



PLAY AND LEISURE

This briefing outlines key information about children and young people's access to play and leisure opportunities in Northern Ireland (NI) and the impact this has on their rights and best interests. It calls for a range of actions to be put in place to make sure that children's play and leisure needs are met.

This is the sixth in a series of 12 policy briefings published throughout 2010 to mark the 20th anniversary of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). These draw from the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) report: *Children's Rights: Rhetoric or Reality* (2008) and the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child's Concluding Observations on the UK Government's report (2008).

Campaign briefings will also be released each month. The purpose of these is to support children and young people to campaign for Government action to address child rights violations in Northern Ireland (NI).

NICCY was established in 2003 in accordance with the provisions of The Commissioner for Children and Young People (Northern Ireland) Order 2003. The principal aim of the Commissioner, as defined in Article 6 of the Order, is to safeguard and promote the rights and best interests of children and young persons.

Please note that the use of the term child refers a child or young person that falls within the remit of NICCY (up to 18 years or up to 21 years where they are care experienced or have a disability).

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has expressed concern that: "children's right to play is sometimes referred to as the 'forgotten right', perhaps because it appears to the adult world as a luxury rather than a necessity of life".¹

UNICEF challenge this perception by highlighting the importance of play and leisure in supporting children's social, physical and intellectual development while also providing them with opportunities to learn key life skills, such as, cooperation and problem solving.

Recent developments including the publication of a Play and Leisure Policy Statement (2008) by the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMdfM) indicate a new commitment to play and leisure in NI.²

The Implementation Plan to accompany the Policy Statement is being prepared for public consultation as we go to print and changes in the structure and duties of local Councils which have a key role in the provision of play are planned to come into force next year. NICCY believes that as these developments gather momentum the following actions must be taken:

1. Government should make sure children and young people have access to safe, affordable, accessible and age appropriate play and leisure opportunities
2. Councils should make sure they fulfill their duty to provide play and leisure opportunities
3. Children and young people should be involved in all aspects of the development and review of play and leisure policies and services