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**In this issue**

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PSSA, pay and working time in 2020  
Fitness to practise and CORU  
Traveller Equality  
Unpaid work trials  
National Archives under strain  
Activists: our best people  
Palestine and education  
Advice on Revenue changes  
The right to disconnect  
Workplace harassment  
The perks and pitfalls of remote working

Plus all the latest union news with food,  
music, travel and competitions



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## President's foreword

**FÓRSA**

Winter-Spring 2020

### Time to do a deal

Hours and pay in  
the spotlight

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Front cover: (L to R) Stuart O'Connor, Stephen Broderick, Mary Kelly, Gillian Cawley, Fórsa official Seán McElhinney, Jackie Purcell, Susan Hogan and Paddy Brock of Fórsa's Dublin Hospitals branch, pictured at a training event organised by the branch in Athlone, County Westmeath, in November 2019. Photo: Fórsa Communications Unit 2019.

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**FÓRSA**

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# Taking on a new decade

AS WE face into a new year and a new decade, I'm looking forward to the many challenges facing our union in 2020.

In recent months Fórsa has begun work on a five-year strategic plan for the union. Fórsa wants you to have your say, and the SORT (Strategic Organisational Review Team) project is currently seeking submissions from union branches and members.

Over the course of the next year, the SORT team will be undertaking a broad and extensive consultation with union members, activists, branches, elected officers and staff.

An online portal (<https://consult.forsa.ie/en>) is now open for individual and branch submissions until the end of January, and I encourage you to make a submission. This is designed to ensure the union can hear the views of all members, an opportunity to contribute ideas to help inform the union's future strategy.

Elsewhere, I'm looking forward to our biennial conference in May, preparations for which are already happening. Branch AGM season is now well underway. I'm enjoying the policy debates and will be looking forward to hearing some of the emerging policy initiatives being debated at our conference.

Also anticipated on the union's agenda this year will be negotiations for a successor agreement to the Public Service Stability Agreement (PSSA). Fórsa has already warned of the possibility that no agreement will be in place to follow the current deal when it expires at the end of this year (see page 8). The timing of a general election also plays a role here, but I hope things will become clearer in the early months of 2020.

As the New Year turned, my thoughts were with the school secretaries, who are still engaged in their struggle for pay justice. We must stand shoulder to shoulder with them until their goal is achieved.

Last November I visited Pakistan with our General Secretary Kevin Callinan to monitor the Lady Health Workers project supported by Fórsa and the Nordic confederation of Municipal unions. Their amazing work and their warm welcome has stayed with me, and provides inspiration for the challenges of the decade ahead.



Ann McGee, Fórsa President

January 2020

News



4

Toward a 2020 pay deal



14

Traveller equality



14

Trial of the unpaid



16

Palestine mission



24

**FÓRSA: TIME TO DO A DEAL**

**UNION NEWS**.....4  
Standardised leave deal for hospitals, SNA training, new PSSA measures

**TIME FOR A DEAL** .....8  
BERNARD HARBOR on the moving parts and politics of a new deal

**FITNESS TO PRACTISE** .....10  
HAZEL GAVIGAN on how the union protects CORU registered professionals

**SOCIAL CLASS AND EQUALITY** .....12  
Member activist PAUL McKEOWN on social class and equality

**TRAVELLER EQUALITY** .....14  
Fórsa seeks to improve the workplace for Traveller community

**PAY UP**.....16  
The workplace trials of young and migrant workers don't pay

**PRESERVING THE PAST** .....18  
The strain on our national archives

**GET THE BEST PEOPLE**.....22  
NIALL SHANAHAN meets union activists from Dublin Hospitals branch

**AN EDUCATION IN PALESTINE**.....24  
ANDY PIKE and KATHLEEN O'DOHERTY on their mission to Palestine

**HARASSMENT IN THE WORKPLACE** .....28  
DR LAURA BAMBRICK reveals the findings of ICTU's survey

**IN PRAISE OF BUTTER** .....32  
DANIEL DEVERY on eating well in the colder months

**CULTURE VULTURE** .....34  
Theatre, books and 'Perspectives' at the National Concert Hall

**THE GREAT OUTDOORS** .....40  
ÚNA-MINH KAVANAGH on the delights of outdoors Ireland

**REVENUE CHANGES** .....42  
Important information on how your tax records are managed

**GET DISCONNECTED** .....44  
PAUL DILLON on the FSU campaign to disconnect from our work devices

**WIN WIN WIN**.....47  
Crossword, competitions and prize survey



Niall Shanahan.

# The cracks are where the light gets in

AS WE entered the new decade it was sobering to note the dominant news stories. From catastrophic bushfires in Australia to Trump's misadventures in Iran it might have been a challenge to see where the light of a new decade could get in.

Sometime soon Brexit will actually happen, and for all we know could continue to dominate the news cycle for the years of trade deal negotiations to come. Anyone who claims it won't take that long is selling snake oil.

But time and events continue to move on. Closer to home, in the coming months the nation will go to the polls to elect a new government followed by (or perhaps even overlapping with) a

negotiation for a successor to the Public Service Stability Agreement (PSSA). For more on the timing of it all – and the various moving parts – I recommend you read Bernard Harbor's feature on page 8.

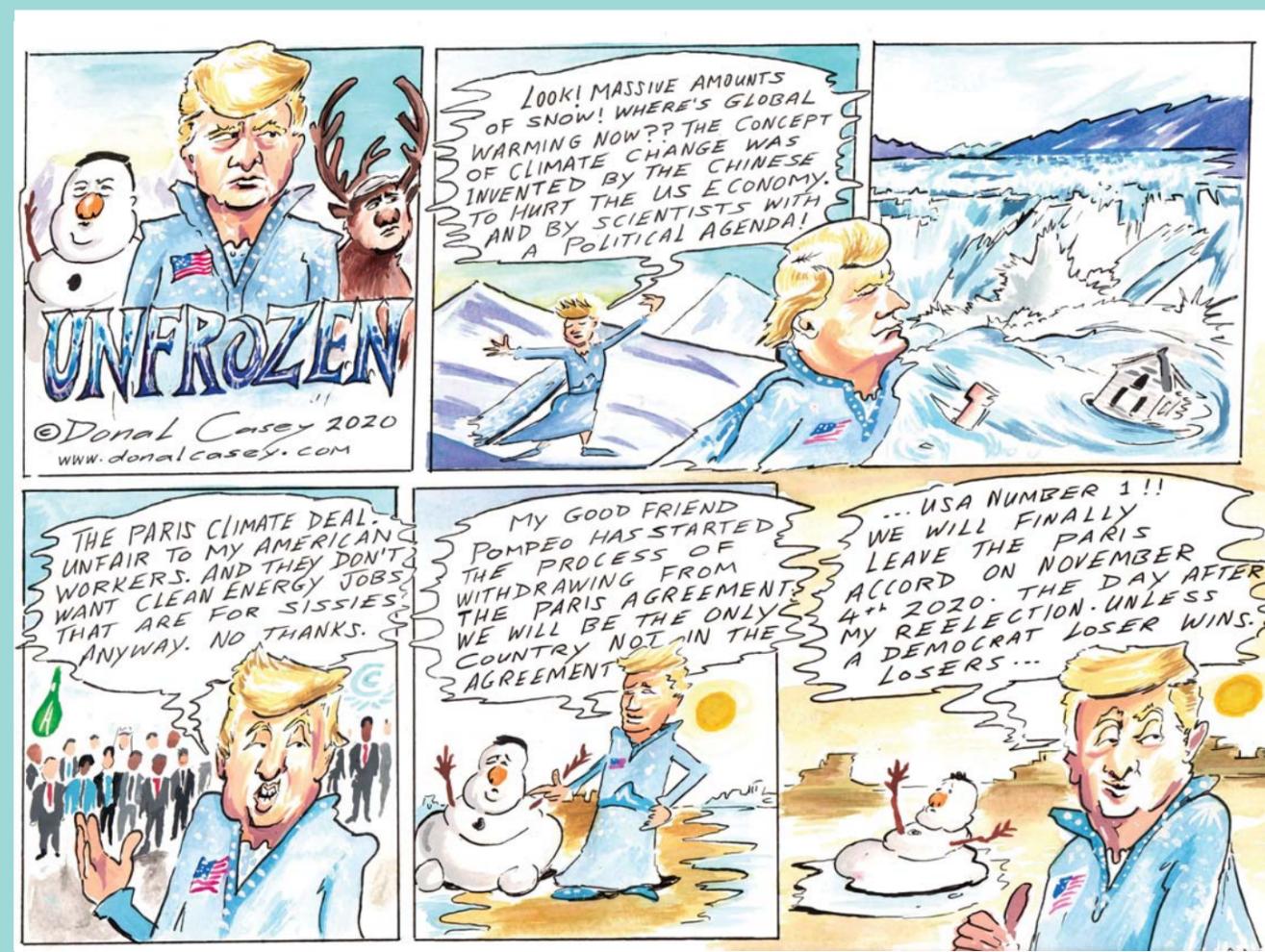
This edition of *Fórsa* welcomes guest contributor Paul Dillon from the Financial Services Union writing about the 'Right to Disconnect' campaign, while Aingeala Flannery tackles the perks and pitfalls of remote working in another excellent contribution.

Our Culture Vulture section focuses on some of the best cultural events taking place in the early months of the year, and on our resident travel correspondent Úna-Minh Kavanagh,

who has published her first book, *Anseo*, a rich and unique perspective of growing up in Ireland.

Mr Connolly opines on the musical turns of the decades of his lifetime, with football legend Liam Brady nodding his approval from the sidelines.

And as a new decade dawns and you're looking for further signs of hope, allow me to refer you to the people we feature on page 22 of this edition. The heartbeat of the union, our activists. I met with a group from our Dublin Hospitals branch and it was a life affirming experience. Our present and our future is in good hands ■



We bring you a roundup of the most read news from our website and Fórsa's fortnightly news bulletins.

# Fórsa wins leave standardisation deal



A NUMBER of HSE grades, including environmental health officers, biochemists, and pharmacy and clinical measurement grades, are to get enhanced annual leave arrangements thanks to a deal painstakingly negotiated by Fórsa. The new arrangement will standardise their leave, bringing it in line with other health professional grades.

The agreement also aligns the leave of similar voluntary hospital staff, who missed out on an earlier standardisation deal that aligned leave with the HSE.

Under a deal brokered by the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC), the improved leave is to be backdated to 2015 on a "cost neutral" basis in both the HSE and the voluntary hospitals.

## Delay

Fórsa official Catherine Keogh said "This was a complex process involving multiple employers and even more grades. But it's finally over the line, and the members concerned will now have their leave standardised with other colleagues. It's a win for them delivered by the collective strength and resources of the union," she said.

The earliest leave standardisation deal was done in 2009, but it emerged that certain grades weren't covered. Repeated union attempts to redress initially stalled because of the financial crisis and subsequent recruitment moratorium.

The union won a commitment to address the problem as part of the 2013 Haddington Road public service deal, and agreement covering most staff was done in December 2014. The recent deal has finally laid the process to rest ■

## Fórsa consults department on SNA training programme

FÓRSA HAS begun consultation with the Department of Education and Skills (DES) on the content of a new national training programme for SNAs.

The consultation process follows the Government's decision to develop a new Schools Inclusion Model. As part of this model, for the first time, the DES is developing a national training programme for SNAs.

A one-year pilot of the new 'School Inclusion Model' scheme, commenced in September 2019, with 75 schools in Dublin and surrounding counties taking part.

Fórsa's head of Education Andy Pike explained: "The information provided to Fórsa indicates that the training would



be offered firstly to some 500 SNAs within the pilot schools on a voluntary basis before being rolled out nationally."

Education providers have been invited to tender for the provision of the training programme.

Andy added "Consultation between ourselves and the Department is ongoing. Fórsa remains concerned that the training should be accredited at an appropriate level reflecting the complexity of the SNA role," he said.

While no agreement has been finalised on the nature of provision of SNA national training, Andy said Fórsa supports the creation of a national training programme for SNAs, on the condition that it reflects the realities of the complex work carried out by SNAs and is appropriately accredited.

Andy said further updates will be provided to Fórsa's SNA members as more information on the content of the training programme becomes available ■

To stay in touch with the latest union news visit [forsa.ie](http://forsa.ie) and subscribe to the news bulletins, which are free to all Fórsa members. Subscribe by sending your details to [info@forsa.ie](mailto:info@forsa.ie)

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|  <b>COVERED LOAN</b>           | <b>Shares greater than loan - 4.97% (5.08% APR)<sup>1</sup></b>      |   |   |  |
|  <b>HOME LOANS<sup>3</sup></b> | <b>LTV &lt; 50%</b><br>3.40% (3.45% APRC) <sup>2</sup>               |   | <b>LTV &lt; 80%</b><br>3.60% (3.66% APRC) <sup>2</sup>                |  |
|  <b>EDUCATION LOAN</b>         | 4.97% (5.08% APR) <sup>1</sup>                                       |   |   |  |
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<sup>1</sup>The APR (Annual Percentage Rate) included is an example only; all APR examples are based on a €1,000 loan over a period of 12 monthly repayments. <sup>2</sup>The APRC (Annual Percentage Rate of Charge) included is an example only; all APRC examples are based on €200,000 over a period of 300 months. <sup>3</sup>1st legal charge will be required.  
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## Fórsa news

# Public service pay improves



Photo: dreamstime.com

CIVIL AND public servants receive their next union-negotiated pay and pension levy boosts from 1st January.

Under the Public Service Stability Agreement (PSSA), the salary threshold at which staff pay the 'additional superannuation contribution', formerly known as the pension levy, will increase from €32,000 to €34,500 a year. This will be worth €250 a year.

Those who earn less than €32,000 a year will see their pay increased by 0.5%.

The PSSA, which was negotiated by Fórsa and other unions in 2017, will also deliver another 2% salary adjustment for all in September. The deal expires next December.

The PSSA was accepted in ballots of the members of the three unions that amalgamated to create Fórsa. It also saw the end of the pension levy on any non-pensionable elements of public

service incomes from last January. Non-pay provisions in the PSSA include strong protections against outsourcing.

Summary of income improvements

- 1st January 2018: 1% pay adjustment
- 1st October 2018: 1% pay adjustment
- 1st January 2019: Additional superannuation contribution threshold up from €28,750 to €32,000 (worth €325 a year). 1% pay increase for those who don't benefit (ie, those earning less than €30,000 a year)
- 1st September 2019: 1.75% pay adjustment
- **1st January 2020:** Additional superannuation contribution threshold increased to €34,500 (worth €250 a year). 0.5% pay

increase for those who don't benefit (ie, those earning less than €32,000 a year)

- 1st October 2020: 2% pay adjustment
- 31st December 2020: Agreement conclude

For more detailed coverage of the PSSA and public service agreements, see our special feature on page 8 ■

## Thousands win enhanced promotion pathway

SOME 9,000 local authority staff are to benefit from new promotional pathways following the overwhelming acceptance of a Fórsa-negotiated deal in a recent ballot.

The new arrangement, which will replace the common recruitment pool, will see 70% of promotions to grades IV, V, VI and VII confined to eligible staff in the local authority sector in what union's head of local government, Peter Nolan, called a "game-changer in terms of promotion opportunities."

The new arrangement, proposed by the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC), will see 50% of all promotions between grades IV to VII confined to the local authority sector, 20% confined to the employing local authority, and 30% open to public competition.

This compares to existing arrangements where half of grade V vacancies are open to public competition.

(See more on this story at forsa.ie) ■

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Bernard Harbor.

Fórsa has led the charge for a reassessment of the Public Service Stability Agreement in light of broader pay changes and the rising cost of living. BERNARD HARBOR reports.

# Unions warned of post-PSSA pay limbo

THE POSSIBILITY that no public service pay agreement will be in place to follow the current deal when it expires at the end of 2020 was recently raised by Fórsa at a meeting of ICTU's Public Service Committee, which represents most unions with members in the public sector.

with the current Public Service Stability Agreement (PSSA).

Talks with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER), which have been underway since April 2019, have reached broad agreement on a basic architecture for sectoral bargaining.

This would allow unions to deal with grade-specific issues in talks early this year, with a view to implementing outcomes as part of a successor to the PSSA.

But, despite Leo Varadkar's New Year hint that state workers can expect "above-inflation" increases this year, there has been no agreement on the amount of money that would be available to meet such claims. More worryingly, the sectoral process is yet to be signed off at political level, with finance minister Paschal Donohoe taking time to consider it.

Fórsa has warned that the green light is needed soon because a near-certain election in the first half of this year will telescope the time available for talks on a possible PSSA successor.

## Election fever

Until recently, it was expected that talks would take place in the spring or early summer of this year. But it's now

possible that an election – or post-election coalition talks – will be underway at that time instead.

Nobody believes that the Government will make firm pay commitments when an election is looming or underway.

*"It's expected that an election, or post-election coalition talks, will be underway during the period when pay talks were expected to take place. Nobody believes that the Government will make firm pay commitments when an election is looming or underway."*

That leaves a very tight timetable. Although PSSA pay increases are budgeted for 2020, next October's budget would have to make provision for 2021.

The likely electoral timetable means it's increasingly feasible that negotiations and union ballots may not be concluded by then.



*"Lurking in the background is a nightmare worst-case scenario where public sector pay increases continue to lag behind, and no deal is in place to deal with this in 2021 and beyond."*

In early 2019, Fórsa's Kevin Callinan led unions into talks when he said the PSSA was no longer adequate to maintain living standards and keep up with economy-wide wage settlements.

Since then the problem has worsened, with average private sector wage growth now running at three times the rate of public service increases in the year to September 2019. Central Statistics Office (CSO) figures show that average weekly earnings rose by 3.9% in the private sector, and by 1.3% in the civil and public service in that period.

The quarterly figures suggest that the gap between earnings in the public and private sectors is continuing to narrow, or even disappear. A separate and more detailed CSO study recently showed that the public-private pay differential narrowed between 2015 and 2018, despite the fact that significant restoration of crisis-era pay cuts took place in that period.

It found that the pay differential in those years ranged from -3.8% to +7.1%, depending on how it's measured. In other words, by some measures, average public service pay is now lower than in the private sector.

## Welcomed

Kevin Callinan welcomed the fact that incomes were rising, but said pay was now increasing faster in virtually every part of the private sector, when

compared to the public service. "The fact that the largest increase was in administrative and support services adds further weight to the union's call for a review of public service pay," he said.

But lurking in the background is a nightmare worst-case scenario where public sector pay increases continue to lag behind in 2020, and no deal is in place to deal with this in 2021 and beyond.

Recent pay rise projections from the union-backed Nevin Economic Research Institute (NERI) suggest that the gap will continue to narrow. It predicts average economy-wide pay increases of 3.6% in 2019 – significantly ahead of increases under the PSSA, which came in at just over 1.75% in 2019.

Looking to 2020, NERI predicts average economy-wide pay increases of almost 4% in a year when PSSA increases will be a maximum of 2.5% in total.

## Making the grade

Meanwhile, Fórsa has also been insisting that a mechanism for dealing with grade-specific issues across the civil and public service, including recruitment and retention difficulties, must be put in place.

It says the need for this has deepened since last summer, when the Government wound up the Public

Service Pay Commission (PSPC), which was established prior to negotiations on what became the Public Service Stability Agreement.

The PSPC identified a substantial number of grades where recruitment and retention problems had been identified, and was charged with examining them in more detail.

Although it issued reports on a small number of grades – including nurses, who experienced a significant pay boost on foot of the process – no definitive outcomes were produced for others.

These included grades in the health sector and the civil service. Fórsa 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.

Similar arguments were put forward on behalf of various health and social care professions.

Some of these were borne out late last year when it emerged that the minister for children had given €60 million of her budget back to the exchequer, even though 6,000 vulnerable children are yet to be allocated a social worker – one of the grades experiencing high staff turnover and retention problems.

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

The union's general secretary Kevin Callinan said Fórsa and other unions needed to prepare for the possibility, while urging the Government to inject more urgency into addressing problems



Hazel Gavigan.

CORU is the statutory body that regulates health and social care professionals (HSCPs) in Ireland. Its role is to protect the public by promoting high standards of professional conduct, competence, education and training. In the event a Fórsa member receives a CORU complaint and is subject to a fitness to practise procedure, the union will provide support, guidance and professional legal advice at no extra cost. HAZEL GAVIGAN reports on this substantial additional membership benefit.

## Fitness to practise and union support



Photo: dreamstime.com



FÓRSA REPRESENTS dieticians, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, social workers and speech and language therapists who are all amongst the professions currently regulated by CORU.

This list will grow to also include clinical biochemists, counsellors, orthoptists, podiatrists, psychologists, psychotherapists and social care workers in the coming months, as these grades are soon to be regulated.

HSCPs must renew their CORU registration every two years in order to maintain their licence to practise. In doing so, they agree to abide by their respective codes of professional conduct and ethics.

These codes set a specific standard of practise for each grade and any complaint made against a registrant (a CORU registered HSCP) will be on the basis that they've allegedly breached this code.

*"The moment you receive notice of a complaint, you make contact with us and we'll work together to ensure your response is the most appropriate to the allegations made."*

In the event a Fórsa member is subject to a CORU complaint, the union will provide support, guidance and professional legal advice at no extra cost. This is a substantial additional membership benefit.

HELEN, a social worker in Killarney, is a prime example of how important Fórsa's support is when dealing with a CORU complaint. She has experience of them being made against her as both a union and a non-union member.

"I can't begin to describe the difference having Fórsa's backing made to me during this experience.

"The first time 'round there was no escape. I'd come home from work, usually on a Friday evening and there'd be a CORU letter sitting on the ground waiting for me. I'd try my best to leave it until Monday but ultimately I'd always end up opening them and my weekend would be ruined. It felt so personal and my stress levels were through the roof.

"Now I no longer have any direct contact with CORU as all correspondence is conducted through the union. Ashley will email to tell me a letter has arrived, explain what it says and then outline how she thinks we should reply.

"Everything you say is shared with the complainant so having the filter of the union is wonderful as they only provide CORU with information that is absolutely necessary.

"This is just a work issue now, something I don't have to take home with me. My mental health is so much better than the last time and that's down to Fórsa's support. I can't speak highly enough of the service they provide," Helen said.

### Escalating

Ashley Connolly, Fórsa assistant general secretary with responsibility for these cases, says the frequency of complaints escalating to hearings significantly increased in the latter half of 2019.

"CORU is a very powerful body and we've started to see it evolve recently as the rate of complaints has increased significantly in the last year. The union has been representing members since CORU's foundation but this is the first time we have a list of cases where they've made the decision to go to public hearing so it's more important than ever to be protected.



Ashley Connolly, Fórsa assistant general secretary.

"The moment you receive notice of a complaint, you make contact with us and we'll work together to ensure your response is the most appropriate to the allegations made. We then become the only source of contact with CORU on your behalf so you no longer have to engage directly with them.

"Often times a complaint won't go any further than the preliminary proceedings committee, which is the first step in the process. However, an increasing amount of cases are being referred on to what's called a committee of inquiry for hearing, which is similar to something you'd see before a court or tribunal.

### Cover

"If at any stage in the process I believe it's likely to go to hearing, we immediately engage our legal team. Then myself, a solicitor and if required, a barrister, who are all qualified in professional regulations will meet with the registrant and we start to prepare our defence against the allegations made.

"A complaint can come in at any time so it's vital that practitioners are covered.

Without Fórsa membership they'd be subject to significant legal fees and all the extra stress of directly dealing with CORU by themselves.

*"You need to ensure you're protected before anything happens to give yourself that peace of mind."*

"The representation we provide only covers incidents that occur when you're in membership. If you receive a complaint, you can't then join Fórsa for support on an issue that predates your membership. In that sense it's like any type of insurance. You can't buy home cover to claim damages after your house is flooded.

You need to ensure you're protected before anything happens to give yourself that peace of mind, and to know that we're here to provide all the support you'll need," Ashley explains ■

CARMEN, a speech and language therapist from Sligo explained, "Being the subject of any professional regulator's investigation is a daunting experience. But it's so reassuring to know that Fórsa will support, advise and represent me at each stage of the investigative process.

"I've found Ashley and the legal team so professional. Their level of expertise and specialist knowledge in the healthcare fitness to practise process is second to none. I really trust I'm in the best hands."

Margaret, a principal social worker in Newbridge, believes everyone should join the union, but particularly emphasised the importance of Fórsa membership for HSCPs.

She explains: "CORU complaints are different to regular court proceedings as you have to prove your innocence as opposed to the complainant proving your guilt. It's a very difficult and emotional time so having proper legal representation is vital.

"I have saved thousands of euro in solicitors' and barrister fees as my regular union sub covered everything. Fórsa have an expert legal team and they cover the entire cost with no expense spared.

"This is a bonus benefit for HSCPs which should be availed of by all. You never know when a complaint will come in against you so preparation is key. The best time to join the union is today."

*"Names and locations have been changed to protect the registrants' identities."*

Fórsa member PAUL McKEON works at the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission. He writes in this edition of Fórsa magazine about the long road to including Socio Economic Status in Irish equality legislation.

# A class act



Fórsa member, Paul McKeon.

TWO YEARS ago I wrote an article about my experience of growing up in generational poverty in Dublin's Inner City and my experience of discrimination because of my background.

I also wrote about the exclusion of social class or 'socio-economic status' from Irish equality legislation. Current legislation outlaws discrimination in employment conditions and opportunities, or when accessing goods, services, accommodation or accessing education.

Currently, there are nine grounds protected by the legislation; gender, civil status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, race and membership of the Traveller Community.

Not long after my article was published, an Oireachtas private members Bill sought to amend the current legislation by adding socio-economic grounds as a new protected ground in equality legislation.

The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) carried out

legislative observations on the Bill, and welcomed its passing, recognising that this could be a catalyst for breaking cycles of deprivation.

However, despite its recent track record as being progressive on equality issues, the current Government issued a 'money message' on this Bill, which allows it to block the passing of any legislation that requires spending public money.

Explaining the decision, the Minister of State for Justice David Stanton said "a

clear definition as to what is meant by socio-economic discrimination" was required before the legislation could be considered further.

The minister gave a commitment to tender for a research project "to develop the necessary evidence base on this issue" and to "create a more precise definition of any potential new equality ground. This research was expected to start last September and be completed by December, but the department has still not signed off to allow it to go ahead.

## Bias

The Government's use of the money message suggests you might only expect a refusal to be based on fiscal grounds and not on any political motive. However, given the class issues the new legislation raises, it appears it's not just being refused on the grounds of perceived fiscal reasons, but more on the ignorance of class bias.

What's also worrying about the continuous failure to include a socio-economic status in equality legislation is that it puts forward the message that "equality is not for you" to particular marginalised and oppressed groups in our society.

This is the message that, in my opinion, has divided and weakened the pursuit of a more equal Ireland as those who would



seek such a goal become fractured and isolated into silos of minorities, rather than welded into a movement of a collective majority.

It's also disappointing that, yet again, the Government response to the recent demand for the inclusion of socio-economic status is to have Justice commission do more research. This is a

discriminate in this way, but it does happen and, while often done subconsciously, it can limit social and economic mobility.

This type of experience is also reflected in the most recent Irish research. *Does it only happen to me?* was compiled by All Together in Dignity Ireland. It's a collection of stories and reflections from

importance in both human rights and equality law, and its prohibition is included in a growing number of jurisdictions and international and European instruments.

Its inclusion in Irish equality legislation also presents an opportunity for the law to embrace a substantive conception of equality, capable of redressing material disadvantage by tackling systemic poverty and social exclusion.

It would also help to combat prejudice, stigma and stereotyping, and resolve any perception in society that there is a hierarchy of equality. A perception that some forms of discrimination are protected whereas others are not.

Finally, the inclusion of socio-economic status in our equality legislation would give people access to a robust state system in which to lodge a complaint, as with the other grounds protected by the existing legislation.

With these kinds of measures, people who have known generational poverty and exclusion would be given a more level playing field. That's worth fighting for.

Paul McKeon is a Higher Executive Officer in the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission and is also part of the Emerging Voices EU 27 future of Europe panel in the Institute of International and European Affairs. Follow Paul on Twitter at @PaulFMcKeon ■

'No one should have to deal with that': Taoiseach slams discrimination shown to north inner city man

Lovin' Dublin blog issues apology over offensive comments – Here's what happened

Bernard Shaw pub ignites fury with 'classist' Instagram post about new northside venue

DIT defends garda vetting for students applying for course entry

'People in council estates won't put down their address on job applications for fear of discrimination'

Real estate group apologises to Grafton Street flower sellers for 'clutter' remarks

Social class and postcode determine students' access to highly paid careers

Disadvantaged communities 'want change, not charity' Report documents widespread discrimination on socio-economic grounds

**Newspaper headlines highlighting social class prejudice.**

repeat of its response to the 2002 recommendation of the Equality Authority, and follows the 2004 research, commissioned by Justice, to include socio-economic status.

Research published in 2016 examined the existence and use of socio-economic status in equality law and policies across Europe. The report found that discrimination on these grounds has grown in importance, both in human rights and equality law. There is also a growing body of case-law from courts and tribunals on socio-economic status.

## Assumptions

Recent research from Yale University found that recruiters make assumptions about class after just a few seconds of conversation with a prospective employee and then make snap decisions.

Dr Michael W. Kraus, an assistant professor at Yale, said those doing the interviewing may not intentionally aim to

individuals with lived experiences of social and economic discrimination.

The discrimination is real and affects people every day and this is borne out with a wide range of research and evidence. Kicking the can down the road on the basis that this type of discrimination is difficult to define is a poor reason to prevent its implementation.

Nuanced and abstract definitions haven't prevented other grounds for discrimination being included in the existing legislation. For example, an individual's religion or faith may be as intangible, subtle or unclear at a job interview as their socio-economic background, yet religion is a firmly established ground in current legislation.

## Implications and recommendations

Discrimination on grounds of socio-economic status has grown in

## How Fórsa can help

Fórsa has a unique opportunity to progress the efforts to finally include socio-economic status as a new protected ground in equality legislation.

I'm suggesting that Fórsa considers taking action by:

- Writing to the Department of Justice, as it has done in the past, requesting an update in relation to the advancement and outcome of the research project they are currently working on that seeks to "create a more precise definition of any potential new equality ground."
- Calling on all relevant stakeholders and political parties to work together to make sure all manifestos for the 2020 general elections include a commitment to improve the Irish equality legislation with the added protection of socio-economic status.



Niall Shanahan.



Lisa Connell.

While Ireland's reputation as a tolerant society is challenged by a growing polarisation on immigration and asylum issues, the Travelling Community has a unique understanding of how discrimination and intolerance has never been too far from the surface in Irish society. Fórsa's Equality Network hosted an inaugural Traveller Network event in Sligo last November, marking the commencement of the union's efforts to advocate for Travellers in the workplace. NIALL SHANAHAN & LISA CONNELL report.

## Prejudice and people

SPEAKING AT last November's Traveller Equality Network event in Sligo, James O'Leary revealed that Ireland's recorded 30,000 members of the Traveller community are a young population, averaging 22.4 years, while half the Traveller population is under the age of 20.

The Irish Census figures of 30,000 Travellers may be understated. The true figure is closer to 40,000, but many Travellers remain reluctant to identify their ethnicity on the census form.

O'Leary works with Involve (involve.ie), the main provider of youth work services for young Travellers throughout the country, which was founded in 1972. He outlined the disproportionately high level of unemployment within the community. Only 19.8% of Travellers are in employment, while only 13% complete their second level education.



James O'Leary of Involve.ie, an organisation providing youth work services for young Travellers.

In addition to the high levels of unemployment and the low levels of school completion experienced by the Travelling Community, O'Leary also revealed that members of the Travelling Community feel they have to hide their identity in their workplace because of their fear of discrimination.



This revelation, above all, shows the enormous work that remains to be done to improve the education and employment opportunities for Travellers, as well as to take a collective look at ourselves, and how we might contribute to an improved working environment where, at the very least, nobody feels they need to hide their identity.

### Creating a safe space

Addressing the Sligo meeting, attended by trade union members, community activists and members of the Travelling Community, Fórsa's Head of Education Andy Pike said that, despite his lifelong activism on issues of racism and anti-discrimination, he's 'part of the problem': "My understanding of traveller issues is very small.

"This is the beginning for Fórsa, bear with us. There is no policy document to dust off and revise. Our starting point is the creation of this safe space, through the union's equality network," he said.

**Ellen Mongan: "We need to be empowering our young people more. I really do feel frustrated for the amount of talented young people I've seen who are not achieving their potential."**

The creation of a Fórsa Traveller Equality Network marks a new phase of development for the union, and reaching out to Traveller advocacy groups, developing appropriate policies and finding out how the union can eliminate the social barriers experienced by Travellers are some of the important next steps.

The union does have experience of industrial relations interventions on behalf of Travellers at work. Speaking at the Sligo event, our official Richy Carrothers outlined the union's experience intervening on discriminatory treatment of Traveller workers at the Leitrim Development Company in 2018.

"We discovered the company had been paying Traveller workers just €5 per

hour, significantly less than the statutory minimum wage.

"When they were challenged about this, management raised the hourly rate but cut the hours of affected staff. We discovered serious issues of concern about the treatment of Traveller workers there.

"These were staff employed to advance the work and support for Travellers across Leitrim, and who were treated in the most shameful way by their employer," Richy explains.

The issue was resolved following high level talks but the episode serves to highlight the enormous work that still needs to be done to ensure that Travellers are not discriminated against in the workplace, and how the union can play a robust and constructive role in this work.



Fórsa official, Richy Carrothers.

### Quotas

Among the required measures and initiatives discussed in Sligo were the need for workplace 'champions', positive affirmative actions and employment quotas in order to improve employment opportunities for Travellers in the civil and public services.

Travellers account for just 0.7% of Ireland's population, so there is an opportunity for the public service employers to show leadership in this area and implement a minimum employment quota that reflects Traveller numbers in the wider community.

The Department of Justice & Equality's National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy (2017-2021) includes a commitment to develop proposals for internships for Traveller and Roma in government departments, local authorities and other public bodies.

The commitment extends to supporting the provision of transition year, leaving certificate applied and Youthreach work experience placements for Travellers and Roma in public services and statutory agencies as a route to meaningful employment.



Bernadette Maughan, manager of Sligo Traveller Support Group.

However, there remains little evidence that any progress has been made on these measures, and it is here that the union's interventions could make a meaningful difference.

Bernadette Maughan, a Fórsa member and manager of Sligo Traveller Support Group spoke about the systematic exclusion of the Travelling Community, "There is a blind spot there. We're used to it, it's always there. This network is a great innovation, but it shows how much still needs to be done."

### Culture

Ellen Mongan is a Fórsa member employed in local government services in Galway, having previously worked in education. Ellen is also a member of the Traveller community, and has experienced and witnessed discrimination, both as a woman and as a Traveller "in the workplace, both from colleagues and service users."

Her work now involves working with the Traveller community and she says there's a very different story to tell in terms of what Travellers are experiencing, and where they see themselves going. Low educational attainment remains 'a major issue'. Remaining in secondary education is, she says, a huge challenge for most, with a very small number going on to third level education.

She cites the experience of young people she knows who have used the Irish form of their name in order to disguise their Traveller ethnicity and background, particularly in the private sector, in order to secure a job interview. "We need to be empowering our young people more," she says.

Ellen also notes the rates of drug addiction and suicides within the community. "I really do feel frustrated for the amount of talented young people I've seen who are not achieving their potential."



Fórsa's Head of Education Andy Pike: "This is the beginning for Fórsa. Our starting point is the creation of this safe space, through the union's equality network."

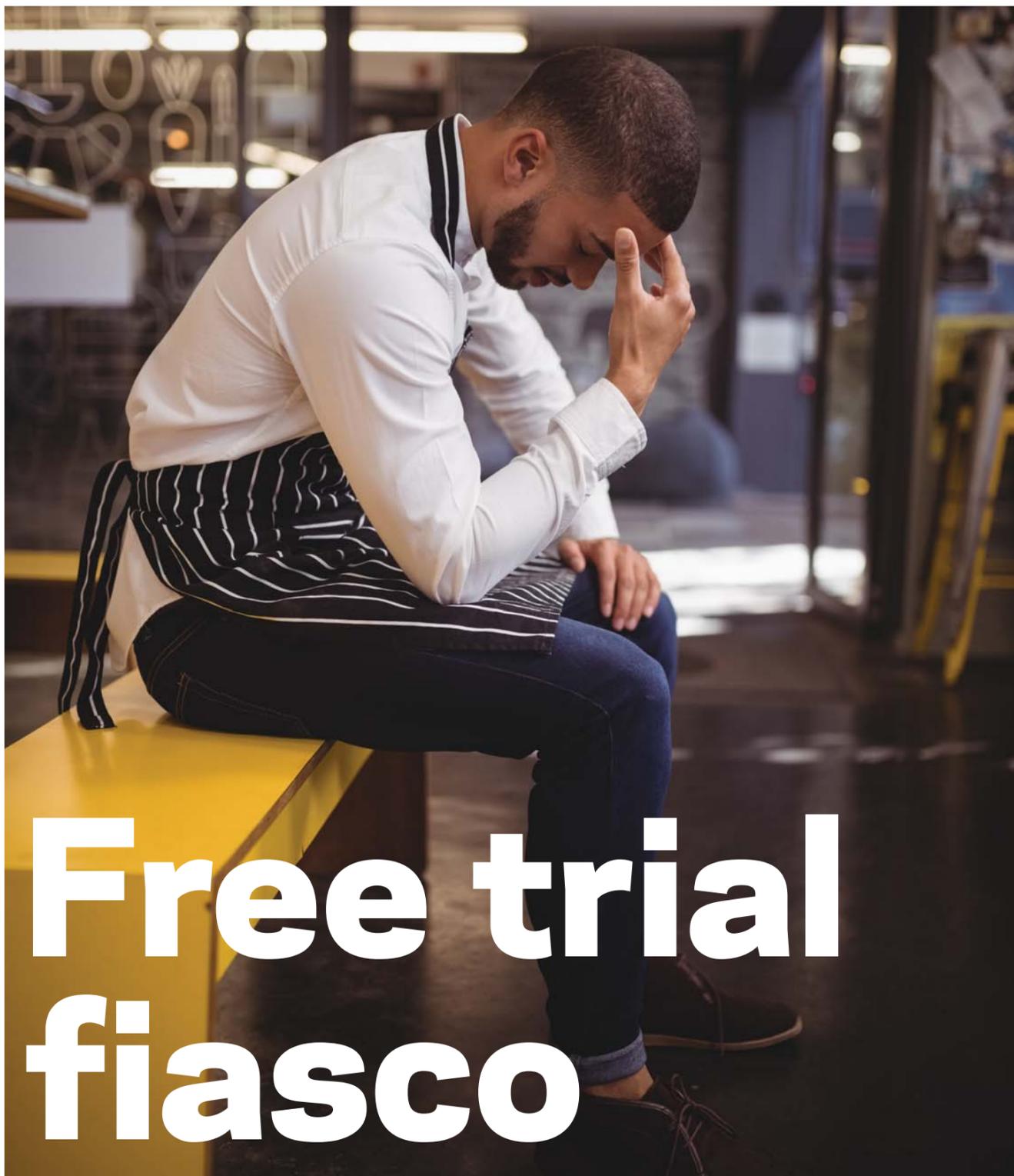
### Positive

Commenting after the event, Jim O'Leary said he believes the union's initiative marks the beginning of a positive and structured relationship between Fórsa, Involve and the Traveller community: "It was the first time for me that I saw the key role unions could play regarding employment of Travellers across a range of professions and sectors." ■



Rory Hogan.

We asked student RORY HOGAN, who worked at Fórsa's Communications Unit for a few months last summer, to write about his experience of unpaid work trials. Anecdotal evidence, particularly among younger and migrant workers, suggests that this might be a widespread trend in some sectors, and exposes many workers to short-term exploitation.



# Free trial fiasco

Photo: dreamstime.com

TWO YEARS ago I was in college and looking for a part time job to keep me going through the college semester. A bar in my locality sent me an email asking if I was interested in doing a trial shift for them. I'd applied for a job there about two months before. I jumped at the opportunity to make a good impression.

This was March 2018, as the 'Beast from the East' brought heavy snow across the country. I was surprised that the bar remained open during the extreme weather, but I managed to get there ten minutes before my shift was due to start.

The manager showed me around and brought me into his office to explain the work. He explained the trial shift would last six hours and that I would only be paid if I was successful in getting the job.

He showed me the ropes and I found myself waiting on tables for the first time. I settled in quickly and felt I performed well, working two hours more than I'd agreed, which I thought might boost my chances of getting the job.

*"The following day I received another message from the manager, this time asking if I'd be interested in doing another 'trial' shift. I was a little suspicious when it was offered at such short notice."*

The manager congratulated me and assured me the job was mine. I went home with a copy of the menu to memorise for my next shift two days later. However, the next time I heard from them it was to tell me the job had gone to someone else. They weren't hiring me after all. I was disappointed, but I moved on.

## Round two

The following day I received another message from the manager, this time asking if I'd be interested in doing another 'trial' shift. I still needed a job, so I made my way over through heavy snow, a little suspicious that the shift was offered to me at such short notice. The manager brought me through the same routine and explained that someone had just quit so there was a vacancy.

At the end of the shift, I received the same praise as last time and was reassured again by the manager that I was successful. With a little, but less, confidence than before I went home thinking I had the job. I received a message from the manager the next day notifying me that I was, again, unsuccessful at the trial.

*"National minimum wage rates apply to work experience placements, work trials, internships and any other employment practice involving unpaid work or working for room and board, regardless of the duration of the engagement."*

The sting in the tail, however, was that I wouldn't be paid for the 16 hours I'd already worked.

## Laura

I spoke to some friends about the experience and was surprised to discover many of them had similar experiences of these unpaid trial shifts. My friend Laura applied for a job in a late-night bar that doubled as a café during the day. She was told she'd be trialed doing either a late-night or a breakfast shift.

Laura ended up completing a 25-hour trial, working both shifts, and was offered a job and then rostered for a succession of late-night and early breakfast shifts. This left Laura with just six hours to rest between busy shifts. When she queried this, the offer of a job was immediately withdrawn and Laura was never paid for her 25-hour 'trial shift'.

Clearly, there are some employers taking advantage of an opportunity to exploit workers, though it's hard to say if it's widespread. It is most visible in the hospitality industry where it seems to be a common recruitment feature, at least for workers without any previous experience.

But where such practices can develop unchecked it's too easy for unscrupulous employers to exploit the practice to cut costs. Of particular concern is how it could be used to exploit young and inexperienced

workers, or migrant workers unfamiliar with the legal obligations of Irish employers ■



## What are the legal requirements?

The Workplace Relations Commission's advice on unpaid work is very clear.

"The National Minimum Wage Act applies to all individuals engaged under a contract of employment.

"The law defines a contract of employment as any contract whereby an individual agrees with another person, to do or to perform personally, any work or service for that person or a third person.

"Apart from the employment of close family relatives and the engagement of registered industrial apprentices, there is no exemption in law from the obligation to pay the national minimum hourly rate of pay.

"Therefore, national minimum wage rates apply to work experience placements, work trials, internships and any other employment practice involving unpaid work or working for room and board, regardless of the duration of the engagement.

"The right to receive the minimum wage cannot be waived in a contract as any provision in an agreement to do so is void as a matter of law.

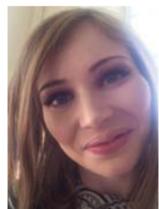
"Failure to pay the national minimum hourly rate of pay is a criminal offence, punishable upon summary conviction, by a fine not exceeding €2,500 or imprisonment not exceeding 6 months or both.

"In addition, an employee not in receipt of the national minimum hourly rate of pay may refer a complaint to a WRC Adjudication Officer who may order payment of the wages unpaid or underpaid."

See more at [workplacerelements.ie](http://workplacerelements.ie) ■



Bernard Harbor.



Roisin McKane.

Ireland's national archive was in the spotlight again as 2019 turned into 2020, with journalists and researchers drooling over the latest batch of State records released under the 'thirty-year rule.' But a new report says this trusted repository of precious records is at risk. **RÓISÍN MCKANE** and **BERNARD HARBOR** lift the lid.

# Precious national archives creaking under pressure

NAMA, THE Central Bank, the National Treasury Management Agency, the Garda Ombudsman, and the children's agency Tusla are among over 150 publicly-funded State bodies with no legal requirement to maintain and archive records for eventual release to the public under the 'thirty-year rule.'

That's one of the findings of a new report into Ireland's national archives, which uncovered a system creaking under the pressure of staff and skills shortages, expanded responsibilities, new technologies, space constraints, and legislative shortcomings.

*"Organisations like NAMA, the National Treasury Management Agency, the Garda Ombudsman and Tusla, which are playing leading roles in our national story, have no obligation to maintain or archive records for eventual release to the public."*

Published by Fórsa last December, just as archivists prepared to release more eagerly awaited papers in January 2020, the report also says that only

four out of 61 State departments and agencies covered by the National Archives Act are up-to-date with their legal obligations to transfer records to National Archives Ireland, the body charged with maintaining archives and making them available to the public.

The union also says the annual transfer of records under the thirty-year rule has been scaled back this year because of a lack of storage space.

The report, which was undertaken on behalf of the Fórsa's Archivists' Branch by *Creative Cultures and Associates*, uncovered a substantial backlog in the processing of records, and in making them available to the public.

It also identified major shortcomings in the digitisation of records and the development of online access.

This is largely due to serious staffing and skills shortages in National Archives Ireland, a problem that will be exacerbated when the 20-year rule, due to replace the current 30-year arrangement soon, is implemented.

## Staff under pressure

The report found that National Archive Ireland's staff complement is currently 25% below the number identified as necessary in management's 2016 workforce plan. The organisation also lags behind comparable state archive bodies in Denmark, Scotland and

Northern Ireland in terms of the employment of qualified archivists and other relevant specialists.

National Archive Ireland employs 40% fewer staff per capita than the National Records Office in Scotland, and 25% fewer than the Public Records Office in Northern Ireland, while most of its employees have no relevant professional training.

## What's the thirty-year rule?

It's the informal name given to laws in Ireland that require many Government documents to be released to the public after 30 years. A similar system is in place in other countries, including Britain and Australia.

Legislation has recently been passed to change to a twenty-year rule, partly because Britain has already done so. The change will ensure that Republic of Ireland material about Northern Ireland and our relations with the UK are available at the same time as British documents from the same period.

Meanwhile, professional archive staff are virtually non-existent in major State departments and agencies, and there is no State policy governing the management of electronic records in place.



Photo: gettyimages.ie

**Then-Taioseach Charles Haughey on the steps of No 10 Downing Street, with then British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in 1980.**

Fórsa official Seán Carabini said the crisis in the State's archives meant the quality of material made available to journalists, researchers and the public under the thirty-year rule and other services was in rapid and steady decline.

"The scant and declining involvement of professionally-trained archivists, including in records management, the digitation of records and IT more generally, is putting the quality of our national repository at serious risk as new technologies increasingly shape

the way we keep records and tell our national story," he said ■

## Our story

"In reality, most of the State institutions required to release material to the National Archives don't do so. And the majority of public service bodies established since 1986 have no legal requirement to transfer records to the archives at all.

"These include organisations like NAMA, the National Treasury Management Agency, the Garda Ombudsman and Tusla, which have played, or are playing, leading roles in Ireland's social, political and economic story," he said.

Fórsa is calling for a fundamental review of the relevant legislation, with a view to extending its scope and updating legal requirements on information governance, data retention, GDPR and digital preservation.

The union also wants a rapid and comprehensive review of records management across the public sector, and adequate and suitable space to store the growing national archive.

Seán also called for an immediate increase in staffing from the current 45 to 60, in line with a management workforce plan, with an emphasis on professionally-trained specialists.

## See for yourself

### Visiting the national archives

You can view Irish records dating from medieval times to the end of the last century at the National Archive in Dublin's Bishop Street. Its public reading room is open Monday to Friday, and many records - including the 1901 and 1911 census and soldiers' wills from the First World War - are available online.



A free genealogy advice service is also available for anyone who wants help researching their family tree.

Students, historians, academics, journalists, legal searchers and those interested in their family history are among the many people who visit the facility. In addition to departmental files, the archive holds official records like wills, court files, licensing applications, maps, and census returns.

There's always an archivist on duty to provide advice and answer queries.

National archives also participate in Culture Night each year, allowing even more people to visit and see the behind-the-scenes work of the archive repository, digitisation and conservation.

The National Archive website also provides information and guidance on visiting and using the archives.

**Get more information at [nationalarchives.ie](http://nationalarchives.ie) or follow National Archive Ireland on Twitter (@NARIreland) or Instagram (@NARIreland) ■**



Bernard Harbor.



Roisin McKane.

*Don't give up! Disturbing new data on the climate crisis should inspire us to act, and unions have a unique role to play, says RÓISÍN MCKANE and BERNARD HARBOR.*

# Unions can help win a green new deal



Photo: Conor Healy, Picture It.

**Thousands participated in the Climate Action strike rallies in cities and towns across Ireland in September. Fórsa staff and activists took part in the Dublin and Cork events.**

THE CLIMATE emergency is now near the top of the international political agenda, but it's also picking up pace. Even if we stopped emitting all greenhouse gases today, global warming would continue for several more decades at least.

In the absence of rapid and fundamental change, global temperatures are on track to keep rising to levels that will harm millions and probably destroy the planet.

The young Swedish activist Greta Thunberg, who's been instrumental in

the global mobilisation for climate action, says we should "listen to the scientists." That's not always comfortable.

Towards the end of last year, they sparked new concerns that the world may already have already crossed a series of climate thresholds, and warned of an "existential threat to civilisation" if we don't act faster.

Lots of us are now recycling, turning off the lights, shopping and eating more

thoughtfully, and even buying more fuel-efficient cars. All of these are important behavioural changes. Every little helps.

But if we're approaching the tipping point – and some say it's already best seen from a rear-view mirror – relatively small changes like this won't make enough headway to save the planet.

And Ireland remains a laggard on climate action. The Climate Change Performance Index ranked us the worst EU country on climate action as

recently as 2017. A year later two more studies had us second from the bottom, just above Poland.

So, while everybody – unions, employers, politicians, even banks – are talking about climate action, are we really seeing enough political and social will to migrate to a low-carbon economy in time?

## Hopes

Here and abroad, many of us are placing our hopes in building public and political support for a 'green new deal,'

First proposed by US Democrats, and inspired by US President Roosevelt's 1930's depression-busting 'New Deal,' the green new deal describes a package of social and economic measures that would simultaneously address climate change and economic inequality, including by harnessing the employment and economic potential of green technologies and industries.



**Dr Lorna Gold speaking at the NERI climate event in December.**

It sits nicely with the concept – championed by unions here and abroad – of a 'just transition,' which would protect workers and communities currently dependent on environmentally-damaging jobs and industries as we move to a low-carbon world.

Speaking at a recent event hosted by the union-backed Nevin Economic Research Institute, Dr Lorna Gold said this demanded a total rework of our ideas of economic development. "This is not about recovery or coming out of a crisis," she said.

The Maynooth academic urged policy makers to focus on communities on the margins and to manage the migration to low-carbon by creating generous supports for those affected by the necessary economic and industrial shifts.

While there are no jobs on a dead planet, she said we must share the unavoidable cost to workers directly

affected by green measures, particularly through the creation of meaningful employment replacement opportunities.

## War

Gold called for a "war on emissions," expanded public transport, and major programmes to retrofit public housing and the homes of those on low incomes.

And she argued that we need to radically revise our social policy to develop a progressive welfare state, social insurance and quality social services: a "social floor to be strengthened and reformed to address the challenges of an equally unpredictable world."

Gold reckons Ireland is well placed to participate in a global response in these ways. But she warned that changed mind-sets were needed. Put another way, we need a socio-political tipping point to head off the environmental tipping point.

But change is happening. Political candidates know that green concerns are high on the agenda as we enter a general election year. In many countries, including Ireland, last May's local and European elections saw climate become a decisive voting issue for the first time in history.

Here and abroad, the environment is now one of the primary concerns for hundreds of millions of citizens – a number that will grow as the 'climate strike generation' becomes part of the electorate.

They know that change of the scale and speed we need will have to be state-led. Yet despite the ravenous appetite for change, political systems are slow to act.

Even considering the 'additional measures' proposed by Government in the National Climate Action Plan, it's sometimes difficult to see where Ireland's promised radical cut in emissions is going to come from.

## Unique

That's where trade unions – with their resources, numerical strength and longstanding experience of effective political campaigning – can perhaps play a unique role.

Last September, an estimated four million people took part in the largest ever worldwide mobilisation for action on the climate crisis, with tens of thousands attending events in more than 50 Irish cities and towns.

Behind the scenes, Fórsa deployed its campaigns and communications expertise to support the determination and urgency of the young organisers, who were spearheaded by the students behind earlier school strikes for climate action.



**Greta Thunberg.**

Photo: dreamstime.com

Working with the protest organisers, and without fuss or profile, we helped promote the demonstrations and get young, passionate voices on the airwaves.

Working with other unions and environmental groups, the union has also lobbied the Government to establish a national just transition taskforce to oversee and manage Ireland's move to a low carbon economy.

## Deep well

We now need to see unions draw from their deep well of policy and negotiating experience to push politicians and corporations from fine words to robust actions that will meet our climate targets while keeping the transition just – and to make a reality of the bold ambition of the green new deal.

Addressing a major conference of European trade unions last summer, Fórsa general secretary Kevin Callinan highlighted the role that unions have to play in this global response, and urged them to do more.

"Unions must go beyond the protection of the people we directly represent, to embrace and lead the imaginative policies and difficult actions needed to confront the single most catastrophic threat facing humanity," he said.

We need to do it faster.

**Róisín McKane and Bernard Harbor work in Fórsa's Communications Unit**



Niall Shanahan.

*Fórsa's branch activists are the lifeblood of the union and we're lucky to have them. All over the country, in every employment where the union represents workers, we have activists who give their own time to solve problems, deal with members' queries, establish union policy and provide crucial union leadership. NIALL SHANAHAN spent some time with senior activists from Fórsa's Dublin Hospitals branch to find out who they are and what motivates them.*

# The best people



Photo: Fórsa Communications Unit.

(L to R) Stuart O'Connor, Stephen Broderick, Mary Kelly, Gillian Cawley, Fórsa official Seán McElhinney, Jackie Purcell, Susan Hogan and Paddy Brock of Fórsa's Dublin Hospitals branch, pictured at a training event organised by the branch in Athlone, County Westmeath, in November 2019.

THE DUBLIN Hospitals branch of Fórsa is among the largest branches of the union, with a long history reaching back beyond the establishment of IMPACT in 1991, representing staff across nine Dublin's hospitals.

I met the members of the branch committee for a training day in Athlone last November. I was there to give them some tips on public speaking, and arrived as my colleague Dessie Robinson was putting them through their paces on health and safety. The branch had a very packed two-day

programme organised, and the mood in the room was lively.

The officers of the branch squeezed in a separate meeting between sessions, and the chat between activists ranged between agenda items for the next AGM, industrial relations issues emerging in different employments, future holiday plans and day-to-day life.

What became clear fairly quickly is that this is a group of like-minded friends with a deeply held interest in how union strength works for the members of their branch.

### Comradery

Gillian Cawley has been a union member for 27 years and is a senior pharmacy technician in Temple Street Children's Hospital. She's been a rep and active on the branch committee now for five years, and says it's all about comradery for her. "I got involved initially because I like making sure that people's rights at work are looked after.

"Pharmacy, for example, has been left behind. Career progression remains an issue. We don't want to see people

leaving their chosen profession as a consequence of the lack of career progression. The biggest lesson I've learned throughout my involvement with the union is that you have to keep arguing," she says, drawing instant laughter (and approval) from her colleagues.

*"My job has given me good people skills and when you combine that with information sharing and the collective experience within the branch, it provides you with the skills to represent people in the workplace."*

Mary Kelly is a staff grade physiotherapist in Beaumont who's been active in the union since 2018, when she was co-opted on to the branch following her work with the union's Physiotherapists vocational group. Mary identifies lots of issues requiring attention, but, like Gillian, career structure and progression for therapy grades are top of her list. She explains it's key to retaining these professionals in the public health system. Recruitment of health and social care professionals (HSCPs) into the union is also a priority for her.

### Kudos

Jackie Purcell, a deputy patient services manager in St Luke's Hospital has been a union member since the 1980s, and active in the branch for the last six years. Fairness is a big motivation. "Not enough kudos is given to the people on the ground floor who carry the health service from day to day. My approach to solving problems in the workplace is to focus on fairness," she explains.

Stuart O'Connor is a procurement manager in Tallaght Hospital since its establishment, having previously worked as a porter in the Adelaide Hospital. He joined his first union in 1993, and stepped in to branch activism in 2013.

Stuart says getting the facts straight is a vital part of representing members in the workplace, and welcomes the opportunity to learn about the varied challenges in different employments.

Paddy Brock is a retired member of the branch, who enjoyed a long career in the

prosthetics department of the National Rehabilitation Hospital in Dún Laoghaire, and is a long time union activist. I asked him what it is that keeps him involved. Paddy feels strongly that the motivation for union activism is all about a person's interest in their fellow man, driven by a desire for justice and fairness at work.

"For me the issues are participation in the branch, including the social element. The friendships I've made in the union over the years are very important to me.

"My involvement in the union gives me an additional interest in life. I've also got an interest in what's going on in the workplace and, more generally, in the country," he explains.

### Priorities

Stephen Broderick is chair of the branch, and is a principal clinical engineering technician in St Luke's Hospital. He's been active in the union for more than 15 years and was recruited into the union by former IMPACT President, the late and much loved union stalwart Edwina Jones.

*"For me it's a case of being able to speak up on behalf of people who might be reluctant to speak up for themselves. When people work together and prepare well they can achieve things for their colleagues. That's our strength."*

"For me it's a case of being able to speak up on behalf of people who might be reluctant to speak up for themselves. When people work together and prepare well they can achieve things for their colleagues. That's our strength.

"Our priorities include standardisation of annual leave (see news on page 4) about Fórsa's recent breakthrough on this issue), we have 39 individual employers, so we have plenty of issues common to all employments, but others are specific to particular grades and locations," he says.

Susan Hogan is a senior receptionist in Leopardstown Park Hospital, where she's worked for 36 years. The union played a role in turning her initial two-year temp job into a permanent post at the beginning of her career. Susan enjoys the information sharing opportunities through her union

involvement. "My job has given me good people skills and when you combine that with information sharing and the collective experience within the branch, it provides you with the skills to represent people in the workplace."

Having enjoyed their warm welcome and excellent hospitality, I came away from my chat with these activists struck by their commitment and the serious and professional way they approach both their work and their union activism. It's complemented by a mix of great personalities and, if I found myself in a tight corner in work, these are exactly the type of people I'd want around me. Great activists, great people ■

## Fórsa's Dublin Health Cluster



by Seán McElhinney

THE DUBLIN Hospitals' Branch is one of four branches which make up the Fórsa Dublin Health Cluster. Alongside our Boards and Voluntary Agencies, Dublin Care Services and Irish Youth Justice branches, the Dublin Health Cluster is an aggregate of approximately 6,000 Fórsa members.

The branches within the cluster share a vision about how they can best deliver for their members. That vision is set to be realised this year.

Members across the cluster will be able to access advice and support, tailored to their particular needs, by making a call to a special cluster advice-line or dropping an email to the cluster member-mailbox. The branches hope to make it as easy as possible for members to get the advice and support they need, when they need it.

Their working relationship won't stop there. The branches plan to publish a regular bulletin, reporting on issues of shared interest for members across the cluster, and work together on campaigns to better the lot for their members at work and home.

*Seán McElhinney is an assistant general secretary with Fórsa ■*



Andy Pike.

Fórsa's Head of Education ANDY PIKE travelled to Palestine last October to examine education provision in the occupied Palestinian territories. The visit was organised by the Trade Union Friends of Palestine, and Andy was joined by Fórsa member activists including school secretary Kathleen O'Doherty, SNAs Annette Murphy and Niamh Jordan and Shelley Healey from the union's Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown branch.

# Bearing witness to conflict and hope



WE WERE not fully prepared for our experience in Palestine.

We were disarmed by the warm welcome we received from teachers, children and parents in the schools of East Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Jordan Valley.

We were moved by the friendly, excited and curious children enjoying an education that is being delivered in the most challenging and hostile circumstances.

And we were overwhelmed by the dedication of the teaching and other staff we met there. We can have nothing but admiration for those struggling to provide an education to students under occupation in the most trying of conditions.

## Tension

The first school we visited was the Al Fataa Al Laji'a Primary School for girls,

## Al Fataa Al Laji'a primary school for girls.

just outside the walls of the old city of Jerusalem. The Israeli authorities refuse permission for the construction of Palestinian schools in East Jerusalem, so this school operates in converted residential buildings. It's funded by the Palestinian Authority, but its status is not recognised by Israel.

The children are the same as children anywhere. Excited, curious and proud of their school and their culture.



Hebron checkpoint.

The Al Wifaq primary school, inside the old city of East Jerusalem, is situated in a residential building on the first floor. Israeli settlers have occupied the adjacent building and use the same stairwell as students entering and leaving the school.

There is a unique tension in the air when a school is forced to exist in close proximity to Israeli settlers. The playground is a small internal courtyard with no space for children to run or play. The classrooms are cramped and dark, but are decorated with the same artwork and pictures you see in any classroom in the west.

*continued on page 26*



Fórsa delegate Shelley Healy with parents in Hebron.

# Teenager describes incarceration by Israeli authorities



by Mehak Dugal

PALESTINIAN YOUTH Ahmed Alsoos was released last autumn from an Israeli military jail, following a six-month prison sentence for throwing a stone at a soldier – a charge he denies.

Speaking in Dublin last November, at a conference on the rights of Palestinian children organised by Trade Union Friends of Palestine (TUFFP), Ahmed, now 17, recalled the horrors of his time in prison and the drawn-out military court proceedings – during which he had no contact with his family – that led to his conviction, solely on the testimony of an Israeli soldier.

He recounted his confinement in a small, stuffy dark room with no windows, and tearfully relived the constant humiliation, degradation and abuse he suffered at the hands of the guards.

Since Israel lowered the age of criminal responsibility, the military can – and do – arrest and confine children as young as 12 years old.

The conference called on the Irish Government to halt trade links with Israel in protest at the systematic maltreatment of Palestinian children by the Israeli military.

Speaking on behalf of TUFFP, Fórsa official Denis Keane said an Israeli strategy of mass arrests and maltreatment of Palestinian children was being implemented on an “industrial scale,” and appeared to be part of a deliberate policy to traumatise large numbers of children.

According to UNICEF, the United Nations agency for children, 59 Palestinian children were killed by Israeli forces in 2018. Another 3,472 were injured, while over 200 children – some as young as 12 – were detained and prosecuted in the Israeli military court system every month.

“Israel is the only country in the world that prosecutes children through military tribunals instead of civilian courts, and even strong allies of Israel have expressed alarm at its treatment of Palestinian children.

“We are calling on the Irish Government to take a stronger stand on Israel’s deliberate policy of killing, injuring, imprisoning and traumatising thousands of children. It should end all economic and trade links with Israel until the physical and psychological maiming of Palestinian children stops,” said Denis.

Other speakers included psychiatrist Samah Jabr, who spoke about the physical and mental impact of living in a war-torn environment, and the suppressed trauma experienced by children who experienced violent and life-threatening confrontations with Israeli soldiers. Speakers were united in their calls for greater EU solidarity with the Palestinian people ■



Khaled Quzmar, General Director of Defense for Children International, translates for teenager Ahmed Alsoos at the Dublin Trade Union Friends of Palestine event in November 2019.

## Hebron

We visited a school in Hebron situated in the middle of the old town where thousands of Palestinians live in a militarised zone with multiple check points.

*“There is a unique tension in the air when a school is forced to exist in close proximity to Israeli settlers.”*

We witnessed teachers and others undergoing several physical checks on their way into work. Perhaps the most distressing spectacle was the treatment of the school children on their way to school. Their bags were searched and contents upturned on inspection benches, boys were required to lift shirts and show their torso and legs in front of heavily armed soldiers.



The Al Aroub refugee camp outside Bethlehem.

All our delegates returned with concerns over just how these conditions continue to affect children and their education. The dedication of the teaching and other staff we met was tremendous.

We must redouble our efforts to ensure that Israeli and Palestinian children are given equal life chances.

Read Andy's full account of the visit at [forsa.ie/blog](http://forsa.ie/blog)

Fórsa is affiliated to the Boycott Divest Sanctions (BDS) campaign. Find out more at [www.bdsmovement.net](http://www.bdsmovement.net)

# Journey to Hebron



by Niall Shanahan

KATHLEEN O'Doherty is a long time activist with Fórsa and has worked as a school secretary in Letterkenny, Co. Donegal for 24 years. She spoke to me about her impressions of Palestine.

“It was overwhelming at times. As a grandparent of six boys aged 10 years to six months, I'm used to boys being boys, but I can't imagine them having to live the way kids do in Palestine.

“How they're being treated as they come through checkpoints, emptying their pockets, lifting up their jerseys, and how many times can a young boy can endure that?,” she says.

Kathleen's description of her own encounters with Israeli military and security personnel frequently refers to the fear and tension involved. All she thought about each time this happened was the effect of such encounters on children.

“They provide anger management training for young children from primary school onwards, emphasising the dangers they'd face if they retaliated in any way to their experiences at checkpoints.

“If they retaliate that could lead to arrest and abuse. It's a side of life there that struck me more than anything else, that young children need to be trained to keep themselves safe. It's bound to affect their development,” she says.

On her first day in the country, Kathleen was struck by the beauty of the countryside. “But then, when you see the wall, and the settlements which are pristine and well kept, and you get to the other side and witness the level of deprivation, in which Palestinians are living. I noticed that more than anything else.

“Hebron was grim. Formerly busy shopping streets are boarded up and deserted. It's hard to imagine what it used to be. Our driver at one point was surrounded by soldiers after waving to our guide up the street. They checked his phone, his papers, they appeared from nowhere.

*“Kathleen's description of her own encounters with Israeli military and security personnel frequently refers to the fear and tension involved. All she thought about each time this happened was the effect of such encounters on Palestinian children.”*

“I work in a lovely, bright and well-equipped school in Donegal, so I was also struck by how the children are being taught in small, residential living rooms. The schools are doing their best in very difficult circumstances, but it is a world away from the experience of our children here.

“They're happy kids, despite everything, and were clearly excited by our visit. Everyone we met gave us a very warm welcome, which I found very moving. We met so many people working hard to alleviate suffering and deprivation. Seeing what they're up against was unnerving and, at times, traumatic,” she says.

Kathleen is clearly moved and deeply affected by what she saw, but expresses her gratitude for being able to bear witness and meet, as she says, so many wonderful people. She pays particular thanks to Andy Pike for leading the delegation. “Andy was, at all times, so supportive and caring and reassuring throughout. He made us feel safe and I'm very grateful for that,” she says



School secretary Kathleen O'Doherty with Samir Jibreel, ead of the Palestinian Education Ministry, Jerusalem Branch.

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Dr Laura Bambrick

Sexual harassment can happen to anyone, anywhere, at any time. Yet all too often, it happens in the workplace. Congress Social Policy Office DR LAURA BAMBRICK shares some of the findings of a recent Congress survey of trade union members' experience of sexual harassment at work.

## Sexual harassment in the workplace

AHEAD OF the International Day to End Violence against Women last November – a UN designated day which kick-starts 16 days of activism against gender-based violence – the Irish Congress of Trade Unions conducted an online survey of more than 1,300 union members with experience of sexual harassment and sexual assault in the workplace. Fórsa members accounted for 40% (542) of all respondents.

*“Sexual harassment is defined as any form of unwanted verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature which has the purpose or effect of violating a person’s dignity and creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for the person.”*

Sexual harassment is defined, in the Employment Equality Acts 1998-2015, as any form of unwanted verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature which has the purpose or effect of violating a person’s dignity and creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for the person.

The survey focused exclusively on people’s experience of unwanted sexual behaviour at work, rather than measuring the scale of the problem. We know from international studies that

around one in three working women will experience sexual harassment in the workplace over the course of their working life. The purpose of the Congress survey was to gain a deeper understanding of workers’ experience – the type of incident, the perpetrator and location, the barriers to reporting, and the impact sexual harassment has on the lives of those affected.

For instance, the Christmas party has long been identified as the most common off-site location of workplace sexual harassment, and this is borne out in our survey. However, the extent of unwanted sexual behaviour from colleagues taking place online points to a growing problem in the modern workplace. One in five (20%) of the most recent incidents experienced by respondents had taken place at a work-related social event. One in seven (14%) had taken place on the phone, by email or over social media.

### Incidents and perpetrators

We asked respondents to select from several options the type of sexual harassment they had experienced, and allowed them to select more than one option in recognition of the fact they might have had multiple experiences.

The most common type of sexual harassment incident reported by respondents were verbal e.g. unwelcome jokes of a sexual nature (one in two incidents); verbal sexual advances (two in five), comments of a sexual nature about their body or clothes (one in three).

Around one in seven (15%) of respondents reported experiencing unwanted sexual touching or attempts to kiss them. Two per cent reported

being seriously sexually assaulted or raped at work, of which five respondents said that this occurred within the past 12 months.

*“The purpose of the Congress survey was to gain a deeper understanding of workers’ experience – the type of incident, the perpetrator and location, the barriers to reporting, and the impact sexual harassment has on the lives of those affected.”*

In line with existing research, the Congress survey found that in eight out of ten cases (81%), the harasser in the most recent incident was a man. For the majority, their harasser had been a colleague (one in two incidents). One in three (31%) reported that their direct manager or another manager was their harasser.

### Reporting and impact

The survey found a high number of workers experiencing sexual harassment take no action (either formal or informal) and there is an unacceptably high level of dissatisfaction with their employer’s actions among those who do report. Four in five workers (81%) took no action, while only one in four of the small minority who did report sexual harassment to their employer felt it was taken seriously and dealt with satisfactorily.



Photo: dreamstime.com

While the #MeToo movement has shed light on the hidden problem of sexual harassment and sexual assault at work and empowered women to speak out, the fear of a negative impact on their career or their working relationships were the most common reported reasons for not taking action (three in five respondents).

Two in five took no action because they felt they would not be believed, taken seriously or they would be blamed. Worryingly, one in ten did not know that they could report the sexual harassment to their employer or how to go about reporting the incident.

Respondents were asked to list the effects the harassment had on them. Feeling embarrassed (one in two respondents), cautious of certain work situations (two in five) and less confident at work (one in three) were all cited by respondents, as well as it having a negative professional (one in six), psychological (one in four) and physical (one in ten) impact.

### Congress recommendations

Trade unions and employers play an important role in preventing sexual harassment and violence at work.

*“We need to see more urgent action to tackle this problem – raise awareness that such behaviour is unacceptable and may be subject to discipline, adopt comprehensive and accessible policy, put in place robust procedures for reporting, for supporting victims and for dealing with perpetrators.”*

Congress, together with trade unions across Europe, are actively calling for the ratification by Member States of the 2019 ILO Violence and Harassment in the World of Work Convention.

The Employment Equality Acts places a legal responsibility on employers to have

policy and procedures in place to prevent, and deal with, sexual harassment in the workplace. We need to see more urgent action to tackle this problem – raise awareness that such behaviour is unacceptable and may be subject to discipline, adopt comprehensive and accessible policy, put in place robust procedures for reporting, for supporting victims and for dealing with perpetrators.

Congress wants to see more employers making use of the provision in the Department of Justice Code of Practice on Sexual Harassment at Work to have designated people to make an initial informal approach to the harasser in circumstances – where it is too difficult for the worker to explain to the harasser that the conduct is not welcome – that it offends them or makes them uncomfortable. After all, most of those who experience sexual harassment at work simply want the harassment to stop and to do their job without interference.

There needs to be real consequences for employers who do not comply with their obligations under the Acts. Everyone has the right to respect and wellbeing at work ■



Aingeala Flannery.

As employers seek more worker flexibility and technology blurs the boundaries of working time, is working from home a boost for productivity or a tool of social isolation? In this edition AINGEALA FLANNERY looks at the perks and pitfalls of remote working.

# Working from home



IT TAKES the crane-operator forever to climb the ladder in the morning. I see him when I raise the bedroom blind to wake my son for school. Then, as I'm scraping uneaten Weetabix into the kitchen bin I glance out the window toward the sky and I see he's still got a few dozen rungs to go. 'Come on,' I say to my son, 'the crane man is almost there. You'll be late.' What I mean by this, is we will both be late. I work remotely from home and if I'm not at my desk by the time the crane-operator has reached his cab, I worry that the day is running away from me.

*"More than 200,000 people in Ireland work remotely, yet there's a perception that you're not really working if you're doing it at home, that you're not 'part of the proper workforce.'"*

Mornings are a flurry of emails. This is productive, I tell myself, even though it

feels anything but. I email X, who responds and CCs Y. In order to progress the issue Y has a question that requires me to forward her email to Z. By half-past ten, I have generated an email thread the length of my arm, and I'm no closer to resolving an ostensibly simple problem. I go downstairs, put the kettle on and eat two chocolate Hobnobs while I'm waiting for it to boil. If myself, X, Y, and Z were in the same room the problem would be solved by now. I carry my mug of tea upstairs and see there are two missed calls from Z on my mobile. I call her back, but it goes to

voicemail. Outside a concrete block the size of a double decker bus is swinging from the crane by chains, if it falls it will surely kill someone. I wonder what kind of character assessment crane-operators undergo, if any.

## Keep an eye out for the black dog

Three years ago, I decided to go freelance for 'family reasons'. I'd had enough of juggling childcare and work, all I wanted was flexibility, especially around the school holidays. I remember telling this to my GP as she stuck a flu jab into my upper arm. 'Hmm,' she said. It was not the response I'd hoped for. Previously when we'd discussed my work/life balance, she'd warned I was at risk of burning out if I didn't slow down. What did I expect from her now? Congratulations and applause? 'Mind yourself,' she said. 'and keep an eye out for the black dog.' She withdrew the syringe and I felt like I was deflating.

At the time, I had two friends who were working from home. One, a therapist, for whom it was going quite well, except when clients felt entitled to miss and change appointments. The other friend, a journalist, was employed by a start-up that had yet to find a suitable premises, it was using hot desks and was allowing some employees, including my friend, to work remotely.

*"The worst part was the surveillance. Her employer had installed productivity monitoring software on the laptops of remote workers, to make sure they weren't skiving off."*

She couldn't afford to take full maternity leave after the birth of her second child and so was back to work, breastfeeding at the desk in her home office. It was, in her words, 'a dump': littered with half-eaten rice cakes, cast-off socks and nappies. She often stepped in puddles of smoothie and puke.

But the worst part was the surveillance. Her employer had installed productivity monitoring software on the laptops of remote workers, to make sure they weren't skiving off. She was working morning, noon, and night—and couldn't wait to get back 'into the proper workforce', as she put it.

## Hours

More than 200,000 people in Ireland work remotely, yet there's a perception that you're not really working if you're doing it at home, that you're not 'part of the proper workforce'. This is especially the case if you are freelancing despite evidence to show that the self-employed work an average of ten hours more a week than employees. Freelancers complain of being 'always on' and certainly that's how I felt: available 24/7, at the beck and call of whoever needed me.

*"My own son started to balk at going to aftercare - why couldn't he sit in front of the telly scratching himself while I worked? Nobody seemed to take my job as seriously as I did. Did they even understand what my job was?"*

Friends and relations who were on holidays, or leave, or were stay-at-home parents texted me to go for coffee, walks, and playdates. Parents who were stuck in the office or in traffic asked if it was okay for me to pick their kid up from school, seeing as though I was at home. My own son started to balk at going to aftercare - why couldn't he sit in front of the telly scratching himself while I worked? Nobody seemed to take my job as seriously as I did. Did they even understand what my job was? Something to do with books and children and writing?

The work itself was going well, not only was I making a living but we could afford to go on holidays, and I was so busy that I found myself turning down jobs. I didn't want to spend my nights as well as my days alone in the box bedroom, shackled to the computer. What I wanted was company. I wanted work colleagues to tell me what was good on Netflix, I wanted people I could shout ideas across the office at. I wanted throwaway remarks, chit chat, I even began to miss the thing that annoyed me most about shared offices - gossip.

## Marooned

Instead I was marooned, connected to the world by my Skybox, and from this remote eyrie the simplest of questions meant composing an email, and waiting

for a reply. I was starting to feel stupid and unproductive, and there was nobody to tell me I wasn't. There were days when the crane-operator was the only adult I saw and I wondered if he felt as lonely as I did.

Compared to him, I'd little to complain about. I had a heater, a radio and a toilet. If I fancied a cup of tea or a sandwich all I had to do was get it. I was my own boss, I didn't have to shower or put on make-up. I could work in my pyjamas. I didn't actually own pyjamas, I owned a pair of leopard print lounge pants and they became my work uniform, with slipper boots and an oversized grey cardigan. Some days I was unrecognisable, even to myself. Afraid that this might be the 'black dog' the doctor had warned me about, I decided to go for a walk every day.

It was on one of my walks that I came across the 'creative workspace', in the backstreets near the canal. It had huge windows and graffiti art on the walls. A couple of hipster types - faux hillbillies - were manoeuvring a foosball table through the open doors. A sign in one of the windows advertised 'available co-working spaces'. I tried and failed to imagine myself making small talk with my creative co-workers, my lounge pants and slippers giving me away for the misanthrope I had become.

*"I tried and failed to imagine myself making small talk with my creative co-workers, my lounge pants and slippers giving me away for the misanthrope I had become."*

By then, I'd been working from home for more than two years, and in that time hundreds of buy to rent apartments were built on the land surrounding our little cul de sac. In September, the crane outside my window was dismantled and the operator moved on to another job. I was surprised at how bereft I felt—and how ghostly I found the view outside my window: all those empty units.

A few weeks later, an organisation I'd been freelancing for offered to put me on staff, and I all but took the hand off them. It would mean a fixed income, pension, holiday pay, sick leave entitlements, and a desk in their office. The desk was the clincher. If working remotely had taught me anything, it was that humans, for all their imperfections, were what I'd missed the most ■



Daniel Devery.

Let's face it, the Irish Winter has really only just started. Until some time in April, the cold and damp will continue to assault us. The Scandinavians have perfected the art of Hygge (defined as 'a mood of coziness and comfortable conviviality with feelings of wellness and contentment') and DANIEL DEVERY reckons a similar approach to comforting food in the coldest months provides the key, not just to surviving the bitterest season, but to actively enjoying it.

# Sensible pleasures



Photo: Fórsa Communications Unit.

THIS DISCUSSION begins and ends with mashed potatoes. No other food can achieve the simultaneous feat of being filling, comforting, warming, nourishing, tasty, therapeutic, even medicinal, especially if you've had a bad day. And more especially if that day was cold, damp and dark.

While we're here let's tip our hat to butter. That golden-coloured perky block of wonder who plays such an important role in this dish. And let's also tip our hat to the Irish dairy farmers, the grass and the cows for producing, frankly, the best butter in the western world. Bravo to all of you.

One of the many irritating aspects of the self-styled 'clean eating' movement – a dogmatic brand of food morality that's been enjoying too long a time on its self-righteous perch – is how perfectly good staple foods have been demonised into submission.

Clean eating disciples appear to be able to shamelessly boast about perfectly good food they *don't* eat. Isn't that a bit like talking at length about films you'll never watch?

Potatoes, bread, pasta, indeed any form of comforting, warming fat-lubricated starch – the very stuff our bodies

justifiably crave during these long, cold dark months – is banished to a list of prohibitions that would make that notoriously fun-averse curmudgeon of the Old testament, Leviticus, blush.

## Free the gluters!

Before Gwyneth Paltrow led the charge on this joyless clean-eating quest, it was diet guru Robert Atkins who drove popular opinion away from carbohydrates (a quick reminder here that carbohydrates are an essential fuel for the human body), and helped create the current obsession with protein.

The boys and girls in the marketing department were quick to catch on, and now everything from ready meals to chocolate bars are tripping over themselves to announce their protein content to you.

Ironically, that much maligned protein, gluten, still has its absence loudly declared in a lot of processed foods (a quick reminder here that Coeliac disease is a very serious condition, and shouldn't be confused for the current vogue for 'gluten intolerance').

As any sensible nutritionist will tell you, a healthy balance is everything. We're encouraged to steer a sensible course between the emaciated joyless kale disciples climbing up to the moral high ground of the food pyramid on one side, and the crisps-and-chocolate bingers on the other side who don't really feel like climbing anything right now.

*"A golden crust of nutty sweetness, a little crunch, a lot of starchy comfort, with wilted greens on the side, felt like the beginnings of a new and wonderful friendship."*

Oh, and a short public service announcement: The production of almond milk (a favourite tippie of the clean eaters) is one of the main factors behind the drought in California, where more than 80% of the world's almonds are grown. It takes 6,098 litres of water to produce just one litre of almond milk.

Not on my porridge thank you very much.

## Pleasure

What we're doing at this time of year is parking that month of seasonal over-indulgence behind us and trying to eat well. We just need to remind ourselves that this does not preclude one of my favourite food ingredients: pleasure.

And there is so much pleasure to be found.

For me it's a weekend feast of slowly bubbling casserole, filling your home with the sweet fragrance of slowly braising, aromatic root vegetables and herbs.

Last week this was prepared with a roasting joint of beef, perched on a trivet of roughly chopped carrots, parsnip, onions, finely chopped celery



Photo: Matt Russell/The Guardian

Anna Jones' root vegetable stew with celeriac dumplings.

and red kidney beans. There was a dozen or more whole cloves of garlic, seasoned with black pepper, fresh thyme and bay leaves. The braising liquid was a treacle coloured half litre of old fashioned porter stout, fresh out of St. James's Gate.

The week before there was no meat involved at all. Celeriac, that knobbly, gnarly and versatile root vegetable, still in abundance at this time of year (its season runs roughly from October to March), took centre stage.

*"While we're here let's tip our hat to butter. That golden-coloured perky block of wonder who plays such an important role in this dish."*

I was trying out Anna Jones' root vegetable stew with celeriac dumplings (a quick online search will deliver the recipe details on The Guardian's website). This was the dish that brought it all home to me.

The vegetables, braised in red wine and stock with white beans and harissa paste, for just the smallest kick of comforting heat, conspire to assure you that the absence of meat from this dish does not diminish it in any way.

The celeriac dumplings, a combination of grated celeriac, self-raising flour, cheddar cheese, thyme and – oh yes please – lots of butter, were a revelation. A golden crust of nutty sweetness, a little crunch, a lot of starchy comfort, with wilted greens on the side, felt like the beginnings of a new and wonderful friendship.

It's rare enough for a home cook to be entranced by their own food (they are often inured to the flavours from having been so involved in the dish's creation), but this one was a proper charmer, so thank you Anna.

## Gravy

With this approach I think we can definitely find our way out of the bitter abyss of darkest winter. The roasted chicken will deliver a lovely stock, perfumed with veg, bay leaves and peppercorns.

The stock will deliver a great soup or gravy for next week's roast, and the gravy, poured lovingly over whipped, buttery mashed potato, will fill your senses, soothe your soul, and keep your spirits up until the clocks move forward and the days are bright again.

All hail the humble spud, and his buttery companion ■



Niall Shanahan.

2020 looks to be another year of rich offerings in Irish arts and entertainment. NIALL SHANAHAN takes a look at some of the theatre, music and book highlights coming up in the early months of the year, and salutes one of our contributors on the publication of her first book.

# Culture radar 2020

THE REVIVAL of a classic Brian Friel play is always a good reason to head to the theatre, and in March the national theatre brings the mystical and spellbinding *Faith Healer* back to the Abbey stage. Joe Dowling directs, 40 years since he directed the Irish premiere of the play at the Abbey Theatre.

Frank Hardy (played by Game of Thrones/Peaky Blinders star Aidan Gillen) is the faith healer of the title. Travelling through remote and isolated areas in Scotland and Wales, he offers his unique cure to the most desperate and hopeless of people. Does he actually possess a gift? Or are these rare and miracle healings only tricks of the mind?

Telling the story of Frank, his wife Grace and manager Teddy, we encounter differing perspectives of their absurd and momentous lives together. With each tale come new revelations in this spellbinding narrative. From 30th March on the Abbey Stage. See [abbeytheatre.ie](http://abbeytheatre.ie) for more details.

## Corn Exchange

The always innovative Corn Exchange company will bring Michael West and Annie Ryan's ensemble comedy, *The Fall of The Second Republic*, to the Peacock stage from 24th February.



Caitríona Ennis plays investigative reporter Emer Hackett, pursuing corruption in a reimagined Irish state.

In an imagined Ireland, 50 years after its independence, Emer Hackett (Caitríona



*A Holy Show*, starring Roseanna Purcell and Mark Fitzgerald tours from February.

Ennis) is a fearless and determined investigative reporter. Her target is the Taoiseach, Manny Spillane, a wily political survivor.

Their paths cross in the ruins of an old theatre, set to be the site for a banking centre, which promises to bring wealth to the Irish economy as well to Spillane and his cohorts. What Emer uncovers sparks a fury of consequences for her newspaper, her colleagues and the political framework of the country. See [abbeytheatre.ie](http://abbeytheatre.ie) for more details.

## A Holy Show

The play that promises you a miracle, actor/writer/director Janet Moran's comedy is back for a national tour after successful turns at the Dublin and Edinburgh festivals in 2018 and 2019.

Inspired by the 1981 hijacking of an Aer Lingus plane by an ex-Trappist monk with a bottle of water as his weapon, the Pope as his nemesis, and a burning desire to know The Third Secret of Fatima, *A Holy Show* promises music, nostalgia, heroism, praying, visions,

romance (maybe) sex (maybe) a special appearance by Our Lady (definitely) and a guaranteed miracle.

From 23rd January at the Project Arts Centre, Dublin and then touring the country as follows:

- 29th January: Town Hall Theatre, Galway
- 31st January-1st February: Belltable Arts Centre, Limerick
- 4th February: Dunamais Arts Centre, Portlaoise
- 5th February: Mermaid Arts Centre, Bray
- 7th February: Ramor Theatre, Cavan
- 8th February: Visual, Carlow
- 11th-12th February: Civic Theatre, Tallaght
- 14th-15th February: Pavilion Theatre, #DúnLaoghaire
- 17th-20th February: Everyman, Cork
- 21st February: Backstage, Longford
- 22nd February: Draíocht, Blanchardstown
- 25th February: Glór, Ennis
- 27th-29th February: The MAC, Belfast
- 4th-5th March: Irish Cultural Centre, Paris
- 7th March: Source, Thurles

More details at [facebook.com/AHolyShowByJanetMoran/](https://facebook.com/AHolyShowByJanetMoran/)

## Perspectives at NCH

The National Concert Hall's *Perspectives* series has brought a dynamic range of performers to the NCH stage in recent years, including New York's Bang On A Can Allstars' performances of music by Brian Eno and Steve Reich, the Will Gregory Moog Ensemble and jazz legend Pharoah Sanders, to name just a few.



Radie Peat.

On Sunday 9th February, *Perspectives* celebrates the groundswell of women's voices in Irish literature, music and poetry. *Imagining Ireland: Speaking Up, Singing Louder* is billed as an intimate event celebrating those voices, bringing together a stellar cast of women with a lot to say.

Art-pop auteur, SOAK, creates emotionally probing songs of startling candor. Lisa O'Neill's raw and unvarnished folk has won widespread praise and awards. With Lankum and solo, Radie Peat (a personal favourite) is one of the remarkable voices of new folk. Sorcha Richardson's debut *First Prize Bravery* marks the arrival of a major new artist.

The words are just as vital as the music, the show gathers the leading lights of

an acclaimed generation of Irish writers to speak up. The cast includes Eimear McBride (*A Girl Is a Half-formed Thing, Strange Hotel*), Sara Baume (*A Line Made by Walking*), Wendy Erskine (*Sweet Home*), Sinéad Gleeson (*Constellations*) and Emer McLysaght & Sarah Breen (*Oh My God, What a Complete Aisling, The Importance of Being Aisling*).

Word and music meet in the work of Denise Chaila, a Zambian-Irish rapper, singer and poet hailing from Chikankata, Zambia and based in Limerick. Her music blends spoken word and rap to give voice to the sound of a transatlantic odyssey. The event is curated by Sinéad Gleeson and Gary Sheehan, NCH. Details and booking at [nch.ie](http://nch.ie) ■

# Tá Úna-Minh anseo

A COUPLE of years ago we were fortunate enough to convince a busy young gaming, travel and food blogger to write about travel for *Fórsa* magazine. Úna-Minh Kavanagh has been bringing us tales of adventures, far-flung and closer to home, ever since. We consider ourselves lucky to have her as a contributor and we were delighted to see her become a published author last October.

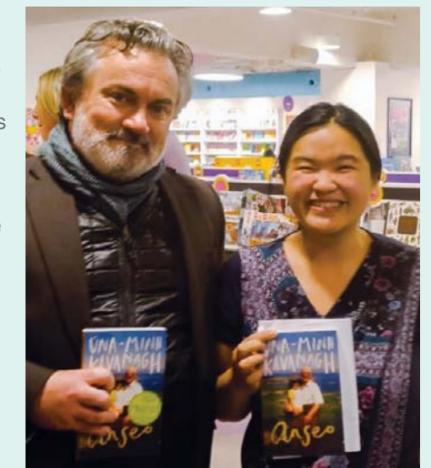
In 2013 Úna-Minh took to Twitter to call out the 'land of a thousand welcomes' for its naivety and cowardice in dealing with racism. This followed an incident when she was racially abused and spat upon in Dublin's city centre. Having dealt with racism throughout her young life, this proud Kerrywoman had finally had enough.

But Úna-Minh's story actually begins in Hanoi, Vietnam, in 1991, when she was adopted at just three days old by a single woman from Kerry.

Raised in a loving, Irish-speaking home by her mother and grandfather, she was instilled with an enduring sense of her multi-faceted Irish identity.

In *Anseo*, published by New Island, she writes honestly and humorously about tackling racism, language elitism and online trolls and the joy of turning her love of the internet, video games and accessible Irish-language content into a healthy work/life balance.

The book is sprinkled throughout with Úna-Minh's own #FrásaAnLae, and *Anseo* is the heart-warming story of a diverse and contemporary Irish life. Available in all good book shops now ■



*Fórsa* magazine editor Niall Shanahan picked up his signed copy of *Anseo* from the author herself at the book's launch in Easons, Dublin, last October.



Raymond Connolly.

As we enter a new decade the editorial team at Fórsa magazine are nevertheless resigned to the reality that, in one particular corner of a shabby bar room in Finglas, it will forever be somewhere between 1978 and 1979 as far as RAYMOND CONNOLLY is concerned. Lately we've debated him on the merits of music at the turn of the decade. He took the bait, but not before he met his footballing hero Liam Brady on an aeroplane. Readers should be advised that this article contains substantial Brady-themed preamble. The music fades in eventually.

# Out with the old

THEY SAY you should never meet your heroes, as they're likely to disappoint you. But take a bow Mr Liam Brady from Whitehall for bucking the trend. I had occasion recently to travel back from an Arsenal away game in his company, and a more polite and engaging character you couldn't meet. Hats off Liam. Hero worship is alive and well.

We spoke about the current malaise of The Arsenal and Liam reminded me that the team I began supporting, which he played in, flirted with relegation for a few years before blossoming in 1979. An FA Cup final win, a glorious last minute victory against the unmentionables from Manchester (not City). It's often referred to as 'The Brady Cup Final'.

*"I wondered aloud what had become of Neneh Cherry, only for him to tell me Cherry toured last year with an album called Broken Politics."*

The Arsenal were at it again in 1989, clinching a first league title in 18 years with a dramatic last-minute win at some place called Anfield. These successes led me to conclude that the close of the decade was when we did our finest work.

1999 brought a spectacular end-of-season collapse which allowed the unmentionables to complete an unprecedented treble.

Such a hurtful way to demolish my theory.

## My eternal optimism

The journey into January can be defining, and magnified by ten as we

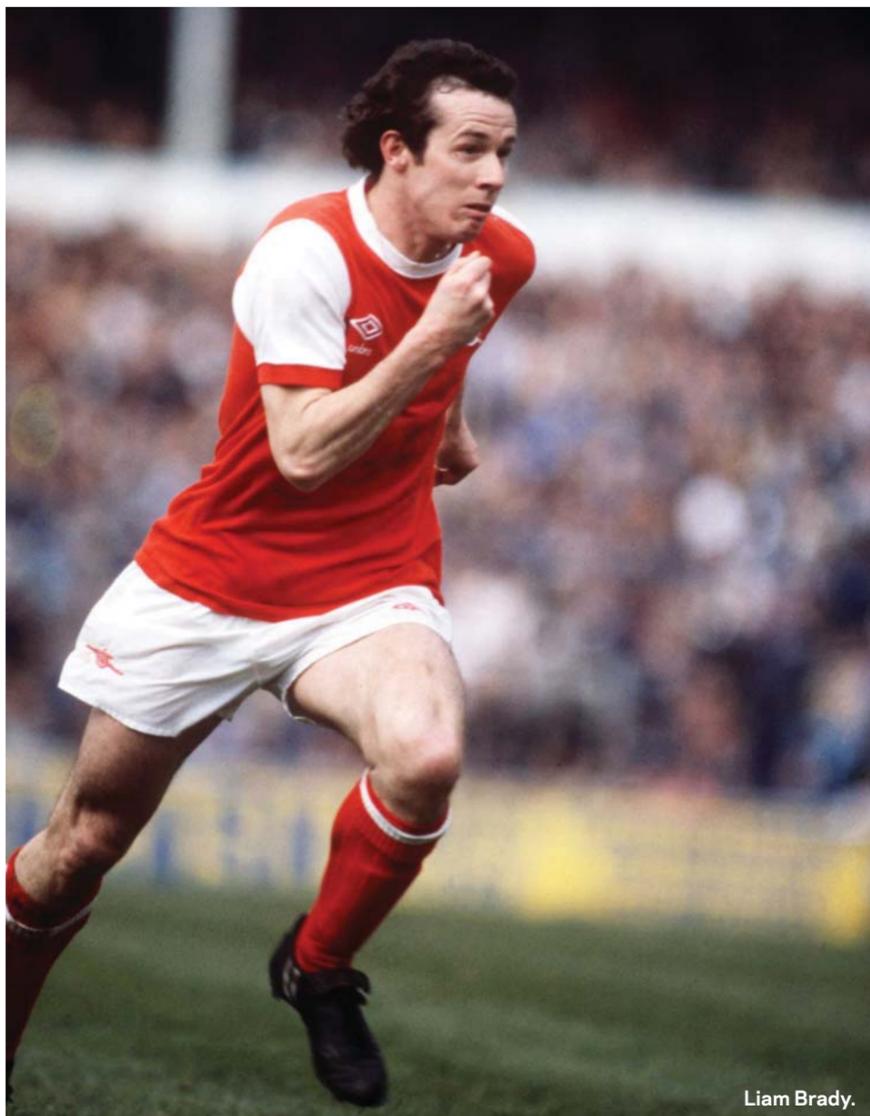


Photo: EMPICS OT

Liam Brady.

enter a new decade. American author and columnist Bill Vaughan was quite sceptical about this new leaf business. "An optimist stays up until midnight to see the New Year in. A pessimist stays up to make sure the old year leaves."

I'm a little bit of both, and mindful of Oscar Wilde's caustic assertion that "good resolutions are simply cheques that men draw on a bank where they have no account". Maybe if we had some sort of state-sponsored guarantee on

the deposits? Too soon? Yeah, too soon.

My editor and I had one of our many fraternal public house spats on this whole business of entering a new decade. Both of us are fond of an opinion, usually our own. He seems to think that, like my discredited Arsenal theory, imminent closure of a decade brings about music's most industrious creativity, as if in some way artists stand up to define the decade.



The Beatles, Abbey Road.

I assumed, not for the first time, that my editor was drawing his inspiration from the bottle of altar wine he keeps in his desk, but then I did the research. He has a point, but, like Eric Morecambe, he's playing all the right notes but not necessarily in the right order.

## Best of the decades

Scrolling through the top albums at the conclusion of each decade of my own life, we had The Beatles *Abbey Road* in 1969 (a big boost for road safety) the iconic *Velvet Underground's* eponymous release and The Who's *Tommy* (a disturbing piece of genius).

A decade later and 1979 brought *The Specials* debut (produced by Elvis Costello), Pink Floyd's *The Wall* (not my cup of Barry's but undeniably inventive) and *Look Sharp* by Joe Jackson.



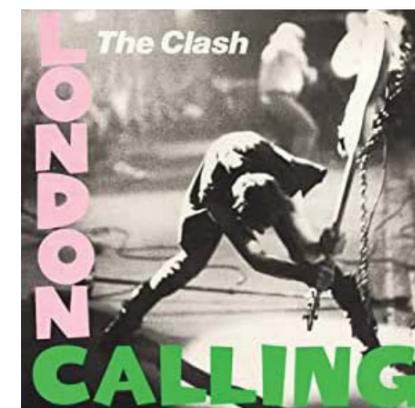
The Specials.

In 1989 it was *The Stone Roses* (still not convinced, something upon which my editor and I are in complete agreement) and the wonderful *Club Classics Vol 1* by Soul II Soul.

Moby's *Play* saw out the millennium in 1999 along with The Red Hot Chili Peppers *Californication* and David Gray's *White Ladder* (coming back to an arena near you in 2020). Moby could have exercised a bit more restraint when it came to the ads. He licensed every tune until he it was used to flog everything from cars to coffee and beer, leaving a slightly sullied aftertaste.

*"London Calling by The Clash and Brass in Pocket by The Pretenders opened the 1980s, and at this stage I'm cruising to victory but, in boxing parlance, I punched myself out."*

In terms of singles we had *Victoria* by the Kinks in January 1970 and *Liquidator* by Harry J All Stars. *London Calling* by The Clash and *Brass in Pocket* by The Pretenders opened the 1980s, and at this stage I'm cruising to victory but, in boxing parlance, I punched myself out.



The Clash, London Calling.

The pick of January 1990 was *Nothing Compares 2 U* by Sinead O'Connor and *N-R-G* by Adamski (featuring a bottle of Lucozade). January 2000 saw some respite with *The Great Beyond* by REM and the remaining pick of a bad lot was Gabrielle's *Rise* (risible in my view).

## Droning on

When my editor sensed a rare victory in our conversational joust, he proceeded to display his tendency to be ahead of the game and mercilessly dislodge me from my time warp.

I have previously advised that if you choose to live in a time warp, select a good one and cling on for dear life,

especially when shopping for clothes online.

He pointed me in the direction of the "liberating life affirming joy" that is Lizzo. I wondered aloud what had become of Neneh Cherry, only for him to tell me Cherry toured last year with an album called *Broken Politics*.



The Pretenders.

Then he introduced me to Kate Tempest. Bingo. Now here indeed is a reason to step out of 1979, even if only for a day. The closing track on Tempest's latest album, *People's Faces*, is perhaps the first artistic gesture of post-Brexit healing for a traumatised nation.

My editor's new fad (well it's a new decade) for new (-ish) female voices suggested I explore the highly acclaimed folk innovations of Dublin band Lankum, but my time warp machine just couldn't cope. My editor became more animated as he tried to explain "the soaring beauty of drone-induced melancholy" and how their *Livelong Day* album is the soundtrack of contemporary Ireland.



Kate Tempest.

I stepped outside as yer man droned on, and engaged myself in an imaginary conversation with Felix the Feral Cat, which I won comfortably ■

**5 Fórsa members were diagnosed with cancer through this campaign**



Their outlook was improved thanks to swift intervention



## Breast & Prostate Health Assessment and Education Programme

for members of the two Fórsa Salary Protection Schemes administered by Cornmarket\*

## Our fight against cancer



Over the past year:

**4,258** were invited

**1,216** booked an assessment

**280** were sent for further tests

(e.g. Mammogram, Ultrasound, Biopsy or MRI)

### Lives potentially saved

4 members were diagnosed with Prostate Cancer.  
1 member was diagnosed with Breast Cancer.

"It saved my life as it picked up breast cancer early and I was treated. Without pink power my story would have been very different."

"They found something abnormal during the assessment, its early and hopefully caught in time."

"Anything that helps saves lives should be encouraged."

"Excellent service carried out by extremely lovely and dedicated professionals."

"I required surgery so the pink power campaign was of great benefit to me. Literally saved my life."

"It encouraged me to have an exam which wouldn't have happened without it."

"My friend's breast cancer was caught early due to Pink Power. Any reminder to become more breast aware is brilliant."

"I was diagnosed with stage 1 breast cancer that definitely would have not been diagnosed for some time yet without this! In the mammogram they found calcifications on my right breast that could not be felt. So grateful they were found now. Thank you."

## Education helps save lives

Awareness improved by a huge **50%** thanks to the education provided by the programme.

**90%** said they were confident to self-check after their Pink Power appointment, compared to only **40%** before.

**99%** rated the programme excellent, good or very good.

**Thank you for supporting Pink and Blue Power.**

If one life can be saved through this initiative it will all be worthwhile.

The programme is now closed for booking.  
For more info on Salary Protection, visit [cornmarket.ie/forsa](http://cornmarket.ie/forsa)

Sources: Participation & clinical numbers provided by Full Health Medical, Beaumont Private Clinic & Bon Secours Private Hospitals, 2018 – 2019. Quote and survey results provided by Cornmarket across INMO, Fórsa and TUI schemes, 2018 – 2019. Cornmarket Group Financial Services Ltd. is regulated by the Central Bank of Ireland. A member of the Irish Life Group Ltd. which is part of the Great-West Lifeco Group of companies. \*Health & Welfare, Local Government & Local Services and Education Divisions and Civil Service in Professional, Technical and Service Grades. Schemes underwritten by New Ireland and Aviva. New Ireland Assurance Company plc is regulated by the Central Bank of Ireland. A member of Bank of Ireland Group. Aviva Life & Pensions Ireland Designated Activity Company, trading as Aviva Life & Pensions Ireland and Friends First, is regulated by the Central Bank of Ireland. Aviva Life & Pensions Ireland Designated Activity Company, trading as Aviva Life & Pensions Ireland and Friends First, is regulated by the Central Bank of Ireland.



Una-Minh Kavanagh.

As we get settled into 2020, we can look forward to a brand-new year and what better to leap headfirst into it all by exploring Ireland's great outdoors. UNA-MINH Kavanagh takes us on a whistle stop tour of some of the best spots in Ireland.

# The timeless wonder of the great outdoors



Gougane Barra, Cork.

WE'RE SPOILED for choice on this island and while this is a great list of options, it certainly isn't an exhaustive one, so I would recommend you check out the National Parks & Wildlife Service at npws.ie and coillte.ie to discover what's in your area. This is but a taster for the experience with hopefully a few unexpected locations to add to your 'must-visit' list.

## Gougane Barra, Cork

This visually stunning location is set in a deep U-shaped valley that was carved out of the mountains in West Cork at the end of the last Ice Age. The glorious park covers over 339 acres, and it is

within these hills that the River Lee rises. Head to the edge of the lake to the island where St. Finbarr, the patron saint of Cork founded his early Christian monastery in the 6th century. It's a park for all seasons, and has six walking trails to suit all levels of fitness.

## Lough Key Forest Park, Roscommon

Perfect for all the family, Lough Key is the place to go for both young and old adventurers. It's home to 'Ireland's only Tree Canopy Walk' that immerses you in the history, flora and fauna of the area. Based in a 19th century parkland

comprising of land and islands, it's also home to a native woodland, bog garden, follies and historical features from bridges to canals. For walkers, the trails are graded with the length, expected duration and whether the trail is linear or looped. For cyclists, there are about 8km of routeways to explore that are traffic free.

## Glenveagh National Park, Donegal

It would be impossible to write about every wonderful thing that Glenveagh National Park has to offer. This remote park nestled into the wild ruggedness of



Glenveagh National Park, Donegal.

Donegal is home to some of the most breath-taking scenery in Ireland. At the heart of the park at the edge of Lough Veagh sits Glenveagh Castle a late 19th century castellated mansion. A horticultural masterpiece, the gardens at the castle have been conserved to the highest standard with rare plants unique to Ireland.

## Lambay Island, Dublin

Not a park per-se but still an outdoor treasure that showcases true sustainable living. This island is completely off-grid and unattached to the mainland. Utilising solar and wind energy to power the island, Lambay also has its own natural spring for water. There are delightful walks, sandy shores for relaxing, swimming and a plethora of natural wildlife to be seen. A protected bird sanctuary, it's also home to the largest breeding colony of Atlantic Great Grey Seals on the east coast of Ireland!

## Tollymore Forest Park, Down

Tollymore was in fact the first state forest park in Northern Ireland! It covers a whopping 1600 acres with panoramic views of the Mourne Mountains, so you can imagine what natural delights it holds for visitors. This park is open all year round and caters for campers, tours, walkers and even those on horseback. For fans of Game of Thrones, you can also take tours of Tollymore and see where they filmed part of the series!

## Avondale Forest Park, Wicklow

Each trail in this 500-acre park offers varying lengths and showcases the best of what Avondale has to offer, be it by foot or by bike. Head under the woodland canopy and through the trees and view everything over the Avonmore river valley. Rich in wildlife, with a well-

developed arboretum, the park also contains the home of Charles Stewart Parnell that was built in 1777 and is now the Parnell Museum.

## Derrycarne Wood, Leitrim

Though the Derrycarne House was demolished in the 1950s, the surrounding lands provide a calm and pleasant walk route along the shore of



Gleninchaquin Park, Kerry.

Lough Boderg. Walk amongst a rich wood full of beech, oak, spruce and cypress or get onto the water where cruisers have access to the lake through the Shannon's water system.

## Connemara National Park, Galway

With nearly 5000 acres under its belt, there's no doubt that Connemara is a must for outdoor lovers. Bogs, heaths, grasslands and forests await those willing to venture into the wilderness and visitors will be rewarded with unbelievable views from the famous Twelve Bens (Beanna Beola) range. Animal lovers may spot Connemara ponies, red deer and even peregrine falcons, while historians can reflect on times gone by with ruined houses, ancient walls and former ice houses. The

visitor centre at the park is well known for featuring exhibitions on the surrounding area and is free of charge. Head to the top of the 400-metre high Diamond Hill where on a good day you'll be able to see the islands of Inishbofin, Inishturn and Inishshark.

## Wild Nephon Ballycroy National Park, Mayo

Ballycroy has one of the largest expanses of peatland left in Europe with nearly 120km of Atlantic blanket bog, thus making it a very special and protected place. The visitor centre has unbelievable panoramic views of both the park and Achill Island. Experienced hillwalkers will probably enjoy Ballycroy the most and the park has multiple walking routes with its Claggan Mountain coastal boardwalk route connecting visitors to the wild. For those with a permit and who are on multi-day hikes, you can also camp in the designated areas with a 'Leave no Trace' policy.

## Gleninchaquin Park, Kerry

Log bridges, mountain paths, lush meadows, lakes and waterfalls greet visitors to Gleninchaquin. This incredible valley was formed by glaciation approximately 70,000 years ago and makes for a fantastic day out for both experienced walkers and those who prefer a stroll. Picnicers and those with a barbeque are welcome and if you have pets, they're welcome to roam across the hundreds of acres. The massive 140 metre waterfall is a sight to behold, especially after a heavy rain when the water is torrenting down the side of the mountain. Six short walks and a nature trail are available to visitors which are both suitable for adults and children.

Una-Minh Kavanagh is a travel writer, gamer and content producer. Her first book, *Anseo*, is published by New Island books, see more about it on page 35 ■



Hazel Gavigan.

From January 2020 employers will now no longer be obliged to provide P60 documents to their staff. Instead, employees will access their P60 information through Revenue's online system, myAccount. HAZEL GAVIGAN reports.

# Marking the changes at Revenue for 2020



Photo: dreamstime.com

THIS NEW arrangement marks another in a series of changes introduced by Revenue in the last 12 months. January 2019 saw mandatory reporting introduced for employers who now have to report pay and statutory deductions to Revenue as part of their payroll process. This was described as the most significant reform of the PAYE system since its introduction in 1960.

The new P60 procedure aims to build on that initiative, allowing PAYE customers to take advantage of the availability of real time information. This facilitates

greater transparency over tax affairs and makes it easier to ensure all entitlements are availed of.

Change manager for PAYE modernisation, Sinéad Sweeney said the quickest and easiest way of managing tax affairs is through myAccount. She explained some of the system's recent improvements:

"Revenue is committed to continuously enhancing and simplifying our online services to make it easier for people to manage their tax affairs.

"One of the most important developments for PAYE customers is that employers are no longer responsible for providing their P60.

"At the start of this year, Revenue made an employment detail summary available to its customers through the PAYE services section in myAccount. This summary serves the same purpose as the old P60 and can be used in exactly the same manner.

"The employment detail summary document contains the pay and

statutory deductions for each employment or pension held during the year. It can be downloaded or printed and used where proof of income is required by a third party.

"This statement is based on income and statutory deductions reported by all employers during the year and shows whether the correct tax has been paid. If necessary, a short online return can be completed to claim additional tax credits or declare additional income," she explains.

## What's available

Pay and tax details reported by employers are also accessible through myAccount. Only pay and statutory deductions are available, as employers don't report non-statutory deductions to Revenue, such as union subscriptions or credit union payments.

"If you notice any discrepancies between the information shown in myAccount and those on your payslip, you should contact your employer," said Sinéad.

## End of year statement

Further enhancements to the end of year process include the provision of the end of year statement (P21) will be made available to all PAYE customers from 15th Jan 2020 and is based on the income and statutory deductions reported by employers, pension providers and any other income known to Revenue.

*"If you notice any discrepancies between the information shown in myAccount and those on your payslip, you should contact your employer."*

Sinéad says the preliminary statement will indicate whether the customer has paid the correct amount of tax for the year: "As well as the tax breakdown, if a customer wants to receive a statement of liability or make additions, amendments or corrections to the information included on the preliminary statement, they can submit and an online income tax return on myAccount."

Other improvements to the service include being able to claim an unemployment repayment, update civil status, upload supporting documentation for claims and download a secure pay and tax summary.

Revenue  
Cáin agus Custaim na hÉireann  
Irish Tax and Customs

The easy way to manage your tax

[www.revenue.ie/myaccount](http://www.revenue.ie/myaccount)

www.revenue.ie

## Pay and tax summary document

Sinéad says the advantages of the new pay and tax summary feature is that it allows customers to create a secure document summarising those details.

"The summary is password protected and allows customers to manage who accesses their information. Users can securely transfer this summary electronically as proof of income to any person or body, such as a financial institution, a solicitor or local authority to perhaps apply for a loan, mortgage or grant.

"There's a number of different configurations of information which can be included in the summary document depending on why you require it.

"Details of your pay and tax for the current year to date, a comprehensive breakdown of payments received from an employer or employers for the last one to three months and a statement of liability for the last four tax years are the options. Any or all of these can be

Revenue  
Cáin agus Custaim na hÉireann  
Irish Tax and Customs

An bealach éasca chun do chuid cánacha a bhainistiú

[www.revenue.ie/ga/myaccount](http://www.revenue.ie/ga/myaccount)

www.revenue.ie

included in the final document," she says.

## Receipts tracker

Another easy way for PAYE customers to manage their tax affairs is by using Revenue's receipts tracker. This service is available in the 'manage my record' section of myAccount. It allows customers to record and keep track of receipts for various expenses.

Sinéad explains, "When making a claim to Revenue, customers are ordinarily required to keep a record of receipts for six years.

"With the receipts tracker, they don't have to keep a paper copy of receipts if they upload the image to Revenue storage. This makes it much easier to make a claim at the end of the year."

The Revenue Commissioner is actively encouraging everyone to register for myAccount to take advantage of these enhancements, making your tax affairs much easier to manage ■



Paul Dillon.

The Financial Services Union's campaign on the 'right to disconnect' is set to grow this year. The campaign seeks to challenge the gradual extension of the working day facilitated by smartphones and other technology. The FSU's PAUL DILLON explains how this is blurring the lines between work and leisure, the office and the home, changing our understanding of work and piling additional stress onto workers.

# Taking on the 'always on' culture



WE ARE very attached to our phones. Almost all of us hold in our hands a device that's more powerful and possesses more computing power than all the computers in the world in 1969.

This of course brings obvious benefits, opportunities and outlets for entertainment. But it's not all good news.

The problem for an increasing number of workers is that this technology is being used to lengthen the working day. Phones, laptops, tablets and other devices are allowing employers to stretch out working time by giving people the means to answer emails,

respond to messages, and take calls after working hours.

This technological revolution is blurring the lines between work and leisure, the office and home, and changing our very understanding of work. Ever-increasing numbers of people are working from home while, at work, roles are being transformed by technology. The future of certain roles is being questioned, as technology develops at a pace which is causing many of us to rethink what work will look like in the future.

This revolution in the world of work is, however, proving to be far from benign. The predictions made by John Maynard

Keynes in the 1930s - of a future with greatly reduced working hours and vastly increased leisure time - have not come to pass. Instead, the opposite has occurred. Working hours are increasing, commuting times are up and work-related stress and pressure are a feature of many workers lives.

### Privatised stress

There's an increasing body of evidence to suggest that workers are bearing the brunt of the stress caused by technology at work on a personal and individual level. The problems experienced by many people are, in effect, privatised to the individual when it comes to finding a solution.

*"Phones, laptops, tablets and other devices are allowing employers to stretch out working time by giving people the means to answer emails, respond to messages, and take calls after working hours."*

There's a boom in the 'wellness' industry, and indeed many employers are making wellness programmes available to staff, but there's a legitimate concern that this is treating the symptoms rather than addressing the root causes of stress and pressure in the workplace.

This is why the Financial Services Union is arguing for positive, collective

responses to the stresses faced by workers that are being exacerbated by technology. Work extension can be tackled, but it requires a collective response, not one where individuals are somehow expected to simply absorb extra work on buses, trains, on the go, or on couches in their homes.

FSU research conducted by the University of Limerick reveals that one in four workers in banking, finance and technology are expected to answer calls and emails outside of paid working hours.

*"Working hours are increasing, commuting times are up and work-related stress and pressure are a feature of many workers lives."*

The same research revealed that very few employers are taking steps to prevent employees over-using technology for work purposes. Just 1.3% of responders to the University of Limerick research indicated that their employer had put in place measures to prevent employees over-using technology for work purposes.

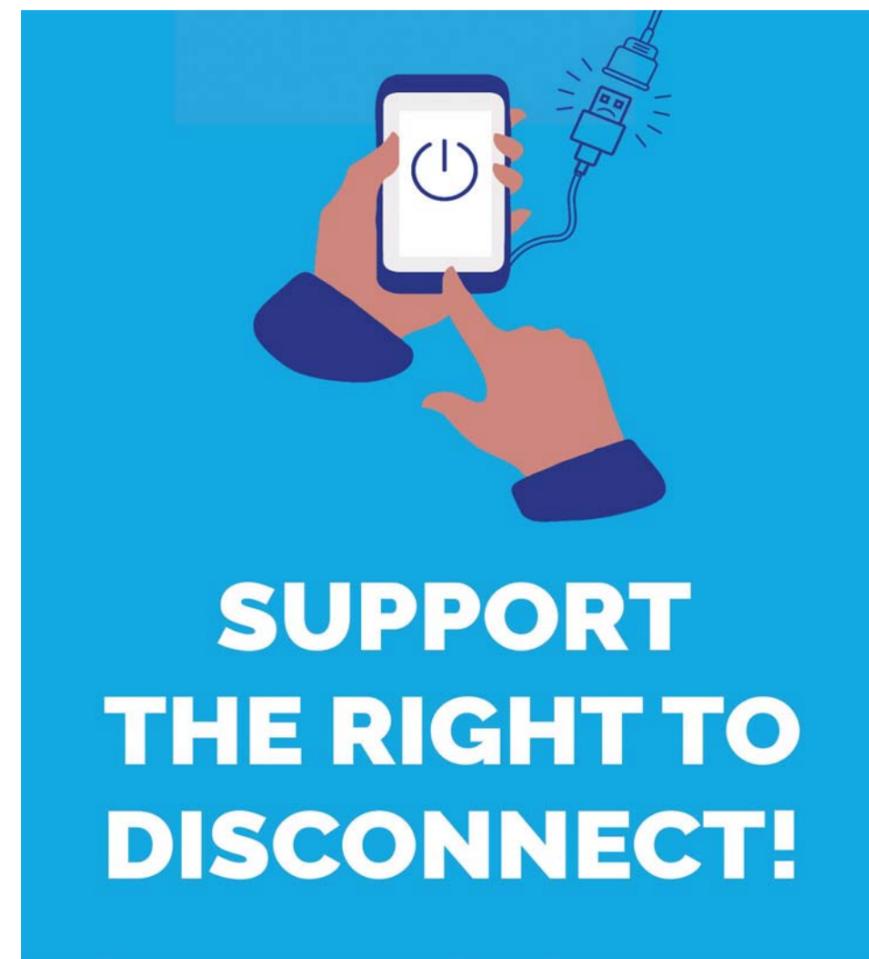
### El Khomri law

All of this begs the question: what is to be done to protect workers from the extension of the working day through technology, in a context where few employers are taking on the challenge of the "always on" culture.

The French have paved the way. Their 'right to disconnect' legislation - 'El Khomri' (Article 55, Chapter II "Adapting the Labour Law to the Digital Age") - is often cited as the best example. Since the French passed this law in 2016 - operating on the basis that companies with more than 50 workers are obliged to draw up a charter of setting out the hours when staff are not supposed to send or answer emails - others have followed suit.

It has recently come up for discussion in Ireland. Last summer, jobs minister Heather Humphries announced she was "looking at" a right to disconnect law in Ireland. Since then it's become clear that the Government favours a policy solution. Better than nothing at all, perhaps, but the FSU has argued that far more is required.

Legislation could put a stop to the expectation that workers should be available outside of paid working hours, and bring about the necessary cultural



**financial  
services  
union**

change. By amending the Working Time Act 1997, the principle of a right to disconnect could clearly be established in law.

Such an amendment could also clearly define a right to disconnect, and acknowledge the role of 'standby allowances' and overtime payment for employees who work, or are available to work, outside of working hours. It's crucial that workers can liaise with employers through their unions to establish local right-to-disconnect policies.

Local agreements and policies with commitments from senior management to minimise out-of-hours contact with workers would help too. Establishing on-call/standby allowances for any worker expected to keep a device on, and restoring the concept of paid overtime for work done on devices after working hours, should also be part of any legislation. A mechanism to deal

with breach of policy through the WRC should also be introduced.

Throughout Europe, working hours are increasing. We're also working for longer. The last government wound back the clock on the retirement age, and this is a European trend. While a right to disconnect would be very welcome, a wider debate into working time also needs to take place.

If we work together, we can start to turn back the tide on the encroachment of working time into personal time. Please support the campaign by signing our petition at [actionnetwork.org/petitions/i-support-the-right-to-disconnect/](http://actionnetwork.org/petitions/i-support-the-right-to-disconnect/)

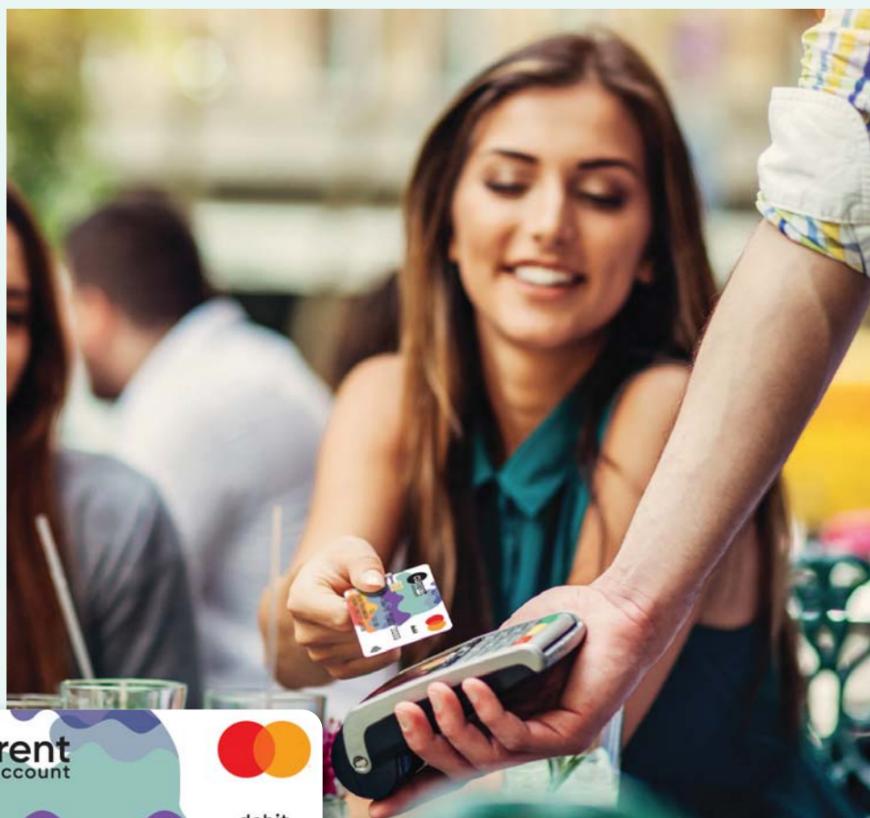
Paul Dillon is an organiser with the Financial Services Union (FSU). Follow him on Twitter at @pauldillondillon and check out Paul's excellent podcast about workplace issues, *The Office Block*, via @TheOBtweets ■

# Introducing Current Accounts from Public Service Credit Union (PSCU)

Public Service Credit Union is delighted to announce the introduction of current accounts from late January.

CURRENT ACCOUNT with PSCU is a full-service current account that is separate from your existing savings or loan accounts. This current account provides you with instant access to your money through a debit card, a secure app and online portal. In other words, your credit union is always with you, no matter where in the world you are!

You also get the added benefit of a current account that is delivered by your friendly credit union.



## The benefits of having a current account with PSCU

- Easy to apply
- Same friendly service
- Same credit union ethos of 'not for profit' and social responsibility
- Transparent low fees
- Instant access to your money
- Globally accepted debit card
- Use in-store, online or at ATMs
- Contactless
- Cashback from participating retailers
- Existing/new members 16yrs or older are eligible to apply
- Overdraft available to 18 years and older
- Separate from share and deposit accounts
- 24/7 Call Centre for lost/stolen cards



## How to open a current account and apply for a debit card

### Already a member?

- **Online:** If you are registered for Online Banking, you can apply for a current account and debit card online.
- **In person:** Call in to either the Earlsfort Terrace or the Earl Place office.

### Not a member?

- **Online:** To start your application for membership please visit [www.pscu.ie/membership](http://www.pscu.ie/membership)

## What you need if joining the credit union or if your documents with the credit union are out of date

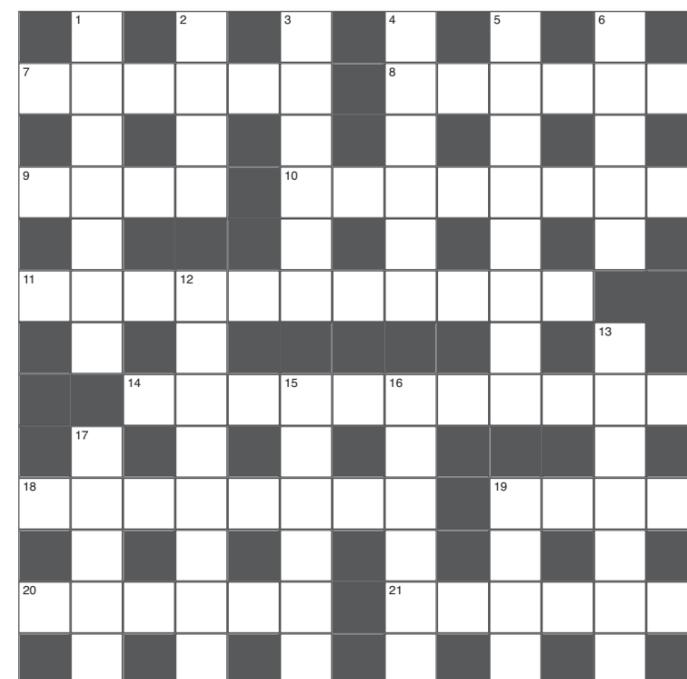
- Proof of ID: Copy of a current driving licence or passport.
- Proof of address: Copy of a utility bill or bank statement (dated in the last 6 months).
- PPS Number: Copy of your Certificate of Tax Credits, P60 or payslip.

Many credit union members have been waiting for a new current account as an alternative to those offered by the main banks. The wait is over ■

*PLEASE NOTE: Your current account is not eligible for a dividend nor does it qualify for free credit union insurance cover as it is designed for everyday banking. If you would like to lodge funds to your new current account, you can do so by using Online Banking or by Salary Deduction.*

## 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 6th March 2020. We'll send €50 to the first correct entry pulled from the hat.



Crossword composed by Peter Connaughton.

### ACROSS

7. North and South in the States (6)
8. French missile, used by both sides in the Falklands War (6)
9. Printer colour (4)
10. A personification of the United States government (5,3)
11. English mathematician and physicist (1642-1727) (5,6)
14. Hannah Sheehy - suffragette and nationalist (1877-1946) (11)
18. Members of the Total Abstinence Association (8)
19. First President of Ireland (4)
20. In The Matrix, the Prime Program (3,3)
21. Vertical fin on the back of a fish and marine mammals (6)

2. See 4 down (4)

3. As, this planet (6)
4. And 2 down - Speaker of the House of Commons from 2009 to 2019 (6)
5. Sweden's second largest city (8)
6. Asian country, capital Kathmandu (5)
12. Manchester United manager, succeeded by Alex Ferguson (8)
13. Len was head judge on Strictly Come Dancing for 12 years (7)
15. Welsh rock band, who had a hit with "Buck Rogers" (6)
16. This before, job, out and right (6)
17. Number of senior All Ireland titles won by Mick O'Dwyer as a manager (5)
19. This to This - American mystery TV series starring Robert Wagner and Stefanie Powers (4)

### DOWN

1. West Indian music and a sea nymph in Greek mythology (7)

### ISSUE 8 (AUTUMN-WINTER) WINNERS:

**CROSSWORD:** John Tierney (Property Registration Authority). **QUIZ:** Valerie O'Connell (Probation Services). **SURVEY:** Thomas Byrne (Revenue).

### ISSUE 8 (AUTUMN-WINTER) CROSSWORD SOLUTIONS:

**ACROSS:** 7. Volume 8. Larson 9. Posh 10. Tungsten 11. Von der Leyen 14. Marlborough 18. Alicante 19. Reet 20. Waylon 21. Litmus **DOWN:** 1. Molotov 2. Hugh 3. Dexter 4. Plunge 5. Prospero 6. Nobel 12. Dead Calm 13. Igneous 15. Lining 16. O'Neill 17. Bleak 19. Rite

## 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. Where did Raymond Connolly meet Liam Brady?

- a On a golf course
- b In a pub
- c On a flight from London
- d The BlackStock pub in Finsbury Park

### 2. Which member of the US administration appears as a snowman in this edition?

- a Donald Trump
- b Mike Pompeo
- c Mitch McConnell
- d Marsha Blackburn

### 3. What is the title of Úna-Minh Kavanagh's new book?

- a Amach
- b Amárach
- c Anseo
- d Arís

### 4. When is the PSSA agreement due to expire?

- a 29th February 2020
- b 31st March 2020
- c 31st October 2020
- d 31st December 2020

### 5. Daniel Devery's food column begins and ends with what?

- a An unnecessary flourish
- b Humblebragging
- c Mashed potato
- d Questionable punctuation

### 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 6th March 2020. 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 winter-spring 2020 issue of *Fórsa*?

Excellent

Good

Okay

Bad

Awful

Comments \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### 2. What did you think of the layout, style and pictures in the winter-spring 2020 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?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

*Fórsa* branch \_\_\_\_\_

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 6th March 2020. The editor's decision is final. That's it!

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