

What is the Young Life and Times (YLT) 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 YLT 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.

With the exception of 2020, when YLT fieldwork could not take place due to the COVID19 pandemic, YLT has been conducted annually since its inception.

Links with other surveys

The YLT survey has links with both the **Northern Ireland Life and Times (NILT) survey** and the **Kids Life and Times (KLT) survey**, both also run by ARK.

NILT is an annual survey that began in 1998. It 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 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.

In 2002/2023, NILT and YLT asked identical or similar questions in the areas of:

- Good relations
- Tackling paramilitarism
- Gender-based violence
- Mental Health

KLT 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. This was the case in 2023 when both surveys asked questions on Sport and physical activities, on mental health, and on the cost-of-living crisis. More information on the KLT survey can be found at www.ark.ac.uk/klt.

Technical details of 2023 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 2023 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. The use of alternative universal or random sample frames for YLT (such as the GP register) have been considered. However, unlike in other parts of the UK, there is currently still no legislation in place in Northern Ireland that would permit the use of such sample frames. Consultations with HM Revenue and Customs, who administer Child Benefit payments across the UK, also 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 HM Revenue and Customs, for example, in order to issue National Insurance Cards. Thus, the Child Benefit Register remains the only suitable sample frame of 16-year-olds for the YLT survey.

As in previous years, the sample for the 2023 survey was provided to ARK directly by HM Revenue and Customs. The sample for the 2023 survey included the names and addresses of all young people living in Northern Ireland, and registered on the Child Benefit Register, who celebrated their 16th birthday in January, February and March 2023.

In 2022 a Service Level Agreement (SLA) and Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between ARK and HM Revenue and Customs 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. The sample for the 2023 survey was received in the December 2022.

Data Collection

Data was collected using a bespoke online ARK survey tool. This ensured that all data were held securely on the ARK server, and no data or personal data was passed on. Details of survey respondents are not accessible to anyone outside the ARK survey team. All files are password protected.

All administration of the mailout for the survey was undertaken by an independent mailing company (RW Pierce). Fieldwork was conducted from 31 March to 8 May 2023. In the week beginning 27th March each potential 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, and the web link for the survey. The letter provided participants with a unique identifier code which was required for accessing the survey platform and questionnaire.

Anyone who completed the survey and who answered the majority of questions was offered a £10 gift voucher in return for taking part in YLT. In the third week of April 2023, a reminder letter was sent to all those who had not as yet completed or opted out of the survey. Postal or phone completion was offered as an alternative mode of taking part in the survey.

Survey Content

The high level of interest in the YLT survey in 2023 and the respective number of questions included, meant that a split survey was required. Table 1 details the module content, the funder and the survey version in which the questions were included.

Recording Ethnicity – Methodological Experiment

On request of the funder, in version 1 of the 2023 YLT survey, we diverted from the traditional open-ended way of recording the self-reported ethnic background of respondents. Instead, they were given with a set of closed options to state their ethnic background alongside one ‘other’ open option. We are producing a working paper to analyse the methodological experiment with the aim to inform future YLT survey design.

Table 1: YLT 2023 survey content by funder

	Funder	Version	Version
		1	2
Background	Split among all funders	✓	✓
Cost-of Living crisis	NSPCC – also included in KLT 2023	✓	✓
Personal Relationships	QUB/ARK	✓	✓
Community Relations	The Executive Office	✓	
Attitudes to Minority Ethnic Groups	The Executive Office	✓	
Gender based violence, particularly violence against women and girls	The Executive Office	✓	
Sport and Physical Activity	Sport NI - also included in KLT 2023		✓
Safety and Attitudes to Paramilitaries	Department of Justice (DoJ) – also included in NILT 2021		✓
Mental Health	Northern Ireland Mental Health champion – also included in KLT 2023		✓
Attitudes to the age of criminal responsibility	QUB/ARK		✓

Completing the questionnaire

Potential participants were invited to complete the survey online. While postal or phone completion was offered as an alternative mode of taking part in YLT there were no requests for either.

Response rate

After cleaning the dataset received from HMRC, i.e. removal of respondents with incomplete or incorrect addresses, 5,695 eligible names remained. These were randomly split and invited to complete survey version 1 or 2 respectively. Fifty initial mailings were returned as ‘addressee unknown/gone away’. One parent got in touch to let us know that their child’s birthday did not fall into the specified period, so this child was removed as ineligible. Fifteen young people or their parents/carers opted out of completing the survey. If reasons were given, this was usually inability to complete due to a severe learning disability, or because the young person was too busy with school exam preparations. This left an overall base sample of 5,627 16-year-olds.

2,139 young people logged onto the survey platform with their ID. After removal of the most incomplete responses (i.e. responses where only very few or no questions were completed),

2,065 responses remained. This represents an overall response rate of 36.7%. The response rates varied little between version 1 (35.3%) and version 2 (37.2%).

Table 2: Response rate calculation

	n	%
Delivered sample	5,717	
Ineligible/incomplete addresses removed	22	
Addressee unknown/Return to sender	52	
Ineligible	1	
Opted out/unable to complete	15	
Base	5,627	100
Logged on	2,139	38.0
Removed incompletes	74	3.5
Remaining responses in dataset	2,065	36.7

Getting the data

Tables of results from the 2023 YLT survey can be accessed from the YLT website (www.ark.ac.uk/ARK/ylt/results). Users can also download the data in SPSS portable file format from the website to carry out their own statistical analyses (www.ark.ac.uk/ARK/ylt/datasets). Findings and publications from all YLT surveys are 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 (version 2 only) 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.

Using data from the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ12)

The 12-item version of the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ12) is a measure of respondents' mental health. This was included in version 2 of the survey. It consists of 12 items (questions) asking respondents how they have felt over the last few weeks (variable names GHQ1-GHQ12). These variables should not be used individually by themselves– rather the calculated caseness variable should be used for analysis. We also provide a total score variable. An alternative method to analyse the GHQ12 data is to calculate a Likert scale. We provide both the Likert scale and the caseness by gender and religious background on our website.

This dataset should not be weighted.

Contact information

For all queries relating to the survey, please contact:

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