



# FORSA

CSQ

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## Getting remote working right

Pages 3, 10 & 11, 12

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# Redoubling our efforts in these difficult times

As we pass the six month point in the pandemic it is very clear that people are struggling to cope with the new circumstances we face.

The optimism of summer is fading quickly as we witness the resurgence in the virus and despite how tired everyone is with the restrictions, it is important that we renew our efforts to follow the public health advice – this week the emphasis from NPHE is to double our efforts to minimise contacts.

On the pay front, we have just managed to secure payment of the final phase 2% of PSSA and as CSQ goes to print talks about talks are taking place with the Government to establish whether it will be possible to begin talks on a successor to the PSSA – with all of this, as you know, taking place against a very challenging economic background.

As well as pay Fórsa is grappling with big issues around remote working and flexible working arrangements. As members return to the workplace many will also continue to work remotely and now more than ever we need to reach agreement on remote working for the future. Such an agreement would put some order on the current circumstances in which members were sent home to work in emergency circumstances.

The union has identified the key issues for our members in a major survey over the summer – as reported in this edition of CSQ – which will be reflected in our negotiations with the Government.

Working arrangements throughout the pandemic have proven the Public Service's ability to be agile and flexible in responding to this major health crisis and has led us to consider a range of different

approaches to flexible working to cater for various health requirements, such as social distancing, and also to allow members to cope with the demands of childcare and other caring responsibilities.

It is clear that these arrangements did not undermine productivity levels across the Civil and Public Service and this suggests that we should not miss this opportunity to agree on remote working arrangements and on revised flexible attendance arrangements for the future.

The pandemic has taught us that traditional ways of working, which are largely office bound, do not meet the current needs of the nation, nor do they meet the needs of the individual worker or employer.

There is no doubt a solid case for continuing flexibility exists beyond the pandemic with blended working arrangements being the favoured option for Fórsa members.

There is much to work towards at this difficult time and more than ever trade union membership will be vital to protect workers' interests in the coming months and years. Join Fórsa at: <https://www.forsa.ie/join>

**Derek Mullen**  
Editor



# Home working, Covid-19 and going through the phases...

## Derek Mullen

Head of Civil Service Division

Despite our best efforts we are now experiencing the expected resurgence in the Corona virus, firstly in clusters and now in community transmission as we head for the end of September. Clearly this has led to a re-emphasis of the Government's guidelines on working from home.

In the Government's announcement of 18th August, employees were told that they should only attend the workplace where it is essential for them to do so. Employers will determine what roles are required to be done in the workplace to ensure that important services continue to be provided to the public.

The advice states that these measures will be in place until at least 13th September. Where employees are required to attend the work premises, employers may consider the continuation of temporary alternative arrangements or new temporary arrangements, e.g. flexible shifts, staggered hours, longer opening hours, blended working patterns, weekend working etc. to continue to facilitate social distancing and public health requirements, where feasible.

The guidelines stipulate that there should be engagement between management and unions/associations, in line with appropriate arrangements, for any such continued or new arrangements.

The Fórsa view on this is that agreement must be reached on alternate work patterns as they have the potential to cause serious disruption for members, particularly those with childcare or caring responsibilities.

Flexi-time arrangements have also been reintroduced from 24th August 2020 where employees are attending the employer's work premises and are working their normal, pre-Covid work attendance patterns.

For those employees where flexi-time remains temporarily suspended, this arrangement does not preclude employers from using clocking-in and -out arrangements for monitoring purposes. Any balances accrued by employees before the suspension of flexible working hours arrangements can continue to remain and be held over until the Covid-19 working arrangements are no longer in place.

This has led to a demand for flexi-time from



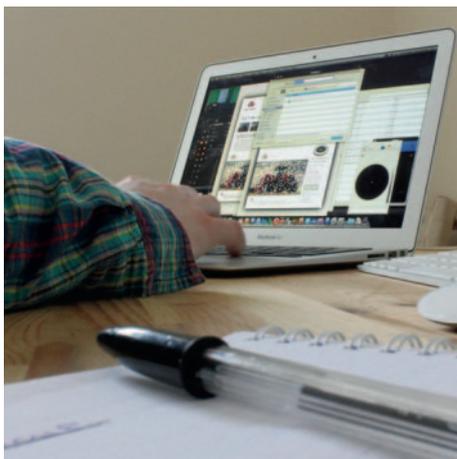
**FLEXI** Currently not available for remote workers

those who continue to work remotely and those who are working a blended arrangement with time at the office as well as home – an issue that remains under discussion with DPER, as is the whole question of a remote working agreement for the future.

As you will see from the results of our survey (see page 10 and 11), 86% of respondents were interested in working remotely. More than 80% of those who favour home working expressed a preference for a hybrid arrangement or blended working arrangements.

## Social isolation

A lot of concern about social isolation can be dealt with by ensuring regular attendance at the office as part of a more formal remote working arrangement. We expect other matters to be dealt with in our central



**SURVEY RESULTS** Positive view of home working

discussions including the issue of health and safety, provision of equipment and clarity on allowances.

The provision for special leave with pay as an alternate to sick pay continues to apply in lieu of sick leave for Covid-19 when an employee is advised to self-isolate and is displaying symptoms of the virus or had a positive test. Medical or HSE advice should be followed.

Special leave with pay for employees who are not required to work due to Covid-19 should be based on basic salary and fixed allowances only, excluding premium payments. This special leave payment does not accrue or count as sick leave against the normal entitlement set out above.

Also employees deemed to be very high risk should be facilitated to work from home to the maximum extent possible. Where an employee is very high risk, is cocooning, and working

**... agreement must be reached on alternate work patterns as they have the potential to cause serious disruption for members, in particular those with childcare or caring responsibilities**

from home in their current role is not feasible, then they may be assigned work outside their usual core duties, or given a new role.

The guidelines continue to be updated on a regular basis and it is expected that the latest version will take account of the new Government Living with Covid-19 framework.

The framework, titled *Resilience And Recovery 2020-2021: Plan For Living With Covid-19*, sets out what is permitted at each of five levels of response.

Launching the new six-month plan recently, the Government said the country was at phase two, but has since placed Dublin and Donegal at level three.

Under phase three of the framework, which gives specific guidance in a number of areas, employees must "work from home unless [it's] absolutely necessary to attend in person." This compares to a softer exhortation to work at home "if possible" under phases one and two.

## Covid-19 Advice

# Are you in a high-risk category?



### Should employees who are at high risk for serious illness from Covid-19 attend the work premises?

Employers should continue to facilitate this group, where possible, in terms of flexible working arrangements, including working remotely where such arrangements are appropriate to the business needs.

Employers are working to implement measures to ensure the safety of the workplace for all employees, as provided for in the Return to Work Safely Protocol. High-risk employees who are required to attend the work premises, in ac-

cordance with HSE advice, should take extra care to practise social distancing, where possible, and wash their hands regularly and properly. Appropriate measures may need to be considered for employees in the high-risk group in the work premises where maintaining social distancing is difficult.

### What to do if an employee is identified as being at very high risk (extremely vulnerable) and is advised to cocoon?

Employees should declare to their employer if they believe that they are at very high risk of

Covid-19. Please refer to the HSE website for more information.

The employer's Occupational Health service should be consulted for employees in the very high-risk category, or to determine if an employee falls into this category.

Employees deemed to be very high risk should be facilitated to work from home to the maximum extent possible. Where an employee is very high risk, is cocooning, and working from home in their current role is not feasible, then they may be assigned work outside their usual core duties/given a new role.



## Civil Service Employee Assistance Service (CSEAS)

Tel: 0761 00 00 30 Email: [cseas@per.gov.ie](mailto:cseas@per.gov.ie) Web: [www.cseas.per.gov.ie](http://www.cseas.per.gov.ie)



An Roinn Caiteachais  
Phoiblí agus Athchóirithe  
Department of Public  
Expenditure and Reform

### Civil Service Employee Assistance Service (CSEAS)

The CSEAS is a confidential\* work-based support service for civil servants.

#### What can the CSEAS do?

- Support staff dealing with work and personal issues
- Give time and listen
- Assist in exploring options
- Provide information
- Ongoing support as requested

#### Examples of Types of Issues

- Feeling stressed and need to talk?
- Have you experienced a recent bereavement and need support?
- Do you need to talk about work or personal relationships?
- Are you coping with depression, anxiety?
- Is substance misuse or gambling causing you problems?
- Are financial pressures worrying you and causing emotional strain?
- Absent on sick leave and concerned about it and/or your return to work?
- Are you retiring soon and would like to talk about your plans?
- Has your work situation changed recently?
- Are you struggling with work/life balance?
- Are you experiencing difficulties with family/caring responsibilities?

#### Line Manager Support

The CSEAS can provide support and guidance to line managers when dealing with staff wellbeing issues. We can act as a sounding board, assist in planning how to approach sensitive issues and provide information on how to refer a staff member to the CSEAS.

#### Presentations

Please contact your EAO to discuss the feasibility of presentation delivery on topics such as stress management, self-care etc.

### CSEAS Publications

The following are examples of topics available to download from the [CSEAS website](http://www.cseas.per.gov.ie)

- Managing Stress
- Effective Communication
- Bereavement/Impacted by Suicide
- Mindfulness
- Critical Incident in the Workplace
- Responding to Difficult Phone calls
- Substance Misuse
- Good Mental Health in the Workplace
- Conflict Resolution Skills for Managers
- Building Personal Resilience
- Covid-19 Supports
- Plus many more...

The screenshot shows the CSEAS website interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with 'CSEAS.PER.GOV.IE' and a search bar. Below that is a banner with the service name in Irish and English. A main menu includes 'Home', 'About Us', 'Helpful Links', 'Contact Us', and 'Coronavirus COVID-19 Support'. The central content area features 'MEET OUR TEAM' with a photo of a staff member, 'CENTRAL POINT OF CONTACT' with contact details (0761 000 030, cseas@per.gov.ie), and a grid of service categories: CSEAS INFORMATION, RESOURCES, MANAGING STRESS, MENTAL HEALTH, FAQs, and MORE. Below this is a 'NEWS FEED' section with articles about 'CSEAS New Operational Hours' and 'CSEAS Coronavirus Covid-19 Support'. To the right is a 'CSEAS COMMUNICATIONS' section with links for Leaflet Series, Webcasts, Featured Articles, and Other Publications. The footer contains a 'Mission Statement' and contact information for the Civil Service Employee Assistance Service (HQ) at 4th Floor, St. Joseph's Green House, Leinster Towers, Dublin 2, D02 PH42, Ireland.

### Who is your Employee Assistance Officer?

Please see our website for contact details of the Employee Assistance Officer for your Department or Office or click on : <https://www.cseas.per.gov.ie/eao-contact-details-contact-form/contact-form-2/>

\* Exceptions apply – see the CSEAS website for further information



This plucky Dublin contingent of Fórsa cyclists prepare to set out on their 100km bike ride across the capital on 25th September. They were taking part in the Fórsa Covid-Compliant Conference Charity Cycle in aid of four mental health charities: First Fortnight, Pieta House, Limerick Suicide Watch, and Suicide or Survive. Donations can still be made to support these worthy charities - email Brid Ruddle at [bruddle@forsa.ie](mailto:bruddle@forsa.ie) for further details.

## National Framework for living with COVID-19



	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
<b>Social &amp; Family Gatherings</b>	Max: 10 from 3 other households	Max: 6 from 3 other households	Max: 6 from 1 other household	No visitors	No visitors
<b>Weddings</b>	Max: 100	Max: 50	Max: 25	Max: 6	Max: 6
<b>Indoor Events</b>	100 200	50 100	No organised events	No organised events	No organised events
<b>Outdoor Events</b>	200 500	100 200	Gatherings of up to 15	Gatherings of up to 15	No organised events
<b>Sports Training</b>	Normal training with protective measures	Indoors Pods of 6 Outdoors Pods of 15	1 Individual only Pods of 15 Non-contact	1 Individual only Pods of 15 Non-contact	Individual training only
<b>Matches &amp; Events</b>	100 indoor, 200 outdoor, 500 stadia	50 indoor, 100 outdoor, 200 stadia	Excise specific exemptions	Excise specific exemptions	No events
<b>Gyms, Pools &amp; Leisure Centres</b>	Open with protective measures	Open with protective measures	Individual training only	Closed	Closed
<b>Religious Services</b>	50 (for sub-groups of 50)	50 (for sub-groups of 50)	Services move online Funerals 25	Services move online Funerals 25	Services move online Funerals 10
<b>Bars serving food, Cafés &amp; Restaurants</b>	Open with protective measures	Open Groups of 6 & from up to 3 households	Range of restrictions up to and including no indoor dining	Outdoor dining only Max: 15 Takeaway/Delivery	Takeaway/Delivery only
<b>Wet Pubs</b>	Open with protective measures	Open Groups of 6 & from up to 3 households	Range of restrictions up to and including no indoor service*	Outdoor only Max: 15 persons Takeaway/Delivery	Takeaway/Delivery only
<b>Hotels, Guesthouses B&amp;Bs</b>	Open with protective measures	Open with protective measures	Services limited to Residents only	Existing Guests & Essential Purposes only	Essential Purposes only
<b>Retail &amp; Services</b>	Open with protective measures	Open with protective measures	Open with protective measures	Primarily outdoor Essential retail/services	Essential Retail only
<b>Indoor Cultural Venues</b>	Open with protective measures	Open with protective measures	Venues closed Libraries available for e-services/tall & collect	Venues closed Online services available	Venues closed Online services available
<b>Workplace</b>	Staggered attendance	Essential Meetings, Induction & Training only	Attend only if absolutely necessary	Essential & other designated workers only	Essential workers only
<b>Domestic Travel</b>	No restrictions	No restrictions	Stay in your county except for work, education & essential purposes	Stay in your county Except for essential work, education & essential purposes	Stay at home Exercise within 5km
<b>Public Transport</b>	Off-peak hours	Peak hours reserved for essential workers and purposes	Only when necessary	Avoid public transport	Avoid public transport
<b>Schools &amp; Childcare</b>	Open with protective measures	Open with protective measures	Open with protective measures	Open with protective measures	Recommendations based on situation and evidence at time
<b>Adult &amp; Higher Education</b>	Open with protective measures	Open with protective measures	Open Escalate all appropriate protective measures / limit congregation	Move online On-site attendance only when essential	Recommendations based on situation and evidence at time
<b>Care Homes</b>	Open with protective measures	Open with enhanced protective measures	Visiting suspended, aside from critical and compassionate circumstances		
<b>Over 70s &amp; Medically Vulnerable</b>	Exercise judgement regarding engaging with others and in activities outside home.				

\*Pubs currently remain closed in Dublin

More detailed information is available at [gov.ie/COVID19](http://gov.ie/COVID19)



Rialtas na hÉireann  
Government of Ireland

## News

## ● Fórsa pressure leads to work carried out on shape of post-PSSA deal

# Final phase of pay deal sanctioned

## Bernard Harbor

Head of Communications, Fórsa

The Government has sanctioned the payment of the final phase of the union-negotiated Public Service Stability Agreement (PSSA), which expires at the end of 2020.

The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) recently published revised civil service pay scales, which include a 2% pay adjustment effective from 1st October. Cuts to fixed allowances will also be reversed.

The pay adjustment will be applied to staff across the civil and public service, section 38 organisations including voluntary hospitals, and non-commercial State agencies.

It means that, over its three-year lifetime, the PSSA has brought pay adjustments of more than 7% for more than 70% of civil and public servants, with slightly smaller percentage adjustments for the higher-paid.

Following PSSA and earlier adjustments, around 90% of civil and public servants have now had their basic pay rates restored to



DEAL union negotiators at one of the talks sessions that led to brokering of PSSA in 2018

2009 levels. But most of their incomes are lower than in 2009 because of other factors, including increased pension contributions.

Meanwhile, exploratory talks on a successor to the PSSA opened at a meeting between union leaders and senior DPER officials.

### Headline issues

This was teed-up following a July meeting between leaders of the ICTU Public Services Committee and the new minister for public expenditure and reform, Michael McGrath.

Led by Fórsa general secretary Kevin Callinan, the unions outlined their headline issues for the talks at a meeting on 8th September. The employer representatives also set out their stall.

Another meeting, due to take place before the end of September, will likely signal whether

the two sides believe there is scope to negotiate a new deal.

Fórsa pushed the process hard in 2019, and this led to substantial work on the potential shape of a post-PSSA deal. But momentum was lost in the months of Government formation that followed last February's general election.

Furthermore, the economic and financial impact of Covid-19 – including the huge cost of wage supports and additional health spending – has fundamentally changed the context of the talks. While the Programme for Government firmly commits the new administration to seeking a deal, Brexit and the pandemic also mean the Government's main focus has been elsewhere.

Fórsa has said the process needs to acknowledge the contribution of public servants both during the pandemic and in the hard years following the 2008 banking crisis. The union wants it to address outstanding post-crisis restoration issues, including additional working time introduced for lower and medium-paid workers in 2013.

The union also wants a mechanism for dealing with issues specific to particular grades and categories of staff, and points out that public service pay did not keep pace with cumulative inflation – or pay movements in the broader economy – in the years following the banking crisis.

The PSSA was endorsed in national ballots by members of the three unions that amalgamated to form Fórsa.

# TALK TO US

If things are getting to you

## SAMARITANS

A registered charity



# 116 123

FREE

This number is FREE to call



jo@samaritans.org



samaritans.org

## DEASP

Report: Paul MacSweeney

# Talks continue over Jobseekers VPU

Fórsa continues discussions with the DEASP over the Jobseekers Virtual Processing Unit which will facilitate longer-term homeworking for up to 600 staff in the department.

Fórsa had called on DEASP to defer the setting up of the new unit – set for 7th September – as talks were still ongoing. DEASP wanted the unit operational before 17th September – the date when no new PUP claims were to be accepted by the department.

Our primary focus in these discussions is on retaining jobs in local communities, retaining current IC's, protecting/enhancing promotional opportunities for members, introducing remote working opportunities for staff on a longer term and sustainable basis as well as ensuring that work is grade appropriate.

Fórsa has sought an increase in staffing at the DEASP given the significant increase in Live Regis-



ter numbers.

The DEASP proposals on moving to a centralised processing unit are in two phases. In the first phase staff currently working in back office functions that have

been FOBO'd will move into the Virtual Processing Unit.

While reporting structures will change, staff will remain in situ and will continue to carry out their current work.

Fórsa has sought a blended working pattern with a mix between home and office working for members to ensure the link with the local Intreo Centre is maintained. This has been agreed.

Our insistence that vacancies be replaced in situ has also been agreed. This is a significant departure from FOBO proposals where vacant posts would not be filled in location when they became vacant and instead would be moved to larger back offices thus undermining the future of IC's.

There is also a commitment to enhance Public Employment Services in Intreo Centres. This is another welcome measure that will help to ensure the future of IC's.

Among other matters Fórsa is also seeking flexitime for home workers as well as no diminution in access to SWY for our front office members.

## Time and attendance discussions

**Discussions are continuing with the department on recording of time and attendance. The limited risk – on health and safety grounds – of keying in at the clock is being explored. Fórsa is strongly opposed to any change in the recording of time and attendance that will lose our members' time.**

**We have flagged up that logging on through PCs is a slower process than at the flexi clock and that any recording of time and attendance must not involve the loss of our members' time.**

## Flexi restored for in-office workers

**Flexible working hours were restored on Monday, 14th September for staff working full-time in DEASP offices. Flexitime working will not be available for staff working from home or for those office-based staff who continue to work outside of their pre-Covid hours. We are seeking that staff are given the opportunity of continuing with earlier opening at 7/7.30am where possible. Meanwhile, discussions on remote workers being able to access flexitime is also under discussion centrally in the context of a remote working agreement.**

## Fórsa seeks staffing boost in ICs

Fórsa has sought additional case officers/support staff to provide the enhanced public employment services across Intreo Centres announced under the Government's jobs stimulus package.

We have also flagged up our opposition to any further outsourcing of Activation work through any increase in contracted services.

We have queried new targets introduced under Phase 2 of Activation. These targets are higher than those that operated pre-Covid. The targets have not been agreed or discussed in advance with Fórsa. Pre-Covid Activation targets are the only valid performance targets in operation.

## Management opts not to extend opening hours for Intreo Centres

Fórsa has noted the department's efficient and effective level of service provided remotely during the pandemic while also operating limited public-facing opening hours.

The union has requested that DEASP reduces public opening hours in the light of current Government advice that "unless it is absolutely essential for an employee to attend in person, they should work from home." The Government has also stated that "people should avoid using public transport where possible".

Fórsa had questioned whether the current opening hours of 10am-4pm or a further extension

in opening hours was in compliance with the latest Government advice and emphasised this point in a meeting with management on 4th September.

At the eleventh hour, management pulled back from extending the opening hours further, other than for public service cards, which is by appointment only.

During this stage of the pandemic DEASP can deliver a greater level of remote services to customers at less risk to customers, our members and the wider public.

This is particularly relevant at this stage where there has been a steady increase in Covid infec-

tion over the past number of weeks and our health officials are seeking the support of all to restrict the further spread of Covid.

Fórsa is arguing that where DEASP services can be delivered at less risk remotely it is not "absolutely essential" for employees to attend the workplace in person on a daily basis and in many cases to travel there by public transport.

The reduction in IC opening hours, at this time, will help the Government in their aim of restricting the spread of Covid-19 and we know from earlier in the pandemic that IC services can be effectively delivered remotely.

## News

- 77% back Government looking into a four-day working week...
- 46% of employers see trialing four-day week as 'feasible' option

# Making it work

## Bernard Harbor

Head of Communications, Fórsa

The Four Day Week Ireland campaign has published the results of a new survey on public attitudes to a four-day working week. The survey, conducted in August by Behaviour & Attitudes (B&A), reveals a very enthusiastic response to the prospect of a four-day week in Ireland.

Two out of three respondents expressed the view that a four-day week (defined as "same job, same goals, same salary but over four days rather than five") is "realistic and achievable" in the medium term, and a majority of employers who took part in the survey expressing the view that it is achievable.

Just over three-quarters (77%) of those surveyed said they are supportive of the Government exploring the potential introduction of a four-day week. Among employers, more than two out of three (67%) supported this.

A substantial majority (75%) believe that a four-day week would be desirable for employees, with a majority (59%) feeling it should be achievable for employers as well. Almost half of employers (46%) said they see trialling a four day week in their own workplace setting as "feasible."

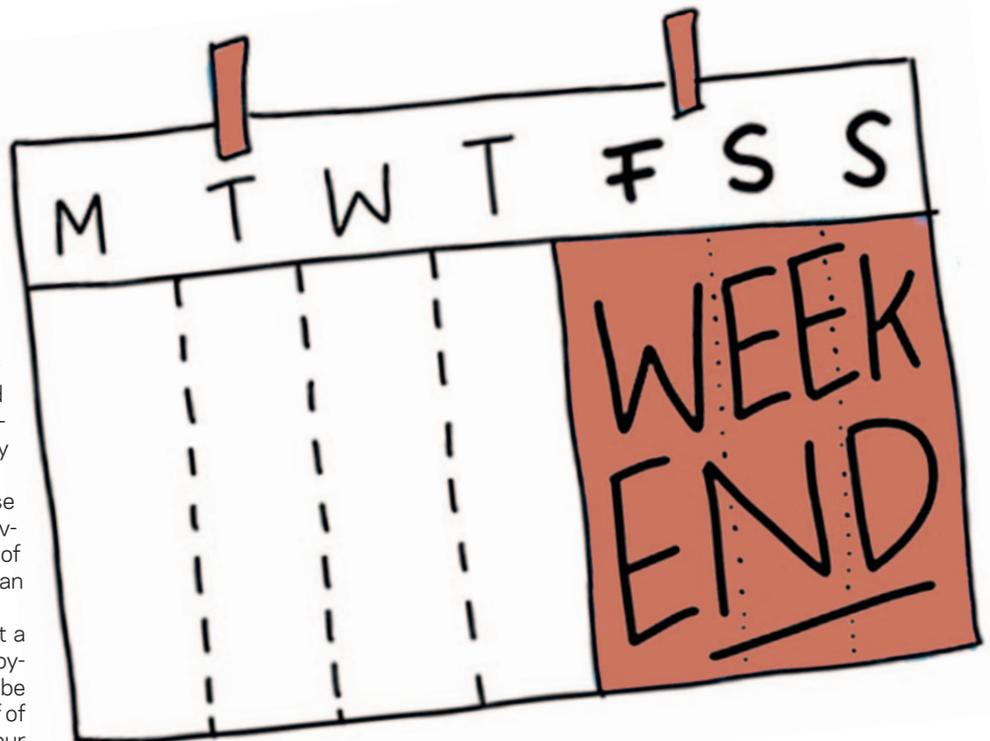
### Achievable

Factoring out undecided respondents, the survey result shows that more than 80% of those expressing an opinion feel it is a realistic and achievable ambition, while 93% would favour a trial.

The survey results were published ahead of a special online public briefing on 17th September as the case for a four-day working week was the discussed with TDs and senators from across the political spectrum.

Joe O'Connor, director of campaigning with Fórsa trade union, said the survey results demonstrated a significant public appetite for a shorter working week in Ireland: "Close to half of employers see this as feasible in their own workplace, which is very encouraging, while a substantial majority believe the Government should explore this concept.

"The four-day week, with no loss of pay, offers the potential of a genuinely better future for workers and employers alike. When we launched this campaign last year, we were pleasantly surprised by the enthusiasm expressed by many employers, and the openness



**What may once have seemed like a radical concept is now, for many, a reasonable and rational ambition**

of some employer representatives to the idea.

"It's clear employers recognise the productivity potential of a four-day week, while some employers have already taken the first steps with very promising results."

Mr O'Connor continued: "The strong support for a four-day working week among Irish people



Joe O'Connor



Orla O'Connor

is consistent with similar studies internationally. What may once have seemed like a radical concept is now, for many, a reasonable and rational ambition. The Covid-19 pandemic has further disrupted societal and workplace norms, while illustrating the potential for very different models of work.

### Feasibility

"We are now urging the Oireachtas Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Employment to commission an expert report on the feasibility of a four-day working week in Ireland, and consult with key stakeholders on this as part of their work programme," he added.

The survey response to the concept of a four-day working week was strongest among younger adults and those working full-time. Professional and technical grades and those working in manufacturing, office or administration-based roles, retail and distribution showed the most enthusiasm for the four-day week concept.

Margaret Cox, director of ICE Group, a Galway-based recruitment firm which has been operating a four-day working week for more than a year, said: "Many employers may now see the



**TRAIL BLAZER** ICE Group director Margaret Cox

possibilities, where previously this idea may have seemed unachievable.

"Given our own experience in ICE Group with the success of the four-day initiative, I believe Ireland is incredibly well placed to lead Europe and the world in making a real change in the way business runs, and consolidating our international reputation as a world class country, where business success and societal wellbeing go hand in hand."

Orla O'Connor, director of the National Women's Council (NWC) said the experience of Covid-19 demonstrated a need to reorganise working time: "A four-day working week would be particularly beneficial to women, allowing better distribution of caring responsibilities between women and men.

"Women still do the majority of care work. Reduced working time would allow men to spend more time with their families, to take on more caring responsibilities, and this would help remove barriers to women achieving senior positions in work, and allow women to take on more training opportunities," she said.

Oisín Coghlan, director of Friends of the Earth, said: "It's great to see such strong public

**... there is an opportunity to embrace ideas that boost productivity, reduce pollution and increase wellbeing**

support for the idea of the Government exploring the introduction of a four-day week. We've seen how employers and workers have innovated and adapted in the face of Covid, and how commuting doesn't need to be central to the everyday experience of work.

"As we live with the virus, and ultimately move beyond it, there is an opportunity to continue to embrace ideas that boost productivity, reduce pollution and increase wellbeing. The four-day week is one of those ideas," he added.

● Four Day Week Ireland is a campaign coalition of trade unions, businesses, environmental organisations, women's rights and civil society organisations, academics, health practitioners and global advocates.

See <http://fourdayweek.ie/> or follow **Four-DayWeek Ireland** on Twitter. Check out the full B&A presentation at <https://bit.ly/3mE7Sqm>

CSQ ONLINE Autumn 2020

## Revenue

Report: Geraldine O'Brien

### Return to work protocols as safety committees set up

We continue to see a large number of Revenue staff working remotely, with senior management putting in place safeguards to ensure local managers do not insist on staff returning to offices unnecessarily.

Revenue has also set up safety committees and appointed lead workplace reps - many of

whom are Fórsa nominees.

In addition, Revenue has put in place appropriate procedures clearly laid out in government protocols for the safe return to the workplace. Management have committed to working on policy in relation to remote working within the department.



### Phone line protocols to be drafted

**Staff assigned to the Revenue national telephone helplines continue to work remotely. Revenue has not deviated from the temporary arrangements of operating the phone lines on a morning-only basis.**

**We hope to secure this as a permanent arrangement and it is envisaged that new protocols in relation to the phone lines will be drafted in the coming weeks.**

Picture: Jared Sexton (CC BY 2.0)

### Revenue publishes latest stats on TWSS

According to the latest Revenue statistics, the cumulative value of payments made under the TWSS is now €2,610 million.

More than 69,500 employers are registered with Revenue for the scheme, with over 66,000 employers having received subsidy payments. An estimated 370,000 employees are currently being supported by the TWSS.

Revenue's compliance programme on the TWSS scheme continues. The introduction of changes and new initiatives will see our members having to overcome challenges as they continue to deliver high-level productivity while working remotely. They will do this while, in some locations, receiving little support and guidance from senior management.

### BREXIT update...

**Work is continuing in Revenue to boost numbers in the Customs division both in the border counties and in Trade Facilitation. It is envisaged that Revenue will be increasing its workforce by around 300 - with at least 200 of these positions being at clerical officer grade and with most carrying a shift premium.**

## Department of Education & Skills

### PPE for SENOs

**An issue arose relating to the purchase of personal protective equipment (PPE) for Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs). This is now being made available centrally.**

**The branch is currently considering return-to-work protocols particularly with regard to school visits.**

### Skip increments

A major issue arose at the National Educational Psychological Service over skip increments under circular 7/2019 and 4/2020. A number of staff were informed that they had been paid these in error and will have their increments readjusted and will have to repay any overpayment made. In examining individual cases it appears at least in some cases the NSSO interpretation is wrong.

## Department of Housing & Local Government

### OGCIO services role

Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO) will manage shared services for the Department of Housing, Rural & Community Development, Office of the President, Comptroller and Auditor-General, Children and Youth Affairs, National Shared Services, and National Shared Services with the project rolling out over the next number of years.

Meetings have taken place with DPER, OGCIO and Housing which are in the first phase. The issue of staff assignment to OGCIO has been referred to third party adjudication.

### Met Éireann IT upgrade

**A meeting of all parties has taken place to consider a management proposal for tendering for an upgrade along with a managed service and backup system. Fórsa has requested that new systems are serviced either by existing or new IT staff as set out in the 'service delivery options' contained in the national agreement.**

**A further meeting is to place with management shortly. The union has received proposals that are unsatisfactory as they set out a minimal increase in IT staffing with an emphasis on buying in a managed service.**

## News

# Largest ever employee survey reveals huge support for remote working

Ireland's largest ever employee opinion survey on the issue of remote working has revealed a huge appetite for working from home, with most respondents favouring a hybrid model where they blend time worked remotely and in the workplace.

The study, conducted by Amarách Research for Fórsa trade union over five days in July, found that 86% of respondents were interested in working remotely. More than 80% of those who favour home working expressed a preference for a hybrid arrangement.

Over 4,300 workers completed the survey. Although most were civil and public servants, Fórsa says its findings broadly mirror similar research, conducted by the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (DBEI) last year, in which the majority of respondents were from the private sector.

Seven in 10 of those who had worked at home during the Covid-19 crisis said remote working had been a positive or very positive experience. But this figure fell to 66% for workers aged under 30, suggesting that younger workers face particular challenges in home working.

At 67%, there was a lower-than-average – though still significant – preference for remote working among staff who worked from their employer's premises throughout the emergency.

Reduced exposure to Covid-19 was the most frequently-cited (81%) positive factor associated with home working during the pandemic, followed by improved work-life balance (70%), reduced commuting time (67%), and increased work flexibility (55%).

Half the respondents said home working had improved their productivity, while 45% of those with school-aged children said it had made it easier to manage childcare when schools and crèches closed during the pandemic.

Concerns about home working related to four broad areas: disconnection from the workplace; work encroachment on home life; costs and the appropriateness of home work space;



Picture: Bryce Johnson (CC BY 2.0)

**Seven in 10 of those who had worked at home during the Covid-19 crisis said remote working had been a positive or very positive experience. But this figure fell to 66% for workers aged under 30...**

and health and safety issues. Again, these broadly mirrored the concerns that surfaced in the 2019 DBEI survey.

The biggest single negative aspect of home working, cited by 69% of respondents, was the lack of interaction with colleagues. Almost half said they found it harder to find out what was happening at work, and a quarter said management communicated poorly during the pandemic.

The second most frequently cited disadvantage (51%) was difficulty in separating work from home life, while almost half (48%) said that they incurred costs that would not arise if they were in the workplace.

Worryingly, just 28% of those who worked remotely said a manager had asked them about their home working set-up from a health and safety perspective. The union has now called for the Health and Safety Authority (HSA) to draw up specific employer and employee guidelines on remote working, including mental health risks.

In its submission to a Government consultation on remote working, which was delivered last week, Fórsa said: "The HSA and social partners should explore the challenges of risk assessment in the context of remote working to seek solutions that will protect the health and safety of workers without impeding the expansion of home working."

The union says health and safety concerns include the potential impact of loneliness and isolation on mental health, working time issues, potential physical impacts arising from inadequate workstations, and conditions arising from eyestrain.

Fair access to remote working also emerged as a major concern for Fórsa members. When asked to rank future priorities for the union,



Picture: Travis Isaacs (CC BY 2.0)

this was cited by the largest number (70%) of respondents, with more than a third (36%) ranking it as their top priority.

Fórsa's submission to the State's public consultation makes 20 recommendations. It calls on the Government to open a dialogue – with unions and employers – aimed at strengthening the legal framework around remote working, including the possibility of a legal right for employees to seek remote working and other flexible working arrangements.

And it says official guidance should require employers to set objective criteria for determining the tasks and staff selected for home working arrangements. The union adds that remote working is not sustainable for all workers, and says employees should have the right to refuse home working without having to give their reasons.

It insists that those working remotely should benefit from the same rights, guaranteed by legislation and collective agreements, as comparable staff at their employer's premises. And it calls for strong safeguards with regard to surveillance, privacy, data protection and cyber-security.

The union's submission notes that additional household costs accrue from home working, and that these are likely to rise in the winter months. "This was not addressed in temporary arrangements introduced during the Covid-19 emergency, but a different approach is required for long-term arrangements where employees are based at home for significant periods of work time," it said.

Fórsa's head of communications Bernard

## Key findings...

- **7 in 10 say remote working positive experience**
- **86% interested in remote working**
- **Half of respondents flagged up improved productivity benefit**
- **51% found some difficulty separating home and work life while working remotely**

Harbor said strong employer support for remote working had also been identified in earlier studies, including in research conducted by the DBEI last year.

He explained: "The experience of remote working during the Covid-19 emergency has demonstrated that many roles can be carried out remotely in ways that are productive, cost-effective and attractive to employers and their staff. Workers value the flexibility that remote working can bring, while managers cite access

**Remote working during the Covid-19 emergency has demonstrated many roles can be carried out remotely in ways that are productive, cost-effective and attractive to employers and staff**

to talent, improved productivity and cost savings as benefits. Enhanced remote working also has huge potential to boost climate action and regional development.

"The need to address barriers to increased remote working, including the lack of a clear legislative framework and awareness of supports, has become more pressing. Legal rights to request access to remote working and other forms of flexible work are stronger in a range of comparable countries, and working people also deserve protections to ensure that new arrangements don't undermine their incomes and working conditions," he added.

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
Work from home if possible. Attend work for specific business requirements and on a staggered attendance basis	Work from home if possible. Only attend work for essential on-site meetings, inductions and training	Work from home unless absolutely necessary to attend in person	Only essential or other designated workers should go to work	Work from home unless it is for working in health, social care or other essential service and cannot be done from home



Illustration: Roblin Hutton  
(CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

# Flexible working overhaul needed

**Derek Mullen**

Head of Civil Service Division

As CSQ goes to print we are pressing Government to ensure that departments do all in their power, particularly in counties at Level 3, to ensure as much remote working as possible.

Concern is being expressed by members in departments such as DEASP that not enough is being done to minimise office attendance and to ensure the staff and customer interaction is kept at a low level, to minimise potential contacts.

We have reminded departments that Level 3 in the Government framework requires home working unless it is absolutely necessary to attend in person. As members returned to offices

over recent weeks we ensured a return of flexi-time for those working normal patterns. However Fórsa is seeking a review of the flexible working hours agreement for the Civil and Public Service.

Borrowing from the Government's theme voiced throughout the pandemic of one public service, we believe it is timely to consider revisions of the scheme to apply uniformly across the whole public service.

**Agile and flexible**

Working arrangements throughout the pandemic have proven the Public Service's ability to be agile and flexible in responding to a major health crisis and has led us to consider a range of different approaches to flexible working to

cater for various health requirements such as social distancing and also to allow members to cope with the demands of childcare and other caring responsibilities. It is clear that these arrangements did not undermine productivity levels across the Civil and Public Service.

It is appropriate, therefore, to consider a review of the Flexible Working Agreement to take account of the pandemic experience and to provide ongoing and greater flexibility for members and employers into the future.

This, in our view, requires a review of the flexible working hours agreement and ensuring that flexi-time should apply as the default time and attendance system for all members, including those who will continue to work remotely.



*Obituary Willie Sargent*

## A true gentleman and the best of us

During the month of August we lost our good friend and comrade, Willie Sargent. Willie passed away after a short illness.

He served on the Civil Service Divisional Executive Committee right until the very end and the news of his passing was a big shock for all his colleagues including at his in beloved AEH Branch, where he worked tirelessly over the years. Testament to Willie was his call to me a week before he died

telling me not to forget the allowance he had been working on with Cliodhna McNamara on behalf of architectural assistants in the OPW. Fitting that it was agreed and sent for payment during August.

Cliodhna worked with Willie closely and she wrote eloquently in the wake of his passing when she said he'd never leave a member hanging, regardless of whether they were within his branch or not.

A true gentleman whom she said she felt glad to know and how dearly she would miss him.

Willie was the best of us and we send our heartfelt condolences to his friends and colleagues but in particular his beloved family, wife Rose and sons and daughters Conall, Aislinn and Anna.

Rest in peace, Willie, you were the best of us *Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam*

**Derek Mullen**

# GENERAL COUNCIL UPDATE

By **Derek Mullen**



The General Council is the main industrial relations forum for Civil Service unions, comprising mainly of senior, elected and full-time officials from Fórsa and other unions as well as senior officials from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER). The Council is established under the Conciliation and Arbitration Scheme. The Committee meets every month to consider claims from the union or management side and ongoing policy matters that affect the terms and conditions of civil servants.

## Transfer of functions

Talks are continuing in departments over the transfer of functions following the formation of the new government in June.

This includes discussions in Housing with the transfer of Heritage; Transport to Communication and Climate; Justice functions to the Department of Children and the new Higher Education Department among others.

In so far as is possible Fórsa is seeking to have as limited an impact on staffing as possible, and in some instances we have managed to protect promotions rights in former departments for a period of time.



## Employee relations hearings set for review

We will review the arrangements for remote employee relations hearings in late September. The arrangements entered into as a result of the pandemic have worked reasonably well, including at hearings of the Civil Service Disciplinary Appeals Board.

There are a couple of issues to address including the often-necessary exchange of messages between an official and a member at a meeting.

In situ hearings have also happened following Fórsa requests through the case conference mechanism. This has turned out to be important for those hearings which are not suited to a remote approach.

## HEO/AO mobility 2021 launch

We have received a draft timetable from the Mobility team which sees the HEO/AO launch set for the first quarter of 2021. The testing of the portal for HEO and AO transfers was successful. Fórsa is seeking introduction of this in the fourth quarter of 2020.

Fórsa was seeking to have mobility for CO and EO resumed in September but a decision on the move is still pending.

## DPER discussions on new Arbitration Board

The Arbitration Board's term was up in July and we are now discussing a full replacement of the three-person Board with DPER. We expect the new Board will be in place until the transition from the C&A scheme to the state machinery.

We also hope to be able to deal with a significant issue regarding gender balance on the Board. It is expected that nominees to the Board will be approved by the Minister in coming weeks. Meanwhile, work continues on the WRC/Labour Court transition.

## Industrial News

### Garda Area

## Reps for divisional change teams

Following the change in how the proposed operational model is being rolled out, a communication has been issued to all divisional APs outlining Fórsa's position over engagements on members' issues.

The appointing of local reps to each of the 19 divisional change teams is continuing and an internal Fórsa engagement and communication structure has been put in place. Virtual information/training modules are planned for

all the operational model reps. Planning on communications with members at divisional level is also continuing.

A central engagement meeting took place on 18th September and a specific central meeting on finance processes is planned for the near future.

Meanwhile, discussions continue over the civilianisation process of which the new operational model is an integral part.



### Prison Service

## BTW protocols in place

Back-to-work protocols are now in place with the cohort of staff continuing to work from home. According to Fórsa, no serious issues of note have been received. Meanwhile, prison chaplains have now joined Fórsa and management has been informed of this.



### Courts Service

## Jury trials are re-introduced

The Courts Service has been proactive on the back-to-work protocol which is being kept under review, while the return of flexi is being managed at a local level.

Meanwhile, the Courts Service has reintroduced jury trials and 11 areas outside of the CCJ have been identified. Contingency plans over jury selection have been put in place in line with Covid-19 guidelines.

### OPW

## Talks continue on PCW 1% payments

Discussions are continuing over arrangements to update and pay overdue monies under the PCW 1% for technical and professional grades.

Meanwhile, a competitions shortlisting policy is nearing the final stages of agreement. The department has yet to confirm an

agreement over the next AP competition to be held without shortlisting.

Fórsa has met with the committee and received comments and observations about the policy.

This will be followed up in a subsequent meeting with management.

## Architectural Assistants allowance

Following agreement between the parties, PeoplePoint has been instructed by the department - as of 14th August - to pay the allowance and make it retrospective to April of this year (when the agreement was brokered). This allowance was championed by our former colleague Willie Sargent, who sadly passed away during the summer. **Obit: p12**

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## Department of Justice & Equality

Report:  
Eugene Quinn

### Update on BMU Sunday payments

The temporary paper calculation of Sunday attendance is now automatic following an upgrade by NSSO. The issue of arrears was referred for adjudication under the C&A scheme and the union's statement of claim issued to DPER on 20th April 2020. Management's counter statement was also received. A date for a remote hearing is awaited. A

claim for on-call allowance for HEO shift managers was lodged at Departmental Council. A response on this is due at next Departmental Council.

Meanwhile, Border Management Unit staff members are now collecting forms for passengers who have to self-isolate because of Covid-19.

### DJE management sets up oversight group

Due to Covid-19 most staff are now working remotely with a skeleton staff in Corporate Services, IPAS, IPO and INIS.

Management has set up a management oversight group drawn from HR, Facilities and Corporate Services to carry out risk assessments and schedule a return-to-work programme.

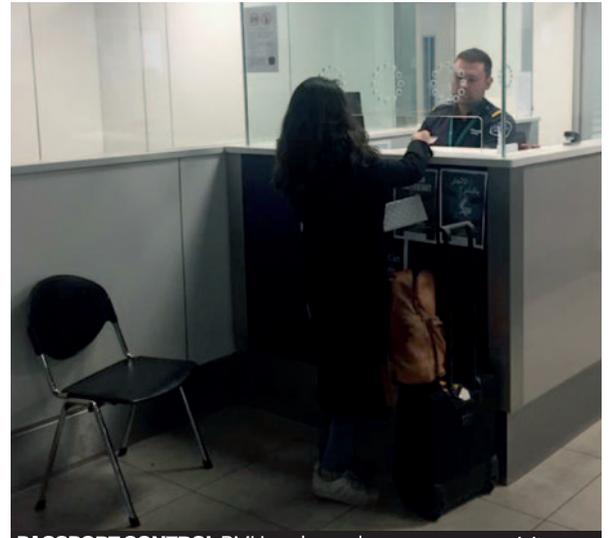
The Lead Worker Representative will have direct access to this group and may be invited to attend meetings. In most offices no more than 30% are due in at any one time.

### Clarification over internal promotions

Recent internal promotions (EO and HEO) competitions have taken place. With part of DJE functions being transferred to Department of Children there was a concern by successful candidates who are due to transfer that they would lose out by being removed from panels

on transfer.

Following representations by Fórsa it is now agreed that these staff will remain on DJE panel and if their position is reached will transfer back to DJE to take up the promotion. This will remain in place until end of June 2021.



PASSPORT CONTROL BMU worker welcomes overseas visitor

Picture: Fórsa

## PRAI

### Phased return to work under way

A phased return to work at the Property Registration Authority Ireland in accordance with the Covid-19 RTW Protocol is under way and a number of workplace representatives have been nominated.

Meanwhile, a small number of people with underlying medical conditions are being facilitated by being able to work from home.

## Central Statistics Office



### Discussions on jump increments

Meetings on the outcome of the Arbitration Board on jump increments for statisticians have now recommenced. The management board has approved a joint proposal and we are awaiting a meeting of the supervisory group before it is forwarded to DPER. Meanwhile, the majority of staff continue to work remotely. A number of offices are reopening with staff rostered to attend.

## Valuation Office



### Change proposals

Valuation Officers have received proposals for changes in work practices and are willing to consider these as Covid-19 temporary changes. A meeting with HR is to be arranged.



## Foreign Affairs

Report: Sean Carabini

### Clarification over attendance rules

Following a summer of engagement with Passport Office management, we hope to bring some stability to Passport Office workers by having a very clear set of rules for office attendance issued to staff.

They follow from a series of on-line consultation meetings that Fórsa conducted with the staff (and more will follow shortly).

The difficulty has been a mixture of very difficult staff/local management interactions, a large number of childcare arrangements required and the fact that a lot of the work cannot be done from home.

This makes things particularly difficult given that the Government

is beginning to define 'essential work' as 'work that cannot be done at home'. We are hopeful that a protocol will shortly issue that will see:

- A commitment to reviewing all passport office jobs to identify where home working is possible.

- A commitment to safely move as many staff as possible back to pre-Covid working arrangements with immediate effect (this will, in particular, help with caring arrangements).

- A mechanism for identifying what staff can work pre-Covid hours and which will have to work a shift.

A particular difficulty is that it is

not possible for 100% of staff to attend the workplace on pre-Covid hours. Therefore, a blend of full-time working alongside temporary shift working is the proposed solution.

The shift working will be six hours a day alternating between morning and afternoon starts. In Dublin, approximately 75% of staff will be able to return to pre-Covid hours, meaning only 25% will have to do shifts.

The biggest difficulty is likely to arise in the Cork office, where it is the inverse of this. Fórsa will consult with staff on their position.

## Industrial News

### Department of Agriculture and the Marine

Report: Des Fagan

#### Return to work talks

Discussions are continuing at Agriculture relating to a return to work. There are particular issues in Johnstown Castle, Wexford, which has nine separate sections and almost nine different return-to-work terms as well as no LWR training, and work-site inspections. These issues were raised at a partnership meeting on 8th September.

Management are also to respond to concerns raised over a recent AP completion and discussions continue on the sheep and goat census.

#### Agriculture No.1 Branch

Efforts to conclude a settlement of the badger vaccination claim are on-going with DPER. A meeting has also been arranged to dis-

cuss the role of the area supervisor as well as other matters of concern to the branch.

Members in some areas have been asked to undertake Covid-19 checks in the smaller meat processing plants in their regions on behalf of DAFM. The information is, if necessary, being passed to the Health and Safety Authority.

#### DAFM talks with Forestry Inspectors Branch

Discussions have taken place with branch officers and the DAFM over the standard operating procedures and the certification process in Forestry applications. It follows reports in the media relating to hold-ups in the processing application system.

Most hold-ups involve the vast number of appeals lodged against



Picture: Terry Ballard (CC BY 2.0)

licences granted in the area. Added to that, there is the backlog created by the licensing system being unable to process applications or deal with appeals.

Media reports claim this is threatening thousands of jobs. Talks continue with DAFM to help

Forestry Branch members carry out their duties in an efficient and professional manner.

#### Agrilabs Branch

Proposals to recruit laboratory analyst grades into the Seed Certification Unit have been queried by the union. Queries relate to the number of posts in the competition and other matters. DAFM has offered all seed analysts an internal promotional competition to lab analyst as well as a further two new posts of higher seed analyst and one senior analyst post.

#### Brexit

Discussions continue with the DAFM over the implementation of Covid-19-specific measures at the ports as well as issues relating to assignments.

### Culture, Heritage & the Gaeltacht

#### Heritage functions transfer

**The legislation to allow for the transfer of heritage functions from the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht to the Department of Housing as announced recently is not yet in place. There is likely to be some confusion over advancing employee matters until this is resolved.**

### Business, Enterprise & Innovation

#### Talks continue on PCW 1%

Discussions are under way about re-introducing a scheme for the award of the PCW 1% for the legal professionals in the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation. Although constituting a small number of people, it will impact the legal professionals working in the department, WRC, Labour Court, CRO and ODCE.

### Chief State Solicitor's Office

#### Agreement reached on posts

**A lack of staff in the Immigration and Asylum section has led to the union considering issuing an instruction to members not to take on additional cases. Following engagement with management and members, agreement has been reached in this dispute. Competitions for a number of posts are under way.**

#### Starting wage for solicitors

An issue had arisen in recent years with legal offices generally being unable to attract suitably-experienced solicitors due to the wages that were on offer.

In the past, experience taught the legal offices that only if there was a dispensation to start staff on point 10 of the scale, did they

begin to receive applications from suitable candidates for the positions. DPER reduced this to point 7 last year – something that was considered unacceptable by many legal offices. However, since March the starting wage of up to point 7 is actually attracting new solicitors into employment.

### Attorney General's Office

#### Fórsa call to revive Dept Council

The Attorney General's Office has not had a Departmental Council structure in place for a number of years. This has effectively meant that there has been little real engagement on staffing matters, competitions, etc. We have requested that the Departmental Council structure be revived immediately and, failing that, we may need to move the entire matter of industrial relations engagement in the AGs to a third party.

### Department of Transport

#### Agreement reached over media monitoring function

**Negotiations are continuing in the Department of Transport following the sudden outsourcing of the media monitoring function performed by staff.**

This outsourcing occurred at the start of the lockdown and was not negotiated or agreed with the union.

The background to this issue relates to Clerical Officers in the Department of Transport monitoring daily newspapers for relevant news articles for each section in the Department.

This job was done by physically reading through the papers and extracting relevant information.

**When staff were instructed to work from home this function**

**ceased. This was regular and rostered overtime by a small group of COs. This function had been performed by COs for more than two decades.**

Following numerous bilateral meetings between Fórsa and management, the union side has achieved agreement that this function should return back in-house.

This will be trialled through a 'pilot' as the function of extracting the relevant news articles will be done through online subscriptions to the relevant newspapers – which is necessary as staff continue to work remotely.

Currently the terms and conditions of the pilot are being negotiated through the union official and local reps.



**WILL WE EVER GET BACK TO THIS ROOM?** Cathaoirleach John O'Flanagan (right) chairs a meeting of the Civil Service Divisional Executive Committee in January

## Pay and hours will be to the fore in talks

**John O'Flanagan**

*Cathaoirleach, Civil Service DEC*

After many years of activism in Met Éireann, I was finally projected into the role of Cathaoirleach of the Civil Service Divisional Executive Committee (DEC) of my union last spring. It arose after Niall McGuirk resigned from the role.

Since then there have been further changes at officer level with the departure of Kathleen McGee on promotion, and the installation at Leas Cathaoirleach of Melissa Brennan (Department of Justice) and Helen Linehan (Courts Service). I wish them all well.

My elevation also coincided with the emergence of Covid-19 on this island. This was a prelude to a lockdown and new virtual ways of doing business.

This concept began well within the Divisional Executive Committee but has not been without its own difficulties. Its format and style will be examined collectively by the group shortly in order to optimise its effectiveness.

I am an advocate of virtual meetings and, by extension, remote working.

This does not rule out physical meetings where possible or indeed in circumstances where being physically present is deemed a necessity.

Challenges before us in the spring may have dissipated in some cases. There are instances of improvements to working conditions as a result of the pandemic but overall the scale of challenge and the situational, departmental tests that are before us are

mounting. A pay increase has just been processed. Let there be no doubt this is money owed and not money on account. We are entering public service pay talks where pay and hours will be among high priority Fórsa issues.

Within Fórsa I am pleased to report that civil servant representatives are to the forefront of activities on the Fórsa equivalent grades committees.

This stratified, indigenous level of representation within a union of our size and diversity is both a necessary and beneficial innovation and development.

As a cross-divisional strand of representation it has enormous potential.

Certain symmetries of topics have emerged but these topics are then considered through the

prism of aligned grades. Reports from these committees are now standing items on DEC meetings.

There is a gap in the extent of this equivalent grade representation. No forum has yet been established to afford similar grade representation or focus to members serving above the grades currently catered for.

This is an issue that needs to be addressed.

The 2020 Biennial Union Conference will be held on a virtual platform on Thursday 19th November, a Biennial Divisional Conference is scheduled for next year and a Divisional Consultative Council is being planned.

I look forward to meeting you at or in the lead up to these events. Stay safe, stay together.

## Changes at DEC as focus turns to flexible and remote working

Kathleen McGee, Vice Chair of the DEC, was promoted recently. CSQ sends its best wishes and congratulations to her as well as a big thank you for all the great work she did on the DEC, NEC and the DEASP committees. It is much appreciated.

Helen Linehan, of the Courts Service, was unchallenged in replacing Kathleen as Vice Chair. Helen also fills Kathleen's NEC seat.

CSQ ONLINE Autumn 2020

Congratulations to Helen and to Tom Madden and Deirdre Fanning who were also co-opted to fill consequential vacancies at the DEC table.

The DEC will be focusing on flexible working, remote working and - indeed - the range of ongoing industrial relations issues concerning our members in the Civil Service over the coming months.

It is likely that they will continue to meet online throughout the rest of this year in line with Government guidelines.

While it has been agreed that the main Fórsa Conference, deferred from May, will now be a virtual conference, to be held on 19th November, it is too early yet to state whether the Civil Service Division Conference can proceed in May of next year.

News

# Fight goes on for Community Employment supervisors

"It is outrageous that after a lifetime of service in our communities we deserve a secure retirement. We effectively work for the State. A pension scheme is one of the things that marks out decent employers from those who wish to exploit workers. The fact that community workers in these state sponsored schemes are

denied this basic entitlement is not acceptable and the politicians know this. The majority of them said so before the election in February." – An excerpt from our latest blog post by CE supervisors Michele Rohan and Ian Thomas.

In 2008, the Labour Court recommended access to a pension scheme for these vital

community workers. In 2020, this recommendation has still to be implemented. Political administrations have come and gone since 2008, some leaving promises to implement this recommendation broken, while others have ignored or defied the recommendation.

Read the full blog at <https://bit.ly/33VYCWk>



# Fórsa backs initiative to end dispute at Debenhams

Fórsa has backed a new initiative by Mandate and the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU), which seeks new legislation to resolve the Debenhams dispute. The move has also been unanimously backed by a national representative group of Mandate members from all Debenhams stores.

ICTU says its initiative would help resolve the long-standing deadlock between the Debenhams staff and management, while providing protections for workers who find themselves in similar situations in future.

Earlier this year, Debenhams went into liquidation with the loss of more than 1,000 jobs. The sudden announcement, coupled with the Covid-19 pandemic, denied the workers access a collective redundancy agreement negotiated by Mandate and the company, as would normally have been the case.

Fórsa has called on its members to show their support for the ex-Debenhams workers.

The proposed legal protections would restrict companies from using limited liability and corporate restructuring to avoid obligations to their staff. And it would mean staff were protected when their employer goes into



liquidation. If implemented, the ex-Debenhams workers would be entitled to an agreed redundancy package worth four weeks' of pay per year of service.

It also proposes the establishment of a fund that employers would pay into, and which could be used in the event of future liquidations, and calls on the Government to make an advanced payment from this fund to the ex-Debenhams workers.

ICTU says several European countries have similar legal provisions. Mandate general secretary Gerry Light said the proposal "would

bring an end to the continuing abuse of workers in this country."

The Debenhams workers have been campaigning for a fair redundancy settlement for nearly six months.



CALL Gerry Light

● You can watch the Debenhams workers' campaign video at <https://bit.ly/2HzFUMJ>

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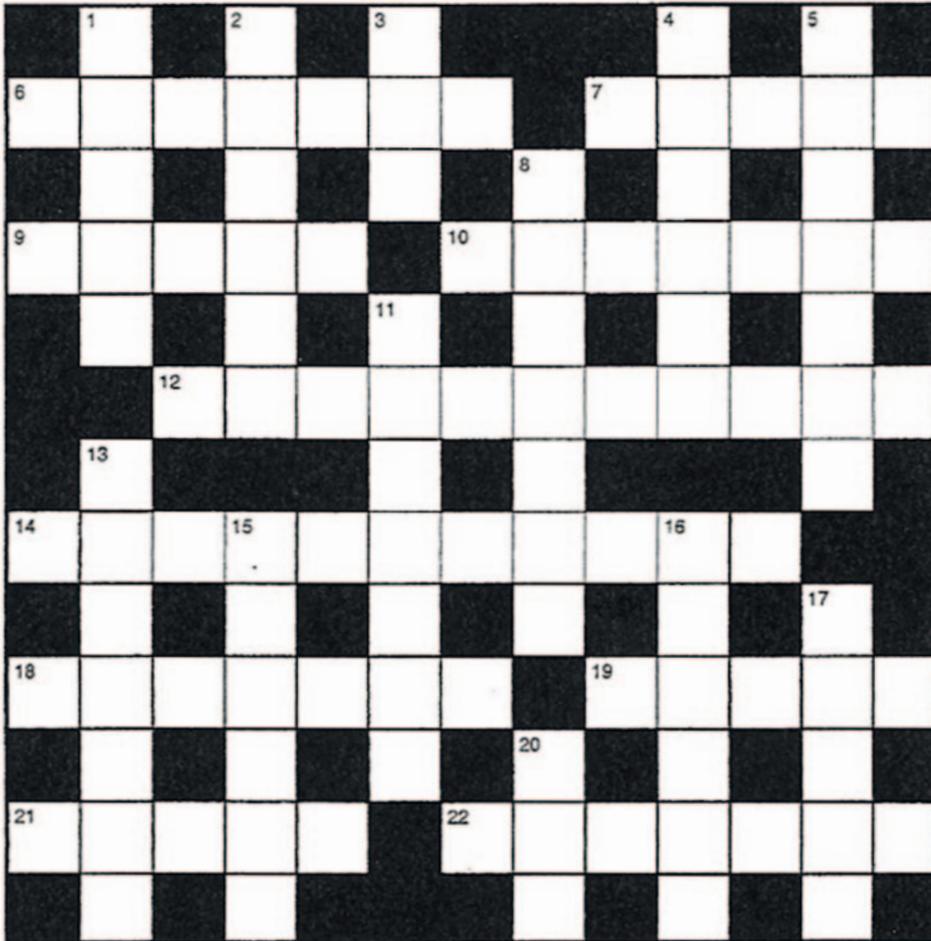
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# 01/20

# Prize Crossword



### Across

- 6. Be told a mixture is swollen (7)
- 7. Detector works both ways on location (5)
- 9. Sounds extremely posh craft going over and back (5)
- 10. There may be method in this crazy lake (7)
- 12. Magnificent parent is a highly respected veteran (5,3,3,)
- 14. Exile's dream land is familiar territory (4,7)
- 18. 'e groans about the fruit (7)
- 19. The first saint, possibly, is a rock (5)
- 21. What a namby-pamby you are my flower (5)
- 22. The headland was blushing as it frisked and frolicked (7)

### Down

- 1. Rest and the skin comes off backwards (5)
- 2. More equitable and lighter in colour (6)
- 3. Decimal basis in lignite, naturally (3)
- 4. Edward is cautioned after armed conflict (6)
- 5. He may be put out by bowler (7)
- 8. Sarah soon turns to the pubs (7)
- 11. Pool game for non-swimmers (7)
- 13. Much abused person underfoot at the entrance (7)
- 15. He sounds sincere in the 'en' house (6)
- 16. Nero and the teetotaller can be very nasty (6)
- 17. It is never, in short, made to scorn (5)
- 20. Tom may be a very agile burglar (3)

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