

Background

The Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) PlayBoard, NIPPA –The Early Years Organisation and the Commissioner for Children and Young People for Northern Ireland are working together on the first phase of a project to develop an overall Play Policy for Northern Ireland. The development work will be taken forward in two stages - Stage One will involve developing a Play Policy aimed at children aged 11 years and under. The second stage will involve the development of a Recreation/Leisure Policy for children and young people aged 12 to 18 years.

Work has commenced on the development phase of the Play Policy and will lead to a shared understanding of Play and its importance. The process will also incorporate an initial mapping exercise to establish the current position regarding areas in Northern Ireland designated for play.

What is play?

Play is what children do when they themselves decide what to do, when to do it and how to do it.¹ Children's play does not have a specified goal or outcome².

Thomas 7 said:
Play is something everyone does



Why is play important?

Play is fundamental to a healthy and happy childhood³.

Play challenges and informs our understanding of children, because it views the child as a competent, confident being⁴.

Play is essential for the survival of the species, if it was not important we would have stopped doing it a long time ago⁵.

Play facilitates children's holistic development incorporating areas such as physical literacy, cognitive skills and creativity⁶.



Play is crucial to physical and mental health⁷.

Play is important for the development of brain capacity⁸.

Play supports a connection with nature and the environment⁹.

Play allows children time to relax and to be in control of what they do¹⁰.

Play is significant for cultural development and society¹¹.

Play provides opportunities for children and young people to assess and manage risk for themselves¹².

Play is adaptable variability¹³, and as such a mechanism to prepare us for constant change.

INFORMATION PAPER

PLAY POLICY for Northern Ireland

Context for play

Play is a child's right enshrined in the UN Convention of the Right of the Child Article 31.

Play supports many of the priority areas for local Government. It is recognised as a cross cutting theme in the way that it supports children's health and wellbeing and their learning and physical literacy.

The Welsh Assembly has developed a Play Policy as well as an implementation strategy. In England the Big Lottery has invested in infrastructure development for play as well as support for local projects. The Republic of Ireland has recently launched a play policy. In Sweden, Government and Local Councils have been required since 1999 to do child consequence analysis ("Child proofing") on policies and physical developments and this has a positive impact on children's play.

The Process

Since January we have been working on a literature review that will inform the draft Play Policy. We have hosted consultation events with adults across Northern Ireland and NIPPA and PlayBoard are facilitating ongoing consultations with children. We are now carrying out a mapping exercise with Councils, Education and Library Boards, Health Boards, Childcare Partnerships and the Housing Executive to attempt to identify designated areas for play.

We plan to launch the draft Play Policy for Northern Ireland for consultation around the beginning of June.



Keeping in touch

You can keep in touch with the work by visiting the following websites:

PlayBoard – www.playboard.co.uk

NIPPA – www.nippa.org

Children and Young People's Unit – www.allchildrenni.gov.uk

Commissioner for Children and Young People for Northern Ireland
www.niccy.org

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INFORMATION PAPER
PLAY POLICY for Northern Ireland

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http://www.ncb.org.uk/resources/cpc_manrisk_2002.pdf
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