Management Information Systems (MIS) & Financial Accounting Systems (FAS) Guidance for Maintained Schools

Contents

All acronyms are explained in Appendix 1.

Introduction

Maintained schools have been provided with SIMS and FMS through a Local Authority (LA) contract. Schools have paid for SIMS and FMS via de-delegation, as agreed by the Schools Funding Forum. This has been a long-established arrangement. However, the LA contract ends on 31 March 2024, and ESS are moving away from LA contracts to direct contracts with schools.

We are also aware that over the last 1-2 years, some maintained schools have opted to move away from SIMS to an alternative MIS provider. The MIS market is therefore splintering in Kent, and some schools are currently paying for two systems, which is not a sustainable position for stretched school budgets. With this backdrop schools need to make their own decision about what they pay for.

Going forward schools will hold their own contracts with MIS and FAS suppliers, and there will not be an LA contract so there will be no further de-delegation in this area.

We are not telling you which system to buy or recommending one system over another. There is no 'right answer' as it will depend on the needs and size of your school, and your own preferences. Instead, we are presenting information on licences and support, routes to market, and arranging demos with suppliers, to enable you to make the decision that's right for your school.

We have focused our work on the three market leaders: SIMS, Arbor and Bromcom. We have done this because they have a proven track record, they have experience of working with high volumes of schools to migrate data, they are all accessible to buy via the KCS Framework (see Routes to Market section) and they can be supported by Cantium and The Education People (see table below in the Options section). There are other providers are available, and more information on the full range of providers is available on the gov.uk website: [Choosing a school management information system (MIS) - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)](#)

Working Group

In Spring 2022, we agreed to set up a working group with maintained schools to look at systems and suppliers so we could pull together information to support and inform your decision making about suppliers and future contracts from April 2024.

The working group, made up of a range of school types, and with a range of MIS and FAS experience, has met several times since autumn 2022 and we have surveyed schools, seen demos from the main suppliers, and have gathered responses to key questions arising from those. The working group have a variety of differing views about their preference going forward which reiterates the fact that there is no 'right answer'.

Outside of the working group, KCC, Cantium and The Education People have been working with suppliers to negotiate the best possible prices for Kent maintained schools, to explore different licencing and support models, and seeking advice about the best route to market for procurement of the different systems.

Options

All three systems meet schools' core requirements, and all three MIS systems fulfil schools' statutory obligations e.g., school census. We believe the FAS systems also fulfil KCC's financial management controls (we have established this for FMS and Bromcom, however at this point in time we still need to see the Arbor finance system).

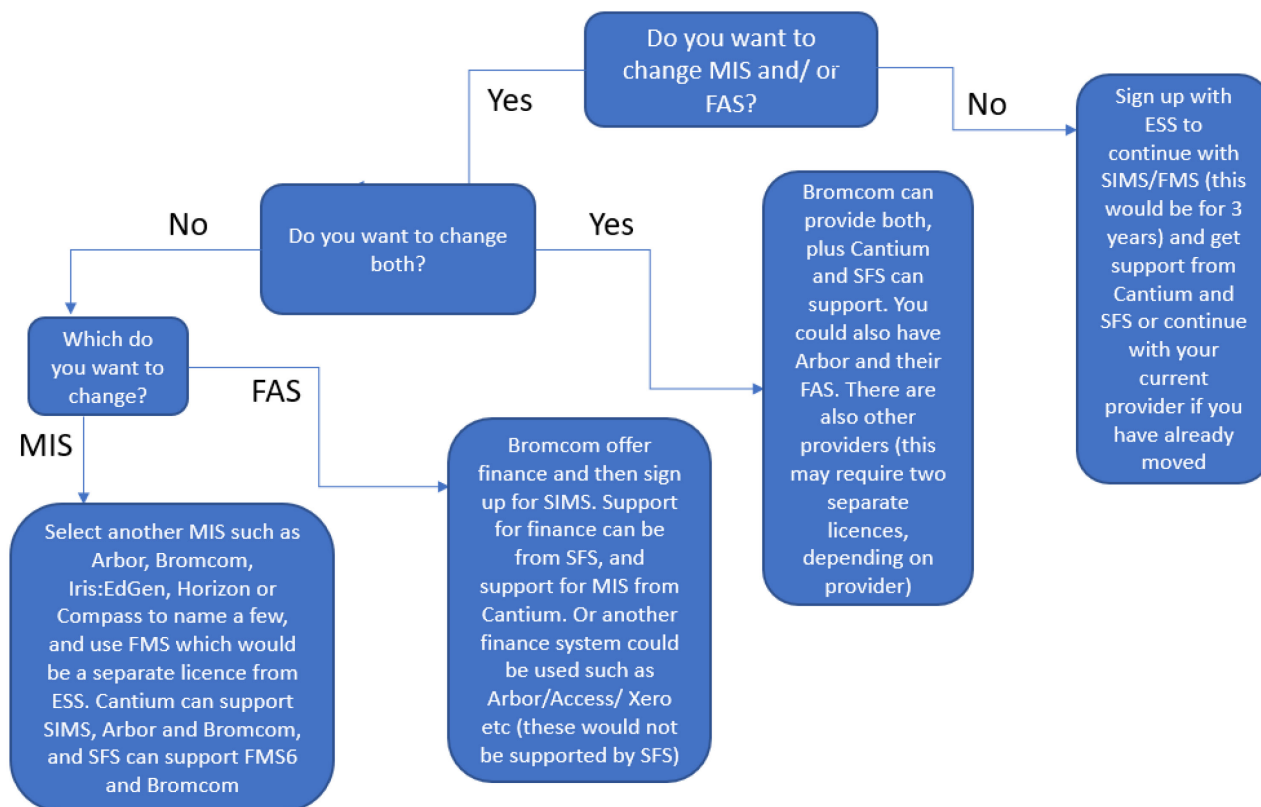All 3 main providers are offering 3-year contracts.

<u>Summary Table</u>

Supplier	MIS	Supported by Cantium?	FAS	Supported by Schools Financial Services (TEP)?	MIS/FAS Integration?
Arbor	✓	✓	✓	✗*	?
Bromcom	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
SIMS	✓	✓"	✓	✓	✓

* Arbor have announced their purchase of RM Finance on 12th June 2023, which is now known as Arbor Finance. At this time we have not had the opportunity to review this system and therefore Schools Financial Services (SFS) are currently not able to support the system in time for implementation in April 2024. SFS support for this will be considered in the future but won't be in place for the 2024-25 financial year.

"Cantium can support the current version of SIMS, but ESS will support early adopters across the UK of the Next Gen slices until usage is established. Once the system is 'settled', support units will support schools.

Decision Making Flow Diagram

Do you want to change MIS and/ or FAS?

Yes

No — Sign up with ESS to continue with SIMS/FMS (this would be for 3 years) and get support from Cantium and SFS or continue with your current provider if you have already moved

Do you want to change both?

No

Yes — Bromcom can provide both, plus Cantium and SFS can support. You could also have Arbor and their FAS. There are also other providers (this may require two separate licences, depending on provider)

Which do you want to change?

MIS — Select another MIS such as Arbor, Bromcom, Iris:EdGen, Horizon or Compass to name a few, and use FMS which would be a separate licence from ESS. Cantium can support SIMS, Arbor and Bromcom, and SFS can support FMS6 and Bromcom

FAS — Bromcom offer finance and then sign up for SIMS. Support for finance can be from SFS, and support for MIS from Cantium. Or another finance system could be used such as Arbor/Access/ Xero etc (these would not be supported by SFS)

To see the impact of your decision on required licences, please refer to the table in the Purchase Models section below.

Route to Market

Schools need to meet procurement requirements, i.e., three quotes or use of an approved framework. We recommend Kent Commercial Services (KCS) framework (it is DfE approved). There are other frameworks available but **the best prices we have negotiated are only available through the KCS framework**. These are significantly cheaper than the suppliers' standard pricing models. Your use of the KCS framework does not negate your responsibility to obtain governing body approval for spends over a certain limit. We recommend that you check your finance policy to ensure that you are following the correct procedures.

The KCS Framework allows for direct award, placing an order with any capable supplier awarded on the framework, without re-opening competition, following the criteria set out below. Regulation 33(8)(a) of the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 (PCR 2015) sets out the criteria for making a direct award where a framework is concluded with more than one supplier:

- All the terms governing the provision of the works, services and supplies concerned are set out in the framework, and
- The objective conditions for determining which of the suppliers on the framework shall perform them are set out in the procurement documents. In accordance with the above regulation, direct award orders may be placed under this framework provided the customer can meet any **one** of the following objective conditions:

  o Customer is satisfied that, following their own due diligence, they can identify the supplier that offers best value for their requirement.
  o The supplier is able to supply the required goods/services within the customers timescales.
  o The supplier scored the highest mark for price/quality in the framework evaluation.
  o Goods/services required are unique/exclusive to one vendor/supplier.
  o Continuity of existing goods/services from an awarded supplier

If you want to use a system that isn't available via the KCS website you will need to follow your schools' usual procurement approach and associated governance (usually obtaining three quotes).

Purchase models

Arbor: Use KCS Framework to procure through Cantium for your licence and MIS support
Bromcom: Use KCS Framework to procure through Cantium for your licence and MIS support (Financial support from SFS would be separate)
SIMS/FMS: Use KCS Framework to procure **licence direct from ESS**, with nominated purchased support from Cantium and SFS (in line with **current support models**).

Provider	MIS Licence	FAS Licence
ESS (SIMS)	Procured directly from ESS. This licence allows schools use of SIMS core modules. Other modules might be extra cost e.g., InTouch/ Dinner Money/ Lesson Monitor	FMS6 is included in the ESS SIMS licence.
Arbor	Procured through Cantium to access preferential price. Perform Licence included.	Arbor have just acquired an FAS. This is not currently part of our negotiated pricing model.
Bromcom	Procured through Cantium to access preferential prices. Bromcom one stop shop licence included.	Bromcom have a FAS module that is included in the Bromcom MIS licence.

<u>Prices</u>

We have negotiated the best possible pricing for the main providers, but these are still being finalised. The pricing could also be dependent on the number of schools choosing a particular provider. This makes general pricing difficult to put in this document. For a quote tailored to your school please contact accountmanagement@cantium.solutions with the following information;

- Number on roll at May 23 census
- School Name and DfE number
- Which supplier(s)

<u>Licence considerations</u>

- If a maintained school has an agreement with ESS and they convert to an academy they would lose this pricing and would need to enter into another agreement. With Arbor you would not have to take out a new contract unless you joined a MAT that already had a discounted agreement with Arbor. With Bromcom, if a school becomes an academy, the intention is that the contract is novated across with the school with no change to the agreed pricing and terms.
- All licences will be subject to yearly inflation related price rises.
- All agreements are a minimum of 3 years.
- Pricing for the subsequent years, after this initial 3-year term, is not guaranteed.

Considerations if changing Financial Accounting System

If your school decides to move away from FMS6 then the following considerations should be given:

<u>Statutory requirements</u>

- Monthly VAT returns to KCC are currently automated
- Closedown and Six Month Statutory reports will still be required by the LA. They are:
    - o Income and Expenditure
    - o KCC Manual Reconciliation
    - o Unreconciled transaction listing
- Chart of Accounts - The chart of accounts will need to match and be compatible with the Consistent Financial Reporting (CFR) regulations as set out by the Education and Skills Funding Agency Consistent financial reporting framework 2023 to 2024 - Introduction - Guidance - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)
- Transfer of Balances - Any transferring balance will need to be evidenced and confirmed by the Returns and Compliance team – ideally the figure from the Outturn report should be used
- Access to historic FMS data - For records management purposes, access to 6 years + current will be needed Records management – KELSI

- Schools will need to obtain a "read only" database of FMS6 from ESS in readiness for transferring from one system to another

<u>System Support</u>

- Currently system support is provided by SFS (through the purchase of the Core Financial Support Package), consideration would need to be given to where this support would come from if you move to another system.
- System support would cover such things as:
  - General FAS enquires, for example: VAT queries on your new FAS system, having a balance on a FAS report where you shouldn't and needing help to clear it or payment run issues
  - Detailed guidance packs – Healthcheck and Closedown guidance
- If you currently purchase Bursarial support from SFS then due consideration needs to be given where that support will come from with a different system.
- As per the table on page 3, SFS will be supporting Bromcom Finance from 1 April 2024 and therefore all of the above will be supported in the same way as FMS6.

Next Steps and Timescales

We understand that if you are considering changing your MIS and/or FAS, you will want to see a demo of your preferred system and find out more. Please check your email inbox for invitations from suppliers and Cantium, and linked are included below. ***Please use the links to join and/or register.*** Each of the 3 suppliers will be running 2 demonstrations as follows:

<u>Arbor</u>

20th June 1.30pm [Introduction demo](#)
22nd June 9.30am [Deep dive demo](#)

<u>Bromcom</u>

26th June 10-12pm https://events.teams.microsoft.com/event/dbccd1fe-e545-4da4-8fea-a500f6bdeebe@3a9f4f27-83da-43ab-b7fa-e201f9f71643

5th July 2-4pm https://events.teams.microsoft.com/event/e216e9ac-d3e9-417b-a5b4-7a0ac98d2cf4@3a9f4f27-83da-43ab-b7fa-e201f9f71643

<u>ESS</u>

3rd July [ESS SIMS session - Monday 3rd July 3pm to 5pm](#)

4th July [ESS SIMS session - Tuesday 4th July 10am to 12pm](#)

Contact Details

MIS questions, support models and to access supplier demos
Mark Hodges – accountmanagement@cantium.solutions

FAS questions and support models
Emma Baldock – schoolsfinancialservices@theeducationpeople.org

Your Intentions

We need to know schools' intentions so that we can work with suppliers to plan for possible migrations if your decision is to move away from SIMS and/or FMS6.

Please complete this form by the end of July 2023. This is an indication; it is not a binding decision. You can change your mind later.

We will be back in touch with you at the start of the autumn term.

Appendix 1 - Acronyms explained

SIMS – School Information Management System

FMS6 – Financial Management System 6 (finance software)

FAS – Generic term for Financial Accounting System

ESS – Education Software Solutions – owners of SIMS and FMS6

KCS – Kent Commercial Services

TEP – The Education People

SFS – Schools Financial Services

KCC – Kent County Council

LA – Local Authority

MIS – Management Information System

Appendix 2 - Frequently Asked Questions

1. **Will there be two migration dates for the schools that choose Bromcom? One for the MiS which may be earlier and one for the finance system for the new financial year?**

   That will be partly the decision of the school. The FAS will be migrated for the new financial year 2024-25. For the MIS we anticipate Bromcom would be able to facilitate an early migration and still ensure schools are only paying for one MIS. Schools would need to engage with both Cantium/ SFS (for the licence and support) and Bromcom as the provider who manages the migration with the school.

2. **Is there a price for the licences that don't include Cantium support?**

   The best price available to schools has been negotiated via the KCS framework and includes Cantium support. Schools can go direct to suppliers for licence costs, however we foresee the cost being greater than coming direct to Cantium.

3. **If we already use Arbor can we come into the Cantium 'fold' once the group contracts are in place?**

   As long as the school is a maintained school Arbor have said that you can transfer onto the KCS/ Cantium pricing at an appropriate billing point.

4. **Will the new companies be able to provide the reports for Pupil Premium Pupils and Free School Meals Pupils?**

   Yes

5. **Can governors attend demos or will school have an edited version for governors?**

   Governors, Headteachers, Network Managers and finance staff can all attend the demos with dates as outlined in the document.

6. **Is there a place we can compare prices of all these systems?**

   This information will be provided to schools on an individual basis, please contact accountmanagement@cantium.solutions to request the estimated quotes.

7. **Will all MIS support Wonde, CPOMS & Insight?**

   The MIS providers support a range of integrations so that other systems can utilise the data. For a full list of integrations we recommend that schools check the providers websites as there are too many to list here. Also on the demos schools will have the opportunity to ask questions about their own specific 3rd party apps that may need supporting.

8. **What happens if you do not go with one of the financial packages you list as there are others on the market - is there SFS support still and does this incur greater charges from SFS?**

    From April 2024 SFS will provide support for FMS6 and Bromcom Finance. If you choose another finance package then SFS will be unable to support you at this time.

9. **We have moved to Arbor MIS and still have 2 years left, could we use Bromcom finance system?**

    Yes this is possible, however we would need to contact Bromcom directly to obtain a price on a school by school basis.

10. **Can you keep the current finance system (FMS6) but change MIS supplier?**

    Yes, you would need two licences in place for this: one from ESS for a SIMs licence (which is the cheapest way to buy a licence for FMS6) and a second for your chose MIS system.

11. **Does SFS intend to be able to support Arbor finance model in the future?**

    Unfortunately we will be unable to support Arbor Finance from April 2024, however this is something we will review in time.

12. **Should we move to a different FAS provider, will we have 'read access' to FMS to support answering any queries?**

    You will need to ensure you have access to a "read only" version of your FMS database. It is the responsibility of the school to obtain this from ESS.

13. **Where can we find the list of 5 conditions to be met when using a framework?**

    Direct award orders may be placed under this framework agreement provided the customer can meet any one of the following objective conditions:

    - Customer is satisfied that, following their own due diligence, they can identify the supplier that offers best value for their requirement
    - The supplier is able to supply the required goods/services within the customers timescales
    - The supplier scored the highest mark for price/quality in the framework agreement evaluation
    - Goods/services required are unique/exclusive to one vendor/supplier
    - Continuity of existing goods/services from an awarded supplier

14. **Arbor has three package levels which is the best level to go into?**

    The KCS framework price provides schools with the Perform package, plus Cantium support. This is one of the top licences and allows you to have numerous modules such as communication and payments, along with many more. Obviously, you don't have to 'turn on' all the modules at go live. You can adopt a phased approach. Maybe as other subscriptions for modules like

communications expire with other suppliers you can migrate that service to the MIS, if that is what the school wants to do.

15. Can academies use the KCS framework?

Any school can use the KCS framework, but academies can't access preferential pricing for SIMS through the framework. Arbor don't make a distinction between Maintained and Academy schools, and neither do Bromcom.

16. Is FMS being discontinued?

ESS have assured us that FMS will continue to be updated by ESS in the future and will not be "withdrawn".

17. Is FMS being replaced by ESS?

We recommend attending the ESS demo to find out more. ESS plan for FMS to be replaced by Next Gen Finance.

18. Arbor don't have a timetabling module. Is that right?

You can do timetable work within Arbor such as move a teacher, lesson, room, but doing any sort of timetable creation has to be done in another application. Arbor integrates with Timetabler (https://www.timetabler.com/) and TES Timetabling (formerly known as Edval-https://www.edval.education/?lang=uk), **but not** NOVA T6. Bromcom do have a timetable module called e-timetabler.

19. Can the other systems do exams?

Both Bromcom and Arbor have an exams module.

20. Do the systems allow for safeguarding to be recorded?

This very much depends on how you want to record safeguarding in the MIS and the work flows you want to follow. They have sections for you to track safeguarding, but some have different ways e.g., in some systems you can record the issue and upload a document, whereas in others you have body maps integrated with documentation upload and areas to record incidents.

21. Do these MIS systems replace other 'add-ons' we have like a separate communication package?

With Arbor and Bromcom there is the potential to reduce subscriptions for other services because they have the relevant module built in. A good example is the communication modules. Both Arbor and Bromcom allow schools to send emails, print letters and send SMS messages (SMS messages have an extra cost attached for the messages themselves). They both also have an app that schools can 'push' messages out to users. SIMS requires either a separate subscription to something like Parentmail (or equivalent) or purchasing Intouch, as well as ParentApp being extra

as well. These modules do the job well, but they are not exact replacements. The in-built modules don't usually have the enhanced functionality of a standalone product either.

22. What do we do if we don't want the extra ESS modules such as Lesson Monitor or Dinner Money as we want to change MIS?

As the school contracts directly with ESS for additional modules the school will need to give the requisite notice to ESS for these modules.

23. Can I move to a new MIS early?

Yes, you can move early, however the providers prefer you to have a signed agreement in place with Cantium from 1st April 2024 onwards, giving them confidence that you are committed to the decision.