



European Construction Sector Observatory

Policy fact sheet

Ireland

Safe Pass Programme

Thematic objectives 2, 4 & 5

February 2020



In a nutshell

Implementing body	SOLAS – Further Education & Training Authority (an agency of the Department of Education and Skills).
Key features & objectives	A one-day health and safety awareness programme that leads to the issuing of a Safe Pass Registration Card, which is valid for four years and is a legal requirement for all personnel working in the construction sector in Ireland.
Implementation date	2000-present
Targeted beneficiaries	All construction sector personnel, including apprentices and trainees.
Targeted sub-sectors	All construction sub-sectors.
Budget (EUR)	2.25 million ¹ of SOLAS revenue generated by the Safe Pass registration and card production process by 2016.
Good practice	★★★★★
Transferability	★★★★★

The Safe Pass Programme² was developed as part of the Construction Safety Partnership Plan which was launched by the Ministry for Labour, Trade and Consumer Affairs in October 2000. It followed an initiative by the Construction Industry Training Committee.

Safe Pass was the result of a thorough consultation process with expert working groups and benefited from the support of the Construction Industry Training Committee. The consultation process focused on the content and delivery of the Safe Pass

Programme and the target group to whom it was to be delivered.

The Safe Pass Programme complies with the provisions of the:

- Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005³, which defines the main provisions for organisations to secure and improve the health, safety and welfare of people at work, including:
 - Management and organisation of the systems of work necessary to achieve a safe working environment;
 - Requirements for the control of safety health and welfare at work;
 - Identification of responsibilities and roles of employers and employees;
- Safety Health and Welfare at Work (General Application) Regulations 2007⁴, which further specified the requirements of employers, employees and others with regards to, for example, the workplace, equipment, load handling, electricity, dangerous working conditions (height, noise, vibrations, explosives), first aid and signage;
- Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Construction) Regulations 2013⁵, which clarified and strengthened the general duties of all parties to secure occupational safety, health and welfare in construction work. This includes the duties of clients, project supervisors, designers, contractors and employees.

These regulations apply to all construction projects including the alteration, decoration, maintenance and repair of buildings and the installation, maintenance and removal of mechanical and other systems fixed within or to structures. They place obligations on clients and designers to ensure that safety and health is taken into account before any construction work begins.

Since its inception in 2000, the Safe Pass Programme has provided health and safety awareness training to over 1.7 million construction sector personnel in Ireland. It has received the endorsement of both employers and trainees, and is considered to provide a baseline in health and safety awareness.

1.

General description

The Safe Pass Programme is managed by the Further Education & Training Authority - SOLAS. SOLAS took charge of running the programme upon its establishment in 2013. It was previously run by the Training and Employment Authority (*Foras Áiseanna Saothair, FAS*), which was dissolved in 2013.

Safe Pass is a one-day health and safety awareness programme that is delivered by an approved SOLAS Safe Pass Tutor. Those that complete the programme are issued a Safe Pass Registration Card. The card is valid for a period of four years, after which the holder must attend the one-day Safe Pass course again, in order to be eligible for a new card. The aim is to ensure that each holder regularly updates their health and safety knowledge and awareness⁶.

The SOLAS Safe Pass Programme is designed to address the needs of all workers in construction.

All construction workers in Ireland are legally required to hold a valid Safe Pass Registration Card⁷. The programme does not, however, relieve employers of their statutory duty to provide other appropriate health and safety training for their employees.

All new entrants to the construction sector, including construction-related apprentices, trainees undergoing construction-related traineeship programmes, and transition year students availing of work experience opportunities within the construction sector, are required to attend and successfully complete the Safe Pass course⁸.

The main objectives⁹ of the programme are to:

- Raise the standard of safety awareness in the construction industry;
- Ensure that, over time, all site personnel undergo basic health and safety awareness training to enable them to work on-site without

being a risk to themselves or others who might be affected by their acts or omissions;

- Maintain a Register of personnel who have undertaken the Safe Pass Programme;
- Issue a SOLAS Safe Pass Registration Card to those that successfully complete the programme. The card informs employers that the card holder has attended a formal course on health and safety awareness.

The Safe Pass training programme consists of 13 learning units, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Safe Pass course content & learning units

Learning Units	Unit Title
1	Introduction to site safety
2	Legislation & site safety
3	Site accident reporting
4	Introduction to risk assessment
5	Risk assessment for electricity
6	Risk assessment for excavations
7	Risk assessment for heights
8	Behaviour-based safety
9	Site safety & construction equipment
10	Site safety & construction vehicles
11	Personal health & welfare
12	Noise & vibration
13	Personal protective equipment

Source: SOLAS¹⁰

A list of Approved Training Organisations (ATOs) is available on the SOLAS website¹¹. Each ATO charges a participant fee for attendance on a Safe Pass Programme. Fees are typically around EUR 100 but can vary from one provider to another. The participant fee covers the cost of the training programme and includes a charge for the administration of the SOLAS Safe Pass Registration Card. A part of each fee (EUR 25) paid to ATOs is passed on to SOLAS to cover the cost of Safe Pass card production.

Upon completion of the Safe Pass Programme, the ATO uploads the participant's results onto the SOLAS Card Management System. Registration Cards are printed twice per week by the printing company and they are issued directly to the ATO for distribution to the participants.

Therefore, once the ATO uploads the participant's file onto the SOLAS database, it takes approximately five working days for Safe Pass Registration Card to be issued to the ATO. Delays in issuing a Registration Card may be encountered if there are any queries or

errors arising regarding the information provided in the participant's file.

Additionally, Schedule 4 of the Safety Health and Welfare at Work (Construction) Regulations 2013 provides for the recognition of equivalent safety awareness schemes approved by SOLAS. The Construction Skills Register (CSR Northern Ireland) one day health and safety course is the only course recognised by SOLAS as equivalent to the SOLAS Safe Pass programme¹².

2.

Achieved or expected results

The Safe Pass training programme has successfully provided health and safety awareness training to more than 1.7 million construction sector workers over the last two decades, according to the most recent figures published by SOLAS (2018). The number trained each year is shown Table 2. Overall, that equates to an average of 104,024 people trained per year over a 17-year period, up to 2018.

Table 2: Number of participants that have completed the Safe Pass Programme (2002-2018)

Year	Number of participants trained
2002	112,540
2003	117,562
2004	178,870
2005	118,156
2006	207,748
2007	151,399
2008	78,264
2009	48,217
2010	88,079
2011	73,019
2012	54,680
2013	60,568
2014	102,112
2015	89,029
2016	89,167
2017	91,511
2018	107,481
Total	1,768,402

Source: SOLAS¹³

The annual participation rate peaked in 2006, just prior to the economic crisis in 2008. In the years that followed, the fall in construction sector investment and activity is reflected by the fall in the number of participants in the programme. In more recent years, a 69% increase in participant numbers between 2013 and 2014 stands out. This is linked to

a 4.8% growth in the national economy in 2014¹⁴. Not until 2018 has the annual number risen to above 100,000 participants.

According to the Safe Pass Programme Business Process Review¹⁵, developed by Bearing Point and published in December 2017, there are over 350,000 Safe Pass holders at any given time (i.e. that are within their 4-year validity period), based on numbers completing the training programme. That figure is considerably higher than the number of people actually employed within the construction sector. Data published by the Labour Force Survey¹⁶ shows that there were 240,000 people employed in the sector in 2007. The number then fell to its lowest point in 2012 (81,300) before gradually rising year on year to 145,500 in 2018.

The review report by Bearing Point concludes that the difference between the number of valid Safe Pass Cards and annual construction sector employment figures may indicate that there is a large amount of international mobility of construction workers, and/or large numbers of non-construction workers completing Safe Pass training.

Monitoring and oversight of the training provided as part of the Safe Pass Programme is an ongoing activity. SOLAS uses external monitors to conduct regular assessments of ATOs to verify the quality of the training they provide and mentor new tutors. External monitors make at least two unannounced visits to each ATO every year. The monitors then report back to SOLAS¹⁷.

In its most recent annual report (2018¹⁸), SOLAS announced that it had introduced a new weighting element to the Safe Pass monitoring process in order to promote greater equity and transparency within the monitoring process.

3.

Perspectives and lessons learned

The Safe Pass Business Process Review¹⁹ report by Bearing Point has identified a number of lessons learned, based on feedback provided by Safe Pass stakeholders.

The general consensus among the stakeholders consulted is that Safe Pass is a successful programme. It works well and serves as a sound baseline in health and safety awareness²⁰.

Employers continue to endorse the programme by enrolling their employees in it, despite not having a legal requirement to do so (the legal obligation is on the individual worker). This indicates the value employers place on the course content.

The Safe Pass Card administration/production process is not always as efficient as it should be²¹.

Although most participants that complete the training receive their Safe Pass card on time (within 5 working days), for some the process is lengthier than expected. From the point of view of SOLAS, the card issuing timeframe is dependent on ATOs (approved tutors) uploading trainee files on time and on the timely receipt of payment.

There are also issues concerning the card replacement procedure, which some view as being overly complicated. The option to apply online would be more user-friendly and efficient.

Recognition of UK qualifications and higher-level courses by the SOLAS Safe Pass Programme is lacking²².

The majority of foreign workers in the Irish construction sector are from the UK. Employers and employees would like to see UK qualifications receive formal recognition by the SOLAS Safe Pass Programme. Currently, the SOLAS scheme only

recognises valid cards issued by the Construction Skills Register (CSR) Scheme in Northern Ireland.

There are also concerns about the value of Safe Pass training for those that already possess higher level health and safety qualifications that are recognised by the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) in Ireland.

Safe Pass training materials need updating²³.

Although Safe Pass course materials are periodically revised, the general consensus among stakeholders is that they are a bit dated. There is too much focus on PowerPoint presentations, instead of more effective media formats such as video. More up-to-date content and formats are needed. For example, the video should reflect the current regulations on the use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

Safe Pass training delivery methods need updating²⁴.

Classroom-based training continues to be the preferred method for first time trainees; however, there is also interest among stakeholders for the option to access training courses online, especially for refresher courses. The use of a continuous learning approach to renewals, supported by 'toolbox' talks and online modules, is also suggested.

The Safe Pass card renewal process is a burden²⁵.

Although the importance of refresher training is recognised by employers, many consider the need for card holders to attend a full day's training every four years to be unnecessarily excessive and costly in terms of time and money.

4.

Conclusion and recommendations

Safe Pass continues to be a very successful health and safety awareness programme. It has achieved sustained success over two decades, training an average of 104,024 people per year since 2002, and over 1.7 million in total.

Establishing the programme on a statutory basis has no doubt played a part in its appeal and success, at least in terms of encouraging individual construction sector workers to join the scheme. However, employers are not required by law to send their employees on the course. Their willingness to do so indicates the value they place on the training provided.

There are however some areas for improvement, based on feedback from stakeholders. The card production and issuing process is not always efficient, and the card renewal process is considered to be cumbersome, unnecessary and costly by both trainees and employers.

Looking forward, three recommendations are suggested to help to further improve the Safe Pass Programme:

- Consideration should be given to updating the content and format of training materials, in line with feedback from stakeholders, who would like to see more varied use of media formats;
- The use of more varied and flexible training delivery methods, such as online training and/or continuous learning, should be considered, particularly for refresher training courses. This would help to make ongoing or periodic training more accessible and conducive for employers and employees;
- Formal recognition of higher-level courses on health and safety (e.g. FETAC) and equivalent international qualifications should be considered by the SOLAS Safe Pass Programme. Employers are particularly keen for UK qualifications to be recognised as the bulk of their foreign workers are from the UK.

Overall, the Safe Pass Programme is rated as a '5-star good practice measure' on a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high).

This score is based on the high level of sustained success that the scheme has achieved over a prolonged period of time. Having begun as a voluntary scheme, it has acquired a statutory basis and is now a legal requirement for all personnel working in the construction sector in Ireland. Safe Pass is well received by trainees and it also endorsed by employers, who view it as providing a sound baseline in health and safety training.

The Safe Pass Programme is rated as a '5-star transferable measure' on a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high).

This score is based on similar reasons as stated on 'good practice'. The long-term success of this scheme, the high number of people it has trained and the positive feedback it has attracted from stakeholders (employers and trainees), indicate that it has the potential to be very transferable. It provides an interesting 'good practice' reference model on how large-scale health and safety awareness training can be successfully delivered. The lessons from the programme (or parts of it) design and implementation generated useful insights, that can be relevant to other countries from a policy learning perspective.

Other countries interested in implementing a similar type of programme would need to ensure close consultation between government, training bodies, the domestic construction sector and expert groups to agree on a programme structure that is commensurate with the domestic environment and training needs. Consideration would also need to be given to the viability of placing it on a statutory basis.

Endnotes

- 1 Bearing Point, Safe Pass and CSCS/QSCS Programmes – Business Process Review, Dec 2017:
https://a.storyblok.com/f/70398/x/6db63f3fce/bearingpoint_report_cscs_qscs_safe_pass_business_process_review_2017.pdf
- 2 SOLAS, Safe Pass Programme:
<http://www.solas.ie/Pages/Safepass.aspx>
- 3 Health and Safety Authority (HSA), Safety, Health and Welfare Act 2005 (No. 10 of 2005):
https://www.hsa.ie/eng/Legislation/Acts/Safety_Health_and_Welfare_at_Work/
https://www.hsa.ie/eng/Publications_and_Forms/Publications/Safety_and_Health_Management/Short_Guide_to_SHWWA_2005.pdf
- 4 Irish Statute Book, S.I. No. 299/2007 - Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (General Application) Regulations 2007:
<http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2007/si/299/made/en/print>
- 5 Health and Safety Authority (HSA), Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Construction) Regulations 2013 (S.I. No. 291 of 2013):
https://www.hsa.ie/eng/Legislation/Regulations_and_Orders/Construction_Regulations_2013/
- 6 SOLAS, Overview of the SOLAS Safe Pass Programme – Health and Safety Awareness Training:
http://www.solas.ie/Documents/Construction/Overview%20of%20Safe%20Pass%20CSQA%20G02_v1.0_AUG_2019.pdf
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 SOLAS, Safe Pass Programme:
<http://www.solas.ie/Pages/Safepass.aspx>
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 SOLAS, Approved Training Organisations:
<https://www.solas.ie/construction-lp/trainers/>
<http://trs.solas.ie/>
- 12 SOLAS, Safe Pass Programme, Course information:
<https://www.solas.ie/construction-lp/course-information/#safe-pass>
- 13 SOLAS, The 2014 Further Education and Training Services Plan
https://www.kilkennycoco.ie/eng/Services/Community_Culture/Social-Inclusion/2014-Further-Education-Training-Plan-SOLAS.pdf
SOLAS Annual Reports, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018:
<http://www.solas.ie/SolasPdfLibrary/AnnualReport2014Full.pdf>
<http://www.solas.ie/SolasPdfLibrary/Final%20Version%20for%20Web.pdf>
<http://www.solas.ie/SolasPdfLibrary/SOLAS%20Annual%20Report%202016.pdf>
http://www.solas.ie/SolasPdfLibrary/14438_SOLAS_annual_report_2017_english_web.pdf
<http://www.solas.ie/SolasPdfLibrary/Annual%20Report%20English.pdf>
- 14 The Irish Times, Irish economy surges ahead with 4.8% growth in 2014 (March 2015):
<https://www.irishtimes.com/business/economy/irish-economy-surges-ahead-with-4-8-growth-in-2014-1.2136685>
- 15 Bearing Point, Safe Pass and CSCS/QSCS Programmes – Business Process Review, Dec 2017:
https://a.storyblok.com/f/70398/x/6db63f3fce/bearingpoint_report_cscs_qscs_safe_pass_business_process_review_2017.pdf
- 16 Central Statistics Office (CSO), Labour Force Survey:
<https://www.cso.ie/en/statistics/labourmarket/labourforcesurvey/>
Construction Industry Federation (CIF) and Davy, Construction Industry Economic Update, May 2019:
https://cif.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Davy-Briefing_JMair_May-2019-4.pdf
- 17 Bearing Point, Safe Pass and CSCS/QSCS Programmes – Business Process Review, Dec 2017:
https://a.storyblok.com/f/70398/x/6db63f3fce/bearingpoint_report_cscs_qscs_safe_pass_business_process_review_2017.pdf
- 18 SOLAS, Annual Report and Accounts 2018:
<https://a.storyblok.com/f/70398/x/d21ad1190d/annual-report-english.pdf>
- 19 Bearing Point, Safe Pass and CSCS/QSCS Programmes – Business Process Review, Dec 2017:
https://a.storyblok.com/f/70398/x/6db63f3fce/bearingpoint_report_cscs_qscs_safe_pass_business_process_review_2017.pdf
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.