



Enhancing Education By Valuing Education Staff



2025
REPORT

Education
Divisional Conference

23rd - 25th April 2025

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Foreword

This report details the activity of Fórsa as the union enters its eighth year of operation with 89,000 members. The union continues to grow, continues to organise and continues to win. Growing Fórsa's membership and strength remains a priority, particularly at this time of intense global uncertainty.

There has never been as many people at work in the Republic. The Irish economy is now technically at full employment, and the workforce stands at more than 2.8 million people, up 3.7% compared with the previous year.

This creates a very significant challenge for the trade union movement, particularly in an economy that looks successful from the outside, but where massive structural challenges remain, each one of which affects working people.

Last May, each member of the union staff was assigned to either a divisional or functional team. This is providing a greater focus on objectives, while also offering a more streamlined system of management and accountability. During the past year, also, the union has focused its time and resources on organising for power.

The good news is almost 10,000 members joined Fórsa in 2024. However, this only just keeps pace with employment growth, so our efforts will be centred on knowing where our membership gaps are, building our membership density, and training and equipping an additional cadre of workplace leaders. This work has already begun in every division of the union.

As the population grows, so must public services. That means more people working in services to meet the needs of our growing population, and laying down a challenge for Fórsa to ensure the expansion in employment is reflected in the expansion of our union membership, and to accompany that with a plan to build strength from the bottom up.

The challenge for individual members is to foster and encourage union membership in the workplace, to open up the conversation about union strength, and ensure that new workers know the importance of collective action, and where to go to seek advice and support.

Crucially, those who are new to the workforce need to be aware of how, by coming together with their colleagues, they can win better outcomes on the issues that matter to them.

In the last year, we've seen escalating tensions abroad, and there is growing economic uncertainty, about which we cannot afford to be complacent. Economic shocks to Ireland seem almost certain, and our unity and organising strength will be crucial in protecting members from the challenges we will face. But face them we will.

By being unified, strong and active, I fully expect we will face those challenges successfully.

Kevin Callinan
General Secretary

Introduction

The Fórsa biennial report 2023-2024 was finalised and distributed to branches and executives in May 2024. The report covered union events and activities and was adopted at the national conference in May 2024. This report covers developments in Fórsa's Education division in the period between 2023 and 2025, in addition to a broader look at developments across the union during the same period. This includes a brief synopsis of the extension of the Building Momentum pay agreement, and leading into the negotiation and ratification of its successor, the current **Public Service Agreement 2024 - 2026**.



Organisation

Union officers

Officer elections took place at Fórsa's biennial delegate conference in May 2024, and Martin Walsh, of the Louth Health and Local Government branch, was elected Fórsa's new president. Julie Flood, of Fórsa's Dublin City branch, was elected senior vice president, Michael Crowe (DSP Executive Grades branch) and Tara Horigan (Health & Safety Authority branch) as vice-presidents, while outgoing president Michael Smyth of the School Completion Programme branch was elected honorary treasurer.



Education division

Leadership and organisation

The Education division has continued to grow and develop over the last two years, consolidating progress made in strengthening membership and organisation during the pandemic.

Divisional priorities over the last two years have been to increase bargaining strength and influence through maximising the recruitment of new members and strengthening branch capacity. This objective has been successful in raising the profile of the grades, groups and categories of members within the division and has delivered beneficial outcomes that would not have been achievable without significant membership growth.

Elected leadership

At the 2023 divisional conference, Noreen O'Mahony (Munster SNA branch) was re-elected as Cathaoirleach. Eilise McGarrell (Connaught Ulster SNA) was elected as Leas Cathaoirleach, and Ursula Cox (Higher Education) elected to the third divisional seat on the national executive committee (NEC).

The other members elected to the divisional executive committee were Breda Halley (Education No.1), James Kavanagh (School Completion Programme), Carol McSherry (SNA North Leinster), Claudia Jennings (SNA Connaught/Ulster), Marcel McCafferty (NETB), Annette Murphy (South Leinster SNA), and Catherine Quirke (Munster SNA). Noreen O'Mahony stood down from the elected post as Cathaoirleach

following her secondment into an organiser role with Fórsa and Eilise McGarrell assumed the role of Cathaoirleach in March 2025.

Fórsa staff

Andy Pike continues in the post of Head of the Education Division, Stella Griffin (assistant general secretary/AGS) retired in 2024 and was replaced by Barbara Anderson who works with the NETB, Higher Education, and the Education No.1 branches.

Shane Lambert (AGS) is responsible for the four SNA branches, the School Caretakers, School Completion and School Secretaries branches. Gary Honer (Industrial Relations Officer/IRO) with the Munster SNA and South Leinster SNA branches. Dave Sexton (IRO) is working with the Connaught/Ulster SNA and North Leinster SNA branches. Both Gary and Dave also support the School Secretaries and the new School Caretakers branches.

The role of assistant industrial officers (AIO) is crucial to the work of the division. Their duties relate to recruitment, organisation and local representation of members. The four posts involve assignments with schools' branches. There were several changes between 2021 and 2023. In March 2025, Linda O'Sullivan was seconded on a temporary basis to work with the North Dublin North Leinster SNA branch, while Noreen O'Mahoney was seconded on a temporary basis to work with the Munster SNA and Connaught Ulster SNA branches.

Seamus Ryan is now acting IRO and continues to support branches in the division. Organiser Diarmaid Mac Abhaird continues to support the South Dublin South Leinster SNA branch, while organiser Joan McCrohan continues in her assignment in Munster.

Seconded staff

The division's capacity was strengthened significantly by the release of activists for union-related work. While the individual Fórsa members continue to be employed by their respective employers, they have been assigned to work on behalf of the union in relation to specific projects.

Joan Regan (NETB branch) continued in her role supporting members in education and training boards across the country. Joan has indicated her wish to retire at the end of April 2025, and Marcel McCaffrey is due to take over this role in May 2025. Ursula Cox is seconded from the Higher Education sector, to lead on the implementation of job evaluation and to support members across the country working in higher education institutions alongside Barbara Anderson (AGS).

Gina O'Brien (Higher Education branch) continues on release as a facilitator working on behalf of members at the Munster Technological University consortium. Sarah Clarke and David Jackman are assigned to similar roles at the Technical University South East Ireland (TUSEI.) Linda McGlinchy is assigned to a facilitator role within the Atlantic Technological University (ATU).

These arrangements demonstrate a significant degree of management recognition and respect for the role of Fórsa local representatives in the sector, and all our seconded members have undertaken vital work representing the interests of union members affected by the creation of new technological universities.



Gaining traction

During the period under review, the Education division continued to gain ground and consolidated Fórsa's position as the leading union, and the authoritative voice, for non-teaching staff across the education sector. Divisional membership grew from 17,500 in April 2023 to 19,400 in April 2025. The division has grown by more than 60% since 2019. This represents significant and sustained growth, with the greatest gains being made in recruiting school secretaries, SNAs and higher education staff.

The Education Division Executive Committee (DEC) considers membership and density within each branch each month. Density building projects are undertaken and regularly reviewed to maximise bargaining strength and influence, which in turn builds membership numbers.

Membership growth is set to continue through the establishment of the new national School Caretaker branch and other significant developments across the division. The continued development of the Education division should result in a membership figure approaching 22,000 by the time of the next divisional conference in May 2026.

Industrial strategy

The DEC continued its approach of dividing agenda items under the headings of organising, policy and industrial relations. The committee regularly takes stock of divisional conference resolutions and receives presentations from staff working in the division outlining their plans.

The divisional industrial strategy forms the basis of work in the division and seeks to implement the relevant sections of the **Fórsa Strategic Plan**. This is a process requiring the identification of bargaining objectives, aligning activity with those objectives and maximising branch and member involvement in such activity designed to achieve improvements to pay, conditions of employment, status, influence and branch effectiveness.

The division reviews membership levels each month and has met all membership targets agreed and set for the division between 2022 and 2024.

From 2023 to 2025, the divisional strategy included the following objectives and outcomes:

1 Local bargaining under the Public Service Pay agreement

The current national pay agreement provides a local bargaining facility for unions to negotiate claims for grades, groups and categories, to the value of 3% of the total payroll costs, inclusive of allowances. The first claim to be submitted by Fórsa was a claim for a new career structure for SNAs (see Appendix i). This claim seeks the establishment of posts of responsibility across the schools' sector to provide the first ever career progression opportunities for serving SNAs.

Members are also encompassed by the clerical admin claims for grade III members (see Appendix ii). and the separate claims for grades IV to VII respectively (see Appendix iii). These claims seek to shorten the incremental

scales by removing two points. The claims also see the removal of the waiting times for the award of long service increments, and the extension of the maximum incremental point on each scale by 3.5%.

Members in the higher education and national education and training board branches will benefit directly should these claims be agreed. Members in other branches who are paid on scales linked to the public service scales will also benefit, as their scales will also be adjusted, those branches include the school completion branch, education no1 branch, school secretaries branch and the school caretakers branch

Negotiations on the claims must conclude by the Summer, with the first instalment of 1% of the value of any claim being payable in September 2025 with the remaining 2% to be paid over the lifetime of the next national pay agreement.

2 Campaign: Pension parity for school secretaries and caretakers

Following a campaign of industrial action from 2020, a new national pay agreement was secured for grant paid school secretaries, in March 2022, with benefits backdated to September 2021. Staff were added to the Department of Education payroll system and, as of 14th September 2023, they are paid centrally, as are public servants. The benefits of the pay agreement have delivered significant pay increases and a new incremental scale which mirrors the clerical officer pay scale. Members received considerable back pay in September 2023 when they moved to the new scale.

However, the agreement does not provide access to the single public service pension scheme, access to the scheme was refused by the last Government. The transfer of school secretaries to the department of education payroll system created an anomaly, whereby the minister is now the paymaster for teachers, SNAs and secretaries. The Minister sets the terms and conditions for all three staff groups but still excludes secretaries (and caretakers) from the same pension entitlements as their teaching and SNA colleagues. The exclusion of secretaries from the public service pension arrangements has resulted in thousands of secretaries retiring with no occupational pension after decades of loyal service.

To address this ongoing injustice, Fórsa launched the Pension Parity campaign in December 2024, with the aim of building support and solidarity to include school secretaries and caretakers in public service pension arrangements. The campaign will continue throughout this school year, culminating in an industrial action ballot, at the end of the summer term.

3 Campaign: Pay for school caretakers

A framework agreement for school caretakers was concluded in March 2022. Negotiations continue to focus on gathering pay data to enable the Department of Education and Fórsa to conclude discussions on a similar pay agreement as agreed for secretaries. Progress has been slow, the new agreement should be completed in 2025, no agreement has been reached in the effective date of implementation.



4 National review of the role of the SNA/ negotiating a new contract

Fórsa conducted the #RespectForSNAs campaign throughout 2022 and 2023. This campaign sought greater recognition and respect for the work of the SNAs. In response to the issues raised the Minister for Special Education and Inclusion announced that a new National SNA Workforce Development Plan (SNAWDP) would commence in January 2024.

This process will be complete by September 2025 and will encompass a review the role of the SNA for the first time since 2005. The proposals being discussed include a new contract, new training and development frameworks, a new minimum qualification at QQI Level 6, a national redeployment scheme to enhance job security, revised job descriptions and changes to other

conditions of service such as special leave, the 72-hour obligation and June working.

The aim of the process is to professionalise and modernise the role of the SNA to reflect the reality of the work undertaken with students. Alongside Fórsa the workforce development plan involves independent academic experts, the Department of Education, the NCSE, schools' inspectorate, children's rights groups and school management bodies. The new arrangements are to be agreed and implemented by September 2025.

Progress to date includes agreement on changing the minimal essential qualification to an accredited QQI level 6 award, the continuation of the national SNA training programme for another three years (the course will now be provided by St Angelas college), and agreement on

implementing a pilot national redeployment scheme in September 2025. Considerable work remains outstanding on the use of the 72-hour obligation, and problems associated with June working.

In April 2025, the Minister for Education announced that the Teaching Council would be asked to include specific modules on special education in the teacher training curriculum. This will ensure that newly qualified teachers are aware of the role of the SNA and are better equipped to meet the needs of students. This was one of many issues highlighted in focus groups organised for SNAs and teachers as part of the SNAWDP process.

An important element to the SNAWDP process is the production of a new circular outlining the role of the SNA. Discussions on the nature of any changes, which may include more focus on meeting the educational as well as care needs of students, are ongoing. A literature review will be published shortly by the Department of Education, outlining international evidence on the approach which is most beneficial to students. The range of existing circulars, covering the role of the SNA, may be replaced by a single new document bringing together all the relevant information on SNA duties and responsibilities. Recognition of the fact that SNAs have a positive role to play, supporting students in accessing the curriculum, is a milestone toward professionalising the SNA role.

SNA members will be given the opportunity to express their own views on the package of measures within the final SNAWDP in a consultation ballot later this year.

5 Negotiating end of 32-hour contracts for SNAs

In March 2023, Fórsa secured agreement on a new SNA job-sharing circular, removing reference to a 32-hour working week, bringing attempts by school employers to impose a 32hr week on SNAs - who would normally work on a 'bell-to-bell' basis - to an end. While substitute SNAs are still paid using a 32-hour pay divisor, job sharers are no longer required to work a 16-hour week. They work 50% of the full-time hours and are paid 50% of their full-time salary.

6 Abolishing the '72-hour' and June working obligations for SNAs

Negotiations will conclude shortly on the Fórsa claims for the abolition of these obligations. The union is seeking a new dispensation, based on continuous professional training and development, with any additional work requirements outside of class being strictly and solely related to the needs of SEN students. These claims will be addressed by the development of the new workforce development plan.

7 A new funding and governance structure for School Completion programmes

Following the transfer of administrative responsibility for the school completion programme (SCP) to the Department of Education in 2021, Fórsa has sought meaningful engagement on the future funding and governance structures, aimed at securing public service status for SCP staff.

A national seminar in March 2022 was well attended and supported. The then Taoiseach, Micheál Martin, attended and provided commitments to secure

the future for the SCP within the education sector. Since then, Fórsa secured an agreement, under the auspices of the WRC, which obliges the Department of Education to develop a framework for the employment of SCP staff by September 2024.

Regular engagement continues and Fórsa secured a further agreement on the use of the correct public service pay-scales for project workers and coordinators, while discussions on the need to align annual leave, and other leave entitlements, continue. In October 2024, Fórsa secured an agreement on the transfer of all SCP staff to the employment of education and training boards (ETBs). Work to deliver this commitment is ongoing. Funding from Budget 2025 is required to deal with the additional costs of transferring staff to the ETB payroll system.

8 Implementing a new job evaluation scheme in higher education

Following a successful campaign of industrial action in 2019, a WRC agreement secured the design and implementation a new job evaluation scheme for members working in Technological Universities, Institutes of Technology and Mary Immaculate College.

Work on the design of a new job evaluation scheme has been led by facilitator Sean McHugh, who has assisted the parties in developing a robust scheme. It has since been tested across different higher education institutions. The first tranche of jobs are currently being evaluated, with the number expected to reach 10% of all clerical and library jobs within the Technological Universities and Institutes of Education on an annual basis.

9 Agency labour in Education and Training Boards

Some Education and Training Boards (ETBs) have been routinely using agency labour to fill clerical admin posts, citing the difficulties in obtaining sanction from the Department of Education as justification for the continued practice. Fórsa raised the issue at the Education Oversight Group as no agreement had been concluded with Fórsa on outsourcing labour, contrary to the provisions of the national pay agreement. Fórsa has made a referral to the WRC, seeking agreement on the use of direct labour, with agency staff being given the opportunity to transfer to public service posts.

10 A fair grading structure for ETBs

Fórsa continues to pursue a joint union claim with the TUI, AHCPs, SIPTU and UNITE seeking a uniform grading structure across all ETBs. This claim was first discussed when the RTBs were created more than ten years ago. The employer has consistently refused to standardise arrangements. A further engagement at the WRC is scheduled for May. In tandem with this claim, Fórsa is also seeking to standardise grades through the introduction of a new job evaluation scheme for members working in ETBs. Discussions on this continue.

Other developments

SNA allocation model

Fórsa continues to advocate for changes to the SNA allocation model and is seeking clarity on the future direction of policy for the special education sector. Joan McCrohan serves on the consultative forum for the review of the EPSEN Act, a process which might finally result in the statutory guarantee of access to education for all children first promised in 2004.

The proposed 'frontloading' SNA-allocation model, first proposed in 2018, has not been implemented and the Schools Inclusion Model pilot – covering 72 schools in HSE CHO Area 7 – has not yet been rolled out to other parts of the country. Despite this lack of progress some positive steps have been taken, with a freeze on mainstream SNA allocations since 2020.

Since then, more than 1,000 new posts have been added to the national allocation in each successive year. There have been a very small number of potential redundancies. In 2024, only 28 posts were affected by redundancy. The availability of a redeployment scheme will provide significantly enhanced job security for SNAs, so the allocation model for 2025-2026 will not be significantly changed.



Personal assistants in further and higher education

Fórsa secured a significant pay increase, worth 30%, for personal assistants working in further education colleges. The PAs undertake similar work to SNAs in schools. They are employed on a spot rate which has been increased to €21p/h as of January 2024.

Fórsa has referred a claim to the WRC for secure contracts, an incremental scale and paid annual and sick leave. The Department of Education has proposed a review of the PA role. Fórsa has welcomed this development, and the union will pursue further improvements to terms and conditions through negotiation at the WRC and, if necessary, referral to the Labour Court.

Community outreach and engagement

The EDEC encourages branches to participate in community outreach and engagement activities to build links with local communities, enhance Fórsa's relationships with key stakeholders and to build union strength in our society.

As part of that initiative the South Dublin South Leinster SNA branch, with the help of the division, has sponsored two soccer competitions, one for 60 students from 6 special schools in Dublin in November and a second competition for 120 students from mainstream schools in Portlaoise, which took place earlier in April.

Participating students were given a Fórsa soccer jersey and the union sponsored cups and awards for the winning teams with staff and elected officers making the presentations. Discussions may commence with the FAI on more permanent involvement partnerships in the years ahead, aimed at providing the opportunity for involvement in organised sports for students who rarely have the opportunity.

Other community outreach and engagement work has taken place on the issue of access to school places, with branches and activists supporting grass roots parent campaigns which have succeeded in highlighting the plight of children and families who are effectively locked out of the education system for years.

Every branch in the Division will be encouraged to establish a community engagement team and to organise at least one appropriate event or initiative each year.

Pay and related

Extension of Building Momentum

In the period under review the trade union side, in talks on public service, pay and conditions, continued to be led by Fórsa general secretary Kevin Callinan, acting in his capacity as chair of the ICTU Public Services Committee.

Fórsa continued its focus on cost-of-living pressures at its biennial delegate conference in May 2022 because inflation, by this time, had exceeded what had been projected when the Building Momentum agreement was negotiated in late 2020.

With the agreement also due to expire at the end of 2022, Fórsa said talks on a successor agreement would need to prioritise the restoration and improvement of living standards in the context of high inflation.

A pay talks process at the WRC in September 2022, secured a public service pay package – an extension of the Building Momentum Public Service Agreement – in a ballot of union members.

The main provisions of the deal were:

- Increases of 3% with effect (backdated) from 2nd February 2022.
- An increase of 2% increase from 1st March 2023.
- An increase of 1.5% or €750 (whichever is the greater) from 1st October 2023.

These measures were in addition to 1% or €500, whichever is greater, which fell due in October 2022 under the Building Momentum agreement.

The minimum payment of €750 a year from October 2022 meant the package was of greater value to workers on lower incomes. The overall package was worth 8% to a worker earning €25,000 a year and 7% to a person on €37,500 a year.

While neither side achieved all it sought in the negotiations, the revised terms were a significant improvement on those of the Building Momentum agreement, and worth more to those who needed it most.

Following a successful lobbying effort by trade unions, Budget 2023 included a series of short-term measures to help people with the cost of living, including electricity credits, increased social welfare payments and a series of once-off payments.

Fórsa members backed the extension of Building Momentum in an electronic ballot by a significant margin (91.3%) on a strong turnout (67%) and the union supported ratification of the pay measures at a meeting of the ICTU Public Services Committee (PSC) in October 2022. The revised pay deal would expire at the end of 2023, which meant that pay talks on a successor would need to take place before the end of that year.

Negotiating a new public service agreement

Fórsa general secretary Kevin Callinan, in an address to INTO conference delegates in April 2023, said that unions would concentrate on key cost-of-living issues during pay talks on a successor to Building Momentum, including the need to “make good the shortfall in pay against inflation” during the remaining term of the pay agreement, acknowledging that the review didn't fully compensate for the rate of inflation, which averaged 8% over 2022.

With the extension of Building Momentum due to expire at the end of 2023, talks on a successor agreement were expected to take place in the latter half of the year. In late September, the ICTU's Public Services Committee (PSC) set out its priorities for the anticipated round of public service pay talks, setting its sights on securing appropriate pay measures in response to continuing cost-of-living pressures on working families.

The PSC also focused on stabilising public pay agreements, following an inconclusive process of engagement on Building Momentum's commitment to address outstanding issues affecting several public service grades, groups and categories. Unions said this was essential if a successor to Building Momentum was to commence with a solid foundation.

Another priority of the PSC was to normalise public service industrial relations – and to move on from a process of industrial relations shaped by the response to the 2009 financial crisis – through the final dismantling of remaining pieces of FEMPI legislation.

Unions also prioritised the pursuit of measures to ensure the ‘futureproofing’ of quality public services and public service employment. With the population of the State having just exceeded five million people, unions said it was vital to ensure the State could continue to build and

maintain quality public services designed to respond to people's needs.

An invitation to pay talks was eventually issued to unions in mid-November. The 19 unions affiliated to the PSC agreed that a multi-year agreement would only be possible if the Government made a commitment to repealing the remaining elements of FEMPI. Kevin Callinan noted the comments, made by the Minister for Public Expenditure in his invitation, that an agreement had the potential to provide certainty and stability in a ‘normalised industrial relations environment.’

Kevin said normalising industrial relations would mean dismantling the remaining elements of FEMPI, which continued to excessively centralise control in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, stopping ordinary industrial relations progressing, even in the event of agreement between employers and unions.

By mid-December, despite the slow pace of talks, unions had nevertheless secured a commitment on the repeal of FEMPI, in the context of a multi-year pay deal.

Kevin Callinan commented that the commitment on FEMPI represented an opportunity for unions to operate in an environment no longer bound by emergency measures, but that the intent of any draft legislation to deliver this needed to be clear.

Pay talks adjourned on 20th December, and the Building Momentum agreement expired on 31st December, without a successor agreement in place.

Public Service Agreement 2024-2026

Talks resumed on 9th January 2024. Unions reported progress on several key non-pay issues before the focus of talks shifted to pay. Despite initial optimism that the talks might progress quickly, unions were alarmed at the Government's opening offer, which it described as 'derisory'.

A revised offer was still viewed by union negotiators as lacking credibility, as it would have provided little more than an average of just €5 per week, before deductions, in the wages of low-income public service workers in the first year, with no payments scheduled prior to June 2024.

Unions expressed concern that the Government's opening pay offer illustrated its lack of preparedness to complete a sustainable multi-year pay deal. The talks adjourned to allow time for reflection on the Government side.

In a note to Fórsa members, Kevin Callinan said: "Public sector workers show up for our country and our citizens every day. They deserve to be treated with respect and an offer like this is neither fair, nor credible."

The Government has effectively undermined its own approach to negotiating a multi-year public service pay agreement. There have been months of delays, and they have allowed Building Momentum to lapse, which puts us in an unprecedented position."

In the same week, the officers of the PSC met with affiliate and non-affiliated unions and associations. At these meetings ballot wording was approved so that unions were ready to ballot members for industrial action should it become necessary.

Talks resumed on 25th January and continued for almost 22 hours at the WRC. On Friday 26th January, the officers of the

PSC briefed the 19 affiliate unions on the terms of a proposed new public sector pay agreement, advising that the pay terms of the new agreement, valued at 10.25% over 2.5 years, represented the "absolute maximum achievable" through negotiations, and the outcome of a challenging negotiations process.

The new agreement was set to run from 1st January 2024 to 30th June 2026. The balloting period for the unions extended until 25th March 2024, to provide adequate time for all unions to consider the terms of the new agreement and to ballot their members.

Union negotiators said the new pay provisions would, as unions had sought, deliver more for lower paid workers, providing pay improvements worth up to 17.3% for the lowest paid workers, while improvements in the pay adjustments due in 2024 – valued at 4.25% for the year – would mean that public service workers would receive more money in the first year than originally envisaged in the Government's initial pay offer, providing a noticeable difference in pay at a time when workers were still feeling the impact of three consecutive years of inflation.

The deal provides for the following pay terms over the duration of the agreement:

2024

- A general round increase in annualised basic salary for all public servants of 2.25% or €1,125, whichever is greater, from 1st January 2024.
- A general round increase in annualised basic salary for all public servants of 1% on 1st June 2024.
- A general round increase in annualised basic salary for all public servants of 1% or €500, whichever is greater, on 1st October 2024.

2025

- A general round increase in annualised basic salary for all public servants of 2% or €1,000, whichever is greater, on 1st March 2025.
 - A general round increase in annualised basic salary for all public servants of 1% on 1st August 2025.
 - The first phase of local bargaining, equivalent to 1% of payroll cost, on 1st September 2025.
-

2026

- A general round increase in annualised basic salary for all public servants of 1% or €500, whichever is greater, on 1st February 2026.
 - A general round increase in annualised basic salary for all public servants of 1% on 1st June 2026.
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The union's National Executive Committee (NEC) unanimously recommended acceptance of the terms of the deal in the ballot, and arrangements were made for a series of online and in-person information meetings. Fórsa commenced a ballot on the new public sector pay deal in February 2024.

The Fórsa ballot concluded on 15th March 2024, with members backing the new public service pay deal in a ballot which saw more than 52,729 members voting on the new pay terms. In total, 94% of members voted in favour of the deal, in a turnout of 67.3%.

In March, the Public Services Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) announced it had ratified the new public service pay agreement following the aggregation of ballots by the 19 affiliated unions, most of whom had returned ballots

of their members with sizable majorities in favour of the new pay agreement.

Local bargaining

The agreement also provides for local bargaining, allowing trade unions to submit claims for improvements amounting to an additional 3% of pay costs, inclusive of allowances, for particular grades, groups or categories of employee (See Appendices ii and iii).

Local negotiations are to take place between July 2024 and June 2025, and agreements secured, to the greatest extent possible, through direct negotiations. Fórsa published its [position paper on the local bargaining element of the pay deal in July 2024](#).

The first [Fórsa claim](#) was lodged in December 2024. The cross-sectoral claim covering clerical officers, grade III roles, and library assistant posts. A second claim lodged in February 2025 covers EO/HEO/AO/grades 4-7 and related grades.

The full text of the Public Service Agreement 2024-2026 is available to download [here](#).

Pensions

During negotiations on the latest agreement, union negotiators secured a commitment that the pay increases would be applied to public service pensions for the duration of the agreement. In the main, this means that pension payments will be adjusted in line with pay adjustments for serving staff.

Pensions are adjusted in line with inflation (the Consumer Price Index, or CPI) in the case of the single public service pension scheme, which applies to all civil and public servants who entered public service employment on or after 1st January 2013.

This means that the pensions of members of this scheme are not affected by pay movements, including those in the proposed agreement.

The principle of pay parity under pre-existing pension schemes has been agreed for the lifetime on the new Public Service Agreement 2024-2026. The lump sums of people who retired on or after 1st January 2024 should also be revised by reference to the adjustments of basic pay as appropriate.

Travel and subsistence

Revised rates for work-related travel and subsistence took effect from 1st September 2022. They include changes to the standard domestic subsistence rates, overnight and day subsistence rates. Full details are available on the Fórsa website [here](#) and Revenue [here](#).

A further update to Domestic Subsistence Allowances was introduced with effect from 14th of December 2023. Full details are available [here](#).



Strategic change

Several projects are managed currently by the Strategic Change team and the following report summarises the progress since the last conference.

Fórsa Strategic Plan

A strategy for the implementation of the plan and the evaluation of progress has been guiding the work of the team for the past two years.

An area of key importance was the implementation of Core objective no.1: Organising to create a stronger, more powerful union, which has 22 sub-actions committing the union to developing and applying a national organising strategy at every level of the union.

With expert guidance, from the late **Dr Jane McAlevey**, bespoke training centred on building high participation and developing power in workplaces was developed. The methodology, known as Organising for Power, has been presented to the NEC and Divisions and training delivered initially to all staff. Rollout across the union is ongoing and pilot projects in divisions have highlighted the potential of the structured approach that Organising for Power (O4P) offers.

Branch Supports, Development and Membership Engagement Project

This project has been streamlining and standardising the materials and tools available to branches so that branches are able to devote more time to engaging directly with members.

A Workplace Reps charter, AGM guide, Branch Toolkit and branch merger guide were developed and tested with branches from each division. They had been participating in a pilot of the materials ahead of their launch to the NEC in September 2024. The next phase of the project, which includes communications and GDPR, will also see an expansion of participation in the development and testing phase.

The Branch Merger guide was developed in real time as several branches came together to increase their effectiveness. There are still a few branches with membership in single figures and others which are in the process of merging for various reasons and the guide continues to evolve.

Solas CRM project

This membership system project has now successfully progressed to Phase 2. The project team have steered the implementation of Phase 1, which required working closely with our tech partners and internal stakeholders to progress development work, testing and implementation as well as resolution of initial system faults. Additional functionality, requested following user feedback was scoped out, developed and implemented.

In parallel with continuing system development and testing, the project team have produced and delivered bespoke training, with training materials, for staff and branches and piloted these as the first tranche of branches were given access to

the new system. Further to this, the project team collaborated with colleagues in other divisions and functional teams to agree security protocols and identify business processes for review or refinement.

Although improving the data held on Solas is an ongoing process, we are now able to analyse and present information in ways which were previously beyond reach, helping us make more strategic decisions and contributing to the overall effectiveness of the union.

Solar PV Project

This project commenced in an effort to meet the commitments within the Strategic Plan to create a greener, more sustainable union, by improving the sustainability of union offices and working towards carbon neutrality.

To date, Solar PV has been installed in the union's Nerney's Court offices in Dublin, and this is contributing to a decrease in energy costs and Fórsa's carbon footprint. The financial savings are expected to ensure the installation costs are recouped over a period of 3-4 years. An SEAI grant has been secured and reduced the cost by 18% and work is ongoing to secure quotes for the union's other premises.



Membership Unit

General: applications, subscriptions, and data

Fórsa's director of membership is Seán McElhinney.

The Membership Unit processed more than 10,000 new member applications in 2024 and appointed a senior recruitment officer. This role is crucial in helping branches and divisions that wish to profile union membership at public and promotional events. The senior recruitment officer's efforts are instrumental in raising the union's visibility and attracting new members.

The team has also continued with major data enhancements, added more than 20,000 workplace Eircodes to Fórsa's membership system, and has created dashboards, accessible to staff and Solas users, which make it easier to obtain reports about members and assist industrial colleagues with building a high-participation union environment.

Additionally, we've established protocols for collections for non-paying members and to maximise retention, as well as taking steps to ensure that, wherever possible, members are paying their subscriptions by deduction at source.

The Membership Unit team is determined to play a supporting role to divisions, branches, and the national union in terms of recruitment and density building, and to expanding the membership base by ensuring that new members are seamlessly integrated into the union.

Fórsa Income Protection Scheme

This complex project undertaken by the Membership Unit delivers auto-enrolment to the union's income protection scheme. This initiative involved collaboration with multiple stakeholders and meticulous planning. Fórsa members now have increased security in the event they become too unwell to work, providing them with peace of mind and financial stability.

Fórsa Retired Members Project

This year, almost 200 retiring Fórsa members have already transitioned to retired membership. In 2025 Fórsa will appoint a membership development Officer, specifically focused on union building within Fórsa's retired members' section. This new role will focus on strengthening the network of retired members and ensuring their continued engagement and contribution to the union's activities.

The union's aim is to make Fórsa Retired Members the largest network of retired public servants, fostering a strong community of retired members who continue to contribute to the union's goals and activities, while advocating and campaigning in relation to issues affecting workers in retirement.

Reporting

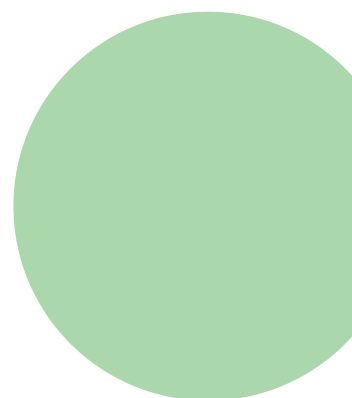
As part of its commitment to enhance reporting mechanisms, the Membership Unit produces weekly and monthly reports that demonstrate recruitment progress across the union. These reports are shared with key branch, divisional, and national elected representatives and officers, ensuring transparency and facilitating informed decision-making.

Solas

The Membership Unit has doubled the number of members who have access to Solas, Fórsa's membership database. Currently, more than 80% of members are in a branch with a trained and accredited Solas user. This reflects the union's commitment to providing activists with the tools and resources they need to succeed and participate in union activities.

Digital Infrastructure Development

In 2025, the Membership Unit aims to launch a new tool that will enable members to update their details and allow reps and activists to update us about changes to membership in their workplace. The team is also developing new collections protocols to make it easier for members in the private sector to pay union subscriptions.



Subscription rates

Following the negotiation and ratification of the Public Service Agreement 2024-2026 last year, Fórsa members received pay increases across the board. As membership subscriptions are a percentage of a member's salary, the maximum rate of subscription increased in January 2025.

A maximum level for membership subs is set by the union's National Executive Committee (NEC). This is called the subscription 'ceiling'. This only affects members with annual salaries exceeding €57,125.

The union's two other subscription rates are unaffected by the change. These are the legacy rate paid by those who were members of the former PSEU of 0.62% on 31st December 2017 and the 1% rate for new and existing CO related grades in the Civil Service who have access to the former CPSU Benefit Scheme which was carried over into Fórsa.



Communications and campaigns

Fórsa's communications incorporates three discrete areas of activity overseen by three directors reporting to the union's general secretary. These are digital (Kate O'Sullivan), membership communications (Hannah Deasy) and media relations (Niall Shanahan). Working cooperatively to ensure consistency and quality of union communications, the work of each director is integrated to maximise the effectiveness of the union's reach to internal and external audiences and are coordinated with the work of the Campaigns unit and divisional and functional teams.

Digital

In 2023 and 2024, the Fórsa website had over 4.6 million visits, seeing an average yearly increase of 650,000 extra visits since the last report.

A sub-domain was installed for digital campaigning. This gives us the ability to run petitions, email campaigns, and event sign-ups. It's useful for both building powerful shows of support and to increase member engagement. The latter has been extremely high, averaging between 10,000 to 15,000 signatures per campaign. We're seeing rates of up to 40% of engagement coming from sharing on WhatsApp for example, which is far higher than industry average.

The website 'hubs' are also an innovation that is working well for issues such as disputes, conferences, and campaigns. They are centralised sections of the

website with all the information members need, from 'how to vote', FAQs, resources like conference papers, etc.

Artificial Intelligence, specifically Generative AI, became a huge media story in 2024. The Director of Digital sits on the Fórsa AI working group as well as Unions 21's international group.

Training for members on digital campaigns and social media was rolled out through Fórsa's Skills Academy in 2024. More intensive training will be available following the successful pilot year.

On social media, the strategy was rolled out to focus on a mixture of operational information (e.g. ballot announcements) as well on building engagement and recruitment through win stories, value statements about unions, imagery that reflects members, and light-hearted content. Extensive outreach has been done to get more content from our members to great success. We now have a great range of people-focused imagery that is open, warm, and engaging.

Paid social media ads have been most successful in terms of recruitment on LinkedIn, as we're able to target employments. We run campaigns with a general Join Fórsa message, alongside ads during ballots as well as for events.

The social media landscape has gone through another round of changes in recent years, with Elon Musk notably now owning Twitter/ X. While Big Tech platforms have always had both a negative as well as positive influence, the negative

has increasingly become more visible in Western countries. In response to this and to ensure we are on the platforms our members are, we have created presences on BlueSky, Mastodon, and Threads, alongside Facebook, Instagram, Twitter/X, TikTok and LinkedIn.

Membership communication

The aim of membership communications is both to enhance the clarity with which Fórsa communicates with members, and to elevate members' voices within union communications. Fortnightly sectoral bulletins are issued to members across all divisions by the Communications Unit. These form the core outreach to members, keeping them up to date on union developments, workplace issues, and relevant national stories.

Readership of these bulletins is consistently very high, with each division hitting an open rate above 50% for each edition. Average newsletter open rates are between 15 and 20%. Such a high average demonstrates a high degree of trust in union news content among Fórsa members.

In addition, all union promotional materials, activities and events are coordinated through membership communications to ensure coherency, consistency and the highest standards of professionalism.

From 2023 to 2025, delivering successful divisional conferences and a biennial conference were a priority focus for the team, as well as supporting divisions with ballots and industrial relations, through the production of information tools such as 'Frequently Asked Questions', leaflets, and emails to members.

To empower members and make the union more accessible we are increasing the use of 'plain English' in union communications and creating more toolkits that include posters, leaflets and guides for members

A new Skills Academy communications training is being designed to enhance reps and branches' communication skills, strategies and techniques.

Video is becoming an increasingly important part of the union's communications work. Producing high quality videos allows Fórsa to communicate effectively to a mass audience, using storytelling to demonstrate the collective power of Fórsa's members.

Media relations

The union continues to develop its position in national media as an authoritative voice on industrial relations, public services, collective bargaining and a wide range of social issues.

Between 2023 and 2025, the union led on extensive media coverage on a wide range of issues, including public service pay talks, the community and voluntary dispute in health, the HSE Pay and Numbers dispute and the Aer Lingus/IALPA dispute.

Fórsa is regarded as a trusted source and welcome contributor by national and local media outlets, with daily engagement and regular coverage in national media and a growing presence in regional print and broadcast media.

Aligning with Fórsa's strategic plan, the union plans to continue the development of boosting local media relations activity, working with branches regionally to create media content and establish local representative voices in the media, to grow its presence in media opinion pages and radio panel discussions, and to increase the national media presence of senior and elected officials of the union.

General Election 2024

Fórsa called on parties and candidates to support the union's vision of a society that works for workers during the 2024 General Election. While not aligned to any political party, Fórsa's campaign encouraged trade union members to demand a society that delivers a decent quality of life for all workers, offers accessible, high quality public services, and which provides a secure future in the face of a changing climate and developments in technology expected to disrupt the workplace, such as Artificial Intelligence (AI).

The union's general election manifesto, launched on 14th November, presented policy proposals to strengthen public services and enhance the working lives of Fórsa members, securing substantial media coverage.

The manifesto was published on Fórsa's dedicated [election hub](#), where members were encouraged to send a strong message to all political parties by taking part in Fórsa's email campaign, in addition to providing election materials.

The manifesto's priorities were informed by the Ámarach research, which drew responses from more than 20,000 Fórsa members.

These included:

- Meaningful pay increases, that go beyond inflation, that reward workers for their commitment to public service.
- The protection of remote and hybrid working arrangements, and a commitment to piloting the four-day week in the public sector, without loss of pay.

- Investment in high quality public services, including community healthcare, publicly funded childcare, and availability of reliable public transport.
- Amend the industrial relations acts to give civil service workers access to the WRC and Labour Court.
- Legislate to modernise the outdated practice of excluding the majority of civil servants from engaging in political activity.
- Engage with unions on issues of serious concern in relation to the Civil Service Regulation (Amendment) Bill 2018.

Campaigns

Fórsa's director of Campaigns is Kevin Donoghue, Aisling Cusack is Policy and Research officer, and Mehak Dugal is Communications and Campaigns officer.

Research

The evidence-based approach continues to be a cornerstone of campaigning in Fórsa. Work is currently underway in the areas of remote work and political engagement as well as specific projects in health, and education.

In 2024, we published research relating to the experience of workers in local government and the civil service. Additionally, we published reports relating to election campaigns and worked with partners such as TASC (think-tank for action and social change) on more significant projects.

The unit has also undertaken larger projects to ensure we meet our obligations as set out in the strategic plan. Our most recent, aimed at improving our overall effectiveness as a lobbying organisation is expected to take 18 months and involve several phases.

Better In A Trade Union

Fórsa was one of the unions that took part in the Better in a Trade Union campaign in 2024. The all-island campaign continues this year and aims to ensure that all working people are aware of the benefits of being in a trade union, and the collective strength of organised workers. The centrepiece of the campaign was the first ever Union Week, which ran from Monday 29th April to Friday 3rd May 2024.

The campaign is, in part, a response to research that revealed that 44% of working people aged between 18-34 are interested in joining a union but hadn't yet joined one.

A host of member-organised events showcased the strength and diversity of the movement and included an impromptu concert by legendary singer Christy Moore in Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Hall, a talk by Helen Corish in Red Books in Wexford on the 1911 Wexford Lockout, and Bohemians F.C, wearing the 'Better in a Trade Union' jerseys at an away game at Oriel Park.

Fórsa branches organised events in hospitals, schools, offices and colleges, with many hosting joint events with other unions in their workplaces. Fórsa's Youth Network also hosted a Mayday event in Dublin featuring a panel of young workers. Fórsa national secretary and ICTU vice president Katie Morgan described Trade Union Week as "a celebration of unions and union members, and it provides a perfect opportunity to talk to your colleagues about all the reasons they should join Fórsa."

Union Week gave a real boost in workplaces where events took place, with Fórsa noting an average increase of 25% in new membership applications.

A subsequent event at Áras an Uachtaráin in June celebrated the success of the campaign. President Michael D Higgins extended a warm welcome to union delegates, the lifelong trade unionist and founder of the teaching section of the Workers' Union of Ireland, he called on unions to "to play a leadership-defining role in the coming years as we build the future of our economy and our society," and where all workers, and people from all backgrounds, can flourish.

Branch Campaigns Officers (BCOs)

The re-activation of Fórsa's Branch campaigns officer network commenced in 2024. This included identifying vacancies in the network and surveying BCOs on supports required to effectively undertake campaigning activities. A plan has been developed to build skilled activists within Fórsa branches and will be delivered throughout 2025.

Ploughing Championships

Fórsa was one of 1,700 exhibitors represented at the 2024 National Ploughing Championships. It was the first time Fórsa exhibited at the event, which drew nearly a quarter of a million visitors.

Fórsa general secretary Kevin Callinan said: "So many in the agricultural sector are in employment, either full-time or part-time. We need to support those workers, and to support our members working at this important national event."

Fórsa will return to this event in 2025.

Local elections

Local and European elections also took place in 2024. The campaign focused on More Power to You, a campaign for improving local services provision and strengthened local democracy. The campaign's unit published a manifesto document ahead of polling day, with the key pillars of focus being housing, water, waste services, energy, and democracy.

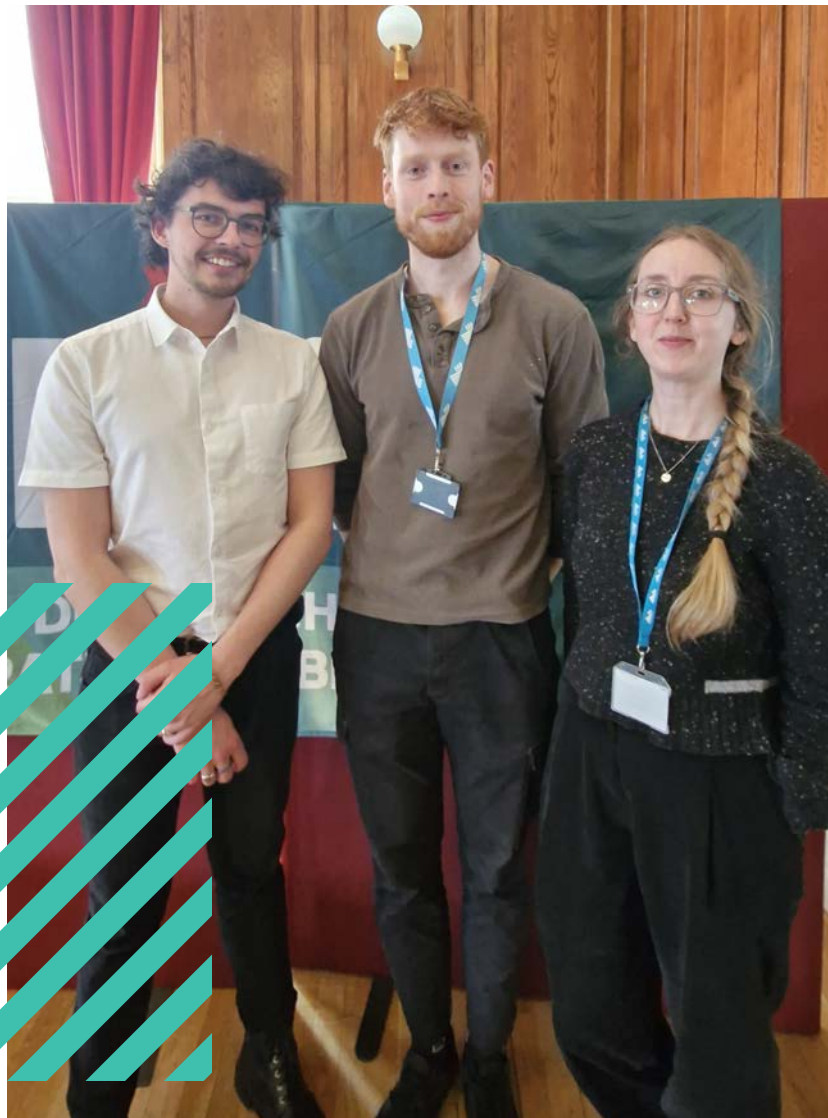
Summer school

The annual summer series event returns in 2025. This year's programme will provide a range of sessions covering key campaign elements. This event is open to branch campaigns officers and others with an interest in developing campaigning experience.

Stop the Stigma

The Stop the Stigma campaign has continued to make progress and Fórsa is recognised as a leader in the area. Several divisions have successfully engaged on this issue with employers through the industrial relations forums.

Those seeking to become more involved in campaigns or get more information should contact campaigns@forsa.ie.



Future of work and Artificial Intelligence (AI)

As AI continues to influence workplaces and dominate conversations and media, it is essential that Fórsa proactively addresses potential challenges related to discrimination, worker surveillance, data privacy, and job displacement. This was evidenced by the motions that were brought to the Biennial Delegate Conference last year. Following on from that, in July 2024, the NEC established an Artificial Intelligence (AI) Working Group to examine how to give effect to those motions. The working group has since examined these motions in-depth, identified critical areas for action, and made recommendations to ensure that Fórsa takes the lead in protecting its members from AI's potential risks, while also maximizing its opportunities for workers.

A lunch and learn webinar to take place on April 11th entitled 'An Introduction to AI in your Workplace'. Following this, Fórsa will conduct a survey of all members to establish further data in relation to the use and impact of AI in the workplace. This data will then be analysed in conjunction with information received through a mapping exercise across branches and workplaces. Preparations have commenced for a high-level seminar on AI and Trade Unions which will be held in Nerney's Court in October 2025. Once the date had been confirmed, branches will receive further details. We are also engaging with the European Trade Union

Institute (ETUI) who have considerable expertise in this area. The ETUI is the independent research and training centre of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) which itself affiliates European trade unions into a single European umbrella organisation.



Skills Academy

Fórsa's director of Membership Training & Development is Fiona Dunne.

Skills Academy

The Skills Academy training and development programme has been growing from strength to strength with keen interest shown for all workshops and programmes over the last number of years. This enthusiasm has been matched by the ambition of Skills Academy to create a strong supportive learning environment and pathway in which our workplace representatives can develop and build their capacity throughout their union journey.

This year our focus is twofold i) to identify additional skills and topics, in addition to the core programme, to ensure our workplace representatives can continue their role development and ii) ascertain how workplace representatives and branch officers are implementing their learning in the workplace and assess outcomes.

As the essence of training is empowerment, Skills Academy is working to ensure training participants are tasked with the skills to implement their learning thus increasing their influence locally. We will continue to work with branches, workplace representatives and officials to remove any challenges or barriers to this and will be carrying out a series of surveys and focus groups, over the summer period, to do this.

This will ensure that future requirements for training will entail workplace

representatives illustrating (with the support of their branch) the application of their learning to access higher stages along the learning pathway.

The programme

Running every month since January 2023, this year the Lunch and Learn series covered topics such as understanding neurodiversity to utilising the international BDS campaign for solidarity and learning about anti-racism practices to gaining a better insight into Public Service pay determination. The series continues to enjoy a high level of interest from representatives and members alike.

The Fórsa Induction programme, open to all new members, has identified those with an interest in stepping up and participating to a greater level in their workplace, and we are working hard in Skills Academy to ensure potential new activists are given the encouragement and support they need from their branch committees and Fórsa official to grow in that role.

Due to high levels of demand, the Level 1 Workplace Representative Training programme runs eight times every year across the country, ensuring as many skilled new representatives are entering their workplaces with an increased knowledge and capacity to undertake their role to the best of their ability.

The new calendar for the 2025-2026 academic year will be published in time for conferences and will be available at our Skills Academy stand present at every

Divisional conference. This year it will come in pocket and A5 size, opening as a wall poster for branch training officers, along with a digital version on the Skills Academy hub page on the website.

Several new skills workshops were introduced at branch executive committee level which includes time management, public speaking, negotiations Level 1, presentation skills and utilising local IR mechanisms, which enjoy a significant level of demand. Additional workshops introduced for the 2025-26 term will include a resilience workshop and Level 2 Resolving Industrial Conflict, along with a new leadership programme for our more senior activists.

We have also worked directly with many branches, designing bespoke workshops for the committee to suit their needs which include building a strong branch team, creating a baseline for branch strategy and learning a range of skills to operate a strong and dynamic branch. Upward of 15 workshops are scheduled every academic year with more currently being scheduled.

The path to learning will be paved with newly applied practices, and we look forward to working with all our branches to ensure they have the capacity to achieve great success for members locally.

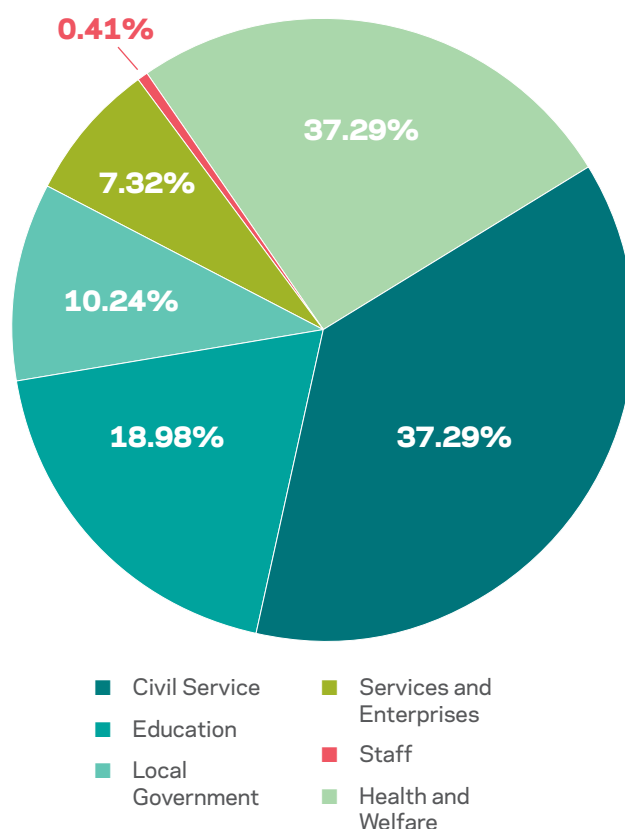
For a more detailed explanation of our courses and programmes, please contact the Fórsa Skills Academy skillsacademy@forsa.ie.

Learning by numbers

From September 2023 - February 2025, we have had engagement with approximately 1280 learners of which almost 50% are members taking the induction session (new and long-term members).

Between September 2023 and May 2024, 379 branch and workplace representatives participated in training with 260 participating to date in the Sept 24 - Feb 2025 period.

Learners by division



Third level grant scheme

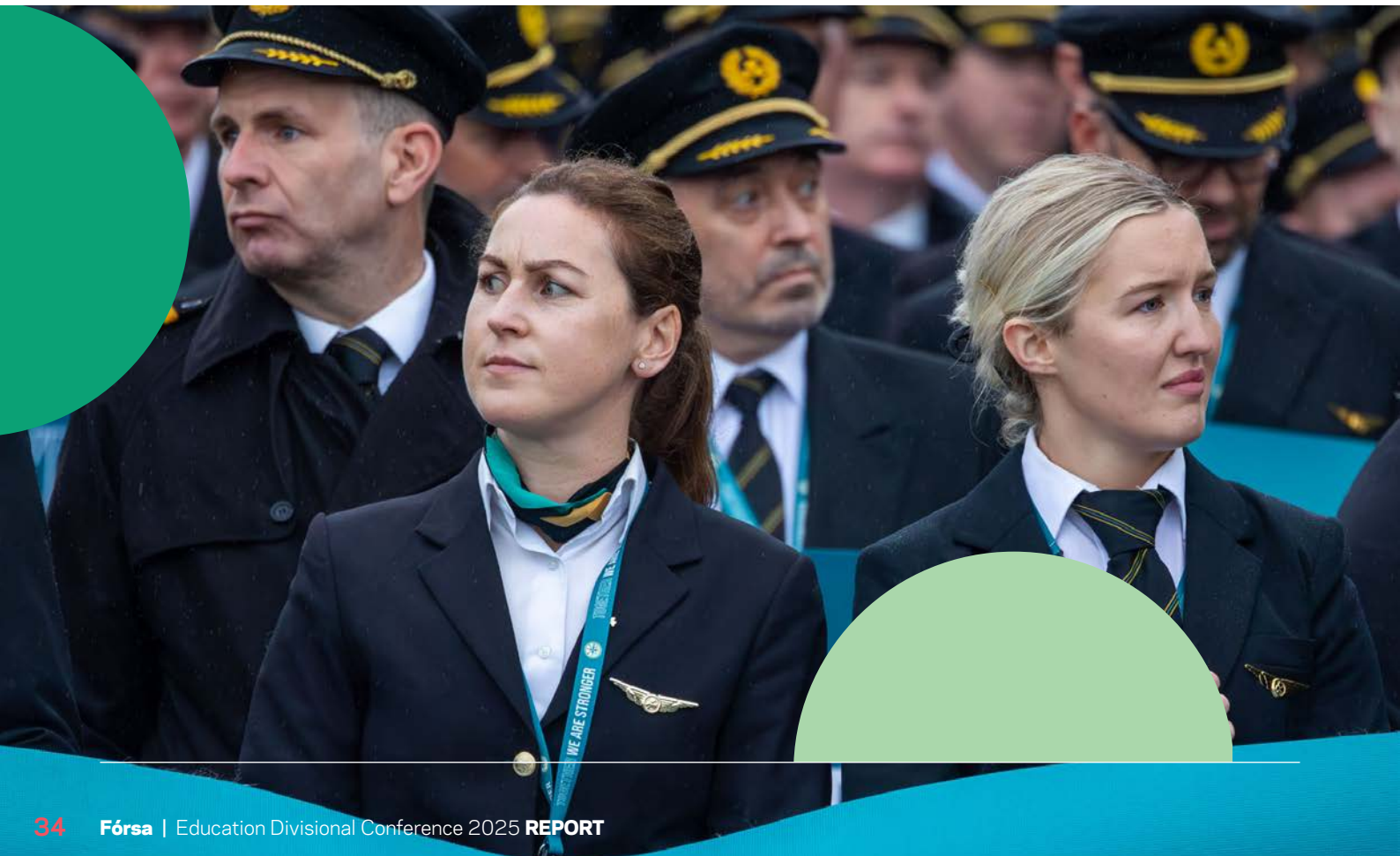
Fórsa's Third Level Grant support scheme for union representatives continued ahead of the 2024/25 academic year. The scheme is intended to assist union representatives in acquiring knowledge and skills that will help them to better carry out the role of a union representative.

Financial assistance is provided to successful applicants, enabling them to undertake a certified educational course at third level. Courses (not including post-graduate) must provide qualifications and skills which will benefit a member in their work, union, and personal life. The grant is not intended to assist in the progression of a members' professional development or career.

The scheme is open to all union representatives. A union representative role includes performing any role on behalf of their union colleagues at workplace, branch, vocational group or other level.

Only current, in-benefit members of Fórsa can apply, and must be able to provide details of their role, current or past, as a union representative.

Grants are based on the gross cost of undertaking the course up to a maximum of €3,000 per year. The amount awarded to successful applicants will be decided by the Membership Services Committee.



Working conditions

Improving Workers' Rights

In March 2024, Congress published its **Challenging myths and improving working conditions in a strong economy** as employer groups sought to push back on reforms to the National Minimum Wage, statutory sick leave and pension auto-enrolment plans.

The Congress document challenges some of the arguments put forward by some business groups, which are regarded by unions as largely weak and occasionally false.

Many of the recent government reforms, such as new statutory sick leave entitlements, merely bring the Irish workplace into line with European peers, while some sectors pushing back hard against reforms, such as hospitality and retail, have experienced real employment growth between 2023 and 2024.

Adequate Minimum Wages Directive

Congress has argued that part of the solution to sector specific challenges are within reach, including the “transformative potential” of the Adequate Minimum Wages Directive. The Government missed the deadline to transpose the directive into law before mid-November 2024.

In January 2025, an advocate general of the European Court of Justice that the directive be annulled its entirety. In a case taken by Denmark and supported by Sweden, the advocate general found that the European Commission and European Parliament had exceeded their authority by adopting the directive which is intended

to provide stable mechanisms for updating and increasing national minimum wage levels across the EU.

The specialist publication, Industrial Relations News, reported in February 2025 that these developments have raised trade union concerns about the development of an action plan on collective bargaining. Article 4(2) of the Directive obliges Ireland to form an ‘action plan’ to promote collective bargaining.

This obligation is reiterated in the latest Programme for Government, where it is stated that the government will: “Publish an Action Plan for collective bargaining in 2025 in line with our commitments under the EU Directive.”

The directive requires the state to promote collective bargaining and to facilitate the right to exercise collective bargaining and will be the subject of a Court of Justice ruling later this year.

Gender pay gap

The gender pay gap (GPG) is the difference between the average hourly wages of women and men. A gender pay gap will exist if the majority of lower-paid jobs in an organisation are carried out by women and the higher-paid roles are carried out by men.

The Gender Pay Gap Information Act was implemented in 2022 and sets out employers’ obligations on gender pay gap reporting. In October 2023, it was reported that Ireland’s gender pay gap (GPG) is 9.6%, according to the CSO’s **Structure of Earnings Survey 2022**

Work Life Balance and Miscellaneous Provisions Bill (2022)

The Work Life Balance and Miscellaneous Provisions Bill (2022) was passed by both Houses of the Oireachtas on 29th March 2023. The Bill introduced a new workers' right to paid leave for victims of domestic violence and new rights for workers requesting remote work, both of which ICTU and Fórsa campaigned for. The legislation includes improvements to support working parents and carers balance paid work with family care, necessitated to give effect to EU law.

In March 2024, unions welcomed the new code of practice on requests for flexible and remote working. The code, which unions said strengthen workers' work-life balance rights, was developed by the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) and social partners. The draft code was developed by an ICTU working group, which included Fórsa representatives, and now provides a comprehensive guide on compliance with the Work Life Balance Act and best practice principles.

In January 2025, Fórsa instructed its civil service members in the Department of Finance and the Department of Social Protection (DSP) to continue to work their current hybrid working arrangements. The instruction was issued in response to staff directives to increase the number of office workdays from the beginning of February.

It was the first instance in which the Government has rolled back remote working arrangements for its own staff, following the publication of the new Programme for Government, which commits the new administration to a review of remote and blended work policies.

Following a swift intervention by the Taoiseach's office, the DSP revised its position and advised staff they had the option to continue current arrangements while consultation takes place. Similarly, the Department of Finance issued correspondence to staff confirming there has been no change to the department's blended working policy, and that "all staff can continue to work their existing blended working patterns" as well as confirmation that the department will engage with the unions on the issue. Consultations are expected to get underway in 2025.



Fórsa in action

Membership survey

More than 20,000 Fórsa members took part in an Amárach survey in 2024.

Responding to the survey, 84% of members said that pay improvement would inform how they'd vote in the general election, while 74% said that they would be more likely to vote for parties that would commit to negotiating pay increases "that go beyond inflation."

Three quarters of members who took part in the survey expressed support for a four-day week and said they would support candidates and political parties that would pledge to run a trial of a four-day working week in the public service. Investment in community health is an issue of utmost importance to members with 81% saying they will vote for candidates and parties who make this a priority.

Fórsa Youth Network

The Fórsa Youth Network aims to strengthen and empower younger members by providing an open, equal and respectful space for young members to discuss matters relevant to them, while respecting the contributions of every member.

The Fórsa Youth Annual General Meeting (AGM) took place in October 2024. Each branch of Fórsa may nominate a maximum of one voting youth representative (under the age of 35) to attend meetings of the National Youth Network, and branches may send additional non-voting representatives to meetings.

A steering committee was elected at the AGM, and the new committee held their

first meeting in December 2024, outlining its programme of work for the year ahead. The Fórsa Youth Network is chaired by Hugh McNerney. More details about Fórsa Youth Network is available [here](#).

Fórsa's LGBTQIA+ network

Fórsa's newly established LGBTQIA+ network was formally launched at the union's equality seminar which took place in November 2024. Fórsa's LGBTQIA+ network was formed following a motion brought to the union's biennial conference in May by Fórsa activist Rob Partridge. The network will work to support all members and staff who identify as a member of the LGBTQIA+ community.

The seminar included contributions from veteran trade union activist Kieran Rose, retired Fórsa member and chair of Dublin Pride Philippa Ryder, and David Carlos Casanova Rinehart of the newly established Queer Library Alliance.

Fórsa President fundraiser

Four charities located in the Northwest received donations from Fórsa in 2024, made possible by funds raised at the Fórsa President's dinner in January 2024. Then president Michael Smyth and treasurer Julie Flood awarded donations of €6,000 to each of the charities on behalf of members.

The four charities were Ballybay Cancer Society; Errigal Truagh Special Needs Parents & Friends; SOSAD (Save our Sons and Daughters) Monaghan and Down Syndrome Centre North.

Fórsa 2024 biennial conference - Your Union, Your Power

There were 700 delegates in attendance at Fórsa's biennial conference in May 2024. Delegates elected a new officer board and was officially opened by a performance by singer Tolú Makay followed by an address by outgoing Fórsa president Michael Smyth.

Motions on housing dominated the opening session. Fórsa activist Anne Marie Ryan, from the Westmeath health and welfare branch, called on delegates to support the union's active engagement with government to advocate for "a meaningful and workable resolution to the housing crisis."

Helen Linehan, Cork general clerical branch, told delegates the branch had brought its housing motion to the conference because so many of her younger work colleagues were still living at home with parents or contemplating emigration because they could not find a home.

In his address to conference, Fórsa general secretary Kevin Callinan declared that Fórsa will take a lead role in building a better Ireland. He said: "Everything we have, we won by organising. Now we have to do more than we ever have before. We need to mobilise on the issues that will make our country a better place to live and work."

Conference also welcomed Fórsa member Esther Lynch, general secretary of the European Trade Union Confederation

(ETUC), and Daniel Bertossa, general secretary of Public Services International (PSI) who spoke about the work public sector unions across the world do to protect their members.

Four members working in local authorities spoke to both The Irish Times and the Irish Independent about the experience of dealing with aggressive and abusive behaviour by service users and far-right agitators, while the Skills Academy and the Membership Unit were among those hosting conference fringe events.

Conference also welcomed Palestinian Ambassador to Ireland Dr Jilan Wahba Abdalmajid. She told delegates: "We the Palestinians deserve to live, deserve to be viewed just as worthy as other human beings, for our right to self-determination to be acknowledged."

2024 Fórsa Members' awards

The inaugural Fórsa Members' National Awards were presented at the Biennial Conference in Killarney in May 2024. The new awards, distinct from the Distinguished Service Awards, are open to all members, regardless of years of service.

Members were encouraged to nominate members in seven distinct categories (organising, delivering for members, campaigning, recruitment, community champion, branch effectiveness and

outstanding pandemic response champion), whose work they felt deserved recognition, providing an opportunity to celebrate each other's hard work, learn from one another, and in the process build a more positive and productive union culture.

2024 Fórsa member award recipients

Mary Carty	Ballinasloe Branch
Mary Fuller	Cork Health and Local Government Branch
Marie Turner	Cork Health and Local Government Branch
Teresa Barrett	DSP Executive Grades Branch
Michael Cryan	DSP Executive Grades Branch
Dorothy Doherty	DSP Executive Grades Branch
Brian Reynolds	DSP Executive Grades Branch
Michelle Kenny	Dublin Hospitals Branch
Gina O'Brien	Higher Education Branch
Geraldine McCarthy	Limerick Health and Welfare Branch
Frances Tallon	Meath Health and Local Government
Dermot McCague	Monaghan Health and Local Government
Carol McGeough	Monaghan Health and Local Government
Paul Carey	NETB Branch
Kevin Lewis	NETB Branch
Mick Scully	Ordinance Survey Professional Branch
Helen Sheridan	Proposed by Officers/ATC Branch
Gerry Foley	Retired Members Group
Lorraine Currivan	State Enterprises No.1 Branch
Noreen O'Mahony	Cork Health & Local Government
Michael Doyle	Coillte
James Kavanagh	School Completion Programme
Niall Weldon	School Completion Programme
Maureen Keenan Barry	Dublin Central CS Clerical

International

Affiliations

Fórsa is affiliated to, and plays an active role in, the following international trade union federations: Public Services International (PSI), the European Federation of Public Service Trade Unions (EPSU), the International Transport Federation (ITF), the European Transport Federation (ETF), and Uni Global Union.

Fórsa is also one of the active international trade union affiliates of the Justice for Colombia (JfC) campaign. JfC was set up in 2002 by the trade union movement to support Colombian civil society in its struggle for human rights, labour rights, peace, and social justice.

Fórsa plays a leading role in Trade Union Friends of Palestine (TUFOP). Established by ICTU in 2007, the group works within the trade union movement to educate members and highlight the injustices inflicted on the Palestinian people, to promote further policy motions to help address Israeli human rights abuses, and to mobilise solidarity activity.

Developing World Fund

Fórsa's Developing World Fund provides ongoing support to education, development, and human rights projects across the globe. Funded by 3% of every member's union subscription, the Fórsa Developing World Fund gives over €600,000 a year to projects around the world, allowing the union to make ongoing contributions to human rights and development, as well as responding to humanitarian emergencies.

Since 2022, organisations including Self Help Africa, Concern Worldwide, Turkey/Syria ITUC Emergency Appeal, Vita Ireland, Justice for Colombia, the Irish Red Cross, UNICEF, and PSI International Projects and Tír nan Óg Children's Foundation have been supported through this fund. In the period 2022 and 2023 Fórsa supported international solidarity projects with over €1.3 million in funding.

Fórsa Gaza appeal

Fórsa has donated €100,000 to the UNICEF's Gaza Crisis Emergency Fund, with proceeds helping to provide humanitarian relief to the Palestinian people following Israel's ongoing war and continued bombardment of Gaza.

The donation was made following a meeting of the union's National Executive Committee (NEC) in November 2023 as part of the urgent humanitarian appeal. In addition, branches and members raised a further €32,000 for the UNICEF appeal. UNICEF Executive Director Peter Power has said that these funds allowed the organisation's global logistics supply chain to scale up operations on the ground in support of the team inside Gaza.

With Fórsa's support, UNICEF was able to transport significant humanitarian assistance to Egypt for onward delivery through the Rafah border crossing. UNICEF's efforts, including eleven airlifts, have been among the first deliveries to pass through Rafah, reaching those in need with unprecedented speed. The funding has also contributed to UNICEF providing clean and safe water, hygiene

dignity, tents and bedding, medicines, and food to the people of Gaza.

Since November 2023, Fórsa has participated in weekly demonstrations across the country, calling for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza. The union continues to monitor the devastating humanitarian impact of the war on the people of Gaza and the West Bank.



Appendices

Appendix i:

Claim on Behalf of Special Needs Assistants under the Public Service Agreement 2024 - 2026 available [here](#).

Appendix ii:

Claim for Civil Service Engineer Grades under the Local Bargaining Clause of the Public Service Agreement 2024-2026 (7th April 2024) available [here](#).

Appendix iii:

Claim for Executive Officer/Higher Executive Officer/Administrative Officer and Related Grades (Civil Service) and Administrative Grades 4 to 7 and Related Grades in Public Service (Health, Education and Local Government Sectors) under the Local Bargaining Clause of the Public Service Agreement 2024 - 2026) (February 2025) available [here](#).



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