

## Meeting Report: UKeiG Intranets Forum, at the Qualification and Curriculum Authority

October 2007

The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) hosted the latest meeting of the UKeiG intranet forum. It was a well-attended meeting, with three speakers, two from QCA and one from Netcel, who created the new look and functionality for the QCA intranet, Qudos.

Gavin Edwards, QCA Intranet Manager, spoke about the process of relaunching the intranet from the tendering stage, to procurement, planning, testing and finally to launch, in approximately 9 months. When Gavin started at QCA three years ago, the intranet had been without an overall manager for a number of months. The need to revitalise Qudos was clear – there were approximately 150 editors throughout the organisation, and the lack of central control over content and structure made Qudos less useful than it could be. Work was done to improve the intranet; this made a considerable difference and eventually paved the way for the complete redevelopment of the intranet that took place this year.

Gavin's presentation covered the whole redevelopment process, with logical steps explained, potential pitfalls highlighted and tips for success. One important consideration is to have a project team, of, as Gordon Brown would have it, all the talents. The QCA team consisted of members from internal communications, knowledge management, business analysis and IT. Having secured funding for a relaunch, Netcel was engaged to do the work. QCA and Netcel worked closely for several months planning what was needed and what was possible; building upon the results of usability studies conducted by QCA, creativity workshops and previously conducted site visits.

The information architecture of the site was revamped and the CMS, which had been upgraded the year before, was used to a greater capacity than previously. Style guides, editors' workshops and face-to-face support were offered to the intranet editors. Qudos was launched at the end of September, and has been well received so far. The presentation, available on the UKeiG website, would make a useful checklist for anyone starting a similar project

Tim Parfitt, the Managing Director of Netcel then spoke about the relaunch process from the viewpoint of the agency. Netcel won the tender because their approach to project planning ensured that risks were kept to a minimum, and the degree of technical documentation they provided met the requirements of QCA. Tim highlighted the need to develop and maintain excellent communication between both parties, and the importance of building a good rapport so expectations are met. The planning stage may seem a long period where little appears to be happening, but it is crucial, and good communication is essential during this phase.

When pressed for the three things that a client can do to smooth the work of the agency Tim identified the following:

- Know what you want to consider, but without too much detail. A brief can be too broad or too prescriptive, but either way, a project cannot skip the planning stage and that is the best arena for thrashing out the detail.
- Have one primary contact in the client company who has the authority to green-light developments, rather than a contact who then needs to consult internally and secure the go-ahead, delaying progress at every stage.
- Have a client project team with the right balance: one that covers all aspects of the project, so that agency questions, such as technical specifications, can be answered immediately.

Tim's talk was a refreshing change of perspective, and it was interesting to consider that we as the client have obligations too, beyond those to our users, so choose your agency wisely.

After a coffee break and a turn on the 8th floor terrace, with stunning views across south London on a rare sunny afternoon, Sue Muceniaks, QCA Knowledge Manager, spoke about another recent project, Collaboration, which facilitates working with external stakeholders.

Having come to the QCA to initiate a knowledge management programme, Sue was asked to lead a project to create an extranet that could be accessed by external stakeholders. It had been decided to use QCA's existing EDRMS, and incorporate additional functionality that could allow external stakeholders to store and share documents, take part in online discussions etc. The project evolved to include a system upgrade to the EDRMS, which was a challenge but ultimately a huge success. Once the upgrade was complete, work could start on the collaboration tool itself.

Collaboration allows project groups to share files, discussions, task lists and meeting dates, particularly to improve management and version control of documents, by avoiding the need to e-mail large files and to make amendments and then re-send them to large groups.

The successes and pitfalls of the project were pointed out, and Sue's top tip for any similar project was to engage your pilot group from the start. Finding a pilot group mid-way through the project proved difficult, and although several teams were interested, few were willing to commit the time and effort required to test the tool fully (which, ironically, would save them time and effort in their workings with external stakeholders). In the end, the Qudos/Netcel development team were used as an initial pilot and a second pilot team from the business was found soon afterwards. The feedback from the pilots has been very positive, and roll-out to the organisation is taking place during October and November.

*Susan Henry, Intranet Officer, TUC*

UKeiG Committee wish to thank QCA for all their help in organising the meeting. The presentations are available at <http://www.iiscmail.ac.uk/cgi-bin/filearea.cgi?LMGT1=UKEIG-INTRANETS-FORUM>