**Heuristic Evaluation of Blue Castle**

Using a combination of Jakob Nielsen’s and Rolf Molich’s (Nielsen, 1995) 10 user interface design heuristics from 1995 and Schniederman’s eight golden rules for interface design (Shneiderman et al., 1986) I have compiled a list of the heuristic features by which I will evaluate the Blue Castle page.

Once logged into Blue Castle the user is presented with a home-screen from which they can view several pages displaying information about their; modules, marks, award, progression and surveys. The interface is designed so that these pages are categorised into two groups sorted by a colour coordinated key. These categories are ‘My Programme’, in green, including ‘My Modules’ and ‘My Surveys’ and ‘My Assessments’ including ‘My Marks’, ‘My Award’ and ‘My Progression’. The categories are given symbols which appear when the user moves the cursor over the buttons, the symbol used to denote the ‘My Programme category is a mortarboard and for the ‘My Assessment’ category a pencil symbol is used. This imagery is fairly arbitrary and doesn’t necessarily help the user in distinguishing between the categories. The use of the pencil symbol to denote assessments may also confuse the user, as the pencil symbol usually connotes the ability to edit a field, something that is not possible in this scenario. Therefore, cognitive load for the user is not eased but instead complicated as they have to re-learn the symbolism used in this interface.

The headings that are used may also be misleading to the user as the titles used for the buttons are quite ambiguous and do not necessarily describe the information being displayed very well. ‘My Award’ and ‘My Progression’ for example both give information about the status of the user’s degree, with ‘My Award’ allowing the user to view their ‘award status’ once having completed a programme of study, and ‘My Progression’ stating whether the user has passed their current stage in their programme of study. Besides stating what the user has achieved in a past degree or how they are doing in their current degree, these pages contain very little information relevant to the user’s progress, such as tracking marks in current modules or providing feedback on assessments, instead they contain a large amount of contact details for different student services and financial support outlets. This information is presented poorly and because it isn’t student specific contains a lot of information that is irrelevant making it difficult for the user to find the relevant contact information if they did have a query. All this unnecessary information competes for the user’s attention and distracts from finding the information that may be of relevance to them.

The buttons that are used to link to each page from the homepage also have images, intended presumably to be visual prompts to the user to relate to the content displayed on each page. The photographs chosen, however, seem to have little relevance to the information that is being shown in the pages. With the exception of the ‘My Award’ showing mortarboards being thrown into the air the other photographs do little to signpost to the user what the headings for the pages could mean.

The user is able to access the majority of the pages from the homepage, which improves the efficiency of use of the interface. It is useful therefore that the homepage is easy to navigate to from any of the other pages allowing the user to flexibly navigate through the interface. The icon used to do this is a small house image with the caption ‘home’ that appears on every page. This symbol is ubiquitous and is commonly used to represent a link back to the main screen or homepage from where the user can navigate to other parts of the website. This therefore reduces the cognitive load on the user as most are able to recognise what the house icon connotes and therefore can use this feature to quickly navigate around the website.

**Bibliography**

* Nielsen, J. (1995). *10 Heuristics for User Interface Design*. [online] Nielsen Norman Group. Available at: https://www.nngroup.com/articles/ten-usability-heuristics/ [Accessed 28 Oct. 2018].
* Shneiderman, B., Plaisant, C., Cohen, M., Jacobs, S. and Elmqvist, N. (1986). *Designing the User Interface: Strategies for Effective Human-Computer Interaction*. 1st ed.