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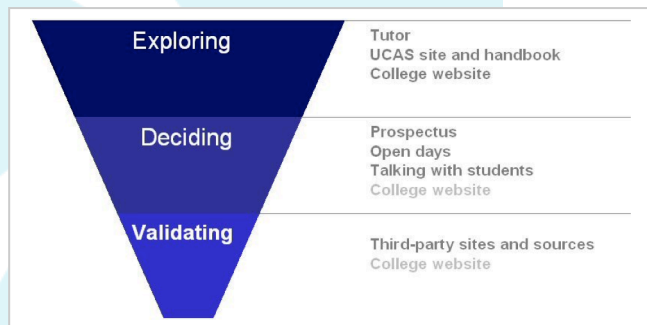
In-context ethnographic research and usability testing
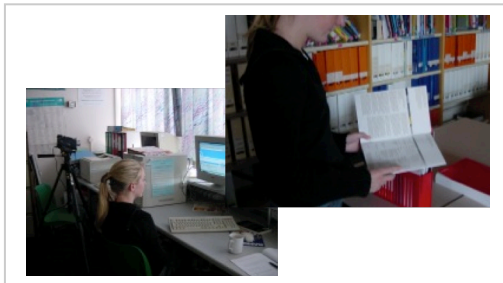
From the outset we recognised that the college website is just one information source a prospect student will use when choosing a college to apply to. To understand the broader context of use, and the stages involved, we conducted research with prospects and current students using in-depth contextual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

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