

General points:

It is clear from the responses from the children across both age ranges that they all endorse the vision for play. The range of examples they gave represents the play opportunities and experiences which are important to children. It is clear that children aged over 5 have given more outdoor examples, however risk and proximity to parents are factors coming through in all of the responses.

Children recognised that play was about having fun, having friends, playing with toys, making things, playing sports, getting dirty and also playing alone. Many of the quotes were similar and the main ones are as follows:

- *Children like to have fun*
- *They want to have more fun and better equipment*
- *They like art and making things*
- *They like working together, playing with cars*
- *They need to be more free*
- *They go to lots of play areas*
- *They should be able to play whatever they want*

Children also related to play taking place in different places for example, outside and indoor play, in parks, sports pitches, fields, hills, the street, the front garden, bedrooms, in friends' or relatives' houses and in play parks. Playing in fixed play areas (e.g. local council play parks) and also playing indoors were mentioned least as providing play opportunities for the children. The most popular play opportunities for children occurred outdoors and close to home for example in their own street or garden, in a nearby open space such as a field or sports pitch. The majority of responses related to playing outside:

- *Camping, playing outside, playing in the garden especially boys, getting dirty outside*
- *(Play parks should be)... "Everywhere"*
- *"We should be allowed to have fun outdoors, camping, playing with fires, we want play and play for all ages"*
- *"Parks should be clean"*

Resourcing

A common concern expressed in responses was that funding had not been ring fenced in order to ensure that the actions contained in any action plan arising from the draft policy would actually take place and without firm resources in place the policy carried little weight. Respondents wanted to see concrete evidence in the policy of the amount set aside for play.

'a secure funding stream needs to be allocated to play to ensure that there is adequate provision for all.' Belfast City Council Youth Forum

Scope of the Policy

Twenty seven respondents stated a strong desire to see one play policy for all children aged 0-18 years. There appears to be some confusion in that it was always our intention to have one overall Play Policy for all those aged 0-18, but to implement it in two phases: a play policy for 0-11 years and a recreation policy for those aged 12-18 years. The language used in the draft document may have contributed to this confusion and the views of these respondents will be addressed in the published Play Policy.

Further mapping exercises

Around a quarter of respondents supported the need to do further work on mapping the extent of play provision. As was stated in the draft document (page 13), this is a need we recognise and work on assessing the quality of provision has already commenced. Respondents also highlighted the need to identify barriers to and benefits of community based play; the need to map quality of provision, including access, especially for children with disabilities and marginalised children and the need to record the length of time children actually spend at play facilities.

In responses, the use of the Six Acre standard as a recommended minimum open space standard was disputed by most councils, with only one council supporting it. The Equality Commission also questioned its application to Northern Ireland,

'... which may not be entirely appropriate in contexts such as areas where there is a community interface.'

In the preliminary mapping work done for the production of the document, we used the criteria used by local councils in Northern Ireland and which is largely consistent with the Six Acre Standard to give us a benchmark for mapping existing provision. It should be made clear that in doing this, we were not advocating the use of one system of measurement over another.

Policy proofing

The importance of policy proofing from a child/young person perspective was mentioned in a number of responses and it was noted that this process should apply to existing as well as new policies.

Participation

A number of responses highlighted the need to ensure effective participation for the most marginalised groups of children and young people and efforts should be made to ensure their active involvement in future decisions. In particular respondents were keen that children from ethnic minorities and children with disabilities should be involved in decisions about access to provision. Several respondents questioned the lack of a child-friendly version of the consultation document.

As stated above, OFMDFM organised several focused consultation events with children, both before publication of the document and during the consultation period, and is content that the broad view of children aged 3-11 years has been represented. We accept the point that older children could have been involved and could have spoken from their experiences. This point has been noted for future work on the policy.

Conclusion

It is aimed to publish the final policy in the Spring of 2008.

Responses to Play Policy Consultation Document	
No	Response from
1	Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission
2	Arts Council of Northern Ireland
3	North and West Belfast Health and Social Services Trust
4	Limavady Borough Council
5	St Peter's Primary School
6	Commissioner for Children and Young People for Northern Ireland
7	PlayBoard
8	PlayBoard Members
9	Ballymena Borough Council
10	Armagh City and District Council
11	Ulster Teachers Union
12	DCAL
13	Belfast City Council
13a	Belfast City Council Youth Forum
14	Ards Borough Council
15	The Bees Nees Early Years Centre
16	Northern Ireland Branch of Early Education
17	Northern Childcare Partnership
18	Upper Andersonstown Community Forum
19	Jeanette Keenan
20	Big Lottery Fund

