The Play Satisfaction Survey: a guide to using it locally

This guide is designed to support local authority officers in undertaking surveys of children's play satisfaction as part of their Play Sufficiency Duty requirements under the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010. It sets out good practice in planning, preparing and using the survey, and provides guidance on collecting, processing and undertaking some basic analysis of the data.

Background

Statutory guidance[1] published in 2012 included a toolkit and template to guide the information required in the Play Sufficiency Assessment (PSA). The template was updated in 2015 for the 2016 PSA and further revised for the 2019 PSA. The toolkit includes a suggested survey[2] that seeks to gain mainly quantitative data on the views of children about their satisfaction with opportunities to play in their local area.

Over the four rounds of Play Sufficiency Assessments, the survey has been used by many local authorities both in its standard form, and with adaptations to meet local needs and to focus on specific issues. From data shared by local authorities using the standard form, Play Wales has also published summary reports which provide a limited view of play satisfaction across Wales.

However, it is also important to recognise that whilst play surveys have value in terms of establishing generalised levels of satisfaction and identifying places where children report different levels of satisfaction, they are a fairly crude instrument that provides limited detail in terms of how children's opportunities to play are affected by localised conditions within communities.

Surveys should therefore be seen as one element of a broader strategy in assessing children's play satisfaction. While surveys are good at providing quantitative statistics, more qualitative methods might include:

• Interviews with children and teenagers

• Interviews with adults (parents, carers, professionals and community members)

• Interactive activities and discussions with children

• Structured focus groups with children

• Play diaries

• Observations and visual records.

The purpose of the Play Satisfaction Survey

Gaining an understanding of children's views on the sufficiency of opportunities to play in their area plays a key role in the first part of the Play Sufficiency Duty, which is to understand the barriers to creating a play friendly environment which provides time, space and permission for children to play. A survey can go some way to meet this objective, and the results can have an important role in part two of the duty through providing the evidence needed to identify gaps in provision and support the development of action plans to address these gaps.

The standardised Play Satisfaction Survey 2021-22

A standard Play Satisfaction Survey has been included in each version of the PSA toolkit with a small number of revisions and improvements made over time. The most recent version is available as an appendix to this guide. While some local authorities have used the survey in the standard form, others have adapted it or developed their own version. While each local authority must approach the PSA in a way that best meets its local needs and situation, using non-standard surveys across Wales means that opportunities to look at an all-Wales picture of play sufficiency is very difficult.

From the 2019 PSA, data from 13 local authorities was collated and used to inform the *'I learn new things and climb trees'* What children say about play in Wales report. While this provided some valuable data, the partial picture meant that the results did not reflect the experiences of children in every area, and comparisons between areas could not be made. When set in context, comparing experiences between areas, and across time would be extremely useful both nationally and locally in developing play policy. Therefore, local authorities are encouraged to use the standard survey to help achieve this.

The standard survey asks questions about aspects of children's play and then seeks to measure overall play satisfaction:

- **temporal (time)**: children's 'free' time when they can become immersed in playing

- **spatial**: how public space can support or constrain children's ability to play as well as access to designated spaces for play

- **psychological (permission)**: children's experiences of time and space, including factors such as a sense of freedom, permission, belonging, fear and harassment, as well as the increasing adult appropriation and control of play for other purposes.

The remaining questions are 'demographic' including geography, and identity. While essentially 'boring', these provide crucial information that can be used to identify differences in children's play experience by location, gender, age or ethnicity. Postcode data in particular will help you to identify where within your area children's play experiences might be poor, prompting opportunities for investigation and maybe specific support. Postcodes can be grouped into a range of other areas including Super Output Areas that are used in the Census, parliamentary constituencies, health boards and Council Wards. Collating postcode data by different geographies also means that it can be seen in the context of other data sets such as the Wales Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) and WIMD children's index.

Figure 1: Aspects of play in the standard 2021-22 survey

Question number	Question	Aspect
4	How often do you go out to play or hang out with friends?	Temporal
5	Do you have enough time for playing or hanging out with friends?	Temporal
6	When you're *not* in school, what types of places do you play or hang out in?	Spatial
7	Can you play in all of the places you would like to?	Spatial
8	How good are the places you play in?	Spatial
9	How safe do you feel when playing or hanging out?	Psychological
10	What are grown ups like when you're playing or hanging out?	Psychological
11	Are you allowed to play out on your own or with friends?	Psychological
12	How do you usually get to places where you play?	Psychological / spatial
13	How do you usually get to school?	Psychological / spatial
14	Overall how good are your opportunities for playing and hanging out?	Play satisfaction
15	What's good about your area for playing and hanging out?	Play satisfaction
16	What's not good about your area for playing and hanging out and needs to be made better?	Play satisfaction
17	How has COVID-19, lockdowns and restrictions had an impact on how you usually play?	COVID-19
18	If you can, please tell us more about how COVID-19 has impacted on your play	COVID-19

Figure 2: Grouping responses by area examples

Satisfaction with play opportunities by Family Centre areas
% of children satisfied with play
- 70.0%
- 70.1%
- 70.2% - 80.0%
- 80.1% - 82.1%
- 82.2% - 90.2%

Number of different play spaces - by Family Centre area
Average number of play spaces
- 5.07
- 5.66
- 5.77
- 5.88
- 7.26

As a fall-back, the survey also asks children which school they attend, which while not as good as a postcode (because children may not attend their nearest school), it can indicate the approximate location of the play spaces that children refer to.

The 2021-22 standard Play Satisfaction Survey asks children about their ethnicity for the first time – based on Office of National Statistics recommended Wales-specific questions. Collecting data on ethnic group can be complex because of the subjective and multifaceted nature of the concepts. Membership is something that is self-defined and subjectively meaningful to an individual. Because of this complexity, guidance may be needed from an adult, as children may not understand what the question is asking. It is not recommended that categories are removed from the response options available to children as their choice should not be limited because of their age (or other factors).

Of the 15 core questions about play, 12 are closed questions where children are asked to just tick boxes. The remaining three are open questions, asking children to add commentary. This balance is important in encouraging responses but also has implications for the recording and subsequent analysis of the data collected.

Planning your survey

A number of key decisions need to be made at an early stage of the survey planning process.

Firstly, you will need to decide whether to use a paper-based survey, use an interviewer to ask children the questions, deploy the survey online – or use a combination of all three.

Paper-based surveys

This is the method that has traditionally been used by most local authorities, where copies of the surveys are sent to various partners such as play settings, schools

and youth groups. While a simple approach, there is a cost to be considered of distributing and collecting the forms and entering data. There are also issues to consider around validity and accuracy. Unless children are closely supervised, many forms may be incomplete when returned. Depending on the setting, children may also not answer questions honestly, succumbing to either peer pressure, concerns around adult expectations, or influenced by the type of setting they are in at that given time.

Interviewer surveys

Having an experienced interviewer asking children the questions one-to-one and recording their answers (for example electronically onto a tablet) is usually seen as the most accurate method of surveying. It enables questions to be explained, if necessary, and responses to be more considered, and recorded accurately. However, it is expensive in both time and money if a large sample is to be gathered.

Online surveys

Once the cost of setting-up an online survey is covered, this is a very inexpensive method. Many local authorities may already have an online survey package that can be adapted, and may have expertise in-house to support development. Otherwise there are numerous easy-to-use packages that can be purchased relatively cheaply. Once set up, links to the survey can be sent out via existing mailing-lists or to partner organisations such as schools where the availability of tablets and laptops now makes it viable for all children to have access.

Using an online platform gives you a high degree of control over how respondents answer questions, enables you to monitor take-up in real time and of course, no further data-entry is required. There are some disadvantages with online surveys however, with issues of verification (you never really know who is completing the survey), response rates, and accuracy – as children may not have the opportunity to be supported when they have queries or lack understanding.

Targeting the survey

Surveying every child in your area is usually not going to be possible, so you will need to decide on a sample of children to target with your survey. One approach

is to choose a random sample, whereby from a list of every child in your area you choose for example, every fifth name on the list and ask them to complete the survey. While this will produce good data, the obvious problem is that you are unlikely to have access to such a list in the first place.

At the other end of the spectrum is to take a convenience sample and survey anyone, or anyone who's available within a particular timeframe. This is likely to produce 'selection bias' and less accurate results, so a compromise is a stratified sample. This requires you to break down the population of children into groups, and then set a representative target of respondents from the whole, and from each sub-group based on their presence in the population as a whole. For example, as shown in Figure 3, the population of Welsh speakers in this authority is 27%, therefore we would need to make sure that 27% of those surveyed in each area were Welsh speakers.

Figure 3: A *stratified sampling* approach

Area	Population 0-14 (Stats Wales)	32% Sample (CI=5)	Girls (50%)	Welsh speakers (27%)	Disabled children (5%)	BME (2.6%)
Cwm	657	210	105	57	11	5
Blaenau	1034	331	165	89	17	9
Dyffryn	954	305	153	82	15	8
Pont	1695	542	271	146	27	14
Llanfair	859	275	137	74	14	7
Totals	**5199**	**1643**	**832**	**449**	**83**	**43**

Finally, a purposeful sample is where you target a specific group of children within the population and assume that their responses are broadly representative of all children. This may be geographical, where you decide to survey as many children in one area as possible, or by age, where you aim to gain responses from one age group. This approach has been used by a number of local authorities (for example Conwy and Wrexham have focused their survey on children in Year 5). If consistent, this has the advantage of requiring a smaller sample to be valid and providing data that can be compared more accurately with previous surveys. The obvious disadvantage is that children of other ages do not have a say, therefore an age-targeted survey needs to be complimented with wider consultation.

Sample size

Calculating how many children you need to survey for your results to have accuracy and validity is an important part of your planning. This is usually done by calculating two measures.

Confidence Level (CL) is how sure you can be that the sample is representative of the whole. It is expressed as a percentage and represents how often the whole population of children would pick the same answer. Most research uses a Confidence Level of 95%.

Confidence Interval (CI) tells you how confident you are in your results. With any survey you are never

100% sure that your results could be repeated. Confidence Interval is a statistical calculation setting your sample size against the total population of children. It is expressed as a number by which your results might vary when repeated. It can be presented as the 'margin of error' in your results.

For example, if the CI calculation based on sample size and population gives you a Confidence Interval of '4' and 47% percent of your sample picks an answer you can be 'sure' that if you had asked the question of the entire relevant population between 43% (47-4) and 51% (47+4) would have picked that answer. A CI of around '5' is usually acceptable but a higher CI could mean an unacceptable margin of error.

More information and sample size calculator: www.surveysystem.com/sscalc.htm#one

As can be seen in Figure 4, sample size is not directly related to population, so areas with twice as many children as another do not need twice the number of survey responses. However, if you decide to stratify your sample you would need to calculate a sample for each sub-group (see Figure 3).

Figure 4: Suggested sample size for a survey of Year 5 children only, by local authority

Local authority	Population of year group 5	Sample with CL=-95% CI=5
Anglesey	790	259
Gwynedd	1265	295
Conwy	1205	291
Denbighshire	1205	291
Flintshire	1780	316
Wrexham	1660	312
Powys	1355	298
Ceredigion	685	246
Pembrokeshire	1385	301
Carmarthenshire	2125	325
Swansea	2780	338
Neath Port Talbot	1660	312
Bridgend	1800	317
Vale of Glamorgan	1700	314
Rhondda Cynon Taf	2920	340
Merthyr Tydfil	725	251
Caerphilly	2175	327
Blaenau Gwent	765	256
Torfaen	1140	288
Monmouthshire	920	271
Newport	2010	323
Cardiff	4350	353

Collating the data

Whichever method of survey you use, the responses will need to be collated in a form that allows the results of the survey to be reported and the data to be used for further investigation. If you have used an online survey, data can usually be downloaded directly as a spreadsheet file. Paper-based and interview surveys will need to be entered manually either onto a spreadsheet, or via the online survey, if you've used one as well.

At this point, it is important to ensure that the data is 'clean' and suitable for the next stage of analysis. This involves examining each 'variable' (question response) for errors. Common errors can include using capital O instead of zero in postcodes, or spelling mistakes in data entry. These can mean that specific responses cannot be counted accurately, for example, 'gril' instead of 'girl' in Q19.

If you have collected postcodes, these will need to be grouped together into the areas that you will be using for your analysis (for example Ward, Middle Layer Super Output Areas [MSOA]) This can be done using a simple look-up table that is supplied by the Office for National Statistics (ONS). By importing the appropriate look-up table for your area, the 'Lookup' formula in Microsoft Excel can be used to assign area names to

postcodes (you may wish to ask someone in your local authority for support if you are not confident in using advanced Excel features). As well as assigning ward or super output areas, postcode data can also be used to incorporate other data such as the area's Index of Multiple Deprivation ranking, or its rural or urban status from freely available look-up lists from ONS, StatsWales or from within your local authority.

Using the data

Data from the survey can be used in a number of ways, ranging from simple reporting of results to more complex statistical analyses. The extent to which you can use the data will depend on your own experience, and that of any support that you either buy-in, or have access to within your local authority, or in partner organisations, such as local higher education institutions.

Reporting your sample

The simplest use of data is in counting the number of responses you had to your survey, whom they were from and where they were from. This involves just counting the number of surveys returned but is really important to indicate how valid the data is and to build a profile of the respondents. You may wish to include a statement such as:

'In total, 728 survey forms were returned. Of these, 683 were found to be valid. Population data estimates that there are 1,212 children in the cohort. The survey responses therefore represent the views of 56% of the total population. The size of the sample means a 95% probability that the responses accurately reflect the attitudes of the whole population. The margin of error is calculated as +/- 2.48%. This means that if 47% percent of the sample picked an answer, we can be "sure" that if we had asked the question of the entire relevant population between 44.5% and 49.5% would have picked that answer.'

It is also good practice to identify how many children in sub-groups completed the survey including gender identity, disabled children, Welsh speakers and children from minority ethnic groups. You may also be able to use the postcode data to identify how many children in each geographical area of the authority returned surveys. Limited numbers of survey responses in some areas may result in misleading representations, so presenting this information is really important.

Aggregate data

You can present the overall findings from the survey using aggregate data tables based on the entire group of survey respondents. You may wish to do this for each survey question as a starting point. Figure 5 shows a simple aggregate data for Q4.

Figure 5: Q4 aggregate table

Q4. How often do you go out to play or hang out with friends?	Number of responses
A few days each week	233
Hardly ever	121
I don't play or hang out with friends out	46
Most days	281
No response	2
Grand total	**683**

It is usually more helpful however, to present the data as a percentage, but you must include the total number of responses which is usually presented as 'n'.

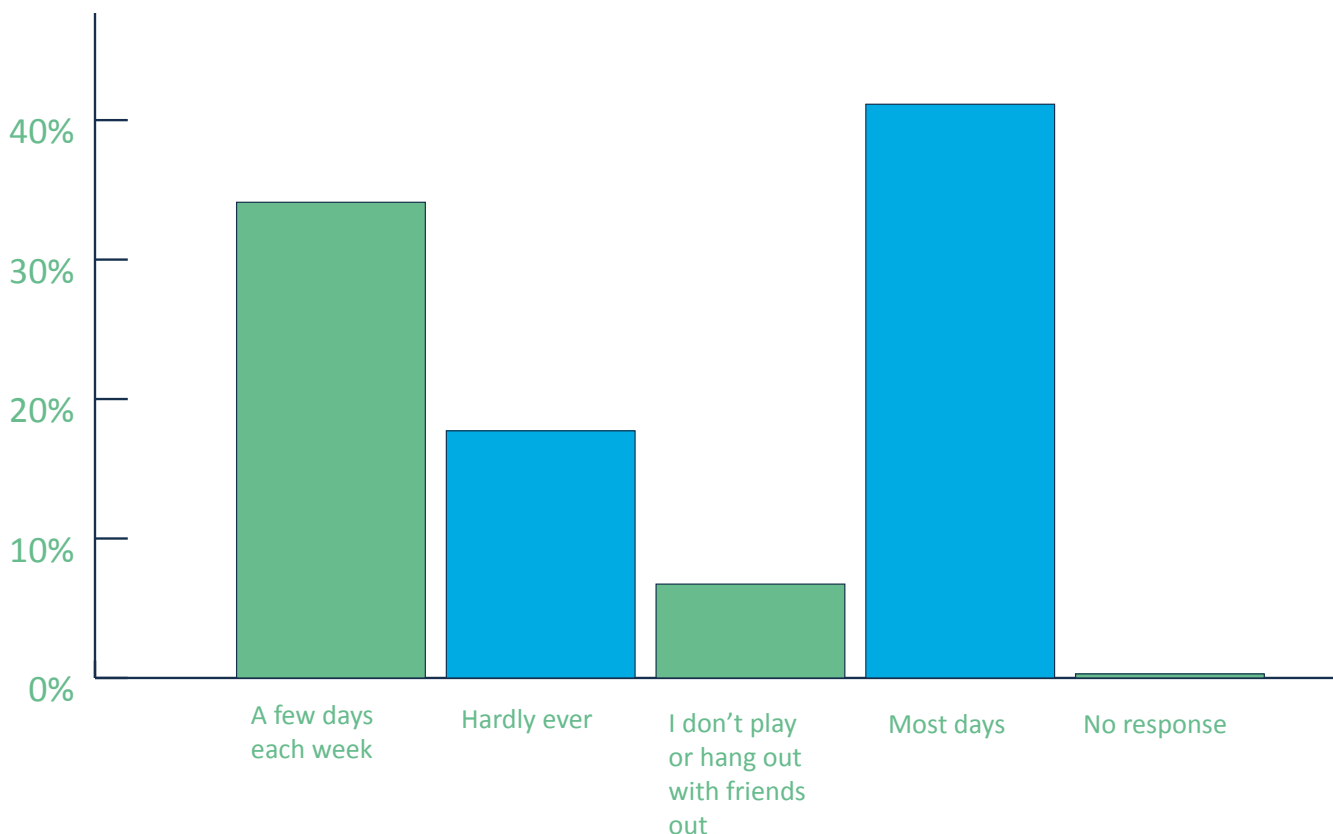**Figure 6: Q4 aggregate table (n=683)**

Q4. How often do you go out to play or hang out with friends?	% of responses
A few days each week	34.11%
Hardly ever	17.72%
I don't play or hang out with friends out	6.73%
Most days	41.14%
No response	0.29%

In Excel, it is also simple to present the same data as a chart, but again it is important to include 'n' as this enables the percentages to be contextualised.

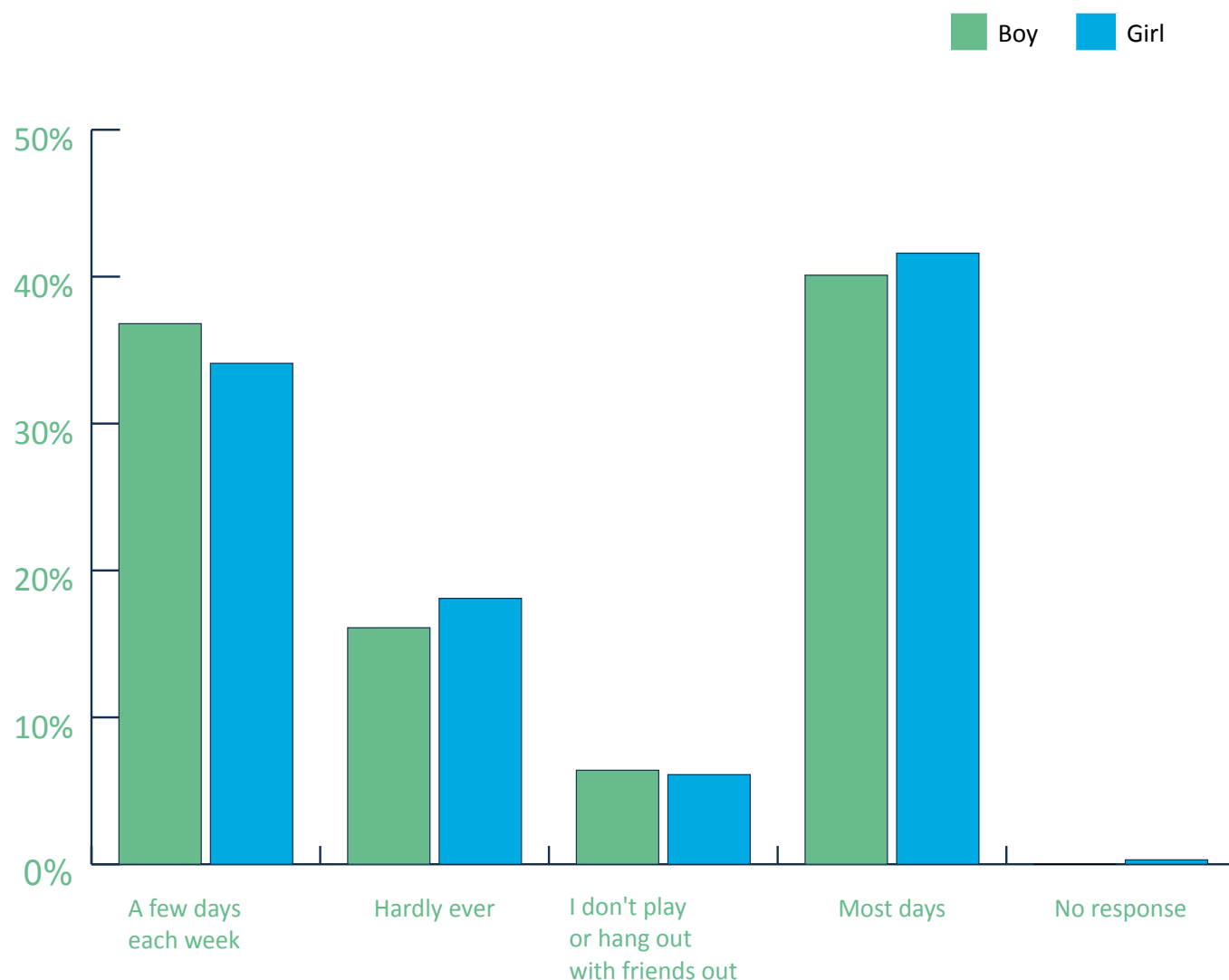## How often do you go out to play or hang out with friends?

Cross-tabulation

Cross tabulations provide a way of analysing and comparing the results for one or more variables from your survey with the results of another. They are data tables that not only present the results of the entire group of respondents, but results from sub-groups of survey respondents as well. Cross tabulations enable you to examine relationships within the data that might not be readily apparent when analysing total survey responses. Cross-tabs can be constructed in Excel using the simple yet powerful PivotTable function. There are many excellent PivotTable tutorials online. Taking Q4 as an example, a cross-tab allows you to compare how girls and boys respond to the same question. Again, displaying the data in a table as percentages makes it easier to read, and as before, the data can easily be displayed as a chart.

Figure 8: Q4 and Q19 cross-tab table and chart (n=683)

How often do you go out to play or hang out with friends?	Boy	Girl	Grand total
A few days each week	36.8%	34.1%	35.5%
Hardly ever	16.1%	18.1%	17.1%
I don't play or hang out with friends out	6.4%	6.1%	6.3%
Most days	40.1%	41.6%	40.9%
No response	0.7%	0.0%	0.3%

How often do you go out to play or hang out with friends?

Legend: Boy (green) | Girl (blue)

Chart showing responses by category:
- A few days each week: Boy ~37%, Girl ~34%
- Hardly ever: Boy ~16%, Girl ~18%
- I don't play or hang out with friends out: Boy ~7%, Girl ~6%
- Most days: Boy ~40%, Girl ~42%
- No response: Boy ~0%, Girl ~0.5%

Cross-tabulation provides new insights into your survey data by highlighting correlations between one variable and another. However, you should always treat correlations with care, as they do not infer that one thing causes another.

In the example above, it would seem that more girls than boys 'hardly ever' play out. This is an observation and we cannot say definitively that girls play out less than boys just because they are girls. There may be other factors that we cannot account for.

Nonetheless, crosstabs allow you to take 'dependent' factors such as age, gender, language, disability, ethnicity and location, and examine how the responses to the survey questions about time, space, permission and overall play satisfaction are different for each sub-group.

Advanced analysis

With the appropriate expertise and tools, you may be able to undertake other analyses of the survey data. Using geographical information system (GIS) software, you can produce maps that display the survey data according to the location of the participants. This can be very useful in areas with more diverse populations, or where there are clear urban/rural divides.

Another powerful statistical method is to undertake a 'regression' analysis. This takes one variable – such as Q14 (play satisfaction) and then analyses a group of other variables (for example gender, permission to play, disability, rurality) to see which one is most likely to predict high (or low) children's satisfaction with play opportunities. Factors such as the size of your sample are very important in this kind of analysis, but it can be a very useful indication of where local play policy might best be focused.

Qualitative data

The standard Play Satisfaction Survey contains three open questions around what's good about play, what's bad about play, and for 2021-22, the effects of COVID-19 on play. It is likely that you will not have responses to these questions from all participants, which can restrict their use as primary evidence. However, they can be extremely helpful in providing context to some of the phenomenon that you observe in the quantitative data analysis. Using quotes from these questions can be helpful in illustrating data, while presenting responses as WordClouds can highlight particular common themes.

Reporting

Having undertaken all of this work, it is important to present it in a way that best meets the needs of your audience. This may require a more detailed report that includes a large number of tables and charts that provides you and interested colleagues and partners with information that can be used to guide their work. A short summary report can also be useful for a more general audience including parents, councillors and for publishing online. This should focus on addressing the research question: What are the barriers to creating a play friendly environment which provides time, space and permission for children to play?

References

[1] Welsh Government (2012) *Creating a Play-friendly Wales: Statutory Guidance to Local Authorities on assessing for sufficient play opportunities for children in their areas*. Cardiff: Welsh Government.

[2] Welsh Government (2019) *Play Sufficiency Assessment Toolkit. Part 4.* Cardiff: Welsh Government.

[3] Welsh Government (2021) Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC). Cardiff: Welsh Government.

Appendix 1: The standard Play Satisfaction Survey

The Welsh Government has a law which means all local authorities in Wales must carry out an investigation into the time and space children have for playing or hanging out in their local area.

By filling in the survey below you will be helping us to build a picture of what it's like for children playing in _____. We will then use the information to find ways of protecting and improving the time and space children have for playing or hanging out. Thank you!

Before we start, we need to know a bit more about you

Q1. How old are you?	Q2. What is your postcode at home? (Or in which area do you live?)

Q3. Which school do you go to?

Right, now let's have a think about the time you have for play

Q4. How often do you go out to play or hang out with friends? *Tick just one answer*

	Most days		Hardly ever
	A few days each week		I don't play or hang out with friends outside

Q5. Do you have enough time for playing or hanging out with friends? *Tick just one answer*

	Yes, I have loads		No, I would like to have a bit more
	Yes, it's just about enough		No, I need a lot more

Next, think about the different places where you play or hang out

Q6. When you're not in school, what types of places do you play or hang out in?
Tick all the answers that are true for you

	In my house or a friend's house		Somewhere with water or sand in it
	In my garden or a friend's garden		On the bike or skate park
	In the streets near my house		In a community centre or leisure centre
	On a local grassy area		In a youth club
	In a place with bushes, trees and flowers		In an afterschool club
	In a play area with swings, slides and other equipment to play on		At an adventure playground or play scheme
	In the woods near my house		In an indoor play centre

	On a football field near my house		Somewhere else (tell us where)
	In my school playground		

Q7. Can you play in all of the places you would like to? *Tick just one answer*

	I can play in all the places I would like to		I can only play in a few of the places I would like to
	I can play in some of the places I would like to		I can hardly play in any of the places I would like to

Now think about all the things you like doing when you're playing or hanging out

Q8. How good are the places you play in? *Tick just one answer*

	They're great, I can do all the things I like		They're not good, I can't do many of the things I like
	They're OK, I can do some of the things I like		They're rubbish, I can't do any of the things I like

Q9. How safe do you feel when playing or hanging out? *Tick just one answer*

	I always feel safe		I never feel safe
	I usually feel safe		I don't play out

Q10. What are grown-ups like when you're playing or hanging out? *Tick just one answer*

	Most adults are great and are happy with children playing out		Some adults are grumpy and don't like children playing out
	Most adults are OK and are alright about children playing out		Most adults are grumpy and hate children playing out

Now think about how you get around your local community

Q11. Are you allowed to play out on your own or with friends?

	Yes		No

Q12. How do you usually get to places where you play? *Tick just one answer*

	I walk or ride on my own		An adult takes me in the car
	I walk or ride with friends		I get the bus
	I walk or ride with an adult		

Q13. How do you usually get to school? *Tick just one answer*

	I walk or ride on my own		An adult takes me in the car
	I walk or ride with friends		I get the bus
	I walk or ride with an adult		

OK, these are the really important ones!

Q14. Overall how good are your opportunities for playing and hanging out?
Tick just one answer

	It's great, and couldn't be made much better		It's not good and it needs to be made better
	It's good, but could be made *even* better		It's rubbish and needs to be made much better
	It's OK, but needs to be made a bit better		

Q15. What's good about your area for playing and hanging out?

Q16. What's not good about your area for playing and hanging out and needs to be made better?

Just to finish, a few questions about you

Q17. Are you…

	A boy?		**A girl?**

Other (please describe)

Q18. Do you think of yourself as being 'disabled'?

	Yes		No

Q19. Which language do you prefer to speak?

	English		Welsh

Other (tell us which)

Q20. Tell us which one of the following best describes your ethnic group or background?				
Please ask for help if you're not sure				
White				
	Welsh/English/Scottish/Northern Irish/British			Gypsy or Irish Traveller
	Irish			Any other White background, please describe
Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups				
	White and Black Caribbean			White and Asian
	White and Black African			Any other Mixed/Multiple ethnic background, please describe
Asian/Asian British				
	Indian			Chinese
	Pakistani			Any other Asian background, please describe
	Bangladeshi			
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British				
	African			Any other Black/African/Caribbean background, please describe
	Caribbean			
Other ethnic group				
	Arab			Any other ethnic group, please describe

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey

When you've finished this, please hand it back to the teacher, playworker or youth worker you got it from.

Author: David Dallimore

David is a policy advisor and research consultant specialising in early years childcare and play. He is part of the Bangor University WISERD civil society team examining change in places over time. Awarded a Fellowship at the National Assembly for Wales, he has worked with the Assembly Research Service to provide information about early childhood education and care (ECEC).

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Play Wales is the national organisation for children's play, an independent charity supported by the Welsh Government to uphold children's right to play and to provide advice and guidance on play-related matters.