

## Effectiveness Bank user survey 2012

In addition to this report readers can see the survey as presented to site users at:

[https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/EB\\_2012](https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/EB_2012)

and a current summary of responses at:

[https://www.surveymonkey.com/sr.aspx?sm=MDhs\\_2fdz2WAWodO3I4FXfW9nwAKdMzSwyrhch8wOIGCU\\_3d](https://www.surveymonkey.com/sr.aspx?sm=MDhs_2fdz2WAWodO3I4FXfW9nwAKdMzSwyrhch8wOIGCU_3d)

All %s reported here are based on the number of respondents to that question. Where appropriate comparable figures from previous survey are given in brackets in italics, eg, (56%).

### Summary and discussion

Year	2008	2010	2011	2012
Number of respondents	183	563	506	584
Respondent is a drug/alcohol service practitioner	79%	80%	83%	81%
Service developed thinking or changed response to substance use	69%	77%	82%	78%
Found the site very or extremely useful	81%	88%	91%	90%

Above are some key figures from surveys to date of subscribers to the Effectiveness Bank e-mail list and users of the web site.

Most responses were prompted by alerts sent to the Findings mailing list, so should be interpreted in the light of the fact that respondents were mainly people interested enough in the service to sign up for e-mail updates. In line with the aim to target UK-based drug and alcohol service practitioners, about two thirds were UK-based and for 8 in 10 their work involved responding to drug and alcohol use/problems.

Among these respondents there is great appreciation for the service because it is seen as fulfilling an important function (making the 'what works' literature available and intelligible to people who would otherwise not have the time and resources to access it), being practically unique in serving this function, doing so rigorously and to a high standard, and achieving ease of reading without taking quality or information shortcuts. They say the service would be greatly missed and their work would suffer if it were not available.

Why this might happen is revealed in response to the question about what impact reading the research analyses had on their work. About 8 in 10 said it had developed their thinking and/or changed their present or planned behaviour in respect of their response to drug and alcohol use/problems.

As an access route to Findings documents, appreciated most of all it seems are the e-mail alerts which require little of the user other than to click to get the analyses described in the alert. The search facilities on the site are less known, less often used, and therefore overall less appreciated, though still seen as valuable (eg, 62% who responded to this question found the topic search function very or extremely useful).

## Methodology

On 5 October 2012 the survey link was made available on the Findings site and the next day an invitation to complete the survey was sent to subscribers to the Findings mailing list. Reminders were sent to subscribers on 18 and 26 October.

The survey consisted of eight questions. Among these were three opportunities to rate elements of the service from 1 to 5 in terms of usefulness or importance (the site as a whole; the topic search facility; the word search facility). Another question probed the degree to which “anything you have read on this site influenced you or your colleagues’ thinking about how drug and alcohol use should be responded to”. Respondents also had the opportunity enter free-text answers to explain why they did/did not find the site useful, similarly with respect to the search functions, and to “to tell us in your own words how we are doing and what how you would like us to develop our service”.

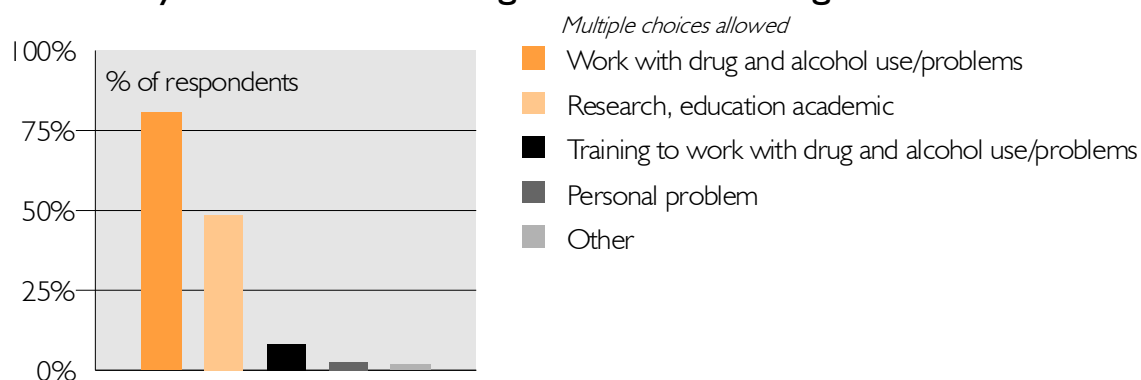
Instead of asking about the alerts sent to mailing list subscribers (see Appendix 1), a new section asked about the research analyses we write, our main final product. One question asked whether “Generally they give me the information I want in the way I want it” and another about whether generally readers found them too detailed or not detailed enough.

### Who were the respondents?

At the time data for this analysis was harvested (1 April 2013), 584 (506) responses had been received. On that date there were 4077 (3937) subscribers to the mailing list.

48% (44%) of the mailing list could be identified as UK in origin via the .uk suffix to their e-mail addresses and by visually inspecting a sample of the remainder. Of the 165 survey respondents who left e-mail addresses, 56% (59%) could be identified as of UK origin. Allowing for UK subscribers/respondents who could not be identified, it seems likely that about two thirds (*about two thirds*) of both the Findings mailing list and of survey respondents were UK-based.

### What led you to access the Drug and Alcohol Findings web site?



81% (83%) of respondents who answered this question (only five did not) said they visited the site because “My work involves responding to drug and alcohol use/problems”. 49% (46%) visited as well/instead (multiple choices were possible) in

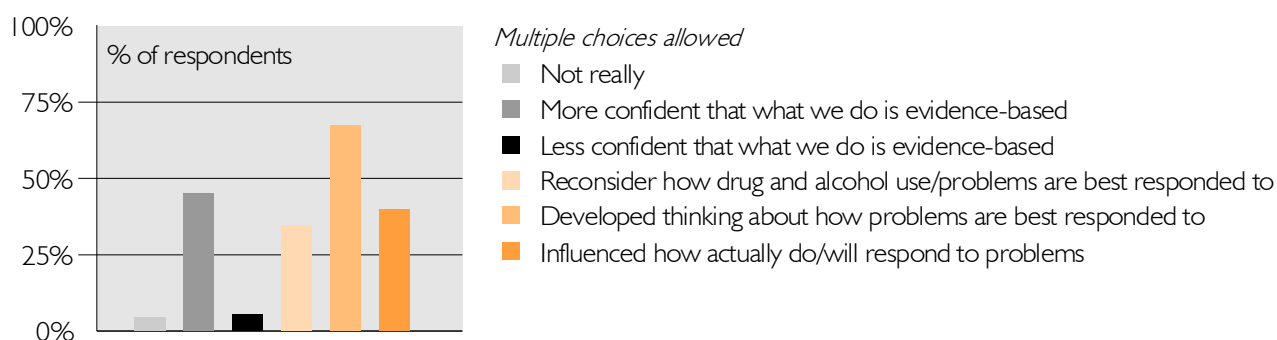
the course of “Research, education or other academic” activities. Few – 2% (3%) – came seeking help with a personal problem.

If this profile is representative of regular site users it seems the intended audience – UK drug/alcohol field practitioners – is being well targeted.

### **Influence on thinking and action**

The bottom-line question asked, “Has anything you have read on this site influenced you or your colleagues’ thinking about how drug and alcohol use should be responded to?” Respondents could tick as many options as they liked. It was answered by all but 4 respondents.

**Has anything you have read on this site influenced your or your colleagues’ thinking about how drug and alcohol use should be responded to?**



Just 4% (4%) had “not really” been influenced in some way or another.

At the other end of the scale, 40% (40%) endorsed “Influenced how I/we actually respond to drug and alcohol use/problems or how we might respond in future”, indicating that 4 in 10 of respondents had or would alter their behaviour in response to our work.

At one step down, 67% (71%) endorsed “Developed my/our thinking about how drug and alcohol use/problems are best responded to”. Together with those who endorsed the previous question, and after eliminating overlap, 78% (82%) of respondents had developed their thinking and/or changed their present or planned behaviour in respect of their response to drug and alcohol use/problems.

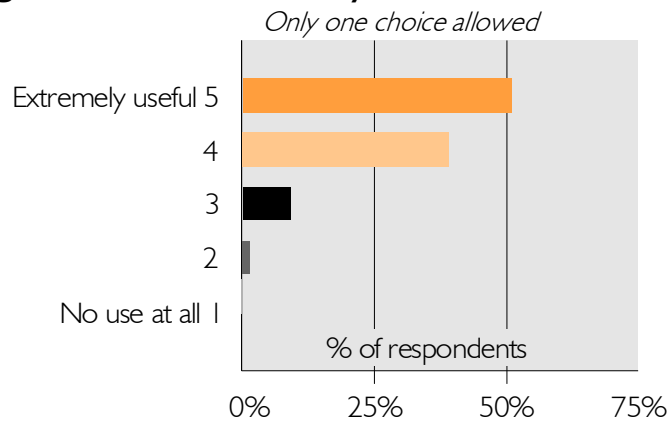
Additionally or instead, 45% (43%) felt “more confident that what we do is evidence-based”. From comments we know that an important function of the service is to give people the confidence to sustain what research shows is good practice and to back them up in their relations with colleagues, commissioners and funders.

### **Reactions to the site as whole**

Asked “In general terms, do/did you find the service useful?” 51% (56%) of those who answered (none did not) endorsed the top of the scale “Extremely useful”. Another 39% (35%) endorsed the step below, which can perhaps be interpreted as “very useful”, making 90% (91%) who found the site very or extremely useful.

66% (50%) of people explained why. Of the 384 (254) responses, 12 (12) were unhappy or had reservations about aspects of the service (see Appendix 2). Three related to there being too much information in the analyses and the remainder were ‘one-off’ comments including one respondent who perceived a bias to the medical

### In general terms, do/did you find the service useful?



model and another to positive findings. Generally respondents appreciated the clarity and depth of the analyses and the way they kept them up to date with the research in a way they would otherwise find impossible.

It seems from the responses that Effectiveness Bank improves productivity in three ways: by saving time on finding, selecting and analysing the research (“It saves me weeks in time allowing me to learn quicker and transfer evidence into practice”; “Saves hours in research time”); by enabling interventions to be informed by research findings in ways which would otherwise be beyond the resources of practitioners (“Saves me searching journals, which I would not get done”; “I learn things that I would otherwise not learn”); and by adding value through the links it makes and the acuity and balance of the analyses (“Summaries of multiple studies and meta-analyses help me see larger connections”; “Really applicable information presented from a position of questioning usefulness rather than a fixed position”).

In summary, 9 in 10 respondents found the site very or extremely useful.

Overwhelmingly the site was seen as providing accessible, relevant, trustworthy, rigorous and high quality information otherwise unavailable in practice.

### Satisfaction with research analyses

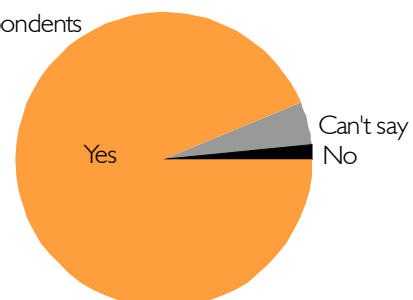
Instead of asking about the alerts sent to mailing list subscribers (see Appendix 1), a new section asked about the research analyses we write, our main final product. These summarise, comment on and critique individual studies and reviews.

One question asked whether “Generally they give me the information I want in the way I want it”. Of respondents (10

### Research analyses generally give me the information I want in the way I want it

*Only one choice allowed*

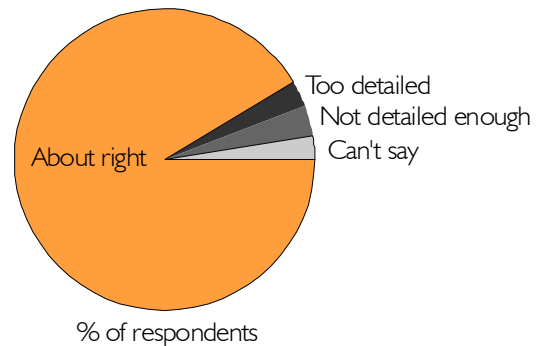
% of respondents



skipped this question), 94% said, yes, they did generally satisfy in these respects, 2% that they did not, and 5% were unable to say.

A second question asked whether generally readers found the analyses too detailed or not detailed enough. Of respondents (8 missed this question), 91% said the level of detail was about right and 3% each that it was too much, too little, or they could not say.

**[In terms of detail],  
generally I find [the analyses]:**  
*Only one choice allowed*



Our analyses are often extended. These results suggest that for regular readers this is not a problem, partly (from open-ended comments to other questions) because the alerts give a one-sentence summary (reproduced at the top of each analysis) which enables them to decide whether or not to read the analysis.

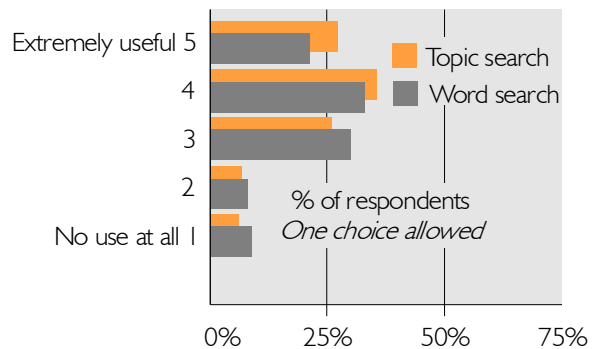
### Usefulness of search functions

Respondents were reminded that all the documents on the site can be searched to find those relevant to specific topics and asked “How useful have you found this?” Additionally respondents were asked “Would you like to tell us why?” A similar question was asked about the free-text search (or word search) function.

36 people skipped the topic search question. 27% (25%) of respondents found the topic search function “extremely” useful and another 35% (38%) very useful (interpretation of scale point 4) totalling 62% (63%) who found it very or extremely useful.

Corresponding proportions for the word search function were: 53 people skipped this question, 21% (21%) extremely useful, 33% (32%) very useful, and 54% (53%) extremely or very useful.

**All the documents we alert you to can also be found by using the two search facilities on our web site. How useful have you found this?**



The impression gained from these figures and from open-ended comments is that most people value the search functions quite highly because they enable them to quickly narrow in on relevant analyses. However, they are often not the most important element of the service. Commonly respondents did not know about the functions, did not feel they had the time or inclination to use them, or preferred to rely on e-mail alerts to bring new material to attention. Few people who had actually used the facilities had any complaints about them.

Unlike the alerts which simply land in the user’s e-mail in-box, the search facilities will only be used at the initiation of the site user. A minority, because this takes time

or because they discount older material, don't use the search facilities, presumably satisfied with having been made aware of new material via the alerts.

### **Open comments**

315 (283) comments were received (from 54% (56%) of all survey respondents) in response to the prompt: "Your chance to tell us in your own words how we are doing and how you would like us to develop our service".

Generally the comments indicated enthusiasm for the service and a desire for it to continue as it is, because it opens up access to research that would otherwise be unavailable to this largely practitioner group, and offers related insights and practice ideas. The e-mail alerts were often picked out as particularly welcome.

Sample comments:

"Especially important is the rigorous reading which means that surface findings cannot always be taken for granted."

"I like having alerts, because they get me to learn at times when if left to my own devices I'd think I was too busy to learn!"

"Having an up to date research site saves me endless hours of internet hunting and it is usually published with great detail. Very user friendly site."

"The Effectiveness Bank draws attention to the key findings in a vast and occasionally overwhelming literature and performs the invaluable service of collating, analysing and discussing them in a highly readable and accessible way."

"Excellent. A unique resource. Not available on any other social policy field."

"I wish there were similar research services in some of the other fields we need to research according to project. All in all – it's a wonderful service – a national treasure."

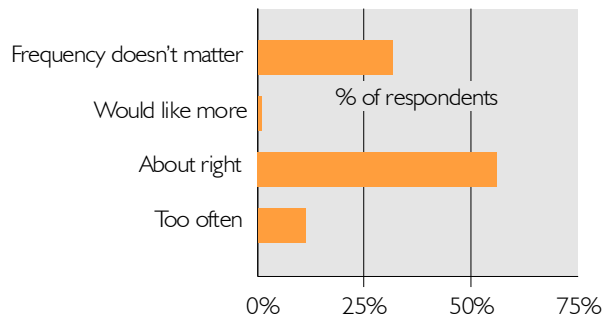
## Appendix 1: 2011 survey responses to question omitted in 2012

### Satisfaction with alerts

Section 4 was divided in to two questions about alerts sent to subscribers by e-mail to let them know about new research analyses and other site developments. Rather than direct access to the site and use of its search facilities, these are the main ways subscribers access Effectiveness Bank analyses.

Currently we send [alerts] out two or three times a week.

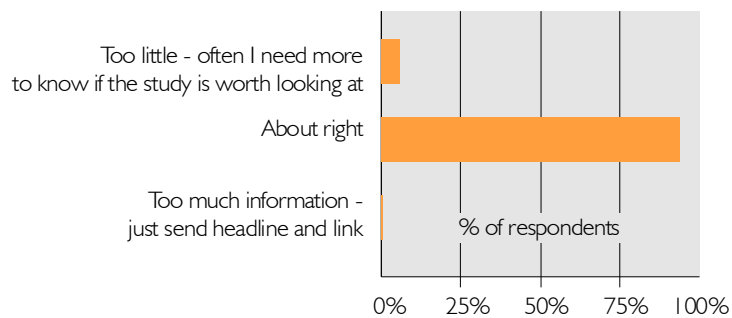
For you is this:



Of respondents (just four missed this question), 88% said they preferred the current frequency with which alerts were sent out (two or three times a week) or that alerts should be sent out as needed – frequency did not matter. This allays concerns that changes to the service (alerting to single studies; alerting to all relevant studies) had led to an unwelcome frequency of alerts.

Of respondents (nine missed this question), 94% said the level of details in the alerts (usually a headline, a short paragraph describing the study, and a link to our analysis) was about right.

The alerts usually consist of a headline, a short paragraph describing the study, and a link to our analysis. Is this generally:



## **Appendix 2: Critical comments to 'Is service generally useful' question**

A number of research findings regularly contradict each other, the effectiveness bank doesn't seem to be evaluating effectiveness, just churning out research findings. Not sure if that's being effective. It certainly does raise awareness to research though

Would be more useful for my purposes if there was less focus on American studies - not always relevant to the UK

I generally find that I don't have enough time to read the articles properly/fully, and that a lot of the research isn't that relevant to the actual work that I do.

An excellent service, but as I am not in the UK some of the location-specific material not of use

Good content but layout isn't easy to use/read

I find the pieces of evidence chosen for your analysis highly selective, driven by an agenda based on the medical model.

... feel it could be improved by some tightening up of the selection criteria used to determine which studies are publicised by Effectiveness Bank. My general impression of reading them over a number of years is that many results of rather ordinary studies tell us what logic/common sense/"experience in the field" told us ages ago. Doesn't mean the research is useless if it validates practice, obviously, but I suppose I subscribe because I am looking for new knowledge that will help me improve my clinical practice.

I think you are a bit biased towards reporting mostly effective interventions and positive results.

I'd like more on prevention... though I understand emphasis on treatment

I am a teacher in addictions and get about a hundred email a day, so it gets buried, and I cannot distinguish how it is important so it gets ignored

It's potentially very very useful but sometimes it's just too much dense information (and repetitive; I seem to get things multiple times). The concept is excellent. I'd just like to see the something in between the snippet in the email and the long article when you click on the link.

Find the length of findings too time consuming to read.