

The Student Loans Company Gets Top Marks From FAST!

The Student Loans Company is working in close partnership with FAST Corporate Services and has already become the proud recipient of registration to the FAST Standard for Software Compliance (FSSC-1:2007) Gold Award. Its next goal is to achieve the FAST Platinum Award.



The Student Loans Company (SLC) is a non-departmental public body employing over 1,400 staff at four locations in the UK. Established to provide financial services via loans and grants to the one million UK and EU students who undertake higher education in UK colleges and universities, SLC's loan portfolio is currently valued at over £19 billion. SLC's other primary responsibility is the administration of repayment collections, from over two million customers no longer in Higher Education.

All SLC's operational activity relies on having a highly available, fault-free hardware and software environment in order to meet its best practice financial services remit and service its large (and growing) customer base. But, with more than 1800 technology devices (laptops, desktops and servers) spread across four regional locations and only a small central IT team to provide day-to-day support, this is no mean feat!

Last year SLC decided to take proactive steps to ensure that it was managing its technology assets to optimum benefit. By working in close partnership with FAST Corporate Services, SLC has been able to focus its energies as a team and:

- achieve a best practice software environment that is fully compliant with current legislation requirements
- put in place a framework for viewing and analysing its licence position easily and efficiently
- deliver a Return on Investment of nearly £85,000 by clarifying contract renewals and support agreements.

The organisation has also become the proud recipient of registration to the FAST Standard for Software Compliance (FSSC-1:2007) Gold Award as a result. Read on to find out more!

Stepping Stones To Success

SLC's FAST project started in April 2004 with a view to establishing a legally compliant software estate right across the organisation's 1800-device network spread across four key

sites in Scotland, England and Wales. SLC worked its way through the requirements of FAST Bronze and Silver stages and created a set of rigorous policies and procedures to explain SLC's approach to software management and ensure that the organisation's staff understood their responsibilities as technology users.



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It was at this point that the IT team at SLC realised it needed some external advice to select the best tools for conducting a full software audit and licence reconciliation exercise and support the business-wide roll-out of its policies and procedures. Theresa Kilpatrick, SLC's Software Licensing Co-ordinator, takes up the story:

"SLC is an extremely customer-focused organisation, so how we operate matters as much as what we do. We wanted to make a strategic technology investment that would support our goal of becoming software compliant and enable our small team to maintain this position easily. We also wanted to launch our policies and procedures in the most effective way possible to ensure that we got full buy-in from all our staff. It made perfect sense to bring in FAST Corporate Services to give us some best practice advice and strategies for meeting both these needs."

Out With The Old, In With The New

SLC was already running Centennial Discovery to track its IT assets, so it was an easy decision for the company to upgrade to a 2006 version of the auditing software and, at the same time, make an investment in a new server. However, as Theresa Kilpatrick explains, the SLC IT team also needed a tool that would allow them to manipulate the file data exposed by Centennial Discovery and use this information to assess the company's actual licensing position.

"When we started out on our software compliance journey, we knew that the

learning curve would be pretty steep. We wanted to make it as easy as possible and so decided to invest in a tool that would do a lot of the hard work for us by interpreting the data that Discovery generated. FAST Corporate Services provided a very useful sounding board and was able to give us impartial advice on a number of the tools that we were considering.

After conducting some in-depth research and thinking through our long-term needs, we made a decision to invest in Software Organiser – a leading licence compliance solution for automatically managing licensing documentation, maintenance contracts and supplier purchasing data.

Software Organiser enabled SLC to import all the licensing information that was being collected manually and stored in an Excel spreadsheet into one easy-to-use tool for ongoing reference. It also allowed us to clean all the software data that was being generated by Centennial Discovery so that we could accurately assess our level of licensing risk.

At one point, Discovery delivered more than 800 folders of information; Software Organiser turned this into manageable data that could be easily identified as commercially licensed software, freeware, trial software or shareware. This allowed us to make a very accurate assessment of our licensing position and address any under- or over-licensing issues."

A Question Of Culture...

Having done all the necessary groundwork for collating and analysing SLC's software licensing information, FAST Corporate Services then worked with the SLC IT team to ensure that its pre-drafted policies and procedures were still appropriate and conformed to FAST's guidelines. This done, the teams defined a strategy for rolling out the policies and procedures in a way that would ensure that everyone in the company understood the requirements and restrictions involved in using SLC technology.



An education initiative was then developed to remind SLC's team that all desktop and laptop PCs are company property (and therefore not entitled to be used as if they were individually owned) and explain the rules and regulations that were about to be introduced. Theresa Kilpatrick says:

"From my previous experience I know that it can be very easy for company users to get very attached to the desktop or laptop machine that they have been allocated to work with. This can bring a whole host of software management problems into the organisation.

For instance, if you're trying to maintain a clean and legally compliant software estate, numerous problems can be unnecessarily caused by music files deposited via iPod synchronisations, personal photographs saved from email downloads, and miscellaneous documents brought in on USB memory sticks. At SLC we wanted to short-circuit these potential issues by being really transparent about what our staff are – and aren't – allowed to do with company property."

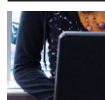
On advice from FAST, the SLC IT team put in place a simple step-by-step process for rolling out its policies and procedures document and keeping them 'front of mind' with its UK user base. As a start-point the company's IT and HR teams ran a series of workshops to introduce and explain the SLC Acceptable Computer User (ACU) Policy to everyone in the business. These workshops provided an overview of:

- software licensing legislation and the penalties for non-compliance
 - the history behind the creation of the SLC ACU Policy
 - the daily software auditing process that the company had decided to introduce in order to support the achievement of a fully compliant software environment.
- They also involved an in-depth Q&A session about the restrictions that had been applied

to personal content stored on business computers. All members of staff were then asked to sign a tear-off slip on the SLC ACU Policy to confirm that they understood and accepted the terms of the agreement. This commitment is reinforced via reminders on the SLC intranet and a simple PC login process that means every time a user starts up his or her PC a notice appears requiring tick box acceptance to confirm that they are willing to abide by the SLC ACU Policy.

Securing The Future

As a result of the work carried out in partnership with FAST Corporate Services, SLC has now achieved a fully compliant software position. This achievement has safeguarded SLC's reputation as a leading provider of financial services support to the UK student community. It has also saved the organisation money by allowing it to pinpoint, and then remove, unnecessary software maintenance agreements.



It's never easy to bring in new regulations governing what users can and can't do with their PCs...

The SLC IT team is still auditing the whole organisation's software environment on a daily basis and plans to continue doing this for some time to come – using the information gathered to gradually build up SLC's database of licensing intelligence and making it easy to maintain that coveted software compliance position. SLC's goal is to achieve the FAST Platinum Award in three years' time.

Thanks to the thoroughness of SLC's new policies and procedures programme and the rigour of its new licence recording and analysis process, Theresa Kilpatrick feels

confident enough to be able to recruit a licensing assistant to take on some of the ongoing software administration. She is also now able to focus her professional development on building an even greater understanding of the Software Asset Management lifecycle, and is planning to undertake a three-day BCS/ISEB Accredited 'Certificate in Software Asset Management Essentials' course with Ultima Risk Management in the near future.

Commenting on the success of the services provided by FAST Corporate Services and the internal SLC IT team, Theresa Kilpatrick says:

"At the very beginning, SLC's goal of achieving a fully compliant software environment seemed a very long and daunting project for a small IT team managing more than 1800 technology devices – but thanks to the excellent support provided by FAST and SLC's desktop and network teams led by Infrastructure Services Manager, Lesley Murrie, we have completed our journey with flying colours. In addition, we have revolutionised the way that we gather and use our licensing data, which will be invaluable for ensuring that we achieve the Platinum Award in 2010.

It's never easy to bring in new regulations governing what users can and can't do with their PCs, but if people understand why the restrictions are being brought in and what they are setting out to achieve for the company, then there will always be a greater willingness to participate. The advice provided by the FAST team helped us to introduce a clear, yet collaborative, approach that encouraged transparency and feedback – one which sent out a company-wide message that said: 'let us help you to get it right'. It has worked really well!"

Read more case studies on organisations that have achieved registration to the FAST Standard for Software Compliance in the 'News and Case Studies' section of www.fastcorporateservices.com.