Author's response to reviews

Title: The NIHR Public Health Research Programme: Responding to Local Authority Research Needs in the United Kingdom

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Dear Reviewers,

The authors would like to thank you for your time and useful comments. The manuscript has been updated and the changes have been tracked in the word document. We believe the paper has been improved ready for publication. Please see how we have addressed each of the comments below:

**Reviewer 1**

1. The paper uses the King’s Fund nine key areas that can improve public health and reduce inequalities as a framework by which to assess the breadth of the programme's current portfolio. Authors use these nine areas as headings under which they discuss relevant studies. However, no detail is offered as to the suggestions made by King’s Fund (KF) for priorities for local authorities under each ‘theme’. This leaves the reader lacking important insight into the evidence needs identified by the KF and makes it difficult to assess whether the PHR programme is making progress in these areas and to identify future directions for funding.

   For example, under ‘The best start in life’ authors describe how PHR have funded a number of parenting programmes aimed at reducing harm to and maltreatment of children and interventions aimed at increasing physical activity and improving diet in early years. However, there is no mention of what, if any, interventions have been aimed at pregnant mothers, have focused on improving pre-natal health of children, or whether studies have successfully targeted the most disadvantaged parents, as suggested by KF. This lack of detail somewhat undermines the use of the KF themes as a framework.

   **Response:** Examples of the King’s Fund priority actions have been added throughout the paper, where appropriate, in relation to Public Health Research (PHR) programme funded projects.

2. It is unclear what proportion of the 79 funded projects fall under each of the nine KF areas. Far fewer than the 79 are cited and it would be interesting to know where those studies not included would fit in terms of the selected themes (if in fact they do). The reader would also benefit from knowing what proportion of studies fall under each theme. For example, have more projects relating to early intervention been funded than ones that look to help people find good jobs and stay in work and, if so, how substantial is the difference? Answering these questions more explicitly would help demonstrate to the reader why the authors have drawn the conclusions they have. This information could simply be inserted into the narrative or could be displayed as a table.

   **Response:** A table has been added to the paper showing how many projects are coded in each category and the split of commissioned and researcher-led funded projects. An ‘Other’ category has also been added, explaining that not all projects fit into the King’s Fund framework. However, the purpose of the paper is to describe the range of research funded within the programme, rather than attempt a quantified description of all studies.

3. In its current form the paper does suggest diversity in the studies which have been funded to date, and that that each of the KF themes are represented. However, less is clear about the diversity of the studies within the themes. As a result, where authors have highlighted areas with a ‘particular need’ for further research, it has not always been made clear how this need has been demonstrated. For instance, under ‘Healthy schools and pupils’ authors suggest that focus should be given to secondary, further and higher education. However,
they have not alluded to how many of the funded studies are targeted at these settings and whether primary settings are disproportionately represented.

Overall the article offers an interesting overview of the programme and its portfolio but more detail would make it more valuable for health researchers in helping to identify potential areas for focus.

**Response:** Further detail has been added to describe the work funded for the key areas, and identify future research. As previously stated the purpose of the paper is to describe the range of research funded within the programme, rather than attempt a quantified description of all studies.

**Reviewer 2**

1. A table or graph of the 79 projects distributed by the nine King’s Fund themes and the exclusion in the text of imprecise statements like a “range of projects”, I want to know how many.

**Response:** A table has been added to the paper, as per response 2 to reviewer 1.

2. An exploration of demand and success rates by themes (was there a lack of demand/applications for themes? This tells us something about the capacity to address questions).

**Response:** This is beyond the scope of the paper, however an explanation has been given to why some areas may be suited to the commissioned or researcher-led workstream.

3. Difference between the commissioned led projects and the researcher led ones.

**Response:** An explanation has been given to the difference in researcher-led and the commissioned workstream. The table also show the split of projects between the 2 themes.

4. Some reflective thoughts about the prioritisation processes (do they work, what are they based on - there is a body of literature on this). Are the King’s fund themes applicable?

**Response:** Some general comments have been added on the prioritisation process and text has been added on why the King’s Fund themes are applicable.

5. Some forward looking assessment on how you are going to assess the impact of these projects - have they delivered the programmes aims?

**Response:** A paragraph has been added on the current ways impact is measured and the possible future plans.

Kind Regards,

Hannah Dorling, Andrew Cook, Liz Ollerhead and Matt Westmore