



FIPS Modern Apprentice External Focus Group

31 August 2017

SDS, Lomond House, Glasgow (10am to 1pm)

Attendees

Name	Organisation
Pamela Lockhart, Manager, NTP Reports and Funding Team	Skills Development Scotland
Lindsay Hewitt, National Operations Manager	Skills Development Scotland
Marie Donnelly, National Operations Manager	Skills Development Scotland
Andrew Bruce, NTP Reports and Funding Team Leader	Skills Development Scotland
Debbie McFadyen, NTP Hub	Skills Development Scotland
Bernadette Lavelle, ESF Management Accountant	Skills Development Scotland
Chris Ruane, NTP Partnership Assistant	Skills Development Scotland
Linda Petrie	Forth Valley College
Gillian Steele	JB Management (Scotland) Limited
Marissa Renucci	learndirect limited
Christine Devine	New College Lanarkshire
Linda Healy	Qualitas International Limited
Gillian Harvey	Scottish Electrical Charitable Training Trust
Isobel Dobson	The Intraining Group Limited
Carolyn Johnstone	The Tell Organisation Limited
Brian Woodrow	XL Training (Scotland) Ltd
Linsay Bryce	Xtra-Mile.com Ltd
Michelle Batt	MGT Training
Kyle Main	GTG Training

Section One - Welcome / Introductions

Andrew Bruce and Pamela Lockhart welcomed attendees

Section Two - Note of previous meeting / Terms of Reference

The group had no further comments on the minutes of the previous meeting and the Terms of Reference.

Section Three - ESF and FIPS

SDS provided a summary of ESF activity, highlighting areas of interest for training providers. The presentation also covered audit requirements for Scottish Government and a walkthrough of the ESF guidance document.

ESF Tagged trainees

- An ESF guidance document has been sent to providers where MAs in FIPS have already been tagged as ESF.
- It was noted that this is a change to the type of evidence and timescales for SDS requiring evidence.
- Some TPs in the room confirmed they had already uploaded evidence.

Please see Appendix One for further information on ESF evidence.

Q – Can the trainee name be added to the “ESF Evidence Request” screen?

Action - SDS to review and advise.

Q – Can we amend information that has been uploaded incorrectly? SDS advised that as this is the early stages of a new way of working, they will not be rejecting evidence if one part is incorrect. They will notify TPs and allow them to upload the additional documents.

Note: The ESF team will allow providers to upload any additional information required. We will not reject a full file of evidence. We will contact providers directly if a particular document within a file is incorrect / missing and request that additional evidence is added.

If it is a single page document e.g. SOAR or review this will be rejected on FIPS with an explanation given for the rejection. The TP will then need to upload the correct evidence.

Providers discussed evidence requirements in terms of collecting all the required information retrospectively as the information requested may be difficult to source if an individual has left training. e.g. proof of date of birth / participant address. The ESF Guidance Document states acceptable forms of evidence for ESF purposes and this currently includes SQA Navigator Report.

Note: Proof of address and DOB are the only ESF required items we now ask for which has to be gathered retrospectively. SQA Navigator is an acceptable source of evidence which would help with the retrospective issue.

Action – ESF team to discuss further with SDS National Operations.

Q - One provider highlighted that norm plans are not published by SDS and that there is not a clear published list like there was on CTS. SDS advised there is a guidance video (Qualifications) on FIPS which explains how to drill down on FIPS to view the norm plans.

In FIPS for ESF trainees, if travel and subsistence expenses are to be claimed it is through the Bulk Expenses process and PL clarified the records in FIPS need to be flagged as: “claiming expenses; yes”.

However the ESF Guidance Document clearly states the evidence which is required to be uploaded for ESF purposes.

If expenses are to be claimed on CTS, providers will be emailed in relation to evidence requirements. SDS stressed that providers send any ESF queries via the ESF email address - mas@sds.co.uk

Note: The ESF team will take into consideration the TPs ability to provide expenses evidence when submitting ESF claims.

SDS raised the issue of data protection and highlighted that information should not be held longer than the required time period. Data Protection rules will be more stringent in 2018 and SDS shall advise on any update to the policy.

SDS also advised that for data recording a retention policy is still to be agreed in relation to timescales for keeping data that is entered on FIPS.

Action – SDS to upload the ESF Guidance Document onto the FIPS area of SDS corporate website.

Note: The ESF team will advise on the data retention period for ESF. As the ESF document retention period is set by the Scottish Government, the ESF team will notify TPs directly with retention timescales.

Section Four - Changes to FIPS since previous meeting

Validation

SDS updated the group on improvements to validation. Since the last meeting of the group, SDS had met with STF and a workshop was held with STF Members. The validation message for rejected records has now been resolved.

SDS advised that they had undertaken a manual exercise to issue validation messages in these instances. One provider noted that there had been a decrease in the volume of individual issues relating to validation.

Q - Clarification on whether the response is “unknown” if a trainee responds late, outwith the given time period. The group confirmed that the record will not update.

SDS advised that milestones should not be processed until the Assignment has been confirmed.

Q – Once the Assignment is confirmed, Providers asked why in some cases when they went to process milestones that the Assignment still read as pending. In these circumstances, SDS advised to log with the NTP Hub.

Training Providers advised that in some instances when reactivating an assignment after rejection due to non validation that the IPP is no longer displayed. SDS advised that for a small volume of individuals they have exceeded the timescale set to reactivate an IPP. This is because they have been rejected and reinstated multiple times. SDS will extend the timescale however there will be an extended limit set.

Q - How to deal with a situation whereby the individual has completed and left and they do not reply to messages to confirm outcome - how they can validate claims? SDS advised that this is an area being discussed with SDS National Operations Managers and that Employers shall be able to validate claims. *(Note - The bug fix to allow employers to validate claims has now been implemented)*

Making claims – it has been noted that Training Providers are making further milestone claims for individuals before initial milestones sent to Finance are confirmed. There is no rule in the system to prevent this, however TPs need to review their claims processes to ensure that going forward they do not make further claims and allow them to be transferred to Finance until initial milestones are confirmed.

The out of hours message is expected to be resolved by the end of September and user tested before being released to the live version of FIPS. TPs will be advised when this goes live.

Leavers Report - issue is now resolved – TPs should only see leavers in this view.

TPs commented that milestone expected claim dates calculated by the system can exceed the expected end date of the assignment. SDS advised that the change request to resolve this issue is still outstanding. However there is a video on how to update expected milestone claim dates.

Section Five - Adopt an Apprentice – demo and discussion

A member of the AAA team provided an update which included the following:

- The aim is to ensure AAA is more robust in terms of evidence requirements. Previously TPs were asked to attach the Funding Assistance Agreement (FAA). The new system requires FAA and proof of redundancy for audit checks, going back one financial year.

Q - What is classed as proof/evidence? For example, a small employer could go bust, an individual is made redundant and there may be no way of supplying evidence of redundancy. SDS advised that a print from Companies House – which shows company in liquidation, is sufficient. An email is also acceptable (as opposed to letter on letterhead paper) as long as it is specific to the trainee/employer.

This will be soon introduced as an official/standard process.

Q - Clarification sought on whether it is acceptable to scan as a single document and upload as a single file rather than uploading each individually. SDS advised this was fine.

SDS advised of a further change re double funding – the trainee will most likely not be able to receive two AAA payments within a single financial year.

Q - How is an application cancelled? For example when an AAA payment is made, then the individual is made redundant - is it up to provider or SDS to claw money back as TP has already paid employer? SDS advised the process is that a letter goes to employer first in relation to repaying the money from SDS.

Q - What is the procedure when an application is suspended – if the evidence is not uploaded in time? SDS advised the TP must email the AAA team to reactivate the record. At this point they are able to upload FAA and continue with application.

Q – Regarding the TP mobile number as mandatory field – If the TP does not have a mobile number what do they do in this instance? SDS advised to complete this field with any data in order to bypass.

Section 6 - Changes to Wording of validation emails and texts

The group participated in an exercise to review the wording for validation emails and texts. SMS is limited to 160 characters.

Issues raised by the group included:

- One provider felt the wording of “review/achievement” is confusing to MAs.
- MAs may be confused by the “start” messages as they do not feel they have “started” so reply “no”.

The group’s input was appreciated. Revised wording will require a change request and approval from management in the first instance.

Section 7 - AOB

The issue of bulk expenses was raised and that TPs could only make one per period. The TPs agreed that expense authorisation is confusing as you are able to go over the authorised value.

Action – Videos are already available in relation to bulk expense authorisation and approvals. SDS will review to ensure videos are still accurate.

Shared best practice - one provider advised that they are taking screenshots from videos to create their own guides for their staff and this is useful. A second provider confirmed they are carrying out a similar exercise and the user has a strong understanding of FIPS. This provider would be willing to allow their FIPS user to meet with other providers to share best practice / hold a workshop. TPs agreed that a practical workshop for using FIPS would be worthwhile. Group Members to review at next meeting.

Milestones – TPs would like to see FIPS Report which details the outstanding milestones i.e. 3/6, with the same level of information as on CTS. SDS advised this is not a view on FIPS, and cannot be set up as an Advanced Find view. If required, SDS will raise a change request for review and approval. Contents of the report to be discussed at the next meeting.

Advanced Find - SDS circulated hard copy of basic guide in relation to Advanced Find. They also explained that the system CRM views already created can be updated in Advanced Find and saved and shared by TPs for their own use.

Action – SDS to publish this guidance document.

Section 8 - Date of next meeting

Date for next FIPS Focus Group meeting was agreed as Friday November 17th at Shandwick Place, 10am-1pm.

Appendix One – Note on ESF evidence

There are three additional evidence items now required as part of ESF eligibility checks – Appendix 5 of the programme rules (participant and training provider declaration), proof of address and proof of Date of Birth. This is due to tighter eligibility checks required by Scottish Government.

SDS has changed the process for gathering ESF evidence. In the past, we only ever asked TPs to provide evidence during audit periods, for a sample of trainees. During this time, the ESF team would discover evidence was no longer available / incorrect, by which point it was too late to rectify, resulting in various issues. For this reason, the ESF team now request evidence in advance to mitigate any risk to both the TP and SDS.

To assist with the volume of information required at any one time, the ESF team are currently reviewing their processes. Ideally, a process that allows them to identify ESF trainees more frequently. This would help reduce the volume of evidence requested at any one time. TPs would no longer have a full year of evidence to provide retrospectively. It would be more staggered throughout the year.