Appendix 1. Description of the role of the youth advisors

Introduction: Purpose and recruitment

The OxWell Student Survey, like many other studies, has some important limitations regarding how it has measured gender. Whilst analysing data from the 2023 wave, it became clear that a more nuanced approach to gender was needed.

To support this, we recruited three 17-18-year-old trans and gender diverse (TGD) adolescents ('youth advisors') to work in partnership with us to improve the way we analysed our existing data and to explore how to design future waves to be more inclusive of TGD individuals. We recruited the three youth advisors from an existing Young People's Advisory Group (YPAG) convened by another one of our adolescent mental health research studies (BrainWaves; https://brainwaveshub.org/). Recruitment for this wider YPAG occurred from June-July 2023. Advertisements were primarily circulated via social media, organisations that work with young people (e.g. the McPin Foundation), the BrainWaves website, and school mailing lists. We received 127 applications and of these, invited 20 young people to join the YPAG. We prioritised creating a diverse group in terms of characteristics such as age, gender, ethnicity, geography and urbanicity, type of school attended, lived experience of mental health difficulties, and reasons given for wanting to be part of the YPAG.

When the present opportunity arose, we invited all three YPAG members who had identified as TGD in their application form. As part of the recruitment process, the lead researcher met with each young person one-to-one to provide an overview of the purpose and structure of the project, outline motivations for undertaking the work, learn about preferences for involvement, obtain verbal consent to share who was participating in the group, and provide an opportunity for the young people to ask questions or share concerns. All three young people approached agreed to take part in this additional work.

Working closely with these three youth advisors allowed us to explore these topics in substantial depth and provided opportunities for contributions that would likely not have been possible in a larger group. However, we acknowledge that there is a wide variety of views and experiences amongst TGD adolescents, and so do not claim this group to be representative of all TGD adolescents.

Overview of sessions and at-home tasks

Whilst this partnership is ongoing, we have thus far had seven two-hour virtual meetings and five interspersed optional 'at-home' tasks. The youth advisors were paid £15 per hour for the meetings and at-home tasks, which focused on the following:

- **Session 1:** Introductions to the study, researchers, and each other (including an opportunity to share pronouns and any other information about gender identity); agreement on ways of working and ground rules (including confidentiality); relationship building; exploration of individual interests regarding gender and mental health; discussion regarding concerns related to potential harms of research on gender and mental health.

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- ○ **At-home task 1:** Creation of a set of gender categorisations from a de-identified extract of free-text gender descriptions from the OxWell Student Survey (also censored for slurs; all youth advisors asked that the remaining potentially disingenuous answers *not* be censored).
- **Session 2:** Discussion of why categorisations are needed in mental health research (i.e. rather than using each individual's stated gender); initial exploration of categorisations; 'sorting' activity of genuine gender responses versus those that were likely disingenuous.
  - ○ **At-home task 2:** Creation of four additional sets of gender categorisations for discussion at the next session, limited to 5, 6, 7, and 8 categories to facilitate meaningful quantitative analysis.
- **Session 3:** Discussion of the different sets of categories and agreement on which would be most useful for the OxWell Student Survey (landing on a 'broad' and 'granular' set); prioritisation activity of which elements of mental health and well-being would be interesting to explore in our co-produced analysis [separate to the present *Perspective*].
- **Session 4:** Series of interactive activities to develop guidance for other researchers working with TGD adolescents.
- **Session 5:** Presentation of initial findings for the co-produced analysis on mental health support for TGD adolescents [separate to the present *Perspective*]; discussion of findings (what they mean, what was surprising/unexpected, who should know about the findings, etc.); introduction to the present *Perspective*, which was not initially planned at the outset of our work together.
  - ○ **At-home task 3:** Review of a first draft of this *Perspective*, formatted as a side-by-side version of the draft and a corresponding bullet-pointed lay version.
- **Session 6:** Group discussion of the *Perspective* draft; 'blue-sky thinking' activity to develop recommendations in the three categories covered by the perspective (measurement, processing, analysis); re-cap of the guidance discussion and progress.
  - ○ **At-home task 4:** Review of the collated and curated recommendations and provision of any additional feedback/thoughts/ideas.
- **Session 7:** Discussion of reviewers' feedback on the present *Perspective* and how we could address their suggestions (including new recommendations focused on critically appraising existing gender data); continued development of the mental health support analysis [separate to the present *Perspective*].
  - ○ **At-home task 5:** Opportunity to formally write up reflections on being part of the group, including what went well, what didn't go well, what they learned in the process, how they felt they had contributed, etc.

At each step, we took care to ensure that the youth advisors felt confident to contribute and that they never felt pressured to share if they did not want to do so. We regularly checked in one-to-one by email and/or video call. Furthermore, as both facilitators were cisgender women, we placed a strong emphasis on reflexivity and actively sought input for how to ensure the group was as inclusive and useful as possible, including by offering several opportunities after each session to provide anonymous feedback.

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Youth advisors' reflections

As we strongly believe that youth voice should be at the heart of our work, we provided our youth advisors with the opportunity to write a paragraph about their experiences (see *At-home task 5* above). Here is what they wrote:

'I have loved being part of this group because I have gotten to be part of something I feel will truly make a difference. I've enjoyed being able to share my experiences and listen to other people's, whilst also learning a lot about what goes into research. I especially liked learning about the data analysis, and seeing the graphs of the results of the OxWell Study, even if some of the results surprised me. I think what makes the group so special is the people in it and our sessions never fail to make me smile. I think it is very important that facilitators of YPAGs and groups like this are respectful and open minded, as [the facilitators, ES and SOL] have been, as this can really make or break a group. One thing I think really works are the vibe checks done at the beginning of sessions, as they help us gauge where everyone is at so we can get the most out of the session. Overall, I've found the process of creating these papers an incredible experience so far and can't wait to carry on.'

'It has been amazing to be a part of the gender YPAG because as trans young people, we are often talked about rather than listened to. [The facilitators, ES and SOL] really took the effort and time to understand what we were saying and then they would show us how our recommendations were being implemented in their research. Being a small group, we each contributed because we had vastly different experiences and there were often some funny moments when this was exemplified (like when I forgot the 'unsure' category completely in my category-suggesting and [another youth advisor] had completely forgotten the 'binary trans' category). I learnt a lot about the research process itself and its stages, with the most surprising thing being how much data and code was involved in it! Moreover, I got to see the human element behind research, and that academics were real (and very cool!) people too, who cared about the work they were producing, even if academic journal articles perhaps don't showcase that sometimes. Overall, being a part of this group has made me feel like I've had an actual impact on research that will affect my community, and the researchers made us feel heard and valued.'

'A highlight of the last year for me has undoubtedly been this YPAG. I've particularly loved the way in which we've dealt with this topic because every one of us simultaneously understood how important this project was and wanted to do it justice, yet still managed to enjoy ourselves by laughing in every meeting and making genuine connections, which taught me that you don't always have to take yourself seriously to effectively deal with serious topics. It was so refreshing to be meeting with [the facilitators, ES and SOL] who cared about this project as much as the we did, and this showed from the very first meeting, and I credit this for not only how flawlessly it's gone but for how safe and inclusive this whole experience has been, not once did I so

much as even slightly feel uncomfortable or unlistened to. Every second I've been in this group with these amazing people, I've loved it and I'm genuinely going to miss both the project and the people when it's over.'