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## Change programme embedding SLC values

SLC is working towards the 'delivery date' for the introduction of the new Student Finance Service.

The detailed work is involving SLC in close liaison with the UK Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills and HM Revenue & Customs in taking forward a wide-ranging organisational development programme.

The programme is embedding the values, behaviours, structures and organisational processes that will ensure full and effective delivery of the new student finance service from the beginning of academic year 2008/09 for English-domiciled students.



Ralph Seymour-Jackson, Chief Executive, says:

"The UK economy is changing. It is critical to make sure that different types of students from different backgrounds are able to access higher education to make that change possible.

"2008 is going to be a challenging year for everyone in SLC. We are undertaking our biggest-ever change programme as we start delivering our Customer First programme.

"The prime driver of this change is better service for our customers and our stakeholders. A new service needs a new SLC, focused on the customer experience, providing a more uniform, consistent level of service."

The change programme is set to run to 2012, re-engineering the delivery processes for customers and linking electronically with delivery partners to provide a responsive, effective and efficient service.

SLC will take responsibility for processing student finance support applications currently handled by local authorities in England.

All local authority processing work will migrate to the company's Darlington centre by academic year 2012/13.

## Update



“Welcome to this first edition of SLC’s external newsletter, *Update*.”

“SLC is promoting two-way communication across all areas of its business. As part of this commitment, we will publish an electronic edition of *Update* every two months.

“The newsletter will provide opportunities to inform stakeholders and a wider external audience about developments and current issues, both in the company and across the wider higher education sector.

“We welcome feedback from readers and we will publish relevant comments, subject to editorial discretion. We also welcome suggestions from readers on areas of the company’s business that they would like to see discussed in these pages.

I look forward to hearing from you.”

Ian McLaren Thomson  
Editor

Please e-mail your feedback to:  
[communications@slc.co.uk](mailto:communications@slc.co.uk).

# Focusing on customer service



SLC’s recently formed Customer Services Directorate is key to delivering the company’s new Customer First programme. Director Martin Herbert outlines its role ...

“The directorate was formed because the introduction of the new Student Finance Service means that, for the first time in England, SLC will have sight of its customers from the beginning to the end of their higher education journey.

“SLC recognises the importance of the customer. We have always been customer-focused, but at a time when the organisation and structure of the company are undergoing real change we must ensure that we continue to focus on servicing the needs and expectations of our customers.”

Martin Herbert points out that SLC will be taking over responsibility for what is currently the student finance work of 160-plus local authorities at the application stage, so it is critical that SLC:

- provides people with the right information to support their decision to go to university
- processes loans and grants efficiently and on time
- ensures effective repayment of loans.

He says that, given the very high volume of calls we answer – some three million a year – SLC’s customer satisfaction level is good.

“But we are very self-critical, and we do listen to what our customers, funders and stakeholders tell us. This insight has formed the basis of the Customer First transformation programme.

“We recognise that we must always be improving and reacting to change – not only for the straightforward majority of cases, but for students who have particular, specialist needs, such as those with disabilities or learning difficulties, or students from overseas.”

To serve the needs of customers better, and to provide operational flexibility and efficiency, Martin Herbert has designed the structure of his directorate based on:

- planning ahead accurately
- delivering our customer promise
- gaining insight into customers and continually acting on that insight to change and adapt the service.

*please turn to p3*

## Focusing on customer service

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The structure of the directorate was developed during a series of interactions with staff at all levels in the company.

He explains: “I held a design competition for all senior managers to ask them how they would structure the directorate.

“They each made a presentation on what they saw as the main need and they had a theme common to all of them – the changing customer at different stages of their journey. We need to reflect the changing requirements of our customers throughout.”

Martin Herbert held workshops with teams throughout the management and in Customer Services. “It was a collaborative approach, listening to staff and to the Board and funding bodies.

“People were then brought on board and that inclusive approach meant they understood what they were doing and why.”

Funding bodies were involved at an early stage, at regular stakeholder meetings. “I approached each of the devolved authorities to explain the process and brought their feedback back into the strategy.

“One common theme was the need to make sure that students with special requirements are provided with support from specialist contact and processing teams.”

Some key appointments have already been made and they include:

- David Thomson, the new Head of Contact Services, who will oversee all customer contact with the company, including telephone, webchat, online contact, e-mail and post
- Christopher Harrison, Head of Processing Services, who will oversee all processing of loan and grant payments
- Fraser Donaldson, Hub Services Manager, who will make sure that SLC has the right people in the right numbers to meet our customers’ needs.

Martin Herbert says: “The Hub is an industrial-scale resource and planning unit. Its job is to balance supply and demand – for example, outsourcing some call-handling at times of high demand in September and October.”

SLC is also developing and building a 3i Team (Insight, Innovation and Improvement). Martin Herbert says: “3i is a small team that will conduct both qualitative and quantitative research into customers and their experience with us. We can then use that insight to improve our services in the year ahead.

“Building and developing the capability of the directorate will stand us in good stead to address the challenges that lie ahead.”

## Voice of the customer

Customers are helping SLC to identify ways of improving quality of service, providing constructive feedback in a three-month pilot survey, Voice of the Customer.

SLC is using an automated feedback tool to provide an accurate and instant collection of valuable customer opinion.

At the end of every call, customers are asked to respond to 10 questions using their telephone keypad, scoring questions on a scale of 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent) and, at the end of the survey, they have an opportunity to leave feedback.

Early feedback to questions on ‘advisor enthusiasm’ and ‘advisor knowledge’ produced an overall positive score of 95%, with 55% of customers scoring advisors as 5/5 (excellent).

Martin Herbert says: “The pilot allows us to react in real-time. We can use this to feed back to our contact centre staff – positive comments as well as constructive criticism.

“A significant amount of feedback to date is creating a real buzz and change of attitude in terms of employee engagement.”

*“ ... it is clear that we are capable of making this happen.”*



## Delivering for our customers

Colleagues shared learning about the SLC way of ‘delivering for our customers’ at the company’s 2008 conference. A conference setting is the best format for engaging and informing all 1200 employees, with presentations in Darlington for colleagues in England, and in Glasgow for colleagues in Scotland and Wales. Lord David Triesman, former UK Minister for Students, told conference: “SLC is critical to the Government’s determination to ensure that different types of students from different backgrounds are able to access higher education.”

SLC employees commented:

“I was looking for a higher level of understanding of what’s happening in Customer First, right across the board - and that’s what I got. When you’re involved on a day-to-day basis at a lower level, you can lose track of what’s happening in the main programme. So I thought today was very useful for that.”

“It was quite a high-level overview of the future - how we’re going to gear up for 2012 and what’ll be happening in the meantime with our values and behaviours.”

“It comes back to everyone living the values: every department has its own objectives and maybe its own degrees of urgency and it’s good for everyone to look at the bigger picture and know where they fit in!”

“We have proven that we are a successful organisation, with good processes and good people, which means we have the right substance to enable us to live up to the challenges that face us in the coming year.”

Ralph Seymour-Jackson  
Chief Executive



“We have an enormous range of skills and job types in SLC but, whoever you are, what you do is going to make a real difference to the new Student Finance Service.”

Martin Herbert  
Director of Customer Services

“Delivering the new Student Finance Service is a huge challenge. We will need to work together, but it is clear that we are capable of making this happen.”

Derek Ross  
Deputy Chief Executive



*“We enhance people’s lives by delivering financial support and advice to unlock their potential through education”* SLC Vision statement

*“We believe that we can attract the right people with the right skills in the local labour market”*

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# SLC creating jobs to deliver new service

SLC is creating more than 520 jobs in the north-east of England as it prepares to launch the new Student Finance Service.

The new service - part of the UK Government's strategy to transform public services around customer needs - will improve the way that students in England get financial support.

SLC is creating the jobs at its new, environmentally-friendly operations centre at Lingfield Point, Darlington, which is due to open in May.

The company aims to recruit around 40 new staff each month during 2008 to fill new posts in customer services, application processing, administration and management.

Derek Ross, SLC Deputy Chief Executive, says: “We are creating a national centre of excellence in Darlington and we believe that we can attract the right people with the right skills in the local labour market.

“SLC is committed to investing in people. We are making maximum use of our personal development provisions, including a huge range of in-house training tailored to the individual and clearly identifiable career progression.”

Recruitment started in February, one month earlier than planned; the first new employees start training in March.

*The Northern Echo*



The fit out and infrastructure of the new facility, in the Memphis building, are on target. Employees currently based at SLC's centre at Mowden Hall are due to move to the new facility in May.

Architects designed the low energy, state-of-the-art facility by 'recycling' an old building on a brownfield site. The infrastructure includes:

- a full-height glazed facade that allows natural light to flood into the loft-style office space
- a central building management system that controls an integrated low energy lighting system and a gas-powered air conditioning system
- landscaping surrounding the building that features a row of lime trees to create a 'flying hedge' across the entrance plaza.

A planned, comprehensive recycling programme will include paper, plastic, metal and glass, with all material separated on site and compacted for transportation.



## Jobs on the way Recruitment push for student office

By ALL PYRAM

THE STUDENT Loans Company has launched a major recruitment drive in the Tees Valley bringing 500 new jobs

The company is in the process of creating a high tech office at Darlington's Lingfield Point, where it will handle all aspects of student finance for the whole of England. The first phase of the recruitment drive got under way this week. The new office will open in May, and the company hopes to take on and



SKILLS: Derek Ross, left, says the necessary skills are available here

relationship between SLC and Darlington and the Tees Valley. "We have done a fair bit of

*Tees Valley Evening Gazette*

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*“SLC is able to claim a long-standing commitment to community involvement”*

## SLC is giving something back

There are many reasons that SLC takes its corporate social responsibility (CSR) seriously. The UK Government requires us to have a policy, and our customers and stakeholders expect us to have a commitment to CSR. But there are more compelling and positive reasons than simply our obligation. As an organisation, we want to be seen as responsible and public spirited.

There is already work going on in SLC to bring the different strands of CSR together and a steering group was set up to take this work forward. Throughout the company, it is impossible to ignore messages about saving energy and reducing our ‘carbon footprint’. And we are greatly increasing the emphasis we place on partnerships with like-minded suppliers.



One of the key areas in which SLC is able to claim a long-standing commitment to community involvement is in taking part in a range of local authority-driven schemes to improve the lives of schoolchildren in a variety of different ways.

Many SLC employees have taken part in events such as ‘carousels’,



in which industrial representatives go to local schools to explain to pupils what is involved in life beyond school, in the workplace. There is a steady stream of young people who are given opportunities to visit SLC and find out about life in a large administrative organisation.

On a different tack, groups of employees in SLC’s Darlington office have been taking part in community gardening projects in their area.

SLC has also excelled in the charity work that employees take part in. Every year, employees agree to subscribe to a small number of chosen charities. The company, within reason, allows people time during working hours to raise money for charity, but it is entirely at the discretion of employees what they do and for whom they do it.

Over the last two years, SLC employees have raised over £20,000 for BBC Children in Need, by far the largest amount raised by the staff of any Scottish organisation.

The steering group has also looked at what SLC does in the workplace to make sure we have the right policies

in place that positively impact on employee wellbeing and our working environment. The group has reviewed the company’s policies on reducing waste, recycling and re-using valuable resources, as well as the sustainability of supply chains.

Our customers, like most consumers, expect that we are taking positive steps to minimise our impact on the environment. And the steering group is looking at our impact on our own community and ways that we can extend our existing activities.

The steering group will report shortly with a series of recommendations to help us improve our performance. Meanwhile, SLC will continue to work with the local authorities and Scottish Business in the Community to identify opportunities for employees to get out and help the community by giving something back.



“ ... constantly sharing our messages and vision, among ourselves and with our customers and stakeholders.”

# Communicating is a two-way business

SLC has developed a parallel expertise - as a communicating organisation. Media Relations Adviser Rona Cameron says: “SLC was well ahead of many other public sector organisations in introducing electronic mail when this form of communication was still fairly new. That is one example of how the company has embraced different forms of communication, strengthening and adapting them to make sure we are constantly sharing our messages and vision, among ourselves and with our customers and stakeholders.”

**Update:** SLC’s new bi-monthly publication, *Update*, is at the core of the company’s two-way communications network. Circulating electronic editions of *Update* to a wide audience - including stakeholders, opinion-formers and expert commentators - will provide opportunities for SLC’s executive team to cascade information on developments in the company and for external stakeholders to comment on current issues.

**e-Communications:** SLC’s highly capable e-mail base delivers regular staff information bulletins. The company’s powerful intranet contains comprehensive business information and has easy-access links, including a facility to ‘ask the chief executive’.

**Exchange:** It is crucial that all employees are fully engaged in SLC’s major change programme. A series of meetings, the Exchange, is providing them with opportunities to discuss the programme with senior executives.

**Annual conference:** SLC takes two-way, ‘upward-downward’ communication extremely seriously. All 1200 members of staff, in a series of repeat sessions, attend and take an active part in the company’s annual conference.

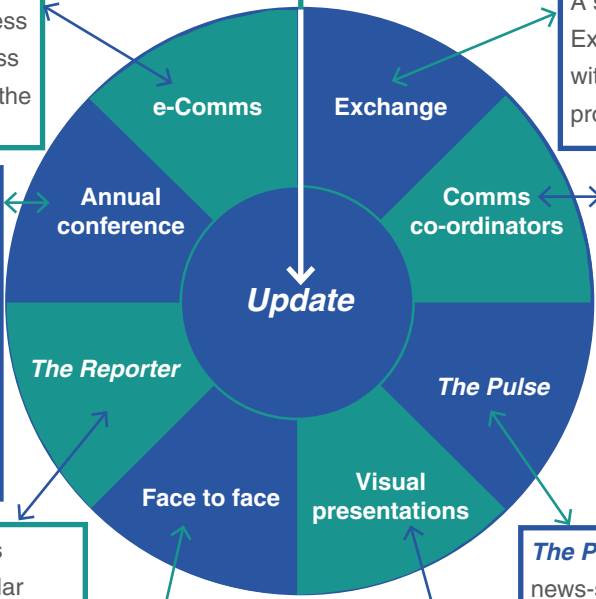
**Communications co-ordinators:** Team leaders across the company designated as communications co-ordinators are providing a two-way point of contact for cascading information and for learning staff views through feedback.

**The Reporter:** SLC employees have their own, dedicated regular newsletter, *The Reporter*, with news and comment from across the business. It is for personal as well as business use, and the readership welcomes its staff-friendly style.

**The Pulse:** SLC’s twice-monthly news-sheet, *The Pulse* - a simple A4 digest of short news clips in a colourful presentation - currently supports the major work being done across the company to build the new Student Finance Service.

**Face-to-face:** SLC continues to use well-tryed, traditional methods of communicating alongside the more technologically advanced ways of exchanging information. Methods employed include face-to-face meetings, and ‘cascade’ and team-briefing mechanisms. And experience has taught that a well-managed and properly ‘housekept’ noticeboard network can often be the best way of getting information across.

**Visual presentations:** SLC has developed a quite remarkable, company-wide proficiency in delivering state-of-the-art presentation material. And by employing a combination of specialist skills in its communications department, the company quite routinely reinforces its information channels by putting together short video packages with which staff can easily identify and empathise.



*“These colleagues ... have demonstrated many of the values to which we all aspire.”*



SLC is celebrating the loyalty and commitment of some of the company's longest-serving employees.

SLC Chief Executive Ralph Seymour-Jackson says: “Achieving 15 years' service is considerable by any measure.

“Originally, there were fewer than 70 people in the company, of whom 22 were able to attend our first 15-year celebration lunch. With this second celebration, we now have no fewer than 47 people with 15 years' service.

“Over the years, these colleagues have contributed greatly to our success. They have helped to put in place the solid foundations on which we are now building the new,

modern, customer-focused SLC. They have demonstrated many of the values to which we all aspire.”

Sheilagh Young, a team leader in Customer Support, says: “It is the people here that make the quality of working life so good - I really look forward to coming into work every morning.

“We are developing a more modern style of management that is empowering people. I like the way that it is shaping up. Staff are involved and are asked for their point of view.”

*Pictured: Long-serving employees flanked by (left) Derek Ross, Deputy Chief Executive and Martin Herbert, Customer Services Director and (right) Wallace Gray, ICT Director and Ralph Seymour-Jackson, Chief Executive.*

## Trainer is world-class finalist

SLC is a finalist in three categories in a worldwide competition to recognise the world's best call centre staff.

In the ContactCentreWorld.com annual awards:

- SLC 'soft skills' trainer Alexis Farndell (right) is nominated for 'best trainer' for her highly acclaimed 'phone rage' training course
- SLC and partner Response are nominated for 'best outsourcing partner'



- SLC is nominated for 'best technology innovation' for its innovative Webchat facility

Alexis Farndell has already won widespread acclaim for the 'phone

rage' training course. Call Centre operators are trained to be 'better listeners' and to 'manage' the unreasonable rage of an unhappy customer.

The idea has been taken up by the Scottish Government and a number of major private organisations. It has been widely reported in the HR and call centre press.

There were over 800 entrants worldwide for the 'best trainer' award. Other finalists are from Bulgaria, England, Ireland and South Africa.