



Circular Letter 38/2014

To: The Boards of Management and Principals of Post-Primary Schools and the Chief Executives Officers of Education Training Boards.

Revised arrangements for the submission of returns to the Department of Education and Skills by post-primary schools for 2014/15 and future years.

1. This circular replaces a number of previous circulars

The following departmental circulars and any associated procedures are now being replaced by this circular

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| 71/2008 | Revised arrangements for the submission of September Returns (Teacher Timetables) and October Returns (Second-level Pupils) |
| 56/2009 | Revised arrangements 2009/10 September Returns (Teacher Timetables) |
| 57/2011 | Notification re: Short Term Pupil Placements for October Returns 2011/12 and future years |
| 42/2013 | Timely Submission of September and October Returns 2013/14 |

2. Purpose

The purpose of this circular is to notify post-primary schools of the revised requirements for the submission of returns of data by post-primary schools to the Department of Education and Skills with effect from 2014/15 school year until further notice.

This circular should be brought to the attention of all persons in the school who use the Post-Primary Online Database (P-POD) system and/or who are involved in the generation of the October Returns and/or who previously were involved in the generation of the September Returns by the school.

3. Importance of timetabling

The formulation of school timetables, appropriate to the diverse needs of individual schools, is a core function of school managerial authorities in ensuring effective deployment of resources and the provision of a broad, high quality education experience for all students. School authorities must ensure the school timetable continues to provide curriculum coverage for students and the best use of teaching resources.

4. September Returns

Previously, in 2009 the Department informed schools that the September Returns ceased to be required for teacher allocation and other purposes. This continues to be the position.

In recent years these Returns were utilised to assist the Department's Inspectorate as part of its evaluation activities in assessing the quality of education provision in each school in accordance with the Education Act, 1998 Section 7(2)(b).

Therefore there continues to be a requirement for schools to provide, on an annual basis, information about the deployment of teaching resources in the schools to the Department's Inspectorate.

The Department in consultation with the post-primary management bodies and the NAPD are currently examining how best to obtain this information. This examination will include whether the September Returns format should continue to be used or whether the information, as required, may be obtained from reports that schools are able to generate from their existing local school administration/management information systems in order to meet the needs of the Inspectorate in fulfilling its statutory remit in 2014/15 and following years.

The Department will advise all schools in the coming weeks of the outcome of this consultative process.

5. Post-Primary Online Database

The Department of Education and Skills has developed, in consultation with the ACCS, ETBI, JMB and the NAPD, a new system called the Post-Primary Online Database (P-POD). The P-POD system is a central database for student and some school data which is hosted by the Department. P-POD provides an efficient and effective system that enables the sharing of data on schools and students which are common to the data requirements of schools, the Department, the State Examinations Commission and other agencies within the education sector. The Department has developed a *Fair Processing Notice for the processing of the personal data of students* which is available on www.education.ie which provides information on the purposes for which personal data of students is shared with other bodies in compliance with the provisions of the Data Protection Acts. Schools are able to access P-POD using the Department's *esinet* secure portal to maintain data on their schools and students.

In order to ensure that all the student enrolment data is accurate as at the 30th September post-primary schools are required to enter all students enrolled in their school for the school year onto P-POD. Furthermore, schools are required to keep the information on these students up to date in a timely manner. The entry of students and the updating of student data on P-POD by schools should occur throughout the school year as students enrol or leave the school.

User guides to P-POD and tutorial videos on using P-POD are available on the Department's website

<http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services>Returns/Post-Primary-Online-Database-P-POD-Project/P-POD.html>

6. Recognition of Students on Short Term Placements

Under the *Rules and Programmes for Second Level Schools*, a recognised student is a student who is following an approved course for junior and senior cycle who is not less than 12 years on 1st January of the school year. The approved junior cycle course is of 3 years duration (Rule 21). An approved course in senior cycle must comply with Department Circulars 31/93, 47/93 and 2/95 and must be of 2/3 years duration (Rule 21(b)).

Short term placement refers to any enrolment in a school of a student outside of the Republic of Ireland which is for a period of less than a full school year.

Students who are enrolled in the school on a full-time basis and following a full-time programme of at least one year's duration, but who are temporarily absent on 30th of the school year due to a short term placement on an exchange programme abroad, **ARE** eligible to be included in a school's October Returns. Staffing and grant allocations to schools will include these recognised students.

The Department of Education & Skills wishes to advise School Management Authorities and Chief Executives of Education and Training Boards that students who are from outside of Republic of Ireland and on short term placement and in attendance on 30th September are **NOT** recognised students. However, schools are asked to identify these students in their October Returns by:

Tick the Short Term Pupil field on the enrolment tab for students on the P-POD system and also enter the number of weeks the student will attend the school. See screen in video tutorial on *Adding a new Pupil to your database*.

<http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Media-Library/P-POD-User-Guide/>

It is not intended to exclude students resident in Ireland who may be enrolled in a particular school for less than a year purely by virtue of having moved newly into an area, or changed school, or are moving out of an area etc. The intention is to exclude

only those on temporary placement who intend to return to their own jurisdiction after a number of weeks.

7. October Returns

The P-POD system supports the generation of the October Returns by schools together with a facility to print off hard copies of the necessary form which must be signed by the management of the school and submitted to the Department of Education and Skills, Schools' Division – Parents, Learners and Database Section, Cornamaddy, Athlone, Co. Westmeath.

Each year schools are required to generate their October Returns via P-POD after the 30th September and no later than 7th October (or the Monday immediately following the 7th October should the 7th fall on a weekend).

Details on how to generate the October Returns from within P-POD is available here

<http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services>Returns/Post-Primary-Online-Database-P-POD-Project/P-POD-User-Guide.pdf>

Please note that schools will no longer have to post the five October Returns files via the *esinet* portal as heretofore.

The timely generation of the October Returns by post-primary schools ensures that the allocation of staffing and grants can be notified to schools as early as possible. It also allows information on entrants for the State Examinations to be forwarded to the State Examinations Commission to allow that body to make the necessary preparations for oral, practical, aural and written examinations.

In the case of Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) students it allows information to be shared with SOLAS together with other agencies as provided for in the Department's *Fair Processing Notice for the processing of the personal data of students* available on www.education.ie

8. Discontinuation of existing data transfer processes between schools and the Department.

Please note that the *esinet* portal which was used for the uploading of the October Returns by schools in previous years has been removed as this mode of submitting returns has been replaced by the P-POD system. The *esinet* portal for the September Returns continues to be available.

Post-primary schools will no longer be required to download the May files issued in previous years by the Department with Personal Public Sector Numbers (PPSN) of students as verified by the Department of Social Protection. Instead the verified PPSNs will be updated onto the student records on P-POD by the Department. The Department will notify schools when this has been done. Notified schools may then download the verified PPSNs of their students from P-POD via the synchronised routine which has been provided to them by the supplier of the software in use in the school to support local school administration.

9. Returns of Irish Exemptions

Under Departmental Circular M10/94 school management are authorised to grant exemptions from the study of Irish to students whose circumstances fall within the criteria for exemptions. Schools are requested that in future they should enter details of any exemptions granted into the P-POD system. Please refer to the P-POD video tutorial for assistance on how to enter exemption details,

<http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Media-Library/P-POD-User-Guide/>

Schools should continue to retain all relevant documentation regarding the exemptions and make it available for inspection by authorised officers of the Department.

10. Schools must provide contact details

The name and contact telephone number and fax number, if applicable, should be provided for the school principal, the chairperson of the board of management and the contact person for P-POD queries/Departmental notices on P-POD.

These contact details should be entered under the *School Details* on P-POD. Guidance on how to use P-POD for this purpose is available in the P-POD video tutorial on Login and Initial Setup

<http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Media-Library/P-POD-User-Guide/>

In addition to the above schools are further required to provide the following e-mail addresses:-

The school principal's e-mail address – This e-mail address should be the address used by the principal for official contact purposes. It should also be noted that information of a confidential nature may be forwarded to this e-mail address.

The chairperson's e-mail address – This e-mail address should be the e-mail address used by the chairperson for official contact.

The e-mail address of the contact person in the school for P-POD/October Returns – This e-mail address should be the e-mail address of the person in the school who oversees the use of the P-POD system within the school and the generation of the October Returns on behalf of the school.

These e-mail addresses should be recorded under the *School Details* on P-POD. The e-mail addresses will be used for communications to schools from the Department in a timely manner. The effectiveness of the e-mail addresses as a form of communication is dependent on the schools keeping these addresses up to date via the P-POD system.

The principal's contact details including his/her e-mail address and the chairperson's contact details including his/her e-mail address will be used by sections within the Department of Education and Skills for the purposes of official communications.

The e-mail address of the P-POD/October Returns contact will be used by the Department for communications in respect of P-POD.

It is also proposed to provide the principal's e-mail address and the chairperson's e-mail address to the management bodies for post-primary sector of the school. If the school does not wish the e-mail addresses of principal and chairperson to be shared with the management body for the sector in which the school is located, i.e. voluntary secondary, community and comprehensive or ETB please tick the opt out box on the Form of Declaration at **Appendix 1** and return it to the Department.

The principal's e-mail address will be shared with NAPD where that body has advised the Department that the school is a member of the NAPD.

The principal's e-mail address may also be provided to other agencies within the education sector e.g. State Examinations Commission, National Council for Special Education, Educational Welfare Service (formerly National Educational Welfare Board) of Tusla (Child and Family Agency).

Schools are required to maintain the above contact details up-to-date at all times, in particular where there are changes to staff or to the board of management.

11. Declaration

School management and the Chief Executives of Education and Training Boards are required to complete the *Declaration Form* at **Appendix 1** below and return the completed form to the Department of Education and Skills, Parents, Learners and Database Section, Cornamaddy, Athone, Co. Westmeath no later than **16th May, 2014**.

12. Accuracy of data

Personal data

The personal data of students enrolled in each school will be stored by the student's school on P-POD. Therefore, schools as the Data Controllers for this data must ensure that they adhere fully to the provisions of the Data Protection Acts, 1988 and 2003.

Further information on the personal data recorded on P-POD is available in the departmental circular *Fair Processing Notice for the processing of the personal data of students*. This circular is available on the Department's website www.education.ie

Accuracy of Returns

Please note that the total number of recognised students submitted in the October Return will be used to calculate staffing and grant allocations to your school. It is therefore very important to ensure, in particular, that the total number of recognised students is accurate.

The Department is obliged to refer to An Garda Síochána, any deliberate overstatement of student numbers for the purposes of claiming additional resources from the Department. In these circumstances it will be a matter for An Garda

Síochána to determine what action, if any, should be taken and consequently this may result in criminal prosecution. Recoupment arrangements will also be required in respect of any overpayments (staffing or grants).

13. Department Contact

Any queries in respect of this circular should be e-mailed to p-podhelpdesk@education.gov.ie. The Roll no and name of the school should be included in the e-mail.

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April 2014

