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Preface

The Northern Ireland conflict has been one of the most thoroughly researched conflicts in the world. So, what has this book to offer beyond what has already been said about Northern Ireland?

We believe that the cessation of paramilitary violence opens up the opportunity to focus on issues affecting young people which in the past have been overlooked due to the sheer impact that the Northern Ireland conflict has had on the lives of people living here. A side effect of this conflict is also that relatively little has been communicated about the lives and times of young people growing up in Northern Ireland which goes beyond conflict-related information on violence, paramilitary activities, sectarianism and segregation. We have been systematically collecting attitudinal data since 1998 and now feel that we have gathered sufficient material to offer this to a wider audience in this volume.

This is a timely book as the first generation of young people from Northern Ireland is now coming of age with no personal memories of the 'Troubles'.

The book is thus an opportunity to reflect on the issues faced by young people in societies like Northern Ireland that come out of conflict or experience substantial societal change. From that point of view it is a critically important resource that will appeal to anyone working with young people or being interested in this unique and crucial time in Northern Ireland's history.

At the same time this book gives evidence that underneath the sectarian surface, young people have grown up with all the same issues, desires and opportunities as other young people elsewhere of today's 'txt generation'. Therefore the book also contains messages for people working with 16-year-olds in all other parts of the UK, of Ireland and beyond.

For all such readers, this multi-faceted study across different parts of young people's lives and communities can act as a powerful reminder that making a difference requires us to work across all parts of their lives, not just on those that present themselves immediately.

This book looks beyond what many expect to hear about when Northern Ireland is being discussed: violence, sectarianism, segregated schooling, cross-community conflict and tribal politics. It also discusses how parallel to the peace processes issues like inward migration, mental health, suicide rates, bullying and pupil participation, sexual health and poverty have gained momentum in

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the policy arena of a society coming out of conflict. What is more, this book also provides an insider perspective to this all through the publication of a prize-winning essay from a competition that was open to all Northern Ireland's 16-year olds in 2007.

In the final chapter we reflect on methodological challenges in providing an academically robust yet participatory research vehicle that allows us to continue to collect young people's views on issues that are relevant and important to them.

The Editors

Foreword

Articulating the diverse and poignant experiences of young people growing up in Northern Ireland at a time of rapid change and uncertainty, but also considerable hope for the future, this book captures a unique passage of time through the eyes of young citizens making transitions of their own.

It achieves this by drawing on survey data from the Young Life and Times* survey which records the attitudes of 16-year-olds living in Northern Ireland to a range of social issues:

- Has the ability to communicate the experiences of young people to a wider audience in a way that is even-handed, clear and accessible.
- Actively involved young people in identifying the issues surveyed, making YLT an unusually democratic and participatory resource.

The themes emerging in the following chapters – community relations, pupil voice, social disadvantage, sexual and mental health, bullying – are issues that will have a poignancy for young people from across the UK, Europe and beyond.

We hope that this book helps improve the understanding readers have of young lives in contemporary society and, at the same time, lead to a clearer consciousness in which young people are regarded not merely as a challenge for adult society, but as vibrant, creative and productive citizens willing and able to improve the communities in which they live.

In Northern Ireland there is the potential for young citizens to achieve a unique settlement with adult decision-makers, where their experiences and concerns are clearly understood and valued. This book, and the survey which informs it, will help this process considerably.

Carnegie UK Trust, ARK, YLT and the young people of Northern Ireland

The strong commitment to youth voice at ARK, and the ethos that has seen them experiment with new forms of participatory research reflects the values the Carnegie UK Trust promotes.

*YLT is a constituent part of ARK, an initiative by the two universities in Northern Ireland, which aims to make social and political information on Northern Ireland available to the widest possible audience.

Foreword

For ten years, until 2007, the Trust ran a programme which promoted the wider influence of young people over decisions made about their lives. During that time we funded over 100 projects across the UK and the Republic of Ireland which were either shaped by young people or in which young people had a key role. We also published research, advocated for change with policy makers, established practitioner networks and towards the end of the programme initiated with partner organisations the 'Participation Works' consortium (www.participationworks.org) to provide a repertoire of support to organisations seeking to improve their practice of youth engagement.

So, the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust was extremely pleased to be able to support the Young Life and Times (YLT) survey.

Robert Bell, Carnegie United Kingdom Trust

Introduction

Paula Devine and Dirk Schubotz

The Northern Ireland conflict is one of the most thoroughly researched conflicts in the world (Smyth and Darby, 2001). Whole libraries could be filled with publications concerned with the effects that the so-called 'Troubles' have had on people living in Northern Ireland and beyond. In 1993 a register of conflict-related research in Northern Ireland (Ó'Máolain, 1993) revealed that there were 605 projects undertaken on the subject, an enormous number considering the small size of Northern Ireland, and there has not really been a noticeable decline in conflict-related research since the peace process began. Children and young people have been the focus of many of these projects, since they were particularly vulnerable to the paramilitary and sectarian violence in the three decades of conflict in Northern Ireland. Research about the human impact of the 'Troubles' on Northern Irish communities found that those under the age of 24 accounted for 40 per cent of conflict-related deaths (Faye, Morrissey and Smyth, 1999). Socio-religious segregation intensified from the late 1960s onwards, and the effects of segregated education and residency on community cohesion has also been widely researched from different angles: politically, psychologically and sociologically, to name but three. So, what has this book to offer beyond what has already been said about Northern Ireland?

Since the mid 1990s Northern Ireland has experienced significant societal change. The main paramilitary organisations have declared that 'the war is over' and ceased their activities. Albeit still very vulnerable, the Northern Ireland peace process has progressed beyond what would have been expected in the 1990s. The fact that the two parties (DUP and Sinn Féin) which have held the staunchest and most opposing views in relation to the way the Northern Ireland conflict should be resolved are now sharing power in a devolved Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive could be seen as evidence that there is now a shared commitment to creating a peaceful Northern Ireland regardless of its constitutional future.

We believe that the cessation of paramilitary violence opens up the opportunity to focus on issues affecting young people which in the past have been overlooked due to the sheer impact that the Northern Ireland conflict has had on the lives of people living here. In this way, this book is not merely a book about Northern Ireland, but it provides an opportunity to reflect on the

issues faced by young people in societies that come out of conflict or experience substantial societal change.

About the surveys behind this book

All contributions in this book are based on data collected by the Young Life and Times (YLT) survey, which is undertaken by ARK on an annual basis. ARK is a joint initiative by academics from the two Northern Ireland universities – Queen’s University Belfast and the University of Ulster. The YLT surveys have collected the views, attitudes and experiences of young people living in Northern Ireland on a range of social issues since 1998. From 1998 to 2000, a YLT survey ran alongside its sister survey, the Northern Ireland Life and Times (NILT) survey. This latter project records the attitudes and values of adults aged 18 years and over in Northern Ireland. However, in 2001, the survey team undertook a review of YLT since the level of use of the young person’s survey came nowhere near the level of use of the adult survey. Based on these findings, an amended methodology was introduced in 2003. YLT is now an annual survey giving a representative sample of approximately 2,000 16-year olds living in Northern Ireland the chance to tell us about their lives. A core set of questions are included each year, for example, experiences of school and health, and views on politics and sectarianism. A range of other questions are asked less frequently. Significantly, each year YLT also includes a number of questions proposed by the previous year’s respondents. (More details about the survey can be found in Appendix 1 of this book.)

The YLT survey is quite unique as it is a reliable, robust annual and ongoing project which allows us to monitor changes in attitudes and behaviour over time.

Children and young people in Northern Ireland

The interest in young people’s issues in Northern Ireland at the present time is tremendous. For example, there is a dedicated Children and Young People’s Unit at the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister. As well as that, the post of Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People was established in 2003. The Commissioner’s Office has been working on a multitude of issues concerning children’s and young people’s rights and

wellbeing. There are numerous statutory, charitable and voluntary organisations working in Northern Ireland that lobby and provide services for young people. In addition, there is a substantial research community in all corners of the globe whose interest is the changing Northern Irish society in particular.

About this book

We have invited some of the most well-known academics and social policy makers in Northern Ireland to contribute to this book, to present their views on the challenges which this first post-conflict generation faces in the new Northern Ireland. These authors are nationally or internationally recognised experts in their field. Whilst this book gives evidence that the effects of the 'Troubles' will continue to shape young people's lives for the foreseeable future, in terms of school experiences, socio-economic conditions and mental and sexual health, the contributions in this book also reveal some of the pressures that many 16-year olds face regardless of where they live. Together with the prize-winning essay of **Shaun Mulvenna** who offers his own insider perspective as a 16-year old, the chapters in this book provide comprehensive and compelling insight into key issues facing the 'txt generation'.

Most contributions in this book focus on the findings of the YLT surveys conducted since 2003. Thus it is based on the attitudes and experiences of young people living in Northern Ireland who can be regarded as the first post-conflict generation as the first years of their lives coincided with the beginning of the Northern Ireland peace process. What most of them have in common is that, unlike their parents and grandparents, they have no active personal memory of the worst conflict-related atrocities, even though they are likely to have come across some form of sectarianism.

Firstly, in his chapter, **Duncan Morrow** explores community relations in Northern Ireland. In particular, he focuses on issues related to the Northern Ireland conflict, such as cross-community contact, experiences of violence and sectarianism and factors which influence attitudes to each other. The chapter also highlights the new Northern Ireland, which has most recently experienced substantial inward migration, in particular from Eastern Europe, Portugal and South Asia.

In the second chapter, **Katrina Lloyd, Ed Cairns, Claire Doherty and Kate Ellis** discuss mental health issues of young people in Northern Ireland. The

relationship between mental health and stress is explored within the context of school. The authors also investigate whether increasing suicide rates among young people in Northern Ireland are in any way reflected in an overall decline in mental health.

Within her chapter on tackling bullying in schools, **Ruth Sinclair** looks at lessons to be learned for pupil participation in general. The data for this chapter comes not only from the YLT survey, but from a qualitative follow-up project undertaken in both primary and post-primary schools. The chapter asks how pupil participation can be a means of reducing incidences of school bullying whilst relating the specific findings on school bullying policies to a more general perspective on how pupils' participation in schools can be enhanced.

Simon Blake's chapter on sexual health advocacy work for young people looks at YLT findings relating to experiences of sex education and sexual intercourse, as well as social pressures to engage in sexual activity, and addresses the challenges that arise from this. The author relates the findings from respective YLT surveys to his personal experiences of working for a leading UK provider of sexual health services for young people. The possibilities of sexual health advocacy work for young people are explored in this chapter.

The education system in Northern Ireland is at a time of flux, with the transfer procedure at age 11 years due to be phased out in Northern Ireland after 2008. Currently this is one of the most contentious policy issues in Northern Ireland and the outcomes of this discussion are closely monitored by educationalists who consider the reintroduction of transfer tests in Britain. Within the UK more generally, the role of faith schools is being increasingly debated, and again the *de facto* religiously segregated school system in Northern Ireland can provide some lessons on the impact of segregated education on educational outcome and social attitudes. Thus, it is timely that **Tony Gallagher's** chapter looks at the school experiences of pupils in Northern Ireland.

Unemployment rates in Northern Ireland are now among the lowest in the UK. Lower rates only exist in the south west of Great Britain (DETINI, 2008). Despite an overall increasing national wealth, poverty continues within society today because wealth remains unevenly distributed. Within their chapter on young people and social disadvantage, **Alex Tennant** and **Marina Monteith** look at the economic conditions of 16-year olds today and how poverty and class impact on a number of experiences and attitudes. They relate YLT findings to other research undertaken by Save the Children on the persistent poverty of children and young people.

A key feature of the YLT research project is the participation of young people, not only in completing the questionnaire, but also in suggesting topics for the following year's survey. In 2007, YLT respondents as well as all 16-year old school pupils were also invited to take part in an essay-writing competition. All participants were asked to submit an essay on what they think encapsulates 'The Life and Times of 16-year olds in Northern Ireland today'. We were very pleased with the high standard of submissions to this competition, and delighted to include the winning essay 'Is Anybody Listening?' by **Shaun Mulvenna** in this book. By doing so, we continue our commitment to give young people themselves a voice in the debate about issues that concern them.

In the final chapter, we review the methodological challenges for the YLT project, especially given our aim of recording the views of 16-year olds in Northern Ireland. Equally important, how can we enable these voices to have an impact on research and policy making relating to young people in Northern Ireland and beyond?

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Acknowledgements

The Young Life and Times project is a team effort. As well as the book editors, the management group includes two ARK colleagues, Katrina Lloyd and Lizanne Dowds, and Ed Cairns from the School of Psychology, University of Ulster. We appreciate their continued support. We are also grateful for the support from Mike McCool who provides significant technical assistance in managing both the YLT survey and YLT as an online research resource, and for the administrative and secretarial support from Ann Marie Dorritty and Shonagh Higgenbotham.

The production of this volume would not be possible without the many generous funders who have supported the YLT survey since its inception, including the Economic and Social Research Council; Save the Children; the EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland 2000–04, Measure 2:1 – Reconciliation for Sustainable Peace; the Electoral Commission and the Nuffield Foundation. In particular, we would like to acknowledge the support of the Carnegie UK Trust, which made this book possible.

We would also like to acknowledge the support given by Department for Social Development and by Inland Revenue in providing the sample for the YLT survey.

Most importantly, we appreciate the time and effort taken by all the 16-year olds who responded to the survey.