Professor Jane Noyes &
Professor Andrew Booth

Cochrane Methods
Qualitative and Implementation

Applying and reporting GRADE CERQual

How to avoid common mistakes
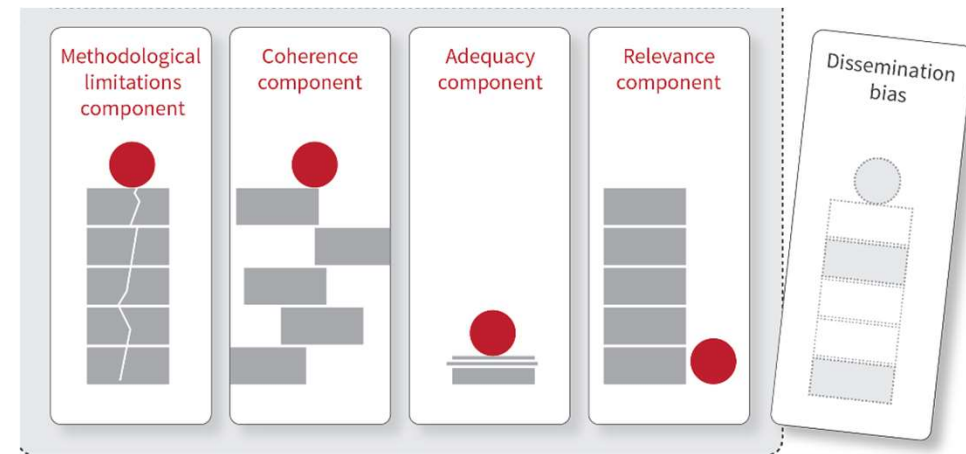
Declaration of interests

This presentation was created in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Noyes and Booth are members of the Cochrane Qualitative and Implementation Methods Group and originators of GRADE CERQual and CAMELOT.

Noyes is a member of the Cochrane Methods Exec and Editorial Board and an originator of the data richness/thickness assessment tool

Funding for the development of GRADE-CERQual came from the following organizations:

The GRADE-CERQual approach for assessing confidence in synthesised qualitative findings
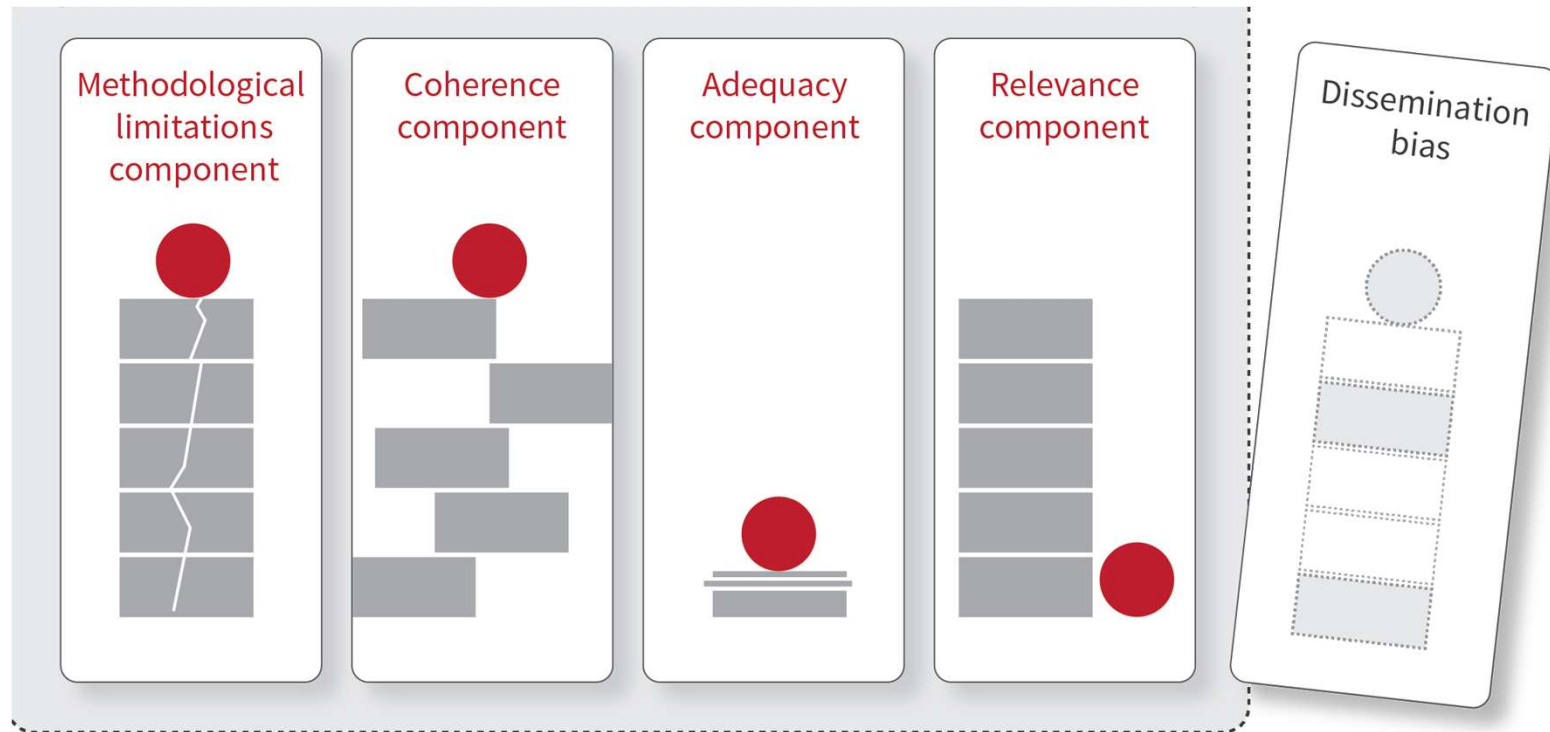
GRADE-CERQual: An introduction for qualitative evidence synthesis [webinar]

This webinar presents the Confidence in the Evidence from Reviews of Qualitative research (GRADE-CERQual) approach, an innovative approach for assessing how much confidence to place in findings from qualitative evidence syntheses. (www.cerqual.org).

Qualitative evidence syntheses (or systematic reviews of qualitative studies) are increasingly used to bring together findings from individual qualitative studies. However, it has been difficult to use these findings to inform decisions and policies because methods to assess how much confidence to place in synthesised findings have been poorly developed. The GRADE-CERQual approach addresses this need.

The webinar, which is part of the Cochrane Learning Live series, is presented by Heather Munthe-Kaas, Simon Lewin and Claire Glenton, all coordinators of the GRADE-CERQual Project Group.

The webinar was delivered in February 2017. The webinar is edited into the following five parts:

1. Introduction to GRADE-CERQual
2. Overview of CERQual components
3. Individual components and overall assessment
4. Where to find guidance and how to get involved
5. Questions and answers

Accompanying webinar slides [PDF] are also available below.

Enter fullscreen mode

Part 1: Introduction to GRADE-CERQual

GRADE CERQual pt1: Introduction to GRADE-CERQual

Share

Qualitative evidence synthesis

Integrating qualitative evidence syntheses with intervention effect findings [May 2022] *QES webinar series*

Angela Harden, Professor of Health Sciences, City, University of London.

James Thomas, Professor of Social Research & Policy, UCL Social Research Institute, UCL Institute of Education, London.

[click here for recording & accompanying materials]

GRADE CERQual [April 2022] *QES webinar series*

Megan Wainwright, consultant in qualitative research, Portugal & member of the GRADE-CERQual coordinating team.

[click here for recording & accompanying materials]

Meta-ethnography [March 2022] *QES webinar series*

Kate Flemming, Professor of Hospice Practice and Evidence Synthesis, University of York, UK

[click here for recording & accompanying materials]

Thematic Synthesis [February 2022] *QES webinar series*

Angela Harden, Professor of Health Sciences, City, University of London.

James Thomas, Professor of Social Research & Policy, UCL Social Research Institute, UCL Institute of Education, London.

[click here for recording & accompanying materials]

Making Sense of Framework and Best Fit Framework Synthesis [January 2022] *QES webinar series*

Professor Andrew Booth, Professor in Evidence Synthesis, School of Health and Related Research (ScHARR), University of Sheffield, UK.

[click here for recording & accompanying materials]

Selecting studies and assessing methodological limitations [December 2021] *QES webinar series*

Jane Noyes, Professor in Health and Social Services Research and Child Health, Bangor University, UK

Dr Andrew Booth, Reader in Evidence Based Information Practice & Director of Information, University of Sheffield, UK.

[click here for recording & accompanying materials]

Question formulation and searching for qualitative evidence [November 2021] *QES webinar series*

Dr Andrew Booth, Reader in Evidence Based Information Practice & Director of Information, University of Sheffield, UK

CERQual Information and Resources

- Join the mailing list
- Join the project group
- Read our PLOS paper: http://journals.plos.org/plosmedicine/article?id=10.1371/journal.pmed.1001895
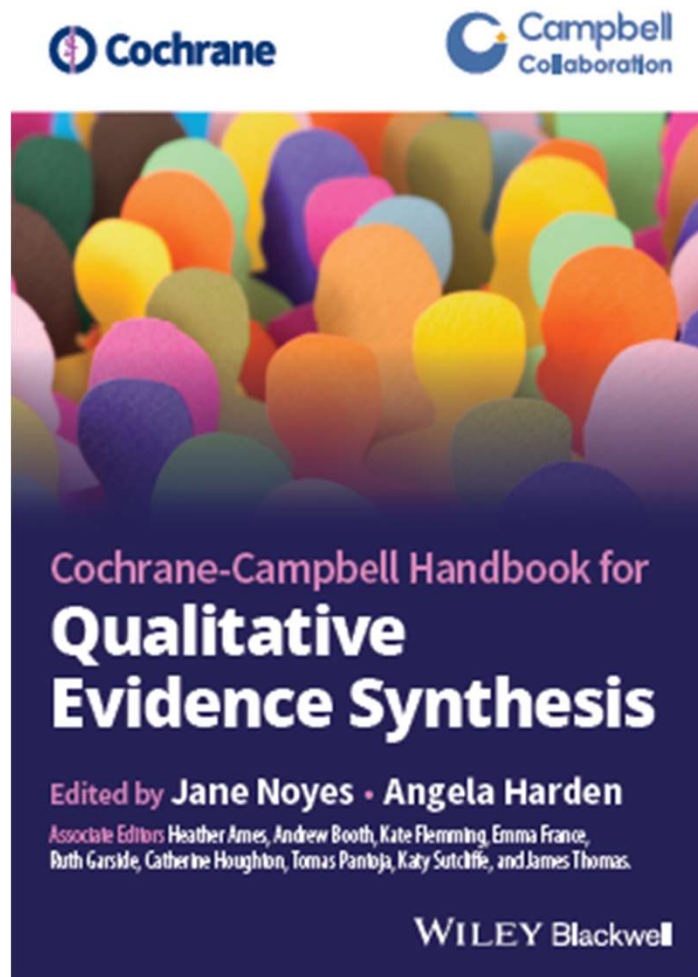- CERQual Series in Implementation Science

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GRADE CERQual

New Cochrane-Campbell Handbook for QES due early 2025

Cochrane · **Campbell Collaboration**

Cochrane-Campbell Handbook for
Qualitative Evidence Synthesis

Edited by **Jane Noyes · Angela Harden**

Associate Editors Heather Ames, Andrew Booth, Kate Flemming, Emma France, Ruth Garside, Catherine Houghton, Tomas Pantoja, Katy Sutcliffe, and James Thomas.

WILEY Blackwell

Part 1: Core methods

1. Starting a qualitative evidence synthesis
2. **Defining the review scope and formulating review questions**
3. **Selecting and using theory**
4. **Developing and using logic models**
5. **Searching for and identifying studies**
6. **Selecting studies and sampling**
7. **Assessing study methodological strengths and limitations**
8. Selecting a method of synthesis and data extraction
9. **Conducting a framework synthesis**
10. Conducting a thematic synthesis
11. **Conducting a meta-ethnography**
12. **Using visual methods to support synthesis**
13. Assessing confidence in the evidence using the GRADE-CERQual approach
14. **Integrating qualitative and quantitative evidence**
15. Conducting time-sensitive reviews

Part 2: Other relevant methods

16. Conducting a realist synthesis
17. **Reviewing diverse types of implementation evidence**
18. **Conducting a qualitative comparative analysis**
19. Introducing meta-narrative reviews, critical interpretive synthesis, narrative syr

Part 3: Reporting and peer review

20. Reporting a protocol and a review
21. **Peer reviewing a protocol or a review**

https://training.cochrane.org/cochrane-campbell-handbook-qualitative-evidence-synthesis

# CERQual is used widely and there are common reporting and fidelity issues

RESEARCH   Open Access

The use of GRADE-CERQual in qualitative evidence synthesis: an evaluation of fidelity and reporting

Megan Wainwright[1*], Rana Islamiah Zahroh[2], Özge Tunçalp[3], Andrew Booth[4], Meghan A. Bohren[2], Jane Noyes[5], Weilong Cheng[6], Heather Munthe-Kaas[7] and Simon Lewin[8,9,10]

KEEP CALM I HAVE GOOD NEWS
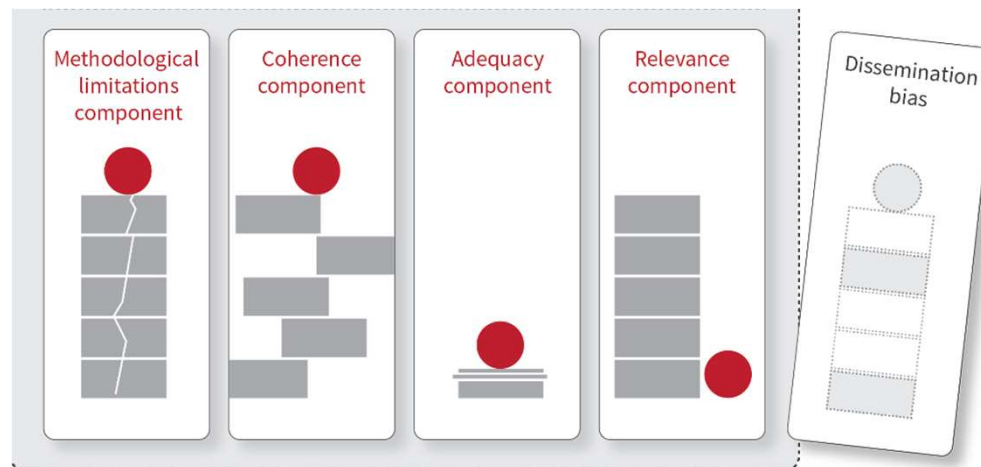
The good news is that Cochrane QESs included in the analysis (up to Aug 2020) had no issues with GRADE CERQual:

- QES authors were CERQual originators
- QIMG convenors provided peer review and Editorial sign off

- Fidelity and reporting issues were generally picked up before QES reviews were submitted for publication.

The current challenges

- There are increasing numbers of QESs being conducted by wider groups of Cochrane authors in a new streamlined publication pipeline

- Problems with CERQual application and reporting are being picked up at the peer review and Editor sign off stage

- Cochrane QES authors are not making best use of available free CERQual training resources and guidance

- Cochrane Qualitative and Implementation Methods Group Convenors have not generally been informed/consulted

Common reporting issues

Labelling

Summary of qualitative findings table not clearly labelled

Evidence profile table not clearly labelled

CERQual is used rather than GRADE-CERQual

GRADE-CERQual not in keywords or abstract

Terminology

Instead of the word 'confidence', alternative terms used to define GRADE-CERQual (strength of the evidence, quality, or certainty)

Levels of concern misnamed (e.g., instead of 'serious' concerns, 'major' or 'substantial')

Components misnamed (e.g., 'methodological quality' instead of 'methodological limitations'; 'cohesion' instead of 'coherence')

Component assessments do not use 4 categories of concern (e.g., 'high coherence' instead of 'no or very minor concerns about coherence')

Completeness

Summary of qualitative findings and/or evidence profile tables not provided

References for each finding missing from summary of qualitative findings and/or evidence profile

Some levels of concern or confidence omitted, combined, or split

Overall assessment and/or explanation for the overall assessment missing from the summary of qualitative findings and/or evidence profile
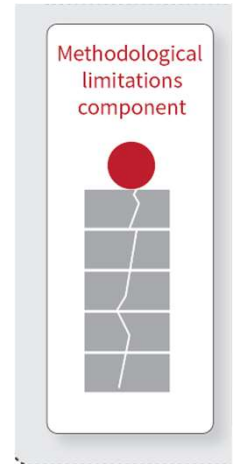
Explanation of the overall assessment missing reference to all components and level of concern for each

Common fidelity issues

A Number of studies for which concerns were identified for each fidelity question (n = 136)

Methodological limitations component
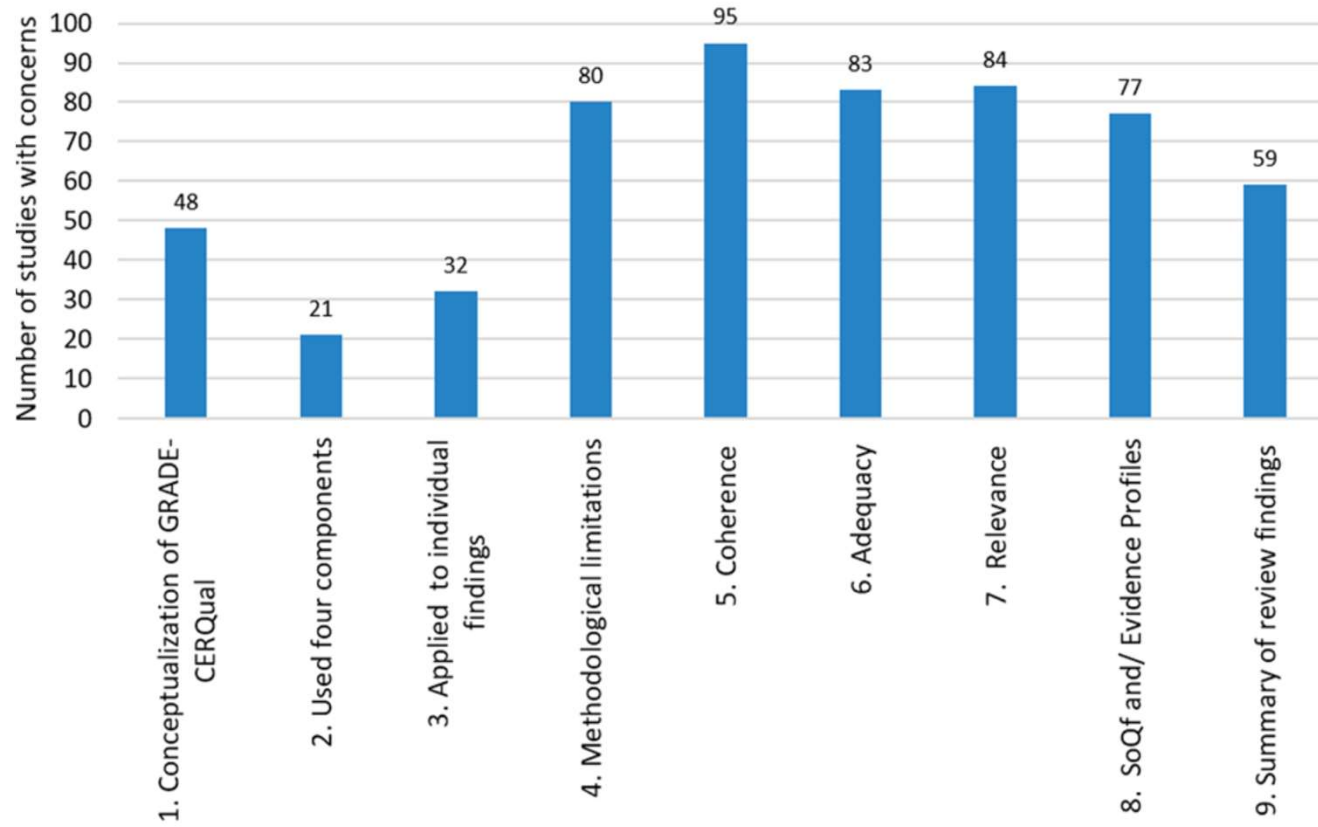

Methodological limitations component

Assessment: Authors conceptualise methodological limitations in line with the guidance

Main Fidelity issues
• Applied the levels of concern to individual studies rather than review findings
• Conceptualised the assessment as a count of appraisal categories, not specific limitations in relation to the finding
• Component not defined and no Evidence Profile or SoQF tables from which to infer
• Not conceptualised in terms of identifying concerns
• Problems with how critical appraisals were done (e.g., only yes or no, no explanation)
• Specific methodological limitations mentioned but not how important they are in relation to the finding
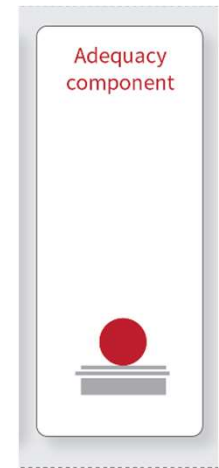
Coherence component

Coherence component
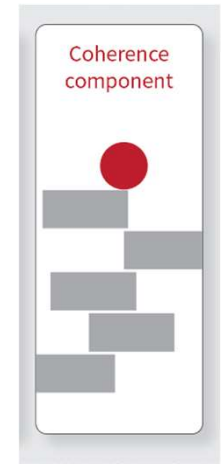
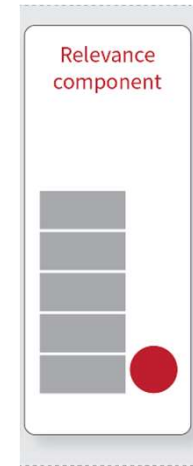*Assessment: Authors conceptualise coherence in line with the guidance*

Main Fidelity issues

• Component not defined and no Evidence Profile or SoQF tables from which to infer
• No demonstration of thinking of it in terms of the fit between review finding and data from primary studies, only focus on primary studies
• Not conceptualised in terms of identifying concerns
• Using wrong definition ("Consistent within and across studies")
• Assessment was quantified

Adequacy component

Adequacy component

Assessment: Authors conceptualise adequacy of data in line with the guidance

Main Fidelity issues

• Component not defined and no Evidence Profile or SoQF table from which to infer
• Not assessed in terms of concerns
• Not assessing both quantity and richness, emphasising one or the other
• Confounding with other components
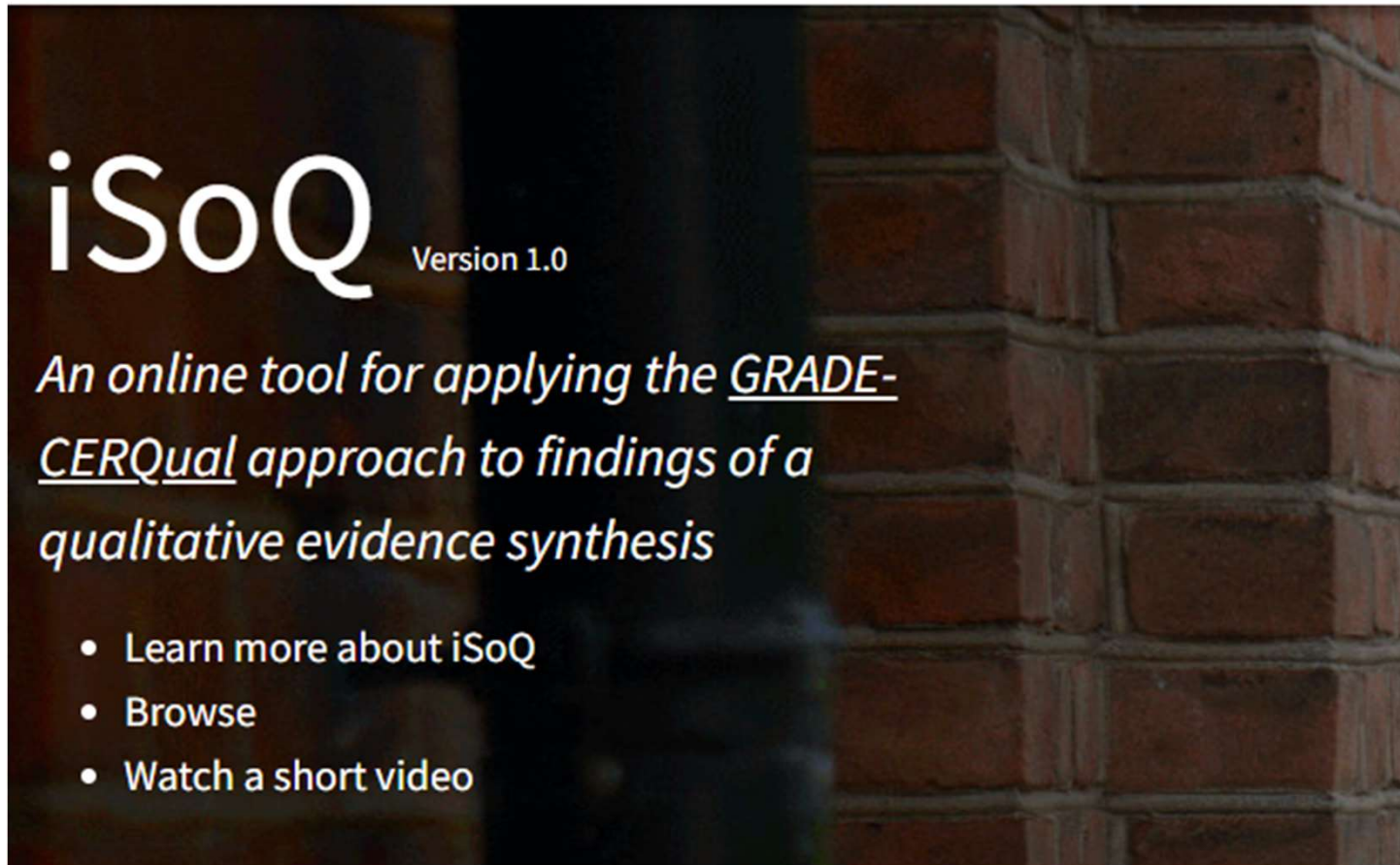• Quantify the assessment of the component

Relevance component

Relevance component

Assessment: Authors conceptualise relevance in line with the guidance

Main Fidelity issues

• Component not defined and no Evidence Profile or SoQF tables from which to infer
• Language of concerns not used, or not used correctly
• Not all elements of 'context' were considered in the assessment
• Quantify the assessment by counting how many primary studies are indirect or partial, rather than identifying concerns

New innovations to support review authors

New Data thickness/richness assessment tool – can help with assessing the richness of data for the adequacy component*

See Ames et al Cochrane Evidence Synthesis and Methods journal – in press
and chapter 6 Cochrane-Campbell Handbook for QES

**Figure 4: The sliding data (A) thickness assessment tool and (B) richness assessment tool**

No or very little contextual description

Mostly thin contextual description

Mixture of thicker and thinner contextual description

Mostly thick or very thick contextual description

No or minimal data transformation and little interpretation

Minimal data transformation and some interpretation

Some data transformation and theoretical interpretation

Extensive data transformation and theoretical interpretation

*CERQual group would like to undertake more work on use of this tool

New CAMELOT tool for assessing methodological limitations

CochrAne qualitative Methodological Limitations Tool. (**CAMELOT**)

Figure 7.1 Overview of CAMELOT
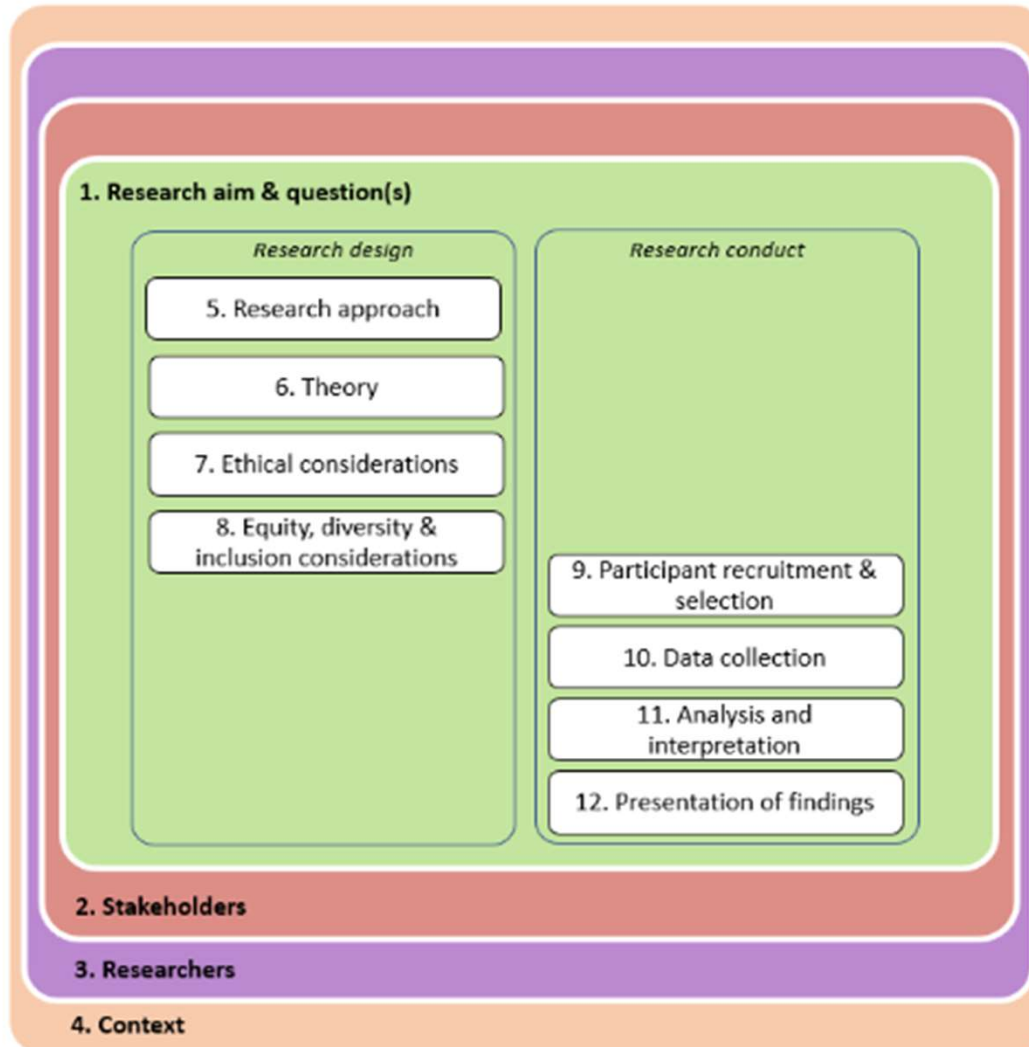
See Munther-Kaas et al Cochrane Evidence Synthesis and Methods journal – in press
and chapter 7 Cochrane-Campbell Handbook for QES

We are here to help!