

## **Written evidence submitted by the Association of Play Industries**

### **Effect of COVID 19 situation on UK Play Industry.**

#### **Background**

The Association of Play Industries represent the UKs, Designers, Manufacturers, Installers of Outdoor Playground, Sports equipment and associated services (such as safety surfacing, fencing, site amenities). Our members account for approx. 85% of the total UK market which is estimated at approx. £220m p.a. Although this is a relatively small and “niche” sector it provides a range of services which at relatively low cost provide a significantly high social value to communities.

Play and physical exercise are vital to health and well being and free to use public play areas provide communities the opportunity to socially interact across generational and racial boundaries and encourage Play and movement. There has already been a reduction in such provision in recent years due to LA funding constraints. We believe this is having a significant impact on children’s physical and mental health.

#### **Immediate and Medium term Impacts**

The obvious impacts of closures of public play spaces and the detrimental effects on both children’s mental and physical health are well known and documented so reiterating this is probably wasting this opportunity, save to say the reinstatement and reinvestment of such areas should be seen as an urgent and important requirement once this crisis is over

The more worrying impacts are upon our member companies. Without a clear classification (The industry is simply too small to warrant it ?) our members largely fall into the “construction” sector and while not specifically instructed to close the immediately, found continuing to work on public sites extremely difficult and as such over the two week period they slid into shutdown. As a result, revenues and resultant cash has dropped in many cases to minimal operating levels and less.

ALL of our member companies fall into the SME category and most actually fall into the small or micro categories. These businesses are often local, family run and serve local communities. Their very livelihoods are hanging in the balance and while the “Furlough” scheme has been welcomed and is widely being used, many have failed to secure the grants via local authorities due to their business classifications not registering as Retail, Hospitality or Leisure.

In terms of accessing business loans the government scheme is not currently filtering down to our members (with a few notable exceptions). The issue appears to be size and scale in that our members are simply not getting the attention of their banks and further that they are worried that business is so fragile that simple liquidity checks will fail them.

It is likely that many of our members will simply not survive.

It is essential that spending in the sector at least returns to pre-covid levels immediately that lock down is released. We are hopeful that the renewed recognition of public free play areas results in increased demand but are conscious that this is largely driven by Govt and LA funds and we would request that enough attention be paid to our small but vital niche industry.