

What is the Young Life and Times Survey?

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 records the attitudes and values of adults aged 18 years and over in Northern Ireland. This is an annual survey and began in 1998. The range of topics included in NILT varies each year, although many modules are repeated over time in order to monitor changing attitudes on specific social policy issues. In particular, questions on community relations and political attitudes are included each year in order to track attitude change on these issues taking place 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, which took the form of a paper questionnaire. Questions mostly consisted of a subset of questions from the adult questionnaire. One of the main aims was to be able to analyse 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 due to the fact that the level of use of the young person's survey came nowhere near the level of use of the adult survey

Consultation with a variety of users from the academic and voluntary sectors, found that 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 was a concern 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. The first YLT survey using this methodology was undertaken in 2003.

Technical details of the 2013 survey

Sample

The survey sample was taken from the Child Benefit Register. Since 2004, a statutory instrument and explanatory memorandum is in place (Tax Credits (Provision of Information (Evaluation and Statistical Studies) (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2004) which allows ARK to access the Child Benefit Register for the YLT survey.

Child Benefit is a benefit for people bringing up children and is paid for each child. Therefore, the 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. Alternative universal or random sample frames for YLT were considered prior to the 2013 survey but found unsuitable or unworkable, (such as the GP register). However, consultations with HMRC 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 altogether are still held at HMRC – for example in order to issue National Insurance Cards , thus the sample of 16-year olds available to ARK for the YLT survey remained universal and unaffected by the recent legislative changes.

The sample for the 2013 survey was provided to ARK directly by HMRC which administers the Child Benefit payments UK-wide. In October 2013 a Service Level Agreement was signed between ARK and HMRC about the sample provision. Within this agreement ARK had to lay out arrangements for the safety and security of the personal data of respondents. This 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.

The sample drawn from the Child Benefit Register contained the names and addresses of all young people resident in Northern Ireland who celebrated their 16th birthday during February and March 2013.

Advance letter

Fieldwork was conducted in November and December 2013. All administration of the mailout for the survey was undertaken by an independent mailing company. An initial letter was sent out in November 2013 to all eligible 16-year olds and provided an introduction to the survey, after the wording of this letter had been agreed with HMRC. Recipients of the letter were given the opportunity to say that they did not want to participate in the survey. A few parents contacted the survey team and opted out on behalf of their sons/daughters, predominantly due to their learning or sensory disabilities.

A second letter was then posted out to all those 16-year olds who had not opted out of the survey. This consisted of a letter from the project team, a paper questionnaire and a return envelope with a FREEPOST address. This letter contained a unique identifier (with a check letter) under the address, which was highlighted as “Your identification number”. The provided more information about the survey, including the aims of the project, the three possible methods of completing the questionnaire, and details of a draw for five prizes of £100 for which all respondents completing the questionnaire were eligible.

Completing the questionnaire

The fieldwork period lasted from 8 November – 31 December 2013.

Respondents were able to choose one of three methods for completing the questionnaire.

1. They could take part by phone, having quoted their identification number and check letter.
2. They could complete the questionnaire online – quoting their personal identifier to enter that part of the YLT website.
3. They could complete the paper questionnaire that was sent to them and post it back in the pre-stamped envelope.

After approximately ten days, a reminder letter with a second questionnaire was sent out to addressees who had not made contact of any kind.

Multiple responses from respondents (e.g. one online and one postal response) were prevented by daily recording of the receipt of completed questionnaires. Once a respondent had submitted an online questionnaire, his or her unique identifier was automatically disabled. Six respondents completed multiple surveys, either two paper surveys or one paper and one online survey. One completed survey each from these respondents was disregarded. One completed survey was deleted as there was evidence that the respondent did not respond to questions seriously.

Survey content

The 2013 survey entailed the questions on the following subject areas:

- Community relations - funded by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM);
- Mental health and self-harm - funded by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM);
- Financial wellbeing – funded by the Improving Children’s Lives (ICL) Initiative – Queen’s University Belfast;
- Family;
- Background information.

At the end of the 2012 survey, respondents were given the opportunity to identify questions they felt should be included in the next YLT survey. Questions on mental health, community relations and financial wellbeing were covered anyway, but two additional questions - one on views on lowering the voting age to 16, and one of experiences of private tutoring – were also included.

Response rate

3,879 names of eligible respondents were on the database of Child Benefit recipients received from HMRC/DSDNI. Eighteen letters or questionnaires were returned because the addressee had moved or was unknown at the address. This leaves a sample of 3,861 eligible respondents.

In total, 21 young people opted out of completing the 2013 YLT survey at different stages. In addition, nine parents contacted YLT to say that their sons/daughters would be unable to complete the survey due to their special needs.

1,367 completed questionnaires (double completions disregarded) were received by the end of the fieldwork period. The overall response rate of the 2013 YLT survey is therefore 35.4%. Table 1 shows that the most popular mode of completing the survey was paper (1,127 questionnaires or 82.4%). The rest of respondents completed the survey online. To encourage online completion, the first 100 online respondents received a £10 shopping voucher.

Table 1: Mode of survey completion

	n	%
Paper	1,127	82.4
Online	239	17.5
Telephone	1	0.1
Total	1,367	100

Getting the data

Tables of results from the 2013 survey were made available on 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 contact details on page 5).

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. Please note that this data should not be weighted.

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

In order to maintain anonymity, the ethnicity (Q5) and religion (Q53) variables have been recoded. Responses to the question: Q5 '*To which ethnic group do you consider you belong?*' have been recoded in the ETHNCAT variable. The full list of open responses to Q5 is available in the results section to the 2013 survey on the YLT website. 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 also not made available as part of the downloadable data set, but will appear in the form of 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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