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: 2 Date: 30 January 2014

Reviewer: Bryony Soper

Reviewer's report:

Major Compulsory revisions
None at this stage: the authors have done a good job addressing the points raised by both reviewers, and the paper now reads much better.

Minor Essential Revisions
Final sentence at the bottom of p.3
This does not make much sense as it stands. Are the authors trying to say that the blurring between context and intervention can mean that important elements of the research that is being proposed may be overlooked or undervalued, and that the aim of the check list is to help applicants to identify these elements, and to explain as explicitly as possible how they will be explored in the research proposal?

Discretionary revisions
1. In the Results section, p. 9
Could the eight initial constructs be listed under the description of Stage 1 rather than having to find them in Figure 1 at the back of the paper?

2. In Fig 1 the constructs are presented from right to left in one order; in Table 2 and in the text of the Results section they appear in another order. Could the two be reconciled? This would make things clearer for the reader.

3. As described in the paper, the history of the final constructs differs. Using the ordering in the Results section, the first three and the fifth construct were identified as separate constructs from the start and remained so throughout, though the name of the fifth was changed. The fourth "Workforce and Staffing" is an amalgamation of two constructs that at the start were separate. The sixth, similarly, is an amalgamation, and an extension, of constructs that were identified at the start.

Given this, it might help to start the discussion of each construct with a brief statement of where it started from and then explain where it ended up (as is done in the case of the first, 'Organisation', and is also done for the fourth, though here the description jumps around a bit).

This should only require a little tweaking of the existing text.
4. P. 14 First sentence in the Discussion section. Could Simon Bishop's words (which I found helpful) be used here, and the study described as a "small action-orientated mixed methods study"?

5. Some stylistic suggestions

P. 4 The grammar in the final sentence is a bit odd. Might it be better if it said:
"Taking these points into consideration, it was felt that the development of a checklist would be a useful tool that could enable less experienced applicants to address more successfully the complex set of requirements involved in writing research proposals to the NIHR HS&DR Programme."

P. 9, 5th sentence from the bottom also reads rather oddly. Might it be better if it said:
"The researchers appreciated having a tool to aid them in writing their research proposals and commented that it made them think about factors that they would not have considered previously."

P. 11 Last sentence. Do you need to say "it was difficult to distinguish the difference between the two". Isn't "distinguish between the two" sufficient?

P. 12 1st sentence in paragraph headed 'Other Important Contextual Information' seems to miss a word. Should it read:
"In the earlier phases of developing the checklist, a number of constructs were difficult to justify and it was not thought appropriate to represent them in a separate single construct, however they were of high importance."

P. 14 Last sentence in first paragraph. There is a comma missing after "as the feedback confirms".

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

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

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

**Declaration of competing interests:**

As before