Reviewer's report

Title: Towards a methodology for cluster searching to provide conceptual and contextual "richness" for complex interventions: case study (CLUSTER)

Version: 2 Date: 29 July 2013

Reviewer: James Thomas

Reviewer's report:

The authors have done an excellent job in revising and clarifying their paper. I think it is much stronger as a result, and its contribution to the field is clear. While the authors don't recommend that CLUSTER be adopted instantly in all reviews, I am sure it will be widely used! My comments are below – mainly items for the authors to consider, but nothing to suggest the paper is not ready for publication.

Discretionary Revisions (which are recommendations for improvement but which the author can choose to ignore)

1. Page 12, “associated with a specific study.”: Is 'associated' a strong enough word here? Maybe something which encapsulates relevance / direct & indirect relevance / etc is needed? I'm thinking that this suggests all the associated papers that describe a study, but you're also suggesting something that goes beyond this, and identifies papers which have no 'knowledge' of this specific study at all, but can shed light in terms of their theoretical ancestry? (I think??)

2. Page 13, end of central paragraph re EPPI-Centre method: Can you reference this? (I'm fairly sure I agree, though would say "...is SOMETIMES sufficiently substantial...", and of course it depends on the question you're answering... which of course means that the process evaluations aren't completely unrelated, but may not have a direct, mechanistic, relationship.)

3. Page 14, top paragraph: I think I'd be more provisional here. The range of mechanisms which "work" for hospitals MIGHT "work" for schools, but we'd need to be prepared for entirely different underpinning mechanisms to be at play, even if the outcomes were similar. (I'm sure you know Ray Pawson's piece on naming and shaming, which is relevant here.)

4. Page 15: paragraph 1: Just a comment, that you have a huge number of duplicates. Does it suggest, possibly, that those databases are covering much the same area and giving you much the same 'perspective'? Alan Gomersall finds a north American bias in those databases and recommends others for searching (Gomersall A, Cooper C: Database selection bias and its affect on systematic reviews: a United Kingdom perspective. Workshop at the Joint Cochrane and Campbell Colloquium; 2010 Oct 18–22; Keystone, Colorado, USA [abstract]. Cochrane Database Syst Rev 2010, Supplement:156) - especially if you're looking to inform UK policy / practice.
Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

5. Top of page 6: insert comma after ‘review’ (first line).
6. Page 13 no closing “ in subtitle

Major Compulsory Revisions (which the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

None

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests