

## What is happening to the Structure and Function review?

### Contents

Background	1
Sustainability Review	1
Editorial Board	2
Publication checklist	2
Screening on demand	3
Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)	3
Methods Support Team	3
Editorial Process Pilots	4
Policy development	4
Appendix: Publication checklist	5

### Background

As most readers will know, at its meeting during the Seoul Colloquium in October 2016, Cochrane's Governing Board (previously Steering Group) gave its full support for the recommendations in the Structure and Function paper relating to review production and impact (paper 1). In addition, the Board strongly recommended the appointment of a project team, to facilitate and expedite the initial work relating to review quality and group sustainability, with a view to ensuring visible progress by the time of the mid-year meeting in April 2017.

We intend to update progress reports every 2-3 weeks to coincide with the Reviews and Methods Digest publications. However, we are also pleased to receive feedback or enquiries via [email](#).

### Sustainability Review

The project team has now been agreed and comprises Martin Burton, Nicky Cullum, Jonathan Craig and David Tovey. The team will report directly to the Governing Board and will be an executive body making recommendations directly to the Board for actions aimed at ensuring review quality and the sustainability of review production systems in Cochrane. The team will be supported by Karla Soares Weiser, Toby Lasserson and Nuala Livingstone.

The CEU team is preparing data reports that will inform the project team's deliberations. These will include information relating to the following:

- CRG Resources: financial and human, stability of funding
- CRG Review production and impact metrics
- CRG Review quality assessments and actions taken
- Assessment of the leadership of the CRG and functioning of the editorial process

We envisage a two stage process: focussing in phase 1 on those groups who appear most vulnerable in terms of resources, or at highest risk of producing reviews that fail to meet the agreed standards. Phase 2 will take a broader system-wide perspective and we anticipate that this will lead to recommendations for fewer, larger, more sustainable editorial units. Further information on the Sustainability Review will follow in due course.

CRG teams based in the UK may be interested to know that in a recent meeting, Professor Tom Walley (Director of NIHR Evaluation, Trials and Studies) expressed his support for the direction of travel Cochrane has indicated in the Structure and Function paper, and for the proposal for fewer, larger, more sustainable editorial units. Professor Walley noted that there are important practical considerations to take into account, but was nonetheless keen to see progress in relation to the proposals. He also indicated the importance of impact, and that a move towards more complex and challenging reviews that addressed the needs of local health systems would be welcomed by NIHR. Finally, he noted that the [Complex Reviews Support Unit](#) has been set up to facilitate such reviews and encouraged CRG teams to make maximum use of this service.

Whilst I doubt that anything in the above paragraph runs contrary to the perspective of funding bodies elsewhere in the world, we are also acutely aware of the importance of retaining a global perspective. Part of the challenge of the Sustainability Review project will be to ensure that we are engaging as broadly as possible and that solutions are applicable worldwide.

### [Editorial Board](#)

With the current spate of elections to the Scientific Committee and Council, we have decided to postpone the appointment of the Editorial Board until early 2017. The next step will be to prepare and circulate terms of reference for the Board along with eligibility characteristics, and this will be followed by an open call for applicants. As Editor in Chief, I will select the membership ensuring that the Board comprises five Co-ordinating Editors (past or present), and representatives from the methods and end user or funder community, plus an individual to champion knowledge translation. We will also ensure that the Board benefits from the geographical, gender and linguistic diversity of its members.

### [Publication checklist](#)

The CEU has considered feedback received in relation to the checklist presented in the Structure and Function paper. We will now undertake an audit of the most recent five reviews (new or updates) that each CRG has published. We aim to complete this before the end of January 2017 and will publish the results within the Cochrane community as part of our commitment to transparency.

We are aware that the checklist only covers Abstracts. However, it is our experience that problems with Abstracts are common, and frequently signal problems elsewhere in the review. Furthermore, as is well documented, the Abstracts are the most frequently read sections of our reviews, so it is particularly important that they are both valid and clearly written.

A copy of the checklist is included at the end of this blog. I strongly encourage you to communicate this checklist to author teams and editors. The elements included in the checklist are basic requirements of an Abstract, addressed in the Handbook, and yet in our experience they are frequently absent in reviews that are submitted for screening. We will explore whether it would be useful to include the checklist in the pre-Copy Edit checklist, and whether it would be feasible to add use of the checklist to the work of the Copy Edit Support team, but in the interim we expect that reviews submitted for screening will have been assessed by the editorial teams against the checklist.

### Screening on demand

Reviews are submitted for screening from several sources:

- CRGs using the 'on demand' service
- Reviews picked up as potentially problematic by the Copy Edit Service
- Reviews being considered for media dissemination
- Reviews identified by the Cochrane UK ARGO meeting

The proliferation and complexity of requests, plus the new requirement in relation to pre-publication checking has put pressure on our limited resources. To ensure that we do not create further delays to review production by introducing a 'waiting list' we are introducing some changes to the service we provide.

- Screening will now be limited to a maximum of one day's editorial work per review except in specific circumstances (predominantly very high priority reviews where a press release or media conference is planned). We believe that this will mean that we can provide a prompt and efficient service, even though there will be times where we need to hand back to CRGs an incomplete report.
- We intend to experiment with different style of editorial feedback to increase efficient and speed of response, without compromising utility.

The 'Screening Guide' that formed part of our Strategy to 2020 target for 2016 has been drafted and is currently undergoing editorial revision. We are aiming to release it before the end of February 2017.

### Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

We are very keen to move forward with developing MOU's with CRG teams and where appropriate their employing institutions. However, we will postpone the roll out of this process pending progress of the Sustainability Review. It may be, for example, that the move to fewer, larger editorial units influences the content and implementation of the MOU.

### Methods Support Team

We intend to progress the appointment of a methods support team in 2017. We are currently awaiting the outcome of the Strategic Methods Fund process, and following this will produce a paper describing the expectations, eligibility criteria, level of funding support and terms of reference.

### Editorial Process Pilots

We will initiate pilots of at least three different processes in 2017 with volunteer CRG teams. These will include the following:

- A 'journal-like' fast track editorial process
- Separating the author and editorial functions
- Accelerated processes for empty or sparse reviews where the output is explicitly aimed at stimulating research rather than making judgements about effectiveness

Helen Wakeford and Karla Soares Weiser are developing more detailed specifications for all of the pilots and will be in contact with CRGs who have expressed an interest in due course.

### Policy development

In 2016, despite the challenges created by the ongoing Enhanced Cochrane Library project we have made progress in developing policy and guidance on peer review, and the management of suspected and proven scientific misconduct. We have also introduced the Updating Classification System, which will form a key component in the development of an updating strategy.

These developments will continue in 2017 and we also plan to develop and consult on new policy guidance on rejecting submissions that fail to meet expected standards; whether at the protocol review or updating stage.

## Appendix: Publication checklist

- Does the title reflect the review question?
- Is the research question (PICO) clear and the rationale for the review well described?
- Is the search date less than 12 months from publication?
- Does the abstract indicate that trials registers were searched?
- Are the eligible study designs described in the abstract appropriate to the review question?
- Are the findings for all important outcomes reported for the main comparison(s), including information about adverse effects? (i.e. consistent with the outcomes reported in the SoF table)
- Is there an estimation of the certainty (or quality) of the body of evidence using GRADE for each outcome reported in the abstract?
- Are harms (or the absence of harms) reported?
- Are the direction, magnitude and confidence intervals of effects clearly described where appropriate?
- Does the reporting of results avoid reliance on emphasizing on statistical significance to determine presence or absence of an effect?
- Are the conclusions an accurate reflection of the evidence presented in the GRADE SoF table(s)?
- Do the authors avoid making recommendations?