

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 YLT survey is to record the views of 16-year-olds in Northern Ireland on a range of issues such as community relations, health, politics, social media, 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.

Except for 2020, when YLT fieldwork could not take place due to the COVID19 pandemic, YLT has been conducted annually since its inception.

Links with other surveys

The YLT survey has links with both the **Northern Ireland Life and Times (NILT) survey** and the **Kids Life and Times (KLT) survey**, both also run by ARK.

NILT is an annual survey that began in 1998. It 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. Questions on community relations and political attitudes are included each year 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.

In 2025/2026, NILT and YLT asked identical or similar questions in the areas of:

- Good relations
- Community safety and paramilitarism
- Gender-based violence
- Refugees and asylum seekers

KLT is an annual school-based online survey conducted by ARK among Primary 7 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. This was the case in 2026 when both surveys asked questions on education and social media. More information on the KLT survey can be found at www.ark.ac.uk/klt.

Technical details of 2026 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 2026 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 means testing for Child Benefit was introduced and higher earners were 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 no legislation in place in Northern Ireland to permit the use of such sample frames. However, consultations with HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC), who administer Child Benefit payments across the UK, 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, 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 2026 survey was provided to ARK directly by HMRC. The sample for the 2026 survey included the names and addresses of all young people living in Northern Ireland, and registered on the Child Benefit Register, who celebrated their 16th birthday in January, February and March 2026.

In 2024 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. The sample for the 2026 survey was received in January 2026.

Data Collection

Data were collected using Pavlovia, a secure open source survey platform for academic research. Queen's University holds an institutional license for Pavlovia, which is held at the School of Psychology. Pavlovia is based in the UK with all data held on UK-based servers. Previously, a bespoke ARK survey platform had been used, which had come to the end of its lifespan. Prior to the YLT survey taking place, Pavlovia was extensively tested to ensure it met all survey requirements, including data safety and data security policy requirements. Pavlovia is cloud-hosted on ISO 27001-certified EU servers. Data is encrypted in transit (TLS) and at rest. The platform is GDPR-compliant. Regular penetration testing takes place and strict access controls are in place. Survey data was deleted from Pavlovia upon completion of data collection.

All data files are password protected and held securely at Queen's University Belfast. Details of survey respondents were only passed on for the purpose of the administration of the fulfilment of the mailouts of the invitation letters with study information and reminder letters.

The mailout for the survey was undertaken by RW Pierce. Fieldwork was conducted from 30 March to 1 May 2026. In the week beginning 23 March each potential participant received a letter providing information about the survey, including the aims of the project; details on how to opt-out; options for postal or phone completion; GDPR clarification, contact details for the survey team, and the web link for the survey. The letter provided recipients with their unique identifier code required for accessing the survey platform and questionnaire. They were also advised that anyone who completed the survey and answered most of the questions would receive a £10 shopping voucher. In the week beginning 13 April, a reminder letter was sent to all those who had not yet completed or opted out of the survey.

Survey Content

The high level of interest in the YLT survey in 2026 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 2026 survey content by funder

	Funder	Version 1	Version 2
Background	Split among all funders	✓	✓
Community Relations	The Executive Office (TEO)	✓	
Minority Ethnic Groups	The Executive Office (TEO)	✓	
Asylum Seekers and Refugees	The Executive Office (TEO)	✓	
Gender Based Violence (Violence against women and girls)	The Executive Office (TEO)	✓	
Personal Relationships	The Executive Office (TEO)	✓	
Social Media Use	The Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI)	✓	
Lowering the Voting Age	Politics in Action	✓	✓
Community Safety and Tackling Paramilitarism	Department of Justice (DoJ)		✓
Mental Health	ARK		✓
Shared Education	The Department of Education (DE)		✓
Victims of Crime	Commissioner for Victims of Crime Northern Ireland		✓
Environment	ARK		✓

Completing the questionnaire

Potential participants were invited to complete the survey online. Postal and phone completion were offered as alternative modes of participation, but no requests were received.

Response rate

After cleaning the dataset received from HMRC, i.e. removal of respondents with incomplete or incorrect addresses, 6,268 eligible names remained. These were randomly split and invited to complete survey Version 1 or 2 respectively. 108 initial mailings or reminder letters were returned as 'addressee unknown/return to sender/gone away'. 26 young people or their parents/carers opted out of completing the survey. If reasons were given, this was usually an inability to complete the survey due to a learning disability, or because the young person was too busy with school exam preparations. This left an overall base sample of 6,142 16-year-olds.

2,139 16-year-olds logged onto the survey platform with their ID – a response rate of 35%. After removal of the most incomplete responses (i.e. responses where only very few questions were completed), 1,965 responses remained. The achieved response rate varied a little between survey versions 1 (34%%) and 2 (31%).

Table 2: Response rate calculation

	n	%
Delivered sample	6,276	
Ineligible/incomplete addresses removed	8	
Addressee unknown/Return to sender/Gone away	108	
Opted out/unable to complete	26	
Base	6,134	100
Logged on	2,139	35
Incompletes removed	176	3
Remaining responses in dataset	1,965	32

Accessing the data

Tables of results from the 2026 YLT survey can be accessed from the YLT website (www.ark.ac.uk/ARK/ylt/results). Users can also download the data in SPSS portable file format from the website to carry out their own statistical analyses (<https://www.ark.ac.uk/ARK/ylt/datasets>). Findings and publications from all YLT surveys are available at www.ark.ac.uk/ylt.

Using the data

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

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

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'.

Recoding of Religious Belonging variables

Religious belonging was captured using three questions:

- Q17 (ANYRELIG): *Do you regard yourself as belonging to any particular religion* (Yes, No);
- Q18 (RELIGION): *If yes, which? I identify as ...* (twelve specified religions and three 'other' options provided – see survey questionnaire);
- Q19 (RELIGOTH) *Please tell us your religion.* (Open response for those who chose 'other' option in Q18).

The RELIGCAT variable is constructed as follows:

- Anyone stating in Q17 that they don't regard themselves as belonging to a religion, and anyone who states they are 'atheist' or have 'no religion' or similar in Q18/Q19 is coded as 'no religion'.
- Anyone stating in Q18 or Q19 that they are 'Catholic' or 'Roman Catholic' or 'Irish Catholic' is coded as being 'Catholic'.
- Anyone stating choosing 'Presbyterian'; 'Church of Ireland'; 'Methodist'; 'Baptist'; 'Free Presbyterian'; 'Other Protestant'; other Christian; 'Brethren' is coded 'Protestant or other Christian'. Smaller/other Protestant religions; 'reformed Presbyterian' (e.g. Elim; Church of England; Evangelical) are also coded as 'Protestant and other Christian'.
- Missing values responses and 'Don't know'/I prefer not to say' responses in Q18 are coded as 'missing'.

Removal of case-sensitive data

Any open text responses to any question that may compromise the anonymity of respondents were removed from the downloadable dataset but may be listed in the results section on the YLT website. A list of open responses to particular questions is available on request but will exclude identifiable information.

Using data from the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ12)

The 12-item version of the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ12), which was included in survey Version 2, is a measure of respondents' mental health. It consists of 12 items (questions) asking respondents how they have felt over the last few weeks (variable names GHQ1-GHQ12). These variables should not be used individually – rather the calculated caseness variable should be used for analysis. We also provide a total score variable. An alternative method to analyse the GHQ12 data is to calculate a Likert scale. We provide both the Likert scale and the caseness by gender and religious background on our website.

The YLT dataset should not be weighted.

Contact information

For all queries relating to the survey, please contact:

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