

What is the Young Life and Times (YLT) survey?

The Young Life and Times (YLT) survey is a constituent part of ARK, a resource providing access to social and political information on Northern Ireland (www.ark.ac.uk). All too often the opinions of young people are ignored when decisions are made about many of the issues involving them. Thus, the aim of the Young Life and Times survey is to record the views of 16-year olds in Northern Ireland on a range of issues such as community relations, health, politics, sectarianism and education. By inviting respondents to suggest issues for the next year's survey, we make sure that the topics covered are relevant to the lives of 16-year olds in Northern Ireland today.

Links with other surveys

The Northern Ireland Life and Times (NILT) survey, an annual survey that began in 1998, records the attitudes and values of adults aged 18 years and over in Northern Ireland. The range of topics included in NILT varies each year, although many modules are repeated over time to monitor changing attitudes and trends on specific social policy issues. In particular, questions on community relations and political attitudes are included each year in order to track how/if attitudes change within the rapidly shifting social and political environment of Northern Ireland. Full details can be found on the NILT website at www.ark.ac.uk/nilt.

From 1998 to 2000, a Young Life and Times (YLT) survey ran alongside NILT. All 12-17 year olds living in the household of an adult NILT respondent were asked to partake in YLT. This was a paper questionnaire with questions mostly being a subset of those asked in the adult questionnaire. One of the main aims of this approach was to enable the analysis of the attitudes of young people and compare them with the attitudes of their parents. However, in 2001 the survey team undertook a review of YLT as the level of use of the young person's survey was much less than that of the adult survey.

Consultation with a variety of users from the academic and voluntary sectors found that:

- There was an extremely high level of interest in a young person's survey.
- There was little interest in linking the attitudes of children to those of their parents.
- There were concerns that questions suitable for 17 year olds were not always suitable for 12 year olds (and vice-versa) and that this was restrictive.
- There was strong policy interest in the views of young people in the areas of community relations, political attitudes, education and employment.
- There was a concern that young people were not interviewed by young people and that the optimal survey design required this.
- There was a concern that the survey did not involve young people in the design of the questions.
- Interviewing young people in their own homes – often in front of their parents – was problematic.
- However, interviewing young people in schools, often with peer effects, was equally problematic, and had the additional coverage problems of children excluded from schools and low numbers of 16 and 17 year olds.

Based on the findings of the consultation exercise, the current methodology was designed to address as many of these issues as possible and the first YLT survey using this methodology was undertaken in 2003.

More recently, the YLT survey has had more links with the Kids Life and Times (KLT) survey which is an annual school-based online survey conducted by ARK among P7 age children, namely children in their final year in primary school in Northern Ireland. The first KLT survey was undertaken in 2008. KLT and YLT have regularly asked similar or identical questions on certain subject areas, and this was also the case in 2020/21, namely in relation to questions of Shared Education, Community Relations, Equality and Diversity Education (CRED), children's and young people's rights and their experiences of the Coronavirus pandemic. More information on the KLT survey can be found at www.ark.ac.uk/klt.

The YLT survey has been conducted annually since its inception. However, exceptional circumstances in 2020 and 2021 meant that the survey field originally planned for the last quarter of 2020 had to be postponed to May 2021.

Technical details of 2021 survey

Sample

The survey sample was taken from the Child Benefit Register. Since 2004, a statutory instrument and explanatory memorandum (Tax Credits (Provision of Information) (Evaluation and Statistical Studies) (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2004) has been in place which allows ARK to access the Child Benefit Register for the YLT survey. The 2020/21 YLT survey was also approved by the Ethics Committee of the School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work at Queen's University Belfast.

Child Benefit is a benefit for people bringing up children and is paid for each child. Therefore, the Child Benefit Register contains information on all children for whom Child Benefit is claimed. Until March 2013 this was a universal benefit, but in April 2013 legislation came into place which introduced means testing with regard to Child Benefit payments. Higher earners are now no longer entitled to receive Child Benefit. This meant a potential significant change to the YLT sampling strategy. The use of alternative universal or random sample frames for YLT (such as the GP register) have been considered. However, unlike in other parts of the UK, there is currently still no legislation in place in Northern Ireland that would permit the use of such sample frames. Consultations with HMRC, who administer Child Benefit payments across the UK, also revealed that the names and addresses of those 16-year olds affected by the Child Benefit Payment changes and those whose parents opted out of receiving Child Benefit are still held at HMRC, for example, in order to issue National Insurance Cards. Thus, the Child Benefit Register remains the only suitable sample frame of 16-year olds for the YLT survey.

As in previous years, the sample for the 2020/21 survey was provided to ARK directly by HMRC. The sample for the 2020/21 survey included the names and addresses of 5,000 randomly selected young people in Northern Ireland who celebrated their 16th birthday in April, May or June.

In March 2021 a Service Level Agreement (SLA) and Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between ARK and HMRC about the sample provision. Within this agreement ARK laid out the arrangements for the safety and security of the personal data of respondents and included arrangements for a safe transport and storage of the files as well as destruction of the address file after completion of the data collection. Within HMRC, staff turn-over and priority commitments in relations geo-political changes (ie Brexit) alongside the challenges in relation to the COVID19 pandemic resulted in a delayed delivery of the sample of names and addresses of eligible YLT respondents to ARK. The sample was not received until the final week of April 2021.

Until 2018 YLT had been primarily a postal survey, but in 2019 the viability of conducting the survey online with an incentive (£10 shopping voucher) was tested; the cost of the latter was covered through reductions in the postage and processing costs associated with a mail survey. As this approach proved successful, the decision was taken that the YLT survey would move, primarily, to online completion, although participants would have the option to request paper or phone completion. As such, in conjunction with the Centre for Data Digitisation and Analysis (CDDA) at QUB, a customised online survey tool which complies with university and HMRC confidentiality and data security regulations was designed and utilised for the 2020/21 survey.

Data Collection

All administration of the mailout for the survey was undertaken by an independent mailing company. Fieldwork was conducted in May 2021. In the first week of May each potential participant received a letter providing information about the survey, including the aims of the project; details on how to opt-out; GDPR clarification and contact details for the survey team, and the web link for the survey. The letter provided participants with a unique identifier code which was required for accessing the survey. The financial incentive was also detailed, namely that those who completed the survey online by the end of May 2021 would receive a £10 gift voucher. In the second week of May 2021, a reminder letter was sent to all those who had not as yet completed or opted out of the survey. Postal completion was offered as an alternative mode of taking part in the survey.

Survey Content

The high level of interest in the YLT survey in 2021 and the respective number of questions included, meant that a split survey was required. Table 1 details the module content, the funder and the survey version in which the questions were included.

Table 1: YLT 2021 survey content by funder

	Funder	Version	Version
		A	B
Background	Split among all funders	✓	✓
Community Relations	The Executive Office	✓	✓
Attitudes to Minority Ethnic Groups	The Executive Office	✓	✓
Shared Education and Community Relations, Equality and Diversity Education (CRED)	Department of Education (DE) - also included in KLT 2020/21		✓
Coronavirus	Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) - also included in KLT 2020/21	✓	✓
Mental Health	Ohio University HCOM	✓	✓
Safety and Attitudes to Paramilitaries	Department of Justice (DoJ) – also included in NILT 2020		✓
Politics	ESRC grant held at QUB (PI Dr K. Hayward)	✓	
Coercive Control	Northern Health and Social Care Trust and Public Health Agency - also included in NILT 2020	✓	✓

Completing the questionnaire

Potential participants were invited to complete the survey online. Postal or phone completion was offered as an alternative mode of taking part in YLT, and two requests for paper alternatives were received. The respective survey questionnaires were posted out, but none was returned completed. No requests for phone completions was received.

Young people did not need to complete the survey in one session. If they were interrupted when taking part in the study, they could log back on using their unique identifier and could return to their survey where they had left off and complete any remaining questions. However, once a respondent had answered all survey questions, his or her unique identifier was disabled, ensuring only one completion per eligible respondent could be submitted.

Response rate

After cleaning the dataset received from HMRC, i.e. removal of respondents with incomplete or incorrect addresses, 4,999 eligible names remained. Sixty-two initial mailings were returned as 'addressee unknown/gone away'. Eight parents of 16 year olds got in touch to let us know that their child had deceased. Sixteen young people or their parents/carers opted out of completing the survey. This left an overall sample of 4,913 16-year olds.

2,147 young people logged onto the survey platform with their ID. After removal of the most incomplete responses (ie responses where only very few or no questions were completed), 2,069 responses remained. This represents an overall response rate of 42.1%.

Table 2: Response rate calculation

	n	%
Delivered sample	5,000	
Ineligible address removed	1	
Addressee unknown/Return to sender	62	
Deceased	8	
Opted out/unable to complete	16	
Base	4,913	100
Logged on	2,147	43.7
Removed incompletes	78	1.6
Remaining responses in dataset	2,069	42.1

Getting the data

Tables of results from the 2020/21 YLT survey can be accessed from the YLT website. Users can also download the data in SPSS portable file format from the website to carry out their own statistical analyses. The YLT website is available at www.ark.ac.uk/ylt.

Using the data

This documentation is intended to provide background information to the survey and to the survey and sampling methodologies. However, if you require any further technical information, please contact us (see details below).

The data have been tested extensively, but if you find anything that looks like a mistake, please let us know as soon as you can.

A helpline service is also available should you have a query about the survey or the results (see contact details below). Alternatively you can use the help section on the YLT website (www.ark.ac.uk/ylt/help/).

In order to maintain anonymity, the open ethnicity variable has been recoded into the categorical ETHNCAT variable. Open responses to the question on respondents' religious background have been recoded. The derived religion variable RELIGCAT consists of the following categories: 'Catholic', 'Protestant', 'Other religion' and 'No religion'. Open responses to other questions that may compromise the anonymity of respondents are not available as part of the downloadable dataset, but will appear as a list of all responses in the results section on the YLT website.

This dataset should not be weighted.

Contact information

For all queries relating to the survey, please contact:

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