

Methods Report for
Mid-year meeting

April 2017

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Document prepared by:	Jackie Chandler
Submitted to Governing Board:	No
Access:	Open
Purpose of the Paper:	Information
Status:	Various
Decision Required:	No – for Information
Strategy to 2020 target:	No

Cochrane Scientific Committee

Important outputs last 12 months

Call and selection of Committee members using a selection panel.

Summary

Cochrane Scientific Committee membership is complete and first meeting planned on the 18th May 2017. Three meetings annually are anticipated with occasional face to face meetings for more intense activity, such as the development of a research agenda and strategy. The Methods website like the Governing Board web pages will report details of the Committee's agenda, activities and output. A final draft set of Terms and Conditions are available. The Committee will agree and sign off these T&C's at their inaugural meeting. Processes and procedures are in development for submissions to the Committee. This will include a call for methods of interest briefly outlining the issue for consideration. The Committee will consider and prioritise submissions requesting further detailed supporting evidence. The Committee, on reaching a decision, will complete a statement of recommendation to Cochrane through the Editor in Chief. Some early methods topics for discussion may include:

1. Review of the updated 'Risk of bias' tool RoB 2.0.
2. Review of the development of the risk of bias tool for non-randomised studies for interventions – ROBINS-I.
3. Review of approaches to cumulative meta-analyses for systematic reviews. An article discussing aspects of Trial Sequential Analysis (Wetterslav and colleagues) with commentary from Julian Higgins can be found in Cochrane Methods 2012 pp 29-35. More recently Wetterslav and colleagues published another paper addressing TSA in systematic reviews with a meta-analysis. This work and its critique addresses both the problem of statistical power in meta-analyses and errors that occur in repeated updates of meta-analyses. The Methods Innovation Fund includes a project led by Mark Simmonds evaluating the different approaches to updating meta-analyses due for completion April 2018.

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CDSR 'Methods Section'

Important outputs last 12 months

Discussions continue between Cochrane and Wiley on the planned section's aims & objectives, author guidelines, funding and editorial structure. Progress very dependent on the Cochrane Library Platform delivery. Currently we understand inclusion of methods articles will not occur before October 2018.

Summary

This new CDSR section will provide an opportunity to highlight high quality methodological work applicable to the production and dissemination of Cochrane and other systematic reviews, and related articles on the development and application of high quality systematic review and research synthesis methods. This section is integral to the CDSR and will fit within its overall structure and table of contents. We expect to include empirical research studies assessing and evaluating methods and procedures applicable in the prioritisation, production or dissemination of Cochrane and other systematic reviews (incl. primary methodological research, some methodology reviews, studies within reviews or 'SWARs) and empirical research studies evaluating methods and procedures designed to improve the conduct and reporting of primary research studies in order to facilitate their incorporation into Cochrane and other systematic reviews (e.g. studies reporting on the development and evaluation of reporting guidelines, EQUATOR network etc.). We are currently negotiating the APC charge for Gold access, developing the Scholar One manuscript system and considering the best editorial structure to support this section.

Cochrane Handbook for Systematic Reviews of Interventions - update

Important outputs last 12 months

Plans to produce a minor (5.2) and major (6) update of the *Cochrane Handbook for Systematic Reviews of Interventions* has suffered considerable delays due to number of factors primarily the capacity of the Editors. We have curtailed the publication of online chapters for version 5.2 to a handful of chapters near ready for publication. Many version 6 chapters are advanced, however, several, are yet to get underway.

Summary

To address the lack of capacity we undertook a re-structure of the Editorial Team increasing from four editors to three senior editors, four associate scientific editors, an implementation editor (training) and a managing editor supported by an editorial assistant. We expect this increase to progress the Handbook more smoothly along with tighter project management systems to resolve delays when they occur. We are in discussions with Wiley Books to discuss options for an expanded version of the current 2008 Handbook. We will shortly discuss whether October 2018 is a realistic date for completion and publication of a new

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hardcopy version. This new team will review the overall structure of the Handbook with the anticipated expansion of topics. We will publish online version 6 chapters in PDF via a Drupal Book, when ready.

Methods Innovation Fund 1 & 2

Important outputs last 12 months

Projects for [MIF 1](#) (completed) and [MIF 2](#) are listed on the Methods website. A report on MIF 1 projects (6) is available in [Cochrane Methods 2016](#) pp 6-7. MIF 2 projects (7) suffered delays due to contract development on both the Cochrane side and several Universities. All projects are underway and will complete over the next 18 months.

Summary

Some projects are a priority to facilitate key areas of methodological challenge, such as, when to search for unpublished data (Clinical Study Reports) and an evaluation of different statistical methods for updating meta-analyses. Both are expected to complete January and April next year. Cochrane is also investing through both MIF 2 and the Strategic Methods Fund to deliver Reviews of prognosis. The Scientific Committee will review project outputs.

Strategic Methods Fund

Important outputs last 12 months

A call for submissions based on criteria for the implementation of methods including capacity building resulted in five submissions. A selection panel comprising a range of Cochrane experts and external expertise reviewed submissions. Two were rejected as not fulfilling criteria and three submissions responded to peer reviewer and selection panel comments. [Two projects](#) were successfully funded.

Summary

Contract and project negotiations will commence over the next couple of months. Previous Methods Innovation Fund suffered delays due to contract issues. For future calls we will ensure we receive quality applications that focus on *implementation* of methods beyond guidance development.

Methods Structure & Function – *Next steps*

Important outputs last 12 months

Following the 2015 Methods Review, a series of discussions, Group meetings and webinars took place throughout 2016 discussing the Methods infrastructure. Different perspectives indicate the diversity between Methods Groups, such as, size, scope, focus and their priority within typical Cochrane Reviews. The divergent views lie between those wishing to retain the current structure and those with more radical ideas to re-organise or disband the current structures.

Summary

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A proposal developed by Jackie Chandler based on these differing perspectives is on the agenda at the upcoming Mid-Year meeting in Geneva for Methods Convenors. The proposal suggests moving to a flexible system of Methods Research Networks to accommodate these perspectives and priorities for both methodologists and Cochrane. We have an opportunity to refresh the current structure along with other developments, such as the Scientific Committee. Networks are easier to set up and close. For a given period Networks will negotiate an individual workplan. Key aspects of this proposal are:

- flexibility, allowing more Networks than Groups;
- more receptive to individual methodologist capacity;
- involving more methodologists with a wider range of methodological interests for future evidence synthesis needs;
- a system that Central organisation can manage and support.

Several new positions for Methods leads (Council, Scientific Committee (MG convenors), Editorial Board (Senior Methods Adviser), Handbook editors, CDSR “Methods Section” Editors) could naturally form a co-ordinating group. The Methods Executive will continue to support the Methods infrastructure through any agreed transition. The Governing Board seek recommendations by September 2017.