

# **Skillnets**

# **Freedom of Information**

# **Reference Manual**

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

February 2015



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Skillnets registered in Ireland No. 298694. Registered office: 5th Floor, Q House, 76 Furze Road, Sandyford, Dublin 18, D18 E268.

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## 1. Introduction

The ‘*Skillnets FOI Reference Manual – A guide to the functions, records, rules and practices of Skillnets, February 2015*’ is compiled in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2014.

The Freedom of Information (FOI) Act, effective from 21<sup>st</sup> April 1998, established 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 Act asserts 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 Act is 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 FOI Act 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 a state-funded, enterprise-led support body dedicated to the promotion and facilitation of training and upskilling as key elements in sustaining Ireland's national competitiveness. Skillnets' mission is to enhance the skills of people in employment in Irish industry to support competitiveness and employability. It supports and funds networks of enterprises (known as a Skillnet) to engage in training. These networks are led and managed by the enterprises themselves to design, manage and deliver specific training programmes across a broad range of industry and service sectors nationwide.

Skillnets manages two main programmes:

- The Training Networks Programme (TNP) and
- The Finuas Networks Programme (Finuas), a similar initiative for the international financial services sector.

An additional initiative, the ManagementWorks programme was undertaken in 2012 and aims to increase the level of management development in small and medium enterprises.

Skillnets manages these programmes with funding from 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) and Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU).

Further information on the above programmes may be found in Part 2 of this manual.

### **3. Purpose of this Reference Manual**

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

### **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.

## **5. How to access information held by Skillnets**

### ***Routinely Available Information***

Skillnets routinely makes available Annual Reports, Programme Evaluation Reports and the “*Skillnets News*” newsletters. On occasions, other publications are produced. To view and download all publications currently available, please visit <http://www.skillnets.ie/publications>.

This information will continue to be available informally without the need to use the Freedom of Information Act 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](http://www.skillnets.ie), and then enquire at our office.

### ***Access to Records***

The FOI Act has applied to Skillnets since 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<sup>st</sup> April 1998.

The FOI Act allows 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:

#### **The Freedom of Information (FOI) Officer**

**Skillnets, 5<sup>th</sup> Floor, Q House 76 Furze Road, Sandyford, Dublin 18,  
D18 E268.**

**Tel: 01 207 9630 Fax: 01 207 9631 Email: [FOI@skillnets.com](mailto:FOI@skillnets.com)**

#### **Applications should:**

- specify that the information is sought under the 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, CD etc)

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

A Request for Access to Records under the FOI Act form is included as an appendix in this manual.

Processing of requests for information is subject to time limits specified by the Act. 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 the internal review, you may seek an independent review of the decision from the Information Commissioner. Also, if you have not received a reply to your application for the 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: 01 639 5689**

**Fax: 01 639 5676**

E-mail: [info@oic.ie](mailto:info@oic.ie)

Website: <http://www.oic.ie>

## ***Fees***

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

### **Application Fees**

There is no application fee for making a request.

### **Search and Retrieval and Copying Fees**

Fees may 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.

Fees do not arise if your request is for personal information.

- €20 per hour for search and retrieval of records  
(for charges that exceed €100)
- €0.04 per sheet for photocopies

Fees, where charged, have to be paid before the information is made available

There is an **Internal Review** prescribed fee of **€30** (medical card holders €10).

There is a prescribed fee for an **Appeal to the Commissioner** of **€50** (Medical Card Holders €15). 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.

The principle roles of Skillnets are:

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

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) and Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU).

Skillnets 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 enterprises 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 (TNP). These networks encompass a wide variety of sectors and regions in Ireland, with a particular focus on the needs of small and micro-enterprises. 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.

#### **Finuas Networks Programme (Finuas):**

The Finuas Networks Programme is dedicated to specialised training within the international financial services sector and is jointly funded by the government and companies within the sector. 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](http://www.finuas.ie)

### **ManagementWorks Programme**

Skillnets was tasked with developing the Management Development Network programme (MDN) under the Action Plan for Jobs Initiative. The programme, ManagementWorks, was started on a pilot basis in 2012 and continues to support a range of management development training opportunities along with mentoring support for SME managers.

For further information: [www.managementworks.ie](http://www.managementworks.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 and 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 (ICTU)
- Three representatives nominated by the Minister of Education and Skills.

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:**

Brendan McGinty (Chairperson)

Karl McDonagh

Kara McGann  
Mairéad Divilly  
George Hennessy  
Ian Talbot

**Employee Representatives:**

Peter Rigney  
Eamon Devoy  
Nuala Keher

**Ministerial Representatives:**

Terry Hobdell  
Henry Murdoch  
Paul O'Brien

**Board Committees:**

**Finance & General Purpose Committee:**

Brendan McGinty  
Paul O'Brien  
Mairéad Divilly  
Eamon Devoy

**Evaluation and Performance Monitoring Committee:**

Henry Murdoch (Chairperson)  
Peter Rigney  
Terry Hobdell  
Ian Talbot

**Policy, Research & Communications Committee:**

Nuala Keher (Chairperson)  
George Hennessy  
Karl McDonagh

**Audit Committee:**

Mairéad Divilly (Chairperson)  
Paul O'Brien

Eamon Devoy

## **Skillnets and Records Held**

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

- Programme Management – TNP, Finuas, ManagementWorks and Accel programmes
- Finance & Services
- Communications

## ***Skillnets Structure & Classes of Records Held***

### **Programme Management**

#### **Training Networks Programme (TNP)**

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.

Funding for network programmes is financed by way of grant from Skillnets together with match funding contributions from participating enterprises. Skillnets funding is made available following competitive calls for proposals.

Skillnets has completed six Training Networks Programmes (TNP) to date:

- TNP 1999 – 2001
- TNP 2002 – 2005
- TNP 2006 – 2007
- TNP 2008 – 2009
- TNP 2010 – 2011
- TNP 2012 – 2013
- TNP 2014 – 2015 (current programme)

The scale of activity and level of funding for these programmes has varied over the years.

***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 2009-2014**

The Finuas Networks Programme commenced in 2009. Funding for this programme is financed by way of grant from Skillnets together with match funding contributions from participating enterprises.

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.

***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

**ManagementWorks Programme**

The ManagementWorks Programme commenced in 2012. Funding for this programme is financed by way of grant from Skillnets together with match funding contributions from participating enterprises.

The role of ManagementWorks programme management is to increase the level of management development in SMEs and to report on a regular basis on its progress. This role involves ongoing contact with SMEs throughout the country and the recruitment of participants and the delivery of training programmes for this sector.

The programme is delivered by Skillnets' own subsidiary, Skillnets DAC, to act as a training network in pursuit of this objective.

***Classes of records held:***

- Network Contract Information
- Network Programme Data
- Training provider procurement records
- Programme member company and participant records
- Management and financial accounts
- Grant payments to network
- Expenditure on administration & associated overheads
- Payroll & pension files
- Tax clearance records
- Legal correspondence

**Accel Programme 2006-2008**

Accel was an initiative of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and was managed by Skillnets DAC 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.

This programme involved 55 training networks with 9,000 companies and 29,000 employees participating. The programme received grant funding of €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

Funding for Accel projects was financed by way of grant from the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment together with match funding contributions from participating enterprises.

### **Finance and Services**

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, programme management and corporate governance support for the Board and the Chief Executive.

#### ***Classes of records held:***

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

### **Communications**

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 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 associated programmes
- Collateral material developed by Skillnets and networks
- Conference and seminar data



## 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 and Funding Agreement between the Department of Education & Skills (DES) and Skillnets together with the annual allocation letter from DES.
- 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:

### **Training Networks Programme (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.

## Appendix 1: Request for Access to Records under the FOI Act

**Please use BLOCK letters. Applications must be accompanied by appropriate fee.**

<b>Surname:</b>			
<b>First Name:</b>			
<b>Postal Address:</b>			
<b>Home Tel No:</b>		<b>Business Tel No.</b>	

In accordance with section 7 of the FOI Act, I request access to records which are: (Please tick as appropriate)			
<b>Personal:</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Non-personal:</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>NOTE:</b> Before you are given access to personal information relating to yourself you may be asked to provide proof of identity.			

In the space below, please describe the records as fully as you can. If you are requesting personal information, please state precisely in what name those records are held. You will not normally be given access to personal information of another person unless you have obtained the written consent of that person.
I request the following records:
My preferred form of access is:
To receive copies of records by post: YES/NO
Other please specify
Description:
Please sign here:
Date:

**Return to:** Freedom of Information Officer, Skillnets, 5<sup>th</sup> Floor Q House, 76 Furze Road, Sandyford, Dublin 18, D18 E268. Tel: 01 2079630 or email [FOI@skillnets.com](mailto:FOI@skillnets.com)