



## **Student Information Service & Fee Payments**

### **Service Definition**

#### **1.0 Background**

- 1.1** The Student Information Service (SIS), provides HEIs <sup>(1)</sup> with a wide range of student data once a student's application for funding has been approved. This allows HEIs much earlier sight of this information. SIS also enables an HEI to confirm student(s) ongoing attendance, business rules permitting, for the current academic year as well as any reassessments or outstanding attendance confirmations for previous academic years from AY 2006 / 07 onwards. SIS enables HEIs to access a financial reports section which includes a tuition fee balance screen as well as tuition fee remittance reports in order to track payments of fees. Finally the Change of Circumstance Service, which for AY 2009/10 was hosted on the HE Portal, is now part of the larger Student Information Service.

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

- 1.2** Previously HEIs confirmed student(s) on-going attendance either uploading Attendance Confirmation Report (ACR) files to the Electronic Link Portal (ELP) or by returning a paper copy of the ACR to SLC. This could only be done on receipt of ACR files from SLC (either via the ELP site or paper form) which were issued at the start of December and February, then on a monthly basis from February onward. The Change of Circumstance (CoC) process has been hosted as a stand-alone service on the HE Portal since December 2009, prior to this HEIs were required to complete CoC notifications via paper form and send to the local authority to process. The CoC Service is now included under the wider Student Information Service. With regards to financial reports, previously HEIs could only view the Tuition Fee Position Report via the ELP site twice per year. There was no previous equivalent for the Student Information function within SIS. Therefore the Student Information Service encompasses four distinct areas: Student Information, Attendance Confirmation, Change of Circumstances & Financial Reporting.

#### **2.0 Service Review**

- 2.1** HEI Student Information Service is as a stand-alone service on the HE Portal, hosted on the HE Gateway. The service provides HEIs with student information within 24 hours of the student's application being approved as well as a means to confirm student(s) ongoing attendance, raise change of circumstance notifications and access financial reports. With much earlier site of student information HEIs have the opportunity to perform internal business processes much earlier in the academic year.

The on-line portal is the only option available for HEIs to confirm attendance and submit their Change of Circumstances as this functionality is not accessible via any other channel.



**2.2** HEI users will access the service through the HE Portal. Each user will require access to the Portal which will be administered by the User Administrator at each institution. Student Loans Company (SLC) issued User Administrator access to a named user at each HEI. There are six separate user roles within the Student Information Service:

- Student Information Service User Administrator
- Student Information Advisor
- Attendance Administrator
- Change of Circumstances Administrator
- Change of Circumstances Advisor
- Financial Reports Advisor

There is no restriction on the numbers of users that an HEI grants access to.

### **3.0 Student Information**

**3.1** The Student Information function allows the user to search and view the student details held in the Student Information Service, for their specific HEI. It allows the user to filter, export and view personal, course and student specific details relating to an individual student attending their HEI. The HEI user is provided with the option of exporting a full data set, matching the current Tuition Fee Position Report (TFPR) or an extended data set of student information, to allow the early import of files into HEI systems. A history of actions for each individual student (i.e. attendance codes etc) is also available through the Student Information section.

### **4.0 Confirmation of Attendance**

**4.1** The online process for confirming attendance within SIS contains specially tailored business rules to determine whether a student requires an attendance confirmation and will display all the students that meet the criteria on an Attendance Confirmation Worklist. All current academic year students will require their attendance to be confirmed via the worklist (or import) plus any outstanding attendance confirmations from AY 06/07 onwards. The business rules are designed in order to ensure that only students that require an attendance confirmation will appear the worklist.

HEIs will have the ability to select the relevant existing attendance code:

**A, C, F, L, N, X, S or NULL**

When confirming attendance the following process will be used (this is the same as the previous process):

- |                     |  |
|---------------------|--|
| - If code A is used | : Payment will be released                               |
| - If code C is used | : HEI is expected to raise a CoC                         |
| - If code F is used | : HEI is expected to raise a CoC                         |
| - If code L is used | : Payment will be released                               |
| - If code N is used | : HEI is expected to raise a CoC                         |
| - If code X is used | : HEI is expected to raise a CoC                         |
| - If code S is used | : Payment will be released – HEI expected to raise a CoC |

- 4.2** The Attendance Confirmation Worklist will include all students that meet the criteria, including, for bursary purposes, students who would not normally appear. The user can then view, save or submit attendance information for these students. It should be noted that normal business rules apply with regard to the timing of attendance confirmations. The responsibility of maintaining the Attendance Confirmation worklist lies with each HEI, who should ensure that all students that require a confirmation are actioned in order to release the payment of fees from the SLC. HEIs may well be contacted throughout the course of an academic year by SLC prompting them to confirm attendance as and when required.
- 4.3** Attendance Confirmations can be made either manually through the portal screens or by the HEI user importing an Attendance Confirmation file into the system. The file format for the import remains the same as the previous ACR file used in the previous process.
- 4.4** The relevant dates on which a student must be in attendance in order for the public contribution to their tuition fee to be payable are:
- 1<sup>st</sup> December – for courses which begin in the autumn quarter
  - 1<sup>st</sup> April – for courses which begin in the winter quarter
  - 1<sup>st</sup> July – for courses which begin in the spring quarter
  - 1<sup>st</sup> October – for courses which begin in the summer quarter
- 5.0** **Change of Circumstances**
- 5.1** HE Student Information Service Change of Circumstance (CoC) function is used to notify the student's exacting Award Authority of any change to the students study plan. When a CoC is submitted it is raised as a 'task' to be worked by the relevant Award Authority. On receipt of the CoC, the Award Authority re-assesses and updates the student's information and sends the student a notification (the Student Support payments would be adjusted if required). The online process provided by the Student Information Service, allows HEI Change of Circumstance notifications to be created and submitted to the Award Authorities in real time.
- 5.2** The user will select the 'CoC Home' tab within the SIS homepage on the HE Gateway and then proceed to Record the change of circumstance notification. The selected function has logic to ensure the right information is provided. There will be standard data format validation and also a check against the customer system to ensure all notices are valid. The HEI can notify SLC of a change of circumstance for an individual student due to a number of different reason categories:
- a student withdrawing
  - a student suspending
  - a student resuming a course they were originally attending
  - a student repeating a year of study
  - a student transferring to a new course or HEI
  - a student who is updating information regarding course year or changing Tuition Fee amount or Tuition Fee liability.
- 5.3** If the notified change is a withdrawal, the system will trigger stop notices in SLCs Student Finance systems This in turn generates a text / e-mail / letter to the student advising that payments have been stopped.



- 5.4** The HEI user can submit a notification Change of circumstances for...
- single submissions
  - multiple submissions
  - bulk import
- 5.5** Multiple CoC submissions are entered through the portal screens for a maximum of 20 CoCs. This facility only be available for transfers and course / fee changes as these are the only two categories that permit the re-usage of information. Bulk CoC submissions can be submitted by import. A maximum of 500 CoCs can be submitted at a time and SLC will provide the file format to use for the import. The bulk submission can be used for any category of notification.
- 5.6** Outstanding Change of Circumstances are presented to the HEI user via the CoC Worklist. The CoC Worklist will be populated automatically depending on the attendance code an HEI user submits when confirming student(s) attendance. The HEI user can then proceed to create a CoC or delete it from their worklist.
- 6.0** **Financial Reporting**
- 6.1** The previous process SLC prepared Remittance Reports on a weekly basis of payments made during that period and published them on the ELP site for HEIs to view. Instead of publishing the Remittance Report on the ELP site, within the Financial Reporting section of the Student Information Service HEIs will have access to retrieve the appropriate report on a user request basis. The format of the Remittance Report has not changed, it is still split out by payment type (loan or grant) and academic year so that each HEI receives multiple reports for the previous week. The HEI user can export the Remittance Report to their own systems if required. The Tuition Fee Balance Report is a new report for HEIs. Upon user request, the Tuition Fee Balance Report for the relevant academic year is displayed. This information is updated on a weekly basis.
- 6.2** The Tuition Fee Balance Report provides graphical representation of your Tuition Fee Breakdown and summary for a specific academic year. This same information is also displayed in table format. The Tuition Fee Breakdown table show's the breakdown of "Total Value of Fees Expected to be Paid".
- 6.3** The Tuition Fee Balance Report also displays as a graphical representation of the Tuition Fee Breakdown table for the HEI. If a breakdown of these totals is required to student level this can be obtained by filtering on the student details within the Student Information section.
- 7.0** **Data Validation**
- 7.1** The Student Information export is in the same format as the previous TFPR report. The Extended Student Information Export also in the same TFPR format although it does contain additional fields.
- 7.2** When exporting a file from the Attendance Worklist the file format remains in the existing ACR format. Although HEIs are mostly importing attendance files back into SIS that were previously exported it's possible for HEIs to create their own Attendance Confirmation file and import it to the system. As long as the file passes the validation steps it will be successfully imported.

- 7.3** Upon import of an attendance confirmation file the real time validation checks the following:
- The file is of the expected type (i.e. “.txt” or “.out”)
  - The number of records in the file does not exceed 50,000
  - A file containing identical content has not already been imported
- 7.4** Imported attendance confirmation files that have passed real time validation will then have detailed format and business validation performed on the contents of the file. This is completed within a maximum of 24 hours within the file being imported. The detailed format validation checks that the file contains all fields expected and they are in the correct order, the file contains a minimum of one record, the HEI code in the file header is the same as the HEI logged in and also that the no. of records and totals of the tuition fee loan / grant / student pays in the header are equal to the sum of all records for those fields. The business rules validation will check that the record can be matched to a unique HEI, Course, Course Year, academic Year and customer within the Student Information Service, an attendance confirmation is required for that record, that the attendance confirmation code is one of A, C, F, L, N, S, X OR or ‘NULL’ and that the attendance confirmation has been provided against the most recent tuition fee data (i.e. the amounts in the Tuition Fee Loan, Tuition Fee Student fields)
- 7.5** When a CoC is created through the portal screens or the bulk file import function, ‘primary validation’ needs to be fulfilled. This checks when an attribute is mandatory or optional and ensures that when the system is expecting a date, a date is entered or when it’s expecting a number, a number is given. These kinds of validations are known as “format validations”. In order for the CoC to be submitted successfully ‘Business Rule Validation’ also must be met. This validation performs the format field validations mentioned, but also checks the business rules that a CoC has to follow.
- 7.6** CoCs can either be submitted through the portal screens or via bulk import. The bulk import file must be in XML format. Although up to 500 CoCs can be submitted at any time using the Bulk Upload functionality, on submission each CoC is processed as an individual record. File format validation will ensure that the format of the file is consistent with the format detailed in the schema and that all mandatory files have been completed. This validation also checks whether the file has previously been submitted, that the HEI code contained within the file is the same as the HEI code of the institution which the user is administering and whether any duplicate CoCs are contained within the file (the details of the file uploaded will be saved to ensure that the same file is not submitted more than once which would create duplicate CoC records).
- 7.7** If any validation errors occur relating to the format of the file, the processing of the submission stops and the following message is returned “The selected file does not meet the specified file format. Please update the file and resubmit”. If any validation errors occur which indicate that this file has already been submitted, the system stops processing the submission and returns the message “This file has already been submitted. Please select another”. If the HEI Code contained within the file is different to the HEI Code of the institution which the user is currently administering, the system stops processing the submission and returns the message “The HEI Code contained in the submitted file is different to the HEI Code of the institution currently being administered. Please update the file and re-submit” If any validation errors occur which indicate that there are duplicate CoCs within the file (more than one CoC where the details are exactly the same), the system stops processing the submission and return the following message “Duplicate records have been identified within the file. Please update the file and re-submit” If no format validations are encountered, the details of the submission are shown on the Change of Circumstances Import Results page.

## **8.0 System Access & Availability**

- 8.1** There are 6 user access levels available within SIS (as shown in section 2.1). The Student Information Service User Administrator that SLC has set up at every institution is able to set up (or delete) access for any number of users with any of the six user roles available within the service.
- 8.2** SLC provides such notice as is reasonably practicable of any known times when the Portal will be unavailable due to planned maintenance or system upgrading. A message will be displayed on the HE Gateway homepage informing HEI users of any scheduled downtime. In the event of unscheduled downtime, HEI users will be notified by e-mail.

## **9.0 HEI Support**

- 9.1** The HEI Help Desk team handles operational calls in order of when received and is managed to assist HEI with all course database enquiries. This operates between 9.00 and 17.30, Monday to Friday. The helpdesk number is **0845 702 3316**. (E-mail enquiries should be sent to **sis@slc.co.uk**)
- 9.2** Any issues with usage of the Student Information Service should be raised through the Help Desk. This speeds up the rate of response.

## **10.0 Training**

- 10.1** Specific training in the format of e-Learning modules have been sent to all institutions via e-mail and they have also been made available on the HE Info website.
- 10.2** HEIs are responsible for ensuring that a sufficient number of nominated representatives are trained in using the HE Portal. HEIs are further responsible for identifying suitable delegates that are able to cascade training to other users if required

## **11.0 Further Guidance**

- 11.1** The User Guide was issued via e-mail to all institutions along with e-Learning training modules. These were both also made available on the HE Info website.
- 11.2** Access issues to the Student Information Service can be raised through the HEI Services mailbox (**HEI\_Services@slc.co.uk**)

## **12.0 Management Information**

- 12.1** The system generates management information using the data within the Student Information Service to help SLC track the frequency and type of Attendance Confirmations / Change of Circumstances, being raised by HEIs, in order to attempt to improve business processes.

## **13.0 Maintenance & Enhancements**

SLC are responsible for the upkeep of the service and for providing system updates on any issues that are impacting system performance through Release Notes. Any enhancements to the service will be communicated through the Release Notes and updates to the User Guide.

## Appendix 1

### Performance Targets / Service Level Agreements

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

- 1.1 The minimum availability of the Student Information Service is **99%** 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 The HEI Helpdesk will answer 90% of telephone calls within 60 seconds.
- 1.3 SLC intends to achieve average response times for retrieving data from the portal will be **5 seconds or less**.
- 1.4 SLC to notify all the named contacts by email when the Student Information Service is temporarily unavailable and will confirm when the system is fully available once again.
- 1.5 All Award Authorities to have processed CoCs within 4 weeks (20 business days) of receipt. This will be 6 weeks (30 business days) during peak processing times (August & September).
- 1.6 Newly approved student details will appear on the portal within 24 hours of their application being approved.
- 1.7 The Tuition Fee Balance Report will be refreshed on a weekly basis on a Sunday evening.
- 1.8 The Tuition Fee Remittance Reports will be produced weekly on a Wednesday evening.
- 1.9 Attendance Import files will be processed and results returned within 24 hours of submission.
- 2.0 SLC will make tuition fee payments that are due to an institution in all instances where an HEI confirms a student(s) ongoing attendance prior to the cut off date for BACs processing\*. HEIs will be able to confirm the attendance of their autumn start students from the 1<sup>st</sup> December annually. SLC will then make the fee grant and loan payments via BACs in the first week of February into the bank account nominated by each institution.

**\*BACs payments will be made each Wednesday. In order to ensure that payments are made the following Wednesday, HEIs should ensure that the relevant attendance confirmations have been made on SIS by the preceding Friday. If there is a bank holiday (or public holiday on the Friday) confirmations will have to be completed by close of business on the Thursday to ensure Wednesday payment.**

## 2.0 Responsibilities for HEIs

- 2.1 Each HEI is responsible for managing their Attendance Worklist and ensuring that all students that require a confirmation of attendance recorded are processed as necessary. HEIs should aim to have their autumn start students attendance confirmed within 3 weeks of the 1<sup>st</sup> December.
- 2.2 HEIs to ensure that when confirming a student is not in attendance that the subsequent Change of Circumstance should be processed within 2 weeks (10 working days). Withdrawals should be processed immediately.
- 2.3 The on-line CoC service should be used as and when HEIs become aware that a CoC is required for a particular student(s). This would ensure that HEIs meet their obligations under the Student Support Regulations Act 1998.
- 2.4 All failed submissions should be addressed and rectified by the HEI, wherever possible, within 2 weeks (10 business days) of failing the submission attempt.
- 2.5 Any errors that cannot be rectified should be raised with the **HEI Help Desk on 0845 702 3316**
- 2.7 Each HEI to ensure a suitable number of staff are fully trained on all aspects of the Student Information Service process and available should the SLC require to contact the institution.
- 2.8 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 contact for the Student Information Service.