



31 July 2020

To: Branch secretaries
cc: NEC, SOC, scrutineers, all staff

Re: National Conference 2020

Dear colleague

I am mailing to inform you of some important decisions that the NEC and officers have taken regarding Fórsa's 2020 national conference and officer elections.

You are aware that the requirement to hold a national conference in 2020 is established by the Fórsa rule book, which also sets out certain functions that conference must carry out. These include the election of officers, the appointment of trustees, the adoption of the union's accounts, the receipt of an NEC report, and the receipt of motions submitted by the NEC and branches. The NEC also gives a report on progress on motions adopted at the previous national conference.

At the outset of the pandemic, in March 2020, I sought and received legal opinion regarding the postponement of conference. In summary, the advice was that the NEC had powers under rule to postpone the conference to the second half of 2020. I subsequently informed branches of the NEC decision to postpone the conference to November 2020 in a letter of 19th March 2020.

In these extraordinary times, and against the backdrop of continuing coronavirus-related risks and restrictions (including limits on large indoor gatherings), the NEC has now reluctantly decided that the conference must be a 'remote' event rather than a physical gathering. This decision, which reflects the approach being taken by other trade unions and large membership-based organisations, was taken at the NEC meeting of Wednesday 22nd July.

Following on from this decision, the NEC also decided (at the same meeting) that the 2020 elections for the union's five officer posts, which must take place this year under rule, will be conducted by secure postal ballot.

At its meeting of Thursday 30th July, the union's officer board subsequently agreed that:

1. The digital/remote conference should take place on Thursday 19th November
2. The agenda should consist of the essential business that conference must conduct under rule
3. Key conference documents (eg, the union accounts and financial report) will be circulated in advance to allow branches to raise questions and issues in advance of conference
4. A single Principal Delegate from each branch will have the facility to participate in the remote conference. This will include facilities to vote electronically, to raise questions, and to speak.
5. The conference will be live-streamed to allow all activists and members to follow the proceedings
6. The final arrangements for conference will be proposed by the Standing Orders Committee (SOC) and put to conference for ratification in the usual manner
7. The conference will also be asked to ratify the decisions that the NEC and officers have taken regarding conference, as well as the outcome of the officer elections
8. Union staff will be tasked with ensuring that the conference is of the highest possible quality
9. Branches will be briefed in detail on the conference format and ballot arrangements well in advance, and they will be offered technical assistance and training where required.

You will recall that SOC Report No.2 made recommendations on how conference business should be handled. This report was contained in the 'provisional final agenda' for conference, which I emailed to branches on 28th April 2020. On foot of its recommendations, I now intend to:

1. Refer motions listed in appendix three of the 'final preliminary agenda' to the NEC for consideration and appropriate action. These are motions 226 to 300.
2. Refer motions listed in appendix two of the 'final preliminary agenda' to the relevant divisional executive committees for consideration and appropriate action. These are motions 190 to 225.

SOC Report No.2 also set out a pre-conference timetable, which included a requirement for me to issue formal confirmation of the revised conference dates to branches on 11th August 2020. In doing this, I will also circulate branches with more detailed information about the format of conference and the conduct of the secure postal ballots for the office elections.

Please note that ballot papers for the election of the Fórsa officers will be sent to Principal Delegates (as they are normally handed to Principal Delegates at conference). You should, therefore, **forward the name of your Principal Delegate to elliott@forsa.ie as soon as possible.**

I write this with a heavy heart. I am keenly aware that the national conference is the most important event in the union's biennial calendar and, like you, I will miss the opportunity to meet colleagues, share experiences and insights, and debate motions in the usual way.

To this end, the NEC has also made a decision in principle to call a special delegate, under rule 22, conference sometime next year if and when the public health restrictions allow it.

I can assure you that the NEC, officers and senior staff gave full consideration to all the potential options for our 2020 conference, but had to conclude that this is the best available approach in the current difficult and extraordinary circumstances.

I will write to you again on or before 11th August.

Yours sincerely



Kevin Callinan
General Secretary