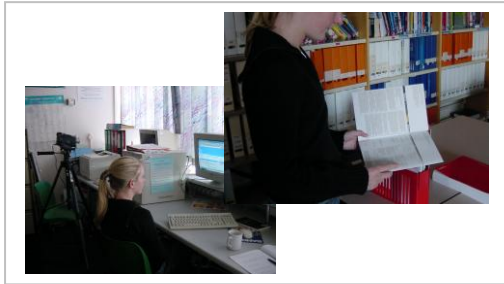


Helping Ravensbourne College increase applications by 53.3%

In a market where survival depends on recruiting prospect students, this college, affiliated to Sussex University, aimed to increase the effectiveness of its website as a recruiting tool. Our role was to inform development of the site by conducting user research.

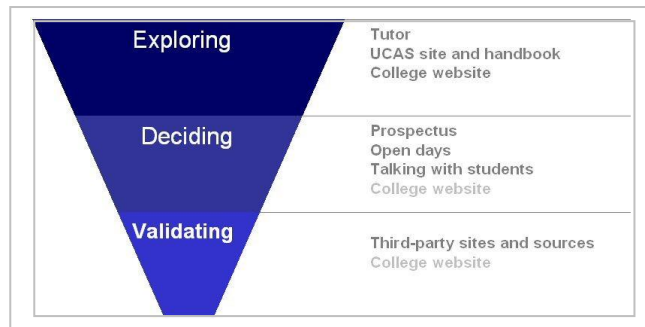
In-context ethnographic research and usability testing



From the outset we recognised that the college website is just one information source a prospect student will use when choosing a college to apply to. To understand the broader context of use, and the stages involved, we conducted research with prospects and current students using in-depth contextual interviews and usability testing.

Mapping the prospect student experience

We identified three stages as prospects narrow down their candidate list, decide which college is their preferred and finally look for objective validation of their choice. We found that prospects use a range of different information sources at each stage. While the website was useful in *Exploring* potential colleges it was not playing a role in either *Deciding* or *Validating*.



Identifying enhancements that have helped increase applications by 53.3%*

	Content	Architecture/Navigation	Design/Functionality
Exploring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Search results Clearly content up to date, identify new ones Register for event notifications? Priority display about those courses being highly recommended, to highlight high demand/required Priority requirements by country Priority course details about location and what it is like 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Generate information about the range of courses Reduce the way Make Open day Priority display Help navigation Link information to particular key 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make those pages more
Deciding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have course detail eg a typical week For modules, what requirements Have other details to resources Priority display to help Personalise the way it flows Priority display about those courses being highly recommended, to highlight high demand/required Priority requirements by country Priority course details about location and what it is like 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pushed content three-part navigation of course information, one section per course with sub-menu to more detail Add course events, images of modules, better to search results Full list of modules at each course Pushed About Ravensbourne priority navigation for each course Distinction lists from each course Clearer references to specific modules Make content visible on in the site Ask more the Join the way Ask more the Join the way Ask more the Join the way 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Help users visualise the site, details and resources better using 3D technology as possible course details to present
Validating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Links to other that make mention of Ravensbourne of course 		

As well as identifying ways of making the site more *usable* we juxtaposed the above stages with *Content*, *Architecture/Navigation* and *Design/Functionality* to identify enhancements that would also make the site more *useful* to prospects.

* Source: SCOP January 2004

What our client had to say about the research process

“new experience’s research and analysis helped us understand our target audience in a way we never had before. Their representation of the prospect student experience has proved an invaluable tool for formulating our recruitment communications and activities. They opened our eyes to the benefits of conducting in-depth and in-context user experience research.”

Dr Janthia Taylor, Director of Digital Futures, Ravensbourne College of Design and Communication