6 May 2021

Dear Needs Assessment Centres and Assistive Technology Service Providers,

I am writing to thank you for your participation in the training sessions for the e-quote system we have held over recent weeks. We hope you found these sessions useful, and we are grateful for the constructive manner in which you engaged.

I am pleased to confirm we are on track for full implementation from 12 May 2021. Quotes for the supply of equipment and assistive technology should be submitted via the e-quote system for Needs Assessments carried out on or after 12 May.

Yours sincerely,

Mark Cassidy
Head of Estates and Sourcing
Student Loans Company

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Frequently Asked Questions – v4.0

1. Why is SLC implementing an e-quote system?
The e-quote system will increase transparency of pricing and provide SLC with improved access to data and information on the costs and supply of assistive technology.

2. Is SLC implementing AT Quote?
SLC is working with Stone Technologies and their partners to develop and configure a solution that meets our needs. That system will operate similar to an existing solution, AT Quote. While there will be similarities, the new system is not AT Quote, rather a purpose-designed system configured for use by all NACs and ATSPs.

3. Has SLC conducted an equality impact assessment?
Yes, SLC has conducted an equality impact assessment and this is published under the transparency data section of SLC's website, available here:
https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/equality-impact-assessment-quotations-for-assistivetechnology

4. Is this an interim measure?
Yes, our current intention is that this is an interim measure. As you are aware SLC is currently planning a new procurement exercise that will put in place contracts for the supply of needs assessments and assistive technology. The implementation of the e-quote system was designed as an interim measure to increase transparency of pricing and provide SLC with improved access to data and information on the costs and supply of assistive technology; however, depending on the outcome of the procurement exercise the system may continue to be used on a more permanent basis if appropriate.

5. How does SLC intend to select the suppliers that are included on the system? All current ATSPs will be provided with access to the system.

6. Can new suppliers gain access to the system?
In line with current arrangements, new assistive technology suppliers can become suppliers of DSAfunded assistive technology if they meet the requirements of the Quality Assurance Framework as set out by the Department for Education in SSIN 08/19 of November 2019 (available here: https://www.practitioners.slc.co.uk/media/1760/dsa-qag-closure-information-ssin-08-19.pdf); and by the Welsh Government in SFWIN 07/2019 (available here: https://www.studentfinancewales.co.uk/media/198810/sfwin-230120-dsa-process-change-v10final.pdf).

7. How will the assistive technology supplier be selected via the e-quote system?
The assistive technology supplier will continue to be selected in the same way as they currently are: SLC will select the most cost-effective solution by choosing the supplier with the lowest quote that meets all of the students' need as set out in the needs assessment report.

8. How will standards be maintained using the e-quote system?
The UK Government and Welsh Government have set out the quality assurance and audit arrangements that apply following the closure of DSA-QAG. In November 2019 the Department for Education (DfE) set out in SSIN 08/19 that it expects all ATSPs to continue to adhere to the key principles and standards underlying the Quality Assurance Framework for ATSPs previously operated

by DSA-QAG. The Welsh Government has similarly set out the standards it requires of ATSPs in SFWIN 07/2019. It remains the case that ATSPs supplying SFE and SFW students must continue to meet these respective standards. Both DfE and Welsh Government will monitor the performance of ATSPs in collaboration with SLC and may carry out spot checks on ATSPs. DfE and Welsh Government reserve the right to take action as appropriate in response to any concerns.

9. What is the specification of the e-quote system?

As the contract has now been awarded, we're working with Stone Technologies to refine the requirements of the system. The system is based upon a popular existing solution, AT Quote; will meet relevant information security standards; and can account for VAT complexity. User testing will be conducted with partners prior to launch and training will be provided.

10. Will Needs Assessors see pricing?

Needs Assessors will not be able to view supplier pricing in the new system, but they will be able to select the products they are recommending for each customer. Needs assessors are responsible for providing SLC with recommendations on solutions they believe to be essential for a disabled student to overcome barriers within Higher Education. SLC are accountable for value for money where DSA expenditure is concerned.

11. What is the feedback loop for queries and issues between students, Needs Assessors, assistive technology suppliers and SLC using the new system?

The communications channels will not change by the introduction of the e-quote system. Students will continue to have direct access to, and communication with, their Needs Assessor, assistive technology supplier and SLC. If the NACs need to communicate with potential ATSPs prior to the quotes being requested or supplier selected, this can be done directly (i.e. they can contact any ATSP as they would now to ask technical questions or similar.) Once SLC has selected the ATSP, the NAC will be made aware of the successful provider. Any issues relating to the e-quote system itself should be raised directly with SLC.
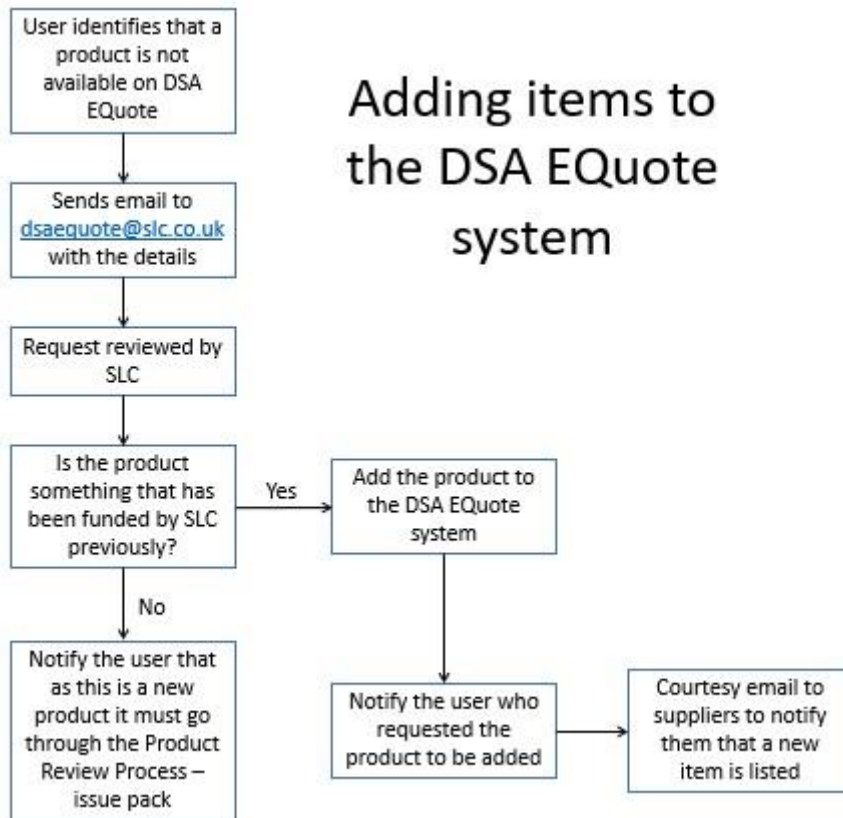
12. How will the e-quote system supplier engage with ATSPs and Needs Assessment Centres to understand the sector?

The supplier, Stone Technologies Limited, is currently finalising an implementation plan, which will include user testing and training sessions with NACs and ATSPS, likely to be held in March and April.

13. Will users be able to have items added to the e-quote system and within what timeframes? If a user identifies an item missing from the e-quote system they should email dsaequote@slc.co.uk to request that it be added. SLC will respond to these requests within one working day. SLC will first establish whether the item can be added immediately, or whether it is a new product and would need to follow the New Product Review process, details of this process can be found here: https://www.practitioners.slc.co.uk/exchange-blog/2017/april/dsa-product-review-process/

In cases where new products are added these will appear at the top of inventory lists in the system as they will not have a price, so should be easily identifiable. We will also send a courtesy email to let users know that a new item has been added.

The process for adding a new item is set out in the process map below:

Adding items to the DSA EQuote system

```
User identifies that a product is not available on DSA EQuote
        │
        ▼
Sends email to dsaequote@slc.co.uk with the details
        │
        ▼
Request reviewed by SLC
        │
        ▼
Is the product something that has been funded by SLC previously?  ──Yes──▶  Add the product to the DSA EQuote system
        │                                                                              │
       No                                                                              ▼
        │                                                         Notify the user who requested the product to be added  ──▶  Courtesy email to suppliers to notify them that a new item is listed
        ▼
Notify the user that as this is a new product it must go through the Product Review Process – issue pack
```

14. What should users do if they believe that the descriptions of items need to be updated?
Suppliers are able to edit their descriptions of items within their account, this allows the supplier to give specifics about the item i.e. version numbers.

15. Will the system be used for any other goods or services funded by DSAs?
Initially, the e-quote system is being introduced only for the supply of assistive technology and certain associated services including warranties and insurance. For the avoidance of doubt, the system will not initially be used to source quotes for AT training, certain specialist forms of equipment (including ergonomic equipment and specialist equipment for students with hearing impairments or visual impairments) or for non-medical help. SLC will continue to explore the possibilities of onboarding other goods and services funded via the DSAs onto the new e-quote solution. We will deliver any enhancements in an iterative approach and will engage with stakeholders before any decisions are made in this regard.

16. What is the process for obtaining quotes for specialist equipment (e.g. ergonomic equipment, and specialist equipment for students with hearing impairments or visual impairments) and assistive technology training that is not provided by the currently registered ATSPs?
The requirement for assistive technology training quotes remains the same in that Needs Assessors must obtain a minimum of two competitive quotations. For items that are considered specialist (e.g. ergonomic equipment or certain HI equipment) our business process also remains the same in that one quote will be sufficient. It will not be possible to obtain quotes for AT training and specialist equipment from the new e-quote system at this time. However, we will be continuing to explore further enhancements to the e-quote solution in an iterative approach.

17. Why are AT training quotes not included within the e-quote solution?

We will be exploring the possibility of onboarding AT training and other goods & services onto equote in future deployments. The priority for this first release was to enable SLC to obtain quotes from the ATSPs for assistive technology provision. AT training is currently classified as Non-Medical Help, and a significant proportion of AT training is provided by non-ATSPs.

18. What is the process now for Needs Assessors when providing AT training quotes?

This process is not changing. Needs Assessors can provide SLC with a minimum of two quotes for AT training and these are to be included within the Needs Assessment Report as they are now. It will not be possible to obtain AT training quotes via e-quote at this time, so Needs Assessors will continue to obtain quotes via alternative means.

19. What is the process now for Needs Assessors when providing quotes from specialist ergonomic/VI/HI suppliers?

This process is not changing. Where students need to be referred to a supplier to be assessed for more specialist/bespoke products, SLC can accept one quote. It will not be possible to handle this via e-quote at this stage and Needs Assessors should use existing methods to obtain these quotes.

20. Will the provider of the e-quote system Stone Technologies Limited have access to ATSPs' data?

We recognise that the data that will be held by the e-quote system is commercially sensitive and it will be treated accordingly. Stone Technologies Limited will not have access to the data held on the system, however, the developer (subcontractor) will have root access to the data in order to administer and maintain the system. If Stone Technologies requires access for any reason, it will need to seek authorisation from SLC first via its subcontractor. Both Stone Technologies as the supplier and its subcontractor will be commercially bound by this**.**

21. Where will the system be hosted?

The system itself is being hosted by Clouvider, a London-based cloud hosting service.

22. Will the system be tested prior to launch?

Yes, the system will be thoroughly tested to ensure all functional and non-functional requirements are met. This will include testing with a small number of NACs. A third party will also carry out vulnerability penetration testing. In addition, the system is being implemented via a phased rollout, meaning we can take feedback and address any issues prior to full implementation.

23. How many staff members from each NAC and ATSP can/should attend the training? Given the number of organisations required to attend the training, initially we ask that up to four staff members from each ATSP and two staff members from each NAC attend the training sessions.

24. Will there be further support provided if required?

Relevant training material will be available to all users within the application once access is granted and a demonstration training video is also available.

25. I missed the training session; how can I access the training?

A demonstration training video is available. If you would like to access this, please email dsaequote@slc.co.uk to request it.

26. What should an ATSP do if they believe that there are products within the e-quote catalogue that are out of date?

The catalogue that has been provided has been extracted from the existing AT Quote solution which is currently used by all the ATSPs and hundreds of Needs Assessors to generate quotes. If ATSPs do not supply any items on the catalogue, they should mark them as inactive. If ATSPs believe something should be removed completely from the catalogue, please email SLC at dsaequote@slc.co.uk.

27. What assurance is there that information and data on the system is secure?
Prior to entering into the contract with the successful third-party vendor, thorough security reviews were completed to ensure the application satisfies SLC security standards. Robust controls are in place to ensure data is stored and managed safely and in line with GDPR legislation. Please see the terms and conditions and privacy notice for further information: https://dsaequote.slc.co.uk/login/

28. Can pricing data be transferred from AT Quote to the new e-quote system?
Data security and integrity is one of our top priorities at SLC. As SLC is not the data controller of pricing information on the existing AT Quote system, the information will not be transferred directly to the new e-quote system. ATSPs can input their information into the e-quote system either by a secure bulk upload or entering it manually.

29. Why can't ATSPs access information that they could previously see on AT Quote?
The e-quote system will enable quotes to be obtained securely for the supply of DSA equipment and ensure that confidential pricing information is surfaced only to the relevant users who require it to approve quotes. Reporting requirements will be considered as a post launch delivery, therefore there may be opportunity for SLC to share some information with users as long as this is in line with data-protection and competition laws.

30. Does SLC have the expertise and knowledge to build quotes within the system? SLC will not build the quotes. It is Needs Assessors who will build the package of support they believe the student requires within the system. When SLC approve the Needs Assessor recommendations, prices are generated from all ATSPs who are able to meet the customer needs.

31. The e-quote system could be improved by allowing for API data transfer and the ability for ATSPs to download quotes as well as upload and download CSV files, will this be considered?
The new e-quote solution is an iterative development, and we will be considering improved features in future deployments. We will give consideration to enhancements like this, but they will need to be prioritised alongside other requirements.

32. What is the process for ensuring VAT is applied correctly?
SLC does not provide VAT advice or ensure ATSPs are appropriately charging VAT. Each ATSP must ensure they are VAT compliant and should engage with HMRC for advice. However, should SLC notice any irregularities with how ATSPs are applying VAT to items within the e-quote solution, we will bring to the attention of our sponsors within DfE and Welsh Government.

33. What process should ATSPs follow if they believe there is a problem with something Needs Assessors have included in an approved quote, i.e. an incompatibility issue with items recommended?
ATSPs should bring any exceptions like this to the attention of SLC by emailing dsaequote@slc.co.uk. SLC will then correct this and regenerate the quote or contact the Needs Assessor if necessary. It is our aim to turn these issues around within one working day.

34. How will SLC monitor the impact of e-quote on market dynamics?

SLC will have access to systematic data which will provide a wide range of useful insights to monitor any potential changes in market share or in item costs.

35. What happens in circumstances where there is a sudden increase in the cost of items and ATSPs are no longer prepared to supply on the original quoted price?
It is entirely within the discretion of ATSPs whether they are prepared to supply on their original quoted price if the quote validity period has passed. Please contact SLC by emailing dsaequote@slc.co.uk if the original priced quoted can no longer be honoured. SLC will regenerate quotes and will engage with our customer should this result in a change in supplier.

36. Does the e-quote system cover SFE and SFW students?
Yes, the e-quote system will be used for the supply of assistive technology to both Student Finance England and Student Finance Wales students.

37. Will the e-quote system meet the Welsh Language Standards?
Yes. A Welsh language option will be available for any Welsh speakers using the system.

38. What is the maximum insurance warranty period that can be quoted via the e-quote system? In line with the existing supplier requirements, the maximum insurance warranty period is four years, with the ability to extend by one additional year if required.

39. Will the ATSP receive a copy of the DSA2 letter?
No, in line with current processes ATSPs will not receive a copy of the DSA2 letter. The DSA2 letter, with the list of approved equipment, will continue to be provided to the student and the Needs Assessor.