Results of Terminology Survey

March 2015

Available Online: http://uktrans.info/terminology

UK Trans Info recently looked for feedback on what terminology we should use when speaking about trans and non-binary people. We recognise there is unlikely to be a perfect solution or complete consensus on this issue, but we want to try and use terminology that is as inclusive as possible. To this end we ran a short online survey which we publicised through our facebook, twitter, tumblr and ello accounts. We are also very grateful to the significant number of individuals and organisations who publicised the survey. It ran from 22nd February until 8th March 2015.

The survey collected opinions on four topics:

1. Where appropriate, should we use the term 'trans and non-binary' or is 'trans' sufficient?
2. Should we talk about community or communities, or only talk about people?
3. Should the word non-binary include a hyphen, or should it be nonbinary?
4. When using the term trans, should it include an asterisk so it says trans*?

Each question had limited options, and we did see a few comments expressing concern over this. The decision to do this was intentional as it would allow for the clearest results. The options available were determined from discussion with UK Trans Info's advisory group, which is made up of people with varying gender identities from around the UK.

We received a total of 495 responses. All questions were optional but each question received at least 483 responses.

As some of the questions impacted particularly on those who could be included under the term non-binary people, we wanted to produce two sets of results to our survey. The first set of results will take into account every answer that we receive, regardless of gender identity. The second set of results will look only at those who do not identify entirely as either a man or a woman.

To achieve this we asked the question "How would you describe your gender identity?" which could be answered using a free text box. With hindsight we recognise that this was not the best way to identify people for our second set of results, and a small number of individual responses will have wrongly been included or excluded. We apologise for this and will review our methods for future surveys.

The most common words that enabled us to identify responses for the second set of results were agender, genderqueer, genderfluid, non-binary, bigender and androgynous however this is not a complete list. For the purposes of this survey we have called this group of respondents the non-binary group, however we realise that some people in the group will not identify this way.

In total there are 260 respondents in the non-binary group, which is 53% of all the responses that we received.

Trans vs. Trans and Non-binary

Question 1: The word "trans" is widely used as an umbrella term. UK Trans Info currently uses the term "trans and non-binary" (when appropriate) to make it clear that we include non-binary people and also because some non-binary people do not identify as trans. However some people feel that it reinforces the idea that "trans" is not inclusive of non-binary people. Which term should we use?
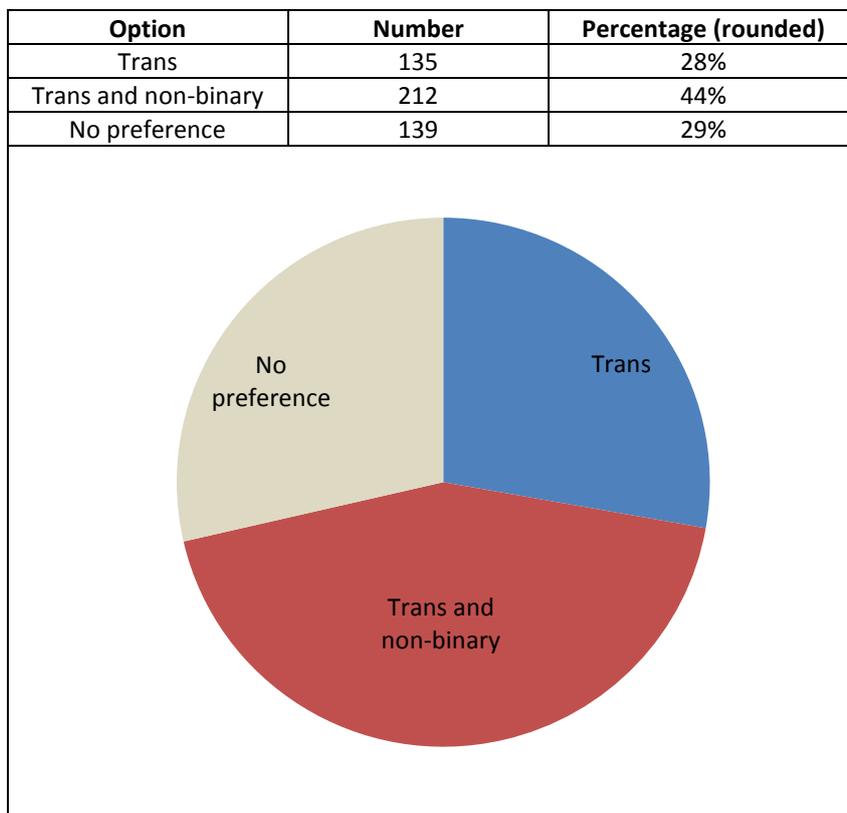
Option	Number	Percentage (rounded)
Trans	135	28%
Trans and non-binary	212	44%
No preference	139	29%

Table 1: Results of first question, all responses

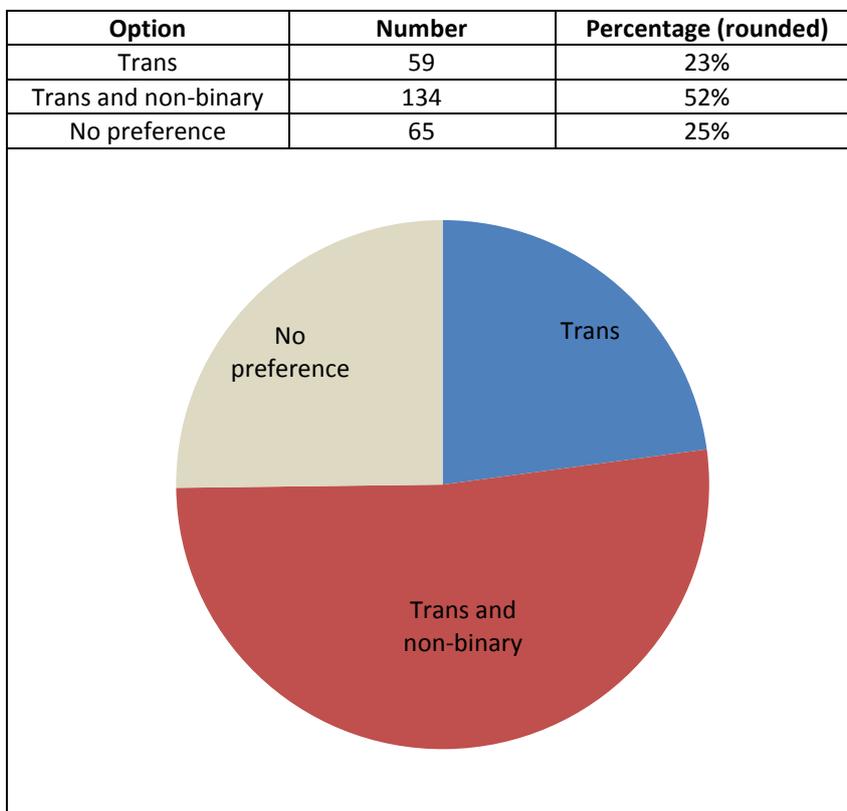| Option	Number	Percentage (rounded)
Trans	59	23%
Trans and non-binary	134	52%
No preference	65	25%

Table 2: Results of first question, non-binary group only

Several people told us that the word trans automatically includes non-binary people:

- The general consensus is that "trans" is an abbreviation of "transgender". As transgender is largely considered to be an umbrella term is there no need to add a further layer of attempted inclusivity.
- Trans is an umbrella term that includes non-binary people, so listing the two terms separately is also unnecessary.
- I feel non-binary people do belong under the trans umbrella, no need to set us as a separate category - as you said above too, that just reinforces a quite restrictive definition of 'trans'.
- I believe that non--binary people should be included within the trans umbrella and should not be separated out. we are trans too.

However several other people told us that some non-binary people do not feel included by the word trans:

- Surveys of nonbinary people have repeatedly found that only a minority are confident that they count as 'trans' or 'transgender'.
- The reason I say "trans and nonbinary" is because I know many nonbinary people who don't feel its appropriate for them to use the word "trans" if they have no aspiration to make any kind of transition.
- I personally do not think that trans includes non-binary. 'Trans' implies that a 'transition' has taken place whereas non-binary does not require a transition. Non-binary people just are - the way they have always been. For me, 'trans' and non-binary are two completely diffrrent concepts.

Some people told us that even if trans includes non-binary people, it is important to make it explicit that they are included:

- I am a non-binary person who identifies as trans and I agree that non-binary falls under the trans umbrella and therefore in a perfect world, we shouldn't NEED to include the asterisk or specify "trans and non-binary". However it is not a perfect world and I have definitely experienced being unwelcome in certain areas/circles within the trans community because I'm non-binary instead of binary trans. There is still a stigma that some people have that nb people "aren't trans enough". So even though it shouldn't need to be a specific clarification, I am always relieved to see "trans and non-binary" or "trans*" because I feel more confident that I will be included and supported within that community.
- I feel like going with 'trans' rather than 'trans and non-binary' is *probably* more inclusive, as long as you still make it clear that non-binary people are included in that, because a lot of organisations still just aren't aware that non-binary people exist, and would use 'trans' to mean 'binary trans'. So you could say something like 'We are open to trans people of all genders' or 'we are open to trans people, including men, women and nonbinary people'. Hopefully we'll eventually get to the point where 'trans' is automatically taken to include nonbinary trans people, but I don't think we're quite there yet, so those would be some compromises while we're still in a transitional period.
- I like it to be clear about whether an event wants me there or not. I don't want to feel unwelcome or like I am invading a space that wasn't intended to be mine.
- While I identify as both trans(gender) and nonbinary and there is some overlap between the two communities, I feel like it's important to explicitly mention nonbinary people since nonbinary people aren't well known yet, and many do not know that trans can include nonbinary people.

A few people gave alternative options:

- Perhaps "trans including non-binary" could be used to indicate that both nb and binary folks are being talked about while also suggesting that nb people are included in the definition of trans?
- I'd prefer trans and/or non-binary because while there are non-binary people who don't ID as trans, there are plenty who do ID as trans.
- Preference is the plain trans but with a definition when first used e.g. "trans (including non-binary) people are awesome. Go trans people!" This also makes terms like transphobic work otherwise you would need a new word for non-binary-phobic.

People vs. Community vs. Communities

Question 2: When talking about all trans and non-binary people some people and organisations talk about "the community" or "the communities". For example "it is important that the government engage with the trans and non-binary community when creating policy". Should we do this?
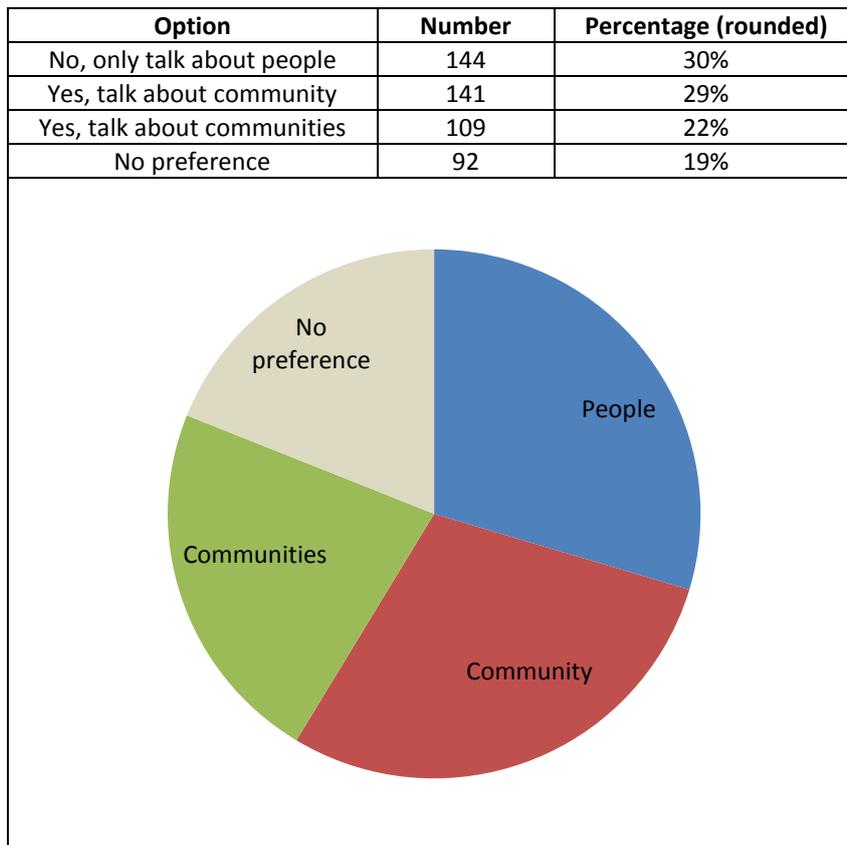
Option	Number	Percentage (rounded)
No, only talk about people	144	30%
Yes, talk about community	141	29%
Yes, talk about communities	109	22%
No preference	92	19%

Table 3: Results of second question, all responses

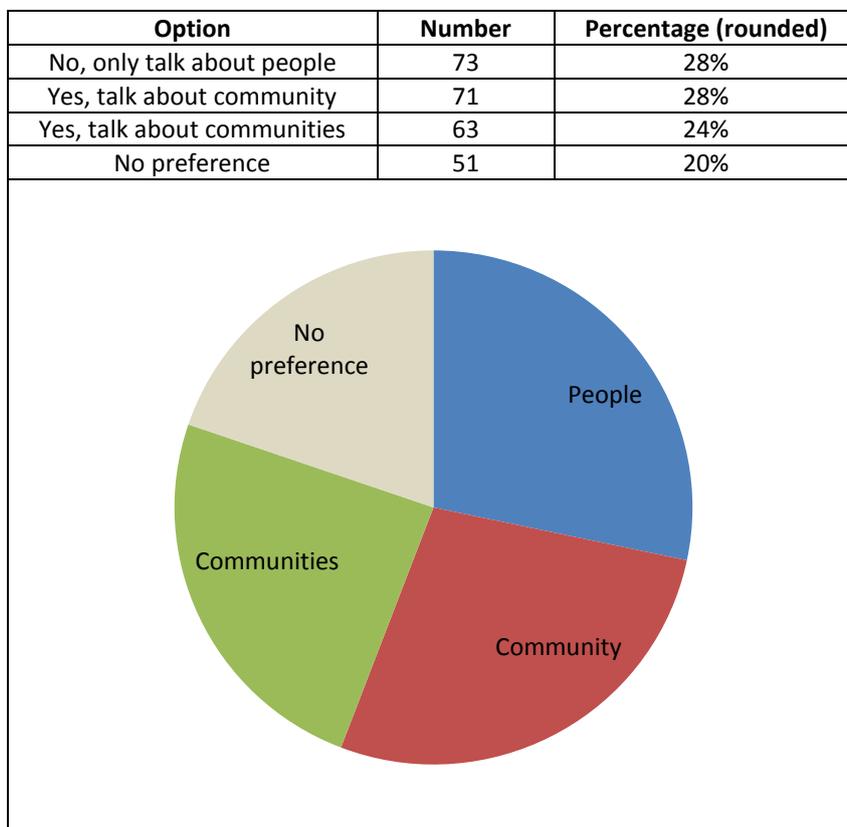| Option	Number	Percentage (rounded)
No, only talk about people	73	28%
Yes, talk about community	71	28%
Yes, talk about communities	63	24%
No preference	51	20%

Table 4: Results of second question, non-binary group only

Some people felt that it was important to talk about people, not communities:

- The phrase community makes a group which ends up being a mob. We are people just like everyone else so call us people.
- People are people and shouldn't be grouped into communities, they should be part of everywhere
- Many people who could be described as "trans" or "nonbinary" do not feel part of "the community" - and a single, monolithic community is very much a myth.
- I would strongly suggest using trans* people or trans and non-binary people in place of communities. The latter implies that one needs to be an active participant in trans* areas instead of simply identifying as trans* or non-binary. It is also very possible for an individual to strongly hold a certain identity but not feel as though they are part of that community.
- The word "community" implies groups of people living or working together, having their own culture/religion/education/social rules. There is no "community" that I have ever been aware of except very loose connections where people are joining internet groups.
- i have the impression that "trans & non-binary people" extends to every person in this category & considering the human side of individuals, whereas "trans & non-binary community/communities" is more of a social and/or political stance
- constantly speaking about trans/non-binary individuals as a community can hurt those who feel alone. To some, it may feel like they are being excluded from yet another social group because they aren't part of the "trans community" and/or "non-binary community". They may be alone in their journey due to location and/or parental constraints and/or financial issues that prevent them from frequent access to the internet. Unless an article/group/individual is only referring to an actual community, perhaps it's wise to simply say "trans and/or non-binary people" or "trans and/or non-binary individuals". Another point to be made is that some individuals may feel that, other than sharing a particular gender identity, they have nothing in common with individuals of their gender. It may seem as odd to them as saying "the male community" or "the blonde community". Unless you are speaking about an actual community of trans/non-binary/male/blonde individuals, the term may seem out of place.
- In regard to the word community, it's a problematic term in that it has no clear definition and is abused by virtually everyone. A phrase like "trans community" and the way it's used implies all trans people think alike, have the same view and sensitivities etc. Anyone who has studies sociology knows that community is a problematic term. As such, any responsible organisation ought not use it.
- I do not like descriptions like "trans community" as it sounds self-selected / volentiery / chosen - suggesting that people choose to be trans seems wrong to me. Might as well say "cancer suffering community" or "people with blue eyes community". They are not choices, just facts. Social groups should not be defined by things people do not get to choose. Making it sound like a choise could give the impression that the validity of trans identities is something to be debated.

A couple of people highlighted that there is not just one community:

- I'd also prefer "talk to trans and non-binary communities" - that is, that regardless of which labels are picked, there are multiple corresponding communities in practice.
- My main concern is that the singular "community" is problematic as it implies a single group identity, and that simply doesn't reflect reality.

Non-binary vs. Nonbinary

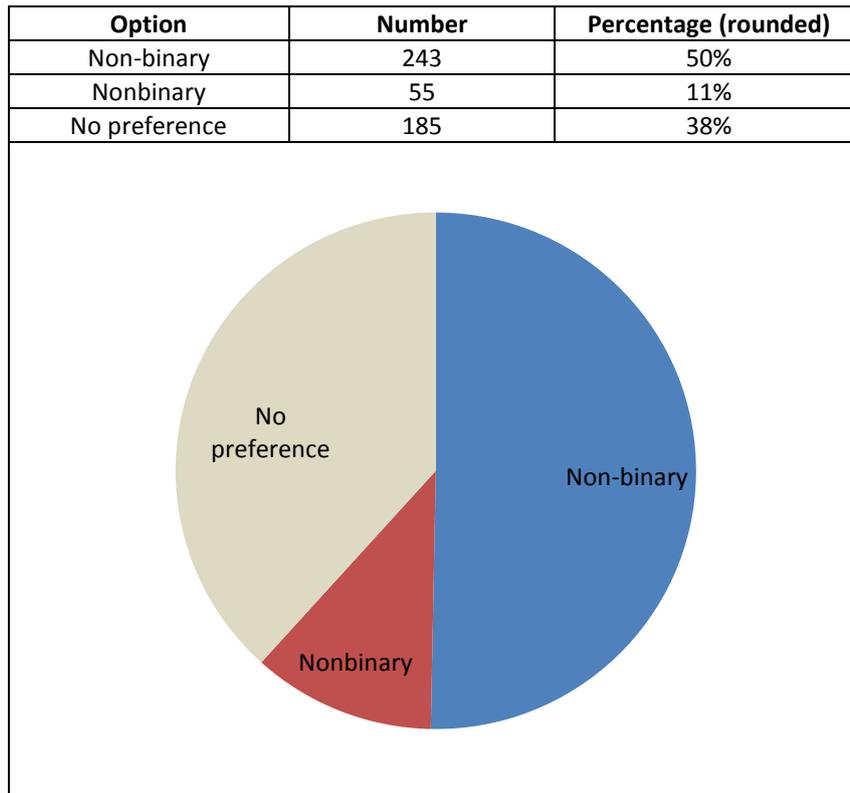Question 3: When talking about non-binary people, which spelling should we use?

Option	Number	Percentage (rounded)
Non-binary	243	50%
Nonbinary	55	11%
No preference	185	38%

Table 5: Results of third question, all responses

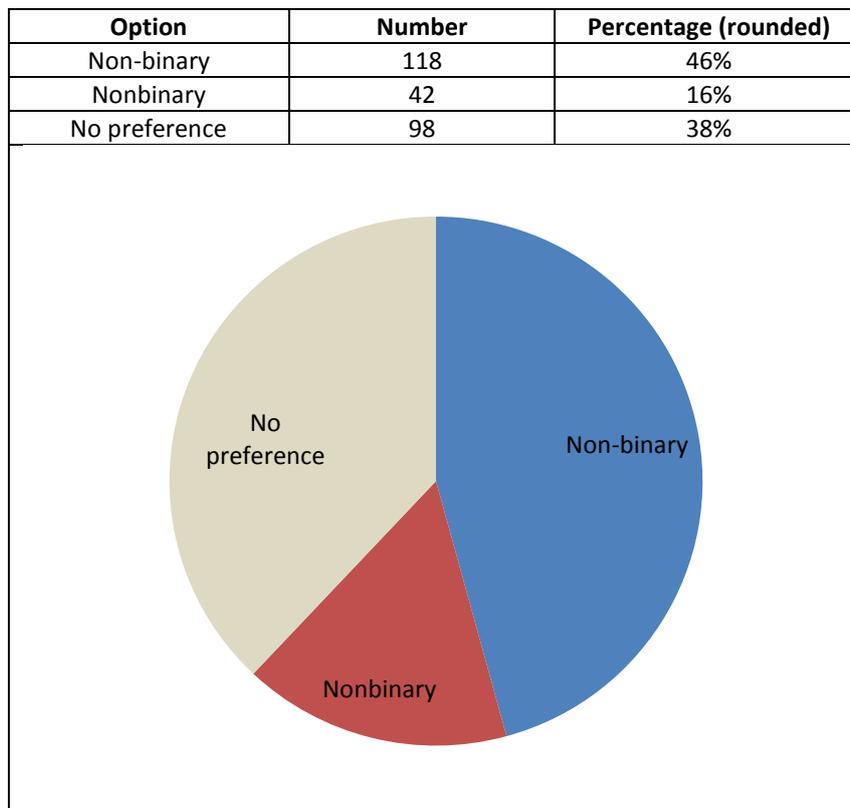| Option	Number	Percentage (rounded)
Non-binary	118	46%
Nonbinary	42	16%
No preference	98	38%

Table 6: Results of third question, non-binary group only

There were a few comments about this question:

- it's a word, it doesn't need to be split up. It's not bi-sexual, so it's not non-binary.
- The dehyphenation of words, like nonbinary, should be an inevitable change for the acceptance of the meaning of the word -e.g- On-Line -> online

One person pointed out that the dictionary says that the correct term is non-binary:

- The question which has been responded to with a preference, ' When talking about non-binary people, which spelling should we use? ', has been responded to with that particular preference as that is the correct grammatical presentation for the adjective, non-binary. (online Oxford English Dictionary 2014, due to be updated march 2015).

Two people suggested that non binary (with a space) is an alternative:

- I always used non binary, with just a space between the two words.
- non binary with a space for the spelling one

Trans vs. Trans*

Question 4: When using the term "trans" some people and organisations add an asterisk to the end so that it reads trans* as they believe it is more inclusive. Others have objections to the asterisk and prefer it not to be used. Which version do you prefer?
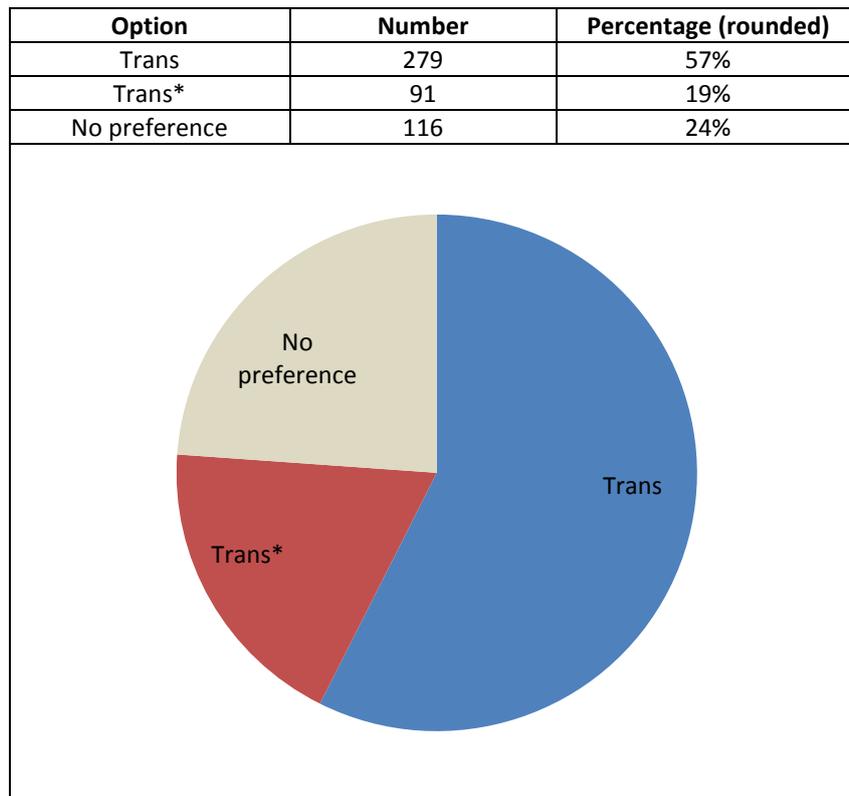
Option	Number	Percentage (rounded)
Trans	279	57%
Trans*	91	19%
No preference	116	24%

Table 7: Results of fourth question, all responses

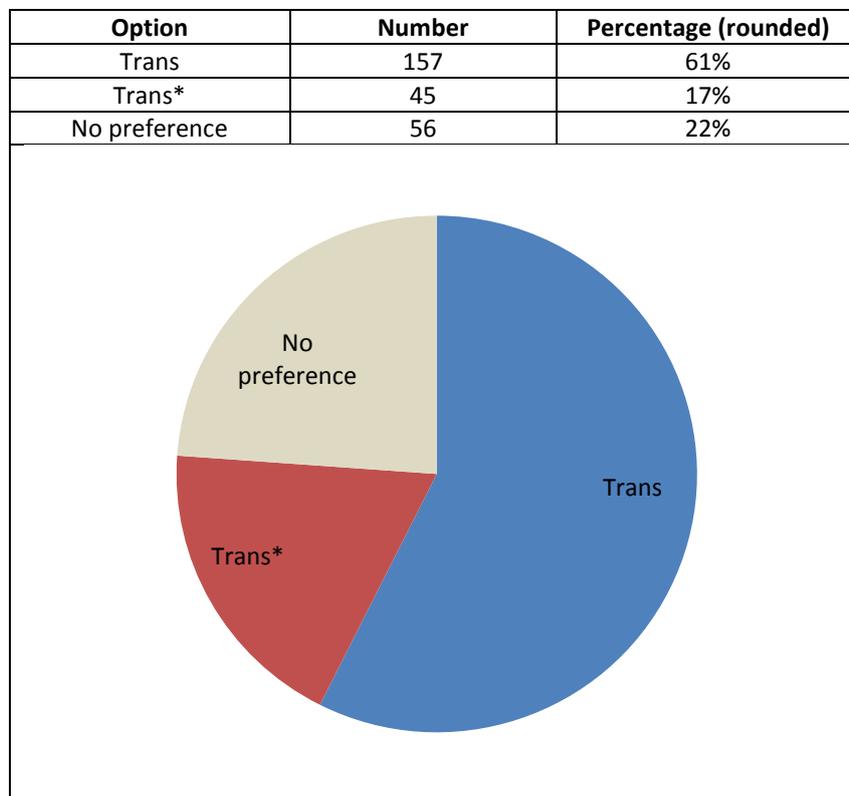| Option	Number	Percentage (rounded)
Trans	157	61%
Trans*	45	17%
No preference	56	22%

Table 8: Results of third question, non-binary group only

This question received the most comments by far. Several people commented that the asterisk is more inclusive:
- I think the asterisk makes the term more inclusive
- When describing a group of us, I personally prefer trans* with the asterisk over trans without because as a genderfluid individual I feel constantly left out, as if forgotten. And often I am. I have read articles, particularly research articles, that discuss transgender individuals but only those who identify as male or female exclusively. The asterisk is a symbol of inclusiveness. It is a symbol to myself and others that the speaker is referring to more than just trans men and trans women. I feel as if that tiny little star is a reminder that I exist.
- Trans* in my opinion refers to all people who are gender variant, whereas Trans refers to people who have or are permanently changing their bodies to reflect their gender identity (for example by taking hormones or having surgery). Trans* includes people who cross dress and have no intention of living full time in their 'other' gender, but Trans excludes this group, which is sometimes necessary.

However, many more people commented that the asterisk excludes or otherwise harms certain groups, particularly non-binary people:
- the asterisk should not be used as it implies that 'trans' does not already include nb people, which is incorrect. it is also used transmisogynistically (eg 'transwomen*') which delegitimises trans women's identities.
- In technical terms, adding an asterisk after "trans" means that the only words which it could refer to are those beginning "trans-" as it is a wildcard denoting that any letter could follow it. For example: transgender, transsexual, and transvestite would fit the convention. This excludes genderqueer or non-binary people.
- 'Trans*' has been used negatively against trans women, and so 'trans' without the asterisk is the better option.
- The only one I have a strong opinion on is trans without an asterisk, because of the associated problems regarding inclusion/exclusion/transmisogyny etc.
- Using the asterisk implies that because I'm not a binary trans person, I'm not a real trans person.
- The asterisk that is meant to include makes everyone other than binary, dyadic non-cross dressing trans people look like an afterthought. If campaigning is done properly, then it should be evident that we're all included. The asterisk makes it look like they're just paying lip service to the idea of inclusion, and not actually including.
- I have chosen "trans" without an asterisk as, while the asterisk is meant to include people who are not binary trans, I find that it gives the implication that non binary people who identify as transgender are not by default a part of this group. The addition of the asterisk is to say "hey, we are including you guys too!" but why wouldn't we be included in the first place?

Some people had problems with the non-standard use of an asterisk:
- I'm big on normalisation; I appreciate the asterisk but I think it really sets us apart if we try to use it in the mainstream.
- Putting an * after a word is just an instruction to check the foot note. What would you do if trans* needed a footnote? You cant go trans** as that just means to check the second footnote. Its dumb.

Some people commented that the asterisk didn't work when spoken:
- Trans without an asterisk means exactly the same as trans with an asterisk, and when you speak you don't say 'trans asterisk', so why add to an already bewildering array of neologisms?
- Never use terminology that people can't pronounce.

A few people also provided links with more details on why the asterisk should not be used:
- http://www.thepulpzine.com/the-trans-asterisk-and-why-we-need-to-stop-using-it/
- http://makingmountainsoutofmountains.tumblr.com/post/70870181938/why-i-started-and-stopped-using-an-asterisk-after
- https://twitter.com/auntysarah/status/570163529820606464
- http://getrealcambridge.com/2014/12/18/the-case-against-trans/

Conclusion

The vast majority of comments received were regarding the use of an asterisk in the term trans*, and this also had the clearest survey results. Using Trans* (with an asterisk) is largely considered to be highly problematic, and although intended to be inclusive it seems to largely have the opposite effect. Trans (without an asterisk) was the preferred option by far.

The question of whether to use a hyphen in the word non-binary seems to be largely uncontroversial. Only a small amount of people chose nonbinary and there were very few comments on the topic. Non-binary (with a hyphen) was the preferred option by far.

The choice of whether to just use the term trans or to say trans and non-binary had a slightly bigger split. Although several people said that the word trans either does or should include non-binary people, most of the comments emphasised the need to be explicit about non-binary inclusion. A few people suggested alternatives such as trans and/or non-binary people, or trans (including non-binary people), but these do not work very well when spoken. Trans and non-binary was chosen by most people, importantly including over half of the non-binary group.

The question with the least clear results was whether to talk about community or communities where appropriate, or just to talk about people. Just over half of respondents said that yes we should be talking about either the community or the communities. However, almost a third of respondents said no we shouldn't do that, and the comments we received were largely against using the terms community or communities with many highlighted how the terms could be harmful to some people. We didn't receive any comments suggesting that it was important to use the terms community or communities – although a couple of comments said that communities was better than community.

As a result of this survey, UK Trans Info will (apart from in direct quotes):

- Use the term trans without an asterisk.
- Use the term non-binary with a hyphen.
- Explicitly include non-binary people in our work by using the term trans and non-binary where appropriate.
- Talk about trans and non-binary people rather than community or communities. This decision has been made due to the number of comments indicating that using community or communities could be harmful, however we will do some follow-up work in the future to review our position on this.