

Project B – Online text editor

B.1 Background

Ninety-four Cochrane entities prepare and maintain their module text through an online editor in Archie. This module text is submitted to Wiley-Blackwell and is published in The Cochrane Library under About Cochrane/Cochrane Groups. In contrast, the text of a Cochrane review is edited in RevMan 5, software that needs to be installed locally onto a PC. It is not possible to edit the text of a review online through Archie.

B.1.1 Module text

An entity's module document is published in The Cochrane Library. Although the text of the module document can be edited online, the current text editor has limited editing capabilities, and does not allow an entity's module document to be published as professionally as it could be. There are also many reports of problems when substantial edits are made to the text of a Cochrane Review Group's (CRG's) module document, usually around the quarterly module submission deadline when most of the editing of the module text takes place. For example, users have experienced the system freezing, had problems with line spacing and headings or had errors when saving the text, resulting in the loss of work. Editors of the module text, usually Review Group Co-ordinators (RGCs), have to find ways of working around these problems, which in many cases can be frustrating and time consuming. The Editorial Management Advisory Group (EMAG) and others have asked for greater flexibility in the preparation and formatting of the module text, e.g., to be able to include tables. These requests have been documented and in many cases approved already, but the current online text editor cannot accommodate them.

B.1.2 Review text

RevMan 5 is the key authoring tool for the preparation and maintenance of Cochrane reviews. It includes the statistical package used for the conduct and display of analyses in the reviews and considerable functionality beyond the ability to edit text. In order to use RevMan 5, it is necessary for authors and editorial teams to install the software locally onto their PCs.

However, there are many examples worldwide of institutions that will not allow authors to install RevMan on their work PCs because of local restrictions on the installation of third party software. It is usually possible to obtain the necessary permission but, even then, the installation has to be carried out by the institution's IT staff. An online text editor for the review text would give authors access to the text of their reviews and allow authors greater flexibility to work on their reviews when away from their offices without having to open or install RevMan 5 onto the computer they are using.

B.2 Proposal and discussion

We propose the replacement of the current online text editor for the module document, to resolve the problems with it and to allow entities greater flexibility in the preparation and presentation of their module documents. The current guidelines for preparing the module document (for CRGs and all other Cochrane entities) were prepared before Archie was introduced and, in some areas, reflect the restrictions of the software available at that time.

When considering a new online text editor for the module text, it makes sense to include the requirements for an online text editor for Cochrane reviews.

B.3 Summary of recommendations

The IMS team should identify a more advanced online text editor that will cover the needs of editors of the text of the module document as well as of authors (to allow them to edit the text of their reviews online, if this is approved by the Collaboration). In choosing a new online text editor, the following should be borne in mind:

- The editor for the module text should improve the ability to use data already stored in Archie (e.g. a list of new reviews) so as not to duplicate work. It should be able to prepare tables and incorporate other standard editing features such as heading styles, yellow marker and track changes.

- The editor for the review text needs to have all the editing functions that are currently available in RevMan 5, including links, nested lists and symbols.
- The IMS team should liaise with the RevMan Advisory Group, EMAG and the Editor in Chief to identify all the requirements for improvements to the quality of module documents and the text of reviews so that these can be addressed by the new online editor.

B.4 Resource implications

The project will depend on the successful identification of an editor component that can be customised to fulfil the requirements. If the editor is open source there will be no direct software costs involved. If not, the costs for a licence fee will need be added. The staff resources set out here cover development of the module text and the review text editors, but additional resources may be required if some features need special development (e.g., track changes).

- Analysis (including identification of a suitable editor tool): 2 FTE weeks
- Development (customisation of editor component, conversion to and from XML): 6-10 FTE weeks
- Testing: 2 FTE weeks
- Documentation: 2-3 FTE weeks

B.5 Impact statement

A more advanced online text editor will:

- allow entities to improve the quality of their module documents, giving them a more professional look when published, and helping users to obtain relevant material more easily;
- allow entities to concentrate on the content of the module document rather than spending time trying to cope with the problems with the current editor;

provide authors with greater flexibility in the preparation and maintenance of their Cochrane reviews. This might lead to more timely submissions of draft reviews for editorial approval and faster correction of minor errors in reviews for publication.