



## An overview of playwork qualifications in the UK

*Changes to the regulatory framework and a steep decline in services have led to a fragmented landscape for playwork training and qualifications in the UK. Here, Ali Wood of the Playwork Foundation attempts to clarify the picture in each of the four home nations.*

### England

Since September 2014, there has no longer been a statutory requirement for out of school clubs and holiday playschemes registered on the Ofsted Early Years Register to employ staff with 'full and relevant' childcare or playwork qualifications. Providers who only take children over-8 years, or which are open access, have never been required to register (although they may do so voluntarily if they wish).

Together with the effect in England of cuts to local authority play services across, which in many places have been withdrawn altogether, this has meant that, despite the needs and wishes of the playwork sector - playworkers, playwork employers and commissioners - for trained and qualified staff, there is now very little funding for playwork qualifications.

Additionally, the funding available for playwork training providers has been for playwork apprenticeships, with the majority of smaller centres not eligible for it unless subcontracted by larger providers. Thus, a big proportion of the few larger centres or colleges that do offer playwork apprenticeships have often recruited trainers and assessors either not occupationally competent in playwork or with no experience of working to the Playwork Principles, or both. This has been difficult to challenge, as awarding bodies have not always supported external quality assurers who question centre staff's competence.

The government is currently introducing more funding for apprenticeships through its Apprenticeship Levy, and awarding organisations are currently considering development of future playwork apprenticeships. Groups of playwork employers are currently making the case for the development of playwork apprenticeships to:

- a) Enable playwork employers to access apprenticeships;
- b) Develop the skills needed for quality playwork provision;
- c) Clarify what the playwork apprenticeships should cover; and
- d) Reinforce that they need to be delivered by trainers and assessors that are occupationally competent in playwork.

## Northern Ireland

Here, out of school clubs and holiday playschemes for children under 12 are required to register with their local Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts, who are responsible for registering and inspecting all services with responsibility for children in sessional or full day care against the requirements laid down in the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995. The Minimum Standards for Child-minding and Day Care for Children Under Age 12 were developed to clarify the requirements contained in the legislation. The implementation guide for these standards can be read [here](#).

All registered settings are required to have a Play Policy. The Play Policy should be underpinned by the Playwork Principles and recognise children's capacity for development through play.

All leaders must have a current Safeguarding and Child Protection Certificate. If this is not the case, this must be achieved as part of the induction process and within one month of appointment. If the Leader is the Designated Child Protection Officer, evidence of certificated training must be in place prior to commencing duties.

The following qualifications have been agreed by DoH as those that meet the requirements for the Person in Charge/Leader and Deputy Leader role Out of School Clubs role:

- BA Hons Degree in Early Childhood Studies, or Degree level qualification in Early Years or Playwork;
- QCF level 5 Diploma in Children's Care Learning and Development (Management) Wales/NI QCF;
- QCF Level 5 Diploma in Playwork QCF;

*or*

- a relevant occupational qualification in early years' education, social work, nursing, youth work, teaching or health visiting;

*and*

- 2 years' experience working in a play, education, youth or day care setting. Volunteer experience can be included providing it is with the same age group relevant to the setting.

All staff and volunteers working directly with children must complete a minimal three-hour, face-to-face, formal certificated Safeguarding/Child Protection course every three years. (It is currently a requirement of the Safeguarding Board of Northern Ireland that training must be face to face). All staff and volunteers must have a valid Safeguarding/Child Protection certificate at all times.

All group-based services must have at least one person identified as a Designated Officer for Safeguarding. In full day care this should be a member of staff. In sessional care this should be a named individual. Designated officers must have a current certificate for Designated Officer Training valid for three years. All managers must have a current Safeguarding and Child Protection Certificate. If this is not the case, this must be achieved as part of the induction process and within one month of appointment. If the Manager is the Designated Child Protection

Officer, evidence of certificated training must be in place prior to commencing duties.

Leaders or supervisors should have at least a qualification at QCF Level 3 Diploma in Child Care, Learning and Development or Playwork. Where staff members in any setting have previously attained Level 2, 3 or 5 NVQ qualifications in Playwork or Early Years Care and Education, this will be an acceptable alternative to QCF Diplomas.

Where staff members in any settings have previously attained Level 2, 3 or 5 NVQ qualifications in Playwork or Early Years Care and Education, this will be an acceptable alternative to the QCF Diplomas. 50% of all staff must hold at least a level 2 qualification. Staff members are, however, encouraged to progress their knowledge and skills through continuous professional development, which may be attained by both short courses and accredited qualifications. The Transitional Award in Playwork is also available for those already qualified with a level 3 CCLD.

Most qualifications are self-funded, although means tested grants are available at Level 3 and Level 5 to those who do not hold a qualification at the same, or higher level. One college offers full-time Level 2 and Level 3 courses, so these are free as long as students attend 3 mornings a week and either have, or will complete, either GCSE Maths and English, or an Essential Skills Level 2 in Numeracy and Literacy. Some funding is available at all levels through bursaries or local community funds. Some training organisations offer Playwork at Level 2 under the 'Training for Success' programme.

## Wales

The Care and Social Services Inspectorate for Wales (CSSIW) has National Minimum Standards for Regulated Childcare in Wales, covering settings providing for children up to age 12. The leader in charge must have at least a level 3 qualification recognised by the Care Council for Wales' through its current list of Accepted Qualifications for the Early Years and Childcare Workforce in Wales or Skillsactive's Integrated Qualification Framework for Playwork. At least 50% of the rest of the staff must have at least a recognised Level 2 qualification.

In 2015, a Level 3 Award in Managing a Holiday Play Scheme (MAHPS) was developed by Play Wales. This provides a qualification that has been added to the SkillsActive List of Required Qualifications to work within the Playwork Sector in Wales, *specifically for persons in charge of a holiday play scheme*. Where the person in charge of a holiday playscheme does not hold a Level 3 Playwork qualification, but does hold another relevant qualification at level 3 (e.g. youth work, teaching, childcare), gaining the MAHPS award meets the requirements for registration. In the first instance this was envisaged as an interim qualification. However, discussions are continuing with a view to removing the current time constraint.

This award was developed because a significant proportion of holiday play providers were experiencing difficulties in meeting the qualification requirements set out in the NMS for the Person in Charge holding a level 3 Playwork qualification. These difficulties in accessing qualified staff have contributed to a reduction in registered holiday play provision and concerns remain about further loss of provision.

Several years ago, Play Wales also developed - at levels 2 and 3 - Awards, Certificates and Diplomas in Playwork Principles into Practice (P<sup>3</sup>), including

substantial materials for learners. It has however been a challenge in recent years to deliver these, due to funding arrangements that favour the apprenticeship route. In the meantime the Level 3 Diploma (NVQ) in Playwork available in England and Northern Ireland has been available; more recently as an apprenticeship, although this has not been widely accessed, as the number of playwork jobs has diminished.

A number of providers across Wales also had difficulties in meeting the standard of qualifying half their staff at Level 2 or above, and so many of these had reduced their opening hours to under two hours to avoid registration. A new level 2 qualification called the Award in Playwork Practice (L2APP) has just been developed and considered suitable to meet registration requirements on its' own for non-supervisory staff working on holiday playschemes.

This will also serve the purpose of a transitional qualification for those with a level 2 childcare qualification (CCLD), to help providers move forward. This award is offered through Agored Cymru, a Welsh awarding body, and can additionally be used as good practice continuing professional development, for those in other sectors who wish to further their understanding and perhaps occasional practice of playwork. Agored Cymru is not confined to Welsh learners only - there is the potential for training providers in England to consider its delivery.

In addition, Wales is currently developing a new CCLDP (Children's Care, Learning and Development and Play) which will include some content on play and an understanding of the playwork approach - this is to be ready by September 2019. It will not act as a qualification for those in playwork roles but will ensure that new childcare learners get a basic grounding in playwork principles.

## **Scotland**

In Scotland, out of school care services are registered with, and regulated by, the Care Inspectorate against the same national care standards as other daycare of children services, such as nurseries. Out of school care staff are registered with, and regulated by, the Scottish Social Services Council; in accordance with legislation, managers of out of school care services must either be qualified to, or working towards a degree level qualification in Childhood Practice. This is the same requirement as that for managers of other daycare of children services.

The registration categories are linked to job function, which is, in turn, linked to qualifications. Scotland has its own credit and qualifications framework (SQCF), which is considerably different in terminology, levels and grading. Currently a support worker would register with the SVQ Level 2 Playwork or National Progression Award. A Playwork Practitioner would register with an SVQ Level 3 Playwork or an HNC with Playwork options.

A Lead Practitioner/Manager in Playwork would register with an SVQ Level 4 Playwork, in the first instance leading to a SCQF Level 9 qualification such as the PDA Childhood Practice at SCQF Level 9 or a BA in Childhood Practice. (Please view the SSSC web site to view further qualifications linked to registration requirements). The Scottish Modern Apprenticeship Framework Active Leisure and Wellbeing at level 2 and level 3 also has a pathway for Playwork.

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## Reference

Children's Rights Alliance for England (CRAE), 2015, UK implementation of the Convention On The Rights Of The Child: Civil society alternative report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, England, London: CRAE

## UK National Play Organisations

For further information about playwork training and qualifications in any of the UK home nations, please contact the relevant national body:

Play England	<a href="http://www.playengland.org.uk">www.playengland.org.uk</a>
Playboard Northern Ireland	<a href="http://www.playboard.org">www.playboard.org</a>
Play Scotland	<a href="http://www.playscotland.org">www.playscotland.org</a>
Play Wales	<a href="http://www.playwales.org.uk">http://www.playwales.org.uk</a>

## Join the discussion

Play England will be hosting a discussion at the National Playwork Conference in Eastbourne on 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> March for all those interested and/or concerned about the future of playwork qualifications. If you are a playwork employer and can lend your support, please contact [Nicola@playengland.net](mailto:Nicola@playengland.net)