Portal Management Group
Notes of the meeting of 11th December 2006, Room 4D24

Present: Barry Cawthorne (Chair), Simon Ramsden, Rich Egan, Debra Campbell, Margaret Needles. Sid Baldwin, Nick Coates, Karen West, Emma Taylor.

1. Apologies
Helen Cole (Simon Ramsden attending in Helen's absence), Kevin Foreman.

2. Minutes of the meeting of 6th November
Approved.

3. Matters arising not elsewhere on the agenda

3.1. Subtabs: to receive a demonstration
Sid demonstrated subtabs, which have been introduced in response to concern over the load implications of calling two SOAP services simultaneously. Sid noted that the use of sub-tabs would facilitate the introduction of additional functionality to areas of the Portal without making multiple calls to services. Sid advised that this was a mid-term proposal for implementation after Easter 2007. Barry thanked Sid and noted that the introduction of subtabs would bring both technical and presentational benefits.

3.2. Expansion of pilot: inclusion of other faculties; report on Hartpury
Rich reported that, as of 8th December, every faculty had students in the portal. All Faculty of Education undergraduates and postgraduates have access, and other faculties have between 250 and 750 students, bringing the total number of students able to access the portal to over 9,500. Students included in the extended pilot have been informed via a message to their UWE e-mail accounts and posters have been placed in faculties. A second round of e-mails will be sent in January 2007. Accesses to the portal have not increased significantly, but Rich advised that this was likely to be due to the time of year. Rich noted that the benefit of this inclusion was that faculty-specific administrative issues could be identified before the roll-out.

Rich reported that he and Margaret would be meeting Hartpury administrative staff on 19th December to discuss portal access. Barry noted that the meeting would allow a judgement to be made on the state of Hartpury's data and stressed that they would not be included in the pilot if any risks were identified. Margaret confirmed that she had real concerns but that it would be useful to get further information.
ACTION: Rich and Margaret to recommend course of action to next PMG.

3.3. Announcing the launch: January demonstrations; Bulletin; video/audio/viewlet
Duplicated item, taken under substantive Item 7 below.

4. High Level Plan 2006/07
Rich confirmed that there was nothing in the plan to threaten the February release date and reported the following:
- Item 7. Feed for roll-out. Simon confirmed that Bryan was hoping to finish this by Friday 15th December.
- Item 8. ISIS test users. Now complete.
- Item 9. Production hardware. External consultants Unicon are looking at our production hardware. Rich is awaiting their sign-off.

- Item 10. End-to-end stress testing. Encouraging figures have been received with 400 different users getting good response from the system. Simon confirmed that performance was much improved.
- Item 11. Timetable channel. Sid confirmed that he had had a demonstration this morning. The channel is late, but will be completed shortly.
- Item 12. Rollout to cluster of AMD students. Complete.
- A number of ISIS services applied in the development environment are now being tested in the live environment including 16a, the Academic Record channel.
- Item 19. Faculty and Service briefings. These are under review and will be discussed under Item 7 below.
- Item 23. Announcements are now live.
- Items 24 and 24a. The rollout to Education and other faculties is complete as noted under Item 3.2 above.

5. Announcements and channel announcers

It was agreed that, in order to manage the risk of inappropriate and/or excessive use of announcements and avoid the release of inaccurate information to students, the number of staff able to place announcements should initially be restricted. Margaret advised that the implementation of restrictions should be managed carefully and suggested that the protocols for announcements developed for BBS by Sharon Bohin could be used as the basis of a policy for all faculties. Sid noted that, although the feed would control access to the portal, there was also a need to ensure the currency of staff data, to decide the level at which announcers would be attached (at award or module run level), and to identify administrative areas outside faculties requiring access to announcements, such as CETTS. Rich suggested that the initial number of announcers in each faculty be limited to ten. Barry agreed and noted that this restriction could be relaxed soon after the launch. Sid advised that it would not be possible to develop a user-facing interface to administer access to announcements before the launch, so the database of announcers would have to be administered manually. Karen suggested that defining the key roles which could announce different types of information would ensure that announcements were accurate and came from a definitive source. It was agreed to control the named users able place announcements at faculty level and to review module level attachments.
ACTION: Margaret to organise a meeting to discuss the announcements policy.

6. Readiness for February launch

Barry noted that there were now only 6 working weeks until the launch.

6.1. Portal framework

myUWE currently uses the uPortal 2.4 framework. Sid reported that, as no significant requirement had been identified to move to the 2.5 framework and as no framework-specific problems had been identified, the intention was to go live with the current 2.4 underlying portal framework. Sid advised that recommendations still to be received from Unicon's review of the portal infrastructure may require an upgrade after the launch.

6.2. Hardware

Sid reported that two production servers, failover and load balancing were now in place. Encryption to protect data is being placed off the portal and further up the network chain to make the portal servers more efficient. Hardware is in place and ready for migration in January, again subject to the findings from Unicon's review of the portal infrastructure.

6.3. The feed
Simon reported that Bryan Mitchell anticipated that the feed would be completed by 15th December. In reference to Item 30 of the High Level Plan, Rich noted that, although it had been intended to roll out the portal to equal clusters of users by last name, he had been advised by Bryan that this aspect of the feed would not be completed in time. It would therefore be necessary to fall back on a contingency and put everyone in the portal and send e-mails to clusters of users on given days. Sid suggested that an extended sequel query may be used to determine which users to let in on given dates according to their last names. This would have to be done over 26 calendar days as the load would be too great to balance evenly over 20 days.

Barry enquired why this was only being reported now, as he had received consistent reports that it would be possible to allow users to access the portal through the feed, and he and Steve Grive had taken the original plan to both the Project Board and ISCG. Sid advised that this was the first point at which Bryan had been able to evaluate his workload and enquired whether the proposed solution was acceptable. Margaret confirmed that this was part of the progress report on the feed and that Bryan had determined that this area of the feed was an area which could give if necessary. Margaret noted that she and Nick had only recently finished specifying the feed and that this risk had always been recognised. Barry stressed that this was a serious issue. He'd been assured that the mechanism was achievable in the last two meetings of the Project Board and it had always been on the project's critical path. Rich suggested that, for the good of the project, the alternative model suggested by Sid should be followed. In answer to a query by Sid, Rich and Barry confirmed that the myUWE icon would appear on the UWE desktop on 1st February. Rich advised that the rationale for this was that, if the icon appeared on 1st March when all users had access, it may cause everyone to log in at once and create the problem which we had been trying to prevent by staggering the roll-out. In answer to a query by Barry, Rich and Sid confirmed that they considered the suggested alternative solution to be achievable. Barry thanked Sid for his suggestion.
ACTION: Rich to advise Steve of the changes to the planned release of the Portal.

6.4. ISIS2
Simon reported that there were no major issues. Some slow performance had been identified and work had been done to address and improve this. Work on Online Coursework Submission had been completed recently and other threads were being tested. Stress testing on Atlas will commence this week.

6.5. Syllabus Plus
Karen reported that faculties were ready for February 2007:
- AMD, BBS, CEMS and HLSS will have all students timetabled in Syllabus Plus.
- FAS undergraduates will have access to the Timetable channel, but postgraduates will not.
- FBE are working on undergraduates but can't guarantee that this will be ready for February. Karen advised that, for now, FBE would not have access to the Timetable tab.
- All EDU students (other than CPD students) will have access.
- All LAW undergraduates and some postgraduates will have access.
- HSC have no student level data in Syllabus Plus and have no plans to get this data in.

In answer to a query by Sid, Karen advised that the same principle would apply to student photosets. FBE and HSC staff will not have access to the Photosets tab, but all activities will be available for the cohorts of students listed above.

6.6. UWEonline
Rich reported that no issues were anticipated other than the issue of UWEonline performance and that work was underway to address this. Sid reported that the Portal developers did not currently have access to the Blackboard developer network so were unable to re-work the UWEonline channel to include it in the myCourses tab.

6.7. Online Coursework Submission [report on pilot and readiness for launch]
Margaret reported that the pilot had gone well with two FAS modules, one of which would be marked on paper and one electronically, but that the electronically marked work had not yet been picked up. Margaret confirmed that she had completed preparatory work to include the March 2007 submission of coursework for MA Translation. Margaret has met administrative staff and will be meeting academic staff to ensure consistency. Barry noted that submission of late coursework had not yet been tested and advised that the system should not be released until a greater volume of submissions had been received and all areas had been tested.

7. Publicity and support: proposed January presentations
Barry reported that, following careful consideration, it had been decided not to run large presentations in January 2007. Viewlet presentations are being developed and Barry will be creating a short video presentation. A piece has also been drafted for the 3rd January deadline of the UWE Bulletin. Sid advised of the need to check the wording to ensure that it reflects the planned changes to the phased release.

8. Access statistics
Sid reported that there had been a small difference in overall users in October (10,000 logins) and November (9,900 logins). There have been 3,000 logins in December to date.

9. Proposed dates of next meetings
Barry noted changes to the original April and June dates.
22nd January 2007, 4D24
5th March 2007, 4D24
30th April 2007, 5D6
11th June 2007, 4D24
All from 11:00-12:15.

10. Any other business
None.