Usability guidelines

Features & functionality

		Importance
1	**Features and functionality meet common user goals and objectives** Key and common user goals and objectives (e.g. carry out some transaction, find some information, carry out some research etc…) should have been identified and addressed. Ideally the site or application should allow users to meet all of their key goals and objectives.	**Very high**
2	**Features and functionality support users desired workflows** The site or application should support or at least be compatible with the way that users wish to work. For example, users might want to be able to carry out bulk transactions or be able to save and return to their work.	**Very high**
3	**Frequently-used tasks are readily available (e.g. easily accessible from the homepage) and well supported** For example short cuts and a login to retrieve details might be provided to speed up the completion of frequently carried out tasks.	**High**
4	**Users are adequately supported according to their level of expertise** For example, novice users are given help and instructions and features are progressively disclosed (e.g. advanced features not being shown by default).	**Medium**
5	**Calls to action (e.g. register, add to basket, submit) are clear, well labelled and appear clickable** Possible actions should always be clear and the primary call to action (i.e. the most common or desirable user action) should stand out on the page or screen.	**Medium**

Homepage / starting page

6	**The Homepage / starting page provides a clear snapshot and overview of the content, features and functionality available** For example, an introduction and overview of the site is provided together with section snapshots and example content.	**Medium**
7	**The homepage / starting page is effective in orienting and directing users to their desired information and tasks** Users should be able to work out where they need to go to complete a given task (e.g. carry out some research, complete a transaction).	**High**
8	**The homepage / starting page layout is clear and uncluttered with sufficient 'white space'** Users should be able to quickly scan the homepage and make sense of both the content available and of how the site is structured.	**Medium**

Navigation

9	**Users can easily access the site or application** For example, the URL is predictable and is returned by search engines. If a user attempts to find the site via a search engine, it should ideally be returned on the first page of search results for likely queries.	**Low**

10	**The navigational scheme is easy to find, intuitive and consistent**	**High**
	Users should be able to very easily locate and use the navigational scheme (e.g. left hand menu, top menu, tabbed menu), and it should not be significantly different across the site or application (unless a decision has been made to specifically differentiate a given section or area).	
11	**The navigation has sufficient flexibility to allow users to navigate by their desired means**	**Medium**
	For example a user might want to be able to search for an item or browse by size, name or type. Although not all user preferences can or indeed should be addressed, the most useful and common navigational means should be supported.	
12	**The site or application structure is clear, easily understood and addresses common user goals**	**Very high**
	For example, gathering information, submitting data, carrying out research. Users should be able to work out where they need to go to carry out common user goals and be able to quickly gain an understanding of how the site or application is structured.	
13	**Links are clear, descriptive and well labelled**	**Medium**
	Links should be clearly 'clickable' (e.g. underlined or colourised) and it should be clear to users where any given link goes to. Non-descriptive links such as 'click here' should be avoided and any links going to an external website or opening a new window should be identified as such.	
14	**Browser standard functions (e.g. 'back', 'forward', 'bookmark') are supported**	**High**
	Users should be able to bookmark a page (or be presented with a URL to use) and go back and forth without breaking the site or losing any information they have entered.	
15	**The current location is clearly indicated (e.g. breadcrumb, highlighted menu item)**	**Low**
	Users should always know where they are in the site or application.	
16	**Users can easily get back to the homepage or a relevant start point**	**Low**
	For example, a homepage link might be part of the breadcrumb or a home link might be available as part of the header.	
17	**A clear and well structure site map or index is provided (where necessary)**	**Very low**
	The sitemap might be part of the header or footer and should ideally be available from every page on the site.	

Search

18	**A consistent, easy to find and easy to use search function is available throughout**	**High**
	The search function (where required) should be directly available from most pages on the site or application and should be consistently positioned (e.g. top left, top right or top centre).	
19	**The search interface is appropriate to meet user goals**	**High**
	For example users are able to filter search results, an advanced search is available (if necessary) and common search conventions such as quotation marks (") and natural language searches are handled.	
20	**The search facility deals well with common searches, misspellings and abbreviations**	**Low**
	Ideally synonyms (e.g. 'coat' should also match 'jacket') should mean that logical and appropriate search results are returned for common user queries. Popular search results (e.g. top matches) should also be identified for common queries.	
21	**Search results are relevant, comprehensive, precise, and well displayed**	**High**
	It should be easy for users to see what has been returned, to work out why something has been returned and to determine how many results there are.	

Control & feedback

22	**Prompt and appropriate feedback is given** For example, a confirmation message is shown following a successful transaction, input errors are promptly highlighted and it's made clear to users when a page has been updated.	**High**
23	**Users can easily undo, go back and change, or cancel actions** If an action can not be undo then users should at least be given the chance to confirm an action before committing (e.g. before placing an order). For example, users can return to a step and change their options or dynamically change a value without having to start again. Where an action can't be undone (e.g. a deletion), this should be made clear to users.	**Medium**
24	**Users can easily give feedback** For example, via email or an online feedback / contact us form. There should be an indication of how long users can expect to wait for a response if a query has been made.	**Very low**

Forms

25	**Complex forms and processes are broken up into readily understood steps and sections** For example, a checkout process might be broken up in to 'address', 'delivery options', 'payment' and 'confirmation'. Where a process is used a progress indicator is present with clear numbers or named stages.	**Medium**
26	**A minimal amount of information is requested and where necessary justification is given for asking for information** For example a site might outline that a telephone number is required in case there is an issue with a transaction. Users shouldn't be asked for extraneous information and where possible information should be auto populated (e.g. postcode lookup, code lookup) to keep input to a minimum.	**Low**
27	**Required and optional form fields are clearly indicated (e.g. using text or '*')** Where most fields are required the optional fields should be identified and when most fields are optional the required fields should be identified.	**Low**
28	**Appropriate input fields are used and required formats are indicated** Appropriate input fields might include calendar for date selection, drop downs for selection and radio button for small selections. Text might be used to indicate the required format or an example might be provided. Field lengths should correspond to the expected input so for example an email input field should be long, where as an initials input field should be very short.	**Medium**
29	**Help and instructions (e.g. examples, information required) are provided where necessary** Where input is non trivial or is likely to require some explanation this should be provided. Where a-lot of explanation is necessary a link to a page outlining what is required should be provided.	**Medium**

Errors

30	**Errors are clear, easily identified and appear in appropriate locations** Errors should be immediately apparent to users and ideally be located close to the offending input or function (e.g. adjacent to an input entry field). Inputs causing an error should be highlighted, together with an explanation for the error.	**High**
31	**Error messages are concise, written in easy to understand language and describe what's occurred and what action is necessary** Errors should avoid using very technical terms or jargon and should be written from the user's perspective.	**Medium**
32	**Common user errors have been taken into consideration and where possible prevented** Common user errors might be missing fields, invalid formats and invalid selections. For example, fields might limit input to particular a format (e.g. numbers only) or only become available once certain criteria have been met. JavaScript might also be utilised to provide immediate feedback for common formatting errors or errors caused by missing fields.	**Medium**
33	**Users are able to easily recover (i.e. not have to start again) from errors** For example, users might be able to re-edit and resubmit a form or enter a different value.	**Medium**

Content & text

34	**Content available (e.g. text, images, video, audio) is appropriate and sufficiently relevant, and detailed to meet user goals** Content should also be appropriately formatted, so for example videos and audio should be directly playable (i.e. shouldn't need to be downloaded to be played) and images should be of a sufficient quality.	**Very high**
35	**Links to other useful and relevant content (e.g. related pages, external websites or documents) are available and shown in context** For example there might be links from an article to related articles, related content or related external websites.	**Low**
36	**Language, terminology and tone used is appropriate and readily understood by the target audience** Jargon should be kept to a minimum and plain language should be used where ever possible.	**High**
37	**Terms, language and tone used are consistent (e.g. the same term is used throughout)** Capitalisation (e.g. 'Main title'; 'Main Title'; 'MAIN TITLE') and grammar should be consistent, together with the use of formal or informal terms (e.g. could not vs couldn't; what's vs what is etc...).	**Medium**
38	**Text and content is legible and scanable, with good typography and visual contrast** Users should be able to quickly scan headers and body text, in order to get an overview of what's available.	**Medium**

Help

39	**Online help is provided and is suitable for the user base** Help should be written in easy to understand language and only uses recognised terms. Users should be able to easily find and access help and where appropriate contextual help should be available, such as help for a specific page, feature or process.	**High**
40	**Online help is concise, easy to read and written in easy to understand language** Help should cover the essentials without providing excessive detail and shouldn't use jargon or technical terminology that isn't likely to be understood by users.	**Medium**

41	**Accessing online help does not impede users** Users should be able to resume work where they left off after accessing help. Ideally help should be available directly on a page or using a new window. If help is provided in the form of a document, it should be formatted for the web (e.g. PDF, rather than a Word document).	**Medium**
42	**Users can easily get further help (e.g. telephone or email address)** If a telephone help number is provided the hours of operation should be shown. If an email address or online form is provided, an indication should be given of how long a response is likely to take (e.g. within the next 24 hrs).	**Low**

Performance

43	**Site or application performance doesn't inhibit the user experience (e.g. slow page downloads, long delays)** Web page downloads shouldn't take longer than 5 seconds and on page interactions (e.g. using an application or AJAX functionality) shouldn't take any longer than 1 second to respond. Interactions taking longer than 1 second to respond should provide suitable feedback to show that something is taking place (e.g. an hour glass or swirling graphic).	**High**
44	**Errors and reliability issues don't inhibit the user experience** Sites and applications should be free of bugs and shouldn't have any broken links.	**Medium**
45	**Possible user configurations (e.g. browsers, resolutions, computer specs) are supported** Websites should be usable at a 800x600 screen resolution and should work with the most common browsers (IE, Firefox, Opera, Chrome etc…). Applications should be usable with common computer specifications (operation system, memory, available disk space) and screen resolutions (e.g. 800x600, 1025x768).	**Medium**