



The Welsh Play Workforce Study 2021

Executive summary



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Methodology

The main aim of the research was to gain an insight into the play workforce in Wales and contribute to the 2019-21 Welsh Government Ministerial Review of Play which seeks to look at play in the wider context of the statutory duty. The statutory duty relates to legislation passed as part of the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010, where each of the 22 local authorities are required to undertake a Play Sufficiency Assessment (PSA) with statutory guidance provided in *Wales – a Play Friendly Country*¹.

A six-month study on the Welsh play workforce was undertaken between June and December 2021. The Welsh Play Workforce Study 2021 involved a nationwide online survey, interviews with three leading national organisations involved in play and playwork in Wales, interviews with lead PSA officers across the 22 local authorities, a focus group and interviews with the play workforce. A summary of the results is shown below.

It is important to note that there is a difference between a playwork workforce and a play workforce. The playwork workforce encompasses those whose particular role is playwork. The play workforce is a wider group of people that includes early years and childcare but could also include those who work indirectly in play, for example politicians, planning, highways, and health. However, this study focused on those who work directly with children and young people.

A thematic analysis of the results identified four themes in relation to the play workforce. These were:

- approach to play
- partnership working
- funding and development
- delivery.

The approach to play is reflected within the Playwork Principles². Partnership working included both within and between the three organisations, but also with other external individuals and organisations, including local authorities, play-related settings and individuals in the play workforce.

Other organisations that have both a direct and indirect impact in relation to partnership working included:

- SkillsActive – Sector Skills Council
- Social Care Wales (SCW) – oversees the qualifications framework
- Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) – registers and regulates play provision
- Welsh Government – provides statutory guidance and funding relating to the play workforce in Wales.

The combination of the approach to play, partnership working and funding all link together through the development and delivery of play-related training and qualifications in Wales. These include UK-wide playwork qualifications and Wales specific ones.

Seven interviews with PSA leads were undertaken with six local authorities representing each of the six regions of Wales. A thematic analysis of the results identified three themes: play profile, collaboration and funding. The play background in relation to experience, knowledge and qualifications varies between the PSA leads. There was a continuum of having no experience, knowledge or qualifications, to experience and knowledge and no qualifications, to having all three aspects. This was reflected in the local authority approach to the play workforce where there was an established play team and where play was only considered when the PSA was due every three years. Where play and the play workforce are integral to the local authority all year round, the PSA lead was more experienced and qualified. Where play and the play workforce has less priority within the local authority, the play experience, knowledge, and qualification

of the PSA lead decreased. However, what was clear was the importance of play and the need to collaborate with the play workforce as well as with the more strategic partners.

Summary of findings

The Welsh Play Workforce Survey generated 384 responses that provided data in relation to the demographic profile, employment and education and training. There were 211 playwork responses, 90 childcare/early years and 90 other play professionals, for example people who use play in hospitals. The responses were mostly from people who live and work in south-Wales and south-east Wales. The analysis of the data enabled an overview of the play workforce as a whole and comparisons between the three population groups that make up the workforce.

1. Findings from the survey element of the 2021 study demonstrate the play workforce is predominately non-Welsh speaking, white, female with no registered disability. The average age across the play workforce is 37.63 years and the average age of playworkers (33.43 years) is significantly different compared to childcare/early years workers (41.57 years) and other play professionals (43.44 years).
2. The play workforce is mostly employed in the statutory sector and employed in their current role(s) on average for 7.03 years. The number of years employed in their current role is statistically different between playworkers (5.85 years) and childcare/early years workers (8.48 years) and with playworkers and other play professionals (7.39).
3. Across the play workforce, the number of years employed and job role between management and practitioner, management and education and training, management and co-ordinator, and management and development were statistically different.
4. The average number of different roles was higher for other play professionals, and this was significantly different between playworkers and other play professionals and with childcare/early years and other play professionals.
5. Playworkers were less likely to have one full-time job and more likely to have a single part-time job, whilst childcare/early years workers were more likely to have a full-time job.
6. More provision was unregistered than registered with CIW. Registered provision was more likely to be pre-school, nurseries, day care and holiday playschemes whilst after-school clubs, adventure playgrounds, parks/open spaces, community centres and other settings were more likely to be unregistered.
7. The average full-time hourly rate is £11.39 across the play workforce. The average full-time hourly rate is more for other play professionals (£14.17) compared to playworkers (£10.76) and childcare/early years (£10.61) and the difference was statistically significant.
8. For the first part-time job, the average part-time hourly rate is £11.40 across the play workforce. The average first part-time hourly rate is more for other play professionals (£18.11) compared to playworkers (£10.29) and childcare/early years workers (£10.28) and the difference was statistically significant.
9. For a second part-time job, the average part-time hourly rate is £14.83. The average second part-time hourly rate was more for other play professionals (£32.66) compared to playworkers (£10.33) and childcare/early years workers (£11.57) and the difference was statistically significant.
10. The average annual full-time salary across the play workforce is £24,384.14 and the average annual part-time salary (job 1 only) is £11,922.61. The average hourly rate and annual salary is higher for other play professionals compared to the playwork and childcare/early years workforce.
11. Over 50% of the play workforce in this study had a playwork qualification. More of the play workforce had a level 3 playwork or childcare qualification. Playwork NVQ/CACHE Level 2 or Level 3 was mostly undertaken over five

years ago whilst MAHPS or L2APP were mostly undertaken within the last five years. For P³ Level 2 this was undertaken over five years ago and for P³ Level 3 less than five years ago.

12. For those who have studied childcare qualifications, the majority from level 2 to 5 were undertaken more than five years ago. Those with the Level 3 Transition to Playwork qualification were equally likely to have studied within the last one to five years.
13. There are strong relationships between the age range of respondents and qualifications held. The 16-25 age range is more likely to hold just playwork or childcare qualifications or to have neither. The 26-35 age range is more likely to only hold playwork qualifications. The 56-65 age range is more likely to have childcare or early years but not playwork qualifications.
14. There is interest in undertaking playwork qualifications, however the two main barriers are cost and time.
15. Over 50% of the play workforce in this study had undertaken some form of Continuing Professional Development (CPD). This was mainly workshops/seminars and short courses and mostly undertaken online.
16. Play-related training was very limited, with the other play professionals more likely to have undertaken some form of play or playwork training. When asked about the Playwork Principles, playworkers are less likely to not have heard about them, whilst other play professionals are more likely to not have heard about them.

Analysis of results

The aim of this study was to gain an insight into who the play workforce was in 2021. It did this by capturing the overall demographics of the sector as well as some of their subjective experiences. The study was undertaken by collecting quantitative data via a survey and qualitative data through interviews and a focus group.

The study focused on the play workforce, which was divided into three populations: playworkers, childcare and early years workers and other play professionals. This approach was used as it is difficult to put an actual figure of the number of people who work in the play workforce in Wales, as indicated by Melyn:

‘There are likely to be around 5,000 people employed as playworkers in Wales but there will be thousands more who use play as part of their work in other fields. They work in a wide range of organisations spanning a number of sectors. These include out of school childcare; holiday playschemes; adventure play; open access play provision; and community play.’³

The play workforce in Wales

A review of the Childcare Sector in Wales⁴ stated there were around 17,000 people working in the childcare sector. The figure of 5,000 in 2010 would have included all the BIG Lottery Child’s Play programme funded projects and whether any remained in the playwork, or play workforce, when the funding came to an end, is difficult to know. In addition, the figure of 17,000 will have been impacted by COVID-19, in both playwork and childcare provision where face-to-face delivery was mostly suspended between March 2020 and March 2021. Even when this survey was undertaken, not all out of school provision (for example after-school clubs, holiday clubs, open access schemes) was able to run.

Between July and August 2021, the survey received 384 responses that provided data. It is difficult to gauge how representative this is of the play workforce in Wales. With the three population groups of playworkers, childcare/early years workers, and other play professionals the survey provides a breakdown for each group. The number of responses from playworkers were 209 (54%) (206 in English and 3 in Welsh), from childcare/early years there were 86 (22%) (84 in English and 2 in Welsh), and 89 (23%) from other play professionals (all submitted in English).



It is difficult to indicate how the sample obtained for this study reflects the total population of playworkers, childcare/early years workers and other play professionals. For example, from the 2011 UK census, 52,429 respondents stated that they were 'playworkers' by trade, however only 32,754 reported themselves to be employed as such⁵. Taking into account that most would be employed in England, 209 participants who considered themselves to be Welsh playworkers would indicate a good sample size, particularly as it can be predicted the number of people who are playworkers by trade or employed in the 2021 census will be less due to austerity and resulting funding cuts.

For childcare and early years workers, the number of people employed can be deduced from the settings registered with CIW⁶. Between 2019 and 2020, CIW had 385 out of school care settings and 41 open access play settings registered⁷. In addition, 970 full day care, 525 sessional day care, 20 creches, and 2025 childminders were registered⁸. For out of school care, these could be people who consider themselves playworkers, childcare workers or

both, whereas it is more likely the open access settings workers would consider themselves to be playworkers. The 385 out of school care settings and 41 open access play settings are registered as they run for more than five days a year and for more than two hours a day. However, there are settings that run for less than five days or less than two hours – both out of school settings and open access – which do not have to be inspected. Therefore, the 385 out of school care and 41 open access play settings do not include unregistered settings.

Changes between 2008 and 2021

The last play workforce studies in Wales were undertaken in 2008 and 2010⁹. Since 2010, funding from the BIG Lottery has finished and austerity measures have had an impact on the play workforce, but there has been an increase of both level 2 and level 3 playwork qualifications. The results from the Welsh Play Workforce Study 2021 have provided an up-to-date picture of the play workforce. The table below provides a comparison of the Welsh Play Workforce Study 2021 with the Melyn (2008) study.

| Workforce | Melyn (2008) | Welsh Play Workforce Study (2021) | PWS – playworkers | PWS – CC/EY | PWS – other play professionals |
|-------------------|--|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Gender | 78% female (n=453) | 82.9% female (n=391) | 78.1% female (n=211) | 95.5% female (n=90) | 82.2% female (n=90) |
| Age | 53% aged between 19 and 34 years (n=449) | Average age 37.77 years (n=380) | 33.43 years (n=204)* | 41.57 years (n=88)* | 43.44 years (n=88)* |
| Ethnicity | 97% white (n=440) | 96.4% white (n=391) | 96.2% white (n=211) | 95.5% white (n=90) | 97.7% white (n=90) |
| Disability | 1.5% stated a disability (n=453) | 5.6% stated a disability (n=391) | 7.5% stated a disability (n=16) | 1.1% stated a disability (n=1) | 5.5% stated a disability (n=5) |

| Employment | Melyn (2008) | Welsh Play Workforce Study (2021) | PWS – playworkers | PWS – CC/EY | PWS – other play professionals |
|------------------|---|---|--|--|--|
| Sector | 43% statutory and 37% third sector (n=451) | 60% statutory, 18% third sector and 15.2% business (n=250) | 56.5% statutory, 21.3% third sector and 13.9% business (n=122) | 61.9% statutory, 9.8% third sector and 22% business (n=71) | 60.3% statutory, 19% third sector and 11.1% business (n=63) |
| Full-time | 34% full-time all year round (n=453) 22% full-time part-year (n=453) | 47.5% full-time only (n=265) 6.0% full-time and part-time combined (n=265) | 35.4% full-time only (n=127)* 7.8% full-time and part-time combined (n=127) | 64% full-time only (n=75)* 5.3% full-time and part-time combined (n=75) | 52% full-time only (n=63)* 3.1% full-time and part-time combined (n=63) |

| | | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|--|---|---|---|
| Part-time | 18% all year round (n=453) 23% part-year (n=453) | 23.7% part-time only (n=265) 5.6% more than one part-time job (n=265) | 28.3% part-time only (n=127)* 6.2% more than one part-time job (n=127) | 18.6% part-time only (n=75)* 5.3% more than one part-time job (n=75) | 20.6% part-time only (n=63)* 4.7% more than one part-time job (n=63) |
| Average length of service | 4 years 6 months (n=407) | 7.03 years (n=259) | 5.85 years (n=123)* | 8.48 years (n=73)* | 7.39 years (n=63)* |
| Average working week full-time | 24 hours (n=453) | 36.24 hours (n=139) | 35.09 hours (n=53) | 36.9 hours (n=50) | 37.01 hours (n=36) |
| Average working week part-time | No information available | 17 hours (n=89) job 1 13 hours (n=19) job 2 | 16.03 (n=49) job 1 16.02 (n=9) job 2 | 19.46 (n=20) job 1 14.8 (n=5) job 2 | 19.5 (n=20) job 1 6 (n=5) job 2 |
| Average pay hourly full-time | £6.85 (n=139) | £11.39 (n=40) | £10.76 (n=17)* | £10.61 (n=15)* | £14.17 (n=8)* |
| Average pay hourly part-time | No information available | £11.40 (n=70) job 1 £14.83 (n=16) job 2 | £10.29 (n=44)* job 1 £10.33 (n=9)* job 2 | £10.28 (n=16)* job 1 £11.57 (n=4)* job 2 | £18.11 (n=10)* job 1 £32.66 (n=3)* job 2 |
| Average pay annually full-time | No information available | £24,384.14 (n=82) | £23,968.98 (n=31) | £22,743.50 (n=22) | £26,072.55 (n=29) |
| Average pay annually part-time | No information available | £11,922.61 (n=33) job 1 | £8,305.77 (n=17) job 1 | £12,066.66 (n=6) job 1 | £17,984.80 (n=10) job 1 |

| Qualifications and training | Melyn (2008) | Welsh Play Workforce Study (2021) | PWS – playworkers | PWS – CC/EY | PWS – other play professionals |
|---|---|--|---|---|--|
| Qualifications | 62% had no playwork qualification (n=453) 39% had a playwork qualification (n=453) 40% had a play related qualification (n=453) | 20.5% had no playwork or childcare qualifications (n=258) 33.7% had only playwork qualifications (n=258) 26% had only childcare qualifications (n=258) 19.8% had both playwork and childcare qualifications (n=258) | 24.3% had no playwork or childcare qualifications (n=123)* 58.5% had only playwork qualifications (n=123)* 12.1% had only childcare qualifications (n=123)* 5% had both playwork and childcare qualifications (n=123)* | 6.8% had no playwork or childcare qualifications (n=73)* 0% had just a playwork qualification (n=73)* 61.6% had just childcare qualifications (n=73)* 31.5% had both playwork and childcare qualifications (n=73)* | 29% had no playwork or childcare qualifications (n=62)* 24.1% had only playwork qualifications (n=62)* 25.8% had only childcare qualifications (n=62)* 20.9% had both playwork and childcare qualifications (n=62)* |
| Playwork specific qualifications | 14% had level 2 (n=453) 21% had level 3 (n=453) | 25.5% had level 2 (n=258) 30.2% had level 3 (n=258) | 40.1% had level 2 (n=112) 42.8% had level 3 (n=112) | 23% had level 2 (n=26) 65.39% had level 3 (n=26) | 46.8% had level 2 (n=32) 40.6% had level 3 (n=32) |
| Playwork training | 52% had undertaken playwork training within last two years (n=363) | 50.8% had undertaken some form of CPD (n=391) | 44% had undertaken some form of CPD (n=211) | 63.3% had undertaken some form of CPD (n=90) | 54.4% had undertaken some form of CPD (n=90) |

* Statistically significant

The comparison between the Welsh Play Workforce Study 2021 and the Melyn (2008) study indicates:

- The workforce is still predominately female
- The workforce still has a low diversity and disability recruitment
- The workforce still has a high level of part-time employment
- Many people in the workforce still may have more than one job
- The play and playwork qualifications held are still a mixture of playwork specific and playwork applied
- The playwork qualification mostly gained is at level 3, but there is an increase in level 2.

There have been some changes:

- The average age of the play workforce has increased from 34 to 37.77 years
- The average length of service has increased from 4.5 years to 7.03 years
- Pay in the sector has increased to £11.39 per hour for full-time employment and £11.40 per hour for part-time employment (this includes all job roles from management to practitioner)
- Most playworkers now have a playwork qualification
- The workforce on average is older than in 2008, although there is still a young seasonal employment from the student population
- Playwork training is low and most CPD is online (with a strong COVID-19 influence during 2020/2021).

When considering playwork qualifications being undertaken, the 2010 Melyn report stated:

*'Demand for playwork training is closely linked to the supply of playwork jobs. People tend not to follow a vocational training path in play unless they are already employed as a playworker. Furthermore, as there is no common approach to induction for playworkers across Wales, this will inevitably lead to a variation in the quality of play provision. In particular, more and more playworkers in out of school settings have little play training and often lack an understanding of basic playwork principles.'*¹⁰

However, as well as the supply of playwork roles, there are also challenges regarding the availability of qualifications and where you can study playwork. A search for playwork qualifications in Wales in relation to FE colleges found variations in both the level of award and where and how they can be studied. The variation in playwork qualifications in relation to FE colleges was summed up with a comment from the focus group:

'Because we've got such a big workforce and opportunities to do things, it should be in our local FE college. They [FE College] said they have never had playwork promoted to them as a profession in a careers evening.'

Currently, playwork qualifications enquiries are signposted to one of three organisations: Clybiau Plant Cymru Kids' Clubs, Addysg Oedolion Cymru | Adult Learning Wales and Play Wales. The three organisations are all involved in the construction and delivery of playwork qualifications in Wales. This was recognised in both the PSA lead officer interviews and the individual practitioner interviews and focus group where it was acknowledged that for playwork qualifications, both for information and studying for them, one of these three organisations would be the first port of call.

Conclusion

The main aim of the research was to gain an insight into the play workforce in Wales and contribute to the 2019-21 Welsh Government Ministerial Review of Play which seeks to look at play in the wider context of the statutory duty.

The current position in the Welsh Play Workforce Study 2021 indicates that there are similarities between playworkers, childcare and early years workers and other play professionals, for example gender.

However, there are also some clear differences in relation to age, employment, salary, and qualifications between the three groups. This study provides an overview of the play workforce in three overlapping areas: strategic, links between the strategic and practice and the play workforce itself.

References

¹ Welsh Government (2014) *Wales – a Play Friendly Country*. Cardiff: Welsh Government.

² Playwork Principles Scrutiny Group (2005) *The Playwork Principles*. Retrieved from www.playwales.org.uk/eng/playworkprinciples

³ Melyn Consulting (2010) *Review of the Capacity and Delivery of Play Training in Wales*. Cardiff: Welsh Assembly Government, p.47.

⁴ Welsh Government (2018) *Review of the Childcare Sector in Wales*. Cardiff: Welsh Government.

⁵ King, P. and Newstead, S. (2020) Demographic data and barriers to professionalisation in playwork, *Journal of Vocational Education & Training*, DOI: [10.1080/13636820.2020.1744694](https://doi.org/10.1080/13636820.2020.1744694)

⁶ Care Inspectorate Wales (2020) *Improving social care and childcare in Wales: Chief Inspector's Annual Report 2019-20*. Sarn Mynach: Care Inspectorate Wales.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Melyn Consulting (2008) *Where are you? Ble wyt ti? The 2008 Play Wales Workforce Survey*. Cardiff: Play Wales; *Review of the Capacity and Delivery of Play Training in Wales*.

¹⁰ *Review of the Capacity and Delivery of Play Training in Wales*, p.48-49.

If you would like a copy of the full research report, please email info@playwales.org.uk