



# Research Update

## Young people's experiences of integration and segregation in Northern Ireland

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### Introduction

The Northern Ireland Life and Times (NILT) and Young Life and Times (YLT) surveys have, since their inception in 1998 and 2003 respectively, elicited the views of adult and sixteen year olds across a range of topics. While the majority of questions change from year to year, a number of questions are asked annually, for example, respondents' preferences for living in mixed or single religion neighbourhoods; working in mixed or single religion workplaces; and sending children to mixed or single religion schools. However, changes in attitudes towards mixing and integration have been positively or negatively affected by significant political events and incidents, for example, the Holy Cross School dispute in 2001 or, more recently, the debate round the flying of the union flag (Hughes and Donnelly 2001; 2003; Devine and Schubotz 2004; 2005; Schubotz and Robinson 2006; Devine, Kelly and Robinson 2011; Hayward, Dowds and Shaw 2014). As such, the responses to these time series questions act as a barometer for community relations and are used by the Northern Ireland government, amongst others, as good relations indicators.

In 2014 the Integrated Education Fund (IEF) sought to explore the attitudes of children and young people in Northern Ireland to integration, segregation and mixing. To do so, they funded and devised

a series of questions for inclusion in two ARK surveys, namely, YLT, a postal survey of sixteen year olds, and Kids' Life and Times (KLT), an online survey available to all Primary 7 aged children in Northern Ireland and completed in school. While previous YLT surveys have asked questions around issues of segregation and integration, the inclusion of the IEF questions in KLT was the first time that the views of a large number of 10 - 11 year olds had been sought on these issues. KLT was completed by 4757 children (21% of P7 aged pupils) from 215 schools (25% of primary schools); all children had the opportunity to respond to the IEF questions. While YLT was distributed to 5962 sixteen year olds only half of the surveys (2846) included the IEF questions - of these 1034 were completed (37%).

This Research Update highlights the most important findings in relation to how divided children and young people think Northern Ireland is; whether they think that more integration is needed; how welcome a new pupil from different backgrounds would be made in school; and which type of school they would prefer their own children to attend and why.

### Perceived Division in Northern Ireland

Using the options 'very divided'; 'quite divided'; 'not really divided'; 'not at all

divided' and 'don't know' respondents were asked how divided they felt children (KLT) and people (YLT) who live in Northern Ireland are in terms of:

- their religion
- their skin colour and/or the language they speak (KLT) / their ethnicity (YLT)
- their cultural traditions and festivals
- the sports they play
- the schools they attend
- how rich or poor they are (KLT) / their social class (YLT)

A large majority (81%) of YLT respondents saw religion as the main source of division in Northern Ireland. In the case of KLT 42% saw children as being divided to some extent by religion, which was the only one of the six terms where more respondents answered 'very or quite divided' than answered 'not really or not at all divided'. In terms of school, the same proportion saw this as a source of division as did not see it as a dividing factor: 36% in each case. In each of the remaining three terms more respondents believed that the people who live in Northern Ireland are 'not really or not at all divided' than 'very or quite divided'. YLT respondents perceived divisions in Northern Ireland across all terms, and the more negative perceptions of the sixteen years olds in comparison to 10 - 11 year olds are clearly demonstrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: KLT and YLT respondents (%) who think that people in Northern Ireland are very or quite divided in terms of...

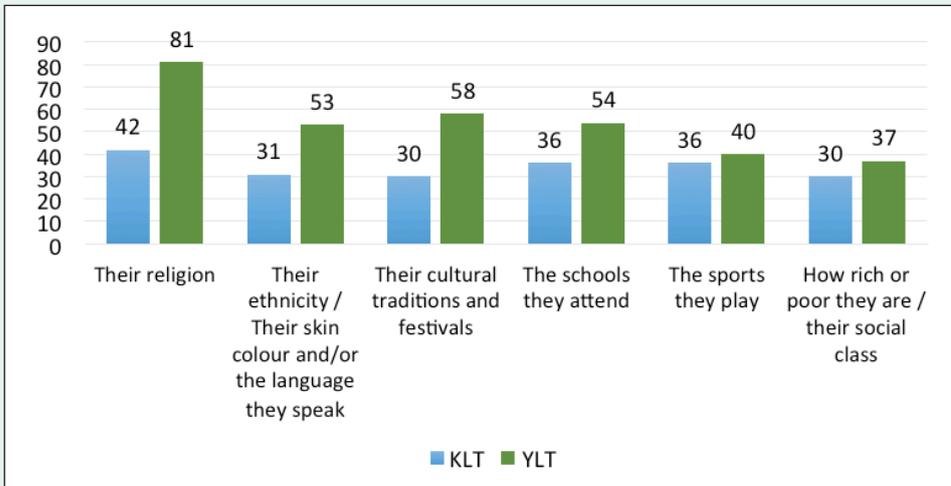


Figure 2: KLT and YLT respondents (%) who think there should be much more or a bit more integration between the children/the people who live in Northern Ireland in terms of...

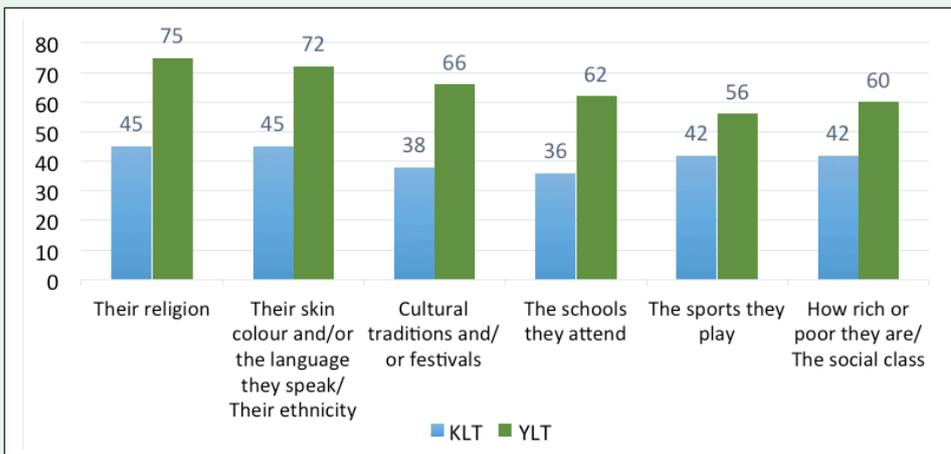
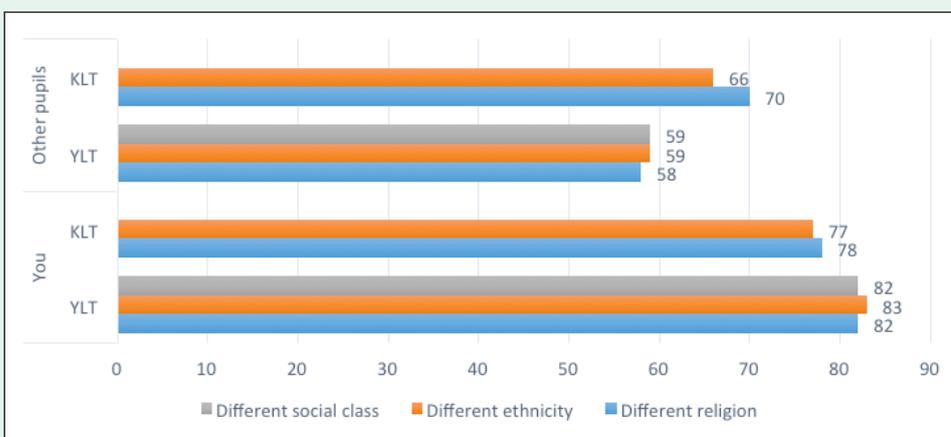


Figure 3: KLT and YLT respondents who think that other pupils or themselves would make a new pupil feel very welcome (%) when they are of...



## Need for more integration in Northern Ireland

Respondents were asked how much

integration (mixing) they thought there should be between children (KLT) or people (YLT) in Northern Ireland in the same terms as in the question about division in Northern Ireland.

Figure 2 shows that YLT respondents were significantly more likely to see a need for more integration than KLT respondents in all areas of society, with the largest differences between the KLT and YLT responses being in terms of religion (30 percentage points). Even so, religion and skin colour/language were the two areas where KLT respondents were most likely to want to see more integration (45% in each case). They felt least strongly that there should be more mixing in relation to the schools they attended (26%). Pupils attending integrated schools were most likely to say that there should be more integration in all areas.

YLT respondents felt most strongly that there should be more integration in relation to religion (75%). They also felt strongly about the need for more integration in relation to ethnicity (72%). They felt least strongly that there should be more integration in relation to the sports people play (56%).

## Making new pupils feel welcome

Respondents were asked how welcome they thought they and, separately, the other pupils in the class would make a new pupil feel if they were of a different religion, ethnicity (KLT 'skin colour and/or different language'), or social class (KLT 'rich or poor') from most other pupils.

In both surveys, respondents thought that they themselves were more welcoming to children and young people from other religious, ethnic and social backgrounds than their classmates; however this perceived difference between other pupils' attitudes and respondents' own attitudes was much larger (24%) among 16-year olds (Figure 3). A much higher proportion of KLT than YLT respondents felt that their classmates would be

welcoming to a new pupil with a different ethnic or religious background, whilst a higher proportion of 16-year olds than P7 children felt that they themselves would be welcoming to such a pupil.

KLT respondents thought that their classmates would make new pupils with other religious backgrounds feel slightly more welcome (70%) than pupils who spoke other languages or had another skin colour (66%), but there was virtually no difference with regard to the proportion of respondents who said they themselves would make pupils with other religious or ethnic backgrounds welcome (77% and 78% respectively) as Figure 3 shows. In KLT, girls were somewhat more likely than boys (10% as opposed to 8%) to say that they would make a new pupil from a different religious or ethnic background feel very welcome at their school.

Around six in ten YLT respondents thought that new pupils from a different ethnic or social background (59% in each case) or a different religion (58%) would be made welcome by the other pupils in their class. However, more than eight in ten respondents said they themselves would make pupils with other ethnic (83%), religious or social class backgrounds (82% in each case) feel very welcome. Nine to twelve percent more females than males felt that they themselves would make a new pupil of a different religion, ethnicity or social class welcome.

In both surveys, respondents from integrated schools were most likely to say that they thought their classmates would make a new pupil with another religious background feel very welcome.

## Integration preferences with regard to school

KLT and YLT respondents were asked if

they had children if they would prefer to send them to a school where all the children had the same religion or to a mixed-religion school. Whilst, for all, except a very small number of YLT respondents, this is a hypothetical question it is, nonetheless, useful in assessing integration preferences among children and young people.

In KLT the proportion of respondents who said they would prefer to send their own children to a school with children of only their own religion was exactly the same as the proportion who preferred a mixed religion school (36%). Twenty-eight percent said they did not know which school they would prefer their own children to attend. Respondents who attend an integrated school were significantly more likely to prefer a mixed religion school (69%) than pupils who

children had the same religion (26%). Table 2 shows that there was a majority of respondents in favour of mixed religion schools for their children among respondents in all school types; however this proportion was by far the highest (90%) among respondents who attend an integrated school

## Reasons for choosing a mixed school

Respondents were asked to explain why they would choose a 'mixed religion school' or single religion school for their children. Below are details of a thematic analysis of mixed school preferences.

Among KLT respondents, the main reasons given for preferring a mixed

Table 1: KLT preferences regarding their own children's school, expressed by school type attended by respondents

	%				
	Catholic Maintained	Controlled	Integrated	Other	All
Own religion only	45	31	10	19	36
Mixed religion school	29	37	69	54	36
I don't know	26	32	21	27	28

Table 2: YLT preferences regarding their own children's school, expressed by school type attended by respondents

	%				
	Planned Integrated	Grammar	Secondary	Other	All
Own religion only	5	25	33	30	26
Mixed religion school	90	60	51	55	59
Other	6	14	1	15	14
I don't know	0	1	1	0	1

attended Catholic Maintained schools (29%) or Controlled schools (37%).

In YLT more respondents would prefer their children to attend a mixed religion school (59%) than a school where all the

religion school for their children were:

1. They should learn about other people's lives and religions and understand the differences. Respondents thought that this was important because their children

should form their own opinions about religions, they should learn to respect others and they should be prepared for the future.

2. Respondents want their children to get to know different people and make new friends.
3. There should not be any separation because of differences; different religions should not be a reason for separation.
4. Everybody should be treated the same, and everyone has the same rights.
5. Those who attend a mixed school themselves want their children to attend one. Also their own religious background could be a reason for choosing a mixed school, especially if they have different religions in their own family.
6. Some respondents said they wanted to support integrated schools, or they did not see any reason for not attending an integrated school.

Among YLT respondents, the main reason why they wanted their own children to attend mixed schools were:

1. They should have the chance to interact with different people.

2. They should learn about other religions and cultures and learn from each other, so that the children have the chance to form their own opinions.
3. They should build a better future in Northern Ireland and should learn to be open-minded and should not be part of the divisions in Northern Ireland.
4. Respondents thought that mixed schools fulfil the right to equality; every child should be treated the same, and religion is not seen as a reason for separation.
5. Respondents thought that mixed schools better represented the reality in society.
6. Some respondents preferred mixed religion schools because of their own religious background or because they themselves attended a mixed school.

## Conclusion

The IEF funded research shows a clear perception among children and young people of continuing division in Northern Ireland especially in relation to religion, with the latter being particularly the case for YLT (aged 16) respondents. Nonetheless, respondents to both YLT

and KLT (P7 children) feel there is a need for more integration and mixing in many areas of life.

## References

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## Key points

- Religion is the aspect in which both KLT (42%) and YLT (81%) respondents are most likely to say that people in Northern Ireland are divided.
- KLT respondents feel strongest about the need for more integration in relation to their religion and their skin colour and/or language (each 45%), whereas YLT respondents feel strongest about the need for more integration in relation to religion (75%).
- YLT respondents are much more likely to say that people here are divided and they see a greater need for more integration than KLT respondents.
- Respondents in both the KLT and the YLT surveys think that they themselves would make a new pupil from a different ethnic background feel more welcome than other pupils in their class would.
- In KLT there is no difference between the proportion of respondents who would send their child to a mixed school and those who would send their child to a single religion school (each 36%).
- Among YLT respondents more 16-year olds would prefer their children to attend a mixed religion school (59%) than a school where all the children had the same religion (26%).
- There are many different reasons given for preferring a mixed religion for their own children.

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