

LIS Service Issues Update

General

During October, November and December there 5 weekend incidents which prevented students being able to access some UHI services. One incident was caused by failures in the Internet from JANET and our automatic failover not working as expected for all parts of the network, this fault would have affected all access. This fault did recur twice during the week but manual actions were undertaken to quickly re-establish the service. After several weeks work we have now resolved this issue and automatic failover to a redundant link will now occur if the main JANET link fails. Some internal network links also had a similar effect on Perth College links and we now believe that this has also been resolved.

On the 30th of October a large volume of student accounts expired. This meant that a number of students were not able to access UHI services. We have ensured that student accounts now have an expiry date that matches the end of their course.

The other three incidents, which occurred in November, were due to email server crashes (please see GroupWise section below) and this affected a subset of students whose mailboxes were on the post offices which failed.

There can be incidents where it may appear that services are unavailable because the main website isn't accessible. This has been the case in two of the major incidents we have had. We would advise that students always try the direct web address (noted below) for a service as well as the shortcuts from the Website.

Web addresses

<https://webmail.uhi.ac.uk> (email)

<https://my.uhi.ac.uk> (MyUHI)

<http://www.blackboard.uhi.ac.uk> (Blackboard)

<http://libcat.uhi.ac.uk> (Library Catalogue)

<http://www.studentjourney.uhi.ac.uk/> (UHI Records)

<http://communities.uhi.ac.uk> (UHI Communities)

Helpdesk

Budget restrictions on the department mean that we are unable to provide additional helpdesk cover outside the Monday – Friday 09:00 – 17:00. This means that issues to services in the evening or over weekends can undetected until the next morning or Monday in the case of weekend issues. This has been recognised as a major issue for UHI's delivery of IT services and a cross college team has been looking at possible solutions to provide the additional monitoring and cover. However LIS operations staff do regularly check systems that they are responsible for and facilitate repairs themselves but this currently relies on good will and there is no payment for it.

Timing of Work

As with all electronic equipment, sometimes there are failures and emergency maintenance is necessary. This happened with one of our main storage locations in Inverness, where a battery unit

failed which required a fix to be implemented on the system. This work was scheduled to happen on the 8th of December as there was a high risk of the failure causing more disruption at a time when exams are taking place. For this reason the work was scheduled to happen after evening classes at 21:00 and was due to take 2 hours. The work actually took 90 minutes and full service was restored. We are aware of the academic calendar and do not schedule routine work to happen during exam periods but sometimes the risk of continuing to run equipment that might fail during the normal working day means that we will act to protect the service.

When we have planned maintenance it is our aim to provide at least 5 days notice of a disruption, we send out this notification through the UHI Email service. However we have also recently reinstated our [Service Status](#) page on the UHI website to try to give staff and students more information about issues, failures and planned work. If you experience any issues whilst using UHI services that are not noted as known on the Service Status page please do not hesitate to report the fault to the UHI Helpdesk, by email (150@uhi.ac.uk) or by telephone (01463 279150). The UHI Helpdesk is open 0900-1700, Monday to Friday.

Blackboard

There have been a number of short disruptions (6) to the Blackboard service since the start of the academic term these are generally due to high server load. The system has been largely stable since the beginning of November. A new deal for an upgrade and external hosting of this service has now been reached and work to plan the implementation of this new system has started. We fully anticipate that the new system will provide an enhanced service. We would ask that in the meantime any current performance or access issues are reported to the [UHI helpdesk](#) in the first instance.

GroupWise

To address reliability and performance issues on the Student email service, we moved a number of the servers to different hardware and this has dramatically improved the performance and reliability of this service.

We have now undertaken a major review of the email service for both staff and students. This will almost certainly result in a new service hosted externally and offering a huge increase in email space. We believe that any changes made based on the outcome of the review will result in an improved service that will meet our needs for many years to come.

MyUHI/Citrix

There have been a number of bedding in issues for the new MyUHI service that have affected the functionality and availability of the system for our users. We have now implemented a number of changes to make the system more stable and resilient and we believe that this has been successful. We were mindful of the usage during exam week and the changeover to the new gateways was done at a time of least use.

Over the next few months there will be additional applications added to the service that will benefit our staff and students. We will also be looking to decommission the old Citrix platform once we are happy that all the required applications are now functioning as expected.

We temporarily disabled the use of Microsoft Office 2007 applications as they caused the system to become unstable under certain conditions and affected all users on that particular server. This bug has

been highlighted to Citrix and we believe that we may now have a solution. This has been distributed to Shetland College to test initially as they had been using these applications for ECDL students.

WiFi

The usage of the bring your own WiFi service has continued to grow month on month. A large proportion of this use by students is through smart phones which are becoming more predominant.

Staff and corporate laptops which are devices in the new Active Directory environment can now access a new WiFi service that provides exactly the same access as a wired computer. We will be reviewing the services that we offer through the WiFi system and are looking at a solution for increased functionality within the student residences. We would expect this service to be available in the next few months for those colleges that wish to offer this service to their students who stay on campus.

We would like to remind all staff and students that they can provide feedback for LIS through a number of ways, by emailing [Tracey Cruickshank](#), completing the [form](#) on the UHI Website, or by filling in the survey that is sent out with a closed helpdesk call notification.

Mike MacDonald
Head of IT Services

Tracey Cruickshank
LIS Customer Services Manager