

Central Commissioning Facility



*National Institute for
Health Research*



Patient and Public Involvement getting going as a research reviewer

Invitation to review
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How your review is used

What some of our reviewers say

"There is certainly a lot of job satisfaction from feeling that you have influenced the way decisions have gone, to the benefit of patients and the public. I've been very pleased to find that we are allowed – even expected – to comment on any aspect of proposals about which we happen to know something, or feel strongly: this is a good example of the 'public' part of Patient and Public Involvement (PPI)."

**John Walsh, sub-panel member (PPI)
reviewer for Programme Grants for Applied Research**



"I have been a reviewer for a number of years now. The experience has been invaluable for me as someone who is in close touch with the community and their concerns, in that it has clearly demonstrated the robust nature of the application process, and how individuals with a unique perspective can genuinely add to the research assessment process. It is essential that research is grounded in real world issues and problems, and reviewing ensures that this approach continues. I have enjoyed my time as a reviewer and would sincerely recommend that anyone interested in research who is willing to share their experience and a small amount of time should take part."

Jay McNeil, reviewer for Research for Patient Benefit, Policy Research Programme and Programme Grants for Applied Research



Getting going as a research reviewer

Reviews from members of the public, service users, patients and carers play an influential role in the funding of health and social care research projects for the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR). Patient and Public Involvement (PPI) is fundamental to all stages of NIHR research.

We value your input to the work of the NIHR Central Commissioning Facility (NIHR CCF). This leaflet explains how our review process works for public reviewers.

Registration

To register your interest as a reviewer, please visit www.ccf.nihr.ac.uk/ppi and click on "Register Your Interest". This will direct you to our Research Management System (RMS) where you will be asked to fill in a short form. Please add ccfrms@lgc.co.uk to your email address book so that you can receive our emails.

Competition alerts

When a competition comes into the review stage for either Research for Patient Benefit (RfPB) or Programme Grants for Applied Research (PGfAR), we alert patient involvement organisations. We issue adverts on the INVOLVE website (www.invo.org.uk) and the People in Research website (www.peopleinresearch.org). We also use our own PPI registration system to alert our registered public reviewer contacts and to send invitations to join in a competition's review process.

Invitation to review

We send an invitation to review by email from ccfrms@lgc.co.uk which contains the title and Plain English/Lay summary of an application which may be of interest to you. This is based on our record of your area(s) of interest. The invitation email contains the link to the online RMS where you can accept or decline the invitation. There is never any obligation to review; and the request and your reply are in confidence. Simply let us know if you are willing to take part this time round.



Receiving your review materials

When you accept an invitation to review, we will contact you directly with the application, review form, and guidance on how to complete the review online.

Remuneration

We are able to provide remuneration for time and effort, claimed through the expenses form, in line with the NIHR programmes' guidance. If you are in receipt of benefits INVOLVE (www.invo.org.uk) has produced an introductory guide for members of the public called *What you need to know about payment*. You can download the NIHR guidance and the introductory guide from our PPI page www.ccf.nihr.ac.uk/PPI or request a paper copy.

Submitting your review

You will receive information about how to send back the review form to NIHR CCF when the review is completed. You will be using the online system to do the task and we will give you a guide on how to use it. No one except you and the programme concerned can access it. All reviews are time-critical and need to be returned on time but if for any reason you find you are unable to complete it or return it on time please let Liz Scott (liz.scott@nihr-ccf.org.uk) know as soon as possible. We are usually able to assign the review to someone else if given sufficient time.

Your guidance for the review task

You will receive the guidance document about the review task with your review documentation. We have developed this guidance with the help of our external reviewers who provided feedback and suggestions on what to include and how to explain the task. The guidance document is updated for every Competition and we welcome feedback from you to ensure we are meeting your needs.

Confidentiality

The applications and reviews are confidential. If you do decide to review for us, and you receive or print any hard copy to work from, please either shred the documents when the task is completed or send them back to us and we will reimburse postal expense through the expense form. You are also asked to confirm that you have deleted any documents you may have stored on your personal computer.

Your assigned task of reading through an application for one of our programmes and submitting your review form is very important to us.

We look forward to working with you



What do we need from a review?

In becoming a reviewer, you are commenting on the acceptability of the proposed research to patients and the public as well as on its overall importance and relevance. Your comments from the review form are submitted anonymously to the relevant funding panel or committee. This assists the funding panel or committee members (including patient/public members) in the NIHR funding process.

What to focus on?

Patient and Public Involvement

One of the important criteria for assessing research proposals is the way the research team has involved – and plans to involve – patients and/or the public. It is helpful when reviewers comment on whether the form of involvement is appropriate given the research question. Those reviewers who are active service users in the field of the study can point to weaknesses – an unrealistic element in the design, for example, that could have been avoided by consultation with a named national service user organisation or with a local group in the area. Public reviewers often comment if there is a lack of provision for payment of service users who are advising or helping to conduct elements of the study.

Backing up your views

Please do not be tempted into one word answers – yes, no or possibly. Scientific as well as public/patient reviewers sometimes do this. Funding panels and committees will usually have to discount them altogether. The same can be true of a single sentence to sum up. The sentence, 'This is excellent, it is a model of how it should be done' would need to continue with 'because'. Without it, an unsupported assertion might still be discounted, despite the time you have invested, so please include a concise explanation to support your view.

Relevance to the programme

Those reviewing from the patient/public perspective can certainly have an impact here. The most persuasive comments are those that explain why the project is important – often adding more context about the patient group being studied and the potential it has to improve the lives of a specific group with which they were already familiar. Knowledge from your lived experience of the condition under study, or the experience and knowledge of your family or patient organisation could thus endorse and strengthen an applicant's case.

Feasibility and quality of the research design

Although the first reaction of many reviewers is that they couldn't possibly comment on technical issues, observations about the appropriateness of the design and whether it would work could in fact be made. Consider the following questions. Would recruitment to a study work? Has the plan for the intervention taken account of patients' lives? Would treatment of the control group be alienating? If poor outcomes worsened the lives of those taking part, what steps would be taken to address this? If you feel that the methodology is not going to work because the researchers do not understand enough about the respondents, this is an important design fault - so do comment in the appropriate section.

Adequacy of the project plan

Reviewers contributing from their own, or their family's lived experience or from the perspective of a relevant patient organisation are often hesitant on grounds of technical issues. It is helpful, however, to have comments perhaps deliberately to draw the attention of the subject experts as to what might be unrealistic scheduling, or a lack of clarity on who is doing what in a team.

Impact

There is a role here for you in spotting, for example, that there are no plans to inform a service user group or to provide feedback to the patients who have actually been involved in the study. This can be a useful counterbalance for the scientific reviewers who tend to focus on the design of the study and its methods and give much less attention to the way the findings will be conveyed to whom and with what result – key questions if research is to have any effect on daily practice and patient experience.

Value for money

It is useful to have views of patients and the public to set alongside those of people working in the service or researchers working in a single field of practice. Although public/patient perspective reviewers may not necessarily be in a position to comment on the detail, they could take a view on implications for the NHS, such as whether the suggested intervention has the potential to improve outcomes for the patient as well as to make a real cost-saving.

Style and tone

Good points can be missed because an apologetic-sounding comment can detract from its seriousness and importance. So, be clear and confident. Say the design could be improved by xxx or, without xxx, the danger is yyy. Point out if xxx is well-argued, clearly thought through / particularly appropriate and why. It is also not necessary to apologise for a lack of knowledge. So, instead of saying I don't know about / have no expertise in xxx, say from a lay point of view or as someone with experience of a related disease, I would question xxx or I would strongly support xxx.

How does the review process work?

Registration with CCF as a reviewer

Identified for review (search is by region and interests)

Invited to review (by email)

Reviewer accepts

Reviewer is sent application and review form

Reviewer completes review

Expenses form returned and reviewer reimbursed

Review (anonymised) included in committee papers / panel papers

Committee / panel discuss and recommend applications to accept or reject

Recommendations ratified by the programme director and the Department of Health

Applicants notified and feedback sent

Funded projects posted on the NIHR CCF website when contracts are signed



Patient and public awareness

The National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) has put structures in place that will help people take part in all stages of NHS research. One example is through its funding of INVOLVE, which promotes active public participation in NHS, public health and social care research to improve the way that research is prioritised, commissioned, undertaken, communicated and used.

Further information

NIHR Patient & Public Awareness www.nihr.ac.uk/awareness

INVOLVE • www.invo.org.uk • Tel: 023 8065 1088 • Email: admin@invo.org.uk

Visit the NIHR website at www.nihr.ac.uk



Patient and Public Involvement at the NIHR Central Commissioning Facility

We manage the following NIHR programmes: Programme Grants for Applied Research, Research for Patient Benefit and Invention for Innovation (i4i). We always welcome new reviewers. We work closely with INVOLVE and other partners including the UK Clinical Research Collaboration, who developed the People in Research website (www.peopleinresearch.org).

Contact the Patient and Public Involvement team at:

The NIHR Central Commissioning Facility

Grange House • 15 Church Street • Twickenham • TW1 3NL

Tel: 020 8843 8000 • Email: ppi@nihr-ccf.org.uk

Web: www.ccf.nihr.ac.uk/ppi

The NIHR CCF is based at and managed by LGC Twickenham.

Visit the NIHR CCF website at www.ccf.nihr.ac.uk