Author’s response to reviews

Title: Exploring the factors affecting the implementation of tobacco and substance use interventions within a secondary school setting: a systematic review

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Author’s response to reviews:

Reviewer One

The author has addressed all of my review comments successfully in the revised manuscript and responses.

Response: Thank you, we made major revisions to the paper following first review, and are happy that Reviewer One feels that the comments have been adequately addressed.

Reviewer Two

1. I am still not convinced that this article makes a substantial contribution to the literature. In my view, the authors still do not make a convincing case about what is unique about the secondary school setting, and why it merits a systematic review of "factors affecting implementation."

Response: We have made changes throughout the manuscript to more clearly emphasise specific features of the school context with regards to intervention implementation (eg. Student engagement factors; structure of school environment; expertise/comfort in health intervention
and training issues). We believe we now more clearly give the reader the reason why the high school setting is important and therefore how this manuscript makes a significant contribution to the literature.

2. Making a better case for what is unique about this setting (including providing a case for the uniqueness of the UK), providing more background about gaps in understanding, and providing a clear direction for what will be done with these findings.

Response: See point 1. Further, as requested we have added information to the manuscript which indicates how the findings will be used and developed to help implement substance misuse interventions in the high school setting (see additional paragraph in discussion- lines 540-554).

3. The latter point could be focused on what will be done with these finding for the specific research group (i.e., How will these findings be used to advance implementation within secondary school settings? Is there a particular intervention that you are attempting to implement that these findings will inform?), as well as what implications these findings have for the broader field.

Response: We have added further information in relation to this point in the discussion (again lines 540-554). The findings are being used to develop an implementation model to be used to facilitate the implementation of tobacco and substance use interventions within UK secondary schools. We believe there is a relevant gap in the research evidence base as very few implementation studies in school settings employ the use of theory or a model to positively influence implementation. We will be using the results along with further qualitative work to develop an implementation model which we expect to test in the future.

4. I believe the authors do a better job of connecting the findings to extant literature, but more could be done on that front.

Response: Thank you for this point, and we have added more literature to support our discussion of findings, which has, however meant that we have marginally exceeded the word limit for the journal.
5. Similarly, more could be done to suggest what is unique about these findings and how they advance the broader field of implementation science. This could focus on the specific factors identified, the methodology of their review, and/or the use of a theoretical framework to frame the review findings.

Response: We have now made this clearer within the manuscript. In the introduction (last paragraph lines 134-35), we have further articulated that a major unique aspect of the review is in using Normalisation Process Theory as a theoretical framework for this work. Although NPT has been used successfully by other authors to synthesise implementation findings with reference to theoretical explanation (Mair et al. 2012; O’Reilly et al. 2017 – now referred to in the introduction as justification for use of NPT in the paper), it has never been used to describe and understand implementation determinants within a secondary school context. We also seek to highlight the importance of consistent reporting as although there does appear to be an emerging body of knowledge of school based implementation research, the reporting is often limited and inconsistent (lines 435-445). These points have been added and expanded upon in the discussion section. Further, we believe that in addressing other points above (about how the findings of the review will be used), we have now better connected this current work with key new developments within the implementation science field (e.g., around determinants assessment, implementation strategies, and measurement).

6. However, I simply was not sold that the paper offers much that is new, nor was I clear about how one would translate these findings into meaningful action. Making these links more explicit may improve the manuscript.

Response: As discussed in the previous response, the unique elements have been more clearly emphasised and how these findings will be used in relation to the development of a future implementation model.

7. Another concern is that I found the results to be a hodgepodge of implementation determinants (e.g., organizational climate), implementation strategies (e.g., training), and implementation outcomes (e.g., fidelity, sustainability), with little conceptual grounding. For the most part, these "factors" were not well referenced with links back to conceptual and empirical literature.
Response: We appreciate the point being made by the reviewer, and are aware of substantive publications in the implementation science field more generally that focus more clearly on, for example, implementation determinants (Damschroder; Flottorp), implementation strategies (Powell et al 2015; Grimshaw etc), and implementation outcomes (Proctor et al; Lewis more recently). Given that the field of implementation studies regarding substance use interventions in the school setting was small, we expected heterogeneity in the emphasis of the included studies and did not wish to narrow our focus in this respect.

However, we accept the paper could be improved by further clarifying in the results whether we are referring to a strategy, an outcome or a determinant, and have addressed this where appropriate. In places, we have reconsidered the conceptual terms being used, to (re)check the appropriateness of their use in terms of the authors’ findings, and have corrected some of these where necessary (eg. ‘organisational climate’ is replaced with ‘contextual factors’ as more accurately reflecting the range of findings referred to, pg. 12, and in the conclusion – this term has different meanings, not always reflecting original theoretical conceptualisations of the term). We have also made links with other literature, where possible to do so without compromising the original word limit (although in addressing this reviewers’ comments we have added to the word limit overall).

8. Overall, I am wondering if this article may be of greater interest to a journal audience that is specific to prevention and/or secondary schools rather than a general implementation science audience.

Response: We believe that this manuscript is best placed within an implementation journal, where it will be readily accessible to a readership whose research can be both informed by and contrasted with our findings, and contribute to further development in this field. Similarly focused reviews have been published in Implementation Science previously, for example:

We believe that the further amendments we have made following this second round of reviewer feedback, have strengthened the paper and hope that it will now be considered suitable for publication in Implementation Science.