



The Power of Play

Annual Review 2023



It gives us great pleasure to welcome you to our 2022-23 report. We'd like to begin by acknowledging our outgoing Chairperson, Patricia Lewsley-Mooney CBE, who ably steered the organisation over the past number of years. On behalf of the Board of Trustees and the wider staff team, we would like to thank Patricia for her hard work, dedication and leadership throughout her term.



Our vision
A society where the right to play is both valued and realised



Our mission
Leading the play agenda



We would also like to express our thanks to our outgoing CEO, Jacqueline O'Loughlin, who retired in June 2022 after leading the organisation for 18 years. During her time, PlayBoard NI achieved many significant gains for children and young people's play, not least the embedding of the right to play within both the Children's Services Cooperation Act and the Children and Young People's Strategy. On behalf of the Board and staff team, we would like to acknowledge Jacqueline's contribution to PlayBoard and the play sector, and to wish her all the best for her well-deserved retirement.

With the absence of a functioning Executive and local Assembly impacting significantly on both service funding and policy development, it has been a challenging, yet busy year.

When we consider the many reported concerns about mental and physical health outcomes for our children and young people, it's not difficult to see why advocating for the child's right to play is at the core of everything PlayBoard does. Play is vital to every aspect of a child's health, well-being and achievement potential.

Given the extremely challenging social, political and economic environment we operate within, it is vital that we continue to promote the right to play for every child in Northern Ireland. Consequently, this year, advocacy, campaigning and lobbying at all levels continued to be the cornerstone of PlayBoard's work. Our focus, as always, has been on making Article 31 of the UNCRC - the right to play - a reality for all children.

Over the year our membership continued to increase, with almost 1,600 members joining us from across the globe, providing us with a clear play-focused mandate going forward. We are committed to continually working collectively with others, and building strong alliances to improve societal outcomes around play.

The demand for PlayBoard's support, training and resources reaches beyond Northern Ireland, and increasingly includes the Republic of Ireland. Our profile and affiliations across the island of Ireland have grown in the last number of years, and we look forward to seeing this work develop further in the future.

On behalf of the Board and wider staff team, we would like to thank our members, funders and play ambassadors for your continued support and belief in our vision for a playful future for all our children and young people. We look forward to continuing to work collectively with you as we strive to achieve the vision laid out in our strategic plan.

Finally, the last word must go to our fantastic staff team who, with skill, determination and unfailing enthusiasm, do an amazing job in leading the play agenda. Thank you all!

Stuart Buchanan
Chairperson

Alan Herron
Chief Executive Officer

Outcomes



Opportunities for play

Increased profile, access and quality of play at a local level.



Playwork practice

The profile and professionalism of playwork has been enhanced, and training and practice has stimulated collaboration and cross-sectoral mobility within the children's workforce.



Research & advocacy

Play is secured as an outcome in its own right within both the Children's Services Co-operation Act (2015) and Children and Young People's ten-year strategy. An increased evidence base on play and establishing good practice.



Relationships

Working collectively has resulted in shared learning, a greater appreciation and understanding of play, and more effective and efficient play services.



Our year in review

Our Reach

5,901

Twitter followers



310,100

Twitter impressions



6,693

Facebook followers



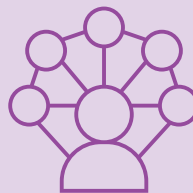
589,900

Facebook reach



1,596

members



16

E-Play newsletters to members/subscribers



www.playboard.org





Projects & services



Youth@Play builds the capacity of youth workers to facilitate play for their younger members in statutory youth settings. The project was supported by the Education Authority, with playwork training accredited by OCN NI.



84

playwork training sessions to youth workers.



78

youth workers achieved OCN Level 2 playwork.



31

youth workers achieved OCN Level 3 playwork.

"The Playwork course has really improved my confidence in what to do when it comes to play, and helping me better understand that child-led play is the best for the children. Before the course I got too involved and was planning play sessions ... whereas now I plan the play around the children, and they get to choose their own activities."

"I was able to better understand the play process and the positives it can have on the lives of children and young people by experiencing challenges and learning their own negotiation and problem-solving skills, and not relying on staff to step in and 'solve' the issue for them."

"I have become much more focused on 'what do the kids want?' and 'what will interest them?'. I'm thinking more about how I can help to create an environment where kids can come and play and enjoy themselves in a safe and welcoming way as they grow and develop."



PlayBoard's Spaces to Be programme, delivered as part of the overarching OUR Generation project, advocates the use of play as a means of supporting the development of childhood resilience, and as a mechanism for positively addressing differences.



65 play sessions for 385 children and young people.



29 training sessions to 143 practitioners.



15 training sessions to **142** parents.



4 cross-community events with **172** children and young people attending.



2 shared learning seminars with **171** participants.

OUR Generation is supported by the European Union's PEACE IV Programme, managed by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB).

Children's feedback:

"The more I played the happier I was!"

"The programme made me do things that I would never have got the chance to do like make stressballs and talking so much about my emotions. Now I've got an emotions chart I keep a tally of my feelings and after a while I show it to my mum."

Play in schools

Through a combination of training and focused play development programmes, PlayBoard supports schools to develop and implement effective play strategies, enhancing growth, development and learning. Working with the whole school community, PlayBoard supports and enriches knowledge and understanding of play, whilst guiding development of the outdoor environment to maximise opportunities for play, leading to improved learning and play experiences.

Supported by the Department of Education (DE) as part of Covid-19 recovery:



10 primary schools achieved our T O P S Award.



10 primary schools received Positive PlayGrounds training.

"There is a greater variety of play and small equipment being used in the playground, fewer contentious incidents between pupils reported, better pupil interactions, and a more relaxed atmosphere in the playground".

"Our outdoor play has been enhanced this year and our children have astounded us with their creativity and imaginative play. It has been particularly beneficial to the health and well-being of the older children in our school. The staff have embraced the changes whole-heartedly with the help and encouragement of the TOPS team."

"Since the training the adults are more aware of what they can do to facilitate play ... the training re-focused our team."



School-Age Childcare

PlayBoard delivers advice, support and training to the wider School-Age Childcare sector across Northern Ireland, whilst also providing targeted support to those groups who are funded through the NI Executive's Bright Start School-Age Childcare programme.

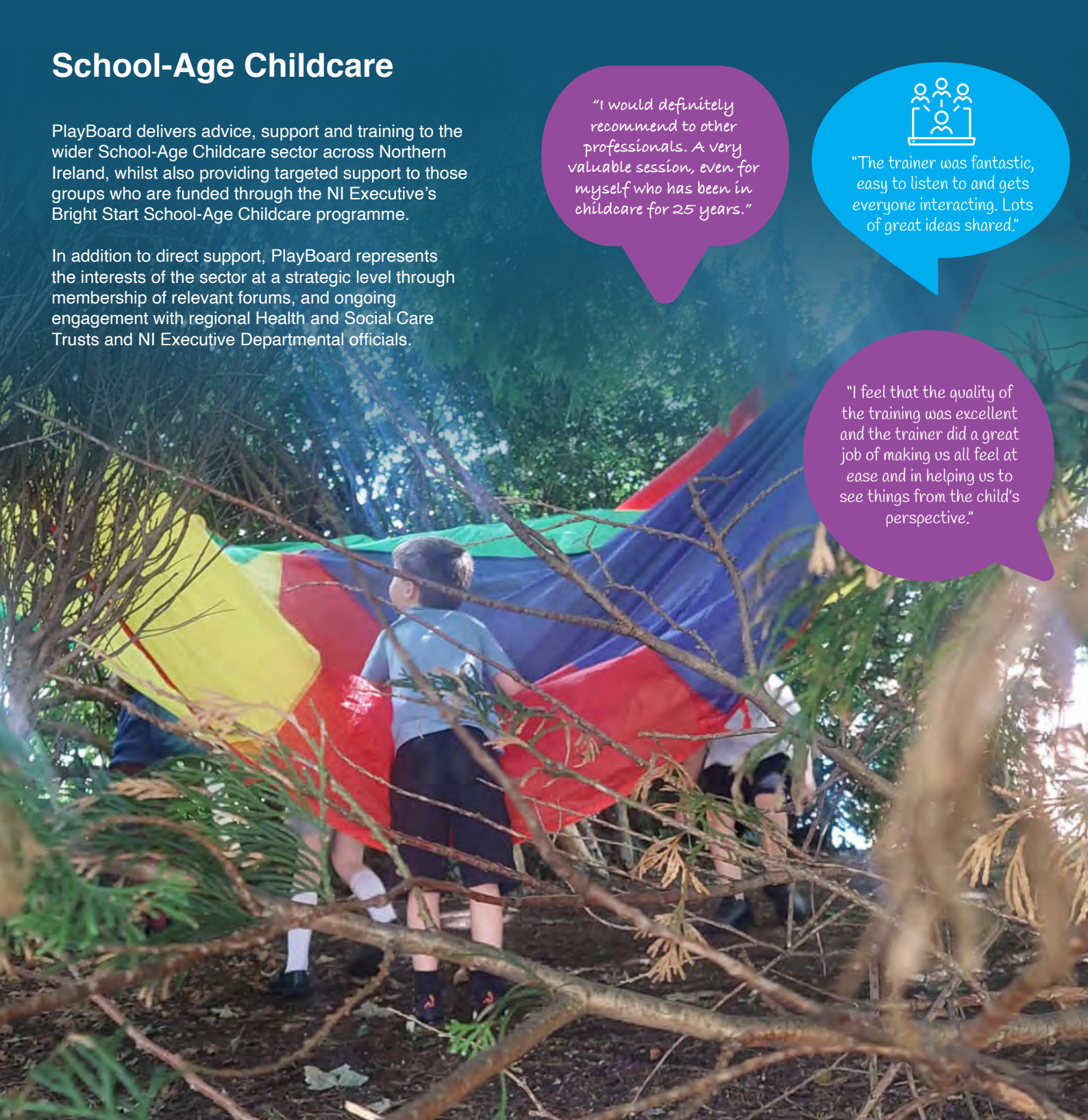
In addition to direct support, PlayBoard represents the interests of the sector at a strategic level through membership of relevant forums, and ongoing engagement with regional Health and Social Care Trusts and NI Executive Departmental officials.

"I would definitely recommend to other professionals. A very valuable session, even for myself who has been in childcare for 25 years."



"The trainer was fantastic, easy to listen to and gets everyone interacting. Lots of great ideas shared."

"I feel that the quality of the training was excellent and the trainer did a great job of making us all feel at ease and in helping us to see things from the child's perspective."



Delivered **25 cluster sessions** to **250 participants** exploring key issues impacting on quality of delivery within settings.



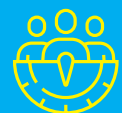
Delivered **four webinars** to **Early Years practitioners** through the Department of Education's Getting Ready to Learn programme.



Delivered **2 training sessions** to **91 individuals** representing **37 organisations**, focused on building practitioners' knowledge and understanding of play.



37 play resource packs distributed containing play equipment and information resources.



Supported **Bright Start funded groups** with guidance on a range of issues including strategic development, fundraising, Minimum Standards compliance and governance.



Councils

During the year, PlayBoard resumed delivery of face-to-face community play sessions (suspended during Covid-19) alongside the delivery of strategic support aimed at enhancing children's access to quality play opportunities.



Newry, Mourne and Down District Council –
70 community play sessions.



Mid & East Antrim Borough Council –
6 pop up play sessions with 191 children.



Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon Borough Council –
3 street play sessions.



Kerry County Council –
Developed a play strategy

for Council incorporating play park play value assessments, key recommendations on the enhancement of play parks and good practice guidance on quality in play delivery.



Commenced formal impact reviews

of Council play strategies in Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council, and Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council.

In addition to area specific delivery, PlayBoard continues to provide secretariat support to the all council Play Development Officers' group. The group meets on a quarterly basis to share good practice and develop a cohesive support network across all council areas.



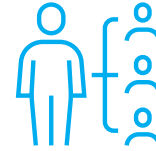
Research, advocacy, policy & engagement

PlayBoard continues to advocate for improved conditions for play and strives to put play firmly on the agenda of policy makers and resource providers at regional and local government level. Our research aims to inform, shape and influence practice and policy for children and families in Northern Ireland.



Strategic representation on 30+ networks,

forums, and partnerships including the European Network for School-Age Childcare, UK Play Safety Forum, UK Play Policy Forum, DE Sectoral Partnerships, Network Youth NI, All Party Groupings, Childcare Partnerships, and NICCY Participation Forum.



Represented the School-Age Childcare and play sector

on the newly established Early Years and Childcare Strategy Reference Group and Stakeholder Forum.



Undertook consultation

with children from school-age childcare on behalf of DE on their vision for an Early Years and Childcare Strategy.



Inclusion on newly formed Sectoral Partnership

(Department for the Economy driven) representing playwork.



Ongoing engagement with senior government officials

across a range of departments aimed at enhancing the commitment to delivering quality play opportunities.

"Staff were hesitant to have a play session in the morning as this is core learning time ... staff were also apprehensive about children coming back hyper after the play sessions and how that would impact their learning. However, staff noted that children actually came back more settled after the play sessions and engaged really well with their learning activities."



Worked strategically with a range of partners

including government departments, Childcare Partnerships, local authorities, training providers, colleges and employers to promote greater access to training and qualifications, greater choice of courses and greater access to variety of approaches to learning.



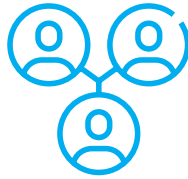
Presented internationally on our work at Play on Early Education conference

in Athens, at the Children's Research Network conference in Dublin, online at the Australian National Sports Convention, and at IPA World online events.



Input to the National Occupational Standards Review

(4 Nations group, representing PETCs across the 4 Nations) and participation on PETCUK and PETCNI.



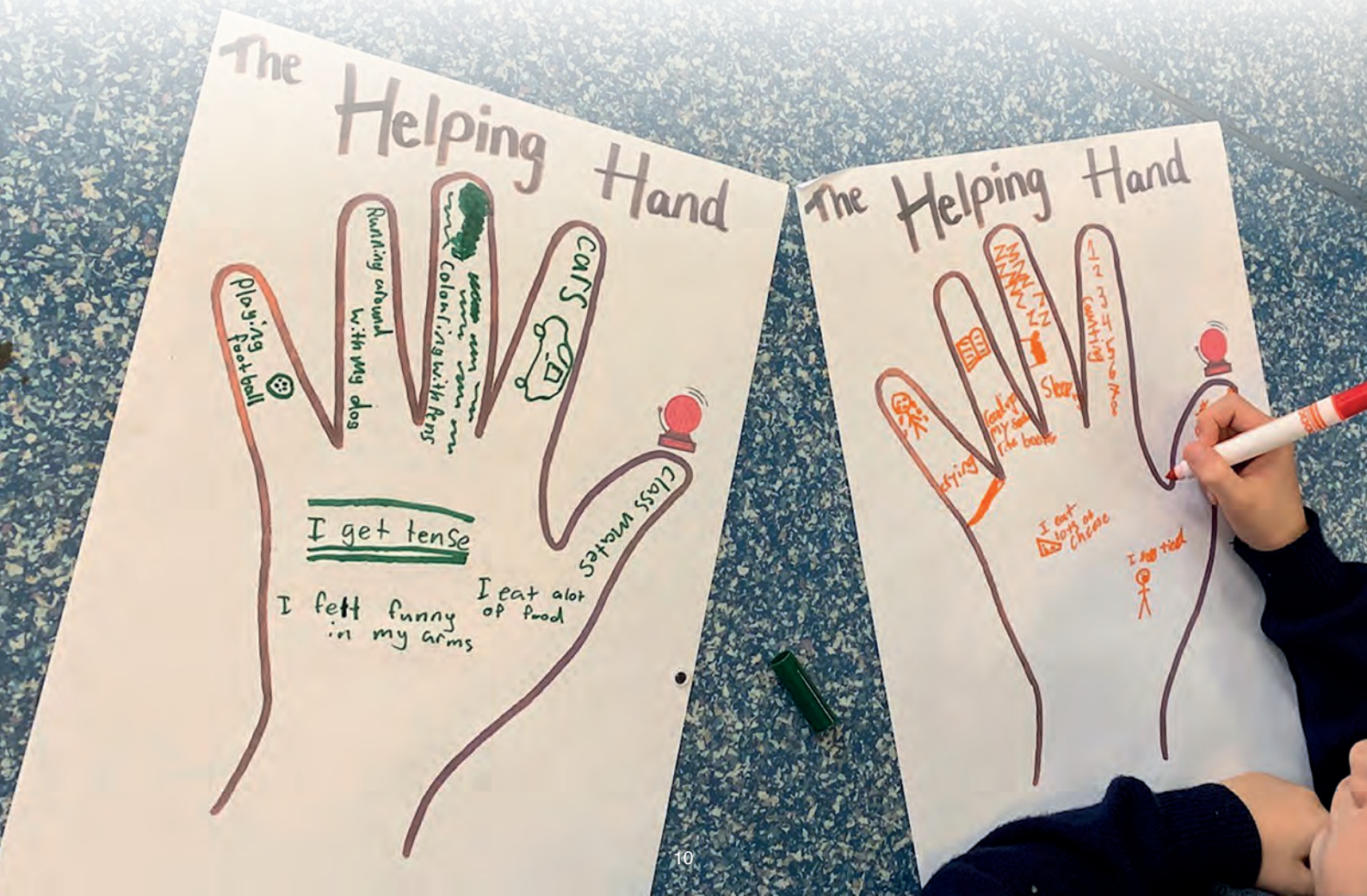
Developed a partnership with Radius Housing

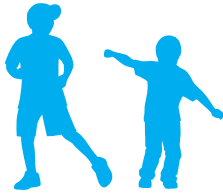
and facilitated two pilot programmes for two new housing developments (indoor afterschool play and street play programmes).



Sessions held with fathers in Maghaberry Prison

to highlight the importance of play, how play can reconnect families, and play planning for a Christmas Families' Party.





Focused on play in times of hardship throughout the year,

publishing a new resource and delivered training with low-cost play ideas.



Distributed play packs and donations

(from local supermarkets and staff) to local foodbanks.



Hosted Playday event

in Crescent Gardens, Belfast.



Our work within the Republic of Ireland continued to grow with a new post holder joining the team in a joint post with National Childhood Network. This has been instrumental in

establishing connections to pro-actively advocate for play

by developing relationships with key stakeholders including political representatives, government officials, colleagues, and practitioners from across the children's sector.



Delivered training programmes

to Cobh Youth Services and Dublin City Childcare Committee.

"My daughter was born during lockdown, so for her sharing and socialising with other children is alien, it's through attending play events such as this that she has had the opportunity to mix with other children and actually learn how to share with others. It was a tough process, but now because of play she is so much more social in general."



"Loose parts are great, nothing actually fits together, they all need to problem solve in order to make their creations."



Board and staff as at 31 March 2023

PlayBoard Board of Directors

Mr Stuart Buchanan	Chairperson
Mr Roger Winter	Vice-Chairperson
Miss Joy Hadden	Treasurer
Mrs Alix Crawford	
Mr Neil Galway	
Mr Israel Hontavilla	
Miss Sinead Kelly	
Mrs Pam Lowry	
Mrs Patricia Lewsley-Mooney CBE	(Stood-down 1 February 2023)
Mrs Caroline Yeomans	(Stood-down 16 November 2022)

PlayBoard staff

Jacqueline O'Loughlin	Chief Executive Officer (Retired 30 June 2022)
Alan Herron	Chief Executive Officer
Jimmy Gillen	Director of Corporate Services & Finance
Angela Stallard	Director of Service Delivery & Development (Acting)
Maria McBride	Senior Marketing & Communications Officer
Frances Walsh	Regional School-Age Childcare Co-ordinator
Peter McCartney	Training Co-ordinator (Retired 31 March 2023)
Katherine Lindsay Dunlop	Service Delivery & Development Co-ordinator
Mairead McLaughlin	Finance Officer
Shauneen McCusker	Play Development Officer
Aisling Hosick-Flynn	Play Participation Officer (Left 31 March 2023)
Maeve McLaughlin	Play Participation Officer
Aidan Burns	Play Participation Officer
Roberta Johnson	Play Participation Officer
Bernadette McCann	Play Participation Officer
Laura Perry	Play Participation Officer
Bríd Duffy	Play Participation Officer
Ciara McKenna	Project Officer
Michelle McGee	Development Officer
Olivia Johnston	Playworker (Left 31 March 2023)
Rebecca Smith	Playworker
Sara Madsen	Administrator
Declan McLaverty	Administrator (Left 31 May 2022)



PlayBoard NI

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RAS
Solutions

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