Portal Management Group

Notes of the meeting of 26th May 2005, 4D24, Bolland Library

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

1. Apologies: Jenny Wills.

2. Minutes of the meeting of 25th April 2005
Approved with one correction to the final paragraph of Item 4.2:
"Funding is available to October 2006, at which point the decision will be made whether to develop a production *model* of the Portal."

3. Matters arising not elsewhere on the agenda
Rich gave an update on Item 4.1 of the previous minutes. 105 users have now activated their Portal accounts, and 38 feedback forms have been completed. Rich noted that the overall feedback received remained positive, particularly in relation to ease of use, and that all respondents had rated the portal as either 'Very easy' or 'Easy' to use. Barry sought suggestions from the group for ways of encouraging students to activate their portal accounts. Kevin offered to re-circulate a message to returning students. Rich confirmed that work to improve the speed of the module marks channel had been completed. Some usage statistics are now available, but Sawmill is not fully functional.
ACTION: Kevin to send an e-mail reminder to pilot students.

3.1. Scalability

3.1.1. Processes and implications identified from the pilot
Rich circulated a draft business implications document, containing advice on the potential impact of each portal channel on faculty processes. Rich confirmed that he would forward the document to Margaret for comments, and would upload the document to the myUWE support web site, where it would be maintained and updated to incorporate information on any new channels developed. Barry noted that this was useful work.

3.1.2. Demonstration to Faculty Administrators
Rich reported that FASG had declined his offer of a demonstration of the portal and awareness raising of its potential impact on faculty business systems. The group expressed their surprise at this refusal and Leon suggested that Deans may be contacted individually. Rich noted that, while he was reluctant to push the portal on people, it would be necessary to insist that any faculties deploying the portal should attend a demonstration. Barry expressed his disappointment but advised that, as the faculties involved in the next phase of the pilot (HSC, BBS and FAS) had received or will receive demonstrations, further awareness-raising could be left until early in the next academic year.

3.1.3. Timetable channel
Leon and Karen's paper on timetabling requirements was circulated. The document compared the existing timetabling procedures within each faculty with the requirements for the portal, and identified those faculties which would currently be unable to utilise the timetable channel. Barry proposed that faculties be advised that, unless their timetabling data is in the required form, they will not be able to use this channel. Barry also proposed that this

approach should be extended to existing and future channels. The group agreed with Barry's proposal.

Rich noted that the current fix which has been applied to allow HSC to use the timetable channel is not scalable, and that he has advised Jenny Wills of the changes to HSC's timetabling data required to allow the faculty to use the channel beyond the current pilot.

3.1.4. Groups

Rich reported that a large number of groups had been identified, and that he and Sid had met the Database Administrators in IT Services to discuss data structures. Rich noted that a firmer specification was required of the ways in which groups may be used, for example, with announcements. Barry, Margaret and Katie are meeting on 9th June to agree the first tranche of groups and announcements to be developed.

4. Update on re-enrolment project

Margaret confirmed that Phase 1 of the re-enrolment channel has been specified, and is on target for delivery in July 2005. Margaret has met with faculty administrative staff in FAS to develop working practices, and will provide Sid with a list of students for inclusion in the existing table of pilot users. Margaret noted that there was a lack of knowledge of Finance's plans for an online payment system and that she has scheduled a meeting with Finance in order to address this uncertainty.

Margaret reported that Steve West's proposal to absorb the Re-enrolment Project Board into the Portal Project Board will be considered at the Re-enrolment Project Board meeting of 8th June. Barry noted that the Directorate had initially requested that the two projects be run separately, but that this had become untenable due to the expectation of the Re-Enrolment Project Board that Phase 2 of the project would be a production system. This expectation had conflicted with the pilot nature of the portal, and the possible end of Portal Project funding in October 2006, when the delivery of a production re-enrolment system through the portal had been planned.

Sid reported that he had attended a meeting between Finance and a potential supplier of a web-enabled payment system, which appeared to offer a viable solution. Helen and Rich confirmed that this system was used by a number of universities.

5. Announcement in the Bulletin

Barry circulated an announcement for the June bulletin, which includes information on the Online Re-enrolment and Student Photosets Projects.

6. Project plan for June 2005 – September 2006

Barry requested that the end date of the plan be amended from September to July 2006, and that evaluation be included.

6.1. Release of pilot to wider range of faculties

Barry noted that it is currently undecided whether the pilot should be extended within HSC, or to other faculties.

6.2. Group functionality

Discussed under item 3.1.4 above.

6.3. Announcements channel

Dependent on group functionality.

6.4. Electronic submission of coursework
Planned to be delivered through the portal in the next few months.

6.5. Phase 2 of re-enrolment of returning students
Barry noted that the issue of whether Phase 2 should be delivered as a production system remained unresolved. In response to a query by Kevin whether HSC would be included in Phase 2 of the Re-enrolment Project, Barry confirmed that Phase 2 participants were currently unknown.

6.6. Pilot staff portal to allow academic staff to print out lists of seminar/tutorial groups with student photographs
Rich confirmed that the pilot staff portal was currently on schedule for delivery in September 2005. Barry confirmed that this pilot will be delivered through BBS, and that Jane Harrington has provided a list of suitable modules, which has been sent to Rich. Barry noted that, although it had initially been intended to exclude large modules, the need for modules from each year had made it necessary to include one large compulsory Year 1 module. Barry reassured the group that this module is led by Sarah Mackie, who is an experienced user of UWEonline and other technologies. Rich and Barry are meeting Jane and Sarah to discuss the announcement of the pilot to participating module leaders and to arrange a date for a demonstration. Rich reported that there had been progress on the integration of grouping data and Syllabus Plus, but Barry noted that confirmation was still required from CETTS that the correct staff have been associated. It was noted that the currency of the photo data remained an outstanding issue. Currently, photos are delivered to Helen on a CD on a monthly basis, but Helen has received assurances from Chris Abbott that House Services are working to improve the delivery of data. Barry stressed the need for refreshed data.

ACTION: Rich to produce a high-level plan, including evaluation, by the PMG meeting of 27th June if possible.

7. Date of next meeting
27 June 2005 from 11:00 to 12:15 in room 4D24.

8. Any other business

8.1. Scientia student allocator
Leon reported that the first part of the student allocator product would be available for beta testing in August 2005, and would allow students to amend their own timetables. Leon noted the need to consider how this may be delivered as a pilot channel. Sid noted that there was a risk in developing new projects for delivery within the pilot portal system, and stressed that any projects which are developed with the possibility of stand-alone delivery have a development overhead. Rich expressed agreement with Sid's statement.
ACTIONS:
- **Barry to take to the Portal Project Board.**
- **Leon to demo the student allocator at the PMG meeting of 27th June.**