

PLAY STRATEGIES

As part of the government policy Every Child Matters, each local authority should be developing a play strategy. From your emails it appears that some authorities already have strategies, some are auditing the current situation prior to developing the strategy and some have had a strategy in place for some time and are considering updating it.

To find out more about Every Child Matters, The Children's Play Council fact sheet [Play in coordinated children's services: A briefing for directors of children's services and lead members for children](#) is a useful resource. Although this guide is targeted at children's services, parks and playgrounds are high on the agenda.

An excellent document entitled: [guide to developing play strategies](#) has been published by Greater London Authority and can be obtained from them or downloaded (follow link).

RESEARCHING PLAYGROUND USE

The Play Research Network email group were contacted and there were numerous responses, summarised below.

Whatever method is used, the first task when assessing the value of a playground facility is to define the aims of the study, i.e. what questions are you trying to answer?

Questionnaire / Interview

Questionnaires are arguably a cheap way to assess playground usage. You need to decide whether to question the children or their parents/carers and also if they are to be assisted with completing the form rather than just hoping they will be returned. An alternative avenue would be to interview users, although this is more time consuming. Problems include knowing if respondents are telling the truth and getting enough responses. It is essential that a valid set of questions are used, targeted to the relevant age group. The San Diego website includes free questionnaire downloads (see below) although these measure physical activity and would need some adaptation. One respondent warned against questionnaires, preferring to use sampling techniques.

Sampling

This involves visiting the site on different days of the week at different times etc. The observer then categorises the activity of the users. Approximate age/gender and ethnicity can be measured there are checklists for this which would be available by searching the internet/scientific databases ([Child's play: Facilitating play on housing estates](#) contains an example).

This method is time consuming; however is a good role for volunteers. Sport/leisure, sport science or sport studies students at a local college or university students may help in return for gaining experience. Alternatively a community group may be happy to do this. There are protocols on the Roundtree Foundation website and the San Diego website (would need adaptation). See below for links.

One problem with this method is measuring variables such as weather, time of day, time of year, day of week, school breaks and training days and a solution to this is collecting the data over a long period; however this has resource implications.

Other

Some respondents advocate informal measuring techniques as apposed to more scientific ones. These involve building up a picture through staff observations, engaging with users and keeping registers in supervised play areas etc...

It is worth considering that after improvements have been made, schools often report a drop in accidents, improved behaviour of pupils and staff are often more positive about

playground duty. Children may become fitter, look forward to play time and girls, who are often pushed aside by boys' football, may become more included.

A number of authorities use Pocket Computers (PDAs) with the PlaySafe software for the regular playground safety inspections and we have had a contact from the parent company. They suggest putting some use assessment measures into the regular safety inspections. If there is a demand the PlaySafe software could be adapted to include these measures, building up data over time. If you are interested in this please contact them at tbaker@pssltd.co.uk.

A number of respondents advocate the advantages of different authorities using similar measures so that data can be compared. It is also worth noting that the Children's Play Council is developing strategic performance indicators for play for the Comprehensive Performance Assessment framework. Recommendations will go to the DCMS in 2006.

WEBSITES

Play Wales <http://www.playwales.org.uk/index.php?lang=english>

The links page is very good and their publication The First Claim has been recommended.

Children's Play Council <http://www.ncb.org.uk/cpc/index.asp>

This is a good website with lots of information on play. The leaflet http://www.ncb.org.uk/cpc/res_detail.asp?id=279 brought out by their Play Safety Forum tackles the issue of risk and play.

Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents – play safety

<http://www.rospa.org.uk/playsafety/index.htm>

RoSPA not only works on safety in playgrounds, but is also involved in the wider issues of play areas. They are also the body that designate the Play Quality awards.

National Playing Fields Association <http://www.npfa.co.uk/>

Manchester Young Lives <http://www.manchesterplay.org.uk/index.asp>

San Diego State University <http://www.drjamesallis.sdsu.edu/>

Research into physical activity, this website includes a number of questionnaires that are free to download. There is also a protocol for observing play and leisure activity in youth (SOPLAY).

Rountree Foundation <http://www.jrf.org.uk/>

[Child's play: Facilitating play on housing estates](#) can be downloaded from this website. The full report contains methodologies and codes for measuring play.

Play Space Survey Results

http://www.the-childrens-society.org.uk/media/pdf/info/Play_Space_Survey.pdf

Children and young people's views on public space

Comprehensive research project by Chester City Council

<http://www.chester.gov.uk/PDF/Outside-CYP-on-Public-Space.pdf>

PLAY RESEARCH NETWORK ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Chloe Hughes (PhD Student), Sue Fenoughty (Environmental Education Teacher Consultant), Dr Fraser Brown (Leeds Metropolitan University), Trevor Baker (Public Sector Software), Tim Ferguson (Manchester Young Lives), Vicky Hunt (Wakefield and District Play Forum), Martin Chase, Rob Wheway (CAPT), Helen Woolley (Sheffield University), Mark Gladwin, Jayne Shenstone, Bernard Speigal.