

Portal Management Group

Notes of the meeting of 5th September 2005, Room FC78

Present: Barry Cawthorne (Chair), Jenny Wills, Margaret Needles, Rich Egan, Sid Baldwin, Mike Garnier, Helen Cole, Emma Taylor (Notes).

1. Apologies: Kevin Foreman, Leon Smith, Karen West

2. Membership

Barry informed the group that, following Leon Smith's resignation, Karen West had agreed to take Leon's place on the group. Barry offered thanks to Leon for his contribution to the group.

Barry proposed that, as discussed under item 8 of the meeting of 27th June, PMG representatives from FAS and BBS were needed. Barry also noted that Kevin Foreman was now Acting Dean within HSC, and had sent apologies for the September, October and November meetings. It was agreed that Jenny should act as HSC representative and that representatives from FAS and BBS should be sought when the scope of the roll-out in 2005-2006 becomes clearer.

3. Minutes of the meeting of 27th June 2005

Approved.

4. Matters arising not elsewhere on the agenda

4.1. Student allocator

Barry enquired about the status of the student allocator and the PID as discussed under Item 4 of the meeting of 27th June.

ACTION: Barry to request an update of the status of the student allocator and PID from Leon and Karen.

4.2. Evaluation prize draw

The prize draw took place on 6th July. Barry requested confirmation that the £100 book token prize had been sent to the winning student.

ACTION: Rich to establish when the prize has been/will be sent to the winner

5. Student photosets

5.1. Feedback from academic staff and Students' Union

Barry reported that he had consulted both the Students' Union and BBS academic staff on their preference for the information displayed on student photosets. The Students' Union had expressed a clear preference for student names only to be visible, rather than both name and number. Most BBS academics had also agreed that names only should be visible. Barry sought formally to record this decision and noted that the Project Board had given a clear steer that if there was any sensitivity over the information displayed on photosets, the student name only should be displayed.

5.2. Update on BBS pilot

Rich noted that student photo data had not been available until 1st September, the target date initially given in the High Level Plan. Sid confirmed that a working prototype of student photosets, which complied with requirements, was now available on the development server, and that he would be seeking to demonstrate the student photos tab to BBS staff on 14th September.

Sid demonstrated the photos tab, through which student photographs are displayed. The photographs are displayed with the students' second name and first name, and are sorted alphabetically by second name. In order to ensure security, student numbers are encrypted and direct access by URL is prevented. Sid reported that the photo data database was now fully populated and Helen confirmed that automation of updates was in progress.

Sid confirmed that automation of staff group¹ membership was in hand, and sought advice from the PMG whether dynamic groups or a static set of users should be used to determine access. Sid drew the PMG's attention to the following implications:

- if access to the Portal is maintained for tutors regardless of staff group membership, any tutors who lose staff group membership will lose access to the student photos tab, but will retain access to the Portal;
- if access to the Portal is allowed only to staff group members, any tutors who lose staff group membership will lose access to the Portal entirely.

It was agreed that dynamic staff groups should be used and that:

- tutors newly-allocated to student groups² in the Portal pilot would gain access to the Portal and student photos tab via a feed from Syllabus Plus;
- tutors allocated to student groups in the Portal pilot but subsequently removed should lose access to the student photos tab, but retain access to the Portal.

In response to a concern raised by Sid about support requirements, Barry noted that the timetable was normally dynamic for the first two or three weeks of term, and anticipated that the bulk of the support calls would be confined to this time. Helen suggested that FAQs be created for staff, advising them to check their group membership in Syllabus Plus if they lose access to the student photos tab.

Sid demonstrated the photosets channel to the group and noted that optimisation of the tab's performance was being undertaken, and that a staff version of the welcome screen would be required, incorporating information about the photos tab. The tab gives staff group members a view of student groups with a membership greater than zero. These student groups are shown in a drop-down menu with a concatenation of the module code and group code. Sid confirmed that the number of students in each student group would also be appended. When a student group is selected, the photoset view shows the student group title, code, total membership and fifteen student photographs per screen. In answer to a query by Barry, Sid confirmed that a 'show all' option was available, and that 20 photos were visible on each sheet when printed. Barry thanked Sid for his demonstration.

It was confirmed that:

- If no students are in a tutor's student groups, they will see the photos tab, but will not see any student groups in the drop-down menu.
- If a tutor is not attached to any student groups, they will not see the photos tab.

Barry suggested that, for future guidance, it would be valuable to obtain feedback from staff on their first use of the photos tab and the accuracy and completion of the data obtained. Sid noted that this would require the development of a new feedback channel for staff. Rich suggested that this data could be collected by means other than a channel. Sid noted that BBS contact information was

¹ Meaning the group of staff attached to student groups within syllabus plus in the pilot BBS modules

² Meaning a group of students within syllabus plus in the pilot BBS modules

required for the support pages for the tab. Margaret noted that BBS timetabling was managed by CETTS, so Karen West may be able to provide support information.

ACTION:

Margaret to contact Karen West for details of what support information should be supplied and pass this to Emma for incorporation into new support web pages.

Rich to draft a feedback response form

6. Report on Phase 1 of online re-enrolment

Margaret circulated a report on Phase 1 of the project, and thanked Rich, Sid, Helen and FAS administrative staff for their contributions. Barry congratulated all involved and asked Margaret to pass on thanks from the group to administrative staff in FAS. Barry noted that online re-enrolment had been released early with few snags and that, despite a relatively low-key launch, there had been a good take up.

Margaret noted that there was now an issue of whether/how to extend access to the Portal to all FAS students and, if access were extended, whether this would include the My Marks and My Details tabs. Rich noted that this would be dependent on the ability of FAS to support marks and address maintenance. Barry confirmed that he and Rich would review their response following investigations with FAS. Sid noted that extension of the pilot to FAS students would represent a substantial shift in the High Level Plan.

7. Progress with Portal High Level Plan June 05- Sep 06

Rich confirmed that Phase 3 of the project was on target for the start of term. Rich stressed that Phase 4 represented the greatest challenge, and that business analysis would play a key part in this phase. Helen confirmed that Mike Garnier would replace Katie Huthnance in this role.

8. Evaluation

Barry confirmed that emerging major issues were becoming clearer and included business and administrative implications, and the support which faculties need to put in place. Barry stressed that consistency of use of related systems was critical.

Barry noted that, as the Portal was an in-house system, a different type of evaluation to that undertaken for Blackboard would be required. The primary purpose of any evaluation of the Portal would be to inform strategic decisions relating to its future direction and resourcing. Barry confirmed that evaluation of the business case, user experience and lessons learned could be written up, but that two steers would be required from the Portal Project Board if a report was to be written by December 2005:

- i) The type of resource envelope, and what could be achieved with the available resources.
- ii) A steer from Steve Grive on whether longer term development should make use of uPortal or a supported product.

9. Strategic direction of timetabling and impact on the portal

Barry confirmed that he had spoken to Karen West and would keep a watching brief on this issue. He re-stressed the need for consistent use of component systems. Jenny raised concerns over timetabling and its effect on student photosets, as HSC uses Syllabus Plus as a class allocator rather than as a timetabler, and had commissioned a project manager to conduct an administrative review. However, Barry confirmed that the decision, previously taken, that the timetable channel would only be made available to faculties timetabling at the student level still stood.

10. Dates of next meetings

17th October 2005, 11:00-12:15, Room FC78

28th November 2005, 11:00-12:15, Room 4D24

11. Any other business

None.