

Portal Project Board
Notes of the meeting of 7th December 2005, 4D24

Present: Barry Cawthorne (Chairing the meeting in the absence of Steve West), Margaret Needles, Warwick Jones, Steve Grive, Rich Egan, Emma Taylor (Notes).

1. Apologies

Steve West.

2. Minutes of the meeting of 30th June

Approved with three corrections:

Item 4.2, Student Photosets (paragraph 1, line 5). Rich noted that there was a transfer, rather than a feed, of photosets, as user data is pulled by ITS and not pushed by House Services.

Item 7, High Level Plan (paragraph 2, line 5). The timetable channel may not be available until December 2005.

Item 7, High Level Plan (paragraph 4, line 6). Rich anticipated that he would be able to answer this question with greater confidence after December 2005.

3. Matters arising not elsewhere on the agenda

Item 4.1. Re-enrolment.

Phase 1 of the Online Re-enrolment Project was launched on 14th July to eligible FAS students and closed on 11th September. Barry noted that there had been a high degree of take-up despite a low-key launch.

Item 6. IS Project Co-ordination Group

Action on Steve West to raise the positioning of the UWE web site with the group. Barry requested that this be recorded as an outstanding action.

ACTION: Carry forward

Item 7. High Level Plan for 2005-2006

Rich confirmed that business rules for portal channels had been taken to FASG and accepted, and were now available on the Portal Support web site.

4. Transition from Pilot system to Production version in 2006-2007

Barry noted that the portal was now half way through the two year pilot period, and funding for the two portal developer posts in IT Services would formally run out in October 2006. In order to enter the planning round for 2006/07, Steve West had asked Barry and Rich to develop a plan for the transition from pilot to production system in 2006/07, incorporating the current and planned pilot functionality. The plan has been taken to the 2nd December meeting of the IS Project Co-ordination Group and will now be taken to the CPE.

Barry raised a number of concerns identified in the Executive Summary:

- Diversity of operation. The portal will be drawing on university systems, and will require data which is formed in a consistent way. Barry cited the example of student photosets, which would be difficult to roll out widely due to inconsistencies in coding conventions adopted in Syllabus Plus. Barry stressed the need for CPE support for consistency of underlying data, and for Systems Managers to have the authority to insist on particular coding conventions for portal use.

- Major risks. Barry confirmed these were of a different order to the risks identified in the risk register, as they could potentially cause the portal project to fail:
 - o Faculty liaison has to date been undertaken by Margaret Needles on a goodwill basis. If the portal is to operate at a University-wide level, this role must be formalised.
 - o Business analysis. A significant amount of ISIS systems knowledge will be lost on the retirement of a key Business Analyst.

Barry also noted the following:

- There is a medium degree of uncertainty about the proposed production portal functionality (p. 19) as the pilot system has not been fully developed.
- The February 2007 release (p. 23) is ambitious but, Barry and Rich believe, is achievable. A staggered release is recommended, rather than single 'big bang' release. This decision was informed by the problems experienced by another University, which had adopted a 'big bang' approach and had experienced database locks as a result.

Rich reviewed the recommendations in the executive summary:

- Recommendation 1. The uPortal open source platform has been adopted. Rich noted that uPortal is gaining currency, and is being adopted by an increasing number of universities. Experience to date has been positive and there was no reason to doubt its suitability for a production level release.
- Recommendation 2. As uPortal is open source, support relies on the development community. Given UWE's preference for supported systems, commercial options for supporting the portal have been considered, and the recommendation made that support be purchased from Unicon for at least the first year of production-level operation.
- Recommendation 3. Rich noted a correction to the indicative features listed on p. 20. Photosets is live, and not a new feature.
- Recommendation 4. Requirement reviews will be undertaken as the production portal is developed. Rich noted that the CSA recognised the potential of the portal to support student services.
- Recommendations 5 and 6. Two fixed term posts associated with portal development expire in October 2006. The recommendation has been made to extend or make permanent these posts in order to retain the knowledge developed by the current post-holders. A recommendation has been made for an additional 3.5 FTE posts in recognition of the operational impact of developing a production portal. Rich stressed that this was a realistic estimate of additional requirements.
- Recommendation 7. Experience with UWEonline has indicated that users expect high levels of availability, and that dramatic improvements in performance can be made by using shared servers to balance the load on the system and provide resilience in the event of an outage. Rich noted that the portal will experience levels of use at least as high as UWEonline, in part because it will be the entry point to UWEonline, and that this has informed the recommendation to invest in resilience for the production portal.

Steve Grive recommended that the measure of use in the proposal be updated to include the launch to FAS and BBS to give a better reflection of the level of uptake. Rich suggested that a future key moment of uptake would be the point at which a link was posted on the intranet home page, as access to myUWE currently requires users to bookmark or manually enter the URL. Warwick agreed that the need for prescription must be stressed, and that a fast rollout was important.

Steve Grive sought confirmation of when the extra resources requested would be needed. Rich confirmed that the request for hardware was based on the start of the financial year in August 2006.

It was agreed that data consistency was a significant issue, and that 12 months was a relatively short period in which to resolve business process issues. It was also agreed that student pull would be significant in encouraging consistent use of systems within faculties. Barry noted that attempts would not be made to enforce practice through the imposition of a system, but that faculties would be informed of the processes required to make a facility available to students via the portal.

Barry sought the authority of the Board to take the issues raised to Steve West for discussion. This was agreed, and Barry thanked the Board.

ACTION: Barry to discuss the rollout plan with Steve West prior to its submission to the CPE.

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

Rich reported the following:

- Phase 2 of the High Level Plan (target completion 1st August 2005) had gone live on 14th July.
- The Phase 3 launch to BBS had taken place on 14th September.
- The period of stabilisation within the plan had not been necessary, as an upgrade to Blackboard had obviated the expected need for consultancy.
- Development had been completed for Phase 4 (target completion 1st December), and it was intended to release the pilot portal to BBS undergraduates in December 2005 and also to launch the announcements channel at the same time.

6. Confirmation of scope of Phase 2 of the Re-enrolment Project [Phase 6 on the High Level Plan]

Barry requested that a formal note be made of the scope of Phase 2 of the Re-enrolment Project. Barry noted that it had been formally agreed at the IS Project Co-ordination Group that the scope of re-enrolment phase was as described in the Project Initiation Document, and that online payment of fees would be delivered to the same set of students as in Phase 1, i.e. returning FAS students who had passed their modules. General online fee payment is scheduled to go live in July 2007.

7. Risk register

Rich reported two changes to the risk register:

- Risk 0202 had increased to 9 as faculty liaison and business analysis had been identified as areas of vulnerability in the Portal Rollout Business Plan.
- Risk 0604 had been addressed as a proof-of-concept for groups had been developed in preparation for the release of the announcements channel.

8. Change to the composition of the Portal Management Group

Barry reported that, following the roll-out of the portal to FAS and BBS, there was a need for representation from these faculties within the Portal Management Group. As there were two representatives from HSC due to the initial release of the pilot in that faculty, Jenny Wills had agreed to stand down, leaving Kevin Foreman as HSC representative. Barry confirmed that Sarah Mackie (BBS lecturer) and Debra Campbell (FAS postgraduate administrator and student adviser) had agreed to join the Group, giving executive, academic and administrative representation from the three faculties within the pilot.

9. Date of next meeting

Wednesday 22nd February 2006, 10:00-11:00, Room 4D24, Bolland Library, Frenchay Campus.

10. Any other business

10.1. Project Board membership

Steve enquired whether more representatives from the customer community were needed on the Board, and noted that the Board's composition comprised five providers and two customers. Barry noted that the current composition was already large for a Board whose purpose was strategic, and questioned whether additional members were needed. Rich noted that, as he had raised in Item 4 above, CSA were important contributors.