Portal Management Group

Notes of the meeting of 28th November 2005, Room 4D24

Present: Barry Cawthorne (Chair), Margaret Needles, Rich Egan, Mike Garnier, Nick Coates (in attendance), Sid Baldwin, Karen West, Emma Taylor (notes).

1. **Apologies:** Kevin Foreman, Helen Cole.

2. **Minutes of the meeting of 17th October 2005**
Approved.

3. **Matters arising not elsewhere on the agenda**

   3.1. Phase 2 of the re-enrolment channel
   Barry reported that he had received confirmation from Steve West at the last meeting of the new IS Project Co-ordination Group, that Phase 2 of the Re-enrolment project is as according to the PID. Margaret noted that her expectation was that only students who had enrolled online would be able to pay their tuition fees online. Sid confirmed that an off-site third party system would be used for fee payment, and that users would be channelled to this hosted web site via the portal. Margaret and Rich are meeting to discuss online payments on 8th December.

   3.2. Transition from pilot to production level system
   Barry reported that he and Rich had met with Steve West and Steve Grive to discuss the development of a production portal system, and that he and Rich had worked on a proposal for a production system to be rolled out in the 2006/07 academic year. The proposal will be taken to the IS Project Co-ordination Group on 2nd December, to the Portal Project Board on 7th December, and will then be circulated to PMG. Barry stressed that he and Rich considered a number of items in the proposal to be predicates and not negotiable, including the need for the CPE to sign up to a position of consistent use of the systems on which the portal draws.

   Sid reported that he had received advice from staff at Edinburgh University at a recent visit. Edinburgh's portal had been released at a single point in time across the entire University and had been inundated with accesses when it was first launched, causing databases to lock, and Sid had been advised that a progressive rollout may avoid similar problems. Rich confirmed that LSE had also experienced similar problems with their institution-wide portal launch. However, Rich noted that there would already be approximately 4,000 users in the myUWE Portal before it goes fully live.

4. **Update on student photosets channel**
Rich circulated data on usage of the photosets channel and confirmed that a session represented a single entry into the portal to use the channel, and that multiple photosets could potentially be retrieved in one session. Rich noted that there had been a distinct tailing off in the number of sessions, with 49 recorded in September, 46 in October, and 12 in November (to date). There were 19 discrete users of the channel, with a small number of heavy users, and there had been only one use of the feedback channel to comment on the feature. In response to a query by Karen, Rich confirmed that the original group of 39 users was unchanged, and that the channel had been promoted. Barry expressed surprise at the low level of uptake. Rich noted

that it was unfortunate that the majority of staff in the photosets pilot were Visiting Lecturers.

5. Further release of pilot functionality
Rich reported that, between 3rd August and 1st November, there had been approximately 2,500 logins to the portal. Rich noted that a solution had been implemented to address a problem with UWEonline access, which had occurred when UWE's Blackboard installation was upgraded. Sid confirmed that portal users could now access the balanced Blackboard environment, rather than a single server.

5.1. FAS undergraduate students
Rich reported that the portal had been released to all FAS undergraduates on 19th October, bringing in over 1,700 users in addition to the existing 837 HSC students and 39 BBS staff.

5.2. BBS undergraduate students
Rich reported the intention to release the portal to BBS Undergraduates during December 2005, which would re-introduce the timetable channel and add an additional 2,300 users. Rich noted that Sarah Mackie, Jane Harrington and Sharon Bohin had been very enthusiastic, and a flyer had been placed in all staff pigeonholes asking them to promote the portal to students. Margaret confirmed that a demo for BBS academic and administrative staff was planned. Rich noted that BBS considered the facility to issue announcements to seminar groups to be a priority, but had expressed concern for students of other faculties taking BBS modules, who may not have access to the portal.

6. Announcements channel
Sid demonstrated the announcements channel, which he has written as a stand-alone application.   Sid reported that, within the last week, error checking had been added, the portal channel was being implemented, and a sample feed provided by Bryan Mitchell had been integrated. Further work is now being undertaken on the feed and Rich confirmed that, subject to discussion with Sid, it was hoped to roll out the channel at approximately the same time as the launch to BBS.

Sid demonstrated the functionality of the channel, in which portal users can view announcements made to the groups to which they belong. Announcements contain a small piece of text and possibly a link to further content. Staff entitled to publish announcements can also access a link to add/edit announcements and anyone with publishing rights to a group can edit and/or delete any announcements posted to that group. Attachment to a module run will cause staff to inherit publishing rights to all tutorial groups in that run. Sid noted that, following advice received from portal developers at Edinburgh, a default limit of 1 month had been set for the availability of announcements. Margaret enquired about limits on the size of announcements. Sid confirmed that there was a limit of approximately 250 characters. Rich noted that inclusion of a URL would allow links to be placed to further information, limiting the amount of text necessary. It was agreed that end-user education would be needed.

In response to a query by Barry about the size of the drop-down list of an individual's available groups, Sid confirmed that it would be possible to attach users to tutorial groups only, to reduce the number of options. Rich confirmed that, for the purposes of the pilot, publishing rights would be manually allocated. Rich noted that, in addition to the original pilot with BBS, announcements may also be piloted with HSC and FAS. Sid noted that this would depend on how Bryan could construct group membership in the feed.

Karen noted that BBS had raised the issue of service modules for FBE and Hartpury students, who would be unable to access the portal, and stressed that the portal should not be used as the only mechanism for delivering announcements. Barry noted that the issue of students taking modules from other faculties would affect every faculty apart from HSC.

7. Bookmarks channel

Sid demonstrated the bookmarks channel, an off-the-shelf product from the JSIG clearing house, which operates in a similar way to Internet Explorer favourites and allows the personalisation of a user's portal home page. This channel will be rolled out shortly, subject to agreement of functionality.

Barry thanked Sid for his demonstrations.

8. Proposed dates of next meetings

16 January 2006
27 February 2006
3 April 2006
All from 11:00-12:15, Room 4D24, Bolland Library, Frenchay Campus. These meeting dates were agreed.

9. Any other business

9.1. Membership

It was agreed that, as the pilot is extended, the group membership should comprise representatives from all three participating faculties, including a member of academic and administrative staff.

ACTION: Barry to approach Kevin and Jenny to confirm dates of future meetings and to discuss membership.