



An Roinn Oideachais  
Department of Education

# Schools Photovoltaic Programme

## Programme Overview and Guidance

Document Reference SPP01

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## 1 Introduction

The provision of up to 6 kWp photovoltaic (PV) panels to schools, to be funded from the Climate Action Fund at the discretion of the Minister for the Environment, was announced in September 2022.

This is a really positive programme for our schools and will assist with energy needs and costs along with supporting the decarbonisation of our school buildings.

This project will form part of the response to meeting the 2030 and 2050 climate action targets for the schools sector and is a joint venture between the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications (DECC) and the Department of Education (DoE).

Significant work has been undertaken to review and validate the parameters of the scheme, drawing on relevant expertise from both Departments. The two Departments have engaged extensively over the last year to prepare for the roll-out of this programme. This has involved discussions around the scope of the scheme, the detail of what is included in the PV installation package and rules of the Climate Action Fund.

To meet the objectives of the September 2022 announcement, the Department of Education has developed the strategic management requirements for provision of a multi annual solar PV delivery programme for primary and post-primary schools.

This programme is the Schools Photovoltaic Programme (SPP) and it will be a multi-annual programme.

The SPP is a devolved programme. This means that school authorities will be provided with funding from the Department to have PV panels installed by a registered contractor, with guidance from the Department.

The school Authority will be able to select contractors to tender for the work supported and defined by the programme from the Non-Domestic Micro-Generator (NDMG) Company list published and maintained by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI). In order to successfully claim the grant, the works must be carried out in accordance with the guidance set out in documents SPP01 to SPP08.

The scheme will fund up to 6 kilowatts of roof-mounted solar PV, which equates to approximately 16 solar panels. Connection to the grid will be included, to allow unused solar energy to feed to the grid when schools are closed. This will enable schools to be compensated for renewable energy exports to the grid.

Monitoring software will also be provided to each school, to allow review and discussion of the energy generated each day for staff and students.

The SPP will be a phased programme, with the first phase commencing in November 2023. It is intended that the scheme will be implemented using the Department of Education School Hub, a new online platform hosted by the Department's geographic information system (GIS).

This will be the first capital delivery programme of its kind to be implemented using the School Hub to maximize two-way engagement between schools and the Department. The Hub platform will provide a simple, clear and efficient application and approvals process for schools applying for the Schools PV Programme.

Schools will be invited to participate in the scheme by email and will be provided with log-in details for the School Hub in the invitation email.

To ensure compliance with the requirements of the SPP, please read thoroughly this guidance document **SPP01**, and document **SPP02 Technical FAQs for Schools**, before proceeding to obtain quotes.

Document **SPP03 Schools Application Checklist** provides a comprehensive list of all of the information a school will require at each stage of the process, as well as a step-by-step guide through the School Hub application process.

Documents **SPP04** to **SPP08** are primarily for the use and guidance of PV installation contractors.

The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) are kindly providing the SPP with helpline support. If you have a question following review of the guidance documents, support will be available at **01 808 2100** between 9am and 5pm Monday to Friday, commencing on 30 November 2023.

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## 2 Programme Documentation

The suite of documentation relating to the programme is listed below and is available on the Department of Education website, [here](#).

### **SPP01 Programme Overview and Guidance**

This document outlines the programme and provides guidance to the school.

### **SPP02 Technical FAQs for Schools**

This document provides answers to some of the more frequent questions from schools in relation to the programme.

### **SPP03 Schools Application Checklist**

This document provides a list of information that schools will need to have in hand at each stage of the School Hub online application process. Reading and completing it fully will reduce the amount of time required online and ensure that you will have all relevant information prior to going online.

### **SPP04 Contractor Code of Practice and Standards and Specification Guidelines**

This document is a reference for Registered Contractors who wish to carry out works supported by the SPP for primary and post primary school buildings. It sets out the general competence, standards and specifications that contractors should possess, and adhere to, in carrying out works supported by the SPP.

### **SPP05 Technical FAQs for Contractors**

This document provides answers to some of the more frequent questions from contractors in relation to the programme.

### **SPP06 Contractor Form of Tender**

This is a standard quotation return template for the programme which contractors must complete and use to submit their quotation to the school. Contractors can only be considered by the school if they have fully completed this document.

### **SPP07 Contractor Completion Document**

This document outlines the Contractor conditions and documentation requirements associated with the installation works completion and sign-off. It must be completed by the contractor to confirm regulatory compliance, inspection, testing, commissioning and satisfactory completion of the completed works.

### **SPP08 Contractor Withdrawal Form**

This document must be completed by a contractor who has successfully tendered for the works at a school but for unforeseen reasons is unable to proceed with the contract.

### 3 Glossary of terms

|                      |   |
|----------------------|---|
| Contract             | The terms and contract between the school Authority and the contractor for the PV installation under the Schools Photovoltaic Programme. SPP Model Contract is included in Appendix A of <b>SPP04 Contractors Code of Practice and Standards and Specification Guidelines</b> . |
| Contractor           | Company registered with SEAI's Non-Domestic Micro-Generator Company list. The installation of these measures by unregistered Contractors will not be supported by the Scheme.   |
| Enabling Works       | Minor works required to existing school infrastructure to complete installation or connection of the PV system. In general, minor works will be completed by the PV company and will not add significant time or cost to the installation.                                      |
| Funding agency       | The Department of Education   |
| Grid feed-in         | Excess electricity generated by the PV panels and not used by the school is diverted to the national grid   |
| Grid feed-in tariff  | The amount of money, per unit of electricity fed to the grid, that is credited to the school by their energy supply company   |
| Infrastructure works | Works required to the existing infrastructure at the school before a PV array can be installed and/or connected.  |
| Installer            | Qualified PV panel installer who is on SEAI's Non-Domestic Micro-Generator (NDMG) Installer list.   |
| Inverter             | The power converter for converting the energy generated from the Solar PV System into AC electricity for connection to the building's electrical system.  |
| Module               | The Solar PV panel including all solar PV cells, frame, and electrical connections  |
| Module Array         | A collection of multiple solar PV modules, making up part of the overall PV system.   |
| Mounting Bracket     | The bracket for fixing the solar PV system to the roof structure.   |
| Mounting System      | The Mounting System includes the mounting frame, connection to the roof (mounting bracket), connection to the ground or building, and connection to the solar modules.  |
| Peak Output - Wp     | The rated peak power output (DC) of the Solar PV system at Standard Test Conditions.  |
| Programme            | Schools Photovoltaic Programme (SPP)  |
| Roof                 | In this document, roof means the roof supporting structure, roof covering, and all associated roof elements.  |
| Scheme               | Schools Photovoltaic Programme (SPP)  |
| School Authority     | The school Authority is the Board of Management of the school, or in the case of ETB schools, the school Authority is the ETB   |
| School Hub           | Department of Education's new online platform for two-way engagement between schools and the Department, hosted by the Department's geographic information system (GIS).  |

|                                 |  |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Self-consumption                | The energy generated by the solar PV system that is used by the school.  |
| Slate/Tile                      | General term for any pitched roof covering including slates, tiles, bitumen shingles etc.  |
| Solar PV Company List           | For the purposes of the grant scheme, companies must be registered on SEAI's Non-Domestic Micro-Generator (NDMG) Company list. Conditions for registration on this list can be found at <a href="http://www.seai.ie">www.seai.ie</a> . See T&Cs for details.   |
| Solar PV System                 | All components, wiring, electrical interfaces making up the operating Solar PV generator.  |
| Supporting Infrastructure Works | Works required to the existing infrastructure at the school before a PV array can be installed and/or connected. Supporting infrastructure works are more significant than enabling works and may involve significant time and/or cost to complete. Supporting infrastructure works are not funded under the Schools Photovoltaic Programme. |



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## 4 Programme Phasing

The programme will commence with a pilot phase that will be open to all schools in a number of specified areas. The area selection criteria considered achieving balanced regional representation, a mix of urban and rural areas, and the inclusion of Gaeltacht and Island schools.

Based on the criteria above, schools in the following areas have been selected for inclusion in the pilot phase, which will open for expressions of interest via the School Hub on 30 November 2023:

- Co. Clare
- Co. Donegal
- Dublin City Council Area
- Co. Galway
- Co. Kerry
- Co. Kilkenny
- Co. Leitrim
- Co. Limerick
- Co. Offaly
- Co. Waterford
- Co. Wicklow

Applications will be invited under the pilot phase in accordance with the terms and conditions as outlined in this document. Please read this document carefully before seeking quotations, and refer also to **SPP02 Technical FAQs for Schools** for further information.

Schools in areas not selected for the pilot phase will be invited to apply for the programme at a later date. Details of later phases will be provided following completion of the pilot phase application process.

Schools will be invited to participate in the programme via personalized email, which will contain their log-in details for the Department of Education's online School Hub portal.

Schools will be asked to log in to the School Hub and to answer a few short questions to determine eligibility for this scheme. Most schools will be eligible and will receive email approval to obtain quotes for the works in accordance with the SPP terms and conditions.

Section 7 gives further details on the application procedures.

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## 5 Key Dates

The pilot phase is now open for expressions of interest from schools in the selected areas.

**Expressions of interest** must be received no later than **1 February 2024**. If you have not completed Stage 1 (submitted an expression of interest) via the School Hub by this date, you may not be approved to participate in the pilot phase.

**Applications for funding** must be received no later than **15 March 2024**. If you have not submitted 3 quotes via the School Hub by this date, you may not be approved to proceed with the works or to receive funding in the pilot phase.

All schools approved for funding in the pilot should aim to have the PV installed at the earliest date and no later than **30 May 2024** if possible.

Key dates for later phases will be provided following completion of the pilot phase application process.

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## 6 Eligible Schools

Participation in this programme is limited to recognised schools in the free education scheme.

Schools applying for funding under this programme must have appropriate roof areas to accommodate 6kW of PV.

Schools with existing PV systems that were not provided or funded by the Department of Education can submit applications for this programme.

Schools who have received 6kW or more of PV panels funded by the Department of Education and installed after 1 January 2018 may not be eligible to apply for additional funding under this scheme, since they have already had a modern PV installation funded. This may have been part of a new capital project, extension or Pathfiinder project. It is recommended that such schools should nonetheless submit an expression of interest for this programme. This will assist the Department in ensuring that all schools receive an invitation to participate, and in identifying any existing barriers to installation of PV at your school.

Schools that are scheduled to be provided with a new school building that has commenced Design Stage 2b may not be eligible to participate in the SPP.

Schools scheduled to receive stand-alone extensions or additional accommodation are eligible to participate.

Schools scheduled to amalgamate, or currently operating in temporary accommodation, will be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

To achieve payment under the SPP, schools will need to confirm that they have registered or will register on the SEAI Monitoring and Reporting (M&R) website, and confirm their commitment to making the appropriate returns in future years.

All public sector bodies, including schools, have a statutory obligation to report annually on their energy usage directly to the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI). All schools were notified of this requirement in writing in December 2014 by the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications (DECC).

SEAI and DECC have developed an on-line energy Monitoring and Reporting (M&R) system to facilitate schools to report their energy use (as required and detailed in SI 426 of 2014 and SI 626 of 2016 and SI 599 of 2019). As well as enabling schools to report and track energy data annually, the online system provides:

- A scorecard that presents a powerful snapshot of the school's progress to date.
- Online access to annual electricity and natural gas consumption data.

There is additional information on the reporting process available [here](#).

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## 7 Eligible Works

The funding will cover the provision of 6kW of roof-mounted solar PV - approximately 16 solar panels - and all associated inverters, cabling etc. to connect the panels to the school's main distribution board.

Minor enabling works such as connection modifications to the main electrical distribution board may also be funded.

Connection to the grid will be included, to allow excess generated renewable solar energy to be exported to the grid when schools are closed. All suppliers are mandated to offer an export payment (Clean Export Guarantee) to any microgenerator below 50kW. Further details are available [here](#).

Monitoring software will be provided to each school, along with a flat screen display monitor located in a central school area to allow review of the energy generated each day for staff and students. This information can be used by the school in the teaching and learning environment.

Battery storage and power diverters will not be eligible for funding under this programme.

Some schools may have infrastructure that is not compatible with the new technology solar panels; this may include incompatible roofs or electrical systems. These schools may be determined, based on quotations received, not to be compatible with the programme scope and may require infrastructure works to be completed prior to accessing SPP funding support.

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## 8 SPP Application Procedure

The SPP will be delivered on a devolved basis, with funding distributed by the Department to the school, which will enable the school to make payment to the contractor.

To assist with the application process, which will be operated using the Department of Education's School Hub portal, Document **SPP 03 Grant Application Checklist** details all of the information required at each stage of the application process, as outlined in Sections 7.1 to 7.4.

Compiling the necessary information will reduce the amount of time required online and ensure that you will have all relevant information to hand prior to going online.

Compliant applications will be approved on a first come, first served basis.

Any school which does not comply with the conditions attaching to the Programme will automatically be deemed to have submitted an invalid application.

Some quotations and information received from contractors may deem the project to be outside the programme scope. These projects will be reviewed on an individual basis to establish what additional works may be necessary to enable provision of PV under this programme.

Persons signing application forms are reminded that the Department may be obliged to release any information supplied under the Freedom of Information Acts, 1997 and 2003 and 2014.

Sections 7.1 to 7.4 below outline the main stages and steps in the SPP application process.

### 8.1 Expression of Interest

Schools will be invited to participate in the programme via personalized email, which will contain their log-in details for the Department of Education's online School Hub portal.

Schools will be asked to log in to the School Hub and to answer a few short questions to determine eligibility for this scheme. Most schools will be eligible and will receive email approval to obtain quotes for the works in accordance with the SPP terms and conditions.

### 8.2 Obtaining Quotations for the Works

Quotes can only be considered from contractors on the Sustainable Authority of Ireland (SEAI) published approved Non-Domestic Contractor Framework, available [here](#). When the school has obtained a minimum of **three** quotes from suitable contractors using document SPP06

Contractor Form of Tender, log in to the Hub and upload the quotes for review by the Department of Education.

As noted on the SEAI Contractor Framework, the qualified contractors are registered on the basis of their commitment to installing the works in accordance with the Non-Domestic Technical Standards and Specifications and adherence to the programme Code of Practice and Quality Assurance and Disciplinary Procedures. Companies are also registered to ensure tax and insurance compliance. Their submission of quotes will infer their acceptance to extend their commitment to installing the works in accordance with the SPP technical standards and specifications.

Schools should consider requesting references of the contractor's past projects and/or speak to past customers of the company.

### 8.3 Quotation Approval and Funding

On funding approval by the Department of Education, an email notification will be issued to the school. The school should then confirm their order to the successful contractor, and log in to the School Hub to confirm that the contract for installation is in place. 85% of the approved costs will then be transferred to the school bank account.

### 8.4 Works Completion and Final Payment

On completion of the works, the successful contractor will certify that the PV panels comply with the SPP's published guidelines and requirements using **SPP07 Contractor Completion Document**. The school will log in to the School Hub and upload a copy of the completed **SPP07**. The remaining 15% of the approved costs will then be transferred to the school bank account.

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## 9 Planning Requirements for Solar PV Panels

The Planning and Development Act 2000 (Exempted Development) (No. 3) Regulations 2022 (S.I. 493 of 2022) and the supporting Planning and Development (Solar Safeguarding Zone) Regulations 2022 (S.I. 492 of 2022) came into effect on 5 October 2022. These two regulations contain the most recent provisions regarding planning exemptions for solar panel installations.

These include a new class of exempted development dealing with the installation of solar panels on various types of buildings including educational buildings; however, the exempted developments are subject to 15 conditions and limitations, to include the measurement of the solar panels (taken together with any panels previously installed on the roof) not exceeding 300 square metres in the event that the installation is within a Solar Safeguarding Zone.

The exemptions do not directly apply where the building is a Protected Structure or is located in an Architectural Conservation Area (Planning and Development Act 2000 (Exempted Development) (No. 3) Regulations 2022).

Where the property may be on the RPS list, or the installation of the proposed measures supported by this tender may require approval from the Local Authority, the contractor must inform the school Authority that consultation with the Local Authority should be sought prior to completion of the works, or select another installation area that they are satisfied with in regard to any planning requirements.

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## 10 Technical Support

To ensure compliance with the requirements of the SPP, please read thoroughly this guidance document, and document **SPP02 Technical FAQs for Schools**, before proceeding to obtain quotes. Document **SPP05 Technical FAQs for Contractors** provides answers to some of the more frequent questions from contractors in relation to the programme.

The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) are kindly providing the SPP with helpline support. If you have a question following review of the guidance documents, support will be available at **01 808 2100** between 9am and 5pm Monday to Friday, commencing on 30 November 2023.