

**Portal Management Group**  
**Notes of the meeting of 25<sup>th</sup> September 2006, Room 3Q49**

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

**1. Apologies**

Debra Campbell, Sarah Mackie.

**2. Minutes of the meeting of 15<sup>th</sup> August**

Approved.

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

**3.1. HSC demonstration**

Barry reported that the demonstration to HSC on 13<sup>th</sup> September had been well attended and that a second demonstration was planned for 27<sup>th</sup> September.

**3.2. Recruitment**

Rich confirmed that all vacancies had now been filled.

**3.3. Verbal report of away-morning outcomes**

Barry reported that an away-morning had been arranged to address the request by the ISCG for an indication of plans for the development of the Portal to August 2007, following the launch in February 2007 and two months of stabilisation. The away-morning met to decide on actions for the remainder of the 2006/07 academic year and on a process to elicit new requirements, which was open and manageable. It was agreed that key stakeholders should be identified within four constituencies:

- students
- academic staff
- administrative staff
- staff from key service departments

and that groups would be established round each of the first three with representatives from key services joining the group most appropriate to their main interest.

Barry clarified that the requirements emerging from these groups would then be prioritised by the PMG. Strategic requirements would require the approval of the ISCG.

**4. Timetabling channel**

Karen reported that she was working with Margaret on a specification to determine how the timetable would be displayed through Syllabus Plus, and confirmed that Syllabus Plus timetables had gone live on Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> September. Karen noted that, to allow referred students to be processed, the Timetable channel within the portal would not be made live in the first two weeks of term. In answer to a query by Barry, Karen confirmed that this would not affect the availability of photosets.

Sid requested a formal agreement that CETTS would manage their own database to allow timetables to be withheld from specific users. Business Systems would then ensure that MIIS was able to forward this data into the portal. Karen agreed. In answer to a concern expressed by Rich on the demand placed on the DBAs in the Business Systems Team, Helen assured Rich that it was better to handle this data outside the portal.

Kevin enquired whether this delay would be an annually occurring problem. Margaret confirmed that, in the future, there would be a mechanism to manage

access to timetables on a student-by-student basis. In answer to a query by Kevin, Karen confirmed that she and Dave Spiller had been in discussion with HSC to determine how to timetable to allow use of the channel in the portal.

## **5. Tabs**

### **5.1. Re-organisation**

Rich outlined a proposal to rationalise the existing tabs. E-mail and Academic Record will be retained, a My Courses tab may be introduced to display the UWEonline courses currently visible on the front page of the portal, and the Feedback tab may be replaced with a link. Rich confirmed that a specification was currently under development, and would be brought to the next meeting.

Sid noted that he was conscious of the finite space available in the portal for tabs, and of the need for constant reviews of tabs to ensure that they presented a collection of targeted information. Helen suggested that, when new functionality was discussed, it may be useful for the Group to consider where it would be best placed within the portal. In answer to a query by Kevin, Rich advised that there was no current plan to include HSC's ARC placement system in the portal. Helen assured Kevin that she would ensure that ARC remained on the portal agenda.

**ACTION: Rich to bring tab specifications to the PMG meeting of 6<sup>th</sup> November.**

### **5.2. Grouping associations**

Nick reported that he had met with Sid, Margaret, John Norrish, Bryan Mitchell and Simon Carter to discuss feed issues. Users within the user ID table will progress to the portal and indicators and attributes will determine whether or not they have access and the tabs they will have access to. Margaret confirmed that a set of criteria would be developed to determine access to tabs. Nick raised the need to determine which staff would be given access to the Coursework Collection tab as administrative staff may be responsible for the collection of submitted coursework. Rich noted that this raised broader access issues and suggested that, until August 2007, criteria for access be determined by PMG. Sid raised Bryan Mitchell's suggestion that groupings should be MIIS objects which are fed into the portal.

Margaret noted that Bryan was working to deliver the production feed by December 2006 and that, if the pilot was to be extended, this would be done using the existing feed. Sid expressed reservations about using the existing feed to support an extension of the pilot within HSC with the possible inclusion of 12,000 additional students. Sid also stressed the need to manage user expectations and make it clear that, even though a large number of additional users may be given access to the portal, it is still a pilot system. Helen noted that an extension of the pilot would assist with stress testing and advised that the figure of 12,000 HSC students was probably a significant overestimation due to data management issues. Kevin agreed that this was likely to be an issue of data management as the figure given to QAA was 5,000 students. Nick requested that the feed be a separate agenda item at the next PMG.

**ACTION: Feed to be a substantive item on the PMG agenda of 6<sup>th</sup> November.**

## **6. Testing**

### **6.1. ISIS stress testing**

Helen reported that work was in progress to test the possible number of database connections to ISIS, and that this had been given top priority. Helen confirmed that she would e-mail the group with any significant results of stress testing.

**ACTION: Stress testing to be a substantive item on the PMG agenda of 6<sup>th</sup> November.**

## **6.2. Testing new functionality in the live portal**

Rich confirmed that he and Nick had discussed the testing of new pilot functionality within the production portal, and that it had been suggested that a pilot tab may be used and included in groupings with the feed criteria depending on the pilot functionality. Margaret noted that a budget was available to pay students for testing, for example, with Pharos credits for printing.

## **7. Updates**

### **7.1. Announcements**

Sid confirmed that a grouping structure was in place which defined group membership down to module level and that this table was currently populated with approximately 5,000 pilot users. Sid noted that the current mechanism would not scale up to accommodate all users (approximately 25,000), but that Bryan Mitchell was working to provide a short-term fix to increase the number of groups in the grouping table to allow announcements to be tested with all users. Margaret noted that there was also uncertainty over whether programme-level announcements would be included in the pilot. Barry stressed that programme-level announcements were a very high priority. Margaret assured Barry that this would be done by the February 2007 launch, but noted that the issue was the pilot feed. Rich recommended a focus to resolve the production system for programme-level announcements, not the pilot. This was agreed.

### **7.2. Online coursework submission**

Rich reported that FAS were still willing to participate in a pilot of online coursework submission, but that BBS would prefer to wait for the launch of the live portal. Rich confirmed that development work had been completed, and that connection to the ISIS feed was now required. Barry suggested that it would be beneficial to pilot the system with academics who had already expressed an interest in online marking, e.g. Dave Lush and Stephen Gomez. Margaret noted that this would depend on their modules having submission dates before Christmas 2006.

**ACTION: Margaret to check possible module codes and ask Dave Lush if staff are interested in the pilot of OCS.**

### **7.3. Academic record**

Rich confirmed that it was intended to reinstate the Academic Record channel on Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> September and that the channel was currently being tested.

### **7.4. Online re-enrolment**

Margaret reported that 30% of eligible students had re-enrolled online and a breakdown of fees could be obtained from ISIS. Barry noted that this was a good indicator of how much students like this sort of system, as it had only been publicised in a letter containing a URL.

### **7.5. Photosets**

Rich reported that the high level plan included the extension of the Photosets pilot in October/November. Rich requested a steer from the group on whether BBS should be approached to enquire whether they would like to add extra staff to the manual feed for Photosets. Margaret confirmed there had been a demand for Photosets of postgraduate students, but Syllabus Plus would not allow this. Sid noted that additional user entries would have to be created for BBS students who were not in the portal and suggested that FAS should be targeted as all of their students were already in the portal.

**ACTION: Karen to approach BBS and FAS to get 30-40 staff for manual entry into the feed.**

#### **8. High level plan for 2006-2007**

Rich confirmed that he would amend the plan in the light of the away morning to include post-launch and stabilisation and the processes in place to August 2007. Rich noted that the intake of new staff had had an impact on the schedule of work, so the staging of the updated production bookmarks channel would be moved to the first or second week of October.

**ACTION: Rich to update the high level plan for the Portal Project Board meeting on 13<sup>th</sup> October.**

#### **9. Access statistics**

Sid reported that the total active users for September were 2,820 to date. There had been a peak in accesses on Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> September, which Margaret suggested was due to the release of student timetables. An increase in BBS student accesses may also have been the result of an induction session within the faculty. Sid noted that the peaks in access were similar to the accesses to the UWE web site. In response to a query by Kevin, Sid confirmed that no HSC staff had posted announcements, but suggested that this may be because HSC would want to post announcements to programmes, but were currently unable to.

#### **10. Dates of next meetings**

6<sup>th</sup> November (3Q49), 11<sup>th</sup> December (4D24) both from 11:00-12:15.

#### **11. Any other business**

##### **11.1. Deans presentation**

Barry requested advice from the group on whether the presentation for Deans originally planned for November 2006 should be re-scheduled, or whether Deans should be left to attend the open demonstrations planned for November and December. Kevin suggested that any Deans interested in attending would be likely to attend the open demonstrations. Barry agreed that the demonstration for Deans would not be re-scheduled unless he received a strong steer from elsewhere.

##### **11.2. Timing of open demonstrations**

Rooms have been booked for demonstrations in November and December 2006 and January 2007. Barry noted that the reaction to HSC demonstrations had led him to the opinion that demonstrations should be given closer to the February launch date to manage expectations and demand. Barry proposed that open demonstrations should be given in January 2007 as a focus for academic staff, and that the November and December demonstrations should be for administrative staff only. Rich noted that Margaret was already giving in-faculty demonstrations to administrative staff. Margaret requested that the demonstrations not be separated for academic and administrative staff, as they would give an understanding of processes for both sides. It was agreed to cancel the demonstration on 1<sup>st</sup> November and to keep the 6<sup>th</sup> December demonstration open for the time being.

##### **ACTIONS:**

- **Karen to cancel the room booking for 1<sup>st</sup> November.**
- **Kevin to get feedback from attendees at the large-scale demonstration to HSC on 27<sup>th</sup> September.**