



Risk-Benefit Assessment Form

Introduction

The Play Safety Forum, formed in 1993, exists to consider and promote the wellbeing of children and young people through ensuring a balance between safety, risk and challenge in respect of play and leisure provision.

Managing Risk in Play Provision: Implementation Guide shows how play providers can develop an approach to risk management that takes into account the benefits to children and young people of challenging play experiences, as well as the risks. It starts from the position that, while outside expertise and advice are valuable, the ultimate responsibility for making decisions rests with the provider.

This *Risk-Benefit Assessment Form* was co-authored by David Ball, Tim Gill and Bernard Spiegel on behalf of the Play Safety Forum. Sponsorship was provided by, and the copyright belongs to: Play Scotland, Play England, Play Wales and PlayBoard Northern Ireland.

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Risk-Benefit Assessment Form

Purpose and scope of form

This form is designed to support a balanced approach to risk management using the process of risk-benefit assessment (RBA). It is aimed at those involved in providing play opportunities in a range of contexts, including play areas, public parks, green spaces, out-of-school childcare settings, playwork settings, schools and early years services. It builds on the guidance document *Managing Risk in Play Provision: Implementation guide* (2nd edition), published in 2013 by the Play Safety Forum with Play England, Play Wales, Play Scotland and PlayBoard Northern Ireland. See this publication for a fuller discussion of the principles and approach set out here.

Those using this form should focus on the significant risks that the play provision gives rise to. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) defines significant risks as those that go beyond everyday life and that “are capable of creating a real risk to health and safety which any reasonable person would appreciate and would take steps to guard against.”

Why risk-benefit assessment?

Risk management in play contexts is different from workplace or factory contexts in one crucial respect. In play provision, a degree of risk is often beneficial, if not essential. Children and young people enjoy challenging, adventurous play opportunities where they can test themselves and extend their abilities. Giving children the chance to encounter hazards and take risks provides other benefits, such as the chance to learn how to assess and manage these and similar risks for themselves. Hence accidents and injuries are not necessarily a sign of problems, because of the value of such experiences in children’s learning. Unlike conventional risk assessment, RBA takes account of benefits by bringing together consideration of risks and benefits when deciding on appropriate responses.

Judgements about the balance between risks and benefits can be complicated. They involve many factors, and are often partly subjective. For example, children may be unpredictable in their play, and have widely varying interests and competences; different providers may have different aims, goals

and values, which may be expressed in widely varying approaches; and the context of a site, and the level and style of supervision, are important local factors. Guidance such as play equipment standards help to set reference points, but do not provide an absolute answer, nor do they take into account local circumstances.

Some play environments and structures are complex, and go beyond everyday experience. Judgements about structural stability, water hygiene, head traps or structures built into trees, for instance, may require some technical knowledge and specialist expertise. However, other cases will not involve such expertise: decisions can be based on everyday experience, skills and knowledge. Different situations will require different types and levels of expertise, and this form is designed to reflect this.



Risk-Benefit Assessment in Practice

Incorporating RBA into your risk management system is a significant step. It may involve changes in principles, procedures and practice at many levels, including thinking and understanding about children and their play and development, overall values and direction, service management, staff and site supervision, and ongoing maintenance and inspection procedures. Some kind of organisational review or training may be helpful in ensuring that considerations of the benefits of risk in children's play are properly understood and implemented. When first introducing the form, some piloting and group/team discussion is likely to be useful.

Structure of form

Before the form, there is a table for recording the details of the risk-benefit assessment. The form is split into two parts, to reflect the different levels of expertise that may be involved. The main form sets out the factors to be addressed in any overall RBA. The supplementary form asks about the knowledge and/or specialist expertise that may – or may not - be needed when carrying out a particular RBA. A glossary at the end gives brief definitions of some of the key terms. This form is available in two formats: Word 2007 (with a blank form) and pdf (with a worked example) at

www.playengland.org.uk

www.playscotland.org

www.playwales.org.uk

www.playboard.org

This form is not set in stone: users may find it useful to make amendments or adaptations.

Overview of Risk-Benefit Assessment: Markethill PS

Project/ proposal name:	Markethill Primary School Positive Playground Initiative for Outdoor Play and Learning Environment / Resources		
Type of assessment (tick one box):	<i>Designer</i>		
	<i>Provider/manager</i>	YES	
	<i>Post-installation</i>		
	<i>Monitoring</i>		
Assessor:	<i>Name</i>	Markethill PS	
	<i>Position</i>	Principal and staff	
	<i>Date</i>	May 2022	
Description and location of facility, feature, activity or equipment:			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School playgrounds: tarmac spaces and no fixed equipment. • Grass areas x2: one with no bushes/trees and one (conservation area) with bushes, plants and trees. • MUGA: synthetic surface. • Play Park: fixed equipment e.g. swings, slides. <p>The outdoor spaces have been zoned to offer a variety of play types and include play zones within the areas for play and storage.</p> <p>The zones and resources provided are:</p> <p>Loose Parts (Green area beside MUGA)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wood • Crates • Wooden planks • Tyres – different sizes 			

Small World Zone (Play Area)

- Fake grass
- Trucks
- Cars
- Trains
- Animals
- Guttering

Energy Zone 1 (MUGA)

- Footballs
- Soft balls
- Goal posts

Energy Zone 2 (MUGA)

- Skipping ropes
- Balls
- Hula hoops
- Pull trolleys
- Ankle skip
- Balance boards
- Giant pop-up target
- Practice tennis ball
- Bounce sport disc
- Floor basketball
- Katcha cups
- Animal stilts

Stage: Dress-Up (Play Area)

- hats,
- scarfs,
- shoes,
- bags,
- shirts,
- dresses,
- jackets,
- costume jewellery,
- fabrics
- pots, pans
- sticks

Sand Zone (Play Area)

- enclosed sand pit (sand house)
- sand play resources
- brush
- seating area

Seating Zone: Playground Area and Play Park

- Seats
- Benches
- Tables

House Zone (Play Area)

- Small hut
- Furniture
- Utensils
- Empty cartons / boxes
- Imaginary props

Creative Zone (Bottom Playground)

- Chalkboards
- Chalk
- Crayons
- Pencils
- Wallpaper

Numeracy Zone (Red Area) Carpet tiles

- Connect 4
- Number / Shape tarter
- Bow and arrow target

Mud Kitchen (Play Area) PENDING

- Pots
- Pans
- Utensils
- Plastic bowls, baking trays and containers
- Water
- Soil

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Free Play Zone (Back Playground)

Chill Out Zone (Conservation Area) PENDING

- Carpet tiles
- Chair
- Bookcase
- Books
- Comics
- Teepee

Cycle Track (Upper Playground) PENDING

- Cones
- Own bicycles and safety gear (helmets etc)

Date to review risk-benefit assessment:

Daily by staff supervising play times

Signature of senior worker/manager:

Main Form: Risk-benefit assessment

<p>Benefits:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pleasure and fun. • Can meet children’s individual play needs. • Children learn to regulate their exploratory play for themselves. • Can be used for large or small construction that encourages physical development of fine and gross motor skills. • Will encourage development in a range of skills; predict, collaborate, problem solve, organize and creative. • Development of self-confidence, self-esteem and well-being. • Development of language, social, negotiation and conflict resolution skills. • Potential for imaginary play where children can explore their own and others feelings and emotions through role play. • Potential physical activity promoting health and well-being – healthier life style. • Children can challenge their abilities and limitations independently. • Engagement of regular contact with nature in promoting environmental awareness. • Extends learning from curricular areas such as WAU, maths, literacy – drama/speaking and listening.
<p>Risks (<i>taking into account any technical information identified in the supplementary form below</i>):</p>	<p>Children’s management and use of equipment and resources.</p> <p>Arguments and disputes.</p> <p>There are some risks that could occur where children have access to wide range of equipment to choose from. Disputes and arguments over resources and or rules for games and activities. The children at MPS are encouraged to manage conflict and mediate their own rules independently and supervisory staff are present</p>

for more serious issues.

Getting hit with equipment.

There is the potential risk of children getting hit with flying objects. It is our school policy that children are involved in discussion about responsibility for equipment and boundaries for their use.

Broken or damaged equipment.

With the high number of children using the equipment it is inevitable that equipment will get damaged and broken due to wear and tear. All staff are aware that part of the schools monitoring process is to remove broken or damaged equipment; this has become part of the daily practice.

Other falls or collisions.

Possibility of head injury, cuts, bruises, sprains or limb breakage. Due to the high number of children outside during playtimes it is possible that they could fall or collide into one another. The play areas are checked for sharps and protrusions. The football is a supervised activity and therefore the risk is not considered too high for serious injury.

Rope burns / strangulation / hanging.

Possible rope burns could occur when children are playing with ropes. There is little risk of hanging as there is nothing low enough to suspend the rope and supervisors present would intervene appropriately when children put ropes around neck area; a topic that is included in the conversations with children around use of equipment and resources.

Other risks.

The conservation play area – possible risk of tripping / running into low branches. Getting hurt while handling tools and resources.

	<p>The natural environment shows no sign of highly dangerous protrusions and will be checked for sharps daily prior to playtimes. The grass while it may become slippery in wet weather is off soft landing. Therefore, the natural environment is considered an invaluable resource for play.</p>
Local factors:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school is located in a densely populated area where open natural spaces have not been preserved. • Local parks in the area may not be accessible to all children especially young children.
Precedents &/or comparisons:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Across the globe many primary schools are providing similar resources and equipment for break and lunchtimes with no evidence to support that they increase the risk of serious injury. • Children are engaged at a higher level when they have a variety of resources such as loose parts; they can be used for so many different types of play.
Decision:	<p>The outdoor play equipment and resources offer an acceptable level of risk. The staff have devised an outdoor play policy which will act as a set of guidelines for all staff to work from. Planned play provision for break and lunch times will go ahead with ongoing management and monitoring arrangements in place (see below). The school embraces the importance of valuable play experiences for our children and understands that children need to have experience of managing risk independently. We are confident that there are no obvious hazards that may cause serious injury.</p>
Concerns:	<p>Initial concern of children's use of the resources and space available for children with freedom to move around playgrounds, MUGA, Play Park, Play Area. The more</p>

	relaxed approach to enable free play caused some worry among staff.
Actions taken:	Resources and equipment were introduced over a period of time to let children get used to the changes. Consultations were held with the children for their input into implementing change.
Ongoing management and monitoring:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children should be introduced to resources prior to play session where a conversation about use of materials and boundaries for their use takes place. • Staff need to be aware if any of the children ‘mouth’ equipment and remove small parts/beads accordingly • As clearly stated in the outdoor play policy – staff will carry out daily risk assessments (dynamic) throughout their supervisory duties. • Ongoing monitoring of resources – if broken, remove. • Children may be encouraged to take responsibility for taking out and putting away resources/equipment. • Staff to communicate successes as well as concerns as part of their monitoring and evaluation process.

Refer to the Glossary at the end of the document for an explanation

Supplementary Form: Knowledge and/or specialist expertise needed (if any) for this risk-benefit assessment

Use this table to give information about any additional specialist or technical expertise that is felt to be necessary. In some circumstances, no such input will be needed. If this is the case, a suitable note such as 'none applicable' or 'N/A' should be made in the table (which should otherwise be left blank). In other circumstances, such as those involving bespoke structures or unusual sites, specialist input may be appropriate. Such expertise might, for example, cover the following topics: trees, structural engineering, rope specialisms, water, soil, EN standards and maintenance. In rare cases, other areas of expertise may also be needed. Ensure that relevant information is noted above in the main form.

Knowledge or specialism	Person providing the knowledge/ carrying out the assessment	Any checks carried out and actions proposed

Glossary

Actions taken: This should state the actions taken as a result of the decision reached. The choices could include:

- None
- Introduce or increase monitoring of benefits and/or risks
- Introduce or increase supervision
- Book technical inspection
- Contact manufacturer to make modifications
- Introduce other measures to reduce risks
- Introduce additional features or activities that increase the level of risk and challenge or other benefits
- Meet with parents/users to raise awareness of approach to risk and benefit
- Remove facility/structure, or suspend activity

Benefits: the specific, positive things that children and young people gain through the play opportunities that are under assessment (social, physical, emotional, educational, psychological, etc.).

Decision: this is the assessor's conclusion following a risk-benefit assessment. The choices could include:

- Proceed/continue with no adjustments to the play environment or working practices and continue to monitor
- Proceed/continue with some specific adjustments to the play environment or working practices while continuing to monitor
- Cease use of the play environment until work can be carried out/further assessments can be made

Local factors: any relevant issues that are specific to the setting being assessed (for example, proximity to housing, characteristics of local residents and typical users, nature of supervision, access to the site, size of the site, proximity to busy roads or other hazards, etc.). Any relevant supporting policies and strategies should also be mentioned here.

Ongoing monitoring and management: State here any future actions that may need to be taken. These could include:

- Maintenance schedules
- Inspection regimes

- Reviews of accident records, injuries or other outcomes
- User feedback exercises

Precedents and/or comparisons: similar equipment, environments, loose parts or potential situations where play is taking place either locally or elsewhere. This section is particularly helpful in relation to unusual, innovative, unconventional or novel initiatives, to help to justify departures from standard approaches. It may be left blank in the case of straightforward projects.

Risk-benefit assessment (RBA): a tool to aid risk management that explicitly brings together considerations of risks and benefits in a single judgement.

Risks: in general use, the word 'risk' refers to the probability, likelihood or chance of an adverse outcome. In risk management contexts, the word tends to include a measure of the seriousness of the outcome, as well as its probability. HSE defines risk as the chance that "somebody could be harmed by [a hazard] together with an indication of how serious the harm could be."

Other language used when assessing risks and benefits for play

Hazards: hazards are potential sources of harm. The HSE defines a hazard as "anything that may cause harm, such as chemicals, electricity, working from ladders, an open drawer, etc." There is no action and no object that may not be hazardous in certain circumstances. It is impractical to treat all potential hazards with the same degree of seriousness. In managing risk, judgements need to be made about:

- Which risks and hazards need to be modified or removed
- Which risks and hazards might be acceptable or desirable, because of their benefits to children and young people
- What, if anything, is to be done about risks and hazards that have been identified.

Safe: 'safe' or 'safety' is perhaps the most commonly encountered term in debates about children and risk, such as: "Is this playground/park/tree/public square safe?" There is no simple answer to questions like this, because the word 'safe' means different things to different people (see *Managing Risk in Play Provision: Implementation* guide, p. 31).