Portal Management Group
Notes of the meeting of 26th June 2006, Room 5D6

Present: Barry Cawthorne (Chair), Rich Egan, Margaret Needles, Debra Campbell, Nick Coates, Helen Cole, Sid Baldwin, Sarah Mackie, Emma Taylor (Notes).

1. Apologies
Karen West.

2. Change of membership
Barry welcomed Nick Coates (Business Analyst, Business Systems Team) to the meeting.

3. Minutes of the meeting of 15th May
Approved.

4. Matters arising not elsewhere on the agenda

4.1. Testing of component systems
Rich and Sid reported the following:
- A meeting with Dave Spiller (CETTS) took place on 25th May. Dave was positive about the possibility of testing Syllabus Plus.
- Test user accounts have been set up in LDAP and work is progressing.
- Andy Pearce has put together a paper on the actions needed to allow testing of ISIS.

5. Recruitment
Rich reported that there are four vacant posts: Systems Administrator, Senior Programmer Analyst, Part Time Web Developer, and an additional vacancy for an Applications Developer (Java) following the departure of Rory Galvin. The Web Developer post has been appointed to start on 1st August, and interviews for the Applications Developer will take place on Wednesday 28th June. Rich noted that there had been a disappointing response to the remaining two posts, which are most sensitive to our production system, with an inadequate field for the Systems Administrator and no applications for the Senior Programmer Analyst post. Rich confirmed that these posts would be re-advertised in the print and online editions of Computer Weekly, in jobs.ac.uk, the UWE web site and the Evening Post. To encourage applications further, the posts will be offered with a three-week window of opportunity, increased from two weeks. Rich advised that the re-advertisement would cause a delay in appointments of approximately one month. In response to a query by Barry, Rich confirmed that the February 2007 timescale remained in place for the production portal.

Helen reported that, to mitigate the delay in appointments, Nick Coates had been working on the portal for the majority of his time. Barry confirmed that thanks to Helen for allotting Nick's time had been noted in the Portal Project Board meeting of 14th June, and that the Risk Register had been amended to increase the impact and likelihood of Risk 0101 (the loss of key development staff) to 9. Barry noted that everything possible had been done to encourage applications to the remaining two posts, but queried what would be done if the key applications developer post was not appointed on 28th June. Rich and Sid confirmed that they were hopeful of an appointment as although the field was small it included some strong candidates.

6. Demonstrations to faculties and services

Barry reported that he and Rich had given two demonstrations to Associate Deans and Faculty Executives, one of which was well attended, and one less well attended. All but two faculties (BBS and AMD) had attended, but Barry noted that much of the BBS executive had already seen a demonstration of the portal, and a separate demonstration had been given to AMD at the Arnolfini. A demonstration will be given to Library Services staff in the first week of July. Barry sought advice from the group on demonstrating the portal on a broader basis in October and November 2006. Margaret suggested that a series of demonstrations should be organised, and should be open to all faculties and services. Helen suggested that demonstrations could be given on different sites, and that an animated demonstration would allow staff unable to attend a demonstration to see an overview of the portal. Rich confirmed that this was a planned task for the newly appointed Web Developer.

ACTION: Margaret to check the availability of lecture theatres in October and November 2006 for a series of portal demonstrations.

7. Timetabling and Portal compliance

Barry reported that he had received the following advice from Karen about the compliance of timetabling data in preparation for the October release of the timetable tab to faculties:

- BBS, HLSS: Timetabling is fully centralised, so will be compliant.
- CEMS, EDU: Both timetable at student level, and Karen is confident about the quality of their data.
- LAW: Undergraduate timetabling is centralised, so will be compliant. Postgraduate and Professional timetabling is done by the faculty but Karen is confident about the quality of the data.
- AMD: Karen questioned the ability of AMD to timetable at student level, and the quality of their data.
- FAS: Karen was confident about the ability of FAS to timetable at student level, but had some reservations about data quality.
- FBE: Karen felt that FBE's data would not be of the quality required.
- HSC: Not claiming to be compliant, and do not timetable at student level.

Helen noted that she, Margaret and Karen would need to discuss whether it would be possible to compare Syllabus Plus and ISIS data to check data quality.

Sid enquired at what point a decision would be made whether to release the timetable tab. He noted that students taking modules from more than one faculty would have a timetable view which was a concatenation of timetables, so it would only be possible to determine whether or not to show the tab itself, rather than selecting which faculty's timetable was shown. Rich stressed that business rules were needed to determine faculty tab association, but noted that it would be possible to control access to AMD and HSC timetables, as these are located on separate databases.

Barry stated two possible options:
- To display timetable data from each of a student's faculties regardless of data quality.
- Not to show the timetable tab if the data of any faculty with which the student is associated is inadequate.

Barry agreed that business rules were needed, and stressed the need to take into account Karen's decisions on data quality.

8. Progress reports: channels

8.1. Announcements

Sid reported that some bugs had been found, but were solvable, and that Charlie Beckett's team were working to re-factor the channel to provide announcements in the portal in the short-term using the solution which Sid had developed. Helen confirmed that it would be too big a risk to implement Mike Garnier's solution in his absence, but that it would be re-visited at some point.

8.2. Online coursework submission
Rich reported that the online submission channel had been made live on 3rd May for a small pilot with FAS Postgraduates. Unfortunately, seven of the ten students in the pilot had already submitted their work, and one student had withdrawn. Although the functionality had been proved and some useful issues raised in the development of the pilot, the channel had not been used and had been withdrawn on 6th June. Aaron Johnson had demonstrated the online submission channel to a student focus group, and students had expressed some concerns about storage, handling and security of their materials, and about the robustness of the system and the varying levels of use of electronic systems by teaching staff.
ACTION: Rich to circulate the Student Focus Group report.

8.3. Academic record
Margaret reported the intention to release the Modules and Assessment Opportunities elements of the Academic Record channel on 12th July. Approval has been given by the Academic Registry for the release of marks after the locking of the Field Board but before the Award Board.

8.4. Online re-enrolment
Margaret reported that the ISIS and portal work were completed, but that some web standards issues remained outstanding with WPM. A demonstration will be given to Faculty and SARI staff on 5th July. Sid confirmed that the development site was finished, but that communication between the test environment and WPM needed to be enabled to test payment. Margaret confirmed the intention to make re-enrolment live on 12th July.

9. Faculty and tab associations
As discussed under Item 7, Rich noted the need for business rules to determine students' faculties to allow a tab to be withdrawn on a faculty-wide basis if necessary.

10. Unicon consultancy
Exploration of commercial options for portal technical support has identified Unicon as a company with long-term involvement in uPortal development. Sid confirmed that technical support via telephone and e-mail and on-site consultancy from Unicon would be considered when the budget becomes available. However, Sid raised the following reservations:
- A large amount of development has already taken place, and there is the risk that advice given by Unicon may make it necessary to undertake some re-development.
- It will not be possible to plan and make a decision about a site visit until the System Administrator post has been appointed.

11. Access statistics
Rich circulated portal access statistics since January 2006. He noted that, although there had been a tail-off in users since March, usage was continuing with 1,086 distinct users in May. In response to a query by Helen, Rich confirmed that there were just over 5,000 distinct potential users in the system. Sarah enquired whether faculties would be including information about the portal in inductions. Rich advised

that he would be sending an e-mail to all students in the pilot after the start of term. Helen noted the need for volume testing in case large numbers of students access ISIS when using the portal.

12. Date of next meeting

Tuesday 15th August, 11:00 – 12:15, Room 5D19, Bolland Library, Frenchay Campus.

Barry suggested the following dates for the remainder of 2006, which were agreed by the group:

Monday 25th September, Monday 6th November, Monday 11th December.

All at 11:00-12:15, locations to be confirmed.

ACTION: Emma to schedule PMG dates to follow UMG and book rooms.

13. Any other business

13.1. Student debtors

Helen raised an enquiry by Kevin Foreman whether students with debts could be flagged in the portal. Margaret confirmed that a student's debt status would be visible in online re-enrolment, but noted that students with a debt from the previous academic year wouldn't be enrolled, and therefore wouldn't have access to the portal.

13.2. Student e-mail addresses

Margaret noted that online re-enrolment would communicate with students via both their UWE e-mail address and preferred e-mail address (if given), and requested that Personal Information include both UWE and preferred e-mail addresses and any e-mail from the portal be sent to both accounts.