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## The Play Workforce in Wales – An Exploratory Demographic Study

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## **The Play Workforce in Wales – An Exploratory Demographic Study**

### **Abstract**

An online survey of 211 playworkers, 90 childcare and early years workers, and 90 ‘other play’ professionals provided demographic data from 391 people involved in the play workforce in Wales. This was the first extensive survey of the Welsh play workforce since 2008 and was part of a larger Welsh play workforce study. Results of the study found the play workforce in Wales is predominately white, female with no disabilities. Differences within the play workforce exist in relation to the average age where playworkers are younger compared to childcare/early years workers and ‘other play’ professionals. There is a significant difference between the average years employed, hourly rate for both full-time and part-time employment, and types of play-related qualifications when comparing playworkers with childcare/early years workers and ‘other play’ professionals. The results from the study can contribute to both the statutory Play Sufficiency Assessment each of the 22 local authorities has to undertake as well as the current play review. The study could be replicated in England, Scotland, and Northern Ireland.

**Key Words: Play; Play Workforce; Wales; Childcare; Early Years; Play Professionals**

### **Introduction**

Under the Children and Families Wales Measures Act 2010 (Welsh Government (WG), 2010) in Wales, each of the 22 Welsh local authorities have a statutory duty to undertake a Play Sufficiency Assessment (PSA) every three years (WG, 2014). The Statutory Guidance requires Local Authorities to Assess and Secure sufficient play opportunities for children by

considering nine ‘Matters’ (specific areas). Matter G specifically refers to “Securing and developing the play workforce” (WG, 2014, p. 25) where:

The Local Authority should support the development of the play workforce including the involvement and training of other professionals within the children’s workforce, volunteers, and community members, in line with the National Occupational Standards for the sector. (WG, 2014, p. 25)

The term ‘play workforce’ is often used to encompass a variety of professions and contexts where adults use play in their work. The play workforce in the United Kingdom (UK):

Encompasses anyone employed whose role has an impact on children playing – those who may either directly facilitate their play, design for playing or those with the power to give permission for children to play, or not. (Play Wales, 2020, p. 5; Welsh Government (WG), 2014, p. 38)

The play workforce is a heterogeneous group of individuals and groups using play in some capacity across a range of professions. This includes playworkers, childminders, playgroup workers, childcare workers, and early years workers. In addition, the play workforce exists in other non-childcare or recreational type settings, for example in hospitals as play specialists. The play workforce is employed in a variety of contexts such as recreational (playwork), educational (early years), and therapeutic environments (hospital play). The variety of roles and contexts provides any demographic study of the play workforce with some difficulties.

The studies on the playwork workforce undertaken by SkillsActive (2004; 2006; 2008; 2010) in England and Melyn (2008) in Wales have identified difficulties in collecting demographic data. The studies acknowledge that not all the participants who took part may be playworkers and not employed or qualified as playworkers. However, in their role, they use a ‘playwork approach’ when working with children or young people. A playwork approach is where the workforce focusses on the process of play rather than outcomes (Newstead & King, 2022). This makes undertaking a play workforce survey complex and highlights the importance of capturing the demographic data from three distinct groups: playworkers; childcare and early years; and ‘other play’ professionals. This was the position taken for this Welsh Play Workforce Study.

This direction provided a unique way of exploring the play workforce from three distinct populations and widening the accessibility of the study to the ‘play’ workforce as defined by the Welsh Government. The last survey related to the play workforce in Wales was undertaken by Melyn (2008) and their report ‘Ble Wyt Ti’ (Where Are You?) was the last time demographic data was collected in Wales, although this focused on the playwork workforce, rather than the wider play workforce. The results from both SkillsActive (2004; 2004; 2008; 2010) and Melyn (2008) summarizes the playwork workforce as:

- The workforce is predominately female
- The workforce has a low diversity and disability recruitment
- The workforce has a high level of part-time employment and not always all year round
- Many people in the workforce may have more than one job

- The qualifications people have which are related to play and playwork are a mixture of playwork specific (where playwork qualifications are specific to the job) and playwork applied (where playwork qualifications are applied to a non-playwork role).

In addition, the Melyn (2008) study in Wales found the average length of service was 4 years and 6 months and the workforce is generally young with a high proportion of seasonal employment from the student population. The pay in the sector was below the average hourly wage for workers in Wales. In relation to qualifications, most playworkers did not have a playwork qualification and those who did were more likely to be qualified at Level 3. Playwork training was high with over 58% of respondents stating they had participated in some form of training. However, this was limited due to funding and access, and playwork training may not lead to a qualification.

Although the Melyn (2008) study focused on the playwork workforce, not everybody who took part in the survey could be classified as a ‘playworker’, although they may have used a playwork approach in their work. The problem of collecting demographic data from playworkers and non-playworkers who use a playwork approach was considered in a recent demographic study (King & Newstead, 2022). This approach of asking participants to choose whether they were playworkers or non-playworkers reflects how:

Workforce development now includes not only the playwork workforce but also the broader play workforce: those whose work affects children’s ability to find time and space for playing (Russell et al., 2019, p. 6).

This current study was part of a larger six-month study of the play workforce which includes the playwork workforce, the childcare and early years play workforce and any ‘other profession’ that uses play in their work. Understanding where play and playwork are happening in Wales will help to develop a definition and vision of the workforce over the next ten years and support and contribute to the current 2020-21 Welsh Government Play Review (Department for Health & Social Services (DHSS0, 2020). The play workforce in this study is therefore considered to include:

- People who identify themselves as playworkers
- People who use play in their work and identify themselves as childcare workers or early years workers
- People who use play in their work with children but do not fall into either of the two other groups (tentatively called ‘other play’professionals’)

This approach facilitated potential inclusion in the survey by all those who might use play in their work with children across recreational, educational and health and social care. It also enabled people to identify themselves as playworkers or non-playworkers which provided demographic data for comparison. This approach was undertaken by King and Newstead (2022) where the collection of demographic data and subsequent statistical analysis may “play an important part in helping the playwork sector to define not only its foundations. With up to date demographic data from the play workforce, this would provide the ‘enumeration’ to support Matter G of the PSA (WG, 2014).

The current research was commissioned by Play Wales. The main aim of the study was to gain a current insight into the play workforce in Wales by capturing the overall demographics

of the sector in order to identify any demographic similarities and differences between playwork, childcare/early years and other ‘play’ professionals that make up the play workforce in Wales.

## **Method**

The Welsh Play Workforce study provided the scope to collect both quantitative and qualitative data to provide analysis on the current picture of the play workforce across contexts in Wales. The research design comprised four elements:

1. Online Survey
2. Interviews with local authority Play Sufficiency Officers
3. Interviews with leading Welsh play organisations with a remit for play-related training and qualifications
4. Focus group interviews with the play workforce

This paper focuses on the first area of an online survey, ‘The Welsh Play Workforce Survey’. The study was granted ethical approval from the College of Human and Health Science at Swansea University. The online survey used the software platform Qualtrics® and was split up into four sections:

**Section 1: Demographic data every participant completed** – This section was completed by all participants and collected demographic data on whether their level of Welsh language use, age, gender, ethnicity, disability and the local authority where they live. This section concluded with participants choosing to complete the survey as a playworker, childcare or early years worker, or an ‘other play’ professional.

**Section 2: Demographic data for playworkers only** – This section collected demographic data on the local authority where they work, job role, hours worked, salary, type of settings (whether registered with the Care Inspectorate of Wales (CIW) or not), playwork qualifications, other play-related qualification, playwork training, non-play related qualifications, any continuing professional development undertaken, barriers to studying in Welsh, any playwork qualifications they would like to study, barriers to studying any playwork qualification and knowledge of the Playwork Principles (PPSG, 2005).

**Section 3: Demographic data for childcare and early years only** – As with section 2 but asked specifically for any childcare or early years qualifications.

**Section 4: Demographic data for ‘other play professionals’** – As with section 2 but asked for either playwork or childcare or early years qualifications

The survey was set up so that after Section 1, participants who clicked on ‘playworker’ were sent to Section 2 only, those who clicked on ‘childcare or early years’ sent to Section 3, and those who clicked on ‘other play professional’ to section 4. This enabled the participants to decide which professional group they aligned themselves with within the play workforce, irrespective of the setting, or the number of settings they were currently working in.

The survey was piloted with 12 play professionals, 4 playworkers, 4 childcare and early years workers and 4 ‘other play’ professionals. Feedback on the structure of the survey was largely positive. Suggestions from the pilot led to the re-arrangement of some questions for increased clarity and the inclusion of information about provision being registered or



unregistered with CIW and options to study in Welsh. A second pilot study was then undertaken with three play professionals (playwork, childcare or early years and ‘other play’ professionals) who fed back that the survey was clear to understand and complete. The average time taken to complete the survey was 10 minutes. The final survey was translated for participants to complete the survey either in English or Welsh.

The Welsh Play Workforce Survey was distributed online through a Qualtrics® link with a separate link for surveys to be completed in Welsh or English. The links were circulated from the end of July 2021 to the end of September 2021. This enabled participants who were working in the play workforce either as their main job or in a sessional capacity during the school holidays to take part. The circulation of the survey link used a combination of social media sites (Twitter® and Facebook® groups) and membership databases from three leading Welsh play-based organisations. Emails were sent to membership groups, networks, and associated groups on two occasions in July and September.

### **Analysis**

The data was entered into the SPSS® computer package that enabled both descriptive and inferential statistics to be undertaken. The analysis was grouped into three categories:

1. Workforce demographic for gender, age, ethnicity and disability
2. Employment for sector employed, type of employment, length of service and salary
3. Types of qualification

The Shapiro-Wilk test for normal distribution demonstrated the data for both childcare/early years workers and ‘other play’ play professionals were normally distributed. However, this

was not so for the playworker data. For this reason, the parametric ANOVA test could not be undertaken. Instead, the non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis H test was used to see if there were any significant differences between the three groups about the workforce, employment and education and training. In addition to the Kruskal-Wallis H test, Chi-Square analysis was also undertaken to identify any possible relationships between variables.

## Results

The total number of surveys submitted with full data was 391 (386 in English and 5 in Welsh) and can be broken down into 211 playworkers (54%), 90 childcare and early years workers (23%), and 90 ‘other play’ professionals (23%). The results in Table 1 shows the play workforce in Wales is predominately female, white and with no stated disability. This was also reflected within each of the three population groups (playworkers, childcare/early years, and ‘other play’). There was a difference in average age where playworkers (33.43 years,  $SD\pm 0.98$ ) were younger than both childcare/early years (41.57 years,  $SD\pm 1.26$ ) and ‘other play’ (43.44 years,  $SD\pm 1.22$ ).

Workforce	Combined Total	Playworkers	Childcare/Early Years	‘Other Play’
<b>Gender</b>	82.9% Female (n=391)	78.1% Female (n=211)	95.5% (n=90)	82.2% (n=90)
<b>Average Age</b>	37.77 years (n=380)	33.43 (n=204)*	41.57% (n=88)*	43.44 (n=88)*
<b>Ethnicity White</b>	96.4% (n=391)	96.2% (n=211)	95.5% (n=90)	97.7% (n=90)
<b>With Disability</b>	5.6% (n=391)	7.5% (n=16)	1.1% (n=1)	5.5% (n=5)

**Table 1: Demographic Data for Gender, Age, Ethnicity and Disability (\* indicates statistically significant)**

The non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis H test showed a statistically significant difference in average age between the different groups ( $H(2) = 43.31$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) with a significant difference between playworkers and childcare or early years workers ( $p < 0.001$ ) and with playworkers and ‘other play’ professionals ( $p < 0.001$ ).

Table 2 shows the play workforce in this study were predominately employed in the statutory sector and mostly in a full-time capacity, or if working part-time having only one job.

<b>Employment</b>	<b>Combined Total</b>	<b>Playworkers</b>	<b>Childcare/Early Years</b>	<b>'Other Play'</b>
<b>Sector</b>	60% statutory, 18% third & 15.2% business (n=250)	56.5% statutory, 21.3% third & 13.9% business (n=122)	61.9% statutory, 9.8% third & 22% business (n=71)	60.3% statutory, 19% third & 11.1% business (n=63)
<b>Full-Time</b>	47.5% Full-Time only (n=265) 6.0% Full-Time & Part-Time combined (n=265)	35.4% Full-Time only (n=127)* 7.8% Full-Time & Part-Time combined (n=127)	64% Full-Time only (n=75)* 5.3% Full-time & Part-Time combined (n=75)	52% Full-Time only (n=63)* 3.1% Full-Time & Part-Time combined (n=63)
<b>Part-Time</b>	23.7% Part-Time only (n=265) 5.6% more than one Part-Time job (n=265)	28.3% Part-Time only (n=127)* 6.2% more than one Part-Time job (n=127)	18.6% Part-Time only (n=75)* 5.3% more than one Part-Time job (n=75)	20.6% Part-Time only (n=63)* 4.7% more than one Part-Time job (n=63)
<b>Average Length of Service</b>	7.03 years (n=259)	5.85 (n=123)*	8.48 (n=73)*	7.39 (n=63)*
<b>Average Working Week Full-Time</b>	36.24 hours (n=139)	35.09 hours (n=53)	36.9 hours (n=50)	37.01 (n=36)
<b>Average Working Week Part-Time</b>	17 hours (n=89) job 1 (n=19) job 2	16.03 (n=49) job 1 16.02 (n=9) job 2	19.46 (n=20) job 1 14.8 (n=5) job 2	19.5 (n=20) job 1 6 (n=5) job 2
<b>Average Pay Hourly Full-Time</b>	£11.39 (n=40)	£10.76 (n=17)*	£10.61 (n=15)*	£14.17 (n=8)*
<b>Average Pay Hourly Part-Time Job 1</b>	£11.40 (n=70)	£10.29 (n=44)*	£10.28 (n=16)*	£18.11 (n=10)*
<b>Average Pay Hourly Part-Time Job 2</b>	£14.83 (n=16)	£10.33 (n=9)*	£11.57 (n=4)*	£32.66 (n=3)*
<b>Average Pay Annually Full-Time</b>	£24384.14 (n=82)	£23968.98 (n=31)	£22743.50 (n=22)	£26072.55 (n=29)
<b>Average Pay Annually Part-Time</b>	£11922.61 (n=33) job 1	£8305.77 (n=17) job 1	£12066.66 (n=6) job 1	£17984.80 (n=10) job 1

**Table 2: Demographic Data Related to Employment (\* indicates statistically significant)**

The average number of years service was 5.85 (SD± 0.62) years for playworkers, 8.48 (SD± 0.81) years for childcare workers, and 7.39 (SD± 0.92) years for ‘other play’ professionals. The Kruskal-Wallis test showed that there was a statistically significant difference in average years employed between the different groups ( $H(2) = 13.98$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) with a significant difference between playworkers and childcare or early years workers ( $p < 0.001$ ) and with playworkers and ‘other play’ professionals ( $p = 0.23$ ). However, there is no difference between childcare workers or early years workers and ‘other play’ professionals ( $p = 0.301$ ). This indicates playworkers are employed for significantly fewer years than other populations.

The average full-time hourly rate for playworkers was £10.76 (SD± 0.61), for childcare/early years workers £10.61 (SD± 1.21), and for ‘other’ play professionals £14.17 (SD± 0.78). There was a significant difference between pay levels ( $H(s) = 11.22$ ,  $p = 0.004$ ) between playworkers and ‘other play’ ( $p < 0.001$ ) and childcare/early years and ‘other play’ ( $p < 0.011$ ).

The average part-time hourly rate for job 1 for playworkers was £10.29 (SD± 0.38), for childcare/early years workers £10.28 (SD± 0.53), and ‘other play’ professionals £18.11 (SD± 3.38). There was a significant difference in pay levels ( $H(2) = 11.22$ ,  $p = 0.004$ ) between playwork and ‘other play’ ( $p < 0.001$ ), and between childcare/early years and ‘other play’ ( $p = 0.011$ ).

The average part-time hourly rate for job 2 for playworkers was £10.33 (SD± 0.80), for childcare/early years workers £11.57 (SD± 0.93) and ‘other play’ professionals £32.66 (SD± 13.67). There was a significant difference between pay levels ( $H(2) = 8.04$ ,  $p = 0.018$ ) between playwork and ‘other play’ ( $p = 0.018$ ).

## Job Role

The survey asked participants to state their current job role from the list of Board, Management, Development, Co-ordinator, Practitioner and Education and Training. The responses showed that:

- 1% have a Board role (n=4) employed for 14.25 years (SD± 6.56),
- 15.1% in Management (n=59) employed for 10.84 years (SD± 1.12),
- 9.7% in Development (n=38), 4.3% employed 6.86 years (SD± 1.03) as a Co-ordinator employed for 6.25 years (SD± 0.51) (n=17),
- 30.2% as a practitioner (n=118) employed for 5.10 years (SD± 0.51)
- 7.4% working in education and training (n=29) employed for 6.40 years (SD± 1.38).

The results from the Kruskal-Wallis H test showed that there was a statistically significant difference in average years employed and job role ( $H(6) = 28.03$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The significant difference was between management and practitioner ( $p < 0.001$ ), management and education and training ( $p = 0.005$ ), management and co-ordinator ( $p = 0.048$ ) and management and development ( $p = 0.12$ ), where management was the longest reported role and practitioner the least serving role

The average number of different job roles a person in the play workforce was 2.61 (SD± 1.48). There was variation between the three groups where playworkers (n=119) had on average 2.12 different job roles (SD± 0.14) compared to 2.07 (SD± 0.14) for childcare/early years workers and 3 (SD± 0.21) for 'other play' professionals. When comparing the average number of different roles between groups, the results from the Kruskal-Wallis H test showed that there was a statistically significant difference in the average number of roles between the different groups ( $H(2) = 13.51$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ) with a significant difference between playworkers

and other play professional ( $p < 0.001$ ) and with childcare/early years and ‘other play’ professionals ( $p = 0.002$ ). However, there is no difference between childcare workers or early years workers and playworkers ( $p = .995$ ).

### Rate of Pay

When comparing the average full-time hourly rate for job role, people employed in Management was £12.99 ( $SD \pm 0.85$ ), in Development £11.32 ( $SD \pm 1.56$ ), for a Co-ordinator £12.00 ( $SD \pm 1.00$ ), for a practitioner £10.06 ( $SD \pm 1.04$ ) and for those employed in Education and Training £11.75 ( $SD \pm 2.75$ ). The average hourly rate for part-time employment was £14.92 ( $SD \pm 2.86$ ) for people employed in Management, £12.60 ( $SD \pm 1.64$ ) in Development, £11.05 ( $SD \pm 0.62$ ) as a Co-ordinator, £10.18 ( $SD \pm 0.37$ ) for practitioners, and £12.34 ( $SD \pm 2.89$ ) for those employed in Education and Training.

### Qualifications

Table 3 provides the data for the type of qualification participants had obtained where four options were possible: No Playwork or Childcare Qualification, Playwork only, Childcare Only or Both Playwork and Childcare Qualifications. From the responses, most playworkers had a playwork qualification, most childcare/early years had a childcare qualification and most ‘other play’ had neither.

Qualifications	Combined Total	Playworkers	Childcare/Early Years	‘Other Play’
No Playwork or Childcare	20.5 % (n=258)	24.3% (n=123)	6.8% (n=73)	29% (n=62)
Playwork only	33.7% (n=258)	58.5% (n=123)	0% (n=73)	24.1% (n=62)
Childcare only	26% (n=258)	12.1% (n=123)	61.6% (n=73)	25.8% (n=62)
Both playwork and childcare	19.8% (n=258)	5.1 % (n=123)	31.5% (n=73)	20.9% (n=62)

Table 3: Demographic Data Related to Qualifications

The type of qualification (playwork or childcare/early years) and population group were analysed using Chi-Square Test for any potential relationship. The Chi-Square Test was significant ( $\chi^2$ , 6, 124.02,  $p < .001$ ) where there is a strong relationship between playworkers having a playwork qualification only (Adjusted Residue 8.0) and not having a childcare/early years qualification (Adjusted Residue -7.4) or having both types of qualifications (Adjusted Residue -2.9).

For childcare/early years workers, there was a strong relationship between having a childcare/early years qualification only (Adjusted Residue 8.2) or having both playwork and childcare/early years qualifications (Adjusted Residue 3). There is also a relationship between childcare/early years workers not having just a playwork qualification (Adjusted Residue -7.2) or not having either qualification (Adjusted Residue -3.1).

### Age and Qualifications

Table 4 below indicates the age in 10-year intervals of the workforce and the type of qualification they have. A Chi-Square Test for Association was undertaken to consider the relationship between age and type of playwork or childcare or early years qualification. With the low numbers of those thover 65 years, these were removed for analysis as for Chi-Square.

	Playwork Only	Childcare/Early Years Only	Both Playwork & Childcare/Early Years	None
16-25	20	9	2	17
26-35	20	8	11	9
36-45	18	19	16	10
46-55	15	18	12	11
56-65	5	10	7	5
65+	4	1	1	1

**Table 4: Play Workforce in Wales: Population Group, Age and Type of Qualification Held**

The Chi-Square showed a significant relationship between age and type of qualification  $\chi^2(12, N = 223), p 0.001$ . There is a strong relationship between the age range of 16-25 years and not having both a playwork and childcare or early years qualification (Adjusted Residue -3.1) or having neither qualification (Adjusted Residue 2.9). For the age range of 26-35 years, there is a strong relationship with having only a playwork qualification (Adjusted Residue 2.2) and for participants in the age range of 56-65 years of not having a playwork qualification (Adjusted Residue -2.2) but having a childcare or early years qualification (Adjusted Residue 2.0).

### **Summary of Results**

The demographic profile of the play workforce in Wales shows it is predominately white, female with no registered disability. The average age across the play workforce is 37.63 years and there is a significant difference in the average age of playworkers compared to childcare/early years workers and ‘other play’ professionals.

The play workforce is mostly employed in the statutory sector. The average number of years in their current role across the play workforce is 7.03 years. There is a significant difference between the average years employed in their current role when comparing playworkers with childcare/early years workers and ‘other play’ professionals. The highest number of different roles was higher for ‘other play’ professionals, and this was a significant difference in the average number of roles between ‘other play’ professionals and with both playworkers and childcare/early years workers. The number of years employed and job role between management and practitioner, management and education and training, management and co-ordinator, and management and development were statistically significant.



The play workforce average working week for full-time work is 36.24 hours and for part-time work is 17 hours. Chi-Square analysis indicated playworkers were less likely to have one full-time job and more likely to have a single part-time job, whilst childcare or early years workers are more likely to have a full-time job. The average full-time hourly rate is £11.39 across the play workforce. There was a significant difference between ‘other play’ professionals and both playworkers and childcare/early years. For the first part-time job, the average part-time hourly rate is £11.40 across the play workforce and there was a statistical difference between ‘other play’ professionals and both playworkers and childcare/early years workers. For the second part-time job, the average part-time hourly rate is £14.83 across the play workforce and the difference of hourly part-time rate for job 1 between ‘other play’ professionals and childcare/early years workers was statistically significant.

The type of qualification within the play workforce identified that playworkers were more likely to have a playwork qualification and not have a childcare qualification.

Childcare/early years workers were more likely to have a childcare-related qualification. For the age range 16-25 years, there was as strong relationship between not having both a playwork and childcare/early years qualification or having neither qualification. However, there is a strong relationship between the age range of 26-35 years having only a playwork qualification and a strong relationship between the age range of 56-65 years of not having a playwork qualification but having a childcare or early years qualification.

## **Discussion**

This study explored the current play workforce in Wales and Matter G: Securing and developing the play workforce of the Play Sufficiency Assessment (PSA) (WG, 2014) which is a statutory requirement for all 22 local authorities to undertake every three years as part of

the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 (WG, 2010). The Welsh Play Workforce Study provides much needed up to date demographic data since the last similar study undertaken by Melyn (2008). The results of this study can support the Lead Officers responsible for their local authority PSA and also contribute to the current Welsh Government Play Review (Department for Health & Social Services (DHSS0, 2020).

The play workforce was split into three groups or populations: playworkers, childcare/early years workers, and ‘other play’ professionals, where participants could choose which group they belonged to on an online survey. This approach enabled data analysis to be considered as an overall play workforce and to compare between the three groups. This was useful on two counts. Firstly, it eliminated any ambiguity found in previous workforce studies (e.g. SkillsActive, 2010; Melyn, 2008), where although the focus of the studies was playwork, not everybody who took part in the studies were playworkers. Secondly, it provided demographic data and analysis to develop the playwork profession (King & Newstead, 2020), using a quantitative approach which playwork is lacking (McKendrick, 2021).

The play workforce continues to be a profession that employs mainly white females with no declared disability which reflects other demographic studies (King & Newstead, 2020; Melyn, 2008; SkillsActive, 2010), and this was found across the three groups (playworkers, childcare/early years workers and ‘other play’ professionals). In 2002, the recruitment of minority ethnic staff was “only 28 percent of clubs across the UK” (Smith & Barker, 2004, p. 12) and it appears this figure has not increased in 2021. Whilst the play workforce is still predominately female, male playworkers are more likely to be found in summer holiday provision (Melyn, 2008) and adventure playgrounds (Petrie, et. al., 2000). The average age between the three groups did differ, where playworkers are statistically younger than

childcare/early years workers and 'other play' professionals. As a group, the average age of the play workforce in Wales has increased since the Melyn (2008) study.

Whilst the play workforce in Wales continues to be mostly in the statutory sector and employed full-time, more people are employed full-time in the childcare/early years settings and 'other play' professions compared to the playwork sector. However, more playworkers are employed part-time compared to the other two groups. Again, the results reflect the Melyn (2008) study in Wales.

King and Newstead's (2020) demographic study of playworkers found two population curves. The first was 0-7 years and the second 8+ years (King & Sturrock, 2019). When asked how long each participant had been in their current job, the average number of years the whole play workforce had been employed was 7.03 years, nearly 3 years longer than the Melyn (2008) study. However, for playworkers, the average years employed of 5.85 years was statistically lower than childcare/early years workers of 8.48 years and 7.39 years for 'other play' professionals. This average age of 5.85 years for playworkers fits into the first population group identified by King & Newstead (2020) of 0-7 years and possibly reflects the uncertain nature of playwork that is often funding dependent. For example, when Melyn (2008) undertook their study, the BIG Lottery provided £13 million of funding to develop a play infrastructure and support play projects, which has been considered as a 'golden era of funding' (King, 2015). However, the funding has now finished, and along with the austerity measures put in place this has had a marked effect play across the UK (Voce, 2015).

The average hourly full-time rate was £11.39 and part-time between £11.40 and £14.83. This indicates the play workforce in Wales is paid more than in 2008 (Melyn, 2008) and above the

National Living Wage which was at £8.91 as of the 1st of April 2021 and above the lowest bracket of £4.62 for 16-17-year-olds (Low Pay Commission (LPC), 2021). However, some care is needed in the interpretation as this includes all the job roles (Board, Management, Development, Co-ordinator, Practitioner and Education and Training) where the hourly rate will be higher for somebody in management compared to, for example, a 16-year-old apprentice (which is fixed at a rate of £4.30) (LPC, 2021). Regarding the three groups, the ‘other play’ professionals are statistically paid higher than either the playwork or the childcare/early years workforce, although all are on average above the National Living Wage.

The significant difference was between the number of years employed for management compared to the other roles of practitioner, management, co-ordinator and education and training. This study found that across the whole play workforce in Wales, management was the longest reported role and practitioner the least serving role. The results from this study reflect those found by King and Newstead (2020) where they found a significant relationship between years in playwork and main role in playwork. King and Newstead (2020) found that practitioners were more likely to have been employed between 0 and 7 years. The number of different roles (board, management, development, co-ordinator, practitioner, and education and training) undertaken by one person in their play-related career was less in playwork and childcare/early years compared to ‘other play’ professionals. This could reflect the uncertain nature of playwork concerning funding, for example, or that playwork, childcare and early years could be a starting point or springboard for individuals to move into different play-related work settings, such as hospital play.

This study found a strong relationship between playworkers having a playwork qualification only and not having a childcare/early years qualification, or not having both playwork and

childcare/early years qualifications. It was not unexpected for a strong relationship with childcare/early years workers having a childcare/early years qualification only. However, there was also a strong relationship with childcare/early years workers having both playwork and childcare/early years qualifications. In Wales, there is a suite of playwork qualifications developed by Play Wales (2021) that are only available in Wales (Playwork Education & Training Council (PETC), 2021) and sit on the qualifications framework alongside the UK wide available qualifications (Social Care Wales (SCW), 2017). One of these qualifications ‘Managing A Holiday Playscheme’ (or ‘MAHPS’) is a level 3 playwork qualification that can be undertaken by anybody working in a play setting that wants to run a holiday playscheme. This can enable people with existing childcare qualifications to study the MHPS and complete the qualification specific to running a holiday playscheme, rather than undertake other qualifications such as the level 3 Transition to Playwork.

Whilst Level 2 and Level 3 qualifications are required for registered settings in Wales (WG, 2019), it was apparent from the survey that settings in the childcare/early years sector were more likely to be registered with the Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) than playwork settings. This may reflect why those who work in playwork-related settings are less likely to have either a playwork or childcare qualification, especially in the age range of 16-25 years, reflecting the same results found by King and Newstead (2020) years and 56-65 years. Employment between these two age ranges may relate to people entering playwork as a new work experience, particularly if this is holiday run provision. This may also reflect that the years in practice are lower in playwork compared to the other two groups. It is only in the older age group of 26-35 years where there is a strong relationship in having a playwork qualification where possibly playworkers have been in the profession for more than 8 years (King & Newstead, 2020). However, it is apparent that, with the wide range of playwork

qualifications available in Wales, more people in this survey had a playwork qualification compared to the study undertaken by Melyn (2008).

The Welsh Play Workforce survey was the first demographic study to be undertaken in Wales since 2008 (Melyn, 2008). Although Melyn (2008) was focused on playwork, and this study identified three distinct groups within the play workforce (playworkers, childcare/early years workers, and ‘other play’ professionals), an overall comparison with the Melyn (2008) study of the playwork force over the last 13 years has shown the play workforce still to be predominately female, has a low diversity and disability recruitment and a mixture of full-time and part-time employment, where the workforce has more than one job. Changes over the last 13 years include the average age of the play workforce increasing and spending longer in their current jobs. The pay has increased in both full-time and part-time employment and on average is more than the National Living Wage. The workforce on average is older than in 2008, although there is still young seasonal employment from the student population.

There are limitations to the study. Firstly, the sample of 391 is a good sample size, but difficult to know how far it can be generalised to the wider play workforce population. Although 211 playworkers, 90 childcare and early years workers and 90 ‘other play’ professionals took part in the study, there are more people employed in childcare compared to playwork. However, the samples were large enough to undertake relevant statistical analysis to provide a comparison between the three groups. Another limitation could relate to the reduction of funding to support the play workforce which has decreased since 2008, resulting in less people being recruited. This, along with austerity measures has put a strain on the play workforce. However, the statutory duty now placed on each of the 22 local authorities

has ensured a Play Sufficiency Assessment is undertaken every three years, and this includes each local authority to update the play workforce under ‘Matter G’ (WG, 2014).

This statutory duty only applies to Wales. The Welsh Play Workforce Survey could be replicated in the other UK countries using the three group approach, playworkers, childcare/early years workers and ‘other play’ professionals to identify the play workforce both within and between the countries in the UK. The findings from this study have implications for not only the recruitment of the play workforce across playwork, childcare, early years and ‘other’ play contexts, but also for play workforce planning, delivery and service.

## **Conclusion**

King and Newstead’s (2020) demographic study with playworkers acknowledged that playwork had “no demographic about its workforce” (p. 9) that clearly defined it from other related professions, for example childcare. This study was the first demographic study undertaken on the Welsh play workforce since 2008 (Melyn, 2008) and considered the play workforce within main groups of playworkers, childcare/early years workers and ‘other play’ professionals. There are many aspects in common between the three groups in relation to the gender, ethnicity and disability. However, there are some differences between the three groups in respect to age of practitioners, length of time working in their current role, pay and the types of qualifications each group have. The study provides an important overview of the current play workforce in Wales and can contribute to each local authority as they undertake the next Play Sufficiency Assessment (PSA) and to the current play review being undertaken by the Welsh Government. Whilst this study focused on Wales, there is a play workforce in

England, Scotland and Northern Ireland where a replication of this study could be useful in developing the play workforce across the UK.

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