

Response to the Department for Education, Character and Resilience: A call for evidence

Introduction: extract from the introduction to the Call for Evidence from Ian Bauckham CBE, Chair of the Character Advisory Group

“The Secretary of State for Education, Damian Hinds MP, has asked me to chair an advisory group which will make recommendations in the autumn of 2019 on character education and development for children and young people. In recent years a priority for schools and colleges has been the improvement of academic outcomes, especially for disadvantaged young people, as we know that this can enable them to access a wider range of opportunities in education and employment. The government is committed through its education reforms to ensuring that all children, regardless of background, are prepared to thrive and succeed in adult life.

An excellent academic education and good qualifications sit alongside other important outcomes for young people. Developing aspects of character and resilience can also help young people to achieve their goals, overcome challenges, develop their readiness for adulthood, and help the most disadvantaged to compete more equally with their advantaged peers in the labour market.

The Secretary of State has defined character as:

- believing that you can achieve
- being able to stick with the task in hand
- seeing a link between effort today and payback in the future, and
- being able to bounce back from the knocks that life inevitably brings to all of us.

Young people also benefit from developing personal character attributes such as kindness, generosity, a sense of justice, respect, integrity and humility. These attributes can be developed and promoted through a wide range of activities, including, for example, sport, performance, creative activities, opportunities to be of service to others or to the community and experience of the workplace.

The Secretary of State has made clear that developing the work that schools are already doing to build character and resilience among young people is a high priority for him.

When the advisory group I am chairing makes its recommendations to the Secretary of State, I would like those recommendations to be informed by as wide a range of views, evidence and examples of good practice as possible. I am therefore launching this call for evidence.”

The Children's Play Policy Forum (CPPF) response to the Call for Evidence

(Submitted through an online form)

10. We are defining character as:

- believing that you can achieve
- being able to stick with the task in hand
- seeing a link between effort today and payback in the future, and
- being able to bounce back from the knocks that life inevitably brings to all of us.

To what extent do you agree that character and resilience are important in enabling young people to be successful and to thrive in later life?

- Strongly agree

11. Thinking about the aspects of character and resilience that you think are most important in order for people to be successful in life, are there any that you feel are **not** covered in the list below? If so, please list these and tell us why you feel they are important.

- a. Believing that you can achieve (e.g. being self-confident, believing in your own abilities)
- b. Being able to stick with the task in hand
- c. Seeing a link between effort today and payback in the future (e.g. deferred gratification, being aspirational and ambitious)
- d. Being able to bounce back from the knocks that life inevitably brings to all of us (resilience)
- e. Having strong personal qualities and values like kindness, generosity, a sense of justice, respect, integrity and humility.
- f. Social skills, such as being articulate and able to mix and work easily with others, forming and maintaining long term relationships and commitments

(Please list any missing aspects of character here and say why they are important)

- Creativity and problem solving

12. Which aspects of character do you think are most important in the workplace, or most valued by employers?

- a. Believing you can achieve
- b. Being able to stick with the task in hand
- c. Seeing a link between effort today and payback in the future
- d. Being able to bounce back from knocks
- e. Having strong personal qualities and values like kindness, generosity, a sense of justice, respect, integrity and humility.
- f. Social skills, such as being articulate and able to mix and work easily with others, forming and maintaining long term relationships and commitments
- g. Others (please list)

- A positive, solution-focussed attitude – being resourceful, able to use initiative and able to learn for yourself
- Creativity and Problem solving – being able to manage risk and to think outside the box.

13. What activities and approaches do you think are most effective in supporting the development of character and resilience? What evidence do you have to support this (for example, any published evaluation studies, or data collection done within your organisation)? (Word limit 250)

Playing builds children's character and resilience. Playful activities, such as climbing trees, joining in playground games and riding bikes, help build confidence, encouraging children to have a go and persevere.

Children benefit from a balanced diet of structured and unstructured activities, including healthy doses of free, child-led play. <https://childrensplaypolicyforum.wordpress.com/play-builds-children/>

Playing is something children can do by themselves or with family and friends without having to join a club or organised activity.

Provision for play includes free, structured and care-based environments, for example, out-of-school provision, playgrounds, school playtime projects, adventure playgrounds, community halls and sports fields.

<http://www.playengland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Adventure-Playgrounds.pdf>

Playwork is a skilled job requiring expertise and understanding of children's play and how it can be facilitated.

Playwork is distinct from professions such as sports coaching and youth work.

<http://playwales.org.uk/eng/playworkprinciples>

<http://www.playengland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Staffed-play-provision-web.pdf>

Play builds character and resilience

Managing risk: risky or adventurous outdoor play is an important contributor to the benefits derived from 'positive stress', across a number of health and behaviour indicators.

- <https://www.mdpi.com/1660-4601/12/6/6423>
- <https://playsafetyforum.files.wordpress.com/2015/03/managing-risk-in-play-provision-position-statement.pdf>

Resilience: moderate levels of anxiety or stress experienced during the safe environment of play strengthen resistance to stress in the future - helping children to 'roll with the punches'.

- <https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanchi/article/PIIS2352-4642%2817%2930092-5/fulltext>
- <https://www.journalofplay.org/issues/3/4/article/decline-play-and-rise-psychopathology-children-and-adolescents>

Executive function: adaptability and emotional regulation are products of 'executive function' developed through play.

- <https://www.webarchive.org.uk/wayback/archive/20170107065352/http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2015/10/1442/downloads>
- <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/guide/a-guide-to-executive-function/>

Play is a gateway to engagement in sport, creative activities, performing arts, volunteering and work-place skill development. "Active play at younger ages helps develop healthy habits, enjoyment of physical activity and physical literacy skills" (National Sports Strategy, DCMS).

- https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/486622/Sporting_Future_ACCESSIBLE.pdf

14. We are keen to understand how access to character building activities can help make the greatest positive difference to groups of children and young people vulnerable to poorer life outcomes, such as those living in poverty/with economic disadvantage, having a disability or SEN, being a young carer, living in care and others.

What examples of good practice do you have that demonstrate how barriers to participation in activities can be overcome for these groups? (Word limit 250)

Example 1: Adventure Playgrounds, after school and holiday play schemes

Adventure playgrounds, after school clubs and holiday play schemes connect disadvantaged children with the five foundations of character through play, including disabled children, Black and Minority Ethnic children and girls.

Adventure into Sport, a Play England project funded by Sport England, successfully piloted engagement of hard to reach children and young people into physically active play and sport, through adventure playgrounds and after school clubs. The programme positively influenced young people's attitudes towards physical activity and physical, social and emotional benefits.

"There should be an adventure playground in every community" (Boris Johnson MP, former Mayor of London)

https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/453893/Mayor-Boris-swings-into-action-and-hails-10million-HealthLotterypledge?utm_content=buffer140fe&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter.com&utm_campaign=buffer&fbclid=IwAR3fIAQk08K7rymwsf36UIOvhKeYb12B6O88ccPXnAiZV31P7BJuyfc4TYs

Example 2: Play before, during and after school

Schools are experiencing the positive impact on health, well-being and learning through programmes supporting play, both in class-time and before, during and after school. Children who have time and space for self-organised play are more likely to be happy, settled and engaged in other aspects of school life. Across the UK positive impacts have been documented and measured from a range of school and out-of-school care play interventions including:

- improvements to schoolgrounds, e.g. <https://www.ltl.org.uk/>
- introduction of active play programmes e.g. Active Play was delivered in a school serving one of the most deprived areas in Scotland (datazones in the most deprived 15%). In one year pupils' involvement in sport rose by more than 257% <https://www.inspiringscotland.org.uk/publication/active-play-prospectus/>
- development of play policies, projects such as 'loose parts play' and play-friendly schools (EU Erasmus+) <http://www.playfriendlyschools.eu/> <https://www.beaconriseprimaryschool.co.uk/play/>

15. What evidence do you have of specific activities or approaches that can be particularly helpful for these groups of children? Please be specific about which groups and provide details of the evidence you have e.g. references, links. (Word limit 250)

Example 1 evidence

Adventure into Sport: Evaluation Report, University of Cambridge, with funding support from Sport England (2018) <http://www.playengland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Adventure-into-Sport-Evaluation-report.pdf>

Reconceptualising play: balancing childcare, extra-curricular clubs and free play in contemporary childhoods. (2018) *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 43 (3), pp.420-434. <https://dspace.lboro.ac.uk/2134/27529>

Out of school activities during primary school and KS2 attainment. UCL Institute of Education University (2016) <https://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/news/out-school-activities-improve-children's-educational-attainment>

Play for a Change. University of Gloucestershire, Play England (2008) <http://www.playengland.org.uk/resource/play-for-a-change-play-policy-and-practice-a-review-of-contemporary-perspectives/>

Example 2 evidence

The Play Return: A review of the wider impact of play initiatives. (2014) CPPF <https://childrensplaypolicyforum.files.wordpress.com/2015/09/the-play-return.pdf>

Evaluating the effects of the Lunchtime Enjoyment Activity and Play (LEAP) school playground intervention on children's quality of life, enjoyment and participation in physical activity. *BMC public health* 14:1 164-179. (2014) <https://bmcpublichealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1471-2458-14-164>

Supporting school improvement through play: An evaluation of South Gloucestershire's Outdoor Play and Learning Programme. London: National Children's Bureau. (2011) <http://www.playengland.org.uk/resource/supporting-school-improvement-through-play/>

Development of the Great Recess Framework – Observational Tool to measure contextual and behavioral components of elementary school recess, *BMC Public Health*, 18: 394 (2018) <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/s12889-018-5295-y>

Active Play: Evaluation Report April (2016) Inspiring Scotland. <https://www.inspiringscotland.org.uk/publication/active-play-evaluation-report-april-2016/>

Children's right to play. British Psychological Society (2019) <https://www.bps.org.uk/sites/bps.org.uk/files/News/News%20%20Files/PP17%20Children%27s%20right%20to%20play.pdf>

General comment No. 17 (2013) on the right of the child to rest, leisure, play, recreational activities, cultural life and the arts (art. 31) https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRC%2fC%2fGC%2f17&Lang=en

16. We are keen to understand how developing character and resilience in children and young people may contribute to reducing the likelihood of gang membership and youth violence (e.g. knife crime), and preventing anti-social attitudes. Are you aware of any character-related work focused on this area? (Word limit 250)

Open access staffed adventure playgrounds in England are particularly effective at reaching children and young people at risk of gang membership and youth violence. For example, Pearson Street Adventure Playground's attendance levels are in highest of any Hackney voluntary sector youth organisation. Adventure playgrounds provide early intervention, positive activities and supervision for children at risk, at a younger age range than most youth clubs. Some are currently being funded and evaluated as part of the DCMS and Big Lottery Youth Investment Fund. <https://yiflearning.org/resources/insight-papers/>

Hackney Integrated Gangs Unit considers adventure playgrounds and youth clubs as helping to reduce gang involvement and youth violence. <https://www.hackney.gov.uk/young-hackney-resources>

The Children's Commissioner for England (2018) pointed out that play is a "way of developing social and emotional skills: by playing with others children learn to share, take turns, negotiate and make friends – the exact opposite of the kind of worrying behaviour seen in violent gangs where supremacy, provocation and retaliation are all.... Play therapists tell us how children explain and process the world around them through play - especially important for those children who have experienced serious trauma... it is clear that play helps children grow into the rounded, sociable and skilled people we all want them to be." <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Play-final-report.pdf>

With regard to prevention of cycles of violence, the case for early support through play, attachment and consistent relationships is made by former Detective Chief Superintendent John Carnochan (Strathclyde Police's Violence Reduction Unit) in *Pre-Birth to Three: on the importance of the early years* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wl4p6EUW1h8>

17. Finally, please share any views or specific examples of character development which have not been captured elsewhere which you think will assist us to support schools and other organisations in character development. (Word limit 250)

Both we and our children face an uncertain future. Our children must be able to embrace change, turn anxiety into excitement and open themselves to the risks and challenges of a new world.

We believe that play is at the heart of this process. When they play, children drive their own development, whereas lack of play leaves children mentally and physically unprepared to cope with life.

From the moment that you put a mark on a piece of paper, challenge a friend to a race or prepare to perform before an audience, you are taking risks and committing yourself to unknown territory. This process leads to resilience. Through play children begin to learn and experience this process.

Play, as well as supporting character and resilience in itself, is a steppingstone on the route to activities such as sport, performance, arts and volunteering. This is especially important for disabled and disadvantaged for whom play provision can provide a 'bridge' into more structured activities.

CPPF recommends a broad and comprehensive approach, involving cross departmental collaboration and accountability for play. Together we can make sure that children and society are not fundamentally damaged by the lack of play in children's everyday lives - and that we all gain the unique benefits of children playing more.

CPPF welcomes the opportunity the DfE has given to respond to this call for evidence and is very happy to provide further information and have further discussion around the importance of play in child's lives.

Robin Sutcliffe, Chair

Children's Play Policy Forum

Submitted 5th July 2019

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