

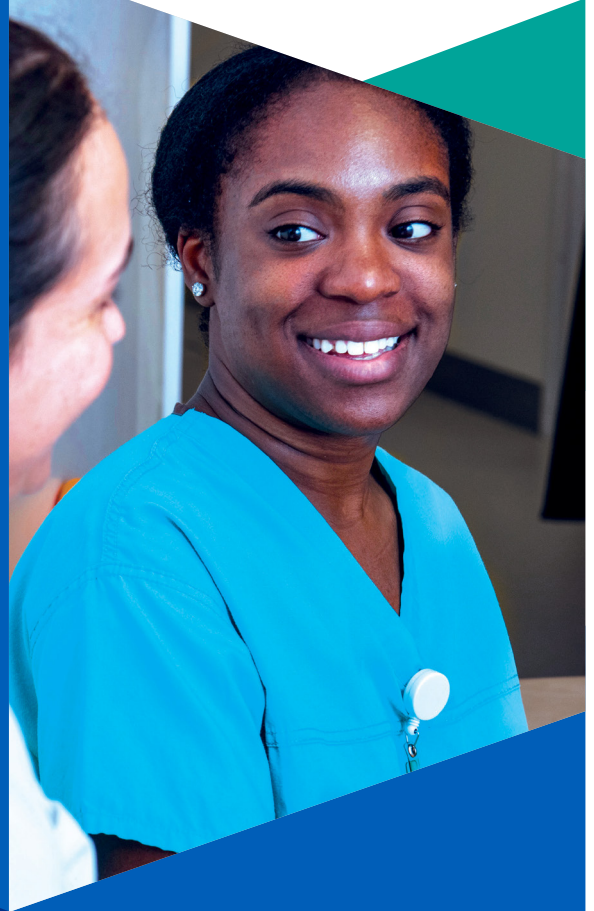
DBA Design  
Effectiveness Awards

# Step into the NHS



Client  
**Health Education  
England,  
NHS Health  
Careers team**

Agency  
**Brand Ethos**



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For publication

## Executive summary

The NHS is the UK's most recognised brand. It is also our largest employer, with more than 1.3 million people working for the NHS throughout England. Health and care professionals are the most trusted of all occupations.

And yet, there is a chronic shortage of NHS staff. To cope with the increasing demand on services due to a growing and ageing population, there is huge pressure to recruit more people from all backgrounds into the many different careers within the NHS.

The Covid-19 pandemic brought into sharp focus the contribution health and care workers bring to our society.

As support for health and care workers rose, so did interest in taking up health and care careers. During 2020 page visits to the NHS Health Careers website reached an all-time-high.

But to develop a pipeline of talent into all roles within the NHS, engagement needs to start early in schools, so that the next generation of recruits can hit the ground running. Step into the NHS is England's go-to health careers website specifically targeted at pupils, teachers and careers advisers. It features real NHS career journeys and is packed with helpful information and resources.

At the start of the pandemic most children and young people in education were online learning from home. As a result, the Step into the NHS website saw an increase in site visits. However, it was soon very clear that the site was failing to capture and hold user attention: bounce rates were high and time spent on the site was brief.

Recent market research had also shown that users considered the site design "boring", "not eye-catching" and too "basic". Informed by this insight and driven by broader market challenges, Step into the NHS needed a design overhaul.

The new design solution is a playful combination of the NHS identity with the simple concept of a doorway into a career. It is pitched to engage a young audience at the critical point in considering their career options.

Given the unprecedented pressures on schools to rapidly evolve teaching and learning and comply with Covid-19 restrictions, the response to the redesigned Step into the NHS website has been, and continues to be, phenomenal.

# STEP INTO THE NHS

The new design has transformed engagement:

Number of users during National Careers Week increased by

**98%**

Page views during National Careers Week increased by

**179%**

Resource downloads year on year increased by

**65%**

Competition school entries increased to the second highest level since launch in 2008

Both teachers and students were unanimous in their praise for the redesign

# Context and overview

## The brief

Step into the NHS was failing to inspire young people in its current form. The design was 10 years old. It was tired and out of touch with its user base. The brief was simple:

**Redesign to effectively appeal to the target audience of 7–16-year-olds, their teachers and careers advisers, and support their expectations and needs.**

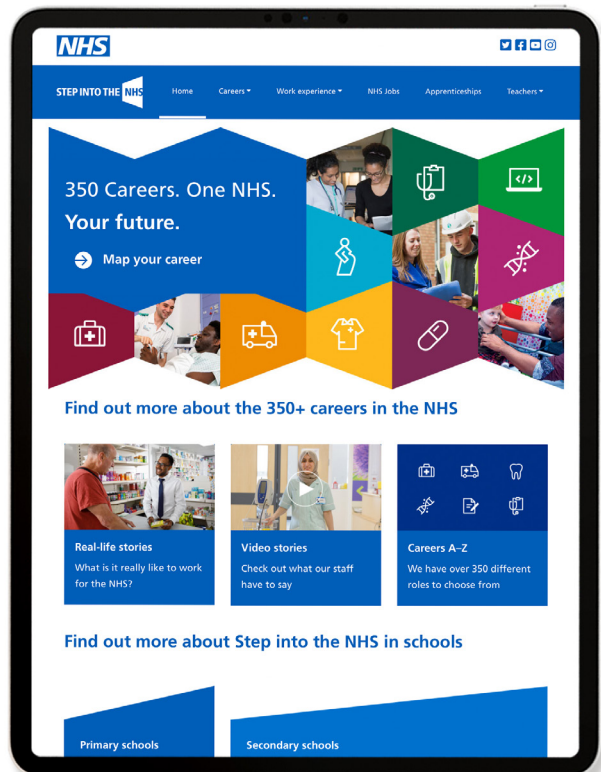
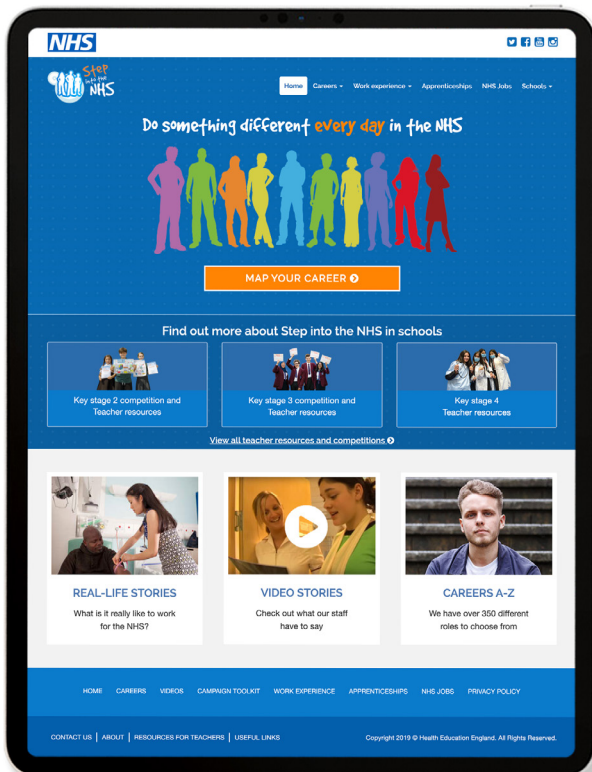
The client team was keenly aware the existing Step into the NHS website and associated resources did not comply with the NHS brand identity, nor did they reflect research insights into young people's expectations of health careers information and of the NHS as an employer.



A site rebuild was out of the question, so the objective was to try and transform the user experience by improving the design and meeting expected accessibility requirements. Most of the content was to remain the same.

The design had to be mindful of the NHS's brand identity as well as making a strong visual impact to attract and resonate with target audiences across Key Stages 2, 3 and 4. The creative approach needed to be easy to implement within a wide variety of supporting digital and printed resources.

Photography was limited to images of real people in real careers, reflecting feedback from audience research. No new photography was to be commissioned due to Covid-19 and budget restrictions. All other existing branding assets, including illustrations, had to be dropped.



Before the redesign (left) and after the redesign (right)

## Market context and challenges

NHS Health Careers is the careers information service for the NHS, consisting of a website, helpline, literature, careers events programme and targeted marketing and social media. It provides information on over 350 roles in the NHS, including entry routes, qualifications needed and what each role involves.

Interest in careers within the NHS continues to soar, and the NHS Health Careers website enjoyed unprecedented traffic in 2020. The overall number of page visitors looking for information on training to be a nurse rose by 138% between March and June 2020, with a 103% increase in people seeking information on becoming a paramedic. Other roles saw even greater increases of interest.

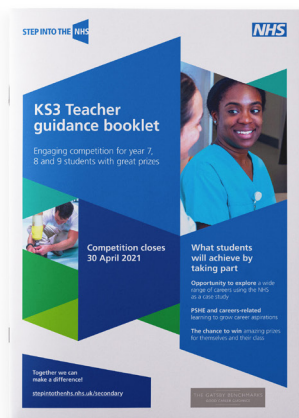
But the NHS is facing serious workforce challenges<sup>ii</sup>. There is a chronic shortage of staff in some professions, and with a growing and ageing population placing exponential pressure on services, the problem is not going away.

The NHS needs to educate and inspire people from all backgrounds into the NHS, in particular young people, as routes into health careers can often take years of training and careful consideration of subject choices.

Other careers – engineering, professional services, retail and more – vie for young people’s attention and so the NHS is also competing with other young people’s careers services such as Prospects, UCAS and the National Careers Service. And it has to work hard to gain teachers’ time and attention when a myriad of other teaching and careers resources is available to them every day.

In addition to the main NHS Health Careers website, Step into the NHS was set up in 2008 to target young people exclusively. Its focus is on telling real career stories from within the NHS, explaining the various routes into a wide range of roles and what they each involve. The NHS is also keen to challenge known misconceptions about working in the NHS, for example, that you need to go to university, that you will deal directly with patients, or that you must want to be a doctor or a nurse.

Step into the NHS runs an annual school competition, has a host of useful teaching resources, as well as online diagnostic quiz to help match young people to a range of roles that suit their interests and broaden their awareness of the NHS’s 350+ careers.



Redesigned resources for teachers in primary (top) and secondary (bottom) schools

# Meeting the design challenge

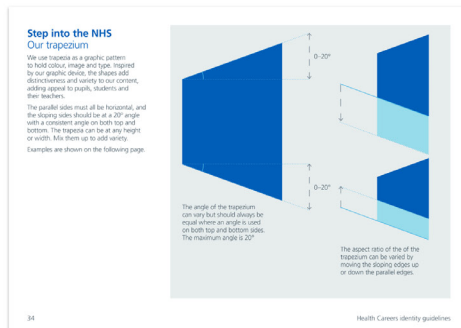
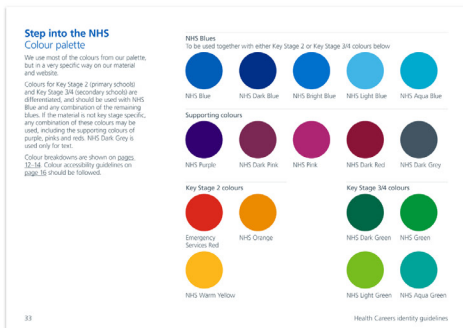
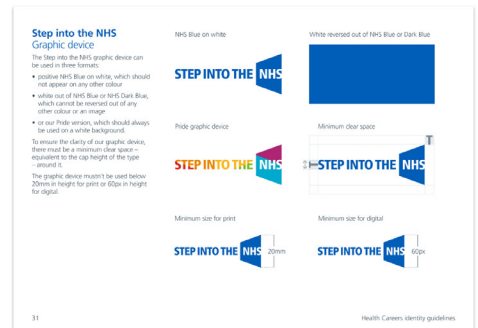
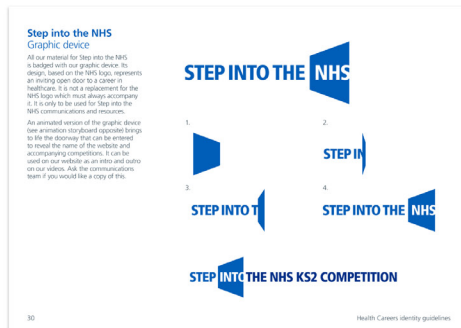
Our task was to ensure the redesign appealed to the target audience of 7–16-year-olds, their teachers and careers advisers, supporting their expectations and needs.

Due to time and budget restrictions, the website could not be fully redesigned, in part because user testing wasn't possible and because there was insufficient time for a complete rebuild. Instead, the decision was made to reskin the site, making it mobile-friendly and updating any relevant content through the content management system.

The design reskin had to fit into an existing site map, align with the look and feel of the overarching NHS Health Careers website, follow

NHS identity guidelines and comply with government accessibility regulations<sup>iii</sup>. We started with high-fidelity wireframes, incorporating real text. Collectively, agency, client and developer worked closely to discover what small changes were possible within the reskinning scope to significantly improve the user experience.

Along with the wireframes providing a clear structure and framework, we had a brand toolkit – including NHS fonts, selection of colours, icons and photography style – created when we worked on the NHS Health Careers identity review the previous year. These were drawn from the NHS identity guidelines and reflected research into what appealed to young people.



Pages from the updated NHS Health Careers identity guidance, which focus on the creative opportunities for the design devices within the NHS identity while remaining accessible

## A doorway metaphor provided a design platform

After exploring ideas with moodboards we had a clear winner: the concept of a portal that children and young people could step into metaphorically, to discover more about health careers in the NHS. It enabled us to create an animation revealing the site's name while coming through a graphical doorway, suggesting an open invitation to discover and be inspired by the stories and content within.

This doorway offered an ever-changing trapezium that could be used creatively and effectively across the site and associated literature, from tessellating into a pattern to a more dynamic composition with trapeziums at different sizes.

The colour palette is bright, to engage students, with colours chosen to pop against the corporate NHS blues. Part of the website has resources aimed at either primary or secondary school teachers and students, so a reduced colour-coded palette was created for each of these to aid navigation.

Photography, chosen from an existing library, focused on young people happily engaged in their work, colour adjusted so they all matched one another and sat well with the vibrant colours of the trapeziums.

The updated competition booklets and worksheets were more structured with easier to follow instructions. Design remained paramount, even when used within the constraints of PowerPoint and Word for some documents and considering the needs of teachers who would be printing in black and white when using printers in schools.

The design concept was flexible enough to be used in a variety of ways, but also provided clarity and consistency and solved the issues of poor accessibility and brand identity compliance inherent in the original designs. The website, literature and worksheets now work as one cohesive, inspiring whole.

Design deliverables included:

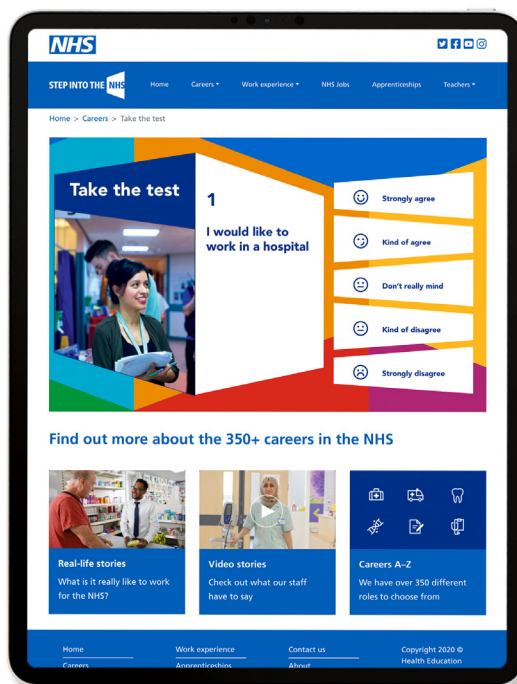
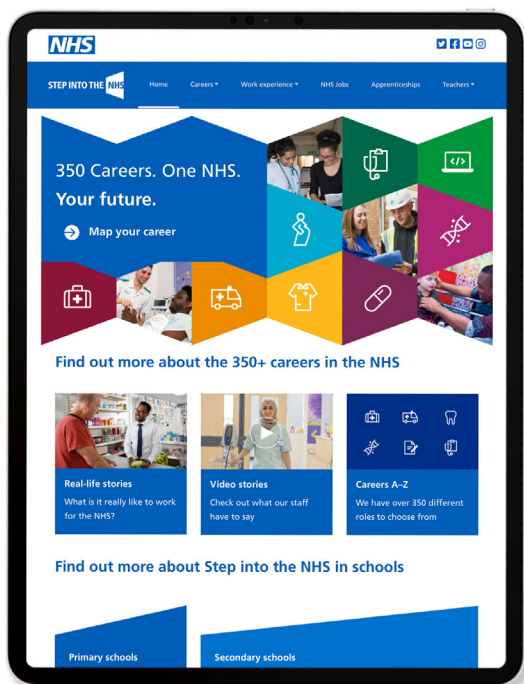
- A fresh, original design styling for both online and print, routed in a strong narrative and including a new graphic device and coded colourways
- UIs for the reskinning of the existing site
- Redesigning and updating the online quiz
- Teacher booklets (3) and resources (60)
- Templates (14) for PowerPoint and Word
- Identity guidance incorporated within NHS Health Careers identity guidance.

The Health Careers team worked with an education specialist partner to manage the competition and support the team with marketing communications expertise. The partner carried out research among the target audience and asked for their views on the old branding and the proposed new branding.

## Key facts

Launch date: September 2020

Design fees: [Redacted confidential data]



Newly designed webpages kept students onsite longer looking at more

# Results

## 1. Research among users was overwhelmingly positive towards the redesign

### Pupil survey

**86%**

of respondents said the **new design** was appealing overall (they answered 7 or more on a scale on 1–10 of appeal). A third (32%) gave a score of 9 or 10.

**70%**

thought the colours were “appealing” on the **website design**, 54% liked the icons, 52% thought it would appeal to young people.

**82%**

thought the layout and structure of the design on the **career quiz**, was appealing and 68% said it made them want to explore the quiz further.

There was a shift to a **positive Net Promotor Score of 17** (32% promoters, 52% passives, 16% detractors).

### Teacher survey

In an evaluation survey

**100%**

of teachers said the new website gave them a clear idea of what Step into the NHS was for.

Teachers said the design had dramatically improved. Comments included:

“Quick and efficient.”

“Professional and clear.”

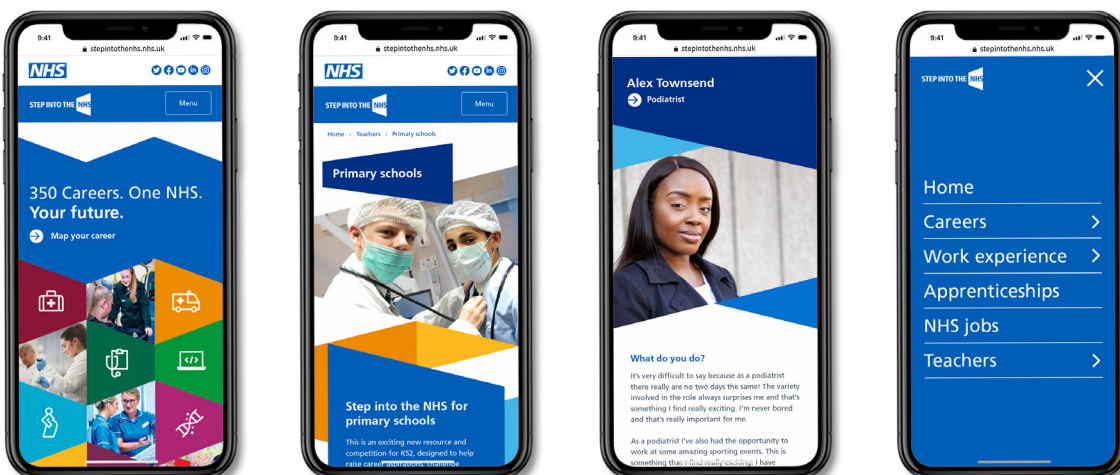
“The design is upbeat and fun, the pupils really took to it.”

## 2. Website traffic increased significantly following the redesign

National Careers Week is one of the UK's busiest weeks of the year for careers-related web traffic. It includes a dedicated "NHS day" for targeted activity such as case studies, blogs and online events.

The redesigned Step into the NHS website had a dramatic increase in users during National Careers Week 2021. Visitors used the site more often, viewed more pages and spent much longer on the site. The bounce rate also reduced significantly, and users kept coming back for more.

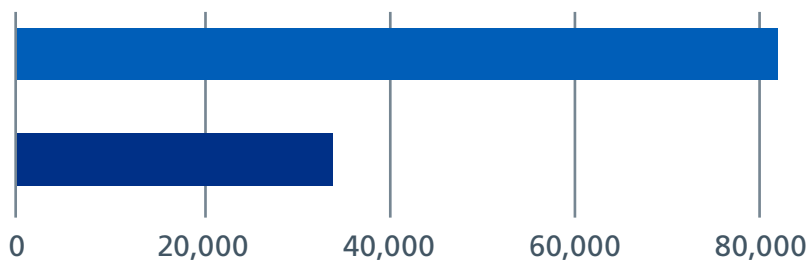
Metric	National Careers Week 2020 (before launch) 2–7 March 2020	National Careers Week 2021 (post launch) 1–6 March 2021	Change
Number of users	11,323	22,385	+98%
New users	10,752 (87.6%)	20,885 (83.1%)	+94%
Sessions	12,809	26,832	+109%
Page views	29,550	82,357	+179%
Pages per session	2.31	2.52	+9%
Average session duration	00:01:47	00:03:29	+95%
Bounce rate	65.64%	52.20%	-20%
Number of sessions per user	1.13	3.07	+172%



Newly designed webpages kept students onsite longer looking at more



## Page views



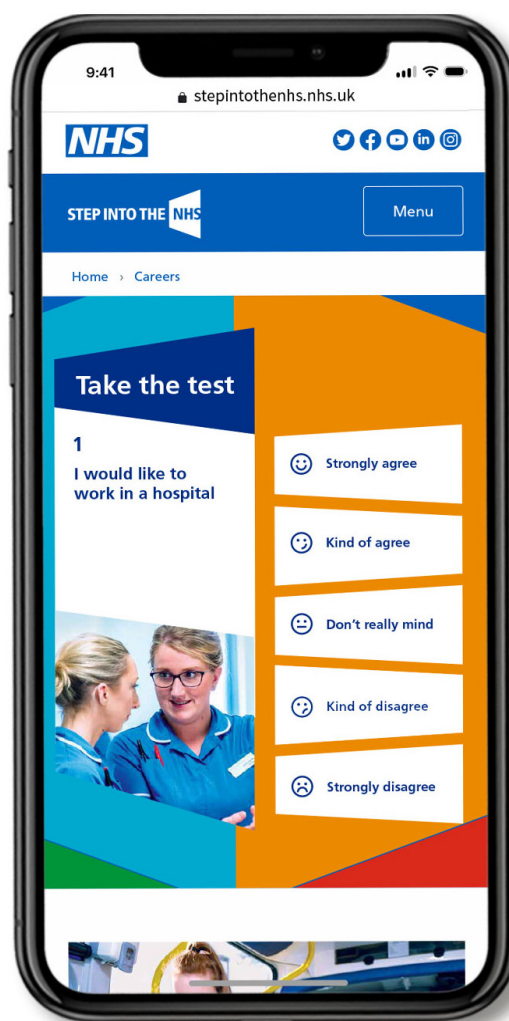
National Careers Week 2021  
(after launch) 1–6 March 2021

National Careers Week 2020  
(before launch) 2–7 March 2020

## Page views during National Careers Week increased dramatically following the launch of the redesigned website

Not only did website visits increase, so did the overall website activity.

- Number of people **completing the “Contact us”** form on the Step into the NHS website increased by 142% (from 626 to 1,515) between 21 October 2020 and 20 October 2021 following the new design suggesting that the redesign improved the user experience.
- The number of people starting the careers quiz on the NHS Health Careers website between 21 October 2020 and 20 October 2021 rose by a modest 5% compared to the previous year yet the number of **completions of the career mapper quiz increased** by 19% from 67,431 vs 56,648, again suggesting an improved user experience.



## Comparison of website usage between year to October 2020 and the year to October 2021

Metric	1 October 2019 – 30 September 2020	1 October 2020 – 30 September 2021	Change
Number of users	514,574	589,385	+15%
New users	510,909	586,207	+15%
Sessions	620,681	720,223	+16%
Page views	1,650,112	1,806,209	+9%

### 3. The redesign boosted marketing efforts

#### Improved email marketing open rates

Strong increase in unique user opens for email marketing for primary and secondary school comparing the old design (2019/20) and the new design (2020/21). A benchmark for the sector of email open rates is 10%. The redesign shows a strong performance against the sector benchmark.

##### Primary schools launch email

Metric	September 2019 (pre-redesign)	October 2020 (post redesign)	September 2021
Unique user opens	7.7%	12%	14%

##### Secondary schools launch email

Metric	September 2019 (pre-redesign)	October 2020 (post redesign)	September 2021
Unique user opens	11.6%	15.4%	18%

#### Social media engagement (November/December campaign)

Strong uptake in response to autumn social media advertising campaign comparing the old design (September 2019) and the new design (October 2020 and September 2021), in turn dramatically reducing cost per click across Facebook and Twitter. The redesign shows a strong performance against the sector benchmark.



##### Primary schools

Metric	September 2019	October 2020	September 2021
<b>Twitter</b> – cost per click	£5.00	£1.74	£0.46
<b>Facebook</b> – cost per click	£10.14	£0.45	£0.44

##### Secondary schools

Metric	September 2019	October 2020	September 2021
<b>Twitter</b> – cost per click	£3.57	£1.78	£0.43
<b>Facebook</b> – cost per click	£8.06	£0.38	£0.26

## Resource downloads increased

The redesign has generated a dramatic increase in the number of unique downloads.

Metric	1 October 2019 – 30 September 2020	1 October 2020 – 30 September 2021	Change
Unique downloads	9,605	15,816	+65%

## Competition entries were better than expected

The site has run competitions for secondary schools since the outset, but only for primary schools in the last couple of years. As such, data for primary schools is not a useful comparison. Covid-19 had an impact on the number of the competition entries received in 2020/21 but the number of schools participating increased.

The only thing that changed about the competition was the design of the material and supporting website. All other aspects remained the same. Feedback from teachers highlighted the appeal of the design as a vital contributing factor.



## Number of secondary schools that entered: 2019/20 compared to 2020/1

In the 2019/20 school year, there were 1,784 entries from 126 secondary schools. In the 2020/21 school year, following the redesign, there were 1,186 entries from 134 schools.

- The key performance indicator is the number of schools entering, showing that the competition is reaching more young people. There was a modest increase in schools participating, although a significant achievement bearing in mind that teachers were under pressure in 2020/21 to catch up on curriculum teaching which would have disincentivised them or made it very hard to make time for any extra-curricular activities like the Step into the NHS competition, and during the year post redesign most children and young people were learning online from home.
- **2020/21 year saw the second-highest number of schools ever enter the competition** since it was launched in 2008. Second only to the 10th anniversary year in 2018 for which there was considerably more marketing effort.



# Proof of effect and other influencing factors

## Proof of the effect of design

The objective was to ensure the redesign appeals to the target audience of 7–16-year-olds, their teachers and careers advisers, and supports their expectations and needs.

Despite an initial increase in users at the start of the Covid pandemic, it was very clear that the site was failing to capture and hold user attention: bounce rates were high and time spent on the site was brief.

Because of Covid, and budgetary and time restraints, it was not possible to look at any other aspects of the resources, including a rebuild of the website, development of new content or resources, or to reframe the competition.

The design was the only element that was changed. Its appeal among the target audience was reflected both in research and in the significant increase in the use of the website, teachers' resources downloaded and entries by schools into the competition.

- **Number of users** during National Careers Week increased by **98%**
- **Page views** during National Careers Week increased by **179%**
- **Resource downloads** year on year increased by **65%**
- **Competition school entries increased** to the second highest level since launch in 2008
- Both teachers and students were unanimous in their praise for the redesign.

## Influencing factors

Covid-19 had both a positive impact on engagement (awareness of and support for the NHS) and negative impact (school and education disruption). Bounce rates were reduced, while the number of page visits and length of time on the site increased significantly post-design. The second highest number of schools participating in the competition was recorded post-design since the start of the initiative in 2008 (the only year to outstrip this success was 2018 when there was considerable additional effort put into marketing the competition in its tenth anniversary). The pandemic also meant that it was not possible to update the photo library.

The marketing strategy employed by the education specialist partner e.g., promotional emails and social media posts, runs year-round and would have encouraged people to visit the website. Promotional emails and social media posts used the same design as the website. Budget with this provider remained the same over the two years as did much of the content.

The annual competition runs every year from September to April which would have had an impact on web traffic. Teachers who entered in previous years would have visited the website regardless of the web design.

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<sup>i</sup> NHS Long Term Plan, page 6, January 2019

<sup>ii</sup> We are the NHS. People Plan 2020–21 – Action for us all. July 2020

<sup>iii</sup> Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No. 2) Accessibility Regulations 2018