

REVIEW OF PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT (Dublin City Play Strategy)

Dublin City Council has consulted with partner agencies and organisations who contributed to the Play Strategy and who will also use the Strategy as a tool for developing their own organisational statement of intentions with regard to play.

The consultation process that preceded the Dublin City Play Strategy placed particular focus on children and young people through a mixed range of research methods to support public engagement. This involved a mosaic approach including group work, active research and public consultations with children and young people that featured informal conversations, playful engagements and observations of their use of outdoor space. Ongoing work with regard to active research carried out for local play projects have also provided vital information that has been acknowledged and considered within the Play Strategy.

The development of the Play Strategy required contributions from local communities, children and young people throughout the city. This process involved children, young people, and their parents/guardians/carers, who shared their views and ideas as part of a citywide consultation process that involved a multi-method approach. This process included the following methods:

- Interactive workshops and conversations hosted at National Playdays
- Parks Pop-Up Play & Conversations
- Comhairle na nÓg (Young People’s Parliament - approximately 50 young people from across the city)
- Article 31; Right to Play Workshops
- Stoneybatter Greening Strategy – ‘Playful Parks Mobile Radio’ Interviews
- Let’s play with clay to create a child friendly and playful city; National Playday Clay Modelling Consultation Workshop
- Online survey ‘Have your say about play’ (2019-2020)
- Survey Regarding ‘The Impact of Covid-19 on children’s play and friendships in the Dublin City Council Area’ (2020)
- Online Survey ‘The Changing Patterns of Urban Park Usage in Dublin City Council Catchment Area During the Covid-19 Pandemic’

Parks Pop-Up Play & Conversations

Pop-up Play Consultations in some of Dublin’s local parks, that involved parents/carers, children and young people. ‘Have Your Say About Play!’ Surveys were distributed alongside informal conversations with adults/parents/carers and interactive play sessions that supported children in articulating their views and ideas about their particular play experiences.

Comhairle na nÓg (Young People’s Parliament - approximately 50 young people from across the city)

Presentation on the draft Dublin City Play Strategy to all members of 2018, 2019 & 2020 Comhairle na nÓg where they participated in Play Strategy workshops and formed a sub-group to review the Play Strategy draft. They also gave their views on their experiences of Dublin as a child friendly and playful city. Additionally, the members completed hard copies of the 'Have your say about play survey'.

Article 31; Right to Play Workshops

In support of the development of the play strategy, the Ombudsman for Children's Office provided a venue to host a series of consultative workshops on Article 31; *the child's right to play*. A collaborative process was developed with the Lab Arts Centre where the practice of Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) was used as a way of working with children and young people to explore what Article 31 means for them. Children and young people from the Central Model School in Dublin 1 and the City Council's network of Community and Recreation Centres engaged in a series of workshops. These workshops took place over 3 days.

There were approximately 705 respondents to the overall engagement process that provided meaningful input for the Dublin City Play Strategy. The profile of participants was made up of approximately of 300 adults, 45 Comhairle na nÓg members, 100 children and young people who participated in interactive art workshops at National Playday 2019, 120 children and young people who attended pop-up play sessions in city parks. Finally, 110 children and young people from the Dublin City Council Community and Recreation Centres and 30 pupils from the Central Model School attended workshops on 'Article 31; right to Play' at the Ombudsman for Children's Office

Dublin City Council also consulted cross-departmentally and with partner organisations and outside agencies to obtain additional input, comments and agreements for the content of the new city Play Strategy.

As part of some of the above mentioned public engagement sessions, some participants also completed hard copies of 'Have your say about play!' survey.

Stoneybatter Greening Strategy – 'Playful Parks Mobile Radio' Interviews

A key part of the Stoneybatter Greening Strategy was engagement with the local community. The safe and accessible places for play was a key in this area which presented the catalyst for local conversations. These conversations evolved to more detailed and specific workshops, meetings, walkabouts etc. where playable space for children and young people remained at the forefront of conversations. One way of carrying out active research with children was to conduct radio interviews with local children during one of the workshops. Dublin City Council Design Landscape Architects and Play Development Officer worked collaboratively to design the workshops so that

younger people and children could take part. This provided them with the opportunity to give feedback in different ways through drawings and giving them a voice. This included the use of a playful tool 'Parks mobile radio station' to spark conversations with children and young people and record feedback.

During these interviews the children outlined barriers to play which included lack of space, speeding traffic, litter and mainly dumping and road safety on residential streets which can even stop them calling in to friends who live closely.

The children and young people explained how they could offer solutions to these issues and described their ideas and design for a 'parklet' at the end of their street. The children explained what the space could look like, what kinds of things they could play there and how this would support them to be able to play every day.

"Well we don't have many places to play because we're near the city so though the 'parklet' would be a good idea. This would have flowers, trees gamesand cars can't park there anymore!" (Girl aged approximately 9 years)

Additionally, adults input equally focused on preserving and increasing green infrastructure alongside opportunities for play and socialising for children and young people. The results have been the steady progress of interventions and initiatives that are people and more importantly child focused and play friendly. Some of the play friendly interventions planned are 'parklets', a rain garden and small local pocket parks.

"right now we play on our road but my little sister has a friend across the road so my parents have to watch her all the time ...and sometimes they're making the dinner and the road can be like.... there are people flying up it like they're cars" (Girl aged approximately 10 years)

"Stuff we'd like to happen on our road; Well it would look like a greener street and well it would look a lot nicer to live on because right now there's a lot of rubbish on it and loads of people just dump their clothes and mattresses and everything on it!"

It is clear from children and young people's responses and input that the key constraints to play are speeding traffic, littering and freedom to be with other children to make and maintain friendships.

Let's play with clay to create a child friendly and playful city; National Playday Clay Modelling Consultation Workshop

As part of National Playday interactive art workshops took place where children and young people joined in conversations and used clay modelling and other materials available to create an image of what they thought a child-friendly city would look like. The workshops were facilitated by an Artist who specialized in this art form with children and young people. Utilising this art form as a medium for play provided an active and participative way for children and young people to actively explore and articulate what a child friendly and playful city means to them and how it might look.

During the clay workshops the Children and young people were most engaged when they were not told what to do. They were most interested when they thought that they had the freedom to create anything they wanted with only some direction usually initiated and requested by them to the artists facilitating the workshops and sometimes their parents/guardian. Most of the children and young people's creations indicated that they wanted more playgrounds and playful objects that they could play on in an ideally playful city. Many produced models of slides, tunnels, swings and mobile cars for children made out of mainly clay and other loose materials. The children and young people felt more confident about their ideas when they communicated with facilitating artists who realised the importance of acknowledging and praise of their creations and encouraged them to continue on with making and expanding ideas for the city. Similarly to this previous point, many children were most engaged and interested in making when they had a parent/ guardian actively helping or being involved with their actions in a manner that was supportive rather than directive. Quite a lot of the children noted that there needed to be more animal friendly areas within the model city, which indicates the importance of animals in their lives. Most participants also mentioned that there was not enough water, lakes or ponds to be seen in the city. Notably, for this form of participation, cars and bikes were not as frequently mentioned when children were making the model.

Approximately 300 children and young people participated in this activity throughout the day as engagement was transient rather than set times so children could join in and leave as they so pleased. The models they completed were creative, detailed and provided information that is now included in the Dublin City Play Strategy.

Have Your Say about Play! (2019-2020)

This online survey was available on the Dublin City Council website and included three questionnaires for specific categories - adults, children under 12 years and teenagers 12 years plus. The activity ran from 18/03/2019 to 27/06/2019.

The purpose of this online survey was to form part of a citywide consultation that supports Dublin City Council to get as many views and as much information as possible from the city's citizens, especially children and young people, in order to reflect their wishes and needs within the Play Strategy. This process has informed and influenced a strategy action plan aimed at improving and increasing play opportunities and facilities for children and young people living in and visiting Dublin City.

The survey included the following three age appropriate surveys, which could be completed online line and were also offered as hard copies at onsite consultation venues and completed manually:

- Children’s Survey - under 12 years
- Young People Survey 12 – 18 years approximately
- Parent/Guardian/Carer Survey – age is only a number!

Overall there were 376 responses to the survey of which 27 were children, 50 were young people/teenagers and 299 adults. This is a reasonable representation of the city’s population and their views on children’s play and Dublin as a child-friendly and playful city.

The following findings are based on the results of these completed online surveys:

Children’s Voices

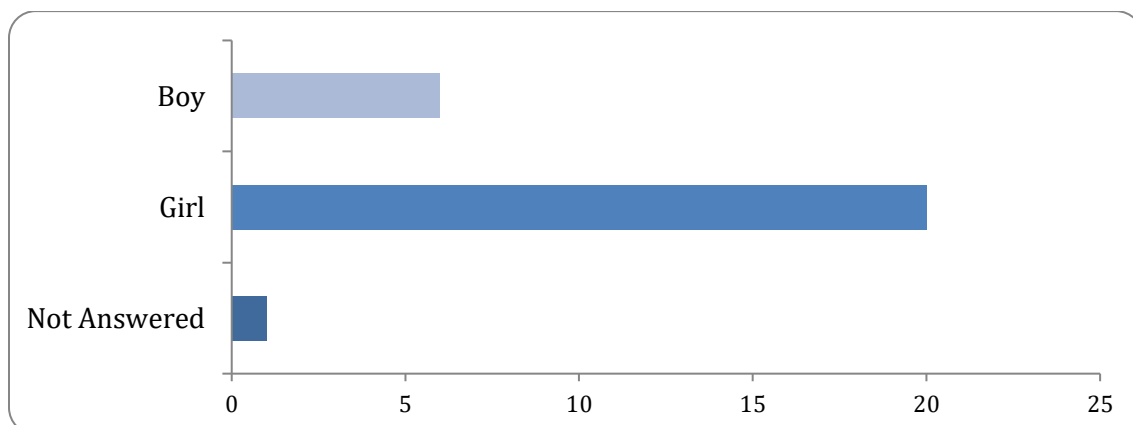
1: What is your name?

2: How old are you?

Almost all respondents answered initial questions 1 & 2 regarding name and age; names were provided by 96% of respondents and all 100% of respondents provided their age where the main age cohort was 5 – 12 years.

3: Are you a /I identify as?

The question was posed in a manner that demonstrated inclusion for young people with regard to gender identity. There were 96.30% responses to this part of the question which revealed that 22% identified as a boys and 74.07% identified as girls. This result also demonstrates the level of equality and fairness with regard to gender representation and fairness in giving children a voice in matters that effect their lives.



Option	Total	Percent
Boy	6	22.22%
Girl	20	74.07%
Not Answered	1	3.70%

4: What area/neighbourhood do you live in?

96% of respondents answered this question which provided information to confirm representation for children across Dublin City Council's 5 Administrative Areas; North Central, North West, Central, South Central and South East.

5: Where do you like to play?

All respondents (100%) answered this question which provided information to identify popularity and use of particular play facilities and spaces across Dublin City Council's five Administrative Areas. Within their replies children identified their gardens, local streets and visiting friends' houses for play dates as well as beaches, seafronts and local parks, greens and playgrounds. In some cases school and sports grounds that were made available for play after school and match/training hours. Playgrounds in local parks featured highly within responses which provided information regarding the favored parks across the city. This can also guide the future distribution of play facilities, upgrading and design, so as to improve and increase the play value of the city's parks and playgrounds. The level of responses provided demonstrates the importance children place on facilities and informal opportunities for play and the need for adults, decision makers and local authorities to support children's journeys in navigating through their local neighbourhoods in order to safely access opportunities to play. Some of the most popular locations identified included St Anne's Park Raheny, Fairview Park, Fr Collins Park Clongriffin, Griffith Park Drumcondra, Johnstown Park in Finglas, Greenhills Park Walkinstown, Botanic Gardens and Albert College in Glasnevin and Herbert Park Ballsbridge. Those identified within other local authorities administrative areas were Malahide Castle, Ardgillan Castle, Tymon Park, O'Toole Park and Temple Manor Green.

"My family and I go to parks all around Dublin almost every weekend (if we're not too busy e.g. with matches or Coder Dojo). Dublin has a good variety of different parks and gardens, so we usually have fun on scooters or bikes, and, of course, with playgrounds! Also, there is an area of grass right outside my school. It's not huge, but for the city it is

quite large. We call it the Green and a few kids in my class play there often after school, even just for half an hour. Some play football in the mornings too.” (Girl aged 11 years)

“Belgrave and 'The Green' in front of Safari Childcare and behind Swan Leisure. I go there after school nearly every day.” (Boy aged 5 years)

“On the roads, in parks, in the crèche across from my house when it is closed, in my friend’s gardens front and back, greens, I like to walk to spar with my friends. I also like to walk up to a close park to play.” (Girl aged 11 years)

“I like playing at my cousin’s house and in Poppintree Park!” (Girl aged 10 years)

6: What stops you from playing?

When asked about barriers and constraints to play, 100% of respondents provided replies to this part of the question. Many of the responses echoed those provided by older children/teenagers who noted safety as a key concern and identifying anti-social behavior such as gangs, street drinking, drug use, dog fouling and vandalized playgrounds. Additionally busy and speeding traffic as well as the weather and lack of shelter were identified as barriers to play. Children also expressed that some lifestyle issues had negative impacts on the amount of time they have to play and identified chores, homework, scheduled activities and working/busy parents as things that took up a large amount of their free time. Incidentally, there were also a small number of children who reported that nothing stopped them from playing!

“There aren't many good parks or open spaces near where I live, so we have to take a 15 minute car drive minimum whenever we want to go somewhere. It means we can't really go anywhere once at home after school. My parents don't allow me to play on the road like some kids in my neighbourhood, because it's too dangerous. I totally agree with them, but I've nowhere to go after school if I'm really bored.” (Girl Aged 11 years)

“My mum, weather and rubbish, dog poop.” (Boy aged 5 years)

“Nothing really, but the nearest park is like 10min walk away from my house so I wish there was one closer but I can understand that they take up a lot of space so it is often difficult to find a nice area to build a park.” (Girl aged 12 years)

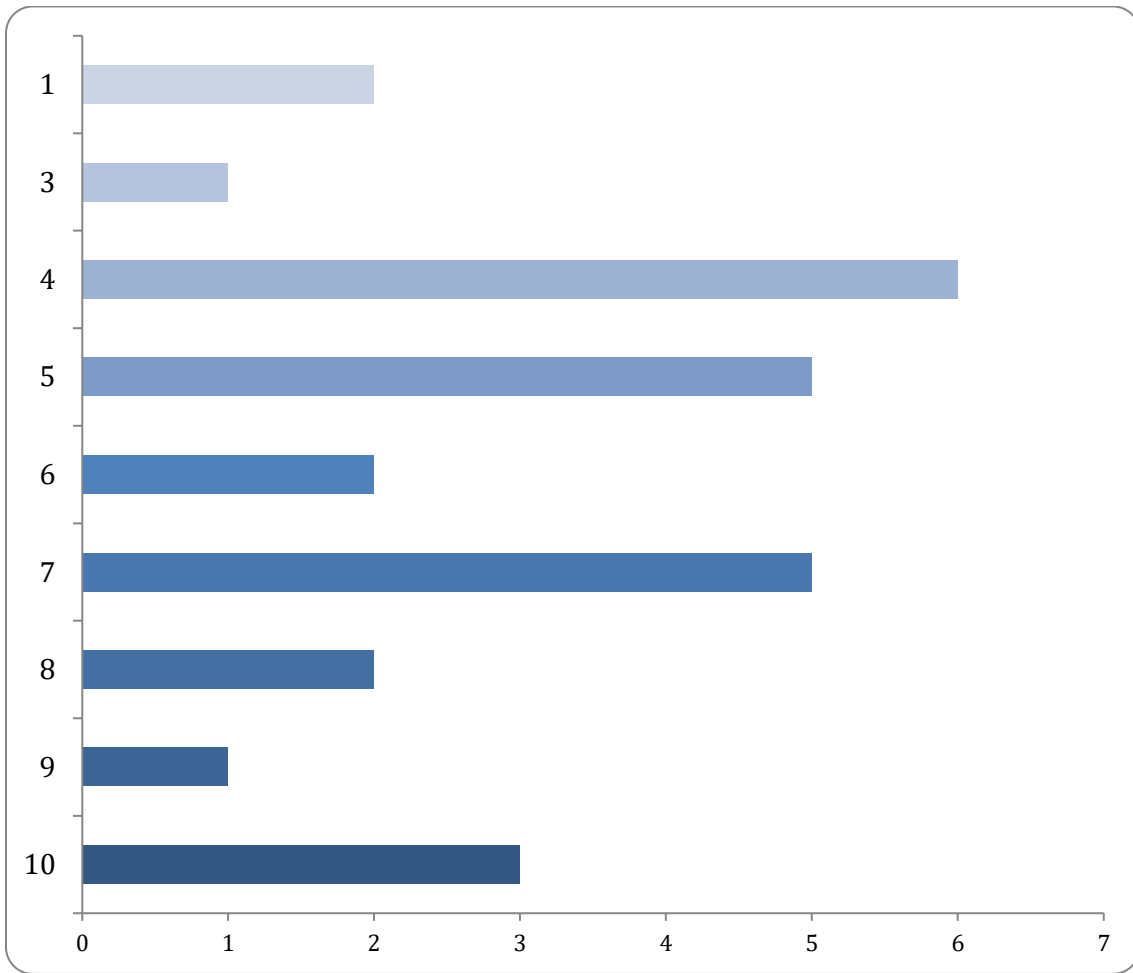
“Often when there is lots of cars we can't play on the roads to play football or a game that takes up a lot of space. Or when I can't walk to the park because some roadworks are happening so I have to go the unsafe way which I'm not allowed to go.” (Girl Aged 11 years)

“Gym equipment in Griffith Park stops us playing football. Also play area in park geared for small kids. We are not allowed to cycle.” (Boy aged 10 years)

“Bad smells from the sewage at the Courts, everyone litters where I live. When I'm at a park people not giving turns on the swings and slides. The shootings in the area and bonfires during Halloween” (Girl Aged 10 years)

7: How would you rate Dublin as a "child friendly and playful city"? 10 being the highest and 1 being the lowest

100% of respondents replied to this question. The majority of replies gave a scoring of between 4 and 7, which gives some indication regarding children’s own personal experiences and perception of Dublin as a child friendly and playful city.



Option	Total	Percent
1	2	7.41%
2	0	0.00%
3	1	3.70%
4	6	22.22%
5	5	18.52%
6	2	7.41%

7	5	18.52%
8	2	7.41%
9	1	3.70%
10	3	11.11%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

8: If I never played my life would be like...?

The 88.89% of respondents who replied to this question provided replies that resonated with those provided by older children/teenagers. It is highly important to note that children used really strong emotive language to describe how their lives would be without play. Some children provided quite well articulated comments based on their own personal perspective, to describe the negative outcomes for them if they did not play. Sad, boring, lonely, angry, dull, unadventurous, unsocial, horrible. This selection of emotional language clearly demonstrates how children associate play with their mental health more than their physical health. This clearly identifies its importance and how play supports children to develop resilience, negotiation and problem solving skills, assess and take both physical and emotional risks, maintain friendships and generally *roll with the punches* - all of which impact hugely on their mental health and wellbeing.

Some children who responded also voluntarily included images to further articulate how their lives might be without play which demonstrates how strongly they feel about their opinions being heard regarding this issue.

"a different life - very sad with no imagination and no fun." (Girl Aged 10 years)

"It would be horrible if I couldn't enjoy sunshine or play with my friends." (Boy Aged 9.5 years)

"If I never played my life would be extremely boring and dull. It would take away a big part from who I am and myself as a person would be much less interesting, as would many others I know. Playing is one of the joys of life, where you can let your imagination run wild and nobody really cares. I know from experience that it really helps to just go to the park or playground and just do what I want, especially if I'm stressed or anxious". (Girl Aged 12 years)

"vjvjbfg (nonsense)!" (Boy Aged 6 years)

"one word: BORING" (Girl aged 8 years)

"Very, very sad. Like a rainy day" (Boy aged 5 years)

10: Anything Else?

There were 70.37% responses provided for this question which included mainly suggestions for children's own local areas. The suggestions mainly reiterated what has been highlighted within the adult and young people's survey responses e.g. supervised play provision and more youth clubs, less and slower traffic, safety issues, play for all ages and abilities, more playgrounds and cleaning, maintaining and improving existing playgrounds. The comments provided by children present further emphasis on what they have identified in order to successfully create a child friendly and playful city.

"Hanging out and playing is as important to me as going to the pub and parties and concerts that adults like to go to" (Girl aged 6 years)

"More community gardens so we can learn about growing and sustainability and work together in a fun way to make something grow. I'd love youth clubs that do dance and art and fun stuff without it feeling like a class or any kind of a competition." (Girl aged 10 years)

"It would be amazing if good playgrounds were erected in, especially, residential areas that teenagers and other adults couldn't hang around, destroy or scare off young families. The problem is that many beautiful new playgrounds are built only for no one to use them because the teens are so loud and, literally, scary.

Also, some playgrounds are creaky or missing swings and it'd be really good to have them renovated or have new things added in. It would almost certainly boost the number of visitors to that park or playground.

Speaking as an older child, playgrounds are still fun and great to let off steam, but there isn't much for older kids. For example, a stimulating obstacle might be a difficult climb up to a really high slide. Most playgrounds just have swings with 6 - 12 years or something on it which isn't very mentally challenging, though still great fun. (Girl Aged 11 years)

"More money for the youth center's so they can do more with young people, help the homeless and more things for young people to do." (Boy aged 12 years)

"Maybe in the playgrounds you could add softer ground as the tar that is in the playground nearest me is quite hard and if you fall (which I have quite a lot) it can hurt really bad. Also maybe nets in the football goals, but I'm sure some parks already have that. Maybe just to keep all of the play items in good shape as some things are missing and broken. More bins just around the park to prevent as much litter as possible and I think that's all. Thank you for listening to my suggestions!" (Girl Aged 12)

"More Playground area, bigger slides, more swings and ziplines" (Boy aged 5 years)

"A child friendly city should have playgrounds and safe places to go." (Girl aged 10 years)

"NOOOOOOPPPPPPEEEEE!" (Girl aged 11 years)

"loads of trees, safe cycle paths and more and/or better quality playgrounds. Also, make sure to cover up swear word graffiti in child-friendly areas like playgrounds. I'll give you a hint: there is a bad swear word in the big slide in the John Paul Park". (Girl aged 8 years)

"Bring Disney to Ireland or Leprechaun Land, I would like the Spanish shop Spera to be in Ireland. More water play in parks. In Spain they have longer summer holidays!" (Girl aged 9 years)

Young People's Voices

1: What is your name?

92% of respondents replied to this question. Many young people including, approximately 30% respondents who were Comhairle na nÓg members, who did not provide names as this question was optional and not totally necessary for this part of survey.

2: How old are you?

The dominating age range of the 96% respondents who replied to this question was from 11 to 17 years with one aged 25 years.

3: I gender identify as

The question was posed in a manner that demonstrated inclusion for young people with regard to gender. Almost 96% of respondents answered this question where 74% identified as female or girl and 25% identified male or boy. The ratio of responses from male/boy and female/girl within this age cohort, provides vital information regarding equality for all genders regarding consultation fairness in giving young people a voice in matters that effect their lives. One participant stated 'male dog' – playfulness!

4: What area/neighbourhood do you live in?

92% of respondents answered this question which provided information regarding the location of the young people who responded. This was between 15% - 20% of respondents representing and living within each of Dublin City Council's administrative areas; North Central, North West, Central, South Central and South East Dublin. There was also a small representation from other local authorities' administrative areas such as Fingal, Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown and South Dublin County Council.

5. What would a child-friendly and playful city look like?

100% of respondents provided replies to this question which varied from written text, uploaded images and drawings. The majority of young people provided their idea of what a child friendly city would look like as a city with a lot of parks and playgrounds, basketball/football areas and providing day care or after-school clubs. It is important to note that trees and landscape also featured highly in responses as did concerns for safety regarding busy and speeding traffic, crime and anti-social behavior.

"Like Dublin"! (Male 'dog' aged 14 years)

"Many playgrounds, day cares, safer streets, little or no crime". (Female aged 14 years)

6: What makes it difficult for you to spend time/be with your friends outside?

90% of respondents answered this question. It is important to note that the key responses given are those often perceived by adults as important for children and young people. For example, scheduled activities such as homework, studying, sports matches and training, music and drama classes etc. were identified as key constraints to play. Additionally, issues of safety were also highly represented in responses as young people

expressed fears from gangs, street drinking, having no safe places to go with friends, safe journeys to activities and friends' homes and busy and speeding traffic. Distance from friends' homes presented barriers to spending time and being with friends outside. The weather and adequate sheltered play facilities to address this issue was also highly noted. Young people also noted that there was not enough places or facilities appropriate to their age group as they stated that teenagers need places to sit and socialise as well experience challenging active play opportunities. Another important issue raised was young people's living arrangement as in some cases children of separated parents may live in different neighbourhoods for part of the time which impacts on proximity to friends, school, youth clubs etc. and therefore equal distribution of play and recreational facilities and services is key in resolving this issue. In some cases working part-time also presents limitations on young people's time to engage in play and leisure activities. This information is key in inciting adults/parents/carers and educators to consider the amount of children and young people's time that is taken up with scheduled activities and supporting the balance between this and their free time for play and social activities. Similarly, local authorities will need to pay close attention when addressing the provision of age appropriate play and leisure facilities for older children/teenagers. This also raises the issue of sheltered play facilities, particularly in response to Ireland's inclement weather conditions.

"I have autism and can't go out safely alone in my area"

"Nowhere to go when the weather is bad" (Boy aged 16 years)

"All the gangs hanging around. My ma hates me being out cause of all the people that hang around" (Female aged 14 years)

"I live on a main road and this is not a safe place to play"! (Male aged 13 years)

"The activities I do prevent me from having much spare time to spend with my friends" (Female aged 12 years)

"Other commitments like school, work, weather - lack of places to go" (Female aged 17 years)

"No facilities" (Male aged 14 years)

"The city centre is all business blocks now. There's nowhere to play with my cousins. Also, some playgrounds are creaky or missing swings and it'd be really good to have them renovated or have new things added in. It would almost certainly boost the number of visitors to that park or playground." (Male aged 14 years)

7: What makes your area a good or bad place to live in?

The key responses from the 90% of respondents who answered this question consisted of a range of positive features for example good amenities such as cinemas, coffee shops, snack bars and restaurants. Additionally, having the local park and lots of football pitches near main roads which provided access to public transport and having nearby safe places were also mentioned. Good friendly neighbours were noted as important aspects of a good area to live in.

The negative elements identified by young people included safety issues and lack of facilities e.g. gangs, crime, anti-social behavior, traffic, building density and the weather again! With regard to facilities young people reported the lack of areas for hurling, football or basketball etc. to facilitate informal sports activities.

"Bad - gangs, no areas for hurling. Only one astro for soccer and we have to climb over the gates a lot to access." (Male aged 16 years)

"Bad- not enough trees, hundreds of cars, gas fumes, damage to playground equipment, not enough things to do, I get bored easily. Good – Green outside my school" (Boy aged 16 years)

"Not much local organised activities that is supervised and safe to go with my friends" (Male aged 13 years)

"Bad – Lack of public space so required to go to a pub to catch up with people. Good - community, good school, close to everything, Dolphin Park." (Male aged 25 years).

8: What would a 'child-friendly and playful city' mean to you?

When asked what a child friendly and playful city would mean to them, 85% of respondents provided replies that had many similarities to those of Question 5 e.g. more outdoor parks and playgrounds, trees, landscaping, places for sport and sheltered spaces for hanging out with friends. Safe and clean spaces and less traffic were highlighted by young people as key factors in supporting outdoor play and would consequently ease anxieties about safety and increase freedom to play independently. Casual sports, bike and skates also featured heavily when young people articulated what a child friendly and playful city meant to them. The findings also revealed that a more holistic approach is required in providing play and recreational facilities for this age cohort as they mentioned people smiling and being friendly which indicates the importance of adult attitudes and perceptions and acceptance towards young people's use of public space. Accessibility and inclusion and supervised play activities and events were also highlighted as a measure of child friendly and playfulness.

"In my own apartment complex, if there was pressure put on the management company to replace some of the car parking with green areas, seating, BBQ area etc. Seeing kids and mother's playing with toys every evening on the concrete, dodgem cars and teen areas." (Male aged 25 years)

"It would be great to be able to just be out with my friends and not have to worry." (Female aged 14 years)

"A child friendly city sounds safe to me, but a play friendly city sounds appealing." (Female aged 14 years)

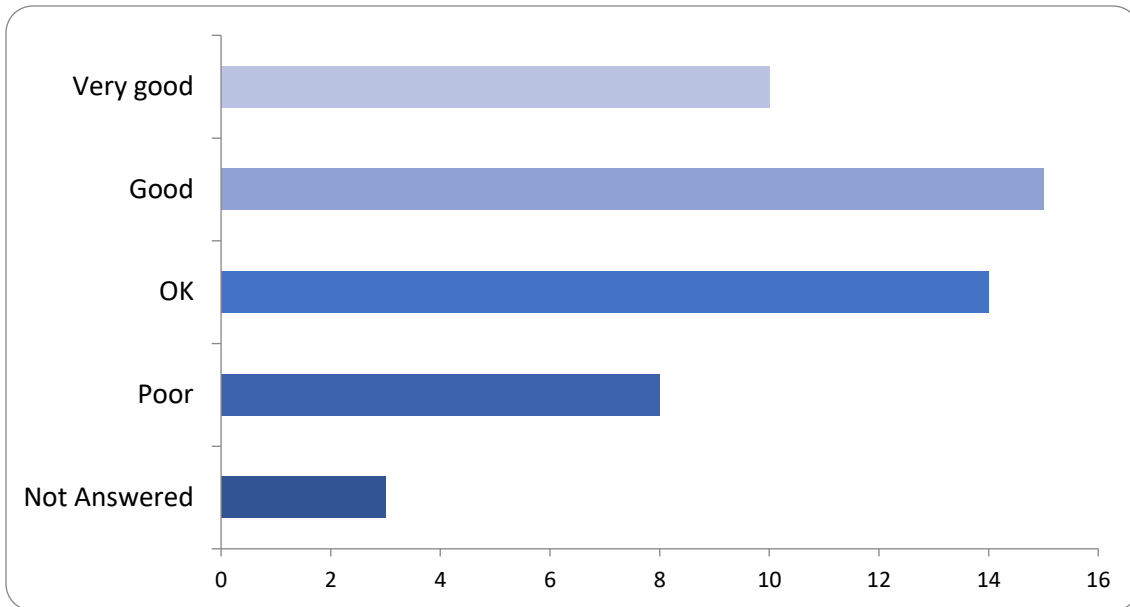
"It means kids are safe to play in the local park, on the road etc. without parents wondering what is around the corner." (Female aged 16 years)

"Haven't heard of it!" (Boy aged 12 years)

"It means a better place for children and a little more freedom in the city." (Female age 12 years)

9: How would you rate opportunities for outdoor play & recreational facilities in your area?

85% of respondents answered this question regarding their rating for opportunities for outdoor play and recreational facilities; 20.00% rated them very good, 30% rated them good, 28% rated opportunities as ok, while 16% rated them as poor.

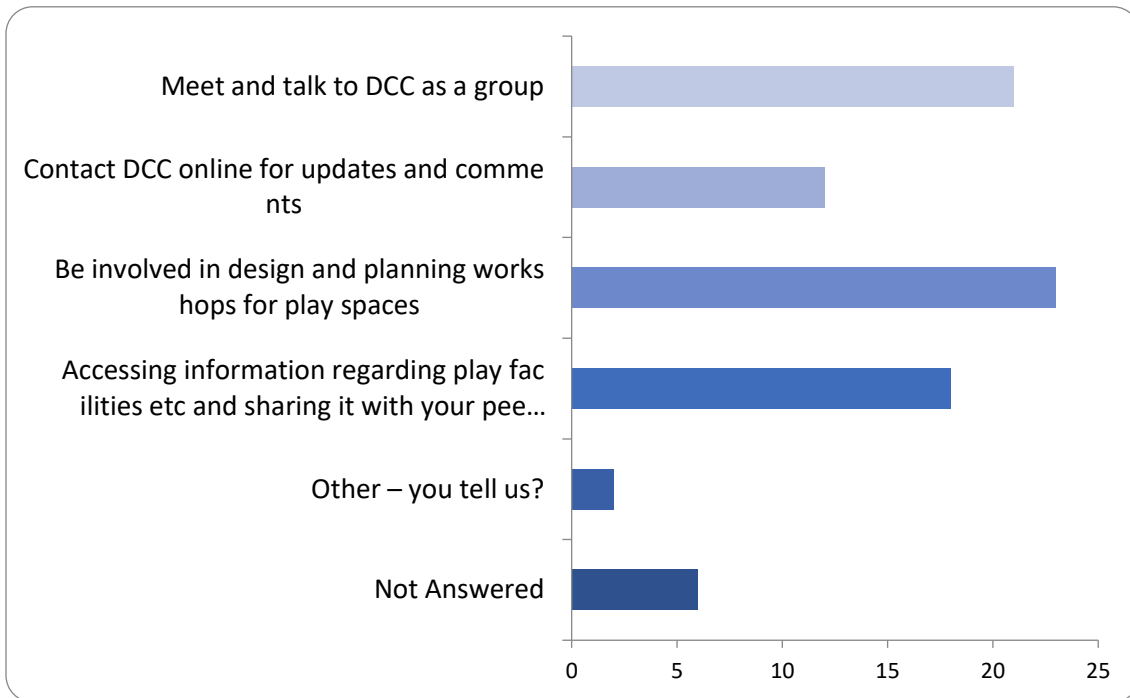


Option	Total	Percent
Very good	10	20.00%
Good	15	30.00%
OK	14	28.00%
Poor	8	16.00%
Not Answered	3	6.00%

10: When play and recreational spaces are being planned in your area, how would you like to be involved? Tick one or more of the following:

Regarding their involvement in the planning and design of play spaces in their area 88% of respondents answered this question. A majority of young people (46%) wanted to be involved in design and planning workshops for play spaces. Followed by another 42% who preferred to meet and talk to DCC as a group. Another 36% were satisfied to access

information regarding play facilities etc. and share with peers and local community. A reasonable 24% of young people were more comfortable with contacting Dublin City Council online for updates and to provide comments and only 4% requested that the City Council should provide options for engagement. Although a varied response, it is clear that young people want to be involved and informed regarding the design and planning of the city’s play infrastructure.



Option	Total	Percent
Meet and talk to DCC as a group	21	42.00%
Contact DCC online for updates and comments	12	24.00%
Be involved in design and planning workshops for play spaces	23	46.00%
Accessing information regarding play facilities etc. and sharing it with your peers and local community e.g. local play bulletin for children by children	18	36.00%
Other – you tell us?	2	4.00%
Not Answered	6	12.00%

"You tell us!" (Male aged 13 years)

"I like all of these" (Female aged 17 years)

11: If I never played my life would be like?

Just as it had for younger children, this question sparked quite emotive responses from young people/teenagers as 86 % of respondents provided replies that included language such as boring, clueless, lack confidence, lonely, nervous, no friends, poor social skills, sad. The consequences noted by young people are largely focused on poor access to opportunities to play in terms of resilience, social skills and confidence building and the negative impacts on mental health, use of online methods for play and recreation. It is also important to note that connection between play and friendships is clearly identified by young people.

"A prison - everyone needs the green areas and outdoor space, even big kids." (Female aged 16 years)

"Without my friends and our bikes I'd be on Xbox all day." (Male aged 12 years)

"10 million sad faced emojis" (Male aged 12 years)

"I'd be very nervous and cautious and clueless in social situations" (Female aged 12 years)

"Boring, no purpose, no happiness in life" (Female aged 16 years)

12: How would you persuade adults of the importance of play/ hanging out/being with friends?

80% of respondents provided replies to this question which indicates young people's concerns with adults' perception and power regarding young people's presence and participation as active citizens within their cities and local communities. Young people suggested that adults need to share empathy with them in order to fully understand how to support their right to engage in play and recreational activities.

"They have places to go, why don't we?" (Male aged 12 years)

"I would ask adults to imagine when they were young they played out on the streets with their friends so how would they like it if they weren't able to go out and play with their friends, how would they have felt and I bet they would feel very sad so please do not deprive me of playing with my friends as it's different now compared to the days when the adults were young as the streets had more playing space for children and were more safe but now we need a dedicated safe place to play as the streets have less space now as more cars etc. and is less safe but we still need to play with our friends the same way adults did when they were young." (Male aged 13 years)

"I would show facts of the difference of children in later life when they play or not play." (Female aged 16 years)

"I would say "mom I'll get off my Xbox for like 10 hours" (aged 11 years)

"I would try to explain the importance of socialising and having fun as teens" (Female aged 14 years)

"If parents knew you were in a safe and outdoor place I think they would be happy - need to de-stress after study - sport is great but it's different than just hanging out and messing about" (Female Aged 16 years)

13: Anything Else?

When asked if there was anything else 60% of respondents provided a broad range of replies. They mainly included comments that restated previous comments throughout the survey responses such clean air, slowing down and less traffic, safety and anti-social behavior. These responses also included the need for more places to play and things to do including other amenities e.g. casual sports, shopping, youth cafés and affordable fun parks. More importantly the young people clearly identified how play supported their overall physical and mental health and wellbeing.

"Play is essential for childhood development. It teaches resilience, sociability, confidence" (Female aged 14 years)

What Adults said

98% of adults responses provided a reasonable sample of adults across the city's administrative area to give an overview of adult's perceptions, experiences and concerns with regard to play for children and young people.

1: What is your name?

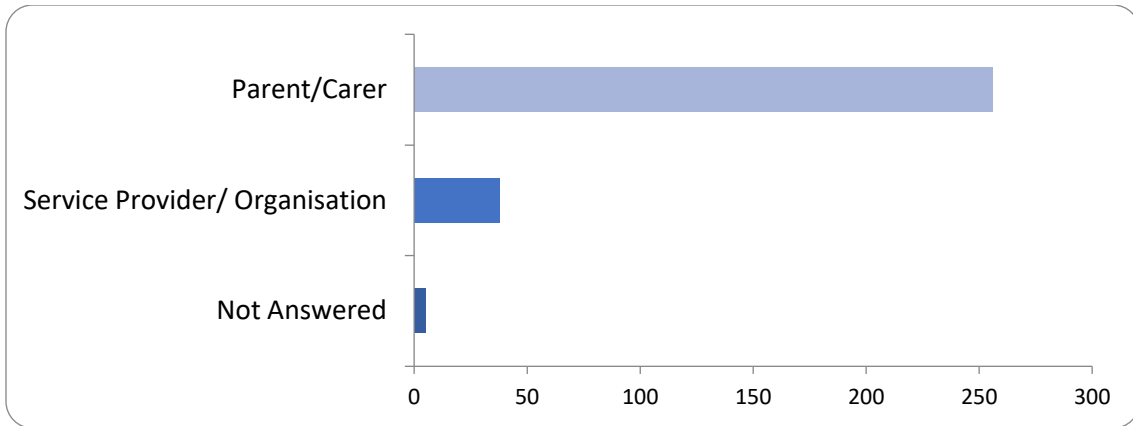
2: What is your email address?

3: What area/neighbourhood do you live in?

Adult respondents provided a high level of replies for the initial questions 1, 2 & 3 of this section of the survey where 88.29% provided their name, 82.94% provided email addresses and 98.66% provided details of local neighbourhoods. This provides reasonable information to identify a fair representation across all five of the city's administrative areas; North Central 20%, North West 14%, Central 19%, South Central 29% and South East 12%. Additionally the provision of home and email addresses proved to be useful in terms of continued correspondence and feedback on the Play Strategy and any other issues regarding play for children's and young people.

4: What is your role?

The responses with regard to adult roles consisted mainly of parents/carers 85%. However, 12.71% of respondents provided a broad representation of outside agencies and service providers such as early years education and childcare, community representatives, family support, community and youth services.



Option	Total	Percent
Parent/Carer	256	85.62%
Service Provider/ Organisation	38	12.71%
Not Answered	5	1.67%

If you are an organisation can you provide the name of your organisation/group/service?

85.62% of respondents represented parent/carers. 12.71% of respondents who answered this question provided information from 47 groups and organisations from across the city and gave useful feedback regarding their opinions on children’s play within the context of their services, settings and various support mechanisms.

5: Would you consider Dublin to be a child friendly and playful city?

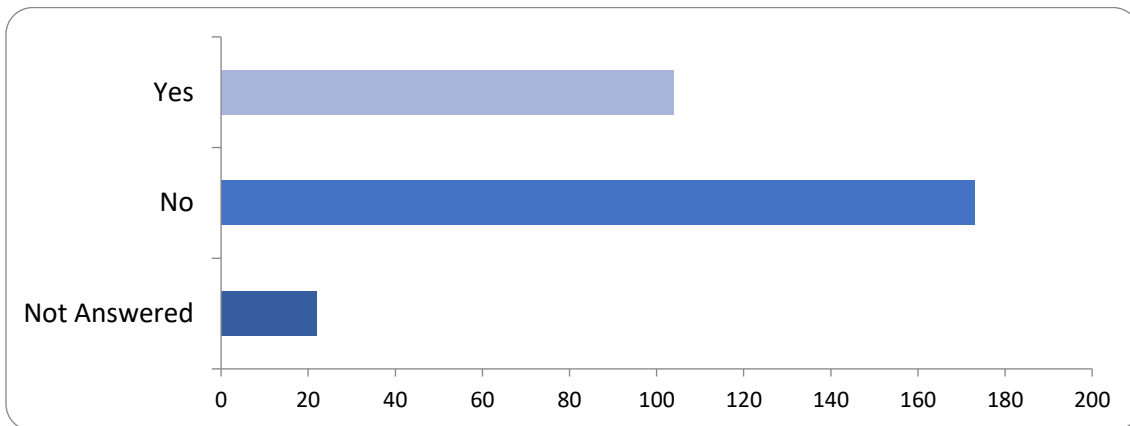
In response to this question 37% replied ‘yes’ while 57% replied ‘no’. This indicates the possibility that over half of the respondents do not consider Dublin to be a child friendly or playful city. However the responses and comments from this cohort alongside those of the other 37% expressed a belief that Dublin was reasonably playful and was somewhat improving and getting better as it had great parks. Respondents also stated that Dublin was getting better and improving as it had great parks. Some comments stated that the city could do better through the provision of more evenly distributed sports and play facilities.

“More sports facilities than play in Artane” (Parent/Carer)

“Not enough playgrounds” (Parent/Carer)

“Only if you live near a playground” (Parent/Carer)

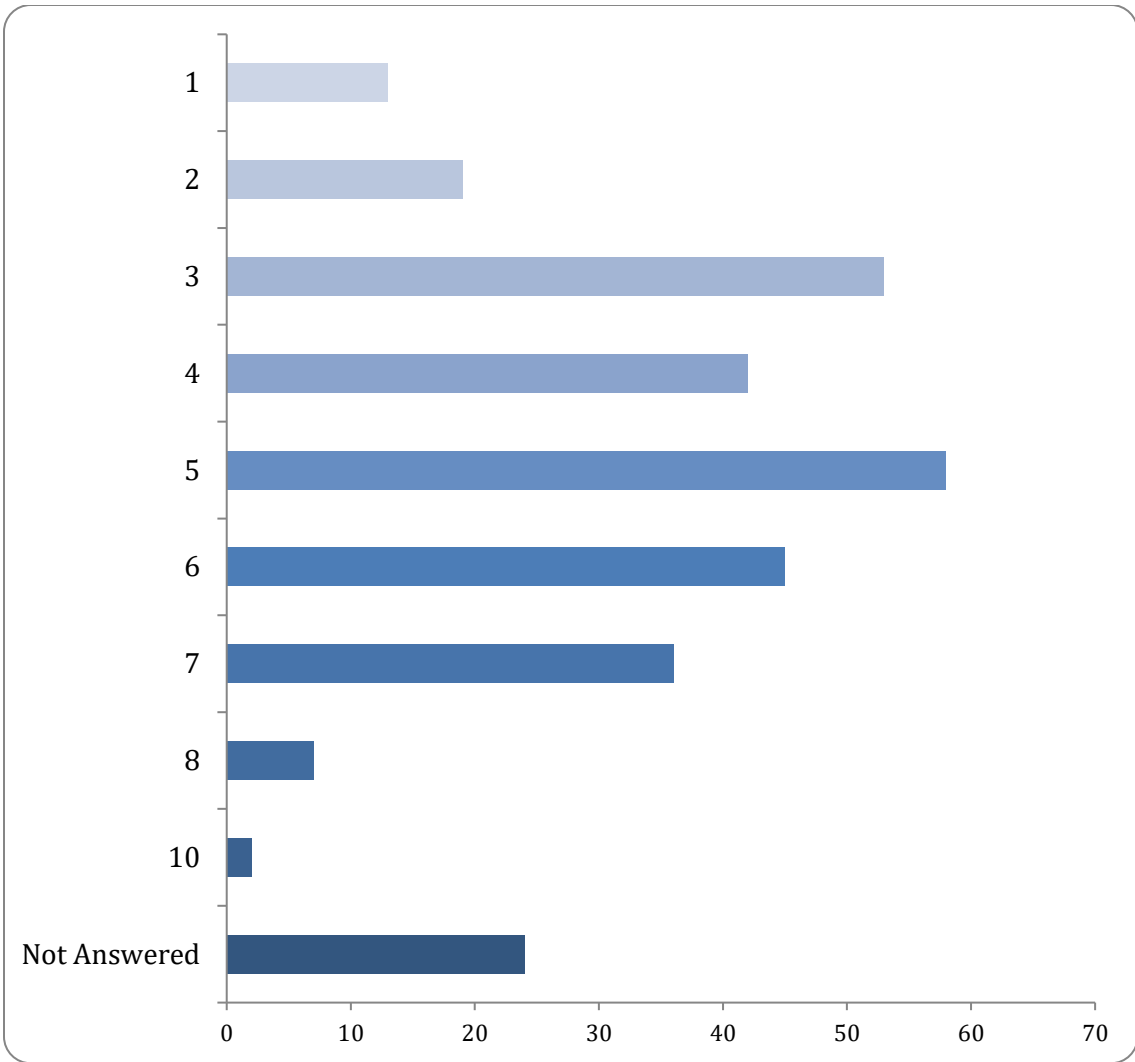
"Getting better, however compared to other countries we would be the lowest I feel on amenities!!! More could be done for all age groups?" (Parent/Carer)



Option	Total	Percent
Yes	104	34.78%
No	173	57.86%
Not Answered	22	7.36%

And how would you rate Dublin as a 'child-friendly and playful city'; 10 being the highest and 1 being the lowest?

Respondents provided mixed opinions with regard to rating Dublin's child friendliness; the lowest rating of 1 was provide by 4.35% of respondents, with the majority of respondents 19.40% rating this at 5 and only 0.67% giving the highest rating of 10. This presents a divided opinion with regard to how child friendly the city is perceived.



Option	Total	Percent
1	13	4.35%
2	19	6.35%
3	53	17.73%
4	42	14.05%
5	58	19.40%
6	45	15.05%
7	36	12.04%

8	7	2.34%
9	0	0.00%
10	2	0.67%
Not Answered	24	8.03%

6: What groups of children and young people do you think do not have opportunities to play?

The responses to this question varied from replies based on parents with regard to their own children or service providers regarding the children and young people in their care, or from more general observations and opinions on play experiences of other children when visiting local parks, playgrounds or on local streets. This resulted in identifying groups of children who do not have equal opportunities as younger children/toddlers, older children/teenagers and children with diverse needs, which indicates that the issue of play is much broader than playground provision.

And what could be done to help them?

In terms of what could be done to support and improve play for these children and young people, initiatives and interventions were suggested by approximately 90% of respondents including; hang out spaces for teens, more younger children/toddler play facilities, more accessible inclusive play facilities or improve existing for same, more access to nature play experiences and more skate and parkour play facilities.

Respondents also looked at broader levels of intervention and support mechanisms which included; improved public transport and parking, access space for play within apartment complexes, safe streets initiatives to support street play near home, and more play facilities near home.

Initiatives were suggested to highlight and promote play and encourage community and citywide cohesion such as Dublin City Council hosted play activities, events, and supervised play provision for informal local play facilities e.g. Play Rangers programme.

Overall provide play facilities for all ages and increase play facilities throughout the city. Provide play facilities at key destination locations e.g. playgrounds at seafront in Clontarf.

7: What can be done to make play spaces more appealing for everyone?

95% of respondents provided replies to this question, which were somewhat reflective of the responses to the previous question 6. Respondents expressed the need for play facilities for all ages, improved accessible and inclusive opportunities for play, more swings and access to nature and malleable play materials such as sand and water. Ideas presented to support duration of visit to the playground were ancillary items e.g. seating for parents, toilets and improved levels of cleanliness, safety and maintenance.

Respondents also suggested initiatives to encourage local community ownership and support children and young people to play independently through initiatives such as the development of informal play spaces. Also street play initiatives in local neighbourhoods which involve traffic restrictions, multi-use or shared intergenerational spaces and, overall, talking to and listening to children and young people regarding the design and planning of local play spaces and places. More broad reaching initiatives were suggested such as supervised provision that would involve the reinstatement of adults to work with children at play e.g. Play Officers and Play Rangers. And provision of children's activity centers and/or 'drop in' play sessions as well as playful interactions available within the city's galleries, museums and places of heritage etc. alongside DCC hosted public play events.

"Ask Children!" (Parent/Carer)

"Develop informal play spaces e.g. open space and street play initiatives" (Parent/Carer)

"Provide play and 'hang out' spaces for teenagers" (Parent/Carer)

"Reinstate Play Officers and Play Rangers" (Parent/Carer)

8: How can government and local communities support play through changing negative perceptions of children and young people?

80% of respondents provided replies to this question which included an exhaustive list of interventions that could be provided through government agencies and which also reflected responses in the previous questions 6 and 7. This ranged from improved security measures in playgrounds to increased inclusive play opportunities for all age groups including older children/teenagers and children with diverse need and increased access to nature. There were also suggestions to develop pilot initiatives and mechanisms to support street play, and playable public space and development of supervised play provision.

The issue of involving children and young people in decision making and active research regarding their opportunities to play was also a key element of these responses. Placing children and young people as a central element of a vibrant and playful city was

suggested through the development of increased numbers of children’s festivals and play events hosted by the City Council as part of the city’s overall cultural events programme.

“Build more child friendly zones” (Parent/Carer)

“Develop and implement pilot projects” (Parent/Carer)

“Involve children and young people in planning and design for play” (Parent/Carer)

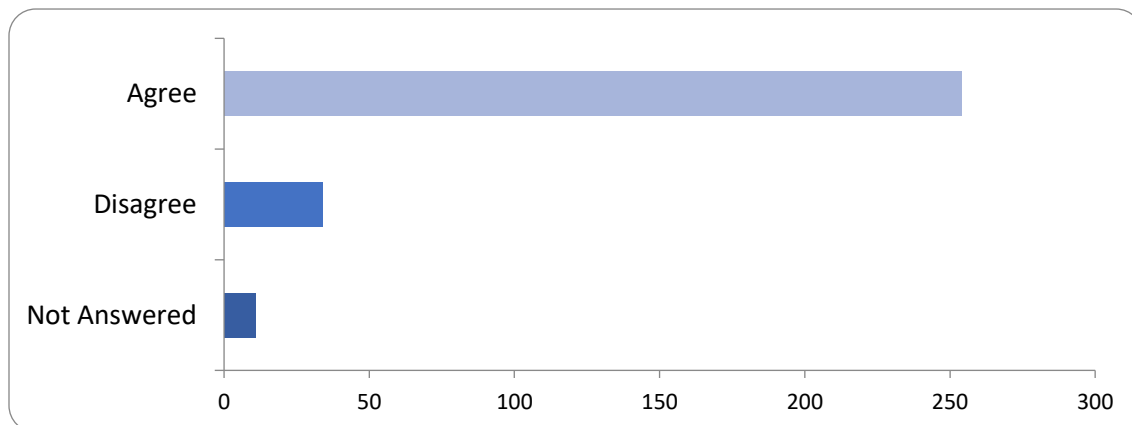
“Understand and support the importance and value of play” (Parent/Carer)

“Children and young people also play in a way that is safe!” (Parent/Carer)

9: Do you agree with the following?

“Aim of the Dublin City Play Plan (2021 – 2017): All relevant agencies will work together to ensure that Dublin City is a Child-Friendly and Playful City”.

84.95% agreed, 11.37% disagreed and 11.37% did not provide an answer to this question. The results of this question indicates that the majority of respondents agreed with the aims of the city Play Plan which precedes and informs the aims of the subsequent Play Strategy.



Option	Total	Percent
Agree	254	84.95%
Disagree	34	11.37%
Not Answered	11	3.68%

10: If I never played my life would be like * or (if my child) or (the child in my care) never played his/her life would be like*)?

98% responded to this question, the majority of whom were parents, of which a large proportion replied from their own perspective. A smaller number replied on behalf of children and young people in their care. A small percentage of respondents did not understand this question or found it incomprehensible or pointless. However the vast majority of responses (approximately 90%) included a diversity of emotive language which highlighted the negative impacts of a child's life without play e.g. sad, boring, bleak, dark, colourless, lonely, miserable, stifling, no life skills, detrimental to mental health, angry, bleak, destructive, and restrictive.

Resonating responses from children and young people, almost all adult replies to this question were provided in great detail. This information strongly indicates the importance and value of play with regard to children's overall health but in particular their mental health, emotional wellbeing and social life/friendships.

Adults/parents/carers have clearly and articulately identified the negative and detrimental effects of play deprivation - which was what this question aimed to achieve from their perspective. This has clearly demonstrated adults' support and awareness and understanding of the value and importance of play in the lives of children and young people in their care. Therefore, the information gleaned from this question has been key to informing and reaffirming the direction of the Dublin City Play Strategy to continue to support play as vital to children and young people's mental health and wellbeing and social life - and the joy of playing for play's sake. Consequently, the strategy action plan includes related actions that address the therapeutic value of play.

"Stifling! Play is like breathing to children!" (Parent/Carer)

"If I never played my life would be like I never dreamed, touched the sky, landed on the moon, ran away and found freedom in a universe inside my heart" (Parent/Carer)

"Very sad indeed. A child's job is to play." (Parent/Carer)

11: Vision of the Dublin City Play Plan; Dublin will be a child-friendly and playful city where all children and young people can enjoy their right to play.

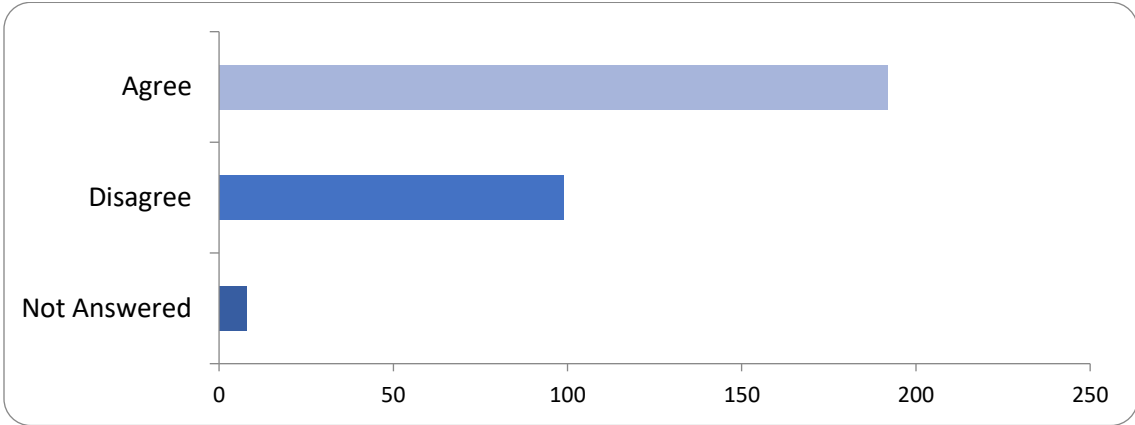
96.32 % of respondents provided replies to this section of multi-choice questions.

In order to realise this vision do you agree with the following:

Agree or disagree - Children and young people in Dublin are valued as an integral part of their neighbourhood and the community of the city.

64.21% agreed, 33.11% disagreed with the vision for the Dublin City Play Plan. 2.68% of respondents did not provide a reply. The results of this question indicate that the majority of respondents agreed with the vision of the city Play Plan which precedes and

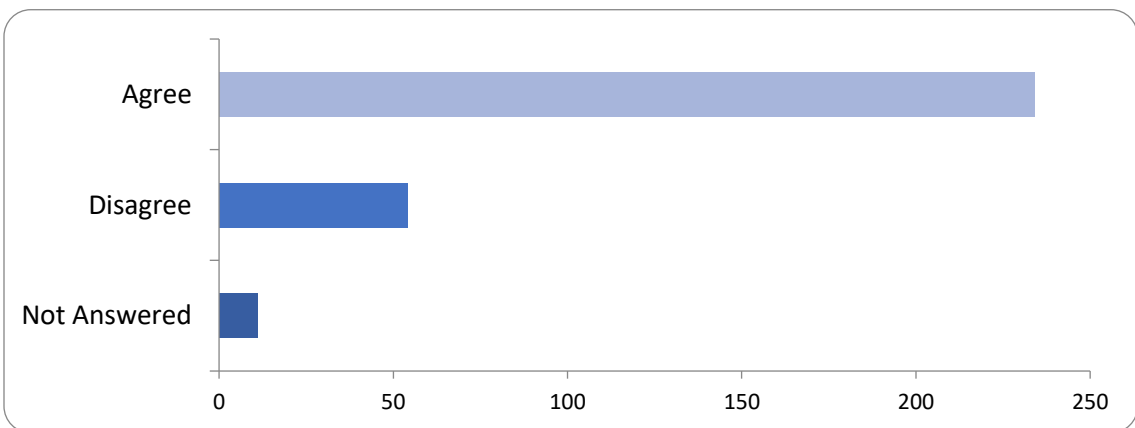
informs the aims of the subsequent Play Strategy. Some concerns expressed by respondents in realizing this vision included monitoring of parks and open spaces for safety and security, inclusion of space for older people and/or shared intergenerational spaces and importance of walking distances to play facilities within residential areas.



Option	Total	Percent
Agree	192	64.21%
Disagree	99	33.11%
Not Answered	8	2.68%

Agree or disagree - play and young people’s recreation is recognised as an essential and important part of their growing up.

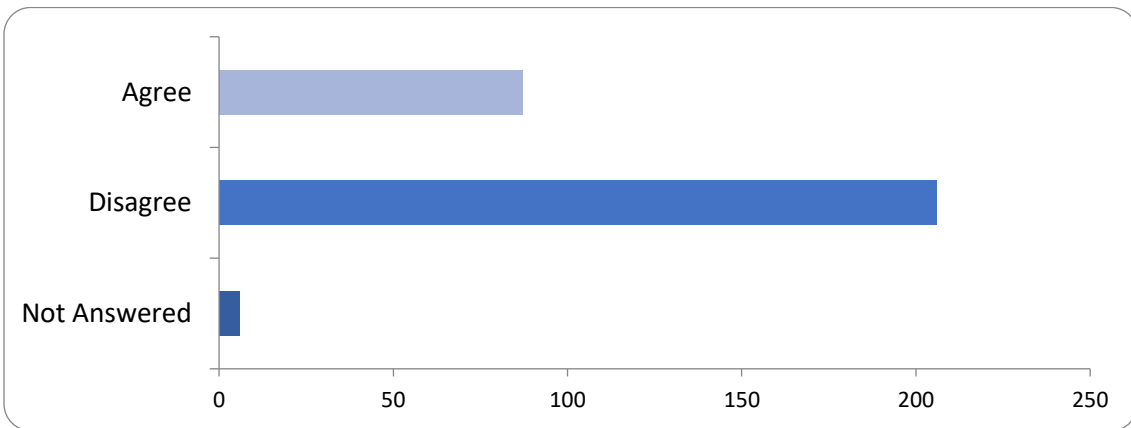
78.26% agree. 18.06% disagreed that play and young people’s recreation is recognised as an essential part of their lives. 3.68% did not provide a response.



Option	Total	Percent
Agree	234	78.26%
Disagree	54	18.06%
Not Answered	11	3.68%

Agree or disagree - In every residential area there are a variety of good quality places to play for all ages.

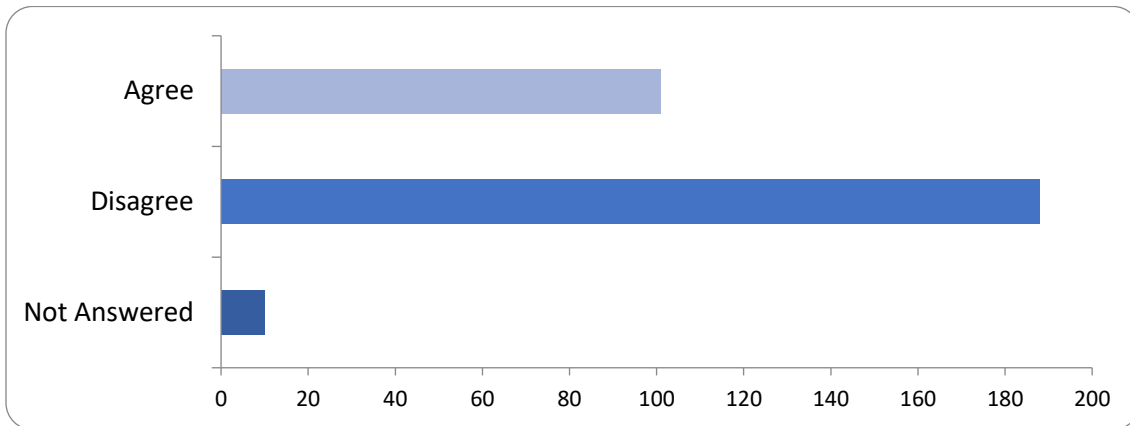
29.10% agree. 68.90% disagreed, 2.01% did not provide a response. This result indicated that although a reasonable number of respondents agreed with this statement, the majority of respondents were not satisfied with the level of variety and quality of play facilities and spaces for play in their local neighbourhoods.



Option	Total	Percent
Agree	87	29.10%
Disagree	206	68.90%
Not Answered	6	2.01%

Agree or disagree - The city and its neighbourhoods are and feel like safe and interesting places to play.

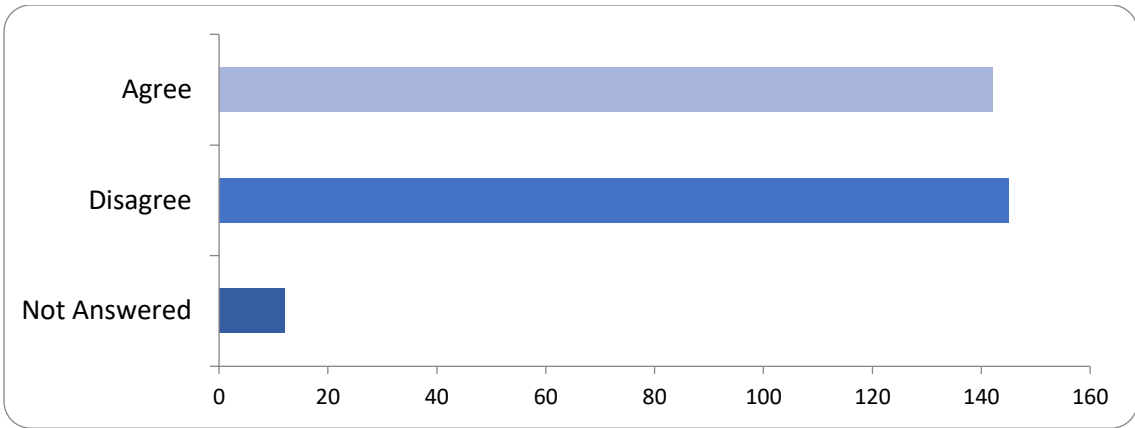
33.78% agree. 62.88% disagreed. This result indicated that although a reasonable number of respondents agreed with this statement, the majority of respondents did not feel that the city and its neighbourhoods were safe or provided interesting places to play.



Option	Total	Percent
Agree	101	33.78%
Disagree	188	62.88%
Not Answered	10	3.34%

Agree or disagree - All public space is considered possible play space.

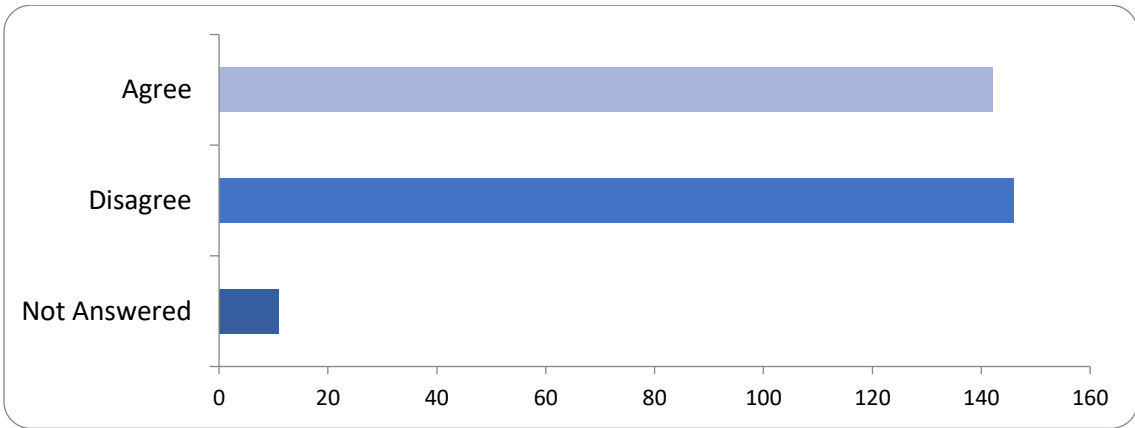
47.49% of respondents agreed and 48.49% disagreed with this statement. This result demonstrated an almost even split between respondents who agreed and disagreed that all public space is considered possible play space. Subsequent actions with the strategy will assist in further demonstrating this issue with regard to supporting children and young people’s play in public space.



Option	Total	Percent
Agree	142	47.49%
Disagree	145	48.49%
Not Answered	12	4.01%

Agree or disagree - Parks and open spaces are safe and accessible for all children and young people.

47.49% of respondents agreed and 48.83% disagreed with this statement. This result also demonstrated an almost even split between respondents who agreed and disagreed on the accessibility and safety of parks and open spaces, which presents an issue regarding safety and accessibility to be addressed within the Play Strategy action plan.

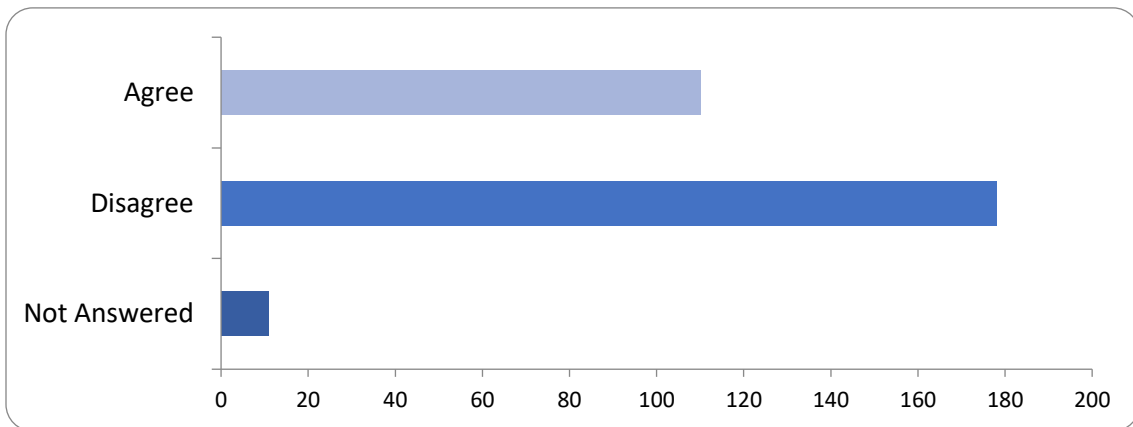


Option	Total	Percent
Agree	142	47.49%
Disagree	145	48.49%
Not Answered	12	4.01%

Agree	142	47.49%
Disagree	146	48.83%
Not Answered	11	3.68%

Agree or disagree - All play spaces are attractive, welcoming, engaging and accessible to all children and young people, including disabled children and children from minority groups in the community.

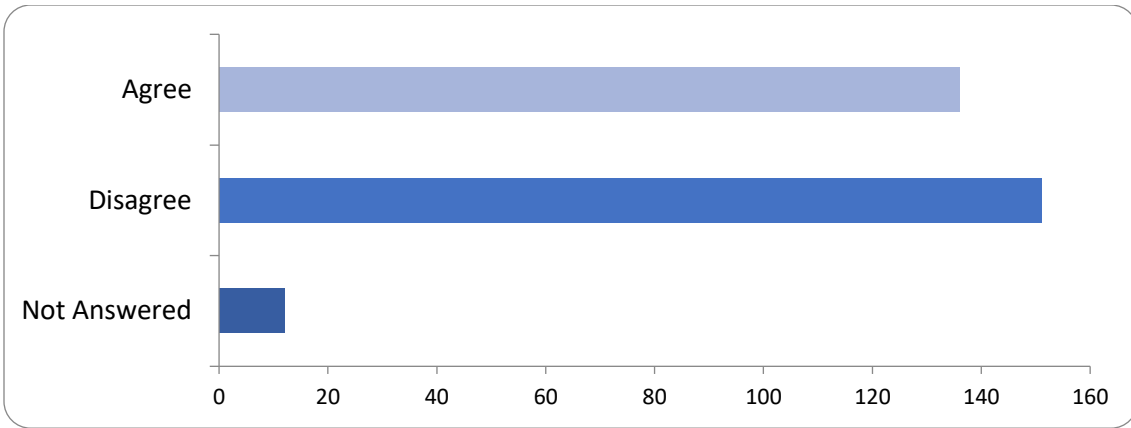
36.79% of respondents agreed and 59.53% disagreed with this statement. This demonstrated the majority of respondents are not satisfied with public play facilities and that these facilities do not always provide sufficient opportunities for play.



Option	Total	Percent
Agree	110	36.79%
Disagree	178	59.53%
Not Answered	11	3.68%

Agree or disagree - Children and young people have a clear stake in public space and their play and activities are accepted by their neighbours and readily defended.

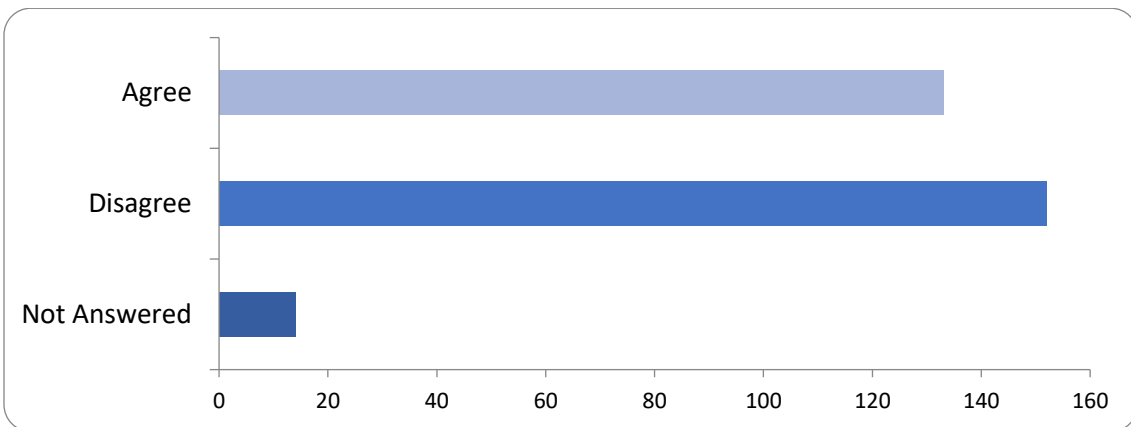
45.48% of respondents agreed and 50.50% disagreed with this statement. 4.01% did not provide a response. This result showed that although the majority of respondents did not feel that children and young people were accepted and defended regarding their use of public space for play, there is a close split between those who agree.



Option	Total	Percent
Agree	136	45.48%
Disagree	151	50.50%
Not Answered	12	4.01%

Agree or Disagree - Children, young people and their communities take an active role in the development of local play spaces.

44.48% of respondents agreed and 50.84% disagreed. Again this provided a marked divide in respondents' perception and agreement with regard to children and young people's active participation in the development of local play spaces.

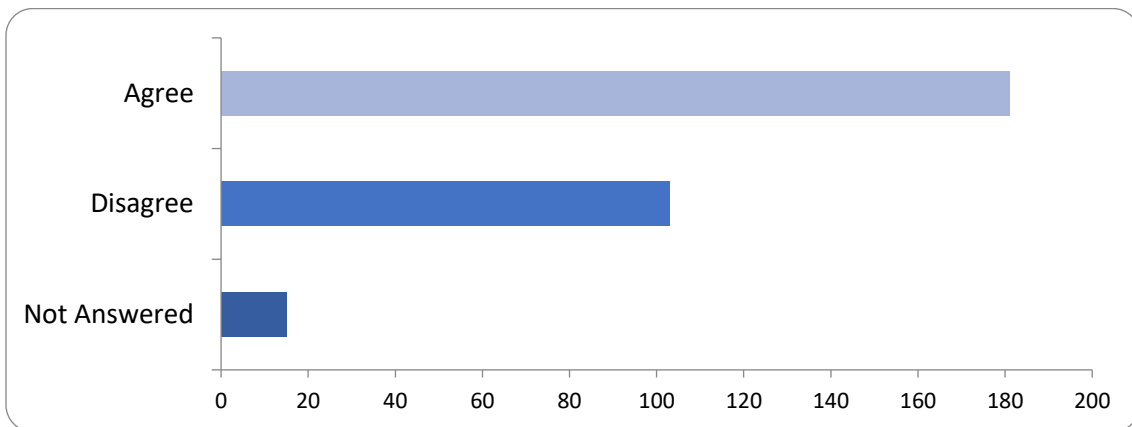


Option	Total	Percent
Agree	133	44.48%

Disagree	152	50.84%
Not Answered	14	4.68%

Agree or disagree - Children and young people play in a way that respects themselves, other people and property

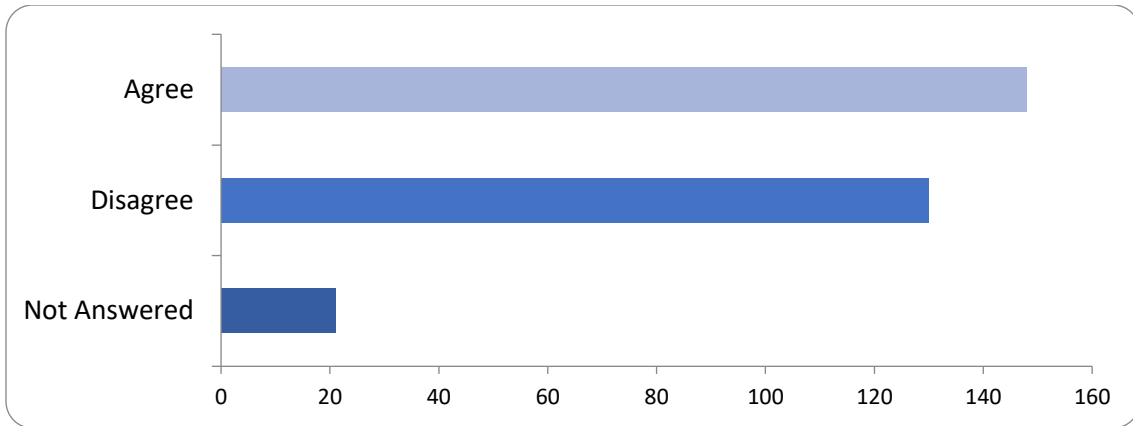
60.54% of respondents agreed and 34.45% disagreed with this statement. This result showed that for the most part children and young people play in a positive way with regard to each other, other people and public property. However there is also a reasonable percentage of respondents who have more negative views and/or experiences regarding this issue.



Option	Total	Percent
Agree	181	60.54%
Disagree	103	34.45%
Not Answered	15	5.02%

Agree or disagree - Children feel able to and encouraged to move between play spaces, schools and other services useful to them.

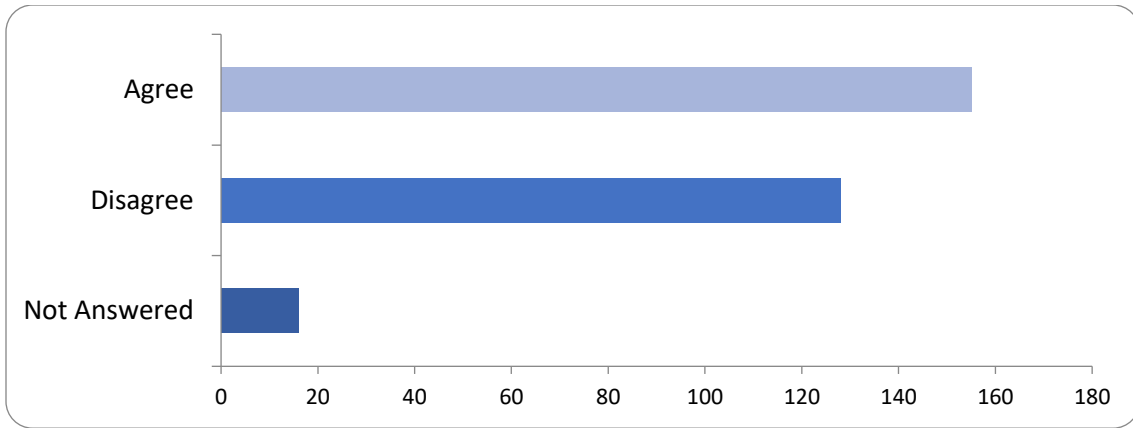
49.50% of respondents agreed and 43.48% and disagreed, providing a near to even divide with regard to agreement of this statement which focuses on children and young people's freedom of movement throughout their daily infrastructure regarding families, friends, education, play and recreation.



Option	Total	Percent
Agree	148	49.50%
Disagree	130	43.48%
Not Answered	21	7.02%

Agree or disagree - Interaction between children, young people and other generations is fostered within their communities.

51.84% of respondents agreed and 42.81% disagreed. This result indicated support that the wider community and older people should also have a clear stake in, and enjoy, public space and that children’s play and activities are accepted by their neighbours and fostered within their communities. However there is also a marked percentage of respondents who disagreed with the statement, which may be based on individual experiences or from one local area to another.



Option	Total	Percent
Agree	155	51.84%
Disagree	128	42.81%
Not Answered	16	5.35%

Anything else?

A broad range of comments and suggestions were provided which included key issues such as proximity of play facilities, security and safety, intergenerational shared spaces in addition to noted decline in opportunities for play, access to nature and the need and value of inter-agency working.

"Agree ++++ ++ Walking distance is vital" (Parent/Carer)

"Please develop more intergenerational spaces" (Parent/Carer)

"Please develop more natural recreational spaces" (Parent/Carer)

"Traffic restrictions to support play" (Parent/Carer)

"Kids need not only a home but services that go with it and play areas available in all weather conditions, and free!!!" (Parent/Carer)

Summary of Findings

Overall this survey has provided results that indicate overarching themes in terms of where improvements can be made on play facilities and opportunities to play for children and young people, and the positive impacts for the wider community. These results have provided a wealth of information to inform and shape the Dublin City Play Strategy and subsequent action plan that will include the following matters:

- Equality of access and improved and increased accessible and inclusive play facilities and opportunities for play
- Increased opportunities for play for older children/teenagers
- Increased access to nature and tactile play experiences for all ages and abilities
- Enhancement of public space and local neighbourhoods to include shared and intergenerational spaces for play facilities and spaces
- DCC hosted play activities and events programme
- Supervised play provision

Play and the Pandemic/Play through the Global Pandemic

The Impact of Covid-19 on children’s play and friendships in the Dublin City Council Area (2020)

More recently Dublin City Council Parks & Landscape Services – Play Development, commissioned a report extracted from an online survey carried out by Dublin City University which focused on ‘The impact of Covid-19 restrictions on children’s play and friendships in the Dublin City area’ (2020).

This survey was carried out during 2020 by Dublin City University (DCU) in response to the coronavirus pandemic and how it has disrupted the play world (s), friendship groups and potentially the wellbeing of every child and young person in Ireland. Initially all local authority playgrounds closed, as did schools. Children and young people could not socialise with their friends face to face, which had hugely negative impacts on children and young people’s physical, mental, social and emotional health and wellbeing. In order to capture the voice of parents and school aged children, DCU developed an online questionnaire which children completed with parental consent and their own assent. The questionnaires focused on children’s play, play activities, hanging out and friendship groups. In total there were 1,553 individual responses to the online survey. In support of children’s play, Dublin City Council (DCC) acknowledged this issue and were keen to obtain and understand children and young people’s own perspectives, as well as their parents, on the impact of these new circumstances on their wellbeing and play experiences.

In order to identify subsequent supports that could be included within the upcoming Play Strategy, DCC were also highly interested in finding out what ideas, strategies and solutions children, adults and young people came up with, and where possible, to overcome the difficulties imposed by the social restrictions imposed by Covid-19 in relation to their play, hanging out and keeping in touch with their friendship groups. Consequently, DCC engaged DCU to extract a report that focused exclusively on the findings from the parents and children who lived in Dublin City Council catchment areas from which a subset of 191 responses were analysed. The findings focused on responses from 51 separate areas within the Dublin City Council catchment area. This comprised

164 parents and 27 children. 82.3% of parents answered questions in relation to children aged between 4 and 9 years of age. 60.8% of child respondents were aged between 10 and 13, and 39.2% were aged between 14 and 18 years. In total, this report covers the views of children between aged 4-18 years. 88.5% of parent respondents were between the ages of 31 and 50. Although the responses received covered a wide geographical distribution within the DCC catchment area, the top four clusters of responses were from Glasnevin, Raheny, Cabra and Clontarf.

Survey Findings: The Impact of Covid-19 on children's play and friendships in the Dublin City Council Area (2020)

The majority of respondents are overwhelmingly white Irish for both parents and children. Most of the parental respondents were female and parented children between 4 – 10 years. The findings summarised below focus on responses from Dublin City catchment areas only and under the following set of headings which were posed as themed questions within the survey:

Dwelling type and available outdoor play spaces

The majority of respondents, both children (85.2%) and parents (84.1%), live in a house. However, 14.8% of children and 14% of parents live in apartments. The most common outdoor areas accessible to respondents are back gardens, followed by front gardens, followed by the street. 62.4% of parents tell us they have fixed play equipment in their gardens. Fixed play equipment was most common for parents of children aged between 4 – 8 years, this declined to 42.9% for parents of children aged 13 years.

Pre Covid-19 - Where do children play and 'hang out'

Younger children (4 – 10 years) play in close geographical proximity to the home. The spaces that children occupy for play do indeed change as they get older with a stronger concentration on public parks and sports facilities as opposed to playgrounds and back and front gardens. The home still remains a significant space for children's play and recreation.

Children, the outdoors and physical activity during the Covid-19 Pandemic

36% of children (10 – 18 years) tell us they spent less than 30 minutes playing outdoors on their own in the last week. 4 out of 10 parents of the younger children tell us that their child spent less than 30 minutes in vigorous physical activity in the last 24 hours. Overall younger children spent less time outdoors by themselves or being vigorously physically active.

Changes to daily routine

9 out of 10 mothers have spent the last few months in the home setting with their children. 92.2% of parents tell us that their routine has seen significant disruptions due to Covid-19 restrictions, whereas 100% of children said their day to day routine was disrupted.

Changes to Indoor Play Activities during Covid-19

Parents tell us that watching T.V. / Netflix saw a significant increase (75.5%) for younger children (4 – 10 years). Overall, children (10 – 18 years) report that watching television/Netflix and ‘just hanging about’ saw the highest increase in their indoor play related behaviours. Both of these activities can be classified as sedentary activities.

Who do children turn to when they need support?

26.9% of children over the age of 10 said they would turn to a friend for support during the pandemic, while 65.4% said they would turn to a parent. 87.7% of parents of children aged 4-13 reported that their child was most likely to turn to a parent for support, with only 2.6% saying that they would turn to a friend.

Social media usage to maintain friendship groups

Both Zoom, which the majority of children had likely never heard of before February/March 2020 and TikTok have seen very significant increase in usage as has WhatsApp. Facebook is no longer a platform popular with children.

Children’s life satisfaction

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the top three aspects that children rated themselves as being happiest with in their lives were with the ‘things’ that they have (50%), their relationship with their friends (48%) and with the home they live in (44%).

What caused the most difficulty in assisting children to play and maintain their friendship groups

There are two outstanding issues that caused the most difficulty for parents, firstly; the reality that children could not meet up with and play with their friends, and secondly; working from home. Parents clearly understood the importance of socialising with peers for children themselves and this was exacerbated in certain circumstances such as only children. Parents reported that technology was not always helpful with younger children to maintain their friendships. Children echoed this view in their responses to the same question. Moreover, the worst and hardest thing about social restrictions according to children and teenagers is it restricts their ability to play with their friends, and more importantly, children miss simply spending time with their friends.

“Only child so misses her friends to play with. Depending on parents - not as much fun!!” (Parent/Carer)

“Not being able to see friends face to face” (Adult)

“Missing school friends - Zoom does not work at this age (5 years) We have been social distancing outside so the kids play in zones but it feels artificial and way too organised and rigid” (Mother , Dublin).

“It is usually hard when I meet my friends when me and my family are out for a walk - we have to social distance and we don't really play, we just talk” (Boy aged 10 years, Dublin).

Working from home

Many parents had to work from home with no child care and all schools closed, this caused them significant stress. Even when both parents were working from home, some parents report this did not help to enable play. Parents also found this additional role difficult.

"Both parents working from home means nobody free to play" (Parent/Carer)

"I have an 8 month old and also trying to balance and help my mother who is cocooning" (Mother, Dublin)

Best ideas to promote play

Children liked cycling, tennis, going for a walk or a run. Parents bought a lot of new playground equipment for the back garden (trampolines, bouncy castles, and climbing frames) to keep their children occupied and happy.

For those fortunate enough to have a back and/or front garden, these spaces played a central role in children's play activities, ranging from gardening, camping in the back garden, using fixed play equipment, paddling pools and using their imagination. The park was the most common space that parents took their children to during the period of social distancing, as it is viewed as a space with multiple attractions.

"Getting a climbing frame helped as he had something new to focus his energy on" (Parent/Carer)

"Dug a hole in the garden and let him play in it. Filled it with water and splashed around, threw toys in etc. Allowing him to engage in very messy play in the garden especially using the hose has worked well" (Mother, Dublin)

"I made a fort in my garden. I made a snail hotel. I made a zip line for my brother's action heroes" (Boy aged 10, Dublin)

What can the Irish Government do to help children's ability to hang out or play during this time?

The number one choice for both children (52.2%) and parents (31.7%) was to allow children to meet their friends face to face. This was followed by reopening school as parent's second choice (23.9%). For children it was allowing them, and families, to travel further than 5km for play and recreation (26.1%). The most important thing that the government could do was to enable socialising rather than reopening clubs or playgrounds. Parents of children (aged 4-13) and children themselves (10-18) agree that the most important factor for enabling play was interaction with their friends, rather than public spaces.

Summary of Findings

These findings clearly demonstrate that the spaces that children occupy for play are key to their day to day lives and play experiences. Additionally, children and young people's infrastructure and use of play spaces do indeed change as they get older with a stronger concentration on public parks and sports facilities as they reach adolescence, whereas playgrounds and back and front gardens feature more for younger children unless age appropriate play facilities are provided. Interestingly, the home still remains a significant space for children's play and recreation.

Overall this survey revealed that younger children spent less time outdoors by themselves or being vigorously physically active. Older children did spend slightly more time with friends outdoors than younger children but the children tell us that a lot of this contact was socially distanced e.g. talking to friends over the garden wall etc.

Going forward Dublin City Council will continue to implement actions with the Play Strategy that support the development of a citywide play infrastructure that can address many of the issues identified within this survey report.

The survey was authored and carried out by Dr Carol Barron & Ms Mary Jane Emmet June 2020 of Dublin City University. To view full report, follow link for the flip book version: <https://media.dcu.ie/media/parksreport2021/>

Changing Patterns of Urban Park Usage in Dublin City Council Catchment Area During the Covid-19 Pandemic

Public Parks and the Covid-19 Pandemic

Dublin's parks were an exception to the lockdown, as they stayed open through all phases of the Covid-19 pandemic. The full extent of the direct impact of the coronavirus pandemic on children, adults and older people is still being researched and understood. The indirect effects however may be substantial and widespread, stemming from overburdened health systems, loss of household income, disruptions to child and adult health services, disruptions to education and work-life balance, social isolation and reduced opportunity for contact with nature and physical activity.

Dublin City Council's (DCC) urban parks became a vital resource to Dublin citizens during the Covid-19 pandemic. In order to address and support any key issues for the city in this regard, Dublin City Council (DCC) were keen to investigate and report on urban park usage in the Dublin City Council catchment area during the Covid-19 pandemic. Subsequently, Dublin City Council Parks & Landscape Services and Play Development and Dublin City University (DCU) worked collaboratively to develop an online survey to identify the health and social benefits of parks, changing patterns of usage and what citizens expect from their parks now and in the future. This research was part funded by Dublin City Council, Publishing Fund from the School of Nursing, Psychotherapy and Community and the Covid-19 Research Grant, DCU.

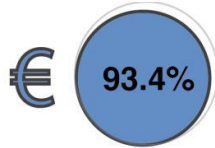
Findings of Survey on Changing Patterns of Urban Public Park Usage and the Covid-19 Pandemic:

The survey reached out to 1,337 residents of the Dublin City Council catchment area of whom 96% were adults and 4% were children aged 10 to 17 years old. The following information is a general overview of the findings within this report:

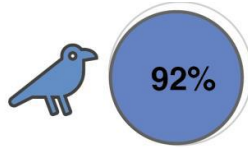
- Most respondents (93.4%) stated that they agree or strongly agree that Dublin parks are a good use of taxpayer's money. Just over half of all adult respondents (52.1%) were working remotely from home due to Covid-19 restrictions.
- The majority of respondents (87.3%) were house dwellers. Most respondents have access to an outdoor space for recreation (93.6%), and 87.7% stated that they had access to a public park.
- Almost half (46.1%) of respondents said they visit a park daily, while 32.1% visit the park twice a week.
- Dublin City Council parks are less than a 10 minute walk away from 68.4% of respondent's homes. This is in keeping with previous literature on the importance of proximity of parks to urban dwellings and rate of visitation.
- Most respondents stated that they walk (81.9%) to the park, while 12.8% drive and only 4.4% cycle or scoot.
- The uptake of public transport to access Dublin parks is very low (less than 1%), and there is a noticeable increase in the number of respondents who drive to the park if they live more than a 10 minute walk from the park.
- Before the pandemic, respondents understandably visited the park much less frequently during the working week (Monday to Friday) compared to the weekends.
- During Covid-19, DCC parks have seen a steady increase of usage during working days that is comparable to weekend usage. There was a noticeable increase in the time spent in Dublin parks during the Covid-19 pandemic. While the length of stay between 30 minutes and 1 hour remained stable (48%), there were significant increases in the length of stay between 1-2 hours (from 23.3% to 31.3%) and 2 hours or more (from 4.9% to 8.5%). Lengths of stay of less than 30 minutes pre-pandemic (24%) dropped by half to 12% during the pandemic.
- The most common online information resource used to find out about park facilities and upcoming events was Facebook (32.2%), followed by the Dublin City Council website (27%) and Twitter (16.2%). This suggests that there is no 'one-stop shop'.
- During the Covid-19 pandemic, most respondents (71.6%) said they were visiting other parks, and the main reason given was 'change of scenery'. Respondents placed the most importance on going to a park for their mental health, with 85.5% respondents saying that this was either fairly or very important and also for their physical health (83.65%) or overall wellbeing (82.2%), with a much smaller

cohort of respondents singling out social life (44.8%). This focus on mental health can likely be explained by the social restrictions and loneliness experienced by citizens during the pandemic.

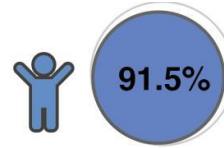
- Participants were asked to list the most common reason for visiting parks and all the answers given were individually calculated by activity out of 100%. The most common reasons were 'walking' (86.2%), 'to improve my wellbeing' (75.1%), 'to experience and get close to nature' (59.4%), 'for rest and relaxation' (54.2%), and 'to spend time in a quiet place' (43.6%). Sports and fitness activities were mentioned significantly less as activities that respondents did frequently or all the time: running/jogging (17.5%), cycling (10.6%), playing organised sports/activities (10%) and using outdoor gym equipment (3.2%).
- The single most attractive element of parks for respondents with children was the presence of a playground (26.1%) followed by nature (15.4%) and open/green space (11.1%). When asked to rank a list of events they would like to see in their park in the future, 28.3% of respondents ranked open air markets as their number one event, followed by family days (20.5%) and music concerts (15.6%).
- The number one issue which impacted on park usage was the lack of toilets in their park, with 41.8% of respondents citing this issue. The next two most common issues were overcrowding (34.3%) and dog fouling (30.4%). It is likely that the issue of overcrowding is unique to the pandemic, similar to the focus on mental health benefits and the increased weekday park usage. When asked what facilities and resources they would like to see in their local park in the future to make it more enjoyable, interesting and welcoming, the most common responses were toilets (25%), catering facilities (18.2%), ample bins (4.6%) and seating (4%), all of which involve infrastructure investment.
- Looking to the future, respondents felt that the key priorities for Dublin City Council to focus their attention on in relation to parks are 'more planting greenery/trees' (34.3%), followed by 'better facilities in the park' (17.2%) and 'more socialising initiatives' (16.1%).



Dublin parks are a good use of taxpayer's money



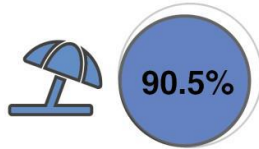
Parks should provide opportunities to see nature



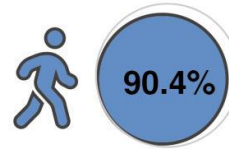
Parks should be places for children to play



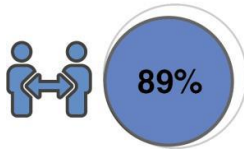
Visiting public parks improves my mental health



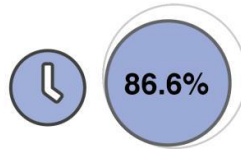
Parks should be places where you can relax and unwind



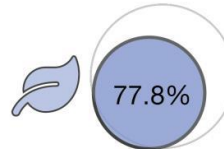
Visiting public parks improves my physical health



Parks are ideal places for people to meet others from their local community



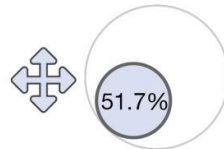
I intend to use the park as frequently as I am currently after the COVID-19 pandemic is over



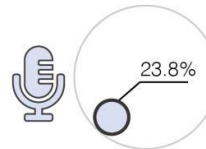
My local park is attractive and well maintained



I feel safe at all times when in the park



My park is sufficiently large to meet the leisure needs of the local population



Upcoming events and activities in my local park are well promoted

Icons sourced from <https://www.fontawesome.com> - CC BY 4.0 license
author: Marcos Dias

Parks, Play and Families

Within the survey a particular focus was placed on parks, play and families. Dublin City Council asked adult respondents to report on the main attractions of the park for their children. A total of 605 respondents who use parks in the DCC catchment area answered this question. 91.5% of respondents said that parks should be places for children to play. Three differing themes emerged from their responses; the Outdoors (338 responses), Socialisation (274 responses) and Active Pursuits and Facilities (232 responses).

The single most attractive element of parks for respondents with children was the presence of a playground, mentioned by 220 (36.3%) respondents, which is a component

of the Socialisation theme. Parents also recognised the importance of the socialising opportunities afforded by the park where their children can meet up with their friends and to a lesser degree the attraction of having catering facilities provided for parents.

Park as an Imaginative Natural Environment

The Outdoors theme contained the second and third most attractive elements of parks for families: nature (130 respondents or 15.4%) and open/green space (94 respondents or 11.1%). To a lesser extent, respondents also mentioned water sources, tree climbing, wildlife, sense of freedom and fresh air. This demonstrates the appeal of parks for parents that are concerned with the health and wellbeing of their children and see parks as a means of letting their children enjoy the benefits of active pursuits in a natural environment. For example, one respondent expressed an interest in playgrounds, but also “less formal adventures such as walking through forests, climbing trees, ‘secret’ passageways/ routes, looking at animals” (Female aged 45-64). Parents also emphasised the importance of parks as an alternative to sedentary activities. One respondent highlighted the imaginative power of being in a natural environment when describing the benefits for children; “Playground, forest and scrub land for making forts and tunnels and their own games. Also, the ducks and the river” (Female aged 45-64).

The Active Pursuits/Facilities theme also had many responses, highlighting a variety of interests from walking to organised sports to skate parks. The most common responses in this theme were sports/sport facilities (89 respondents or 10.5%), running (84 respondents or 4%), cycling (25 respondents or 3%) and walking (26 respondents or 3.1%). Other specific activities/facilities mentioned include skate park, scooting, exercise (non-specified), exercise equipment and play/walk with dogs.

The Park as a Safe and Accessible Space for Families

Parks are seen as a safe space for families to do activities together, such as cycling and scooting, as well as an alternative to green spaces that have less convenient access. The safety factor is also mentioned by one respondent. The element of safety is associated with being away from street traffic, but also with the general quality of footpaths inside parks when compared to citywide footpaths. Parks are seen as an informal space and place for play, and more specifically, child-led imaginative play opportunities. Other parents emphasised the need to provide facilities for all children, including those with disabilities.

“[The children] enjoy using the smooth surfaces for their scooters as the footpaths [outside the park] are atrocious” (Female aged 25-44)

“They love the playground and cycling all over the park. Every morning my husband and 10-year-old go cycling in the park for an hour or more – they have started to develop small mountain biking trails in the park with jumps etc. as they can’t currently escape to the mountains.” (Female aged 25-44)

“Outdoors, but feels safe, they meet friends & get off screens & have ‘old fashioned’ fun” (Female, aged 45-64).

"[The park is] a great amenity for kids to meet outside and play together, outside of organised activities. They learn social skills and how to use their imaginations. It's wonderful for children" (Female aged 25 – 44).

"[We have] 3 kids, our younger 2 like to use the play aspect. Our eldest daughter in a wheelchair rarely can get involved as there are little facilities for our disability community" (Male aged 25-44).

Teenage Children and Parks

Some respondents mentioned the specific ways in which their teenage children enjoyed park visits, which involve contact with nature, socialising with their peers, generally 'hanging out' and sports activities. One respondent (Female 45–64) stated that they had teenagers and therefore the "solitude & wildness of park [was] very appealing". The social aspect was also mentioned by a mother, who stated that parks were beneficial for their teenage children for "wellbeing and a chance to dress nice/pose and see other teenagers" (Female aged 45-64).

"I have 2 teenagers who like to meet friends in the park to play football, cycle and 'hang out'" (Female aged 45-64)

Children and Active Pursuits

In the Active Pursuits and Families theme, the most popular activities/facilities mentioned were sports/sports facilities (10.5%), followed by running (4%), walking (3.1%), cycling 3%, Skate Park (2.4%) and scooting (1.4%). Skate parks are known to be facilities that cater to teenagers and that involve an element of risk, although they were mostly mentioned in tandem with other activities/facilities, such as playgrounds, sports facilities and climbing trees (another risk-taking activity). A few parents demonstrated concern for their children using park equipment during the Covid-19 pandemic. Another respondent stated that they avoid using the playground altogether during the Covid-19 pandemic. There were a few mentions of grandparents bringing their children to the park, mainly for using the playgrounds, contact with nature (climbing trees) and wildlife (ducks and swans).

"[We use] the swings but it's difficult in the pandemic because I don't like letting the kids touch everything—I try to go with kids early morning to avoid crowds" (Female aged 18-24)

"[Our children] also love the playgrounds in the park but we haven't used them during [the] pandemic as they are very busy/crowded" (Female aged 25-44).

Summary of Findings

The report includes a set of key recommendations for overall changes in parks usage that will assist in supporting Overall Health and Wellbeing of the city's citizens. This includes building on 'Infrastructure Investment' improving 'Mobility and Accessibility', responding to 'Changing Park Usage', removing 'Barriers to Park Usage' in the DCC catchment area, and improving communication mechanisms regarding 'Park Events' Promotion'.

However, for the purpose of the Play Strategy, the focus is placed on findings and recommendations involving 'parks, play and families' in order to inform the strategy action plan. It is therefore noted that the single most attractive element of parks for respondents with children was the presence of a playground.

Parents also acknowledged that parks assist with the health and wellbeing of their children and see urban parks as a means of letting their children enjoy the benefits of active pursuits in a natural environment. A wide variety of child activities and behaviours are facilitated within urban parks by creating the right conditions for informal and imaginative child-led play in the natural landscape.

The survey respondents were asked to identify and rank the priority areas that they believed should be the key priority for Dublin City Council moving forward. The most common request was for more landscaping (plants and trees), followed by better facilities (toilets, seating, bins), more socialising initiatives, including more local events. This presents DCC with the task of working in partnership with local community groups, partners and outside agencies to implement these priority areas identified by the park users.

The survey and all subsequent reports were carried out and authored by Dr Carol Barron, Dr Marcos Dias and Ms Mary-Jane Emmet June/July 2021 of Dublin City University. To view full report, follow link for the flip book version:
<https://media.dcu.ie/media/parksreport2021/>