

# Travel to and from School by Pupils in Northern Ireland 2020/2021

*Findings from the Continuous Household Survey 2020/2021*

An Official Statistics Publication

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## KEY POINTS

### Primary School

- Almost two-thirds (65%) of primary school pupils travelled to/from school by car as their main mode of travel.
- More than a quarter (27%) of primary school pupils walked or cycled to/from school as their main mode of travel.

### Post-Primary School

- Almost half (46%) of post-primary school pupils travelled to/from school by bus as their main mode of travel.
- Almost two-fifths (38%) of post-primary school pupils travelled to/from school by car as their main mode of travel.

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This publication is also available at the [Travel to School research webpage \(opens in a new window\)](#)

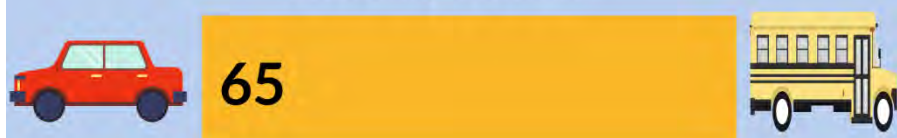
# Travel to and from school in Northern Ireland 2020/2021

Respondents to the Northern Ireland Continuous Household Survey (CHS) were asked if children in the household attended primary school or post primary school.

Of the 473 children whose parents were surveyed in 2020/21, 227 children attended primary school, 246 attended post-primary school.

## Main mode of travel to and from school

### Primary School



### Post-Primary School



## Methodology changes due to COVID-19

Due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, data collection for the 2020/21 survey moved from face-to-face interviewing to telephone mode with a reduction in the number of questions. The results from the CHS 2020/21 are not directly comparable to previous years due to the significant changes to the survey in terms of methodology and content. The output from the survey, in terms of the range and depth of topics covered, has been reduced from that of previous years, with the subsequent capacity for detailed analysis constrained.

More information is available on the [NISRA website](#).

## INTRODUCTION

How we travel has a really important impact upon our physical and mental health and wellbeing – whether through social exclusion, poor air quality or the fact that we are not active enough. Hence, the Program for Government draft Outcomes Framework reference to promotion of and access to safe, active and sustainable transport to encourage people to make environmentally responsible choices about transport is part of delivering on a range of the outcomes – including health, infrastructure and the environment. By increasing activity and reducing reliance on the private car, walking and cycling will contribute to sustainability, provide children with a better and healthier start in life, cultivate better active travel habits, improve air quality and contribute to longer healthier lives.

The Department for Infrastructure (DfI) has responsibility for the development of sustainable travel throughout Northern Ireland and there is significant potential to increase the number of children walking or cycling to school. We want to create safer conditions that allow children to replace the daily school run by an active and sustainable method of travel where possible.

DfI supports various initiatives that help support parents, teachers and children to make a healthier choice for their mode of travel to school, such as the Active School Travel Programme, the Cycling Proficiency Scheme and the Practical Child Pedestrian Safety Training and Walk/Cycle to School week (usually late May each year).

### ***Uses of the data***

This report provides annual statistics on the main method of travel to/from primary and post-primary school. This information may be used to monitor the overall effect of the initiatives that are aimed at increasing the proportion of children who travel actively to school.

### ***Methodology changes due to COVID-19***

Due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, data collection for the 2020/21 survey moved from face-to-face interviewing to telephone mode with a reduction in the number of questions. The results from the CHS 2020/21 are not directly comparable to previous years due to the significant changes to the survey in terms of methodology and content.

The output from the survey, in terms of the sample size, range and depth of topics covered, has been reduced from that of previous years, with the subsequent capacity for detailed analysis constrained. With the reduction in the achieved sample due to the lower response rate, the precision of survey estimates is reduced. To assist with gauging the level of uncertainty in the data, 95% confidence intervals have been added to the charts.

### **What is a confidence interval?**

The error bars and shaded areas in most of the charts in this report show 95% confidence intervals. A 95% confidence interval shows the range around a central estimate that we are 95% confident contains the true value of the population.

For example, in 20/21 27% of primary school pupils walked or cycled to school with a 95% confidence interval of +/- 6%. This means we can be 95% certain\* that the true figure for the Northern Ireland population (if we surveyed everyone and not just a sample) falls between 21%-33% i.e. the values indicated by the error bars in Figure 1 and Figure 2.

\*If 100 samples were chosen from the population giving 100 confidence intervals, we would expect 95 of these confidence intervals would contain the true population value.

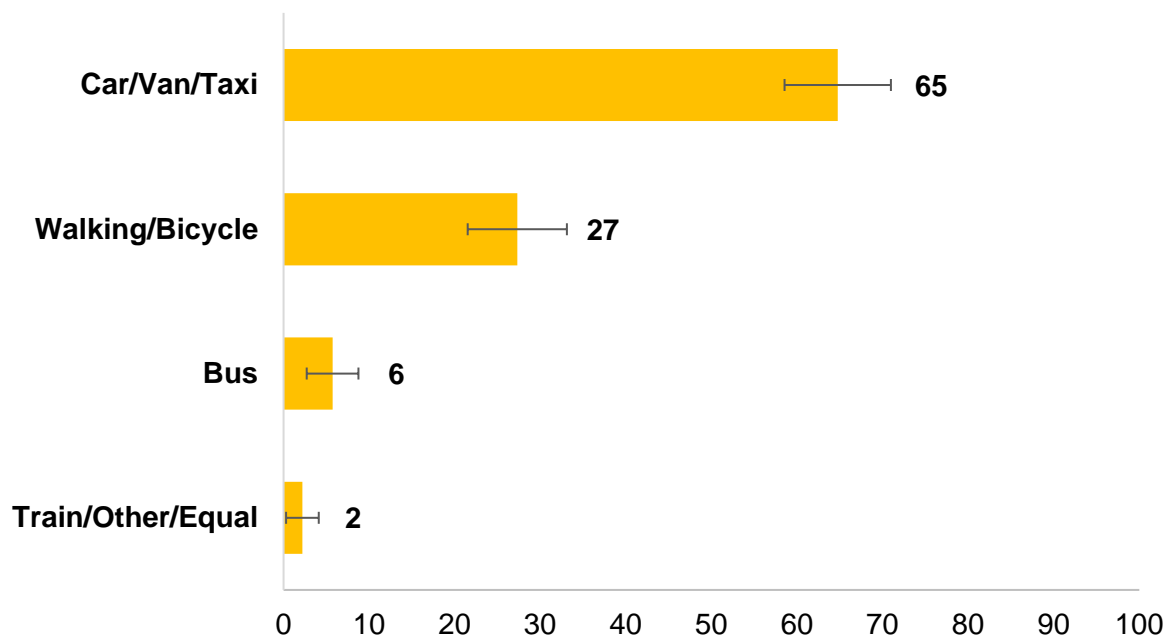
## MAIN MODES OF TRAVEL TO AND FROM SCHOOL

Respondents to the Northern Ireland Continuous Household Survey (CHS) were asked if children in the household attended primary school or post primary school. Parents<sup>1</sup> were then asked a set of questions on behalf of their children. Of the 473 children whose parents were surveyed in 2020/21, 227 children attended primary school, 246 attended post-primary school. The results of these questions are presented in this report.

Respondents were asked to consider the **main** mode of travel their child used to travel to and from school, that is, the mode of travel used for the longest part of the journey.

### a. *Primary School*

**Figure 1: Main mode of travel to/from primary school (%)**



Base: 227

In 2020/21, almost two-thirds (65%) of primary school pupils travelled to/from school by car<sup>2</sup> as their main mode of travel. More than a quarter (27%) of primary school pupils walked or cycled to/from school as their main mode. A further 6% of primary school pupils travelled by bus.

<sup>1</sup> Throughout the report 'parent' is used to refer to parent, guardian or caregiver.

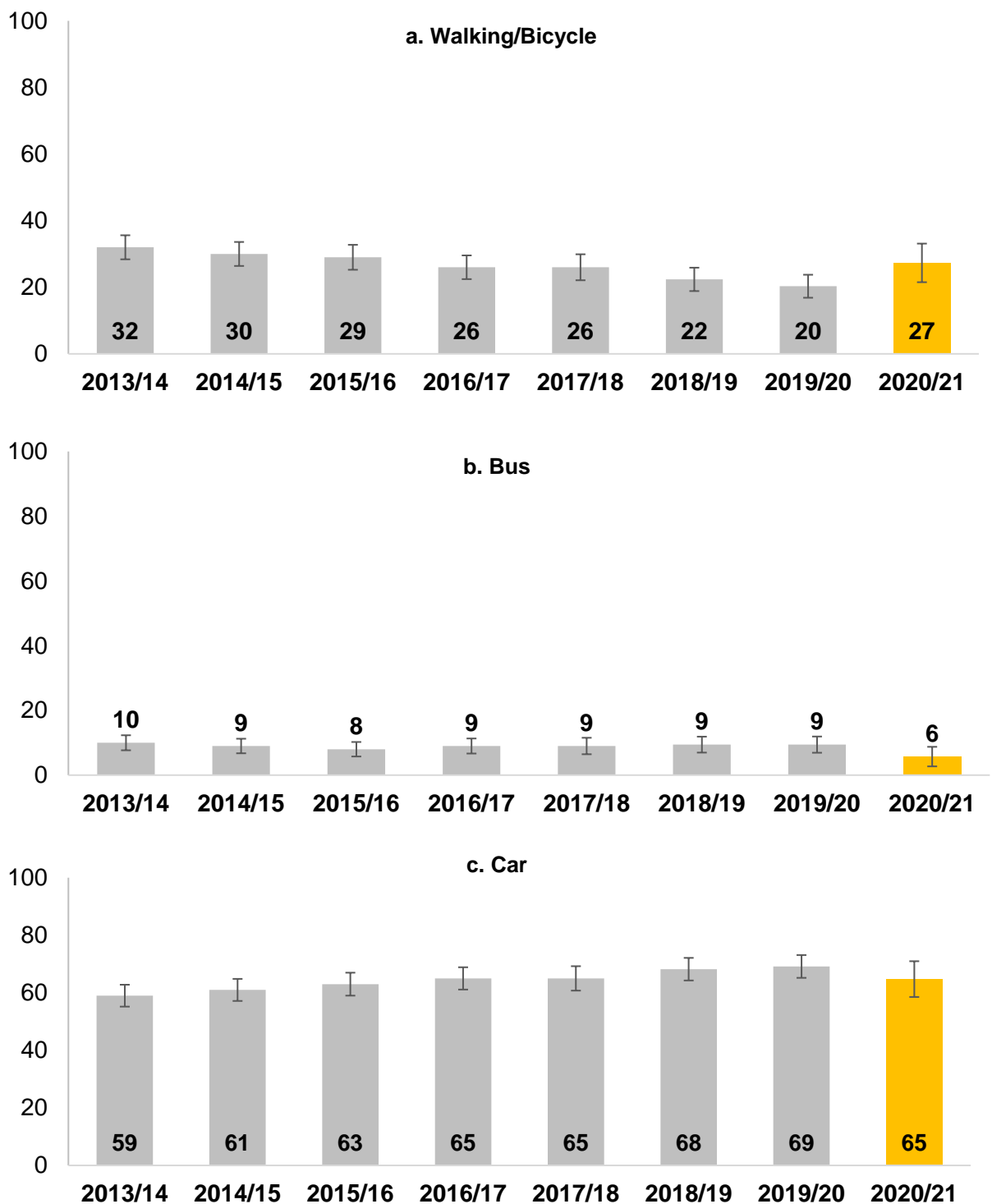
<sup>2</sup> Throughout the report 'car' is used to refer to travel by car, van or taxi.



The following charts present results for walking & cycling, car travel and travel by bus to primary school for each of the last 8 years. Please note that while results for previous years are displayed below, these figures are not directly comparable to results from 2020/21 due to methodology changes arising from the Covid-19 Pandemic.

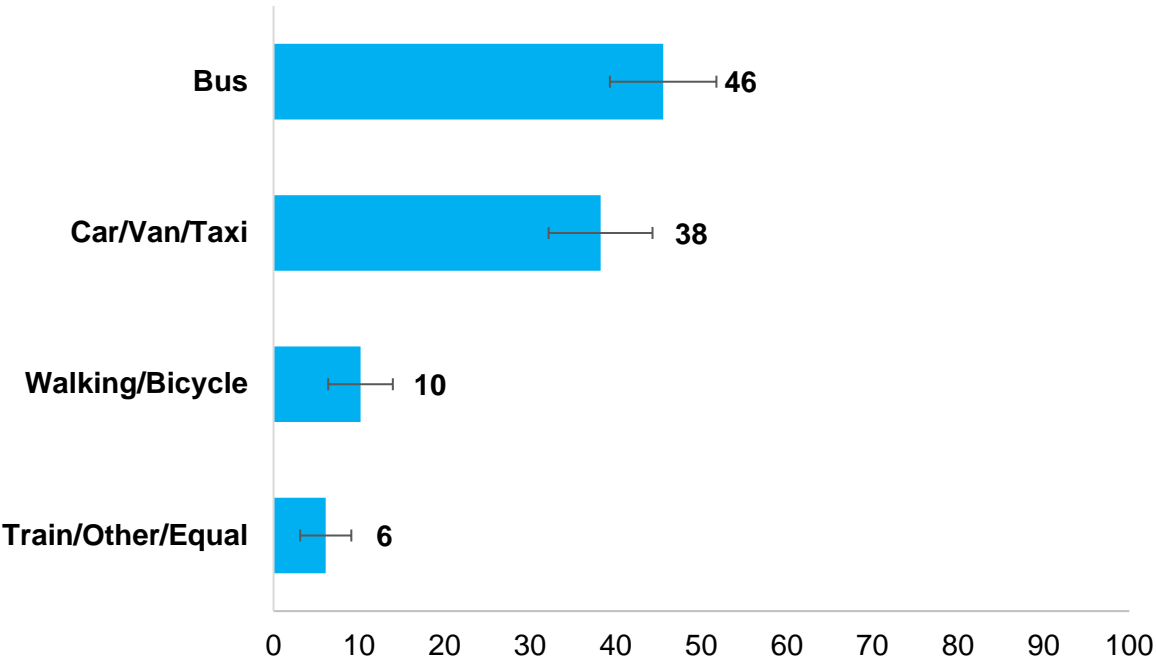
From the charts below, it is evident that for primary pupils, travel by car remains the most popular method of travelling to school.

**Figure 2: Travel to and from primary school (%)**



**b. Post-Primary School**

**Figure 5: Main mode of travel to/from post-primary school (%)**



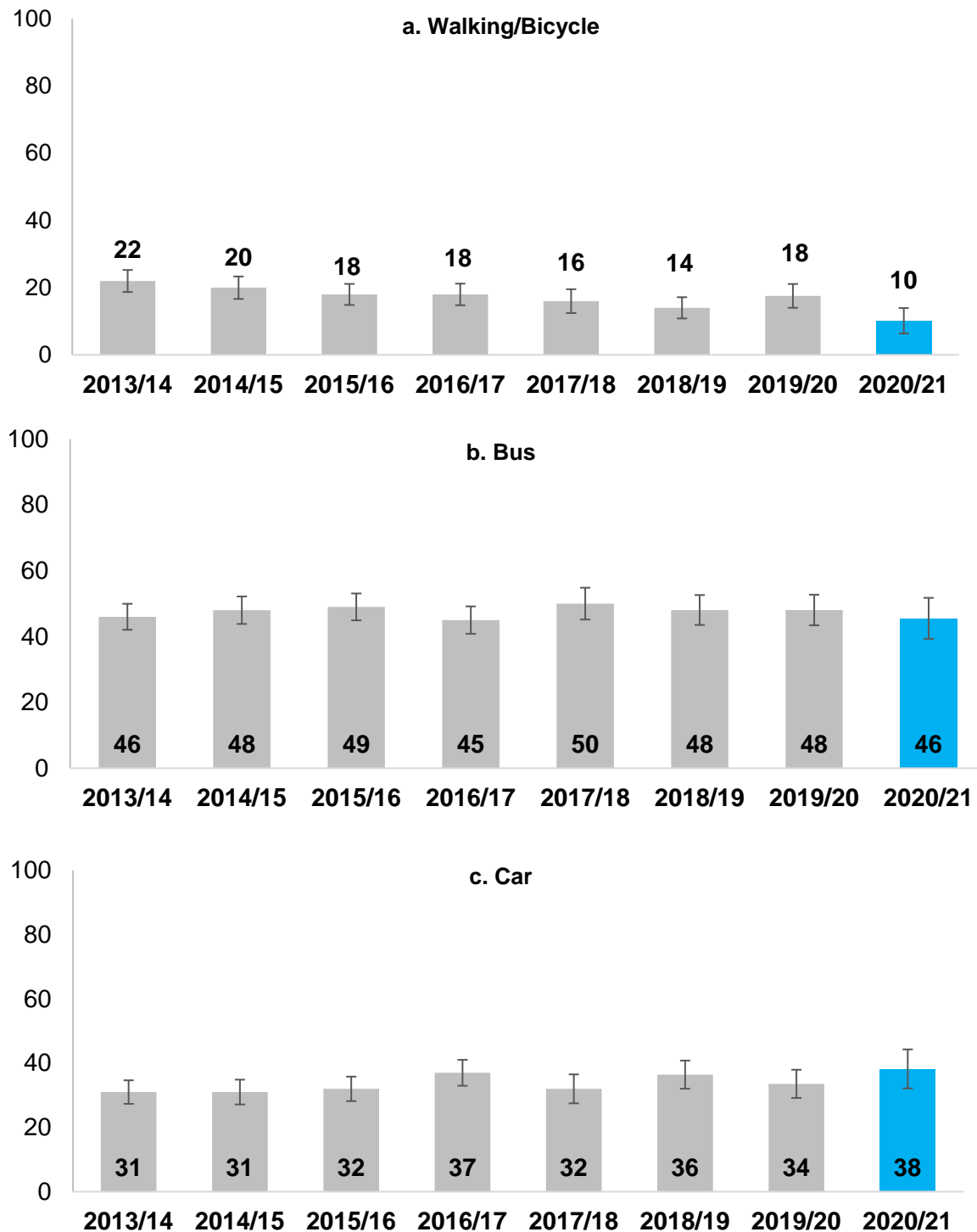
Base: 246

Almost half (46%) of post-primary school pupils travelled to/from school by bus as their main mode of travel in 2020/21. Almost two-fifths (38%) travelled to/from school by car as their main mode of travel and one in ten (10%) pupils walked or cycled to/from school.

The following three charts present results for walking & cycling, car travel and travel by bus to post primary school for each of the last 8 years. Please note that while results for previous years are displayed below, these figures are not directly comparable to results from 2020/21 due to methodology changes arising from the Covid-19 Pandemic.

Even though not directly comparable, it is evident that for post primary pupils, travel by bus is the most popular method of travelling to school.

**Figure 6: Travel to and from post-primary school (%)**





## **Appendix 1: Technical Notes**

### ***Data collection***

The information presented in this publication derives from the Northern Ireland Continuous Household Survey (CHS), a Northern Ireland wide household survey administered by Central Survey Unit (CSU), Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA).

It is based on a sample of the general population resident in private households and has been running since 1983. The Survey is designed to provide a regular source of information on a wide range of social and economic issues relevant to Northern Ireland.

Due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, data collection for the 2020/21 survey moved from face-to-face interviewing to telephone mode with a reduction in the number of questions. The results from the CHS 2020/21 are not directly comparable to previous years due to the significant changes to the survey in terms of methodology and content.

The output from the survey, in terms of the sample size, range and depth of topics covered, has been reduced from that of previous years, with the subsequent capacity for detailed analysis constrained. With the reduction in the achieved sample due to the lower response rate, the precision of survey estimates is reduced. To assist with gauging the level of uncertainty in the data, 95% confidence intervals have been added to the charts.

More information is available on the [NISRA website](#).

Questions related to method of travel to/from school were commissioned for the first time in 2013/14 and have been included in the CHS every year since then. Therefore this is the eighth time that they have been asked. Due to the constraints imposed on the survey in 2020/21, questions on distance travelled, time taken and frequency of travel were omitted.

The 2020/21 survey was based on a random sample of 9,000 domestic addresses drawn from the NISRA Address Register and interviews were sought with all adults aged 16 and over in these households. The questions relating to school travel are included in Appendix 4 of this publication.

The dataset contains the records for 473 children who attended a primary or post-primary level school at the time of interview and whose parents provided a response. These records are based on the responses to the DfI Household Module answered by the Household Reference Person or Spouse.

### ***Data quality***

Data were collected by CSU and various validation checks were carried out as part of the processing. CSU is the leading social survey research organisation in Northern Ireland and is one of the main business areas of NISRA, an Agency within the Department of Finance. CSU has a long track record and a wealth of experience in the design, management and analysis of behavioural and attitude surveys in the context of a wide range of social policy issues. CSU procedures are consistent with the Official Statistics Code of Practice<sup>3</sup>.

The CHS sample was assessed and considered to be a representative sample of the Northern Ireland population at the household level.

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<sup>3</sup> [Code of Practice for Statistics](#)

Whilst data quality is considered to be very good, note that all survey estimates are subject to a degree of error and this must be taken account of when considering results (see notes on sampling error on page 21). This error will be reasonably small for the majority of Northern Ireland level results but care should be taken when looking at results based on smaller breakdowns.

### ***Rounding conventions***

Percentages have been rounded to whole numbers and as a consequence some percentages may not sum to 100. 0% may reflect rounding down of values under 0.5.

### ***Sampling error***

No sample is likely to precisely mirror the characteristics of the population it is drawn from due to both sampling and non-sampling errors. An estimate of the amount of error due to the sampling process can be calculated. For a simple random sample design, the sampling error (s.e.) of any percentage,  $p$ , can be calculated by the formula:

$$s.e. (p) = \sqrt{(p*(100-p)/n)}$$

where  $n$  is the number of respondents on which the percentage is based.

### ***Confidence interval***

A 95% confidence interval for the population percentage can be calculated using the formula:

$$95\% \text{ confidence interval} = p \pm 1.96 * s.e. (p)$$

This means that if 100 similar, independent samples were chosen from the same population, 95 of them would yield an estimate for the percentage,  $p$ , within this range of values.

The absence of design effects in the survey means that standard statistical tests of significance can be applied directly to the data. 95% confidence intervals were calculated for the headline figures as detailed in Appendix 3 on page 13.

### ***Other notes***

The following should be noted when interpreting figures and tables:

- Detailed tabulations are not provided where the number of respondents is too small to allow meaningful analysis.
- The base number of responses to each question is the unweighted count. The base may vary due to some respondents not answering certain questions.

## Appendix 2: Questionnaire

### CHILDREN TRAVEL TO SCHOOL

**[CINTRO]** I would now like to ask some questions about the children in this household.

#### **ASKED OF EACH PERSON IN THE HOUSEHOLD AGED 4-19**

**[C1]** Is CHILD at a primary or post-primary school?

1. Primary school -> [MODE]
2. Post-primary school -> [MODE]
3. No longer at school -> [DEintro]
4. Not started school -> [ENVIRON]

#### **[MAIN]** SHOWCARD 9 (MODES OF TRANSPORT)

Which of these do you consider is CHILD's main mode of transport to and from school?  
*(IF MORE THAN ONE MODE SELECT THE MODE WITH THE LONGEST JOURNEY)*

1. Walking (all or part of the way)
2. Bicycle
3. Car/van
4. Bus
5. Train
6. Taxi
7. Other
8. Cannot distinguish - equal number of journeys made with different modes (e.g. car lift to school 5 days a week, walk home from school 5 days a week)