2012 Evaluation of the NHS Medical Careers website

Robin Mellors-Bourne
CRAC - Careers Research & Advisory Centre

For the Kent, Surrey and Sussex Postgraduate Deanery
December 2012

Confidential to CRAC and KSS Deanery
Acknowledgements

CRAC and KSS are grateful to all the medical students, postgraduate trainees and doctors, and medical education and careers professionals who gave their time to respond to the survey upon which this update evaluation is based. Particular thanks are due to those who forwarded our e-mail invitations to their students and trainees. I am also very grateful to Jason Yarrow and Lisa Stone in the KSS careers team who encouraged and stimulated that process and promoted participation in the survey at every opportunity.
CONTENTS

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 1
2. BACKGROUND 3
3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES 4
4. RESPONSE SAMPLE 5
   4.1 Methodology 5
   4.2 Responses obtained 6
   4.3 Data presentation 7
5. RESEARCH RESULTS 7
   5.1 Overall sample characteristics 7
   5.2 Awareness and use of the website amongst target audiences 8
      5.2.1 Awareness amongst potential users 8
      5.2.2 Frequency of use of the website 9
      5.2.3 Access platforms and devices 10
      5.2.4 Summary and implications 11
   5.3 Motivations – how and why users reached the website 12
      5.3.1 Reaching the site 12
      5.3.2 Motivations to use the website 13
      5.3.3 Implications 14
   5.4 Design and overall content of the website 14
   5.5 Use and usefulness of key content features 16
      5.5.1 Usage of main content sections 16
      5.5.2 Rich media and interactive content 17
      5.5.3 Summary: use and usefulness of content 19
   5.6 Impact 20
      5.6.1 Evidence from respondents 20
      5.6.2 Professionals’ perceptions 22
      5.6.3 Evidence for impact 22
   5.7 Potential website and social media developments 23
   5.8 Views from non-users 25
6. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS 28
1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CRAC was commissioned by the Kent, Surrey and Sussex Deanery to undertake a user evaluation exercise for the Medical Careers website that it runs on behalf of the Department of Health. This was designed to enable comparison to be made with a more wide-ranging evaluation CRAC undertook of the website in 2010. The aim was to provide an up-to-date view of the website’s progress and position in relation to its aim to be a national online port of call for medical students and postgraduate trainees with a career-related question about working as a doctor.

The autumn 2012 evaluation was conducted through an online survey. This obtained 360 responses from registered users of the site and 980 responses believed to be representative of the broader target audience (i.e. potential users).

Awareness and overall use

Awareness of the Medical Careers website amongst its target audience remains at the same high level as in 2010. 49% of potential users were aware of the website and 43% had used it (42% in 2010), of whom two thirds had used it more than once.

The awareness and usage levels amongst postgraduate trainee doctors have risen since 2010, especially those in Foundation Programmes of whom two thirds were aware of the site and almost 60% had used it. Amongst medical students, awareness and usage levels were slightly lower than in 2010.

Most site users first discovered the Medical Careers website either as a result of web searching or by professional recommendation (i.e. by a careers adviser or referenced in careers information provided). This suggests that the site is now well embedded both in professional careers provision but also prominently in relation to online search ‘visibility’.

The principal motivations to use the website – seeking information to support specific decisions, but also more general career options and planning – were similar to those recorded in 2010, suggesting consistency in users’ needs for medical careers support.

Content and utility

Highly positive impressions were recorded in relation to the website’s design (look and feel), structure and organisation, as well as the range, depth and currency of content. The website appears to remain fit for purpose. Significant minorities access the site from smartphones in particular (around 25%) and tablet devices, and this is projected to rise.

Users continue to be very satisfied in relation to the range and type of content on the site; the most widely used sections are again specialty information, career options and career planning, while content targeted to those in particular training stages is highly viewed by those audiences, and usefulness levels remain as high as reported in 2010.

Similar to 2010, around one in six users view video content, most of whom report it useful. This suggests that rich media remains a valuable component for a substantial minority of users, but much broader investment in video content is probably not merited.

Future developments

Overwhelmingly, most potential users who had not used the Medical Careers website reported that they had been unaware of it – now that they learnt about it most believed
they would benefit from using it. There is no evidence that other online services have lessened the need amongst potential users to use the Medical Careers website.

The current content development and maintenance strategy adopted by the KSS careers team for the website appears to be delivering the key topics and content that users and most non-users seek and effective in maintaining its currency.

There is significant appetite for additional services, including some use of social media, amongst both current users and potential users. The most popular potential developments would be a 'Medical Careers App', the development of adviser-facilitated online fora and also blogging by careers professionals. These could potentially increase the reach of the site into its target audiences and/or deepen their engagement with it, with advisers and each other. Social media could be helpful chiefly in promoting the site and its content. These developments were of interest to both medical students and postgraduate trainees, but to different extents.

**Recommendations**

Although hardly revelatory, the overwhelming message from this evaluation is endorsement of the current Medical Careers website offer, and for its continuation, i.e. ‘more of the same’.

The near absence of significant dissatisfaction with the site or its content, and high ratings of utility and currency of information by users, strongly suggest the existing content strategy is effective and should be maintained (evolution not revolution).

The site is known to and used by the majority of postgraduate trainees, but less than half of medical students; sustained promotion of the site through medical schools, and perhaps directly to medical students, remains a priority.

Rich media content, such as video, is viewed and appreciated by a significant minority, but usage does not merit heavy investment in video or rich media across the site. Selective development of associated video content through the site’s new associated Youtube channel may well be a more cost-effective approach.

There is an appetite amongst the target audiences for appropriate (but limited) social media support for the site and also enhanced interactive content services (an App, online fora, blogging). Testing and trialling of these technologies is recommended, taking note of differential demand amongst audience types. Further research with users and potential users is recommended to understand more specifically how best to respond to the apparent enthusiasm for a Medical Careers App.
2. BACKGROUND

This evaluation study was commissioned in order to update understanding of awareness, use and value of the NHS Medical Careers website amongst its target user community, following a first evaluation carried out by CRAC in 2010.¹

In recent years, there has been significant growth in the variety and extent of online provision of career support and information for medical training, provided through individual postgraduate deanery websites, medical school websites, Royal College websites, and national sites such as NHS Careers, BMJ Careers and MMC (Modernising Medical Careers). These were set up partly in response to a series of initiatives to improve NHS education and training, particularly a desire to provide more systematically careers information and support for progression at different stages of medical training.² The emphasis on online support resulted from growing recognition of the potential value of internet-based and online services in these areas.³

The NHS Medical Careers website was launched in November 2008 with the aim of providing a central, up-to-date source of information to support the career decision-making of medical students and postgraduate doctors in training. The website has been developed and continues to be managed by the careers team of the Kent, Surrey and Sussex (KSS) Deanery, under contract from the Department of Health, with the support of an advisory group which includes representatives of key stakeholders.

The vision for the website was for it to provide a first step for UK medical students and postgraduate trainee doctors (and medical education trainers and careers specialists supporting them) who had a careers question relating to working as a doctor. The website was re-launched in July 2009 in response to user feedback and specifically to incorporate careers materials developed and licensed from the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) Careers in Medicine programme. CRAC’s evaluation of the website in autumn 2010 provided a view after two years in relation to the accomplishment of its original vision, along with additional feedback to steer its further incremental development.

Two years on, KSS invited CRAC to undertake a repeat evaluation exercise to gauge further progress and elicit views and feedback, from website users and others in medical training, in relation to existing provision of content and the potential development of new features.

3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The principal aim of this repeat evaluation study was to assess the extent to which the NHS Medical Careers website continues to fulfil, or has developed further towards fulfilling, its intended mission. That mission was stated as providing a national, online first ‘port of call’ for medical students, postgraduate trainee doctors, trainers and career specialists, who have a career-related question relating to working as a doctor. Accordingly, the research was designed to obtain information, views and perspectives from users and potential users which could be comparable with information obtained in the 2010 evaluation.

In meeting this broad principal aim, the main objectives were to provide an update on:

- The current visibility of the website: e.g. to what extent its target groups of potential users are aware of and can access it, across its intended footprint of the UK nations;
- Utilisation of the website, and particularly whether the information, tools and resources provided continue to meet the needs of the core target user groups (and to identify any particular emerging gaps in its current provision);
- Any clear changes to its impact seen through the perceptions by users of the benefits that use of the site brings to them when seeking career information;
- Any changes in the perceived value of different methods of presenting information, tools and resources on the site, including the use of media-rich content and interactive functionality.

In addition, the study sought to ascertain perceptions of the attractiveness and potential extent of take-up of a range of social media-based communications and information services which have been identified as possible augmentations to the website (Mellors-Bourne, 2012).

The main target user groups, as in the 2010 evaluation, were agreed to be medical students, postgraduate trainee doctors in Foundation and Specialty Programmes, and medical

---

education trainers and professionals, including those offering careers advice/support services to these groups.

4. RESPONSE SAMPLE

4.1 Methodology

For purposes of timeliness and especially cost-effectiveness, the research was entirely undertaken using an online survey method. The online questionnaire created was based on that used in the 2010 work, with a minimal number of amendments in order to maximise opportunities for comparison with 2010 results. A small number of new questions and options were introduced to address new issues. The questionnaire dominantly used closed questions but provided a number of open-ended questions which invited comments on particular issues.

The single questionnaire was designed so as to offer different groups of questions to different subsets of respondents, based on their answers to particular questions. These enabled analysis of responses to be conducted for different target user groups and other subsets of respondents. The main attraction strategy was the issue of e-mails to different groups of users and potential users, inviting participation in the online survey, and offering a prize draw as an incentive.

E-mails were issued direct to registered users of the website who had consented to such contact. Temporary software issues relating to the Medical Careers registered user database placed some limitation on the extent to which these e-mails could successfully be issued to registered users, resulting in a somewhat smaller response from this group than had originally been hoped.

A wider attraction campaign was also undertaken asking contacts – in a variety of medical schools, postgraduate deaneries and other organisations and groups involved in medical education – to forward the e-mail to their students and/or trainees. A link was also placed on the website itself so that users could click through to the survey if they chose.

The survey was launched on 27 September 2012 and remained open for a period of two months.
4.2 Responses obtained

In total, 1268 responses were received to the online survey, of which 360 were in response to the e-mail issued to registered users. The remaining 908 responses were from target user groups who were a combination of potential users and actual users of the Medical Careers website, reached through the wider campaign activities. The 360 respondents from the database of registered users form a significant proportion, but not the majority, of the subset of respondents who had used the website and answered questions about using it (Figure 1).

These totals were slightly below those obtained in the 2010 evaluation survey (a total of 1504 responses, of which 484 were from the registered users database) which had been open for a considerably longer but overlapping period and with several phases of attraction activity.

*Figure 1 Conceptual depiction of respondent types and number of responses*

Due to the attraction methodology used, it is not possible to calculate a response rate as the total number invited to participate (by a variety of contacts) is unknown. The vast majority of responses were elicited in response to the e-mails issued, with only a small proportion from Medical Careers website users who clicked through to the survey whilst on site.
4.3 Data presentation

Data from the online survey are presented in the remainder of this report in tabular and graphical format, together with sample response sizes (N) and descriptions. All data are unweighted. Percentages have been rounded to the nearest integer; due to rounding, the totals within a column or row in a table may not always sum to 100%.

On the basis of the total size of the response sample, in relation to the target medical training populations, the derived confidence interval is between 3% and 5% at the 95% confidence level (i.e. 95% of cases will fall within an ‘error bar’ of 3-5% for any particular data point).

5. RESEARCH RESULTS

5.1 Overall sample characteristics

The responses comprise two key sub-samples, one which is representative of registered users of the Medical Careers website (‘registrants’) and the other a separate and potentially representative sample of the wider target audience (‘potential users’). Due to the existence of these two distinct subsamples, which were attracted in different ways, the overall set of responses cannot be considered to represent a random sample of potential users. As a result, much of the following analysis is presented on the basis of certain key subsamples of responses, each of which is more meaningful in relation to being representative of key target groups.

The training stage for those in medical education or other key role of respondents is shown in Table 1 for the entire sample, to give a broad indication of the response sample achieved, as well as the balance between main medical education stages. This shows that 85% of responses were received from those in medical education/training. Of these, over half were medical students, 17% were Foundation Programme trainees (FY1 and FY2) and 22% were Specialty trainees. Due to the relatively modest number of responses from Foundation stage trainees, results are not reported for respondents in individual Foundation years, but reported together (F1/F2).

The remaining 15% of respondents were not currently in medical education or training, and comprised medical educators, trainers and/or careers advisers (9%) and others who were considering entering medical training (6%).
Table 1 Survey respondents by medical training stage or other role

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Medical Training Stage or Role</th>
<th>% of all respondents</th>
<th>% of those in medical training</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In medical training</td>
<td>85</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical students</td>
<td>58</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foundation FY1 trainees</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foundation FY2 trainees</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialty trainees</td>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education/training professionals</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Considering studying medicine</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count (N)</td>
<td>1268</td>
<td>1065</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on free-text responses to a question about their current institution, which were then coded to nations and/or regions, there appeared to be respondents in all four nations of the UK and all English regions, and from trainees in all postgraduate deaneries (with the exception of the Defence Postgraduate Medical Deanery). This analysis could not be entirely thorough due to the variety/creativity of some respondents when asked to name their current institution.

A small number of responses were from respondents based overseas, both registered users and probably also some site users who had clicked through to the survey.

5.2 Awareness and use of the website amongst target audiences

5.2.1 Awareness amongst potential users

A key issue for this comparative evaluation was to obtain the level of awareness of the Medical Careers website amongst the ‘potential users’ sub-sample which represents its target user groups, especially medical students and postgraduate trainee doctors. In Table 2 it can be seen that 49% of respondents in the potential users sub-sample reported that they were aware of the website and 43% had used the website at least once. These were remarkably similar figures to the proportions obtained in the 2010 survey (also 49%, and 42%, respectively).
When analysed by broad training stage, higher proportions of Foundation Programme trainees were aware of the website (66%) and used the site (58%), than of medical students (44% and 39%, respectively) or specialty trainees (40% aware and 35% used). These figures represented increases, compared with 2010, in the level of awareness and use of the website amongst Foundation stage trainees and a rise in use by specialty trainees, but slight falls in both awareness and levels of use amongst medical students.

Table 2 Awareness of and usage of Medical Careers website amongst potential users

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>%</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Medical students</th>
<th>Foundation F1/F2 trainees</th>
<th>Specialty trainees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aware of site</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used site</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N) 2012</td>
<td>1211</td>
<td>607</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analysis of responses to certain questions posed to non-users is provided in a later section, but one or two points are noteworthy here. Around 10% of those who had never used the website reported that they were nonetheless aware of the site. Over two thirds of these respondents (and over three quarters of those who were medical students) indicated that they expected to use it future when need arose. Extremely few reported that they would not need to use the site and/or that their career needs were fully satisfied by other websites.

5.2.2 Frequency of use of the website

The frequency of usage of the website, for those who reported that they had used it, is summarised in Table 3. Overall, this shows that over two thirds of those who have used the site at all have done so more than once, which immediately indicates that it has contained content of sufficient value to them to merit return. When analysed by training stage, there is a trend indicating that medical students tended to be less frequent users than those in postgraduate training. The group of users which reporting most frequent use of the site, perhaps unsurprisingly, was the education professionals which includes those advising on careers, i.e. professional users.
The pattern of frequency of usage of the website broadly replicates that obtained in the previous evaluation, with no evidence for any systematic shift in the frequency either overall or for any major user group.

Table 3 Frequency of use of website by training stage (respondents who had used the site)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>%</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Medical students</th>
<th>Foundation F1/F2 trainees</th>
<th>Specialty trainees</th>
<th>Education professionals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Once only</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-3 times</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 3 times</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N)</td>
<td>577</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.2.3 Access platforms and devices

The 2012 survey introduced a question asking respondents who had used the Medical Careers website the type of device with which they currently accessed it, and their expectation of how this might change in future. Figure 2 summarises the results, showing that although the overwhelming majority used a laptop or PC, 15% of users were now using a tablet and 24% a smartphone (most in addition to laptop or PC) to access this site. Despite this significant development of access through devices other than laptop or personal computers, literally only a handful of users reported any problems when accessing the site or its content.

The proportions expecting to use such devices to access the site in future rose to 28% for tablets and 39% for smartphones. These proportions were similar for Medical Students and postgraduate trainees.
5.2.4 Summary and implications

The data relating to awareness levels of the website are based upon a sample representing the diversity of potential users both geographically and by training stage. They demonstrate:

- The extent of awareness of the website amongst its target audience of students and postgraduate trainees as a whole remains high and consistent with 2010 levels;
- Awareness levels amongst postgraduate doctors in training, especially the Foundation stage (the primary audience for much of the website’s content), have risen since 2010. Around two thirds of Foundation trainees are aware of the site and almost 60% use it. However, awareness and usage levels amongst medical students are slightly lower than recorded in 2010;
- 43% of all potential users responding to the survey had used the website at least once and, across all target user groups, two thirds of these have returned at least once more to the site to use it further;
- Of those who had not used the site, the majority had simply not been aware of it and high proportions report that (now that they are aware of it) they expect to make use of it in future, as their needs are not satisfied by other career-related websites.
5.3 Motivations – how and why users reached the website

5.3.1 Reaching the site

Over half of users (53%) reported that they had first come across the Medical Careers website as a result of their own search on the internet (using a search engine such as Google, while 18% reported that they had followed a link from another website), 27% had seen reference to the site within careers information and 20% had been recommended by a careers adviser or trainer (respondents could tick more than one option).

When analysed by training stage, significantly higher proportions of Foundation Programme trainees than others had either been recommended the site by careers advisers (38%) or seen it referenced in careers information (31%).

Figure 5.1 Principal reasons/mechanisms that prompted users to access the website for the first time, for selected groups (all site users; multiple responses were allowed)

The most commonly reported mechanisms are shown in Figure 3, for all respondents, along with comparative results from the 2010 survey. The comparison shows significantly greater proportions reporting first access as a result of their own web searching. This could reflect the increasing trend amongst learners to use generic searching almost universally; for medical students the proportion was 60%. For the key target audience of Foundation
Programme trainees, greater proportions in 2012 reported recommendation by careers advisers and seeing reference to the site in careers information, than had been the case in 2010. This may indicate some increase in the extent to which the website is being used as a key information source for this group, and made reference to by those who advise them.

5.3.2 Motivations to use the website

The most commonly cited primary motivation for using the Medical Careers website, for all those in training who had used it, was to obtain specific knowledge to inform future decisions (35%), which was markedly higher than had been the case in 2010 (around 26%), while 34% cited a need for greater awareness of career options (a little lower than in 2010). These motivations are summarised in Figure 4.

Figure 4 Primary motivation to use the website (all respondents who had used the site; only respective target audiences shown for specific Specialty and Foundation options)

The ranking of motivations varied strongly with training stage, as would be expected and had been the case in the 2010 survey. For medical students, the most popular primary motivation (for 42%) was greater awareness of career options, which had also been the most popular in 2010 at over 45%. Only 15% of medical students reported their primary motivation being related to Foundation selection/applications, which was lower than the 21% who had
reported this as their motivation in 2010. Meanwhile for Foundation Programme trainees, the need to select and apply for specialty options was the most common motivation (for 44%, and nearly 60% of F2 trainees), which was similar to the picture in 2010 (39% of F1/F2).

As had been the case in 2010, information was obtained from respondents about the other career-related activities that they had been undertaking, to understand the context in which they were using the Medical Careers website. The results obtained were very similar to those in the previous study, and do not reveal any systematic trends in relation to any changes in motivations for or utilisation of the Medical Careers website, and so are omitted for brevity.

5.3.3 Implications

- The maturity of the website, roughly 4 years since launch, is perhaps reflected in the results indicating that many users of the website came across it for the first time as a result of either the recommendation of careers advisers or a reference within careers information, and this is particularly the case for Foundation Programme trainees. This presumably reflects that it is well embedded in careers support provision and programmes.

- On the other hand, the highest proportion of users first came to the site as a result of their own web search, which may reflect the increasingly universal use of generic web searches by those in education, as a first step to find information, rather than utilising reference lists or secondary sources. The implication of this trend is that continued effort is required to sustain search engine optimisation, so that the Medical Careers website is returned (as is now the case) as a ‘top’ result in relevant searches using Google and similar search engines.

- The principal motivations to use the website, as reported by users, are broadly consistent with those obtained in 2010, suggesting some consistency in the needs of users, at least in relation to accessing this particular website.

5.4 Design and overall content of the website

As in 2010, users expressed overwhelmingly positive views about the website, in terms of its design, appearance, broad structure and overall content offer. When asked their first impressions of the site, 94% of respondents felt it looked professional, and over 85% that the brand inspired confidence, the content was well-organised and the information was up to date. Over 80% felt it was easy to navigate and that there was a sufficient range of
information. While, overall, 75% indicated that there was enough depth of information, this was higher amongst respondents at several training stages – the only group amongst with a significant proportion felt there was insufficient depth was specialty trainees, of whom 23% did not believe there was sufficient depth. The results for all respondents are depicted in Figure 5.

*Figure 5 Percentages of users expressing level of agreement with a series of descriptive statements about the website (all users, N=548)*

These reported impressions were almost remarkably similar to those recorded in 2010, with no changes of sufficient significance to indicate that any of the features of design or content have become less acceptable to users.

When invited to indicate information or content that respondents felt the website lacked in relation to their expectations, 87% did *not* think that information or content was lacking (even higher than the 84% recorded in 2010). The proportion was 90% amongst Foundation Programme trainees but slightly lower (80%) amongst specialty trainees, perhaps reflecting demand for increased depth of content from some of this group. A small number of specific suggestions about additional content were made by individual respondents, in response to an invitation to make suggestions, and will be passed to the KSS team. Many of these related to very specific and detailed content about individual specialties.

These results seem to provide quite convincing evidence that the website remains fit for purpose, in terms of its design (look and feel), content structure and organisation, and also the range, depth and currency of information. The very low proportions of respondents
(amongst current users) who reported less positive impressions, and the consistently high usage rate amongst potential users, suggests that there is no obvious need to alter or redevelop the fundamentals of the website. It seems likely that the content development process, by the website team who review, update and add aspects of content incrementally, is keeping pace with any increasing demands of users. More than one open-ended comment expressed appreciation for this aspect of the site “I like the way you keep adding the website.”

5.5 Use and usefulness of key content features

5.5.1 Usage of main content sections

Detailed information was obtained from users in relation to which of the main structural sections and features of the website they had accessed and the extent to which they had found useful. Analysis of these responses shows results which are extremely similar to those found in 2010. Over 80% had accessed the ‘Specialty pages’ and ‘Career options’ sections, 73% the ‘Career planning’ section and 63% the ‘Tools and resources’ section. Many of the other sections had been accessed by fewer than half of users overall, but most of these are targeted towards particular user groups and had been highly viewed by their respective target audiences. For example, 65% of student users had viewed the ‘Medical students’ section and 66% of postgraduate trainees had viewed the ‘Postgraduate doctors’ section. The key usage figures are summarised in Figure 6, along with indications of the extent to which respondents found the content useful.

As seen within Figure 6, the perceived usefulness of content within these sections was consistently high, with very small proportions indicating that content that they had accessed was not useful. No more than 5% of any target group reported that the content provided for it was not useful, while broadly 20-30% of such groups reported that content was very useful and around 50% quite useful.

These detailed figures are, again, very consistent with the detailed analysis undertaken in 2010, reinforcing the broader views of the continued fitness for purpose of the content, at least for those who use the website. The position is somewhat reinforced by the results to a question asking respondents to indicate if any aspect of the website or its content stood out as being the most useful to them. Over half of users reported that many aspects of the site were equally useful, rather than singling out a particular aspect. Of those who did cite a particular aspect, using open-ended responses, the majority mentioned specialty information.
5.5.2 Rich media and interactive content

A particular focus for the 2010 evaluation work was to investigate the extent to which users accessed video content and interactive career tools in which the Medical Careers website management team had invested, and the perceived usefulness of this enhanced content. It should be noted that access to the majority of the interactive career tools requires registration with the website. The results of this aspect of the 2012 evaluation survey are somewhat less robust than in 2010, as they were reported by a somewhat smaller sample than in 2010; this was largely due to the more limited number of responses obtained directly from registered users of the website (360, compared with 484 in 2010).

The broad context of online information has evolved since 2010 and video content has become much more prevalent across almost all types of website. At the same time, it has become an information format that is now central for many users, particularly young users, and so questions of whether or not it should be included have become somewhat outdated.

For these reasons, the extent of reporting in relation to use of the interactive online tools and video content is lower in this report, than in the 2010 evaluation.
Overall, 17% of those who had used the website reported that they had viewed rich media content (video files or audio podcasts), a similar proportion to the 16% reported in 2010. Due to the somewhat restricted sample who reported viewing this type of content, detailed figures for different sub-groups are not presented here, but the trend appeared to be for least access amongst medical students (perhaps 10% having viewed any video), around 16-17% for postgraduate trainees, and the highest levels amongst career/education professionals. The relatively low figure for students may partly reflect that much of the video content has been focused on topics of particular interest to postgraduate trainees. In 2010 correlations were observed between those who were frequent users of the website, or were registered users, and those who had viewed video content. The same correlations were again observed in 2012, with 33% of those visiting the site more than 3 times having viewed video content (compared with 17% overall) and 23% of registered users.

Detailed analysis of the use of specific videos or video types was limited, as this was based on the responses of only around 100 respondents who reported detailed feedback on their access to video content. Of those who had viewed rich media content, the most commonly viewed types of content were:

- Video of consultants talking about their specialities – viewed by two thirds (of those viewing any rich media), of whom over half rated this very useful
- Videos of trainees relating personal experience – viewed by around 55%, of whom nearly two thirds indicated that it was very useful
- Video of workforce statistics – viewed by almost half, and in turn of whom half rated it very useful
- Audio podcasts had been accessed by only around a third of these users, which was about half the level of access to text-based case studies.

Similar analysis was carried out for users' reporting on their use of the interactive career tools offered on the website, use of which required registration on the site (other than for one specific tool). Overall, 20% of users had made use of at least one of the interactive career tools, although given the requirement for registration for most of them, an alternative and perhaps more meaningful figure is that 36% of those registered with the website had used them.

In parallel to the analysis of types of rich media, those who had used any of the career tools were asked which of the specific tools they had used and the degree to which they had found it useful. These perceived usefulness ratings were all rather similar, in the range of 75-80%
rating them very or quite useful (30-40% very useful). These were very similar figures to those obtained in 2010, albeit based on a somewhat limited sample size.

5.5.3 Summary: use and usefulness of content

Results of this recent re-evaluation work, and comparison with 2010 results, suggest that the website’s users continue to be very satisfied in relation to the range and type of content provided, which backs up their first impressions on range, depth and currency of information that were reported in the previous section.

The most widely used sections of the website continue to be its coverage of specialty information, career options and career planning, while sections of content targeted towards particular training stages were also widely viewed by those audiences. The usefulness of the main content sections was also highly rated, as had been the case in 2010. Many users felt that much of the content was equally useful, and very few users could identify content that they deemed was not of value or importance.

Opportunities to develop additional rich and interactive media content on the Medical Careers website have been considered by the KSS careers team, on the basis of a review of practice more widely across the HE careers sector. Around one in six users of the website make use of the existing video content, most of whom report it useful, which are similar levels to those reported in 2010. This suggests that rich media remains a valuable component for a substantial minority of users, but it may not be critical to invest further heavily in the immediate future development of the website. This inference is perhaps reflected in the observation that text-based case study content was as widely used as broadly comparable video content. The KSS team are currently experimenting with hosting additional video content on a linked Youtube channel, which may offer a cost-effective means to augment this type of rich media content.

---

5.6 Impact

5.6.1 Evidence from respondents

The 2010 evaluation report addressed in some detail the available evidence for the impact of use of the website on its target audiences. This included results from several questions in the 2010 online survey which probed the resultant actions of respondents (i.e. that had been prompted by using the website) as well as broader perceptions of overall impact. It also considered to what extent such actions could be considered genuinely to be causal, rather than merely associated with use of the website. The conclusion drawn was that the website was believed to be having a significant impact in relation to its objectives, although this was greatly strengthened by the comments received in qualitative interviews with advisers and other medical education professionals who were able to report the impact that they had observed for individuals who had used the website. Their views were very positive and reinforced the overall picture that the Medical Careers website was then delivering well against its stated objectives for many within its target audiences.

The current study's constraints did not allow for similar qualitative interviewing in 2012. For this reason, issues of impact of the website are not treated in depth here. Taken overall, the 2012 survey results present perceptions that are, if anything, even more positive in relation to beneficial impact of using the website than was the case in 2010. The majority of results were very comparable to those obtained in 2010, in relation to users’ recollections of next steps after using the site, the actions they believed they took as a result of using the site, and their broader perceptions of its impact. In all cases the new results were either similar to those in 2010 or only slightly different, and often more positive.

Amongst these results, a summary of selected user-perceived impacts of using the Medical Careers website is given in Table 4, which demonstrates many rises in apparent positive impacts of using the website since 2010. For example, 70% of relevant users, and 68% of Foundation Programme trainees, felt that using the site had influenced their decisions in relation to specialty training (these were below 60% in 2010), and almost half of medical students and other relevant users felt it had influenced their Foundation choices. The proportions of medical students and Foundation Programme trainees who reported that using the site had led to a conversation with a careers adviser both rose in comparison with 2010 results, although this fell somewhat for specialty trainees (but was still well over half).

To the specific question of whether respondents had recommended the site to other students, trainees and colleagues (which is generally taken to reflect satisfaction), almost two thirds of users overall, and at each training stage, reported that they had done so, which was slightly higher than recorded in 2010.
Table 4  Percentage of different respondent groups expressing agreement with statements describing perceived impacts of using the website (site users excluding those making ‘non-applicable’ responses)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All users</th>
<th>Medical students</th>
<th>Foundation trainees</th>
<th>Specialty trainees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Influenced specialty training decision</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influenced Foundation training choice</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Led to careers adviser conversation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommended website to others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N (2012)</td>
<td>421</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents were also invited to make any additional comments about the website, or their survey responses, should they wish to do so, in the form of free-text inputs. 75 such responses were received. Two common themes emerged – that the website was definitely of value to them and that it needed greater levels of publicity within medical schools so that others could also benefit from using it. While the short selection below does not aim to be representative of all comments made, these are authentic voices which articulate clear opinions about the Medical Careers website:

‘It’s a superb resource, but it needs more publicity at a grass-roots level’ (Medical student)

‘I have loved this website ever since I first visited it. It is a regular resource I use whenever I have a question regarding career development or how I could improve my PDP. I have recommended it to peers on numerous occasions’ (Medical student)

‘Many thanks – great to have a central point of information sources’ (Specialty trainee)

‘Very professional and well laid-out. This site has good feedback from other users who are telling others about this by word of mouth’ (Medical student)

‘It’s a very good website. I hated Foundation years so much I wanted to leave. Your website helped me work through why I like medicine and subsequently look into other specialties I hadn’t considered initially. Thanks!’ (Foundation trainee on year out after FP)

‘A fantastic and much needed resource’ (Medical student)

‘Keep up with all the good work! I try my best to promote it whenever appropriate as there is so much useful stuff on there..’ (Careers adviser)

It should be noted that, in general, respondents who take advantage of open-ended
questions to express opinions tend to be those who hold either strongly positive or strongly negative opinions. It is quite striking here that there was an almost complete absence of negative comments.

5.6.2 Professionals’ perceptions

Although the number of education professionals and careers advisers responding to the survey was modest (82 responses to these particular questions), their overwhelmingly positive perceptions of the website and reflections of the trends mentioned above are worthy of note, and were very similar to the views collected in the 2010 survey:

- Over 85% felt it has valuable information for postgraduate doctors and over 80% for medical students
- Only 35% thought that most postgraduate doctors they met were aware of it, and only 24% believed most medical students knew of it
- Over 70% believed more postgraduate doctors would use the site if they knew about it, and almost 75% believed this was the case for medical students
- 73% stated that they found it invaluable as a professional.

5.6.3 Evidence for impact

There continue to be strongly positive perceptions of the potential and real benefits of using the website, expressed by users in medical training and advisers/education professionals. The 2010 evaluation concluded, on the basis of multiple strands of evidence, that the website was having impact on its target audiences. Comparable results to the questions on which that conclusion was reached were recorded in 2012 and align with the same broad conclusion. Thus the information available in 2012 mutually reinforces to suggest that the Medical Careers website continues to offer value to its target audiences and that there is no sign of any diminution in its impact despite its existence in an evolving information market.
6. Potential website and social media developments

The KSS team were keen to investigate the attitudes of users and potential users towards possible augmentations and enhancements to the Medical Careers website service that had been identified in CRAC’s review of social media and web 2.0 technologies for KSS and internal discussions about development options. A number of these are being trialled already as ancillary communication services to support and extend the reach of the website into its target audience groups.

Figure 7 summarises the results of questions asking existing users whether they were likely to use possible new features associated with the website, and non-users whether these features would make it more likely that they would use the website. By some way, the most popular amongst these options was a ‘Medical Careers App’ (although the nature of this was not specified), which 31% of users stated they were very likely to use and 40% would possibly use. More than half of user respondents also said that they would very likely or possibly use online discussion fora facilitated by a careers adviser, and blogging by careers professionals and trainees. Just under half indicated that they might use a Facebook page or group related to the site, and just over 20% a dedicated Twitter service.

When analysed by training stage, it was medical students who tended to more keen than others on all of the social media applications suggested. For example, 78% stated that they were either very likely (44%) or would possibly (34%) use a Medical Careers ‘App’), and almost 60% a dedicated Facebook page. Amongst postgraduate trainees, 65% would or might use an App, 58% would use facilitated online fora and 53% a blog by a careers professional, while relatively few expressed a strong desire for Facebook or Twitter.

In response to the question to non-users, similar trends were observed, although similar proportions found the idea of an App and online fora to be desirable (37%), 33% a careers adviser blog and 27% a Facebook page. Respondents were able to indicate more than one option, hence percentages sum to more than 100%. These response proportions varied somewhat according to training stage. Amongst medical students the most appealing development was the prospect of a dedicated App (43%), while similar proportions would like a careers professional blog, online discussion fora or a Facebook page (all 37%). On the other hand amongst postgraduate trainees it was the online fora that would make the site more attractive to them (33% citing this), while 29% sought a dedicated App and 24% a careers adviser blog. Interestingly, almost a quarter of the responses from Specialty Trainees specifically suggested that they did not want to see such additional services, which may indicate that such developments might need some tuning to the best audiences.

---

These results seem to indicate reasonably significant appetite for additional communication services using social media, amongst both current users and potential (currently non-) users. CRAC’s review suggested that such services could be used simply to promote the site and its content, and/or extend its reach to more of those who are currently not using the site, but could also provide new communication channels between students/trainees with careers professionals, as well as between each other. Further research is recommended to identify, in particular, the nature of the services that might be delivered through a Medical Careers App. More generally, trials of test developments should be continued to ensure that, as indicated could be the case by this study, new services are designed to appeal to and directed towards the most receptive user groups.
5.8 Views from non-users

A range of questions was included in the survey for respondents who had not used the website, for which results are only very briefly reported here, as the overall picture was extremely similar to that recorded in the 2010 evaluation. The dominant reason that most respondents identified for not having used the website was simply that they had been unaware of it.

The majority of respondents who had never heard of the website (74%) reported that they would almost certainly (25%) or probably (49%) use it now that they were aware of it. A further 19% were unsure, but were not thinking about careers currently. Only 3% felt that their needs were fully satisfied by other careers websites, and a further 4% did not believe they needed careers information.

Due to the relatively small number of postgraduate respondents who had not used the website (the majority of these respondents were users), analysis has not been undertaken by different stages within this group. Results are therefore given here for medical students or postgraduate trainees as a whole. Amongst the postgraduate trainees who had not used the site, just under 60% of non-users expected to use it in future, although a surprising 35% were either not thinking about careers or expressed no need for careers information. If anything these proportions appeared to be depressed particularly by the views of specialty trainees, who made up a larger proportion of the sample than in 2010, and of whom only half expected to use the site (and over 40% expressed no immediate or overall need for careers information). On the other hand, amongst medical students who had not used the site, over 80% expected to do so and only 2% expressed no need for additional careers information. This would appear to be the key target market to whom the site should be promoted.

These results are summarised in Table 5. When compared with 2010 results, only the results for the postgraduate trainees differ to any significant degree, and this difference could largely be accounted for by the higher proportion of specialty trainees in the 2012 sample.

These respondents were also asked to indicate the features of the website that they would expect to use or value, which may give some insight as to the type of content that might be valuable to potential users. Those expectations are summarised in Table 6, which shows that ‘detailed information on career options/pathways’ and ‘detailed information about specialties’ were the most commonly sought topics. Video and interactive content was identified as potentially useful by between a quarter and a half of users. The results for non-users overall, and non-user medical students, were very similar to those obtained in 2010. However, some results differed for those in postgraduate training (although the relative ranking of topics remained much the same as in 2010). These differences are thought partly to reflect the
somewhat different profile of the sample of non-users in this survey, with a higher proportion of specialty trainees than had been obtained in 2010.

Table 5 Expected future use of website for those who had not previously been aware of it, by training stage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>%</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Medical students</th>
<th>Postgraduate trainees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expect to use site in future</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertain about future use</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have no need to use site</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N) 2012</td>
<td>571</td>
<td>329</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6 Features of the website that current non-users expected to use or value in future (percentage of respondents who had never used the website, N=623)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>%</th>
<th>All in training</th>
<th>Medical students</th>
<th>Postgraduate trainees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Detailed info on career options/pathways</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detailed information about specialties</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basics of medical career planning</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactive personal career/decision tools</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Videos about specialties/consultants</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video case studies of trainees</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of this content</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N)</td>
<td>623</td>
<td>356</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The views of non-users in relation to possible developments using social media and certain other new functions were covered in the previous section.
The main inferences to be drawn from the results of respondents in the target user groups who do not currently use the Medical Careers website seem broadly to be as follows:

- The key reason why most of those who do not use the website is not that they would have no benefit from it, but rather that they are not aware of it (as was the case in 2010). This suggests that there is an ongoing need for promotion of the site through medical schools so as to reach greater numbers of medical students in particular;

- There is no evidence to suggest that other existing or new online services developed since 2010 have usurped the position of the Medical Careers website in fulfilling the careers information needs of users – in other words the need for the Medical Careers website appears to continue;

- Although expectations of what constitutes useful or desirable website content may vary somewhat amongst postgraduate trainees, the current website is delivering the key topics and aspects of content that most non-users would look for, so there is no clear message for any major change to content strategy. In fact the high ratings of potential usefulness of existing content types amongst medical students, who progressively become the key audience for the website as they move into postgraduate training, reinforces the suggestion that the main strategy for content provision remains appropriate.
6. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Awareness and overall use

- Awareness of the Medical Careers website amongst its overall target remains high, at 49% of potential users, and very consistent with the level recorded in the 2010 evaluation. 43% of potential users had used the website (42% in 2010).

- Awareness and usage levels amongst postgraduate trainee doctors, and especially in the Foundation stage, have risen since 2010. Around two thirds of Foundation trainees were aware of the site and almost 60% had used it. Amongst medical students, awareness and usage levels were slightly lower than in 2010.

- Across all target user groups, two thirds of those who had used the site at all had returned and used it again, demonstrating (as had been the case in 2010) that there is value in its content.

- Of those who had not used the site, the majority had simply not been aware of it; high proportions of these reported that (now that they were aware of it) they expected to make use of it in future.

- Most site users first discovered the Medical Careers website either as a result of web searching or by professional recommendation (i.e. by a careers adviser or a reference in careers information provided). This suggests that the site is both well embedded in professional careers provision but also prominent in relation to search ‘visibility’.

- The principal motivations to use the website reported by users were similar to those obtained in 2010, suggesting some consistency in the needs of users in relation to accessing medical careers information.

Content and utility

- Highly positive impressions were recorded from users in relation to the website’s design (look and feel), content structure and organisation, and also range, depth and currency of content. This suggests that the website remains fit for purpose, in terms of its design, content and structure. Up to a quarter of users are accessing the site from smartphones in particular, and tablet devices, and this is projected to increase.

- Very low proportions of users reported negative impressions. Together with high usage rates (consistent with 2010) amongst potential users, there seems no obvious
need to alter or redevelop the fundamentals of the website. The content update and development process appears to be keeping pace with evolving demands of users.

- Results of detailed questions about content sections and topics, and comparison with 2010 results, suggest that users continue to be very satisfied in relation to the range and type of content provided. The most widely used sections of the website continue to be specialty information, career options and career planning, while content targeted to those in particular training stages was highly viewed and rated by those audiences. The usefulness of all the main content sections remained as high as had been the case in 2010.

- Similar to 2010, around one in six users view video content, most of whom report it useful. This suggests that rich media remains a valuable component for a substantial minority of users, but it may not be critical to invest heavily in widespread video development. One fifth of users had accessed the interactive tools, most of which require registration on the website; again this was quite similar to 2010 levels.

**Future developments**

- The primary reason that potential users do not use the Medical Careers website appears not to be that they would not benefit from it, but rather that they are not aware of it (as had also been the case in 2010). This suggests an ongoing need for promotion of the site, particularly through medical schools or at least to medical students. There is no evidence that other online services have lessened the need for the Medical Careers website in relation to fulfilling the careers information needs of users.

- The current website appears to be delivering the key topics and nature of content that both users and most non-users seek, so the current content strategy remains very appropriate.

- There is significant appetite for additional services, including some use of social media, amongst both current users and potential users. The most popular potential developments would be a ‘Medical Careers App’, the development of adviser-facilitated online fora and also blogging by careers professionals. These could potentially increase the reach of the site into its target audiences and/or deepen their engagement with it, with advisers and between each other. Social media could be helpful chiefly in promoting the site and its content. These developments were of interest to both medical students and postgraduate trainees, but to different extents.
Recommendations

- Although hardly revelatory, the overwhelming message from this evaluation is endorsement of the current Medical Careers website as being fit for purpose, and for its continuation, i.e. ‘more of the same’.

- The near absence of significant dissatisfaction with the site or its content, and high ratings of utility and currency of information offered, strongly suggest that the existing content development strategy is effective and does not require substantial change (continued evolution not revolution).

- The site is well known to and used by the majority of postgraduate trainees, but the modest decrease in awareness and its use amongst medical students suggests that continued promotional effort is required to this group, who become its main target audience as they progress. A review of promotional work could be valuable, to assess current and potential mechanisms to increase awareness of the site through medical schools and also direct to medical students.

- Rich media content, such as video, is viewed and appreciated by a significant minority. This suggests that heavy investment in video or rich media across the site is not merited, but rather developing associated, lower-cost means to offer more video content (such as through the site’s new Youtube channel trial) may be more appropriate and cost-effective.

- Although there were incredibly few reports of difficulties accessing existing content from smartphones and tablet devices, the level of access from these types of devices is expected to rise significantly and future content design and development should be considered accordingly.

- There is an appetite amongst the target audiences for appropriate (but limited) social media support for the site and also enhanced interactive content services (an App, online fora, blogging). Testing and trialling of these technologies on a limited basis is recommended, taking note of differential demand amongst different groups within the target audiences. Specific research is recommended in order to understand the detail behind the apparent enthusiasm for a Medical Careers App, so as to provide optimal value in such investment.