

MA Programme Business as usual FAQs

This document is solely for questions related to the published MA Programme Conditions and Specification and associated appendices.

Version 1 – 1st April 2024

Updated - 10th October 2024

Updated – 14th April 2025

Updated – 1st July 2025

Questions have been clustered under the following headings:

Each updated version will show latest additions in **green.**

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1. Funding

Q1.1 What are the different assignment types used on FIPS?

A1.1 In Paragraph 2.3 of the MA Programme Specification there are full details of the funding eligibility criteria for the MA Programme – below are some examples of Assignment type allocation and funding for some of the MA frameworks. **We would always recommend that you discuss any queries you have with your Contract Executive.**

Example	Assignment Type	Funding
Apprentice has completed SCQF L5 Administration prior to their 20 th birthday and then wishes to start SCQF L6 Administration after their 20 th birthday	Progression	Funding will be the progression funding of £350. (20-24 L6 £1,200 less 20-24 L5 £850)
Apprentice has completed SCQF L5 Hospitality and then wishes to start SCQF L7 Hospitality Supervision & Leadership	New Start	Full funding
Apprentice has completed SCQF L5 Construction Operations and then wishes to undertake SCQF L5 Plant Operations	Not eligible	Not eligible as only one pathway within a framework is fundable
Apprentice has partially completed SCQF L6 and is re- entered at SCQF L5 within 3 years	Re-entrant	No deduction to funding
Apprentice re-enters the same MA framework, within 3 years of leaving the previous assignment, and has moved from 16-19 to 20-24 age category	Re-entrant	The balance of funding from the previous age group will be applied
Apprentice has partially completed Light Vehicle Maintenance pathway and re-enters within 3 years to Heavy Vehicle Maintenance.	Re-entrant	Milestones and the value from the previous assignment will be deducted from the new Individual Payment Plan removed.
Apprentice progresses from Automotive SCQF L5 to L7	Progression	L5 funding is deducted from L7 at current year age group

End of Section 1.

2. Eligibility

Q2.1 Can an Apprentice work outside Scotland during their MA programme?

A2.1 Yes. We understand there are instances where Apprentices occasionally work outside Scotland:

Examples

- Apprentices may work outside of Scotland as part of their programme for a short period of time.
- Modern Apprentices attend induction, training courses and work-based events outside of Scotland

These examples do not constitute a change to the Apprentices main employment and normal working premises.

SDS have introduced a new function in FIPs which will stop the process of an application if the address of the proposed Apprentice and Employer postcode is out with Scotland. This function is to ensure SDS has a more robust process in place to ensure all the eligibility criteria is met. If you need further clarification about this please speak your Skills Investment Adviser.

Q2.2 Can an Apprenticeship be used solely to award CSCS cards for the Construction Sector?

A.2.2 NO, SDS expects that you put forward for MA registration only those employees who are in appropriate job roles/occupations. All the MA eligibility criteria must be met in full before you sign an individual up for the Modern Apprenticeship Programme and all the MA eligibility criteria (as set out in the MA Specification, section 4.2) applies to all MA Frameworks.

You, the Provider must evidence demonstrable need; this is part of the eligibility criteria for the MA Programme. You must ensure through the initial assessment and learning plan that you can evidence that the Apprentice requires significant new knowledge and skills to fulfil their job role. Failure to evidence this SDS shall take steps to recover any funds paid in respect of Apprentices who are not employed within an appropriate job role/occupation.

Q2.3 Is an individual who is currently in education eligible for the MA Programme?

A2.3 No. To avoid double funding, an individual is not eligible for the MA Programme if they are in any, employment, education, training, or enterprise programme funded by any UK or Scottish Government department or by SDS.

An individual is not eligible for the MA Programme if they are enrolled in education - either at School, Further Education College or University.

We have several data sharing agreements in place which allow us to undertake sample checks of eligibility for the MA Programme and this will flag up if someone is in education, training or an enterprise programme funded by any UK Government, Scottish Government department or SDS.

Q2.4 I have received an application from a 15-year-old and want to know if they are able to leave school and start an MA? What is the statutory school leaving age that applies in Scotland?

A2.4 The individual cannot start an MA until they have officially left school. The official statutory school leaving dates for Scotland only are:

Statutory summer school leaver date is 31st May. If an individual's 16th birthday is on or between 1st March to 30th September, they are a statutory summer leaver.

Example

If your 16th birthday is 5th March 2022, your statutory school leaving date is 31st May 2022

Statutory winter school leaver date is 23rd of December or at the start of the winter holidays in that school year depending on each local authority area. If an individual's 16th birthday is on or between 1st October and end of February, they are a statutory winter leaver.

Example

If your 16th birthday is 25th February 2022, your statutory school leaving date is 23rd December 2021 or at the start of the winter holidays in that school year depending on each local authority area

Further information on official school leaving dates for Scotland can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/know-when-you-can-leave-school>.

SDS have developed a short module to help with the understanding of the Statutory School Leaving Date requirements in Scotland and Providers should review and share this with all relevant staff. Click [here](#) to review the module.

Q2.5 Will FIPS stop me entering an apprentice's details which includes a date of birth which would deem them ineligible because they have not reached their Scottish School Leaving age?

A2.5 Yes, SDS has introduced a function into FIPS which will provide an alert to Providers if an individual has not reached their Statutory School Leaving Date. During the FIPs application process, when the application is validated prior to submitting an assignment, a warning pop-up box will appear to highlight that the individual is ineligible as they have not reached their Statutory School Leaving Date. Also, within the 'Details Tab' of the Individual's contact record in FIPS a new field titled 'Statutory Leave Date' has been created which will automatically populate depending on the Date of Birth entered.

Q2.5 What is the HMRC definition of an Apprentice in Scotland?

A2.5 HMRC have a data sharing agreement with SDS. For HMRC, regarding national minimum wage, Apprentices in Scotland are Apprentices with effect from the date their full details are registered on SDS's Funding Information and Processing System (FIPS). Your attention is drawn to Guidance on calculating the minimum wage from HMRC. Please note that this guidance may be updated by HMRC from time to time, and you should periodically check the webpage for any updated information.

Q2.7 Is there a new process in place for employers to check an individual's right to work in the UK?

A2.7 Yes. As of 6 April 2022, the Biometric Residence Permit is **no longer** a valid form of evidence as someone's permission to work. To check someone's permission to work, the successful applicant will need to firstly obtain a Share Code by visiting [Prove Your Right to Work to an Employer](#). They will require their biometric residence card or permit number and their date of birth. The process takes less than 10 minutes and at the end, they will be presented onscreen with a Share Code which is to be shared with the employer.

The employer then visits [View a Job Applicant's Right to Work Details](#), enters the Share Code, applicant's date of birth and the company name, and will be presented with the Right to Work details of the successful applicant.

Employers must retain evidence of the online right to work check.

The Home Office have produced an [Employer's Guide to Right to Work Checks](#)
<https://www.gov.uk/prove-right-to-work>

<https://www.gov.uk/view-prove-immigration-status>

[Employer viewing an applicant's right to work details](#)

[Employer's guide to right to work checks](#)

There is also an e- learning module available [here](#)

Q2.8 What does it mean if an individual who is in the UK and is on a visa that includes a “no recourse to public funds” and are they eligible for a MA?

A2.9 If an individual is in the UK on a visa that includes a “no recourse to public funds” this means they are unable to claim any benefits that are classed as public funds. The benefits regarded as public funds for immigration purposes are included in [section 115 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 and paragraph 6 of the Immigration Rules](#). A list of the current benefits that will be regarded as public funds is also available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/public-funds--2/public-funds>. **This is a very complex process and can change very quickly (therefore as at the date of this Q & A 10th July 2023),** this list does not currently include any funding relating to the Modern Apprenticeship programme in Scotland.

An individual in the UK on a visa including a “no recourse to public funds” may be eligible for a MA, However the individual must meet all the eligibility criteria for a Modern Apprenticeship as set out in the MA Specification. This would include any time restrictions on an individual’s visa. Therefore, you must include this in your eligibility checks to make sure the length of stay remaining on the individual’s visa at the date the apprenticeship would start is sufficient to complete the apprenticeship.

End of Section 2.

3. Signatures

Please note that signatures must comply with the current MA Programme Specification and Conditions which requires Apprentices and Employers to sign and date all relevant MA Programme documentation.

We facilitated an Electronic Signatures Webinar in June 2022, you can view the recorded session and Q & A from the event [here](#).

Q3.1 Are wet signatures accepted by SDS?

A3.1 **Yes. Wet, stylus and electronic signatures have all been accepted by SDS for some time. We do not accept copied and pasted signatures and dates.**

Q3.2 Can a typed date be used on all SDS paperwork?

A3.2 **A typed date is acceptable for SDS Administration by the Apprentice and Employer if you are using electronic signature software and if there is stylus signature.**

Providers must not prepopulate any dates for the Apprentice and Employer in advance of signatures on any hard copy documentation such as word documents or printed copies of pdfs or with electronic signature systems.

The Apprentice and Employer must sign and date all documentation including SDS mandatory forms individually.

Q3.3 If the Provider is also the employer, do you require a signature in both places on the Training Agreement and Apprentice Progress Review?

A3.3 SDS requires a signature in both places on the Training Agreement and on the Apprentice Progress Reviews as there are different undertakings for each role. Best practice is that the “employer representative” signature would be someone who has a supervisory role with the MA and the “Provider” signature would be someone involved in the training element of the MA. In exceptional cases, where this is the same person, only one signature may suffice and, in these circumstances, Providers should seek the guidance of their SIA.

End of Section 3.

4. Apprentice Progress Reviews (APRs)

Q4.1 Do all 3 parties (Apprentice, employer and provider) must be present at the APR meeting, do all APRs need to be carried out face to face and signed on the same day?

A4.1 For an effective high-quality review discussion to take place, all 3 parties should have an opportunity to input. It is good practice to complete reviews face to face, a hybrid approach is acceptable so long as appropriate signatures are captured using the approved SDS measures as outlined in the MA Specification under 'signatures.'

For more detailed information on the Apprentice Progress Review process please refer to the [APR SDS Exemplar Guidance](#) and the e- learning module. You can access this module by following the link to the Quality Assurance Learning Management System [LMS](#).

End of Section 4.

5. Payment Plans

Q5.1 When claiming a milestone as part of a QPR Payment plan, what is the timeframe between completion of a progress review for the Apprentice and making the milestone claim?

A5.1 The Provider should aim to claim this as soon as possible once they hold the appropriate evidence including all signatures which must be gained within the 8-week flexibility (4 weeks before or 4 weeks after the scheduled progress review date) to prevent any delays in the funding. The duration to claim this is 90 days from achievement as outlined in the MA Conditions Claims and Payment Arrangements Section 9.

Q5.2 Has there been a change to the Payment Plan for Automotive framework and what paperwork do I need to use if I am delivering this framework?

A5.2 Yes. The Automotive Framework changed in 20/21 to the Summary of Achievement Record (SOAR) payment plan. Please refer to the link below and read each of the guidance documents and information on which paperwork is required to deliver this framework.

<https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/for-training-providers/fips-funding-information-and-processing-system/additional-information-for-specific-ma-frameworks/>

End of Section 5.

6. Documents & Forms

Q6.1 When can the records be destroyed relating to an apprentice.

A6.1 You can only destroy the records (either hard copy, scanned copy or electronic copy) if it has been 3 years from the end of the contract schedule of the final claim made against that apprentice. See example below.

Please refer to the MA Conditions section 28 for further information on Records Audit and General Assistance .

Example.

An Apprentice who started in 17/18 contractual year (November 2017), on a 4-year apprenticeship. The claim for the final milestone is made in December 2021 (21/22 contractual year). The Provider would be required to retain all records for this Apprentice until end of March 2025.

If you have been contacted by the SDS ESF team you must adhere to the communication, you were issued about retention periods for ESF documents. Please contact your SIA if you need more information about ESF documents retention periods.

Q6.2 I need to send SDS some documents relating to an apprentice. What kinds of information do we need to encrypt?

A6.2 As per the programme Conditions, any personal information relating to the Data Protection Act in line with the Appendix 4 SDS information security Policy. As stated, all information being electronically sent under this act must be encrypted using 256-bit AES encryption and your SDS assigned password.

Q6.3 I am unable to open/send/receive documents encrypted using AES-256 as specified in the MA Conditions Appendix 4 SDS Information Security Policy for NTP Providers?

A6.3 SDS expects all providers to have their IT software and systems to be up to date and to have the functionality to encrypt, also their staff to have the knowledge and skills to be able to apply the mandatory encryption set out by SDS. If you are unable to adhere to the MA Conditions - Appendix 4 Information Security Policy, you must contact your SIA immediately.

Q6.4 In some of the documentation you refer to the “Employer” and in others the “Employer representative”, what is the difference?

A6.4 The “Employer” is the name of the organisation that employs the Apprentice. The “Employer representative” is the name of the person that is acting on behalf of the Employer. Best practice is that the “Employer representative” is someone who has a supervisory role with the MA e.g. line manager, buddy, mentor who can speak knowledgeably and from an informed position about the Apprentice. The Employer Representative must be an Employee of the organisation that employs the Apprentice.

Q6.5 What changes necessitate the completion of a new Training Agreement (TA)?

A6.5 If there is a change to the Apprentice's Start Date or Qualification you must ensure that a new TA is completed. For any other changes to the TA please see the MA Specification Section for details.

Q6.6 What does the 4 weeks either side of the start date mean when completing the Training Agreement?

A6.6 SDS have allowed Learning Providers some flexibility when it comes to completing all the signing up paperwork for the MA Programme which includes the Training Agreement.

For example - When you the Learning Provider, the Apprentice and the Employer have agreed the official start date for the Apprentice to begin their Apprenticeship you will have 4 weeks before the agreed official date and/or 4 weeks after the agreed official date to get all the paperwork completed including all the signatures and dates completed on all paperwork. You will have fully explained the eligibility criteria and the declarations in the Training Agreement and all the details in the Privacy notice to ensure the Apprentice and Employer fully understand and comply with their roles and responsibilities to signing up for the MA Programme. You must then ensure all the information is accurate on all the SDS documentation before it is entered on to the FIPS system. SDS acknowledges that this can take some time to complete and that is why the flexibility of the 4 weeks has been introduced.

Once the information is inputted on to FIPS and the assignment has been created accurately on FIPS, it will go through the FIPS process for approval by SDS which includes email validation and validation that the Apprentice has started their training. If successful and only at that point the Apprentice will be registered as an Apprentice with SDS, and you have this approved and confirmed by SDS.

Q6.7 Can the Apprentice complete section A of the Training Agreement as its states on the TA that sections A to E must be completed by the Provider?

A6.7 There are certain circumstances where this may be applicable. If there is group induction or the Provider uses an electronic process for the signing up paperwork. Provider will have already carried out a thorough and robust initial Assessment which must be separate from the induction process. The Provider has a duty to fully explain the TA to the Apprentice. It must be made explicit to the Apprentice so that they can confirm and fully understand what they are signing this includes the following -The SDS Privacy notice, the Apprentice declaration, the Framework that they will be undertaking and that it fully meets the requirements of the job role before the Apprentice signs and dates the TA. The same robust process must be applied to the Employer.

They can fill in their details, but the Provider must explain the SDS Privacy notice, the Eligibility Criteria, the job role identified must meet the MA Framework criteria and the Employer must fully understand all the above before signing the Employer declaration on the Training Agreement.

SDS is aware that some information can be prepopulated on the Training Agreement for example the Framework information. If this happens when a Provider is using a hard copy (which includes a printed version of the TA where the pre population information is displayed) and there is correction to the information identified by the Apprentice or Employer and before any signatures have taken place you, the Provider must initial and date on the TA where the change has taken place for audit purposes.

Electronic/ Digital systems will provide an audit trail to any changes made on the TA prior to signature.

Q6.8 What Equality Monitoring form (Appendix 6) should I use if I am using a digital system/ platform to complete some of the SDS paperwork?

A6.8 If you are using a digital system, you can use the original Appendix 6 form however you have controls in place to ensure you are deleting Part A of this form once you have inputted the information on to FIPS. There must be no record or digital footprint of Part A anywhere on your computer systems. There cannot be any record of Part A stored either as a hard copy (printed versions) or on your computer (via an email -sent or in your deleted items - or on a digital system).

All hard copies (printed versions) of Part A must also be disposed of in a confidential waste bin. Failure to do so will result in a breach of contract.

Retaining personal data for longer than necessary can violate an individual's privacy rights and is considered a serious violation. Data protection legislation states that personal data should only be kept for as long as it's needed. If Part A of the form is discovered after the information is uploaded to FIPS, SDS will act accordingly.

Just to remind Providers -Part A is the section of the form that has the personal and sensitive data. All of Appendix 6 must be completed, signed, and dated by the Apprentice only and Part A is the information you input to FIPS. Part B is the signed and dated declaration, and you must retain this for audit purposes. Part B of the form can be stored electronically.

SDS have provided an option to support providers who are using digital platforms and have split the Appendix 6 into two forms – Appendix 6- A and Appendix 6- B.

All variations of Appendix 6 are published on the MA Programme Rules Page on SDS web pages, and you must adhere to the MA Specification and Equality monitoring guidance when administering the Equality Monitoring form.

Q6.9 Can you use e-signature software with the SOAR exemplar?

A6.9 Following feedback from the e-signature webinar, we have created an additional SOAR exemplar which is suitable for use with e-signature software. **This SOAR should not be used for wet signatures as its design and purpose is to support e-signature software.** The original Summary of Achievement exemplar is still available for use but does not have e-signature functionality. Both exemplars contain all the minimum requirements as set out in the MA Specification.

The main features of the additional SOAR exemplar are:

- it is for a single claim only rather than a cumulative document. This means if the Provider has all the evidence for the units/credits that have been fully achieved they can submit a claim for what they have achieved at that point in time.
- it only requires the Apprentice and Assessor to sign once on the document.
- it includes e-signature fields.
- it is formatted in the same style as the other MA documents.

Providers are reminded that for cumulative claims (which is the original SOAR document) units/ credits can be signed off at a point in time however you must have all the fully completed units / credits to support the claim for the relevant milestones.

The SOAR exemplars are published as editable pdfs. We have removed the security settings to allow Providers to combine documents and/or to convert to Microsoft Word themselves. As such, we will not be providing Word versions of editable pdf documents.

End of Section 6.

7. Awarding Body and MA frameworks

Q7.1 Why is there a delay in new qualifications being available in FIPS?

A7.1 SDS can only put qualifications/payment plans in FIPS in accordance with the published approved MA framework.

The Scottish Apprenticeship Governance structure ensures that there is a robust process in place to protect the integrity of the MA frameworks. The development and approval of MA frameworks is overseen by the Apprenticeships Approval Group (AAG) which sets out the timeframe for new and amended MA frameworks (including new qualifications within the MA framework) becoming available.

As soon as a new or updated MA framework has been approved it is published on the ['What we do' pages of the SDS website](#) and [Employer page of the Apprenticeships. Scot website.](#)

Example

If a new qualification code is not included within the published MA framework, we are unable to put that qualification in FIPS

Q7.2 How do I update FIPS when the Apprentice has chosen a different Engineering pathway?

A7.2 Using the FIPS Change of Circumstance – [Qualification process as outlined in the FIPS Quick Start Guide.](#)

Q7.3 What do I do if an Apprentice changes job role with the same employer?

A7.3 If an Apprentice changes job role once they have started on a MA framework and wants to continue the MA programme, the Provider must ensure that the new job role has been matched to the most appropriate MA framework. The Apprentice and Employer must agree to the change and fully aware that the correct MA framework has been identified to suit the new job role.

If there is an identifiable need to change the Apprentices MA framework, then the Apprentice will have to be removed from the current programme and recorded on FIPS as a leaver. The Apprentice must then be entered on to FIPS as a new start on the correct MA Framework. You will be expected to carry out the initial assessment and create a new Learning Plan to ensure you have the evidence that this is the correct framework for the Apprentice.

Q7.4 What do I do if the Apprentice has been entered into FIPS using the incorrect VQ reference number?

A7.4 Use the FIPS Change of Circumstance – [Qualification process as outlined in the FIPS Quick Start Guide](#)

Q7.5 What do I do if the Apprentice has given me the wrong date of birth and the wrong NI number.

A7.5 Use the FIPS Change of Circumstance – [NI number process as outlined in the FIPS Quick Start Guide.](#)

End of Section 7.

8. End Dates

Q8.1 What expected end date should I enter into FIPS?

A8.1 The expected end date should be determined by your initial assessment of each Apprentice and should form part of the progress review discussion with the Apprentice. You should always record accurately the expected timescales for completion of the MA with the Apprentice. You should not automatically use the same expected end date for each Apprentice. The expected end date should be amended immediately if the Apprentice is likely to complete sooner or later than initially predicted.

You must also take account of lead times for collating, submitting, and certificating all supporting evidence of the MA framework authorised by the relevant SSO including evidence of achieving the full VQ or work-based qualification from the Awarding Body.

All information on how to use FIPS can be found here - [FIPS Self-Service Help Guides and Videos - Skills Development Scotland](#)

Q8.2. Can I update Expected Claim Dates and Expected End Dates on FIPS?

A8.2 Yes, to help improve financial controls FIPS introduced a function for those individuals following a Summary of Achievement Record (SOAR) Payment Plan whereby a provider can amend Expected Claim Dates and Expected End Dates (for those with a status of Available to Claim) within the Individual Payment Plan editable grid of the assignment.

For individuals following a **Quarterly Progress Review (QPR)** Payment Plan, the Individual Payment Plan Expected Claim Dates and Expected End Date fields are now locked. The Provider can only amend the Expected End Date for an individual by updating this within the Training Details tab within FIPS when this is required.

Please refer to the guidance for assignment type re-entrant.

[fips-quick-start-guide-amending-expected-claim-dates.pdf](#)

Q8.3 When should I update the expected milestone dates in FIPS?

A8.3 If an assignment has a **SOAR payment plan** and the expected end date has been amended due to how the Apprentice is progressing, the expected claim date of each milestone (unit achievement) should also be amended to reflect the Apprentice progress or delivery model. You are required to update the expected achievement dates and end dates on FIPS.

If an assignment has a **QPR payment plan** you must adhere to all the mandatory requirements set out in the MA Conditions and Specification.

If you are unable to do this or conduct a review within the 8-week window, due to a delay, a claim cannot be submitted and must be declined unless exceptional circumstances exist.

If exceptional circumstances exist to explain the delay, you may apply to your Contract Executive for approval to allow the claim to be submitted. In such circumstances approval must be obtained in writing (email) from us before making the claim. If this is approved, the reason for and the duration of the delay must be captured on the next APR. You are required to update the expected end dates on FIPS if appropriate

Where a candidate will achieve the full Apprenticeship early, you are required to update the expected end date on FIPS. The remaining milestones will be automatically adjusted on FIPS in accordance with the new end date entered.

Where a candidate will achieve the full apprenticeship later than originally anticipated, and where all milestones have been claimed, the progress reviews with the Apprentice are still expected to be conducted and completed fully, documenting any change to end dates or apprentice/employer details.

End of Section 8.

9. Leaving Codes

Q9.1 If an Apprentice leaves the MA programme without completing, I sometimes struggle to find the most appropriate leaving codes, can you offer guidance?

A9.1 The MA leaving codes were reviewed and updated for 21/22 to offer more clarity for providers and ensure consistency across the other programmes within the apprenticeship family. We recognise that circumstances vary so we have provided some examples below to illustrate the most appropriate options. **If you are unsure of other codes, please contact your SIA in the first instance to discuss.** Please see examples below.

Example	Main Leaving Code	Sub Leaving Code
Not employed status due to Self-Employment	Employed	Self Employed
MA experiencing mental health related issues	Personal and Health issues	Health issues
Inactivity	Difficulties with Course/attendance	Not achieving in line with training plan
Paid off or terminated due to lack of work	Unemployed	End of Employment Contract
Change of job role	Difficulties with course	Course no longer relates to plans

End of Section 9.