

Interdisciplinary Case Study

intro page.



The NSW Department of Education had around 50 websites. Most of them repeated content, contradicted each other, and had that classic “decrepit government website” energy. Broken links, bloated menus, and confusing discrepancies meant parents didn’t really use them. Norm Oblepias and the team were handed the joyful task of bringing all of these services under one clear, coherent roof.

This wasn’t a small job, but it was one that was a good fit for UX designers. Beyond Norm and his crew of designers, the project needed a whole web of collaborators: content strategists, info architects, education policy people, government comms folks—you name it. And while staff were the main users at the time (confirmed by traffic data plummeting during school holidays), the goal was to make the site actually work for parents and teachers, not just internal staff. A rare and noble aim.

UX design was the backbone of the whole thing. The team leaned into the core principles: structure, clarity, and empathy. This was back in the pre-Figma era, so they used Balsamiq for prototyping, worked from parent/teacher personas, and ran card sorting exercises to untangle the chaos. All the usual UX suspects, used in a very non-usual context.

And that’s what made it interesting, UX wasn’t being used to increase conversions or sell something. It was being used to fix a messy government system and make it make sense for actual people. As Norm put it:

“We conducted guerrilla research through phone interviews with parents to test our hunch. We asked them about what kind of information they were seeking regarding their children. Where did they look on the DoE website to look for such information?”

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BCI100 (N04723)
Trimester 2 HE, 2025

Denby Serrao-Arnot
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case study.

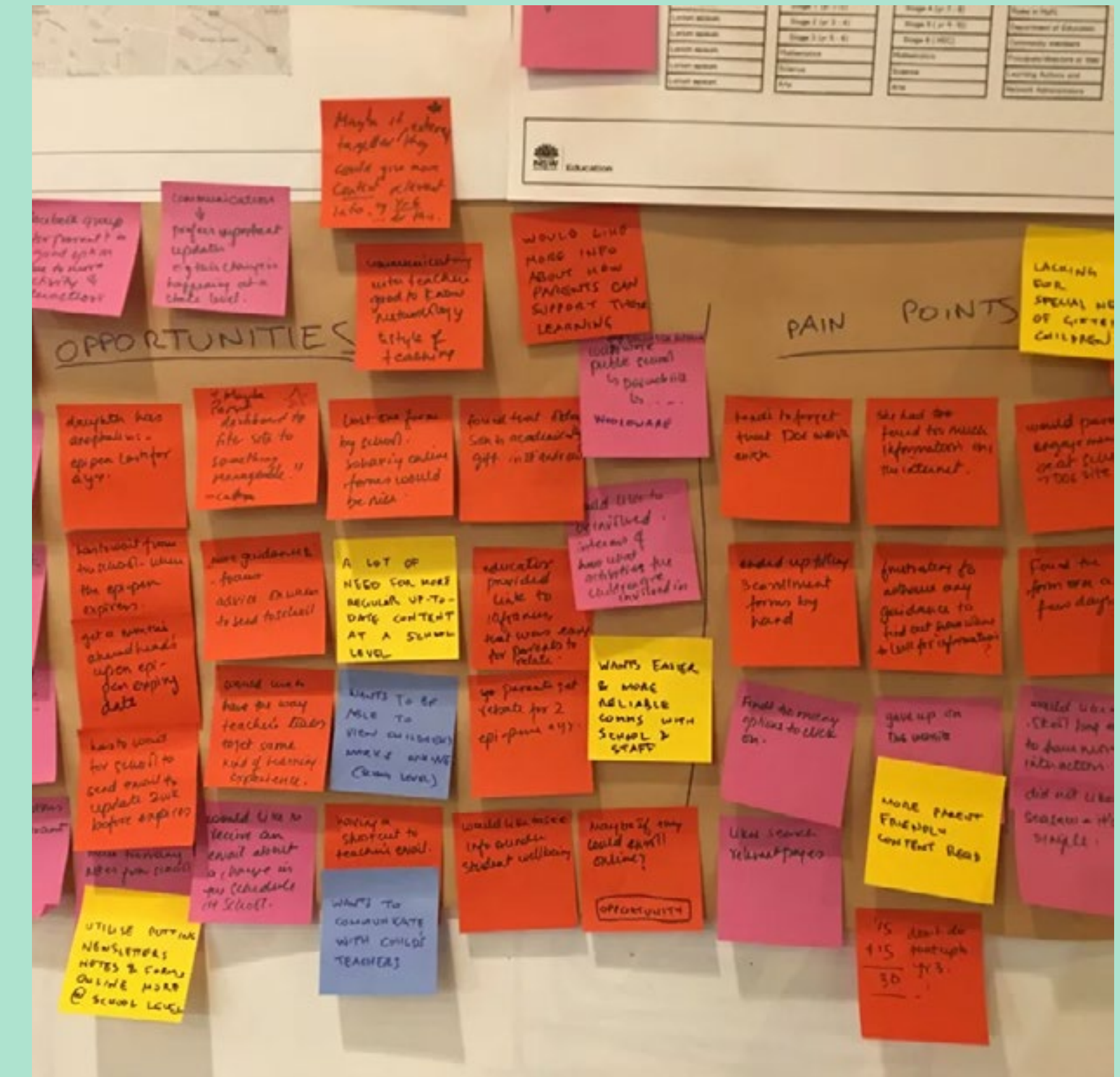
The answer? They didn't. Parents were getting their info from individual school sites, newsletters sent home in backpacks, or other parents. The Department's main site was too hard to navigate and written in internal jargon (like "Stage 2" instead of "Year 4")-language that made sense to staff but alienated to parents.

The brief was pretty clear: rebuild the IA from the ground up with a “child-first” mindset and make the site work for parents and teachers. The team split in two: two focused on teachers, while Norm and Nazia focused on parents. They reviewed over 300 pages of DoE research, ran interviews, pulled in competitive analysis from other state education sites, and then built out the new IA structure. They also tested it with actual parents, co-designing the navigation through closed card sorting.

The result was a validated prototype for a dedicated “Parent Hub,” grouping the most common tasks—like finding a school, understanding the curriculum, and preparing for transitions, into one clear section. Instead of asking parents to learn department language, the site met them where they were.

The client was stoked. She said she could use the research and testing results to build out a roadmap, and finally saw a way forward for making the site actually helpful. Which would've been enough on its own—but the story doesn't stop there.

Just two years later, NSW launched the OneCX Program: a massive digital transformation initiative aimed at consolidating over 500 separate government websites into one unified platform: nsw.gov.au. It was a direct evolution of the thinking behind this project. Same logic: consolidate the chaos, structure it around user needs, and bring clarity to the public. You can draw a straight line from the DoE redesign to this whole-of-government digital rethink, it was the prototype before the prototype. What started as a small UX intervention snowballed into a statewide shift in how digital government services are planned, structured, and delivered. The ripple effect? Real people spending less time digging and more time doing.



OPPORTUNITIES & PAIN POINTS RESEARCH



"I would love to take a look at the school's calendar for key dates, so I know when enrolment begins or when Orientation week is on"

Meet Sarah Ingle

Parent with daughter going into high school.



NAME:

Sarah Ingle

AGE: 37

LOCATION:

Five Dock

PERSONA CREATED & USED DURING RESEARCH



"Communication is the key. We are all busy people and don't always get the chance to get to the school to speak with the Principal or teachers."

Meet Patrick Taylor

Two children studying at different schools



NAME:

Patrick Taylor

AGE: 39

LOCATION:

Gosford

ANOTHER PERSONA CREATED & USED DURING RESEARCH



CREATING A NEW STRUCTURE FOR THE WEBSITE INFORMED BY UX

What are alpha and beta?

You might have heard the terms 'alpha' or 'beta' in relation to software development:

In software, alpha is the stage where developers experiment with their ideas. They figure out what works and what doesn't so that they can move forward to beta with a solid understanding of what their users need.

We're taking a similar approach with the [Global Experience Framework](#).

What is alpha?

In alpha, we:

- deliver the minimum, focusing on information over everything else
- continue to learn what our users need
- refine our understanding of what our business units need
- work out how to balance those needs
- experiment to see what works
- learn and adapt so we can move towards beta.

What is beta?

Once we've learned and adapted from the alpha stage, we can then move on to beta. The beta stage is much closer to the ideal state.

During the beta stage, we:

- deliver similar functionality to the site or section we're replacing
- test how well specific functions are working
- learn and adapt so we can move towards the full release.

For a full explanation of the technical side of things, see the [Digital Transformation Office's Service Handbook](#) [📖](#)

Introducing GEF

What are alpha and beta?

education.nsw.gov.au IN 2019 ADVISING USERS OF UPCOMING CHANGES

So, was it an innovative use of UX? I'd say absolutely. This wasn't marketing. It wasn't product. It was service design at the system level. UX was used to make an institution usable, something it arguably hadn't been before.

It delivered a validated IA, a prototype tested with real parents, and gave the DoE something actionable. something they could actually build on. More than that, it showed what's possible when you treat government services like real-world user experiences, not internal filing cabinets with a URL.

Could it go further? Definitely. Future improvements could include deeper integration with school-level content, personalised dashboards for parents, or fully digital enrolment workflows. There's also room to expand co-design efforts to include multilingual households, rural families, and anyone else who's usually left out of "standard" user testing.

But as far as UX projects go, this one did the thing. It found the pain points, designed around them, and created a blueprint that not only helped the Department of Education- but arguably helped inspire a broader transformation across NSW Government.

Not bad for a few UX designers, a bunch of sticky notes and a fsome phone calls with parents.

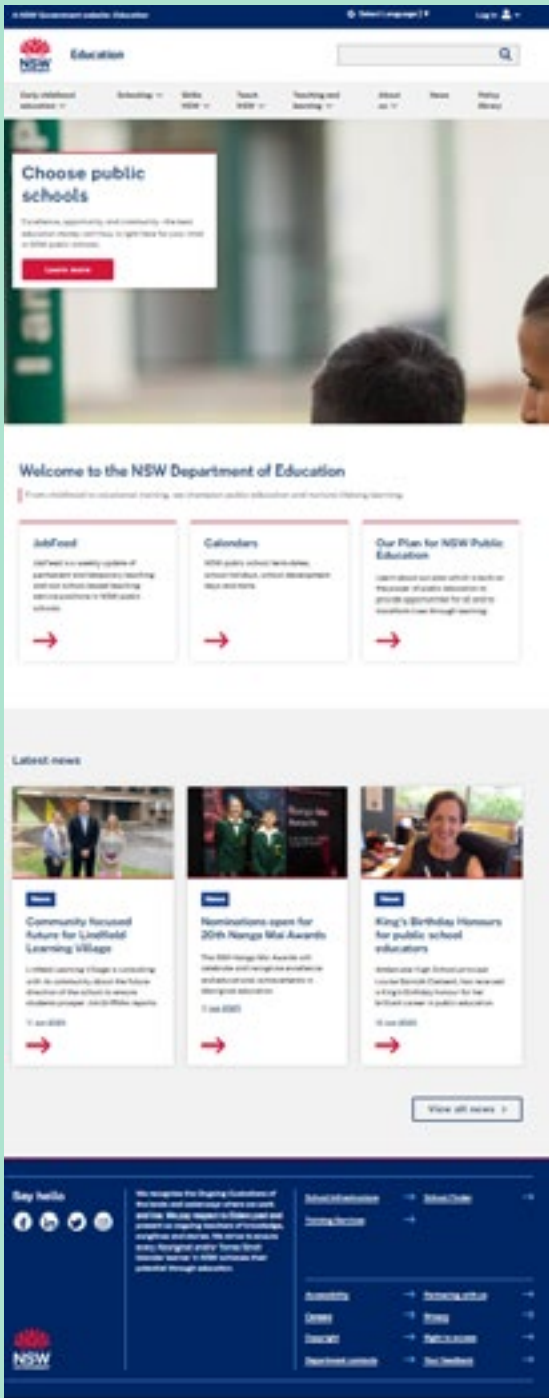
conclusion.

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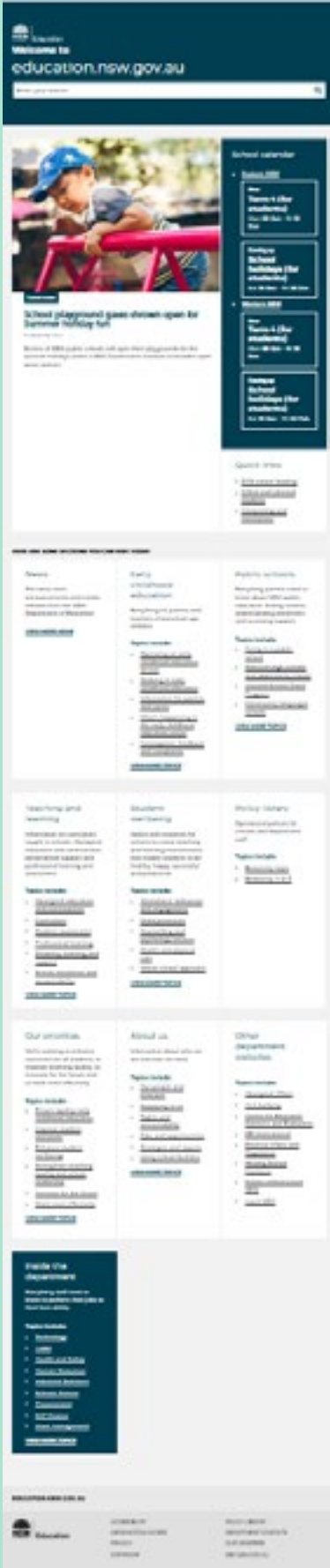
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Trimester 2 HE, 2025

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