

LIS Service Issues

Over the last three months we have had a series of issues which have caused us some problems in delivering as robust and reliable a service as we would expect. On behalf of Learning and Information Services I would like to apologise to our Staff and Students for the inconvenience that this may have caused. Some of our major systems are being changed for the first time in many years and this has resulted in a more complex environment in the short term.

Blackboard

The issues with access to this system for some students were due in part, to the very high loads caused by enrolment and induction. There was also an issue with one of the authentication servers which was not allowing students to login. We appreciate that the performance of this system at times is not what we would expect, however as was recently announced to academic staff a new deal for an upgrade and external hosting of this service has now been reached. We fully anticipate that this will provide an enhanced service. We would ask that in the meantime any performance or access issues are reported to the [UHI helpdesk](#) where we can direct the issue to the correct person very quickly.

GroupWise

The availability of the email servers has been badly affected by an incident which caused two thousand accounts to be reset within the system. This in turn caused a large number of student mailboxes to be moved between the servers, and in some cases this happened many times.

The cumulative effect of creating new mailboxes, plus the move of all these mailboxes, put a significant strain on the systems and affected both the performance and availability.

We have taken the performance issue as a priority and will be undertaking several server moves overnight onto new hardware. This will improve the performance and reliability of these systems.

We are about to undertake a major review of the email system provided for both staff and students, one of the options we are considering is the move to an outsourced email provider, such as Microsoft Office365. 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

LIS accepts that the announcement of the delivery date for the new MyUHI service was not communicated effectively, and we can only apologise that this did not happen. Unfortunately we have had a number of bedding in issues that have affected the functionality and availability of the system for some users. We have had consultants onsite working to address the problems that have been identified and reported; although this work has improved the service it has also caused some issues whilst the work was carried out. We are still coming across bugs in the system that have only come to light with a significant amount of staff and students now using the system. We are continuing to make significant changes to the system in order to improve the performance and ensure that the existing applications run as expected.

We have 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 are actively working on a solution. Applications which were on the old version of Citrix can still be accessed using the online plugin under Citrix in the new system.

We would expect that over the next few months significant work by staff will ensure that the system is both stable and reliable, and we will be adding a range of new applications to the system.

General

A failure of the main hosting platform on Thursday 29th Sept caused some services to be unavailable for several hours whilst engineers reset the servers. This issue is currently under investigation with our hardware and software suppliers.

Failures on some network components caused access issues to UHI services on Sunday 16th of October and during the week of the 17th of October. These failures are under review and we are applying additional monitoring to ensure that any similar faults are captured more quickly in the future.

Fault reporting

Unfortunately budget restrictions mean that we cannot currently provide out of hours cover, which can mean that there is the potential for services to be unavailable for longer periods if they fail in the evenings or at weekends. The Learning and Information Services management team are looking at the helpdesk availability, and how we can best provide cover outside our normal working week.

The busy enrolment period and technology changes have meant that there has been a large increase in calls to the UHI Helpdesk over the August and September period. This has resulted in some delays in dealing with, and resolving calls that have been logged and we apologise for any additional frustration that this has caused.

When we have planned maintenance it is our aim to provide at least 5 days notice of a disruption, we have recently reinstated our [Service Status](#) page on the UHI website to try to give staff and students more information in the future 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.

I am confident that we will have any outstanding issues resolved shortly and that we will be delivering the service that is required by our staff and students.

Mike MacDonald
Head of IT Services