PLSS Frequently Asked Questions

Why was PLSS developed?

PLSS was developed as the integrated and coordinated mechanism for the achievement of Strategic Goal 4 of the Further Education and Training Strategy 2014-2019, which is to implement a new planning and funding model for further education and training.

What are the benefits of PLSS for the FET learner?

PLSS will reduce the data collection burden placed on learners who are attending or have attended FET courses or programmes previously and who either: (1) would like to enrol in another FET course or programme; and/or (2) access their FET educational records.

What are the benefits of PLSS for the FET sector?

The benefits of PLSS include transparency, accountability, improved efficiency and increased data quality of the FET sector. PLSS will improve the public image and attractiveness of FET courses and programmes.

What forms do we use with PLSS?

There are 3 forms associated with PLSS.

> *1. Expression of Interest*

Submitting an Expression of Interest (EOI) may be the first phase in the FET application process. The form allows a prospective applicant to provide their details in order to access information on a course/programme of learning that they are interested in. The form does NOT constitute an application for a FET course. The submission of an Expression of Interest form will not be taken as an indication that the prospective applicant will be awarded a place on the named course/s. Should the prospective applicant continue onto a FET course then a full learner details form should be completed either in hard copy or on-line, through registering for a fetchcourses.ie account at www.fetchcourses.ie

> 2. Learner Details form

This form should be used and completed by all persons pursuing a SOLAS funded course/programme of learning. The learner details form should be completed in full either in hard copy or on-line, through registering for a fetchcourses.ie account at www.fetchcourses.ie Completion of the form indicates the learner has been accepted onto the course/programme of learning.

> 3. Parental Consent Form

This is to be used where a learner is under the age of 18. A parent or guardian must be notified before the prospective learner engages in the FET provision.

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Are these forms available in Irish, plain English or Easy Reader versions?

All forms will be available in Irish, plain English and Easy Reader versions.

What is the purpose of the data being collected?

The data collected has several purposes:

1. Operational

SOLAS is statutorily required to communicate with learners and the other PLSS Participants to evaluate the FET sector in Ireland under the Further Education and Training Act. The data must establish the eligibility of learners and applicants to attend FET courses and assess their employability. The data will also serve to facilitate SOLAS in meeting the demands of the labour market to coordinate and evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of FET provision in compliance with its statutory functions in the Further Education and Training Act.

2. Reporting

The data will allow SOLAS to co-ordinate and evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of the FET sector in Ireland (as mandated by the Further Education and Training Act) e.g. FET learner level, national level and European level.

At FET learner level, SOLAS has a statutory obligation to report on the education/training and funding received by learners. The ability to provide appropriate, informed and comprehensive reports further serves to allow SOLAS to help the FET sector meet the demands of the labour market and to effectively coordinate an efficient FET sector in Ireland and evaluation of FET outcomes.

At national and European level, SOLAS must report (as a statutory requirement for funding) on the FET sector pursuant to the ESF Regulation 1. Until 2027, under the Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning 2014-2020 ("PEIL"), SOLAS must justify the ESF co-funding that it seeks via the DES by way of reporting. The PEIL requires the national authority in each Member State charged with the function of FET provision to collect and store detailed data about each learner in receipt of ESF co-funding. For this, SOLAS must be able to gather evidence which it obtains from its evaluation of FET outcomes including improved employability and the social inclusion of various groups in society (e.g. youth, females, long term unemployed, immigrants, persons with disabilities, socio-economic disadvantaged, etc.). SOLAS may also be randomly audited by the European Commission to verify and validate Ireland's ESF claim for funding. In the event that such ESF auditors were to make a finding of poor data or information quality, ESF co-funded provision could be suspended. This would have a serious knock-on effect on FET funding in Ireland (not least through a potential funding deficit) and therefore its provision in Ireland and SOLAS's legislative mandate under the FET Act would not be fulfilled.

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Has the same data to be collected for all learners on all courses?

Yes, all FET learners engaged on an ETB SOLAS funded course are requested to complete the same data fields. This enables the ETB to report and reflect accurately their provision and support their legal obligations in relation to auditing and funding requirements.

Why do we need this information?

It is necessary to process personal data about an individual's application to and attendance on a SOLAS funded FET programme. The applicant's data may be processed for the following purposes:

> *1. To contact them about the application.*
>
> *2. To administer the application and to assess eligibility for a SOLAS funded FET programme in a particular year.*
>
> *3. To follow up with the applicant after the application is received as required.*
>
> *4. Maintenance of the learner record (including personal and course details).*
>
> *5. Management of course processes (including commencement, completion, progressions).*
>
> *6. Providing advice and support through the FET provider Guidance Services where available.*
>
> *7. To contact learners after course completion to measure course impact in relation to further education and training participation and/ or employment.*
>
> *8. To track, evaluate and assess the outcomes of the FET programme.*

Who has access to the data in PLSS?

SOLAS will be the only agency that will have access to the full data set and a complete overview of PLSS. Each ETB and ETB centre will only have access to the data that it populates with PLSS as per its functions and responsibilities under its respective founding legislative acts.

Does the DEASP or QQI have access to my ETBs data in PLSS?

No, the ETB is the only organisation that can access the full data set. SOLAS will receive aggregate data from each ETB on their provision.

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Will DEASP receive details on the clients they refer?

DEASP will receive feedback via PLSS on learner/applicant participation in FET programmes (e.g. attendance at interview, acceptance, completion) for people they refer.

Will DEASP receive information on people they did not refer?

Information will not be shared with DEASP on persons they did not refer to PLSS.

Who will have access to individual learner files?

The ETB person(s) responsible for the management of the course and learners whilst participating on the course.

Are there any special categories of learners in PLSS?

The category of 'protected user' will exist to ensure anonymity to certain agreed categories of learner.

Other than SOLAS who are the parties to the data?

The other PLSS Participants have legislative mandates to fulfil in relation to FET provision in Ireland. Currently the parties include: The Education and Training Boards, Department of Education and Skills, Department of Social Protection, QQI, and the Higher Education Authority.

When would my information be shared?

To support efficient processing of the application, an ETB may need to check the accuracy of personal information provided with external data sources for example:

    1. Verification of applicant identity.

    2. Confirmation of DEASP payment or Personal Public Service Number (PPSN).

    3. Obtaining of additional information to decide eligibility for exemption of fees.

    4. Verifying the completion of previous study.

What data do they see?

The Education and Training Boards, see all data in relation to their learners to allow them to provide and administer the FET programme. Department of Education and Skills, receive some detail about PLC learners - Name, address, course code and PPSN. Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection receive feedback on touchpoints during the applicant/learner lifecycle of the clients that they referred to the ETB, for example, if the

learner attended the interview for the course, started on the course or when they finished on the course. QQI receive the details required to claim the certification for the learner. Additionally, it is envisaged the PPSN will be used to identify the destination of FET leaners upon completion of the FET course, the purpose being to ascertain the outcomes from the FET intervention.

What is the purpose of sharing the data with them?

The main purpose is to establish the learner outcomes from the FET course. FET providers are required to identify the destination of their learners after the FET intervention. PLSS facilitates compliance with the respective legislative functions of each PLSS Participant organisation. ETBs have a legislative mandate to fulfil under the Education and Training Board Act, Section 10. DEASP has a statutory mandate under the Social Welfare Consolidation Act to exchange information with specified bodies. HEA has a legislative mandate to fulfil certain functions which extend to the FET sector under the Higher Education Authority Act, Sections 3(a) and (b). Under Section 9 of the Quality and Qualifications Ireland (ET) Act. No secondary purposes are permitted outside the scope of the Data Sharing Protocols. The personal data of learners/applicants shared is relevant to the processing purpose.

Is the PPSN required from all FET applicants?

Yes, this is the unique identifier used to link the learners' FET journey and data.

What is the Programme and Learner Support System Data Protection Statement?

It is necessary to process applicant's personal data in connection with their application for a programme of study on, a SOLAS funded further education and training (FET) programme. This personal information must be treated in an appropriate and lawful manner, in accordance with applicable data protection laws. The Data Protection Statement makes the applicant aware of how their personal data will be handled.

Why do we need to collect the PPSN?

The PPSN is a unique identifier which eliminates the possibility of confusing one person with another and makes it possible for SOLAS, ETBs and the PLSS participants to operate more efficiently and effectively with learners and each other.

Will PLSS accept the National Insurance Number for residents of Northern Ireland?

Yes

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If the PPSN is not provided what happens?

A learner record cannot be created for the applicant. Therefore, the ETB cannot report fully on the activity, value and benefits of their provision to the community it serves.

Are some data fields optional?

All fields are required for operational, reporting and/or accounting purposes supporting the ETBs to accurately report and reflect the depth and breadth of FET provision it offers. ETB's funding and reporting requirements are met by the completion of the data sets.

What options are available to learners in relation to the provision of data fields?

All fields are required for operational or reporting purposes and therefore should be completed. However, if an applicant/learner chooses not to disclose information, that will be respected. Within PLSS they can choose to furnish the data, note the data will be furnished at a later date or indicate they do not wish to disclose the data.

What happens in PLSS when learners decline to complete data fields?

The data fields will remain blank and the option 'Incomplete due to Non-Disclosure' can be chosen within PLSS.

If a learner decides not to complete the Further Details section has this implications for future funding?

The data fields in the Further Details Section are of a sensitive nature and provide providers and funders with a greater understanding of the profile and needs of FET learner. All learners have the option not to disclose or reply to the questions in this section.

Further Details was completed but there is no data visible why is this?

The data inputted to the 'Further Details' tab is saved but, for data protection reasons, will not be visible to the ETB user subsequently. The detail under that tab is not required for operational purposes, it is only needed for reporting and statistical purposes. Therefore while the screen will record the tab as completed/saved the PLSS user will not be able to view the data.

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How long will the data be held?

Learner data will be kept for the purposes of on-going administration, audit, and review, but only for as long as is necessary. Any personal data of learners/applicants that is not bound by statutory and/or ESF regulations for record retention will be deleted following an individual request. PLSS learner personal data will be available to learners indefinitely to support the individual in documenting their portfolio of learning within FET provision.

Where is the data held?

All learner/applicant personal data is held on a secure server, with restricted permission for access.

The map location for my course is incorrect, but why can't I change the map location for my course in the schedule?

The map is associated with the venue and can be changed by choosing Provider, then Venue, then click on the Venue in question and Edit the map for that specific location using the drop down. Don't forget to save your changes.

Why can't applicants apply online to my course on FETCH?

Accept Online Applications (FETCH) must be ticked in the Course Calendar Details tab when scheduling the course. The status of course must be set to Active for the Accept Online Applications (FETCH) tick-box to work. If, both the status of the course is Active and Accept Online Applications (FETCH) is ticked, applicants will be able to apply Online to your course.

I have ticked Publish to Web in the Course Calendar Details tab, so why can't I see my course on FETCH?

The status of the course must be set to Active for the Publish to Web tick-box to work. Set the status of the course to Active and ensure Publish to Web is ticked and you will then see your course on FETCH.

I cannot see the TAPS icon on the "On Course" tab.

Go to the Course Calendar details screen and ensure that TAPS is selected as the Local Admin System.

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How do I specify Manual/Automatic TACS badge numbers for Learners?

Go to the Course Calendar details screen and use the TACS dropdown list.

When will my terminations be sent across to the Legacy System?

Once a learner is finished on a course his/her termination details are sent across to the TAPS system on the hour one hour after termination. For example- If a learner's finish details are input on PLSS at 11:10am their details will be sent across at 13:00 hrs.

I have transferred a learner to TAPS and I have realised he is on the wrong course?

The learner must be terminated of the wrong course and managed onto the new course.

I do not have bank details for a learner or I have a Learner who is not getting paid (e.g. sending to TACS only), how do I populate these learners' bank details for transferring to TAPS?

Input 14 zeroes for the bank account details. This allows the learners to be sent to TAPS and subsequently to TACS.

Will learners who are "On Course" be available in the RCCRS for Training Centre activity?

Yes. A job runs at 13:00hrs and every 10 minutes between 17:00hr and 20:00hr which copies learner details from PLSS to the legacy systems.