

What is the Young Life and Times Survey?

The Young Life and Times (YLT) survey is a constituent part of ARK, a resource providing access to social and political information on Northern Ireland (www.ark.ac.uk). 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, an annual survey that began in 1998, records the attitudes and values of adults aged 18 years and over in Northern Ireland. The range of topics included in NILT varies each year, although many modules are repeated over time 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 how/if attitudes change 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.

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. This was a paper questionnaire with questions mostly being a subset of those asked in the adult questionnaire. One of the main aims of this approach was to enable the analysis of 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 as 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:

- 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 were concerns 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 and the first YLT survey using this methodology was undertaken in 2003.

More recently, the YLT survey has had more links with the Kids Life and Times (KLT) survey which is an annual school-based online survey conducted by ARK among P7 children, that is children in their final year in primary school in Northern Ireland. The first KLT survey was undertaken in 2008. KLT and YLT have regularly asked similar or identical questions on

certain subject areas, and this was also the case in 2015. More information on the KLT survey can be found at www.ark.ac.uk/klt.

Technical details of 2015 survey

Sample

The survey sample was taken from the Child Benefit Register. Since 2004, a statutory instrument and explanatory memorandum (Tax Credits (Provision of Information) (Evaluation and Statistical Studies) (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2004) is in place which allows ARK to access the Child Benefit Register for the YLT survey.

Child Benefit is a benefit for people bringing up children and is paid for each child. Therefore, the Child Benefit Register contains information on all children for whom Child Benefit is claimed. Until March 2013 this was a universal benefit, but in April 2013 legislation came into place which introduced means testing with regard to Child Benefit payments. Higher earners are now no longer entitled to receive Child Benefit. This meant a potential significant change to the YLT sampling strategy. Alternative universal or random sample frames for YLT (such as the GP register) were considered prior to the 2013 survey but found unsuitable or unworkable. However, consultations with HMRC, who administer Child Benefit payments across the UK, revealed that the names and addresses of those 16-year olds affected by the Child Benefit Payment changes and those whose parents opted out of receiving Child Benefit are still held at HMRC, for example, in order to issue National Insurance Cards. Thus, the sample of 16-year olds available to ARK for the YLT survey remained universal and unaffected by the legislative changes.

As in previous years, the sample for the 2015 survey was provided to ARK directly by HMRC. In June 2015 we contacted HMRC to confirm that they were again willing to provide the sample to us and advised them of one significant change. The sample included all 16-year olds with February and March birthdays. In August 2015 a Service Level Agreement (SLA) was signed between ARK and HMRC about the sample provision. Within this agreement ARK laid out the arrangements for the safety and security of the personal data of respondents and 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.

Advance letter

Fieldwork was conducted from October to December 2015. All administration of the mailout for the survey was undertaken by an independent mailing company. An initial letter was sent in September 2015 to all eligible 16-year olds and provided an introduction to the survey; the wording of this letter had been agreed with HMRC. Recipients of the letter were given the opportunity to say if they did not want to participate in the survey. A few parents contacted the survey team and opted out on behalf of their sons/daughters, predominantly due to their learning or sensory disabilities.

In October 2015, 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". This letter provided more information about the survey, including the aims of the project and the three possible methods of completing the questionnaire. Recipients were also advised that there was a draw for five prizes of £100 for which all respondents completing the questionnaire were eligible, and, as an extra incentive, that the first 100 online entries would receive a £10 shopping voucher.

Survey Content

Table 1 details the module content and the funder.

Table 1: 2015 YLT survey content by funder

Module	Funder
Background questions	Split among all funders
Community Relations	Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFMNI)
Attitudes to Minority Ethnic Groups	Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFMNI)
Shared Education	Department of Education (DE. This module was also included in the 2015 KLT survey.
Sport	Sport NI. This module was also included in the 2015 KLT survey
Young Carers	ARK Ageing Project. This module was also included in the 2015 KLT survey.
Child Sexual Exploitation	Barnardo's NI and PSNI
Internationalisation and Language Learning	British Council. This was a half module followed by a number of participatory focus groups.

Completing the questionnaire

The fieldwork period lasted from 22 October – 31 December 2015.

Respondents could choose one of three methods for completing the questionnaire:

- They could take part by phone, having quoted their identification number and check letter.
- They could complete the questionnaire online – inputting their personal identifier to enter that part of the YLT website.
- They could complete the paper questionnaire and post it back in the pre-stamped envelope.

After approximately two weeks, 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. Six respondents completed multiple surveys – three had completed two paper versions and three had completed one paper and one online survey. Duplicated surveys were disregarded.

Response rate

3,853 names of eligible respondents were on the database of Child Benefit recipients received from HMRC/DSDNI. 100 letters or questionnaires were returned because the addressee had moved or was unknown at the address. This leaves an overall sample of 3,753 eligible respondents.

In total, 49 young people or their parents opted out of completing the 2014 YLT survey at different stages. Commonly this was because the young person suffered from a learning disability or mental illness (n=12), however the majority of young people opted out without giving a reason why.

Overall 1,156 16-year olds completed the questionnaires. This represents a response rate of 30.8%

Table 2 shows that the most popular mode of completing the survey remains postal/paper completion. Telephone responses were offered as in every year, but no phone completions were recorded at all in 2014.

Table 2: Mode of survey completion by survey version

	n	%
Surveys sent out	3,853	100
Addressee unknown/Return to sender	101	3
Base	3,752	100
Paper	979	26
Online	179	5
Total/response rate	1,158	31

Technical difficulties

Due to a coding error in the online version of the YLT questionnaire, some answers to multiple response questions were not captured correctly. Whilst this error was corrected after three days of the fieldwork, at that stage the majority of online responses (n=154) had already been received. This is due to the fact that early online responses are encouraged and incentivised. Whilst some responses to the respective questions could be identified retrospectively, in many cases this was not possible and the respective responses were set as missing values.

Getting the data

Tables of results from the 2015 survey can be accessed from 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.

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 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 also available for anyone who has a query about the survey or the results (see contact details below). Alternatively you can use the help section on the YLT website (www.ark.ac.uk/ylt/help/).

In order to maintain anonymity, the open ethnicity variable has been recoded into the categorical ETHNCAT variable. Open responses to the question on respondents religious background have been recoded. 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 not available as part of the downloadable dataset, but will appear as a list of all responses in the results section on the YLT website.

This dataset should not be weighted.

Contact information

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