SER Advising Project newsletter

1 April 2016

Towards a new Advising System

A replacement of the current Advising system has been on the cards for a few years now. The current Advising system has served the University well during the years, but it has started showing its age. As students, academics and administrators agree that we need a more modern and efficient system, the University decided some time ago to include it in the Senate Efficiency Review programme.

The current St Andrews Advising system was developed in-house for use from Academic Year 2002-2003. For those who remember, it replaced the earlier system of paper forms filled out in triplicate! The current system allows students to enter their choices in pre-advising, which are then confirmed by their Adviser(s) of studies. It is flexible and (usually) quite fast, but has numerous limitations; e.g. it doesn't check against Senate and Degree regulations; it isn't sufficiently user-friendly, it cannot guide students and Advisers to the appropriate and best module choices; it doesn't include provision for exceptions like waivers; it requires a lot of communication to happen outside the system, with no way of capturing it for future consideration.

The decision to start work towards a replacement Advising system was taken as early as 2011, and a lot of work has been done since then. This includes a wide consultation process, with academics (Deans/Pro Deans, Directors of Teaching, Advisers), students and Registry. The result was a detailed list of High Level Requirements of different priorities, which was used for the development of a prototype of an in-house Java-based solution.

The current Project team aims to consolidate and update work undertaken in those previous project phases. The new solution will be developed by Tribal, with additional support from the University's IT Services. The system will be using the existing eVision tool for module selection, with numerous customisations in order to adapt it to the needs of our University.

The Project team is working closely with the IT developers, and will also be in touch with everyone who will be using or affected by the new Advising system. Workshops and beta testing are expected to take place between April and July. The final version of the pilot will be delivered in August, in time for final tests and for training prior to Advising.

The plan is to use the new Advising system in September 2016 to advise new students only, including incoming visiting students.

SER Advising Project – Who is who

Academic Sponsor: Lorna Milne
Business Sponsor: Sam Lister
Product Owner: Iain Matthews
Business Ambassadors: Stephen Tyre & Graham Kirby
Project Manager: Kostas Zafeiris
Team Leader: Nicole Judd
SER Programme Lead: Daniel Farrell

Keep track of the team's progress

The SER Project Team (Advising) has created a webpage (a board in Trello) to communicate with anyone interested in Advising about what the Project team is working on, what potentially is coming up, and to listen to your insights and ideas about what you'd like to see in the new Advising portal. Please visit it at https://trello.com/b/VoJdNzhi/, and let us know what you think.

You can also contact the team at ser-advising@st-andrews.ac.uk.

Project deliverables

The following deliverables have been agreed and approved for the SER Advising project, which is contained within Waves 3 and 4 of the SER Programme. Wave 3 has been running since February 2016 and will finish at the end of July 2016. Wave 4 will run from August to December 2016, and the new Advising system will entirely replace the current one in 2017.

The deliverables cover more than seventy specific requirements that have been collected and sense-checked in collaboration with users of the current system.

Wave 3 (Feb – Aug 2016)

- Academic approvals of module selection
- Course change requests and approvals
- Entry requirements (for module prerequisites)
- Pre-advising (standard i.e. not balloting)
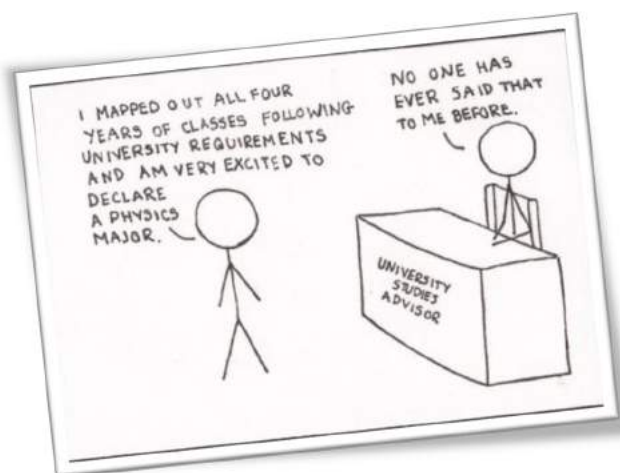- Student module selection
- Study abroad engagements

Wave 4 (Sept - Dec 2016)

- Provision of personal timetables
- Timetabling compliance
- Balloting & pre-advising processes
- Exploratorium

PROJECT VISION

'The SER Advising project aims to deliver a robust and intuitive student-focused system that validates students' programmes of study in accordance with award regulations and programme requirements in order to provide better, coherent information and improve the learner journey with tools that support constructive, purposeful and tailored academic advice.'

Project Objectives

The new Advising system will

- Maintain the reputation of St Andrews by providing tools that lead to excellent guidance on informed module and programme options.
- Improve the student experience of participating in the Advising process.
- Provide a better tool for Advisers to advise and students to select choices with confidence knowing they are regulation compliant.
- Ensure rules dispensations are suitably authorised and logged.

- Provide an audit trail to assist any retrospective review.
- Completely remove or at least minimise the number of instances of rule non-compliance.
- Provide a tool that will support greater demand due to planned growth in undergraduate numbers and growth of the postgraduate population.
- Support the University's green initiatives by eliminating paper-based processes.
- Deliver a more seamless service that integrates systems to simplify the Advising process for all users.