



# UsabilityNorth



## Case Study Website Usability Evaluation



## Client Skills for Learning

**“We build confidence, helping partners to understand and achieve IT-based disability and accessibility conformance.”**

**Dr Tony Renshaw**, Usability North,  
Leeds Metropolitan University.

### Synopsis

In preparation for a full redesign of its existing website, the Skills for Learning team at Leeds Metropolitan University wanted to establish the needs and expectations of its 'customers' i.e. the students.

Usability North conducted a comprehensive usability evaluation of the existing site, involving interview, questionnaire, eye tracking study and video recording.

The results were used to determine the design concepts for the new site and help the Skills for Learning team develop its new design objectives.

Thanks to the project's success, the Usability team was asked to undertake further analysis to determine effective organisation of the website information.

### The issue

As a student-centred university, Leeds Metropolitan University operates a Skills for Learning department that provides resources to help students acquire other life skills, e.g. conducting research, generating CVs and other interpersonal skills.

One of the key ways in which it achieves this is through the Skills for Learning website.

As the website had evolved over the years, the Skills for Learning management team recognised that a redesign was urgently required to update the site. It was also acknowledged that a thorough understanding of its audience's needs and expectations would be fundamental to the design.

The Skills for Learning team turned to their colleagues from Usability North for help in obtaining the required information.

**Skills for Learning**

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## The project

Through a series of meetings with the Skills for Learning team, experts from Usability North developed an agreed evaluation plan to determine the usability and accessibility of the website and provide practical recommendations and solutions to resolve any issues. A number of students and staff, studying part-time at Leeds Metropolitan University, were invited to take part in the usability evaluation.

The first part of the study involved a one-to one interview and questionnaire, to determine the participants' expectations of the site and services they felt it should provide. These individuals were then asked to complete online tasks, designed to test the existing site's functionality and user friendliness.

Usability North sophisticated eye tracking software was used to monitor the participants' eye movement and actions, capturing data for analysis. The test was also videoed to reveal the participant's facial expressions throughout.

## Preparation

Seven tasks, identified as being representative of the actions visitors to the website might make, were agreed with the client:

- Start at Google and find Leeds Metropolitan University home page
- From the home page find the Skills for Learning website
- Find Flash animation about qualitative and quantitative research
- Find workshops for IT absolute beginners in November
- Send an email to the Skills for Learning team requesting log-on information
- Find examples of unsent letters to aid reflection
- Find the section for testing your maths skills.

Prior to testing, the tasks were transformed into discrete, executable procedures. In other words, they were clearly worded to avoid confusion, the Skills for Learning website carefully checked to ensure that there was only one way of completing the task, and that the site would respond as expected.

A trial run was conducted by Usability North's personnel, to ensure that the tasks could be completed fully, the eye tracking software could capture the necessary information and that there were no glitches with the system.

## Results

An interim report, showing how long the tasks took and 'click through' statistics, was quickly produced for the client. The video information allowed the Skills for Learning team to see the participants' actions and eye movements as they tried to overcome the site's difficulties. A more detailed report, complete with recommendations was subsequently provided.

It has resulted in a fundamental change to the design concepts around which the new site is constructed, including the need for an obvious, Skills for Learning portal on the University's home page and more logical grouping of information.

The quantitative nature of the results has also provided the Skills for Learning team with the necessary evidence to secure additional funding for its new design objectives.

Skills for Learning has since contracted Usability North to provide additional analysis, in the form of a card sorting exercise, to determine the most effective way to organise information within the website.

## Benefits

Usability North offers clients:

- Leading experts in the field of usability evaluation
- Low cost access to state-of-the-art technology and facilities
- Potential to increase customer profitability through improved return on investment (ROI)
- Potential for increased sales through improved products
- Bespoke projects – customer focussed approach designed to achieve the client's objectives
- Legislative compliance
- World-class service



**“The eye tracking expertise and facilities of Usability North allowed us to assess how effectively participants completed website tasks.”**

**Clare Lindley**, Senior Web Developer,  
Skills for Learning.

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