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**CSQ**

**Civil Service Quarterly**  
WINTER 2021



**FORSA**

**Season's Greetings  
and hopes for a better 2022**

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**Editor:**

Derek Mullen

[dmullen@forsa.ie](mailto:dmullen@forsa.ie)**Asst Editor:**

Róisín McKane

[rmckane@forsa.ie](mailto:rmckane@forsa.ie)**Fórsa Civil Service Division**

Telephone:

**+353 1 817 1500**

Contact us:

<https://www.forsa.ie/contact/>**Copy editing/design:**

Brazier Media

[www.brazier.media](http://www.brazier.media)**Cover image:**

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**Editorial**

# Thank you all for your service to the public...

As we approach the end of 2021 we should reflect on the past year and all that it has brought us. When I wrote my editorial in last year's Christmas edition of CSQ, I signalled my hope for 2021 – in particular that it would be a better year with the roll-out of vaccination programmes. However, 2021 has proved to be yet another challenging year, and it is clear that booster vaccinations are now very necessary.

I have dealt with some anti-vaccine propaganda during the year and, to be honest, it has left me wondering whether some of these people have any grasp of the real challenges we are facing.

Vaccinations have played an important role in eradicating a number of once-common illnesses and conditions. I would challenge anyone who is opposed to Covid vaccines to argue against vaccines that have been so important in protecting our children – in particular in combatting illnesses such as rubella and meningitis.

Indeed, how could anyone take issue with vaccines that effectively eradicated Polio and TB? These are illnesses that plagued families in the past but as a result of vaccines have now been controlled.

I have been criticised this year for my position on vaccines but I make no apologies for it. Doing the right thing and following public health advice to prevent the spread of Covid is vital – anyone

who doesn't get this is living in a false reality.

On the Industrial Relations front – in this issue of CSQ, we report about problems on the management side over completing negotiations on a blended working agreement for the post-pandemic work environment.

The issues that are of concern to management side need to be resolved. Members have clearly demonstrated their productivity throughout this pandemic. There is no reason to doubt this continued productivity as we move to a future blended working environment.

It only remains to thank you all for your public service throughout this year. I couldn't be prouder, and I would like to wish you all a happy and peaceful Christmas.

Enjoy the break.

**Derek Mullen**

Editor



## News

# 'No return to austerity' EU finance chiefs told

CONGRESS President Kevin Callinan and EPSU General Secretary Jan Willem Goudriaan have urged Minister of Finance Paschal Donohoe and his ministerial counterparts in other EU nations to reject a return to austerity.

In a joint letter to the Minister, Callinan and Goudriaan said it was crucial that EU governments boost public investment to strengthen public services and economies in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Minister Donohoe chairs the influential Eurogroup of EU finance ministers drawn from countries that use the currency. The union leaders' letter follows comments made following a meeting of Eurogroup ministers on 6th December.

Callinan and Goudriaan acknowledged concerns about controlling the growth of current expenditure in EU states, but said this needed to be "assessed in relation to the measures required to make our public health and care services more resilient and capable of coping with another surge in the pandemic or future crises."

Some EU member states are keen to roll back on the relaxation of EU fiscal rules put in place during the pandemic. But, in their letter, the union leaders advised against a return to the old approach to fiscal policy.

They wrote: "A key element of the pandemic response and the creation of resilient public services, particularly health and social care,



Picture: Informatique (CC BY 2.0)

requires an increase in current spending to tackle understaffing and the undervaluation and low pay of the mainly female health and care workforce. EPSU research indicates that 421,000 workers have left the care sector alone in recent years and urgent action is needed to avert a recruitment and retention crisis."

Minister Donohoe has chaired the Eurogroup since he was elected as its president in 2020. In an interview after this week's meeting, he distinguished between the EU's austerity response to the 2008 banking crisis and its fiscal reaction to the economic impact of Covid.

Mr Donohoe told the *Irish Times*: "This crisis is completely different. We have used some of the architecture that's been built up in the

European Union of a decade ago, to deal with this crisis really differently.

"But we also recognise that we were dealing with a disease, and that disease does not lend itself to being defined in economic terms. So it's a different crisis, different response."

Callinan and Goudriaan said: "We would strongly agree with the statement about the need to maintain fiscal support for the recovery and to preserve nationally financed investment throughout 2022. We believe it is crucial that national governments have the scope to boost public investment which is not only essential to make up for the below-trend rate of public investment since the last crisis."



Jan Willem Goudriaan

## Fórsa representation on ICTU EC

Fórsa has once again secured a sizeable representation on ICTU's Executive Council following elections held at the recent Biennial Delegate Conference (BDC) in Belfast.

It was General Secretary Kevin Callinan's first BDC as ICTU president - a position he will hold until 2023 and in which he will be instrumental in spearheading the organisation's post-Covid 'No Turning Back' agenda.

The Executive Council meets monthly and oversees the running of Congress between BDCs. Fórsa Deputy General Secretary Eoin Ronayne was elected to the 35-strong body along with Head of Services and Enterprises Katie Morgan, Head of Communications Bernard Harbor and Betty Tyrell Collard, a stalwart of the union's Dublin Central branch.



DGS Eoin Ronayne



Brendan Harbor



Katie Morgan



Betty Tyrell Collard

Katie was also elected on to the influential General Purposes Committee.

Welcoming the strong showing for Ireland's largest public service union, National Secretary Derek Mullen told CSQ: "Congratulations go to Eoin, Kate, Bernard and Betty - and, of course, to Kevin, who will play a key role at the helm in navigating the wider union family through some choppy waters in the months and years ahead."



KEY ROLE ICTU President & Fórsa GS Kevin Callinan

# Blended Working talks paused

Talks on reshaping the future of work post Covid within the Civil Service have been paused in recent weeks.

Discussions between management and Fórsa had centred on securing an agreement providing for a Blended Working Framework but there is now a lull in the process as the management side seeks clarification on a number of issues.

Fórsa and the other Associations at Staff Panel had expressed concern over this development, particularly given that good progress was made in negotiations.

Fórsa negotiator Derek Mullen told CSQ: "We have made it very clear to DPER our views over the manner in which these negotiations were paused."

The Government has made it clear to DPER that it expects the Public Service to move to 20% remote working by the end of 2021 - and, according to Fórsa, that responsibility rests firmly with the management side.

Mullen explained: "There is no doubt that there is a lot to play for in these negotiations; however, Fórsa expects DPER to return to the negotiating table - and in good faith - to complete a deal which was almost there in November and to meet those targets set by Government. Any failure to do so will not be acceptable."

Mullen insisted it was imperative that negotiations were completed and pointed out that any outstanding issues will have to be dealt with when talks resume, even if this means 3rd party referral. He added: "If we have



Picture: David Martyn Hunt (CC BY 2.0)

**Fórsa expects DPER to return to the negotiating table - and in good faith - to complete a deal which was almost there in November and to meet those targets set by Government. Any failure to do so will not be acceptable**

learned anything from these last two years it is the importance of evolving our approach to work to meet the new times we live in."

## Return to offices

Discussions continue in a number of employments where Fórsa is seeking to ensure that Government advice is adhered to. The current advice stipulates a return to pre-September 20th arrangements - that everyone should return to working from home unless it is necessary to attend workplace.

The union has questioned the necessity for attendance in a number of offices where we believe more could be done to adhere to the guidelines during this latest spread of the Omicron variant of Covid-19.

# Forsa welcomes Govt move on face coverings in public offices

Fórsa has welcomed the Government move to legally mandate the wearing of face masks in public offices - something the union has been advocating for now for several months.

It follows the publication of Statutory Instrument 677 of 2021, amending The Health Act 1947, which provides for the wearing of face coverings in any part of a Department, office or agency of the State or

Local Authority to which the public has access.

National Secretary Derek Mullen told CSQ: "We've called for this measure to be brought in all year. This is, of course, a welcome development - though admittedly very late on in the course of the pandemic. However, we think this will give added protection to those of our members who must attend essential services and serve at public counters."

Picture: Waldemar Brandt at Unsplash



## End-of-year reflections



# So proud of our Division, the members we serve and the communities they serve...

As we close out the end of 2021, which was a very busy year, I want to take this opportunity as Chairperson on behalf of the Civil Service Division to extend our deepest condolences and solidarity to those whose families have been touched by tragedy during the pandemic. Our thoughts are with you always.

I have been an active union member for many years holding various positions but, last May, I was so honoured to be elected as Chairperson of the Civil Service Division. I want to thank you most sincerely for putting your faith in me.

Over the past year, we have had very good reason to be proud of our Division, the members we serve and the citizens and communities of Ireland that they serve.

I want to acknowledge all of you who serve on this Divisional Executive, on Fórsa national committees and as branch activists and officers. Regardless of the restrictions imposed by the pandemic, you have worked with us to ensure that union business continues. As a result, you have maintained and expanded the

support our members experienced when they most needed their union to be there for them.

To all Fórsa divisional staff that work within this division and have supported members across all the workplaces, I personally thank you for your commitment and hard work over this past year.

Above all, I want to express our respect to our members as they worked, and continue to work, through this crisis – the many members across the division who go to the office to maintain essential services – often whilst putting themselves at heightened risk of contracting the virus.

I would also like to express our respect to the many members who quickly adjusted to working remotely, sometimes in extremely difficult, cramped, stressed or lonely settings – again ensuring that the public get the services, information and supports sought.

We are here to serve and support all these brave, committed, professional and resilient servants of the public. In other words, Fórsa and its members

have given their all, sometimes co-operating with measures that would not be acceptable in normal times and temporarily setting aside hard-won agreements, practices and benefits. This is what I call leadership in a crisis. Thank you.

I wish you and your families a very happy and peaceful Christmas, whilst also thinking of our members who will find Christmas difficult and lonely through the loss of a loved one.

I look forward to working with you all in 2022.

Enjoy the break. Disconnect, stay safe and best wishes.

**Helen Linehan**  
Chairperson, CSDEC




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# 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.

## Transition to state IR machinery

The Civil Service IR arrangements outlined at the top of his page have been in place since the early 1950s after civil servants were excluded from the Labour Court when it was set up in 1946.

In recent times, Fórsa has been critical of the operation of the scheme and has campaigned, along with other Civil Service unions and associations, to modernise the IR system and to open up access to the state industrial relations machinery for civil servants. Generally speaking the only access currently enjoyed is on rights-based cases.

It was recently agreed that a special sub-committee of General Council is to be put in place to drive the transition forward over the course of 2022.

Welcoming the move, Civil Service National Secretary Derek Mullen told CSQ: "This will allow us to focus on the tasks necessary to complete the move, in particular the development of a robust internal dispute resolution mechanism.

"We will be also pressing DPER in this process to deal with outstanding legislative amendments to ensure that civil servants are interpreted appropriately as workers under the terms of the 1990 Industrial Relations Act."

## Ensuring overtime payments are made before Christmas

General Council met on 24th November to consider a range of issues including that of ensuring that overtime payments will be received by lower-paid grades before Christmas.

Arrangements were agreed back in 2017 to ensure these payments were made. This



**LANSDOWNE HOUSE** Labour Court building

arose because the NSSO payroll shuts down at the end of November for the completion of year-end clear-downs of cumulative and shorter working year data, balancing and reconciliation of tax and PRSI to validate P60 and P35 listings etc.

Since the Council met, we have managed to resolve difficulties in the Department of Social Protection.

## Incremental credit review

A sub-committee of General Council is also continuing the important review of incremental credit, with Fórsa seeking to improve general arrangements in the Civil Service for those with previous service. This is in line with EU norms and reflects what is happening in the wider public service.

Incremental credit is awarded in the Civil Service in recognition of previous service; however, it is capped at 3 or 4 increments, depending on the grade. Significantly, this cap

does not exist elsewhere in the public service.

National Secretary Derek Mullen said the union was hopeful of improving arrangements within the Civil Service "to reflect the norm elsewhere".

## Sunday premium and Revenue APTH pensions issues discussed

There has been an ongoing problem for members with Sunday attendance requirements relating to the pensionability of their Sunday premium allowance. Happily, this is now closer to being settled after the principle was conceded at a meeting of General Council in November.



**AGS Geraldine O'Brien**

Further talks have taken place since then. At the General Council meeting on 2nd December discussions continued on securing full entitlement for all those receiving the allowance.

Fórsa informed DPER that setting a date of 1st January 2022 could mean some members would not have this allowance considered for pension purposes.

In addition, the union raised a question about the calculation for those members who have work shared and who also receive the Revenue APTH allowance.

Anyone who is on a pro rata salary has their pay regressed to calculate pension. This should also happen with allowances, including the Revenue APTH.

Fórsa AGS Geraldine O'Brien told CSQ she has been made aware of cases where this has not happened but she did welcome developments on the issue arising out of the 2nd December meeting.

# Plan to move Staff Officer issue to Arbitration

In 2017, the Staff Officer (SO) grade was amalgamated with the Executive Officer (EO) grade. However, there were some grades that are attached on a pay basis to the SO grade that were not part of the amalgamation. The Legal Clerk grade is one such example of this.

Assistant General Secretary Seán Carabini told CSQ: "Grade restructuring was part of the Civil Service management's modernisation plan. The amalgamation of the SO and EO grades was the mechanism that was used to deliver on this goal. But this job hasn't been completed."

In 2019, Fórsa brought this to

the attention of Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) with a view to correcting it. At present there are about 120 staff in the Civil Service who are still tied to the old SO pay scale. Carabini explained: "In

**In many cases, the grades still tied to the SO pay scale are specialist grades, meaning that promotion opportunities are quite often limited**

many cases, the grades still tied to the SO pay scale are specialist grades, meaning that promotion opportunities are quite often limited.

"Additionally, it is having a real impact on mobility. The Staff Officer [grade] is not catered for in the mobility scheme. How, then, can you look for a transfer if there are no SOs to swap with? The only sensible thing is to complete the amalgamation of grades for the last few staff tethered to the SO grade."

DPER did not agree to the proposal to amalgamate those still tethered to the SO grade with the EO grade. Now, this disagree-

ment has been formalised, meaning that the union can consider whether to bring this claim forward or not. Carabini added: "Our intention is to lodge a case with the Civil Service Arbitration Board for a decision on the matter. It is a curious outlier that the union has to bring a claim to ask DPER to finish out the modernisation and grade rationalisation programme that they began. However, as things stand, those still tied to the SO grade are losing out."



**AGS Seán Carabini**

More General Council news on page 8

## General Council News

# Promotion sequences in the Civil Service

### Derek Mullen

National Secretary, Civil Service Division

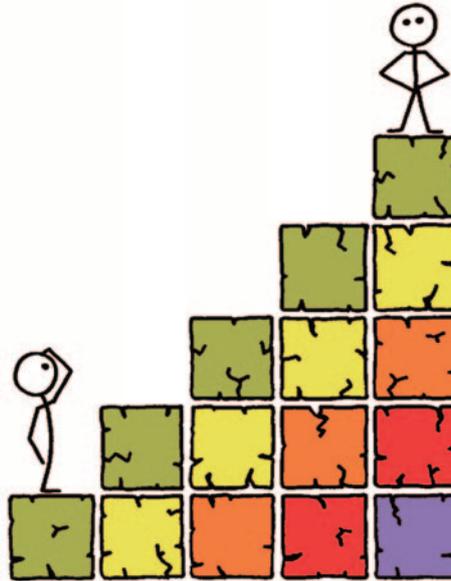
We get many queries on the question of promotion sequences in the Civil Service, so we decided to set out arrangements in this article.

The purpose of sequences is to ensure balance between the various promotion strands – open recruitment, inter-departmental and departmental promotion.

It should also be noted that restrictions on access to promotion to certain grades was lifted when we reached agreement on cross-stream promotion in 2014, when it was agreed that members could apply for promotion across streams and eligibility for promotion was no longer to be restricted to service in particular grades, as long as competitors had two or more years' service and met other eligibility criteria. This provision also applied to those on fixed-term contracts.

What this meant in practical terms was that, for instance, a Clerical Officer was no longer debarred from promotion to grades above officer, equally an Executive Officer no longer debarred from promotion to grades above Higher Executive Officer.

Getting back to the sequence question...



### Executive Officer

A short-term temporary increase of internal promotions at EO level expired in 2020 and we have now reverted to 50% open recruitment and 50% internal promotion. Internal promotions are split evenly between interdepartmental and departmental promotions, as follows:

- 50% open recruitment;
- 25% interdepartmental promotion
- 25% departmental promotion).

### Higher Executive Officer

Generally Higher Executive Officer positions are not subject to open recruitment although there is an agreement which allows no more than one in six posts with special requirements to be filled openly.

Generally posts at Higher Executive Officer level in the Civil Service are filled in accordance with the provisions of *Sustaining Progress* national agreement:

- 50% of all promotions are made from departmental selection processes.
- The remaining 50% is divided between interdepartmental appointments.
- The first appointment in each department/office will be a departmental appointment.

There is also provision for import and export quotas to deal with any imbalances in promotion between departments and organisations.

### Assistant Principal Officer and Principal Officer

Posts at Assistant Principal Officer are sequenced as follows:

- A third through open competition;
- A third through interdepartmental competition; and
- A third through departmental competition.
- Principal Officer posts are filled two-thirds by open recruitment and one-third internally.
- Equivalent professional and technical posts common to two or more departments operate sequences on the same basis as AP and PO.

**NOTE: Sequence distribution** – The distribution of promotions under the sequence arrangements happens on a national basis.

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**TAX WEALTH** New ICTU President Kevin Callinan sets out 'No Going Back' programme at ICTU BDC in Waterfront Hall, Belfast

# New ICTU President calls for a tax on wealth to fund better public services

Kevin Callinan, the incoming president of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, has called for an expansion of employer PRSI contributions, taxes on wealth, and "meaningful financial deterrence for environmentally-damaging activities." This, he claimed, would provide adequate funding for "decent public services worthy of a wealthy European nation."

Kevin made the comments at the ICTU biennial conference in the Waterfront Hall, Belfast, on 26th October. He told delegates employer social contributions North and South of the border were way below the norm in other advanced European nations, accounting for the shortfall in investment in public services. He insisted that the tax burden fell too heavily on incomes, rather than wealth.

Kevin was elected ICTU President at the conference. He will serve two years in that role and will continue his duties as general secretary of Fórsa during that time.

He told delegates that ICTU's 'No Going Back' programme set out a vision for a "high skills, high productivity" post-Covid economy that provides secure well-paid work, a "European-standard social wage," decent pensions and a strong safety net for those unable to work.

"Right now we spend far less on public services and infrastructure than similar European countries - almost €3,500 less per person each year in the Republic, a total of over €17 billion in 2019 alone.

"The entire public spending gap between Ireland and its nearest EU neighbours matches, almost exactly, the shortfall in employer social contributions.

"That's why our vision of decent public

services, worthy of a wealthy European nation, would be funded by an expansion of employer contributions, increased tax on wealth rather than just incomes, and meaningful financial deterrence for environmentally-damaging activities," he said.

Kevin told conference the Covid-19 pandemic had put past failures and future possibilities into sharp relief and had exposed the "structural weaknesses" of public services on both sides of the border.

"What passed as worker protections on this island - the weakest among the wealthier societies of Europe - exposed the insecurities that are the daily reality for hundreds of thousands of workers.

"And the vulnerabilities of our low-tax, light-touch, fiscal and regulatory regimes left us exposed to a massive external shock for the second time in little more than a decade," he said. But workers, communities and public services had stepped up to the challenge and governments had little choice but to step up too. "Their response contrasted sharply with the earlier banking crisis, when they quickly



ducked behind the devastating and divisive economics of austerity. This time, strong support for a State-led response to the massive public health and economic challenges emerged on this island and beyond.

"We saw what can be achieved when the State mobilises financial, organisational and human resources for the common good, when people work together collectively, and when citizens have access to essential goods and services," he said.

Conference delegates backed the ICTU 'No Going Back' programme, which sets out a practical blueprint for embedding these principles into Ireland's economic and social model.

Kevin said: "'No Going Back' outlines how we can recover and rebuild an economy based on decent, secure well-paid work. A high-productivity, high-skills economy, supported by investment in education, childcare and infrastructure. An economy where all workers earn at least a living wage, and enjoy a European-standard social wage with robust social solidarity based on decent pensions and a strong safety net for those unable to work."

He said the programme also planned for a sustainable society, "where workers and communities are heard and heeded through robust social dialogue, and where action to secure the future of our planet - through a just transition - trumps the pursuit of private profits for vested interests."

**'No Going Back' outlines how we can recover and rebuild an economy based on decent, secure well-paid work**

# Fórsa backs Orange *The World* drive

On 25th November, Fórsa joined the trade union movement across the world in support of the *Orange The World* campaign, part of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.

*Orange The World* marks the starts of this year's 16 Days of Activism to counter gender-based violence against women and girls, which ends on 10th December, Human Rights Day.

The colour orange symbolises a brighter future, free of violence. It also serves as a means of demonstrating solidarity in eliminating all forms of violence.

Fórsa National Secretary Ashley Connolly, pointing out that the union's NEC had given its full backing to the campaign at a recent meeting, told CSQ: "Fórsa strongly believes that no woman should be subject to the fear of violence at any time.

"Domestic violence is also a workplace issue, while the humanitarian crisis caused by the pandemic has exposed an unprecedented increase in gender-based violence.



Picture: UN Women (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

SISTERHOOD Orange The World...

"Unions have an important role to play in providing leadership on this issue, by calling for an end to gender-based violence against women, and providing support to women in the workplace and elsewhere who are subject to violence," she said.

The 16 Days campaign was first organised by activists at the first Women's Global Leadership



Institute (WGLI) in 1991.

The WGLI, marking its 30th anniversary this year, coordinates the campaign which is used as an organising strategy by individuals, institutions and groups across the world.

Meanwhile, Public Services International (PSI) has urged unions to call on governments for the ratification of C190, the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) convention on Violence and Harassment (2019), which recognises the right of everyone to a world of work free from violence and harassment and provides a common framework for action.

Calling on Irish legislators to act on the issue, Ashley said: "The convention provides the first international definition of violence and harassment in the world of work, including gender-based violence and harassment.

"Ratifying the convention in Ireland is a necessary step toward the goal to eliminate gender-based violence against women and girls, and unions will press our Government to do so," she added.



NS Ashley Connolly

# Move to boost substitute teacher numbers

## Clíodhna McNamara

Assistant General Secretary

The Department of Education is seeking to use emergency measures to boost the number of substitute teachers.

This will include asking other parts of the public service where teachers or ex-teachers are employed to consider releasing some of them to relieve Covid-related pressures on schools.

Minister for Education Norma Foley has also asked the Inspectorate to re-examine the way it works to see if some activities could be deferred, enabling inspectors to volunteer for work that would reduce the need to draft in substitute teachers until the mid-term break in February 2022.

Fórsa Head Office, the Early Years/Primary Branch and Post-Primary Branch have engaged with the Inspectorate on these proposals and made it very clear that members would not compromise the integrity of their professional roles by returning to teach in classroom settings under any guise.

However, it was also emphasised that members would continue to support schools in any other capacity necessary - as they already have been doing during the course of the



BOOSTING SUBS Department of Education HQ in Dublin (above) and (right) AGS Clíodhna McNamara



Picture: House of the Oireachtas (CC BY 4.0)

pandemic. While some changes to the Inspection programme have been negotiated and some policy development work brought forward, the Chief Inspector has confirmed there is no requirement now from the Minister or the Department for inspectors to act as substitute teachers in schools.

Meanwhile, there is an outstanding matter of concern over supporting the State Examinations Commission (SEC) and how these discussions progress. It is envisaged

that a group of inspectors will be assigned to assist and collaborate with the SEC in delivering assessments from early December 2021 through to May 2022.

It is recognised that there may be some difficulty in sourcing examiners given the pressure schools will be under to release teachers as well as the unpredictable nature of the pandemic but we will work through any issues that arise with the Inspectorate as the detail unfolds.



# Union remains vigilant on AI

Picture: Markus Spiske at Unsplash

Fórsa has warned that strong State measures will be required to ensure that everyone shares in the potential benefits of artificial intelligence (AI) and other new technologies.

The warning came after Micheál Martin this week said AI was not a threat to jobs. An Taoiseach was launching Ireland's first National Artificial Intelligence Strategy, which estimates that AI could double economic growth by 2035, while creating more jobs than are lost.

Also published is the impact report prepared by Deloitte setting out progress to date across the civil and public service. In its report, Deloitte set out initially what is Robotic Process Automation?

"Robotic Process Automation, robots or 'bots' are software programs, which have been designed to automate computer-based transactional processes and rules-based tasks by effectively mirroring how a person might interact with various software applications.

"RPA is a software program which can be deployed through a variety of service delivery methods such as off-premises (for example cloud/hosted) or on-premises (within your IT infras-

structure). Typically, RPA software programs automate high volume, computer-based, and rules-based tasks."

Deloitte is a service provider which - working alongside government departments, agencies and bodies in the civil and public service - provides support in the delivery of services using RPA strategy.

In their recent report they set out a number of case studies in public service bodies (PSBs) demonstrating intelligent automation projects and the changes they have delivered for their organisations, including:

- Garda vetting matching process;
- Covid-19 test reporting;
- Automation of job seeker requests; and
- PAYE, assessment tasks.

A number of pilots are also up and running in places such as POBAL, Tax Appeals Commission, Local Government Management Agency and the National Transport Authority.

All of these developments are under discussion either locally or centrally with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) and Fórsa's position is guided by the principles set down

**More than 40% [of Fórsa officials] believed their members performed tasks likely to be impacted by automation, while over 80% judged it would 'definitely' or 'probably' will be an issue in the future**

in its 2019 report, titled *Acting On Automation*. The report set out the case for dialogue, consultation and agreement with unions when employers seek to introduce major new technologies.

*Acting On Automation* also highlighted the need for training and skills development for workers under threat of 'job displacement' as AI becomes more embedded in the economy. It also warned that the introduction of AI should not be used as cover for outsourcing.

The report outlined how AI had the potential to improve work-life balance by reducing working time. This would help ensure that the productivity benefits of new tech-

nologies are shared between businesses and their staff.

In a survey of Fórsa officials, report author Craig Whelan found that almost two-thirds saw automation as an issue in the workplaces they represent. More than 40% believed their members performed tasks likely to be impacted by automation, while over 80% judged it would 'definitely' or 'probably' will be an issue in the future.

In the same year, a Fórsa submission to DPER argued that civil and public service management should work with unions to ensure that the introduction of new technologies did not lead to job losses, outsourcing or poorer services.

Fórsa's Head of Civil Service Derek Mullen, who wrote the paper, said the union would not oppose the introduction of new technologies such as AI, but added that technological advancement should not undermine services or jobs.

He pointed to the experience of Revenue, where new forms of work organisation, supported by retraining, had increased the tax-take and improved audit and fraud control rather than cutting jobs.

The national AI strategy seeks to position the public service as a leader on the issue.

## Industrial News

# Branch mergers and new branches

CSQ is pleased to report there have been a number of branch mergers as well as the creation of branches that combine clerical and executive grades. It's being seen as a development that will ensure greater coordination of industrial relations business at departmental level.

### Garda Civilian Garda Dublin North and South Branch

Proposals have now been finalised to merge pre-existing branches in the Dublin Metropolitan Region as a means of developing a more focused and effective approach to union issues.

It follows months of (virtual) information meetings as well as extensive engagement with members on the ground to address an activist deficit in the Garda area around the capital.

This process culminated in an Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) on 30th September, where the decision was taken by members to amalgamate the former branches. The purpose of the EGM was to set up a branch committee and to rename the Dublin Garda Civilian Clerical Branch, resulting



**NEW BEGINNINGS** Back Row (from left): Paul Doyle, Chris Crowley, Ciara Gaffney, Eddie Soye. Front Row (from left): Lucas Spiro, Joanne Mooney, Jackie Howard, and Stephen Keogh (Committee member Paul Bolger not pictured)

in not only a new committee structure but a more cohesive branch membership.

The inaugural meeting of the committee took place on Friday 12th November, and the following officer roles were filled: Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary and Treasurer.

The branch will run with this interim committee until the AGM in February 2022 and CSQ would like to take this opportunity to congratulate all involved in this process. Lead Organiser Bernie Aston and AGS Tosh Cowman, the principal driving forces behind the initiative, welcomed the move and told CSQ that it showed there was "power in an organised union".

### DPER/Finance Setting up new branch

Clerical and executive grades in

DPER/Finance and associated organisations are to meet on the 16th December to establish a new branch.

### NSSO Bringing grades together

Fórsa was approached by members working in the National Shared Services Office some time ago to explore the potential of amalgamating Fórsa executive grade members and Fórsa clerical grade members.

And following full engagement and consultation with all the relevant branches as well as local representatives in each of the locations, members in the NSSO have recently elected their Branch Executive Committee.

The branch rules for the amalgamated NSSO Branch are in line

with those agreed by the National Executive Committee on 27th February, 2019 and members were happy to adopt them.

The inaugural meeting was held on 27th October, and the newly elected committee worked through a busy agenda covering a number of issues, including a survey of members, recruitment, and workplace representation.

A Fórsa source told CSQ: "There is much work to do but members along with their full-time official will strive to protect the rights and interests of all members in the NSSO from a strong unified base of one national branch. We look forward to working through an ambitious agenda with the branch and will support the branch and hope it grows from strength to strength as the years progress."

## Garda Civilian

# Phased return to office work on agenda

**FGE grades:** A phased return to the office and the launching of a wellbeing app were among other items discussed at a recent meeting of Civilian Council.

And Fórsa expects the issue of CIDs will be resolved shortly with a "significant number" issued.

Meanwhile, problems remain in Garda HQ over unfilled Services

Attendant posts and the union is seeking to have these filled as soon as possible.

Issues have also arisen in Garda College with management instructing cleaners to take on Services Attendant work full-time as well as taking on new work related to the sports hall and swimming pool. Fórsa Assistant

General Secretary Paul Moyer told CSQ: "We recently met with local management and a member of the IR Unit, and they are to come back to us with formal proposals for consideration."

A bilateral was also held with the newly-formed IR Unit. Issues raised included: CIDs; replacement of cleaners in Garda

stations, Garda HQ and Garda College; filling of Service Attendant vacancies in Garda HQ; and the filling of Service Officers positions in Garda HQ, Garda College and Garda Security huts.

The outsourcing of overtime work in Enniscorthy is still under discussion. It follows the recent renewal of an outsourced contract for a further three months.

### Civilianisation

**Front Office:** There have been delays in moving successful staff and we are continuing engagements with management.

**One Organisation:** Following representations Fórsa has been invited as part of their stakeholder engagement to make a submission which has now been sent to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Justice.

**Control Rooms:** Meetings are taking place about dropped 999 calls and the rollout of the civilianisation of dispatching.

### CIDs

All members with more than four years' service have now been given their CID contracts. Separate discussions are also taking place on the overall issue of how the Garda organisation use TCO contacts.

### Divisional Policing Model

**Engagements are continuing at both local divisional and central level. Due to the ongoing industrial action by the Garda Superintendents Association, there is a considerable delay in progressing the OP Model in several of the divisions.**

## Department of Social Protection

## Fórsa opposed to new management model proposals

DSP has carried out a review of current divisional structures and is proposing to move to a functional-based management model.

Fórsa has outlined its opposition to the changes which would see the loss of walk-in services in certain Intreo Centres.

The union has also raised concerns over the restructuring of SWI and CWO services

## 'Staff burnout our primary concern'

A number of meetings have taken place between members from the NICC and representatives of both clerical and executive branches.

A joint meeting was held on 5th November and a management negotiation on 18th November.

Describing the meetings as "extremely productive", Fórsa Industrial Relations Officer Donna Mooney told CSQ: "The main issues raised were: clerical staff dealing with irate



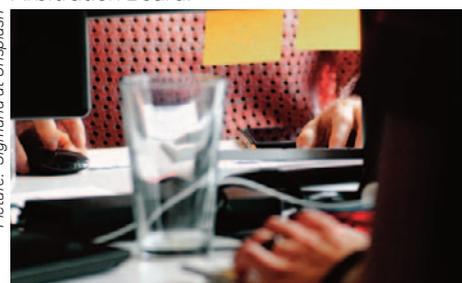
callers because of customer claims not being dealt with; the lack of help available to clerical staff as many EOs have been rostered on the phones; dealing with an escalation of calls, and a lack of clear process of work on the phone lines."

"Above all, staff burnout remains the primary concern," Mooney added.

The union has asked that staff who spend 50% of their time answering calls, spend the other 50% of their shift on other duties.

## Opposition to shift change

A counterstatement has been received from DSP on proposals to move from a 24x5 to a 24x7 shift for computer operators. A change from a 12-hour to an eight-hour shift is also proposed. Fórsa is opposed to moving to an eight-hour shift, with some 89% of staff voting to retain the 12-hour option. The union is awaiting a date for the Adjudication hearing. We have queried the referral of the case to the Arbitration Board.



## Queries over office recall

Fórsa has queried further increases in the number of staff recalled to DSP offices - where that work can be carried out remotely - given the increasing levels of Covid infection in the community. Discussions on this issue are continuing.

## Central Statistics Office

## 2-day office work put off

CSO staff are currently working one day a week in the office. A planned shift to two days a week in late October was postponed based on Government health advice. This will not be subject to review until early 2022.

Meanwhile, since 20th September, CSO staff have returned to recording their Time and Attendance (T&A).

Management had allowed staff a measure of flexibility in working their contracted hours while dealing with other responsibilities (such as childcare) throughout the day. However,

from 8th November, staff were required to start work before 10am with a continuing flexible approach applied in the afternoons. That entailed working a continuous one-and-a-half hours between 2.30pm and 6pm. Fórsa Assistant General Secretary Paul Moyer told CSQ: "The reasons they are doing this is to prepare staff in adjusting to using the systems again in advance of a fuller return to pre-Covid arrangements."



AGS Paul Moyer

## NSSO

## No hurry back to office

Staff at the National Shared Services Office (NSSO) are returning to offices on a voluntary basis for one day per week. A very cautious approach is being taken and the employer is in no hurry to see staff return to the offices. Meanwhile, a new BEC has been elected for the NSSO Branch and the first meeting of the newly-elected committee was held recently.

## Dept of Health

## Phased return to office

At the recent Departmental Council it was noted a phased return to the office of one day a week had started but that further attendance was now under review. Department of Health management have also agreed to supply details of competitions, panels, liabilities etc. as currently Staff Side are not supplied with such information.

Meanwhile, Staff Side were also informed that new software to detect ransomware has been installed.



## Statisticians talks for arbitration

Talks have concluded with DPER with no progress made on the issue of a previous arbitration finding. A number of meetings were subsequently held with the branch to update them on developments and it was agreed to refer the matter back for arbitration. A submission has been submitted for arbitration.

# Keeping you in the loop...

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Fórsa trade union



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## Industrial News

### Department of Education

# Phased return to office plans put on hold

The Department of Education has put plans for a phased return to work – from one day a week to two days a week etc – on hold until further notice. In a recent communication from the department, staff were invited to “self-assess” with regard to working from home.

The department linked this to the central framework agreement on blended working arrangements. Fórsa Assistant General

Secretary Cliodhna McNamara told CSQ: “We formally requested a withdrawal of the communication on the basis that there has been no framework agreed yet and any link set out by the department was premature.”

Meanwhile, the same situation applies to the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS) as there is a continuing reliance on DoE HR to

conduct business.

Fórsa has received a set of recommendations, titled Organisational Design – Final Report, from Crowe Consultancy.

This report will be considered by branches and full engagement on its contents has been established with the department.



AGS Cliodhna McNamara

### Inspectorate

#### Complaints procedures

**The Inspectorate has committed itself to reviewing current complaints procedures after Fórsa raised issues relating to the protection of inspectors as they carry out their duties.**

**The union is fully engaged with the Inspectorate to ensure members are protected and are supported in all scenarios, including on social media.**

**Meanwhile, the inspectorate is developing the Early Year's Inspection Model but, to date, has not fully accepted the need to engage with Fórsa in the context of the roll-out of the pilot. Discussions are on-going.**



Picture: US Dept of Education (CC BY 2.0)

### NEPS

#### Atypical contracts

Talks continue with NEPS management over the recruitment of educational psychologists with a focus on the barrier in attracting new staff caused by the department being in direct competition with the HSE. The branch has asked management to consider the possibility of atypical permanent contracts which they think will be more attractive to potential recruits. Fórsa is seeking to discuss this with HR in the department.

### NCSE

#### Caution shown

Seen as a cautious approach, NCSE initiated a phased return to work of one day per week for office-based staff on 18th October. Meanwhile, talks continue over

the role of Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs), and the new 'Frontloading Allocation Model' for SNAs.

There are up to 17 vacancies at SENO level and, according to the union, staffing levels are in crisis as all grades continue to try and deliver a full service to pupils.

### SEC

#### On-site return

The full complement of staff at the State Examinations Commission returned to the office on 4th October on full flexi (apart from seasonal and temporary staff who

have never had flexible working hours except during the Covid-19 pandemic).

Even with the most recent announcements on Covid, all staff are back working on-site at the SEC and it appears DPER do not intend to instruct any department to the contrary.

### Department of Transport

#### Coastguard

#### Comparative salary analysis over claim

**The Electronics Officers claim was not identified as part of the sectoral bargaining process under *Building Momentum*, and will have to be considered in the context of the successor to the agreement.**

**In the meantime, the branch is continuing to conduct research including comparative salary analysis with counterparts in the UK and in the North.**

Picture: William Murphy (CC BY-SA 2.0)



#### Meeting sought on staff vehicle use

Historically and traditionally Irish Coastguard patrol personnel had access to official vehicles both on-duty and off-duty to facilitate their speedy response to maritime and other rescue emergencies.

This resulted in some families being left for several days without a family car as the Coastguard Officer could be away from home for days dealing with an emergency or recovery mission. Fórsa is seeking a bilateral meeting to see if any progress can be made on this issue.

### Office of Public Works

#### Doing away with post 'fundamentally flawed'

OPW management has confirmed it intends to do away with the post of Assistant Principal Architect in Intermediate Projects. Fórsa is vehemently opposed to this decision. Fórsa Assistant General Secretary Pat Ennis told

CSQ: “It is our view that, notwithstanding their initial non-engagement with us on the matter, the decision to extinguish the post is fundamentally flawed for a number of reasons.

“These include the corporate risk and

potential implications for members; the de-professionalisation of the role; possible inappropriate reporting structures; as well as removing career path opportunities for our P&T members.” Fórsa HQ is liaising extensively with the local AEHS Branch which is carrying out research to bolster its position on the issue.

Houses of the Oireachtas

Ushers Branch submission

Fórsa HQ is working closely with the local Usher Branch Executive on the parameters of the extended System for Recording Attendance (SRA).

A draft set of protocols for implementing the SRA for Ushers has been received and the branch is preparing a submission seeking to ensure that existing protections and established precedents are retained.

The submission will also be setting out the requirement for compliance with the European Working Time Directive and Organisation of Working Time Act.

Picture: Kent McConnell (CC BY 2.0)



Fórsa welcomes interim report recommendations

Fórsa has welcomed recommendations contained in an interim report on the review of working arrangements and practices of Ushers at the Houses of the Oireachtas. The review is being conducted by Kevin Duffy, the former Chairman of the Labour Court. Fórsa Assistant General Secretary Pat Ennis told

CSQ: "The branch is seeking to progress these recommendations in a collaborative way to secure an outcome that delivers for both sides, including an equitable and functional roster as well as a normalisation of IR processes. The local Ushers Branch and Fórsa HQ are committed to the implementation

process set out in the report and are engaging with Oireachtas management on the issue."

The recommendations cover rostering, a core hours system for recording attendance as well as Industrial Relations and Communications.



AGS Pat Ennis

Upton report: 'devil in detail'

The Forum on a Family Friendly and Inclusive Parliament has issued a report setting out some 51 recommendations.

Fórsa Assistant General Secretary Pat Ennis told CSQ: "At first glance many of these recommendations appear suitable to many of our members but, as is so often the case, the devil is in the detail.

"Some or all of these recommendations may have serious and long-term implications for some of our members, particularly those on the frontline, including Ushers and Reporters."

The Houses of the Oireachtas Staff Panel has acknowledged receipt of the 75-page document and set up an internal all-union subcommittee to conduct "an immediate and in-depth analysis" of the report and full implications of all of its recommendations.

Ennis added: "This analysis will inform the union's response to the Forum report."

Dept of Housing, Local Govt & Heritage

Flexibility emphasised

Fórsa has met with management on new rosters for one-day-in-the-week office work. There is joint agreement that the emphasis should be on flexibility where a staff members outlines any difficulties through line management in the first instance.

Built Heritage

Fórsa has written to management setting out the current vacancies in the professional/technical area and seeking a meeting on the issue. The union regards this as a matter of some urgency especially since a staff member has recently been unilaterally transferred creating a further vacancy.

Local Govt Auditors Branch

The union has responded to management on the proposed quality assurance review and has sought a meeting on this and other issues.

Dept of Foreign Affairs

Terms agreed for Forum

Fórsa recently agreed terms of reference at the inaugural meeting of the Consultative Forum to deal with Passport Office-related issues. These include the ramping up of services and increasing the number staff to meet an expected 100% increase in demand for passports in 2022.

A Fórsa bulletin was issued to members informing them of impending changes over the coming months. A further 400 Clerical Officers - mostly based in Dublin - are to be appointed and a temporary office opened in Swords.

Fórsa Assistant General Secretary Des Fagan told CSQ: "Suggestions of a compressed four-day week as well as shift working with an allowance are also being discussed to enable social distancing as staff numbers are set to increase in limited-

space accommodation."

"The Forum has been especially useful for dealing with some Covid outbreaks in offices in Cork and Balbriggan," he added.

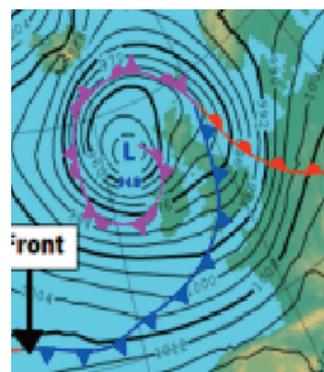


AGS Des Fagan



SURGE IN DEMAND Irish passports

Dept of Environment, Climate & Comms



Meteorologists/CLME Talks continue on the professional/technical grades - jumped increments issue, with management representatives taking the draft proposal back to the management team.

Meanwhile, Fórsa has continued to raise the issue of restoring the eight-person roster in the airport, while the non-implementation of IMAMS staffing agreement is being referred to third party.

Dept of Comms in 1-day office roster

Staff at the Department of Communications have returned to one-day office working on a roster basis, but attendance will be kept under review in accordance with Government advice.

Meanwhile, restructuring discussions are continuing over the setting up of a stand-alone Geo-Science regulatory unit and to ensure adequate staffing structures are in place.

Fórsa met with management recently to discuss progressing an internal Senior Geologist Panel as well as outstanding PCW Allowance posts.

## Industrial News

### Revenue Commissioners

## Helpline peaks amid recruitment of COs

The National PAYE helpline has had numerous peaks in contacts over the past few months due to the continued opening up of the economy. This is against the backdrop of a reduction in the number of staff in the PAYE area over the past two to three years.

In the same period, however, Revenue has recruited a large number of new staff - most of

whom, as a result of Brexit, have been assigned to Customs Division.

As CSQ goes to press, 40 to 45 newly-recruited Clerical Officers are in training which should - in time - alleviate some of the pressure, but it is unlikely these new starts will be phone ready until mid-to-late December/early February.

Fórsa AGS Geraldine O'Brien told CSQ: "This will take some pressure off the existing staff, as they will be dealing with correspondence received. Therefore it is likely that the support mechanism that was put in place early this year will remain a while longer."



AGS Geraldine O'Brien

## Additional staff for Airport/Port

Revenue's Customs Division has experienced a huge turnover of staff since new regulations were introduced as a result of Brexit.

And it would appear the Customs Division has continued to operate with a less than adequate staffing level.

To address this, Revenue has continued its drive to recruit new staff, and from early December there will be a weekly intake of new starts.

Revenue has secured sanction for up to 60 additional staff, most of whom will be initially assigned to Dublin Airport and Dublin Port.



Picture: SwissBert (Public Domain)



## Extra staff beefed up LPT ops

Revenue brought in extra staff to boost operations in the Local Property Tax area in time for the issuing of 400,000 paper LPT forms in September and October.

Some 20 new Clerical Officers were recently recruited and, in advance of the issuing of LPT forms, Revenue management flagged up that they intended to re-deploy staff from other areas where work had been warehoused due to the pandemic.

### Department of Justice

## Legal Aid Board claims

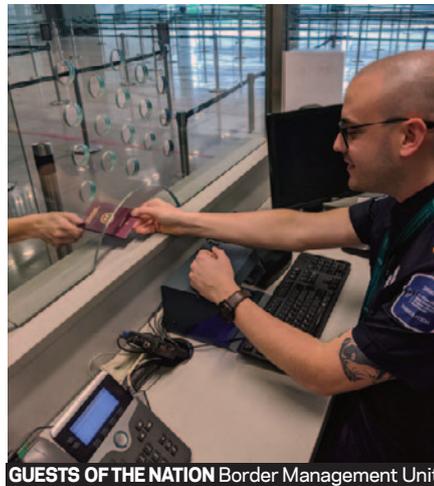
Fórsa has taken a number of claims in the Legal Aid Board. These claims seek:

- Career progression avenues for COs;
- Annual leave parity for Mediators. Currently, although attached to the Engineer pay scale, they are not on Engineer annual leave;
- To have all Grade III solicitors moved on to the State Solicitor pay scale applicable in the rest of the Civil Service;
- To have the same starting pay arrangements per-

taining to solicitors elsewhere in the Civil Service apply to new starts in the Legal Aid Board.

- To have vacant Legal Staff Officer positions filled;
- To close off the practice of filling general vacancies from location-specific posts.

The union has also made representations on behalf of Mediators, who have not been afforded the same remote working options as other staff.



GUESTS OF THE NATION Border Management Unit

## Local forum is set up for BMU

A local forum has been set up in the Border Management Unit to allow for discussion on industrial relations matters.

Meanwhile, two claims have been presented at the Department of Justice Departmental Council:

- A claim to clear promotion liabilities at EO, HEO and AP level; and
- A claim to reinstate the allowance due to scientific staff under General Council Report 950.

## Info from Probation Service survey

A workplace survey of COs in the Probation Service has provided Fórsa with a good deal of guidance on what family-friendly issues to pursue. Traditionally, COs in Probation have had

little or no such flexibilities, including no flexitime access.

Also, a group of members has been identified as the core of a potential national committee.

### FSI

## Call to introduce Chief Analyst post

A claim has been taken to management to seek the introduction of a 'Chief Analyst' grade in the Scientific Analyst structure. A similar career progression structure currently exists in other Backweston-based state labs.

### Office of the Chief State Solicitor

## Architect's advice sought

The Legal Professionals Branch is considering plans for a proposed new office and seeking to talk directly to the project architects in the OPW.

This has not been facilitated as yet, despite a number of

meetings on the issue. However, Fórsa has managed to have some elements of the layout of the new building changed to better accommodate clerical and admin staff.

Picture: GotCredit (CC BY 2.0)

## DPC Workplace survey flags up issues

A workplace survey has flagged up a number of issues to pursue at the first Departmental Council of the Data Protection Commissioner set to take place in December.

Meanwhile, two reps have been appointed as Fórsa begins to build a presence at DPC that will potentially be independent of Justice.



Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine

# DAFM seeks hike in relief staff numbers for badger jab drive

**Agriculture No1 Branch:** Following talks, Fórsa and the DPER have resolved an argument centred on clauses in the *Building Momentum* agreement. A hearing date is awaited and a submission is being prepared.

DAFM has written to the union seeking to increase the number of Farm Relief staff (who are outside contractors) requiring supervision as the roll-out of the badger vaccination programme ramps up.

Fórsa advised DAFM that no further increase will be accepted until the matter is heard at Adjudication and a recommendation received.

The union has already agreed to increase the number of supervised staff from one to two in the past number of years.



Picture: Vincent Van Zoilinge at unsplash

Dept of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration & Youth

## Talks on IPAS on-call work

Talks continue with HR about the on-call work members in International Protection Accommodation Services are being asked to carry out, requiring them to be rostered seven days a week initially during 5pm and 9pm and weekend earlier hours.

However, due to changes in Garda work at the airports and ports, it actually means members receive calls in the early hours of the morning (e.g. 3am) to deal with asylum seekers arriving into Ireland.

Fórsa Assistant General Secretary Paul Moyer told CSQ: "They are required to have a duty phone to take these calls which then

requires additional follow-up work of [making] phone calls and [sending] emails to other areas.

"The department noted that this is a legacy issue inherited by them when functions were transferred from the Department of Justice.

"They have sought guidance from DPER and once they've received it this will allow further discussions and a resolution to be found."



AGS Paul Moyer

Professional Agriculture Inspectors Branch

**The Professional Agriculture Inspectors Branch (PAIB) is one of the few branches in Fórsa that has opted for an allowance-based pay deal rather than a general round increase for its members under the Sectoral Bargaining element of the Building Momentum agreement.**

**Talks continue between the union and the Department over the exact elements of the allowance and which grades it applies to.**

**Executive Grades Branch Fórsa has asked the Department for information about staff promotion in Dublin Port, where an 'Expression of Interest' panel currently awaits deployment to vacancies there.**

## Conservation Rangers

### AGM votes to take 'all steps necessary' in advancing grades review

The Conservation Rangers AGM, held on 17th November, unanimously passed a motion agreeing to take "all steps necessary" to advance a review of grading within the service.

Fórsa set out its case for a review to management in 2019, including:

- The merging of Conservation Rangers with Park Rangers with added responsibilities involving law enforcement.



NATURAL BEAUTY Glenveagh National Park in Donegal

- The ecological assessment of planning applications, agricultural works and infrastructural projects.
- The introduction of the Birds Directive and Habitats Directive as well as the increased require-

ment for ecological assessments and follow-up prosecutions on infractions to habitats.

- The expansion of visitor attractions and the management of habitats.
- The increase in surveys to be

carried out on scientific species and habitats.

The union argued for an updating of the qualifications needed for the posts. Even though biology or related sciences are "desirable", the reality is that practically all Conservation Rangers are highly qualified with masters degrees and/or doctorates.

AGS Shay Clinton told CSQ: "What is also frustrating is that the review of the National Parks and Wildlife Services was to be completed at the end of the summer. Although the union has sought a copy of the review, the draft format has not even been made available by management to date."



AGS Shay Clinton

## Yuletide

# Remember some festive giving amid all the Christmas cheer...

## Derek Mullen

Head of Civil Service Division

Whatever we do this Christmas we should remember how difficult a time it can be for many. The festive season can bring added pressures, particularly for those who are struggling.

It could be financial pressures, mental health issues, family bereavement or loss, or the plight of all those people who are homeless in Ireland.

To this end, I am putting links (right) to two charities, **Pieta House** and the **Simon Community**, and if you can manage please try and make a small contribution this Christmas. It could go a long way.

That said, I hope all our members can enjoy a break this Christmas, while at the time trying to stay safe from the Covid-19 virus. I think last Christmas we all hoped that by this time in 2021 we would be looking back and thanking whoever we thank that we had got beyond it safely. However, that is not the case and we continue to try and do what we can to abide by public health advice.

Our thoughts are with those who have lost family, friends or colleagues over the course of the pandemic.

Hopefully this Christmas will give everyone a good rest from it all, a chance to recharge the batteries and enjoy some quiet time.

While Christmas is a time to reflect and to try to help others, we also look forward to doing what's best at Christmas, be it putting up the tree, preparing the turkey or doing a nice nut roast.

So here is a nice recipe for **mulled wine** to help you in the cooking process, or NOT!!

### INGREDIENTS

- 1 (750-ml.) bottle red wine**
- 1 orange, sliced into rounds, plus more for garnish**
- 6 whole cloves**
- 3 cinnamon sticks, plus more for garnish**
- 3 star anise**
- 1/4 c. honey**
- 1/2 c. brandy**

### DIRECTIONS

In a medium saucepan over medium heat, combine all ingredients. Bring to a simmer not a boil, then reduce heat to medium-low. Simmer gently over low heat for 10 minutes. Serve warm and garnish with more citrus slices and cinnamon sticks.

Hopefully this Xmas will give us a good rest and a chance to recharge batteries

Picture: Cuddly Little Owl (CC BY 2.0)



Picture: Mohammad Jangda (CC BY-SA 2.0)



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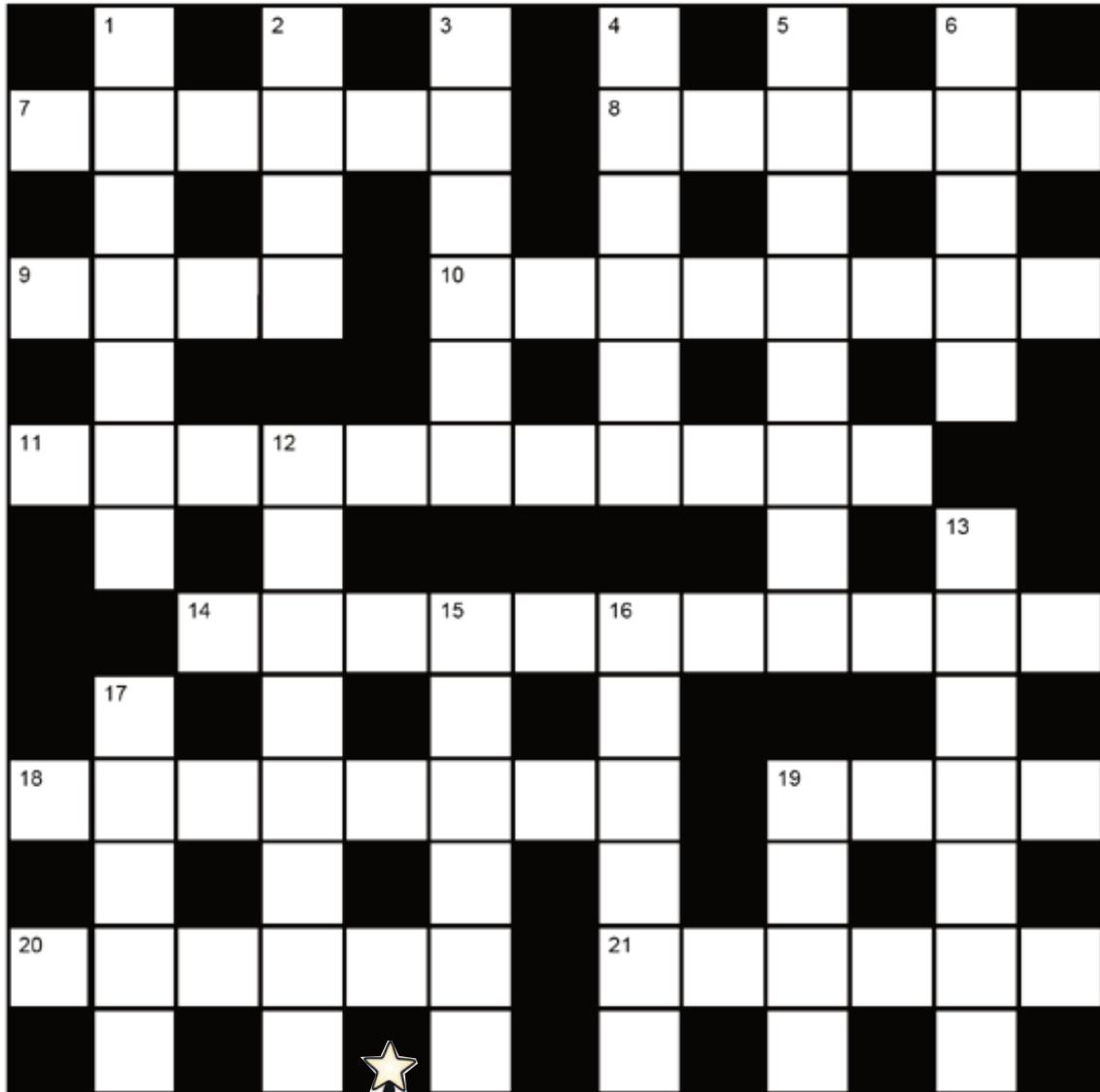
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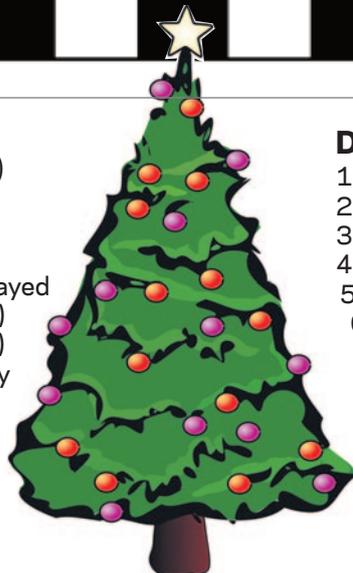
# Christmas Crossword

As **CSQ** is currently being published **online only** during the course of the pandemic, we have decided to end the competitive element to the crossword as it is more difficult to track returned entries to Head Office. However, the crossword will continue to run in **CSQ**.



## Across

7. Pastry from Copenhagen (6)
8. Car safety device (6)
9. Cher starred in this movie in 1985 (4)
10. And 17 down. Character played by 12d in Peaky Blinders (8)
11. Athy based rock band (7, 4)
14. Animated sitcom created by Seth MacFarlane (8, 3)
18. German Shepherd (8)
19. And 20 across - The Secret Santa in Ireland (4)
20. See 19 across (6)
21. Painters' supports (6)



## Down

1. Tropical disease, spread through infected mosquitoes (7)
2. Classic board game of military strategy (4)
3. She could be a vixen or a governess (6)
4. The Prince of Denmark (6)
5. Scottish mountain range (8)
6. U.S. state, capital Augusta (5)
12. English actor, who starred in Venom, The Dark Knight Rises and Dunkirk (3, 5)
13. The Duchess of Cornwall (7)
15. He plays football in Las Vegas (6)
16. Star sign (6)
17. See 10 across (5)
19. Lighthouse off the Dublin coast (4)



## CROSSWORD SOLUTIONS CSQ Autumn 2021

ACROSS: 7. Mikado; 8. Eleven; 9. Skye; 10. Two Overs; 11. Cook Islands; 14. Sligo Rovers; 18. Ramblers; 19. Gumb; 20. Stalls; 21. Iguana.  
DOWN: 1. Wicklow; 2. Jame; 3. Cortes; 4. Verona; 5. Medvedev; 6. Heart; 12. Kill Bill; 13. Bromine; 15. Grease; 16. Rustic; 17. Taste; 19. Gout.