

Press Office
Department of Communication and Development

Time To Listen To Children

The University of Ulster and QUB are providing a novel platform for children to have their say on a range of key topics and the potential to influence the decisions of adults.

In an initiative unique within the United Kingdom, all P7 pupils in Northern Ireland are being given the opportunity to give their views anonymously on a range of issues in an online survey conducted in school.

The purpose is to provide a means of important self-expression to pupils approaching the end of primary education about how they perceive themselves, their problems and issues and how they relate to aspects of the adult world.

The feedback will be correlated and made available so that it may be taken on board by people who make decisions that help shape young people's daily lives –from politicians to computer games producers, educationalists to fashion leaders, parents to consumer product makers, community groups to social policy experts.

The project- the 'Kids' Life and Times Survey 2009' - is the second part of a pilot survey that got under way last year, the results of which have already fed into policy debates on issues such as bullying and happiness at school.

The current survey is being sponsored by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Ministers and questions will cover a range of topics including bullying at school and children's feelings about themselves and their lives.

It is being conducted under the aegis of ARK, a joint collaboration of Ulster and QUB, which has been gathering and dissemination social science information to policy-makers and interested sectors since it was established in 2000

About 2,000 children aged 10 and 11 have already signed up to take part in the survey and more are expected as the schools begin their countdown to the summer holiday break. All primary schools across Northern Ireland have been notified about the initiative and the organisers are appealing for a large uptake.

Professor Gillian Robinson, Director of ARK, says that all too often the opinions of children are ignored when decisions are made about issues involving them. The survey is intended as part of a process to redress the balance by being a “listening ear” that informs the outlook of adults.

“The purpose of the survey is to give children a voice in issues that affect them and to give relevant organisations feedback on the views of the children,” she said.

“We have framed a range of questions on the 20-minute questionnaire based on suggestions which children themselves have put forward, about issues that matter to them and which policy-makers, media, teachers and commercial interests will want to take account of.”

Professor Katrina Lloyd of QUB says: “Hardly a day goes by when there’s not a major news issue involving children.

“Sometimes it’s a major national policy issue such as social care, healthcare, education, or a headline case about abuse or poverty but it may also be about how popular media impacts on children, how they interact with their families and friends, how they feel about fashion and popular trends, about social networking on the web and computer safety, how they regard themselves and the society they are growing up in.

“So often when we hear about these issues, it is through the mouths of adults but the children’s voices that are missing – voices that should be heard and listened to.”

She added: “The information we obtain from the children may be used in a number of ways, including being published on a web page, in a report, disseminated to and used by children’s organisations, used for educational training purposes and/or published in academic journals. These materials will be accessible via this website. We will ensure that anonymity is guaranteed and the information will not be used in any way that would identify a school, a child or a family.”

Further information about the Kid Life and Times 2009 survey is available at www.ark.ac.uk/klt.

Ends

Note to Editors

- The survey is a project of ARK (the Northern Ireland Social and Political Archive), a collaboration between the University and QUB which was established in 2000.
- ARK makes social science information on Northern Ireland available to a widest possible audience including researchers, policymakers, journalists, community and voluntary groups, schoolchildren and their teachers.