



# **Branch Handbook**

Dear Member,

Fórsa is Ireland's largest public and civil service trade union with members in health, local authorities, the civil service, education, community and voluntary organisations, semi-state companies and aviation.

The objectives of the union are to protect and promote the interests of its members. To protect, maintain, and improve its members' remuneration and conditions of employment.

Most of us hope to get through our working lives without any major problems or difficulties however, sometimes problems arise. Whatever the problem, Fórsa will endeavour to assist you in resolving difficulties.

## The Structure

### National Executive Committee Members

***Elected by Fórsa conference***

***Elected by each division (23 members in total) as follows:***

**1 President**

3 Services and Enterprises Division

**3 Vice-Presidents\***

6 Health Division

**1 Treasurer**

3 Education Division

6 Civil Service Division

\*Local Government and Municipal Employees are combined

3 Local Government Division

2 Municipal Employees Division

## The Divisions

There are 6 Divisions as follows:

The Civil Service Division

The Health and Welfare Division

The Local Government and Local Services Division

The Municipal Employees Division

The Services and Enterprises Division

The Education Division

Every member shall be allocated to a relevant Branch and every Branch will be located within one of the 6 Divisions.

## **The Education Division**

Each Divisional Conference shall determine policy on pay, conditions and other matters affecting only the members in the Division. These matters shall constitute Divisional policy having the status of recommendations to the National Executive which shall decide on any action to be taken.

The Divisional Executive shall consist of a Chairperson, Vice Chairperson, and not more than 13 other members elected by each Biennial Meeting of the Divisional Conference from the nominees of Branches with members in the Division. The Chair and Vice Chair shall not be from the same branch and not more than one of the other members of the Divisional Executive shall be from the same branch. The Chair, Vice Chair, and one other person elected at conference will represent the Division on the National Executive Committee.

The Higher Education (HE) branch is located in the Education Division as does the NETBS branch, the four SNA branches, the School Completion branch, School Secretaries branch, and the Education Branch No.1.

The Division was formed in July 2012 following approval at the Union Bi-annual Conference. Mr. Andy Pike, Head of Education has responsibility for the division along with two full time officials Mr. Sean Carabini and Ms. Stella Griffin. Elections for positions on the Divisional Executive are held during conference which takes place every two years.

## **The Branch**

The Higher Education (HE) Branch.

This handbook contains the guidelines for the operation of the HE Branch and reflect the Union Handbook (Instrument of Amalgamation) 2017 and any further amendments therein.

The affairs of the Branch shall be conducted at meeting held in Forsa Head Office or at any such other place as may from time to time, be designated by the HE Branch Chairperson/Secretary.

## **Membership of the Higher Education Branch**

Application for membership shall be made to the appropriate Branch Executive or to the National Executive on such form as prescribed by the National Executive.

Acceptance of an applicant into membership by the Branch Executive or by or on behalf of the National Executive shall not be treated as final until the application has been approved by both the appropriate Branch Executive and by or on behalf of the National Executive.

The HE Branch will legislate on all membership issues in accordance with the current HE Branch Rules or any amendments thereof.

### **Management of the HE Branch Affairs**

The day to day affairs of the Branch shall be conducted by an Executive Committee, hereinafter referred to as “the Branch Executive Committee” or “BEC” which shall be elected in accordance with the procedures hereinafter laid down.

The Branch Executive currently consists of 21 members but following a motion to AGM in 2019 the structure of the Executive will be reviewed following mergers to create Technological Universities.

### **Eligibility for Membership**

The HE Branch is a higher education workplace based branch representing professional, management, student support, and library staff and takes into membership any employee, including a temporary employee of a higher education institution subject to the applicant accepting the objectives and Rules of the Union.

### **New Membership Application**

Most people join Fórsa for the collective protection and bargaining power that comes with membership of Ireland’s largest public and civil service trade union. Wherever you work, the worry of public spending cuts mean uncertainty over your job, your income and your working conditions. Fórsa members enjoy representation and better protection when these threats arrive in the workplace. That is why there has never been a more important time to be in Fórsa, the union for public and civil servants, the community sector, commercial state companies, and more. In addition to this, Fórsa members also benefit from a wide range of discounts on products and services from financial services and membership of a credit union.

### **Financial Benefits**

Fórsa members can opt into Fórsa facilitated financial benefits i.e. car insurance, home insurance, travel insurance, additional pensions benefits, salary protection and life cover.

#### **Fórsa members are entitled to:**

€5,000 personal accident cover

€5000 critical illness or death benefit and Spouses also covered for death benefit

€5000 illness benefit if you’re out of work for more than 12 months

Evacuation or repatriation expenses up to €250,000 for members

## **Free Fórsa 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	1850-77-66-44
Free 24/7 domestic assistance helpline	1850-77-66-44

*24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year*

## **New Applicant Procedures:**

1. Application forms can be obtained on request from the Branch Representative or can be downloaded from the Fórsa Website: [www.forsa.ie](http://www.forsa.ie)
2. The completed application form should then be sent to New Membership, Fórsa Trade Union, Nerney's Court, Dublin 1, D01 R2C5 and marked "Higher Education Branch", for processing.
3. The Branch Membership Secretary brings the monthly report of proposed new applicants to the next Branch Executive meeting. Local representatives will inform the Executive of any issues pertaining to the application form before approval or not is granted.
4. The HE Branch will inform HQ of approved new members who will submit the list to the National Executive Committee for final approval.
5. The "Authorisation for Employer to Deduct Union Subscriptions" section of the application form will then be sent to the relevant employers Payroll Office.
6. New members will then receive a Membership Card and a Branch Membership Welcome Pack following inclusion on the Fórsa HQ membership database.
7. The relevant In House Committee will then include the new members on their email listing for communication and distribution of information.

### ***Please note:***

***Entitlement to assistance from the Union arises only from the date of branch approval and only after three month in respect of issues arising on or after that date. Therefore, the Branch are under no obligation to deal with any past or on-going personal issues on approval of application and acceptance as a union member.***

## **Membership Subscription**

The Union subscription payable by members, including retired members, and Associate Members shall be as determined from time to time by the Union Bi-annual Conference. Responsibility for ensuring that the Union subscription is paid at the correct rate and for the payment of any arrears arising shall rest with the member.

*A member shall cease to be a member:*

- a. On cancelling their deduction at source mandate with their employer or on cancelling a

- payment mandate with a financial institution, or
- b. On ceasing to be employed in an appropriate role or by an appropriate employer, or
  - c. On acceptance by the Union of a written resignation, or
  - d. On foot of a decision by the National Executive to comply with a ruling of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions on a dispute between unions on the organisation of members, or
  - e. On being expelled from the Union.

*And shall:*

- Not be entitled to the industrial relations services of the Union
- Not take part in the affairs of the Union
- Not hold any office in the Union
- Not be reckoned for the purposes of any Rule where numbers of members are relevant.

Since the 1<sup>st</sup> January 2019 the Union subscription payable by members of Fórsa is 0.8% of basic salary, subject to a maximum subscription based on the first point of the Grade VI scale currently €380. Retired member subscription is €96 or 0.4% of pension whichever is the lesser.

### **Retired Members**

On retiring, members are encouraged to join the retired members' vocational group. Retired members remain with their relevant branch. An annual subscription is paid directly to Fórsa HQ allowing membership of the Vocational Group. Retired members can vote only on issues which directly affect their income and conditions as retired public servants. They cannot vote on issues relating to terms and conditions of employment or work related issues.

### **Resignation from Fórsa**

A person wishing to resign from Fórsa can do so by formally writing (letter, e-mail etc) to the relevant branch advising them of their decision to resign. The member must give his/her full name, employer, employment address and union or staff number (or some other means of identifying themselves from others of the same name). They are encouraged to give the reason(s) for resigning. This allows the union to understand whether any of its actions, or otherwise, may have led to that decision. Their decision to resign will be recorded on the union's membership database and the appropriate branch will be notified.

#### *Ceasing Payment of Union Subscriptions*

The responsibility for ensuring that the payment of union subscription has ceased rests with the member and not with the union. Where a member is paying a union subscription by deduction at source from salary they must write to their employer requesting them to cease deducting the union subscription. Employers will not take any instructions from the union, or anyone other than the employee concerned, to either commence or cease any deduction from pay.

Where a person's employment ceases, the union subscription will automatically cease if deducted from salary.

## **Change of Employer**

Existing members who transfer to a new employer should complete a “Notification of Change of Employer” form. The completed form should be forwarded to the branch representative or to Membership, Fórsa HQ, Nerney’s Court, Dublin 1 D01 R2C5

## **Re-joining Application Process**

Former members seeking to re-join the union should complete a standard application form and submit it for approval by both the appropriate Branch and the National Executive Committee.

Not until an application is approved by the branch is it treated as final and full membership. Instructing the employer to recommence a union deduction does not, in itself, satisfy the union rule requirement when seeking to join or re-join. Depending on the circumstances of the member's departure from the union he/she could be asked to make a financial contribution in respect to part/all of the period in which they were outside of the union membership. However, the HE branch agreed at its AGM in February 2019 that on accepting an application from a past member to re-join the branch will not ask for a financial contribution but instead will not take on board any current issues or issues arising within the first six months from the date of re-joining the union.

Members returning from maternity or long term sick leave do not have to re-apply to join the union. Members on unpaid leave continue to be members of the union but do not pay a subscription (0.8% of zero basic pay is zero!). The payroll officer should re-commence subscription deductions when such members return to work. Members who through no decision of their own cease paying subs should still continue to be treated as members and correctly should not have to re-join.

### ***Procedures:***

- a. Each application to rejoin will be considered on its own merits by the branch.
- b. The returning member will be asked to explain in writing the reason for the lapse in membership and indicate why subscriptions were not paid.
- c. The Branch reserves the right to refuse re-admission into membership in certain circumstances.
- d. Former members have the right to appeal the decision to the Branch Executive committee

## **Strikes and Industrial Action**

Members may take strike or other industrial action only when authorised to do so by the Educational Divisional Executive or the National Executive. A Branch may authorize a ballot on industrial action of the membership of the branch.

The Union shall not organize, participate in, sanction or support a strike or other industrial action

without a request from the Branch, following a secret ballot in which two thirds of those voting or at least half of those entitled to vote support the proposed action. Entitlement to vote shall have been accorded equally to all members whom it is reasonable at the time of the ballot to believe will be called upon to engage in the strike or other industrial action.

### **Branch Executive Meetings**

There shall be a Branch Executive for the Branch which shall conduct the business of the Branch in accordance with, and subject to, the decisions of general meetings of the branch and subject to the overriding authority of the National Executive. The Branch Committee is charged with the orderly running of all Branch activities between Annual General Meetings.

The branch executive currently consists of a representative from each establishment and meetings are held in Fórsa HQ or at any such other place as may, from time to time, as designated by the HE Branch Chairperson or Secretary. These meetings enable the BEC to discuss issues with the official and the chairperson. Personal issues or issues pertaining to an individual member are not discussed at the Branch Executive meeting. These are discussed in private with the official.

The workplaces where the Chairperson, Vice-Chair, Secretary, and Treasurer reside are entitled to have an additional representative on the branch executive.

### **Branch Executive Meetings**

1. The HE Branch Executive shall meet approximately every 6 weeks and will also hold an Annual General Meeting at least 90 days before conference as nominations and motions must reach Head Office no later than 77 days before conference commences.
2. The attendance of 7 reps from different employers including 2 branch executive officers shall constitute a quorum.
3. Decisions are agreed by a show of hands and by way of a simple majority. In the case of a tie, the Chairperson has a casting vote.
4. Agreed decisions and rules need a two thirds majority to be over-turned.
5. The Secretary shall e-mail a copy of the approved minutes of the previous meeting within 7 working days following the meeting for circulation to all members.
6. The agreed Agenda and a reminder of the meeting to be sent to each representative 5 working days in advance of the next meeting, together with the relevant documentation.
7. The Branch Executive has the power to appoint sub-committees. Each sub-committee will have a chairperson who shall regularly report back to the Branch Executive on its

activities.

8. If a BEC member is unable to attend a meeting his/her apologies should be sent to the Secretary as soon as possible. The relevant BEC sub-representative may attend in their place.
9. A BEC member who is absent on an ongoing basis and who has not given a valid reason for such absences, will be advised by the Branch Chairperson to step down. The relevant house committee to elect a replacement.
10. The Branch Executive may be convened at any time at the direction of the Chairperson, or on receipt of a requisition in writing addressed to the Secretary signed by at least 7 Branch Executive members giving 7 days' notice of the meeting.
11. The Branch Executive has the power to invite observers to attend any of its meetings but they will not have the right to vote.
12. The branch at the Annual General Meeting may elect a registered retired member of the Union to a non-voting position on the Branch Executive.
13. Amendments on motions on behalf of the Branch to the Divisional Conferences and Bi-annual Conference or any Divisional Conference shall be decided by the Branch Executive, or as may be determined from time to time by a general meeting of the Branch.

### **Special General Meetings of the Branch**

A Special General Meeting of the Branch shall be convened by the Branch Secretary at the request of the National Executive, the Divisional Executive or the Branch Executive or one third of the members of the branch.

### **Fórsa Meetings with Management**

- The Chairperson shall agree the composition of all delegations for meetings with the management side at National Level. A full time Fórsa Official will always accompany the delegation to such meetings.
- All formal contact involving the HE Branch members of Fórsa at National level must be reported to the Branch Executive at the earliest possible opportunity after the meeting has taken place. The report and any resulting documentation should be sent to the Secretary of the BEC for inclusion at the next BEC meeting.

## **Local House Committees / Workplace Representatives**

Each workplace to form a local in-house committee comprising of a Chairperson, Secretary, and (preferably) representatives from each functional area. Each local in-house committee agrees on the size and remit of their committee.

- Each Workplace will have at least one/preferably two Fórsa members to act as the local staff representatives. They should act as the first point of contact between the member and the Branch.
- If the member does not wish to involve the House Committee the HE Branch Executive shall be the second point of contact for the member.
- The member to report an issue in writing to the Chair or Secretary of the committee
- The Local Branch Chairperson/Secretary shall decide if the issue warrants the attention of the Fórsa Official.
- Branch Officers/Representatives are instructed to involve a full time official (at the earliest opportunity) where a meeting takes place with the Management side involving issues concerning or which may result in disciplinary action or serious industrial relations matters.

### **The role of the Workplace Representative includes:**

- Liaising with the Branch and official on matters relating to members in that workplace.
- Assisting with communications between the branch and the members in that workplace
- Promoting the Union and assisting in recruiting new members

### **Meetings**

Where practicable local meetings with the management side should include the following personnel:

- A full time Official / Organiser of Fórsa and/or
- The BEC representative/Branch Officer and
- House Committee representatives (a minimum of two union members should attend
- A written record of the meeting and attendance sheet should be maintained

The remit of the committee to be agreed locally in accordance with the structure of the workplace but with the approval of the BEC.

## **Branch AGM**

The Annual General Meeting of the Branch shall be held in accordance with the rules of the union and shall be open to all HE Branch members. The Branch Secretary shall issue a notice to each local representative at least 28 days before the AGM is to take place. Local representatives must inform and invite all Branch members in their respective Institutions of the AGM including the date, time and venue.

The order of business of the Annual General Meeting of the HE Branch must include the following:

1. Minutes of previous AGM of the HE Branch
2. Matters Arising
3. Chairperson's Address
4. Secretary's Report
5. Treasurer's Report
6. Guest Speakers Address
7. Officials Report
8. Organisers Report
9. Reports (other branch officers)
10. Appointment of Tellers, if required
11. Election of Branch Executive
12. Election of Branch Auditor(s)
13. Appointment of Trustees (if required)
14. Conference:
  - Number of Delegates
  - Motions
  - Nominations
15. Nominations and Elections to:
  - Education Divisional Executive
  - Standing Orders
  - Consultative Council
16. HE Branch Internal Branch Motions
17. Branch Motions to Conference
18. AOB

## **Motions to Conference**

HE Branch motions to Conference must be submitted in writing to the Branch Secretary at least 14 days in advance of the AGM. HE Branch internal motions will be accepted from the "floor" at the AGM.

## **Nominations for Officer Positions**

Nominations for officer positions on the Branch /Executive/Division/NEC must be sent to the Branch Secretary 14 days in advance of the HR Branch AGM. The following officer positions

shall be elected at the HE Branch AGM; Chairperson, Vice Chairperson, Secretary, Treasurer, Training Officer, Membership Secretary, Equality Officer.

Elections will take place at the AGM and the standing orders / returning officer will conduct the elections and announce the successful candidates.

## **Branch Funds**

The Treasurer of the Branch shall:

- Lodge all receipts to a branch bank account from which all payments shall be made by cheque/EFT signed by the Treasurer and the Chairperson
- Submit to the AGM of the Branch and the General Secretary the Income and Expenditure Accounts for the preceding calendar year with a Balance Sheet as at year end which has been examined by the branch executive.
- Comply with all instructions and financial management requirements as specified by the General Secretary to comply with external financial regulations as they apply to registered trade unions.
- Attend training courses as may be held for Treasurers from time to time ensuring that the Branch Committee adheres to and meets all its fiduciary responsibilities.

The amount of honorarium, if any, payable to a Branch Officer shall be as decided by the Branch Executive and /or as may be determined from time to time by a General Meeting of the Branch and shall be subject to specific approval by the National Executive prior to payment. Such honoraria or any other discretionary payments are subject to the appropriate national taxation regulations in force from time to time as advised by the General Secretary.

Head Office may deduct from the next Branch Allowance due to a Branch any tax liabilities incurred by the Branch in the previous 12 months as advised by the Union's Auditors.

## **Branch Training**

The training rep and the branch official agree subject areas for branch training on an annual basis. This training must be relevant to the branch and usually assists in policy formation. Head Office also offer Level 1 & 2 training and graduations are held on an annual basis. The branch executive and house committee reps are encouraged to partake in whatever training is on offer from the union centrally.

## **Branch Strategy in relation to Mergers/Clusters/Alliances**

The branch executive at its training session in February 2014 agreed its strategy in relation to the Technological University Act which came into law in 2018. This agreed position paper was sent to THEA for circulation to management in each institute. The first Technological University was established in Dublin on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2019. Three more applications are currently being pursued and the branch and members are actively engaged in the process.

## **Communication**

The Secretary and the Chairperson are the main point of contact for the Branch and all communication should be received and circulated by them. Information received by the Secretary from Head Office will be sent to the workplace representatives on the branch executive. The Secretary will inform the rep if the information is to be kept in confidence or if it is to be circulated to all members.

Permission to circulate information must be sought by the Chairperson before being circulated to other representatives.

The HE Branch's main communication channel is by email and a group branch executive email list has been generated by both the Chairperson and the Secretary. The HE Branch agenda and minutes of meetings are sent to reps by email with a request for amendments and/or additional agenda items.

## **Fórsa Website**

Address: [www.forsa.ie](http://www.forsa.ie)

Information on the Education Division and the Branch can be found by clicking the heading Education.

Branch details and information on current activities and campaigns can be found by clicking on the Education page and clicking on the Higher Education Branch section

The Communications Office regularly send emails and an ebullition on up to date activities and campaigns for each division.

## **Work and Life Magazine**

The Work and Life Magazine for Fórsa members is produced four times per year. It is very informative on live industrial relations issues, social issues, interviews with members, and articles of general interest. All members are encouraged to sign up for the magazine which can be delivered to home or workplace.

*Please refer to the Fórsa Rule Book (2017) for more detailed information.*

E & O E

**This Branch Handbook will be reviewed and updated annually.**

## Appendix 1

### The HE Branch Executive elected at Branch AGM for the Year 2019

**Chairperson:** Gina O'Brien, Cork - Tel: 087 9133397 email: gina.obrien@cit.ie  
**Vice Chairman:** Eileen Byrne, TU Dublin - email: Eileen.byrne@dit.ie  
**Secretary:** Siobhan O'Callaghan – Tralee email: impact@ittralee.ie  
**Treasurer:** Ursula Cox, Sligo - email: cox.ursula@itsligo.ie  
**Representatives:** Sarah Clarke, **Membership Secretary** - Carlow- email: sarah.clarke@itcarlow.ie  
Maggie Ryan, **Training & Equality Rep**, Maggie.ryan@tu4dublin.ie  
Pamela Gaynor – IADT Dun Laoghaire email: [pamela.gaynor@iadt.ie](mailto:pamela.gaynor@iadt.ie)  
Barbara Byrne – TU Dublin- email: [Barbara.byrne@dit.ie](mailto:Barbara.byrne@dit.ie)  
Marea Curtin, Carlow – email: marea.curtis@itcarlow.ie  
Blanchardstown - email: [forsa@itb.ie](mailto:forsa@itb.ie)  
Tallaght – email: [HouseForsaCommittee@it-tallaght.ie](mailto:HouseForsaCommittee@it-tallaght.ie)  
Yvonne Magill - Dundalk email: [yvonne.magill@dkit.ie](mailto:yvonne.magill@dkit.ie)  
Catherine O'Reilly, Sligo – email: oreilly.catherine@itsligo.ie  
John Doyle, Athlone - email: jdoyle@ait.ie  
Mary Coughlan – Waterford email: mcoughlan@wit.ie  
Bernie Lally – Galway/Mayo email: [bernie.lally@gmit.ie](mailto:bernie.lally@gmit.ie) or  
Maura Gilligan – Galway/Mayo email: [maura.gilligan@gmit.ie](mailto:maura.gilligan@gmit.ie)  
Ann O'Leary – LIT email: ann.oleary@lit.ie  
Peter Somers – Cork email: [peter.somers@cit.ie](mailto:peter.somers@cit.ie)  
Linda McGlinchey - Letterkenny email: linda.mcglinchey@lyit.ie or  
Cathy McGowan email: [cathy.mcgowan@lyit.ie](mailto:cathy.mcgowan@lyit.ie)  
Marie Quaid, Mary Immaculate College - email: marie.quaid@mic.ul.ie

- **Divisional Executive Representative:** Gina O'Brien
- **Consultative Council & Vice Treasurer Representative:** Peter Somers
- **Retired Members Rep,** Vincent Lennon email: vincentjlennon@gmail.com

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### In addition:

**Union Official:** Stella Griffin, ASG, Fórsa - email: sgriffin@forsa.ie  
**P.A.:** Trish Lydon, PA for Education – Tel: 01 8171518 Email: [plydon@forsa.ie](mailto:plydon@forsa.ie)  
**Organiser:** Michael Kerrigan – Tel: 087 7183496 Email: mkerrigan@forsa.ie

### Your local House Committee are as follows:

Chairperson:  
Secretary:  
Committee