

Young Life and Times (YLT) Survey

Summary of Results

2025



Background

Every year, ARK, a joint initiative between Queen's University Belfast and Ulster University, invites 16-year-olds from across Northern Ireland to take part in the Young Life and Times (YLT) survey to share their views on school, politics, community relations and other social issues. Due to the large number of questions YLT 2025 was a 'split survey'. This meant that there were two versions of the survey - some questions were asked in both and some in one or the other.

This document provides a summary of some key findings from the 2025 survey. Detailed results for all YLT surveys (2003–2025), as well as topical Research Updates, are freely available on the YLT website at www.ark.ac.uk/ylt.

The 2025 YLT survey was part-funded by the Executive Office, the Department of Justice, the Northern Ireland Mental Health Champion, and several research projects at Queen's University Belfast.

Who Took Part in the 2025 YLT Survey?

Everybody living in Northern Ireland who celebrated their 16th birthday between January and March 2025 was invited to take part in the survey.

Of the 2,129 16-year-olds who took part in YLT:

- 57 per cent were female, 41 per cent were male and 2 per cent had another gender identity.
- 21 per cent said they lived in a big city or its outskirts, 42 per cent in a small city or town and 34 per cent in a village or in the countryside.
- 44 per cent attended a grammar school, 45 per cent a secondary school, 8 per cent a formally integrated school, and 3 per cent another type of school.
- 74 per cent lived with both parents, 17 per cent lived only with their mother, 2 per cent lived only with their father and 6 per cent lived with their mother some time and father some time. 2 per cent had other living arrangements.
- 17 per cent of respondents said they had a long-standing physical, mental, or developmental/sensory health condition. For 19 per cent of these respondents this health condition limited their ability to carry out day-to-day activities 'a lot'.
- 65 per cent regarded themselves as belonging to a particular religion - 38 per cent Catholic, 21 per cent Protestant, while 5 per cent belonged to another religion. 36 per cent of respondents indicated that they belonged to no religion.
- 30 per cent of respondents said their families were financially either well-off or very well-off, 50 per cent described them as average, and 12 per cent said their families were not well-off or not at all well-off.
- When asked what they thought they would be doing in two years' time, 84 per cent of respondents reckoned they would be going to college or university full- or part-time. A further 9 per cent felt that they would be working full- or part-time, while the remainder chose 'unemployed', 'on a training scheme' or 'other'.

Good Relations

About three quarters of respondents (76%) thought that religion would always make a difference to how people in Northern Ireland feel about each other. One third of respondents (33%) thought relations between Protestants and Catholics were better than 5 years ago whilst 7 per cent thought they were worse.

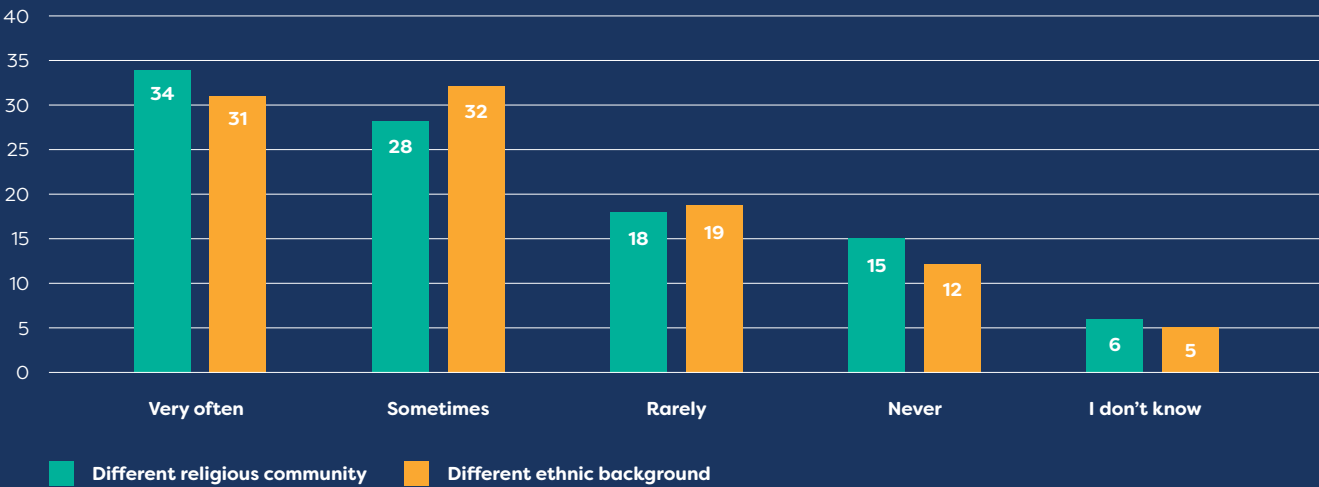
However, the largest proportion (44%) thought relations were about the same. When asked what they thought relations would be like in 5 years' time the proportions were similar: 33 per cent thought they would be better, 10 per cent thought they would be worse and 42 per cent thought they would be about the same.

Only 23 per cent of 16-year-olds agreed or strongly agreed that Northern Ireland is a

place where people respect each other, 35 per cent disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 39 per cent neither agreed nor disagreed. Nevertheless, 68 per cent of respondents said that they definitely or probably had a sense of belonging to Northern Ireland; this was noticeably higher for Protestants (81%) than for Catholics (66%).

Figure 1 shows how often respondents socialised or played sport with people of different religious or ethnic backgrounds. 62 per cent very often or sometimes socialised or played sport with people from a different religious community. When it came to socialising with those from a different ethnic background, the proportion was almost the same (63%).

Figure 1:
How often do you socialise or play sport with people from a different religious community or from a different ethnic background to yourself? (%)



34 per cent of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that Northern Ireland is a society that welcomes refugees escaping persecution. 51 per cent strongly agreed or agreed that it is our duty to provide protection to refugees escaping persecution, whilst 33 per cent agreed or strongly agreed that they would like more opportunities to get to know asylum seekers or refugees.

63 per cent of respondents felt they were 'not at all prejudiced' towards people from

minority ethnic communities. However, 64 per cent agreed or strongly agreed that people's perceptions of refugees and asylum seekers are negatively affected by the media.

Overall, Table 1 indicates that 44 per cent of respondents felt very or quite favourable about people from minority ethnic communities. Positive attitudes to minority ethnic communities varied between Catholics (50%), Protestants (31%), and those of no religion (44%).

Table 1:
Respondents who feel very or quite favourable about people from the Catholic, Protestant and minority ethnic communities (By religion, %)

	%			
	Catholic	Protestant	No religion	All
Catholic community	85	35	50	61
Protestant community	35	69	48	47
Minority ethnic communities	50	31	44	44

Community Safety and Attitudes to Paramilitaries

85 per cent of YLT respondents said they felt safe or very safe in the area where they lived. Males were more likely than females to state that they felt 'very safe' (48% compared to 35%). However, those of no (34%) or another religion (39%) were less likely to feel very safe than Catholics (46%) or Protestants (43%).

Respondents who lived in rural areas were much more likely (55%) to say that they felt 'very safe' in their area than respondents from urban areas (32%). Those who lived in rural areas were slightly less likely to agree or strongly agree that the PSNI kept their area safe (35% compared to 37% of those living in urban areas).

36 per cent of respondents who lived in urban areas agreed or strongly agreed that there was a lot of crime, drugs, and anti-social behaviour among young people in their areas, compared to just 18 per cent living in rural communities.

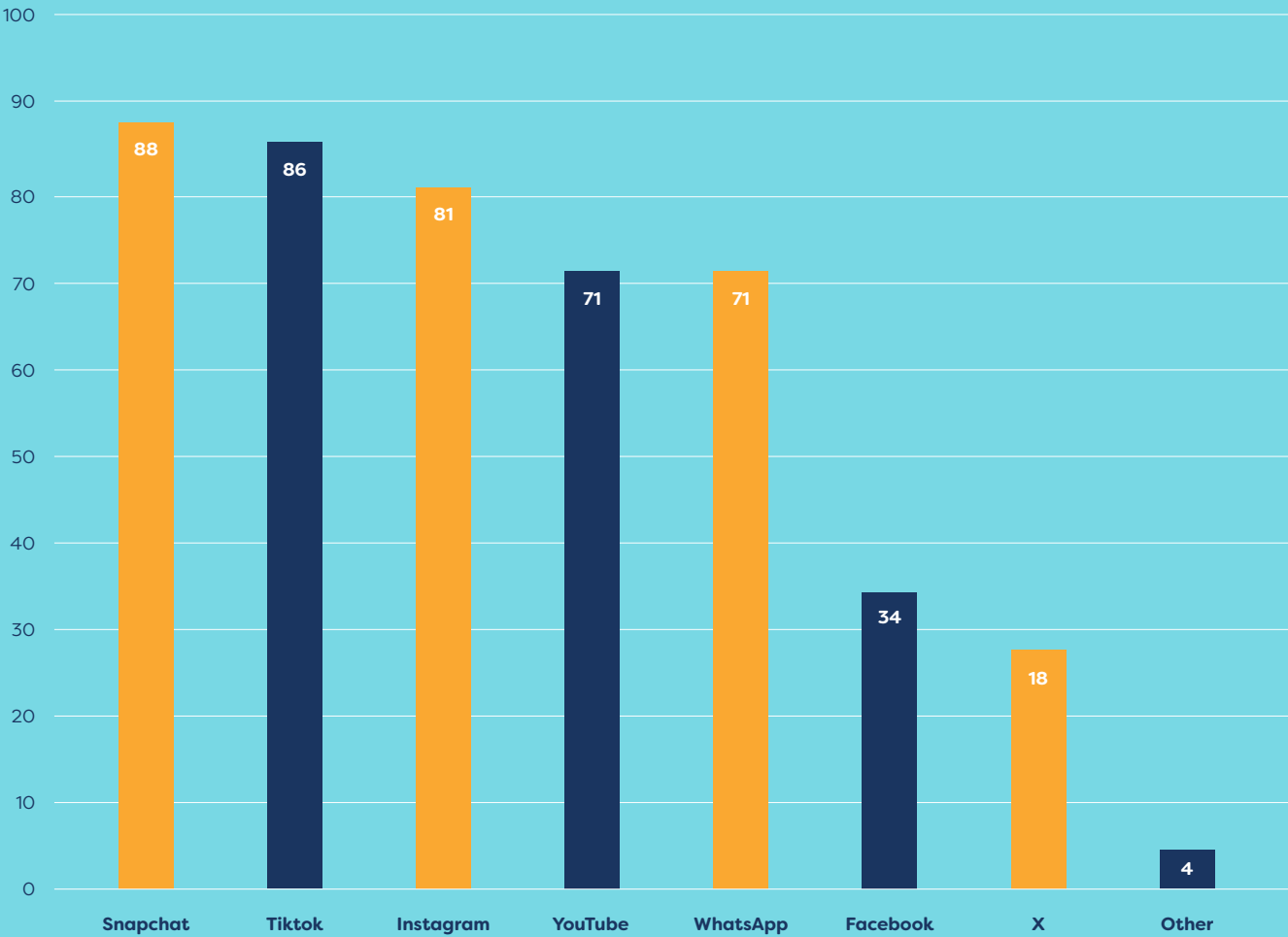
13 per cent of respondents living in urban areas, compared to just 9 per cent of respondents in rural neighbourhoods, agreed or strongly agreed that paramilitaries had a controlling influence in their area. 59 per cent of respondents living in rural settings disagreed or strongly disagreed that young people were being influenced too much by paramilitary groups, compared to 48 per cent who lived in urban areas.

Social media

Only 2 per cent of YLT respondents did not spend any time on social media. 46 per cent spent 2-3 hours per day, 22 per cent spent 6-8 hours, 18 per cent fewer than 3 hours and 8 per cent more than 8 hours. Females (35%) were

more likely to spend more than 6 hours per day on social media compared to males (23%). Figure 2 shows that Snapchat, TikTok and Instagram were the most popular social media apps used by 16-year-olds.

Figure 2:
Social media apps used (%)



YLT respondents reported experiencing multiple types of harmful behaviours on social media (Table 2), although almost half (46%) of all respondents had not experienced any. Of those who had, posting/sharing material considered offensive, indecent or obscene was the most common (26%), followed by someone sharing

their information, photos, videos with others without their consent (21%). Females were more likely than males to report experience of 'someone attempting to build a relationship with you to try to manipulate you' (16% v 9%) or 'someone stalking your activities' (22% v 16%).

Table 2:
Experience of social media-related behaviours (%)

	%
I have not experienced any of these behaviours	46
Someone posting/sharing material which you found offensive, indecent or obscene	26
Someone sharing your information, photos, videos with others without your consent	21
Someone stalking your activities	20
Someone attempting to build a relationship with you to try to manipulate you	13
Someone posting/sharing material motivated by hostility/dislike towards your race, religion, sexual orientation, disability, gender	12
Someone posting/sharing threatening, intimidation or harassing material about or towards you	11
Offers to buy or sell illegal or stolen goods	11
People deliberately being dishonest to you to obtain a financial/personal benefit or cause you to lose something	9
Blackmail	9
Someone using your information on social media to hack into your accounts	8
Someone using your information on social media to steal your identity	4



Respect

Table 3 shows what young people associated with respect. The strongest levels of agreement were found in relation to the statements ‘listening to other people’s ideas’, ‘being taken seriously, even when you are young’, ‘treating

people with kindness’ and ‘sticking up for your friends’. All of these had agreement levels above 80 per cent. Self-care (77%) was still associated with respect by a large majority of respondents, as was ‘thinking before acting’ (75%).

Table 3: How much young people agree or disagree with the following statements about what respect means (%)

	Strongly agree / agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Strongly disagree / disagree	Don't know
Listening to other people's ideas	94	4	1	1
Being taken seriously, even if you are young	91	6	1	1
Treating people with kindness	82	11	6	1
Sticking up for your friends	81	14	4	1
Taking care of yourself	76	16	6	2
Thinking before acting	75	15	7	3
Going along with what people say or do even if you don't think they are right	11	18	70	2

Table 4 shows the level of respect and disrespect experienced by 16-year-olds in different locations. The proportion of those saying they felt always or mostly respected was highest for doctors/hospital (83%) and youth clubs/youth centres (80%). By a very large margin, the highest level of disrespect was reported online (with 51% saying they were always or mostly disrespected). This was the only category where those who always or mostly experienced disrespect outnumbered those who mostly or always experienced respect. This was followed by school (43%) and when using public transport (36%).

Female 16-year-olds (48%) were much more likely than their male counterparts (34%) to say that they felt always or mostly disrespected in school. This also applied to public places (males: 25%; females 31%) and public transport (males: 29%; females: 40%), but also in locations where disrespect experiences were relatively low, e.g., at home (males: 12%; females 18%) or at the doctor/in hospital (5% of males, but 11% of females reporting disrespect).

Table 4: How often young people feel respected or disrespected in certain places (%)

	Always/mostly respected	Always/mostly disrespected	Don't know
At the doctor or in hospital	83	9	8
In youth clubs/youth centres	80	3	18
In their neighbourhood	76	13	12
At sports clubs or playing fields	75	10	14
At home	74	16	10
In shops	63	26	11
In public places, such as parks, leisure centres, or town/city centres	59	29	12
When using public transport, e.g. in a bus or train or when waiting for a bus or train	51	36	13
In school	49	43	8
Online	35	51	14

YLT respondents were also asked about the feelings and emotions that they associated with being respected or disrespected. Figure 3 shows the proportion of respondents who identified certain emotions/feelings when they experienced respect from someone. The three emotions identified by the largest proportions of

respondents were acceptance (66%), being taken seriously (65%) and happiness (63%). Over half (51%) of respondents also identified being included as a feeling. Only very small proportions of 16-year-olds did not feel they were respected (1%) or did not care if they were respected (5%).

Figure 3:
Feelings when other people respect you (%)

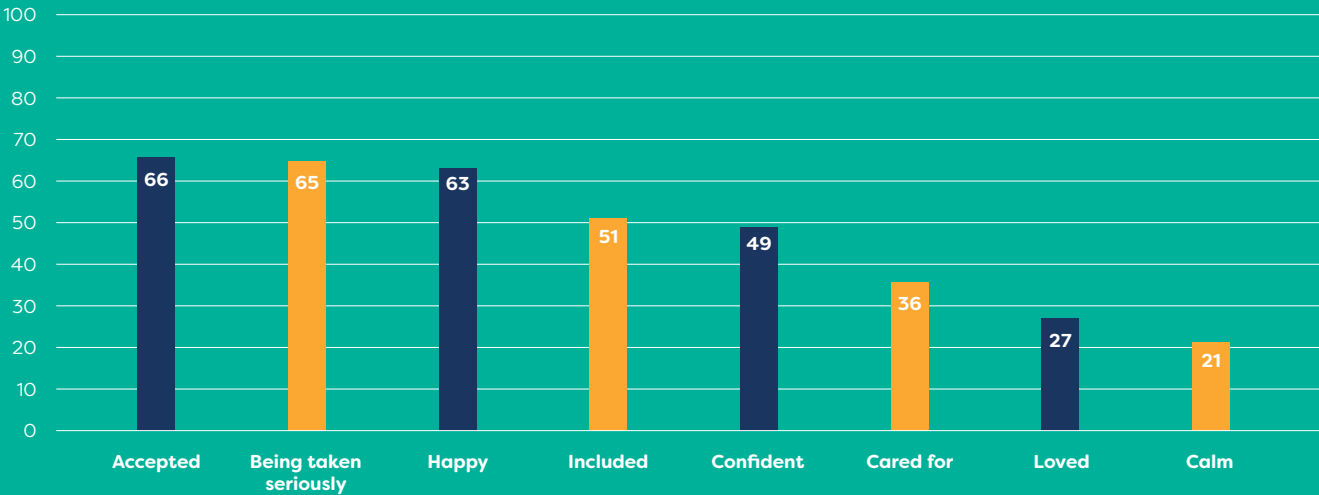


Figure 4, on the other hand, shows the emotions and feelings identified when respondents felt disrespected. The three main feelings related to disrespect were feeling annoyed (66%), not being taken seriously (56%) and feeling excluded (50%).

As with feelings associated with respect, small proportions of 16-year-olds did not feel they were disrespected (1%) or did not care if they were disrespected (12%).

Figure 4:
Feelings when other people do not respect you (%)

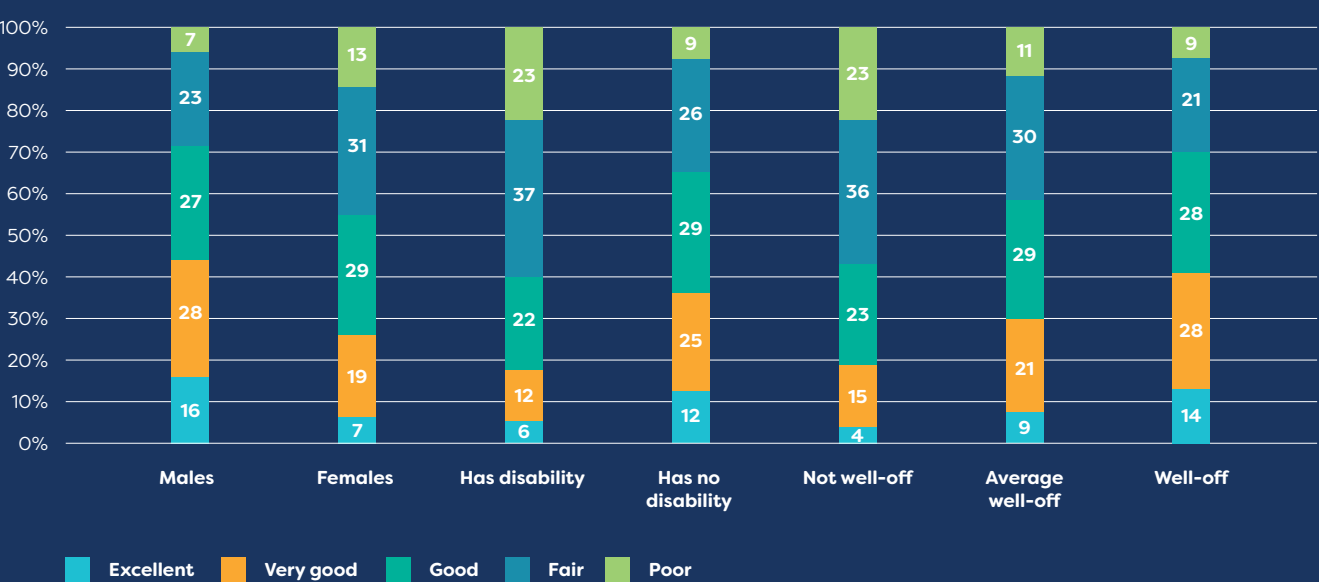


Mental health

When asked about their mental health and wellbeing, overall one third (33%) of respondents described their mental health and wellbeing as ‘excellent’ or ‘very good’, 28 per cent said it was good, whilst 39 per cent said it was ‘fair’ or ‘poor’. Figure 5 shows that self-assessed mental

health varied significantly between males and females, those with disability or a long-term illness and those without, and between those who came from well-off backgrounds compared to those from not well-off backgrounds.

Figure 5: Self-assessed mental health and wellbeing (%)



16-year-olds were also asked to select one issue from a list that they thought the Northern Ireland Mental Health Champion should focus on in relation to young people (Table 5). Making sure that young people can get help

and support from mental health services if they need it was by far the most frequently mentioned issue (33%), followed by looking at the effect of social media and the online environment on young people’s mental health and wellbeing (17%).

Table 5: Priorities of the Mental Health Champion in relation to young people (%)

Mental Health Champion priority	%
Making sure that young people can get help and support from mental health services if they need it	33
Looking at the effect of social media and the online environment on young people’s mental health and wellbeing	17
Making sure that young people learn about mental health and wellbeing in school	15
Improving access to free activities/spaces in the local community	15
Making sure that schools teach young people about building healthy friendships and relationships	14
Something else	6

Environment

In relation to the environment, YLT respondents were asked how important or unimportant they felt each of the six goals of the Northern Ireland Environmental Improvement Plan were (Table 6). ‘Excellent air, water and land quality’ was considered the most important goal

while tackling climate change and ‘sustainable production and consumption on land and at sea’ were regarded as the least important. Female YLT respondents were more likely than male respondents to believe that all of the goals were very important.

Table 6: Importance or unimportance of NI Environmental Improvement Plan goals (%)

	Very important/important	Neither important nor unimportant	Not very/not at all important	Don’t know
Excellent air, water and land quality	85	9	3	3
Healthy and accessible environment and landscapes	82	11	4	4
Thriving, resilient and connected nature and wildlife	78	15	5	3
Zero waste and highly developed circular economy	74	14	7	6
Sustainable production and consumptions on land and at sea	71	18	6	6
Net zero greenhouse gas emissions and improved climate resilience and adaptability	71	15	7	9

Young people were also asked about what action they would be willing to take to help the environment (Table 7). Buying less single use plastic was the most common response, with 51 per cent indicating that they would be likely or very likely to do this. By contrast, eating less meat was the least common response.

Around one fifth (19%) of 16-year-olds indicated that they would be very likely or likely to do this. As with environmental policy preferences, female YLT respondents were more likely than male respondents to consider adopting all of the pro-environmental actions.

Table 7: Likelihood of taking the following action to help the environment (%)

	Very likely/likely	Neither likely nor unlikely	Very unlikely/unlikely	Don’t know	Already do this
Buy less single use plastic	51	16	21	6	7
Choose to travel by public transport or bike rather than car when feasible	40	16	30	5	10
Pay more for food to support more sustainable farming	29	23	38	8	2
Go on fewer holidays where you need to fly	26	21	37	8	8
Buy sustainably produced or second hand clothes	25	19	44	6	5
Cut down on how much meat you eat	19	16	57	5	3

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