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SIMS Primary FAQ's

SIMS Primary FAQs for SIMS Support Units (SSUs)

SIMS has been a hugely successful management information system (MIS) in schools for many years. Now, developments in the way software is built, delivered and used by customers mean we have decided to release SIMS Primary, a browser-based, hosted management information system with the power to transform the way schools use data. SIMS Primary is a solution for the future.

SIMS Primary Software

Q1: Why have you decided to build SIMS Primary now?
A: The time is right. We have considered offering a web-based MIS for several years, but it is only recently that the technology and infrastructure is available to support it. The very latest browser technology can provide schools with the same level of functionality and responsiveness as a client-server MIS. The provision of much more robust access to the internet in most areas ensures almost 100% availability of the software.

Q2: I've also heard about "SIMS 8". What's the difference?
A: There is no difference! "SIMS 8" is the project name we have been using during the early stages of development and we have referred to the new version of SIMS as "SIMS 8" in discussions with stakeholders which is why you will have heard the name. As we get closer to launching the new version of SIMS to Primary Schools (in the first instance), we have changed the name to SIMS Primary.

Q3: What are the key benefits of SIMS Primary?
A: Different schools will have different reasons for choosing SIMS Primary but the main benefits can be summarised as:

- An evolution of SIMS – the system you know and trust, made even better.
- Ease of use, with minimum set-up required, especially for classroom teachers.
- Simple reporting with powerful analysis to drive informed decision making and interventions to improve pupil outcomes.

The software has a much improved user interface, with intuitive navigation, similar to technology like smart phones and popular and responsive websites. Processes are slicker and information is easier to understand and find. In addition, SIMS Primary is accessible from any computer or tablet device; backing up data is automatic; upgrades are managed centrally and the technological infrastructure to support the system is consequently minimised, saving IT management time and money.

Q4: Will SIMS Primary do everything that current SIMS does?
A: At the top level, all the functional areas in SIMS have been replicated in SIMS Primary - e.g. Assessment, Behaviour/Achievement, Attendance, SEN, and Statutory Returns etc. However, we want SIMS Primary to improve on SIMS rather than simply replicating what the system does now. As a result, we have been consulting with users on the SIMS Primary pilot programme on the detail of which features of SIMS they find invaluable, which they no longer use and also what additional

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functions they would like to see. It is possible that some of the least used features from SIMS may not be available in SIMS Primary but there will also be numerous new features that SIMS does not currently offer.

Q5: How much will SIMS Primary cost?
A: We recently finalised the price for SIMS Primary. Existing SIMS schools and SIMS Support Units considering joining the 2017 pilot of SIMS Primary, prior to general availability in early 2018 should contact their Account Manager for further details. Schools will be able to make savings in IT infrastructure as a SIMS server will no longer be required in the school. Additionally, schools will not have to concern themselves with the cost and inconvenience of undertaking software upgrades or backups. There will be no charge for data transfer on upgrade.

Q6: What about SIMS Learning Gateway? How will this work with SIMS Primary?
A: The SIMS Learning Gateway product is currently being replaced by the new SIMS Parent and Pupil apps which will make equivalent (and more) data available to parents and pupils. The new Parent and Pupil apps will link into SIMS Primary in due course so parents and pupils can see important data that helps drive parental engagement and pupil achievement directly on their smart phones.

Q7: What about partner products? How will they work with SIMS Primary?
A: We are committed to our partner programme as we know many of the products our partners supply are crucial tools for our customers. For this reason, we are consulting with our partners so they can make the necessary adjustments to their products and ensure they will be compatible with SIMS Primary when it becomes available. Partners can connect their product to SIMS Primary via a suite of APIs that are available to registered partners We will provide further detail in due course in relation to the range of products that are compatible with SIMS Primary.

Q8: FMS is currently a separate database and needs its own server in the school. Will this become web based and hosted too?
A: SIMS Primary links to Capita's FMS finance software, so key personnel data such as salary commitments are passed to the finance solution. FMS can remain on a server on school premises or be hosted by Capita. We are currently producing a new cloud based finance solution for schools and school groups and will announce further detail in due course. SIMS Primary will link to the new finance solution so key staffing data is shared for budgeting and forecasting

Q9: Schools are paying annual entitlement for SIMS, how will that money be used?
A: We are retaining our commitment to current SIMS until the end of the changeover period to SIMS Primary. Annual entitlement fees will ensure that any changes as a result of government policy, new statutory return requirements or compliance issues will be reflected in the SIMS software. Annual entitlement charges also cover support from our service desk and addressing any significant bugs or issues with SIMS. There is no date after which SIMS will not be supported and we have no plans to announce such a 'sunset' date in the near future.

Q10: A school is thinking of buying SIMS products like SIMS InTouch, SIMS Agora, SIMS Activities, SIMS Parent, Student or Teacher apps. Should they wait for SIMS Primary?

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A: Any additional SIMS products a school purchases will be updated to work with SIMS Primary or be replaced with equivalent functionality when they move to the new system. Therefore, there is no advantage in waiting for SIMS Primary to be launched to take advantage of the additional functionality these products offer today.

Timescales and Roadmap

Q11: When will schools be able to buy SIMS Primary?
A: Following close work with a range of pilot schools throughout 2017, our current plans are to release SIMS Primary for all Primary schools early in 2018.

Q12: When will I be able to see a demonstration of SIMS Primary?
A: We will be releasing short videos demonstrating selected features of SIMS Primary to those signed up to receive our updates throughout the year. Live demonstrations of SIMS Primary will be available in the autumn term through your account manager or our sales team.

Q13: Where can I get the latest SIMS Primary Roadmap?
A: A SIMS Primary Roadmap document is available in the SIMS Primary Knowledge Hub on My Account.

Q14: What about the availability of a new version of SIMS for secondary schools?
A: We are already building a new generation of secondary school solutions to deal with Options, Examinations, Staff Cover and Timetabling. The first of these is Options which is already in pilot with some schools, and will work with the current and next generation of SIMS. We will be able to reveal new software for the other components over the course of the next 18 months which will eventually result in the availability of a completely new, cloud based SIMS for secondary schools.

Q15: We support an Independent school – what about them?
A: For preparatory and junior schools we hope to be able to make a version available in the near future as these schools have less demanding requirements than independent senior schools. For the latter type of schools we will be developing new versions of Options, Cover, Timetabling, Examinations and Fees Billing, which means that the availability of a new solution for this type of school will begin to emerge in around 18 months' time.

Q16: When will SIMS Primary be available for special schools?
A: Depending on the age of the children involved and the requirements of the school, special schools may need to wait until the required functionality is present. For those special schools dealing with primary age pupils only, it is likely that they will be able to make use of SIMS Primary.

Q17: We support a MAT and have both primary and secondary schools in our trust. What options are available to them?
A: MATs with a mixed economy of primary and secondary schools may begin to move their primary schools to SIMS Primary on release (or earlier if they become involved in the 2017 pilot) and leave their secondary schools on SIMS until the cloud version for secondary schools is released. They

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may prefer to wait until both primary and secondary school versions are available before moving to the new software although there is no obvious benefit in doing this.

Q18: Many of our schools use Dinner Money. When will this be available?
A: We currently anticipate that Dinner Money functionality will be complete in Q4 2017.

Q19: We use B2B to exchange data between the LA and schools. Does this work with SIMS Primary?
A: For the period of the SIMS Primary pilot in 2017, SIMS Primary communicates with Capita One using B2B Open (http://www.capita-one.co.uk/downloads/b2b-open-student-process-guidance). SIMS Primary will produce a B2B Open file that can be consumed by Capita One. For general market availability the fully automated integration with One B2B student will be available.

Data Transfer

Q20: How will you move the data from current SIMS to SIMS Primary? Will any data be lost on the move?
A: The move of the data is automated and controlled via an SSU web portal. It is possible to transfer the vast majority of a school's data into the SIMS Primary system – even locally designed data fields. However, given the wide spectrum of SIMS usage, some schools may be required to move some data themselves. In this instance we will provide support documentation to coincide with the launch of SIMS Primary to help make this process as simple as possible and make it clear what data is and is not transferred. You will be able to review your data in SIMS Primary with your schools before electing to 'go live' and you will be presented with data reports to show how successful a data transfer has been, with any issues that require correction or investigation being highlighted.

Q21: Will a school's data reports be transferred over to SIMS Primary?
A: One area that has been significantly enhanced in SIMS Primary is the area of data reporting and a completely new approach that provides interactive data dashboards, a library of 'drillable' reports and a new 'ad-hoc' drag-and-drop report designer will benefit schools. Unfortunately, the difference between the new system and the current system means that it is not possible to transfer a school's current data reports to the new software. Schools will find it easy to create the vast majority of their reports in the new SIMS Primary software. Alternatively, Capita's Professional Services team will be happy to help manage the creation of new reports in SIMS Primary.

Q22: Will bespoke Assessment materials be transferred over to SIMS Primary?
A: Yes - however with some important caveats. The migration process will ensure that all active school-defined internal assessments such as aspects, templates or PoS schemes, and most importantly all associated pupil results, will be brought across. However as the underlying data structures within SIMS Primary are very different, there will be requirement to interact with some of these migrated items before being able to use them within SIMS Primary.

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- Scheme related information will migrate and be available to use straight away.

- Aspects created in a school, along with linked mark ranges, grade sets, comments etc. and all associated pupil results will be moved into SIMS Primary. Additional 'intelligence' will need to be added to any aspects that schools want to continue using and a wizard will be provided to guide users through the process. Once complete, any upgraded aspects can then be called into new marksheets and used within all analysis and reporting tools.

- Marksheets will migrate for data viewing purposes only. The formula creation functionality has been completely overhauled to offer a more powerful and intuitive solution to schools, as a result any formulas within migrated Marksheets will NOT be operational. Schools wishing to replicate these marksheets will need to re-create them using the more efficient template creation and formula editing tools. The new improved template creation and formula process will ensure this is a much quicker and straightforward task, even for those who have not used SIMS assessment before. SSUs may also wish to assist schools in creating new templates, further guidance on this area will be provided in the data transfer training materials.

- Analysis grids - will NOT be migrated. SIMS Primary offers a more intuitive analysis solution that includes a varied selection of built in reports geared to work off of our assessments or yours.

Q23: Will schools be able to go back to SIMS if they do not like SIMS Primary?
A: A school's old SIMS system can stay in the school for reference purposes, although it will have a screen watermark to try to ensure nobody uses it as the 'live' system. Once they have gone live on SIMS Primary if they decide to use SIMS at any point, data entered into SIMS Primary will need to be re-entered in SIMS. However we are confident that schools who move to SIMS Primary will not be eager to go back to the older version of SIMS.

Q24: What happens to a school's SIMS data after they have moved to SIMS Primary?
A: When the school has transferred to SIMS Primary and is using it as their operational MIS, they can still login to their legacy SIMS system. However, they will be presented with a 'watermark' to indicate that this is no longer their live SIMS system and be informed that any data entered here will not be reflected in SIMS Primary. This instance of SIMS can be kept as a reference copy if required by the school or the data could be backed up and archived and SIMS can be uninstalled.

Running a SIMS Primary Pilot

Q25: How do you intend to work with schools to help you pilot SIMS Primary?
A: We are working closely with SSUs to agree a selected group of schools to pilot the new SIMS software. If you are interested having some of your schools join our pilot programme then you should email Gareth Owen at gareth.owen@capita.co.uk.

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Q26: What materials are available to help me plan a SIMS Primary Pilot with my schools?
A: We are developing a toolkit for SSUs to use with their schools to help plan the implementation of SIMS Primary. These materials will build on our own experience with pilot schools, and will include documents such as a 'Pilot Programme Checklist', 'Things to Consider and Lessons Learned' etc. These documents are now available in the Resource Hub on My Account.

Q27: Is there a limit to the number of schools that we can pilot SIMS Primary with?
A: SSUs are entitled to deploy a number of schools for a SIMS Primary pilot at existing annual entitlement rates until 31st March 2018 based on the scale shown below. Should you wish to pilot the SIMS Primary software with more schools than this please raise the request with your Account Manager.

Band	Schools
A (75 schools)	1
B (76-300 schools)	2
C (301-625 schools)	3
D (626-900 schools)	4
E (>900 schools)	5

Training and Support on SIMS Primary

Q28: Will school staff need to be retrained to use SIMS Primary?
A: We have worked very closely with schools on the development of SIMS Primary to make ease of use one of the main benefits of the new solution. School staff will enjoy using the modern, bright and fresh interface. Our research with pilot schools shows that they found the software highly intuitive and little training was needed for teachers to complete their core business processes such as taking the register, adding assessment marks, entering behaviour and achievement data for pupils, or looking up information such as parent contact numbers. Where we have made improvements that have resulted in the software being significantly different to the current version of SIMS, or added completely new areas of functionality, then some training is bound to be beneficial and we will be offering familiarisation materials and training courses to ensure schools make the most of their investment in the new software.

Q29: We run lots of training courses on SIMS today. How will this work with SIMS Primary?
A: SIMS Primary offers new potential for SSUs in considering approaches to training, including the possibility of training course delegates to work on their own school's data. Our Professional Services team are currently devising a range of new courses with new approaches, including online delivery to aid familiarisation for key roles in schools based around themes such as assessment, safeguarding, SEN, etc. Similarly, SIMS Primary 'Train the Trainer' materials are being developed for 'Data Migration', 'Statutory Returns', 'preparing for a New School Year', and so on. We are still

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investigating the most effective way to provide SIMS Primary training environments, training data and supporting materials to SSUs and will publish more information on this in due course.

Q30: How will you release new versions of SIMS Primary and tell us what features are in them?
A: SIMS Primary will change the way SIMS is released to schools. Currently SIMS is released to schools three times a year. During the pilot period SIMS Primary is being updated every two weeks, and each update contains a range of new features, smaller enhancements and some bug fixes. We intend to maintain a regular schedule of updates similar to this. Information is provided to users about the contents of each new update. Where SSUs would wish to familiarise themselves with major new areas of functionality before live release to schools we envisage a process by which early release can be made to Support Unit tenants only to allow this to happen.

Q31: Is it possible for us to access the data for all the schools we support?
A: Yes. An SSU user must have the correct access credentials and must have been invited to be a user of the system by the school concerned. They can then access any number of school data sets individually. In this scenario the user is presented with a dropdown of schools to which they have access when logging in. Selecting a school will allow the user to access that individual school database.

Q32: Is it possible to take a copy of a SIMS Primary database for support?
A: No. SSUs could access the live school database using the method described above to investigate any data issues or to observe the behaviour of the software for reporting issues and bugs. Capita support has a range of tools with which to investigate such issues with the permission of the schools. Clearly, the need to send data to Capita for investigation is removed with SIMS Primary.

Q33: Is it possible for an SSU to restore a school backup?
A: This is not possible and is a service that needs to be requested from Capita support.

Q34: What do schools need to have in place to use SIMS Primary?
A: SIMS Primary is web-based software so it will run on any computer or tablet connected to the internet, anytime, anywhere. Schools on the pilot only need to have an internet connection and a computer that uses Microsoft Internet Explorer 11 or higher or Chrome. We will add Firefox and Safari support on release.

Q35: If all the student data is held offsite will it be secure?
A: The security of data is generally improved with the move to a hosted solution as there is no longer a need for sensitive information to leave the system as secure access to SIMS Primary will be possible from any computer. The responsibility for backing up and storing backup disks safely is managed centrally and therefore more robust procedures can be followed – including, for most schools, much improved physical security. More detail of the security, data protection, privacy and hosting approaches are available on request.

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Q36: Can you provide further detail about security, back-up, resilience etc?

A: Capita takes the security and availability of the data in SIMS Primary very seriously – it is our number one priority. The SIMS Primary solution architecture has been subjected to an ongoing and thorough security review. A range of techniques have been used to design a system that is as secure as possible with mitigations in place for a wide range of different threats and security risks. The combined use of the highly secure data centre facilities and platforms provided my Microsoft Azure, regular external penetration testing and threat modelling, failover provision and commitments to guaranteed uptime mean you can be confident that SIMS Primary is secure. We will publish final uptime service levels on release of the software. Backups are taken multiple times per day and are held for a rolling 30 days. The capability to restore from backup is regularly tested. For more information on the technical architecture of SIMS Primary, please see the 'Technical Guide to SIMS Primary' on the My Account Resource Hub.

Q37: How is access to SIMS Primary controlled?

A: Access to SIMS Primary is managed through SIMS ID, which itself confers a number of benefits to schools. Please see http://www.capita-sims.co.uk/support-and-services/sims-id for more information. User credentials can be linked to O365, Google or other account types, and a safe and secure SIMS ID login is generated for each member of staff and pupil. The solution also offers full support for Local Active Directory account provisioning. Once access has been granted, availability of features and access to certain screens is controlled by role based permissions set up within the system Management areas of SIMS Primary.

Q38: Will schools have a choice over where the data will be stored?

A: No. The solution is hosted in the Microsoft Azure cloud, which is a market leading hosted services platform with the highest levels of security, reliability and 'up-time'. All data is stored within the European Union and held in such a way as to fully comply with the requirements as a data controller under the UK Data Protection Act and the forthcoming General Data Protection Regulation changes coming into force in 2018. Full details of Capita's cloud services for schools, certification statements and service and support commitments are lodged with the DfE and are available here: http://www.capita-sims.co.uk/campaigns/cloud-software-services-schools

Q39: Can schools access data when the internet connection goes down?

A: No, the system requires a connection to the internet to work. However an intermittent internet connection is now becoming a thing of the past as the UK's infrastructure improves to support our increasingly 'always online' culture. We are hopeful that when SIMS Primary is launched, even schools in the most challenging rural areas will have a reliable internet connection.

Q40: If the data in SIMS Primary is not held in the school is it 'their' data?

A: Any data that a school records on their pupils is 'their' data and therefore they are responsible for it in the same way they would be if it was held in school. In Data Protection parlance, Capita SIMS is the 'data processor' and the school is the 'data controller'.

Q41: How fast do you expect schools to move over to SIMS Primary?

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A: The speed at which schools move over to SIMS Primary will be decided by SSUs working in partnership with their schools. There is no suggestion of withdrawal of support for current SIMS to encourage schools to move. We want schools to adopt SIMS Primary because they can see the benefits of moving and using the new software.

Q42: What are the internet bandwidth requirements for SIMS Primary?
A: We are continuing to review the internet connection requirements throughout the pilot period and looking at performance in pilot schools. Our in initial testing has shown that a minimum of 2Mbps download and 1Mbps upload speed for a single user should be available. Approximately 300k download and 150k upload should be available for each concurrent user, dependant on usage. For example, it you think 10 users will be accessing SIMS at the same time, then you should have a minimum of 3Mbps for accessing SIMS Primary. Remember, if the school are using this connection for other things, like teachers and students browsing the Internet, you will need to have enough bandwidth for this as well.

Q43: How does the development of SIMS Primary tie in with the DfE proposals for central data exchange?
A: We are working with the DfE along with other suppliers on this project and will be able to comment further when the DfE proposals are better understood and more formally agreed.

Q44: Is there a SIMS Primary Fair Usage Policy?
A: During the period of pilot operation we are not limiting access or usage and will be using feedback and metrics from the pilot schools to understand in more detail how schools access and make use of the application. Consequently, we do not anticipate instituting a usage policy that would penalise those schools that wish to make heavy use of the system to support effective school management.

Q45: Where are the Census and CTF files stored?
A: When generated, these files are stored in the SIMS Primary document store from where schools can select them and then choose to 'Save As' in a new location, before sending them on to other destinations.

Q46: Will SIMS Primary be GDPR compliant?
A: We are reviewing the GDPR guidelines and have been working with colleagues at the Information Commissioner's Office to understand the impact of the proposed new legislation on our systems. We will be able to make more detailed commentary available in due course in relation to how SIMS Primary helps meet obligations imposed by the GDPR.

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