Author’s response to reviews

Title: Mixed methods evaluation of an employer-led, free lunch initiative in Northern Ireland

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Author’s response to reviews:

Dear editorial team and reviewers,

We would like to thank the reviewers for their time to provide feedback on our manuscript. We addressed the recommended revisions as outlined in the table below. We would be happy to make further changes if required.

Reviewer 1 – R1

Reviewer 2 – R2

Authors - A

-R1: Identify if and how theory informed the work (i.e. grounded theory, ethnography, case study etc.) and state which theory was used.

A: Page 18, Line 316 - Thank you for your comments. The intervention was co-developed with the management workforce but a theoretical basis was not considered. We realise that this is a limitation and have included this in the discussion section as such.

-R1: Provide information on the format of the interviews, including which tools were used in the interviews (i.e. topic guides).

A: Page 7, line 137 - We included the information (i.e. topic guides)

-R1: Provide information as to how the interviews were structured. In methods, lines 127 - 131, the authors' state: 'Interview questions were adapted from previous qualitative studies [7, 10, 16]. Questions regarding improvement suggestions were included at follow-up. Interviews with stakeholders who were involved with organising the food court were similar to employee
interviews and also included questions assessing their motivation to provide healthy lunches.' It would be helpful to describe how the questions and interview structure were decided and by whom? Was this structure piloted/reviewed and adapted during data collection? If yes, please describe any adaptations.

A: Page 7, line 137 onwards - We added further description about how topic guides were reviewed/changed.

-R1: State when the interviews were conducted (i.e. months/year).

A: Figure 1 highlights that baseline assessments (including interviews) took place in August/Sept 2014 and follow up interviews in May 2015

-R1: Were interviewers and interviewees known to one another? State their relationship.

A: Page 8, line 145 onwards – we included the information

-R1: It would be helpful to include how long each interview lasted, report the mean length of the interviews and the range.

A: The interviews were deleted after transcription as per protocol and we did not take a record of the exact length of each interview. Unfortunately we are not able to provide the mean length but the interviews did take between 20-30 minutes as highlighted in the manuscript.

-R1: State whether coders were independent, whether they were in agreement/disagreement, was any validation by a third coder required?

A: Page 8, line 149 onwards - we added information

- R1Please describe any techniques employed to reduce bias in the methods.

A: Page 6, line 118 onwards - Please note, we did highlight: To reduce inter-observer error, baseline and follow-up recalls were entered by one researcher and checked for accuracy by a second researcher

-R1: Please clarify if, and amend if required, the figures are correct from baseline to follow-up for interview participants; Results, line 199. Authors' state: 'Employees (n 10) and four key stakeholder were interviewed at baseline' And at follow-up, results, line 222. Author's state: 'Eleven employees from the IS and the same three stakeholders were interviewed at follow-up'
A: Page 13, line 241 - Three out of the four stakeholders who participated at the started also participated at follow up. We rephrased it to clarify.

-R1: The authors raise an interesting point in the introduction, lines 32-34: 'Research suggests that employers may play an important role in facilitating healthy eating and that management support seems key for workplace wellbeing interventions to be successful' With this in mind, could the authors' elaborate on the justification for not involving management in the planning and delivery of the initiative? Could the importance of engaging management for the success of an initiative such as this be further emphasised in the conclusions/recommendations for future research perhaps?

A: Page 6, line 93 onwards/ Page 19, line 317 - Please note that we called the intervention ‘employer-led’ to highlight that this intervention was led by the management. In the intervention description and discussion we highlight that management oversaw the introduction of the food court, however, clear guidance on the nutritional content of the lunches was lacking and possibly the reason for the mixed feelings employees expressed and also limited changes to diet and health. Based on the findings of this study we feel this are the only comments we can make regarding management support.

-R1: Provide a justification why only full-time workers were included in the study sample. Excluding other members of the workforce (i.e. part-time, shift workers etc.) can contribute to creating intervention-generated inequalities (IGIs). Should this be acknowledged as a limitation/consideration for future practice?

A: Page 5, line 85 - We included the justification. Please also note that very few people worked part-time.

-R1: Suggest re-wording or shortening of the sentence for clarity for the reader in Discussion, lines 317-320 'Analysis of the diet and health measures of workers in the IS who had the lunches compared to workers who did not have the lunches and meal composition analysis of meals prepared at work compared to those prepared at home would also be of interest.'

A: Page 19, line 339 onwards - We rephrased the sentence.

-R2: Line 31: define what is meant by an unhealthy diet as there is no reference to the nutrients you've assessed (i.e. saturated fat, added sugar, excess kilojoules)

A: Page 3, line 31 onwards - Thank you for your comments. We defined unhealthy diet.

-R2 Line 35: Introduce NI abbreviation here, as it's later used (line 58) without it first introduced in brackets
A: Page 3, Line 36 - We included the abbreviation as recommended

-R2 Line 41: First use of UK abbreviation.

-A: Page 3, line 42 - We included abbreviation as recommended

-R2: Line 46: define what is meant by higher nutritional value

A: Page 3, Line 48 - We defined higher nutritional value

-R2: Line 59: When the primary outcome is introduced it reads as if change in fruit and veg combined is the outcome. Suggest separating the acronym. (F) and (V) instead as it is not reported as combined change in fruit and vegetables.

A: Throughout - We changed FV to F and V.

-R2: Line: Describe IS and CS abbreviations. First use (excluding abstract).

A: Page 4, line 62 - We included the abbreviations earlier.

-R2: Line 61-62: Current confusion with number of secondary outcomes. Suggest editing to - and (5) acceptability of the lunches and the overall initiative post-intervention by employees from the IS.

A: Page 4, line 65 - Thank you for highlighting, we made the suggested change.

-R2: Line 72-73: Suggest to further clarify setting of study. It is currently unclear if both sites are in NI (assumed), or if one site is a sister company worldwide.

A: Page 4, line 77 - We added some clarification, we hope this is more clear now.

-R2: Line 80-81: Provide a justification for why this exclusion criteria is in place

A: Page 5, Line 85 onwards - We added further explanation.

-R2: Line 92: Provide further description into the selection and provision of food items for the lunches. For example, was it solely selected by a catering staff member (i.e. just their opinion),
was it assessed against any type of dietary guideline? This is not clear until the discussion when limitations are listed.

A: Page 5, line 97 onwards - We added further information

-R2: Line 138-139: Inconsistent use of abbreviations as well as intervention and control groups. Suggest selecting one for consistency

A: Throughout - Thank you for pointing this out, we changed everything to sites.

-R2: Line 151: Suggest adding results in text for changes to fruit and vegetables between groups as this has been reported as your primary outcome

A: Page 9, Line 180 - We include further information

-R2: Line 154: first use of calories in reference to energy. Also reported as kilojoules within the table. Suggest selecting one for consistency

A: Throughout - We changed energy and TE to calories (kcal)

R2: Line 254: specify who has made the suggestions to management (e.g. stakeholders, employees, etc.)

A: Page 14, Line 264 onwards - We added further information.