Author's response to reviews

Title: Development of a quality assurance handbook for improving educational courses in Africa

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Author's response to reviews: see over
The following changes that are highlighted in yellow, have been made in line with the second reviewer’s comments:

1) **Title:** The reviewer commented on the fact that the previous title “Principles and Practice underlying the development and delivery of high quality educational courses in Africa” was misleading. As recommended by the reviewer we changed the title to: **Development of a quality assurance handbook for improving educational courses in Africa**

2) **Abstract and background:** We have omitted the word “brian drain” in line with the reviewer’s comments and in place of that have stated the following: **The departure of these health care workers from developing countries**

3) The reviewer requested us to clarify the types of courses we were targeting the book to be used in. Our aim is for the handbook to be used to improve the quality of all higher education, including professional development courses such as health care related courses. We have therefore altered this accordingly as follows:

**Conclusion in abstract:** This would contribute to providing a skilled and sustainable health care workforce that would reduce the need for health care workers to travel overseas in search of **good quality higher education courses.**

**Conclusion:** The principles outlined in the handbook help to provide a regulatory framework to guide development and management of good quality higher education courses, **including professional development courses,** that will contribute to enhancing the teaching and learning experience of students on courses in the developing world. The provision of high quality education in their own country will reduce the need for health care workers to travel overseas in search of **internationally recognised higher education courses,** and will contribute to providing a skilled and sustainable workforce.

4) We have included a statement in the abstract-methods section about the participatory nature of the development of the handbook as requested by the reviewer. It states: **The development of this handbook was participatory in nature.**

5) **Page 7 Curriculum design:** In line with the reviewer’s comments we expanded on the need for the content to be relevant to the local priorities and for development of generic skills. It now states the following: We advocate for the curriculum design to be guided by benchmark statements for specific
subjects that may be national or international. The course should also be designed in consultation with students, employers and funders, to ensure that they are relevant to the local needs. For example, the course may be designed to address local health priorities that are guided by the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. We emphasise the need for tutors to vary their teaching methods as not all students learn well for example through lectures. The abolition of tutorials at Makerere University in Uganda was associated with a perceived decline in academic standards and a review recommended the reinstitution of tutorials to ensure the quality of academic programmes [18]. Students should also be trained in generic skills such as ability to perform literature searches and critically appraise published literature. They should also have access to information and communication technology and well-resourced libraries. We recognise that this may be difficult to implement in resource poor settings but some institutions have been successful in making this provision through, for example, donor funding or using internet resources that are free for poor countries. [12, 18, 19]

6) **Page 7 Course delivery:** The reviewer recommended that we have a greater discussion about plagiarism in this section. The paragraph on quality assurance of student assessments now states: We highlight the need to ensure that the assessments strategies are valid (i.e. they measure the students ability to meet the course learning outcomes) and fair (i.e. do not discriminate against minority students). [20, 21, 22] We also highlight the need to have policies in place that clarify for the students, issues of academic honesty and correct referencing of material used in assignments. This would include clearly defined penalties for plagiarism and collusion.

7) **Page 8:** The reviewer recommended that we mention the importance of student feedback/input into course development and quality assurance, as well as role of local health departments in curriculum development. The paragraph on quality assurance of approval and review processes now states the following: We stress the importance of having clear procedures for approval of new courses and modification of existing ones. We also advocate a regular review of courses in order to identify good practice that can be disseminated as well as areas of weakness that can be addressed and improved on. This should include obtaining feedback from the students and employers, for
example local health care departments that would facilitate the development of
good quality courses that are fit for purpose and relevant to the local needs of
the community.