Summary of the 2024 information session

Including a list of Q&As and a link to the recording

On 8 February, we held our annual start-of-the-year online information session – 'The year ahead for the Skills First program'. This document summarises some key themes raised during the session, lists our answers to your questions, and gives you a link to watch the recording of the session.

A well-attended session with many questions

We had over 600 attendees from Skills First training providers, peak bodies, industry associations and the department. You asked us over 200 questions during the session, covering many topics. Most of which we answered during the session.

Watch the session

Many of you told us you wanted a recording of the session.

We've uploaded the session to the department's YouTube channel, as a private stream. It is available until 31 March 2024. You can access it through this link:

- Watch the recording on YouTube

Your feedback

Thank you again for your high level of engagement. We enjoyed the opportunity to listen to your views and experience. You rated the sessions very highly in our feedback survey. Following your feedback, we will consider how we can host more and different online sessions throughout the year.

We heard your requests to publish the questions asked during the session. In response, we collated your most-asked questions into FAQs, which you can find in this summary. We also included links to fact sheets and guides.

You had other continuous improvement suggestions, such as introducing more engagement opportunities between training providers and our department. We've taken on your feedback and will consider what we can offer for the future.

VICTORIA State Government
Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions

List of questions and answers

Aboriginal Access fee waiver

Question	Answer
When I grant a Skills First Aboriginal Access fee waiver, do you pay a fee waiver contribution? And if so, how much?	Yes, we pay a fee waiver contribution. We calculate the fee concession contribution by multiplying the scheduled hours you're entitled to be paid by the 'fee waiver contribution per hour' for the program in the funded programs report.
How do I determine if a student is eligible. What evidence do I need to keep?	A student is eligible for the fee waiver if they self-identify as being of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander descent when they enrol. This is one of the standard enrolment questions. You must retain a copy of the enrolment form on which the student self-identified as indigenous as evidence of their eligibility. See Appendix 1 of the Victorian VET student statistical collection guidelines for information on the standard enrolment questions.
Do I need to grant the Skills First Aboriginal Access fee waiver to fee for service students?	No. This fee waiver only applies to Skills First funded training.
Where can I get information on reporting?	See contract notification 2023-17 for information about reporting the new fee waiver. If you have any questions after reviewing this document, please lodge an enquiry via SVTS.

Allocations

Question	Answer
What factors do you look at to set allocations?	We look at 3 things: • Your program delivery plans (PDPs) – we look at PDPs collectively across the total training sector, including projected training volumes from TAFEs. This information about what you can deliver, helps us get the right balance between the provision of Skills First training, industry need, and Government priorities and budget. • Program allocations – we set limits for some programs where we want to manage Skills First delivery, for several reasons including the potential oversupply of training and lack of alignment with Skills First priorities. • Your history of delivery - we aim to align your allocation with your expected delivery. These are factored in with the market supply of programs across the VET sector, Government policy priorities and budget limits. These are system-wide decisions about allocations; they are not made at an individual training provider level.
What flexibility do we have in our 2024 allocations?	If you have a program allocation, you can't go over this limit for that program or swap your allocations between qualifications or enrolment types (apprenticeship/traineeship and non-apprenticeship/traineeship). There is no flexibility on this. A commencement allocation for an AQF qualification cannot be used for skill sets and vice versa. The only time you can distribute your commencement allocation freely is if you have no program allocations. You can distribute your commencements for AQF qualifications amongst any AQF programs on your funded scope, or you can distribute your skill set commencement allocations amongst any skill set programs on your funded scope. Commencements are allocated on an annual basis, and they can't be carried over from a previous year. Your 2023 commencements can't be re-allocated into 2024.
How do we decide which students receive Skills First funding within our limited allocations?	How you distribute your allocations to students is at your discretion. We advise that you act fairly and within the best interests of your students.

Question	Answer
When is a commencement allocation consumed?	Once we pay you any amount for an enrolment, this consumes a commencement and your allocation goes down by one. This applies even if your payment is later reversed. For example, your payment may be reversed because a student withdraws and you report zero hours attended, or you stop reporting the enrolment altogether. If you report zero hours or stop reporting before you've received payment, this will not consume a commencement allocation. To track your commencements, go to SVTS > Contracts > Contract commencement allocations.
Can I recommence a withdrawn student in the same program without consuming a second commencement allocation?	If your student comes back later in the same year, or in the next calendar year you can report them against the original program enrolment. This won't consume another commencement allocation. See attachment 1 of the Guide to withdrawals under the heading 'Reporting against the original program enrolment' for the steps you'll need to follow.
Can an apprentice or trainee continue their program with a new employer without consuming a second allocation?	If an apprentice requires a new training contract in Epsilon due to an employer change during their program, please raise an enquiry in SVTS for assistance.
Will there be a contract variation process for 2024?	There is currently no expectation that we will open a contract variation process in 2024. We'll tell you if, and when, you can vary your contract to apply for an increase to your commencement allocation or add new programs to your Funded Scope.
How will allocations in 2025 work?	There will be a PDP process for 2025 allocations and we'll let you know when we open the process later this year. We have taken on your feedback regarding the timing and communication of the 2024 allocations.

Apprenticeships/traineeships

Question	Answer
Do I need to get confirmation from the employer that an apprentice is competent before I report the subject as competent? Is the employer's confirmation the end date for the subject?	Yes. If you've delivered all training and assessment, you need the employer's confirmation before reporting the subject as competent (outcome code 20). In the meantime, report the subject with outcome code 79. This is used when the apprentice has completed all their training and assessment and is only waiting for the employer's confirmation that they're competent. You should also update the activity end date for the subject to your estimate of when you expect to receive the confirmation.
Is there any flexibility in our obligation to make monthly contact with the apprentice or trainee as well as the employer?	While we understand it can be challenging getting in touch regularly with apprentices and trainees, the monthly contacts are a minimum requirement to ensure sufficient oversight of their apprenticeship or traineeship.
Can any of our minimum number of visits to deliver workplace-based training be done virtually?	No, the minimum visits to deliver workplace-based training must be done onsite. This ensures you have opportunities to observe the workplace conditions and check in with both the apprentice or trainee and the employer on progress with competencies in a detailed way. If you wish to propose a different approach for an apprentice or trainee in specific circumstances, you can contact us via SVTS to put forward a business case for consideration.

Audit

Question	Answer
When should we complete our internal audit?	Your first internal audit should be completed within 6 months of the commencement date of your contract. Any issues can be added to your rectification plan.
If we've identified a one-off, non-systemic issue, when should we notify you?	If you find non-compliances and would like some guidance, we encourage you to lodge an SVTS enquiry.

Question	Answer
How long does it take before we receive an audit report once an audit is completed?	The auditor will typically provide you with a draft of the audit report for you to comment on within 5 business days after the audit is completed. You'll typically receive the final report within one week of submitting your management comments and an outcome letter from us within 4-6 weeks of us receiving the final report from the auditor.
What support/training do you give to third party auditing firms to help them understand the contract and the VET system?	Audit service providers undertake training each year and receive a comprehensive set of contract guidance materials. We carefully review and quality assure the work of our audit firms. When we feel they don't meet the standards we require, we provide them with feedback on their work, including through regular quarterly meetings, and we performance manage them if concerns arise.

Concessions

Question	Answer
How do I apply the new concession policy to students who commenced before 2024, and are continuing in 2024?	**If you didn't charge all your fees upfront** If you didn't charge all your fees upfront when the program commenced, you must recheck their concession when you charge any new fees for subjects that start in 2024. You must do this even if they were entitled to a concession the last time you checked. Once you recheck their entitlement, you can apply the concession to their fees for the remainder of their program without rechecking again. **If you did charge all your fees upfront** If you charged all your fees up front, you don't need to re-check their eligibility in 2024. However, if you become aware that a student who paid all their fees at the start of their program gets a new concession entitlement, you can choose to apply the concession to any subjects they haven't yet started. Whether you choose to do this is at your discretion, and it should be part of a documented business process. If you do this, you will need to re-calculate the tuition fees for those subjects, provide any refund owing to the student, and re-issue the statement of fees to reflect this change.

Question	Answer
What if a student's concession entitlement was current at the time I checked it at enrolment, but **expires before training starts**?	Once you've confirmed a student's concession is current and valid at the time you check it as part of your enrolment process, you can apply the concession to all tuition fees for the full program, even if the card expires before the program starts.
What if a student's concession entitlement expires **before their program finishes**?	Once you've confirmed a student's concession is current and valid at the time you check it as part of your enrolment process, you can apply the concession to all tuition fees for the full program, even if the card expires before the program finishes.
How will you audit our evidence of concession if we are no longer allowed to keep copies of concession cards?	We'll use your written declaration stating that the evidence has been sighted as evidence of a student's entitlement to a concession. The declaration must show the: • name of your authorised delegate who sighted the evidence • date the evidence was sighted • concession holder's name • card type. If you use Centrelink Confirmation eServices or the document verification service to confirm concession eligibility, see our fact sheet on concessions for more information about how to sight and retain evidence.
Can we take a copy of the concession card and redact the CRN instead of making a declaration?	No. We want to ensure there is no chance of you accidentally retaining the CRN on a copied or scanned card, so we require you to use the declaration.

Evidence of participation (EOP)

Question	Answer
Do the EOP changes apply to continuing students, or do we have to look at which contract they enrolled under to work out the EOP requirements?	The new EOP requirements apply to subjects that commence from 1 January 2024. For continuing students, you just need to look at when a subject started rather than when they enrolled in their program. For example, they may have enrolled in 2022 but if the subject started in 2023, the 2023 EOP requirements apply.
Can you explain the requirements for the second item of EOP - evidence of assessment?	Your evidence of assessment must show that the student has completed the assessment requirements for the subject. For example, if the requirements consist of assessment tasks 1-3, you can use a summary record of the 3 tasks and results (such as satisfactory/not satisfactory). You can't just use evidence that the student completed one of the 3 assessments. You don't need to provide the actual work submitted for the assessment. Examples of what you could provide are a report extracted from your learning management system, or an assessment tool cover sheet. You must include the student name or identifier, the subject name or identifier, the signature of the teacher who made the assessment and the date. Evidence of assessment doesn't have to be dated within the last 30 days of the subject. You just need to retain the evidence of assessment at the time that it normally occurs. It doesn't need to show a result of competent or not yet competent for the whole subject. We understand that sometimes this is a final administrative step. For example, when you need to get employer confirmation of competency for an apprentice. See our fact sheet about evidence of participation for more information.
Do I need to include the name of the teacher as well as their signature on evidence of assessment? What if the signature isn't legible?	You only need the signature of the teacher who made the assessment to confirm the accuracy of the information. However, the teacher should be identifiable. For example, at audit you may be asked to identify the teacher who made the assessment.

Question	Answer
Can you explain the requirements for EOP when we apply recognition of prior learning (RPL)?	Keep one item of EOP for RPL subjects. This must be the tool you used to make and record the decision that the student is competent. This could include documents submitted by the student, such as records of their past training or a written assessment. A record of an observation completed by an assessor would also meet the requirement. Make sure the EOP includes the student's name or identifier, the subject name or identifier, a date and the signature of the teacher who made the assessment.
If a student is continuing to participate in a subject but hasn't submitted an assessment, how do we retain a second item of EOP?	If the student is continuing the subject, one valid item of EOP dated within the first 30 days is sufficient. It's only when the assessment is complete that the second item (the evidence of assessment) is required. Should you be audited for a subject that is continuing, you will be compliant if you have a valid first item dated within the first 30 days. If the student withdraws and doesn't complete the subject only one item of EOP is required.
Does the activity start date for a subject have to match the date of the first class?	You don't have to use the first class as the activity start date (ASD) for a subject. For example, if students are doing work online before the first class, you can set the ASD to match the date of the first training activity. Your first item of EOP doesn't need to be an attendance roll, you can use any of the accepted types of EOP (other than evidence of assessment) if the evidence is dated within the first 30 days of the subject. For example, if the student has submitted some work online you may be able to use the 'work submitted' option or the 'secure log on and engagement via a learning management system' option.

Free TAFE

Question	Answer
If a student commences in Free TAFE but withdraws before we report any hours, has the student used their Free TAFE entitlement?	If we've made no payments for the commencement, the student has not used their Free TAFE entitlement.

Funding

Question	Answer
With inflation staying above usual level, will there be an indexation to Skills First fee in 2024?	The department monitors the level of subsidies available under Skills First and adjusts them from time to time - there is no default indexation applied currently.
What is the process for adding new programs to the training needs list?	We regularly review training products to consider their suitability for the training needs list. If you want us to consider adding a training product that isn't funded under Skills First, you can submit a business case. See 'Adding programs to the TNL' on the government's Training Needs List website for instructions and a business case template. If a training product is superseded, we regularly update the training needs list and funded programs report with the new training product. You do not need to request us to add superseding training products.

Physical presence requirement

Question	Answer
What has changed with the physical presence requirement and why?	Eligible interstate students have always been able to access Skills First funding if they cross the border into Victoria to do their training and assessment. What's changed is that we've adjusted the physical presence requirement to improve access to VET for students who live or work close to the Victorian border. To meet the physical presence requirement, students need to be physically present in Victoria or in one of the designated interstate postcodes specified in the Guidelines about eligibility when doing training and assessment.
Is training and assessment in the specified interstate postcodes limited in any way, for example, to online delivery or work placements?	No. Training and assessment can occur in Victoria and/or in the designated postcodes regardless of delivery mode - and can include non-apprenticeship / traineeship work placements that require training and assessment.

Question	Answer
Do students need to provide evidence they live in Victoria or in one of the specified interstate postcodes?	We require you to collect the student's address as part of your normal enrolment process. No other proof of residence is required.
How does the physical presence requirement work with apprentices and trainees?	Apprentices and trainees must be employed in Victoria with their training contract registered with the VRQA to receive Skills First funding. This has not changed.
How does the physical presence requirement work with online training?	If students are doing training and assessment online, you need to consider this as part of your enrolment process. If a student lives interstate, you need to check whether they will be in Victoria or one of the designated postcodes for their training.
What happens when students move away?	If a student can no longer do their training or assessment in Victoria or in one of the designated border postcodes, they will no longer be eligible.

Engagement with training providers

Question	Answer
Will you continue training provider visits in 2024?	Yes, we will be continuing training provider visits in 2024.
How will you engage with us to get a better understanding of our training practices and experiences?	Last year we returned to our program of training provider visits, after putting it on hold during Covid. We'll continue these planned visits this year as part of our efforts to have face-to-face conversations with you about your practical challenges. We also want to celebrate your successes and see your work and facilities first-hand. We also have our annual training provider survey which we use to seek your views and experience of working with us and find out more about how you'd like to interact with us. Aside from these planned events, we encourage you to share your views and experiences with us at any time - you can use SVTS for this purpose, and not just for enquiries.

Reporting

Question	Answer
What is the purpose of the 'commencing program cohort identifier' and how we should collect the data?	The 'commencing program cohort identifier' is described in the Victorian VET student statistical collection guidelines. If you have specific questions about this data field, please lodge an SVTS enquiry.
How should we use 'outcome identifier - national' code 79?	Use 'outcome identifier - national' 79 when a student completes their supervised training and assessment, and you are just waiting for their employer to sign-off on their competence before you later report them with their final outcome (usually '20' - competency achieved). You should typically only use this for reporting apprenticeships, but you can choose to use it for any subject where it is awaiting employer sign-off. For apprenticeships (but not other enrolment types), if you report this outcome identifier while you are waiting for employer sign-off, SVTS won't re-apportion your payments if you need to extend the 'activity end date' while you wait for the employer to respond.
How should we use 'outcome identifier - national' code 40?	Use 'outcome identifier - national' 40 to tell us that a student withdrew from a subject. When you report outcome 40, you also need to report the 'hours attended' so you get paid for the number of hours of training and assessment you actually provided. If you report zero (0) hours attended for a withdrawn subject, SVTS will not pay you any money for the subject and will reverse any previous payments we made to you for the subject. See the Victorian VET student statistical collection guidelines and the guide to withdrawals for more information.

Sighting and retaining evidence of eligibility

Question	Answer
Can we sight ID via Zoom or video call if the Document Verification Service (DVS) check fails?	No, you cannot sight a student's ID via Zoom or video call if DVS fails. You should sight their evidence of eligibility through other ways detailed in the Guidelines about eligibility. Check out our fact sheet: sighting and retaining evidence of eligibility.

Question	Answer
Do we need to keep a copy of a student's photo ID?	We just require you to sight and retain evidence that proves a student is eligible by showing they're either an Australian or NZ citizen or a permanent resident of Australia, as detailed in the Guidelines about eligibility. We don't require this evidence to be in the form of a photo id, or for you to collect a form of photo ID in addition to this.

Student privacy

Question	Answer
Do we need to ask students if they object to us retaining their evidence of eligibility for privacy reasons?	No, you do not need to ask students if they object to you collecting their personal information. Don't build this option into your eligibility checking processes. The option to make a declaration instead of retaining evidence must only be used when the student themselves raises the privacy objection. This is likely to be rare.

Students under 17

Question	Answer
What are our obligations if a student under 17 stops attending training?	You must notify the Department of Education's regional office and the student's school if they stop attending training. You can then withdraw them from their program. See our fact sheet: enrolling students under 17 for more details.

SVTS

Question	Answer
Will there be any updates to geocoding in SVTS to account for new addresses?	We update our address data sets automatically once a month against a range of government sources, such as Australia Post and Geoscape Australia. We receive monthly updates from these sources, but they can take time to update their records with new addresses, which also means they won't be available to us. This creates the warnings and errors you may experience. So, it may take time for new addresses to be available to us, but when they are, we will update the system with them at the next monthly update point. Google Maps is not an official source for addresses and, therefore, updates much quicker than our official sources. If you can find an address there it does not necessarily mean it will pass validation.

Question	Answer
How do you communicate changes to SVTS reports?	We regularly communicate upcoming changes to SVTS via release notes. We also communicate regularly with SMS providers. We try to give you advance notice so you can upgrade your system as needed. However, this is not always possible due to time constraints. Where possible we provide the old version of the report for a period to allow you time to transition. We are currently reviewing the SVTS reports to align the terminology with the Victorian VET student statistical guidelines and standardise report and extract layouts. As part of this exercise, we are also reviewing the content of the reports to better help you understand any issues in your submissions and the calculation and invoicing of payments.
Why did you remove the completions report from SVTS, and will you return it?	We provide summary information about reported course completions, through the validation outcome report. You can also use the missing outcomes report to help understand where you haven't reported a valid for a subject enrolment. This information should also be available in your SMS as the data in those reports is a representation of the information in your data submissions to SVTS. The VET qualification completion rates published by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) can also help you gain a broader understanding of completions rates across the country.

Teaching practice

Question	Answer
What's your take on students using AI tools like ChatGPT?	We do not provide any guidance related to the use of AI tools. We suggest you use your professional judgement. You must also maintain robust assessment practices and have your own policies and procedures about how you make sure each student's work is authentic.