

Office for
Students



OfS and implications for student finance

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SLC conference 20 and 21 April 2023

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Session outline:

- Introduction to the OfS
- What does everyone in the audience have in common?
- What notifications do we receive that relate to SLC funding
- How do these relate to the OfS conditions of registration
- Potential risks
- OfS monitoring and intervention

Introduction to the Office for Students

- Independent regulator for English higher education providers, established in 2017
- Registration with the OfS allows access to a range of benefits including:
 - Access to student loan system
 - Access to public funding
 - Ability to apply for degree awarding powers and university title
 - Ability to apply for a licence to recruit international students
- There are currently around 415 higher education providers listed on the OfS register including large multi-faculty universities, small specialists, private providers and charities

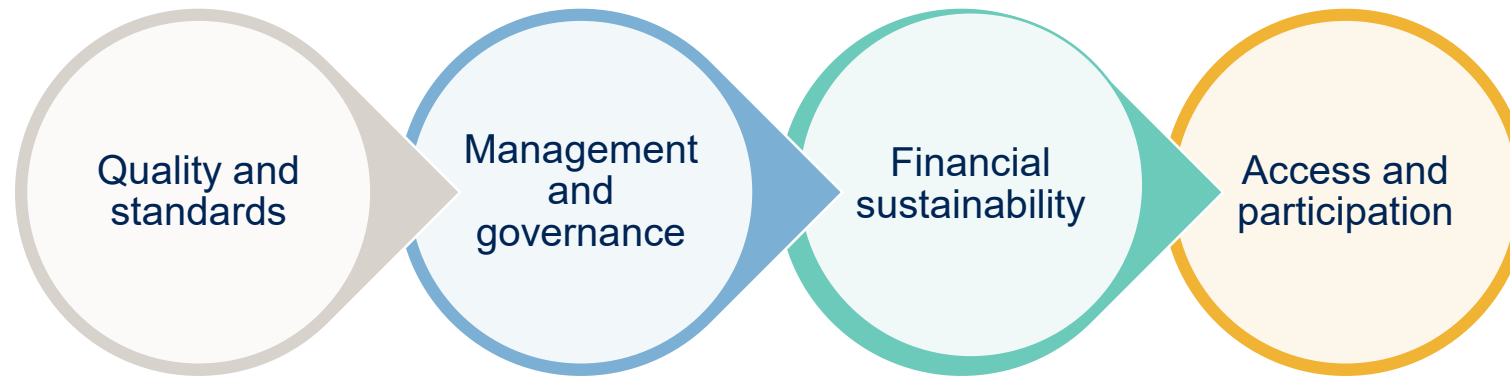
Who we are and what we do

- The independent regulator for higher education in England
- We aim to ensure that every student, whatever their background, has a fulfilling experience of higher education that enriches their lives and careers
- Our work covers all students:
 - undergraduate or postgraduate
 - young or mature
 - full-time or part-time
 - partnership provision
 - transnational education



How we regulate

- Conditions of registration set out in our Regulatory Framework cover:



- OfS regulates activity on basis that the obligations of the registered provider extend to its students wherever and however they study
- Registration covers all of a provider's HE courses e.g. at an overseas campus or as part of a partnership arrangement

Who is our audience today?

- Finance team
- Student records team
- Student funding team
- Data team
- Anyone else?

Notifications that raise potential concerns about SLC funding

- “students on my course can’t speak English”
- “staff at my provider help us to buy essays”
- “I’m a staff member and I’m being told I have to give all students at least 80% in assignments”
- “students just attend the minimum number of lectures to receive the SLC funding”
- “students register then drop out once they’ve got the SLC funding”
- “I was told I’d need to pay a bribe to register for a course because my English language is so weak”
- “we have terminated a partnership because the staff at the partnership are supporting the students to commit academic misconduct”
- “this provider is not meeting SLC service level standards”

The B (quality) and E (management and governance) conditions of registration

- Is public funding being paid inappropriately (by SLC or OfS)?
- Is the data flowing from providers to the SLC or OfS (sometimes through a delivery provider) of poor quality?
- Are students being supported to succeed regardless of their entry qualifications?
- Does the quality of the course meet our baseline expectations?
- Do student outcomes meet our baseline expectations?
- Are internal controls sufficient to have a good oversight of partnership arrangements?
- Have partnerships been set up with appropriate due diligence?
- Who is making decisions around partnerships? Are there adequate conflict of interest policies in place?

Risks providers are exposed to when internal controls are weak

- SLC may “claw back” tuition fee funding if it’s been paid out inappropriately
- Partnerships might end, with resource intensive teach out requirements
- Data amendments might be required in relation to data submitted to the OfS or Jisc
- Funding calculations might require amendments for funding distributed by the OfS
- External auditors might require extra assurances to provide a going concern opinion or to sign off accounts
- Providers are vulnerable to fraud, both from outside and within the provider
- Reputational risk should adverse information enter the public domain

OfS monitoring and intervention

- Additional monitoring requirements “always reportable events”
- Requests for additional information to assess compliance with conditions of registration
- Data amendment panels
- Provider required to investigate concerns or commission internal audits
- Increased scrutiny by SLC and DfE (decision maker for SLC funding)
- Findings of a breach, or being at a higher risk of breaching a condition of registration – imposition of specific conditions of registration – publication of these
- Monetary penalties, suspension, deregistration

Avoiding common pitfalls

- Good policies and processes for registration, enrolment, attendance monitoring
- Understanding of SLC timelines to ensure data submitted in a timely way
- Awareness of fraud vulnerabilities, patterns and weaknesses
- Robust internal control arrangements to test policies and processes
- Clear agreements with partners around expectations and submission of data
- Good oversight of quality of courses delivered by partners, including visits / audits
- Use of internal control programme
- Clear understanding of risk profile

Any questions?

Icebreaker:

- The SLC was incorporated in July 1989. From July to December 1989 it was known as:
 - a) Perchlane Limited
 - b) Student Finance Systems Limited
 - c) Recordfile Limited

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Thank you for listening

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