



## Level 3 Project Case Study Dissertation

### Building Healthy Communities Database

Christopher Sean Harris, Documentation, 2128878h

David Andrew Brown, Lead Developer, Docker Magician 2137184b

David Robertson, Lead Developer, 2135967r

Jaklin Yordanova, Documentation and Front End Developer, 2122832y

Kiril Ivov Mihaylov, Front End Developer, 2062132m

Maria Papadopoulou, Documentation and Front End Developer, 2136603p

March 29, 2017

#### **Abstract**

Building Healthy Communities in Dumfries and Galloway is a community development programme which aims to advance the health and well-being of all individuals within its area, but particularly those in difficult circumstances. Its main goal is to improve the lives of people who may otherwise become isolated, by encouraging participation in initiatives which help keep them physically and mentally healthy, while also promoting the creation and sustaining of social bonds. The programme consists of three different types of participants; *Administrators*, *Volunteers* and *Service Users*. Both *Service Users* and *Volunteers* attend the initiatives that come under the scheme. The difference being *Volunteers* have the added responsibility of running the weekly meetings and recording attendance of *Service Users*. Currently, many of the administrative tasks associated with the scheme are done by hand. Administrators must manually input the data given to them into *Microsoft Access*, which is a slow and laborious process.

#### **Education Use Consent**

We hereby give our permission for this project to be shown to other University of Glasgow students and to be distributed in an electronic format.

# 1 Introduction

Third year undergraduates on the Computing Science course of the University of Glasgow undergo a year long team project, the aim of which is to give students the experience of working in a team on an extended software engineering project. The lesson the course instills in students is how to liaise with customers, and use agile software development practices and methodologies to turn this communication into an end product. Another takeaway from the course is the *art* of Retrospection; the act of looking back to see what can be improved in future. With this case study; our intention is to analyse and explore the methodologies we employed in order to better understand their intricacies and how they should be used in a project.

This paper presents a case study of the building of a database system for the public health program 'Building Healthy Communities', and the development practices we used in the process. The BHC system is designed to replace the cumbersome, manual database currently in use by the NHS team that administers the BHC initiatives. It is intended to be a streamlined service, allowing for faster input and retrieval of data. Which before required the cumbersome use of *Microsoft access*. *Service Users* and *Volunteers* will be able to log in and perform tasks that would otherwise require the time of an *Administrator*.

Throughout this study, a more in-depth explanation will be given on how the end product was designed and created. Using not only knowledge gained in our spare time, but also that which has been imparted upon us by courses at the University. More specifically; *Professional Software Development and SIT*, *Interactive Systems 3* and *Database Systems*. The aforementioned courses played a critical role in the development of the end product. By following principles taught to us, it led to the smooth development of the end of product. Which is of a standard and quality that we can all be proud of.

## 2 Case Study Background

### 2.1 Customer Organisation and Background

Building Healthy Communities is a programme based in Dumfries and Galloway which consists of a regional partnership of strategic and local representation to help shape and direct, alongside four local area partnerships operating across the region. These area partnerships co-ordinate and take collective action by creating initiatives to tackle community health issues and the root causes of ill health.

The primary method by which Building Healthy Communities tackles its main objective is the creation and running of health initiatives. These are regular events, run by community members, for community members, with the aim of bettering the health of individuals and the community as a whole. They foster a sense of well-being, and

focus on people who might not otherwise be engaged in social events and feel isolated. Individuals are given the opportunity to become community health volunteers through training and one-to-one support. This allows local citizens to feel active and helpful in their community.

While initiative events are run by volunteers from local communities, the programme itself is run and maintained by a group of NHS employed administrators. During the development of the project we had monthly meetings with the administrators. Our interactions with them were instrumental in the shaping of our product, providing requirements and feedback. There was also some incidental contact with another NHS employee from the same area running a different project, whose technical advice was of particular use when designing the database and deciding which information needed to be included.

## **2.2 Initial Objectives for the Project**

The initial objectives for the project were to develop a software which will be used by the service users, volunteers and administrators of the programme. Different types of user have different levels of access to the website. The service users can use the software to complete a small questionnaire and give a regular feedback for the initiatives they attend. Volunteers are an extension to a service user in that they would be able to leave feedback, but also take attendance for the initiatives they are assigned to. Administrators have the access and rights to do everything. They can manipulate data in the database, and view all information that is collected. Like user feedbacks and attendance statistics. Through customer meetings the requirements were changing and adapting frequently, as explained later in the dissertation.

# **3 Agile Programming, Technologies, and Team Organisation**

## **3.1 Team organisation**

During the initial team meetings, every team member identified their strong and weak points in order to divide the work. As the website and supporting database needed to be built from scratch, the work required was extensive. Throughout development, everybody contributed what they could. Inevitably, certain team members had a higher level of expertise and thus were tasked with the more complex areas of development. The team discussed various means of communication and decided to avoid the usage of common social media sites. The group-chat application 'Slack' was used throughout the course, which provides a more organised and professional chat room with different channels.

### 3.2 Agile Methods

Agile methodologies were followed throughout the entire process where sensible. Specifically, they are suitable for small teams and they involve frequent customer meetings because the requirements cannot be fully collected at the beginning of the software development cycle. The project focused around an agile method called "Extreme programming". One of the most useful features that Extreme Programming offers is called 'pair programming.' As the project was developed by students, a lack of experience was a major bottleneck for some aspects of development. Pair programming negates this issue to some extent by allowing team members with different levels of expertise to combine their knowledge and come to the best decision. Additionally, pair programming increases work productivity since working in pairs motivates even the less productive members of the team to contribute. Furthermore, user stories and prototyping played a critical role in understanding the application requirements. Finally, another important feature of Extreme Programming is the automated testing which will be described in more depth in section 6.

### 3.3 Technologies Used

The University Moodle page suggested a litany of technologies to use for handling the project such as "Ant and Ivy", "Jenkins", "Apache", etc. After a small group meeting and a discussion with the supervisors about what technologies were permitted, the decision was taken to ignore all of the suggestions and use Gitlab [7] for our project and repository management.

Gitlab is a complete repository management system. It not only provided us with a git based repository; but also gave us an integrated wiki in which to store documentation, a comprehensive issue tracking system like Trac, and a continuous integration suite in the same vein as Jenkins. The combination of all of these features in one discrete package made Gitlab the obvious choice for us, negating the need for multiple cumbersome systems that we would need to keep track of separately. The next few paragraphs illustrate the reasons why the use of Gitlab turned out to be a wise choice.

The first major feature Gitlab provides is the git based repository that gives it its name. This repository allowed the team to simultaneously work on the project in different branches, either collaborating on a single section or working individually. With the added benefit of wrapping all of git's powerful features into a sleek interface.

The issue tracking system in Gitlab allowed us to create detailed issues containing checkboxes of tasks, time estimates, comments and more. These issues can be assigned labels; the labels allowed us to see at a glance which area of the project the issue was for (a new feature, documentation, testing etc). Issues were assigned to individual team members, so that those members had a clear focus. Gitlab's repository and issue tracking system are linked, which meant that we could create a new branch for each issue easily. This greatly simplified the process of implementing and

testing features, by making each small feature its own issue and spawning a branch from it. The feature could then be worked on in isolation, and when complete and tested a merge request could bring those changes back into the master branch. The lead developers would review the code before accepting the request, and either leave a comment about any problems and wait for their resolution, or accept the request, which automatically closes the relevant issue and deletes the merged branch.

Gitlab also features a Continuous Integration suite [3], an extremely powerful toolkit that we used to continually test the system upon every commit. We created and continually updated a set of tests that would run on every commit by default, in the hopes of ensuring that no bugs would effect the master branch. The method we used to implement CI, was through Docker. Which is explained in its own section.

The final useful feature provided by Gitlab is the wiki. This is an easily editable collection of pages used for the project documents. We created an organised system for documentation, with a sectioned wiki homepage linking to a variety of documentation types, from our design documents, to customer requirements and meetings, to our retrospectives. This simple structure allowed us to keep a very clean and easy to understand collection of documents that could be referred to later, helping us to keep focused and organised.

A decision was now to be made on which technologies were to be used to implement the application itself. Namely, a web application framework was to be chosen. All members of the team had some degree of experience in Django [1]; however, other alternatives were explored to ensure the best option was selected for this particular project. Ruby on Rails was a prevailing suggestion, and whilst being conceptually similar to Django, has been around for much longer. Rails has a mature and reliable code base, abundant documentation and excellent built in testing support, as seen in section 6.4 [10], [13]. Also, with Rails being an industry standard for modern web application development, the team felt it was a valuable experience to develop a large scale application using this framework. With all this in mind, the team chose to go ahead with Ruby on Rails. One downside of Rails is the lack of official programming style reference, something that Django does have. Despite this, many community driven style guides do exist for both Ruby [5] and Rails [6]. There was high emphasis placed on trying to ensure our code conformed to these style guides. Following a style guide not only helps keep code efficient, but it allows other developers to quickly identify the intent of code because, in theory, everyone should be working to the same style. It also ensures that for projects with multiple developers working simultaneously, a consistent layout is maintained.

### 3.4 Retrospective

In order to regularly summarise the team's progress, the usage of retrospectives was a useful tool. Retrospectives for us was team effort to identify how we were progressing as a team. The creation of retrospectives was done on "Trello". The criteria used for the retrospectives were the 4L's: Liked, Lacked, Learned and Longed for. A new retrospective was created every time a customer meeting was performed, which

indicated the end of a milestone and an iteration. The retrospective process took approximately one hour, allowing every team member to individually outline their thoughts and suggestions about the previous iteration. Following this process, an hour long team meeting took place which discussed the major issues that were outlined and identified through Trello. A summary of which was added to our wiki. This process proved to be a highly efficient method of discovering and resolving issues in the team.

### **3.5 Team Roles**

Due to the fact that the team was composed of novice programmers, the team roles were not clearly defined in the beginning. After the first iteration, and we had all identified our strengths, the roles assigned to team members evolved naturally. These roles can be referenced at the beginning of the document. The team voted to elect a leader, The team leader conducted all retrospective meetings and any presentation of the application to the customers. The team leader did not make final decisions alone, apart from where necessary. All team members were of course given the chance to voice their opinions. The team leader's main priority was to organise and delegate tasks to the rest of the team. The team voted fairly to elect David Brown as the team leader since he is one of the lead developers and was by far the most proficient at communicating with the customers. Over time we found that certain team members would face greater difficulties in resolving code-based issues than others, this is why we decided to introduce the concept of 'lead developers'. Since the workload of back end development is substantial, it allowed minor issues to be assigned to other team members, allowing the lead developers to focus on more technical issues.

## **4 Documentation**

After some initial consideration, we decided that fortnightly sprints would be ideal. Each sprint corresponded to the conclusion of a milestone. Issues would then be created, most of which having a deadline of the upcoming milestone. The following portion of the case study will chronologically outline the development process from the requirements elicitation, to the final software presentation.

### **4.1 Requirements Gathering**

During the first customer meeting, some basic requirements were outlined. Notes were taken during the meeting and a wiki page was created containing a summary of the meeting. Our aim during this meeting was to get a basic understanding of the functional and non-functional requirements for what the website could be. Using our summary and further conversations with the client through email, we managed to establish a solid basis from which to launch the project.

The functional requirements were:

- An administrator should be able to view all information stored in the database.
- An administrator should be able to add/remove/modify users and groups that are stored in the database.
- An administrator should be able to search and sort on specific fields belonging tables.
- An administrator should be able to view metrics on how particular initiatives are progressing.
- Different groups of users should have differing levels of permission to the data they can access.
- Volunteers should be able to view some data about the specific initiatives they are enrolled for.
- Volunteers should be able to record attendance for initiatives.
- Provide a facility to gather feedback from service users and volunteers.

The non-functional requirements were:

- The system should be secure.
- The system has to conform to the Data Protection Act.
- The system should be stable whilst in use and have a high up time.
- The system should be able to operate for long periods of time without intervention from system admins.
- The system should be simple to use.
- The system should be modular and hence maintainable.
- The system should be lightweight.
- The site should be compatible with many web browsers on a range of devices.

## 4.2 User Stories

User stories [4] play a critical role in the agile methodologies which we followed. A user story formally describes the state of the application and the basic functionality that a potential user can expect it to have. We compiled a list of Functional and Non-Functional user stories. These helped us tremendously in figuring out not only the flow of the interface, but what features the website could/should have.

These are a few highly representative functional user stories:

- As an administrator, I want to add a member to the database, so that they can join a group.
  1. Add an activity to add a person
  2. Add an activity to enter their information
  3. Add an activity for choosing groups
  4. Create a query for retrieving groups
- As a volunteer, I want to be able to register attendance at my group(s), so that I can contribute data.
  1. Create a query to retrieve groups I run
  2. Add an activity to log attendance
  3. Create a query for members of the group
  4. Add an activity to enter attendance per member
- As a member, I want to be able to log in, so that I can view my information.
  1. Add an activity to log in
  2. Add an activity to enter log in information

Some non-functional user stories are:

- As an administrator, I want to replace a member's name with numbers in the database, so that I can find them easier.
  1. Create a query for retrieving a person
  2. Add an activity to update a person's information
  3. Create a warning message for wrong type of input
  4. Do not allow this modifications to be saved
- As a volunteer, I want to be able to have access to the database, so that I can add a new program that the administrators haven't added yet.
  1. Restrict the "Add a new page", "Add a new page", "Add a new member", etc buttons to can be only accessed from administrators
- As a member, I want to be able to add or delete a group that I am part to, so that I can register my self to new groups or delete me from the old ones.
  1. Restrict the member's redirected page to do very basic tasks
  2. Do not provide this functionality to members.



### 4.3 User Scenarios

Although user stories provide a clear outline of the features and attributes the system should have; Scenarios helped us to concretise how our 'real world' users could interact with the system. Example scenarios:

- Carolyn is an administrator in the Building Healthy Communities program. She is in charge of tracking the volunteers progress and checking if they are doing their work correctly. It is important for the program to not only track members attendance and feedback but also to track the same for volunteers. This is vital for ensuring the programme is being run correctly and also would be an advantage in building the relationship between members and volunteers.
- Rebecca is a volunteer in the Building Healthy Communities program at the Arts group. She is currently working with a group of eight people. At the end of every session she collects attendance. The process of submitting attendance on paper is very time consuming. She would prefer to have a website to input this data, to save her time and to provide administrators with instant access to the information.

### 4.4 Wireframes

After creating and compiling the previously mentioned documentation, the next process was to develop wireframes. Wireframes were the final goal of the first milestone and the only requirement specified by the customers for the next meeting. After researching wireframe and prototyping tools, Balsamiq proved to be the most suitable application for our needs. Balsamiq is a very useful application, easy to use and focuses on the creation of wireframes. Before we started sketching in Balsamiq, we decided to take an initial low-fidelity route and sketch the wireframes on paper. Low-fidelity wireframes are often a good starting point as they are quick to produce and thus many designs can be produced rapidly, allowing the best from a selection to be chosen to move ahead with.

A wireframe of the login page which was presented to the customers can be found in [Figure 1](#).

### 4.5 End of First Milestone

The second customer meeting was held on the 16th November. In the meeting some example user scenarios were showed to the customer and a brief demo was given through our interactive wireframes. The customers expressed their opinion about our current progress and what they expect to be completed by the next customer meeting. After the meeting, the team completed a retrospective. We found that during the interim period between this meeting and the last, we as a team improved our knowledge on using Gitlab as a project management tool. The biggest issue we

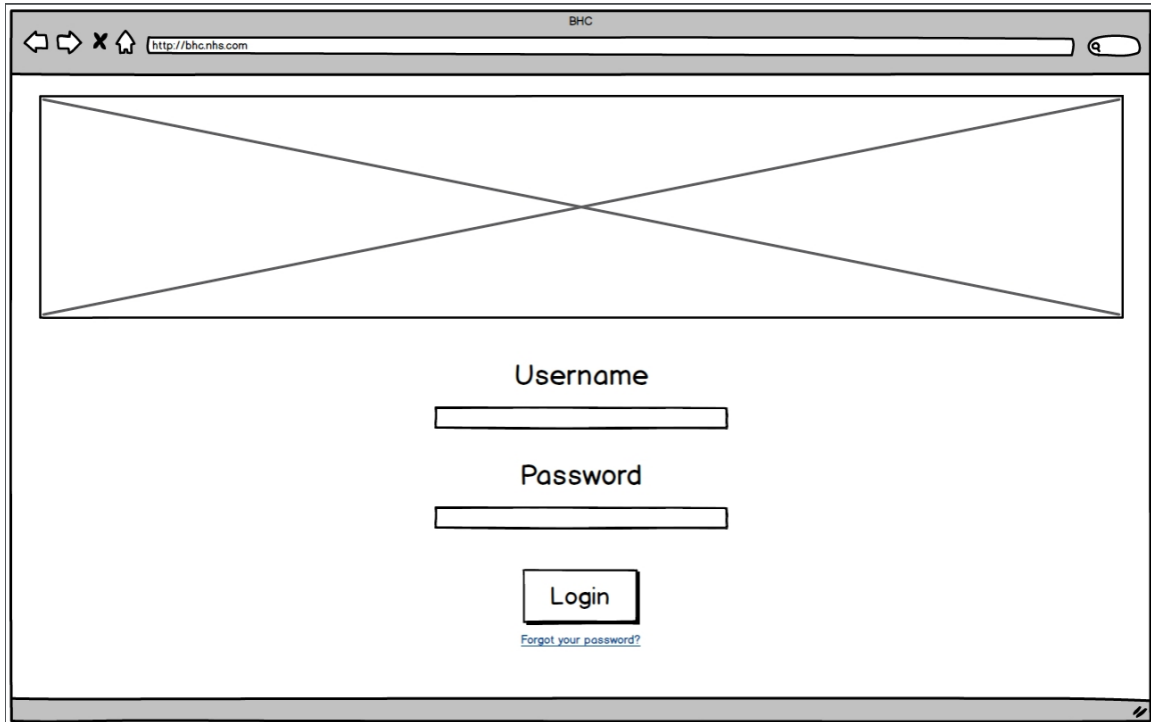


Figure 1: Wireframe of the login page

identified was that further and more frequent communication with the customers was needed. As some aspects of the application were left ambiguous and misunderstood. Not entirely our fault, but just teething problems that arose as the customers fine tuned their ultimate vision of the project/website.

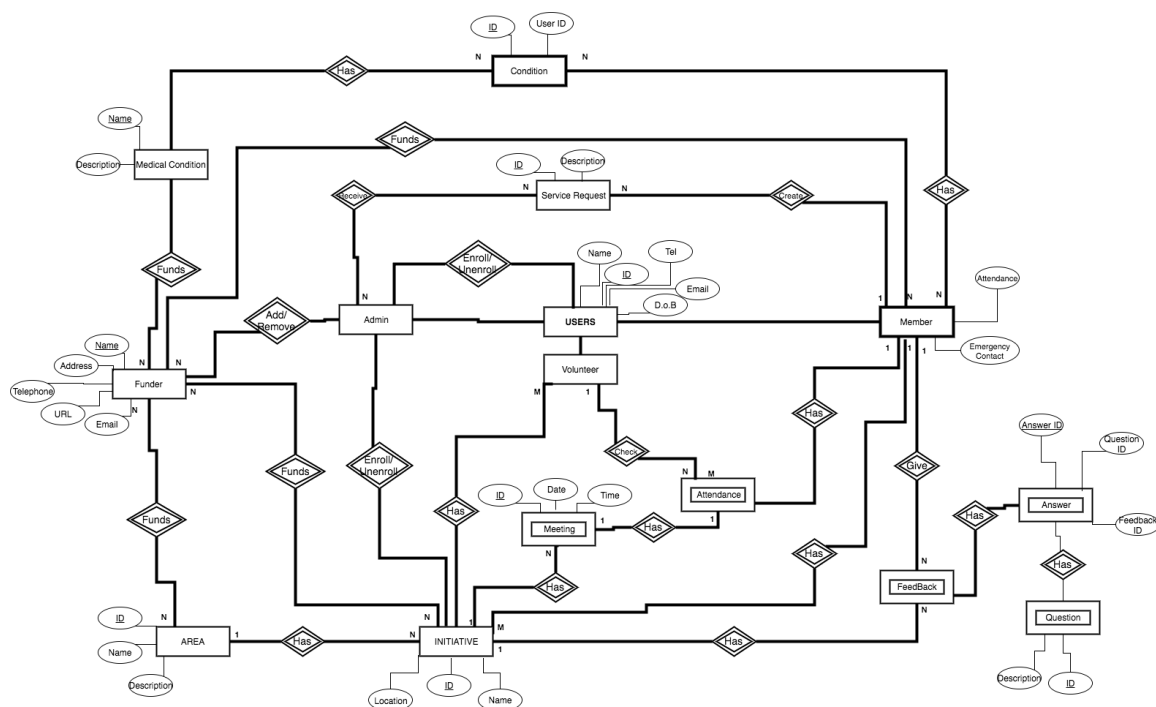
## 5 Design of the Website

### 5.1 Objectives

During the next iteration, after a group discussion, the objectives for the next customer meeting were stated. An ER (Entity-relationship) diagram and Component diagram were to be designed for the documentation of the project. Particular team members were assigned with new issues to do this. Not only were the diagrams created, but the process of designing and coding the application had begun.

### 5.2 ER Diagram

An Entity-Relationship diagram [12] is a useful tool in terms of clarifying the development of every application. Having an ER diagram represents clearly the relationships between the entities and the attributes that belong to them. The team started the



development of the application only after an ER diagram was present to specify the structure of the database.

The main aspect of the diagram is that the users of the programme have different privileges depending on whether they are administrators, volunteers or members. Each group of those users is permitted to do different actions as already mentioned in the Abstract section above. For example, only the administrators are allowed to add/remove users and volunteers or to enroll/unenroll them from different initiatives. Moreover, only the administrators can apply different fundings either to specific initiatives or members based on their medical conditions. Furthermore, the volunteers have restrictions on seeing all of the members' personal information compared to the administrators. Only the volunteers are able to track members attendance and to create new session of the initiatives they are enrolled to. The members would fill the questionnaire form in order to give their feedback every 3/6 months. As the customers required, both volunteers and members could not change their own personal details. The only way to do that is to send a service request to the administrators, specifying the changes they wish to apply. The full ER diagram is shown in **Figure 2**.

### 5.3 Component Architecture

Since Ruby on Rails uses a model-view-controller architecture pattern, it allows our team to develop an agile application. The model layer represents the logic of the application and the management of interactions with elements in the database. The view is the front-end of the application and the HTML files with embedded Ruby

code. Controllers interact with models and views because the requests coming from the browser are processed by them. This means that the controllers fetch data from the models and pass it to the views for representation. In addition we decided to use Docker [2] to aid the implementation of our Continuous Integration. This contains everything we needed to run the application from code to libraries. It builds a Docker image of our application using Dockerfile and then runs the test suite inside a container. Using Docker has many benefits, the most important one regards the deploying of the project. All of those are illustrated in [Figure 3](#) which demonstrates visually the component architecture of our application.

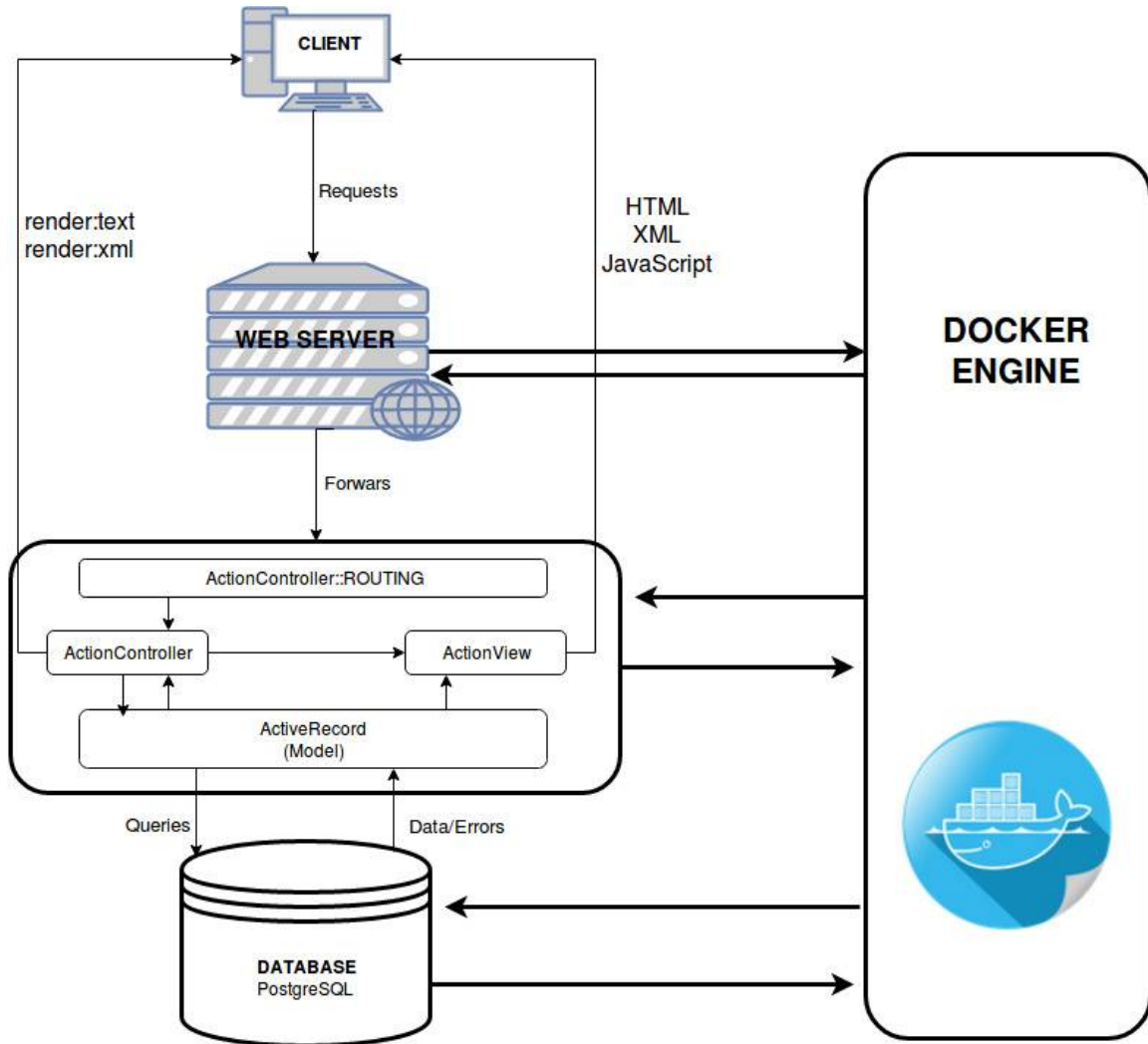


Figure 3: Component Architecture

## 5.4 Initial Prototype

Having the basic database structure, initial prototypes of the page were created, in order to discuss potential design changes. The first version of the page can be found in [Figure 4](#).

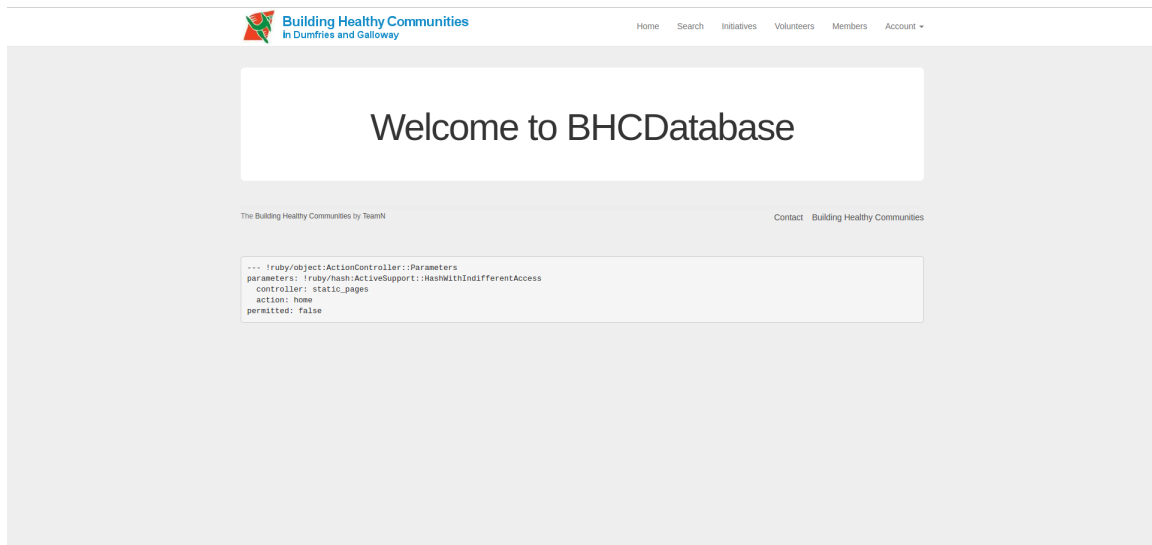


Figure 4: Initial Prototype

The initial page was very basic, not very colourful and errors containing. It was created to point out the idea of the design and to outline a vision of how the site would work. After that we added the colours following a similar theme as the blog, which the customers already had.

## 5.5 Final Prototype

The second design was more simplified in terms of account organisation. The customers clarified one of their requirements regarding that the members would not be able to sign up, which had the consequence of deleting this feature. Furthermore, the home page and the login page have been merged into one single page in order to provide easier access for the customers. The new prototype can be found in [Figure 5](#).

Note that this is not the final design of the page but final prototype presented to customers in terms of structure.

## 5.6 End of second and third milestone

The above section was generally outlining the progress in the second and third milestone. The progress was steady and specific. By the 7th of December, a third customer meeting has held which was again mainly used for further clarifications about the software implementation and navigation to some more complete wireframes. Furthermore, after the Christmas break and before the fourth customer meeting at the 26th of January, the team managed to create an initial version of the application. The application was presented to the customers up to its current point and their opinion was taken into account. An impression was expressed for the progress that was taken place to the website since in the previous customer meeting the back end develop-

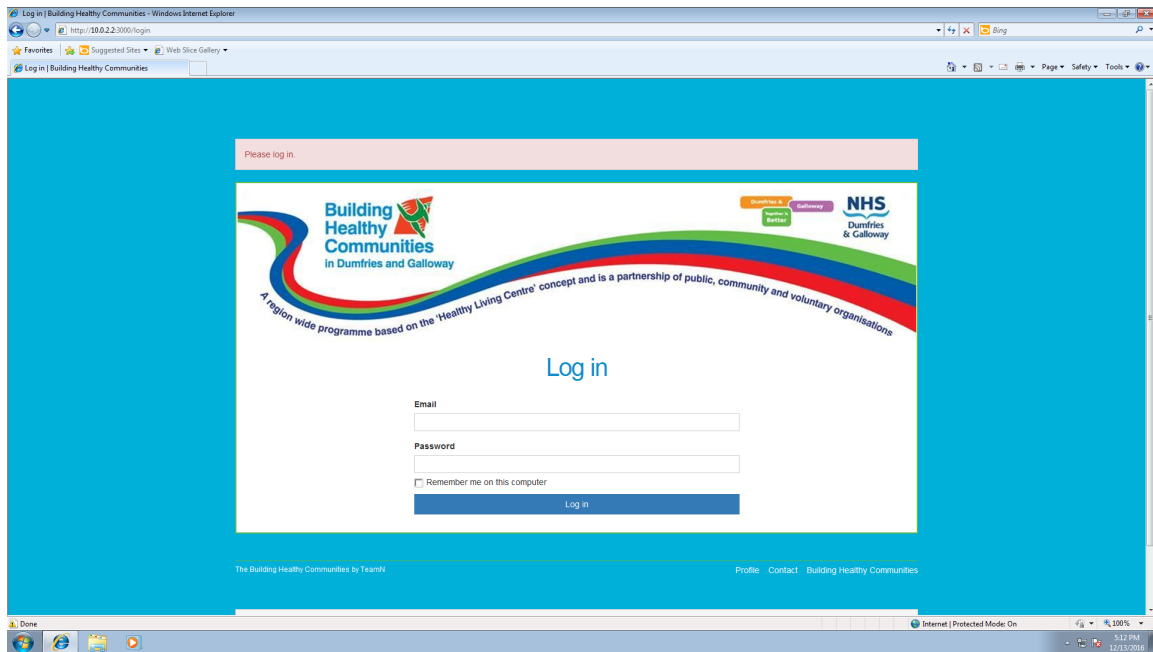


Figure 5: Second version of the prototype

ment was not even started. Further clarifications were made about the navigation of the page, since once the customers had a visualisation of the application, it was more convenient for them to express their view for it. Additionally, they requested a new feature which was never discussed before - the addition of a funding flag which represents which funding is from which organisation and where in which groups it is applied. Furthermore, different funding's apply to a specifying group of people and different funding's apply to a specified initiatives group.

The retrospective performed by the end of the second milestone, showed some lack of communication. The team did not consider this as a major issue since there was a three week holiday gap during which everyone was focused on self studying about how to develop and deploy the application. Additionally, the team lacked on clarifying some basic features of the website with the customers. All the issues outlined on the second retrospective, they were clearly solved during the next. The team was more organised and communicative. Due to the fact that an initial stage of the application was presented on the fourth customer meeting lack of clarification of the features that was raised as an issue in the previous retrospective was know clearly solved.

## 6 Working on the backend development

### 6.1 Objectives

Before the beginning of the fourth milestone, the next objectives were outlined. Due to the fact that by the end of the current milestone a working version of the website was expected to be delivered, the main goals were to resolve opened issues that were

raised from the previous retrospective and customer meeting. In the following weeks the website had all the added functionality created. The most critical issues that were raised is the newest demands that the customers were requested including the flag feature described above.

## 6.2 User Authentication

One of the most important factors of the development of the site was the protection of the user's information. A secure user authentication was a very crucial implementation part. By the phrase "User authentication" [11] is meant the process where the user of the page types some credential information which are compared with the information that are kept in the database, if the information are matched the user is able to access various other information based on the level access that they have on the site. Improper development of the user authentication could lead to the leak of personal information from one user to another or the ability of every user editing the database. A small research online was performed in order to explore the best practices of developing a highly secure user authentication. A highly suggested, "gem" for developing a good user authentication was the "Devise" [9]. Devise is one of the most popular user authentication tools. Some of its features are the ability of assigning multiple models in at the same time and its modulation. A user authentication tool such that provide a lot complexity and unnecessary tool that we will never user. On top of that, all these additional functionality may introduce issues that as programmers with a small experience may be unable to solve. All in all, a conclusion has been taken that a pre-built solution was not a very good idea. However, building from scratch the user authentication seemed a better solution since the complexity is controlled and every new feature is known along with any anomalies that may introduce. The user authentication was based in an authenticated book called "Ruby on Rails Tutorial (Rails 5)" written by Michael Hartl [8]. The book provides some online tutorials which the authentication is based until chapter 6. The authentication was finalised with some simple HTML commands based on our previous experience.

## 6.3 Browser and Mobile Compatibility

The aim for browser compatibility was quite broad. Throughout the customers' meetings it was clear that broad support of the most popular browsers is essential and that the website should function on both iOS and Android (Running in both tablet and mobile form).

A huge issue that was raised at that point, was the browser compatibility and more specifically the support of Internet Explorers version 7 and before. The earliest Internet Explorer version we aim to support is IE 8. This is because IE8 comes as standard with Windows 7. Although possible, we have chosen not to support IE 7 due to it coming with Windows Vista. Vista has 'Extended support until 11 April 2017.' After all, the final decision not to support IE7, as to do so would be to support a soon to be dangerously out of date operating system. An important point to note is

that Bootstrap only officially supports Internet Explorer 8-11. Another requirement that was provided for the system is the mobile compatibility. Thus, a good mobile compatibility is demanded. Although, all the different types of users support mobile compatibility, the one type that it is guaranteed to fully work is the volunteer's side which was actually the only site that was demanded. The volunteer side compatibility was highly important since a volunteer must be able to quickly take attendance from his/her mobile phone. Moreover, some screenshots have been taken from the initial prototypes of the page showing the mobile compatibility. An example screenshot can be found in [Figure 6](#).

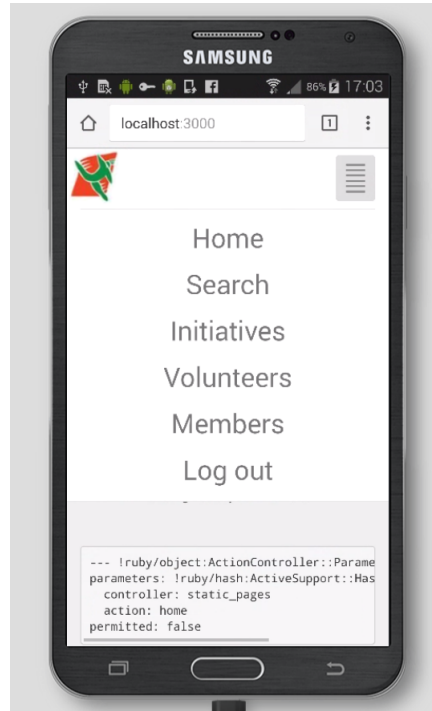


Figure 6: Mobile Compatibility Prototype

## 6.4 Testing

An integral step in developing an application is constructing a test suite that is as complete and as robust as possible. It is vital that testing begin early in project development, as the costs required to implement defect tests late in the process can be extremely costly. With this in mind, testing began almost immediately, any time a feature was to be implemented, the corresponding tests were to be written before the issue could be closed. The tests were constructed using Rails's built-in testing framework. Upon creation of an app in Rails, a 'test' directory is created which holds many other directories intended to contain different testing groups. For example, the 'controllers' directory holds all tests for the controllers and the 'integration' directory holds all tests that involve many controllers interacting together. When creating a model or a controller, the skeleton code for the tests is automatically generated and placed within the corresponding directory. 'Fixtures' are a way of creating and organising test data. On top of using Rails's testing, the 'SimpleCov' gem was



introduced. SimpleCov is a code coverage analysis tool which amongst many other things, displays coverage statistics upon test execution. It also generates a 'coverage' folder which contains interactive documentation displaying the code coverage of each file, which lines were hit, and how many times. The application's tests were designed in an attempt to ensure correct functionality in as many target areas as possible, this includes: controller execution, model validations, uniqueness validations, page restriction validations, etc. Tests were not designed to achieve a high test coverage. Whilst lines covered does give a good indication of which areas of the project need attention, it should not be used as a defining tool for 'good' test coverage. It is perfectly possible to have extremely high test coverage, with relatively meaningless, superficial tests.

Gitlab's CI provides tests in every build using the *.gitlab-ci.yml* file. The file created for the specific software is using all the three stages provided: build, test and deploy. Then we have deployed the *Runners*. A runner picks up a build in the proposed project. Then, every time a commit or merge is triggered to the repository, tests are running to check whether there are issues. Furthermore, the team developed their own tests using mutants. The program has an impressive percentage of testing coverage reaching an approximate of 86.6%.

## 6.5 End of fourth milestone

The fourth milestone was successfully completed with all its major goals succeeded. The website was successfully presented to the customers on the customer meeting performed on the 23rd of February. Although some minor features were not yet implemented, a fully working version was delivered and in the following month all the features were progressively added. During the navigation process, information were provided to the customers about how to access the deployed website in all three different types of users (administrators, volunteers and service users). The initial online deployment was in heroku. Unfortunately, the customers made more last minute demands to the team. This additions were added to the next milestone. Finally, a questionnaire was asked to be answered based on their navigation experience which was later used in the next milestone for the application evaluation.

## 7 User Documentation

A very essential product that needed to be developed was the user documentation. Due to the fact that this is a university course, the software life cycle would not be strictly followed. For example, no future maintenance would take place. A well defined user documentation had to be produced. To put more depth, the documentation mainly explains how to navigate in the program and perform simple tasks such as adding a new user or deleting an old one. The documentation was given in the form of a small book. It is divided in three different parts, the administrator section, the volunteer and the member section. Three sections, each referring to one of the three

different authentication types. The development of the documentation was based on a single principle, develop it such as every aspect, every word will be possibly read by a person who has no idea how to navigate through the site so he/she can understand and successfully complete their task. Due to the fact that this is a fund based program, many different people will have administrate the website through the years. Thus, a well understood user documentation is obligatory.

## 8 Formative Application Evaluation

The Formative Application Evaluation is the stage when a developer receives objective feedback, useful comments and suggestions about their product. After the successful early delivering of the application to the customers, the next step was creating a questionnaire. In combination with the simple user guide, an evaluation was performed. The evaluation was only performed from the customers. Due to the fact that the team had already discussed the design issues with them, the evaluation and questionnaire were mainly focused in the navigation and understanding of the page. On the fourth customer meeting, the team leader performed a sample navigation to the page, explaining to the customers how the pages work. Additionally, a user guide and a simple questionnaire were given. The goal of the questionnaire was to study whether the customers are able to navigate to the page and to what extent they are able to solve their issues using the user guide. The questionnaires were collected and studied. The questionnaire was made via simple "Google Form". Some questions that the customers were asked are:

- In general do you like the look and the feel of the website?
- Have you found trouble performing search queries in the website?
- Have you faced any difficulties in adding new sessions, users, questions and so on?

As a consequence of having a small amount of responses, the results were rather qualitative than quantitative. The responses of the questionnaire showed no major issues except of the fact that they have asked for more features that again were not discussed in previous meetings. The team focused on solving the small navigation issues that the customers identified first and in a following time managed to add the new features.

## 9 Challenges

Developing a site from scratch, always creates some major challenges. The second and third retrospective were extremely representative in the matter of stating major challenges and proposing possible solutions. A very common issue that is experienced during the software development process is the development of test cases. Tests are

one of the most time consuming task since every small aspect of an application needs to be tested. Surprisingly, the tests created for the proposed software had a very high coverage of an approximate 86.6% . Leading to the fact that testing was a challenge only in terms of time consume.

The organisation of the database was another big challenge that the team have encountered. Although the proposed database can be characterised by its simplicity, retrieving the information was sometimes tricky since a member of a team could be a volunteer in another team and a general administrator. Possible authentication issues can be raised questioning the fact of where that specific user is allowed to alternate information and where is not.

As in every project developing process, programmers will face some last-minute demands from the customers. One of these demands were the creation of some type of flag pointing which members or groups are funded from specific organisations. The current demand raised some issues in in the database development since this is an addition very specific information regarding every member of every group. The feature was flagged as an "extra feature" which would be developed only after the rest of the software is properly developed. The decision of taking that action was stated clearly to the customers from the very first day that it was suggested. The feature caused last minute additions to the ER diagram. The feature was successfully created and added to the website after the correct testing.

Having an agile oriented development sometimes leads to unexpected demands. This was the case of changing the deadline for delivering the website to a month before the due date. The customers suggested an early delivery of the website for testing purposes and feedback submission. The following action raised some challenges since the overall coding time was only one and a half months. The team managed to deliver the software on time but without some minor features which were progressively added in the software.

Last but not least was the creation of a User Manual. Developing a user manual is useful not only for the current customers but also for any other future users of the application. Any user can have a simple and brief guidance how to navigate through the application and to take as much advantage of it as they can.

## **10 Final Customer Day**

On the 22nd of March the final demonstration of the product was performed. The team had to present the website to the customers and lecturers.

The final state of the product was a fully working software with some added functionality. As previously stated, the customers were having new requirements in the ongoing process of meetings and communication. All of the major and important features were successfully delivered on time. Considering the fact that a major addition had to be done due to a mistake performed by the customers just eight days before the final customer day, not all the extra functionality that the customers required

was added. The customers were informed of the time constraints, thus a couple of minor features were just a suggestion and not a demand resulting good relationships between the customers and the team.

The demonstration lasted approximately 20 minutes and it was a combination of a brief presentation about the project and a live demonstration. The demonstration consisted of three different parts:

- Navigation through the administrator's side
- Navigation through the volunteer's side
- Navigation through the service user's side

The demonstration ended with questions from the audience and the customers. An overall summary is that the customers were satisfied of the progress and the lecturer was impressed with the high test coverage that the team managed to create.

After the demonstration had finished, the customers expressed their gratitude to us for the work we had done. Upon request the deployment version was updated including the latest updates in order to enable the customers to test the application themselves.

## 11 Conclusion

Taking everything into account, designing and developing a software application was everything but an easy process. Considering the fact that the team consisted of six novice students with no experience at all in using agile software programming, the presented result was more than satisfactory. Having real customers with high demands was definitely a huge challenge. By the adaptation of several techniques and methodologies every difficulty was successfully confronted.

Agile programming proved itself that is a very good practice to be followed from novice programmers. Pair programming played a critical role in terms of identifying bugs and errors in the code. By the early weeks, the team lacked of organisation but reviewed some valuable Agile programming rules. Communication was also identified to be extremely important, since many major issues that could not be solve from one team member, were solved from another one. Although, at some point we faced a few communication issues, they were not considered important since the team was already in a very good position with the project. Putting in practice so many technologies such as Ruby and Docker was undoubtedly one of the hardest tasks that the team had to undergo. Thus, during the Christmas break a wiki page was created which pointed out many useful resources for self-studying and self-practicing.

One of the best practices that were kept, was to strictly follow the university guidance and create test cases for each new aspect we created in the application. The test cases

identified many bugs and errors which the team managed to successfully solve. Many other teams did not kept that practice and as a result many serious issues were not identified in advance resulting to the inability of delivering their software within the time constraints.

Furthermore, branching was another important practice that we kept. The team followed a strict plan of creating a new branch for every issue and resolving that issue in the branch. After everything are checked and tested, a merge request is created which only two of the six team members can accept after inspecting the code for conflicts. Thus, the master branch was always in a fully working condition with the testing percentage to be from the very beginning at 80-90%. Performing frequent commits also helped the testing to be constantly kept high.

Delivering a software does not only demand writing code but also creating a project meeting the customers' views and expectations. Despite the fact that the clients were characterised by politeness and cooperation, they were very high demanding. Until the very last week new features were requested. After endless hours of re-factoring the system the team managed to deliver as many features as they were able. The team learned that even with many demandings, you have to always tell the truth to the clients. When the team decides that due to time constraints a feature cannot be implemented or even when the team does not know how to implement a feature, the customers must be contacted and the issue must be discussed. Promising features that will never been delivered will result to a mistrustful relationship between the clients and the developing team. This experiences helped the team to realise that requirements negotiation is an important part in the software development process.

On the 24th of February the team managed to deliver a fully working website to the customers. Furthermore, on the 22nd of March, the final demonstration date, an improved website with added functionality was delivered to its final state.

To conclude, working with real clients, gave to each member the opportunity to develop a minor working experience, to realise how the future is going to be and develop the proper bases needed for working in a real company. Every student discovered in more depth their abilities and weakness and most importantly learned that a customer has not only a vision but also important requirements that need to be followed step by step. Everyone managed to develop professionalism were you have to constantly communicate with inexperienced customers and listen with respect their demands, even when they are impossible to be developed. Backtracking the experience, everyone managed to develop new skill that will be later used in their software engineering career.

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