

Appendix 1: Origin and development of the statements and questions used in this study

The UK Medical Careers Research Group has studied doctors' careers for many years. Its main focus has been on doctors' career plans, choice of eventual specialty, career progression and experience of work. In addition to our closed questions, we invite the doctors to tell us about any aspect of their work or training that they would like to let us know about. In the first two national surveys undertaken by the present team, the qualifiers of 1993 and 1996, we were struck by the large number of doctors who told us (often in very similar terms) that they had felt unprepared for the work that they undertook as house officers (i.e. in their first year of medical work). When seemingly important issues emerge in the comments, we sometimes incorporate the issue in our next survey, of the doctors at the same stage of career, to determine whether the views are shared by a more representative group of doctors than those who spontaneously commented. In discussion with postgraduate deans, in preparation for the survey of the cohorts of 1999 and 2000, they too were interested in junior doctors' views on 'preparedness'. The research team and two deans discussed the precise wording of a single statement – settling on “Medical school prepared me well for the jobs I have undertaken so far” – and we invited the doctors in the qualification cohorts of 1999 and 2000 to score it on a five point scale from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree”.

We had no idea, in advance, of the likely pattern of response or its likely importance; but, when we studied the responses, we were struck in particular by the large differences between medical schools in their graduates' responses. Our principle is to keep our questionnaires short to encourage a high response rate but, nonetheless, in subsequent surveys we decided to add a little more. Spontaneous comments about preparedness, from

the qualifiers of 1993, 1996, 1999 and 2000, were often specific and used phrases as cited in Table 2. We therefore included these in the questionnaires sent to the qualifiers of 2002, 2005, 2008 and 2009. It was also clear from the spontaneous comments that some doctors considered that, though they did not feel well prepared, it was not much of a problem and they learnt very quickly. Accordingly, we also added the question about whether feeling unprepared was a minor, medium-sized or serious problem for them.