Portal Project Board
Notes of the meeting of 7th April 2006, 4D24

Present: Barry Cawthorne (Chairing the meeting in the absence of Steve West), Rich Egan, Steve Grive, Margaret Needles, Warwick Jones, Steph Keeble, Emma Taylor (Notes).

1. Membership
In order to mitigate a risk identified at the Portal Awayday, Tessa Harrison has been invited to join the board. Barry confirmed that Tessa has accepted the invitation, but is unable to attend today's meeting.

2. Apologies
Steve West, Tessa Harrison.

3. Minutes of the meeting of 22nd February
Approved with one amendment to item 6, Phase 2 of the re-enrolment project. Rich expressed confidence that the July delivery date could be met *from the portal perspective.*

4. Matters arising not elsewhere on the agenda

4.1. Project funding: status of FIN10
Steve confirmed that the FIN10 for £547K over two years had been signed off by the University Management Group. Approval has been given for early recruitment to the Faculty Liaison post, and hardware has been purchased to take advantage of an offer of higher specification servers for the same cost.

4.2. Outcomes of Awayday
Barry circulated a summary of the outcomes of the Portal Awayday on 24th February. Faculty Liaison had emerged repeatedly as the most important requirement, to allow faculties to begin to make preparations for the 2006/07 academic year. Warwick noted that faculty engagement would be crucial within the next few months. Rich confirmed that the Faculty Liaison post had been advertised on the UWE web site with the closing date of 19th April, and the intention was to hold interviews by the end of April. Rich noted that this post was offered as a secondment to ensure that the post-holder was familiar with the University's infrastructure. Barry confirmed that Steve West had e-mailed Deans to request their support for the secondment. In answer to a query by Steph, Rich confirmed that the post would be located within IT Services.

A lack of consistency of Syllabus Plus data had emerged as a significant risk at the awayday. Rich noted that this risk was not confined to timetabling, as staff access to student photosets also relied on Syllabus Plus. Margaret noted that faculties would be allowed to make the decision whether they would change their organisation and working practices to use the portal. Barry confirmed that the portal would not be used to force change, and noted that some faculties had decided to timetable at student level to allow use of the timetable portal channel, while others had not. Steph enquired how faculty variability within the portal might affect Joint Honours students. Rich confirmed that the affect of differing faculty practice on Joint Honours students had been highlighted by the issues arising with Syllabus Plus, and had been raised at the Portal Management Group. Margaret confirmed that portal administration would need to be considered in any future review of the management of Joint Honours. Barry reported that, in response to a request for clarification from Steve West, Tessa Harrison had

confirmed that there were no posts in timetabling on temporary contracts, but Margaret noted that her understanding was that the Timetable Manager post was temporary. Barry noted that this required clarification, and that it would be appropriate to await Karen West's return.

Barry reported that shortage of analysis expertise was also identified as a potential risk and that currently analysis lagged behind development. The February 2007 launch of the portal was still seen as ambitious but achievable, with the proviso that announcements are still carrying issues of concern for the Portal Manager and ISIS Manager.

5. Business rules for granting and denying access to the portal

An additional outcome of the awayday was the identification of the need to define the Business rules for access to the portal. Rich proposed to the Board that the criteria for access to the portal should follow existing policy for access to the majority of UWE IT systems:

- Staff and students will gain access to the portal at the time they are issued with a UWE user ID and password (an 'account' in the UWE authentication service LDAP).
- A user with an active UWE account will be able to gain access to the portal, although their rights within the portal, and services they receive, will depend on a number of other records.
- A member of staff's account is disabled at the end of the day of leaving, is maintained in this state for 28 days, and is then deleted.
- A student's account remains active for 42 days after the Withdrawal Date or Achieved Date. At the end of the 42 days 'grace', the account is deleted. Research students are given 365 days 'grace', instead of 42 days.

Rich noted that there was also an issue of access to the portal by external people, and that this issue had arisen with UWEonline. Rich noted that the decision whether to allow access by external people was bigger than the portal as it affected a number of systems, but expressed confidence that it could be accommodated.

Steph enquired whether the portal could be used to contact students after graduation. Rich noted that the current specification was for a portal for existing students. Barry expressed agreement with Rich, but also agreed that access to the portal by students after graduation was worth noting as a possible future requirement. Steph also raised the issue of access to the portal by applicants, and stressed the need to remove the current rigid distinction between applicants and students. Barry noted that this was a much bigger issue, which was outside the remit of the Board: applicants would need a presence in ISIS to gain access to the portal and this is currently not possible. Barry noted that the claim made by Kingston University to have allowed access to their Blackboard installation by applicants appeared not to be sustainable, as Kingston had a formal agreement with access courses and it was this group of students who were supported with their applications.

6. Review of progress with High Level Plan for 2005-2006

6.1. Announcements

Rich reported that the announcements channel had been used by all three pilot faculties and that three issues had emerged:

- Administrative staff had requested changes to the announcements interface, and the changes requested were now being put in place.
- The ISIS team had suggested that greater flexibility in groupings should be allowed. Mike Garnier had specified an alternative model for grouping (eg.

grouping by disability record), and proof of concept of the new grouping structure was being trialled.
- A performance issue had been identified in the current version of the portal, and stress-testing had indicated that announcements would not be satisfactory for use when rolled out to 25,000 users. To address this performance issue, some re-engineering will be necessary, which will be rolled out in the summer.

Barry noted that, as raised in Item 4.2 above, the ISIS and Portal Managers had both expressed concerns that announcements were the greatest remaining unknown, and the design and implementation of the announcements channel was still work in progress.

6.2. Academic history
Rich reported that it had been hoped to implement the Academic History channel quickly, but that the level of specification had been more challenging than expected. Following the resolution of a technical issue, a proposal has been submitted to the Academic Registry. Margaret confirmed that she had proposed to Tessa Harrison that the channel provide:
- Module enrolments open and past, and an indication of what they're contributing towards;
- a Credit tally; and
- Results of award boards and notification of which modules went to the award board.
Margaret confirmed that Tessa was in agreement to proceed with the three elements identified above, and to provide the results information which is currently available on the web. Margaret also noted that the re-naming of this channel was being considered.

Barry and Rich confirmed that, because of the time needed for specification, this channel would be slightly late. Barry noted that development of the channel had been awaiting the completion of analysis work, and that more was being done with the channel than had been initially anticipated. Barry requested a projected date from Rich once the specification was completed.
ACTION: Rich to provide a projected date for availability of the Academic History channel.

6.3. Online submission of coursework
Rich noted that the specification of this channel had been revised dramatically from the original concept. The specification had been completed 6 weeks ago, and the Portal Development Team were on-task to have development work virtually complete by Easter. Rich noted that HSC had originally been approached to pilot the system, as they have an existing e-submission system which could be used as a fall-back, but it had become apparent that this may present a risk of duplicate submissions on the two systems. Barry noted that HSC used e-submission to obtain an electronic copy of coursework for submission to plagiarism checking software, and that HSC students were also required to submit a paper copy of coursework. Warwick stressed the need for a system to allow high security, high speed coursework submissions as UWE internationalizes, as courier-sent coursework from international partner institutions had been lost this academic year. Barry noted that the online submission channel represented the first time that the University had developed a system which provided the robustness and tracking necessary for an electronic submission of work.

Rich noted that FAS and BBS undergraduates had been considered for the pilot, but it had become apparent that, of those with access to the portal, only referral students would be submitting coursework in the summer term, and it had been considered too great a risk to pilot the channel with referral students. It had been decided to extend portal access to FAS postgraduates, and to include them in the pilot of online submission. Margaret confirmed that she had met Jan Dekker to discuss this.

Rich noted that FAS postgraduates were particularly suitable as:
- They are a small group of students (approximately 200-300).
- The pilot will require sensitive handling, and FAS (through the LRW), have a history of supporting this type of initiative.
- They are entirely self-contained. Barry confirmed that a risk of using BBS for the pilot of online submission would be the lack of access to the portal by students from other faculties on BBS modules.

Barry noted that it was crucial to provide clarification to faculties of the intended purpose of online submission, and stressed that the intention was not to force the electronic submission of assignments by all students, but to satisfy a specific need for distance courses and academics wishing to mark online.

Steph enquired how much information non-pilot faculties had been given about the portal. Warwick suggested that it would be timely to begin demonstrations to faculties to ensure a general understanding of the portal. Barry agreed that, as the portal had now moved into project mode with the sign-off of the FIN10, dissemination of information to non-pilot faculties should be addressed.
ACTION: Rich and Barry to organise demonstrations of the portal to all faculties (through Deans).

7. Phase 2 of the Re-enrolment Project

Phase 2 of the online re-enrolment project involves connecting the provisional re-enrolment with a method of payment, allowing a fee record to be created in ISIS. At the PMG meeting of 3rd April, Margaret identified a potential risk to the re-enrolment project, which Barry had asked her to bring to the Board. Margaret circulated a paper in which she raised the need to determine whether it is possible to restrict payment to one method within the WPM online payment system used by Finance, as it will not be possible to proceed with online payment without this. Margaret confirmed that she would be meeting Finance staff, Mike Garnier, and members of the ISIS team to specify what is required from WPM. Barry requested details of the specification, the price charged by WPM to accommodate this, and a firm commitment that this will be possible.

Margaret proposed that, as a contingency plan, it may be possible to keep the provisional re-enrolment channel live within the portal to allow students to pay online, but to still require the submission of paperwork and administrative intervention to complete the re-enrolment. The Board agreed to Margaret's proposal, as it was agreed that closing down provisional online enrolment would be a retrograde step.

Steve noted that restricting re-enrolment within the production portal to a single payment method would be too inflexible, and questioned the advisability of paying WPM to put this restriction in place for a small number of pilot users if the existing ISIS fee structure will be re-structured in the coming year. Steve requested a further meeting with Margaret to discuss this before her meeting with Finance and ISIS.
ACTION: Margaret to keep the board up to date on the re-enrolment project.

8. Risk register

Rich highlighted four areas of the risk register:
- 0101. The likelihood has been raised to 3 in recognition of the possible retirement of a key business analyst.
- 0102. The risk level remains at 9 because of concern about contention on staff.
- 0202. The likelihood has been lowered in recognition of the FIN10 sign-off.
- The faculty liaison post has been added as a mitigating factor to the 400 risks.

9. Demonstration: would the Board like a demonstration of the portal at the next meeting?

It was agreed that the Board would like a demonstration of the portal at the meeting of 14th June.
ACTION: Emma to extend the booking of 4D24 to 11:30 on 14th June.

10. Date of next meeting

10:00-11:30, Wednesday 14th June, Room 4D24, Bolland Library, Frenchay Campus.

11. Any other business

11.1. Accesses to the portal

Rich circulated portal access figures for January 2006 to March 2006, and noted that there had been a significant increase in portal usage since BBS had joined the pilot. During March 2006, there were a total of 13,056 logins to the portal, with 1,372 distinct logins (both of these figures exclude logins by ITS developers), suggesting an average of 10 logins by individuals during March. Rich clarified that the accesses shown by FAS staff were by announcers. Warwick noted that the 908 distinct BBS student logins represented approximately one third of BBS undergraduates.