

**SEN/2011/10. MyCampus/Student lifecycle Project**

Senate received a report on the implementation of the MyCampus system from the Secretary of Court. Mr Newall was Chair of the Project Board.

The University's new information student system, MyCampus, had been opened to students in August. In the weeks since the new system was introduced, many staff and students had experienced considerable difficulties with Class Enrolment, which had been consuming much more staff time than had been estimated.

By 30 September, over 12,000, or 70% of eligible undergraduate students, had fully enrolled on a 120-credit programme. However, there remained a large number of undergraduates, estimated at 2,000 students, who had still to complete their enrolment. Most of these had enrolled for the large majority of their programme. For postgraduate taught programmes, as at 30 September, just 42% of full-time Postgraduate Taught students were fully enrolled.

Difficulties with the system had in some areas led to poor course choices and, in Geographic and Earth Sciences, low Level 1 student numbers. The need for coordination with advisers of studies was recognised. Mr Newall wished to express his apologies and his gratitude to advisers for the additional work they had had to undertake.

The reasons for the unresolved enrolment difficulties had been discussed in recent days by the Student Lifecycle Project Team, meeting with school administrators and Chief Advisers of Study. Every effort would be made to ensure that enrolment was completed for all students as soon as possible. The SLP Board had met on 4 October to review progress and revisit the Project Plan to ensure that priority was given to completing this task.

Re other aspects of implementation of MyCampus, the Registration process was now largely complete. The performance of the system hardware had mainly been good. MyCampus had routinely had 5,000 users at any one time and had been handling this volume satisfactorily. The system software had features such as American spellings that had drawn adverse comment. The supplier was developing an update of the software with UK spellings. In addition, some software configuration had been poor - an aspect that could be improved on. However, generally, the software had been doing what it was designed to do.

The immediate priority was to ensure, as soon as possible, that all students were fully enrolled on MyCampus. This was critically important in preparation for the December diet of exams. A second important action, that would be led by the Project Board in consultation with staff and students, was to learn the lessons from the experience of Registration and Enrolment in 2011. This time next year, it would not be required to migrate 20,000 student records between systems, with all the complexities involved. However, action was needed in specified areas to avoid the large workload that staff had faced this year.

The Project Board was also concerned to avoid placing further burdens on staff and in consequence decided to defer the introduction of other aspects of the system. It was recognised that piloting was essential and that insufficient time and resources had been devoted to training and system testing in advance of Registration and Enrolment being implemented. A group, which would include four members of Senate and be chaired by Vice-Principal Professor Coton, was being formed to identify lessons learned. Queen's University, Belfast, had introduced a system

from the same supplier one year previously and reported that the first year had been difficult, but that matters had now improved.

Mr Newall continued that implementation of MyCampus had been a major project, and paid credit to the many staff throughout the University for the contribution they had made to it. The development had happened at a time when the University had been going through major organisational change, with Restructuring in 2009/10 and Cost Reduction in 2010/11.

The immediate response to the introduction of MyCampus had not been positive, mainly because of the large volume of work and frustration associated with Class Enrolment. Aspects of the implementation could have been managed better. There were deficiencies associated with training, software configuration, data input, and the set up of programme and course information that had to be addressed in order to avoid a repeat of this year's difficulties.

Mr Newall apologised that the issues above had caused frustrations for students and had added to the workload of many staff, and he thanked all members of staff who had worked so hard to support students through such a difficult enrolment process. He and the Project Board promised they would ensure that the Registration and Enrolment exercise worked much better in future.

In discussion at Senate, many comments were made on the experience and effects of using the new system for enrolling. The interface was seen as very difficult to use, unfriendly and not intuitive. Processes were elaborate, involving many steps, and the system slow. Screens were poor and staff reported feeling they were operating in the dark. In some contexts, use of the system took longer than manual recording of information and face-to-face interaction with colleagues and students. The call-logging function had been particularly frustrating in this regard. It was not possible for students to be enrolled on more than one course at a time; this was particularly frustrating where programmes had fixed structures and few options. Concern was expressed for the experience of students dealing with the system. There was agreement that the insensitivity of the system to compatible and less compatible combinations of courses needed to be dealt with. The Secretary of Court undertook to provide an apology to students for the difficulties many would have experienced with enrolling on the system. The Director of IT Services reported there had been a hardware problem, with jobs being queued on only one server. It had not been possible to identify the cause of this, but servers were being closely monitored and interventions made to ensure they did not contribute to slowing of the system. Software reconfiguration would assist and would be undertaken to streamline processes, but it would be extremely difficult to make changes that would significantly improve the interface. There was agreement that insufficient training had been provided. Many expressed concern for the toll enrolment had taken on staff - notably, for advisers of study and administrative staff, and the need to avoid repetition of the experience was strongly stressed. It was reported that workloads were such that a recently issued deadline for enrolment was impossible to meet. The Project Director confirmed that the deadline could be extended.

Discussion also covered the development process for MyCampus. A number of members commented that they had not felt they had been listened to during the consultation stages. Matters had been widely identified that should be customised, but did not seem to have been addressed. It was stated that desirable modifications to the software could have been made in advance, and that the IT system was driving the University rather than serving it. The software was not well aligned with needs. Schools were also being requested to provide significant amounts of

information for reasons that were opaque to them. It was also recalled that the budget for the new system had included only direct costs, and not reflected the significant amounts of additional time staff were now spending on operating the system. Cost estimates for future projects might be undertaken so as to reflect the full cost of implementation.

Comment was also made on the related matter of the advising system. The coincidence of the changes to the advising system and implementation of the enrolment function of MyCampus had in some ways been unfortunate. However, it was pointed out that Senate had supported the new advising system when it was reviewed in 2008-09, although currently the academic body seemed divided on the appropriate role of advisers in curriculum advice. The new advising approach had been predicated on the removal from advisers' roles of the more mechanical aspects of course choice; that the latter had not worked well had placed strain on continuing advisers of study, it also frustrated the intention that advisers would now be free to concentrate on pastoral support for students. The matter of continuing need for advisers who were experts on programme structures was considered. However, the President of the SRC also noted that the previous advising system had had its faults. These had included the need for increased pastoral support. Mr Ritchie also noted that the development of the new advising system had taken several years. It was imperative that progress was made in this regard as well as with MyCampus.

With respect to the future, consideration was given to the possibility of either reverting to the previous system, WebSURF, or retaining it to operate in parallel with MyCampus as a safeguard. It was explained that this would itself be an elaborate exercise and not straightforward. Some who had criticised MyCampus also held the view that reverting to WebSURF would not be feasible. Senate was reminded that there were serious loading issues with WebSURF and that aspects of it had started to falter. It was also recalled that Senate in 2008-09 had been kept abreast of, and supported, the development of the SLP/MyCampus system. MyCampus was still scheduled to bring substantial improvements to University processes.

The information that the introduction of a number of components was being deferred was welcomed by many. It was also noted that benefits these new elements of the system would bring were also thereby delayed. There were challenging and critical academic management processes in the period that lay ahead that needed to operate successfully: it was essential that potential difficulties with these were anticipated and circumvented. The forthcoming student number return to the Funding Council, internal income allocation, the December and then spring examination diets were noted in this regard. Progression decisions would fully test the programme plans that the system utilised. A number of members noted that it would be vital to properly resource training for the next steps of implementation.

It was recognised that time was limited for the identification, by the group convened by Professor Coton, of lessons learned. However, it was agreed that the overriding concern was to get things right and ensure that the Registration and Enrolment exercise in 2012 would operate satisfactorily. Professor Coton's group would address this as a matter of urgency, and would report to the next meeting of Senate, on 8 December.