

# ILR top tips

## A short guide for specialist colleges to help complete the ILR successfully

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### 1. Introduction

This guide has been produced by Natspec using information published by the Department for Education (DfE) and the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA). Providers should note that the information may be amended by DfE and/or ESFA at any time and should refer back to the links provided at the end of this document for full details.

All publicly funded education providers must collect and return data about their learners. The further education (FE) and skills sector in England uses the [Individualised Learner Record \(ILR\)](#) to collect data about learners in the sector and the learning undertaken by each of them. The ILR is an electronic data return, submitted to the ESFA, with information about your learners. You must submit your return in accordance with the ILR Specification, which is published every year and is regularly updated mid-year.

For specialist colleges, ILR returns deal with learners aged 16-19 that meet basic eligibility rules for funding, or those learners eligible for funding who are aged 19-24 and who hold an EHC Plan.

Funding through the 16-19 funding formula is per learner, not per qualification, however data is returned for all qualifications a learner undertakes. If a single learner, during the course of one teaching year, benefits from more than one type of funding, then a single learner record should be returned detailing all of the learning aims that they are undertaking.

**It is imperative** to submit accurate data because:

- the ILR is used to calculate funding for your organisation
- Ofsted may use ILR data for pre-inspection analysis of performance
- ILR data contributes to government statistics
- The ILR is used to monitor your delivery against your funding allocations

Your organisation has secure access to communicate with the DfE via this link: [DfE Sign-in \(education.gov.uk\)](https://education.gov.uk)

## 2. The basics: Learner data

Basic information about each learner is required: their Unique Learner Number (ULN), name, address and postcode, ethnicity, sex, etc.

- ULNs can be found via the Learner Records Service if not known: <https://lrs.education.gov.uk/>
- Many learners provide preferred names on enrolment; you must ensure their name on your ILR matches that on their identity documents
- Details such as email address are not mandatory, however if you return permission for email contact it will become a required field
- The learner's date of birth is used to calculate their academic age (their age on 31 August of the funding year) which in turn determines whether they are eligible for 16-19 funding or not.
- Planned learning hours and Employment Enrichment & Pastoral (EEP) Hours are collected annually for all 16-19 funded students and used to determine the number of full-time and part-time students in FE which in turn determines which funding band each student is assigned to. (for best funding for a student, Band 5, above 540 hours should be the target). This is a fundamental part of the 16-19 funding methodology and determines the base rate of funding each student receives. They should be finalised within the funding qualifying period (42 days for most full-time students), however this data is not returned until the first ILR return of the year (December for most providers). They should not be changed after this unless it is to correct errors.

## 3. English and Maths Condition of Funding (CoF): top tips

- Please read the [Condition of Funding Factsheet](#) in addition to the notes below. You can also download the [interactive tool](#) to help you determine whether or not a student meets the condition of funding or not.
- The Condition of Funding does not apply to students on short programmes (less than 150 total hours per year)
- Students with a GCSE grade 3 or D in Maths **must** continue to study GCSE Maths
- Students with a GCSE grade 3 or D in English Language **only must** continue to study GCSE English Language
- Students with a GCSE grade 3 or D in English Literature **only** can continue to study GCSE English, or can study an approved Stepping Stone qualification
- Students with a GCSE grade 3 or D in **both** English Language **and** Literature must continue to study GCSE English
- From academic year 2019 to 2020, students with a grade 2 or below in maths or English can study towards a pass in functional skills level 2 (legacy or reformed) **or** they can still study towards a GCSE grade 9 to 4. Once they have achieved this, there is no requirement to undertake further maths or English qualifications to meet the condition of funding.
- Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), who are assessed as not able to study either GCSE or stepping stone qualification, can be exempted from the CoF - *In this case, in addition to the student's EHC plan, the institution must hold an evidenced assessment*

*that the student is not able to study these subjects. All exemptions must be considered on a case by case basis and re-assess annually. There is no blanket exemption for whole institutions. There are a small number of students who are not able to take any qualifications. These students are exempt from studying qualifications but appropriate literacy and numeracy should still be included in their programme at an appropriate level e.g. RARPA evidence*

- Stepping Stone, GCSE and UK qualifications deemed equivalent to GCSEs for the purposes of the condition of funding can be found in the [Learning Aims Reference System \(LARS\)](#) easily by searching with the "EFA Funding condition – English/Maths qualification validity" filter ticked
- Please check the LARS **regularly** to ensure that the qualifications you are using remain approved each year.

## 4. LDD/High Needs/EHCP fields:

Specialist colleges would normally code all learners as indicating that they have a learning difficulty, disability, or health problem. Of all the disabilities that the learner has, you **must** assign a primary disability.

A learner's High Needs status and whether or not they have an Education Health Care plan is recorded using the learner funding and monitoring (learner FAM) type and codes. The definition of a High Needs student is where the local authority is paying top up funding because it agrees that the support costs are in excess of £6,000.

For High Needs students as defined above, use the Learner FAM type HNS and FAM code 1. Please do not use this field in any other circumstances, as ESFA will adjust your funding allocation if you complete this field incorrectly.

Most, if not all, students in specialist colleges would have this box ticked.

Learner FAM type EHC and code 1 identifies a learner having an education health care plan – most learners in specialist colleges would have an EHC plan and have this box ticked. Only two groups of 19+ students are funded through the 16-19 funding methodology:

- 1) 19+ continuing students (those who started their programme when under the age of 19 and who are continuing the same programme after turning 19)
- 2) 19-24 year olds with an EHCP

## 5. Learning Aims: top tips

All students must have at least one learning aim that either began in the current year, or began in a previous year and has continued into the current year, in order to be valid.

Students can have as many learning aims as are required, but one aim **must** be recorded as their Core Aim (Aim Type 5) – this should be *the substantive learning aim being undertaken in a programme of study*.

Give consideration to the planned duration of the student's learning aims; aims constrained within one academic year are easier to manage from an ILR perspective, and also pose less risk to Achievement Rates should a student not secure continuing funding in subsequent years. However, be realistic in planning delivery; aims with high Guided Learning Hours e.g. Diplomas may need to be planned over 2 or more years, despite the potential risk to Achievement Rates.

Student Study Programmes can contain just regulated qualification learning aims, just non-regulated learning aims, or a combination of both.

Once you have returned learning aim Start and Planned End dates ***do not, under any circumstances, change them.*** The only exception to this is to correct administrative errors, please see the online Provider Support Manual ([ESFA - Online Documentation \(fasst.org.uk\)](https://www.fasst.org.uk)) Section 5

The funding model is normally Code 25 – 16-19 funding (excluding Apprentices): this includes those aged 19+ with EHCPs.

The Learning Aim Class Codes document ([Learning aim class codes - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)) details which non-regulated (“Z-code”) learning aims can be used and how to find them; students under funding model 25 should use codes from Categories E (general) and G (maths and English), and additional codes from Categories I and J for Work Experience and Supported Internships. These Categories can be seen, and searched for, within the Learning Aim Database (LAD) application ([Find a learning aim \(fasst.org.uk\)](https://www.fasst.org.uk)) by using the quick access filter box for Maths or English only and clicking “Search”

Search for Z-codes that have a Sector Subject Area that match your delivery e.g. “Preparation for Work”, “Hospitality and Catering”, “Performing Arts”, “Mathematics and Statistics”. Remember that Z codes are used to describe your learning delivery/activities.

Z-code aims normally have no Guided Learning Hours prescribed, so you need to plan appropriate length courses of learning. Non-regulated delivery needs to be tracked with RARPA methodology, and a genuine appraisal of achievement or failure made at the point the student leaves the course.

### **Work experience**

If a student plans to undertake Work Experience within an academic year, a single Work Experience learning aim should be recorded; if the student undertakes multiple placements within a year, these are attached to the single learning aim using the work placement entity which collects multiple instances of work placements, their start and end dates, the type of placement and the hours delivered. As such, the Start and Planned End dates of the learning aim ***must*** encompass all attached placement records. If a student completes their planned placement, and their overarching learning aim, but later in the year undertakes further work experience outside of the original date scope, subsequent learning aims can be added and will validate, just be aware they will generate a “potential duplicate learning aim” warning in the PDSAT report.

## **6. ILR data accuracy good practice**

Submitting accurate data to the ESFA is crucial to getting an accurate funding allocation on time and avoiding additional work in submitting a business case post-allocations. Business cases are subject to a materiality threshold so there is no guarantee of a successful business case.

There are a number of ways to ensure you submit accurate data which we strongly advise all ILR returning institutions to use.

- 1) **Use rule violation reports** – When you submit your ILR file to the ESFA using Submit Learner Data, the system runs a series of automated data checks to ensure your data is accurate and basically valid. This validation process outputs 2 very important reports – The rule violation summary and rule violation detail reports.

The summary report will show you any validation rules your data has failed and how many instance of each rule have failed. The detail report will show which records have failed which rules.

Validation rules are split into:

**Warnings** - things that could be correct but should be checked as they fall outside normal expectations and

**Errors** – things that are incorrect and need to be amended – **If a learner has any element of their record that fails validation with an error, the whole learner record will be rejected from your return and the data will not be transmitted to the ESFA.**

Validation errors are a common cause of student counts being lower than anticipated in 16-19 funding allocations and **so it is imperative you submit your ILR data well in advance of the return deadline to give you chance to identify and fix any validation errors.**

- 2) **Look at your 16-19 funding reports** - When the ILR submission process is complete the system will post a reports zip file for you to download containing a suite of very useful funding reports.

There are 5 16-19 funding reports:

- 1) **16-19 Funding Claim report** – this gives you a summary of all the valid 16-19 students in your ILR return who qualify for funding broken down by the funding category and funding band they fall into. If the report shows fewer students than you expected to see this will either be because they have failed validation and not been submitted to the ESFA or they do not pass the funding qualifying period and so don't count for funding purposes.

Please note that this report in the hub shows all fundable students regardless of their start date. In 16-19 allocations the ESFA applies a reference date of 1<sup>st</sup> November to your R04 data and 1<sup>st</sup> February to your R06 data – any student starting after this date is not counted. If you want to replicate this count in your report you can do so by running it out of FIS and applying a reference date filter – see below.

- 2) **16-19 Summary of Funding by Student Report** – this shows you key information about all of your 16-19 learners who have passed validation. If a student is valid but does not pass the qualifying period you can identify them in this report as it includes all students regardless of whether they qualify for funding and shows you who does and doesn't qualify. If a student fails to qualify and you think they should you should review their start, planned and actual end dates to ensure they meet the minimum 2 or 6 weeks qualifying periods.

- 3) **Maths and English Report** – this report shows you if your 16-19 students are compliant with the condition of funding on maths and English. Those highlighted in red are not compliant based on the data you have submitted. If you have non-compliant students in this report who you think should be compliant you should check:

- That the student's highest prior attainment in English and maths (Enggrade and Mathgrade) is correct.
- That they are recorded on English and maths aims that count toward the condition of funding (using LAD as mentioned earlier on in this document) and that they stayed on the qualification(s) long enough to qualify (usually 6 weeks unless the aim has a very short planned length).
- If they hold Grade D/3 that they are undertaking a GCSE or equivalent qualification – i.e. they are not undertaking a stepping stone qualification.

- 4) **High Needs Students Summary and Detail reports** – these reports show you how many learners you have recorded as high needs and/or having an EHCP. These flags can be very important in ensuring you are allocated correct levels of funding.

More information about the 16-19 funding reports can be found on [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk)

- 3) **Funding Information Service (FIS)** – FIS is a [free application you can download](#) to check and validate your data prior to submitting it to the ESFA. When you load your file into FIS you can do many of the things that the HUB does – in particular, you can run the same validation rules, rule violation reports and funding reports giving you early sight of any errors in your data before you have submitted it. For institutions operating across several sites who wish to record

ILR data across these sites FIS also enables you to amalgamate several separate ILR files into a single file for submission to the ESFA.

For those institutions who want to dig deeper into their data FIS also allows you to export your data into CSV files or into Microsoft SQL after all the ESFA funding calculations have been performed on it giving you access to the same funding data the ESFA uses to calculate your allocations from.

It is recommended you use the FIS system to check the validity and integrity of your data in the ILR often and importantly before submitting to the "Submit Learner Data" portal

**Please note that importing your ILR file into FIS will not transmit it to the ESFA, you must upload your file to the HUB in order to transmit the data to ESFA.**

- 4) **Read the guidance** – There is a wealth of information about the ILR and how to submit your data on [gov.uk](http://gov.uk). In particular you should ensure you have read the provider support manual and have the ILR specification close to hand for detailed information on all ILR fields.

Also ensure you have [read the 16-19 funding guidance](#), in particular the Rates and formula and funding regulations books.

- 5) **Use the ESFA [on-line enquiry form](#) and Contact the servicedesk if you have questions about ILR submission** - <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/esfa-business-operations-help-and-support> or contact NATSPEC for available support

## 7. Bursary funds

Bursary Fund guidance can be found at [16 to 19 Bursary Fund guide 2021 to 2022 academic year - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

The 16 to 19 Bursary Fund provides financial support to help students overcome specific barriers to participation so they can remain in education.

There are two types of 16 to 19 bursaries: bursaries for defined Vulnerable groups of up to £1,200 a year, and Discretionary bursaries of no set amount, which institutions award to meet individual needs, for example, help with the cost of transport, meals, books and equipment. Being awarded one kind does not necessarily exclude the student from receiving the other.

To be eligible to apply for a Vulnerable bursary a student must be aged 16-19, funded by the ESFA, and meet UK residency criteria. They must also meet further criteria based on benefits they receive, or be in (or leaving/recently left) Local Authority-arranged care.

To be eligible to apply for a Discretionary bursary a student must be aged either 16-19, or 19-24 with a current EHCP. They must also be funded by the ESFA, meet UK residency criteria, and meet further criteria as set out by the provider they are enrolled at.

Both types of Bursary, if awarded, must be returned via ILR using Learner Funding and Monitoring (FAM) type "LSR" with a code of 55 or 56 (or both), depending upon the type of bursary received.

## 8. Summary of useful links

### Summary of useful links:

[16 to 19 education: funding allocations](#) tells you how ESFA use your data and describes how the allocations process works.

ILR introductions with links:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/individualised-learner-record-ilr>

ILR specification, Provider Support Manual, validation rules and appendices:

[ESFA - Online Documentation \(fasst.org.uk\)](https://www.fasst.org.uk)

Funding information service (FIS) for checking your ILR data:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/check-how-accurate-your-ilr-data-is-with-fis>

Submit Learner Data:

<https://submitlearnerdatabeta.fasst.org.uk>

Known Issues with Submit Learner Data – regularly updated:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/submit-learner-data-known-issues>