

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 and trends 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 was much less than that 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 age children, namely 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 2018, namely in relation to questions of Shared Education, Citizenship and Wellbeing. More information on the KLT survey can be found at www.ark.ac.uk/klt.

Technical details of 2019 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 2019 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 2019 survey was provided to ARK directly by HMRC. The sample included all 16-year olds with January, February and March birthdays. In November 2019 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. Staff turn-over within HMRC plus and changes in their procedures concerning the sharing of personal data meant that the dataset with the names and addresses of eligible YLT respondents was not released to ARK by HMRC until third week of November 2019. This meant that we were unable to begin contacting potential participants until December 2019 which resulted in a delay in the data collection.

While respondents have had the option to complete YLT online, 8% of respondents doing so in 2018, it has remained primarily a postal survey. However, in 2019 the decision was taken to test the viability of moving to online completion with an incentive. The cost of the (£10 shopping voucher) could be sustained through a reduction in postal and processing charges associated with a mail survey. As such, in 2019 one-third of potential respondents (1500 young people) were sent a letter with instructions on how to complete online and advising that if completed by 15 December 2019 they would receive a £10 voucher. If participants did/could not complete online contact details were provided whereby they could request a paper survey. The remainder (3500 young people) would, as in previous years, receive a paper questionnaire in the post with all those who completed being entered into a draw for 5 prizes of £100. Participants were randomly selected to complete either a paper questionnaire or online.

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 the beginning of December 2019 to 15 February 2020. In the first week of December each potential online participant received a letter providing information about the survey, including the aims of the project; details on how to opt-out; GDPR clarification and contact details for the survey team. The letter provided participants with their unique identifier (with a check letter) which was required for accessing the survey. Financial incentives were also detailed, namely that those who completed the survey online by 15 December 2019 would receive a £10 voucher, while those completing after that date would be entered into a prize draw for 5 cash prizes of £100 each.

During the week beginning 16 December 2019, the remaining participants (3592) who had been selected to receive a paper survey were contacted by mail. As with the online only participants, the letter they received provided information about the survey, including the aims of the project; each participant's unique identifier; details on how to opt-out; GDPR clarification and contact details for the survey team. Importantly, each participant received a paper questionnaire with the participant's unique identifier on the front page, and a return envelope with a Freepost address for completed surveys. Participants were advised that everyone completing a survey would be entered into a prize draw for 5 cash prizes of £100 each.

In the second week of January 2020, reminder letters advising a final completion date of 15 February 2020 were sent to all those who had not, as yet, completed or opted out of the survey. Those initially selected as online only participants received a letter asking them to complete online; for those who had previously received a paper questionnaire a letter including a second questionnaire and a prepaid return envelope.

Survey Content

Table 1 below details the module content of the survey and the funders

Table 1: YLT 2019 survey content by funder

	Funder
Background	Split among all funders
Community Relations	The Executive Office
Attitudes to Minority Ethnic Groups	The Executive Office
Safety and Attitudes to Paramilitaries	Department of Justice (DoJ) – also included in NILT 2019
Attitudes to Breastfeeding	Public Health Agency
Politics	ESRC grant held at QUB (PI Dr K. Hayward)

Completing the questionnaire

As detailed above, one-third of potential participants were asked to complete online only. They could request a paper survey if they wished; however, one online participant availed of this option.

The remaining two-thirds of potential participants could:

- Complete the paper questionnaire and post it back in the prepaid envelope.
- Complete online

All participants were advised that they could contact the survey team and complete the survey on the phone if they wanted to; no participants did this.

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. 1 respondent completed online and on paper – the paper survey was used and the online survey disregarded. 9 online surveys were incomplete and were also disregarded

Response rate

After cleaning the dataset received from HMRC, i.e. removal of respondents with incomplete or incorrect addresses, 5,092 eligible names remained. These were randomly split between online and paper respondents - 1500 online only and 3592 receiving a paper questionnaire. From the potential 1500 online participants - 30 initial mailings were returned 'addressee unknown/gone away'; 1 had been included in error due to a mistake in the original dataset from HMRC; 1 respondent requested a paper survey. This left an overall sample of 1468.

From the potential 3592 paper questionnaire sample – 88 initial mailings were returned 'addressee unknown/gone away'; 1 unable to complete health reasons; 6 did not wish to participate; 1 online participant wanted paper questionnaire. This left a sample of 3498 and an overall sample 4966

Overall 1150 completed questionnaires were received by the end of the fieldwork period. This represents a response rate of 23% percent. While in previous years postal/paper completion had been the more popular mode, the trial of online only with a financial incentive in 2019 proved the more popular mode of completion.

Table 2: Mode of survey completion by survey version

	Online Mailing		Paper Mailing		All	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Mailings	1500(less one wanted paper)		3592(plus one from online)		5092	
	1499		3593			
Addressee unknown/Return to sender	30		88		115	
Opted-out/Unable to complete	1		7		8	
Base	1468	30	3498	70	4966	100
Paper	n/a	n/a			605	54
Online					525	46
Total Response Rate					1131	100

Getting the data

Tables of results from the 2019 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 should you have 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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