



# ARK

## ARK Annual Report 2019 (Summary)

**This summary annual report details our key activities in 2019**

### **About ARK**

ARK is a research, policy and impact hub, based jointly in Queen's University Belfast (QUB) and Ulster University (UU). Our activities focus on making social and political information on Northern Ireland (NI) accessible to all, supporting civic society, and challenging policies.

Our key resources include:

- Three public attitudes surveys, which record the views of people of all ages living in Northern Ireland about the issues that affect their lives – the Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey (NILT); Young Life and Times (YLT) and Kids' Life and Times (KLT);
- The *ARK Ageing Programme*, which helps us to think what it means to be old in Northern Ireland, via our events, Visiting Fellows, and research projects;
- *Conflict Archive on the Web (CAIN)*, which contains information and source material on 'the Troubles' and politics in Northern Ireland from 1968 to the present day;
- The *Northern Ireland Elections* site, which provides data about elections in Northern Ireland since 1885 and detailed breakdowns of election results;
- A wide variety of knowledge transfer and public engagement activities, such as seminars, conference presentations, workshops and policy round tables.

**In 2019 funding for ARK's work totaled £603,451.**

**Full details of all ARK's activities are at [www.ark.ac.uk](http://www.ark.ac.uk)**

### **Web statistics**

The ARK resources online continue to be heavily used, with over 6 million page views. In particular, the CAIN site had 847,834 visits, which is at its highest level since 2015. The total (annual) number of visits (480,428) to the CAIN Home Page in 2019 was the highest figure in any year since records began in 1997.

### **Attitude surveys**

In 2019 we continued to monitor public opinion in Northern Ireland through our suite of surveys. Topics included community relations, racism, Brexit and politics, criminal justice system, and breastfeeding (NILT); identity, cross community contact, shared education, and breastfeeding (YLT); and attitudes to school, learning languages, wellbeing, citizenship, and attitudes to research (KLT). Data from the earlier surveys were made publicly available and dissemination enhanced through the publication of 7 research updates and briefings on the findings, as well as articles and book chapters, seminars and video podcasts.

The inclusion of the same set of questions in more than one of ARK's surveys allows us to compare attitudes across different ages. In the most recent surveys, questions on attitudes and knowledge of breastfeeding have been included in both NILT and YLT, with funding from the Public Health Agency. In addition, questions on community safety and perceptions of paramilitary influence (funded by the Department of Justice) were included in both surveys.

## **CAIN**

Staff from CAIN and the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) have continued to work together to add previously secret government records available. In August 2019, 324 documents (for 1991 and 1992) were added to the associated site PRONI Records on CAIN (<https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/proni/index.html>). CAIN has also been able to continue its partnership with the National Archive, Ireland by way of an award (September 2019) from the Reconciliation Fund of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). This will allow for the selection and digitisation of a further batch of Irish government records for the years 1986, 1987 and 1988. Another DFAT award (December 2019) will enable the digitisation of the speeches, statements, etc. of John Hume and present these in a new section on CAIN.

Following earlier work with representatives from the BBC 'Rewind' project, the BBC launched in November 2019 its new conflict audio-visual resources 'Ten Chapters of the Northern Ireland Troubles'. The chapters link to resources within CAIN.

Various documents related to elections and political developments were added to the CAIN site during 2019. These included the topics of Brexit and legacy issues.

Following a lack of funding to cover the full salary costs of CAIN staff, Ulster University initiated a consultation on the future of CAIN. There was strong support in favour of CAIN remaining as an active (staffed) archive. ARK provided funding, from its reserves, for CAIN for the period to 30 April 2020. (A final decision on CAIN is due before 1 April 2020.)

## **Policy Unit**

The ARK Policy Unit continued to conduct primary research and to engage on a range of issues including via policy roundtables, seminars and response to consultations.

The ESRC funded study on abortion was concluded in 2019. A major focus of the year was on dissemination of findings, including engagement with health professionals and politicians at Westminster. Written and oral evidence was provided to the Women and Equalities Committee Inquiry and the committee's report heavily referenced the ARK project data.

A project (with Health Sciences at UU) analysing existing data on contraceptive use in NI from 2010-2016 research was concluded. A policy roundtable event was held to disseminate findings.

A new project on gender budgeting (with School of Accounting at Ulster and Women's Budget Group), funded by Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, commenced.

## **ARK Ageing Programme**

Paula Devine and Katrina Lloyd won a tender to undertake quantitative analysis of the Arts Council's Arts and Older People's Programme.

The ARK Ageing Programme team has also collaborated on a number of research applications including: a UK-China grant proposal in collaboration with Dementias Platform UK (University of Oxford) (Gemma Carney and Paula Devine); and a Wellcome Trust small grant application on cultural gerontology with Trinity College Dublin (Gemma Carney).

ARK hosted a seminar in Queen's given by Sarah Bauermeister from Dementias Platform UK in October.

As part of her work with the British Society Gerontology, Gemma Carney has attended two meetings of Age Platform Europe which represents the rights of older people at EU level.

## **Events**

During the year ARK held a wide range of public engagement events including research seminars on attitudes towards transgender people, the abortion pill and abortion law reform, enabling large scale multi cohort longitudinal research, and a seminar launching the key findings from the YLT and KLT surveys. In addition, policy roundtables focused on young people and peace building, use of prescribed contraception, and compensation for victims of the conflict in Northern Ireland.

ARK has a collaborative agreement with the National Centre for Research Methods (NCRM). In October, ARK hosted the *Using Creative Research Methods* course at Queen's.

## **Conferences and Publications**

ARK staff presented papers at learned society international conferences including those run by the European Survey Research Association and the Social Policy Association. The ARK team also presented at other conferences and workshops including those relating to the Integrated Education Fund; Digital Preservation in the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities; Disrupting Technologies; and Child Maltreatment and Wellbeing.

In addition to Research Updates, ARK Features, Policy Briefs, blogs and videos, ARK staff published five articles in peer reviewed journals. Dirk Schubotz authored the book *Participatory Research: Why and How to Involve People in Research*, which has been published by Sage Publications.

## ARK Advisory Board

The ARK Advisory Board was re-convened in 2019, and its members reflect the diversity of ARK users, funders and collaborators. The main function of the Board is to provide strategic advice to inform our work, and it is chaired by Peter Osborne. The members are:

Peter Osborne (Chair)  
Lorraine Calderwood (Arts Council of Northern Ireland)  
Professor Tony Gallagher (Queen's University Belfast)  
Professor Frank Lyons (Ulster University)  
Paddy Kelly (Children's Law Centre)  
Sam McBride (Political Editor, *News Letter*)  
Helena McElhinney (NICVA)  
Eileen Regan (Northern Ireland Assembly and Research Service)  
Susan Reid (National Centre for Social Research)  
Professor Jonathan Tonge (Liverpool University)

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