

CHILDREN'S PLAY REVIEW

CONSULTATION EVENTS IN ENGLAND – REPORT OF FINDINGS

1 Introduction**1.1 The consultation process**

In February and early March 2003 DCMS listened to the views of 563 people in nine consultation events across England. The events, designed and run in partnership with the Children's Play Council, Dynamix Ltd. and Regional Cultural Consortia, focussed on specific issues raised in the Government Play Review consultation paper and offered an opportunity for exchange of ideas and consensus building. Children and young people, aged three to sixteen, took part in five of the events, which were primarily attended by people with a professional interest in children's play. A variety of active and participatory methods were employed to ensure everyone's views were represented.

This report summarises the findings of the nine consultation events. It looks at the definition of play and the mechanism for distributing the NOF funding proposed by DCMS and discusses the degree of consensus on priorities for funding differing types and scales of play provision. It also reports on the preferred solutions and approaches of professionals on issues key to the success of the funding stream. These included views on which agency should lead in the local distribution of the Fund, how the distribution of the Fund should support existing local strategies and plans, how partnership and other approaches might support the sustainability of funded projects, how quality of provision could be assured through the Fund, what the Fund might do to support the development of a trained workforce and how good practice could be highlighted and shared to ensure the best possible play provision for children and young people.

The events were widely publicised through the publication *PlayToday*, EYDCPs, Local Authorities, and a range of other publications including the Local Government Association's newsletter.

1.2 The participants

In line with its commitment to consult across England one consultation event took place in each of the nine English regions. In total 85 children and young people and 478 professionals took part. Of the professionals, who were involved with both supervised and unsupervised play provision, approximately:

- 36 percent were play development officers,
- 30 percent were funders and managers
- 15 percent were involved in early years and out-of-school childcare provision
- 14 percent had an interest in education or training
- 4 percent were day-to-day playworkers and
- 1 percent were parents.

Whilst the numbers of people attending each event varied there was good representation in each region (see Table 1).

Table 1: Number of participants at each regional event.

Region	Children and Young People	Adults	Total
Yorkshire and Humber	20	86	106
North East	10	39	49
North West	8	71	79
West Midlands		50	50
East Midlands		57	57
South East		25	25
South West	16	60	76
East		40	40
London	8	50	58
Birmingham	25		25
Total	87	478	565

2 Main findings

2.1 Definition of play (Section 3.1)

There was broad agreement on the DCMS definition of 'play' although some reservations and modifications were offered to ensure that it fulfilled the needs and interests of all children and young people and that it was child focussed..

2.2 The Funding Mechanism (Section 3.2)

Although there was broad agreement with the proposed funding mechanism there were many reservations. These related, in particular to the mechanics and accountability of the proposed structure, the choice of the local agency chosen to distribute the money, definitions of 'need' in relation to the equitable distribution of the Fund the involvement of children and young people and the specific criteria for funded projects.

2.3 Priorities for funding (Section 3.3)

There was a strong tendency to suggest that decisions about the type and scale of provision to be funded should be decided at local level and in conjunction with local children and young people and other community members. Never-the-less some clear priorities emerged.

Although there was a tendency to favour smaller local provision many groups were unable to reach a consensus and a mix of provision was also popular. There was however a strong consensus in favour of support for unsupervised dedicated play areas and supervised open access play areas. These two types of provision were the top priority for 36 of the 40 groups who were evenly split as to which was more important. Mobile play services were seen by some as important in addressing problems of accessibility and transport, particularly in rural areas. Schools were often discussed as potential providers of play but there were concerns about access to schools after normal hours and play in childcare and nurseries was given a relatively low priority as it was generally considered that there has already been a lot of support in these areas. Although not specifically mentioned in the consultation document improvements to existing parks to make them safer better play places was also mentioned.

2.4 The local lead agency (Section 4.1)

There was no clear consensus about who should take this role and there was a feeling that it may well be a different agency in each area depending on local circumstance including the existence of effective partnership working, commitment to play and motivation.

Partnership models of working was strongly favoured in most of the groups but there was less consensus over which organisation should lead the partnership. Existing partnerships were the most popular option, followed by the voluntary sector and local authorities. There were advantages and disadvantages associated with types of agencies and models.

There was, however, more agreement over the characteristic and criteria NOF should demand of the lead agencies.

2.5 Partnerships and sustainability (Section 4.2)

There was a strong feeling at most events that sustainability was only really possible if there was a commitment from central government to long-term and adequate funding for children's play opportunities. Relying on the commitment of individual local authorities to support children's play left play provision vulnerable to local authority cuts and an ever uncertain future.

It was also suggested that, in order to promote sustainability, the Fund might support projects in fundraising and income generation, community involvement, working in partnership, infrastructure support, strategic development of projects, promoting greater commitment from local authorities, raising awareness of the importance of play and valuing children, evaluation and monitoring and sharing and building on good practice.

2.6 Quality tools and processes (Section 4.3)

The quality of projects funded through the NOF programme should be measured by the level of involvement of the children and young people, practical aspects of provision and the play value. Although there are useful quality tools these are not comprehensive. The Fund could develop tools to fill existing gaps and be clear and consistent about the quality assurance expected by NOF.

2.7 Strategy and planning (Section 4.4)

Although there was considerable agreement on the importance of partnership working, sharing good practice, and having a cohesive sustainable play strategy there were issues of concern. These included the capacity of some organisations to develop play policies and strategies and it was suggested there might be some early support for this work. There was also a feeling that local play policies should be developed within a shared national agenda for play.

2.8 Training Issues (Section 4.5)

Training and staffing issues were consistently seen as areas where there is a great need for the investment of time, thought and money. The nature of play work, the status, pay, and the length of employment of people involved in playwork are all unrecognised at national and local level.

Ways in which the programme could promote training and education and support the development of a skilled competent workforce included taking positive steps to attract staff,

including the need for qualified staff in the criteria for funded projects, working with existing training organisations, building and expanding on existing good practice and promoting the effective management of funded projects.

2.9 Good practice support (Section 4.6)

Possible ways to support the dissemination of good practice included promoting consultation and participation, creating and supporting networks, training and development, strategic development, mapping and creating a sense of empowerment.

Good practice already exists in design, community involvement, accessibility and this should be widely disseminated by the Fund.

2.10 Other comments (Section 5)

At each event participants were offered the opportunity to write freely on 'graffiti walls'. In addition to comments responding to questions posed during the events these included comments on inclusive provision, the involvement of children and young people, criteria for funding and risk and safety.

2.11 Participant evaluation (Section 6)

On the whole there was a high level of satisfaction amongst participants who took part in the evaluation of the events. The vast majority felt they had had an opportunity to think and that their voices had been heard. Most also enjoyed the day. There was, however, some skepticism over whether anything would change as result of the consultation process. Children and young people tended to be slightly more satisfied with and less skeptical about the results than adults.

3 Issues of general interest

The consultation events were divided into two distinct sections. In the morning all participants stayed in the same room and, although, for some discussions divided into groups according to their area in interest and expertise, everyone discussed the same issues. Children and young people took part in all these discussions.

3.1 The definition of play

The definition of 'play' used to inform the NOF programme is of crucial importance. It will be one of the primary guides to the types of projects and facilities the Fund will support. DCMS offered a definition of 'play' in the consultation document and at each of the events participants were offered the opportunity to comment on this. The DCMS definition of play was:

Play is:

What children do when they are given the freedom to follow their own ideas and interests, in their own way and for their own reasons.

Although there was general agreement with the definition 54 comments and possible modifications were written on the 'graffiti walls'.

Of these 14 offered modifications along the lines suggested in the following quotes:

“Ideas, interests and reasons are very adult concepts. The definition of play should convey the instinctive nature of children’s need to play”

“Definition is okay but should be ‘children and young people’ and ‘in their own space’”

“Freely chosen, personally directed, intrinsically motivated, actively engaging”

Eleven comments took a cautious line on the definition fearing that it may exclude certain children and that adult intervention is sometimes necessary if all children and young people are to have good play opportunities. For example:

“Definition is positive as long as it doesn’t rule out facilities for special needs and small children”

“Definition is too limited. Needs to include providing opportunities to try new things”

“This definition suggests that adults should never intervene. What if this free play is immoral in some way?”

“I like the play definition. Just concerned for those of us who work in environments where things are expected to be organised and measurable.”

“Sport can be casual not organised and so it should be included as part of play”

The other comments were broadly supportive of the definition.

3.2 The Funding Mechanism

At each event participants were asked to make individual comments on the potential strengths and weaknesses of DCMS’s proposals on the process for distributing the Fund. These proposals suggested that local delivery agencies would be appointed by NOF to distribute the Fund to local projects and organisations. These agencies would be required to meet specific criteria and submit detailed delivery plans to NOF in order to receive the allocated funds.

There was a considerable amount of interest in this issue and 216 written comments were made. Of these the most interest (nearly one in three comments) was in the mechanics and accountability of the proposed structure. There was also considerable concern (over one in four comments) about the choice of the local agency which would distribute the money. Definitions of ‘need’ in relation to the equitable distribution on the Fund were highlighted by one in six and the involvement of children and young people in decisions about the distribution process and concern about the specific criteria for funded projects were mentioned in one in ten comments.

3.2.1 General observations

A few people warmly (5)¹ welcomed the new money for play but for some there was concern that there was too little money or that it would be wasted if not used well (6).

At last there is money for play.

The government have at least recognised there is a need. It now needs to be directed properly or it will be wasted.

£200 million not enough

3.2.2 Mechanism and accountability

Of most interest was the issue of **strategic planning and delivery**. Twenty of the 61 comments were on this issue. Whilst the importance of planning was acknowledged there was concern that local play organisations and providers must be actively involved in the development of the plans and strategies.

Get an adventure play person in as a consultant

Any strategy developed for the Fund must be closely linked with other local planning mechanisms including, for example the Children's Fund, Local Strategic Partnerships and Children and Young People's Strategic Partnerships.

Children and young people's strategic partnerships. How do we get play influence?

Strategies should be clear and encompass more than the distribution of the fund and there should also be a strategic 'fit' between the strategies of different partners and local and central government.

Will encourage/force local authorities to develop and implement a play strategy - long term impact

Concern was also expressed about the use of consultants without the relevant knowledge and information in drawing up plans and strategies.

Accountability and transparency were highlighted in 15 of the comments. There was concern that NOF was being given too much power with little or no accountability, that care must be taken to ensure that some organisations were not excluded by others, and that all the processes should be open and transparent.

Of equal importance (15) was the need for a **strong infrastructure** to support both the lead agency and the individual projects. Lead agencies should be given sufficient money to carry out play audits and prepare their strategies and clear guidance on developing bids. They should also be required to work with the local play sector and should develop a mechanism to support their funded projects.

Eleven comments related to the actual **procedure for delivering the money**. Some money should be available in advance for agencies to develop their role. The process should be fast and efficient and dependent on the development of a baseline audit. The use of the Fund should be well monitored to ensure money is not wasted.

¹ Numbers in (brackets) represent the number of comments relating to the issue mentioned

3.2.3 The lead agency

It should be possible to have different lead agencies in different areas (3) and these should be existing, successful partnerships or agencies (3). Lead agencies should understand play and have a play policy or strategy (3) and should work in partnership and be accountable to local people and organisations (3).

It appeared from the comments that some participants understood DCMS to be recommending that **local authorities** become lead agencies. This elicited a considerable number of comments of which.

- 5 were general observations or questions about the existing role and interest of local authorities in play, for example:

Need to think whether council or any statutory body is the right person to draw up plans.
- 13 had strong reservations about local authorities taking the lead, expressing concern that the money would not be used for play but for other services, that there is not always knowledge or commitment to play and not all local authorities are good at partnership working.

Local authorities are not always enthusiastic about wider partnerships if that means voluntary organizations - they can be positively obstructive.

Please avoid local authorities if you can – they will use the money to keep council tax down (and still put it up!)
- 4 were in favour of local authorities taking the lead

Local authorities have the capacity to organise and co-ordinate schemes and can ensure sustainability through 'core' budgets.
- 4 felt that district councils would be more appropriate than county council where there were two tiers of local government.

In 2-tier authority areas, go to more local tier (e.g. districts).

The importance of **working in partnership** was highlighted in 16 comments. Partnerships should include linking play organisations and providers with existing groups and partnerships in the statutory and voluntary sectors and with community groups. This was seen as advantageous to the development of the plan and strategy, the knowledge base within the local authority, and for the play Fund to link with and compliment other funding streams.

This is an opportunity for local authorities to find out what play organisations exist in their locality

In five comments the **local voluntary sector**, in particular play associations and children's charities, was seen as suitable organisations to provide the lead role:

County play associations should receive the funding - they are the experts on children's play.

EYDCPs as the lead agency were considered in four comments, two in favour and two against.

3.2.4 The equitable distribution of the Fund

One in six of the comments expressed interest and concern about the way in which the fund would be most equitably distributed. There was concern that *existing mechanisms* used by Government to distribute funds, reliant on indices of deprivation, *were not necessarily appropriate for the play Fund*. Children and young people in wealthy areas can be as or more deprived of play opportunities than those in other areas (5). Rural areas often miss out under existing systems and there is a great need for more and better play opportunities for children and young people in rural areas (5). Disabled children and young people are disadvantaged in terms of play where-ever they live (2) and cities in the north of England have greater need than those in the other parts (2).

Eleven comments offered suggestions for how best to reach most children. These included the importance of universal services, undertaking audits to establish need, offering opportunities to small groups, ensuring a geographical spread and ensure that poorer areas do get sufficient funds.

Other general comments included the statement:

It should be possible to come up with an allocation formula that means all areas get enough money, but there is still at least some weighting for disadvantage

3.2.5 The involvement of communities, children and young people

One in ten comments were about the involvement of local communities, especially children and young people in the design and implementation of the funding process. These comments, largely in agreement with each other, indicated that timescales should allow sufficient time for comprehensive consultation on plans and strategies and disabled children and young people should specifically be sought out to participate. Schools might have an important role to play in this. Also adults and professionals working in an area can often offer insights into the views of children and young people and this should be acknowledged and utilised.

People that know the local areas and its people/needs should be the ones who decide who the money is allocated to.

3.2.6 Criteria for funded projects

Seventeen comments also talked about the criteria for funded projects. Half of these were about the importance of sustainability and the need to ensure that capital expenditure was backed by a commitment to the running and maintenance of the provision beyond the life of the Fund. Creating links with other organisations and funding partners was important to this.

The other comments referred to characteristics of funded projects including for example quality assurance, links with other provision, the range of provision to be funded and the need for support and clarity in any processes.

3.3 Priorities for funding

Although the Play Review Team had a view on the definition of 'play' and the structure of the funding mechanism they were open to the development of a consensus on the types of provision the Fund would support. During each of the consultation events participants were allocated to groups according to their type of work or interest in play and asked to attempt to

achieve agreement, within their group, about the scale and types of provision to be prioritised by the Fund. Although there was a strong tendency to suggest that this was not possible as local people should be consulted on these issues, participants were encouraged to develop and offer their own views.

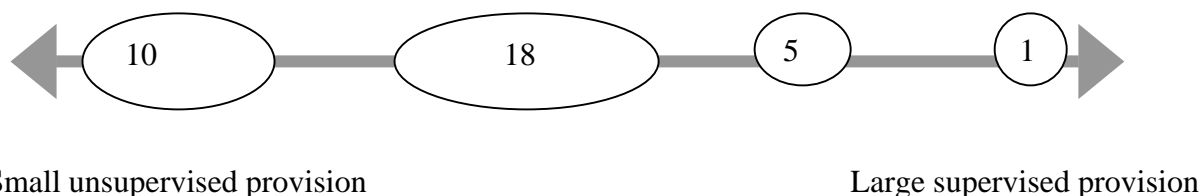
3.3.1 The scale of provision

To stimulate debate about priorities for the scale of provision which should be prioritised, participants were asked to imagine that they had £400,000 to spend on play provision in their area over the next three years. They were then asked to decide whether the money should be spent on a number of small, unsupervised play areas at the end of each street or on one big, staffed, well equipped play centre in the middle of town. Comments arising in the discussion were noted and each group was asked to describe where on a continuum between these types of provision their group’s consensus lay.

Although some groups at almost every event were unable to reach a consensus some were. Figure 1 shows that, in general there was a tendency towards preference for more, smaller, local provision although there were reservations about this and some groups did favour larger, more centralised provision. Some groups favoured a mixture of provision and many said it would depend on the area.

“Must not compromise our right to have both types of provision (and others)”

Figure 1. Numbers of interest groups able to reach a consensus on the scale of play provision the Fund should prioritise.



The main advantage of small, local provision was its accessibility and proximity to children and their parents. It was also seen to be flexible, good for community cohesion and cheaper than larger provision. It did, however, have the disadvantage of being vulnerable to vandalism or domination by one group of children and young people, difficult to maintain and not being able to offer childcare. The following comments illustrate issue raised by many on small scale provision:

- “One model doesn’t fit all”*
- “Local provision is better for smaller children who need to be close to home”*
- “Difficult for councils to maintain small local provision”*
- “Localise...kids have territories”*
- ‘Parents aren’t needed’*

Larger more centralised provision, whilst being able to offer a wide range of play opportunities for children and young people of all ages, security for children and their parents and the potential to be more valuable for disabled children and young people, had the major disadvantages of being hard to travel to for many children and young people and of being expensive to run.

“Large central provision is easier to maintain, more accessible and secure and is good for sustainability”

“Transport issues with a central area”

“One big play facility can make a big impact”

“Older children can travel more”

3.3.2 Priorities for types of provision to be funded

To assess whether a consensus was possible on whether the Fund should prioritise specific types of play provision each group was given a list of six types of provision and asked identify the three they felt should be prioritised by the Fund. They were then asked to pick one of these as the most important. The six types of provision were:

- Type 1 - Unsupervised dedicated play areas
- Type 2 - Supervised open access play areas
- Type 3 - More play in childcare
- Type 4 - More play in nurseries and playgroups
- Type 5 - Better Play spaces in schools
- Type 6 - Play provision which moves around

In all events there was a clear consensus on the importance of funding unsupervised dedicated play areas. All forty groups from the nine events put this type of provision in their top three priorities. Thirty-two of the groups also put supervised open access play areas in their top three. These two types of provision were the top priority for 36 of the groups who were evenly split as to which was more important (see table 2). Typical comments about unsupervised provision included:

“Most young people want to do things by themselves

“Teen focus, home zones”

“Balance between free chosen and opportunities”

“Must be well maintained”

‘Imagination can be used’

Comments about supervised provision included:

“People can be safe and there’s a choice for younger children”

“Play work skills are important”

Table 2: Number of groups putting specific types of provision as their first, second and third priority for funding

Priority 1	Number of groups	Priority 2 & 3	Number of groups
Supervised open access play areas	16	Unsupervised dedicated play areas	20
Unsupervised dedicated play areas	15	Play provision which moves around	17
Unsupervised dedicated play areas & Supervised open access play areas	5	Supervised open access play areas	11
Play provision which moves around	2	Better Play spaces in schools	11
More play in nurseries and playgroups	1	More play in nurseries and playgroups	4
Other	1	More play in childcare	2

Mobile play services were seen by some as important in addressing problems of accessibility and transport, particularly in rural areas. Comments included

“Expertise, good practice taken out from main play area”

“Where lacking play spaces e.g. high density populations”

Schools were often discussed as potential providers of play but there were concerns about access to schools after normal hours and play in childcare and nurseries was given a relatively low priority as it was generally considered that there has already been a lot of support in these areas.

Table 3 shows the priorities identified by the different interest groups represented at the seminars. It was notable that those with possible vested interests in prioritising one specific type of provision did not necessarily do this.

Table 3: Top three priorities for funding identified by different interest groups
 (Numbers in bracket are approximate total numbers of the people in each category. Not all groups recorded the number of people so these figures are an indication only.)

Name of group and size	Priority 1	No. of groups	Priorities 2 & 3	No. of groups
Funders and Managers (89)	Unsupervised dedicated play areas	4	Play provision which moves around	5
	Supervised open access play areas	4	Unsupervised dedicated play areas	4
	Unsupervised dedicated play areas & Supervised open access play areas	2	Supervised open access play areas	3
	Play provision which moves around	1	More play in childcare	1
			More play in nurseries and playgroups	1
Early years and childcare (44)	Supervised open access play areas	2	Better Play spaces in schools	4
	Unsupervised dedicated play areas	1	Play provision which moves around	3
	More play in nurseries and playgroups	1	Supervised open access play areas	1
Play workers (12)	Supervised open access play areas	2	Supervised open access play areas	2
	Unsupervised dedicated play areas	1	Unsupervised dedicated play areas	1
			Better play spaces in schools	1
			Play provision which moves around	1
Education and training (42)	Supervised open access play areas	2	Supervised open access play areas	3
	Unsupervised dedicated play areas & Supervised open access play areas	1	Play provision which moves around	3
	Other	1	Unsupervised dedicated play areas	2
			Better play spaces in schools	2
Children and young people (45)	Supervised open access play areas	4	Unsupervised dedicated play areas	2
	Unsupervised dedicated play areas	1	Better play spaces in schools	1
			Supervised open access play areas	1
			More play in nurseries and playgroups	1

Name of group and size	Priority 1	No. of groups	Priorities 2 & 3	No. of groups
Play development (108)	Unsupervised dedicated play areas	8	Unsupervised dedicated play areas	9
	Unsupervised dedicated play areas & Supervised open access play areas	2	Play provision which moves around	3
	Play provision which moves around	1	More play in nurseries and playgroups	2
			Supervised open access play areas	1
			More play in childcare	1
			Better play spaces in schools	1
Other adults and parents (5)	Supervised open access play areas	2	Unsupervised dedicated play areas	1
			Better play spaces in schools	1
			Play provision which moves around	1

The type of provision to be funded was the focus of 40 of the 250 comments written on 'graffiti walls'. These comments included the following issues:

- Improvements to existing parks to make them safer better play places (9)
- The potential for making better use of school grounds and facilities for play (6)
- The value of open access, supervised provision, especially adventure playgrounds (4)
- More and better opportunities for children and young people to play in the natural environment (4)
- More and better opportunities for sport (4)
- Opportunities for children and young people of all ages (4)
- Access to playgrounds for disabled children and young people (3)

Other comments covered the need to improve play in childcare, the importance of mobile provision and central resource centres and the possibility of developing demonstration play projects.

4 Issues of specific interest to participants

For the second part of each consultation event participant chose to attend two of six discussion groups. Children and young people were not involved in these discussions. The aim of the discussions was to allow for more in depth debate on issues of particular interest to the Play Review Team.

4.1 The local lead agency

Participants were asked to consider which agency should lead the in the distribution of the Fund at local level and what criteria might NOF expect that agency to meet in order to enable the best possible outcomes for local children and young people. The following comments are typical of those recorded.

"If just one lead agency, then no diversity"

“Strategic partnership – different organisations can lead but local authorities must be involved”

“Local authority can be accountable body but not the leader”

“...need to look at lessons of Surestart and Children's Fund”

“Don't want to waste money on new agencies”

“Must be robust / have an active play strategy”

Of the 250 comments on the 'graffiti walls' 15 were about the lead agency. Of these:

- 8 mentioned importance of using existing structures and partnerships: the Children's Fund and Local Strategic Partnerships were specifically mentioned.
- 4 emphasized the importance of a play focus and involvement of play organizations.
- 3 commented on the importance of clarity when there was more than one tier of local authority involved.

4.1.1 Preferred agencies

There was no clear consensus about who should take this role and there was a feeling that it may well be a different agency in each area depending on local circumstances. Factors influencing the decision over which agency it should be included the existence of an established partnership, links with local play organisations and the motivation of the organisation.

Partnership models of working were strongly favoured in most of the groups but there was less consensus over which organisation should lead the partnership. Existing partnerships were the most popular option, followed by the voluntary sector and local authorities. Three participants suggested the agency should be at regional rather than local level and three suggested the health service should take the lead. (See table 5).

Table 5: Number of time different agencies were proposed as lead agency

Sector	Agency	No. suggesting as Lead Agency
Existing Partnerships	All	25
	General	3
	EYDCPs / SureStart	8
	Children and Young People Strategic Partnerships	5
	Children's Fund	5
	Local Strategic Partnerships	3
	Rural Community Councils	1
Voluntary Sector	All	20
	Existing relevant local organizations	8

Sector	Agency	No. suggesting as Lead Agency
	Play Associations and Networks	7
	National children's charities with local structures	5
Local Government	All	16
	Local authority	7
	District Council	5
	County Council	3
	Parish Council	1
Regional bodies	All	3
Local NHS Structures	All	3
Newly created partnerships	All	1

4.1.2 The appropriateness of different agencies.

In each consultation event participants discussed the relative merits of local authorities (county and district), EYDCPs, voluntary agencies, play organisations and partnerships taking the role of the delivery agency at local level. The main advantages and disadvantages of each type of agency are summarised in Table 4.

Table 4: Summary of the most frequently cited advantages and concerns of different agencies taking the lead at local level.

Lead Agency	Summary of advantages	Summary of concerns
Local Authority	Accountable, capacity, expertise, departmental connections, systems in place	Partnership working not always effective, commitment to play variable, possibility of using Fund to supplement existing services, bureaucratic
Voluntary organisations	Needs led, responsive, committed, community ownership, independent	Insufficient infrastructure, exclusive, can be non democratic, lack of capacity, lack of sustainability
EYDCPs	Local knowledge, partnerships, multi-agency, local authority support	Prioritise limited age range (0-4 perception), bureaucratic, specific knowledge is childcare, closed access provision

Lead Agency	Summary of advantages	Summary of concerns
Partnerships in general	If an existing partnership, good representation, local knowledge, diversity of skills, longer term sustainability	Responsibilities confusing, quality varies, resource implications, ownership of outputs, who takes the lead
Play Organisations	Staff experienced in play, in touch with what children want, resourceful	Could they ensure equality, capacity?, lack of national vision

4.1.3 Criteria required of the lead agency

Whichever agency is chosen to lead at local level it should meet the following requirements:

- Expertise in / commitment to / focus on play
- Local knowledge
- Adequate capacity – time and resources
- A track record in good management
- Good partnership working
- Financially stability
- Track record of commitment to play
- Trust of local community

4.2 Partnerships and sustainability

Aware of major concerns about the short-term nature of the NOF grants the Play Review Team were keen to identify ways in which sustainability of projects beyond the life of the Fund could be supported by the distribution mechanism and through partnership working. Participants were asked to discuss the question:

- How should the programme promote effective local partnerships to support the long-term sustainability of funded projects?

Amongst most groups there was a strong feeling that sustainability was only really possible if there was a commitment from central government to long-term and adequate funding for children's play opportunities. Relying on the commitment of individual local authorities to support children's play left play provision vulnerable to local authority cuts and an ever uncertain future.

From the nine groups discussing this issues proposal for sustainability included:

- **Greater commitment from central government** (22). This included the need for central funding for play (10) based on a play strategy for England, being more flexible with funding streams generally and allowing for long-term funding (8), raising money for play through the tax system, either through a hypothecated tax or through giving tax credits to families for play provision (4) and making play a statutory service (2).
- **Fundraising and income generation** (19) though applying for other grants (5), involving local business and other organisation (6), selling services (4), asking for resources in kind (3) and developing social entrepreneurship (1).

- **Community involvement** (17) through consultation, management groups, fundraising and other methods.
- **Working in partnership** (12) with local people and relevant organisations.
- **Infrastructure support** (12) including support for play associations, developing a trained, valued workforce and working within a local play policy and strategy.
- **Strategic development of projects** (10) involving systematic business planning and development plans for the future of the project and linking in with other local plans and strategies.
- **Greater commitment from local authorities** (8) including core funding, representation on management groups, involvement of local politicians and promoting a long-term commitment.
- **Raising awareness of the importance of play and valuing children** (7)

Other possibilities included evaluation and monitoring (6), sharing and building on good practice (3) valuing space (1) and ensuring any cuts are given a high profile in national and local media (1).

Sixteen of the comments on the 'graffiti wall' related to sustainability and partnerships. These focussed primarily on the importance of ensuring that short-term funding is backed up with a commitment to maintain successful projects in the future and the importance of all local partnerships having an understanding of play.

The following are some of the comments recorded

“Committed sums, eg planning and housing”

“Core funding for workers to promote and develop long-standing play projects”

“Play strategy urgently needed”

“Good practice must be acknowledged financially”

4.3 Quality tools and processes

The Play Review Team were keen that all projects supported by the Fund provide quality play opportunities for children and young people. Aware that there are a number of Quality Assurance scheme currently in use in the play sector the groups were asked to discuss the questions:

- How appropriate are existing benchmarks, standards and quality assurance tools for the NOF play fund?

Groups identified areas in which the quality of play provision should be measured, the existing tools for measuring quality and whether these were adequate and discussed whether or not new tools should be developed.

4.3.1 Aspects of play provision which should be measured

There were a variety of elements of play provision that quality tools should measure. These included:

- **Involvement of the children and young people:** Top of the list was what the children get out of the provision (20). This was described in terms of their satisfaction, but also their involvement and how much control they have. It was also suggested that community involvement (3) and parents' perceptions were important measures (2).
- **Practicalities:** Health and safety was an important issue (7), along with other practical things like equipment and resources (7) and training for staff (6).
- **Values:** There was frequent mention of "Play Value" and also "play values", specifically equal opportunities (3), inclusiveness (6), diversity (3), accessibility (3) and sustainability (4).

Lower down the scale of quality measures, mentioned only once, were accidents, complaints, risk assessments and quality of partnership.

4.3.2 Existing quality assurance tools

These are wide ranging and included

- *Play value.* QA schemes/best play. SPRITO, CPC/PFA/PLAYLINK. Children.
- *Inclusion and access* – local strategies CPC/PFA/PLAYLINK/Kidsactive. Legislation.
- *Consultation and participation.* Local strategies, CPC/PFA/PLAYLINK. Children. Local government and communities. Qualitative evidence.
- *Health and safety.* QA schemes, Daycare Standards, legislation, ROSPA. Environmental standards. Insurance. CRB checks.
- *Staff qualifications and training.* Legislation. Management. Best play. QA schemes. SPRITO. Children Act. Daycare standards.
- *Value for money.* Children. Evaluation and reviewing.
- *Usage.* Children and young people's surveys
- *Space:* NPFA Six Acre Standard

4.3.3 Quality tools for the Fund

Most groups felt that it was inappropriate to develop a new set of tools for the Fund but that modifications to existing tools, in the light of their use so far, should be considered. More than one group mentioned the importance of strengthening values making comments like:

"Play value - possible NOF kite mark to show that play settings are good quality"

"Strengthen play value, inclusiveness, participation"

There was also some discussion about how much support NOF could offer in terms of quality tools – should they have their own criteria and principles, or do standards need to be consolidated in a broader sense? -

"Develop overall 'standards' for play, not just for the NOF programme"

Other comments included:

"Sustainability isn't measured – very important for new funding streams"

“Should include children’s involvement”

“Must be part of local authority / community strategy”

4.4 Strategy and planning

Strategic planning is widely accepted as important in the sustainable development and effective targeting of services. As the provision of play opportunities is affected by many local authority functions this is particularly important for play. Groups were therefore asked to discuss:

- How should the programme promote effective strategic planning and link with other government initiatives?

4.4.1 General issues

There was considerable agreement on the importance of partnership working, good practice, and having a cohesive sustainable strategy. There were, however, some points that would still seem to be open for discussion. For example:

- Should money be available for developing play strategies for areas that don't have one, or should it be solely for play provision?
- Where should the commitment to play come from and who should be responsible? Should this be at a national, regional or local level? At what level do decisions get made and the money get spent?

Recommendations on this issue included:

- weight behind and support for play should be a shared national agenda
- the importance of a local strategy, to the extent that it's a requirement (5)
- support for local authorities to make links, bring the community together and use local capacity (5)
- commitment and duty to play and access to the money should filter down from national to regional to local (4)
- money more likely to meet demands if local
- budget, management and partnerships should be local

4.4.2 Specific issues

- **Partnerships** (25): Although partnerships are important in strategic development there are some important factors in their success. These include the importance of building cross-sector links and having a “shared vision between cross-cutting themes”, including those not normally involved in play, sharing time, effort, talents and resources, and promoting and raising awareness through these wider links.
- **Sustainability** (21): Participants seemed to agree that any strategy needs to be sustainable. This requires shared objectives, the active involvement of key decision-makers, commitment from all involved – from anyone signing up to it as well as from local and central government, clarity about where responsibility lies, and agreement about who is accountable to whom and appropriate requirements / criteria set by NOF in terms of eligibility for the funding,
- **Good Practice** (20): There is much to be learned through sharing best practice, gathering and disseminating information – “give voice to good practitioners”, involving

people from local communities, consulting children and young people and involving them at all levels – “a champion for play to be children and young people centred”, monitoring and evaluation and inclusion strategies – looking at broad needs in terms of who should be involved, perhaps rethinking who to consult – “more proactive in engaging agencies that are hard to reach”

- **Money** (14): The money should be easy to access – developing easier ways of applying for money. Matched funding requirements can provide more links.
- **Mapping existing provision** (9): Mapping, researching and evaluating existing provision is important and there should be a commitment to build on but not duplicate what already exists. The Fund should be used to complement existing provision and fill current gaps in services.
- **Promotion** (6): Strategies should aim to raise awareness, promote play to and through other departments and provide an effective information flow.

Six comments on the graffiti walls suggested that plans should be accessible to children and young people and that play policies should be developed by lead agencies.

4.5 Training Issues

Although the programme is not intended to be for developing training and education programmes in playwork the Play Review Team wanted to know what role the Fund could have in supporting the development of a well trained workforce. Participants discussed the question:

- How should the programme ensure that any jobs are filled by people with appropriate skills and competences?

Training and staffing issues were consistently seen as areas where there is a great need for the investment of time, thought and money. The nature of play work, the status, pay, and the length of employment of people involved in playwork are all unrecognised at national and local level. It was strongly suggested that the programme remain as flexible as possible to accommodate all the relevant factors.

Ways in which the programme could promote training and education and support the development of a skilled competent workforce included:

- **Attracting staff** (21) through supporting the development of a structure for career progression (6), promoting a ‘portfolio job’ approach where staff work in a number of childcare and playwork posts to provide full time work (4), improving the pay and conditions of playworkers (3), raising the status of playwork (3), encouraging playworkers from black and minority ethnic groups (3) and raising awareness of the importance of training (2). Also mentioned were support for professional development and attracting older people into the play workforce.
- **Including the need for qualified staff in the criteria for funded projects** (12) whilst providing support to projects in developing their training programmes.
- **Working with existing organisations** (10) including Ofsted, colleges, SPRITO, those involved with youth work training and Connexions.
- **Building and expanding on existing good practice** (8) for example through linking existing projects and developing mentoring schemes.

- *Promoting the effective management of funded projects* (8) through, for example, supporting the development of business plans and development plans and through working closely with providers.

Other proposals included promoting training in *inclusive provision* (3), *involving the play sector* in the allocation of the Fund and in recruitment to projects (2), improving *liaison between Government departments*, and *providing advice on funding for training*. One graffiti wall comment suggested that pump-priming funds could be provide for staff training.

Amongst the seven comments on the graffiti walls relating to staffing issues was a focus on concern about the poor status, pay and conditions currently existing in the play sector and a concern that the distinct nature of playwork was in danger of being subsumed into the youth work sector.

Comments included the following:

“Qualifications aren’t recognized highly enough”.

“Too much training can put people off”

“Target people from minority communities – play workers with English as a second language”

“NOF should support mentorship schemes”

“Recruitment fairs could be a source of workers – play road shows”

“Mapping profile of play workers – skills audit”

“Make managers go on training to ‘cascade’ skills down”

“Volunteer training is a weakness that NOF could support”

“More links to Connexions”

4.6 Good practice support

Sharing information about good practice is recognised as an effective way of promoting improvement and innovation generally. Participants discussed the question:

- How should the programme disseminate and support good practice?

Participants first identified key elements of good practice in play provision and then suggested possible guidelines on general practice, design, accessibility and involving the community.

4.6.1 General

Ways to support the dissemination of good practice included:

- *Consultation and participation*, particularly regarding children and young people and the community, and creating a sense of ownership (19)

- **Creating networks** / opportunities to share good practice (11), including websites (4), newsletters (more than just Play Today), directories and linking to existing groups / case studies (9)
- **Training and development** (8)
- **Having a strategy** / plan / vision / clarity of process (5)
- **Mapping** (5)
- **Creating a sense of empowerment** – recognition and reward (4)

Also mentioned were the need to minimise bureaucratic 'red tape', supporting mentor schemes, promoting Quality Assurance schemes such as 'Quality in Play' and 'First Claim', ensuring there are appropriate people on the awarding panel in NOF (e.g. SPRITO and OFSTED), funding some pilot projects – 'fast track' some projects so others can learn from them, providing a database of resources and scrap stores and developing a benchmark of good practice.

4.6.2 Design

Good practice to be shared in design could be found in or provided by, for example:

- Guidelines / guidance (5)
- Involving choice, challenge and appropriate risk in projects (3)
- Drawing on local expertise (3)
- Best play (2)
- Daycare Standards for open access play provision
- Hands on designers who will work directly with children and involve them in the process
- Inspections
- Awards such as MENCAP MEZ
- Involving urban planners and architects

4.6.3 Involving the Community

Expectations of involving children and young people and other community members should be realistic and could include, for example

- Training events on basic consultation processes and community development
- Planning for real

It was also suggested that NOF might be able to develop a toolkit for workers.

4.6.4 Accessibility

Good practice in accessibility was seen to be wide ranging, including for example:

- Variety of provision (4)
- Information (4)
- Location (3)
- Well maintained equipment (2)
- Transport (2)
- Safety (2)
- Supervision (2)
- Trained staff (2)
- Equal opportunities policy (2)
- Grant application and selection criteria should be in easily understood language
- New quality award for accessibility "Happy Kid" award

5 Graffiti walls

At each event participants were offered the opportunity to write freely on 'graffiti walls'. These comments were recorded and categorised and those not relating directly to the questions discussed in the events are summarised below.

5.1 Additional comments

5.1.1 Play for all

Twenty seven comments on the graffiti walls referred directly to the importance of recognising that all children have the right to play and the currently some groups of children and young people systematically have fewer opportunities than others, The fund should therefore:

- Recognise the right of all child to play (9) wherever they live, mentioning Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- Fund provision that is inclusive of disabled children and young people (12)
- Ensure the play needs of other disadvantaged groups of children and young people are met, for example those from low income families, traveling families and in rural areas and those who have been bullied and abused (6).

5.1.2 Involving children, young people and other community members

The importance of involving children and young people and other community members was mentioned in 18 comments on the graffiti walls. These included pleas for real participation, not tokenism, proposals for capacity building of local people and resources to support this work.

5.1.3 Risk and safety

Eight of the nine comments on safety referred to the need for greater security in parks and play areas to prevent vandalism and to ensure children and young people felt safe whilst playing there. One comment asked about the importance of controlled risk in children's play.

5.1.4 Comments to central government

The 11 general comments addressed to the Government asked for more money to be made available on the longer term, for Government to work across departments to promote and support the strategic development of children's play opportunities, for local authorities to be required to have play policies and for children's play to become a statutory obligation.

6 Evaluation of consultation events

At the end of each event participants were asked to evaluate the process by responding to the following questions:

- Did today make you think?
- Did you get your voice heard?
- Do you think things will change?
- Did you have fun?

Each participant was asked to rank their satisfaction in relation to these questions by placing a mark on a target of 3 concentric circles. The closer the middle the better satisfied the participant was. Tables 6, 7 and 8 summarise the evaluation targets.

Table 6: Total number of adults placing dots in each circle of satisfaction

	Did today make you think?		Did you get your voice heard		Do you think things will change		Did you have fun?	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Number of dots in inner circle (most satisfied)	95	45	92	50	22	14	78	40
Number of dots in middle circle	78	37	74	40	70	43	84	43
Number of dots in outer circle (less satisfied)	37	18	13	8	70	43	30	15
Number of dots outside target (not satisfied)			4	2			3	2
Total	210	100	183	100	162	100	195	100

Table 7: Total number of children and young people placing dots in each circle of satisfaction

	Did today make you think?		Did you get your voice heard		Do you think things will change		Did you have fun?	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Number of dots in inner circle (most satisfied)	31	58	44	63	12	28	37	61
Number of dots in middle circle	16	30	11	16	26	60	17	28
Number of dots in outer circle (less satisfied)	4	8	8	12	2	5	6	10
Number of dots outside target (not satisfied)	2	4	6	9	3	7	1	1
Total	53	100	69	100	43	100	61	100

Table 8: Total number of people placing dots in each circle of satisfaction

	Did today make you think?		Did you get your voice heard		Do you think things will change		Did you have fun?	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Number of dots in inner circle (most satisfied)	108	50	136	54	34	17	115	45
Number of dots in middle circle	94	44	85	34	96	47	101	39
Number of dots in outer circle (less satisfied)	11	5	21	8	72	35	36	14
Number of dots outside target (not satisfied)	2	1	10	4	3	1	4	2
Total	215	100	252	100	205	100	256	100

Over nine in ten participants who took part in the evaluation were felt that the day had made them think with half feeling they had had a very good opportunity to do this. Nearly nine in ten also felt their voice had been heard with over half being very satisfied that they had put their view across. The area where there was least enthusiasm was the anything would change as a result of the consultation process. Over one in three participants doing the evaluation were skeptical about this.

On the whole the children and young people participating were even more likely to be satisfied and less skeptical about the possibility for change than the adults.

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