

Where are you?  Ble wyt ti?

# The 2008 Play Wales Workforce Survey

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## Executive Summary

**melyn**  
*Consulting*

## **Introduction**

Playwork as a qualified and trained profession is relatively new as are many of the structures now in place to develop a quality workforce. Key policy drivers - including the Welsh Assembly Government's *Play Strategy* published in 2006, the *Children & Young Peoples Workforce Strategy for Wales* and local authority *Children & Young People's Single Plans*, - all put a focus on building a qualified and competent professional workforce that meets the needs of children and young people.

In May 2008, Melyn Consulting Ltd. was commissioned to undertake research into the play workforce in Wales, which took place over the period June to October 2008.

The overall aim of the research was to gather labour market information that will help the development of workforce strategy at a national and local level and drive up skills in the profession. In addition, the information provides evidence for *Play Wales* and the *National Centre for Playwork* to plan workforce strategy and develop programmes of work focused on the needs of the sector.

The main method for gathering information about the play workforce in Wales was through a paper and web-based questionnaire. In total, 453 unique responses were received representing 9% of the workforce. The responses received mean that we can be 95% sure that the responses would reflect the whole population of playworkers.

In addition to the playworker survey, forms were sent to employers to gather specific information around recruitment, retention and training issues and a small-scale telephone survey of training providers was undertaken to ascertain the availability of play training across Wales in both the maintained and non-maintained sectors.

## **People who do Playwork**

People working in play are predominantly female with women making up 78% of the workforce but with a greater proportion of men working in play outside of childcare, and particularly in play training and play development.

Male playworkers are more likely to be working full-time in the in all-year-round posts as opposed to the majority of women who worked either term-time-only or just in school holidays. Women in play also tended have achieved lower levels of general education than men.

The play workforce is a fairly youthful one with over half aged between 19 and 34 years. Less than 20% are over 44 years of age.

The ethnicity of playworkers is broadly in line with the population of Wales as a whole but non-white playworkers were recorded only in West, South East and South Wales. Only 1.5% of playworkers are disabled.

## **Playwork Roles**

Play as an emerging profession contains people working in a wide variety of roles, in differing positions of responsibility and in a range of settings. The majority described themselves as Playworkers with the remainder being managers of other playworkers, involved in development work or users of play as a tool in other situations.

The range of jobs that people involved in play have, reflects the diversity of play provision and the range of ways in which play is used in other non-play-specific fields. This includes community development, therapeutic services, education, libraries, sports, arts and childcare.

Almost half of all those working in play in Wales are employed within the public sector but the voluntary sector employs over a third of playworkers in Wales. Only a third of playworkers work all-year-round on a full time basis. A quarter of playworkers only work during school holidays, while a further 18% work only during term-time.

Because of the seasonal and part-time nature of many playwork jobs, those working in play often have other employment. Nearly half of all playworkers have another job with very diverse range of alternative employment. While some are related – such as student, youth worker or teacher – play in Wales is also delivered by farmers, waiters, shopkeepers, cooks, cleaners, barmaids and librarians. Playwork provides the main household income for only 37% of workers.

While the average length of service with current employers was 4 years six months, the average playworker has been working in the field for nearly ten years. While those with greater experience were more likely to be managing others, a third of people with over 20 years experience were still working as playworkers.

Playwork is a very low-paid sector with the average hourly pay rate only £6.85 per hour. This was 34% below the average hourly wage for workers in Wales of £10.40 per hour and only 24% above the national minimum wage.

Turnover of workers in the sector was 25% in 2007-2008 although this is influenced by the large number of staff working seasonally.

In 2008 the play workforce grew by an estimated 12% but the majority of employers said that they found it difficult to recruit the play staff that they needed. Many said that the working hours and conditions often associated with playwork jobs made recruitment of staff difficult. A lack of training was a further factor.

People working in Playwork find the work itself particularly rewarding, especially seeing the positive impact that play has on the lives of children. However, playworkers are also frustrated by a lack of awareness and understanding of play from other professionals which makes it difficult to advocate the benefits of play. Low

pay puts off some people from becoming playworkers as do the unsociable hours and the demanding nature of the work.

Promoting play amongst other people in the children and young people's workforce was seen as important. Playworkers recognised that many in related fields –such as youth work, sports, uniformed groups, and church groups - were using play in their work but without clear links to playwork principles and without access to play training.

### **Qualifications**

Information about the existing qualifications held by practitioners is important in both assessing the current and future development needs of the workforce.

Relative to the population as a whole, people working in play are more highly educated but only 41% have a recognised playwork qualification. The most common qualification held is the NVQ Level 3 Playwork held by 10% of those involved in play in Wales.

People with play qualifications have generally gained them recently. 71% have gained their most recent qualification within the past 5 years and only 14% have studied more than 10 years ago.

17% of playworkers are currently working towards a playwork qualification. Of these, half are studying towards a level 2 qualification and 30% are working towards a level 3 qualification – primarily NVQ Level 3 Playwork. Only a small proportion are studying for higher level qualifications up to degree and masters level.

Less than half of qualifications being taken by those working in play are being funded by employers with over a third of people paying for training themselves.

While only around 40% of people working in play had a playwork qualification 25% have a related qualification such as sports development; youth & community work; early childhood education, primary education; early years childcare and education; and arts.

Playwork Level 3 is the most common type of qualification sought by employers for a range of posts including senior playwork roles and play managers.

### **Training**

The majority of playworkers receive regular training but the amount and quality of training to support continuing professional development is often dependent on the type of employer and the playwork role involved.

People working for local authorities are most likely to receive play training (65%) followed by those working in the voluntary sector (55%) and the private sector (40%).

During 2008, the most commonly accessed training had been Playwork Principles into Practice (P3).

Those working for private businesses were most likely to have received training with Clybiau Plant Cymru Kids Clubs or in local colleges while training provided by Play Wales was mainly used by those working in the voluntary sector and local authorities.

While the majority of the employers have training plans for all staff a quarter have only partial plans in place and 13% had no plans at all.

Much of the non-qualification training received by playworkers is what is termed statutory training - first aid, child protection and food hygiene training. Other play-practice focused training is less common.

On average, people involved in play spend 5.7 days each training each year. However, nearly 40% of people working in play spend no time training at all. People who described themselves as Playworkers spend on average 5 days training each year. This compares with 1 day for childcare workers, 7 days for playwork coordinators and 8 days for play development staff.

While employers mainly pay for the cost of training, 18% of playwork employers did not pay their staff to attend training courses.

The average amount spent on training by employers of playworkers in 2008 was £109.24 per person. Local authorities spent the most with a budget of £313 per head; private businesses spent £158; and voluntary sector organisations spent just £27 per person.

Most employers find it relatively easy to access the training that they feel their employees need. Some find it difficult to access playwork qualification training (mainly at Level 3), while others have specific training needs that could be met through short courses – such as behaviour management, activity ideas, listening skills etc. Many employers said that they find it difficult to access what can be termed 'statutory' training such as first aid, health & safety or food hygiene.