

# Keeping children's play and health on the political agenda

As the trade association for the UK play industry, the API takes representing the industry to government very seriously and never more so than now. With an election looming, all funding under scrutiny and pressure and play at last on the political agenda, the API wants to keep it there. One of its most recent activities to do this was an API House of Commons breakfast.

Hosted by Janet Dean MP, the API's primary aim was to stimulate debate on how to ensure the sustainability of investment in play. Invited guests discussed key areas surrounding the benefits of play which included The Play Strategy and thoughts on how it had impacted play provision. They considered the question, 'So far, has The Play Strategy delivered what was expected?' Ideas and thoughts on how the current investment into play could be maintained were reviewed. The importance of a cohesive approach from the sector to promote the benefits of play and how, play can assist the health and obesity agenda, was emphasised.

Guests included, Jane Fienmann, Media Journalist; Rowan Brockman, University of Bristol; Richard Vaughan, Head of Play DCSF; Adrian Voce, Play England and representatives from four local authorities. There will be more details of the discussions available on the API website soon. Meanwhile the API's position is summarised in this briefing paper.



## Ensuring the Sustainability of Investment in Play

In recent years we have seen an increase in the awareness by Government of the importance of play for children, young people and families. BIG Lottery Funding and the more recent Playbuilder and Play Pathfinder initiatives have started to address the quality of play provision that was available.

In 2008, the Government launched its National Play Strategy and 10-year plan to make this country the best in the world for children to grow up. This was backed by £235 million to develop 3500 play areas over a 3-year period.

The first phase of this initiative (Year 1 - approx 500 play areas) has resulted in an 8 percent increase in the satisfaction levels with parks and play areas from the Tellus4 survey (NI 199). The API believes that this can be hugely increased in future years through continued investment.

Research by University College London found that outdoor and unstructured play is one of the best forms of exercise for children and that play provided children with more calorific benefit than any exercise other than PE classes.

There is evidence that the provision of high quality, well maintained play areas can significantly benefit the health and fitness of children. The API briefing paper 'The Politics of Play' (See External Environment, January 2010 issue) outlines the importance of play, not only to children, but also to families and the wider community. In particular we would like to highlight the following areas:-

- Play keeps children fit and healthy
- Play helps children develop their sense of risk
- Active children become fitter and healthier adults

Play therefore needs to be linked to both the sport and health agendas as it has the potential to increase participation in sport and therefore reduce future healthcare costs through a healthier and fitter next generation.

The API believes that regular funding of play is essential and will have many benefits for children, families and communities. The best way to achieve this, particularly in the current climate, is for funding for play facilities to become a statutory requirement at a local authority level. Such a statutory budget requirement would ensure that play facilities were of the highest quality, well maintained and used by local communities. Our children would be able to enjoy new and richer play experiences in a safe and appropriate environment.

The API hopes this will be discussed further after the May election at this year's perfectly timed (post-election) PlayFair exhibition on June 22-23 at Stoneleigh Park near Coventry.

