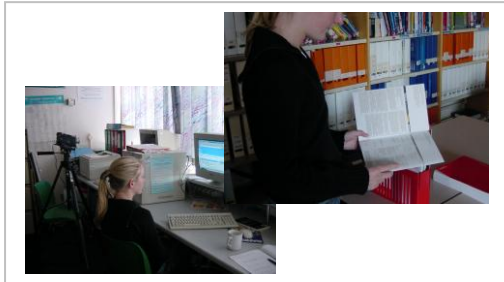


Helping Ravensbourne College increase applications by 53.3%

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.

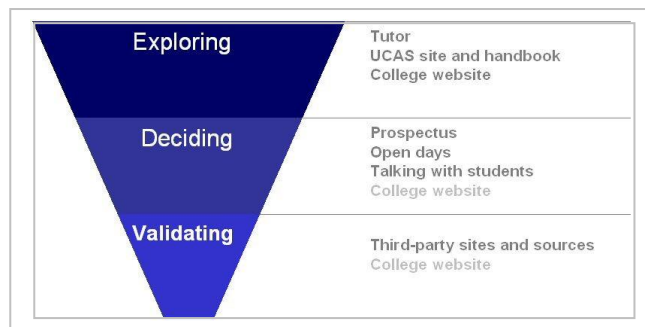
In-context ethnographic research and usability testing



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%*

Opportunity	Participants	Findings	Conclusions and recommendations
Opportunity matrix			
	Content	Architecture/navigation	Design/functionality
Exploring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Search results Easy access to the site, identify open days Register for most universities Provide details about course content Course entry requirements, to suggest high standard required Identify requirements by course Provide more details about courses and what is in the EC 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide information about the range of courses Clarify the way that Open day events are run Help, brochures and information to participants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make Home screen more
Deciding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More course detail eg typical week for modules, their assessment, class size, access to resources Students' views on the course Students' feedback on the day's Open days Identify features of campus Use of space, and students' management opportunities Use about Open Day Locations, resources used Book sessions and links for local events and opportunities Establish future open-days for eg, courses to their needs as transitional students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finalist content: Develop suggestions of course information, one session per course with help sheet to show dates Add course details, images of materials, gallery to attract attention Full list of modules as a curriculum Student About Ravensbourne page including the rich content Clarification links from top-sections Greater emphasis to social media Make course entry page in the site book sessions and links for local events and opportunities Establish future open-days for eg, courses to their needs as transitional students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Help users visualise the site, using the resources page Using 3D technology Provide course details as per the EC
Validating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Links to sites 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