Reviewer’s report

Title: The academic backbone: Longitudinal continuities in educational achievement from secondary school and medical school to MRCP(UK) and the Specialist Register in UK medical students and doctors

Version: 1 Date: 5 July 2013

Reviewer: Sam Leinster

Reviewer’s report:

1 The issue of the significance of prior academic achievement in predicting performance in a medical career is important as it impacts on selection for medical school and for postgraduate training.

2 The authors have carried out a thorough and rigorous analysis of available data sets to provide empirical evidence to support the concept of an academic backbone underpinning performance in a medical career. The size of the correlations however suggest that while the academic backbone might be a necessary requirement for success it is not by itself a sufficient requirement.

3 They argue convincingly that success in examinations is a good surrogate for success in clinical practice but they do not fully discuss the limitation of considering only the MRCP. The assumption appears to be that performance on MRCP for those who choose to follow a career in Medical Specialties is similar to performance in other postgraduate examinations for those who choose different career paths. The data for performance in medical school is strong but there is no empirical evidence presented that the academic backbone is necessary for a postgraduate career in (say) General Surgery. This needs to be tested and this should be noted as a limitation.

4 I do not think they sufficiently address the limitation of using entry into the specialist register as a criterion. The discussion implies that hospital medicine is academically more respectable than other branches although I am sure that the authors do not mean this.

5 Major Compulsory Revisions
None

6 Minor Essential Revisions
None

7 Discretionary Revisions
The discussion could be developed to address the limitations arising from the use of MRCP and entry to the specialist register as noted above.
Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare I have no competing interests