

## Response to those expressing an interest in the Conversation with Play England

November 2015

We are writing to you because you responded to the open invitation to join a conversation about Play England. Thank you very much for your response. In that invitation, we said we would share responses, and this is what we are doing here, together with some thoughts and questions about where we go from here.

We had 45 responses in total. Their names and email addresses are at the end of this letter.

Your responses included a range of themes and issues for dialogue, some offers of practical help including hosting, and also some very thoughtful reflections on process and what might be needed to create conditions for open-ended dialogue where everyone feels able to contribute. Further on in this letter, we give a summary of those responses, but first we want to say a bit about our own role and our own view on the Conversation.

As we said in the original letter, we are not, and don't wish to be, leaders of this process. We saw our role as sending out the invitation and sharing what came back. What happens next we hope will emerge...That said, it will only emerge through a dialogue between those who responded to the invitation.

Whilst eschewing a leadership role, we are allowing ourselves the 'privilege' of sharing some of our initial thoughts with you.

We remain committed to the original intent as expressed in the letter of invitation:

'...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...[is] 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.'

Our hope, therefore, is that the first steps have been taken towards creating the conditions for an open-ended dialogue, one not to be hurried along towards decisions and action points, but which allows itself to meander down sidetracks and actively fish for red herrings if that is where the flow of conversation takes us.

Such a conversational space needs to be one where difference of experience and opinion can be expressed, heard and valued. We do not, in this conversation, need to speak with one voice. For example, one of the comments made in response to the original invitation was about making space for younger and/or newer people to be heard, and not alienating them with what can appear to them to be the rehearsal of personal and historical tensions. At the same time, there are key and enduring issues that any dialogue needs to address

Our own view is that we should not, in the first instance, seek to tie down PE's role, nor formulate a list of priorities for it. Rather, we should take the opportunity to think as widely as possible, about the 'field' itself - how and to what degree it should connect with itself - and the wider context within which it exists and which it wants to affect.

## **What happens now?**

To begin with, there needs to be a conversation within this group (which does not need to be exclusive) to come up with some practical moves that will create a number of spaces within which the Conversation(s) can occur.

These could be face-to-face, online, it could be a mixture of the two. We wondered if perhaps something online might be a good starting point for this initial discussion, something that could act both as a dialogical and an organisational space. In other words, conversations could take place there and also face-to-face meetings could be organised there.

There are difficulties with an online platforms such as Facebook. We wondered if perhaps a blog might work better. But we don't have sufficient technical skills to set one up that can allow for conversations. *Is there someone in this group who could set up and host such an online space?*

It is a pressing matter to establish dialogical spaces that we can all connect to on equal terms. Our role as initial enablers to this process is coming to a close.

## **Themes**

Although theming the responses risks privileging one interpretation over another, it also makes them easier to share. Here are the themes we came up with from the 46 of you who replied to us via email.

## **Handling the conversation**

- Not raking over old ground
- Managing agendas
- Not alienating younger/newer people. I think that how this new discussion is had is very important, and that conversations should not be about people's personal or historical problems that they have with each other.
- Keep it positive
- External facilitator?
- Online rather than/as well as meetings

## **Remit for PE:**

- Getting PE back to a position where it can support (resources/info/advice) and campaign on behalf of sector
- Strong and independent voice for play in England – how does this link to others like Fair Play?
- Remember to include/frame within GC17/UNCRC and article 12 with meaning, ideas of play sufficient (as in Wales)
- 'children' means up to 18 years, don't forget young people
- Free play as part of everyday life, not only play provision
- Play as a statutory service
- Supporting regional organisations
- Co-ordinating a voice for the sector that can shout

- Playing out
- Disabled children
- Play? Playwork? New vehicle for playwork (playworker meet up Feb)
- Separate area for adventure playgrounds?
- Involvement in training: Play England have a mandate to train from Introduction courses to sending to University with a Centre of excellence
- Play space design
- Advice to play space designers/manufacturers – brand?
- Advice/support to those wanting to start up own services following redundancy/cuts. Mutuals?
- Protecting what already exists in current climate (political support, CAT, supporting each other, mapping what we still have)

#### **Issues of funding:**

- Ensure national orgs are adequately funded

#### **Linking with other orgs/initiatives:**

- Play Wales, Play Scotland, PBNI
- UNCRC/GC17
- European networks
- Fair Play
- KIDS
- Playing Out
- New vehicle for playwork
- Powerful alliance with, eg, Save Childhood Movement, Early Years Alliance, PEDAL research institute at Cambridge Uni, 2017 Festival of Childhood
- Allied org such as CRIN, CRAE, BEN, Sustrans, etc
- Parents

#### **Venues**

We also had some offers of free venues in London, Cambridge, Wokingham and Gloucester.

#### **ENDNOTE**

We hope that all of you who have said they want to be part of the discussions will now enthusiastically get this particular show on the road. We stress again that we believe the immediate and pressing need is to create some form of online platform - a blog? - which will allow us all to engage with each other on equal terms. **For this, one or more people with the practical skills in this area need to step forward and help out.** We do not have those skills. In any case, it's now time for us to thank you once again for your responses and to step down from the temporary and limited role we have fulfilled. We look forward to participating in the discussions.

Yours sincerely

Wendy Russell

Bernard Spiegel