



FORSA

CSQ

Civil Service Quarterly **ONLINE SPECIAL**

UNDER LOCKDOWN

Covid-19: Our 1945 moment?

Comment page 3



Dr Tony Holohan
Chief Medical Officer of the Department of Health



FÓRSA
CSQ

Civil Service Quarterly

ONLINE SPECIAL

Editor:

Derek Mullen

dmullen@forsa.ie

Asst Editor:

Róisín McKane

rmckane@forsa.ie

Fórsa Civil Service Division

Tel +353 1 817 1500

Tel +353 1 676 5394

Email info@forsa.ie

Copy editing/design:

Brazier Media

www.brazier.media

Keeping ship of state afloat in a time of crisis

With the announcement of the Government Roadmap, we begin to see the likely timescale for a return to the workplace. However, according to Government, higher-risk organisations – which by their nature cannot easily maintain social distancing – must implement plans for how they can eventually progress towards the on-site return of a full complement of staff. Particular reference will now have to be made to the return to work protocol.

It is clear in the first instance that there may not be a full return to offices and that remote working, which has been a key feature of this health crisis, will continue in some form for a considerable time. With that comes the need to reach agreement on arrangements for remote working. This should take into account any health and safety issues which arise and ensure that members are equipped to work from home. We should also ensure that fairness exists in the application of such arrangements – much of which was impossible to deal with as the crisis unfolded as members were sent home without preparation.

Having said that, it is a credit to the civil and public service that services were maintained and that productivity remained so high, even with the massive volume of remote working.

During this crisis essential workers continue to attend their workplaces and we applaud their dedication. That dedication in the Health Sector has led to some colleagues paying the ultimate price, sacrificing their lives in the effort to save other lives. At this point there are thousands of health workers in Ireland who have contracted Covid-19 and we hope for their recovery.

Childcare is a vital issue for key workers particularly in the Health Sector but also for those civil servants continuing to attend their workplace and to provide important services to citizens. The Roadmap does not satisfactorily deal with this key need. It continues to be unacceptable that essential workers must use up their annual and parental leave to deal with childcare responsibilities.

In the Civil Service our members in the Department of Employment and Social Protection have literally knocked the ball out of the park processing 600,000 pandemic unemployment claims in a matter of weeks.

More than 50,000 employees have also benefitted from the employer subsidy scheme so effectively run by our members in the Office of the Revenue Commissioners.

All across the Civil Service essential staff have kept the ship of state afloat, supporting vulnerable citizens at this time of greatest need throughout what is an unprecedented crisis – be that in Justice with ongoing Visa

work or by the Border Management Unit; or in Agriculture, maintaining the industry and keeping safe the food chain along with members in the Customs Service of Revenue.

We should also not forget the role played by harbour masters and their staff around the country in keeping our ports open – such an important task in maintaining the continuing supply of food and essential goods.

And Garda Civilian members have stepped up to take over frontline roles in supporting the policing service and those in operational roles.

Meanwhile, Law Offices continue to play their part in keeping the judicial system operating while the National Parks & Wildlife Service protect our National Parks and ensure against the gatherings witnessed in the early days of this crisis.

Across society we have seen which jobs matter – the post worker, the retail and supermarket worker, the bin men. These are the services we all rely on but often took for granted in pre-Covid times.

The public service has been the spearhead in the fight against Covid-19 and Fórsa members have stepped up to the mark and performed over and beyond what is humanly expected to protect lives and continue essential services and payments.

They are the backbone of our society and that must continue to be recognised as we enter the economic crisis which is now unfolding. Austerity is not the answer and will not be acceptable.

More now than ever workers need their unions and those who are not in unions need to join up, as there is no doubt that the right-wing of economic thinking will seek to push the massive bill for this crisis on to the backs of workers.

Derek Mullen
Editor



Cover image:

Dept of Health's Chief Medical Officer
Dr Tony Holohan at a Covid-19 briefing

Picture: RollingNews.ie



Is 2020 our 1945 moment?

In the storm of this public health crisis, we've seen a significant shift away from a four-decade market-centred economic orthodoxy, and towards some of the principles and tools associated with Europe's post-war reconstruction. This contrasts sharply with the 2008-2010 banking crisis, when political, economic and, initially, social consensus swung quickly behind the politics and economics of austerity.

Driven in part by public health imperatives, and accompanied by an inspiring spirit of social solidarity, strong support for a State-led response to the massive economic challenges of the Covid-19 crisis has emerged in Ireland and beyond. Indeed, Pope Francis himself called for a post-war spirit of solidarity in his recent Easter message.

Over the last few weeks, we've seen what can be achieved when the State mobilises financial, organisational and human resources for the common good, when people work together collectively, and when citizens have equal access to essential goods and services.

The next challenge will be to embed these principles into our economic, social and business model on the other side of the emergency. There are strong reasons to believe that we may be experiencing a '1945 moment,' where the enormity of loss and sacrifice, the scale of economic devastation, and fatigue with austerity, combine to create the conditions for a radical shift in European public policy. And the sheer scale of the coming economic storm means we need a fundamentally different approach to the one adopted during the banking crisis.

As Irish government formation efforts intensify, any unity of national purpose will, at the very least, require a progressive counterweight to the centre-right if we are to avoid a repeat of the mistakes of the past.

This is also a challenge to the left, as the development and display of untested 'alternatives' will be as irrelevant to today's citizens as they are to tomorrow's historians. That means trade unions, civil society organisations and others must stand ready to play their part, together, in the implementation of practical solutions. Recent events suggest that a genuinely new social and political consensus is possible on the basis of:

- A high-productivity, high-skills competitive economy supported by public investment in education and infrastructure;
- An economy where all workers can expect an income capable of supporting a decent standard of living;
- Social solidarity, in the form of a strong safety net to support those unable to work;
- A social wage, with essential public services provided on a universal basis;
- Flatter wealth distribution;
- Supported by adequate taxation, social dialogue, collective bargaining, and legal rights to equality and civil and political freedoms.

Without the US leadership displayed in 1945, the responsibility for rebooting our economies now rests squarely with the leaders of Europe and its nations. In this context, the makeshift deal testily hammered out recently by EU finance ministers is utterly inadequate to the scale of the challenges before us.

The distinction they made – between debt directly associated with the virus and debt that isn't – may look like fancy footwork today, but it will seem laughable when the full cost of economic recovery emerges. Once the health crisis abates enough for us to properly assess that damage, the priority will be to kick-start our economies and maintain living standards, not to classify and pay back debt. This will require effort and imagination from politicians, the financial sector, public services, businesses, civil society, and representative organisations.

Just as in the post-war period, the strongest available tool of recovery will be investment in infrastructure. Critical public services such as health, education and childcare will need to recoup. Jobs permanently lost in the Covid crisis will have to be replaced. Incomes must be supported in the meantime.

That's before we step up our response to the climate crisis, tackle the pre-coronavirus shortcomings in housing and other public services, or address the reasonable expectation that recently-introduced universality in public provision will be maintained and expanded.

The crisis has also exposed the vulnerability of people in low-paid and insecure

employment, while its impact on the organisation of work – in particular the rapid shift from office-based to remote working – holds huge potential for productivity, public services, regional balance, quality of life, and the environment.

In recent weeks, we have witnessed some extraordinary things, not least the loss and fear that the coronavirus has inflicted. We've also seen the inspiring bravery of our health and other essential workers, the many thousands of volunteers who have put themselves forward, and a community spirit that has both helped limit the spread of the virus and found new ways to socialise and support others.

If we build on that, our country and our continent can become more secure, more equal, more united, and better prepared for future shocks. If we fail, we risk a descent into long-term economic hardship and political chaos, here and across the European Union.

Kevin Callinan
Fórsa General Secretary

Joe Cunningham
SIPTU General Secretary



Picture: Jonathan Cutter (Public Domain)



Extraordinary measures

A number of extraordinary measures have been introduced and set out in a guidance document for civil and public service employers and employees which apply to all public service employees during the Covid-19 crisis.

These measures have been introduced by the Government for the duration of the crisis and the union is being consulted on an ongoing basis.

This is a very important development and it is important we understand what these measures are and the reasons why they are being implemented.

What is clear is that we are not currently in a normal industrial relations environment. The union's response to measures out in place by the Government was set out clearly at the outset of the crisis.

Fórsa and its members across the civil, public, private, voluntary and semi-state sectors are committed to co-operating fully with emergency measures necessary to contain the Covid-19 coronavirus, protect the health and safety of citizens and workers, and maintain essential services during this unprecedented public health emergency.

A Fórsa spokesperson told 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, so 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."

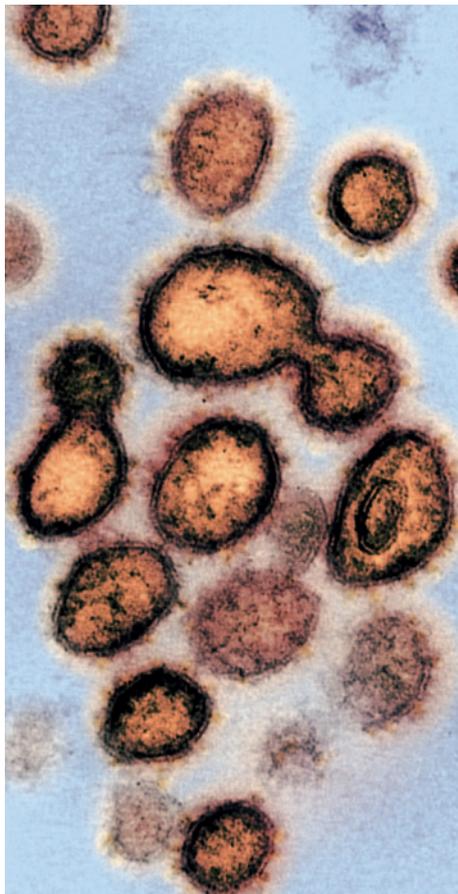
Members are strongly advised to co-operate with management in its efforts to contain the Covid-19 coronavirus, protect the health and safety of citizens and workers, and maintain essential services - including when this means doing different things, in different ways, at different times.

Guidance issued by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform - available at <https://bit.ly/3f4GJcl> - states that staff re-deployment across the civil and public services could be required to ensure the maintenance of essential services. It also called for the re-assignment of staff within organisations to prioritise the most critical services.

The union is liaising constantly with management to ensure that appropriate protective and containment measures are in place.

At the forefront of the national response to Covid-19 the focus has been to support the health and wellbeing of all citizens. To achieve this, and to keep delivering crucial services to society, the Government has sought our support to work together as a unified public service.

Clearly there is a big ask on our members to keep the ship of state afloat, to support the



Picture: NIAID-RML (Public Domain)

Members are strongly advised to co-operate with management in its efforts to contain the Covid-19 coronavirus, 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

outstanding efforts in the Health Sector and to deliver key services and payments from the Civil Service.

Our members have responded in the best possible way and in the most difficult of circumstances to ensure this is done and to continue to provide services to very vulnerable citizens.

Temporary assignments across the civil and public service are a necessary response to the unprecedented national crisis arising from the Covid-19 pandemic and FAQs have been pre-

pared to assist staff and management to understand the process, rules and expectations associated with temporary assignments across the public service.

New arrangements for a public service-wide mobilisation to tackle the Covid-19 virus and maintain essential public services have been put in place. They allow the temporary reallocation of civil and public servants to critical roles in the HSE, social welfare and elsewhere for up to three months, with a possible extension if required.

Under the new arrangements, published in a Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) circular on 18th March, local Human Resource departments across the civil and public service will identify staff who could be released for temporary reallocation.

Staff identified as available for potential temporary reallocation will receive a link to an online questionnaire for submission to a dedicated Public Appointments Service (PAS) portal.

Then PAS will process temporary reallocations in consultation with the relevant local HR departments - with assignments starting as soon as possible.

The new measures guarantee that staff who take on temporary roles will continue to be employed, and paid by, their existing employer. And they will return to their existing employer and role once the temporary reallocation is over. The measures also confirm that HSE-recommended social distancing will be observed in work settings.

Special leave

The general principles that will apply for members including those who have been infected are set out in the FAQs. Obligations under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act, 2005 must be met and flexibility for alternative working arrangements, especially home working, must be implemented where possible.

This will enable employees, who are not ill, to continue working and to ensure social distancing and support for those essential workers who need to attend the workplace.

Special leave with pay will apply to periods of medically/HSE recommended self-isolation, and also to medical diagnoses of Covid-19 infection where the employee is not well enough to work from home. The general principles applying to the management of sick leave, for example the requirement of employees to contact managers, and for ongoing contact with employees who are on special leave for this purpose, will also apply.

Any special leave with pay granted for the purpose of self-isolation or any diagnosis of Covid-19 will not be counted as part of the employee's sick leave record. The application of



for extraordinary times...



Picture: Nik Andr (CC BY-SA 2.0)

special leave with pay will apply for the number of days advised by the HSE/doctor. Appropriate medical/HSE confirmation/advice of the need to self-isolate and/or a diagnosis of Covid-19 will be required.

Attendance at work

Following the Government's 'stay at home' announcement of 27th March, Fórsa has advised members to stay away from workplaces on public health grounds unless their employer has told them they need to attend work. This was a change to previous advice given to members to go in to work unless otherwise instructed by their line manager or HR department.

The latest advice is you should not attend work if:

- You have been told not to attend work by your manager or HR department.

There is a big ask on our members to keep the ship of state afloat, to support the Health Sector and deliver key services and payments from the Civil Service

- Remote working arrangements have been put in place, and you have been told to work at home by your manager or HR department.
- You have a medical reason for not attending work.
- You are self-isolating on medical or HSE advice.

Civil and public servants who are not attending work for approved coronavirus-related reasons – or on medical advice – will receive basic

pay including fixed allowances. Coronavirus-related sick leave will not be counted as part of the employee's sick leave record, so long as they have medical or HSE confirmation of the need to self-isolate. But you must follow the guidelines published by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

Pregnant women

The HSE published new guidance for pregnant health workers on 15th April. If you are pregnant and concerned about attending work, you should phone your doctor for medical advice before attending work. Please don't attend the doctor's surgery unless specifically advised to do so. You should also advise your line manager or HR department that you are doing this. The most recent official guidelines include advice on contacting work when seeking medical advice, which is available at the following link <https://bit.ly/2VHplvW>.

'Vulnerable groups'

The HSE published new guidance for 'vulnerable health workers' on 15th April. (Guidance at <https://bit.ly/2yvJq66>) The new guidance also lists a range of serious medical conditions and advises 'vulnerable health care workers' who have them not to go to work.

But it says workers with other medically managed pre-existing diseases "are unlikely to be at greater risk of acquiring Covid-19 virus infection" if they wear appropriate personal protective equipment. "They can continue to work unless there is a specific recommendation from their treating specialist," it adds.

If you are in vulnerable group (ie, if you are over 60 or have a long-term medical condition such as heart disease, lung disease, diabetes, cancer or high blood pressure), you should phone your doctor for medical advice before attending work. (For a list of at-risk groups, go to <https://bit.ly/2RVmrbC>). Please don't attend the doctor's surgery unless specifically advised to do so.

You should also advise your line manager or HR department that you are doing this. The most recent official guidelines include advice on contacting work when seeking medical advice, which is available at the following link: <https://bit.ly/3cH0Hbp>.

Members recently recovered from a critical illness

If you've recently recovered from a critical illness, have recently been signed fit for work, but are concerned that you might be particularly vulnerable to the virus, you should phone your doctor for medical advice before attending work. Please don't attend the doctor's surgery

Continued on page 6



Continued from page 5

unless specifically advised to do so.

You should also advise your line manager or HR department that you are doing this. The most recent official guidelines include advice on contacting work when seeking medical advice, which is available at the following link: <https://bit.ly/2zmuEix>.

Self-isolating

On 16th March, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) issued advice on what employees should do if they have to go into self-quarantine or self-isolation as a result of the Covid-19 virus. You can read a summary on the following link <https://bit.ly/2RYFbGY>.

Childcare difficulties

You will not automatically be paid if you are absent for work because of childcare difficulties arising from school or crèche closures. However, DPER has called on managers and employees to be flexible in such circumstances, and has advised public service employers to support staff experiencing childcare problems including by enabling home working or introducing flexible shifts, staggered shifts, longer opening hours or weekend working. You can read more at <https://bit.ly/3azD2bv>.

Staff recently returned from abroad

Staff who have recently returned from abroad – particularly from restricted areas as defined by the Department of Foreign Affairs, should follow HSE guidelines and/or seek medical advice. You should also advise your line manager or HR department that you are doing this. The most recent official guidelines include advice on contacting work when seeking medical advice, which is available at the following link: <https://bit.ly/3cBXC5L>.

Employers and those deemed medically vulnerable...

Employers should advise employees to self-declare if they believe that they are extremely medically vulnerable and are advised to cocoon and should be facilitated to work from home to the maximum extent possible.

If an employer is unsure whether or not an employee falls into the extremely medically vulnerable category, advice can be sought from the Occupational Health Service associated with their organisation.

Where workplace attendance has been deemed essential, employers should implement arrangements which support segregation of the workforce and social distancing measures. For example, this could include flexible shifts, staggered hours, longer opening hours and weekend working.

What if an employee can't work from home?

Employers should be exploring every possible



Picture: NJNG (CC BY 2.0)

avenue of making a suitable arrangement to facilitate home working. Managers should maintain regular contact with employees who have been advised to restrict their movements and continue to explore opportunities for work which can be performed at home both inside and outside the organisation as services come under increasing pressure.

If remote working in an employee's current role is not feasible, then work may be assigned that is outside their usual core duties, for example: contact tracing, payment processing or any other work identified. Employers should agree arrangements with their employees in this regard.

How should flexi-time operate during this period?

The normal operation of flexi-time or equivalent attendance management rules, including any flexi-time accruals and deficits, is to be temporarily suspended during the period of the Covid-19 crisis to facilitate the required new ways of working across the public service.

This does not preclude organisations from using clocking in and out arrangements that apply. Any balances accrued by employees before the suspension of flexible working hours arrangements can remain and be held over until the Covid working arrangements are no longer in place.

Is special leave with pay available for caring responsibilities?

There is no special paid leave available for Covid-19 caring arrangements during this time. All forms of flexible working must be considered including working from home and/or working adjusted hours to facilitate employees to balance work and caring responsibilities.

If employees are not set up for remote working at present, they need to continue to remain available to work, and their employer should identify work that can be given to them. Employers should be looking at alternative ar-

rangements – such as staggering hours, wider opening hours including weekend work, looking at temporary assignment etc. This will be a standard approach across the entire public sector.

If the person cannot work outside the home and cannot perform their current role remotely, the employee is still to be considered as actively on duty and available to work. Employers need to be flexible and innovative in terms of ensuring that their employees remain as productive as possible during this time.

If the employer cannot assign work to them remotely, then the employee can/will be assigned work outside of their usual core duties i.e. potentially a new role.

This should be continuously reviewed by management to ensure that employees are placed where they are most needed to deliver critical services. There will be temporary assignments in the public sector under the principle of one public service to deal with this crisis.

What this means is that any employee can be assigned work outside their usual core duties, or in a new role as required by the public service. Any employee who wishes to avail of existing leave allowances during this time is entitled to have such requests considered by their employer, as always, including parental leave, annual leave etc.

Living with high-risk individuals - Is there special leave with pay?

Special leave with pay does not apply in such circumstances. Employers should facilitate flexible working including working from home where possible in these circumstances. Where it is not possible to perform one's role at home and the employee is required to attend a workplace as an essential worker, they should follow the HSE guidelines on social distancing to minimise risk of transmission.

Requests to cancel or reschedule pre-booked leave

Where an employee wishes to cancel pre-booked leave (e.g. parental or annual leave) this may be facilitated once it is in line with the normal rules applying in the relevant sector. Flexibility during this time, from both employers and employees, is advisable. This flexibility should be based on the individual circumstances of each case, with regard to balancing the needs of the business and the employee.

Shorter Working Year update

The expectation is that any Shorter Working Year (SWY) arrangement that is scheduled will go ahead as planned. Where there is a business requirement, it may be possible for employers to cancel/postpone SWY with the agreement of the employee. In exceptional circumstances employers may agree to defer at the employee's request, subject to business requirements.



LEEF sets out priorities on safe return to work

The Return to Work Safely Protocol has just been published following high level discussion at the Labour Employer Economic Forum (LEEF).

It is designed to support employers and workers to put measures in place to prevent the spread of Covid-19 in the workplace when the economy begins to slowly open up, following the temporary closure of most businesses during the worst phase of the current pandemic.

The protocol should be used by all workplaces to adapt their workplace procedures and practices to comply fully with the Covid-19 related public health protection measures identified as necessary by the HSE.

The measures include no-handshaking policy, temperature testing, intensive cleaning,

and contact logs to facilitate contact tracing.

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.

There is also considerable responsibility placed on an employee to monitor their own wellbeing and to report any symptoms to a manager as well as self-isolating and contacting a doctor.

At-risk and vulnerable workers must be preferentially supported to maintain physical distancing and, where possible, supported to work from home.

The protocol stated that workers should be organised into teams who consistently work and take breaks together. Remote meetings

should be encouraged and essential face-to-face meetings should be as short as possible, with the number of participants kept to a minimum and gatherings of workers at the beginning and end of shifts to be avoided.

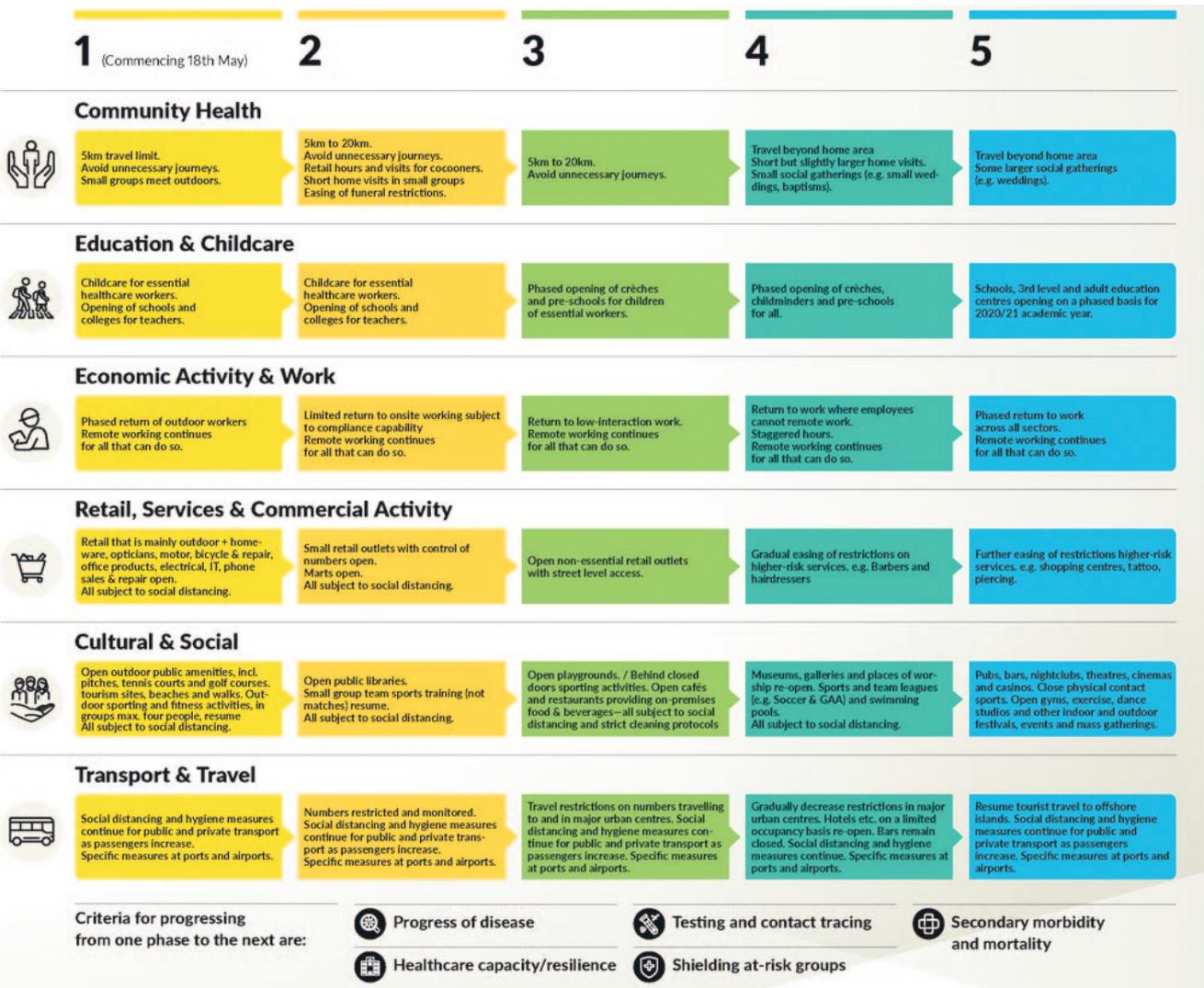
In the Civil Service, departments and organisations are beginning to develop plans to deal with emerging circumstances and the possible return to work later in the year.

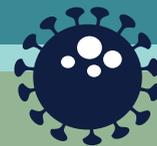
It is clear, taking account of the protocol and its requirements, that there will be much work necessary to ensure that offices are fit for purpose.

Looking at the design and delivery of services will be vital and issues of remote working including general arrangements for such an approach must involve engagement with Fórsa.

Overview of Reopening Phases

Commencing May 18th





DEASP cards marked over temporary use of outside provider during emergency

Over the last few weeks what constitutes essential services within the Civil Service and elsewhere has been determined – and this includes key staff in DEASP and Revenue who are involved in the pandemic unemployment claims as well as the employer subsidy scheme (being handled by Revenue).

DEASP has seen a huge spike in Covid-related PUP claims and a surge in Covid-related illness benefit claims is awaited.

At this point more than 200 staff have been redeployed to DEASP, but there will be a requirement for many more to deal with the unprecedented volume of claims as well as the expected spike in telephone queries arising from rejected claims.

This spike in calls, expected in April, led to the union having to deal with a difficult proposal from the DEASP to outsource some of the call answering to a ‘processes management services’ company called Abtran for a period of three to four weeks.

However, Fórsa made its position about the use of external resources crystal clear in a subsequent communication with the department.

This was set out in Fórsa’s response to a 5th April email from department chiefs informing the union of its intention to put in place an “emergency plan” to use external resources to boost DEASP phone-answering capacity.

National Secretary Derek Mullen insisted the union fully shared the department’s desire to ensure there was a “speedy response” to the “unprecedented surge” in Covid-19 related claims but expressed disappointment that the union had not been consulted earlier “particularly in light of the unprecedented effort, commitment and productivity” shown by its members in recent weeks.

He continued: “In normal times, Fórsa would oppose outsourcing of this kind, which would normally be deemed unnecessary and in breach of the Public Service Stability Agreement.

“And, while I fully accept that these are not normal times, I cannot accept that consultation should be set aside – particularly at this time,

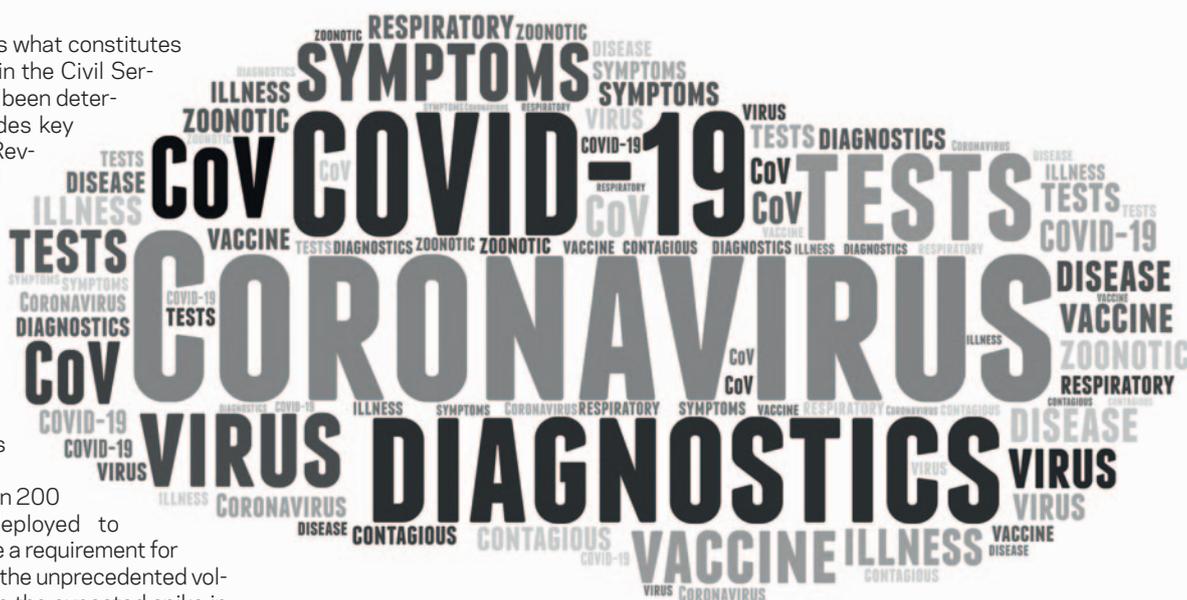


Illustration: www.epictop10.com (CC BY 2.0)

If an emergency arrangement with an external supplier is necessary in the short-term, this should be for the minimum possible period and certainly no longer than the short time necessary to ramp up the deployment of public service temporary reassignments

goodwill and momentum” needed to deal with the huge number of claims and calls expected following the 7th April pay date.

Mr Mullen did acknowledge that the DEASP intended to boost numbers in the Covid-19 Income Support Helpline by redeploying internal staff as well as drafting in colleagues from across the public service.

He also accepted the DEASP’s characterisation of the proposal as “an emergency temporary response designed to respond to an unprecedented situation” and the department’s intention to use the services of the NSSO and possibly the Passport Office in the near future.

Despite this, Mr Mullen reiterated Fórsa’s position that the department should source call-takers from within the civil and public service and flagged up the large number of staff awaiting temporary reassignment.

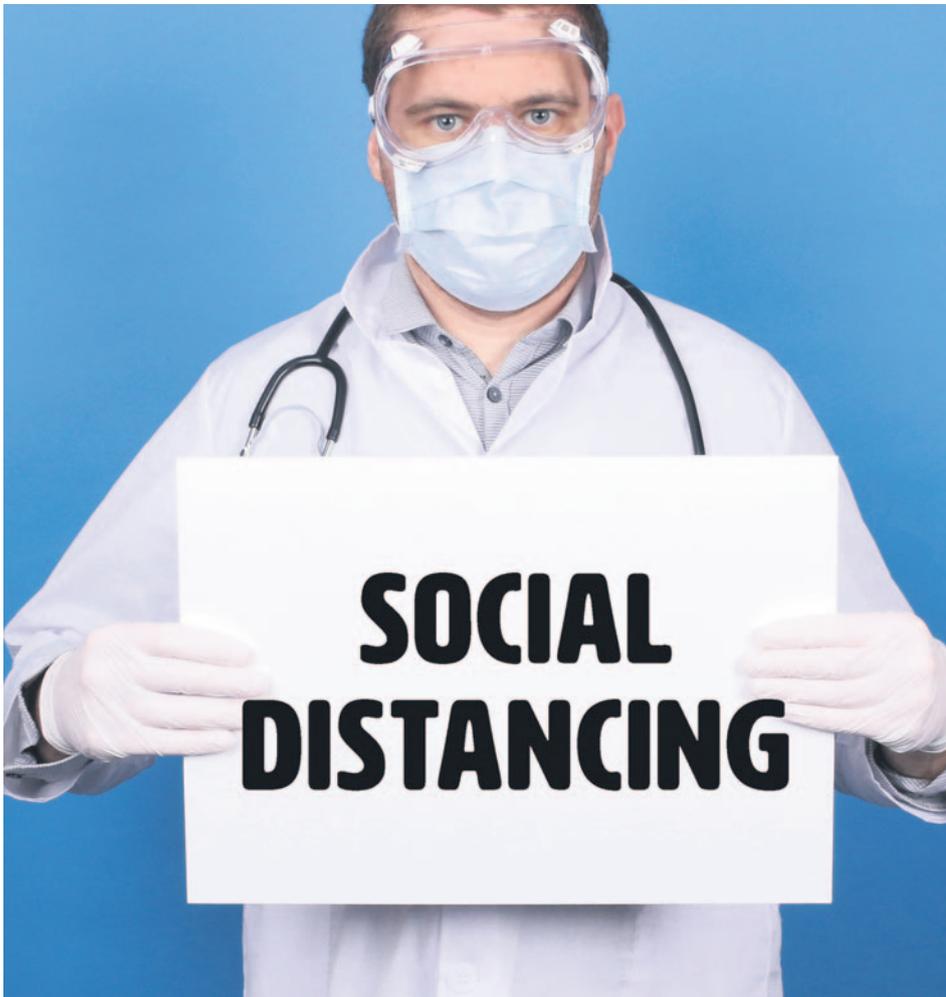
“We expect the department to proceed on the basis of public service temporary reassignments as a matter of urgency. If an emergency arrangement with an external supplier is necessary in the short-term, this should be for the minimum possible period of time and certainly no longer than the short time necessary to ramp up the deployment of public service temporary reassignments.”

Mr Mullen made it clear that any external ar-

when all of us are trying to work together to achieve the best possible outcomes for the public, in terms of safety and income supports.”

Highlighting how closely the union had worked – and would continue to work – with the department on a range of Covid-19 contingencies, Mr Mullen, however, pointed out that the “lack of timely consultation” over the proposal would make it more difficult to maintain “the





Picture: Jernej Furman (CC BY 2.0)

angement made by the department “should certainly not exceed the three to four week period” or for anything other than the “specific emergency purpose” set out in the 5th April email. He added: “And, clearly, there can be no question of DEASP staff being reassigned during this period, given the emergency that you have identified in the department.”

Vowing to keep the situation under review, Mr Mullen underlined to the Department that Fórsa’s position on this should not “in any way, or at any time, be read as a precedent”.

As CSQ goes to press, the three to four week external contact has now ended and we have warned the department against any further use of outsourcing. Fórsa has made it clear that the department and DPER must now follow through with putting in place the internal resources to replace the outside contractor.

At the same time in DEASP, the union has worked hard to ensure that the opening of public offices – particularly Intreo Centres – is kept to a minimum. This is now under further review following the closure of offices in Swords and Cahirciveen.

Overall it is gratifying to report the extraordinary efforts made by our members in DEASP to process so many claims – 600,000 to date – in such a short time.

Meanwhile, in Revenue, huge efforts on the Employer Helpline relating to the subsidy scheme have seen more than 200,000 claims processed, while in Customs significant progress has been made to expedite trade channels.

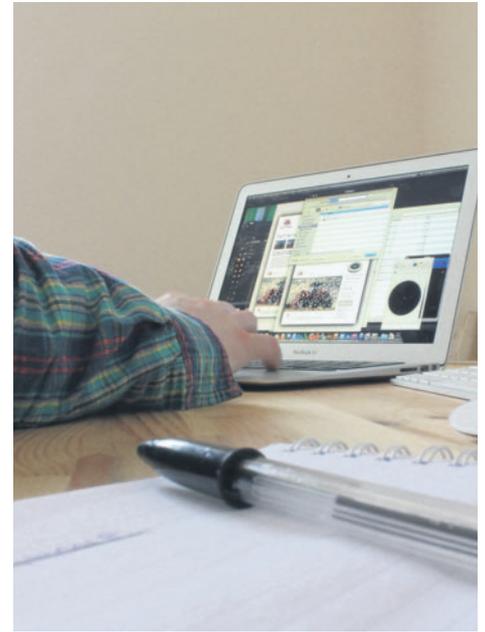
Other essential services

In Justice, essential services continue in the BMU, Visa section and Direct Provision among others. Civilian staff continue to attend in AGS, supporting operational roles and taking over roles such as front of Garda station, a development that was expected later under civilianisation, but has now been fast-tracked.

Vital services are also being provided in many other departments such as Foreign Affairs with continuity of passport processing and consular service concentrating on getting citizens home from abroad, while in Housing the MET Service continues to operate.

Government decisions on state exams, particularly the Leaving Certificate, will also have implications for essential officers over the coming weeks and months. The Department of Agriculture continues to provide essential services related to farming and the food supply chain.

Law Offices have determined domestic abuse and childcare as essential too.



NEW REALITY remote working

Picture: David Martyn Hunt (CC BY 2.0)

Remote working

Not all essential services operate from the work base as many are being worked remotely as is the case with many non-essential services. While some technical issues have arisen with remote working, generally it has turned out to be a good experience. Fórsa is trying to increase the numbers who are remotely enabled and supervised as well as deal with reporting arrangements.

Social distancing and work patterns

Most departments have introduced staggered or rostered work arrangements alongside the suspension of flexi time to help with social distancing and to ensure that those with caring responsibilities have the flexibility to meet both work and caring demands.

This is not a perfect solution but thus far it is working reasonably well and has been particularly well received by parents who struggle with the closure of crèches.

Some of these arrangements include possible weekend work. However, no-one on a normal five-day pattern is required to work weekends unless they need to make up time.

In DEASP, the working day has been reduced to seven hours as part of these changes with other departments putting in place similar measures.

PAS/temporary reassignment

Many staff now identified as non-essential are awaiting possible temporary reassignment. Those members are being asked to complete a questionnaire which identifies skills to help with these temporary reassignments.

As CSQ goes to press, 200 have moved at the early volunteer stage to DEASP with many more engaged in contact tracing across departments.



DEASP

Unprecedented: 600,000 PUP claims processed in 7 weeks...

Paul MacSweeney

Assistant General Secretary, DEASP

Members have processed more than 600,000 Pandemic Unemployment Payments (PUP) in the past seven weeks – with the number of people becoming unemployed increasing four-fold.

Many of our members in DEASP have been working flat out to ensure that people who have lost their jobs due to the pandemic are paid as quickly as possible.

The collective effort of our members, the flexibility and commitment they have shown in stressful workplaces, to ensure that fellow workers who've lost their jobs have money in their accounts to put food on the table has been immense and is ongoing. The processing of PUP arrears will now be the main focus.

Face-to-face services

Fórsa has questioned the need to retain face-to-face services during the pandemic when these services can be provided at a reduced risk remotely (either by phone, online or by post).

Management have reduced the risk by cutting the opening hours in Intreo Centres (ICs) to three half-days per week, but the risk persists. Two ICs were recently closed due to Covid 19 concerns.

Management have been informed of some customers attending Intreo Centres over Covid-19 illness benefit claims, stating that their doctors have advised them to self-isolate.

On Friday 24th a customer arrived in an IC claiming to have Covid 19. This matter has been referred to An Garda Síochána.

Fórsa continues to highlight in the strongest terms possible that ICs – as well as other public offices – can and should provide their services remotely over the course of the current emergency.

The Community Welfare Services (CWS) are being provided effectively remotely by our Community Welfare Officers (CWOs) across much of DEASP. A number of locations are still providing CWO services face to face and we are working on introducing remote best practice across the department.

Intreo Centre catchment areas

We have requested that where Intreo Centres (ICs) continue to provide face-to-face services that only customers from the catchment area are dealt with. At present there are customers using Kings Inns on Parnell Street who shouldn't be there.



Picture: Fórsa

We have advised DEASP that their advice that a customer can use any Intreo Centre they want runs counter to Government public health measures that restrict movement

We have advised DEASP that their advice that a customer can use any IC they want runs counter to Government public health measures that restrict movement. Not only are other customers and our members being put at risk by this practice but customers attending ICs, other than their local IC, also put bus drivers and other essential workers using public transport at greater risk. This matter remains under discussion.

Outsourcing

There has been a significant peak in calls to DEASP given the unprecedented rise in unemployment over such a short period of time. Call volume since the crisis began has quadrupled.

Staff from the Passport Office were temporarily reassigned to answer DEASP calls, as were staff from the NSSO.

DEASP staff have also been reassigned to both Covid-19 and Illness Benefit phone banks.

Management took the unilateral decision to

temporarily outsource part of the call answering function to Abtran for a three to four-week period.

We have queried why DEASP staff assigned to phone banks were being stood down from carrying out this work when the work was being outsourced.

Fórsa has raised this matter at the highest levels within DEASP and DPER to ensure that this contract is not extended and that the peak in calls are dealt with through the further temporary reassignment of DEASP and civil/public servants to call answering.

Homeworking

About 2,300 of DEASP's 6,000 staff were initially facilitated with homeworking. Fórsa has pushed for this level of homeworking to be increased but DEASP has started to decrease the number of staff working from home.



Picture: Nenad Stajkovic (CC BY 2.0)



Staff in Waterford, Buncrana and other locations have been directed to return to the office as their online work, including processing of PUP, has reduced significantly.

While we have received assurances on compliance with social distancing we have raised concerns over canteens, toilet facilities as well as entrances and exits to buildings.

Fórsa continues to seek additional homeworking, including facilitation of homeworking for phone bank work. Technical difficulties appear in part to be impacting on the level of homeworking.

In a number of cases staff have only been facilitated with homeworking where they have upgraded broadband or bought PCs. These additional costs will be examined at the end of the crisis.

In Sligo, HQ staff are being put on a homeworking rotation, giving office-based staff an opportunity to work from home while prioritising the retention of homeworking for staff in the 'at risk' categories as well as those with caring responsibilities.



Childcare and homeworking

With most DEASP staff carrying out work from the office, securing homeworking for childcare purposes has not been possible for all members.

This has been a particular difficulty for our members working in Intreo Centres, as they continue to provide a face-to-face service.

In some instances members have been told that if they want to take care of their children that annual leave, parental leave or other unpaid leave are the only options. Some members have taken a mixture of unpaid and annual leave.

Fórsa has written to department chiefs advising them that this approach is unsustainable and that our members who are available to work from home should be facilitated to do so in the wider civil and public service if DEASP cannot facilitate their requests.

NEWS IN BRIEF

State Examinations Commission

Following the decision of the Minister to postpone the Leaving Certificate, considerable demands are set to be placed on the SEC in the coming weeks and months, particularly with the development and delivery of the calculated grades model through all stages, and including the appeals process. Added to this is the need to start planning for the 2021 examinations.

It has also been deemed necessary that the SEC will be largely reconstituted, on a temporary basis, as an executive agency of the Department of Education and Skills.

To effect this change, the SEC will continue as a body corporate, albeit with a skeleton staff, while staff in the other business areas will be seconded on a temporary basis to this new executive agency in the department.

It is intended that the normal SEC management structures and management team will be in place in respect of the seconded SEC staff in this temporary executive agency.

Fórsa expects to begin important engagements on these matters in the weeks ahead.

Dept of Agriculture

A large number of issues relating to the requirement for Clerical Officers to attend work during the Covid-19 crisis have been dealt with. Most of the higher grades had been accommodated with home working arrangements. However, some AP's had deemed whole sections 'essential work' - including forestry and some farm management services - requiring staff to work in offices. After discussions with HR on this designation of 'essential' work, it turned that there was no requirement on members of staff to attend work in the offices.

Dublin Port

The Covid-19 crisis developed shortly after agreement was reached with the union to place CO Portal Inspectors on

a double-day shift working pattern. Because of the reduction in port traffic, the need to place staff on shift was significantly reduced.

However, management wanted to continue to implement the deal on back of union arguments that social distancing would be impossible if all staff were required to attend work at the same time.

Agri-Labs Branch

A number of lab analysts and other grades have now volunteered and were redeployed to the testing of Covid-19 samples as part of the HSE request for further testing resources. Staff in the DAFM Backweston facility are working on double-day shifts and are satisfied with the arrangements. Other Fórsa members who work as chemists in the State Lab in Backweston have also volunteered for Covid-19 testing.

Department of Education & Skills

Most staff are working from home and no major issues have been raised with the union other than a concern over health and safety advice issued by the department. Fórsa is also dealing with a number of individual issues over childcare and related matters. These are being handled on a case-by-case basis.

NSSO

Most staff in NSSO are working from home at this stage. Between 55 to 60 staff were deployed and trained by DEASP to work from the site in Clonskeagh servicing the Covid-19 helpline. Fórsa was satisfied that the building is more than large enough to cope with those numbers being deployed there and will ensure that there is more-than-adequate social distancing in place.

OPW

The majority of staff are working from home and have arisen, and the union is starting to return to normal IR business.

Prison Service

Most staff are working from home and the union is in regular contact with management on various members' issues as they arise.

GSOC

Fórsa is awaiting final clearance on a new flexibility allowance for investigation teams. The submission is with DPER. Management at GSOC has been very quick to respond to the Covid-19 crisis and has very efficiently set up remote working.

CSSO

While management struggled with introduction of flexible working options - they were trying to be fair - particular problems arose with the non-solicitor grades as their only remote access, including email access, is by phone.

Members were also asking why the State was continuing with civil litigation matters in the face of the Covid-19 crisis. Fórsa has raised this issue with management as it means unnecessary attendance in the workplace.

Attorney General

There is still poor communication with our members in the AG's Office despite the best efforts of Fórsa's Sean Carabini to ensure remote working arrangements for administrative staff. The union has taken up the matter with DPER.

Legal Aid Board

Concerns have been raised over increased targets coming from management during the Covid-19 crisis. Before the crisis hit, the union had engaged on an extensive consultation with members on the issue. A union source told CSQ the issue for "ripe for follow up" in the aftermath of the crisis.

Meanwhile, there have also been issues raised over remote working. According to Fórsa, public offices also took a long time to close as the crisis developed - but they are now closed.

More NEWS IN BRIEF p16



GARDA AREA

Policing's response to the Covid-19 emergency

All Garda staff have been deemed by the Garda Commissioner to be essential workers. Those who are carrying out their duties in the workplace are subject to the social distancing rules set out in the DPER and HSE guidelines.

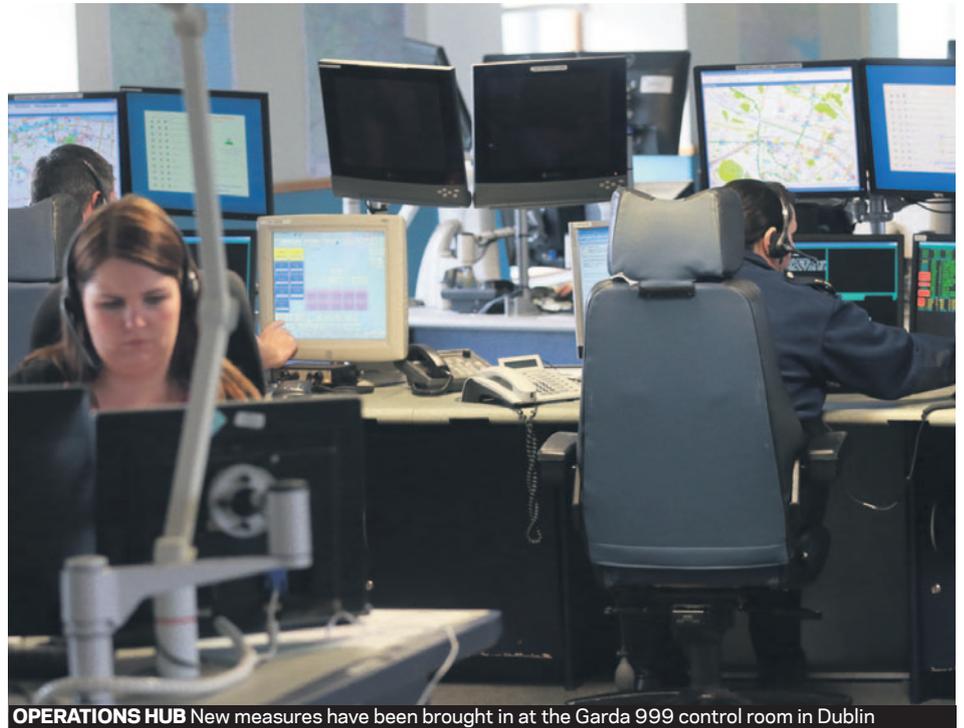
However, staff who are able to work from home are being facilitated to the maximum extent possible with measures put in place to increase the scope for remote working.

In addition to these home working arrangements, a number of other options have been offered to employees, such as flexible shifts, staggered shifts, longer opening hours and weekend working, as well as working from another location.

Contingency measures have also been put in place at the Garda 999 control room in Dublin with staff working from two separate locations to protect the service's operation.

Meanwhile, all student gardai have been released from the Garda College to serve on the front line.

Four Garda-related testing areas are being set up: Santry Garda station in north Dublin; the Garda Training College in Templemore, Co Tipperary; a unit at the disused Galway Airport; and a Garda facility in Ballyshannon, Co Donegal. Garda management have stated that these



OPERATIONS HUB New measures have been brought in at the Garda 999 control room in Dublin

Picture: RollingNews.ie



REASSIGNED Student gardai at Templemore have been drafted to front line service during Covid crisis

centres will operate as stand-alone areas. Existing staff will not have access to these areas and will not be involved in any way.

Protocols involving the setting up of these areas, the disposal of waste etc, will be in line with HSE guidelines.

Management have also confirmed that those members of staff that have volunteered for this process will not be interacting with other staff.

COURT SERVICE

Flexible approach on and off-site...

All Court Service staff have been categorised as essential workers. The Courts Service is facilitating this both through on-site flexibility - including staggered shifts, longer days etc - as well as off-site flexibility. In general, one office per county (outside of Dublin) remains open.

New practice directions have been put in place for online applications; eCourt rooms where only the judge and registrar are in court; the use of technical video solutions (especially in civil matters in High Court); and the use of VLA for those in prison.

In addition, where possible, those in police custody can be represented by their solicitor.

Meanwhile, CCJ appearances are being scheduled where possible instead of the current system of finding out at court on the day. The District Court is only open for emergency matters and Dublin family law is being dealt with solely in Dolphin House with attendance by appointment only.

ONLINE SPECIAL CSO

BORDER MANAGEMENT UNIT

Manual processing on Sunday premiums

Following the mediation process a Sunday premium came into effect from January 1st, 2020.

However, it appears that a new SLA has to be put in place with NSSO requiring a software update.

A manual process to ensure payment of the Sunday premium has been in use in the meantime. All arrears from January 1st 2020 were to be paid on April 2nd/3rd 2020.

The issue of arrears has now been referred for adjudication under the C&A scheme, with

the union's statement of claim issued to DPER on April 20th 2020. A counter statement from management has now been received and - subject to Covid-19 developments - a hearing is awaited. A claim for on-call allowance for HEO shift managers was also lodged at Departmental Council and is under consideration.

Due to a massive fall-off in passenger numbers because of the Covid-19 emergency, some staff have volunteered to do alternate work. Management is currently looking into this.



REVENUE COMMISSIONERS

Remote working and social distancing

The Revenue Commissioners have somewhere in the region of 80% of personnel working remotely. All Revenue offices are now closed to the public and the national phone line functions.

All functions including the Employers Wage Subsidy Scheme helpline have moved to the Revenue Online Service (ROS).

Workers that are attending the offices for essential services are doing so while conforming to the Government's advice under the new social distancing measures. This allows our members to safely carry out their work.

Redeployments

Revenue has facilitated the redeployment of staff to the Department of Health for Covid-19 contact tracing, and has identified staff that can be redeployed to DEASP.

Some of the Customs vehicles will be used to help the state deliver essential services within our communities and the delivery of PPE for frontline health staff.

Keeping the wheels of Revenue turning...

While the majority of staff in Revenue are working remotely, they have processed in excess of €30 million in state aid payments during the coronavirus pandemic.

More than 8,000 employers have signed up to the Covid-19 Wage Subsidy Scheme, operated by Revenue, which ensures that workers receive enhanced supports directly from their employer.

Unemployment in the State has now reached 25%, and a significant number of those affected are eligible for payments under the various aid programmes. To date, more than 58,000 employees have benefited from the Wage Subsidy Scheme.

This Trojan work being carried out by our members remotely is vital work in keeping the Irish economy going.

Suspension of family friendly agreements...

While remote working arrangements are in place, Revenue has moved to suspend flexi-working arrangements in line with the rest of the public service and as per DPER's instruction. Time accrued,

however, before the introduction of this suspension will be honoured. Management have introduced an extension to the clocking system, from 8am to 8pm (Monday to Sunday), for staff working remotely. They advised the union that this adjustment was introduced as a means of facilitating workers with familial or caring responsibilities, who may find that they need to spread their

working weekly hours outside of the normal working week.

This provision has been made solely to help members space their work across the seven-day period to facilitate their own domestic arrangements. There is no request from management for work to be carried out past the normal weekly working hours or normal working hour arrangements. Nobody should work

above their normal hours unless an overtime arrangement has been made with their manager.

Previous Shorter Working Year, parental leave and other leave arrangements will go ahead as previously booked. If members need to seek changes to their previously-booked unpaid leave, they should contact their manager where their requests will be considered on a case-by-case basis.



We see your finances differently

- Income Protection
- Superannuation Advice
- AVC's
- Health Insurance
- Savings Plans
- Lump Sum Investments
- Mortgages
- Life Cover
- Mortgage Protection
- Cost cutting Service
- Pensions
- Financial Reviews
- Serious Illness Cover

For more information contact
Lyons Financial Services at 01 801 5808
or email query@lfs.ie



Office 1, Dunboyne Business Park, Dunboyne, Co. Meath | Phone: 01 8015808 | Email: query@lfs.ie | Web: www.lfs.ie

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



Covid-19 Departmental News

GUIDANCE FOR MANAGERS

Respond with flexibility, kindness and, if possible, a sense of humour

Management at the Department of Justice and Equality have produced an important guidance booklet for managers dealing with remote working, which looks set to be a continuing reality for many civil servants in the months ahead.

The guidance sets out what the Department sees as a new set of demands and responsibilities for managers during the current Covid-19 emergency.

It calls on line managers to understand the impact the crisis has had on the personal circumstances of members of staff and flags up the need "to respond... with flexibility, with kindness and with a sense of humour, where possible."

The guidance is split into three areas and looks at communication, work planning and managing expectations, as well as staff wellbeing and motivation.

In terms of **communication**, line managers are encouraged to "up the level of interaction", with a call to set aside "specific time for check-ins", including on a one-to-one basis.

Because of the disruption caused to normal ways of working, managers are instructed to make their communication to staff "as clear as possible" and to encourage team members to ask questions "if they are unsure on any point".

The guidance calls for team members to be encouraged to "to stay in touch with each other to connect informally" and suggests virtual tea/coffee breaks using video conferences facilities.

On **work planning**, the guidance wants managers to maintain their "usual style as much as possible" giving regular feedback and recognising high quality work.

"It may not be possible," the guidance suggests, "to manage every aspect of your work in a remote team in the same way you would in the office."

Because of this line managers should focus instead on specific outcomes and adapt their approach accordingly.

It adds: "Encourage your team to let you know if they are having difficulty completing specific tasks or if they have other concerns."

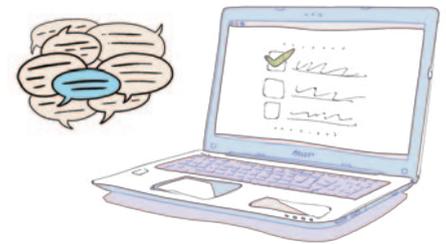
On **staff wellbeing and motivation**, the guidance underlines the importance of line managers offering "encouragement and emotional support".

"This is a difficult situation for everyone," it points out, "but we know from research that employees look to their managers for cues on



SAGE ADVICE Department of Justice & Equality managers have been issued with Covid-era guidance

We will continue to provide supports which take into account people's individual circumstances, and approach the challenges we face in a collegiate, flexible and empathetic way



Pictures/Illustrations: Nenad Stojkovic (CC BY 2.0); Jurgen Appelo (CC BY 2.0); Duckman Design (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

how to react to a crisis."

Among other points, the guidance calls on managers to:

- Remain calm and optimistic when interacting with staff;
- Seek feedback from staff on both work-related and personal wellbeing issues;
- Focus on achievement and record what has worked well; and
- Share what has been learned with colleagues.

Meanwhile, in a May 2nd letter to staff, Secretary General Aidan O'Driscoll said the Department was working on the assumption that "remote working is to be maximised until the autumn at least" and pointed out that "how we work is likely to be fundamentally altered even after the health threat dissipates".

Mr O'Driscoll admitted that the Civil Service was "better placed" than many sectors in terms of remote working, but insisted that the health and wellbeing of those members of staff who needed to attend offices to carry out their duties "will continue to be our priority".

"This will mean revising how we make use of

our office space and ensuring that necessary protective measures are in place," he added.

Mr O'Driscoll continued: "While adapting our work might be straightforward in many instances, we know that adapting as individuals might not be.

"We will therefore continue to provide supports which take into account people's individual circumstances, and approach the challenges we face in a collegiate, flexible and empathetic way."

Other news

Most of our members in the Department of Justice and Equality are now working remotely with a skeleton staff operating in Corporate Services, IPAS, IPO and INIS.

In Tipperary, all staff are working remotely except for one AP and one HEO who attend the workplace to deal with post and the allocation of work to staff.

In Killarney, staff are working remotely with a core shift going to the office on a split-shift basis.

 **FÓRSA**



Exclusive Insurance Schemes for FÓRSA Members & their Spouses or Partners.

CAR

- ✓ Comprehensive Driving of Other Cars
- ✓ 24 Hour Breakdown Assistance
- ✓ Unlimited Windscreen Cover

HOME

- ✓ 24 Hour Emergency Assistance
- ✓ Alternative Accommodation
- ✓ €3m Personal Liability

TRAVEL

- ✓ Single or Annual Multi-Trips
- ✓ 24 Hour Medical Assistance

Use Promo Code **FOR001**

**TO OBTAIN A QUOTATION OR TO FIND OUT MORE
CALL US 01 7075800 OR VISIT US ONLINE fora.glennons.ie**

Frank Glennon Limited, trading as "Glennon" and "Glennon Insurances", is regulated by the Central Bank of Ireland.



NEWS IN BRIEF

DPP

The main issue in the DPP's office concerned the number of people still working in the office due to a lack of remote working policies. However, according to the union, management has been "as pro-active as possible" and Fórsa reps are being consulted.

Good lines of communication are open with management. Initial attempts to lengthen the working day for a week followed by a week working from home were opposed by the union. Now a week on/week off (standard day) work pattern is in place.

Foreign Affairs

Fórsa is working with grades with overseas postings to come up with a list of questions for those due to go on foreign postings later in the year. Many healthcare questions relating to Covid-19 have arisen. Generally, the department agreed to let those with health difficulties return home from abroad to work remotely. Passport Office members are being redeployed to HSE and DEASP in some cases to assist in call answering on the Covid helpline.

Probation Service

A number of concerns have been raised about working in prison

during the crisis. While much of this work is unavoidable and has to be carried out, some of it is not, and the union has raised this issue with Probation Service management.

There had been reports of some managers applying pressure to individuals to attend unnecessarily but these incidents were resolved at early stage. A source told CSQ: "Raised at the top to nip in the bud."

Garda College

The Garda College is a designated testing centre for Covid-19. Cleaners working there were concerned that they would be given responsibility for cleaning in the testing area and asked to clean up after the testers. They have no specialist training relating to

Covid-19 or, indeed, access to PPE. Management informed Fórsa that an area of the campus would be sectioned off for testing and that HSE staff would have responsibility for that area.

Agriculture

Concerns were raised that the introduction of a two-shift pattern would apply to the Fuge grades. The Department informed the union that there would be no exceptions made to the two-shift pattern but later provided the Fuge grades with assurances on overtime payments.

Dept of Housing and Local Government

Practically all members of staff are working from home except for a few essential staff based in Cus-

tom House. Meanwhile, many Met Éireann staff are working as normal except for some who are able to carry out their work remotely.

Dept of Business, Enterprise and Innovation

Most staff are working remotely and HR are currently carrying out a survey on the issue. A Fórsa source pointed out that the survey was due to take place anyway, although with the developing Covid crisis, its importance was "even more pronounced".

WRC

The process to recruit a number of inspectors has been delayed and the branch is calling for these posts to be filled "as soon as it is safe to do so".

Management has confirmed that the next EO competition is to be confined to the department – although Covid crisis has delayed matters.

Labour Court

All staff are working remotely with an improvement in IT capacity over recent years facilitating the smooth transition to these arrangements. Meanwhile, work is currently ongoing to facilitate on-line hearings.

FÓRSA MEMBERS FIGHTING COVID-19...**Maureen Quirke**

Intreo centre manager

Maureen supports a team of 40 staff in their office in Tralee, Co Kerry. Her work includes overseeing customer payments, dealing with complex cases and working with her team to meet deadlines.



Probation officers adopt new workload agreement

Fórsa Probation Officers Branch members have approved a new workload agreement – in a vote that is being viewed by branch activists as a "strong mandate for positive change".

The result, overseen by the Standing Orders Committee, was:

- **Ballot papers sent out – 219**
- **Ballot papers returned – 135** (61.6%)
- **Votes for the proposal – 119** (88.1%)
- **Votes against the proposal – 15** (11.1%)
- **Spoiled (unmarked, returned to sender as uncollected) – 1** (0.8%)

The development is being seen as an important step for both probation officers and for the branch itself. Negotiating a new workload agreement has been a branch priority in recent years. Given the workplace stress that can come with a large workload of difficult and taxing cases, the branch correctly identified the pre-existing workload agreement as being no longer fit for purpose.

Branch activists led consultations with the membership and were key in coordinating efforts to ensure that any new agreement would contain realistic and attainable targets. While no deal is ever perfect, this agreement has implementation and review periods built into it to ensure that any issues that arise can be addressed in a timely manner.

Branch Secretary Sean Lowde told CSQ: "Fórsa – and before that Impact – has long argued that the existing workload agreement, when operating at the maximum numbers allowed, is unreasonable, not workable and has to go. This vote represents an overwhelming vindication of that position and is a strong mandate for positive change.

"The branch will be doing everything we can to get both the letter and the spirit of this agreement realised as swiftly as possible. The formal review of the agreement will take place a year after full implementation."

The agreement is a good news story that



AGREEMENT Sean Lowde with ballot result

demonstrates what can be achieved by a dedicated and focussed team of activists and may even serve as a template to other professions within the Civil Service that are considering ways to manage difficult workloads.



GENERAL COUNCIL UPDATE

By **Derek Mullen**



As we finalise this special online edition of CSQ we are also planning to have an online General Council this month. We are also starting to re-engage with what you might describe as normal industrial relations issues at departmental level and meetings on such non-Covid matters are starting to happen. We include in this issue some updates on business that were being dealt with centrally before the crisis struck.

ANNUAL LEAVE

Leave issues for arbitration

An additional two days of annual leave were secured for clerical officers and executive officers in 2018 with the deal extended to related departmental grades in Fórsa.

The leave is service-based and is applicable after 12 and 14 years.

Related claims seeking to increase the overall threshold of annual leave and other special leave - such as *force majeure* - are being rejected by Public Expenditure, given the recent annual leave increase. The union has referred these matters to arbitration.

Meanwhile, in other issues relating to leave, it has been agreed that we will shortly review the annual leave circular. Hopefully as part of this review we will seek to abolish the three-year carry-over rule which can impact on members and lead to a loss of leave,

It is also agreed that statutory annual leave accrues when an individual is on TRR and/or zero rate of pay due to certified sick

Picture: Bogdan M [CC BY-NC 4.0]



leave. Periods of sick leave at full and half pay will retain full annual leave entitlements.

This is in response to Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) rulings on the accrual of annual leave entitlements during sick leave which relate to the requirements of the EU Directive on Working Time.

INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

Talks over WRC move

Talks will continue post-Covid over the move to the WRC and Labour Court. This will see civil servants moving to the state IR machinery for the first time since the Labour Court was set up in 1946.

Discussions centre on which aspects of the conciliation and arbitration scheme - such as the General Council and Departmental Councils - will be retained.

The legislative amendment for the inclusion of the Garda was made in 2019. However, the civil service entry to the state system was delayed as the AG's Office had raised civil service regulator concerns with DPER.

Our expected timescale on this has now moved out to later in 2020. Obviously resourcing issues will be to the fore as the WRC/Labour Court prepares for the transfer of the Civil Service and Garda to the state industrial relations machinery.



DISCIPLINARY CODE

'Important protection' in new code

A new disciplinary code for staff on probation was agreed in 2019. This is the first time that staff on probation have had access to a disciplinary process.

National Secretary Derek Mullen has described this move as a very welcome development. He told CSQ: "We have worked hard to achieve a successful outcome to these negotiations and while the new code is not as robust as the main code, it does offer

important protection under the key principles of natural justice and due process."

In a more serious development though Public Expenditure had sought to devolve sanction for dismissal to principal officer level, a proposal that is being resisted by the union. This matter is ongoing as CSQ goes to press and we are also discussing contingencies to deal with disciplinary cases online during the crisis.

EQUALITY ISSUES: matters under discussion pre-Covid...

Parental Leave age limit

Fórsa is examining family leave issues arising out of a number of motions, including leave sought to accompany elderly/young relatives to medical appointments.

In discussions with management, while there has been a degree of sympathy expressed by them over this issue, they have highlighted in reply the recent significant changes to bereavement leave.

They indicated that in circumstances

where such a significant change had been secured, it would be very difficult to secure additional improvements in family leave in the short term. The change in bereavement leave covered some 40 organisations and involved some 37,000 employees.

Superannuation

We had asked DPER to ensure that members are fully aware of the implications of job sharing, special leave etc. for superannuation benefits.

Shorter Working Year

Fórsa is seeking greater consistency in applying the scheme. The union is also seeking to expand the options available to include periods of one, three, five, seven, nine, 11 or 12 weeks.

The current scheme allows leave in blocks of two, four, six, eight, 10 or 13 weeks. It also permits three separate periods, provided each is not less than two weeks and the total does not exceed 13 weeks.

General Council Update

PSSA

Sequence arrangements relating to 2018 deal

The agreement under the Public Service Stability Agreement for Executive Officer grade sequences are set out below and apply for a three-year period from August 1, 2018 to July 31, 2021:

● Temporary EO sequences

Open 40%, IDP 30%, Internal 30%. The sequence will be: open, internal, interdepartmental, open, internal, open, interdepartmental, open, internal, interdepartmental.

The previous sequencing arrangement were 50% open; 25% internal and 25% interdepartmental.

● HEO Level

At HEO level there is provision to have one in six posts at HEO level filled openly, but only for specialist posts, rarely used but being pushed a bit more now. This provision was established in a national agreement.

The proportion of posts to be filled from interdepartmental promotion competitions at HEO level remains at 40%, as agreed under the terms of Sustaining Progress (Paragraph 22.17(ii)). This means that in a sequence of vacancies, the second and fourth will be filled from the interdepartmental panel and the balance departmentally.

● AO/HEO issues

Fórsa is also processing claims seeking parity for AOs working in HEO roles and also seeking to ensure that members are not precluded from taking a HEO promotion after taking an assignment from an AO panel.

OTHER NEWS...

Temporary clerical officers

At the end of August 2018 there were 1,773 (FTE) TCOs in the civil service. This matter is being reviewed by the DEC with concern over the high numbers of TCOs, particularly in Social Protection.

The union is contemplating a revision of the agreement on the use of temporary staff to ensure that overall numbers are reduced to acceptable levels and that fixed-term contracts do not become the norm for long term projects.

A claim to this effect is near agreement at General Council and during our discussions we have managed to decrease the number of TCOs to less than 1,000.

Appeals process review sought by Fórsa

There are two distinct review procedures provided for under Section 7 and Section 8 of the CPSA Codes of Practice.

As CSQ goes to press, Fórsa has lodged a claim at Council seeking a fundamental review of the appeals process given the view that the current system is hard to access and does not serve the appellants well.

SELECTION PROCEDURES

PAS/DPER defend current way of testing large volume comps

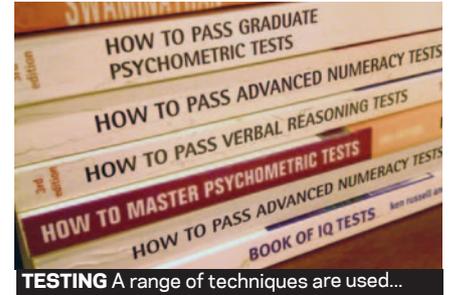
In our discussions with PAS and DPER they have resolutely defended the testing processes for shortlisting in large volume competitions. They use a range of techniques for various competitions.

These are: psychometric tests; job simulation/work sample exercises; situational judgement; group exercises; case study/strategic exercises; presentation exercises; role play exercises; video/PC based job simulations; media exercises; biodata/skills experience questionnaires; assessment centres; personality questionnaires; and interviews.

Fórsa has received many complaints from members about the use of these various processes - firstly, over technical issues (as the process is online), and secondly relating to issues about testing and the subsequent validation process. Some queries were also raised about scoring and feedback.

In presentations to the civil service unions, both DPER and PAS have committed to resolving technical issues but challenged us on what on what our alternative might be for shortlisting large volumes of candidates.

A significant issue has also arisen in Garda and elsewhere over the use of a



TESTING A range of techniques are used...

Picture: Satis Krishnamurthy (CC BY 2.0)

'remote proctoring' system. This is when candidates are tested from home or another remote base. We have advised DPER and PAS that we will oppose remote proctoring in the future unless they can fully guarantee that it works.

Another important factor raised by the union - and, indeed, some members - is the question of reasonable accommodation for staff with disabilities.

We are dealing with this question again at our next meeting with PAS as there is clear prima facie evidence to suggest discrimination, and statistics on promotion for members with disabilities has been sought. Discussions continue at this time.

FÓRSA MEMBERS FIGHTING COVID-19...



Harry McLoughlin

SFPA, Dept of Agriculture, Food and the Marine

As harbour master Harry, and his team of 11 staff, help to keep the seafood chain operating throughout the crisis. They also work with EU trawlers to complete declarations of health prior to entering ports. Harry also works with port health officer and the HSE.

FÓRSA
#HiddenHeroes



Edel Meaney

Clerical Officer, DEASP

Edel is a clerical officer working in the department of social protection. She has been part of a team of people processing thousands of additional applications for social protection since the onset of Covid-19 crisis.

FÓRSA
#HiddenHeroes

HIGHER SCALES**Arbitration referral considered by Fórsa**

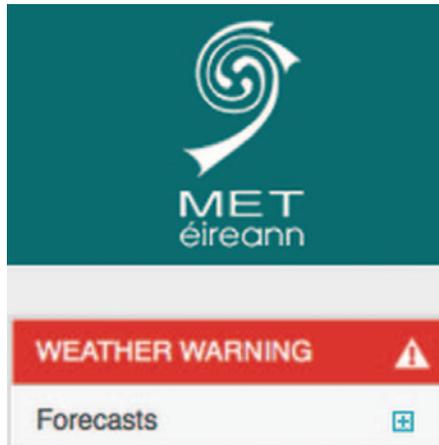
Improvements in the percentage of higher scales available for clerical officers were achieved in 2018. The long-standing entitlement to higher scales of 15% of the grade was increased to 20% in 2018 and 25% from January 1, 2019.

Claims seeking further improvements are now before General Council but are unlikely to be agreed in the short term, given the recent positive developments. In particular, we are pursuing access to higher scales for all in the grade.

We are currently considering a referral to arbitration.

PROBATION**Agreement reached**

Fórsa has also reached agreement on new guidelines governing the management of probation in the civil service. These new guidelines should bring a level of consistency across departments and organisations in the treatment of staff on probation, following both recruitment and promotion. However, we have sought statistics on probation from management both in respect of dismissals and promotion reversion as we are detecting a spike in cases as we enter 2020.

**Red Weather alerts**

Discussions will continue at General Council over arrangements for red weather alerts. However, compensatory arrangements, including the availability of TOIL, are causing some difficulty for those staff who are considered essential.

Appropriate credits, be it leave or time on the clock, is also a factor for those staff members who cannot make it to work.

As this report is being finalised we are awaiting an arbitration hearing on these matters. It is important that each organisation has a communications plan for employees – and customers, if relevant – to cover severe weather situations.

OTHER NEWS...**Objections over new attendance proposals**

Proposals for a new attendance management policy have run into difficulty at General Council. This is because management have sought to use the same approach as the underperformance policy which allows for warnings under the disciplinary code.

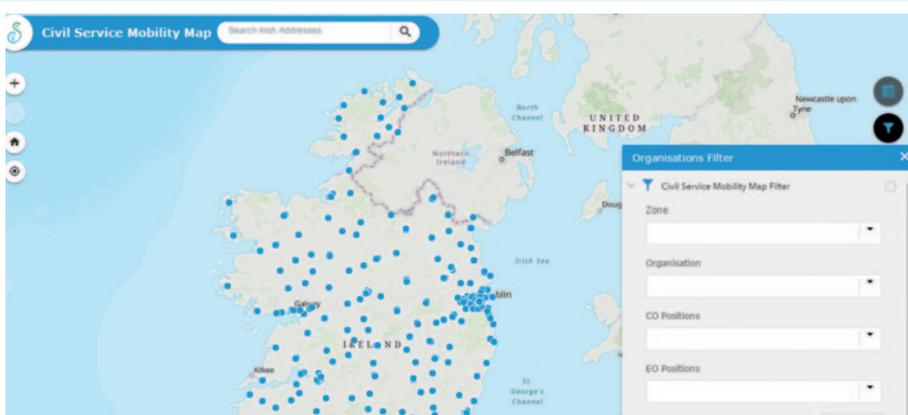
This approach hasn't been effective for underperformance and in the view of the union should not be adopted for the management of attendance.

Fórsa has also objected to long-term – and likely serious – illness absences being treated under the same category as other attendance difficulties.

Promotions policy reviewed by DEC

The DEC has been conducting a review of competitions policy following on from many motions at conference in 2018 and 2019, taking particular account of selection mechanisms in large volume competitions.

It was noted that volumes had increased for various reasons including the cross-stream promotion agreement in the civil service.

**MOBILITY****Extending scheme to HEOs, AOs and APs...**

Discussions aimed at extending the new civil service mobility scheme to Dublin concluded successfully in 2019 for clerical officers and executive officers.

Since then we have been concentrating on extending this important scheme to HEOs, AOs and APs.

A target date has been set for the month of May. However, we will now have to wait until we get past the Covid crisis.

Thousands of COs and EOs have applied for transfers since the scheme was launched. However, as CSQ goes to press,

we are having to address some necessary adjustments to the scheme given the numbers of posts being turned down. This is likely related to the number of locations that an individual member can express an interest in.

Issues have also arisen over reasonable accommodation for members with disabilities which has led to revisions of text under terms and conditions, including an assessment process. However, this will not be used as a means to impede moves under the mobility scheme.

**COMPS POLICY** Vote at 2019 conference**Fórsa sets out new technology principles**

Fórsa has made a submission to Public Expenditure as part of the union's response to civil service management proposals over the procurement of new technologies, on foot of an automation pilot that has been under way in a small number of civil service departments over the last year.

The submission set out important union principles that we believe should be reflected in the roll out of new technology.

Ultimately Fórsa's support for technological advancement and greater automation will be based on a commitment to some of important principles.

Though we acknowledge the world of work will change (as will society), this change must be achieved equitably and well remunerated civil and public service jobs must continue to be key to the delivery of better public services. Obviously, this now a key issue arising out of the Covid crisis.

Coronavirus COVID-19



Coronavirus
COVID-19
Public Health
Advice

Help prevent coronavirus



Wash your
hands



Cover mouth if
coughing or sneezing



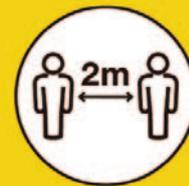
Avoid touching
your face



Keep surfaces
clean



Stop shaking
hands and hugging



Keep a safe
distance

The virus spreads in sneeze and cough droplets, so regularly taking the above measures helps reduce the chance of it spreading.

Visit [HSE.ie](https://www.hse.ie)

For updated factual information and advice

Or call 1850 24 1850

Protection from coronavirus.
It's in our hands.



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland