

# Understanding engagement with an app targeting harmful drinking: Development and evaluation of the BRANCH smartphone app

<b>Submission date</b> 23/07/2018	<b>Recruitment status</b> No longer recruiting	<input type="checkbox"/> Prospectively registered <input type="checkbox"/> Protocol
<b>Registration date</b> 26/07/2018	<b>Overall study status</b> Completed	<input type="checkbox"/> Statistical analysis plan <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Results
<b>Last Edited</b> 17/12/2018	<b>Condition category</b> Other	<input type="checkbox"/> Individual participant data

## Plain English summary of protocol

### Background and study aims

Excessive alcohol consumption accounts for approximately 3 million deaths per year and is the third highest risk factor for ill-health, behind only smoking and high blood pressure. In the UK when young adults drink at hazardous or harmful levels, their consumption is the highest amongst all age groups. Young adults are reluctant to seek professional help for mental health problems when necessary. When they do seek help via primary care, harmful drinking in younger adults is under-identified by doctors. Therefore, finding ways to reduce harmful alcohol consumption in this population is a challenge. Electronic screening and brief interventions (eSBI) are typically delivered via the internet and smartphone apps, including tools such as alcohol screening, feedback on drinking and information on risks and advice for cutting down, and have shown to be effective in reducing harmful alcohol-use. However, a major issue with the eSBI app is sufficiently engaging individuals with the app, with the app not being used as frequently as necessary.

The aim of this study was to develop a smartphone app called 'BRANCH', which included new strategies to target harmful drinking, and to examine whether it improved use of the app, along with whether it reduced harmful drinking.

### Who can participate?

18-30 year olds from the UK who drink alcohol at a harmful level and have a smartphone

### What does the study involve?

The study involves comparing a comprehensive version of the app 'BRANCH', to a basic version. The comprehensive version includes screening and personalised feedback for alcohol use, the option to set a goal to reduce alcohol use, and information on alcohol risks and advice for cutting down, along with new strategies such as tailoring to motivations for cutting down reminders and a Twitter style newsfeed. The basic version just includes screening and personalised feedback for alcohol use, the option to set a goal to reduce alcohol use, information on alcohol risks and advice for cutting down. Participants are allocated at random to either the basic or comprehensive version of the app, and asked to use it to record their alcohol use.

What are the benefits and risks of participating?

The possible benefit to participants is that taking part could potentially reduce their harmful alcohol use and therefore reduce their risks of alcohol-related disease. There are no known risks to participants taking part in this study.

Where is the study run from?

King's College London

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

January 2015 to December 2017

Who is funding the study?

1. Medical Research Council (MRC) (UK)

2. Collaboration for Leadership in Applied Health Research and Care in South London (CLAHRC) (UK)

Who is the main contact?

Joanna Milward

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## Contact information

### Type(s)

Scientific

### Contact name

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### Contact details

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## Additional identifiers

### Protocol serial number

1

## Study information

### Scientific Title

Development and evaluation of a smartphone app targeting harmful drinking in young adults:  
How do we promote engagement to improve clinical outcomes?

### Acronym

## BRANCH

### Study objectives

1. Null hypothesis: The addition of EPSs in an app targeting harmful drinking in young adults would not result in a significant increased use measured by number of logins compared to the same app including only core-components and basic strategies 28 days post randomisation.
2. Null hypothesis: Users of the comprehensive version of the app would not show a significant reduction in harmful drinking score as measured by the AUDIT – C score compared to users of the basic version at 6-month post randomisation.
3. Null hypothesis: Engagers in the intervention arm who logged into BRANCH more than once would not show a significant reduction in harmful drinking as measured by the AUDIT – C score compared to non-engagers in both treatment arms.

### Ethics approval required

Old ethics approval format

### Ethics approval(s)

King's College London University Ethics Committee, 09/08/2016, RESCMR-16/17-2896

### Study design

Interventional single-centre randomised controlled trial

### Primary study design

Interventional

### Study type(s)

Treatment

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

Harmful drinking

### Interventions

This trial uses an electronic screening and brief intervention app targeting harmful drinking in young adults aged 18-30. Participants will be randomised into either the intervention or control group using an online automated system.

Participants in the intervention group receive a comprehensive version of the app, including screening and personalised feedback for alcohol use, the option to set a goal to reduce alcohol use, information on alcohol risks and advice for cutting down and novel engagement promoting strategies. These include a social Twitter-style newsfeed, tailoring to motivations for cutting down and goals via the newsfeed, a social teams section based on the principles of gamification, extended infographic information on advice for cutting down and in-app reminders on the newsfeed.

Participants in the control group receive a basic version of the app including screening and personalised feedback for alcohol use, the option to set a goal to reduce alcohol use, information on alcohol risks and advice for cutting down. Minimal engagement promoting strategies included. For example, all participants received an app which was multimedia, interactive, with single exposure delivery of information. The basic version included no tailoring, gamification, reminders or social features. All other features of the app remained the same, including the branding, overall look and feel and aesthetic design.

### Intervention Type

Behavioural

**Primary outcome(s)**

Number of logins over the 28 day study period

**Key secondary outcome(s)**

Harmful alcohol consumption, assessed using the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test for Consumption (AUDIT-C) at the baseline and after 6 months

**Completion date**

23/06/2018

## **Eligibility**

**Key inclusion criteria**

1. Aged 18-30 years old
2. Harmful level of drinking (scored  $\geq 7$  on AUDIT-C)
3. Living in UK
4. Owns a smartphone

**Participant type(s)**

Other

**Healthy volunteers allowed**

No

**Age group**

Adult

**Lower age limit**

18 years

**Upper age limit**

30 years

**Sex**

All

**Key exclusion criteria**

N/A

**Date of first enrolment**

01/01/2017

**Date of final enrolment**

30/12/2017

## **Locations**

Countries of recruitment

United Kingdom

England

**Study participating centre**

**King's College London**

ASB

4 Windsor Walk

Denmark Hill

London

United Kingdom

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## Sponsor information

**Organisation**

King's College London

**ROR**

<https://ror.org/0220mzb33>

## Funder(s)

**Funder type**

Not defined

**Funder Name**

Medical Research Council

**Alternative Name(s)**

Medical Research Council (United Kingdom), UK Medical Research Council, MRC

**Funding Body Type**

Government organisation

**Funding Body Subtype**

National government

**Location**

United Kingdom

**Funder Name**

South London Collaboration for Leadership in Applied Health Research and Care in (CLAHRC)

## Results and Publications

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

The data sharing plans for the current study are unknown and will be made available at a later date

**IPD sharing plan summary**

Not provided at time of registration

**Study outputs**

Output type	Details	Date created	Date added	Peer reviewed?	Patient-facing?
<a href="#">Results article</a>	qualitative study results	13/12/2018		Yes	No
<a href="#">Participant information sheet</a>	Participant information sheet	11/11/2025	11/11/2025	No	Yes
<a href="#">Study website</a>	Study website	11/11/2025	11/11/2025	No	Yes