

Effectiveness Bank user survey 2015

This report presents an analysis of results from the 2015 survey of users of the Effectiveness Bank service provided by Drug and Alcohol Findings. For more on that service go to:

<http://www.findings.org.uk/aboutDAF.php>

The survey as presented to site users is at:

https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/EB_2015

A current summary of responses is at:

<https://www.surveymonkey.net/results/SM-Y32VGL6Q/>

This report is available for download at:

http://findings.org.uk/PHP/dl.php?file=EB_2015.pdf

Unless indicated otherwise, %s are based on the total number of respondents including those who did not answer the relevant question.

Summary and discussion

The surveys combine continuity in core questions plus variable questions to explore different aspects of the service. Invitations to complete surveys are sent to subscribers to the Effectiveness Bank e-mailing list and other outlets to which similar alerts are sent, and are featured on the web site. Below are some core figures from surveys to date.

	Year	2008	2010	2011	2012	2014	2015
Number of respondents		183	563	506	584	418	254
Respondent is a drug/alcohol service practitioner		79%	80%	83%	81%	80%	78%
Service developed thinking or changed response to substance use		69%	77%	82%	78%	80%	81%
Found the site very or extremely useful		81%	88%	91%	90%	87%	90%

For earlier survey results see:

2008: http://findings.org.uk/PHP/dl.php?file=DAF_survey_2008_results.pdf

2010: http://findings.org.uk/PHP/dl.php?file=DAF_survey_2010_results.pdf

2011: http://findings.org.uk/PHP/dl.php?file=EB_2011.pdf

2012: http://findings.org.uk/PHP/dl.php?file=EB_2012.pdf

2014: http://findings.org.uk/PHP/dl.php?file=EB_2014.pdf

Responses should be interpreted in the light of the fact that respondents would tend to be those most positive about the service. The most engaged users are presumably those who have signed up to the Effectiveness Bank mailing list, and they are likely also to be the main source of survey responses. There will be others not reached by the survey who came across the service but did not want to keep in touch, and others who were reached by the survey but did not feel engaged enough to respond. At the time the mailing list numbered around 4,300. Even if all respondents were on the mailing list, they would constitute just 6% of the list. This a smaller fraction than in previous years, perhaps suggesting that a relatively stable readership has become unwilling to complete repetitive surveys every year. Stable mailing list numbers and rising numbers of downloads suggest that the reason is not mounting dissatisfaction with the service.

In line with the aim to target UK-based drug and alcohol service practitioners, at least three-quarters of the mailing list are UK-based and the work of 8 in 10 survey respondents involved responding to drug and alcohol use/problems.

Among 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 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 want the service to continue because of these qualities and because it has impacted on their thinking and work; about 8 in 10 said using the service had developed their thinking and/or changed their or their service's present or planned behaviour in respect of responses to drug and alcohol use/problems.

A few responses indicate that the web site could benefit from cosmetic and usability enhancements and extensions such as comment forums, as long as the features valued by users do not suffer. The search functions are valued by most respondents but not used by substantial minorities, partly because they do not know they exist. Respondents rely more on the 'pushed' elements of the service, especially email messages alerting them to new analyses.

Above all, typically respondents want the service to continue as it is.

Methodology

On 13 November 2015 the survey link was made available on the Effectiveness Bank site. Over the next two days an invitation to complete the survey was sent to subscribers to the Effectiveness Bank mailing list, to DS Daily, and to LinkedIn groups which had been sent alerts for new analyses. Reminders were sent to the Effectiveness Bank mailing list only on 26 November 2015, 17 December 2015, and 19 January 2016.

The survey consisted of seven top-level questions with sub-questions. Among these were three opportunities to rate elements of the service from 1 to 5 in terms of usefulness or importance. These related to the site as a whole and to the two search facilities. 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". Alerts about new Effectiveness Bank analyses of evaluation research are the main way we communicate with service users. A question asked whether these generally gave the reader the information they wanted in the way they wanted it. Respondents also had the opportunity enter free-text answers to explain their responses, and to "to tell us in your own words how we are doing and what how you would like us to develop our service". The 2014 survey had focused on the matrices. These were omitted from the 2015 survey in favour of questions about the search functions.

Who were the respondents?

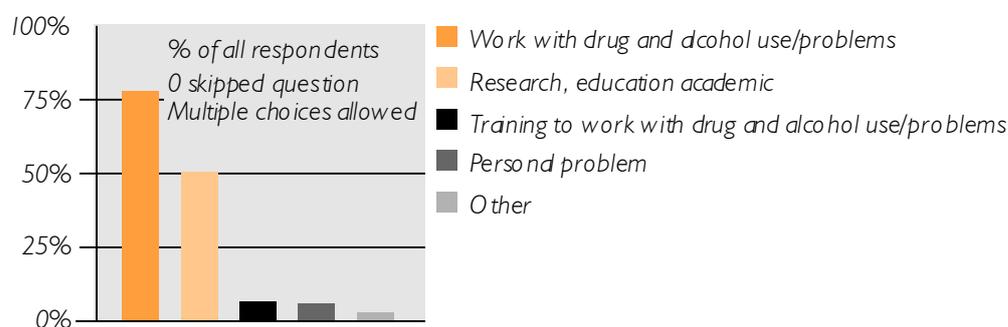
In this and later sections, where appropriate comparable figures from the previous survey are given in brackets in italics, eg, (56%).

At the time data for this analysis was harvested (15 February 2016), 254 (418) responses had been received. When the survey was first released there were 4330 subscribers to the mailing list.

The pool of potential respondents presumably consists mainly of mailing list subscribers. Of these subscribers, 76% (70%) could be identified as probably UK in origin via .uk or .nhs.net in their email addresses. From the internet addresses of their computers, the MailChimp mailing list system identified 48% (46%) as operating from the UK.

67 (108) survey respondents left email addresses enabling a guess about where they worked. Of these, 45% (42%) could be identified as of UK origin by a .uk suffix or visual inspection.

What led you to access the Effectiveness Bank?



Asked what led them to access the service, 78% (80%) of all respondents said they visited the site because, "My work involves responding to drug and alcohol use/problems". At 50% (48%), half visited as well/instead (multiple choices were possible) in the course of "Research, education or other academic activities". Just 6% (3%) came seeking help with a personal problem.

If these figures are representative it seems the intended audience – UK drug/alcohol field practitioners – is being well targeted. However, a large minority also have research or educational roles. We may be especially missing out on practitioners without these roles and on trainees.

Influence on thinking and action

The 'bottom-line' question was, "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 your or your colleagues' thinking about how drug and alcohol use should be responded to?



Just 5% (4%) had "not really" been influenced in some way or another. At the other end of the scale, 39% (39%) 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 the Effectiveness Bank communications.

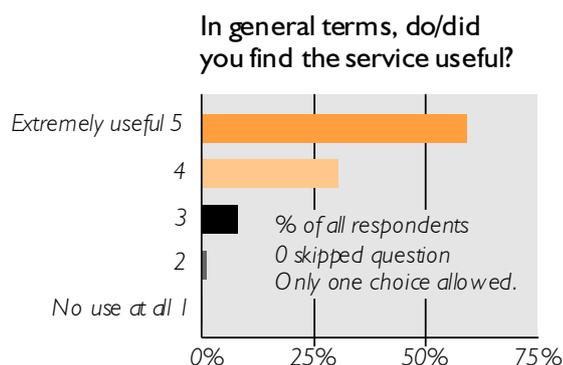
At one step down, 70% (69%) endorsed, "Developed my/our thinking about how drug and alcohol use/problems are best responded to". Together with those who endorsed the previous question, after eliminating overlap 81% (80%) of respondents said the service had developed their or their service's thinking and/or changed present or planned responses to drug and alcohol problems.

Additionally or instead, 43% (40%) 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 service as whole

Asked "In general terms, do/did you find the service useful?", 59% (52%) endorsed the top of the scale, "Extremely useful". Another 31% (34%) endorsed the step below, which can perhaps be interpreted as 'very useful', making 90% (87%) who found the site very or extremely useful.

64% (62%) of all respondents explained why. Excluding a handful which simply asked for more or more on the respondent's specific interest, of the 163 (260) responses, just 3 (9) were unhappy or had reservations about aspects of the service. All three were about the look of the site and its usability rather than the quality of the content. 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: "Relevant and saves time trawling research and other websites"; "saves me a lot of time searching the internet for the significant developments"; "It is very time consuming to search the literature and read it in depth--you do this for me and you do it so well"; "Saves me time in searching as difficult to access journals with payment".
- By enabling interventions to be informed by research findings in ways which would otherwise be beyond the resources of practitioners: "informative and well researched - it brings items to my attention that I would never have discovered otherwise"; "Provides a way of keeping up with a research findings that can be difficult and expensive to access".

- By adding value through the links it makes and the insight and balance of the analyses: “A quick summary on the initial e-mail with links to all other relevant papers within the main article”; “Excellence and sustained quality of research summations. Excellent compilations of threads linking associated research”; “the collation/curation aspect makes finding related research very easy too”; “It provides intelligently assimilated, concise and accessible evidence in an intuitive structure”; “Having often complex material digested and communicated in such a clear balanced way is extremely helpful to keeping up to date”.

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

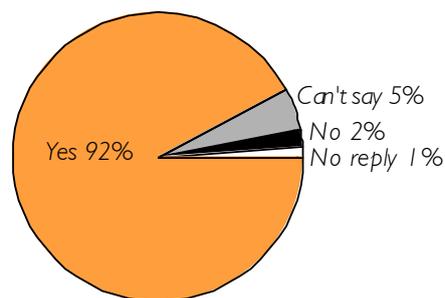
Research analyses are the service’s main final product. They summarise, comment on and critique individual studies and reviews.

About these the survey asked, “When you click the links we send out usually you see one of our Effectiveness Bank analyses. Do these generally give you the information you want in the way you want it?”

Of all respondents, 92% (89%) said, yes, they did generally satisfy in these respects, 2% (1%) that they did not, and 5% (8%) were unable to say.

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

*% of all respondents; 3 skipped question
Only one choice allowed*



Usefulness of search functions

Respondents were reminded that all the documents on the site can be searched to find those relevant to specific topics or which contain certain words, and asked if they you know they could do this. 67% of all 254 survey respondents knew of the topic search function and 54% of the word search function.

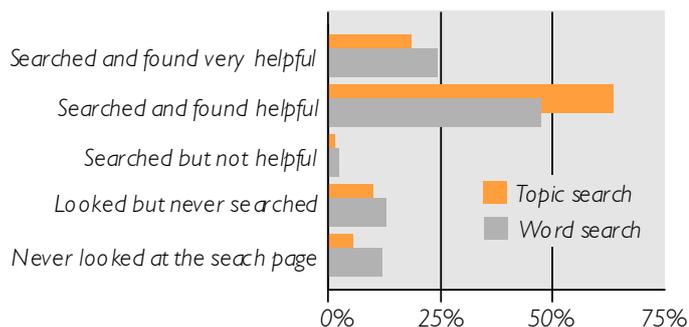
Those who said they knew about these facilities were then asked of each, “did you do a search and how helpful was it?” Corresponding questions had last been asked in 2012 but differently phrased and without the preliminary question about awareness of these facilities, so no comparison figures are given. Unlike previous figures, unless specified otherwise, in the remainder of this section %s are based on respondents to the question, not to the survey as a whole.

If you [know of this facility], did you do a search and how helpful was it?

*Only one choice allowed
% of 176 respondents on topic search and 122 word search*

19% of respondents found the topic search function “very helpful” and another 64% “helpful”, totalling 82% who found it at least helpful. This represents 57% of respondents to the survey as a whole.

25% of respondents found the word search function “very helpful” and another 48% “helpful”, totalling 72% who found it at least helpful. This represents 35% of respondents to the survey as a whole.



After eliminating overlap, 151 respondents said they found at least one of the search functions helpful or very helpful, 83% of respondents to the questions and 59% of respondents to the survey as a whole.

The impression gained from these figures and from open-ended comments is that most respondents value the search functions 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 email alerts to bring new material to their attention.

Unlike the alerts which pro-actively land in the user’s email inbox, search facilities will only be used at the initiation of a site user. For a substantial minority of respondents the alerts and the analyses ‘pushed’ to

them plus the links these contain, and possibly also the top 10 most closely related entries automatically flagged up, are as far as they wish to go.

Open comments

The final substantive question gave respondents an opportunity to make a general comment not tied to any feature of the service: “Your chance to tell us in your own words how we are doing and how you would like us to develop our service”. In all 139 (203) comments were received from 55% (49%) of survey respondents.

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. Its analyses are relied on and considered unbiased – the service has credibility. There was some desire for extensions to the service such as discussion forums and the ability to post comments and for a more appealing, user-friendly presentation.

Responses to comments

All responses to the surveys are read and respondents who leave email addresses are thanked and any specific comments responded to.

Suggestions for improvements are sought and have been implemented. Though the project has no dedicated capacity to make technical and cosmetic changes, the results have included major improvements. Among the improvements implemented after suggestions by readers have been:

A re-tweet button in research analyses, commonly used now by readers to tell their network about the analysis.

Social media links in email alerts to enable these easily to be shared with the reader’s contacts.

Drug and Alcohol Findings Facebook page offers the possibility for readers to comment on the site and its analyses.

A “Comment/query” link at the top of each analysis link makes it easier for readers to send comments and ask questions by automatically inserting the title and link to the document in the email.

A click-down box at the top of each analysis (“Title and link for copying”) enables readers to easily copy the link and title of the web page for sending to colleagues and/or publicising via social media systems.

Analyses end with both a “Last revised” and a “First uploaded” date so it is clear to readers whether they are reading an updated or unchanged version.

The navigation bar at the top of each web page and each analysis was systematised and improved.

Navigation links at the top and bottom of each analysis offer a route to the home page.

The availability of personalised help from the project is made more visible in a “Comment/query to editor” link at the top of each analysis, in the contact entries in navigation links at the top of all pages, on both search pages, in a contact link on the [home page](#) next to the editor’s photo, and in the [help page](#).

Width to which text in expands as a browser window is resized was capped to prevent long lines impeding readability.

Ability to offer optional detailed content without making the entry look excessively long was developed and implemented, using an ‘eye-opener’ icon to mark fold-out text

A “Key points” panel in major analyses aids assimilation of the major features and findings of the study.

Each analysis includes a button so readers can easily download a PDF version to store on their computer.

The [subject search](#) function categories were subdivided to make more fine-grained searches possible.

A [free text search facility](#) enabled readers to type in their own search terms.

Both search functions enable searches to be narrowed to research not just relevant to but also actually done in the UK.

The [subject search](#) function incorporates a filter so reviews can be singled out; see the “Document type” line towards the bottom.

Readers are regularly reminded about the search facilities on the web site by links in email alerts.