



**University of London
External System Academic Committee**

External System System's and Technologies Sub-Committee

The fourth meeting of the Systems and Technologies Sub-Committee took place on 10 December 2008. The ESAC is invited to receive the attached minutes of the meeting and in particular to note the following recommendations.

1. Update and Progress Report on the SITS Implementation Project

- It was noted that some budgetary increases had been identified relating to stock control options, appointment of external consultants for project assurance and the requirement to appoint a dedicated SITS trainer **(min 202)**
- It was noted that there is a potential lack of clarity between the governance of SITS in relation to other governance structures within EISA (e.g. the STSC) and it was resolved that:
 - All SITS stage reports should be scheduled to coincide with future STSC meetings where possible **(min 202 and 205)**
 - That there is a need to further investigate working practices to attempt to ensure convergence between formal and project governance structures **(min 206)**.

2. Update and Progress Report on the Portal Project

- It was noted that there had been significant problems with the implementation of the Portal project due to a major failure of a piece of IBM software relating to identity management. This had caused a considerable amount of functionality to be removed from the current release of the Portal as well as affecting some of the existing functionality of the live Portal **(mins 210-215)**
- It was also noted that EISA was in negotiation with IBM to seek some form of compensation for the problems caused and it was resolved that the Director of the Business Transformation Programme would keep the STSC informed of progress in this matter **(min 216-218)**
- It was also noted that, despite the concerns relating to the single piece of software, all other functionality of the Portal had been delivered on schedule **(min 221)**

3. Update and Progress Report of the eLearning Strategy

- It was recommended that the eLearning Strategy update and progress report is amended to include the recommendation of the STSC and submitted to ESAC for endorsement as soon as possible **(min 240-241)**

4. Update on the revised Online Costing Model

- It was noted that a report on the revised Online Library costing model was expected in Spring 2009 and that costing solutions were likely to combine a variety of different models. **(min 251)**
- The STSC also noted that this would miss the Finance Committee meetings for 2009 and that any budgetary recommendations would not be effected until the following year. **(min 251)**



The fourth meeting of the Systems and Technologies Sub-Committee
10 December 2008

MINUTES

PRESENT:	Jon Gregson (EISA) (Chair), John McConnell (EISA), Craig O'Callaghan (EISA), Brian Sayer (EISA), John Dickens (EISA), Paul McGaughlin (ULRLS), Steve Ryan (LSE), Trevor Manning (LSHTM)
IN ATTENDANCE:	Jonathon Thomas (EISA) (Secretary)
BY INVITATION:	None
APOLOGIES:	Gary Preston (EISA), Mary Luckham (EISA)
ABSENT:	Curtiz Cotterell (EISA)

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE CHAIR

189. The Chair announced that, due to the number of EISA officer absentees, he would ask the Dean of the External System to remind all EISA committee members the importance of attending governance meetings.
190. The Chair welcomed Trevor Manning (eLearning Advisor, LSHTM) who has agreed to be a member of the STSC.
191. The Chair also noted that the STSC was actively seeking new members from both the Colleges and within EISA.
192. The Chair informed the sub-committee that Professor Geraint Wiggins (Goldsmiths) has resigned from the sub-committee due to other commitments. The Chair informed the sub-committee that he had written to Geraint to thank him for his valuable and insightful contributions over the previous meetings. The sub-committee all echoed these sentiments.

MINUTES

Received

193. **STSC 4/1**, minutes of the third meeting of the STSC, 07 May 2008. The minutes were all approved by the sub-committee.
194. The sub-committee then discussed the action points from the last meeting and following key points were raised:

- That the feasibility study of the Agresso Stock control software is an ongoing task and has been extended to be a full options appraisal of stock control systems in general. It will report to the SITS Project Board and to the STSC in March 2009.
- The Plagiarism Working Group has met and agreed a paper relating to the introduction of TurnItIn. This paper will be circulated to members of the STSC for information. The STSC noted unless any matters related to TurnItIn or plagiarism detection related systems are referred to STSC by QASL this agenda item is resolved as far as STSC involvement is concerned.

Resolved

195. *That a report on the stock control options appraisal will be presented to the next meeting of the STSC*
196. *That the paper relating to the introduction of the TurnItIn software will be circulated to all members of the STSC for information.*
197. *That the agenda item related to TurnItIn is now resolved unless further matters are referred to the STSC by QASL.*

STANDING ITEMS

TO RECEIVE AN UPDATE AND PROGRESS REPORT ON THE SITS IMPLEMENTATION PROJECT

Received:

198. STSC 4/2, SITS Project Plan, STSC 4/3, Minutes of the first SITS Project Board, 25th September 2008
199. A verbal report of STSC 4/2 was given by the Director of the Business Transformation Programme (BTP). A number of key points were highlighted:
- That the programme had adopted Prince2 as the project management methodology
 - That the timescales of the project were quite lengthy but realistic (to be completed by 2012)
 - That there is an average requirement for a Project Team of 11 FTEs rising to a maximum of 15 FTEs during project peaks. These FTEs would predominantly be non-technical.
 - That an external consultancy has been recruited to provide project assurance
200. This paper was accepted by the sub-committee and no comments were received.
201. A verbal report of STSC 4/3 was given by the Director of the BTP. The following key points were highlighted:
- That there was a need to strengthen the membership of the Project Board to include more technically skilled representatives
 - That there was a need for communications expertise to support the BTP to ensure that the nature of the programme was being disseminated accurately, which is now being acted on.
202. The issue of project 'scope-creep' and budgetary increases were raised by the sub-committee. The Director of the BTP confirmed that a number of additional costs have been identified. These related to:
- The stock control options appraisal
 - The appointment of external consultants for project assurance

- The requirement to appoint a dedicated trainer for SITS
203. The governance of the SITS project was discussed and concern was raised about its potential lack of clarity in relation to other governance structures within EISA (for example, the STSC, the User Steering Group). The following key points were noted:
- That the membership of the SITS Project Board was acceptable
 - That all Quality Review work for the SITS Project would be submitted to the STSC for comments and approval
 - That all stage reports for the SITS Project should be scheduled to coincide with the STSC where possible
 - That exceptions in the SITS Project plan can be handled by the STSC through email correspondence or, if necessary, an extraordinary meeting. However, further consideration must be given to establish convergence between formal governance structures and project governance structures.

Resolved

204. *That all Quality Review work for the SITS Project will be submitted to the STSC for comment and approval*
205. *That all stage reports for the SITS Project should be scheduled to coincide with future STSC meetings where possible*
206. *To investigate working practices to ensure convergence between formal and project governance structures*
207. The Director of the BTP also reported that the forthcoming work for the BTP would be related to business process change and not product build. As such, it is unlikely that there will be any functional or technical developments to discuss at the next meeting of the STSC. However, a full report would be submitted to the next STSC for information.

Resolved

208. *That a paper on the BTP work relating to process change would be submitted to the next meeting of the STSC for comment.*

TO RECEIVE AN UPDATE AND PROGRESS REPORT ON THE PORTAL PROJECT

Received

209. STSC 4/4, Evolution 2 End of Stage Report, STSC 4/5, Evolution 3 Stage Plan
210. A verbal report was given by the Portal Project Development Manager on the current status of the Portal Project and the following key points were noted:
- That the project had experienced significant delays due to the failure of a single piece of IBM software (Tivoli Identity Manager).
 - That the problem was due to scale which is why it was not noticed during the pilot phase
 - The software failure has meant that a significant amount of functionality has had to be removed from the project launch (for example, the ability to change passwords, to manage security questions and update profiles).

- Additionally, the failure has meant that the launch of student social networking site has also been delayed until the New Year as time was diverted from this work to work on fixing the identity management problems.
- That a number of manual and automated 'workarounds' have been implemented by EISA and the external consultants to the extent that the problems with the identity management software do not now have any effects on the registration of students on to the system.
- That there is still no solution available to register staff users onto the system.
- That IBM have now provided two fixes for the problems and that the external consultants are now working on implementing these fixes and although final resolution that will remove the need for workarounds will not be delivered until April, the solution to those problems where no workarounds currently exist will be delivered in January/February 2009.
- In addition the Student Networking functionality is also expected to be delivered in January/February 2009.
- That the implementation of the fixes to the system have necessitated the complete rebuild of the pre-production environment to bring it in line with the live production system
- That once the pre-production environment has been rebuilt progress with the Portal in other areas can begin and significant improvements in the usability of the Portal can be made available to the students quickly
- That all other software and functionality of the portal is working as expected.

211. The STSC then received comments from the Director of the Centre for Learning Technology at LSE who has been using the Portal since the start of the academic year. The comments related to:

- The recommendation of Firefox in the user guide as the preferred browser may lead some users to think that other browsers were not supported
- That the 'stateless' nature of the navigation within the Portal severely impacted the usability of the system
- That the inability to create staff users was causing serious issues
- That the End of Stage Report provided by the external consultants did not fully emphasise the severity and impact of the problem with the identity management software and that improved communications with the Colleges was required
- In summary, there were no tangible benefits to using the Portal system in its current format

212. The Portal Project Development Manager noted the significance of the comments and the following recommendations were made:

Recommended

213. *To change the Portal user guide to remove the recommendation on which browser to use and to ensure that users are fully aware of all of the supported browsers*

214. *To investigate and consider solutions to the 'stateless' navigation issues of the Portal once the pre-production environment has been rebuilt*

215. *To investigate and provide a solution to allow staff to be registered onto the system as soon as possible*

216. The sub-committee then considered what approaches necessary to escalate problems. It was reported by the Director of the BTP that high level discussions with IBM had taken place (with

the Head of UK Software and Vice-president of Europe Sales) and that extreme dissatisfaction with the Tivoli product had been expressed. IBM has admitted that the software is not fit-for-purpose in its current release.

217. In addition to this, it was reported that the University Lawyer has been consulted and on their recommendation it has been decided that the matter will be pursued extensively with IBM once the fixes have been fully implemented and a true assessment of the delay can be evaluated. It is anticipated that a financial resolution will be sought.

Resolved

218. *That the Director of the BTP keeps the STSC aware of the progress of the grievance with IBM.*

219. The relationship between the External System and the external consultants responsible for development of the Portal was also discussed. Some dissatisfaction over the cost and timescales of delivery were noted, although it was also recognised that much of this was the direct result of the problems with the IBM software. However, it was recognised that future contractual obligations with the consultants may need to be considered carefully

220. In summary, the sub-committee expressed grave concerns over the delays of the Portal project caused by the failure of the IBM identity management software. Specific areas for attention as a result of these problems are:

- PR and Communications with the stakeholders
- Technical solutions
- Legal issues and compensation
- Usability and navigational issues

221. The sub-committee noted, however, that the other functional areas not affected by the identity management problem were delivered and operating successfully.

Resolved

222. *To ensure that Colleges are kept fully aware of the progress of the Portal project, both in terms of developments and delays*

223. *To draft a revised Portal Project Plan to accurately reflect the current project situation*

TO RECEIVE A VERBAL REPORT FROM QUALITY ASSURANCE AND STUDENT LIFECYCLE SUB-COMMITTEE MEMBERS ON ANY MATTERS RELEVANT TO THE STSC

224. There were no issues to report

GENERAL DISCUSSION ON SYSTEMS AND TECHNOLOGIES AND ITEMS FOR FUTURE AGENDAS

225. This item was introduced as an opportunity to explore future items for the STSC and to ensure that the STSC maintained a broad agenda for future discussions.

226. The Chief Officer raised the issue relating to External System examiners developing exam questions collaboratively online and what was the progress of the developments relating to this.

It was noted that a paper had previously been produced on this matter that recommended the use of secure emails but that this approach had not been successful. It was also noted that a dedicated Moodle site could be used to provide a solution and that the matter should be discussed at future STSC meetings.

Resolved

227. *To circulate the paper relating to External System examiners developing exam questions collaboratively online and add to the agenda for the next STSC*
228. The issue of whether the STSC could act as a 'think tank' rather than a 'monitor' was discussed. It was recognised that there is often difficulty in understanding where the next 'big idea' was coming from and that the STSC represented an opportunity to stimulate ideas and share knowledge. As such, it was recommended that, where appropriate, working groups could be convened by the STSC to consider and report on specific technical areas or developments.

Resolved

229. *That the STSC will convene working groups where required to consider and report on specific technical areas or developments*

MATTERS FOR DISCUSSION

TO CONSIDER AND DISCUSS THE DEVELOPMENT OF A COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY FOR THE BUSINESS TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME, ELEARNING STRATEGY AND OTHER RELATED PROJECTS

Received

230. **STSC 4/6**, SITS Implementation Project Communications Strategy, **STSC 4/7**, Portal Project Communications Strategy, **STSC 4/8**, BTP Communications paper.
231. The Chair explained the background of the Communications Strategy and noted that a Communications group has now been established and that regular meetings of this group are now occurring.
232. The sub-committee discussed the papers received and whilst the quality of the papers was commended, some concern was raised about whether sufficient resource was available to deliver to the objectives laid out in the papers.
233. It was noted by the Director of the BTP that additional funding has been made available. It was also noted that, whilst this cost would be coming out of recurrent spending, the resource would have a substantial focus on BTP communications work. The specifications for this post are currently being finalised.
234. Members of the sub-committee also raised the point that the communications plan should not be a propaganda tool, and that all information, whether good or bad, should be communicated to ensure that all stakeholders are adequately informed to make reasoned decisions.

**TO CONSIDER AND DISCUSS THE REVISED ELEARNING STRATEGY AND PROGRESS REPORT
AND MAKE RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STRATEGY**

Received:

235. **STSC 4/9**, eLearning Strategy Update
236. The sub-committee raised the issue about the general understanding and knowledge of the eLearning Strategy within the stakeholders. It was considered that very few people were genuinely aware of it.
237. It was noted that, the simplified paper as recommended by STSC 3 (min 174) was to be included as part of the Communications Group work for the BTP.

Recommended

238. *That the BTP Communications Plan is expanded to provide a simplified and non-technical description of the eLearning Strategy for circulation to the wider audience.*
239. The sub-committee then discussed whether the paper should be submitted to ESAC for endorsement of the strategy and also to provide an update. It was agreed that the paper should be submitted as soon as possible but with the following changes:
- The title of the paper is amended to Open Campus Update: from eLearning Strategy to eStrategy
 - The role of Shibboleth is emphasised much more strongly in the paper as a key operator in providing greater interoperability within the Colleges
 - The diagrammatic representation of the eFramework is updated to include significantly more third-party services
 - The key timescales are added

Recommended

240. *That the paper is revised and updated to include the recommendations of the STSC.*
241. *That approval is sought to submit the paper to the ESAC for endorsement as soon as possible*
242. The sub-committee then had some discussion regarding the use of the phrase Open Campus as a suitable tool for branding the eStrategy. Whilst it was recognised that the name had some beneficial qualities, it was noted by some members that it was 'predictable' and did not distinguish the strategy from other initiatives (e.g. the Open University's Open Learn initiative) or emphasise the eFramework model sufficiently. However, during the discussions no suitable alternative was reached.

Recommended

243. *That for the immediate future the title Open Campus is maintained to describe the eLearning Strategy but further consideration of the branding should be considered by the BTP Communication Group.*

MATTERS FOR REPORT

TO RECEIVE A VERBAL REPORT ON THE INTEGRATION OF THE ONLINE LIBRARY AND PORTAL

244. A verbal report was given by the Portal Project Development Manager. It was outlined that there was to be closer synergy between the Portal, the Online Library and Moodle in the future. A paper detailing this approach and giving recommendations for change would be made available in the early New Year. The key points of this paper would be to:
- To integrate the Online Library more closely with the Portal and with VLEs
 - To increase the categorisation of resources in the library to include, where possible, study unit level resources
 - To consider ways of directly linking learning objectives or specific key subject areas to library resources.
245. It was also recommended that continued discussions with Course Directors and Programme Teams on how to best make use of and improve access to the Online Library resources and integration with the Portal should be continued.

Resolved

246. *A paper detailing the proposed integration of the Online Library and the Portal will be circulated to all members of the STSC for comment on completion*
247. *To continue to discuss with Course Directors and Programmes teams on possible improvements to the Online Library and its integration with the portal*
248. It was also noted that there needs to be greater communications with the Library staff about this project as well as with the colleges and the students. It was also noted that, from the student's perspective, too much change in a single year may become too disruptive. It was reported that the changes would either be gradual, or would not be effected until the start of the next academic year.
249. The issue of Athens versus Shibboleth was addressed by the sub-committee. It was noted that the Shibboleth service was now running successfully on the Online Library site, but that some suppliers had not yet migrated to this service and were still using the old Athens service. However, it was expected that the majority of the suppliers were expected to migrate to the Shibboleth service in the future. Because of this, it was not considered worthwhile integrating Single Sign-On with Athens.

TO RECEIVE AN UPDATE ON THE REVISED ONLINE LIBRARY COSTING MODEL

250. The sub-committee received a verbal report from the Director, Technical Services, ULRLS, on the revised costing model for the External System Online Library. It was noted that the ULRLS were not examining a single costing model that could be applied across the board to Colleges and that the project funded by the Vice-chancellor looking at sharing of library resources across colleges also provided a potential solution. It was noted that solutions were likely to combine different costing approaches. These solutions are being actively explored and will need to be communicated and discussed with stakeholders in the coming months.

251. A report is expected in Spring 2009. However, it was noted that this will miss the Finance Committee meeting for 2009 so any budgetary recommendations would not be effected until the following year.

MATTERS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

252. None

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

253. The Chair of the STSC spoke briefly about the need to monitor the performance of the sub-committee under the new guidelines for Corporate Performance produced by EISA. The Chair informed the sub-committee that the documents would be circulated for comment and discussion at the next meeting of the STSC.

Resolved

254. *That the papers relating to performance monitor for the Systems and Technologies Sub-Committee will be circulated for comment and discussion at the next meeting.*

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

255. The date of the fifth meeting of the Systems and Technologies Sub-Committee is **11 March 2008**.

RESERVED ITEMS OF BUSINESS

256. None