

The OxWell Student Survey 2025 - Study Description

SR White, S Patel, M Fazel

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Overview of included institutions

The OxWell Student Survey 2025 (OxWell 2025) comprised two age-appropriate versions for English school years 5-6 and 7-13 (participants mostly aged 9 to 18 years). OxWell 2025 collection was conducted from 24 February – 28 March 2025 for most schools, with six schools completing in April and May 2025. The majority of schools are mainstream schools, as shown in the tables below. In summary 35,244 school and Further Education College (FEC) students participated in OxWell 2025, 3,142 from 46 primary schools and 32,102 from 49 secondary and FECs (see Tables 1 & 2).

Participation and consent

Participation in OxWell 2025 was voluntary, those under the age of 16 were asked to assent to participation after their parents were given an opportunity to opt their child out of the study (information sent to parents/caregivers – usually by email- at least one week before their children were invited to participate- as per study protocol [1]; those 16 and over provided consent. No incentives were offered.

Number who started and did not consent:

- 36,169 original participants
- Four institutions were removed (two alternative provision/non-mainstream (secondary); two with minimal/irregular engagement), dropping 103 participants; leaving 36,066
- Consent was determined by responding to three consent questions and responding to the year group item. For the secondary schools participants 3,964 (12%) did not complete all three consent questions; leaving 32,102 consenting participants.
- Summary demographics of participants are included in Tables 3 to 8 and figure 1.

Ethics University of Oxford MS IDREC approval R62366/RE017 (Medical Sciences Interdivisional Research Ethics Committee) on 7 Feb 2025. An amendment for three questions (X4010, X4020, X4030) to be added to the Optional survey was approved 5 March 2025 (same reference remains).

Survey design and instruments

Secondary School Core Survey (school years 7 to 13, including equivalent FEC years)

OxWell 2025 included between 73 and 90 questions, depending on contingent responses, with a minimum of 4 items required as all other responses could be left blank. The survey was designed to take approximately 15 minutes (previous survey waves were designed for 45 minutes). All participating schools were asked to show a short explanatory video to students in the days prior to conducting the survey. Overseeing staff members were provided with written and video information detailing key aspects of the survey, including awareness that designated staff would be available to provide additional support if needed. Immediately prior to conducting the survey, they were asked to read aloud to all participating students a standardised script emphasising anonymity, voluntary participation, and the option to skip any question. No individual names, dates of birth or addresses were collected, and students were informed that there would not be any attempt to try and identify them individually. This approach, developed with youth input, was intended to increase trust and encourage accurate responses. All students had to answer a question about their year group and then the three consent/assent questions. If they answered in the affirmative for all three consent questions they would proceed to the main survey. Before questions on more sensitive topics such as self-harm or maltreatment, students saw the following on-screen pop-up reminding them that they could skip any questions: *'The next questions cover some serious topics about self-harm and mental health. Please remember it is entirely optional to answer these questions. You can leave any question blank. We will never try and find out your identity but will use your responses to better understand how to help young people with mental health difficulties.'* This step was introduced to promote informed choice and minimise distress, in line with youth advisory recommendations. A full variable guide is available on the OxWell OSF page (<https://osf.io/sekhr/>). The survey was delivered online, using Qualtrics, and was only available in the English language. Each school had a unique core survey link (start/end times recorded).

The order of questions was deliberately structured to promote engagement and reduce fatigue, beginning with positively framed wellbeing questions from the Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS) [2,3] before moving to questions that address a range of issues relevant to public mental health. These included demographic questions (for example ethnicity, deprivation including free school meal status, gender, trans status), general questions on lifestyle (exercise, sleep) and school life (enjoyment, support in learning). Some additional indicators of vulnerability such as loneliness, exposure to bullying and/or aggression, online exposures were asked, as well as questions about mental health and attitudes to accessing mental health support, as outlined in the study protocol [1].

In brief, the questions asked were either individual items or full sections drawn from validated questionnaires where possible; otherwise OxWell-developed items or legacy questions from the Online Pupil survey were used. Many had been included in earlier survey waves [1] or were newly designed with stakeholder input, particularly student advisors (see below under Co-production). The questionnaires utilised were drawn from the following domains: ethnicity was asked according to Office of National Statistics (ONS) categories used by the ONS and gender identity followed a period of co-design [4]. Mental health problems were assessed through questions about a range of worries (including appearance, shape and weight, exam results and the climate), one item on loneliness (grounded in the psychometrics of the UCLA Loneliness Scale and utilised by the ONS) [5,6] and another on eating behaviours. Depression and anxiety were assessed using the 25-item Revised Child Anxiety and Depression Scale (RCADS-25) [7]. Self-harm was explored through questions informed by previous OxWell work and drawing from the CASE study [8-10]. Questions about negative in-person and online experiences and exposure to self-harm content were developed by the study team. Questions about neurodiversity (self-identified and diagnosed neurodevelopmental conditions, sensory sensitivities, and special educational needs support) including six questions from the Comprehensive Autistic Trait Inventory (CATI) (one per section of the scale) [11] were included. Questions on the use of, and preferences for, mental health support and services (informal, semi-formal, formal and online) were developed by the OxWell Study team in consultation with local providers [10,12]. Questions about school experience and safety (belonging, support, bullying (Olweus Bullying Questionnaire) [13], racism, school detention and exclusions, safety at school/home/travel, and extracurricular participation); and about health and lifestyle (physical activity [14] and sleep quality [15] were also included. Students were asked additional questions about their household and family circumstances, including items on poverty [16] and parental mental illness.

At the end of the core survey, students in 32 secondary schools and 7 FECs were invited to complete an optional module (*Thank you for answering the questions. You have now reached the end of the survey. If you have more time, we would be grateful if you would like to help us further by answering some more questions (approximately another 15 minutes)*). Ten schools used their own 18-item extension questions within the core survey; therefore their 9,046 students were not invited to answer the Optional survey to facilitate roll-out.

Teachers who wanted to understand what their students were being asked could access the survey and answer questions but were asked to choose the 'Other' option under Year Group; all 'Other' responses for Year Group were removed from the final data file.

Optional Survey

Of the 16,861 students who answered the final question on the core survey, 6,910 (41%) continued to the 'optional' survey. The optional section consisted of six blocks of questions presented in random order (block order was not logged), with between approximately 45 and 70 questions depending on contingent responses. 6,602 optional survey participants reported gender of which 3800 were girl/ woman (57.6%), 2647 were boy/man (40.1%), 155 gender diverse (2.3%), 51 Not sure (0.8%) and 105 Prefer not to say (1.6%).

The six blocks of the optional survey included questions about: sleep and body-focused repetitive behaviours (BFRBs) (Block A); gaming and online behaviours [17] (Block B); maltreatment and peer abuse [18] (Block C); substance use (Block D); chronic pain [19] (Block E); and responses to trauma or stressful events (CRIES-8) [20] (Block F). Additional questions assessing anxiety and depression from the RCADS-11 (and not included in the RCADS-25) were also asked [23].

Two schools opted out of the Maltreatment questions being asked of their students (n=865). Following an amendment three additional questions were added (X4010, X4020, X4030) on March 6th 2025.

Data linkage for the Optional Module

The optional survey was a unified survey in Qualtrics and these were programmed to be linked to a students' core responses via the Qualtrics redirect. However, of the 6,910 who participated in the Optional survey, 744 could not be initially be matched to their original responses because the redirect failed for a small number of schools and FECs (no reason identified). We attempted deterministic matching using timestamp (<5 seconds) + age + year group (if provided) + gender, linking 438 responses with 306 unable to be matched.

Primary School Survey

The primary school version of OxWell 2025 was designed specifically for pupils in Years 5 and 6 (typically aged 9–11 years) and comprised approximately 85 to 100 questions, depending on contingent responses. The survey covered similar domains to the secondary version but used age-appropriate language and simplified formats. Questions focused on wellbeing (using the Stirling Children's Wellbeing Scale) [24] and similar items as the Secondary survey for loneliness, depression and anxiety, school experience and safety, worries, bullying, sleep, and physical activity. Simpler questions on neurodiversity were asked (autism and ADHD identification). Items also asked about family and home circumstances, including deprivation, free school

meal status, and parental care. Sensitive topics such as self-harm and mental health support were presented using the same opt-in and pop-up safeguards as in the secondary school survey, although the questions had different wording.

Scoring and derived variables for the RCADS-25

To maximise computable RCADS-25 scores, a number of decisions were taken:

- The RCADS scoring algorithm requires a year group (technically a grade, since it is based on the United States Education System). This is available as OXWELL.YEARGROUP
- FEC students without a school year were assigned a derived year for scoring (required for the RCADS calculation) and placed into Years 12 and 13 utilising the following approach:
 - Placed into Year 12:
 - Students in FEC Level 1 (n=259)
 - All those who gave an age as 16 years (this was in X1010 and X1030)
 - Placed into Year 13: All other year group responses
- The RCADS scoring algorithm requires a binary sex/gender, this has been coded as RCADS25.SEX
- Gender diverse and gender non-disclosing students: for interpretability purposes, RCADS T-scores were computed using gender-specific (boy/girl) norms, as indicated by the RCADS scoring guide. For trans and gender diverse and gender non-disclosing participants, we applied the girl norms as their patterns of responses were more closely aligned to girls than boys (with higher overall risk - these are likely to be more conservative results). The raw variables can be used to make study-specific calculations (for example by utilising: <https://www.corc.uk.net/news-blogs/developments-in-rcads-scoring-combined-gender-option/>).
- OXWELL.GENDER and OXWELL.GENDER.TGD are obtained from combining multiple columns.

Additional Points

Wording for item X1100 was changed mid-survey following feedback from our pilot school that this question was being misinterpreted by some of their students, from: *Are you a Child in Care, Looked After Child, or fostered?* to *Are you fostered or a Looked after Child (under Social Services)?*

Co-production

The OxWell survey has been co-produced with young people through multiple advisory groups and consultations that have informed both the content and implementation of the survey since its inception in 2019. Rather than a single advisory panel, OxWell adopts a continuous and iterative approach to co-production, engaging different groups of young people as new topic areas emerge or existing questions are refined. This ongoing, topic-specific model of co-production has strengthened the survey's ecological validity, ethical integrity, and the alignment of its priorities with young people's lived experiences.

For OxWell 2025, for example, a group of six youth advisors met on three occasions to advise on new questions and on the information students would need to help them complete the survey accurately. Their input led to the development of the teacher text used to introduce the survey in all schools and to the inclusion of the on-screen pop-up that precedes more sensitive questions. Students have also contributed directly to question design: a class of approximately twenty Year 13 psychology students in Oxfordshire reviewed the school-belonging items, recommending the wording of the question to be "what engages you most in the school community" and helping to refine the response categories. On another occasion, youth advisors proposed adding a question about whether students would have liked support to help a friend or family member which was included.

Co-production with four Year 12 students guided the wording and framing of questions on social media and online behaviours to ensure relevance and clarity. Input from other Young People's Advisory Groups - including those linked to previous OxWell collaborations and national youth networks, shaped the tone of the information provided before and during the survey and informed the plans for accessible dissemination of findings.

When developing questions about body-focused repetitive behaviours (BFRBs), we needed to ensure the full range of behaviours were being asked about, including hair-pulling, skin-picking, nail-biting and similar behaviours. This was a newly developed, co-produced measure, as little is known about these behaviours [21,22]. Participants were asked whether they experience these behaviours, whether they cause distress, whether they interfere with family, school, leisure or friendship activities, and whether and from where they have sought help. 22 respondents attending a conference on body-focused repetitive behaviours (BFRBs) in September 2024 provided direct feedback on that section's content and framing.

Data Access for schools and other stakeholders ('OxHub')

- A subset of core variables was made available via OxHub, a secure, interactive data platform designed for participating schools and partners. The platform can anonymise schools and regional identifiers in line with access agreements to protect confidentiality. OxHub, developed by Philippa Liggins and Mihaela Duta, (Oxford Research Software Engineering, University of Oxford) allows authorised users, following a data access agreement, to visualise and explore aggregated OxWell data within a secure environment.
- The platform enables users to apply tailored filters - for example, by year group, gender, or specific risk indicators - allowing schools, local authorities, and health partners to gain a more precise understanding of student experiences and areas of need. This functionality supports a more targeted interpretation of difficulties and facilitates the planning of appropriate interventions or service responses at both school and system levels.
- To safeguard anonymity, OxHub applies a suppression rule of five, meaning that data from any subgroup with fewer than five responses are automatically suppressed to prevent identification. Only core survey variables are included in the platform to balance accessibility with data protection, while the full dataset is securely held and available for research use under separate governance arrangements.

Data Access for researchers

The data used in this study are not publicly available. The study protocol, variable guides, the full list of questions and other supporting information are available on the OxWell Open Science Framework website (<https://osf.io/sekhr/>). The data are not publicly available because of ethical and information governance restrictions. Fully deidentified extracts of the data can be provided to academic research collaborators upon reasonable request after a review process by the research team to ensure that uses of the data fall under the remit of the intended purposes set out in the privacy information and to prevent duplication of analyses. We are actively working to make the 2025 survey data available through a trusted research environment to facilitate broader access for approved researchers, and anticipate this will be in place in due course. The 2023 survey data are currently available through the BrainWaves Data Portal (<https://brainwaveshub.org/for-research/>). Further details, including the full list of questions, study protocol, and other supporting materials are available via the OxWell project's Open Science Framework page: <https://osf.io/sekhr/>.

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Table 1: Summary of all included educational institutions in OxWell 2025

School phase	Number of institutions	Number of responses
Combined summary		
School phase	Number of institutions	Number of responses
All primary schools	46	3,142
All secondary schools and FECs	49	32,102
All institutions	95	35,244
Secondary school and further education college summary		
School phase	Number of institutions	Number of responses
State-funded secondary	40	27,777
Independent school	2	1,297
Further education college (FEC)	7	3,028
All secondary schools and FECs	49	32,102

- Note on totals: we initially reported on 99 participating institutions however, four school responses were excluded from final analyses (two alternative provision/non-mainstream (secondary); two with minimal/irregular engagement).
- All data presented is calculated is utilising Release 13.

Table 2: Participating secondary schools and FEC by region

The majority of participating OxWell 2025 schools were in Liverpool City and Oxfordshire:

Data redacted if cell count <5 (contact OxWell study team if more information required)

Participating institutions by characteristics derived from ONS and DfE linked data							
Region	LEA	School phase	Intake	Number of institutions	Number of responses	Institutions by region	Responses by region
Berkshire	Reading	State-funded secondary (one selective)	Mixed/Girls				
Berkshire	Slough	State-funded secondary	Mixed				
Berkshire	West Berkshire	Further education college (FEC)	Mixed				
Buckinghamshire	Buckinghamshire	State-funded secondary (selective)	Mixed				
Cheshire	Warrington	State-funded secondary	Mixed				
Greater Manchester	Bolton	State-funded secondary	Mixed				
Merseyside	Liverpool	State-funded secondary	Boys			12	7,403
Merseyside	Liverpool	State-funded secondary	Girls				
Merseyside	Liverpool	State-funded secondary	Mixed				
Merseyside	Sefton	State-funded secondary	Mixed				
Oxfordshire	Oxfordshire	Further education college (FEC)	Mixed			25	17,432
Oxfordshire	Oxfordshire	Independent single-sex school	Boys/Girls				
Oxfordshire	Oxfordshire	State-funded secondary	Mixed				
Surrey	Surrey	Further education college (FEC)	Mixed				
Wiltshire	Swindon	State-funded secondary	Mixed				

Table 3. Distribution of OxWell 2025 secondary and FEC participants by school year

Year Group (derived from X1010 and X1030 and OXWELL.SCHOOL.LINK)

OXWELL.YEARGROUP	N
Y07	5,780
Y08	5,779
Y09	6,145
Y10	4,946
Y11	3,233
Y12	2,784
Y13	3,435

Table 4: Distribution of OxWell 2025 participants by age (11 – 21+ years only)

Age	N
X1030	
A11	2,368
A12	5,470
A13	5,695
A14	5,350
A15	3,983
A16	3,046
A17	2,653
A18	1,366
A19+ (to account for school-FEC differences, merged A19, A19+, A20, A20+)	418
No Response	1,753
No Response (Chose not to answer this question- answered later questions): 462	
No Response (Likely stopped answering survey entirely): 1,291	

Table 5. Distribution of OxWell 2025 secondary and FEC participants by ethnicity

Ethnicity	
X1040	N
White	19,964
Mixed/Multiple Ethnic Groups	2,044
Asian/Asian British	4,218
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British	1,995
Arab	737
Other Ethnic Group	1,069
No response	2,075
No Response (Chose not to answer this question- answered later questions): 783	
No Response (Likely stopped answering survey entirely): 1,292	

Table 6. Distribution of OxWell 2025 secondary and FEC participants by gender

OxWell Gender (including Trans/Gender Diverse). This is a combination of multiple columns

OXWELL.GENDER.TGD	N
Girl / Woman	14,811
Boy / Man	14,436
Trans/Gender Diverse	841
Don't know / Not sure	267
Prefer not to say	331
No Response (Chose not to answer this question- answered later questions)	1,416

Table 7. Distribution of OxWell 2025 schools and FEC by 2019 IMD based on school postcodes

Table 7a: Secondary and FEC; Table 7b: separating Secondary school and FEC; Table 7c: all institutions (including Primary Schools)

Table 7a: Secondary and FEC combined by Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) Quintiles

IMD5	Number of institutions	Number of
1	8	4,531
2	10	6,608
3	5	2,559
4	10	7,161
5	16	11,243

Table 7b: Separating Secondary schools and FEC by IMD Quintiles

IMD5	Number of institutions_FEC	Number of institutions_SE	Number of responders_FEC	Number of responders_SE
1	1	7	357	4,174
2	2	8	1,281	5,327
3	2	3	939	1,620
4	0	10	0	7,161
5	2	14	451	10,792

Table 7c: All institutions (including Primary schools) by IMD Quintiles

Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) Quintiles. Note: the primary schools (PR) are manually obtained.

IMD5	Number of institutions_FEC	Number of institutions_SE	Number of responders_FEC	Number of responders_SE	Number of institutions_PR
1	1	7	357	4,174	22
2	2	8	1,281	5,327	4
3	2	3	939	1,620	3
4	0	10	0	7,161	3
5	2	14	451	10,792	14

Table 8. Distribution of OxWell 2025 secondary and FEC by IMD (calculating Free School Meal percentage by IMD quintile)

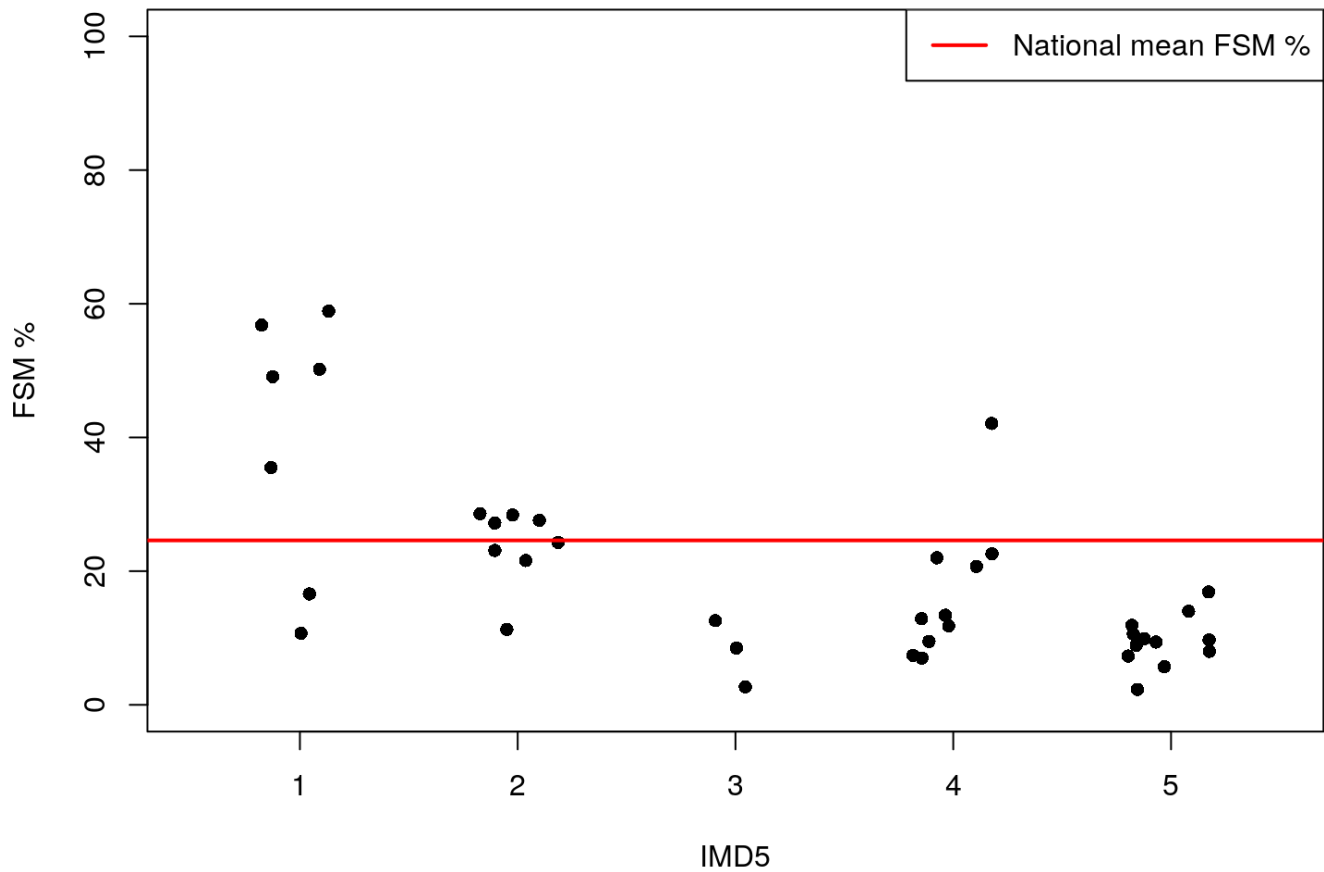
Free School Meal (FSM) percentage by Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) Quintile: median and Interquartile Range (IQR). Note: the Further Education Colleges (FEC) have been excluded since they do not report the DfE School Census (i.e. FSM is unknown); also the Independent Schools have been excluded since they report zero pupils on FSM (i.e. they are not part of the same distribution)

IMD5	Number of institutions	Median FSM%	FSM% IQR
1	7	49.1	<26.1, 53.5>
2	8	25.8	<22.7, 27.8>
3	3	8.5	<5.6, 10.6>
4	10	13.2	<10.1, 21.7>
5	12	9.6	<7.8, 10.9>
All	40	13.2	<9.5, 25.0>

Figure 1. Distribution of OxWell 2025 secondary and FEC by 2019 IMD based on school

Free school meal (FSM) of sample (not including independent/private schools and FEC - as these are not included in national reports):

- Mean: 19.44% (national average 24.6%);
- median 13% (skewed proportion on FSM)
- national mean stratified by IMD quintile-



Free School Meal (FSM) percentage by IMD

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