



Student
Loans Company

BUSINESS PLAN

2011-12



FOREWORD



As Chairman, I am privileged to lead an organisation at the heart of the changes being introduced by this Government.

The transition to the Student Loans Company delivering the vast majority of teaching funding in England and the changes occurring in the Devolved Administrations are of critical importance to students, Higher Education Institutions across the UK and other stakeholders. Ensuring that higher education in the UK continues to build its reputation for excellence, and attract and retain quality applicants from all sections of our diverse society, has never mattered more.

We now have a strong executive team, led by Ed Lester, and an excellent Board to oversee the development of the transition strategy and delivery plans. We need to strive for operational excellence within the resources made available to us. We need to have all of our people delivering great customer service to our applicants. We need to get the right amount of money on time to students for maintenance and to institutions for tuition fees. We need to ensure the data in our loan book records are accurate and complete so that we recover monies due to the Government from graduates in a timely, fair and robust way. We need to plan for longer term changes, through structures, investment (especially our technologies) and collaboration, to the regulatory, funding and delivery frameworks of Higher Education.

If we focus our organisation on these things and do them well, we will have delivered on our obligations and responsibilities. That is our intent.

Ed Smith
Chairman

April 2011

CONTENTS

Introduction

Where we are going

Our Direction	5
Purpose of the Business Plan	5
Who we are	5
What we do	6
Why we do it	6
Our values	6
Business priorities and objectives	7
Enablers and controls	7

What we will deliver

Delivering cost-effective services	8
AY 11/12 student finance cycle delivery for England	9
Services for Devolved Administrations and the HE sector	12
Repayment and collections	15
Supporting Government Administrations' wider objectives	18
Managing public money and delivering Spending Review savings	19
HE and FE funding policy development	22
Change programmes and projects, and AY 12/13 cycle launch	24
Developing and improving delivery capability	26
Staff capability, capacity and organisational culture	27
Improving service delivery outcomes	30
ICT capability	33

Flexing our resources

Relationships and resources	35
Stakeholder relationships and reputation management	35
Our people	37
Change management and programme delivery	38
Information and Communications Technology	39
Financial resources	40
Physical assets	41
Corporate social responsibility	41

Ensuring our success

Plan delivery	42
Corporate governance	42
Corporate planning	42
Performance measurement and management	43
Financial control	43
Risk management	44
Security	45
Fraud	45
Legal	46
Internal audit	46

Appendices

Glossary	47
Change Portfolio	49
Targets	53
Key risk themes	56

INTRODUCTION



We are close to completing a much improved AY 10/11 cycle with a number of achievements that we can justifiably feel very proud of, improving processing and contact centre performance significantly, so that over 99% of customers who applied on time were paid on time and over 90% of calls answered. Last year we also created dynamic management information to inform our decision making, continued building the successful relationships we have with our major stakeholders and further rebuilt our confidence after the disappointment of AY 09/10.

Expectations do not stand still, however, and the success of AY 10/11 must serve as a springboard for the future. We are working hard on AY 11/12 and AY 12/13, and are at the heart of creating the shape of the new higher education landscape.

I am delighted that we will be undertaking these challenges with an extremely strong Executive team that is now complete and in place, and an organisational structure built to deliver success. Every member of the team is committed to making the SLC an exemplar of outstanding performance in the sector over the next five years.

I am satisfied that, within the Company, we have the capability to deliver what will be required of us, although we will need to develop the necessary capacity. Our ICT, which has served us well over the years, is ageing and will need to be upgraded or replaced. Our on-line application service also needs to be rethought if we are to achieve our goal of providing improved customer service and achieving the Government's expectation that initial applications by students are made online by AY14/15.

We need to create an environment and culture where the customer is at the heart of everything we do. We must become even more customer-focused in every contact, going that extra mile, where nothing is too much trouble for our customers and colleagues. We do that by understanding our customers and their needs, building team spirit and being very clear about what we are seeking to achieve.

There will be real challenges with a tight financial budget, restrictions on pay and recruitment and greater scrutiny from central Government. We will have to work within these constraints and overcome them. **This will undoubtedly be a tough year but I truly believe we can deliver.**

Ed Lester
Chief Executive Officer

April 2011

OUR DIRECTION

Purpose of the Business Plan

Each year, the Business Plan sets out how SLC will fulfil its Delivery Strategy obligations for the year ahead. The current Delivery Strategy, which was prepared in 2008 in response to a three-year Strategic Commission issued to SLC by Ministers, is due for renewal and SLC has now received a strategic delivery letter for England, setting out the key role SLC is to play in preparing for and delivering the Government's vision for the future of higher education funding in England. As elections are pending in the Devolved Administrations, we expect to receive a full, UK-wide Commission towards the end of 2011 on behalf of all Administrations following those elections and the subsequent setting of priorities by the new Administrations, and subject to their timing.

In the interim, therefore, this Business Plan has been prepared with three purposes in mind:

- to set out our business objectives for the FY 11-12 period and the actions that we will take to achieve them, including the enablers we will deploy, the controls that will keep us on-track, and the measures that we will use to monitor success against the targets contained in our Balanced Scorecard;
- to provide stakeholders, and in particular the four Government Administrations who fund us, with a clear understanding of our priorities and approach over the next twelve months, an appreciation of the challenges, issues and risks we face and insight into how we propose to address them; and
- to provide a clear statement of direction that can be cascaded through the organisation to inform each individual's personal objectives, so that everyone in SLC has a clear line of sight to the Company's objectives and understands how she or he contributes towards them.

Supporting the Business Plan are more detailed service delivery, financial, functional, resource, change and technical plans. Of particular importance are the AY 11/12 Student Finance England Service Delivery Plan, which provides comprehensive coverage of how the service will be delivered, and the FY 11-12 Corporate Financial Plan.

The Business Plan is intended to be a living document that we will refer back to over the year. We hope that other audiences will also find it informative.

Who we are

The Student Loans Company Limited (SLC) is an arms-length public sector organisation that provides financial assistance to people studying at universities and degree-awarding colleges throughout the United Kingdom. We were incorporated in 1989 as a company limited by shares under the Companies Acts and are wholly in public ownership. We are a non-profit organisation and all funds repaid to us by customers are returned to HM Treasury.

SLC was established to administer the loans scheme introduced by the Education (Student Loans) Act 1990, and the Education (Student Loans) (Northern Ireland) Order 1990. We began operating in 1990 and since 1996 have been classified as an executive non-departmental public body.

We have become an integral part of student finance, working in partnership with the four UK Government Administrations, with local authorities in Wales, the Education and Library Boards in Northern Ireland and the Student Awards Agency for Scotland (SAAS). We also work closely with colleges and universities, UCAS and HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC). We currently employ around 1,800 people across four sites in the UK.

What we do

Our primary purpose, on behalf of Ministers, is to provide financial assistance to people who want to go to university or college and ensure effective repayment afterwards.

We provide loans and non-repayable grants for living costs and study expenses. We also offer loans for tuition fees, which we pay directly to universities and colleges on behalf of students. These tuition fee loans are also available to non-UK European Union residents studying higher education courses at UK universities.

We are responsible, with HMRC, for administering the repayment of Income Contingent Repayment (ICR) loans and manage the direct collection of repayments for mortgage style loans (MSL), which preceded the ICR loan scheme.

We carry out specific tasks for the Devolved Administrations, such as payment of Education Maintenance Allowances in Northern Ireland and Wales to young people continuing beyond compulsory schooling.

We have around four million customers, including those currently receiving finance and those repaying their loans. In AY 09/10 the amount of student financial support awarded was over £7 billion, while loan repayments posted to customers' accounts in FY 09-10 exceeded £1 billion. We strive to operate in an efficient and effective way that balances cost and good customer service.

Why we do it

Everything we do is centred on helping our customers to fulfil their ambitions and potential through education.

Our values

Our work is supported by our corporate values, which are to:

- deliver for our customers' futures, enabling customers to fulfil their ambition and potential;
- lead and inspire, by living the values and realising the vision;
- make a difference, creating opportunity through all we do;
- work together, to achieve shared goals;
- have confidence in each other through openness, honesty and trust; and
- recognise and encourage, respecting and valuing individuals' contribution.

BUSINESS PRIORITIES AND OBJECTIVES

We have three over-riding priorities in FY 11-12, supported by nine objectives:

PRIORITY	OBJECTIVE
Deliver cost-effective services that meet the needs of our customers	1. Deliver a safe, efficient and customer-focused AY 11/12 student finance cycle for England
	2. Provide agreed services to Devolved Administrations and the HE Sector
	3. Maximise repayment and collection efficiency and effectiveness
Support Government Administrations' wider objectives in developing sustainable student finance delivery arrangements for the future	4. Manage public money effectively and deliver agreed Spending Review savings
	5. Support development of Higher Education and Further Education funding policy
	6. Deliver agreed sponsor-led change programmes and projects and launch the AY 12/13 student finance cycle on time
Develop and improve our delivery capability	7. Develop the right staff capability, capacity and organisational culture
	8. Improve service delivery outcomes by enhancing quality and reducing risk in conjunction with delivery partners
	9. Enhance and upgrade ICT capability so that it remains fit for purpose and is able to meet future demand

A brief description of the targets set for each objective is included in the Appendices.

Enablers and Controls

Underpinning these priorities and objectives are the corporate resources that will enable us to deliver the plan and the controls that will govern their use. These are discussed briefly in Resources and Relationships (page 35) and Plan Delivery (page 42) respectively, together with the steps we will be taking to develop and strengthen them.

PRIORITY 1. DELIVER COST-EFFECTIVE SERVICES

THAT MEET THE NEEDS OF OUR CUSTOMERS

“In particular I look to the Board to ensure that the Company... remains focused on the needs of customers and sponsors in the service it provides”

David Willetts, Minister of State for Universities and Science, April 2011



Providing financial support to enable people to pursue their ambitions in further and higher education is at the heart of what we do. Acting as a central delivery arm, we are intermediaries between Government Administrations and the citizens they serve, administering support to eligible applicants within the frameworks set by Government in partnership with a range of other bodies.

Consequently our responsibilities lie in three directions. We work closely with each Government Administration to develop cost-effective ways of delivering the range of services they require to achieve wider policy objectives and account to them for our actions. We build, sustain and extend relationships with other organisations involved in the delivery chain wherever there is a need to supply or receive services in order to fulfil our respective roles. And we deliver agreed services to the very substantial number of customers who rely on us to make their education ambitions achievable financially.

Customers need us to make delivery as seamless and straightforward as possible, allowing them to focus on the important business of pursuing their studies and getting on with their lives afterwards.

They will not want to be concerned with the particular challenges that administering a wide portfolio of products, services and support arrangements to a large – and increasing – customer base presents: that is for us to manage, unobtrusively.

They will look to us to make things as simple as possible: to demystify the process; give them what they need to make the right decisions for their own circumstances; support them as they follow through; and collect repayments afterwards accurately, fairly and at the right time. They should be able to have confidence that we will do our part faithfully, whatever stage of their journey they are at, and they should recognise fully their own obligations.

Delivery has to be cost-effective and efficient, not only to meet the needs of customers, but also to satisfy the operational and financial performance targets set for us by the Government Administrations funding the student finance support schemes. This section of the Business Plan sets out how we will deliver AY 11/12 services in each of the four UK countries and how we will tackle loan repayment and collection nationally this financial year.

OBJECTIVE 1. DELIVER A SAFE, EFFICIENT AND CUSTOMER-FOCUSED AY 11/12 STUDENT FINANCE CYCLE FOR ENGLAND

What we need to achieve

In AY 11/12 we take on the remaining application handling and assessment work from English Local Authorities, completing the transition set out in the Customer First Programme initiated by the end-to-end review some five years ago. We expect to receive around 360,000 additional applications this year as a result, increasing our processing volumes by around 45%, with a corresponding increase in telephone calls.

At the same time, we are addressing lessons learned from AY 10/11, recognising the need to balance quality and quantity better, improve customer service, achieve efficiency savings and protect service quality for all Administrations while we prepare for introduction of the AY 12/13 changes.

To meet our objective **we will**:

- process approximately 1.14m student applicants effectively to meet agreed targets;
- deliver the service in an efficient and cost-effective manner, eliminating wasteful effort and improving value for money; and
- build positive relationships with stakeholders and communicate effectively to help build the reputation of SLC for delivering a quality service and reduce the need for customers to call the Company.

How we will do it

Full details for England are set out in our Student Finance England (SFE) Delivery Plan, which encompasses lessons learned, success criteria, changes required, marketing and communications, volumetric forecasts, budget, benefit management, quality, service improvement programme, resourcing, controls, stakeholder engagement, risk management, contingency, readiness criteria and capturing lessons for future cycles.

The SFE Delivery Plan defines what will be different for AY 11/12:

We will improve the customer experience via:

- simpler income evidence for new students – in the majority of cases, sponsors of new students seeking means-tested support will only have to provide their national insurance number and declare their income, which will be verified automatically with HMRC;
- simpler renewal process for non means tested returning students – SLC will contact students directly and all they need to do is sign and return the declaration or, where their circumstances have changed, amend their details on-line;
- planned changes to the Contact Centre – we will contact returning students who have yet to apply and remind applicants and sponsors who have not yet supplied all the information needed;
- better customer contact experience – through enhanced technology support for SLC front-line teams, improvements will be made to call routing to ensure that calls are directed to the most appropriately skilled advisor, and a knowledge management tool will be adopted to improve the quality and consistency of advice provided to customers.

We will manage customer demand effectively.

We will make it easier for customers to access and use the service effectively and get their applications right first time by developing an integrated marketing and communications strategy that encourages students to apply on-line and provide the correct supporting evidence via:

- more timely communications, better aligned to customers' needs;
- simpler, clearer and more effective information, advice and guidance (IAG);
- improved co-working with stakeholders to deliver key messages;
- working with Directgov to determine options, priorities and funding for possible improvements to front-end web design – possibly later in the cycle (see On-line service offering, page 31)

We will improve organisational efficiency as a result of improvements to the customer experience, including:

- less manual work for processing teams, for example through the introduction of automated checking of household income via a link with HMRC;
- faster application processing and improved assessment accuracy as a result of improvements to application processing that reduce the need for manual intervention;
- less manual intervention for customers changing course by allowing students to submit their change of circumstances on-line;
- stronger course database checks and controls, to remove ineligible courses and ensure that variants of the same course (such as full-time and sandwich) can be identified; and

- improved service stability and effectiveness through upgrades and improvements to technical infrastructure, for example, replacement of network infrastructure equipment including firewalls, switches and load balancers.

Marketing and communications will continue to underpin these commitments. Our aim is to enable customers to access and understand how to use the service effectively by providing effective information, advice and guidance. We will manage both customer and stakeholder expectations about the level of service they can expect to receive through the cycle. We will also work with stakeholders' in delivering the service and influencing customer behaviour to ensure that they apply before the deadlines, provide the right information and make good use of self-serve channels, and monitor the customer experience closely to identify how the service can be improved. Public communications, including through media and press activity, will be managed actively and we will meet the communications needs of parliament via the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) and Ministers. This is discussed further in Relationships and Resources (page 35).

Integrated management of the service through a single service management board worked well last year and will be continued in AY 11/12, with additional and more frequent management oversight as appropriate during key phases of the application cycle. The Student Finance England AY 11/12 Programme Board will play a major part in the governance arrangements. The approach to service continuity management is also being extended to incorporate workplace recovery, ICT disaster recovery, business impact assessments and scenario testing, while at the same time ensuring that existing contingency plans are fully updated where appropriate.

We are taking steps to improve our service by strengthening the way we manage quality and will also capture lessons learned during the cycle to improve delivery in future years. More details are given under Objective 8.

HOW WE WILL MEASURE SUCCESS

Customer satisfaction

Customer complaints

Application processing timeliness (core)

Application processing timeliness (targeted support)

Customer contact

Effective communications with customers

On-line Take-up

OBJECTIVE 2. PROVIDE AGREED SERVICES TO DEVOLVED ADMINISTRATIONS AND THE HE SECTOR

What we need to achieve

Since devolution, the direction and vision for higher education has diverged steadily, as higher education activity within each country develops in line with the broader ambitions and priorities of its own Government Administration. Where goals remain similar, the instruments used to achieve them often differ: for example, the place of Higher Education (HE) in supporting economic development and social justice; the relationship between Further Education (FE) and HE, and progression routes from one to the other; the structure and funding of the two sectors; partnership and collaboration opportunities between institutions; and promotion of wider access for people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Consequently student financial support has become increasingly complex to administer. The differences are not only quantitative, but qualitative. SLC supports different products and services, customer bases, entitlement and assessment rules, delivery structures – and even languages. Individual higher education students are able to take advantage of this diversity by choosing to study elsewhere in the UK, generating substantial cross-border student flows, while Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are able to respond to individual need through the tailored bursary administration service we provide and, if they wish, make use of the additional information services that we offer.

From a delivery perspective, underlying this diversity are a number of common, critical themes for SLC to tackle in order to meet our objective. **In FY 11-12 we will:**

- recognise each Administration's distinct needs, understanding its priorities and protecting these in planning and delivering operational services and change initiatives;
- provide service stability during a time of flux in the FE and HE sectors, strive to maintain and improve customer service and deliver unfailingly to service level agreements;
- remain effective and demonstrate greater value for money within increasingly tight budgetary constraints;
- identify and exploit UK-wide aspects of student finance delivery, seek out common delivery solutions and leverage economies of scale wherever it is possible and makes sense to do so.

How we will do it

To ensure sharper focus on Administrations' needs we have restructured our service management functions to provide distinct and dedicated HE and FE managers. As in FY 10-11, we intend to attain high levels of service performance levels, and will revise our Service Agreements accordingly in line with the requirements of each Administration.

Our customer and support services will provide stable systems for AY 11/12, with an improved on-line service, and enhanced promotional materials that reflect customer and partner feedback. We will remain a supplier and enabler for information, advice and guidance – although we do not have overall responsibility for this – and will support Wales and Northern Ireland by operating and maintaining the application and assessment portals they use. We will also provide bilingual contact centre support for Welsh-domicile customers.

For customers in repayment, we will continue to administer collection arrangements on a national basis, for both Income Contingent Repayment (ICR) and mortgage-style loans.

AY 11/12 Higher Education service

Wales and Northern Ireland

Student finance application is not centralised in Wales and Northern Ireland and SLC currently supports the 22 Welsh Local Authorities and 5 Northern Ireland Library Boards. In FY 11-12 we will:

- provide content for both Administrations' own information, advice and guidance material, together with application packs and on-line tools, which have been enhanced for AY 11/12;
- offer a Student Finance Calculator to enable students to determine approximate levels of funding;
- manage the public web-sites, including the customer application portal. The website is the main source of support information, and students are encouraged to apply through a link with UCAS. Applications and assessments are processed by local authority staff using the software application we provide;
- deliver measures that will encourage on-line take-up, in line with Welsh Ministerial requirements. We will issue direct prompts to returning students to encourage them to apply early and on-line, and send direct mailings to students moving from further education to higher education encouraging them to apply early;
- print customer correspondence. In addition to the main Student Finance letter, issued to confirm every student's entitlement, our Document Management service produces a wide range of correspondence items, many in bilingual format;
- make payments via BACS following confirmation from HEIs of students' attendance at the start of the academic year. We will notify students of their payments via SMS text message;
- provide a fully bilingual customer contact centre for handling student and sponsor enquiries. For Wales, all advisors are able to deal with calls in English or Welsh, while our contact centre in Glasgow serves Northern Ireland. Both centres make use of leading technologies for interactive voice response (IVR) and contact agent desktop software;
- manage the interface with delivery partners, including UCAS and DWP regarding student applications and HEIs in Wales and Northern Ireland regarding course and attendance data;
- undertake a customer satisfaction survey and devise customer service improvement plans to address issues raised; and
- play an active part in monitoring the service and work to resolve issues and explore future opportunities via the management boards overseeing delivery.

Scotland

We work in partnership with the Students Awards Agency (SAAS) to provide support for Scottish students. In FY 11-12 we will:

- provide HEI course data and undertake national insurance number validation to assist SAAS in undertaking assessments;
- receive loan notifications from SAAS and create loan accounts, provide a payment service and schedule payments to be made every month;
- work with HEIs to receive and pass on attendance confirmation data relating to Scottish students, to enable SAAS to make payment of grants; and
- handle loan payment enquiries from Scottish students via our Glasgow contact centre.

We will work with SAAS to establish the costs and timescale of migrating the loan payment service for Scottish students to SAAS (see Objective 6).

AY 11/12 Further Education service

Wales

We will provide learner finance services to Wales through the Assembly Learning Grant (ALG), Pathways to Apprenticeship and the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA). The service for AY 11/12 will be enhanced through improved forms, literature and correspondence and an easier transition from FE into HE student finance systems. The service will also deliver policy changes following the Welsh EMA review.

Northern Ireland

We will provide learner finance services to Northern Ireland through the EMA. As for Wales, the service for AY 11/12 will be enhanced through improved forms, literature and correspondence and an easier transition from FE into HE student finance systems.

Repayment service

Wales

Although repayment is administered on a UK-wide basis, to meet specific Ministerial and SLC Welsh Language Scheme commitments under the Welsh Language Act, we will implement a fully bilingual repayment service for all UK and EU domiciled students who reside in Wales and whose ICR loans enter repayment, or are already in repayment, in April 2013 (see Objective 6).

Work will commence during FY 11-12 and will cover the repayments web-site, white mail and email correspondence and forms, and contact centre services (including IVR). Bilingual text messaging will be considered separately to assess cost-effectiveness and usability.

For AY 10/11 and AY 11/12 Student Finance Wales customers who took out a maintenance loan may have up to £1,500 cancelled from their student loan balance when they start repaying.

Services to Higher Education Institutions

We will continue to provide contracted bursary administration services to subscribing universities in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The full administration service will be delivered with enhanced controls and efficiency gains. We will also supply management information services to HEIs where contracted.

We will pay tuition fees to HEIs in respect of fee loans granted to students across the UK. The service is being enhanced through the implementation of the on-line Student Information Services with major benefits to HEIs in information delivery and attendance confirmation processing.

HOW WE WILL MEASURE SUCCESS 

- Customer satisfaction**
- Customer complaints**
- Performance against SLA (services to Northern Ireland)**
- Performance against SLA (services to Scotland)**
- Performance against SLA (services to Wales)**
- Performance against SLA (services to HEIs)**

OBJECTIVE 3. MAXIMISE REPAYMENT AND COLLECTION EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS

What we need to achieve

By the first month of FY 11-12 the number of ICR customers in repayment will have risen to nearly three million, taking the total value of the ICR loan book in repayment to around £29 billion.

Given the current scale and projected increase in lending, collection activity must be highly effective, returning what is due to the Exchequer without delay and with the minimum of unnecessary activity. For customers, we have to make it as simple as possible for them to understand and comply with the terms of their financial obligations.

The same applies to our remaining mortgage-style lending. Although this has reduced steadily since the closure of the scheme to new entrants over a decade ago, we are still administering the Government-owned loans of over 300,000 customers, totalling nearly £1bn, and we pursue arrears vigorously. We also continue to process deferment applications on behalf of both Government and the private sector.

This FY, we will:

- sustain effective ICR collection by maximising borrower compliance, reducing frictions and minimising evasion in conjunction with delivery partners;
- drive further improvements to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the ICR collection process;
- assist Government Administrations in defining their long-term requirements of the Mortgage Style Loan (MSL) book and work closely with them to secure long-term value for money; and
- maintain an effective and efficient mechanism for collecting overpaid grants and loans.

How we will do it

Continuous improvement

Continuous improvement of ICR delivery is well-established and enhancement of business as usual activity will continue in FY 11-12. For example, for ICR, we are currently reviewing options for streamlining the handling and processing of Confirmation of Customer Details and Overseas Income Assessment forms in order to reduce costs. For MSL, we have designed additional screening to improve targeting of litigation activity and are now moving to implement this. We will also be looking to make better use of information we hold to manage this part of the loan book more effectively to improve recovery. Further work will be needed, however, to embed continuous improvement.

Strategic Review

At the end of 2010, we brought all collections activity together within a single Repayments Department, to provide a clear focus, sharing of best practice and resource pooling to manage operational peaks. A strategic review is underway that builds on previous longer-term improvement recommendations in both ICR and MSL books and will feed into our cost-reduction drive under the Spending Review. This strategic review, which is due to report at the end of August 2011, will record and analyse current business processes, identify future business process options and make recommendations concerning:

- potential efficiency initiatives, with cost benefit analyses;
- opportunities for improving the customer experience;
- future channel use and immediate steps that can be taken to reduce the need for customers to call us;
- training needs to create a more flexible, efficient and knowledgeable workforce;
- prioritisation of work, and how it is actioned, tracked and reported;
- operational management reporting and higher-level “dashboard” management information requirements;
- opportunities for improving motivation and culture to create a more unified repayments division and improve ‘Best Companies’ staff engagement survey scores;
- options for future management and administration of the MSL book;
- opportunities for realising quantifiable savings through changes to software provision; and
- departmental restructuring where appropriate.

Specific areas we propose to examine this year include:

ICR	MSL
Opportunities to reduce the need for contact for customers entering repayment and seeking interest charge information	Process review covering: MSL collection, ICR grant/loan overpayment collection, overdue ICR loan repayment collection, trace, litigation, performance management
Take-up and use of secure on-line transactions, including on-line statements, updated customer details, and on-line Direct Debit set-up and account servicing for customers nearing full repayment	Collections and litigation systems, software, operation, management and contracts
End of loan processing and accelerated refunds for over-repayments	Collection options for grant/loan overpayment
Borrower matching information, including scanning for status tracking with HMRC, and use of catch-up payments for borrowers who are behind	Longer-term positioning of MSL book administration
ICT capacity and processing arrangements for HMRC repayment files	Collections fixed costs

Wider Government Objectives

The Government's proposals for Higher Education funding reform in England following the Browne Review (see Objective 5) have implications for the way we collect graduate contributions in future across all Administrations and we will, therefore, seek opportunities for integrated solutions that meet the needs of all Administrations wherever possible. We will be developing practical, cost-effective arrangements that support the Government's repayment policy.

During FY 11-12 we will also provide support to BIS and their advisors on the analysis of options for the Government to sell or otherwise monetise the ICR loan book and keep abreast of progress with HMRC's Real Time Information initiative.

HOW WE WILL MEASURE SUCCESS **Customer satisfaction****Customer complaints****Repayment (ICR)****Repayment (MSL)****Repayment (Grant Overpayment)**

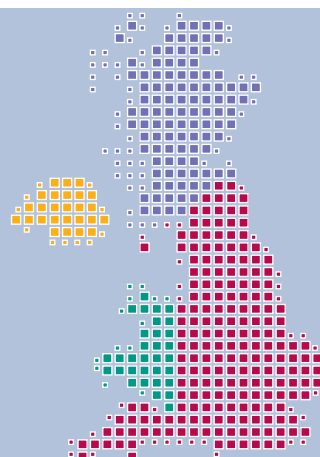
PRIORITY 2. SUPPORT GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATIONS'

WIDER OBJECTIVES IN DEVELOPING SUSTAINABLE STUDENT

FINANCE DELIVERY ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE FUTURE

“Potentially there may be considerable policy changes in all Administrations during this financial year giving rise to new and urgent issues requiring the Company’s attention”

David Willetts, Minister of State for Universities and Science, April 2011



The far-reaching changes facing higher education funding scarcely need introduction. Each Government Administration is facing a daunting array of challenges arising from the social, economic and political environment and is responding, or preparing to respond, in ways that reflect its own priorities and pressures.

It will not be sufficient for SLC to continue sharpening its current operational performance without also having a clear understanding of how these operations will need to change to meet the demands of the future. Some of these demands are already clear, or becoming clearer. Others may remain opaque for some time to come.

These pressures drive SLC to respond in three ways: to ensure that it is well-positioned to deliver known requirements; to put at the disposal of each Administration the right mix of creativity and operational knowledge to help it develop its plans for the future and turn these into practical delivery arrangements as appropriate; and, as a defining characteristic, to become a truly flexible and efficient organisation, capable of adapting rapidly and intelligently to emerging needs.

The next two sections of the Business Plan describe some of these challenges and how we intend to respond to them. Priority 2, Support Government Administrations' wider objectives in developing sustainable student finance delivery arrangements for the future, explores the implications of changing student finance policy. Priority 3, Develop and improve our delivery capability, focuses on three specific areas of internal capability where we need to take action urgently.

OBJECTIVE 4. MANAGE PUBLIC MONEY EFFECTIVELY AND DELIVER AGREED SPENDING REVIEW SAVINGS

What we need to achieve

“... everyone working in public services in the UK should be aware of the need to manage and deploy public resources responsibly in the public interest... The duty to safeguard public funds is invariant. But how it is carried out will change over time. Public sector organisations can and should innovate in carrying out their responsibilities, using new technology and taking advantage of best practice in business efficiency...”

Managing Public Money

As custodians of public money we have a strong responsibility to deliver value for money, operating at all times within the wider set of values, behaviours and disciplines set out in HM Treasury’s Managing Public Money: honesty, fairness, impartiality, integrity, openness, transparency, accountability, objectivity, accuracy and reliability.

This requires us to maximise repayment and collection (Objective 3); to improve the accuracy and quality of our processes (Objective 8) so that we drive out unnecessary cost, minimise error and get it right first time; to minimise fraud; and to maintain a clear focus on what activity is core and determine the most cost-effective way of performing it. Under our Spending Review proposals we have embarked on a multi-year programme designed to ensure that SLC becomes an organisation that delivers the Government’s current and future student finance policy from an appropriate, sustainable cost base over the Spending Review period. Front-line services must be protected, supported by a more efficient and effective back office, at the same time as intense change is taking place in the student finance policy landscape.

Our FY 11-12 financial settlements for England and the Devolved Administrations have been finalised, with indicative figures for subsequent years, reflecting BIS’s assessment of opportunities and risk, and building on the £5m of savings already delivered in FY 10-11 for England.

In FY 11-12 we will:

- maintain strong disciplines governing the way we manage public money;
- comply with the cost-reduction drive in each Government Administration by defining and delivering agreed savings and efficiencies in year 1 of the Spending Review period;
- devise, plan and implement initiatives that will deliver target savings and efficiencies over the remaining Spending Review period;
- ensure that the Spending Review programme supports the Company’s priorities, and those of sponsoring Government Administrations; and
- maintain positive employee relations with our people and their representatives.

How we will do it

Given the incremental financial challenges facing us over the Spending Review period, discussed above, the way we manage public money has never been more important. The funds under our control are of four main kinds¹:

- maintenance or targeted support grants and loans issued to eligible students;
- tuition fees paid to HEIs on behalf of students taking out tuition fee loans;
- loan repayments collected, either directly or via HMRC, and returned to the Exchequer; and
- running costs, funded from grant-in-aid paid to us by Government Administrations.

¹ We also have a small revenue stream from income-generating activity.

Our continuing priorities in managing public funds, therefore, concern:

- accuracy and error-prevention: ensuring that students are assessed accurately and objectively first time, and awarded their correct entitlement where they are eligible;
- fraud prevention: establishing, operating and continually refining the controls that detect attempted fraud and prevent funds from being misapplied;
- secure on-time payment: so that students and HEIs receive the funds they are due at the correct time;
- timely information flow between delivery partners: to ensure that changes of circumstances are captured without undue delay and acted on, whether during HE or once in repayment;
- revenue maximisation: ensuring that those who are due to repay do so, making the correct payments at the expected time;
- accurate forecasting and reporting: ensuring that our Government Administrations are well-sighted on demand and cash flow;
- stringent cost control: to achieve economy, efficiency and effectiveness in all our operations;
- transparency and accountability: so that Government Administrations and the taxpayer can see that the funds provided are being managed well and applied as intended;
- honesty, integrity and impartiality: so that Government Administrations and the taxpayer can trust every member of our organisation to act in accordance with the highest ethical standards; and
- effective governance: to ensure that the disciplines around managing public funds are pervasive, embedded in SLC's processes, systems, values and behaviour, and operating effectively across the end-to-end student finance system.

Spending Review

The FY 11-12 financial settlement for each Government Administration is shown in Table 1 (page 40) and reflects their Spending Review requirements for the first of the four years. Our Spending Review Programme is being designed to produce over a four-year period a transformed, sustainable organisational cost base capable of delivering the services commissioned by Government Administrations at a cost that represents value for money. It will contain a broad-based portfolio of initiatives combining tactical and strategic change to deliver immediate and longer-term savings that build steadily over the life of the programme.

A supporting aim is to embed a cost-conscious culture throughout the organisation over the period so that the continuing drive for efficiency becomes a routine (rather than exceptional) business activity once the Spending Review programme has completed. In view of the scale of savings sought, it is also essential that our people remain committed. We will develop and deliver an internal communications programme which informs and gains commitment from all levels.

To manage the complex and wide-ranging nature of the savings, we will establish a programme management structure and implement normal controls and reporting arrangements over this activity. The Finance Director, as Senior Responsible Officer, will lead a Programme Board directing the programme and will update the Executive and Board on a regular basis.

The programme comprises:

- Cost reduction and recovery initiatives:
 - Front-line cost reduction and recovery initiatives outside AY 11/12 operating model;
 - Third-party spend reduction, including supplier renegotiation and cost curtailment;
 - Value for Money;
- Cost management disciplines:
 - Internal cost controls;
 - Ownership and accountability;
 - Budget-setting process;
 - Employee costs review; and
 - Central initiatives: We will work with Government Administrations to support central cost reduction initiatives, including BIS's commercial strategy.

HOW WE WILL MEASURE SUCCESS

Assessment / payment accuracy

Fraud and error

Delivery within agreed budget

Loans and grants expenditure forecasting accuracy

OBJECTIVE 5. SUPPORT DEVELOPMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND FURTHER EDUCATION FUNDING POLICY

What we need to achieve

The Coalition Government's response to the Browne Review will introduce profound changes to Higher Education funding in England, with implications for the way student finance is delivered. In addition to routine changes for each academic year, including changes to the level of entitlement and thresholds, fee loans will be increased for full-time students and provision extended to part-time students. Additional support will be introduced for eligible students under the National Scholarship Programme. HEIs will receive more of their funding via the tuition fees that we pay on behalf of customers and less via central block teaching grants. Repayment thresholds will be increased and a rate of interest linked to earnings introduced.

Not all these changes need to be in place for the start of AY 12/13 but time is limited for those that do, and there are advantages in completing detailed specification and analysis for the remainder at the same time, even though implementation will occur later.

While each Administration is confronting common cost pressures, its own vision and priorities for HE will determine its response. In England, the Coalition Government has set out its initial proposals and will publish a White Paper. Scotland's Green Paper has initiated a consultation process. Revised fee arrangements were announced in December 2010 and February 2011 by the Welsh Assembly Government. Student support in Northern Ireland is being revisited.

We will need to provide high quality support to all Administrations for their individual funding policies and the other initiatives they wish to take forward. We are committed to working closely with BIS to support their HE reform programme and will need to ensure that we have in place a streamlined approach that keeps abreast of the situation, allowing us to stay informed of policy developments and the resulting decisions, and to respond promptly.

We will continue to support the management of Student Finance Wales and Student Finance Northern Ireland through their management boards and regular review meetings of service, finance and projects. We will also be an active participant in the management of change programmes commissioned by Administrations and will work with a range of partners to implement programme requirements.

During FY 11-12 **we will:**

- work closely with colleagues in BIS to evaluate and plan delivery changes arising from the Coalition Government's proposals following the Browne Review in the timescales set;
- provide all Administrations with high quality delivery impact assessment analysis to support HE and FE policy option evaluation;
- provide insight and analysis support for loan book monetisation as required;
- offer proactive, timely and relevant insight into policy outcomes from a delivery perspective;
- support wider Government data-sharing initiatives.

How we will do it

Analysis work to support the Student Finance England 12/13 programme is well-advanced and will continue against an agreed baseline and stringent change control. Requirements for other Administrations will be progressed as they become known.

Analysis and feasibility work to support loan book monetisation will continue, allowing a preferred way forward to be established and implementation planned as appropriate.

We will continue to provide management information from our delivery systems to assist policy insight, and respond to wider initiatives where, subject to legal authority, data-sharing with other HE public bodies or parts of Government offers opportunities to enhance realisation of policy intent. We will also provide Administrations with student finance outlay forecast data, routine management information and processing support for answering Parliamentary Questions.

HOW WE WILL MEASURE SUCCESS

Support development of HE and FE funding policy

OBJECTIVE 6. DELIVER AGREED SPONSOR-LED CHANGE PROGRAMMES AND PROJECTS AND LAUNCH THE AY 12/13 STUDENT FINANCE CYCLE ON TIME

What we need to achieve

A key aspect of our support for Government Administrations' wider objectives involves delivery of sponsored change. We work closely with sponsors to identify requirements, define costs and benefits, assess feasibility, impact, dependencies and risk, and manage any unknowns, tensions and trade-offs. We then crystallise agreed initiatives into coherent programmes of work that deliver the change sought.

Detailed student support delivery arrangements are being developed where policy is settled and we will provide dedicated focus and support to each Administration over this period. It is critical that all necessary operational preparations have been completed to allow the AY 12/13 cycle to launch on time and operate as envisaged. Our customers also have to be ready and know what to do. Although transactional activity may not start in earnest until the end of FY 11-12, customers, sponsors and delivery partners must be able to access the right information, advice and guidance well before this.

We will also be working closely with BIS as they consider how provision of loans for Further Education at Level 3 and above might be aligned with the Higher Education loans system, the potential costs and timescales involved, and the possible role that SLC might play in supporting delivery.

Given the scale of change facing SLC over the forthcoming years, effective change delivery will be a critical activity for the Company as we continue to deliver and improve services to customers, strengthen our delivery capability and implement the mix of routine and far-reaching change required by our sponsors at a time of strict expenditure control.

In FY 11-12 we will:

- ensure AY 12/13 cycle preparations are completed in the required timescales and to the necessary standards for all Government Administrations;
- devise sound service delivery plans based on solid understanding of the changes being introduced to the Student Finance schemes;
- understand and anticipate customers' information and support needs, ensuring that these are pre-empted as far as possible through effective information, advice and guidance that makes it easy for customers to understand and navigate the new Student Finance support arrangements;
- ensure viable, tested contingency plans are in place to manage departures from expected customer behaviour, business volumes and profiles;
- identify any new operational responsibilities or delivery partner relationships required and implement the necessary arrangements;
- ensure that AY 12/13 planning and delivery does not affect service provided to existing customers, regardless of domicile;
- deliver other development work commissioned by Government Administrations;
- support as required delivery or transitional arrangements for any loan book monetisation programme agreed; and
- deliver routine AY rollover and minor policy change work.

How we will do it

Change Management and Programme Delivery (page 38) provides more detail about how we will approach management and delivery of the challenging change portfolio, which is summarised below in Figure 1. The full list of projects is detailed in the Appendices (Change Portfolio, page 49)

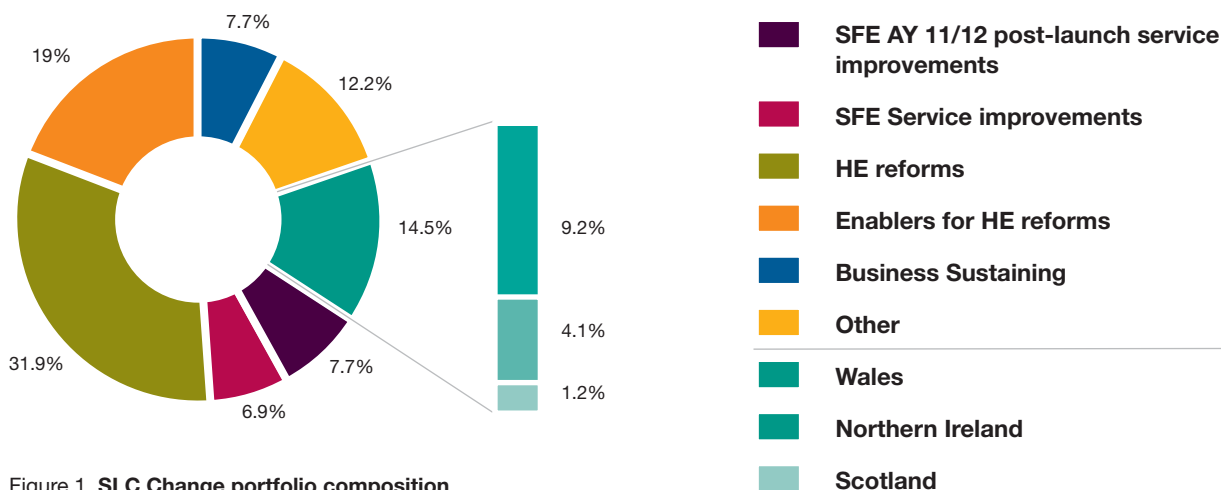


Figure 1. SLC Change portfolio composition

The main categories of work are:

- Post-launch service improvements:** “in flight” enhancements to the SFE AY 11/12 service that are being carried over from the previous year. These are already in development but could not be introduced in time for launch and will be implemented within the current AY cycle;
- Service improvements:** further proposed enhancements to the SFE service;
- Business Sustaining:** security and disaster recovery projects;
- HE reforms:** preparation for the changes proposed by the Coalition Government following the Browne Review, including mandatory and legislative changes;
- Enablers for HE reforms:** work to upgrade our core customer ledger system (CLASS) to provide the functionality needed to support the HE reform programme;
- Other:** Student Loan Sale Feasibility work, FE tuition fee loans, Department of Health NHS package;
- Wales:** post-launch and other service improvements, plus mandatory and legislative projects;
- Northern Ireland:** post-launch service improvements, plus mandatory and legislative projects; and
- Scotland:** service changes (SAAS loan payments).

HOW WE WILL MEASURE SUCCESS

Change programme delivery

PRIORITY 3. DEVELOP AND IMPROVE

OUR DELIVERY CAPABILITY

“... ensure that the Company... builds its strategic capability to respond to the changing needs of Higher Education”

David Willetts, Minister of State for Universities and Science, April 2011



The scale of change we are facing as an organisation over the next three to four years is immense, but we need to embrace it wholeheartedly and positively.

We rely on a wide range of enablers, set out in the Relationships and Resources section of this plan, and will continue to develop these in an evolutionary way over the next twelve months. Three areas, however, require specific, urgent focus and investment to ensure that they are capable of supporting the load they will be expected to bear in the future.

The first concerns our people. The previous two years have not been easy for the Company and the results of our Best Companies survey reveal the cost in human terms very clearly. If it is not an overstatement to say that our future depends on our people, then we need to find better ways of addressing their concerns, offering rewarding work, drawing out full potential, recognising contribution and celebrating success within an environment that is positive, challenging and supportive.

The second concerns quality; in particular, the need to go beyond tactical improvements – although these will remain important – and introduce a way of embedding improvement within the organisation so that it becomes a core part of how we operate and respond to change.

The third concerns our ICT capability. The combined demands of increased business volumes, new products and services, greater functionality, diverging directions within higher education and student financial support, and greater agility all pose significant challenges. These have to be met within the constraints of tighter controls over investment expenditure, long lead-times and wider Government thinking on public sector ICT provision.

This commits us to act now and each subject is explored in the next section of the plan.

OBJECTIVE 7. DEVELOP THE RIGHT STAFF CAPABILITY, CAPACITY AND ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

What we need to achieve

SLC's three business priorities in FY 11-12 touch all parts of the organisation and our people are at the heart of successful delivery. A key objective of people and transformation planning across SLC is to maximise performance in service delivery, by having well informed, led and managed staff in the right places in the right numbers, with the necessary skills and expertise, and working in a positive, encouraging environment, to provide customers with the agreed service and standards. This is imperative throughout the organisation, both for the front-line and for those who support the front-line.

Capacity planning has, therefore, to address in detail the staffing resource and configuration required to meet the volume of demand from different customer groups at different times across the year and to build in sufficient flexibility to protect service from degradation if demand patterns change unexpectedly, or contingency plans need to be invoked. This has to be done in a sustainable, cost-effective way that minimises surplus capacity, allows resource allocation to flow dynamically in line with customer demand, protects investment and minimises waste.

It needs to be supported by effective capability planning to ensure that our people have the knowledge, skills, confidence and outlook to answer customers' queries and satisfy their needs. This, in turn, has to be underpinned by learning and development plans that spell out how these competencies will be established.

At the same time, we have to address the staff engagement, organisational, leadership and management needs expressed by our people in our 2010 Best Companies survey, all of which are key to securing motivation, commitment and performance, creating a positive, dynamic organisational culture and environment.

At all times we have to provide clear, regular, relevant and appropriate information to our people by communicating the Company's direction and progress, openly and honestly, via reliable communication and participation channels that meet their needs.

Therefore, to achieve our objective, **we will:**

- offer strong leadership and clear direction;
- ensure organisational design and structure are fit for purpose;
- align staffing levels carefully with service delivery priorities;
- work with our people to establish changes to working practices, communicating clearly what we expect of them and what we will offer them, and provide well-targeted development, training and management support to achieve change;
- train our people to achieve customer service standards and provide personal development;
- build on AY 10/11 success and improve customer service by establishing the appropriate balance between quality and quantity;
- devise and implement action plans that respond to the issues identified through the Best Companies survey and work with our people and trade union colleagues to achieve a positive employee relations climate;
- ensure our people are fully engaged and able to contribute to decision-making where they have relevant expertise;
- establish communication mechanisms that promote listening and provide our people with accurate and timely information;

How we will do it

Figure 2 below illustrates how we are structuring our approach to people and transformation planning. Detailed information is contained in our People and Transformation Plan and supporting documents.

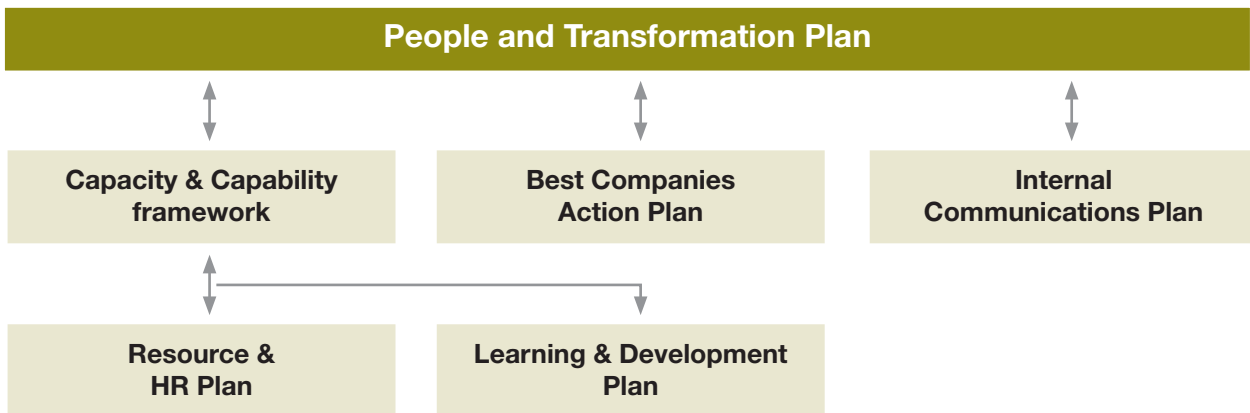


Figure 2. People and Transformation Planning

People and Transformation Plan

The overarching People and Transformation Plan contains three core supporting plans: the Capacity and Capability Framework, the Best Companies Action Plan and the Internal Communications Plan.

Capacity and Capability Framework

The Capacity and Capability Framework has two components.

With increased business volumes and a compressed cycle, accurate forward planning is essential. The Resource and HR Plans build on the positive experiences of last year's delivery cycle and contain details of the staffing resource and configuration required at different points in the service cycle, as well as incentives, supervisory needs and support for staff. Performing to the service standards and targets set requires a flexible approach. Contingency plans will be put in place to meet fluctuations in demand and potential risks within the service delivery cycle and the Resource and HR Plans will be kept under review as the cycle unfolds. Specific resourcing issues are discussed further in Objective 9 and Our People (page 37).

The Learning and Development Plan addresses the skills development needs of staff and managers to ensure successful service delivery.

Front-line training will focus on customers' needs at different points in the academic cycle and training delivery will be timed to the needs of the front-line staff serving them. This will reflect the different skill levels needed by different groups – for example, our outsource call handling providers will have less need for high levels of product knowledge as they will be dealing with the less complex calls routed to them through our agent desktop systems. More complex work will be distributed to our own internal staff, whose skill levels will need to be more advanced.

Front-line training will provide trainees with real-world scenarios that allow them to test their product knowledge and system skills against actual customer queries, derived from common call types and issues that typically arise in handling assessments. Training will be designed to enhance customer service standards by focusing on customers' needs, improving quality and increasing first contact resolution.

Training requirements will continue to be derived from our business priorities, with clear learning outcomes defined that support business objectives. Development plans will be established organisation-wide, with associated plans for each division that address succession planning and induction of new starts, as well as key personal and technical skills.

During FY 11-12, therefore, key initiatives include:

- putting clear workforce plans in place that allow us to manage cycles of customer demand well, including planned recruitment to ensure that employees are productive in advance of peak periods. Workflows will be assigned based on the appropriate skill sets and attendance management initiatives will be sharpened to improve efficiency;
- improving management capability through better definition of SLC managerial roles, and providing tailored management development solutions to ensure that managers are able to provide their employees with the right support;
- deploying internal resources flexibly to meet customer demand across application processing and customer contact peaks;
- improving training quality and productivity by establishing closer links with business areas to understand their development needs and refining assessment and evaluation to identify how well these are being met; and
- providing incentives, recognition and reward linked to service delivery priorities.

Best Companies Action Plan

The Best Companies Action Plan addresses in detail the business transformation agenda and plan, including staff engagement, development, organisational, leadership and management issues identified in the 2010 survey that are critical to staff motivation and contribution. The priority concerns in FY 11-12 are as follows:

Key Driver 1	An urgent need for leadership stability and clarification of what the future holds for SLC and to be told and understand our vision and strategy
Key Driver 2	A desire to see a real balance between quality and quantity – enabling SLC to focus on delivering good customer service, whilst achieving the necessary targets to be successful
Key Driver 3	Increased recognition of the progress and achievements made during AY 10/11 by everybody, not just for those who work within SFE
Key Driver 4	More consistency and improved levels of manager capability from Executive members through to Team Leaders
Key Driver 5	More regular and improved communications, delivered in an open and honest way, by everybody in the organisation
Key Driver 6	To be kept informed and know that all decisions taken (either locally or company wide) are the result of appropriate consultation with those best placed to contribute
Key Driver 7	Better understanding of differing roles and responsibilities across the entire organisation to drive greater unification and a sense of overall team spirit

This plan will be further developed, have a two-year horizon, with in-year milestones, and focus on achieving the transformation, culture, leadership and staff engagement for success.

Internal Communications Plan

The Internal Communications Plan contains information and communication flows, and staff engagement mechanisms. The plan will align with the Marketing and Communications strategy to ensure that communications to our own people are consistent with external messages and are released at the right time to inform and assist them.

HOW WE WILL MEASURE SUCCESS

Capacity, capability and culture

OBJECTIVE 8. IMPROVE SERVICE DELIVERY OUTCOMES BY ENHANCING QUALITY AND REDUCING RISK IN CONJUNCTION WITH DELIVERY PARTNERS

What we need to achieve

Although SLC's management of the application cycle for AY 10-11 overcame many of the shortfalls experienced in AY 09/10, it became clear that despite processing applications fast enough and answering the phones at a rate well ahead of target, customer satisfaction with the service remained low, the number of complaints had increased and the assessment error rate was too high. Specific quality issues were also identified.

We need to tackle these issues systematically, not only by developing the service through individual initiatives but also by developing the way we approach service enhancement itself, so that we build an enduring organisational capability that allows us to sustain service improvement consistently into the future.

In FY 11-12 **we will**:

- identify and address priority areas for service quality improvement and take steps to develop a formal quality management system;
- reduce the barriers to a more usable and fully on-line service, working with Directgov to improve the on-line proposition, and fulfil our commitments under the "digital by default" initiative;
- improve customer communications and remove stumbling blocks that cause customers to phone us;
- identify and implement further enhancements that will improve customer service, reduce delay and rework, improve accuracy and increase efficiency;
- exploit scope for automating manual / paper-based processes and reducing risk of loss via third-party data-sharing; and
- strengthen operational contingency and service continuity.

How we will do it

Quality management system

Work is already underway to improve the quality of the service we deliver to our customers. We have begun tactically, by articulating quality objectives for the SFE service and priority improvement themes. These are to improve: consistency of advice given over the telephone; first time accuracy of assessments; and escalation processes. Initiatives have been identified, together with success measures that will demonstrate that improvement has been made. These need now to be progressed within a formal quality model, based on the "Plan-Do-Check-Act" sequence, adopting ISO 9000 principles as a guide and using supporting tools appropriate to our organisation. The approach needs then to be consolidated into a service quality plan.

In the longer term, we intend to extend the approach established for SFE to other services, review programme and project quality management, consider how we establish formal quality management in support areas and consolidate the whole into a formal organisational quality management system.

A ten-point plan is being developed that addresses: quality policy and quality objectives; SFE quality plan; cultural / people aspects; communication; quality control systems; quality improvement mechanism; links between quality and training; quality measurement; quality assurance; and ongoing review of the approach.

On-line service

Although we are currently receiving 80% of our applications from students on-line, there is increasing recognition of the difficulties customers face in using the services we offer through this medium, not just as a result of policy complexity but also because of usability and accessibility issues in the design of the student finance web pages they need to access within the Directgov web site. Directgov reviewed these issues recently and made a series of recommendations, indicating the need for fundamental redesign from first principles.

We will, therefore, be considering how to proceed in the light of the Cabinet Office's "digital by default" initiative, which commits SLC to a 100% on-line service by 2014 for all customers, and proposed development of a single application portal for students that brings together application for a place in HE and funding, following the Browne Review of Higher Education funding in England. Any proposals will also need to take account of longer-term plans for the Directgov platform itself.

Directgov and SLC are committed to working together. Our initial steps will be to prepare the business case, identifying options and priorities, funding implications and degree of fit with Directgov's recommendations in the light of wider developments mentioned above. Timescales are being agreed and a multi-disciplinary team mobilised.

In the short-term, we will continue with planned tactical changes to AY 11/12 SFE on-line information, advice and guidance, including enhanced page layout and review of pages accessed by sponsors. We will improve navigation, making it easier to find the information needed, and look for further opportunities for quick wins.

Improvements introduced after service launch

Further improvements, which could not be implemented in time for launch of the AY 11/12 service for England, are being introduced during the cycle to streamline processing, minimise the risk of incorrect assessment or payment and reduce the need for customers to call us:

April 2011:

- removal of ineligible courses from the SFE part of the course database and pre-population of tuition fees amount during on-line application, based on course details entered, removing the potential for incorrect assessment and payment;
- additional controls to ensure that course approval is Administration-specific;
- removal of option for sponsors to use paper;
- dynamic control over timing of evidence chasers, allowing greater flexibility of intervention;
- (subject to resource availability) automatic navigation to evidence checklist summary screen after submitting application, and enhanced information, advice and guidance around means-tested support;

June 2011:

- improved handling of applications where customers change course before term starts;
- improved logon and password reset;
- improved national insurance number verification; and

July 2011

- improved process for capturing receipt of signatures on on-line declarations.

Extended data-sharing

We already make extensive use of data-sharing with other public sector organisations, to simplify the process for customers, reduce manual effort, exchange the data that each organisation needs for processing purposes, and reduce scope for error or fraud (see Financial Control, page 43).

This year we are going a step further by verifying household income for new means-tested applications automatically with HMRC. This means that sponsors will no longer have to supply original paper evidence of income, streamlining the assessment process and reducing the risk of under- or over-declaration, helping ensure that we award and pay customers their correct entitlement.

Service continuity

Service continuity will be strengthened by systematic review of existing arrangements, for example testing our disaster recovery sites at Hamilton and Gateshead. Business impact analyses, contingency planning, desktop scenario tests and disaster recovery for the SFE service will be used as the model to be applied to other non-SFE areas.

A further review will take place in advance of AY 12/13 launch to reflect the changes being introduced to the service.

We have also now split our requirement for outsourced call handling support between two suppliers, in different locations, increasing resilience and reducing recruitment challenges faced by a single supplier covering the full outsourced workload alone.

HOW WE WILL MEASURE SUCCESS 
Delivery partner performance
Avoidable contact
First contact resolution
Complaints analysis

OBJECTIVE 9. UPGRADE AND ENHANCE ICT CAPABILITY SO THAT IT REMAINS FIT FOR PURPOSE AND IS ABLE TO MEET FUTURE DEMAND

What we need to achieve

A robust and flexible student finance delivery capability depends heavily on its ICT to provide services that are reliable and easy to use for customers, provide front-line teams with the tools they need to do the job and operate effectively and efficiently. These services and tools must also be capable of accommodating change, anticipating and meeting business growth that has been rapid and will continue to expand as the customer base and product set grow, and being sufficiently flexible to allow Government Administrations to develop and implement new policy. The changes to student finance being introduced for AY 12/13 will increase both complexity and, over time, transaction volumes.

Processing demands may expand further still following introduction of fee loans for further education. Also, if a decision is taken to exploit the additional repayment information that will become available when HMRC's Real Time Information development goes live, SLC may be able to receive monthly (instead of annual) student loan repayment data from HMRC for PAYE customers.

SLC's data centres are approaching capacity. While our core customer ledger system (CLASS) is well-structured and can be developed further to meet future functional demands, some existing software and hardware components will become unsupported in the near future, increasing delivery risk. This risk will become increasingly acute with time, as the impact of growing business volumes and processing intensity make CLASS more susceptible to failure. As lead times for software redevelopment and acquisition / commissioning of additional infrastructure capacity on the scale required are extensive, we need to evaluate options and begin planning for migration immediately to ensure that the necessary system capacity and capability is secured in time, aligning our plans with the Government's broader direction on ICT.

Delivery is also coming to rely increasingly on secure data-sharing with other public and HE sector bodies, to provide a simpler and more joined-up service for customers in line with the Government's vision for digital public services; to contain operating costs; and to reduce financial risk. It is imperative, therefore, that we maintain appropriate fraud prevention and security arrangements. Simultaneously, our services must remain readily accessible and easy to use for all our customers.

In FY 11-12, **we will:**

- address existing data centre capacity constraints and comply with longer-term Government plans for shared data centres;
- subject to appropriate funding, devise, agree and commence implementation of an integrated plan that will ensure that SLC possesses a core customer ledger system and associated interfaces that is capable of meeting the Company's current and future requirements;
- ensure that Student Finance service offerings satisfy accepted access and usability compliance standards; and
- establish security compliance at appropriate levels and in line with available funding to satisfy legislative, HMG and industry requirements.

How we will do it

Following permanent appointment to Chairman and Chief Executive roles last year we have moved quickly to complete the Executive team and start FY 11-12 in a stronger position, with the new role of Chief Information Officer (CIO) filled. The CIO will lead on ICT capability and development of our ICT strategy.

Our approach to CLASS has three parts that need to be taken forward simultaneously:

- full-scale development of the systems needed to support the new Student Finance England funding arrangements will proceed on the existing CLASS platform to ensure that launch dates for AY 12-13 are not put at risk;

- we will commission an independent market scan to identify whether suitable alternative systems solutions already exist, either within Government or as commercial offerings, that could be adopted or adapted to meet our needs. We will then evaluate the relative merits and risks of each against redevelopment of our existing system and prepare a business case for the preferred option; and
- in parallel, we will initiate a proof of concept technical build of the new system environment. This will start immediately and be structured in such a way that it can support whichever solution is chosen. This will allow us to make headway in advance of system selection, in readiness to migrate those elements of the new functionality which pose greatest risk to peak AY 12-13 processing.

Timescales and prioritisation of the remaining work needed to complete full transition to the new (or redeveloped) platform, over and above what is needed to support mandatory HE reform changes, will also be considered as part of this work.

We have completed a preliminary assessment of planned and potential business changes over the next 3 years to establish their implications for our ICT infrastructure. Much depends on detailed design decisions around how each new application is written, however, which will not be known until well into the design process, and in a number of cases the business requirements are not yet known with certainty and may be subject to change.

This also applies to improvement of on-line service accessibility and usability, which is being progressed actively with Directgov.

Where existing infrastructure can be used, the challenge is assessed as containable. Where it cannot, for example where new or materially different functionality is required, where new products being introduced have transactional peaks that coincide with existing pressure points in the processing calendar, or where user populations need to become more self-contained, the challenge is greater.

There are a number of short-term measures we can take, such as reallocating existing resources and procuring additional capacity. Also, as hardware leases expire, we are able to source replacements with higher performance, reduced space requirement and lower carbon footprint. Investment is, however, subject to Government approval in the light of continuing spending restraint and the Government's own ICT strategy. A key issue for us is whether we need to act in advance of the Government Strategy implementation timetable to meet pressing capacity needs. The Strategy may also open up the possibility of hosted ICT services, centralised business applications and shared services and we will align our thinking as more detail becomes available.

In the interim we will continue to quantify anticipated demand with increasing precision, manage pressures tactically and evaluate possible longer-term solutions.

Potential security enhancements we wish to implement over the next 2-3 years have been evaluated and costed, and we will decide shortly which are to go forward during FY 11-12 as priority initiatives.

HOW WE WILL MEASURE SUCCESS

Systems availability and performance

RELATIONSHIPS AND RESOURCES

The trio of objectives (people, quality, and ICT) just discussed under Priority 3 Develop and improve our delivery capability concerned specific areas where we need to act urgently to bring about radical change in specific elements of our delivery capability. Alongside this, we shall continue developing all our enablers over the year ahead and the following section of the plan discusses the resources and relationships we will learn to deploy more effectively to enable our business objectives to be achieved.

Stakeholder relationships and reputation management

Stakeholders play a vital role in supporting effective delivery of student financial support by:

- providing communication channels direct to potential applicants and to applicants for student finance support;
- helping resolve student issues and reduce customer contact directed to SLC;
- providing feedback on service functionality on behalf of their own customers, or as customers in their own right;
- offering subject matter expert input to service design and delivery;
- conducting related activities of their own that support wider operation of the service; and
- acting as champions and advocates for SLC and expressing confidence publicly in the Company.

The range of stakeholders we engage with is broad and increasing, including: central delivery partners, such as Directgov, UCAS, IPS, DWP, SAAS, HMRC and Government Gateway (with closer links to HEFCE and HESA in future); HEIs, concerning approved course details, bursary administration, tuition fee payment and disability support; FE colleges and schools in Wales and Northern Ireland²; Welsh local authorities and Northern Ireland Library Boards; university and college representative bodies; information, advice and guidance delivery partners; disability stakeholders; wider HE sector organisations; and the press and media. We also have a number of longer-term or higher-spend supplier relationships that merit specific attention.

In order to provide sharper focus, we have now brought together several functions under a new role, Director of Marketing and Communications, who will be responsible for customer insight; customer information, advice and guidance; development of our on-line channel; stakeholder engagement and relationship management; relationships with Devolved Administrations; and press/media handling.

² We expect to extend our partner network in FY 11-12 to include English schools taking Welsh students

To support successful delivery of the AY 11/12 cycle and preparation for the changes being introduced in AY 12/13, activity in FY 11-12 will concentrate on the following areas:

- continuing to engage with, and develop strategic relationships through, the Stakeholder Forum and Stakeholder Working Groups;
- engaging with key influencers to build support and capture and act on real-time feedback;
- enhancing SLC customer communication delivered across the cycle via stakeholder channels;
- communicating effectively with stakeholders and partners, particularly around SLC's role and objectives, key features of our services, planned changes and updates, and transparent flow of statistical performance data; and
- developing the use of our stakeholder CRM system.

We will also act in each of the following areas:

- **UCAS.** We will develop joint initiatives with UCAS. On our behalf, UCAS will incorporate key student finance messages and action prompts into a wide range of customer mailings and other contacts. This will for the first time include students with disabilities. We will provide information stands at many UCAS convention events. We will also use UCAS application data to better forecast the volumes and timing of student finance application. Longer-term, we will work with UCAS towards the single student application portal enunciated in the Browne Review;

- **HEIs.** Our HEI services team works actively with HEIs to ensure that key enabling data for the student finance service, courses, attendances etc, is timely and complete, utilising the new portal-based services. We will complete the operational take-on of the Student Information Service, ensuring readiness for the changes being introduced for AY 12/13. Tuition Fees payments and management information will be developed into a more formal business service to HEIs;
- **DSA.** Whilst not introducing any major service changes to DSA this year, we will implement a range of continuous improvements, including needs assessments, sharing of customer contacts with delivery partners. We are also exploring how we can improve quality assurance and sustain this through peak periods. We will verify changes with our DSA stakeholder group. Having achieved new service completion times within SFE processing activities, we will now expand service monitoring to include the full end-to-end process cycle; and
- **Press and media.** We will be targeting communications to the media and key influencers, aligned to specific interests and addressing regional, educational, consumer and public sector audiences through the full range of channels. These will be designed to build the profile of SLC and its leaders, and may showcase individual students, universities and topical issues, such as phishing scams. We will continue to anticipate and pre-empt potential issues and respond to Freedom of Information requests and Parliamentary Questions in line with prescribed timescales.



Our People

In addition to the work underway to support a step change in our capability, capacity and organisational culture (Objective 7), we are maintaining a strong focus on day-to-day needs.

Ensuring that the SLC front-line has the right resources in place at all times to deliver its service commitments requires us to understand and manage the issues that can affect resource plans unpredictably. A priority here is to manage attrition in situations where no single factor is responsible, and our response has to be tailored carefully, balancing quality, risk and cost within local employment markets. Providing the right environment and support systems to maximise attendance, minimise turnover and keep our people engaged is essential.

A further challenge is to ensure that we have the necessary change and ICT development resources available to deliver an ambitious change programme over the next few years (see below).

We will review our approach to recognition and benefits early in FY 11-12 to help us attract and retain people with the skills and competencies we need during this demanding economic climate. Performance management and management capability will continue to be improved through our management and leadership development programme, to address concerns voiced in our Best Companies staff engagement survey.

Personal development will also remain vital. We will source, design and deliver a wide range of learning and development tools and interventions to meet departmental requirements and personal development plans, to ensure that our people feel confident and well-equipped to fulfil their roles. Training and development programmes for front-line teams will draw on quality data, customer insight, complaints and stakeholder feedback to improve customer service, but also address multi-skilling and knowledge management. Training will be tailored to support new business initiatives as required.

Throughout the year our people will be kept well-informed about SLC's direction and progress through our rolling internal communications programme. The key objectives of this are to provide clear direction, project confidence, generate stability, demonstrate leadership and engagement, communicate progress, and build reputation and pride. We will use a variety of media and styles, matched to the specific needs of the message, audience and occasion.

We will also continue to work closely and constructively with our recognised Trade Union, PCS, through the established meetings cycle and the Partnership Forum.

Change Management and Programme Delivery

Developing the strategic direction

Where invited, we will work with Government Administrations to contribute a delivery perspective to help define and evaluate alternative longer-term development paths and possible end-states for the higher education (and wider skills) landscape. We will lead, co-ordinate or support specific initiatives as required and provide carefully researched and well-reasoned arguments that may be used by policy experts to inform their advice to Ministers.

We will also volunteer delivery insight where we see opportunities for enhancing achievement of Government goals, but where action would require significant change to our delivery model or lies outside our own remit.

By building a shared understanding of Government Administrations' strategic directions, we will be better able to define and align our own strategic delivery plans to support them.

Understanding policy and delivery contexts

This shared understanding will also serve as a backdrop for implementing policy. It will allow us to engage with our sponsoring Administrations to understand the emerging policy agenda and to provide advice from a delivery perspective about opportunities and constraints that might have a bearing on policy implementation decisions.

The goal of this dialogue is to reach settled policy, supported by stable delivery models that all parties can be confident will achieve policy intent efficiently and effectively, with a minimum of unintended or unforeseen consequences.

Constructing the Change Agenda

Architecture will play an increasingly important role in the change analysis process in future, acting as the central repository of codified knowledge about our processes, channels, systems, resources and business transactions, against which future change can be measured. It will both contribute to, and feed from, policy definition.

This will help ensure that translation of change requirements into formal specifications via the business analysis process will be informed by a single, shared view of the end-to-end customer journey and supporting business/ICT model, allowing a clear understanding of which elements will need to be changed and the implications of doing so.

It will also allow change requirements to be considered alongside each other, and against an emerging future business/ICT model that reflects the totality of agreed or potential change, so that opportunities for synergy can be maximised and time, cost and risk minimised.

For this to work well, business and ICT architectures – and the roles supporting them – will need to be closely coupled. The two roles will act as joint drivers of the Design Authority, a central clearing house through which all change will pass, and all decisions and status advices will be communicated to parties involved, in a controlled, consistent way.

The principal output from the change definition process will be an agreed, costed and prioritised package of change requirements – our Change Agenda – that will go forward for delivery.

Delivering the Change Agenda

In FY 11-12 the change agenda will include not only new policy directives and initiatives but also the challenge of a significant programme of internal change, as the organisation develops its future operational capabilities for AY 12/13, AY 13/14 and beyond.

Implicit in the Change Agenda is the need for detailed service delivery planning for our part of the annual student finance cycle for each Administration. Starting from a stable set of policy requirements, we will adopt a customer-focused approach to defining business requirements, developing a clear service proposition for AY 12/13 cycle customers, underpinned by a detailed delivery plan. Potential enhancements to the service model will be reviewed against the business architecture and prioritised against a range of factors, including customer service improvement.

Delivery of change programmes across the Company will be the responsibility of a new role – Head of Programme Management. This management position will build on previous investments in programme and project management capability and practice, leveraging the additional programme management resource that was put in place last year to integrate discrete change elements, and ensuring delivery in a disciplined, sustainable way.

Change Governance

A key aim for FY 11-12 is to establish simple, effective governance of the end-to-end change process, from inception early on in the policy process through to change delivery management. This includes embedding coherent planning processes that integrate effort drawn from internal and external sources effectively, and establishing a sound challenge and assurance mechanism that reaches from delivery managers upwards, via project and programme, to Senior Responsible Officer and board.

Information and Communications Technology

Critical capability issues requiring action are covered in Objective 9. A further task for us is to quantify the impact of the forthcoming change programme on people capacity and capability in detail, particularly our ICT Development team. We are able to source a range of commodity technical skills on demand from the marketplace. Others, such as systems analysis and technical design, which require in-depth understanding of SLC business processes and systems, take time to develop and are essential to retain over the duration of the change programme. The change programme will also stretch our leadership – as well as technical – capability. Developing our people through succession planning, secondment, internal movement, personal development and exposure to new tasks will help ensure the right skills are available when required.

Our first step, therefore, will be to define accurately the skills we need over the period, and then to establish recruitment and development plans that provide the best mix of permanent and contract (or other configuration, such as partnerships) to deliver continuity of skills supply, value for money and acceptable risk within a strong leadership framework.

We also need to develop greater ability within the organisation to understand specific business processes end-to-end, the ICT that supports them and the interdependencies. Although this is not a commitment to enterprise architecture at this point, focusing on individual components in isolation increases the risk of issues not surfacing until late in the development cycle. In FY 11-12, as part of our review of how change is commissioned and delivered, we will consider how best to develop and embed and exploit end-to-end knowledge of business processes more effectively.

Financial Resources

Financial settlements have been agreed with each Administration, based on close analysis of their service delivery goals, change programme requirements and efficiencies sought.

These are set out below in summary form in Table 1.

£000s	UK TOTAL	BIS (England)	Scottish Government	DEL (NI)	DEL EMA	DCELLS (Wales)	DCELLS EMA	HEIs
Non Ringfenced Resource								
Pay	56,690	48,132	1,929	1,699	676	2,372	1,355	527
Non-pay	47,520	42,920	1,318	878	241	1,286	468	409
Receipts	(1,346)	(309)	(53)	(15)	0	(2)	0	(967)
	102,864	90,743	3,194	2,562	917	3,656	1,823	(31)
Capital Resource								
Capital Resource	5,557	5,208	102	87	0	160	0	0
Ringfenced Resource								
Depreciation	5,089	4,585	133	79	37	149	63	43
Disposal of Assets	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	5,089	4,585	133	79	37	149	63	43
AME	(194)	(194)	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL RESOURCE	113,316	100,342	3,429	2,728	954	3,965	1,886	12

Table 1. FY 11-12 financial settlements for each Administration

Note: The amounts above exclude funding for the following initiatives: work on Further Education funding (BIS); the Department of Health NHS Package (DOH via BIS); feasibility work on the monetisation of the student loan book (BIS); DCELLS HE Reforms; Traineeship Allowances (DCELLS) and Pathways to Apprenticeships (DCELLS). Funding for these initiatives will be confirmed separately following agreement on delivery priorities and capacity for FY 11-12.



Physical Assets

In line with the Government's approach to organisational strategy, we will look at which of our facilities, processes and equipment can bring about greater efficiency through sharing these with other public bodies where it makes sense to do so.

Throughout the year we will continue to manage our physical assets to maximise value, provide continuity of service and recognise our wider environmental responsibilities in line with our Corporate Social Responsibility agenda.

We also need to plan carefully for the future. The lease of our central Glasgow office expires in December 2013 and agreement will be needed on how we meet our accommodation needs before the end of the FY 11-12 plan period. During the year we will continue to explore and evaluate options against need, cost and risk (particularly service continuity and key skills retention). This will also take into account any opportunities arising from wider Government estate management initiatives.

The lease of our Hillington site expires in August 2014 and we will be considering our future accommodation needs during the FY 11-12 plan period.

We are now in our third year of a 15-year lease at our award-winning Darlington site, and this remains the operational hub of the Student Finance England service.

We also have a small office in Colwyn Bay, North Wales, where the lease expires in October 2015, to support the Student Finance Wales service. We will respond to future needs of the Welsh Assembly Government following elections in May 2011.

Corporate Social Responsibility

Our Corporate Social Responsibility strategy was revisited shortly before the start of the Financial Year. The new strategy is simpler, more straightforward and measurable, and aligns more closely with the demands of the business cycle. It has three components:

- **Making a difference to Others:** initiatives brought together within this grouping include employee giving, employee volunteering, Pilotlight support (sharing experience and knowledge with voluntary organisations), Education Support Programme and fundraising;
- **Making a difference to Our World:** initiatives brought together within this grouping include recycling, "think before you print", green week and carbon monitoring; and
- **Making a difference to Ourselves:** initiatives brought together within this grouping include employee well-being, healthy working lives (employee assistance and Axa campaigns), work-life balance and flexible working practices, and green policies.

PLAN DELIVERY

Up to this point, the Business Plan has discussed our objectives, and how we will achieve them by developing and deploying our resources and relationships in the most effective ways. This section of the Plan sets out how we will stay on track, describing the controls we have put in place and how they will be strengthened during the year to become more effective still.

Corporate governance

Ministers are accountable to Parliament for SLC's business and SLC is required to conduct its affairs to the highest standards, using the funds entrusted to it to achieve the objectives set out by Ministers³ in accordance with stringent governance arrangements. These arrangements are set out in our Framework document, which establishes the boundaries within which the SLC must operate and how it interacts with BIS, the Devolved Administrations and other bodies. It is based on the HM Treasury corporate governance model, and draws in a wide range of central Government guidance on governance and accountability, management and financial arrangement (in particular Managing Public Money, which sets out the main principles for dealing with resources used by public sector organisations in the UK), and information handling. This also includes recommendations made by the Public Accounts Committee, or by other Parliamentary authority that have been accepted by the Government and are relevant to the SLC.

As Accounting Officer, SLC's Chief Executive is charged with maintaining a sound system of internal control that supports the achievement of the Company's policies, aims and objectives, and regularly reviewing the effectiveness of that system. He is required to summarise the arrangements and highlight any significant control issues in the annual Statement on Internal Control as part of the Company's Annual Report and Accounts.

As a Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB), it is essential that all employees maintain the highest ethical standards in conducting our business. The SLC Code of Conduct which forms part of the terms and conditions of employment for all employees, reflects the "Seven Principles of Public Life" (Nolan principles).

The SLC Board ensures that effective corporate governance arrangements are in place concerning how SLC is directed and controlled and provides assurance on risk management and internal control. Governance risks and issues are formally reviewed quarterly by the SLC Audit Committee.

In FY 11-12 we anticipate that the SLC Framework Document will be re-issued, as part of a BIS-wide review, following which the internal SLC governance and assurance arrangements will be reviewed and updated as appropriate.

Corporate planning

The governance requirements around corporate planning are designed to ensure that we deliver what stakeholders commission. The current SLC Framework Document cites three documents:

- **SLC Delivery Strategy:** this is written by the Company in response to the Strategic Commission, which is issued by BIS on behalf of all Government Administrations and covering three financial years. Our current Delivery Strategy will be revisited in the light of the proposed new Strategic Commission;
- **Annual Performance and Resource Agreement Letter (APRA):** this confirms, on behalf of all the Administrations, the priorities for the year ahead; performance targets, annual budgetary provision and indicative funding for the remaining years of the Spending Review allocation; and
- **Annual Business Plan (this document):** this focuses on the implementation of the Delivery Strategy for the year immediately ahead.

³ Performance and resource requirements for FY 11-12 are set out in our Annual Performance and Resource Agreement letter issued by Ministers.

The corporate planning process contains a number of interlinked activities: strategy, business planning and objective-setting, performance measurement and targeting, service and resource planning, project planning, financial planning and budgeting, risk management and ensuring organisational alignment through effective communication and cascading to personal objectives.

Performance measurement and management

Progress against the Business Plan is assessed through three monthly performance measurement reporting tools, allowing early remedial intervention where necessary:

- The **SLC Balanced Scorecard** is the prime means by which the SLC monitors its overall business performance and reports to the Board and Government Administrations. The Balanced Scorecard reports against the performance targets included in the APRA and is tightly coupled to the Business Plan's objectives;
- The **SFE Management Information Pack** provides detailed information on performance of the SFE service in the areas of Processing, Contact and Customer Communications, as described in the SFE Service Proposition and associated service level agreements; and
- The **SLC Programme Report** provides detailed information on performance of all projects within the SLC Programme portfolio.

Additional reports are produced as required to demonstrate performance in other areas or to provide greater depth of analysis.

Financial control

SLC is responsible for managing significant volumes of public funds, distributing in excess of £7 billion each year by way of student financial support grants and loans, and administering a total loan book which stood at around £36 billion at the end of FY 09-10.

The Company takes this responsibility extremely seriously, and our priorities in managing public money (Objective 4) set out how we intend to discharge this. Accurate assessment and payment is one of our formal targets, set by our sponsors, and success is measured and reported to our Main Board monthly via our Balanced Scorecard. Repayment collection effectiveness – for ICR loans, MSL-scheme loans and grant overpayments – is another, again reported to Main Board via the Scorecard, and the steps we are taking to improve performance here are set out in Objective 3.

We maintain tight control over the funds we disburse:⁴

- **Payments to HE students and HEIs:** in addition to automated identity, NINO and income confirmation via IPS, DWP and HMRC we undertake checks to ensure that we capture valid bank account details and that any subsequent changes are legitimate. We maintain segregation of duties to ensure that award and payment cannot be authorised by the same person. Initial payment is made via the secure medium of BACS and is not initiated until we have confirmation from an HEI that the student has registered for his or her designated course at the start of term. Payment of tuition fees is subject to a further confirmation by the HEI later in the year that the student is still in attendance and any subsequent withdrawal, course change or transfer notified to us by the HEI results in immediate award reassessment. Where relevant, any overpayment is deducted from subsequent instalments or reclaimed direct from the customer. Payment of bursaries under HEBSS falls within the same controls;

⁴ Loan repayment collection is discussed under Objective 3.

- **Payments to FE students:** for new customers we require sight of original hard copies of identity and income evidence before an application can be approved. Assessment is fully automated. As for HE awards, bank account details are checked and duties segregated before payment can be made. Payment is triggered electronically by confirmation of attendance from the Learning Centre for both new and returning students. Returning student details are rolled forward automatically and any changes of circumstances captured when the award letter is issued. Where changes are advised by the customer subsequently, their award is reassessed. Original financial evidence is sought from returning applicants after payment on a sample basis. If not supplied, payment is stopped;
- **Programme budget forecasting:** we report the amount paid out in loans and grants monthly to Government Administrations and any variance from forecast is investigated. Where necessary we carry out detailed research into take-up patterns for individual products. The importance of this information to Government Administrations is reflected in the stringent targets imposed on SLC regarding the accuracy of our forecasts;
- **Administration budget control:** financial resources allocated to SLC are confirmed by Ministers in their Annual Performance and Resources Agreement letter to the Company. Divisional and departmental budgets negotiated through the financial planning process are formalised with budget-holders, and further delegated spending powers signed-off by them. Monthly expenditure against forecast is reported to the Executive, Board and Government Administrations and variances challenged vigorously. Where agreed, reforecasts are provided from Quarter 2 onwards; and

- **Procurement:** in addition to the stringent controls we have in place already around procurement, certain categories of expenditure are now subject to Departmental or Cabinet Office approval, introducing a further exacting value for money challenge. In some cases a blanket spending freeze is in place. During FY 11-12 we will continue to work closely with colleagues in BIS to support their commercial strategy and we anticipate further changes to the way we procure goods and services.

During FY11-12 we also intend to pursue a programme of internal initiatives to further strengthen our financial controls, including enhanced validation of bank account details.

Risk management

During 2010-11, following recommendations made in the Hopkin Review and the NAO Report, we established an improved risk management framework for the Student Finance England service. We are now focusing on expanding this incrementally into the wider organisation, for other services and support areas, and development of corporate business continuity arrangements.

We will continue to identify and manage risks both “top-down”, involving stakeholders, the Board and the Executive Team, and “bottom-up”, involving all SLC managers in the process.

Risk reports that describe the high level corporate risks and issues, and how we are managing them, are reviewed weekly by the Executive Team, monthly by the Main Board (via the Balanced Scorecard), and quarterly by the Risk Sub-Committee of the Board. In addition, tailored reports are produced for review by other forums as appropriate, covering, for example programme and operational areas.

We have also reviewed the Business Plan objectives from a risk perspective, updating risks and treatments and realigning presentation accordingly. A summary of key risk themes is included in the Appendices (page 56).

Security

As a manager of public funds SLC must ensure it has appropriate security in operation at all times and keep ahead of changes to its business model arising from increased use of on-line channels and greater reliance on data-sharing across existing and new partners. To sustain the confidence of Government Administrations, stakeholders, delivery partners, customers, parliament and taxpayers we have to be able to demonstrate effective protection against intrusion, business interruption, fraud and loss, and comply with relevant legislation and security standards.

For example, as a BIS "Tier 1" NDPB we must adopt relevant requirements of the Government's Security Policy Framework and associated Communications-Electronics Security Group (CESG – the Information Assurance arm of GCHQ) Information Assurance guidance; as an organisation accepting loan repayments made via credit and debit cards we must comply with the Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard; and as a processor of large volumes of personally identifiable information we are required to apply the Information Commissioner's Privacy Impact Assessment to new processes or data uses.

We are active, therefore, on numerous fronts within a broad Information Security Management System, which has been developed on the requirements of ISO 27001. For example, we maintain close involvement at the outset of change initiatives, provide advice on security aspects, arrange security testing at the end of projects and assist with any remedial work required. We also provide advice to customers to help them protect themselves. Behind the scenes, we operate a wide range of security tools, which we monitor constantly, and investigate any potential breaches. We maintain effective reporting and escalation procedures and liaise closely with colleagues and relevant authorities outside SLC.

Internal assessment of ongoing fitness for Government Secure Intranet (GSI) access is validated externally. We also pursue continuous improvement and undertake an annual Information Assurance Maturity Model assessment to establish progress towards meeting the Security Policy Framework and Privacy Impact Assessment requirements. The most recent review, coupled with Payment Card Industry compliance requirements, points to a number of areas where action is now required and we are proposing initiatives to address these in the SLC Security Service Plan during FY 11-12.

Fraud

Provisional figures for England and Wales show that, two months into AY 10/11, approaching £4.5bn had been awarded in student maintenance and targeted support. Against payments of this magnitude, and the increasingly sophisticated nature of fraud, effective prevention is critical.

SLC is committed to managing the risk of application fraud whilst improving the customer journey. By integrating fraud prevention activity to the application process, we have demonstrated that fraud prevention activity can, and should, coexist with an improved, cost efficient customer journey. We aim to reduce fraud by investing our resources in deterrence and prevention, whilst using measurement to assess the effectiveness of current counter fraud arrangements and identify emerging trends.

The ongoing fraud measurement programme is instrumental in identifying high risk application types and has already led to enhanced identity and income checking processes. In FY 11-12 SLC will build on existing counter fraud arrangements through the introduction of a new third-party product. We anticipate that this will further strengthen prevention of fraudulent applications from entering the student finance system and have committed to a one year trial period.

Legal

Our internal legal and compliance team provides advice to the Board, Executive Directors and operational areas on a diverse range of legal and compliance issues, including the following:

- student support regulations;
- company law;
- procurement rules and public contracts regulations;
- money laundering and the 2010 Bribery Act;
- consumer credit;
- data protection and Freedom of Information (FOI); and
- employment, equality and pensions.

The Legal and Compliance team will continue to fulfil a dual role during FY 11-12, in an advisory capacity on planned changes for forthcoming academic cycles, and in an operational capacity providing legal counsel and day to day handling of any Freedom of Information (FOI) requests, debt recovery actions, county court claims and personal injury cases.

As Government drives the on-line service agenda, the legal team is likely to become involved in assessing the legal risks and impact of new initiatives. Data protection queries arising from the establishment and extension of data sharing agreements, ensuring legal admissibility of scanned documentation and maintaining the integrity of loan contracts are likely to be high on the agenda as we move to more streamlined, cost-effective and less cumbersome services.

Introduction of the Bribery Act and the Equality Act are likely to have compliance implications for us. FY 11-12 will also be the first year we have had to comply with the Money Laundering requirements, which will mean rolling out training across the Company. Advice to HR teams on employment and pensions matters will also present a major part of the day to day practical advice provided by the team.

Data protection advice will continue to be relevant, particularly as the remaining student finance functions previously carried out by Local Authorities in England are transferred to SLC, increasing the number of customers applying to us for support in AY 11/12 significantly.

Internal Audit

Internal auditing is an independent, objective assurance and consulting activity designed to add value and improve an organisation's operations. It helps an organisation accomplish its objectives by bringing a systematic, disciplined approach to evaluate and improve the effectiveness of risk management, control and governance processes.

The main purpose of internal audit activity within Central Government is to provide the Accounting Officer with an objective evaluation of, and opinion on, the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the organisation's framework of governance, risk management and control. The Head of Internal Audit's opinions are a key element of the framework of assurance that the Accounting Officer needs to inform the completion of the annual Statement on Internal Control.

SLC's Internal Audit Plan is produced in line with best practice as set out in the Government Internal Audit Standards and aims to reflect the needs of SLC and its stakeholders, based on a review of the current strategic and business risks and issues facing the company. Our Audit Plan for FY 11-12 has been aligned closely to the Business Plan's objectives. Key areas of audit focus this year will be: the quality and accuracy of payments, effectiveness of collections, review of ICT business support and financial systems, and appraisal of benefits realisation for key projects. This will help secure delivery of a safe service to our customers. Internal Audit will also be closely involved with SLC's change programme from the outset.

Lastly, we will be introducing software to streamline management of electronic working papers and recommendation tracking.

APPENDICES - GLOSSARY

Name	Description
APRA	Annual Performance and Resource Agreement. Ministerial statement of the resources to be provided by each funding authority in the UK (England, Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Wales) for delivery of the student finance system by the Student Loan Company (SLC), and the Objectives and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to be achieved by the SLC for the financial year in question
AY	Academic Year
BACS	Bankers Automated Clearance Payment System. Used by SLC for making secure payments to customers electronically
Balanced Scorecard	A business performance measurement and management system that combines a number of perspectives to achieve a balanced view of organisational success, and is used to align individual and department goals with overall corporate strategic objectives
Best Companies	An independent workplace engagement benchmarking, accreditation and improvement device
BIS	Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (England)
Browne Review	Review of Higher Education funding in England (report published October 2010)
CCT	Contact Centre Technologies
CLASS	SLC's customer ledger system that maintains loan account, repayment and interest accrual information for each customer
CRM	Customer Relationship Management. System for managing and recording contacts with customers or stakeholders
Customer First	Transformation programme initiated by BIS to re-engineer student finance delivery for English-domiciled students
DCELLS	Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (Wales)
DEL	Department for Employment and Learning (Northern Ireland)
Directgov	Government portal providing one-stop shop for information, advice and guidance on public services and other information of interest to citizens and businesses
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
DSA	Disabled Students Allowance. Grant to help meet the extra course costs students can face as a direct result of a disability, ongoing health condition, mental health condition or specific learning difficulty. They help disabled people to study in higher education on an equal basis with other students
EMA	Education Maintenance Allowance
FE	Further Education
FY	Financial Year

Government Administration	One of the four Devolved Government Administrations, England, Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland, exercising a range of powers transferred to national parliaments or assemblies. The term is often used interchangeably with “Devolved Administration”
Government Gateway	The centralised registration service for e-Government services in the UK
HE	Higher Education
HEBSS	Higher Education Bursary and Scholarship Scheme. Scheme administered by SLC on behalf of HEIs that assesses and pays financial awards funded by HEIs to eligible students using information shared by the applicant with SLC for this purpose.
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
HMRC	HM Revenue and Customs
IAG	Information, advice and guidance. Abbreviation used to denote both the SF(E) function responsible for student finance IAG and the material itself, whether produced and/or delivered by SF(E) or another body.
ICR	Income Contingent Repayment. Used as shorthand to denote the new type of student loan introduced in 1997, where repayment varied in line with graduates’ earnings, as opposed the original fixed repayment “mortgage style” student loan
ICT	Information and Communications Technology. Used in the paper to denote both the technology itself and the SLC function with responsibility for it.
IPS	Identity and Passport Service
IVR	Interactive Voice Response
MSL	Mortgage-Style Loan (see ICR above)
NAO	National Audit Office
NINO	National insurance number
Pilotlight	Knowledge sharing initiative between senior SLC staff and voluntary organisations
SAAS	Student Awards Agency for Scotland
SFE	Student Finance England. The student financial support service provided for HE applicants domiciled in England (or in the EU outside the UK but applying to an English HEI)
SFW	Student Finance Wales. The student financial support service provided for HE applicants domiciled in Wales (or in the EU outside the UK but applying to a Welsh HEI)
SFNI	The student financial support service provided for HE applicants domiciled in Northern Ireland (or in the EU outside the UK but applying to an HEI in Northern Ireland)
SMS	Short Message Service – text messaging
UCAS	Central organisation through which applications are processed for entry to higher education

CHANGE PORTFOLIO (SUBJECT TO ONGOING REVIEW)

England

Inflight Programme	Project Ref
Contact Centre Technologies	60190
LA Transition	60164
My Payment	60189
AY Rollover 11/12	60323
Policy Simplification – AY 11/12	60324
AY 11/12 SFIP England – Online Enhancements	60357
AY 11/12 SFIP England – Enhanced Tactical Processing	60358
AY 11/12 SFIP England – Eng Correspondence Review	60360
AY 11/12 SFIP England – Business Improvements	60361
AY 11/12 VHI	60362
ICT Infrastructure Stability and Effectiveness	60366
Scanning – Phase2	60005
HMRC Datasharing	60171

Business Sustaining	Project Ref
GSI Disaster Recovery	H61
Security Initiatives	H54-H60

HE Reforms	Project Ref
AY 12/13 Rollover and Policy Changes Thresholds and Tapers	H16 & H17
AY 13/14 Rollover and White Paper Feasibility	H79 & H80
Multiple ACRs and Staged Payments to HEIs	H22
AY 12/13 Part Time	H23
Repayment - Variable Interest Rates, Increased Repayment Threshold, Loan Write Off Change	H24, H25, H26
National Scholarship Scheme	H27

HE Reform Enablers	Project Ref
CLASS Transition Phase 1	H30
Data Centre Capacity	H62
Service improvements	Project Ref
Tactical Processing Enhancements	H45
DSA Invoicing	H46
EU & Migrant Workers Online	H47
LA Portal Special Support Grant	H48
Application Tracker	H49
Tactical Review of Correspondence	H50
LA Portal – Pend Reasons	H51
Other initiatives	Project Ref
FE Tuition Fee Loans	F4
Department of Health NHS Package	H40
Debt Sale (Feasibility only)	n/a

Wales

Inflight Programme	Project Ref
AY Rollover 11/12 – Wales	60343
AY 11/12 SFIP National Bursary for Wales	60356
FE to HE Transition	60290
Partial Cancellation	60300
ALG 11/12 – Rollover	60347
ALG 11/12 – Enhancements	60352
EMA Wales 11/12 – Rollover	60346
EMA Wales 11/12 – Enhancements	60351
PTA 11/12	60369

Mandatory/Policy - HE	Project Ref
AY 12/13 Rollover and Policy Changes	H16, H19
AY 13/14 Feasibility	H79
HE Reforms – DCELLS	H28
Bilingual Repayment Customer Services	H38
Wales – Centralisation	-

Mandatory/Policy - FE	Project Ref
AY 12/13 EMA Rollover	F2
Traineeship Allowances	F5, F6
Pathways to Apprenticeships	F7-F9

Other -Technical Improvements	Project Ref
CLASS Transition Phase 1	H30
Automation CLASS / ICR Processes	H34
GSI Disaster Recovery	H61
Security Initiatives	H54-H60
Data Centre Capacity	H62

Scotland

Mandatory / Policy	Project Ref
SAAS Loan Payments – analysis and design	H36
SAAS Loan Payments – initial development (subject to available resource)	

Technical Improvements	Project Ref
CLASS Transition Phase 1	H30
Automation CLASS / ICR Processes	H34
GSI Disaster Recovery	H61
Security Initiatives	H54-H60
Data Centre Capacity	H62

Northern Ireland

Inflight Programme	Project Ref
AY 11/12 Rollover 11/12	60342
FE to HE Transition	60290
Shared ELB Access	60291
EMA NI 11/12 – Rollover	60345
EMA NI 11/12 – Enhancements	60350

Mandatory/Policy - HE	Project Ref
AY 12/13 Rollover and Policy Changes	H16, H18
AY 13/14 Feasibility	H79
HE Reforms - DELNI	H29

Mandatory/Policy - FE	Project Ref
AY 12/13 EMA Rollover	F3

Technical Improvements	Project Ref
CLASS Transition Phase 1	H30
Automation CLASS / ICR Processes	H34
GSI Disaster Recovery	H61
Security Initiatives	H54-H60
Data Centre Capacity	H62

ANNUAL TARGETS

“APRA” Balanced Scorecard targets for FY 11-12

No	Title	Weighting	Target
0.1 Customer Satisfaction (UK-WIDE)			
0.1a	Overall Satisfaction	100%	FY 2010-11 outturn + 1.6%
		0	≥ 75.1%
0.2 Complaints (UK-WIDE)			
a	Substantive responses within 15 working days of receipt	75%	≥ 85%
b	Substantive responses within 20 working days of receipt	25%	≥ 95%
1.1 Applications Processing Timeliness – Core (ENGLAND ONLY)			
a	% of core applications, new and continuing, received before the deadline processed before the start of term	25%	≥ 99.0%
b	% of applications, [new and continuing,] received before and after the deadline, processed within x working days	50%	≥ 70.0% within 20 days ≥ 95% within 30 days
c	% of financial evidence assessed to confirm full entitlement within 20 days of evidence being received where it is not provided with the application	25%	≥ 95.0%
1.2. Applications Processing Timeliness – Targeted Support (ENGLAND ONLY)			
a	DSA applications processed within 10 working days of receipt	35%	≥ 95.0%
b	DSA needs assessment reports processed within 10 working days of receipt	35%	≥ 95.0%
c	CCG applications with estimated costs processed within 20 working days of receipt	15%	≥ 95.0%
d	CCG applications with actual costs processed within 20 working days of receipt	15%	≥ 95.0%
1.3 Customer Contact (ENGLAND ONLY)			
a	% Calls Answered	70%	≥ 90% (average)
			≥ 70% (floor)
b	Customer Experience – advisor	10%	≥ 80%
c	Customer Experience – outcome	10%	≥ 74%
d	Customer Experience – consistency	10%	≥ 80%

1.4. Effective Communication with Customers (ENGLAND ONLY)			
a	Customer Satisfaction with, and effectiveness of, Information, Advice & Guidance	100%	≥ 73%
1.5 On-line Take-up (ENGLAND ONLY)			
a	On-line Take-up - Students	67%	≥ 90%
b	On-line Take-up - Sponsors	33%	≥ 60%
2. Services for Devolved Administrations and Other Stakeholders			
a	Performance v SLA – Northern Ireland	25%	Only minor elements of the service agreement not met
b	Performance v SLA – Scotland	25%	Only minor elements of the service agreement not met
c	Performance v SLA – Wales	25%	Only minor elements of the service agreement not met
d	Performance v SLA – HEIs	25%	Only minor elements of the service agreement not met
3.1 Repayment (ICR) (UK-WIDE + EU)			
a	% borrowers in repayment channel (UK & EU incoming cohort)	40%	≥ 96.3%
b	% UK resident borrowers in repayment channel (past cohorts)	40%	≥ 98 %
c	% Overseas resident borrowers in repayment (past cohorts)	20%	≥ 70 %
3.2. Repayment (Mortgage Style) (ENGLAND/WALES, NI, SCOTLAND)			
a	% MS loan accounts not in arrears	100%	≥ 91.7%
3.3. Repayment of Grant Overpayments (ENGLAND, NI, WALES)			
a	% Grant overpayments making a payment	100%	≥ 21.7%
4.1 Assessment / Payment Accuracy (ENGLAND ONLY)			
a	Predicted Payment Accuracy	100%	≤ ±0.5%
4.2 Fraud & Error (UK-WIDE)			
a	Fraud & Error	100%	≥ 5%
4.3 Delivery within agreed budget (UK-WIDE)			
a	Delivery within agreed budget	100%	Year end outturn between a -5% underspend and zero overspend against the agreed budget

4.4 Loans & Grants Expenditure forecasting (UK-WIDE)			
a	In year forecasting accuracy (mid year)	50%	$\leq \pm 2.25\%$
b	In year forecasting accuracy (9 month)	50%	$\leq \pm 1\%$
5.1 Support development of HE and FE funding policy objectives (UK-WIDE)			
a	Stakeholder satisfaction	100%	Conduct survey by 1 September 2011
6.1 Change Programme Delivery (UK-WIDE)			
a	Change Programme Delivery	100%	GREEN against evaluation criteria

Non-“APRA” Balanced Scorecard targets for FY 11-12

No	Title	Weighting	Target
7.1 Capacity, Capability & Culture)			
a	Capacity – sickness absence	17.5%	$\leq 4.0\%$
b	Capacity – turnover / post occupancy	17.5%	$\leq 10.5\%$
c	Capability – training plans & evaluation	35%	GREEN
d	Culture – annual Best Companies survey results	30%	> 2008 score
8.1 Delivery partner performance			
a	Delivery Partner Performance	100%	Only minor elements of the service agreement not met
8.2 Avoidable Contact			
a	Reduce Avoidable Contact	100%	Reduction over 2010-11 outturn by $\geq 10\%$
8.3 First Contact Resolution			
a	First Contact Resolution	100%	$\geq 55\%$
8.4 Customer Complaints			
a	Reduction in SLC service-related complaints volumes	100%	Baseline to be established in FY 2011-12
9.1 System Availability & Performance			
a	Availability Index	80%	≥ 3.5
b	Future capability	20%	GREEN

KEY RISK THEMES

Executive risk themes		
Priority	Description	Objective
PRIORITY 1 Deliver cost-effective services that meet the needs of our customers	We are set up with sufficient resources to deliver a safe, successful 11/12 processing cycle , but there is little room for manoeuvre and unforeseen (and foreseen) events may have a critical impact on our ability to deliver, e.g.	1
	...Successful implementation and operation of the technical and business solution for Verification of Household Income (VHI) is critical to the sustainability of the business model.	1
	...Inaccuracy in the predicted profile of applications and / or inability to manage and influence	1
PRIORITY 2 Support Govt Administrations' wider objectives in developing sustainable student finance delivery arrangements for the future	Lack of appropriate engagement with the Devolved Administrations results in SLC's inability to gain a sufficient strategic understanding of the expectations and requirements of the Administrations	5
	Late decision-making and policy changes impact SLC's ability to deliver solutions cost-effectively and to the expected level of quality (E)	6
	Our ability to deliver the overall change portfolio , and reap the associated benefits, to the satisfaction of all funding bodies, depends on (a) accurate sizing of the projects / initiatives and matching capability to funding; (b) transparent and fair prioritisation across all funding bodies' initiatives; (c) understanding and management of the complexities of project interrelationships	6
PRIORITY 3 Develop and improve our delivery capability	Lack of a sufficiently engaged workforce will jeopardise the achievement of the required level of customer service and quality delivery	7
	Insufficient management emphasis on quality objectives, alongside quantitative targets, may result in an unacceptable level of customer service and assessment errors, with resultant cost to the public purse	8
	The current ICT infrastructure is capable of delivering the service that we require today, but may not be fit-for-purpose to enable us to deliver against future demands (this includes the infrastructure itself and the computer room environments (e.g.space and air conditioning))	9
GOVERNANCE Other Governance and support framework	The current situation with regard to business continuity / ICT disaster recovery leaves us with a lack of sufficient assurance over the effectiveness of contingency / continuity / recovery plans	other business plan section
	The Company needs to ensure that it can meet the required external information security standards. Failure to do so could jeopardise our credibility and cause reputational damage.	other business plan section
GOVERNMENT-RELATED PRESSURES	Emerging government policies may require fundamental structural changes to the student finance system and SLC. (E)	n/a
	The lack of a current corporate / business strategy (in response to a strategic commission) means that we do not have a context within which to develop longer term (>1 year) functional strategies and plans (e.g. for ICT) (E)	n/a
	As a result of centralised decision-making within Government, the Board / Executive may lack the necessary decision making authority to carry out the obligations placed upon SLC. (E)	n/a



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Loans Company

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