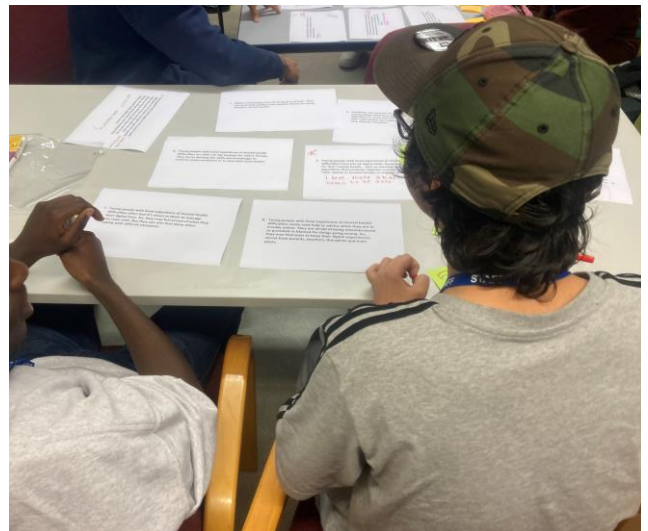
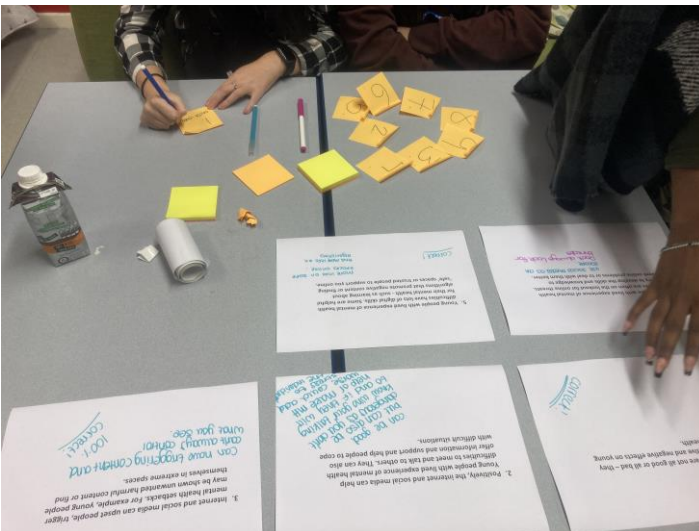
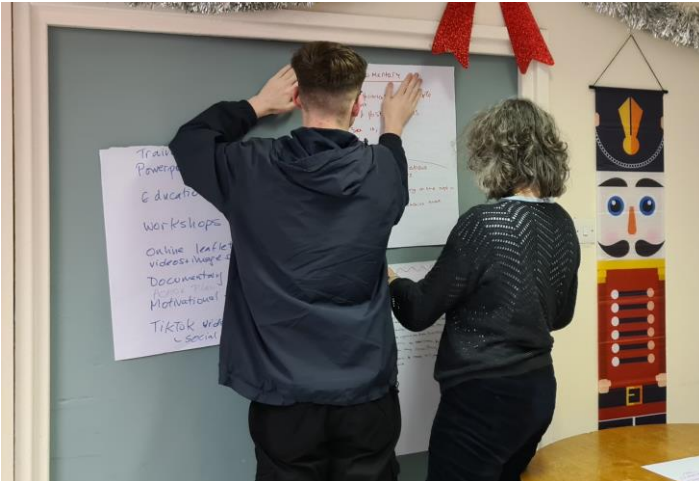


Internet use and digital skills: deliberative workshops with young people



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The project

The deliberative workshops were carried out as part of Work Package 7 (WP7) of ySKILLS (Youth Skills) – a EU Horizon 2020-funded project involving 15 partners from 13 countries. The project aims to explore how the digital environment affects the wellbeing for children and young people and how resilience might be stimulated through the enhancement of digital skills.

In WP7 we deliberated on the synthesis of results of ySKILLS with children and youth people, aiming to identify, respond to and incorporate their views, priorities and experiences in developing the recommendations for policy and practice. With the help of the young participants, the ySKILLS results and recommendations are being mapped to relevant legal standards and legislative and regulatory bodies and framed in terms of the rights of the child.

For developing and piloting the protocol we used the findings from a ySKILLS qualitative study on digital use and mental health (WP6.4). The study aimed to discover whether young people develop distinctive skills because of the particular risks and opportunities they encounter online. For this study, we conducted in-depth interviews with 62 young people aged 12 to 22 in Norway and the UK with experience of mental health difficulties of varying severity, most of whom had received treatment in the recent past.

Developing the methodology

The methodology was developed based on three elements:

- **A systematic review of the existing research** to identify what is known about youth digital skills, and to examine the evidence for the antecedents (or factors influencing the acquisition) of digital skills, and the consequences of having digital skills. This enabled us to sketch the research approach, design and methods, which were later elaborated on and developed further. You can access the evidence review [here](#).
- **In-depth qualitative studies** were conducted to gain a detailed understanding of the role of digital skills in improving or undermining at-risk (vulnerable or disadvantaged) children and young people's wellbeing. For an overview see [here](#). The results of one of these studies – looking at digital use and mental health – were used to design the deliberative workshop protocol. You can find the mental health study results [here](#).
- **Deliberative workshops** were held online and in-person. Using the findings from the mental health study we designed deliberative engagement with the results and recommendations which will serve as a pilot test to the design jams in the six survey countries.

Aims of the deliberative workshops

The deliberative workshops (Coleman et al., 2017; Kleine et al., 2016; Pothong, 2022) were proposed to allow children to work creatively and collaboratively with the research findings, enabling them to identify possible solutions to the key online challenges for youth mental health and to select which ideas to be transformed into practical recommendations for

different stakeholder groups. The deliberation approach aims to allow the bottom-up formulation of public agendas and to open up opportunities for the participation of young people in the debates relevant to them (Coleman et al., 2017; Pothong, 2022). In previous research (Livingstone et al., 2019) this method has proved an effective means of child consultation that can inform policy and practice development in a way that is close to children's lives and current concerns.

The aims of the deliberative workshops were to:

- Co-create a child-friendly summary of the scientific results by inviting input from young people and facilitating the sharing of experiences and views.
- Identify various stakeholder groups that young people would like to engage in relation to their digital lives and wellbeing.
- Draft different recommendations for various stakeholder groups and design the outputs for these audiences, by enabling young people's creative and deliberative engagement.
- The create a deliberation protocol in a form of a hands-on toolkit to be implemented by ySKILLS teams in the six survey countries and with the potential for use also by stakeholder groups and other researchers.

The plan was to select children and adolescents for diversity, with attention to the inclusion and participation of young people with vulnerabilities or from marginalised groups based on criteria identified in the project. We, therefore, made a decision to use the findings from the mental health study to pilot the protocol.

Workshop activities

We contacted two UK youth organisations with whom we had already collaborated for the mental health study in the UK. They helped us to reach out to young people, recruit participants for the workshop and host the deliberation sessions. We ran two workshops, one with each organisation, consulting a total of 13 adolescents and young people. Some of these had taken part in the research while others were new to the project.

One of the workshops was conducted online and lasted 90 mins, while the other took place face-to-face and lasted four hours. Both workshops followed the same protocol, but the face-to-face version had additional tasks as it was longer.

The workshop had three activities: drafting key findings in a child-friendly language, identifying stakeholders and resources, and designing resources with key messages. All activities were designed in open format allowing young people to express their ideas and make suggestions, while the researchers facilitated the discussion and provided prompts when necessary (see also Appendix 1).

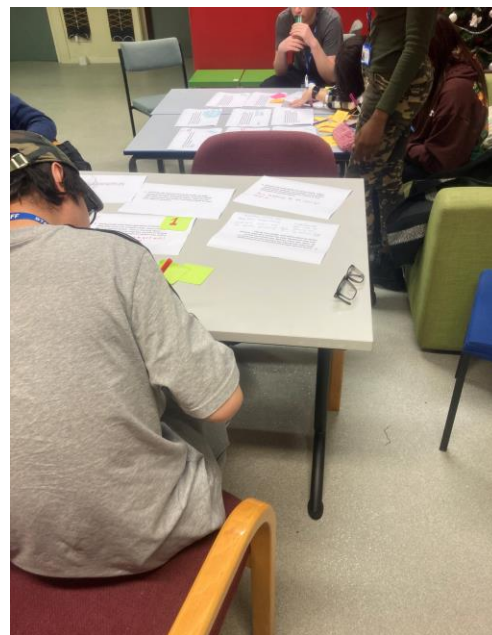
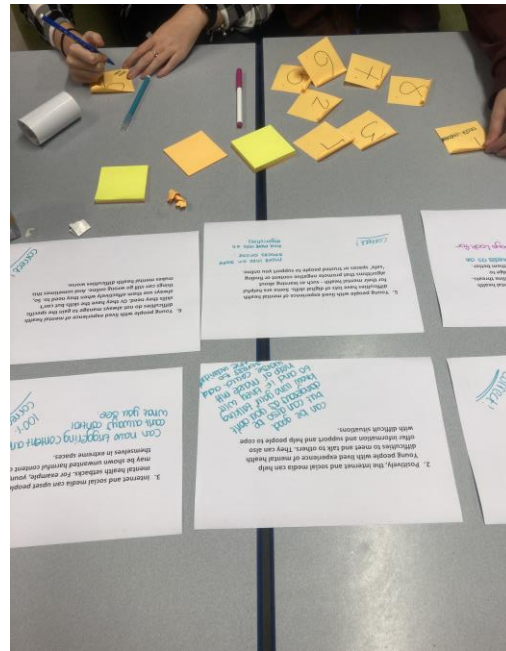
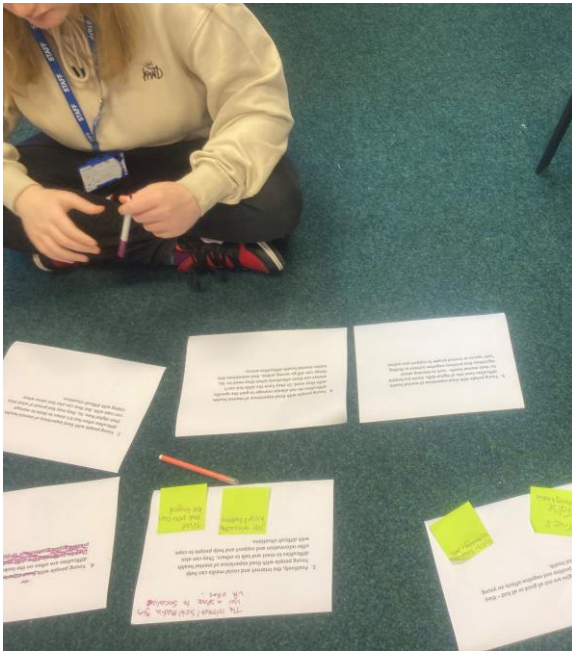
Task 1: Redrafting key findings

We started with the findings from the interviews with young people on their digital engagement and how this related to their mental health. We had drafted 9 key findings and

prepared worksheets to facilitate work of the young people. We asked the youth participants to help us to improve the findings and making them child friendly.

The young people worked in small groups of 3 or 4 people, taking one worksheet with a finding at a time, discussing and redrafting them. Some of the prompts we used to facilitate the discussion include: Do you want to rewrite the findings? Break them up? Give examples? Which are the most important findings children should know about? Any way to improve them? Anything to add or remove?

Photos of task 1: Redrafting key findings

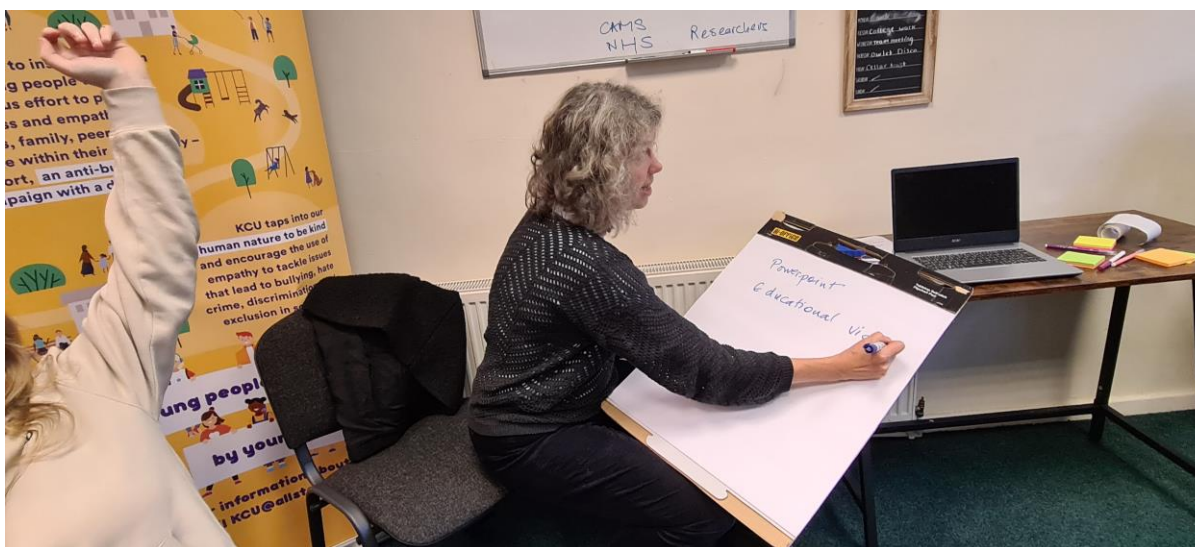
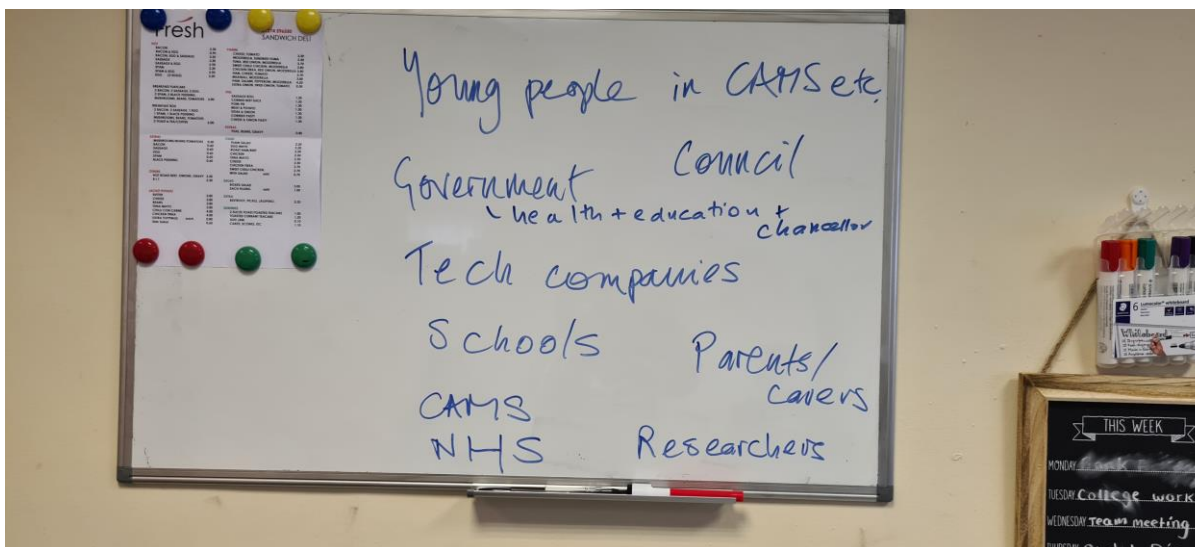


At the end each group presented their version of the findings, and we discussed the changes that were made and why.

Task 2: Identifying stakeholders and resources

In a large group the discussion continued around key stakeholder groups that the young people would like to engage with and discuss mental health in a digital age. The young people listed a broad range of stakeholders including parents, other young people, educators, tech industry, mental health professionals, governments and policy-makers. We then asked the young people to think of the different formats of the key messages - thinking about the different groups of people that we should send the messages to, should we present them different to each group? How should they look like?

Photos of task 2: Stakeholders

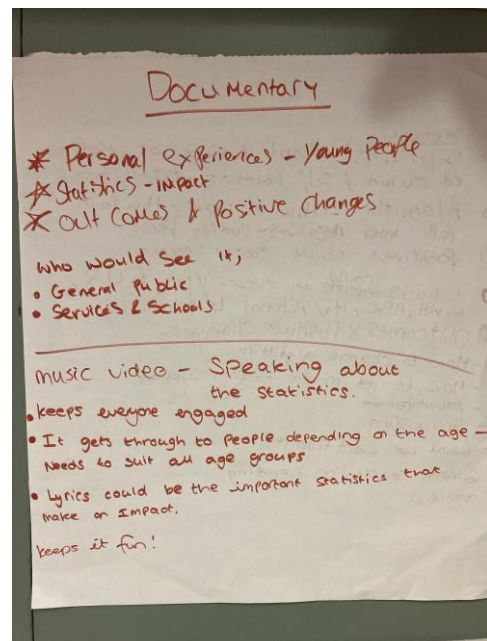
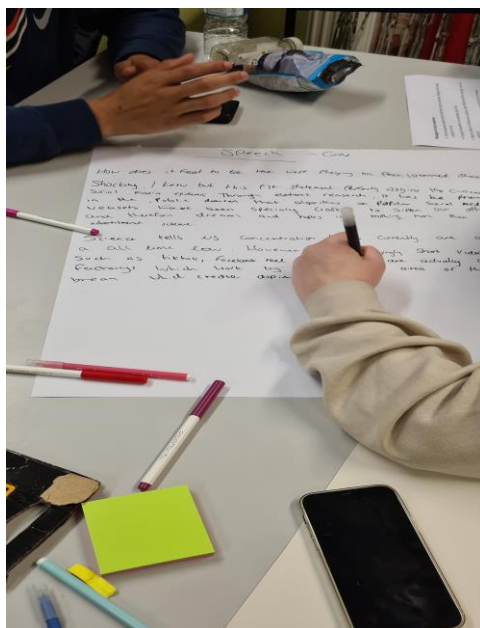
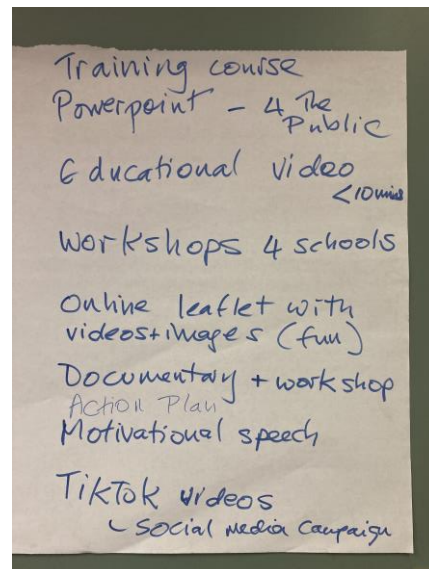
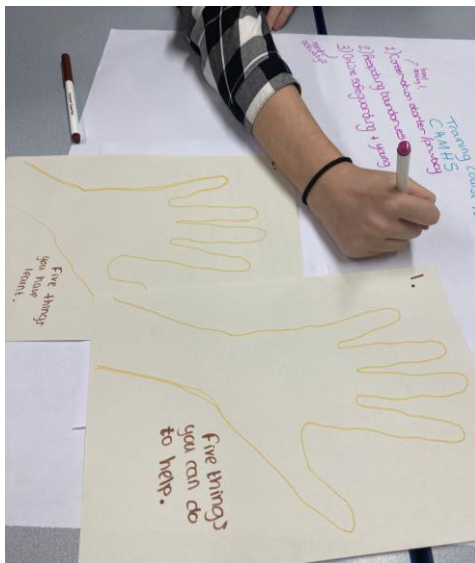


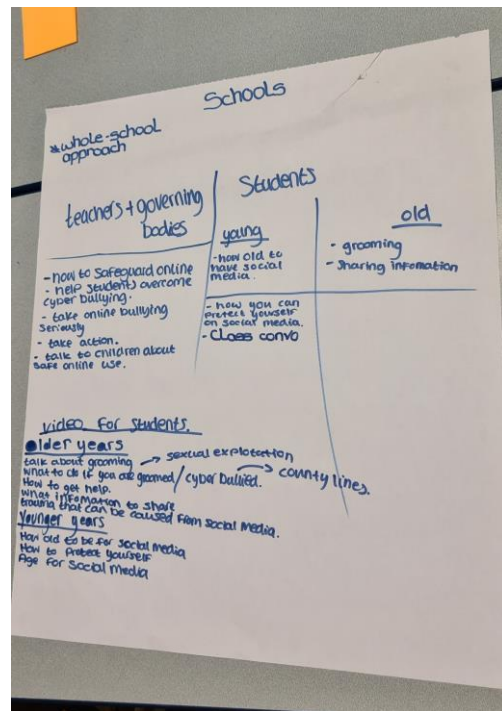
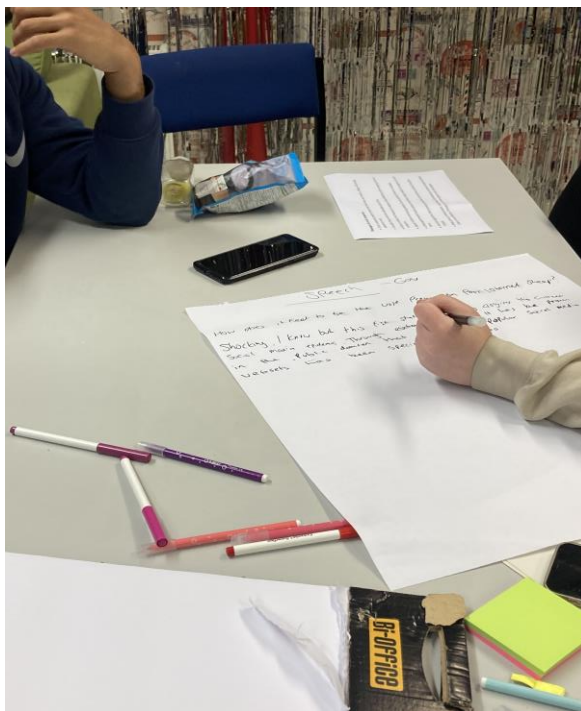
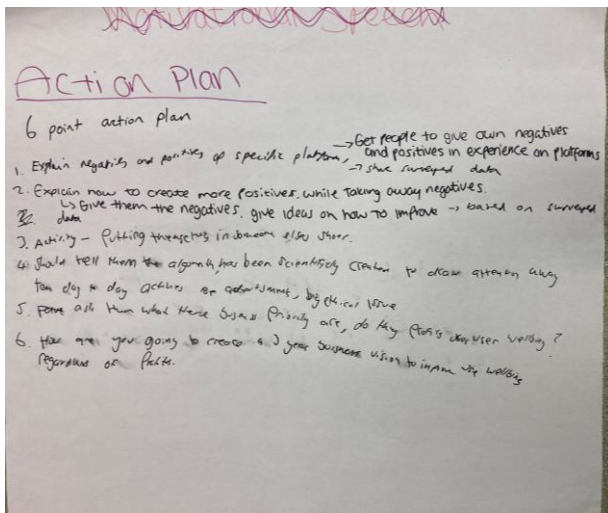
Task 3: Designing resources with key messages

The final task was to choose one of the stakeholder groups that were suggested and create a resource with 3 to 5 key messages for the chosen stakeholder group. The young people could choose any format for their resource and had time to engage creatively and design the resource and the key messages. We had a list of already prepared key messages for different stakeholder groups in case the young people needed examples and guidance.

At the end each group presenting their resource and the rationale behind it and we discussed key takeaways and what the young people suggested our next steps should be. We also asked for feedback on how the session went and what should be improved.

Photos of task 3: Designing resources with key messages





Overall the protocol worked really well. The young people were very skilled at drafting the child-friendly findings and identified some gaps in what we had originally suggested. They also were able to identify a wide range of stakeholders and had many creative ideas about the formats of the resources that would be suitable. Finally, they seemed to enjoy the creative task of designing the concept of these resources and were even interested in developing them in practice if we were able to provide the funding for this (for example, a documentary film).

Appendix: Consultation protocol

I. Introduction (10 min)

Thank you for agreeing to participate. Today we want to share the findings from our interviews with young people and ask for your help in identifying the key messages.

Some of you participated in the research and spoke to us about digital technologies and wellbeing. This was really helpful for us.

If you are new, don't worry, you don't need any advance knowledge.

Altogether, we interviewed 62 young people. We're first going to tell you what we found out, and we'd like to you tell us what you think are interesting or important, and whether there's things you'd like to add.

Then we'll ask you who we should share these findings with who can take some action to make a difference to your wellbeing – perhaps, parents, mental health professionals, tech companies, policy-makers, teachers.

This conversation will be anonymous and confidential. We will not tell anyone who we talked to when we publish our results. Please, do not share what we say here. However, if I get concerned about your wellbeing today, I will discuss this with you.

We might need about 3 hours but we will have a break. We would like to audio record the conversation and take a few photos (no faces). Is that OK? Can you put your name tag on?

I. Key findings and discussion (30 mins)

Let's start with our findings from the interviews with young people. We asked them about their digital lives, and how this related to their mental health. We have drafted some key findings but need your help to improve them and make them child-friendly.

[hand out key messages, ask them to work in small groups of 3 or 4 people, discuss and re-write the findings as they see fit]

1. Digital technologies are not all good or all bad – they can have both positive and negative effects on young people's mental health.
2. Positively, the internet and social media can help young people meet and talk to others. They can also offer information and support and help people to cope with difficult situations.
3. But they can also upset people, trigger mental health setbacks. For example, young people may be shown unwanted harmful content or find themselves in extreme spaces.
4. Vulnerable young people are often on the lookout for online threats. They try to develop the skills and knowledge to prevent online problems or to deal with them better.

5. Young people with lived experience of mental health difficulties have lots of digital skills. Some are helpful for their mental health - such as learning about algorithms that promote negative content or finding 'safe' spaces or trusted people to support you online.
6. Young people with lived experience of mental health difficulties do not always manage to gain the specific skills they need. Or they have the skills but can't always use them effectively when they need to. So, things can still go wrong online. And sometimes this makes mental health difficulties worse.
7. Young people often feel it's down to them to manage their digital lives. So, they may feel proud of what they can cope with. But they can also feel alone when coping with difficult situations.
8. Young people rarely seek help or advice when they are in trouble online. They are afraid of being misunderstood or punished or blamed for things going wrong. So, they may find ways to keep their digital experiences secret from parents, teachers, therapists and even peers.
9. They would like the internet and social media to be made into more friendly and supportive places. And they would like their therapists and other trusted adults to understand their digital lives better.

Prompts: Do you want to rewrite them? Break them up? Give examples? Which are the most important findings children should know about? Any way to improve them? Anything to add or remove?

II. Key stakeholders (30 mins)

[Back to large group. Ask each group to report back] What messages did you decide on?

Let's now think who we should talk to about our key messages? Who should we send them to?

Prompts: Parents? Young people? Educators? Tech industry? Mental health professionals? Governments and policy-makers?

Thinking about the different groups of people that we should send the messages to, should we present them different to each group? How should they look like?

Prompts: What format? What might make them interesting? E.g.: Twitter feed for industry, a PowerPoint for schools, a leaflet for MH professionals, a blog for policy-makers?

[break 20 min]

I. Key messages (30 mins)

Let's now create a resource with some key messages. Choose one of the groups we were discussing and decide on the format that these messages should be in (presentation, leaflet, etc.). What do you think the messages should be for your group? Try to come up with 3-5 key messages.

Prompts: Which are the most important ones? Anything to add? What about... [select from below if they need prompts]?

Messages for young people

- Take control and use your skills and knowledge to manage your own digital lives. Delete the negative stuff and engage with things that are helpful to you.
- Know yourself and what you are comfortable with. Set your own boundaries.
- Be mindful that what's helpful might change from one day to another.
- Look out for early signs when things might begin to get unhelpful, stressful or upsetting.
- Know your way around the different apps that you use. Check the privacy settings, how to turn comments or notification off, how to block or report things, how to hide content or ban certain words, how to check the time you spend on each app.
- Pay attention to things that don't look right. If it doesn't seem trustworthy, it probably isn't.
- If you might be in trouble, just tell someone. Even if it feels like it is your own fault, it's better to tell somebody you trust.
- If something bad happens – go to the police and get it stopped. No one will judge you.

Messages for safeguarding and mental health practitioners

- Young people have diverse digital lives, you must know about them. Ask about the positives and negatives of their online experiences.
- Encourage young people to share about difficult online experiences by showing understanding and being supportive.
- Do not advise them to stop going online, it's hard to follow. They receive help and support from peers and might do risky things as a way of exploring and socialising.
- Support needs to cover both digital and in-person lives. Practitioners training also should cover both.

Messages for teachers

- Education should be relatable. It should cover all online activities that are important for young people's wellbeing and safety.
- Teaching should cover different types of digital skills, not only online safety and technical training on how to use the internet. Education on algorithm literacy is now urgent.
- It should involve responding to online challenging behaviours from peers and risks that come from the design of the digital environment.
- Attention to the specific needs of at-risk and vulnerable adolescents is vital.

- Education should promote resilience and help-seeking. It should work to overcome digital and social exclusion.

Messages for parents, carers and the public

- Young people face pressures in both their in-person and digital lives. It's important to recognise both.
- Do not talk only about online safety. Discuss how to manage stress, anxiety and trauma.
- Encourage young people to share and report online problems.
- Do not blame young people for their difficulties online and offline.
- Ask children and young people what they need and how to support them.

Messages for tech companies

- Tech companies need to know that their users are diverse. Design with young people in mind.
- Consider those who are vulnerable and at risk.
- Work to reduce risk features in advance. Deal effectively with emerging risks and violations.
- Support children and young people. Do not penalise them for mistakes.
- Create good mental health content that helps young people to recognise risk and harm.
- Harmful algorithms that promote upsetting and extreme content should be limited.
- Make privacy settings easier, reporting of problematic content simpler and take down more effective. Provide just in-time support and safe spaces.

Messages for Government

- Provide training and funding for mental health services to learn about digital technologies.
- Make sure that children and young people receive support when they need it.
- Mental health services must engage with the digital and non-digital lives of young people.
- Make sure that professionals (educators, law enforcement, mental health) support vulnerable and at-risk adolescents in their digital lives.
- Regulate companies, especially the large platforms, to limit the extreme risks posed to young people's safety.

Presentations and discussion (50 mins)

Now show us your design and tell us about your ideas.

Wrap up (5 mins)

Thank you for taking part. We will take these key messages to the stakeholders on your behalf. How was it for you to talk about these things today? *(If distressed or has revealed immediate risk, follow-up as appropriate)*

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