Chapter 15 - Time-sensitive qualitative evidence syntheses

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Key points box

- The increasing need for time-sensitive qualitative evidence syntheses (QESs) parallels wider developments in rapid reviews, overviews of reviews and living reviews.
- The conduct of time-sensitive QESs is an emerging and rapidly evolving area of methods development
- This chapter provides guidance on four types of time-sensitive QES: rapid QES, the QES update, the overview of existing QESs and the living QES.
- Maintaining rigour and relevance when faced by time constraints is challenging
- Review authors commonly focus on the technical processes of study identification and quality assessment when analysis, synthesis and interpretation may benefit most from extra attention.
- Using a time-sensitive QES that is well conducted with acknowledged limitations for decision-making is preferable to using one that is not fit for purpose or not using one at all

15.1 Introduction

Conducting time-sensitive reviews is a key priority for Cochrane and Campbell. Cochrane has invested in a rapid reviews method group to support the development of methods to meet the needs of decision-makers. Decision-makers typically have a "window of opportunity" within which to usefully incorporate evidence and review authors seek to

deliver against this “just in time” opportunity. Similar to other review types, qualitative evidence synthesis (QES) review authors face the challenge of timely delivery of robust findings whilst optimising rigour and relevance.

This chapter makes a new and important contribution to the field as the conduct of time sensitive QESs is an emerging and rapidly evolving area of methods development. Concerns have been raised about whether time pressures may impact negatively on the quality of the final synthesis (Thorne, 2017). Review authors commonly focus on the technical processes of study identification and quality assessment when it is analysis, synthesis and interpretation that may benefit most from extra attention. Although there has been considerable recent work to develop methods, there is a lack of methodological clarity, evaluation and detailed guidance for review authors to follow. Some methods and processes are also in the development and refinement stage and cannot yet be recommended for use without further specification and evaluation and there are not yet any examples of a living QES. There are also several different methods (some still evolving) for sampling studies (Ames, Glenton, & Lewin, 2019) Fewer studies take less time to synthesise but it is unclear which sampling methods are best suited for use in a time-sensitive QES. Despite these challenges, increasing numbers of QESs and review authors skilled in time-efficient delivery offer opportunities to further shape methodological development, policy and practice (Toye, Seers, Hannink, & Barker, 2017). In addition, the use of overviews of QESs to provide a synthesis of the existing review-level qualitative evidence is expected to increase as the pool of systematic reviews continues to grow.

This chapter aims to provide additional clarity on the methods and possible types of time-sensitive reviews together with guidance on their conduct. This guidance is important because of the fledgling nature of some methods and the rapidity with which crisis situations, such as Covid, Ebola and Zika unfold, matched by developments in rapid synthesis methods, make “urgent reviews” increasingly requested by decision-makers. Ongoing methods development, clarification and refinement offers potential benefits beyond urgent situations, such as in resource-constrained contexts where abbreviated or accelerated methods become both attractive and feasible. The requirements of decision-makers may make it preferable that time-sensitive QESs are conducted in conjunction with or alongside time-sensitive reviews of intervention effects generating additional challenges for co-ordination and integration.

Four types of time-sensitive QES and associated methods are outlined in this chapter: the rapid QES (rapid QES), the QES update, and the living QES and the overview of multiple existing QESs. All four types are mirrored by intervention review counterparts. This chapter starts by defining each of the four types of time-sensitive QES and outlines the contexts in which a time-sensitive QES might be carried out. The common time-saving review

processes for the four types are then discussed before looking in detail at the specific requirements for each type. The chapter concludes by considering issues of equity, diversity and inclusion, stakeholder engagement and involvement and reflexivity.

15.2 Types of time-sensitive QESs and considerations for use

The four main types of time-sensitive QES – rapid QES, the QES update, the overview of multiple existing QESs are defined below (Table 15.1).

Table 15.1 Four types of time-sensitive qualitative evidence synthesis

Review type	Definition
Rapid QES	Accelerates bringing together of findings from primary qualitative research within a systematic review through streamlining or omitting specific methods to produce evidence for stakeholders in resource-efficient manner. (Garritty et al., 2021)
QES Updates	New edition of a published [QES] with changes that can include new data, new methods, or new analyses and updated synthesis to previous edition [Adapted from (Garner et al., 2016)].
Overviews of multiple existing QESs	Use explicit and systematic methods to search for and identify multiple [QESs] on related research questions on the same topic for the purpose of extracting, analysing and synthesising their findings [Adapted from (Michelle Pollock, Fernandes, Becker, Pieper, & Hartling, 2018)].
Living QES	High-quality, up-to-date online summaries of [qualitative] health research updated as new [qualitative] research becomes available [Adapted from (Elliott et al., 2014)].

Although each type of time-sensitive QES meets specific needs they share similar considerations when deciding whether a time-sensitive approach is needed (Table 15.2).

Table 15.2 Considerations for whether a time-sensitive QES is justified

Consideration	Question	Response
Criticality of topic*	Is the topic high impact, wide spread, high importance or volatile[1] to new perspectives?	If the topic is high impact or volatile, consider a *rapid QES* or *QES update*. If the topic is high importance consider a *living QES*
State of knowledge	Does the index QES** include all available studies (so that additional studies matter), or incompletely analyse and synthesise included studies (so that perspectives/contexts/ themes are missing or under-supported)? What is the added value of additional perspectives/contexts/themes?	If the index QES included all available studies then consider a *QES update of new studies*; if incompletely analysed/synthesised included studies then consider a *QES update* that reinterprets previous and new studies

[1] "volatile" may either refer to the characteristics of the topic (e.g. political sensitivity, speed of development/change etc) or the characteristics of the literature (e.g. high incidence of new studies, potential impact of new data etc).

Uncertainty	How long are uncertainties regarding the evidence base likely to persist? Are current QESs (if available) limited by poor study quality and data of insufficient richness?	If uncertainties are short- to medium term consider a *QES update*; if uncertainties are longer term consider a *living QES*
Incidence of new literature*	How prolific is the literature? How broad is the scope? At what rate are new studies being produced?	If the literature is prolific, consider a *QES update*, an ov*erview of multiple QESs* or a *living QES*
Mechanisms for update	How feasible are (i) alerts to new citations, (ii) periodic search updates or (iii) use of semi-automated study tagging?	If mechanisms for update are identifiable, consider a *living QES*
Sustainability*	What infrastructure is available (staff time/resources) to support an index QES** and (potentially) ongoing updates?	If a sustainable infrastructure is available, consider a *living QES*
* Items marked with an asterisk are most likely to determine the interval between review versions ** In a time sensitive context the "index" QES is the first version of the QES, whether planned or already completed		

15.3 Time saving processes and procedures

Time saving processes and procedures are critical to all time-sensitive reviews and these are discussed below according to stage of review (formulation of review, identification of evidence, data extraction and assessment of methodological limitations, synthesis and interpretation of evidence and reporting). Streamlined processes and procedures, although fundamental to time-sensitive reviews, can similarly be adopted for standard QESs provided the review authors acknowledge the limitations of shortcuts or efficiencies.

15.3.1 Formulation of review

Effective team working is essential, involving a shared understanding of tasks and effective communication. Processes developed within longer timeframes need to be tested for usability in time-sensitive reviews. *Rapid QES* and *Living QES* are facilitated by hive working – capitalising on a distributed workforce (Biesty et al., 2020). Practically, this can expand otherwise limited organisational capacity. File sharing technologies and web conferencing facilities make collaboration possible. Review authors may even capitalise upon time zone differences – extending the cumulative working day by passing a time-critical task or manuscript across successive time zones.

A protocol communicates task allocation, in addition to safeguarding against bias. A key early task is to develop a protocol that includes review questions, SPICE, PICo or PerSPE©TiF (see Chapter), and eligibility criteria. Eligibility criteria, generated together with input from key stakeholders, may readily roll-over for use in a *QES update* or a *living QES*. Using a protocol template helps to standardise processes and speed up early stages of a *rapid QES*. Cochrane and Campbell provide a standardised template for reporting a QES

protocol and review (see Chapter 20). However, no template currently exists for an *overrview of multiple QESs*.

15.3.2 Identification of evidence

An information specialist is key to all time-sensitive reviews and, optimally, will be a full-team member, acknowledged by co-author status. Under time pressures their involvement becomes almost mandatory – not only to achieve time-savings but also to assure quality. The Cochrane Rapid Reviews Group specifies involvement of an information specialist. While information specialists who specialise in qualitative research are comparatively rare, skills are generic and transferable to time-sensitive reviews (see also Chapter 5). *QES updates* or *living QES* require access to saved or published search strategies which are briefly reviewed before being re-run. *Rapid QES* may need to use a methodological filter for qualitative studies, privileged for specificity while a*n overview of multiple QESs* needs to privilege review sources (e.g. Epistemonikos) and use methodological filters that target review articles. Illustrative search filters for different types of QES and to achieve the desired level of sensitivity and specificity are shown in Table 15..

Periodic current awareness alerts on bibliographic databases (e.g. PubMed) and search platforms such as Google Scholar signal new studies for inclusion in *QES updates* and *living QESs*. Review teams producing *QES updates* or *living QESs* can run strings of search terms periodically and/or store individual keywords or phrases, titles of known publications or names of experts as alerts for new publications.

Large one-off searches for each new review topic are time-consuming. *Living QESs* and *QES updates* benefit from study classifiers for qualitative research studies (Thomas et al., 2021). Study filters should optimise sensitivity and/or specificity to meet the needs of the QES (Table 15.3). Review authors for all time-sensitive QES types should start by searching for existing QESs to minimise research waste. If review authors identify an existing QES this could negate a need for a *rapid QES* or a *QES update.*

Table 15.4 – Illustrative search filters for different search purposes

QES Type	High Specificity Filter	Optimised Sensitivity/Specificity filter	High Sensitivity Filter
Rapid QES	qualitative.tw. OR themes.tw. OR qualitative research/ [Ovid] qualitative[Title/Abstract] OR themes[Title/Abstract] OR qualitative research [MeSH Term] [PubMed]	interview:.mp. OR experience:.mp. OR qualitative.tw. OR qualitative research/ [Ovid] interview*[Title/Abstract] OR interviews[MeSH:noexp] OR experience*[Text Word] OR qualitative[Title/Abstract] OR qualitative research [MeSH Term] [PubMed]	interview:.tw. OR px.fs. OR exp health services administration OR qualitative research/ [Ovid] interview*[Title/Abstract] OR psychology[Subheading:noexp] OR health services administration[MeSH Term] OR qualitative research[MeSH Term] [PubMed]
Living QES	interview:.mp. OR px.fs. OR qualitative.tw. OR qualitative research/ [Ovid]	UTHealth [University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston]. Search Filters for Various Databases: Ovid Medline. Last Updated: 28.11.2018. Houston, US-TX: UTHealth. http://libguides.sph.uth.tmc.edu/search_filters/ovid_medline_filters	interview:.tw. or px.fs. or exp health services administration/ OR qualitative research/ [Ovid]
QES Update	UTHealth [University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston]. Search Filters for Various Databases: Ovid Medline. Last Updated: 28.11.2018. Houston, US-TX: UTHealth. http://libguides.sph.uth.tmc.edu/search_filters/ovid_medline_filters		
Overviews of multiple QESs	Hendricks Filter (Hendricks, Eshun-Wilson, & Rohwer, 2021)	Toye Filter (Toye et al., 2017)	Cochrane Qualitative and Implementation MethodsGroup study filter (See Chapter 5)

Carefully designed, standardized forms for screening the results of searches are key to time-sensitive reviews; *QES updates* and *living QES* in particular benefit from pre-existing templates. For example, the review authors can use a standardized title and abstract form for screening. For *rapid QES*, the entire screening team would pilot 30-50 abstracts to calibrate and test the new form. Once the form is finalised two reviewers can dual screen a minimum of 20% of abstracts, with conflict resolution. Dual screeners may also surface different viewpoints on the phenomenon of interest (A. Booth, Carroll, Ilott, Low, & Cooper, 2013). Similar considerations apply to full text screening. For *rapid QES* a standardized form is piloted using 5-10 full-text articles to calibrate and test the review form. The review authors should target aspects of screening at highest risk for overlooked or misclassified studies and harness software, such as Covidence, EPPI-Reviewer, Rayyan or Excel drop-down menus, to achieve screening efficiencies. A tool such as Covidence or Rayyan for example can move experienced review author sift rates to the upper reaches of 80-120 items per hour. In a time-sensitive review it can be useful to code and then map studies meeting inclusion criteria either to prioritise studies within a comprehensive set of full-texts or to inform selection of a purposive sample (e.g. using SPICE characteristics, data richness/contextual thickness or methodological quality (see chapter 6 and 7)

15.3.3 Data extraction and assessment of methodological limitations

Processes to extract data from study reports should target the most relevant data to address the review question. Review authors should avoid over extracting data (which can happen due to the ease with which data can be cut and pasted from a pdf article). A review team could re-use the thematic labels used by authors of included studies to create a framework to speed up data extraction. A framework or conceptual model may help to classify and code data efficiently (Chapter 9). Some review authors seek to save time by extracting data direct into tables in a final report, rather than going through interim data extraction. However, “raw” data of variable length and format, may detract from the final presentation and shows that little analysis, synthesis, and interpretation has been undertaken to support decision making by end users. Again, review authors should view the whole process not simply a quick win for an isolated stage. See also Chapter 8 for additional information on data extraction.

Rapid approaches to assessment of methodological limitations either reduce the cognitive load (by using simplified checklists or key quality markers) or facilitate rapid recording of responses. For example, an Excel spreadsheet can use drop-down menus to generate traffic light responses ready for pasting into a Word table. Rapid approaches to quality assessment include using the CASP tool (Long, French, & Brooks, 2020). The QUART tool has been used in rapid reviews (e.g. Scotland et al., 2019), but it is primarily designed as a reporting checklist and has only been used as a starting point to identify reported methodological description in included studies. When QUART was used in the review by Scotland and colleagues, the review authors subsequently applied their expert judgement to appraise

methodological quality of the included studies and the assessment criteria were not reported as to how these judgements were made. Reporting tools are not recommended for assessing methodological limitations (see Chapter 7). In general, review authors are not encouraged to dispense with assessment of methodological limitations as a time-saving measure as this precludes the use of GRADE-CERQual or the development of robust recommendations. Application of GRADE-CERQual requires an assessment of methodological limitations using one of a few selected tools (e.g. CAMELOT, CASP) and reporting the level of methodological concerns at individual study level to subsequently feed into an assessment of methodological limitations of studies contributing to a finding (see Chapter 13 on GRADE-CERQual). However, where a QES serves a scoping, descriptive or mapping function it may not always be necessary to assess methodological limitations in full. A clear justification should always be provided for whether and how methodological limitations have been assessed.

15.3.4 Synthesis and interpretation of evidence

Shortcut approaches to analysis and synthesis may prove a false economy given that a superficial synthesis reflects poorly on the review authors (Thorne, 2017). A review team should be clear as to the extent to which the review commissioner expects a descriptive summary (perhaps, to sustain the commissioners' own observations) or an analytic interpretation that moves closer to recommendations.

Framework synthesis is recognised as a potentially speedy process of coding, particularly where the framework represents a good fit for the data (Dixon-Woods, 2011). However, (i) gains in speed may be lost in identifying a suitable framework (A. Booth & Carroll, 2015) or in a false start from selecting an inappropriate framework, and (ii) the review authors may be tempted to squeeze data into inappropriate categories. However, on balance, framework approaches can bring about considerable time-savings (**Chapters 9)**. Where a framework is not readily apparent, or where review authors do not feel comfortable in using external coding within their team, thematic synthesis offers a viable alternative (Chapter 10).

Use of additional tools for rapid synthesis is shaped by personal preference. Some review authors find use of review management or qualitative data analysis software to manage the review straightforward and speedy, others stick to generic software such as documents and spreadsheets. Before deciding, review authors should not only consider the synthesis process but also time spent producing reports and presentations.

20.4 Rapid QES

Limited guidance exists on how to conduct a rapid QES although generic guidance for conduct of rapid reviews is useful (Garritty et al., 2021). The National Health Service (NHS) Organisation Healthcare Improvement Scotland has produced a specific guidance document for conducting rapid QESs (Scotland, 2019). The Canadian Agency for Drugs and

Technologies in Health has also reported their extensive experience in conducting this type of rapid review (Majid & Weeks, 2020). Methodologists have identified specific shortcuts (Biesty et al., 2020; Campbell, Weeks, Booth, Kaunelis, & Smith, 2019; Majid & Weeks, 2020). Common approaches include abbreviated search strategies, date and language restrictions and the use of a single reviewer for screening, data extraction and assessment of methodological limitations (Campbell et al., 2019). Published rapid QESs have employed descriptive approaches to synthesis (for example by undertaking the first two stages of a thematic synthesis see Chapter 10), more frequently than interpretive approaches, such as meta-ethnography (Campbell et al., 2019) (Chapter 11). Rapid QES authors can learn both from rapid intervention effects reviews and from rapid methods of *primary qualitative research* (Johnson & Vindrola-Padros, 2017; Luciani et al., 2021; Tremblay et al., 2021; Vindrola-Padros et al., 2020).

An overview of practical considerations when undertaking a rapid QES are outlined in Box 15.1 and these are discussed in more detail in sections 15.4.1 to 15.4.5 below.

Box 15.1 Practical considerations for the conduct of rapid Qualitative Evidence Synthesis rapid QES

Formulation of review

1. Seek to ensure involvement of knowledge user stakeholders, even when the QES is abbreviated or accelerated; especially when setting the review question and refining the topic to ensure key perspectives are included and to secure a mandate for key review decisions.
2. Use templates to fast-track writing of a protocol, while acknowledging topic-specific requirements and resource-specific deviations. The protocol should be publicly available and may be registered.

Identification of evidence

Together with knowledge users:

3. Clearly define the *included perspectives.* A rapid QES may need to limit the *number of perspectives*, focusing on those most important for decision-making.
4. Define if other types of studies (partial relevance, indirect relevance, unclear relevance) are to be used in the absence of directly relevant evidence. A rapid QES may focus on direct evidence, except when only indirect evidence is available. See chapter 13 for additional information on different types of relevance.
5. Consider including multiple QESs within a review of reviews.
6. Consider *privileging rich/thick qualitative studies*; consider a stepwise approach to inclusion of qualitative data and explore the possibility of sampling (see chapter 6). Be aware that strategies for optimising the rigour of included studies may result in the omission of insights from important contexts/populations.
7. Involve an information specialist (e.g. librarian) in prioritising sources and search methods.
8. Consider limiting database searching to MEDLINE and Embase (if available) and, if resources allow, searches of one or two specialized (subject or regional) databases.
9. Even when resources are limited, consider factoring in time for peer review of at least one search strategy.
10. Selectively target appropriate types of grey literature and supplemental searches, including citation chaining, especially for diffuse topics.
11. Use pre-prepared, pre-tested title and abstract forms to limit the scale of piloting, calibration and testing.

12. Target and prioritise identified risks for each specific rapid QES and corresponding quality control procedures (for example, use of additional reviewers and percentages for double screening) in preference to extensive generic quality assurance procedures.

Appraisal of evidence

13. Use or adapt a pre-prepared pre-tested standardized tool as far as possible such as CAMELOT (see chapter 7)
14. Identify likely risks to trustworthiness of findings and focus quality control procedures on specific threats (for example, use of additional reviewers and percentages for double screening).
15. Use a single reviewer to extract data using a piloted form, with a second reviewer for checking, or code data directly from full-text articles, again with checking. Limit data extraction to minimal essential items. Consider re-using data extracted from primary studies included in previous QESs.
16. Use a single reviewer to assess methodological limitations, with verification of judgments (and support statements) by a second reviewer.

Synthesis and interpretation of evidence

17. Favour conducting the first two stages of a thematic synthesis (chapter 10) or a framework synthesis to produce translated synthesised findings that stay close to the included studies (chapter 9), except when data transformation and theory generation is a priority (meta-ethnography, chapter 11 or analytical thematic synthesis, chapter 10).
18. Consider whether a conceptual model, theory or framework offers a rapid way to organise/code/interpret/present findings (chapters 3 and 4).
19. Target GRADE-CERQual assessments at findings most critical to decision-making (chapter 13). Additional reviewers could verify all, or a sample of, assessments. Consider reusing GRADE-CERQual assessments from previous QESs if findings are relevant and of demonstrable high quality.

Additional considerations

20. Use review management software or qualitative analysis management software to streamline the process.

15.4.1 *Formulation of review*

A rapid QES is not defined simply by the speed of its methods. A narrow "window" for decision-making and a research question that is meaningfully and feasibly answered within limited resources also drive formulation of a rapid review. Speed of methods is only possible with a good understanding of the needs of the commissioners and potential beneficiaries. Making time for adequate consultation may pose a greater challenge than technical processes. The first ever Cochrane rapid QES on healthcare workers' adherence to infection prevention and control guidelines was completed in only 25 days from protocol to publication in the Cochrane Library (Biesty et al., 2020; Houghton et al., 2020). In a paper highlighting lessons from conducting the review (Biesty et al., 2020), the review authors highlighted challenges in balancing the time needed for thoughtfulness and comprehensiveness against the need for an urgent response. Consultation was made possible by condensing the consultation process within the first few days of the project.

The rapid QES should always start with setting the review question and subsequent topic refinement. Stakeholders help to set and refine the review question, to identify eligibility criteria, and highlight the perspectives of interest (e.g. children, parents, partners, family,

service users, managers, community) and to ensure that the rapid synthesis is fit for purpose. They can also sanction *ad hoc* changes (whether omissions or expansions) as the rapid QES progresses. For example, can any aspects of the phenomenon of interest or any perspectives be omitted? Are these perspectives already covered in an existing QES? Review authors should be cautious about unplanned expansion of review topics ("scope creep"). At the same time they should be alert to the risks of an "empty review" which may require inclusion of studies that are partially or indirectly relevant. Findings should focus on informing practical recommendations for action.

Date restrictions should be determined by topic requirements (e.g. critical policy dates, changes to the context), by the existence of other syntheses. Typically, rapid QESs privilege a single language (or a principal language plus English) (Campbell et al., 2019; Majid & Weeks, 2020). Other languages are included if dictated by the review commissioner (e.g. the World Health Organisation), the topic (e.g. Zika in South American countries) or by important cultural differences (e.g. between Anglophone and Francophone contexts). The review authors might decide to sample from qualitative studies of the same type (e.g. all ethnographies), according to richness/thickness of data (see Chapter 6) or on the basis of methodological limitations (**See Chapter 7**).

15.4.2 Identification of evidence

A rapid QES typically involves a limited number of databases, supplemented by geographic- or discipline-specific sources (A. Booth, Mshelia, Analo, & Nyakang'o, 2019) and supplementary search strategies (Cooper, Lovell, Husk, Booth, & Garside, 2017). A two database strategy might include a discipline-specific database plus a multi-disciplinary database such as Scopus or Web of Science. A Cochrane rapid QES team searched a single database having undertaken "a rigorous and comprehensive scoping exercise and search of the reference lists of key papers" (Houghton et al., 2020). In resource-constrained contexts access to subscription databases may prove prohibitive. Accessing open access databases, plus regional resources, may offer the preferred strategy. Additional topic-specific databases should be restricted to 1-2 additional sources, or omitted if time and resources are limited (Garritty et al., 2021). Peer review of a search strategy from one core database is essential, wherever feasible.

Grey literature is often excluded to save time. However, specific grey literature types may prove particularly useful. For example, PhD theses from local institutional repositories may cover context-specific data not found in journal articles (A. Booth, 2016). Process evaluations may be particularly important alongside trials and outcome evaluations of interventions or programmes in Low- and Middle- Income Countries. Screening reference lists may identify studies missed during database searching or subsequent screening.

15.4.3 Appraisal of evidence

Within a rapid QES context it is particularly important to consider why assessment of methodological limitations is being conducted. An abbreviated tool might target review-specific causes for concern. Efforts should focus on identifying concerns about important methodological limitations – for example, neglect of precautions when sensitive or controversial subjects are the focus for study (**See Chapter 7**). Methods for presenting assessments of methodological limitations in a rapid QES typically resemble those for conventional QES. However, particular attention may be required both to efficiencies in conducting the assessments and clarity in presenting them within the context of a concise report.

15.4.4 Synthesis and interpretation of evidence

Framework and thematic synthesis (**See Chapters 8 and 9**) are commonly used in rapid QESs (Campbell et al., 2019). Alternatively meta-aggregation involves use of themes pre-identified by original study authors (**See Chapter 19**). Tables, boxes, diagrams and graphics can summarise large quantities of data. A single reviewer can use GRADE-CERQual (**See Chapter 13**) to assess the confidence in the evidence, verifying all judgements and footnoted rationales using a second reviewer. An abbreviated version of the eMERGe or ENTREQ reporting guidance may be used in reports although a complete version may be required if proceeding to journal publication.

15.5 QES Updates

There are a growing number of examples of QES updates. An update of a 2011 synthesis of GPs' experiences of antibiotic prescribing expanded its scope to include nurses and pharmacists who prescribe or dispense antibiotics (Germeni et al., 2018). An update to a 2012 meta-ethnography on willingness to hasten death was justified by data from regions not previously featured, specifically from countries with different legal frameworks. The motivation to update a QES does not simply relate to new studies but usually includes other indications of added value. Daker-White et al (2013) updated a published meta-ethnography by conducting a separate new meta-ethnography and comparing the findings of the two syntheses to explore conceptual development over time (Daker-White, Donovan, & Campbell, 2014).

While many qualitative topics are neither as volatile nor as sensitive to new data as effectiveness questions, substantive numbers of topics are appropriate for periodic review. A *QES update* asks a similar (SPICE) question (**See Chapter 2**) to the original and shares objectives and inclusion criteria. Teams can modify inclusion criteria to acknowledge new interventions, new standards of care, or new contexts. Potential eligible studies ("incident studies") need to be integrated with included studies from the original review ("prevalent studies") and findings and conclusions modified as appropriate. New methods, for example

new tools for assessment of methodological limitations, impact not only on the new studies but also on the previous included studies. The review authors should decide whether to base the QES update on the same methods used in the original review or to submit old and new studies to the same new methods, or to just synthesise new studies.
An overview of practical considerations when undertaking a QES update are outlined in Box 15.2 and these are discussed in more detail in sections 15.5.1 to 15.5.5 below.

Box 15.2 *Practical considerations for the conduct of a QES update*

Formulation of review

1. Topic must be a sufficient priority (to merit funding) and volatile (liable to change) or prolific (to justify update intervals), or both.

Identification of evidence

2. Period covered by the update search should overlap by at least one year from date of search completion (not publication).
3. Current awareness strategies, pre-stored search strategies and study filters may facilitate searching

Appraisal of evidence

4. A common tool should be selected for appraisal otherwise past assessments of methodological limitations need to be revisited.

Synthesis and interpretation of evidence

5. A framework may offer a structure for revision.
6. Alternatively studies can be added to existing themes and/or can be used to generate new themes

15.5.1 Formulation of review

Limited guidance exists for whether, when and how a review team should update a QES. Available guidance on meta-ethnography updates is likely to apply equally to other syntheses (France, Wells, Lang, & Williams, 2016; Germeni et al., 2018; Rodríguez-Prat, Balaguer, Booth, & Monforte-Royo, 2017). There is no fixed time interval after which a QES becomes out-of-date; a QES update is determined, firstly, by the needs of the question and the audience, secondly, by the characteristics of the literature (France et al., 2016) and, lastly, by any methodological advances. Technically, a QES that includes all identified studies becomes out-of-date when a new eligible study is published, whereas and a QES that includes a theoretical or purposive sample becomes out-of-date when a new study, in the view of a review authors, or stakeholder(s) adds a new and meaningful insight. If conceptual saturation was previously achieved, inclusion of further relevant studies is unlikely to add insights unless they report new data on experiences (France et al 2016), or add new contexts, interventions, populations or settings e.g. countries (A. Booth, Mshelia, et al., 2019; France et al., 2016). Thus, being out-of-date does not simply relate to the incidence of new studies; it also refers to whether prevalent studies from the original review remain contemporary. In a QES update of HIV adherence which replicated the original review question and the search strategy, the review authors concluded that the update had confirmed and enriched the findings but the update did not alter the theory or overall findings of the original synthesis (Rohwer, Hendricks, Oliver, & Garner, 2021).

Similarly, whether a QES has become out-of-date depends on whether they remain useful to the user and fit for the audience and purpose (France et al., 2016). If methods have improved or the original review was poorly conducted or reported then the update may increase the trustworthiness and utility of the findings (France et al., 2016). Review authors may justify a QES update on the basis of improved methodological quality, increased coherence, enriched adequacy, or increased relevance (A. Booth, Mshelia, et al., 2019; Lewin et al., 2018).

A QES update could be conducted by the original review authors, with or without additional authors, or by an entirely new team of review authors. Updating by the original authors could 'force' the new data to fit with the original (France et al., 2016; Germeni et al., 2018) but benefits from review authors being familiar with the data (France et al., 2016; Germeni et al., 2018). Conversely, new review authors offer new perspectives and interpretations (A. Booth et al., 2013; Germeni et al., 2018).

A team deciding to update a QES should consider three methodological processes: (1) how to revise the literature search and selection strategy (identification of evidence), (2) how to assess methodological limitations of primary studies (appraisal of evidence), and (3) how to perform the analysis and synthesis (synthesis and interpretation).

15.5.2 Identification of evidence

It may be necessary to revise the review question, or any element of PICO/SPICE, and therefore the literature search strategy and inclusion criteria should be updated too e.g. to include new subgroups (see also Chapter 2). The updated search strategies should remain compatible with the aim of the update (France et al., 2016). Searches may also require amending due to changes in the availability or index terms of databases, or a new study context (such as a different country or healthcare setting), and so on. For example in QES updates specific to two countries (Booth et al 2019), geographic-specific resources were searched and identified many more studies than included in the original multi-context QES.

15.5.3 Assessment of methodological limitations

A QES update could retain the same assessment method as used in the original review, to make comparison between new and previous studies easier, or use a new tool. It may be necessary or desirable to (re)assess the methodological limitations of primary studies in the original QES, for instance, to apply a new or revised appraisal tool, to re-do poorly conducted assessments of methodological limitations or when no assessment was undertaken in the original.

15.5.4 Synthesis and interpretation

Three key models are proposed for how to update the analysis and synthesis for a meta-ethnography (France et al 2016). Their application, advantages and disadvantages are described in Table 15.5. These models similarly apply to other synthesis methods such as thematic synthesis.

- Model 1. Add to and revise the original QES to incorporate the new publications ("extend and renovate the original house").
- Model 2. Do a new, standalone synthesis of the new publications, then compare the findings to the original QES ("build a new house next door to the original and compare the two houses").
- Model 3. Start the analysis and synthesis from the beginning; incorporating older articles with newer ones to create a single combined synthesis ("knock down the house and rebuild it") (France et al., 2016).

Since QESs that seek to include all studies are by definition 'additive,' model 1 would seem to offer the preferred option for those types of synthesis, unless new studies invalidate older study findings, e.g., older studies focused on currently defunct treatments.

Table 15.5 Contrasting three models to updating a QES in terms of when and how to use them, advantages and disadvantages (adapted from France et al 2016)

	Model 1. Add to and Revise	**Model 2. New stand-alone QES and Compare**	**Model 3. Start again from the beginning**
When to use	Conduct and reporting of original QES were good quality. No methodological advances to incorporate.	Allows comparison between outputs of original/updated reviews. Not recommended if no rationale for comparing outputs of the reviews.	If original was low quality, reviewers need to incorporate new methodological advances, and wish for single output Suitable for revised review question
Advantages	Single coherent output. Efficient use of resources expended on original. No arbitrary dividing date between literature in original and update.	Efficient use of resources. Readily achievable by new review authors.	Single coherent output. Readily achievable by a new review authors. Can incorporate new methodological advances. Could improve quality/ utility of poor quality original.
Disadvantages	Challenging for new review authors with no familiarity with original analysis.	Potentially arbitrary dividing date between literature in original and update	Research 'waste' of original QES if starting again was unnecessary. Could result in large

	Model 1. Add to and Revise	**Model 2. New stand-alone QES and Compare**	**Model 3. Start again from the beginning**
	Lack of established methods for updating original analysis/ synthesis.		volume of data to synthesise.
Methods			
Search	Update entire search strategy (years and terms) using wider date range than the period of interest for the review (e.g. 12 months overlap)	Run year update AND append search strategy addendum to document new terms to aid comparison	Either run update strategy with new years and new terms (allowing for up to 12 months overlap) [if previous high quality search] or rerun for all years [if low quality search]
Appraisal (assessment of methodological limitations)	Use same assessment method (if current) or redo all assessments (if new checklist, poor quality original assessments or no original assessments)	Retain same assessment method to facilitate comparison (unless former tool is no longer considered valid/useful) (See Chapter 7)	Use same assessment method (to minimise workload) or redo all assessments (if new tool or poor quality/no original assessments)
Synthesis	Document original and novel contributions from two sources of studies (e.g. single diagram different typography)	Juxtapose 'original' and 'original plus novel' contributions (e.g. side by side)	Present new framework or model only
Product	Focuses on new items and refers to original review for further detail, except for the overall summary.	Adds addendum to existing review focusing on areas of similarity/ difference (methodology and findings)	Completely integrates narrative between the existing review and new update so the "join" is seamless

In addition, when using model 1 a review team needs to decide how to update the synthesis. This is particularly challenging for QES methods that aim to develop new theory and/or theoretical insights such as meta-ethnography (**see Chapter 11**) and thematic synthesis (**see Chapter 10**). For example, in an updated meta-ethnography on patients' experiences of head and neck cancer used model 1 (Lang, France, Williams, Humphris, & Wells, 2013), the updated synthesis, carried out by the original team plus one new member, compared the meaning of the primary (study author) interpretations in the newer studies to their own (reviewer) interpretations generated in the original meta-ethnography to revise and add to the findings.

15.6 Living QES

Living reviews are resource intensive and, potentially, may deflect resources from other review questions. A key decision is whether a living review is justified. Living QESs are a logical extension of review updates and the drivers for this type of review mirror the drivers for living reviews of intervention effects . Living QES methods have been conceptualised (A. Booth, Mshelia, et al., 2019; Tricco et al., 2020) but no actual examples have been identified. There is also a lack of examples of QESs with multiple updates. Because of this early stage, this section of the chapter does not follow the same format as the sections detailing the other types of time-sensitive reviews (i.e. formulation of review, identification of evidence assessment of methodological limitations and synthesis and interpretation) but it does raise some key considerations for each of these stages in Box 15.3

GRADE-CERQual (**See Chapter 13**) may assist in assessing the need for ongoing synthesis. Further GRADE-CERQual considerations may determine both the need for further searching itself and the specific search strategies to be used (**See Chapter 5**). For example, review authors might ask the following questions: Is the existing synthesis deficient in terms of the methodological limitations, adequacy and relevance of existing studies when compared to new studies? Specifically, should the emphasis of follow-up searching be on improving the *adequacy* of data from contexts already covered or on further enhancing and or extending the *relevance* to contexts not yet included?

Questions challenging the need for further searching and synthesis are particularly useful when assessing whether there is a need for a context-sensitive (e.g. country-specific) synthesis alongside a multi-context synthesis, again focusing on the added value of the additional studies (A. Booth, Mshelia, et al., 2019). Living QESs would not automatically address limitations in methodology, adequacy or relevance and should not be entered into lightly. For example, if specific perspectives or contexts have been omitted, a focused (e.g. country- or region-specific) QES may offer a speedier short-term solution than reviewing the entire topic area again. The output of the context-specific review could serve a useful purpose in its own right before being subsumed within a living review once such a review is viable. Similarly, individual organisations could maintain viable segments of a larger review with a long-term aim to integrate these within a future living review (A. Booth, Mshelia, et al., 2019).

Having established the need for a living QES (Table 2) attention turns to the key stages in a living QES (Table 15.7).

Box 15.3 - Practical considerations for the conduct of a living QES

- **Formulation of review:** Is topic of sufficient priority (to merit funding) and volatile (liable to change) or prolific (to justify update intervals), or both?
- **Identification of evidence:** Can newly-incident studies be identified using current awareness strategies, pre-stored search strategies and study descriptors?
- **Appraisal of evidence:** Will a common tool for assessment of methodological limitations be selected to reduce the need to revisit past assessments?
- **Synthesis and interpretation of evidence:** Might a framework offer a structure for revision? Alternatively, might the review team add studies to an existing thematic synthesis and/or generate new themes?

Living QESs will have three principal decision points (Table 15.7):

Table 15.8 - Principle decision points for a living QES

1. How regularly will the QES be maintained?	The interval between versions is determined by whether the question is critical, the needs of the audience and the numbers of new studies; adding "Why Now?" to the considerations of the RETREAT framework (A. Booth et al., 2018) (See above and **Chapter on selecting your synthesis method**).
2. How will new studies be identified?	Re-running the original search strategy is time-consuming. Search processes should factor in data on past yield from different sources (Daker-White et al., 2014). Changes in terminology and, less frequently, technical changes may require revisiting the search strategy. Methods include citation monitoring (flagging key reviews/included studies for periodic reports of new citations), use of *citation chaser* to run automated batch searches of citations to key studies or use of Related Articles features. Study classifiers offer the prospect of identifying new qualitative studies as they are indexed.
3. How will the findings be synthesised/integrated?	Synthesis is time-consuming; will new material be supplemental or fully integrated? Full integration may require revisiting included studies. Frameworks could simply map studies to appropriate items with decreasing numbers of new themes added for each iteration. Thematic synthesis combines existing with new themes, resembling a framework approach.

15.6 Overviews of existing QESs

If the volume of literature for a review topic is substantial and QESs have already been conducted review authors may consider conducting an overview of existing QESs. Overviews of QESs are not always time-sensitive; they may seek broad coverage or to identify research gaps. Some methodologists also caution against further abstraction of QES findings in isolation from the contexts and assumptions of source reviews. Overviews of QES should be used judiciously and not seen simply "as a new/faster methodological practice for the 'super-aggregation' of existing findings" (Frost, Garside, Cooper, & Britten, 2016) .

There are very few examples of overview of existing QESs to date. Methods for conducting overviews of QESs are still emerging and additional worked examples are required. Review authors should build in an element of evaluation and critique when conducting their overview of QESs to further establish the rigour and value of these methods in a Cochrane and Campbell context. Within the examples that exist, two approaches have been used called 'mega-ethnography' (e.g. Toye et al. 2017) and 'mega-aggregation' (Hendricks et al., 2021). There has been little evaluation of these two approaches and as currently described the labels 'mega-aggregation' and 'mega-ethnography' inadvertently introduce a lack of clarity to the field. This is because the one published example of 'mega-aggregation' does not follow the underpinning steps of meta-aggregation (Chapter 19) and instead follows the steps of a framework synthesis (chapter 9). A more methodologically coherent and accurate label would therefore be 'mega-framework synthesis'. Likewise, the few published examples of 'mega-ethnography' report using some but not all of the stages of meta-ethnography (chapter 11). These examples appear to stop short of the complex analytical stages that are used to further refine and articulate new theory. Although mega-ethnography may further evolve as a method, at present the steps seem to align more closely with thematic synthesis so there is a question as to whether a more coherent and accurate label would be a mega-thematic synthesis. The two methods are introduced in this chapter but neither are endorsed for use without further methodological consideration and evaluation for the aforementioned reasons. To avoid further methodological confusion, review authors are encouraged to use a methods label that best represents the underpinning method or use a methods neutral label such as 'overview of QES's' or 'synthesis of existing QESs'.

15.7.1 Formulation of review

Generic guidance exists for the conduct of any overview of reviews (Hunt, Pollock, Campbell, Estcourt, & Brunton, 2018). All overviews should include an a priori peer-reviewed protocol formed around a clearly pre-specified research question with detailed inclusion and exclusion criteria, search strategies and methods for data extraction and appraisal, followed by clear, replicable methods for synthesis and summary of included data.

Overviews of QESs have similar requirements to overviews of intervention effect reviews. Titles should include either "an overview of QESs" or label their specific type of overview method – see the suggested steer in the previous section 15.7. They should state clear QES inclusion and exclusion criteria. Relevant section headings refer to 'reviews' instead of 'studies' and discuss the methodological quality of *both* the included QESs *and* their constituent qualitative studies.

The stages of an overview of reviews broadly correspond to the stages of any systematic review, with question formulation, review selection, quality appraisal, extraction, analysis and synthesis targeting the review, rather than the individual primary study (Michelle

Pollock, Fernandes, Becker, Pieper, & Hartling, 2020). Similarly, an overview of QESs mirrors an individual QES using a specific method of synthesis but with a focus on each QES, not primary studies (Box 15.4).

Box 15.4 Practical considerations to consider in the conduct of an overview of existing QESs

- **Formulation of review:** Is the topic well-covered by current QESs that include rich conceptual data and thick contextual data?
- **Identification of evidence:** Which types of QES methods will be included? All or selected QES methods? Please note that for inclusion in a Cochrane overview of intervention reviews, the included reviews must be systematic reviews. A minimum quality threshold or verification of the types of QES methods has yet to be decided for QES overviews and further methodological development and testing is required
- **Appraisal of evidence:** Will a generic tool be used for assessing QES quality (e.g. CASP (Long et al., 2020) or JBI Systematic Review tool) (Lockwood, Munn, & Porritt, 2015) or a QES-specific tool (the SBU tool for assessing methodological limitations of a QES)(SBU, 2023)? Although there is currently no validated QES specific tool available, review authors should assess and comment on the methodological limitations of the QES and take note of any methodological issues in the primary studies included within them.
- **Synthesis and interpretation of evidence:** Current available methods aim to synthesise at review level allowing for duplicate studies. There are no examples where the primary studies included in the QESs were reanalysed. Further methodological development and testing of synthesis methods for overviews of QESs is required.

15.7.2 Identification of evidence

An early decision relates to the types of review that report synthesised qualitative evidence to be included. Cochrane overviews of intervention reviews only include reviews meeting the definition of a systematic review. A minimum quality threshold or consensus on the types of QES methods suitable for inclusion has yet to be decided for QES overviews and further methodological development and testing is required. In the meantime, review authors should consider what type of QESs they will include and why, and then incorporate a methodological evaluation element to their overview of QESs to test different inclusion strategies. If review authors prefer to include all types of reviews that report synthesised qualitative evidence (systematic, non-systematic, mixed-methods (if a qualitative component is reported) and scoping reviews), then conducting a scoping review or knowledge map may be more appropriate.

Any reviews explicitly excluded, should be reflected in the exclusion criteria. Eligibility criteria for a review of QESs typically include Population, Phenomena of interest and Context (PICo) elements or SPICE(S) with the addition of a second S for Study Design. (**See Chapter 2 on Formulating a Question**). Further specification of the question formulation framework could overly restrict retrieval and review selection. In less common instances, where different QESs explore different aspects of a phenomenon, a granular question framework may be required; such as PerSPE©TiF (A. Booth, Noyes, et al., 2019). In such circumstances QESs may be included on the basis of substantive data, rather than on their

review question. Eligibility may be framed as "the presence of included data on X" rather than "X as the focus of the review question". Corresponding judgements on inclusion/exclusion are made at the full-text stage, rather than from the review question/aim in the abstract.

Searches for overviews of QESs follow standard principles of strategy construction, but restricted to reviews via preset publication types or evaluated search filters. Such approaches dramatically reduce the numbers of records to sift – typically by a factor of at least ten – by excluding most primary studies. If review limits or filters are used review authors should pilot their performance specifically for QES as many include terms associated with quantitative reviews (e.g. meta-analysis) or exclude less familiar labels associated with QES (e.g. meta-interpretation). Essentially the choice lies between using an evaluated generic review filter and then identifying specifically QESs or using an unevaluated QES specific filter (See Chapter 5 on Searching). Specific sources of reviews include such databases as Epistemonikos or the databases from Health Evidence (healthevidence.org) and Health Systems Evidence (healthsystemsevidence.org).

15.7.3 Appraisal of evidence

There is currently no validated tool to assess QES quality and further methodological development and testing is required. There are currently three unvalidated options for assessing the methodological limitations in a QES: the tool developed by the Swedish Agency for Health Technology Assessment and Assessment of Social Services (SBU), which has been designed to assess a QES that includes GRADE-CERQual assessments of synthesised findings; a draft prototype tool, MACAQuES, previously compiled for delegates on the international ESQUIRE courses (A Booth & AftCQaIMG, 2019); and tools for assessing systematic reviews in general (e.g. the CASP or JBI tool to assess systematic reviews). The latter offer the possibility to standardise across quantitative and qualitative reviews within a mixed-methods review of reviews. Assessments of methodological limitations are integral to overviews of QESs, presented either in summary tables or as summary statements. At this point review authors should seek to identify overlap and duplication between included studies to avoid artificially amplifying the messages from individual studies. A matrix of reviews (in columns) versus included studies (in rows) complete with publication dates, helps a team to identify and respond to any publication lags in inclusion of studies within syntheses. This problem can be addressed by including primary studies published subsequent to the capture date of the most recent reported search in the discussion.

In addition, the limitations of QES should be considered in the discussion section in the write up of the overview. Review authors should comment on factors beyond their control, including whether all relevant QES were identified and included in the overview, any gaps in coverage (as priorities for future QES), whether all relevant data were obtained (and implications of missing data), and whether any methods (e.g. searching, study selection,

data collection, analysis and synthesis, review author reflexivity etc), at either the QES or overview levels, could have introduced threats to rigour.

15.7.4 Data extraction

Data extraction methods generally mirror those for a standard QES, except that published examples of overviews privilege different types of data to develop the synthesis. In overviews called 'mega-ethnography' conceptual findings reported in the included QESs were extracted for re-interpretation by the review authors (Toye et al., 2017). In the overview called 'mega-aggregation' the interpretations of the original QES authors were extracted using an a priori framework to organise the data into categories, and then to identify themes. Irrespective of the approach, a key decision relates to how much data will be extracted. Typically, overviews include extracted author observations and identified themes. Inclusion of verbatim quotes, themes or author interpretations from the included QESs is methodologically controversial; extracts should be chosen carefully particularly if they might imply that an isolated finding generalises across multiple studies. For example, a finding related to dignity or privacy will translate across multiple contexts but if this is derived from reference to the absence of screening curtains in resource limited contexts its universality is undermined.

Authors of overviews also need to consider whether to report verbatim extracts from primary studies which have already been "editorialised" by being selected and highlighted within their parent QES. Review authors should ask to what extent these extracts being used to normalise, to illustrate, to exemplify, or even to punctuate a disconfirming case. These issues relate to method of synthesis in the original QES rather than reporting conventions.

15.7.5 Synthesis and interpretation

With limited examples of overviews of QESs to date there is little work to guide synthesis and interpretation. Examples to date have focused on broad topics such as living with pain (Toye et al., 2017), living with arthritis (Toye, Seers, & Barker, 2019), child and adolescent obesity (Carroll, Sworn, Booth, & Pardo-Hernandez, 2022) and living with HIV (Hendricks et al., 2021). Review authors should decide upon the extent to which their synthesis will engage with included studies within the reviews. Potential options are "building a bridge" across the existing reviews using a common framework, creating an entirely new structure by repurposing the included studies from within the reviews or something in between.

As noted earlier Toye and colleagues have conducted several overviews of QESs using what they call 'mega-ethnography' (Toye et al., 2017) and Hendricks and colleagues have conducted an overview of QESs using a method they call 'mega-aggregation' (Hendricks et al., 2021). Toye et al (2017) used the standard steps of a meta-ethnography to guide the synthesis stage of their overview which included 11 published QESs that explored patients' experiences of living with chronic non-malignant pain and developed a conceptual

understanding of what it is like to live with chronic non-malignant pain. Hendricks et al. (2021) used the Kaufman HIV Behaviour Change model (Kaufman et al., 2014) as a framework to organise the 33 systematic reviews focused on adherence to antiretroviral treatment, linkage to care and retention in care for people living with HIV included in their overview. In contrast to Toye et al. (2017) their aim was not to develop new conceptual understanding but to summarise the evidence, highlight gaps and recommend next steps for research, policy and practice.

Uncertainty exists as to whether findings from overviews of existing QESs become "fourth order constructs" (as a "review of reviews of findings interpreting findings") or whether they remain third order constructs (the interpretations of the original review authors). Other challenges relate to either wider or partial coverage of source QESs, compared to the question(s) being asked in the overview, and to the difficulty in isolating data specifically relating to age, gender, and country subgroups. Transparent documentation of methods and their strengths and limitations are critical to credibility, particularly while methodological issues remain unresolved

The methods for conducting overviews of existing QESs are novel and remain to be further developed. For example, currently mega-ethnography only synthesises individual QES findings from included QESs not lines of argument or theoretical models and as such could be seen to align more with thematic synthesis methods; future methodological developments could focus on ways to further enhance the synthesis of theoretical insights and new theory reported in included QESs. It is perhaps surprising that there are no examples of overviews of QESs explicitly using thematic synthesis (see chapter 10), particularly given that thematic approaches have commonly been used to produce QESs (with the caveat that mega-ethnography seems more methodologically aligned with thematic synthesis).

20.3.6 Reporting

Currently no specific reporting guidance exists for *QES updates* or for *overviews of QES* although for the latter it is likely that many reporting requirements could be satisfied by following the Preferred Reporting Items for Overviews of Reviews (PRIOR) (M. Pollock et al., 2019).

Both *living QESs* and *rapid QESs* are expected to comply with current reporting standards. Until specific guidelines are available, all time-sensitive QES should follow the ENTREQ reporting guideline (Tong et al 2012) for diverse types of QES and the eMERGe reporting guidance for meta-ethnography (France, Cunningham et al 2019a,b,c,d) (**See Chapter 20 on Reporting**). Deviations (*overview of QESs*) from, or changes (*QES update* or *living QES*) to, the original methods and methodology should be documented. A *rapid QES* should focus not only on any shortcuts used but also on the confidence in synthesised findings and their implications.

Many eMERGe reporting criteria apply to a meta-ethnography update (France, Cunningham et al 2019a,b,c,d; (France et al 2016); the eMERGe reporting criterion 1 (for reporting the rationale and context for the meta-ethnography) specifically references updates and recommends that review authors specify reasons for the updated meta-ethnography. *QES updates* and *living QESs* should document any changes to the original methods, including methods used for updating the synthesis and any changes in membership from the original team since this might influence the synthesis output (France et al 2016; Rodríguez-Prat et al 2017, Germeni et al 2021).

A review team could save considerable time by using relevant domains from existing reporting guidelines (e.g. ENTREQ, eMERGe, Cochrane protocol and review template checklists) to provide an initial structure. If no existing reporting guideline is an exact fit, this initial structure could be a bespoke hybrid framework based on selecting the most appropriate domains from available reporting templates. Alternatively review authors could identify an exemplar QES from a target journal and edit the text down to a skeleton structure with indicative word counts for each section (**See Chapter 20**).

20.8 Stakeholder engagement and involvement

Although it may seem tempting to abbreviate, or even exclude, stakeholder engagement and involvement for time-sensitive reviews such input can prove critical; for example, in ensuring shared expectations, avoiding redundant effort and in targeting energies at stakeholder uncertainties. Stakeholders can help to decide and refine the review question, inform and agree the search strategy and eligibility criteria, inform and verify the synthesis findings, and ensure that the review addresses stakeholder priorities. However, time and resource constraints will determine both the priority of aspects of the review in which stakeholders could be involved and the relative allocation between engagement and the technical processes of the QES itself.

20.9 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Time-sensitive Cochrane and Campbell QESs share the imperative to produce reviews of global relevance, therefore equity, diversity and inclusion are important. This requires that consideration is given to the contexts of studies within an evidence synthesis. Clearly outlining the populations to whom synthesis findings may be transferable, and any limitations in the coverage of populations in the included studies, should be considered – using equity frameworks when feasible. When undertaking a time-sensitive review, review authors should consider such issues at all stages, including when identifying and selecting studies or reviews. Limited inclusion of databases or language exclusions (for example in excluding francophone studies) can impact on the diversity of study contexts and populations represented in the QES. For QES updates and living QES, the existence of new studies in different contexts or with different populations impacts on whether to conduct an update and might require modification of the review inclusion criteria to identify those

additional contexts and populations. Overviews of QES should pay attention to equality, diversity and inclusion within the synthesised reviews in terms of the included primary studies and the QES findings. Known issues with exclusion of little-researched or seldom-heard populations may be further exacerbated by imbalances in either production or identification of primary studies or in regional generation of the overviews themselves.

20.10 Reflexivity

In line with standards for qualitative research, the review authors of time-sensitive QESs should consider and report how their attitudes, experiences and backgrounds might influence the review processes and outputs. This should be considered in relation to the specific phenomenon of interest. Given the time-sensitive nature of the QES it may be helpful for the review authors to schedule specific agenda slots at the beginning (prospective) and towards the conclusion (retrospective) of the QES to ensure that the opportunity for the review authors to be reflexive and to document their positions is not lost within the "business" of the review. Review authors should also be mindful that attitudes are volatile and dynamic so that reflexive statements that have been made previously will definitely require revisiting, and potentially changing, in the course of QES updates or living QES.

20.11 Chapter information

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