Author's response to reviews

Title: Missing steps in a staircase: a qualitative study of the perspectives of key stakeholders on the use of adaptive designs in confirmatory trials

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Author's response to reviews: see over
**Response to reviewer 2**

A concern was raised in the prior review due to the fact that only 3 lines were devoted to facilitators recommended by respondents to address these barriers. In their response, the authors decided not to modify this text and state: “Hence, we decided to create a Table summarizing facilitators and supported this with the discussion, and expanded further in the follow-up manuscript which is now ready for submission”. I don’t fully understand the meaning of this sentence. The text in the “Discussion” section does not seem to be closely aligned with the information shown in Table 5. It does not seem to make sense to include such a detailed table in the paper without providing some type of explanation of the table in the text. I would strongly recommend that the authors consider one of two options:

- Remove Table 5 and section 3.4 completely from the paper, and address this information in the follow-up manuscript.
- Keep Table 5 in the paper, and expand section 3.4 to include at least a brief discussion of the information in the table.

We would like to thanks the reviewer for the suggestions, which we have carefully considered. We have now taken a decision to delete Table 5 (and section 3.4) and incorporated the information on facilitators as expanded recommendations in the discussion section. We hope this is reasonable approach. This information is visible as tracked changes under discussion.

Other minor comments:

- Based on feedback from the prior review, the authors now provide a breakdown of the prior AD experience of the participants. The authors should consider adding this summary to Table 1.

We have considered the reviewer’s suggestions and moved the following information to be part of Table 1:

  “Participants’ diverse previous AD experiences: none (n=9), of which 6 expressed interest in ADs; during planning only (n=6); during planning and conduct, either in early or confirmatory phase or both (n=8); statistical regulatory assessment (n=4).”

- References 2 & 3 appear to be identical

We thanks the reviewer for picking up this referencing error. We have corrected this error.