



Cochrane
St Albans House
57–59 Haymarket
London
SW1Y 4QX
UK

T +44(0) 207 183 7503

13 November 2018

Re: Letter to Governing Board on “four major policy issues for Cochrane” received 8 November 2018

Dear Jos, Gerd, Matteo, Jani, Chris, Mark, Caroline, Lotty, Tianjing, Gerald, Nicole, Barbara, Nancy, Philipp and Małgorzata,

Thank you for your letter detailing “four major policy issues for Cochrane”. We have, in fact, already corresponded with some of you about these issues. Our plans are to bring them to the Board (including the newly elected Board members) in January 2019, as well as to solicit input from your representatives on the [Cochrane Council](#).

We have already asked the Central Executive Team to investigate options for developing an interactive platform through which members can engage in discussion and debate (to supplement or replace the existing online discussion forums), and staff are looking into options. We strongly believe that increasing member engagement in Cochrane is critical. This is high on our agenda and the Board had planned to have a major strategy discussion about it at its Edinburgh meeting in September, but for other well-publicized reasons had to turn its attention elsewhere. It will now be an important topic for discussion at the Governance Meetings in Krakow, in April 2019.

Clearly, we agree that it is important that the Board considers the whole range of views received from the entire Cochrane membership. This issue – how best to take into account the views of different members, bring those views together, consider alternative options and come to a decision on issues related to policies and procedures – was a topic the Board debated a few years ago. It was carefully considered in the 2016 governance review, during which members were extensively consulted. One of the challenges was to find a forum in which all constituencies within Cochrane were represented, and where those elected could legitimately represent the interests of those who elected them.

The solution, and one of the key elements of the Collaboration’s 2016 governance reforms, was the establishment of the Cochrane Council. The whole essence of this democratically elected, representative Council, is to provide input on behalf of various Cochrane Groups (e.g. Centre Directors, Co-ordinating Editors, Consumers, Methods, Managing Editors, Information Specialists, Fields, Authors and others) to the Board’s high-level strategic decision-making, and to advise the Central Executive Team on the operationalization of Cochrane’s strategic plans.

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The reason the Council is so important is that we would like all the suggestions in your letter to be debated and challenged, and for other members of the community to have the opportunity to give alternative views, or to support your views. In that way, everyone has a fair chance to contribute.

The Council can provide the forum for this. The Council may also want us to establish other mechanisms.

The Board will be asking the Council for consultation on several important issues, including many of those raised in your letter, and taking appropriate action based on their input. Some of the issues which we believe the Council is best placed to advise on include the following:

- Which issues are of most importance to the membership as a whole? Can the Council propose a mechanism whereby these can be openly discussed and debated, and the outputs of those discussions then fed back to the Board?
- What is the Council's preferred method for encouraging 'online' interaction and debate (is this via forums, or some other, more modern method based around the widespread use of smartphone technology for this sort of activity)?
- When creating a culture of open discussion and increased involvement, what should a Code of Conduct for members look like?
- Funds have always been made available for projects designed to improve the quality and number of Cochrane's outputs. Should the Council have a role in advising on the use of these funds for (a) projects, (b) review production, (c) methods development, (d) stakeholder interaction, (e) knowledge translation, etc.? If so, how would the Council wish to see that operationalized?
- Considering the broad strategy under which Cochrane is working (*Strategy to 2020*), which policies does the Council want to comment on as a priority, and what does it wish to say?
- As the Board begins to consider strategy beyond 2020 it had been our intention to consult with the Council and – through them – with the wider membership. Is this acceptable?

Perhaps the key issue is: How can the Council be sure that it is properly representing the views of the whole membership? With this in mind, we strongly encourage you to communicate with your elected Council members, share your concerns, and suggest solutions to some of the issues you have raised in your letter.

The Board recognizes the importance of open communication within Cochrane. We acknowledge that you feel strongly about the issues you raise in your letter and believe that others may have equally strongly held, but in some cases differing, views on these and many other important topics. We want to encourage you to work with the Council and develop some concrete proposals. Proposals for improvements that will enhance Cochrane's ability to deliver high-quality synthesized evidence to the public in an open, collaborative and transparent environment.

With very best wishes,

Marguerite Koster
Martin Burton
Co-Chairs, on behalf of the Cochrane Governing Board

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