

Statement by the Playwork Principles Scrutiny Group

5 October 2015

During the 2002 review of the National Occupational Standards (NOS) for Playwork, undertaken by SkillsActive, there was a widespread agreement across the playwork sector of the need to revise the underpinning Assumptions and Values for Playwork.

It was recognised by SkillsActive that as an employer led organisation, it was inappropriate for this revision to be undertaken by anyone other than the playwork sector itself.

Throughout 2002 and 2003 a three stage consultation was undertaken, overseen by a group of experienced playworkers and playwork trainers from across the UK; convened to act as an honest broker that would evaluate and revise the responses to best represent the majority view of the playwork profession. This group subsequently formed the Playwork Principles Scrutiny Group¹.

In 2005 the Playwork Principles in their entirety were endorsed by SkillsActive and have underpinned the National Occupational Standards since. They continue to be held in trust by the Playwork Principles Scrutiny Group on behalf of the UK playwork profession. As with other professional ethical frameworks, the Playwork Principles have been universally adopted and as such, are referenced in job descriptions, induction programmes and organisational policies and procedures.

SkillsActive is currently reviewing the National Occupational Standards for Playwork and in order to comply with the new criteria that frame NOS (which we are advised by SkillsActive do not allow for the inclusion of the Playwork Principles within the Standards) are proposing a new set of Values, Behaviours and Skills (VBS). However this appears to be contradicted by the following statement which appears on the UK government website '[NOS Quality Criteria](#)'². Page 18 states:

“NOS may indicate how the NOS links to other documents and systems (such as professional standards, codes of practice, pay and grading systems, collective bargaining agreements, licenses to practice, Core Skills and Key Skills). How external links are presented is left to the discretion of the standards setting organisation developing the NOS.”

¹ A decade on from its establishment, members of the Playwork Principles Scrutiny Group (www.playwales.org.uk/eng/scrutinygroup) remain active in the playwork sector as playworkers, trainers and educators. They are actively involved in the development and delivery of both training and qualifications, referring to both the Playwork Principles and the NOS.

² NOS Quality Criteria - www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/304238/nos-quality-criteria-2011.pdf

Page 15 states:

“For some NOS, the knowledge and understanding specification is contained in a separate document. This is permissible as long as: there is clear reference to the separate document containing the knowledge and understanding; it is made clear that competent performance requires an individual to both meet the performance criteria and possess the underpinning knowledge and understanding”.

Whilst it is recognised the proposed VBS have been framed to include elements of the Playwork Principles, the Playwork Principles Scrutiny Group have serious concerns about this, particularly: the Playwork Principles state that the Principles must be taken as a whole. They describe what is unique about playwork. The proposed VBS incorporate generic statements about professional conduct and working with children that in places contradict the Playwork Principles. It is the view of the Playwork Principles Scrutiny Group that this proposal is wrong and reflects a disregard for the agreement made between SkillsActive and the Playwork Principles Scrutiny Group on behalf of the profession in 2005.

Currently each NOS unit has the following statement in the overview section: “This standard is underpinned by The Playwork Principles and staff must be familiar with these and committed to them in their practice.”

We have been advised by SkillsActive staff that awarding bodies are not required to pay attention to the overview section, only to the standards themselves. The same argument may be made for the VBS statements, which are also extraneous to the standards. Given this, we feel strongly that the VBS statements should be abandoned and the statement referring to the Playwork Principles should remain.

This statement is to establish that it is the view of the Playwork Principles Scrutiny Group that the revised national occupational standards should not be informed by any statement other than the Playwork Principles. To do otherwise would represent a breach of trust between SkillsActive and the playwork profession.

Playwork Principles

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 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 wellbeing 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 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 wellbeing of children.

The Playwork Principles are held in trust for the UK playwork profession by the Scrutiny Group that acted as an honest broker overseeing the consultations through which they were developed.

Endorsed by SkillsActive 2005