Reviewer's report

Title: Training practitioners in preparing systematic reviews: a cross-sectional survey of participants in the Australasian Cochrane Centre training program

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Reviewer: Rob Herbert

Level of interest: A paper whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Advice on publication: Accept after discretionary revisions

This paper reports a survey of participants in the Australasian Cochrane Centre's training programs in systematic reviews. It aims (a), to determine if educational needs of participants are being met, and (b), to explore reasons for non-completion of reviews.

The second of these two aims is likely to be of broad interest. Why do some people who have sufficient interest in conducting reviews to attend a training course subsequently not publish a review? Promoters of systematic reviewers will want to know the answer to this question.

The first question, that of whether the educational needs of participants were met, is likely to be of much narrower interest, and perhaps only of real interest to the Australasian Cochrane Centre. The training program is not described in any detail, so readers cannot use measures of participants' impressions of the training program to help design other training programs. Moreover, the analysis focuses on participants' perceptions of barriers to training in systematic reviews, yet the participants are just the people who did not have sufficient barriers to prevent participation. Arguably it would be of greater interest to survey people who wanted to attend but couldn't. For these two reasons I would suggest (recommendation #1) that the first aim be dropped, and the paper concentrate on the interesting and important question of impediments to completion of reviews. This recommendation is a "discretionary revision" not a "compulsory revision".

Other discretionary revisions:

#2. In the abstract, the "Background" is an aim rather than a background. Either re-title this section as "Aims" or give some background.

#3. In the Methods describe, in a sentence or two, that respondents were required to agree or disagree with a series of statements, and that opportunity was also provided for open-ended responses.

#4. Perhaps it is overstating things to say that it is "striking" that most participants perceived a lack of time hindered completion of reviews. Everybody is busy! Perhaps the more interesting way to look at
this data is to consider if participants who had not completed reviews were more likely to perceive lack of time as an issue than participants who had completed reviews (an odds ratio would be one way of describing this). This might provide a better indication of the degree to which lack of time impeded review completion.

**Competing interests:**

One of the authors is on the advisory panel of a centre which the reviewer directs.