

Provision for learning outdoors for under fives: State of the nation survey ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

Full report PDF ^[2]

Executive summary

In July 2015 the national charity Learning through Landscapes (LTL) working with the national Early Childhood Forum (ECF) and other partners, initiated a survey to 'check in' with the state of outdoor play in early years in the UK.

The survey had nearly 400 respondents from the sector, and found continued strong support for outdoor play and learning that promotes healthy child development in the early years. Encouragingly, many respondents also reported that they have made improvements in their outdoor provision over recent years. However, the survey also found a wide variation in what children are offered in terms of their statutory entitlement to daily outdoor experiences as part of their core early education provision. Many providers are unsure of what is required, are struggling with inadequate space or in some cases have no outside space at all. The survey responses also identified the need for additional staff training as well as more detailed information for parents, planners and childcare commissioners.

Government funded early years education and childcare is offered through a range of schools and settings, voluntary groups and private provision. Unlike the schools sector however, there is little guidance and no statutory requirement for the minimum outdoor space per child. This survey shows that the importance of outdoor space as a key learning and development resource (not simply recreation) is not fully understood by some planners and developers of childcare businesses. This is of particular concern as the Government rolls out its plans for the expansion of free childcare for working parents from 15 to 30 hours per week with the potential for growth in the market and expansion of places as a result.

The statutory Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) still requires that "Providers must provide access to an outdoor play area or, if that is not possible, ensure that outdoor activities are planned and taken on a daily basis" (EYFS 2014 para 3.58). The survey found a wide variation in what is offered to young children in terms of the entitlement to daily outdoor experience under the EYFS, with many settings struggling with inadequate or insufficient space to provide high quality outdoor learning, and that there may also be a small minority of children who are not getting this entitlement at all.

Ofsted is the regulating body for the EYFS, and whilst there are good case studies on their website (the latest we could find was dated 2012), the survey results suggest that many providers are unsure about what is required, or find it difficult to do so well. There was a particularly strong call from providers for more staff training in this area and also for help with engaging with parents about the importance of outdoor play for young children's development in all weather.

Region: Europe ^[3]

Tags: child outcomes ^[4]

outdoor ^[5]

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Source URL (modified on 27 Jan 2022): <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/research-policy-practice/16/06/provision-learning-outdoors-under-fives-state-nation-survey>

Links

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