In confidence

SIMS Technical Roadmap

Lancashire County Council

EDUCATION DIGITAL SERVICES

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1 Introduction

The purpose of this guide is to provide customers with a detailed overview of any software and hardware infrastructure they might need to run the SIMS Product suite. It has been developed in line with customer feedback to enable Local Authorities, Support Teams, Schools and Academies to effectively plan their future support of SIMS.

This document is based on information provided by ESS in their Annual SIMS Technical Roadmap and has been reviewed by them in January 2025. It provides schools with an overview of what changes we expect in 2025 and upcoming months.
Please Note: LCC Education Digital Services is not responsible for the SIMS Technical Roadmap, and this could be subject to change at any time by ESS however, we hope that this document helps you understand and prepare for up-and-coming changes.

If you have any questions or need support from your LCC Education Digital Services SIMS support team, please don't hesitate to contact us.

Date	Changes Made	Updated by	Next planned review date
19/03/2025	• Updated release date for SOLUS 3.12.86	T Jones	
15/12/2024	• Standard updates to SQL and SQL Server Support	T Jones	
24/06/2024	• Interim update to extend support for SOLUS version 3.12.72	T Jones	Autumn 2024
10/10/2023	• Inclusion of support for Windows Server 2022 • Inclusion of support for SQL Server 2022 • Inclusion of support for MS Office 2021 LTSC / O365	T Jones	
19/12/2022	• Inclusion of support for SQL2019 • Recommendations around SQLExpress	T Jones	Summer 2023
13/06/2022	• Previous Technical Updates	P Featherstone	-
15/11/2021	Clarification on SQL Versions	P Featherstone	Spring 2022
01/11/2021	Simplifying .NET Framework, Office, and SQL versions. Addition of SIMS Connected details.	P Featherstone	Spring 2022

2   What support is ending in the next 12 months?

2.1   Roadmap Key Code

Not supported by ESS

Support is provided only where the additional conditions are met
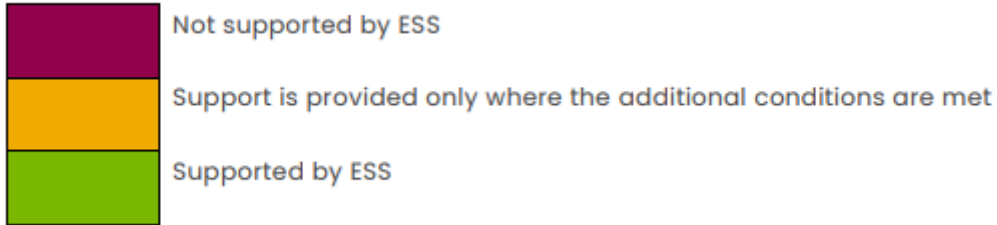
Supported by ESS

2.2   What does the red 'Not supported by ESS' indicator mean?

'Not supported by ESS' means that they are either no longer testing their software on the stated platform or have not finished testing the software on the stated platform. This does not necessarily mean that the software will not work on the stated platform, but it does mean that ESS will be unable to support any issue raised by customers. For the most robust SIMS experience, ESS advise all customers to keep to a supported platform.
LCC Education Digital Services will only support schools that are on supported software.

2.3   What does the yellow indicator mean?

Technologies marked as yellow are either considerations for future support or considerations for retirement of a technology. Typically, where a new technology is supported, an older version of the technology is retired so that ESS is testing the same number of overall technologies and platform scenarios.

3 A Typical School

The following information is provided to run SIMS and FMS in most typical schools. These components on the server would include SQL, Document Management Server, SIMS Services Manager (SSM), InTouch, and SOLUS3. Separate sections for other products such as TeacherApp are covered later in this document. If you are unsure about any of these specifications, then please contact the Education Digital Services Service Desk.

3.1 Minimum Hardware Specification Guidance

Component	Requirement
SIMS Server	
Computer and Processor	Quad Core processor or higher is recommended for optimum performance. A minimum of four v-cores should be assigned to virtual servers.
Memory (minimum recommended)	8GB or higher (16GB+ recommended for optimum performance). If a virtual server is in use, this should be statically assigned memory, not dynamically.
Disk space guidance #	We appreciate that each school will have different server configurations and setups, so we feel it's best to advise on the disk requirements for each separate element that is needed to run our software. It will then be for the server administrator to decide on what requirements are needed for their setup given the following advice: **SQL Server Requirement** We estimate as a minimum that you should allow 150Gb for all SQL databases required for your setup. **File Share Requirement** Please allow 10-20GB for the SIMS Applications and Setups folder. **SOLUS3 Repository** There is an ability to clear down the SOLUS3 repository so sizes in use in schools will vary, we advise customers should allow for 10Gb of storage space **Docstorage Requirement** For the Docstorage drive, this will vary so greatly by customer, we therefore advise schools should consider 50Gb as minimum. **General Guidance** If a virtual server is in use, then the virtual hard drive files should be statically sized.
Drive	We no longer send software out on physical media, however, ISO mounting software if not supported by server OS is required for software installation.
Display	1280x720 or higher monitor resolution.
Backup of whole system required?	Yes. You are reminded that it is critical that backups are moved to an alternative media on a daily basis, i.e. that one is kept in a physically separate place from the server that is backed up. Customers need to ensure that they have a disaster recovery plan (DRP). This includes where they will source a replacement server and what they will do whilst the system is down. The DRP is only worthwhile if, on a termly basis, the backups are restored to another machine and proven to work. SIMS data backups stored offsite must be stored in an encrypted format. ESS recommends Redstor Backup Professional software for the backup of SIMS. SIMS and Backup Professional are fully integrated to provide seamless, offsite backup for SIMS data. If using Redstor Backup Professional to backup and protect SIMS, you will need to ensure that you have enough disk space available on the server or workstation. The free space available on the device needs to be 150% of the amount of SIMS data (i.e. if you have 1GB of SIMS data, you will need 1.5GB of free disk space). If using other solutions by other providers, it is essential that you work with those service providers to ensure the backups are GDPR compliant.
Other information	It is not recommended that servers be used normally as workstations except in small schools. Non-dedicated servers are unlikely to be suitable with more than five concurrent users of SIMS. ESS recommends the purchase of a dedicated database server (not used for other domain roles in the school) where there are 20 or more concurrent users, or where the network server is of a low specification. A whole school network will almost certainly require a dedicated database server. The use of Lesson Monitor and/or Assessment Manager in each classroom usually means that a dedicated database server running a Full SQL Server edition of Standard or higher is required. Internet access is required. SOLUS details can be found in KB0023674 – SOLUS3 – What ports or URLs does SOLUS3 use?

SIMS Workstation	
Computer and processor	Quad Core 2.4GHz processor or higher recommended for optimum performance.
Memory (minimum recommended)	8Gb or higher for main SIMS machines. 4GB is acceptable for a casual SIMS use machine.
Disk space guidance #	Workstations will need 1.5GB free including 500MB on system partition for third-party components in the Windows directory. Workstations using FMS should allow for an additional 150MB.
Display	1280x720 (1280x1024 or higher for optimum experience).
Operating system and software	Operating System — 32-bit and 64-bit versions of Windows 10 Pro. The PC will require a minimum of Microsoft .NET Framework 4.7.2 to be present. From the Autumn 2022 release of SIMS7, if the minimum .NET Framework of 4.7.2 is not met, SIMS will not load and the user will be prompted to install it as required. Software — Microsoft Office 2016 or later. Adobe Acrobat Standard and Adobe Acrobat Pro, At present we do not support Adobe Document Cloud.
Other	Internet access is required. For information surrounding Font sizing and Display resolution please see KB0023886 - Font sizes in SIMS are too small / Recommend display scaling settings

Disk space guidance does not include the generic 15-25% hard drive space to be free for the general and smooth running of servers/workstations.

Please note: For a SIMS Workstation, Education Digital Services recommends 16Gb RAM reflecting the additional requirements of Microsoft SQL 2019 and additional processes.

4 Detailed Roadmap

4.1 SIMS Software Support

System	Autumn 2024	Spring 2025	Summer 2025	Autumn 2025	Spring 2026	Summer 2026	Additional Notes	
Server Operation System								
Windows Server 2012	🟥	🟥	🟥	🟥	🟥	🟥	Microsoft Security Support End Date: 10/10/2023.	ESS will only support Windows Server where the Desktop Experience (GUI) is installed. We do not support servers where only the Core installation has been carried out.
Windows Server 2012 R2	🟥	🟥	🟥	🟥	🟥	🟥		
Windows Server 2016	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	Microsoft Security Support End Date: 12/01/2027.	
Windows Server 2019	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	Microsoft Security Support End Date: 09/01/2029.	
Windows Server 2022	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	Microsoft Security Support End Date: 14/10/2031	
Workstation Operation System								
Windows 10 Pro (32 / 64 bit)	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	Supported as long as the instance is still supported by Microsoft and is not obsolete.	
Windows 11	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	Only with compatible SQL versions, please see Microsoft for full details.	
SOLUS3								
SOLUS 3.12.72	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟥	🟥	🟥	Support extended to include Summer 25 release	
SOLUS 3.12.86	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	Planned Release 4th April	
Microsoft Office								
Office 2016	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩			
Office 2019	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩			
Office 2021 LTSC	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩		Office 2021 LTSC supported from Spring 2024 where the application is locally installed.	
Office 365	🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧		ESS recognises that a local installation of Office applications under the O365 license takes place in schools. While our testing does not cover this scenario specifically, we continue to monitor any difficulties schools may raise via the Service Desk. Integration with O365 is supported provided the applications are locally installed.	

4.2   SIMS Next Gen

It is critical that schools manage their users in a secure way. This provides advice to schools on best practices for authentication and security for Next Gen.

It is important that SIMS Next Gen users are managed in a safe and secure way. Identity and authentication is the foundation of security, and needs to be robust and well managed.

Check your SIMS server meets the minimum hardware and software requirements

Please ensure that your SIMS server meets our minimum requirements, as summarised in the table below:

Computer and processor	A Quad Core 2.4GHz processor or higher is recommended for optimum performance.
Memory (RAM)	8Gb minimum or higher is recommended for optimum performance.
Disk space guidance	A minimum of 5Gb free disk space on the System partition (C: drive). The data drive should have at least 25% free disk space to allow for smooth upgrades and backups.
SQL	Minimum SQL Version 2016. Maximum SQL Version 2022.
Other requirements	It is not recommended that servers are used as workstations except in small schools. Non-dedicated servers are unlikely to be suitable with more than five concurrent users of SIMS. ESS recommends the purchase of a dedicated database server (not used for other domain roles in the school) where there are 20 or more concurrent users, or where the network server is of a low specification. A whole school network will almost certainly require a dedicated database server.
Ongoing Use	The server or workstation where SIMS Services Manager is installed should be kept running at all times, except for scheduled maintenance. Where this computer needs to be shut down for an extended holiday period, schools should ensure it is switched on at least 24 hours before the school term resumes.

Recommendations and considerations

We propose the following recommendations and considerations:

- **All users must be provided with named individual user accounts**; shared accounts must be prohibited.
- Single-Sign-On integration with the organisational identity provider is highly recommended (e.g. Microsoft, Google, et al).
- **Multi-Factor-Authentication (MFA) should be enabled for all users.**
- "Passwordless" technologies should be adopted where possible.
- **Any passwords must meet sufficient security standards**, e.g.:
  - Contain at least 10 alphanumeric characters.
  - Contain both upper and lower case letters.
  - Contain at least one number (e.g., **0-9**).
  - Contain at least one special character (e.g., **! $ % ^ & * ( ) _ + | ~ - = \ ` { } [ ] : " ; ' < > ? , /**).
- Passphrases should be used rather than passwords; passphrases consist of multiple words or a sentence.
- **Passwords must never be written down or shared.**
- All systems with distinct accounts must have different passwords; i.e., **do not use the same password across several systems.**
- **Make sure to operate an effective onboarding-offboarding process** to safely manage access.
- Do not use personal accounts for corporate systems, and vice-versa.
- **Use of a password manager is highly recommended** (this should be approved and managed by your organisation).
- **Subscribe to some form of breach notification service**, such as HaveIBeenPwned.

Best practices for passwords

Never reveal your password, whether verbally, in email, chat messaging, or any other communication. There should be no reason whatsoever to share your password. Passwords are confidential information and must be treated as such. Nobody should ask for your password.

If the security of an account is ever in question, the password must be reset as soon as possible, and audit logs reviewed to confirm or deny malicious activity. When resetting an account, consider any account recovery channels that might have been tampered with, and terminate any existing logon sessions where possible.

> **NOTE: SIMS-ID is protected by best-in-class account takeover technologies, unique to the industry. We take exhaustive measures to protect your accounts from bad actors.**

Ultimately, customers (end users) are responsible for the security of their own accounts. This guidance will help to ensure that only authorised individuals gain access to information systems.

4.3 SIMS SQL Support

System	Autumn 2024	Spring 2025	Summer 2025	Autumn 2025	Spring 2026	Summer 2026	Additional Notes
							Not supported by ESS (maroon) **Support provided only where the additional conditions are met** (orange) **Supported by ESS** (green)
SQL Server Details							
SQL Server 2012 (SP4) (KB4018073) – 11.0.7001.0	orange	orange	maroon	maroon	maroon	maroon	SP4 Extended Security Update End Date 08/07/2025 (not applicable to Express Versions)
SQL Server 2014 (SP3) (KB4583462) – 12.0.6433.1	orange	orange	maroon				Microsoft Security Support End Date: 09/07/2024 – As indicated previously, support for SQL Server 2014 will cease as per the Summer 2025 release.
SQL Server 2016 (SP3) (KB5003279) – 13.0.6300.2	green	green	green	green	green	maroon	Microsoft Security Support End Date: 14/07/2026 Customers are recommended to set the SIMS database to use compatibility mode 110 for maximum performance
SQL Server 2017	maroon	maroon	maroon	maroon	maroon	maroon	Although available, schools are recommended to install SQL2016 and set the SIMS database to compatibility level 110 for SQL2012
SQL Server 2019 (RTM-CU16) – 15.0.4223.1	green	green	green	green	green	green	Microsoft Security Support End Date: 8/1/2030 Customers are recommended to set the SIMS database to use compatibility mode 110 for maximum performance Includes support for enabling enforced encryption for SQL Connections
SQL Server 2022	green	green	green	green	green	green	Microsoft Security Support End Date: 11/01/2033 Customers are recommended to set the SIMS database to use compatibility mode 110 for maximum performance

Additional notes on Microsoft Extended Support arrangements

These versions of SQL are considered outside of the Microsoft mainstream support however we will endeavour to support on the grounds that schools have an extended support agreement with Microsoft.

What about SQL Express Editions

SQL Express is a license-free version of SQL. Express additions are supported except where the instance of SQL is in extended support as indicated in the above table. Please refer to Microsoft's guidance for full details.

SQL Express Edition

SQLExpress cannot be used as a database server if the database size exceeds 10Gb, and is **not** recommended if any of the following are true:

- Number of users is greater than twenty
- School intends to make extensive use of InTouch
- The customer wishes to take advantage of database servers that have more than one CPU or more than four cores

4.4 Microsoft .NET Framework Support

The version of .NET Framework supported by each server or workstation operating system will vary and it is best that the most recent guidance and advice is retrieved from the following page on the Microsoft Website: https://learn.microsoft.com/en-us/dotnet/framework/get-started/system-requirements

Headline versions that will impact SIMS users can be outlined as follows:

- Windows 10 requires .Net 4.7.2 or later
- Windows 11 requires .Net 4.8.1 or later

If the minimum .Net Framework of 4.7.2 is not met, SIMS 7 will not load and the user may be prompted to install it as required.

LDAP Signing and Channel Binding Requirements
Microsoft is not enforcing LDAP Signing and Channel Binding Changes as outlined in the Microsoft KB:
https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/help/4520412/2020-ldap-channel-binding-and-ldap-signing-requirements-for-windows

4.5   SQL Compatibility Mode

ESS are aware of some customers experiencing issues with performance when running SQL2016 in its native mode. Following guidance and direction from the EPG group, if you are experiencing this, we recommend changing the compatibility level to 110 within SQL Management Studio. Please contact Education Digital Services for more information.

4.6   TLS Requirements

ESS' suite of products support TLS 1.2.

4.7   Azure SQL

ESS are aware that some schools have subscriptions in Azure, but ESS do not support SIMS in an Azure SQL Managed Instance or as an Azure SQL Database.

5 Additional Information for the TeacherApp

TeacherApp require SIMS Services Manager to be running on a server with a minimum version of .NET Framework 4.7.2.

iPad – Requires iPadOS 9.0 or later

6 SIMS Online Solutions Browser Support (not native Apps)

For the best experience of using SIMS connected, ESS recommends the use of the latest version of SIMS Online Solutions Browser Support (not native Apps)

System	Chrome	Internet Explorer*	Firefox	Safari	Edge	Phone Size Browser	Tablet Size Browser	Additional Notes
Options Online	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	
SchoolView	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	
SIMS Parent, SIMS Student	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	
SIMS Finance	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	
FMS Hub	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	To ensure secure access, HMRC Fraud Prevention Headers works best with Edge, ESS does not support Internet Explorer.
Hosted Discover via .xbap application	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	Please see the additional information below
SIMS Services Manager (SSM)	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	

6.1 Discover and SQL Compact Edition

When installing Discover, some elements of SQL Compact Edition (SQLCE) 3.5 were originally installed and used. This version of SQLCE is no longer supported by Microsoft. For the SIMS Summer 2022 installation files of Discover, ESS have removed the use of the legacy SQLCE 3.5 files. This, therefore, means that customers can re-install Discover without SQLCE 3.5 files.

Please ensure you understand the following three scenarios:

If you are using SQL 2012 Express
Your SIMS, FMS, and Discover installation is not supported if you are using SQL 2012 Express
If you are using SQL 2012 Licenced with ESU in place
If you choose to re-install Discover on your SQL 2012 instance, SIMS and Discover will not successfully transfer data between the systems. If you wish to continue to use Discover you can:
- Remain on SQL 2012 and your current Discover installation and accept the risk of SQLCE 3.5 files being used. ESS **cannot** be responsible for any data issues or breaches, this risk has to be accepted by the school
- Consider updating your SQL version that is running SIMS and Discover to SQL 2014 or later and re-install Discover

If you are using SQL 2014 or later
Reinstalling Discover to have an installation without the SQLCE 3.5 files present works on SQL2014 (Licensed and Express) and later

7 SIMS Parent and Student App

ESS support the following versions of operating systems;

- Android OS version 7 -14 only. All previous versions are no longer supported, and any device operating on the older versions will not receive further updates.

- For Apple, ESS support version iOS 11 onwards.

On the server where SIMS Services Manager is installed to exchange data between the solutions, .NET framework 4.7.2 is required as a minimum.

8 SIMS.net Version Statement

In line with the terms and conditions of the SIMS Annual Maintenance and Contract ESS will support the current and previous version of SIMS.

Where applicable the terms below will apply:

8.1 Ensure that Main Releases, Software Updates and corrections are installed by the Locations as soon as practical and always within a timescale that will ensure that only the most recent version or the immediately preceding version are in use at any time. ESS retains the right to refuse to accept a support call where older versions are in use.

The support services do not include:

8.1.1   Diagnosis or rectification of problems associated with the other systems, software, or equipment of the Customer or any third party.

8.1.2   Rectification of any defects or errors resulting from modifications to the Software and / or Hosted Services by any person other than ESS.

8.1.3   Remedial action required to any version of the Software other than the most recent Main Release patched to include all subsequent Updates or all but the most recent Update.

8.1.4   Fixes required to any version of the Software other than the most recent Main Release patched to include all subsequent Updates including the most recent Update.