

**Feedback from MEs regarding issues related to the Editorial Management System that the Council could raise with the Editor in Chief/Governing Board – updated 15 November 2021**

**Issues working with Editorial Manager**

- While it feels inevitable that there would be a whole range of teething problems with transitioning to EM, and I would normally accept that, that fact is that this year the NIHR told us they were going to cut our CRG's funding, and then in response Cochrane told us they'd disband our CRG. I'm now having to face the loss of my job – even if we could find funding, our Cochrane roles will no longer exist (and frankly I haven't heard anyone in Cochrane's leadership acknowledge how utterly crap this is – calling this a 'challenging time' does not cut it when we're all losing our jobs – I realise you can't save our jobs, but you could at least grieve with us). All this is to say that my morale is at rock bottom, so even though I'm sure I could get past the EM teething troubles under normal circumstances, my motivation to engage with it at all is zero, and every time I try to use it I'm reminded of how disposable I am, because I'm learning to do task that will soon be taken away from me. I'm much more interested in trying to ensure that our CRG closes shop on a positive note, prioritising the most important reviews and trying to not let down authors who are as baffled as we are.
- Whilst almost all CRGs may have onboarded, this does not necessarily mean that all are actively working/engaging with the new system. I think this is an important distinction to make. Looking at the Slack channel for EM, there seems to be a very small group of people posting queries. Whilst I appreciate that not everyone is comfortable posting queries on Slack, I do wonder whether this is in fact a fairly accurate reflection of the level of engagement. Engagement with EM may not be as widespread as Central Cochrane would like us to believe. The very long list of issues and concerns relating to EM as presented here should therefore be seen in the context of a potentially small group of people actively engaging with the system rather than the CRG community as a whole. I dread to think how many comments there would be if all CRGs were actively engaging with the system.
- Given that funding for the majority of CRG ends in March 2023 (and that I would anticipate CRG being dissolved imminently anyway), would Council back delaying full roll-out of EMS for CRG until March 2023 and turning back on Archie for us to manage reviews? It would dramatically alleviate stress at an already stressful time.
- I support the call for Archie to be maintained until 31 March 2023 and then whoever will be responsible for Cochrane reviews after that time can be properly trained in EM.
- A lot of work is falling on to the editorial base – the authors and editors are being faced with too many new systems/software at the same time (RMW, EM and Convey) and many don't want to or have the time to engage and learn the new process – they just want to write/update their review and submit. Especially experienced authors are frustrated that processes like submission for ed approval now involve multiple systems and more steps than previously. I have had EM described to me as 'a stroppy system' and worse!
- I'd really like to reiterate the need for a project dashboard, and just for each CRG, **not** the whole Network.
- The two CRG Reports you can generate in EM are inaccurate and not fit for purpose.
- Lots of messages from EM support telling us that they are there to help. If we had a new workable editorial management system, we would not need all this help!!

- Persistent confusion for authors and editors regarding how RMW, EM, Archie, and other platforms such as Convey are meant to interact. There needs to be better clarity/communication around this, acknowledging that while the information exists, authors are unlikely to read it in detail, and will often seek guidance from the ME.
- This is a huge system change and is a massive shift in the way we work and manage our portfolios. It has come at a time when MEs are under incredible strain in almost every other aspect of our work, which has only increased the burden of trying to adjust to EM.
- The ongoing developments to the system are completely non-transparent, and so maybe one thing I could suggest is that the community is informed of what developments are in the pipeline – especially in relation to copy edit and publication. That way, we will all know which bits of EM are here to stay and which bits are going to improve.
- I am surprised that there is no general ‘search’ option. .g. I tried with ‘**Simple Submission Search**’, but it provided no result. However, it I found it in the system, but not through simple search. I searched for another title that was submitted as a proposal, and simple submission search identified it. The authors were supposed to resubmit a complete proposal, and by email, I was informed that they gave up on this title as they were not aware that our Group was not accepting reviews prepared on observational studies. So, now, I had to follow unnecessary and time-consuming steps in order to come to the option to reject the proposal that was accepted based on its first submission. In addition, I could not close the process in EM unless I sent the first author an email through the system, which I find it wrong, as we have had correspondence on this by emails. Work in vain, instead of having the simple choice – ‘delete proposed title’ or ‘case closed’. Also, the people submitting the proposal entered the title with capital letters. I could not revise it using the EM but had to go to Word.
- I have had an extremely busy year with lots of new reviews and updates going through the editorial process, along with all the additional tasks that that entails, as well as keeping our Group going. I have not had protected time to learn EM and I do not have a joint ME or AME to work through problems with. I am slowly finding out how to do one-off specific tasks (with LOTS of mistakes along the way) but have no understanding of how EM works or interacts with other systems. I do not understand the terminology used within EM, I don't understand where reviews move to in the menu system as a title moves through the process, and the processes are not intuitive at all. And I haven't even got to the point where I am inviting editors, peer reviewers, and consumers to comment on submissions ... I am dreading it. Working between EM and Archie is also difficult ... when still working so much in Archie, it is difficult to switch to EM-think, which adds to the confusion.
- I am muddling through, mostly by trial and error, but am aware that this is generating additional work and confusion both for authors (at this stage) and for me. This is not a case of me being resistant to change - I am all for introducing new systems which improve our efficiency and working lives (we already have a brilliant online editorial system) - but EM is a huge burden which is demoralising and unhelpful, especially at a time when, as others have said, there is such uncertainty about the future - it is difficult to find the motivation to invest in such a large undertaking when it is likely that after March 2023 it will no longer be relevant to me.
- There is a very annoying issue of inaccurate labelling of Article Type. Articles are always filed as the ‘Parent submission’ so pending protocols/reviews may show up as proposals in the system when you Solicit Commentary. Because of this and other limitations, there is an urgent need to set up an external project management dashboard.

#### **Additional work caused by EM**

- I don't know how I am going to keep track of work once Archie is switched off – we are reverting to excel spreadsheets that we were using over 10 years ago!
- Terrible system to even look at, let alone navigate. We've given up and have devised our own tracking spreadsheets to replace the brilliant Archie workflows.
- There is a lack of a useable tracking system for reviews (still in production phase and reviews anywhere in the editorial process).
- We were one of the first groups to go over to EM, and I have been doing my best to try things out, but we are now reverting to using spreadsheets to track editorial progress and tasks within the group. Archie was a brilliant system for this and we are now back to pre-Archie days but worse because in parallel we have to try and work out what is going on with EM – I surely can't be the only ME who knows a review is somewhere in the system but can never find it unless I do a search for the manuscript? I know other groups are also planning on using Excel as an alternative to Archie as they can't understand/make EM work for us.
- I am at a loss as to why moving to EM was ever thought to be helpful for us. Overwhelmed at being forced to use this new system which isn't a patch on Archie. One click in Archie (with no extra platforms to navigate) and we were done, it's an excellent resource. I am so worried about losing track of my reviews in EM that I have created an excel sheet to do this (not the only Group doing this, what a backward step).
- EM is not suited to CRGs with multiple MEs and/or Satellite groups. All workarounds require extra administrative effort by MEs/AMEs. Plus, it is difficult to filter by site/editor/topic.
- Lack of uptake by and training for non-MEs/CISs, which in turn increases pressure on core staff.
- Can someone in leadership please put their hand up and admit that the wrong decision was made, and we should have kept and possibly improved Archie? I already have authors refusing to use it, back to pre-Archie days for communication as they are emailing now, instantly my workload has increased. What a mess and my heart goes out to my colleagues who are losing their jobs as well as having to face EM on a daily basis.
- I thought 'the nightmare that is RMW' meant that things could not get any worse, but we now have EM to contend with. It is not fit for purpose. Archie is a far better system. We have work arounds and additional software (three at least) instead of the one or two clicks the same task would have taken in Archie. We (and many other groups) have developed our own spreadsheet to record our reviews through the process as we can't use EM and now that we have had our marching orders, we are simply not willing to use it. Utter nonsense that 'we can't afford to keep Archie going'.
- If we are going to separate the editorial responsibilities anyway, is it a good use of our time learning the new EM? The amount of effort needed from us to learn to use EM is ridiculous, when in the end we will just be handing our reviews over to the CET to take them on. We are expending a lot of effort and using multiple work arounds to move review through EM – is it worth the time?
- I am still finding EM difficult and there are numerous glitches. Many of our reviewers seem to have been imported into EM as clinical reviewers rather than consumers, which means I have to go into their record and change their role description before sending a peer review request or if I only realise when I am midway through the request, I have to break off, make the change in the record and then restart the peer review request.
- The wording of the automated emails is poor at best. I spend time rewording such sentences. I have already spent time redrafting one of the automated emails and sending suggestions to Support, which degenerated into us each quoting definitions from different dictionaries at each other! That is not productive for either of us and I don't have time to do this as well as actually focus on getting reviews through the editorial process.

- The issue of multiple MEs/AMEs and having to proxy for each other, not able to get a full picture because we don't have a project dashboard and the CRG Reports are inaccurate. It shouldn't be so hard to find a review in EM.
- This is an unfortunate story about a very experienced Consumer Reviewer: I recently asked the Consumer to peer review a draft review that is in EM. To start with she couldn't cope with how EM wanted her to return her comments, so she used one of our old forms that she had stored on her computer. She sent me the completed form by email apologising about not being able to use the new system. By the time I got round to looking at her comments, she had received an automated email about 'reminder of late review'. Firstly, I didn't know this email would be automatically sent out. And secondly, I object to my name being on the bottom of an email that I would never have phrased in that way – I find "your review is now 3 days late" simply rude especially when being sent to a consumer reviewer who has absolutely nothing to gain from helping our group by commenting, she is not interested in any sort of professional kudos associated with Cochrane. The Consumer was understandably somewhat confused and upset by this email, especially when I had already acknowledged the receipt of her comments by personal email. Before I realised this automated 'late' email had been sent, I proxied in as the ME to submit her comments rather than going back and telling her they had to be submitted via Editorial Manager. As a result of this she was sent another automated email thanking her for submitting her comments (attached). Again, confusing her as her reply to me proves: "OMG! I just sent you an email that says my review is overdue. But now this says it's been received. I'm so confused with this new system. Plus, I need points to become a member?! Oh, dear. Life is getting too complex for me!" As soon as I had finished proxying in I sent the Consumer an additional email thanking her again for her comments and explaining what I had done to submit them on her behalf. **So in this case, rather than EM saving us time etc. it has only succeeded in confusing and alienating a long-standing Cochrane consumer reviewer and staunch Cochrane supporter and causing my workload regarding the peer reviewer comments to at least be doubled.** It is all very well for tech support to explain how things should happen, but many of Cochrane's supporters are just not that au fait with automatic systems let alone complicated ones like this, supporting Cochrane is something they do in their spare time to help out and why should they have to learn to navigate new systems like this? **We are at risk of alienating not only consumers, but also clinicians who have enough to deal with in their daily work without having to contend with new systems.** The way EM is working is also risking destroying long-standing relationships which MEs have built up over years by sending such poorly worded automated emails with our names on the bottom. I am beyond annoyed.

#### **Copyediting queries and concerns**

- In the two-stage copyediting process, will it be possible to do a 'compare' between the RevMan file and Fonto?
- Is it possible for copyeditors to complete all edits in RevMan and then move the review into Fonto for publication?
- The Copy-Editing Service go above what would be expected of a copy-editor and we don't always agree with everything they say. So who is making that decision in the final publication? Very occasionally (once or twice a year) CES make mistakes in editing, plus sometimes they make changes which are different style to how we normally do it (around presentation of airways specific clinical stuff) so who is checking the CES work?
- My understanding is that the copy editors will first work in RevMan and send back to the ME as they do now along with their report. The suggested changes can be accepted or rejected as now. The copy editor's suggestions can be ignored (however I am not sure how often this happens).

- When the CRG and the authors are happy, the review is sent back to copy editing and the original copy editor will then do the final proofread in Fonto. They cannot edit forest plots or figures from this point
- By sending to copy editing the CRGs are effectively signing off the review – the review has been checked thoroughly (data, conclusions etc) by the editors, ME and Co-Ed and as with print journals the review now enters the production stage
- I am not sure how the issue of major changes identified once the copy editor views the review in Fonto will be handled.
- If a copy editor makes any final edits before publication (i.e. when they are checking that their copy edits have been actioned), will the CRG and author be sent a version to review or will it go straight to publication?

### **Publishing queries and concerns**

- The lack of an effective process or system for publishing reviews through EM is a major concern for efficiency.
- The task of publishing reviews has been taken away from the ME, the reason being “it’s about editorial integrity”. Why aren’t the central MEs responsible for this task?
- Copyeditors will now be responsible for checking their requests have been followed, but who makes the final decision on whether a copyedit comment should be adhered to or ignored?
- Setting the publication date and time for a priority review to coincide with a press release – does this mean the copyeditor now has to liaise with the dissemination team and production team?
- Who will publish our reviews in this new system?