

Portal Management Group
Notes of the meeting of 6th November 2006, Room 3Q49

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

1. Apologies

Debra Campbell.

2. Minutes of the meeting of 25th September

Approved.

3. Matters arising not elsewhere on the agenda

3.1. Tab re-organisation

Margaret confirmed that she and Nick had developed rules for individual channels and were working on rules for tab access. Rich circulated a document detailing a proposal for the re-organisation of Portal tabs in the pre-login, student and staff layouts. In answer to a query by Barry, Rich confirmed that suggested tab names had been given, but no formal decision had been made on the naming of tabs. Rich noted that there was the potential to present additional information on the pre-login screen. In order to manage the number of tabs, the following changes to the Student layout were proposed:

- UWEonline courses to be removed from the Home/myUWE tab and placed with Online Submission on a Courses/myCourses tab.
- Provisional marks and Academic record to be placed together on a Marks/myMarks tab.
- The Timetable, Email and Personal Info tabs to remain as present.

Sid suggested that, as the Marks and Personal Info tabs would each contain two ISIS channels (provisional marks and academic record, and addresses and personal details), the two channels could be combined in each tab to make a single call to ISIS, but could be presented separately. Sid reported that his team had been looking at the concept of sub-tabs, but stressed that the combination of channels would require a significant amount of work by both the Business Systems and Portal teams. Helen suggested that it may be useful to combine the two channels on the Personal Information tab and enquired whether it would be possible to add this combined channel to the Home tab. Sid advised strongly against placing any channels on the Home tab which made calls to ISIS, as this could slow performance.

Rich noted that, while there was no commitment to make the proposed changes, there was a need to start to plan naming to accommodate future expansion. Margaret proposed that the organisation of tabs should be considered in the light of the elicitation process. Barry agreed with the proposal to amalgamate addresses and personal information into one channel, but queried whether the proposal to amalgamate provisional marks and the academic record was equally as intuitive from the user point of view. Sid noted that feedback from users did not support this view. Barry stressed the need to be careful when presenting marks to students to distinguish between marks which are fixed and marks which may change. Margaret noted that she had anticipated that sub-tabs would be used in the academic record channel. It was agreed that the definition of tab names should be brought back to PMG.

ACTION: Portal Team to review technical considerations including sub-tabs and bring back to PMG.

3.2. Online Coursework Submission pilot

Margaret reported that she had checked the submission dates of FAS modules and had found two suitable modules, both of which have a submission date in the week beginning 13th November. Margaret confirmed that she had spoken to both members of academic staff involved in the pilot. One of the staff would be printing and marking coursework on paper; the other would be marking online and giving feedback via e-mail. Margaret reported that she would be demonstrating OCS and collection on Thursday 9th November and had asked for test users to be set up in ISIS.

3.3. Feedback from HSC events

Kevin circulated a collation of the feedback from HSC portal demonstrations. A significant number of respondents had requested demonstrations closer to the Portal launch date, and some after the launch. Margaret confirmed that demos would be given to administrative staff before the launch, and would then become part of the standard training for administrators after the launch. Barry enquired how time-consuming it would be to create a video presentation. Rich advised that this could take a considerable time. Kevin suggested that the HSC technical unit could assist with the creation of a video. Helen suggested that an animated demonstration could be created in PowerPoint with screen shots. Rich confirmed that this approach would be relatively straightforward, and could be achieved by using Viewlet Builder to create screen captures with an audio commentary. Sid stressed the need for materials created for demonstrations to reflect any changes made to the tab layout.

ACTION: Barry, Margaret and Rich to meet to discuss demonstrations.

3.4. Photosets extension

Karen reported that she had had a good response from BBS and FAS and that more than 40 staff had been identified for the extension to the photosets pilot, bringing the total participants to over 60. Karen confirmed that a manually maintained list of staff activities would be fed into the portal from Syllabus Plus for the extended pilot, but once live, photosets would work from activities with a portal tag attached in Syllabus Plus. Karen will be documenting this. Margaret reported that FAS data differed from BBS in Syllabus Plus as some FAS activities were lectures. Margaret reported that she had received confirmation from John Elliott, Data Protection Act Administrator, that as long as a member of staff had a legitimate teaching or administrative role, the Data Protection Act would allow their access to lecture photosets. In response to a query by Barry, Sid confirmed that a 'health warning' would be displayed if very large groups of photographs were retrieved.

4. Feed and Grouping Associations

Nick confirmed that Bryan Mitchell had made good progress on the feed. A meeting was held on Thursday 2nd Nov to look at timetabling and getting the feed in place. Paul Hunnisett and Dave Spiller are working together on timetabling and work is going on to connect the live feed. Nick noted that there were some issues outstanding over which groups of students should and shouldn't get access to the re-enrolment tab, and that he and Margaret would be meeting Sarah Hudson and Sue Porter to discuss funding issues. Margaret noted that issues with online re-enrolment were complex, and that she had discussed this with Bryan Mitchell. Margaret confirmed that the delivery of re-enrolment to clean students had been prioritised for next year, but discussions were also underway to determine whether it would be possible to make improvements to offer online re-enrolment to a larger group of

students. Rich stressed the need to be conscious that the timescale was now tight and that the feed was critical.

5. Stress testing

Sid reported that good results had been received from initial testing on a clear portal not connecting to third party services, and expressed confidence that the base portal was well able to cope with 512 simultaneous requests. Unicon have been employed to carry out an evaluation of the portal hardware and configuration and to advise on any improvements necessary. Sid expressed confidence in Unicon as they have a large amount of uPortal experience. Helen noted that there had been more difficulty determining how to stress test ISIS. Two consultants had been employed and had now submitted reports. Helen confirmed that, using a phased approach, adjustments were being made to the test system to put in place the recommendations made. Barry noted that it appeared that everything possible was being done to progress with stress testing.

6. Planning

6.1. High Level Plan 2006/07

Barry reported that the High Level Plan requested by the ISCG had gone to the Portal Project Board and would be taken to the ISCG meeting of Friday 10th November. The plan had been requested by ISCG and includes details of the phased roll-out, the proposed re-constitution of PMG to reflect the production status of the portal, and a number of new developments for the remainder of the 2006/07 academic year. Barry noted that the new developments were currently un-specified, so the development times given in Section 4 represented informed best guesses.

Rich reported the following progress from Section 1 of the plan:

- Items 4, 5, 8 and 20 (appointment and induction of new staff, Bookmarks channel, ISIS test users, and extension of the photosets pilot) are complete.
- Items 6 and 7 (stress testing and the feed), are substantive items on the agenda.
- Items 9 and 10 (deployment of production hardware and end-to-end stress testing) are likely to stray into December.
- Item 12 (roll out to a cluster of AMD students) will test the impact of using a non-Frenchay timetable database.
- Items 13 to 16 (ISIS service address channel, error reporting and ISIS service architecture) are dependent on performance work on ISIS by the Business Systems team.
- Items 17 and 18 (OCS pilot and Faculty and service briefings) are under way.
- Item 21 (the online re-enrolment channel) is being looked at.
- Item 22 (Marks checker and Academic record) is an issue of tab re-alignment.
- Item 23 (Announcements) is dependent on the feed.
- Item 24, the Faculty of Education have been approached for inclusion in the pilot. Helen noted that an increase of pilot users would help stress testing.

6.2. Requirements Elicitation, Definition and Prioritisation from 2007/08

Barry reported that the Requirements Elicitation document had been informed by an away-morning of some PMG members, and contained a proposal for a process whereby portal requirements could be elicited and prioritised in a manageable and transparent way. Requirements of a strategic nature would come only through ISCG and other requirements would be elicited through groups of stakeholders in a student forum, an academic group and a business group. Key service areas would be attached to these groups as appropriate (for

example, the Library would be represented within the academic group). Prioritisation would be the responsibility of the PMG, which the document proposes would be re-constituted to reflect the production status of the portal. The document also proposes that, all being well, the Portal Project Board would stand down at the end of the 2006/07 academic year.

7. Readiness for February launch

Barry noted that this would be a substantive item on the PMG agenda until the launch of the portal in February 2007.

7.1. Mechanism for phased release over February 2007

Sid confirmed that users would be increased on a week-daily basis. The intention is to include students and staff in equal tranches alphabetically by second name. Sid noted that this approach would allow a quick response to queries, as it could easily be determined when users should have access to the portal according to their name. In response to a query by Barry, Sid confirmed that all existing pilot users would remain in the portal. In answer to a query by Kevin, Rich advised that the portal support web page would include a list of users included in each tranche. Users would also be sent an e-mail notification when they had access to the portal. Barry raised the need to discuss this issue further. In response to a suggestion by Margaret, Helen proposed that Derek Norris' IT bulletin or the UWE bulletin could be used to announce details of the phased roll out to staff.

7.2. Recycling and data retention

Sid confirmed that the current agreement was for users' personal preference settings (RSS feeds, bookmarks, views etc) to be removed 28 days after the user disappeared from the feed to the portal.

7.3. Meetings with key administrative staff in CEMS, FBE, HLSS, Law and Hartpury

Barry stressed that he was keen to include a manageable number of representatives from each faculty in the portal pilot. Barry, Margaret and Rich had met faculties not yet in the pilot and asked them to identify any students they'd like to include in the portal and to establish a means by which Sid could identify them. Helen enquired whether target numbers of students had been set. Sid noted that there was already nearly 25% of the university in the portal. Rich advised that, if the remaining faculties could identify just 200 students, this would bring the total of portal pilot users to approximately 8,000.

Karen noted that she was aware of changes to the relationship between Hartpury and UWE, and that the partnership may move closer to University of Gloucestershire with Hartpury becoming an associate college, rather than an associate faculty. Barry thanked Karen for raising this issue and confirmed that he would seek clarification from Sheila Newby and would discuss this issue in his meeting with Hartpury on 7th November. In answer to a query by Kevin, Helen and Karen confirmed that these changes should not affect HSC students at Hartpury, as they would simply be treated as students at a separate site.

7.4. Readiness of component (including bespoke) systems

7.4.1. ISIS2

Helen confirmed that there was nothing to report, other than the Stress Testing discussed under Item 1. It was agreed to include stress testing under readiness in future agenda.

ACTION: Stress testing to be on future readiness agenda.

7.4.2. Syllabus +

Karen confirmed that all faculties apart from HSC would have student-level timetable data for use in the Portal. FBE are working on this and will have timetable information in place by January 2007. A standard format/view for portal timetables is being agreed at the timetables group this week.

7.4.3. UWEonline

Rich had reported intermittent performance issues at MGU but confirmed that there was no impact from the Portal perspective.

7.4.4. The feed

Helen reported that Margaret, Nick and John Norrish were working on the pilot feed to add extra users. Bryan Mitchell is writing the live feed and has assured Helen that it will be ready for December 2006.

7.4.5. Online Coursework Submission

Barry expressed concern at the adequacy of testing Online Coursework Submission with only two modules. Rich noted that it had been originally planned to conduct a larger pilot, but BBS had withdrawn. Rich also advised that the developer who had worked on OCS was now on two weeks paternity leave. Barry enquired whether MA Translation could be included in the pilot, as OCS had been developed specifically for distance courses such as this. Margaret advised that she would need to find out the submission dates for this course, but stressed the need for OCS to be piloted with students already engaged with the portal.

Kevin enquired whether HSC could participate, but Margaret noted that this would be complex because of the use of an existing online submission system by the faculty for plagiarism checking. Barry advised that a pilot with HSC had been avoided for this reason. Kevin asked if there were plans for HSC to move from their own system as there may be student demand for access to online submission through the portal. Rich advised that there would be no insistence on a move from the HSC system, as it offered functionality not currently available in the portal system, such as onward transmission. Helen suggested that online submission and HSC be a substantive item on the PMG agenda in December.

Barry warned that, although OCS wasn't intended to be used to collect large numbers of undergraduate submissions, and hadn't been tested with this level of use, faculties could choose to use it in this way. Barry advised that there may be a need for initial control on the use of OCS to avoid this.

ACTIONS:

- **Margaret to speak to Roger Clewett, HLSS Faculty Administrator, about submission dates for MA Translation.**
- **Online submission and HSC to be substantive item on PMG agenda for December.**

7.4.6. Announcements

Rich reported that work was underway to address issues concerned with collation within databases. Sid noted that this was a question of staff time. In response to a query by Barry, Rich confirmed that programme announcements were feed-related, and Margaret advised that programme-level announcements won't be available until the new feed had been

developed. It was agreed that a report on the portal infrastructure should be included under the readiness for launch item on future PMG agendas.

ACTION: Portal Infrastructure to be included under the readiness for launch item on future PMG agendas.

8. Student testing

Rich confirmed that a small budget was now available to give token recognition to students taking part in testing.

9. Access statistics

Sid circulated a summary of portal usage statistics, available at:

<http://info.uwe.ac.uk/myuwe/stats/historical/summary.asp>

Sid noted that the October 2006 boost in usage had followed an e-mail reminding pilot participants and informing first year students about the pilot, and that no major problems had resulted from this increase in usage. Usage had increased to 40 BBS staff in October as more photosets went live. Sid noted that faculty definitions were now becoming misleading.

10. Date of next meeting

11th December (4D24) 11:00-12:15.

11. Any other business

None.