

# Evaluation of an online cognitive-behavioural treatment programme for social anxiety for higher education students: the Participate programme.

<b>Submission date</b> 24/11/2015	<b>Recruitment status</b> No longer recruiting	<input type="checkbox"/> Prospectively registered
		<input type="checkbox"/> Protocol
<b>Registration date</b> 03/12/2015	<b>Overall study status</b> Completed	<input type="checkbox"/> Statistical analysis plan
		<input type="checkbox"/> Results
<b>Last Edited</b> 03/12/2015	<b>Condition category</b> Mental and Behavioural Disorders	<input type="checkbox"/> Individual participant data
		<input type="checkbox"/> Record updated in last year

## Plain English summary of protocol

### Background and Study Aims

Social anxiety describes a condition where someone is fearful of social situations. It is one of the most common types of psychological difficulty that people can face. The problem affects a significant number of higher-education students and it can cause them to struggle to progress academically or to succeed in a career. Social anxiety may also lead to isolation, depression and substance misuse. Research suggests that one-to-one cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) with a trained practitioner is the best treatment for social anxiety. However, there are not enough CBT therapists to treat the large numbers of students having difficulties, and, in any case, it is too expensive to do so. The aim of this study then is to test an online programme based on cognitive-behavioural therapy. The effect of the programme is measured by assessing the severity of social anxiety experienced by the participants before and after the treatment.

### Who can participate?

Adult higher-education students suffering from social anxiety.

### What does the study involve?

All students in participating higher-education institutions are sent an email with a link to a website where they can register to look at an introductory module that explains the CBT model of social anxiety, what the programme involves and how to apply. The application process involves consenting to take part in the research and completing questionnaires to assess social anxiety and depression. Applicants who meet the criteria for the research are then allocated randomly to one of three groups. One group can start the programme immediately, and have a personal supporter (a trained psychology graduate), who contacts the student every week with feedback on their progress. A second group undertake the online programme without a personal supporter, and a third group are allocated to the supported version of the programme, but have to wait for 3 months before they can begin. The online CBT programme, called Participate, consists of 5 essential and 1 optional module. Modules consist of text, videos, exercises and logs in which to record work. The modules help the participants to learn about the

thoughts and behaviours that maintain social anxiety, and how to change those thoughts and behaviours, so as to build confidence and overcome the condition. At the end of an 8-week period social anxiety and depression are assessed again for participants in each of the 3 groups.

What are the possible benefits and risks of participating?

Benefits of participating include a better understanding of social anxiety, a reduction in anxiety about social situations and increased participation in social and work-related activities. Potential risks of participating are insignificant, however some temporary increases in anxious feelings, while thinking about or engaging in social activities, may be experienced.

Where is the study run from?

1. School of Psychology, National University of Ireland, Galway (Ireland)
2. Dublin Institute of Technology, Aungier Street, Dublin (Ireland)
3. University of West Scotland, Hamilton (Scotland)

When is the study starting and how long is it expected to run for?

June 2014 to September 2016

Who is funding the study?

National University of Ireland, Galway

Who is the main contact?

Éamonn Ó Dochartaigh

#### **Study website**

<https://participate.nuigalway.ie>

## **Contact information**

#### **Type(s)**

Public

#### **Contact name**

Mr Éamonn Ó Dochartaigh

#### **Contact details**

Student Counselling Service  
NUI Galway  
5, Distillery Road  
Galway  
Ireland  
H91 PK33  
+353 91 492484  
[eamonn.odochartaigh@nuigalway.ie](mailto:eamonn.odochartaigh@nuigalway.ie)

## **Additional identifiers**

EudraCT/CTIS number

IRAS number

**ClinicalTrials.gov number**

**Secondary identifying numbers**

Participate\_v2\_supported\_vs\_unsupported

## **Study information**

### **Scientific Title**

A randomised controlled trial of the effectiveness of the Participate online cognitive-behavioural treatment programme for social anxiety for higher education students whose social anxiety scores exceed cut-off points on the SIAS-6/SPS-6 social anxiety scales, comparing changes in social anxiety score at programme end and 3-month follow-up for participants with weekly online support; those without weekly online support; and those on a waiting-list.

### **Acronym**

Participate

### **Study objectives**

Are the supported and the unsupported versions of the Participate programme effective for the treatment of social anxiety as measured by the short form of the combined Social Interaction Anxiety Scale (SIAS-6) and the Social Phobia Scale (SPS-6), in comparison with a wait-list control.

### **Ethics approval required**

Old ethics approval format

### **Ethics approval(s)**

Research Ethics Committee of the National University of Ireland, University Road, Galway, Ireland, 11/08/2014 (ref: 14/JUNE/06) and 14/08/2015 (ref: 15/JUL/12).

### **Study design**

Multi-centre, interventional randomised controlled trial

### **Primary study design**

Interventional

### **Secondary study design**

Randomised controlled trial

### **Study setting(s)**

Internet/virtual

### **Study type(s)**

Treatment

### **Participant information sheet**

Not available in web format, please use contact details to request a participant information sheet

### **Health condition(s) or problem(s) studied**

Social anxiety.

## **Interventions**

There are 3 arms to the trial:

1. Group 1 will undertake an online cognitive-behavioural programme for social anxiety with weekly support via email
2. Group 2 will undertake the same programme but without weekly support
3. Group 3 will be tested before and after the programme period without treatment, since they are on a waiting-list for the programme

## **Intervention Type**

Behavioural

## **Primary outcome measure**

Primary outcome measures are to assess the severity of social anxiety. They consist of:

1. The 6-question short form of the Social Interaction Anxiety Scale (SIAS-6)
2. The 6-question short form of the Social Phobia Scale (SPS-6)

They are measured at completion of an introductory module; after 8 weeks (at programme end); and 3 months later in a follow-up.

## **Secondary outcome measures**

1. Social anxiety, consisting of the short form of the Social Phobia Inventory (miniSPIN), and administered at weekly intervals during the 8-week programme
2. Severity of depression and suicidal ideation, consisting of the 9-question form of the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9) and administered at the end of an introductory module; after 8 weeks (at programme end); and 3 months later in a follow-up
3. Self-reported social, academic and occupational functioning, consisting of some purpose-designed questions, which are administered at weekly intervals during the 8-week programme, at programme end, and 3 months later in a follow-up

## **Overall study start date**

01/06/2014

## **Completion date**

01/09/2016

## **Eligibility**

### **Key inclusion criteria**

1. Participants must be registered students of the relevant higher-education institution
2. Participants must have a score 6 or more on the SIAS-6 questionnaire or 3 or more on the SPS-6 psychometric scales

### **Participant type(s)**

Other

### **Age group**

Adult

### **Sex**

Both

**Target number of participants**

200

**Key exclusion criteria**

Participants must not:

1. be acutely suicidal
2. begin or change a dose of psychoactive medication in the period from 1 month preceding the programme until its end
3. be receiving psychotherapeutic treatment in the period from 1 month preceding the programme until its end
4. have a history of bipolar depression
5. have previously received cognitive-behavioural therapy

**Date of first enrolment**

01/09/2014

**Date of final enrolment**

01/03/2016

**Locations****Countries of recruitment**

Ireland

Scotland

United Kingdom

**Study participating centre**

**National University of Ireland, Galway**

University Road

Galway

Ireland

-

**Study participating centre**

**Dublin Institute of Technology**

Aungier St

Dublin 2

Ireland

-

**Study participating centre**

**University of West Scotland**  
Almada Street  
Hamilton  
South Lanarkshire  
Hamilton  
United Kingdom  
ML3 0JB

## **Sponsor information**

### **Organisation**

National University of Ireland, Galway

### **Sponsor details**

University Road  
Galway  
Ireland  
H91 PK33  
+353 91 524411  
vpresearch@nuigalway.ie

### **Sponsor type**

University/education

### **Website**

<http://www.nuigalway.ie>

### **ROR**

<https://ror.org/03bea9k73>

## **Funder(s)**

### **Funder type**

University/education

### **Funder Name**

Student Project Fund, National University of Ireland, Galway

## **Results and Publications**

**Publication and dissemination plan**

The intention is to submit for publication:

1. A study protocol, in January 2016
2. A systematic review of online and individual face-to-face CBT for social anxiety, in December 2016
3. A paper outlining the main study results, in December 2016

**Intention to publish date**

30/01/2016

**Individual participant data (IPD) sharing plan**

**IPD sharing plan summary**

Available on request