

Web Committee Meeting

23rd November 2012
13.00 hrs
Huxley, Room 217

Minutes

Present: S. van Bakel,
S. Zappacosta
M. Wheelhouse
T. Kimber
S. Ingram

Apologies: P. Pietzuch, C. Cadar and F. Toni

Introduction

S. van Bakel welcomed everybody and explained the purpose of the Committee. He expressed concern that staff were unhappy with the Departments web presence and highlighted the areas that people have expressed concerns about. These were:

- a. The site doesn't work very well in terms of promoting the department.
- b. The site doesn't generate updates and content automatically from our databases.
- c. The web pages are of poor quality and not very professional.
- d. Some of the links on the site are broken.
- e. Some links deep down in the site point to out of date pages.
- f. Mistakes and out of date content is not reported.
- g. The CATE user interface needs to be improved.
- h. We have some very talented students in the department and maybe we should offer paid work to students to improve the site.

He then asked the members present for their views on this.

M. Wheelhouse stated that he felt students would enjoy working on the webpages and would probably do a very good job.

S. Zappacosta stated that links to College pages seem to be one of the problems with dead links on the DoC pages. They often seem to change the URL's, she said.

S. van Bakel asked how difficult it would be to check the site for broken links.

S. Ingram stated that he had used a W3 web page validator in the past and it seemed to work well although it could only check single pages at a time rather than the whole website which made it quite time consuming to use.

M. Wheelhouse stated one of his concerns was the links on the Internal pages pointing to old

web pages such as old Regulations for example.

S. van Bakel stated that he felt there needed to be a better reporting system where people could report these sort of things.

S. Ingram stated there was an email address webmaster@doc.ic.ac.uk that people could use rather like help@doc.ic.ac.uk that logs people's requests etc. The only problem with this, he said, was at the moment only John Charnley and he responded to these requests and in the Autumn and Spring terms he was often too busy to respond to these quickly.

S. van Bakel replied that a smoother interface that would allow people to report problems more easily would be better. He had spoken to S. Eisenbach about maybe creating small jobs that we could offer students for payment and she had stated that there would be money available for this if we wanted it. He asked the Committee to suggest possible students who might be willing to do this and possible jobs that might need doing. He then asked the Committee how we might progress with the automatic generation of web pages.

S. Zappacosta stated that this would depend where the pulled data lived. Currently she believed the process involved running a script and then the pages being updated manually from the results generated by the scripts.

S. Ingram stated that this had come about because ICT aren't keen on giving a live feed to their systems. If the data was pulled from our own systems this would be less of a problem, he said.

S. Zappacosta stated that getting sources from College particularly PhD information is extremely difficult or even impossible. We could use J. Charnley's scripts but they would need to run as part of a cron job probably twice daily but you would also need a data push so that it automatically populates the webpage, she said.

S. Ingram stated that whatever solution we look at we should probably keep Peter Gillings from Communications and Caroline Detchenique the Faculty Media Officer informed as they can be helpful in advising us on what is possible in terms of the College Systems particularly the CMS system.

M. Wheelhouse stated that he believed it was possible to create portlets in CMS that allows you to add dynamic code to the webpage.

S. Ingram stated that this was true but it wouldn't accept all code, however if we inform Peter Gillings of our plans he often can get ICT to create portlets that accept the code we want to use, he said. He also stated that in two years' time the College website look and feel will change so whatever we do it's important that it fits into the College template so the change will be as smooth as possible when it comes.

S. Zappacosta stated one problem with the Colleges pages is that departments all report courses etc. differently, there is no consistency. She also stated that she felt it was a good idea to date all pages so we are aware how old they are.

S. Ingram stated this dating came about because ICT don't back up individual pages so you can't ask for a page to be rolled back as it would mean the whole College's website would have to be rolled back. We dated the pages just to see if there had been a roll back at some point that we were unaware of. Some of the MSc pages seemed to revert back to previous ones at times, he said.

S. van Bakel stated that if this was the case then we should back up the DoC website using our own servers so we can restore individual pages if we want to.

T. Kimber stated that the structure of the pages can be misleading as there does seem to be problems with the split of the admissions pages and the teaching pages; for example to get into

the admissions pages and then by following the links you can unknowingly navigate out of these onto the teaching pages, he said.

S. Ingram stated that P. Peitzuch led the development of the structure and his idea which seemed correct was that admissions should be separated from teaching.

S. van Bakel stated that teaching should refer to current students and admissions should refer to potential student but somehow there is a lot of crossover.

S. Ingram stated that this probably came about because we didn't want to duplicate the pages but this did create problems with navigation.

S. Zappacosta stated that a further problem is that the teaching pages need to communicate academic year. For example, prospective students want to see courses offered in 2013-14, not what is currently offered.

S. Ingram agreed and stated this could easily be fixed.

T. Kimber stated that if we increased the number of scripts running to pull the 2013-14 data from the database as well as the current data and locate 2013-14 in admissions and current in teaching this may reduce some of the problems of having crossovers.

S. van Bakel stated that it was important to avoid replication and this would probably help that. He then asked S. Zappacosta how long it would take to set up a new database to run alongside the current one.

S. Zappacosta replied that it would probably take one or two full days to do this.

S. van Bakel stated that he would need to talk to maybe the 3rd year students to see if any would be willing to work on these sort web pages but asked S. Zappacosta whether she would be willing to give them field information etc.

S. Zappacosta replied that she would have to be very careful what she would release as some of the fields carry sensitive information but within reason she would allow some information to be released or create extra fields that they could have access to.

S. van Bakel concluded the meeting at this stage and said that he would try and talk to interested 3rd Year students to see if any would be willing to work on the site. He also stated that the next meeting would be in two months' time.

The meeting was concluded at 1.50pm