CONSULTATION DOCUMENT FOR A RECREATION POLICY FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN IRELAND
An idea for a youth club for 15-18 year olds in our locality... It wouldn’t be called a youth club... different activities every night/evening such as soccer, basketball or table tennis... for those not interested in sport, there would be an area to relax, buy coffee or soft drinks... an area to socialise with your friends and other people from your own age group from your locality... extremely comfortable with couches and cushions. The club would be open every evening and all day at the weekends. In the evening local bands could play for the young people...¹
I am delighted to launch this consultation document on Recreation and Young People.

The need for a Recreation Policy was highlighted during the public consultation on the National Children’s Strategy. The lack of play and recreation opportunities was identified as a major concern of young people during the consultation process.

We recognise that young people have different needs throughout their youth. For that reason the National Play Policy, which was published in March 2004, concentrated primarily on young people under 12. The focus of the Recreation Policy will be on teenagers.

This public consultation gives all interested parties, including young people, a chance to have a say in how the Recreation Policy is developed. I want you to take this opportunity to tell us what you think. In addition to this consultation process we are carrying out research with over 2,000 young people on their views about opportunities, barriers and supports to recreation in Ireland.

I want to ensure that young people are given every opportunity to enjoy their leisure time, whether they choose to spend it playing recreational sport, in a local youth group, or doing dance and drama. I want recreational activities to be run in safe, youth-friendly environments. I want young people to be actively involved in running programmes, and for programmes and facilities to be as inclusive as possible. Last but not least, I want young people to have fun!

Our aim is to produce a Recreation Policy that offers new opportunities for young people, while drawing on the lessons learned from past experience. So whatever comments or suggestions you have to make, now is the time to tell us.

I look forward to receiving your views.

Brian Lenihan, T.D.,
Minister of State with Special Responsibility for Children
The National Children’s Office is currently developing a recreation policy that will be aimed at young people of secondary school age (12-18).

The policy will deal with recreation programmes and facilities that are funded by the Government.

In this consultation document we set out the reasons for developing the policy as well as the principles and objectives that we consider should underpin the development of the recreation policy.

Throughout this document we have highlighted the sections where we would particularly welcome your thoughts and views on how the recreation policy should be developed.

RESPONSE FORM
This booklet poses questions at the end of each section which are printed on the attached response form.

WEBSITE
The form can also be completed on our website at www.nco.ie

YOUNG PEOPLE
We are very keen to hear what young people have to say and in addition to this open consultation we are also speaking directly to young people to make sure their voice is heard. We will be doing this in a variety of ways including a large-scale survey of young people and through focus groups.
We are defining recreation as “comprising all socially acceptable activities in which a person may choose to take part that will make his or her leisure time more interesting, more enjoyable and personally satisfying.”

Recreation can include reading, recreational sport, art, music in a group, hanging out, camping, surfing the web etc.

Recreation can be distinguished from organised sport because it does not necessarily involve competition, it is subject to the starting and stopping wishes of the individual and is less constrained by rules. However, many activities that would normally be thought of as sport if they are done informally and non-competitively can be viewed as recreation. The Irish Sports Council Act, 1999 supports this idea by defining recreational sport as “all forms of physical activity, which through casual or regular participation, aim at expressing or improving physical fitness and mental well-being and at forming social relationships.”

VISION
An Ireland where the importance of recreation is recognised so that young people experience a range of quality recreational opportunities to enrich their lives and promote their physical, mental and social well-being.

DO YOU AGREE WITH THIS DEFINITION OF RECREATION?
Question 1 on the response form asks for your views.

DO YOU AGREE WITH THE VISION FOR A RECREATION POLICY?
Question 2 on the response form asks for your views.
WHY IS RECREATION IMPORTANT?

When the National Children’s Strategy was being developed, children and young people were invited to take part in the consultation process. The lack of play and recreation facilities was the most pressing issue they raised.

During the teenage years young people develop their own identity and gradually negotiate independence from their parents.

Research suggests that what young people do in their free time is a very important part of growing up. How young people spend their free time affects their development; how they integrate into society and their future life.

Structured recreation involves activities that young people choose to do, and which include some element of being instructed and developing skills (e.g. recreational sport, dance, gymnastics, art, drama, music, guides, scouts). Structured recreation can be beneficial to young people’s development. It can increase self esteem, provide the benefits associated with being a member of a group and help to integrate young people into their communities. It also helps to reduce boredom which can lead to undesirable behaviour. Participating in activities that involve physical activity has important benefits in terms of overall fitness.

We also recognise that organised activities are just one part of what young people do in their free time. Young people also engage in more casual or unstructured leisure activities particularly as they grow older. They may replace organized activities with activities that they control themselves e.g. skateboarding, use of electronic media such as surfing the net etc. Friends are an important part of young people’s lives. A great deal of young people’s leisure time is about not doing - it involves “hanging out” or talking to and visiting friends. This may fulfil important developmental functions for young people including group membership and negotiating their own role within groups.

Evidence suggests that young people’s leisure patterns change over the years. Sports participation and other organised activities tend to decline after a peak at around 13/14 years of age. Hanging around with friends in the local neighbourhood and looking for places to meet is important up to about age 16. Young people in the older age group are more interested in attending entertainments such as discos and cinemas.

The recreation policy will deal with structured recreation that is publicly funded as well as with the more unstructured/casual activities that young people engage in.
BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION IN RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

There are benefits for the individual and for the wider community when young people are given the opportunity to participate in positive recreational activities. The benefits can include:

PERSONAL BENEFITS
- Enhancing confidence and self-esteem
- Relating to others
- Improving leadership skills
- Promoting greater tolerance and understanding
- Increasing adaptability and resilience
- Enhancing a sense of personal space
- Increasing learning about history, culture, nature etc.
- Nurturing a ‘can do’ attitude

SOCIAL BENEFITS
- Socialising young people into challenges they will face as adults
- Enhancing teamwork with peers, family and community
- Enhancing cross cultural understanding and appreciation
- Providing opportunity to make friends
- Increasing opportunities to talk and interact with others
- Providing the opportunity to learn that not all people are of equal ability. Developing tolerance for those who are not as strong or as quick

PHYSICAL BENEFITS
(particularly in relation to any sport or physical activity such as dance)
- Reducing levels of obesity in young people when combined with changes in diet
- Increasing general strength, fitness and flexibility
- Reducing risk of heart disease for at-risk youth
- Educating young people about their bodies, its limits and potential to improve
- Providing an enjoyable way to keep fit

COMMUNITY BENEFITS
- Developing and enhancing citizenship skills
- Facilitating integration in the community
- Promoting social interaction
- Increasing participation in community and voluntary activity including into adulthood
- Increasing levels of social cohesion and well-being
- Increasing levels of community development
The importance of recreation for young people is recognised in a number of important documents concerning children and young people under the age of 18. These include:

**The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)** which was ratified by Ireland in 1992. Article 31 of the Convention recognises “the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts”.

**The National Children’s Strategy (2000)** specifically referred to the issue of play and recreation. The lack of play and recreation facilities was identified by children themselves in the consultation process that preceded the National Children’s Strategy. Objective D of the Strategy states that:

“Children will have access to play, sport, recreation and cultural activities to enrich their experience of childhood.”

The commitment to a National Recreation Policy was included in the **Programme for Government** of June 2002, which contained a commitment that:

“We will develop a National Play and Recreation Policy which will aim to ensure that all children have access to at least a minimum standard of play and recreation facilities.”

The **National Play Policy** for children up to and including primary school age was published in March 2004.

The National Children’s Office is developing a recreation policy to promote positive recreational opportunities for young people. The policy will concentrate on statutory provision but we would hope that the private/commercial sector will also draw on the policy when planning and developing new initiatives and outlets.
I have a skate board and every
time I go out on my skate board
I always hear someone shouting
‘go skate somewhere else’ or
‘move it or I’m calling the Gardaí.’
I think everybody with a skate
board, rollerblades and a BMX
should have somewhere to skate
without getting into trouble.

What I strongly dislike is that there is very
little to entertain or occupy young people in
the same age group as myself. I am 16 years
old and in... there is very little to do in the
evenings for young people between 15 and
18. A recent survey has shown that there is
a high incidence of alcohol and drug abuse
in... According to many adults this is due to
peer pressure, however I do not agree.
In my opinion boredom is to blame.
THE CHALLENGE WE FACE

During the consultation process on the National Children’s Strategy, children and young people made a link between the lack of play and recreation facilities and a whole range of social and personal problems for teenagers.

Some of the aspects of the lifestyle of young people that give cause for concern are

- Under-age drinking. Ireland is ranked as the highest among 35 European Countries in terms of the number of teenagers who regularly binge drink and the second highest in reported regular drunkenness.\(^23\)

- The fall-off in physical activity with age. While 51% of young people up to age 11 exercise 4 times a week this drops to 35% for 15-17 year olds. The drop is most significant for teenage girls.\(^24\) The percentage of young people dissatisfied with their body weight also increases with age.\(^25\)

Participation in various forms of activity (such as sport, arts, music and hobbies) will not solve these problems but it can form part of the solution in tackling the risks and harm associated with sedentary lifestyles.\(^15\) Providing attractive alcohol-free places for young people to meet can also form part of the solution to under-age drinking, when combined with other policy measures.\(^26\)
WHAT ARE THE MAIN ISSUES?

BARRIERS AND MOTIVATORS

We know that there are a number of barriers and motivators that can either hinder or encourage participation in recreational activities.

BARRIERS

Examples of barriers to structured recreation identified internationally include gender, age and income. Girls do not participate in physical activity to the same extent as boys. The reasons for this are complex and may be due in part to cultural factors that discourage girls from developing their physical skills. Participation in organised activities dramatically decreases with age for both genders. Young people have also identified lack of money as a barrier to participation.

“The kids are walking around the streets and there’s nothing around for them. Then they ask why the kids get into trouble. It’s all money, money, money. If only there was something for the kids to do that didn’t cost loads of money.”

Barriers that may be significant in the Irish context include: lack of appropriate facilities; accessibility and opening times of facilities; a lack of staff to manage facilities; lack of free time; inappropriate programmes; teenage employment; availability/pressure of drug/alcohol use; and safety issues e.g. real or perceived threats from young people outside of their own group/territory.

Lack of access to transport would also appear to be a barrier (for both structured and non-structured recreation) particularly for young people in rural areas and for young people with disabilities.
MOTIVATORS

There are also a number of recognised "motivators" to encourage participation in recreation. Motivators can be extrinsic (external) or intrinsic (internal). Extrinsic motivators can include role models e.g. parents, other adults, friends, celebrities or PE classes. Intrinsic motivators are more concerned with personal satisfaction, a sense of enjoyment, positive self-esteem and self-image.8,28,29

The Recreation Policy will examine issues around barriers and motivators. As part of this process we are undertaking research with 2,000 young people on their views about opportunities, barriers and supports to recreation in Ireland.

The research as well as this consultation process should help us to identify barriers and motivators to recreation. We will then work with other stakeholders to see how we might encourage young people and give them greater access to recreation opportunities.

BASED ON YOUR EXPERIENCE WHAT ARE THE MAIN BARRIERS TO RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE?

WHAT ARE THE MAIN MOTIVATORS?

Questions 3 and 4 on the response form asks for your views.
WHO IS INVOLVED?

The Government (through its departments and agencies) as well as the voluntary and community sector is involved in providing recreation opportunities for young people.

IN THE STATE SECTOR

- The Department of Education and Science
- The Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism
- The Irish Sports Council
- The Arts Council
- The Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs
- The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government
- The Local Authorities
- The Department of Health and Children
- The Health Service Executive
- The Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform
- The Department of Transport

All have roles (directly or indirectly) with regard to recreation. This may be in the provision of facilities, programmes or transport; as well as responsibility for the physical environment in which young people engage in recreation.

The appendix sets out a summary of what each Government Department and agency does in the area of recreation.

SPORTS GOVERNING BODIES

Sports Governing Bodies such as the GAA, FAI and IRFU also provide recreational opportunities for young people throughout the country.

COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTARY SECTOR

Community and Voluntary bodies play a very important part in providing recreation opportunities for young people. They include the National Youth Council of Ireland and their member organisations - ranging from large umbrella organisations such as the National Youth Federation and Foroige, to Scouts and Guides, through to smaller specialist organisations such as No Name Clubs and An Óige.

Organisations such as Súgradh (which is the only national organisation dedicated to children’s play) have an important role with regard to raising awareness. The Churches are also actively involved in providing recreation opportunities for young people.
The Community Games operates through local communities and provides opportunities for children and young people to experience a range of sporting and cultural activities. Summer projects are also run by local communities.

There are a number of organisations providing opportunities for young people who are ill, who have a disability or who are disadvantaged. These would include Rehab, Vincent de Paul, Barnardos, Special Olympics Ireland, the Irish Wheelchair Association and the Barretstown Gang Camp amongst others.

While young people have identified gaps in facilities and programmes it is also the case that innovative programmes/projects have been put in place following consultation with young people. There has also been significant investment in facilities in recent years, particularly through the Sports Capital Programme and the Young People’s Facilities and Services Fund.

**Cabra Parkside Community & Sports Complex** was funded by the Young People’s Facilities and Services Fund and opened in April 2004. The complex contains an all-weather pitch, gym, indoor basketball hall, dance studio, multimedia room and office space. It now hosts a wide variety of recreational activities for young people, in particular youth at risk and also the wider community. The Youth Service for the area is based in a number of offices in the building.

**Ballymun Horse and Animal Centre**

The Department of Agriculture has allocated funding of €2.25 million for the development of the Ballymun Horse and Animal Centre. Ballymun Regeneration Ltd. is committed to ensuring that this centre is built and run to the highest standards with a management committee representing the various interest groups in the project.

There are already similar projects in Cherry Orchard and Fettercairn where young people have been equipped with skills in relation to managing and caring for horses alongside a broader education, training and life skills dimension. These projects also aim to improve employment prospects and the quality of life for the young people involved.
WHAT WE’RE AIMING FOR

GUIDING PRINCIPLES
We believe the following principles should guide the policy. They are similar to those underpinning the Play Policy which were drawn from the consultation process on the National Children’s Strategy (2001). They also reflect the values set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. This would mean that they would be:

- **Centred on Young People:** The best interest of young people should be a primary consideration in planning publicly funded recreational opportunities. Young people should be active participants in planning and implementing programmes and facilities having due regard to their age and experience.

- **Family and Community Oriented:** Publicly funded programmes and recreation facilities should be established in a manner which supports and empowers families and communities.

- **Equitable:** All young people should have equality of opportunity and access to publicly funded recreation. A key element should be to target investment at communities most in need.

- **Inclusive:** The diversity of young people’s experiences, cultures, lifestyles and levels of ability should be recognised in the design and implementation of recreation programmes and facilities.

- **Action Oriented:** Publicly funded recreation programmes and facilities should be focused on achieving specified results to agreed standards in a targeted and cost effective manner.

- **Integrated:** Recreation facilities and programmes should be delivered in a co-ordinated manner through integrated needs-analysis and policy planning.
OBJECTIVES OF THE POLICY

We are proposing a number of objectives for the policy which follow from the guiding principles and which reflect the key issues identified in the academic literature.

These objectives will be reviewed following this open consultation and our consultations with young people.

Our view is that the policy should aim to:

→ Give young people a voice in the design and implementation of recreation policies and facilities. (Objective 1)

→ Promote structured recreation for young people and examine ways to motivate them to be involved. (Objective 2)

→ Ensure that the recreation needs of young people are met through the development of youth friendly and safe facilities and environments. (Objective 3)

→ Maximise the range of recreational opportunities available for young people who are marginalised, disadvantaged or who have a disability. (Objective 4)

→ Promote relevant qualifications/standards in the provision of recreation activities. (Objective 5)

→ Develop a partnership approach in developing and funding recreational opportunities across the statutory, community and voluntary sectors. (Objective 6)

→ Improve information on, evaluation and monitoring of recreational provision for young people in Ireland. (Objective 7)

These objectives are expanded on in the following pages.
OBJECTIVE 1
GIVE YOUNG PEOPLE A VOICE IN THE DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION OF RECREATION POLICIES AND FACILITIES

The first goal of the National Children’s Strategy is to give children and young people a voice in matters that affect them and to ensure that their views are given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity. The NCO is actively encouraging Government Departments and Local Authorities to consider young people at the planning stage of policy proposals and new initiatives.

Initiatives designed without the input of young people can result in inappropriate programmes. There is a danger that when programmes do not suit young people they will drop out.

Giving young people a voice on recreation issues can also have a positive influence on their participation as active citizens. This is an important dimension to the provision and delivery of recreational activities internationally.

Many successful programmes go beyond consultation to active participation by young people. The Gaf youth café in Galway is one such example. The Gaf has a youth advisory board that helps to oversee the running of the centre.

WHAT WE PLAN TO DO

We want local authorities and other agencies to commit to the involvement of young people in planning publicly funded recreation programmes and facilities particularly at local level.

DO YOU AGREE WITH THIS OBJECTIVE?

See Question 5 in the response form.
OBJECTIVE 2
PROMOTE STRUCTURED RECREATION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE AND EXAMINE WAYS TO MOTIVATE THEM TO BE INVOLVED

Structured recreation is activities that young people choose to do, which include some element of being instructed and developing skills. This could include a range of activities, including recreational sport as well as games, arts, music, membership of youth groups and other hobbies. Evidence suggests that there are positive physical, psychological and social benefits to be derived from structured recreation provided that the programmes and the social environment in which they take place are appropriate.

LUAS ARTS FORUM (LAF)
The LAF project brought together young people from several local youth organisations to work on a piece of public sculpture with an artist. It was unusual in that young people were involved in the entire process, which included choosing to be involved at all, deciding where their work would be located, planning how the project would work and interviewing interested artists. The sculpture - which is the result of a collaborative process between the children and the artist - has now been completed and will be sited near the LUAS stop in Smithfield.

WHAT WE PLAN TO DO

→ We will address the barriers that prevent young people from participating in structured recreation.

→ We will look at ways of promoting the benefits of physical activity and encourage young people to continue to participate in physical activity (ranging from recreational sport to dance).

→ We will examine what is preventing/encouraging participation in physical activity particularly by teenage girls. We will identify models of good practice in conjunction with other agencies including the Irish Sports Council.
"ACTIVE 8"
"Active 8" is a peer mentoring programme for second year female students. The objective is to stimulate interest and increase participation in activity by the girls. The programme is overseen by schools over an eight week period. "Active 8" one day tutor training is provided by the Health Promotion Department of the relevant Health Board to interested teachers who work with Transition Year (TY) groups. Second year students are then mentored by their TY peers. Students keep a journal to record their activities and the Southern Health Board awards certificates to the students for their participation and training respectively.

→ We will examine how other activities can be encouraged including arts, music and drama as well as participation in clubs and activities arranged for the summer holidays.
→ We will look at getting the most use out of existing facilities, including schools.
→ We will also highlight the value of other initiatives and activities, including those run by cultural institutions in the State e.g. Museums and Galleries.

DO YOU AGREE WITH THIS OBJECTIVE?
See Question 6 in the response form.
OBJECTIVE 3
ENSURE THAT THE RECREATION NEEDS OF YOUNG PEOPLE ARE MET THROUGH THE DEVELOPMENT OF YOUTH FRIENDLY AND SAFE FACILITIES AND ENVIRONMENTS

While there is a strong focus on organised activities in the case of young teenagers; from the age of 14 on there is a move towards more casual recreation that young people control themselves (e.g. skateboarding/biking, use of the internet).

Hanging out with friends is an important part of growing up for most young people. However, “hanging out” is or can be perceived as threatening or anti-social by local communities. It is often due to a lack of alternatives and having “no place to go” that results in young people gathering in inappropriate places.

Young people have repeatedly identified the lack of attractive alcohol-free venues where they can go at night as a serious gap in the recreational opportunities available to them. This issue was raised by young people at the 2005 Dáil na nÓg and they suggested that more leisure centres, youth clubs and drop-in centres are needed.

Young people may also be just as concerned about their personal safety as adults and may perceive threats to themselves from adults and from other groups.

Youth-friendly and safe environments include dedicated spaces/facilities for young people but it also goes beyond this to providing a youth-friendly environment. Recreation does not just take place in those physical spaces allocated to it but also occurs in pathways around homes and schools, and around all buildings and spaces in the locality. A recent study has highlighted the importance of the physical environment in promoting physical activity.

WHAT WE PLAN TO DO

→ We will examine and seek to address the barriers to the development of youth-friendly and safe facilities and environments.

→ We will look at some of the more adventurous activities that young people are engaged in (e.g. skateboarding) and see how best to meet these requirements.

→ We will look at what is happening internationally to see if we can devise ways in which young people can be facilitated to get together safely in groups without impinging on the rights of other members of the community.
“YOUTH SHELTERS”
In the UK, Thames Valley Police have introduced “youth shelters” as a safe place for young people to get together. They have done this in consultation with young people.

Best practice has shown that these shelters are most successful when located with sports or other facilities. They are simple structures, essentially a sheltered place to sit and talk. When young people are asked about their requirements, they are often surprisingly modest – “just somewhere dry where they can meet their friends.”

We will look at the issue of youth drop-in centres as these are frequently mentioned as being important to young people. Some of the most successful examples of publicly-funded youth cafés, such as the Gaf in Galway, offer a wide variety of programmes and activities as well as acting as information points on issues for young people – alcohol, drugs, sexual health etc.

We will look at measures that will encourage alcohol-free discos and other venues where young people can meet at night.

YOUNG SOCIAL INNOVATORS
2004 Winners of the National Children’s Office Making a Difference for Young People Award – St. Dominic’s Secondary School in Ballyfermot.

Through the work of this project, a youth club was set up for young people in Ballyfermot. The club has run quiz and games nights, drama, cookery and hairdressing classes, and video nights. It gives young people in the area a place to go and an opportunity to stay on the “right track”.

The Second Report of the Strategic Task Force on Alcohol recommends increased investment in the development of alcohol free venues as part of community-wide initiatives. In particular, alcohol-free venues for music and entertainment such as the Gaf are needed for 12-15 and 16-17 year old age groups.

We will examine the implications for young people’s recreation in the design of the wider environment.

DO YOU AGREE WITH THIS OBJECTIVE?
See Question 7 in the response form.
OBJECTIVE 4
MAXIMISE THE RANGE OF RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES AVAILABLE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE MARGINALISED, DISADVANTAGED OR WHO HAVE A DISABILITY

The Recreation Policy is aimed at all young people. However, some young people have additional needs. These include:

→ Young people from low income families
→ Young people from the Traveller Community
→ Young people from ethnic minority groups
→ Young people who are at risk of drug misuse
→ Young people who are at risk of offending
→ Young people with disabilities
→ Young people who are ill
→ Young people living in rural areas

Young people with additional needs are often in need of more targeted, resource intensive interventions. It is also important to recognise that recreation initiatives are only one means of addressing the issues likely to arise for disadvantaged or at-risk children and young people.

WHAT WE PLAN TO DO

→ The Policy will identify the factors that make for successful interventions with high risk and disadvantaged young people. It will highlight a number of projects and look at how good practice might be shared and adopted throughout the country.

→ We will also deal with the recreation needs of young people who are ill or who have disabilities. Therapeutic recreation, which is increasingly used as a method of treatment for the physically and intellectually disabled as well as young people who are experiencing illness, will be examined in this context.

→ Young people with a disability often have particular difficulties in accessing recreational facilities. These may be difficulties in physically accessing facilities or in getting to/from facilities.

→ Public transport also appears to be an issue for young people, particularly those living in rural areas. The Policy will look at how access could be improved for these groups of young people and provide some examples of good practice.

The research we are undertaking with young people will include groups of young people with additional needs so as to enable us to identify barriers and motivators to their recreational opportunities. We would also welcome the views of young people with additional needs as part of this consultation process.
BARRETTOWN
Each year Barretstown in County Kildare caters for up to 1,600 children with serious illnesses and their families, from Ireland, Britain and throughout Europe. Barretstown Castle was donated by the Irish Government and the founder Paul Newman provided the initial funding for the project. The programmes are endorsed by the medical community as an important part of a child’s recovery. By taking part in fun challenging activities such as horse-riding and archery, crafts and drama, music and canoeing, children with serious illnesses are given a chance to rediscover their own inner strength, confidence and self-esteem.

DO YOU AGREE WITH THIS OBJECTIVE?
See Question 8 in the response form.
OBJECTIVE 5
PROMOTE RELEVANT QUALIFICATIONS/STANDARDS IN THE
PROVISION OF RECREATION ACTIVITIES

This objective will deal with standards in relation to the quality and safety of recreational facilities used by young people. It will also seek to address issues about the qualifications of people dealing with young people in recreational settings.

WHAT WE PLAN TO DO

→ Relevant legislation and codes of practice will be outlined in the Recreation Policy along with information about who has responsibility for them.

→ Where important gaps or a lack of progress are identified we will seek to advance them in conjunction with the relevant Government Departments and Agencies.

→ This objective will also deal with training and other requirements for staff/volunteers working with young people in recreation settings.

→ We will set out the role of new mechanisms such as the National Play Resource Centre, which is to be established under the Play Policy (and which will also be a resource for recreation) in providing information, support and advice on a range of issues, including child protection and safety issues.

→ People need new skills to work in new ways to deliver services and supports to young people. The Recreation Policy will try to share examples of good practice in the field and look at “what works”.

“We need new types of professionals who can work with teenagers to provide activities and support over a period of time. They need to be people who have more than one ‘tool’ in the bag.”

DO YOU AGREE WITH THIS OBJECTIVE?

See Question 9 in the response form.
OBJECTIVE 6
DEVELOP A PARTNERSHIP APPROACH IN DEVELOPING AND FUNDING RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES ACROSS THE STATUTORY, COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTARY SECTORS

The National Children’s Strategy outlines the case for child-focused, needs-driven supports and services. It also highlights the importance of finding better ways to link services.

At National level there is no single Government Department responsible for the provision of recreation programmes and facilities for young people. Responsibility rests with a number of Government Departments and statutory bodies.

At local level, the Local Government Act, 2001 provides broad discretionary powers for a local authority to take action to promote the interests of the local community including the support of amenity, sport and recreation facilities. There are also a range of other structures at local level including County and City Development Boards, the Health Service Executive, VECs, Local Sports Partnerships, Local Drugs Task Forces and YPFSF* Local Development Groups that have a role in providing recreation programmes for young people.

*(Young Peoples Facilities and Services Fund).

The recreation needs of young people could not be met without the enormous contribution made by the voluntary and community sector.

One of the issues that we need to address is whether we are making the best use of the resources we have so that they meet the requirements of young people. This may be with regard to buildings and facilities; human resources and financial resources. Because of the large number of organisations involved the challenge is to find ways of engaging them to maximise recreation opportunities for young people.

FUNDING
Ireland would appear to be unusual in the extent to which facilities are funded by central government but managed locally. Different elements of the same project may also be funded from a number of government sources.

In some cases where funding has been provided for capital expenditure it has been difficult to secure funding on an ongoing basis for maintenance, inspection and staff costs. However, specific provision for current and administration costs has been made by some funds such as the Young People’s Facilities and Services Fund which provides funding for managers, youth workers and running costs in Youth Centres developed under the YPFSF.
WHAT WE PLAN TO DO

→ The policy will explore partnership approaches using existing structures. The emphasis will be on maximising inter-agency cooperation/coordination, avoiding duplication and ensuring shared quality standards.

→ As part of the partnership approach we will take account of the very important contribution that volunteers make to the recreation and leisure pursuits of young people. This includes parents and families as well as the wider community.

→ Developing partnerships with young people will also be addressed. A recurrent theme in the international case studies which we have examined is the importance of training young people themselves to become volunteers so that they can contribute to/lead recreational projects in their own right.

→ We will also examine issues concerning the funding of public recreational facilities and programmes to ensure that provision matches need as well as the scope for private investment in the expansion of recreational opportunities for young people.

DO YOU AGREE WITH THIS OBJECTIVE?

See Question 10 in the response form.
OBJECTIVE 7
IMPROVE INFORMATION ON, EVALUATION AND MONITORING OF RECREATIONAL PROVISION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN IRELAND

Research and information is necessary to help Government Departments and other service providers develop and provide appropriate recreation facilities/programmes for young people.

It would also appear that while there is lot happening on the ground there is a lack of information available both to service users and service providers on existing recreation facilities and programmes.

This objective will also outline how we will monitor and evaluate the implementation of the policy.

WHAT WE PLAN TO DO

→ The research that is being undertaken by the NCO with 2,000 young people as part of the development of this policy will contribute to this objective by providing information on the barriers and motivators to young people’s participation in recreation.

→ We will work with other Government Departments and agencies to establish what is available at present e.g. one of the objectives of the Sports Facilities Strategy, to be undertaken by the Department of Arts, Sports and Tourism, will be to assess current levels of facilities through an audit to help to determine priorities for future requirements.

→ We will set out the role of the National Play Resource Centre with regard to ensuring the dissemination of information, research and good practice in the area of recreation.

→ We will examine how best to provide information for young people on recreation opportunities. We will look at the contribution new technology can make in this regard.

DO YOU AGREE WITH THIS OBJECTIVE?

See Question 11 in the response form.
WHAT’S NEXT...

We want the recreation policy to provide strategic direction to enable Government Departments, Local Authorities, County and City Development Boards, the Youth Sector, the Community and Voluntary Sector and any other interested parties to develop recreational facilities and opportunities in an informed and appropriate manner.

This consultation document has outlined some of the work we have undertaken to begin to develop a recreation policy. However we recognise that this is a complex area and that there may be things that others consider to be very important that are not reflected in this document.

We would like you to tell us if you think we are missing any important issues. We would also like you to tell us what you consider is the biggest need in your area in relation to recreational opportunities for young people in the 12-18 age group. If you know of projects/programmes in your area that you think work particularly well we would also like to hear about them. Questions 12 to 16 in the response form ask for your views on these and other issues.

A steering group is being established by the NCO. This group will finalise the Recreation Policy taking into account the views expressed during the consultation process. Part of the work of the group will be to consider what specific actions Government Departments and Agencies could take to develop, expand and improve recreational opportunities for young people.
REFERENCES


22 Department of Health and Children (2000) ibid. Pg. 23

23 ESPAD (European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs) (2003)


**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**


ROLE OF GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS AND AGENCIES

The following is a brief summary of the role of the main Government Departments and Agencies involved in providing leisure and recreation programmes/facilities.

The Department of Education and Science is responsible for the curriculum including physical education in schools as well as PE/sports facilities in schools. Physical education is not, however, compulsory at second level. The Transition Year programme offers the opportunities for the development of independent leisure skills among participating students through a variety of innovative programmes and projects. Schools also work in co-operation with the Health Boards in supporting the physical health component of the SPHE Programme. Opportunities are also provided through extra-curricular programmes for sport and recreation (e.g. chess and drama). The Department is collaborating with local authorities to explore the possibility of providing shared school and community facilities on new school campuses.

The Department is also responsible for the provision of a policy framework and financial support for the development of youth work services. These deal with the personal and social development of young people outside of, but complementary to, formal education. The services, in the main, are delivered by national and regional voluntary youth services such as Foróige, the National Youth Federation, Ógras Chorcai and Catholic Youth Care and, in relation to one service in particular, the Special Projects for Disadvantaged Youth Scheme, by such organisations in close co-operation with the VECs.

The Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism (through the Sports Capital programme) provides National Lottery funding towards the development of local, regional and national facilities. €297m has been allocated in the past 5 years* in respect of over 3,500 projects. The main recipients of funds are club-owned facilities, community groups, national governing bodies of sport, third level institutions and more recently, Local Authorities. The Department also operates a Local Authority Swimming Pool Programme.

The funding provided over the past 5 years has assisted sports clubs and community organisations to provide a network of high quality indoor and outdoor facilities for a wide range of sports and leisure activities.

* (2000-2004 inclusive)
→ **The Irish Sports Council**'s role is to ‘plan, lead and co-ordinate the sustainable development of competitive and recreational sport in Ireland’. The Council works in partnership with other agencies including the Department of Education and Science. It is also working on the development of local sports programmes through Local Sports Partnerships (which include Local Authorities, Vocational Education Committees, sports clubs, health boards and educational institutions). While the partnerships are aiming to increase participation in sport they are also looking at more inclusive and less competitive forms of sport. The Council also plans to carry out a detailed investigation into youth sport including the barriers/opportunities for children’s introduction to sport.

→ **The Arts Council** works with youth services to provide opportunities for self-expression amongst young people. The Council works closely with the Department of Education and the National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI). There is a National Youth Arts Programme housed in the NYCI which deals primarily with arts programmes in the Youth Services Sector. There are also Arts Officers based in the local authorities (see below).

→ **The Department of Community, Rural & Gaeltacht Affairs** has responsibility for a number of schemes that facilitate the provision of youth services at local level. These schemes provide funding for youth services and facilities and are typically targeted at children at risk of social exclusion and/or drug misuse.

The objective of the Young Peoples Facilities and Services Fund (YPFSF) is to assist in the development of youth facilities, including sport and recreational facilities, and services in areas where a significant drug problem exists or has the potential to develop and to attract “at-risk” young people into these facilities and activities and divert them away from the dangers of substance abuse.

Funding is also provided for Sports Development Officers in each of the Task Force Areas. The main focus of the work of the Sports Development Officers is in developing sport and recreational programmes to attract “at-risk” youth.

The main focus of the Fund to date has been in Local Drugs Task Force areas.

In relation to Local Development, the Community Based Youth Initiatives of the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme (LDSIP) are aimed at enhancing the social and personal development of young people who have left school early or who are at risk of leaving school early. Many of the actions seek to increase the range of community based education and youth development opportunities available from early years through to adulthood, particularly in areas of disadvantage.

The Peace II Programme aims to build on the successful interventions commenced under Peace I and further target those groups of children and young people who are at greatest risk of social exclusion and marginalisation both in schools and the youth sector.

→ **The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government** has responsibilities through the Local Authorities for play and recreation programmes facilities.

The Department also provides certain grants to local authorities to assist with the provision of footpaths, cycleways and traffic calming measures on public roads.
The Local Authorities provide, operate and maintain parks and open spaces for amenity and recreation purposes. These include football pitches, tennis courts and playgrounds in both parks and in housing complexes. They administer swimming pools provided under the Local Authority Swimming Pool Programme. Local authorities are the monitoring agency for the Young People’s Facilities and Services Fund which contributes to the construction, development and management of sports/youth/community centres. A number of Local Authorities have acquired land in scenic and rural areas which accommodate a range of active recreational facilities. Local Authorities provide other opportunities for recreation and leisure through, for example, the Public Library Service.

There are Play Development Officers and Sports Development Officers in a number of local authorities. There are also Arts Officers based in 33 local authorities administering a variety of programmes, some of which are targeted at young people.

Local Authorities also support summer projects and summer activities for children and young people many of which are organized by local volunteers.

Most City and County Development Boards, which have a key role in implementing the National Children’s Strategy have incorporated play and recreation in their Strategies for Economic, Social and Cultural Development.

The Department of Health and Children has responsibility at policy level for promoting the health and well being of the population including young people as outlined in the National Health Strategy and the National Health Promotion Strategy 2000-2005. The Health Service Executive has responsibility for the implementation and co-ordination of health promotion policy in a range of settings and across population groups. Physical Activity Co-ordinators promote physical activity among young people including a number of specific programmes targeting teenage girls. Funding is also provided for a number of alcohol-free venues for young people e.g. the Gaf in Galway; Elmo’s Attic in Sligo.

The Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform funds projects under the Probation and Welfare system as well as the Garda Diversion Scheme which aim to divert young people from taking part in criminal activities. Garda Youth Diversion Projects are community-based, multi-agency crime prevention initiatives which provide activities to facilitate personal development, promote civic responsibility and improve prospects of employment. It is estimated that the 64 Garda Youth Diversion Projects cater for approximately 2,500 participants per annum. The Department also has responsibilities in relation to policy on issues such as Garda Vetting and Disability.

The Department of Transport is responsible for the Rural Transport Initiative which, among other things is exploring the transport needs of young people in rural areas. The Department is involved with a number of initiatives to promote public transport which can help to create a healthier and safer environment for young people. Among these is a Traffic Management Guidelines Manual which provides guidance for Local Authorities, developers, Government Departments and an Garda Síochána on a variety of issues including traffic planning, traffic calming and management, the incorporation of speed restraint measures in new residential designs and the provision of suitably designed facilities for public transport users and vulnerable road users.