

# SLC Executive Director of Operations visits Durham University

Members of SLC's Executive Leadership Team have been visiting universities across the UK, meeting with staff and students to find out about their experience of using SLC's services.

At the end of February, Derek Ross, SLC Executive Director of Operations spent the day at Durham University. He was joined by colleagues from SLC's Partner Services Team who manage the relationship between SLC and universities and colleges. Derek reflects on the visit in his blog.

As Executive Director of Operations, I am very conscious of the need to continue to improve the service we provide to our customers. Feedback from those who use our services is crucial to this, which is why I was delighted to visit Durham University as part of SLC's ongoing engagement programme with UK Universities.

The visit started with a meeting with Durham Vice Chancellor, Professor Stuart Corbridge, and other members of the University's senior team. During the meeting I updated them on the enhancements we have planned for the next couple of years, including the roll out of an improved digital self-service system for students. We talked about how this would make it easier for customers to get answers to straightforward enquiries and enhance our customer advisors' ability to support individuals with more complex circumstances.

This was followed by a meeting with Operations staff from the university and I was glad to hear that their experience of working with SLC was generally very positive. They had encouraging feedback around recent improvements we've made, including the new childcare process introduced last year. This sees us pay Childcare Grants directly to childcare providers, removing the need for students to estimate their costs for the year ahead. It's good to know that this has been working well for Durham students.

A highlight of the visit was the opportunity to attend focus groups with undergraduate and postgraduate students. During these sessions students asked specific questions relating to their own situations. The questions covered a range of topics including parental contribution, postgraduate funding rules and evidence requirements.

One student, who was not from the UK, told me about issues they had experienced when providing evidence to support their application. I outlined the improvements we have planned which will allow students to submit their evidence digitally. Everyone welcomed this development, agreeing that it would make the application process more efficient in the future.

I left Durham University feeling very positive about the job SLC is doing in enabling people to invest in their future through higher education, but also

with lots of lots of constructive feedback on areas we can improve on. I look forward to continuing with the HE engagement programme and visiting more universities in the very near future.

Derek Ross, Executive Director, Operations