Reviewer's report

Title: Developing a checklist for research proposals to help describe health service interventions in UK research programme: a mixed methods study

Version: 1 Date: 6 November 2013

Reviewer: Simon Bishop

Reviewer's report:

General comments
1) This paper describes the process of developing a checklist for researchers to use to check that their research proposal contains an appropriate description of the intervention to be investigated. The paper concerns quite a specific funding environment, namely the UK NIHR HS&DR program, and as such it will largely be of relevance to those who make submissions this program. However, to those people (myself included) the paper is likely to make quite interesting reading as it describes some the detailed thought and working out that has gone into the development of a tool that potentially assists their work.

2) As a piece of research it is comparatively light in terms of literature and methodology, but as an action orientated tool development study (with the outputs to be used in a specific context) I would say that the approach and depth are of an appropriate level. I have made most of the comments below under the 'discretionary revisions' heading as I think this is most appropriate – but added together I think these comments should lead to at least some re-writing, particularly of the results section.

Discretionary revisions
1) The paper states that failure to specify adequately the intervention in question is 'one of the most common' reasons for the Funding Board to reject proposals – if the data is available it may be interesting to put some figures to this.

2) Stage one of the methods section states relevant literature was reviewed. It would be interesting to know how relevant literature was identified. For example, was it based on streams of literature that appeared relevant to applicants to the program or by other means? Alternatively, was it informed by a particular understanding of interventions / healthcare organisations?

3) Stage three of the methods – should state how many were contacted/took part (rather than in results). What was done with the data collected?

4) Stage four of methods – again state how many here and how was data handled?

5) The headings of the results currently reflect the initial checklist. I would suggest it may be clearer to use the final items as headings and describe the
process these final items were arrived at. Further, could the number of subheadings in the results section be reduced, for example by combing in some way headings for stages and for items to allow clearer reading?

6) The content of each of the ‘results’ sections should stick to the process by which the items were developed from previous checklists and the data collected, rather than introduce new conceptual discussions about the nature of each of the areas. E.g. discussion of the nature of leadership and culture. These sections can’t begin to do justice to the vast streams of literature written on these large subjects. A clearer picture of how prior literature that informed the first iteration of the checklist may help here (i.e. expand the output from stage 1).

Minor essential revisions

1) The paper needs thorough proof reading

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

none