

Portal Management Group

Notes of the meeting of 27th February 2006, Room 4D24

Present: Barry Cawthorne (Chair), Kevin Foreman, Karen West, Helen Cole, Mike Garnier, Sid Baldwin, Rich Egan, Debra Campbell, Sarah Mackie, Emma Taylor (Notes).

In attendance: Nick Coates

1. Apologies: Margaret Needles.

2. Membership

On agenda in error.

3. Minutes of the meeting of 16th January 2006

Approved.

4. Matters arising not elsewhere on the agenda

4.1. Advice on the publication of announcements

Rich confirmed that advice for students and staff had been placed on the Portal support web site, and the business implications document updated.

4.2. Progress on roll out bid

Barry noted that the rollout plan was still awaiting a formal sign-off.

4.3. Arrangements for Awayday

Barry confirmed that the awayday had taken place on Friday 24th February, and that he would be meeting Steve West on Friday 3rd March to report on the outcomes. The actions needed to scale up each channel for use across the university were identified, and the total impact on component systems considered. Barry noted that one of the most significant issues identified was the need to appoint to the Faculty Liaison post as soon as possible. Rich confirmed that there was some concern about announcements and grouping structures, and the consistency of Syllabus Plus data.

5. Developments in progress

5.1. Coursework Submission

Rich reported that a specification had now been developed which links coursework submission with work items in ISIS. Rich confirmed that a number of security issues raised in the specification process had been addressed, and that work had started on building the system. Rich noted the need for a small-scale pilot, sensitively handled, possibly with a sub-set of students already using the Portal, as the availability of the Portal would become critical when used for coursework submission due to submission deadlines.

Barry raised concerns over user expectations of coursework submission, and stressed that the system was not intended to replace hand-in for the majority of full-time students, and was for submission only, not for forwarding, marking or return. Barry noted that the Open University had developed a system to allow online submission, forwarding, marking and return, but that this system had taken 12 person years to develop. Barry described the intended users of the submission channel, which included modules and programmes which were

genuinely distance learning (eg the MA in Translation in HLSS and the Web MBE in FBE), modules which required electronic submission to allow the use of plagiarism detection software (eg Interprofessional modules in HSC) or modules where the module leader had expressed the desire to mark online. Barry noted that management of expectations was required, and that back-up facilities would need to be in place for the pilot. Sarah noted that there was a genuine need for online submission for distance learning students in BBS, who were currently disadvantaged by the need to post assignments on a Friday for delivery for a Monday submission date. Rich noted that extending the use of online submission would raise the issue of access to workstations and system usage at peak times on submission dates.

Kevin suggested that groups of between 30 and 100 students may be selected from the School of Allied Health Professions to take part in the pilot. Barry suggested that it may also be valuable to involve staff who wished to mark online.
ACTION: Coursework submission to be substantive item at the PMG meeting of 3rd April.

5.2. Academic History

Mike confirmed that he and Margaret had met to consider what would be achievable and appropriate in a small-scale pilot, and would be meeting a member of the Academic Registry to discuss the initial specification. A member of the programming team in Business Systems was also looking at the specification. Mike noted that the pilot proposal was based on what was already visible to students, and would allow read-only access to Award Registrations, Module Registrations, Board decisions, and the latest module marks. It was also proposed to build in notification of assessment grades and to make visible all credits by level and award.

Mike noted that he and Margaret now considered the Easter delivery date to be unrealistic, and that delivery was more likely to be in the summer term. Barry agreed that accuracy was crucial, and that summer delivery was acceptable. Helen noted that the amount of data required from ISIS to display the Academic History in the Portal may potentially have an impact on performance of the channel.

ACTION: Academic History to be substantive item at the PMG meeting of 3rd April.

6. Online re-enrolment

Rich confirmed that this was on course.

ACTION: Online re-enrolment to be substantive item at the PMG meeting of 3rd April.

7. Announcements channel

Sid reported that Announcements had been lightly used, and that there had been no feedback to date, making it difficult to gauge how the channel was being received. Sid noted that he was aware of performance issues, but that an alternative design may potentially address these. Mike confirmed that the initial design of a hierarchical tree may become unworkable, so he had proposed an alternative structure based on the concept of sets, rather than pre-defined groups. Rich noted the need to see a proof-of-concept, and advised that the current channel should continue to be used while the alternative is developed.

ACTION: Announcements channel to be substantive item at the PMG meeting of 3rd April.

8. Testing component systems

Rich acknowledged the need to safeguard the accuracy of live ISIS and Syllabus Plus data, but also raised the need for access to these systems to allow testing in the live portal environment, which is not currently possible. It was agreed that this was primarily an issue for IT Services, but that it should be noted.

ACTION: Review testing of component systems at PMG meeting of 3rd April.

9. Date of next meeting

3 April 2006, 11:00-12:15, Room 4D24, Bolland Library, Frenchay Campus.

10. Any other business

None.