Portal Management Group
Notes of the meeting of 15th August 2006, Room 5D19

Present: Barry Cawthorne (Chair), Rich Egan, Margaret Needles, Helen Cole, Karen West, Nick Coates, Emma Taylor (Notes).

1. Apologies
Kevin Foreman, Debra Campbell, Sid Baldwin, Sarah Mackie.

2. Minutes of the meeting of 26th June
Approved.

3. Matters arising not elsewhere on the agenda

3.1. Demonstration dates: 1st November; 6th December
Barry confirmed that, in addition to the 1st November and 6th December demonstrations, presentations to HSC had also been arranged for 12th and 27th September. It was agreed that Helen's suggestion to give demonstrations at St Matthias and Bower Ashton should also be considered.

3.2. Student focus group
Emma has circulated the report on student feedback to the group.

3.3. Dates of next meetings
These have now been set.

4. Recruitment
Rich confirmed that the following appointments have now been made:
- Emma Cooper has taken up the post of Web Developer, with a start date of 1st August;
- Conan Cook has taken up the post of Applications Developer, with a start date of 14th August;
- Simon Carter has been appointed to the Senior Programmer/Analyst post, with a start date of 4th September; and
- Nicholas Fielding has been appointed to the System Administrator post with a start date of 4th September, at which time the Portal Development team will be at full strength.

5. Timetabling channel
Margaret and Nick have met with CETTS staff to develop a specification for the Timetabling channel which addresses students who are not included in the channel. Nick reported that he was working to ensure that links between ISIS, Syllabus Plus and the portal are consistent. Karen confirmed that data in the channel would be driven by Syllabus Plus and that the timetabling channel had been taken down until the Web version of the 2006/2007 timetable was published in Induction Week. Margaret noted that changes to the Web timetable may be necessary to ensure that the portal and Web versions are synchronised.

6. Portal tab and grouping associations
Nick reported that work was in progress on determining rules for the inclusion of students in tabs, in particular the rules governing portal users undertaking a programme of study in two faculties. In response to a query by Barry, Nick confirmed that the existing time scale would be unaffected. Barry raised the need to keep a watching brief on timetabling and portal tab grouping.
ACTION: Timetabling channel and Portal tab grouping associations to be included in the updates for future meetings.

7. Updates

Barry noted that Sid Baldwin had submitted a report with updates on items 7.1, 7.3 and 8.

ACTION: Emma to forward Sid's report to Helen, Karen and Nick.

7.1. Announcements

Rich reported the following:

- Optimisation work is still needed.
- Work is required to correct the display of certain characters within announcements.
- Currently, students who lose module attachment will lose faculty association and therefore lose access to the portal. The inclusion of Programme information in the feed will remedy this.
- It is intended to introduce generic 'All Portal Users' announcements.

Helen confirmed that she had asked Mike Garnier to ensure that Nick was fully informed of the grouping structures he has developed. Helen noted that it was probable that grouping would have to be re-engineered at some point. Barry stressed that programme information would be essential in the live system.

7.2. Online coursework submission

Following the attempted FAS pilot in May, Rich reported that it was now planned to run a further pilot in October and November. Rich noted that the pilot would run with FAS only, as BBS have informed him that they no longer wished to take part. As the pilot will be running close to the launch of the live portal, Rich has asked developers to work on a production level channel. This is currently awaiting sign-off.

7.3. Academic record

Barry expressed concern at the repeated release and withdrawal of the Academic Record channel. Rich confirmed that this channel was proving far more complicated than originally expected. Helen noted that, while the difficulties experienced had exposed the fact that there are problems testing with live data, they had also provided useful information to help address these testing problems. It was agreed that the Academic Record channel was critical, as it represented the first exposure of regulatory information to users. Margaret noted the need for live users to test the channel and that, despite the relatively brief releases of the Academic Record, there was significant demand from students for this information. Margaret suggested that students who had made enquiries about the channel, and those who had taken part in earlier tests may be willing to participate in testing of the Academic Record. Margaret noted that legacy ISIS1 data had affected the channel. Barry noted that, while there was time for work to be done before the release of the live portal, there would be a high level of demand for the type of information contained in the Academic Record channel.

Rich noted that, to date, we had become accustomed to channels working first time, and that this may possibly raise unrealistic expectations. Rich noted that the process of IT development normally involved initial problems, and it was agreed that this was an expected part of a pilot. It was also agreed that the problems experienced above raised the issue of how new functionality could be piloted within a live system. Barry stressed the need to address this issue.

ACTION: Regular updates on testing to be included in future PMG agendas, including the issue of piloting new functionality within the live portal.

7.4. Online re-enrolment
Margaret circulated online re-enrolment statistics, and noted that re-enrolments this year had surpassed last year's enrolments. As of this morning, 64 students are now fully re-enrolled to ON and 69 are provisionally re-enrolled. Barry noted that this was a very good result and again offered thanks to Margaret and her team for their work. Barry reported that the success of online re-enrolment had also been recognised at the ISCG meeting of 14th August, and that ISCG would require no further reports on online payment. Margaret confirmed that two students had experienced problems accessing the re-enrolment channel, but that these had been caused by problems within their ISIS records.

7.5. Photosets
Rich reported the intention to expand the photosets pilot to include all BBS staff, but noted that he first needed to discuss this with Karen.

8. Portal makeover
Rich circulated screenshots of the portal makeover, and reported that the new colour scheme had been live for over two weeks. The makeover now represents the production look of the portal.

9. Tab restructuring
Rich noted that, during the pilot, tabs had been added to the portal as they were released, but that there was a need to review the tab structure before going live.
ACTION: Rich to bring a proposal of how tabs may be re-structured to the PMG meeting of 25th September.

10. High level plan for 2006-2007 [draft circulated]
In liaison with Helen and Margaret, Rich has brought together a list of outstanding actions before the production portal launch, including the months in which the actions will take place. Karen has pointed out some omissions, which Rich will include in future drafts. Rich drew the group's attention to Item 20 of the plan, which includes programme-level announcements. Barry confirmed that the plan had been taken as work in progress to the Portal Project Board, and ISCG. The plan had been well received by ISCG, but the Group had raised the need for a clear idea of how to prioritise requirements after February 2007. Barry confirmed that he'd advised ISCG that this was being considered, but that a balance was needed to give a sense of ownership to the user community without too large a requirements group. Nick noted that the needs of students should also be considered.

Barry noted the need to develop a firmer version of the plan including a suggested structure of groups for determining priorities in readiness for the ISCG meeting of 10th November. Barry noted that the revised plan could be discussed at the PMG meeting of 6th November, and that a first draft may be required to present to the Portal Project Board meeting of 13th October. Helen enquired what the role of the new Director of Planning would be in this. Margaret suggested that another away day meeting may be useful.
ACTIONS:
- **Barry to see Steve West to clarify the role of the Director of Planning.**
- **Emma to arrange a half-day planning session with PMG members.**

11. Access statistics
Rich circulated access statistics to 10th August and noted that there was a tail-off of accesses during August.

12. Dates of next meetings
25th September (3Q49), 6th November (3Q49), 11th December (4D24.
All from 11:00-12:15.

13. Any other business

13.1. ISIS releases and the Portal
Helen noted that database releases in ISIS may affect tables used by the portal. As this may bring down portal channels, Helen is speaking to Simon Ramsden about ways of managing ISIS releases without affecting the portal. Helen noted that, if changes to tables used by the portal must be made, these may be bundled into planned shutdown weekends to avoid pulling the portal offline.