



## HEI Courses Service

### Service Definition

#### 1.0 HEI Courses Service Background

- 1.1 The previous process for HEIs (1) returning information to SLC with regards to their course, fee and HEI-related information by disc was labour intensive that limited SLC Business Services ability to actively manage the process. In addition, the legacy technology (VB App) that allowed the return of information to be captured also had limitations that restrict the ease of use for HEIs.

(1). Universities, HE Colleges, FE Colleges providing HE Courses, and SCITTS

- 1.2 This has been replaced by the HEI Courses Service. The process is now more efficient by removing some of the time constraints that were inherent in the VB App process, such as dependencies on CDs, floppy discs or pro-formas for the submission by SLC Business, and a reliance on the postal service.

#### 2.0 HEI Courses Service Overview

##### 2.1 Introduction

- ❖ The HEI Courses Service is accessed through the existing HE Gateway. The service has been designed to have increased usability for each HEI, and enable SLC to effectively monitor and manage the course data submissions process, allowing the effective audit of returns, and provide assistance to HEIs where necessary.

##### 2.2 Submission Method

- ❖ HEIs select the method in which they provide the required course data to SLC, either via Web Services or through the use of HEI Portal screens. There is also the option of using a combination of both methods to provide all course information. For example an institution could use Web Services to provide their bulk data initially before following up and making their ad-hoc amendments via the Portal Screens.
- ❖ HEIs are only required to submit data on courses that run on a full-time basis with the exception of PGCE / PCET etc. SLC already add a generic course called PART TIME COURSE against each institution and apply a standard set of term dates which allows the Local Authorities to use this for assessing their part time students.

### 2.3 Data Processing

- ❖ Each year, on a pre-determined date, SLC will run a data population process to create the course data for the forthcoming academic year, from the current academic year data but with certain data items, such as the course term dates removed.
- ❖ Once this process has been completed, a notification email will be generated and sent to a nominated primary contact at HEIs.
- ❖ HEIs access the Courses Service (via secure login to the Gateway) and provide their course data using their preferred method, either via Web Services or by updating the Portal Screens. HEIs can provide their updates in bulk or on an ad-hoc basis. Updates will include amendments to existing courses/locations/fee rates etc, adding of new courses and closure of courses where required.
- ❖ Once updates are completed by the HEI this information is then submitted for validation and then subsequent promotion to the live database (see below).

### 2.4 Data Validation

- ❖ Initially, primary validation is carried out which includes the dates are valid / valid subset of alphanumeric characters etc.
- ❖ The information is then subject to secondary validation where the business rules are imposed on the course data. Errors highlighted at either of these validation stages result in errors being raised against the HEI, which would be displayed on the 'Tasks & Errors' page.
- ❖ A process has been incorporated into the course database in order to ensure that all courses submitted to the database are 'designated' and therefore entitled to statutory support.
- ❖ Errors that are highlighted at either the primary or secondary validation stages are then displayed on a 'Tasks and Errors' screen. This screen allows the user to view and address all errors (by category) and then send for validation again.
- ❖ When data passes validation, it is then promoted to the live database.
- ❖ Users have the ability to amend certain fields within the Courses Service after an Institution, Location, Franchise Location or Course has been promoted to the live database.

## **2.5 Promotion of Data to Live**

- ❖ If a course update or insertion is successfully validated, then the course and any associated course locations and the corresponding institution information will be immediately promoted to Live.
- ❖ A response is given to the HEI informing of the success of the submission. For users of Portal Screens, a message appears on the screen indicating submission has been made.
- ❖ For users of the Web Service, validation and promotion to live (if data passes the validation step) happens concurrently once the data is submitted over the Web Service. For any data that fails validation, notification is sent back to the HEI indicating errors. Each submission is identified by unique submission number.
- ❖ For the Web Service, the system checks the validity of the user identification details that are supplied (if not a general authentication error is returned). If the authentication details are valid for a particular HEI then each of the submissions for that specific HEI are applied individually.
- ❖ The service has the functionality to allow a user to amend certain fields that have already been promoted to the live service. The user would make the necessary changes to the live information and re-promote the course back to live once again. Post promotion changes to live data can be made either through the portal screens or via the web service.

## **2.6 Course Designation**

- ❖ HEIs are reminded that only designated courses (which are valid for statutory financial support) are to be submitted to the course database for validation. SLC will carry out checks to ensure that all courses are valid and designated. (See Appendix 2)

## **3.0 System Access and Availability**

- 3.1** All user-names and passwords are issued initially by the SLC. Subsequent access to the system is maintained via the gateway functionality by HEIs.
- 3.2** There are three types of access available for users – Course DB User Administrator access : this permits the user to create / modify / delete user logon accounts pertaining to the course database service, Course DB Administrator access : this enables users to update / enter / validate courses and Course DB Advisor access : this gives users read-only access to the course database.
- 3.3** SLC provides such notice as is reasonably practicable of any known times when the Web Services / Portal will be unavailable due to planned maintenance or system upgrading.



#### **4.0 HEI Support**

- 4.1 The HEI Help Desk team handles operational calls in order of when received and is managed to assist HEIs with all course database enquiries. This operates between 9.00 and 17.30, Monday to Friday. The helpdesk number is **0845 702 3316**.
- 4.2 Any issues with usage of the course database should be raised through the Help Desk. This speeds up the rate of response.

#### **5.0 Training**

- 5.1 Specific training in the format of e-learning modules sent via e-mail to all institutions.
- 5.2 HEIs are responsible for ensuring that a sufficient number of nominated representatives are trained in using the portal. HEIs are further responsible for identifying suitable delegates, able to cascade training to other users if required.

#### **6.0 Further Guidance**

- 6.1 The User Guide sent via e-mail to all institutions and also available on the HE Info website (<http://www.heinfo.slc.co.uk/he-services.aspx> )



## Appendix 1

### Performance Targets / Service Level Agreements

#### **1.0 Service Levels for Student Loans Company**

- 1.1** The minimum availability of the Courses Service is **95%** of the supported window (excluding any period of scheduled maintenance). The supported window runs from 9.00am till 5.30pm Monday to Friday (excluding Scottish Public Holidays). The system can be accessed out-with these business hours but will be unsupported.
- 1.2** Under 'normal conditions' all courses submitted by an HEI to the Courses Service are processed and validated within **24 hours** upon receipt by SLC (this is based on a bulk submission of 3000 courses).
- 1.3** SLC intend that average response times for retrieving data from the portal will be **5 seconds**.
- 1.4** SLC to notify all the named contacts by email when the Courses system is temporarily unavailable and will confirm when the system is fully available once again.
- 1.5** All the above will be reviewed after a period of 12 months live operation of the Courses Service.

#### **2.0 Responsibilities for HEIs**

- 2.1** Each HEI to have submitted all of their course information by the date determined by SLC for the relevant academic year.
- 2.2** All errors that are reported on the Tasks & Errors page should be addressed and rectified by the HEI, wherever possible, within three business days of appearing on the Tasks & Errors page.
- 2.3** Any such errors that cannot be rectified should be raised with the HEI Help Desk on **0845 702 3316**.
- 2.4** Each HEI to ensure a suitable number of staff are fully trained on all aspects of the course database and available should the SLC require to contact the institution
- 2.5** HEI to ensure that an IT contact (either internal or external) be made available on request. It is also the responsibility of the HEI to carry out a regular review of contact details and notify SLC if there are any contact detail changes involving the primary course database contact.

## Appendix 2

### Designated Courses – Policy Regulations

#### Designated Courses

1. The Education Student Support Regulations 2008 state that a course is a designated course for the purposes of the Teaching & Higher Education Act 1998 if it is one of the following –

- (i) a full- time course ;
- (ii) a sandwich course ; or
- (iii) a part-time course for the initial training of teachers

And of at least –

- (i) one academic year's duration; or
- (ii) six weeks' duration in the case of a flexible postgraduate course for the initial training of teachers; and
- (iii) wholly provided by a publicly funded educational institution or institutions in the United Kingdom or provided by such an institution or institutions in conjunction with an institution or institutions outside the United Kingdom.

2. The Regulations explain that a course is **not** a designated course under the following circumstances;

- (i) A course is not a designated course where the governing body of a maintained school has arranged for the provision of such a course to a pupil of the school.
- (ii) Any course that is taken as part of an employment-based teacher training scheme is not a designated course.

3. In order to clarify the points raised in paragraph (1), it should be noted that;

- (i) course is provided by an institution if it provides the teaching and supervision which comprise the course, whether or not the institution has entered into an agreement with the student to provide the course;
- (ii) university and any constituent college or institution in the nature of a college of a university is to be regarded as publicly funded if either the university or the constituent college or institution is publicly funded.

Further information on Designated Courses can be found in Section 2 of The Education Student Support Regulations 2008.