

# Quasi-experimental evaluation of an online health and well-being screening questionnaire (Digital Health Contact [DHC]) used in secondary schools in the UK

<b>Submission date</b> 29/10/2020	<b>Recruitment status</b> No longer recruiting	<input type="checkbox"/> Prospectively registered <input type="checkbox"/> Protocol
<b>Registration date</b> 23/02/2021	<b>Overall study status</b> Completed	<input type="checkbox"/> Statistical analysis plan <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Results
<b>Last Edited</b> 13/12/2022	<b>Condition category</b> Other	<input type="checkbox"/> Individual participant data

## Plain English summary of protocol

### Background and study aims

A UK local authority area introduced an online questionnaire, called the Digital Health Contact (DHC). The DHC is a universal, online, health and well-being screening questionnaire delivered to secondary school children in years 7, 9 and 11. At-risk children, identified by the self-completed questionnaire, are offered an appointment with the school nurse. The aim of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of this online health and well-being screening questionnaire (the Digital Health Contact). Specifically, whether the DHC affected the number of referrals to the school nurse and if this had a positive impact on the well-being of these young people.

### Who can participate?

Students in years 7, 9 and 11 in participating schools

### What does the study involve?

Once a year, children from participating schools in academic years 7, 9 and 11 complete the online questionnaire. The questionnaire covers general mental health topics such as depression and anxiety, as well as other public health topics such as diet and sleep. Responses are processed automatically, if a young person responds in such a way that indicates urgent, unmet needs (red flagged), a referral alert is sent to the school nurse. The nurse will organise a face-to-face consultation with the young person to conduct a health assessment. The researchers will analyse anonymous data from the DHC collected during the pilot phase (2017/2018) and the three subsequent years.

### What are the possible benefits and risks of participating?

The data being analysed is anonymised secondary data, so there are no potential risks as a result of processing the data. However, it is anticipated that should the researchers find important results this may inform the further development of the DHC and potentially increase the uptake

of it by additional schools. It is currently envisaged that the DHC may identify students who have developed any mental health difficulties or those who have health behaviours or concerns which may impair their educational performance or their long-term health, prior to them seeking help.

Where is the study run from?  
University of Bristol (UK)

When is the study starting and how long is it expected to run for?  
March 2020 to April 2021

Who is funding the study?  
NIHR School for Public Health Research- Public Health Practice Evaluation Scheme (PHPES) (UK)

Who is the main contact?  
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## **Additional identifiers**

## **Study information**

### **Scientific Title**

Evaluation of the Digital Health Contact (DHC): an online, school-based health promotion, screening and population health intelligence intervention for children and young people

### **Acronym**

DHC

### **Study objectives**

**Aim:** to evaluate the effectiveness of an online health and well-being screening questionnaire (Digital Health Contact) implemented in secondary schools in the UK.

### **Objectives:**

1. To assess whether the DHC has affected the number of referrals to the school nurse and possibly onto further pathways of care
2. To assess whether the introduction of the DHC has resulted in a positive impact on the wellbeing of young people who were seen by the school nurse following their answers to the DHC

### **Ethics approval required**

Old ethics approval format

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

Approved 29/09/2020, University of Bristol Faculty of Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee (First Floor South, Senate House, Tyndall Avenue, Bristol, BS8 1TH, UK; +44 (0)117 331 8197; research-governance@bristol.ac.uk), ref: 110982

## **Study design**

This study is designed as a natural experiment to explore the effectiveness of a digital health and well-being screening tool used in schools, the study includes intervention and control schools, as well as repeated measures for a sub-sample of the population

## **Primary study design**

Interventional

## **Study type(s)**

Screening

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

Health, mental health, and well-being in school children

## **Interventions**

The study includes an intervention arm and a control arm. The intervention schools received the DHC questionnaire for their Year 7, 9 and 11 students to complete while the control schools proceeded as usual.

Data collected from both groups of schools were the number of referrals to the school nurse, attendance to referrals, and actions taken following consultation. The questionnaire is completed once a year by students in years 7, 9 and 11. The researchers will obtain 4 years of data which means for most students they should have two timepoints, while for some (those in year 11 in the first 2 years) they will only have one timepoint.

## **Intervention Type**

Other

## **Primary outcome(s)**

Number of young people identified as having an unmet need (red flagged) identified based on the DHC, collected in Years 1 to 4 (2017 to 2020)

## **Key secondary outcome(s)**

1. Number of children that were referred to a school nurse recorded by the schools and provided by the data custodian
  - 1.1. Number of children that attend these referrals recorded by the schools and provided by the data custodian
  - 1.2. The onward actions including the number of onward referrals recorded by the schools and provided by the data custodian
  - 1.3. Wellbeing measured using the DHC at participating schools, once per academic year

## **Completion date**

30/04/2021

## **Eligibility**

**Key inclusion criteria**

1. All year 7 students in the participating schools with parental consent and who also provided assent
2. All year 9 and 11 students in the participating schools who provide consent

**Participant type(s)**

All

**Healthy volunteers allowed**

No

**Age group**

Child

**Sex**

All

**Total final enrolment**

3786

**Key exclusion criteria**

Does not meet inclusion criteria

**Date of first enrolment**

01/09/2017

**Date of final enrolment**

30/04/2021

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

United Kingdom

England

**Study participating centre**

University of Bristol

Canynge Hall

Bristol

United Kingdom

BS8 2PS

**Sponsor information**

**Organisation**

University of Bristol

**ROR**

<https://ror.org/0524sp257>

**Funder(s)****Funder type**

Government

**Funder Name**

NIHR School for Public Health Research- Public Health Practice Evaluation Scheme (PHPES)

**Funder Name**

National Institute for Health Research

**Alternative Name(s)**

National Institute for Health Research, NIHR Research, NIHRresearch, NIHR - National Institute for Health Research, NIHR (The National Institute for Health and Care Research), NIHR

**Funding Body Type**

Government organisation

**Funding Body Subtype**

National government

**Location**

United Kingdom

**Results and Publications****Individual participant data (IPD) sharing plan**

The datasets generated during and/or analysed during the current study are not expected to be made available as the researchers are not the data controller and are merely processing the anonymised data. They are acting as processors of this data under a data-sharing agreement and unfortunately cannot agree to sharing the data.

**IPD sharing plan summary**

Not expected to be made available

**Study outputs**

Output type	Details	Date created	Date added	Peer reviewed?	Patient-facing?
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[Results article](#)  
[Results article](#)

16/02/2022  
29/03/2022

13/12/2022  
13/12/2022

Yes  
Yes

No  
No