

# Web Publishing Guidelines (Version 1)

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## **1.0 Background**

### **1.1 Who produced this document?**

The University's Web Development Team has produced these guidelines.

It has been developed from the results of extensive internal and external research, together with consultation throughout the University, and reflects good industry practice.

### **1.2 Doesn't the University already have some Web Publishing Documents?**

There are two documents regarding publishing on mmu.ac.uk:

- Web Publishing Requirements
- Web Publishing Guidelines (this document)

Whilst the University has certain requirements, which are compulsory for web content on mmu.ac.uk, the web development team has also produced this document detailing best practice. It is hoped that all web publishers will strive to meet as many of these web guidelines as possible. Details of the University Web Template are also available from this document.

### **1.3 Philosophy**

If you publish, or wish to publish, information on mmu.ac.uk then this document is aimed at you.

The purposes of the guidelines are threefold:

- To help the University communicate effectively via the web
- To help ensure the University's website is *usable*
- To help the University meet its strategic plan especially in relation to inclusivity, communication and reputation.

### **1.4 Revision**

The Internet is a developing medium and these guidelines will be periodically revised by the Web Development Team following user testing and in response to major changes in technology. Comments and feedback are always welcome.

### **1.5 How to publish on [www.mmu.ac.uk](http://www.mmu.ac.uk)**

If you wish to publish information on [www.mmu.ac.uk](http://www.mmu.ac.uk) please contact your relevant member of the Web Development Team – <http://www.mmu.ac.uk/web/>.

## **2.0 Design, Accessibility and Usability**

### **2.1 University Template**

A University web template is available for use. Use of this template would help ensure that your site meets all of the web requirements and go a long way towards meeting many of the guidelines detailed in this document.

#### **2.1.1 Who can use the template?**

This template is for use for official University web publications.

As the concepts and code used in the template are complex it is envisaged that it will be used by experienced web developers only. Those who are not experienced web developers and who wish to use the template for their site should contact the Internet Manager or their relevant member of the Web Development Team for support and advice.

#### **2.1.2 Scope and Philosophy**

Use of the template will help the University unify visual standards for online communication.

The templates are designed to form a flexible but disciplined framework – it must be stressed that using this template does not prohibit or inhibit the ability of faculties, departments, institutes or projects to publish content that is geared towards their subjects or are branded to their specifications.

Through consistent placement of navigation and page structure users will become familiar with MMU web pages, increasing ease of use and engendering confidence. Users of mmu.ac.uk should instantly be aware that the page they have visited forms part of the greater MMU whole.

#### **2.1.3 University Web Requirements and Guidelines**

The MMU template conforms to the University's own web publishing requirements. These requirements include accessibility, identity and meta tags.

The template also conforms to many of these University Web Publishing Guidelines.

#### **2.1.4 Code structure**

The templates are currently offered in HTML 4.01 and PHP.

The templates are built using valid code. Clearly content will be added to the template or certain elements changed before publication - therefore publishers should make sure that the finished page is valid by checking them via the following link - <http://validator.w3.org>.

#### **2.1.5 Design Approach**

Representing the University's visual brand and values online raises it's own set of challenges. There are elements that must remain constant to ensure clarity of identity, and elements that are flexible.

The templates have been designed to address these principal aims:

- Clear MMU brand identity
- Clear communication
- Consistent page structure
- Flexible elements to portray departments, faculties, projects etc..
- Accessible
- Quick to download
- Work across a wide variety of browsers / platforms (including NN 4)
- Fit in a 800 x 600 pixel screen resolution
- Not forgetting – useful and positive experience for the user!

### 2.1.6 Template structure and Implementation Guide

The following graphics and list show the elements which must remain *constant*, those which are *flexible* and those which are *open*.

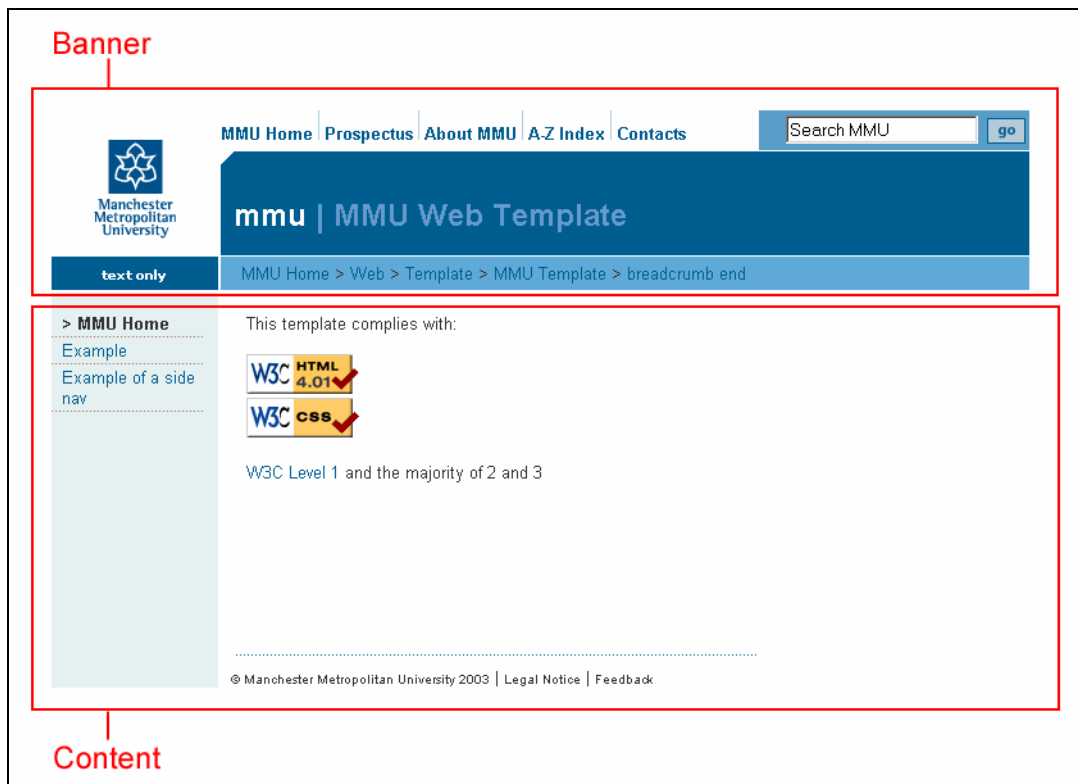
A *constant* element is an element that **cannot** be changed.

A *flexible* element is an element that **can** be changed within certain parameters.

An *open* element is an element that **can** be changed.

It must be emphasized that in using these templates you are publishing information that represents both the University and your department, faculty, project etc. It is important therefore that, as an official University publisher, you should not undertake to change any element that has been deemed *constant*.

The template is made up of the following elements - banner, content and style.

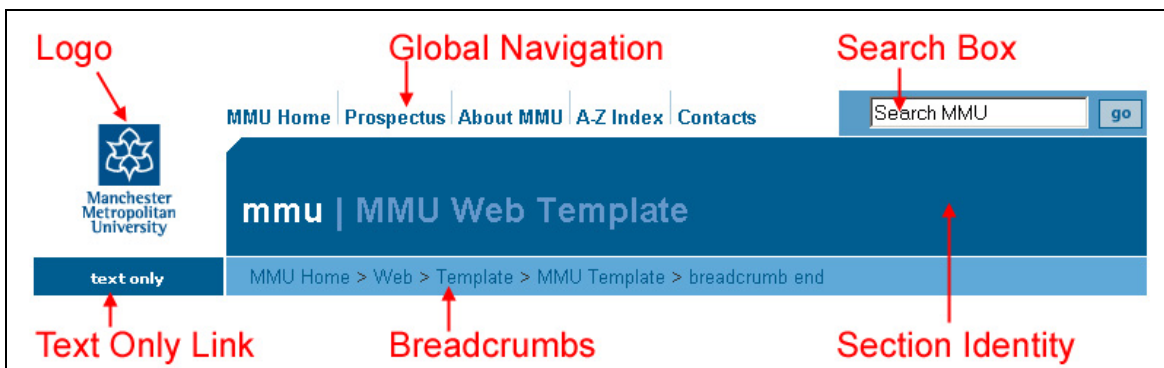


The style elements affect the whole document especially font and colour.

## 2.1.7 Banner

The banner is made up of elements that can be applied to any page across the MMU sites. It is MMU branded, and contains the MMU logo, section identity, global links, text only link & search box that tie any page into the overall MMU structure. It acts as unifying device and ensures no page becomes a dead end. It engenders confidence in users as they know they will find 'lifelines' within the banner [search, homepage etc.] that act as conduits to useful information should they visit a page whose content is not what they were looking for.

The banner structure consists of the following elements and their status;

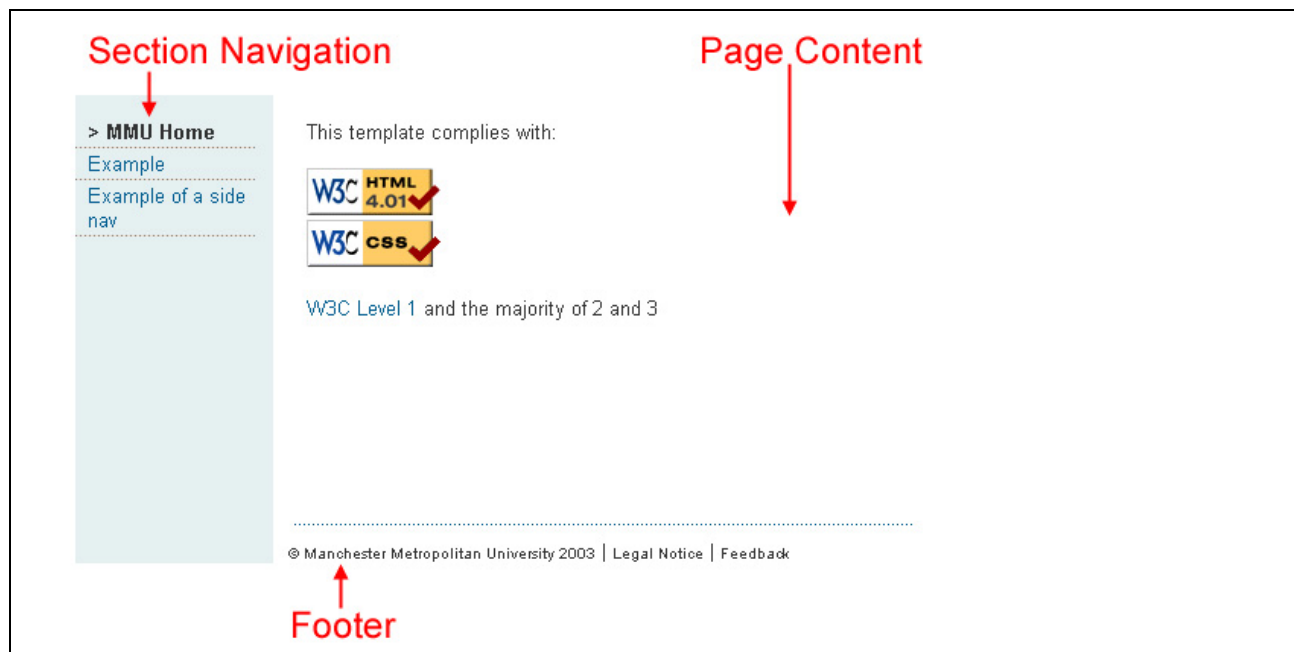


	Element	Status	
i.	Logo	Constant	The logo is constant and therefore must not be changed.

ii.	Global navigation	Constant	The global navigation is situated at the top of the banner, these link to main and useful sections of the MMU site. These links are regarded as 'lifelines' and the familiarity of the branding style aids usability. This navigation is constant and therefore must not be changed.
iii.	Search box	Flexible	The search box is located in the top right of the banner, and appears on every page. This function performs a contextual search that returns results relevant to the content of the page searched from; with options to search the entire site, or perform an advanced search from the results page. This element is flexible – it should always be a search box however publishers could change this to a local search rather than MMU wide.
iv.	Text only link	Flexible	The text only link is flexible. A text only link should always appear here however the background colour and style could be changed by a web publisher.
v.	Breadcrumbs	Flexible	The breadcrumbs are a trail of main sections that a user has been through to reach the current page. e.g. “MMU homepage > Style guide > Page design”. The previous sections are hyperlinked, and use the breadcrumb style found in the style sheet. These are located in the light blue bar at the bottom of the banner. This navigation is flexible – a breadcrumb trail should always appear here however the background colour and style could be changed by a web publisher.
vi.	Section identity	Flexible	The section identity is flexible and can hold imagery and text as well as different colours. The section should always be used for identity and therefore publishers could change the content/colour to suit their needs. Please see the examples at section 2.1.11 to see how this section identity can be used.

## 2.1.8 Content

The content element is entirely *open*. It consists of the section navigation, page content and footer.



	Element	Status	
i.	Section navigation	Open	The section navigation is a menu of links is situated on the left of the template. This element is optional and open for your use.
ii.	Page content	Open	Page content is open for your use.
iii.	Footer	Flexible	A common set of footer links appear on every page – legal, feedback, and copyright. This navigation is flexible – the links must appear on the page to comply with the university web publishing requirements however it is up to the designer where and how they should appear.

## 2.1.9 Style

The style of the template consists of the following elements. All elements are contained in the style sheets.

Style	Status
<b>/*Redefined HML Tags*/</b>	
body	Flexible (except padding)
p	Flexible
table	Flexible
td	Flexible
form	Constant

<b>/* Headers */</b>	
h1	Flexible
<b>/* Links */</b>	
a	Flexible
a:hover	Flexible
a.link	Flexible
a.link:hover	Flexible
a.body	Flexible
a.body:hover	Flexible
<b>/* No Margin Body Class */</b>	
.mmu_no_margin	Constant
<b>/* Global Navigation Links */</b>	
a.mmu_global_nav	Constant
a.mmu_global_nav:hover	Constant
<b>/* Site Search Box */</b>	
.mmu_search_cell	Flexible
.mmu_search_box	Constant
.mmu_search_button	Constant
<b>/* Banner */</b>	
.mmu_banner_cell	Flexible
.mmu_banner_corner_cell	Flexible
.mmu_banner	Flexible
.mmu_banner_title	Flexible
<b>/* Side Navigation Cell */</b>	
.mmu_side_nav_cell	Flexible
<b>/* Side Navigation Links */</b>	
a.mmu_side_nav	Flexible
a.mmu_side_nav:hover	Flexible
.mmu_side_nav	Flexible
<b>/* Text Only Cell */</b>	
.mmu_text_only_cell	Flexible
<b>/* Text Only Links */</b>	
a.mmu_textonly	Flexible (only colour)
a.mmu_textonly:hover	Flexible (only colour)
<b>/* Breadcrumb Cell */</b>	
.mmu_breadcrumb_cell	Flexible
<b>/* Breadcrumb Directory Links */</b>	

a.mmu_breadcrumb_directory	Flexible
a.mmu_breadcrumb_directory:hover	Flexible
<b>/* Breadcrumb End */</b>	
.mmu_breadcrumb_end	Flexible
<b>/* Footer Links */</b>	
a.mmu_footer	Flexible
a.mmu_footer:hover	Flexible
.mmu_footer	Flexible


## 2.1.10 Template Files

Directory/File	Description
/images/	Directory which contains all images used.
/includes/	Directory which contains all include files.
/includes/phpsniff/	Directory which holds the browser detection script – phpsniff. It is doubtful developers would want to change anything present here.
/includes/breadcrumb.inc	File for setting the breadcrumb function.
/includes/browser.inc	File which sets the correct css and other variables.
/includes/customise.inc	File which sets the breadcrumbs.
/includes/footer_inc.php	File which includes the template's footer.
/includes/header_inc.php	File which contains the template's banner.
/includes/side_nav_inc.php	File which contains the template's side navigation.
/styles/	Directory which contains the template's css.
index.php	Main index file. There are variables here.

## 2.1.11 Example Use

Some examples of the templates in current use are shown below:

<p>www.mmu.ac.uk</p>	<p>www.mmu.ac.uk/artanddesign</p>	<p>www.mmu.ac.uk/businessgateway</p>

 <p>MMU Home   Prospects   About MMU   A-Z Index   Contacts</p> <h3>Conferences at MMU</h3> <p>MMU Home » Departments » Services » Customer Services » Conferences</p> <p>Search Conferences</p> <p>MMU has a variety of facilities to host all occasions, including hotel-style features, exhibition areas and function rooms.</p> <p>Where is MMU? How do I get there? What's on in Manchester?</p> <p>MANCHESTER The location</p> <p>CREWE ALSAGER</p> <p>© Manchester Metropolitan University 2004   Legal Notice   Feedback</p>	 <p>MMU Home   Prospects   About MMU   A-Z Index   Contacts</p> <h3>mmu   Faculty of Humanities, Law &amp; Social Science</h3> <p>Faculty Home</p> <p>Latest News</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Student Based Officer News</li> <li>Philosophy &amp; Philosophy Department creates innovative links courses</li> <li>Faculty Prize for Teaching Innovation and Excellence</li> <li>National Poetry Day celebrations</li> <li>Show MA course in Creative Writing</li> </ul> <p>Visit Days - See for yourself</p> <p>Student Services &amp; Support</p> <p>www.mmu.ac.uk/hlss</p>	 <p>MMU Home   Prospects   About MMU   A-Z Index   Contacts</p> <h3>mmu   student financial support</h3> <p>Student Financial Support</p> <p>These pages summarise the main forms of financial support available to students at MMU, regardless of your mode of study.</p> <p>To find which schemes you may be eligible for, use the links on the right.</p> <p>For general information about the Unit and the schemes on offer, use the links on the left.</p> <p>For help and advice about specific financial problems you can contact the Student Advice Centre (part of the Students' Union). Their trained advisers have lots of experience of all the main issues affecting students at MMU.</p> <p>Who are you?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Full-time undergraduate</li> <li>Part-time student</li> <li>POCE student</li> <li>International student</li> <li>Students with disabilities</li> <li>Students with dependants</li> <li>Franchise student</li> </ul> <p>© Manchester Metropolitan University 2004   Legal Notice   Feedback</p>								
<p><a href="http://www.mmu.ac.uk/conference">www.mmu.ac.uk/conference</a></p>	<p><a href="http://www.mmu.ac.uk/hlss">www.mmu.ac.uk/hlss</a></p>	<p><a href="http://www.mmu.ac.uk/studentfinance">www.mmu.ac.uk/studentfinance</a></p>								
 <p>MMU Home   Prospects   About MMU   A-Z Index   Contacts</p> <h3>mmu   study at mmu</h3> <p>Study at MMU</p> <p>Looking to study at MMU? These pages will help you make the right choice.</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Courses</th> <th>Visiting MMU</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Course Search</td> <td>Open Day</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Browse our courses</td> <td>Applicant Visit Days</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Order a Prospectus</td> <td>Other Opportunities to Visit</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>Key Facts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>City Life</li> <li>MMU Cheshire</li> <li>Accommodation</li> <li>Student Financial Services</li> <li>Library</li> <li>International Students</li> <li>Facilities and Departments</li> <li>Contacts</li> </ul> <p>Help and Advice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Why MMU</li> <li>Choosing your course</li> <li>Study Choices</li> <li>Applying to MMU</li> <li>Clearing</li> </ul> <p>© Manchester Metropolitan University 2004   Legal Notice   Feedback</p>	Courses	Visiting MMU	Course Search	Open Day	Browse our courses	Applicant Visit Days	Order a Prospectus	Other Opportunities to Visit	 <p>MMU Home   Prospects   About MMU   A-Z Index   Contacts</p> <h3>mmu   Department of Information &amp; Communications</h3> <p>Welcome</p> <p>The Department of Information and Communications at Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) has developed a strong international reputation for excellence in teaching and research and was awarded a grade 4 in the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise. It offers an undergraduate programme with a variety of named routes, Masters courses in Information Management and Library &amp; Information Management, and doctoral level study in any aspect of our three research foci: Access to Electronic Information, Information Management and Social Informatics. The Department is home to the well-known Centre for Research in Library and Information Management, (CELIM).</p> <p>News: The 2003/04 Research Seminar Programme is now available</p> <p>Manchester Metropolitan University 2004   Legal Notice   Accessibility</p>	 <p>MMU Home   Prospects   About MMU   A-Z Index   Contacts</p> <h3>mmu   Regional Office</h3> <p>mmuch more relevant</p> <p>60% of MMU's 33,000 students come from the North West</p> <p>Working in partnership with regional agencies and organisations to build a strong society and a strong economy</p> <p>Welcome to the MMU Regional Office Website</p> <p>The Regional Office facilitates, develops and brokers activity across MMU's areas of unique specialism, contributing to the North West. The Office seeks to align the activities of the University with key regional strategies, promoting MMU's areas of unique specialism, securing regional and EU funding, and working in partnership with the region.</p> <p>Proactive not reactive: Your project ideas</p> <p>© Manchester Metropolitan University 2004   Legal Notice   Feedback</p>
Courses	Visiting MMU									
Course Search	Open Day									
Browse our courses	Applicant Visit Days									
Order a Prospectus	Other Opportunities to Visit									
<p><a href="http://www.mmu.ac.uk/studyatmmu">www.mmu.ac.uk/studyatmmu</a></p>	<p><a href="http://www.mmu.ac.uk/infocomm">http://www.mmu.ac.uk/infocomm</a></p>	<p><a href="http://www.mmu.ac.uk/regional">www.mmu.ac.uk/regional</a></p>								

## 2.1.12 Availability

Before considering using the template publishers should contact their relevant member of the web team for advice.

The template code is available from the Internet Manager – [m.deyes@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:m.deyes@mmu.ac.uk), tel: 0161 247 2196.

If not using the University template web publishers should seriously consider the design credibility of their web pages prior to uploading or during any redesign programme.

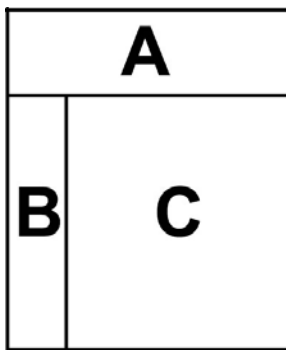
MMU's top-level pages and template are designed to stand alongside high-profile commercial standard websites and give the impression of a professional organisation with high standards and a commitment to quality.

Using amateur 'gizmos' can severely damage your professional credibility.

The graphical design of your site, while not the most important aspect, is the first thing a user sees upon entering and is the first opportunity you have for establishing credibility.

### 2.3 Standard Page Layout

If not using the University template Web publishers should strive to design their pages to the MMU Standard Page Layout:



*A – Identity (and Navigation)*

*B – Navigation*

*C – Content*

### 2.4 Typography

To promote consistency publishers should use one of the University's preferred web fonts; Arial, Verdana, or Helvetica.

### 2.5 Writing for the web

It has been well documented that people tend to spend little time reading most web pages, instead we scan them looking for words that catch our eye. As a result web pages could employ scannable text, using:

- highlighted *keywords* (hypertext links serve as one form of highlighting; typeface variations and color are others)
- meaningful *sub-headings* (not "clever" ones)
- bulleted and numbered *lists*
- *one idea* per paragraph (users will skip over any additional ideas if they are not caught by the first few words in the paragraph)
- the *inverted pyramid style*, starting with the conclusion.
- *half the word count* (or less) than conventional writing

Some further information on writing form the web is available from <http://www.useit.com/alertbox/9710a.html>

## 2.6 Additional techniques/best practice to improve accessibility

Many of the MMU web requirements are either aimed at improving accessibility, or improve accessibility as a side-effect, so this section is aimed at highlighting techniques and considerations which aren't covered elsewhere.

### *Principles worth considering*

1. You can't predict the particular needs of every user of your site. A more fruitful approach would be to produce a design which works for as broad a range of users as possible, while avoiding design techniques which get in the way of your audience setting their own preferences or using specialised or adapted browsers. For example:
  - Avoid using fixed sizes for text, as in most browsers this will disable the text resize/zoom functions which would otherwise allow visually impaired users to make the text larger.
  - When using CSS styles, avoid using the **!important** keyword in style rules as this will make it difficult for some users to use their own style sheet to set up customised font, text size and colour settings.
  - If you use tables for your visual layout, make sure the content makes sense when it's rendered linearly.
2. Consider the unstyled/text rendering as well as the graphical rendering at the initial design stage and throughout the process. It's far easier to work accessibility into the design from the start than to try to bolt it on later. This has been made much easier through the use of CSS, as to a great extent you can separate the underlying page structure/content from the visual layout.

An example of this can be seen on the MMU Library site (<http://www.mmu.ac.uk/library>), where the underlying structure is:

- Breadcrumb trail navigation. (This includes a first link to skip it and move straight to the page content, which is hidden when viewed in a graphical browser.)
- Main page content.
- Main navigation. (Placed here so people using audio browsers hear the page content first, then the navigation, instead of having to listen to the navigation links at the start of every page. This way round, you hear the links at a point where you want to move off the page anyway.)
- Small print. (Links to copyright statement, policies etc.)

When rendered in a graphical browser, though, the main navigation is positioned at top left, in accordance with the MMU standard page layout.

### *Standard HTML elements*

Intelligent use of standard HTML elements can greatly improve your audience's experience of your site when using specialised/adapted browsers. For example:

- Headings and links: if you use the relevant markup correctly (properly nested and meaningful headings, meaningful link text), you will greatly aid users of audio browsers who may do the equivalent of skimming the page by listening to a list of the headings within the page, or a list of the links. Using meaningful text for links will avoid the user getting a list which reads something like "click here, click here, click here, click here", which isn't a great deal of use. Especially if the person doesn't use a mouse, so won't be clicking on anything, anyway.
- Using valid list markup is particularly useful for lists of links (it helps some screen readers to separate a continuous set of links accurately, for example), and CSS provides a means to do remarkable visual transformations on lists so they don't have to look like bullets etc if you don't want them to. Styled lists can be a particularly useful alternative to table-based navigation bars, for example. Check out the Listamatic site for ideas and examples (<http://css.maxdesign.com.au/listamatic/>).
- Alt tags on images are mandatory in HTML 4 and later, and are obviously useful for visually impaired users and others who use text browsers. However, just incorporating text into alt tags throughout a page without considering the end result in a text-only rendering of the page can make it unpleasant to use, with repeated information and inappropriate phrases interrupting the text flow. This hinders comprehension rather than aiding it. Blank alt tags (ie with nothing between the quotation marks - **alt=""**) are usually completely ignored by text browsers, which can be invaluable for reducing text clutter. Many images in web pages are effectively eye candy rather than conveying useful information (spacers, icons which already have text equivalents included etc), so making them disappear completely in text browsers can be helpful.

HTML includes markup which allows you to incorporate additional navigational help for people who don't use a pointing device such as a mouse:

- The **accesskey** attribute allows you to provide a keyboard shortcut for a particular link or page feature. You do need to tell users what these shortcuts are, so this technique is probably more suited to providing shortcuts to standard navigation which is on every page, such as a search box, a home link etc.
- The **tabindex** attribute allows you to tailor the order in which the cursor moves around links within a page when using the tab key on the keyboard. This is particularly useful where the visual presentation of the page is different to the underlying structure, as in the example given above.

### *File formats*

Avoid using inaccessible file formats without providing accessible alternatives. The main culprits here are Acrobat (PDF) files, which are often used for providing downloadable versions of documents. Acrobat files have many advantages, but they aren't accessible to some people, primarily those with visual impairments. Newer versions of the Acrobat reader have improved accessibility features, but they are still not ideal. So:

- Provide an accessible alternative alongside any Acrobat documents you provide for download.
- The ideal solution is to provide the same information in a standard web page (HTML).
- If page layout features are important, you can substitute a word processor file, but in this case it's important to avoid proprietary formats so that the file can be used by as many people as possible: not everyone has Microsoft Word, for example, or uses a computer for which it is available. A better solution would be to use Rich Text Format (RTF), which is supported by the vast majority of word processing software across a variety of computer platforms.
- State that alternative versions are available upon request (and make sure they are!)

### *Useful links*

Tips on accessible design from the DEMOS website:

<http://jarmin.com/demos/access/index.html>

Listamatic: <http://css.maxdesign.com.au/listamatic/>

W3C accessibility documentation: <http://www.w3.org/WAI/>

## **2.7 Usability and testing**

The practice of ensuring that the pages you produce work properly in the real world with a real audience is called usability.

Important points of of usability:

- *Consistent* placement of navigation and page structure
- Remember [western] people read left to right, top to bottom
- Therefore: most important screen area = top left
- Create a logical screen hierarchy [following the above points]
- Clearly title all your content, and pages
- Keep your content concise
- People scan copy looking for relevant links [headings and bulletpoints are good devices . . .]
- Features supported by images can be very eye catching
- Use general language [avoid technical jargon where possible]
- Consider what your audience are likely to be looking for

The best way to ensure usability is to test your designs with real people.

After you have worked on a site for a few weeks, you can't see it freshly anymore, to only way to find out if it really works is to test it.

Recommended reading: 'Don't make me think' by Steve Krug [Available from the MMU library]

In a Usability test, one user at a time is shown something [a website, a prototype or even just sketches of pages] and asked either (a) what they think it is, it's purpose, or (b) carry out a task.

Important points about Usability testing:

*Testing always works* – Even a bad test with the wrong user will show you things that will improve the site.

*Test early in a project* – carry out a simple test early in the project while you have time to learn from it.

*Target Audience* – It's good to test with people who are likely to use the site but is more important to test early and often.

### **3.0 Technical Guidelines**

#### **3.1 Frames**

Publishers should avoid using frames unless they can provide a compelling reason to do so. Frames can cause problems for search engines and for the user.

#### **3.2 Under Construction**

Do not publish any pages with the words “under construction” or “in development”. If they are not ready yet, please do not publish them!

#### **3.3 Animations plus Flash/Shockwave and similar**

Animation should be avoided, but if used should not loop indefinitely.

Flash should only be used when there is an alternative version of the site for users without the appropriate plug-in, to conform to accessibility standards. Flash should be used with care, especially when used for navigation.

#### **3.4 Language**

It is recommended that content on mmu.ac.uk should only be developed in English. It is preferable that html tags etc are also in English.

#### **3.5 Meta Tags**

*The description meta-tag*

Many search engines, when displaying the results of a search, list the page title followed by the contents of the description meta-tag. The description meta-tag should contain a short description, 100-200 characters in length, of the web-page. The description should be human readable and should not be a list of key words.

The following is a good example:

```
<meta name="description" content="Welcome to Manchester Metropolitan University - dedicated to excellence in teaching, learning, research and scholarship.">
```

### *The keywords meta-tag.*

The keywords meta-tag is a list of key phrases, separated by commas, reflecting the most important theme of your site, and is used by search engines to find appropriate pages. The keywords you list should reflect the kind of phrases you would use if you were looking for the site with a search engine. If you use irrelevant words some search engines will blacklist your site. Similarly, you may be penalised if you repeat a word more than 5 times; 'noise words' such as 'a', 'the', 'in' etc. are ignored and can be repeated as often as desired. To some search engines the word order of a particular phrase is relevant, so try to use phrases as they are likely to be typed. Try to keep your keywords meta-tag between 200-400 characters in length (25 words is a good number) with the most important words and phrases contained within the first 100 characters.

The following is a good example:

```
<meta name="keywords" content="manchester, university, homepage, england, united kingdom, uk, higher, education, research, programs, study, undergraduate, postgraduate, graduate, degrees, prospectus, student, education" >
```

### **3.6 URLs**

URLs (Uniform Resource Locators) should be marketed as short as possible for your department/faculty etc. e.g. <http://www.mmu.ac.uk/english>. Please see <http://www.mmu.ac.uk/web/>.

### **3.7 Page Width**

Where possible web pages should use fluid or flexible design. This is a technique which makes the page elements adjust to the size of the browser window on resize and means that a web page takes up all of the space allocated to it by the browser rather than a fixed width dictated by the page author.

This technique makes your content more accessible because flexible layouts can more efficiently accommodate content for users who choose to have larger text size settings as well as different resolutions and output devices.

Fluid designs are achieved by using relative size units (em, %) rather than fixed attributes (points, pixels (*pixels in theory are relative but in practice operate as a fixed unit*)).

For example, you could use the following as the main container for all of your page content:

```
<div style="width: 100%">  
Page content here  
</div>
```

All content within this <div> tag will resize to fill the browser window (horizontally) whatever its actual size.

However, this may pose a problem for users with large screens (and who have their browser windows maximised while they browse) in terms of line length. Studies<sup>1</sup> have shown that long line lengths are more difficult for users to read, especially on screen.

Therefore, publishers using this technique are recommended to limit line-length by restricting the width of the text containing object (whether that be a table cell (<td>), <div> tag or <p> tag).

The standards compliant and easiest way to achieve this is using the CSS2 attribute max-width:

```
<p style="max-width:40em;">  
text goes here  
</p>
```

However, this only works in the latest Netscape (6+) and Mozilla browsers and is, as yet, unsupported by Internet Explorer. Users can, therefore, use the width attribute, on nested <div> tags, or on paragraph (<p>) tags, for example:

```
<div style="width: 100%">  
  
  <div style="width: 40em;">  
    Text inside this nested layer will be restricted to 40em width, but content,  
    background etc outside of this will stretch to fill the browser window.  
  </div>  
</div>
```

A flexible multi-column layout might be achieved by the following:

```
<div style="width: 100%">  
  
  <div style="width: 47%; float: left; padding: 4px">  
    Column one text here  
  </div>  
  
  <div style="width: 47%; float: right; padding: 4px">  
    Column two text here  
  </div>  
</div>
```

This may not restrict the width of the columns per se, but the fact that there are two columns sharing the horizontal space of the browser window results in the line-lengths being adequately reduced on most screen sizes.

---

<sup>1</sup> Michael Bernard, Marissa Fernandez, Spring Hull (2002) 'The Effects of Line Length on Children and Adults: Online Reading Performance' Usability News 4.2 [online] Available From: [http://psychology.wichita.edu/surl/usabilitynews/42/text\\_length.htm](http://psychology.wichita.edu/surl/usabilitynews/42/text_length.htm)

Advanced users may like to use the following resources for more sophisticated solutions:

Line-length and width and max-width attributes:

Russ Weakly (2003) 'Ideal line length for Content', Max Design [online] Available from: <http://www.maxdesign.com.au/presentation/em/>

Svend Tofte (2003) 'max width in Internet Explorer' [online] Available from: [http://www.svendtofte.com/code/max\\_width\\_in\\_ie/](http://www.svendtofte.com/code/max_width_in_ie/)

Flexible Layouts using CSS (multiple columns):

Dug Falby (2002) 'Flexible Layouts with CSS Positioning' A List Apart, Issue 155 [online] Available from: <http://www.alistapart.com/articles/flexiblelayouts>

Eric Costello 'CSS Layout Techniques: for Fun and Profit' Glish.com [online] Available From: <http://qlish.com/css/>

Owen Briggs 'CSS Box Models' The Noodle Incident [online] Available from: [http://www.thenoodleincident.com/tutorials/box\\_lesson/boxes.html](http://www.thenoodleincident.com/tutorials/box_lesson/boxes.html)

Many of the techniques used in achieving flexible layouts are down to good use of CSS (for example, making sure that your background does not tile incorrectly on a larger screen).

### **3.8 Plug-ins**

Web publishers should always assume that a visitor does not have any plug-ins installed. If publishing content that requires a plug-in, clear links to the relevant download should be provided for the visitor.

For example a pdf document should always have a link to instructions for downloading and using Adobe Acrobat.

### **3.9 HTML Standards**

It is recommended that publishers should at least use HTML 4.01 or above as the standard HTML version. This should be declared in the "Document Type Definition" (DTD) at the head of HTML pages.

e.g. `<!DOCTYPE HTML PUBLIC "-//W3C//DTD HTML 4.01 Transitional//EN">`

Use the following to validate the code on your page - <http://validator.w3.org>

### **3.10 Maximum Page Size**

Endeavour to design your pages to load within 15 seconds over a 28.8k modem. Remember that if a page doesn't load in 8 seconds you could lose 1/3 of your visitors.

For a page to download in ten seconds the 'page size' (i.e. the sum of the file sizes for all the elements that make up a page including the HTML file and all embedded objects (e.g. image files) should be no greater than 80Kb.

The user should be presented with predicted download times and/or file size details when downloading a document, video clip or other multimedia element.

### 3.11 Server Standards

Only use lower case when naming files and ensure that no filename contains spaces. If you wish to use a longer file name then use an underscore “\_” to connect the words. No filename should include more than one period “.”.

No directory should exist without an index file in it. Allowing http directory browsing should be avoided on University servers due to security risks.

Old or out of date files should be deleted from the server or at least have their file extension altered. Just removing links to these files is unacceptable - search engines and the University search facility will still find these files.

All servers should have generic pages for (at least) 403 and 404 errors.

E.g. <http://www.mmu.ac.uk/errors/403.php>  
<http://www.mmu.ac.uk/errors/404.php>

### 3.12 Technical Testing

Publishers should check that their web pages work in both *Internet Explorer 5.5+* and *Netscape Navigator 6+* as the most commonly used browsers.

The MMU Standard Platform includes both *Internet Explorer 6* and *Netscape Navigator 7* on Windows Platform. At time of writing MMU is still phasing out *Netscape Navigator 4.7x* so you should be aware that if much of your audience is from within MMU that these are the three browsers they will be using.

Where possible, key pages should be tested on as many other browsers and platforms as possible, a recommended list of these additional ones are below:

*Internet Explorer 5.5+* on Apple Macintosh platform

*Mozilla* (<http://www.mozilla.org/>)

*Opera* (<http://www.opera.com/>) NB: Opera is also a good tool for quickly testing that your site works without tables and style sheets due to quick user configuration options available)

*Konqueror* on Linux platform (<http://www.konqueror.org/>)

It is important that your pages are accessible for non-graphical browsers and text-readers.

It is strongly recommended that you test your site with one of the following popular text-only and/or screen-reading browsers:

*Lynx* – text only/non-graphical browser (<http://lynx.browser.org/>)

*Lynx Viewer* – an online Lynx emulator (<http://www.delorie.com/web/lynxview.html>)

*HTML2txt* – an online HTML to text reader (similar to lynx emulator) (<http://cgi.w3.org/cgi-bin/html2txt>)

*WAVE Web Accessibility Tool* – checks how your site performs for non-graphic browsers and screen readers and gives you an annotated output showing how it will be read and tab-order (<http://wave.webaim.org/>)  
*JAWS for Windows* – One of the most popular screen reading packages

#### **4.0 Contacts, Feedback and Support**

If you have any questions or wish to comment on these guidelines please get in touch with the Internet Manager or your relevant Web Development Team Member.

Contact details for the Internet Manager and the Web Development Team are available at <http://www.mmu.ac.uk/web/contacts.php>