



FORSA

CSQ

Civil Service Quarterly

Unions set to consider successor to PSSA
Full story pages 3 & 4

ONLINE SPECIAL
WINTER 2020



Season's Greetings
New beginnings in 2021

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Picture: Tony Mullen

**Editorial**

We proved our mettle in this year of crisis...

2020 and its aftermath will live with us for a long time. Many of you lost family members and loved ones to the pandemic and more will contract the virus before it is over. Optimistically we look to news of vaccines, hoping beyond hope that they will help us return to some level of normality over the course of 2021.

This year has proven to highlight things that are important. Our Public Services met the challenges of the pandemic head on, and we should be rightly proud of that.

In the Health sector, we saw monumental efforts to look after very sick citizens - with public servants putting their own lives at risk for the common good, from doctors to nurses to cleaners and porters and health-care professionals, everyone answered the call.

In the Civil Service, the ship of state was kept afloat. Members in DEASP delivered vital payments to hard-pressed citizens out of work because of the virus, and similarly in Revenue with the delivery of the wage subsidy scheme. Other departments kept going to deliver their services - in Justice, Agriculture, Health, Education and many more.

Fórsa worked closely with Government throughout to ensure services continued and to cooperate with emergency contingency measures aimed both at providing those same services and keeping our own members safe.

Many attended the workplace and many more operated remotely proving beyond a doubt their commitment to keep going with high levels of productivity.

Across the economy essential workers did the same. And it became very apparent which occupations proved to be of vital importance - from the supermarket retail staff who kept us fed through to the postal workers who delivered so much to our homes and

indeed many more. What is clear is that workers deserve respect after this year. The anticipated downward spiral in the economy should not be used to revisit the policies of austerity and such an approach will, if necessary, be strongly resisted.

As I write this editorial, pay talks have concluded with Government. The union faced these talks with a clear agenda as set out at our recent virtual Biennial Conference - full report on page 3 & 4.

It remains to wish you all a peaceful Christmas. I hope that you enjoy a well-earned break after such a difficult year.

Our hopes rest in science in 2021 and good governance and respect for workers - something that is not always there, so join a union and make it count.

Picture: Tony Mullen



Derek Mullen
Editor



Proposals agreed for a two-year public service agreement

Bernard Harbor

Head of Communications, Fórsa

Representatives of public service unions and employers have agreed proposals for a two-year agreement to succeed the Public Service Stability Agreement (PSSA), which expires at the end of this month.

The main elements of the proposed agreement were outlined by union negotiators at a meeting of the ICTU Public Services Committee (PSCon Friday, 11th December after negotiations at the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) concluded in the early hours of this morning.

The team of four ICTU negotiators told the meeting that Building Momentum: A New Public Sector Agreement represented a positive short-term package, negotiated against a difficult background, to build on the momentum of recent pay restoration and public service flexibility and service quality.

They said the package, which would run from 1st January 2021 until 31st December 2022 if ratified, was substantially weighted towards lower-income civil and public servants, and had achieved solid progress on the three priorities set by the PSC at the outset of the talks.

These were: **(1)** a mechanism to address issues outstanding from the Haddington Road agreement; **(2)** a separate mechanism to address sectoral issues; and **(3)** a realistic and acceptable approach to pay.

Each of the public service unions affiliated to ICTU, which represents more than 90% of public servants, will now give the proposals detailed consideration before putting the package to their members.

Pay...

- A general round increase worth 1% of gross pay or €500 a year, whichever is the greater, on 1st October 2021. This means those on lower incomes will receive a significantly larger percentage increase than higher paid staff.

- A second general round increase worth 1% of gross pay or €500 a year, whichever is the greater on 1st October 2022. This means those on lower incomes will receive a significantly larger percentage increase than higher paid staff.

- Provision for the equivalent of a 1% increase in annualised basic salaries through a



PSC CHAIR Fórsa General Secretary Kevin Callinan

'sectoral bargaining fund' on 1st February 2022.

Issues outstanding from the Haddington Road agreement...

Recognition that certain measures introduced under the Haddington Road agreement (HRA) "are to be addressed and implemented". These include:

- The establishment of an independent body by the end of March 2021, to make recommendations to begin the process of returning to pre-Haddington Road hours, with €150 million available to commence implementation of the outcome during 2022, as well as provision for a successor agreement to engage on the roll-out of additional recommendations.

- A resolution of the new entrant teacher issue, which will see those recruited since 1st

January 2011 move from point 11 to point 13 of the pay scale, or move up one additional point.

- Restoration of overtime and premium payments to pre-2013 levels.

Sectoral bargaining...

- The establishment of a 'sectoral bargaining fund,' initially worth 1% of basic pensionable pay during the lifetime of the agreement, to deal with outstanding adjudications, recommendations, awards and claims, with the option for groups to use the available allocation as a sectoral pay round.

- The proposals outline how the 'sectoral bargaining fund' would operate, including an implementation process and compliance with "the maintenance of industrial peace."

Continued on page 4

News

Proposals agreed for a two-year public service agreement

From page 3

Maintaining reform momentum...

● The proposals acknowledge the recent “unprecedented display of commitment, flexibility, hard work and agility in public service provision” and pledge the parties to harness this momentum to meet the immediate challenges of 2021 and 2022, including the continuing response to Covid-19, a return to normal delivery of health services, ensuring that schools remain open and addressing challenges that arose for children during the crisis, managing the response to Brexit, establishing the public service as the driver of best practice on remote working, and addressing digitisation.

● The package sets out measures to harness the potential for technology to improve service delivery.

● The package sets out measures to improve access to services through reformed work practices, including enabling temporary reassignments where necessary and increasing the movement of staff across the public service, where necessary.

● The package sets out an implementation and reporting mechanism to ensure delivery of agreed reforms, including through sectoral action plans.

Outsourcing...

● The agreement retains existing safeguards on any proposed outsourcing of public service provision.

Service stability & industrial peace...

● The agreement sets out a detailed dispute resolution process, including an “industrial peace” clause in line with previous public service agreements.”

● There is provision to review the terms of the agreement “where the underlying assumptions of the agreement need to be revisited.”

Speaking after the 11th December meeting, the chair of the PSC, Kevin Callinan, said the proposals were the best outcome that could be achieved over the relatively short lifetime of the proposed deal.



AGREEMENT Talks team (from left) John King, John Boyle, PSC chair Kevin Callinan, & Phil Ní Sheaghda

He told CSQ: “This agreement builds on recent momentum to improve our public services and the lives of those who depend on and deliver them.

“The pay terms represent a realistic and acceptable approach to incomes, and they are substantially skewed towards lower earners in a very challenging context of limited resources.

“The ICTU team has also achieved a process to address sectoral issues, and a separate mechanism that will make real and substantial progress on the issues outstanding from the Haddington Road agreement, including its introduction of longer working hours that fell

most heavily on women workers.”

The PSC represents all ICTU-affiliated unions with members working in the civil and public service. Its officers, and lead negotiators, are Fórsa General Secretary Kevin Callinan; SIPTU Deputy General Secretary John King; INMO General Secretary Phil Ni Sheaghda; and INTO General Secretary John Boyle.

The PSC is to meet again before Christmas to consider the detail of the proposals.

Each of the PSC unions is then expected to consult their members on the package.



FLASHBACK Union negotiators at one of the talks sessions that led to brokering of the PSSA in 2018

NEC recommends acceptance of deal

Fórsa’s National Executive has decided overwhelmingly to recommend acceptance of the proposed new public service agreement at a meeting on 15th December.

The proposals in *Building Momentum* will now go to a ballot of Fórsa members early in the New Year. The union represents almost 80,000 civil and public servants.

ICTU’s Public Services Committee (PSC) will accept or reject the agreement on the basis of a weighted aggregate of the outcomes of individual union ballots. That outcome will be announced on Monday 15th February 2021.

Keeping you in the loop...

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'Redoubling of efforts' needed in move to state I.R. machinery

Fórsa general secretary Kevin Callinan recently wrote to DPER Minister Michael McGrath in an effort to inject some impetus into discussions over the transition of civil servants into the state industrial relations machinery.

It was also in response to a motion on the issue that had come before the union's Biennial Conference. Meanwhile, unions at Staff Panel are anxious to make progress on the transition in 2021 and want to see the setting up of a sub-committee to address a number of matters, including securing agreement on an internal dispute resolution mechanism.

National Secretary Derek Mullen told CSQ: "While the conciliation and arbitration scheme has served us well, it doesn't meet our collective needs in what is an increasingly complex industrial relations environment.

"Civil servants are entitled to have the same access to the WRC and Labour Court as other workers, including those in the

wider public service."

He added: "We expect discussions will continue into 2021 to facilitate an orderly transition, as set out by Fórsa and other unions at Staff Panel."

In his letter, Kevin Callinan reminded Minister McGrath that the commitment to move from the C&A scheme to its state IR counterpart goes back over a decade.

The move had not been realised despite a strongly held view that industrial relations in the Civil Service needed to be "modernised" and "brought into line" with the provision given to other workers in the state, "including other public servants".

He continued: "To achieve this Fórsa has been proposing the establishment of a sub-committee to deal with the internal transition arrangements including the need for agreement on internal dispute resolution machinery, which will gov-



ern the conduct of industrial relations both centrally and at departmental level."

And Callinan flagged up the necessity for legal changes to make the move possible.

He explained:

"There is also a need for further legislation to enable the move as we are advised that the power to designate under s23 (3) of the 1990 Act (as amended by section 86(2) of the

Workplace Relations Act, 2015) is constrained by the definition of "worker" in section 23(1) in that the Minister cannot designate a category of persons who are not defined as workers with the meaning of section 23(1).

"The amendment introduced by section 86(2) of the 2015 Act did not amend the definition of worker in sections 23(1) of the 1990 Act but only the power of the Minister to designate persons in section 23(3) of the 1990 Act."

The Fórsa general secretary also claimed it appeared DPER was "less enthusiastic than it once was" and that the need for change on the issue appeared "to have drifted down the list of [its] priorities".

He suggested the rationale behind the exclusion of civil servants and their unions from the Labour Court when it was set up in 1946 did "not exist anymore" and that apart from a few outstanding matters there was "no good reason why civil servants should be treated differently to other workers in the state".

Callinan continued: "While the C&A scheme has served us well, it does not offer the same opportunities, available to other workers to avail of a modern WRC and Labour Court. Oftentimes under the scheme we are bound by its restrictions. We can be left with disputes that are not capable of being referred to third party for resolution, something that is in nobody's interests."

He concluded his letter by calling for the Minister's support "for a redoubling of efforts to achieve this transition over the course of 2021."

While the C&A scheme served us well, it doesn't meet our collective needs in what is an increasingly complex I.R. environment



Picture: Constantin Wenning on Unsplash

Fórsa welcomes appointments move by Government

While the union awaits the transition to the state machinery referred to above we have been advised that at a recent Cabinet meeting in November, the Government confirmed the appointment of the Adjudicator and Arbitration Boards for the schemes of conciliation and arbitration covering the Civil Service, the Defence Forces and teachers.

Mr Dan Murphy has been reappointed as Adjudicator for a one-year term ending

30th June 2021. The Adjudication Board has been appointed for the period ending 30th June 2022, with the option of a further one year extension. The names of the Board members are:

- Mr Loughlin Quinn, Chairperson of the Arbitration Boards for the Civil Service, the Defence Forces and teachers;
- Mr David Denny, Employer representative for the Civil Service, Defence and teachers;

● Ms Angela Kirk, Staff Side representative for the Civil Service and teachers;

● Mr Gerry Rooney, Staff Side representative for Defence.

Notwithstanding the priority of moving to the state machinery, Head of Division Derek Mullen welcomed the development. He told CSQ: "This will allow us deal with outstanding cases, which have been delayed as a result of the pandemic."

GENERAL COUNCIL UPDATE

By **Derek Mullen**



The General Council is the main industrial relations forum for Civil Service unions, comprising mainly of senior, elected and full-time officials from Fórsa and other unions as well as senior officials from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER). The Council is established under the Conciliation and Arbitration Scheme. The Committee meets every month to consider claims from the union or management side and ongoing policy matters that affect the terms and conditions of civil servants.

Opposed to outsourcing

Fórsa Civil Service Division is tackling outsourcing on a number of fronts and has cited three departments/organisations for breaches of the service delivery options as set out in successive national agreements.

In Social Protection, there are two companies that are contracted under the JobPath scheme to provide work activation capability for the Department. While there was built-in extensions to the JobPath contracts which were previously used, we are now advised by the Department that the contract is further extended, outside of the terms set down.

Social Protection argues that its decision is informed by the current pandemic-driven unemployment crisis. However, the Department proceeded with this extension without the appropriate consultation.

Fórsa is also opposing efforts by the Department to provide continuing external support for telephony services, having used

Red weather alerts

Fórsa is still awaiting an arbitration hearing on TOIL and emergency leave for red weather alerts. Here's hoping we don't have a snow storm before then! In the lapse of time since we made our first submission to the Arbitration Board in 2019, we have witnessed an unprecedented change in the lives of working people, as the pandemic took hold from March 2020.

Added to that, arrangements in Health have changed since we made our original submission, with limitations on paid emergency leave and TOIL. However, given the vast increase in home working since the start of the pandemic, there is no doubt that re-



Picture: eberhard grossgasteiger on Unsplash

ote working can effectively continue during any red weather alert event. Beyond the pandemic such remote working should also be possible.

In these circumstances, there will be much less reliance on paid emergency leave. Such leave, however, should be available to those who find they are unable to reach their place of work safely due to severe weather conditions, but who are also not in a position to work remotely. For those who must attend work to provide essential services, TOIL will be awarded.

Clearly attendance arrangements for essential staff must be in line with public health guidelines and the Return to Work Protocol during the pandemic.

CSQ will report further as the arbitration hearing takes place.

emergency arrangements twice during the pandemic.

The outsourcing of security services in DSP and cleaning services in Foreign Affairs and other departments is also under discussion. Similarly, the Revenue Commissioners advised the union of a new request for tender (RFT) for telephony services for Local Property Tax (LPT).

Abtran is currently contracted to provide telephony services for

LPT queries. However, the latest RFT was carried without appropriate consultation, with Revenue pointing to the urgent need for LPT revaluation in 2021.

The union has also cited the Attorney General's Office, following a decision to advertise a RFT for the provision of external services for drafting primary and secondary legislation – again this was done without the appropriate consultation.

Fórsa is to raise these matters at General Council. National Secretary Derek Mullen underlined the union's opposition to outsourcing and expressed concern over the "cavalier attitude" on display.

He told CSQ: "These arrangements are set down in national agreements. They are there to be complied with by all parties. Employers are not entitled to set these arrangements aside."

OGCIO: assurances sought for IT staff

Fórsa is seeking agreement with DPER/OGCIO on arrangements for staff involved in the centralisation of IT functions to OGCIO. Discussions continue but the principle of following work will be referred to third party for determination.

We are also seeking assurances that staff who do not move will continue in substantive roles within their respective Departments or have mobility arrangements to other IT roles in the Civil Service.

Focus on competitions and on recruitment

Fórsa met with DPER officials on 24th November. There was a packed agenda at the meeting with a particular focus on competitions and recruitment.

As a result of the meeting, DPER will give a full update on all competitions and



Picture: AltumCode on Unsplash

panels, both those in place and those in planning. The Department will also provide an update on sequencing and liabilities for applicable grades.

We also discussed a possible review of the CPSA appeals process and our claims at General Council or Arbitration on the question of a 5% ceiling for Temporary Clerical Officers and the AO/HEO issues Arbitration referral arising from members being taken off HEO panels if they accept an AO appointment.

Related to this, the union has also recommended a discussion on graduate recruitment.

Fórsa received an update on the IT apprenticeship schemes and will report further on this important development. The union has also stressed the importance of nurturing IT talent from within.

We were also briefed on the WAM pathway proposals, a programme for graduates with disabilities. The plan is to move from work experience placements to full-time roles.



NEW PRESIDENT Michael Smyth



Martin Walsh



Ann McGee



Eugene Gargan



Kevin O'Malley

Meet our new team of officers

Fórsa has new team of officers, elected by the union's branches, who were formally adopted at the union's virtual national conference on 19th November.

In light of the ongoing Covid-19 restrictions on assembly and travel, the union's president, vice presidents and treasurer were selected following postal ballots for the first time. They will hold the positions for the next two years.

Michael Smyth of the union's School Completion Programme branch was elected president, while **Kevin O'Malley** of the Kerry Health and Local Government branch was re-elected as honorary treasurer.

Martin Walsh of the Louth Health and Local Government branch became the union's new senior vice-president, and the remaining vice-president positions were filled by **Ann McGee** (first President of Fórsa) of the Department of Social Protection Clerical branch, and **Eugene Gargan** of the Communications Companies branch.

Under Fórsa rules, each of the union's divisions must all be represented on the five-person officer group, with the Local Government division and Municipal Employees' divisions counting as one constituency for this purpose.

Snapshot...



SECTION 39 PROTEST Fórsa & SIPTU members outside Simon Coveney's constituency office in Cork

New CSO data reflects need to reject austerity

Bernard Harbor

Head of Communications, Fórsa

The latest CSO figures underline the need for Government to continue to stimulate the economy through income and business supports as well as investment in public services and infrastructure, Fórsa has said.

The CSO data, published on 4th December, show domestic demand soared when Covid-19 restrictions were eased in the third quarter of 2020.

Fórsa said the figures emphasise the need for Government to reject austerity in its approach to public finances, and instead give people - particularly those on low incomes

- the hope and confidence that will help the economy bounce back when the Covid situation stabilises.

General Secretary Kevin Callinan told CSQ: "These figures are further, encouraging evidence of the need for Government to reject an austerity approach to public finances, which would sap confidence from our economic biosphere.

"If we give people hope, we will also give them confidence to spend and participate in the economy and in their communities. This is the lifeblood that can quickly rejuvenate businesses - be they large, medium or small.

"And it's the route to rapid employment, economic and fiscal recovery, which must be grasped in all sectors of the economy - public, private and community."

Fórsa is currently involved, with other unions, in talks on a successor to the PSSA public service agreement, which expires at the end of the year.

Speaking at the union's conference last month, Callinan acknowledged that any successor to the PSSA would have to be realistic in the context of a challenging economic and fiscal situation, but said this didn't mean ruling out pay improvements over the lifetime of a deal.

"All the economic projections

point to a rapid economic and fiscal bounce-back once the Covid situation stabilises, and we have cause to hope that will start to happen in the coming months," he said.

The CSO figures for the July-September 2020 period, during which Covid restrictions were eased considerably, showed:

- Personal spending on goods and services grew by over 21%;
- Underlying domestic activity increased by almost 19%;
- The distribution, transport, hotel and restaurants sector saw grow by 47%; and
- Exports of goods and services increased by almost 6%.

Industrial News

Department of Justice

Report:
Eugene Quinn

Arrears issue referred for adjudication

The issue of arrears involving members at the Border Management Unit (BMU) has been referred for adjudication under the C&A scheme.

Meanwhile, Fórsa's statement of claim was issued to DPER on 20th April 2020, and the management's counter statement was also received.

A date for a remote hearing is awaited.

Bilateral talks are to be organised after a claim for on-call allowance for HEO shift managers was lodged at Departmental Council.

The calculation of annual leave for those on shift is also to be looked at.

Assurances given transferees won't lose out

Internal promotions (EO and HEO) competitions have taken place recently. With part of DJE functions being transferred to the Department of Children, concerns were raised by successful candidates set to transfer that they would lose out by being removed from panels upon the move.

However, after representations by Fórsa, it has been agreed that these members of staff will remain on the DJE panel and, if their position is reached, they will then transfer back to DJE to take up the promotion. This arrangement will remain in place until the end of June 2021.

Property Registration Authority Ireland

Phased return to work under protocol

There has been a phased return to work in line with the Covid-19 RTW Protocol, while a small number of people with underlying health conditions are being facilitated to continue working from home.

Meanwhile, issues relating to the return of staff to Chancery Street and Roscommon are being discussed with management. A number of workplace representatives have also been nominated.

Central Statistics Office

Jump increments update

Meetings have started again to look into the outcome of the Arbitration Board on jump increments for statisticians.

It is understood that what was discussed by HR and DPER "is not quite in accordance with the views of the branch". However, three weeks have been set aside to conclude these amendments.



In the meantime, most CSO staff continue to work remotely. A number of offices are reopening with staff rostered to attend.

Some workplace representatives have been nominated and agreed with management. A claim for Sunday premium was also lodged at Departmental Council.

State Exams

The Executive branch and management have met and agreed on the number of days in lieu to be carried forward as well as a process to work down the surplus. Covid-19 related social distancing also formed part of the discussions.

Department of Education

Transfer of functions

Fórsa met with Department of Education HR in November to discuss the transfer of functions to the new Department of Further and Higher Education.

A Fórsa spokesperson said: "We impressed upon the Department the need to communicate with staff in advance of the receipt of transfer letters which is imminent. We have also sought a list of the transferees from the Department."

While all sections dealing with further and higher education are to transfer, there will be a shared ser-

vice arrangement for HR, Corporate and IT services.

Though the Department has a corporate HQ in Leeson Lane, it is not expected that staff covered by the transfer of functions will be moved off-campus - and this includes Athlone and Tullamore locations.

Fórsa is considering future competitions and how higher scales will be applied. The terms of a HEO competition have been just agreed.

Certain functions in HR and Corporate services are to remain with Department of Education.



Picture: Annie Spratt on Unsplash

SENOs role paper awaited

A working group, involving both management and Fórsa, on school visits is to be reconvened.

Meanwhile, the filling of vacancies remains a major issue as staffing is now below approved numbers.

Also, a management paper on the role of Special Education Needs Organiser is still awaited.

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NEPS update

Skip increments under circular 7/2019 and 4/2020 has been raised as a major issue. Some members of staff were informed that they had been paid these in error and are to have their increments readjusted, meaning they will have to repay any overpayment.

A Fórsa spokesperson told CSQ: "In examining individual cases it appears that - at least in some cases - the NSSO interpretation is wrong."

Also, National Officer Derek Mullen is finalising a submission on the use of external psychologists by the Department of Education.

Getting back to I.R. brasstacks post lockdown

Since the pandemic hit last March the Civil Service Divisional Executive has been meeting online. We also managed to conduct two divisional councils during the year and had a similar meeting in late November.

Following some early technical hitches we are now managing our meetings well online, and hope - like the rest of the union - to be back around tables later in 2021.

Decisions on Divisional Conferences, due in 2021 will be made by the NEC in January. The question for the NEC is whether to conduct virtual conferences similar to the recent, very successful, biennial conference.

Coming to grips with this new way of working has been a challenge for the union in 2020, but it was important that we complied with public health guidelines and we will continue to do that until we are past this crisis and it is considered safe to gather together again.

As well as dealing with the working issues arising from Covid-19, the DEC also managed to get back to normal industrial relations business particularly from the summer months on.

Obviously in the early days of the first lockdown, the concentration was on remote working, essential workers attending the office and ensuring that the important return to work protocol was implemented, including in those



THE NEW NORMAL Zoom meetings

Picture: Chris Montgomery on Unsplash

departments that remained at work throughout, particularly DSP.

Departments such as DSP and Revenue made extraordinary efforts during the year to ensure PUP and temporary wage subsidy payments were made. They were a credit to the Civil Service.

Full range of services

Other departments continued to deliver a full range of services throughout the crisis. As more members start to return to office spaces, our priority is to ensure safety and implementation of measures in the revised return to work protocol.

During the year we very sadly marked the

passing of our comrade, Willie Sargent. May he rest in peace. We also saw Rhona McEleneay leave through promotion along with Stephanie Kelly. They have been replaced by Larry Kelly and Kieran O'Connor. Vice Chairperson Kathleen McGee also departed through promotion and was replaced by Deirdre Fanning. In addition, Tom Madden joined us from the Civil Service No.1 Branch.

As we head for Christmas there will be one further meeting of the DEC on 17th December.

The DEC wish to send season's greetings to all our members and express the hope that 2021 will be a better year for you all and your families.

Weathering the storm in a traumatic year

John O'Flanagan

Cathaoirleach, Civil Service DEC

I write as the year 2020 comes to an end. A traumatic year from the spring onwards.

The DEC has continued in its 'virtual' existence and, indeed, has broadened this means of doing business to having its regular autumn in-house seminar on the Webex platform.

This event - while not as highly interactive as previous events - was nonetheless an effective forum, not at all hindered by its format.

It came immediately on the back of our Fórsa Biennial Conference and - combining the formats and outcomes of both events - I am impressed by Fórsa's ability to respond in an agile and effective way to dealing with serious challenges to how we do business.

This needs to be replicated



PARTNERSHIP ROLE Tony Conlon

and built upon at branch level so that the very important role of workplace representation and activism does not fall into decline.

The emergence of remote working and sparsely, often randomly attended workplaces are not given to bread and butter trade union activities.

The ability to respond effectively and meaningfully to developing situations in workplace will be challenged.

At Central Level a process has just concluded on a new national pay round and it is currently being considered by the NEC.

There is a frustration mounting with slow progress on a number of fronts - for example, agreement on remote working practices and the process surrounding the move to the WRC. These will be high-priority issues as we enter 2021.

The continual change in the membership of the Divisional Executive has also to be mentioned. I must single out one departure. That of a stalwart whom I got to know long before the formation of Fórsa. The great Tony Conlon has resigned his DEC position on foot of his secondment to the partnership role in DSP, a full-time release role.

Tony previously held office with distinction in the CPSU and was central to the formation of the bridgehead that was to become the Civil Service Division of Fórsa. My best wishes and good luck go to him in his new role.

On behalf of myself, my fellow officers Melissa Brennan and Helen Linehan, together with National Secretary Derek Mullen and Civil Service Division officials and staff, I wish you all a Happy and Healthy Christmas. Stay safe. Stay together.

Review of the year



Derek Mullen

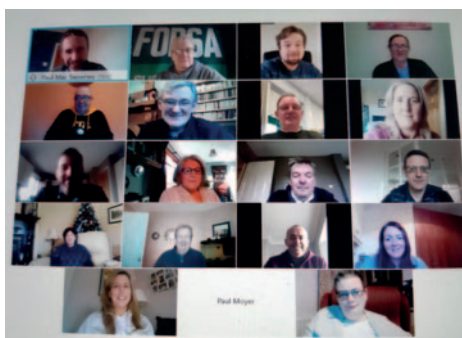
Head of Division: Civil Service

2020, as I noted in my editorial on page 2, is a year we will never forget – the first global pandemic in over 100 years that has wrought havoc on family and working lives. We have lost many loved ones and – as the year ends – the battle continues to control the coronavirus.

At the outset of this crisis a number of extraordinary measures were introduced and set out in a guidance document for civil and public service employers and employees which applied to all public service employees during the course of the emergency. These measures were introduced by the Government for the duration of the crisis and, as we review the year, the union continues to be consulted on an ongoing basis.

What was clear from the outset was that we were not in a normal industrial relations environment. The union's response to measures put in place by the Government was set out clearly at the beginning.

Fórsa and its members across the civil, public, private, voluntary and semi-state sectors were – and continue to be – committed to co-operating fully with the emergency measures that were necessary to contain the virus, protect the health and safety of citizens and workers, and to maintain essential



NOW BY ZOOM DSP National Committee meeting

What was clear from the outset was that we were not in a normal industrial relations environment

services during this unprecedented public health emergency.

A Fórsa spokesperson explained to CSQ: "The union will continue to advise its members to co-operate with all necessary measures, including some that might not be acceptable in normal times, as long as employers consult with the appropriate unions, respect existing collective agreements, and reach agreement

with the union if they feel it necessary to waive aspects of collective agreements in the short-term."

Members are strongly advised to co-operate with management in its efforts to contain the Covid-19 virus, protect the health and safety of citizens and workers, and maintain essential services – including when this means doing different things, in different ways, at different times.

Essential services

The upshot has been unprecedented arrangements put in place for home working. This saw thousands of civil servants work productively from their homes during the first lockdown announced by the Taoiseach on 27th March, while thousands more turned up at offices to deliver essential services. Many hundreds were also redeployed to the HSE for vital contact-tracing work or to provide assistance on telephony services in Social Protraction.

During this period The Return to Work Safely Protocol was also published following high-level discussions at the Labour Employer Economic Forum (LEEF). It was designed to help employers and workers put in place measures to prevent the spread of Covid-19 in the workplace before the economy began to

Review of the year

Results from an important survey conducted by Fórsa revealed that 86% of respondents were interested in working remotely



PROTECTION Sourcing supplies of PPE for frontline workers became, rightly, almost a national obsession

Pictures: Navy Medicine (Public Domain); NIAID-RML (Public Domain); RollingNews.ie

slowly open up in the early summer, following the temporary closure of most businesses through the worst phase of the pandemic.

This protocol was used by all workplaces as a means of adapting their workplace procedures and practices to comply fully with the Covid-19-related public health protection measures identified as necessary by the HSE. These measures included a no-handshaking policy, temperature testing, intensive cleaning, and contact logs to facilitate contact tracing. According to the protocol, each workplace must appoint and train at least one "lead worker representative" charged with working with the employer to ensure that health and safety measures are strictly adhered to.

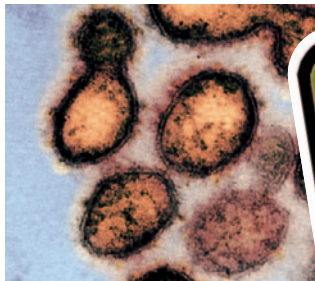
Despite our best efforts earlier in the year particularly during the first lockdown, we then experienced an expected resurgence in the coronavirus over the late summer - firstly in clusters and then in community transmission as we neared for the end of September.

This led to a re-emphasis of the Government guidelines on working from home. In the Government's announcement of 18th August, employees were told that they should only attend the workplace if it was essential for them to do so. It was up to employers to determine what roles were required to be carried out in the workplace to ensure that important services continued to be provided to the public.

Flexi-time arrangements were re-introduced from 24th August. This applied to employees attending their employer's work premises and working normal, pre-Covid work attendance



BRIEFING THE NATION CMO Dr Tony Holohan



patterns.

In turn, this has led to a demand for flexi-time from those who continued to work remotely as well as those working blended arrangements with time spent at the office as well as home. This is an issue that remains under discussion with DPER as is the whole question of a remote working agreement for the future. Results from an important survey conducted by Fórsa revealed that 86% of

respondents were interested in working remotely. More than 80% of those who favoured home working expressed a preference for a hybrid arrangement or blended working arrangement. Much of the concern about social isolation can be dealt with by ensuring regular attendance at the office as part of a more formal remote working arrangement.

We expect other matters to be dealt with in our central discussions including issues relating to health and safety, the provision of equipment and clarity on allowances.

The provision for special leave with pay as an alternate to sick pay continues to apply in lieu of sick leave for Covid-19 when an employee is advised to self-isolate and is displaying symptoms of the virus or had a positive test. Medical or HSE advice should be followed. Special leave with pay for employees who are not required to work due to Covid-19 should be based on basic salary and fixed allowances and premium payments (Premium payments have been included recently following a case at the WRC). However, we expect DPER to put a 28-day limit on special leave with pay for Covid from January next year.

High risk

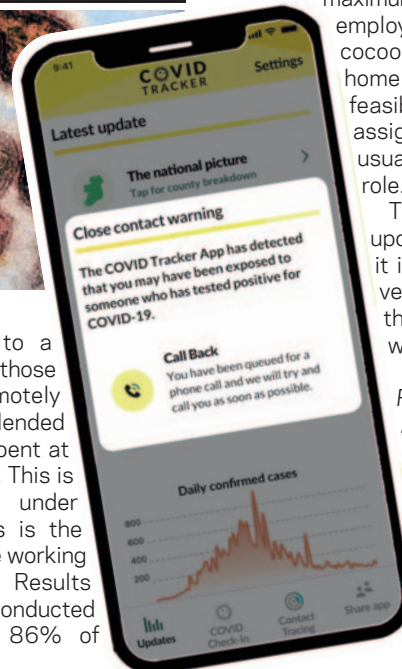
This special leave payment does not accrue or count as sick leave against the normal entitlement set out above. It is expected though that DPER will bring forward changes in the near future.

Also employees deemed to be very high risk should be facilitated to work from home to the maximum extent possible. Where an employee is very high risk, is cocooning, and working from home in their current role is not feasible, then they may be assigned work outside their usual core duties/given a new role.

The guidelines continue to be updated on a regular basis and it is expected that the latest version will take account of the new Government Living with Covid-19 framework.

The framework, titled *Resilience and Recovery 2020-2021: Plan for Living With Covid-19*, sets out what is permitted at each of five levels of response.

As we finalise this Christmas edition we are returning to level three after a six-week level five lockdown.



Focus on...

Home working in the public service

Bernard Harbor

Head of Communications, Fórsa

Immediately after the pandemic struck, it was estimated that more than a third of workers in Ireland were working from home. Across all sectors, this widespread shift happened very quickly and, by and large, was highly effective in productivity terms as well as in the delivery of service quality, and in safeguarding public health.

Large numbers of public servants worked remotely during the Covid-19 emergency on foot of public health advice and the instructions of their managers. Before this, the public service generally lagged behind the private sector on remote working.

The experience of remote working during the pandemic has changed attitudes across the economy (and internationally) and has accelerated an existing trend towards the expansion of remote working.

A sustained effort to expand, promote and support remote working – including in the civil and public service – would be good for the public sector and would show broader leadership in our economy and society.

It should include an exploration of the potential contribution of public service organisations developing hubs for remote working for workers in both the public and private sector.

Fórsa is pressing for an agreed public service-wide framework for remote working, with supports and advice to managers on how it should be implemented, which would be an important component of public service leadership on this issue.

It should include the following principles:

1. Objective criteria for identifying the work and functions that will be performed remotely, and the process for the selection of staff to be allocated to remote working arrangements, should apply across the civil and public service.

2. Remote working should not be compulsory, and members of staff who agree to work remotely should have the right to opt out of such arrangements

3. As a general rule, members of staff who work remotely should routinely spend some time in the workplace.

4. Employees working remotely should benefit from the same broad terms and working conditions as comparable workers based at the employer's premises.

5. New staff recruited to pre-existing roles should not be required to work remotely as a condition of employment.

6. As a general rule, remote workers should not be required to provide work equipment.

7. Training and advice should be provided to managers and line managers to enable them to deal with specific issues arising from remote working, including communications, work measurement, performance management and compliance with health and safety as well as

e-working and tax...

Derek Mullen

Head of Civil Service Division

The Revenue Commissioners Tax and Duty Manual and e-Working and Tax guidance has been updated. The new guidance for remote workers claiming tax relief on expenses allows for:

- 10% deduction for electricity and heating bills.

- 30% deduction for broadband bills starting in 2020 and for the duration of the pandemic.

- If a bill is shared – for instance, with flatmates – the cost can be apportioned based on the amount paid by each person.

These reliefs apply where employers are not paying a €3.20 allowance per day and, as you know, this allowance is not paid in the Civil and Public Service.

The question of allowances generally will be addressed by Fórsa in discussions on a new agreement for remote working or e-working, as will all other key aspects identified for a remote working agreement.

Capital expenses incurred, such as for laptops or office equipment or furniture, are not allowable deductions under the taxes consolidation acts.

The union continues to press employers and DPER to ensure that they provide the necessary equipment to facilitate working from home.

E-Working expenses can be claimed by completing an Income Tax return.

An individual can complete this form on the Revenue website as follows:

- Sign into 'myAccount';
- Click on 'Review your tax' link in PAYE Services;

- Select the **Income Tax return** for the relevant tax year;
- Click 'Your Job'

- Select '**Remote Working (e-Working) Expenses**' in the '**Tax Credits and Reliefs**' page and insert the amount of expense at the '**Amount Claimed**' section.

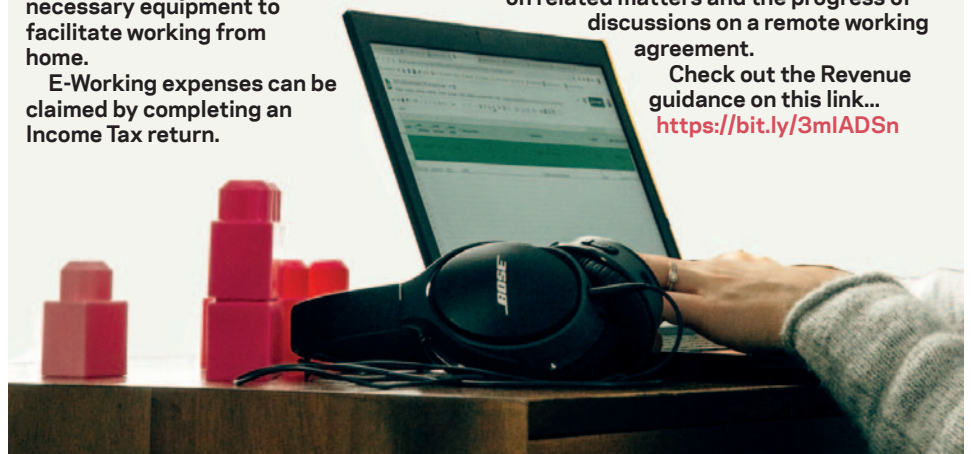
As a claim may be selected for future examination, all documentation relating to a claim should be retained for a period of six years from the end of the tax year to which the claim relates.

An example of the calculation of expenses is set out in paragraph 6 of the document.

The updated guidelines also define the office as the normal place of work for those who are working a blended arrangement, i.e. office/home, or those who are working at home all the time as a result of the pandemic. No travel and subsistence payments can be reimbursed without a deduction of tax for those members in these categories.

Fórsa will continue to update members on related matters and the progress of discussions on a remote working agreement.

Check out the Revenue guidance on this link...
<https://bit.ly/3mlADSn>



Picture: Charles Deluvio on Unsplash

working time legislation.

8. The use of monitoring or surveillance products and practices should be by agreement, and should respect employees' rights to privacy and comply with the transparency provisions of data protection legislation.

Discussions on an agreed public service-wide framework should also cover:

1. Health and safety issues including mental health and risk assessment, with a view to agreeing solutions that uphold health and

safety standards without impeding the expansion of home working.

2. Measures to quantify output and ensure productivity and quality.

3. The costs associated with home working.

4. The management of caring responsibilities, with a view to maximising the flexibility available to employees with caring responsibilities.

5. Issues relevant to specific groups such as younger workers, older workers, parents and carers.

Department of Social Protection



Picture: Paweł Czerwiński on Unsplash

Report calls for greater air circulation

A recent report by the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) has recommended greater air circulation in air-conditioned offices and frequent opening of windows in offices where windows can be opened as a response to Covid-19 health concerns.

Fórsa has flagged up the contents of this report with DSP. However, DSP has advised the union that recent recommendations from OPW did not support the call for increased air-flow in offices. DSP has committed to further consult with OPW on ventilation and is complying with the Return to Work Safely Protocol on ventilation.



Outsourcing of core work opposed

Fórsa has referred DSP to the oversight body given the extension of JobPath in the absence of appropriate consultation. The union is seeking a significant increase in staffing in Activation and is opposed to the outsourcing of this core work.

DPER has sanctioned an additional 100 posts in Activation at DSP which, according to management, will be at EO level. Fórsa has argued that these posts should be at HEO level, the primary Case Officer grade in Activation. DSP is planning on going to tender on expanding Local Employment Services across the State.

Fórsa has asked to be consulted on this and advised DSP that the current Intreo Centre structure - which operates across all 26 counties - should be used rather than outsource this core work.

DSP extends public opening hours

DSP extended public opening hours from 10am-1pm, three days a week to 10am-4pm, five days a week when the country returns to Level 3 with appointments operating from 9.15am-5pm.

Fórsa AGS Paul MacSweeney told CSQ: "The union is opposed to the extension of hours as we have pointed out to DSP that services can be delivered more

effectively, efficiently and safely, if delivered remotely during the pandemic.

"We have also raised concerns that extended opening hours will require additional staff returning from home working to the office at a time when the Chief Medical Office is calling for greater home working."

Flexi-clocks go

DSP management is to remove flexi clocks from offices at the end of December. It is understood DSP opted for a computer-based sign-in time and attendance system following a recent tendering process. In the meantime, DSP has advised staff not to use the clocks that are still in place as a Covid-19 health and safety precaution.

Fórsa AGS Paul MacSweeney told CSQ: "Members should not be penalised and lose time as a result of complying with a health and safety measure, or indeed because DSP is bringing in a new time recording system. In fact, DSP has assured us that staff who end up getting 'lates' under the new recording system because of the delays in signing in will not be penalised."

Punctuality will continue to be taken into account when assessing the granting of an increment and in assessing performance. According to DSP, some 3,970 staff have been returned to the flexi system. Not all staff on flexi have access to sign-in on flexi clocks.



AGS Paul MacSweeney

ISH home work allowed

Some members on the Income Support Helpline (ISH) have been allowed to work from home and supplied with DSP laptops loaded with the Windows 10 software needed to facilitate phone bank home working.

Also, more than 20 staff from the Department of Foreign Affairs have been temporarily redeployed to carry out DSP ISH work, and they have been joined by other staff drafted in from NSSO and the Passport Office.

Meanwhile, the temporary



Abtran contract is coming to an end on 8th December.

Separately, DSP has advised the union that it plans to go to tender on a draw-down contract for emergency phone bank support. Fórsa has reiterated its opposition to the move and underlined the need for DSP to consult with the union over this issue. A meeting is scheduled for the second week in December.

New mechanism activated in VPU

A new mechanism has been activated in the Virtual Processing Unit (VPU) with local HEOs drawing down the work for their staff. Fórsa AGS Paul MacSweeney commented: "We have received an assurance that this development will not lead to the introduction of individual targets. Fórsa remains in talks over the Virtual Processing Unit. Where the main issues of concern are not resolved - including the grading of work, staff rotation and greater assurances on the future of Intreo Centres - we will go to third party arbitration on these and other outstanding matters."

Mobility update

Combined lists within zones with the mobility list has now taken place in DSP.

Security contract renewal dispute

The FGE Branch are in dispute with the Department of Social Protection (DSP) over their decision to renew a security contract with the SAR Group.

Under terms set out in the national agreements, the Department was to consult with the union on a service delivery plan. The purpose of this plan was to evaluate and compare the existing in-house service with the outsourcing option. A source told CSQ: "The Department failed to live up to its obligations and discussions are ongoing."

Industrial News

Revenue

Higher scale awards 'important outcome' for COs

It has been a number of years since higher scale awards have been made to Clerical Officers in Revenue but following lengthy discussions with Fórsa the following was agreed with management:

- Approximately 350 higher scales will be awarded, with notification given when final calculations are made.

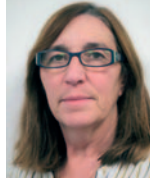
- All higher scales due will be backdated to 1st September 2019.

- Higher scales will be awarded on a 50% Senior/Suitable basis and 50% on a criteria basis.

- When this process has been completed, Revenue is to enter into discussions with the union to ensure a fair and timely process is put in place in

future for Clerical Officers, in a bid to ensure that such a backlog of awards does not happen again.

Welcoming the move, Fórsa AGS Geraldine O'Brien told CSQ: "This is an important outcome which has come about following lengthy discussions with 350-plus members set to benefit from the higher scale award."



AGS Geraldine O'Brien

Jobs boost

Revenue has boosted its workforce by 300 - 200 of whom will be at Clerical Officer grade. The first of the recruits started work in mid-October, with 20 new starts then entering employment each Monday until the middle of December.

It is understood this process will resume again in January until the appropriate number of staff is reached.

The first group is to be assigned to Rosslare, with the remainder going to either Dublin Airport or Dublin Port. Most of these newly-employed Revenue workers are to go to Dublin Port, which has caused some logistics problems which are currently being addressed.



Latest stats published on TWSS

The latest Revenue statistics on the Temporary Covid-19 Wage Subsidy Scheme (TWSS), published in early September, revealed the total value of payments made through it was €2,844 million.

More than 69,500 employers are registered with Revenue for the scheme, with over 663,100 employers having received a subsidy since it was launched. It is estimated that some 360,000 employees are being directly supported by the TWSS, with a further 220,000 employees not in the TWSS being

supported through their employers' participation in the scheme.

A Fórsa source told CSQ: "Revenue's compliance programme on the TWSS scheme continues, and our members continue to overcome challenges as well as delivering high-level productivity while working remotely.

"In some cases, our members have encountered particular difficulties and found they received little support and guidance from senior management in some locations."

Dublin Port: COs acting as Portal Inspectors

There is a focus on the outcome of the continuing Brexit discussions taking place in Europe. The Department has placed a large number of Clerical Officers in Dublin Port acting as Portal Inspectors. All of the staff are set to be placed on shift working covering a 24-hour, seven-day week roster. Further Expressions of Interest

have issued for posts in Rosslare Port. Local discussions continue in the Port to resolve difficulties related to accommodation as well as health and safety. It is expected that Dublin Port will remain as the highest volume area although new appointments have also been made in Rosslare Port.

Foreign Affairs

Report: Sean Carabini

No agreement on remote working

Following continued discussion with management, it has not been possible to agree a remote working protocol for Passport Office workers.

A recent change in management in the Passport Office has seen a 'doubling down' on this issue and, in recent correspondence, management have indicated that they will not allow remote working on any passport material because of a fear of

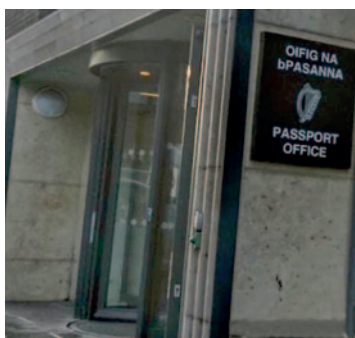
workers being targeted by criminal gangs. Fórsa has responded by noting that with workers in such peril, it would seem appropriate to discuss the introduction of a CAB-style allowance given the until-now unknown criminal risks!

We have referred the matter of constructing a remote working protocol to the WRC for assistance.

New DSO grade

A new grade of Development Specialist Officer, tied to the AO/3rd Secretary grades, is to be introduced in 2021.

A meeting will shortly take place with HR to discuss reporting issues, job descriptions and access to opportunities for general service and 3rd secretary staff.



HR overseas access

We have voiced concern about the lack of availability of HR to people going on remote postings recently. Feedback sought from members indicates that it is taking HR an average of one to two weeks to respond to queries that require 24-hour turnarounds. This is particularly acute for those on their first posting abroad.

National Archives

Extra staff hired

Five additional archivists are to be hired - a significant achievement. However, discussions are being held on why sanction was sought for temporary posts only.

Heritage/Nat Parks

Legacy issues

A meeting to discuss all legacy matters took place with the Department of Housing on 20th November.

CSSO

Claim taken

A claim has been taken to hold a competition ring-fenced to temporary staff to allow them to become permanent staff.

Office of Public Works

PCW 1% allowance talks continue

There has been broad agreement between both parties over arrangements for the first and second call. However, discussions are continuing over the third call and it is hoped an agreement on this issue can be reached in the very near future.

The staff side has raised a number of concerns to management. These include the legislative changes made through the Public Service Superannuation (Age of Retirement) Act 2018 and any unintentional consequences that these may have for Fórsa members. The union is awaiting a response from the management side on these concerns.

Agreement sought on shortlisting

Fórsa is seeking to re-engage with OPW management to agree a draft shortlisting policy for the next AP competition. It followed what was described as "robust discussions" between staff side and management on

the issue. The AP competition has already been advertised with shortlisting criteria that was not agreed with staff side.

The union has now written to OPW management with the re-engagement request.

Rural and Community Development

Talks over Charities Regulator

Talks continue with management over the Charities Regulator operating as a stand-alone public service agency. Options for existing staff to redeploy back to Civil Service form one element of these discussions along with terms and conditions of new staff.

Department of Defence

Fórsa acts on MATS cover

The Ministerial Air Transport Service (MATS) is administered by Fórsa members in the Department of Defence. The very nature of the service means, that staff are required to provide out-of-hours cover. The Department do not pay



Picture: Óglaigh na hÉireann

an on-call allowance and the union has decided to submit a loss-of-earnings claim to the Civil Service Adjudicator to rectify this.

Met Éireann

Tender proposed on IT upgrade

Management is proposing to tender for an IT upgrade along with a managed service. Meetings of all stakeholders on technical issues involving this project are continuing to establish what work can be carried out in-house. Once these technical discussions have concluded, the union/HR group will resume meetings.

Meanwhile, local discussions between CLME branch and management are taking place over a rostering dispute at Dublin Airport.

Business, Enterprise & Innovation

Remote working talks continue

Lead worker reps continue to meet with DBEI management on Covid-related issues as well as on remote working. The Department has been very pro-active on remote working and is managing the consultation process on putting in place national guidelines on the issue. DBEI officials also form part of the DPER management team examining remote working across the Civil Service.

NSSO

Payroll function Midlands transfer

Management and Fórsa met recently to discuss the outstanding issue of the transfer of the payroll function to the Midlands. A source told CSQ: "Management are to get back to the union over our proposed solution to the problem which has led to increased workloads for a number of staff."

Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport & Media

Fórsa seeking 'to rebuild branch'

Fórsa is to rebuild the branch after most of its representatives transferred over to the Department of Housing. The Department numbers now just below 300 (including 65 from Tourism and Sport and 15 from Media). The

Irish Film Censor's Office will also transfer in 2021.

The Islands portfolio function has also moved to Housing but staff will remain in-situ. A memorandum of understanding has been signed.

Department of Transport



Re-run of media monitoring pilot

A pilot looking into the return of the media monitoring function in-house at the Department of Transport "has encountered many errors", it has been claimed.

Both sides then agreed to run it again, informed by insights

gained (such as access to e-papers etc) by the initial pilot. The new pilot involving two COs was run over six days at the end of November.

The number of papers included has also increased which is a benefit to the staff involved.

Oireachtas Ushers

Roster agreement signed off

The Branch sought the restoration of an allowance in line with the Public Service Stability Agreement (PSSA). This was successful with members receiving the outstanding restoration over the last number of years before Christmas. Meanwhile, discussions continue over the implementation of a rostering agreement signed off 12 months ago. The lack of movement on this is causing "considerable stress" on the ground, and talks are continuing locally.

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Roisin Lyons t/a Lyons Financial Services is regulated by the Central Bank of Ireland

Garda Civilians

Civilianisation talks

Talks continue on the civilianisation process. Call dispatcher Expressions of Interest (EOI) in CAD have taken place and a panel formed after interviews. Rollout of process has started in Harcourt Street. EOI has also taken place for back fill of call takers. In the absence of existing staff for both call takers and dispatchers an external competition will take place. Front office positions EW to roll out in DMR West and DMR North Central with more than 20 new positions for Clerical Officers within first roll-out.

Back to work protocol

The Garda Covid-19 response plan is now in place and is rolling out across the country. Covid reps are also being appointed in all areas. Meanwhile, the controversial HEO competition circular is now agreed and circulated.

Picture: Greg Clarke (CC BY-SA 2.0)



DPM set up

Five divisions are continuing to set up their BSFA. Engagements continue at local, divisional and central level and a Central Op model meeting is taking place in December. Fórsa training of local OP Model representatives is ongoing.

Legal Aid Board

Departmental Council calls

It remains difficult for workers in the Board to access the option of home working, and Fórsa is dealing with this on a case-by-case basis. The union recently submitted a list of outstanding issues to the Board. As part of this, Fórsa has called for the setting up of a Departmental Council structure.

Department of Agriculture and the Marine

Report: Des Fagan

Agriculture No.1 Branch

Formal arrangements under the Conciliation and Arbitration scheme to conclude 'disagreed reports' were actioned at the last Departmental Council. One claim is on behalf of members operating the TB eradication scheme for badgers.

Another involves the Veterinary Public Health Inspection Service (VPHIS) where technical grade members lodged claims for an allowance over working conditions and responsibilities in meat plants.

Outsourcing objection

Fórsa and the Veterinary Officers Association met with management to object to a plan to outsource the sampling of carcasses for BSE infections. Both unions lodged detailed written objections to the proposal, which had previously been raised in 2017 and were the subject of some discussion at the WRC.

Covid work protocols

Engagement with senior management in DAFM has taken place at the Central Partnership meetings as well as at the Departmental Council.

Working closely with DAFM managers, the union has ensured that any staff member who is required to return to the workplace for essential work can do so in confidence knowing that preventative measures have been put in

place. There are issues relating to the non-provision of masks and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) in some locations. This has been brought to the attention of the Department and they looking into the matter.

Promotions/recruitment

Fórsa has raised matters relating to Expression of Interest and promotional appointments at a recent Departmental Council meeting. This comes after some branches raised concerns over the use of a competition-based approach to filling positions from Expressions of Interest.

Other branches have difficulties with appointments made from an Order of Merit list that had not been agreed at the time of the competition announcements.

One of the branches has already put a claim into the Council seeking to sanction the Department for placing non-Executive grade staff



in positions that should have been reserved for Executive Officers and Higher Executive Officers.

Agri-Labs Branch

A successful conclusion has been reached with DAFM management on proposals that provide assisted learning, promotion opportunities and upgrades in the Plant Science Division for the grades of Seed Analysts, Higher Seed Analyst and Senior Seed Analyst. Follow-

ing discussions at the Agri Labs Branch Executive Committee, the union is awaiting an update from HR about when their position paper on the proposed roles and responsibilities of the laboratory grades (SLA, AAI, RO etc.) in the new Divisions will be available for review by relevant Fórsa branches.

Executive Grades Branch

The Branch has rejected a proposal to transfer the inputting of sheep price reporting data to technical staff at the Beef Carcase Classification Unit in Portlaoise. This work is currently carried out by clerical and executive grade staff in the Meat & Milk Policy Division in Agriculture House.

The technical grades branch has indicated support for this stance by the Executive grades branch.

State Laboratory Chemist III comp

A recently-advertised competition for a Chemist III grade has been given the go-ahead after discussions with management. The competition booklet was amended after concerns were raised by the union.

Further competitions to appoint a principal chemist and a senior chemist will also be advertised shortly.



Picture: NCI on Unsplash

Irish Coast Guard Hope for progress on long-standing claims

Engagement with Irish Coast Guard senior management has finally started over long-standing claims involving the use of emergency vehicles and a cut in on-call allowances. It is hoped further progress can be made on these claims in the coming weeks.

Festive tips...

How to ensure Yule all be fine!

Derek Mullen

Head of Civil Service Division

I think everyone is hoping for an opportunity this Christmas to spend some time with family or friends after a very difficult year.

The Government has eased restrictions from 4th December and will ease them some more from the 18th - inter-county travel being allowed from that date, which will be great news for many.

Thankfully we can all get together this Christmas, albeit with limitations on the number of households who can gather. Hopefully though the three-household rule will allow us to celebrate in a meaningful way.

Some Government advice for celebrating a safe Christmas Day...

Plan ahead

- Plan how you will spend your Christmas Day and who you will be in contact with.
- Keep your guest list short and try to ensure that you limit your close contacts in the days and weeks beforehand.
- Remember - every contact counts!

On arrival

- Try encourage guests to use hand sanitiser or to wash their hands when they arrive at your home or do so when you arrive at someone else's home.

Limit contact

- Try to avoid hugs, kisses and handshakes as people arrive.
- Don't share items like crockery and glassware.
- Avoid sharing food and buffet style set ups.

In the kitchen

- Remember to wear a mask when cooking and serving food.
- Limit the amount of people in the kitchen.

Give a little extra space...

- Extra distance between settings will make sure everyone is comfortable and keeps safe.

Ireland is at **Level 3**, with a number of exceptions in place for the Christmas period...

Activity	From 1st December	From 4th December	From 18th December
Visitors to your home	No visitors, apart from those in support bubble	No visitors, apart from those in support bubble	2 other households
Places of worship	50 max	50 max	50 max
Museums, galleries and cinemas	Open	Open	Open
Restaurants	Closed	Open	Open
Pubs operating as restaurants	Closed	Open	Open
Wet pubs	Delivery and take-away	Delivery and take-away	Delivery and take-away
Retail	Open	Open	Open
Travel outside your county	No	No	Yes



- Try to allow extra space at the dinner table.
- People from the same households should sit together.

Fresh air

- Keep your home and spaces where people are gathering ventilated.
- Keep windows and doors open where possible.
- Try and get out for a walk or spend some time in the fresh air.

There are those for whom this advice will be meaningless so it's important that we think of ways to be in touch with those who are alone or unwell or those who find themselves homeless this Christmas. Important too that we

remember the loved ones we have all lost this year be it to the virus or other reasons.

As we leave 2020, we hope for a better 2021 and we place great trust in science and vaccines.

In many respects it is like the journey from winter to spring, captured perfectly by John O'Donohue from *Anam Cara*, his book of Celtic wisdom: *"Within the grip of winter, it is almost impossible to imagine the spring. The grey perished landscape is shorn of colour. Only bleakness meets the eye; everything seems severe and edged. Winter is the oldest season; it has some quality of the absolute."*

"Yet beneath the surface of winter, the miracle of spring is already in preparation; the cold is relenting; seeds are waking up. Colours are beginning to imagine how they will return."

"Then, imperceptibly, somewhere one bud opens and the symphony of renewal is no longer reversible. From the black heart of winter a miraculous, breathing plenitude of colour emerges."



Civil Service Employee Assistance Service (CSEAS)

Tel: 0761 00 00 30 Email: cseas@per.gov.ie Web: www.cseas.per.gov.ie



An Roinn Caiteachais
Phoiblí agus Athchóirithe
Department of Public
Expenditure and Reform

Civil Service Employee Assistance Service (CSEAS)

The CSEAS is a confidential* work-based support service for civil servants.

What can the CSEAS do?

- Support staff dealing with work and personal issues
- Give time and listen
- Assist in exploring options
- Provide information
- Ongoing support as requested

Examples of Types of Issues

- Feeling stressed and need to talk?
- Have you experienced a recent bereavement and need support?
- Do you need to talk about work or personal relationships?
- Are you coping with depression, anxiety?
- Is substance misuse or gambling causing you problems?
- Are financial pressures worrying you and causing emotional strain?
- Absent on sick leave and concerned about it and/or your return to work?
- Are you retiring soon and would like to talk about your plans?
- Has your work situation changed recently?
- Are you struggling with work/life balance?
- Are you experiencing difficulties with family/caring responsibilities?

Line Manager Support

The CSEAS can provide support and guidance to line managers when dealing with staff wellbeing issues. We can act as a sounding board, assist in planning how to approach sensitive issues and provide information on how to refer a staff member to the CSEAS.

Presentations

Please contact your EAO to discuss the feasibility of presentation delivery on topics such as stress management, self-care etc.

* Exceptions apply – see the CSEAS website for further information

CSEAS Publications

The following are examples of topics available to download from the [CSEAS website](http://www.cseas.per.gov.ie)

- Managing Stress
- Effective Communication
- Bereavement/Impacted by Suicide
- Mindfulness
- Critical Incident in the Workplace
- Responding to Difficult Phone calls
- Substance Misuse
- Good Mental Health in the Workplace
- Conflict Resolution Skills for Managers
- Building Personal Resilience
- Covid-19 Supports
- Plus many more...

Who is your Employee Assistance Officer?

Please see our website for contact details of the Employee Assistance Officer for your Department or Office or click on : <https://www.cseas.per.gov.ie/eao-contact-details-contact-form/contact-form-2/>

The unforgettable fire of punk at its peak...

Seán Carabini

Assistant General Secretary

Great Gig Memories is the latest book from the Hope Collective, a charity initiative aimed at generating funds for the NHS Charities Trust. The book is compiled by Michael Murphy and Fórsa activist Niall McGuirk.

The book is a 'must have' for fans of the punk scene. The premise of the book is wonderfully simple – ask members of the punk community and their friends to share their memories of their favourite gigs.

The book features more than 100 contributions with participants sharing memories of

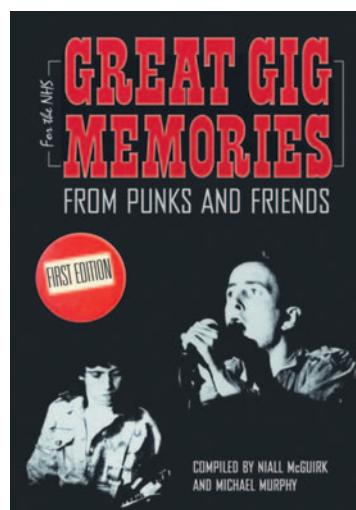
gigs ranging from the Clash, to the Kinks to the Ramones.

As an ardent music fan myself, I have missed the thrill and the experience of live music during the Covid-19 pandemic.

However, reading *Great Gig Memories* has helped to rekindle some of that experience. I was particularly struck by the tone of celebration in the book.

There are many contributions from what was a very tight-knit punk community in Ireland in the 1980s and this book is a way of capturing something of the energy, enthusiasm and, dare I say, hope of that community.

It is a fitting tribute to that Irish



music scene. And as Niall McGuirk writes in *Great Gig Memories*: "Does community mean anything to you? It means the world to me."



Niall McGuirk

"Whether community is the area you live, the sport you play, the people you work with or the music you listen to, it is an essential bond for living." This book captures that special feeling that music fans get from the experience of a great gig. It belongs on the shelf of all music fans.

News



Fórsa's urgent call to members

We need you to update personal email details...

Fórsa's members in the civil service are being asked to help distribute an important message to their colleagues. The union is currently updating its database system, ensuring that members' contact details are up to date.

The union is appealing to members who receive the bulletin to share this message - and the accompanying video message - with civil service colleagues, as a matter of urgency.

Fórsa's deputy general secretary Eoin Ronayne explained: "A significant number of Fórsa's civil service division members don't have a contact email address included in the details they submitted when they joined the union, while others have provided work email addresses, which means that union messages can often be quarantined or filtered by their employer's computer systems.

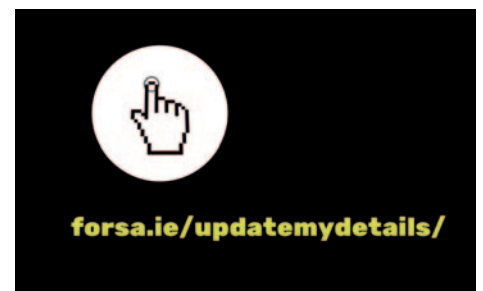
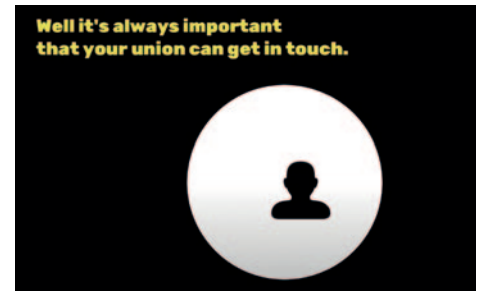
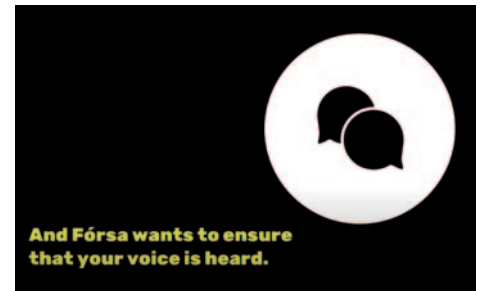
"The drive is now on to ensure that we have a complete record of contact details for every member. This is going to be particularly important now that we are about to ballot

members on a new national pay agreement. Ronayne said it was especially important for members to include a personal email address, which is much more effective than a work email address.

Data control

"It's now far more commonplace for people to use a personal email address as a hub for all their various subscriptions, particularly as so many people are now using smartphones.

"It gives people greater control over the data and messages they receive, and it means your union can reach you quickly and easily, keeping you up to date with the latest information, and bypassing the risk of messages being lost in



your employer's computer system," he said.

Fórsa member Donna Mooney, of the Revenue Officers branch, features in the union's video message. She told CSQ: "Fórsa wants to ensure your voice is heard, and to make sure your vote in any upcoming ballot is counted, so it's vital that your union can make contact with you."

To update your details quickly and easily visit the 'update my details' page on the Fórsa website at www.forsa.ie/updatesmydetails and complete the online form. You can view the video message at the following link: <https://bit.ly/33YM4hJ>

Fórsa's Civil Service members are asked to share this message with work colleagues and union friends, via email or social media.



Check out new Fórsa video at...
<https://bit.ly/33YM4hJ>

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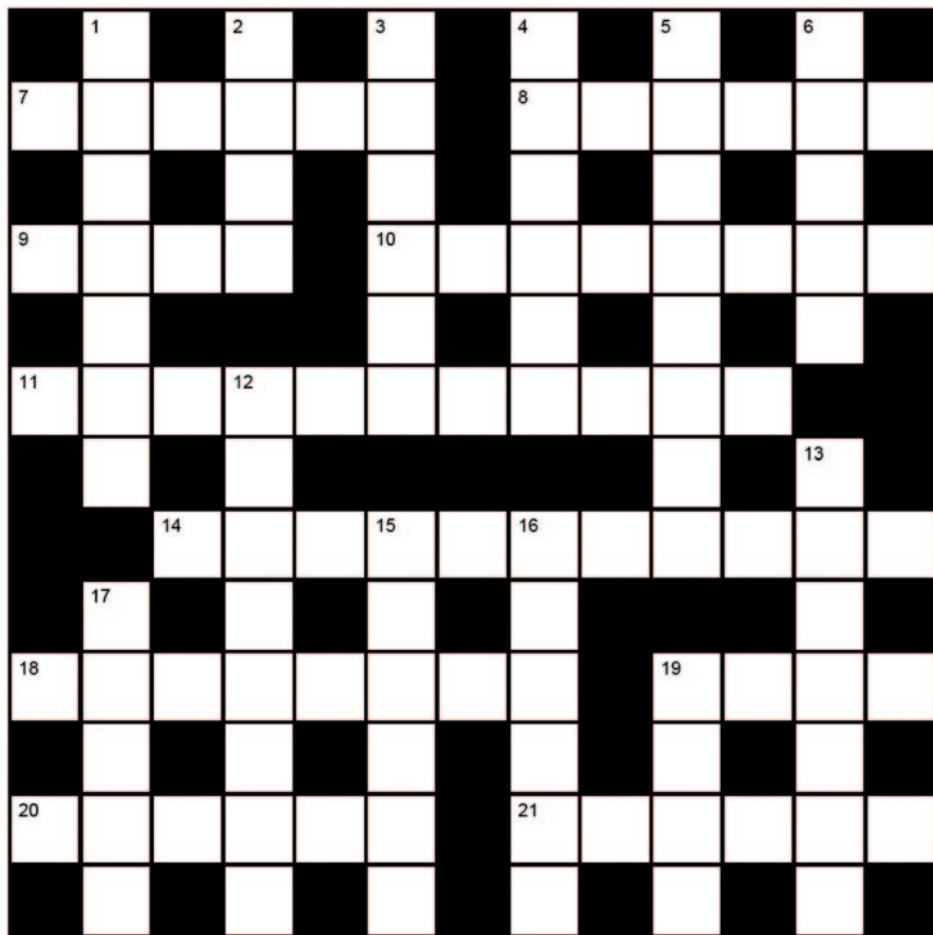
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02/20 Prize Crossword



Across

7. EastEnders character played by Patsy Palmer (6)
8. The Tuesday before Ash Wednesday (6)
9. See 19 down (4)
10. This ...Man - The Smiths (8)
11. M. Night Shyamalan supernatural thriller starring Bruce Willis and Samuel L. Jackson (11)
14. Irish writer, who won the Booker Prize for 'The Gathering' (4,7)
18. Happened, per Nessa in Gavin & Stacey (8)
19. Sr. Arrizabalaga Revuelta (4)
20. Atalanta striker - 1-50-1-100-1-100 (6)
21. Vitamin B3 (6)

Down

1. She is @badgalriri on Instagram (7)
2. Eithne Pádraigín Ní Bhraonáin (4)
3. Winner of the 2017 U.S. Masters (6)
4. Capital city of Eritrea (6)
5. The princely family of Monaco (8)
6. These are hot in County Cork (5)
12. Formally declare one's abandonment of (a claim, right, or possession) (8)
13. The star of City Lights, Modern Times and The Great Dictator (7)
15. Quote from The Naked Gun - "It'sPalazzo" (6)
16. Ms. Coyle, of Girls Aloud (6)
17. This after Pay, Sliding and Spatial (5)
19. And 9 across - Self-defence system used by Israeli Defence Forces (4)

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Crossword 01/20 winner:

Regina O'Riordan, OPW, The Demense, Killarney.

A €100 One4All voucher will go to the first correct solution opened.

Crossword entries for **Crossword 02/20** should be posted to:

**The Editor, Civil Service Quarterly, Adelaide House,
19/20 Adelaide Road, Dublin D02 WA00
to arrive not later than Friday, 29th January, 2021.**



Name

Work Address

Union Branch

SOLUTIONS Prize Crossword 01/20

Across

6. Bloating; 7. Radar; 9. Ferry; 10. Madness;
12. Grand Old Man; 14. Home Country;
18. Oranges; 19. Stone; 21. Pansy; 22. Capered.

Down

1. Sleep; 2. Fairer; 3. Ten; 4. Warned; 5. Batsman;
8. Saloons; 11. Snooker; 13. Doormat;
15. Earnest; 16. Rotten; 17. Sneer; 20. Cat.