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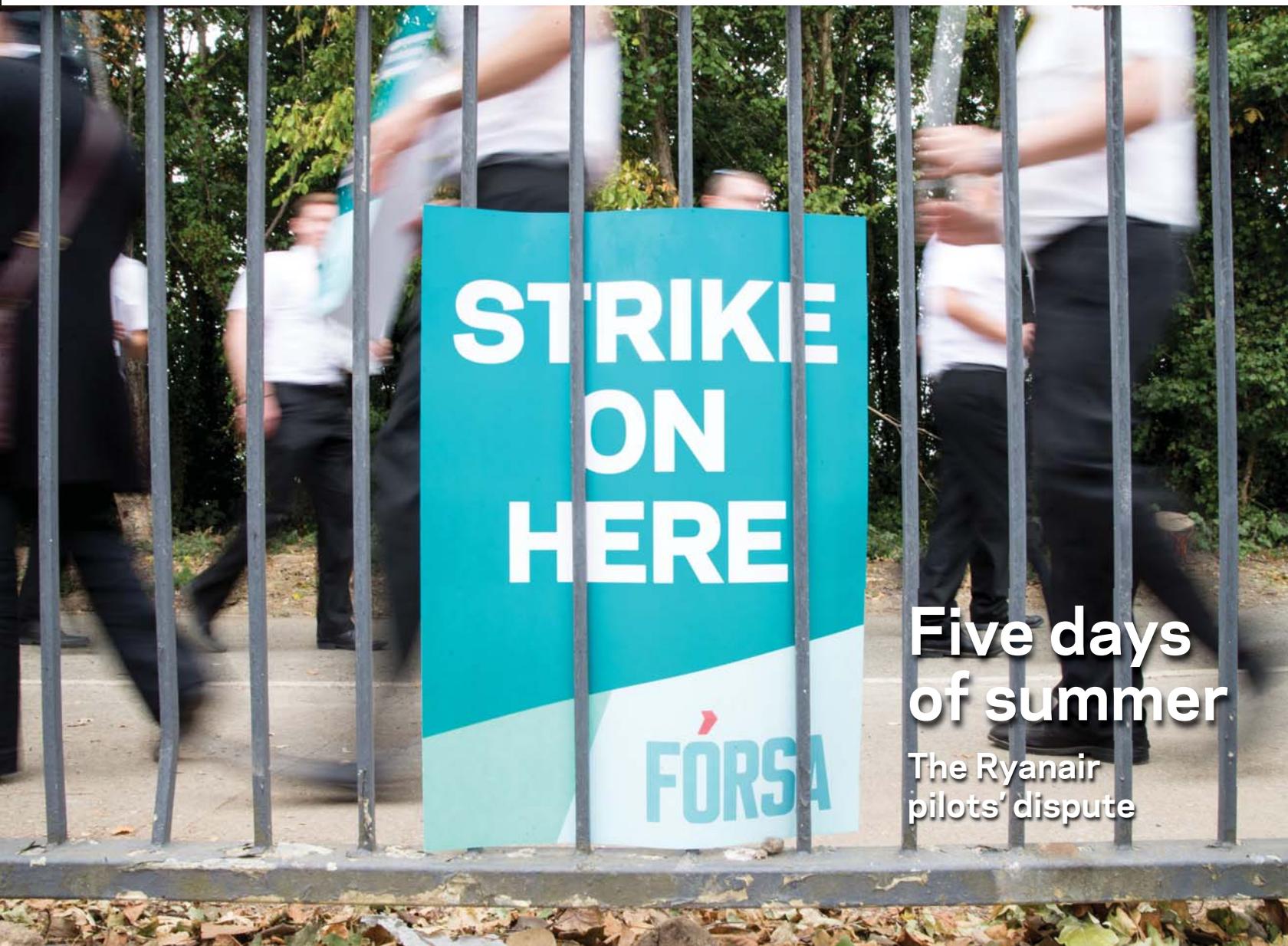
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Fórsa Insights: Love In The Wild  
SNA smartphone app

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and competitions



# FÓRSA



## Five days of summer

The Ryanair  
pilots' dispute

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Autumn-Winter 2018

## Five days of summer The Ryanair pilots' dispute

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Front cover: Fórsa on the picket line, Dublin Airport, 12th July 2018. Photo: Conor Healy [pictureitphotography.ie](http://pictureitphotography.ie)

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# President's foreword

AS WE head into the autumn months, I'd like to take this opportunity to reflect on a busy summer for our organisation.

I've received a very warm welcome from Fórsa's five divisional committees this year. Meeting with them has given me an opportunity to inform myself of the issues our members face in their diverse range of workplaces.

September saw the dispute at Ryanair reach a successful conclusion. I visited pilots on the picket line several times during the five strike days, where there was a great sense of solidarity and public support for their action.

It was good to see that the intensive negotiations that followed, facilitated by Kieran Mulvey, produced an agreement that the pilots were able to back unanimously.

It marked the completion of a lot of hard work by many in our organisation, and I would also like to acknowledge the assistance of our colleagues from ICTU. In addition, I welcome the fact that we've signed an exclusive recognition agreement with Ryanair on behalf of directly employed cabin crew.

Our members in Roscommon County Council also fought hard to win their dispute on flexible work. The solidarity shown by branches and members throughout Fórsa was extraordinary.

However, we remain concerned the scheme is not being implemented to its full potential. This is being monitored closely by the divisional executive and the officials.

September also saw measures introduced to resolve the outstanding issue of new entrants pay. This is very much welcomed and the Public Services Committee of Congress is to be commended on a job well done. It means public servants will no longer be at a long-term disadvantage based on when they were recruited.

I want to thank general secretary Tom Geraghty for his many valued years of service to the union. As a friend to many in Fórsa he will be truly missed, but we sincerely wish him well in his new role as Deputy Chair of the Labour Court.

Finally, I wish to thank the branch activists, officers and union staff across all the offices for the great work they're doing within Fórsa.



**Ann McGee, Fórsa President**

**October 2018**

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Niall Shanahan.

It's been a remarkable few months for this newly formed union. Less than a year since Fórsa's formation and we've seen two very high profile disputes. Both involved facing off with employers who were determined to have it all their own way. More recently, the measures to address new entrants pay marks another significant result on pay restoration.

**Five days, two points, one voice**

THE RESOLVE of members involved in both the Ryanair and Roscommon County Council disputes was tested, and ultimately vindicated.

Our members in Roscommon County Council suspended a planned fifth day of industrial action with less than 24 hours to go, following statements from the National Oversight Body and a recommendation issued by the Workplace Relations Commission.

The Roscommon members had battled on the issue of flexi-leave with their employer for years. In the end, taking their strike action into a fifth day proved decisive in shifting management's approach. Nevertheless, the struggle to establish a normal application of flexible working arrangements continues there.

Similarly, the Ryanair pilots' dispute dominated the daily news cycle throughout July and August, much to the relief/delight of the nation's news editors.

Aside from the attention usually afforded to any aviation dispute, this one had a number of unique factors. It took place in high summer. It involved five 24-hour stoppages. Above all, it took place in an airline where organising workers and engaging in a dispute had, for so long, seemed unthinkable.

In addition, getting the parties around the negotiating table with an independent third party facilitator - which the union had pushed for throughout the dispute - was a first for the airline.

Announcing the result of their ballot on the final agreement in September, the IALPA branch said "pilots in Ryanair have now firmly found a unified voice."

Finding a unified voice turns out to be the story of 2018 for this, the country's newest trade union, with both Ryanair pilots and Roscommon County Council workers showing how five days can be decisive.

In 2013 unions secured an agreement to merge the pre-2010 and post-2010 pay scales. The latter had been unilaterally set 10% lower. It was one of the many measures introduced by the Government during the economic crisis to reduce the public pay bill.

**New entrants**

Merging the pay scales in 2013 was an important first step to removing the disadvantage faced by new entrants. It received little (if any) media attention at the time, or since.

In September, two years earlier than previously envisaged under the current pay deal, unions secured measures to bypass the two additional scale points for new entrants.

The measures will apply on the next increment date that falls on or after 1st March 2019, bringing the work of eliminating two-tier pay to a satisfying conclusion ■



# Unions secure measures to address new entrants' pay

FÓRSA HAS said that newly agreed measures on public service new entrants' pay successfully addresses the task that unions undertook in 2013 to resolve the issue.

Speaking in September after a plenary meeting between ICTU's Public Services Committee (PSC) negotiating group and representatives of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, Fórsa's senior general secretary Shay Cody said the new measures will mean that public servants will no longer be at a long-term disadvantage based on the year in which they were recruited.



Shay Cody.

"Under the terms agreed in the Public Service Stability Agreement (PSSA) last year, we achieved a commitment to resolve the remaining issue, which has now been brought to a conclusion two years earlier than originally anticipated. This completes the task we began by

merging the pay scales in 2013," he said.

## Points

The newly agreed measures identify two points on each pay scale – year four and year eight – which new entrant public servants will now skip.

For example, a public service worker recruited in 2016 (currently on point 3) will move to point 5 of the scale – instead of point 4 – in 2019.

Similarly, a public service worker recruited in 2013 (currently on point 6) will move to point 9 of the scale (skipping points 7 and 8) in 2019, meaning that public servants with more than four years of service are not at any disadvantage.

Mr Cody said that bypassing of points 4 and 8 of the scales ensured an equitable outcome for new entrants in different circumstances. He said: "We are satisfied that the measures we've developed in our discussions with the Government have achieved this outcome."

## Years

"When we negotiated the Haddington Road Agreement in 2013, we successfully merged the pre-2010 and post-2010 pay scales. The remaining issue to be resolved was that post-2010 recruits had two additional points on their pay scales, which means it took them two years longer to reach the top of their scale.

# Congress housing lobby campaign shows appetite for change



Activists at the recent Raise the Roof rally.

THE IRISH Congress of Trade Unions' report on its housing lobbying campaign shows strong support among TDs for radical action to tackle the housing and homelessness crisis.

The lobby campaign focused on TDs in Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and independents in government, and sought their support for the Congress Charter for Housing Rights.

The Charter calls for the declaration of a housing emergency, an end to evictions into homelessness, action of security of

tenure and rent certainty and establishing a legal right to housing.

The campaign showed the strongest support for the measures outlined in the Charter amongst Fianna Fáil TDs, with the overwhelming majority of the parliamentary party stating they were 'very supportive' or 'broadly supportive'.

There was also support among Fine Gael TDs and some independents for some of the measures. The lobby campaign took place between February and June this year.

Congress President Sheila Nunan said the results of the lobby campaign "showed clear support for a significant and radical change in policy on housing, to tackle the emergency.

"We're told the land is there and the resources can be found. It now seems clear that the political appetite for a change of direction is also there," Ms Nunan said.

The report is available to download at [ictu.ie](http://ictu.ie).

# Changes to overnight subsistence

CHANGES TO the Civil Service rate for overnight domestic subsistence allowance have increased, from 1st October 2018, following an agreed review. The day rates remain unchanged.

The revised rate of €147.00 replaces the current rate of €133.73.

Due to the exceptionally high cost of hotel accommodation in Dublin, especially at peak periods, a new vouched rate for Dublin was introduced last year. Previously the rate had been capped at €167 – consisting of the overnight rate plus the '10-hour' subsistence rate – for which a hotel receipt must be provided.

This has now increased to €147.00 plus the 10-hour day rate of €33.61.

Under the terms of the Haddington Road Agreement (2013), the Government signalled its intention to conduct a review of how travel and subsistence rates are calculated. The agreement committed unions and management to cooperating with the review, and with the implementation of a standardised system of travel and subsistence across the public service.

# Sylvia Meehan remembered

IT WAS with great sadness that we learned of the passing of Sylvia Meehan, a true champion of equality, and mother of our Fórsa colleague John Meehan, who works in the Municipal employees division of Fórsa.

Sylvia studied legal and political science at UCD, where she was the first woman to win the UCD Literary and Historical Association gold medal in 1951. She began her career in teaching, becoming heavily involved with the ASTI during her teaching years and the Women's Committee of ICTU.

She served as the first chair and chief executive of the Employment Equality Authority, from its establishment in 1977 until 1992.

On her lifelong activism and pursuit of equality she said, "As I was growing up, it was quite normal to pay women less for doing the same work as a man. I suppose I always knew about it. It was when I became a widow with five young children, as a newly qualified teacher, that it hit home. In a nearby school, a man who was separated from his wife was paid more than me. He received a married man's allowance. There was no married woman's allowance.



Sylvia Meehan.

"All over Ireland there was a male and female rate for the job. The 'stronger sex', so-called, received a bulkier wage packet. I resolved to do something about that with other women in the post-1960s women's movement."

In retirement Sylvia fought injustice and was a founder member and President of the Senior Citizen's Parliament, a board member of Age and Opportunity, where she championed and fought for the rights of senior citizens.

# Pay restoration agreement for Section 39 agency workers



FÓRSA AND other unions representing staff working in HSE funded agencies (Section 39) secured an agreement on pay restoration for workers in the agencies at the beginning of October.

The measures were approved by Fórsa's Health & Welfare divisional executive.

Under the proposals Section 39 workers will receive an additional payment of €1000 from April 2019. The remaining pay restoration measures will be applied in 2020 and 2021.

Fórsa officials Catherine Keogh and Ian McDonnell said the proposals marked a successful conclusion to a very challenging process to achieve pay restoration for Fórsa members working in Section 39 agencies.

Catherine Keogh said the unions had achieved a significant result by working together, and thanked staff at the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) for their efforts in finalising proposals.

The other unions representing staff were Siptu, Unite and the INMO, working together as part of a group led by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU).

# School Secretaries mobilise for pay equity campaign



Kathleen O'Doherty.

campaign messaging and materials, and raise awareness in the political system of the plight of school secretaries," he said.

## Pay varies

Caretakers and secretaries pay rates vary, as they are determined by the individual board of management of each school, and paid from the ancillary grants paid to the schools by the Department of Education and Skills.

Almost all are paid below the scale paid to equivalent public service workers, including a minority of secretaries and caretakers who are paid directly by the department.

In a recent in-depth feature on the treatment of school secretaries,

respected journalist Mick Clifford wrote in the Irish Examiner that school secretaries "have precious little power in a system in which power talks and those without it must do without."

He spoke to Kathleen O'Doherty for the article, describing how she had, in 2001, written to the then minister for education pointing out the apparent disregard for her role. "She has written to every minister since, and each one has quietly ignored the problem."

Kathleen said: "We're not fighting against the boards of management, we know their hands are tied. But there is no security whatsoever. In fairness to principals and boards, a secretary's wages may be the last thing taken into consideration simply because things are so tight."

FÓRSA'S SCHOOL Secretaries branch is preparing a national campaign to improve secretaries' pay next year.

Under the terms of a 2015 arbitration finding, the payment of four separate pay rises of 2.5 per cent for school secretaries and caretakers will be completed by 2019.

The branch plans to launch the campaign once these pay improvements have been completed.

Fórsa official Barry Cunningham explained that the planning for the campaign has gained momentum this year, following the union's Education conference event in April.

"The branch has grown by 15% over the last year. We've established a working group chaired by Maria Dunne and Kathleen O'Doherty from our Education executive" he said.

Fórsa lead organiser Joe O'Connor added, "The campaign will launch in 2019 when negotiations are due to commence under the current adjudication agreement.

"We intend to use the intervening months to do the required planning and groundwork for the campaign, develop

## National Museums Science & Arts Attendants win agreement on pay and overtime



National Museums Science & Arts Attendants branch celebrate reaching agreement in the long running pay and overtime integration negotiations. The deal was concluded recently following a breakthrough side agreement to bring the negotiations to a close at the PSSA talks last year. The Branch laid its first claim for the consolidation of overtime and weekend working into basic pay nearly 12 years ago. In the picture Liam Walsh (branch secretary), official Paul MacSweeney, Willie Doyle (branch chair) and Eoin Ronayne, Fórsa general secretary.

# Public Service Pay Commission

Fórsa is to study the first Public Service Pay Commission (PSPC) which was published in September.

The latest report looks into nursing, medical consultants, and non-consultant hospital doctors (NCHDs). Future reports will study recruitment

## Fórsa wants higher employer pension contribution

FÓRSA HAS welcomed the publication of detailed proposals for new 'auto-enrolment' pension arrangements, which would introduce compulsory contributions from workers and their employers. But the union says employers and the state should contribute more than workers to the scheme.

The Government proposals, which were launched in August, envisage that the scheme would be rolled out from 2022.

Under the current Government plans, workers would have to initially contribute 1% of their salary towards their pension pot, increasing to 6% by 2027, with employers having to match the workers contribution. The state would then pay €1 for every €3 the worker contributes.

Fórsa official Billy Hannigan welcomed the move, but said it fell short in terms of employer contributions.

"It will provide mandatory pension entitlements for all workers wherever they are employed, and will significantly enhance occupational pension coverage. But Fórsa believes the employer's contribution must be at least twice that of the worker."

Fórsa backed Government proposals for the introduction of 'auto-enrolment' pension schemes for all workers, funded by contributions from employees, employers and the State, at its national conference in May.

and retention issues for other public service grades identified by the PSPC in its initial (2017) report.

The reports are being produced to fulfil a commitment in the public service pay deal - the Public Service Stability Agreement (PSSA) - which commits the pay commission to analyse the causes of recruitment and retention difficulties in specific areas of the public sector. The agreement also requires the Commission to recommend options to deal with these problems.

The Government approved the terms of reference for this examination in October 2017, after which the PSPC

invited submissions from unions representing grades identified in its original report.

Fórsa made written submissions on behalf of named grades in the health sector and the civil service, which will be the subject of future pay commission reports.

The union put forward evidence to show that the civil service is struggling to recruit staff in many areas because salaries are not keeping pace with those available in comparable private sector jobs. It made similar arguments in respect of various health and social care professions.

## Betty Tyrrell Collard elected president of Dublin Trades Council



FORMER CPSU president Betty Tyrrell Collard was elected president of the Dublin Trades Council in August, taking over from retired Fórsa official Pat Bolger.

Betty is the branch secretary of Dublin Central Clerical branch, and a member of Fórsa's Civil Service divisional executive.

Betty said she was honoured and privileged to take on the role: "Using the expertise, experiences and knowledge of the current Council executive we

need to introduce the Council to new audiences and groups of workers who live and work in the city in often precarious conditions.

"We need to re-engage the working population in dynamic campaigns on issues that represent an urgent priority in their lives. I look forward to working with current and new Council affiliates and with Congress to ensure that our labour strength grows and that we can re-emerge as a significant influence in the city of Dublin," she said.

# A summer of change for Ryanair cabin crew



The summit introduced Ryanair cabin crew worker representatives to assembled media to answer questions about working conditions at the airline.

Cabin crew workers from all over Europe convened at Fórsa's head office in Dublin in July for the first ever Ryanair Crew summit.

THE EVENT, organised by the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) saw the launch of the Ryanair Crew Charter, outlining demands on economic conditions, safety and rostering, a fair and supportive work culture, agency employment, the right to sick pay and sales targets.



The cabin crew summit was opened by Fórsa senior general secretary Shay Cody.

A key demand is that employment contracts explicitly recognise national law and jurisdiction in the country a worker is based.

The summit also introduced a number of Ryanair cabin crew worker representatives to assembled media to answer questions about working conditions at the airline, the first engagement of its kind.

## Recognition

At the end of August Fórsa signed an agreement with Ryanair making the union the sole negotiating union for directly employed Ryanair cabin crew in Ireland.

The agreement was signed by Fórsa officials, cabin crew representatives and Ryanair management.

Fórsa official, Ashley Connolly said the agreement marked a new, and very significant, milestone in the development of collective bargaining at the airline.

Ashley said: "This is a very positive development and we're proud to be in a position now to represent Ryanair cabin crew. Together we look forward to

growing our membership and securing improvements in terms and conditions as the negotiating union for Ryanair cabin crew."

Ashley is now seeking engagement with cabin crew agencies contracted to the airline.



ITF official Eoin Coates. Eoin is a former member of Fórsa's cabin crew branch.

In an interview with Newstalk FM Ashley said: "It's important that, for the first time in Ryanair, cabin crew members have a voice. They will be to the forefront of any discussions I have and they will be present at every meeting that I carry out with the company." ■



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# Raise the roof not the rent



ON WEDNESDAY, October 3rd Dublin saw roughly 10,000 people take to the streets, calling for an end to the housing crisis. The Raise the Roof rally took place outside Leinster house and was organised by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU), joining forces with the National Housing and Homeless Coalition and a number of community groups, trade unions, students, women's organisations, housing agencies and political parties.

The rally coincided with a cross-party motion in the Dáil calling on the Government to enact legislation to lower rents, make it illegal to evict private sector tenants into homelessness and insert a right to housing into the constitution.

The motion also called for a doubling of the capital expenditure on public housing in Budget 2019 and subsequently passed by a wide margin.

Fórsa was well represented with staff and activists out in full support. Sheila Nunan, president of ICTU was the MC and speakers included Orla O'Connor, director, National Women's Council of Ireland, Síona Cahill, president, Union of Students in Ireland and Fr. Peter McVerry.

Singers Frances Black and Damien Dempsey also provided entertainment for the vast crowd of supporters.

There are currently approximately ten thousand people who are homeless in

Ireland with children making up more than a third of the numbers in emergency accommodation. This figure does not include 'hidden homelessness', which refers to people living in squats or 'sofa surfing', women and children staying in domestic violence refuges and people who sleep rough.

Fórsa lead organiser, Joe O'Connor expressed his gratitude in particular to the union's branch campaign officers after the rally:

"They played an integral role in the success of the day both by stewarding the stage and mobilising Fórsa activists to come out in large numbers." ■



Tom Geraghty, Fórsa general secretary and Shay Cody, Fórsa senior general secretary.



Gina McDonald, Keivan Jackson and Ruth Crowley.



Patricia King, ICTU general secretary.



Fórsa organisers Julie Healy and Bernie Aston.



Éamonn de Barra and Damien Dempsey performing at the rally.



Bernard Joyce, Irish Traveller Movement.



Aisling Hederman, Take Back the City.



Mary Keating, secretary of Fórsa's retired members group and organiser Roisin Nolan.



Bernard Harbor.

British trade unions have been more relaxed about Brexit than their Irish equivalents. That's now changed, says BERNARD HARBOR.

# Do UK unions hold key to Brexit?

AT FIRST I couldn't put my finger on it. But, as I waited in Gatwick airport for my Dublin flight in September, I felt there'd been something weird about this trip to England.

I get over there four or five times a year to visit my daughter, sisters, in-laws, nieces and nephews. Young and old. London and the country. Male and female. Politically engaged and not.

In the run-up to this summer excursion I'd been reading increasingly alarming 'hard Brexit' stories in the British press. Government warnings of supplies of life-saving drugs drying up. Free-flowing motorways turning in to 20 mile long lorry parks. Advice about storing tinned food. Businesses warning of huge job losses and spurned investment.

How strange, then, that the Brexit issue never once came up in conversation during a four-day visit.

So weird, considering that most of my family – particularly the younger ones – had been disconsolate when the referendum result landed just over two years ago. And chilling for those of us who still hold out some hope that the nation and its leaders will see sense and rethink the self-harming decision to leave the EU and, particularly, the insane notion of a hard Brexit.

## People's Vote

Just a few weeks ago, that Brexit rethink looked about as likely as Southampton football club challenging for a Champions League place this season.

But there have been some encouraging straws in the gale recently, not least with the emergence of a strengthening People's Vote campaign, which is pressing for a referendum on whatever comes out of Teresa May's chaotic Brussels negotiations.

And events over the last couple of months could put the British trade unions – so far much more relaxed about Brexit than their Irish equivalents – at the centre of events.

At its September conference in Liverpool the TUC – the UK equivalent of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions – voted to keep open the option of supporting another referendum in two circumstances. The Government might avoid the first – a hard Brexit scenario. It is unlikely to even try to avoid the second – guaranteed protection of workers and preserving "tariff-free and frictionless trade with the EU."

Speaking ahead of the conference, TUC general secretary Frances O'Grady said unions would back the People's Vote campaign if the final Brexit deal fell short on job protections and workers' rights. "The TUC will be throwing our full weight behind the campaign for a



popular vote so that people get a say on whether that deal is good enough," she said.

This when only a quarter of Daily Mail readers – Brexit's bedrock supporters – think Britain is likely to get a good deal from Brussels.

## Polls

Around the same time, opinion research found that members of the country's three biggest trade unions now support a fresh referendum by a margin of more than two-to-one.

The poll of over 2,700 members of Unite, Unison and the GMB also revealed that a clear majority think Brexit will damage job opportunities.

Its finding that trade unionists overwhelmingly want to prioritise trade over immigration controls will disappoint those who frequently paint working people as anti-immigration.

Each of the three unions whose members were surveyed has shifted its position over the summer. The 620,000-strong GMB has called for a public vote on the final deal, while Unison, with 1.3 million members, now says it will support a referendum under certain circumstances.

At its national conference in Brighton, last July, Unite – which is the UK Labour Party's largest single financial backer – said it was unlikely that the Government would deliver a satisfactory deal. The union would then mobilise to force a general election. "We are also open to

the possibility of a popular vote being held on any deal," it said in a statement.

Some unions, like the RMT, remain resolutely against another referendum. But in a country with much stronger links between unions and Labour than here, the change in attitude among the party's biggest union backers is piling pressure on the main opposition party, which, in turn, is showing signs of a subtle rethink.

## Labour

In the wake of the 2016 referendum, the Labour leadership has been solidly pro-leave, albeit with conditions that the divided, fractious and DUP-supported minority Tory government will find hard to meet.

The reasons for this range from unfounded worries about an electoral backlash from Labour-voting leave

supporters, to paranoid fears that the People's Vote movement is a Corbyn-undermining conspiracy – as well as latent anti-EU sentiment on the far left.

Earlier this year shadow foreign secretary Emily Thornberry was arguing that Labour would likely vote in favour of a Tory-negotiated deal. Times have changed and it's now widely assumed that the party will oppose any deal that PM Theresa May brings to the House of Commons, and then push for a general election.

In a significant, if subtle, shift, Labour's powerful shadow chancellor John McDonnell conceded in September that the party would keep all options open – including support for a referendum – if it failed to force an election in the chaos that would surely ensue.

## A Social Europe

All in all this could mean a significant change in the UK Brexit arithmetic, as well as a chance for British trade unions – which have lost much of their influence over the last three decades – to play a central role in the country's most important political drama since the Suez crisis.

Next year will be the thirtieth anniversary of the then-European Commission president's famous speech to the TUC congress. In 1989, Jacques Delors outlined – and won support for – a vision of a 'social Europe,' that would champion jobs, living standards and workers' rights.

It was a pivotal event for Britain's labour movement and its relationship with Europe. Let's hope the shift in union thinking over this summer means something similar.

**Bernard Harbor is Fórsa's head of communications**

While industrial relations problems in the Irish aviation industry tend to attract a lot of media attention, work stoppages are relatively rare. For a long time, the prospect of organising workers in Ryanair seemed remote. All that changed in 2018, as Fórsa's IALPA branch members at the airline took decisive action in a dispute over seniority.

## Five days of summer



### 3rd July 2018

Directly-employed pilots in Ryanair, who are members of the Irish Airline Pilots' Association (IALPA), a branch of Fórsa, serve notice of industrial action on the airline.

Pilots had voted overwhelmingly in favour of industrial action (99%) in a dispute over management's approach to transferring pilots and accessing leave and promotions.

The pilots announce 24-hour strike action commencing at 01:00 on Thursday, 12th July.

### 5th July

Pilots say they've seen no evidence that the company will engage in meaningful negotiations with a view to reaching agreement on the issues they've raised with the company. The union remains willing to meet the company, emphasising the need to meet at a neutral venue, rather than the company's head office.

### Day 1: Thursday 12th July



The first day of action sees pilots picketing outside Dublin Airport, attracting strong public support.

Despite talks with the airline the previous day, establishing some common ground on the proposal of a joint working group, terms of reference can't be agreed. The union describes as "regrettable" that Ryanair management has so far rejected the suggestion of third party assistance.

The union serves notice for two further one-day pilot strikes in July.

### Day 2 & 3: Friday 20th July & Tuesday 24th July



The location of the picket on the second day of industrial action is outside Ryanair's head office in Swords, Co. Dublin.

*"After decades of declining terms and conditions, pilots in Ryanair have now firmly found a unified voice."*

### Wednesday 25th July

Pilots announce a fourth day on Friday 3rd August. The union says further strike action will follow unless the company changes tack and negotiates in good faith.

Ryanair issues protective notice to 300 of its staff. Fórsa describes the move as a provocative act likely to harden pilots' resolve, and escalates the dispute while demonstrating management's unwillingness or inability to negotiate with unions in good faith.

### Day 4: Friday 3rd August



As the picket draws to a close outside Ryanair's head office, the company announces it will accept independent third-party assistance from Kieran Mulvey.

Fórsa, which has been calling for third-party assistance throughout the dispute, welcomes the "unexpected and positive" development.

### Day 5: Friday 10th August



Fórsa issues a statement to say the company's belated recognition of the need for an independent third-party facilitator meant a fifth strike by the pilots went ahead.

The union says its focus will shift to the negotiations due to get underway the following week.

### Thursday 23rd August

Following a 22-hour negotiation, where the union side was assisted by the general secretary and industrial officer of the ICTU, an agreement is reached between Fórsa and Ryanair in the pilots' dispute. The proposed agreement goes to ballot, and on 5th September IALPA issues a statement announcing unanimous backing for the deal, describing it as "A first step towards providing transparency and fairness for Ryanair pilots while also assisting Ryanair in recruiting and retaining pilots in the future."

Acknowledging that relations have been difficult in the past between IALPA and Ryanair, IALPA says its "committed to building a constructive relationship with Ryanair based on mutual respect and a shared future."

"While our members fully respect Ryanair's operational model, they no longer accept the company's highly problematic employment model. After decades of declining terms and conditions, pilots in Ryanair have now firmly found a unified voice." ■



Niall Shanahan.

Fórsa's Limerick to Killarney charity cycle took place on the opening day of the union's national conference in May, and raised €24,000 in aid of four suicide prevention groups. One of these is Limerick Suicide Watch. Formed in May 2016, and well on their way to recruiting their 80th member, NIALL SHANAHAN went to meet some of the people involved, to learn how their work has seen a significant reduction in the number of suicides taking place in the city's River Shannon.

## Keeping watch



As I exit the motorway to enter Limerick City, I'm greeted by the white metallic arc over Thomond Park. I'm reminded that this is a city with a strong sense of pride, community and friendship,

Turning into the lane behind Costello's Tavern on Dominic Street, the door is open at Limerick Suicide Watch. The project's chair, Colm O'Byrne is sitting in the middle of the large and neatly ordered space.

He's surrounded by neatly placed high-viz jackets, personal flotation devices, two-way radios, branded bicycles, first aid kits and a wall of volunteer photos.

He's deep in conversation on the phone, laptop open, talking about arrangements for the imminent launch of the Limerick Suicide Watch smartphone app.

Since its 2016 formation, the group's main focus is to keep eyes on the river, and identify and provide support to those in distress and who may be contemplating suicide.

### Patrols

Colm welcomes me with a mug of fresh tea. "Our patrol teams are on duty Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and

Saturday night, but we envisage being on patrol seven nights a week in the near future," he says.

The group is currently training more volunteers (due to the high level of interest, applications are currently closed) which will see its current compliment of 67 increase to around 80 by the end of the year.



Supporters getting ready for their tattoos at the Thumbs Up For Benny event.

In an adjacent office, PRO Lucy O'Hara and vice-chair Stacey Markham are also attending to the details of the Friday night launch at St Mary's Cathedral.

It's a big night for everyone involved. The app's launch brings months of

research and development to a satisfying conclusion. Lucy walks me through the various features of the app. "It's a one-stop-shop for information on available support services.

"All of the in-app links are active, which means you can call or email the services by clicking them on the app. It also has information about our work, the people involved, and we can use it internally to organise the patrol rosters," she explains.

### Fundraising and training

Thumbs Up For Benny is a fundraising event with local tattoo artists providing a special tattoo in return for a donation to Limerick Suicide Watch. It's just one of a series of the group's fundraising events to which the people of Limerick have responded enthusiastically.

"We depend on donations from the public and fundraising events to fund our work. We're very lucky because the people of Limerick have been incredibly supportive since the beginning," Stacey explains.

Colm says the annual cost of the project is around €40,000. "Training is the biggest cost, it's quite specialised and is mandatory for all volunteers," he says.



Photo: Fórsa Communications Unit

(L to R) Stacey Markham, Lucy O'Hara and Colm O'Byrne.

That training includes radio operation, child protection, manual handling, first aid (including CPR and defibrillator), 'throw bag' training (for river rescue) and Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST).

All three describe a time when people in the city became accustomed to the overhead sounds of the Valentia Coastguard rescue helicopter.

"It was a commonplace thing. You'd be sitting at home and you'd hear the coastguard helicopter overhead and you'd think, oh my God, somebody's gone into the river," Stacey explains.



The semi-colon tattoo was designed for the Thumbs Up For Benny event.

Lucy adds, "Everybody in the city knows about people going to the river," and so the river became the focus of the group's patrols.

### It's good to talk

The group enjoys strong volunteer retention. What do they put that down to?

"Well, you know, we spend four hours out on patrol and we talk about everything," says Lucy. All three are laughing now. "We've formed strong bonds with each other and, you know, we do have the craic," Stacey adds.

Colm says one of the group's strengths is that it attracts people of all ages and social backgrounds, people who might not otherwise engage with each other.

The people with whom they've intervened are as young as 13, as old as 70, male and female and from all walks of life. "Suicide is not a problem confined to young men," says Lucy.



Photo: Fórsa Communications Unit

Jackets, radios and safety equipment are neatly arranged for the next night time patrol.

Volunteers do a minimum of three nights per month, at least one Saturday (midnight to 4am). They're required to be physically fit, as there's a lot of walking involved while on patrol. There is a three month probation period and Garda vetting is also required.

Colm says the focus now is on a five-year plan in which they hope to secure a permanent base, and develop the service to include suicide awareness in addition to the prevention work, and offer more services to the people they encounter on patrol.

To find out more and support the work of Limerick Suicide Watch, visit [limericksuicidewatch.ie](http://limericksuicidewatch.ie) or [facebook.com/limericksuicidewatch](https://facebook.com/limericksuicidewatch)

## Supporting positive mental health

Limerick Suicide Watch is one of four mental health charities supported by funds raised by Fórsa's conference charity cycle this year.

### Suicide or Survive (SOS)

Dublin-based charity which acts to support and assist people and their families who are suffering with mental health difficulties. Established in 2003, Caroline McGuigan set up the organisation on foot of her own mental health difficulties. One of its main aims is to support individuals with difficulties in a way that they can harness their own strength, and provide people with the tools to improve their own mental health.

[facebook.com/SuicideorSurvive](https://facebook.com/SuicideorSurvive)

### First Fortnight

Dublin-based charity that aims to challenge mental health prejudice and stigma through arts and culture. It began as a volunteer-led initiative in 2010, establishing the first mental health arts and culture festival in 2012. It also provides creative therapies to marginalised communities affected by mental ill-health.

[firstfortnight.ie](http://firstfortnight.ie)

### Jigsaw Kerry

A free, confidential support service for young people aged 12-25 living, working or studying in Kerry. The organisation operates as part of the national network of Jigsaw services and aims to provide tailored community based help for young people's mental health needs. In addition to operating a drop in space which provides support on a "call in" basis, the charity also provides support and information to people who may be concerned about a young person in their life.

[jigsaw.ie/jigsaw\\_kerry](http://jigsaw.ie/jigsaw_kerry)



Roisin McKane.

With the amalgamation of CPSU, IMPACT and PSEU came an opportunity to enhance membership benefits. There are a broad spectrum of benefits available to members, varying in nature. Some are financial, others by means of support. With some schemes members are automatically enrolled in when they join the union, and there are others that operate on an "opt in" basis. It is important to note however, that members can make considerable savings through these benefits.

# Adding value for your union sub

SO WHAT exactly does your membership subscription get you?

### Financial benefits

After 6 months in membership all members are entitled to the following:

- €5,000 in personal accident cover
- €5,000 critical illness cover or death benefit. Spouses are also covered under this scheme
- From 2 January 2019 a €5,000 illness benefit will be available to members if you are out of work for more than 12 months
- For members who are seriously ill, injured, or pass away while abroad, Fórsa will cover evacuation or repatriation expenses up to the value of €250,000

Fórsa has also negotiated a number of group schemes for its members through various providers including Cornmarket, Glennons Insurance, JLT, KennCo and Lyons Financial Services, to name but a few. These providers will give members advice on various financial products such as car and home insurance, pension benefits, salary protection and life cover.

### Support services

Fórsa members can also avail of free counselling, legal advice and support

24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year, through the following helplines

- Free legal help in bodily injury cases 1850-77-66-44
- Free 24/7 legal advice helpline 1850-77-66-44
- Free 24/7 confidential counselling helpline 1850-77-66-55
- Free 24/7 domestic assistance helpline 1850-77-66-44



Bernie Aston.

In addition to this, provisions have been made for a benevolent grant for members who are in financial distress. Gaeltacht scholarships are available for members who have school age children. Members can also avail of industrial relations scholarships.

### Group Scheme

Another hidden gem is the group scheme. This operates on an "opt in" basis where there are huge savings to be made on everyday items. Members can access discounts from small businesses located near their place of work, including restaurants, retailers, hairdressers and coffee shops

The group scheme also operates a cashback system. The concept is simple; every time you shop online with one of the cashback partners they will reimburse a portion of what you spend. The money accumulates in your group scheme cashback account, which you can transfer to your bank account at any time.

Fórsa organiser Bernie Aston explains just how important these schemes are for members. "All of the membership schemes are hugely beneficial. Fórsa has negotiated with a number of financial providers to give members the best options available. Generally, with the likes of the financial products, members will see discounts on what they are currently paying."

Bernie also highlighted the benefits of the group scheme. "This is a real money saver" said Bernie. "Members can more than negate the cost of their union subscriptions through the savings and offers available."

For more information on the full range of benefits see [www.forsa.ie](http://www.forsa.ie)

# You're better off in Fórsa

Fórsa members can save lot of money with our enhanced package of financial benefits provided or negotiated by the union. Some of these are free to all Fórsa members. Others are optional benefits, available only to Fórsa members, which can mean savings on insurance, salary protection, additional pension coverage and more.

### Fórsa members are entitled to\*

- €5,000 illness benefit when out of work for more than 12 months
- €5,000 personal accident insurance
- €5,000 critical illness or death benefit
- €5,000 death of a spouse or qualifying partner
- Evacuation or repatriation expenses of up to €250,000 for members who die or are seriously ill abroad, including emergency medical expenses incurred for members temporarily abroad as a result of death/illness
- Free legal help in bodily injury cases
- Free 24/7 legal advice helpline
- Free 24/7 confidential counselling helpline
- Free 24/7 domestic assistance helpline.

### Members can opt in to Fórsa-facilitated financial benefits

- Car insurance
- Home insurance
- Travel insurance
- Additional pension benefits
- Salary protection and life cover.

### Fórsa members can also apply for

- Gaeltacht scholarships for their school-age children
- Industrial relations scholarships
- Benevolent grants for members in financial distress.

\*Six months continuous membership is required to avail of services. Financial benefits are strictly subject to policy, terms, conditions and exclusions. See [www.forsa.ie](http://www.forsa.ie) for details.



Why we need a

# YOUTHQUAKE

in the trade unions

HOUSING  
PRECARIOUS WORK  
PAY INEQUALITY



**FORSA**  
Youth

**"The great appear great because we are on our knees. Let us rise!"**

- Jim Larkin

## Youthquake



Osal Kelly.

Pay inequality, precarious working conditions and the housing crisis were all up for discussion at the most recent "Youthquake" event hosted by Fórsa's youth network. Following on from this, chairperson of the group Osal Kelly delves into the issues of a two tier pay system and what it means for younger workers.

# Pay inequality in a two tier system

ACCORDING TO Social Justice Ireland, there are over 100,000 workers in Ireland today who live in poverty. There is no doubt that young workers are over-represented in the growing ranks of the working poor, with a recent ICTU survey showing half of young workers having to forego essentials such as heating or food in order to pay rent.

Young public-sector workers have had the additional struggle of a discriminatory, two-tier payscale, which meant being placed on a longer payscale with a lower starting point simply because of when they were born and when they joined the public service, despite doing the same work. For a clerical officer on the post-2011 payscale, this means having to work for four years before reaching a point on the scale equivalent to the Living Wage of €11.90 per hour. Though recent measures to shorten the pay scale are welcome.

Not only is it almost impossible to make ends meet, but many cannot even afford to join a union to be represented. I remember talking to one young clerical officer colleague who spoke about how she hoped to join the union when her wages were higher, as if joining the union was some kind of perk only open to those who earn enough. Financial means should never be an obstacle to union membership and representation, and if it is, the people who need representation the most are being failed.

Resolving this issue should be the immediate focus of public-sector unions, but it will only be the first step in tackling the issue of low pay generally, which demands that we look at the



Sinéad Pembroke, Researcher at TASC discussing how precarious working conditions can be damaging to workers health at the recent Youthquake event. (L-R): Éilis Barry, Free Legal Advice Centre; Sinéad Pembroke, TASC; Séamus Farrell, SIPTU & Take Back the City Dublin; Mick Byrne, Dublin Tenants' Association; Michael Taft SIPTU.

structural factors that enable employers to keep their workers on low pay.

One such factor is that the bargaining power of workers is weakened if there is no safety net for those who lose their jobs. This is a huge problem for workers aged 18 to 25, as the social safety net for this age group is nonexistent. Unemployed workers aged 18 to 24 who live independently (as they may have to do if, for example, they grew up in state care) are only entitled to €107.70 per week in Jobseeker's Allowance, even though the standard rate is €198. (25 year olds can get €152.80.) Creating a proper social safety net for all jobseekers, regardless of age, will make workers less afraid to

unionise and demand fair pay from their employers.

Our opponents know that this type of arbitrary discrimination - whether in terms of payscales or welfare rates - is indefensible and so rather than trying to defend it, they instead disparage the "millennial" generation through stereotyping and ridicule. It is important that millennials do not take this to heart, but instead recognise this approach for what it is: a means to deflect from the fact that our generation of workers is being impoverished to fulfil the objectives of private profit. We must organise and resist this. If we allow poverty pay to be normalised for our generation, it will eventually become the norm for all ■

# Love In The Wild



Photo: courtesy of Beaten Track Productions.

THE FÓRSA Insights series hosted a special performance of Love In The Wild in September. The play was written by Lisa Walsh and performed by award-winning actor Anto Seery.

Lisa is a member of Fórsa and a social worker with Tusla. The ground-breaking play, about the experiences of a recovering drug addict, made its premiere at the Axis theatre in Ballymun earlier this year.

A podcast featuring the post-show discussion is now available on the Fórsa website (forsa.ie).

Fórsa Insights is a specially curated series of talks and cultural events which aims to explore a wide range of issues. Events are free of charge and open to Fórsa members, ICTU affiliates and NGOs ■

## Audience reaction

*"Great night, couldn't stop talking about it in work the next day"* - Flora Dunne, HSE Dublin South branch.

*"A brilliant performance. Thanks for organising it"* - Sean Lowde, Probation Officers branch.

*"I really enjoyed it, the actor was good, particularly when interacting with the homeless, given his experience he was able to relate to them and understand their situation, his determination to improve on himself was real"* - Binta Obola, Dublin North Health and Welfare branch.

*"It was a fantastic play!"* - David M Glynn, Dublin Care Services branch.

*"Really appreciated the development of Fórsa Insight series, interesting new way of engaging with the union. The play was so good... poignant, funny, sad and well scripted, acted and directed. Well done and thanks"* - Patrick O'Dea, Probation Officers branch.

*"Great play. Anto Seery was superb - really believable, likeable and talented. The writer did a great job bringing me into a world I know nothing about. This play made you laugh and want to cry in equal measure. Extremely entertaining. Well done Fórsa for putting on this play, thanks"* - Mary McGuire, Fingal Local Government branch.

# FÓRSA

Dental, optical and hospital benefits

(Available to Fórsa members from the 'former CPSU' constituency only)

## Benefits Claim Form

Members of Fórsa who are in grades formerly represented by the CPSU (ie, civil service clerical officer grades) pay a higher union subscription than other Fórsa members and, therefore, retain access to a 'benefits fund' that provides certain dental, optical and hospital benefits formerly available to CPSU members. If they leave the grades of the former CPSU constituency, they are no longer eligible for these benefits, and their rate of union subscription is reduced accordingly. This application form should only be completed by Fórsa members currently working in former CPSU grades.

Fórsa Trade Union  
Adelaide House, 19/20 Adelaide Road,  
Dublin, D02 WA00.  
Tel: 01-676-5394, 661-5389, 661-5448 Fax: 01-676-2918

forsa\_union\_ie

forsaunionie

Fórsa Trade Union

Fórsa trade union

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forsa.ie



**PART ONE PLEASE FILL OUT THIS SECTION FULLY**

First Name  Surname   
please print first name and surname in full

Former Name (if any)  Date of Birth  Day Month Year

Home Address

Post Code  Staff No.  Union No.

Mobile  Gender M  F  Year Joined Union

Personal Email

---

Bank/CU Name

Bank/CU Account Name

Bank/CU Account No.  Bank/CU Sort Code

IBAN and BIC numbers can be obtained on your bank statement

IBAN  BIC

---

Current Department

Location/Address

Office Tel. No.  Branch

Claimant Signature  Section

**PART TWO TICK WHICH TYPE OF BENEFIT YOU WISH TO CLAIM**

Dental  Optical  Hospital  Other (please specify)

**PLEASE ENCLOSE:**  
 1. Original receipt showing last day of treatment      2. Copy of current pay slip

**PART THREE TO BE COMPLETED AND STAMPED BY DENTIST/OPTICIAN**

Date of examination/treatment  Day Month Year

Date payment received  Day Month Year

Signed  Date  Day Month Year

Cost of treatment (in words)

**PART FOUR FOR OFFICE USE ONLY**

Amount paid  Inputted  Processed

Please fill out this form as carefully as possible to ensure a speedy and accurate response to your benefit claim. Incorrect or insufficient information will delay the processing of your benefit cheque.  
 Your payroll number is printed on your paycheque and it is important to include this on our application form. Please submit claims between 1st January-31st December of current year.

**Fórsa benefits – Civil Service Clerical Officers**



ROISIN MCKANE

Members of Fórsa, who are in grades formerly represented by the CPSU (civil service clerical officer grades), pay a higher union subscription than other Fórsa members and, therefore, retain access to a benefits fund that provides certain dental, optical and hospital benefits formerly available to CPSU members. These benefits – and the higher rate of union subscription – only applies if you work in one of the grades formerly represented by the CPSU. They no longer apply if you transfer to a grade outside of this constituency. ROISIN MCKANE finds out more.

# Dental, optical and hospital fund

“THE FUND is in existence for more than 20 years, well before my time,” explains Fórsa general secretary Eoin Ronayne. “It stems from an old CPSU rule which sees members in the CO grade pay 1% of their salary to the union in subscriptions.

“Of this 1%, 20c in each euro is ring-fenced, and goes directly into a benefits fund which provides for certain optical, dental and hospital benefits,” he says.

The fund also provides for a special assistance benefit which will consider claims for financial assistance to help cover the costs associated with alternative medicine, prosthesis and serious illness such as cancer. This aspect of the benefit operates on a discretionary case-by-case basis.

*“The fund was carried through the amalgamation into Fórsa, and is now available to all members in the CO grade or equivalent in the civil service.”*

The fund was carried through the amalgamation into Fórsa, and is now available to all members in the CO grade or equivalent in the civil service.

Eoin says the benefits fund is hugely popular, and very important in the recruitment of members in CO grades in the civil service. “In the discussions surrounding the amalgamation, it was critical that we maintained the fund for CO grades.



Fórsa general secretary Eoin Ronayne.

“Any new members joining the union at CO level in the civil service will pay the higher subscription rate of 1% and will subsequently have access to the fund, in addition to the other Fórsa benefits.

“If members get promoted and leave the CO grade however, their subscription rate will decrease to 0.8%, and they will subsequently no longer be eligible for this benefit,” he explains.

Eoin explains why it was not possible to extend this fund to all members in the union. “It simply comes down to cost,” said Eoin. “If we were to roll this out to all members it would mean increasing subscriptions by 20% across the board.

In some cases members would see an increase of 38% in their subscriptions, and that just isn't feasible.”

*Any new members joining the union at CO level in the civil service will pay the higher subscription rate of 1% and will subsequently have access to the fund, in addition to the other Fórsa benefits.*

Standing with almost €2.5 million in reserve, the fund takes in approximately €500,000 each year. On average, the fund pays out in benefits what it recoups in subscriptions. The fund has become increasingly popular over the last number of years, and while it has come under some pressure in recent years, it remains healthy.

The scheme operates on an annual basis and all claims must be submitted within the calendar year. Members who wish to make a claim through the fund for expenses incurred this year must do so by 31st December 2018.

The application form is available on page 23.

For more information please see [forsa.ie/membership-benefits](http://forsa.ie/membership-benefits)



Derek Mullen.

As preparations are made for Brexit, Fórsa took the opportunity of visiting our Customs members at Dublin Airport. DEREK MULLEN gets to see first hand the role performed by customs officers on the frontline of the state.

# The gate keepers



Dublin Airport arrivals hall.

Photo: dreamstime.com

TOM BLAKE, one of our main representatives in Dublin Airport, facilitated the tour giving me a vivid insight into the work carried out by the Revenue Customs team.

According to Tom, passengers are generally stopped because of profiling. This can be by visual profiling (such as some sort of visual indicator), by customs dog indication, or simply by a tip-off.

Cigarettes/tobacco from non-EU countries, which are over the prescribed allowances, are seized. If the seizure is of commercial quantity the passenger may be arrested. Irish citizens with commercial loads are routinely prosecuted through the courts.

And, just in case you are wondering, all tobacco and cigarettes seized are accounted for, sealed, collected by a recycling company and eventually shredded.

## VAT

Customs also seize medicines, counterfeit goods and prohibited food products, as well as charging VAT and duty on other fiscal goods. This work generally takes place over at the cargo terminal. Officers are kept busy with big cargo companies such as DHL and FedEx, landing large cargo planes on a regular basis.

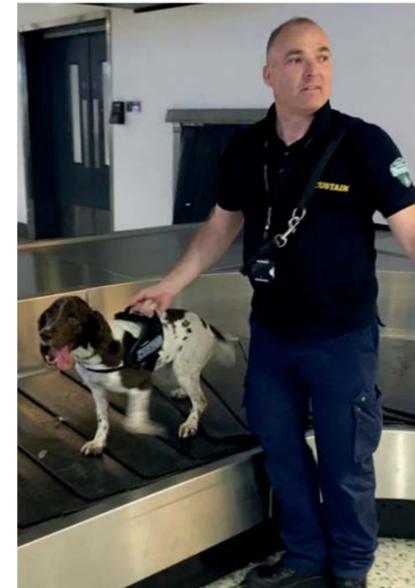
There is a significant team of officers at both terminals, in addition to the cargo terminal, helping to keep the state safe. Tom tells us there are 18 staff in profiling and more than 40 on the channel teams.

Profilers will look at flights particularly from airline hubs such as Schiphol in Amsterdam and Hahn in Frankfurt. Passengers connecting through hub airports from locations across the world can often raise a red flag for the team.

## Serious crime

Seizures, of a small amount of drugs for example, will be subject to ongoing investigations to determine if there are

any links to serious criminal activity. A passenger found with drugs is initially detained by Customs, interviewed and then handed over to Gardaí who prepare the case for prosecution.



John and Josie.

Drugs are brought to a forensics lab for analysis and kept - well locked up - by Customs. There is also a frost toilet facility at the airport for what's known as 'stuffers' and 'swallowers' of drugs.

*"The seizure of money is seen as a double whammy against the criminals as it gets cash out of the system."*

Customs officers involved in such cases are also involved in overt or covert surveillance, and of course, the team wouldn't be complete without the customs dogs. We met two on the day. Josie with handler John Murphy, who has the ability to detect food and cash and Lottie who works with handler Linda Smith specialises in tobacco and cash.

## Training exercise

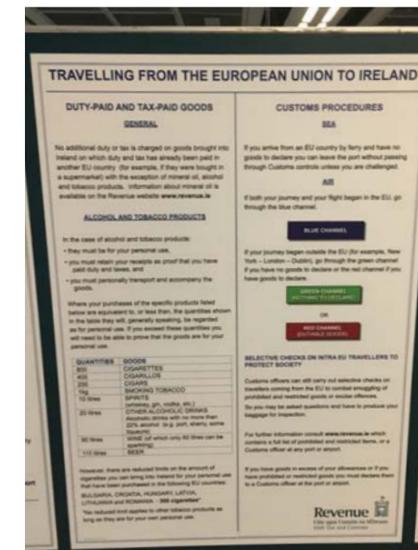
In an event specially organised for my visit, I was detected standing at the baggage carousel awaiting luggage off the Abu Dhabi flight which had just arrived.

Stuffed in my pocket was a tidy sum - €50,000 in cash - a wad of cash used exclusively for training purposes and rendered completely unusable by being punched.

As I saw Linda and Lottie approach I got a tingling sense of what it must be like for a real smuggler who has something to hide. Out of the side of my eye I watched as Lottie clambered over the luggage on the carousel, sniffing passengers as she went before eventually arriving at me, detecting almost immediately what I had secreted about my person. Lottie sat down to indicate a positive find to her handler for which she was rewarded.

## Cash

To see all this in action is very impressive. There are eight dogs at Dublin Airport, and they also cover Dublin Port. According to their handlers, John and Linda, the dogs tend to have a working life of approximately eight years usually retiring to their handlers' homes where they live out the remainder of their lives.



Linda and Lottie.

EU to Ireland custom procedures in Dublin Airport.

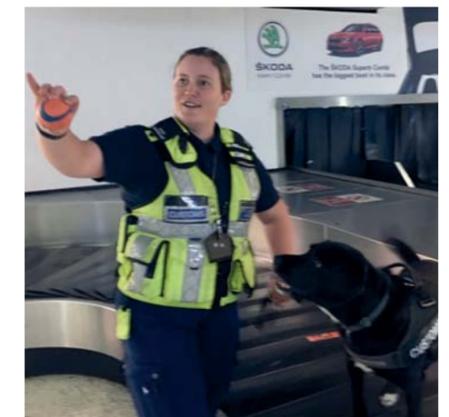
If cash is believed to be the proceeds of crime it is detained by Customs. A detention order is then obtained from a judge and the sum is lodged in a special account.

The seizure of money is seen as a double whammy against the criminals as it gets cash out of the system and prevents an importation.

Meanwhile, discussions continue with Revenue management in preparation for Brexit in early 2019. Staffing is beginning to ramp up with the likelihood that an extra 600 staff in trade facilitation will be employed on a 24/7 shift basis and with a 25% shift allowance.

They will perform such functions as:

- Clearing the movement of cargo imports from, and exports to, countries outside the EU
- Clearing goods in real time for import and export
- Collection of duty and taxes
- Detention and seizure of goods
- Control of warehouses
- Control of temporary storage facilities
- Authorisation and monitoring of economic operators
- Processing refunds claims
- Public counter service
- Ensuring compliance with Customs law and procedures.



These are changing times for customs officers as we all gear up for Brexit. There is still a great deal of uncertainty about what it will look like in the end, not least in terms of the Irish economy.

*"As I saw Linda and Lottie approach I got a tingling sense of what it must be like for a real smuggler who has something to hide."*

Whatever happens, there is no doubting the commitment of our members at the airport and ports to do their job as professionally as possible as preparations shift up a gear for what is likely to be a seismic change on the European political stage.

This item was first published in Fórsa's publication CSQ (Civil Service Quarterly), which is distributed to the union's Civil Service membership ■



Seán Purtil.

SEÁN PURTILL is a horticulture instructor at Merlin Park hospital and chair of Fórsa's Galway branch. In May this year Seán availed of an unexpected opportunity to take a trip to Tromsø in Northern Norway, 350 kilometres north of the Arctic Circle. He volunteered with the Teater Vildenvei while the company performed at a special seminar on mental health. Here he shares his account of his polar expedition.

# My polar expedition

HOW ON earth did I find myself in a town 350 kilometres north of the Arctic Circle?

My adventure began in 2013, and the visit of Teater Vildenvei to Galway.

Founded in 1996, the Oslo-based company has focused on mental health care and addiction, performing dramas, comedies, musicals, children's theatre and poetry programmes in Norway and internationally.

The company is composed of mental health service users, a director and several volunteers, part-time actors, playwrights and supporters.

A friend of mine works with the group, and came to Galway with director Edvard Myska to look around with a view to having the group perform here and spend some days in the west of Ireland.

Of course I was delighted to be their guide and we spent a busy couple of days checking out performance spaces, seeing a few sights and meeting some people involved in the area of community arts. Teater Vildenvei performed in An Taibhdhearc theatre in Galway in September 2013.

## Invitation

We stayed in touch after their Galway visit, and this led to an invitation to accompany the group to Tromsø in Northern Norway as a volunteer helper.

While I had previously lived in Norway for a number of years, I'd never been to Tromsø. It's the third largest urban area north of the Arctic Circle, with a population of around 75,000.

The group were invited to perform at a seminar on Participation in Theatre for Mental Health Service Users. They gave three performances from their repertoire during the course of the seminar.



Arctic mountains overlooking Tromsø.

I'd volunteered to help out in any way I could, so I found myself taking a crash course in sound recording, running around with a cameraman recording interviews, performances and talks over the three days.

It was a fascinating experience, matched only by the extraordinary experience of being in the Arctic.

## Midnight sun

Our visit coincided with appearance of the midnight sun. I proved to myself that it was indeed possible to sit outside and read a newspaper at midnight.

Tromsø itself is a city about the same size as Galway spread over two islands and the mainland linked by bridges and tunnels in a sheltered inlet.

It gained its city charter in 1794 and became the centre for hunting, fishing and exploration in the Arctic with explorers like Fridjof Nansen and Roald Amundsen using it as a base for their explorations.

Fishing became a major source of wealth because of its rich waters teeming with cod and a unique climate. Anyone enjoying a dish of bacalao (a stew made with salted dried cod) in Portugal or Spain will probably be eating cod from the waters around Tromsø.

Today Tromsø has the reputation of being the cultural centre of the arctic with a vibrant nightlife and many cultural events over the course of the year. Winter draws many visitors to see the Northern Lights and whale-watching.

## Stunning

The ten minute drive from the airport takes you through the elaborate tunnels between the islands. Even the smallest islands seem to be linked to either another island or the mainland.



The Arctic Cathedral in Tromsø.

A cable car trip to the top of a mountain overlooking Tromsø provides a spectacular view of local mountain ranges reminiscent of the Alps. As a gardener I was drawn to the plant flowering in the snow at the mountaintop.

A local flower seller enlightened me. Rodsildre is a species of edible plant that is very common all over the high Arctic, and is the emblem of the region.



The Arctic Cathedral is a stunning white modern triangular building with a simple interior which sets off the beautiful stained glass panels. They are at their most stunning when illuminated by the midnight sun.



Teater Vildenvei director Edvard Myska.

## Roleplay

The seminar was hosted by The National Centre for Culture, Health and Social Care and a local theatre group. It featured speakers, performances and activities over a packed three days. Speakers ranged from local politicians to professional actors to academics to service users.

The contributions from service users were most striking as they spoke about how theatre had transformed their lives. However, the term 'service user' was rarely used here.

In the case of Teater Vildenvei, members of the group defined themselves in terms of their role in the group: "I am an actor", "I am a playwright" "I design and make the costumes."

Talks on professional acting techniques were followed by a workshop where the entire audience was invited on stage to participate in games and activities with a twist. It was a lot of fun and gave an interesting insight into interpersonal dynamics and group behaviour.

## Polaria

A trip to Polaria is worth a visit. It is an aquarium containing much of the sea life from the arctic sea. The building itself is highly unusual as it looks like a series of large fallen rectangular arches from the outside, and our visit coincided with feeding time for the seals.

The venue screens a film about the landscape and birdlife of Svalbard onto



Polaria is housed in a very distinctive building, representing ice floes pressed up on land by the rough seas of the Arctic.

panoramic curved screens, creating the sensation of flying over the mostly untouched Arctic landscape.

A major theme at Polaria is the conservation of the Arctic environment. Information on climate change and the acceleration of the melting permafrost gave ample food for thought.

A wonderful experience overall, and light years from my day-to-day work.

Sean Purtil is a horticulture instructor in the Galway Training Centre, Merlin Park hospital, under mental health services, and chair of Fórsa's Galway branch ■

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## Fórsa resources



Diarmaid Mac a Bhaird.

A new app for Special Needs Assistants, designed to provide information on contracts, allocations and other useful information is coming soon. DIARMAID MAC A BHAIRD spoke to Fórsa’s Séan Carabini about his plans for the app and its origins

# SNA information? There’s an app for that!

THE ROLE of a Special Needs Assistant (SNA) brings plenty of challenges. One of those challenges is finding information on contracts, terms and conditions. A new smartphone app is currently in development, and is set to provide a go-to point for useful information for SNAs.

Much of the information specific to SNAs come in the form of government circulars on the Department of Education website and Gov.ie. But there remains a lack of co-ordination on where and how circulars appear.

experience for many. Fórsa assistant general secretary Seán Carabini spotted an opportunity to test a solution for these problems.

“There’s simply a need to gather all of this information in one place, for both convenience and accessibility. More importantly, there’s a need to make this information available to SNAs in a format which is quick and easy to navigate.

*SNAs often won’t have time to make phone calls or emails, and many end up having to exhaust their lunchtimes or breaks chasing down information*

*With these challenges in mind, Seán has developed a prototype smartphone app, allowing quick and easy access to information compiled by the union. The app is due to go online in October.*

“SNAs often won’t have time to make phone calls or emails, and many end up having to exhaust their lunchtimes or breaks chasing down information,” he says.

With these challenges in mind, Seán has developed a prototype smartphone app, allowing quick and easy access to information compiled by the union. The app is due to go online in October.

What kind of useful information can you expect to find on the app?

“For the most part, it’s all the important nuts and bolts of contracts, Department of Education circulars and information about terms and conditions. There’s also

some useful union information, news bulletins and anything else SNA-related coming from the Department of Education,” he explains.



“There’s simply a need to gather all of this information in one place, for both convenience and accessibility. More importantly, there’s a need to make this information available to SNAs in a format which is quick and easy to navigate” - Fórsa official Seán Carabini.

Seán says the app content is not ‘set in stone’ and subsequent updates will allow room to expand based on user feedback.

“This is the first version of the app so we’ll be focusing on improving it as the number of users grow. We’ll be actively seeking feedback from SNAs about the app, and developing it further based on what they tell us about their user experience. First and foremost, we’ve tried to ensure the app is a really useful tool for SNAs,” he says.

Seán says the free app will be available initially on the Android (Google Play) platform, followed by Apple’s iOS and another 20 app providers and platforms.

<http://apps.appmakr.com/snaapp3>



In addition, these sites can be difficult to navigate, especially for new SNAs. There can be difficulty knowing what circulars to check, and suddenly finding an answer to a simple question can become a tedious and time consuming task.

Looking for specific information about more specialist issues is even more complicated and a frustrating



Aingeala Flannery.

The Government recently scrapped plans for a referendum to delete the part of the constitution defining a woman's place in the home. AINGEALA FLANNERY finds herself captive on a long car journey where it's a burning issue. However, she concludes that the real issue is that the State has failed for generations to provide what it has pledged to its citizens

# No place for women



Photo: dreamstime.com

DEIRDRE STABS the button on the car radio with her finger. "Typical," she huffs, "just typical." We're somewhere in County Westmeath, and according to the five-o'clock newsreader, the government will not, after all, be holding

a referendum in October to delete the part of the constitution defining a woman's place in the home. The decision sends Deirdre into a rage. I look out the window and wonder where she gets the energy.

We're on our way back from our friend's mother's funeral in Sligo. The woman was eighty and had been sick for a long time. Her daughter, our friend, was her carer for almost a decade. She did this while working as a teacher, and raising

her own children: three unconventionally attractive teenagers. The husband was looking well too, in fact, he was so trim and tanned, Deirdre reckoned he was a cyclist. Our friend, on the other hand, looked entirely wretched – neither of us recognised her in the church.

*"The husband was looking well too, in fact, he was so trim and tanned, Deirdre reckoned he was a cyclist."*

There was endless tea in the hotel after the funeral, and two hours down the road I am bursting to go to the toilet. Deirdre, still fuming about the deferred referendum, says we'll stop at the next petrol station. "It's a paternalistic throwback," she rails. I know she's been reading up on it, because she's able to quote the whole shebang: "by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved"... for fuck's sake."

## Patronising

The language is shocking, I agree. But I'm not agreeing enough, she continues in a quasi-judicial baritone: "mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home." Deirdre wants to know if I've ever heard anything more 'patronising' and 'sexist'. We are entering Ballinalack, I spy a Texaco up ahead. We zoom past it at twenty kilometres an hour above the speed limit, my bladder heaves.

The truth is I'm opposed to the deletion of Article 41.2, and I'm in no form to debate it. Were we in my car, I could pull in where and when I pleased. But I am captive to Deirdre's mood, if I don't engage there might not be a pit stop in Mullingar either. She wants the Article erased, and I want it replaced with a commitment to compensate anybody whose earnings are diminished because they're looking after a family member in their home. Not lip-service, not symbolism, but payment through the social welfare and the personal taxation system.

We stop outside Mullingar, at a big flashy garage that sells diesel and bun-burgers and cut-price CDs. Deirdre

makes a beeline for the Frank and Honest coffee machine. I head for the ladies, which is so clean and comfortable I allow myself to sit for longer than is necessary. It's a habit I developed early on in motherhood – using bathrooms as places of refuge. At home, the bathroom is where I go for a private rant or a short discreet cry. Men use bathrooms to shower and shit.

Back in the car, I'm about to share my observation about bathrooms and gender with Deirdre, but it dawns on me that she won't get it. How could she? Deirdre never wanted children. She has poured all her energy into her career. People who work in her sector have told me she's the best there is. She knows it too, and is unapologetically vocal about equal pay for equal work. Once I heard her described as 'shrill', by somebody who never would have guessed that we were friends.

## Care-giver

But here's the thing, Deirdre has of late been called upon by her siblings to drive their elderly mother to hospital appointments, to pick up her prescriptions and do her supermarket shopping. In time, her mother will become more dependant, and Deirdre will have to prioritise family over career to meet her mother's 'intimate needs' – the dressing, washing, and feeding, the tantrums and infections, the endless cycle of intimacy and despair, the sheer intensity and exhaustion of it all.

*"Deirdre has of late been called upon by her siblings to drive their elderly mother to hospital appointments."*

Deirdre doesn't see the correlation between the life stage she is heading towards and the one I'm already at. When she arrives here, she will understand why women aren't stampeding to the polls to demand the removal of Article 41.2. Yes, they want the constitution to be changed. And yes, a gender neutral term such as 'care-giver' would be rather nice, but why get bogged down in a sideshow about language and political correctness, when the real issue is that the State has failed for generations to provide what it has pledged to its citizens.

For years I 'engaged in labour' outside the home, sometimes paying half my

salary to another mother to babysit, while her own children were minded by their grandmother. As a single parent, I could not work at all when my child was sick. As for 'duties within the home' – our house was rarely less than dirty and we lived on frozen pizza. One morning, after a longer than usual bathroom cry, I decided to change careers, taking a 60 per cent pay cut so that I could work fewer and more flexible hours from home.

## Just people

As we shoot down the N4, I recite to Deirdre all the things I miss about the workplace... people to have a laugh with, or to have lunch with, people to give out about, people to run my ideas by, people to talk to... just people.

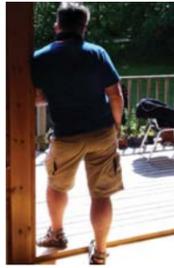
*"For years I 'engaged in labour' outside the home, sometimes paying half my salary to another mother to babysit, while her own children were minded by their grandmother."*

Deirdre, drinking her coffee and munching on a protein bar, says that I should sue the State for loss of earnings. I tell her she has it the wrong way around.

I could have taken a case before I left my job because, by virtue of my womanhood, the constitution says I shouldn't have had to go out to work in the first place. The State did not endeavour to ensure that I wasn't forced by economic need to labour outside the four walls of my family home.

It is astounding that no woman, since the foundation of the State, has come home dog-tired after a ten-hour shift, to a filthy house, an empty fridge and a mountain of laundry – and called a solicitor in a fit of pique, with the intention of suing the State. Can you imagine the queue of women outside the High Court if she won her case? Now, imagine the cost to the State if carers got in on the act? That's a chance the Government are not willing to take, when it's so much simpler to just hit delete.

@missflannery ■



Daniel Devery.

As the seasonal air shifted in early September DANIEL DEVERY found himself suddenly struck down with aches and pains and a sore throat. When we're under the weather we want uncomplicated food that provides nourishment and warmth, perhaps even seasoned with a dash of nostalgia. Comfort food means different things to us all. But its connection to a sense of home, and being taken care of, is universal.

# Home comforts



THE WRETCHED lurgy lasted five days and was no fun at all. I craved two things. The first was a good chicken broth, using a whole chicken, quartered carrots, celery, onion, garlic and some whole chillies. It simmered very gently on the hob for an hour and a half on a Sunday afternoon, and produced a lovely clear and healing broth.

The delicately poached meat, served with the carrots, mashed potatoes and

broth, were just the remedy to restore strength.

## The 'Yellow Dinner'

The second craving took me back to my childhood. There was a weekday dinner (and by 'dinner' I mean the meal that was eaten around 4pm, when we got home from school) that surfaced every few weeks.

Its constituent ingredients couldn't have been simpler. A pile of freshly cooked, fluffy mashed potatoes (the very definition of comfort food), with butter salt and pepper.

Separately, we were presented with an egg. Raw and in its shell, we made a well in the centre of the mashed spuds, cracked the egg into it, and blended the egg through the mash, giving it a velvety smooth texture.

I loved it.

It's a method that won't appeal to everyone, much less anyone who feels squeamish at the thoughts of a raw egg. However, it gently cooks and emulsifies in the mash, creating a soothing plate of comfort food.

While our mother included this dish in the school day repertoire, she recently confessed that she never ate it herself, and was always amazed by our enthusiasm for it.

## Cheesy pasta

Roughly twenty years since I'd last made it myself, I was coaxed back to health by the yellow dinner, and remembered it was one of my reliable hangover cures as a student.

This prompted memories of another hangover favourite. Having discovered how to make a basic béchamel sauce while living in my first flat, I aimed to create the cheesiest of cheesy pasta dishes. This is the sort of calorie-rich food for which there seems to be no consequences when you're in your twenties.



Japanese comfort special, okonomiyaki, fried cabbage pancakes.

Needless to say, it's not a sustainable diet, but I have many happy memories of a large plate of macaroni with cheese sauce on a Saturday afternoon, bingeing on VHS copies of *Twin Peaks* (a reference more reliable than carbon dating to determine this writer's age).

## Nostalgia

If any of these dishes demonstrate anything, it's that what we regard as comfort food is very personal. While I find solace in starchy savouries and healing broths, others may head for ice cream, warm buttered toast, or salty snacks, but they will invariably plot a course, guided by nostalgia, for their childhood home.

Comfort is conjured up by the essential qualities of home, and the sense of being taken care of. When we're at our

most vulnerable, and craving comfort and reassurance, this is where our appetite takes us.

## Regional variations

In Poland, this craving may find expression in a pot of halushki, consisting of flat noodles, cabbage and lots and lots (and lots) of butter.

Cabbage also plays a role in the Japanese comfort special, okonomiyaki, fried cabbage pancakes. The name translates as "how you like it" as you can add any of your favourite ingredients, from shrimp and spring onions to fried egg and pork belly.



Cassoulet.

A definitive recipe for cassoulet is hotly contested within the Languedoc region of France. This autumnal slow-cooked pot of duck confit (that's duck leg slowly poached in butter), sausage and white beans is, nevertheless, a Gallic expression of comfort, and one in which they take obvious pride. It's even available to buy pre-cooked in jars and tins throughout France.

And of course, the healing power of chicken broth, and its association with Jewish households throughout the world, is best exemplified by matzo ball soup, a traditional eastern European soup passed down through generations.

## Find your comfort

As we head in to the colder, darker months, it's worth thinking about those dishes that call to mind that sense of comfort. They are usually very simple and require few ingredients.

That brings me back to my yellow dinner. Its humble origins are to be found in the back yard of my grandmother's house in Tyrellspass, County Westmeath.

With six hungry children to feed, she kept hens and grew spuds. To this she added her sense of invention.

The economics of the dish are self-evident, and its comforts have cured me again ■

## Parts Unknown

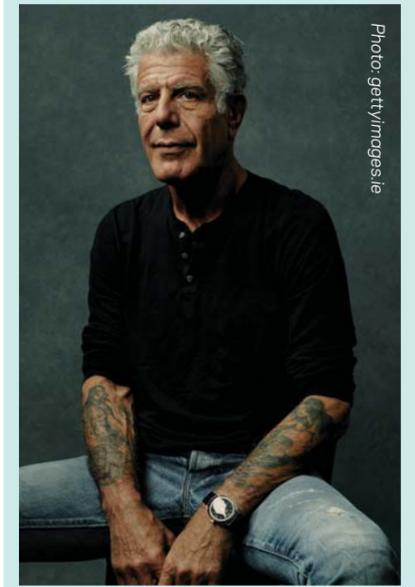


Photo: gettyimages

ANTHONY BOURDAIN'S untimely death in June came as a shock to fans of the writer and broadcaster. His 1999 book *Kitchen Confidential* remains the definitive account of the gritty realities of the restaurant trade.

He went on to develop a unique approach to broadcasting about travel and food that combined his curiosity about places and people with his fearless palate (cobra heart anyone?) and a languid, rock star persona. By his own count, Bourdain was on the road 250 days of the year.

Earlier shows, including *A Cook's Tour* and *The Layover*, are widely available on Netflix and YouTube, and while they're entertaining, the MTV-styled editing looks a little dated. Both feature trips to Dublin, which Bourdain clearly enjoyed.

Where Bourdain really hits his stride is on CNN's *Parts Unknown*. All eight seasons of the show are currently available to view on Netflix.

From Beirut to Addis Ababa, and from Bogota to Detroit, Bourdain looks more at ease, even in the most uneasy situations. He's not afraid to ask difficult questions, and there's a sense of wonder and joy in his encounters that is less evident in earlier shows.

The world is poorer for Bourdain's absence, but he left something genuinely nourishing for us to enjoy. A bittersweet legacy.



Una-Minh Kavanagh.

To tip or not to tip? Is it rude to make this gesture? When it comes to etiquette while travelling, it often involves an awareness of the silent, unspoken “rules” of the community. ÚNA-MINH KAVANAGH is your guide to a range of customs and taboos from across the globe.

# Custom or taboo?

ONE COUNTRY that takes pride in its rules is Japan. I’m just back from this incredible country and while there were things I knew I had to be mindful of, there were even more things that I discovered I had to do (or not do).

But it’s not just Japan where certain etiquette is part of daily life. Here are a few things I’ve picked up that you can keep in mind while on your global travels.

## Japan

I could write an essay on the list of things to watch out for, but two things tourists will experience while visiting Japan is their tipping system and the practice of eating in public.

Tipping: It simply isn’t done in Japan. Some may even see it as insulting as they believe that their top-class service should be enough. Stories abound of foreigners who left tips and the waiter chased them down to give it back.

Don’t eat food while walking. When it comes to cleanliness, Japan is spotless. There are hardly any public bins and its residents are encouraged to bring home their rubbish. Part of the reason why it’s so clean is because people don’t eat while they’re walking.

You may have picked up that delicious barbecue skewer but it’s far more polite in Japan to stand to the side and eat it

then and there rather than walk with it. While Japanese people won’t call you out on your mistakes, you may get frowns of disapproval enough to make you feel like you’ve embarrassed yourself!

## Germany

Don’t jaywalk. We love crossing the road randomly here in Ireland but in Germany you can be fined for it. Even in rush hour you will see people patiently waiting for the green man.

Germans are renowned for their punctuality and while you’re there you should try your best to be on time, be it a meeting with friends or a tour. Try to arrive a few minutes early or if you’re going to be late, text or call to explain why.

## Italy

If you’re a coffee lover, drink your cappuccino or any milky form of coffee in the morning, and never after a meal. Also, the Italians absolutely cringe at the thought of people messing around with their coffee with things like ‘mint frappuccinos’. And, please note it’s ‘espresso’ not ‘expresso’.

When you’re ready to leave a restaurant and want the bill, ask for “il conto per



Tokyo, Japan.

favore” (“the bill please”). Waiters don’t usually put it on your table unless you’ve requested it as this is seen as trying to get you to leave.



Italy.

## India

While visiting places of cultural significance like a temple, it’s respectful not to show a lot of skin. Sometimes you may even be refused entry or scolded. Don’t wear shorts, make sure your knees are not in sight and cover your shoulders with something like a scarf.

As a woman, it’s useful to have a light scarf with you, as sometimes you may

be required to cover your hair. This rule comes into play with many countries in Asia like Indonesia, Vietnam and parts of Malaysia.

Though there are, of course, places to cater for foreigners, eating with your hands in India is commonplace so don’t be offended. If you do try it, use your right hand as the left-hand is considered “unclean”. The sharing of food is also considered good Indian manners, and it’s common for people to order a number of dishes and share them among your party.

## Vietnam

If you’re trying to get someone’s attention don’t use your finger. Summoning someone with a curled index finger, as is done in the West, is only done by those in authority. Instead, extend your arm with the palm facing downwards and move your fingers in a scratching motion.

History buffs note: The war in Vietnam is known to locals as the ‘American War’. It really doesn’t make sense to call it the ‘Vietnam War’ as it was arguably a civil war which was distinguished by American involvement.

## Brazil

We may be familiar with using the “Ok” symbol using our thumb and index finger but in Brazil it’s the equivalent of giving the middle finger. It’s considered to be one of the rudest gestures you can make.

Brazilian people use a lot of physical contact as part of their communication so when talking to someone don’t be shocked if they touch your arms, elbows or back when they’re being friendly. They also take the time to greet and say goodbye to each person present and are not overly concerned about being late.

## France

When eating cheese don’t expect to be given crackers, it’s eaten with bread most of the time. Don’t make a sandwich out of it or use giant chunks of bread either. Consider that the bread is just an accompaniment, but the cheese is the star.

The French greet those who they know with a kiss on each cheek. Sometimes the amount varies but it’s easier to just go with the flow and at least expect two. A pro-tip is if you’re wearing



Golden Temple, India.

glasses, remove them before going for a kiss. It helps avoid extra obstacles.

## Canada

Canadians meeting for the first time usually shake hands to introduce themselves and may shake hands while leaving too. Kissing on the cheek is usually reserved for the family. However, some French-Canadians do it as a friendly greeting.

Many staff in Canada rely on tips and these are seldom included in the bill. It’s customary in restaurants to tip around 15-20% on the total bill before tax, less for poor service, and more if the service was excellent.

Some restaurants automatically charge the gratuity for larger groups. People also tip staff in hotels and taxi drivers. It’s not necessary to tip for counter service, but tip jars often appear there. At the end of the day, it’s your choice ■



Hazel Gavigan.

It's the hit musical of the moment. Tickets for *Hamilton* are like gold dust. The box office took more than \$30m before it even opened on Broadway in 2015, and the show racked up a record-breaking 16 Tony nominations. These seats are flaming hot. After months of sold-out shows in London's West End, HAZEL GAVIGAN finally nabbed those precious tickets.

# My name is Alexander Hamilton

SEVEN MONTHS of waiting and the day finally arrives. Myself and my group of equally keen friends board a flight, check in at our tiny London hostel (a room so small the six of us couldn't even stand up at the same time) and enthuse over what we are about to witness.

The lyrics of each song are embedded in our brains after listening to the soundtrack on repeat for two years. We enter the newly refurbished Victoria Palace theatre ready to experience the performance first-hand.

## Special

There's something special about the atmosphere here. Any other show I've seen, whether it be on the West End, Broadway, in Dublin or Edinburgh, there's never been the same level of anticipation, the room is fizzing. We file into the auditorium, clutching our programmes, eyes met with the wide smiles of strangers.

Finding our seats isn't difficult. We're in the very, very back row. Sometimes I choose the 'nosebleed' seats in the hopes it won't be sold out and we'd get

upgraded to the stalls. No danger of that happening here. The lights go down, the room falls silent and the first seven beats of *Hamilton* ring out.

It no longer matters that we have our backs to the wall.

## Who is Alexander Hamilton?

What is *Hamilton* and why has it captured the world's attention?

It's a hip-hop musical written and composed by Lin Manuel Miranda. Sung fully from start to finish, it tells the remarkable life story of Alexander Hamilton, one of America's founding fathers. (Possibly better known as the guy on the ten dollar bill.)

Hamilton, born out of wedlock to a half-British/half-French mother on the Caribbean island of Nevis, was orphaned at age 11. After his town was destroyed by a hurricane, he wrote about this experience and, so moved by his story, strangers collected enough money to send him to King's College (now Columbia University) in New York.

At King's College he soon became involved in the War of Independence and assumed the role of George Washington's right hand man. After becoming the first president of the United States, Washington appointed him as Treasury Secretary.

## Career

Hamilton's political life saw him co-write the US constitution, establish America's first national bank, forge a trading relationship with Britain and oppose slavery. He led a colourful life with many highs and lows. He found himself at the centre of the country's first political sex scandal and lost his eldest son, Philip, in a duel. Ultimately, Hamilton would meet his end in the same way. (That's not a spoiler. You learn of his demise in the first song of the show).

This tale of a complete underdog (a "bastard, orphan, son of a whore") has really resonated with audiences on both sides of the Atlantic. We follow his rise to success, watching as he defies all odds and makes a life for himself in America, laying the foundations for generations to come.



Lin-Manuel Miranda, the show's creator, played the role of Hamilton for two years when it first opened on Broadway.

The producers made an interesting decision to cast people of all ethnicities in the various roles. While it may appear strange to see an African-American Thomas Jefferson (Jason Pennycooke) or a Filipino (Rachelle Ann Go) Eliza Schuyler (Hamilton's wife), it's completely intentional. We get to witness American history through the lens of what America looks like today.

As its creator explains: "We're telling the story of old, dead white men but we're using actors of color, and that makes the story more immediate and more accessible to a contemporary audience."

## "Immigrants, we get the job done"

In a musical that's essentially one continuous song, you might think it would be difficult to pick out favourite phrases or moments.

However, there's one line in particular that has stayed with me. It isn't some dramatic high note or key change. It's just spoken with no music behind it at

all, a casual aside: "Immigrants, we get the job done."

I've always loved that remark exchanged between Hamilton and the French revolutionary, Lafayette. But seeing it live, I don't think any of us were expecting the rapturous applause it provoked.

For me, it was the most poignant moment of the whole show. It felt like the entire room was saying we respect immigrants, and we recognise their undeniable value, while at the same time rejecting the nativism of Trump, Brexit and the far right.

"Immigrants, we get the job done." It's a powerful moment.

That same line, you may remember, triggered a standing ovation in 2016 when US Vice President-elect Mike Pence was in the Broadway audience.

At the end of the already deeply political show, actor Brandon Victor Dixon (Vice-president Aaron Burr) acknowledged Pence's presence and pleaded with him

to ensure the new administration represents all Americans.

"We, sir - we - are the diverse America who are alarmed and anxious that your new administration will not protect us, our planet, our children, our parents, or defend us and uphold our inalienable rights. We truly hope that this show has inspired you to uphold our American values and to work on behalf of all of us."

## Reflection

Thinking about the show in an Irish context, we've nearly 5,500 refugees currently living in direct provision, denied the opportunity to fully contribute to society.

At the end of our evening, we are enthralled, thrilled, exhilarated...and a little sad that it's over.

*Hamilton* has worked its magic on us. And it forces us to recognise the fundamental value of a rich and diverse society.

Job done ■



Raymond Connolly.

In his early career as jaundiced-eyed pundit, RAYMOND CONNOLLY spent several summers in a pub near London's Finsbury Park playing chess with Peter Ustinov. The pair famously fell out on a ferociously hot July day in 1976. Accounts vary. Some say Ustinov attempted an illegal move to checkmate, others that Connolly stole Ustinov's pork pie. The real reason was that Ustinov had attempted to argue that Eton or Harrow could just as easily have produced a band like the Sex Pistols. Connolly was having none of it, and has been waging class warfare ever since.

# Public versus private

Cerys Matthews.



Photo: gettyimages.ie

THE WELSH singer Cerys Matthews, front woman for Catatonia (remember 1997's iconic singles *Mulder & Scully* and *Road Rage*?) was a contestant in the 2007 season of (catatonic) reality TV show *I'm A Celebrity Get Me Out Of Here*.

Matthews concluded her time on the show in a tryst with actor Marc

Bannerman. Each to his or her own, but it remains a personal tragedy that someone of Matthews' talent and credibility appeared on such a lamentable TV show.

Bannerman is an Irish-born actor, raised in North London, who played Italian beefcake Gianni di Marco in *Eastenders*. That Irish/Italian thing has always sat

well with me. The suburb of Finglas was populated exclusively by first and second generation Dubs, and a large tribe of Macaris from Southern Italy, in the 1970s.

In fact, having a Macari boy in your class was a badge of honour: "We're mates with the fella whose ma owns the chipper." Macaris remains the home of

the uniquely Dublin spiceburger, a deep-fried compendium of mystery stuff in breadcrumbs.

## Class

I reference Ms Matthews because recently she has taken a stand for working class music. On her BBC6 radio show she has stopped playing records created by artists from the fee-paying school privileged classes.

Matthews has copped that they're taking over our art. That's James Blunt, Coldplay, Mumford & Sons and Florence & the Machine wiped out in one stroke of Welsh working class genius. Hats off Cerys.

The tipping point must have been the realisation that top Indie act The Maccabees consist of a Hugo, an Orlando, a Felix and a Rupert. They should've called themselves The Magic Roundabout.

Matthews follows the lead of the writer/broadcaster Stuart Maconie who, in 2015, lamented the takeover of the creative industries waged by the upper classes. Maconie observed: "Damon Albarn of Blur was mocked as the posh boy of Britpop when in fact he'd gone to a comprehensive in Essex and his family was just mildly bohemian. Nowadays he'd be decidedly 'below stairs'."

Maconie also drew attention to Sandie Shaw's advice, to the Commons' culture select committee, that a career in pop had become unviable "unless you're Mumford & Sons and come from a public school and have a rich family that can support you." Shaw, let's not forget, emerged from Dagenham in the regional and social upheaval of the 1960s.

## Public v Private

I must clarify that a public school across the water is a fee-paying school. Here at home, it does what it says on the tin. Public means the general public have access. Private means they don't unless they cough up the funds.

I marvel at how English became a universally spoken language yet its creators frequently fail to understand its correct usage. My own highly developed Hiberno-English was developed in a non-fee-paying (i.e. public) school.

*Sherlock Holmes* actor Benedict Cumberbatch was educated in Brambletye Boarding School and Harrow. "Being a posh actor in England, you cannot escape the class typing from



Chris Martin.

Photo: gettyimages.ie

whatever side you look at it," says he. Elementary my dear Cumberbatch. It only serves to remind me that, with that name, he wouldn't have fared too well in De La Salle Finglas in my day.

I loved Cilla Black's unselfconscious confession that she loved being put up in posh hotels. I always imagined the hotel brigade arriving to turn down her bed for the night. "Nah I'll do it myself Chuck," as she boomed out a verse of *Anyone Who Had A Heart*. Speaking of which, Doncaster's own Sheridan Smith gives a belting performance of that tune (check it out on YouTube) in the 2014 biopic *Cilla*.

## Simon who?

Pete Townshend (Chiswick) and Roger Daltrey (Hammersmith) both did so well at their '11 plus' exams that they were advanced to Acton Grammar School. Grammar school sounds highfalutin', except it's basically a non-fee-paying school which does a bit of grammar.

Sir Raymond Douglas Davies (aka Ray Davies) was the son of an abattoir worker from Harringey (the part which is now referred to as Muswell Hill - dangerously close to Tottenham Hotspur catchment but Ray chose The Arsenal - legend). Paul (*Eton Rifles*) Weller attended non-fee-paying Sheerwater County Secondary School.

My point is that these all-time greats had lots of important critical observations to make on society, having come from a societal position of disadvantage. Add in the genius of the tunes and the result was, for me, an unbeatable mix.

The current trend, however, is a reminder that all that post-war social mobility is at an end - for now.

The most irritating evidence of all this is that the likes of Simon Cowell wields so much power and influence, and has taken charge of the industrial drivel he peddles as pop music. Cowell is an old boy of the Dover College (£3,995 a term in his day).

## In dreams

There was a time when kids played street games in the sun and played records in the rain. The demise of the 45rpm 7" inch vinyl single has equally lowered the prospect of being discovered by a record company A&R man in the local working class pub, along with the dreams that goes with that.

That leaves us with Chris Martin (£34k per year Sherborne Boarding School) singing about Roman Catholic choirs. An appalling vista.

Don't blink Cerys. We're on your side ■

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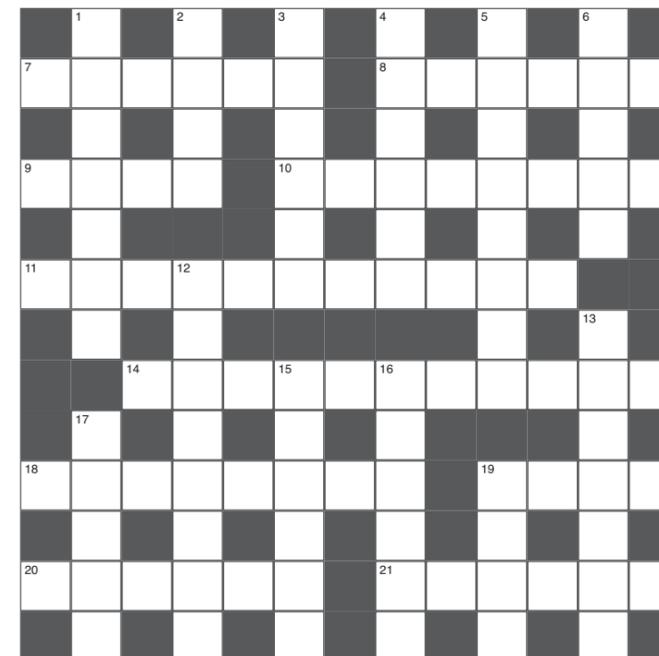
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## Win win win

### WIN €50 PRIZE CROSSWORD

Win €50 by completing the crossword and sending your entry, name and address to Hazel Gavigan, Fórsa crossword, Fórsa, Nerney's Court, Dublin, D01 R2C5, by Friday 7th December 2018. We'll send €50 to the first correct entry pulled from the hat.



Crossword composed by Peter Connaughton.

#### ACROSS

- Be in Naas with the former Belgian airline (6)
- Type of paint on a tooth (6)
- Ring a friend for a gemstone (4)
- Knitwear and Welsh bay (8)
- Icelandic explorer, said to have landed in North America 500 years before Columbus (4, 7)
- Romanian tennis player, winner of the 2018 French Open (6, 5)
- Greek dish of minced meat and aubergines (8)
- A present for the Fine Young Cannibals (4)
- In science, the opposite of 15 down (6)
- A decoy to charm or attract (6)

#### DOWN

- Monsters with a female head and body and the wings and claws of a bird (7)
- Hadephobia is a fear of ending up here (4)
- Zodiac sign between Gemini and Leo (6)
- Given name of Ibsen and Larsson (6)
- Canadian province, capital Winnipeg (8)
- Younger daughter of King Lear (5)
- Breed of cow from Holland (8)
- This county won four-in-a-row All-Ireland Senior Football titles in '18 (7)
- Poisonous acid, found in spinach, used as bleach (6)
- James Cameron movie starring Sam Worthington (6)
- And 19 down, Iron Pyrite for the Stone Roses (5)
- See 17 down (4)

#### ISSUE 3 (SUMMER-AUTUMN) WINNERS:

**CROSSWORD:** Jean Collier-Brownrigg, Gorey, Co. Wexford. **QUIZ:** John O'Donovan, Blackpool, Co. Cork. **SURVEY:** Helen Murphy, Dundalk, Co. Louth.

#### ISSUE 3 (SUMMER-AUTUMN) CROSSWORD SOLUTIONS:

**ACROSS:** 7. Mangan 8. Acorns 9. Glad 10. Rapparee 11. Information 14. Battle Calls 18. Team mate 19. Sage 20. Barrel 21. Greens **DOWN:** 1. Ballina 2. Aged 3. Ingram 4. Rat Pit 5. Coca Cola 6. Sneem 12. Oranmore 13. Elegant 15. Trails 16. Energy 17. Decay 19. Shed

## PRIZE QUIZ

WIN €50

Just answer five easy questions and you could win €50.

YOU COULD have an extra €50 to spend by answering five easy questions and sending your entry, name and address to Hazel Gavigan, Fórsa prize quiz, Fórsa, Nerney's court, Dublin, D01 R2C5. We'll send €50 to the first completed entry pulled from the hat.\* All the answers can be found in the pages of this magazine.

**1. The #RaiseTheRoof housing rally was about what burning public issue?**

- Reopening Stepside Garda station
- Public transport
- Housing and homelessness
- The 'granny grant' proposal

**2. In what months did Ryanair pilots go on strike?**

- January and February
- March and April
- May and June
- July and August

**3. How much should you tip a waiter in Japan?**

- 10%
- 10% plus local taxes
- Whatever loose change you're carrying
- Nothing, they might even chase you to give back a gratuity!

**4. Who wrote hit musical Hamilton?**

- Leonard Bernstein
- Lin Manuel Miranda
- Andrew Lloyd Webber
- Tim Rice

**5. What's in a 'yellow dinner'?**

- Noodles and cheese
- Bananas
- Mashed potato and eggs
- Butternut squash and cream

#### The small print\*

You must be a paid-up Fórsa member to win. Only one entry per person (multiple entries will not be considered). Entries must reach us by Friday 7th December 2018. The editor's decision is final. That's it!

## YOUR VIEW

WIN €100

# How do you like *Fórsa*?

WE HOPE you enjoyed this issue of *Fórsa*, the magazine for *Fórsa* members. We want to hear your views, and we're offering a €100 prize to one lucky winner who completes this questionnaire.



Simply complete this short survey and send it to Hazel Gavigan, *Fórsa* survey, *Fórsa*, Nerney's Court, Dublin, D01 R2C5. You can also send your views by email to hgavigan@forsa.ie. We'll send €100 to the first completed entry pulled from a hat.\*

## The survey

### 1. What did you think of the articles in the autumn-winter 2018 issue of *Fórsa*?

- Excellent
- Good
- Okay
- Bad
- Awful

Comments \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### 2. What did you think of the layout, style and pictures in the autumn-winter 2018 issue of *Fórsa*?

- Excellent
- Good
- Okay
- Bad
- Awful

Comments \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### 3. What were your favourite three articles?

- 1 \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 \_\_\_\_\_

### 4. What were your least favourite articles?

- 1 \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 \_\_\_\_\_

### 5. What subjects would you like to see in future issues of *Fórsa*?

- 1 \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 \_\_\_\_\_

### 6. What did you think of the balance between union news and other articles?

- The balance is about right
- I want more union news
- I want less union news

### 7. Any other comments? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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