

Portal Management Group

Notes of the meeting of 7th February 2005, 4D24, Bolland Library

Present: Barry Cawthorne (Chair), Rich Egan, Sid Baldwin, Kevin Foreman, Margaret Needles, Emma Taylor (Notes).

1. Apologies: Helen Cole, Katie Huthnance.

2. Minutes of the meeting of 17th January 2005

Approved.

3. Matters arising not elsewhere on the agenda

Kevin enquired about the progress made in securing engagement from HSC staff. Barry reported that there had been engagement in the pilot by Steve West, Kevin, and a small number of other staff, but that general engagement by teaching and administrative staff within the faculty had been sporadic rather than sustained. Barry stressed that engagement was crucial to ensure the success of the pilot, but noted that although consideration had been given to piloting in another faculty, it had been decided to proceed with the pilot within HSC to avoid alienating the staff who had engaged. Barry noted that anything Kevin could do to encourage further engagement within HSC would be valuable. The pilot was discussed further under Item 10 below.

4. Changes to Project Initiation Document

Rich reported that, following the Portal Project Board meeting of 17th December, he had made the following amendments to the PID:

- The project status has been updated following the decision to consult the CSA on requirements.
- A timeline has been mapped out, proposing a pilot launch date of 18th April 2005, when several cohorts of participating HSC students will be on campus.

The PID is now awaiting ratification by the Project Board.

5. Progress report

Sid circulated a summary document and described the progress to date in three areas:

Hardware.

Operating systems have been built on two production servers, and the configuration of the production database server is currently being checked by Database Assistants in IT Services. The CAS authentication server is ready to put in place for the pilot.

The Portal Application.

The completion of automated builds and testing will now allow more visible development work to be undertaken. A targeted push allows specific portal content to be delivered according to a user's login details. While elements of the portal layout may be customisable in the future, to allow effective administration and support of the system during the pilot, this feature will not be enabled.

Work will begin in the next two to three weeks to ensure that users can access ISIS channels such as change of address without the need for a second log-in. This will be achieved by the storage of LDAP login credentials in Cryptowallet, and this system could potentially be used to authenticate additional applications in the future. Sid hoped to achieve log-ins to the production portal in the next two weeks.

Outstanding work includes the integration of Apache and Tomcat to allow scalability and the handling of requests by multiple servers, the purchase of an SSL certificate for CAS server encryption, and the availability of grouping information.

Portal Channels.

Blackboard announcements, including 'My Announcements', 'My Courses' and 'My Organisations' will be made visible within the portal. To assist in the integration of Blackboard with the portal, one of the portal Java programmers has attended a Blackboard Building Blocks course.

Staff access to e-mail will be given via a link to the Outlook web client. The existing Webmail service will be used to provide access to e-mail by students. Rich noted that, as the pilot was of a student-facing portal, the emphasis in development was on accommodating student access to e-mail.

Access to exam results is given via an existing stand-alone application. The intention is to migrate this service to give a single point of access via the portal.

6. Status of group functionality and decision about inclusion in the pilot

Attempts are still being made to establish the best way of obtaining grouping information. LDAP does not currently contain all grouping information, but it is anticipated that this information will be included shortly. Sid noted that, while LDAP could provide information on the membership of groups, the system could not easily look up an individual's group membership. Rich reported that he had raised the need for a decision on the source of group information with Alistair Sandford, as this would inform the development of a staff-facing portal giving access to photographs of student groups.

7. Access to coursework marks

It was noted that access to grouping information would also affect the provision of module marks, as the intention had been to announce the availability of marks to groups of students within the portal. Barry queried whether announcements could be made to groups by other means, such as e-mail, or a general announcement to alert all portal users to the availability of marks. Rich noted that announcements could be made to students on a module run via a UWEonline course, which would be visible in the portal via the announcements channel. It was agreed that, while the unavailability of groups was not a show-stopper, this was a significant issue. Barry noted that the use of e-mail alerts would require engagement by administrative staff. Margaret suggested that a member of HSC administrative or programmes staff should attend PMG.

ACTION: Kevin to contact Jenny Wills to propose that Avicia Burchill attend future PMG meetings.

8. Ongoing requirements elicitation

Rich reported that he and Katie had held a workshop with eight student ambassadors from a range of faculties, which had been organised by Marketing. The requirements elicited by this workshop had matched those already identified, with Blackboard connectivity as the highest priority. Katie will be running further workshops with HSC student reps arranged by UWE Students' Union and with staff from the Centre for Student Affairs.

9. Current status of on-line re-enrolment

Margaret reported that the first meeting of the On-line Re-enrolment Project Board had been positive, and the PID is under development. The project has been divided into two phases: getting the ISIS record to EN; and payment. Margaret noted that

the management of payment was reliant on the development of finance systems. Finance has not yet recruited a Web Developer to undertake this work, but Steve Grive is aware of the resourcing issues involved. Margaret stated that a project priority was the inclusion of personal details in the online re-enrolment form. Rich requested information on the details required, and Margaret agreed to spec these in a meeting with Sue Porter. A pilot of online re-enrolment will take place with FAS in July 2005.

10. Final recommendation to Project Board regarding timing and nature of pilot

It was agreed that, to avoid alienating existing participants, the pilot would proceed within HSC, with a target launch date of 18th April. Sid confirmed that development work was currently on schedule. Barry stressed that the success of the pilot would be dependent on engagement of and use by academic and administrative staff and consequently, students, and anything Kevin could do to encourage support would be valuable.

ACTION: Kevin to request that the Portal Pilot be placed as a standing item on the agenda of meetings of the School of Allied Health Professions.

11. Date of next meeting

17th March 2005, 11:15 – 12:30

Room 5D19, Bolland Library, Frenchay Campus.

ACTION: Emma to arrange monthly meetings to July 2005.

12. Any other business

None.