

Getting Serious About Play

A review of children's play



Children's Play Review: Feedback to children and young people

What's it all about?

This report gives feedback to children and young people about a review of children's play. The review looked at how best to spend £200 million from the National Lottery on improving children's play opportunities.

(The report says that the New Opportunities Fund (NOF) will manage how the money is spent. Since the review took place, the Government has decided to replace NOF with a new body).

The money was pledged in June 2001. The review took place between October 2002 and April 2003. It was UK-wide and covered children and young people aged 0 – 16 so the review looked at older young people as well as younger children, even though they may not use the word 'play' to describe things they might want to do.

Frank Dobson MP led the review. His full report was published on 21 January 2004 and it makes recommendations to Government about how Lottery money on play should be spent.

It is called **Getting Serious about Play: A review of children's play.**



What does the Dobson report say?

What does it say about play?

The report uses the following definition of play: play means what children and young people do when they follow their own ideas and interests, in their own way and for their own reasons. NOF, and the projects it funds, should apply the same definition.



What does it say about how the money should be spent?

The NOF money should improve and create thousands of places and spaces where children and young people can play freely and in safety. Most will be in one place and permanent, but some might involve mobile facilities, or the money might go towards events.

£200 million may sound like a lot of money. But it is not enough to improve play opportunities for everyone. The money should go to areas and groups of children and young people with the poorest access to good quality play opportunities. There should be a big effort to make sure that disabled children and young people are able to use facilities alongside others. Long term popularity with children and young people is the main test of success. The review identified four principles of successful projects:

- they are centred on children and young people
- they have an attractive location with high quality play opportunities
- they fit in well with local circumstances
- they give both children and young people and parents a sense of security.



NOF should make sure all projects follow these principles: -

- Most projects should cater for a local neighbourhood or village rather than a whole town or larger area. Access should be free.
- Play opportunities with some form of adult supervision or adult oversight are likely to be more successful.
- The bulk of the NOF money – around 80 per cent – should support good projects that follow tried and tested models. Most of the rest should support new approaches.
- NOF should tell each Council area how much money it will get. The amount should be greater in areas with higher levels of child poverty

Who will decide how the money is spent locally?

The Council or a local partnership should be responsible for drawing up proposals for the use of the money. The proposals should add to existing facilities. The proposals must be prepared in partnership with other local agencies, children and young people and local communities.

Local agencies should draw up plans using their own resources, not the NOF funding, however NOF, the Government and local agencies should work together to ensure that this works well.

NOF should allow enough time to prepare good plans and proposals, and enough time for projects to start up and continue.

Local proposals should try to make the NOF money go as far as possible by using money from other sources as well.



What else does the report say?

Out of hours use of school grounds and buildings should be promoted, especially when schools are being built or improved.

NOF money may cover running costs as well as costs for setting up projects but there is only a limited amount of NOF money, so proposals should show how projects will carry on when the NOF money runs out.

Councils should get better at planning and running play facilities across their area. They should designate a 'play champion' to do this, and to help ensure the success of projects.

NOF, the Government and Councils should all make it a higher priority to give children and young people good play facilities.

It needs to be clear who is in charge of making sure the NOF money is well spent. NOF should look at creating a national identity for projects. This will help to make a bigger impact and to raise standards. It will also help projects carry on for the long term.

NOF should find out what difference the projects make to children and young people, parents and local communities. NOF should also gather information about which projects work and which do not.

Government departments should work together to support NOF.



How did the review involve children and young people?

The review did not want to ask children and young people questions that others have already asked them. So it started by looking at what children and young people have said in other consultations. This showed that most children and young people want to get outdoors more, they want to be able to meet their friends and they want choice and variety. They are worried about bullying, traffic and safety. They complain when facilities are run-down or too far away.

The review team picked some key questions that they wanted to ask children and young people. These looked at the scale and type of facilities the NOF money should make a priority.

The review team decided that the best way to get children and young people's views was to involve them in consultation events, and to make the events fun and enjoyable for everyone. In England and Scotland 103 children and young people aged from four to fifteen years old took part in consultation events. Children and young people participated in six of the ten main events, usually alongside adults on equal terms.

One event focused on rural children and young people, while another involved a group of preschool children. There was also a special event held in Birmingham for children and young people from black and minority ethnic groups, including some with disabilities. The children and young people at all the events came in groups, from schools, play or childcare services.



In Wales, the Welsh Assembly Government is already taking forward work to improve play opportunities. Children and young people are giving their views locally, and these will feed into the national work.

In Northern Ireland, 500 children gave their views on play. These were published in a report called *What Children Say*, which the review team looked at.

On top of this, the TV programme BBC Newsround broadcast a news story on the play review, and also ran an online survey asking for the views of children and young people. Over 1800 responded from across the UK – a record number.

Some Councils and voluntary organisations involved children and young people in making their responses to the written consultation for adults.

Finally, the Children's Rights Alliance for England helped to get children and young people's views by writing a child-friendly version of the consultation document and sending it out.



What did children and young people tell the review? How did the review respond?

Priorities for types of facility

Children and young people were most keen on facilities with adult helpers, where they could come and go as they please – for instance adventure playgrounds, youth cafes, play centres and holiday playschemes. They also quite keen on public facilities where there were no staff – for instance playgrounds, skateparks, bike tracks, youth shelters and informal sports facilities. Some also said that mobile facilities such as playbuses and improving play in childcare should be a priority. Improving play in schools was less of a priority.

The BBC Newsround online survey gave similar results. It asked, “What do you think about having adult helpers at the places you go to?” About a third said it was really important, a fifth said it was a bad idea while the rest said it was nice, but other things matter more. Younger children were more keen on adult helpers than older young people.

The Newsround survey also asked children and young people for their preferences for different types of facilities. Boys preferred skateparks, while girls preferred youth cafes.



In response, the Dobson report says that the NOF money should go on spaces where children and young people can play freely. The report says that is valuable for projects to have adult oversight or supervision, since these are more likely to be successful. It says that local children and young people should have a say about how the money is spent locally and it says that out of hours use of school playgrounds should be supported.



Scale of facilities: big or small

Given the choice, children and young people tended to favour smaller, more local facilities over larger more centralised ones. They liked the idea of having somewhere close to hand: places they could meet their friends and perhaps get to without their parents. On balance they felt this was better than having bigger facilities with more choice that might be too far away to get to. Some felt that there should be a mix of different sizes.

The BBC Newsround survey confirmed this preference. Children and young people were asked “what is the best way of giving you more places to hang out: having lots of smaller places nearby, or building fewer, bigger places, further away?” Nearly 90 per cent said they preferred smaller places nearby. In response, the Dobson report says that more money should be spent on smaller, local neighbourhood facilities than on large ones.



What happens now?

Government will consider the Dobson report and may or may not agree with everything in it. It will make a statement about what it intends to do in due course.

Government says it may be two years or more before the money starts to be spent.

So will the £200 million pay for new play facilities in my area after 2006?

The £200 million will pay for thousands of new and improved facilities. But it is not enough to make all the improvements that people will want. Some areas will see a difference while others will miss out. What is certain is that the money will mean that many thousands of children and young people will enjoy better play opportunities.

