

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) about LSC audit of e-learning in Train to Gain for 2008/09

### INDIVIDUAL LEARNING AGREEMENTS

Q1 Is it possible to collect Learning Agreements electronically with digital 'signatures' of workplace candidates obtained from tablet PCs?

A *This is not an effective approach to confirming learner existence and eligibility. A paper copy of the learning agreement (which may be combined with an enrolment form) must be signed on behalf of the provider and by the learner as compliance evidence to support a funding claim. Any learning agreement or enrolment form completed online or electronically by the learner should if necessary, be printed out by the provider and posted to the learner's home address. It should then be signed and returned in the post by the learner. Experience has shown this to be an effective means of preventing ineligible funding returns or claims to the LSC.*

(See ILR Funding Compliance Advice and Audit Guidance for Providers (Final Version 2008), paragraphs 36, 38, 41, 43 and 44)

Q2 Do Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) and amendments to ILPs also need signatures on paper copies?

A *One paper copy of an ILP signed by the learner must be available for audit (see above). In return, both internal and external auditors will be more willing to accept all other audit evidence electronically once assured that providers have systems in place to demonstrate that 'learners are who they say they are' and providers are behaving with propriety.*

(Keith Standing, LSC Funding and Eligibility Manager, Funding Implementation Team, National LSC, in October 2008)

Q3 Why would an auditor think that a signature on paper is more reliable than an iris scan or face recognition?

*Register systems need to be proportionate in delivering benefits to providers that offset the costs involved in running these systems. The LSC offers no advice or preference on types of systems, which may be either paper-based or electronic, or a mixture of such systems. Some providers are now examining different processes to assure digital signatures such as face recognition and iris recognition. These processes may be acceptable for situations such as changes to ILPs (see above), but at this stage they are not acceptable as replacements for paper signatures on the ILR and initial Learning Agreement.*

(See ILR Funding Compliance Advice and Audit Guidance for Providers (Final Version 2008), paragraph 44)

### FUNDING CLAIMS

Q4 Can funding claims be made for NVQ underpinning knowledge delivered by e-learning?

A *The same rules apply for e-learning as for distance learning. The LSC is now prepared to allow providers to make the case to the LSC partnership team for permission to claim funding for NVQs delivered by e-learning with certain provisos. Providers can deliver the underpinning knowledge for NVQ in the way that best suits the learner and the employer. It can be included within the 15 hours activity required to support higher level funding in Train to gain. The appropriate funding SLN value should be claimed to reflect the cost incurred in the delivery of the learning programme in accordance with the standard LSC funding methodology. If in doubt this should be discussed with the Local Partnership Team.*

(LSC Funding Guidance 2008/09. Principles, rules and regulations, (Draft Version 4) paragraphs 435 – 437 and paragraphs 528 and 529)

Q5 Can funding claims be made for the higher SLN value of over 15 hours of support using e-learning and if so, what evidence is required?

*Yes, in principle any activity that forms part of the standard LSC definition of GLH apart from assessment and observation can count towards the 15 hours. This can include blended, distance and e-learning, where evidence of suitable provider input has been retained. Providers are encouraged to reasonably balance individual claims for high and low cost learners in order to avoid audit difficulties later in the year. Providers are encouraged to discuss the proportion of lower and higher funded learners with their Local Partnership Team.*

**(LSC Funding Guidance 2008/09. principles, rules and regulations, (Draft Version 4) paragraphs 526 - 532)**

Q6 Can time spent by learners in using workbooks be counted towards the higher SLN value?

*Yes, but only where there is appropriate evidence of supported contact with the learner. The claim should not be based simply on the learning hours stated in the workbook. The learning hours in course materials, whether in a workbook or online vary for each individual, as learners may choose to use only part of the materials. Claims need to take account of additional learner contact time with tutors, mentors, and other facilitators which will vary from individual to individual as they progress through their course at their own speed. Providers should be able to evidence a learner journey with appropriate records of the hours of provider input as agreed in the ILP giving the reason for choosing distance or e-learning. Records should show that work has been completed predominantly during work hours and that it has been reviewed and assessed by a suitably competent person.*

**(Keith Standing, LSC Funding and Eligibility Manager, Funding Implementation Team, National LSC, in October 2008)**

Q7 What does completing distance learning materials 'predominantly during work hours' mean?

*Learners completing distance learning outside their normal shift hours can be included within the 15 hours of support, as long as their learning is supported and managed by the provider. LSC auditors will primarily be looking for auditable evidence of supported learning contact rather than the 'time of day' such support is delivered, as providers are expected to respond as flexibly as possible to their learners' training and educational needs.*

**(See ILR Funding Compliance Advice and Audit Guidance for Providers (Final Version 2008), Annex B paragraph 34 Q12)**

## **ATTENDANCE RECORDS**

Q8 What is eligible as 'documentary evidence' for attendance records on e-learning programmes that needs to be retained by the provider?

A *Wherever possible, LSC auditors seek to place reliance on evidence that is generated by the natural administration of the learning process, within the providers' own systems, provided that evidence is sufficient, relevant, reliable and robust.*

**(See ILR Funding Compliance Advice and Audit Guidance for Providers (Final Version 2008), Annex B, paragraph 7)**

Q9 What are examples of digital evidence for learner attendance that an auditor would find acceptable as 'sufficient, relevant, reliable and robust'?

A *Digital evidence may include:*

- *Recorded outcomes of initial assessment*
- *An online ILP and ILR (with a printed/signed ILP also available)*
- *Records of learner log-ins to an E-portfolio, Virtual Learning Environment or Learning Management System*
- *Records of online activity using learning resources, and other time spent online*
- *Online self-assessments or assignments completed*
- *Registration for the use of offline learning materials (if appropriate)*

- *Online tutor notes forming a narrative of contact with individual learners by email, phone or face-to-face and time spent on each of these. This contact could be for reviewing assessments, resolving difficulties, planning/assessing evidence or providing additional support*
- *Records of attendance at workplace or centre assessment sessions or training workshops*
- *Supplementary paper evidence and portfolios*
- *Interviews with a sample of learners, tutors and assessors*

*Taken together, this evidence provides a full audit trail that can be indicative of the amount of work required to get any learner to complete their course and achieve a qualification. It provides reasonable evidence of support and should be able to be generated through most online tracking systems.*

Q9 Is an exchange of texts between a learner and a tutor evidence of participation?

A *Yes, provided that it forms part of the learning programme and has some recognisable learning or support purpose so that it can be counted as part of a Guided Learning Hour*

*(Keith Standing, LSC Funding and Eligibility Manager, Funding Implementation Team, National LSC, in October 2008)*

## **ACHIEVEMENTS**

Q10 What electronic evidence submitted for assessment should be retained by the provider and for how long?

A *Any electronic evidence as required by the relevant Awarding Body is acceptable but records legally need to be kept for at least 6 years.*

*(Keith Standing, LSC Funding and Eligibility Manager, Funding Implementation Team, National LSC, in October 2008)*

Q11 Is evidence of competence collected via handheld devices and e-portfolio systems acceptable?

A *Assessment evidence gathered through handheld technologies and e-portfolios is acceptable and auditors should have been briefed accordingly.*

*(Keith Standing, LSC Funding and Eligibility Manager, Funding Implementation Team, National LSC, in October 2008)*

## **OTHER**

Q12 Why is e-learning seen as 'high risk' provision by the LSC?

A *It isn't. The LSC does not want to stifle new ventures. High risk only applies to 'distributed and electronic provision' that involves a franchise, sub-contracted or a partner organisation or where a significant number of learners is outside a provider's normal recruitment area. Experience at the LSC shows that this is where most fraudulent claims have arisen in the past.*

*(LSC Funding Guidance 2008/09. principles, rules and regulations, (Draft Version 4) paragraph 333)*