



## ARK Annual Report 2020 (Summary)

### **This summary annual report details our key activities in 2020**

#### **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 help 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.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions from March 2020, ARK staff worked from home maintaining contact through regular meetings online. All events from March 2020 were also undertaken online.

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

#### **Funding**

In 2020, ARK obtained grant funding of 1,704,213.

#### **Web statistics**

The ARK resources online continue to be heavily used. The CAIN site had 2.9 million page views, and 1.2 million visits; the latter being the highest since 2007. Other ARK resources had 1.7 million page views, which is the second highest recorded.

## **Attitude surveys**

In 2020 we continued to monitor public opinion in Northern Ireland through our suite of surveys. Topics in both NILT and YLT included community relations, including minority ethnic communities; Brexit and politics; identity; cross community contact; coercive control; and community safety and perceptions of paramilitary influence. NILT also included questions on the criminal justice system. YLT and KLT each asked questions on Shared Education and Community Relations and Equality Education (CRED); while all three surveys included questions on COVID-19. The inclusion of the same set of questions in more than one survey allows us to compare attitudes across different ages.

Data from the earlier surveys were made publicly available and dissemination enhanced through the publication of four research updates on the findings, as well as articles and book chapters, seminars and videos.

## **CAIN**

Staff from CAIN and the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) continued to work together to add previously secret government records to the associated site. This included fieldwork on files relating to 1993 – 1996; material which will be added to the site in 2021.

CAIN continued its partnership with the National Archive, Ireland by way of an award (September 2019) from the Reconciliation Fund of the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), Dublin. This facilitated the addition of a further 965 items, covering the years 1986-88, to 'NAI Records on CAIN' (<https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/nai/>) in July 2020.

Work was ongoing, both within ARK and beyond, to secure the sustainability of CAIN. In this regard, the Department for Foreign Affairs held a meeting of interested stakeholders and funders in Belfast in January 2020. In June, one of those funders, Initiatives of Change (IofC) Committee in Ireland, made an offer of a donation towards the cost of maintaining CAIN as a live/staffed Archive; CAIN also applied for and received an award from the Reconciliation Fund at DFA. In October ARK commissioned Recordkeeping Innovation Pty Ltd. to carry out a review and offer recommendations on the future direction of CAIN; this report is due in February 2021.

## **Policy Unit**

The ARK Policy Unit continued to conduct primary research and to engage with policy makers, NGOs and statutory organisations on a range of issues via policy roundtables, seminars, advisory meetings and response to consultations.

Dissemination and engagement on the findings of the ESRC funded study on abortion continued in 2020. Goretti Horgan was invited to be part of the NI Abortion and Contraception Task Group (NIACT) to provide evidence and support to clinicians who wanted to develop abortion services following decriminalisation.

Two roundtables were held, focusing on young people and youth work: one on young people and peacebuilding and one on youth work during the pandemic.

Fieldwork on the first phase of the Gender Budgeting project, funded by Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, concluded in September 2020. A series of policy papers, webinars and roundtables are planned in 2021 to disseminate findings.

The second phase of the project, *Tackling Gender Inequalities and Promoting Reconciliation in Northern Ireland: the role of gender budgeting* (Ann Marie Gray and Joan Ballantine) commenced in November 2020. Dr Michelle Rouse has been recruited as Research Associate on the project.

### **ARK Ageing Programme**

Paula Devine and Katrina Lloyd completed quantitative analysis of the Arts Council's Arts and Older People's Programme, and published a report.

Two PhD studentships were awarded. Gemma Carney won a Faculty award for a fully-funded PhD studentship and Ángel Leira Pernas started his PhD 'Material Objects on the Journey of Life' in October; and Susan Hughes commenced her PhD with the School of Applied Social and Policy Sciences at University Ulster in September 2020. She is researching self-directed support and adult social care services.

Sarah Lawrence successfully defended her PhD thesis focusing on the health and wellbeing of older male prisoners in Northern Ireland, and graduated in December 2020. Another graduate of the ARK Ageing programme, Elizabeth Martin obtained a permanent lecturer post in Social Policy (education) at QUB. She will continue to work with the ARK team at QUB, starting with a British Society of Gerontology (BSG) NI event in 2021.

### **Dementia in the Minds of Characters and Readers**

Gemma Carney and Paula Devine are CI's on this AHRC-funded project which started in May. The initial analysis has been completed and the ethics application has been submitted. Fieldwork and reading groups will start early 2021. A blog provides updates on the project, along with reviews of books focusing on dementia <https://blogs.qub.ac.uk/dementiafiction/>

### **COVID-19 and Vulnerable Groups Project**

Gemma Carney, Ann-Marie Gray and Bronagh Byrne (Centre for Children's Rights, QUB) were awarded ESRC Rapid Response Scheme funding to investigate the impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable groups, particularly older people and people with disabilities. The external partner is AGE Platform Europe, which represents the interests of older people across Europe. The project examined the portrayal of vulnerable groups by the media and produced a number of outputs including a Research Update, with accompanying video, features, blogs, and an article. Stephanie Maguire who was the research assistant on the project has since secured a position of postdoctoral researcher at the School of Psychology, Ulster University.

### **Men's Health in Numbers**

Paula Devine and Erin Early successfully bid for a tender from the Men's Health Forum in Ireland to produce two reports focusing on men's health in Ireland. The *Trends Report* described changes in key markers of men's health on the island of Ireland between 2004 and 2019. The *Irish Men's Health Report Card* provides an infographic-based synopsis of men's health in the Republic of Ireland. Dissemination activities include presentations at the launch of the reports and a blog, with other activities planned for 2021.

<https://mhfi.org/news/1096-men-s-health-in-numbers.html>

### **National Centre for Research Methods (NCRM)**

ARK renewed its collaborative agreement with the National Centre for Research Methods and agreed to facilitate a course 'Understanding small areas: spatial analysis of population and neighbourhood data' in April. However course was cancelled due to COVID-19.

### **Northern Ireland Longitudinal Study (NILS)**

Paula Devine was a co-investigator on a successful bid to the ESRC for a 5-year extension to the Northern Ireland Longitudinal Study (NILS). ARK's role is to collaborate on events, facilitate dissemination of NILS outputs, and promote NILS.

### **Events**

ARK was founded in 2000, and a series of events were planned to mark this occasion. The key event was a seminar presented by Sir John Curtice and Katy Hayward *Is the UK stronger or weaker after 20 years of devolution?*, to mark ARK's 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Face-to-face events were curtailed from March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and so the anniversary events moved online. These focused on poverty activism in Northern Ireland, and commemoration of the visit of President Clinton in 1995.

In addition, two online seminars focused on data from the 2019 Northern Ireland Life and Times survey, one focusing on attitudes towards Irish unification, and the other on public attitudes to breastfeeding.

### **Conferences and Publications**

ARK staff presented papers at Learned Society international conferences including the Gerontological Association of America Annual Scientific Meeting, and at a TEDx event.

In addition to Research Updates, ARK Features, Policy Briefs, blogs and videos, ARK staff published four articles in peer reviewed journals, and chapters in four books. Gemma Carney (and co-author Paul Nash) co-authored a textbook on social gerontology *Critical questions for ageing societies*, published by Policy Press.

## **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 of the 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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