Engagement in culture, arts, heritage and sport by young people in Northern Ireland 2025 – Background Quality Report (BQR)

Background

Analytics Division (AD) of the Department for Communities produces the Experience of culture, arts and heritage by young people in Northern Ireland and the Experience of sport by young people in Northern Ireland reports. These reports present findings from the 2025 Young Persons' Behaviour and Attitudes Survey (YPBAS).

The YPBAS is a triennial school-based survey of pupils aged 11 to 16 in Years 8 to 12. It covers a wide range of topics relevant to young people's lives. The survey is administered by Central Survey Unit of the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA). Participation is voluntary.

The survey has been running approximately every three years since 2000. Questions on culture, arts and sport being included from that date, with questions on heritage included from 2016. The results provide evidence for the Department for Communities and support policy development relating to culture, arts, heritage and sport.

Fieldwork for the 2025 survey took place from September 2025 to February 2026. All 190 post-primary schools in Northern Ireland were invited to take part. Ninety schools participated, giving a school response rate of 47%. In total, 8,875 pupils took part.
Three versions of the questionnaire were used to accommodate the range of topics included in the survey. Each version was allocated to an approximately equal number of schools. The culture, arts and heritage questions were included in version A. The sport questions were included in Versions A and B.

Data Quality

Relevance:

The report and accompanying tables provide Northern Ireland statistics on young people's experience of culture, arts, heritage and sport. They include overall estimates and

breakdowns by pupil and school characteristics, where the sample size supports reliable analysis.

The report includes charts and commentary to communicate the main findings. The accompanying data tables are provided in OpenDocument Spreadsheet format. Explanatory notes and technical information are provided to help users understand the definitions, methods and limitations.

Before each survey cycle, Central Survey Unit asks client departments to review existing questionnaire modules and propose changes. Analytics Division works with policy colleagues to ensure that the questions remain relevant and that the outputs meet user needs.

Accuracy and reliability:

The 2025 YPBAS used a three-stage sample design. First, all eligible post-primary schools were invited to participate. Second, each participating school supplied details of its classes in Years 8 to 12 and one class in each year group was selected at random. Third, all pupils in each selected class were invited to take part.

Pupils and their parents or guardians were told about the survey through the school's preferred communication method. If a pupil declined to take part or was absent on the survey day, no replacement pupil was selected.

Most responses were collected online using school computers. Tablets were used where requested. Responses were transferred directly to secure NISRA servers.

Non-response can introduce bias if the pupils or schools that take part differ from those that do not. The achieved sample was compared with the 2025/26 School Census. Weighting was used to make the responding sample more representative of the population of pupils in Years 8 to 12 by sex, religion and year group.

The analysis uses weights developed for questionnaires version A and B. A religion and year group weight is used when analysing differences by sex. A sex and year group weight is used

when analysing differences by religion and a sex and religion weight is used when analysing differences by year group. A religion, sex and year group weight is used for any other analysis. Weighting can reduce bias from known differences between the sample and the school population. It cannot remove all possible bias.

The survey used a clustered design because pupils were selected within classes and schools. A methodological review in 2013 found little difference between standard errors calculated using a complex sample approach and those based on a simple random sample for the variables examined. Sampling and post-stratification methods have remained consistent. The publication therefore uses the simple random sample approach to estimate sampling error. Confidence intervals show the range of values within which the true population value is expected to lie, allowing for sampling error. The accompanying tables include 95% confidence intervals for the main estimates. A wider interval means that the estimate is less precise.

Statements about differences between groups are based on statistical significance testing at the 95% confidence level. This means that there is less than a 5% probability of observing a difference of that size, or larger, if there were no real difference in the population. Statistical significance does not show whether a difference is important in practical terms.

Estimates based on small numbers are less precise. Analysis is only presented where the sample size is large enough to support reliable interpretation. Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding or because respondents could select more than one answer.

Timeliness and punctuality:

The fieldwork took place from September 2025 to February 2026, and Analytics Division of the Department for Communities, who produce this report, received the dataset in May 2026. The ‘Experience of culture, arts and heritage by young people in Northern Ireland 2025’ report and the ‘Experience of sport by young people in Northern Ireland 2025’ report were published on 12 November 2026. The publication date was announced in advance through normal departmental procedures.

Accessibility and Clarity:

The report is published in HTML format on the Department for Communities website. Accompanying tables are provided in OpenDocument Spreadsheet formats. Charts include clear titles, labels and notes. A definitions and technical notes section explains the survey, key terms, weighting and other methodological points.

The publication follows accessibility requirements for public sector websites and documents. Contact details for the responsible statisticians are included so that users can ask questions or request further information.

Coherence and Comparability:

The statistics in the report are derived solely from the 2025 Young Persons' Behaviour and Attitudes Survey. Questions on engagement in culture, arts and sport have been included since 2000, with heritage included from 2016. The current range of questions has been included on a consistent basis since 2007 allowing for comparability over time.

Other surveys across the United Kingdom publish information on culture, arts, heritage and sport. Differences in age coverage, definitions, question wording, survey mode and sampling mean that estimates may not be directly comparable.

Further Information:

For further information relating to the quality of these publications, please contact: analyticsdivision@communities-ni.gov.uk.