



Piloting the playable space Quality Assessment Tool

Haki Kapasi, INSPIRE Consultancy Ltd
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1. Introduction

- 1.1 The playable space Quality Assessment Tool¹ was designed and piloted as part of the former Children's Play Council (now Play England) Play Indicators project. Play England has been supported over the last three years, by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the Big Lottery Fund to develop a small number of strategic indicators for assessing local authority performance in ensuring the availability of quality facilities and spaces for all children and young people's play and informal recreation in their local neighbourhoods. The indicators are intended to capture the range, extent and quality of play provision and play opportunities across an area, and be practicable as both management tools and upward drivers of performance for the local authority and its partners in the delivery of the 'play offer'.²
- 1.2 The suite of performance indicators includes an assessment of the quality of playable spaces available to children and young people in the area where they live. In order to measure this quality it was necessary to develop a tool for local authorities that could provide an objective analysis of the complex factors that contribute to the quality of a space or facility for children's play. This report describes the process of developing and piloting this tool.
- 1.3 The quality assessment measure has evolved considerably from its original concept developed by Rob Wheway and Haki Kapasi. The aim of the Quality Assessment Tool is to measure the quality of dedicated play areas created by local authorities and others.
- 1.4 There was much debate within the play and playwork sector about whether it was at all possible for play areas to be assessed for quality given that children and young people's play experiences are highly individual and subjective phenomena. For example how could one measure whether a play space felt safe for a child or not, or whether the play area was enticing to children?
- 1.5 Clearly each child and young person will experience a play space, and indeed any space, in their own individual way. The way they experience the space will be governed by many factors such as their emotional and social associations with that place. However, adults are constantly intervening in children and young people's ability to play both intentionally and unintentionally. The increase in traffic and fear of 'stranger danger' has resulted in children playing out less, particularly on their own. There has been a continuous increase in the percentage of children being driven to school and thereby losing opportunities to play while going to school. To combat the reduction in children's outdoor play opportunities a number of local authorities have created imaginative, stimulating play environments that satisfy all the five senses.
- 1.6 Children and young people do want to play out (Cole-Hamilton, Harrop Street 2002)³ and the Quality Assessment Tool refers to the growing body of knowledge about good design principles in outdoor play and about where and how children

¹ A copy of the assessment tool is not included in this report as it changed significantly as a result of the pilot process. The final tool will be published by Play England in April 2009.

² A detailed report describing the four indicators and evaluating the pilot projects is available online from the Play England website.

³ Cole-Hamilton, I, Harrop, A and Street, C (2002) *Making the Case for Play: Gathering the evidence*. London: National Children's Bureau.

like to play to assess the quality of dedicated play areas. It sets out to establish some base-line measures for play spaces so that local authorities can identify and prioritise play areas for improvements.

How enticing is a place to play?



2. A performance management tool

- 2.1 All those that participated in the pilots agreed that the Quality Assessment Tool was useful as a performance management tool that provided useful data for prioritising improvements to sites.
- 2.2 Comparing scores between local authorities can be useful in informing how well each local authority was performing, although this was sometimes a rather crude measure for comparisons given the breadth of locations, sizes and geographical context for each site. Furthermore, when Bolton and Kirklees peer-assessed sites the differences in scores were notable.
- 2.3 While the tool has not been tested to see if it can support the designing of new sites the results from the pilots show it can offer an important methodology for doing so.

3. Scoring

- 3.1 The scoring calculation was developed in partnership with the project team and took into consideration the type of space of being scored and the number of items being assessed. For example, Type B and C spaces included the provision of toilets while Type A did not. Types B and C also included the presence of trusted/supervisory adults while Type A did not.
- Type A: Doorstep spaces and facilities
Type B: Neighbourhood spaces and facilities
Type C: Local spaces and facilities for play
(Based upon the typology used in *Planning for Play*⁴ see Chapter 6 for more about typology).
- 3.2 Local authorities were asked to total scores for each category – location, play value, and care and maintenance and then insert these into an Excel spreadsheet containing the formula while would calculate their final scores.
- 3.3 Although tempting just to assess provision against the final percentage score, it was very valuable to keep and study the results of each category – location, play value, and care and maintenance. There is considerable potential for local authorities to understand the effectiveness of their outdoor play strategies when the scores for the three categories, the final and individual scores are all studied.
- 3.4 In addition access to child population figures would provide even more evidence as to effectiveness of its outdoor play strategies.

⁴ Children's Play Council (2006) *Planning for Play: Guidance on the development and implementation of a local play strategy*. London: National Children's Bureau and Big Lottery Fund.

4 Results

- 4.1 Bolton, Bristol, Chelmsford and Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC) assessed all of their sites. Kirklees surveyed 100 sites (approximately 30 per cent) and Manchester assessed 25 sites. This gave good data regarding the effectiveness of the assessment tool and an indication of how the data could be used.
- 4.2 The results of the assessments are shown as percentages below and classified as very poor, poor, fair, good or excellent. There was a considerable range of scores for the sites, for example Type A sites scored between 22 per cent and 100 per cent. Given this range, five classifications were developed for the purpose of the pilot, however this needs further discussion. The five classifications are:

Classification	Score as per cent
Very Poor	20 – 35%
Poor	36 – 50%
Fair	51 – 65%
Good	66 – 80%
Excellent	81 – 100%

Type of play area	Pilot authority					
	Bolton N=66	Manchester N=4	Bristol N=50	Chelmsford N=15	Kirklees N=37	RBKC N=45
Type A						
Very Poor	26%	0	4%	0	3%	11%
Poor	45%	0	6%	0	3%	51%
Fair	26%	50%	20%	0	19%	20%
Good	3%	50%	42%	0	59%	16%
Excellent	0	0	28%	100%	16%	2%
Type B						
Very Poor	21%	0	0	0	0	5%
Poor	36%	0	0	11%	4%	9%
Fair	24%	33%	35%	14%	11%	45%
Good	16%	56%	48%	0	76%	27%
Excellent	3%	11%	17%	75%	9%	14%
Type C						
Very Poor	83%	0	0	0	6%	0
Poor	0	0	12%	17%	19%	15%
Fair	17%	25%	31%	66%	0	15%
Good	0	67%	42%	14%	62%	39%
Excellent	0	8%	15%	3%	13%	31%
Total sites assessed	N=110	N=25	N=99	N=80	N=100	N=80
Total child population April 01	69,841	107,258	93,298	39,013	104,196	30,086

Figure 1. Percentage of sites scoring from Very Poor to Excellent in each pilot authority.

4.3 Bolton and Kirklees conducted peer assessments of a sample of sites and the results showed inconsistency between the two local authorities in their scoring. The results for assessment of Bolton's sites by Kirklees were as follows:

Name of play area		Type ABC	Location	Play	CM	CPC score	Rating
Queens Park	Bolton Kirklees	C	23	21	13	39%	Poor
		C	25	30	25	67%	Good
Barlow Park	Bolton Kirklees	B	21	23	19	57%	Fair
		C	24	32	24	67%	Good
MBP	Bolton Kirklees	C	25	26	25	64%	Fair
		C	27	36	31	78%	Good
St Leonards Close	Bolton Kirklees	A	12	12	13	39%	Poor
		B	13	16	12	37%	Poor
Little Holme Park	Bolton Kirklees	B	22	19	14	51%	Fair
		B	26	21	17	60%	Fair
Gt Lever Park	Bolton Kirklees	B	31	25	19	70%	Good
		C	28	32	20	68%	Good
Haslam Park	Bolton Kirklees	C	17	18	17	44%	Poor
		C	18	22	19	49%	Poor
Broadgreen Gardens	Bolton Kirklees	A	26	16	12	59%	Fair
		A	25	23	12	64%	Fair
Hulme Rd	Bolton Kirklees	B	20	10	6	35%	Poor
		B	20	19	9	45%	Poor
Dymchurch	Bolton Kirklees	A	25	7	10	47%	Poor
		A	26	8	11	50%	Poor

Figure 2. Scoring of Bolton play areas by Kirklees for peer assessment comparison.

4.4 Figure 2 shows the scores between Kirklees and Bolton. While Kirklees gave Bolton higher scores than Bolton did for itself the difference between the scores varied by approximately 10 per cent, with the exception of Queens Park which was 28 per cent.

4.5 Further observation of the scores were offered by Kirklees as notes:

1. There was a disagreement on three areas regarding classification (Barlow, St Leonards, Gt Lever).
2. Out of the 30 scores across location/play/CM (care and maintenance) all but three (two on location, one on CM) were scored higher by Kirklees and two showed the same score (1 on location, 1 on CM).
3. Kirklees scored the play value of all the locations higher by an average of 6.2 points per area.
4. The scoring was generally higher by Kirklees taking out the three differences in clarification the percentage of CPC score was 10.5 per cent higher.

Kirklees Type A sites		Location	Play value	CM	Score	Rating
Lodge Farm, Huddersfield	Kirklees	33	18	24	81	Excellent
	Bolton	24	13	17	58	Fair
Shepherds Grove, Huddersfield	Kirklees	31	24	24	84	Excellent
	Bolton	22	11	15	52	Fair
Wellfield Court, Crosland Moor	Kirklees	29	17	21	72	Good
	Consultant	30	12	19	67	Good
	Bolton	25	8	13	51	Fair
Mason Court, Crosland Moor	Kirklees	28	15	24	72	Good
	Consultant	31	17	23	76	Good
	Bolton	20	11	16	50	Poor
Hob Lane, Crosland Moor	Kirklees	23	13	21	61	Fair
	Consultant	17	11	23	54	Fair
	Bolton	22	8	14	48	Poor
Tom Lane, Crosland Moor	Kirklees	26	21	24	75	Good
	Consultant	26	16	21	67	Good
	Bolton	23	13	17	57	Fair
Moorside Ave, Crosland Moor	Kirklees	26	12	10	53	Fair
	Consultant	25	8	10	48	Poor
	Bolton	20	7	5	36	Poor
Kirklees Type B sites						
Oak Road, Huddersfield	Kirklees	30	30	26	79	Good
	Bolton	24	19	19	57	Fair
Priory Place, Huddersfield *	Kirklees	29	31	27	79	Good
	Bolton	21	19	16	52	Fair
Glenfield Avenue, Huddersfield	Kirklees	28	29	25	75	Good
	Bolton	20	17	13	46	Poor
May Street, Crosland Moor	Kirklees	28	36	25	81	Excellent
	Consultant	18	28	20	59	Fair
	Bolton	20	26	15	55	Fair
Ivy Street, Crosland Moor	Kirklees	30	36	25	83	Excellent
	Consultant	21	28	22	64	Fair
	Bolton	21	27	18	60	Fair
Kirklees Type C sites						
Bradley Park, Huddersfield	Kirklees	30	32	24	73	Good
	Bolton	22	23	16	52	Fair
Beaumont Park, Huddersfield	Kirklees	24	28	27	66	Good
	Bolton	22	20	22	54	Fair

* Scored as Category 'A' by Bolton MC.

Figure 3. Scoring of Kirklees play areas by Bolton and consultant for peer assessment comparison.

- 4.6 Despite the variance in scores, the overall classifications for the sites were similar with disagreements on two sites, Queens Park being the site with the biggest difference.
- 4.7 There was very little agreement however in Bolton's scores for Kirklees. Bolton gave consistently low scores for Kirklees and the variance in scores was significant. The results are contained in Figure 3 (above).
- 4.8 The findings demonstrated the subjective nature of the assessment tool and the need for moderation and for even further clarification in the guidance. Further, Bolton scored the 14 sites as poor or fair, while Kirklees scores ranged from excellent to poor. The project consultant visited seven of the 14 sites and agreed with four of Kirklees' ratings and three of Bolton's ratings.
- 4.9 The results show that Kirklees has a tendency to score high while Bolton scores much lower – Bolton even scored their own sites lower than Kirklees.
- 4.10 Further discussion needs to take place with both Bolton and Kirklees to establish the points of differences and to incorporate these into the quality tool. These are discussed further below.
- 4.11 The analysis of all the pilots' scores should take into consideration the subjective nature of the assessment as a reference point.
- 4.12 While the assessment tool has not been designed to compare different local authority scores, doing so would give local authorities some indication of how well they were doing. For example, Bolton has the most play areas scoring in the 'Very Poor' and 'Poor' range while Manchester and Chelmsford had none. Indeed all of Chelmsford's Type A play areas scored as 'Excellent'. In Kensington and Chelsea, 51 per cent of Type A spaces scored as 'Poor'.
- 4.13 The actual numbers of sites show that Bolton has the most Type A sites (66) while Chelmsford has 15. Studying the location, play value and care and maintenance scores for Bolton showed that the scores for location were higher than the play value and care and maintenance scores. This might suggest that while the play areas are located in fairly suitable places, work needs to be done to improve the other scores. As a local authority, Bolton might consider whether it can adequately maintain the large number of sites and whether it might follow Chelmsford's policies of having fewer but high scoring sites or whether it wants to retain all the sites and increase the play value and care and maintenance of its sites.
- 4.14 The three different assessment categories: location, play value, and care and maintenance, could be used by local authorities to help prioritise which sites to improve or even remove. If a site scores low on location it is unlikely its usage will be high. It may be a site that is regularly vandalised. A site with a high location score and poor play value score might benefit from investment to increase its play value.
- 4.15 In Type B play areas Bolton has the most play areas in the 'Very Poor' and 'Poor' categories while Chelmsford has the highest score for 'Excellent' followed by Kirklees, which scored 76 per cent 'Good'. Manchester and Bristol's scores are similar for Type B spaces. With the exception of Chelmsford, the other local authorities scored better for Type B spaces than Type A.
- 4.16 Bolton scored 83 per cent in the 'Very Poor' category for Type C space and 17 per cent in the 'Fair' category. Kensington and Chelsea had the highest percentage of sites in the 'Excellent' category. Included in Kensington and Chelsea's Type C

space were three adventure playgrounds that increased the scores considerably. The local authority did not use the assessment for supervised play but focused instead on the assessment criteria for outdoor play.

- 4.17 When asked whether the scores adequately reflected the quality of the play areas the response was, in general, they did. Bolton stated the care and maintenance scores reflected the scores from previous site assessments using their own model. Interestingly, they also said that some of the scores were affected by their location scores although they did not elaborate on this.
- 4.18 While the assessment has evolved as a performance management tool for each individual local authority it is a useful exercise to obtain scores from other local authorities to judge performance against. These should be made available to all local authorities.

5 Methodology for site assessments

Timing

- 5.1 The recommendation to the pilots was to carry out site assessments during school holidays. However, this was not possible and most of the pilots carried them out during term time. Assessments during school holidays, particularly the summer holidays, would provide valuable additional perspective such as whether a site was popular with children or was unused despite having a high play value. If children are playing in play areas, assessors can use the opportunity to ask children and young people questions about the site and get their perspectives.

Scoring sites

- 5.2 While guidance was available to each local authority for scoring, the way in which they carried out the quality assessments varied slightly. All the local authorities carried them out in teams of two or more people. Some local authorities asked each team member to score individually and then compared scores, while others discussed the site and gave one group score.
- 5.3 While both methods were valid, it was more useful to obtain individual scores that provided more data for analysis and showed up any discrepancies or similarities between the scores. Individual scoring also provided first judgements, without the influence of others, which was valuable.
- 5.4 Comparing scores at the end of each site visit was useful because it allowed for discussions about that site. Some team members changed their score once they had heard the opinions of others. Team members were also able to point out features another colleague may have missed.

Consistency

- 5.5 The quality tool is most effective when the same people are conducting the assessments enabling consistency of scoring for all the sites. While individual scores varied, there was consistency of scoring between individuals when the same people assessed the sites. For example, in one local authority, four people assessed the sites: one person gave consistently lower scores on play value while another gave consistently lower scores on care and maintenance.

Subjectivity in the assessments

- 5.6 All attempts were made, in the design of the tool, to remove the potential for subjectivity. However, given the nature of what was being assessed and the huge variety of dedicated play areas this task was impossible. The range of play areas assessed by the pilots included one slide on a small patch of land at the back of a housing estate to huge play sites with play features of all types and for all ages.

The wide and varied play areas assessed by the pilots



- 5.7 Individuals' perceptions or notions of play, danger, challenge, risk and safety were also subjective; for example: brooks could be either viewed as dangerous or a wonderful play opportunity; a climbing feature could be deemed challenging or boring and the level of care and maintenance may be seen to be a good standard by some while not good enough by others.



Is a brook dangerous or playful?

- 5.8 The problem of the subjective nature of the assessments was overcome by comparing and discussing scores. The discussions helped to moderate the scoring and helped each team member view the site from different perspectives. Some assessors referred strictly to the guidance, which might have helped to reduce subjectivity in their scoring.
- 5.9 The scores showed that it was usually just one team member who would score differently to the others and that in fact the scores were broadly similar. At one site, it was the consultant who gave consistently low scores compared to the other team members. At another site all the team members, including the consultant, gave very similar scores.
- 5.10 The consultants to the project visited the pilot local authorities and conducted sample site assessments with the assessment teams. This provided a useful 'outsider' perspective. The site assessment team could be influenced by local knowledge or their personal investment in the site and the consultants were able to question certain assumptions. An independent assessor who has no or very little knowledge of the area and who is knowledgeable about children's play can offer a valuable perspective to the whole process.
- 5.11 All but one of the pilots were visited by the project consultants during at least one day of the assessment. The consultants were able to provide clarification, guidance and moderation in the assessment. Kensington and Chelsea trained a number of volunteers for the assessments. Training helped to ensure all those participating understood the methodology, criteria and process of the tool and it also helped to ensure some moderation in the scoring.
- 5.12 The difference in scores given by Bolton for sites in Kirklees illustrates the need to develop systems to reduce subjectivity in the scoring methods and ensure rigour and consistency. This can be done through training, peer moderation and moderation with project consultants.

Local knowledge

- 5.13 As described above, local knowledge can be useful during the assessments. It provided knowledge such as the age of the equipment, how regularly the play area was inspected, what health and safety procedures were in place, the types of people that used the site and other issues in the usage of the play area. This local knowledge should also be tempered with as much objectivity as possible to prevent bias in the scoring. Peer assessment or assessment by other independent people would help to balance local knowledge with objective assessments.

Consultation with children and young people

- 5.14 As part of general information required for the assessment, such as the time of the assessment, the weather and the name of the assessor, assessors were asked whether children and young people had been consulted in the development of the site. The response was not recorded in the final score but was an attempt to encourage local authorities to consider consultations with children and young people.
- 5.15 Because many fixed equipment playgrounds would have been designed and installed by adults a number of years ago it did not seem appropriate to down score the sites for not having consulted children. However, increasingly local authorities are now consulting with children and young people on the development of new play areas and perhaps this criterion should be included when new play areas are being considered. This should be discussed further by the pilots and other play specialists.

6 Definitions in the Quality Assessment Tool

- 6.1 The Quality Assessment Tool went through a number of revisions. All the local authorities agreed that the version used by the pilots was the most user-friendly. Manchester used the version used by the other pilots for three sites and then a newer version developed after comments from a network meeting and found the latest version (not used by the other pilots) more useful.
- 6.2 There were issues with some specific features in the assessment tool. These are described below.

Typology of play space and play provision

- 6.3 The original tool was developed to take into account the play needs of children and young people of different ages. The ones used by the pilots did not specify any ages for children. However, there was an inherent assumption that the different types of spaces would accommodate different age groups as defined in the *Planning for Play*⁵ guidance, see Figure 4 below.
- 6.4 There was a disagreement between Bolton and Kirklees on the classification of four sites illustrating the need for further clarity in the classification of types of space.
- 6.5 The assessment guidance needs to clarify and reflect the typology of space **and** provision and should include a score for age appropriate provision.

Boundaries

- 6.6 There was confusion as to what constituted a space for children to play. While children may play in any space or place, clearly, local authorities designate areas, particularly in parks, as play areas. Identifying the assessment boundary was particularly difficult in large and medium sized parks where potentially the whole area could be assessed. In general, the pilots used their own judgement and were pragmatic about the physical space that they assessed. It may be possible to use the GIS mapping to define play areas for assessment – this would need further discussion.

⁵ Children's Play Council (2006) *Planning for Play: Guidance on the development and implementation of a local play strategy*. London: National Children's Bureau and Big Lottery Fund.

Type of space	Type of provision
<p>Type A: Doorstep spaces and facilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • small equipped play areas (furnished primarily for young children) • neighbourhood amenity green spaces (unequipped) • home zones or equivalent 	<p>Toddler/doorstep – small space near housing specifically designed for play – may or may not have some small items of equipment for toddlers and seating for adults</p> <p>Small equipped – primarily aimed at under-eights with, say, three to five items of equipment, seating. Near to housing</p>
<p>Type B: Neighbourhood spaces and facilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • large equipped play areas (furnished primarily for children aged 5–11 years) • satellite parks • junior bikes, skate and skateboard facilities, kick-about areas 	<p>Large equipped – aimed at 5–11s with a larger range of equipment, say, four to eight items and space/design for ball games, wheeled sports etc. Seating and near to housing</p>
<p>Type C: Local spaces and facilities for play</p> <p>Supervised:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • adventure playgrounds • open access play centres • open access playschemes • play ranger and outreach play projects <p>No formal supervision:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • school playgrounds (open out of school hours) • neighbourhood equipped play areas (eight+ items) • teenage wheeled sports area • ball courts, multi-use games areas • hangout/youth shelters • community parks • local parks • playing fields and recreation grounds freely available for children to use • beaches, woodlands and natural areas 	<p>Neighbourhood – providing for all children, including teenagers. Facilities as for large equipped but with additional equipment challenging to older children; youth shelter-type provision; and floodlit MUGA and/or wheeled sports facilities. These sites will serve considerably wider areas than the four above</p>

Figure 4. Typology of play space and play provision.

What area should be assessed?



Age of equipment and wear and tear

- 6.7 One of the assessment criteria is the extent to which children use the play area. The tool suggests looking for signs for wear and tear to judge this. Pilots reported that local knowledge also helped to assess this. Newer play areas did not show signs of wear and tear, or in one instance, a dedicated play area looked new but in fact was rarely used by children. The criterion is still important to include, but additional, local knowledge and information is also useful.

Definition of 'trusted adults'

- 6.8 Although the guidance gave examples of 'trusted adults' such as park keepers, street wardens and play rangers, there was some confusion about the meaning of 'trusted adults' and a number of pilots considered parents and grandparents as trusted adults. The intention in the assessment tool is to score the number of regular, paid staff who are available when children and young people need them and who, through their presence, are able to create a sense of safety for children and young people. Often their presence encourages parents and carers to allow their children to go out and play without accompanying them. Following a suggestion from one of the pilots, the term was changed to the presence of 'supervisory adults'.



Supervisory adults help children to play

Seating for children

- 6.9 While this criterion suggested that seating was available specifically for children, in reality, all types of seating, even those for adults was deemed as suitable for children. This category needs further clarification regarding the definition of seating.

Hazards

- 6.10 In the first version of the assessment tool, negative scores were given if there were any hazards nearby the dedicated play area, for example canals and major roads. This was not included in subsequent versions. One pilot felt this category should be included because it would help when planning for future play areas. Often local authority officers were under political pressure to develop play areas even in

unsuitable sites near hazards. This category would support them to identify unsuitable places for children's dedicated play areas. Further discussions need to take place on this issue.

Ball games

- 6.11 The guidance asked pilots to score on the space available for children and young people to play ball games. In some areas there was plenty of space for ball games and in other areas the space available was much smaller. The smaller areas maximised the space with equipment such as multi-use ball games features. This criterion needs a clearer definition and description to allow for those areas where local authorities have extended the range of ball games possible through markings and multi-use features.

7 Other issues

Children and young people's survey

- 7.1 Kensington and Chelsea proposed using young people to carry out assessments of a few sites to 'spot check' the scores given by adults. The assessment tool would be greatly enhanced if children and young people were involved in the assessments. Pilots suggested developing a guide for children and young people too. Comparing adult and children and young people's scores would provide additional data to guide the development, design and management of play areas.

The importance of location

- 7.2 Work carried out by Whewey and Millward⁶ shows that the location of a play area is perhaps one of the most important factors in whether children will use it or not. During the development of the assessment tool, several sites were visited and it was noted that those sites, although challenging and stimulating for children, were tucked away or difficult to access because of fencing, busy roads or with poor sight lines. Children were not using these sites, even in summer when you would expect to find them in use. In contrast some play areas, although poorly equipped or indeed with no equipment, were popular with children and young people because they were near homes with good sight lines.
- 7.3 Given the importance of location there was some debate as to whether a site must reach a minimum score for location for it to be eligible for consideration for any further assessment. So far this has not been included in the assessment criteria although it would be beneficial to consider the concept further.



Low play value and popular, good play value but empty of children

Assessment of supervised provision

- 7.4 None of the pilots carried out an assessment of their supervised provision, even those who offer after school play provision. The assessment criteria for this is relatively straightforward. However, local authorities need to carry out the assessments to ensure they are offering a good quality service. The results of the supervised play provision survey can be included in a performance indicator being developed by the whole indicator project.

⁶ Whewey, R and Millward, A (1997) *Child's Play: Facilitating play on housing estates*. Coventry: Chartered Institute of Housing.

8 Conclusion

- 8.1 The feedback from the pilots is that the quality assessment guide has been a useful instrument in identifying priority areas for development of existing and new play areas. The tool has undergone substantial changes from its very first inception and all the pilots agreed the latest version was both user-friendly and practical.
- 8.2 All the scores – location, play value and care and maintenance – offer rich information on each site and can potentially help to design and develop new and existing sites with a better understanding of how play areas are used or not used by children and why. A low location score and high play value score may mean, for example, that the play area is designed well but not used well or used inappropriately.
- 8.3 While there was recognition that the Quality Assessment Tool would not provide data for comparison between local authorities, doing so can be valuable in identifying thresholds.
- 8.4 The subjective nature of the assessment can be reduced by moderation procedures such as comparing scores between team members, identifying an external play expert to carry assessments of a sample site or peer moderation between local authorities.
- 8.5 Finally the assessments should be seen as supporting the creation of rich play environments that are innovative and go beyond fixed play equipment so that children grow up in their local neighbourhoods enjoying the best possible play environments.

9 Recommendations

Recommendation on scoring

- Local authorities participating in the quality assessments should study all the different scores (total percentage, individual scores and scores for the three categories) with child population statistics to identify whether its outdoor play strategies are effective.

Recommendations for data results

- Discuss further the classifications developed above and get agreement on the classification bands.
- Make local authority site scores available to all local authorities to help compare performance and to help further analysis.

Recommendation for conducting site assessment

- Local authorities should carry out the site assessments at weekends or during school holidays, particularly the summer holidays.
- A minimum of two people should carry out the site assessments. Ideally at least three assessors should conduct the assessments.
- Maintain the same team of assessors to ensure consistency of approach and scoring.
- Assessments should be carried out individually and scores compared immediately afterwards for moderation.
- That teams of two or more carry out the site assessments.
- Scoring is carried out individually by each team member and scores are compared at the end of each site assessment.
- That peer moderation with local authority partners and moderation by a play expert takes place in the assessment process to ensure consistency and rigour.
- Use local knowledge where appropriate but ensure local knowledge does not lead to bias in scoring.
- Those conducting assessments should have training to ensure participants understand the criteria, terminology and process of the tool and to ensure consistency and moderation in the scoring.
- Discuss further with the pilots and play specialists the feasibility of including criteria for consulting with children and young people.

Recommendations for assessment definitions

- Include in the assessment guidance a criterion for type of play provision according to age.
- Clarify the way in which assessors define the physical boundary for assessment to, perhaps using the GIS mapping if appropriate.
- If appropriate, use GIS mapping to define play areas.
- Ensure this process is pragmatic and realistic.
- Where possible identify the age of the play area of each site and make this available to the assessors.
- Clarify and develop further the definition of seating for children and young people.

- Discuss further the inclusion of negative scoring for 'hazards' for children.
- Clarify and develop further the descriptions for 'ball games' in the assessment tool.
- Identify a method for ensuring all local authorities carry out assessments of their supervised facilities.
- Discuss further the idea of allocating a minimum score or further weighting for location before play value and care and maintenance can be considered further.

Other recommendations

- Develop a Quality Assessment Tool to be used by children and young people in conjunction with the adult assessment tool.
- Discuss further the idea of allocating a minimum score for location before play value and care and maintenance can be considered further.

Piloting the playable space Quality Assessment Tool

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