

Portal Project Board
Notes of the meeting of 14th June 2006, 4D24

Present: Barry Cawthorne (Chairing the meeting in the absence of John Rushforth), Margaret Needles, Tessa Harrison, Steve Grive, Rich Egan, Emma Taylor (Notes).

1. Membership

Barry confirmed that John Rushforth had taken over from Steve West as sponsor of the Portal Project for the UMG, and will be chairing future meetings of the Board.

2. Apologies

John Rushforth, Warwick Jones, Steph Keeble.

3. Minutes of the meeting of 7th April

Approved.

4. Matters arising not elsewhere on the agenda

4.1. Outcomes of Awayday [timetabling risk]

In response to a significant risk identified at the Portal Awayday, Tessa confirmed that the Timetabling Manager post had been created as an additional but temporary post on Leon Smith's departure and that, as part of planned re-structuring, the intention was to make the post permanent.

ACTION: Tessa to inform the Board when a decision has been made on the Timetabling Manager post.

4.2. Demonstrations to faculty executives

Barry reported that two demonstrations had taken place which were attended by all faculties apart from BBS and AMD. A demonstration is being given to AMD at Bush House this afternoon, and a demonstration to Library Services is also planned. Barry noted the need to give larger scale demonstrations to all faculties before January 2007.

ACTION: Barry and Rich to keep the Board informed of future demonstrations planned.

5. Short demonstration of the Portal

Barry confirmed that this had been cancelled due to the absence of John Rushforth, Steph Keeble and Warwick Jones.

6. Recruitment

6.1. Faculty Liaison post

Rich confirmed that Margaret Needles had been appointed to the Faculty Liaison post.

6.2. Recruitment to vacant posts

Rich reported that there are currently 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. Interviews for the Applications Developer and Web Developer posts will take place in June. Rich noted that there had been a disappointing response to the posts advertised, 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, and that he had sought advice from Personnel on other appropriate areas to advertise. 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 three weeks. The Board supported Rich's assertion that he was anxious not to appoint to the Java post unless a suitable candidate could be found. In response to a query by Tessa, Steve confirmed that a number of CEMS graduates were working within ITS, but that the posts currently advertised required previous experience.

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

7.1. Announcements channel: to note pending revision intended to address performance issues

Rich reported that the announcements channel had been released under Phase 3 of the Portal, but performance had slowed when the channel was scaled out to include BBS students. Mike Garnier had developed an alternative model for the channel, which gave more flexible groupings, and Sid Baldwin had developed a model to address the performance issues. Rich confirmed that, as Mike is currently on extended sick leave, Sid Baldwin's model has been implemented, but noted that this does not preclude the use of Mike's model at a later date. Rich has been advised by Sid that he has tested his new announcement channel model and found that it successfully addresses the existing performance issues.

7.2. Academic Record (formerly History) channel: to note impact of extended absence of the Business Analyst and mitigating issues in hand

Rich reported that, following an initial slippage of the Easter release date for the Academic Record Channel, he had informed the Board of a revised target date of 31st May. Unfortunately, Mike Garnier's absence had begun shortly after he had informed the group of this revised date, which has resulted in a further delay. Barry noted that this slippage wasn't too serious an issue as the scope of the channel had broadened significantly. Rich confirmed that, in order to mitigate Mike's absence, Helen Cole had allocated time for another Business Analyst, Nick Coates, to work with Margaret Needles on the channel.

Rich noted that it had been intended to include three elements in the channel: Module Enrolments, Credits, and Exam Results. However, as UWE administrative staff have had no previous imperative to maintain a current record of credits, a change of business processes would be required to maintain up-to-date records of credits. In recognition of this, Rich proposed that the module enrolments component of the channel be introduced first, followed by credits then exam results (which are already available online). Rich has been advised that implementation of module enrolments will require approximately five days of development work and the signing off of guidance materials.

Barry stressed the importance of maintaining academic record data. Tessa confirmed that the Academic Registry were moving forward with a review of administrative processes, and would be appointing a project manager and setting service level agreements with faculties. In response to a query by Tessa, Rich confirmed that there was also a need to consider the management of debtors within the portal.

7.3. Online submission of coursework: progress report

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 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.

Rich confirmed that a further pilot would be undertaken with FAS in the autumn term, and that he and Margaret had also discussed an October pilot with BBS.

Barry noted that there had been positive responses to the online submission channel in faculty demonstrations, but stressed that this channel was intended for use for distance learning and academics wishing to mark online, and not for all of the university's coursework submissions. In response to a query by Steve, Rich confirmed that the time-stamp for electronic submissions was UWE's server time (UK time). In response to a query by Tessa, Rich confirmed that the online submission channel was not linked to the JISC plagiarism detection service as UWE students own the intellectual property rights to their coursework, and the JISC service requires the retention of material. Tessa confirmed that the issue of student IPR would be addressed at the Academic Board.

7.4. Phase 2 of the Re-enrolment Project

Margaret reported that the portal developers are currently awaiting a specification from WPM, and talked to her paper outlining the current status of the project. Margaret confirmed that contingency plans were in place to allow provisional re-enrolment online if online payment is not possible.

8. Risk register

Rich highlighted four areas of the risk register:

- 0101. It was agreed to raise this risk to 9 in the light of recruitment issues, and to reduce the risk when these are resolved. Barry requested that Helen Cole's help in giving Nick Coates' time to the project in Mike Garnier's absence be noted.
- 0501. Prior to the planned summer migration to Blackboard Version 7.1, the migration of the UWEonline development service has indicated that the portal single sign-on facility is functioning correctly in Blackboard 7.1.
- 0503. IT Services is now stress-testing ISIS (the Portal will place an additional load on ISIS). Rich confirmed that the portal can be detached from ISIS in order to manage the impact on the system.
- 0704. This has been introduced as a new risk to note the concern about data consistency raised due to the need to withhold the credits area of the Academic Record channel.

9. Dates of next meetings

Barry suggested that meetings of the Board continue to follow an eight-weekly cycle, with meetings in the weeks beginning:

7th August 2006, 2nd October 2006, 27th November 2006 and 29th January 2007.

Rich noted that he was on leave in the week of 7th August.

ACTION: Emma to suggest dates for future meetings with the first meeting in the week beginning 31st July.

10. Any other business

10.1. News channel

Rich noted that a News aggregator had been introduced as a new channel in the portal, and had received a positive response from UWE Students' Union. In response to a query by Steve, Rich confirmed that the new colour scheme approved by PMG would go live with the next release of the portal.