



RIGHT TO PLAY!

**£500 MICRO COMMISSIONS
FROM SALFORD'S CULTURAL
EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP**

Salford

Local Cultural Educational Partnership



WHAT ARE THE RIGHT TO PLAY! MICRO COMMISSIONS?

There are 12 Micro commissions of £500 available in total.

These Micro commissions aim to activate FREE PLAY for children, in your school or local community

SCHOOLS – x6 micro commissions available

COMMUNITIES – X6 micro commissions available



CHILDREN NEED THE FREEDOM AND TIME TO PLAY, **FREELY.**

BRIEF:

These £500 Micro commissions can be used to activate 'FREE PLAY' for any children (any aged 0-16) in Salford.

Why not have a festival of Play all day at your school and fill the rooms/outdoor areas with Lego, Cardboard boxes, Clay, any materials and let them play all day?

Or be brave, and let your year 9 class play for the day? This isn't just for little ones.

Or why not organise a FREE PLAY Day at your local family hub or parent-toddler group?

Or use the money to create a safe environment for children to play on your local street or in your local park?

What we mean by 'Free play' is below.

HOW TO APPLY?

Send us a brief overview telling us how you would like to activate FREE PLAY for Children in your school or community and answer a few simple questions, using this Microsoft form.



Return this to us by Tuesday 6 Jan 2026.

Successful commissions will be chosen by a panel including an artist, a teacher & a young person.

You will be asked to capture visual evidence of the activity such as photographs or video and submit with a brief evaluation form on completion. All image consent must be in place via the lead organisation.

All activity has to be completed and evidenced by 31 March 2026

WHO CAN APPLY?

SCHOOLS COMMISSIONS X6– Any formal learning setting in Salford working with children aged 0-16.

COMMUNITY COMMISSIONS X6– Any constituted group working with children in Salford aged 0-16 such as VCSE organisations, Family Hubs, Parent/Toddler groups, neighbourhood groups

- You must have a Bank Account that is not for a individual person
- You must have Safeguarding procedures in place along with DBS checked staff who will lead the activity
- Your award will be subject to a professional reference

PLAY IS NOT A LUXURY. PLAY IS A NECESSITY.

PLAY IS A BIOLOGICAL AND NEUROLOGICAL NEED FOR CHILDREN TO DEVELOP.

CHILDREN HAVE THE LEGAL RIGHT TO PLAY AND IT CAN HAPPEN ANYWHERE.

AT SCHOOL, OUTSIDE, ON THE STREET, AT HOME.

UN CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF A CHILD

If you have any questions please email salfordlcep@gmail.com

WHAT DO WE MEAN, BY FREE PLAY?

WHAT IS FREE PLAY?

Free play is when children have full freedom to play in whatever way they want. “They can choose everything – they have the freedom to select their play materials, interest area” UNICEF 2025.

During free play, children can express themselves in the way that they choose depending on the day, time and situation they are in. These kinds of opportunities are crucial for children’s development.

This is often the case in settings for younger children 0–5, however we don’t always create these opportunities for older children– yet the science shows that it remains crucial for their neurological, social and emotional development to learn through free play up to the age of 16 and beyond.

Free Play is an activity someone chooses for themselves simply because they want to do it—that is, the activity is intrinsically motivated.

The person is doing the activity for the internal satisfaction experienced from the activity – versus doing the activity for an external reward e.g., money or to gain someone’s approval.

Scientists say play is a self-selected, self-directed activity that is structured by the player.

Play is an activity that is 100% playful with no imposed target, outcome or reward.

A key point here is that activities that are directed by another person and activities that we pursue for an external reward, are not play. They may be to varying degrees playful, but they are not play or free play.

In a playful state of mind—the player is very engaged, alert, mentally active, and focused on the activity, but is not stressed about the activity, They have no fear of judgment, and there are no consequences that matter outside of the activity itself.

HOW DO I CREATE A FREE PLAY ENVIRONMENT?

To create a free play environment, provide a safe space and a variety of open-ended materials and dedicate a specific time for unstructured play.

It is important to have a wide range of materials, as opportunities for play, that children can choose from.

Encourage exploration, and step back while children lead their own activities, sometimes playing alone or with each other—intervening only to ensure safety or to engage in Child- led play when invited to.

This could look like an Early Years continuous provision, but in Year 5 & 6.



WHY IS PLAY IMPORTANT?

We All Have Play Circuits in Our Brains

Humans — and all mammals — have a biological drive to play that has evolved over millions of years. The biological elements are the play circuits buried deep in our midbrain, waiting to be activated. When the neurons of our play circuits are activated by playful elements in our environment, they motivate us to engage with those elements.

For example, when the presence of a ball, a puppy, or a fun friend activates our play circuits, we feel an urge to turn our attention to that stimulus and engage with it — toss the ball, pet the puppy or joke with the friend.

(National Institute for Play)

Jaak Panksepp a prominent neuroscientist, identified seven foundational brain circuits that are primary emotions we are born with, like fear, care, panic and play. These primal emotions are with us at birth, pre-wired in our midbrain—an ancient part of the human brain. The instinct to play is built into our biology, the play circuits in our brains. See Panksepp’s TED talk on the 7 primary emotions.

The more that very young children can act from their play nature, the better they will develop and reinforce the neural circuits in other parts of their brain — circuits that become the neural pathways of many life skills. The more adults act from their play nature, the greater their overall well-being.

Adults who do not regularly activate their play nature may experience their lives as tinged with depression, and may lack the optimism, adaptability and resiliency to perform well in their work and family lives.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR SOCIETY?

By the time children are in the classroom, they have often been taught to suppress their natural play-based curiosity.

The National Institute for Play discovered that lack of play for children increases the prevalence of:

- Depression
- Inflexibility, poor adaptability to changing conditions
- Lack of empathy
- Poor impulse control
- Addictive predilections
- Mood-driven behavior, and sometimes violence



Salford
Local Cultural Educational Partnership



Salford City Council



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This work is led by Salford's Cultural Education Partnership

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