Author's response to reviews

Title: Should we 'hug a hoodie'? Protocol for a systematic review and meta-analysis of interventions with young people not in employment, education, or training (so-called NEETs).

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Re: MS: 1236562952125636

Dear Editor,

Many thanks for your comments and feedback regarding the above manuscript “Should we ‘hug a hoodie’? Protocol for a systematic review and meta-analysis of interventions with young people not in employment, education, or training (so-called NEETs)” and for the opportunity to submit our revisions.

Please find below a point-by-point response to the comments raised. All changes have been highlighted in red font in the revised manuscript.

We look forward to your response in due course,

Sincerely,

E. J. Oliver,

(On behalf of the authors)
Handling Editor comments:

"Please respond the numbered points in the reviewer's report and consider including either a sample search strategy or list of key search terms as an appendix."

Response: Please see our responses to the reviewer’s report below. A search strategy has now been added as an Appendix (Page 17) and referred to in the methods section of the manuscript (Page 7).

Editorial requests:

1) Please mention each author individually in your Authors? Contributions section. We suggest the following kind of format (please use initials to refer to each author's contribution)? AB carried out the molecular genetic studies, participated in the sequence alignment and drafted the manuscript. JY carried out the immunoassays. MT participated in the sequence alignment. ES participated in the design of the study and performed the statistical analysis. FG conceived of the study, and participated in its design and coordination and helped to draft the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript?

Response: This has now been completed (Page 16).

Reviewer’s report

This is a very important and topical subject. Bringing together the result of experimental studies that have examined interventions for this group of young people should prove a valuable exercise. The protocol is clear and well-written. The authors have carefully considered questions of quality control and their approach seems sensible, in terms of both the narrowing of results on the basis of method (experimental approaches only, with a control group, though this need not be randomized), and the assessment of quality within included studies. The way in which results will be synthesized is left fairly open and this also seems reasonable given uncertainty about the studies that will be identified.

Response: Thank you for your comments.

My one major concern is that no attention has been given to the fact that interventions may take place against very different backgrounds and contexts that are likely to influence or mediate their impact. This will place limitations on the possibility of generalizing more broadly and may make any attempt at meta-analysis (rather than narrative review) misplaced. In my view, the importance of the specific context would be a factor worthy of careful consideration even if all studies were going to be from the UK, but it is even more relevant given that the review covers the whole world with no exclusion on study country. The protocol talks about different components of the interventions themselves, and about different target groups (such as offenders), and about heterogeneity of outcomes, but not at all about these broader contextual issues.

Response: This is an excellent suggestion. Please see response to Point (1) below.

No search terms have been provided, so I assume these are under development and will be published with the paper.
Response: A search strategy has now been added as an Appendix (Page 17) and referred to in the methods (Page 7).

Major Compulsory Revisions
(1) As highlighted above, I would like to see more consideration of the issue of context. The success or failure of a particular intervention will surely depend on the environment in which it is applied. A training programme may work to reduce non-employment against a background of high employment demand but not in a depressed area. A media campaign may work well in one cultural context but not in another. Counselling support may be right for teenagers in a particular time and place but far from helpful for others. What works in Namibia may not work in Paris and what works in London may not work in Merthyr Tydfil. I think this poses quite a challenge for the review and I think the protocol needs to address it.

Response: We agree that this is an important point, and one which our previous extraction category of ‘setting’ would not have adequately covered. We have now added a brief discussion of this issue to the introduction, including some examples of potential contextual factors of relevance (page 6). Further, we have added this category to our intended data extraction template (see Page 10). We anticipate that these factors will be explored in depth post data extraction.

Minor Essential Revisions
(2) In footnote DCFS presumably should be DCSF (the references is the Department for Children, Schools and Families), not Children, Families and Society. It would also be helpful to have more detail here if possible (see comment below).

Response: This reference has now been amended (Page 19). Additional detail has been provided (see also response to Point 4 below).

Discretionary Revisions
(3) On page 5, middle paragraph, with reference to the “widely-cited” study in the North of England: this is (I understand from the references) an untitled study from the DCSF, which has been cited in the TES. I’d like a bit more information here given that this is such a striking statistic – based on what data and how robust is the calculation. It seems odd that the report is untitled. And can we call it widely cited if the main citation is the TES?

Response: We agree with the reviewer that this is a striking statistic. We have amended the phrasing of this section to reflect the nature of the evidence more appropriately (Page 5). Additional detail has been provided within the reference (Page 19) to direct the reader towards the sources of the original information.

(4) Secondly, I found the last paragraph on page 5 a little confusing in relation to the direction of causation between disengagement and poor mental health. Of course causation can run both ways, and I think the authors are saying this, but they might want to revisit and make the phrasing clearer.

Response: This is indeed the case. We have reworded the paragraph to more accurately convey our meaning (Pages 5-6).