

## 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 topics 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 website at [www.ark.ac.uk/nilt](http://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 Young Life and Times Survey using this methodology was undertaken in 2003.

## **Technical details of the 2009 survey**

### **Sample**

The survey sample was taken from the Child Benefit Register. 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. This Register had previously been the responsibility of the Social Security Agency (SSA) of the Department for Social Development in Northern Ireland (DSD). However, while DSD still maintained the database, the responsibility for the payment of Child Benefit transferred to Inland Revenue. Thus, it was necessary to negotiate access to this Register from Inland Revenue, which involved an explanatory memorandum being prepared relating to the Tax Credits (Provision of Information (Evaluation and Statistical Studies) (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2004).

In autumn 2007, two disks containing personal details of tens of thousands of Child Benefit recipients were lost by the UK government. Following this incident, regulations relating to sensitive and personal data were tightened by the Government.

As a result of the revised data security procedures, ARK was informed in May 2008 that we had to re-apply to access the Child Benefit dataset for further YLT surveys. The application was submitted in May 2008 and was considered by respective units within Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) and by the legal team of DSD. Permission to access the Child Benefit Data for YLT surveys was eventually granted by HMRC on 13<sup>th</sup> November 2008, with just one amendment to the existing statutory instrument. This amendment related to the way the data could be passed on and now required the address file of eligible respondents to be encrypted during transmission from DSD to the YLT research team. However, access is only permitted to the most recent data available to DSD, which can sometimes be a few months old. Each year DSD has to apply for a sweep of the Child Benefit data on behalf of the YLT survey team, and the processing of this application can take several months. For the 2009 survey, the latest available sweep of the Child Benefit Register was the January 2009.

All young people who celebrated their 16<sup>th</sup> birthday during February and March 2009 were invited to take part in the survey. Due to the fact that the sample was based on a Child benefit register sweep that was almost 11 months old when the fieldwork for the YLT survey took place, we expected that a small proportion of the invited 16-year olds would have moved house and would therefore have to be removed from the list of eligible respondents.

### **Advance letter**

Fieldwork was undertaken in November and December 2009. All administration of the mailout for the survey was undertaken by an independent mailing company, thus ensuring that the survey team do not have access to individual names and addresses. A letter was posted out to all eligible 16-year olds, consisting of an initial letter from DSD, a letter from the project team, a paper questionnaire and a return envelope with a FREEPOST address.

The initial SSA letter was addressed to the eligible 16-year old and provided an introduction to the survey. It also explained the role of DSD in the project, and confirmed that the YLT project team did not have access to names and addresses of the young people in the sample. This letter contained a unique identifier (with a check letter) under the address, which was highlighted as "Your identification number".

The letter from the university project team 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. Furthermore, in a pilot to test the viability of an online-only survey, this year the first 100 online respondents were rewarded with a £10 gift voucher each, and the letter highlighted this fact.

## **Completing the questionnaire**

The fieldwork period lasted from 26 November – 31 December 2009. Compared to previous YLT surveys, fieldwork was extended to acknowledge the fact that due to the reapplication process to access the Child Benefit data:

1. Again, due to the waiting time in relation to receipt of the address file of eligible respondents, field work took place much later in the year than anticipated. Like in 2008, fieldwork extended into the Christmas period, which ultimately led to delays in the delivery of mail.
2. The address file of potential respondents was out of date, so in some instances mail to respondents would have been re-directed or returned, if addresses had moved.

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 on-line – quoting their personal identifier to enter that part of the Young Life and Times 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. Eight respondents completed the questionnaire twice, either online and on paper or twice on paper (original questionnaire and reminder). One record each from these respondents was deleted and disregarded

## **Survey content**

The 2009 survey entailed the questions on the following subject areas:

- Volunteering; (asked on behalf of the Volunteer Development Agency and funded by the Youth Council for Northern Ireland);
- Mental Health (funded by, and asked on behalf of, the Patient Client Council);
- Children's Rights (funded by and asked on behalf of OFMDFM)
- Community relations;
- Family;
- Background information.

At the end of the 2008 survey, respondents were given the opportunity to identify questions they felt were suitable for inclusion in the next Young Life and Times survey.

The range of topics included in the 2009 survey incorporates these suggestions. Namely questions on the impact the 'credit crunch' had on young people and their families were included. In addition, respondents to the 2009 survey were asked to give suggestions for future survey topics.

### Response rate

3,859 names of eligible respondents were on the database of Child Benefit recipients received from HMRC/DSD. 73 questionnaires were returned because the addressee had moved or was unknown at the address. This leaves a sample of 3,798 eligible respondents.

856 completed questionnaires were received by the end of the fieldwork period, representing a response rate of 23%. Table 1 shows that the most popular mode of completing the survey was paper (684 questionnaires or 79.9%). The remaining 20.1% of respondents completed the survey online, with no respondents opting to complete the survey by phone.

**Table 1: Mode of survey completion**

	n	%
Paper	684	79.9
Online	172	20.1
Telephone	0	0
Total	856	100

Compared to previous years the uptake of online completions quadrupled. This is almost certainly due to the fact that online completion was rewarded with gift vouchers for the first 100 respondents as described above. However, an analysis of the mode of response (online or paper) by type of school attendance and financial background of respondents' families shows that 16-year olds from more prosperous backgrounds and respondents attending Grammar Schools are somewhat over-represented among online completions, which suggests that an online only survey may result in an over-representation of young people from more prosperous backgrounds, which is not desirable despite practical advantages of undertaking an online-only survey.

### Getting the data

Tables of results from the 2009 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](http://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 6).

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/](http://www.ark.ac.uk/ylt/help/)).

In order to maintain anonymity, the ethnicity (Q5) and religion (Q46) variables have been deleted from the data file. 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 2009 survey on the YLT website. The derived variable RELIGCAT consists of the following categories: 'Catholic', 'Protestant' and 'No religion'. Due to the small number of cases, other categories are not included in this variable. 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 results section on the YLT website.

## **Contact information**

For all queries relating to the survey, please contact:

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