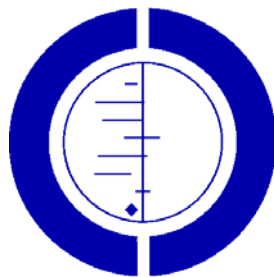

Training and Supporting
UK Contributors to
The Cochrane Database of
Systematic Reviews



Annual Report
1999-2000

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UK Cochrane Centre

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Phil Alderson
March 2001

Summary

- Demand continues to grow for training and support for people preparing, editing and maintaining Cochrane reviews.
- During 1999-2000, 273 participants filled 340 places on workshops on *Developing a Protocol for a Review* and *Getting a Review into RevMan*, a rise of 16% over the previous year.
- Feedback from the workshops continues to be good, particularly for *Developing a Protocol for a Review*.
- About two thirds of participants go on to contribute to *The Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews*.
- As a result of the increasing ease of use of RevMan, we plan to develop a new workshop to replace this during the next 12 months.
- Material from the *Finishing School for Systematic Reviews* will be made widely available during 2001.
- We plan to have distance learning material for reviewers ready to pilot by mid-2001.

1. Background

Since 1994, when the UK Cochrane Centre first held workshops for reviewers, there has been a large increase in interest and involvement in the Cochrane Collaboration in the UK. Twenty-four of the 50 collaborative review groups have an editorial base in the UK, and there are hundreds of people involved in preparing and maintaining systematic reviews across the country. About 40% of all Cochrane reviews have a UK-based contact author. As a result, demand for workshops for reviewers has been growing steadily.

To cope with this increasing demand, to provide reviewers with training closer to home, and to help train and support key members of review groups, four Cochrane review groups (Airways, Effective Practice and Organisation of Care, Pregnancy and Childbirth, and Schizophrenia) have been funded to provide some of these workshops. After a successful first year's pilot of this system, this UK Training and Support Network secured funding for a second year, to March 2001.

1.1 Activities of the UK Cochrane Training and Support Network

All four groups have organized training and support days for editorial base staff in their area. The content of these days has been varied, including consideration of practical problems in running a review group, methodological training, consumer training and special workshops on MeerKat software for managing a review group register. Many staff from the four training nodes also run training events at the UK Contributors' Meeting each spring, and at the annual Cochrane Colloquium.

In addition, each of the four groups has organized reviewer workshops. Feedback from these is incorporated in the following sections.

2. Workshops for reviewers

This report covers workshops held between November 1999 and December 2000, a total of 14 months. Future reports will be based on the calendar year.

2.1 Participants

During 1999-2000, 340 workshop places were filled. 273 participants attended workshops, some more than once. This is an increase of 38 participants (16%) over 1998-99. We will refer to the number of participants, rather than places, throughout this report.

During 1999-2000, nearly all participants were from the UK (Table 1).

Table 1 Area of residence of workshop participants

	94-95 n=87	95-96 n=127	96-97 n=139	97-98 n=163	98-99 n=235	99-00 n=273
UK	69%	88%	96%	96%	97%	96%
Rest of Europe	13%	7%	3%	2%	2%	3%
America (North & South)	9%	3%	-	1%	1%	1%
Australasia	7%	1%	-	-	-	-
Africa	-	1%	-	-	-	-
Asia	2%	-	-	-	-	-

We have continued to restrict workshop participation to members of registered Cochrane collaborative review groups.

2.2 Facilitators

We have continued to expand the number of people acting as facilitators at our workshops. New facilitators are placed with more experienced facilitators for the first few occasions, so that they are exposed to different ways of conducting workshops.

We have adopted a policy of encouraging Review Group Co-ordinators to act as facilitators, as well as trying to expand our pool of other facilitators. This has helped build a greater understanding between the UK Cochrane Centre and editorial bases about the content of workshops. It also helps Review Group Co-ordinators to respond to reviewers questions outside the workshops. During 1999-2000 eight new people facilitated at these workshops, of whom four were Review Group Co-ordinators.

2.3 Location, timing and administration

Workshops were held in Aberdeen, Liverpool, London, Manchester, Oxford and York. There were 14 workshops on *Developing a Protocol for a Review* during 1998-99 and 14 workshops on *Getting a Review into RevMan*. Nearly all reviewers were able to attend the workshop of their choice.

A timetable of workshops is circulated to Review Group Co-ordinators several months in advance and posted on the Cochrane Collaboration's web sites.

3. Evaluation of the workshops for reviewers

At the end of each workshop, participants are asked to complete a feedback form. Data from these are analysed at the end of each series of workshops. This helps the UK Cochrane Centre to assess whether the programme continues to meet the needs of reviewers. Out of 340 workshop places filled, we received 268 evaluation forms (79% response rate).

3.1 Workshops on Developing a Protocol for a Review

Most participants report having had little experience of preparing a protocol or completing a systematic review (Tables 3 & 4). The proportion of people with little experience does not seem to be decreasing over time.

Table 3 Participants' rating of their previous experience of preparing a protocol for a systematic review

Rating* of experience	Year (% of total)					
	94-95	95-96	96-97	97-98	98-99	99-00
1-3	70%	73%	76%	65%	74%	73%
4-7	22%	25%	24%	35%	24%	24%
8-10	8%	3%	0%	1%	2%	3%

* 1 = wondering how to start, 10 = completed several protocols

Table 4 Participants' rating of their previous experience of completing a systematic review

Rating* of experience	Year (% of total)					
	94-95	95-96	96-97	97-98	98-99	99-00
1-3	67%	74%	83%	72%	79%	79%
4-7	21%	20%	17%	26%	19%	18%

8-10	12%	6%	0%	2%	2%	3%
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* 1 = wondering how to start, 10 = completed several reviews

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Most participants reported finding these workshops helpful and enjoyable, with the distribution similar to previous years (Tables 5 & 6).

Table 5 Participants' rating of the protocol workshop in terms of what they learned

Rating* of workshop	Year (% of total)					
	94-95	95-96	96-97	97-98	98-99	99-00
1-3	3%	3%	0%	2%	2%	0%
4-7	52%	40%	55%	35%	37%	33%
8-10	45%	57%	45%	64%	61%	66%

* 1 = outstandingly unhelpful, 10 = outstandingly helpful

Table 6 Participants' rating of their enjoyment of the discussion groups

Rating* of enjoyment	Year (% of total)					
	94-95	95-96	96-97	97-98	98-99	99-00
1-3	0%	1%	0%	1%	0%	0%
4-7	30%	18%	28%	27%	23%	18%
8-10	70%	81%	72%	72%	78%	82%

* 1 = not at all, 10 = very much

In response to comments on feedback forms, we reintroduced a demonstration of *The Cochrane Library* at the workshops. Compared to the other parts of the workshop, this scored less well, and needs improving if it is to be retained.

Table 7 Participants' rating of the usefulness of the demonstration of *The Cochrane Library*

Rating* of usefulness	Year (% of total)
	99-00
1-3	7%
4-7	58%
8-10	35%

* 1 = not at all, 10 = very much

Participants are also invited to make general comments about the workshop. These comments cover a wide range of topics, and provide very useful feedback. They are difficult to summarise, but Table 8 shows loose categories.

The multidisciplinary, small group format remains popular, and the facilitators usually create a good atmosphere for discussion. Most of the requests for additions are for coverage of more topics, and we need to look at ways to cover more ground without more workshops. We have added a brief demonstration of RevMan to the workshop, showing a completed protocol, which seems to have been well received. There is still demand for examples of protocols, which suggests that the review groups are not supplying examples to their reviewers as asked. This needs to be followed up.

Table 8 Summary of comments about the workshops on Developing a Protocol workshop (1999-2000 only)

		Number
What was good about it?	Small group discussion	54
	Facilitators: expertise & guidance	26
	Multidisciplinary	25
	Problem solving	23
	Shared experiences/support from others	21
	Group size/informality/facilitator attention	16
	Clarifying own Protocol ideas	15
	Friendly atmosphere	8
	The food!	1

What was bad about it?	The room/venue (mostly too hot/cold!)	21
	Timing / need for another day	18
	Nothing	16
	Sessions too long	9
	Facilitators/demonstration	5
	Group size	5
	No examples of Protocols to take away	4
	Groups at mixed stages	4
	More trial search strategy needed	2
	The coffee!	2
	No practical sessions	1
	The map	1
What could be added?	Good example of Protocol to take away/view	14
	More time/another workshop	12
	More on inclusion /exclusion/ heterogeneity/ methodology/ search strategy	9
	Nothing	8
	Demo of RevMan	6
	Cochrane Library	5
	More info on day/Collaboration	4
	How to do a Review	3
	Time for writing Protocol/entering into RevMan	3
	Practical sessions	2
	Servicing articles/quality assessment	2
	Copy of PPT slides/Exercise disk	2
	Someone to talk about their recent review	1
	Worked example of appraisal of studies	1
Comments/suggestions	Excellent/Thanks	36
	Have a 3 rd workshop	9
	Example of Protocol to take away	5
	Good food	4
	More on Cochrane Library	3
	Send out brief notes on handbook – too long	3
	More fluid refreshments during the day	2
	Good facilitators	2
	Award CME points for workshops done	1
	Write Protocol as going along	1
	Discussion with facilitators via email	1
	Participants to have done some work on their protocol before attending	1
Demonstration of completed Protocol – was it useful?	Yes, extremely useful, thank you	35
	Yes but session could have been longer	5
	No	3
	Partly	2

3.2 Workshops on Getting a Review into RevMan

Participants continue to have little previous experience of using RevMan (Table 9). This means that the workshop has to begin at a very basic level.

Table 9 Participants' rating of their previous experience of using RevMan

Rating* of experience	Year (% of total)					
	94-95	95-96	96-97	97-98	98-99	99-00
1-3	82%	80%	84%	91%	80%	74%
4-7	19%	18%	16%	7%	19%	24%
8-10	0%	2%	0%	2%	2%	2%

* 1 = hadn't touched it before, 10 = had entered several reviews

Most participants reported that the workshop was helpful in terms of what they learned. (Table 10).

Table 10 Participants' rating of the RevMan workshop in terms of what they learned

Rating* of workshop	Year (% of total)					
	94-95	95-96	96-97	97-98	98-99	99-00
1-3	4%	2%	0%	3%	0%	0%
4-7	33%	32%	29%	35%	24%	33%
8-10	63%	67%	71%	62%	76%	67%

* 1 = outstandingly unhelpful, 10 = outstandingly helpful

The majority of participants also feel that the workshop helps them to use RevMan with their own review (Table 11). However, reviewers who come just to learn RevMan, rather than working on their own review, often find that they are comfortable with the program after using the self-directed RevMan exercise. This suggests that RevMan is now easy to learn, and we need to consider how to best use this workshop in the future.

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Table 11 Participants' rating of the usefulness of the workshop for getting their review into RevMan

Rating* of usefulness	Year (% of total)					
	94-95	95-96	96-97	97-98	98-99	99-00
1-3	4%	2%	6%	3%	2%	0%
4-7	52%	45%	27%	38%	24%	40%
8-10	44%	53%	68%	59%	74%	60%

* 1 = *outstandingly unhelpful*, 10 = *outstandingly helpful*

The software demonstration continues to be given moderate scores (Table 12). It is difficult to know how to make this more useful, so we aim to keep it short and move on to hands on experience.

Table 12 Participants' rating of the usefulness of the demonstration of RevMan

Rating* of demonstration	Year (% of total)					
	94-95	95-96	96-97	97-98	98-99	99-00
1-3	4%	4%	7%	2%	0%	1%
4-7	54%	46%	47%	51%	36%	46%
8-10	42%	50%	47%	47%	64%	53%

* 1 = *outstandingly unhelpful*, 10 = *outstandingly helpful*

Most participants enjoyed the workshop (Table 13).

Table 13 Participants' rating of their enjoyment of the RevMan workshop

Rating* of Enjoyment	Year (% of total)					
	94-95	95-96	96-97	97-98	98-99	99-00
1-3	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
4-7	22%	21%	11%	24%	23%	30%
8-10	78%	79%	90%	76%	77%	70%

* 1 = not at all, 10 = very much

Participants are also invited to make general comments, providing useful feedback.

Categories containing similar comments are shown in Table 14. The availability of practical advice while actually working on the review appears to be valued, although by a minority of participants. There remains unmet demand for help with methodology.

Table 14 Summary of comments about workshops on Getting a Review into RevMan workshop (1999-2000 only)

		Number
What was good about it?	Facilitators: Advice & Support One-to-one / size of group Hands on experience RevMan Exercise Ability to work on RevMan / own review Friendly / helpful atmosphere Facilities / Venue Pace of workshop Useful discussions Documentation Understanding of Cochrane philosophy	25 19 12 9 7 7 4 2 2 1 1
What was bad about it?	Venue and facilities Nothing A lot to absorb in one day / Course too short Day too long for people with previous RevMan experience I did not realise that the workshop was intended for people with completed data extraction until course information arrived Not enough on Statistics Poor instructions about file preparation from Reference Manager Demo of RevMan – a bit rapid Long wait to see facilitator	9 8 3 2 2 2 1 1 1
What could be added?	Nothing Session on Statistics and Meta-Analysis More time Start time for self-management of Cochrane Library More details of problems using RevMan and guides in the system Guidelines on extraction of data Session on data-sets for entry	7 4 1 1 1 1 1
Comments/suggestions	Thank you / Very helpful day Need another workshop More guidance on when to do a workshop Good food Map was poor Good RevMan exercise Need a methodological / statistics workshop Very good. Good instructors and hands on experience More as "Distance Learning Material"	11 4 3 2 1 1 1 1 1 1

3.3 Output of workshop participants on *The Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews*

At the end of each year of the training programme, we examine *The Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews* to see how many workshop participants have gone on to publish Cochrane reviews and protocols. Grouped by the year in which a person first attended a workshop, this is shown in Table 15. The majority of participants go on to publish a protocol or review within two years, with the eventual proportion publishing reviews on The Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews being about two thirds.

Table 15 Participants who have published at least one protocol or review in Issue 4/2000 of *The Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews*

	Year first attended a workshop					
	94-95	95-96	96-97	97-98	98-99	99-00
Participants with at least 1 review	64%	57%	50%	37%	11%	5%
Participants with no reviews but at least one protocol	2%	14%	14%	31%	41%	16%
Participants with no reviews or protocols	34%	29%	37%	31%	49%	79%

4. New developments

4.1 Finishing School for Systematic Reviews

Philippa Middleton and Phil Alderson worked together with Jon Deeks of the Oxford Systematic Review Development Programme (OSRDP) to develop a new workshop covering the analysis and interpretation of systematic reviews. This has now been run twice - once in Oxford and once in Cape Town as a satellite event at the Cochrane Colloquium. Facilitators came from a variety of backgrounds in the Cochrane Collaboration, with Jon Deeks and Julian Higgins leading most of the sessions.

The format of the workshop has been refined, using the experience gained in the two held so far. The programme for the next workshop, to be held in May 2001, is in Appendix I.

Further workshops are planned for Oxford and Melbourne during 2001. We also plan to produce a package of the slides and speakers' notes from this course for dissemination within the Cochrane Collaboration.

4.2 Distance Learning

Work has begun on distance learning materials for reviewers. The idea is that the material will help guide a reviewer through the review process, using the Reviewers' Handbook as the reference material, rather than duplicating it.

The first version of this is about half completed and is expected to be ready in mid 2001, as a collaboration between the UK and Australasian Cochrane Centres.

As part of this development, Phil Alderson updated the RevMan exercise originally prepared by David Badger of the Australasian Cochrane Centre. This has now been used in several workshops, and also seems suited for distance use.

5. Future Plans

The coming year promises to be challenging. We can expect more reviewers than ever at our workshops. The UK Training and Support Network faces some uncertainties over funding which may threaten the training activity of the four review groups. Finally, increasing evidence on the quality of published Cochrane reviews will mean action to address any problems with quality through training.

Future plans fall into the following areas:

5.1 Reviewer training

Protocol workshops will continue as they are, with minor changes reflecting feedback.

Now that RevMan 4.1 is in use, and we have the RevMan training exercise to introduce reviewers to it, we need to reorganize the workshops to make better use of the time currently spent on RevMan workshops. To do this we plan to survey all of last year's participants at these workshops, to see how they feel we could have used the time better.

The first version of the distance learning project should be complete by mid-2001. We need to start planning now for testing, disseminating and further developing it.

Packaging slides and notes from the 'Finishing School' will provide another option for reviewers who want to concentrate on analysis and interpretation.

5.2 Training editors and trainers

Training for editors is very limited. The UK Training and Support Network training days are open to editors; the UKCC subsidises places at courses run by (for instance) the Oxford Systematic Review Development Programme; and other training takes place at UK Contributors' Meetings and Colloquia. We plan to review the processes we use to advertise subsidised places, as uptake has not been good.

Iain Chalmers attended a strategy meeting of the World Association of Medical Editors (WAME) in early 2001 in Bellagio, Italy. The Association has decided to prepare training materials for editors, which will be available on its website. This will be a useful opportunity for editors of Cochrane collaborative review groups to access training material relevant to some of their tasks.

We also need to ensure that, if we change the format of the RevMan workshops, we provide training to enough facilitators to present the various topics.

5.3 Training and support of editorial base staff

The UK Training and Support Network training days have been aimed at meeting the need for training and support of editorial base staff. During 2001, we will review how best we cover this need, given the increased workload on those groups involved in organizing workshops for reviewers.

APPENDIX I

Systematic Review Development Programme Finishing School for Systematic Reviews

12.3		Lunch
1.15		Welcome and Introductions
1.3	1	Introduction to meta-analyses
2	2	Summary statistics for binary data
2.3	3	Weighting and combining trials
3.15		Tea
3.45	4	Issues related to the unit of analysis
4.3	5	Data extraction
5.15	6	Meta-analysis of continuous data
6		END OF DAY ONE
		Day Two – 31st May
8.3	7	Interpreting a review
9.3	8	Choice of statistics for a binary review
10	9	Selecting a statistical method and sensitivity analyses
10.3		Coffee
11	10	Publication bias
11.3	11	Study quality
12	12	Beyond the RCT, tradeoffs and adverse outcomes
12.3		Lunch
1.3	13	Methodological and clinical heterogeneity
2	14	Statistical heterogeneity
2.45	15	Incorporating and investigating heterogeneity
3.3		Tea
4	16	Individual patient data meta-analyses
4.3	17	Review clinic
5.3		END OF DAY TWO
		Day Three – 1st June
8.3	18	Interpreting a meta-analysis in context
9.3	19	Reporting inferences and uncertainty
10	20	Re-expression of statistical summaries
10.3		Coffee
11	21	Writing practical - results and conclusions
12	22	Applicability and strength of evidence
12.3		Lunch
1.3	23	Expression
2	24	Summing up
3		FINISH

APPENDIX II

NHS R&D PROGRAMME FUNDING FOR UKCC PROGRAMME OF WORKSHOPS

Training for Cochrane Reviewers
November 1999 to December 2000

Direct costs of workshops – 1999/2000 (total 9)	£
Hire of seminar rooms, computer facilities	2,050
Travel/accommodation for facilitators and staff	768
Catering for participants and facilitators	898
Per diem allowances for facilitators	1,000
Training materials/postage	2,850
Total direct costs	£7,566

Average direct costs per workshop – 1999/2000	£841
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