

From IS response to original campaign document:

Successfully commissioned in 2004, the Portal has been used increasingly to deliver key services to Students. In 2005, performance issues began to be experienced when the number of concurrent users exceeded 1,000. Unfortunately, this coincided with periods of peak demand such as exams.

Following extensive analysis with the vendor, it was decided to upgrade the portal “front end” service hardware from a single high performance server to a cluster of up to 8 servers, each with a capacity of handling 700 concurrent sessions. This work was completed during summer 2006, and at the same time more powerful “back end” server hardware was introduced.

The new Portal cluster environment has been proven to be a significant improvement, with concurrent sessions during on line registration for 2006 having exceeded 2,000 without service failure. Further work is being undertaken to refine the load balancing of the Portal web servers, and performance will be closely monitored in particular when exam timetables are published.

On **February 12th 2007**, the day on which many University schools and departments aimed to release first semester examination results at 9.30am, the Portal became unavailable almost immediately.

However, by 10.50am it seemed to be operating for some users. Presumably the system will either be in limbo all day as the number of concurrent requests fluctuates, or manual reconfiguration by the IS team will be able to ensure that results are available for the remainder of the day.

One might claim that one should expect a level of technical difficulty during times of such extreme server load; then again, the publication of examination results is arguably the single most important function that the Portal performs.

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