

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 2017, namely in relation to questions of school bullying and shared education. More information on the KLT survey can be found at www.ark.ac.uk/klt.

Technical details of 2017 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) has been in place which allows ARK to access the Child Benefit Register for the YLT survey. The 2017 YLT survey was also approved by the Ethics Committee of the School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work at Queen's University Belfast.

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 largely universal and unaffected by the legislative changes.

As in previous years, the sample for the 2017 survey was provided to ARK directly by HMRC. The sample included all 16-year olds with January, February and March birthdays. In July 2017 a Service Level Agreement (SLA) and Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) 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. Due to staff turn-over and other work commitments at HMRC, the dataset with the names and addresses of eligible YLT respondents was not received by ARK until November 2017. This caused a significant delay in the data collection and resulted in the fieldwork period having to be extended to the end of January 2018.

Data Collection

All administration of the mailout for the survey was undertaken by an independent mailing company. The delay in the delivery of the address file of 16-year olds eligible to complete the YLT survey meant that fieldwork was conducted from December 2017 to January 2018. Measures were put in place to make up for the delay in the fieldwork. One step taken was to send out the survey questionnaire alongside the information sheet/opt-out letter. This was done in the second week of December 2017. Thus, the mailout contained 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 information about the survey, including the aims of the project and the three possible methods of completing the questionnaire. Recipients were also advised about the financial incentive of completing the

survey by the end of 2017. In January 2018, a reminder letter, a second questionnaire and another FREEPOST envelope was posted out to all those 16-year olds who had not responded or opted out of the survey by that stage.

Survey Content

Due to the high level of interest in the YLT survey in 2017 and the respective number of questions included, a split survey needed to be run. Table 1 below details the module content, the funder and the survey version in which the questions were included.

Table 1: 2017 YLT survey content by funder

Module	Funder	Blue version	Purple version
Background questions	Split among all funders	✓	✓
Community Relations	The Executive Office	✓	✓
Attitudes to Minority Ethnic Groups	The Executive Office	✓	✓
Shared Education and Community Relations Equality and Diversity Education (CRED)	Department of Education (DE) - also included in the 2017 KLT survey.		✓
School Bullying	Department of Education (DE) - also included in the 2017 KLT survey.	✓	
Volunteering	Volunteer Now	✓	
Safety and Attitudes to Paramilitaries	Department of Justice (DoJ) - also included in the 2017 NILT survey		✓
Attitudes to and Experiences of Police Stop-and-Search practice	Queen's University Belfast		✓

Completing the questionnaire

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.

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. Two respondents completed multiple surveys – one had completed two paper versions and one had completed one paper and one online survey. Duplicated surveys were disregarded.

Response rate

After cleaning the dataset received from HMRC, i.e. removal of respondents with incomplete or incorrect addresses, 5,437 eligible names remained. These were randomly split between the Blue and Purple surveys, with 2,718 Blue (version 1) and 2,719 Purple (version 2) surveys being mailed to potential respondents. Subsequently, 55 Blue and 69 Purple initial mailings were returned because the addressee had moved or was unknown at the address provided by HMRC; this left an overall sample of 5310 eligible respondents.

In total 18 young people or their parents opted out of completing the 2017 YLT survey, commonly this was because the young person suffered from a learning disability or mental illness; however the majority of young people who opted out did not give a reason.

Overall 1,198 completed questionnaires were received by the end of the fieldwork period. This represents a response rate of 23 percent. As in previous years, the most popular mode of completing the survey remains postal/paper completion.

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 2017.

Table 2: Mode of survey completion by survey version

	Blue survey		Purple survey		All	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Surveys sent out	2,718		2,719		5,437	
Addressee unknown/Return to sender	55		69			
Respondents deceased	3					
Base	2,660	100	2,650	100	5,310	100
Paper	503	18.9	417	15.7	920	17.3
Online	123	4.6	155	5.8	278	5.2
Total/response rate	626	23.5	572	21.6	1,198	22.6

Methodological experiment

Taking advantage of the split survey, we used the opportunity to test the reliability of some of the Likert Scale responses to questions that have been included in the YLT survey since its inception in 2003. Whilst the questions were identical in both survey versions the scale direction of the answer scales was reversed in the purple version of the survey. This affected the following questions: Q28, Q29, Q31, Q36, Q40, Q41 and Q42.

Getting the data

Tables of results from the 2017 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

For all queries relating to the survey, please contact:

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