



Department  
of Health &  
Social Care



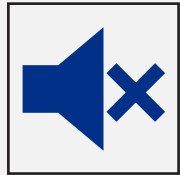
England

# Implementing the Play Well Toolkit for Children's Play in Healthcare

# Agenda

| Time  | Agenda Item   | Owner   |
|-------|---|---|
| 12:00 | Welcomes and Introductions  | Kath Evans  |
| 12:05 | Overview of the work that has been completed to produce the toolkit.        | Ellen Duke  |
| 12:15 | Experience and impact of health play services                               | Ola   |
| 12:20 | Play Well: guidelines for commissioning and designing health play services  | Krutika Pau, Irene O'Donnell  |
| 12:45 | Putting the Toolkit to work: recommended standards for health play services | Catherine Carpenter-Clawson, Damien Griffiths, Tanya O'Driscoll, Steph Fairbain |
| 13:00 | Professional support in using the Toolkit                                   | Penelope Hart-Spencer<br>Tina Clegg   |
| 13:10 | Taskmaster Education  | James Blake-Lobb  |
| 13:20 | Questions   | All   |

# Welcome and Introductions



Please mute yourself during the presentations until question time; this helps reduce background noise.



Please introduce yourself in the chat box and add any comments and thoughts into the chat box as we go through the presentations.



Please type any questions you have during the webinar into the chat box.



If you are having any technical problems, send a message via the chat panel and someone will try to assist you.

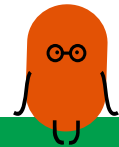


We will be recording this session



# **PLAY WELL**

## **TOOLKIT FOR CHILDREN'S PLAY IN HEALTHCARE**



**Dr Krutika Pau, Deputy CEO and Director of  
Children's Services at Starlight**

**ABPN Webinar, 15.10.25  
'Playing Well: Implementing the Play Well  
toolkit for children's play in health care'**



# ABOUT STARLIGHT



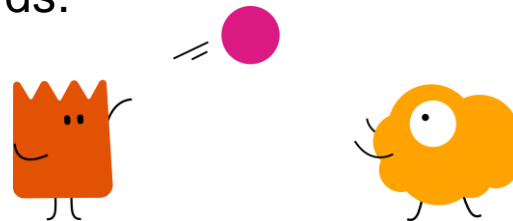


TRANSFORMING CHILDREN'S HEALTH THROUGH PLAY

**Our mission is to enable all children to enjoy their right to play when they are receiving healthcare – in or out of hospital – supported by health play staff and resources according to their need.**

We work to ensure all children can experience the power of play to support their mental and physical health during treatment and recovery from illness.

Our aim is that every child's right to play is protected and provided for as an integral part of their healthcare. We want them to be safeguarded and protected from avoidable distress and trauma through the support of specialised, properly resourced play services working to recognised national standards.



**There is a unifying  
human truth**

**Healthcare is a scary  
world and feeling scared  
can make us less  
resilient & less  
receptive to treatment,  
especially children**





**To transform  
children's  
health  
through  
better  
healthcare  
experiences**



# **RESEARCH ON PLAY IN HEALTHCARE**



# Our research

(a selection – including commissioned research)



**VIRTUAL REALITY DISTRACTION THERAPY RESEARCH 2022**

leeds hospitals charity NIHR Yorkshire and Humber Patient Safety Transformation Research Centre dubit leeds children's hospital

A break-even analysis of Starlight Boost Box services

Rachel Gomez  
July 2023

**STARLIGHT**  
TRANSFORMING CHILDREN'S HEALTH THROUGH PLAY

**PRIORITISING PLAY IN HEALTHCARE IN AREAS OF DEPRIVATION**

Play In Healthcare Week Report 2023

**STARLIGHT**  
TRANSFORMING CHILDREN'S HEALTH THROUGH PLAY

**VACCINE PROJECT 2024**

February 2024

**STARLIGHT**  
TRANSFORMING CHILDREN'S HEALTH THROUGH PLAY

**CAUSES OF TRAUMA FROM CHILDREN'S HEALTHCARE**

Play In Healthcare Week Report 2025

March 2025

# PLAYING WITH CHILDREN'S HEALTH?

A scoping review of recent literature on play and children's health



Kelsey Graber PhD, Paulina Pérez-Duarte Mendiola MSc,  
Kateryna Tyzhuk MPhil and Paul Ramchandani DPhil



This review identifies five key domains where play contributes to health in healthcare settings:

1. reducing stress and discomfort during medical procedures
2. helping children express and manage emotions
3. fostering dignity and agency
4. building connection and belonging
5. preserving children's sense of childhood.

The evidence highlights the unique capacity of play to address the emotional and mental aspects of healthcare for children and young people, and calls attention to the evolving perception of what it means to be 'healthy' or 'well' within healthcare spaces.



# THE PLAY WELL TOOLKIT



## THE PLAY WELL TOOLKIT

Search

About us

Our work

Commissioning

Get involved

# Play well – resources for health play services for England

Document first published: 2 June 2025

Page updated: 2 June 2025

Topic: [Children and young people](#), [Commissioning](#), [Patient care](#)

Publication type: [Guidance](#)

This toolkit will help commissioners, service managers, health play practitioners and clinical leaders to design, plan and deliver high-quality health play services for babies, children and young people.

The resources include guidelines, recommended standards and a quality checklist.



# PLAY WELL GUIDELINES



Play well: guidelines for commissioning and designing health play services

< Publication

Content

Foreword

Introduction

[The role of play in children's health and education](#)

[Health care services](#)

[The health care service](#)

[Quality improvement](#)

[Why commission these guidelines?](#)

[Appendix A: roles in the play team](#)

[Appendix B: recommended resources for health care services](#)

[Appendix C: different roles in supporting children's mental health](#)

Foreword

Play is a vital part of childhood – and that shouldn't change when a child becomes unwell. Health play services help young people have a voice, feel safe, reduce anxiety, and improve outcomes. They change how children experience health services and that can have long-lasting effect on their engagement with healthcare well into adulthood.

NHS England and Starlight formed the Taskforce on Children's Play in Healthcare and with input from more than 60 health professionals and young people, these are the first national guidelines and standards for commissioning and delivering health play services in England.

It's an important step, but it's only the start. These documents will support system leaders and clinical staff to embed health play services as a core part of healthcare for all children, and help make the NHS as welcoming, gentle, and child-friendly as possible.

Cathy Gilman, CEO, Starlight  
Duncan Burton, Chief Nursing Officer for England

Introduction

What are these guidelines about?

They are about play services in children's healthcare. Specifically, they are about commissioning, designing and delivering therapeutic health play services that help ensure

# RECOMMENDED STANDARDS

Play well: recommended standards for health play services

< Publication

Content

Introduction

[Recommended standards](#)

Introduction

What services do these standards apply to?

They are designed to be used by health play services providing therapeutic play to babies, children and young people in England – and by the services within which these teams operate.

The aim is to support auditing, monitoring, and evaluation of services and ensure children and young people receive high-quality care.

The standards should be used alongside the:

- [Play well: guidelines for commissioning and designing health play services](#)
- [Play well: quality checklist for health play services](#)

How these service standards relate to professional standards

These standards apply to health play services. They are not [professional standards](#) for health play specialists. However, the standards – along with the [quality checklist](#) – have been developed in close collaboration with the Society of Health Play Specialists (SHP) to ensure alignment with recognised professional standards.



## Recommended standards

# QUALITY CHECKLIST



Classification: Official

**NHS**  
England

**STARLIGHT**  
National Children's Mental Health Charities

## Play well: quality checklist for health play services

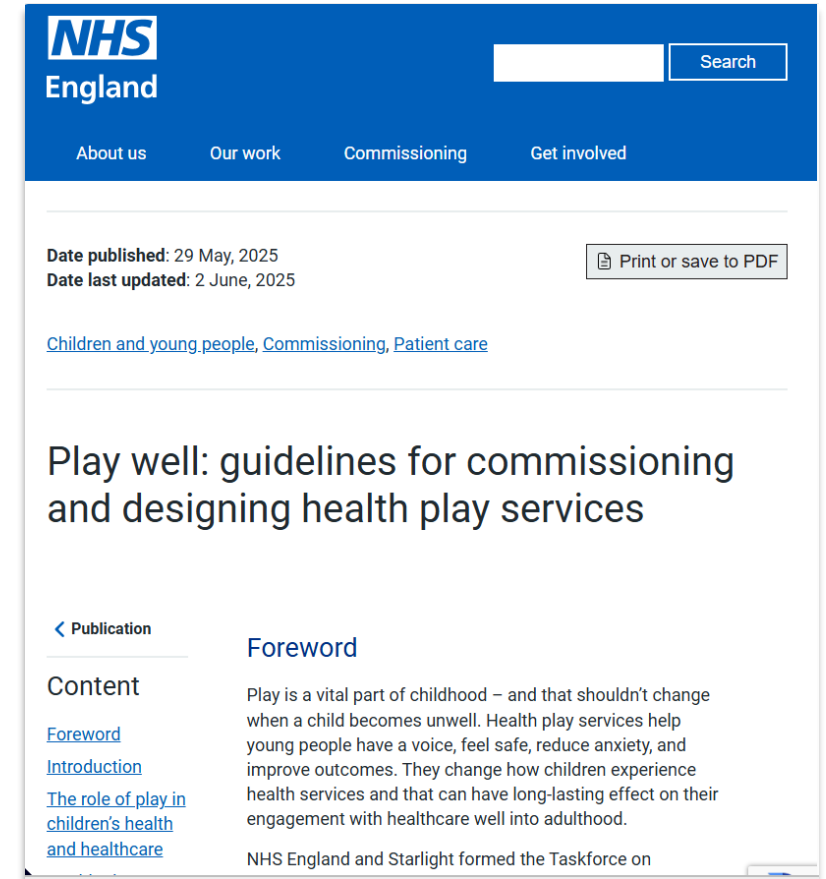


## Quality checklist



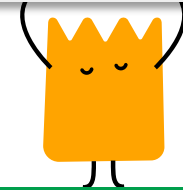
# GUIDELINES

- The role of play in children's health and healthcare
- Therapeutic play and health play specialists
- The play team
- Health play service design
- Environment and resources for play
- An integrated model for universal provision
- Community health play and referrals
- Standards and quality improvement



The screenshot shows the NHS England website interface. At the top left is the NHS England logo. To the right is a search bar with a 'Search' button. Below the logo are navigation links: 'About us', 'Our work', 'Commissioning', and 'Get involved'. The main content area includes the following information:

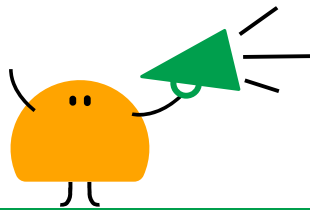
- Date published:** 29 May, 2025
- Date last updated:** 2 June, 2025
- A button labeled 'Print or save to PDF'.
- Tags: [Children and young people](#), [Commissioning](#), [Patient care](#)
- Title:** Play well: guidelines for commissioning and designing health play services
- Navigation:** A breadcrumb trail shows '< Publication' and 'Foreword' (which is highlighted).
- Content:** A list of links includes 'Foreword', 'Introduction', and 'The role of play in children's health and healthcare'.
- Text:** 'Play is a vital part of childhood – and that shouldn't change when a child becomes unwell. Health play services help young people have a voice, feel safe, reduce anxiety, and improve outcomes. They change how children experience health services and that can have long-lasting effect on their engagement with healthcare well into adulthood.'
- Footer:** 'NHS England and Starlight formed the Taskforce on'



# THE ECONOMIC CASE FOR INVESTING IN PLAY

## Pro Bono Economics evaluation:

### Demonstrating the cost and time efficiencies of play as distraction in a healthcare setting



#### Insight: shortening treatment times by using play resources

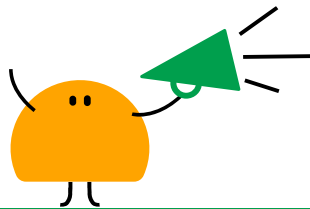
An independent evaluation by Pro Bono Economics indicated that play resources can shorten treatment times and reduce the need for sedation – and therefore saving NHS resources.

The study found that ‘Distraction boxes’ and ‘Boost boxes’ – collections of bespoke toys and play resources curated by the Starlight Children’s Foundation for use in clinical support by health play staff – could reduce average treatment time by 6 minutes. The study estimated a potential annual staff cost saving of £2.2 million and further savings of up to £1 million per year from removing the need for sedation in up to 100,000 treatments per year. It concluded the distraction boxes would pay for themselves if only one fifth of these potential savings were realised.

# THE CASE FOR PLAY IN IMPROVING PAEDIATRIC CARE

## RCPCH recommended standards:

## Health play specialist's integral to ED settings



### Insight: play specialists in emergency care

Standard 5 of the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health's (RCPCH's) [Standards for emergency care](#) says "all emergency departments that treat children employ a play specialist".

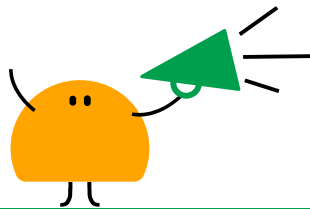
According to the RCPCH, the role of a play specialist in emergency care settings includes:

- providing distraction therapy for potentially distressing procedures
- enhancing nursing and medical skills to involve play in the management of procedures in children
- maintenance of a child-catered environment, including advising on safe and appropriate toys and facilities
- supervision of play in the department
- advising on the requirements of children with additional needs

# THE CASE FOR INTEGRATING PLAY INTO NEIGHBOURHOOD CARE AS PREVENTION AND TO IMPROVE OUTCOMES

**Commissioned project by the North East London ICB:**

**Play supported vaccination programmes to drive uptake**



## Case study: supporting children's vaccinations

Play sessions and resources in sites across North East London

The Starlight Children's Foundation provided play sessions and play and distraction resources to 8 COVID-19 vaccination sites for the North East London Integrated Care Board (ICB).

The sites included community centres, medical practices, special education schools and family hubs. An estimated 2,500 children and young people were supported through the project.

The evaluation of the project found that providing play sessions and resources before and after receiving a vaccine reduced the proportion of children feeling negative emotions and increased the proportion feeling positive emotions. Feedback from parents and carers, clinical and non-clinical vaccination staff, and the Starlight team indicated that parents also felt positive emotions (for example, relief, relaxation) because their children were supported by the play provision.

# STARLIGHT SERVICES

## Education and training

- Training for students, MDTs, and skills development for health play teams.

## Health play delivery and integration into paediatric care

- Play supported vaccine initiatives.
- Embedding health play into dental environments, youth hubs and neighbourhood health centres.

## Play Well Toolkit implementation

- Support on how to embed the national guidelines and standards for health play provision into your service.



To connect with the policy team at Starlight,  
please email us at:

[sarah.owen@starlight.org.uk](mailto:sarah.owen@starlight.org.uk)

For bespoke support and more information  
on delivery services please contact us at:

[consultancy@starlight.org.uk](mailto:consultancy@starlight.org.uk)

**FOR MORE  
INFORMATION**

**Starlight Children's Foundation**

To access free health play  
resources please visit our  
website.

[www.starlight.org.uk](http://www.starlight.org.uk)



**STARLIGHT**

TRANSFORMING CHILDREN'S HEALTH THROUGH PLAY

Company limited by guarantee 2038895. Registered charity 296058 (England & Wales) SC047600 (Scotland)

# Designing play services and GIRFT- impact of play for BCYP in healthcare

## ”Play on Prescription”

**Irene O’Donnell** -Trust Lead for Therapeutic Play Services & Youth Services

Society of Health play specialists (SoHPS) Workforce Development Lead





# STARLIGHT

TRANSFORMING CHILDREN'S HEALTH THROUGH PLAY

## The Play Well Promise



“We recognise all children’s right to play as part of the best possible healthcare. All our staff working with children understand the importance of play to their care, and we also employ specialised health play staff.

We want our health play services to be of the highest possible quality and are committed to adopting and implementing the recommended standards”.



# Health play workforce development strategy

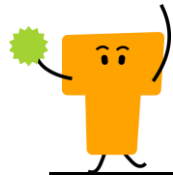


- Chaired the WFD group for the taskforce
- Published June 24
- Commissioned Skills for Health
- Collaboration between Starlight, SoHPS and stakeholder group
- Sets out a road map of how we develop and grow the health play workforce

# OUR MESSAGE TO BABIES, CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE



This strategy is for you.



---

### **More staff – when you need them**

We want there to be more health play specialists and playworkers to support you, 7 days a week.



---

### **Better skills**

We want all health play staff to have the right training, skills and qualifications to do the best job they can for you.



---

### **Higher standards**

We want health play staff to have what they need to be able to provide you with high quality, professional services.



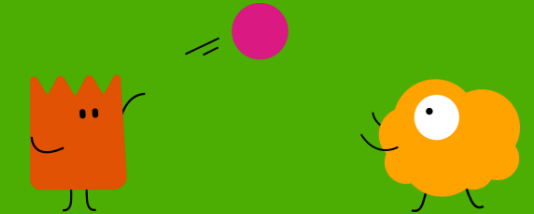
---

### **Greater recognition**

We want the importance of play, and the staff who support you to play, to be better recognized by other health professionals, the NHS and the public.

We want to work with you, your families and your health professionals to develop and implement this plan to provide the health play services you need and deserve.

# 4 PILLARS



## Capacity

---

1000 new health play staff over 3 years

New guidance and standards

Review of commissioning specifications

Growth in professional infrastructure



## Capability

---

Accessible training and qualifications

Apprenticeship schemes

Capability frameworks

Continuous professional development



## Professionalization

---

Develop and refine the professional register

Independent accreditation

Job evaluation and banding guidelines

Support for professional members



## Recognition

---

Awareness raising

Research and evidence

Information and advocacy for children and families

Policy and practice development

Collaboration and ally-ship with MDTs



McKenzie O'Reilly, youth member of the CYP transformation board board, NHS England

‘The downside was weekends...I struggled during the weekends with not having the play specialist there to help me for operations and cannulas...they weren't there, and I'd really struggle about that. I wasn't sure what to do.’

‘Play Specialists was one of the things I wanted to help change and have my say about.’



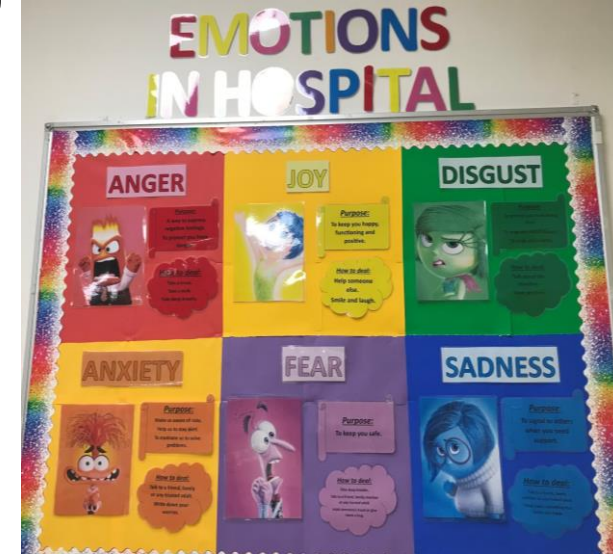
# Designing health play services – What roles can the play team include?



- |   |                                    |                           |
|---|------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Professional lead                                   | Registered Health play specialists | play and activity workers |
| advanced health play specialists/team leads         | Youth support coordinators         | youth workers             |
| trainee psychological wellbeing practitioner LD/ASC | Mental Health Practitioner         | Volunteers                |
|   |                                    | therapy dogs              |

# Environment - first impressions count!

Create a welcoming, safe and child/young person-friendly environment



# GIRFT - how can play contribute to improving efficiencies, addressing health inequalities for BCYP healthcare

- Case examples -
- It pays to play - MRI awake
- Surgical pathways
- Improving access to healthcare



# Monthly neurodiversity dental clinic

- Request for support from consultant for clinic where CYP who were neurodivergent were struggling to access due to high anxiety
- 1 HPS 1 play worker support the clinic
- Play specialist liaison with Spread a smile to explore options of therapy dog support
- Therapy dog now attends monthly Monday clinic
- CYP booked into this clinic and prep for therapy dog support
- Staff hope to extend this to other clinics due to the success

**Results- Improves experience, access to healthcare and efficiencies**

**Thank you to SAS**



# Supporting flow and efficiency in surgical pathways

## Before surgery date:

- All about me sheet completed with CYP/parent/carer in pre-assessment appointment
- Play specialist prep- flagged in advance then call or email check in
- Video prep or in person tour and prep offer
- Feedback to the MDT via EPIC documentation

## On the day of surgery:

- Sensory environment set up
- Staggered arrival time for CYP
- Communication between MDT and CYP/family to provide bespoke support to manage the procedure
- Play sessions adapted to each patient

**Quicker recovery time with play involved post op**

**Reduced waiting lists from 11 to 3 months**  
**Improved surgical flow, patient experience and safety**

**Making healthcare more accessible**



# Health Play Specialist Role in Imaging

Make assessments – GA or Non GA?

Prepare for planning and treatment – age appropriate, child friendly resources, individualised

Patient and family support

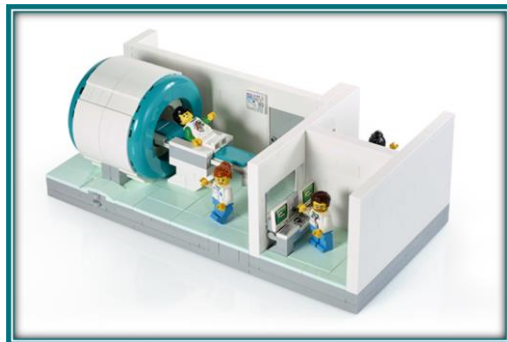
Act as link between family and MDT- information sharing, referrals

Radiographer education, speak at national/international conferences

Normalise environment, child and young person -friendly

Create positive experience

reduce need for GA or sedation



## MRI Virtual Prep Clinics

- Introduced in Jan 25' to continue to improve efficiency & Patient Experience –
- Virtual Prep clinics prior to appointment. Advanced preparation, not rushed during waiting time.
- The focus can be on completing MRI safety questionnaires, and allowing child/young person time to relax and get used to environment
- Takes place at home on a Monday afternoon/early evening – **reduced time off school/work for CYP/family, making healthcare more accessible and substantiable**

Family contacted week before appointment

- Option to book in for an MRI prep session

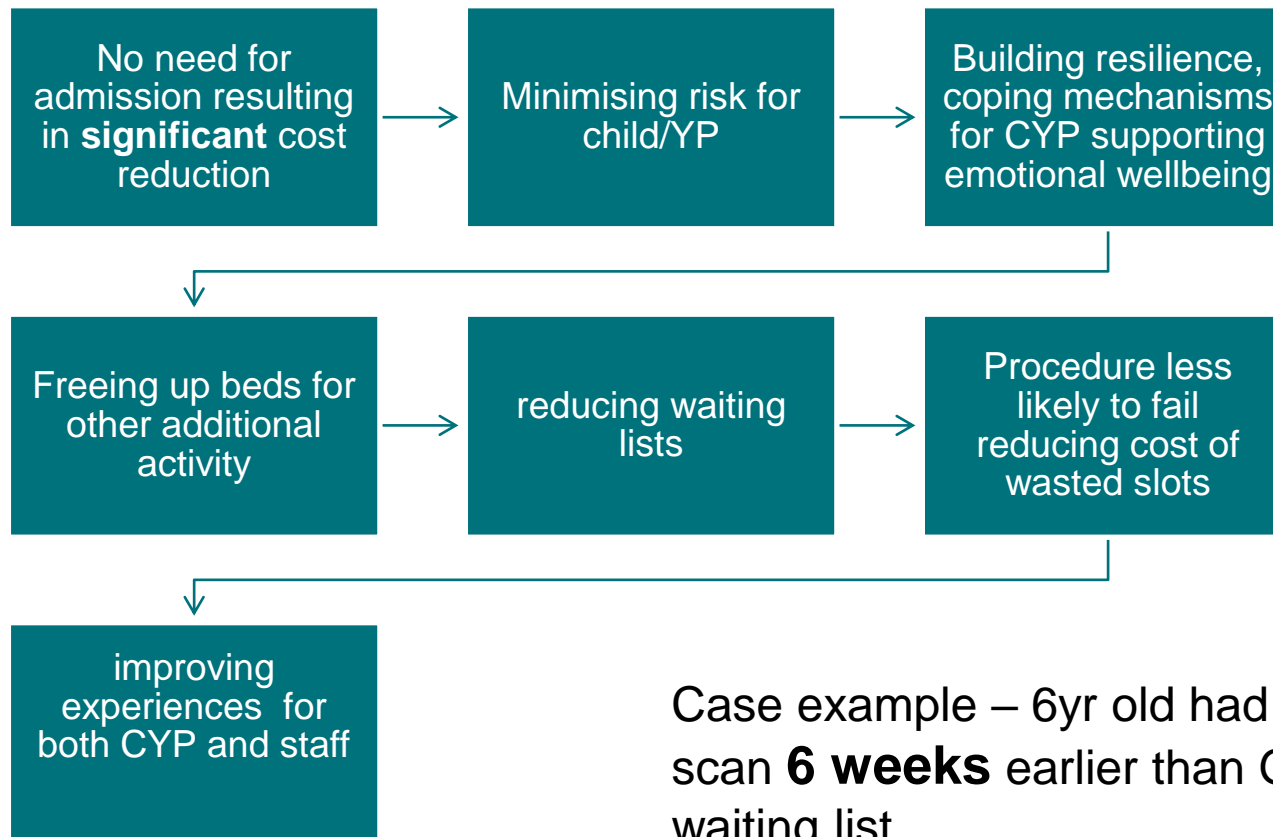
Virtual MRI Prep session takes place

- Shares Images and sounds
- Delivers prep, asks questions. Establish what child/parent already knows

HPS supports patient for MRI

- Revisits prep on the day
- Child already has understanding, focus on relaxing in environment

# Efficiency improving compassionate care through play....MRI awake - it pays to play!



Case example – 6yr old had scan **6 weeks** earlier than GA waiting list



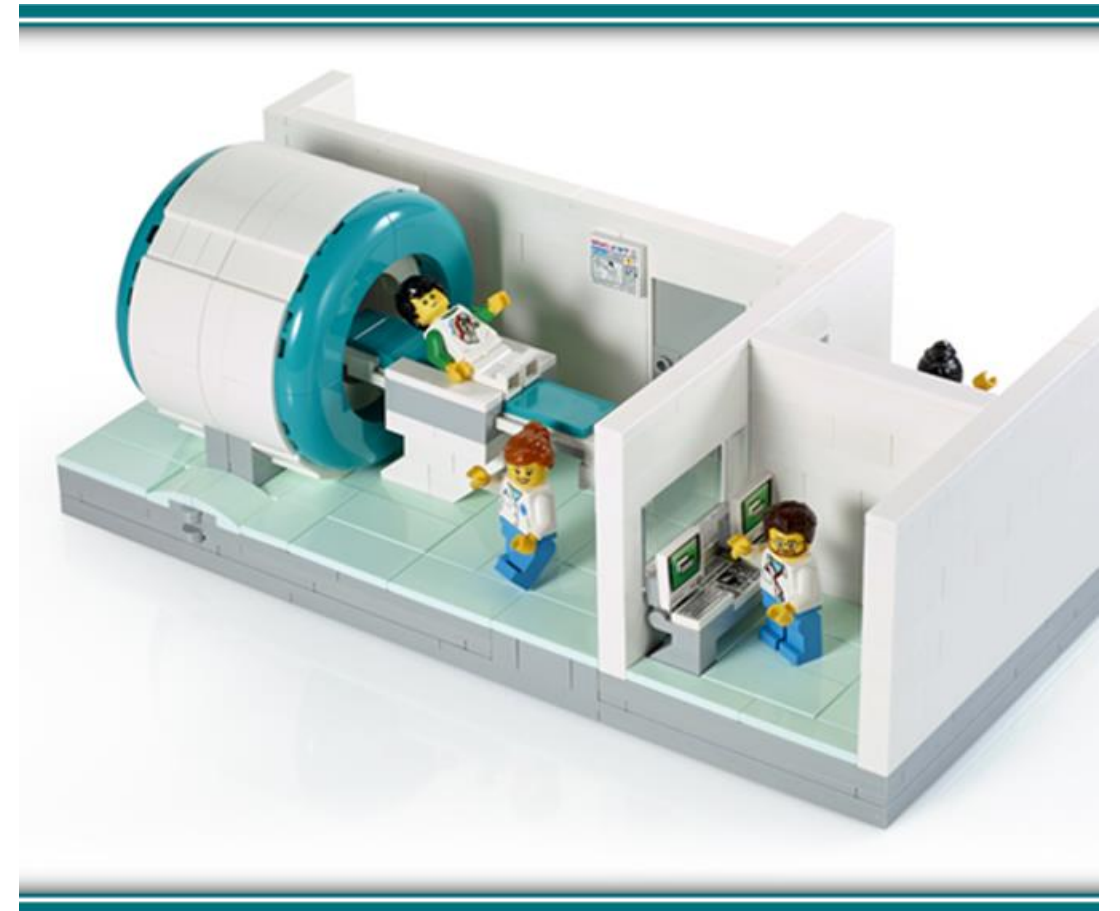
## The Impact of Play at UCLH - GIRFT

Fluoroscopy and Nuclear Medicine: now running two awake lists every week, supporting up to 13 CYP on the morning lists

Supporting all Imaging services, including CT, USS, skeletal survey

***University College London Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust has adopted a similar approach, appointing a Band 6 Health Play Specialist who now works with 95% of children needing an MRI. It has found that around nine children a week, who would previously have required a general anaesthetic for MRI, now receive an MRI without one. As well as benefiting the individual children, this also means that the time needed for these MRIs is reduced – freeing up additional imaging sessions.***

***<https://gettingitrightfirsttime.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/GIRFT-radiology-report.pdf>***



# FEEDBACK

"The Play Specialist made my daughter feel at ease, told her what to expect and know that nothing was going to hurt. I think it was an outstanding way to bring down the anxiety. When my daughter walked in and saw the machine, she was a bit scared but going back to the things that Katie had prepared for made her calmer, I think she might not have gone through with it had she not had the virtual prep".

(Parent, May 2025)

"Reassuring. Could know in advance what was going to happen and could ask questions. Telling our daughter to pick out music to play while having the MRI was also a brilliant distraction and a positive preparation, she was able to do at home before going into the procedure.

(Parent, May 2025)

Feel more relaxed when running paediatric lists, knowing I can focus on their role, and the HPS is supporting the CYP and the list runs to time and is more efficient - radiographers



**"This is such a brilliant resource for neurodivergent families, the time and effort to have someone offering this support to us makes all the difference for us."-Parent**

**"The list has been so successful - we have reduced the wait time for neurodiverse patients from 11 months down to 3 months due to this initiative. Couldn't do without them!"- Amanda O'Donnell, Clinical Lead and Dental Surgeon**

**"Our daughter has numerous and profound learning disabilities and is autistic and becomes distressed in unfamiliar surroundings. Nicola's calm and reassuring attitude shone through immediately. Nicola made it a really positive experience for us all. I feel confident our return appointments knowing that Nicola is there to support us and I know our daughter will be pleased to see her!"-Parent**

# Key to Success - how do you embed play into healthcare?

Champions – supporting to embed the role in the department. Education and training on play in healthcare for MDT

Good Communication - looking at referrals, notes in EPIC, MDT supporting our role and colleagues seeing the benefits in real time

Standardised pathway (SOPs) – for example children aged 4 and above booked on awake list /referred to HPS/pre assessment all about me completed for all BCYP

Gather your evidence! audits, feedback , research, involve CYP and families, collaborate with others – don't reinvent the wheel!



# Looking to the future for health play services - what now?

- Research in health play – (play on prescription)
- Auditing services through the quality check list – play well standards
- Evidencing the impact
- Standardizing
- Growing the workforce
- Addressing health inequalities
- Focus on Primary care and community



Irene O'Donnell

[irene.o'donnell@nhs.net](mailto:irene.o'donnell@nhs.net)



[admin@sohps.org.uk](mailto:admin@sohps.org.uk)



# Playing Well Webinar

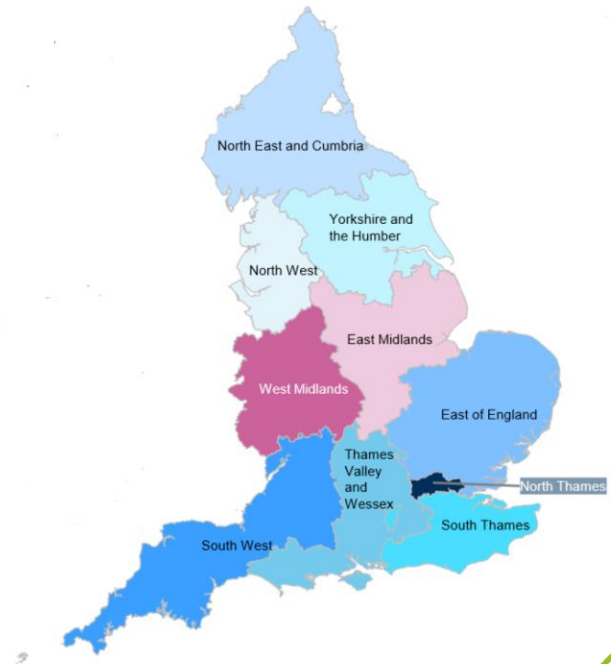
Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> October 2025

- Collaborating with Network Colleagues  
*(who are we, what do we do and how we can hopefully help)*

# Operational Delivery Networks (ODN) – who

Operational Delivery Networks cover England (and collaborate across borders)

Focus on specialities/ areas (South West Paediatric ODNs below)



Severn Major Trauma Operational Delivery Network



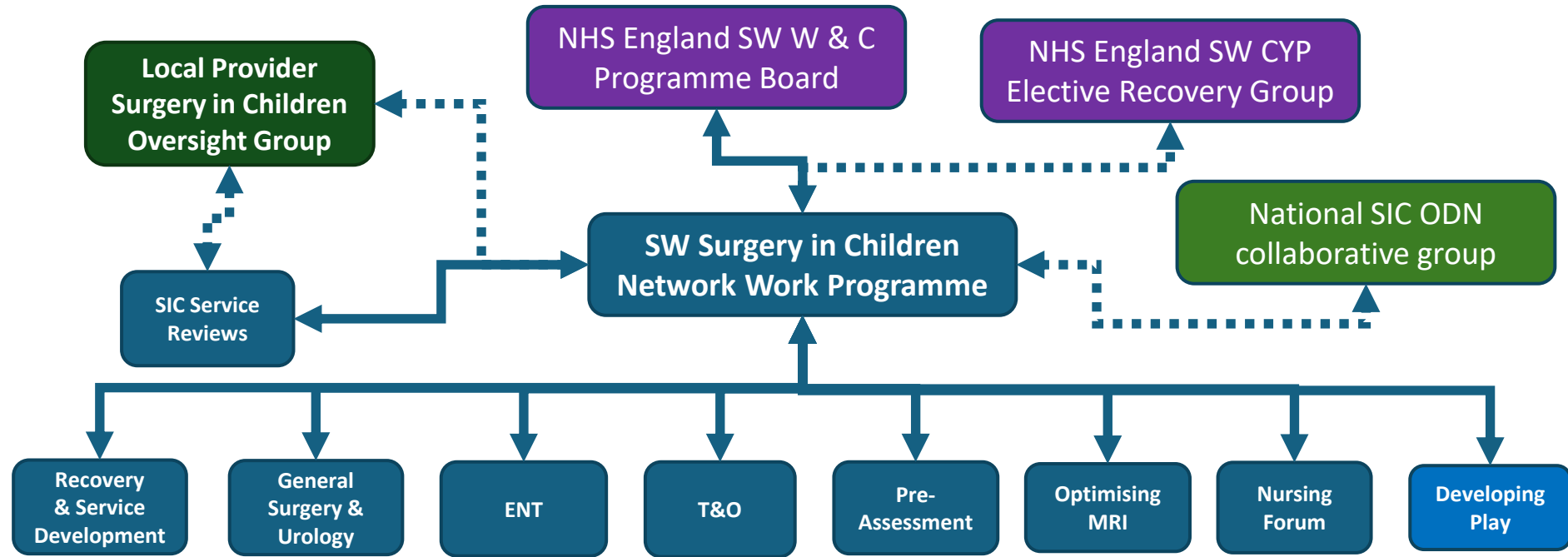
South West Surgery in Children Operational Delivery Network



South PAEDIATRIC NEUROSCIENCES Operational Delivery Network

# Operational Delivery Networks – what

South West Surgery in Children ODN covers key surgical specialities, work driven through clinical working groups in these areas and reports to regional colleagues

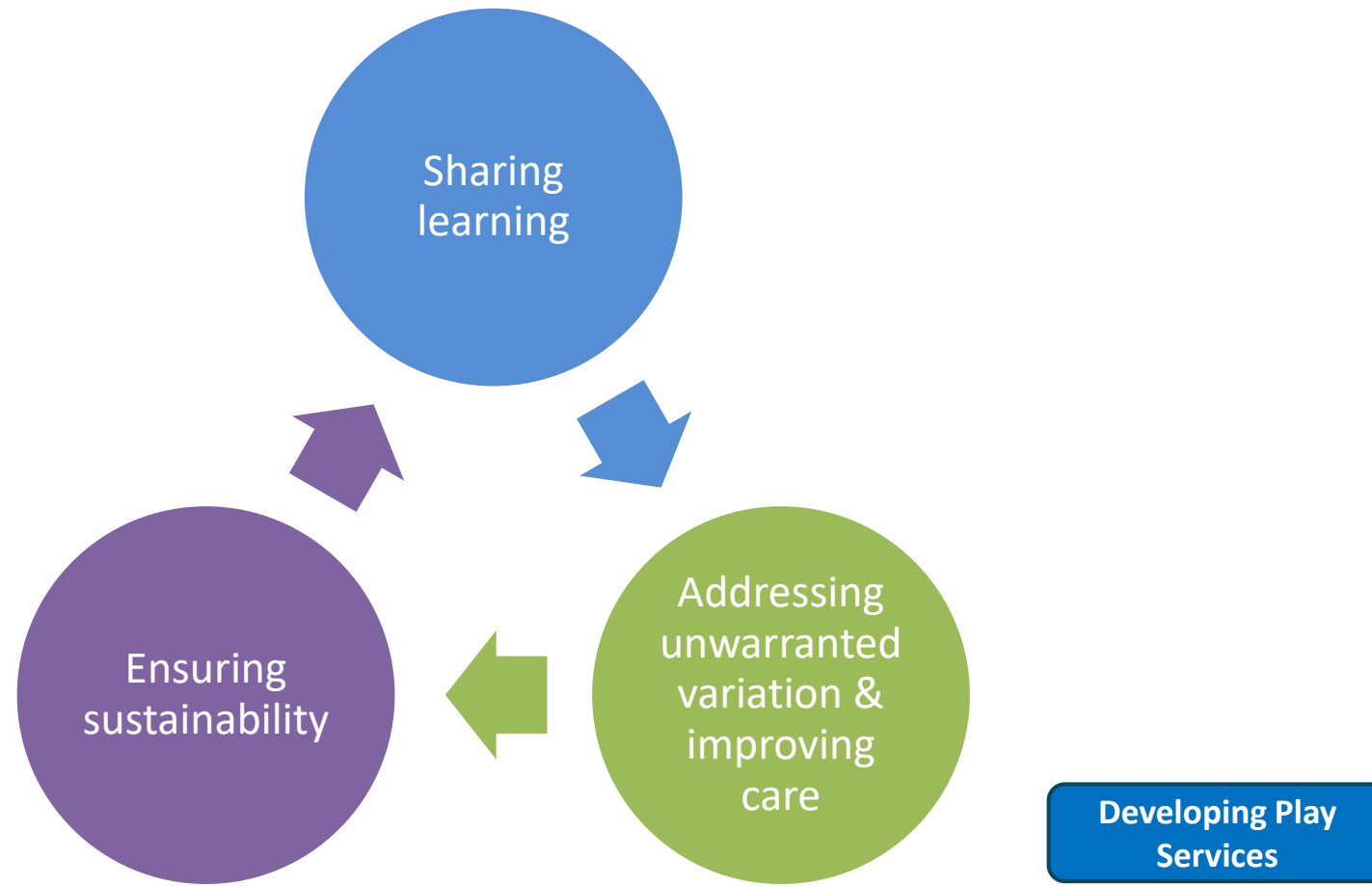


Regional Clinical Working Groups facilitated by the network team – align to national priorities, agree regional workstreams



Support working towards national standards, guidelines and Getting It Right First Time report recommendations led by local colleagues

# Operational Delivery Network – what Aims & Objectives



# SW ODNs - Involvement with Play Services

Challenges with access to Play services highlighted across the region during 2022 Service Review Meetings



Began working with local play leads as part of an MRI Working Group set up to review pathways



Benchmarking SW Play Service Survey carried out in 2023 which was completed by all 11 SW providers



Presented survey results which show significant regional variation and held a 'what next' discussion



Established the SW Developing Play Services Working Group to support providers

# SW ODNs - Involvement with Play Services

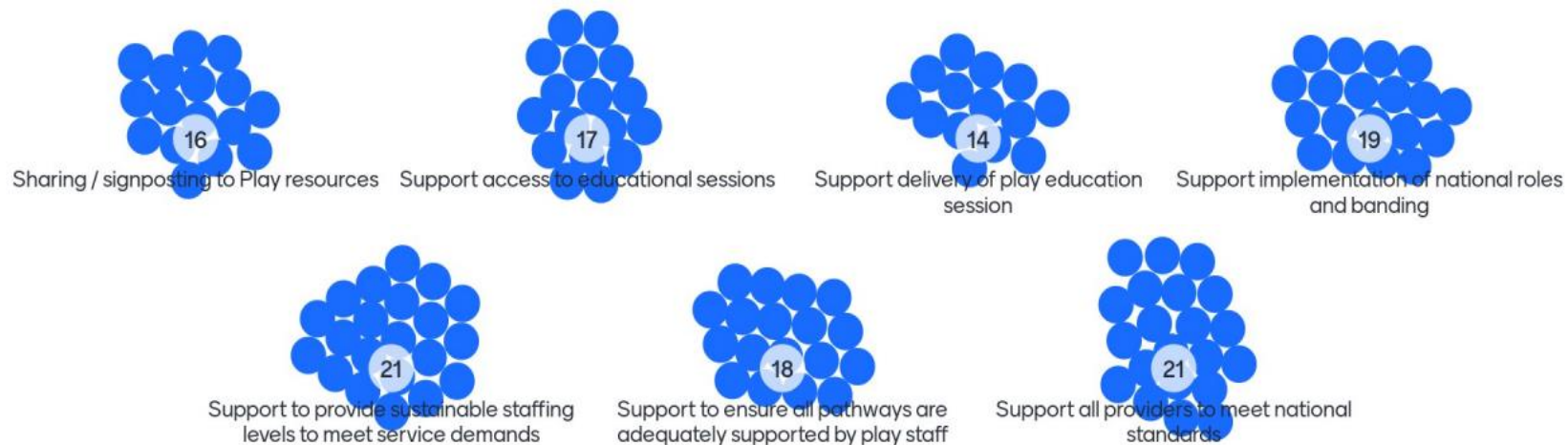
Themes identified during initial play services meeting:

- Benchmarking against national standards
- Guidance and policies
- Play advocacy
- Sharing of tools and resources
- Access to education and training

Develop a working group / task and finish group to collaborate a south west plan

Formalise a South West play network to cover all providers

## What can we do to support play teams?



December 2023

# SW ODNs - Involvement with Play Services

National standards shared with all centres in SW and offered help with completion

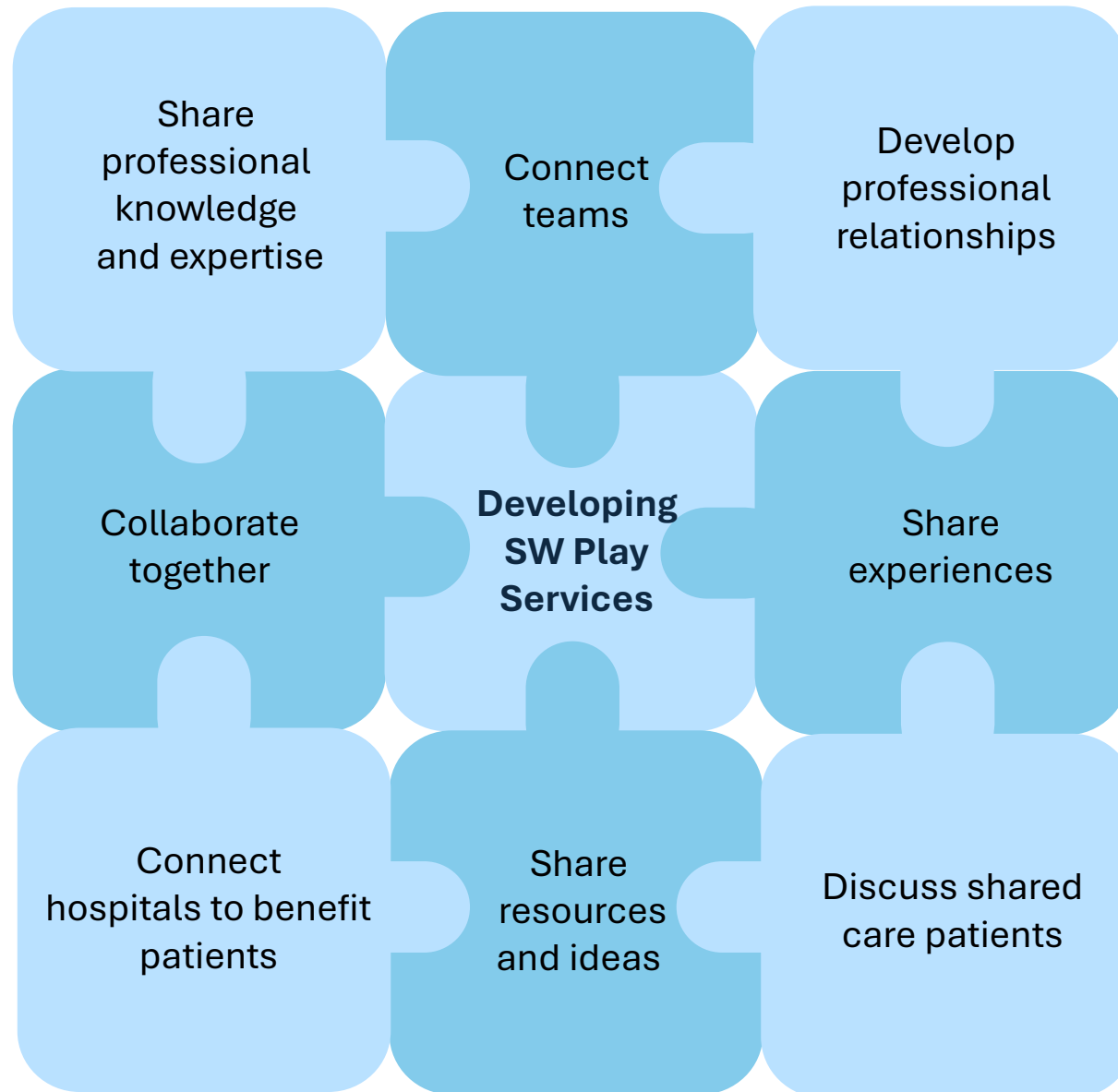


Requested that completed templates are returned to regional ODN team for consideration

Plan to review of responses & benchmarking at regional level to identify areas of good practice & gaps

Will review findings at SW Developing Play Services Working Group to consider actions and next steps

Identify opportunities for support – sharing, collaborating, advocacy and regional next steps



**With thanks to the SW Children, Teenage and Young Adult Cancer ODN for sharing these themes following a meeting with the Bristol Oncology Play Team!**

# Thanks – Team Contacts

## Website:



[southwestsicodn.nhs.uk](https://southwestsicodn.nhs.uk)

## Email:



[swsicodn@uhbw.nhs.uk](mailto:swsicodn@uhbw.nhs.uk)

## NHS Futures:



[SWChildrenSurgeryODN](https://SWChildrenSurgeryODN)



**Simon Courtman**  
Clinical Director  
[Simon.Courtman@nhs.net](mailto:Simon.Courtman@nhs.net)



**Guy Atherton**  
T&O Clinical Co-Chair  
[Guy.Atherton@uhbw.nhs.uk](mailto:Guy.Atherton@uhbw.nhs.uk)



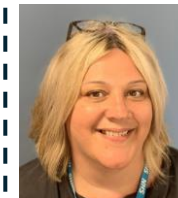
**Julian Gaskin**  
ENT Clinical Co-Chair  
[Julian.Gaskin@uhbw.nhs.uk](mailto:Julian.Gaskin@uhbw.nhs.uk)



**Tim Rogers**  
GS&U Clinical Co-Chair  
[Timothy.Rogers@uhbw.nhs.uk](mailto:Timothy.Rogers@uhbw.nhs.uk)



**Catherine Carpenter-Clawson**  
Network Manager  
[Catherine.Carpenter-Clawson@uhbw.nhs.uk](mailto:Catherine.Carpenter-Clawson@uhbw.nhs.uk)



**Gael Rolls**  
Lead Nurse  
[Gael.Rolls@uhbw.nhs.uk](mailto:Gael.Rolls@uhbw.nhs.uk)



**Tania Sparks**  
Project Manager  
[Tania.Sparks@uhbw.nhs.uk](mailto:Tania.Sparks@uhbw.nhs.uk)



**Cat Edwards**  
Support Manager  
[Cat.Edwards@uhbw.nhs.uk](mailto:Cat.Edwards@uhbw.nhs.uk)

# East of England Surgery in Children Operational Delivery Network

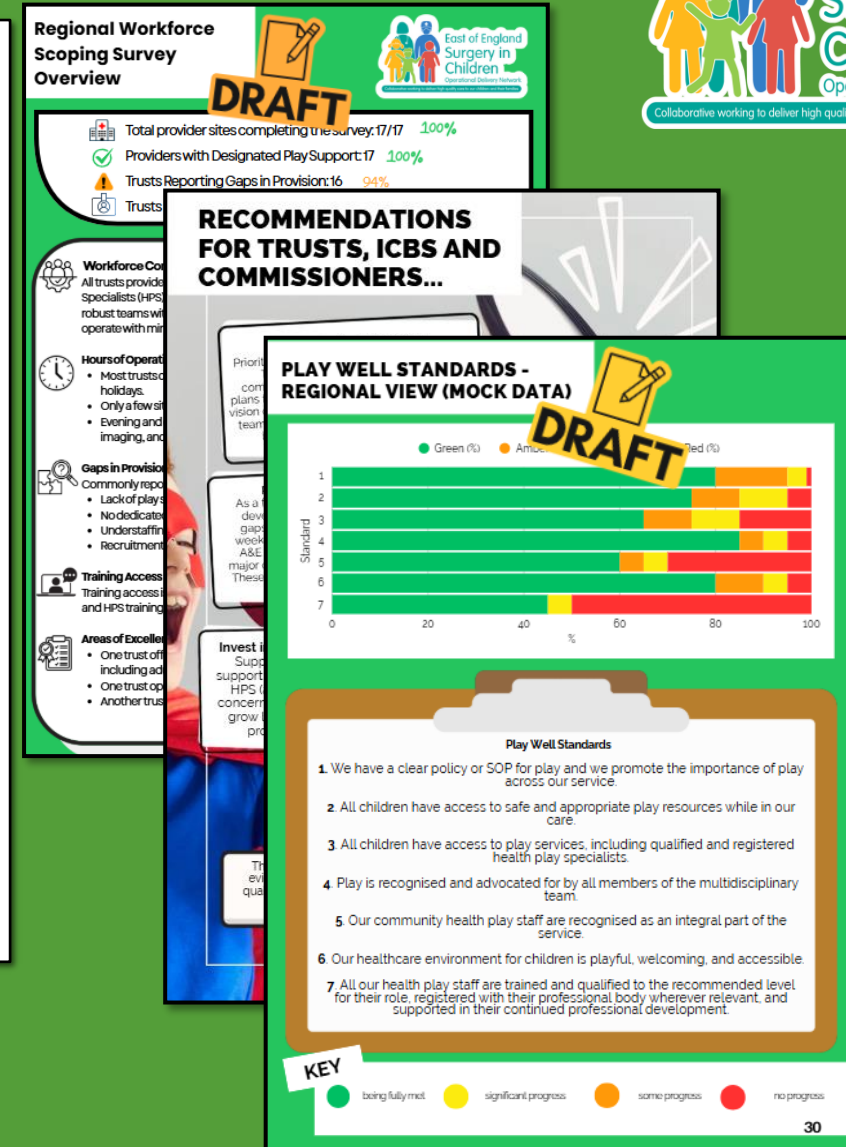
## Play Well Standards in the East of England ODN footprint

- Workforce scoping survey undertaken – 17/17 responses
- Supporting regional analysis of the **Play Well Standards** to identify themes, excellence and deliver **regional** provider and ICB **recommendations**:

- Drive reports via a Business Case Template Agent
- Provide ongoing conversations via service review visits
- Support via the existing regional health play network chaired by Steph Faibain at SoHPS



Contact [add-tr.eoesicodn@nhs.net](mailto:add-tr.eoesicodn@nhs.net)  
Damian Griffiths – Lead Nurse



# North Thames Paediatric Network supporting Healthcare Play

The Healthcare Play forum is made up of staff from teams across all the hospitals in North Thames and shared trusts, Community teams and Hospices in the region.

The Play well toolkit results will be collated and benchmarked at regional level to identify areas of good practice & gaps –aim is to identify opportunities.

**North Thames Paediatric Network**  
Connecting paediatric services

## North Thames Healthcare Play Forum

11<sup>th</sup> September 2025  
09:30am–4pm  
Location: London Zoo

The North Thames Paediatric Network are hosting an in person event for healthcare play staff in the region. Please note that you need to work in the North Thames region to be able to attend this event. We will have a mix of speakers, workshops and there will be time to network with colleagues! Topics include: Autism and Learning Disability, Mental Health

If you would like to attend this event you can [click here](#) to register or please scan the QR code!

SCAN ME

norththamespaediatricnetwork @NorthThamesPN https://ntpn.co.uk/

North Thames Paediatric Network

### Healthcare Play

In 2023/24 the North Thames Paediatric Network carried out visits to our acute care providers. We assessed the provision of play for children and young people and what support is in place for staff who work in this area and found that there is a significant variation in play provision across the different healthcare settings, and availability funding for resources.

We identified that accessibility for further training post registration to support and develop staff varies dependent on where the post holder works.

The network has subsequently set up a healthcare play forum for staff to obtain support and advice from their co-workers in the region and held a face-to-face event for play staff which took place in September 2024.

The network will continue to work with play teams. We aim to develop a collaborative approach to supporting health play staff in developing their services and ensuring a combined voice for health play across the sector.

**North Thames Healthcare Play Forum Summary**

- The North Thames Paediatric Network (NTPN) carried out visits to our acute care providers to assess the provision of play for children and young people and what support is in place for staff who work in this area and found that there is a significant variation in play provision across the different healthcare settings, and availability funding for resources.
- We identified that accessibility for further training post registration to support and develop staff varies dependent on where the post holder works.
- The network has subsequently set up a healthcare play forum for staff to obtain support and advice from their co-workers in the region and held a face-to-face event for play staff which took place in September 2024.
- The network will continue to work with play teams. We aim to develop a collaborative approach to supporting health play staff in developing their services and ensuring a combined voice for health play across the sector.

**Futures**

Home My Dashboard My Workspaces

Documents for core tea

- Healthcare play
  - Healthcare play forum
  - North Thames Healthcare Play website page
  - North Thames Play teams Contact details

### Healthcare play

Healthcare play forum  
This is a forum for you to communicate with other members of the healthcare play forum in North Thames, ask questions (please be aware this is not a confidential space) and post information about vacancies  
Modified 7 months ago.

North Thames Healthcare Play website page  
https://ntpn.org.uk  
Modified 7 months ago.

North Thames Play teams Contact details  
Modified 6 days ago.

### SUPPORTING AND DEVELOPING THE HEALTH PLAY WORKFORCE ACROSS NORTH THAMES PAEDIATRIC NETWORK

**North Thames Paediatric Network**  
Authors: SOHPS Society of Health Play Specialists  
Irene O'Donnell - Play and Youth Lead UCLH  
SOHPS workforce lead

Tanya O'Driscoll, Nurse Director NTPN

#### INTRODUCTION

The NTPN carried out visits to North Thames acute care providers 2023/24 to seek out areas of good practice and areas for development. Part of this review assessed the provision of play for children and young people, as well as the support and development in place for staff in these teams.

We were interested in the wellbeing of staff in health play roles and in evaluating how the NTPN core team can contribute to this. With this data we aimed to develop a collaborative approach to supporting health play staff in developing their services and ensuring a combined voice for health play across the sector.

#### RESULTS

We found that there is significant variation in play provision across the different settings and also within wellbeing support and development available for staff.

We identified that accessibility to further training post registration varies considerably dependent on the setting in which the post holder works, with established programmes being available within larger tertiary centres, and minimal availability to post holders in other providers.

#### CONCLUSIONS

Health play staff now work in a variety of settings including acute trusts, tertiary centres, hospices, and community. Recent work UCLH has reviewed the health play workforce and generated recommendations at national level to support staff both in job titles, grading, and levels of responsibility, but additional local support will be needed to take this forward.

Wellbeing of staff is pivotal to the development of health play teams and the NTPN can work with providers to champion and facilitate this.

#### ACTIONS

Having identified that provision of additional support for this group of staff as well as creating a shared ownership of play services is needed at a local level we facilitated a collaborative team day, bringing over 40 play staff from across different providers together with representatives of the play workforce and the Society of Health Play Specialists. Issues raised centred around development of play staff and recognising current barriers to play provision, including recognition of the role, and the ability of teams to communicate between provider settings.

We have also engaged with SOHPS representatives to ensure staff receive regular updates and can access support.

#### FUTURE PLANS

Continue to facilitate communication through regular forums, facilitating accessibility to shared documents via our website and highlighting the benefits of health play at all levels.

Collaborate further with SOHPS and other health play related organisations to ensure support and development of healthcare play staff across the network.

REFERENCE

A Common Purpose Report of the Taskforce on Children's Play in Healthcare (2023)

Supported by:  
Jessica Kinghorn (NTPN)  
Starlight Children's Foundation

**Live demonstration on using the interactive tool**

**Steph Fairbain, Society of Health Play Specialists**

# The Society of Health Play Specialists

Chair – Tina Clegg

Vice Chair – Penelope Hart-Spencer

Formally – Health Play Specialist Education Trust and National Association of Health Play Specialists –  
Merged in November 2023

Officially represent the Health Play Specialist profession in the UK

15 Board members – Professional volunteers with a mixed skill set

Voluntary register – 688 registered practitioners in UK – 25 new registrants by end of 2025

Education – We validate the colleges and universities delivering the HPS course – Foundation Degree  
and Apprenticeship routes.

CPD – professional development – conferences, workshops, webinars

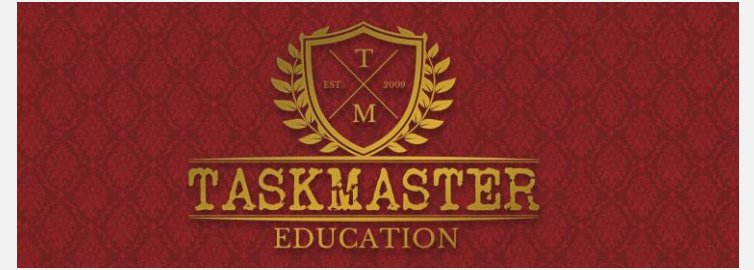
Professional Standards Authority membership applying for stage 1, 2025 – stage 2, 2026

Website – [www.sohps.org.uk](http://www.sohps.org.uk)

Enquiries – [admin@sohps.org.uk](mailto:admin@sohps.org.uk)



# Taskmaster Education



Taskmaster Club with Little Alex Horne is for everyone, everywhere.

