

It's time for Playful by Design: Free play in a digital world

Today, the [Digital Futures Commission](#) (DFC) launches 'Playful by Design: Free play in a digital world'.

The report looks at one of the most important aspects of a child's development – free play – and how platforms succeed and fail in facilitating it. It is essential that we improve children's opportunities for free play and overcome the inhibiting factors in digital services that children reported as part of our study.

As the Commission has [shown throughout its work](#), free play is essential to the development and growth of children, and contributes hugely to their wellbeing. We often worry about physical spaces for children — playgrounds, parks — but digital spaces, where they spend so much time, are neglected and not held to the same standards. This issue has been supercharged by a pandemic that has meant that play has evolved with children spending more and more time online than ever before.



Playful by Design | Thursday 4th November 4pm GMT

DIGITAL FUTURES COMMISSION
Innovating in the interests of children and young people



“Playing is a child’s right. While it’s easy to imagine what ‘good play’ looks like in the offline world – think playgrounds and board games – the same doesn’t currently apply to the online world. Playful by Design provides evidence-based recommendations for the design of our digital world to ensure it puts children’s needs first.”

Professor Sonia Livingstone

“Playful by Design challenges us to design a world in which children can play freely in the digital world. This is an industry populated by creative and innovative people, it must be a priority to deliver the digital world that children and young people deserve – for learning, for life and for play.”

Baroness Beeban Kidron OBE, Founder and Chair, 5Rights Foundation

While there is a growing focus on the need to make the digital world safe for children, Playful By Design takes the next step by drawing attention to the need for this environment to be designed as a space where children can not just be safe, but also thrive.

The work left no stone unturned with extensive consultation of experts (including a survey of over 1000 children aged between 6 and 17 – the real experts when it comes to play). Of the 6-17-year-olds surveyed, a greater proportion reported having a great time playing offline (73%) than online (45%), a concern when they are spending an increasing amount of time online.

Children told us they want to see digital games designed to be age-appropriate and safe, with no commercial exploitation, with 58% of those aged between 10 and 17 years old that we spoke to wanting more age-appropriate features.

“I think you should get two [...] or three warnings n a social app like TikTok. Because you’ll get someone that could be showing their body parts, and they’ll often get reported, but because there are so many people on TikTok, TikTok doesn’t see immediately”

Girl, Aged 12

The study also identified twelve qualities of free play, recognising that play should be intrinsically motivated; voluntary; open-ended; imaginative; stimulating; emotionally resonant; social; diverse; allow risk-taking; safe; offering a sense of achievement; immersive.

[You can download the report here.](#)

[You can download the survey report and findings here.](#)

The report will be launched at a zoom event on 4th November at 4pm.

Event attendees will hear from children and young people how they view play in the digital world and what it means to them. In response to their views, **Baroness Beeban Kidron** – 5Rights Foundation, will then chair a discussion with:

- **Professor Sonia Livingstone OBE** – LSE, DFC lead researcher and report author;
- **Professor Mimi Ito**, University of California – Irvine;
- **Dr Tim Gill**, Rethinking Childhood, Author of *Urban Playground*; and
- **Dr Sangeet Bhullar**, Executive Director, WISE KIDS

The event will be followed by a Q&A with attendees.

[Sign up for the event here.](#)

[Please also get in touch with us if you’d like to receive a printed copy of the report.](#)

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