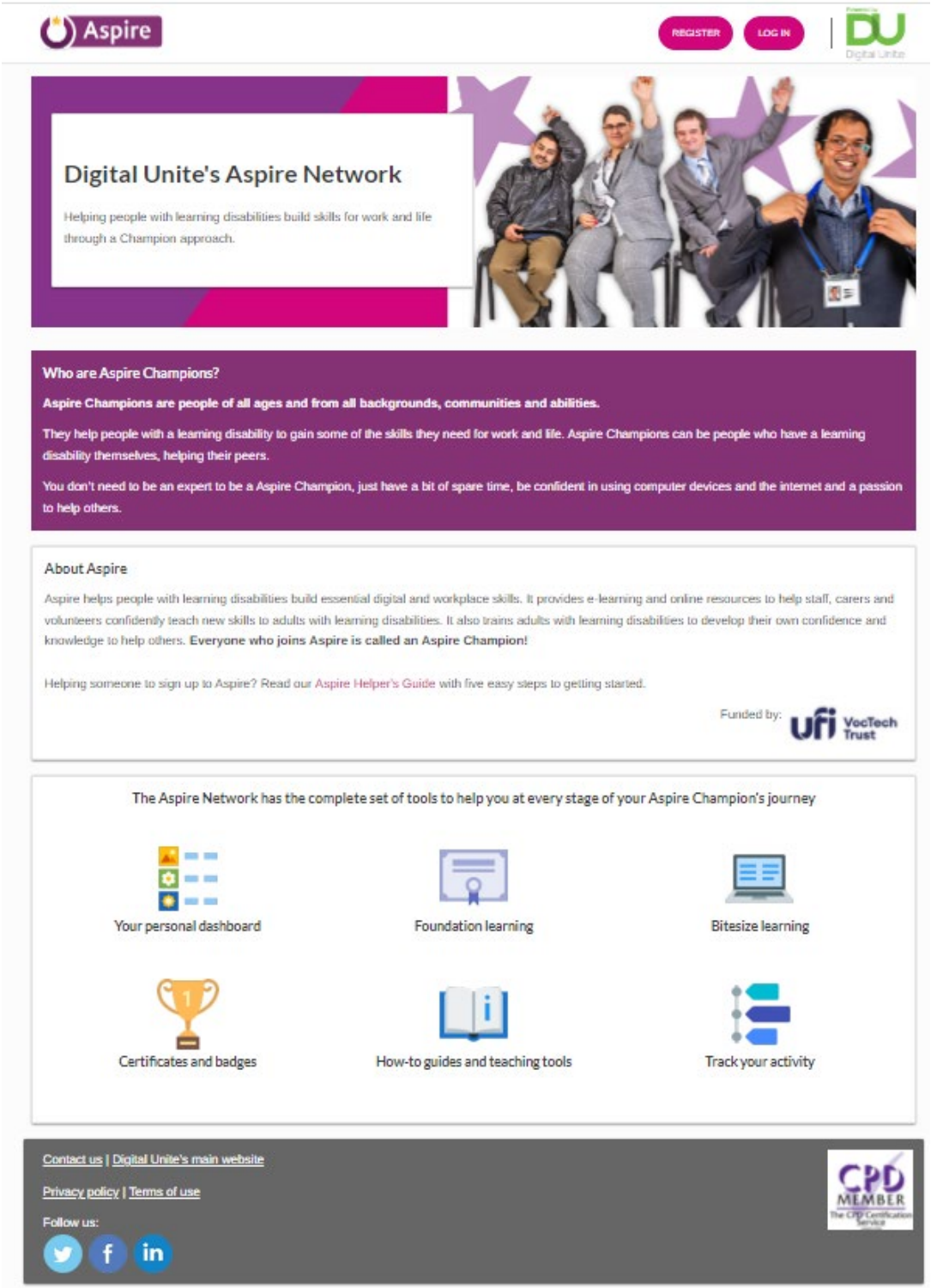
Aspire Champions Website Evaluation Report



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Summary

We are a group of 6 researchers with and without learning disabilities. We have been asked to evaluate the Aspire Champions Website www.digitalchampionsnetwork.com/aspire
We worked on this project together using action research approach. The project started on the 8th of December 2021 and finished on the 30th of March 2022.

We had ten workshops, three cognitive walkthroughs with three different people with a learning disability, followed by three interviews and two focus groups. All the sessions were video recorded and transcribed by our research assistants.

We used heuristics to evaluate the usability of the website.

Interviews and focus groups were used to test the accessibility and understanding of the Aspire Champion Network website.

Cards sorts were used to evaluate the existing design of the website and brainstorm solutions to design.

We used RIX Wiki to

- document the project process and progress
- collect and organise the data
- record our findings

Overall, we found that although there are some positive aspects of the website it needs further work to make it more accessible, easier to understand and use.

Introduction

Internet has many functions for different people for example, real time communication, access to information and services such as healthcare, entertainment, gaming, shopping, learning, publishing, advertising, news and more. In our society access to information about services happens online before speaking to someone. It is therefore important that information and the websites are easy to find, use and understand for everyone, including people with a learning disability. Aspire Champion website aims to be accessible and easy to understand by people with a learning disability.
RIX Research and Media with a group of co-researchers with a lived experience of a learning disability were commissioned to evaluate the Aspire Champion website and provide recommendations for future development.
This report will firstly provide an overview of the Aspire Champion Website. Secondly, it will explain the evaluation goals, methodology and methods applied by the researchers. Next, it will report of the findings using usability heuristics. This will be followed by conclusions and recommendations.

Overview of Aspire Champion Website

Who is it for? As we approached the project, we asked ourselves a question who is this website for? We all agreed that the website is for people with a learning disability who are trained to be digital champions. They are call aspire champion.

What is the function of this website? The next question we have considered was what is the function of this website? After some discussion we concluded that the function of this website is to provide a training space and useful resources for aspire champions.

Our first impressions. We were quite critical when we first had a look at the website (Fig 1). The researchers felt that the homepage text was too long, and not easy to understand. Just by looking at the website it wasn't obvious to us who is this website for or what is the function of it. The group felt that the text needed to be broken down further to improve transparency and accessibility of the website.

The range of colours, the different fonts, colours and sizes were not making things any easier for the group. There were also a range of logos that were not clear to understand.
The image used provoked discussion about representation of people with a learning disability. The group agreed that they would like to see real photograph of some real champions like Ros, Kiran or Baljit for example. They felt that this page should inspire people to be a champion. Seeing a real champion with their little story or comment would work much better.

The group liked the use of icons at the bottom of the page and discussed the meaning of each icon. The meaning of those icons was not obvious to our co-researchers.

Exploring the website further, logging in, setting up profile, exploring the content was an interesting exercise. Researchers felt that the site was currently lacking consistency, was difficult to navigate and understand, and not easy to use. Once clicking on few links, they were lost in another website with completely different layout, purpose and content. We agreed that the evaluation of the existing website is required.

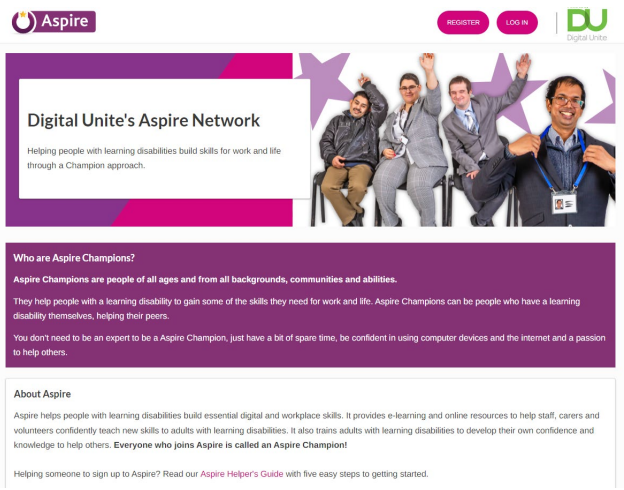


Figure 1 – Aspire Champion Website Homepage www.digitalchampionsnetwork.com/aspire

Evaluation

1.1 Goals

The agreed goal of the evaluation was to review the Aspire Champions website and make recommendations on how to make the website and content:

- More accessible
- Easier to navigate
- Easier to understand

1.2 Methodology

To conduct this research, we used qualitative, action research approach (learning in action) which enabled researchers to learn from end user experiences, collect feedback, reflect throughout the project lifetime and adjust the methods as they progressed.

1.3 Research Methods and techniques

The group applied a range of research methods to evaluate different elements of the Aspire Champions website. Firstly, to evaluate the accessibility and usability of the website we used Nielsen's Heuristics Technique. Secondly, to evaluate the navigation and user understanding of the existing website we used test (cognitive walkthroughs) and follow on interviews. Finally, to evaluate existing design, layout, feel and look we used 'card sorts' and workshop approach with the co-researchers.

1.3.1 Heuristic Evaluation Technique

Heuristic technique was introduced to the group as a structured and practical method which could help the group to explore, evaluate and produce good enough solutions within the limited project timeframe. **Heuristics are rules of thumb**. We researched different types of heuristics and agreed that Nielsen's rules of thumb for usability are going to work well for our evaluation and analysis.

There were many different websites presenting Nielsen's heuristics in various formats (Fig 3) and discussing the technique in detail. The group met on a weekly basis throughout the project lifetime; they familiarised themselves with the technique and created an easy to understand version of the heuristics. This can be found on the project website https://www.rixwiki.org/rix/home/aspire *(this website is private – please use login details to access aspire/aspire01.) (Fig 2)*

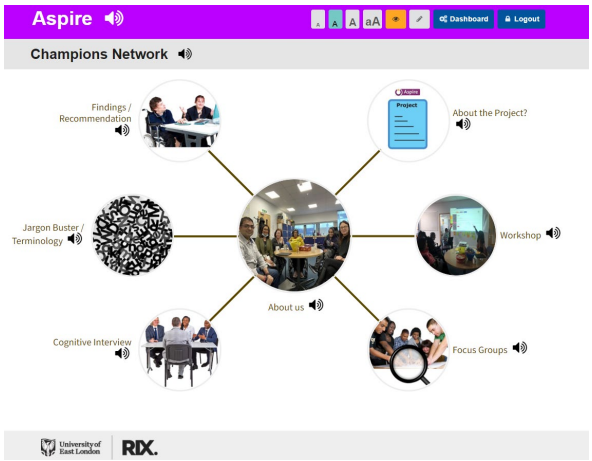


Figure 2 – Project Wiki Website www.rixwiki.org

Figure 3 Nielsen's heuristics – taken from https://www.merixstudio.com/blog/heuristic-evaluation/

Findings

1.1 Visibility of system status

According to Nielsen the system should always keep users informed what is going on. This can be achieved by providing a clear feedback to the user. Our findings from workshops, focus groups, cognitive walkthroughs and interviews suggest that users were lost within the system very quickly as the pages were not clearly labelled and there was no visual marker on the top of the page to indicate where they were.

1.2 Match between system and the real world

Well-designed website should avoid system's language and instead use words, concepts, phrases and visuals which are familiar to the user. The organisation of information should also be natural and logical to the user. Our findings suggest that this area could also be improved. Our participants reported that having visual representation to match the system to the real world would be helpful for example, login button could have a padlock on it (Fig 4), submit button could have an arrow pointing up, read more could have a page/book visual etc.

Figure 4 Match between the system and the real world – login option with a padlock

1.3 User control and freedom

User should always feel in control and feel that they can go back and forth between pages. This heuristic was partially met, users were able to navigate the site back and forth. However, the look of the homepage changes significantly, see figure 4.

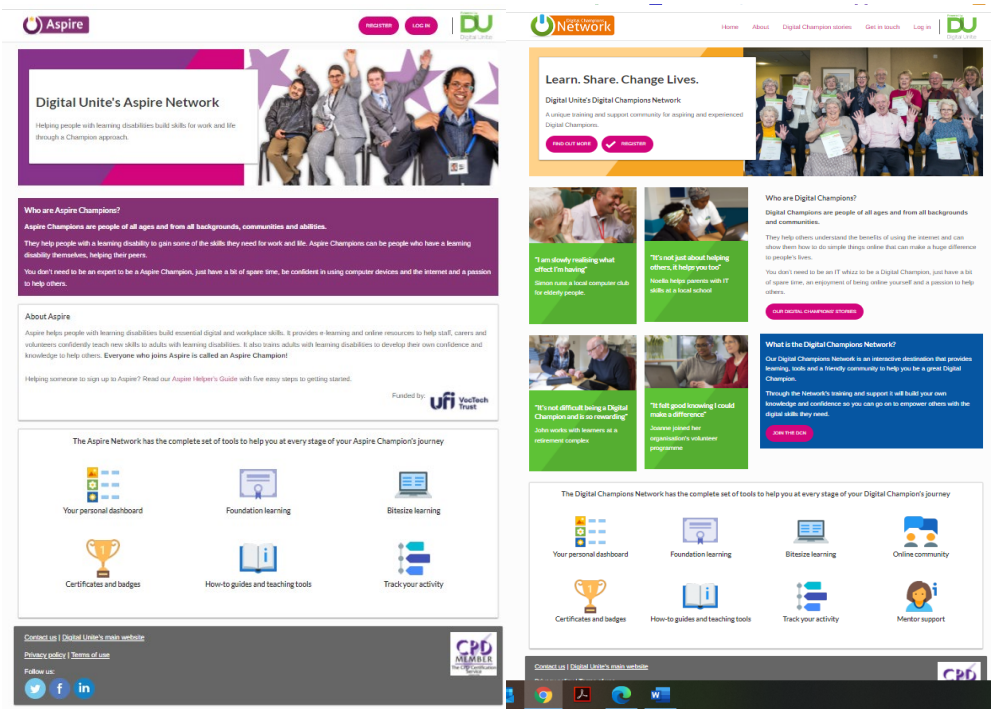


Figure 5 Login page changes before and after leaving users confused

1.4 Consistency and standards

Consistency is one of the most important features for any website. Users want to feel in control and secure. Currently as demonstrated in previous points the website is not consistent, options, icons, position, navigation and colours change on different pages. This area needs a lot of attention. For example, the login button looks differently on different pages. (Fig 6)

Figure 6 Login buttons options

1.5 Error prevention

Good design should minimise errors. We tested the website looking at errors. There are good error prevention measures in place. The only area that was reported as problematic was the registration page. Where the user had to complete the whole page before getting error notification that one of the fields was entered incorrectly resulting in the user needing to go back and re-enter all the details. Registering was problematic for everyone who was involved in tests. Users found long text password more difficult to enter correctly twice, for every person it took several attempts to register. The researchers felt that having a picture password option as well as 'view

password' when inputting could all help to prevent these errors. The 'view password' option is now available on login page but not on the registration page.(Fig 7).

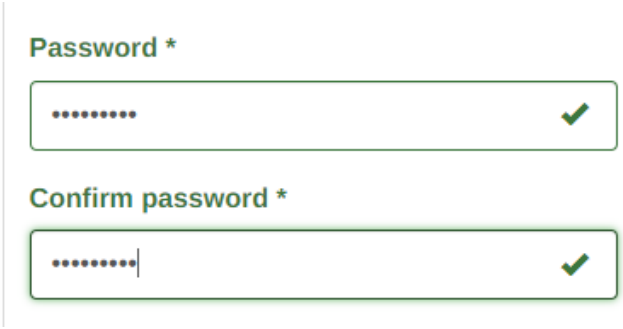


Figure 7 Error prevention - password when setting the account

1.6 Recognition rather than recall

Good website design should minimize the user's memory load by making options and actions visible and recognisable. Ideally, the user should not need to remember information in order to use the website effectively. Instructions on how to use the system should also be easily accessible on the website.
During our tasks and cognitive walkthroughs, only few users were able to recognise where to go if they wanted to find resources or complete a training or edit their profile, but it took everyone a while to figure those out. It was felt that this was due to the amount of information available on any one page.

1.7 Flexibility and efficiency of use

A good system should have features within the system that would support novice users as well as experienced users. Additional features that may not be visible to new, inexperienced users but can help expert users to use the system more efficiently for example by customising actions or option. Our research findings suggest that for new inexperienced users it would be useful to have simpler interface with fewer options visible on the login page.

1.8 Aesthetics and minimalist design

Aesthetics play an important role in user experience; good aesthetics can provide a memorable, pleasurable experience resulting the user coming back and using the system more. The art is to design an interface that is aesthetically pleasing and only includes necessary elements with high information value. Clarity of information is therefore the most important here. Our findings suggest that currently the Aspire Champions Website is full of useful information. However, the organisation of this information could be improved.
For example, when the new user logs in they need to know what the first step for them is and should not be overwhelmed with all that the website has to offer. This would minimise confusion and support users to login and have the confidence to explore and engage with the system content on a more regular basis and have a positive experience when doing so.

1.9 Help users recognise, diagnose and recover from errors

This heuristic was met by the current design. The system error messages are clearly designed, precise, constructive, clearly visible and easy to read and understand. These only occurred during the registration/login process. Clear messages were displayed to notify the user what went wrong and how to correct.

1.10 Help and documentation

Help, documentation and tips should be visible throughout the system from the beginning. There are two types of interface help namely proactive and reactive. Reactive help is clearly embedded within the system and it helps and guides the user when troubleshooting problems. The proactive help on the other hand should aim to familiarize users with the interface from the beginning. There is some room for improvements for proactive help features to be embedded. This could be addressed with a simple, logical, accurate, navigation, organisation and presentation of information within the entire system.

Additional Accessibility evaluation

We tested the Digital Unite Aspire Network website using the Wave tool which is especially designed to test web content for accessibility for people with disabilities https://wave.webaim.org/

The test highlighted several Alt Tags missing that need fixing in order to meet the accessibility standards. Please see the link for details WAVE Report of Digital Unite's Aspire Network | Digital Champions Network (webaim.org)

Conclusions and recommendations

Following our tests, interviews, focus groups and workshops we have concluded that there are a lot of areas that would benefit from improvements on the current website. Below we offer our conclusions and recommendations for the following aspects: accessibility, navigation and understanding.

1.1 Accessibility

In conclusion the team agreed that the current website does not meet all the accessibility standards and requires improvements.

Our recommendation to make the website more accessible are:

1. Provide images and icons that will assist with the understanding and the website purpose. In addition, all images and icons need to have an Alt Text for screen readers which will describe each image/icon accurately and clearly without use of jargon.
2. Allow users to enlarge font size on the Aspire Champion Network as virtually all users commented on the font size and colour, including text and colour of the buttons.
3. The contrast was difficult for several project participants. White and pink was not great for some users, however the Wave tool did not highlight it as inaccessible. Co-researchers recommended that if the final colours are to be

changed, contrast test is recommended. There are a number of tools that we found useful here for example Color Shark https://colorshark.io/ or Sketch Color Contrast Analyser https://github.com/getflourish/Sketch-Color-Contrast-Analyser

4. There are many users accessing the site using different devices and technologies e.g. mouse or a touch pad, keyboard or a screen reader, touch screen. In order to meet the needs of all the users we recommend highlighting interactive elements such as links or buttons by adding visual clues for users to identify for example making interactive text/links or buttons bold, underlined, highlighted. In addition, use distinct styles so that the user understands which elements are in focus or clickable. Our project participants commented on this feature e.g. focusing on the text in bold, observing the changing status of the login button when the mouse was moved over it.
5. Input boxes were well designed and had appropriate labels in most part of the existing website. The only one could be improved was the password input box on the registration page. Where view password option was not available resulting in users having difficulties logging in.
6. Website navigation was problematic as it was not consistent. Our recommendation is to ensure that you provide consistent navigation option throughout the website, with elements having the same look and are in the same position. Adding icons to options on the menu is recommended. Presently, only some buttons have accompanied icons and others don't.
7. Organisation and presentation of content could be improved. Although there is some evidence of this our tests suggest that there is still significant cognitive overload resulting in confusion. Researches provided several drawings of how the pages could be structured to address this point. Please see appendix 1.
8. The current website is responsive and the layout, feel and look changes on different devices and screen sizes. This feature works well, but visual display, alignments could be improved.
9. Accessibility of the navigation could be improved by adding keyboard navigation feature so users could use keyboard and other switching devices to select appropriate icons or elements of the website.

1.2 Navigation

Navigation is an important element of any website; we see this as user journey which is impacted very much by the architecture of the website. The current links, menus, logos, options and connections between pages make the navigation of the Aspire Champions Website clear most of the times. There are different navigation styles embedded within the website depending on the device used. For example, at the login page the navigation runs alongside the top of the website. As soon as the user logs into the system the navigation panel appears on the left-hand side of the page. On the mobile device a hamburger menu icon is used on the right-hand side of the device. The menu however looks and feels the same and have the same options in the same order which helps our users.

However, we do have some recommendations for improvements of the current navigation.

1) Ensure all icons on the menu have visual representation (now the top three option have icons and the rest have text only).

2) We recommend limiting the number of items on the menu to 5 -7 option; limiting the number of items and organising the website architecture in a more logical way will limit the amount of information that the user is presented with at any one time and could greatly improve the user experience.
3) Labels on the menu are clear and easy to understand but could be structured in a more logical way. Coresearchers examined user responses and carried out card sorts to try and organise the best, most logical for most option. Their recommendations are for the website designers to consider the following sections: Profile, Home, Courses, Achievements, Community, Events (see Fig 8).

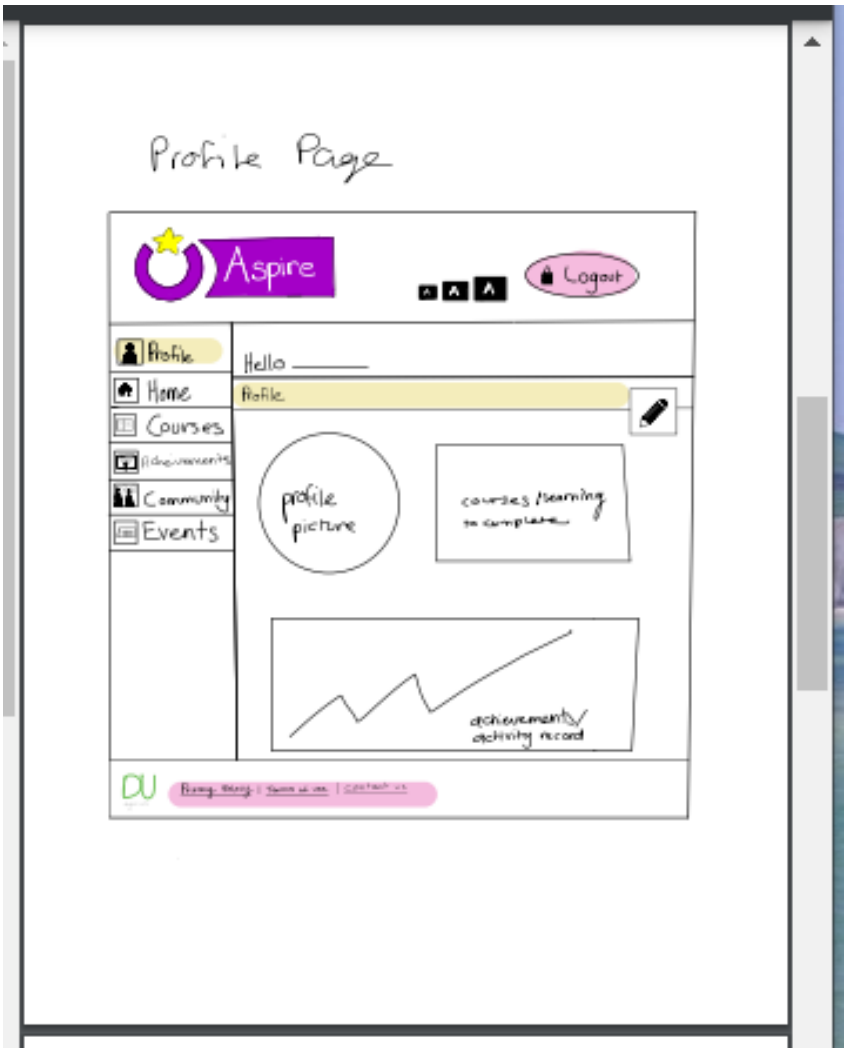


Figure 8 Low fidelity prototype

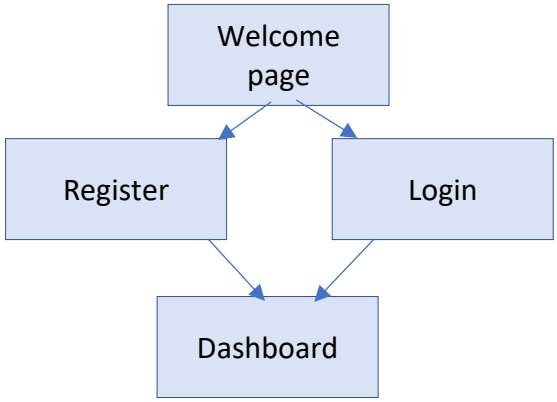
4) The new design should consider user journey and what is the first thing that every user who visits the site should see. Kiran's recommendation is 'less is more'; Ros says, 'Make it easy read'; Baljit says 'make it accessible to people who speak other languages'. Prioritise clarity and ease of use over aesthetic (Please see appendix 1 for our recommended designs).
5) Adding a breadcrumb navigation would greatly improve the existing website. Users should be able to always know where they are and have freedom to move easily from any page to another.

6) Finally, home page was very long and required a lot of scrolling. We recommend adding ‘Anchor Links’ on the top of any page that is long, to help users quickly access the content without scrolling and looking for specific information.

1.3 Understanding

Currently, the Aspire Champions Website was found not easy to understand by people with a learning disability.
Our recommendations to make the website easier to understand are:

- Use easier text – one idea per paragraph
- Support your idea with an image or a picture to aid understanding. For images we recommend using PhotoSymbols because these are recognised standard set of images that people with a learning disability are familiar with.
- Break down the aspire website into sections to aid understanding of the website purpose and the target audience. Starting with a simple welcome page that explains the ‘About’ – who is the website for, who are aspire champions and what is the function of the website. A real picture of our Aspire Champions is recommended – perhaps with a quote why it is good to be a champion. We recommend the following architecture:



- Consistency – finally our final recommendation for aiding understanding of the Aspire Champions Network website is to keep pages layout, design, feel and look consistent.

References

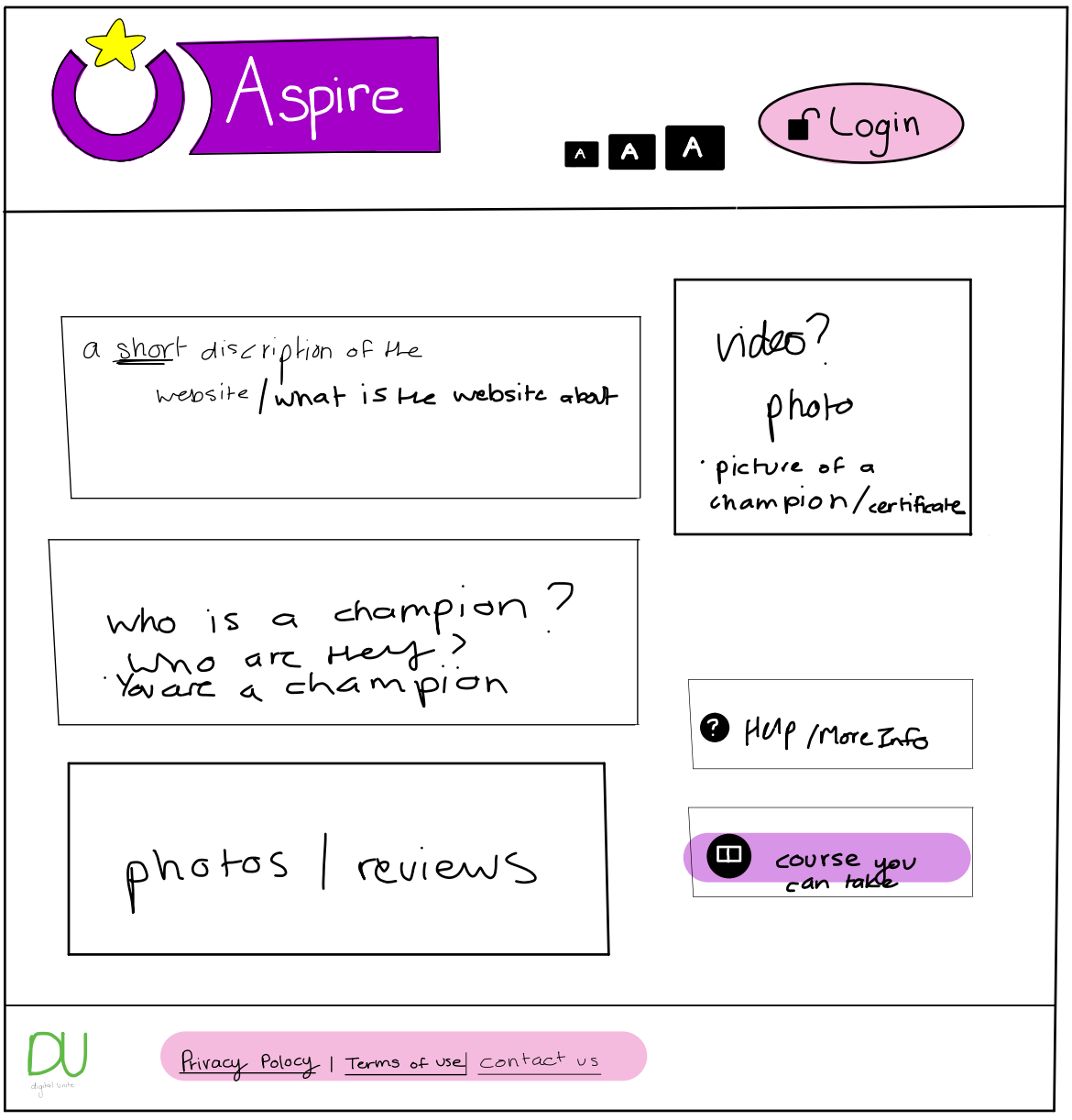
Aspire project Wiki - https://www.rixwiki.org/rix/home/aspire (Last accessed 10/3/22)
Heuristics Evaluations – Available from: https://www.merixstudio.com/blog/heuristic-evaluation/ (Last accessed 10/3/22)

Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.1
https://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG21/

Techniques for WCAG 2.1
https://www.w3.org/WAI/WCAG21/Techniques/

Appendix 1

Start page


Aspire
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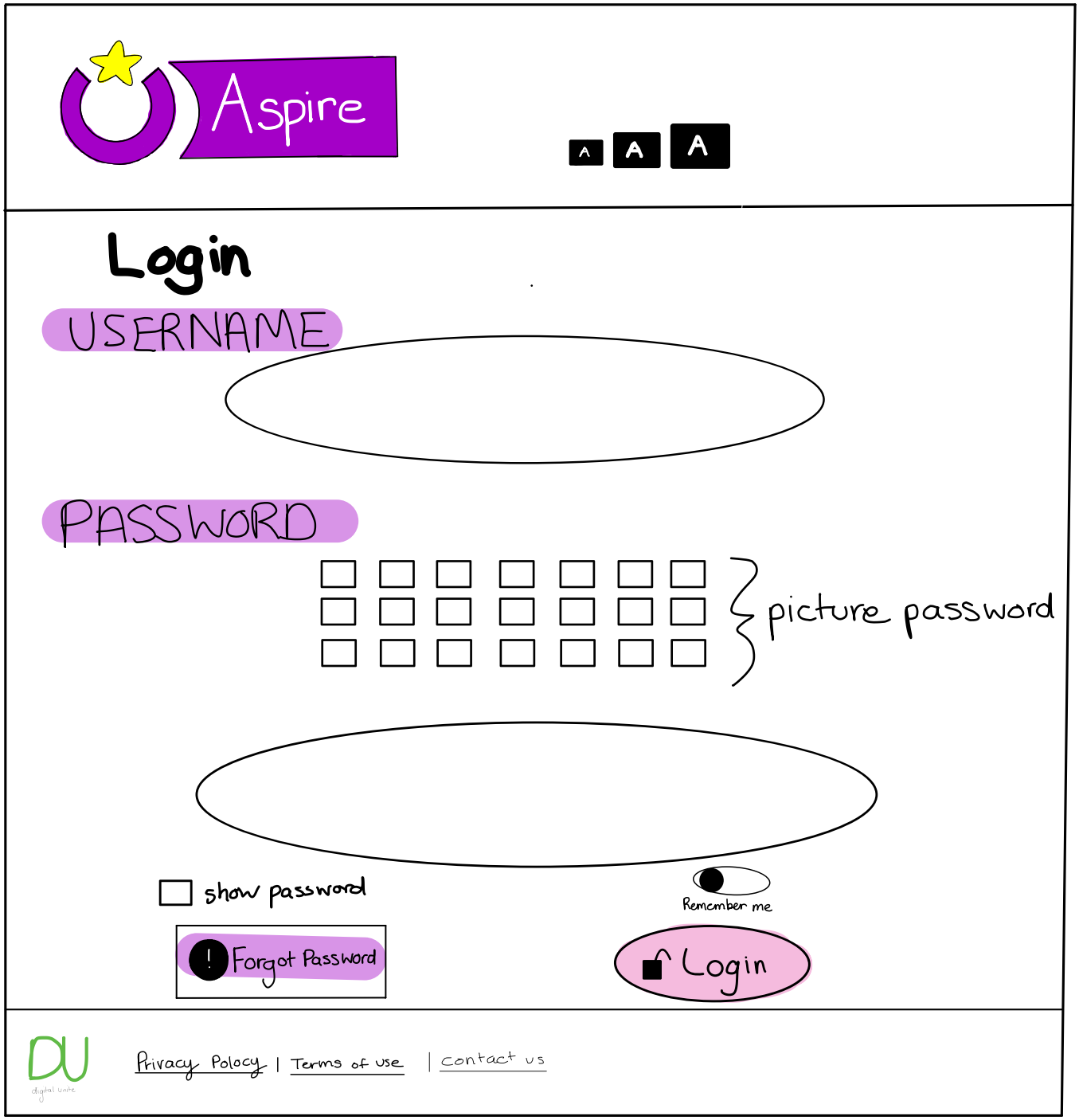
Login
a short discription of the website / what is the website about
video?
photo
· picture of a champion / certificate
who is a champion ?
Who are they?
· You are a champion
Help / More Info
photos | reviews
course you can take
Privacy Policy | Terms of use | contact us

Login Page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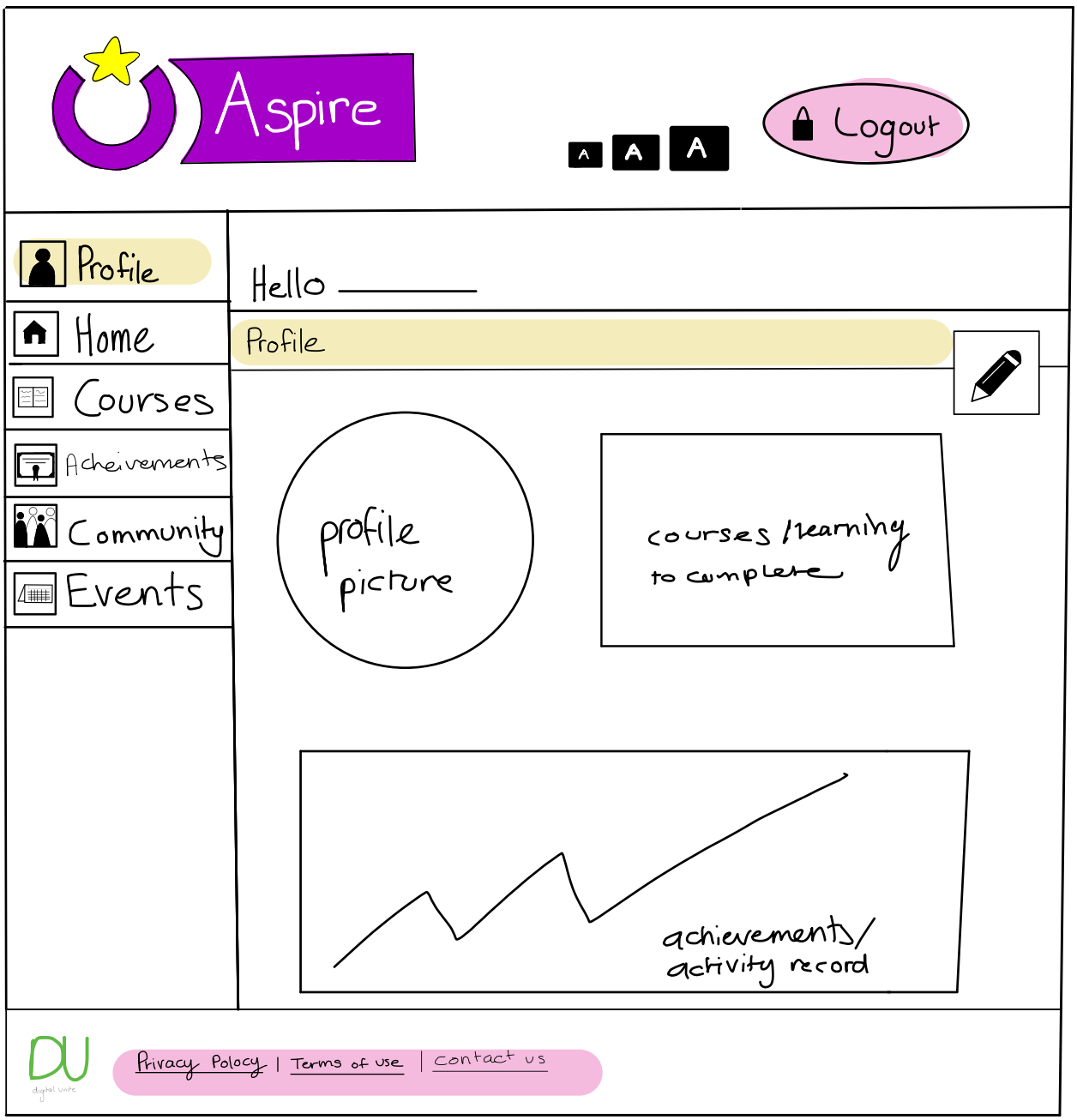
Profile Page



Home

Aspire
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Profile
Home
Courses
Acheivements
Community
Events
Information
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Home
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· who is a champion
· defintion of aspire
testamonials
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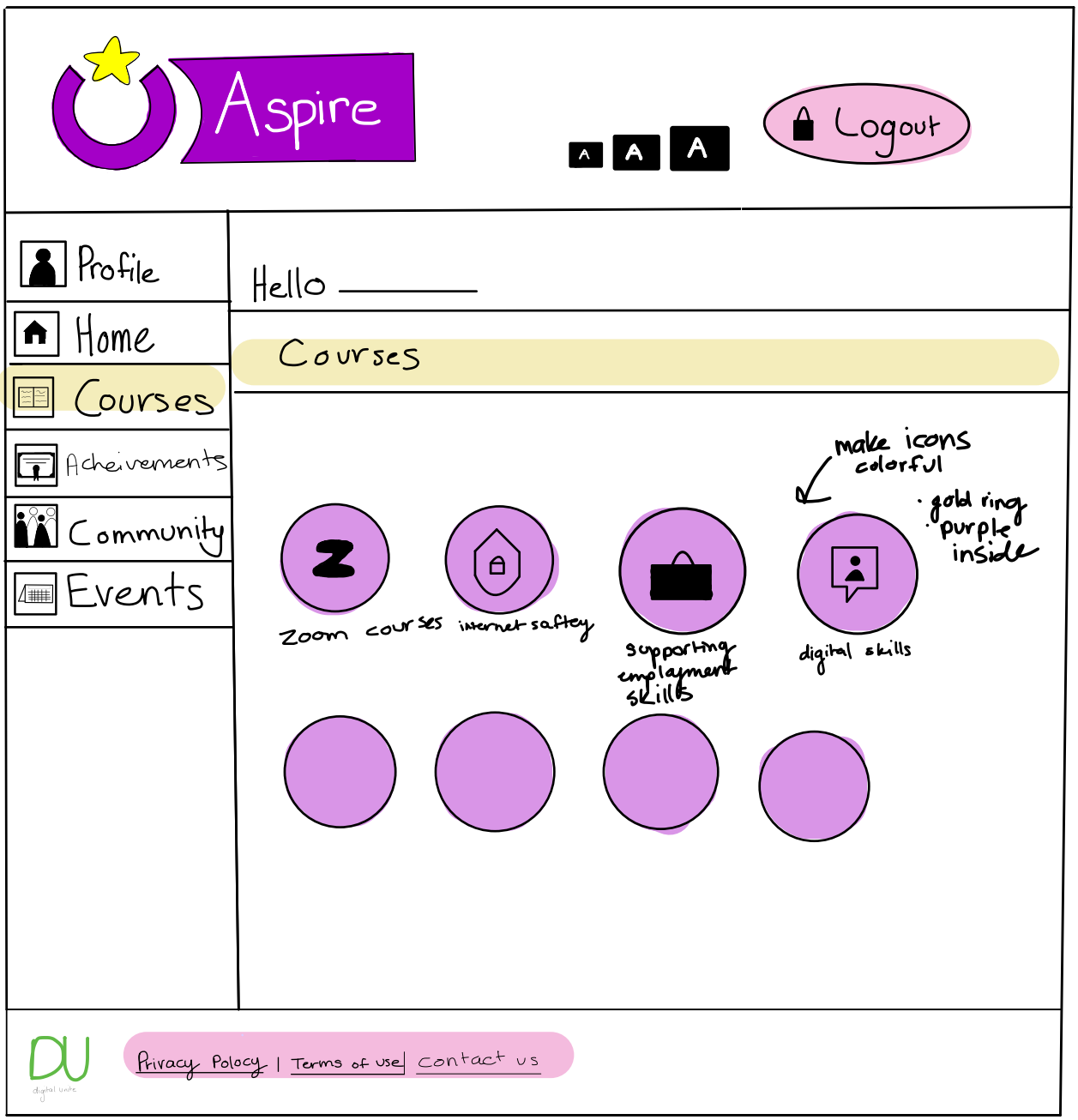
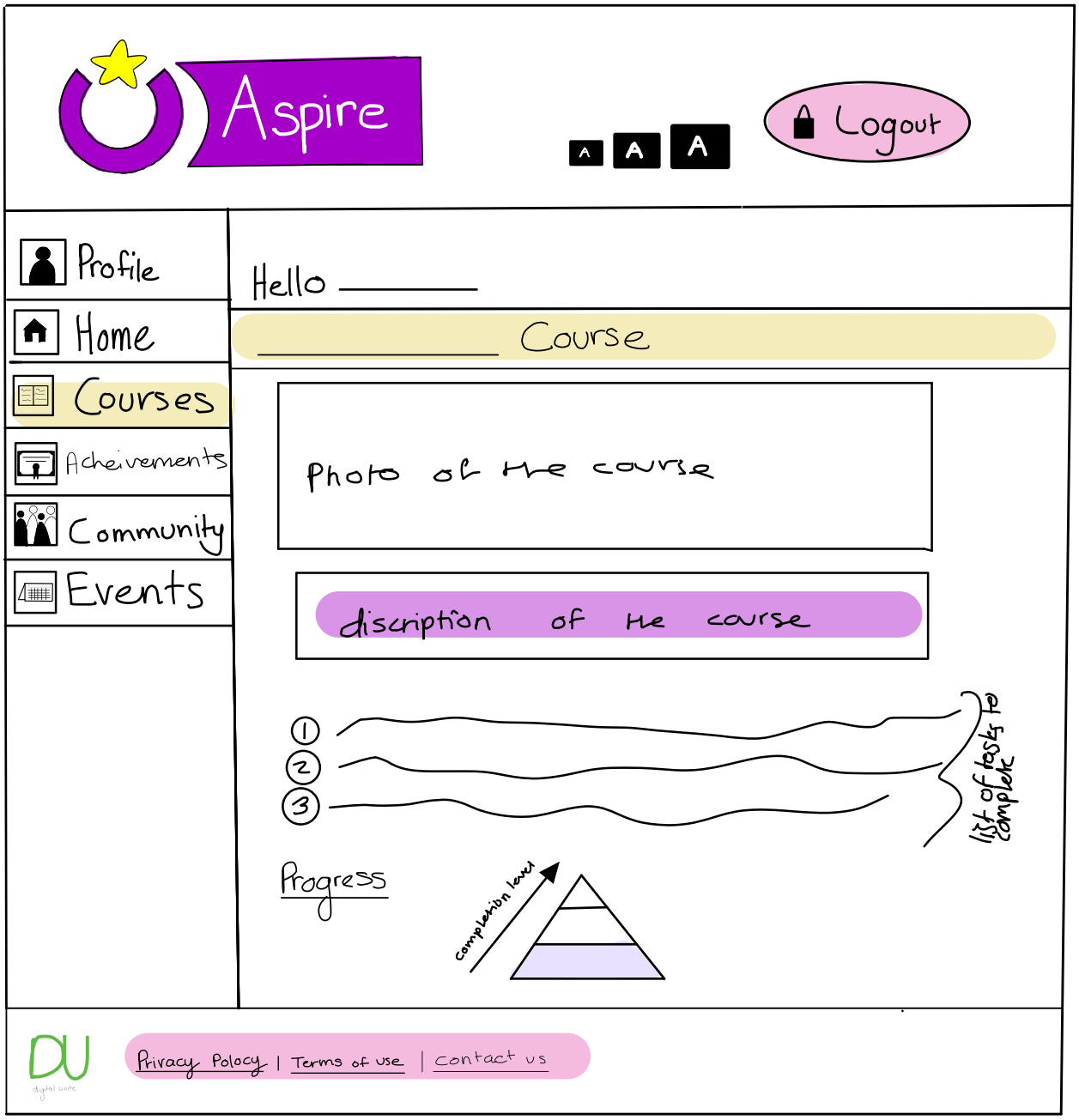
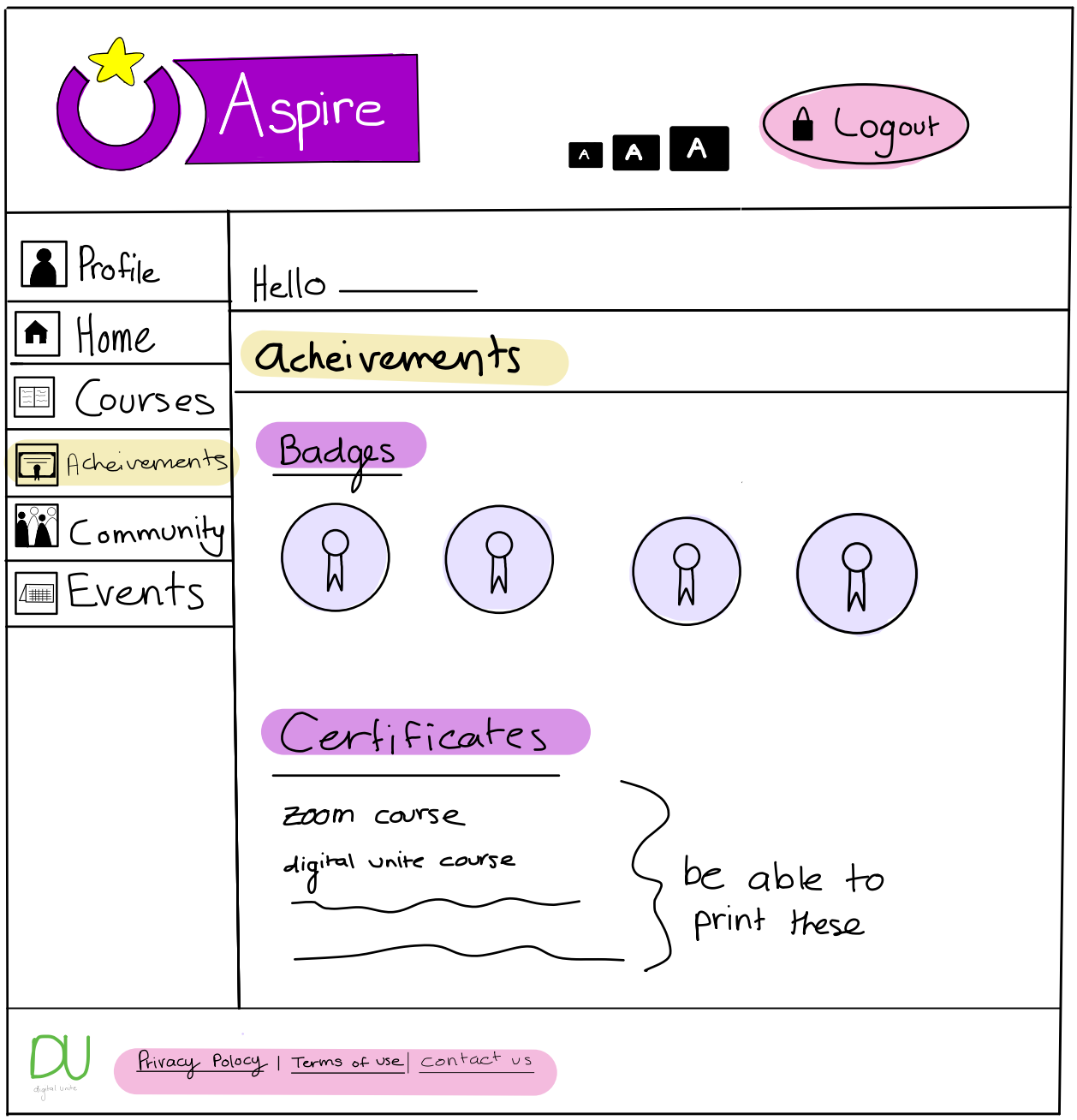
courses page



specific course page

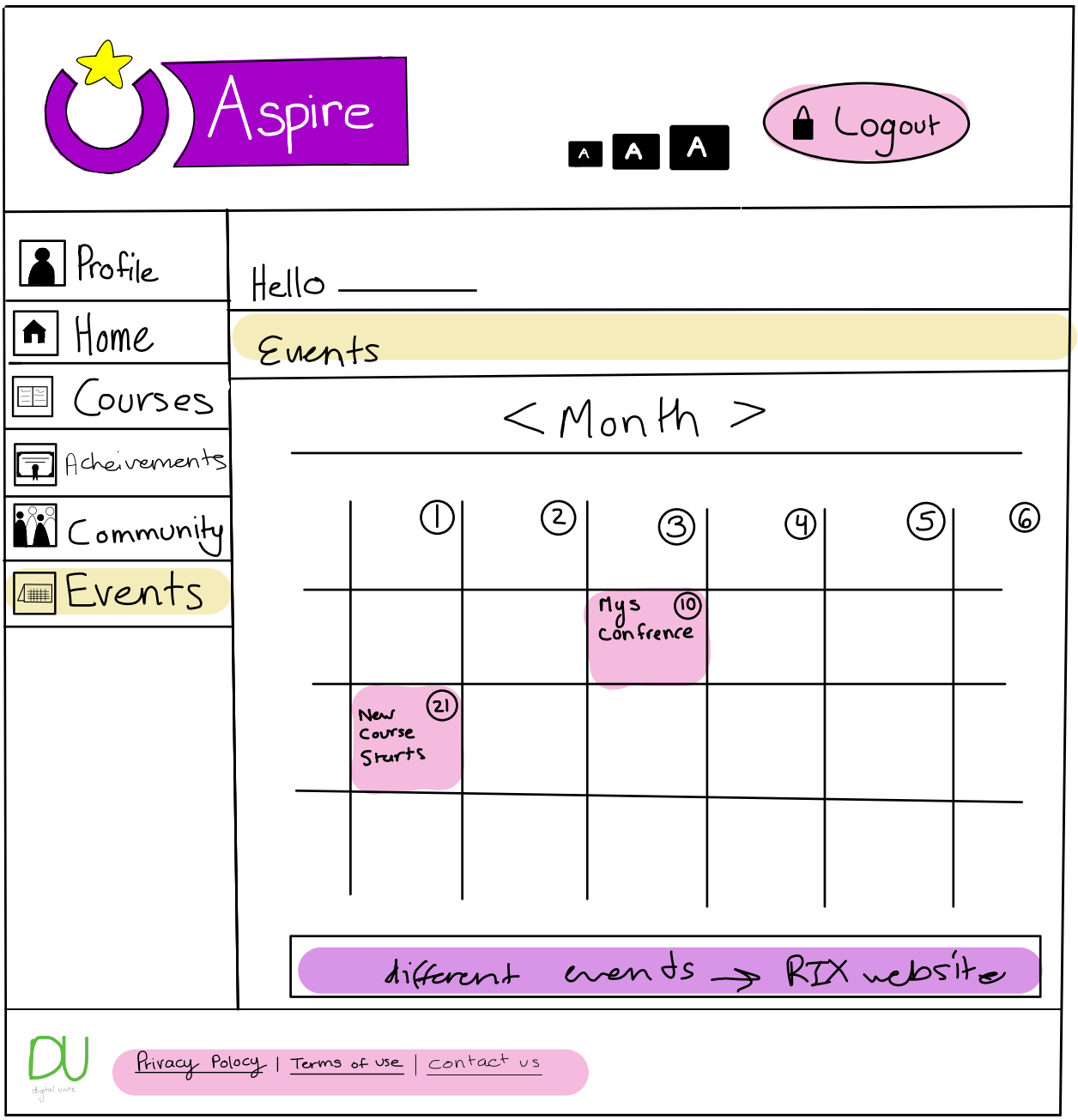


achievements



Community Page

Events page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