SIMS

SIMS Technical Roadmap

DRAFT November 2021

Contents

Introduction

Thank you for your viewing of this updated SIMS Technical Roadmap. The November 2021 version of the document has updates covering the following topics:

- SQL2012 support - Microsoft have extended their support of SQL2012 to July 2025, ESS recognise that a proportion of our customers will only have SQL2012 licences and upgrading comes at a cost. We have therefore decided to extend the support of SQL2012 SP4 with all the security patches applied up to and including the Spring 2025 release of SIMS.
- .NET Version Support – We have made 4.7.2 a minimum version now for many of our products.
- Windows 11 – With the introduction of this version from October 2021, ESS will plan to support this on the Summer 2022 release of SIMS
- SIMS Connected

The information included within this document is subject to change and will be reviewed every six months.

Date	Changes Made	Updated by	Next planned review date
01/11/2021	Simplifying .NET Framework, Office and SQL versions. Addition of SIMS Connected details.	P Featherstone	Spring 2022
03/06/2021	Update to Browser Support in relation to the FMS Hub	P Featherstone	Autumn 2021
04/05/2021	Update to .NET Framework, LDAP, TLS, SOLUS3, SQL updates, Parent and Student App	P Featherstone	Autumn 2021
06/03/2020	Update to hosted SLG status, hosted SIMS and Chromebook support and Office 2019 testing outcomes	P Featherstone	September 2020
25/09/2019	Updates made to screen resolution, partnership exchange, hosted SIMS and SOLUS	P Featherstone	May 2020
17/04/2019	Updates to all areas and inclusion of minimum hardware details previously held in a separate document	P Featherstone	September 2019

Roadmap Key Code

- Not supported by ESS

- Will be confirmed in a future release of the Technical Roadmap

- Supported by ESS

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

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

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.

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 Partnership Exchange or TeacherApp are covered later in this document. If you are unsure about any of these specifications, then please contact your SIMS Service Desk.

Minimum Hardware Specification Guidance

Component	Requirement
SIMS Server	
Computer and Processor	Quad Core processor or higher 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 in Secondary schools). 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 to 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 on ensuring the backups are GDPR compliant.
Other information	It is not recommended that servers are 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 KB0046733.
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 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.
	Software — Microsoft Office 2016 or later. Adobe Reader DC or above.
Other	Internet access is required.

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

SIMS Software Support

System	Spring 2022	Summer 2022	Autumn 2022	Spring 2023	Summer 2023	Autumn 2023		Additional Notes
Server Operation System								
Windows Server 2012	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	Microsoft Extended 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	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	Microsoft Extended Support End Date: 10/10/2023	
Windows Server 2016	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Microsoft Extended Support End Date: 12/01/2027	
Windows Server 2019	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Microsoft Extended Support End Date: 09/01/2029	
SQL Server Details								
SQL Server 2012 (SP4-GDR) (KB4583465) - 11.0.7507.2	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	SP4 Microsoft Extended Security Update 08/07/2025	
SQL Server 2014 (SP3-GDR) (KB4583463) - 12.0.6164.21	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	Microsoft Extended Support End Date: 09/07/2024	
SQL Server 2016	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	Microsoft Service Pack Support End Date: 09/01/2018	
SQL Server 2016 SP1	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	Microsoft Service Pack Support End Date: 09/07/2019	
SQL Server 2016 (SP2-CU17) (KB5001092) - 13.0.5888.11	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Microsoft Extended Support End Date: 14/07/2026	
SQL Server 2017	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	Although available, schools are recommended to install SQL2016 in compatibility mode (for SQL2012).	
SQL Server 2019	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗		
Workstation Operation System								
Windows 8.1	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	ESS stopped support on the Summer 2021 release	
Windows 10 Pro (32 / 64 bit)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Microsoft Support End Date 14/10/2025	
Windows 11	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
SOLUS3								
SOLUS 3.1250	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	URLS in SOLUS 3.1250 ceased on 15th October 2021, schools	
SOLUS 3.1259	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Microsoft Office								
Office 2010	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	ESS stopped support on the Summer 2020 release	
Office 2013 SP1	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	ESS recognise that a local install of Office applications under the 0365 licence 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.	
Office 2016	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Office 2019	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		

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://docs.microsoft.com/en-us/dotnet/framework/get-started/system-requirements. Headline versions that will impact SIMS users can be outlined as follows:

System	4.7.2	4.8	Additional Notes
Server Operating Systems			
Windows Server 2012	✅	✅	4.5.1 is preinstalled, later versions installed separately
Windows Server 2016	✅	✅	4.6.2 is preinstalled, later versions installed separately
Windows Server 2019	✅	✅	4.7.2 is preinstalled but not necessarily enabled
Workstation Operating Systems			
Windows 8.1	✅	✅	Windows 8.1 is not supported on the SIMS Summer 2021 version and onwards
Windows 10	✅	✅	
Windows 11	❌	✅	Add when we will support Windows 11 from (see previous page)

LDAP Signing and Channel Binding requirements

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

SQL Compatibility Mode

We are aware that some customers experience issues with performance when running SQL2016 in it`s native mode. Following on guidance and direction from the EPG group, if you are experiencing this, we recommend changing the compatibility level to 110 within SQL Server Management Studio. We have made KB0036825 available for more information.

TLS requirements

Our suite of products support TLS 1.2, which is backwards compatible with TLS 1.0.

Azure SQL

We are aware that some schools and support units have subscriptions in Azure, we do not support SIMS in an Azure SQL Managed Instance or as an Azure SQL Database.

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.

Additional Information for the Document Management Server

While the SIMS Document Management Server Service works on earlier versions of .NET Framework, we recommend that a minimum of 4.7.2 is now used.

SIMS Partnership Exchange

Version 6 of the ZIS application works on Server 2012 R2 and SQL 2014 where IIS version 8 is activated with Version 6 compatibility mode enabled.

Hosted SIMS

For the best experience of using the Hosted SIMS service we recommend that for client access you use:

- Microsoft Remote Desktop App 8.1 or later (Mac, Android)
- Microsoft Remote Desktop client for Windows 8.1 or later
- Internet Explorer (IE11 is recommended)
- Google Chrome (latest version) is supported, but feedback suggests that it does not provide the best user experience with repeated downloads of the RDP clients.

For the 3rd Party VPN Connector we currently use OpenVPN

System	April 2019	October 2019	Additional Notes
Version 2.3.2	■	■	
Version 2.3.3	■	■	We support the 3rd Party VPN Connector on version 2.4.6 or higher.
Version 2.4.6	■	■	
Version 2.4.7	■	■	

Chromebook support on Hosted SIMS

We now support newer versions of Chromebooks when using Windows RDP Client from the Playstore. At the time of publication we are satisfied that we are in a position where we can support Chromebooks on Chrome OS Version 79.0.3945.86 and Windows RDP Application Version 8.1.76.413. We know that customers will find easier ways to connect a Chromebook to Hosted SIMS and we would love to know about this. Please contact paul.featherstone@educationsoftwaresolutions.co.uk with any of your feedback.

Initial Setup Video: https://youtu.be/erHuCGHgYrY
Connecting after initial setup Video: https://youtu.be/t3NjAvi0j4k
How To Documentation: KB0026422

Chromebook Support Notes

Though we will support Chromebooks accessing Hosted SIMS on supported versions of the Chrome Operating System and Remote desktop clients. We will only be able to provide best endeavours support to any issues that we determine to be environmental. This includes but not withstands, accessing file structures, printing to both local and network printers.

Chromebook Supported Operating System and Applications

Given how Chromebooks are updated, we will be performing routine checks to ensure that our test environment is on the latest version of both the Chrome Operating System and the RDP applications. Please see KB0027191 for versions of the Chrome Operating System Hosted SIMS has been tested on.

NEW - SIMS Connected

For the best experience of using SIMS Connected we recommend that you use IE11, however the latest versions of Chrome, Safari, Firefox or Microsoft Edge are also supported and compatible. Your browser must support HTML5 and the .pdf format must be supported to enable printing on any printer connected to the device.

SIMS Connected is accessible from Windows or Mac OS machines, iOS or Android tablets and Chromebooks without any additional software requirements.

For the 3rd Party VPN Connector we currently use OpenVPN

System	April 2019	October 2019	Additional Notes
Version 2.3.2	🟥	🟥	
Version 2.3.3	🟩	🟥	We support the 3rd Party VPN Connector on version 2.4.6 or higher.
Version 2.4.6	🟩	🟩	
Version 2.4.7	🟥	🟩	

SIMS Online Solutions Browser Support (not native Apps)

System	Chrome	Internet Explorer*	Firefox	Safari	Edge	Phone Size Browser	Tablet Size Browser	Additional Notes
SIMS Activities	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	
Options Online	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	
SIMS Pay	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	
SchoolView	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	The online services may work against these systems marked as red, but are not tested against them, hence no support.
SIMS Parent, SIMS Student	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	
SIMS Homework	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	*From June 2022, support for Internet Explorer will end.
SIMS Primary	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	
SIMS Finance	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	
FMS Hub	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	To ensure secure access, HMRC Fraud Prevention Headers works best with Edge, ESS does not support Internet Explorer.

SIMS Parent and Student App

We support the latest and previous versions of Android and iOS operating systems upon which our applications are installed. 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.

SIMS.net (core) Version Statement

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

Contracts, the customer shall:

b) 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;