

Exploring the use of narrative CVs in the NIHR: a mixed method qualitative study

K Meadmore, A Recio-Saucedo, A Blatch-Jones, H Church, A Cross, K Fackrell, S Thomas, E Tremain

National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR), School of Healthcare Enterprise and Innovation, University of Southampton

Description: The report describes a mixed method qualitative study that explored the use of narrative CVs in the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR). The report presents a thematic framework and recommendations developed from findings of secondary and documentary analysis of data provided by the Royal Society on research culture and thematic analysis of focus groups and interviews with NIHR stakeholders. This study is part of a wider programme of work to explore the use of narrative CVs within the NIHR.

Key words: narrative CV, NIHR, research culture, qualitative research, secondary analysis, documentary analysis, thematic framework, focus groups, interviews, Royal Society, Résumé for Researchers, funding organisations, recommendations, applicants, and evaluators.

This work was conducted by the Research on Research team at the NIHR.

Please contact ror@nihr.ac.uk for further information

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Key Findings

Narrative CVs are written descriptions of experience, expertise, and achievements that emphasise the wider contributions of researchers to the research system and encourage all relevant skills and experience to be used in the assessment of research funding applications.

This study explored whether a narrative CV is an efficient and effective mechanism for the NIHR to collect information about applicants and/or teams as part of the NIHR research application and assessment process. These findings are applicable to those interested in using narrative CVs.

Following focus groups and interviews with NIHR stakeholders (NIHR funded early career and senior career researchers, NIHR programme directors, chairs and deans, NIHR funding committee members, external reviewers, and NIHR Coordinating Centre staff), key findings extracted from all groups indicated:

- ❖ The value of implementing a narrative CV and the potential of this initiative to contribute to improved research culture is recognised
- ❖ Piloting and evaluating the initiative is seen as critical before decisions about implementation are made
- ❖ Evaluation is needed to generate evidence to understand change and potential unintended consequences of the initiative
- ❖ Effective communication about the purpose of the narrative CV to stakeholders is also essential to aid adoption, embedding and alignment of the approach cross NIHR, funders, and systems.
- ❖ Training and guidance are required for all stakeholders – those who will write it, those who will assess it and those who will support others in writing it
- ❖ Current practice needs to be reviewed to better understand how to embed the principles of the narrative CV
- ❖ NIHR needs to consider its role in wider adoption of narrative CV principles across all of its activities.

Executive Summary

Should NIHR implement narrative CV? Not yet. Whilst the narrative CV has potential to improve research culture, piloting and evaluating the initiative to generate evidence of change and understanding of unintended consequences is needed before implementation of the initiative across the NIHR.

What we did: In 2021, NIHR joined six other UK research funders in signing a statement confirming their commitment to exploring a shared approach towards a narrative CV (1). This study is part of a wider programme of work to explore the use of narrative CVs within the NIHR. By sharing our findings, learning and reflections about the use of narrative CV within the NIHR and wider research culture, evidence can be used by funding organisations to inform decisions on implementing a narrative CV.

This study explores whether a narrative CV is an efficient and effective mechanism for the NIHR to collect information about applicants and/or teams as part of the NIHR research application and assessment process. Focus groups were conducted with NIHR funded early career and senior career researchers, NIHR programme directors, chairs and deans, NIHR funding committee members, external reviewers, and NIHR Coordinating Centre staff to gather opinions of using a narrative CV in the NIHR. Following analysis, this report makes thirty-seven recommendations across six areas. These recommendations are designed to inform discussions regarding the policy and practice of using narrative CV by the NIHR, and argues that the NIHR should consider the recommendations and complete piloting and evaluation before a decision on implementation is made.

Recommendations from the findings:

Broad considerations for implementation

- Consider starting with implementing narrative CV into individual awards and evaluate before progressing to other awards
- Do not take a one size fits all approach to implementing narrative CVs across awards as the narrative CV may fit some programmes better (e.g., commissioned calls or NIHR Development and Skills Enhancement award)
- Do not request narrative CVs from all co-applicants on an award.

Training and guidelines for content

- Ensure content of the narrative CV that is requested is aligned to the vision and mission of the NIHR and the specific funding being applied for
- Provide clear guidance on how to write a narrative CV and what expectations are for NIHR applicants at different career stages
- Create narrative CV examples that illustrate applicants from multiple and diverse career pathways
- Provide clear and transparent guidelines about how narrative information will be assessed and ensure there is alignment with the information being asked for from applicants
- Ensure guidance explicitly states that applicants should link content in the narrative CV with the research application
- Provide training for all applicants, reviewers and those who will support applicants to write narrative content to understand the purpose, expectations, and ways to assess the content
- Provide detailed feedback to applicants that include comments on the narrative CV to benefit and support applicants in future funding applications.

Reviewing current practices to embed narrative principles

- Decide how narrative information will be used to inform decisions before implementing into research programmes
- Determine what contributions to wider research are considered important, to explicitly state how these will be assessed and to encourage their use during decision-making
- Determine what skills of the research team are considered important for making funding decisions and word contribution questions appropriately and without bias
- Consider what a team narrative may look like (teams for research programmes and infrastructure awards; supervisory teams for individual awards)
- Review funding application documents to ensure there is no duplication of effort or data being requested
- Review funding application questions to consider how narrative CV questions could be incorporated instead of being a separate document
- Review and revise where necessary questions in the NIHR standard application form that capture applicants' background and contribution to ensure that current requirements are not deterring some groups from applying to NIHR funding opportunities.

NIHR role in wider adoption of narrative CV principles

- Consider what NIHR value in a researcher (i.e., what qualities make an excellent NIHR researcher)
- Consider using narrative CVs in contexts other than research applications, such as hiring for funding committees
- Organise conversations with all stakeholders to discuss the initiative and the benefits that it intends to generate, to raise awareness and to encourage positive cultural change
- Encourage and recognise the varied research activities that contribute to wider research culture, and continue to encourage reporting of all research findings, regardless of outcome
- Continue to work with other organisations to encourage a move towards the use of narrative CVs to influence greater consistency of the assessment of researcher contributions
- Use the narrative CV to promote applicant awareness of potential research benefit and impact in their applications
- Encourage wide participation in research, particularly from applicants with non-traditional career backgrounds and pathways
- Narrative CV principles should be embedded across NIHR demonstrating alignment with other NIHR initiatives (such as responsible use of metrics).
- Invest time to shift research culture as it is a slow process.

Monitoring, evaluation, and learning

- Evaluate how long it takes to write and update a narrative CV
- Evaluate how long it takes to review an application with a narrative CV
- Evaluate what information and how information in the narrative CV is used to inform decision-making
- Identify potential consequences of using narrative CVs before implementation and keep track of the implementation to capture intended and unintended consequences
- Evaluate how the narrative CV supports and could add value to funding decisions

- Evaluate intended consequences such as increasing diversity of applicants (background, affiliation, career break, non-traditional academic careers)
- Conduct a mid-/long- term evaluation of the applicants' pool in order to observe and rectify unintended consequences of implementing this initiative
- Evaluate funding committee member views on whether narrative CVs would change their views on assessing membership and ability to recruit new members
- Evaluate the potential value of the information in narrative CVs to contribute to evidencing the impact of NIHR.

Purpose: What a narrative CV is and why NIHR is implementing it

- Ensure there is strong, clear, and consistent messaging about the purpose of using narrative CVs in the NIHR and what benefits this will bring for all NIHR stakeholders (including applicants, external reviewers, funding committees, and staff)
- Be clear that the benefits of using narrative CV outweigh the (perceived or real) increased workload in preparing or assessing applications.

1. Background

The National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) funds, enables and delivers world-leading health and social care research that improves people's health and wellbeing and promotes economic growth. In 2021, NIHR joined six other UK research funders in signing a statement confirming their commitment to exploring a shared approach towards a narrative CV (1). The goal of this study was to explore whether the narrative CV is an efficient and effective mechanism for the NIHR to collect information about applicants and/or teams as part of the NIHR research application and assessment process (for research programmes and/or training schemes awards), to support assessment and review and inform funding decisions.

For the NIHR, decisions about allocation of research funding for individual awards or research programmes require assessment of the research application along with supporting information, including the applicants' CV, by external reviewers and a funding committee/interview panel. Typically, an investigator or co-investigator's CV contains information on their education, employment history, publications, previous grant funding and research and/or clinical experience. This information tends to be more academic by definition and can unintentionally lend itself to assessment via proxy indicators of success (e.g., number of publications in academic journals). There is increasing challenge from the research community to move away from this type of assessment to a fairer research assessment approach (2-4).

One such initiative that is gaining traction is the use of narrative CVs, which focus on written descriptions of experience, expertise, and achievements across a range of areas (e.g., leadership, societal benefit of research). Whilst there is currently no agreed definition common across funding organisations, broadly speaking, the goal of the narrative CV is to emphasise the wider contributions of researchers to the research system and encourage all relevant skills and experience to be used in the assessment of research funding to ultimately improve research culture and quality and diversity of research.

The initiative originally stemmed from work by the Royal Society looking at research culture. From this, the Royal Society developed a narrative CV tool, the *Résumé for Researchers* (5). The *Résumé for Researchers* collects a structured narrative on four areas of contribution to research plus a personal statement. These four areas include contributions to generation of knowledge, to the development of individuals, to the wider research community and to broader society.

Adapted forms of the *Résumé for Researchers* or similar narrative CVs have been developed and/or piloted by research organisations in the UK (e.g., The Royal Society, UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), and the University of Glasgow) and Europe (e.g., the Dutch Research Council (NWO), Luxembourg National Research Fund (FNR), Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) and the Health Research Board (HRB) in Ireland) as alternative approaches to collecting information about applicants. To date, these pilot studies have mainly been conducted with funding streams for individual or personal awards, and the findings of these evaluations are beginning to be shared amongst funders (e.g., (6-9)). As part of a reward and recognition programme for hiring and promotion of staff and Faculty members, the University of Utrecht has used the narrative CV, alongside a number of research culture initiatives, to evaluate applications based on commitment to open science and not on number of publications and journal citation rates (10, 11). This suggests the narrative CV could be a flexible tool, adapted to different processes that require a summative evaluation of a researcher. However, opinions on narrative CVs - which include less use of quantitative

metrics (e.g., impact factors and h-index) and increased use of researchers' wider contributions - are mixed (12-14). Therefore, prior to adoption, it is important that the use of a narrative CV is explored and evaluated in research organisations to understand the benefits and challenges of implementation.

2. Methods and approach

Between July and December 2021, a mixed method qualitative study with two parallel phases was conducted to explore whether a narrative CV is an efficient and effective mechanism for the NIHR to collect information about applicants and/or teams as part of the NIHR research application and assessment process. This work was undertaken in two interconnected phases.

Phase 1: Document and secondary analysis

During phase 1, we undertook documentary and secondary analysis of anonymous data shared with the NIHR by the Royal Society from its work on research culture and the subsequent report (5). Fifteen documents were reviewed, including data from nine workshops, three consultations or reviews and three reports generated by the Royal Society (see Table 1). Data was reviewed to explore whether the information gathered by the Royal Society could inform the use of a narrative CV within the NIHR.

Table 1. Documents and data provided by the Royal Society

Type of data	Documents/data reviewed
Development of 'Research culture: embedding inclusive excellence' workshops:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Early career researcher workshop 2. Industrial Fellows research culture workshop 3. Pilot University Research Fellowship workshop 1 4. Pilot University Research Fellowship workshop 2 5. Alderley Park Industry workshop 6. Science Council Technicians workshop 7. Academy of Medical Sciences workshop 8. Medical Research Council Fellows workshop 9. Dorothy Hodgkin Fellows' networking meeting
Development of 'Research culture: embedding inclusive excellence' outputs:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Midway report 2. Final report (Research culture: embedding inclusive excellence)
Development of Résumé for Researchers:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review of existing biosketches 2. Consultation Feedback gathered from internal and external stakeholders 3. R4R Survey Feedback which includes input gathered from a survey conducted on the Royal Society's behalf by DORA 4. Updated R4R draft

Phase 2: Focus groups and Interviews

In phase 2, online focus groups and interviews were conducted to gather views and perspectives of six NIHR stakeholder groups on the use of a narrative CV in the NIHR. The

study was given ethics approval from the Faculty of Medicine, University of Southampton (id: 66298) and all interviewees and focus group attendees provided online and verbal consent. The focus groups and interviews were held over Zoom and were facilitated by two researchers. For interviews, only one researcher was present. The facilitator introduced the topic of narrative CVs and the purpose of the study before using the topic guide to facilitate discussion of narrative CVs (see Appendix 1 for topic guide). Interviews followed the same topic guide as focus groups. Focus groups and interviews were video and audio recorded and lasted up to 2 hours for focus groups and 1 hour for interviews.

Participants

Participants were recruited from six stakeholder groups that were affiliated to NIHR research programmes and individual awards: (1) early career successful and unsuccessful applicants (2) mid/senior career successful and unsuccessful applicants; (3) NIHR funding committee programme directors, chairs, and deans; (4) NIHR committee members/interview panellists; (5) external reviewers and (6) NIHR Coordinating Centre staff involved in research and training programmes (see Table 2 for full description of stakeholder groups and for included NIHR research programmes and awards). Stakeholder groups also included public contributors. Participants were grouped by role and invited to participate in separate focus groups to give opportunities for sharing views openly. Stakeholders were asked to participate if they had applied for NIHR funding or reviewed an NIHR application within the last two years so that they had recent experience of the NIHR application/review processes. This time-period also aligned with the time-period in which narrative CVs were being piloted elsewhere.

Table 2. Table to define eligible stakeholder groups and NIHR research programmes and training schemes

Stakeholder groups and definitions	Included NIHR research programmes, awards, and training schemes
<p>(1) Early career applicants (researchers): Successful and unsuccessful early career research applicants who have submitted an application for funds to the NIHR in the last 2 years to the included programmes and/or training schemes. Early career researchers are defined as a researcher that is within 10 years of completing their PhD and does not hold a senior research position.</p>	<p>Health Technology Assessment (HTA) MRC/NIHR Efficacy and Mechanism Evaluation (EME) Health and Social Care Delivery Research (HS&DR) Public Health Research (PHR) Evidence Synthesis Programme (ESP)</p>
<p>(2) Mid/senior career applicants (researchers): Successful and unsuccessful mid/senior research applicants who have submitted an application for funds to the NIHR in the last 2 years to the included programmes and/or training schemes. Mid/senior career researchers are defined as those who are at a senior research level and usually more than 10 years of completing their PhD.</p>	<p>Research for Patient Benefit (RfPB) Programme Grants for Applied Research (PGfAR) Invention for Innovation (i4i) Fellowship programme Research Professorships HEE/NIHR Integrated Clinical Academic Programme (ICA)</p>
<p>(3) Funding committee chairs, programme directors and deans: Current programme directors, committee chairs and deans of the included programmes and/or training schemes that have reviewed/ considered an application for NIHR funding in the last 2 years.</p>	<p>Integrated Academic Training (IAT) (the Academic Clinical Fellowships and Clinical Lectureships)</p>
<p>(4) Funding committee members and interview panellists: Current funding committee members and interview panellists (academics, clinicians, content experts, public contributors/advisors, methodologists, statisticians, health economists) of the included programmes and/or training schemes that have reviewed/considered an application for NIHR funding in the last 2 years.</p>	
<p>(5) External reviewers to research programmes: Any reviewer who has reviewed an application in the last 2 years for the included programmes and/or training schemes.</p>	
<p>(6) NIHR staff: Current NIHR staff working in application and funding type functions in NIHR Evaluation, Trials and Studies Coordinating Centre, NIHR Central Commissioning Facility, and the NIHR Academy.</p>	

Note. MRC = Medical Research Council; HEE = Health Education England

Seventy-six people expressed an interest in the study and fifty-five (72%) of these took part in one of a total of 16 focus groups and 6 interviews (see Table 3). Participant numbers also included ten public contributors, across three stakeholder groups. Participants self-selected their stakeholder group, and many had experiences in multiple groups (e.g., they were not just an applicant but also had experience as a funding committee member and external peer reviewer).

Table 3. Number of participants by stakeholder group

Stakeholder group	Expressed an interest	Took part	Number of public contributors
Early career applicants (researchers)	24	20	
Mid/senior career applicants (researchers)	18	11	1
Funding committee chairs, programme directors and deans	6	5	
Funding committee members and interview panellists	16	12	7
External reviewers to research programmes	6	4	2
NIHR staff	6	3	-
Total	76	55	10

Data analysis

In phase 1, thematic analysis was undertaken to extract themes from the data that were of direct relevance to the NIHR context of using narrative CVs. In phase 2, to validate and triangulate data from the two phases of work, focus group and interview data was initially coded using the framework developed in phase 1. From the focus group and interview data, themes and subthemes were added to the framework and refined through an iterative process until a final thematic framework was created that captured all of the data and reflected the views of all stakeholders.

3. What we found

In this section we report the development of the thematic framework and how the framework enabled the identification of key findings and recommendations.

Phase 1: Initial thematic framework

The initial thematic framework developed from the Royal Society data captured three high-level themes relevant to the NIHR.

1. Challenges and impacts of implementing a narrative CV.

We identified six subthemes relating to the challenges and impacts of implementing a narrative CV including: assessment of a narrative CV; additional workload; equity impact; guidance for applicants; interoperability and alignment; and individual awards vs research programmes.

2. Potential contributions of the narrative CV to wider research.

There were three subthemes under potential contributions of the narrative CV to wider research including recognition of contributions to the wider environment, of transferrable skills and for all research findings and invisible research activity.

3. Contexts and uses of the narrative CV.

Figure 1 shows the interconnections between the high-level themes, subthemes, and how the specific implementation issues sit within and interact with broader contextual issues regarding research culture. A description of the initial framework is provided elsewhere (15) (see also Appendix 2) and further description of the final themes are described in phase 2 results.

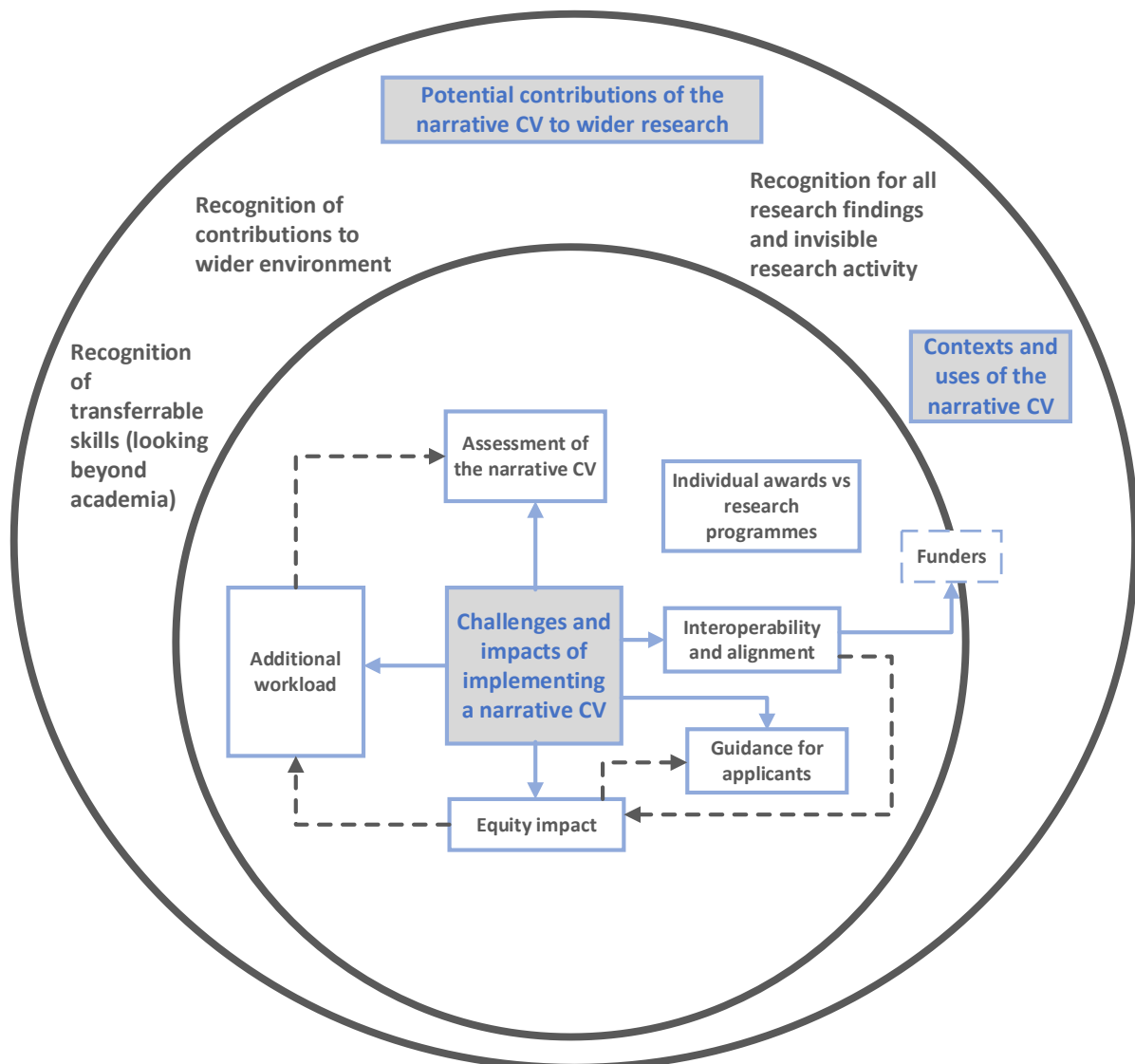


Figure 1. Initial thematic framework of considerations for funding organisations in the implementation of narrative CVs

Blue text represents three high level themes relevant to NIHR. Black text represents the subthemes. The inner circle lists six subthemes linked to the challenges and impacts that the implementation of a narrative CV may have (shown by blue arrows). Dark grey, dashed arrows show links between the subthemes. The outer circle includes three subthemes linked to wider research culture factors that influence the implementation or use of a narrative CV as well as other contexts and uses of the narrative CV.

Phase 2: Final thematic framework

Changes from the initial framework: Figure 2 shows the final thematic framework which incorporates analysis from both phases of the study. The final framework includes an additional high-level theme, considerations driving the initiative, presenting four high-level themes to consider for implementation of a narrative CV in the NIHR. This new high-level theme had two subthemes. In addition, in the final framework, the subthemes under challenges and impacts of implementing a narrative CV increased from six to eleven and the subthemes under potential contributions of the narrative CV to wider research culture increased from three to six. The latter high-level theme also included a small name change (culture was added). The high-level themes and subthemes are described in the next section.

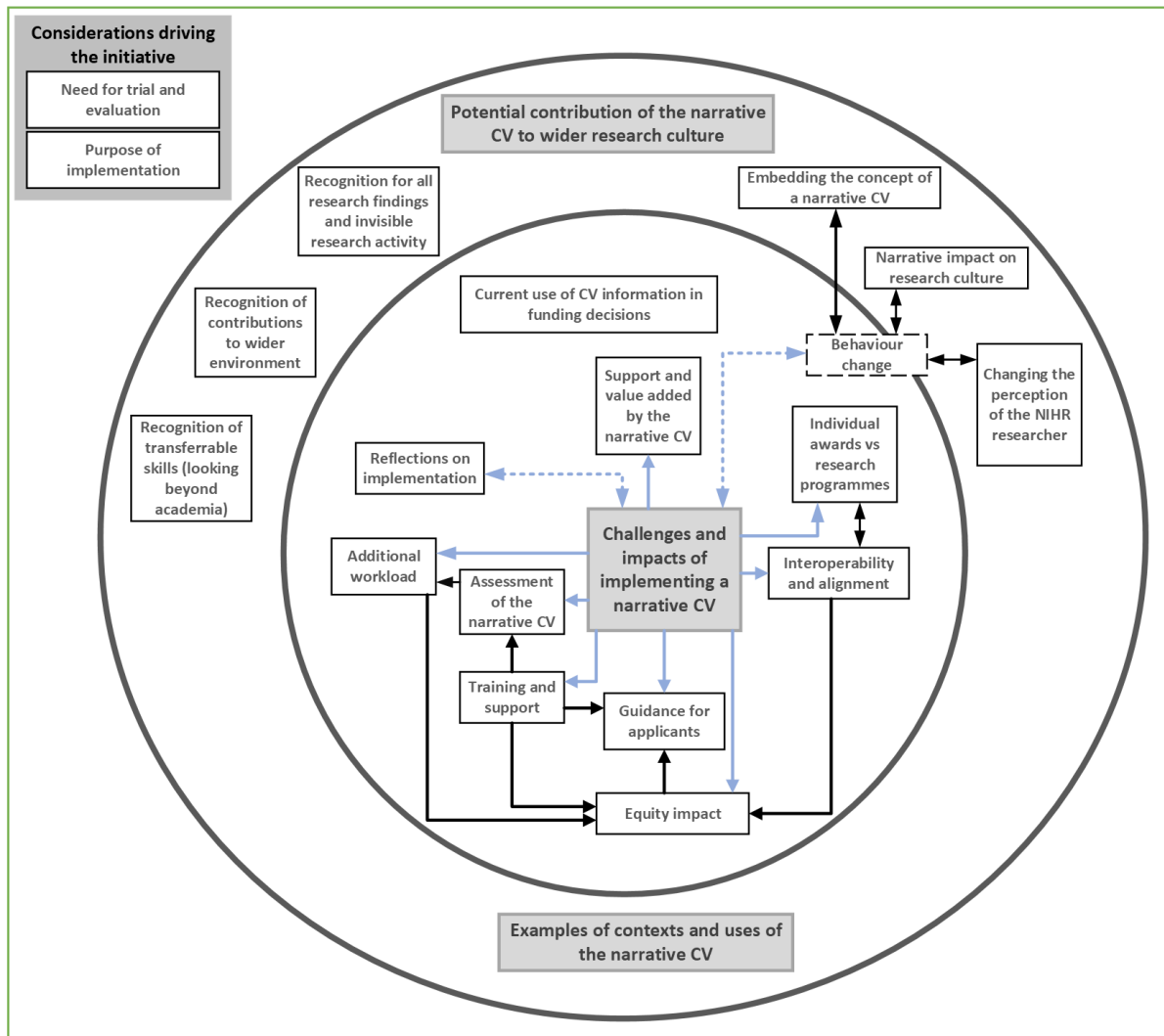


Figure 2. Final thematic framework of considerations for funding organisations in the implementation of narrative CVs

Grey boxes represent four high-level themes relevant to NIHR. White boxes represent the subthemes. The inner circle lists eleven subthemes linked to the challenges and impacts that the implementation of a narrative CV may have. Blue arrows show themes directly linked to challenges and impact. Black arrows show links between the subthemes. Dashed arrows show subthemes that are indirectly linked to challenges and impact. The outer circle includes six subthemes linked to wider research culture factors that influence the implementation or use of a narrative CV as well as other contexts and uses of the narrative CV. The box outside the circles shows two subthemes relating to participants' views of the drivers of the narrative CV initiative.

Description of themes

The below provides an overview of each high-level theme and the subthemes (first and second order) that sit under them. For more detailed descriptions of the subthemes see Appendix 3.

Challenges and impacts of implementing a narrative CV

Our analysis shows that there are challenges and impacts of using a narrative CV which need to be considered if the NIHR implement this approach.

- Participants reflected on the current use of CV information in funding decisions and indicated that reviewers use CV information to assess candidates' track record in conducting research in a certain area. As a result, guidance for how the narrative CV will be assessed by reviewers, including what assessors would like to see in a narrative CV (i.e., only information about the applicants' experience that links to the research project) needs to be considered. This links to the perceived additional workload that writing and evaluating narrative CVs may bring for applicants and reviewers. This was not just as a result of the format of the narrative (i.e., it being wordier) but concern over duplication across application document/questions. In addition, guidance to applicants should include information on writing a narrative CV, the criteria used in assessment and examples of narrative CVs.
- It was recognised by participants that implementing narrative CVs may offer some groups opportunities to apply to the NIHR and improve equity in funding. This included equity in terms of career stage, diversity factors (age, gender, race, and disability), geographic affiliation, non-traditional research routes and career breaks. However, it was also raised that unintended consequences may counteract the potential benefits, affecting some of the groups that the initiative intends to support. Training and support need to be provided for all stakeholders including applicants, reviewers, and those who support applicants (such as the NIHR Research Design Service (RDS) or supervisors).
- Understanding of individual versus team science tensions also needs to be considered. Narrative CVs were found to be more aligned to individual awards than research programmes, but it was recognised that there could be value for both. It was indicated that narrative CVs could add value in terms of context and impact, helping to build a better picture of an applicant(s) or team and as a useful framework to help applicants and funders think about impact of their research.
- Participants recognised that the concept of narrative CVs already aligns with many NIHR values and core principles, and consideration of wider initiatives is needed to ensure that there is a united front on all aligned initiatives (i.e., joined up thinking and consistent messaging). NIHR may also need to consider interoperability and alignment within NIHR programmes, with external systems such as ORCID and with other funders.
- Participants reflected on how they would like implementation to happen, with most indicating a preference not to have another separate form and that narrative CVs were not requested for each co-applicant as this was not practical for writing or reviewing and would lead to wasted effort. Hybrid models where some information from standard CVs is requested in addition to some questions from narrative CVs was also considered. Finally, using narrative CVs needs to be embraced by those writing it *and* those assessing it. However, it was noted that behaviour change of all stakeholders will take time.

Potential contributions of the narrative CV to wider research

Our analysis highlighted wider research ecosystem challenges and impacts linked to actions which are specifically geared towards establishing and encouraging positive (i.e., fair,

transparent, efficient, inclusive, and diverse) research culture, and the role that narrative CVs may play in this wider context.

- The narrative CV may facilitate recognition of contributions to the wider research environment and recognition for all research findings and research activity. This may affect engagement with important wider (and often invisible) research activities such as peer review, since they will be valued. Similarly, the recognition of transferrable skills (especially those which lie beyond academia) also needs to be considered if NIHR wants to encourage more applicants from non-traditional academic routes who may, for example, have ideas and expertise but not publications. This in turn, may challenge the perception shared by some participants that a typical NIHR researcher/fellow is a white, male experienced in RCTs.
- All focus groups discussed that the narrative CV presents an immense culture change requiring applicants, reviewers, and funding committees to focus and value contributions that have not been considered before. Participants agreed that there is a need for this culture change. The initiative needs to be embraced by information users as well as applicants and for this some education would be needed. Moreover, some participants suggested that concepts of narrative CVs need to be embedded into the education curriculum early on.

Examples of contexts and uses of the narrative CV.

Our analysis demonstrated other potential uses of the narrative CV, including recruitment to funding committees, staff promotion, and appraisals, and any other evaluation of an individual. Participants also reflected here that the narrative CV may be written differently for internal and external audiences.

Considerations driving the initiative.

Our analysis indicated that participants felt strongly that the NIHR must be clear about the purpose and end goal of implementing narrative CVs and provide consistent messaging to stakeholders about this. Clear purpose was viewed as fundamental to effect the change that the narrative CV seeks, as stakeholders will be more willing to manage the effort associated with writing and assessing narrative CVs if there is long-term benefit in sight. Participants also indicated the importance of evaluating the initiative to determine whether the right change is taking place.

4. Recommendations

In this section we report the recommendations extracted from the analysis. Recommendations were extracted for each subtheme. These recommendations were then combined and grouped under six areas to reduce duplication and to provide a single set of recommendations (see Table 4). The recommendations were also coded to provide some indication of when they should be considered in the implementation of a narrative CV – before, during or after implementation. In Table 4, before is coloured red (B), during is coloured orange (D) and after is coloured green (A).

Broad considerations for implementation

There were three recommendations under this heading which require consideration before implementation of a narrative CV. There was clear consensus from the findings that narrative CVs aligned more easily to individual awards, and it was suggested that this is where implementation should start and that a one-size approach may not be appropriate for all the

different types of awards and funding streams available. Consensus was also reached for not requesting narrative CVs from each co-applicant on a grant as this was seen as too much information for the reviewers and funding committee members which would lead to wasted effort for both applicants and reviewers.

Training and guidelines for content

There were seven recommendations under this heading. There was consensus that NIHR needs to be clear on the purpose of the narrative CV so that all stakeholders understand why and how content that is requested is aligned to the mission and priorities of the NIHR. Similarly, there was consensus that guidance needs to be provided on how to write a narrative CV, including asking that applicants explicitly link content in the narrative CV with the research application, and stating what the expectations are for NIHR applicants at different career stages or for different funding programmes. It was felt that providing good and bad examples of narrative CVs that illustrate applicants from multiple and diverse career pathways could help with this. Of particular importance, however, was the need for guidance on how narrative information will be assessed. It was felt that understanding this would help to ensure there is alignment with the information being requested from applicants and the information that applicants would provide. All groups agreed that training on this guidance was needed not only for those writing and assessing the narrative CV but also for those who support applicants in writing it (such as members of NIHR RDS or supervisors) so that appropriate and correct advice was given. It was also suggested that detailed feedback would be needed on the narrative CV itself to further support applicants in writing future narrative CVs.

Reviewing current practices to embed narrative principles

There were seven recommendations under this heading, all of which were felt to require consideration before full implementation of the initiative. There was consensus across findings that to embed principles of narrative CVs, NIHR needed to be explicit in the types of wider contributions and skills that they considered important and would be valued in an application. Communicating these to evaluators was considered particularly important to support their use during funding decisions. It was suggested that questions needed to be reviewed for bias and inclusivity (e.g., asking for research experience when not all applicants, such as clinicians, may have a research background). These decisions were considered necessary to encourage a wider pool of applicants and to inform guidance of what information was needed from applicants. Although merits of narrative CVs for all research funding was recognised, participants agreed strongly that the use of narrative CVs in research programme awards required more consideration before implementation. There was also concern about duplication. To reduce duplication and workload, some participants indicated that narrative CVs could be incorporated into the main application form instead of being a separate CV document. In addition, although it was felt that team narratives could be beneficial, participants were concerned that they might not work for all applications in practice and so NIHR would need to consider what a team narrative may look like for different awards (teams for research programmes and infrastructure awards vs supervisory teams for individual awards).

NIHR role in wider adoption of narrative CV principles

Following from the recommendations under heading 3, and once NIHR has decided on the wider skills and experiences that they seek in a researcher, it was clear that NIHR needs to communicate this clearly to all stakeholders to raise awareness of the broader benefits of the initiative. Continued and direct recognition and encouragement from NIHR about what qualities make an excellent NIHR researcher, what wider activities are valued and encouragement of reporting of all research findings, was considered critical to encourage a

positive research culture change more widely. There was consensus that NIHR will need to invest time for this behaviour change and will require continued work with other organisations to influence greater consistency of the assessment of researcher contributions. NIHR also needs to consider how narrative CVs fit with other, similar wider initiatives to ensure that one consistent and clear message is portrayed, rather than lots of individual initiatives. Contexts other than for research applications, such as funding committee recruitment, were put forward as alternative uses for the narrative CV within the NIHR, and that using narrative CVs as a framework to think about impact of research should be encouraged.

Purpose: What a narrative CV is and why NIHR is implementing it

There were two recommendations under this heading. There was consensus across focus groups that the NIHR needed to provide strong, clear, and consistent messaging about the purpose of a narrative CV within the NIHR. It was also seen as important to recognise that there may be an initial or perceived increase in workload in preparing or assessing narrative CVs, but NIHR needed to make clear the multiple benefits that narrative CVs may bring for all NIHR stakeholders.

Monitoring, evaluation, and learning

There were nine recommendations under monitoring, evaluation, and learning. There was consensus across all focus groups that implementation of a narrative CV would require piloting and evaluation to explore the benefits and disadvantages, as well as intended and unintended consequences that using a narrative CV might bring. This included evaluating the number and diversity of applicants and funding committee members and how information in the narrative CV is used by evaluators and how this supports and adds value to decision-making. All participants pointed to the need to evaluate how long it takes to write, update, and assess a narrative CV to understand the possible increased workload on stakeholders. Some findings also suggested that, in the longer term, information in narrative CVs may contribute to evidencing the impact of NIHR funded research.

Table 4. Recommendations based on evidence collected

	Broad considerations for implementation
B	Consider starting with implementing narrative CV into individual awards and evaluate before progressing to other awards.
B	Do not take a one size fits all approach to implementing narrative CVs across awards as the narrative CV may fit some programmes better (e.g., commissioned calls or NIHR Development and Skills Enhancement award).
B	Do not request narrative CVs from all co-applicants on an award.
	Training and Guidelines for Content
B	Ensure content of the narrative CV that is requested is aligned to the vision and mission of the NIHR and the specific funding being applied for.
B	Provide clear guidance on how to write a narrative CV and what expectations are for NIHR applicants at different career stages.

B	Create narrative CV examples that illustrate applicants from multiple and diverse career pathways.
B	Provide clear and transparent guidelines about how narrative information will be assessed and ensure there is alignment with the information being asked for from applicants.
B	Ensure guidance explicitly states that applicants should link content in the narrative CV with the research application.
D	Provide training for all applicants, reviewers and those who will support applicants to write narrative content to understand the purpose, expectations, and ways to assess the content.
D	Provide detailed feedback to applicants that include comments on the narrative CV to benefit and support applicants in future funding applications.
	Reviewing current practices to embed narrative principles
B	Decide how narrative information will be used to inform decisions before implementing into research programmes.
B	Determine what contributions to wider research are considered important, to explicitly state how these will be assessed and to encourage their use during decisions.
B	Determine what skills are considered important in making funding decisions and word contribution questions appropriately and without bias.
B	Consider what a team narrative may look like (teams for research programmes and infrastructure awards; supervisory teams for individual awards).
B	Review funding application documents to ensure there is no duplication of effort or data being requested.
B	Review funding application questions to consider how narrative CV questions could be incorporated instead of being a separate document.
B	Revise questions in the NIHR standard application form that capture applicants' background and contribution to ensure that current requirements are not deterring some groups from applying to NIHR funding opportunities.
	NIHR role in wider adoption of narrative CV principles
B	Consider what NIHR value in a researcher (i.e., what qualities make an excellent NIHR researcher)
B	Consider using narrative CVs in contexts other than research applications, such as hiring for funding committees.
B	Organise conversations with all stakeholders to discuss the initiative and the benefits that it intends to generate, to raise awareness and to encourage positive cultural change.

B	Encourage and recognise the varied research activities that contribute to wider research culture, and continue to encourage reporting of all research findings, regardless of outcome.
D	Continue to work with other organisations to encourage a move towards the use of narrative CVs to influence greater consistency of the assessment of researcher contributions.
D	Use the narrative CV to promote applicant awareness of potential research benefit and impact in their applications.
D	Encourage wide participation in research, particularly from applicants with non-traditional career backgrounds and pathways.
A	Narrative CV principles should be embedded across NIHR demonstrating alignment with other NIHR initiatives (such as responsible use of metrics).
A	Invest time to shift research culture as it is a slow process.
	Purpose: What a narrative CV is and why NIHR is implementing it
B	Ensure there is strong, clear, and consistent messaging about the purpose of using narrative CVs in the NIHR and what benefits this will bring for all NIHR stakeholders (including applicants, external reviewers, funding committees, and staff).
D	Be clear that the benefits of using narrative CV outweigh the (perceived or real) increased workload in preparing or assessing applications.
	Monitoring, evaluation, and learning
B	Evaluate how long it takes to write and update a narrative CV.
B	Evaluate how long it takes to review an application with a narrative CV.
B	Evaluate what information and how information in the narrative CV is used to inform decision-making.
D	Identify potential consequences of using narrative CVs before implementation and keep track of the implementation to capture intended and unintended consequences.
D	Evaluate how the narrative CV supports and could add value to funding decisions.
D	Evaluate intended consequences such as increasing diversity of applicants (background, affiliation, career break, non-traditional academic careers).
D	Conduct a mid-/long- term evaluation of the applicants' pool in order to observe and rectify unintended consequences of implementing this initiative.
D	Evaluate funding committee member views on whether narrative CVs would change their views on assessing membership and ability to recruit new members.
A	Evaluate the potential value of the information in narrative CVs to contribute to evidencing the impact of NIHR.

Red/B = consider before implementation of a narrative CV; Orange/D = consider during implementation of a narrative CV; Green/A = consider after implementation of a narrative CV

5. Conclusions

The aim of this study was to explore whether the narrative CV is an efficient and effective mechanism for the NIHR to collect information about individual applicants and/or teams to support assessment of contributions and inform funding recommendations during the application process. The final thematic framework incorporated NIHR stakeholder views on narrative CVs and built on secondary analysis of work conducted by the Royal Society. The overlap in findings between the two phases of work demonstrates the reliability and validity of the findings and recommendations.

The core challenges and impacts of implementing a narrative CV include increased workload, the impact on equity, the need for understanding how narrative CVs will be assessed, the guidance required for applicants, the need for interoperability and alignment between and within funders and understanding of the different implementation requirements of individual awards vs research programmes. It was unsurprising that the three subthemes on recognising wider contributions of the narrative CV remained, as these are key elements that feature in the narrative content. The additional subthemes that were extracted from the focus groups reflected more the 'how' information in CVs is used/could be used, how the principles of narrative CVs can be embedded in the NIHR and beyond and what the added value narrative CVs may bring. For example, in line with (7), findings from this study showed that the narrative may provide a more holistic context to the applicant and proposal than information in previous CVs.

Additional themes and subthemes were expected in the final framework due to the different perspectives from which the data had been collected. The Royal Society data provided a context that was set in the wider research culture, whereas the focus group data specifically explored narrative CVs within the research culture as well as more focused on how their use might work in practice. This context was reflected in the additional subthemes included in the final thematic framework.

The findings caution against a one size fits all approach to implementation of narrative CVs. There was consensus that narrative CVs were more aligned to assessing NIHR individual awards than research programme awards with multiple co-applicants. In addition, it was clear that there were different expectations for certain groups. For example, that early career applicants may not have as much to contribute to each section in the narrative CV as senior researchers. Despite this seeming at odds with the suggestion that alignment within funding organisations was important, this is in line with evaluations by other funding organisations, in which, to date, narrative CVs have only been piloted in contexts where the individual is being assessed (e.g., BBSRC Tools and Resources Development Fund; UKRI Citizen Science; MRC Clinical Academic Research Partnerships; HRB Ireland Emerging Investigator Award; FNR funding programmes – e.g., CORE, AFR individual, OPEN, BRIDGES and Industrial Fellowships; SNSF Project Funding Scheme in biology and medicine). Alignment does not mean a blanket implementation across funding programmes, but instead that where it is introduced that the relevant information is requested in the same format. This might mean that from the full set of potential narrative questions, not all are relevant for all applicants or funding programmes, or that certain aspects can be emphasised or understated (e.g., early career researchers may not be expected to have contributed to the development of other individuals).

One of the key findings of the study were the two new subthemes under considerations driving the initiative. Understanding the purpose of why the NIHR wants to implement a narrative CV was considered paramount in a successful implementation of a narrative CV. All stakeholders

were clear that for change to happen a clear sight of the long-term goals was required, and that thorough evaluation of the intended and unintended consequences needed to happen before NIHR fully adopts narrative CVs into its assessment processes. This is in line with other findings (6) and many funders are already engaged in evaluations and discussions about implementation of a narrative CV e.g., (1, 16). The recommendations from this study demonstrate the need for evaluations both in the short and in the longer term. It is important to note here however that it is not suggested that a single purpose of narrative CVs is required by all funding organisations. Different funders will implement narrative CVs for different purposes that are aligned with their strategic priorities but there will be overlap and shared underlying principles. It is in the overlap of purpose (e.g., recognition of wider contributions) that funding organisations and the research community more broadly can come together to use similar language and share implementation and evaluation approaches (as well as the findings from their evaluation).

Linked to purpose, was the finding that NIHR needs to be really clear on what and how information from the narrative CVs would be used to inform decision-making about an application. This was considered important not only so that applicants provided relevant and tailored information, but so that reviewers also had clear guidance on how to review the information. Indeed, ensuring that all stakeholders were on board with the purpose of the narrative CV and changes in assessment criteria via training and support was another key aspect to successful implementation in which NIHR needs to invest. Training and support refers not only to the mechanics of how to write or assess narrative CVs, but also to the behaviour change that is required to recognise and value skills and experiences that do not rely on publication and research funding track records that have been used for many years. This was recognised as the biggest challenge to change research culture, but also the one that, if achieved, will bring clear benefit.

In conclusion, all stakeholders recognised the importance of the principles underlying narrative CVs and the need for change within the research landscape. It was understood that embedding these principles and realising change would take time and so it is important to set both short- and longer-term goals for implementation and evaluation. Understanding the real and potential challenges and impacts of implementing a narrative CV will help NIHR to navigate and mitigate against both intended and unintended consequences that result, as well as providing a clear direction for review and evaluation of current and new processes. The long-term aim of the narrative CV is to help to improve research culture via modernising and making fair the assessment of contributions to research, which in turn may lead to greater diversity and quality in funded research applications and applicants. This may take time, but through collaborations and sharing of findings, funding organisations can play an important role in shaping future research culture for the better.

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Appendix 1. Focus Group and interview topic guide

Main research questions

1. How does the NIHR use the information provided by applicants currently to support decision-making for personal awards (e.g., fellowships) or awards in research programmes?
2. Can a narrative CV provide similar or complementary information to support decision-making for personal awards or awards in research programmes?
3. How might a narrative CV influence the research culture within NIHR?
4. What administrative processes would be complemented/modified if a narrative CV were introduced?

Prompts:

- 1a. *Views on using the current CV to evaluate the applicants and/or team that has applied for research funding.*
- 1b. *Views on when reviewers use information on the CV and what kind of information from the CV they use.*
- 2a. *Views of using a narrative document based on the R4R to evaluate the applicants and/or team that has applied for research funding.*
- 2b. *Experience in using a narrative CV in grant/fellowship applications.*
- 2c. *The benefits of a narrative CV to a. researchers, b. decision makers in funding organisations, and c. reviewers to report contributions or evaluate the narrative and make informed funding decisions.*
- 2d. *Views on what a narrative CV might contribute to the application process.*
- 2e. *The challenges of a narrative CV to a. researchers, b. decision makers in funding organisations, and c. reviewers to report contributions and make informed funding decisions.*
- 2f. *Views on whether a narrative CV is appropriate to NIHR personal awards and/or research programmes.*
- 2g. *Views on whether programme awards should request a group (i.e., research team) narrative CV or multiple individual narratives and how this may impact a. researchers, b. decision makers in funding organisations, and c. reviewers to report contributions or evaluate the narrative and make informed funding decisions.*
- 2h. *Views on whether a narrative CV replicates any current processes within the application process*
- 2i. *Views on how information on a narrative CV could be reviewed and assessed by external reviewers and/or funding committees.*
- 3a. *Views on the perceived benefits or challenges of using a narrative CV to change/improve research culture.*
- 4a. *Views on how the current CV is processed by NIHR staff.*
- 4b. *Views of how a narrative CV may be processed by NIHR staff.*
- 4c. *Experience in processing a narrative CV.*

Appendix 2. Table of themes and descriptions of main findings from Phase 1 analysis of data provided by the Royal Society

Theme/First-order Subtheme	Second-order sub theme	Main findings
Challenges and Impacts of implementing a narrative CV		
Additional burden (time, effort, and duplication)		Feedback to indicate that there is additional burden in terms of time, effort, and duplication for those completing it
Equity Impact	Career stage	Concern that narrative CVs may be harder for those earlier in their careers to complete; suggest have different wording for different career stages
	Diversity and gender	Some concern over whether narrative CVs will increase gender bias and debate on whether it would increase diversity of successful applicants
	Affiliation	Narrative CVs may provide a platform to be able to highlight why certain people are best placed for a project – i.e., different geographic areas or communities. This in turn may mean that the Matthew effect for certain institutes lessen
How will the narrative CV be assessed	Guidance for assessors (to assess and lead to inform decision)	Concern that it would be difficult to compare narrative CVs as each CV will be very different so difficult to objectively compare; clear guidance would be needed for assessors to do this in a fair and transparent way.
	Metrics within the narrative CV	Suggestions that the narrative CV should be used as a supplemental to traditional CV and 'outputs' and lists are still important; Some concern that 5 outputs is too little (or for others it may be too much – see interoperability and alignment).
Guidance for applicants	Guidelines for writing and assessment	Encouragement of using the modules flexibly (so not all modules need to be completed or have the same amount of information in them)
	Example CVs	Suggestions that example CVs should be included; however, a narrative CV workshop indicated the need to be careful of gamification or using these as ideals rather than as exemplars

	Individual vs team science tension	Guidance for applicants: need to be clear on what people need to write which will inform a decision. What do assessors need to know what the individual can offer or what the team can offer to deliver a research study/programme? Do you need one CV or many CVs and do they provide individual contribution or team science (we) contributions.
Interoperability and alignment		Top-down approaches add weight to narrative CVs being adopted and how it works with other initiatives (i.e., implementing DORA principles and ORCID)
Individual awards vs Research programmes		Comments around narratives being good to evaluate an individual.
Potential contribution of the narrative CV to wider research culture		
Recognition of contributions to wider environment		The idea that the narrative CV may be able to better capture and recognise all of the wider contributions an applicant has made in their field/to science
Recognition for all research findings and <i>invisible</i> research activity		'Traditional CVs' do not really have space for describing projects that were not successful (in that they showed a positive outcome). Narrative CVs may allow for the description of work that has been less successful (and so may not have been published as widely)
Recognising transferrable skills (and seeing beyond academia)		Narrative CVs may allow transferrable skills or people from non-traditional research routes to more easily describe and recognise the skills that they have.
Examples of contexts and uses of the narrative CV		
Examples of contexts and uses of the narrative CV		Recruitment; Promotion; Annual appraisal; All evaluation; Grants/funding; Job application; Collaborations

Appendix 3. Table of themes and descriptions of main findings of final thematic framework

Theme/First-order Subtheme	Second-order subtheme	Main findings
Challenges and impacts of implementing a narrative CV		
Additional workload (writing/assessment, duplication)		All focus groups indicated that the narrative CV would increase application workload of both applicants and reviewers, and possibly funding committees. It was commented that grant application forms are already too long and have too much information, and caution was needed over duplication or overlap. Duplication might occur with the detailed research plan and research experience backgrounds in fellowship applications. Comments indicated that if narrative CVs were to be implemented then some questions in the NIHR standard application form would need to be removed.
	Additional workload for applicants	For applicants, these comments centred on the additional time it would take to write and update a narrative CV compared to a traditional CV. It was felt that it might be quite daunting to write a narrative CV from scratch and that narrative CVs would not be easy to cut and paste across different applications. There were feelings of it being yet something else that the funder was asking of applicants. Participants highlighted that many applicants are not funded to develop the funding application, and so the NIHR would need to put a very positive spin on the additional burden that would be needed for a longer written narrative. This is especially the case for public contributors and clinicians who do not get paid for working on a grant until the project starts (despite often being co-applicants).
	Additional workload for reviewers (NIHR staff, external peer reviewers and funding committee members)	For reviewers, participants were also concerned about the increased time that would be needed not only to read the narrative CVs but also the ease at which information could be extracted. Whilst some participants felt that having more information in the narrative CVs might help reviewers or decision-makers to make decisions more easily, others were concerned that it would be more difficult to extract relevant information and that it may become a document that

		<p>is just skimmed over due to a lack of time. It was suggested that it is much easier to extract information by glancing at a more traditional CV compared to something that is very wordy. Some participants questioned how much information was needed in order to be able to make a decision. It was also suggested that one unintended consequence of this increased workload may be that fewer people would be interested in joining funding committees.</p>
Equity impact		<p>It was discussed that narrative CVs offer opportunities to level the playing field for Early Career Researchers, applicants from non-academic career backgrounds including, clinicians, public contributors, methodologists, or professionals who have not led research projects but have skills that can be transferred to academia, applicants in part-time research positions, and applicants who have had career breaks. However, it was also noted that narrative CVs may disadvantage groups due to its descriptive nature and the varying skills of applicants to write narratives, influenced by personal preference, linguistic skills, or limited opportunities to contribute to some areas covered by narrative CVs (e.g., a statistician with limited opportunities for engagement with the public because of the nature of their work would have less experiences to share regarding contribution to society). Other forms of unintended disadvantages can originate from the varying level of support and opportunities that different institutions have available for applicants.</p> <p>Some participants discussed that a narrative CV might discourage researchers to apply for funds if it asks about contributions to areas that applicants have not made and the risk of turning a narrative CV into a collection of reasons why something has not been done unless robust indicators for contributions like research engagement are provided.</p> <p>To ameliorate the likelihood of negatively affecting some groups, participants discussed the need for clear guidelines, support mechanisms to applicants, and an explicit message of what the NIHR is looking for in applicants. Guidance to</p>

		reviewers need to be clear about expectations for applicants at different career stages or from diverse groups to tackle the mentality that 'people hide behind a narrative CV'.
	Career stage	<p>Common views among participants that narrative CVs support early career researchers stood in contrast with some opinions that it can present challenges to this group because applicants to predoctoral or doctoral fellowships (or other funds targeting early career researchers) may not have a lot of experience to report in all the areas that narrative CVs request. This may create feelings of being at a disadvantage if having to leave sections blank.</p> <p>Participants discussed that for some senior researchers the format of narrative CVs would be difficult if not being able to add the extent of their experience and outputs of their career to an application.</p>
	Diversity (age, race, disability, and gender)	<p>Participants discussed some benefits and challenges of the narrative CVs linked to applicants protected characteristics. Focus groups of early career researchers and senior applicants saw the narrative CV as a potential equaliser of applications by asking questions about wider contributions, and how it can divert attention from aspects of age or career breaks as it is less chronological. However, they found that the format may be more challenging for some groups including people with dyslexia or dyspraxia. Alternative formats to submit narrative CVs (e.g., video) could offer support for those who are neurodiverse. Participants in all focus groups pointed out that narrative CVs can present linguistic challenges to applicants who do not speak English as a first language. Participants also shared views about female applicants who tend to be less direct/self-assured in writing about their contributions and as a result, may be affected by narrative CVs.</p>
	Affiliation and mentorship	<p>Researchers' affiliation might create unintended disadvantages to applicants because of variability in the support available at different institutions to write applications for research funding, which is linked to resources within institutions. Participants agreed that guidance and support provided by mentors ensures</p>

		<p>that the most relevant information from an applicant is relayed in the best way. Mentors have also helped applicants to identify contributions that might not have been considered relevant by the applicant. As a result, the quality of narrative CVs might depend on the availability and ability of mentorship and other support networks provided at different institutions.</p> <p>Some participants also talked about the 'halo effect' and that it would not be helpful if the affiliation was used to enhance the narrative, as the narrative should help to move away from those [traditional] measures of excellence embedded in the research culture.</p> <p>Another aspect that participants discussed was that whilst narrative CVs can offer opportunities to level the playing field and widen geography of applicants, it may also separate groups more because those organisations with more resources can provide applicants with more opportunities and experiences which will be captured in the narratives.</p>
	Career path including non-traditional routes and career breaks	<p>Participants recognised the opportunities provided by narrative CVs to support applicants with non-academic career backgrounds (e.g., allied health professionals, nurses, some methodologists, technicians) because of the space it provides to report non-research experience and skills that are transferable to academia. Equally, some participants found the space offered in the narrative very welcoming to write about career trajectories that include maternity leave or career breaks. These views were made comparing the current application form which does not provide space to provide detail of gaps in career trajectories, reasons for changes of professional field or wider contributions.</p>
Current use of CV information in funding decisions		<p>Participants reported that the current standard CV collects information on researchers' position, employment history, qualifications, publications, conference presentations, keynote talks invitations, invitations to internal or external NIHR panels, student supervision if relevant, funding history and awards, and a paragraph that brings all the information together. Some applications also include a paragraph on 5-year projections for careers.</p>

		<p>However, assessment of this information varied as some reviewers indicated having access to CV information (e.g., triage stage in fellowships) and others indicated not seeing CV information from co-applicants (in research programmes). It was suggested that there is emphasis in the current application form on outputs and grant income which can lead to a bean counting approach. Reviewing the traditional CV was perceived by some to require less interpretation because of numeric evidence (e.g., how much money have you bought in?) and being effective, most of the time, in providing information to assess skills and experience from applicants, including track record in the research area. However, some participants discussed that numeric information also requires interpretation by reviewers. Applicants' discussions highlighted weaknesses of the current use of CV information in not recognising wider experiences or contributions.</p> <p>Some focus groups of decision makers discussed that the most relevant information from CVs is the applicant track record, not the university attended or their age, indicating the possibility of decreasing emphasis on characteristics that should not be part of the funding decision. It was suggested that external peer reviewers tend to comment if experience on a team is lacking. It was also noted that one research programme had recently conducted a pilot where the CV information was stripped away and that this had had some challenges. The reasons for these included difficulties in blinding the whole application (not just removing CV elements) and not knowing track record.</p>
	Fellowships	<p>The current application for fellowship awards includes a question asking applicants to describe their research experience, and participants found this to be at odds with the requirements of some fellowships (e.g., pre-doctoral fellowships) and not relevant if their professional background is not in academia (e.g., allied health professionals or nursing). Some applicants reported having received feedback from applications which referred to lack of publications. This was considered to indicate the NIHR focus on publications to award funds, even though some of these awards are aimed at applicants in early career stages.</p>

	Research programmes	<p>Feedback received on the CV information covered the strength of the applicant and suitability to deliver the project proposed. A review focus on publications was perceived by applicants from feedback comments that referred to not having too many publications for the career stage applicants were at or to having publications in a relevant field.</p> <p>Some reviewers discussed that the current CV format encourages a cycle of “giving funds to the same people” where successful applicants will keep receiving funds as their track record shows they have been successful in the past.</p>
Assessment of the narrative CV	Guidance for how narrative information would be assessed and inform decision-making	<p>It was suggested guidance would be needed for assessors on how narrative content should be assessed and that funding committees and reviewers would need to know what a narrative CV is, what its purpose is and what the funder expects. Comments highlighted the need for clear guidelines and transparency for assessors.</p> <p>Participants also highlighted that it may be more difficult to compare narrative CVs and that decisions may be more subjective. It was suggested that NIHR would need to ensure that differences in narrative CVs do not lead to larger disparities in reviewer comments.</p> <p>Although participants were able to see the benefits of a narrative CV, there were concerns about how and whether narrative information would actually be used. Participants found some wording in the current application form confusing (for example, guidance suggests that they don’t expect those coming through clinical routes to have research experience but they still ask for that experience in the application form or that they want to know about how the institution can support the student but don’t explicitly ask this) and suggested that only information that would be assessed should be asked for and that messaging should be consistent. Others also expressed the importance of needing to make sure that funding committees can extract and understand information provided on the narrative CV. In particular, it was suggested that</p>

		<p>the information requested in the narrative CV would need to align with the assessment.</p> <p>Participants assumed that reviewers would still want to know about publications, work experience and qualifications and so some also questioned whether the additional narrative information would be needed. Not only did participants question whether assessors may continue to look at this information as they have always done, but they also questioned whether assessors really needed to know that someone did teaching, was a mentor or was part of multiple funding committees (and so on) in order to inform decisions on whether someone could deliver on a project.</p> <p>It was also suggested that narrative CVs sit at the intersection between personal and work life. Participants were concerned that this might bias some decisions, for example if someone had a gap in research career due to illness or maternity leave.</p>
	What assessors are interested in and what they would like to see	<p>Some participants indicated that what would be most helpful is understanding what it is that assessors really want to see in a narrative CV. Comments indicated that assessors would want to see the narrative linked to the application and applicants also link where they are now in their careers to the research funding that they are applying for. Relevance of the information to the research application was flagged as important. It was suggested that assessors would be interested in a chief investigator's narrative on the motivation for their project. It was also suggested that it is easy to tell if a section has been cut and paste from a different research funder application.</p>
Training and support	Training and support for applicants	<p>There were many comments around the need for training and support in writing the narrative CV. Participants acknowledged that NIHR has huge amounts of guidance available on completing applications but emphasised that clear guidelines for and expectations of narrative CVs needed to be provided by the NIHR. It was also suggested that NIHR could provide webinars and online workshops on narrative CVs. Participants indicated that they were reliant on</p>

		<p>support from institutions, mentors and the RDS, and it was suggested that the NIHR needed to also work with those who support applicants to help them understand so that they in turn can support applicants to write a good narrative CV. Participants also raised the need to work with NHS Trusts in this area and to increase knowledge about NIHR opportunities more generally. Finally, participants suggested that that they needed better feedback from reviewers or funders on applications so that they applicants feel supported to write a better application next time, and specific comments would need to be given on the narrative CV as to why an applicant didn't get funding.</p>
	<p>Training and support for reviewers/funding committee /funder</p>	<p>Participants recognised that training needed to be for everyone, including those who review and evaluate applications (e.g., external peer reviewers, NIHR staff and funding committee members) and those who support applicants in writing applications (e.g., mentors, supervisors, line managers, RDS). Comments indicated that there needed to be clear guidance for reviewers and funding committee members (particularly new members) on how to assess narrative content within applications, how to use any metrics provided (or not!) and better understanding of what makes a person or team fundable. Participants commented that funding committees needed to understand the agenda behind implementing a narrative CV (so what is the purpose) and that this was particularly important for funding committee Chairs so that they can help to cascade the information. Participants also commented that all funding committee members should have training in conscious and unconscious bias to help funding move away from established groups and easy winners. It was also suggested that there would need to be some evaluative work to ensure that reviewers were following guidance on this. Training for those who support applicants in writing applications was also required so that the right support and advice could be provided to applicants. It was suggested that training could be done via webinars, workshops, or chats.</p>
<p>Guidance for applicants</p>	<p>Guidelines for writing and assessment</p>	<p>There was overall agreement of the importance to provide guidelines for applicants to write narrative CV, guidelines to support reviewers in focusing and</p>

		<p>assessing information in the narratives relevant to the NIHR and guidelines for funding committee members to make sure that information from narrative CVs is used consistently. Some participants also indicated that guidelines need to tell not only what the organisation wants, but also what it does not want in a narrative document. Participants discussed that online training workshops could be used to support writing of narrative CV and meetings with funding committee members to raise awareness of guidelines available.</p>
	Example CVs	<p>Applicants asked for the need to have examples of good and bad narrative CVs to support writing their own narratives. The downside of this, viewed by all participants, was that the originality of narrative CVs would be lost quite soon, and narratives will conform to a template based on those that have had successful funding outcomes, leading to overuse of 'golden or buzz words and phrases' and defeating the purpose of narrative CVs. This practice was viewed as inevitable as applicants are always looking for mechanisms to decrease the workload associated with writing applications, which was viewed as already monumental.</p>
	Individual vs team science tension	<p>Discussing the use of narrative CVs for NIHR programmes, participants agreed that the level of importance for different members of the team to make a funding decision may be not as important as in fellowship applications. The level of detail in CV information is different for different members of the team making a narrative CV less necessary. There were suggestions about identifying the most important aspects of narrative CVs for a research programme to incorporate that into the application, and some expressed concerns that a team narrative CV would move away from the purpose of narrative CVs, and that information from the team is already captured in other sections.</p> <p>Although there was overall agreement of the suitability of narrative CVs to fellowships because of the award focus on the individual and not a research team, some senior applicants expressed a view contrary to this position. For them, since fellowships awards are about a person's potential and research programme awards are about experience and skills to deliver a research project</p>

		based on what applicants have done, narrative CVs could be more appropriate for research programmes.
Support and value added by the narrative CV	Context	Some reviewers talked about the need to build a picture of an applicant at shortlisting stage, and competitiveness to be seen in relation to other applicants at similar career stage. Because achievements may differ mainly due to opportunities linked to the discipline, narrative CVs would provide space to write about this and be considered during assessment. Narrative CV s will give the opportunity for reviewers to see the applicant(s) more holistically. In research programmes, if a narrative CV is written for a team, they may be used to show how a group of collaborators will work together, and whether they are a new or established team.
	Impact	Discussions from senior applicants and public contributors pointed out how the narrative CV presents information that resembles the statements added to the dissemination and impact section in the Detailed Research Plan. In connection to this, some participants expressed that narrative CVs allow people to think about the impact of their research more and reflect on the benefit that their research will bring or has generated. It was suggested that having impact at the heart of their application might be a beneficial consequence, and that it would be helpful for applicants to be able to talk about their publications in terms of the impact it has had. Information in the narrative CV was viewed as potentially useful in the long-term to build NIHR impact cases which was also raised as an aspect to consider in the potential duplication of information captured by NIHR via other systems (e.g., Research fish asking about contribution of researchers to diverse areas).
Individual awards vs research programmes		The suitability of the narrative CV in individual awards and for research programmes received a lot of discussion. There were arguments for and against uniform adoption of narrative CVs across the NIHR. Participants commented that narrative CVs are more aligned and relevant to individual awards. It was felt that the current application form (especially for individual awards) is already quite narrative in style and that there would be a lot of

		<p>repetition (and that this would need to be addressed possibly by integrating narrative questions into the application form). Participants reflected that the narratives provide a more holistic view of an applicant and some participants felt that this would be more relevant and important in individual awards but may not make a huge difference in assessment of research programme awards. However, others felt that having a better understanding of an applicant would benefit both individual awards and research programmes. Indeed, it was suggested that for research programme awards, applications are much more about the project than the person and so narratives would bring different information that may be helpful to understand the team. For example, for a holistic view of a team, for understanding how an interdisciplinary team works, and to show cohesion of a team. It was recognised that this might not work for all teams though, such as new teams. In addition, there was debate as to whether there should be a team narrative or just one or two narratives from the lead applicants. It was agreed that it would be too much for all lead and co-applicants to provide a narrative CV. However, whereas some participants felt that it would be ok to have narratives from the lead and co-lead applicants only, others felt that this did not send the right message and could be perceived that some members of the team are not equals (which is potentially at odds to the overarching culture that the narrative CV is trying to address). Some participants really liked the idea of a team narrative; however, it was indicated that it would be a real challenge to get the team together to write a narrative or even to get information from each co-applicant in order for a team member to be able to write the narrative. It was suggested that a project may end up dropping people that they wanted on the team because they did not provide narrative content which requires thought and time. One participant also commented that it would be helpful to see more of a team narrative in mentor sections in individual awards, rather than just stating Professor X is a...and will see me once a month and Professor Y is a...and will see me every 3 months, for example. Not only were differences suggested between individual awards and research programmes but there were also differences within these awards. For example, one participant commented that narrative CVs may be more</p>
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		<p>important for awards such as the NIHR Development and Skills Enhancement award in which applicants can apply for up to 12 months support for specific skills training and experience. It was suggested that the narrative could really help people to express how this award would support the next stage of their career. In addition, another participant indicated that narratives might work better for researcher-led than commissioned calls. It was suggested that for commissioned calls, often only those with a good background in an area will apply whereas for researcher-led calls this may be different and so knowing more about the applicant and their background might benefit researcher-led discussions.</p>
Interoperability and alignment	Organisational interoperability and alignment	<p>Participants pointed out that the narrative CV and other NIHR initiatives need to be thought of as an organisation and be linked. There were discussions about the NIHR standard application form section that asks about researchers' contribution, but it was also highlighted that the section is not necessarily aligned to the CV because the information is scattered across the application. Different forms, systems like Research fish, case studies from infrastructure awards, were identified as processes that capture narrative information. Participants asked about the current use of that information and expressed concerns about asking applicants for more information without knowing whether what is already collected, meets the purpose/criteria of narrative CVs or the value that the new information will add/bring. In addition, participants highlighted variability and unknowns in initiatives such as responsible use of metrics and the importance of increasing knowledge on the way that funding committees' use of CV information aligns with those principles. There were views about the need to include narrative CV questions to the application system.</p>
	Alignment across applicants and programmes	<p>Participants did not find it was necessary to uniformly adopt a narrative CV for all NIHR programmes or groups of applicants. The process should be the same, but questions should be adapted. Some suggested that the narrative CV be used only in individual awards as the award focuses on individual applicants</p>

		<p>and make the use of narrative CVs appropriate. This was also discussed in light of some of the questions of narrative CVs (e.g., contribution to education and mentorship) which participants found not to be relevant to research programmes because skills required of research teams to deliver a project are not necessarily linked to those contributions.</p>
<p>Reflections on implementation</p>		<p>There was overall support for the initiative of using narrative CVs in the NIHR, however, there was consensus in all focus groups that some questions about the purpose of using narrative CV need to be answered before implementation.</p> <p>Some of the questions asked for clarification of whether narrative CVs intend to gather more information to support decisions by funding committees or to address issues of applicants' diversity.</p> <p>At an operational level, options to implement narrative CVs ranged from not adding a separate document to capture narrative CV information but modifying questions in the NIHR standard application form to align to the narrative CV purpose, to moving relevant sections from the Detailed Research Plan in the NIHR standard application form to a dedicated narrative CV document. There was overall agreement of the suitability of narrative CVs for fellowships because of the focus of these programmes on individuals and questioned the need to request narrative CVs for each individual co-applicant in research programmes. Reviewers indicated the need for clear assessment guidance to evaluate narratives to manage subjectivity during assessment resulting from the qualitative nature of the narratives and ensure fair treatment of applicants in the review process. Some participants discussed that placing narrative CVs at the beginning of application forms/packages would place the applicant before the application. In terms of the application process, participants pointed out that the information of the narrative CV is relevant at the triage stage in fellowships and at stage 2 in research programmes.</p> <p>When discussing the type of information used to evaluate applicants and how the format of traditional CVs facilitates reviewing, there were some suggestions</p>

		<p>of implementing a hybrid CV model, keeping some sections of the traditional CV, and adding some questions from narrative CVs.</p> <p>Some participants suggested that making changes to the online application system to integrate the submission of narrative CVs, will support stakeholders in adapting to the change.</p> <p>In supporting applicants to writing narrative CVs, participants views were that balanced guidelines would tell applicants how to write the narratives but without constraining creativity. Challenges of the implementation of narrative CVs were recognised and summarised in the view that starting a funding stream from scratch would be a perfect way to introduce narrative CVs.</p>
Behaviour change		<p>Participants commented that to implement narrative CVs successfully, they would need to be embraced by the people who are going to assess them, as well as those who are writing them. It was recognised that the current system works well for many people, and some would be more open to narrative CVs than others. For example, participants suggested that there may be more resistance amongst senior researchers, especially if they are suddenly being told that publications are no longer as important when all their career to date that is what they have strived to achieve. Similarly, there was concern that reviewers may still look at publications and impact factors of journals as that is what they have always done. Some participants highlighted the reasons why impact factors should be discussed because they used as a mechanism to discern quality. Overall, participants felt that shifting culture will take time. The point was also raised that this behaviour change will only really produce a research culture shift if narratives are implemented across the board, as researchers will still be assessed via publications and other metrics by their higher education institutions. It was suggested that early career researchers may be more open to narrative CVs and so implementing narrative CVs may be more popular if training and use of narratives started early in the research pathway.</p>

Potential contribution of the narrative CV to wider research culture		
	Recognition of contributions to wider environment	This subtheme reflected the need for recognition of contributions to the wider research environment. Participants reflected that the majority of time in research is spent undertaking administrative tasks (e.g., approvals, reports) and not data collection or analysis and this is not acknowledged. It was also suggested that many important wider activities were not maintained (such as peer review) because they would not lead to a publication. Participants felt it would be good to move away from publications and metrics as an assessment tool. It was suggested that the narrative CV provides an opportunity to do this and can help shift views on what research activities are valued. It was felt that the narrative CV would make researchers reflect on the activities that they currently undertake and will help people to decide what activities to engage in. For example, participants indicated that they would feel more comfortable in asking for teaching, setting up peer support groups or spending more time on peer reviewing if these activities were valued in future assessments. These are critical and valuable contributions that benefit the wider research landscape. It was suggested that narrative CVs could change culture as NIHR could see more holistically and inclusively what people bring to the research field, rather than just publications.
	Recognising transferrable skills (and seeing beyond academia)	There were comments given on the need to recognise transferrable and interdisciplinary skills. Participants reflected that if NIHR want to encourage more people from non-traditional academic routes with ideas but not publications, then NIHR need to place emphasis on other skills and provide a space to be able to showcase other skills. Narrative CVs provided a good opportunity to do this, to provide evidence of transferrable skills and to bring in other non-academic experience. However, the importance of messaging and language was also raised, and comments suggested that if NIHR ask specifically about research experience (as is in Fellowships currently) then people might not add other experience which is equally important.

	<p>Recognition for all research findings and invisible research activity (part of research culture)</p>	<p>Participants discussed some of the effects that introducing narrative CVs could have on aspects of research culture that encourage assessment of research performance on non-traditional outputs, which at the moment are not visible. There were common views that narrative CVs may help to get the balance between excellence and equity by providing space for applicants to report career challenges, how they've been overcome, reporting of all research findings even those that were not as expected, experience from not traditional academic spaces (e.g., social care, global health), highlight factors of success not based on mainstream metrics (e.g., knowledge mobilisation skills). A long-term effect would be increased level of currently invisible activities (e.g., conducting reviews, mentoring new researchers, conducting/increasing engagement) as there would be a place to report these contributions, indicating that organisations value the activities and/or take them into account in the application process.</p>
	<p>Changing the perception of an NIHR researcher/fellow</p>	<p>Participants commented that an important consequence of implementing the narrative CV might be that the perception of a typical NIHR researcher/fellow changes and moves away from the typical white, male who is experienced in RCTs. It was suggested that the narrative CV may challenge expectations of what a good researcher or team looks like for a research project and may lead applicants and reviewers alike to re-evaluate what skills are perceived as valuable for delivering on a research project or fellowship.</p>
	<p>Embedding the concept of a narrative CV –in the [education, research] system (part of research culture)</p>	<p>Discussions in all focus groups agreed in the potential of the narrative CV to capture broad and relevant information on an applicant, but that the challenge is with the review process. The initiative needs to be embraced by information users (panels, reviewers) and for this some education would be needed. Participants talked about the current ethos and education structure not recognising people who do not follow traditional career routes, disproportionately affecting women.</p> <p>Some participants highlighted the challenge of changing the way that curriculum and track record is developed throughout a person's career and discussed that</p>

		<p>to train the new generation of researchers who will eventually be reviewers and be part of funding committees, concepts of narrative CVs need to be embedded into the education curriculum early on.</p>
	<p>Narrative impact on research culture (part of research culture-NIHR and wider)</p>	<p>All focus groups discussed that the narrative CV presents an immense culture change requiring applicants, reviewers, and funding committees to focus and value contributions that have not been considered before. Careers of established researchers and reviewers have been made within a tradition where value is placed in publications and grants. Participants expressed concerns that using narrative CVs would require a change in the mindsets of established researchers to place value on wider contributions.</p> <p>Participants agreed that there is a need for this culture change and a renewed focus on improving patient outcomes and journey. It was suggested that the narrative CV might help inform the skill set of the change in culture shift that is needed.</p> <p>Applicants discussed the narrative CV considering the responsible use of metrics by asking to know if funding committees' use of CV information align to these. These views indicate the reciprocal contribution of organisational to wider landscape initiatives and vice versa.</p> <p>Participants viewed the introduction of narrative CVs as opportunities to start conversations with funding committees and other NIHR stakeholders of what works in the research system and what can be improved, reflecting on how funding is decided, on research activity concentrated in some institutions/geographic areas, and on whether the configuration of funding committees represent research communities adequately. It was also suggested that NIHR sending the message that non-traditional academic skills and experiences are important will help to start change culture.</p>

Examples of contexts and uses of the narrative CV		
Examples of additional contexts and uses of the narrative CV		Participants gave examples of other contexts or uses of the narrative CV. It was suggested that narrative CVs may be helpful for promotion, hiring, appraisals, selecting chairs for funding committees, and for use in higher education institutions. Participants reflected that there are examples of narrative type CVs being used in research already, without people necessarily realising it. For example, for promotion and for public contributors on grant applications. It was also highlighted that narratives are already used as reflective exercises in medicine to help clinicians to learn from their experiences. Participants also questioned whether narrative CVs would be written differently for internal versus external applications and that it may be more difficult to make claims about contributions in internal applications.
Considerations driving the initiative		
Purpose of implementation		In this theme, participants questioned what NIHR was hoping that implementation of the narrative CV would achieve. Whilst all participants could see potential benefits that a narrative CV might bring to research funding, some participants were concerned that the narrative CV was being put forward as a solution to a problem that is not yet fully understood, that there is a much wider problem of getting people into the system to begin with, and that other initiatives might have a bigger impact to these potential problems. Participants commented that clear and consistent messaging about the purpose and what benefit this would bring for all stakeholders was paramount to any implementation strategy.
Need for trial and evaluation		Participants views indicated the need to experiment, pilot and evaluate the use of narrative CVs to explore how their use impacts applications to NIHR awards. Because of the uncertainty in how applicants would react to the various ways in which the narrative CV could be added to NIHR applications, there was consensus in all focus groups that evaluation needs to be integral to exploring the benefit of using narrative CV for research programmes. Another point of

		<p>agreement was in the potential duplication and overlap of narrative CV questions with questions in the current application form. Participants highlighted that the questions in narrative CVs would expand the information being captured in the NIHR application therefore there was opportunity to revise the current application and evaluate if the revised format captures the information that a narrative CV seeks to capture. Some participants also expressed the need to evaluate whether a narrative CV adds value or adds complexity to funding decisions (e.g., can narrative CV make a difference in funding decision outcome?).</p> <p>Participants discussed that evaluation also needs to observe the impact of narrative CVs on NIHR culture, specifically on reviewers' behaviours towards assessing research outputs, the value placed in non-traditional contributions, contributions from applicants whose career backgrounds do not follow the traditional academic pathway, and whether the initiative attracts applications from more diverse groups. In this evaluation, considerations of modifying review criteria would need to be made as well as recognising the time required to change current assessment practice.</p> <p>Finally, participants indicated that trials of the narrative CV would also need to capture unintended consequences of implementing the initiative (e.g., increased workload in applicants, reviewers, funding committees and no benefit).</p> <p>Evaluation was seen as extremely important, but equally important was the notion that if the evaluation indicated that the narrative CV was not achieving what it set out to achieve, that NIHR would be prepared to stop using narrative CVs.</p>
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