



Expression of Interest Call for Peer Reviewers on the Expert Panel for the SOLAS/Education and Training Boards Strategic Dialogue Process 2025

Overview

SOLAS is seeking expressions of interest from individuals seeking to act as peer reviewers on an expert panel for the SOLAS/Education and Training Boards (ETBs) strategic dialogue process in support of the new SOLAS and ETB Strategic Performance Agreements commencing in 2025. Each peer reviewer will be required to be available to attend 4 strategic dialogue meetings each from 19th November to 13th December 2024.

Background

The Further Education and Training (FET) system supports approximately 219,000 unique learners annually, is underpinned by state investment of over €1 billion per annum (administered by SOLAS) and offers a range of learning opportunities and supports across Levels 1 to 6 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). It is delivered primarily by the 16 Education and Training Boards ensuring that FET reflects regional characteristics and meets regional needs.

SOLAS is commencing a process of strategic dialogue with each of the sixteen ETBs leading to the development of Strategic Performance Agreements from 2025. The current Strategic Performance Agreements complete at the end of 2024.

A new national FET strategy 2025 – 2029 is in development. The Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science will set national targets for the ETBs which are aligned to the new strategy. The Strategic Performance Agreements will drive the strategic ambition for the FET system.

The multi-annual agreements will build upon the first 2 strategic performance agreements for the FET sector, spanning 2018 – 2024. A renewed framework for the development of the next iteration of strategic performance agreements is in train. Elements of the first agreements will be retained such as the unique characteristics of the ETB, strategic priorities and the contribution of FET provision. The agreements will also reflect the social and economic landscape while also addressing future challenges and opportunities associated with the green transition and digital transformation.

SOLAS is embarking on a process of consultation with ETBs via formal strategic dialogue meetings which will take place for each ETB at one of their campuses during November and December.

Finalisation and Reporting

A critical part of the process is the involvement of the independent Expert Panel. It is acknowledged that the intensive role played by SOLAS in developing the agreements means that some external independent input is required to bring robust and independent challenge and validation to the dialogue and performance agreement process. The panel will also play a role in ensuring that any improvements that should

be made, in line with international good practice in further education and training, can be flagged and addressed before agreements are finalised.

The Requirement

SOLAS is seeking to recruit 8 peer reviewers to sit on the independent expert panel. Candidates will be assessed on the basis of their ability to bring at least one of the following attributes, and a balance across these attributes will be sought when selecting the overall panel:

- Understanding and/or experience of the Irish further education and training system
- academic research on FET or system performance frameworks; and
- international good practice in further education and training.

To avoid potential conflicts of interest, peer reviewers should not be currently employed by, or serving as a member of the Board of, either SOLAS or an ETB. It is envisaged that 2 independent peer reviewers will review each draft ETB strategic performance agreement and participate in the strategic dialogue meetings with that ETB, providing formal feedback both before and after the meetings. It is proposed that each panel member would be allocated up to 4 ETBs for review.

The time breakdown for work in relation to each ETB is as follows:

- Review of background information on the ETB, including papers or documents relevant to the new ETB strategic performance agreement and provision of feedback in advance of strategic dialogue meeting – 1.5 days
- Participation in formal strategic dialogue meeting for ETBs - up to 1 day each
- Provision of feedback following meeting to feed into finalisation of Agreements - 0.5 days

A total of approx. 12 days will be required from each successful candidate assuming 4 ETBs are allocated for review. Peer reviewers must ensure that they are available for 12 working days during the period November to December as outlined in the indicative schedule below. It is proposed that an honorarium of €650 per day will be paid for the successful candidate, plus any travel and expenses incurred (reimbursable in line with standard SOLAS consultants' rates).

An indicative schedule of strategic dialogue meeting dates for which you would be required is as follows:

Education & Training Board (ETB)	Indicative Date	AM/PM
ETB 1	Tuesday 19 th Nov	PM
ETB 2	Monday 25 th Nov	AM
ETB 3	Wednesday 27 th Nov	AM
ETB 4	Wednesday 27 th Nov	PM
ETB 5	Thursday 28 th Nov	AM
ETB 6	Thursday 28 th Nov	PM
ETB 7	Friday 29 th Nov	AM
ETB 8	Friday 29 th Nov	PM
ETB 9	Monday 2 nd Dec	AM
ETB 10	Monday 2 nd Dec	PM
ETB 11	Friday 6 th Dec	AM

ETB 12	Friday 6 th Dec	PM
ETB 13	Tuesday 10 th Dec	AM
ETB 14	Tuesday 10 th Dec	PM
ETB 15	Weds 11 th Dec	AM
ETB 16	Weds 11 th Dec	PM

***Note that dates above are subject to confirmation from ETBs and may be changed**

Expression of Interest and Assessment Process

Any interested candidates should submit their CV and any relevant supplementary information to lorraine.hayes@solas.ie by 5pm on **Wednesday 6th November 2024**.

Applications will be assessed by awarding a score out of:

- **75 marks** on the degree to which expertise is demonstrated with regard to **at least one of the following attributes:** the Irish further education and training system; academic research on further education and training; and international good practice in further education and training.
- **25 marks** on the level of experience demonstrated within relevant roles in an education and training setting.

The marks will be added to give a total score for each candidate, with the candidates then ranked in order of score, and the peer reviewers for the panel selected on this basis. Successful candidates will be notified by **Friday 8th November**. It is anticipated engagement will commence in the week beginning 11th November 2024. Confirmation of appointment will be subject to agreement to SOLAS terms and conditions.