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) was introduced in 2008 under the Labour Government. It was based on the principle that children learn through play and states that ‘in their play children learn at their highest level’.  
  
All providers working with young children (from birth to 31 August following the child’s fifth birthday) were expected to deliver the EYFS, unless exempted. Providers were expected to adhere to welfare requirements including having a designated safeguarding lead, making arrangements to register children, identify key workers, have suitable premises, comply with staffing ratios and training/qualification requirements and ensure that the children do not leave the setting unaccompanied by an adult.  
  
Many in the playwork sector felt that this requirement was fundamentally compromised by the philosophy as expressed in the Playwork Principles.  
  
[www.skillsactive.com/playwork/early_years_foundation_stage](http://www.skillsactive.com/playwork/early_years_foundation_stage) |
First Claim

First Claim a framework for playwork quality assessment ‘aims to enable playworkers, and any other adults with an interest in children’s play, to analyse, by observation and reflection, the play environments they operate.’

First Claim, developed by Bob Hughes working with Play Wales, is a comprehensive tool to help workers examine their own practice.

www.chwaraecymru.org.uk/page.asp?id=51

Intervention styles

Playwork theory suggests that an adult in a play space always affects children’s play, so reflective practitioners should be aware of their impact on the play of children. Intervention styles may vary from very subtle observations, through simple or complex support to full intervention in the play in order to prevent harm to the child or others. See also Playwork Principles 7 and 8 – Appendix 4.

www.ludemos.co.uk/Psycholudics.htm

KIDS

KIDS is a charity that supports approaches and programmes for disabled children and young people. These include home learning (portege), parent partnerships, adventure playgrounds and the inclusion of disabled children in mainstream settings.

www.kids.org.uk/information/100140/about_us/

Loose parts

Simon Nicholson described ‘loose parts’ as the things that we can move around or change in an environment – and said that ‘the more flexible an environment, the greater the level of creativity and inventiveness that it supports.’


National Vocational Qualification

National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) are based on national occupational standards, statements of performance that describe what competent people in a particular occupation are expected to be able to do. For playwork there are NVQs at levels 2 and 3.

www.skillsactive.com/qualifications/vocational_qualifications

Play builders, play pathfinders

These are the names of funding programmes which were created from 2008–2011 to deliver £235m of government investment in play with the aim of ‘transforming local areas into innovative and adventurous play spaces.’

www.playengland.org.uk/our-work/playbuilders-and-play-pathfinders

Play cues

The play cue is a signal the child gives that they want to play. This cue may be spoken, eye contact, a body signal or by the use of materials. The play cue comes from the thoughts of the child, their internal world, into the physical world in the expectation of getting a response. A child kicking a ball towards you is a play cue; you are expected to kick it back. Picking up a paintbrush, singing a song, and starting a conversation could all be play cues.

Children invite participation by other children or adults in their play by communicating feelings, thoughts and intentions. Cues may not always be positive in effect.

See also Playwork Principle 6 – Appendix 4.

www.ludemos.co.uk/Psycholudics.htm
Play environments

Given that children can and do play everywhere, in playwork the term play environments describes those spaces specially set aside or created for children and young people to play in. These include public parks, designed public play grounds, nursery and school playgrounds, adventure playgrounds, indoor play spaces and urban areas such as city centres and streets.

When facilitating opportunities for playing, adults can support or constrain play by manipulation of the physical elements and by their behaviours in the space.

See also Playwork Principle 5 – Appendix 4.

Play rangers

Play rangers are a mobile workforce that operates usually in parks and open spaces to ensure that all children have access to safe and challenging play opportunities. Some authorities call their ranger teams ‘detached teams’ or ‘play wardens’.

Play types

Play types have been described as the different behaviours that we see when children are playing. Examples include locomotor play, social play, and imaginative play. Catalogued by Bob Hughes, a full list of play types is described in ‘A Playworker’s Taxonomy of Play Types’ (second edition 2002). Available from Play Education, 13 Castelhythe, Ely, CB7 4BU

See also Playwork Principle 6 – Appendix 4.

Playwork Principles

The Playwork Principles provide a professional and ethical framework for playwork. A full list of the Principles is included at Appendix 4.

Written by the Playwork Principles Scrutiny Group in 2005, there are eight principles that ‘describe what is unique about play and playwork, and provide the playwork perspective for working with children and young people’.

www.playwales.org.uk/page.asp?id=50

SPICE

SPICE is one of several ways of remembering different aspects of children’s development – it stands for Social, Physical, Intellectual, Creative, Emotional opportunities. Other mnemonics include PIES, Physical, Intellectual, Creative, Social, or PC SMILES Physical, Cultural, Spiritual, Moral, Intellectual, Language, Emotional, Social. These systems say more about the users of the tool, in that it is significant what is included in, and what is left out of, each tool.

Appendix 4: Playwork Principles 2005

These principles establish the professional and ethical framework for playwork and as such must be regarded as a whole.

They describe what is unique about play and playwork, and provide the playwork perspective for working with children and young people.

They are based on the recognition that children’s and young people’s capacity for positive development will be enhanced if given access to the broadest range of environments and play opportunities.

1. All children and young people need to play. The impulse to play is innate. Play is a biological, psychological and social necessity, and is fundamental to the healthy development and well being of individuals and communities.

2. Play is a process that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. That is, children and young people determine and control the content and intent of their play, by following their own instincts, ideas and interests, in their own way for their own reasons.

3. The prime focus and essence of playwork is to support and facilitate the play process and this should inform the development of play policy, strategy, training and education.

4. For playworkers, the play process takes precedence and playworkers act as advocates for play when engaging with adult led agendas.

5. The role of the playworker is to support all children and young people in the creation of a space in which they can play.

6. The playworker’s response to children and young people playing is based on a sound up-to-date knowledge of the play process, and reflective practice.

7. Playworkers recognise their own impact on the play space and also the impact of children’s and young people’s play on the playworker.

8. Playworkers choose an intervention style that enables children and young people to extend their play. All playworker intervention must balance risk with the developmental benefit and well being of children.


www.playwales.org.uk/page.asp?id=50
Appendix 5: Those involved in the project

Sites involved

- Cloverlea Play Centre, Birmingham
- Calthorpe Park Play Centre, Birmingham
- Sara Park Play Centre, Birmingham
- Stray Cats Holiday Club, Wakefield
- Starburst Holiday Club, Wakefield
- SPLASH Play, Tower Hamlets, London
- KIDS Lady Allen Adventure Playground, Wandsworth, London
- KIDS Hackney Adventure Playground, Clapton, London
- The Log Cabin, Ealing, London
- King Henlys Walk Adventure Playground, London
- Park Walk Play Centre, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, London
- Barlby Play Centre, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, London
- St Clement and St James Play Centre, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, London

People interviewed

Alison Callixte
Beverley Carroll
Claira Scott-Gray
Claire Crabtree
Daniel Yapp
Eleanor Image
Foster Darby
Graham Brayson
Graham Gault
Hilary Kerr
Ian Logan
Janette Neil
Jeff Wilsher
John Hancock
John Singleton

Julian Danquah
Kelda Lyons
Khalid Sadiq
Kimberley Lynch
Kimberley Williams-Ratajsk
Mohima Kamaly
Pete Hobbs
Rashta Butt
Riley Taggart
Rose Jewkes
Sarah Cooper
Sharon Thompson
Tara Morrell
Vivien Dymock

Play England staff involved

Sue Coates
Annie Hunter-Wade

Steve Close
Steve Chown
References


A journey, not a destination: Evaluating the impact of Quality in Play

An evaluation report by Ludemos for Play England

Written by Perry Else with Julia Sexton and Eddie Nuttall

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