Reviewer’s report

Title: Developing recommendations to improve the quality of diabetes care in Ireland: a policy analysis.

Version: 2 Date: 24 April 2014

Reviewer: Jutta Pulkki

Reviewer’s report:

This manuscript presents a research aimed at examining the Expert Advisory Group as an instrumental case study of the policy formulation process in the context of a health system undergoing major reform in Ireland. This aim is interesting and relevant and when achieved the results would offer useful information for policy makers and professionals both in Ireland and in other countries too. However, the manuscript does not provide a sound respond to the aim. Manuscript has conceptual as well as methodological problems which are addressed below.

Major compulsory revisions:

1) Specified research question and aim needs to define more clearly.

Specified research question(s) cannot be found. However, several aims or focuses are presented: one is to “examine the EAG as an instrumental case study of the policy formulation process”, second is to “examine the evolution and fate of the EAG recommendations”, and third is that the paper focuses on “agenda setting, the formulation of policy proposals, and the barriers to the implantation phase at the time”. That is the aim or focus of the study is unfocused, and need to be redefined. Clear research question(s) is also needed in order to specify what exactly wanted to be known, and it offers a basis for analysis too.

In addition, what actually is meant by the “fate” of the EAG? Whose fate of what? Can the “fate” be studied with the study design used in this paper?

2) The description of the Kingdon’s framework needs to present more clearly.

Kingdon’s framework is insufficiently described. Streams remain unfamiliar for those who are not known them already. A table or a figure could be a useful way to present the idea of the framework.

3) The use of Kingdon’s framework is questionable: the way how it was used needs to be either describe more clearly or reconsider another way to use it.

Was the Kingdon’s framework used as an analytical tool or what? If it was used as an analytical tool then this need to be present more clearly. (In addition if this is the way how framework was used the more proper analytical method would then be theoretical or theory driven content analysis. More about this in next
paragraph.) If the framework was used more as a tool to discuss of the results then the results should be presented in one chapter and after that discussed of them in the light of Kingdon’s policy streams in own chapter.

4) The methods (setting, dosing, data and analysis) need to be described more clearly.

Setting: the reform as well the Irish health system should be introduce here in more detailed, especially as this study was called by the authors to be “one of the first studies to examine the policy process within the Irish health system…” (p. 22).

Design: What is meant by the qualitative instrumental case study design? (Reference of that?) The case was identified to be “the development of recommendations by the EAG” and the detailed case description was said to be built through in-depth data collection using multiple sources. So, was “the case” a context where the study was conducted or the subject of the study? In addition the description of the case remains vague.

Participants: Participants of what? Of the study or the EAG? If participants mean here those who were asked to join the study why the “purposive sampling method” was used to select them, as all of them were invited, isn’t they? Instead of calling them participant it would be a better to call them “interviewees”.

Data collection: It would be a useful to see a list of the discussed themes or questions of the interviews for example in attachment table. How many documents were gathered?

Analysis: It is not stated clearly enough why and how the thematic content analysis was used. I recommended to consider to redo the analysis by using deductive content analysis that is theoretical, theory driven or theory based content analysis where the theory (e.g. Kingdon’s policy streams) is “tested” systematically in the study context.

Again, how the “documentary analysis” was done?

5) Results needs to be reorganized (if not redone by using other kind of method).

If the analysis will not be redone by using deductive content analysis then the results need to separate from the notions of Kingdon’s ideas. In addition it should be specified more clearly what exactly were the themes which were identified from the data? (see page 11, line 2.)

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I have addressed here only the major issues of the paper. There were also minor deficiencies but at this point they are not relevant to point out as after the major revisions the paper need to be reviewed again.

All in all, I want to say, that the topic of the paper is valuable, and the revisions are worthwhile to do, even though they seem quite large at the first glance.
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.