

08 February 2022

Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London
SW1A 2AA

Dear Prime Minister,

I thought it appropriate to write to you as I have also written to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care and the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities on this important matter affecting the health and life chances of children across the UK. Access to public play spaces in the UK is unfair and unequal, according to new research from the Association of Play Industries, of which I am Chair. Our latest Freedom of Information survey of Local Authorities has revealed that some UK regions have almost five times the free-to-access play provision of others.

Free, outdoor play is vital for children's physical and mental health and without it normal childhood development is curtailed. We are therefore urging the Government to level up the life chances of UK children by ensuring equal access for all to public play spaces. Central government funding which is ring fenced for play will enable local authorities to provide every child with a safe, high-quality playground nearby. Despite the release of the government's Levelling Up strategy last week, there was notably nothing specifically related to children's health and wellbeing and this simple ask would go a long way towards levelling up children's play opportunities in the UK. Despite the release of the government's Levelling Up strategy last week, there was notably nothing specifically related to children's health and wellbeing. We are asking the government to allocate monies from the Levelling Up funds towards equal play; this simple ask would go a long way towards levelling up children's play opportunities in the UK.

In the UK, public playgrounds are the number one location for children's outdoor play¹. The vast majority of British children live in built-up urban areas, and those from the 1 in 8 UK households without a garden (1 in 5 in London)², rely on public play areas for outdoor play and exercise. For many children, community playgrounds are their only chance to get active and play outdoors. Disabled children's access to, and enjoyment from, playgrounds also needs to improve.

Our research highlights the postcode lottery facing children and families, with some areas well-served and others seriously deprived of community play facilities:

- Children in London have access to almost five times fewer public playgrounds than children in Scotland.
- The West Midlands has the worst play provision in the UK with 929 children per playground. It also has the worst childhood obesity rates in England³ (Year 6).
- London has the second worst play provision in the UK with 866 children per playground.
- Every playground in the North-East and the North-West serves over 600 children, compared to just 196 in Scotland.
- Welsh children enjoy access to over twice the number of playgrounds than children in London.

¹ Dodd, H.F.; FitzGibbon, L.; Watson, B.E.; Nesbit, R.J. Children's Play and Independent Mobility in 2020: Results from the British Children's Play Survey. *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health* **2021**, *18*, 4334. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18084334>

²<https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/environmentalaccounts/articles/oneineightbritishhouseholdshasnogarden/2020-05-14>

³ <https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/profile/national-child-measurement-programme/data#page/13/>



Association of Play Industries

Under the auspices of the Federation of Sports and Play Associations Ltd.

Postal Address: FSPA, The Farmhouse, Hobb Lane, Uttoxeter, ST14 8RQ. T: 024 7641 4999 E: api@api-play.org

Registered address: FSPA, Network House, Stubs Beck Lane, Cleckheaton BD19 4TT, Registration No. 216719

api-play.org

Our latest campaign - Equal Play - seeks to level up children's play opportunities by calling on the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) to provide local authorities with access to a national funding stream for public playgrounds so that every child has a safe, local, high-quality place to play every day. We believe that the Government's Levelling Up agenda must include children's access to outdoor play; it is fundamental for childhood development and millions of children are currently disadvantaged.

Nationally, play provision is extremely patchy, with some areas well-served and others woefully lacking. Cash-strapped Local Authorities face increasingly difficult choices in how they allocate their budgets, and funding for outdoor play areas is often sacrificed in favour of other demands, particularly over the last two years.

The closure of public play spaces during lockdown and the effects on children of Covid restrictions has brought about a renewed appreciation by the public of the importance of these community assets. Providing all children with somewhere safe and local to play is a relatively inexpensive and simple public health measure and will help to help to tackle soaring childhood obesity rates and mental health issues - problems hugely exacerbated by the pandemic.

On behalf of the UK play industry and, more importantly on behalf of all UK children, we call upon the Government to do more to secure the future of children's outdoor play. It is curious to note that Scottish children in particular seem to enjoy the best playground provision in the UK by some margin, even without the recent commitment to over £60m specific investment in play areas made by the First Minister of Scotland. Surely all British children deserve the same.

I have enclosed a copy of our research report – Equal Play – and would very much welcome the opportunity to discuss this issue further.

Yours sincerely,



Mark E Hardy
Chair, Association of Play Industries

Association of Play Industries

Under the auspices of the Federation of Sports and Play Associations Ltd.

Postal Address: FSPA, The Farmhouse, Hobb Lane, Uttoxeter, ST14 8RQ. T: 024 7641 4999 E: api@api-play.org

Registered address: FSPA, Network House, Stubs Beck Lane, Cleckheaton BD19 4TT, Registration No. 216719

api-play.org



08 February 2022

The Rt Hon Michael Gove MP
Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Dear Secretary of State,

I thought it appropriate to write to you as I have also written to the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care on this important matter affecting the life chances of children across the UK. Access to public play spaces in the UK is unfair and unequal, according to new research from the Association of Play Industries, of which I am Chair. Our latest Freedom of Information survey of Local Authorities has revealed that some UK regions have almost five times the free-to-access play provision of others.

Free, outdoor play is vital for children's physical and mental health and without it normal childhood development is curtailed. We are therefore urging the Government to level up the life chances of UK children by ensuring equal access for all to public play spaces. Central government funding which is ring fenced for play will enable local authorities to provide every child with a safe, high-quality playground nearby. Despite the release of the government's Levelling Up strategy last week, there was notably nothing specifically related to children's health and wellbeing and this simple ask would go a long way towards levelling up children's play opportunities in the UK. Despite the release of the government's Levelling Up strategy last week, there was notably nothing specifically related to children's health and wellbeing. We are asking the government to allocate monies from the Levelling Up funds towards equal play; this simple ask would go a long way towards levelling up children's play opportunities in the UK.

In the UK, public playgrounds are the number one location for children's outdoor play¹. The vast majority of British children live in built-up urban areas, and those from the 1 in 8 UK households without a garden (1 in 5 in London)², rely on public play areas for outdoor play and exercise. For many children, community playgrounds are their only chance to get active and play outdoors. Disabled children's access to, and enjoyment from, playgrounds also needs to improve.

Our research highlights the postcode lottery facing children and families, with some areas well-served and others seriously deprived of community play facilities:

- Children in London have access to almost five times fewer public playgrounds than children in Scotland.
- The West Midlands has the worst play provision in the UK with 929 children per playground. It also has the worst childhood obesity rates in England³ (Year 6).
- London has the second worst play provision in the UK with 866 children per playground.
- Every playground in the North-East and the North-West serves over 600 children, compared to just 196 in Scotland.
- Welsh children enjoy access to over twice the number of playgrounds than children in London.

¹ Dodd, H.F.; FitzGibbon, L.; Watson, B.E.; Nesbit, R.J. Children's Play and Independent Mobility in 2020: Results from the British Children's Play Survey. *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health* **2021**, *18*, 4334. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18084334>

² <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/environmentalaccounts/articles/oneineightbritishhouseholdshasnogarden/2020-05-14>

³ <https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/profile/national-child-measurement-programme/data#page/13/>



Association of Play Industries

Under the auspices of the Federation of Sports and Play Associations Ltd.

Postal Address: FSPA, The Farmhouse, Hobb Lane, Uttoxeter, ST14 8RQ. T: 024 7641 4999 E: api@api-play.org

Registered address: FSPA, Network House, Stubs Beck Lane, Cleckheaton BD19 4TT, Registration No. 216719

api-play.org

Our latest campaign - Equal Play - seeks to level up children's play opportunities by calling on the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) to provide local authorities with access to a national funding stream for public playgrounds so that every child has a safe, local, high-quality place to play every day. We believe that the Government's Levelling Up agenda must include children's access to outdoor play; it is fundamental for childhood development and millions of children are currently disadvantaged.

Nationally, play provision is extremely patchy, with some areas well-served and others woefully lacking. Cash-strapped Local Authorities face increasingly difficult choices in how they allocate their budgets, and funding for outdoor play areas is often sacrificed in favour of other demands, particularly over the last two years.

The closure of public play spaces during lockdown and the effects on children of Covid restrictions has brought about a renewed appreciation by the public of the importance of these community assets. Providing all children with somewhere safe and local to play is a relatively inexpensive and simple public health measure and will help to help to tackle soaring childhood obesity rates and mental health issues - problems hugely exacerbated by the pandemic.

On behalf of the UK play industry and, more importantly on behalf of all UK children, we call upon the Government to do more to secure the future of children's outdoor play. It is curious to note that Scottish children in particular seem to enjoy the best playground provision in the UK by some margin, even without the recent commitment to over £60m specific investment in play areas made by the First Minister of Scotland. Surely all British children deserve the same.

I have enclosed a copy of our research report – Equal Play – and would very much welcome the opportunity to discuss this issue further.

Yours sincerely,



Mark E Hardy
Chair, Association of Play Industries

Association of Play Industries

Under the auspices of the Federation of Sports and Play Associations Ltd.

Postal Address: FSPA, The Farmhouse, Hobb Lane, Uttoxeter, ST14 8RQ. T: 024 7641 4999 E: api@api-play.org

Registered address: FSPA, Network House, Stubs Beck Lane, Cleckheaton BD19 4TT, Registration No. 216719

api-play.org



08 February 2022

The Rt Hon Sajid David MP
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care
39 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0EU

Dear Secretary of State,

I thought it appropriate to write to you as I have also written to the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities on this important matter affecting the mental and physical health of children across the UK. Access to public play spaces in the UK is unfair and unequal, according to new research from the Association of Play Industries, of which I am Chair. Our latest Freedom of Information survey of Local Authorities has revealed that some UK regions have almost five times the free-to-access play provision of others.

Free, outdoor play is vital for children's physical and mental health and without it normal childhood development is curtailed. We are therefore urging the Government to level up the life chances of UK children by ensuring equal access for all to public play spaces. Central government funding which is ring fenced for play will enable local authorities to provide every child with a safe, high-quality playground nearby. Despite the release of the government's Levelling Up strategy last week, there was notably nothing specifically related to children's health and wellbeing and this simple ask would go a long way towards levelling up children's play opportunities in the UK. Despite the release of the government's Levelling Up strategy last week, there was notably nothing specifically related to children's health and wellbeing. We are asking the government to allocate monies from the Levelling Up funds towards equal play; this simple ask would go a long way towards levelling up children's play opportunities in the UK.

In the UK, public playgrounds are the number one location for children's outdoor play¹. The vast majority of British children live in built-up urban areas, and those from the 1 in 8 UK households without a garden (1 in 5 in London)², rely on public play areas for outdoor play and exercise. For many children, community playgrounds are their only chance to get active and play outdoors. Disabled children's access to, and enjoyment from, playgrounds also needs to improve.

Our research highlights the postcode lottery facing children and families, with some areas well-served and others seriously deprived of community play facilities:

- Children in London have access to almost five times fewer public playgrounds than children in Scotland.
- The West Midlands has the worst play provision in the UK with 929 children per playground. It also has the worst childhood obesity rates in England³ (Year 6).
- London has the second worst play provision in the UK with 866 children per playground.
- Every playground in the North-East and the North-West serves over 600 children, compared to just 196 in Scotland.
- Welsh children enjoy access to over twice the number of playgrounds than children in London.

¹ Dodd, H.F.; FitzGibbon, L.; Watson, B.E.; Nesbit, R.J. Children's Play and Independent Mobility in 2020: Results from the British Children's Play Survey. *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health* **2021**, *18*, 4334. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18084334>

² <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/environmentalaccounts/articles/oneineightbritishhouseholdshasnogarden/2020-05-14>

³ <https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/profile/national-child-measurement-programme/data#page/13/>



Association of Play Industries

Under the auspices of the Federation of Sports and Play Associations Ltd.

Postal Address: FSPA, The Farmhouse, Hobb Lane, Uttoxeter, ST14 8RQ. T: 024 7641 4999 E: api@api-play.org

Registered address: FSPA, Network House, Stubs Beck Lane, Cleckheaton BD19 4TT, Registration No. 216719

api-play.org

Our latest campaign - Equal Play - seeks to level up children's play opportunities by calling on the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) to provide local authorities with access to a national

funding stream for public playgrounds so that every child has a safe, local, high-quality place to play every day. We believe that the Government's Levelling Up agenda must include children's access to outdoor play; it is fundamental for childhood development and millions of children are currently disadvantaged.


Nationally, play provision is extremely patchy, with some areas well-served and others woefully lacking. Cash-strapped Local Authorities face increasingly difficult choices in how they allocate their budgets, and funding for outdoor play areas is often sacrificed in favour of other demands, particularly over the last two years.

The closure of public play spaces during lockdown and the effects on children of Covid restrictions has brought about a renewed appreciation by the public of the importance of these community assets. Providing all children with somewhere safe and local to play is a relatively inexpensive and simple public health measure and will help to help to tackle soaring childhood obesity rates and mental health issues - problems hugely exacerbated by the pandemic.

On behalf of the UK play industry and, more importantly on behalf of all UK children, we call upon the Government to do more to secure the future of children's outdoor play. It is curious to note that Scottish children in particular seem to enjoy the best playground provision in the UK by some margin, even without the recent commitment to over £60m specific investment in play areas made by the First Minister of Scotland. Surely all British children deserve the same.

I have enclosed a copy of our research report – Equal Play – and would very much welcome the opportunity to discuss this issue further.

Yours sincerely,



Mark E Hardy
Chair, Association of Play Industries

Association of Play Industries

Under the auspices of the Federation of Sports and Play Associations Ltd.

Postal Address: FSPA, The Farmhouse, Hobb Lane, Uttoxeter, ST14 8RQ. T: 024 7641 4999 E: api@api-play.org

Registered address: FSPA, Network House, Stubs Beck Lane, Cleckheaton BD19 4TT, Registration No. 216719

api-play.org

