

A conversation about Play England's future - an invitation to all

We are asking individuals and organisations to circulate this letter to your mailing lists and contacts.

At Play England's recent meeting entitled 'Children's Play - The Challenge Ahead', a significant number of people agreed that now was the time to generate a wide-ranging discussion about PE's future role, this discussion also to consider *how* PE should go about its business. The emphasis was very much on looking forward in an open minded and mutually supportive way, aware of past and current initiatives and programmes, but not to be governed by these.

This is not a meeting called by PE. It is an informal initiative generated by one of the discussion groups at the 'Challenge Ahead' meeting. It will only develop if those committed to children's and teenagers' play (PE members and non-members alike) engage with it. The intention is to try and create a space for open-ended dialogue, a chance for all of us, PE trustees and staff included, to think beyond organisational interests to broader questions. We have been in discussion with PE trustees about this series of discussions and they are positive about the initiative and keen to participate.

This letter aims simply to take matters to the next stage. It is an invitation to all those committed to children's and teenagers' right to play to join a series of discussions about PE and its prospective future. This initiative is rooted in the commitment to encourage a more open and diverse engagement with the key questions that face us. The formal positions PE might come to as the result of the discussions are a matter for it to decide through its due processes.

Play England is now independent, meaningfully in control of its own future. The signatories of this letter acknowledge that the transition to independence has not been easy and value the ongoing hard work put in by voluntary committee members and staff during the transition and beyond. As a matter of fact, it is important to recognise that the resources (both financial and human) available to PE are currently minimal.

Some of the discussion themes to have emerged thus far include, but are not limited to:

- In what way, and by what means, can independent, dispassionate thought and talk be encouraged?
- How can play organisations, supporters and stakeholders work better together and support each other in the current political environment? How can we support each other?
- Should more reliance be placed on individuals to make voluntary commitments of time and energy to carry forward thinking and action in respect of play in England? Is it realistic to do so? (Ask not what Play England can do for you, but what you can do for play in England!).
- If 'yes' to the above, how might this be achieved, and what should be the relation between this voluntary endeavour and PE?
- How might PE and its supporters campaign on behalf of children's play, and how might the diverse policy and commitment streams in the area of play be more fruitfully, more cohesively, inter-connected?
- How might PE and its supporters better reflect the diversity of England's population?

- Is there a need to make a decisive break with thinking that assumes progress can be made only if PE is externally funded?
- To what extent, if any, should PE involve itself in direct service delivery?
- How might more effective alliances be formed with non-play specific organisations, groupings and campaigns that nevertheless affect the practical realisation of the right to play?
- What are the major themes/issues 'play' should be addressing?

The intention is to hold a series of informal discussions with those who respond to this invitation. The first step is for those who would like to be involved in the discussions **to respond to this email with your contact details, *briefly* stating any points or issues you would like to see raised.** The discussion topics will be determined by those participating as will decisions about location(s).

It needs to be stressed that this initiative is entirely unfunded and can only be carried forward with the active support of those who wish to participate. This includes, for example, such practical matters as securing no-cost venues, and perhaps building up a modest 'petty cash' fund that can help pay travel costs for those who need some help with travelling expenses.

Please note that the signatories of this letter are in no sense leaders of this initiative, their current role being limited to formulating this invitation, accepting and sharing the responses. What happens thereafter will need to emerge in the light of the responses received.

We hope that sufficient responses will have been received by **Wednesday 30 September** for respondents to then decide next moves.

We look forward to hearing from you. You can respond, saying whether or not you would be interested in participating in such a conversation, and any other thoughts you might have about timing, venue, process, content, etc. Please respond to either or both of us by email (below) to register your interest in participating.

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