Faculty of Humanities

School of Arts, Languages and Cultures

User testing Report (Executive Summary)

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# 1. Introduction

On September 4 2012 the new School of Arts, Languages and Cultures website was launched.  To ensure that the new website delivers a high-quality user experience, a detailed programme of user testing was conducted throughout November 2012.

## 1.1    Methodology

The website serves a diverse audience and is underpinned by a variety of stakeholders. To ensure that an effective representation of opinion was received, the following methods of assessment were employed:

1. **Staff Survey:** An online survey was sent to 592 colleagues within the school

2. **Random sampling:** Volunteers from the Student Network were asked to test the website using a selection of scenario based questions

3. **Web Ergonomics Lab:** Volunteers from the University's Youth Forum were recruited to test the website using the specialist facilities provided in the Web Ergonomics Lab

4. **Google analytics review:** A statistical analysis of website metrics was carried out using data gathered from the Google Search Appliance

This paper summarises the outcome of this testing.

# 2.    Staff Survey

## 2.1    Summary

- An online survey was sent to 592 colleagues within the school

- The survey was produced by an external agency in collaboration with the Faculty Web Team and representatives from the ALC Web Committee

- The survey was presented in three sections:

    o   Multiple choice

    o   Direct questions

    o   Open response questions

- The survey ran for one week between 8 and 15 November 2012.

- 101 responses were received

### 2.1.1    Section 1: Multiple choice scenarios

Section 1 began by asking nine questions concerning the general look and feel of the new website. Opinion was gauged using the following scale:

- Strongly agree

- Agree

- Neutral

- Disagree

- Strongly disagree

Of the 101 participants, 77 chose to complete this section while 24 chose to skip it. The questions and majority responses were as follows:

| Question | Majority response | Response % |
|---|---|---|
| The site is clear and easy to navigate | Agree | 41% |
| I am able to find the content I am looking for | Agree | 26% |
| I can easily find my way around the site | Agree | 40% |
| The design and structure is consistent and logical across the whole site | Agree | 36% |
| The content is well written and easy to understand | Agree/Neutral | 40% |
| The text was confusing and contained too much jargon | Disagree | 49% |
| There is too much text on the pages | Neutral | 39% |
| There are enough images and video on the pages | Neutral/Disagree | 30% |
| The images which are used within the site enhance the written content and are visually appealing | Disagree | 30% |

### 2.1.2 Section 2: Direct questions

Section 2 asked a further 10 questions, this time with more focus on the functionality of the website. Opinion was gauged through a direct 'yes' or 'no' response.

Of the 101 participants, 66 completed this section, while 35 didn't. The questions and responses were as follows:

| Question | Majority response | Response % |
| --- | --- | --- |
| The ALC is visually engaging / attractive | Yes | 71% |
| The overall site is visually engaging / attractive | Yes/No | 50% |
| The typography used on the website (font size and style) is attractive and easy to read | Yes | 80% |
| The colours used across the website (text, headings and images) are attractive | Yes | 76% |
| The top navigation (tabs) are easy to understand and navigate around | Yes | 68% |
| I prefer the rotating feature images over the static feature image | Yes | 74% |
| When using the website, I can find the information I need quickly | No | 59% |
| When using the website I generally know where I am within the structure and can easily navigate to other areas | Yes | 55% |
| Each page has the right amount of information | Yes | 53% |
| It is clear what content is aimed at different audiences (prospective students, research associates etc.) | No | 55% |

### 2.1.3 Section 3: Open response questions

Finally, section 3 asked two general questions that allowed participants to articulate thoughts and feelings in an unrestricted way. The questions asked were as follows:

- Would you like to offer any further comment about the website?

- If you could change anything on or about the website, what would it be?

Of the 101 participants, 41 chose to complete both questions while 24 chose to skip them. A diverse mix of opinion was received, which following analysis can be summarised into the following themes:

- Lack of engaging images and video

- Length of text content

- Missing information from subject area pages

- Staff profiles / Our people structure

- Use of generic news

A number of positive comments were also received. Some of the comments included:

- 'Huge amount of progress on this in a short time, well done!'

- 'It's definitely moving in the right direction'

- 'The new website is a great improvement on the old – both in clear design and utility'

- 'The website is a great improvement on its predecessor'

## 3. Random sampling

### 3.1 Summary

- A random sampling exercise was conducted on 7 November 2012

- Volunteers from the Student Network were recruited through the Student Communications Marketing Team

- Each participant was asked to test the website using a selection of 'scenario based' questions

- The scenarios chosen were designed by an external agency in collaboration with the Faculty Web Team and ALC Web Committee Representatives

- The session was conducted by an external facilitator with assistance from the Central Marketing and Communications Team

Overall, the new website was well received and no major concerns were brought to light. However, there were a number of issues highlighted that should be considered to inform potential and future development of the website.

The feedback gathered has been summarised into a list of observations as follows:

### 3.1.1 General look and feel

- The design was well received, with a view that it looked both professional and clean in design

- No concerns were raised with the dual navigation employed by the website (horizontal tabs and vertical left-hand navigation). Differentiation between their use and purpose was understood

- Participants missed information beneath the fold, that is, text that is only visible on screen once a user begins to scroll, as they were unwilling to scroll on longer pages

- Participants favoured the alignment to the Corporate look and feel as it gave a sense that a user was part of the wider institution

- Website terminology seemed to be clear and well understood

- Participants felt that the Graduate School tab was out of place and considered it an 'internal resource'

- Participants felt that the feature boxes on the website homepage duplicate the horizontal tabbed navigation and would be better used to advertise more specific aspects of the school

### 3.1.2 Subject lading page

- The 'Subjects' tab was the natural destination for users when looking for course information, rather than the 'browse our subjects' box on the website homepage and they understood its' purpose

- Participants tended to use links in the left-hand navigation over duplicate links within the body copy. This may be due to the fact that the body copy appears beneath the fold on smaller devices

### 3.1.3 Our people landing page

- The 'Our people' tab was the natural destination for users when looking for academic staff information

- Some participants struggled to find information on academics' research interests when on the staff listing page.

### 3.1.4 Our research landing page

- The 'Our research' tab was the natural destination for users when looking for research information

- Some participants struggled to find information on research topics (as the section structures around centres whose titles may not be self-explanatory)

- Participants were directed to legacy sites which was confusing

### 3.1.5 Individual subject area pages

- 'Postgraduate taught' and 'Postgraduate research' terminology (left hand side navigation) was not entirely clear to participants.

- Most participants at this level (after at least three clicks from the home page) expected to find information in the body copy and tended to ignore the left hand side navigation. When relevant, links from the left hand side navigation could be added to the body copy in order to facilitate site navigation for users.

- Example of the above: participants often missed the 'Course list' link in left hand side navigation when in the Undergraduate, Postgraduate taught and Postgraduate research sub-sections. One simple solution to this could be to move course listings a level up or add a link to the 'Course list' page within the body copy of those pages (as done currently in Drama: http://www.alc.manchester.ac.uk/subjects/drama/undergraduate/). Although this can be seen as duplication, it ensures this crucial link is found promptly either way

- Subject landing page featuring boxes with images (Music section: http://www.alc.manchester.ac.uk/subjects/music/): participants mentioned that the use of pictures made the boxes more obvious on the page. Some participants said they may be slightly drawn to use them instead of the left hand side navigation while others stated they would ignore them

- Subject landing page featuring dynamic slides: participants mentioned they may not wait on the page long enough to see the slides changing and therefore this feature may be irrelevant to them.

### 3.1.6 Course information pages

- Users were directed to legacy sites when trying to find information about modules. This was confusing and affected the user's journey through the site.

- It is not clear whether legacy sites have out-of-date or current information (as users got directed from a current website, they inferred the information on the legacy site was still current but couldn't be sure)

# 4. Web Ergonomics Lab

## 4.1 Summary

- The website was tested using the facilities available in the Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences Web Ergonomics Lab on November 13 2012

- Participants were volunteers from the University's Youth Forum to ensure that the website was tested using the 16-17 year old demographic

- Each of the four participants was asked to test the website using a selection of 'scenario based' questions. Based on those used in the random sampling exercise, the scenarios were adjusted to account for the younger audience

- Specialist 'eye tracking' equipment was employed to better understand how participants navigated the website and where any difficult may have arisen

- The four participants were also engaged in a discussion forum to promote general debate on the look, feel and functionality of the website

- The session was facilitated by experts in the field of human-computer interaction

### 4.1.1 User study

Participants were asked to imagine themselves to be in a number of scenarios, and complete a number of directed tasks. The table below summarises aspects of the website that participants particularly liked or disliked and presents supporting recommendations from colleagues within the Web Ergonomics Lab that may help to inform future development

| Aspect | Recommendation |
| --- | --- |
| Course information | Participants confused information about subject areas with information about degree courses. Making information about undergraduate degree courses directly accessible could make a big difference. A good option would be to add a tab on the top menu taking users directly to (for example) an A-Z list of undergraduate degree courses. The `Browse our subjects' box could be replaced by a `Browse our courses' box. |

| Aspect | Recommendation |
|---|---|
| Website imagery | On subject area landing pages, most of the participants preferred the rotating image feature over the pages that contained a static image, so it is a good idea to employ this type of content on the site. Informative images that tell users something specific about the School or University are more likely to catch their attention and 'add value' to the website. |
| Employability information | At present employability information is difficult to find. In addition to careers information for individual courses, making the central resource for the site richer and more accessible (e.g. linking to it from the SALC home page), would demonstrate to prospective students that SALC graduates go on to exciting and rewarding careers. |
| Website search facilities | Searching is a common activity on websites, so providing adequate facilities is important. Although most of the participants did not use the course search, when they were alerted to it they all said it would be useful. It may be helpful to make the course search more prominent on the home page, or locate it beneath the main search. |
| Menus and navigation | (1) The participants did appear to find the menus confusing, although their lack of familiarity with the subject area, and the fact that they were not in the process of applying to university, may have affected this. It seemed that they were able to work out how to use the menus as they interacted with the site. A big issue here was that the top menu was that the top menu was thought to link to the main University site. Using a different colour scheme to distinguish the two could help to address this.<br><br>When asked about the images on the right of the page http://www.alc.manchester.ac.uk/subjects/music/, one participant showed a preference for them; whilst the other three thought they served little purpose.<br><br>P1 said, `I prefer the images on right. They are more colourful and catch your eye before you start reading the subheading.' |

| | |
|---|---|
| | P3 said, `I don't find the images eye catching. Perhaps the heading might be but not the picture. I'm more likely to use the left-hand menu.' P2 concurred with this view.<br><br>P4 said, `I think I'd probably use the left-hand menu. Are the pictures useful? Not really. Here there are only three. On the left there is so much more and it's more divided. That's the first place you look anyway - you don't really look to the right. Until you told me you could click on them I just thought the pictures were there for fun. I didn't think they were useful. I wouldn't have clicked on them.'<br><br>(2) Images used on the right-hand side of subject area landing pages may be redundant. Although participants expressed a desire for informative images on the site, they are not necessarily a useful replacement for or addition to a menu. |
| Consistency with the University of Manchester brand | The SALC site appears to be consistent with The University of Manchester brand, which is what the users expect. The similarity of the sites can cause confusion, however: P3 thought the top menu was for the whole University, rather than the School, possibly because the colour scheme is the same. A different colour scheme would help to address this issue. |

### 4.1.2 Focus group

The focus group was conducted using an informal set of open questions, which led to additional conversation and questions as time went on. At any one time three participants were present in the focus group setting, while the other was in a one-to-one session in the user lab for the eye tracking and task completion. The initial open questions asked were as follows:

- What kind of information is useful to you / has been useful?

- What other University websites have you been to?

- Did you like them?

- What kind of sites do you normally surf?

- What kind of look should we have / do you like?

- Would social networking / Facebook Twitter provide you with better way of accessing information about Schools and Courses?

- Open chat about anything related.

In summary:

- The main point about website quality and look and feel seems to be that students associate this with trust, quality and legitimacy, as well as helping them to easily find the information they need. But they would not see a quality website as a reason for choosing a course if that course was not right one for them, or if they didn't like the content

- Information finding and content searching were really important to the participants. They were all familiar with Google and so expected to be able to search in a Google fashion. Indeed when asked if they bookmarked pages all said that they didn't (although some used pinterest) but instead preferred to use Google, and repeated Google searches to find information they needed

- Participants seem to suggest that static photography was useful to the general look of the site but did not make them think of the courses or programs differently. Further, they felt that videos of `talking heads' such as students, staff members and heads of School etc. would not influence them in making a decision for a particular program

- Participants suggested that interactive content that is actually related to the course subject or program they would be studying would be more useful

- Participants also suggested that clips of videos of the way that lectures, seminars, tutorials, etc. were conducted would have more influence on them selecting a program than would a student talking to camera. They also suggested that if a website was badly designed but provided this kind of content, whilst another website was well-designed but didn't provide this kind of content, they would more likely go with the badly designed website but with good video content

- When asked what kinds of things the students were looking for they listed (in this order): courses, funding, grades, and student life, with the strongest focus on courses and grades. When asked further about research and whether research was useful the students initially said that it was not

## 4.2    Conclusions

The main conclusions from the user study and the focus group can be summarised as follows:

- Prospective students' top priority is being able to find accurate details about specific degree courses, including information about how they will be taught, and entry requirements

- A good quality website is not sufficient in itself, but it helps to build trust

- Prospective students do not read large blocks of text: it should be broken up into smaller chunks with links to each item of information

- Multimedia content can improve the look and feel of a website, and can draw prospective students in, but it is most effective when it adds value. Images and videos should tell the students something about life at the university, and what to expect when they arrive.

A priority for SALC should be making course information more prominent and accessible. If students are not able to find it on the SALC pages it may reduce their trust in the site. On pages that contain large amounts of text, breaking up the information and linking to it from the top of the page would make it much easier to navigate. Any future move to provide multimedia content should focus on the 'real' student experience, rather than a specifically produced 'artificial' version.

# 5. Google analytics

## 5.1 Summary

- The University of Manchester utilises a Google Search Appliance (GSA) to continually monitor website usage

- The GSA allows for individual accounts to be created to monitor usage on localized (Faculty and School) websites

- The School of Arts, Languages and Cultures analytics account was activated on September 4 2012

F or the purposes of this report, the following metrics apply to the period **4 September 2012 – 2 January 2013**.

Statistical comparison with earlier or associated websites is not available at this time.

### 5.1.1 Visitor overview

Between September 4 2012 and January 2 2013, the School of Arts, Languages and Cultures received the following number of visitors:

| Visits | 92,164 |
|---|---|
| Unique visitors | 55,441 |
| Page views | 465,772 |
| Page visits | 5.05 |
| Average visit duration | 00:03:16 |
| Bounce rate | 37.87% |

**Definitions**

**Visits:** The number of visits to the website.

**Unique visitors:** The number of unduplicated (counted only once) visitors to the website over the course of the specified time period.

**Page views:** The total number of pages viewed. Repeated views of a single page are counted.

**Page visits:** The average number of pages viewed during a visit to your site. Repeated views of a single page are counted.

**Average visit duration:** The average time duration of a session.

**Bounce rate:** The percentage of single-page visits (i.e. visits in which the person left the website from the entrance page).

### 5.1.2 Most popular pages / sections

Between September 4 2012 and January 2 2013, of the 92,164 visitors, the top 10 pages / sections accessed were:

| Page / section | Visits |
|---|---|
| Website landing page | 41,425 |
| Subject landing page | 28,245 |
| Our people page | 13,618 |
| Music landing page | 10,997 |
| Graduate school landing page | 9,155 |
| English, American Studies and Creative Writing landing page | 8,981 |
| How to apply page | 8,429 |
| History landing page | 8,407 |
| Linguistics and English Language landing page | 7,116 |
| About us page | 7,059 |

### 5.1.3 Most popular subject areas

Between September 4 2012 and January 2 2013, of the 92,164 visitors, the top 10 subject areas accessed were:

| Page / section | Visits |
|---|---|
| English, American Studies and Creative Writing | 31,424 |
| History | 27,145 |
| Music | 25,490 |
| Linguistics and English Language | 22,955 |
| Translation and Intercultural Studies | 18,197 |
| Middle Eastern Studies | 16,199 |
| Religions and Theology | 15,583 |
| Art History and Visual Studies | 15,270 |
| Classics and Ancient History | 13,130 |
| Drama | 12,162 |

## 6.    Next steps

This report and the associated Web Ergonomics Report will be used to inform future activity. However, it should be noted that the use of the web remains subjective and a cautious approach to undertaking every issue highlighted should be adopted. The findings of this report will be considered alongside industry best practice and wider user testing which is also being undertaken by the University and other Faculties.

With this in mind there are some initial actions which can be taken to address some of the minor concerns raised. The Faculty Web Content Assistant (ALC) will work closely with the ALC Web Committee over the coming months to identify appropriate actions to follow from this report. Their immediate priorities will be to ensure that all subject areas are aligned to a minimum standard in terms of look and feel and content.

It is also worth noting that work has already begun on addressing the staff profiles issue as well as working to develop richer content (images and videos) as well as reducing the text length in some of the written copy which will address the issue of participants being unwilling to scroll through information.

Further work is also taking place at both Faculty and University levels to improve the Course Listing pages (Campus Solutions) and source high quality images and video for use both in digital and printed media.

In the longer term the Faculty Web project will also consider improvements/developments to be made to the Research sections of the School pages to support the Research Excellence Framework 2014.