



Student Loans Company

## DSSG 04.06.2019 12:30 – 15:30

OfS & SLC Offices, 2nd Floor, Finlaison House, 15-17 Furnival Street, London EC4A 1AB

### Note to cascade

#### DSA Operational Performance Update

Due to the time of year, applications for 2018/19 had reduced significantly, with 2019/20 applications now being received. Students still wishing to apply for DSA support for 2018/19 should be encouraged to do so as soon as possible. The ability for full-time undergraduate students to submit applications online had helped to change the pattern of applications, with 60% of applications for 2018/19 having been received before September 2018. Over 30,000 applications had already been received for 2019/20, with a higher percentage of applicants being eligible than at the same point last year. More of the DSA team were now fully trained in handling student calls.

Invoice processing turnaround was currently taking longer than standard, with a significant increase in the volumes of invoices received. Additional staff had been recruited to help address this. Concerns about the personal implications of this for NMH providers being paid had been raised within the sector. It was agreed that messaging on timescales for payments would be revisited to improve clarity for the benefit of impacted providers.

#### ATSG

The ATSG had been suspended in the absence of any new issues to be addressed, but Assistive Technology would be a regular agenda item at the DSSG to ensure that any new developments were captured. A newly-formed Spec group was working on revising the specification matrix, with membership from SLC, ATSPs, and the Department for Education. The latest version was expected to be signed off in early June.

A final decision was due on the nature of the AT tender, in terms of whether the equipment and training elements should be combined or separate. The invitation would be open on the OJEU (Official Journal of the European Union) website for 30 days once released. Following the award of the contract, it should be implemented in autumn 2019.

#### Department for Education Update

An SSIN (Student Support Information Note) would soon be released on the non-medical help review (on the “mandatory criteria”) which was now complete. The Thomas Pocklington Trust had been involved in this, offering views on behalf of vision-impaired students, and a podcast on this was available. A question on the use of Education, and Health and Care Plans as evidence of

*\* Paper provided*



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DSAs eligibility for dyslexic students had been raised in the House of Lords in early May 2019. The DSA's evaluation research report had indicated that too many students remained unaware of the availability of DSAs prior to applying to enter higher education, which was an issue of interest to the Department. The Minister's round table on student mental health had taken place.

## NMH Support

Students on OU distance-learning courses were asking HEPs to confirm that they could not provide NMH support that was indeed available, in order to apply for SFE funding. This was not a DSA query, and the current SFE letter addressing it would be circulated to the group.

## Anti-competitive Behaviour and Assessment Centres

Students had been signposted via UCAS to two eligibility checkers produced by Assessment Centres, but action had been taken to prevent this. One further instance of an incentive to students had also been identified, and it was suggested that this be included in the DSA GAQ review of assessment centres in the summer.

## DSSG Membership

New requests for membership of the DSSG were under consideration. A decision would follow based on the optimum group numbers and the represented diversity.

## Discussion Topics for Future Meetings

It was suggested that the group take a more dynamic and active approach, moving more towards workshops. Areas for potential focus included barriers for students, participation targets, behavioural insights, impact exchange, and evidence, all of which were being reviewed by the Office for Students. The Institute for Coding was looking at unrepresented groups and how to attract more disabled students.

## AOB

### Colorimetry

Progress on the funding situation for testing should follow from a meeting on 4 June.

### Reduction in NMH Pay Rates

Some NMH support workers were seeing their contracts being amended by HEPs or NMHPs, with significant impacts on their remuneration. The implications for their livelihoods, the quality and range of service being offered, the profession itself, and student choice were concerning. The profession was, to a certain extent, unregulated and therefore audits could prove unreliable. A time-limited working group, facilitated by group members – not by SLC – was set up in the DSSG to investigate this further, with feedback to follow at the September meeting.

*\* Paper provided*



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### Lean

Lean methodology was being implemented throughout SLC in stages. The standard 100-day plan had been extended to eight months for DSA to ensure that it was carried out thoroughly and correctly.

### Cancellation of NMH support

Work on the process for cancellations of NMH support was ongoing, with the deadline for HEPs to notify SLC being looked at.

### GDPR Indemnity Levels

Confirmation of SLC's GDPR indemnity levels was requested and would be provided at the next meeting.

### Office for Students

OfS would be reviewing the impact of Disabled Students' Premium Funding in August or September, and the Leadership group was being overhauled. An update would be provided at the next meeting.

Next meeting details: Tuesday 10 September 2019, 12:30 - 15:30 The Memphis Building, Lingfield Point, McMullen Road, Darlington, County Durham DL1 1RW.

*\* Paper provided*