Medical Career Advice and Guidance Survey 2014:
Initial Findings

In 2001, the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling (NICEC) conducted a survey for the Department of Health that identified the need for improved career support for medical students and doctors in training. Over half (55%) of the survey respondents in 2001 reported that they were dissatisfied with the quality of the career advice and guidance they had received and it was apparent that provision at this time was both fragmented and poorly resourced.

Since then a range of initiatives have been put in place to improve the career support and major changes have taken place in how doctors are trained. NICEC has now conducted a new survey to find out what impact the changes have had. This short report presents some preliminary findings from the survey that was conducted between June and October, 2014 along with some comparisons with findings from the 2001 survey.

Survey highlights

Initial analysis of the survey based on the replies of all respondents shows that:

- 40% were satisfied with the quality of the career advice and guidance available to them compared to just 14% in 2001

- Respondents in 2014 were also more satisfied with the overall quality of the training they had received (74% in 2014 compared to 56% in 2001) and with the flexibility of the current training system (36% satisfied in 2014 compared to 17% in 2001)

- There are many more sources of information and advice and these are also being used more frequently now than they were in 2001, although senior doctors (mentioned by 89% of respondents) and more experienced peers (82%) were still the most frequently mentioned sources of career support

Other initial findings from this year’s survey are summarised below. They suggest that doctors in training are better supported in 2014 than they were in 2001. A key role of career professionals has been to work with the medical profession to shape and deliver career support within the current training system.
The survey

This research is based on an online survey that achieved over 900 replies. Most respondents were Foundation Doctors (54%) or in Core Training (27%). 12% were in specialty training and 6% were medical students.

Doctors were contacted to participate in the survey via a number of different routes. Most were contacted via their Local Education and Training Boards but weblinks to the survey were also circulated by BMJ Careers, the BMA Junior Doctors Committee and the Royal College of Physicians.

Replies were received from Foundation Doctors working in 16 of the 22 English Foundation Schools as well as Wales and Scotland and from doctors working in 11 out of 13 Local Education and Training Boards in England and also from doctors working in Wales and Scotland.

63% of respondents who provided demographic information were female and 36% were male. However, 15% of survey respondents declined to provide any personal information. This is a typical in online surveys but means that some respondents are excluded from certain analyses.

Satisfaction with career advice

In 2001, most doctors and medical students responding to the survey were dissatisfied with the quality of the career advice and guidance they had received, while in 2014 just 25% were dissatisfied and 40% were satisfied with the quality of the career advice and guidance available to them.

This is a marked change and is also reflected in the finding that respondents in 2014 were more satisfied with the overall quality of the training they had received (74% in 2014 compared to 56% in 2001) and with the flexibility of the current training system (36% satisfied in 2014 compared to 17% in 2001).

Flexible training

Only 6% of respondents had undertaken any of their training on a part-time/flexible basis but 30% planned to do so in the future, while 34% were unsure whether they would or not. Not surprisingly, far more women (41%) than men (10%) were planning to do this. In 2001, we found that 22% planned to undertake some of their future training on a part-time/flexible basis with considerably more women (33%) than men (6%) planning this.

More of the respondents in 2014 appear to be planning to take advantage of flexible training opportunities and the gender gap also

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1 Note that not all respondents answered every question and so percentages reported here are based on the number of participants who answered each question.
appears to have widened, although further analysis will be required to confirm this.

Significantly, the proportion of women doctors put off training in certain specialties because of the lack of flexible training opportunities appears to have declined. In 2001, 42% of all female respondents had been put off training in certain specialties but this had dropped to 33% in 2014. For male respondents there had not really been any change with 15% put off in 2001 compared to 13% in 2014.

Sources of career advice

One purpose of the survey was to find out where doctors go for career support and how useful they find the different sources of support. There are significantly more sources of information and advice available now than there were in 2001. Not only has the internet meant that much information is available from websites but the number of other sources has also increased. The 2001 survey asked about 19 possible sources, while 32 potential sources were identified in 2014. Figure 1 summarises the replies from this survey and shows percentage of respondents who had used each one.

Where do doctors go for career support?

The first finding is that the most frequently mentioned sources have not changed. Senior doctors (mentioned by 89% of respondents) and more experienced peers (82%) were still the most frequently mentioned sources of career support. Two-thirds of doctors also mentioned their peer group along with their Educational Supervisor (not listed in 2001).

Websites were not listed as sources of career support in 2001 but now Specialty training websites (50%), BMJ Careers website (46%), NHS Medical Careers (43%) along with several other websites are widely used. Self-help career materials were not used much in 2001 (only 18% mentioned them) but now 44% had used them.

Other sources, although still not widely used had also been used by more respondents. For example, only 8% mentioned using their University Careers Service in 2001 but 15% of this year’s survey respondents had used theirs. Similarly, nearly a quarter had attended a career workshop or event at a Postgraduate Medical Centre compared to just 6% in 2001. More had also used professional bodies such as the BMA or Royal Colleges (24% compared to 14% in 2001).

How useful are different sources of support?

Most sources of career support were rated as useful or very useful by more than half the people who had used them.
Figure 1: Use of sources of career advice, websites and career events attended (N of cases = 816)

Source: Medical Career Advice and Guidance Survey 2014
Figure 2: Usefulness of sources of career advice

People/sources: Figure 2 shows the percentage of respondents who rated each source useful or very useful. The top three in terms of usefulness were unchanged from 2001. They were:

- More experienced peers (93% rated as useful or very useful)
- Senior doctors (87% rated as useful or very useful)
- Family and friends who are doctors (82% rated as useful or very useful)

Career events: The usefulness of different career events is summarised in Figure 3. Three-quarters rated careers fairs/events run by their LETB, Deanery, Royal College, Faculty or Trust as useful or very useful. Over half also rated other events as useful or very useful, although just under half (48%) rated webinars as useful or very useful.

Source: Medical Career Advice and Guidance Survey 2014
**Figure 3: Usefulness of career events**

![Bar chart showing the usefulness of different career events](image)

*Source: Medical Career Advice and Guidance Survey 2014*

**Figure 4: Usefulness of websites**

![Bar chart showing the usefulness of different websites](image)

*Source: Medical Career Advice and Guidance Survey 2014*

**Websites:** Figure 4 summarises the findings on the usefulness of different websites. Specialty training websites (84% rated as useful or very useful) and specialty recruitment websites (78% rated as useful or very useful) were rated the most useful but clearly this is a compilation of the usefulness of a number of different websites. The BMJ Careers website (73% rated as useful or very useful) and the BMA Careers website (71% rated as useful or very useful) were the two single websites found most useful.
Career issues

Survey respondents were asked which of 20 potential career issues they would like help with currently. Just 11% said none and most listed several issues. Figure 5 summarises the overall replies. Six issues were mentioned by more than 40% of respondents. These were:

**Figure 5: Career issues would like help with currently (N of cases = 803)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In-depth information on my preferred career options</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing my chances of success in my chosen career</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A better understanding of medical opportunities overseas</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater awareness of flexible training options</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anticipating the future financial and lifestyle implications of my career choice</td>
<td>43%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Evaluating my chances of success in my chosen career</td>
<td>42%</td>
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<tr>
<td>More awareness of medical careers outside the NHS</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding my strengths and weaknesses</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A better awareness of possible medical career options</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making a decision about future options</td>
<td>40%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prioritising what is most important to me</td>
<td>40%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Preparing myself for future career roles</td>
<td>40%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Clarifying my career preferences and motivations</td>
<td>40%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Building my self-confidence in the workplace</td>
<td>39%</td>
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<tr>
<td>A better awareness of non-medical career options</td>
<td>39%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Developing non-clinical skills important to my career development</td>
<td>39%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deciding about whether to take a break from my training</td>
<td>38%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dealing with conflicts between work and non-work responsibilities</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dealing with setbacks in my career</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Returning to medicine after a break</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other need</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Medical Career Advice and Guidance Survey 2014
• In-depth information on my preferred career options (45% mentioned)

• Increasing my chances of success in my chosen career (45%)

• A better understanding of medical opportunities overseas (44%)

• Greater awareness of flexible training options (44%)

• Anticipating the future financial and lifestyle implications of my career choice (43%)

• Evaluating my chances of success in my chosen career (41%)

More analysis will be conducted to identify not only whether different issues are more important at different stages of training but also how demographic and other variables affect the issues chosen.

Career knowledge and preferences for how career support is delivered

A final section in the survey asked respondents to rate a series of attitude statements about how they find out about medical careers and how they thought career support should be delivered. These statements were included to allow comparisons with data from the 2001 survey. Figure 6 summaries the replies from this year’s survey and some key findings and comparisons are listed below:

• Fewer respondents in 2014 (72% compared to 86% in 2001) agreed that most of what they know about careers in medicine had come from personal experience

• Two-thirds of respondents agreed that there were many areas of medicine that they knew too little about (unchanged from 2001)

• Nearly half (47%) felt they had been forced to make difficult decisions about which area to specialise in too early in their career compared to 35% in 2001

• Just over a third (36%) had found it hard to get the information they felt they needed to make career decisions, while a third had found it hard to get advice and guidance on careers in medicine compared to 40% agreeing with both statements in 2001

• 37% (unchanged from 2001) agreed that the advice they had received about medical careers had been timely and relevant

• 46% (compared to just 26% in 2001) agreed that the information they had received about medical careers had been accurate
The majority (68% and unchanged from 2001) continued to agree that career advice is best given informally by people with direct and relevant personal experience and 59% agreed (compared to 44% in 2001) that experienced doctors (eg consultants or GPs) are the people best equipped to give career advice.

Less than four out of ten (37%) would like access to career advice from someone who is impartial and independent of the medical establishment compared to nearly half (47%) in 2001.

These findings provide further evidence that the perceived quality and usefulness of the career support provided to doctors in training has improved since 2001 but also indicate that there are challenges still remaining. Nearly half (46%) now feel that they have received accurate information about medical careers compared to around a quarter in 2001 but it is not always timely and relevant. More felt that they had been forced to make difficult decisions about which area to specialise in too early in their career and this may be a consequence of changes
to the training system. The proportion (67%) feeling that there are areas of medicine they knew too little about has also not changed.

Who they would like to talk to about career issues has not changed with a strong feeling that experienced doctors are the best equipped to give career advice through informal conversations. Other research has also found that many of the most useful career conversations in other settings are also often not with career specialists.

Career professionals working in LETBs, Deaneries and Medical Schools have had a major role in developing many of the new and improved career resources, such as websites and self-help career materials that are now being widely used. The importance of this role as developer of resources should not be underestimated. Another significant role for career professional is as the trainers, co-ordinators and supporters of those who give career support on an informal basis.

Next steps

This initial analysis has aimed to provide a brief overview of the findings from the 2014 survey. More detailed analysis will now be undertaken to look at replies from respondents at different stages of training and to see how replies vary by demographic and other relevant variables. The survey has also collected information on specialty choice and career decidedness and this will also be analysed to see how this is linked to the type of career issues that different respondents would like help with and their perceptions about the quality of different forms of career support.

Charles Jackson, November 2014

For more information about the survey or to be sent a copy of the final report, please email: charles.jackson@nicec.org