Reviewer's report

Title: Medical School Attrition In Ireland - Beyond the Statistics. A 10 Year Retrospective Study

Version: 1 Date: 18 November 2012

Reviewer: Birgitta Wallstedt

Reviewer's report:

Minor essential revisions
The manuscript is generally well written and easily understood. There are however three minor points which I would ask the authors to revise:

1. For the benefit of international readers could you please define the differences between 'direct entry', 'graduate entry' and 'mature' programmes

2. Sometimes numbers and percentages are referred to as 'x% of the students' and other times as 'x% of the dropout students', when (I suspect) dropout students are meant. Ex.: in paragraph Number of Repeat Years it says Thirty-four students.. etc., and just below in Autumn Repeat Exams: Forty-six dropout students etc.

3. When looking through the tables 2, 3, 4 and 5 I find (of course) different numbers of total dropouts in the different cohorts: 53, 45, 40 and 81. No where can I see the number 70, which seems to be the number used for calculating the percentages in the chapter Factors associated with Dropout - 10 Year Review. I suppose some students have been omitted from the number 81, but this is not properly explained or identifiable in the tables.

Discretionary revisions

The authors state two purposes for this study: 1) to examine factors associated with attrition and 2) to examine the 'when' of drop-out against a background of institutional change. Both these questions are important and of varying originality as the authors themselves documents in the review of current knowledge in the field.

The strength of this study lies in analyzing reasons for drop-out associated with students (nationality, health, academic performance etc.) on a large cohort of students using a combination of qualitative and quantitative data.

When reading the answers to the question of 'when' it gets a bit muddled: There are sound results on 'when' in the course of study students are more likely to drop out (early and late) and a (somewhat short) explanation relating this with different factors. The attempt to examine the 'when' of dropout against a background of institutional (curriculum) change is important and not well documented before and regretfully neither this study has much to add.
4. A recommendation could be to more clearly relate the data regarding both the 'when' and 'why' of student and highlight this in the Background paragraph.

I agree with the phrasing in the conclusion, that this study 'provides a valuable platform on which to evaluate the longer term impact of institutional change' but also must conclude that it provides no answers to the second research question.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests.