

Support Unit for Research Evidence - supporting staff and students conducting systematic reviews

Background

The Support Unit for Research Evidence (SURE) [1] is a grant funded unit that sits within the library service at Cardiff University. The unit was established in 2000 to continue the development of an evidence based project signposting the best available evidence across a broad spectrum of public health topics and evidence types. Since then the SURE team has played a major role in promoting and supporting evidence-based practice (EBP), particularly in conducting systematic reviews that are used in producing practice guidelines. The unit undertakes a wide range of grant funded projects for a variety of health and social science topics, partnering with organisations nationally and internationally.

In addition the SURE team is involved in teaching systematic review methods and supporting staff and students undertaking reviews across the University. Throughout the early years increasing numbers of University researchers requested systematic review related help and advice. This was becoming a challenge due to SURE staff being grant funded and time constraints attached to working on various project grants.

Establishing research support for systematic reviews

In 2008 the University Library Service Review was undertaken. SURE's unique role was noted, along with the increased need for support by researchers conducting systematic reviews. The implementation group within the Library Service Review invited SURE to explore the possibility of establishing an infrastructure to support staff/students undertaking systematic reviews. In March 2010 a university-wide questionnaire survey was conducted among research groups to establish the need for systematic review support and to develop a list of priorities.

In September 2010 the Cardiff University Systematic Review Network (SysNet) [2] was launched. SysNet has been funded by the healthcare Schools within the University. The funding covers the costs of the Network Coordinator, within SURE, supported by a research administrator and a small budget for meetings and invited speakers.

Systematic reviewing in Cardiff University is truly interdisciplinary, even though more than 80% of the Network's activity involves staff and students from medicine and healthcare disciplines.

The objectives of the Network are:

1. To provide advice to interdisciplinary systematic review groups within Cardiff University;
2. To provide and regularly update links to systematic review methodology hand-books and other key resources;
3. To set up training workshops related to undertaking systematic reviews;
4. To notify the Network on funding opportunities, events, conferences and training;
5. To arrange opportunities for Network members to meet and discuss a call for funding relating to a review programme;
6. To further develop the All Wales Systematic Review Register and support relevant collaborations beyond the University.

The coordinator's work involves one-to-one research support in the areas of protocol development, writing grant applications, developing a focussed question, literature searching and critical appraisal as well as advice in other areas relating to reviewing. In addition, events and workshops are organised to promote high quality systematic reviews.

Furthermore two guides have been developed and made available to Network members:

- Beginning a systematic review of the healthcare literature
- The REF and systematic reviews (questions to consider when writing up systematic reviews and selecting outputs for REF submission)

Systematic review research support process

When a researcher contacts SysNet either by phone or via email, they are sent a checklist to assess whether important components of a systematic review have been considered. This is followed by a one to one meeting to discuss any issues relating to the review protocol, which includes the importance of inclusion/exclusion criteria and other aspects of the systematic review process.

One of the common difficulties faced by researchers is often in relation to constructing a systematic review search strategy. If the researcher has no experience in searching he/she is sent to the subject librarian for a training session on advanced searching. This training is followed by the SysNet Coordinator checking and guiding the researcher through developing their search strategies for each of the bibliographic databases.

After searching the databases and relevant sources help is often sought with regard to importing search results. The subject librarians are able to offer training in the Endnote reference management software tool used within the University. Furthermore advice is given by the SysNet Coordinator on search documentation, critical appraisal and data extraction.

Other SURE activities

In addition to the SysNet activities, SURE held its first ever Systematic Review Short Course in September 2012. The course was attended by researchers from across Welsh Universities and the Welsh Government. This was such a success that the course will be repeated in June 2013.

Since 2000, staff in SURE have co-authored over 60 publications, including 45 systematic reviews, and been awarded more than £2,000,000 in grant income. Engagement and collaboration with key stakeholders within and beyond the home University, and the expertise of its staff, appear to be fundamental to success.

Key messages documented in the report commissioned by Research Libraries UK and the Research Information Network [3] clearly describe the developing new roles for libraries and librarians.

SURE staff, as part of the University Library Service, have demonstrated an enormous contribution to the research process; the ability to use our skills to conduct systematic reviews as well as supporting researchers undertaking systematic reviews.

[1] <http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/insrv/libraries/sure>

[2] <http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/insrv/libraries/sure/sysnet/>

[3] http://www.rluk.ac.uk/files/Value%20of%20Libraries%20TG_0.pdf