

Maximising the value of combining qualitative research and randomised controlled trials in health research: the QUALitative Research in Trials (QUART) study – a mixed methods study

Alicia O’Cathain,^{1*} Kate J Thomas,¹ Sarah J Drabble,¹ Anne Rudolph,¹ Jackie Goode² and Jenny Hewison³

¹School of Health and Related Research (SchARR), University of Sheffield, Sheffield, UK

²Department of Social Sciences, Loughborough University, Loughborough, Leicestershire, UK

³Leeds Institute of Health Sciences, University of Leeds, Leeds, UK

*Corresponding author

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Plain English summary

The QUALitative Research in Trials (QUART) study

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Plain English summary

Researchers use randomised controlled trials (RCTs) to test whether or not new health services and treatments work. Sometimes researchers use qualitative research (e.g. interviews, focus groups, observation) alongside these trials and a common reason is to help to understand why these services and treatments do or do not work. We looked at how researchers have done this type of qualitative research and how to make the best use of it. We found 296 papers, published in academic journals, which reported this type of qualitative research during 2008–10. We found that it was used to explore 22 different aspects of trials and qualitative research had the potential to make more efficient use of research money by being used before a trial to make sure that the service or treatment was designed to give it the best chance of working. It could also help the trial researchers to be more sensitive to the needs of people joining or working in a trial. We also interviewed experienced researchers to find out whether or not they felt the qualitative research had been of value and how best to carry it out. These researchers valued the qualitative research because it could improve the treatment and the trial and help to understand how to use the trial results in the real world. They felt that the best way to do this work was to undertake high-quality qualitative research and for team members to plan, in the early stages of the research, how to use the findings to produce the best evidence about the treatment.

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Editorial contact: nihredit@southampton.ac.uk

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