



ARK

ARK Annual Report 2023 (Summary)

About ARK

ARK undertakes research on a range of social and political issues in Northern Ireland (NI), and engages in critical policy analysis. Based in Queen's University Belfast (QUB) and Ulster University (UU), ARK provides robust and independent evidence, which informs policy debate and policy making and supports civic society. Acting as a hub for social and political information on NI, we focus on providing and disseminating accessible research and data through wide ranging activities and our website - www.ark.ac.uk.

Our key resources include:

- Three public attitudes surveys of people of all ages living in Northern Ireland – the Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey (NILT); Young Life and Times (YLT) and Kids' Life and Times (KLT);
- The *ARK Ageing Programme*, which explores how ageing is perceived and experienced in Northern Ireland;
- *Conflict Archive on the Web (CAIN)*, a repository of information and source material on 'the Troubles' and politics in Northern Ireland from 1968 to the present day;
- The *Northern Ireland Elections* site, which provides data about elections in Northern Ireland since 1885 and detailed breakdowns of election results;
- A wide variety of knowledge transfer and public engagement activities, such as publications, seminars, conference presentations, workshops and policy round tables.

In 2023, we were pleased to welcome Dr Minchen Liu (Queen's University Belfast) to the ARK Team.

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Attitude surveys

During 2023, the ARK survey teams continued to monitor public opinion in Northern Ireland through our suite of three annual surveys. In order to provide an ongoing timeseries of attitudes to key social issues, questions in both NILT and YLT explored good relations including minority ethnic communities and refugees; identity; politics; community safety and perceptions of paramilitary safety; and gender-based violence. In addition, NILT asked about experiences of mental health services, and road safety. Other topics within YLT included sport, and romantic relationships. KLT included questions on school, home and family, self-esteem, bullying, and wellbeing.

Data from earlier surveys were made publicly available and dissemination was enhanced through the publication of four Research Updates, as well as articles, reports, seminars and videos.

In 2023, a celebration was held in Malone House in Belfast to mark the 20th anniversary of the YLT survey. A range of speakers, including the Commissioner for Children and Young People, highlighted the importance of the survey in providing ongoing information on the attitudes and experiences of 16-year-olds.

ARK Ageing Programme

This year the ARK Ageing programme expanded its remit considerably by establishing a strategic partnership with the Leonard Davis School (LDS) of Gerontology, University of Southern California (USC), Los Angeles. This builds on Gemma Carney's successful collaboration with Paul Nash on the book 'Critical Questions for Ageing Societies'. A group of 14 students from USC came to QUB for a summer school which Carney organised in collaboration with the Centre for Public Health, QUB. This event was very successful and is set to be expanded in 2024. Gemma Carney also gave two talks at LDS in May 2023.

The ARK Ageing Programme is now collaborating with colleagues from Arts, English and Languages, QUB, on the Housewife of the Year project which began with a Critical Domesticities symposium in May 2023. They are currently conducting pilot interviews following successful media coverage on RTE in September 2023.

Dementia in the Minds of Characters and Readers

Gemma Carney and Paula Devine are Co-Investigators on this AHRC-funded project, and in 2023, work focused on dissemination and engagement activities. This included 3 conference papers, and 1 published journal article.

Peace Monitoring Report

In 2023, a research team led by ARK published the sixth Peace Monitoring Report, which explored the four themes of security; equality; political progress; and cohesion and sharing. The team comprised Ann Marie Gray, Jennifer Hamilton, Gráinne Kelly, Brendan Lynn, Richard Johnson and Gareth Hetherington from Ulster University, Paula Devine and John Topping from Queen's University, and Richard Martin from London School of Economics.

CAIN

Materials related to a range of political developments were added to the CAIN Archive during 2023. Funding was received from the Department for Communities in Northern Ireland for additional work on 'PRONI [Public Records Office of Northern Ireland] Records on CAIN'. This focused on files from the year 1999, and were made public on 7 December 2023. Funding was also received from the Reconciliation Fund of the Republic of Ireland's Department of Foreign Affairs to allow for additional work to be done to 'NAI [National Archives of Ireland] Records on CAIN'. Over 1,000 documents covering the years 1995, 1996, 1997 and 1998 were made available in May 2023. Additional funding was received to cover records from 1992 to 1994, and this work is ongoing.

Work continued on the CAIN Transformation Project to plan and implement changes to the website for the purposes of modernisation and diversification.

Policy Unit

Staff associated with the Policy Unit continued to engage with policy makers, NGOs and statutory organisations at policy roundtables and seminars, and by responding to consultations and attending advisory meetings.

Publications included two Policy Briefs: accessing demand for Integrated Education in Northern Ireland, and on the value of youth work in supporting young people into employment. Two Research Reports were published: the impacts of COVID-19 on people who use alcohol and drug services; and a review of research methods for assessing demand for integrated education. In addition, a working paper highlighted the need for systemic change in how gender equality is understood and integrated into the policy development process.

An important seminar in April focused on poverty in Northern Ireland, highlighting social and economic inequalities since the Good Friday Agreement. This event was dedicated to Professor Eileen Evason, who previously worked within the UU Social Policy team for almost 30 years and was a life-long campaigner for equality and women's rights.

Gender budgeting

In November 2022 the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust awarded three-year funding to further consolidate the capacity and competence of key stakeholders to apply gender budgeting in NI. In 2023, a suite of training materials on gender budgeting were developed and piloted in civil society organisations. Other activities include the event 'Gender budgeting in a culture of gender neutral policy making', as well as two working papers.

Dissemination

ARK organised seven in-person events throughout 2023.

Findings were disseminated via blogs and videos, and publications included four articles in peer reviewed journals, four Research Updates, two Policy Briefs, four reports, and ten ARK newsletters. ARK staff presented papers at 13 conferences/workshops.

Funding

In 2023, ARK obtained grant funding of £664,499.

Web statistics

The ARK resources online continue to be heavily used, with 1.8 million page views and 182,030 visits.