



A Comparison of Playworkers and Non-playworkers Who Use a Playwork Approach

Pete King & Shelly Newstead

To cite this article: Pete King & Shelly Newstead (2022): A Comparison of Playworkers and Non-playworkers Who Use a Playwork Approach, Child Care in Practice, DOI: [10.1080/13575279.2022.2098255](https://doi.org/10.1080/13575279.2022.2098255)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13575279.2022.2098255>



© 2022 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 08 Aug 2022.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 100



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

A Comparison of Playworkers and Non-playworkers Who Use a Playwork Approach

Pete King ^a and Shelly Newstead ^b

^aDepartment for Education and Childhood Studies, Swansea University, Swansea, UK; ^bCommon Threads, Norfolk, UK

ABSTRACT

The International Playwork Census (IPC) was undertaken to compare demographic data from both playworkers and non-playworkers who use a playwork approach in their work. Data were collected from 273 responses in nineteen different countries reflecting the growth of playwork from its United Kingdom beginnings. Results showed the combined playwork (102 responses) and non-playwork (171 responses) workforce is female, white with no registered disability with an average age of 44.8 years. There were also significant differences between job roles in relation to sector employed, playwork training and play qualifications undertaken. There were differences between playworkers and non-playworkers. Playworkers were significantly found to work in management or practice within the Third (Voluntary) sector and have playwork qualifications. Non-playworkers were significantly employed in the statutory sector, work at the board level and have no playwork qualification. Up-to-date demographic data are important to develop the professionalisation of playwork. This study provides a current profile of professionals working with children in a play context who see themselves as belonging to the playwork field. It provides a unique insight into two different sectors within the playwork field: adults who describe themselves as “playworkers” and adults who describe their practice as “a playwork approach”.



KEYWORDS

Playwork; playwork approach; international play census; playwork workforce; professionalisation

Introduction

Playwork is a term used to describe adults who work in children’s play and is nowadays recognised as a growing profession in the UK (King & Newstead, 2020) with increasing recognition internationally (Cartmel & Worch, 2020). Numerous definitions of playwork exist, for example Rennie (1991) offered a definition of playwork as “adult involvement in play provision” (p. 161). However, one commonly understood definition is:

A highly skilled profession that enriches and enhances provision for children’s play.

CONTACT Pete King  p.f.king@swansea.ac.uk  Department for Education and Childhood Studies, Swansea University, Swansea, UK

© 2022 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

It takes place where adults support children's play, but it is not driven by prescribed education or care outcomes (SkillsActive, 2010a, p. 3)

Playwork is currently underpinned by the Playwork Principles (Playwork Principles Scrutiny Group (PPSG), 2005). The Playwork Principles reflect children's play being freely chosen, intrinsically motivated for no external goal (PPSG, 2005), where adults support the process of play with minimal adult interference reflecting the theory of the Play Cycle (Sturrock & Else, 1998). The Playwork Principles focus on the adults supporting the process of play, rather than the product, which provides a unique approach to play compared to other professions, for example early years.

The playwork approach can be traced back to the development of playwork as a job role in the adventure playgrounds set up in the UK just after the Second World War (King & Newstead, 2020). The field of playwork has attracted adults trained or experienced in a wide range of different backgrounds and professions. John Bertelsen, the first "playworker" in Copenhagen, was originally trained as a nursery worker (Bengtsson, 1972), and the UK adventure playground pioneers came from a very mixed set of backgrounds, including plumbing, social work and carpentry (Allen, 1964) with a focus on adults not controlling the play.

Without any sustained qualifications or regulatory body to define and quality assure what eventually became the playwork workforce, the playwork field has continuously imported adults from a diverse range of backgrounds. Some of these adults have arrived in the playwork workforce as a result of major government workforce initiatives. In the 1980s the Youth Opportunities Scheme, a government-led job creation scheme for young people, introduced many people from a wide range of personal and professional backgrounds to playwork (PlayEducation, 1986). In the early 1990s the Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) were established to create local jobs and one of the areas targeted was childcare, which brought another diverse range of adults into playwork through the Out of School Grant Initiative (Sanderson et al., 1995). This was superseded by the New Opportunities fund (legislation.gov.uk, 1998). Both programmes increased the number of after school and holiday playschemes in the UK (Barker et al., 2003) and the number of adults employed in the sector. These adults had been drawn to childcare (and ultimately playwork) from a wide range of personal and professional backgrounds, including parenting, early years, nannying, teaching etc. (Cordeaux et al., 1999; Department for Education and Employment, 1998).

As well as people coming into the UK playwork field, playwork has also crept into other professional psyches to influence the thinking and practice of other professions working with children internationally (Gladwin, 2008). Cartmel and Worch's (2020) edited collection clearly demonstrate how playwork terminology and some of its practices have been adopted in places such as zoos, domestic refuges, environmental projects and schools by adults who do not (or in some cases, cannot) call themselves playworkers. In recent years combined qualifications, such the Level 3 Award in Transition to Playwork (City & Guilds, 2019), playwork modules and university degrees for childcare/teachers with "playwork minors" have accredited those working in other professions with playwork credentials. This incursion of playwork ideas and techniques into other settings and professions is not a new phenomenon: since the early days of the adventure playgrounds, playwork theory and practices have been exported from playwork settings

into schools, hospitals and parks (Fitzmaurice, 1970). This on-going dissemination of ideas and practices to other professions means that there are now a significant number of adults working with children in a wide range of settings internationally who may consider themselves practicing playworkers and therefore part of the playwork field, even if their job title does not reflect this.

It is important to note that these “incomers” from other professions are not simply passive recipients or consumers of playwork theory and practice. Even those who adopt playwork ideas and practices at a very basic level are still active participants in the development of the playwork field, in that they themselves define and refine meanings and understandings of playwork in the light of their own professional and personal experiences (Newstead, 2019). Without any professional organisation to mediate or regulate the “voice of the playwork sector”, ideas and opinions about the nature and purpose of playwork are potentially as unregulated and undefined as the number of adults who consider themselves to be playworkers or to use a playwork approach. This makes any definitive definition of what constitutes “the playwork field” particularly challenging and especially problematic for the collection of demographic data about the playwork workforce.

As this brief overview of workforce development has demonstrated, the playwork field has been in the import/export business for more than 70 years. The playwork field has consistently incorporated adults from a wide range of different personal and professional backgrounds and actively promoted its theory and practice into a wide range of internationally diverse settings. Whilst there are many advantages of such an inclusive approach to workforce development, it also poses many challenges for defining such terms as “the playwork workforce”, as illustrated by the playwork SOC code. SOC (Standard Occupational Code) codes are official codes used by the UK Office of National Statistics to classify all types of paid jobs in the UK economy. “Playworker” has its own SOC code (6123), but the definition for this includes those who work in “playgroups” and “free play” settings. This definition poses significant challenges for defining the playwork workforce as both playgroups and free play settings operate on a different philosophical and practical basis to playwork. In the UK, playgroups are family-orientated support groups with broad educational aims allied to pre-school settings. “Free play” settings are a very general term which could incorporate, for example, soft play areas where the role of an adult might be very different from that of a playworker. Using the “playworker” SOC code as a basis for collecting demographic data therefore lead to inaccurate data about who is using a playwork approach in their job role.

The International Playwork Census was a survey which set out to explore an alternative approach to collecting demographic data about the playwork workforce. Its starting point was a question about how to define the target groups for the survey, based on the above historical understanding of the development of what has become known as “the playwork workforce”. This initial question was “Do you use a playwork approach in your work?”. The playwork workforce is made up of those who are, or once were, playworkers. Recognising the “import/export” tradition of the development of the playwork workforce, the aim of this study was to target those who considered that they used “playwork” in their job role, regardless of whether the term “playwork” was in their job description.

The International Playwork Survey was therefore split into two sub-surveys—those who had “playwork” in their job titles or where playwork was specific in their job role,

and those who considered that they used “a playwork approach” in their work with children in non-playwork contexts. “A playwork approach” was considered to be a broad enough term to encompass those who were influenced by the Playwork Principles (PPSG, 2005) or even subtly by a small amount of playwork theory and/or practice (Brown, 2002; Hughes, 2012; Sturrock & Else, 1998). It also distinguishes those people from the much broader “play workforce” as used in previous studies (SkillsActive, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010a).

The International Playwork Census was a six-month study which collected demographic data on gender, ethnicity, disability, qualifications, job role, location and type of sector (statutory, voluntary (third) or business). It also asked how participants first heard about playwork and their understanding of the purpose and benefits of playwork and their concerns about playwork. This enabled both quantitative and qualitative data to be collected and incorporated those who have “playwork” in their job title and those who consider themselves to use playwork in their job, regardless of job title. When asked the purpose of playwork, three themes emerged of facilitate and provide for children’s play, support play and advocate for play. These three themes were consistent between playworkers and non-playworkers. Within the theme of Facilitate and Provide for Children’s Play, two sub-themes were Self-Directed, Freedom and Control and Minimal Adult Intervention, which reflect the playwork approach within the Playwork Principles. This would indicate that both playworkers and non-playworkers do have a playwork approach to play.

The research question for this study set out to examine what differences exist between playworkers and non-playworkers who use a playwork approach in their work. Whilst playwork is still a predominately UK-based profession (ref withheld), both playwork as a profession and the use of a playwork approach within other job roles is growing outside of the UK (Chan et al., 2021; Patte, 2018; van Rooijen, 2021). This study is the first of its kind and expands on existing playwork demographic data that has been undertaken in England (SkillsActive, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010b) and Wales (Melyn Consulting, 2008, 2010). The data collected and analysed from the IPC uses demographic data to analyse potential relationships between playworkers and non-playworkers and includes quantitative data collection and analysis, which has been recognised as being limited in supporting playwork as a profession (King & Newstead, 2020; McKendrick, 2021). This research design created an exploratory study, which defines the current play and playwork workforce as a field comprised adults who use a playwork approach in their day-to-day work, rather than just “playworkers”.

Method

The International Playwork Census (IPC) was an on-line survey for anybody who considers that they use a playwork approach in their work. This study had ethical approval from the Ethics Committee of the College of Human and Health Science at Swansea University (Ethics application 1680819b). The IPC was divided into three sections:

Section A: Demographic Data

Section A was completed by everybody who took part in the study and asked for respondents to state their job title, the country they are working in, age, gender, if registered as disabled and what playwork training and qualifications they have.

Section B: Respondents who are not playworkers but use a playwork approach

This section asked for the sector respondents worked in and what the purpose, benefits and challenges of playwork. Respondents were also asked if they were members of any play-related organisation and if they had a playwork specific job in the past and what playwork literature they had read.

Section C: Respondents who are playworkers

This section included the same questions as in Section B, but in addition asked how many years they had worked in playwork and if they worked full-time, part-time or in a voluntary capacity.

The survey was piloted with seven respondents from the UK, Australia, Hong Kong and the U.S.A., some of whom were playworkers and others who used a playwork approach within other job roles. Feedback was positive and no amendments except for clarity on some wording was required, such as providing more details to differentiate statutory, third and business sectors which may have been problematic for those working in English as a second language.

The survey was open to anybody aged 18 years or over who were playworkers or used a playwork approach in their work. The survey was developed on the Qualtrics® platform and available from October 2019 to March 2020 by respondents clicking on an anonymous link. This meant that no information about the participants is collected, such as name or IP address. The survey was distributed through social media of Twitter® and playwork specific Facebook® groups, as well as through play and playwork local and national organisations.

Sample

In total 273 people from nineteen different countries provided data who used a playwork approach in their work. At the start of the survey participants were asked to select the option of stating whether their work was specifically playwork related or non-playwork related. From the 273, 102 responses were playwork and 171 non-playwork related.

Pearson's Chi Square for association (Ugoni & Walker, 1995) between job roles was undertaken with other demographic areas (e.g. playwork qualifications). The Chi Square test is a reliable statistical test to undertake with nominal variables and results are most reliable when the data are collected from a sufficiently large randomly sample size (McHugh, 2013). The Pearson's Chi Square test for association tests for independence of two nominal (categorical) variables or whether there is a pattern of dependence between them. For each Pearson's Chi Square test for association, a Cramer V test was also undertaken to find out effect size where a value of up to 0.2 is a small effect, 0.3 is a medium effect and 0.5 and above is a large effect. In addition, *post-hoc* adjusted residue analysis was also undertaken. Residue analysis "identifies those specific cells making the greatest contribution to the chi-square test result" (Sharpe, 2015, p. 2) where "A residual is the difference between the observed and expected values for a cell. The larger the residual, the greater the contribution of the cell to the magnitude of the resulting Chi-Square obtained value" (Sharpe, 2015, p. 2). A residual value above 2.0 or below -2.0 indicated which nominal (categorical) variables have the strongest relationship.

Results

Before either descriptive or inferential statistics was undertaken, these data were carefully screened for any errors, and these were checked between the two researchers.

Geographic region

From the 273 responses, the number of participants who did not state where they were from was 4 (1.5%). This left 269 participants who provided data from their country.

From the remaining 269, 184 responses (67.4%) were from the United Kingdom, 10 (3.7%) from the Rest of Europe, 17 (6.2%) from Asia, 36 (13.2%) from North America, one from South America (0.4%), one from Middle East and North Africa (0.4%) and 20 (7.3%) from Australasia and Oceania. In total participants from nineteen different countries took part in the survey.

From the 102 playworker responses, 79 (77%) were from the UK, 3 (3%) from the Rest of Europe and Australasia and Oceania, 7 (7%) from Asia and from North America, and 1 (1%) from South America and Middle and North Africa. There were 12 (12%) responses which provided no data. From the 171 non-playworker responses, 106 (62%) were from the UK, 28 (16%) from North America, 17 (10%) from Australasia and Oceania, 10 (6%) from Asia and 7 (4%) from the Rest of Europe. There were no responses from the Middle East and North America or South America. There were 3 (2%) responses that provided no data.

Gender, ethnicity and disability

From the 273 responses which provided the demographic data of gender, ethnicity, and disability, 193 (70.7%) were female, 72 (26.4%) were male, 3 (1.1%) were Gender Non-Binary and 5 (1.8%) stated other. For ethnicity, 229 (83.9%) were white, 21 (7.7%) Asian, 7 (2.6%) Mixed, 6 (2.2%) Black/African/Caribbean and 10 (3.7%) stated other. In relation to disability, 250 (91.6%) stated they had no disability, 11 (4%) stated they had a disability and 12 (4.4%) preferred not to say. For both groups of playworkers and non-playworkers the workforce is female, white and not registered with a disability.

Age of participants

The total number of participants stating their age was 269 (4 people did not provide their age). The youngest age was 20 years and the oldest was 92. The average age overall was 44.8 years with a SD of 12.75. From the 269 responses who stated their age, 0% were below 20 years of age, 35 (12.8%) were aged between 20 years and 29 years, 69 (25.3%) aged 30–39 years, 65 (23.8%) 40–49 years, 63 (23.1%) 50–59 years, 31 (11.4%) 60–69 years and 6 (2.2%) aged over 70 years. A further breakdown of age between respondents who non-playwork (Section B) and playwork (Section B) found the average age for non-playwork was 45.64 (SD 13.79) years whilst for playwork was 43.40 (SD 12.05) years.

Playwork training, playwork qualifications and non-playwork qualifications

Playwork training takes place in a wide range of formats, from staff induction programmes, continuous professional development (workshops, conferences, seminars) to online discussion groups. The number of participants who had undertaken some form of playwork training was 141 (51.6%) compared to 132 (48.4%) who had not received any playwork training. For the non-playwork group, more people had undertaken playwork training compared to having a playwork qualification.

In this study data about playwork qualifications was collected separately from playwork training as there are specific playwork qualifications available in the UK, from introductory level up to undergraduate. The number of participants who had a recognised playwork qualification was 130 (47.6%) whilst 143 (52.4%) had no playwork qualification. In total, 221 (81%) had a non-playwork qualification (above A'Level) and 52 (19%) had no qualification. For the non-playwork responses (Section B) on average there were higher numbers undertaking playwork training (55.6%) compared to having a playwork qualification (42.1%). This differed from the playwork responses (Section C) where 45.1% had undertaken playwork training, however, 56.9% had a playwork qualification. For playwork respondents, more had a playwork qualification compared to have undertaken any playwork training.

Job sector

When asked which sector they worked in (statutory, third or business), 81 (29.7%) participants did not provide any information. From the remaining 192 responses, 68 (24.9%) were from the statutory, 87 (31.9%) from the third (voluntary) and 37 (13.6%) from the business sector. Participants were also asked to write down their job role. However, when breaking down the results into non-playwork (Section B) and playwork (Section C), for the 125 non-playwork responses to this question most were employed in the statutory sector (44%), whilst for the sixty-seven playwork responses most were working in the voluntary (third) sector (57%).

Job role as stated by respondents

The different job roles from this study could be placed in one of six groups: Board (includes Directors and CEO); Management; Development; Co-ordinator; Practice (including voluntary) and Education and Training (student, trainer, tutor, lecturer, consultant or researcher). Examples of the range of job roles across the six broad groups are shown in [Table 1](#).

The numbers for Job Role are broken down as 31 (11.4%) for Board Members, 52 (19%), 22 (8.1%) for Management, 37 (13.6%) for Co-ordinator, 80 (29.3%) for Practice and 51 (18.7%) for Education and Training. For non-playwork responses (Section B), most responses were in the job role of practice (25.1) and education and training (20.5). There was also an equal number between board and management (14.6 and 14% respectively). For playwork responses (Section C), most responses were practice (36.3%) and management (27.5%).

Table 1. Grouping of job titles into broad groups.

Board	Management (M)	Development (D)	Co-ordinator (Co)	Practitioner	Education and training
President	Playwork M	Play D Officer	Family Co	Playworker	Researcher
Chief Executive Officer	Play M	Youth D Officer	Youth Co	Youth Worker	Training Officer
Director	Childcare M	Childcare D	After School Club Co	Childcare Worker	Educational Leader
Owner	After School Club M	Early Years D	Community Engagement Co	Early Years Worker	Lecturer
Founder	Project M	Officer	Playwork Co	Childminder	Assessor
Trustee				Nursery Nurse	Student
				Play Leader	Trainer
				Play Therapist	

Chi-Square analysis

Pearson's Chi Square analysis found associations from two perspectives:

- (1) Combined playwork approach of job role with (a) sector, (b) playwork training and (c) playwork qualification
- (2) Comparison between playwork and non-playwork roles with (a) playwork qualifications, (b) sector and (c) job role

Combined playwork approach

Job role and sector

A Pearson's Chi Square association between Job Role and Sector shows there is a significant relationship $\chi^2(10, N = 192) = 31.04, p < .05$. Cramers V is 0.28 which has a medium size effect. Although two cells have an expected count of less than 5, this is less than 20% so does not violate the Chi Square statistics (Tables 2–7).

Table 2. Combined playwork approach and relationship between job role and sector.

Role	Board		Sector		
			Statutory	Third	Business
		Count	4	16	6
		Expected Count	9.2	11.8	5.0
		Adjusted Residual	-2.3	1.8	.5
Management		Count	7	17	10
		Expected Count	12.0	15.4	6.6
		Adjusted Residual	-2.0	.6	1.7
Development		Count	10	4	0
		Expected Count	5.0	6.3	2.7
		Adjusted Residual	2.9	-1.3	-1.9
Co-ordinator		Count	7	16	4
		Expected Count	9.6	12.2	5.2
		Adjusted Residual	-1.1	1.6	-6
Practice		Count	17	23	13
		Expected Count	18.8	24.0	10.2
		Adjusted Residual	-6	-3	1.1
Education and Training		Count	23	11	4
		Expected Count	13.5	17.2	7.3
		Adjusted Residual	3.6	-2.3	-1.5

Post-hoc analysis indicates Board Members (adjusted residual -2.3), and Management (adjusted residual -2.0) are less likely to work in the statutory sector. People working in a Development (adjusted residue 2.9) and Education and Training (adjusted residue 3.6) are more likely to work in the statutory sector.

Job role and playwork training

A second Pearson's Chi Square association was found with Job Role and Playwork training undertaken, $\chi^2 (5, N = 273) = 12.91, p < .05$. Cramer V is 0.22 which has a medium size effect.

Post-hoc analysis shows practitioners are less likely to have undertaken any playwork training (adjusted residue 2.7).

Job role and playwork qualifications

A third Persons' Chi Square association was found with Job Role and Playwork Qualification, $\chi^2 (5, N = 273) = 91.96, p < .05$. Cramer V is 0.28 which has a medium size effect.

Post-hoc analysis shows for the role at Board level is less likely to have a playwork qualification (adjusted residue 2.6). It is at Management (adjusted residue 3.2) and Development (adjusted resided 2.5) where the role has a playwork qualification.

Comparison of playwork and non-playwork

Roles and playwork sector

A first Pearsons' Chi Square analysis was undertaken between playwork and non-playwork and the sector (statutory, third (voluntary) and business sector). There was a

Table 3. Combined playwork approach and relationship between job role and playwork training.

			Playwork training	
			Yes	No
Role	Board	Count	20	11
		Expected Count	16.0	15.0
		Adjusted Residual	1.5	-1.5
	Management	Count	32	20
		Expected Count	26.9	25.1
		Adjusted Residual	1.6	-1.6
	Development	Count	11	11
		Expected Count	11.4	10.6
		Adjusted Residual	-2	.2
	Co-ordinator	Count	24	13
		Expected Count	19.1	17.9
		Adjusted Residual	1.7	-1.7
	Practice	Count	31	49
		Expected Count	41.3	38.7
		Adjusted Residual	-2.7	2.7
	Education and Training	Count	23	28
		Expected Count	26.3	24.7
		Adjusted Residual	-1.0	1.0

Table 4. Relationship between job role and playwork qualifications.

		Playwork qualifications		
			Yes	No
Role	Board	Count	8	23
		Expected Count	14.8	16.2
		Adjusted Residual	-2.6	2.6
	Management	Count	35	17
		Expected Count	24.8	27.2
		Adjusted Residual	3.2	-3.2
	Development	Count	16	6
		Expected Count	10.5	11.5
		Adjusted Residual	2.5	-2.5
	Co-ordinator	Count	15	22
		Expected Count	17.6	19.4
		Adjusted Residual	-0.9	0.9
	Practice	Count	36	44
		Expected Count	38.1	41.9
		Adjusted Residual	-0.6	0.6
	Education and Training	Count	20	31
		Expected Count	24.3	26.7
		Adjusted Residual	-1.3	1.3

significant relationship $\chi^2(2, N = 192) = 11.54, p < .05$. Cramer V has a value of 0.24 which has a medium size effect.

Post-hoc analysis shows playwork roles are more likely to be in the third (voluntary) sector (adjusted residue 2.3) and less likely to be in the statutory sector (adjusted residue -3.4). For non-playwork roles, these are more likely in the statutory (adjusted residue 3.4) and less likely in the third (adjusted residue -2.3).

Roles and playwork qualifications

A second Pearson's Chi Square Analysis found an association between playwork and non-playwork responses with playwork qualifications $\chi^2(5, N = 273) = 5.57, p < .05$. Cramer V is 0.14 which as a small size effect.

Post-hoc analysis shows playwork roles are more likely to have a playwork qualification (adjusted residue 2.4) compared to non-playwork roles not having a playwork qualification (adjusted residue 2.4)

Comparison of playwork and non-playwork roles and job roles

A third Pearson's Chi Square analysis between playwork and non-playwork and job role saw a significant difference $\chi^2(5, N = 192) = 13.50, p < .05$. Cramer V was 0.26 which

Table 5. Relationship between playwork and non-playwork with job sector.

		Sector			
			Statutory	Third	Business
Job Title	Playwork	Count	13	38	16
		Expected Count	23.7	30.4	12.9
		Adjusted Residual	-3.4	2.3	1.2
	Other	Count	55	49	21
		Expected Count	44.3	56.6	24.1
		Adjusted Residual	3.4	-2.3	-1.2

Table 6. Relationship between playwork and non-playwork with playwork qualifications.

Job Title	Playwork	Count	Playwork qualifications	
			Yes	No
		Count	58	44
		Expected Count	48.6	53.4
		Adjusted Residual	2.4	-2.4
	Non-Playwork	Count	72	99
		Expected Count	81.4	89.6
		Adjusted Residual	-2.4	2.4

Table 7. Relationship between playwork and non-playwork with job role.

Job Title	Playwork	Count	Role					Education and training
			Board	Management	Development	Co-ordinator	Practice	
		Count	5	18	3	7	24	10
		Expected Count	9.1	11.9	4.9	9.4	18.5	13.3
		Adjusted Residual	-1.8	2.4	-1.1	-1.1	1.9	-1.2
	Non-Playwork	Count	21	16	11	20	29	28
		Expected Count	16.9	22.1	9.1	17.6	34.5	24.7
		Adjusted Residual	1.8	-2.4	1.1	1.1	-1.9	1.2

shows a medium size effect. There was 1 cell which had an expected value of 5. However, this was less than 20% so does not violate the Chi Square analysis.

Post-hoc analysis shows where playwork is the focus of the job role, the role is more likely to be in Management (adjusted residue 2.4) or in Practice (adjusted residue 1.9). For non-playwork roles, it is less likely to be involved in Management (adjusted residue -2.4) or in Practice (adjusted residue -1.9). However, in non-playwork roles, the role is more likely at Board level (adjusted residue 1.8) compared to playwork roles which is less likely (adjusted residue -1.8).

Summary

Combined playwork approach

- The playwork and the non-playwork workforce are both female, white and not registered with a disability
- Membership to national, regional or local play-related associations was low
- For both playwork and non-playwork responses most people were practitioners but are less likely to have undertaken any playwork training
- Board Members and Management are less likely to work in the statutory sector
- People working in a Development and Education and Training are more likely to work in the statutory sector
- Board level is less likely to have a playwork qualification
- Management and Development are more likely to have a playwork qualification

Differences between playwork and non-playwork

- The playwork average age was 43.4 and for non-playwork was 45.1 years.
- Playwork roles are more likely to be in the third (voluntary) sector and less likely in the statutory sector
- Non-playwork roles are more likely in the statutory sector and less likely to be in the third sector
- Playwork roles are more likely to have a playwork qualification
- Non-playwork roles are more likely to not have a playwork qualification which was statistically significant
- Playwork roles are more likely to be in management or practice and less likely at Board level
- Non-playwork roles are more likely to be at Board level and less likely to be in management or practice

Discussion

The International Playwork Census set out to collect demographic data about the playwork workforce at a global level. It started by recognising that over the last 70-plus years, the playwork field has generally been defined as those who are called “playworkers” in their job title and that this has largely confined the membership of the playwork field to those who work in the UK, as very few other countries recognise the job role of “playwork”. However, this approach to collecting demographic data would unnecessarily limit the extent of the playwork field because playwork ideas and techniques are now being used in a wide range of non-traditional playwork settings internationally by people who do not have playwork in their job titles. The International Playwork Survey is the first attempt at collecting workforce data, which recognises that not everybody who uses playwork in their work with children is called a playworker, even though they may use a playwork approach in their work. A playwork approach is based on the premise of play being freely chosen, intrinsically motivated for no external reward and the adult role is to support the process of play as reflected in the Playwork Principles (PPSG, 2005).

For the development of any profession, understanding the demographics of its workforce is crucial in the development of recruitment, retention, training and qualification strategies. However, in order to collect demographic data it is first of all necessary to define the scope and limits of the workforce to be studied, and this is particularly problematic in the playwork field due to the historical and contemporary difficulties described above. The International Playwork Census definition of the playwork workforce can broadly be described as “anybody who has playwork in their job title or considers that they use a playwork approach in their work with children.” This use of “a playwork approach” enables data to be captured from anybody working anywhere in the world and thus perhaps offers a better reflection of those involved in the playwork field on a global scale. However, what was not defined or determined in this study was what participants understood by playwork or what that means in practice. Definitions of playwork by those who purport to use it vary (Newstead, 2019), and this could result in the definition of a playwork workforce which fundamentally

disagrees about the nature and purpose of the work itself. Those working in the playwork field have a long history of disagreements about the nature and purpose of playwork (Benjamin & Welsh, 1992), and any definition of a playwork field which could perpetuate such disagreements might seem like a retrograde step for the development of playwork as a profession.

What is clear and has not changed since other playwork demographic studies undertaken (Melyn, 2008; SkillsActive, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010b) is that the playwork and non-playwork workforce is still predominately female, white and with no registered disability. This reflects most other child-related professions, such as pre-school, childcare, early years and primary education. This study found that playwork and non-playwork responses were from practitioners and were less likely to have engaged in any playwork training. In relation to playwork qualifications, it was the roles of management or development that were more likely to have obtained qualifications. This highlights the point King and Newstead (2020) raised in relation to the playwork theory of the Play Cycle. In their study, most people had first heard about it through work. In addition, the study found that people with between 0–7 years playwork practice were less likely to have a qualification. This raises the question if practitioners are not engaging in playwork qualifications or training, what aspects of professional practice are being “passed down” from those in management and development who are more likely to be qualified in playwork? Such questions about how playwork theory and practice are disseminated will be of crucial importance to the future development of a professionalised workforce.

Although when combining the data there were factors that enabled similarities between playworker and non-playworkers, the data also found differences. The average age of for playworkers was lower than non-playworkers, although this was shown to not be significantly different. The playwork workforce were more likely to be in the third (voluntary) sector whereas the non-playwork are more likely to be in the statutory sector. In the UK, employment within the statutory and third sector often differ in relation to funding available, whether on full-time or part-time contracts, and whether these contracts are permanent, fixed term or a zero-hour contract. The combination of these factors puts a significant proportion of the playwork field in a permanent state of flux, as demonstrated when the UK went into austerity measures (Voce, 2015). This is another example of how demographic data can be used to formulate strategic thinking in the playwork field about how to develop and support its workforce when the majority of it is reliant on funding.

The finding that playworkers are more likely to have a playwork qualification compared to non-playworkers raises further interesting questions about the development of playwork as a profession. One of the key tenets of professionalisation is a qualified workforce. The IPC data found that adults who have “playwork” in their job title are more likely to hold playwork qualifications, whereas those working in other sectors are more likely to be trained in playwork than qualified in it. Whilst this finding is perhaps unsurprising, in that it would seem to make sense that other professions hold their own professional qualifications and therefore training in playwork is all that is required rather than qualifications, it also begs the question as to how the playwork field can “claim” those working in allied occupations, such as childcare (King & Newstead, 2019), as part of a professional playwork workforce. Perhaps one solution might be for the playwork field to adopt a conceptualisation of the playwork field as “a

workforce that uses a playwork approach”. However, this does not address the more complex issue of how to professionalise that workforce, given that data from this study indicates that a significant part of those working in the playwork field defined in that way might only be inclined to undertake playwork training, rather than qualifications. This study has found that the uptake of playwork qualifications is low across the board, which raises the question of how to incentivise those already qualified in other professions to also take qualifications which are solely relevant to playwork.

Another tenet of professionalisation is a professional body which regulates the sector. Over the last seventy years of playwork history there have been numerous attempts in the UK to develop an umbrella organisation to support playworkers and regulate playwork. (Author withheld). None of these organisations have survived, and today there is still no professional body for playwork in the UK. Looking forward, one of the findings of this study suggests that any future attempts to develop such an organisation should consider the international aspect of the playwork field. With respondents from nineteen different countries using a playwork approach in their work (whether this is recognised in their job titles or not), it is clear from this study that there is a need to bring together those who are using and developing playwork on an international scale. One of the challenges identified by this study is that it appears that both those who are identified as playworkers and those who identify themselves as playwork practitioners are “non-joiners”, with membership of local, national and international organisations being low for both groups. Further investigation could be carried out to explore potential barriers to joining organisations for those in the playwork field as defined by this study in order to inform the future development of a professional body.

This study is the first to attempt to collect demographic data about the use of playwork on an international scale by recognising that not everybody who uses playwork in their work with children are called playworkers. This study is also the first to recognise that it is not only adults with the term “playwork” in the job title who define and influence meanings and understandings of playwork itself. Therefore, in the IPC, equal weight was given to responses from those termed “playwork” and “non-playwork”, and no value judgements have been made about the relative merits of the responses of each group. There are limitations in this study in terms of being able to distinguish how each respondent defines playwork. However, one of the strengths of the research design is that “those who describe themselves as using a playwork approach” is a broader and yet at the same time more precise description and definition of “the playwork workforce” than the current UK SOC code. The current SOC code is based on a spatial description of where people work (for example, “free play settings”) rather than what they do there. “Adults who use a playwork approach” is based on a concept of playwork as a practice, rather than limiting the definition of the playwork field (and by default, the playwork workforce) to defining the playwork workforce by particular types of setting. Definitions which are setting-based run the risk of including data from settings where playwork is not used, or is unlikely to be used, such as playgroups. The data produced by this study, although relatively modest in statistical terms, provides more accurate information on which to base future decisions about the development of the playwork profession. Future research into the playwork workforce and any future developments in the professionalisation of playwork could therefore benefit from the survey design piloted in the International Playwork Census to include those who use a playwork approach in their work with children.

Conclusion

The International Playwork Census (IPC) compares between playworkers and non-playworkers who both use a playwork approach in their work. This paper is the first to collect demographic data on the playwork workforce using a playwork approach based on professional practice, rather than job role or the settings in which the practitioners work. It also provides a useful approach to UK demographic playwork data (Melyn Consultants, 2008, 2010; SkillsActive, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010b).

The findings demonstrated some similarities between the “playwork” and “non-playwork” groups, such as gender, average age, registered disabilities and the lack of membership of umbrella organisations. However, the study also found some differences between those who have “playwork” in their job titles and those who describe themselves as using “a playwork approach” in their role, such as levels of training and qualifications and job role. These findings can be a useful starting point when considering the development of the playwork workforce into a playwork profession. More importantly, this study has also called into question previous definitions of “the playwork workforce” and suggests that a new definition, based on the conceptualisation of playwork as practice rather than setting or job role, would not only better reflect the modern-day state of playwork but also produce more accurate data with which to develop the professionalisation of an international playwork field.

With playwork, and those using a playwork approach still growing internationally, this first study can provide an initial “benchmark” for more in-depth studies to be undertaken within different countries to build upon this initial study and identify potential needs for a playwork and a playwork approach to develop within and between countries.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on contributors

Pete King is the programme director for the MA Developmental and Therapeutic play at Swansea University. His research in children’s play and playwork has been published both nationally and internationally and is the co-editor of *Researching Play from a Playwork Perspective* and co-writer of *The Play Cycle: Theory, Research and Application*.

Shelly Newstead has worked in the playwork field for over 25 years as a practitioner, trainer, author, editor and researcher. She is the Series Editor for *Advances in Playwork Research* and the Managing Editor of *International Journal of Playwork Practice*. She is also currently the President of the International Council for Children’s Play (ICCP).

ORCID

Pete King  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-0273-8191>

Shelly Newstead  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-7398-1135>

References

Allen, Lady Allen of Hurtwood. (1964). *New playgrounds*. The Housing Centre Trust.

- Barker, J., Smith, F., Morrow, V., Weller, S., Hey, V., & Harwin, J. (2003). *The impact of out of school care: A qualitative study examining the views of children, families and playworkers*. DfES Publications.
- Bengtsson, A. (1972). *Adventure playgrounds*. Crosby Lockwood Staples.
- Benjamin, J., & Welsh, R. (1992). Play and participation. *Streetwise*.
- Brown, F. (2002). Compound flexibility: The role of playwork in child development. In F. Brown (Ed.), *Playwork theory and practice* (pp 51–65). Open University Press.
- Cartmel, J., & Worch, R. (Eds.). (2020). *Playwork practice at the margins: Research perspectives from diverse settings*. Routledge.
- Chan, P., Wong, A., Fung, S., Kwok, N., & Pui, L. (2021). Playwork play works. In J. Cartmel & R. Worch (Eds.), *Playwork practice at the margins: Research perspectives from diverse settings* (pp. 39–56). Routledge.
- City & Guilds. (2019). Level 3 Award in Transition to Playwork (From Early Years) (4964-30): Qualification handbook for centres. https://www.cityandguilds.com/-/media/productdocuments/children/playwork/4964/4964_level_3/centre_documents/4964-30-l3-award-playwork-transition-qhb.ashx
- Cordeaux, C., Hall, B., Owen, S., & Miles, R. (1999). *Childcare training in the United Kingdom: Final report*. Suffolk County Council Social Services.
- Department for Education and Employment. (1998). *Meeting the childcare challenge. Green Paper*. HMSO.
- Fitzmaurice, M. (1970). *Playleadership in subnormality hospitals: Some suggestions towards the development of play provision. No. 1 in a series of pamphlets on play for the handicapped*. National Playing Fields Association.
- Gladwin, M. (2008). Let's get off our ice floe and into the swim: A provocation - Ideas Paper 9. *Possible Futures for Playwork*. Play England.
- Hughes, B. (2012). *Evolutionary playwork*. 2nd ed. Routledge.
- King, P., & Newstead, S. (2019). Childcare worker's understanding of the play cycle theory: Can a focus on "process not product" contribute to quality childcare experiences? *Child Care in Practice*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13575279.2019.1680532>
- King, P., & Newstead, S. (2020). Demographic data and barriers to professionalisation in playwork. *Journal of Vocational Education & Training*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13636820.2020.1744694>
- legislation.gov.uk. (1998). *The new opportunities fund (specification of initiatives) order 1998*. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/1998/1598/made>
- McHugh, M. L. (2013). The Chi-square test of independence. *Biochemia Medica*, 23(2), 143–149. <https://doi.org/10.11613/BM.2013.018>
- McKendrick, J. H. (2021). Dancing with the devil or a means to fulfil potential? Enumeration and playwork. In P. King & S. Newstead (Eds.), *Further research from a playwork perspective: Process; playfulness; rights-based and critical reflection* (pp. 119–137). Routledge.
- Melyn Consulting. (2008). *Where are you? Ble wyt ti? The 2008 Play Wales Workforce Survey*. Play Wales.
- Melyn Consulting. (2010). *Review of the capacity and delivery of play training in Wales*. Welsh Assembly Government.
- Newstead, S. (2019). Le playwork à la recherche d'une identité perdue. *Sciences du jeu*, 12. <https://doi.org/10.4000/sdj.2337>
- Patte, M. (2018). Playwork in America: Past, current and future trends. In F. Brown & B. Hughes (Eds.), *Aspects of playwork: Play & culture studies, volume 14* (pp. 63–78). Hamilton Books.
- PlayEducation. (1986). *PlayEd 1986 - the priorities - issues in context II*. PlayEducation.
- Playwork Principles Scrutiny Group. (2005). *The playwork principles*. <http://playwales.org.uk/login/uploaded/documents/Playwork%20Principles/playwork%20principles.pdf>
- Rennie. (1991) Play and playwork. In N. Borrett (Ed.), *Lsirue Services UK* (pp. 159–190). Macmillan Education Ltd.
- Sanderson, I., Percy-Smith, J., Foreman, A., Wraight, M., Murphy, L., & Petrie, P. (1995). *The out-of-school childcare grant initiative: An interim evaluation*. Leeds Metropolitan University.

- Sharpe, D. (2015). Chi-Square test is statistically significant: Now what? *Practical Assessment, Research, and Evaluation*, 20, Art. no. 8. <https://doi.org/10.7275/tbfa-x148>
- SkillsActive. (2004). *Playwork People: Research report 1*.
- SkillsActive. (2006). *Playwork People 2: Research into the characteristics of the playwork workforce*.
- SkillsActive. (2008). *Playwork People 3: Research into the characteristics of the playwork workforce*.
- SkillsActive. (2010a). *SkillsActive UK play and playwork education and skills strategy 2011–2016*.
- SkillsActive. (2010b). *Playwork People 4*.
- Sturrock, G., & Else, P. (1998). 'The Colorado Paper' – The playground as therapeutic space: Playwork as healing. In P. Else & G. Sturrock (Ed.), *Therapeutic playwork reader one 1995–2000* (pp. 73–104). Common Threads Publications Ltd.
- Ugoni, A., & Walker, B. F. (1995). The chi square test: An introduction. *Comsig Review*, 4(3), 61–64.
- van Rooijen, M. (2021). Developing a playwork perspective from Dutch research experience. In P. King & S. Newstead (Eds.), *Further perspectives on researching play from a playwork perspective: Process, playfulness, rights-based and critical reflection* (pp. 58–78). Routledge.
- Voce, A. (2015). *Policy for play: Responding to children's forgotten right*. Policy Press.