

Skillnets

Freedom of Information

S.15 & S.16 Reference Manual

*A guide to the functions, records, rules and practices of
Skillnets*

(June 2010)



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Table of Contents

1. Introduction	3
2. An Overview of Skillnets	3
3. Purpose of Reference Manual	4
4. How to use this Reference Manual	4
5. How to access Information held by Skillnets	5
Routinely Available Information.....	5
Access to Records.....	5
Applying for Information.....	6
Assistance to persons with a disability.....	7
Rights of Review and Appeal.....	7
Fees.....	8
6. Role & Structure of Skillnets	9
Role of Skillnets.....	9
Structure of Skillnets.....	9
Skillnets Structure & Classes of Records Held.....	13
7. Acts, Regulations, Procedures governing Skillnets Decisions	17
Financial Incentives:.....	17
Guidelines for Assessment of Funding Applications.....	18
Appendix 1:	20
Request for Access to Records Under the FOI Acts 1997 & 2003.....	20



1. Introduction

This Skillnets FOI S.15 & S.16 Reference Manual – A guide to the functions, records, rules and practices of Skillnets, June 2010, is compiled in accordance with the Freedom of Information Acts 1997 and 2003. All references in this manual to the Freedom of Information Act or Acts refer to the 1997 Act as amended by the 2003 Act.

The Freedom of Information (FOI) Acts, effective from 21st April 1998, establish three new statutory rights:

- a legal right for each person to access records held by public bodies
- a legal right for each person to have official information relating to him/herself amended where it is incomplete, incorrect or misleading and
- a legal right to obtain reasons for decisions affecting oneself

The Acts assert the right of members of the public to obtain access to official information to the greatest extent possible consistent with the public interest and the right to privacy of individuals.

The FOI Acts are designed to allow public access to information held by public bodies which is **not** routinely available through other sources (e.g. via publication or on the Internet). Access to records under the Acts is subject to certain exemptions, involves specific procedures and time limits and may involve charges to the enquirer. Information on these points is given in this manual.

2. An Overview of Skillnets

Skillnets, established in 1999, is an enterprise-led support body whose mission is to enhance the skills of people in employment in Irish industry to support competitiveness and employability. In the Training Networks Programme (TNP) 2010/11 Skillnets networks are also providing training to job-seekers, who are training with those in employment.

Skillnets Ltd manages the Training Networks Programme and was funded entirely by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (DETE) until April 2010, from the National Training Fund. In May 2010 responsibility for the National Training Fund, and Skillnets, was transferred to the Department of Education and Skills (DES).

Skillnets' stakeholders include leading employer and employee representative bodies: Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC), Chambers Ireland, Construction Industry Federation (CIF), Small Firms Association (SFA) & Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU).

3. Purpose of Reference Manual

This reference manual has been prepared and published in accordance with the requirements of Sections 15 & 16 of the FOI Acts. Its purpose is to describe our organisation and to help members of the public gain access to information held by Skillnets.

S.15 of the FOI Act requires us to facilitate access to information by outlining our structure and functions and details the services we provide and how they may be availed of, and provides information on the classes of records we hold and how to make a request under the FOI Acts, 1997 & 2003.

S.16 of the FOI Act requires us to publish a manual containing the rules, procedures, practices, guidelines and interpretations which may be used by us in our decision making.

4. How to use this Reference Manual

The manual is divided into two parts:

Part 1 describes how to access information held by us and outlines the fees that may arise in doing so.

Part 2 describes the role and structure of Skillnets and the type of information held in the various parts of our organisation. This section also outlines the procedures and guidelines for our decision making.

PART 1

5. How to access information held by Skillnets

Routinely Available Information

Skillnets routinely makes available a number of publications either from our website www.skillnets.ie or on request from the Skillnets office:

- Skillnets Annual Reports
- Training Networks Programme 2008-2009 Directory & Profiles
- Training Networks Programme 2006-2007 Summary Report
- Training Networks Programme 2006-2007 Case Studies
- Training Networks Programme 2005-2010
- Training Networks Programme 2002-2005 Summary Report
- Training Networks Programme 2002-2005 Case Studies Booklet
- Training Networks Programme 1999-2002 Network Directory
- Training Networks Programme 1999-2002 Case Studies
- Training Networks Programme 1999-2002 Final Report
- Accel Programme – Final evaluation
- Selecting the Right Trainer
- Making Networks Work
- Measuring the Impact of Training & Development in the Workplace
- Network Series 1 – 8

This information will continue to be available informally without the need to use the Freedom of Information Acts 1997 & 2003 so, if you think the information you require is likely to be routinely available, you should first review the information available on our website, www.skillnets.ie, and then enquire at our office.

FOI Officer
Skillnets
5th Floor, Q House
76 Furze Road
Sandyford
Dublin 18
Tel: 01 207 9630 Fax: 01 207 9631; email: FOI@skillnets.com

Access to Records

The FOI Act has applied to Skillnets since the 31st May 2006 and the following records come within the scope of the Act:

- all records relating to personal information held by Skillnets, irrespective of when created
- all other records created since commencement of the Act on 21 April 1998

- any records created before commencement of the Act that are necessary to the understanding of a record created after 21 April 1998

The FOI Acts 1997 & 2003 allow public access to information held by public bodies which is not routinely available through other sources. However, access to information is subject to a series of exemptions to protect sensitive information where its disclosure may damage key interests of the State or its citizens. Access to information is also subject to specific procedures and time limits. Among the key exemptions are:

- Confidential information
- Commercially sensitive information
- Personal information (other than information relating to the person making the request).

Should it be necessary to withhold a record, a full explanation of the decision will be given to the requester in writing.

Applying for Information

Applications should be made in writing to:

**Freedom of Information Officer,
Skillnets
5th Floor, Q House
76 Furze Road
Sandyford
Dublin 18**

Tel: 01 2079630

Applications should:

- be accompanied by the appropriate fee (see 'Fees' below)
- specify that the information is sought under the Freedom of Information Act
- be as detailed and specific as possible
- state whether the request is in relation to personal or non-personal records
- include your full name and address and give a daytime contact telephone number
- state the preferred form in which information is to be provided (paper, computer disc etc)

You may be requested to provide proof of identity where personal information is sought, such as a full birth cert, driving licence or other form of identity.

A Request for Access to Records under the FOI Acts 1997 & 2003 Form is included as an appendix in this manual

Processing of requests for information is subject to time limits specified by the Acts. We are obliged to acknowledge a valid request within 2 weeks and to respond to it within 4 weeks. If the request relates to third party information that has been supplied to Skillnets, there are provisions for formal consultation with these third parties before releasing sensitive information relating to or supplied by them. If the period is to be extended you will receive notice before the end of this 4 week period and the reasons for the delay will be explained.

We are happy to help guide you through your application and assist you as much as possible.

Assistance to persons with a disability

We are available to provide assistance to persons with a disability to exercise their rights under the FOI Act (e.g. accepting oral requests from requesters who are unable to read, print and/or write due to their disability, enabling the requester to inspect or have records explained to him or her).

Rights of Review and Appeal

If you are not satisfied with the response received from Skillnets in relation to the information request, you may ask Skillnets to carry out an Internal Review:

Internal Review

A more senior member of the Skillnets staff will review the initial decision. An internal review must be requested in writing addressed to the FOI Officer within 4 weeks of the initial decision.

If you are not satisfied with the decision of the Internal Review you may appeal directly to the Information Commissioner

Review of the Information Commissioner

Following completion of internal review, you may seek independent review of the decision from the Information Commissioner. Also if you have not received a reply to your application for internal review within 3 weeks, this is deemed to be a refusal and you may appeal the matter to the Information Commissioner.

Appeals in writing, and, if applicable, accompanied by the appropriate fee, (see under Fees below) may be made directly to the Information Commissioner at the following address:

**Office of the Information Commissioner
18 Lower Leeson Street,
Dublin 2**

**Telephone: 01 6395689
E-mail: info@oic.ie**

**Fax: 01 6395676
Website: <http://www.oic.ie>**

Fees

The following charges apply in relation to requests for records made to Skillnets under the FOI Acts:

Application Fees

There is no application fee if your request is for personal information only. If your request is for records containing non-personal information, an application fee of **€15** (€10 if you are a medical card holder) must accompany your request.

Search and Retrieval and Copying Fees

Fees may also be applied in respect of the time spent searching and retrieving records that are released to you and in respect of copying of such records. These fees are unlikely to arise if your request is for personal information except where a large volume of records is involved.

- €20.95 per hour for search and retrieval of records
- €0.04 per sheet for photocopies
- €0.51 for a 3.5 inch computer diskette
- €10.16 for a CD-ROM

Fees, where charged, have to be paid before the information is made available. A deposit may be payable where the total fee is likely to exceed €50.79. In these circumstances Skillnets will, if requested, assist you to amend the request so as, if possible, to reduce or eliminate the fees involved.

There is an **Internal Review** prescribed fee of **€75** (medical card holders €25). There is however no prescribed fee for a review of an initial decision in relation to personal information

There is a prescribed fee for an **Appeal to the Commissioner** of **€150** (Medical Card Holders €50). There is however no prescribed fee for a review of a decision involving personal records

6. Role & Structure of Skillnets

Role of Skillnets

Skillnets is an enterprise-led support body whose mission is to enhance the skills of people in employment in Irish industry to support competitiveness and employability. In the Training Networks Programme (TNP) 2010/11 Skillnets networks are also providing training to job-seekers, who are training with those in employment. Skillnets stakeholders include leading employer and employee representative bodies – Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC), Chambers Ireland, Construction Industry Federation (CIF), Small Firms Association (SFA) & Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU).

Skillnets Ltd manages the Training Networks Programme and is funded entirely by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) from the National Training Fund.

Training Networks Programme (TNP):

Through the creation of enterprise-led networks, Skillnets supports groups of firms to come together and devise training and development initiatives to meet their collective skills needs. Networks receive grant aid and other forms of assistance from Skillnets through the Training Networks Programme.

Between 1999 & 2009, Skillnets networks have supported the activities of over 50,000 companies and over 240,000 trainees. These networks encompass a wide variety of sectors and regions in Ireland, with a particular focus on the needs of small and micro-enterprises.

The principle roles of Skillnets are:

- The management of the Training Networks Programme (TNP) by Skillnets Ltd
- Research and investigation into other enterprise and training related areas

Finuas Networks Programme (FINUAS) 2009/2010:

The Finuas Networks Programme 2009/2010 is dedicated to specialised training within the international financial services sector and is jointly funded by the government and companies within the sector. Finuas commenced in 2009 and is envisaged to run for up to 5 years. €1m has been allocated from the National Training Fund for 2010. Managed by Skillnets Ltd on behalf of the Department of Education and Skills (DES), Finuas aims to support the sector in maintaining Ireland's position as a top international financial services centre through investment in the specialist skills and expertise of its workforce.

For further information: www.finuas.ie

Structure of Skillnets

Skillnets is controlled by a Board of Directors representing the stakeholders in the business.

The Board comprises thirteen non-executive directors:

The Chairman nominated by Irish Business Employers Confederation (IBEC).

- Six business/employer representatives nominated by IBEC (3), Small Firms Association (1), Construction Industry Federation (1) and Chambers Ireland (1).
- Three employee representatives nominated by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions.
- Three representatives nominated by the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Employment.

The Board is supported by four committees:

- Finance and General Purpose Committee
- Evaluation and Performance Monitoring Committee
- Policy, Research and Communications Committee
- Audit Committee

The members of the Board and Committees are as follows:

Skillnets Board of Directors:

Business Employers Representatives:

Mr. Domhnall Mac Domhnaill (Chairperson)
Mr. Brendan McGinty
Mr. Sexton Cahill
Mr. Niall Saul
Mr. George Hennessy
Mr. Ian Talbot
Ms. Mairéad Divilly

Employee Representatives:

Mr. Peter Rigney
Mr. Seán Heading
Ms. Nuala Keher

Ministerial Representatives:

Mr. Terry Hobdell
Mr. Henry Murdoch
Mr. John McDermott

Board Committees:

Finance & General Purpose Committee:

Mr. Domhnall Mac Domhnaill (Chairperson)
Mr. John McDermott
Ms. Mairéad Divilly
Mr. Niall Saul
Mr. Peter Rigney

Evaluation and Performance Monitoring Committee:

Mr. Henry Murdoch (Chairperson)
Mr. Seán Heading
Mr. Terry Hobdell
Mr. Ian Talbot

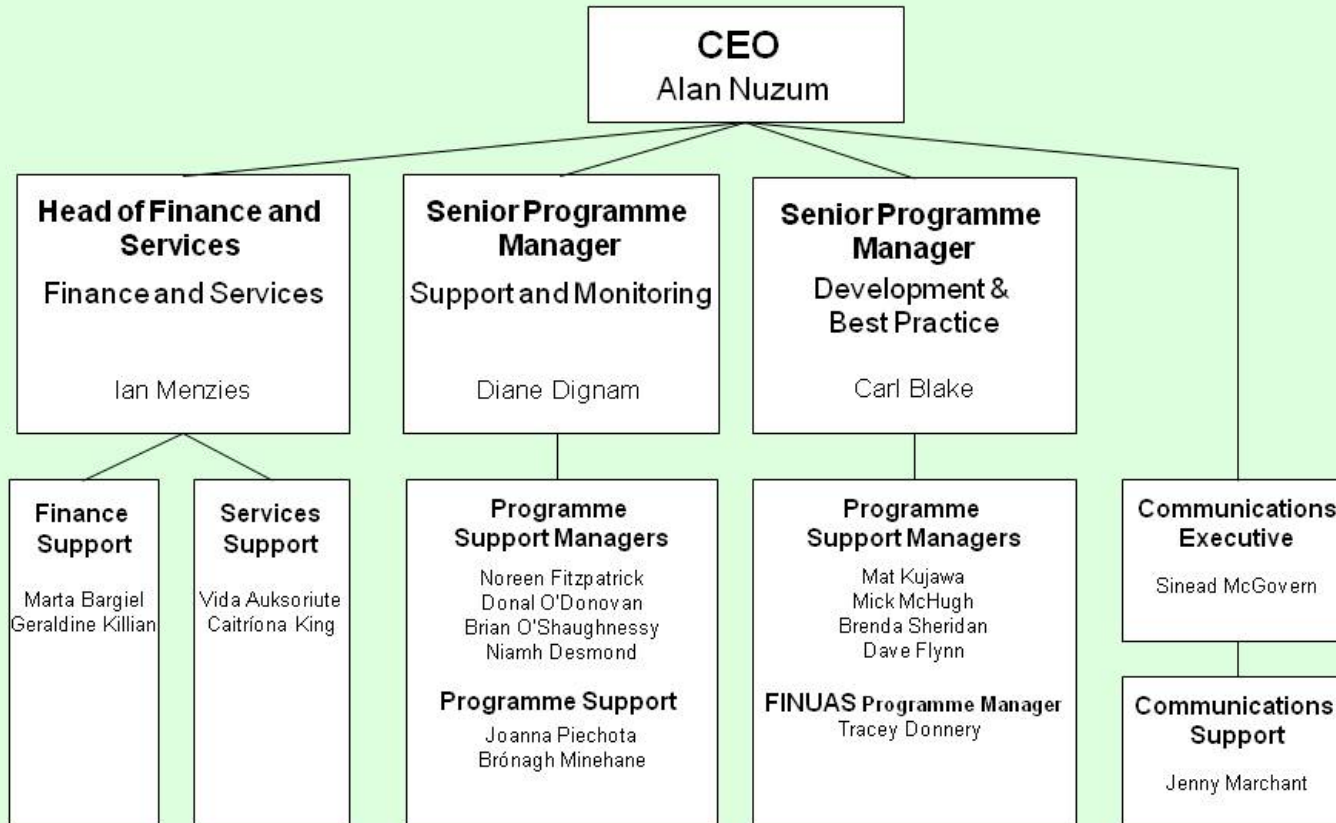
Policy, Research & Communications Committee:

Mr. Sexton Cahill (Chairperson)
Ms. Nuala Keher
Mr. George Hennessy
Mr. Brendan McGinty

Audit Committee:

Ms. Mairéad Divilly (Chairperson)
Mr. John McDermott
Mr. Niall Saul
Mr. Peter Rigney

Skillnets Organisational Structure June 2010



Skillnets and Records Held

For the purposes of preparing requests under the FOI Acts 1997 & 2003, the main areas of activity with Skillnets can be summarised as follows:

- Programme Management – TNP and Accel
- Finance & Administration
- Communications

Skillnets Structure & Classes of Records Held

Programme Management

Training Networks Programme (TNP)

Summary

The role of TNP Programme Management is to support networks in achieving their targets, monitor and report on a regular basis on their progress, and develop best practice in operating enterprise networks. This role involves ongoing contact with networks and network managers to ensure that they are delivering on commitments.

A Skillnets network is a group of enterprises that decide to cooperate in order to undertake a project over a sustained period that individual members of the group would be unable to undertake on their own. Skillnets networks are comprised of groups of enterprises that come together to achieve a common purpose or address a shared issue of importance to the development of skills and long-term competitiveness. In each network, companies jointly address their training needs, collaborate with other enterprises, and engage experts, trainers, certifying bodies, industry bodies and others to work with them to achieve goals.

Skillnets has completed four Training Network Programmes to date:

- **TNP 1999 – 2001:** this programme involved the establishment of 57 training networks with 2,300 companies and 12,800 employees participating.

Grant funding - €8.6 m

- **TNP 2002 – 2005:** this programme involved 56 training networks with 3,800 companies and 22,500 employees participating

Grant funding - €13.6m

- **TNP 2006 – 2007:** this programme involved 54 training networks with 7,500 companies and 32,000 employees participating

Grant funding - €15.3m

- **TNP 2008 – 2009:** this programme involved 123 training networks with 50,000 companies and 96,000 employees participating.

Grant funding - €39.5m

Funding for Skillnets from the National Training Fund in 2010 is €16.5m. This is being made available to enterprise groups on the basis of competitive calls for proposals.

Classes of records held:

- Public Calls for Proposals and assessment criteria
- Applications for Grants
- Assessments of Applications for Grants
- Network Contract Information
- Network Programme Data

Finuas Networks Programme 2010-2011

The Finuas Networks Programme commenced in 2009 and is envisaged to run for up to 5 years. €1m has been allocated from the National Training Fund for 2010. The role of Finuas Programme Management is to support networks in achieving their targets, monitor and report on a regular basis on their progress, and develop best practice in operating enterprise networks. This role involves ongoing contact with networks and network managers to ensure that they are delivering on commitments.

- **Finuas Programme 2009:** this programme involved 4 networks with 169 companies and 1,180 employees participating.

Grant funding - €610k

Classes of records held:

- Public Calls for Proposals and assessment criteria
- Applications for Grants
- Assessments of Applications for Grants
- Network Contract Information
- Network Programme Data

Accel Programme 2006-2008

Summary

Accel was an initiative of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and was managed by Skillnets Services Ltd on its behalf. The role of Accel Programme Management was to assist and support projects in achieving their targets and monitor and report on a regular basis on their progress. This role involved ongoing contact with Network Promoters and Network Managers to ensure that they delivered on commitments. The programme was funded by the European Social Fund and the National Training Fund.

- **Accel Programme 2006 – 2008:** this programme involved 55 training networks with 9,000 companies and 29,000 employees participating

Grant funding - €16.8m

Classes of records held:

- Public Calls for Proposals and assessment criteria
- Applications for Grants
- Assessments of Applications for Grants
- Network Contract Information
- Network Programme Data

Finance and Services

Finance

Summary

The role of Finance and Services is to provide effective financial control for the organisation, to give a support service in the areas of IT, office facility, human resources and to support the Programme Management.

Classes of records held:

- Management and financial accounts
- Grant payments to TNP networks and Accel projects
- Expenditure on administration & associated overheads
- Payroll & pension files
- Procurement records
- Tax clearance records
- Fixed asset register
- Insurance files
- Board & Committee meeting minutes
- Statutory returns and Company Secretarial files
- Legal correspondence

Communications

Summary

The role of Communications is the development and updating of a strategic communications plan for Skillnets and its ongoing delivery. This includes key tasks such as:

- Building and maintaining effective relations with the media, both nationally and regionally
- Developing an external public and media relations plan to support the general programme of dissemination and awareness building on Skillnets activities
- Developing the Skillnets website as a strategic, user friendly information and dissemination tool focused on training practice in business
- Ensuring that network client support and advisory needs are addressed within the overall communications plan of Skillnets, providing key communications with network promoters and managers
- Maintain effective internal communications
- Coordinating the production of Skillnets publications

Classes of records held:

- Copies of media mentions of Skillnets and Accel
- Collateral material developed by Skillnets, learning networks and Accel projects
- Conference and seminar data

S.16

7. Acts, Regulations, Procedures governing Skillnets Decisions

This sections sets out the legislation under which Skillnets operates together with the general rules, procedures and practices applied by Skillnets in the provision of its services.

Authority:

- Mandate 2005 – 2010 and Funding Agreement between the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and Skillnets Limited in respect of Training Networks Programme
- Technical Support Services in relation to the Accel Initiative (Accelerated skills for development) under the Employment and Human Resources Development Operation Programme of the European Social Fund 2000 – 2006. Contract Agreement between DETE and Skillnets Services Ltd.
- Ethics in Public Office Acts, 1995 and 2001
- Guidelines for Assessment of Funding Applications
- Memorandum and Articles of Association
- Board and Committee Terms of Reference

Purchasing:

- Skillnets Procurement Policy

Insurance:

- Legislation governing employers and public liability, motor and other insurances

Financial Incentives:

Skillnets facilitate the disbursement of the following grant types:

TNP:

- **Development Grants:** granted to potential networks enabling them analyse the feasibility of sustaining a Learning Network in the longer term.
- **Full Grants:** granted to a network enabling the member companies jointly address their training needs, collaborate with other enterprises, and engage experts, trainers, certifying bodies, industry bodies and others to work with them to achieve goals.

The provision of financial assistance follows a public call for proposals and an assessment of the applications made. Assessments are carried out according to the Guidelines for Assessment of Funding Applications.

Applications under TNP are first assessed by the executive, and/or independent external assessors, and are then considered by the Evaluation and Performance Monitoring Committee. The Committee then makes a proposal to the Board of Directors. The Board of Directors consider the proposal to approve financial assistance by way of grants.

Guidelines for Assessment of Funding Applications

Assessment Principles:

- Assessments are carried out on each application received by the closing date under a call for proposals
- Applications received after the advertised closing date are not considered
- Each assessor acts independently of other assessors and must apply the agreed guidelines and criteria
- Each assessor produces a report based on the agreed guidelines and criteria in a format prescribed by Skillnets

Assessment Criteria:

Applications are usually assessed under 3 criteria as follows:

- **Strategic Criteria:** look at key features of enterprise training such as the following :
 - Enterprise-led
 - Collaboration
 - Impact on Competitiveness & Employability
- **Operational Criteria:** look at the process and methods of achieving project strategies, including all key project management factors.
- **Wider Impact Criteria:** look at what is developed and shared as well as what can be continued after the project duration.

