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# Cochrane Editorial Resources Committee:

## Survey Results

*February 2012*

### **Executive summary**

The survey had a very high response rate. Most Cochrane entities within the Cochrane Collaboration were aware of the Editorial Resources Committee (ERC), and most people were using one or more of the ERC resources. In general the resources were very well received, and Cochrane entities have been adapting the resources for their own needs. Criticisms of the resources and the ERC were that the resources were too long, the process to develop the resources was too long, and some resources need to be updated to reflect the Methodological Expectations of Cochrane Intervention Reviews (MECIR). Many suggestions for new resources and improvements to existing resources and processes were made. All respondents thought that the work of the ERC should continue, and nearly half of respondents thought that the ERC should continue to function as it does currently.

The results of this survey provide several potential action points for the ERC.

### **Potential action points for the Editorial Resources Committee**

- The ERC to continue to develop and update resources, taking into account the MECIR (as and when are available).
- The ERC to consider criticisms and suggestions for improvements to editorial resources and processes.
- The ERC to consider and prioritise suggestions for new editorial resources.
- The ERC to consider whether adaptations to resources made by individual Cochrane entities should be made to the resources for use by all.

## Background

The Editorial Resources Committee (ERC) aims to support Cochrane Review Groups and other Cochrane entities by providing useful tools to support their work, including information packs, forms and checklists. The resources are developed by one or two members of the ERC, they go through consultation with the relevant constituencies within The Cochrane Collaboration, they are user tested, and they are signed off by the Cochrane Editorial Unit (CEU). Each resource takes several days or more of work to complete. The ERC is made up of 15 voluntary members, they meet four times a year, and they receive no direct funding from The Cochrane Collaboration. Since the inception of the ERC no formal assessment has been made of the utility of and opinions about the resources, or whether Cochrane entities want the ERC to continue to create and update the resources.

## Objectives

To determine the utility and opinions of Cochrane entities about the resources developed by the Editorial Resources Committee, and to determine whether Cochrane entities want the ERC to continue to create and update resources.

## Methods

An online survey was developed for all Cochrane entities. The survey was developed by one person with input from members of the ERC and CEU. The survey included questions yielding quantitative (pre-defined) and qualitative (free-text) data. The full survey is available in [Appendix 1](#). For pre-defined responses data were displayed as the proportion of people responding per pre-defined answer, and for free-text responses a thematic analysis was performed (responses were grouped that shared a common theme, and a representative quote for the theme was assigned). The survey was emailed to all Cochrane entities on 18 November 2011, and the survey was closed on 3 January 2012.

## Results

Fifty-five people responded to the survey, and 77% of CRGs were represented in the responses.

Most people were aware of the ERC prior to the survey (88% of all respondents, 98% of responding CRGs, and 77% of all CRGs if we assume non-respondents did not know about the ERC). Most people also used ERC the resources (78% of all respondents, 93% of responding CRGs, and 73% of all CRGs if we assume non-respondents did not use ERC resources).

Of people who were aware of the ERC but did not use the resources, the most common reason for not using them was that the respondent didn't think the resources were suitable for their Cochrane entity (50% of question respondents).

The editorial resource most frequently described as "Very useful" was the 'Title registration form for intervention reviews' (59% of question respondents), and the resource most frequently described as "Resource not used" was the 'Contact information form' (47% of question respondents). All resources had been used by at least 50% of respondents.

The following perceptions were identified about the editorial resources: the resources are useful; they encourage consistency; Cochrane entities are adapting the resources, or using elements from the resources to develop their own materials; the resources aren't relevant to all Cochrane entities or Cochrane entities have already developed a similar resource; some resources need to be updated; and the resources are too long. The following views were also expressed about the ERC and their work: the resources are well received and appreciated, the resources need to be consistent with the MECIR; implementing checklists with authors of updated Cochrane Reviews can be difficult; and it takes a long time to develop, consult on and sign off the editorial resources.

Respondents requested a wide range of new resources to be developed (31 new resources); some of these resources were already in development at the time of the survey, and some had not previously been considered by the ERC. Respondents also identified that some of their own resources might be useful for the ERC (7 suggested resources).

When asked whether the work of the ERC should continue, all respondents said "Yes". Nearly half of respondents thought the ERC should continue to develop and update editorial resources as they have been (44% of question respondents), 42% of question respondents thought the ERC should continue to develop and update editorial resources, but only after a thorough needs assessment has been conducted for each resource; 4% thought the ERC should keep resources already developed up to date, but should not create new resources; and 40% thought the ERC should take a break, and wait until the MECIR reporting standards are agreed before embarking on new work (responses were not mutually exclusive).

The full results and synthesised data are provided in [Appendix 2](#).

## **Conclusions**

The survey had a very high response rate. Most Cochrane entities within the Cochrane Collaboration were aware of the ERC, and most people were using one or more of the ERC resources. In general the resources were very well received, and Cochrane entities were adapting the resources for their own needs. Criticisms of the resources and the ERC included that the resources were too long, the process to develop the resources was too long, and some resources needed to be updated to reflect MECIR. Many suggestions for new resources and improvements to existing resources and ERC processes were provided. All respondents thought that the work of the ERC should continue, and nearly half of respondents thought that the ERC should continue to function in its current form.

The results of this survey provide several potential action points for the ERC.

## **Potential action points for the Editorial Resources Committee**

- The ERC to continue to develop and update resources, taking into account the MECIR (as and when are available).
- The ERC to consider criticisms and suggestions for improvements to editorial resources and processes.
- The ERC to consider and prioritise suggestions for new editorial resources.
- The ERC to consider whether adaptations to resources made by individual Cochrane entities should be made to the resources for use by all.

## Appendix I: Editorial Resources Committee survey sent to all Cochrane entities

### 1. Which Cochrane entity are you responding on behalf of?

- Free text

### 2. Were you aware before today of the resources developed by the ERC?

- Response options
  - Yes
  - No

### 3. If you have now reviewed the ERC resources since opening this survey, please let us know what you think of them here.<sup>1</sup>

- Free text

### 4. Do you use the resources developed by the ERC?<sup>2</sup>

- Response options
  - Yes
  - No

### 5. Why do you not use the ERC resources?<sup>3</sup>

- Response options
  - The resources increase the amount of time and effort required to complete a protocol or review.
  - We have already developed our own editorial resources that are better suited to our needs.
  - We find the resources difficult to use.
  - The resources aren't suitable for our Cochrane entity.
  - Our authors will not use the editorial resources (please specify in the text box below).
  - Other, please specify (free-text field available)
  - (Specified reason: We have just been registered and didn't have the opportunity to explore it.)

### 6. Please provide any additional information here about why you don't use the resources developed by the ERC.<sup>4</sup>

- Free text

### 7. How useful are the resources developed by the ERC in terms of improving the quality, time taken to completion, or efficiency (i.e. decreasing the number of iterations in the editorial process etc.) of protocols and reviews?<sup>5</sup>

- Response options (grid)

	Very Useful	Useful	Not useful	Resource not used	Response Total
Contact information form					
Title registration form for intervention reviews					
Title registration form for DTA reviews					
Standard email text for new authors					
Resource list for new authors					

Author pre-submission checklist for protocols					
Author pre-submission checklist for reviews					
External peer referee checklist for protocols					

**8. Please provide any additional comments here about the ERC resources. For example, are they useful? Are some better than others? Are there any that you particularly like or don't like? Do you have suggested improvements?**

- Free text

**9. Have you made any modifications to the ERC documents? If so, please could you describe? If you have made major amendments that are too long to type here, please let us know and we can arrange to speak with you on the phone.**

- Free text

**10. What new documents from the ERC, if any, would you like to see?**

- Free text

**11. Please list here any of your resources that you think could be suitable for the ERC.**

- Free text

**12. Do you have any further comments about any aspect of the ERC?**

- Free text

**13. Do you think the work of the ERC should continue?**

- Response options
- Yes, the ERC should continue to develop and update editorial resources as they have been.
- Yes, the ERC should continue to develop and update editorial resources, but only after a thorough needs assessment has been conducted for each resource.
- Yes, the ERC should keep resources already developed up to date, but should not create new resources.
- Yes, but the ERC should take a break, and wait until the MECIR reporting standards are agreed before embarking on new work.
- No, the work of the ERC should cease.

## Appendix 2: Synthesised data from the survey responses

### 1. Which Cochrane entity are you responding on behalf of?

- 55 respondents
  - 47 from Cochrane Review Groups
  - 5 from Cochrane Centres
  - 3 from Cochrane Methods Groups
- 41 out of 53 (77%) Cochrane Review Groups were represented in this survey

### 2. Were you aware before today of the resources developed by the ERC?

- 55 respondents
- Yes: 88%; No: 12%.

### 3. If you have now reviewed the ERC resources since opening this survey, please let us know what you think of them here.<sup>1</sup>

- 6 respondents.

All comments were positive, and respondents thought the resources were high quality and they were interested in using them (representative quote “We are interested in these resources and will review them after completing the survey.”).

### 4. Do you use the resources developed by the ERC?<sup>2</sup>

- 49 respondents
- Yes: 88%; No: 12%

### 5. Why do you not use the ERC resources?<sup>3</sup>

- 6 respondents.

Possible response	Percentage of respondents (number of respondents)
The resources increase the amount of time and effort required to complete a protocol or review.	17% (1)
We have already developed our own editorial resources that are better suited to our needs.	33% (2)
We find the resources difficult to use.	0% (0)
The resources aren't suitable for our Cochrane entity.	50% (3)
Our authors will not use the editorial resources (please specify in the text box below).	0% (0)
Other, please specify (Specified reason: We have just been registered and didn't have the opportunity to explore it.)	17% (1)

### 6. Please provide any additional information here about why you don't use the resources developed by the ERC.<sup>4</sup>

- 2 respondents.

One respondent from a Cochrane Review Group commented that they will revisit the resources, and the other respondent from a Cochrane Centre commented that the resources are particularly suitable for Cochrane Review Groups, and that Centres need to adapt to using the resources used by individual Cochrane Review Groups when working with authors.

**7. How useful are the resources developed by the ERC in terms of improving the quality, time taken to completion, or efficiency (i.e. decreasing the number of iterations in the editorial process etc.) of protocols and reviews?<sup>5</sup>**

- 37 respondents.

	Very Useful	Useful	Not useful	Resource not used	Response Total
Contact information form	28% (10)	25% (9)	0% (0)	47% (17)	36
Title registration form for intervention reviews	59% (22)	30% (11)	0% (0)	11% (4)	37
Title registration form for DTA reviews	46% (16)	17% (6)	0% (0)	37% (13)	35
Standard email text for new authors	39% (14)	30.5% (11)	0% (0)	30.5% (11)	36
Resource list for new authors	47% (17)	33% (12)	0% (0)	20% (7)	36
Author pre-submission checklist for protocols	39% (14)	30% (11)	3% (1)	28% (10)	36
Author pre-submission checklist for reviews	39% (14)	30% (11)	3% (1)	28% (10)	36
External peer referee checklist for protocols	36% (13)	19% (7)	3% (1)	42% (15)	36

**8. Please provide any additional comments here about the ERC resources. For example, are they useful? Are some better than others? Are there any that you particularly like or don't like? Do you have suggested improvements?**

- 28 respondents.  
The comments from respondents were generally very positive. The themes that emerged from the responses are highlighted below. In general, no theme received more than five comments from respondents.

Theme	Representative quotes
<b>General Comments relevant to all resources</b>	
The resources are useful	"The ERC resources are extremely helpful."
The resources encourage consistency	"They're useful to ensure we're consistent across groups, reflect recent changes and provide a professional image."
Cochrane entities are adapting the resources, or using elements from the resources to develop their own materials.	"They give a good template for the CRG to work on rather than us all starting from scratch."
The resources aren't relevant or the Cochrane entities have already developed a similar resource	"We already have a resource almost the same."
Some resources need to be updated	"It would be good to update them to be consistent with MECIR."
The resources are too long	"There is a tendency towards long, wordy documents, which I think we should try to move away from."
Suggestion for improvement	"A possible improvement would be the availability of a centrally approved version (i.e. without the bits at the top to be modified with CRG name, etc.) so that the documents don't appear unfinished when we share them."

Comments specific to the title registration form	
The title registration form has been particularly important	"The title registration form for intervention reviews has been absolutely critical, in my view, in ensuring consistency between CRG approaches, and in assisting Groups to manage situations in which title forms get transferred from one Group to another."
Comments specific to the author pre-submission checklists for protocols and reviews	
Opinions on the utility of the author pre-submission checklists vary	<p>"I love the author presubmission checklists; our authors are finding them useful in ensuring they have 'covered all the bases' for their protocols and reviews, and it saves the editorial base time in checking."</p> <p>"Authors often tick everything regardless of whether they have done it, but at least we can use that to go back to them."</p> <p>"I have experimented with the approved protocol pre-submission checklist and although the feedback from authors was positive, the quality of the protocols that were submitted did not appear to be much higher and I therefore did not get into the habit of sending them."</p>

**9. Have you made any modifications to the ERC documents? If so, please could you describe? If you have made major amendments that are too long to type here, please let us know and we can arrange to speak with you on the phone.**

- 31 respondents.

Many respondents reported that they hadn't made any modifications or that they had made minor modifications (adding their CRG name, dates etc.). Several respondents commented that they had made the resources specific to their CRGs. Specific modifications to the resources are tabulated below.

Contact information form	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Under the section of 'areas of interest/expertise', inserted &gt;15 topic-relevant boxes to gauge which areas are of interest.</li> <li>• Added a question about whether the member wishes to be part of a mailing list or just receive newsletters/notifications of workshops.</li> </ul>
Title registration form	<p>Sections removed from the title registration form:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The tick box requesting a mentor (the CRG was not able to support this).</li> </ul> <p>Sections added to the title registration form requesting the following information:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why the title is important.</li> <li>• Any potential overlap with already existing reviews.</li> <li>• Core outcomes.</li> <li>• RCTs the authors are aware of studies in the area.</li> <li>• How authors will involve consumers.</li> <li>• Proposed peer-reviewer names.</li> </ul> <p>Information added to the title registration form for authors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The responsibilities and requirements of author teams.</li> <li>• A sentence to say that the CRG may not register the title if author requirements are not met.</li> </ul> <p>Additional information requested from the authors along with the title registration form:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A short CV for each author.</li> </ul>
Standard email text for new authors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Amended to provide key information earlier on.</li> <li>• Deleted some sections (Archie and Review Manager training), as</li> </ul>



	these issues have been raised with the authors earlier in the process.
Resource list for new authors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attached Chapter 4 of the Cochrane Handbook as a PDF file.</li> </ul>
Author pre-submission checklist for protocols and reviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Edited to focus on areas where authors frequently have problems.</li> </ul>
External peer referee checklist for protocols	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Added a column for authors to record a comment for each point.</li> <li>Added a note to remind peer-reviewers to be as detailed as they like over and above what the form prompts them to do.</li> <li>Edited to make the form more friendly (e.g. taken out the word 'mandatory').</li> </ul>

## 10. What new documents from the ERC, if any, would you like to see?

- 34 respondents

Specific resources that respondents would like to be developed are listed below.

- Title registration forms
  - Overviews
- Author pre-submission checklists
  - Overviews
  - More specific guidance to authors on particular aspects of their review (e.g. writing up the results section).
- Data extraction forms
- Translation guidance
  - Guidance for translators (including payment)
  - A form for translators (long)
  - A form for translators (short)
- A list of common errors that authors make.
- A MECIR checklist
- Peer-review forms
  - Cochrane Reviews (Intervention)
  - Cochrane Reviews for statistical peer-review
  - Cochrane Reviews (DTA)
  - Overviews
  - A form for collating peer-review comments
- Consumer checklists
  - Cochrane Protocols
  - Cochrane Reviews (Intervention)
  - Cochrane Reviews (DTA)
- Editors' checklists for
  - Cochrane Protocols
  - Cochrane Reviews (Intervention)
  - Cochrane Reviews (DTA)
  - Overviews
  - Updates
  - Abstracts
  - Plain Language Summaries
- Copyediting checklists
- Standard emails:
  - notification of publication to authors
  - letters of thanks/notification of publication to peer reviewers
  - notice of reviews due to expire to contact authors
- Prioritisation guidance for prioritising Cochrane Review questions
- Guidance on how the documents can be made more specific to CRG requirements
- Guidance on project management

## 11. Please list here any of your resources that you think could be suitable for the ERC.

- 9 respondents

Some respondents identified that the resources they had been developing were out of date, and others noted specific resources. Specific resources are listed below.

- A resource for updates, including to do if there are or aren't new studies.
- Generic information for translators.
- A peer-reviewer form for protocols of overviews of reviews.
- A checklist for consumer review of Cochrane protocols and reviews.
- A resource assessing clinical relevance and risk of bias criteria.
- A Cochrane Review broken down as a table of tasks and milestones that's intended to aid project planning.
- A checklist on an Equity lens for prioritisation of topics for systematic reviews.

## 12. Do you have any further comments about any aspect of the ERC?

- 25 respondents

The comments from respondents were generally very positive. The themes that emerged from the responses are highlighted below. Some themes were very common among respondents, and these are highlighted below.

Theme	Representative quote
The resources are well received and are appreciated (around half of all responses)	"The work of the ERC is very important to editorial bases. Standardising the resources and forms that we use helps create a sense of unity across CRGs, as well as decreasing the amount of duplication in us all trying to improve the forms that we use."
The resources need to be consistent with the MECIR standards	"I think it's important for ERC to take in to account MECIR guidance where they're able to."
Implementing checklists with authors of updated Cochrane Reviews can be difficult	"In some cases we have had considerable resistance from authors of older reviews, who feel it is unfair that we expect them to upgrade the formatting and reporting standards in their updates."
It takes a long time to develop, consult on and sign off the editorial resources	"It does take a while to get documents finalised and ready for use - would be worth giving some thought as to whether or not it is possible to expedite the process."
Suggestions for improvement	"I think it would be good to have an idea of when documents that are currently being worked on by the ERC are likely to be completed for use." "It would be useful to be very clear who should do what in the editorial process." "I would suggest adding to the existing editorial resources questions about whether the title for the Cochrane Review was identified in a prioritisation process, and whether this transparently reported in the review." "We would like to have an automatic system for asking updates from authors and for sending peer review documents for example."

## 13. Do you think the work of the ERC should continue?

- 48 respondents

Possible response	Percentage of respondents (number of respondents)
Yes, the ERC should continue to develop and update editorial resources as they have been.	44% (21)
Yes, the ERC should continue to develop and update editorial resources, but only after a thorough needs assessment has been conducted for each resource.	42% (20)
Yes, the ERC should keep resources already developed up to date, but should not create new resources.	4% (2)
Yes, but the ERC should take a break, and wait until the MECIR reporting standards are agreed before embarking on new work.	40% (19)
No, the work of the ERC should cease.	0% (0)

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<sup>1</sup>This question was only available to respondents who answered 'No' to Q2.

<sup>2</sup>This question was only available to respondents who answered 'Yes' to Q2.

<sup>3</sup>This question was only available to respondents who answered 'Yes' to Q2 and 'No' to Q4.

<sup>4</sup>This question was only available to respondents who answered 'Yes' to Q2 and 'No' to Q4.

<sup>5</sup>This question was only available to respondents who answered 'Yes' to Q2 and 'Yes' to Q4.