

# The FRANK friends study: a multicentre cluster randomised controlled trial evaluating a school-based drug prevention intervention

<b>Submission date</b> 25/06/2019	<b>Recruitment status</b> Stopped	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Prospectively registered <input type="checkbox"/> Protocol
<b>Registration date</b> 23/08/2019	<b>Overall study status</b> Stopped	<input type="checkbox"/> Statistical analysis plan <input type="checkbox"/> Results
<b>Last Edited</b> 09/05/2022	<b>Condition category</b> Other	<input type="checkbox"/> Individual participant data <input type="checkbox"/> Record updated in last year

## Plain English summary of protocol

Current plain English summary as of 09/01/2020:

### Background and study aims

The latest UK data indicate that 37% of 15 year olds have ever tried an illicit drug. There are short-term as well as long-term effects on health arising from illicit drug use amongst young people. Schools provide a systematic and efficient way of reaching a large number of people every year. Studies evaluating school-based drug prevention interventions have found few prevent or reduce student drug use, with only a handful taking place in the UK. In response, an effective school-based peer-led smoking prevention intervention (ASSIST) that has been delivered to around 120,000 UK students was adapted to deliver information from the UK national drug education website: [www.talktofrank.com](http://www.talktofrank.com). In interviews and focus groups in the pilot study of this intervention, students, teachers, and parents, all thought the intervention was acceptable, easy to deliver and could have promising effects on drug use. The pilot study was too small to evaluate whether FRANK friends could prevent drug use, so the researchers are now conducting a larger trial to evaluate effects on illicit drug use will be conducted. This trial will introduce and evaluate FRANK Friends (the "intervention") which is a school-based peer-led drug prevention intervention.

### Who can participate?

Students in UK Year 9 (aged 13-14)

### What does the study involve?

In each school, students in UK year 9 (aged 13-14) will be asked to nominate fellow students who they think are influential. Students in receipt of the top 17.5% of nominations are asked to become peer supporters. Those who agree receive 2-days training out of school on the effects and risks associated with specific drugs, minimising potential harms, and the law using material taken from [www.talktofrank.com](http://www.talktofrank.com). Peer supporters practise communication skills including, listening, negotiation, and how to talk with their peer group about drugs. They are then asked to have conversations about the harms of drug use with their peers over a 10-week period and record them in a diary. During these 10-weeks peer supporters receive four follow-up visits from trainers at school to provide support.

There will be 40 schools in the trial and they will be randomly split into two groups, 20 schools will receive the intervention and 20 will form a comparison group, and will continue with usual practice, the trial will include about 7242 students.

Before the intervention is delivered, questionnaire data will be collected from all students in year 9. In these questionnaires the use of drugs ever, in the past year, and in the past month will be measured as well as lifetime and weekly smoking, and quality of life. These things will be measured again 24 months after the intervention is delivered. The researchers will be looking to see if there are positive changes in student drug use, and whether these changes are greater within schools that received the intervention compared to schools that did not. Interviews with peer supporters, other students and trainers will also be conducted and training sessions will be observed to explore what happened during the training, how people feel about the intervention, and in what ways it has been useful. Finally, the cost of the intervention will be calculated, and weighed up against any benefits in terms of student drug use, to see if it provides good value for money.

What are the possible benefits and risks of participating?

If effective, the FRANK friends intervention will prevent drug use onset by the age of 15 and reduce the frequency of drug use amongst students. These effects could lead to improvements in health including reducing the risk of drug dependence, poor lung function, and symptoms of psychosis, and involvement in the criminal justice system. There may be additional benefits for peer supporters. In the pilot study, teachers and parents reported that peer supporters improved their communication skills, became more confident and more involved with school activities (e.g. school councils). Potential risks of the intervention to participants are minimal. Some individuals might find aspects of intervention content or research upsetting if they, or a significant other, have experienced a problem in relation to drug use. Trial managers will work with schools to ensure a system is in place to enable appropriate support to be provided in such circumstances. Any potential for harmful effects due to the intervention itself will be explored via the collection and analysis of qualitative data to explore unintended consequences.

Where is the study run from?

1. Cardiff University (UK)
2. University of Bristol (UK)

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

March 2019 to April 2022

Who is funding the study?

1. Public Health Research Programme
2. Public Health Wales
3. NIHR Clinical Research Network (CRN): West of England
4. South Gloucestershire Council
5. Bath & North East Somerset Council

Who is the main contact?

Dr James White  
whitej11@cf.ac.uk

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Previous plain English summary:

Background and study aims

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people. Schools provide a systematic and efficient way of reaching a large number of people every year. Studies evaluating school-based drug prevention interventions have found few prevent or reduce student drug use, with only a handful taking place in the UK. In response, an effective school-based peer-led smoking prevention intervention (ASSIST) that has been delivered to around 120,000 UK students was adapted to deliver information from the UK national drug education website: [www.talktofrank.com](http://www.talktofrank.com). In interviews and focus groups in the pilot study of this intervention, students, teachers, and parents, all thought the intervention was acceptable, easy to deliver and could have promising effects on drug use. The pilot study was too small to evaluate whether FRANK friends could prevent drug use, so the researchers are now conducting a larger trial to evaluate effects on illicit drug use will be conducted. This trial will introduce and evaluate FRANK Friends (the "intervention") which is a school-based peer-led drug prevention intervention.

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Before the intervention is delivered, questionnaire data will be collected from all students in year 9. In these questionnaires the use of drugs ever, in the past year, and in the past month will be measured as well as lifetime and weekly smoking, and quality of life. These things will be measured again 24 months after the intervention is delivered. The researchers will be looking to see if there are positive changes in student drug use, and whether these changes are greater within schools that received the intervention compared to schools that did not. Interviews with peer supporters, other students and trainers will also be conducted and training sessions will be observed to explore what happened during the training, how people feel about the intervention, and in what ways it has been useful. Finally, the cost of the intervention will be calculated, and weighed up against any benefits in terms of student drug use, to see if it provides good value for money.

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2. University of Bristol (UK)

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March 2019 to June 2022

Who is funding the study?

1. Public Health Research Programme
2. Public Health Wales
3. NIHR Clinical Research Network (CRN): West of England
4. South Gloucestershire Council
5. Bath & North East Somerset Council

Who is the main contact?

Dr James White  
whitej11@cf.ac.uk

## Contact information

### Type(s)

Public

### Contact name

Dr James White

### ORCID ID

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8371-8453>

### Contact details

Centre for Trials Research (CTR)  
Cardiff University  
4th Floor  
Neuadd Meirionnydd  
Heath Park  
Cardiff  
United Kingdom  
CF14 4YS  
+44 (0)29 20 687054  
whitej11@cf.ac.uk

### Type(s)

Scientific

### Contact name

Dr James White

### ORCID ID

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8371-8453>

### **Contact details**

Centre for Trials Research (CTR)  
Cardiff University  
4th Floor  
Neuadd Meirionnydd  
Heath Park  
Cardiff  
United Kingdom  
CF14 4YS  
+44 (0)29 20 687054  
whitej11@cf.ac.uk

## **Additional identifiers**

### **Protocol serial number**

CTR internal ref: 739

## **Study information**

### **Scientific Title**

A multicentre cluster randomised controlled trial to evaluate the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of a school-based peer-led drug prevention intervention

### **Acronym**

FRANK friends

### **Study objectives**

Primary objective: To investigate whether the FRANK Friends intervention prevents the use of any illicit drug compared to usual practice at the 24-month follow-up.

### **Ethics approval required**

Old ethics approval format

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

1. Approved 11/06/2019, Cardiff University, School of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (Glamorgan Building, King Edwards VII Avenue, Cardiff, CF10 3WT, Wales, UK; Tel: +44(0)29 2087 5179), ref: SREC/3342
2. Amendment approved 10/12/2019, Cardiff University, School of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (Glamorgan Building, King Edwards VII Avenue, Cardiff, CF10 3WT, Wales, UK; Tel: +44(0)29 2087 5179), ref: SREC/3342 (added 09/01/2020).

### **Study design**

Parallel-group multicentre two-arm cluster RCT with process and economic evaluations

### **Primary study design**

Interventional

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

## Prevention

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

Prevention of illicit drugs

### Interventions

Current interventions as of 09/01/2020:

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#### Previous interventions:

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## **Intervention Type**

Behavioural

## **Primary outcome(s)**

Lifetime illicit drug use is assessed using a self-report questionnaire at baseline and a 24-month follow-up

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

1. The use of any illicit drug over the past 12 months, past month and week assessed using self-report questionnaires at baseline and a 24-month follow-up
2. The use of specific illicit drugs over the past 12 months, past month and week assessed using self-report questionnaires at baseline and a 24-month follow-up
3. The frequency of use of any illicit drug over the past 12 months, past month and week assessed using self-report questionnaires at baseline and a 24-month follow-up
4. The frequency of use of specific illicit drugs over the past 12 months, past month and week assessed using self-report questionnaires at baseline and a 24-month follow-up.
5. Cannabis dependency assessed using the Cannabis Abuse Screen Test (CAST) at baseline and a 24-month follow-up
6. Smoking (lifetime and weekly smoking status) assessed using a self-report questionnaire at baseline and a 24-month follow-up (weekly smoking defined as usually smoking  $\geq$  one cigarette a week)
7. The frequency of alcohol consumption (past 12 months, month and week) assessed using a self-report questionnaire at baseline and a 24-month follow-up
8. Alcohol use disorder defined as consuming  $\geq$  3 whole alcoholic drinks in the past year using a self-report on the frequency of alcohol consumption at baseline and a 24-month follow-up
9. Health-related quality of life assessed using the Child Health Utility 9D using a self-report questionnaire at baseline and a 24-month follow-up

## **Completion date**

30/06/2022

## **Eligibility**

### **Key inclusion criteria**

Students in UK Year 9 (aged 13-14)

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

Other

**Healthy volunteers allowed**

No

**Age group**

Child

**Lower age limit**

13 years

**Upper age limit**

14 years

**Sex**

All

**Total final enrolment**

6754

**Key exclusion criteria**

1. Fee-paying schools
2. Special schools (e.g. for those with learning disabilities)
3. Pupil referral units
4. Schools with less than 60 students in Year 9
5. Schools likely to be closed or merged during the trial
6. Those that received the FRANK friends intervention in the pilot

**Date of first enrolment**

01/09/2019

**Date of final enrolment**

01/03/2020

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

United Kingdom

England

Wales

**Study participating centre****South Wales**

Centre for Trials Research (CTR)

Cardiff University

4th Floor

Neuadd Meirionnydd

Heath Park

Cardiff  
United Kingdom  
CF14 4YS

**Study participating centre**  
**West of England**  
Population Health Sciences  
Bristol Medical School  
University of Bristol  
Canyng Hall (room 4.09)  
39 Whatley Road  
Bristol  
United Kingdom  
BS8 2PS

## Sponsor information

**Organisation**  
Cardiff University

**ROR**  
<https://ror.org/03kk7td41>

## Funder(s)

**Funder type**  
Government

**Funder Name**  
Public Health Research Programme

**Alternative Name(s)**  
NIHR Public Health Research Programme, The Public Health Research (PHR), PHR

**Funding Body Type**  
Government organisation

**Funding Body Subtype**  
National government

**Location**  
United Kingdom

**Funder Name**

Public Health Wales

**Alternative Name(s)**

Iechyd Cyhoeddus Cymru, Public Health Wales NHS Trust, PHW

**Funding Body Type**

Government organisation

**Funding Body Subtype**

Local government

**Location**

United Kingdom

**Funder Name**

NIHR Clinical Research Network (CRN): West of England

**Funder Name**

South Gloucestershire Council

**Funder Name**

Bath & North East Somerset Council

## Results and Publications

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

The datasets generated during and/or analysed during the current study are/will be available upon request from Dr James White (whitej11@cf.ac.uk).

**IPD sharing plan summary**

Available on request

**Study outputs**

Output type	Details	Date created	Date added	Peer reviewed?	Patient-facing?
<a href="#">Study website</a>	Study website	11/11/2025	11/11/2025	No	Yes