

# Learning and Information Services

PROJECT: STUDENT TIMETABLING

LOAD ISSUES - CONTINGENCY



## INTRODUCTION

At the time of writing (May 2011) we are noting issues with ePortal and the Daily Timetable when large numbers of users attempt to log on at the same time. These issues are being escalated formally with Serco (the suppliers of the software) and there are reasons to expect a resolution in time for the go live of these timetables to students on 1<sup>st</sup> September, although we have to be prepared for such resolutions not to be forthcoming by the time required. This document summarises the plans to resolve the issues in time for go live and also identifies contingency measures that would allow timetables to be made available to students in the event that these issues are not resolved.

## BACKGROUND

ePortal is a piece of software that makes timetables available online to staff and students. It is supplied by Serco and works with the CMIS timetabling product also supplied by Serco. It has two elements to it: a set of web pages that display timetables to the users and a 'data server' element which extracts data from the CMIS database and delivers it for inclusion on the web pages.

In addition, we are using an API (Application Programme Interface) supplied by Serco. This too works with the data server and allows UCLAN to write our own software to display timetables online. It acts as the interface between our software and the data server. We are using this to write a simplified timetable – it just displays a daily timetable for the logged on user in a simple and small format that makes it appropriate for use by screen reading software (used by those with sight difficulties), mobile devices, and the student portal.

Serco have published the fact that loading issues have been reported by a number of universities, although not all – some universities are using it without issue. They have said that they are investigating these issues and have a programme in place to resolve them. In the light of this we did our own load testing and also encountered loading issues. The issue we identified was different to that made public by Serco and so we have logged this separately. Our issue concerns the data server element specifically so that it affects ePortal and the API, whereas the issue Serco have publicised concerns settings in TomCat (the server software that delivers web pages to a client PC) and therefore affects ePortal and not the API.

## ESCALATION

The loading issues are a project risk and have been identified as such on the project's risk register (R016). As the risk owner in the project board, Jane Anthony has escalated this issue along with others that relate to ePortal, requesting resolution dates for them all. This action is ongoing, under constant review, and will continue until a satisfactory resolution is received. The issue is also on the programme team meeting agenda to ensure regular reporting and review as appropriate.

## POTENTIAL CONTINGENCIES

There are a number of ways in which timetables may be viewed from 1<sup>st</sup> September onwards. The following identifies the methods and the impact of the identified load issues on them:

1. **ePortal.** This is the main method we are relying on. It is impacted if no resolutions are forthcoming on either the Serco identified issues or the UCLAN identified issue
2. **Daily Timetable.** This is an alternative method of seeing a timetable to ePortal but is limited by only supplying a daily timetable for students and not the weekly timetable offered by ePortal. It is affected by the UCLAN identified issue, but not necessarily by the Serco identified issue. It is therefore a potential contingency if the UCLAN identified issue is resolved.

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3. **Module Catalogue.** This current facility will display timetables for a module. It is currently being upgraded to cope with a new stylesheet and to cope with the new way of holding modules codes in CMIS. It will not show personal timetables, so students would have to view timetables by individual module. It therefore has limited functionality but is not dependent on any known load issues, so is a contingency in the event that no progress is made on the load issues.
4. **CMIS.** The main software itself has the ability to generate timetables in pdf format. It would therefore be possible to generate timetables at the programme or module level, but this would be a very manual process and it would not cope with changes to the timetable. This is therefore a contingency, but one with heavy overheads in workload and inability to reflect changes.