Portal Project Board
Notes of the meeting of 13th October 2006, 3Q49

Present: John Rushforth (Chair), Steve Grive, Barry Cawthorne, Tessa Harrison, Margaret Needles, Rich Egan, Emma Taylor (Notes).

1. Apologies
Warwick Jones.

2. Membership: to note the retirement of Steph Keeble
John confirmed that, as he was now acting head of CSA, he would act as both Project Board Chair and CSA representative following Steph Keeble's retirement.

3. Minutes of the meeting of 26th July
Approved with one correction to item 4.3. Rich noted that further testing of the Academic Record channel would be undertaken by Margaret and others.

4. Matters arising not elsewhere on the agenda

4.1. Timetabling Manager
Tessa confirmed that the post of Senior Assistant Academic Registrar had been advertised.

4.2. Recruitment to vacant posts
Rich confirmed that all vacancies had been filled and appointees had been in post for one month. Rich noted that recruitment of new staff had had some impact, but anticipated that delivery times would not be affected.

5. Summary of progress
Rich reported the following:
- Online re-enrolment was available between 12th July and 15th September. 22% of eligible students had fully enrolled online despite a relatively low-key launch. Margaret confirmed that the user feedback received had been positive.
- The Academic Record channel was made live on 28th September and feedback had been immediate and positive. Rich noted that this channel had required a lot of work across the Portal Project and Business Systems Teams.
- The Portal Makeover was now live with the production branding and identity. Again, a large amount of very positive feedback had been received from users.
- The Bookmarks channel would go live by the end of the week beginning 16th October.
- The Online Coursework Submission channel is expected to be piloted in November and December by FAS with 85 students from 4 undergraduate modules and possibly 1 postgraduate module. Some of the staff taking part in the pilot plan to mark work online and provide feedback via e-mail.

Margaret noted that some outstanding issues remained, including the provision of a coversheet and late submission sheet online, and the protection of student anonymity. In answer to a query by John, Margaret confirmed that the modules in the pilot were full-time, but two had some Block Release students. Rich clarified that the Online Submission channel was a submission rather than a transmission system and Barry noted that the more advanced system used by the Open University had taken 12 person years to develop. John enquired whether/when additional investment for further development work may be required. Steve confirmed that this requirement would not be until 2007, following the full Portal roll-out. In answer to a

query by Tessa, Barry confirmed that it had been decided to offer online submission through the portal rather than through UWEonline as not all modules are supported in UWEonline and Blackboard does not provide sufficiently robust and secure tracking of student submissions. John stressed the need for the Online Coursework Submission system to be usable by part time as well as full time students. Barry confirmed that both could be supported. The system had been developed with the needs of distance learners in mind.

6. Extension of photosets pilot

Rich reported that the Photosets pilot had been extended to include 59 FAS and BBS staff. Rich noted that, although there was some contention of resources, the Database Administrators in the Business Systems Team would begin work on this in the next two weeks.

7. Dissemination events

Barry reported that the two portal demonstrations given to HSC staff at Kevin Foreman's request had been well attended. As it had become apparent that these demonstrations had raised user demand for access to the portal prior to the planned February 2007 launch date, the open demonstrations planned for November and December had been moved closer to the portal launch date. Two one-hour events have now been scheduled for 24th and 31st January. In answer to a query by John, Barry confirmed that he and Rich had discussed ways of providing demonstrations of the portal to people unable to attend these events, including an interactive version of the presentation with links to existing resources. Margaret confirmed that she would also be making use of existing guidance in demonstrations to administrative staff.

8. Planning

8.1. High Level Plan 2006/07

Rich reported that PMG had agreed that, wherever possible, development focus should be on preparations for the live production portal. Rich gave a summary of the progress made in Section 1 of the High Level Plan:
- Items 1 to 4 have been completed.
- Item 5 (the bookmarks channel) is now underway.
- Item 6 (ISIS stress testing) is a substantive item (9) on the agenda.
- Item 7 (feed for roll-out). Business analysis is underway.
- Items 12 and 24 (roll-out to a cluster of AMD students and remaining HSC students) will allow an increase in the portal user base whilst still in the pilot and the testing of a different timetabling database.

Section 2 of the plan identifies a mechanism to roll out the portal to staff on 5th February 2007 and to students in four tranches from 12th to 28th February. The decision to use this mechanism was informed by the experiences of Edinburgh University, who had rolled out their portal to all users at once and experienced a system crash. Rich noted the need for PMG to decide which students would get access in each tranche and the need to determine how to make students aware of the portal without disadvantaging later tranches. No mechanism has been formally identified, but Rich anticipated that the first three tranches of students would be sent an e-mail and that by the end of February, a portal login would be placed on the UWE Intranet home page. Barry noted that there was also a need for careful consideration of the timing of the removal of icons from the UWE desktop to force use of systems such as e-mail and UWEonline via the portal. Barry confirmed that this would not be done until after the period of stabilisation between March and April 2007, identified in Section 3 of the plan. This decision had also been informed by the problems experienced by Edinburgh University, who had disabled access to systems from outside their portal but had then

experienced a university-wide outage of the portal when it was released to all users simultaneously. Rich proposed that, following the rollout, PMG be re-constituted to reflect the UWE-wide production status of the Portal.

Section 4 of the plan gives an indication of new developments from May 2007 onwards. Barry noted that the items included in Section 4 had arisen as priorities but that, without specifications, the estimated project sizes could only be an informed best guess. The following proposed developments were discussed:
- Roll out of Phase 2 of Online Re-enrolment to the entire University. Tessa noted that enrolment was being considered this term as part of the review of administrative processes and stressed the need to keep close ties between the administrative review and portal development.
- Links to Agresso offering students real-time reports of debt and financial status. Barry noted that requests for this service had come from students and from Financial Services.
- An Assessment Feedback channel to provide generic exam feedback to module runs. Barry reported that this requirement had been raised by academic staff and noted that the provision of exam feedback was part of UWE's assessment policy with online feedback listed among the delivery options. Barry confirmed that a paper on this support for feedback was being taken to LTAC, and expressed confidence that the assessment feedback channel would be widely used. Steve stressed that it was University policy wherever possible to buy commercially supported products and expressed concern that functionality may be built into the portal which could be provided by a commercially supported product. Barry noted that, although the majority of module enrolments were in Blackboard, a significant number of modules were not using the system. Barry also outlined the mechanism whereby access to modules in Blackboard is closed when field boards are locked in ISIS and confirmed that, as it is currently configured, it would not be possible to provide exam feedback via Blackboard. John noted that there may be a need to review the provision of feedback following the development of the new regulatory framework.

In response to a query by John, Barry confirmed that additional functionality requests were included in Appendix A of the Requirements Elicitation, Definition and Prioritisation document. John stressed the need for priorities to be clearly identified to allow resource requirements to be determined.

8.2. 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. The document attempts to identify a way of determining portal requirements in a transparent, representative and manageable way and identifies five key stakeholder groups:
- Strategic management
- Students
- Academic staff
- Support staff (primarily administrative)
- Key service departments

The document proposes that three consultative groups be established from the stakeholders, to meet once per term or twice yearly:
- myUWE student forum (MSF). This group would be more informally run using student representatives.
- myUWE Academic group (MAG). This group would include Library Services.
- myUWE Business group (MBG).

Barry noted that, in addition to these groups, an online feedback facility would also be available. Requirements emerging from the groups and feedback would be prioritised by the PMG. Strategic requirements would require the approval of the ISCG.

Appendix A of the document identifies existing portal requirements and attempts to give an indication of their scale as an informed best guess. Barry confirmed that these requirements had arisen through feedback or were included in the JISC report on portal requirements, and would form part of the agenda for the consultative groups. John raised the need to identify the cost of requirements to allow resource needs to be determined, in particular the resources required for further development of online re-enrolment. Margaret noted that the resource requirements would depend on the level of integration required with other systems. Barry confirmed that the requirements would differ significantly depending on the scope of the project, with significantly more resources required if referred students were to be allowed to re-enrol online. In answer to an enquiry by John about plans for access to the portal by applicants to UWE, Rich confirmed that the ADMIT system had the potential to integrate with uPortal but is not currently in the scope of the project.

The Board approved Barry's request to take the High Level Plan and Requirements Elicitation papers to ISCG.

9. ISIS Stress Testing

Rich reported that the Business Systems Team had successfully tested concurrent access to ISIS web services by 400 users with the same logon. A consultant will be on site on Monday 16th October to conduct further testing with a number of different logons. Rich confirmed that the current figure of 400 concurrent accesses was close to his target of 512 users and that end-to-end stress testing of the system would be undertaken in November or December 2006. In answer to a query by John, Rich confirmed that an increase in hardware specifications may increase the number of possible accesses, but noted that this issue involved the interface between ISIS and the portal, rather than ISIS itself.

10. Risk register

Rich drew the Board's attention to six risks:
- 0101. This risk has been lowered from 9 to 6 in light of recruitment, but Rich expressed concern that Margaret's increasing involvement in Business Analysis work may have an impact on the Faculty Liaison role. Barry noted that Nick Coates' time was also available.
- 0102 and 0501. Rich confirmed that the Blackboard upgrade had been successfully completed.
- 0502. This risk has been raised in the light of stress testing.
- 0503. Rich noted that this risk had been mitigated by consultancy.
- 0701. The impact of organisational changes had been acknowledged because of their affect on the portal. John acknowledged that the Board mitigated this risk to an extent, but it was agreed that it should be raised to at least 7 and discussed at the next meeting.

ACTION: Organisational changes to be a substantive item on the Portal Project Board agenda of 30th November.

11. Dates of next meetings

30th November 2006 (4D24), 31st January 2007 (venue tbc).

12. Any other business

None.