

Drug and Alcohol Findings user survey 2011

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

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/8VR929J>

and a current summary of responses at:

https://www.surveymonkey.com/sr.aspx?sm=JuyaQj0ycp3MnNWIQw_2f8MsIS0nccnINy_2fjgXgURKiIQ_3d

All %s reported here are based on the number of respondents to that question.

Where appropriate comparable figures from the 2010 survey are given in brackets in italics, eg, (56%).

Summary and discussion

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

Above are some key figures from surveys 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 responses 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 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 if it were not available.

Why this might happen is revealed in response to the question about what impact reading Findings 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 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, 63% found the topic search function very or extremely useful).

Methodology

On 20 September 2011 the survey link was made available on the Findings site and an invitation to complete the survey was sent to subscribers to the Findings mailing list. Reminders were sent to subscribers on 29 September 2011 and 7 October 2011.

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 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”. 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”. A new section asked about the alerts sent to mailing list subscribers, shown by previous surveys to be the main way site users access our analyses. One question asked about the desired frequency of alerts and another about the desired degree of detail about the study(ies) the subscriber is being alerted to.

Who were the respondents?

At the time data for this analysis was harvested (18 November 2011), 506 (563) responses had been received. On that date there were 3937 (2801) subscribers to the Findings mailing list.

44% (48%) 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, 59 of 143 could be identified in the same way and 23 others by visual inspection, totalling 57% (59%). 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?



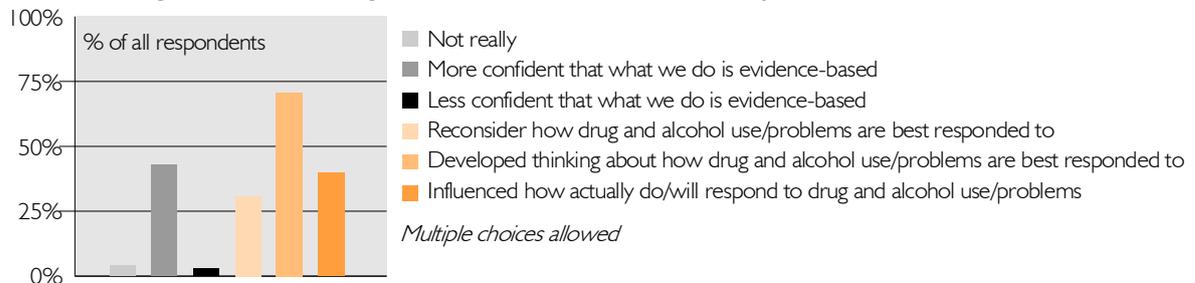
83% (80%) of respondents who answered this question (only five did not) said they visited the site because “My work involves responding to drug and alcohol use/problems”. 46% (46%) visited as well/instead (multiple choices were possible) in the course of “Research, education academic” activities. Few – 3% (2%) – 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.

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



Just 4% (5%) had “not really” been influenced in some way or another.

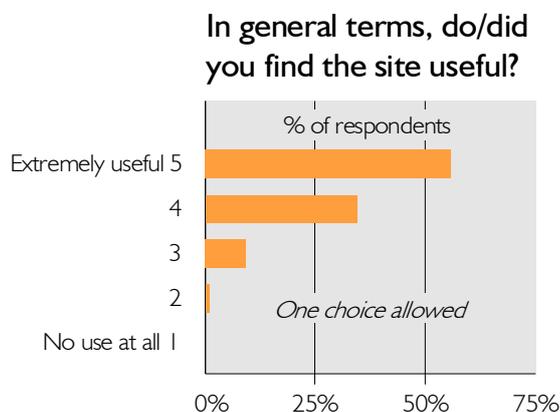
At the other end of the scale, 40% (38%) endorsed “Influenced how I/we actually respond to drug and alcohol use/problems or how we might respond in future”, indicating that nearly 4 in 10 of respondents had or would alter their behaviour in response to our work.

At one step down, 71% (68%) 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, 82% (77%) 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, 43% (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?”, 56% (51%) of those who answered (only one did not) endorsed the top of the scale “Extremely useful” and another 35% (37%) the step below which can perhaps be interpreted as “very useful”, making 91% (88%) who found the site very or extremely useful.



50% (50%) of people explained why. Of the 254 responses, 12 were unhappy about aspects of the service but all these comments related to issues over which the project has no control. Some wanted full text (prohibited by copyright law) and others commented on the preponderance of US and/or treatment articles and the relative lack of policy analyses (the nature of the evidence base). The others 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 (“I think it saves me weeks of time every year”); by enabling interventions to be informed by research findings in ways which would otherwise be beyond the resources of practitioners (“It’s an excellent way of keeping up-to-date with current research that otherwise I would be unlikely to hear about. It contributes to service development”); and by adding value through the links it makes and the acuity of the analyses (“It’s just such an intelligent site. The commentaries are very well balanced and nuanced”).

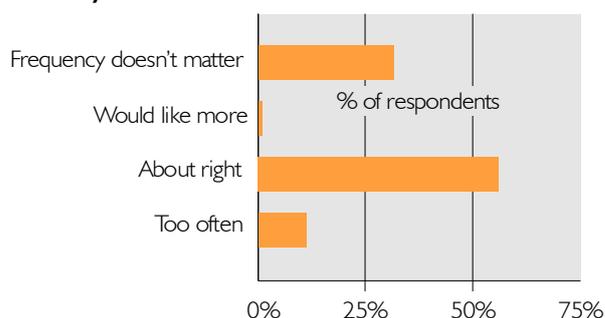
In summary, 9 in 10 respondents found the site very or extremely useful. No one perceived a biased editorial line. Overwhelmingly the site was seen as providing accessible, relevant, trustworthy, rigorous and high quality information otherwise unavailable in practice.

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. These questions were new in 2011 and replaced questions about the relative usefulness of articles from back issues of the magazine versus new research analyses, since the uploading of back issues had been completed by the end of October 2010.

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

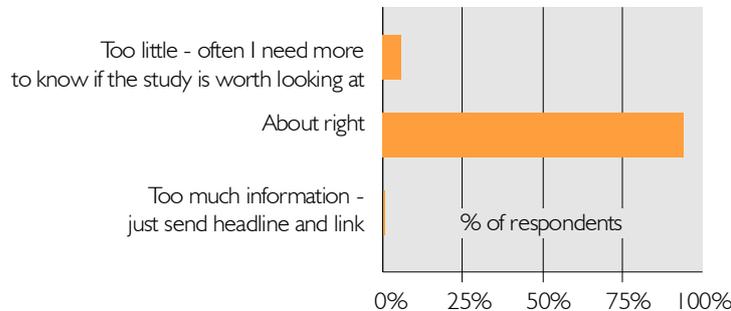
For you is this:



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:

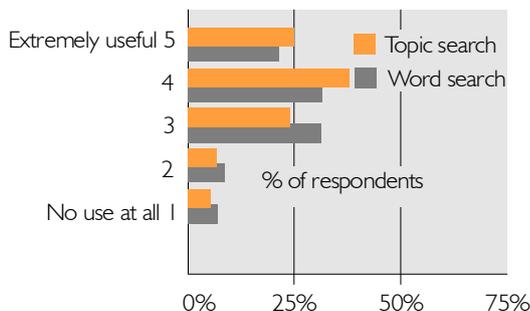


Usefulness of search functions

Respondents were reminded that all the documents on the site can be searched for 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.

25% (38%) of respondents found the topic search function “extremely” useful and another 38% (34%) very useful (interpretation of scale point 4) totalling 63% (73%) who found it very or extremely useful. Corresponding proportions for the word

All these documents can be searched to find those relevant to your interests. How useful have you found this?



search function were 21% (27%), 21% (32%) and 53% (60%). The reasons given were the obvious ones of quickly being able to narrow in on relevant analyses.

The impression is that though most people value the search functions quite highly they are often not the most important element. 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. Just one or two 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 them, 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

283 (292) comments were received (56% (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 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:

“So glad you are there! Also glad to be able to make contact with the service via email. You have made a big difference to my working life at times when evidence has been needed to inform clinical practice.”

“This is a great important service. The email alerts are well written, highly readable, make me aware of research I probably wouldn't have time to find out about otherwise. An important part of my professional development.”

“Your service is vital and so important to us working in the field who need the evidence base to back up our service development decisions so that we move forward in a considered and experienced way rather than jumping on the latest bandwagon. I promote you to all my colleagues and commissioners and you give our field a professional credibility and validity and a voice of reason that is so important in these times when resources are being squeezed and people are questioning our value.”

“DA is doing excellent, consistently high quality work, an invaluable contribution to those involved in substance use issues. Please ensure the long-term future of this unique knowledge bank is assured.”