



# On outdoor electronic play equipment

Mike Hall, Principal Parks, Playgrounds and Playing Fields Officer for Denbighshire County Council, shares his experience of the electronic playground equipment installed at one of the county's play areas last year.

**In the Twenty First Century we are all looking at ways to encourage children and young people to be more active and lead a more healthy lifestyle, to do this we need to encompass (in the right location/environment) modern technology which children and young people can be in tune with.**

What the equipment does is encourage users to move between various stations causing them to stretch, bend and twist all parts of their bodies. It does this through a voice command – the user is instructed to move around 'inside' the framework and each correct action scores points. User(s) aim to beat their last score – shown on a digital display box. The games allow for single or multiple user games with all aspects being recorded electronically and it is powered by a solar panel. Scores can be uploaded to the internet by the user, who can see how their performance compares with others.

I believe there is a future for modern technology in play. The use of the new interactive play unit in one of our parks is showing that young people are of the same opinion. In fact, when the new unit is out of action we get complaints and queries asking when it will be back in service – unlike when one of the traditional play equipment items is disabled.

The users of the new unit range in age and numbers. You could say that traditional equipment also does this, but what is different here is that the new equipment can:

- tell us the numbers of users
- the games they play

- the time spent on the equipment
- tell us the scores of the games played

Just as with any other static play item or piece of equipment, the unit also:

- allows the user to choose the game they want to play
- encourages social interaction
- helps develop physical skills
- positively encourages activity
- educates, trains thought and mental processes

Before dismissing these items and their use of modern technology, play providers and traditionalists must look at traditional equipment and ask how much of this does all of these things?

The only drawback of this equipment is that it does not fit in to the traditional concepts, and with a push towards the provision of natural play and making use of more localised open space, it is in my opinion only appropriate if located in more central and larger play sites.

Since we installed the unit we know that the item has been in use daily over the last year and was in regular use over the Christmas and New Year break. We also know that several different games have been played on it and users have tried cheating to increase their scores. The unit complies with the Disability Discrimination

Act in that it is accessible and there are specific games for those who may be wheelchair bound.

The children and young people I have talked to have thoroughly enjoyed their experience of the system and many of these keep returning to it and actively participating in using it rather than sitting around watching others.

All in all I have been very pleased with the uptake of this new play innovation and would very much like to see similar units located within my main play areas across Denbighshire.



Photo: Playdale