

## **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 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.

### **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 NILT 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 YLT survey using this methodology was undertaken in 2003.

## **Technical details of the 2011 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 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. For the 2008-10 YLT surveys, DSD applied for a sweep of the Child Benefit data on behalf of the YLT survey team.

In 2011, for the first time, the sample for the 2011 survey was provided to ARK directly by HMRC. Again, this required prior approval which was granted in June 2011. However due to the number and volume of projects that HMRC is involved in, it wasn't clear until September 2011 that HMRC would have the capacity to provide the sample for the YLT survey. In October 2011 a Service Level Agreement was signed between ARK and HMRC about the sample provision. Within this agreement ARK had to lay out arrangements for the safety and security of the personal data of respondents. This 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 drawn from the Child Benefit Register contained the names and addresses of all young people resident in Northern Ireland who celebrated their 16<sup>th</sup> birthday during February and March 2011.

### **Advance letter**

Fieldwork was conducted in November and December 2011. All administration of the mailout for the survey was undertaken by an independent mailing company. An initial letter was sent out in October 2011 to all eligible 16-year olds and provided an introduction to the survey. Recipients of the letter were given the opportunity to say that they did not want to participate in the survey. A few parents contacted the survey team and opted out on behalf of their son/daughter with learning or sensory disabilities. A small number of parents also sought further information about the legitimacy of the letter sent out and the process of gaining access to the addresses. In total, 78 young people opted out at this stage.

A second letter was then posted out to all those 16-year olds who had not opted out of the survey. This consisted of a letter from the project team, a paper questionnaire and a

return envelope with a FREEPOST address. This letter contained a unique identifier (with a check letter) under the address, which was highlighted as “Your identification number”. The 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.

## **Completing the questionnaire**

The fieldwork period lasted from 16 November – 31 December 2011.

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 online – quoting their personal identifier to enter that part of the YLT 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. One respondent completed both the original and the reminder paper questionnaire, but this second entry was disregarded.

## **Survey content**

The 2011 survey entailed the questions on the following subject areas:

- Attitudes to minority ethnic group - funded by Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM);
- Community relations - funded by OFMDFM;
- Sexual attitudes and experience - funded by OFMDFM;
- Loneliness and wellbeing - funded by University of Ulster;
- Family;
- Background information.

At the end of the 2010 survey, respondents were given the opportunity to identify questions they felt should be included in the next Young Life and Times survey. Some of these suggested topics were incorporated in the 2011 survey, for example the question on whether or not young people planned to leave Northern Ireland and whether or not they intended to come back.

## **Response rate**

3,869 names of eligible respondents were on the database of Child Benefit recipients received from HMRC/DSDNI. 34 questionnaires were returned because the addressee had moved or was unknown at the address. This leaves a sample of 3,835 eligible respondents.

1,434 completed questionnaires were received by the end of the fieldwork period. Two parents rang on behalf of their children and said that they either did not want to complete the survey or could not complete the survey due to a disability. Eight survey questionnaires were only very partially completed, and so were not included in the sample. The overall response rate of the 2011 YLT survey is therefore 37%. Table 1 shows that the most popular mode of completing the survey was paper (1,336 questionnaires or 93.2%). The rest of respondents completed the survey online, except for one person who completed the survey by phone.

**Table 1: Mode of survey completion**

|           | n     | %    |
|-----------|-------|------|
| Paper     | 1,336 | 93.2 |
| Online    | 97    | 6.8  |
| Telephone | 1     | 0.1  |
| Total     | 1,434 | 100  |

### Getting the data

Tables of results from the 2011 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 5).

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 (Q24) variables have been recoded. 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 2011 survey on the YLT website. The derived religion variable RELIGCAT consists of the following categories: 'Catholic', 'Protestant', 'other religion' and 'No religion'. 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 form of a list of all responses in the results section on the YLT website.

## **Contact information**

For all queries relating to the survey, please contact:

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## **Acknowledgements**

We would like to acknowledge the support by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs in providing the sample.

We particularly appreciate the time and effort taken by all the 16 year olds who responded to the survey.

The Young Life and Times survey is a constituent part of ARK, a resource providing access to social and political information on Northern Ireland. ARK receives core-funding from the Economic and Social Research Council. The 2011 YLT survey was part-funded by OFMDFM and the Psychology Institute at the University of Ulster.