

Attitudes to Shared Education: Findings from the 2020/21 Young Life and Times and Kids' Life and Times surveys

Research Briefing



This research briefing presents key findings from the 2020/21 Northern Ireland Young Life and Times and Kids' Life and Times surveys

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Reader Information

Purpose	The purpose of this research briefing is to present key findings about young people's attitudes to Shared Education in Northern Ireland from the 2020/21 Northern Ireland Young Life and Times (YLT) and Kids' Life and Times (KLT) surveys.
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Key Findings

The key findings from the 2020/21 surveys were that:

- Fifty-three per cent of YLT and 67 per cent of KLT respondents said they had been involved in Shared Education.
- Doing projects with pupils from other schools was the most common activity (81% of YLT and 74% of KLT respondents).
- Whilst very positive overall, YLT respondents enjoyed sharing equipment (82%) with other schools slightly more than doing projects (80%) or having classes (74%). The pattern was similar for KLT respondents (84%, 84% and 75% respectively).
- Over one half of KLT (55%) and 36 per cent of YLT respondents had made at least one close friend from a different religion as a result of taking part in Shared Education.
- Two thirds of YLT respondents (66%) either strongly agreed or agreed that they were better able to respect the views of other people since taking part in Shared Education.
- Over half of KLT and YLT respondents said they were very favourable or favourable about Shared Education (58% KLT and 55% YLT).

Introduction

1. The legislative framework for the implementation of Shared Education is set out in the Shared Education Act (Northern Ireland) 2016¹, which places a duty on the Department of Education (DE) '(so far as its powers extend) to encourage, facilitate and promote Shared Education'.

The Shared Education Act (NI) 2016 defines Shared Education as the education together of those of:

- (a) Different religious belief, including reasonable numbers of both Protestant and Roman Catholic children or young persons; and
 - (b) Those who are experiencing socio-economic deprivation and those who are not, which is secured by the working together and co-operation of two or more relevant providers.
2. In the second 'Advancing Shared Education' report produced by DE for the Northern Ireland Assembly, the Minister of Education states that the core purpose of Shared Education is to 'promote good relations and respect for identity, diversity and community cohesion, and contribute to improved educational outcomes' (2020, pg iii).² There is a clear commitment to Shared Education by the Northern Ireland Executive as exemplified in its document New Decade, New Approach³ (2020, pg 7) which states that 'the Executive will support educating children and young people of different backgrounds together in the classroom'.
 3. To ensure compliance with the Shared Education Act (Northern Ireland) 2016, and assess the impact of Shared Education, DE uses a number of sources, including regularly scheduled surveys of children and young people (DE, 2020). To this end, DE commissions modules of questions on Shared Education in the Young Life and Times (YLT) which is an annual survey of 16 year olds and the Kids' Life and Times (KLT), an annual survey of Primary 7 children aged 10/11 years. This report presents the findings from two modules of questions on Shared Education commissioned by DE and included in the 2020/21 YLT and KLT surveys.

¹ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2016/20/introduction>

² DE 2020 <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/education/Shared%20Education%202nd%20Report%20to%20Assembly%20June%202020.PDF>

³ NI Assembly https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/856998/2020-01-08_a_new_decade__a_new_approach.pdf

Aim and Objectives of the Research

4. The overall aims of the research were to:

- Assess the attitudes of children and young people towards Shared Education and lessons and discussion about different groups of people in our society in 2020/21;
- Compare the views of Primary 7 children (10 and 11 year olds) with their older counterparts (16 year olds);
- Explore changes in experiences of, and attitudes to, Shared Education in 2015, 2017, 2018 and 2020/21.

Main Findings

5. The key findings from the 2020/21 surveys were that:

- Fifty-three per cent of YLT and 67 per cent of KLT respondents said they had been involved in Shared Education.
- Doing projects with pupils from other schools was the most common activity (81% of YLT and 74% of KLT respondents).
- Whilst very positive overall, YLT respondents enjoyed sharing equipment (82%) with other schools slightly more than doing projects (80%) or having classes (74%). The pattern was similar for KLT respondents (84%, 84% and 75% respectively).
- Over one half of KLT (55%) and 36 per cent of YLT respondents had made at least one close friend from a different religion as a result of taking part in Shared Education.
- Two thirds of YLT respondents (66%) either strongly agreed or agreed that they were better able to respect the views of other people since taking part in Shared Education.
- Over half of KLT and YLT respondents said they were very favourable or favourable about Shared Education (58% KLT and 55% YLT).
- In the primary school setting, the lessons and discussion about different groups of people in our society topic the children were most likely to have had in school was gender; least discussed was political opinion.
- Seventy-one per cent of YLT respondents said they have had lessons and discussion about different groups of people in our society either in school or in their youth project/centre. One half (53%) of them said they have had these lessons and discussion in school only, 10 per cent said they have had them in the youth project/centre only, and 8 per cent have had them in both settings.
- The topics YLT respondents had covered most often in the school setting were ethnicity and disability (80% each). In the youth setting, the topic covered most often was religious beliefs (66%).

Conclusion

6. Overall, the evidence from the 2020/21 YLT and KLT surveys suggests that, as in previous years, the majority of children and young people are positive about Shared Education with pupils from other schools. They particularly like the fact that sharing enables them to make new friends, mix with those from different backgrounds to themselves; enhance learning opportunities, and have access to a wider range of activities and subjects than they would otherwise have.
7. While the attitudes to taking part in Shared Education in 2020/21 are generally similar to the findings from the 2018 survey the most notable difference is the increase (13 percentage points) in the percentage of YLT respondents saying they had taken part in Shared Education. This difference was statistically significant. Similarly, in 2020/21, the figure for KLT respondents saying they had been involved in Shared Education increased by 4 percentage points, a difference that was statistically significant. However, the effect sizes were low.
8. Among respondents to both surveys, the activity that was liked the most was being with children and young people who had a different ethnic background to them. While still positive, the aspect of sharing they liked least was being taught by different teachers.
9. KLT and YLT respondents were asked if they had taken part in lessons and discussion about different groups of people in society in their school (and/or youth setting in YLT). The majority (around 85% in KLT and 70% in YLT) said they had. Children and young people who had been involved in Shared Education were more likely to say they had taken part in lessons and discussion about different groups of people in society than their counterparts who had not been involved in Shared Education.
10. A higher percentage of YLT respondents who had done Shared Education said they had become more favourable towards all of the Section 75 groups as a result of having lessons and discussion about different groups of people in society than their peers who had not done Shared Education. Similarly, a higher percentage of KLT respondents who had done Shared Education said they had become more positive than their peers who had not done Shared Education in relation to all Section 75 groups they had discussed in school. However, where KLT respondents indicated that their attitude had not changed it is not clear whether they were

already positive or negative towards any of these groups before having had lessons and discussion about different groups of people in society in school.

11. The findings from the 2020/21 surveys showed that, overall, only a minority of respondents who had done Shared Education said they were very unfavourable towards sharing classes, doing projects, or sharing equipment with other schools. Over half of respondents to both surveys said they said they were mostly favourable or favourable towards Shared Education (58% KLT and 55% YLT).

Young Life and Times (YLT) Survey

12. YLT is a survey conducted annually by ARK among 16 year olds in Northern Ireland and, in 2020/21, was carried out online (with optional phone and paper completion where respondents preferred this). In conjunction with the Centre for Data Digitisation and Analysis (CDDA) at QUB, a customised online survey tool, which complies with university and Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) confidentiality and data security regulations, was designed and utilised for the 2020/21 survey.
13. Each year, the sample for the YLT survey is taken from the Child Benefit Register (CBR). ARK receives the names and addresses of eligible YLT respondents directly from HMRC. Child Benefit is paid to people bringing up children in the UK. Although the UK government uses means testing for Child Benefit, for the purpose of undertaking the YLT survey, ARK has access to the addresses of all families in NI who have registered for Child Benefit even if they are not entitled to receive it due to their income. Therefore, for the YLT survey, the CBR provides the opportunity to select a random sample of 16 year olds whose parents have registered for Child Benefit.
14. In March 2021 a Service Level Agreement (SLA) and Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between ARK and HMRC in relation to 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. Within HMRC, staff turn-over and priority commitments in relation to Brexit, and the challenges in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic, resulted in a delayed delivery of the sample of names and addresses of eligible YLT respondents to ARK. The sample was delivered in the last week of April 2021. The sample for the 2020/21 survey included the names and addresses of 5,000 randomly selected young people in Northern Ireland who celebrated their 16th birthday in April, May or June.
15. Fieldwork was conducted in May 2021. In the first week of May each potential participant was sent a letter providing information about the survey, including the aims of the project; how to opt-out; GDPR, contact details for the survey team, and the web link for the survey. The letter

provided participants with a unique identifier which was required for accessing the survey and they were told that those who completed the survey online by the end of May 2021 would receive a £10 gift voucher. In the second week of May 2021, a reminder letter was sent to all those who had not as yet completed or opted out of the survey. Postal completion was offered as an alternative mode. The high level of interest in the YLT survey in 2021, and the respective number of questions included, meant that a split survey was required.

16. After cleaning the dataset received from HMRC (removal of respondents with incomplete or incorrect addresses) 4,999 eligible names remained. Sixty-two initial mailings were returned as 'addressee unknown/gone away'. Eight parents contacted ARK to say that their child was deceased and 16 young people or their parents/carers opted out of completing the survey. This left an overall sample of 4,913 16-year olds. A total of 2,147 young people logged on to the survey with their ID. After removal of the most incomplete responses (i.e. responses where only very few or no questions were completed), 2,069 responses remained. This represents an overall response rate of 42.1 per cent.

Kids' Life and Times (KLT) Survey

17. KLT is an online survey whose target population is all P7-aged children in Northern Ireland. To this end, in addition to pupils attending mainstream primary schools and special schools, KLT targets children who are educated at home. However, given that the focus of the 2020/21 KLT survey was on attitudes towards, and experiences in, school the target population was children attending mainstream and special schools; children educated at home were not included.

18. Approximately 25,450 children from 842 primary schools across Northern Ireland were invited to participate; 2,242 children from 94 schools logged on to the survey representing 9 per cent of children and 11 per cent of schools. This was a much lower response rate than in previous years but was not unexpected given the Covid-19 pandemic and the impact of lock-downs and school closures throughout the fieldwork period. Furthermore, the 2020/21 KLT survey had an over-representation of Catholic Maintained schools when compared to the DE figures (55% and 42% respectively). Conversely, there were fewer schools from the Controlled sector in the KLT sample (39%) than in the figures reported by DE (42%) and no special schools participated in the survey. The figures suggest that there is slightly more bias in the KLT school sample in terms of school management type than has been the case in previous years. One other thing to note was that there was a higher drop-out rate than in previous years; responses declined

steadily throughout the survey. The number of children who completed the Shared Education module was approximately 2,170.

19. Consent to participate in the 2020/21 KLT involved three levels: firstly, the school principal agreed that the school could participate; secondly, a parent or guardian of each P7 pupil within the participating schools received a consent form which they were asked to complete and return to the school if they did not wish their child to take part. Thirdly, at the start of the questionnaire, each child was asked if s/he agreed to take part. Each school is allocated a unique three-digit identification number which is used to identify the school so that the principal can be sent a confidential school report. However, the children are anonymous.

20. Fieldwork started on 12th October 2020 and was anticipated to end on 29th January 2021. However, due to the need for social distancing in schools as a result of Covid-19, and the restrictions this placed on accommodating completion of the survey by the children, a number of schools requested an extension to the survey fieldwork. Therefore, the survey remained open until 26th February 2021. A dedicated telephone line was set up so that principals or parents could contact the survey team for more information and a PDF version of the questionnaire was made available on the KLT website.

21. The online questionnaire was designed and administered by the ARK team. Throughout the design of the questionnaire, the KLT team worked closely with the funders of the survey and with C2KNI which is the organisation responsible for the provision of an ICT-managed service to all schools in Northern Ireland. When the child logged on and confirmed that s/he wanted to take part, they were asked to enter the three-digit school identification number or their seven-digit DE number. When the code was entered, the full name and address of the school appeared on the screen, and the child confirmed that this was the correct school before progressing with the survey. No further identification codes or names of children were required. The questionnaire took about 20 minutes to complete and each question had a 'Skip' option which the children could use if they did not want to answer it.

The Project

22. The project was undertaken by ARK (QUB) and funded by the Department of Education. The total cost of the project was £17,980.

23. The full research report entitled 'Attitudes to Shared Education: Findings from the 2020/21 Young Life and Times and Kids' Life and Times surveys' is available on the Department of Education website at [DE Website - Home \(opens in new window\)](#).