Reviewer's report

Title: Time to rethink the systematic review catechism? Moving from "what works" to "what happens"

Version: 2 Date: 19 January 2015

Reviewer: Jennie Popay

Reviewer's report:

1. I think the author has adequately addressed all the comments made by myself and other reviewers. I have a few very simple comments from a rapid read though of the revised text which I hope the author will find helpful but I would recommend publication of this paper in revised form.

2. There are one or two typos or clumsy phrasing in the new text – for example repeat of simpler and simple in first line of second highlighted paragraph on page 10. Worth another read through perhaps?

3. I think the revised title is more interesting and a better pointer to the content than the original reference to ‘challenges’

4. I wonder if the reference to Bayesian perspective in the abstract without explanation would be understandable to all readers. It would be helpful to added the phrase from page 10: “a Bayesian perspective that would aim to assemble evidence - of different types, if necessary – in order to inform decisions”

5. To address my second point about the interrelated nature of the challenges if the word ‘inter-related’ was inserted before ‘challenges’ on the second to last line on page 1 of main text

6. The additional text in the first challenge around focused question works well but the author might consider changing the way this challenge is labeled – as he says he isn’t arguing that the question should not be focused but rather than the focus should shift from a narrowly focused ‘what works’ question to a broader focused what happens question

7. Ref page 8: I described the handmaiden role for qualitative research in a plenary presentation to the Cochrane Collaboration Colloquia 2007 I think – maybe could be referenced?

8. I don’t agree with the author that all current reviews of complex interventions actually do consider ‘what has happened’ either explicitly or implicitly. It is letting many reviewers ‘off the challenge hook ‘to say this Some do but not all – maybe qualify?