

Kids' Life and Times Survey 2008

Technical Notes

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Background

The 2008 Kids' Life and Times (KLT) survey was a pilot project undertaken by ARK. ARK is a joint resource between Queen's University Belfast and the University of Ulster, and its goal is to make social and political information on Northern Ireland available to the widest possible audience.

ARK runs two annual attitudes surveys: the Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey for adults aged 18 years and over, and the Young Life and Times Survey for 16 year olds. However, all too often the opinions of younger age groups are ignored when decisions are made about many of the issues involving them. ARK has always been conscious of the lack of a regular and rigorous children's survey that could be open to all researchers in the academic, voluntary and government sectors. In addition, a wave of activity now surrounds the area of children's rights and needs. Therefore, there was a clear community of users and practitioners keen to utilise quality research information and promote the participation of children and young people in decisions that affect their lives.

Given this context, in 2007, ARK took the decision to investigate the feasibility of running a survey of children in Northern Ireland by carrying out a pilot survey. Several survey methodologies were discussed. However, in order to maximise coverage and response, an online survey based in schools was seen as the most appropriate. All primary schools in Northern Ireland have internet access as part of the Classroom 2000 (C2K) initiative (<http://www.c2kni.org.uk/>).

Therefore, the main purpose of the pilot was to test the method of using the Internet to assess the views of P7-age children in Northern Ireland. There were two stages to the project:

- A consultation with children, teachers and parents carried out in late 2007/early 2008.
- A pilot survey carried out in June 2008.

Consultation

The KLT team felt that it was vital that the issues covered in the survey questionnaire were relevant to P7 children in Northern Ireland. It was equally important that parents and teachers were given the opportunity to discuss the methodology and the type of questions that were to be asked, since their co-operation is essential. Consequently, the KLT team carried out consultation sessions with a range of stake-holders: teachers, children and parents. This took the form of focus groups and other qualitative exercises carried out during late 2007 and early 2008. The sample of teachers and children was a purposive sample selected on the basis of contacts known to the ARK team.

The consultation with parents was carried out using the Parents Advisory Group, funded by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister and facilitated by the Parenting Forum.

Technical details of the 2008 pilot survey

Ethical permission

Ethical permission was sought, and obtained, from the Ethics Committee based in the School of Sociology, Social Policy and Social Work, Queen's University Belfast.

Target population

The target population was all P7-age children in Northern Ireland. Approximately 24,700 pupils attended 918 primary schools which had P7-age children, including hospital and special schools. In addition, the target population included children in this age group who were not in school or who were being taught at home.

Within Northern Ireland, the overall administration of the education system is carried out by the Department of Education for Northern Ireland (DENI). There are five Education and Library Boards (ELB) who provide the education, library and youth work services.

DENI provided a database of information for all primary schools within Northern Ireland: name and number of P7 pupils. The address of each school and the name of the principal were held in a database available from ELBs, and these two databases were merged by the KLT team.

Four Education and Library Boards facilitated access to children not attending school. A small number of children living in Northern Ireland are educated at home, and registration of this group is undertaken by the ELBs. Special units for children not in school are provided by ELBs.

Advance letter

The fieldwork for the survey was undertaken in June 2008, and two advance letters were sent out to schools in May 2008. The first letter was posted on 1st May. Letters were sent to all principals of primary, special and hospital schools in Northern Ireland, giving them information about the survey, and explaining that the fieldwork would be carried out in June. A dedicated telephone was set up so that principals could contact the survey team for more information. This letter also offered schools a confidential summary report based on their school's responses in anonymised form.

On 15th May, principals were sent a second letter from the survey team, along with an instruction document for teachers and a copy of the parental consent form and a KLT bookmark for every P7 pupil in the school. Principals could contact the KLT helpline to request translations of these consent forms, and Polish, Portuguese, Lithuanian, Irish and Chinese translations were made.

The second letter also pointed to the KLT website where principals could look at a draft questionnaire. Each letter included a unique four-digit identification code for that school allocated by the KLT team for administrative purposes.

Participating ELBs sent out letters and consent forms to the parents of P7-age children who were being taught at home, inviting them to participate in the survey. In this way, the KLT team were able to target as many P7-age children throughout Northern Ireland as possible. Letters and consent forms were also sent to special units for children not in school where permitted by the ELBs.

A Trouble-shooting document was available on the KLT website.

Consent

Consent to participate involved three levels:

- Firstly, the school principal agreed that the school could participate.
- Secondly, a parent or guardian of each P7 pupil within participating schools signed a consent form to say that s/he agreed that the child could take part, and returned this to the school.
- Thirdly, at the start of the questionnaire, the child was asked if s/he agreed to take part.

Online questionnaire

The contract to design the website and online questionnaire was awarded to Elucidate, a Belfast-based company. ARK obtained permission to use characters from 'Bang on the door' to make the survey fun and interesting to complete. The children could read the questions on the screen, and also listen to them spoken by actors (one male and one female). In this way, children who had sight difficulties or who had difficulty reading could take part in the survey. The questions were presented in different ways to try to maintain interest, for example, clicking a box or a smiley face, dragging words into a box or writing into a text box. Throughout the design of the questionnaire, the web company worked closely with C2K which is the organisation responsible for the provision of an ICT-managed service to all schools in Northern Ireland.

Completing the questionnaire

The initial fieldwork period lasted from the 2nd to the 16th June 2008. However, due to requests from schools, the fieldwork period was extended until the end of June. An email was sent out to all primary schools on the 9th June, which reminded schools about the survey, and thanked them if they had already taken part.

Once the child agreed that s/he wanted to take part, s/he was asked to enter the four-digit school identification number. This number was printed on all documentation sent to the school by the KLT team. When the code was entered, the full name and address of the school appeared on the screen, and the child was asked to confirm if this was the correct school. The class teacher or other staff member was able to phone the KLT helpline number at any stage to confirm their identification number. However, no further identification codes or the names of children were required.

Survey content

The questionnaire had 77 questions and took about 20-25 minutes to complete. Each question had a 'Skip' option which the children could use if they did not want to answer it. The questionnaire was designed by the KLT team, and questions focused on:

- Bullying in school.
- Attitudes towards the 11+.
- Children's experience of their years at primary school.
- World Health Organisation measure of family financial circumstances.

In addition, the 27-item Kidscreen instrument was included, which is a health-related quality of life questionnaire for children and young people. This questionnaire measures five dimensions:

- Physical well-being.
- Psychological well-being.
- Autonomy and parents.
- Peers and social support.
- School environment.

At the end of the survey, respondents were given the opportunity to suggest questions they felt should be included in any future KLT surveys.

Response rate

Fairly accurate information on the number of pupils within primary, special and hospital schools is available from the database provided by DENI. However, in order to maintain anonymity, the KLT did not have exact figures on the number of children being taught at home or within special units for those children who were not in school. In addition, 28 children managed to complete the survey without providing a school identification number. Therefore, the response rates quoted here can only be approximations.

There were 918 schools with P7-age pupils on the database provided by DENI, and of these 217 participated in the survey, representing 25% of schools.

There were 24,726 P7 pupils on the DENI database, of which 3,440 participated in the survey; 21 children did not give their consent at the start of the survey. This represents approximately 14% of children overall and 50% of children within participating schools.

Table 1: Response by Board

Board	Schools %	Children %
BELB	25	14
WELB	26	17
NEELB	25	13
SEELB	30	16
SELB	22	11

Table 2: Response by type of school

Type of school	Schools %	Children %
Controlled	26	16
Catholic maintained	23	12
Controlled integrated	25	9
Grant maintained integrated	35	15
Other maintained	5	1
Prep	29	18
Special	9	2
All	25	14

Table 3: Response by size of school

Number of pupils	Overall %	KLT %
20 or under	49	39
21 to 40	28	29
41 to 60	14	21
61+	9	12

Table 4: Response by gender

	Overall %	KLT %
Boys	51	44
Girls	49	56

Getting the data

Tables of results from the 2008 survey were made available on the KLT website within four months of the end of the fieldwork period. Users can also download the data in SPSS portable file format from the website to carry out their own statistical analyses. However, all identifying information has been removed from this dataset. The KLT website is available at www.ark.ac.uk/klt

Using the data

This documentation is intended to provide background information to the survey and to the survey methodology. If you require any further technical information, please contact us (see details below).

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.

A helpline service is 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 KLT website (www.ark.ac.uk/klt/help/).

In order to maintain anonymity, some variables have been removed from this dataset.

Contact information

For all queries relating to the survey, please contact:

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- The teachers who took part in the consultation exercise.

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