



## **Learning Provider Portal**

### **Applicant Information Service and Fee Payments**

#### **Service Definition**

### **1.0 Background**

The Applicant Information Service (AIS) provides FE Learning Providers (FELPs) with a wide range of learner data once a learner's application for funding has been submitted to SLC. This allows FELPs to have early sight of learners' application information and the corresponding loan amount.

The Applicant Information Service encompasses four distinct areas: Learner Information, Attendance, Change of Circumstance and Financials.

It is the responsibility of each FELP to ensure that certain information held by the Applicant Information Service for their organisation is up to date and accurate. This includes as a minimum:

- Chargeable Fee
- Learning Aim Start and End Dates
- Attendance Information

This will ensure that learners are assessed against the correct details and that the fee payments issued to FELPs are accurate.

### **2.0 Service Review**

**2.1** The Applicant Information Service is as a stand-alone service on the Learning Provider Portal. The service provides FELPs with learner information within 24 hours of the learner's application being submitted as well as a means to update information such as the Unique Learner Number (ULN), confirm learner(s) ongoing attendance, submit change of circumstance notifications and access financial reports. With early sight of learner information, FELPs can quality check information, update mandatory and optional fields and perform internal business processes.

The online portal is the only option available for FELPs to confirm attendance and submit change of circumstances, whether using the screens or the import/export function, as this functionality is not accessible via any other channel.

**2.2** Users will access the service through the Learning Provider Portal. Each user will require access to the portal which will be administered by a User Administrator at each FELP. Student Loans Company (SLC) issued User Administrator access to two named contacts at each FELP. These are referred to as the Primary and Secondary Business Contacts. There will be seven separate user roles within the service:

- LP User Administrator
- LP Administrator
- LP Advisor
- LP CoC Administrator
- LP CoC Advisor
- LP Financial Administrator
- LP Attendance Administrator

Any user with the role LP User Administrator will be responsible for the ongoing management of access of users within their organisation. This includes creating new and maintaining existing users and expiring users who no longer access the portal or who are no longer employed by the FELP.

There is no restriction on the numbers of users that an FELP can grant access to.

### **3.0 Learner Information**

The Learner Information search function allows the user to search and view the learner's application details held in the AIS, for their organisation. It allows the user to filter, export and view personal, learning aim and learner specific details relating to an individual learner's application. It also allows FELPs to update specific mandatory and optional information. The user is provided with the option of exporting a full or historical data set of learner application information. A history of interactions for each individual learner is also available through the Learner Information section via the Detailed Learner Information Screen.

### **4.0 Confirmation of Attendance**

**4.1** The online process for confirming attendance within the service contains specially tailored business rules to determine whether a learner requires an attendance confirmation. All the learners who require an attendance confirmation will be displayed on an Attendance Confirmation Worklist.

FELPs are required to undertake two types of attendance confirmation: initial attendance confirmation and subsequent attendance confirmation.

**Initial attendance confirmation** is the first liability point for a learner, it is requested 2 weeks after a learner's start date.

**Subsequent attendance confirmations** are subsequent liability points for learners, attendance confirmation must be submitted quarterly throughout a learner's learning aim in order to ensure the

FELP continues to receive payment. The quarterly attendance confirmation dates are fixed and the same for all learners regardless of their start date. Attendance will be assumed in the months between quarters. FELPs must notify SLC as soon as possible if a learner withdraws or suspends their studies.

The business rules are designed in order to ensure that only learners that require an attendance confirmation will appear on the worklist

FELPs will have the ability to select the relevant attendance status.

More information can be found by using the User Guides and training material produced by SLC. This supporting material can be found on the LP Services website.

**4.2** The Attendance Confirmation Worklist will include all learners who require an attendance confirmation. The user can then view, save or submit attendance confirmations for these learners. It should be noted that normal business rules apply regarding the timing of attendance confirmations. The responsibility of maintaining the Attendance Confirmation worklist lies with each FELP, who should ensure that all learners that require a confirmation are actioned in order to release the payment of fees from the SLC.

**4.3** Attendance Confirmations can be made either through the portal screens for single or multiple learners in one transaction or by the FELP importing an Attendance Confirmation file into the system. Details of the file formats can be found in the Technical Specifications for the LP Services website.

**4.4** The timeframe in which a learner must be in attendance for the fee to be payable are:

**Initial attendance confirmation** – Learners must be in attendance for 2 weeks after their start date. After this date passes learners will populate the attendance worklist, attendance can be confirmed and payments can be released.

**Subsequent attendance confirmations** – Learners must be in attendance on the 1st day of the month for the FELP to be eligible for payment that month. Learners will automatically populate the worklist on the fixed quarterly dates and confirmation on this date will release payment for that month and the months in between until the next fixed date. Fixed dates are 1 August, 1 November, 1 February and 1 May.

## 5.0 Change of Circumstance

**5.1** The Change of Circumstance (CoC) function is used to notify SLC of any change or correction to the learner's application data. When a CoC is submitted, business rules permitting, the changes within the CoC alter the details in the ALL Operations portal and the account is reassessed by automatic processing. The learner's application information is updated including all relevant sections of the portal and the learner is sent a new entitlement letter notifying them of the change. The online process provided by the service allows CoC notifications to be created, submitted and reassessed in a short period of time.

**5.2** The user will select the 'CoC Home' tab within the service and then proceed to record the change of circumstance notification. Validation rules exist to ensure the changes submitted are within business and policy rules.

An FELP can notify SLC of a change of circumstance after an application is approved and whether the application is pre liability or post liability.

An application is classed as **Pre-Liability** when SLC have not yet received a positive attendance confirmation from the FELP.

An application is classed as **Post-Liability** when SLC have received a positive attendance confirmation from the FELP.

An FELP can submit a CoC for either an individual learner or a group of learners for different categories:

**Pre-Liability**

- Change of Fee
- Change of Learning Aim Details
- Change of Loan Amount Requested (decrease only)
- Change of Learning Provider
- Cancel Application
- Reinstate Application (only when the application has been cancelled)

**Post-Liability**

- Change of Fee
- Change of Learning Aim Details (with restrictions)
- Change of Loan Amount Requested (decrease only)
- Withdraw Application
- Suspend Application
- Resume Application (only when the application has been suspended)
- Early Completion

**5.3** If the notified change is a withdrawal, no payments will be made to an FELP in subsequent months. If the notified change is a suspension, payments will not be made until SLC is notified of the resumption by the FELP.

A change to a learning aim end date within will re-profile the payment schedule accordingly. An early completion notification should only be made when the learner has genuinely completed their learning early. The balancing payment will be made to the FELP.

**5.4** The user can submit a notification Change of Circumstance for:

- single change for single learner submissions
- single change for multiple learner submissions
- multiple changes for single learner submissions
- multiple changes for multiple learner submissions

**5.5** Multiple CoC submissions can be entered through the portal screens for certain categories. FELPs can also use a bulk import file if they choose to.

**5.6** A View CoC function is available for FELPs to view all previously submitted changes; this can be exported also if required. A CoC submission report provides an at a glance view of the number of each type of change submitted.

## **6.0 Financial Reporting**

**6.1** The Financials Home section of the service allows FELPs to view a Payment Instalment Report (PIR) and a breakdown of payments made to their organization.

**6.2** The Payment Instalment Report shows information on:

- value of payments made
- value of scheduled payments where attendance has been confirmed
- value of scheduled payments awaiting confirmation
- value of payments not progressing to payment due to missing information or evidence

FELPs can select whether the information displayed is by Academic Year or Learning Aim Start Year and can choose whether the information is to be viewed on screen or exported.

**6.3** After a payment has been made, a remittance breakdown will be available on the portal which will show the amount paid in respect of each learner. This information can be exported and used as required by FELPs.

## **7.0 Data Validation**

**7.1** In addition to performing all functions via screen functionality, the portal will allow FELPs to export data. All exports are in either CSV or XML file format. Exports include:

- Learner Information
- Learner Assessment History

- Payment Schedule and Attendance
- Payment Instalment Report
- Remittance file
- Attendance Worklist

**7.2** When exporting a file from the Attendance Worklist, depending on technical implementation on the FELPs system, they can choose to modify the export to add the relevant attendance code or create an import file from their own systems. If the file meets the specification and passes validation it will be accepted into the system.

**7.3** Attendance confirmations can either be submitted through the portal screens or via bulk import. File format validation will ensure that the format of the file is consistent with the format detailed in the schema and that all mandatory fields have been completed. Imported attendance confirmation files that have passed file format validation will then have detailed field format and business validation performed on the contents of the file. Please see the Technical Specification for more details.

**7.4** CoCs can either be submitted through the portal screens or via bulk import. File format validation will ensure that the format of the file is consistent with the format detailed in the schema and that all mandatory fields have been completed. Imported attendance confirmation files that have passed file format validation will then have detailed field format and business validation performed on the contents of the file. Please see the Technical Specification for more details.

## **8.0 System Access and Availability**

**8.1** There are 7 user access levels available within the service (as shown in section 2.2). Every FELP has a User Administrator for the service and can create other users. This includes creating further User Administrators.

**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 portal homepage informing users of any scheduled downtime. In the event of unscheduled downtime, users will be notified by email.

**8.3** The portal is a web based service and is accessed through an internet browser. The portal was developed using Google Chrome, and SLC advises using this browser for optimum performance, however, the portal can be accessed using other browsers such as Internet Explorer 8, Internet Explorer 9 and Firefox.

## **9.0 Learning Provider Operational Support**

**9.1** The Partners Support Desk team handles operational calls and is managed to assist FELPs with all system enquiries. This operates between 9.00 and 17.00, Monday to Friday.

The Partners Support Desk number is 0300 100 0643. Email enquiries should be sent to [lpervices@slc.co.uk](mailto:lpervices@slc.co.uk).

**9.2** Any operational issues with usage of the Applicant Information Service or individual learner queries should be raised by contacting the Partners Support Desk.

**9.3** FE Account Managers are available to provide advice, guidance and support on the service as a whole. The team provides ongoing support to FELPs, part of which will include regional training and engagement events.

As part of this team and within their specific regions, Account Managers ensure that FELPs receive the support they require to facilitate their administration processes.

There are 4 FE Account Managers who are each responsible for a region in England, the details of which can be found on the Learning Provider Services website.

## **10.0 Training and Guidance**

**10.1** Specific training and guidance documents have been made available on the Learning Provider Services website.

**10.2** FELPs are responsible for ensuring that a sufficient number of nominated representatives are trained in using the portal. FELPs are further responsible for identifying suitable delegates that are able to cascade training to other users if required.

## **11.0 Further Guidance**

**11.1** User Guides and Frequently Asked Questions have also been made available on the Learning Provider Services website.

**11.2** Portal user access issues can be raised through the [lpervices@slc.co.uk](mailto:lpervices@slc.co.uk) mailbox.

## **12.0 Management Information**

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

**12.2** Management Information is also shared with the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA).

## **13.0 Maintenance and Enhancements**

**13.1** SLC is responsible for the upkeep of the service and for providing system updates on any issues that are impacting system performance. Any enhancements to the service will be communicated through System Updates, FELP Bulletins and updates to the User Guide.

## Appendix A

### Performance Targets / Service Level Agreements

#### 1.0 Responsibility for Student Loans Company

**1.1** The minimum availability of the Learning Provider Portal is 99% of the supported window (excluding any period of scheduled maintenance). The supported window runs from 9.00am till 5.00pm Monday to Friday (excluding Scottish public holidays). The system can be accessed outside these business hours but will be unsupported.

**1.2** The Partner Support Desk will respond to 98% of mail within 10 days at peak, 4 days off peak. They will answer 95% of calls within 60 seconds off-peak, 80% at peak.

**1.3** SLC average response times for retrieving data from the portal will be 5 seconds or less and 20 seconds or less for non-key searches.

**1.4** SLC will notify all the named contacts by email when the service is temporarily unavailable and will confirm when the system is fully available once again.

**1.5** Attendance Import files will be processed and results returned within 24 hours of submission.

**1.6** SLC will process imported CoC files within 24 hours.

**1.7** CoCs submitted via the portal will be processed and reassessment history available within 24 hours.

**1.8** Newly approved learner details will appear on the portal within 24 hours of their application being data entered.

**1.9** The relevant financial reports will be refreshed on a daily basis.

**1.10** The Payment Files will be produced monthly.

**1.11** Attendance Import files will be processed and results returned within 24 hours of submission.

**1.12** SLC will make fee payments that are due to a FELP in all instances where the FELP confirms a learner's ongoing attendance prior to the cutoff date for Bacs processing\*. FELPs will be able to confirm the attendance of their learners from 2 weeks after the start date of their aim. SLC will then make the loan payments via Bacs monthly into the bank account nominated by each institution.

**\*Bacs payments will be made on Wednesdays. In order to ensure that payments are made in a timely manner, FELPs should ensure that the relevant attendance confirmations, if required, have been made by 5.00pm on the Thursday before the payment date.**

## **2.0 Responsibilities for FELPs**

**2.1** Each FELP is responsible for managing their Attendance Worklist and ensuring that all learners who require a confirmation of attendance recorded are processed as necessary. FELPs should aim to have their new starts confirmed as near to 2 weeks after their start date as possible. As attendance is assumed in the months between active confirmations, FELPs must notify SLC if the learner is no longer in attendance.

**2.2** FELPs must confirm attendance within the timescales noted in 1.12 of the appendix in order to ensure payment on the 3rd Wednesday.

**2.3** When a learner is no longer in attendance, the subsequent Change of Circumstance or cancellation should be processed as soon as possible in line with the Service Standards.

**2.4** All failed submissions should be addressed and rectified by the FELPs, wherever possible, within 2 working days of failing the submission attempt.

**2.6** Any errors that cannot be rectified should be raised with the Partners Support Desk.

**2.7** Each FELP should ensure a suitable number of staff are fully trained on all aspects of the service processes and available should SLC require to contact the FELP.

**2.8** Each FELP should ensure that contact details of users using the portal are added to the Contacts section under the Learning Provider Details of the portal.

**2.9** Each FELP should ensure that an IT/MIS contact (either internal or external) be made available on request.

**2.10** It is the responsibility of the FELP to carry out a quarterly review of contact details and update the contact information within the portal or notify SLC if there are any contact detail changes involving the primary or secondary contact for the portal.

**2.11** The FELP must have a process in place to manage Unique Learner Number updates via the portal.

**2.12** FELPs are responsible for ensuring members of staff using the Learning Provider Portal complete any relevant training and are familiar with the guidance materials on the Learning Provider Services website.