

TIER 4 – FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS PHASE 3: IT SUPPORT - BULK DATA TRANSFER FOR SPONSORS

1. What is the Sponsorship Management System?

The Sponsorship Management System (SMS) is a UK Border Agency IT system that supports you in managing your duties as a sponsor across the Tiers of the Points Based System.

2. How do I access the Sponsorship Management System?

Licensed sponsors can access the system via the UK Border Agency website. Users of the Sponsorship Management System (SMS) will need to be nominated by your Authorising Officer.

Please see the [guidance for sponsor applications](#) for information on how to apply for a sponsor licence and how to request users of the SMS.

3. What is a Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies (CAS)?

A Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies (CAS) is a virtual document linked to a student's details on the Sponsorship Management System by a unique reference number. It confirms that the licensed sponsor has offered a would-be student an unconditional place to study at an educational institution on the [Tier 4 Register of Sponsors](#).

Confirmations of Acceptance for Studies (CAS) will gradually start to be required by the UK Border Agency for Tier 4 applications, and will eventually replace the function of the visa letter currently issued to students applying for entry clearance or leave to remain. For more information, see the Tier 4 [Implementation Plan](#).

4. Who needs a Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies (CAS)?

From the 5th October 2009 Sponsors will be able to issue Confirmations of Acceptance for Studies to would-be non EEA students applying from within the UK, including those switching from another Tier 4 or predecessor route, as part of an application for leave under Tier 4 of the Points Based System. A sponsor may however elect to continue issuing visa letters from this date but from February 2010 the issuing of Visa letters will be phased out and all would be non EEA students will require a Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies. For more information please see the Tier 4 [Implementation Plan](#).

5. What is Bulk Data Transfer?

Bulk Data Transfer (also known as BDT) is a facility that will allow you (the sponsor) to transfer data in bulk from your local student record IT system to the Sponsorship Management System (SMS). Three Bulk Data Transfer functionalities will be available when Confirmations of Acceptance for Studies (CAS) are introduced in October 2009: bulk data upload, bulk data export and bulk data reporting.

6. What is a bulk data upload?

Bulk data upload is the function of the Sponsorship Management System (SMS) that allows an authorised logged-on user of the SMS to upload a XML file from your own internal system to pre-populate all of the fields required to create Confirmations of Acceptance for Studies (CAS). The

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upload does not automatically create CAS, it only removes the need to manually enter the data needed to create CAS individually. Following data upload you are then required to enter payment details into the SMS which must then be confirmed before a CAS number is issued.

7. What is a bulk data export?

Bulk data export is the function of the Sponsorship Management System (SMS) that allows you to export Confirmations of Acceptance for Studies (CAS) numbers and the status of the CAS from the SMS, in order for you to provide this data back to your own internal systems. This enables you to update records in your own system with the CAS number that is assigned to them in the SMS. This function also allows you to download a set of CAS data based upon a number of search criteria such as; course / curriculum title, course start / end dates or status of CAS (such as “Assigned” or “Used” for example).”

8. What is bulk data reporting?

There is a duty on registered sponsors to report students who have used a CAS from your institution but who have not enrolled 10 working days after the end of your enrolment period (these students are sometimes referred to as “no-shows”).

Bulk data reporting allows you to fulfil the duty of a sponsor to report student “no shows” by uploading a data file that reports on multiple Confirmations of Acceptance for Studies (CAS) in a single file generated by your own internal systems. If you do not wish to use the bulk data transfer facility to report your student “no shows” then you can still use the SMS to report them on an individual basis.

Please note that other reporting responsibilities, such as reporting students who have ceased their course of study with you are not included as part of the bulk data transfer facility. Therefore, you will also need to report on these activities using the SMS directly on a one by one basis.

9. How does bulk data transfer work?

Files are transferred between your student record IT system/s and the Sponsorship Management System (SMS) across the internet using the Secure Sockets Layer (SSL) protocol. You will have to log into the SMS to facilitate this, the file transfer is not automatic.

10. Is this an interface similar to how some education providers send files to UCAS?

No. This is a facility to upload and export files in a specified format. It is not an automated interface, the upload and export of files will need to be done manually by a logged on user of the Sponsorship Management System.

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11. What format does the information in the Bulk Data Transfer files have to be in?

The data that is transferred between your IT systems and the SMS needs to be in a particular format and structure to transfer successfully. This is outlined in an XML Specification Document (more commonly known as an XSD) which contains the rules and validations that govern how this data needs to be formatted when it leaves your own IT systems or the SMS. The XSD contains two specifications, one for each category of Tier 4: General students and Child students. If the data is not in the correct format then the data will not transfer. This document is available on the UK Border Agency website [here](#).

12. What format do the Bulk Data Transfer files have to be in?

The bulk data is transferred in an Extended Markup Language (XML) data file contained within a compressed ZIP file. The ZIP file has no functional significance and is used solely as a vehicle for data compression. Only XML files are compatible with the bulk data facility, Excel or CSV files are not compatible with the bulk data functionalities.

13. What will happen to the file I attempt to upload if it is rejected?

If the file you attempt to upload contains errors it will be rejected and none of the data will be uploaded on to the Sponsorship Management System (SMS).

14. Why would a file be rejected?

There are numerous reasons why a file could be rejected. These include a file exceeding the maximum number of permitted items (Confirmation of Acceptance of Studies in a batch for example), or containing duplicate records, invalid dates, or incorrectly formatted data such as a UK postcode.

15. Can I send more than one file in a single Bulk Data Transfer?

Bulk data transfer will only process a single data file (single XML file within a single ZIP file) as part of any business operation (whether data upload or download). Any attempt to upload multiple ZIP files or a ZIP file with multiple XML files inside at any one time will be automatically rejected. You can have up to one thousand Confirmations of Acceptance for Studies (CAS) records in a single XML file. You may, however, upload several single zipped XML files in to a batch one at a time; the maximum number of records per batch is 10,000.

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16. Why is the UK Border Agency introducing the bulk data transfer facility?

The Bulk Data Transfer facility has been developed following consultation with the education sector. It will reduce the amount of manual data entry you have to undertake to ensure that all your non-EEA students comply with the requirements to have a Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies (CAS) under Tier 4 and to complete some of your sponsor duties.

17. Why is the Bulk Data Transfer specification being introduced before the Sponsorship Management System (SMS) for Tier 4?

The Bulk Data Transfer facility is not being introduced before the Sponsorship Management System for Tier 4. It will only become available for use when the Sponsorship Management System (SMS) is launched for Tier 4, on the 5th October 2009.

We appreciate that you may need to make changes to your student record IT system/s to ensure they are compatible with the bulk data transfer functionalities. Therefore, we are communicating the bulk data transfer specification now, in the form of the XML Specification Documentation (XSD), to allow a period of time to identify and make any changes that are necessary.

18. Do I have to use the Bulk Data Transfer?

No. There is no requirement to use the Bulk Data Transfer facility. It is being introduced to enable sponsors who anticipate that they will issue large numbers of Confirmation/s of Acceptance of Studies (CAS) to do so more easily than creating them one at a time. Everything that the Bulk Data Transfer facility enables you to do in bulk will be possible for individual Confirmations of Acceptance of Studies (CAS) using the Sponsorship Management System (SMS).

19. I have a problem in applying the XML Specification Document (XSD) to my internal student system, what support is available?

Implementing the XSD may involve changes to your own IT system(s); as such the primary route for implementation enquiries should be your own technical implementation support services.

The UK Border Agency will provide some limited implementation support for enquiries around implementing the bulk data transfer XSD. If your own technical support staff are unable to assist in your enquiry, and it is not addressed in these Frequently Asked Questions, you can email the UK Border Agency at Tier4Enquiries@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk. You should ensure that your email clearly explains the problem you are experiencing and contains 'Bulk Data Transfer implementation toolkit query' in the subject line.

20. Where can I find further information about the SMS?

In support of the launch of the Phase 3 of Tier 4 your Authorizing Officer will have been issued with an "information pack" which also contains an e-learning CD demonstrating how the SMS works for Tier 4; this includes the bulk data transfer functions. Further information is also available on the UK Border Agency website [here](#).