

Drug and Alcohol Findings user survey 2010

In addition to this report readers can see the survey as presented to site users at:
<http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/C2PX7D5>

and see all the responses except for the e-mail addresses of respondents at:
http://www.surveymonkey.com/sr.aspx?sm=_2b4dluaJ6aYOCrCTck4SKR0UvBqE2hGuOv_2bkez_2bDVxIU_3d

All %s reported here are based on the total number of respondents rather than the (sometimes slightly smaller) number who answered that question. Where appropriate comparable figures from the 2008 survey are given in brackets in italics, eg, (56%).

Summary and discussion

Year	2008	2010
Number of respondents	183	563
Respondent is a drug/alcohol service practitioner*	79%	80%
Site developed thinking or changed response to substance use	69%	77%
Found the site very or extremely useful	81%	88%

*In both years at least about two thirds were UK-based.

Above are some key figures from the 2008 and 2010 user surveys. These and others are discussed below and detailed in the subsequent sections of this report.

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

Among these respondents there is great appreciation for the site 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 in quality if it were not available.

Why this might happen is revealed in response to the question about what impact reading Findings documents had on their work. About 8 in 10 overall, and of respondents working with drug and alcohol use/problems, 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. Without Findings these enhancements would not occur as (since the service is unique) they would be unable to access the research and type of analyses Findings presents.

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 document(s) described in the alert. The search facilities on the site are less known, used and

therefore overall less appreciated, though still seen as valuable (eg, 73% found the topic search function very or extremely useful).

This is partly due to the valuing of new research (generally what the alerts are about) over the less current findings which would be among those retrieved in a search. For the same reason there is greater appreciation of the new research analyses than the back issues of the magazine (the last issue was in 2006) uploaded to the site, though both are generally highly valued.

Compared to the previous survey in 2008, there were 563 rather than 183 responses available at the time the results were analysed and there has been an increase the proportion of respondents who highly value the site and whose work it has influenced. 11% more respondents overall and of people working with drug and alcohol use/problems 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, and 9% more found the site very or extremely useful.

Methodology

The survey was made available on the Findings site on 22 February 2010. An invitation to complete the survey was sent to subscribers to the Findings mailing list on 23 February 2010. Reminders were sent to subscribers on 4 and 11 March 2010.

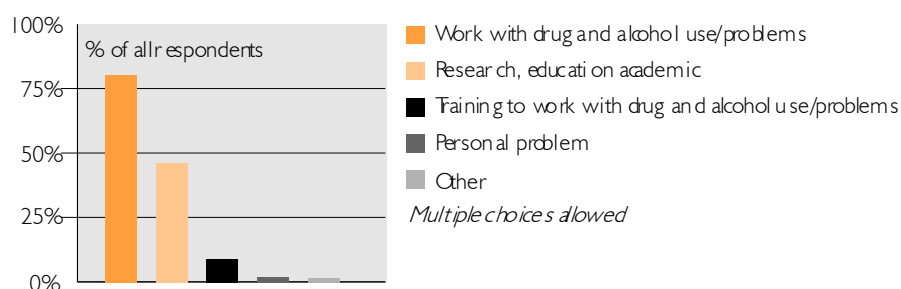
The survey consisted of seven questions. Among these were five opportunities to rate elements of the service from 1 to 5 in terms of usefulness or importance (the site as a whole; PDFs from back issues of the Findings magazine; up to date research bulletins; the subject search facility; the word search 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”. Options ranged from “Not really” to “Influenced how I/we actually respond to drug and alcohol use/problems or how we might respond in future”. 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”.

Who were the respondents?

At the time data for this analysis was harvested (1 May 2010), 563 (183) responses had been received. On that date there were 2801 (860) subscribers to the Findings mailing list. Of the respondents who left e-mail addresses, 90%ⁱ (79%) were on the Findings mailing list. It seems likely then that roughly 90% (80%) of all respondents were on the Findings mailing list and that roughly 1 in 6 (*just over 1 in 6*) of that list responded to the survey in time to be included in this analysis.

49% (53%) of the total Findings mailing list could be identified as UK in origin (.uk suffix to e-mail address). Of the survey respondents who left e-mail addresses, 45%ⁱⁱ (51%) could be identified in the same way and others by visual inspection, totalling 59% (63%). 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 the survey respondents were UK-based.

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



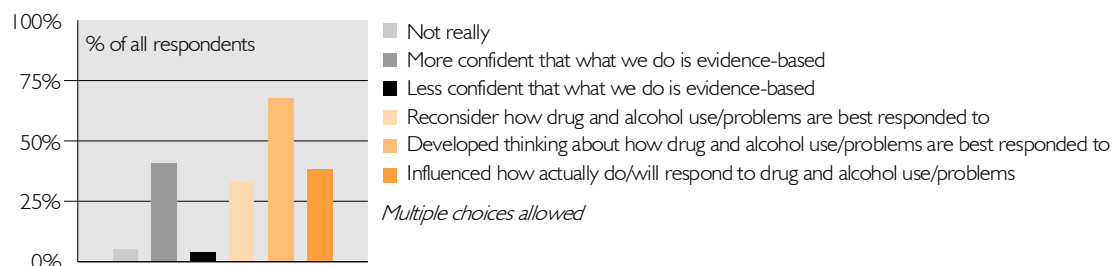
80% (79%) of respondents said they visited the site because “My work involves responding to drug and alcohol use/problems”. 46% (48%) visited as well/instead (multiple choices were possible) in the course of “Research, education academic” activities. Few – 2% (4%) – came seeking help with a personal 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.

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Just 5% (9%) had “not really” been influenced in some way or another.

At the other end of the scale, 38% (26%) endorsed “Influenced how I/we actually respond to drug and alcohol use/problems or how we might respond in future”, indicating that nearly 4 in 10 (*over a quarter*) of respondents had or would alter their behaviour in response to our work. This rises to 44% (31%) of those actually working with drug and alcohol use/problems.

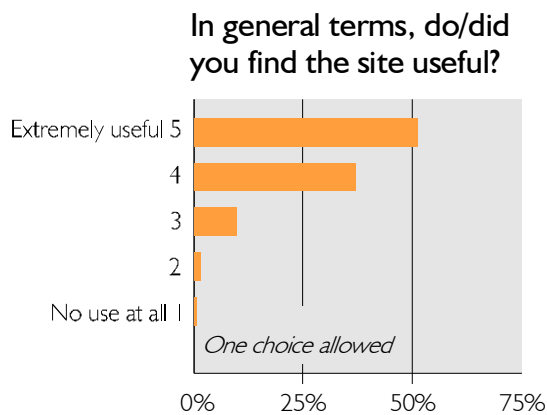
At one step down, 68% (58%) endorsed “Developed my/our thinking about how drug and alcohol use/problems are best responded to”. Together with those who endorsed the previous question, and after eliminating overlap, 77% (69%) of respondents had developed their thinking and/or changed their present or planned behaviour in respect of their response to drug and alcohol use/problems. A slightly higher proportion – 81% (70%) – is found among those actually working with drug and alcohol use/problems.

Additionally or instead, 40% (43%) felt “more confident that what we do is evidence-based”. From comments we know that an important function of the site 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 site useful?”, 51% (44%) endorsed the top of the scale “Extremely useful” and another 37% (37%) the step below which can perhaps be interpreted as “very useful”, making 88% (81%) who found the site very or extremely useful.



Among those actually working with drug and alcohol use/problems, the proportions were very similar with just 2% more endorsing “extremely useful”, or this or “very useful”.

280 people explained why. A few said they relied more on the e-mail updates which direct them to particular entries on the site rather than using the site directly. Three said they found the layout or writing style difficult and two complained that some content was not up to date. The other 275 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.

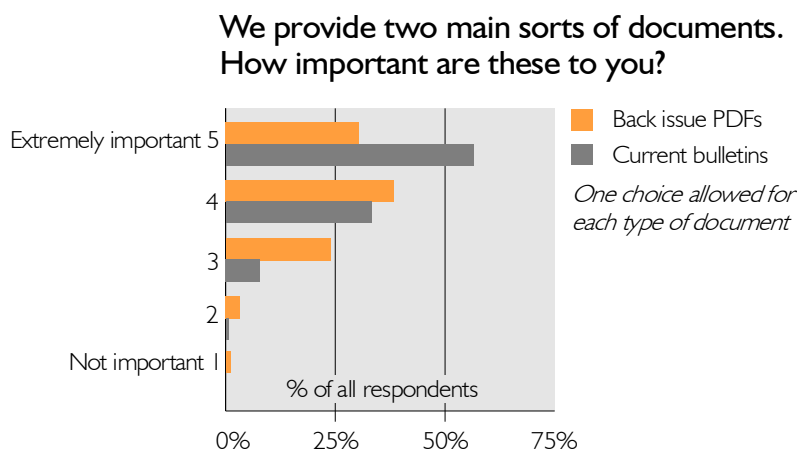
In summary nearly 9 in 10 respondents found the site very or extremely useful and the same was true of respondents actually working in the field. No one perceived a biased editorial line. Overwhelmingly the site was seen as providing accessible, relevant, trustworthy, rigorous and high quality information otherwise unavailable in practice.

Reactions to documents on the site

Question 4 was divided in to two identical questions about how important the “Two main sorts of documents” provided by the site were to the respondent. These were:

- PDFs from back issues of the Findings magazine;
- up to date research bulletins.

The intention was to probe which was the most important to our users as a guide to



allocating effort between the two types of documents.

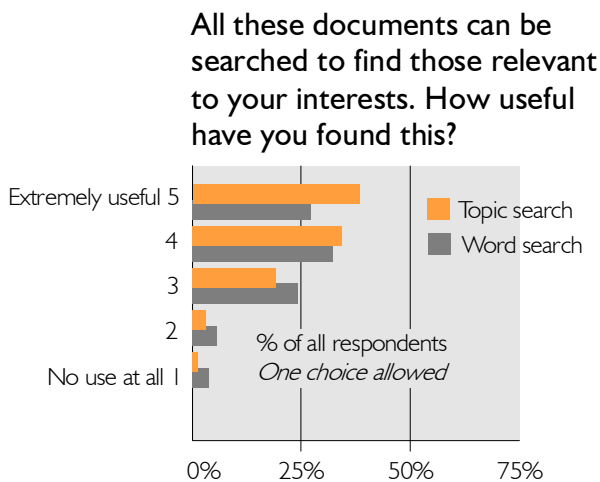
Just six people (0) said either was unimportant and 69% (75%) and 90% (90%) respectively thought they were very (interpretation of scale point 4) or “extremely” important. These proportions clearly differed between the two types of documents, largely accounted for the 27% (20%) more respondents (57% v. 30%) (48% v 28%) who felt the research bulletins were “extremely” important.

From comments, this preference for research bulletins arises from a greater value placed on current as opposed to less recent research. The fact that fewer old issues were uploaded in recent years and that they are aging may account for the diminished perception of their importance compared to 2008.

Usefulness of search functions

Respondents were reminded that “All these documents 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 (“They can also be free-text searched to find the words you are interested in”, etc); this did not exist in 2008 so there is no comparable previous data.

Eight people or about 1% (3; 2%) found the topic search function of no use, all but one because they did not know it was there, preferred to rely on e-mail updates, or simply had not used it. Only one criticised the function itself. 22 found the word search function of no use. Of these 12 explained why; all said they did not know it was there or had not used it.



Another 3% (4%) and 6% respectively found these functions of little use (interpretation of scale point 2). 13 the 32 people who said this of the word search function explained why; all said they were unaware of it or preferred not to use it due to time pressures.

38% (30%) of respondents found the topic search function “extremely” useful and another 34% (38%) very useful (interpretation of scale point 4) totalling 73% (68%) who found it very or extremely useful. Corresponding

proportions for the word search function were 27%, 32% and 60%.

The impression is that though most people value the search functions quite highly they are often not the most important element. Comments in response to the prompt “Would you like to tell us why?” indicate that the main reasons are not knowing of the functions, not having the time or inclination to use them, or preferring to rely on e-mail alerts to bring new material to attention. Unlike the alerts sent out about back issues and bulletins which simply land in the user’s e-mail in-box, the search function 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 bother to use it, presumably satisfied with having been made aware of new material

via the alerts. However, most of the commentators appreciated the ability it gave them to quickly and easily find documents on particular topics.

Open comments

292 (90) comments were received (52% of all survey respondents) in response to the prompt: "Your chance to tell us in your own words how we are doing and what how you would like us to develop our service".

Generally the comments indicated great 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:

"I am a fan ... evidence is often lost due to lack of understanding ... your summaries bring it alive and make it more available ... findings gets it seen"

"an excellent service, much appreciated - keep them coming please"

"Findings gives us (drug and alcohol service with 100 plus staff and 75 volunteers seeing 3,000 individuals a year) access to academic research relevant to our day to day work and future plans which, as a non-statutory service, we would be unable to otherwise access (cost of journals etc.) It also analyses often complex studies to extract what is useful and relevant to work in the field today."

"I feel that the service you provide is invaluable, I could not keep up to date in the way that I have without you. No suggestions for improvement. Well done."

"I think the service is great and as a researcher within a large voluntary organisation it makes my life a lot easier! Special thanks for the quick and very comprehensive response when I've emailed Mike direct about a particular issue that I've struggled to find any evidence for"

"Keep myself and the team thinking about issues on a regular basis"

"This is a useful service that deserves to continue"

"I believe this site makes an important contribution to the understanding of addiction and recovery from addiction. My ability to access relevant information would be diminished if this service was withdrawn."

"You provide a bank of evidence which helps practitioners to deliver effective services. We need this."

"So much work made unnecessary by your marvellous site that gathers together a balanced view and so much information relating to a wide range of topics ... You are the only site I find is thorough, balanced, informative and especially - encouraging."

"D & AI misuse/addictions is a very complex issue - it's like having a Learned friend close by - thanks"

A few respondents wanted the site to widen its remit from UK-relevant intervention evaluations to, for example, etiology, practice guidance, government policies, impact of substance misuse on families, more inputs from drug users,

effects of drugs, or to focus on countries other than the UK. A few also wanted a more accessible presentation but without ‘dumbing down’ the content. A few also suggested technical enhancements like an RSS feed or podcasts.

Changes made in response to comments include:

- continuing focus of effort on new research rather than magazine back issues;
- subheadings in entries;
- a help page and an improved help link on search pages;
- a regularly updated hot topics page and archive which offers one-click ‘canned’ searches on important issues;
- making it clear that personal help is available from the Findings editor;
- reminder alert sent out about the search functions.

ⁱ Based on a 1 in 2 sample.

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