



**This Service Agreement is made between the Student Loans Company and the Higher Education Provider in respect of services undertaken for the administration of student finance.**

## **1. Purpose**

The purpose of this Service Agreement is to define the agreed commitments of SLC and HE Providers (HEPs) to deliver information requirements to each other in respect of the administration of student finance. The Service Agreement is the point of reference for the Service Standards that apply to these commitments.

The Service Agreement is not legally binding and does not have any scope of enforcement through statutory provisions. However, HEPs have committed to meet obligations of the student finance system as an ongoing condition of registration with the Office for Students in England and the relevant governing bodies in the other devolved governments.

## **2. Definitions**

“ARC” means Academic Registrars Council

“BUFDG” means British Universities Finance Directors Group

“HE Providers” is the generic term for universities, university colleges, school-centres for teacher training, FE Colleges that deliver HE

“NAMSS” means National Association of Managers of Student Services

“OfS” means Office for Students

“Private Providers” is the term used to categorise those HE Providers that are not in receipt of public funds.

“Public Providers” is the term used to categorise those HE Providers that are in receipt of public funds.

### 3. Authorisation

The authorisation for this Service Agreement is provided

- (a) For approved HE providers listed on the OfS Register in England
- (b) Public and Private providers who are designated by the Devolved Administrations.

The OfS Regulatory Framework dated February 2018 includes a section, repeated herewith, which established the obligation for HEPs to adhere to the SLC's requirements for student finance administration, in five key areas:

*Whether a provider in receipt of student support funding provides the information necessary for the SLC to administer student support in line with regulations made under section 22 of the Teaching and Higher Education Act 1998. This information includes, but is not limited to:*

- *Data related to eligible courses*
- *Confirmation that the fee charged to a student correctly matches the student's course of study*
- *Information about student registration and attendance*
- *Information about any changes that may affect a student's eligibility for student support*
- *Timely information of a student's suspension or withdrawal from their course.*

This Service Agreement therefore provides the commitment on providers to deliver these information requirements. The obligations on HEPs to meet requirements of SLC for the administration of student finance are covered by the OfS's conditions of registration.

SLC has developed service standards for each of these five information requirements and has also defined standards for the delivery by SLC of enabling dependencies.

These service standards are defined in Appendix 1.

### 4. Duration

This Service Agreement replaces its predecessor which came into force on 1 September 2017 and operates from 1 September 2021 until further notice.

There will be a formal review each February to determine if the Service Agreement, or any service standards, definitions or management provisions within, need to be changed. ARC and NAMSS will lead on the review on behalf of HEPs, with SLC.

Communications of any changes will be undertaken in writing by providing the updated version of this agreement to Academic Registrars or equivalent and through the Students Records Officers (SROC) conferences and the SLC's HEP Student Support Seminar.

## 5. Scope

The scope of the Service Agreement is limited as follows

- HE Undergraduate and Postgraduate courses provided by UK HE public and private providers.
- Information requirements as listed in section 3.
- Service provision from AY21/22 and beyond.

## 6. Provisions

### 6.1 Scope of services

The services falling into the scope of this Agreement, and the applicable service standards, are defined in Appendix 1.

### 6.2 Monitoring and reporting

The HEP will ensure that management and monitoring systems are in place to ensure achievement of the service standards. This will involve annual Account Reviews with the HEP's SLC Account Manager.

SLC's Partner Services Division monitors the performance of the HEP against the target service standards. SLC will provide data to allow Academic Registrars, or equivalent, for effective management of the service standards.

SLC's Head of Operations monitors and reports on the accuracy and timeliness of payments and reassessments.

### 6.3 Remedial action and escalation

Where service standards are identified as not being achieved by an HEP your HE Account Manager will implement an action plan. Actions are agreed to address any significant variances from the service standards, and may include the following:

- Re-prioritisation of administration work
- Essential system and process training delivered by SLC's Account Managers
- Addition of performance improvement plan for continual under attainment
- SLC may escalate issues with individual universities to the Academic Registrar, or for other HEPs, the equivalent head of administration services. The HEP may make available an alternative senior contact, at management level as a point of escalation
- SLC will escalate to Vice Chancellor or for other HEPs, the equivalent head of the organisation, before referring to the OfS.

External remedies and escalations

SLC will report regularly to the Student Finance Operations Stakeholder Group the following information

- The performance of the sector against service standards

- The trends in performance over time
- The extent of remedial action plans

The SLC has a Collaborative Agreement with OfS by which the SLC is required to notify OfS of any HEP that is consistently falling short of the service standards or failing to implement improvement plans. OfS are required to consider whether these concerns merit action in relation to their ongoing conditions of registration.

SLC will report formally to ARC and NAMSS, who will, with SLC and in conjunction with BUFDG where required, consider whether interventions are required by ARC or BUFDG at sector level.

SLC is expected to notify the relevant education department where it believes HEPs are not making reasonable efforts to achieve the service standards. This may, and has in the past, led to suspension and/or withholding of fee payments.

## **7. Oversight**

This Service Agreement is owned jointly by the SLC and ARC/NAMSS on behalf of HEPs. The monitoring of the achievement of agreed service standards will be undertaken by ARC as follows:

- At periodic meetings of the SLC Operations Stakeholder group.
- At an annual review by the ARC Executive
- By incorporation into OfS Registration system

## **8. Complaints about the Service Agreement**

Complaints in relation to the use of the Service Agreement can be made to the signatory in writing, who undertakes an investigation and appropriate resolution.

## **9. Confidentiality and publicity**

This Service Agreement is not deemed sensitive and therefore does not have any restrictions on circulation.


## **10. Publication**

This Service Agreement will be published in SLC's HEP Services website. It will be issued to all HEPs on an annual basis by SLC.

## 11. Approvals

Signatories to the Service Agreement are as below.

<p><b>Signed on behalf of SLC:</b></p> <p></p> <p>Paul Smith, Head of Partner Services                      Date: 10 September 2021</p>
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<p>Endorsed and supported by the Academic Registrar's Council. Signed on behalf of ARC by</p> <p></p> <p>Nikki Pierce, Academic Registrar, University of Bradford                      8 September 2021</p>
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<p>Signed on behalf of NAMSS by</p>
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## 12. Appendix 1 Service Standards

Please note all calculation with 'days' as a metric are referring to calendar days unless stated otherwise.

### Course collection

Mode of study	Accuracy	Elapse time to complete
FT UG	95% by course collection deadline	85% submitted 10 weeks after course collection launch for universities
	99.5% by end of May	14 weeks after course collection launch for all other providers
PT UG	95% by course collection deadline 99.5% by end of May	85% submitted 6 weeks after course collection launch
PGM	95% by course collection deadline 99.5% by end of June	85% submitted 4 weeks after course collection launch
PGD	95% by course collection deadline 99.5% by end of June	85% submitted 4 weeks after course collection launch

### Registration

Service / Process	Accuracy	Mode of study	Elapse time to complete
Confirmation of start of study (Registration Confirmations)	99% Accuracy of submissions	FT UG	- 82% of registrations within 5 days of term start date - 95% of registrations within 30 days of term start date.
		PT UG	80% of registrations complete within 30 days of term start date
		PGML	90% of registrations within 21 days of term start date

Attendance

<b>Service / Process</b>	<b>Accuracy</b>	<b>Mode of study</b>	<b>Elapse time to complete</b>
Attendance Confirmations	99% Accuracy of submissions	FT UG	- 85% of attendances by due date of earliest payment or by end of cooling off period, whichever is later - 95% of attendances within 30 days from first payment due date - 98% of attendances within 60 days from first payment due date
		PT UG	- 90% of attendances within 30 days from first payment due date

Change of Circumstance

<b>Service / Process</b>	<b>Accuracy</b>	<b>Elapse time to complete</b>
Verification of Study Programme and Notification of Changes	99 % accuracy	- 75% of course and fee CoCs within 14 days of course start-date (this must precede a first term Attendance Confirmation)
Withdrawals	99% accuracy	- 80% of withdrawals reported within 60 days of effective date - 95% of withdrawals notified to SLC within 7 days of the withdrawal decision being made
Change of Circumstance Notifications	95% accuracy	80% of CoCs submitted within 60 days of AC return of a non-A code.

SLC

<b>Service / Process</b>	<b>Accuracy</b>	<b>Elapse time to complete</b>
Reassessments (by SLC)	99.5% accuracy of automatic reassessments 98% accuracy of manual assessments	70% within 20 working days at peak, 95% within 30 working days at peak, 95% within 20 working days off-peak
Fee Payments (by SLC)	99.5% calculated fee payments due are made	99% of due payments are made by payment date
HEP Enquiries (handled by SLC)	95% accuracy identified through quality checks	98% mail response within 10 working days at peak, 4 working days off peak 95% of calls answered within 60 seconds



## **13. Appendix 2 Definitions of services**

### **Attendance**

Attendance on a course means active and on-going engagement with the activities and learning opportunities made available by the Provider within the course duration, including, but not limited to, scheduled learning and teaching activities.

### **Registration**

Registration refers to <the duration of> a binding agreement between a person and an organisation for the delivery of educational services. Alternately 'registration' may refer to the event or process through which that binding agreement is concluded.

### **Withdrawal**

A Withdrawal refers to the point at which scheduled learning, teaching and assessment activities and other active and on-going engagement end in agreement with the Provider.

A withdrawal applies where there is no intention on the student to re-engage and means there is no further obligation on the student to pay fees to the HEP. A withdrawal results in termination of a student's period of student finance eligibility.

### **Suspension**

A suspension is where a student with the agreement of their provider, ceases to actively attend a course, with the intention to return to the same course at a later date.

## **14. Appendix 3 Technical information**

SLC maintains a technical specification for each performance report. This defines the derivation of the data used in each of the reports. The specifications will be subject to annual review and amendment if agreed by the Service Agreement signatories.