

# IS IT TIME TO MOVE 'SAFE PASS' TRAINING ONLINE?

Safe Pass – the mandatory one-day health and safety awareness training programme for construction workers, managed by SOLAS – looks set to undergo the most significant overhaul since it was first launched 20 years ago, with plans by SOLAS to provide an alternative online assessment facility, writes safety consultant Declan Gibney.



move the programme online, and it is envisaged that it will be delivered through a national network of assessment centres. Some would claim that switching to a short, question-based renewal assessment in lieu of a one-day training programme is progress, while others would argue that this is not in keeping with the fundamental purpose of the programme, to raise awareness.

## NATIONAL DATABASE

Once a candidate has successfully completed the programme their information is uploaded to a National Construction Schemes Database (NCSD) and a SOLAS Safe Pass Registration Card is produced. When issued, Safe Pass Cards are valid for a period of four years, and card holders must renew their cards before the card expiry date.

Under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Construction) Regulations 2013, all construction workers in Ireland – including apprentices and trainees – are legally bound to hold a valid Safe Pass Registration Card.

The programme is currently delivered by a network of SOLAS-approved Safe Pass tutors in a classroom setting. And existing card holders who wish to renew their card are required to complete a one-day programme leading to a paper-based assessment in a classroom setting.

However, SOLAS now intends to



Each candidate's eligibility will need to be confirmed using a front-end solution, to be developed by SOLAS. All first-time Safe Pass card holders will continue to be required to attend the classroom-based programme and paper-based assessment.

Currently approximately 100,000 Safe Pass cards are processed on an annual basis of which approximately 30,000 are renewals.

It is, therefore, envisaged that approximately 30,000 candidates may be eligible to do the online assessment per annum. While the request for tenders was published in July 2021, a successful bidder has yet to be announced.

**CULTURE CHANGE TAKES TIME**

Most safety professionals would agree that changing the culture is a slow and gradual process.

Although not universally favoured, the great thing about the Safe Pass programme is that it forces 'time out' for the small construction contractor to think about safety in a world of work that is fast paced and never ending.

Many Irish construction sites lack formal safety management structures

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and safety can be a topic that only arises after an accident. Furthermore, many small contractors have little or no health insurance, life assurance or sick pay scheme, meaning that, apart from pain and injury, they are financially vulnerable

as well.

Are we throwing the baby out with the bathwater? Would reform of content and format have been a better option? Has Safe Pass done its job in the current format? Only time will tell.

**SAFE PASS TRAINING PROGRAMME**

The SOLAS Safe Pass Health and Safety Awareness Training Programme was first developed and introduced in 2002 following an initiative by the Construction Industry Training Committee (CITC). This initiative was incorporated into the Construction Safety Partnership Plan, launched by Tom Kitt TD, the then Minister for Labour, Trade and Consumer Affairs.

Detailed consultation took place between FAS (now SOLAS) and Expert Working Groups representing the social partners with the support of the CITC.

The purpose of the SOLAS Safe Pass Training Programme is to ensure, over the course of time, that all construction site and local authority personnel, will have a basic knowledge of health and safety, and be able to work on site without being a risk to themselves or others who may be affected by their acts or omissions.

The one-day Safe Pass training, which is delivered in a classroom environment, is valid for a four-year period. Subjects covered range from working at heights to legislation and include excavations, confined spaces, accident reporting and behaviour-based safety.

Training is delivered in a blended style that incorporates exercises, case studies and discussions based on experience. There is usually a mix of ages and experience in the group, which adds greatly to the learning experience.

For more information visit [www.solas.ie/construction-lp/safe-pass/](http://www.solas.ie/construction-lp/safe-pass/)

