

Portal Management Group

Notes of the meeting of 27th June 2005, 4D24, Bolland Library

Present: Barry Cawthorne (Chair), Leon Smith, Margaret Needles, Helen Cole, Rich Egan, Sid Baldwin, Emma Taylor (Notes).

1. Apologies: Jenny Wills.

2. Minutes of the meeting of 26th May 2005

Approved.

3. Matters arising not elsewhere on the agenda

Item 3. Matters arising

Kevin has sent an e-mail reminder to pilot students.

Item 3.1.3. Scalability

Leon is attending a meeting with HSC to discuss the criteria for access to the timetable channel.

Item 5. Announcement in the Bulletin

Barry's announcement was in this month's UWE bulletin.

Item 6. Project plan for June 2005 - September 2006

The High Level Plan is substantive item 8 below.

Item 8.1. Scientia student allocator

Barry confirmed that Sid's comment on the resource implications of developing stand-alone applications outside the portal would be taken to the Portal Project Board meeting of 30th June.

4. Student Allocator demonstration

Leon demonstrated the architecture of the application and the subject area manager, staff and student interfaces. The allocator allows faculty timetablers to set allocation rules via the subject area manager interface (eg. activities can be made available to single or joint honours students only). These rules may be waived by staff, but can not be overridden by students. Students will not be allowed to make their own allocations, but will be allowed to swap their allocations within the existing rules. Changes made to an allocator event auto-generate an e-mail to everyone associated with, or allocated to, the event. A nightly two-way feed synchronises the allocator with Syllabus Plus.

Sid noted that the system appeared to be JavaScript based, and expressed concern over potential issues of accessibility, cross-browser compatibility and integration with the portal. Rich confirmed that he and Leon had raised these issues with Scientia, and were awaiting a response. Rich agreed that accessibility was a significant issue, but noted that as UWE is governed by SENDA rather than the DDA, it would be acceptable to supply an alternative at the point of delivery. Sid enquired how access to the allocator by students would be authenticated. Leon suggested that existing LDAP authentication could be used. Sid suggested that authentication similar to that employed by Webmail may be used.

Leon suggested that Rich and Sid may be able to advise whether or not a portal channel may be created for the allocator. If this is not possible, Leon will set up a

separate project. If integration with the portal is possible, Leon will submit a PID, and implementation of the allocator will be managed as a sub-activity of PMG. In response to an enquiry by Barry, Leon confirmed that the Subject area manager beta version would be available in November 2005, the Staff interface in February 2006, and the Student beta version in March/April 2006. August 2006 is the target for the project to be available. Rich confirmed that it would be possible to make it appear to students that the allocator was being delivered through the portal. Barry thanked Leon and will await a PID.

5. Preliminary evaluation data

Rich presented data from the evaluation tab in the portal, which had been first presented to HSC. Rich stressed that, as 49 responses had been received to 21st June, this data should be seen as indicative only. Rich reported the following:

- 158 of the 761 students with access to the portal have activated their accounts.
- Most respondents were on their first visit to the portal.
- The timetables tab was one of the most accessed areas.
- 57% of respondents strongly agreed that the portal was easy to use.
- 63% strongly agreed that the portal was useful.
- 29% disagreed that the portal had too little content.
- 51% agreed that the portal was reliable.
- Respondents ranked coursework deadline alerts and electronic submission of coursework as the features they would find most useful.
- In free text comments on other features they would like to be available, a significant number of respondents mentioned access to the library – both to their Unicorn user record and to e-journals.

Rich confirmed that he had e-mailed all pilot students to inform them that the evaluation tab would be closed on Friday 1st July. Barry will then carry out the prize draw. Barry noted that the responses received were interesting, but expressed disappointment that only 158 of 761 pilot users had activated their accounts. Leon suggested that the heavy use of the timetable may have been due to the fact that HSC students, (unlike other faculties), have to log in with a separate identifier to access their timetable, so may have liked the seamless access which the portal provided.

6. Student photosets report

Sid reported that, although online re-enrolment was currently taking priority, the following had now been proven:

- the ability to show and watermark student photos
- the ability of a viewer to select which group's photos they want to see

Bryan Mitchell is giving Sid a snapshot of data for the portal, and Helen has spoken to Kate Best from House Services about getting the photos into a shared area. John Norrish can then take the photos from the shared area into a database, which the portal can access.

7. Online re-enrolment

Barry confirmed that the Online Re-enrolment Project Board has now handed over to the Portal Project Board and will be overseen by the IS Project Co-ordination Group introduced by Steve West. The Co-ordination Group will make a decision on Phase 2 of online re-enrolment.

7.1. Phase 1 report

Margaret has received confirmation from Rich and Sid that Phase 1 of online re-enrolment is on target. Sid is now awaiting the automated feed, and Margaret has given criteria for the feed to John Norrish. Margaret confirmed that she has received a PDF of the standard form FD1, and that the graphic design team are working on a large font form. Sue Porter has agreed to go ahead without the large font form if it is not available in time for the launch of Phase 1. Margaret has received text from Bill Evans for addition to the submit button, and has received assurance from Bill that this is an acceptable equivalent to an online signature.

Margaret is working on content for a help page for FAS, and FAS have agreed that the Help pages will contain e-mail addresses rather than links to faculty web pages. Sid noted that, as the original portal help pages were written for HSC students, any channels to which FAS students also have access would need their help pages amending. Margaret confirmed that she was seeking this information from FAS. Barry enquired about the target launch date and noted that respective leave commitments may mean that online re-enrolment is launched in a period of absence. Rich assured Barry that, if possible, online re-enrolment would go live before the original July 18th launch date, and that 11th July had been identified as the earliest possible date.

Sid sought to clarify Jonathan Barton's notes and enquired whether the 1,500 FAS pilot students would cease to have access to the pilot portal when they had completed their re-enrolment. Sid noted that his understanding was that users would not be removed from the pilot once they had been included, but that notes taken by Jonathan suggested that this would happen. Sid confirmed that allowing access to the portal by FAS students after they had re-enrolled would simply involve changing the re-enrol flag.

Barry enquired whether FAS students would have access to the timetable channel. Leon confirmed that they would not because, although FAS were in some respects model users of ISIS, they did not have the required timetabling data. Rich noted that bullet point 6 in Phase 2 of his high level plan (item 8 below), listed the portal functionality to which FAS students would have access.

7.2. Phase 2: discussions with finance

Margaret confirmed that discussions with Finance were underway, and that she, Helen and Sid were visiting the University of Gloucester to see a demonstration of an online payment solution.

8. High level plan 2005-2006

Rich circulated a high level plan for 2005-2006, and noted that the inclusion of FAS in Phase 2 would represent 1500 potential additional users. Rich drew the group's attention to bullet point 5 of Phase 2 and noted that, unless HSC began to timetable at student level, there would be no users of the timetable channel until BBS join the pilot in December 2005. Sid noted that development had been scheduled on the assumption that no further work would be required on timetabling. Rich noted that evaluation was required before the 2006/07 annual planning round. Barry confirmed that evaluation was on the Portal Project Board agenda.

In reference to Phase 5, Rich noted that HSC were developing their own electronic submission solution, and would be piloting this next term. Rich suggested that, as the portal pilot was being rolled out to include FAS and BBS, these faculties should be represented within the group. Barry agreed that this was a good point, which he would consider for the next meeting.

The plan was approved for submission to the Portal Project Board meeting of 30th June. Helen stressed the need for the Project Board to be advised that the results of evaluation should be taken into account when making decisions relating to the future development of the portal. It was agreed that the Project Board should be advised of this.

ACTION: Rich to add note to the High Level Plan circulated to the Portal Project Board, mentioning the need to take into account feedback and results from evaluation when developing the Portal.

9. Proposed dates of next meetings

It was agreed to cancel the meeting of 28th July and for future meetings to take place at six-week intervals on the following dates suggested by Barry:

5th September, 17th October, 28th November 2005, 09:45-10:45.

ACTION: Emma to book rooms and schedule the meetings in Outlook.

10. Any other business

None.