Reviewer’s report

**Title:** Policymakers' experience of a capacity building intervention designed to increase their use of research: a realist process evaluation

**Version:** 0  **Date:** 15 Jun 2017

**Reviewer:** Justin Jagosh

**Reviewer's report:**

This is a well written paper on realist process evaluation conducted within the larger Spirit trial. The author have exemplified a clear grasp of realist principles and have written the report with transparency and an honest approach.

Minor recommendations include:

1. Please include a table of definition of terms, specifically how you define 'programme theory', context, mechanism, outcome, retroduction and other relevant terms

2. The finding section organized according to mechanism is structured in terms of 'context' 'how did mechanism X function' etc. This section is very dense with a lot of text in each box. Is there a way to simplify this depiction without compromising the complexity you are portraying. Consider visual modelling CMOs for greater impact

You might consider calling your propositions 'demi-regularities' in line with the realist paradigm, but important to define what it is and if it fits.

Consider moving the proposition statement up underneath the heading

Page 8, line 52 - 'realist evaluation focuses on an intervention's underlying theory and causal mechanism rather than its activities - can this be reworded as it is not quite accurate? activities are focused, but not at the expense of underlying causal mechanisms perhaps?

Page 30, line 45, 'triggered negatively' is not clear.

The table depicting the initial programme theory and revised is very good. It needs a title

**Level of interest**

Please indicate how interesting you found the manuscript:

An article of importance in its field
Quality of written English
Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Acceptable

Declaration of competing interests
Please complete a declaration of competing interests, considering the following questions:

1. Have you in the past five years received reimbursements, fees, funding, or salary from an organisation that may in any way gain or lose financially from the publication of this manuscript, either now or in the future?

2. Do you hold any stocks or shares in an organisation that may in any way gain or lose financially from the publication of this manuscript, either now or in the future?

3. Do you hold or are you currently applying for any patents relating to the content of the manuscript?

4. Have you received reimbursements, fees, funding, or salary from an organization that holds or has applied for patents relating to the content of the manuscript?

5. Do you have any other financial competing interests?

6. Do you have any non-financial competing interests in relation to this paper?

If you can answer no to all of the above, write 'I declare that I have no competing interests' below. If your reply is yes to any, please give details below.

I declare I have no competing interests

I agree to the open peer review policy of the journal. I understand that my name will be included on my report to the authors and, if the manuscript is accepted for publication, my named report including any attachments I upload will be posted on the website along with the authors' responses. I agree for my report to be made available under an Open Access Creative Commons CC-BY license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/). I understand that any comments which I do not wish to be included in my named report can be included as confidential comments to the editors, which will not be published.

I agree to the open peer review policy of the journal