

## **Report of Public Involvement in an NIHR Advanced Fellowship Application**

### **Introduction**

Spending long periods being sedentary (i.e., sitting still) is linked to higher risks of health problems, including heart disease, diabetes, depression, and neck/back problems. With new technology, jobs have become more sedentary, and COVID-19 has meant more people working, sitting at computers at home. Therefore, there is a need to support employers to develop ways to help staff reduce their sedentary time during the working day.

Previous research has found there are many difficulties when rolling out changes in the workplace to reduce sedentary behaviours. To be successful, there needs to be widespread changes to workplace cultures and how sedentary behaviour is perceived as the norm. Furthermore, considering all possible causes of sedentary behaviour during the working day, e.g., individual motivation, the workplace set-up/external space, policies will have a greater impact.

The NIHR Research Design Service for Yorkshire and Humber Public Involvement in Grant Applications Funding Award (Call 9) was successfully granted in October 2021 (a total of £300 was awarded) to support the development of a new public involvement panel to inform an NIHR Advanced Fellowship application. This research proposed in the fellowship application aims to develop a guide to support a wide range of workplaces to reduce sedentary behaviours during the working day among their employees.

### **Aim**

The aim of the public involvement funding was to set-up a public involvement panel to support the development of the fellowship application research plan. It was anticipated that the public involvement panel could then:

- Offer advice on whether the proposed research is important and viable
- Offer suggestions for changes to the planned research
- Advise on the language and content of the plain English summary.

### **Method**

Members of public interested in the research area were identified using social media. Adverts targeted diverse social media community groups across Sheffield, with specific requests for volunteers from different ethnic backgrounds, people with disabilities, and pregnant women. Thirteen members of public with sedentary jobs volunteered and eight were able to attend a one-off online meeting. The timing of the meeting was based on the availability of the majority of the volunteers (determined via a Doodle poll). Of the eight who attended, seven volunteers were

female, there was ethnic and geographical diversity (a mix of White British and South East Asian volunteers from a range of postcodes across the city), two volunteers reported having a disability, and one volunteer was pregnant.

The meeting was held on Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2021 at 7pm and ran for 90 minutes. Microsoft Teams was used to host the meeting. Each panel member was offered a £30 high-street shopping voucher to cover their time. The meeting was chaired by the fellowship applicant.

An agenda was circulated via email prior to the meeting with handouts for the panel members to familiarise themselves beforehand relating to the key elements of the meeting. Ground rules were established at the start of the meeting to ensure that every member felt able to contribute. The fellowship applicant used a Power Point presentation (see Appendix 6) as a visual aid to initially discuss the aim of the research and provide a very broad overview of the research plan, after which the presentation served as a prompt for the following agenda items.

The panel had plenty of opportunity for discussion and feedback on the research plan and methods (facilitated by the fellowship applicant). Feedback on the plain English summary was obtained via a Word document which had been sent to panel members in advance of the meeting that could be annotated, and via discussion during the meeting (verbally or using the chat function).

At the end of the meeting the panel members were informed that they should expect to receive an email from the fellowship applicant once the application had been submitted to inform them how they directly contributed to the development of the research plan. The members were also advised that once the outcome of the application is known (approximately August 2022), they will receive a further email informing them of the outcome and at that stage they will be asked if they would like to continue their involvement in this research.

A detailed breakdown of how the funding was spent is included at the end of this report as an Appendix.

### **Contributions made by the panel**

The panel felt the proposed research topic was an important issue and highlighted the following relevant points that could improve the research plan:

- The need to develop a business case to successfully recruit some organisations; this has been incorporated into Step 1 of the research plan.
- The importance of evaluating all steps of the research plan within each organisation; this has been factored into the research plan.
- The need to incorporate more time to identify a diverse range of appropriate stakeholders. At the time of discussing the project with the panel, I had intended to conduct stakeholder recruitment (Step 3 in the present plan) prior to the assessment of organisational culture and social norms (Step 2 in the present plan). However, based on this advice from the panel,

these steps were reversed to give the embedded or “workplace” researcher more time in the organisation prior to identifying stakeholders.

- Some changes were suggested to the language used in the plain English summary. Specific advice was given to ensure some lengthy sentences were broken up to aid understanding.

The above information was sent to panel members via email once the application had been submitted.

## Evaluation

The meeting was evaluated using the evaluation form provided by the Research Design Service. The evaluation forms were emailed to the volunteers after the online meeting for completion. The fellowship applicant received six out of the eight evaluation forms back from volunteers. The results of the evaluation process are presented below:

Question	Responses
Please describe briefly what you were asked to do by the researcher (for example, were you asked to comment on a summary of the research idea, a recruitment letter, an information sheet, or a questionnaire?)	<p>“We were asked to comment on a summary of the research idea and give feedback on how it could be improved.”</p> <p>“Participate in an online/video consultation and discussion.”</p> <p>“To provide feedback related to proposed research into sedentary behaviour at work, especially a summary document of the proposed research plan.”</p> <p>“Read through a plain English summary of proposed research project; comment on research plan and summary.”</p> <p>“We had a group discussion around sedentary lifestyles and discussed how Kelly wanted to do research to develop a 1-, 5- and 10-year plan that organisations could implement in their workforce.”</p> <p>“Asked to comment on summary of idea and the outline of the project.”</p>
Did the researcher tell you how they would use your input in their grant application? Please tick the appropriate box.	6 x “Yes”
Do you know if your contribution has made a difference to the research?	6 x “Yes”
Did you enjoy the experience of assisting the researcher with their research?	6 x “Yes”

<p>Can you let us know in what ways, if any, the researcher could have improved your experience?</p>	<p>“None, the researcher let everyone speak and didn’t rush anybody.”</p> <p>“It wasn’t entirely clear some of the time if we were taking the discussion off on tracks that weren’t helpful, but Kelly seemed happy afterwards. Maybe a second facilitator to monitor the chat alongside verbal contributions would have made it easier to steer the discussion if required?”</p> <p>“No.”</p> <p>“Little to add. Session was well chaired/facilitated, everyone had a chance to give their views in different ways (verbally, via chat function). I did feel a little rushed in reading the summary and plan ahead of the session as I wasn’t expecting it to take place so quickly, but that was bad time management on my part.”</p> <p>“The researcher was very open and allowed us to express our thoughts and ideas clearly.”</p> <p>“None. I preferred doing the meeting via Teams call rather than face-to-face due to pandemic and time. Very interesting discussion between participants.”</p>
<p>Thinking about your experience, would you be willing to take part in similar activities in the future to help other researchers develop their ideas and their research proposals?</p>	<p>6 x “Yes”</p>

Overall, the responses to the process were very positive. All panel members reported enjoying the experience and felt able to contribute. Suggestions for improvement included using a second facilitator to monitor the chat function so that those comments could more easily be picked up on in the discussion, and ensuring more time was given when providing the documents to read through in advance of the meeting. These are certainly elements that could be incorporated into future sessions.

Two weeks after the initial meeting, each member of the panel was contacted individually via email to ask for any further reflections on the public involvement process and any additional thoughts they may have had about the research plan. The aim of this second contact was to allow an opportunity for more in-depth information about the organisation and running of the panel meeting and whether the members felt that their involvement adequately impacted on the research process. However, no further information was obtained from this email contact.

### **The continuation of public involvement during the research**

Members from the public involvement panel that informed the proposed research have expressed an interest in ongoing participation if this application is successful.

Given the participatory nature of the proposed research, involving the public throughout is a core part of this project, so public involvement has been costed into this application. Costs include payments for members' time for attending meetings and remote/home-working costs, and supply of refreshments and external meeting rooms for face-to-face meetings.

If the fellowship application is successful, the panel will be involved in:

- Supporting the recruitment strategy by suggesting organisations to involve and recommend how best to identify and recruit a diverse range of stakeholders
- Supporting the development of participant information resources by commenting on participant information sheets and consent forms
- Providing suggestions on how to structure the various workshops throughout the research, with a particular focus on creative thinking activities and modelling reduced occupational sedentary behaviour during activities.
- Advising on the language, style, design, and usability of the operational framework
- Supporting the dissemination of the research findings by advising on content, style and design for websites, blogs and newsletters, presentations/reports to participating organisations, and public engagement activities.

Management of the research will be achieved via biannual meetings with the panel, enabling the expertise of the members to support this research at every stage. Panel members were asked during the initial online meeting about their preference for how future meetings should be conducted; face-to-face or online. There was general preference for online meetings, but some members wanted a combination, so some face-to-face meetings have been planned. The fellowship applicant will chair the meetings, which will include structured activities to gain feedback and advice on specific issues as outlined above.

Members of the panel will also be asked to attend a free 1-hour training session, run by NIHR and Learning for Involvement, entitled "Public Involvement and Participation in Research". This will provide members with an understanding of the research cycle and how they can effectively contribute to the ongoing research.

### **Personal reflections**

As the fellowship applicant, I encountered several difficulties during the organisation and running of the public involvement panel meeting. Firstly, it became apparent quite early on in the organisation process that, due to the very nature of the requirement for panel members to be in employment, finding a suitable time and date for the volunteers was a challenge. To address this issue, a Doodle poll was set up, which allowed potential panel members to select the most convenient times/dates.

The most popular time/date was the one selected for the meeting. However, by the time all volunteers had completed the Doodle Poll, the most popular date was the following week. This meant that I had to quickly plan the agenda and disseminate all the relevant information to the volunteers. In future, I would plan for more time between completion of the Doodle Poll and hosting the meeting to ensure more time for me to get the relevant documents together and for the volunteers to read through the documents in advance of the meeting.

Secondly, due to the ongoing pandemic, the meeting was held online using Microsoft Teams. Although there were benefits to this in terms of ease of access for most people, there were also some disadvantages. For example, some people preferred to contribute to discussions using the chat function, which I found difficult to keep on top of whilst other discussions were continuing. In future meetings I will ensure there is a colleague who can monitor the chat function and highlight any relevant points for me to pick up on during the ongoing discussions.

Finally, having the meeting online meant that the evaluation forms had to be sent out via email and not completed “there and then”. I used the evaluation forms provided by the Research Design Service, which were in a Word document, but some of the panel members found them difficult to complete as the formatting caused some problems. In future, I will use an online “survey” to get feedback from the panel members as this should be easier to access remotely.

### **Outcome of application**

The NIHR Advanced Fellowship application was submitted on the 13<sup>th</sup> January 2022. Short-listing is due to occur in April 2022 with interviews being held in July 2022. It is anticipated that the outcome of interview will be communicated to applicants in August 2022 and if successful, the fellowship applicant will begin the fellowship on 1<sup>st</sup> March 2023.

### **Summary**

The funding obtained from the NIHR Research Design Service for Yorkshire and Humber Public Involvement Funds went towards the set-up and running of a public involvement panel to inform a research proposal for an NIHR Advanced Fellowship. This research aims to develop a guide to support a wide range of workplaces to reduce sedentary behaviours among their employees.

The public involvement panel were able to advise on the importance and viability of the planned research, offer suggestions for changes to the methods, and review the appropriateness of plain English summary for this application. The suggested changes were incorporated into the final Fellowship application and the panel members were informed as to how their contributions changed the final version.

Panel members positively evaluated the public involvement panel online meeting, offering useful suggestions for improvements that can be incorporated into future meetings. Some difficulties were

encountered during the public involvement process, but these have been highlighted and addressed or reflected upon as necessary.

If the Fellowship application is successful, the existing panel members will be invited to continue their involvement in order to further inform the research going forwards. To ensure that public involvement is a core part of this research project, further public involvement meetings have been fully costed into the fellowship application, the outcome of which will be announced in August 2022.

#### **Appendix: A detailed breakdown of how the funding was spent**

Panel members were given a £30 high-street gift voucher to cover their time for attending the one-off online meeting and remote/home-working costs.

<b>Panel Member</b>	<b>Amount received</b>	<b>Confirmation of Receipt</b>
1	£30 e-Gift Card	Yes
2	£30 e-Gift Card	Yes
3	£30 e-Gift Card	Yes
4	£30 e-Gift Card	Yes
5	£30 e-Gift Card	Yes
6	£30 e-Gift Card	Yes
7	£30 e-Gift Card	Yes
8	£30 e-Gift Card	Yes
Total	£240.00	-